

HALL OF THE CURSED GOD

JVC PARRY



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THE UNDEAD SCOURGE

After undead start appearing near the local town of Angstadt, the Burgomaster and Father become worried. What could be causing these foul creatures to rise? What can they do to stop the plague of undead? After conducting research, the clergy discover that the throne room of a celestial avatar is located only a few days away from the town. Perhaps this holy site could hold a relic capable of turning the undead?

A 3-5 hour Dungeons & Dragons 5e adventure for 5th-10th level characters

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INTRODUCTION

Hall of the Cursed God is a one-shot D&D 5e adventure for a party of characters from 5th-10th level. It should take 3-5 hours to complete, depending on which elements you choose to use. Its grim feel could be added into a *Curse of Strahd* campaign as a side quest, but could equally fit into any Ravenloft, Forgotten Realms or homebrew campaign.

TIPS FOR THE DM

As with any adventure, *Hall of the Cursed God* should be adapted to work for your group. If you don't like the way an element works, please feel free to change it. If encounters are too difficult for your players, remove monsters or replace them with an easier, but fitting foe.

Similarly, if you would like to adapt *Hall of the Cursed God* for your world, you can easily substitute appropriate plot hooks, NPCs and items.

In order to deliver an optimum experience for your players, it would probably be best to read the adventure, in full, before attempting to run it. There are traps and puzzles that you need to understand fully in advance.

In my opinion, players should level up during this adventure, but do so at the DM's discretion. They may not have achieved all the necessary xp from combat, but I would suggest rewarding players xp for solving puzzles to make up the difference. Alternatively, you can use the popular Milestone Levelling system.

Text to be read aloud to the players is in pale boxes. Feel free to tinker with this text to fit your roleplaying needs, but try to keep the original message clear as it may contain important information.

Try to have fun running this adventure! It was highly enjoyable to create and play with my own group, and I hope that you can share in that experience!

This adventure uses some creatures from the upcoming *Van Richten's Guide to the Undead* written by myself (JVC Parry) and published by Mount Ogden Gaming Company. Keep your eyes peeled for updates!

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Recently, the small town of Angstadt had been beleaguered by skeletal undead. These horrors emerge from the mists at night and assault the town, smashing down doors, breaking windows and killing horses, dogs and any unfortunate souls caught unaware by their raids. Before each dawn, the undead flee back into the fog. The burgomaster of the town, Maaïke Nikilovich, has emboldened the locals to fight off these marauders, but with little success. Each time a skeleton is killed, it collapses into a pile of bones which instantly sink into the earth. The next night, they return again with no loss to their numbers.

After failing time after time to deter the assailants, the folk of Angstadt turned to the clergy for help. Father Martyn is not often trusted by the folk of Angstadt, as he is an outsider, but as a last resort Burgomaster Maaïke sought him out for his knowledge of the undead. After several days and nights of research, Father Martyn believes that not far from the town is the throne room of an ancient celestial, who, many centuries ago, was a pillar of hope for the local communities. Here, there may be some relic or artefact that can assist the town against the skeletons which plague them.

What the poor priest doesn't know is that a cult of death-obsessed rogues have taken up camp in the ruined halls, where they are animating the dead buried within. Inside the celestial that once brought hope has fallen into an unending slumber, cursed by the darklord of the domain. These cultists revere the celestial, hoping to reincarnate him as an idol of death and despair.

Deep inside the halls and tombs of the celestial's resting place are numerous relics that could help the town of Angstadt, but disturbing them will invoke the wrath of the cursed demi-god.

HOOKS

Hook 1: Rummage for Relics

Whilst travelling through the town of Angstadt, the party are approached by locals who ask for their help. Seeing that they are adventurers, the folk of the town desperately ask for the party to talk with Father Martyn and the burgomaster, to find the holy relics that will help them reclaim their town from the dead.

Hook 2: Protect the Priest

Whilst travelling through the wilds of Ravenloft, the party encounter an elderly priest who appears troubled. He tells the party of the quest, to travel to the halls of an ancient celestial in search of artefacts which will help him protect his flock; the villagers of Angstadt. Although he can offer little in return, he would be grateful for the protection of the party. When using this hook, you can choose to skip the chapter detailing Angstadt, or have Father Martyn return their first to consult with the burgomaster.

Hook 3: The Ashen Skull Cult

One night, whilst camping in Ravenloft, the party are assaulted by skeletons and other undead. Searching for refuge, they come to a ruined hall, its gothic exterior is impressive, almost hopeful, but the dark shadows inside make them feel uneasy. Inside, a death-obsessed cult known as the Ashen Skull Cult are attempting to reincarnate a cursed celestial as an undead paragon of despair. When using this hook, you should skip the introductory chapter detailing Angstadt and that which refers to travel in Ravenloft.

OPENING

The adventure starts once the party have arrived and Angstadt, the village which has been plagued by undead for the past five nights. If the party arrive during the day, continue with this section, if they arrive at night, skip ahead to Nightfall in Angstadt.

The rough road you have been following for days finally reveals its purpose to you. A short distance ahead is a small, agricultural town surrounded by fields full of dying corn and wilted wheat. Even from this distance, it is clear that something is wrong in the town. Despite the cold, hardly any of the chimneys are puffing smoke, and only a handful of folk can be seen on the streets. As you near the town, it becomes clear that they have been attacked. The wooden doors of the houses have been hacked at with sword or axe, some have been hastily boarded up with wooden planks or thick canvas. The denizens of the forlorn town have desperation in their eyes, and it is not long before one approaches you. 'Please help us, you appear to be adventurers? Am I right? We are in desperate need of help!'

Should the party stop to listen, the peasant tells the party the following information;

- For the past five nights, skeletal undead have assaulted the town. They emerge from the mists and try to break into the houses.
- All of the town's horses were killed on the first night, as were several dogs. Now, after five nights of the terror, four townsfolk have died; Lauriella Harroкова – a teenage girl who snuck out the first evening and was caught outside her house, Pietrov Relovski – an old man scared to death by the undead assailants, Sergei Braskof and Helga Welter – two of the townsfolk who took up arms against the skeletons.
- After the first night, Burgomaster Maaïke Nikilovich convinced the locals to take up arms against the skeletons, they fought with what they had; axes, scythes and clubs, but to no avail. Each time they killed a skeleton, their bones were eaten by the earth, and they would return unharmed the next night.
- After two of the levy were killed trying to take on the skeletons, Burgomaster Maaïke decided to talk to Father Martyn, a priest of the Morning Lord, to see if he could help.
- Since then, Father Martyn has been researching in his hermitage. There is a town meeting tomorrow at sunrise in the Nikilovich Mansion where the priest will reveal what he knows.

The villager will beg the adventurers to stay for a night at least. The townsfolk no longer go out to attack the skeletons, but instead hide inside their houses with their weapons at the ready. If the party could just stay for a night, it might save the lives of half a dozen sleep-deprived locals.

ANGSTADT

The town of Angstadt is not much larger than a village, with around forty houses, one large tavern, a small mercantile and the chapel, which stands apart from the rest of the town. Most of the buildings have been ravaged in some way by the undead which attack the town each night. Wooden doors are smashed and splintered, hastily boarded up with planks and canvas. Shattered glass from windows is strewn throughout the streets. Blood still stains the cobbles in numerous places where some unfortunate souls were caught off-guard or outnumbered by the skeletal scourge.

NIKILOVICH MANSION

Slouching behind a rusted wrought iron fence in the burgomaster's mansion. It is far larger than the other houses of Angstadt, but is in a sorry state of disrepair. Many of the windows have cracks running through them, and the roof is devoid of tiles in several areas, revealing the wooden skeleton of the manor house. Although the fence looks far from sturdy, it has clearly kept out the undead menace, as the mansion's doors appear unscarred.

This mansion belongs to Burgomaster Maaïke Nikilovich (LN female human **noble**). She is an elderly woman with a kind face, but sorrowful eyes that tell of decades of harrowing existence. She wears dark but expensive clothes and a white ruff and coif to mark herself out from the rest of the populace. She is blunt in conversation and cares little for small-talk, but demands a high level of respect from those below her. Whilst she clearly cares for the townsfolk, she is not willing to compromise her own safety. She has not yet allowed the townsfolk to shelter behind the iron fence of her grounds.

Unless the characters arrive for the meeting, they have no easy way to get into the mansion. The iron gate is locked with a large iron padlock and the fence itself is around 10 feet tall. Characters can pick the lock with a successful DC 15 Dexterity check using thieves' tools or scale the fence with a DC 14 Strength (Athletics) check. If any character sets foot inside the grounds without the explicit permission of the burgomaster, three **mastiffs** come bounding up toward them barking and baying as they come.

The interior of the mansion was once lavish, but is covered with dust and cobwebs. As the exterior suggests, the house has mostly fallen into disrepair.



CHAPEL

On the outskirts of Angstadt is a stoic stone chapel. The weather-beaten frame of the church appears hunched against the cold wind that whips around the town, and the first foot of the building is immersed in the thick fog which rolls through the valley. Dotted around the chapel are numerous tombstones which, like the chapel, are patched with lichen and moss. Despite the world-weary exterior of the church, there is a gleaming gilded sun hanging in the porch.

The chapel is both a place of worship for the townsfolk who still believe in the Morning Lord, and the home of Father Martyn (LG male human **priest** who carries a flask of holy water and a *periapt of health*). He is somewhat of an outsider to the community of Angstadt, as his unerring faith in Lathander is contemptible to those who have lived a life of sorrow. Not only this, but Father Martyn is not a native of Ravenloft. He was brought here on the mists from another plane of existence. You can use this to tie Father Martyn into another setting, such as the Forgotten Realms or your own homebrew world. Father Martyn is a rather wide, bald man with a long white beard. He often carried with him an ornamental cane, and wears a hooded cloak.

If the characters visit Father Martyn before the meeting, he can only tell them so much. He believes he is on the verge of a breakthrough regarding a relic which may help the town defend itself from the undead. All he knows for sure is that he will need an escort tomorrow to somewhere nearby. Should the characters wish to help, they can spend several hours to attempt a DC 18 Intelligence (Religion) check to assist the priest in his research. A successful check gives a character Inspiration, representing their improved knowledge of the task ahead.

If the party wish, they may stay the night in the chapel with a few other townsfolk. The church has been protected from the undead by the grace of the Morning Lord, but it can only hold so many. If they choose to stay here, Father Martyn will recommend a small offering to the Morning Lord as a sign of gratitude.



THE HOWLING WOLF TAVERN

Probably the most inviting building in town is the Howling Wolf Tavern. Warmth and the smell of roasting meat pours forth from the inn, providing a stark contrast to the rest of the frigid town. Unfortunately, the tavern hasn't escaped the attacks of the undead. Although the thick pine doors are relatively unharmed, the leaded windows of the tavern have been smashed, and several shattered oil lamps lie on the ground, the chains on which they were suspended swinging like a hangman's noose.

Inside the tavern, the characters have a chance to rest up and have a good meal. The tavern is owned by Radovan Moldovar (CG male human **werewolf**), who keeps his lycanthropy a secret as best he can. He has no family in Angstadt, but embraces the community that has accepted him as one of their own, and doesn't mind that he closes up once a month to 'refill his barrels'. He headed the military resistance when it was suggested by Burgomaster Maaik, but after two townsfolk died in the fighting, he agreed that it was a fruitless task. Because of this, he is rather depressed, feeling like he should do more, but not wanting to expose himself as a werewolf.

The characters can stay at the tavern for 2sp a night, and get a hearty meat stew for 6cp. The only ale available is Black Moon Brew, which costs 4cp a mug.

A successful DC 20 Intelligence (Nature) check gives characters an insight into Radovan's lycanthropy. His strangely hairy chest and thick eyebrows denote something more than high testosterone. Should the characters confront him about his curse, Radovan becomes panicked which manifests as anger. He will try to kick them out of the tavern, telling them not to return to the town. A successful DC 18 Charisma (Persuasion) check will calm him down. He apologises, telling the party that he has kept his curse a secret.

If the characters wish, a successful DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check any time after this interaction is enough to get Radovan on board with the quest. He will ally with the party to escort Father Martyn to the hall of the celestial.

If asked about the stew, Radovan admits that it is horsemeat.

STEFANOVA'S SUPPLIES

On the corner of Crop Street is a warehouse with a sign outside proclaiming it as Stefanova's Supplies. A makeshift palisade has been erected around the depots perimeter, leaving the building itself in an okay condition.

As you enter, a voice from the back of the building calls out; 'We don't have any nails left I'm afraid, and only six more planks of sturdy wood. I can offer you some canvas and tacks, but it's the best I can do.'

As she finishes her sentence, a young woman emerges from behind a stack of crates.

The owner of the mercantile is Drilvia Stefanova (LG female human **thug**), she runs the family business for her parents, who are getting to old to do the heavy lifting. Drilvia is a strong woman, with broad shoulders and a wide back. She wears a leather apron and ties her hair back with ribbon. She has been helping the rest of the townsfolk repair their broken doors and block up their windows all day, but has run out of supplies.

She has no weapons or armour, but can sell the party more common items such as backpacks, torches, rope and the like.

NIGHTFALL IN ANGSTADT

As evening comes to pass, you sense tension mixing with the aura of despair that permeates the fog of Angstadt. As you scan the fog that surrounds the town, you can't help but feel like sinister shapes are moving just beyond the boundaries. From inside the houses, you hear the sound of hammer and nail as the terrified folk bar their doors from the inside. This frantic pounding is greeted by a murmuring wave of whispered prayers, as the devout beseech the gods for mercy.

Once night falls in Angstadt, undead begin to emerge from the mist. The first wave consists of 6d4 **skeletons**. The second wave is made up of three **wights** mounted on **warhorse skeletons**. The final wave is another 4d4 **skeletons**. Each wave arrives 1d2 rounds after the last until all three are present. The wights are clearly commanding the skeletons, but if they are killed, the skeletons do not desist. Any undead killed collapses into a pile of bones and sinks instantly into the earth, any equipment they were carrying or wearing turns to black smoke and merges with the fog.

Any creature attempting a short or long rest inside a building that is being attacked by the undead must succeed on a DC 18 Wisdom (Survival) check in order to complete the rest.



SPECIAL EVENTS

During the assault, you may choose to have a number of small events occur. Perhaps the skeletons manage to break into the building in which the characters are staying, or a nearby building that the characters can see. This should provide a moral quandary for the characters, should they stay in safety or risk their lives to help the townsfolk? Other events could include more waves of undead, especially if the players are keen on combat. If you wish to make combat harder for characters, you could have the skeletons deal an extra 3 (1d6) necrotic damage on a hit. You could also include animals or children trapped outside their houses, an accidental fire spreading throughout the town or the arrival of a group of tired travellers who are attacked by the undead.

MORNING MEETING

You managed to survive the night, but it is clear that some did not. Red-eyed townsfolk being comforted by their neighbours can be spotted trudging to the morning meeting. It seems like few of the townsfolk managed to get any sleep, save a cohort of folk accompanied by a priest (Father Martyn) walking in from the outskirts of town. As you near the Nikilovich Mansion, you see a woman (Drilvia Stefanova) pulling a covered cart. A pale arm hangs out of the side.

As the town gathers for the morning meeting at the Nikilovich Mansion, tensions are high. Many of the townsfolk have not slept for many nights and are desperate and devastated. Father Martyn bestows blessing on those who have lost family members, and administers healing to any who have sustained injuries. After most of the townsfolk have gathered before the manor, the entrance doors swing open to reveal Burgomaster Maaïke, who solemnly welcomes the locals into her home.

The Nikilovich Mansion is in a state of disrepair, but the iron fence around it at least prevents the undead from getting in. Inside the rooms are filled with moth-eaten tapestries, dust covered rugs and portraits of dour looking Nikilovich ancestors. The burgomaster leads the people into a central hall, lit by candles. At the head of the long oak table is a maid with a copper cauldron full of steaming porridge.

'Please, poor folk of Angstadt, take a bowl of porridge and have a seat' the burgomaster says before placing herself at the head of the table.

Whilst the townsfolk eat, Father Martyn is called upon to stand and tell the people what he has discovered. Burgomaster Maaïke's scepticism is clear in her tone. If any characters assisted the priest, they can join him in telling the people that not far from here is an old site of worship and sanctuary, where a celestial avatar of the Morning Lord once held court almost a century ago.

Though the Father has no first-hand knowledge of the place, many of the journals of his predecessors talked of it. Father Martyn believes that it has now fallen into ruin, and that the celestial is no longer present, but that there may be relics within the temple which could help stave off the undead scourge.

This news seems to provide a glimmer of hope for the villagers, and Burgomaster Maaïke insists that a party of armed and able men and women escort the priest to this place, called the Empyrean Halls, and search for any relics which might change the fate of Angstadt. Hopefully the party will volunteer. Father Martyn intends to leave immediately, as the journey will take several hours.

The priest carries with him a map and a journal which lead him to the Empyrean Halls. Should he die, the characters can attempt to decipher the map with a DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check and the scrawled journal with a DC 16 Intelligence check. The map can lead them to the Empyrean Halls, and the journal describes a *lantern of the morning lord* (Appendix B) which, when lit, will cast fear into any undead who behold it.

TRAVELLING IN RAVENLOFT

To reach the Empyrean Halls the party must travel through the wilds of Ravenloft for four hours. For each hour's travel, roll on the Ravenloft Random Encounters table to see what occurs. Reroll repeat encounters. The environment of Ravenloft is depressing and terror inducing. The majority of the terrain is moorland, with the occasional patch of hills or swamp. A thick fog clouds this region, restricting vision to 40 feet.

RAVENLOFT RANDOM ENCOUNTERS

d20	Encounter
1-10	No encounter
11-13	Wolf pack
14-16	2d6 skeletons
17-18	1 crimson death
19	1 bridge haunt
20	2d4 cultists and 1 cult fanatic

WOLF PACK

Suddenly a piercing howl breaks through the silence of the journey. Several more join in a chorus of canine hunger.

The characters have 1d4 rounds to ready themselves before 2d4+2 **wolves** emerge from the fog. There is a 50% chance that the wolves are accompanied by 1 **dire wolf**.

If the characters convinced Radovan Moldovar to accompany them, they can attempt a DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) check to have him show his true form, and scare the wolves off.

SKELETONS

Characters with a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 12 or higher hear the clattering of bones in the mists ahead, and notice humanoid shapes moving in the mist. Otherwise, the skeletons catch the party by surprise.

Lurching through the fog come more of the undead scourge which plague Angstadt. Faces drawn into a grimace, a group of skeletons nock arrows and point them in your direction.

Like the skeletons in Angstadt, any skeleton killed here collapses into a pile of bones which sink into the earth, and anything they are carrying or wearing disperses into black smoke.

CRIMSON DEATH

Unfortunately for them, the characters must traverse a thick bog. The bog is 120-feet-long, 70-feet-wide and around 2-feet-deep. Moving through the bog counts as difficult terrain. The fog here is thicker, restricting vision to 20 feet.

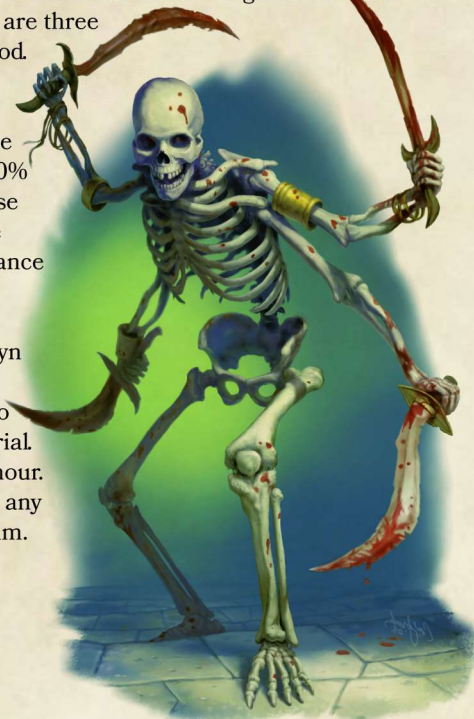
A stinking mire stretches out before you, covered by a patchwork blanket of moss which is pierced here and there by spear-like rushes. The smell is truly awful; reminiscent of death and decay.

Areas of the bog are deeper than others, and can be noticed by characters with a passive Wisdom (Perception) of 18 or higher. These patches follow the rules for Quicksand in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

Whilst the characters travel through or around the bog, they inadvertently attract the attention of a **crimson death** (Appendix A) which lies in wait for them.

Treasure. Characters that succeed on a DC 15 Intelligence (Religion) check are aware that the crimson death must have a lair nearby. A DC 12 Wisdom (Survival) check reveals it atop a mound of reeds in the middle of the bog. Hidden from sight among the reeds are three corpses drained of blood. The characters can salvage 10gp in assorted coins from the cadavers. There is a 50% chance that each corpse carries a simple melee weapon and a 10% chance that they wear silver jewellery worth 10gp.

Should Father Martyn be made aware of the corpses, he will wish to give them a proper burial. Doing so will take an hour. Radovan will not want any silver jewellery near him.



BRIDGE HAUNT

Ahead of you a long, sturdy bridge crosses a gently flowing stream. A figure leans against the guardrail staring longingly into the languid stream below. Although his clothes are outdated, he is well dressed, and appears lost in thought.

The character on the bridge is in fact a **bridge haunt** (Appendix A). The young man was travelling to visit the Empyrean Halls over a century ago, but was murdered here on this bridge by muggers who were ambushing pilgrims on their way to the temple. Should the characters approach, they can engage the man, who introduces himself as Franz Cantemir, in conversation. He claims to be travelling to the Empyrean Halls, and can point the party in the right direction, but wishes to stay here a while longer to wait for his companions. A DC 16 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals that he is lying, but he will insist that what he says is the truth.

Although the 60-foot long bridge appears sturdy, and the water beneath seems gentle, the bridge is truly decrepit, and the stream beneath a raging torrent of floodwater. This is all disguised by Franz's *mirage arcane* spell. Should the characters walk past the 40-foot mark on the bridge, they must succeed on a DC 18 Dexterity check to leap forward or back as the bridge falls away underneath them, leaving a 10-foot gap. Any character who falls into the water is whisked away at a speed of 40 feet per round. Franz will then reveal his true form, dripping with water and the pale blue of a drowned corpse, and use mass *suggestion* to coerce the characters into letting their friends be washed away.

Franz can only be truly destroyed by retrieving his skull from the river bed and taking it to the Empyrean Halls, otherwise he reforms before the characters return to Angstadt. You can repeat this encounter on the return journey.

Treasure. Franz's skull is trapped under a rock 20-feet off the near bank of the river. The rock requires no check to move, although swimming out to it requires a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check. The skull is accompanied by a few other bones, including a finger wearing Franz's *ring of evasion*.

CULTISTS

Out hunting for corpses to reanimate, a group of cultists from the Ashen Skull Cult. If any of the characters has a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 11 or higher, read the following;

A handful of figures move through the mists ahead of you, they appear armed, and are clearly searching for something. One of them drags a large sack through the mud behind them.

Characters have the chance to make a Dexterity (Stealth) check against the cultists passive Wisdom (Perception). If they succeed, they are not noticed, and the group walks past them, if not, they are noticed;

Emerging from the fog are a group of humans wearing blood-red cloaks, each holds a vicious looking scimitar in their hand, save for one who carries a large hessian sack. One of the figures steps toward you and doffs their hood, revealing the angular face of a woman, with a skull painted in ash upon her countenance.

'You should turn back. There's nothing but the dead past here.' she says, drawing a line at her feet in the black mud with her scimitar.

The cult is aggressively against allowing the characters to get any closer to their destination. Should any of the party try to push their luck, they will attack without hesitation. If any of the cultists are taken as prisoners, a successful DC 16 Charisma (Intimidation) check forces them to reveal that they are the Ashen Skull Cult, and have taken up residence in the Empyrean Halls. If the check succeeds by 5 or more, they reveal that to gain access the characters will need a password, which is 'final sunset'.

Treasure. As well as their equipment, each cultist carries with them an unholy symbol on an amulet (worth 5gp).



H03

THE EMPYREAN HALLS

Once the party have travelled for four hours through the wilds of Ravenloft, they come to the ruined temple known as the Empyrean Halls. Within the halls lie the *lantern of the morning lord*, a holy relic which could be used to save the town of Angstadt from the plague of undead which has been assaulting it. However, the relic is not unguarded. The Ashen Skull Cult has taken up a home in the Empyrean Halls, working on dark rituals to animate the dead. Here, they are attempting to channel negative energy into Ortus, the empyrean after whom the halls are named. Should they succeed, a once powerful force for good in the desperate land of Ravenloft will be inverted, turned instead into a heretical commander of the undead.

Emerging from this mists before you is a huge church-like building. Although it is badly damaged in areas, some of the splendour it once had still remains. Gilded spires and masterful stonemasonry adorn its walls and roof, with repeated sun motifs throughout. In some areas, the biting wind has worn this down to nothing, and in others the great stone blocks that form the building have collapsed, but the grandeur remains. Unfortunately, as you get closer, an uneasy feeling wriggles up from the pit of your stomachs. It becomes clear that much of the temple has been defaced, the towering oak doors are ajar, and a skull has been painted over them with ash.

E1. NARTHEX

The great oak doors swing aside with surprising ease, revealing an antechamber with a vaulted ceiling which stretches up into shadow. The only light in the room comes from an assortment of black candles, mounted in skulls and skeletal hands on the floor. On the far wall is another set of doors, guarded by two statues of paladins. The heads of the statues have been cleaved off and replaced with skulls.

This room is empty save for the candles and statues. The doors to area E2 are barred from the other side, and two **cultists** stand watch over it. The cultists will open the door only if the password 'final sunset' is spoken, otherwise they refuse entry, telling the party to leave before they decide to turn them into zombies. The door can be smashed open with a successful DC 18 Strength check, but this automatically starts a fight with the cultists in the next room. Alternatively, a successful DC 18 Charisma (Persuasion) check is enough to convince the guards that the party are cultists, and simply forgot the password. If they cannot disguise themselves before the cultists open the door, they will be attacked.



EMPYREAN HALLS GENERAL FEATURES

The following features are common throughout the chambers of the Empyrean Halls, except where noted otherwise.

Ceilings and Walls. The ceilings of the temple are vaulted, up to a height of 60 feet, which causes footsteps to echo and voices to carry further than usual. Creatures make Dexterity (Stealth) checks with disadvantage whilst in the halls. The walls are covered in alcoves which contain statues of saintly figures, and can be climbed with a successful DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check, a failed check on ordinary wall means the character simply cannot scale it, if the check fails on a ruined area of wall, the character must make a DC 12 Dexterity check or take 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage from falling rubble.

Cultist Loot. As well as their usual equipment, each cultist carries an unholy symbol on an amulet worth 5gp.

Desecrated Ground. Although the Empyrean Halls were once a sanctuary for good, they have been perverted by the Bleach Skull Cult. Each chamber follows the rules for Desecrated Ground found in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

Light. The temple is lit by black candles mounted in skulls and on skeletal hands on the floors of the chambers. If a character is knocked prone in the vicinity of the candles, they must succeed on a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw or take 3 (1d6) fire damage.

Uncanny Ambience. The violation of this once majestic building, couple with the presence of a demi-god make resting here a near impossibility. Characters must succeed on a DC 18 Wisdom (Survival) check in order to complete a short or long rest inside the temple.

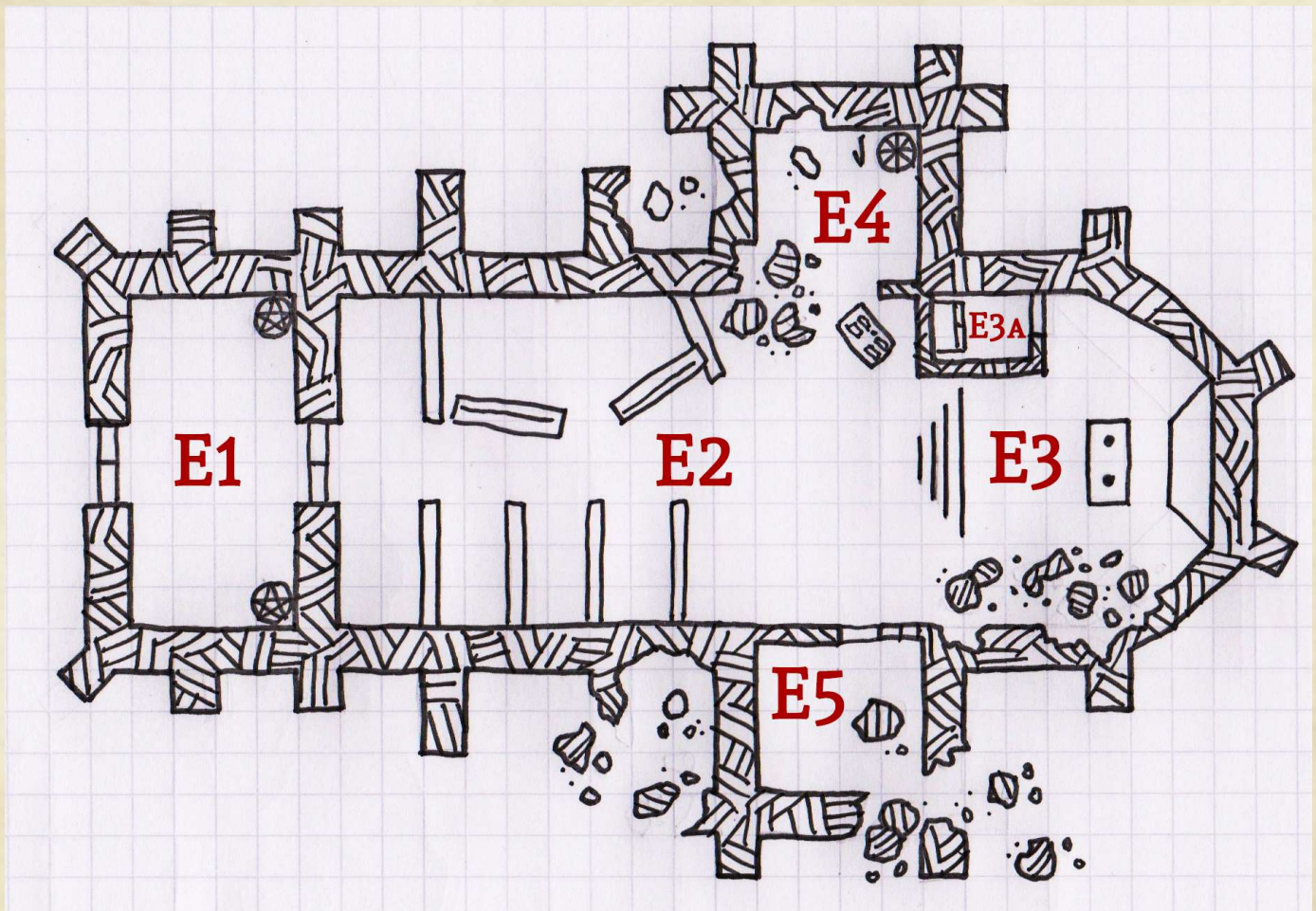
E2. NAVE

This room contains two **cultists** guarding the doorway, and four **cultists** conducting rituals in the makeshift camp. Leading the Ashen Skull Cult is **Vasha Nosferatski** (Appendix A) a vampire spawn intent on bringing about the destruction of the local towns using armies of the undead. Not only this, but she wishes to reincarnate the cursed empyrean as a paragon of the undead.

The room before you is filled with cultists conducting dark rituals, acrid smoke fills the air and stings your eyes as the doors open. A central aisle runs down the temple between two rows of pews, or rather, one row of pews and one barricade of the benches. It is behind this barricade that most of the cultists are at work.

If the characters entered without disturbing the guards, they can make DC 12 Dexterity (Stealth) checks to slink between the pews unnoticed as the cultists work behind the barricade. This check can be made with advantage if they are in some way disguised as cultists.

MAP - EMPYREAN HALLS GROUND FLOOR



1 square = 5 feet.

Should the party fail their Dexterity (Stealth) checks, or initiate combat, all of the cultists will flock to assist in the fight. Vasha will instead fall back to area E3, in the hope of reincarnating Ortus (see area E3).

You may have four **zombies** emerge from area E5 should combat break out in this room.

If you wish, Vasha's coffin, her resting place, may be here behind the barricade of pews. If you wish for Vasha to become a returning character, have her resting place be elsewhere.

Treasure. If the party manage to gain access behind the barricade, they can loot a component pouch (worth 25gp), three bone statuettes (depicting your chosen darklord, worth 25gp each) and an obsidian sickle (worth 60gp).

E3. CHANCEL

Looking further into the church, up a small flight of steps covered in moth-eaten velvet, you see an enormous marble throne, raised up on a plinth. Slumped in this awe-inspiring cathedra is a translucent being of immense proportions. Its androgynous form is muscular and statuesque, even in its current state. As you watch, it seems to fade in and out of corporeal existence, seemingly trapped between two worlds. Its beautiful face is twisted in anguish.

Beyond the crossing is a throne (displayed as an altar on the map) in which sits the cursed for of Ortus the **empyrean**. Whilst in its current state, Ortus is incapable of rising from the throne, or interacting with this plane of existence in any fashion. Instead, the celestial appears to be moving in agonisingly slow-motion.

If the characters have gained the attention of Vasha, she falls back to the throne and begins conducting a ritual. If she can maintain concentration on the ritual (in the same fashion as a spell) then Ortus rises from its throne, its skin turned from radiant white to obsidian black and attacks the characters. During the ritual, describe the celestial as writhing in agony, slowly turning grey and then black. Between the words of the ceremony, Vasha proclaims the power of her darklord, a being so powerful as to curse the children of the gods.

If Vasha is incapable of performing the ritual because she keeps failing concentration checks, or it puts her in serious danger of death, she monologues about how the Ashen Skull Cult has been reanimating the corpses of their victims and sending them to attack local towns, how they will never be stopped thanks to their darklord patron. All the while she will slowly move toward area E5 and attempt to flee through the smashed wall.

If the empyrean rises, make sure to describe the immensity of the figure, how its movements seem to tear through the air around it, and each footstep blackens the stone beneath its feet. Each swing of his greataxe (mechanically identical to the empyrean's maul) burns through the air, leaving the pungent smell of ozone in its wake. The players should be strongly discouraged against fighting Ortus, as the celestial is far too powerful to be taken on by characters of 5th-10th level. If they linger too long, and you fear a TPK, you should fudge certain rolls to have Ortus dramatically miss with swings of its shadow wreathed greataxe, cutting chunks of stone from the walls of the chapel.

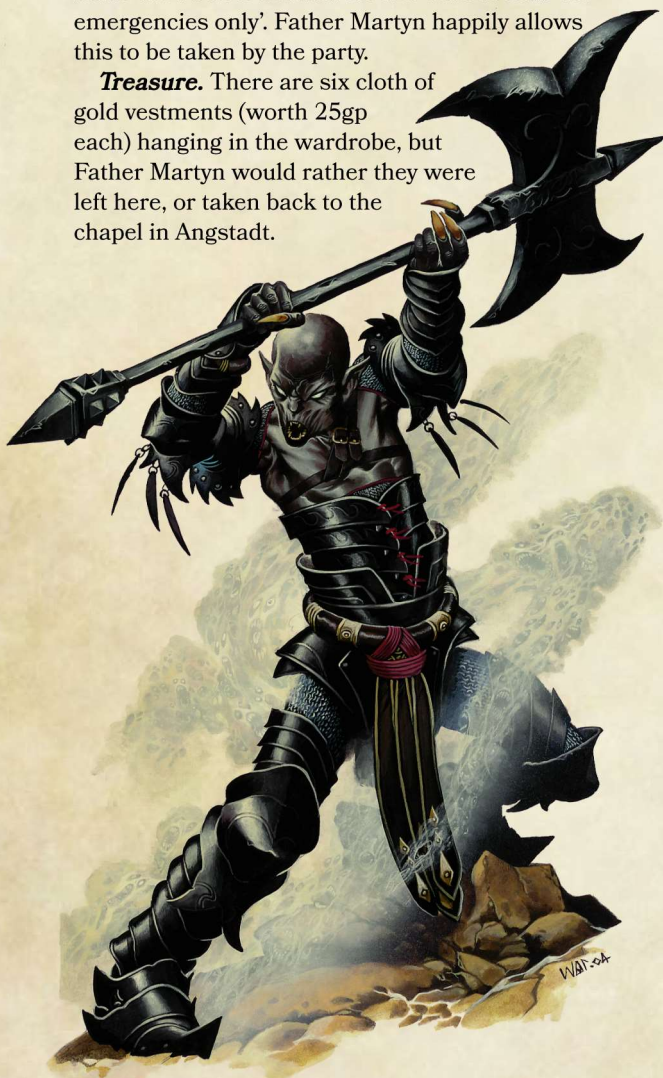
Treasure. On the table behind the throne are a host of valuable items, silver candlesticks, golden bowls, small precious stones and religious texts, the combined worth of which is 500gp. However, if Father Martyn accompanies the characters, he will demand that they leave it, or take it back to the chapel in Angstadt.

E3A. VESTRY

Behind an ornamented door in the chancel is a vestry, which contains a wardrobe filled with the robes of the clerics and priests who conducted ceremonies here decades ago.

A successful DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals a hidden panel in the wardrobe, behind which hangs a *sun blade* with a note around the hilt which reads 'for emergencies only'. Father Martyn happily allows this to be taken by the party.

Treasure. There are six cloth of gold vestments (worth 25gp each) hanging in the wardrobe, but Father Martyn would rather they were left here, or taken back to the chapel in Angstadt.



E4. NORTH TRANSEPT

This side room has nearly entirely collapsed, great sections of the walls have fallen away, and the door lies on the floor, smashed from its hinges. Torn tapestries line the walls, and in the far corner is a spiral staircase leading down.

This room is empty, save for the spiral staircase which leads down to area E6.

E5. SOUTH TRANSEPT

This chamber is filled with the corpses and skeletons of numerous humanoids. At any time, you may have four **zombies** emerge from this room to ambush the party. Vasha may also open the door to this room to cast *animate dead* on the cadavers.

A stench emanates from behind the door to this room. Even from this distance, you can tell that what's behind won't be good.

If the characters open the door;

Piles of corpses upon corpses litter this room. Flies buzz around the bodies in a sickening swarm.

Characters who enter the room must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned for one minute.

Treasure. A successful DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation) check whilst scanning the bodies reveals a satchel on the far side of the room. If a character opens the satchel, they are confronted by an animated skull, which gnashes at their fingers; +2 to hit, 3 (1d6) piercing damage. This character must succeed on a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened of the skull, causing them to drop the satchel and flee the room. Also inside the satchel is a flask of holy water, and a *potion of superior healing*.

E6. RELIQUARY SHRINE

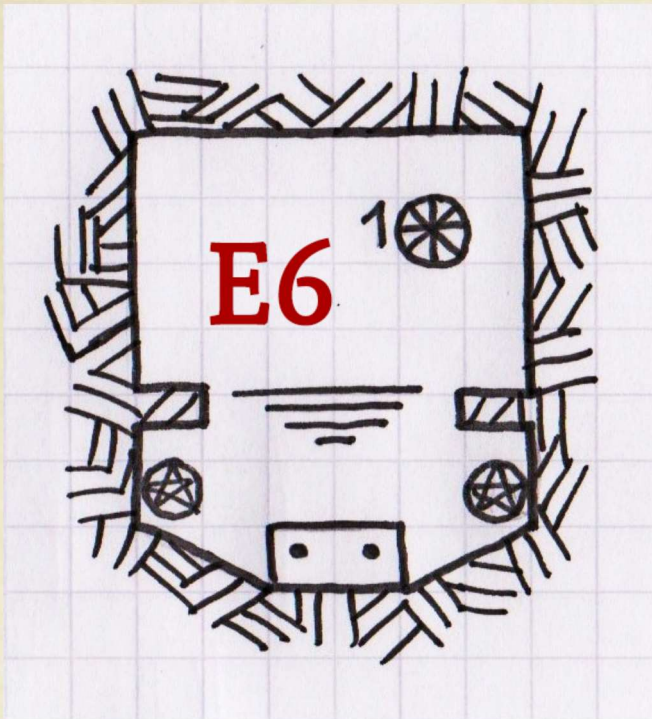
This dungeon chamber is ten feet below the chapel above. It contains a **crypt thing** (Appendix A) and the *lantern of the morning lord* (Appendix B).

As you descend the spiral staircase, it becomes eerily quiet, all light from above slowly gives way to shadows. After a few minutes, you emerge into an unlit room. A dry, rasping voice speaks up.

'Leave this place lest you belong to the true faith...'

As you scan the room for the source of the voice, you notice a skeletal undead sat in an alcove above an altar in the lower portion of the room. You notice that atop the altar is a glorious lantern.

MAP - EMPYREAN HALLS BELOW



Only worshipers of Lathander the Morning Lord can progress into the lower area of this chamber without invoking the wrath of the crypt thing. Initially, the crypt thing will try to talk any non-worshippers away, threatening divine wrath. Have the crypt thing roll a Charisma (Intimidation) check versus a character's Wisdom (Insight). Should the crypt thing win, they feel compelled to leave. If this fails, the crypt thing will use its Scatter Defilers ability if the characters move within five feet of the altar.

If a worshipper of Lathander enters the room, they are greeted by the crypt thing which says 'There is always another dawn'. Only worshippers of Lathander can take the *lantern of the morning lord* without first fighting the crypt thing.

OUTCOMES

Hopefully, the characters manage to recover the *lantern of the morning lord*. After doing so, they should return to Angstadt through the wilds of Ravenloft (see Travelling in Ravenloft). That night, there may be no undead attack if the party killed Vasha and the Ashen Skull Cult, however, if there is, they can use the lantern to destroy the undead permanently. Other possible outcomes include;

- Keeping Father Martyn alive throughout the adventure, who will reward them with three flasks of holy water and periapt of health.
- If the party freed Angstadt from the undead curse, Burgomaster Maaïke will give them a reward of a silver-coated longsword, and a silver chalice, inlaid with gems worth 750gp.
- Hopefully the party managed to retrieve the lantern of the morning lord and used it to destroy the undead which attack Angstadt. Father Martyn will ask that the party leave it with him, should the undead ever return.

- The party may have convinced Radovan to accompany them. If he survives the adventure, he becomes a steadfast ally of the characters, and you may use him as a helpful NPC to assist the party in future adventures.
- If the party managed to kill Vasha and the Ashen Skull Cult, then the undead will no longer attack Angstadt like before.
- Hopefully the party managed to prevent Ortus from being turned into an evil empyrean, if not, they may have to return to the Empyrean Halls to deal with him at a higher level.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Big thanks to all who contributed to this project! Make sure to follow me on social media for more information about *Van Richten's Guide to the Undead*, and follow the Mount Ogden Gaming Company!

<https://www.facebook.com/mountogdengc/>

Cover Art - Arcana Games

<https://www.arcana-games.com/>



APPENDIX A

This appendix contains additional stat blocks that are required to play this adventure. The crimson mist, crypt thing and bridge haunt all make an appearance in the upcoming *Van Richten's Guide to the Undead*, written by myself and the Mount Ogden Gaming Company. Keep your eyes peeled on the appropriate social media pages for more information!

BRIDGE HAUNT

Medium undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 11
Hit Points 45 (10d8)
Speed 30ft., fly 30ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
7 (-2)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	17 (+3)

Skills Deception +5, Insight +4, Persuasion +5
Damage Resistances acid, fire, lightning, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing and slashing from nonmagical weapons
Damage Immunities cold, necrotic, poison
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained
Senses darkvision 60ft., passive Perception 11
Languages any languages it knew in life
Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Incorporeal Movement. The ghost can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. It takes 5 (1d10) force damage if it ends its turn inside an object.

Innate Spellcasting. The haunt's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

3/day: *mass suggestion*
1/day: *mirage arcane*

Rejuvenation. If a haunt dies, it magically restores itself and returns to the bridge it haunts in 1d4 days. Taking a haunt more than 1,000 feet from its bridge can destroy it, as can destroying a haunt's bridge. A bridge haunt is laid to rest by taking a piece of the corporeal remains of its former body, or a possession important to it in life, and delivering that item to the place where the creature that became the haunt was headed before its demise.

Actions

Incorporeal Touch. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5ft., one target. *Hit* 10 (2d6 + 3) necrotic damage. Instead of dealing damage, the haunt can choose to push a creature 10 feet in any direction.

CRYPT THING

Medium undead, lawful neutral

Armor Class 14 (natural armour)
Hit Points 26(4d8 + 8)
Speed 30ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)	8 (-1)	13 (+1)

Damage Vulnerabilities bludgeoning
Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities exhaustion, poisoned
Skills Intimidation +3, Perception +2, Religion +2
Senses darkvision 60ft., passive Perception 12
Languages Common
Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Turning Resistance. The crypt thing has advantage on saving throws against any effect that turns undead.

Actions

Multiattack. The crypt thing makes two attacks with its claws.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5ft., one target. *Hit* 6 (1d6 + 2) slashing damage.

Scatter Defilers (1/Day). Each creature of the crypt thing's choice within a 30-foot-radius of it must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or be transported 1d10x10 feet in a random direction.



CRIMSON DEATH

Medium undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 36 (8d8)

Speed 0ft., fly 50ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
1 (-5)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)

Skills Stealth +5

Damage Resistances acid, cold, fire, lightning, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, slashing from nonmagical weapons

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, grappled, paralysed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained, unconscious

Senses darkvision 60ft., passive Perception 10

Languages -

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

False Appearance. While the crimson death remains motionless, it is indistinguishable from normal fog.

Incorporeal Movement. The crimson death can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. It takes 5 (1d10) force damage if it ends its turn inside an object.

Innate Spellcasting. The crimson death's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 10). The crimson mist can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components

1/day: *telekenesis*

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the crimson death has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Actions

Blood Drain. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5ft., one creature. *Hit:* 9 (2d6 + 2) necrotic damage. The target's hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the damage taken, and the crimson death regains hit points equal to that amount.



VASHA NOSFERATSKI

Medium undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armour)

Hit Points 105 (14d8 + 42)

Speed 30ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)

Saving Throws Dex +5, Wis +5

Skills Perception +5, Stealth +6

Damage Resistances necrotic; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons

Senses darkvision 60ft., passive Perception 15

Languages Common, Infernal

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Dark Devotion. Vasha has advantage on saving throws against being charmed or frightened.

Regeneration. Vasha regains 10 hit points at the start of her turn if she has at least 1 hit point and isn't in sunlight or running water. If Vasha takes radiant damage or damage from holy water, this trait doesn't function at the start of Vasha's next turn.

Spellcasting. Vasha is a 5th-level spellcaster, her spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks). Vasha has the following cleric spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *spare the dying*, *thaumaturgy*, *toll the dead**, *virtue**

1st level (4 slots): *bane*, *command*, *inflict wounds*

2nd level (3 slots): *blindness/deafness*, *hold person*, *spiritual weapon*

3rd level (2 slots): *animate dead*, *bestow curse*

*Unearthed Arcana: Starter Spells

Spider Climb. Vasha can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

Vampire Weaknesses. Vasha has the following flaws:

Forbiddance. Vasha can't enter a residence without an invitation from one of the occupants.

Harmed by Running Water. Vasha takes 20 points of acid damage when she ends her turn in running water.

Stake to the Heart. Vasha is destroyed if a piercing weapon made of wood is driven into her heart while she is incapacitated in her resting place.

Sunlight Hypersensitivity. Vasha takes 20 radiant damage when she starts her turn in sunlight. While in sunlight, she has disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks.

Actions

Multiattack. Vasha makes two attacks, only one of which can be a bite attack.

Claws. Melee Weapon Attack: +6 to hit, reach 5ft., one creature. *Hit* 8 (2d4 + 3) slashing damage. Instead of dealing damage, Vasha can grapple the target (escape DC 12).

Bite. Melee Weapon Attack: +6 to hit, reach 5ft., one willing creature, or a creature that is grappled by the vampire, incapacitated, or restrained. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) necrotic damage. The target's hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the necrotic damage taken, and Vasha regains hit points equal to that amount. The reduction lasts until the target finishes a short or long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0.

APPENDIX B

This appendix contains additional magic items that are required to play this adventure.

LANTERN OF THE MORNING LORD

Wondrous item, uncommon

Once per day, you may speak a command word and use the cleric ability Channel Divinity: Turn Undead at 14th level, including the Destroy Undead addition. The DC for this ability is 20. Any undead destroyed by this ability are permanently destroyed, and cannot be reanimated or resurrected.

