The Mark of the Beast

The second chapter in the Chronicle of the Copper Crown

An Adventure for Symbaroum
The Game Master’s Introduction

**The Mark of the Beast** is an adventure that features numerous agents besides the player characters. The basic plot is simple, but dealing with the situation may prove a challenging task.

The murderer known as the Flayer is a changeling named Alahara, whose goal is to keep his beloved Gorak alive. Gorak has been infected by an artifact that he stole from a tomb in the forest of Davokar – a withered human cranium wearing the crown of a king. Within the skull the corrupt spirit of the long dead king lives on, vindictive and full of hatred.

Alahara is fighting a losing battle, taking drastic measures in the hope of saving his beloved, or at least postponing the inevitable. While studying his books on sorcery, the changeling has read that the consumption of certain human glands may cure or alleviate symptoms of corruption.

Sorcery aids Alahara in other ways too, not least through the ritual *Blood Shrouding*: he dresses up in the skin of others and wanders the streets on the hunt for glands.

Below is a description of the story’s main characters. The Game Master needs to understand who they are, what they want and what they are prepared to do to get there. This will serve the GM well when the player characters, as expected, do the unexpected in their attempt to save the day.

**HURIAN-LO APAK, THE KING’S SKULL**

During the era of Symbaroum, a long line of emperors and local rulers came and went. For a period of time the region now dominated by Davokar was governed by numerous regional kings. One of these was named Hurian-Lo Apak.

King Hurian was neither the greatest nor the smallest king at that time, nor was he the cruelest (then again, he had a lot of insane rulers to compete with in that category). Despite being a capable sorcerer he ended his days like most of his colleagues: in a crypt surrounded by his most precious belongings. But for the venerable King Hurian, death was not the end but the start of a long, long wait.
The bitterness over an all too premature death combined with well-developed mystical skills made his spirit cling to the lifeless body, waiting for a second chance to rule. That chance appeared when the treasure-hunter Gorak entered his crypt.

**GORAK, BLIGHT-MARKED FORTUNE-HUNTER**

Along with his friend Alahara, Gorak led an expedition to an ancient tomb deep in the forest of Davokar. The grave proved to be from Symbaroum’s early days, a remote resting place for a barbarian king, as well as a virtual gold mine of treasure. Gorak was especially fascinated by the mummy king himself, especially his crown. Unfortunately, the copper crown had merged with the skull wearing it, so the whole cranium had to be removed and brought along. Adorned and burdened by the tomb’s treasures the expedition returned to its point of departure, Thistle Hold.

Back in town the members of the expedition lived like kings for a while. The boastful Gorak even showed mayor Nightpitch the king’s skull during a drunken evening at the Salons of Symbaroum. Rumors began to spread about elves being sighted within the town walls and soon thereafter the expedition members began to die in more or less spectacular ways. A couple of them managed to flee south but were later hunted down and killed by the elves (or by the characters who played the Promised Land). Gorak and Alahara went into hiding, taking the king’s skull with them.

**BAUMELO, FALSE WITCH HUNTER**

There are many small villages along Davokar’s southern border. Among the population of these, the black cloak Baulemo became known as a vicious witch hunter, especially after he burned the village of Anamark to cinders when hunting a blight-marked resident. In another village close to Davokar, Glimmervann, the charismatic cultist Odako lived with his followers. There the black cloak’s hunt for abominations ended, as the cultists ambushed him and thrust a handful of daggers into his back.

Shortly thereafter, when Glimmervann was visited by a blight-marked treasure-hunter who rambled on about a whispering skull and a catastrophic expedition led by Gorak and Alahara, Odako and his followers devised a plan.

Odako was already acquainted with Gorak, since they had discussed the possibility of preparing and launching an expedition together. So he and his not so merry men travelled to Thistle Hold hoping to get a closer look at the talking king’s skull, and they did so dressed up as Baulemo and his witch hunters. Dressing like this allowed them to move freely and interrogate those involved without interference, since next to no one dares get between a notorious witch hunter and his prey.

**MASTER VERNAM, AGENT OF THE IRON PACT**

Thistle Hold is a vibrant city and things are quickly forgotten, even when it comes to a series of gruesome deaths where all victims had been part of the same expedition. When the victims of the Flayer appeared, one after the other, no one made a connection between the curse of the king’s skull and the new wave of murders. That is, no one except the tutor Master Vernam, who had been informed of what happened during the adventure the Promised Land by his allies: the elves of the Iron Pact.
**Player introduction**

**FOR THIS ADVENTURE** to become truly enjoyable the player characters need incentives, first for approaching Master Vernam and later for wanting to solve the murders. Preferably these incentives can be rooted in the goals of the gaming group.

In groups that base their gaming on the personal goals of the player characters and the ambitions they have as a team, the Game Master is tasked with working out the motives for finding Vernam and solving the murder plot, preferably together with the players. Here are some inspirational pointers:

- **Contacts**: Player characters with the trait
  
  Contacts can know about Master Vernam if they ask themselves (that is, the GM) “Who do I know in Thistle Hold?” and then succeed with the test. Characters with contacts in the Queen’s Rangers, Ordo Magica or among witches and fortune-hunters are most likely to have heard about the tutor, but the Game Master can be generous with who gets to make the test since Vernam was well travelled and had many acquaintances. His diligent work trying to craft a peaceful coexistence with the elves is renowned and not always appreciated, so his name is also recognized within Ambria’s army, the Sun Church and among the nobles.

- **The Iron Pact**: If the player characters have encountered the Iron Pack before (maybe in the tutorial adventure The Promised Land), many Ambrian scholars can refer to Master Vernam, since he “once served Ordo Magica but now behaves like an agent of the wood-land elves”.

- **A referral**: The characters may be referred to Master Vernam if they are searching for an answer to almost any kind of learned or mystical mystery. The person they are talking to claims not to know the answer but is very sure that the tutor in Thistle Hold does.

**The Chapters**

**Below you will find** a summary of the adventure’s three chapters, following the course of the murder investigation - from the characters involvement (chapter 1), through their investigations (chapter 2), up to the final climax (chapter 3).

**Chapter 2: Trailing the Flayer**

**In the second chapter** the player characters get involved in the hunt for the killer, on their own accord or as a work for hire.

For player characters who have played the core book tutorial adventure, the Promised Land, it should be evident relatively early what is causing the murders. The murderer’s victims can offer the player characters valuable clues, and witness statements provide further assistance. But finding the Flayer and putting an end to his killing spree is not easily done.

**Chapter 3: The Will of a King**

**When the player characters** finally have uncovered the plot and traced the killer back to his hideout, the hardest part still remains: ending the Flayer’s reign of terror.

This too has its intricacies. And when the murderer has been taken care of, yet another question begs an answer: what should the characters do with the cursed cranium?
Scene 1: Divine Complications

A girl comes dashing through the crowded streets; she bumps into one of the player characters and lands on her bottom. Close on her heels half a dozen men dressed in black come running, some of them with weapons drawn. The girl rises and grabs the character she bumped into, begging for her life: “Don’t let the witch hunter take me!”

The henchmen form a half-circle in front of the characters, demanding that they hand over the girl. Behind them a large crowd of spectators gathers, many of them agitated and condemning. They point at the girl saying things like: “There she is, the abomination, the Flayer!” Others are more hesitant: “Can it really be her, who has skinned all those people? She looks so … normal …” Some know-it-all explains: “That’s what’s so horrid with corruption sickness, it can hide where one least expects it.” Some solemn spectators nod agreement.

The leader of the hunters take a threatening step forward, repeating his demand: “In the name of the Black Cloak Baumelo, give us the heretic or be branded heretics yourself!”

The girl, who calls herself Tenid, claims that her neighbor has accused her of witchery in an attempt to lay claim on her henhouse. She admits to being skilled in the art of witchcraft, but denounces all accusations of having dealings with dark powers.

If the characters are about to hand her over, Tenid tries to break free; a successful test against [Strong +3] is required to maintain a grip on her.

Should the player characters refuse to obey, the henchmen draw steel and attack. However, they will only fight until the characters have proven that they can defend themselves, in this case until half of the attackers have fallen or been neutralized some other way. As they retreat the leader raises his fist and shouts: “You just wait, Baumelo will hear of this!”

Player characters who are priests or are knowledgeable about the Sun Church for other reasons may make a Cunning test to recall that Baumelo is a famous Black Cloak whose witch hunts have destroyed whole villages. Baumelo himself enters the stage in Scene 6.
Baumelo’s henchmen (PC +1)
“Give us the heretic!”

The henchmen of Baumelo/Odako love the power granted by the witch hunter’s name, but are not as fanatical when the opposition turns out to be for real.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manner</th>
<th>Grinds their fists</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resistance</td>
<td>Weak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traits</td>
<td>Bushcraft</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accurate</td>
<td>13 (−3), Cunning 7 (+3), Discreet 5 (+5), Persuasive 9 (+1), Quick 10 (0), Resolute 11 (−1), Strong 15 (−5), Vigilant 10 (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weapons</td>
<td>Axe 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armor</td>
<td>Scale mail 3 (Impeding)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defense</td>
<td>+2 (shield)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Toughness</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pain Threshold</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equipment</td>
<td>1D10 shilling, a pouch of Black Root for chewing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow</td>
<td>Gray and black-speckled, like sooty wadmal (corruption: 4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tactics: The henchmen attack one character each, except for the strongest looking character who gets two opponents to handle.

Scene 2: The Academy of Master Vernam

Upon reaching the academy a pale-looking woman meets them at the door, introducing herself as Esbetha, a junior tutor. She is noticeably shaken; her lower lip quivers. Once the player characters ask to see Vernam and have assured her that they have peaceful intentions, Esbetha quietly guides them up the stairs to the top floor. No pupils are moving around the house and if asked Esbetha answers that she has sent them home. She stops at a wooden door and turns towards them: “What you are about to witness is … horrifying. I’ve seen it, right before you came.” The door swings open and there is blood everywhere. The skinned body of a man hangs upside-down from the ceiling, and its entrails and skin lies below. One window is opened and bloody footprints lead out onto the roof.

The player characters have at least three ways to start the investigation: the murder scene, the murderer’s footprints or questioning Esbetha. A fourth option is to perform a ritual, if the player characters know any.

The events they are trying to get a grip on played out as follows:

- Master Vernam came to his room and sat down to do some work.
- A while later the elf Tara-Kel (Iron Pact member) came by to report that the king’s skull had not been recovered and that it probably remained in Thistle Hold, hidden away.
- Tara-Kel left the residence and Vernam wrote a letter to Mayor Nightpitch. Then someone knocked at the window; it appeared to be Tara-Kel but was Alahara dressed in the elf’s skin (see Blood Shrouding, page 24). Vernam let “Tara-Kel” in, and was soon strangled and slaughtered by Alahara hunting for glands and a fresh skin that would make it possible for him to enter Ordo Magica’s tower and learn the ritual Break Link.
- In other words, it is “Master Vernam” who leaves the murder scene over the roofs, or more exactly: Alahara dressed in the skin and clothes of the late tutor.
scene 2.1: the murder scene

There are a number of clues at the murder scene:

The body: Esbetha can confirm that the body hanging from the ceiling matches the physiognomy of Master Vernam. The skinned corpse is missing two digits on its left hand which makes it easy to identify (he lost the fingers while living with the witches in Davokar).

A successful Cunning test with the ability Medicus provides further information – Vernam was strangled before he was skinned; and although most of the entrails are there some glands are not: the adrenal, thyroid and pineal glands. According to some scriptures, these precise glands may contain energies that counteract corruption. Interestingly enough (to the hardened Medicus), all those organs can be removed without skinning the body, and yet all skin has been carefully removed, strip by strip ...

A passed [Vigilant – 5] test reveals that the hair on the floor is brown, but an oil painting nearby depicts Vernam with black hair. Furthermore, a closer examination of the skin exposes an elf’s pointy ears. Clearly, Master Vernam hangs from the ceiling, but the skin underneath is not the tutors. His skin is gone.

A successful Cunning test with the ability Beast Lore (Abominations) allows the character to remember having heard of a sorcery ritual called Blood Shrouding, with which a mystic can flay a body and assume its form for a day. This has probably nothing to do with the glands, but must serve some other purpose.

The Iron Pact Ring (artifact): A successful Vigilant test lets a character find a rusty ring of Iron, on the floor beneath Vernam’s desk. The ring is bloodied and most likely tossed aside by the murderer while skinning his victim.

The inside of the ring is inscribed; the ability Loremaster reveals it to be in Elvish (which is hardly ever written). A character with Loremaster at adept level can read the inscription: “Nevermore”. The character realizes that it is a ring of the Iron Pact, a symbol of a long dead alliance between the Elder Folk and an unknown number of human princes, aimed at fighting back the darkness spreading from Symbar. The scholar also realizes that the ring is a mystical artifact and the player should be shown the description of the item (found on page 24). The insight that the ring is an artifact and the knowledge of how to use it may also be gained with the ability Witchsight and a successful Vigilant test.

The letter for Lasifor Nightpitch: A letter lies on the floor, stained with blood but apparently written by Vernam and addressed to Mayor Nightpitch. What little is discernable reads as follows:

Dear Master Nightpitch,

I know that we seldom see eye to eye, but let me ... and that the skull of the King was shown to you, numerous sources have told me ... infects all who touch it, infects with the power of corruption. You appear to have escaped its destructive powers, maybe you never held it ... how the atrocities and the killings are connected to all this I cannot claim to know, but from a reliable source I have heard that ... 

A successful Cunning test with the ability Alchemy lets a player character use vinegar and other fluids to wash the blood away so the whole text appears:

Dear Master Nightpitch,

I know that we seldom see eye to eye, but let me once again try to explain why I believe that Gorak’s failed expedition is connected to the current killings, performed by the so called Fayer. I know that Gorak sought you out and that the skull of the King was shown to you, numerous sources have told me as much, and I realize that a possible link between the murders and the skull is politically delicate.

The King’s skull infects all who touch it, infects with the power of corruption. You appear to have escaped its destructive powers; maybe you never held it which, if so, was wise. My elven friends have told me that their soothsayers dreamed of the dead king at the time when Gorak was parading around town with his cranium, and they have returned to me saying that they are still dreaming, meaning that the corrupting powers of the skull are still active here in Thistle Hold. Precisely how the atrocities and the killings are connected to all this I cannot claim to know, but from a reliable source I have heard that the art of flaying is an ancient and baneful one, born of darkness.

Nevermore the Dark, Master Vernam
SCENE 2.2: THE FLAYER’S ROUTE
As mentioned, the window is ajar and bloody footprints lead away from the body.

A successful Vigilant test shows that the window and frame are unharmed. It must have been opened from inside; Vernam probably let the killer in.

From the scene of butchery a trail of bloody footprints leads back to the window. A [Vigilant -5] test makes it possible to track the trail out onto the roof: the killer has stopped to wipe his feet.

The trail leads along the rooftop, and acrobotically over to nearby buildings. Close to the Toad’s Square the killer has climbed down and his footprints are lost among hundreds of others. He could have continued on the roofs, but there must be a reason for his descent, something of importance near the square.

SCENE 2.3: INTERVIEW WITH ESBEITHA
Besides the killer, Esbetha was the last one to see Vernam alive, and it is likely that the player characters want to know if she has noticed anything that can help them.

Esbetha has the following to say about the day’s events: Master Vernam came home after running some errands and seemed to be his usual, calm self. He tutored a couple of students after which he closed the door to his study – also his usual routine. Some time later she heard a loud bang, and Esbetha asked about it through the door. Master Vernam told her not to worry; it was only a window beating in the wind. After that all was silent and it was not until an hour later, as she went to his room with wine and biscuits, that she found her employer murdered and skinned.

Since then, Esbetha has been sitting in her room by the entry hall and she is sure that no one has entered that way; a bell tinkles as the front door is opened.

A successful test against [Vigilant -3] reveals that Esbetha is hiding something. A passed [Persuasive -3] roll on questions about the rusty iron ring from the murder scene makes her add to the story:

Some time after Vernam had shut himself in his room but before the bang, an elf came to visit. She does not know the elf’s name but recalls having seen her before. Esbetha does not even try to hide her profound dislike of elves and Master Vernam’s dealings with them: “He was a member of their sect, or whatever they call it; I knew it would come to this, sooner or later!” By sect Esbetha means the Iron Pact and if asked why she detests elves she answers that they are unwholesome nature-worshippers, and that anyone who regularly visits the temple of Prios shouldn’t need to ask.

SCENE 2.4: VERNAM’S LETTER TO THE PLAYER CHARACTERS
If the Game Master wishes, the following can be added to the investigation: a letter from Vernam to the characters, to be delivered in case of his demise. This may not fit all game groups and is not required for the adventure to be played. Some players might perceive its content as blatant and feel that it undermines the mystery in the name of unnecessary exposition.

But for other groups the letter can be seen as a perfect embellishment that functions as a deeper and more dramatic sounding board for the adventure. Only the Game Master, who understands his players, knows if it is suitable or not to include the letter in the story.

Esbetha suddenly looks up and says: “By the way, I have something for you”. She walks away only to return with a sealed letter. It carries the seal of Master Vernam. She says that he gave her the letter about a week ago (the day of the second Flayer-killing). He left no specific instructions, only that it should be “given to the first persons who come to visit me after my death”. Esbetha did not think much about it at the time; Vernam was very eccentric and this was not nearly the strangest thing he had asked of her. The letter reads:

Dear Friends,
If you are reading this I am dead. You don’t know who I am, just as I don’t know you in the common meaning of the word. But I know something about your faith, since it is intertwined with my own – and with the bloody tracks left by the Flayer through our beautiful town. In short, you have appeared in my dream sights, visions I have evoked with the help of rituals, as part of my effort to solve the riddle of the murderous Flayer.

Some months ago, an expedition returned to Thistle Hold. Aside from gold they brought back the skull of a Symbarian King and the expedition leader paraded this distasteful trophy around many of the town’s inns and taverns. Unfortunately the treasure-hunters also brought with them a horrible sickness, which claimed their lives one after the other – some just disappeared, others were hunted down by agents of the Iron Pact, another few turned into abominations and were killed by watchdogs or brave residents. Gorak, the leader, went into hiding and took the skull with him.

Peoples’ memories are short in the Hold and since this new wave of murders began, carried out by the abominable “Flayer”, no one has linked the bloody deeds to Gorak’s expedition. However, my vision revealed some kind of connection; after many frustrating dream sights one thing is clear to me: there is some kind of association between the expedition and the skinning...
THE QUANDARY OF MASTER VERNAM

of our townsfolk. Alas, I also realized that my own death was a crucial step towards solving the riddle. And so, my unfamiliar friends by faith, are you. The how's and the why's are unintelligible to me, but hopefully you will be able to figure them out.

If ever we meet in the world beyond you’ll have to tell me everything about the events to come. Till then I can but ask you to forgive me for placing this burden on your souls. What’s ahead of you I would not wish for my greatest enemy, let alone persons who likely would have been my friends, had I but lived to greet them.

Master Vernam

SCENE 2.5: MYSTICAL PATHS TOWARDS UNVEILING THE MYSTERY

Below you will find a summary of what rituals may be effective in solving the murder mystery, and specific suggestions on what they can reveal regarding Vernam’s murder.

For clarity, it should be noted that the rituals Heretic’s Trail and Summoning cannot be used at the murder scene. Heretic’s Trail requires that the mystic has met the blight-stricken in person and Summoning requires blood, hair or an object with sentimental value to the summoned.

Fortune-telling

The Mystic may, with a successful Resolute test, ask a yes/no question regarding the adventure. Questions about the past are easy to answer, it is harder for the GM to know what will or will not happen. If uncertain it is recommended that the GM responds “unclear, ask again” so the player may rephrase or change the question.

Necromancy

The player character may ask Master Vernam yes/no questions and the GM answers with knocks (1=no, 2=yes), one question per successful Resolute test. Questions that are hard to answer can be met with silence, giving the player a chance to rephrase or change the question. If the mystic gets possessed by Vernam, the tutor’s last wish will be to bring the corruption of the king’s skull to an end.

One can also contact the elf Tara-Kel through the skin stripes, but she does not know more than Vernam about the killings. However, she obviously knows more about her own murder (see scene 4 for details). Tara-Kel is the second most recent Flayer-murder; the Corpse Examiner (4.1) has her body and there is a witness to the killing (4.2).

If the mystic is possessed by Tara-Kel, the elf’s last and hateful wish will be that the player character extracts revenge on the cowardly witness (Tara-Kel, like many others of her kind, had a hard time dealing with humans in general, with few exceptions).

Oracle

With a successful Resolute test the mystic may pose an open question; the GM is required to answer with the truth but not with the whole truth. The key to an effective use of Oracle in the game is to never give the player character exactly what he is after, but always provide something helpful. The answer can be a sudden vision or a name, depending on what the Game Master thinks may provide enough information without spoiling the entire mystery.

Examples of questions and answers:
- “Who killed Master Vernam?” – “The elf Tara-Kel” (Alahara was in the elf’s shape when the murder was committed.)
- “Who wore the elf’s skin?” – “The changeling Alahara”
- “What’s the next victim?” – “Harulo is next to die” (see scene 6)
- “Who is behind the killings?” – Many possible answers, but “King Hurian Lo-Apak” is recommended, followed by a flash image of the King at the prime of his life, wearing his shining copper crown, sitting on a throne in a hall full of subjects kneeling before the grim gaze of the ruler. King Hurian’s hand rests between the horns of a lindworm that is chained to the throne, casually scratching the beast with long fingernails.
- “Where is the Flayer?” – it is recommended that the GM provides the current position of Alahara in response. If posed during the murder scene investigation Alahara visits Ordo Magica; later he goes to Blackmoor hunting for a new victim some distance from Gorak’s hideout. Alahara makes short stops at the warehouse to feed Gorak the glands, but he never stays longer than necessary.
- “Where does the Flayer sleep?” – Alahara sleeps in different places and uses stimulants to sleep as little as possible. The ritual provides a vision of an inn, a shed and a muddy tunnel all as a sign that the killer does not linger in one place for very long.
- “Where is the King’s Skull?” – the question results in a vision of a cellar where someone (Gorak) sits bound to the wall and the skull lies whispering on a broken pillar. A slender shadow is also seen (Alahara), that feeds, comforts and weeps by the captive.
THIS CHAPTER INTRODUCES a small adventure landscape, with a series of scenes that are likely to appear as the characters investigate the recent murders in Thistle Hold. The player characters may tackle scene 3 to 6 in whichever order they like, and they do not even have to face them all in order to move on to the third chapter and its grand finale.

Scene 3: The Tower of Ordo Magica

SLY CHARACTERS WILL reach the conclusion that the killer – now in Master Vernam’s form – can gain entry to places that the tutor had access to. If they ask about locations Vernam used to visit they are given four options. Only two of them are relevant for the adventure but the GM can use this opportunity to introduce the Hold to the players. Estethra, or someone else, can testify that the tutor regularly visited the following places/persons:

- **The Salons of Symbaroum**, for food and drinks.
- **Father Sarvola at the Mission House**, since the tutor helped with the education of orphaned children and the cultivation of goblin juveniles.
- **Captain Marvello of the Town Watch**, who he visited to keep updated on the Flayer killings.
- His Alma Mater, the town’s Ordo Magica chapter, to study rituals or read something in its library. The tower of the order, with its well-equipped ritual chamber, was Alahara’s actual goal.

SCENE 3.1: DOORKEEPER GODALG

Gaining access to the tower of Ordo Magica can be easy, take time or not be possible at all, depending on whom the characters are and how they choose to introduce themselves.

The elderly goblin Godalg is appointed to be the tower’s doorkeeper and takes his job very seriously. His task is to greet everyone arriving to the chapter and do so with the main aim of not letting them in. All manner of people come knocking on the door hoping to “gain an audience with the Masters”, who in turn have no desire to be of service. Even the more prominent residents of Thistle Hold can be made to wait before meeting a Master, and none of them can be sure of having access to the Chapter Master, Cornelio.

Members of Ordo Magica are let in without question and are welcome to explore the tower. Player characters with a certificate from Mayor Nightpitch are also welcome (see scene 5). All others must display proper behavior. In order to gain entry, one needs an errand that appears reasonable to Godalg – which the characters have, if they stress that one of the current visitors may be a killer in disguise.

But for Godalg to disturb a Master, a Persuasive test is required. If successful, the player characters will send for them when she has time to greet them, which proves to be about six hours later.