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Land of Vampires

A duet 5e campaign for one PC and their GM.

Introduction

Several thousand years ago, the land of Steymhorod disappeared from the surface of Eldura. What had once been a mountainous region with fragrant springs, moderate summers, and colorful falls descended into the Shadowlands, its borders separated from the rest of the plane by impenetrable mist. At all times, Steymhorod remains under gray clouds, lit only by weak sunlight even at the brightest times of day. The forests remain on the cusp between autumn and winter, a state of living death. And over the land, a dark vampire lord, Draego, rules.

This chapter gives an overview of the history of Steymhorod as well as the major cities, cultures, groups, and organizations that players might run across during their explorations. We also include a few ideas for adventure hooks and PC backstory hooks to enhance the character's investment in the campaign.

Acquainting Your Player with Steymhorod

Those who live on the prime plane—several thousand years later in Azuria—are unaware of what happened to the land of Steymhorod. Over the millennia since the region descended into the Shadowlands, few have ventured across its borders. For non-vampires, such a visit is impossible save through the use of a portal.

The muddled history of the years before the great flood obscured the history of Steymhorod further still, and characters are unlikely to have heard of the region at all—its very memory has left the prime plane. When your party arrives, they do not know where they are, and this will be one of their chief initial concerns as they grow acquainted with the region.

Personalizing the Campaign

This is a campaign designed to be played one-on-one, which creates lots of flexibility for the GM and the player to make the adventure arc work for them. Before your campaign begins, we suggest having a conversation with the player about the Gothic nature of the campaign and its setting to ensure that they feel comfortable immersing themselves and their PC in the world.

In what follows, there are a few specific points where we note alterations you may wish to make to the worldbuilding and setting setup. Please feel free to make these and other changes to personalize the game to your unique party.

History of Steymhorod

While Steymhorod was still a prosperous land in the northwestern reaches of Eldura, major and minor nobles from across the realms arrived, hoping to win the hand of the young Lord Draego, the noble ruler of all of Steymhorod. To everyone's surprise, a minor noblewoman, Elena of Palais, captured the lord's attention. The captivating Elena left Palais behind, and she remained with Lord Draego and became his wife.

Unfortunately, the couple's happiness was short-lived. While pregnant with their first-born child, Elena became ill and needed a blood transfusion. One of her most trusted servants agreed and offered her lifeblood for her mistress—but the blood was cursed. Elena's condition worsened. Large, seeping pustules covered her skin, keeping her in a constant state of agony. She could often be heard screaming late into the night because of the fire licking her skin and rushing through her blood.

Draego became obsessed with the blood curse. He waged an all-out war against surrounding kingdoms, thinking that by collecting blood he might find a cure for his ailing wife. It was said that in the Killing Fields of Steymhorod, the earth and the grasses drank more blood than water and developed a taste for wet red death. But despite all of this loss of life as Draego expanded the reach of his kingdom, no cure could be found.

Lord Draego was desperate. He called upon his allies, the Four Fae Sisters, ancient beings tied to the land and with whom he shared influence, love, and

control over Steymhorod. Though he begged, they refused to help him save Elena or the child. Draego attacked the fae as they turned their back on him, destroying those who had been his allies for so long. The Sisters died alongside Elena, and the land fell into the Shadowlands, cursed.

A small flicker of light remained. The child lived, delivered as his mother passed on to the realm of Astralei. The distraught father did his best to raise his son and rule his land, but further tragedy awaited Draego. A few months into his young life, the healers discovered that Cadogan also had the blood disorder that had killed his mother.

The Sisters having failed him, Draego turned to a new set of powers, crying out for aid from any who would listen. Braemorn, god of undeath, answered him. The god promised to heal the boy and vowed that he and Draego would live forever. Draego agreed, and the first vampire came into being.

Known vs Unknown

Most people in Steymhorod are unaware of the fact that they live in the Shadowlands. Similarly, the common understanding of what transpired with the fall or the Darkening is that the Four Sisters left—few beyond the *saudad* or the residents of the Green Vale know of Draego's connection to the Sisters' disappearance.

Steymhorod's Major Cities

There are three major cities in Steymhorod: Saint Sebastian, Barasov, and Rasonov. The Witchwood is home to the witches and their servitors, and the town of Willowhold rests inside the forest's borders. The village Umbra sits at the base of Castle Cadogan; a pack of werewolves make their den at Wolf's Head Peak, and a collection of fae and druids secretly dwell within the Green Vale. The desecrated temples to the Four Fae Sisters lie in the heart of each natural element—the mountains, the rivers, the forests, and the fields.

Saint Sebastian

The walled city of Saint Sebastian is the first the adventurers are likely to come across upon their arrival in Steymhorod. The population of Saint Sebastian is aging rapidly, most of their young residents leaving to join the Ring of Light, a cult that

surrounds the city walls, or traveling to the city of Barasov for greater excitement and opportunity.

The mayor of Saint Sebastian is an ancient [seemingly] human man named Sebastian. He maintains strict rules about who may or may not enter the city as well as who may remain after the gates are shut at dusk every night to protect the residents from the dangers beyond the walls.

The Ring of Light

A little over twenty years ago, a middle-aged, bald man with dark brown skin asked for admittance to Saint Sebastian after sundown. Sebastian refused, which was functionally a death sentence. Between the witches, wildlings, werewolves, and vampire spawn, the man would surely be devoured in the dark. The man sat in front of the gates, a lantern by his side.

Dawn rose the next day, and the man remained. He walked through the city streets, preaching a message of hope and light, of safety beyond the walls, so long as the residents remained in his care. Many joined him. After the first year of his residence, a wave of refugees fled from Barasov to Saint Sebastian, and they too joined the Ring of Light. They built wooden shelters around the city, leaning them against Saint Sebastian's sturdy walls.

Barasov

Barasov is the largest, most developed city in all of Steymhorod. Though officially ruled by Lady Divine Odalyde, functionally, it is divided into three sections: one ruled by the nobles, another by the Bloodletters, and the third by the Watchers. The nobility's portion of the city is the wealthiest, and each of the five noble families has ties to either the Bloodletters or the Watchers.

A sharp line runs through the city between the Bloodletters' and the Watchers' territory. Residents pay for protection depending on which of the two sections they call home, though for the most part, the citizens of Barasov try to remain separate from the inter-guild conflicts. Twenty years ago, the fighting between the two guilds intensified to the point that blood ran through the streets and many innocents died, caught in the crossfire. Those who could fled the city and made their way to Saint Sebastian and Willowhold.

A mysterious fog hangs over the minds of those who leave Barasov, slowly erasing their memories of the

city, making recollection more difficult the longer they are away.

The human residents of Barasov oppress the other races of their city, especially those of goblinoid descent. *Note: the degree of this oppression is up to you and what you and your player feel comfortable with. If your adventurers would like to tackle inequality, racism, and hatred, then this can be an interesting plotline. Make sure to address this out of game, and feel free to cut it entirely, or explore issues of class inequality that are not tied to race or appearance. Barasov does not appear in Part One of this campaign, but the party will travel there in later adventures.*

Rasonov

Not much is known of this city to the east of Draego's castle, but groups of hooded riders occasionally burst forth from its gates, quelling disturbances in the countryside before returning to their homes. No one in Barasov or Saint Sebastian has had contact with a citizen of Rasonov for several decades.

Nevertheless, several rumors persist about the place and its formidable walls. Some say that Rasonov is populated by sentient, isolationist ghouls. Others claim that Rasonov is the home of a mad wizard who protects incredible treasures in the labyrinth within the walls. The most improbable claim is that it is within Rasonov that resistance to Draego's dominion over Steymhorod gathers strength.

Witchwood

The Witchwood is a vast forest that spans the region of Steymhorod. Like the rest of the region, the fall to the Shadowlands corrupted the wood and its residents. A single path, the Spindlewood Road, curls through the forest, connecting the vast woodland to the other elements of Steymhorod. The Witchwood is ever-expanding, slowly encroaching on neighboring cities and towns as well as the fields and rivers.

Willowhold

The small settlement of Willowhold sits in the middle of the Witchwood, its residents protecting themselves from the horrors of the forest as best as they're able. So far, the residents have managed to beat back the ever-encroaching Witchwood and ward off the many horrors of the wild.

Castle Cadogan

Lord Draego and his son Cadogan live in Castle Cadogan, a towering structure built into the region's tallest mountain, and the village of Umbra lies at the castle's base. The vampire lord has few interactions with the villagers below, though they dwell always beneath the castle's shadow.

Wolf's Head Peak

Far to the north, a pack of werewolves have made their home in Wolf's Head Peak. Their alphas, Tavion and Solane, have led the pack for the last decade, but a rogue member of their pack, Vicq, vies for power.

Green Vale

The Green Vale resides in the southern reaches of Steymhorod and is the sole remaining fae forest in the land. The first several acres of forest are disguised by a false Witchwood, but within its borders, a conclave of fae and druids remain in harmony with the land. However, they are divided as to their responsibility to the rest of Steymhorod. Over the years, a few different groups have attempted to revive the Sisters' Fanes while others have made pacts with the vampires, werewolves, or the witches.

While some residents of the Vale would say that they are unaware of whether or not Lord Draego knows of their whereabouts, the wisest among them would hold this as a certainty—when he destroyed the Sisters, Draego became one with the land. He knows of all within its borders.

Four Fanes

There are four fanes, or sacred sites of the Sisters. In Draego's rage at the Sisters' betrayal, he destroyed the fanes, and the records of their locations were lost over time. Each Sister had a fane at the heart of her element: Diannan, the Forest Fane; Arduenne, the Mountain Fane, Eronia, the Field Fane; and Lena, the River Fane.

People Groups of Steymhorod

Steymhorod is a region primarily populated by humans. It is ruled by a vampire lord and also home to werewolves, witches, fae, and saudad.

Vampires

Lord Draego, the first vampire, created several others in the early throes of his immortality. His deal with Braemorn inflicted his son with his curse, and he passed the bloodline on to a few others, most notably his military commander Malthael and his chief political strategist, Hugo. All vampires remain under Draego's thrall and are connected to him on some level, but he cannot directly harm them, just as he cannot harm himself.

Draego's blood flows through the veins of all vampires. The further they are from the original bloodline, the weaker they are in their cursed state. There are two remaining vampires of the elder bloodline: Malthael and Hugo. Malthael's servants are violent and bloodthirsty, wreaking havoc on the prime plane of Azuria with large-scale slaughters. Hugo's descendants are more conniving, selecting their targets with care and concocting intricate schemes to avoid detection.

The campaign's primary villain is a vampire named Lord Nassarq. The former human nobleman's transformation occurred with the help of an ancient relic that he discovered in his castle in the kingdom of Linolynn that belonged to Braemorn's servants. He directly imbibed Hugo's blood, reviving the elder line and amassing great power to himself over a short period of time. Three vampires—Rodian, Olya, and Anya—owe their souls to Hugo, either through their transformations or on behalf of deals they made with him, and they are likewise bound to serve Nassarq, Hugo's blood-reincarnation.

Werewolves

With Steymhorod's fall, the curse of lycanthropy worsened in Steymhorod. The pack originally served Arduenne, the Fae goddess of the mountains, but without her presence, their wolf side was corrupted alongside all the native wolves of the region. They remain loyal to Arduenne, worshipping an aspect of her spirit, the Wolf Mother. Lycanthropy in Steymhorod cannot be healed save for the

intervention—and therefore resurrection—of Arduenne herself.

Note: We suggest keeping this information concealed from your players until they are interacting with werewolves in the adventure. These altered curse rules are meant to help increase the threat of curses and diseases which lose a lot of their power with even low-level spellcasting. Being a cursed land, Steymhorod enhances these predicaments, but ultimately, this change is up to you as the GM. You can read more about altered rules for lycanthropy in Appendix C.

Witches

The witches were once the devoted followers of Diannan, the leader of the Sisters and the Archfae ruler of the forest. When their fae goddess disappeared, the witches' magic twisted, the spirits they called warped by shadow. Their desire to protect the Forest Fane remains, and they hunt trespassers through their lands, especially those who stray from the Spindle Path that winds through the woods, crossing rivers and valleys.

The witches hold sway over two other groups that roam the lands of Steymhorod as well: the wildlings and the wights. The wildlings traverse the forests, hunting creatures and travelers alike. If called upon, they will do the witches' bidding for a favor or a fee, though they are also willing to work for the vampires.

The wights travel in a mounted herd, roaming the fields between the vast forest and the city of Barasov in ghostly armor. Several rumors circulate through the lands as to the nature of their hunts, be they for food, vengeance, entertainment, or another cause. Their leader is missing her right hand, lost in a battle long ago.

Fae

Fae from both the Bright- and Shadowlands reside in the Green Vale, teaching a conclave of druids, green witches, and other fae beings their ways. A few other fae roam the lands of Steymhorod in disguise, disrupting the habits of the other people groups save the saudad, for whom they have a fondness.

Saudad

The saudad are interplanar travelers, displaced from the city of Orison after it was swallowed by the

ocean as Reka's sacrifice to Alessandra. A small enclave of saudad were traveling through Steymhorod when it fell into the Shadowlands, and they have been trapped ever since, unable to venture the multiverse. The saudad are storytellers and maintain much of the lore of old, down to when Lewellyn and Pandora brought the planes into existence. They travel freely across Draego's lands unhindered by vampires, his responsibility for their plight resulting in a rare moment of compassion on behalf of the vampire lord.

Their extensive cultural memory helps to protect them from the evils that walk the land as well. While many of the townsfolk and those hiding behind the walls of Steymhorod's cities remain unaware of how to protect themselves from the wandering undead, witches, and werewolves, the saudad remember, passing the knowledge down through generations. Their leaders have ties to the Sisters, and many saudad have a close relationship with the natural world as keepers of her stories.

Possible Adventure Hooks

Each adventure chapter that follows provides you with unique adventure hooks, but the two that follow are meant to help with the preparation and background for your campaign.

Vampire Hunting. Rumors of missing children swarm through all levels of society in the kingdom of Linolynn. Thanks to the party's bravery and cleverness, they discover that the culprit is a vampire masquerading as a noble, Lord Nassarq. King Arontis offers a reward for anyone daring enough to travel to his estate, Nocturne, and rid the kingdom of this beast forever. If the party is willing to pursue the dark creature, they fight their way through the castle to find the vampire's body in his coffin. Stabbing him in the chest, it seems as though their revenge is complete...until they hear a thick liquid dripping in the far corner. Blood pools beneath the vampire's casket, swirling into a funnel, and a portal appears... Leaping through it, they land in Steymhorod.

A note on this adventure hook: In this story version, Lord Nassarq is a twisted vampire whose thirst for blood has twisted an already greedy disposition into targeting children for his meals. Depending on your preferences, this may not be a desirable villainous predilection, and above all, ttRPGs should be fun and not triggering. This preference on Nassarq's part is

not a necessity for the adventure, though there may be a few plot points for you to tweak down the line. Ideally, he maintains a certain signature-type of victim that he pursues, but this can be as benign as you wish and as is possible for beings who eat fellow creatures.

A Missing Friend. Either before the adventure begins or during transportation through the blood portal, the PC might lose a close friend of party member. Maybe their mentor disappeared without a trace on a vampire hunt several years prior. Or, if they are traveling with a larger group, they might become separated from all save one of their party members as they travel through the portal. They could then spend much of their time in Steymhorod searching for their missing companions.

PC Considerations

If possible, the PC should have some sort of connection to vampires in their backstory. Perhaps they've lost family members to vampires, or they've trained as a vampire hunter. This does not need to be an all-out hatred of vampires, but connecting their backstory to the adventure helps with character buy-in. The PC should begin the campaign at level 3.

You can find two unique character backgrounds for this campaign in Appendix C: the saudad and the vampire hunter.

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Map of Steymhorod



Running the Campaign

How to Use this Adventure Text

This campaign assumes that you have access to the 5e SRD. Items or creatures that are not part of the SRD can be found in Appendix A.

Text box example: Text that appears in a box like this may be read aloud, paraphrased, or omitted as you prefer. It is intended to help describe scenarios and environments.

Sidebar example

Text that appears in sidebars is also optional and/or intended to provide extra background information or lore that may be helpful as you flesh out the adventure.

Creatures with stat blocks appear in bold, magic items appear in italics.

[**GM's note:** tips on scale or RP appear in brackets. You'll find information for GM's eyes only in brackets.]

Adjusting Combat

Regardless of whether you are running this campaign one-on-one (in a duet) or for a small group, one of the most important roles of the GM is balancing and tweaking encounters to suit the PC. The combat should feel weighty, but fun. Some strategies include reducing or raising hit points or changing the number of combatants before the session begins or making adjustments during combat.

For more information and resources about playing this one-on-one style, please see dnnduet.com.

A Note on Scale

Even more so than with group adventures, individual stats such as hp and damage-per-turn play a critical role in a duet game. As the GM, it's likely that you'll need to make some adjustments for your PC. We've used GM's notes throughout to indicate moments where you may need to pay particular care to making adjustments to suit your individual party's needs.

In terms of scale, we assume that the PC is traveling with at least one other party member and that the

PC is a bit more powerful—either in terms of extra spells, magic items, or another special bump of your choosing—than most individual PCs would be at their corresponding level in a group game. We use the terms PC and party relatively interchangeably for variety, though we do suggest that the narrative centers around the PC as much as possible.

Campaign Layout and Organization

Each of the chapters that follows began as an individual adventure that was simultaneously part of the campaign. We've retained the out-of-campaign adventure hooks to make each chapter as versatile as possible for you and your duet-ing needs. At the end of each chapter, you'll find the GM's reference maps for the chapter. You can find full-page maps in Appendix D, as noted below.

You'll find four appendices at the end of this adventure. Appendix A contains stat blocks, creature details, magic items, and a few character backstories to help flesh out your campaign. Appendix B contains additional worldbuilding information and world and city maps. Appendix C contains additional character options for running the adventure, including two special character backgrounds and optional rules for werewolf lycanthropy. Appendix D holds the full-page versions of the maps to help you with running the adventure.

Each chapter also begins with an overview of what's come before in the campaign. The five chapters that follow make up Act 1, or the first of what we anticipate being a four-arc campaign. We release a new chapter each month on our patreon, and we anticipate releasing part two after we share adventure ten with our patrons. If you'd like to follow along and support the creation of the campaign, you can learn more and join our patreon at patreon.com/groveguardianpress. We anticipate running a kickstarter campaign or similar extended preorder before releasing the full campaign, and we'll include updates on our website as the project develops.

If you enjoy your time spent in the world of Azuria and would like to spend more time there, you can check out the other adventures on our site at dnnduet.com/shop and/or, if you like high fantasy fiction, check out Beth's novel series, *Age of Azuria*, at bethballbooks.com.

Chapter One: Out of the Witchwood

An adventure for duet parties of 3rd level.

This is the first in a series of adventures set in Steymhorod that points to an ultimate confrontation with a sinister vampire that has been targeting children, Lord Nassarq.



Adventure Premise

The party arrives in Steymhorod disoriented and confused. Fortunately, they encounter an elderly gentleman that points them in the direction of safety. Unfortunately, they are set upon by zombies and forced to flee even as night descends.

The party finds a lukewarm welcome in the small settlement of Willowhold. However, many of the good people here are horribly afflicted with a mysterious sickness. Things go from bad to worse as the following day the leader of Willowhold discovers that his beloved daughter Wellyn has disappeared into the Witchwood. A pall of suspicion falls on the party as the last people that saw her alive. Can they clear their name by returning the girl? Or will they too be sent into the forest, never to return?

Adventure Hooks

As the adventure opens, the party find themselves disoriented and scattered in an unfamiliar, spooky location. The party might have become trapped in Steymhorod through a number of different avenues.

- **Vampire Hunting.** Rumors of missing children swarm through all levels of society in the kingdom of Linolynn. It is discovered that the culprit is a vampire masquerading as a noble, Lord Nassarq. King Arontis offers a reward for anyone brave enough to travel to his estate, Nocturne, and rid the kingdom of this beast forever. If the party is willing to pursue the dark creature, they fight their way through the castle to find the vampire's body in his coffin. Stabbing him in the chest, it seems as

though their revenge is complete...until they hear a thick liquid dripping in the far corner. Blood pools beneath the vampire's casket, swirling into a funnel, and a portal appears. Tendrils of blood seize them and pull them through. They land in Steymhorod.

- **A Missing Friend.** Either before the adventure begins or during transportation through the blood portal, the PC might lose a close friend or party member. Maybe their mentor disappeared without a trace on a vampire hunt several years prior. Or, if they are traveling with a larger group, they might become separated from all save one of their party members as they travel through the portal.
- **Lost in the Woods.** A thick fog descends on the party during their travels and makes further navigation impossible. The party feels they are stuck in a loop, encountering the same landmarks again and again. Eventually, night descends and strange sounds and howls echo from the forest all around them. With morning comes some measure of clarity, but the forest surrounding them has changed. The party has unknowingly stumbled across the thin line between prime plane and shadow, into the cursed lands of Steymhorod.

Adventure Background

In the dark land of Steymhorod, there burns a single flickering flame fueled by zeal and desperate belief. For years the Ring of Light has thrived without walls in spite of the terrors lurking in the dark. Denizens bask in the light of the Bright Father and his ever-burning bonfires.

The ranks of the faithful continue to swell, in part due to a practice called The Road Home. When a member of the Brotherhood of Light grows too old to earn his place, he goes on a one-way pilgrimage out into the wilds of Steymhorod.

Brother Danuk is one such octogenarian who has been sent on his Road Home in the direction of Willowhold in the hopes of convincing some new blood to make the journey up to the Ring of Light.

Meanwhile in Willowhold, a choking illness has fallen on the starving settlers. Over the past several weeks, one by one, the settlers have fallen ill. The wasted villagers have been succumbing in growing numbers to the illness. Fortunately, their leader's sweet daughter has been spared so far and has offered them some comfort.

Part One: A Shape in the Fog

Blinking confusion out of your eyes, you quickly recognize that you are no longer where you were, but in a strange, twisted, dark wood that seems to reach out toward you possessively. Briars and thorns tug at your clothes and gnarled trees close in on all sides.

The party has landed on the edge of the Witchwood, an oppressive, malevolent, seemingly sentient forest of darkness and danger. Proceeding forward after some time, they stumble upon the Spindle Road, running north and south. Wolves howl ominously to the north, while the faint sounds of running water can be heard to the south.

The Road North

Taking the road to the north will put the party in the path of a small pack of Steymhorod's wolves. As they proceed north, **5x wolves** appear in the road. They seem to have unnatural intelligence, blocking the way forward. They are being directed by a **werewolf** looking for new blood, who hides just out of sight on the edge of the Spindle Road. This werewolf is not interested in engaging the party directly, but in observing their actions and testing their worth. Should the party engage the wolves, more will come while leaving a route for retreat. GMs wanting to preview terrors to come may allow a PC with a passive Perception of 14 or higher to witness the unsettling glimpse of a massive wolf suddenly stand upright and begin to walk on two legs even as the fog closes around them.

This is really an unwinnable encounter for a party of third-level players. If your party persists and refuses to take the offered avenues of retreat, have the wolves overwhelm them and reduce the party to 0hp. The werewolf will stalk forward as the last party member loses consciousness and infect them with lycanthropy before leaving them near the stone bridge mentioned in the next section.

The Road South

The road south slopes slightly downhill as the sound of running water increases in volume. Eventually, the party discovers the Lorayne River. Near the

water, the fog abates somewhat, and they can see an old stone bridge crossing the steadily flowing river.

With a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check, the party spots a humanoid form shambling toward them through the fog on the other side of the bridge. On a failure, they don't see the form until it has nearly reached the opposite side of the bridge. The figure has an unnatural gait. The GM should play up its zombie-like qualities.

The form is actually Brother Danuk, eagle-eyed even in old age, attempting to reach the party. Though he was taking his time in his travels south, he is now fleeing a group of zombies and seeks the protection of the party.

As they watch (or preemptively attack) poor Brother Danuk, several other shambling forms emerge out of the fog that lays heavily in the woods. There are **4x zombies** pursuing the aged man. He has the **commoner** stat block with the following changes: his speed is 15ft. A slow-motion chase plays out with Brother Danuk attempting to reach the party before the zombies dispatch him. Complicating things are **4x zombies** pulling themselves out of the muddy banks next to the bridge. The banks count as difficult terrain and any zombies issuing forth have advantage on any skill checks to break or resist the restrained or grappled condition due to the thick, slippery mud coating their horrible bodies. You can find a map for this encounter at the end of the chapter.

Brother Danuk

(Assuming he survives,) Brother Danuk is understandably grateful to the party for saving him from the undead horrors. He informs the party that he was on his way to the settlement of Willowhold which is only a few miles down the road.

Motivation: I want to atone for a life of inadequacy by bringing others into the Light of the Blessed Father.

Flaw: My religious fervor can be off-putting, but that's just because others don't yet get it... but I'll make them...

The most important information that he can offer the party is:

- He is on the way to Willowhold, a settlement less than eight miles away, to bring those poor souls salvation.

Maps for Chapter One: Out of the Witchwood

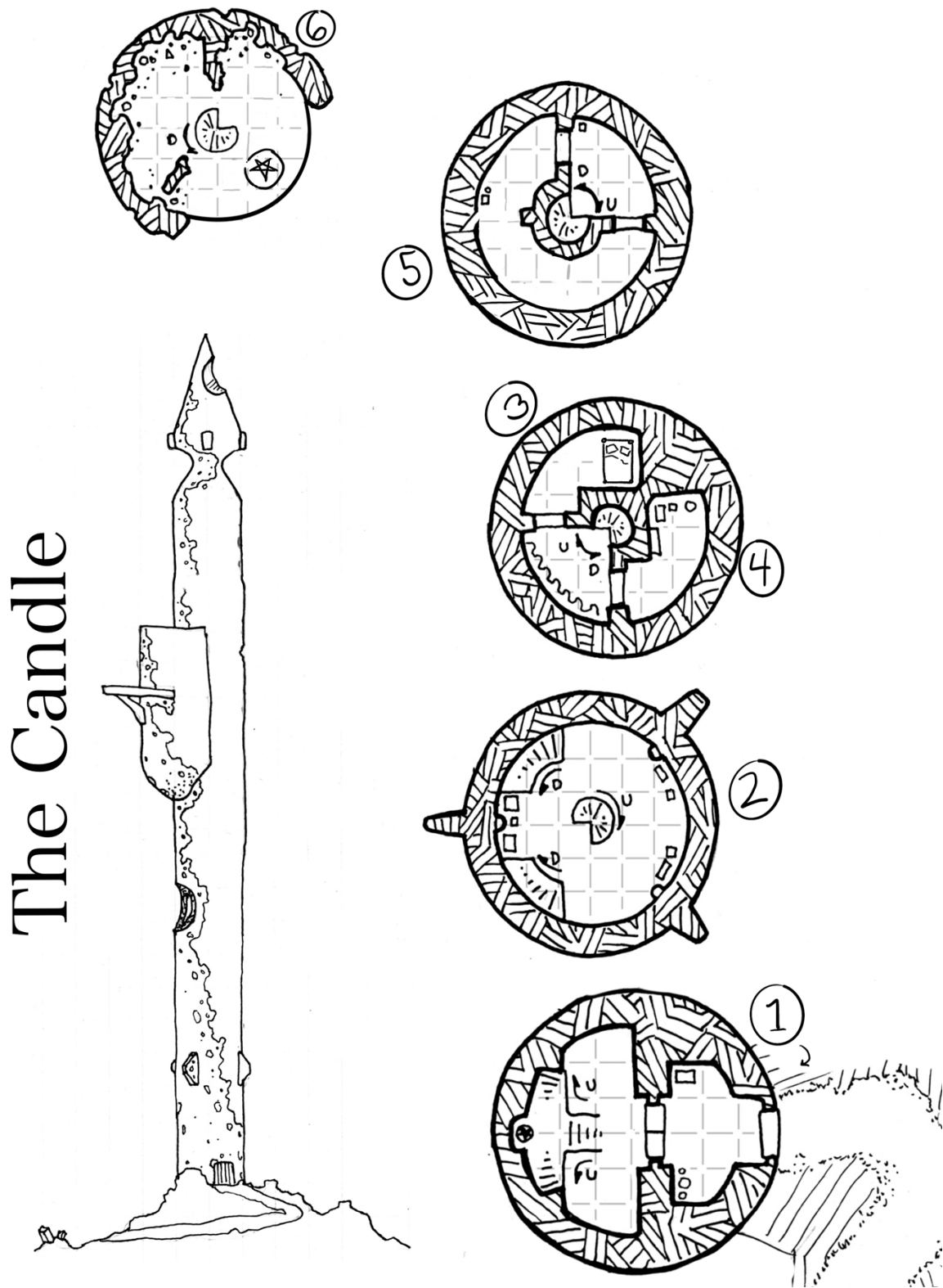
A Perilous Crossing Map



Encounter with the Coven Map



The Candle





The Black Oak

Various clues point to investigating the Black Oak, the area around which Bitterbranch has collected the misfits and outcasts of the Green Vale, including a number of goblinoids.

As the party approaches, read or paraphrase the following:

Twisted, thorny brambles create a prickly wall around this shaded, eerily beautiful settlement. Various monstrous and goblinoid races calmly walk to and fro across this glade. Cheers erupt from a large gap in the northeast corner. A charred treant sitting before a massive black oak casts a curious look at your party as a troupe of bugbears and goblins approaches.

In perfect Common, one of the bugbears inquires as to the nature of the party's interest in Black Oak. Wary of outsiders, he regards the party with suspicion and becomes aggressive at any detected deception. Before things get too out of hand, a crow alights from the treant's branches and pecks a message onto the helmet of the bugbear who turns to the party and sneers, "Bitterbranch has taken an interest. He will see you." The guards escort the party to Bitterbranch's court.

Interview with Bitterbranch

As the party nears, the blackened treant rests his hand on the towering black oak that dominates this darkly beautiful court. Although there is a throne-like chair here, it rests beside the tree. "Yes, my Lord, it will be done," the treant says in a deep voice before turning to regard the party.

[Bitterbranch has been conversing with Lord Draego about the new arrivals to his land. The treant interviews the party in an attempt to size them up and confirm what his spies have already told him. Should the party bring up the Heart of the Fields, he hides his agitation that they do not have it. A DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) allows the character to see his frustration. He intended to relieve the party of the treasure, both to subvert his rival Inamoira and to increase his rapport with Lord Draego. He is frustrated that someone else has beaten him to it.]

Below is the most important information Bitterbranch offers the party:

- The party has caused quite a stir in the Vale. It is exceedingly rare that outsiders are suffered to live here.
- Powerful forces have taken an interest in the party. Lord Draego himself has asked Bitterbranch to give him a report on the new, intriguing interlopers.
- Bitterbranch is a trusted confidant of Lord Draego. They often talk via the Black Oak here. [Bitterbranch may reveal that the Black Oak has

Appendix A

Stat blocks, creature information, and magic items can be found below. For select NPCs, you'll also find additional backstory information.

Creatures and NPCs

Anya Petrovetta

The conniving, insecure, and treacherous assassin. Undercut, floppy brown hair, grey eyes.

Anya Petrovetta is the most recent addition to Lord Nassarq's perverse little family. She was the thirteenth child born to the powerful Petrovetta family of Barasov. Perpetually overlooked and undervalued, she found solace in quiet and shadow and solitude away from the boisterous antics of her massive family. Mostly unseen and ignored, she grew to deeply resent her family and one night wished for all of them to just go away.

That night there was a massive uprising in the city. The downtrodden of Barasov raided the outskirts of High Garden where the Petrovetas and other wealthy families lived. Anya watched from a hiding spot as her family was drug out into the streets, humiliated, and killed by the crowds. After they moved on, she fled.

The mean streets of Barasov were unkind to the young Anya. One night, after suffering a beating for petty theft that left her teetering on the brink of death, a wealthy, handsome young man appeared. Her life was over, but a new one had just begun.

Vampire Assassin

Medium undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 60 (11d8 + 11)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	18 (+4)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)

Saving Throws Dex +7, Wis +4

Skills Perception +4, Stealth +7

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

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages the languages it knew in life

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Assassinate. During its first turn, the vampire has advantage on attack rolls against any creature that hasn't taken a turn. Any hit the vampire scores against a surprised creature is a critical hit.

Evasion. If the vampire is subjected to an effect that allows it to make a Dexterity saving throw to take only half damage, the vampire instead takes no damage if it succeeds on the saving throw, and only half damage if it fails.

Sneak Attack. Once per turn, the vampire deals an extra 10 (3d6) damage when it hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of the vampire that isn't incapacitated and the vampire doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

Nondetection. The vampire's true nature cannot be discerned by a *detect evil and good* or equivalent spell, increasing their effectiveness as an assassin.

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

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

Vampire Weaknesses. The vampire has the following flaws: *Forbiddance.* The vampire can't enter a residence without an invitation from one of the occupants.

Harmed by Running Water. The vampire takes 20 acid damage when it ends its turn in running water.

Stake to the Heart. The vampire is destroyed if a piercing weapon made of wood is driven into its heart while it is incapacitated in its resting place.

Sunlight Hypersensitivity. The vampire takes 20 radiant damage when it starts its turn in sunlight. While in sunlight, it has disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks.

ACTIONS

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

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 9 (2d4 + 4) slashing damage. Instead of dealing damage, the vampire can grapple the target (escape DC 13).

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one willing creature, or a creature that is grappled by the vampire, incapacitated, or restrained. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) necrotic damage. The target's hit

White Elk

Most cultures across Azuria revere white elk as symbols of divine favor, especially of nature deities. When they appear in physical form rather than as a spirit-symbol, they have the ability to bless, heal, and protect those who serve the nature gods and enact their values such as purging a forest of corruption or fending off poachers of vulnerable species. All white elk bear antlers after their first year of life. The more prongs the elk has, the more blessing—or bane—it portends from the gods.

The fall of Steymhorod affected the celestial nature of the white elk, especially due to the corruption of the fanes. If the damage were ever reversed and the fanes restored, the archfae's blessing might return to these majestic creatures, as explained in the uncorrupted fanes sidebar below.

White Elk (corrupted fanes)

Large celestial, any neutral alignment

Armor Class 10

Hit Points 13 (2d10 + 2)

Speed 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	2 (-4)	10 (+0)	6 (-2)

Saving Throws Con +5, Wis +7, Cha +6

Damage Resistances radiant

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 15

Languages telepathy 60 ft.

Challenge 2 (450 XP)



Innate Spellcasting. The elk's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 14). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material or verbal components:

At will: detect evil and good, detect magic

3/day each: entangle, fog cloud, shield

1/day each: gust of wind, moonbeam

Charge. If the elk moves at least 20 feet straight toward a target and then hits it with a ram attack on the same turn, the target takes an extra 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 13 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Magic Weapons. The white elk's attacks are magical.

ACTIONS

Ram. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage.

Hooves. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (2d4 + 3) bludgeoning damage.

White Elk (uncorrupted fanes)

If the PC and party find a way to restore one of the fanes and help return one of the Sisters to Steymhorod, any white elk found in that Sister's environment (field, forest, mountain, or river) returns to its uncorrupted state, resulting in the following changes:

The white elk's alignment becomes any good alignment.

The elk can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material or verbal components:

At will: *detect evil and good, detect thoughts*

3/day each: *cure wounds, protection from evil and good, sanctuary*

1/day each: *calm emotions, lesser restoration*

White elk are extremely protective of their young, defending them to the death if they are unable to help their calf escape.

White Elk Calf

The white elk calf uses the **elk** stat block with the following changes:

The calf is a Medium celestial.

Innate Spellcasting. The elk's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 12). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material or verbal components:

3/day each: *detect magic, pass without trace*

Character Backgrounds

In what follows, we've outlined a few unique character backgrounds for your Land of Vampires campaign.



Saudad

Your nomadic, communal lifestyle growing up combines with the long memory of your people to make you an intriguing companion to almost anyone you met, at least among those who bear the saudad no ill will. Life on the road has been dangerous, and you learned from an early age to keep a sharp eye in the wilds and among “civilization.” You are a skilled interpreter of the signs of Cassandra, the goddess of fate, and treasured for the unique role you play in your muster.

Skill Proficiencies: History, Performance

Languages: Saudad and one other language

Equipment: A musical instrument (one of your choice), implements for interpreting Cassandra's favor (cartomancy, astrology, palmistry), a set of traveler's clothes, and a pouch containing 10 gp

Feature: Fortune's Favor

Should you find yourself in need of fortune, friends, or favor, your identity as a saudad grants you an extension of trust on behalf of local sages, herbalists, and performers alike. Between the three, you're sure of a welcome and a place to lay your head.

Additionally, it's almost impossible for you to travel near a festival or past a fairground market without being asked to speak Cassandra's favor into the lives of those you meet. Your careful insight into the desires of others, quite often, leads to favorable results at these sorts of gatherings.

Suggested Characteristics

The life of a traveler is one of interchanging dualities. You know better than to trust the reception of yourself and your people—the world is a fickle place, filled with pain and joy, beauty and devastation. As one blessed with an extended communal memory, you have a strong sense for when you should share and in whom you should confide. But the constant you can always depend on is the careful eye of the goddess of fate, Cassandra. The saudad are her most blessed followers, traveling through the realms on threads of fate. But behind the cheerful façade, you share a melancholy with the rest of your people—beyond Cassandra's Eye, a single constant remains—you can never return home.

Further Context about the Saudad

The saudad are the interplanar travelers of Azuria who have journeyed widely through Tor'stre Vahn, Caldara, and even the Brightlands and Shadowlands. At the dawn of every decade, the saudad meet in Steymhorod for an assembly, a gathering of the many saudad musters traveling the known realms. Shortly after Steymhorod's fall into the Shadowlands, their homeland Orison was also destroyed and fell into the sea where it has remained hidden for millennia. The saudad who found themselves in Steymhorod at the time of Orison's fall have been unable to leave since. Their musters condensed into a single group that travels Steymhorod. They know many of Lord Drogo's secrets and, as permanent outsiders to his lands, have worked out an understanding with the vampire lord and his heirs. No vampire is to touch one of the saudad and they, in turn, agree to leave the citizens of Steymhorod's cities to their own limited memories. Only they, the fae, and the other vampires are aware of how long the land has been submerged in the lands of shadow.

To be from Steymhorod or to not be from Steymhorod . . .

Saudad from Steymhorod are cautious around outsiders. Those from beyond Steymhorod's borders have proven to be of great interest to Lord Drogo before, and their first concern is to protect their muster, in part by avoiding conflict with the vampire lord. These saudad know that it has been the desire