

RAGING SWAN PRESS

GM'S MONTHLY MISCELLANY:

OCTOBER 2014



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GM'S MONTHLY MISCELLANY: OCTOBER 2014

Featuring material from some of Raging Swan Press's newest products as well as classic releases of yesteryear, advice articles and material from Creighton's own *Borderland of Adventure* campaign, the *GM's Monthly Miscellany* series is a terrific free resource for the busy, time-crunched GM.

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SOURCES

As well as new, never seen before material from my own *Borderland of Adventure* campaign, this instalment of *GM's Monthly Miscellany* presents information from several Raging Swan Press products and advice articles including:

- **Village Backdrop: Fulhurst Moors** Jacob Trier.
- **Alternate Dungeons: Infested Sewer** Alexander Augunas.
- **Brethren of the Crimson Altar** Creighton Broadhurst.

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FOREWORD

October is shaping up to be a momentous month for Raging Swan Press. I've been using the same computer for the last four years and I've finally got around to upgrading. Even worse than that, I moved from PCs to Macs. To say, I'm on a learning curve is somewhat of an understatement. Still my new computer – who I've dubbed "Macswell" – is jolly shiny! This switchover isn't stopping the essential business of Raging Swan Press, but it is slowing me down. Luckily, a good chum of mine – Simon Butler – know his Macs and he's been guiding me through the process.

Anyway, herein you'll find excerpts from some of Raging Swan's newest products as well as material from a golden oldie – *Brethren of the Crimson Altar* – one of my favourite early projects. I've also included a selection of advice articles from those posted weekly at creightonbroadhurst.com. Sadly, my

Borderland of Adventure campaign is still on hiatus as we try a new fangled set of rules that has recently come out. I am, however, still posting up old session summaries weekly on my blog, if you want to catch up on our old adventures!

In any event, I hope you enjoy the material in this GM's Monthly Miscellany, but more importantly I hope you find it useful and that it enhances your campaign. If you've got any comments or questions about Raging Swan Press, I'd love to hear from you; contact me at creighton@ragingswan.com.



GM ADVICE: 5 WAYS TO IMPROVE YOUR GMING

A WISE GM KNOWS THERE IS ALWAYS ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT. ONLY AN IDIOT BELIEVES HIS GAME IS PERFECT.

Although it might seem daunting, actually running a game is quite easy. Sadly, though, like many things mastering GMing can take a lifetime. Luckily, the good news is that improving your GMing skills isn't actually that difficult. You simply need to be open to learning.

To get started improving your GMing skills, consider one or more of the following tactics:

- **Watch the Players:** The way players react to situations in the game is a great indicator of the kind of encounters and adventures they enjoy. Keeping that in mind while gaming can provide valuable insights for a GM plotting upcoming sessions. Take time to review previous sessions. Did the players enjoy the time spent role-playing or did they simply get it out of the way quickly so they could get into the dungeon? Alternatively, do some of your players seem bored or distracted? If so, work out why!
- **Play More:** GMing is a vastly different experience to playing. A GM should spend as much time as possible on the other side of the screen to get a feel for the player's experience. Some situations, that from behind the GM's screen might seem like tremendous fun, could actually be frustrating for the players. Walking a mile in their shoes helps a GM craft sessions players look forward to (and remember).

- **Reduce, Reuse & Recycle:** I could write an entire post on this subject (and I might in the future). When prepping for a session, resist the urge to reinvent the wheel. Do you really need to stat up the evil wizard from scratch? Can you simply tweak an existing stat block in your library instead? It's faster and gives you more time for other prep. (After all, I'm virtually certain the players won't even notice if you change the spell selection and loot).

- **Read Widely:** Reading widely can give a GM a great base of knowledge. Reading almost anything can help improve a GM's game. For example, novels might contain exciting action sequences or interesting scenarios a GM can steal for his game while even articles in newspapers can spark a reader's imagination. On the internet, countless resources exist to help a GM improve his game, from messageboards to blogs they are all only a few clicks away!

- **Podcasts:** Loads of podcasts discuss gaming and GMing. I listen to podcasts while running. With no other distractions it's a great use of my time. Of course, you can also listen to podcasts while driving to work, working around the house and so on. I find that when I'm doing something physical, my brain is much more receptive to information and I almost always come away with ideas.



FULHURST MOORS AT A GLANCE

The windswept moorland around Fulhurst Moors was once a lush forest. Savage clans lived here and sacrificed captives and slaves in the bogs below the hills, where the waters of the Blackraven Creek cut through the acidic valley soil.

The sacrifices attracted strings of will-o'-wisps, who fed eagerly on their dying victims' fears. As the clansmen cut down trees for timber and firewood, the rain washed the nutrients out of the exposed soil. Desolate moor replaced the forest, the clans migrated elsewhere, and the wisps starved.

Centuries passed, and other humans settled beside Blackraven Creek. They built solid stone houses, raised flocks of rugged sheep on the moor and dug peat from the bog's brown waterlogged soil.

A few years ago, the wizard Kelurn Tinddar settled in Fulhurst Moors. Seeking ancient artefacts buried in the sacrificial sites, he struck a terrible pact with the will-o'-wisps yet haunting the bog: in return for the locations of ancient sacrificial sites, he began arranging deadly accidents and ambushes to both foster an atmosphere of fear in the village and provide the will-o'-wisps with fresh victims.

The effects of this terrible, secret compact are easily apparent to anyone visiting Fulhurst Moors. The anxiety is almost palpable, and only a handful of villagers are bold enough to move about as they please. The rest huddle behind their stone walls and speculate who will be the next to meet their doom upon the moor.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Ruler Minerva Meriweather

Government Autocracy

Population 140 (127 humans, 6 dwarves, 2 half-elves, 3 half-orcs, 2 halflings)

Alignments LN, LG, NG, N, CN, NE

Languages Common

Corruption -1; **Crime** -2; **Economy** -5; **Law** -3; **Lore** +1; **Society** -6

Qualities Insular, rumormongering citizens

Danger +20; **Disadvantages** Hunted

NOTABLE FOLK

Most of the population are nothing more than hardworking peasants. A few, however, are of interest to adventurers:

Aisha Brackenridge (location 1; NG female half-elf expert 2)

The feisty and independent proprietor of the village's general store, Aisha is irked by her neighbours' anxious prattling.

Bulgrim Graycairn (location 6; N male dwarf expert 3) Solid as the walls of his inn, Bulgrim is the proud owner of the Bell and Whistles.

Devyn Matson (location 7; LN male human fighter 1/warrior 3) Stern, Devyn takes his duties as constable seriously.

Eliza Reede (location 2; N female human adept 4) Practical and pragmatic, Eliza brews potions, delivers babies and cures minor ailments.

Esmond Wynne (location 5; LG male human cleric 5) Chaplain Esmond tends to the spiritual needs of Fulhurst Moors, and is plagued by his inability to console his congregation.

Grefford Hinks (location 3; CN male old human rogue 2/expert 2) Never a fan of authority, old man Hinks is the resident manufacturer of moonshine whiskey.

Kelurn Tinddar (location 8; NE male human wizard [necromancer] 6) Beneath his chubby stature and well respected position in the village, Kelurn hides a dark secret.

Minerva Meriweather (location 4; LN female middle-aged human expert 2) A prosperous wool merchant, Minerva has been mayor of Fulhurst Moors for over a decade.

NOTABLE LOCATIONS

Most of the village comprises peasant homes. A few locations, however, are of interest to adventurers:

1. **Brackenridge Mercantile:** Aisha Brackenridge and her wife Heather run this well-stocked general store.
2. **Eliza Reede's Hut:** From her modest hut, Eliza Reede offers a selection of potions and remedies.
3. **Grefford Hinks's House:** Thirsty villagers know to call on Grefford for a jug of moonshine.
4. **Mayor Meriweather's Home:** This large stone house is home to Mayor Minerva Meriweather and her husband Darinn.
5. **Temple:** The local temple is often half-empty at services these days, much to the chagrin of chaplain Esmond.
6. **The Bell and Whistles:** Despite the mayor having banned strong alcohol, the tavern is full almost every night.
7. **Village Hall:** The village hall functions as a meeting hall, courthouse and jail. The constable, Devyn Matson, lives here.
8. **Wizard's Tower:** Home of the wizard Kelurn.

MARKETPLACE

Resources & Industry Sheep farming, peat cutting

Base Value 400 gp; **Purchase Limit** 2,500 gp; **Spellcasting** 3rd; **Minor Items** 2d4; **Medium Items** 1d4; **Major Items** –

When the PCs arrive in Fulhurst Moors, the following items are for sale:

- **Potions & Oils** *endure elements* (50 gp)
- **Scrolls (Arcane)** *silent image* (25 gp), *ice storm* (700 gp)
- **Scroll (Divine)** *holy smite* (700 gp)
- **Wand** *mage armour* (28 chgs.; 420 gp)

VILLAGE LORE

A PC making a Knowledge (geography) or Knowledge (local) check may know some information about Fulhurst Moors. A successful check reveals all information revealed by a lesser check.

DC 10: The land around Fulhurst Moors is useless for raising crops, but the locals graze flocks of sheep in the hills and cut peat from the bog.

DC 15: Something sinister lurks in the vicinity of the village. Both locals and travellers have disappeared or turned up dead.

DC 20: The bog where the villagers cut peat is rumoured to hold the remains of ancient sacrificial sites.

VILLAGERS

Appearance Mainly of short and stocky build, most villagers have thick auburn hair and grey eyes. The peat cutters usually emit a persistent waterlogged odour.

Dress The shepherds of Fulhurst Moors favour sheepskin vests and grey woollen cloaks, while the peat cutters wear long oilskin trousers, rugged shirts, wide brimmed hats and solid boots.

Nomenclature *male* Eruc, Garel, Huine, Kalet, Worric; *female* Ashina, Dedra, Kalen, Lyeisse, Therdra; *family* Beynet, Drackir, Kalsard, Thaelm, Wyerran.

WHISPERS & RUMOURS

A PC can use Diplomacy to gather information about Fulhurst Moors and its surroundings. This takes 1d4 hours and requires a DC 10 check. A PC exceeding this check gains one additional rumour for each 5 points by which he exceeded DC 10. Use the table below, to determine which rumour(s) the PC learns.

D6	RUMOUR
1	Old man Grefford hides a whiskey still somewhere on the moor.
2	A local youngster was found dead in the bog, covered with burns as if he had been struck by lightning.
3	The parents of the halfling twins Aisha and Heather Brackenridge adopted suffered a horrible fate while travelling to the village.
4*	The misfortunes plaguing the village are caused by the spirits of the ancient dead, who are angry the peat cutting has disturbed their burial sites.
5	If you know what to look for, you can see signs of long abandoned settlements on the moor.
6*	When Eliza Reede goes off to gather ingredients for her potions, she sometimes turns into a crow or fox.

*False rumour



INFESTED SEWERS: AN ALTERNATE DUNGEON

Sewers are a vital part of any large community. They help prevent disease by filtering out waste and give excess water accumulated during a rainstorm somewhere to go instead of on the roads or into a citizen's basement. But sewers also attract a certain amount of danger, be it annoying beasts like skittering rats or terrifying monsters such as otyugh dwelling mere feet from the populace. These creatures' presence is seldom deliberate; instead they crawl, squirm or barge their way into the sewers in search of food or shelter. And when they nestle in and begin to breed, that's when the infestation begins.

Infested sewers are often some of the first places local authorities send the PCs when they arrive in a new settlement. Whether to test their mettle or to simply send someone no one will miss into a life-endangering situation, infested sewers make for classic encounters, but they are often designed to be extremely short and linear affairs. Their lack of terrain options and physical features are often uninspiring for GMs, making the design of a truly memorable adventure within an infested sewer a chore. This section provides GMs with advice for transforming common tunnels and canals into a memorable adventure site.

DEFINING THE DUNGEON

An infested sewer is a series of underground tunnels, usually no wider than 20 feet across built underneath a settlement in order to control the flow of water and waste. Because sewers tend to stretch the entire length of a settlement, the only limit to the size of an infested sewer is the size of the settlement above. Places within the sewer that aren't infested are likely boring to explore, so choose a specific area defined by the structures above or near the sewer. For example, running a dungeon in "the infested catacombs beneath the trade district" helps to define the dungeon more clearly than the more vaguely described "catacombs beneath Dulwich".

DESIGNING THE DUNGEON

Designing an infested sewer as a dungeon is little different to designing any other dungeon. Like most classic dungeon settings, a sewer is a subterranean setting specifically designed to perform a specific task. Unlike most dungeons, which are built as strongholds, vaults or similar defensible positions, a sewer's primary function is to allow things to exit the area, typically using flowing water. Additionally, sewers are seldom spacious and are typically designed in a very predictable, almost formulaic manner and seldom possess manufactured traps. Below are some considerations a GM could use when designing infested sewers.

Dangerous: Infested sewers are literally crawling with life and most of it is hostile. Increase the chances of encountering wandering monsters within an infested sewer by up to 20% to represent this threat.

Filth: Settlers use their settlement's sewers to dispose of just about anything and everything, from rotten food and discarded goods to their own biological waste. Because of this, all sewers (not just infested ones) are disgusting places. Upon entering a sewer, a character becomes sickened for as long as she remains within the sewer unless she makes a DC 15 Fortitude save. Each hour she remains within the sewer, she must save again or become sickened.

Far worse than the stench is the sewer water itself. Creatures swimming in sewer water must make a DC 12 Fortitude save or contract filth fever:

- **Filth Fever:** *save* Fortitude DC 12; *onset* 1d3 days; *frequency* 1/day; *effect* 1d3 Dex damage and 1d3 Con damage; *Cure* 2 consecutive saves.

At the GM's discretion, characters suffering hit point damage may take up to a -2 penalty on saving throws made against filth fever, as their wounds are prone to infection in such a filthy environment.

Flowing Water: A sewer's primary function is to transport filth away from the settlement. Typically this is done using running water. Although the water isn't as fast as, say, river rapids, it moves quickly enough that creatures must make a DC 10 Swim check to move through the water. In some locations, the water is considerably rougher, such as when water is gushing out from one part of the sewer into another. This increases the DC of Swim checks.

Landless: Not all sewers are designed with adventurers in mind. Most, especially those built within small settlements, are more likely to have simple passageways without any way to avoid trekking through the murk and filth. In such a sewer, the PCs are always considered to be swimming for the purpose of the filth feature (see above) and all passable terrain is considered difficult terrain.

Unkempt: Sewers often fall into disarray because few settlers are willing to perform the necessary maintenance work. As a result, there is a 20% chance every door, manhole, lock or similar device within the sewer is stuck and cannot be opened without a DC 15 Strength check.

RUNNING THE DUNGEON

Running an infested sewer as an adventure site is little different to a traditional dungeon. Below are some considerations GMs should keep in mind when using an infested sewer as a dungeon.

Concealment: Sewers of all sorts are seldom visited by surface-dwelling folk. As a result shadows permeate the area. As most adventurers rely on torches or torch-like spell effects to see in such areas, most of the sewer's unwanted residents make use of the shadows to ambush intruders. The smartest creatures, however, often rely on hit-and-run tactics, striking fast before scurrying back into the shadows.

Slick: Sewers are damp and filled with running water. When this water splashes onto the few passable routes within the sewer it creates areas where it is difficult to move safely. This terrain is considered difficult terrain and requires a DC 2 Acrobatics check to safely move across if the passageway is at least 3 feet wide. If the passageway is narrower, the DC increases as noted in the Acrobatics skill description.

Stealing: Although the sound of running water obscures soft sounds, it is difficult to move quietly while walking in a sewer because the vaulted spaces creates an echo, magnifying the sound of trespassers. All creatures using Stealth to move silently on land suffer a -4 penalty on Stealth checks. Creatures lurking within the sewer's filthy water do not suffer this penalty.

Wandering Monsters: Most creatures move into a sewer because humanoid waste provides an adequate (though not preferred) supply of food that requires little work to obtain. Most creatures living in sewers are scavengers and seldom scoff twice at attacking whoever wanders into their domain. Using the darkness to their advantage, most sewer dwellers wait until their prey is alone or preoccupied to strike. For this reason, there is a 1 in 20 chance during any encounter an additional monster joins the fray, eager to snag a bite of hero to sate its own belly. Each round a monster does not appear in a given combat increases the likelihood one appears on subsequent rounds by 1 in 20.

Additionally, remember a creature suffers a -1 penalty on opposed Perception checks for every 10 feet between the creature and a hidden foe.

SACKING THE DUNGEON

Despite being a trash refuse, sewers are filled with the promise of wealth and treasure, though PCs often have to search harder for it then they would at other adventuring sites. Listed below are inspirational ideas for unique, thematic treasures that await PCs adventuring within an infested sewer.

Fungi: The dim light and the ready source of fertilization make fungi a common find within most sewers, especially types

that thrive in damp environments such as mould. Although most fungi possess insignificant value, some rare types are used to craft different types of poison or as alchemical reagents. The following types of poison (and their gp value) can be crafted using rare fungi harvested from the sewers: drow poison (25 gp), id moss (40 gp), stripped toadstool (60 gp) and violet venom (250 gp).

Hoards: Many of the different kinds of creatures infesting sewers also hoard shiny objects within their nests. Small, light objects such as gold and silver coins, keys and jewellery can all be hoarded in this manner, assuming the creatures are large enough to gather these treasures. A single hoard is usually worth as much as a CR-equivalent encounter for the PCs. Larger hoards kept by more powerful (or more numerous) creatures can exceed this figure.

Immurement: The grisly practice of entombing someone within the sewers' walls serves as a means of execution through starvation and dehydration. In most civilized societies, immurement is illegal, so most tombs PCs stumble across hold missing persons or ritualistic sacrifices. Masterwork chains and locks, masterwork daggers and missing persons bounties are trademark "treasures" the PCs can recover from a sewer. The reward for a missing person (whether immured or not) is often equal to 1 gp per 100 residents within the city, up to four times the recommended gp value for an encounter of the PCs' level.

Labour: Occasionally, PCs can find a way to make themselves useful within a sewer, such as by clearing blockages or replacing a damaged manhole. These tasks are menial and seldom worth more than 1 silver per task. If the task requires skilled labour, a PC may make an appropriate Profession check to complete the task. Since this check represents a full day's work, the PCs must remain within the sewer for 8 hours while the work is completed. Typically there is a chance for a random encounter with the sewer's denizens every hour. This time does not count against the amount of time the PCs need to perform their job.

Taxidermy: The hides of powerful creatures infesting sewers are often worth a sizable sum to collectors, conspiracy theorists or local authorities. Typically, the amount of gold offered for a creature is set when the PCs accept the job. This value is often enough gp to make up for at least half of the recommended wealth for the encounters the PCs face within the infested sewers, with discovered treasure making up the rest of their bounty. However, if a character with Profession (tanner) or a similar skill prepares the body before it is delivered to the authorities, increase the bounty the PCs receive by an amount equal to the Profession check result.

BRETHREN OF THE CRIMSON ALTAR

The Brethren of the Crimson Altar are a quartet of vampires dedicated to serving the *Crimson Altar of Kulan-Wyr*, an ancient artefact of fell provenance. The number of Brethren fluctuates over time and depends upon the current members reaching agreement on whether a new member should join their august, if somewhat depraved, company. Currently, the Brethren are:

- **Tregereth Faull:** LE female human vampire wizard (diviner) 5/loremaster 8.
- **Daveth Goninan:** NE male half-orc vampire fighter 10.
- **Margh Vosper:** LE male human vampire aristocrat 4/bard 9.
- **Terl Yarg:** NE male doppelganger vampire rogue 5/shadowdancer 2.

Each of the Brethren is a powerful adversary in his or her own right but together they are a major threat to even a formidable party of adventurers. Although bound together by their common cause of the *Crimson Altar*, they are disparate individuals with their own goals and desires. Tregereth Faull, for example, ever hunts for lost, esoteric knowledge whilst Margh Vosper loves the limelight, spending many evenings performing for the great and good of the town. In contrast, Terl Yarg instinctively lurks in the shadows and delights in stealing jewellery and valuable trinkets and works of art, but of the four, Daveth Goninan is the most savage. Delighting in wanton slaughter he is the most likely to drag the Brethren into a confrontation with vengeful adventurers or the local authorities.

The Brethren (with the exception of Daveth) dwell in and around a large town or city, hiding their true natures while advancing both their individual agendas and the schemes of the *Crimson Altar of Kulan-Wyr*. Rarely together in public, it is unlikely that any band of PCs would be unlucky enough to battle more than one at a time. In dealing with troublemakers (read nosy adventurers) they prefer subtlety and tact over attention-grabbing violence. Instead of attacking irritating adventurers, they prefer to send them off on wild goose chases towards the location of the Crimson Altar. For those adventurers that start to get close to their secret, they try to frame them for crimes they did not commit.

As a last resort, they use intermediaries and disguises to hire dozens of thugs which they unleash against irritant adventurers. If the PCs suspect the presence of a vampire, they direct an enslaved vampire (of which they have a small network around the city they use to keep a watchful eye on local events) to lead the attack. The enslaved vampire (of course) has orders not to speak of its master's involvement and is established in its own lair so that its destruction does not occur under its master's own roof. In this way, the vampires seek to deflect the PCs' suspicions away from themselves and onto their dupe.

COMBAT & TACTICS

Unless they choose to do so, all of the Brethren but Dareth rarely enter physical combat. Protected by hired thugs and favoured minions (who are unaware of their true nature) they lurk out of reach of all but the most puissant adventurers.

If they do enter combat, none of the Brethren (again with the exception of Daveth) fight to the "death", instead fleeing if the fortune of battle turns against them. In flight (as in battle) Tregereth, Margh and Terl do not use any abilities that clearly mark them as a vampire. Well aware that their greatest defence is their opponent's ignorance of their nature the vampires use every other means at their disposal to defeat their foes. Only when detection is impossible, victory is certain or when forced to assume *gaseous form* do they use their vampiric abilities.

IN YOUR CAMPAIGN

Brethren of the Crimson Altar's is easy to insert into a home campaign. If the GM does not want to use the Brethren as a distinct group, he can easily utilise one or more of its members as random encounters, the PCs' arch-nemesis and so on.

It is best to insert the Brethren into the campaign long before the PCs come into conflict with them. Perhaps the PCs are in need of a sage and contact Tregereth Faull or Terl Yarg steals an item from them. Alternatively, the PCs could attend one of Margh Vosper's performances.

Before placing the Brethren in his campaign, a GM must determine how far the *Crimson Altar of Kulan-Wyr's* plans have advanced. Is the ancient high priest close to his goal of shattering the boundary that keeps Death's legions at bay or is this goal far off?

A GENERIC NOTE

In places, this document speaks of "the town", "the village" and so on, avoiding specifics. This is a deliberate design decision taken to give the GM as much "wiggle room" as possible when inserting these powerful NPCs into his campaign. The text assumes that the vampires dwell in the same general location as each other (a large town or city) but they could just as easily be living some distance apart. This makes it harder for them to hunt, however, and thus they'll probably come to the PCs' or the authorities' attention sooner or later.

Similarly, the *Crimson Altar* is hidden below a forlorn, ruined fortress. The fortress remains unnamed and can stand in any remote, out of the way locale. This locale does not need to be near the Brethrens' "home" town because the vampires can travel there using Tregereth's *teleport*. (She also have *greater teleport* in her spellbook.)

LAIRS

Each of the Brethren has established their own home-lair. Vampire spawn and enslaved vampires protect their inner sanctums, while living servants (many of them unaware of the vampire's true natures) provide a façade of respectability.

Tregereth Faull: The diviner dwells in a stoutly-built, tall townhouse on an affluent street. Extensive cellars below her house (which she can access via a narrow shaft reaching to her private chambers) contain a vast amount of clothes – many excellent examples of styles long since gone out of fashion – and her coffin. A few liveried vampire spawn protect her coffin, while impeccably turned out living servants run the main house.

Daveth Goninan: The only one of the Brethren to not dwell in town, Daveth guards the *Crimson Altar of Kulan-Wyr* in its remote, crumbling fortress. Here he oversees the undead guardians of the places and hunts down the living captives his comrades bring him for sport. (In this way, they both control his bloodlust and keep him from taking actions that could draw unwelcome attention to the Brethren's actions).

Margh Vosper: Un-Life has been good to Margh; the rewards garnered by his frequent performances enable him to live in comparative luxury in a small estate surrounded by richly appointed gardens in the noble quarter. High walls protect his privacy while the shadowy depths of several thick stands of trees provide areas in which he can occasionally meet with those he must speak with during the day.

Terl Yarg: By day, Terl lurks in a rambling series of bricked up cellars that run deep below a ramshackle tenement building in the Poor Quarter. Secretly the owner of the building above, he blocked off access to the cellars decades ago and has dwelt there alone ever since.

Secret passages provide access to the sewers enabling the master thief to reach anywhere in the immediate vicinity quickly. Narrow crawl-ways also lead to several places within the building including an apartment in which he ostensibly dwells in his guise as the building's owner.

HOOKS AND SCHEMES

The Brethren do not simply sit around waiting for things to happen. They are proactive and organised, destroying any threats to their existence. In particular, Tregereth Faull meets and interacts with many adventurers in her guise as a sage specialising in magic item identification and all manners of divinations. She never acts openly against adventurers but those strong in the causes of good and law often come to grief at the hands of her hired thugs or end their lives deep in the wilderness – usually in the location of the fortress that holds the *Crimson Altar* – in search of a treasure that never was.

Little of import occurs in the Poor Quarter without Terl Yarg hearing of it. In one of his many guises, and using his innate

ability to read others' thoughts, few secrets are safe from the lonely doppelganger. Superbly skilled at infiltration, Terl is able to steal items of import or plant them on those the Brethren wish to implicate in his crimes (also inflicting this treatment on rival thieves).

Of course, the Brethren must hunt and do so by stalking those unlikely to be missed – travellers, itinerant tradesmen, outcasts and the like. Fugitives, sailors, mercenary guards and the like are all favourite targets as no one is going to miss those whose business involves frequent travel. They rarely target locals and never take anyone of true importance; in preference, they much prefer to hunt strangers and travellers.

The Brethren must also acquire sacrifices for the *Crimson Altar* and do so in a similar fashion to their hunting, transporting them to the altar using *teleport* and similar magic.

If travellers wander too close to the altar's resting place, Daveth unleashes the fortress' guardians upon them. Leading the assault himself the undead paralyse or otherwise subdue as many victims as possible before carrying them back to the fortress where they end their lives screaming upon the *Crimson Altar* itself.

LORE

Character with ranks in Knowledge (religion) can learn about the Brethren of the *Crimson Altar* with a successful skill check. A successful check reveals all information revealed by a lesser check.

DC 12: This is a vampire, a powerful undead creature.

DC 17: Vampires are able to summon bats and wolves to aid them in battle and have many defences including resistance to many weapons, cold and electricity.

DC 22: Vampires are very hard to kill as they are able to regenerate damage dealt to them. Exposure to bright sunlight kills them as does immersion in running water or driving a wooden stake through a helpless vampire's heart.

Additionally, characters can learn about the *Crimson Altar of Kulan-Wyr* with a Knowledge (history) or (religion) check. A successful check reveals all information revealed by a lesser check.

DC 25: The Brethren of the *Crimson Altar* are an ancient shadowy cabal of vampires that serve the *Crimson Altar of Kulan-Wyr*. Their number varies over the years, but all are powerful and twisted foes dedicated to Death.

DC 30: The *Crimson Altar* is an object of ancient origin. It has powerful abilities; countless lives have ended upon its hard, blood splattered surface, but its fell purpose remains unknown.

DC 35: Said to be have carved from the very bedrock of Hell, the *Crimson Altar* lies in a mile-deep cave below a forlorn, crumbling fortress of ancient origin. A maze of natural caverns and undead guardians protect the altar.

GM ADVICE: HOW TO DEAL WITH GM FATIGUE

NO MATTER HOW MUCH YOU ENJOY RUNNING GAMES FOR YOUR FRIENDS, SOMETIMES YOU JUST NEED TO TAKE A BREAK. BUT WHILE YOU REST, WHAT HAPPENS TO YOUR CAMPAIGN?

By and large, the GM is the most invested member of any gaming group. After all, he is likely the person spending the most time and money getting ready for the game. With modules to prep, figures to buy and paint and a campaign world to develop GMing can seem like a full-time job. Other times, the pressures of real life can impose on a GM's schedule. That's why, every GM suffers from GM fatigue every now and then.

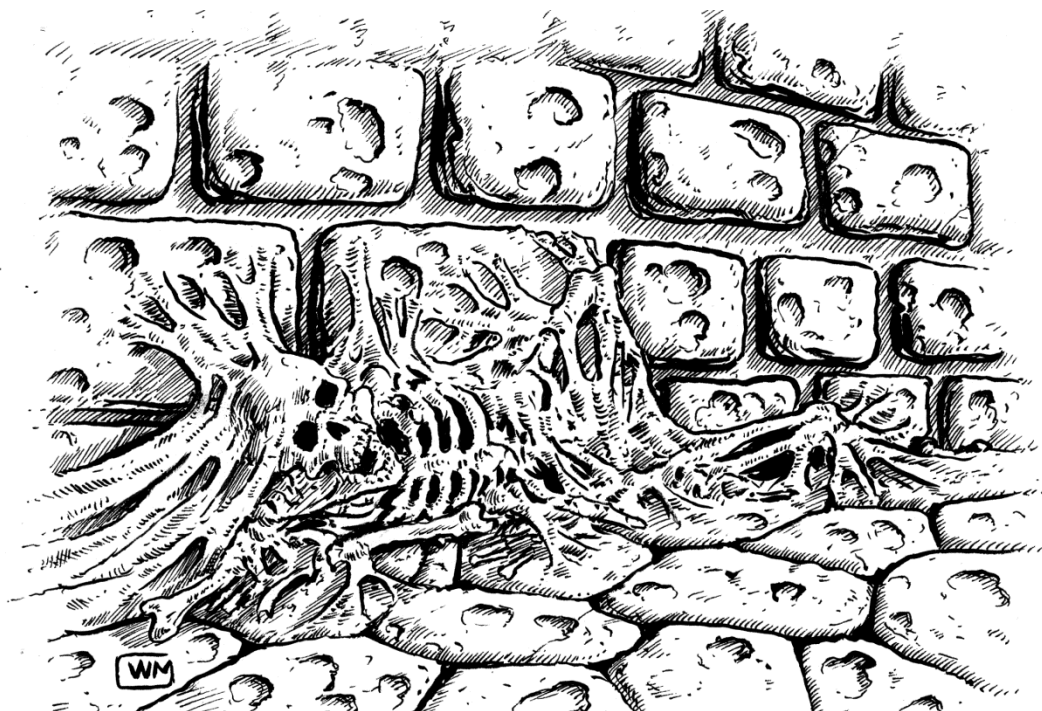
How you deal with GM fatigue is critical. The GM's influence on the game is pivotal. If he is tired, unmotivated or off his game the entire session suffers.

Sometimes, the fatigue is a short-term issue. If this is the case, you've got a couple of options:

- **Cancel the session.** After all, missing one session isn't going to kill the group or derail a regular game.
- **Play Something Else.** You could play a board game or a card game. You still get to game, but you don't have to prepare.
- **Someone Else Runs a One-Shot.** This only works normally if you give the other players a decent amount of warning, and requires a heroic volunteer to step into the breach.

If the fatigue is a more long-standing problem, the group needs to come to a more drastic solution:

- **End the Campaign:** This is the "nuclear" option and should only be used as a last resort. Normally, by the time a GM suffers burnout the campaign has been running for some time. It's a shame to throw all that progress away.
- **Pause the Campaign:** Sometime, the GM still enjoys the game but needs to take a break. In this instance, getting someone else to run something for a while is a great solution. Most commercially purchased adventures last for multiple sessions which provides the main GM a decent break to recharge his batteries.
- **Use a Temporary GM:** Last year in my Borderland of Adventure campaign, I took a short break from GMing. One of the other players volunteered to run a one-shot adventure and luckily it fit perfectly into the campaign setting! He ran the adventure, and we set it in the same geographical area. This was cool as it kept everyone else in touch with the campaign, gave me a break (and let me play) and enabled everyone else to roll up new characters that could conceivably enter the main campaign in the future.



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