

Accursed



Dark Queen's Gambit

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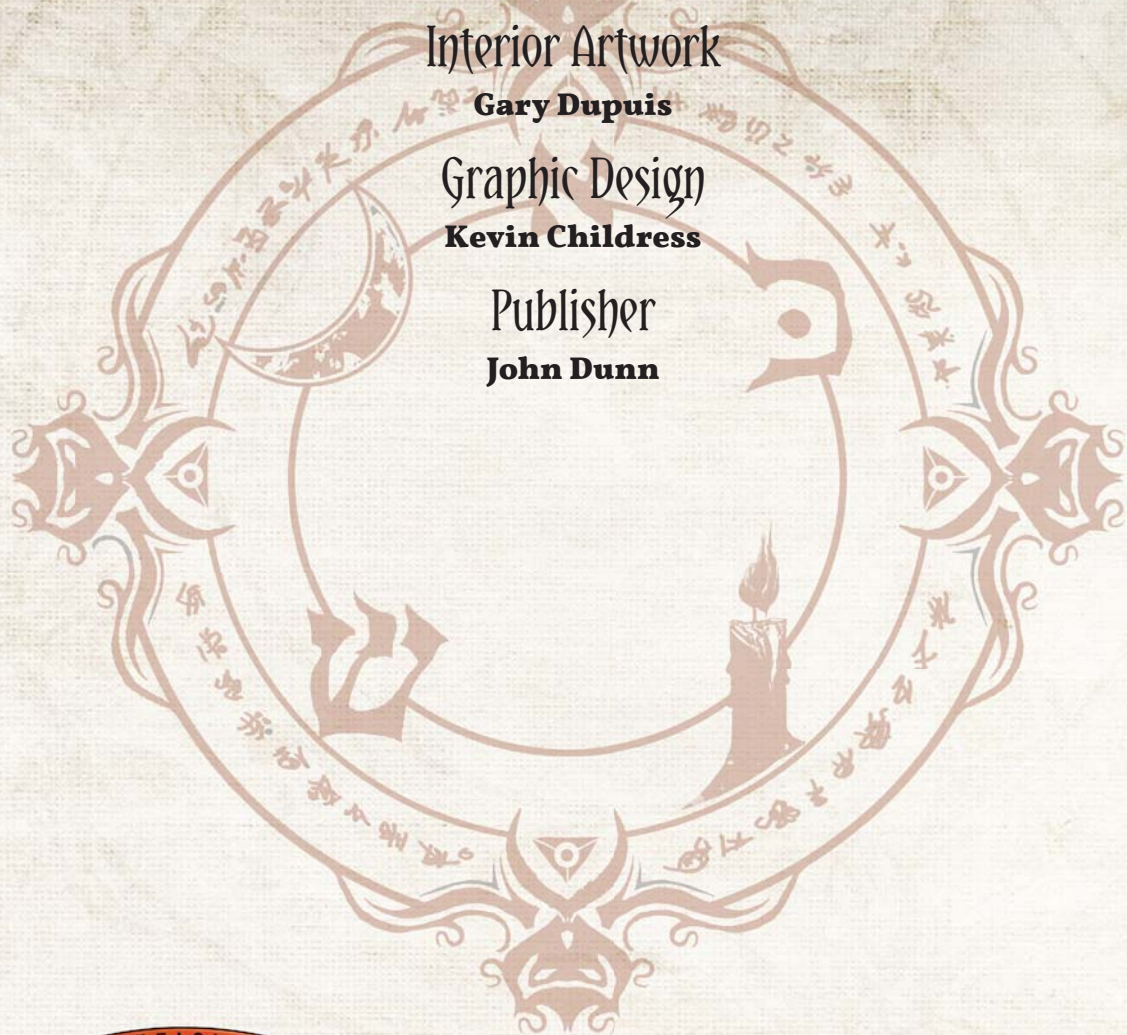
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A ragtag group of refugees set out from Friedrichs Ort in Riverspring three weeks ago, in pursuit of a better life. With few prospects in the canton, and no desire to work in the salt mines, the seven brave families decided to try their luck further afield. After some consideration they chose to resettle the long-abandoned village of Hadiksdorf, where they could reinforce the dilapidated limestone buildings with salt bricks to ward off the haunTERS of the hills.

Unbeknownst to the doomed settlers, however, the Dark Queen had once used the crypt below the village church to conduct a series of nefarious experiments, and a pack of her ghostly mastiffs now guard the grounds. Several days ago, a curious child discovered the church while exploring, provoking a vicious response that wiped out the settlers.

Hadiksdorf

It's obvious at a glance that the settlers have been hard at work in the village. Four of the buildings have been recently repaired, with protective salt bricks inserted into the walls below the newly laid roof slates. There are also signs of violence near the buildings, including several patches of dried gore, although there are no corpses.

A quick search reveals dozens of large canine paw prints, overlapped in places by small human footprints. The footprints lead to one of the buildings, where a young girl is currently hiding in a cupboard. The girl is about 10 years old, and has heaped a large pile of salt in front of her hiding place.

The girl is scared, but tough. Questioning her is resolved as a Social Conflict, with the margin of success indicating how much information the heroes discover. These clues are cumulative.

Margin of Success	Clue
0+	The girl points the heroes toward the trail leading to the church, but she doesn't speak unless they achieve at least 1 success.
1+	She explains that she hid when the village was attacked by a pack of big black dogs. She heard them sniffing around outside the cupboard, but they didn't break through the door.
2+	She says that her name is Sarah, and thinks the dogs left her alone because there was lots of salt stored in the cupboard.
3+	Sarah describes seeing one of the dogs leap through the wall of a building, as if it were a ghost.
4+	She mentions that one dog was much bigger than the others, and it had two heads.
5+	Sarah admits first seeing the dogs at the church while exploring, and describes in detail how they chased her back along the trail. Each player earns a Benny for this valuable insight.

Hot on the Trail

The old trail is not difficult to find, despite being overgrown with vegetation, but as the players reach the first turn they come face to face with a night's mastiff (see *Accursed* page 127). Rather than attacking, however, the ghostly dog spins around and races up the trail, obviously planning to warn the rest of the pack.

This scene is resolved as a standard five-round Chase, with the hound using the foliage to maintain light cover against ranged attacks. The mastiff uses the Force maneuver to distract the heroes, trying to ram them over the edge of the steep cliff along one side of the trail. If the players manage to kill the hound before the end of the Chase, they gain Surprise in the next scene, and receive one Benny each for their quick thinking.

The Hook

There are many ways the players might be drawn into the adventure, but here are a few suggestions:

1. An old white witch tells the heroes that her nephew and his family were among the refugees, and she can no longer locate them with her magic. She fears for the worst, and begs the characters to investigate.
2. The heroes stumble across the village by chance while traveling through the region, perhaps while heading toward (or away from) Friedrichs Ort.
3. The adventure begins with the heroes entering the abandoned village, and it's left up to them to explain why they came, using the Interlude rules.



Battle in the Ruins

The ancient church predates the rest of the village, and has long since crumbled into ruin. The mastiffs are lazing about nearby, chewing on the bones of the settlers, but they react quickly to the threat. Resolve this scene as a regular combat.

There are two shadow hounds per player (use the stats for a night's mastiff, except they are Extras and don't have the Phasing ability), along with the night's mastiff from the previous scene (if it survived), and Orthus, the two-headed pack alpha.

The Gambit

The church may be a ruin, but the entrance to the crypt is still intact, and the thick oak door is securely locked. Picking the lock requires a Subterfuge roll at -2, on a failure the hero triggers a magical trap: ghostly tendrils erupt from the door, and everyone within a Cone Template must make an Agility roll at -2 or suffer 2d10 damage. Breaking down the door (Toughness 10) automatically triggers the trap.

The crypt is thick with dust, but extravagantly decorated with looted furnishings. An ornate mahogany desk sits in one corner, while several shelves line the walls, crowded with macabre knickknacks and a handful of indecipherable books written in a spidery hand. Resting on the desk is a small, brass-bound, cedar chest.

What does the chest contain? That is up to the GM, but here are some suggestions:

- A detailed report on the events surrounding the Betrayal. Although it's never spelled out, the results of the investigation strongly hint that Melusine was involved somehow, arranging for the Djinn to be eliminated so that she could seize control of her former ally's banes.
- A powerful relic is stored inside the magically warded chest, and the inscription on the lid states that only someone "strong of heart and pure of spirit" can open it.
- A notebook containing clear directions to a strange magical gateway. The portal leads to a destination protected by salt, preventing Hecate or her banes from entering it, and her scribbled musings in a nearby notebook suggest she didn't trust any of the other witches enough to share her knowledge with them.

Of course the real question is why did Hecate leave the chest here, where it could be found? Why didn't she ever return to the crypt to collect it? It's almost as if she wanted the chest to be discovered...

Orthus

This massive two-headed hound was the result of an arcane experiment conducted by the Dark Queen. However Orthus proved to be far too aggressive and unpredictable for Hecate's purposes, so she left him behind to guard the crypt.

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

Skills: Fighting d10, Notice d12, Subterfuge d10, Tracking d12

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 9

Special Abilities

Improved Frenzy: Orthus can attack with both heads, making two Fighting attacks each action with no penalty.

Night's Mastiff: Orthus is a night's mastiff, with the same Bite (Str+d8), Infravision, Phasing, Vulnerability, and Witchline abilities as the rest of his kin.

Size +2: Orthus is significantly bigger and heavier than most of his kind.

