



THE DYING EARTH RPG ONLINE: Features

✿ My Master's Manse ✿

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‘Your grace, to be candid, I do not care to enter the hole, by reason of extreme fear.’

The Master, a powerful, vain, gourmandising sensualist of a wizard, dwells in a fine manse sited on a bluff north of the river Scaum. In his elaborate home, he toyed with hybrid botany, the creation of life and the design of automata. In the process, he bred two acceptable vat-creatures, who variously assisted and distracted him. These are Lux and Flook. Lux served the Master as valet, Flook as night-steward and work-room assistant. To prevent Flook from turning upon him, the Master bound a sandestin, Destrin, to watch her on his behalf. Destrin, for reasons so obvious that he feels their disclosure to be mere boring recapitulation, prevents Flook from threatening the Master's life directly but the Master neglected to bar Flook from commissioning his demise. Falsely reasoning from Lux's wretched state that he had no sensibilities, the Master felt it superfluous to extend this prohibition to him.

Flook began her existence grateful merely for the opportunity to be, but her Master's attentions soon became irritating rather than unremarkable, and the quality of her life diminished. The final straw was when the Master rendered her frictionless, the better to act as a sled to transport a case of mead back to Ascolais from a monastery in the Land of the Falling Wall. Noting that Lux responded well to courtesy and attention, she befriended him and determined to end their enslavement to the Master with his assistance. During an elaborate kalligynic exercise that required the Master's left arm and right leg to be tied to a low stool while he sipped on a sherbet, Flook treacherously forced his entire body into Lux's maw, wherein all current knowledge of cantraps was extracted and the action of the magician's talismans and adjuncts was suspended. Then, regurgitated and impotent, the Master lay powerless while Flook glued his mouth shut, rendered him minuscule and cast the Charm of Untiring Nourishment upon him. She then inserted his helpless body into a full brandy bottle. Having emptied it, she then mounted the bottle in the Room of Lenses. Every night she and Lux toast his feet with a lit candle.

Flook made herself Mistress of the Manse, taking care to dismiss all sandestins and other elementals not summoned by and contracted to herself. In preference to such aids, she has devoted herself to the creation of automated vignettes or tableaux, and to the design of such servants.

Aware that her tenure of the Manse is uncertain – Lux has misgivings and apart from being scratched around the eyestalks and washed in perfumed soap, has noticed little improvement in the new regime – Flook has devised a plan to kill the Master once and for all.

In the valley and across the Scaum, is a monastery where the monks make their devotions while peasants work in the fields. The Monastery has a bell which tolls constantly, and a contract with a demon, Perino, who will appear if the bell ever ceases in order to chastise any who have harmed the monks. The peasants, oppressed by the monks and easy to provoke into rash action, dislike the monastery intensely and will be happy to see it brought down.

Flook, who knows how to banish the demon, has hit upon a plan of commendable subtlety. She will lure naïve, greedy adventurers to the manse and have them destroy the monastery bell on some pretext, which she will tailor to the expectations of her agents. Once the bell is destroyed, Perino will appear and Flook will save her stooges from him. In consideration for this service, she will invoke the Law of Equivalences and have them perform one small service for her. Namely, to feed a certain minuscule to a deodand. This will dispose of the Master and conveniently misdirect his dying curse.

All that remains is to cast an opportunistic ensqualment upon the populace of white-walled Kaiin, and those most vulnerable¹ will make their way, in a dream, to the Manse.

The game opens a day after Flook has worked the spell. The adventurers are to be her dupes ...

¹ A spell of considerable delicacy. Place too much stress on greed and the population of Kaiin would migrate to her mass, too much stress on naïve and those summoned would probably not live long enough to survive the journey.

Setting Out²

The player characters are upstream of white-walled Kaiin, in the land of Ascolais. The sun sinks beyond the far-off sea, its ruby light illuminating ripples in the turgid Scaum's flow. The sky is cloudy, dark as lead. In the distance a large creature flaps lazily up the valley.

The PCs are traveling up-river in an overlong punt. To their right, a dolorous bell tolls from a walled, towered monastery. To their left, the ground rises in a long, steep-sided mound, uncharacteristic of the broad Scaum valley. A large, complex building stands on the crest of the bluff. The adventurers know it to be their destination.

The sun sinks lower in the sky. In the distance, shadows move in the abandoned and overgrown vineyards and orchards. Beyond the fields farmers set lights above their doors to guide the workers home.

On the river ahead of them a bargee, yellow kerchief knotted against a stiffening breeze from the hills, poles his craft laden with well-filled sacks, away from a boathouse and into the current. Their punt ties up at the jetty. On the opposite bank stand a rude hut and a pier to which a small boat is moored.

The characters having disembarked, their boat turns into the stream once more. Its pilot nods towards her departing passengers. Or perhaps she was nodding to someone watching from the manse. The vines around a burgundy loggia twitch, almost imperceptibly.

The Manse³

Above the boathouse, which accommodates a jetty, a bell on a post (when rung it summons the boat mentioned above, crossing the river costs a terce a trip) and a picturesque pergola, the land rises in to a low bluff. Stretched along the bluff is a long, low manse with a multiplicity of roofs, two towers and five elegant cupolas. One tower holds an immense clock, the other an Aeolian orchestra.

A path winds up the bluff, between long-abandoned terraces. Higher still the garden wall bulges out, yielding over the years to the weight of the soil and action of the plant roots behind it. Many of the plants are fleshy, with stalks the thickness and texture of a forearm, deep green in color, with a purple mottling. Each has one powder-blue flower, about the size of a splayed hand. At the center is a rudimentary face, a mouth and two goat-like eyes. The lips purse and relax soundlessly, as though the bloom is suckling on the air. When disturbed, they keen weirdly, if damaged they shriek and scream.

On closer examination, their petals are miniature arms with small hands which snatch pasturing insects from the air and press them into the mouth. Each flower has a ring of twitching, dog-like ears about its base.

The path reaches the top of the bluff and turns sharply to the west. In front is a ha-ha. Two steps lead up to a sweeping lawn of chamomile and blood-wort. Plague wasps pasture on the flowers and lay their eggs in a dead deodand in caught in an ornamental vampire tree. The gable-end of an heroically proportioned hall is now visible. Two lower buildings project towards them from its sides to form three sides of a quadrangle. The left (northern) wing abuts on the orchestra tower. The great hall apparently has a balcony on its second floor, edged with lantern vines. The Aeolian orchestra is responding to a change in wind direction by ululating in a minor key. While they are considering this prospect, Lux attacks:

Behind the party appears a creature more like a gray sack filled with something viscous and lumpy (porridge, perhaps?) with a huge toothy maw across its body and some many-jointed, many clawed arms growing from its apex. Bounding silently on some of its limbs, it stretches out others, apparently intent on pushing the trespassers off the cliff to their deaths in the river below ...

Why? Lux will attempt to swallow the PCs in order to regurgitate them after nullifying any magic they might possess (Flook has become distinctly uneasy about magic other than her own). If the characters are defeated by Lux, they will be delivered by him, sticky and entirely unmagical, to Flook who will eventually arrange for baths and clean clothes.

Assuming the characters triumph ...

2. Consider the benefits of reading this section aloud to the players in its entirety, as it sets the scene with an elegance few could emulate.

3. Perceptive readers will have noted that there were maps associated with this document. As you suspected, one indeed shows the manse.

If the PCs look for entrances at this end of the building, they will find the South Door at the junction of the southern wing and the main building and the East Door in the east side of the Orchestra Tower. If they go around the front (north side) of the house, through the dark, ghoul-haunted garden, they will come to the Main Entrance.

The South Door

This is of thick, two-ply timber, unlocked, and opens onto a vestibule. Once inside, to the left is a closed door, straight ahead an embrasure with a window seat. To the right, a long room lined with racks of tools, plant pots and jars of soil, the rudiments of gardening. Should any of the party be concerned about improvising weapons, a turf cutter and a billhook would serve tolerably well.

Running down the centre is a long work bench, with sturdy D-rings bolted sturdily to it. Three large men could be tied to this bench without touching. The workbench accommodates a selection of small implements of curious design. Bone-handled hooked knives, little crescentic saws, skewers, some tweezers and two long, thin spoons. At one end of the bench a copy of a classic 20th Aeon volume, Smoan's *Advanced Hybridization Techniques*,⁴ lies open at the chapter on human/creeper grafting.

There are drawers down each of the long sides of the table. They hold a variety of instruments of use to gardeners – cucumber straighteners, wads of putty, twine, pegs and sticks. There is one small oil lamp, cast in the shape of an obese, ravenous pelgrane. The body is the reservoir, the wick – which is absent – would go into the secondary beak. Neither is there any oil. A small bottle of hinge-oil might make an adequate fuel and the twine a passable wick. The lamp appears to be awaiting repair: it is clearly intended to depend from an embrasure but its eyelet is cracked.

Beneath the bench is a loosely-stoppered bottle of wine. It is very nearly unpalatable if not actually vinegar, being resinated and flavored with anise and owing its dull green color to having previously acted as the preservative for a barrel of gooseberries.

The east door opens into a corridor, eleven feet high by nine wide. To the south is a niche containing a set of pigeonholes. In these are a stock of candles, three candlesticks and a store of tapers. A minute, low-burning oil lamp hangs above the embrasure. The floor of strangely tessellated stone tiles in variegated green, red and dull gold is scrupulously clean.

Fifteen feet away on the south side is a doorway (see The Tea Room, below). The entire northern (left) wall is a pierced stone and glass screen between thick columns.

The wall is carved into a relief of Phandaal's last supper, consequent flight and dismemberment (The PCs will have to walk the entire length of the frieze to establish this). The gaps are filled with colored glass. Through them, the party can dimly see a huge banquet, apparently frozen in time. At the western end is the 'L' of a high and subordinate table (presumably the whole layout will prove to be an inverted 'U'). Guests sit motionless in their places.

The corridor continues through a wide lobby (oval lobby to the north, library to the south), past a stair case leading up and down, other salon doors and the east hall. The walls here are decorated with swirling moiré patterns, which change whenever the party looks away. At the far end, the corridor lets on to the Fountain Terrace. Further along are the Dining Room, the Clock Tower and beyond that, the Jasmine Bower.

The Tea Room

The door opens into the middle of the short side of a room thirty-three feet by twenty-two, from which a door leads onto a loggia. The walls are clad in malachite and marble. It is furnished with five occasional tables with four overstuffed leather chairs arranged about each table.

Along one side is a large counter of dark, varnished wood, supporting a metal box, a samovar in the style of Almerly and a display case containing a tea service. Rugs woven with an abstract pattern from the Land of the Falling Wall cover the floor. Opposite the counter is a hearth between two fireside chairs. The fireplace is under a mirror, between two three-tined sconces. None of these items is alight. The room is spotlessly clean.

The Library

This room occupies three stories, and contains folios including a variety of ephemerae, formulae, lore, scribblings and

4. Copies may still be available from <http://www.dyingearth.com/order.htm>

weak minded ranting. The Master has not yet catalogued his collection – and might never do so. Flook has managed to uncover and transcribe a few formulae. PCs who search might discover a small section containing three librams and one scroll which detail spells. This little cache is remarkable because it is the only evidence of systematic organization in the whole library.

The library looks out over the valley. Its third level has two comfortable window seats in an embrasure, with a Juliet balcony between them.

The Dining Room

An octagonal chamber, with three doors opening into the southern corridor (north), the kitchen (east), and to a conservatory (south west). The small dining-room is seemingly walled with bottle-ends which bulge out into it. Inside each, a small creature beats its fists against the glass in futile desperation. Lux holds a candle to one. It hops from one foot to another. Flook smirks. Removing the candle she toasts a few other captives' feet.

Alert PCs could deduce that there's something special about the one minuscule Flook does not herself toast ...

The round table has [party+1] places set. There is fine cutlery, tall-stemmed bulbous glasses, china bowls, side plates and mounds of parti-colored bread and pats of butter. A large, murky bottle sits next to a huge tureen at the table's centre. Flook sits, Lux serves.

The Conservatory

This is a hexagonal room, mostly of clear glass edged with stained and painted panes, and a roof decorated in the decadent 'Fallen Istoria' style. Plants from the coasts of South Almery grow here. There are two exits, one to the Dining Room, another leading onto a covered staircase which drops twenty six steps down to an owl-friezed arbor that overlooks the river terraces.

The Kitchen

This is a long thin room with a buttery and a pantry. There is a huge range with a variety of fitments, including ovens, grills and spits, all arranged for easy operation by Lux. All the usual tools, pans, knives, skewers, crockery, cutlery, are present. Stairs and a hoist provide access to the cellars and a dumb waiter runs to the first floor. A door leads from the south kitchen wall into a small herb garden.

The Clock Tower

There is a postern at the base of the clock tower's west wall. It opens into the tower itself. Ahead stairs climb upwards; to the south a narrow landing runs to a door into the south corridor. Immediately in front and to the east of this exit, stairs lead downwards.

The staircase winds up the inside of the tower shell from the cellar to the clock itself. The clock is hydraulic, so pipes, pumps and maintenance platforms fill the centre of the tower. If the pipes were breached, the liquid (which is not water, but some non-evaporating fluid) would flood the cellar to a depth of five inches. The piped fluid drives an assortment of little mannequins which beat out the hours on chimes on top of the tower. The pipes themselves are transparent and the fluid luminous, so the tower glows eerily in the dark.

The Jasmine Bower

This structure is at the end of the south corridor. It looks like a huge Chinese lantern, but is grown from the sorcerous hybrid, the Night Jasmine. Dense leaves which exude a natural lacquer form the roof, living branches the uprights, and interwoven translucent petals the walls. At night a warm, soft iridescence emanates from the star moss carpeting the floor. The bower is filled with a rich, heady scent.

The Fountain Terrace

Runs north south across the eastern end of the East Hall, and permitting access from it to the Dawn Fountain in the East Court. The North connects with the east-west corridor, which lets onto three workrooms. To the east a bathhouse, complete with hot and cold plunge rooms. A sandestin called Munze is employed in blowing bubbles in the hot tub. Munze will also, but only if specifically so directed, clean the water and supply soap, bathing oils and perfumes. An automaton specializing in massage is available, although Flook cannot recommend its services without qualification.

The Orchestra Tower Door ...

Lets onto a stairwell. There is a further door in the east wall, presumably leading into the manse proper. The stairs lead upwards, past long, hanging chimes and pipes, strange pumps and valves, all the way to the roof, where grotesque regulators and pendulae open and close chokes and switches according to the capricious whims of the wind.

The Cellar

The stairs also go downwards to a cellar. Here adventurers will find aisles of strong columns supporting the groined vaulting which beards the weight of the building. Other staircases lead up to the eastern extremity of the manse, the Kitchen and the Lobby.

Here and there are stores, wine racks, or old cases filled of rusting machine parts and strange tools of obscure function. Some aisles are blocked by functioning engines, the purpose and operation of which will mystify even the most knowledgeable sage. Some devices clearly serve the manse in some way – cranks and drive shafts disappear into the walls and ceiling.

Tampering with these devices is hazardous. Nevertheless, some characters will probably do so. Should this be the case then, the moment they successfully dismantle something or stop it moving, they will have to contend with clouds of scalding steam or choking dust, or even sheets of shrapnel (exploding gear boxes). The precise damage should be sufficient to force them to expend any healing salves they have to hand.

The North Corridor

The ground floor door leads into a corridor which runs along the north side of the Manse, as far as the Main Entrance. It comes out next to a staircase leading and opposite a bronze door flanked by two caryatids. The north side of the hallway is pierced by the doors of elegant rooms with views over the north lawn. They are not in use at present, but, if aired, cleaned and heated, would form pleasant salons for a variety of purposes.

The south wall is exactly like the north wall of the south corridor, except that the frieze depicts the war between the witches and the wizards, and Llorio's eventual defeat and exile.

The Main Entrance

The Manse has a large porch with a twelve-foot-wide double door in the middle of its north aspect. The door opens into a lobby, with a further double-valved portal beyond it. The outer door is of brass-bound, three-ply wood as thick as a man's leg. The leaves open outwards and are barred by three, thick, iron-bound beams. The eastern leaf has an inward opening wicket. The wicket has a spy-hole and a large knocker. The knocker makes a loud, flat thud, no matter how lightly it is rapped.

The inner doors are of bronze, green with age and inset with colored glass. They lead into a wide, shallow hall. To the west is the corridor leading to the Orchestra Tower. To the east are two lewd caryatids marking the entrance to a small, profane satire on a chapel. Inside are divans and sturdy tables, all displaying erotic motifs. When snapped straight, the hangings show representations of dancing-girls of Kaiin. Snapped again, these pictures take on three dimensions and make themselves available to the celebrant and congregation. They are in need of laundering.

Straight ahead and up four steps, is a lobby, apparently circular but, to the trained eye, oval. It has four entrances. To the west is the dining vignette with automata. To the east a suite of connected halls. Straight ahead, to the south, is the other axial corridor and beyond it the Library.

The walls of the oval lobby are decorated with remarkable pictures of people in distress. The floor has interlocking tiles, some bearing a distorted face, some inhuman. If asked, Flook will explain that these are the soul portraits of the Master's victims. Moistening one with wine forces the actual person represented to describe what is happening in his or her present location to a questioner in the lobby. It is also possible to coerce the victim to perform acts by damaging the soul portrait (or threatening to do so), although this may destroy the artifact.

The Halls

Both halls are three storeys high and receive natural light through the great skylights under the roof.

The West Hall holds one cavernous room, with tables arranged in a 'U' shape, as for a formal banquet. The far wall

holds three immense niches, each accommodating a statue of a demon on a throne. Flook will claim that these can be animated, but that she would only do so *in extremis*, as the consequences of their awakening are grave. In this she is only relaying what the Master told her, and he was lying. These are complex mechanisms, linked to cranks and cams below, which make them shake, emit roars and move their heads around.

Seated at the tables are many automata, with empty soup bowls before them. The automata are dressed in the fashion of Grand Mothlam. Flook intends them to eventually become her mechanical army, but lacks the skill to get them to work. The floor of the chamber is covered with tools and machine parts.

GM: This is where the PCs will first encounter Flook: "You see a woman in a low-waisted, high-bodiced dress standing, hands on hips, her attitude and shaking head betraying considerable frustration".

The eastern suite is as long as the western, but is divided into three wide rooms separated by large doors. Each room has central and side tables, and the suite opens onto a patio leading to the east court. Before his reputation as a host spread, the Master served the famous 17th Aeon three-fold zakushka here, followed by a breakfast dance around the Dawn Fountain.

Upstairs...

Apart from the Library and the North Porch (which have three floors), the Manse is two-storeyed. The two corridors, joined by the galleries either side of (and looking into) the Oval Lobby let onto chambers on their outside edges. At either end, closing off the 'H' are two terraces, intended for breakfast and evening drinks respectively. These overlook the Morning and Evening Courts. Aside from the Music Room, which is at the western end of the south corridor (above the gardening workroom), and Flook's octagonal bedroom (above the dining room) all the chambers are the same, with comfortable beds, comprehensive plumbing and fire places.

The East and West Halls rise up into the central roofs, and are overlooked by windows and balconies in the corridors.

Flook's Room

This octagonal chamber, with its pink and green glass ceiling, is very light and airy. Apart from a bathroom and a dressing table, all at the door end, it is a many stepped pit, covered with cherry red and cream cushions. The bed, also octagonal, has alternate fabric-hung and open panels (The fabric flows from a casement in the centre of the ceiling). It rests in the middle of the floor on the arms of four crouching automata. On command they will straighten up and lift it to head height.

GM: Alternatively, they can hold the bed at head height and drop it on people who go underneath.

The Music Room

This chamber looks out both down and over the Scaum. It has windows and balconies along three sides (so tends to get cold) and has a console which affords control of the Aeolian orchestra. This is not magical, but a sophisticated and unreliable system of levers and pulleys which runs down to the cellar, through pipes under the courtyard and up into the Orchestra Tower.

The North Porch

This is a high room (both first and second storeys), with a single apsidal window leading to a balcony, which looks over the forest to the north. The walls are hung with dusty tapestries; Lux has been too busy of late to clean them.

The Private Infinity

Hanging down from the centre of the North porch is an immense chandelier, in the shape of a peacock feather. This is, in fact, a small private infinity. It contains a stool. When seated on it, the occupant can observe and talk to people in any familiar place. When occupied the private infinity may not be assaulted from without.

The Ruined Pavilion

The Pavilion was once a fine building of good lines and fair proportions. Now its columns have collapsed, its roof fallen in and all that remains are the outlines of an ancient knot-garden and the north wall, nine feet high, sporting three pilasters. Twk-men pasture their dragon flies here.

The Monastery

This is an L-shaped building with a bell tower in the inside angle of the L. The buildings make up two walls of a square compound. There is one entrance, in the south-east wall. The walls are one hundred and twenty feet long and eighteen feet high. There is no sentry-way. There is a secret way in: a hundred-yard-long stretch of sewer, running north, opens into a drainage ditch. It has a grille at each end, with a captive erb between them. This watch-beast subsists on burglars, rats and lazy peasants.

The Monastery's vertices are aligned with the cardinal points. The buildings run along the north-west and north-east walls. They have no windows on their outer faces for their first eighteen vertical feet. The monastery buildings are one hundred and twenty feet long (exterior) one ninety feet long (interior), thus thirty feet deep. They are three storeys – thirty-six feet – tall, with fifteen-foot-high roofs on top. The tower is one hundred and twenty feet high and twenty feet in diameter. The exterior and supporting walls of all buildings are three feet thick.

The buildings in front of the gate (the north-west) form the residential and spiritual portion of the monastery. The chapel occupies the westernmost sixty feet and extends to the ceiling. The other half are, running vertically, a vestibule and kitchen, the confreres' and abbots quarters and at the top, the monks' cells. The buildings to the north-east are from top to bottom, the library, the copyists work-room and the stables and stores. There are further stores and gaol for malefactors, in the cellar.

The Terrace in the Orchard

This is an oblong stone platform, thirty feet by twenty by three feet thick, with five steps leading up to it in the middle of its shorter sides. Its long axis runs north-south.

It was, presumably, once roofed, as there are broken columns running along its long sides, and forming the ruins of porches either side of the steps. Much of its structure seems to have been thrown outwards and lies scattered across the fields.

What if ...

- ☞ the PCs kill Lux? Lux regenerates – he will return to full function when the adventurers are not looking. If they put bits of him in pots, these will grow inside the containers and burst them.
- ☞ the PCs try to attack Flook? Lux will intervene. Don't forget that, before she enlists them into her service, Flook has used Lux to nullify the characters' magic. If attacked herself, she will resort to the Second Hypnotic Spell and, if necessary, Mantle of Stealth. After this, the adventurers will awake in a bottle-end, having their feet toasted.
- ☞ the PCs try to get to Flook while Lux is absent or regenerating? This won't happen. Flook will hide beneath the Mantle of Stealth until Lux is respectively present or recovered.
- ☞ the party frees the peasants from the monks' control? They turn into a vengeful mob, who spare no effort, or risk to their own lives, in killing their masters and destroying the monastery.
- ☞ the party enters the monastery as guests of the monks, then abuse their hospitality? They will doubtless succeed. The monks are unaware of Flook's plan – even of her existence – and will suspect nothing. They will be gracious, if ascetic, hosts and the adventurers will be left to their own devices in the guest quarters, but will be expected to join in the noon, dawn, dusk and midnight services.
- ☞ the party sneaks through the sewer? If they beat the erb, and get through the grilles (NB these are fixed – the erb was introduced as a puppy and allowed to grow whilst inside), they will find themselves in the bottom of a cesspit, under the 'L' of the building. Drains from all sides let into it. By climbing, they can emerge into a privy, the yard drain, or the kitchen sluice.
- ☞ they rush the gate? A few monks will delay them whilst others secure the doors to the building. Any surviving monks will then run outside, closing the gate behind them. Once the party are in the killing ground (i.e. compound) the monks will unleash maledictions, blue concentrate, fire darts, roof tiles, chamber pots and sarcasm upon them.
- ☞ they are discovered inside the tower? The monks throw things at them, while calling for blue concentrate.

- ☞ they talk to the peasants? The churls will wring their hands and mumble.
- ☞ they beat Perino? That's hardly likely, but Flook will lend him a hand anyway, via the Twk-men. She needs to frighten the PCs and have them beholden to her.
- ☞ they free the Master? He will refrain from killing them, but will take them into service until they have compensated him for the loss of his pet monks, destruction of his property and so on. Once the Master is able to speak, he will regain control of Lux. Flook will make every effort to run away.
- ☞ they divine the Master's identity, but keep him in his bottle? The party has an item of high value. Other wizards would be delighted to acquire so vulnerable a rival.



People

The Deodand

This creature lives on a terrace in an old orchard. The Master attached a hook to the beast's right kidney, a line to the hook and a fallen, seventeen ton column to the line. He fed the deodand with unsuccessful burglars. There have been less of these of late, and a general decline in passing trade, so the deodand is hungry. The orchard once belonged to an elegant lodge set in a clearing in the forest, but is now overgrown. It is a mile to the north east of the manse. The local drovers road swings south to avoid it. Given the chance, the deodand will negotiate for his release, offering a cache of treasure, stolen from previous victims, in consideration.

Dorasno

Dorasno is the scholar monk on field patrol on the day the adventurers cross the river. He is interested in flowers and music (and suspects that a living harp is a possible magical construct). He will seek out the party and interview them.

Flook

Flook has the form of a beautiful woman. She is of moderate height and slender, with cream skin and storm-cloud gray eyes and hair. She served the Master as a night-steward and entertainer, she assists in the creation of automata and in the working of magic. Her dress is of heavy rose velvet and reaches below her knees. The formulae for the spells she knows are embroidered into its hem. She wears high, dark boots.

Should any of the characters persuade Flook to perform the fifteen silken movements...

Flook is now dressed in harem trousers and a cropped blouse of light pink. She has white gold and garnet anklets, bracelets, navel, nose and ear rings, all showing a skull and heart motif and enclosing small bells. As she moves, dream-powder trails from them. Her hair spills out over a tiara. Try as he might, no one who has seen this dance can remember any of the details, only that it was wonderful.

Although superficially charming, Flook has an unpleasant character – she is willful, bad-tempered and unreliable. When commissioning the characters into acting for her she might bribe them; claim that the bell causes her distress or interferes with her work; argue that the PCs are burglars and that this service is their punishment.

Lux

A creature, about hip-high, like a gray sack of cold porridge, tied off at the top. Four great, three-jointed arms radiate from its tip. Above them, on stalks are two big, luminous eyes. Across the thing's belly is a huge, toothy mouth. Lux walks, surprisingly quickly, on his hands. He leaps extremely high, too. He can swallow a person whole and spit him out, stickily (When dry, Lux's spit acts as a potent adhesive – only alcohol works as a solvent).

Lux, whose embryonic form the master bathed in the light of the star Algol, refracted through three IOUN stones, is inherently unmagical. He can also drain the magical properties, albeit temporarily, from anything he places in his mouth. Lux can talk, (he has a fine sense of humor), but does not, except to Flook. He is lonely and wants, more than anything else, for people to be nice to him. Lux served his Master as a valet, and Flook as a bodyguard and confidant.

The Master

The Master begins the game as a minuscule, in a bottle, in the dining room. Flook intends that he end it as a morsel inside a deodand. Should he be freed, he has neither spells memorized nor magical adjuncts to hand. Physically, he is a decrepit man with spindly arms and legs, patches of sparse, wiry white hair over his body and pate and evil, intense eyes. If stretched to his full height he would be six and a half feet tall. Aside from professional jealousy, other wizards do not like him because of his habit of taking soul portraits of them while they slept under his roof as his guests. A magic-nullifying spell, or Lux's touch will return him to full size.

The Monks

The Monks are of the Order of Dolorous Obeisance. Strictly speaking they are rational agnostics, rather than a community of the credulous and faithful. Although aware that the divers demiurges, divinities and avatars might be mischievous sandestins amusing themselves at our expense, they do admit the possibility that gods might really exist and be amenable to answering the occasional prayer in the affirmative. So they pray to them, although it offends their intellects to do so. Among their accouterments is a warding bell, which, they claim, both preserves them from otherworldly scrutiny and magical attack. It also perturbs deodands, who do not like its tone.

The monastery's inhabitants may be divided into three groups, the MILITANTS, the CONFRERES and the SCHOLARS.

The MILITANTS police the peasant workforce, collect the rents and guard the gates. They have some value in a fight – two of them can hold out against a motivated adventurer for a while. They are astute tacticians, unswayed by calls to honorable combat. They will erect barricades, throw furniture, gang up on opponents, in short, cheat, to secure victory.

The CONFRERES are visiting scholars and pilgrims who have temporary residence and access to the library.

The SCHOLARS run the monastery. They are copyists, editors, researchers and administrators. They interview strangers, both to gather tales of far off lands and to identify new sources of labor. Each in turn patrols the fields to this end.

The Peasants

These oppressed churls are merely waiting for a catalyst to overthrow the nearest representatives of authority – the monks. While they wait, they pass the time by working in the fields, paying rents and being oppressed. Any stimulus, and particularly ensqualment or the performance of strident music, will set them into a killing frenzy. They have been conditioned to work to the tolling of the bell. Close observation will show that they move to its rhythm.

Perino

A cultured voice says "Good morning. Generally I approve of vicarious destruction and anguished death, but I regret that I am subject to the terms of a contract. My admiration for your style and verve notwithstanding and with profuse apologies for the violence I am obliged to visit upon you, I must require you to prepare to have a little accident. In the spirit of fair play, I invite you each to strike the first blow and would advise you to make them as telling as possible." The speaker is a slight fellow of middling years, dressed in a red and green domino. He has a net in one hand and a rod in the other. The rod terminates in a mummified talon, probably a pelgrane's. His hat is an elongated tricorne. Instead of bells, shrunken heads hang from its points. He raises the net like a matador's cloak. "*Shall we?*" Perino's rod hurts – it's a clawed club, and the effect is much like being hit with a claw hammer. The net is more interesting – it moves autonomously, can float with the breeze, or creep along the ground. It attempts to enmesh an opponent, then it contracts with a cheese-wire effect.

Perino himself may be banished to the nether worlds with the appropriate incantation, or taken somewhere inconvenient by Far Dispatch. Otherwise, his flesh knits back together. He may not be drowned or incinerated. He likes the smell and taste of blue concentrate. If dismembered and stored in separate pots, he would be inconvenienced long enough to guarantee that the adventurers would die from a different cause.

Should further clarification of Perino's status be required "The substance of my contract with the monks which is that in return for smiting their enemies they will ring their most mellifluous bell and thus assist my sleep in my sub-world. As the agents of the order's destruction, I am compelled to visit mortal chastisement upon you all."

GM: If the PCs need to learn how lethal Perino is, let them watch him enmesh, cube and shred a few peasants.

The Twk-Men

Flook has a standing contract with the local kingdom. In return for her disposal of local insectivorous birds they act as her eyes and ears. In specific circumstances, they will lend actual aid, squirting soporific ichor from miniature bellows into the faces of Flook's opponents. Beyond the loosely framed 'not acting against her interests', the Twk men will enter into contracts with others. They can, for instance tell the party what hours the monks keep, what they do during the day and that there is a secret way into the monastery. Incidentally, disclosing the terms of their contract with Flook is acting against her interests.



In the Chest You Find ...

At the Manse ...

Aside from many items of aesthetic appeal, antiquarian interest, or resale value, the Manse contains items of note:

- ☞ In the third workroom on the North side (i.e. the third that the PCs search) are the Master's notes on manufacturing automata.
- ☞ In a pot in the library (middle level, fourth shelf on the east wall, seventh book in – the book is hollow), is a little pot of viscous fluid and a brush. This is a pot of soul paint. If daubed on the face of a living being, allowed to dry then peeled off, it can be stretched on a frame, and used as a soul portrait.
- ☞ Four tubes of blue concentrate. One is inside a hollow priapic statue in the chapel. One is under a pillow in Flook's bed. One is inside a hollow balustrade in the north porch. One is under a stool in the owl-friezed arbor.
- ☞ An illustrated manual, much stained, for the Fifteen Silken Movements. If a page is lit from behind, the dancer appears naked.
- ☞ Folios with formulae for the following spells: Macroïd Toe, Second Hypnotic Spell, Agency of Far Dispatch, Phandaal's Gyrator, Excellent Prismatic Spray, Charm of Untiring Nourishment, Brassman's Twelfefold Bounty, Mantle of Stealth, a spell to render people minuscule and one to ensqualm, from a distance, a party of rogues and thieves.
- ☞ A carved sandalwood box containing five ounces of dream powder lies in Flook's dressing table.
- ☞ It will prove impossible to find the Master's IOUN stones (although he will indicate to captors that he will buy his release with them, then attempt to renege on the deal).

In the Pavilion ...

- ☞ Some herbs of culinary or medicinal use.
- ☞ A deep shaft, filled from top to bottom with broken plates. Remarkably, no two shards come from the same piece of crockery.
- ☞ A dead Twk Man, his brains sucked out by a noophagous hummingbird.

In the Monastery...

- ☞ The peasants will, if allowed, erupt into pyromaniac frenzy (many of the monastery treasures are readily flammable).
- ☞ Adventurers will be able to carry away books, tomes and compilations of all sorts. It is suggested that they not get any complete spell formulae.
- ☞ The monks had several tubes of blue concentrate and a single arrow-gun. Depending on the stratagem the PCs devise, there might be 1-3 tubes and 2-12 fire darts remaining.
- ☞ There are two hundred terces in the monastery strongbox. Most of the monks' wealth is in books, and agricultural products.

In the Deodand's Lair ...

The deodand is wearing the scraps of victims' clothes. He also has a pile of broken, bulbous glass bottles. Scattered about are the possessions of his victims:

- ☞ A pack of water sodden, marked cards
- ☞ Six dice, some crooked
- ☞ A bent tin whistle
- ☞ A small fob, which seems magical, but which does nothing
- ☞ A few terces (2-12).
- ☞ A dented hip flask, still half filled with arrack
- ☞ A left boot.



... what happens next?



Taglines

I feel irresistably drawn. My innate greatness of spirit propels me onward.

Of course we could just knock at the front door and announce ourselves.

For myself I have never been o'erly enamoured of such strident clamour.

*Talking to churls such as these serves merely to confirm my preconceptions.
Let us cease and try to find someone is both washed and lucid.*

Do not cross the lady, in imagination, already I feel my feet growing hot.

*It may be a servant, a guard beast or merely a passing demon.
Smite it, I am behind you reading powerful magics in case it overcomes you.*

Twk men, be polite and just patronising enough so they mistake you for a magician of great power.

There may well be fifteen silken movements, but I could not vouch in detail for more than five.