

CASTLES CRUSADES[®]

A NIGHT ON THE BLACK GOD'S HILL



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A NIGHT ON THE BLACK GOD'S HILL

"...our Witch-Hunter swore we would be here and be able to bring mighty force and terror to these demons and monsters of Czernobog when they crept forth from the noxious fissures of the earth...but he was wrong. The ancient temple that sat here it was said has been here since the time that Czernobog and Svarog, as brothers, were divided and became enemies. This venerable place reeked of the evil from out of the earth.

My heart stopped as we first came up the hillside early in the dusk and spotted the temple's profile against the sky. The curved form of its dreaded arches and roof were evident. The many local tribes, not in league with the monsters, speak of the scores of vampires and demons that surge from this temple on select nights of the year. Frenzied worshippers would build giant bonfires and dance about them hoping that Czernobog himself would crawl forth from the Underworld, and on a few rumored occasions he had.

Our warriors swiftly ran to the temple doors, their swords at the ready. Although they were brave and displayed no fear, their countenances stoic, I knew they deeply had intense terror in their minds and hearts at being here. To be walking where the Black God himself strode is no small task. If he were to again, that would end this raid and our mission is over. Not even praying to Veles or Svarog could protect us from Czernobog on HIS night.

What fools we are to be assaulting one of his sacred temples on one of his holy nights.

Disturbing chatters and a flutter of wings are in the darkness, like bats but more sinister around us near the temple grounds. I sense a humming in the earth, almost a quaking. Peering towards the moon in the grey clouds for perspective, I can still view the vast landscape and the many miles of forested hills. The demons of Czernobog are coming.

The Witch-Hunter prepares himself for the horrors to come, blesses us and charges the forbidding doors of the temple first ahead of the hesitant warriors. The dark shadows about us are amorphous, bend and shift in their form. Hideous faces and bodies appear briefly in it to my astonished horror but I press on, following in the steps of the Witch-Hunter.

A noxious odor hovers in the grounds that fills the nostrils causing the eyes to tear up. "Ignore the senses, this is what the foul servants of Czernobog are trying to do to us to distract us. None of this exists," advises the Witch-Hunter as he kicks the temple's door.

"What is really here then?" a warrior asks. "The winged demons and all things that come at you with an intent to kill or harm you." He replied. His boot shattered open the door and without hesitation he charged inside ax in hand.

Somewhere a deep demonic roar began. Witches were here too, I knew it..."

INTRODUCTION

This temple adventure is inspired from the Slavic pagan tradition and belief of Witches Sabbaths on hilltops or mountains and

the Rimsky-Korsakov and Mussorgsky symphony 'Night on Bald Mountain'. This module brings those related ideas alive and together and the players and Castle Keeper, using the **Codex Slavorum**, can make the grim and dark ritual a truly terrifying experience.

Demons, vampires and even the Black God himself, Czernobog, could appear in this Halloween themed story. Scattered across many high places in Eastern Europe where the Old Slavs settled and migrated during the period of the Late Roman Empire, there were designated countless 'Bald Mountains' or hills where the devoted gathered to praise the gods, Dark and grim. Their rituals and celebrations were viewed as 'evil' and contrary to that of the rest of the populace because they honored Czernobog and the other Dark Gods below. Witches and others, usually outcast from society, were included in these groups in time.

The marginalized and disowned in the populations who worshipped the Dark Forces gather in places not welcomed by the others, and call upon them on the key nights when the know their presence is strong. Usually wild ceremonies would be held, as the later stories go (in the Christian era unfortunately) wherein the Witches would hold their 'Sabbats' and summon Czernobog, or to Christian sensibilities 'Satan' and his demonic court. Such stories persisted far into the Middle Ages and even the Early Modern Period throughout non-Slavic areas of Europe whereby most of the peoples had a shared homogenous culture by then brought on by the conformity of the Christian religion or Roman Church.

Just like the **Codex Slavorum**, this unique temple module goes back into time before that uniformity swept over the many nations and to its earlier origins when the Old Slavs dominated. This adventure will be filled with horror and plenty of danger and if matters turn even worse, the demonic hordes will seem less threatening compared to their divine master Czernobog himself.

The average experience levels required for this module would be between 4th and 5th to survive the many dangers. Common sense and knowing when to pick the right battle or not is the best and most sensible plan of action as well. The Old Slavs believed in a myriad of monstrous dynamic beings that haunted the night and lusted after the human soul, blood and flesh. They will prey after the weaker adventurers in this temple adventure without doubt if given a chance along the way without mercy.

THE STORY OF BOGY MOUND

When the Polenes and others settled in the vast wilderness in the earliest of ages, the forested hills had few peoples, only scattered bands of Germans and Gauls and the occasional Scythian raids from the east and the Black Sea. The many high hills and mountains were left free and clear from use by the other peoples in the region.

Wasting no time, the Polenes and related tribes began to build their temples in honor of Veles and others, but just as soon as these were being made, the witches smelled the noxious crevices in the earth where Czernobog and his Dark Children dwelled

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and discovered the place where they spew forth on selected nights. It was from here they quickly assembled a temple of their own, and built a large and magnificent structure.

Ceremonies were held. Fiery bonfires lit and wild reveries in honor of the Black God and his Children were performed by the devoted witches on selected nights. Their bright festivities could be seen for miles around by the tribes and their dreadful deeds later (missing local children, human sacrifice, etc.) until the local tribes' chiefs had enough. Finally warriors were sent to destroy the temple and its witches. A massive, bloody battle was underway and by a fiery demise the temple was eradicated and its witches slaughtered or sent into hiding.

Many years went by, in this time Rome in the West faded while Byzantium arose in strength and the memory of the horror of the Black Mound was myth and legend. Slowly it was rebuilt again by the descendants of the witches who survived the assault. This time with a vengeance and a larger goal. They knew that Czernobog would someday appear here again, and so they would hire the finest stone masons from Greece and Turkey if needed to create a mighty temple worthy of the Black God. It would not suffer the fires of the enemy a second time.

The building of the temple took many decades and was subtle. The witches distracted the local tribes by many clever means, and due to the many other unforeseen complications in the world already, their job was already simplified for them. By the time the new solid stone temple was completed, many of the generations had forgotten about the previous one and its sordid history.

The witches in the region now were empowered, having a central temple to meet and to devote their praise towards hoping that someday Czernobog, or other Dark Gods would appear on earth again. Not far from this part of Europe, to the southeast are the Carpathians and Transylvania where vampires are known to rule in multitudes over fearful Man by night in the forested mountains. Here, the hope was to do the same.

A few centuries and the witches had already spawned demonic children of their own from the local populace. The vampiric seed was spread and slowly the terrible Kingdom of the Dead was born near the eastern border of the Polenes. Such evil had now grown beyond the expectations of the witches. The temple was their center by night, but there were many places across the wilderness that the toxic and demonic children would gather.

The tribes were quickly overwhelmed by the tide of evil that had grown around them. Witch-Hunters were few in number, and the Bogatyr that were willing to confront them were even fewer. Odds were stacked against those golden and pure of heart in this part of Europe as Darkness fell heavy. Vampires now began to rule as kings in many parts of the Slavic territories. Byzantium sent Christian missionaries into the dangerous wilderness with hopes to stop this but they were not in their element nor where they could understand the foe they faced and lost to powers in another league not their own.

True to the witches' dream, the Dark Forces in the region assembled and did so under a leader, a king named Vaclav. Vaclav is an ancient vampire of note who was chosen by Czernobog personally to organize the other lesser diabolic beings and feed and exploit weak and frail humanity. Unfortunately the witches now too are subject to King Vaclav's whims and must answer to him and his terrible dictates. King Vaclav and his monstrous undead court rest below the temple in the crypts in catacombs riddled with various frightening beings.

After many centuries of plotting and arranging events, King Vaclav has prepared the grandest celebration of *Velja Notj* ('Great Night') or June 23rd or 24th to be undertaken by his people with hopes and some measure of promise that Czernobog will appear for the first time in countless centuries. Witches have come from many hundreds of leagues around after hearing this news, while the other communities of Dark Worshipers seethe with jealousy and silently hope for the worst. The local tribes and innocent peoples generally are ignorant of this epic event to come but for a few.

The looming temple is given the title '*cień Dom*' or 'Shadow House' and its name has found its way to the nearest villages and farms as well, spoken on the lips of travelers. With such a vague name, its purpose or to whom is equally vague. Although the original temple and its bloody history was nearly lost, and the current generations have no connection to that past, many suspect a dire intention behind it all. No wizard claims it and there are no priests in the area that speak of it. Nothing has alerted the chiefs or kings to act on it, or send warriors this time around. If they knew what nightmares swelled and planned to burst forth by *Velja Notj*, sudden alliances would form between rival tribes to destroy it surely.

THE LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND TRIBES

Of the many assorted peoples that live in this North Central region of Europe, the dominate tribe are the Polenes. Many smaller dependent groups fall under their protection and expect the divine blessing by their tribal gods as well, and there are many. Regional chiefs attempt to rule over the disparate farmers and isolated settlers in faraway places the best they can, reinforcing their authority with their bands of warriors or *Druzhina*. It is due to these separate and detached small communities or settlements that witches and their Dark Craft can persist so well. In these inaccessible places beyond the well-trodden paths where even the *Molfari* and normal priests have no influence the Children of Czernobog can run free.

Hard working, and perpetually doing time-consuming chores, the peasant folk, usually not even affiliated with a tribe, just wish to raise their families and keep life simple. They live by observing Nature and the Seasons and have a keen eye and sense for things and know well the wilderness and when things are altered. Even the tribal communities are often blinded to the corrupted changes that might find their way into a population, brought about by the Dark Gods. Places such as *Bogy Mound* and others would catch their notice...unless they too were already twisted by the evil forces in the earth and Czernobog's schemes, and many are within miles of the 'Shadow House'.

FOR THE CASTLE KEEPER

Usually the adventure modules I design have four story hooks to set potential events into motion, but this adventure is given a different beginning. However the Castle Keeper and players first brought their characters together is up to them, but what will occur here in this adventure is based on a structured time-line of a few events in a day focused around ending what may come *before* the 'Great Night'.

The local *Molfar* or 'Shaman' named *Duscha Izet* will contact them through connections and arrange to meet them in a local village tavern briefly before meeting elsewhere to speak in private. His plan, broken down, will be thus:

- Hire a Witch-Hunter(s), several warriors, and others. Discuss the plan in secret away from the ears of witches who might be in the local villages, etc.
- Go to the 'Shadow House' on the day before the 'Great Night' to hunt down and destroy all traces of demons, vampires and others that might be resting there.
- Rescue any captives and send them home. Slay the Vampire King if he exists and the rumors are true.
- Slay the witches and warlocks as they are discovered at the temple, and purge the poisoned graves of the birth of future werewolves and vampires.
- Find a way to bring ruin to the Shadow House forever on the hilltop.
- More importantly, prevent the arrival of Czernobog on the next night and purify the site from its centuries of darkness and evil.

KING VACLAV & HIS PLAN

Dredged from the many poisoned and undead corpses that serve the Black God, Vaclav was chosen almost three centuries ago to lead what the witches in this region began many, many centuries before. Vaclav, like many vampires, detests the Living and wishes nothing more than to find and feed on them to sustain himself. His prior life as a living mortal was humble and hardly noble of blood. He was a scout in the *Druzhina* serving under a mercenary band for Emperor Julian of Byzantium in the 6th Century C.E. He met his end while chasing down Magyar bandits into the highlands of Macedonia on horseback and was separated from them in the woods one frozen winter day.

The Magyar bandits were little more than henchmen for a group of vampires and lured Vaclav and his band of scouts to their deaths. All dozen of the Slavonic scouts were ambushed by the bloodthirsty vampires in the rocky ravine and then left for the wolves and other beasts. Later, their corpses rose due to the nature of their death and burial to become lesser vampires themselves. Centuries passed in a blur before Vaclav found himself drawn to the 'Shadow House' and its lure of blood and songs of praise in honor of Czernobog.

Of the many demons and vampires that now eagerly gathered, he was the most powerful and had the greatest charisma. The witches and warlocks feared him and before the new temple was completed the Black God appeared to him in a dream and granted him the status of 'King of the Vampires' of *Bogy Mound* and the surrounding lands. He was given extra powers by the Dark God the other vampires would be envious of and try to steal.

King Vaclav did not waste any time in establishing his power amid the other undead and diabolical living folk in the region. Czernobog told him that he was planning on returning back to the Mortal world again, but to do this, he needed more sacrificial energies. It would require many years of holidays and rituals to acquire this power to emerge from *Nav* once more, and that time is here after nearly two hundred years.

In a series of carefully laid out plans, coordinating with the local witches, King Vaclav began the process of preparing for the Earthly Coming of Czernobog. Newborns and children were abducted from villages and held, sometimes sacrificed, for the Black God, and a multitude of other disruptive plots to keep the tribes in the region distracted. A short and simplified list of these 'distractions' are given:

- Stir up resentments among families for feuds to begin. This will incur constant animosity and annoy the chiefs and their *Druzhina*.
- The theft of important or sacred items between tribes, framing the rival, to fire up bloody conflicts. This will keep the chieftains and kings distracted.
- Vandalize the temples and holy places, burn them if needed but do not cause too much attention to be drawn to the 'Shadow House'.
- Set loose herds of livestock at times when penned for the farmers to be mindful of their animals.

Any additional problems along the way are extra. Ultimately, King Vaclav only wishes to host the largest ritual and celebration of the 'Great Night' held in centuries for their Dark Master without any complications.

THE GREAT NIGHT

The King of the Vampires in the wilds of Central Europe, as designated by the Black God himself, has plotted out a complex event. This alone has taken a couple of centuries to unfold correctly, with each piece of the puzzle arranged in its own way perfectly.

The witches and warlocks had done the work beforehand for King Vaclav in many minor ways and even coordinated which peasant families were going to be segregated for the upcoming event ultimately. Carefully, the witches had sectioned off the families from the others through a series of 'natural accidents' and disasters until those certain families were isolated from the rest and out of reach from the *Druzhina* of the local chiefs and kings. The criteria of these chosen families and their members came down to particular eyes, skin tone, hair and other details

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that the witches believed were highly important to Czernobog and his demonic entourage.

Scarcely a generation had passed before the local vampires arose as a power to contend with, and among them Vaclav. Then he granted the witches unnatural immortality to continue their work, but under his direction with Czernobog's guidance this time, and in fact, his 'blessing'. More migrating Slavonic tribes pushed in from the East and settled and upset the balance and changed the plans for a time, but as they had done so, King Vaclav and his followers molded these incoming strangers masterfully from the 'Shadow House'.

It became evident that Svarog was praised highly above all the other gods amid the peoples of the Polenes, and because of this, the mere hint of Czernobog was quickly suppressed in a flash. This left no opportunity for the followers to raise him or bring his physical being into the Mortal World as the Vampire King wished. Only the original plan of the witches remained – The Great Night.

Even Svarog is weak on this occasion and cannot deny his own rival brother equal footing in the world they both built. To the regret of the Molfar Duscha, he is aware of this weakness in the cosmic plan and can see how the Forces of Darkness are resting everything they have on it. Why it has taken them over two hundred years to set it in motion the old shaman is not sure, but the patience of the undead and immortals is difficult to understand for those who are doomed to live short lives.

King Vaclav and his witches have in fact banked two centuries of effort into this one particular celebration of the *Great Night* and none other than have come and gone by. Deep in the catacombs of the 'Shadow House' are held, in cages, a dozen captives, taken from those special families. They are ready to be dragged atop the Bald Mountain on the night and sacrificed in savage rites to bring Czernobog to the surface, but they are only a part of the whole picture. The Vampire King has more planned.

Listed are the Night's events in order for the summoning of the Black God:

- Bonfires are lit atop *Bogy Mound* by the witches and warlocks at dusk. The main fire in the center platform designated for Czernobog is lit last, and will be the greatest fire, blazing brilliantly.
- The many celebrants will gather in the company of the witches, who will be directed by their vampire masters around the fires for the first rites once the sun sets.
- The human sacrifices held in cages below in the Shadow House, will be led to the surface in chains, and one by one, in a ceremony led by the Head Witch they will be slain. Some sacrifices will have their throats slit and bled out over a massive cauldron, while others will be immolated in the circle surrounding Czernobog's fire. King Vaclav will pronounce the official and holy words as the sacrificial blood and ashes are given to the Underworld as offerings in hopes of stirring the Black God from his slumber.
- A wild feast and orgy will follow by all the celebrants in the grounds. It is hoped that between the sacrificial and carnal energies, that the Dark God will be made to rise from *Nav*, and his Demon Court with him.
- If so, the vampires and other undead will surge across the moonlit land to wreak havoc on the Living until sunrise. No one can stand in their way, not even the aid of the Gods of Light can prevent their terrible path should Czernobog choose to join them. All people of Good character and morals and souls should hide and find shelter until dawn; there is no other way to survive what will come. Kings, wizards, champions and all will fall to the ravages of the Black God and his Hellish Entourage on that night *if* King Vaclav manages to summon him after two hundred years of preparing to do so.

By the dawn of the next day, Czernobog's dire plan is to have purged the nearby lands of the peoples who are faithful and loyal to his brother Svarog and the other Gods of Light. The damage, bloodshed and havoc is expected to be as nightmarish as the '*Great Night*' itself – if allowed.

This is why the role of the adventuring party is so crucial. Their place in the scheme of things is more important than they understand or probably even comprehend. It won't be until late in the adventure, when they are in the catacombs, amid the sleeping vampires and other undead, that they will truly realize the magnitude and scale of this task.

THE MOLFAR HERMIT

For all of this, it has caught the attentions of the *Molfar* Duscha Izet. He noticed the minutiae of problems erupting across the countryside in the recent years, an almost pattern to it, and a strange silence surrounding the 'Shadow House' and *Bogy Mound*. Duscha believes such omens were given to him by the forces of Nature as the Children of Czernobog have put everything out of balance, and this has sent out the warning signs.

Duscha's plans requires him to find outsiders from beyond the region who have no blood ties or connections to the many tribes and villages in any way. This way the witches and vampires cannot exploit these vulnerabilities or frailties once the hunt begins. To do this, he must leave his seclusion and hermitage and linger in the many taverns amid the larger villages and cities. Here he will spot ideal strangers that might be looking for work, specifically Witch-Hunters.

He is an older man, in his late sixties, with a grey, long beard and hair, braided and styled nicely, garbed in Slavic robes and cloak with a Scythian touch. Duscha Izet's clothes bear the images of Scythian style beasts over them, threaded in gold, richly formed and with intricate art. Golden rings, a pendant and matching ear-rings adorn him, all with inlaid amber and animal forms. Duscha is a gentle spoken Shaman but becomes very passionate about his hatred for the evil that sleeps in the 'Shadow House'.

As with all Shaman, he seeks to see the world and universe restored into its proper balance, and he knows that King Vaclav and his diabolical entourage upset this greatly. Duscha's ancestry isn't purely Slavonic, but a mix of Scythian as well, and he is concerned with the vampires and their ultimate plan. He has read the omens and signs and they tell him that something dire is coming by 'The Great Night' unless it is stopped.

Duscha will first meet the player characters, at first seemingly at random, in a tavern and offer them work. If a Witch-Hunter is in their company he will give a signal or sign that a matter of dire and diabolical importance is at hand first. The old shaman is unafraid of incurring the wrath of King Vaclav and his followers in time, and half expects it. There are very few in the region that both aware of the dangers and strong enough to stand up to them, and the shaman knows the vampires and witches are aware of his existence.

NOTE: Once the situation were to ever become intense and the followers of King Vaclav target Duscha Izet apart from the player characters, they will mercilessly hunt him down. This can provide a separate story opportunity for the adventure in which the adventuring party can find, defend and protect the *Molfar* against the henchmen of the Vampire King...if they survive before the *Great Night*.

WHERE IT BEGINS - THE VILLAGE OF PUTNISKA

A small Slavonic village, tucked away in the forest, with miles of worked farmland surrounding it on the outer edges beyond. Due to the winter season not fully being gone, the region and altitude, a light snow has remained in the area and a chill with it. Putniska only holds less than four hundred people total, and this includes the scattered farmers and other semi-isolated peoples living on the periphery to the village and near the high hills and more importantly to *Bogy Mound* and 'Shadow House'.

The people of the village are not friendly, and very xenophobic towards non-Slavic strangers especially. They associate all outsiders with demons and evil from experience and their past, but unfortunately (as mentioned earlier), folk memory has erased in time exactly what the nature was that caused the ancient dread on *Bogy Mound*. No one can remember the stories that once were associated with it, and all who did are now dead. The vampires and their evil followers however *do* know the tales and wish to keep these secrets.

The people of Putniska meet in a communal tavern house to gossip, listen to the talk of travelers and merchants about distant affairs and wars and know about the world to a limited extent. There is no given name to the place unlike the larger villages and cities where larger populations dwell and competition thrives. On cold wintry nights, many of the locals are here, gathered around the fire, with musicians, food and drink, and chatter until the late hours of the night.

The villagers are predominately pagan and dislike the missionaries that find their way here from Byzantium to 'convert' through friendly discussion, or so it is disguised. They

are devoted to the tribal gods and that is how it is always been. Of course, most are also loyal to King Vaclav and his undead followers up on *Bogy Mound* secretly, and can't choose their fate. The local tribal chiefs occasionally send in their men, with a band of Druzhina to gather taxes in the spring, but do little else from this isolated and poor region.

Duscha Izet will catch the villagers' attention because Shaman rarely come to town, and haven't in living memory (not since the vampires have taken over in the last two-hundred years). The old cultured man will be seated alone by the fire at a table drinking a form of fermented goat's milk common among the Steppe Nomads from a drinking horn.

He will come to the player characters amicably, and say to them:

"The world, the universe, sits on the teetering edge of a dangerous abyss tomorrow were no one to save it and yank it from the hungry teeth of Fate. I ask you, would you be that group to save it?"

I am Duscha Izet, the Molfar, the last of the Molfari in this part of the countryside I am afraid. The others...the others were either hunted down in the recent decades and centuries and slain by Dark Forces, or driven away by them. I...I have bravely remained for this time. The Great Night is to come and a terrible plan with it. I must ask you, will you help me purge the 'Shadow House' up on Bogy Mound of the evil that sleeps by day before it conspires to cast a veil over the shining sun forever?"

If the adventurers say 'No', he will simply leave them alone and exit the tavern back into the night, never to be seen again. If they say 'Yes', he will continue:

"Then, we must leave the warmth of this place and speak in privacy for what must come, and soon. Follow me into the night and chill, away from these people and their prying ears and eyes, and most importantly...from the shadows."

Duscha walks on his bent staff of wood, exiting the tavern house without saying a word to anyone. The windy, snowy night greets him and everyone in the wilderness beyond. The Shaman leads them for a time, walking down narrow and confining paths of shrubs and stones in the villages, occasionally stopping for long lengths of time before continuing onward. He takes them finally outside of the village and is clustered homes, bleating sheep, snorting horses and goats, barking dogs, and into the countryside.

Distant looming hills and mountains shine in the moon under the dark clouds ominously at times. He doesn't stop for a time, even in the biting cold wind across an open field. Duscha eventually leads them to a patch of dark trees near a steaming river under the moonlight where a modest home sits.

Stacks of firewood sit outside, totem symbols of gods and other sacred items are painted and hang everywhere in the grounds. He lets them into his home. After a few minutes, he stirs the coals in the fireplace and a warm fire begins in his nice home.

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He gathers chairs for them and sits with concern on his old face, eyeing them all, studying them over.

“What must be stopped is the rise of the Black God Czernobog on the Great Night, in two nights hence. It was first the plan of the local witches going back almost three centuries who then attracted the attention of the vampires and other evil spirits. Now, they are in charge of this plot.

You cannot put a stop to it on the Great Night itself, you are not strong enough. The only way is to preemptively do so by attacking them tomorrow night while they sleep one more night, on the penultimate night. Only their mortal servants will be a danger, the witches and others. You must slip into the Shadow House, slay the vampires and the other undead that rest, while they are vulnerable in the day time, and burn the temple down. This is the last night we have left to do so. There is no other chance.

They are ruled, I believe, by one powerful Upir named King Vaclav. He holds the leash on them all, but even worse, Czernobog holds his. If you slay the Vampire King, it will set everything these evil monsters have planned for over two-hundred years into chaos instantly. More importantly, the Shadow House must not remain intact. It is made of stone, and must have a weakness up there on the hillside. Whatever it takes, destroy it so these demons cannot return again.

I cannot pay you myself, as I am a simple Molfar, working with the land. I do know however that King Vaclav and his vampire court have collected a sizable treasury over the centuries in the Shadow House, and it is all yours to claim as a reward for the hard task that lays ahead of you. No local chief or king will come to your aid I am afraid, Bogy Mound and the temple have them frightened, and the celebrations of the Great Day and Night will have everyone occupied.

You will be on your own. I cannot aid you, for I must protect the innocent here in the village and the surrounding countryside. Once you begin, the witches and their masters will unleash a terrible wrath that will spread down here. I will do what I must to protect them. If you fail to do the task on the first day and night, you have the next day, but by the time of the Great Night it will be too late. The odds will be against you and they will be prepared for you with reinforcements. This has to be done right the first time or not at all, do or die I am afraid.

Do you have any questions?”

If the adventuring party do not, he continues:

“Expect deception and treachery once this begins tomorrow. If the witches and their vampire masters are aware in the slightest that you are undertaking this, they

will use every trick to stop you. In their insidiousness, death is not what they want to do to you, and that does happen – they will only raise you back as one of the undead. The least terrible fate will be that you will serve them while living under an enchanted control as a slave. Whatever happens, they cannot win this.

By dawn, the plan is simple. Go to the Bogy Mound and Shadow House, and incinerate all of the sleeping Dead you find there, destroy whatever else you discover that might hint at their plans for the Great Night, and then find some means to bring ruin to the temple atop the hillock. The world cannot bear to have the Black God stride it with his court of demons again. Know that you and what you do will deny him that privilege and earn you an honored place amid the glistening palace of Svarog and the Gods of Light. Now rest and gather your strength for what will come tomorrow. If you are not Bogatyri by now, you shall be after this.”

Duscha Izet offers them a place to rest in his warm home for the night if they need for the trip to *Bogy Mound* will not be too far away. If they choose to, it will be comfortable and peaceful sleep. If not, they will have either: a.) Find a camping spot in the chilly wilds, or b.) Hope to be given room and board in the local tavern for the night and avoid any of the spies of the vampires and witches.

THE DAWN OF ‘THE GREAT DAY’

By dawn’s light, where ever the adventuring party have rested, they must begin their travel to the hill and dreaded *Bogy Mound*. Across the Slavonic World this day is holy and is known as ‘*Velik Dan*’ or ‘The Great Day’, and the many communities are filled with celebrations of various, but related sorts. Most people feared that the Underworld god *Veles* might try to return by the night, as he often does every year, forgetting that a more dreadful and dire god awaits below the soil – Czernobog. Every year the communities perform the same rites and sacrifices.

King Vaclav depends on the local chiefs and kings to be very distracted during the day so that his witches and other mortal servants can prepare the elaborate work for the epic task of the night’s ceremony. The player characters *should* be the flaw in their plan. In the Slavic world, this celebrates the first day of spring.

Winter is not yet away across the country but the sun shines. No one stops or slows the adventuring party’s way as they make their way to the looming high hills beyond the villages, farms and settlements. The country roads and trails are fairly isolated, with some people traveling in wagons or on mules carrying supplies for the celebrations.

Signs of the local *Druzhina* are rare (2 out of 6 chance), and when they are, they ride on their armored steeds to oversee the local communities and little else. They won’t hassle anyone if they have no reason to, and will travel on to the next location on their route. They will be traveling in a group of a dozen warriors.

DRUZHINA X 12 (*These chaotic neutral fighters' vital statistics are HD 4d10, AC 15, and HP 40. Their primary attributes are physical. They attack with a Broadsword (2d4), Dagger (d4), and Spear (d6). Weapon Specialization: Broadsword, Combat Dominance, Extra Attack.*)

The various small farmsteads and communities around the larger village of Putniska all are celebrating 'The Great Day' in their own, but similar way. Music, dancing, fires and food are common, and although flowers are not yet blooming, many have premade garlands. Prayers to the various gods and spirits are being held, either in small outdoor shrines, or by streams, in groves, etc. Children run and play, and no one bothers or pays attention to the adventuring party if they choose to not stand out.

If the adventuring party *did* attract negative attention on their way to *Bogy Mound* in the morning hours, any combination of events may happen:

- A hostile community of angered celebrants chasing them, with farming implements, led by the village chief.
- Several bands of Druzhina hunting them, even with a price on their heads for whatever reason(s), and possibly being ordered to capture and take them back to the fortress/palace of their chieftain or king.
- The witches of King Vaclav, tipped off by the players' actions or words on the night before, are now setting the people in the region against them, or lying in wait for them (See '*The Witches of the Vampire King*').

Their trip to the 'Shadow House' should be without incident, given they haven't incurred any attention by the locals or the witches or vampires in any way possible in the last day.

THE ASCENT OF BOGY MOUND

As the player characters make their way beyond the majority of the settlements and people towards the obvious snow covered hills in the distance, they will notice that the landscape will grow rough. The farmlands and other manmade changes to the land are now gone, and what remains is pure wilderness. A *Ranger*, *Druid*, or *Molfar* character can spot the nearly hidden stone-lined pathway that skirts the hillside upwards.

This ascent will take some time, up the hill, over four-hundred and sixty feet high. Moving too quickly will attract attention, while going too slow will take extra time and likely draw more chance of encounters. The stone-lined pathway is worn from centuries of use by the witches and other loyal and devoted servants of the Dark Gods. There is an ominous feeling ascending these steps, even in the morning light.

Even in the day time sentries will be posted across the ridge leading to the top of the hilltop. Usually there are d6 peasants, armed with basic farming implements. If alarmed, they will signal the witches in the temple and those below in the valley of the immediate danger to their ceremonies and organize to prevent it.

8 CASTLES & CRUSADES

It would require stealth or a quick and lethal blade to get around these peasant guards along the pathway up the ascent towards the temple.

THE SHADOW HOUSE

Standing ominous on the ridge of the hillside is the temple, constructed of the finest and sturdiest stonework. Built by skilled hands centuries ago, this massive building honors Czernobog above all others. His image adorns the many totems and tiles in the grounds, and there is no denying its purpose.

Most of the stones, tons of which were quarried and taken from locations many miles from these hills near the south, rumored close to the Carpathians. As with many temples and other locations of places of ill-repute, the Shadow House has been given stories of dread associated with the massive stones. Many in the surrounding villages and farms say that laborers perished toiling and traveling with the blocks along the way, and nothing but blood and gruesome death is related to the temple. Oddly, no locals remember building it or being involved in the construction of the temple, which raises questions. This makes many (who are not silently allied with the vampires) assume that those who built the temple were sacrificed afterwards in order to hide the secrets.

Very few from the surrounding lands have willingly come here to see the temple and its grounds, and so no one really knows about it in detail. Just those privy to King Vaclav and his followers know for sure what is going on and where things are located and to what purpose.

What is detailed here first is given the temple grounds before the interior and below it, in that order, due to its complexity. The Shadow House is a large complex constructed for the dark purpose to raise Czernobog and his hellish court from the Underworld of Nav ultimately and little else. Any other functions and adventures here will result in minor, if slightly less dangerous excursions.

A: STONES OF NAV

This circle of seven jagged standing stones are placed near the altar and 'portal' of Czernobog. Of everything at this location that remains in its history, only these stones pre-date the rest by thousands of years if not more. These 'Stones of Nav' have always been assumed by the local peoples, whoever they might be, to lead to the Underworld. The granite is dark grey, stained by ancient gore and if they alone remained, would appear sinister. The seven stones stand tall on the flattest section of the hilltop upon the ridge. Faded in time are many humanoid and monstrous forms carved on them performing sacrifice, their hands clawed or bearing weaponry. Who incised these images is unknown from ages past.

B: DARK ALTAR

The dais is half a foot high, built of dark stone, with a podium bearing the image of Czernobog. It stands before the 'portal'. This great platform is large enough to hold the Head Priest,

three attendant priests or priestesses, the sacrificial altar and four waiting victims in chains. Four torches blaze on each corner and a fire-pit sits before the altar to smoke the ashen haze.

C: CZERNOBOG'S GATE

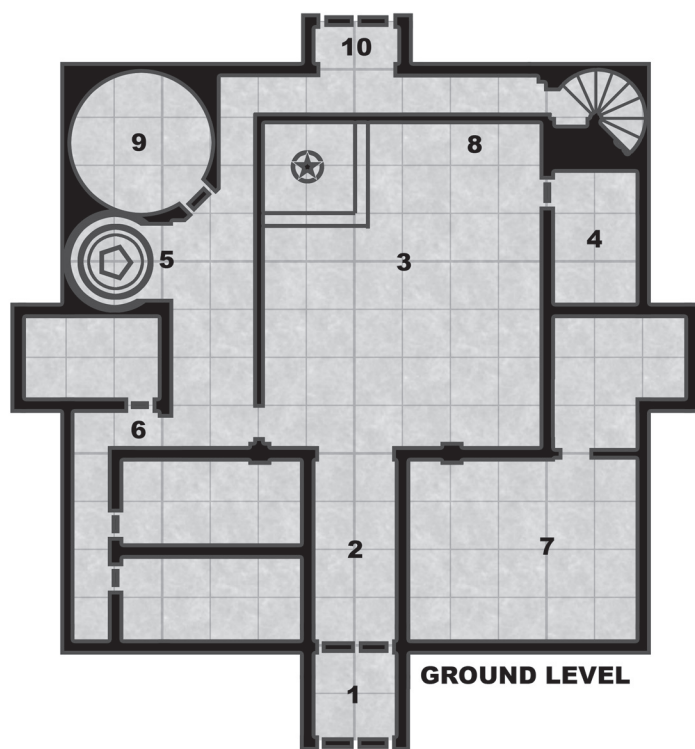
This is the 'portal' that, if the conditions are right, can open up to the Underworld of Nav. The earth is meticulously kept clean, it is stone-lined, and covered in symbols meaning the Underworld, the Black God and his Hellish armies. Unless the ceremony and the conditions are performed correctly, this Gate remains a stone covered earth and nothing more. (See 'The Great Night' for more).

D: WORSHIPPER'S SECTION

The witches, peasants and others (vampires and other undead) all stand in this designated area off to the side of the altar platform and Gate during the ceremony. Initially they begin here but as the night and ritual continues and the frenzy maddens, they will drift and in their craziness find themselves everywhere caught up in the insanity. Orgies and slaughter of any innocents will spring up as Czernobog appears by the celebrants.

GROUND LEVEL OF THE SHADOW HOUSE

NOTE: Due to a sinister design by the witches and later improved upon by the vampires under the direction by Czernobog, all rooms in the temple share a united lock. If at any time they are under a threat or attack, a 'panic' switch can be hit in the subterranean level and all doors locked at once. The locks will become CL 5 instantly.



1: ENTRY ROOM

Two large black and ominous doors, with bronze knockers of chimeric monsters, enter into the large temple. This is a ten foot by ten foot space where the worshippers and visitors first must go. A wardrobe is to the left to hang cloaks and other clothing, torch sconces are on the wall.

2: CORRIDOR OF THE ABYSS

This intricate granite corridor stretches over twenty feet in length and is ten feet wide. Carved on the sides are the images of the ancient cultic symbols and ritualistic icons associated with Czernobog. The imagery of the Underworld of *Nav* is strong in this corridor and bleak. Two doors are at the end of the corridor. There is a spike trap set midway through the tiles that can be set off in a 5X5 area doing 3d10 damage.

3: GRAND SANCTUARY

In this monumental chamber, the devoted worshippers gather, standing side by side to praise the gigantic stone statue in honor of Czernobog, surrounded by his swarm of demons carved from wood. It is a frightening and very grimacing chamber, meant to honor and intimidate the weaker worshippers who have second thoughts. This sanctuary can hold a total of fifty people at one time, but has no seats, and is only meant to be either for standing or orgies. At the very worst, the statue of Czernobog will animate later in the adventure, under the control of the Dark God himself, and hunt down and try to destroy the adventuring party using its powerful size and stone derived force.

4: HOLDING CHAMBER

This windowless chamber is little more than a cell for the human sacrifices to be led into the Grand Sanctuary for special occasions. The captives are chained to the walls in iron shackles, the keys held by the priests on their belts. There are two doors into this grim room. A feeling of much misery can be felt in here from the many decades of victims brought here to be offered to Czernobog and the other Dark Gods of Nav and beyond.

5: THE SACRED FIRE OF JEZI BABA

The circular stone chamber is built around this perpetually burning fire, held inside a rounded smooth stone cauldron-shaped platform. The forest Witch-Goddess Jezi Baba, or more popularly known to the West as 'Baba Yaga' is honored here, as her darker interests often merge with that of the Dark Gods below, and the devotees praise her as well. Dried offerings of animal parts, and various questionable human remains sit on the side of the platform near the flame. Intricate images of the Hag Goddess are carved on the walls in her various guises and none are pretty.

6: SERVANTS' QUARTERS

This section of the temple floor is only used and occupied during the weeks and months leading up to the special ceremonies by the servants. Several dozen chosen servants, hand-picked

by the witches and warlocks, live in the small rooms, and dedicate their meager lives to preparing the food and other necessities for their holy leaders (and the sacrificial offerings). Two kitchens, complete with a larder and refuse chamber for waste, are set aside in the massive temple for them to use and co-exist in without having to concern themselves with any more than making their masters pleased for upcoming rituals. Unfortunately, by the time of the dreaded ceremonies in question, these same loyal and efficient servants, drawn from the general populace, are themselves fodder for the slaughter as well. Czernobog's want of blood is great, especially so on the 'Great Night'.

7: WARRIORS QUARTERS

The elite and sacred guardians, numbering less than thirty and taken from the local tribes, come together to protect the witches and warlocks in their diabolical tasks to serve the vampire lords below the earth and ultimately Czernobog. Well-made wooden beds fill the room, Spartan in maintenance and purpose to house the gaunt and deadly men. The images of the Dark Gods stand everywhere gazing with their empty eyes to remind the warriors of their otherworldly masters' constant all-seeing power over reality. When no ritual or preparation for one is being made, they can be found here lounging and relaxing, drinking and with local village girls or captive sacrificial women. Unless the rituals for the Great Night are underway, there will be 2D12+D6 of Vaclav's warriors present. (For statistics see 'The Great Night of Czernobog').

8: SPIRAL STAIRCASE TO THE SECOND FLOOR

Influenced by Classical Greek architecture, this stone staircase leads both up (on the second floor) and downstairs (underground) in the rear of the grand temple. It is designed with strategy during combat many centuries ahead of its time. If battle is held on these stairs by an enemy unaware of how to fight due to the restrictions, they will fight at a -3. Because of how it is designed, the warriors must use their spears and swords left-handed or suffer the modifier due to the building plan.

9: REAR COUNCIL CHAMBER

Used by the select 'council' of witches and warlocks since the earliest days when the temple was first built, before it was burned to the ground, as a gathering place for the most urgent of meetings. When matters were urgent and were pressed against the followers of Czernobog, challenged them or risked their security or continued existence, they would confer to this little known chamber. Its richly adorned golden decorated door is locked and only has two keys, held by the Head Witch and Vaclav, and otherwise never opened. To the uninitiated, it appears as just a rich panel on the wall among many. Inside sits a large oaken table with a dozen chairs, Roman in fashion, with a collection of wealthy jewel adorned furniture and items covered in imagery of Czernobog and the Dark Gods. It is here that only the most secretive and dire plans are made towards the local peoples and strategized. The cost and wealth in this council chamber is extensive enough and worthwhile for plunder if sold

once melted down or altered from its sacred and holy forms (D100 X 10 Gold in worth). In order to get in here, the two keys must be taken or the lock picked (CL 6).

10: REAR ENTRANCE

Two massive double doors constructed of aged oak, banded in iron and prepared to defend against a siege, with an oak beam to bar it. The bronze hinges are kept oiled and functioning by the servants, when employed, and by the lesser witches otherwise. Nothing is left to rust or go to ruin. Magnificent and dramatic stone steps, tiered and seven in number, lead up to the doors.

SECOND FLOOR OF THE SHADOW HOUSE

Engineered with the same intention, this floor will trap all trespassers once the 'United Locking' mechanism is triggered. Foes who are trapped here will be nearly in a worse place than those on the ground level in the Shadow House, and this is especially true closer to sunset on eve of the Great Night.

11: GRAND HALL

This corridor is the first location one views upon entering this level from the stairs below. It has displays on the walls on all sides with religious art revealing scenes of the Ascent of Czernobog into Nav, and his War with his brother Svarog. One can understand the story of the Two Brothers from this elaborate artwork on the walls and corridor if given time. The theme of sacrifice and mastery over the Earth and its lesser Beings (Man, Beasts, Demons, etc.) is a strong motif throughout the panels. This Grand Hall runs the length of the Second Level and unites the floor. There are no windows here, only sconces for torches and lamps.



10 CASTLES & CRUSADES

12: WASH CHAMBER

This sacred chamber has a basin, smooth and polished, from granite, that sits in the center and filled with the finest water. Either it is collected by rain through bronze piping in the ceiling over time, or gathered by the efforts of servants and the lesser witches. Over fifty gallons of water fit into this basin. It is deemed that such waters are sprung from the Underworld and purified by Czernobog, whether brought by rain or not. After the worshippers are bloodied by their rituals, or even beforehand, they come here and douse their arms and face in the sacred waters to cleanse themselves. Only a richly worked fabric hangs over the doorway.

13: LIBRARY AND SCRIPTORIUM

This perfectly square chamber contains the many scrolls and tomes sacred to the worship of Czernobog and his court of Dark Gods and minions from the Underworld. There are over 10,000 sources collected here in nearly two hundred years' time by the witches and warlocks devoted to the god, many donated by King Vaclav. Two desks sit for the production and reproduction of more texts. It has been the duty of the eldest of his followers to copy the manuscripts gathered from all over the Slavic speaking world since the earliest ages when Rome was still at its greatest power, and to compile a Codex, the *Codex Zcerneboch* or 'Book of the Black God'. A nearly five thousand page text of holy poems, songs and tales that all concern the Underworld God from all over Slavica. This rumored manuscript sits in this room as its centerpiece on a desk bejeweled and much used, and in the process of being added to as more material comes in from abroad.

NOTE: The '*Codex Zcerneboch*' does house spells in its vast pages. These are approximation of the Necromantic, Illusionary, Fire and other more commonly known forms under other names and guises. This book would be priceless for its information alone and the Castle Keeper can draw from it many adventure ideas, divulging from the *Codex Slavorum*.

14: WARDROBE

Under lock and key by the lesser witches, this chamber houses the many special robes, vestments and other garments used by the worshippers of the Black God for all occasions. It also holds the many gowns for the human sacrifices, and stitching and sewing equipment needed for mending and fixing new clothing. The spectrum from the lowest to the richest of garb is held in this chamber, complete with jewels and gold and head-dresses and jewelry for the witches and warlocks used only on rare occasions. Otherwise, everything in this chamber has been gathering dust until recent times.

15: BONE TROPHY CHAMBER

Held in the highest esteem, past Head Witches and Warlocks of Czernobog who have died were given a place of honor here in this chamber. They were allowed to be de-fleshed and their bones placed onto wooden frames with their vestments. In a grim display, barely a dozen are in the room and date to only a hundred and fifty years prior to the arrival of King Vaclav,

who altered the system by enabling the chosen the cursed gift of immortality by vampirism. Now this chamber sits as more of a remembrance of a time before the vampires and demons took over, and in the deepest opinions of many, it was a better time, but they cannot raise their Dark God without his demonic brood realistically. There are no windows in this chamber, as with the others on this level.

16: CHAMBER OF ISOLATION

For those worshippers who need to view the night-sky and be alone, this part of the temple, to the front, opens up to the roof with an altar. The devoted follower can pray and sacrifice under the glare of the moon and stars alone without the distraction of others, having only the wind, howl of wolves and other sounds of Nature to comfort them in their quest for closeness to the Night and communion with Czernobog. In the hundreds of years before the arrival of King Vaclav and other demons, the worshippers eagerly sought some sign from the Black God's minions by Night here, either from the hint of a flap of wings, odd snarl or other curious noise that might clue them in that his demonic brood are afoot from the Underworld. Now that they dwell beneath the temple itself and rule it, the purpose here has changed greatly. The witches and warlocks seek simple peace away from the grimness of it all, which is often overwhelming for even those who wish it. There is a matching Chamber of Isolation below ground fashioned in the Greek and Celtic style, but it is too intense for even the most experienced witches at times.

FIRST LEVEL BELOW THE SURFACE

This is the most dangerous level, deceptively during the daylight hours, but at any time. By night, the monstrous inhabitants of this level will be found amid the many chambers freely in the temple or the grounds (at the whim of the Castle Keeper). Only the burning power of sunlight keeps the demons and vampires at bay here.

17: CORRIDOR OF CRIMSON

The stairs lead here from above, to a dark and blood-soaked natural cavern. It twists and winds in no clear direction from the stairs with bones and ripped and torn clothing strewn on the rough earth. The air stinks of foulness and death crunches underfoot from the old devoured corpses. The walls and steps are worn smooth and crimson from the many decades of use by the vampires and demons of Czernobog, and that is very evident once light is shone here. There are no graceful or artistic attempts here once the stairs dip below the earth. There is a 3 in 6 chance D4 of the demonic minions are hiding here from the light.

18: BISYTSIA AVIARY

Held underground due to their demonic nature, the hellish fiery-eyed large black-birds known as *Bisytsia* are contained in fifteen hanging metal cages and tended to by even more disturbing *Ovinnik*. The floor is covered is steaming piles of waste and remains of the animals and other food offered to the demonic birds. Unless there is activity, or loud noise,

these frightful birds, wrought from Czernobog's divine curse, sleep. If awakened, they squawk deafeningly loud and rattle the cages, alerting the *Ovinnik* and eventually all others in the underground chambers by their irritating racket. In normal times, the witches and vampires would set these *Bisysia* free occasionally into the surrounding world to harass and terrorize the locals nightly before letting them return by dawn with their bellies filled.

BISYTSIA X 15 (HD 4d8, AC 18, HP 16. *Their primary attributes are mental. They attack by 2 Claw 2d6, and Bite D10. They have the ability of Flight and Song of Allure.*)

OVNINNIK X 6 (HD 3d8, AC 19, HP 24. *Their primary attributes are mental. They attack by Claw 4d6 and Bite D10. They possess the ability of Fire Starting.*)

19: HOME OF THE PSOGLAVI

The vile and odorous lair of the Dog-headed beast men that loyally serve their Black God, the Psoglavi. They are amid many of his demonic forces that will battle for him and die for his cause and have rallied early, coming up from Nav to await his arrival on the Great Night. King Vaclav has granted them a section of the bowels of the earth below Shadow House on the condition they will perish if need be to protect Czernobog's interests in the end when the time comes (simply, the arrival of the adventuring party brave enough to risk coming here to

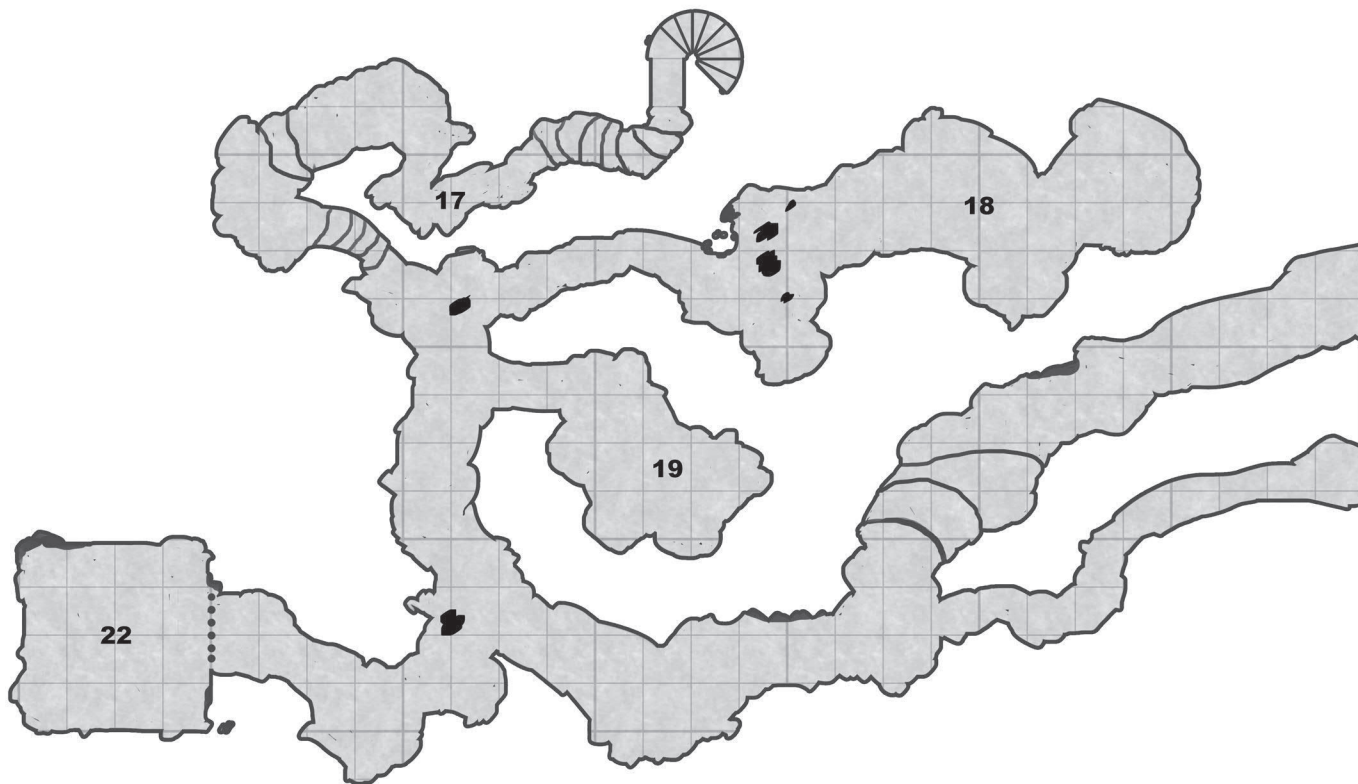
put a stop to this nightmare!). Like with all wild hounds, these beasts have made corners where they dump their waste and eaten remains of animals, but these deadly Beast Men, armed like humanoids, still have weaponry and will stand before all who venture deeper into this lair.

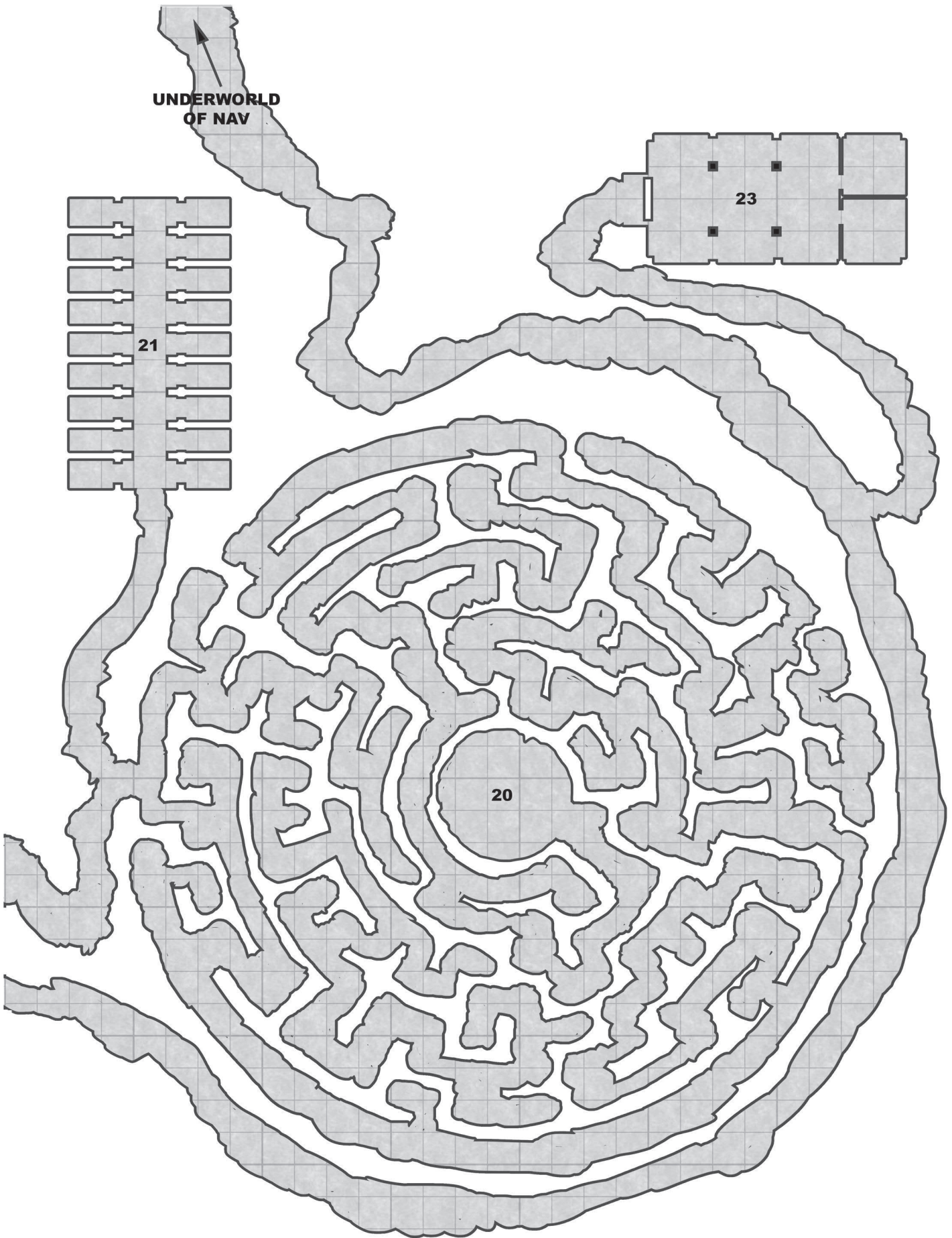
NOTE: Should the adventurers strike during the night, less than a fourth of the Psoglavi will be present as the others will be outside in the countryside running wild and causing their nightly panic, but the tradeoff is – the other horrors will be free to roam as well.

PSOGLAVI X 12 (HD 5d8, AC 17, HP 40. *Their primary attributes are mental. They attack by 2 Claw 3d8 and Bite 2d10, or Weapon. Their ability is Shattering Bite.*)

20: LABYRINTH OF ILYOI

This circular stone maze quickly will confuse those who bravely journey too deeply into the subterranean levels thinking it will be rough caverns. Themed on Troy or its other Greek and Latin name *Illium*, this labyrinth will have many misleading tunnels that branch off into various doom-laden and dead-end reaches. King Vaclav's own minions skulk these dark spiraled corridors and so traps are few or needed, but encounters are plenty. The ultimate and correct end to this maze will lead to realm where the vampire masters and the many human captives are found – but one must get there first. Beyond such a place also lies





the treasures that have accumulated here after two centuries, a wealth that will tempt many with a greedy mind. Traveling this maze will take time, possibly several hours depending on how well the group solve puzzles in dark and stressful conditions. The chance of encounters in this labyrinth does not change night or day: 4 out of 8 there will be one or more minions of Vaclav here. If so, use the following table: (HD/XP Level equal to that of adventuring party).

TABLE 1: LABYRINTH ENCOUNTERS

D6	ENCOUNTER
1	1d4 Czert
2	1d4 Drekavek
3	1d10 Koschei
4	1d6 Skrzek
5	1d4 Vampir
6	1d6 Witches/Warlocks

21: CRYPTS OF THE UPIRI

Shaped from the black and grey stone, these intricate sarcophagi are placed for the many ghastly vampires to rest and gather during the daylight hours, should they not feel strong enough to venture on the surface (many Slavic Undead can walk in the sunlight if they choose too). To most, this would appear as a richly constructed, Roman/Byzantium influenced mausoleum with the lesser vampires' coffins on the floor level (4), the moderately strong waist high (3), and the elite few head level (2), and King Vaclav at the top where it is unreachable unless one were to climb.

VAMPIR X 9 (HD 8d12, AC 20, HP 96. They attack by Slam D6 or Weapon. Their primary attributes are all. Their abilities are Blood Drain, Children of the Night, Dominate, Create Spawn, Energy Drain, Alternate Form, Gaseous Form, Entourage, Electrical Resistance (half), Spider Climb, Shapechange.)

King Vaclav possesses only a higher ranking than the others but little more, if he is slain the other vampires will retreat and flee into the Underworld weakened by his death, their powers, HP and all else cut in half. Facing ten vampires in their lair would be suicide for any party and it would require intense strategy and/or a team of Witch/Vampire Hunters.

22: HOLDING CELL

Kept within the crudely fixed cages (the metal is bronze and not iron as the metal will irritate the demons), in this cavern are the many human captives taken from the local villages. They number close to twenty, of all ages, and are filthy, traumatized and haven't seen the sun in months to a year in some cases due to their special importance for sacrifice. King Vaclav makes sure his servants, witches or demons give them the basics in food and water to sustain them for the long stretches of time leading up to the Great Night. By the time after winter, in early March, when the snows begin to fade, he begins to feed them better and double his efforts to fatten the human sacrifices. The witches

oversee the pampering process for these people, who have been taken by force from their families and tribes and hidden in secret. Each one carries an ideal trait needed to raise Czernobog from Nav, whether it be one is a virgin, has blue eyes and a certain birthmark, etc. They have been meticulously searched out and picked from the populace according to the subscribed data in the *Codex Zcernebuch* and centuries of tradition across the Slavic world. Every day these scared captives hope for rescue from the surrounding shadows, but are met with horror by their vampire and demon masters knowing that the time comes for their demise on a certain 'Great Night', and many have passed. Once freed from their cell they will be frightened and frantic, unsure where to run or go in the gloom. To pick the lock of the cage is a CL 5.

23: SHADOW HOUSE'S VAULT

The earthen corridor leads in two directions after the captives' cell, one into the far abyss of the true Underworld of Nav and the other to a vault where King Vaclav stores his wealth. Originally, much of this wealth was above in the temple, centuries ago when the witches were in charge; it was meager and stored in a room, but the vampire had other plans. He knew the mortal weakness in greed and placed it far below and behind a thick, four foot, bronze door with multiple locks (To pick it would require CL 5 X 5 – If one roll fails, an alarm system is set off in the lair alerting the vampires and other demons who will arrive in D5 minutes.) Within the door lies piles of wealth, Treasure Type 9.

NOTE: The Castle Keeper can design the details of the accumulated 'treasure' that has amassed here from the local largely poor populace within the last two centuries. Such wealth would not be too wondrous, even from the nobles or king in the region unless the campaign being ran calls for it.

THE NIGHT ON THE BLACK GOD'S MOUNTAIN

Should the adventuring party fail their mission sent by the *Molfar* initially, or some other unforeseen reason caused the entire quest to utterly crumble, and The Great Night occurs as planned – here is how it will go. The adventuring party will be truly overwhelmed unlike anything they have ever dealt with before in their lives and the horror of this dreaded occasion will truly scar their memories if they survive.

One on hand, should they prevent Czernobog from rising out of the Nav, they will be heroes, not only in the Lands of Men but in the Shining Realm of the Gods of Light as well and possibly be rewarded by divine blessings. On the other, their lives will never be the same and the Dark Forces will forever remember them for their deeds and mark them and torment them, seeking any chance they can to bring ruin onto them in vengeance.

What follows is the expanded sequence of events for the night briefly illustrated earlier in this module, for the Castle Keeper to use as an overlay in the grand scheme of things when the adventuring party wish to 'crash the party'. King Vaclav will try to continue his ritual from dusk till dawn until his Dark Master

14 CASTLES & CRUSADES

Czernobog is risen at any cost. The basic storyline of *'Night on Bald Mountain'* is the theme behind this story as well in the background.

1 FIRES ARE LIT: The witches carry fire-brands atop Bogy Mound from the temple at dusk with already a doom-filled chant on their voices in the wind. They light the many bonfires in a special order leaving the designated circle for Czernobog last. In this lighting ceremony, it erupts into a dance gradually as they spin and whirl around the fires wildly in their dresses and gown. The fires will blaze across the darkening countryside and their shrieking songs lift on the winds. 30-40 minutes.

2 CELEBRANTS GATHER: In the numerous designated spaces, the many worshippers from the villages arrive on cue in the firelight while the witches dance and sing. Standing on raised platforms in their finery are the ominous vampires amid the crowd gazing on, how and when they arrived is a mystery. 10-15 minutes.

3 SACRIFICES ARRIVE: Led by warlocks and demons, the many human sacrifices on slave chains are brought out from the temple and the Underworld towards the altar. The witches become frenzied at this point, their dancing maddened and singing beyond understanding. The worshippers become caught up in the craze and start to dance, raise their hands to the flames and down to the earth while gazing at the Circle of Czernobog. 15-20 minutes.

4 RITUAL AND BLOOD: Guided by the Head Witch, armed with the ritual knife over a massive cauldron, one by one, a human sacrifice is taken to her, their throat is slit and they are bled out into it. Their bodies are then thrown into the fires. King Vaclav pronounces the holy words of the Black God aloud towards the Circle and fires as each person is slain. (If the adventuring party do nothing, by the tenth victim, clouds darken in the skies and the earth begins to shake as the Underworld of Nav is drawing near to the Mortal and Czernobog is coming close. This should tempt them to act.) 25-30 minutes.

5 COMPLETE SACRIFICES: If not interrupted, the witches will slay every person they held, and by doing so this will cause the ground and sky to grow chaotic and monstrous. Lightning and hellish fireballs will flash in black clouds while the earth trembles below, the bonfires explode occasionally and dramatically. It is up to the Castle Keeper if Czernobog arrives at this point or not. Once the final body is bled and thrown to the fires the witches and worshippers' ritual changes its course. 5-10 minutes.

6 ORGY IN HONOR OF THE BLACK GOD: Should Czernobog not arrive, the entire gathering will dive into an even wilder orgy across the grounds regardless of the flames, blood and other problems. They hope their frantic lustful needs will draw the god from the earthen recesses below if the blood and fire will not. Only the vampires and a few demon servants will not participate in the frenzy. 2-4 hours.

7 CZERNOBOG'S ARRIVAL: By this time, possibly late in the night, even near to the morning hours depending on what happened in the scope of the adventure, the Black God will finally rise from the lightless abyss of Nav. His appearance will be mighty and dramatic and not a simple event as this is the purpose of this of this adventure overall, and the goal of the adventuring party to prevent at all costs. What will occur is thus: 1.) the trembling earth and cloudy, stormy skies will now increase in their intensity causing all to stop in their orgies, singing and dancing to summon him forth from Nav, 2.) his bonfire will explode into the night sky, showering a brilliant light show of flames in all directions across the mountainside and extinguishing out the others instantly in one action, 3.) the earth within the circle in which he is meant to exit falls open, and is sucked into the abyss of Nav, in which a demonic howling of inhuman voices now can be heard from the hole, it is of a sort to cause an icy chill on the flesh and spine, 4.) giant fiery serpents or dragons or *Zmey* are the first to exit the pit outwards, setting fire to anything they make contact with, or anyone, as scores of Czert and other demons issue forth from Nav into the sky and earth in a hellish explosion, 5.) the witches and worshippers who survive the initial demonic entourage quickly gather their senses and begin their frenzied dancing and singing around Czernobog's central fire heralding his arrival, not heeding their own safety in the lethal chaos, 6.) with mighty force, the Black God rises out of the pit from deep in the Underworld, his blackened and winged form creating horror for all onlookers, the vampires will join him as he flies free the Underworld to cause havoc on Mankind with few to stop him. 15-20 minutes.

NOTES: By now only divine aid from one of the Gods of Light can help, and there are very few who will on this night of nights. This is Czernobog's ideal time, and it is rare for him to be given the opportunity to chance to be summoned and allowed to run free. Not even his brother Svarog can truly prevent him until dawn. The adventurers at this point can only stem the tide of nightmare and horror and try to survive until the first rays of sunlight and their failure will be legendary.

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