

Blood of the Innocent

By Eric Avedissian

In London, the daughter of a member of Parliament, Reginald Stokes, is kidnapped and a threatening letter written in blood is mailed to his office demanding a ransom of 2,000 pounds. If Stokes doesn't pay up in a week's time, his daughter will be killed. A jittery Stokes contacts Detective Inspector Richard Pruitt of Scotland Yard and the police begin their investigation, which comes to a screeching halt when one of the investigators is found decapitated and the words "No Coppers" carved across his severed head. Stokes doesn't know where to turn next, and asks the Amazing Zoltar and his magicians for assistance. Zoltar claims he's not much of a detective, but can put some intrepid heroes on the case, and this sets Stokes' mind at ease. Zoltar contacts the heroes and asks if they'd be interested in investigating the disappearance of Stokes' daughter Lydia.

Background

Lydia Stokes is 22 years old and an accomplished musician. She's played piano and sang at the Royal Albert Hall many times, and her beauty won many admirers in London's social circles. Stokes is very protective of his daughter and hires bodyguards to watch over her. On the night she was kidnapped, the bodyguards were found unconscious in the hallway outside her room. Both men claim they were struck by an invisible force. Reginald Stokes had a few enemies in Parliament, the chief one being Sir Lionel Nordaby of the House of Lords, whose feuding with Stokes is legendary. Nordaby says he'd never stoop so low as to kidnap Stokes' daughter, and denied any involvement. The dead police officer was Inspector John Reeves, a constable with Scotland Yard who traced the bloody note to a flat in Salisbury rented by a Hobart Watson. A conversation with the flat's landlord reveals that Watson was a quiet, secretive bloke who kept to himself. The landlord says Watson came from a village nearby, Natterty Bog.

Natterty Bog

The village is comprised of a dozen Tudor-style homes and thatched roof cottages. Rural and remote, the village is far from bucolic splendor of the English countryside; there's something not quite right here, and the heroes have a sense of impending dread about the place. Perhaps it's because the village has no church, or that the graveyard seems a bit overgrown, or that the locals appear to be gossiping when the heroes enter the village. Whatever it is, the heroes get a sense they're being watched.

Goat's Head Pub

Built in 1730 on the sight of a pagan sacrifice, the Goat's Head Pub is a dank, dark, mysterious village tavern in Natterty Bog frequented by warlocks and witches. Crowley's Golden Dawn Society often holds informal meetings in the pub's back room. The pub's owner, Selwyn Mulbury, a stocky gent with a beard, doesn't know anything about a Hobart Watson. A Notice roll indicates Mulbury is lying. Truth is, Mulbury knows Watson because the two are secret adepts of the Golden Dawn Society. Mulbury is protecting Watson and attempts to steer the heroes in the wrong direction.

It'll take some doing to persuade Mulbury to tell where Watson is. Watson's cottage is in the village, a thatched roof home near the outskirts of town.

Nordaby Manor

Heroes making an Investigation or Streetwise roll can find another shocking secret about the village. It is the ancestral home of Sir Lionel Nordaby's family. According to records stored at town hall, Nordaby's family acquired the mansion from Sir Daniel Primrose, a leading 18th century occultist who allegedly baptized his son Lucifer and who constructed an elaborate ritual room in his mansion's cellar. Village records state an "L. Primrose" was born in 1761 and died in 1832, leaving the estate to his son, a "John Nordaby." A Smarts roll reveals Primrose changed the family's last name to possibly avoid connections with his controversial father. This means Sir Lionel Nordaby is a direct descendant of a family of wicked occultists!

Nordaby Manor, originally Primrose Manor, was built in 1720 and is a brick manor house with a large English garden overlooking wide, open fields. The house is festooned with gargoyle statues arranged in bizarre locations throughout the estate. On the inside, the manor house appears comfy and cozy, but some of the portraits appear to be leering at the viewers and the library does have too many volumes on witchcraft and magic and no family Bible or sacred texts.

If the heroes investigate Nordaby Manor, they are greeted at the door by a butler, Mr.

MacGregor?, who informs the heroes Sir Nordaby is not at home and is in fact in London.

If the heroes snoop around the manor anyway, they find a small cottage, inside of which a bed equipped with restraints. Heroes making a Search roll find a woman's ring on the floor near the bed. The inscription in the ring reads, "To Lydia from Father."

This is the ring Reginald Stokes gave his daughter Lydia for her birthday last year.

The Ancient Rite

Hobart Watson does not expect to see the heroes if they come calling. He denies everything and threatens to call the village constable. If threatened, he uses his magic to stun the heroes and make his escape.

Watson, a member of the Golden Dawn Society, kidnapped Lydia Stokes and is holding her ransom under orders from Nordaby, who is also a Golden Dawn Society member. Nordaby's goals come from Aleister Crowley himself.

The plan is to sacrifice Lydia Stokes in a cruel blood ritual at Stonehenge. The ritual, designed to boost the orders' magical abilities, will also claim the life of the daughter of Nordaby's political rival. With Stokes a broken man, he will pose less of a threat in Parliament, clearing the way for Nordaby to introduce aggressive legislation to ban all magic practices, beginning with Zoltar's academy. Crowley hopes to ensnare Zoltar in a political chess game, one Zoltar and his followers would be destined to lose.

Stonehenge

Built between 3,000 B.C. and 1,500 B.C. by ancient tribes, Stonehenge is a circle of concentric rings comprised of stone megaliths. The exact origins are unknown, but the Golden Dawn Society uses it for magic rituals.

Lydia Stokes is held in a small cottage not far from Stonehenge. When the time is right, she will be clothed in white and brought to Stonehenge, where Nordaby and the rest of the Golden Dawn Society will be cloaked in black and waiting. Crowley doesn't participate in the ritual, leaving the details to his able associate, Nordaby. Crowley is several miles away, monitoring the event

through magical means. He wouldn't risk his safety out in public just yet.

The ritual involves reading from a magic book, lighting a few candles, chanting a few chants and sacrificing a human and disposing of the remains in a bonfire. When Lydia is brought to Stonehenge, a roaring bonfire illuminates the faces standing in the ring of stones.

How the heroes want to approach this is up to them. There are 20 cultists plus Nordaby. Lydia is bound and on the stone altar with the bonfire roaring nearby. If the heroes are spotted, Nordaby orders his men to attack. They are armed with daggers and black magic spells.

Aftermath

If Nordaby is killed, the cultists flee Stonehenge. Obviously, there's some explaining to do as to how a Member of Parliament is found dead wearing a black robe at Stonehenge.

If Lydia is killed in the ritual, Crowley has won the day. The shock of losing a daughter pushes Reginald Stokes over the edge and he resigns. If Nordaby survives, once he returns to London, he introduces legislation banning magic from England. Zoltar's academy closes and Zoltar pushes his movement underground just like Crowley's. A stealth magic war rages throughout England.

If Lydia is rescued, Reginald Stokes is overjoyed and the heroes are greeted with fanfare and praise. A gala ball is held in their honor and they meet the king and other royal dignitaries. If Nordaby survives as well as Lydia, he is brought to trial for kidnapping and attempted murder and eventually sentenced to prison. Crowley loses one strong ally and the heroes' actions are watched by a brooding Crowley hungry for revenge.