



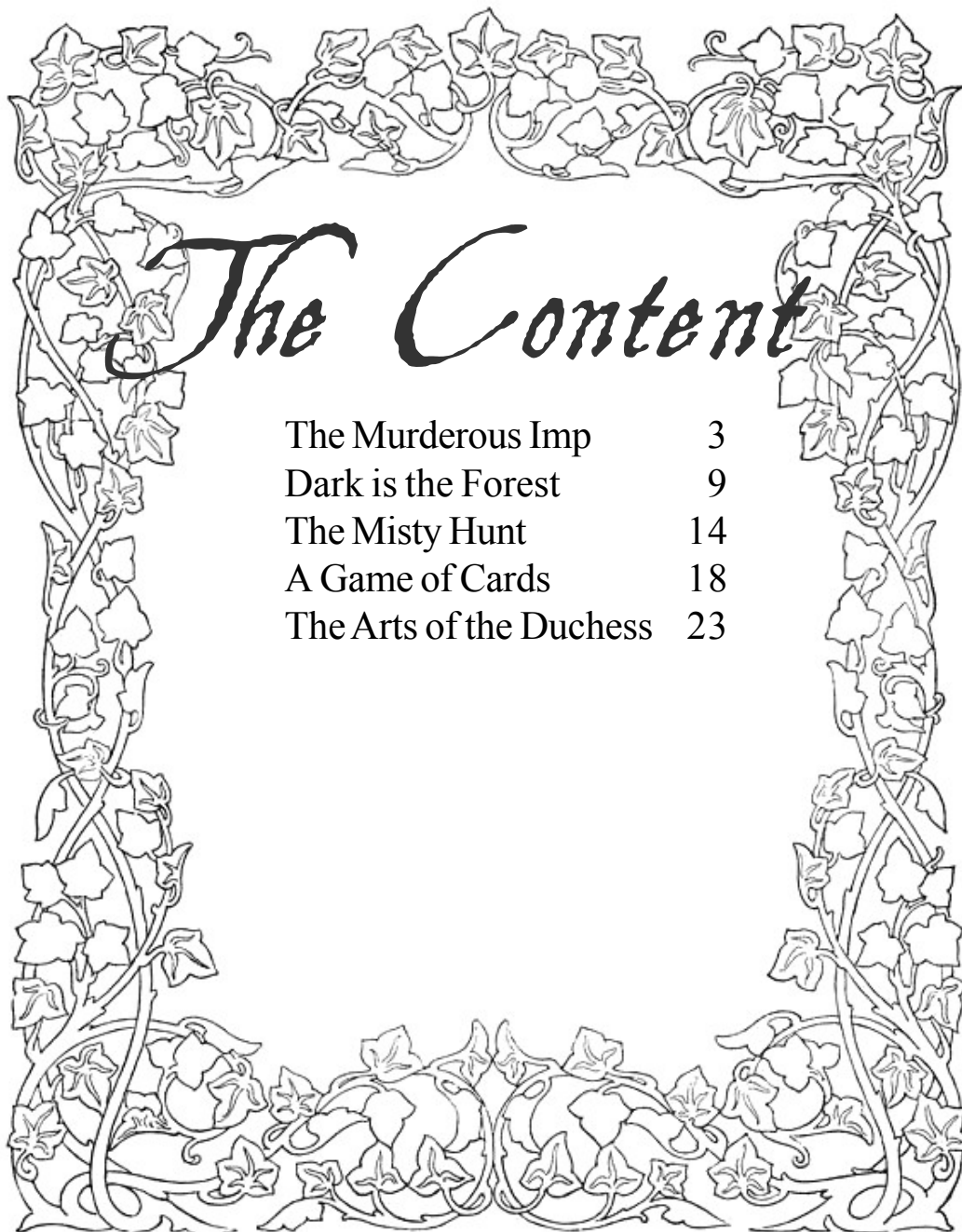
Tales Told by Shadows

A Supplement for the Danse Macarbe



Dean Luter & *Chris Johnstone*





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MYTHOPOETIC
G A M E S

Tales Told by Shadows



Five Scenarios for Danse Macabre

Tales Told by Shadows is a collection of adventures and scenarios for the Medieval horror and dark intrigue Roleplaying Game *Danse Macabre*.

How to Use These Tales

Treat each adventure as a sketch only. You may have to vary the tale a little or a lot depending on the actions of players – which can be unpredictable at the best of times and chaotic at the worst. Don't think of the scenarios as hard and fast stories, they are more of a framework of events that may or may not happen.

Also, remember that although in some of the Tales there are important non-player characters, it is the player characters who are always the protagonists. Make as much of the story as possible revolve around the players.

The Murderous Ymp

A scenario for Danse Macabre by Christopher Johnstone

The characters are invited to a Yuletide banquet in a snowbound castle on a cold winter's day, but there are strange things afoot. Weird creatures have been seen haunting the grounds of the castle, and not all the revellers may be exactly what they appear.

Hook

It is winter. Cold and dark. The darkest depth of the year, in fact. The characters have received invitations to pass a Yuletide twelve nights with the lord of Castle Valzburg on the banks of the Danube. The snows have been heavy this year, the roads impassable in places, barely passable in others. The characters are late.

They arrive at the gates of the small hamlet beneath Valzburg on Christmas Eve. Above them the black castle is studded with the golden glow of squinting windows.

The form the invitation takes will depend a lot on the background of your characters. If there is a noble among them then a distant connection by blood will suffice for Lord Valzburg to offer an invitation. If the characters are known for some deeds or feats then Lord Valzburg may invite them as a result of their renown alone, to be heroes and curiosities to entertain the other guests. Because more or less the entire hamlet has been invited to the Yuletide

festivities a close connection to a person of importance in the village, the miller, baker, sheriff, or priest would be reasonable.

Castle Valzburg

Castle Valzburg is a large and squat limestone lizard crouched on a rocky spur and covered with the spines of early Gothic towers and spires. Gardens and grounds sprawl around it by clinging to the stony bluff. A dozen orchards, gardens and linden groves are built wherever there is space and are connected by stairways that scutter up and down the cliffs.

The snow this year has been heavy. Glittering dunes are piled up against the wall of the hamlet and the castle itself is all but snowbound.

Castle Valzburg is located twenty leagues east of Ratisbon in the Duchy of Bavaria. It is currently under the rule of the Kingdom of Germany.

Yuletide Eve...

The characters will be greeted at the gates of the hamlet by guards who are already a little into the Yuletide cheer. The guards have already festooned their helmets with boughs of holly and are drinking mulled wine and mead.

They are not at all suspicious and are likely to offer the

characters a drink or two before showing them up to the castle. If the characters linger a while with the guards they may learn that there have been some strange rumours floating about. The guards, God-fearing but serious minded men, are not putting much credence to the claims. They'll hint that the guests have been drinking too much and seeing drunkard's demons but won't say much more. Truth be told, they don't know much more.

Lord Valzburg

Lord Valzburg is an aging man with a little grey in his hair and a little paunch around his waist. He'll greet the characters with a bellicose and bearish manner and is by the time the character's arrive, quite drunk. He will spend most of his time either at the high table in the great hall eating and dinking with other privileged guests or will mingle with the commoners who take up the rest of the great hall. Alzburg has dressed himself up to look a little like a Green Man. At the moment his crown, and belt and cape of velvet leaves are the orange, red and black of autumn and winter. At midnight he will disappear change into a costume of green and gold, and return to the hall to dance with any maiden he can catch hold of. It's an old tradition, one that the local parish does not approve of, but also one that the villagers enjoy and so is persisted with.

Lady Valzburg

Lady Valzburg is as mousy as her husband is bearish. She will spend most of her time talking quietly with other ladies at the high table.

If the characters have a reputation for having dealt with a few dark and unnatural things before, then Lady Valzburg will quietly call them aside and tell them that she insisted that her husband invite the characters for this very reason. There is a creature, an imp it seems, that has begun haunting the house in the last month. No one can catch it and no one knows if it is dangerous or not. Exorcisms and hedge charms against evil spirits have achieved nothing. She'd appreciate the character's taking a quiet look around, and their opinion on what is to be done.

Michaela of Valzburg

Lord and Lady Valzburg have three children. Two older sons are currently serving as pages with allied noble houses in the Margravate of Moravia and the Kingdom of Bohemia.

The youngest child is Michaela, a young woman, seventeen years of age and sharing a mixture of her parent's wild and reticent natures. Her fieriness lies beneath the surface and shows only occasionally. She won't interact much with the characters, especially if the characters are mostly male, it simply isn't proper for a lady her age to be seen to be indulging too many men with her smiles and conversation.

Michaela is betrothed to a young lord from Bhoemia who she has met just once.

Sir Renard

Sir Renard is a member of the Teutonic Knights and has just returned from Crusades in the Holy Land. He is considered something of a remarkable adventurer, has many tales to tell, and is only a little knitted by the scars of those adventures. Not much older than twenty, he is often attended by young men and women from the hamlet who are listening to his stories.

If the characters spend any time with Renard they will notice that he often turns dark and moody, however. He seems to be preoccupied, and if pressed for descriptions of battles against the Saracens he will grow silent. If harried he will ask if the revellers really want to know what it is like to have to slit the throats of men who have been struck by lances and are still alive. Men whose entrails are hanging out. Men who are crying in Arabic for wives and mothers. War has left him with a bleak view of things.

Sir Renard is the son of a favoured retainer and grew up in the Valzburg Household.

Sadurni

Sadurni is a tag-along retainer to Sir Renard. He is a short, squinting, silent man with a weathered face and thin, gangly limbs who hails from Aragon in Iberia. He is rumoured to have a little Moorish blood in him, and he carries a curved, strange looking dagger and dresses in a sort of mingled Moresco-Spanish fashion. He seems to enjoy the attention he gets as a loyal squire to Renard, and also as a mysterious foreigner. In truth Sadurni has no significant ties to the Moors of southern Spain, and if questioned by someone with a little knowledge of the Empire of the Almohads or any eastern traditions at all, his lack of knowledge will become quite obvious.

Any conversation with Sardurni reveals very quickly that he is deeply loyal and in awe of Renard.

Baron Lummerslint

Lummerslint is a Bohemian Lord, slightly portly, slightly ruddy faced and very jovial. He is more or less a monomaniac and will happily discuss the arts of hunting for hours on end. Most other topics bore him. He will claim to have hunting many, many strange creatures and will promptly invite almost anyone who happens to be within earshot to visit his hunting castle in the tall and black pine forests that lies between Bohemia and Poland.

The Duchess of Carinthia

The Duchess of Carinthia is a tall, beautiful and elegant lady who looks far younger than her thirty-some years. She is perfectly polite and always carefully watchful, quiet, and just very slightly enigmatic.

No one will say anything but wonderful things about the Duchess of Carinthia, even behind her back. The characters may realise over the course of the night that the Duchess is viewed with a touch of suspicion and fear, but no-one will explain to them why this is.

Her husband, the Duke of Carinthia, has not been seen in public for some years. He is, so it is said, bed-ridden and too sick to leave his room. The Duchess visits the castle

chapel daily to pray for his swift recovery.

The Duchess of Carinthia does have her dark secrets but she is more or less a red herring in this adventure. Don't play her up too much and if a character is foolish enough to go to her chambers keep in mind that the Duchess tends to be on better behaviour when away from the safety of her own castle and isn't likely to murder anyone tonight.

Enter the protagonists

Once the players enter the Great Hall they will likely be assailed with food, drink and dance. Any or all of the characters above may approach them to welcome them to the hall depending on how things play out, although Lords Valsburg and Lummerslint are the more characters to be ready and welcoming.

The Duchess of Carinthia may take an interest in one or more of the male characters if any of them are young and attractive. She has a reputation in this area, too, but again no one will say anything for certain. Hints will be dropped. Slightly older servants or guards may make subtle suggestions to the characters not dally with the Duchess. There are plenty of less dangerous women about. If pressed about the dangers the guards won't expand upon their vague warnings. People will appear to consider it a little dangerous to simply talk about the Duchess.

Strange Goings On

Through the festive night a number of strange things will happen. It is up to you, as the Storyteller, to decide how and when to work these into the tale.

An Argument

At some point during the night one or more of the characters, preferably without taggers along, possibly on their way to a privy or to the gardens to get some air, will hear the hushed voices of an argument.

It will appear at first, to be a lover's tiff; a man and women arguing in low, hushed tones. If the characters approach closer they will find a convenient place to eavesdrop from. A leather curtain that is hanging across a nearby door, a shadowy recess, or room connected to the room in which the couple are arguing by a shared fireplace.

If the characters have met Renard and Michaela then the voices are easily recognised. The conversation, however, is very whispered, very angry and hard to catch. The characters will hear Renard saying things such as "... no-one need know, we can be gone tonight... I've friends in Aragon... a demesne... a fortune in gold from the east... come away with me..."

He is obviously attempting to convince the young Lady Michaela of Valzburg to elope with him. She remains silent through most of the conversation, punctuating his hopeful pleading with short negative responses. Eventually she becomes angry and says, "Renard, I have never loved you. I never will love you. Now leave me be. Leave me be!"

As Michaela leaves the room Renard calls after her, louder. He claims to have done everything for her. To have sought a fortune for her. It was all for her...

The Black Imp

The characters hear a sudden shriek and then several loud screams. There will likely be a few people about and everyone will run at once to investigate.

What they find is a trembling and very frightened kitchen girl who was emptying slops onto a heap in the garden. She has dropped her bucket and is in tears, crouched up against a wall when found.

Slowly, the characters will be able to piece together that something weird and unnatural has frightened her. She'll claim that she heard a weird haunting howl and looked up to see a demon sitting on the ledge of a wall watching her. "It was small," she'll say, "not bigger than a dog, but like a hunched up little man, with a horrible wolf face and sharp teeth and long black claws. It was unnatural, unnatural! I could feel it staring right at my soul!"

The demon apparently vanished as soon as help arrived.

Conversations

The characters will be able to piece together that the imp has been seen a few times over the last month. It doesn't seem to have hurt anyone yet, but it has frightened a lot of people. One lad claims to have been told it can look into your eyes and make you think you want to commit suicide. Another woman will claim that is rubbish, but she does know for sure that it drinks blood from people at night, leaving little holes in their arms. A lot of wild stories will come out of the woodwork, though nothing that is very useful or very true.

Chobry

During the night a particularly drunk and vulgar merchant's son named Chobry will take a dislike to Sardurni, mostly because Sardurni has spent a little too much time saying sweet and charming things to a young woman who happens to be Chobry's sister. Chobry will begin insulting the little Spaniard and Sardurni will simply grow quiet and coldly angry the more Chobry taunts and teases him. Chobry will challenge Sardurni to all sorts of games and contests that he knows Sardurni couldn't win: a friendly wrestling match, an arm wrestle, or a race through the gardens. Chobry is a large and powerfully built man, Sardurni is small and rather feeble looking, somewhat bookish.

Sardurni will eventually just walk away, but not before throwing his cup of wine at Chobry. Chobry will wipe off the wine and laugh this off and call it a woman's tantrum.

If the characters are watchful they might notice Sardurni tapping something from a little crystal vial into the wine before he hurls it.

A Shadow

In a quiet moment, when the characters least expect it, have them walk through a hall or into a room that happens to be empty. It could be on the way to a rendezvous with some other guest or while searching for the troubadours or jugglers or some reveller who is wanted to perform a song or give a speech in the great hall, or perhaps even while searching for some clue as the nature of the imp.

Upon entering the quiet room the characters will immediately see something small, about the size of a dog, hairy

and black suddenly leap out of the shadows, move with unnatural speed across the floor and then up a wall and out a window. The imp will then vanish out the window. If the characters are quick enough and run to the window, they may have a chance to see it climbing up the sheer wall as easily as if it were running on the ground. It will then vanish over the top of the castle wall.

If the characters try to pursue the imp by running up stairs to the levels above allow them to catch one or two more brief glimpses of it but then make it vanish out of sight for good.

A Quiet Moment

If the characters walk in the gardens, which are snow-bound but shovelled along the paths, or walking through a quiet part of the castle, they will find Renard and Sardurni having a low conversation. The two men will stop talking as soon as they notice anyone approaching, and they are being very watchful. Both men will act a little suspiciously if approached. Renard will be a little too keen to return to the festivities and get very drunk. Sardurni will be silent, brooding, as if thinking something over.

The last thing that Renard will say to Sardurni before he leaves is, "I forbid you, Sardurni. You do understand. Never mention that to me again."

Both men will make up excuses if asked about this strange parting of words later.

If the opportunity arises, Sardurni will recognise the characters as the most recent arrivals at the Yuletide festivities. He may engage them in a little light conversation, apparently in order to let his master get away to the hall. He is also, however, interested in learning whether or not the roads out of Valzburg are open, and will ask quite a few questions about the character's journey. How was it? Was there any trouble? How are the roads?

Hunting Imps

From this point on the characters are likely to become increasingly interested in catching the imp. A few likely lads may offer to help but the guards have been trying to catch the imp for some days without success. People are now beginning to hope it just goes away. Allow the characters a few clues if they begin a serious hunt.

They'll find that the larder has been raided recently, jars broken open and bread torn apart. But do demons need to eat? Some of the characters may begin questioning the nature of the creature. Later in the night they may find a tuft of long, black-grey fur snagged on a windowsill. Every now and again the night air will be haunted by eerie inhuman barks and howls. Later still either the characters or someone else will discover bloody hand and paw prints running into a small empty room from the window, around the room in an almost random way, then out of the room by going up the chimney. Where did the blood come from? Whose is it? Is anyone missing? What about the chicken coop? Has anyone looked there?

In fact the blood has come from a murdered person, which is explained below. If the characters manage somehow to scale up the wall, along a roof, to the chimney and ten down another wall to the garden below they will be able to

follow the bloody handprints through the snow and find Chobray's corpse earlier than otherwise.

A Gift

Much later that night, well after Renard has followed through on his desire to end the year very, very drunk, Sardurni will approach Michaela and give her a gift on his master's behalf. He won't make a show of it, but he won't be secretive either.

What he gives her is a very beautiful necklace of gold set with a small ruby. It is obviously of eastern design, and very valuable. It is a gift fit for a queen, not a minor Lord's daughter.

Michaela will immediately put it on, but in a more sad than delighted sort of way.

If the characters ask Sardurni about it later he will say that his master asked him to give it to Michaela as a Yuletide token. He doesn't know why Renard has been so generous, except that the little necklace does have some rumours about it. There are stories that the young princess the necklace was taken from in the Holy Land spat on it and cursed it before she threw it to the ground. She then leapt out a fortress window to prevent the crusading knights taking more from her than riches and gold. It is nonsense of course, there are curses and then there are *curses*, and pampered princesses know nothing of the later. Still, Renard has been trying to forget the Holy Land. He is probably just happy to give away something that has all those awful recollections haunting it.

A Warm Corpse

It is about three in the morning by the time this occurs most of the castle should be asleep on the floor of the Great Hall or retired for the night. A trembling guard will enter the Great Hall to wake the sheriff and some other men. Assuming the characters have shown interest in the imp, or if the characters have a reputation for dealing with dark things, then the characters will either be summoned or woken up.

If not, they will find out about the murder in the morning.

Outside in the snow a corpse has been found. It's a young man but his face has been entirely torn up. His identity is not yet clear. His throat is torn out as if by some huge and vicious wolf.

He appears to have been ambushed by something while going outside to relieve himself in the snow.

Careful examination will reveal three things. The first is that this is Chobry, his clothing is distinct enough if the characters paid any attention to him earlier. The second is that a piece of a steel blade had broken off and embedded in his skull. The blade is shaped like a claw and is razor sharp. The third is that Chobry smells of something very distinct and strange, a sharp, tingling spicy perfume that seems to have been splashed across his chest.

Bloody hand and footprints lead away from the corpse, up a wall and onto a roof.

For the rest of the night the imp will have apparently vanished.

If the characters are suspicious of Sardurni because of the earlier taunting, and if they look for Sardurni, he will

not be found anywhere. He fled sometime during the night, probably after midnight. Sir Renard, whose chambers adjoin his servant's small room is too drunk to be questioned. He is all but comatose and won't be coherent until much later.

If the characters think to check the stables they will find that a donkey and some pack gear is missing.

A Morning of Blood

The morning begins with more screams.

Michaela's bedchamber is spotted with blood and her bed is a crimson mess. The imp has crept in during the night and torn out her throat, and it seems eaten a part of her arm after she died.

Again, if carefully examined the same strange, exotic spice will be scented. The spice smell will reasonably obviously be coming from the gifted necklace that Michaela is still wearing.

If, during the night before, the characters have leapt to conclusions and suggested placing a guard in the lady's room, then two ladies-in-waiting will roused from sleep and set to the job. One or more armed guards can be placed outside the room, but not within it. It simply isn't proper to have commoner's watching a young lady of the house sleep. They ladies-in-waiting will not notice the imp until it creeps in via the chimney and attacks. It will fall upon Michaela with savagery but is then easily frightened and will fought off by the ladies with a handy chair and broom.

Michaela will not be fatally wounded in this case, but her face and throat will be slashed. She will be obviously in danger of death and permanently disfigured.

Sir Renard Awakes

When Renard finally awakens, late in the morning, and learns of the murder he will insist on seeing the body. In fact he will seem to be possessed by madness. He will go to the room, and use his fists to fight past anyone who tries to stop him. He will cradle Michaela's body, begin weeping and then not long after this, he will begin yelling, almost screaming for Sardurni.

Covered in blood Renard will look through the house for Sardurni. Eventually when he is finally convinced that Sardurni is gone he will take a bottle of something very strong to his room and lock the door. If the characters are following him or trying to get him to explain why he is looking for Sardurni he will ignore them and lock them out. If they try to force their way in, he will call for guards. If the guards are on the character's side by now (its likely the sheriff has a good opinion of them if they have been helping in trying to hunt down the demon), and if the guards move to restrain Renard he will jump out the window to his death.

Assuming Renard has locked himself inside his room, after about ten or twenty minutes of silence the characters may get suspicious. If they do not, others will certainly be worried after half an hour. There will be no response to heavy pounding on Renard's door. Soon enough someone will suggest breaking the door down and Lord Valzburg will agree. Renard will be found hanging from a knotted belt from a rafter. Scrawled in charcoal over the fireplace are the words...

Beware of Sardurni. He is possessed of the demon. I have known this and did aught. I thought it a small and feeble thing, a trifling pet. May the Lord have mercy.

Renard, being a member an order of monastic knights had been taught to read and write a little. A scribe may need to be fetched to read the message. It will be written in book Latin, which Renard learned in order to read and copy the scriptures.

If Michaela is disfigured and almost but not quite killed the result is the same. Renard will not be able to cope with thinking his inaction hurt Michaela let alone killed her.

Conclusion and Pursuit

By this time the characters should have a fair idea that Sardurni is possibly a witch and is responsible for both murders and has fled. A lot of people are going to suggest roads that Sardurni might have taken. The characters themselves might have a fair idea themselves. Alternatively they might have some way of tracking him, either magically or through well-honed hunting skills.

Things in fact might pan out in a number of ways. Lord Valzburg will immediately dispatch his knights into the town and then out to scour the roads and byways. But, to keep things satisfying for the players its best to ensure they find Sardurni without the aid of a band of knights with pennants and armour. Valzburg will insist on spreading his men thin to ensure that no byway or track is left open for Sardurni, so there are not likely to be many spare swordsmen lounging about anyway.

If the players have already decided that they know the most obvious escape route then let them go out into the snowy landscape and hunt down Sardurni, who will by this time be trudging along with a slightly reluctant donkey in tow. On the back of the donkey are a lot of pack materials including a large, plain wooden box covered over with a canvas cloth.

If you'd like a slightly different means of escape the characters could be accosted on their way to the gates of the city by a young lad who begs them to follow him. All the town guards will have already left to hunt the countryside, so the boy has just grabbed the first upstanding looking folks to pass by.

If the characters follow the lad they'll find a number of sheds down by the frozen Danube. One of these has been broken open and the boy's family trading sledge is gone. There are donkey tracks around the shed in the snow, and rail marks skating out onto the frozen river. Sardurni, it seems, has thought of a means to escape other than by road.

The characters will be able to quickly arrange for sledges and sledge-horses to follow Sardurni. The sledge-horses are much quicker than a donkey and Sardurni will soon be overtaken, a brown smudge in the distance growing closer.

Once Sardurni realises that he is being followed he will draw out a bow and wait for his pursuers to come in range. He is a reasonable shot and good swordsman and will fight until his is mortally wounded.



Explanations

Sardurni will explain things once he realises that he is dying, bloody in the snow. His motivation is simply to convince the characters not to kill his pet, Fiz, and to exonerate his master Renard, to whom Sardurni has a slightly over developed sense of loyalty. "Do not blame Renard. He told me about that spurning whore. But he told me not to take revenge, when I made the offer. H ordered me. But I could not let that woman insult the good master. I could not see him so made a fool of. So broken by a woman's evil words. And please, please do not kill poor Fiz," he'll say, "I trained him. I tormented the poor creature. Trained him to attack. He has been my assassin before. But don't kill poor Fiz. He's no demon."

The 'poor creature' Fiz is a large, male Barbary Ape, currently locked in the wooden crate on the back of the sleigh or donkey depending on which escape route Sardurni takes. If the character's open the box Fiz will try to escape. He is very fast but is a little hampered by the steel claws that are attached to his paws and, more importantly by a collar that is bound by a chain to a bolt in the box. If cornered the monkey may snarl and attack but isn't dangerous in any real sense. It can kill a single sleeping or drunken person easily enough, but if confronted by a pack of angry humans, it will try to run.

Anyone who has seen a monkey or ape before will (in the broad light of day) immediately recognise the creature for what it is. If no one is very well travelled or educated then consider it still plainly obvious that the animal is just that, and not a demon at all. Guesses many be made, someone from the keep may suggest that it is a satyr or some sort of strange pygmy man from a distant land, assuming it is brought back and revealed.

The monkey has been trained to attack whenever it smells a particular scent, cardamom and myrrh mixed together in water. Sardurni has a vial of this on him, which the characters may recognise from earlier when he poured some of it into the drink he threw at Chobry. Experimenting with the perfume and the monkey will quickly demonstrate that Fiz slips into a blind rage and attacks anything doused with the spice-water. Sardurni presumably smeared some of it onto the necklace he gave to Michaela. It is the same scent that was hanging over both Chobry and Michaela's bodies.

Game Statistics

Below is the relevant information for some of the important characters in the Murderous Imp.

Renard

Skills:	Normal
Attack:	Rank Five
Armour:	Three
Health:	Six
Fear:	-
Trauma:	-
<i>Might:</i>	5
<i>Deft:</i>	3
<i>Wits:</i>	4

Will: 4

The 'Imp'

Skills:	Normal
Attack:	Rank Four
Armour:	One
Health:	Four
Fear:	-
Trauma:	-
<i>Might:</i>	3
<i>Deft:</i>	7
<i>Wits:</i>	6
<i>Will:</i>	3

Sardurni

Skills:	Normal
Attack:	Rank Four
Armour:	One
Health:	Six
Fear:	-
Trauma:	-
<i>Might:</i>	4
<i>Deft:</i>	5
<i>Wits:</i>	6
<i>Will:</i>	6

Dark is the Forest

A scenario for Danse Macabre by Christopher Johnstone

The characters are travelling along a road between thick forest and misty farmland when they hear a horrible, human scream from the forest. Its not far away, just within the trees in fact. But the scream is not quite what it appears and soon leads on to other dark and strange places...

Hook

Mists are gathering. The evening is ghosting up and thickening the air. The characters are walking a lonely road not too far from the next village but not quite close enough when a piercing screaming comes out of the woods to their left.

It is the frightened, horrified scream of a man, over and over again.

The Owl

Assuming the characters respond to the screams and enter the darkening woods they will be able to easily follow the screams to their source. As they draw closer though the screaming dies away.

Finally, after a good few minutes of hunting through holy and undergrowth they will emerge into a wide glen. The broken remains of bridge crosses a small rapid-flowing river. The bridge, if examined closely, has been intentionally thrown down. There are hammer and pick marks over its surface. Dwindling away on this side of the river, but much more obvious on the far bank is a road cut down into the chalky earth.

The chalk-white road stretches into the woods.

Perched above the bridge is a very large snow-white owl. It looks large enough to eat a cat and its huge orange eyes watch the characters intently if they come closer.

After a few moments the owl will scream, making the same terrified shrieking and very human sounds that the characters heard before.

It will then flap up into the air and swoop off down the road to vanish into the mists.

Wandering in the Woods

If the characters decide this is a little too much and decide to just turn about and walk back they will soon find themselves lost. The mists have come up thick in the air and the night is pitch black. They will start to see something moving among the trees, too. Something pale and ghostly and shimmering that drifts into view then vanishes.

They will soon have the feeling that they are being watched and followed by someone or something. Allow them to catch a very brief view of the ghost - for a ghost it

is - a young and beautiful woman in a flowing white gown.

She will appear and vanish. The characters may feel a brushing of something close to their skin.

Eventually one or more of them will hear a low and whispered pleading right behind their shoulder as if breathed into the ear, "Help."

If the character turns around there is of course nothing there.

During this time the character's attempts to find a way out of the forest will become more and more futile. Eventually they will walk out of the forest into a glade with a broken bridge and a white chalky road on the far bank. If they try to find a way back again, they will come back to the river. The first time this happens everyone must make a Test of Fear. It is very obvious that they should not have come back to the bridge. Something unnatural is at play.

The forest shifts, loops and twines itself up to force the characters back. They will realise this soon enough. The forest itself is bound up with an old, wild magic that is preventing their escape. If someone comes up with the idea of cutting a path through the forest or setting a fire to burn a path or some other equally desperate means of fleeing, then you should more or less roll with the player's obvious desire not to cross the river and follow the white road, and just let them escape.

The Chalk White Road

If the characters decide to cross the river it can be easily crossed by either wading or tracking a little way along the bank to where an old willow has subsided and continued to grow sideways out over the waters.

The white road is dead straight and gleams a silvery-grey in the night. Every now and again the characters will catch a glimpse of something white and slender moving between the trees.

The road goes on and on. After an hour of walking the characters will very likely be feeling hungry and tired from the day's travels. If they settle down and camp for the night things will pass relatively uneventfully... to a point.

The Dream

If the characters have set watches then determine randomly who the following event occurs to. Otherwise, you can introduce the Dream by having one of the characters wake up to find that they are looking at the Lady-in-White.

The character or characters on watch or just awakened will glance up to suddenly see the Lady-in-White, the tall and beautiful apparition of a young woman. She will stand in the road, silent and a little sad looking and will then

beckon the character or characters away and along the road.

If the characters on watch follow the ghost, or wake the others and follow the ghost together, she will lead them down the road a little way, to a small, lumpish looking stone building beside the road. She will ignore the building and then point down the road.

She will whisper, "Please help us," and will then vanish.

At this point, the characters all wake up.

They have fallen asleep and dreamt the same dream, thinking they are awake, and then awoken.

It is still night.

The characters will very likely be confused, a little befuddled. Was that a dream? Did anyone else see a ghost?

The next thing the characters will notice is an eerie burbling sound. It soon falls silent. Then in the gloom something very large and pale hops closer.

The great fat owl is no more than a few paces away from the camp. Its beak, thick and yellow, looks far more menacing this close. It looks like it could split old bones.

As the characters watch the owl hisses, then begins to burble, mutter, snarl and generally make the sort of noises that owls are not meant to make. It babbles, it clicks, it whistles and then it begins to hop back and forth, all the while keeping its huge amber eyes on you. As it dances around its head twists about until it is looking at you backwards, as owls sometimes do. It then rights itself – though you are not completely positive that the head twisted the correct direction to rest again forwards – and with one last snigger the owl flies up into the canopy.

If the characters lie back down one or two may find something wet beside their heads. In the wan light of moon and stars they will be able to deduce that it is a dead mouse.

Dawn creeps over the land and grey light seeps into the woods. The characters waken, stretch, yawn, scratch and are about to start thinking about bread and oats out ha when they will notice something small and brown and red in the leaf litter. Another dead mouse. Not far away is another mouse. And another. When they look around they will find over a dozen mice and voles scattered around the camp. All have been eviscerated or cut apart by something sharp.

The owl it seems was busy all night.

You may want to dole out one or two Trauma at this point. The Owl is getting fairly spooky.

If the characters persist on and walk into the night, a similar experience in the form of a waking vision rather than a dream should occur before the characters reach the tomb.

The Tomb

A little way along the road the characters will find the squat building they saw in their shared dream. It is square, sprouts a few sharp decorative spikes along its roof and is otherwise very plain. It has no windows but does have a single open doorway.

Inside the building is a flat plinth of stone. On the plinth is a skeleton in the tattered remnants of a white dress. Scattered all about the skeleton are dozens of little mice

and vole bodies. Piled on the skeleton are the brown remains of last summers flowers. And perhaps the summer before that, too.

If the characters get too close to the skeleton the horrible screaming will start again, but this time the owl is not obvious. The screaming will seem to come for everywhere and nowhere and will grow louder and angrier the closer any characters gets to the skeleton.

The screaming ceases if the characters leave the makeshift tomb.

If a character persists and actually touches the bones then a spectral shrieking creature will appear in the air above the skeleton: a naked man with dead white skin, talons for finger nails, orange eyes and a cloak of owl feathers.

Now might be a good time for some Trauma and a Test of Fear.

If the characters attack or persist in trying to get closer to the bones the White Owl will respond. He is a Wild Incarnate and it should become obvious more or less at once that he possibly shouldn't be upset. If the battle turns very bad for the characters and one or more of them are injured, then the shadowy outline of a young woman will manifest between the White Owl and the characters and block the Incarnate from attacking. She will whisper to him and calm him down.

If the characters retreat the phantom guardian will fade away and so too will the Lady-in-White if she is there.

The Next Bridge

The forest will grow steadily more poisonous. The leaves will turn yellow, the bark black and the songs of birds will fade away to silence.

The road eventually crosses another bridge. This bridge is, however, whole, and guarded. Three (or more if this is not enough) knights dressed in rusted chain and armour from head to toe stand at the bridge. As the characters approach the knights will rouse themselves from standing guard and block the way. One of them, in a creaking sort of voice will say, "None shall pass. Turn back."

He won't give the characters another warning. If they approach or even try to talk or parley the knights will attack. The knights are not an especially difficult foe and should be fairly easily dispatched. Make the knights less dangerous and drop their numbers if you are afraid that three is too many for your players.

Successful Awareness checks during the battle will allow the characters to notice that whenever a knight is struck or stabbed there is no blood. At the end of the battle the characters will find that the suits of armour have nothing in them. They are quite empty.

The suits of armour are automatons of a particular type similar in magic to a golem, but less powerful and more servile. The first time a character looks inside a 'dead' suit the character will gain one Trauma.

As soon as the battle is done with the characters will be hissed at from the trees. An old, very frightened and bent woodsman with a load of kindling on his back has been watching the whole affair. "Come quickly," he hisses. "Eusebius will send out a whole score of his rusted knights

once he knows what you've done." He looks up at the sky. "And he will know soon. The crows and rats and bats are his eyes. Come, if you want to live, strangers."

If the characters decide to wait on the road or ignore the old man and keep walking a small battalion of similar knights in rusted armour will eventually appear in the distance. If the characters engage in a battle they may very well be overwhelmed and killed. The knights are completely emotionless and ruthless. They will kill the characters even if they surrender.

The old man will linger in the woods long enough to be sure whether or not the characters are going to take his advice and flee. If they come with him he will lead them to a hole cut into the side of hedge, through this into the back yard of a large, but very old thatch-crowned house and then into a trapdoor and down into the basement of the house; old stone walls and must and dank.

A Little History

Here the old man will ask who the strangers are and how they came to be in this accursed place. After he has introduced himself as Abelard he will then explain things.

This is a house on the outskirts of a tiny village ruled over by a tyrant king named Eusebius. Eusebius has sold his soul to Hell and has been lord and master of the little village of Grimmfell for at least two hundred years. He is as withered as a corpse, but with bright and liquid eyes, and rules his little demesne from a fortress on a nearby hill surrounded by a moat of foetid water.

People disappear from the village at least once or twice a year. The once thriving village is now reduced to a hundred or so folks dwindling further year-by-year. No one knows what happens to those who vanish, but everyone has their own dark guesses. Attempts to escape into the forest are fruitless. The woods are enchanted, no one can leave as long as King Eusebius lives.

But has no one tried to kill Eusebius? Some have, but centuries ago. Eusebius simply can't be killed. Or no one knows how to kill him. Swords pass through his flesh but do no lasting harm. Fire burns him, but he heals again.

Besides, says Abelard, it's said that the king makes wax effigies of everyone who is born in the hamlet. He has a room full of them. He has only to order one or more effigies cast into a fire and a rebellious individual or family or several families are reduced to ashes. Abelard claims to have seen the results. People suddenly wither, their skin blackens and burns, their eyes melt away and they fall to the ground a smoking heap of ash and burned flesh.

No would dare attack the king. Even if they knew how to kill him.

And what of the Owl and the Lady-in-White? The Lady-in-White is the ghost of a young woman, the most beautiful ever born in the village. She refused to let herself be taken into the King's bed when his eye turned to her – he still has those urges, Abelard will whisper. This all occurred years and years ago. She chose poison instead. The Owl or the He of the Owl Cloak, as Abelard calls him is in local lore a very old god worshipped by the ancient tribes before the times of the Romans. He was not good, but not very evil either. A wild god with wild whims. It seems that He of

the Owl Cloak fell in love with the Lady-in-White, too, but she loved him a little in return.

When the Lady-in-White died He of the Owl Cloak went mad. Instead of haunting the edges of the forest he began to attack Eusebius's knights. Eusebius became terrified of the spirit. The king went into the wooded graveyard and dug up the Lady-in-White. He took a single finger bone and using dark sorceries bound her shade to his power.

Eusebius threatened to subject the ghost of the dead woman to torture unless He of the Owl Cloak relented. So He of the Owl Cloak did relent. He went off into the woods and turned slowly more and more crazed by grief. Not long after this He of the Owl Cloak collected the rest of his lover and took her body away somewhere, no one is quite sure where.

More Dreams

Abelard will allow the characters to digest what he has said and will go away to fetch some food and ale. While he is away the phantom ghost will appear in the cellar. She will smile a sad smile and say, "Please help us. You must kill Eusebius. You must free us from him. You are brave and good, I hope. Please..."

If the characters ask how Eusebius can be killed the ghost will explain. "Eusebius summons me to dance in his court once a moon to teach me I am still his. That I will always be his. But I have listened. I have learned. Eusebius keeps his heart in a glass urn in the very pits of his castle. There is a door behind the curtains that drape the wall behind the throne. It leads down into darkness. The way is guarded, no doubt... but, please, no others have come to the village in a hundred years. You may be out last hope."

At this point the characters all wake up. They have been asleep again, and it seems sharing their same dreams. Ablard has come and gone and left food and drink for them on the little table in the middle of the room.

The characters have several options now. They could try and goad the villagers into a revolt. They could set up a distraction somewhere else in the little village in order to sneak into the castle. Or they could try a more stealthy mode of attack. Perhaps entering after the fall of dusk or early in the morning, before dawn.

The motivation to do away with Eusebius is two-fold at this point. Without killing Eusebius the characters can never leave the little village in the woods. But also, assuming the characters are of a kindly and helpful nature, the plight of the folk of Grimmfell is likely to be already playing on the minds of the characters. Disguise and subtle infiltration might work, too. Dressing up s Knights Revenant is an obvious choice. Other options exist, however. The king keeps a full staff and silent, fearful kitchen hands and servants, chamberlains and maids all work in the castle.

Castle Eusebius

Castle Eusebius is an old, squat and very solidly built keep with an outer wall, perched on a round hill and surrounded by a rank moat.

The castle consists of three four levels. Two above ground and two below. In the topmost level are Eusebius's

personal rooms, the rooms of his more trusted courtiers and chamberlains and a treasury. All of these rooms are heavily protected. Doors are heavy and bound with iron. Knights Revenant patrol the corridors and a Gargoille watches the door of Eusebius's personal inner sanctum.

The ground level of the castle consists of a large throne room and feasting hall, kitchens, servants quarters, a butchery and larder. It is the busiest part of the castle but even here people tend to scurry quickly from door to door, like mice trying not to draw the attention of a hawk.

Many of Eusebius's Knight's Revenant stand motionless at stations in the great or in small 'guard rooms' in the towers or gates of the fortress. Eusebius has created about forty Knight's Revenant in total. Most will be watching over the village at any given time, ensuring hard work for the good of the king.

Below the ground floor are rooms divided into wine cellars, cold stores and a few more dank servant's quarters. At one end of the basement are some small dungeons, little more than holes into which rebellious villagers are thrown into and forgotten about. There are two men in these oubliettes, both are quite mad but more or less harmless.

The entrance to the very deepest pits of the castle can only be made through a doorway hidden behind Eusebius's Throne, and also by a second concealed door in Eusebius's private chambers. Gaining access to the long, snaking secret corridor behind the walls will give characters unhindered access to all three places.

The first room of the very bottom basement is a chamber of summoning and esoteric magic. Pentagram are drawn in blood upon the floor, weird and crazed symbols cover all the walls and more than one victim of sacrifice is slowly rotting in the corners. If the characters examine the corpses they will discover that after being bleed to death the victims had their heart's cut out.

This room is guarded at all times by six Knights Revenant. There is also a heavy chain in one corner dangling through a hole in the ceiling. If any of the slow, lumbering suits of armour are able to reach the chain they will yank down upon it to ring a bell in the rooms above and summon aid.

If the characters manage to stop this, then all the better, but if they don't then not all is lost. It will take reinforcements a good few minutes to be mustered. Eusebius is not willing to allow his secret room to be revealed to all, so Knights Revenant will be ordered into Eusebius's personal chambers and then down into the dungeons below from there. The king will not use the door behind the throne except in a dire emergency.

The next room is not guarded. This room contains dozens and dozen of little wax dolls. Names are written on each doll in a debased form of Latin. A brazier is tended in the middle of the room by an old, blind and crippled man. He will not try to stop the characters, and will cower and hide from them if they approach. If the characters try to speak with him they will soon discover that his tongue has been cut out.

The room beyond this is small and circular, with a high roof and mouldy walls, like the inside of a tower built

underground. The entrance to the Room of the Heart is via a trapdoor in the floor of this room. On top of the trapdoor is a minor demon summoned by Eusebius a hundred years ago and bound here to guard the door. The demon is manifested as a hunched, hairless man-like creature with glowing white-hot eyes and long scimitar claws on the end of dangling arms. You may want to vary the demon's power so that he is a match for the characters without being unstoppable. A demon of lower rank, probably of **Manifestation and Ascendancy** Two or Three is probably best, even if the group of characters are quite powerful in their own ways.

Beyond the demon is the deepest and blackest room of the castle. The characters will need torches or lanterns here. And what they will find is table upon table, row upon row, and shelf upon shelf of glass and crystal vases, urns, jars and bottles. Every one of them contains a human heart.

Conclusion

By this point the characters may find themselves having to split their attention between trying to fight off a horde of Knights Revenant at the door and crushing, hacking or stomping on hearts.

If the characters decide to start destroying hearts at random, then roll a d6 for each character who is engaged in randomly destroying glass urns and bottles. If a character scores a 6 then the heart is destroyed, Eusebius withers and dies and all his magic vanishes.

Alternatively the characters may come up with a quicker and more cunning plan. A fire set with oil or tinder will spread quickly across the wooden tables. If the characters set a fire then Eusebius will try to rush into the room and try to save his heart where he will be consumed along with the heart.

If the characters try to puzzle out which heart is Eusebius's then consider the following possibilities. Eusebius's heart might still be beating every minute or so. Do the character hear a very quiet heartbeat every now and again? Eusebius might have placed his heart vainly in the most ornate and largest urn, or he may have been more careful and put it in a very small and humble jar. His heart could easily be fresher looking than the others, or perhaps an unnatural colour, grey or black or greenish-yellow.

All of these are possibilities that you could work with.

As soon as the heart is destroyed Eusebius will clutch at his chest, the flesh will wither from his features and he will collapse and age the two hundred years he has cheated in a matter of seconds. He will writhe about a moment and end up a dead and desiccated corpse. The Knights Revenant that he conjured up will fall apart and collapse. Small tendrils of silvery smoke will drift up from each pile of armour. If the characters look closely they will see a face in each cloud before it drifts to nothing.

The magic that holds the village bound within the forest will lift, and characters will be able to leave the forest without any delay. The wax dolls will become nothing more than wax dolls. The only thing that will remain is the Gargoille in the upper tower. Gargoille have very little spirit and will of their own. This one will wander about confused for a time, then once it realises that it is free it will blindly try to destroy

everything it can that reminds it of Eusebius (including many priceless treasures) and will then lumber out of the castle and into the forest, never to be seen by human eyes again.

If the characters are successful the Lady-in-White will chose a private moment to appear to the characters and thank them. She will bid them farewell and tell them that she is passing into the Kingdom of Wilds now and that she has hope that He of the Old Cloak will follow her and reclaim a little of his sanity. She is already a little less spectral and little wilder looking. Incarnate magic seems to be seeping into her.

Once she is gone the characters will, of course, wake up.

Knight Revenant

Need: Animus 1, Ritualis 2

Gain: Animus 1, Mortis 1, Ritualis 1, Spiritas 1

A Knight Revenant is a suit of armour given animation through ritual workings and the binding of a small amount of spirit into the suit, in a ritual that mixes elements of automaton and necromantic arts. The armour itself is animated with ritual and esoteric sorcery, but the armour also has conjured into it the soul of a dead knight, soldier or warrior summoned out of the netherworld and bound into the service of the sorcerer who has created the unnatural servant.

Knights Revenant do not appear to be unnatural at first glance as long as they are completely enclosed in armour. Their movements are, however, halting and a little clumsy. If the characters had such a word to use they would describe the movements as mechanical.

Knights Revenant can understand commands, and obey without question, and can speak and reason out problems within limits. The soul trapped within exists in a tortured state. The constant pain of its existence hampers its capacity for intelligent service.

Characters who encounter Knight's Revenant that are obviously unnatural (i.e. the armour is patchy and the suit is obviously walking by itself) take a rank of Trauma. Otherwise, if the armour completely encloses anything hidden within, then any character who investigates a 'dead' Knight Revenant and discovers that the suit is hollow takes a Rank of Trauma.

If seen normally nothing is visible within a Knight Revenant. If seen with second sight or enchanted tricks that allow one to see the dead, then a hideous, tattered and withered spectre of the soul inhabiting the suit of armour becomes visible.

The Fear and Trauma listed blow is sued only when the characters realis what they are dealing with.

Skills:	Normal
Attack:	Rank Three
Armour:	Rank Three
Health:	Four
Fear:	Average
Trauma:	One
<i>Might:</i>	5
<i>Def:</i>	3
<i>Wis:</i>	2
<i>Will:</i>	2

Gargouille

Use the following attributes for the Gargouille that is guarding the Lord's private chambers.

Skills:	Normal
Attack:	Rank Four
Armour:	Rank Four
Health:	Eight
Fear:	Difficult
Trauma:	One
<i>Might:</i>	7
<i>Def:</i>	4
<i>Wis:</i>	1
<i>Will:</i>	1



The Misty Hunt

A scenario for Danse Macabre by Christopher Johnstone

Lummerslint, a Bavarian Baron, invites the characters to his hunting retreat on the borders between the Kingdom of Germany and Poland, where vast and untamed forests thick with shadows still rank the hills and vales.

But all is not as it seems. Lummerslint's hunt goes awry and soon the hunters and hunted may be reconsidering who is who.

Hook

The characters may have been introduced to Baron Lummerslint in an earlier adventure, *The Murderous Imp*. If they have not then you will have to introduce Lummerslint as an acquaintance from the past. Lummerslint is a jovial, hard-drinking and likeable man who likes to think that he has a common touch. He could easily decide to spend some nights wallowing in mead and ale in some dingy little tavern disguised something suitably peasantish, perhaps a blacksmith or baker, only to invite some of the good friends and fellows he meets to his castle at a later time – the good friends and fellows in question being the player characters.

The Hunt

Lummerslint is known wide and far for his near-fanatical pursuit of the pastime of hunting. He is, in fact, a remarkable huntsman, though a little gone to seed. Portly now, and a bit grey he still enjoys the chase and considers no game too large or fierce or mythical.

It has come to his attention that there are rumours of a last herd of white deer roaming a particular stretch of forest known as the Haggarvidden. These are very recent rumours, and they are of course false, propagated by his enemies for reasons discovered later. But for Baron Lummerslint the temptation is too much, and despite the rumours that something else is haunting the woods also, something dark and ancient, the Baron has decided to organise a deer hunt.

The Haggarvidden

The Haggarvidden is remote and empty of even the smallest towns or villages or charcoal burner's hut. To the north it mingles into a ceaseless sea of pine and fir, eventually opening into the farmland of a southern demesnes of Poland. Most of the Haggarvidden, however, is a mingled crosshatch of dense forest and rushy mires. Along the southern edge of the forest there are several rocky tors that restrict entering or exiting the heart of the Haggarvidden to just two narrow passes. A road runs along the southern edge of the woods and crags.

Nominally the Haggarvidden falls within the lands owned by Lummerslint, but in truth no mortal man holds much claim over the place. Stretches of farmland and wooded valleys to the south of the Haggarvidden are very much under the yoke and axe of Lumerslint's serfs and thralls, and can be considered safely in his control.

The Hunting Retreat

The characters will arrive at a small, ivied keep thick with festive airs. They will be greeted perhaps a little over-enthusiastically by a very drunken Lummerslint, assured of fine hunted and liberally indulged in food and beer.

The next morning though is an early start. Lummerslint will explain a little of the planned hunt, and also that he is very excited about the whole prospect. A few people may make jokes that everyone hopes that Lummerslint may catch the Beast of Haggarvidden along with his white deer. If the characters ask the Beast of Haggarvidden will be variously dismissed as superstition, explained away as a rabid wolf, or point-blankly not-discussed as if it were present and listening, depending on who is asked and how superstitious the local person is.

The next morning, very early, perhaps a little too early, the characters will be roused to join the hunting party. The hunting party consists of ten beaters and trackers, a dozen taggers along and invitees, and six guardsmen. The guardsmen will tend to linger at the rear and will smoke their pipes and chew grass stalks and not be overly concerned about prospective dangers.

The Morning

In the morning the hunt will traverse the hills and valleys of Lummerslints territory, then ascend a steeply rising slope into the first outlying woodlands of the Haggarvidden. There are two paths to take, both are treacherous and narrow, and both wend between high crags that stand between the cultivated land to the south and the wilderness to the north.

The rumours that have reached Lummerslint suggest that the white deer have been seen by fur-trappers deep in the Haggarvidden. There is a small outcrop of rock visible amongst the misty fens and black woods, and this is where the deer were last seen – so it is said.

As the party progresses onwards some of the locals will start telling stories about the Beast of the Haggarvidden, laughing and smirking as they do. The usual fare about eyes the size of fists, and teeth like daggers and a terrifying unearthly shriek will come out of the stories. Some people will claim to have meet people who have meet people who have seen the Beast.

But as the hunters press deeper, past the fog-choked fens and among the shadowy pine stands the laughter will turn a little stale, then dwindle away. The forest has a bad feel to it. As if it resent humans profaning its silence and shadows.

The Crag

The Crag is a stand of rock, covered with gorse and hawthorn, about thirty foot high. Its an obvious landmark but of little other interest. The forest around it is very dense and very dark and soupy with fog. There ground here is muddied, too. As if some large herd of something has moved through recently.

Something Amiss

As the characters dismount to look at the tracks you may want to allow Tests of Awareness. There are two immediate clues that all is not right. The muddied prints are hoof prints and looking carefully will reveal that they are iron-shod with shoes. The second is that not long after the party arrives an indeterminate 'bird' will cry out. Then another and another. Anyone with skill in the wilderness who pays attention to the birdcalls will realise that they don't sound quite right. Lummerslint himself is too absorbed in thoughts of the chase to come to notice anything awry.

Successful tests of Awareness will give characters enough of a warning to duck for cover and avoid the first volley.

If the characters ask sensible questions about the Beast of the Haggardvidden, either now or later in the game) they may learn that it is rumoured to be afraid of fire and the holy book and nothing else. Both these rumours are true and knowledge of them may well keep the characters alive later in the story.

Ambush

The first arrow that falls from the sky will strike one of the guards. He'll look down at the bloody mess a little confused before falling to the ground.

The rain of arrows will then begin and the air will turn dark with feathers. All the characters will have to dodge at least three arrows each before the rain stops and heavily armed men in the black and blue eagle livery of Lord Jozef of Hilderwald pour from the forest. For Lummerslint and his men to stand and fight is hopeless.

At least fifty well-armed soldiers will start cutting through the fist huntsmen when Lummerslint, stuck by an arrow to the arm, stumbles and falls next to one of the characters.

"Help," Lummerslint will wheeze. "Its an ambush, a trap! That bastard Hilderwald wants my lands good and proper. He's going to have me done away with. We must flee."

Although standing and fighting is impossible, escape is not. Most of the horses have been struck with arrows and bolted in the same direction trampling the ambushers in one direction. Allow the characters at this point to fight a way out of the ambush and escape. Fog and shadows will be their friends here.

Capture

If the characters manage to get themselves captured, then Lummerslint and his men will be hanged from the trees. Baron Hilderwald, who is a cousin to Lummerslint and the heir apparent, is however a playful man.

He will offer to spare the serfs and peasants and the tag-along sorts (which the player characters will fall into) if one of them can defeat him in a simple game of chess. Hilderwald and his men have been passing the time in the forest in damp and cold and without fires which would have given them away. Hilderwald considers himself something of a chess master and has roundly beaten everyone in his employ who is worth challenging.

He is a little elated at having disposed of Lummerslint, is in a generous mood, and doesn't see the point in killing the workers and serfs he has now inherited or murdering strangers. Hilderwald is in favour with the King of Germany, he feels secure in pressing his claim even if it becomes widely known that it was he who killed Lummerslint in a 'border skirmish'. But of course the serfs and retainers will need to be taught a lesson about who is the master.

So, Hilderwald will offer to play a game of chess against one of the survivors. If Hilderwald wins he'll cut off everyone's left hands. If he loses he'll let them all go free with hands intact.

The Game

Use the Resolve Rules here. No one among the non-player characters has played chess before at all so it will naturally fall to one of the player characters to play the game. Base the Contests of Skill on Games. Whoever reaches zero Resolve first loses the game.

If Hilderwald wins he will keep his promise and have all the survivor's left hands hacked off (including the player character's). If he wins he will keep his word but twist it. He doesn't like being shown up and in a petty act will order his men to put out the left eye of the everyone and cut off the left ear – so that they will remember to not talk too loosely about what they have seen or heard.

The Aftermath

Assuming the characters escape the ambush they will find themselves immediately lost in the fog-choked forest, with a few stragglng retainers of Lummerslint's and the injured Lummerslint himself.

Lummerslint will see at once that he has been deceived. His enemy spread rumours of a thing that he knew Lummerslint would want to hunt and then waited until Lummerslint announced a day for it. The armed knights and soldiers must have crept into the forest the night before.

Of the survivors there are two huntsmen, Godfrey and Buchard, a young courtier named Oswin and two older men, a scribe named Liutprand who had come along for the air and Ethelbert, a groomsman and keeper of the horses.

The characters may or may not have managed to keep hold of some horses, but none of the non-player characters have had the presence of mind to do so except for Ethelbert who has managed to hold onto the reins of two horses. The group is likely going to have to move slowly and on

foot.

Lummerslint will tell them that he knows a secret way past the craggy bluffs that guard the southern borders of the forest. This will allow the group to avoid taking the passes which are no doubt carefully watched, or trying to trek around the craggy hills, which would take days and could end in starvation.

This plan would be simple enough, except that fog has set in and is growing thicker. Hilderwald will be searching the bodies of the dead in the glen and as soon as he realises that Lummerslint is not there his troops of soldiers will begin combing the forest.

The Beast of the Haggarvidden

Most of the rest of the tale will consist of the characters slowly realising that they are being hunted both by armed men and by something else. Each of the following should be used to add to the tension. Use a lot of Tests of Awareness. Make it obvious that the beast, which is never clearly seen, is hunting the characters and possibly playing with them.

Spread the following over two or three days and nights. Imply, but never state clearly that the characters may be walking in circles. With the fog being so thick knowing the right way to walk is difficult.

The first thing that the characters will find which will hint that things are not quite right in the forest is the body of a young deer. The deer is torn all about the throat and its entrails have been torn out and partially devoured. The kill is old, however, a good few days old. There are tracks around that look a little like a very large dog or cat but they have been eaten away by rain.

Another deer is found, only this one is larger and has been dragged into the branches of a tree. It has been slashed about the throat and messily drained of blood. Alternatively one of the escaped horses could turn up dead in the lower branches of a tree.

Call for a Test of Awareness. If the characters succeed then they hear a small troop of soldiers wandering closer. They will then have a chance to hide. If the Test of Awareness fails then the characters may be forced to fight.

The characters are at camp. They still have some food and supplies, and sooner or later a lunch must be made, a small fire set. At some point when one, two or more characters split up, perhaps to look for firewood or wash up in a stream, call for a Test of Awareness.

If the characters pass, tell them that as they double back and walk back along a trail they were wandering along a few moments ago they notice a set of large paw prints sunk across the path. Something crossed the path behind the characters not moments ago.

Have the characters find the slaughtered remains of some of Hilderwald's soldiers. Or, have an insane, babbling and badly injured soldier come stumbling towards them out of the mist. He should live long enough to rave about the

dagger teeth and eyes the size of fists.

All those Non-Player characters are there for an obvious reason, too. They are going to start disappearing. Leave one on watch at night, and he's not around in the morning. Or just turn your back for a moment, turn around again and... where did Ethelbert go? You can use the Non-Player Character's increasing panic to add more tension, as well. More than one may snap. They might try to make a break and run off into the woods. Will the Players try to stop them, or just let them go?

Apply plenty of rustles to the trees and at night the odd eerie and mournful howling cry in the distance might work well, too.

Attacking the Beast

If any of the characters are foolhardy enough to actually attack the Beast of the Haggarvidden, then the results are not likely to be pleasant or protracted. The beast is a very ancient and very powerful strain of dark incarnate that is more or less vanished from the world. The characters, even when fighting it, are unlikely to get a very clear view. It moves fast and will keep to the shadows. Try to keep its whole form obscure to maintain suspense. They might see two flashing, ghost-white eyes, a flash of teeth, a massive hairy back hunched with powerful shoulders. Nothing about the creature should ever be very distinct.

Ascent and Escape

Either when the fog lifts, or through good luck or skill, the characters will eventually come to the foothills of the southern crags. Lummerslint will be able to lead them to a small trail, little more than a goat track going up a sheer cliff. The track winds in and out of outcrops of rock and eventually plunges into a cave. The cave was used once long ago as a burial place for the heathen dead. It is cramped and miserable, full of old yellow bones and weird carvings.

You may want to play with the choice between the lesser of evils here. Either stay out in the forest with the Beast of Haggarvidden or go into a deep, cold, burial cave full of who-knows-what....

The question of what the characters have on hand to light their way may crop up here, too. If they have no torches or lanterns at all, then Lummerslint will suggest that he can find his way in the dark. He will say, "There is but one way, cut level by the heathens long ago. I used to come here as a child to test my courage. I can grope my way along the path."

If the characters are forced to walk through the cave in absolute darkness then the chance to use cold touches of something brushing past, the gentle half-heard whisper of a voice close at hand or the approaching tread of heavy feet are all potentially useful for adding a little final tension.

The Beast of the Haggarvidden will not follow the characters into the cave. If they make it this far, then they are safe.

Conclusion

The cave emerges along with a small stream in a tree-clad gully on the south flank of the crag. There is a small crofter's hut nearby and loyal subjects to aid the Baron. As soon as the keep hears word that Lummerslint and his party has been ambushed the seneschal of the house will send soldiers and knights.





A Game of Cards

A scenario for Danse Macabre by Christopher Johnstone

A small monastery upon a low and hawthorn-choked hill is haunted by a thieving spirit. Or so it seems.

Valuable things have been disappearing, gold candles, then chalices and reliquaries. But worse has now happened. One of the acolytes has disappeared and there is a whiff of something unnatural in the air.

Hook

The characters are upon a long and lonely road. It is an area well known for a haunt of thieves and brigands. Lawless countryside stretches for miles. Twilight is falling without a town in sight, but crouched low on a nearby hill is a saviour. A small, well fortified monastery, lit by gold lanterns and protected by heavy doors.

If the characters present themselves at the monastery they will be welcomed but by a slightly suspicious young monk in brown sackcloth robes. Thieves have tried to sneak into the monastery before by deception. But the monastery is sworn to shelter travellers and pilgrims, so whether or not the characters appear fully trustworthy the monks will welcome them into the halls.

The monks on the doors are well armoured and armoured, and look more like monastic knights than men of peace. The young monk who is sent for to see to the needs of visitors is named Brother Benvido. He is a short, thin man with a mop of mousy hair cut into a tonsure. His face is youthful but hung with worry. His eyes are bright but remote.

First Appearances

Things in the monastery will immediately appear to be somewhat wrong. Not only the usual riches are missing, but more common things. There are no ecclesial paintings on the walls, no wooden carvings or saints or gold-leaf inlaid images of martyrs. If the characters visit one of the monasteries many chapels they will find that the altar is bare, the incense and candles are missing and that there is not even a crucifix above the altar.

Brother Benvido

If questioned about this, Brother Benvido will not be evasive. He will tell the characters quite plainly that things have simply been going missing of late. The spate of theft has grown worse and worse. It started with the small and inexpensive things. Now reliquaries are vanishing from their iron-bound boxes. And then the next night the iron-bound boxes vanish.

In Benvido's opinion it is only fair that visitors know what is occurring in the monastery.

He believes that there is some sort of malignant entity haunting the halls. A thieving demon. But why would a demon be stealing holy things? He doesn't know. Perhaps to destroy them. How long has this been going on? About a year or so. There is very little left in the monastery that is of value.

During the Night

If the characters decide to investigate it will be without Benvido's consent. The Abbot of the Monastery has forbidden outside interference in the matter. He has even barred anyone from sending for help to Rome. It seems that he wants to keep things quiet and prevent a scandal.

The character's cells will not be watched but they will find that, if they move around at night they are restricted by a number of locked doors.

The abbey consists of a small grounds surrounded by a fortified wall. A single squat stone building contains the refectory on the ground floor, a number of dormitory cells in an adjacent wing, and more cells and an infirmary upstairs. A square and not very elegant cloister connects the main building to the church. The church is locked up at night.

Lodgings for guests is in a small building set off to one side and connected to the main dormitories by a covered walk. Many of the outer doors are open and unlocked, but the deeper the characters enter into the sanctums the more doors will be barred.

The Abbot's room is a large cell in the loft of the main building. He has an audience chamber and a constant guard outside his door.

Footsteps

If the characters are wandering about at night tell them that they can hear footsteps coming towards them, short hurried and brisk.

The footsteps will grow louder and louder, until the characters ought to be able to see who is approaching. The footsteps will come right up to the characters, and at this point have them make a Test of Awareness. The characters who pass will realise that the footsteps are coming from within the wall. The footsteps hurry along for some way, then stop. The sound of a door being opening and closed can be heard, and then a descent into a deep stairwell.

Make this a wall dividing a hall from the main refectory so that both sides of the wall can be examined. There are no obvious doors (in fact at this point there are no doors at all).

Nothing else unusual happens during the night.

The Next Morning

When the characters rise the next morning they are likely to immediately notice that a few more things have gone missing during the night. A chair in one of the halls. A small table. Whatever few odds and ends are left in the monastery are slowly dwindling away.

Brother Benvido will come to meet them and show them to the guest's refectory for breakfast. He will appear shaken, pale, quite stricken. As he moves about the refectory his hands will be noticeably trembling.

Eventually, whether or not he is questioned he will confide in the visitors. One of the monastic laymen has gone missing. His cell is in a ruin. There are scorch marks on the walls and the thin raking of claws dug into the stone. Everyone is terrified. Something unholy has entered into the monastery and has now taken a life.

Abbot Maynard has locked himself away with his chief monks and is consulting them, but he has forbidden anyone from interfering in the affair or from inviting help from outside. Benvido is worried that the Abbot is either senile or insane. Because of Brother Benvido's vows he cannot disobey a command from above.

He can however, invite guests to stay a little longer, and if those guests should decide to spend some time in the library searching through the old records or patrolling the halls at night, or setting a trap, then, well, Benvido can hardly be held responsible for such unsanctioned actions.

Choices

There are a number of possibilities here. The characters may decide to simply leave the monks to their fate. If the characters choose to take their leave you can round the game with outlaw trouble. The hills are infested with lawless brigands and sooner or later the characters will be attacked on the road. A skirmish with brigands will give you a way to end with a little excitement.

The players might also decide to offer to go for help, or they might decide to stay and try to puzzle things out themselves.

Benvido isn't keen to send anyone for help just yet. That would invite too much wrath from above once it was discovered by the church that the Abbot had strictly prohibited this. And of course he would prefer to know what they are dealing with first, before going to the nearest cathedral for aid. Summoning an Exorcist from Rome will also take time. If there is a way to deal with the unknown entity sooner and more readily, then all the better.

During the Day

No one will pay a great deal of attention to the characters, except to subtly and helpfully suggest that they may be safer if they left the Abbey. No one is feeling very secure at the moment in the dark and gloomy halls.

Everyone is in a panic about the disappearance. Monks are gathered in little knots of brown robes whispering to one another in hoarse voices.

The Library

If the characters decide to investigate the history of the monastery they will find out a number of things. Some of

these are useful, others not.

The Abbey is built in the site of a village where years ago there had been a terrible slaughter. The village was raised to the ground, and all within were slaughtered or driven into the hills. The ruins of a castle that used to overlook the village are still visible on a higher hill a little way to the west.

There is a local legend that the last Earl of the ruined castle had a penchant for woman and beer in the village and used to go from one to the other by means of a secret tunnel.

There are rumours of ghosts and evil spirits in the ruined castle on the hill.

There are several strange tales about goings on in the monastery itself. The cold room and cellars are supposed to be haunted by the shade of a fat and gluttonous monk who died of a heart attack while stealing wine. One of the cells (now walled up) is supposed to have been the site of a grisly murder.

If the characters think to carefully check the registrar of important religious days they will find that Abbot Maynard has been missing on more than one occasion and that other senior monks have had to preside.

If the characters open up any of the large illuminated manuscripts or Bibles they will find that all the gold lettering, illustrations and scroll-work has been carefully cut out.

The Castle

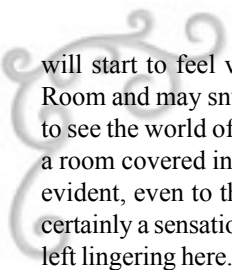
If the characters decide to investigate the castle they will find a crumbling tower of stone, entwined with ivy as thick as a man's arm and completely disintegrated on one side. The whole edifice looks like a great yawning maw. There are a few intact rooms, difficult to get to as the staircases are not entirely complete, a cellar full of mud and broken masonry.

Coming to the castle at night may add a further inexplicable experience. If the characters listen carefully they will be able to hear the faint sounds of laughter and music, but the sounds are coming from under their feet, deep beneath the castle. There is no easy way to gain an entrance to the hellish gambling den below from the castle. The way was completely buried when a wall collapsed years ago.

The Sealed Room

The Sealed Room can be found with some hunting and examining of old plans of the abbey. It is bricked up and can be got into either from the outside (the window is still present and unshuttered – the characters may even notice it and consider it suspicious, being the only unshuttered window in the wall.) or by breaking through the brick.

The room holds nothing of any real significance but any character who spends more than a few minutes within it



will start to feel very cold. Candle gutter in this Sealed Room and may snuff out. Any character who has a means to see the world of the dead, or shades of the dead will see a room covered in spattered blood. No spectre or ghost is evident, even to those with the second sight, but there is certainly a sensation that something full of malice has been left lingering here.

The Cellars

The ghost of the gluttonous monk does indeed haunt the cellars, but he is more or less a distraction, and a small clue. If the characters encounter him they will find themselves staring at a grotesquely bloated spectre, with huge staring eyes, clutching his stomach as if famished. He will appear briefly, then vanish as ghosts are prone to do. He has no interest in the living. Occasionally his dull scuffling footsteps will be heard but he, himself will not be seen.

If the characters are persistent, they will eventually see the ghostly monk walk up to a wall, act as if he is opening a door and then pass through the solid stone. There used to be a door here. The monk remembers it this way and still sees a door.

The wall was blocked over some time ago but very poorly. The stones are loose and can be easily pulled away, even by hand. Behind the wall is a short shaft of stairs leading down to an old and rotten door. On the other side of the door there used to be a staircase leading down into a tunnel that cuts through the earth below. The characters can lower themselves into the tunnel by use of ropes. If they fall it is only about a seven foot drop but the floor is paved with stone. There is a slight chance of injury at the Storyteller's discretion.

The Underworld Tunnel

This is the tunnel that the Earl of the ruined castle used to creep along in order to get from his castle to the village that long ago stood where the monastery now resides.

The Tunnel has an entrance from the cellar, which has been shoddily concealed, as well as several other better-concealed entrances about the monastery.

Other means of finding the tunnel might include carefully tapping along the wall where the characters heard the phantom footsteps until they strike upon a loose stone, a clever little catch or a false panel. Getting into the tunnel from above is also possible, although this means going up into the floor above the wall where the footsteps were heard and then removing floorboards. Crawling down into the hole will bring the characters onto the wood slat ceiling of the secret passage between the two buttresses of stone on either side.

Tunnelling into the wall itself is not something the monks will tolerate. The underworld tunnel is built into a supporting wall and the monks will oppose any attempts to attack it with sledge hammers or picks.

Don't make the tunnel finding too difficult. Once your characters have figured out that the footsteps must belong to someone moving through a secret passage, listen to their clever ideas and allow one of these to pan out.

Dogs and Doors

The Tunnel on the monastery side ends at a great ironbound, polished and relatively new looking door. The door is barred from the other side, a small ram is needed to knock it down, no lock pick will do any good as there is no lock. A small makeshift ram made of a short tree trunk will eventually bring the door down. The monks will however begin to get suspicious of their visitor's intentions if the characters begin making siege equipment in the fields outside the monastery.

The door is also guarded by three large and vicious looking hounds. The floor stinks with their urine and filth and there are bones scattered all around them. The dogs are a large breed similar to mastiffs. They are aggressive and dangerous, but they are also chained to rings set in the walls near the door. A bow will make short work of them if the characters are cruel and cunning enough to think of this solution.

On the other side of the door is a small dark chamber and another door, again locked, but this time with an expensive brass key and barrel lock. The characters will hear the voices of several monks discussing the problem of the disappearances beyond this door quite clearly. The door is very thin.

Breaking through this door would be a mistake. The door is concealed on the other side and leads directly into Abbot Maynard's private audience chamber. The monks in council will immediately mistake the characters for the mysterious intruders, and will cry out for the laymen guards who are on watch outside. The guards won't take chances and will attack. More guards will also be summoned by a horn. At this point the characters will either have to surrender to interrogation, which is unlikely to be pleasant as it will be supervised by Abbot Maynard, or fight their way out of the monastery.

Something Stranger

At the ruined castle end of the Tunnel is a massive stone door decorated all about with leering demonic faces, burned here and there with scorch marks and marked with strange sigils writ up and down the door in scarlet paint. The air has a slight scent of whiskey, smoke and brimstone. This door is utterly impenetrable. No ram or attack, magical or otherwise will bring it down, short of a direct assault by an Angel, Demon or Sylphaen of Manifestation Rank Four or greater.

Benvido's Advice

If the characters go to Benvido and ask his advice he will suggest waiting to see who or what it is walking along the passage at night. He remains very uncertain about the whole exercise and is now feeling increasingly guilty about tacitly employing the stranger's aid.

Vantage

The small precipice where the door from the haunted cellar opens out onto the underworld tunnel makes a good hiding place to look down on anyone or anything walking along the passage below. This vantage point will be spotted by characters carefully searching the underworld tunnel

even if they entered by some crevice or hole other than the door in the cellar. Other little side holes and blocked up tunnels adjoining the main tunnel can also be made into useful hiding places.

The Abbot

Each night at about one o'clock the Abbot gets up from his bed, feeds the dogs some cuts of meat and bones, then hurries along the little tunnel with a candle-lantern in hand. He will be immediately recognisable by his garb alone if the characters are watching the tunnel.

He moves hastily along, head-bent and intent on his destination and will not notice the characters, even those who have made rather incompetent attempts at hiding. He will scuttle along and vanish into the shadows.

If the characters leap out and confront the Abbot he will squeal and try to run for the ruined castle end of the tunnel. He isn't a good runner though, being quite portly, near sighted and a little lame. The characters will very likely outpace him with few problems. If caught or trapped Abbot Maynard will blubber and plead incoherently, and then at random begin screaming for help. He is well out of earshot here. Interrogation of the Abbot will result in little. He is far more terrified of what lies beyond the demon-visage door than the characters.

If your players' characters are of a dark sort and things go too far Maynard will take his secrets to his grave rather than talk.

The Demon-Visage Door

Whether the characters follow Maynard to the door, or go to investigate the door after capturing Maynard they will find the same thing. Maynard will be let through the door without comment. But standing in front of the closed door is a tall, black-cowled figure with a lantern in one hand and a great vellum tome in the other. His hands are spidery and pale, like things that live underground away from the light. Nothing else of his flesh is visible.

If the characters approach the cloaked man will raise his head and greet them. He will then pause, look through his book and after mentioned each character by name, he will say, "Ahhhh, yes, yes. I was expecting you last night. It seems you are a little late in the scheme of things. Places have set, however, and places once set are always set. I expect you be joining us tonight, sirs?"

If the characters ask what it is they might be joining the man in black will chuckle. "What? What indeed? Why only the finest of everything. Everything! Wine and ale. Ladies my friends. Girls if you prefer. Boys if you tend that way. And the finest of games and pastimes. The grandest most spectacular most desirous little place to while away a night in Heaven, Earth or Hell. And I can tell you, sirs, I speak with grand authority. I have spent my time in all three kingdoms, that I have."

The cowled figure is in fact a demon of middling power, a Merchant-of-Souls named Liutranthandulus. Once he has explained what lies beyond the door he will say, "So, good sirs? Will you be joining us tonight? You are of course under no obligations. Nothing need be signed away just yet. Except that there are a few minor and trifling house

rules. No fighting, no summoning of spirits, divine, hellish or otherwise, no working of sorceries or any sort, no cheating at cards, no indulging in the ladies (or men) without paying but of course drinks are on the house. Transgressions of the house rules will punished by being thrown to the nine-headed beast, Siamut, fiend of the fourth circle of Hell to be devoured ipso facto of aforesaid crimes, et cetera etcetera and so on."

More Choices

If the characters decide to attack, Liutranthandulus will grow suddenly larger until his head scrapes the ceiling. A long fish-toothed maw will grow out of his face, wings of tattered black will sprout from his back and his fingers will become clawed and sharp. The transformation will cause two ranks of Trauma to everyone who sees it.

He will try first to frighten the characters into either going away or settling down and talking. He will fight only if pressed. If during a fight the characters break off the attack Liutranthandulus will return to his normal shape and tell them quite curtly that they are no longer welcome. If the characters persist in being troublesome the demon will summon up a large number of implets of Manifestation Rank One or Two and tell them to drive the characters out of the monastery. The characters will be bitten and clawed until they leave the monastery. At this point they have effectively failed. Returning the monastery will result in another preternatural attack of implet demons – which remain invisible to everyone except the player characters. Everyone else, including Brother Benvido will assume the characters have gone insane. The monks may even try to do the kind thing and lock the characters away in the infirmary, where of course they will be chased around and around by a horde of angry imps until they really do go insane.

If, however, the demon is seriously injured in the fight he will vanish in a burst of green and scarlet fire. If Liutranthandulus vanishes in this way the door will crumble and everything within will also vanish. If Maynard is inside the characters will find him quite insane grovelling through dust and litter searching for his gold and gems and lost treasures.

The Hellfire Tavern

Assuming the characters agree to Liutranthandulus's terms they will be allowed to enter the Hellfire Tavern. A dungeon of the old castle converted into a cavernous tavern full of wailing laughter, singing, debauchery and drunken antics. There are witches and warlocks here indulging in the fruits of their bargains, and demons, too. Dozens and dozens of imps, about as tall as five-year old children, long limbed and gangly creatures with little horns and savage mouths and skin of ochre and soot. The demons are playing instruments, dancing, serving drink and gambling.

Unnatural entities of a more beguiling nature, minor dark incarnate made from the souls of the beautiful, sinful dead are here also. These are bound and anguished spirits though. They are obedient but cold, silent and carry a tortured look in the eyes. These Lost Souls are here to

provide carnal pleasures, but their services cost – some implet or other will negotiate a price but the going rate is one piece of Soul.

Abbot Maynard

Abbot Maynard will be found at a great circular table engaging in a game of cards with a group of two witches and five small, guileful and animal-faced demons. They are playing high stakes already. Maynard has already gambled away most of his monastery's worldly goods – now he is gambling with his flock's souls. Already he has placed two on the table.

Some imp, witch or demon in the room will gleefully explain Maynard's love of gambling and the ill it has done him. He has lost so much already and his sanity is all but broken. The demons, however, have stuck to the letter of their agreements, if sometimes in a twisted way. When Maynard bet all the gold left in the monastery the imps took all the gold lettering in the illustrated manuscripts and scriptures as well as the few candlesticks of reliquaries left in the chapels.

If the characters approach and try to interfere demons and witches will politely stand in their way. The offer will immediately be made that the characters can try to win back what Maynard has lost to the table, if they want it so desperately. The demon's will say something along the lines of...

"A game, a game, the stakes are what you set." Then allowing for the characters to state a price. "Weeelll, now that's a high price. Very high. Let me consider. You'll have to put a piece of Soul on the table, no two I think. Two at least."

The Game

Now here is a chance for things to spin wildly out of the realms of the heroic. The demons really will put very nearly anything on the table. They will offer vast treasures, warlock's magic, potions of love and lust, or a weaving machine that conjures up kingly silks on its own. Absolutely anything. All the characters have to do is meet the stake with a reasonable price in Soul. If the characters are determined to resist temptation and state something along the lines of "Give back everything you've taken from the monastery and leave here forever," then the imps will agree as long as at least ten pieces of Soul are put on the table. This can be spread among a few characters or lumped on just one. Or you can modify this and say that they demand three pieces of soul from each character and seven years of service or something equally reasonably unreasonable.

The Game is mundane and fair. Demons of this sort can't afford gained a reputation as cheats – mortals don't make bargains with liars. The game involves drawing cards and matching pairs and triplets from a tarot-like deck of weird cards, and challenging other player's at the table to a show of cards. Once the game begins the witches and Maynard will step away from the table. Modify the number of imps up or down if five is too many or too few. Base the game on the Games skill.

Play out the game using the Resolve rules to the last man standing. If all the characters lose all their Resolve

then they lose all their bets. If all five imps lose then they lose all their bets. Have the characters declare 'attacks' as if the game were combat. Each player character gets to challenge an imp. Being challenged by two or more means the imp will have to its Games skill. The following round the imps get to challenge the players, and so on.

Narrate the game as you would a combat. "You thought you had that one but one of the imps pulls out a dark triplet, the Devil, Death and the High Priestess. He does seem to get those three cards quite a lot."

Conclusion

If the characters lose they can raise stakes again and again until they've no souls left. If they lose and decide to overturn the table, draw swords and attack, they will find that breaking the house rules isn't such a good idea. Great black fissures will open in the floor and hellish fire will spurt out. Hundreds of imps will pour out of the fissures and set about to dragging the characters to hell. These are overwhelming odds. Characters must pass a Very Difficult Test of Fortitude over five successive rounds to escape the horde. Those characters who don't escape will see the gaping mouths of the nine-headed fiend Siamut awaiting them as they are dragged down through rings of fire and darkness.

If the characters win then the imps will keep their promises whatever they may be. They are unlikely to be willing to engage in more wagers, no one likes being beaten. If "go away and never come back" or something similar is among the wagers then the Imps, Witches, Demons and Lost Souls will all vanish leaving behind a ruinous, dank and musty room full of the smell of rats and rot. This sudden vanishing causes one Trauma to everyone who sees it. Maynard will go utterly insane at this point and will have to be carried from the room while he screams and cries out for his lost treasures.

If the players demanded the return of all that was stolen from the monastery then come sunup the lost items will be returned including the lost layman. If the characters didn't state *unharm*ed or *intact* or something similar then all the items will be blackened and burn and broken, and in the case of the layman, dead.

The Arts of the Duchess of Carinthia

A scenario for Danse Macabre by Christopher Johnstone

The Duchess of Carinthia is a peculiar woman, older than the youth of her features tell, seemingly both kind and cruel, cold and warmth, content and desperate.

It is into her strange world, her little feudal state, where the word of the Duchess may as well be the law of God, that the characters must plunge, and therein find a few dark secrets.

Hook

The characters may have met the Duchess of Carinthia before in a previous tale (*The Murderous Imp*). Even if they have not her reputation will precede her. Rumours flit around the Duchess like bats. It is said that she has murdered her husband, others claim that she keeps him in an iron cage somewhere in a tower, others whisper that the Duchess takes a lover a month, then slits his throat to prevent the young men ever telling others about her lusts.

But what draws the characters to the Duchesses abode is a simple plea for help. A friend of a friend has a daughter, and that daughter has recently entered into the employ of the Duchess of Carinthia as a chamber maid.

But the daughter has vanished. She has not been seen for some weeks, and no one knows where she is. But disappearances happen in the Duchesses care. Everyone knows this, but the Duchess pays well and sometimes the need for coin is too great, the hope that all shall go well for a year or two, too strong.

Pelegrina

Pelegrina went into the service of the Duchess of Carinthia planning only to stay a year or so, long enough to save some coin and help her family out of debt. She left about three months ago and it seems all did go well for a time. Over the following months Pelegrina's family received a small purse of coins carried by a messenger from the castle.

But on the third month the messenger arrived with a half bag of coins and the news that Pelegrina had deserted her post. There is some story about a lover but there is always some story to try and explain away the disappearances. No one is ever convinced.

Pelegina has an elderly father and two sisters. Abudino is the father and Irene and Sabela are the sisters. They can't offer much in exchange for the help of the characters

but they will be able to scrape together a small fee in gold and silver. They also own the rights to a parcel of land which is all but unfarmable but which does carry the very minor hereditary title of Baronet. They might offer this if desperate enough, assuming that is the characters refuse to risk their lives without significant rewards.

Carinthia

Castle Carinthia is an old, much added too and build-upon tangle of grey limestone that rises out of a forest thick with black pines. Carinthia lies between the Margravate of Carniola and the Duchy of Styria. It is nominally part of the Kingdom of Italy, but lies on the northern flank of the Alps.

The woods about the castle are reputed to be haunted by something evil, a demon of some sort that is able to creep into people's minds and seduce them with strange dreams that sets upon them a melancholic madness which will cause them eventually blindly wander into the woods never to be seen again.

A narrow and rutted road cuts through the forest and people seldom leave it when traversing the woods. At the base of the castle walls are a scattering of bleak little half-timber dwellings. It's not much of a hamlet but its villagers are reasonably wealthy – although the wealth tends to be kept in small cauldrons and sacks under the floor. The Duchess has cultivated a weaving industry, she has brought expensive weaving machines and very fine wools and dyes and in some eyes is seen as a wonderful benefactress.

Entering the Castle

Entering Castle Carinthia will be reasonably easy as long as the characters are willing to masquerade as menials looking for work. Carinthia's household is always looking for new help, be it as cooks, scullions, maids or guards.

If the characters approach the Duchess as equals and nobles looking for board for a while before travelling onwards, then she will be courteous but suspicious. The Duchess has had too many experiences with the vengeful family of those who have vanished to be very trusting.

Duke Carinthia

Duke Carinthia is kept in a small room under lock and key in a tower in the northern wing of the castle. Access is

very difficult and can only be made via a single twisting stair that is always guarded. The Duke is utterly mad, whether because of his imprisonment or not is unclear. His is huge, bloated by food, filthy and covered in ragged clothes. His hair is a matted and wild mess. He will savagely attack anyone who comes near as if he were a crazed dog.

If the Duke escapes or is let go he will be prowling the castle looking for his wife, upon whom he has developed a murderous fixation.

The Cretin

Madness runs in the Duke's family. He and Duchess have only had one child, a son, who unfortunately never passed through a state of relative sanity before descending into lunacy.

He is called, in a slightly mocking way by most of the staff, the Cretin, and sometimes by the more kind term, the Unfortunate One. The Cretin scuttles about the halls and galleries of the upper castle hidden under a large wooden crate. He has cut a hole in the crate to see out. He makes random babbling, animal noises constantly and thieves the food and drink he wants from where he can by reaching a hairy, horn-nailed hand through the hole. Everyone pretends to be unable to see him (the Cretin believes that he is invisible) and 'seeing' him causes him to pass into a horrible and aggressive rage. He will attack people who see him as best he can without leaving the box, which means that mostly he will bump into their knees. If the Cretin is actually exposed, that is if his box is taken away, he will fly into a truly murderous fury as savage and dangerous as his father.

Someone will probably warn the characters to pretend not to see the thing in the box, but only the more gossipy servants will explain who the thing in the box is. Most will just say, "We prefer not to discuss that." It's considered something of a shameful open secret, the state of the family's minds.

A Lonely Appetite

The Duchess does indeed have a rather overdeveloped sexual appetite. She does take young men into her bower quite often, but her personal preferences are not especially strange. Most of the rumours that surround this side of her existence are just that, rumours.

As monstrous as the Duchess is in some ways, she is still human and in these random encounters she is looking for intimacy above anything else. Most of the young men are eventually paid off and sent away. A few who became more trouble than they were worth met untimely ends, one or two have become a victim of the Duchess's dark arts.

Recent Events

From recent events the characters may be able to piece together the Duchess's dark secrets and also what has happened to Pelegrina.

A recent envoy arrived from the Margravate of Carniola to discuss a disputed oak forest used for feeding swine. Initially very aggressively possessive of the forest, Andrin, the son of the Margrave of Carniola who is the chief

negotiator changed his mind very suddenly one night, bequeathed the forest to Carinthia and left with his men.

The Duchess was taken sick about this time and the final negotiations had to be made in private. Young Andrin then made the announcement to a gathered hall of people in the castle.

The Duchess often entertains suspicious traders and foreigners. These reticent, grim-mouthed merchants are always traders in the strange and usual. It's said that Duchess Carinthia purchases dark artful things from them.

If anyone thinks to ask, the Duchess and Andrin were never seen together at any point after he changed his mind. Before this they dined coldly and silently at the high table each night in the great hall.

Pelegrina was the chamber-maid responsible for Andrin's chambers. Pelegrina also dropped a large and elaborate bowl smashing it to pieces a few weeks earlier. She was out of favour with the Duchess after this event.

Pelegrina was summoned to the Duchess's private chambers to be instructed how to treat the valued guest and to be reprimanded for her earlier clumsiness. She seemed, odd, a little distracted when she left. It was the day after the Pelegrina went missing.

No one in the castle knows this yet, but Andrin has already disappeared on the road south to his castle. His family is now suspicious, but has no real evidence that there has been foul play. And Andrin has openly disavowed any claim to the forest that the family might have had. This has made them furious with him, but now increasingly frightened for his welfare.

The family of Caniola will send spies back to the castle to try and find out if anyone knows anything about Andrin. If the spies realise that the player characters are asking suspicious questions also, then they may approach them and offer a temporary alliance and sharing of knowledge.

The Duchess has been seen wandering the halls very late at night, but no one knows why or where she goes. She is mostly seen in a part of the castle known as the Narrow Lanes, after the tight stone passageways that twist through it between small, mostly disused servant's rooms.

Grisly Discoveries

If the characters decide to explore the haunted forest then they will very likely find eventually some grim things. Scattered in the forest here and there the various bodies of those who have been conjured out into the woods by the demon that is believed to live there.

Occasionally brave family members go into the woods to look for corpses, but more often they are left to the forest. The demon of the woods is often seen wandering about at night. The easiest way to find the dead is to go to the highest tower of the castle, called the Tower of Crows

for this reason, and to look for the black circling shapes of carrion birds.

All of the bodies are stripped of most of their clothing, and are missing a face. If the characters follow the crows and ravens they will eventually find both Pelegrina and Andrin, though neither is very recognisable. Pelegrina can be recognised by a ring she is wearing that her mother gave her years ago that bears the family Baronet crest. Andrin has nothing about him at all which is easily recognisable. His hair is about the right colour and length, and there is a scar from an arrow on his shoulder, but very little else to go by.

Both bodies are bound about the wrists (suspicious if a mind-controlling demon is really to blame) and from the scuffs and scratches on the ground appear to have been alive when dumped.

The Truth of the Matter

The Duchess Carinthia is a dabbler in dark arts and has unearthed or bought many tombs of lore and from them learned a few rituals and useful magics.

She possesses the knowledge of a number of Esoteric paths, and mastery of one rare and dark art that is the keystone of all her political intrigues and dealings.

The Duchess of Carinthia has learnt how to cut away the face of a person and make from it an enchanted mask that works upon the wearer a powerful illusion. The mask changes only the appearance of the body and voice, so she must steal the clothing of her victims, too.

The ritual demands that the victim must be alive when the mask is cut away, the Duchess uses Elfclub (See Core Rules: Esotery) to place her victim's in a coma-like state.

Her most recent little political upset required the death of both Pelegrina and Andrin. The Duchess arranged for Pelegrina to be the chamber-maid for Andrin. Pelegrina had fallen in the Duchess's opinion and the Duchess was using an opportunity to be cleanly rid of a clumsy servant.

The Duchess took Pelegrina's face and made a mask of it when she summoned the maid to her private chamber. Then, wearing Pelegrina's mask she went to Andrin's chamber in the evening to finish off her end of day duties and passed the guards outside without suspicion. The guards assumed as time went on that Andrin had been lucky enough to encounter a ready and willing young woman and didn't anything was strange when 'Andrin' emerged the next morning to go and speak with the Duchess privately.

At this point Andrin was tied up and dying in a locked chest in his chambers, and Pelegrina had already been taken out to the woods by Abel. Abel would be along shortly for the old chest.

The Duchess returned to her chambers wearing Andrin's face and lingered there long enough to make the final 'negotiations' plausible. She then emerged, declared that Carniola had given up its claim and announced this to everyone.

Two nights after riding out from the castle the Duchess slipped away from Andrin's men and returned to Carinthia.

A Fell Chamber

The Duchess has a secret laboratory and ritual room, a small square and black hole at the bottom of a long twist of stairs that can only be accessed from a particular room that she has the only key to. If the characters are very stealthy and clever they might be able to follow her to the door of this room on one her excursions.

The room is filled with racks and racks of books and rows of hooks with what appear at first glance to be tanned leathery masks on them. When the characters realise that these are tanned human faces they will immediately take two Trauma.

The Duchess employs a mute and somewhat simple servant, a giant of a man named Abel with small ears, thick bones and tiny pig eyes to look after the room. He will attack intruders with a fireiron and protect his mistress if she is present.

The Forest Demon

Duchess Carinthia has created a large, but gangly golem, given it hideous features and horns and piled feathers and furs on it and set it to wander the woods. Its sole purpose is to frighten people into not going into the woods, which is where the Duchess commands Abel to dump the dying victims of her art. There is a relatively secure path through deserted halls from the ritual chamber to a small door that opens into a deserted garden, which then leads through a broken gate into the forest.

As an additional clue you may wish to allow the characters to see a large, bulky man carrying something out of the castle, through the little overgrown garden from high up above. If the characters stay and watch they'll see him eventually return his load gone. Follow this with another disappearance in the castle – perhaps one of Carinola's spies.

Conclusions

There are a number of ways in which the tale may end. The characters may piece things together and confront the Duchess openly. They might follow her to her ritual chamber and end up having to fight her servant there, or the Duchess may become suspicious and try and murder the characters.

In any instance the Duchess will do everything in her power not to be taken alive. She wears a little pearl drop around her neck. It is hollow and capped with a gold, and contains a powerful poison, enough to kill the imbibor in a few heartbeats. If things look desperate she will pull the cap off with her teeth and tip three drops of the poison into her mouth.

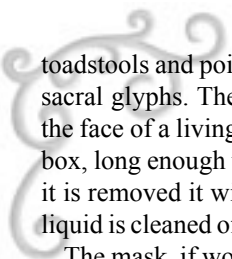
Carinthia's Masks

Need: Alchimia 4, Mortis 3

Gain: Alchimia 1, Mortis 1

This dark Esoteric Wisdom is rare and seldom taught. It is considered unclean by most Esoteric Scholars and even the less morally upright alchemists and sorcerers tend to shy from it.

Carinthia's masks demands that the practitioners prepare a foul smelling brew beforehand made from various



toadstools and poisons and kept in a silver box write with sacral glyphs. The Esoteric sorcerer must then cut away the face of a living victim and place the face into the silver box, long enough to allow the face to soak through. Once it is removed it will appear tanned and once the foetid liquid is cleaned off it can be immediately worn.

The mask, if worn by the sorcerer then casts an illusion that makes the wearer into an exact image in voice and appearance of the murdered victim. Clothing, however, is not affected and must be changed if what the person is currently wearing would give them away.

The masks work very well while the victim is still alive (some dabbers in this art have been rumoured to try and prolong a victim's life because of this) but once the victim has died the illusion begins to die also. Initially the illusion will appear pale, a little wan around the eyes and mouth. Then eventually the illusion becomes more and more deathly, until the illusion fades to nothing and the mask ceases to work.

The masks only work if worn by the initial worker of the ritual. They are useless to anyone else.

