

SHADOWED EARTH

VEILED ADVENTURES #01



OF ORCHIDS AND OATHS

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OF ORCHIDS AND OATHS

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INTRODUCTION

Of Orchids and Oaths is a Shadowed Earth adventure for a party of three to five Seasoned characters. The party should have some type of ties to the Fera Venator. Fera Venator is an ally of the Inquisition and capable of calling upon its resources from time to time. Otherwise the team could be mercenaries hired by Armen Potestas.

Chicago 1935. The Windy City is full of life - and full of death. Despite the fact that the Great Depression is in full swing, many of Chicago's citizens are making a good living in the liquor trade. Prohibition ended a couple of years ago and the good times haven't stopped since. The "King of Swing" Benny Goodman is all the rage on the

radio and jazz dominates the smoky night clubs. Not all is as it seems though. There are dark things in the world and Chicago has more than its share of evil. While most people remain content in their ignorance, a select few have chosen to acknowledge the whispers of the abyss and stare back defiantly into its dread visage.

BACKGROUND

Abraham Nocens is a rare imports dealer living in the Chicago area since the late 1890's. During this time he has lived the life of a recluse to hide the fact he has not aged in nearly half a century. It is not, however, vampirism that has blessed Nocens with his unending youth but something entirely more dark and malevolent.

In the late 1880s, Nocens was in South America bribing suppliers of oddities that entice men in civilized parts of the world into parting with their coins. While there, he met a mysterious native man who shared a tale of the "death flower" worshipped by a tribe of cannibals deep within the jungle. The man told Nocens the tribe worshipped the plant and made horrific sacrifices to honor it. In return, the Death Flower provided a rare type of nectar to the natives that prevented them from aging.

Upon hearing the story, Nocens spent several weeks organizing an expedition into the jungle. His group was heartily provisioned and heavily armed, knowing well the fierce reputations of the tribesmen in the region they were infiltrating. The preparations were for naught though, as a far more powerful enemy had preceded them - disease. As they made their way through the dense growth, it became evident that a plague had already laid waste to any opposition they may run into. By the time the expedition reached the bloodstained temple, the path had been cleared. Almost, so it seemed to Nocens, by a terrible, divine hand that swept his enemies aside to pave the way for his coming.

Within the temple complex was a shrine marking the holy place where the plant held audience. When Nocens first set eyes on the monstrosity, he was both

INTRODUCTION

repulsed and enamored. Impossibly, the thing spoke to his mind and in a moment of cacophonous silence, he knew its desire and it knew his. The massive horror stood atop a mound of “soil” composed entirely of human flesh. It wasn't *planted* in the decomposing rot of human parts as much as it was a *part of them*. Though they were beyond help, many of the men and women still moaned and writhed in agony as the death flower absorbed them. With his subconscious touched by the dark orchid, Nocens knew that cutting into the flesh of one of these still living souls and drinking of the taint that ran through their veins was the key to everlasting life.

After his communion with the horror that would come to be known as the Voro Orchid, Nocens immediately made plans to have it relocated to the United States. The trip was fraught with difficulties and Nocens sacrificed many of his men to sustain the beast. After getting it to Chicago, he went to great pains to make a place for it in his house and has lived in a symbiotic cabal with it ever since. His interests, however, have grown under the influence of the Orchid's suggestion and darker machinations are afoot in old Chicago.

In 1911 Nocens founded a cult called the Wrath of Asari. Under the guidance of the Voro Orchid, he discovered certain people, when they are sufficiently devoid of hope, are easily possessed by dark beings hatching from the same evil and primordial chaos that spawned the Orchid. From this black and malign miasma, beings surged forth, ready to occupy the mortal husks of those poor souls who no longer felt compelled to seek the meaning of the mortal realm. These possessed beings are known as the nihilvorn.

Nocens recruits men and women who he thinks are good candidates for possession. After the nihilvorn has fully manifested, Nocens sustains it with the Nectar of Asari. Nihilvorn are not immortal and are susceptible to aging and all of the other weaknesses that come with a physically human form. Providing the nihilvorn with the nectar gives them the same longevity Nocens enjoys.

To keep the Voro Orchid alive and continue creating the Nectar of Asari, Nocens has his cultists kidnap people and feed them to the plant.

At any time, side encounters and story hooks can be inserted from **Additional Encounters**, see page 21. This includes the actions of the Wrath of Asari cult, as listed under **Asarian Actions**.

WRATH OF ASARI

The Wrath of Asari was founded by Abraham Nocens in 1911. He took his first initiates that year and began indoctrinating them down a path he called “The Lamentation of the Living.”

The central tenet of the Asarian faith is the belief that men and women are born into a universe that teaches chaos as the natural state. Nocens suggests that in order to achieve enlightenment and transcend the banality of the mortal realm, it is necessary to embrace the aspects of our personalities traditionally taught as negative. Society, Nocens says, teaches us that hopelessness and depression are

negative emotional states that hinder our capacity to be happy. This, he posits, is egregiously wrong. He states that because we experience these feelings illustrates how our souls are attempting to communicate to us that the chaos of the mortal realm is not our natural state. To transcend the grip of this world, one must commune with one's darker nature and recognize that ideas like "hope" and "happiness" are barbs that latch onto our psyche in an effort to herd us and keep our potential contained. An individual who can shake the tendrils of the human condition and heed the call to be free no longer wails in the chorus known as "The Lamentation of the Living." That person embraces the omniscient silence of eternity and begins their true ascension.

Nocens nurtures depression and hopelessness in his initiates. Contrary to his teachings, however, this condition does not ultimately elevate them to an enlightened state. Instead, it makes their souls weak, which in turn ripens them for possession by the nihilvorn. After an individual is possessed by the nihilvorn, their soul is ripped from its tethers to the spiritual realm, merging it with the nihilvorn so that it can never be reincarnated into the mortal realm.

NIHILVORN

The nihilvorn are dark entities dwelling within the interstellar fabric between the spiritual and mortal realms. Most religious scholars define them as demons, which they are not, though their existence transcends definitions based on human theology; nihilvorn are more akin to an ethereal being born of dark matter. What is certain, regardless of differences in interpretation, is they are evil in a manner universally true.

When a mortal is possessed by a nihilvorn, their soul essentially ceases to exist. After possession, the nihilvorn retain no memory of their host's previous life. The brain is essentially a blank slate and the body little more than a vessel. Emotion is no longer expressed by a possessed man or woman and this appearance of emotional freedom and detachment is viewed by initiates of the Wrath of Asari as proof of spiritual ascendancy. They believe that the possessed individual has risen above the restraints of human existence. The truth is that the poor soul has been obliterated and replaced with pure darkness.

Nihilvorn who possess a human have no additional physical advantages. They are just as susceptible to aging and injuries as normal humans are. The one advantage they have is the ability to share memories, knowledge, and experiences through touch. One nihilvorn can share information or a memory by touching another.

While it would be tempting to view the presence of the nihilvorn as an effort to infiltrate and invade the mortal realm, the truth is closer to the way an infection spreads. Somewhere in the primordial region of space from which they manifest is an ancient sentience that guides their movements like a ghost in a sail. To know this entity is to know an evil so malevolent that wishing oneself unmade would seem the only sane choice.

The nihilvorn are not contained to Nocens' operations in Chicago. He has set up extensions of his cult all over and each arm of the organization has nihilvorn. Additionally, there are nihilvorn who have found their way into this world who have no affiliation with Nocens or the Wrath of Asari. However, they can only enter the mortal realm upon possessing a mortal being.

FERA VENATOR (HUNTSMEN)

Fera Venator is a secret society dedicated to combating supernatural beings. They are warriors who take a decisively aggressive stance toward their foes and their history is one steeped in tales of battle and glory in the name of righteousness.

The Huntsmen was formed as a clandestine militant arm of the Catholic Church in the early 1800's. Originally conceived as a small force that could be used to expeditiously eliminate supernatural aggressors, they eventually expanded into a larger organization and established autonomous control over their operations.

In 1902, the Huntsmen severed formal ties with the Church due to a falling out over frustrations with the bureaucratic hierarchy in Rome. They felt the Church no longer put the greater interests of mankind ahead of its own geo-political ambitions and had thus become unworthy of wielding the might of the Huntsmen.

In an effort to save their ranks from the same fate they believed had tainted the Church, the Huntsmen restructured the organization to eliminate the possibility of any one group establishing central control. They formed many smaller cells and delegated local oversight to regional members who operate their respective cells individually. Each cell is overseen by an individual who takes the title of swordmaven. The swordmaven's meet in council once a year to reassess the direction and purpose of the organization. They may also call emergency sessions if circumstance dictates a need.

While faith is still a central component of the Huntsmen, they no longer associate themselves with any one religious group. Recognizing that adherence to a specific religion was too narrow an approach that ostracized a significant portion of the land they had sworn to protect, they branched their efforts out. The members of the Huntsmen hail from many different spiritual paths and it is considered to be in bad taste to debate religion amongst their ranks.





Originally, the Fera Venator was a fraternal organization and membership closely followed the example of the Catholic priesthood. Since the emancipation of the Huntsmen from the Church, women have established an increased presence in the ranks of the organization. While men still outnumber women ten to one, the trend is changing. Attitudes toward women and equality within the Huntsmen have advanced well beyond those of the rest of society.

Even though the Huntsmen split from the Church and have shrugged off adherence to any one particular faith, they still maintain a close working relationship with the Catholic Church and frequently assist when a matter calls for their particular area of expertise. This type of relationship has slowly bloomed with other religious groups as well.

Unlike the Inquisition, the Huntsmen have a much tighter focus on where they operate. They function more like a traditional secret society and have been known to utilize the might of a radical or two (in the eyes of the Inquisition). However, they remain allies of the Inquisition as both organizations fight the same enemies.

CHICAGO IN THE 1930S

The 1930s Chicago setting should be emphasized while running the adventure. A GM can infuse a game with a rich feel by providing descriptions with period pertinent information. For example, mentioning that an NPC is wearing a black and white, double-breasted pinstripe suit and hat and has a Lucky Strike cigarette hanging from his lip gives an impression of the era.

If the characters walk into a store, having a tinny version of Shirley Temple singing “On the Good Ship Lollipop” blaring from an old brass belled Victrola helps set the mood. If you use music at your game table, there’s a ton of great music out there you can have quietly playing in the background.

Throw period references in from time to time. Don’t spend hours and hours going through history books to be able to run a convincing 1930s game, just provide a few well-placed references to remind the players of where and when they are.

NOTES ON COMBAT

While a map is provided for the Nocens’ Manor, the other scenes are left to the discretion of the GM. If you use miniatures and plan to use battlemaps, there are a few things you can do to make combat memorable. These suggestions also work for GM’s that prefer to forgo miniatures and run combat in mind’s eye theatre.

- Provide objects that give opportunities for cover.
- Add scenery to the sets to encourage imaginative combat. For example, having vehicles, fire hydrants, and rolling hot dog stands on your battlemap will likely give your PCs tactical ideas that may spice up an otherwise linear combat encounter.

THE ACTION BEGINS

SYNOPSIS

A rash of missing persons cases has drawn the attention of Armen Potestas. Armen is the leader of the Fera Venator based in Chicago. After looking into the most recent case, Armen believes a vampire is threatening the city.

Dr. Johann Middlesex, a local botanist and rare flower collector, is the latest victim. Johann was reported missing to the Chicago Police Department by his wife Abigail. A contact within the Chicago PD alerted Armen to the unusual disappearances. The number of missing persons cases has increased dramatically over the course of the past year and the police have largely written it off as gang warfare, which is FBI business. Armen believes a vampire is somewhere within the city and has asked the characters to look into the matter and destroy the beast.

STOMPIN' AT THE STILL

The PCs arrive are summoned to The Warder's Still to speak with Armen Potestas. He wishes to tell them about the string of unusual disappearances and how he thinks it may be the work of a vampire.

THE WARDER'S STILL

Located on the southeast side of Chicago on Lake Michigan, The Warder's Still is a working pub serving as a front for the central base of the Huntsmen. The cellar of the pub is home to Armen Potestas and also houses private meeting halls for the Huntsmen. Much of their business is conducted over drinks in the pub. While the general public is welcome at the Still, the Huntsmen keep a close eye on the patrons; anyone thought to be out-of-place or suspicious is promptly escorted out.

Read or paraphrase the following:

You walk into the warmth of the pub known as The Warder's Still, leaving the cold Chicago night air behind. The bar runs along the wall on your left while the common room is full of tables on the right. Above the bar is a huge, black, mounted wolf's head with a sword hung below. The old wooden floor boards creak beneath your feet and the few lights about cast long shadows on the burnt brick walls. There are a few patrons talking in low voices and tinny jazz music blares from an old Victrola sitting on the bar. The bartender motions you toward the back of the room where a brute of a man sits at a table. His black hair is streaked with locks of white and a severely broken nose dominates his square

face. The rest of his massive frame is lost in the shadows of the room. He stares in your direction, unblinking.

This is Armen Potestas. His manner is firm, but polite. He's a no nonsense man and any attempt at humor is lost. He tells the PCs that one of his contacts at the Chicago PD, Frank Domenico, alerted him to the unusual number of missing persons of late. The most recent case involved the disappearance of Dr. Johann Middlesex, a botanist and rare plant collector. The prime suspect is a man named Abraham Nocens who Armen believes is a vampire. He shares that Nocens is seldom seen in public and is a known recluse who rarely leaves his house. He then informs the group that Detective Domenico has more information and they should speak to him.

ABRAHIM NOCENS

At this point, Abraham Nocens is already aware of the investigation. A contact has informed him of the Huntsmen's involvement. Nocens knows where The Warder's Still is located and has ordered his group of cult members to keep an eye on the bar and report back to him if it looks like the Huntsmen are making any progress (such as hiring the characters as investigators).

Four cultists traveling in a black 1935 Ford Cabriolet with a white top are assigned to monitor the investigators. They are not outside the bar at the beginning of the adventure, but if the PCs return later that night or the next day, and are observant, they may notice the car occupied by four men in dark suits.

➤ Nihilvorn (four) – see page [27](#)

THE DETECTIVE'S DEBACLE

Arriving at the District Four Police Station, the characters should talk to Detective Frank Domenico about his investigation into the disappearance of Johann Middlesex. Read or paraphrase the following:

The building for Chicago PD's Fourth District is an imposing brick box that looms over the street. The air of governmental banality surrounding the structure is thick and the entire presentation inspires the type of boredom that only bureaucracy can nurture. As you make your way inside, you see that you are in a large public vestibule locked off from the rest of the building. The desk officer sitting at the window doesn't bother to look up as he asks what you need in a slightly annoyed sounding tone.

If the intrepid investigators arrive between 8am and 5pm the desk officer has Frank come talk to them. If it's outside of these hours, the desk officer tells them Frank's hours and asks them to come back.

Frank is the lead investigator working on the Middlesex case. He is also the person who contacted Armen Potestas about the missing persons cases. Frank is

THE ACTION BEGINS

a middle-aged man with olive skin, salt and pepper hair, and a thick moustache. He is a devoutly religious man and not really aware of the purpose of the Fera Venator. He takes his work as a detective very seriously, though he is known for his sense of humor.

Frank tells the PCs he has a hunch that Abraham Nocens is involved in the Middlesex case, but is unable to prove a connection. All evidence and leads loosely tie to Nocens, but no definitive connections have been made. He tried to interview Nocens, but was sent away by workers at Nocens' warehouse who told Frank to get a warrant. Frank believes Nocens is running some sort of cult. He saw several men and women living at the warehouse and noticed a small black letter "A" tattooed on the wrists of a couple men he spoke to. When Frank asked the men about the tattoos, they were evasive. So far Frank hasn't been able to collect enough evidence to persuade his superiors to request a search warrant.

Frank looked into Nocens and his business and found an oddity. He located an old newspaper clipping that mentioned Nocens and described him as a man in his early thirties. Frank found this strange because the clipping was from 1911 and from the reports Frank has heard, Nocens still looks to be in his thirties

Frank has also had some difficulties with other aspects of the case. As part of protocol, he attempted to find the birth records for Johann Middlesex to include with his report. He was unable to find any matching records and the closest he *did* find was for a *Johannes* Middlesex, but the birth year was 1842. Since Dr. Middlesex was only in his late forties, it couldn't be the correct record.

Frank encourages the team to speak with Abigail Middlesex and look around the Middlesex Estate if they are interested in finding more information.



LIPS OF RED

Arriving at the Middlesex Estate, the PCs can meet Abigail Middlesex and learn more about the circumstances surrounding her husband's disappearance. Read or paraphrase the following:

Approaching the Middlesex Estate, you see the grounds and house have all been meticulously kept and cared for. The manicured lawns roll gracefully up to the foundation of the stately Victorian-styled house. Around the back lies a hint of well-tended gardens.

If it is daytime, a butler answers the door and informs the characters that Abigail is away and will be back in the evening. The servant denies them entrance to the house and politely asks them to return in the evening. If they refuse, the servant calls the police.

Upon meeting Abigail Middlesex, read or paraphrase the following:

Abigail Middlesex is a pretty woman in her twenties. She is petite of stature and her raven black hair frames the porcelain features of her face, giving her an ethereal, ghost-like quality. The long sage green dress she wears contributes to the illusion, hiding her feet in a bell of floating fabric. She smiles warmly.

Abigail Middlesex doesn't know who the Huntsmen or the Inquisition is. If the characters convincingly represent themselves as detectives or consultants working with the police, she eagerly helps them and offers any assistance possible. If they present themselves as anything else, she kindly asks them to leave. As is expected with both organizations, the characters should never divulge who they are working for. If they're unable to create a good cover story, Abigail gets visibly upset and asks them to leave. If they refuse, she sends for the police.

Provided the characters convince Abigail they are detectives or consultants, she shows them to her husband's study. The study is filled with books and rare specimens of plants. She explains that her husband was a botanist and collecting plants was his passion. She gives the investigators free reign to search the study. Hanging on one wall of the study is an old framed photograph of Johann and Abigail Middlesex. The photograph is yellowed and very old though Abigail appears to be the same age she is now. If asked about the age of the photo, she lies and tells them it's not very old and simply weathered from excessive handling before it was framed.

Abigail too believes Abraham Nocens was involved in her husband's disappearance because her husband told her he was going to meet Nocens about importing a rare plant of interest. Johann left five days ago but never returned. Abigail claims that as far as she knows, this was her husband's first meeting with Nocens and Johann was to acquire a rare plant specimen that Nocens claimed he could procure.

THE ACTION BEGINS

THE TRUTH HURTS

Abigail is a vampire and her husband has worked for Nocens since the late 1800's. She was attacked by a vampire while Johann was on an expedition with Nocens in South America. She has sustained herself with animal blood for all of these years while Johann attempted to find a cure for her curse. Johann kept himself young by ingesting a liquid, called the Nectar of Asari, he gets from Nocens.

On their expedition to South America, Nocens and Johann retrieved a sentient plant called the Voro Orchid. The Orchid feeds on living human flesh. It is the source of the Nectar of Asari, a sticky red-black liquid that prevents anyone who ingests it from aging. The Orchid slowly absorbs its victims and as they meld with the monstrosity, their blood mixes with the black sap of the plant. The nectar can only be collected by cutting into the flesh of a victim who is being absorbed. Eventually they completely merge with the Orchid and can no longer be used to harvest the precious liquid. At this point, it becomes necessary to find a new victim

If any of the characters search the gardens at the rear of the house, they find an unusual plant in one of the beds. Its fleshy pink folds are almost in the shape of a human fetus and at its base is a nest of small tendrils. The soil around the plant is wet with what appears to be blood. If the PCs ask Abigail about it, she shrugs it off as one of her husband's specimens and doesn't know any more than that. This plant is a Voro Orchid seedling that Johann stole from Nocens.

The theft is the reason Nocens kidnapped Johann. Johann had hoped to feed the plant animal blood and create his own source for the Nectar of Asari and free him of Nocens' grip. After her husband was kidnapped, Abigail tried to get Johann from Nocens' house, but her vampiric curse prevents her from entering a home without an invitation and she was forced to contact the police.

After the investigation is completed, the characters can return to Abigail to learn the truth. See **Abigail's Story**, page [23](#), for more information.

BELLY OF THE BEAST

The investigators should proceed to Nocens' manor to ask Nocens about the strange disappearance of Johann Middlesex. If they approach the manor during the day, they will encounter those at the warehouse. Otherwise they can move straight to raiding the manor. Read or paraphrase the following:

Nocens' property sprawls along the road ahead of you. A newer looking warehouse sits street-side on the front part of the property and men can be seen loading crates onto a truck. There is a large crane permanently affixed between the warehouse and the ten foot walls that surround the house and yard and a worker is using it to lift pallets over the wall. A large rusty gate sits closed at the front of the lot.

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The house sits at the back of the property and what you can see appears dark and rundown. The front of the house is dirty and stained and dogs can be heard barking from beyond the wall.

WAREHOUSE WORKERS

Abraham Nocens runs his business out of this warehouse. He deals in oddities from all over the world and does good business selling his wares to private collectors in Chicago and other major urban areas. The warehouse is bustling with activity and there are workers loading crates. These men and women are all initiates of the Wrath of Asari and work at the warehouse in exchange for food and lodging. At any given time, there are eight workers in the area of the warehouse. Use the **Wrath of Asari Cultist** stats. The crates contain foreign items such as rare ceramics from China, wooden ornaments from South America, etc.

The grounds of Nocens' manor are quite busy during the day. At night, they are guarded to keep trespassers away.

- Asarian cultists (eight) – see page [26](#)

The investigators aren't allowed onto the grounds. If they approach, a worker from the warehouse intercepts them and asks what business they have at the property. If they approach the property stealthily, they discover the walled acreage is guarded by four large Rottweiler dogs. The dogs are vicious and bark and attack the characters upon spotting them – the noise alerts the nearby warehouse workers.

- Rottweilers (four) – see page [27](#)

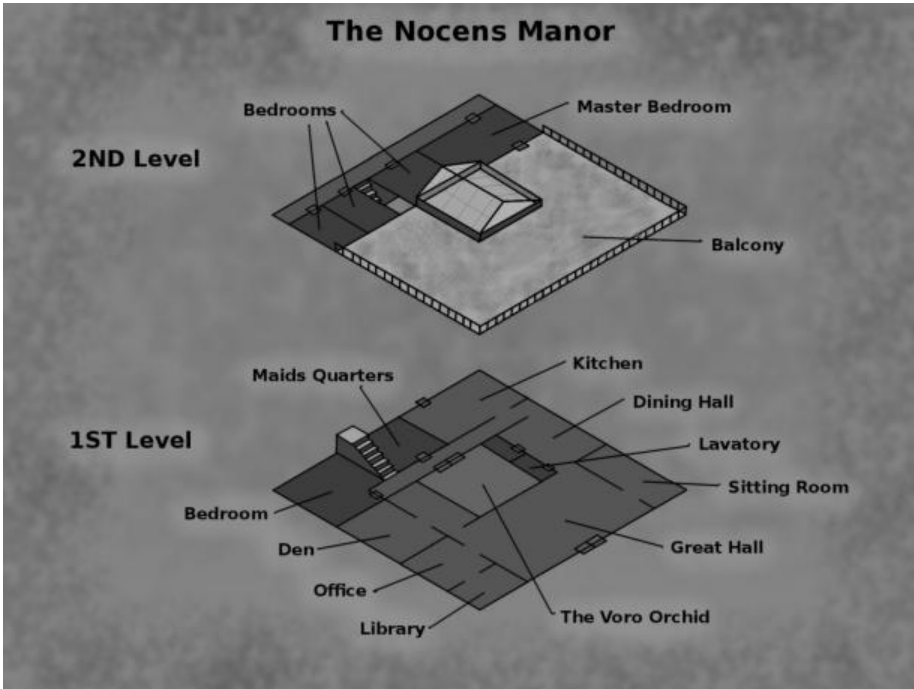
The warehouse workers attempt to deflect any requests to see Nocens by stating he is very busy and unable to meet with anyone. If police credentials are used, the warehouse workers get defensive, requesting a search warrant or demanding the investigators leave immediately.

If the PCs ask about the cult, the warehouse worker they are talking to tells them he doesn't know anything about a cult. He is equally evasive if the characters ask about the letter "A" tattooed on his wrist and requests that they leave immediately. **Note:** If the characters mention the cult at all the GM should escalate the cult's aggression level.

AREAS TO INVESTIGATE

- If the characters search the dirt lot in front of the warehouse they find a silver signet ring bearing the initials JM. If they show this ring to Abigail Middlesex she confirms it belongs to her husband. This ring may also be enough evidence for Detective Domenico to get a warrant to search the grounds. If the PCs enlist the help of the police, Domenico comes to the house with four police officers.

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- There is a loft above the warehouse serving as living quarters for the cult's members. The large area is open and full of bunks.
- There is always a box truck parked in front of the warehouse used to deliver goods to businesses in the city.
- None of the cult members staying in the warehouse are nihilvorn. The nihilvorn stay in the house proper.

RAIDING THE MANOR

The investigators may choose to raid the manor instead of just investigate. This may occur the first time they visit or on a secondary visit. They are not granted access to the house willingly and any attempt made has to utilize stealth or force, although this can be on any side of the manor. Use the map to describe the environment and run the raid appropriately.

There are always four Rottweiler dogs patrolling the grounds, eight Wrath of Asari cultists at the warehouse, and six nihilvorn inside the house. Abraham Nocens is also inside the house, although he inevitably escapes through a secret passage once the characters breach the manor.

- Rottweiler dogs (four) – see page [27](#)
- Asarian cultists (eight) – see page [26](#)
- Nihilvorn (six) – see page [27](#)

If the PCs approach using stealth, be mindful of any noise they make and initiate an appropriate response from the opposition. With enough successful Stealth rolls (at least two from each participant), it is possible to make it all the way into the house undetected. Conversely, the characters can go in “guns blazing” and take a decidedly aggressive and violent approach and have success as well.

Abraham Nocens never appears in this adventure. He is intended to be a recurring nemesis whose nefarious activities continually plague the PCs and the Huntsmen. It should be made clear that he escaped with a seedling from the Voro Orchid.

THE VORO ORCHID

When the characters find the Voro Orchid, read or paraphrase the following:

As you step through the double doors into the courtyard, you are immediately overpowered by the stench of decomposing flesh. The glass ceiling drips with ooze and wet air coils about you. The ground is slick with black blood and pulsating membranous blisters. In the center of the courtyard, writhing in a hypnotic undulating motion, stands a monstrosity that isn't quite plant or beast, but some horrific conjoined mutation of the two. Its deep red fleshy petals, throbbing like an infected limb, peel back revealing a maw of toothy barbs.



THE ACTION BEGINS

The phallic stem of the thing protrudes from a mass of snake like vines that spill outward, threading through a massive pile of human corpses and flesh that the foul thing has rooted itself in. The bodies of men and women, some still moving in agony, are melted together providing nourishment to the horror. Here and there an arm sticks out; a mouth screams silently; a hand reaches for its dead companion. The bloody and rotten mass of hundreds of corpses is now compost nourishing the abomination. Suddenly, the vines mobilize and begin emitting a rattle that deafens your ears. The plant thing's head turns toward you and lets out an impossible roar!

The orchid strikes at the investigators with its vines and attempts to sedate them with poison and absorb their flesh. If there are any nihilvorn or cultists still on the property that the PCs haven't yet dispatched, the GM should feel free to introduce them to increase the challenge. If all of the characters fall to the orchids poison, they are absorbed beyond help within eight hours. Any PC rescued within that time period needs at least 48 hours of bed rest before becoming fully healed.



VORO ORCHID

The Voro Orchid is a giant, carnivorous plant that sits atop the decaying bodies of its victims.

Attributes: Agility d4, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d10, Vigor d8

Pace: NA; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 10

Skills: Fighting d8, Notice d10

Armor: None

Weapons: Vine Attack (Str+d6; Reach 6)

Special Abilities

- **Fear -2:** Seeing the decaying bodies of the Voro Orchid's victims is a horrifying experience.
- **Large:** +2 bonus to Attack rolls against the Voro Orchid.
- **Lash:** The Voro Orchid may attempt to lash a single target in a given round using its vine reach of 6. Treat this as a standard Grapple. With each round of success, the Voro Orchid pulls its victim 2 in. closer to its stem. The Voro Orchid can only Vine Attack one target in the same round it has successfully lashed or held a victim and can only lash or hold a single target at a time.
- **Nourishment:** If a victim comes into contact with the Voro Orchid's stem, the plant begins to exsanguinate them. Treat this as a standard Grapple. With each round of success, the victim gains +1 level of Fatigue.
- **Size +4:** The Voro Orchid is very large.
- **Venom (-2):** If the orchid gets at least a Shaken result with its Vine Attack make a Vigor roll at -2. Failure results in the character being rendered unconscious for 2d6 rounds.
- **Vines:** The Voro Orchid may use its vines to attack two targets at the same time without penalties.

AFTERMATH

Provided the investigators are able to successfully vanquish their foes, they have free rein to explore the rest of the courtyard. The body of Johann Middlesex is easy to locate as he was recently taken. They find he is technically still alive, but beyond help and unable to communicate. He dies shortly after they locate him. A small locket containing a picture of Johann's wife is clutched in his hand.

After solving the mystery of Johann's disappearance, the PCs should return to The Warder's Still and report to Armen Potestas (or to Abigail and inform her about her husband and then to The Warder's Still). When they arrive, they find the Still has burned to the ground and Armen is missing.

ASHES TO ASHES

The Wrath of Asari have burned down The Warder's Still and taken Armen Potestas, the Swordmaven of the Chicago area Huntsmen, captive. The cultists have taken him to a ship anchored out in Lake Michigan, two miles east of the city. They are torturing Potestas in an effort to get information about the Huntsmen. Potestas needs the investigators' help to rescue him from the cultists.

When the PCs arrive back at The Warder's Still, intending to inform Potestas regarding the outcome of all events, read or paraphrase the following:

You can see the black plume of smoke from several blocks away as you approach The Warder's Still. When you get near enough, the destruction is even more absolute than you could have imagined. The entire structure has collapsed in on itself and only a blackened corpse of a foundation remains. Charred boards and cross beams are heaped in the ash and even the old brick walls, once sound and formidable, have succumbed to the inferno. It's as if a portal to hell has been opened and anything that was once near the fiery threshold is now an ashen memory.

The Warder's Still is smoldering. In the smoking ash the characters find the sword that was hanging above the bar. On the hilt of the great sword is a six pointed star of bright silver shining with an unusual glow. Any PC holding the sword sees an image of the star flash in their minds eye and then briefly sees the face of Armen Potestas (this is Armen's psychic resonance linked to the sword). Immediately afterward, they momentarily feel Potestas' presence in a general direction. The sword then leads them east toward the city docks.

Keep in mind that any PC carrying the huge sword draws attention. If they encounter any policemen, they are stopped and questioned.

SHADOWS ON THE WATERFRONT

The sword leads the group toward the docks district along the lake front where they will need to find a boat to pursue Potestas and his kidnappers out onto Lake Michigan. Read or paraphrase the following:

You can hear the rhythmic sound of Lake Michigan's waters lapping at the docks as you approach the waterfront. The cold bite of the night air is more prevalent the closer you get to the water and your path is shrouded in long shadows. Heavy clouds sweep across the night sky obscuring what little light the moon is providing.

As the investigators approach the docks district along the lake, they come into an area of warehouses and buildings. The buildings are used to store freight waiting to be loaded and shipped out. As they step out onto the docks, they are confronted by cultists stationed on the shore to deter pursuers.

- Asarian cultists (two per character) – see page [26](#)

After the battle, the sword indicates that Potestas is somewhere out in the lake. The PCs must either steal a boat or find one for hire and seek out the cultist's ship.

SHIP IN THE NIGHT

The PCs navigate their boat out onto the water, by using the sword, and locate a large freight ship called the *Storm's Bane*. After boarding, they must locate Potestas and then escape the ship. Read or paraphrase the following:

As your boat edges out over the water you can see the large silhouette of a ship steaming across the choppy waves of Lake Michigan. As you get closer, the name Storm's Bane can be seen painted in large black letters across the transom at the rear. From this vantage point you are unable to tell if there is any activity on deck.

The group must find a way to approach, board, and seek out Potestas to complete the rescue. The characters can position themselves alongside the ship (using Boating) or swim (using Swimming) and then use appropriate skills to board depending on their plan (Climbing, Stealth, etc). They can take a stealthy approach or use aggressive tactics to infiltrate the ship. There are twelve asarian cultists and four nihilvorn aboard the ship and Potestas is located in a secured room below deck.

- Asarian cultists (twelve) – see page [26](#)
- Nihilvorn (four) – see page [27](#)

MAELSTROM AND MADNESS

Regardless of how many of the cultists the PCs eliminate, there is a fifth nihilvorn the GM should hold in reserve. As the characters locate Potestas, they hear a commotion on decks. Armen takes his sword after being freed and races to the deck of the ship with the PCs. Once they have made it back to the upper deck, they discover their problems have just begun. Read or paraphrase the following:

Making your way back up to the deck, you suddenly feel the ship lurch wildly. You hear the sound of iron moaning as the huge boat dips, the creaking of the support structures is deafening. As you walk out you see a man standing on top of a large stack of crates with his arms in the air. He is yelling and chanting unintelligible words frantically as he stares out into the water ahead of the ship.

Out in the water you see an impossible void opening up ahead of the Storm's Bane. What can only be described as a huge black mouth, acres across, has opened just beneath the surface of the water, apparently called by the manic chanting of the man standing atop the stack of crates. The monstrous maw is drawing in millions and millions of gallons of water and the sudden opening has caused a massive whirlpool to form. The ship groans as it is violently sucked into the maelstrom!

A nihilvorn is opening an interdimensional portal beneath the surface of the water. As the portal opens, the ship lurches wildly and creaks and moans with the stress of the motion. When the PCs made their way onto the ship's deck, the nihilvorn is in the midst of the dark ritual. As the mouth of the portal widens, water begins to surge into a spiraling whirlpool that plummets into the massive alien maw. The group must now find a way to get away from the vortex and escape certain doom. If they make it back to their boat, allow them Boating rolls to navigate out of the trap. Otherwise, allow them to problem solve creatively and use appropriate skills to escape.

KISSING THE GROUND

Once the PCs make it back to shore, Potestas thanks them for rescuing him. They should use this opportunity to catch him up on the events that have transpired. Armen may ask them questions about what has happened and they should be encouraged to recount as many details as possible.

With The Warder's Still burned down, Potestas and the Huntsmen need a new meeting place. This could lead to additional missions for the characters.

ADDITIONAL ENCOUNTERS

These encounters are meant to be weaved throughout the adventure to extend the overall storyline, provide a distraction, or provide a combat opportunity for the PCs.

ASARIAN ACTIONS

Throughout this adventure, the Wrath of Asari cultists are reacting to the actions of the players. As the GM, envision what the cult is doing and how it corresponds to what the PCs have accomplished, or failed to accomplish.

As a general rule, the cult's activities become increasingly aggressive as the investigators get closer to solving the mystery of the Middlesex disappearance. As noted in **Stompin' at the Still**, the cultists start surveillance on the characters almost immediately. No matter what direction the characters take the investigation, the Wrath of Asari is watching.

At the beginning of the adventure, it's appropriate to have the four cultists in the Ford Cabriolet follow the PCs. Depending on how the game is run, it may be possible for the investigators to notice they are being followed. As the investigation proceeds, the cultists' actions escalate. Maybe the cultists run interference by driving by the party as they exit the police station or the Middlesex estate, with Tommy guns blazing. If the PCs get lax with the investigation and need to be brought back to the story arc, have the cult make an assassination attempt on one of them. This should tip off the group that their actions are having an effect on the world around them.

As the investigation continues, the cult strikes directly at the Huntsmen. This retaliation culminates in the Wrath of Asari burning The Warder's Still down and kidnapping Potestas.

Here are some additional examples of how the cult's aggression is increasing:

- Following the PC's movements and spy on them.
- Attempting to run the investigators off the road.
- Attempting to kill, kidnap, or injure one of the PC's contacts.
- Confront the characters directly in the streets (under the cover of darkness).
- Initiating a drive by shooting targeting the party.

The cult's aggression should also be tied to who is interacting with the characters. At first, cultists are sent in to intervene. As things escalate, nihilvorn are sent in to intervene.

BALLOON RIDE

The PCs find a fair is being held in Chicago. One particular attraction snaring their interest is a man offering balloon rides for \$2.00 per person. There are a number of ways this can be beneficial to them. They might use the balloon as a surveillance tool to scope out Nocens' manor. They might even think to drop ropes and descend onto the roof of the house. Alternately, any number of mishaps could come up, such as a storm or entanglement with a building that the forces the characters to use their wits to get out of.

PROTECTION MONEY

While passing by a business, the investigators witness gangsters extorting a shop owner for protection money. They are physically assaulting the shopkeeper and other people are fleeing the area to avoid being targeted.

- Gangsters (one per character) – use the Thug stats, see page [27](#)

If the pacing of the adventure is a bit slow, this encounter can be used to introduce a combat scenario and spice things up a bit. This is also a good opportunity to allow the PCs to make a NPC friend that may be able to aid them later. For example, the shop could sell items of use and the grateful shopkeeper is now willing to give them a discount.

Having the group intervene in this situation could also be a good way to get on the wrong side of a powerful mob boss or criminal organization. Remember, this is Chicago in the 1930s; there is a lot of great historical reference material out there concerning mob activities in this era and it would be even more interesting if the criminal entity had some dark, supernatural aspect.

THE HOLD UP

The characters witness the tail end of a bank robbery. They might be passing by just as the criminals are getting into their getaway vehicles. Otherwise, they may end up in the middle of a shootout between the criminals and the police where a teller from the bank is being held hostage. There are a number of possibilities for this encounter. You might have the PCs end up in a situation where they have a large sum of money after the encounter and are able to walk away with it with no repercussions. Will they keep the cash or return it to the bank?

- Bank robbers (one per character) – use the Thug stats, see page [27](#)

PICKPOCKETS

The investigators are the intended victims of a group of child pickpockets. A few of the children stage a fight in front of the PCs to distract them while another group approaches from behind and attempts to lift valuables. Allow the Awareness rolls and if they fail, have a look at the target's items on their character sheet. Take the three most valuable items that could conceivably be pickpocketed and let the player number them one to three. After the items are numbered, have them roll a d6. A result of 1 or 2 means item 1 has been taken, a 3 or 4 means item 2 is missing, and a roll of 5 or 6 means item 3 is lifted. Allow the PC the opportunity to give chase if desired.

ABIGAIL'S TALE

The following can be presented to the characters in any manner deemed appropriate as Abigail regales her story. Depending on how the investigation goes, the PCs may or may not realize that Abigail is a vampire. If they are astute and discover it early on, have her explain her story and then let them react to the situation. This is a good opportunity for a moral crossroads since the existence of a vampire will

Abigail Middlesex is a vampire, but not a malevolent one. She detests her condition and hopes to avoid the ire of the Inquisition and the Huntsmen. Once the PCs learn of her story, they are challenged with making a moral decision on what to do with her.

likely not be tolerated by the Huntsmen (or the Inquisition). Abigail is not evil and the decision to destroy her should be challenging.

ABIGAIL'S STORY

Johann and I married in the spring of 1888. He was forty-six and I just twenty-two. My family thought I was crazy for marrying an older man, but I loved him dearly. The summer after we married, Johann received a letter from Abraham Nocens who begged him to come to South America and join an expedition into the jungle. Johann was a well-known botanist and Nocens promised him a once in a lifetime opportunity to locate a previously unknown species of orchid. I begged him not to go, but he talked excitedly of the fame the find would bring and he hoped it would afford us a more affluent lifestyle.

I was heartbroken when he left. The loneliness crushed me and the anger I felt at having been abandoned turned my thoughts to darkness. It was in the midst of that cloud that the vampire found me. His charm was overpowering and before I knew what happened, we were alone. He fed upon me that night and when I awoke the next morning, he was gone, but his twisted gift was forever with me.



When Johann returned we were both changed, both shadows of our former selves. In a way it drove us closer together. Johann told me of the death flower they had found, the “Voro Orchid” he called it. He said it absorbed men and fed off of their flesh. He said the black sap running through the orchid’s victim’s veins while being absorbed could be drank to stop men from aging.

When I told him the woman he had loved and left behind was now undead, he begged me for forgiveness and swore an oath to free me of my curse. Against his better judgment, he went to Nocens and agreed to serve him in return for a supply of nectar from the Voro Orchid. The work was a much darker affair than my beloved was able

to make peace with, however, and his soul was pained by his deeds. He dared not refuse though, for fear of losing access to the nectar and having time slowly tear us apart.

Over the years we learned to survive. I fed on animal blood and Johann worked desperately to find a way to sever his ties to Nocens. Two weeks ago he thought he had found a way. He brought home a stolen seedling from the orchid and began feeding it animal blood. He hoped to be able to produce the nectar himself without murdering innocent people. Nocens wouldn’t have it though, and the last time my husband went to meet with Nocens he never returned. I tried in vain to get him myself, but I could not enter the house without an invitation. I was forced to turn to the police.

Now my Johann is gone and the last thing I loved in this world is no more.

SUPPORTING CAST



Abigail Middlesex

Abigail Middlesex was made into a vampire after being courted while her husband was away, searching for the Voro Orchid. Unfortunately, she has all the curses of being a vampire without all the enhanced abilities that go with it.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d12 + 1, Vigor d10

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 9; **Charisma:** + 2

Skills: Fighting d8, Notice d6, Shooting d8, Swimming d8, Throwing d6

Special Abilities

- **Claws:** Str+d4
- **Frenzy:** Vampires can make two attacks per round with a -2 penalty to each attack.
- **Level-Headed:** Vampires act on the best of two cards.
- **Invulnerability:** Vampires can only be harmed by their Weaknesses. They may be Shaken by other attacks, but never wounded.
- **Sire:** Anyone slain by a vampire has a 50% chance of rising as a vampire themselves in 1d4 days.
- **Undead:** +2 Toughness; +2 to recover from being Shaken; called shots do no extra damage (except to the heart).
- **Weakness (Sunlight):** Vampires catch fire if any part of their skin is exposed to direct sunlight. After that they suffer 2d10 damage per round until they are dust. Armor does not protect.
- **Weakness (Holy Symbol):** A character with a holy symbol may keep a vampire at bay by displaying it. A vampire who wants to directly attack the victim must beat her in an opposed Spirit test.
- **Weakness (Holy Water):** A vampire sprinkled with holy water is Fatigued. If immersed, he combusts as if it were direct sunlight.
- **Weakness (Invitation Only):** Vampires cannot enter a private dwelling without being invited. They may enter public domains as they please.
- **Weakness (Stake Through the Heart):** A vampire hit with a called shot to the heart (-4) must make a Vigor roll versus the damage. If successful, it takes damage normally. If it fails, it disintegrates to dust.

OF ORCHIDS AND OATHS



ARMEN POTESTAS

Armen Potestas is the current swordmaven of Chicago, serving as the leader of the local Huntsmen.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d8, Spirit d6, Strength d10, Vigor d6

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 6; **Charisma:** 0

Skills: Driving d6, Fighting d10, Healing d4, Intimidation d6, Shooting d6, Stealth d6, Streetwise d6, Survival d8, Swimming d6

Armor: None

Weapons: Sword of the Venator (Str+d8), S&W [.38] (12/24/48; 2d6+1; RoF: 1; Shots: 6; AP 1, Revolver)

Hindrances: Code of Honor, Loyal, Pious

Edges: Brawny, Command, Trademark Weapon, Vampire Scholar*, Vampire Inquisitor*, Vampire Hunter*, Vampire Purgator*

** These are Inquisitional Edges that can be found in Judgment Day.*

ASARIAN CULTIST

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 6 (1)

Skills: Fighting d6, Knowledge (Wrath of Asari) d8, Notice d4, Shooting d4

Armor: Leather Jacket (+1, torso only)

Weapons: Knife (Str+d4), Tommy Gun (12/24/48, 2d6+1, AP 1, RoF 3, Auto)



FRANK DOMENICO

Frank Domenico is a detective with the Chicago Police Department and a close ally of the Huntsmen, although he doesn't truly know what they do.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d8, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d8

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 7; **Charisma:** 0

Skills: Fighting d8, Stealth d6, Shooting d8, Streetwise d6, Notice d6 (+2)

Armor: None

Weapons: S&W [.38] (12/24/48; 2d6+1; RoF: 1; Shots: 6; AP 1, Revolver)

Hindrances: Loyal

Edges: Alertness (+ 2 to Notice), Brave (+ 2 to fear tests), Brawny

SUPPORTING CAST

NIHILVORN

Nihilvorn are asarian cultists possessed by dark entities.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4, Spirit d8, Strength d10, Vigor d6

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 5; **Charisma:** -1

Skills: Fighting d8, Knowledge (The Void) d6, Shooting d6

Armor: None

Weapons: Knife (Str+d4), S&W [.38] (12/24/48; 2d6+1; RoF: 1; Shots: 6; AP 1, Revolver)

Special Abilities

- **Emotionless:** Nihilvorn are devoid of human emotion. They are immune to Taunt and Intimidation

THUG

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4, Spirit d4, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 5

Skills: Fighting d6, Notice d4, Shooting d6

Armor: None

Weapons: Knife (Str+d4), S&W [.38] (12/24/48; 2d6+1; RoF: 1; Shots: 6; AP 1, Revolver)

Special Abilities

- **Cowardly:** If the thugs are outnumbered, make a Spirit roll for each of them each round. Failure results in that thug fleeing.

POLICE OFFICER

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d8, Vigor d6

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 6; **Charisma:** 0

Skills: Fighting d6, Knowledge (Law) d8, Shooting d8, Notice d4

Armor: None

Weapons: Billy club (Str+d4), S&W [.38] (12/24/48; 2d6+1; RoF: 1; Shots: 6; AP 1, Revolver)

ROTTWEILER DOG

Use the Dog/Wolf stats from the *Savage Worlds* core rulebook.