



THE LAUGHTER OF DEATH

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Requires the Savage Worlds rules, available at www.greatwhitegames.com.



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INTRODUCTION

This full-length adventure is set in the town of Brasov, high in the Transylvania Alps, and introduces the Circus of Death to the Rippers. Due to the requirements of the adventure, it must take place in the late summer of 1892. GM's wishing to change the year or locale should feel free to do so, but much of the background will need reworking.

There is plenty of combat, almost all of it against members of the Circus of Death (see page 14), but clue hunting and investigation skills will also prove beneficial. Novice characters may have a hard fight on their hands, primarily due to the dangerous foes.

This adventure is independent of the *Rippers* Plot Point campaign and can be run at any time.

GM OVERVIEW

The adventure revolves around the machinations of the Ring Master of the Circus Fabulosus (Latin for "Legendary Circus"), a branch of the Circus of Death. In 1688, the year of the Great Fire and plague, the Ring Master, a man of many vices, made a deal with the Devil by the light of the last full moon of summer.

In return for immortality and power, he swore to deliver seven innocent souls to Hell every 51 years (his age when he made the deal). The Devil, ever one to make things difficult even for his willing disciples, forced the Ring Master to take his victims from a certain town, and all must be killed within the space of the last full moon of the 51-year period. In a bid to distract attention away from his nefarious activities, the Ring Master only sacrifices orphans or gypsy children.

Since the circus was founded, the Ring Master has attracted other demons to swell the ranks of the performers. Worse still, he knows a ritual to actually convert innocent souls into demons. Bearded ladies, freaks, killer clowns, and worse, haunt the dark boardwalks of the Circus Fabulosus. In Romania, evil wears a smiling face.

It has been 51 years, less the current three days of the impending full moon, since the last sacrifices. As the curtain opens on this adventure, the Ring Master begins his search for seven suitable souls. For the Ring Master this is just another contract to fulfill; for the heroes, this is guaranteed to be the performance of a lifetime.

THE HISTORY OF BRASOV

No one knows when Brasov was founded. It is first mentioned in written texts dating back to 1235, when the town was known as Corona. Over the centuries it has had many names, but Brasov is the current one. It lies near the borders of Moldavia and Wallachia, making it an ideal trade centre. Brasov has always been a trading town, and in the 16th century there were more than 45 corporations, or guilds, based there. Naturally, the guildmasters were very influential in the running of the town.

Brasov's defensive wall was started in the 14th century in response to the presence of the Turkish armies south of the River Danube. During this period, it was the best-defended city in Transylvania. The various guilds were each responsible for maintaining and defending their own towers and sections of wall. Much of the defenses still stand today, though the central fortress and parts of the wall have disappeared.

The Renaissance came to Brasov in the 16th century, when Deacon Coresi printed the first books in Romania there. Several schools, libraries, and printing presses grew up in the city, making it a place of culture as well as trade.

The year 1688 is one that will never be forgotten in Brasov. As well as fighting the armies of the invading Austrians, a fire almost razed the town to the ground. If that were not enough, plague followed the fire. However, Brasov survived these disasters, and quickly grew back to its former status.

The 19th century, the current epoch, has been a time of great change. The city walls were partly removed to allow for growth—factories replaced the old guilds and trade grew. Transylvania is part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1892, not Romania. The "Gazeta de Transilvania," the first political newspaper in Transylvania, was first published here in 1838.

Though the majority of inhabitants speak Romanian, Hungarian is the second language and is spoken by around a quarter of the population (1 in 4). German speakers number some 8 per cent (1 in 12).

ACT 1: THE CIRCUS IS COMING

The characters are invited to attend a meeting with Mrs Harker at the Hotel Royal in Bucharest. Meeting in Bucharest is highly unusual, for it lies in the heart of Dracula's domain and is usually dangerous for Rippers to visit. Whatever the reason, it must be important.

SCENE 1: MEETING IN BUCHAREST

As the adventure begins, the heroes sit in a small side room—Mrs. Harker has just entered.

"Thank you for your time," she says, moving a chair and sitting down. "Although meeting here is risky, the matter at hand is most serious. A contact in Brasov, a town high in the Carpathians, has recently uncovered a tome he believes contains information relevant to our cause. Normally we would have met in Budapest, but traveling the length of Transylvania is too dangerous. Dracula will not expect us to come from the south.

"Unfortunately, my husband and I leave tomorrow on a hunt, and we do not place our trust in others easily. Van Helsing has vouched for your discretion and talents, and I have faith in his judgement. Before I reveal any further details, I must ask if you will travel to Brasov immediately and return the tome to the safehouse?"

Mina pauses while the heroes decide whether or not to accept the undertaking. If they accept, she continues.

"Thank you. Your contact is Father Anton Borescu, the senior priest at the Black Church. The church lies in the heart of the town and is unmistakable. He is expecting someone from our organization, but obviously he does not know who." Mina pulls a sealed envelope from her clutch bag and hands it to you.

"This is a letter of introduction, vouching for your identities and trustworthiness. Please hand it to Father Borescu when you arrive. In return, he will present you with a diary, a very old diary. According to his description, there is a bloodstain on the back page, which should allow you to identify it.

"I have arranged for a carriage to be at your disposal. A driver can be provided if you require one. If there are no questions, I shall bid you farewell and good luck."

Chances are, the heroes have some questions. Rather than second guess everything they may ask, answers to the most obvious questions are provided below. For questions not listed, either use your knowledge of the town (gained from reading the

adventure) or have Mina simply state that she does not know the answer.

Q: How do we recognize Father Borescu?

A: "He is a well-built man in his late fifties, with short white hair and a beard. The little finger of his left hand is missing the last joint. Ask him how this happened. He will tell you that a dog bit it off when he was a child."

Q: Where is Brasov, exactly?

A: "Brasov lies on the north-west slope of Tampa Mountain, at an altitude of 1800 feet above sea level. The main road north from Bucharest runs through Ploiesti and then through the mountains to Brasov. Stay on that road and you cannot miss the town."

Q: What is so special about this book?

A: "Father Borescu believes that it is an early diary written by Count Dracula. If this is true, it may provide an insight into our foes' location and his diabolical machinations. For reasons that are obvious, its safe return is of paramount importance."

SCENE 2: THE FIRST ENCOUNTER

Brasov lies approximately 100 miles north of Bucharest. The trip to Ploiesti is across the flat Wallachian Plain, but the remainder of the trip involves a long climb through the Carpathian Mountains, over the summit, and halfway down the other side. In total, the trip takes a little over eight days, the heroes arriving in the late afternoon on the first night of the last full moon of summer. There is no need to draw their attention to the latter fact, but any player who asks about the moon should be told the truth.

On their way to the Black Church, which lies in the center of town, the characters hear a child's scream from a nearby alley. On investigating, they see a giant of a man, bare-chested with rippling muscles, carrying a child over his shoulder toward a brightly painted caravan. The giant is Atlas, a Strongman in the Circus of Death, but his motives, at present, are benign.

Should the heroes call out, he stops and stares at them for a moment before continuing toward the caravan. If allowed to complete his journey, he picks up a large piece of paper and carries it over to a nearby wall. He hands the child a nail and uses one vast hand to hold up the poster. The child places the nail in one corner, and Atlas pushes it into the brickwork using only his thumb.

Of course, some characters may opt to start a fight based on what they witness. Atlas tries to defend the child with his own body and use his fists to inflict



nonlethal damage on his attackers. On the third round, the door to the caravan crashes open and a tall man wearing a ring master's costume confronts the characters verbally.

"STOP!" he shouts in a loud, deep voice. "What are you doing to my strongman?"

Hopefully the characters cease their hostility at this point. The ringmaster, Aitor Nus, demands to know what is happening. If the characters suggest the giant was harming the child, Aitor laughs.

"Atlas wouldn't harm a fly. The child is helping him put up posters." He reaches down and grabs a large colored poster from the rear of the wagon. He holds it up for you to see. It reads, "Circus Fabulosus, Appearing in Brasov for three nights only. Ringmaster Aitor Nus presents strongmen, clowns, and bearded ladies—spectacles to astound and shock."

"So you see," he continues, "there is nothing to worry about. Ah! Here comes the child's mother now." Glancing round, you see a peasant lady approaching from the end of the alley.

Atlas lowers the child to the floor and she gives him a big kiss on the cheek. The mother takes the child by the hand, curtsies to Aitor, and then heads out of the alley. She pays you little attention. As they turn into the main street, you hear the mother say, "Be careful in future. You don't want to end up like an orphan, do you?"

Any character who speaks Latin understands the circus' name, which means "Legendary Circus." Once the mother and child are gone, Aitor doffs his hat and calls Atlas into the wagon.

"If you will excuse us, gentlemen," he remarks, "we have many more posters to put up." He moves to the front of the wagon, picks up the reins, and the wagon slowly trundles off down the alley.

☠ **Aitor Nus:** As Ring Master (page 16). Aitor Nus is several hundred years old but looks like a man in his early fifties. He is highly intelligent, arrogant, totally evil, and unwilling to let anyone stand in the way of his continued immortality. He commands absolute loyalty from his minions, whose fate is tied to his own well being. His name is a stage name and a play on the Latin word Aeternus, which means "Eternal."

☠ **Atlas:** Strongman (page 16). Atlas is passed off as a mute. An incredibly big mute.

SCENE 3: THE BLACK CHURCH

The Black Church is very easy to locate, being visible from anywhere in town. As the characters near, it is obvious why the church is so named—its walls are blackened stone, as if scorched in a terrible fire. On entering, a young curate approaches and asks if he can help. He speaks Romanian, Latin, and a little Greek and English.

If the characters ask to see Father Borescu, the curate, whose name is Cadin Marku, shakes his head.

"I am sorry," he says, "but that is impossible. Father Borescu was called away yesterday on most important business. He won't return for several days. Perhaps I can be of assistance?"

Asking about the diary also proves futile—Marku knows nothing about any book for collection and refuses outright to allow the characters into the father's private chambers. Even if they decide to break in, Borescu is no fool—he keeps the diary on his person at all times.

Curate Marku apologizes for any inconvenience Father Borescu's trip has caused.

"He should be back soon. Why don't you stay over at the Black Knight inn? It's just

across the square. The circus is in town, so you could spend a few days enjoying the sights."

Marku can help if asked about the color of the Church.

"Most unusual, yes?" he says. "The church was built in the 14th or 15th century in the Gothic style, though many of the murals and tapestries are later additions. The outer walls were damaged during the Great Fire of 1688. By some miracle, the church survived the destruction, but its walls were forever blackened. That is why it is called the Black Church."

Marku is happy to give a guided tour. It lasts an hour, and is both enjoyable and educational, but no useful information is gained. A small donation to the upkeep of the church is expected at the end of the tour.

SCENE 4: THE BLACK KNIGHT INN

The Black Knight inn is located just a few dozen yards from the Black Church. Normally there are plenty of rooms, but due to the arrival of the circus many outsiders from neighboring towns and villages have come to town. At present, there are just three twin rooms available. Any unmarried women in the group must have a room to themselves or share with another lady.

Mitru Bentoiu and his wife Voica run the inn and employ six staff. Rooms are clean and aired daily, the fire is always lit, and only traditional Romanian dishes are served. If your players are keeping track of money, room and board costs £0.50 per night—prices have gone up since the circus arrived.

During the day and early evening the main bar is busy, serving peasants and workers, merchants and visitors. A selection of beer and wine is available, as well as some potent local spirits. Virtually everyone is talking about the circus.

By and large, Romanians are friendly folk and happy to engage in conversation with strangers (at least during the day). No die rolls are necessary to learn that the circus comes every 10-12 years, stays just three nights, and then disappears west toward Budapest and Vienna. Small wonder then, that when it does come, it is so popular. The circus has set up camp a half mile out of town, on the slopes of Mount Tampa.

ACT 2: STRANGER IN THE NIGHT

The first night the characters spend in Brasov, no matter where they stay, a strange event occurs. Pick the character with the lowest Spirit to witness the disturbing scene.

SCENE 1: STRANGE LITTLE GIRL

As you sleep, you are dimly aware of the town clock striking midnight. Suddenly you shiver, as if the temperature had just dropped several degrees. Without really knowing why, you awake with a start. Standing at the end of your bed, is a young girl, perhaps only eight or nine years old, clad in rags and clutching a rag doll.

She stares straight into your eyes and says, "Seven little orphans armed with sticks, one got murdered, then there were six." She then moves to the door and is gone. In the pale light, you can't be sure if she opened the door or just vanished into thin air.

The girl expects the character to follow. Chances are, the character will wake his colleagues first. If there is some reluctance to follow, the girl can be heard singing the single line outside their window. On investigating, they see her dancing in the fog-shrouded street.

If the characters follow the girl, proceed to Scene 2 below. Should they decide to be more cowardly, move on to **Talk of the Town** at the end of Scene 2.

SCENE 2: FIRST DEATH

No matter how fast the characters run or what shortcuts they try to take, they cannot catch the girl. They come close several times, getting within a few paces when suddenly she turns a corner. When the characters follow, the girl has somehow managed to reach the other end of the street, opening up a large lead ahead of them.

After some ten minutes of running, the characters follow the girl into a small cobbled courtyard. The girl is gone, although there are no other exits. Lying in the middle of the courtyard is a dead body.

CHILDREN'S RHYME

Each time the strange little girl appears, she repeats a line of the rhyme. Because the characters can encounter her in a nonlinear pattern, when it says, "She sings the next line of the rhyme," simply use the next line after the previous one.

Seven little orphans armed with sticks, one got murdered then there were six.

Six little orphans trying to hide, one got murdered then there were five.

Five little orphans banging on the door, one got murdered then there were four.

Four little orphans hiding up a tree, one got murdered then there were three.

Three little orphans don't know what to do, one got murdered then there were two.

Two little orphans nowhere to run, one got murdered then there was one.

One little orphan too scared to yell, he got murdered they're all damned in Hell.

The corpse is that of a young boy, clad in rags and without shoes. The area around the corpse is covered in blood. A successful Healing roll reveals he has been battered to death, though there is no sign of a weapon. A successful Notice roll reveals no signs of footprints on the slick cobbles. The only clue is in the child's hand—a piece of sugar candy.

Brasov has a small police station and a jail. Should the characters act like law-abiding citizens and report their grisly find, the local police take detailed statements, question them on their motives for being in town and, more importantly, how they discovered the body. After satisfying themselves that the Rippers aren't wasting their time, or drunks, the police then go and investigate the area.

There isn't much for the police to do. They simply look over the body, confirm it's dead, and then drag it away in a cart for a pauper's burial. As he throws a bucket of water over the cobbles, an older policeman mutters, "*It's happening again,*" but he will not elaborate on what he means.

TALK OF THE TOWN

Regardless of whether the characters report the crime or leave the body where it lies, the murder is the talk of the town in the morning.

If the characters stayed in their room, all they learn is that an orphan was found murdered in a courtyard. Investigating the courtyard for clues proves impossible—Romanian policing is not as developed as in London, and dozens of people have trampled through the area. Since the child is an orphan, there is no one to question over his past whereabouts before the murder. To all intents and purposes, the investigation has already reached a dead end.

Of course, if they've hidden the body, no one knows and there's no gossip. Such an act should be morally reprehensible to most characters, especially members of the clergy.

ACT 3: INVESTIGATIONS

SCENE 1: QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

This scene doesn't follow on in any particular order, but sooner or later the characters are likely to start investigating the murders. When they do, consult this scene.

CHURCH RECORDS

Curate Marku is happy to let the characters browse through the church records. However, they are written in Romanian. He charges a donation of £1 for his services as a translator.

Although Marku finds the books the characters want, they still have to make Investigation rolls. On a success, they learn the first piece of information below. A raise is required to learn the second fact.

- Exactly 51 years ago, almost to the day, seven children, a mixture of orphans and gypsies, were brutally slain in Brasov over a period of three nights. The murderer was never caught and vanished as quickly as he arrived. The townsfolk blamed a family of gypsies who moved into the area just before the first murder.

- Every 51 years prior to that event, seven children were killed. Again, always around the same time of year. The first recorded murders were in 1739.

Church records extend back to 1701, but there is no mention of the Circus. Earlier records were kept in a separate building and destroyed in the Great Fire.

TOWN RECORDS

The town records are kept in the Guildhall and are available for consultation. Again, they are in Romanian, so a translator must be hired. This costs £2. Have the characters make an Investigation roll. With success, they learn the first fact. To learn the second bit of information, the characters must score a raise and have already visited the church.

- The Circus Fabulosus has been coming to Brasov since the early 1630s and comes every 10-15 years.
- By crosschecking dates, the characters learn the circus was in town during each set of murders dating back to 1739.

TALKING TO THE LOCALS

The locals seem reluctant to discuss the murders with strangers. A successful Streetwise roll at -2 penalty leads them to one Paul Popescu, an elderly gentleman (for the time) who was a young lad when the last murders occurred. He can reveal the following information, but only if appropriate questions are asked.

- He was just 9 when the last murders occurred back in 1841 but remembers the furor they caused. Children were banned for going out after dark, even though it was late summer.
- The local children invented a rhyme around the murders. The full text can be found in the sidebar.
- The Circus Fabulosus was in town at the same time, as was a gypsy band.
- The townsfolk drove the gypsies out of town, and the murders stopped that very night. Since then, gypsies have been treated poorly in Brasov.
- The ringmaster back then was one Aitor Nus, obviously a trade name as the current ringmaster uses it. Popescu is adamant the current ringmaster is the son of the circus owner in 1841, though he has no proof.

SCENE 2: YET ANOTHER BODY

This scene takes place after the characters have finished their investigations, but only if they have already visited the circus as patrons. If they haven't, insert it at any time before the final showdown.

As the characters make their way through the streets of Brasov, the young girl from the bedroom appears again, this time at the end of a nearby street. She recites the next line of the poem and moves off through the crowd. Again, she proves elusive but can be followed.

Turning into a dark alley between two rows of shops, the characters stumble across another child's corpse. This one has been torn limb from limb, and viewing the scene calls for a Guts roll at -2. Blood covers the walls, and every limb, including the head, and been torn from the child's body. There are no signs of cut marks—it looks as if they were literally ripped off using great strength.

As with all the murders, there are no clues, other than the child's clothing indicating another orphan.

ACT 4: FIRST VISIT TO THE CIRCUS

Run this the first time the characters go to the circus.

SCENE 1: THE SHOWEROUND

The gates open at 6.00 p.m., a few hours before nightfall. Entrance costs just £0.05. Should they go during the day, the circus folk are still erecting tents and stalls. Aitor is willing to talk with them, however.

Answers to typical questions are given below. The GM will have to wing other answers using what he knows. Remember, Aitor is not stupid and gives nothing away as to his real nature. Afterward, he is willing to show the group around, but there is nothing unusual to be seen (except the clowns and bearded ladies, but they appear perfectly "normal").

Q: How long has the Circus Fabulosus been going?

A: "Since about 1639, I think. My distant ancestor started it and I am proud to say it has remained in family hands ever since. To start with, we only traveled

RIPPERS: HORROR ROLEPLAYING IN THE VICTORIAN AGE

Eastern Europe, but as the circus grew we began to tour. We only come back to Romania every decade or so.”

Q: Why do the ringmasters use the same name?

A: “It’s a tradition tied into the circus name. My great grandfather chose the name, and since then all the ringmasters have used it. My real name is Stefan Jung, but I rarely use it now.”

Q: What does the name mean?

A: “Circus Fabulosus means Legendary Circus in Latin. It alludes to its age and some of the wonderful acts. Our magicians are some of the best in the world. Aitor Nus means nothing. It’s just a strange name to attract attention from the crowds.”

Q: Why is the circus always in Brasov when children are murdered?

A: “I have heard the stories myself. My father told me of them when I was a little boy. What can I say? People seek blame for despicable acts in strange places.”

THE CIRCUS OPENS

The small plateau is a blaze of color and sound. Wagons and tents form a perimeter circle, in the center of which is a large, brightly colored tent. Lanterns and torches, already lit to provide color more than actual light, hang from tall posts.



It seems that half the town must be here, and the throng is already queuing to watch jugglers and dancers, magicians and bearded ladies. The smell of candy and roasting meats fill the cool air, and cries of “Roll up! Roll up!”, “See the amazing freaks!”, and such like assail your ears.

The circus has truly come to town.

There are around twenty booths and stalls, some displaying shows, others selling goods or offering games, such as throwing hoops over prizes and catching ducks on hooks. Just invent anything you’ve seen at a circus. There is nothing suspicious taking place, except maybe the stage magician’s tricks—which are *not* real magic.

Eventually, the ringmaster appears and loudly announces that the main show is beginning in the tent in five minutes. The crowd heads that way almost immediately. If the characters decide to use the main show as a diversion for sneaking around, skip ahead to **Gone Sneaking** below. Otherwise, carry on with this scene.

The tent quickly fills. A few moments after the last person takes their seat, Aitor Nus enters the ring in full costume. He welcomes everybody and then the show begins. The characters watch acrobats swinging from a high wire, jugglers using fiery torches, horse riders displaying their skill and grace, the strongman, Atlas, bending iron bars with his bare hands, and clowns performing a farcical act of putting out the Great Fire of 1688.

During the clown show, the character who first saw the little girl in his bedroom sees her across the central ring. She beckons to him. If he points her out, all the characters can see her. She recites the next line of the poem, which is clearly audible despite the loud cheering of the crowd, and then skips away out of the tent. Only the characters can see and hear her—no one else reacts to her presence. Move onto Scene 2 if the characters follow.

GONE SNEAKING

Depending on your group, they may elect to snoop around the circus while the majority of people are watching the main show. Let them break into a few caravans or tents. At this stage, there is nothing for them to learn. If they try to enter Aitor’s caravan (the one they encountered in the alley), have two burly circus performers catch them before they gain access. They move the characters on, and inform Aitor at

the earliest opportunity. Guards are placed on Aitor's caravan. Even if the heroes do gain entry somehow, there is nothing to find yet.

Should a fight break out, use the stats for Atlas but treat them as Extras. Despite the thinning crowd, there are still plenty of witnesses. Killing anyone here is an act of murder and *will* result in the police catching the characters and trying them. Rippers who are arrested should lose an appropriate amount of Status and must languish in the cells until a person of influence bails them out of trouble.

If all the Rippers are caught, they are held in jail for 2d4 days before being released without charge thanks to the good word of Father Borescu, by which time it is too late to stop Aitor. The circus leaves town, leaving the GM with the option of creating another adventure in which the characters get to track their foes down and exact revenge.

SCENE 2: MORE DEATH

As before, following the girl is easy, for she appears through the crowd just as the characters think they have lost her, and yet remains impossible to catch.

She finally disappears behind a tent on the edge of the circus. On reaching the area, the characters find another corpse, this time belonging to a young girl of perhaps 10 years of age. A loop of rope has been placed round her neck, and from her color and the ghastly contortions on her face, she has been strangled. The corpse is still warm, though medical science is primitive and a best guess would be 2-3 hours since time of death. Judging by her clothes, she is a gypsy child. The area is littered with footprints, as befits a busy circus, but no clues present themselves. Once more, the trail is cold.

The local police, if informed, and now mighty suspicious of the characters, though in their hearts they know they are innocent. Whoever has been committing these murders has been doing so for centuries, but such talk is kept behind locked doors. If the characters give the police too much trouble, they may find the local constabulary looking at them as potential scapegoats for the murders.

The locals are shocked at the death, not out of sympathy for "a gypsy child," but because their own children might be in danger.

Either the police or general populace can direct the group to the nearest gypsy camp. It is located about two miles from Brasov, back along the main road to Bucharest.

ACT 5: GYPSY CAMP

Run this act when the heroes decide to pay a visit to the gypsy camp.

SCENE 1: DISTRAUGHT PARENTS

No matter how quickly the characters reach the camp, the gypsies already know about the murder, either through mundane or supernatural sources. As a result, the menfolk have armed themselves with knives and muskets and formed a cordon around the camp, expecting trouble.

When the characters arrive, three gypsies, who demand to know what business the characters have here, approach them. Although their native language is Romani, they have a knack for learning languages and know a smattering of most Western tongues.

This is a tense moment—the gypsies are naturally on edge over the murder and suspicious of strangers, especially foreigners. Good roleplaying, declaration of peaceful intentions, and a successful Persuasion roll convince the guards the characters are on their side. They agree to take the characters to their leader for further discussions. The gypsies are unimpressed by wealth or standing, so Status cannot be used to modify interaction rolls.

The camp consists of eight wagons, twenty-five gypsies, and several dogs. The wagons have been pulled into a tight semi-circle around a central fire, which burns brightly day and night. Regardless of what time the characters arrive, a pot of stew is cooking over the fire. On most days the women and children would be around the fire, cooking, singing, and performing chores—at present they are taking refuge in the wagons.

Leading the gypsies is Janos Balla, a heavy-set man in his mid-forties. When the characters reach the fire, around which he is sitting, the guards talk to him in Romani, making no attempt to translate for the characters. Janos listens for a few moments, and then gestures for the characters to be seated.

"My men tell me you come in peace," he says, his accent thick but understandable. "What brings you to our humble camp?"

Janos listens to their story without saying a word. Every time the characters mention a death, he looks up at the moon and crosses himself, as do the other



men. He already knows about the death of the gypsy child, though he refuses to elaborate on how.

After they finish, Janos offers them stew. A Common Knowledge roll reveals that gypsies rarely share their food with strangers, considering it risky, but to refuse an invite is considered very impolite. If any character refuses to eat, everyone's Charisma suffers a -2 penalty because of the insult. Suspicions aside, the stew is not poisoned and tastes great.

As the group eats, Janos speaks to them.

"My people have lived in this land for centuries. We have seen and heard many strange things beneath the sky in that time—things that were not meant to walk the Earth. My people were in Brasov in 1841 during the time of the last murders. We were accused of the crime, but my people do not murder children."

"Our wise woman told us there would be death in Brasov again this year. This is the reason we are here now—to see if the murderer has returned, for we suspect he is not of this Earth. You must think us superstitious peasants, eh?"

"These murders cannot be allowed to continue, but we are not welcome in these parts and have difficulty moving freely. We want revenge for the death of the child. Find the murderer and let us know. We will fight with you if your cause is just. Now, finish your

stew and go. My people must mourn our loss."

Janos refuses to answer questions and merely stares at the fire.

SCENE 2: A FORTUNE GAINED

As the characters rise to leave, the door of the nearest wagon opens and an old woman, her face weathered beyond mere old age, beckons to them with a skeletal finger. When the characters near, she withdraws back into the caravan, leaving the door open.

The crone is Madame Marusca, the matriarch of the tribe and a

renowned fortune-teller. Unlike many gypsies, her powers are real and stem from a long supernatural heritage. She bids the characters take a seat.

"My name," she cackles, "is Madame Marusca, but you may call me Grandmother. Give me your right hand." She takes a crystal ball from beneath the table and peers into it.

"The creature you seek was once human but now is not, though he wears its skin. A contract made with the Horned One gave him power, yet robs him of freedom. Heh, no one can outsmart the Horned One, the Prince of Lies."

"Confrontation is dangerous without evidence, without... a knife! Yes, I see a knife made of cold iron and drenched in the blood of innocents. This is his weakness. But where is it? Ah! The contract is in blood and he keeps it safe near him."

"Yes, look for the sign of the Horned One in his home and there you will find the contract. Read it and learn from it. Find the weapon and drive it through his heart."

With that, Marusca ceases her observations. She pours them a small cup of tea, before continuing.

"The way you seek is dangerous, but only this path will lead to success. His only weakness is the knife. Do not confront him

without the knife. Now go, for the night is old and you will need your wits about you."

SCENE 3: SHE'S BACK

Heading back into town, the characters catch sight of the little girl with the rag doll, this time standing at the edge of the woods. She recites the next line of the poem, leads them a merry chase for a mile or so, and finally vanishes in a small clearing. Lying in the clearing is a child's body, partially dissolved by powerful acids. Witnessing the half-dissolved corpse calls for a Guts check.

This time there is a clue. A successful Notice roll reveals one footprint—a very large footprint, such as the type a clown in big shoes would leave. The characters have their first piece of solid evidence pointing to the circus.

There's more evidence yet. As the group works its way back to the road, a group of Killer Clowns attack. They realized they had left footprints, and were heading back to cleanse the crime scene. Now they have to kill the witnesses to ensure Aitor's safety.

☠ **Killer Clowns (2 per character):** page 16.

ACT 6: SEARCHING THE CIRCUS

Hopefully by now the characters suspect that Aitor Nus is behind the murders. As Madame Marusca said, confronting him without the knife is dangerous, for only it can kill him. His wagon is his home, and searching it is the only way the heroes can learn the knife's whereabouts.

SCENE 1: A CLUE AT LAST

Depending on what time of day it is after visiting the gypsy camp, the characters may go straight back to the circus or wait until the next night. While there is nothing stopping them breaking into the wagon during the day, it runs a greater risk of being caught.

On the night of the murder at the circus, festivities stop an hour after the discovery. The performers return to their wagons and there is no fairground noise to conceal the character's activities.

Should the characters be caught, Aitor has no compulsion about killing them outright. He is too clever to leave them imprisoned and knows they are a serious threat to his continued existence.

GOING TO THE COPS

Even when the characters have positive proof that Aitor Nus is behind the murders, the police are loath to act.

For a start, this is Transylvania, and Dracula pulls the strings here. Suspicious events are quietly ignored in favor of staying alive—police who solve strange murders often disappear themselves.

If the characters make a nuisance of themselves or begin blabbing about supernatural events, feel free to have Dracula send a few vampires to destroy the team. This is his country, after all.

Curate Marku is also little help. He can provide 1d6 vials of holy water (for a donation), but is not fully ordained as a priest.

He also lacks Father Borescu's courage and, unlike his boss, is not a Ripper.

Day or night, two Bearded Ladies now guard the caravan. Once dispatched, the characters are free to enter to explore. Breaking into the caravan requires a Lockpicking roll. Forcing the door is possible (it has a Toughness of 8), but the noise immediately alerts two more Bearded Ladies.

Once inside, a successful Notice roll at -2 penalty locates the "sign of the Horned One"—an antique chest carved with a stag's head on the front. It is not locked, but it is trapped. Detecting the trap requires a Notice roll at -2 and disabling it a success on a Lockpicking roll.

The trap is a huge, spiked glove on a powerful spring. If the trap is sprung, it attacks with a Fighting of d8 but has the Drop. If it hits, it smacks the unfortunate victim in the face for 2d6+4 damage.

Within the chest are some spare clothes, a makeup kit, and a small black book. The text is in Latin, which Curate Marku can translate if the text is copied or taken to him. Copying the text takes several hours and risks discovery. Roll a d6. One a 5 or 6 a passing band of four Killer Clowns call in to see Aitor about some trivial matter.

Once translated, the text proves to be a diary of dates and locations—Aitor's murder victims. More importantly, it details the very first ceremony, in which he became a demon. Held in 1688 in the cellar of a townhouse near the Black Church, Aitor sacrificed seven children using a cold iron knife. The address of the townhouse is listed. Unfortunately, the Great Fire broke out during the final stages and Aitor fled without collecting the sacrificial paraphernalia. Over the years, he seems to have forgotten about it, for it is never mentioned again. In fact, Aitor assumed it was destroyed in the Great Fire.

The diary also describes the clauses in the pact, as detailed in the GM Overview (see page 2), but more importantly has a special note stating that Aitor himself does not need to kill the children. So long as one of his demons commits the murder, he reaps the benefit. In this way, he can pass blame onto one of his minions if the murderer is ever caught.

☠ **Bearded Lady (2):** page 15.

SCENE 2: THE MESSENGER OF DEATH

While walking back to town, the characters encounter the little girl again. She recites the next line more hurriedly and gestures with some impatience, for the characters to follow her. Again, she always stays one step ahead, disappearing round corners or darting up side alleys just as the heroes think they are about to catch up with her.

This time, she vanishes in a small alley very close to the address the characters seek. Again, the Rippers are forced to bear witness to a scene of bloody carnage.

The body, a young girl, appears to be dissolving into a puddle of sticky goo. Indeed, the walls around the alley are covered in a similar mass of sticky strands. Have the characters make a Guts check at -2 after witnessing this scene.

If they immediately check the remains, they discover it is warm—as in only recently dead warm. Delaying loses this clue, as the body dissolves completely in one round. The reason it's so fresh lurks further ahead in the alley. A Candy Man lured the child into the alley and killed her only moments before the arrival of the characters—now he is hunting the characters.

Check for Surprise as normal. The Candy Man's first action is to throw a ball of cotton candy to catch as many characters as possible. He begins 5' away up the alley, hidden around the corner of a T-junction, but can hear the characters.

☠ **Candy Man:** page 15.

ACT 7: THE LAND OF PAIN

Once the Candy Man is killed, the characters can locate the townhouse in which Aitor killed his first victims.

SCENE 1: DASTARDLY DEEDS

The upper structure is new, built after the fire, but the basement, which survived the fire, was covered over without being investigated.

The owner, a merchant by the name of Ion Antonescu, refuses to let the characters into his house after dark. No amount of Persuasion or Intimidation can override his fear of the night. During the day, however, he is more than happy to talk to them. Gaining permission to dig up his kitchen, the traditional entrance to the basement, requires a successful a Persuasion roll at -4 or a bribe of £20.

Digging up the stone floor is heavy work and takes several hours, even with picks and shovels. Eventually, the characters' toil is rewarded and they reveal a small flight of stone stairs heading into the darkness below.

Within the basement, covered by a thick layer of dust, are seven skeletons, all belonging to children. In addition, there are some candle stubs, and a pentagram carved into the floor, in the middle of which lies a cold iron knife. The knife was used and discarded during the ritual and, as told by Madame Marusca, is Aitor's only weakness. Some characters, particularly the more religious Rippers, may be wary about entering the pentagram, and rightly so.

Trapped within the pentagram is a Horned God, summoned by Aitor's wicked magic centuries ago. It is invisible until an object, living or inanimate, breaks the pentagram, at which point it materializes. If this should happen, because the pentagram has been broken, it is free to leave its confines and the Rippers have a new enemy to worry about.

Aitor threw the knife into the pentagram as he was escaping the approaching Great Fire. It was his plan to have the demon keep it safe until his return, but after witnessing the devastation of the Great Fire 51 years later he assumed the basement, and its contents were destroyed.

Removing the skeletons for burial, although time consuming, earns the characters a free benny. They have allowed the souls of the children to finally reach Heaven.



Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d10, Spirit d12, Strength d12+2, Vigor d10

Skills: Fighting d8, Intimidation d10, Persuasion d12, Taunt d10

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 11

Special Abilities:

- **Armor (+2):** A Horned God's tough pelt is worth 2 points of Armor, and covers its entire body.
- **Breathe Fire:** A Horned God can breathe fire in the shape of a Cone Template. All those within the cone must make an Agility roll or suffer 2d10 damage. Anyone hit by the flames has a chance of catching fire.
- **Fear -2:** The first time someone sees a Horned God, they must make a fear check at a -2 penalty.
- **Immunity (Fire):** Horned Gods take no damage from fire.
- **Improved Frenzy:** A Horned God can make two Fighting attacks each round at no penalty.
- **Natural Attacks:** Horned Gods can attack with massive jaws, slashing claws, scything tails, and protruding horns. These attacks do Str+2 damage.
- **Size +2:** Horned Gods stand over nine feet tall, and weigh over 600 pounds.
- **Weakness (Cold Iron):** Demons take +4 damage from cold iron weapons.
- **Weakness (Holy Symbol):** Horned Gods suffer a -2 penalty to Fighting attacks against anyone brandishing a holy symbol.

SCENE 2: LAST VISIT

After defeating the demon and gaining the knife, the heroes have everything they need to defeat the vile Ring Master. Before they reach the circus, however, the girl appears again. She recites the penultimate line of the poem, and then runs off, beckoning the characters to follow. Realizing the characters are dangerous, Aitor has sped up the rate of the murders. He plans on leaving town as quickly as possible.

The girl vanishes in a small clearing only a few hundred yards from the circus ground. There, the characters discover a sixth corpse, this one crushed to death. Deep footprints, obviously made by a large man, lead toward the circus.

After conducting their investigation, the girl appears again. This time she speaks clearly, rather than just reciting the poem. *"Hurry! The last child is already in danger!"* She heads off toward the circus.



ACT 8: BIG TOP SHOWDOWN

This act marks the climax of the adventure. The climactic battle can be run one of two ways. make sure you've decided which method you're going to use in advance of running the adventure.

SCENE 1: IT'S SHOW TIME!

On reaching the circus, the characters see that it has opened early (or late, depending on the time). Aitor is putting on a special show—the last show in Brasov for another 51 years, as he has no intention of returning before then. Three Freaks stand guard outside the tent.

☠ **Freaks (3):** see page 16

A VICTIM SELECTED

No other demons confront the character as they race for the big tent, for they are all guarding Aitor at this crucial moment. Inside, Aitor is in the ring surrounded by his minions. A small child, a girl clutching a rag doll, is slowly walking into the ring.

"That's right, my dear," smiles the Ring Master, "there's no need to be afraid. We love

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orphans at the Circus Fabulosus. Come here and you'll be rewarded with many gifts."

Stopping the girl should be a priority. Unfortunately, Aitor's legion comprises himself (Ring Master), Atlas (Strongman), four Bearded Ladies, four Killer Clowns, one Candyman, and four Freaks. If the characters hope to win, they'll need help, and who better than the townsfolk of Brasov.

If the characters make a rousing speech to the crowd, and succeed in a Persuasion roll at -2, they can convince the crowd of Aitor's terrible secret. Reading excerpts from the diary grants a +2 bonus.

Incensed with rage at his demonic nature and the terrible suffering he has caused them, they surge forward armed with bits of wood and small daggers. The battle between the Circus of Death and the citizens of Brasov has reached its climax.

BATTLE ROYALE

You can either run this as a skirmish game or using the Mass Battle rules. For those using the skirmish rules, the Circus of Death is as detailed above. The heroes' side has the characters, five mobs (stats as below), and two teams of four constables who come to investigate. It's a tough fight for the forces of good, but the prize is the end of a major Cabal threat.

Aitor can only be killed with the knife, so the final confrontation must be with him. In the skirmish game, all the character with the knife needs do is kill him to assure victory, for as soon as he dies all his demonic servants die. This can happen at any time during the fight, but Aitor keeps Atlas nearby as a bodyguard.

For the Mass Battle rules, treat the citizens of Brasov as has having 10 tokens and the Circus of Death just 6. It's unlikely either side has any skilled generals, so it's more of a brawl than a tactical battle. However, the demons are far more powerful and gain a +4 bonus to their Knowledge (Battle) rolls, whereas the characters have the iron knife and receive a +1 bonus.

The Circus is fighting for its very survival, and so has a +2 morale modifier. The citizens are infused with rightful vengeance and gain the same bonus.

With either system, it's a fight to the death.

THE MOB (GROUP OF 10)

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

Skills: Fighting d6, Guts d6

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 5

Gear: Hand Weapons (Str+1)

SCENE 2: FATHER BORESCU RETURNS

The morning after the Great Fight of Brasov, Father Boreescu returns home, none the wiser as to recent events. Wherever they are in town, Curate Marku locates them and informs them of Boreescu's return.

Once introductions are out of the way and both parties are happy they are dealing with the right person, Boreescu hands over the diary. Sadly, it is written in an archaic form of Romanian, which he doesn't read well. He refuses to translate it anyway, citing that speaking evil words can summon evil.

He is interested to know how they have amused themselves in his "quiet little town" while he was away. Any mention of the murders and battle shocks him, but he blesses the characters for their good deeds. At the start of the next session, give each character an extra benny to represent the blessing.

SCENE 3: A FINAL FAREWELL

As the characters leave Brasov, they see the same little girl that has been haunting them since they arrived. She beckons the characters to follow her. Should they do so, she leads them to an area of the local graveyard in which stand seven graves. Lying on one is a rag doll.

The inscription reads, "*Unknown orphan girl. Died 1841. May her soul find peace.*" As the characters watch, a lone dove settles on the gravestone.

REWARDS

Each surviving character receives 3 experience points for thwarting the Ring Master and his legion of minions. Demonic corpses can be used to create appropriate Rippertech. Recruiting new Rippers from the townsfolk should be easy—many are angry at the supernatural menace that fed off their town for four hundred years and want revenge. Whether or not the diary really is Dracula's is up to the GM. If so, it should be used to lead into other adventures.

THE CIRCUS OF DEATH

The Circus of Death: This faction is led by a vile race of demons known as "Ring Masters." These creatures sow terror and confusion in the world by poisoning the very things that should bring relaxation



and entertainment to the masses. These demons have infiltrated circuses, carnivals, theaters, and even puppet shows.

BEARDED LADY (DEMON)

Horrible demons from the foulest pits of Hell, these grotesque things have living hair growing from their bodies. When displayed as "curiosities", their hair hangs limply, but when angered the flowing strands can grapple, choke, and strangle foes in all directions.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4, Spirit d6, Strength d10, Vigor d8

Skills: Climbing d6, Fighting d8, Gambling d4, Streetwise d4, Taunt d6

Charisma: -2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 8

Special Abilities:

- **Living Hair:** Long strands of hair grapple all foes within a Medium Burst Template, centered on the Bearded Lady. All their actions are at -2, they cannot leave the area of effect without an opposed Strength roll, and they suffer 1d6+2 damage per round.
- **Size +2:** Because a Bearded Lady's hair is alive, it is much larger than it appears.
- **Weakness (Cold Iron):** Bearded Ladies takes +4 damage from cold iron weapons.

- **Weakness (Holy Symbol):** The Candy Man suffers a -2 penalty to Fighting attacks against anyone brandishing a holy symbol.



CANDYMAN (DEMON)

These vile demons are armed with sticky bundles of cotton candy. They use these globs of ectoplasm to bind their foes, then watch as they slowly dissolve like the candy itself!

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

Skills: Fighting d8, Guts d6, Notice d4, Persuasion d4, Stealth d4, Streetwise d6, Taunt d4, Throwing d12

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 6

Gear: Cotton Candy (3/6/12 see below)

Special Abilities:

- **Bite:** Str +1
- **Cotton Candy:** Anything covered by a Small Burst Template is stuck fast, and cannot do anything but attempt to break free on its action (a Strength roll at -2). Each round a victim is bound after the first (and after it attempts to break free), it suffers 2d6 damage. A character incapacitated by this damage is dissolved into a puddle of goo.
- **Weakness (Cold Iron):** The Candy Man takes +4 damage from cold iron weapons.

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- **Weakness (Holy Symbol):** The Candy Man suffers a -2 penalty to Fighting attacks against anyone brandishing a holy symbol.

FREAK (DEMON)

These unfortunates were once normal men and women who sold their souls to the Ring Masters. When their time ran out, the dark powers gave them a choice—Hell or service as a freak. The latter does not keep them from the Pit forever, but at least grants them a temporary respite from their final penance.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d4, Spirit d6, Strength d10, Vigor d10

Skills: Fighting d10, Guts d6, Lockpicking d10, Stealth d10

Charisma: -4; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 7

Gear: Various hand weapons (small improvised weapon, -1 attack, Str+1 damage)

Special Abilities:

- **Fear:** Anyone seeing a Freak must make a Guts roll.
- **Weakness (Cold Iron):** Freaks takes +4 damage from cold iron weapons.
- **Weakness (Holy Symbol):** These demons suffer a -2 penalty to Fighting attacks against anyone brandishing a holy symbol.

KILLER CLOWN (DEMON)

The true stars of the Circus of Death are the killer clowns. The fears expressed by millions of children (and adults!) come true with these freakish demons.

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

Skills: Fighting d10, Guts d10, Taunt d10

Charisma: +2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 8

Gear: Clown costume (Armor +1)

Special Abilities:

- **Tricks:** A clown may only do one trick in a round (no multi-actions).
- **Acid Flower:** Anyone covered by a Cone Template is squirted with acid and must make an Agility roll or suffer 2d10 damage.
- **Bag of Marbles:** The clowns can spill marbles over a Large Burst Template. This remains for 1 minute before dissolving into smoke. The area is considered Difficult Ground, and any creature running through it must make an Agility roll or fall and be automatically Shaken.
- **Mallet:** A gigantic baseball bat, mallet, or other club causing Str+1d6 damage.
- **Weakness (Cold Iron):** A clown takes +4 damage from cold iron weapons.



RING MASTER (DEMON)

The demons that cause pain and panic are cruel and sadistic creatures. Once they've managed to take over a circus, they gradually begin to insinuate their demonic allies into the show. This infiltration is kept very secret, of course, and their mayhem carefully controlled so as not to draw too much attention.

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

Skills: Fighting d8, Guts d6, Persuasion d8, Streetwise d8, Throwing d10

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 8

Gear: Cursed throwing knives (Str+1d6), whip (see below), padded suit (Armor +2)

Special Abilities:

- **Weakness (Cold Iron):** The Ring Master takes +4 damage from cold iron weapons.
- **Weakness (Holy Symbol):** The Ring Master suffers a -2 penalty to Fighting attacks against anyone brandishing a holy symbol.
- **Whip:** This barbed whip causes Str+3 damage, and always causes at least a Shaken result. This special effect cannot wound a creature if the damage isn't actually great enough to cause a second Shaken result or higher, however.



STRONGMAN (DEMON)

Ring Masters use these powerful demons to crush those too curious about the circus. At first, a Strongman appears to be a heavily muscled human, but it has hairless leathery skin, no genitals, and no tongue or ability to speak.

Attributes: Agility d4, Smarts d4, Spirit d8, Strength d12+4, Vigor d12

Skills: Fighting d8, Guts d10, Intimidation d12, Taunt d6

Charisma: -2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 10

Gear: Large improvised weapon (Str+3, -1 attack)

Special Abilities:

- **Armor +1:** Strongmen have a tough hide.
- **Crushing Blow:** A Strongman's attack does double damage on any round he is dealt a Joker.
- **Size +1:** Strongmen stand over 7 feet tall
- **Weakness (Cold Iron):** The Candy Man takes +4 damage from cold iron weapons.
- **Weakness (Holy Symbol):** The Candy Man suffers a -2 penalty to Fighting attacks against anyone brandishing a holy symbol.