

JOLENE
OR
THE BEAUTY FROM
BEYOND THE STARS

A
Ravenloft
GOTHIC EARTH

ADVENTURE FOR
6TH-8TH LEVEL
CHARACTERS

BY MRS C. EVANS





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“Playing in Gothic Earth” taken from Oliver Clegg’s excellent adventure Cliffhanger Abbey, and reprinted here with permission.

Special thanks: Oliver Clegg for beta reading and insights; M. T. Black and the aforementioned Oliver Clegg for turning Gothic Earth loose on DMs Guild; and several dozen odd folk on Twitter for encouraging this adventure’s creation. I hope it doesn’t disappoint.

If you enjoy this adventure, please consider leaving a rating or review, and looking up some more of my releases.

If you want to talk, you can find me on Twitter as @perpetualgloom

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Foreword

Welcome to Gothic Earth, a world similar, but not identical, to our own world in the 1890s.

There are no orcs or goblins to fight here, but there are deep mysteries, sinister cults, doomed romances, and a creature from beyond the stars,

Whose beauty is beyond compare,
With flaming locks of auburn hair,
With ivory skin and eyes of emerald green.

We cannot compete with you, Jolene.



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Welcome to Gothic Earth

Content Warnings

This is a horror adventure. It deals with seduction and coercion, meaning that it may have negative impacts on survivors of sexual assault or harassment, amongst others. The antagonist of Johanna wears the form of a beautiful woman, so there is also a high probability of violence against women and – depending on your group – some unkind jabs about her as a sexual being.

In addition, Chapter One includes a graphic depiction of suicide.

Sensitive subjects and scary situations require safety tools. If you are unfamiliar with RPG safety tools, this article by The Gauntlet, as well as Monte Cook Games' Consent in Gaming are great places to start:

<https://www.gauntlet-rpg.com/tools-of-the-table.html>

<https://www.montecookgames.com/store/product/consent-in-gaming/>

Lethality in Gothic Earth

Gothic Earth is dangerous. Characters are mere mortals, and the threats they face are evil and supernatural. Worse, the world is very much on the monsters' side.

In a traditional game of 5th edition Dungeons & Dragons it is very hard for characters to die. When they do, resurrection magic makes it a temporary pitfall. Not so in Gothic Earth. Combat here is dangerous, injury traumatic, and the chance of a mistake leading to permanent character death is high.

There are several combat encounters in Johanna, or The Beauty From Beyond The Stars. Any of them could prove deadly; Johanna herself is a frighteningly powerful enemy for characters of the recommended level. For an easier ride, save the adventure for a slightly higher level.



Playing in Gothic Earth

What is Gothic Earth?

Gothic Earth is a world much like ours, isolated from all other planes by a mysterious dark power. It is not, strictly speaking, a domain of Ravenloft. Or, at least, scholars in the topic differ on the matter. All that matters is that Gothic Earth is a strange mirror of our own, laced with dark monsters, evil magic and frozen in a period of time that vaguely reflects the 1890s. Characters are whisked away to and from Gothic Earth just as they are to any other domain of Ravenloft, often to a bitter and unsatisfying end.

Character Classes and Subclasses

Gothic Earth attempts to evoke a Victorian, gothic horror feel, but no classes or subclasses are restricted. Instead, consider re-flavoured classes that may seem jarring to fit the aesthetic your campaign is going for. For instance, your Drunken Master monk, instead of being influenced by eastern tropes, might instead be a drunken sailor with a sore head and enough dumb luck to fool the devil.

Magic in Gothic Earth

Gothic Earth resides in its own plane, isolated from all others. No spell, not even a Wish spell, allows one to escape. Astral Projection, Teleport and all similar spells cast with the intent of leaving Gothic Earth simply fail, as do all effects that banish a creature to another plane of existence, which instead spirit affected creatures to a random location on Gothic Earth for their duration. These restrictions apply to magic items and artifacts. Magic that allows transit to the Border Ethereal is the exception to this rule. A creature that enters the Border Ethereal from Gothic Earth is pulled back into Gothic Earth upon leaving that plane.

Magic is strange in Gothic Earth. Spells of fire and thunder are far less common than curses and augmentations. The world of Gothic Earth shuns flashier displays of magic, tending instead towards the subtle movements more easily disguised as coincidence or providence. Amended spell lists for Spellcasting classes are provided in the Appendices. Creatures drawn into Gothic Earth from other worlds find they are unable to remember or prepare spells not on this list whilst on Gothic Earth. Any such spell inscribed in spellbooks or onto a scroll appears as gibberish whilst on Gothic Earth.

Firearms and Armour

Firearms have been commonplace in Gothic Earth for quite some time. Re-imagining crossbows as pistols and rifles (while retaining their in-game statistics) keeps play moving and avoids learning a batch of new rules. However, firearms have one significant advantage over less sophisticated ranged weapons: firearms ignore non-magical armour. Dexterity, magic items, and spells such as mage armor function normally against firearms.

The Red Death

Magic is wrong on Gothic Earth. Dreadfully wrong. In the ancient past, something evil slipped through the cracks in reality in unknown circumstances, and began to poison the leylines of magic that criss cross the earth. Unopposed for long years, it squats like a hideous spider over the web of magic, and taints every spell cast on the plane. Furthermore, it hungers for the souls of magic users, seeking to corrupt them and steal their delicious life essence for itself. The shadow of the Red Death lies heavy on Gothic Earth, and has caused the plane to take on some unusual traits.

Dark Powers Checks

Consider using Honor in your Ravenloft campaign as a way of determining the sway the Dark Powers have over any character as a result of their actions. Honor is a barometer for how tightly the dark powers cling to any particular soul. If creating new characters for a Ravenloft campaign, you may allow characters to roll an extra ability score/spend some of their points on increasing their starting Honor score. See the Dungeon Master's Guide, Chapter 9: Dungeon Master's Workshop for rules on Honor. In Ravenloft, an Honor Saving throw is called a Dark Powers check.

In Gothic Earth having a character make an Honor saving throw when a character comes into direct contact with magic, or uses it for their own ends. Set the DC in accordance with how likely you think the occurrence is to have drawn the attention of the Red Death. On a failure, reduce that character's current Honor score by 1.

If the character's Honor score ever falls below half of their Spellcasting Ability score, they become an evil NPC under the Dungeon Master's Control and are removed from play. Characters who do not utilise magic for their own ends need not fear corruption by the Red Death, but they may find themselves at its mercy without the Art to protect them.

Dark Supremacy

In some places on Gothic Earth, where the influence of monsters and magic lies most heavily, mortal magic gutters in the face of true evil. No regional or lair effect can be dismissed or counteracted by mortal magic. In addition, when a spell is resisted by an evil creature's Legendary Resistance trait, the creature that cast the spell must immediately make a Dark Powers check.

Parasitic Siphon

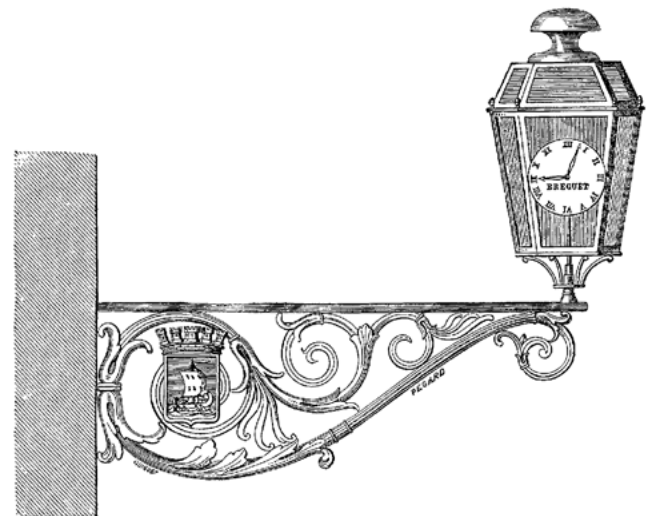
The Red Death draws magic to it through ley-lines, disrupting magical spells as they are cast and making it harder for spellcasters to safely

work their magic. When a creature attempts to cast a spell of 1st level or higher, that creature must succeed on a Spellcasting Ability check equal to 10+ the level of the spell being cast. On a failed check, the spell fails to cast and both the action and the spell slot used to cast the spell are wasted. If a creature ever rolls a 1 on this check, the spell backfires in a spectacular manner determined by the Dungeon Master.

As if this were not enough, the casting time of every spell is increased to represent the difficulty of working magic on Gothic Earth. The usual rules for casting spells over several rounds apply.

Listed Casting Time	Gothic Earth Casting Time
Reaction	Reaction
1 bonus action	1 action
1 action	2 actions
1 minute	10 minutes
10 minutes	1 hour
1 hour	8 hours
8 hours	24 hours
24 hours	24 hours

See the Appendix for amended spell lists for magic users in Gothic Earth.or



Back ground

Miss Rose Ashton of York was, until recently on course for a happy and entirely mundane existence. Engaged to a dashing young military officer by the name of Captain Roger Hurt, Rose was due to be married in the spring, mere months from now. However, Roger's affections have been diverted to Miss Jolene Eldon, a rare beauty who arrived from London at the turn of the year.

Roger is delirious with passion for Jolene. Literally. He raves about her when he dreams, and is completely under her sway. Rose is a determined girl and has opened up several lines of enquiry. She has already engaged a private investigator to look into Jolene's history in London, and has written to friends – either hers or Roger's, depending on the player characters' backgrounds – to consider more supernatural possibilities.

Jolene, meanwhile, is not at all what she appears to be. She is a creature of cosmic origin, summoned into the body of Johanna Egremont, a young London socialite, by a cult dedicated to great cosmic powers. The creature is ancient but its nature - a spirit of "profound, cosmic truth" - resonates with the "truth is beauty" philosophy of bohemians across Europe in this era of history.

When the Cult of the Cosmic Beauty's activities were disrupted by the secret society called The Knightly Order of the Balefire, Johanna escaped. Used to feeding on the adoration of a hundred followers, she has subsisted on the worship of eligible young men, draining them of sanity and energy until they are nothing but husks in the care of their families, or in asylums. She moves around the country, changing names and identities to evade pursuit, and attempting to replenish her power. She must be stopped.

Dramatis Personae

Captain Roger Hurt – A troubled young man
Rose Ashton – The fiancée of the troubled young man

Harry Arbuthnot – A private investigator hired by Rose

Jolene Eldon / Josephine Esher / Joelle Ender / Joan Everley / Johanna Egremont – the creature

Spencer Norton / Kenneth Buckley / Alfred Horne – the creature's previous victims

Felix Quisen – leader of the Cult of the Cosmic Beauty

Helena Fisher – occult investigator who busted the cult. An American

Adventure Outline

In **Part One**, the characters meet with Rose and Roger. The investigator, Harry Arbuthnot, takes his own life, but investigators learn a little of Johanna's history from his notes.

Armed with Harry's case file, in **Part Two** the characters travel to London, where they encounter the secret society called the Order of the Balefire, stumble into the underground temple of the Cult of the Cosmic Beauty, and discover a way to dismiss Johanna back to her own plane of existence.

Finally, the characters return to York for **Part Three**, and face down the creature known as Johanna.

Adventure Hooks

The characters are assumed to be personal friends of one of the parties involved: Rose Ashton, Roger Hurt, or some member of their family, and to be known as open-minded individuals who can be called upon when a situation defies mundane explanation. Rose (or a person close to her) has invited them to York to see what they make of Roger's condition.

The adventure also works as written for characters who are professional "monster hunters" or similar, or when one of the group is a respected physician or psychotherapist.

Part One: York

Tea with Miss Ashton

Read or paraphrase the following:

It is the tail-end of winter, and the entire city of York, from the ancient walls to the spire of York Minster, is coated in gritty, slushy, grey snow polluted by coal fires and smoke from the railways. Even in the medieval city centre, where buildings cram into winding streets and give some shelter from the wind, it is bitterly cold. To wait here, in the private upstairs room of the pub called the Three Kings, is to step back in time, to an age where trains and gas lamps were not yet conceived of and when man fought off the creatures of darkness with prayers and flashing steel.

The upstairs room of a pub is not the sort of place one would expect to meet a respectable young lady such as Rose Ashton, but it's the location she chose. The room is warm and cosy, a retreat from the brutal winter outside, and the pub is pleasant enough, serving hearty meals and a range of good, local beers including the infamous Viking Raider stout.

Rose arrives a little later than promised, and enters without knocking. Read or paraphrase:

You are joined, quite suddenly, by a young woman in a fur-lined cloak who immediately calls downstairs for a brandy to warm her up. It's a little early in the day for such things – if the sun could be seen in the grey sky, it would barely be past its zenith – but she has a presence that does not brook refusal.

Roleplaying Rose

Rose is a tall, confident young woman. Her clothes are fashionable and well made, but not especially fine. With a Roman nose and poker-straight hair, she's not quite in line with the current notion of 'beauty,' but she has intelligent eyes and there's something about being on the receiving end of her full attention that makes one feel rather special.

When she speaks, she is candid and to the point. She is intelligent and quick-thinking, but has only a limited education (for example, she is not familiar with science or medicine, should these be discussed). She won't be persuaded that there is nothing "unusual" about

her fiancé's condition. She responds to suggestions that she is simply jealous of Jolene Eldon with a cool glare and a "try to prove me wrong, if that's the only way you'll help me."

Rose's Perspective

Rose describes how she and Roger met: her aunt is a nurse, and cared for Roger after he was discharged from the army in South Africa following a serious injury. The two have known each other for just over a year, and been engaged for seven months. They were due to marry in May, just under two months away. Rose describes their relationship as one of equals, a "meeting of minds": they make each other laugh, and the world fades away when they're around one another.

All was well until, around the new year, a woman called Jolene Eldon entered their social circle. She had just arrived from London, under somewhat mysterious circumstances, but quickly made friends and was soon "invited to everything." Rose, like most of the women in her circle, found her dull, almost incapable of conversation, and somewhat distant. Every man, however, was enchanted by her. Rose initially assumed it was her beauty, but as Roger grew increasingly infatuated with her, began to suspect a more sinister cause.

Roger's health declined to the point where he was almost unable to care for himself. Rose's aunt Mary-Ann is nursing him once again. He spends most of his time in delirium, crying out for Jolene by name or by description ("my flame haired beauty, queen of my soul," and the like). He grows weaker by the day, doctors can do nothing, and Rose fears Roger will be dead before the day they were supposed to be wed.

Rose's Request

Rose wants the characters to investigate Jolene. She has already employed a private investigator by the name of Harry Arbuthnot to look into her past in London, but she didn't feel comfortable asking him to follow supernatural leads. She

hopes that the characters will be able to find out what sort of creature Jolene is, and how to drive her away from Roger.

Payment

Rose and Roger are comfortably well-off but not rich. Rose can offer payment up to £25 (roughly 2-3 months wages for a skilled tradesperson), and if necessary will promise further payments by instalment, up to a fee the characters will accept. However, she tries to impress upon them that this investigation might be the making of their careers, or provide them with new knowledge, and reminds them that letting a creature of evil hurt good people is a sin.

Educated Guesses

Characters who succeed on an **Intelligence (Arcana) check** draw the following conclusions, based on the DC achieved:

- DC 12: certain vampires are said to have the ability to enchant and enslave mortals
- DC 15: this sounds like faerie stories of young men pining after fae beauties

Development

Rose provides two leads for the characters to investigate: Roger and Harry.

Roger Hurt's Bedside

Roger is in his house on the outskirts of York. It's large and spacious but run-down, with a sagging, leaky, roof, a damp atmosphere and thick climbing plants attempting to pry their way in through every loose window and cracked stone. Rose, or Harry's housekeeper, Mrs Armstrong, explains that he bought it at a low price, with the intention of fixing it up for he and Rose when they were married.

Getting into the house is simplicity itself: Mrs Armstrong will admit anyone who might be able to help the young master. Mary-Ann Ashton, his nurse, is another matter: characters will have to drop Rose's name for her to allow them into Roger's sickroom.

Mrs Armstrong

Mrs Armstrong is a stout, grandmotherly woman in middle age. She's been a domestic servant for nigh-on fifty years, and running a household where the only master is sick in bed doesn't phase her. She's well paid and well treated, and she doesn't want to see Captain Hurt pass away - she doesn't wish to go looking for a new position. She knows very little of his situation, except that unless he's heavily dosed with laudanum, he wakes up screaming at all hours, thrashing around and shouting for his love. Sometimes he screams in a language she doesn't know, and they've had to start locking his bedroom door because he sleepwalks.

Jolene visited Roger occasionally, before he grew too ill, and Mrs. Armstrong never liked her: "cold and haughty, the sort of person you'd cross the road to avoid." She called in the evenings (most improper) or the late afternoons. As it's winter, this means it was always dusk or full dark by the time Jolene visited. Jolene is currently out of town - Mrs. Armstrong is not sure where.

Mary-Ann Ashton

Mary-Ann is about the same age as Mrs. Armstrong, but considers herself superior in every way. She started nursing during the Crimean War, learning directly from Mary Seacole, and regards this new career of caring for a single invalid as a huge step down from battlefield medicine. She's only here because she feels a certain loyalty to Roger after nursing him over the effects of the spinal injury that ruined his army career... and because her niece Rose is now engaged to him.

She is acutely embarrassed by Rose's insistence that there is some supernatural force at work, and firmly believes that Roger is an unpleasant little man with a wandering eye and a brain fever. She reels off his symptoms with clinical precision, and only occasionally indulges herself in snide remarks about Roger's moral character, all relating to his abandoning her niece Rose for Jolene.

Mary-Ann is only present during the days; after administering laudanum, she returns to her own home, about fifteen minutes' walk away. She is aware that Roger is "difficult" at night, but not in what ways. Mary-Ann can, however,

accurately describe the symptoms of his decline.

Initially he seemed to have influenza, or perhaps the early signs of tuberculosis: lack of energy and appetite, and little engagement with the outside world. As he neglected himself, he grew weaker, and slipped into delirium. At first he thought and spoke of nothing but Jolene, but when he grew too ill to receive visitors he declined quickly to a state of complete incoherence.

Captain Roger Hurt

The characters will have to wait at least an hour for Roger to emerge from the protective embrace of the latest dose of laudanum if they wish to speak to him. They can examine him while he is asleep, however.

Roger is a man in his early thirties, short, red-haired, and moderately attractive.

Medical Examination

The results of a **Wisdom (Medicine) check** are as follows:

- DC 10: Roger is extremely weak. He's emaciated, and his skin and hair show signs of malnutrition (they are dry, brittle, and weak)
- DC 11: He is being well cared for: he's clean, and there are no signs of sores or any physical injury except scars on his lower back consistent with a bullet wound, and surgery to remove it (note that there are no bite marks, if the characters are looking for them)
- DC 15: There is no physical illness or injury causing Roger's decline

Psychological Assessment

Once Roger is awake, the characters are free to attempt to converse with him. He is not remotely coherent, constantly looking towards his bedroom window and attempting to get out of bed and go to it. He cries out for Jolene, and accuses Mary-Ann, Rose, and anyone else nearby of keeping him prisoner. He will not answer questions on any topic other than Jolene, and responds to most of those with "my queen, my unearthly beauty, my star fallen to earth."

Magical Intervention

Roger's state of mind is not magically induced, and cannot be altered by *dispel magic*, *remove curse*, or similar. *Calm emotions* makes him rational for the spell's duration, but does not disrupt his obsession with Jolene: he talks about her as a woman he is in love with. He feels mildly guilty about choosing her over Rose, but he can't control his heart. *Charm person* or similar enchantments have the normal effects but will not, on their own, make Roger rational or take priority over his obsession with Jolene.

The Legacy of Harry Arbuthnot

Rose directs the characters to Harry Arbuthnot: she thinks it better they hear his findings direct from him. She assumes they are grave, because she knows he returned from London yesterday – a friend mentioned seeing him at the station – but he has not yet made contact with her. When the characters visit, read or paraphrase:

Harry's home is a cottage near the railway station. It's small, far from modern, and sits on the end of a row of similar whitewashed buildings. A small vegetable garden out front is suffering terribly, with the leeks and winter cabbages badly frost-damaged. The curtains are all drawn, no smoke rises from the chimney, and there is no sign that anyone is home.

Gaining Entrance

The cottage has both front and back doors. Both are locked – bolted from the inside – and no one answers characters' knocking or shouting. The doors must be forced open with a successful **DC 12 Strength (Athletics) check** if the characters wish to use them.

If characters force the front door in broad daylight and do not take care to check their surroundings, a passerby will see and confront them, raising enough fuss that someone will call the police. This may well result in an arrest, if they cannot talk their way out of the matter. After a brief hearing the next day, the characters will be bound over: required to appear in court a week from now, and to remain in York until then. Feel free to use the local constabulary to make the characters' lives difficult for the remainder of the adventure (e.g. to have them sneak unnoticed onto a train to London).

The windows are thin glass, and are easily 10

smashed, but they are too small for anyone but a child to crawl through.

Cottage Interior - Downstairs

The cottage smells awful, as if a sewer pipe has burst somewhere (improbable, as the toilet is in a small wooden outhouse).

The lower floor has two rooms: a small and dated kitchen, and the living room. There is no food in the kitchen except a stale loaf of bread, two full bottles of beer, four empty ones, and an almost empty bottle of Scotch. The living room is similarly sparse: a pair of slippers by the cold hearth, and a few books (apparently Harry quite enjoys the Brontë sisters) are the only personal effects. A brown leather bag, similar in style to a physician's, stands open next to an armchair by the fire. It's stuffed to bursting with papers.

The Cult of the Cosmic Beauty are watching the cottage remotely, and Harry's bag is the focus of their scrying magic. *Detect magic* doesn't reveal anything (the effect originates from the cultist Felix Quisen, in London) but if the characters have any means of detecting magical spying, inform them that they sense they are being watched.

A narrow flight of stairs leads up to the first floor. The smell is strongest close to them.

Cottage Interior - Upstairs

There are two rooms up here. The back room is currently a junk room, full of unwanted furniture, old correspondence, worn out clothes, and the like. It's thick with dust, and the spiders (which are mundane and harmless) are very put out by the characters' intrusion.

The front bedroom is dominated by the relatively new feature of a corpse hanged from the rafters. The smell up here is intense, and would be far worse were it not for the winter chill. The corpse in question is of a short, slight man with hair both greying and receding. This is Harry Arbuthnot, though there is no form of ID on the corpse.

A successful **DC 13 Wisdom (Medicine) check** indicates that this man has been dead for roughly two days.

The room contains a bed, desk, nightstand and wardrobe. Even a cursory look around reveals the suicide note on the desk. It reads

11 simply:

I have seen her eyes like deepest stars and I shall never be solely myself again.

Characters who have the *Speak with Dead* spell will surely want to speak to Harry Arbuthnot. Do not gloss over the horror of this process. The corpse's vocal chords have been crushed by the noose and his eyes bulge out of his head, wild and staring. He speaks in a slow, ugly croak and from the moment he is summoned he weeps and begs to be allowed to rest once more, "safe where I can forget." Harry answers questions truthfully, to the best of his ability (see "Harry's Findings" below). Characters who witness this brief 'resurrection' must make a **DC 15 Wisdom saving throw**. Those who fail are unable to sleep that night, without the use of drugs or alcohol, and do not gain the benefit of a long rest.

Harry's Findings

The doctor's bag in the living room contains all of the evidence Harry gathered in London. In summary:

- A list of names – one woman and one man, paired up; each of the male names has a status in parentheses (see Player Handout A)
- A newspaper article about the shocking disappearance of Miss Johanna Egremont, noted society beauty, after a "scandalous week-end of carousing in London's West End." The article is dated approximately two years ago
- Portrait photographs of "Johanna Egremont" and "Miss Joelle Ender" – who are quite clearly the same woman: a sharp-featured beauty with a direct, piercing gaze. Unlike Johanna, Joelle has a poise and grace that borders on chilling (though the characters do not know this, "Joelle" was the host of the Cosmic Beauty when this picture was taken). Her photograph is hard to look away from, and characters who see it have the strong urge to look again. This woman fits any descriptions of "Jolene" that the characters have gathered and, if shown to Roger sets him raving, begging to be allowed to see "my beautiful Jolene" in person
- Another newspaper article, this one about an arson attack that burned out two restaurants and a pub in Covent Garden last January

Development

Having gathered all of this evidence, the next

logical step is to go to London and continue Harry's investigations: he wasn't looking for evidence of the supernatural, and the characters are. If they do not draw this conclusion, Rose will strongly suggest it. Otherwise, let the characters carry out any investigations they wish to in York, and move on to London when they're ready.

A Perilous Journey

The railway is by far the most efficient way to get from York to London. Tickets range from expensive, for first class – a luxurious experience with a dining car – to cheap third class travel that requires rattling around on wooden seats for the entire six-hour journey.

The Cult of the Cosmic Beauty now has one eye on the characters, and would prefer they not reach London armed with several leads and a doctor's bag full of painstakingly collected evidence.

Cultists in London conjure Spirits of Truth – an ethereal creature that serves Johanna – onto the train to steal Harry's findings (if the characters have them in their possession), and to remove their memories of everything that occurred in his home.

Spirits of Truth - Tactics

Use one Spirit of Truth (use the **invisible stalker** stat block, with the Devour Truth ability described below) for every two characters. They prowl through the train, invisible, and strike when characters are alone if there is an opportunity to do so; otherwise, they attack as a group when the train is about fifteen minutes from London.

Unless characters can see invisible creatures, they are unlikely to sense the spirits' presence. Inform characters with a **passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 16** or higher that they feel they are no longer alone. Characters who can see the spirits perceive clouds of green and purple gas that extrude limbs from their forms to propel themselves along walls and ceilings. Within their forms, dozens of mouths open and close silently, gasping and snapping, and when they locate their pray, they settle around their head and shoulders like a blanket.

The spirits settle on as many characters as possible, and extract the memories of Har-

ry's home and what they found there from their minds. The spirits become visible when they feed, and remain visible for a minute afterwards.

Once their work is done, or they are reduced to 50 hit points, the spirits flee. They escape through the windows of the train and climb up onto the roof, then flee to the back of the train where they take off, flying towards London. Should the characters choose to follow, combat on the roof of a moving train is, naturally, a dangerous endeavour. The surface is difficult terrain, and each character must make a **DC 14 Dexterity saving throw** at the beginning of their turn. Failure means they fall prone; a second consecutive failure means they fall from the train, taking 21 (6d6) points of bludgeoning damage. Characters who survive this will have to limp into London on foot.

Devour Truth

The Spirit of Truth feeds on truth, in the form of memory. As an action on its turn, the many mouths of the spirit's ephemeral form whisper and suck, drawing thoughts from the victim's mind and replacing them with knowledge of the deeper truths of the cosmos. Victims who fail a **DC 14 Intelligence saving throw** open their mind to the spirit. It is a profoundly beautiful experience, like suddenly understanding the entire universe at once. It is also profoundly terrifying, causing the victim to be Paralysed. The victim may repeat the save each round at the end of their turn, ending the effect on a success. The effect also ends if the Spirit of Truth is no longer in physical contact with the victim.

If the Spirit of Truth remains in contact with a victim for a full minute, it removes one key memory from the victim's mind – for example, the memory of a previous encounter in-game.

It is unlikely, and undesirable, that the Spirits of Truth should succeed in wiping the memories of the entire group of characters. If it does happen, the characters remember their commission from Rose, and know that Harry Arbuthnot came to London to gather evidence, just not what he found. When they start asking around, Helena Fisher will find them, and tell them everything Harry knew.

Part Two: London



Arrival

The characters reach London's Kings Cross station early in the evening, arriving in light snow and bitter cold. The area is home to little except warehouses, factories, and other industry, and overall it is a grim, but accurate, welcome to the metropolis.

They now have several leads to follow up:

- **Helena Fisher:** Harry's notes include a scribbled reference ("Who is Helena Fisher???"). Helena is not mentioned anywhere else in his investigation. Whether or not the characters actively investigate her, Helena will find them
- **The Trail of Destruction:** The characters have the names and locations of several of Jolene's previous conquests. Interacting with her victims is optional, but provides limited insight into her behaviour. At your discretion, you may wish to summarise what characters learn from each young man, rather than play out each scene in full

- **Johanna Egremont:** The characters may be interested in the "original" Johanna, and if they have the right contacts will be able to track down limited information about her
- **The Covent Garden Arson:** Harry noted the address of the buildings burned down several years ago. This is the key lead: it takes the characters to a meeting with the remnants of the Cult of the Cosmic Beauty. If the characters go here first, they may skip the 'trail of destruction.' This makes for a shorter (but more action packed) adventure.

Who is Helena Fisher?

As the characters follow up their leads, they should hear frequent mentions of a woman named Helena Fisher. Helena has been following all the same beats as the characters. She's been everywhere before them. Various NPCs – monks, jailors, nurses, as well as Kenneth and Arthur – mention the American lady who's been asking

questions. They all remember Harry Arbuthnot as well.

Characters with connections to occult groups, who work their contacts, learn about a group of secretive Americans who came “sniffing round” the West End early last year. Some go so far as to claim that one of them, a woman, is still in town.

Helena is a member of the good-aligned secret society known as the Order of the Balefire: a small, close-knit group dedicated to tracking down and destroying groups who practise “dark” magic (see Appendix C). She – with the assistance of some other members – burned out the Cult of the Cosmic Beauty’s sanctum in Covent Garden. Her colleagues have returned to the United States, but Helena has remained behind to make sure the remnants of the cult don’t reform: “it’s never a clean job. Cults are like ringworm: pernicious.”

Helena knows the True Song that will separate the Cosmic Beauty from its host.

Roleplaying Helena

Helena knows the world is a bleak place where the worst impulses of humanity thrive and monsters own the shadows. Fortunately, Helena is a calm, skilled professional who is prepared to take on the darkness. She is reserved and self-assured, never showing a single crack in her confident demeanour. She gives the impression of knowing precisely what to do in any situation, and is right more often than not. She’s aware that she is alone in London and in need of allies, and chooses to trust the characters.

Helena is a tall, muscular, African American woman with a strong New York accent, who dresses in tailor-made men’s suits (she will deeply regret losing access to the famous tailors of Savile Row when she returns to America), and carries a sword-cane (use the statistics of a rapier) and a pistol (hand crossbow) with silver bullets.

Trail of Destruction

The characters have a list of men associated with Johanna, under her different aliases, and their current locations. They can visit any and all of them. The three young men are in varying states of health. Spencer Norton is as delicate as Roger Hurt, and is kept heavily sedated;

Kenneth and Alfred escaped before the Cosmic Beauty’s influence was as strong, and are a little more coherent.

Spencer Norton

Spencer knew Johanna as Josephine Esher. Before their romance, which ended the previous November (just before “Jolene” appeared in York), Spencer was a promising young barrister. His mental state deteriorated throughout his courtship of Josephine and his family had him committed to an expensive but pleasant private asylum in the leafy suburb of St. John’s Wood. Spencer looks exhausted: haggard, despairing, and several years older than his alleged age of twenty-eight. He is kept under heavy sedation.

When asked about Josephine, he weeps, and begs to be allowed to see her again: his family wrenched him away from her, but “a little longer and she could have taken all of me. I would have disappeared into her. I would have known the Truth...”

If the characters can get him to talk coherently – allow appropriate **Charisma-based ability checks, or Wisdom (Medicine) for psychotherapeutic approaches (all ability checks start at DC 16)** but can be reduced through good roleplaying) – Spencer tells them of the group of gentlemen – “rather rakish, of a queer disposition, and mostly frequenting the more outrageous bars around Covent Garden” – who introduced him to Josephine. He can’t recall any of their names, and he never saw them again once his friendship with Josephine was established.

Kenneth Buckley

Kenneth is now Brother Theophilus, of the Abbey of St. Hugh Redemptor in Bromley (a quiet town a short train journey from central London). He is physically healthy, but there is an anxious, nervous energy about him: he seems fragile. He has taken a vow of silence, and refuses even to be in the presence of women. Kenneth can be induced to speak through appropriate **Charisma-based ability checks, or Intelligence (Religion) checks (all made at DC 16)**, though this can be reduced by good roleplaying).

He knew Johanna as Joelle Ender, and their relationship began in July of the previous year and ended in October. Before Joelle, Kenneth was attracted only to men but once he met her, she quickly eclipsed every other person in

his life. He recalls, with hindsight, becoming obsessed by her... but also terribly frightened of her. He saw her in his dreams, along with visions of a yawning void of silver nothingness. He prayed to God for deliverance and found the strength to flee, seeking sanctuary in the monastery.

Joelle simply approached him in a park one day, and they fell to talking. As far as he knows, their meeting was a coincidence. He recalls that when they met, her hands and arms were badly burned, but she made a rapid recovery in the first few weeks of their acquaintance.

Alfred Horne

Alfred is the youngest son of a family indirectly descended from a baronet. That is to say, he is technically a nobleman, but only barely. He knew – and courted – Johanna as Joan Everley, between January and July of last year. He is currently in Pentonville Prison (very new, very modern, and very foreboding: over five-hundred prisoners, all kept in solitary confinement) after falling into heavy drinking and sinking deeply into debt due to a serious gambling addiction.

Note that the characters will have to sign in and provide a current address to visit. This is not intended as an obstacle, but looking at these records is the best approach to finding Helena Fisher.

Alfred remembers Joan with no fondness whatsoever:

“She would have taken everything. If not for Miss Fisher, there’d be nothing left of me. She taught me the song...”

He frequently trails off into humming an unpleasant, discordant tune under his breath. The characters can learn the tune with four hours of practice and a successful **DC 18 Intelligence (Performance) check**, or by making multiple visits (three visits allows them to learn the tune without the need for an ability check).

Helena Fisher also visited Alfred in prison

– and was required to provide an address to the guards, when she signed in. With a little bribery or coercion, the characters can learn that she is staying in an upmarket hotel in the West End, called Durant’s. Armed with this information, they may find Helena before she finds them (see Covent Garden Arson, below).

The Original Johanna

The characters may wish to seek out information about Johanna Egremont, the subject of one of the photographs amongst Harry’s papers. This is easily achieved, if the characters have any contacts in high society, or the seedier, vice-ridden parts of London.

Johanna went missing over a year ago, but she remains infamous as a wild girl who turned her back on respectable society and spent her time (and a lot of her parents’ money) debauching herself with disreputable theatre folk and other “young bohemians”: lots of artists and musicians, the type who preach facile ideals like “truth is beauty, and beauty is truth.”

Rumour has it that she left the country after a particularly disgraceful period of partying and recklessness. She was never seen again afterwards, and some former acquaintances now claim she described that stretch of time as “her last week on earth.”

Her family left England for the continent a few months after she disappeared, to escape the scandal.



Covent Garden Arson

Harry’s notes make reference to a cluster of buildings in Covent Garden that burned out in an arson attack whose perpetrator was never caught. Memory of the crime is still relatively fresh, and any locals – shopkeepers, hansom cab (taxi) drivers – can direct the characters to the site on Goring Street. When the characters

arrive, read or paraphrase:

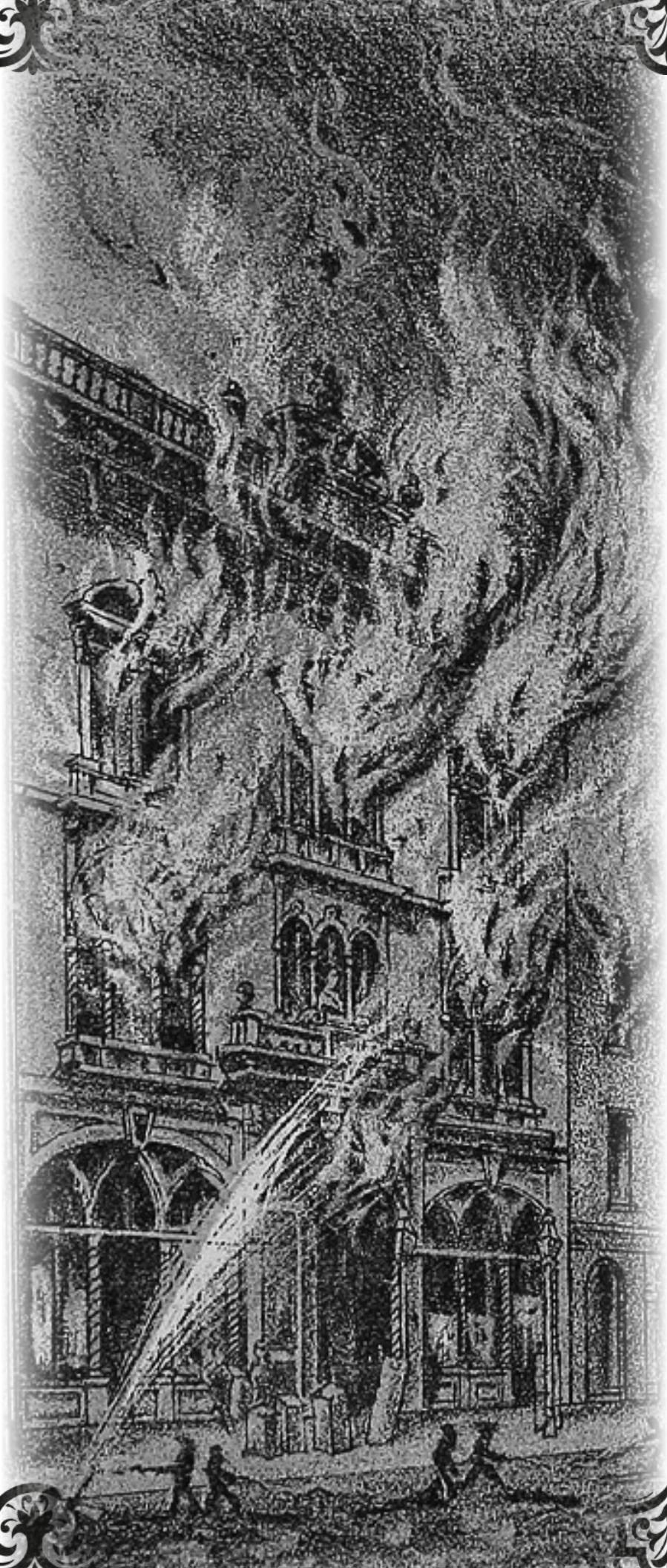
Covent Garden is busy and loud. Well-to-do folk jostle shoulder-by-shoulder with the rougher sort who feed and entertain them here, in the clamour of the West End. Riotous Punch and Judy shows take place yards away from the Royal Opera House and genteel supper houses look out onto bustling market stalls.

The buildings you're looking for stand out like rotten teeth, black and broken, between freshly plastered shops to either side. The two restaurants and a bar haven't been rebuilt or re-opened, which is in itself bizarre, in this part of London, where anything that might turn a profit is for sale.

More Information

The businesses to either side are Jolliver's Tea Room and McCarthy & Dunne's, purveyor of sheet music. The staff at both are more than happy to gossip with potential customers about the establishments that used to stand between them (the restaurants Heming's and Quisen's, and the pub called The Bantam). They insist that:

- there was something very odd about the proprietor of Quisen's (the building in the middle of the three burned out businesses) – a young man by the name of Felix Quisen
- the owner took no care of the establishment, which therefore did very little business
- the place was best known for private parties that went on until dawn, always with the same set of people. They used to “slink home, pale and worse for wear” when staff were opening up nearby shops the morning after
- the attendees of these parties were mostly men, but there were occasional women – most notable “that red-haired society girl. Julia something... no, Johanna.”
- With a successful **DC 13 Wisdom (Insight) check**, the characters conclude that those they speak to are hiding something from them; with a successful **DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion or Intimidation) check**, they convince someone to reveal that they have seen people creeping about the ruins late at night, as recently as last week.



Exploring the Ruins

The ruined buildings on Goring Street are easy to access. No one will prevent them from simply walking in: not all of the windows are boarded up. If the characters wish to enter without being seen, they must succeed on a **DC 17 Dexterity (Stealth) group check**: the surrounding area is busy at all hours of day and night.

By day

Standing in the ruins is an unpleasant experience. The characters have a strong sense of unease, as if something is not quite right; they feel that the street – and the rest of the world – is further away than it is. At the end of every minute they spend in the ruins, the characters must succeed on a **DC 11 Wisdom saving throw**, or leave the area as quickly as possible. If the characters manage to stay for ten consecutive minutes, they no longer need to make saving throws unless they leave and re-enter.

Characters with a **passive Wisdom (Perception) of 15 or better**, or who succeed on a **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check**, spot markings on the walls. Splashed in red paint, they are crudely drawn and disquieting to look upon. A successful **Intelligence (Arcana) check** reveals the following information:

- DC 12: there are a lot of eyes and what look like mouths amongst the markings
- DC 15: they have elements in common with Enochian and other Western occult practices, but also a crudeness that is unique
- DC 18: some of the symbols look almost like constellations, but slightly warped
- DC 20: a hunch says the meaning is something to do with readiness or return

Use of *comprehend languages* or similar ability allows a character to fully understand the messages (“be ready”; “the cosmic beauty is replenished”; “the beauty of cosmic truth”; “awake, awake, brethren of the stars”; “she returns”). However, as they perceive the meaning, they experience a vision of the starry night sky, which tears open and devours them; they must succeed on a **DC 18 Intelligence saving throw** or lose the ability to speak coherently, including the ability to cast spells with verbal components, until they complete a Long Rest. The only sound they can make is a wordless, discordant, ululating song.

and debris that cover the area find some of it has been arranged to cover a new, sturdy trapdoor. Characters who succeed on a **DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) check** find the trapdoor after two minutes of searching; if no characters succeed, they find the trapdoor after ten minutes of searching. Characters who are searching must still succeed on the Wisdom saving throw described above, or flee the area.

Characters with a **passive Wisdom (Perception) of 18** or better, or who are actively watching the street outside the area and succeed on a **DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check** see someone watching them as they browse shops across the street. This is Helena Fisher.

By Night

By night, the ruins are even more disconcerting. Characters there after dark must succeed on a **DC 13 Wisdom saving throw** at the end of every minute, or leave the area as quickly as possible. Characters continue making this saving throw however long they remain.

The area is in darkness: characters without a light source or a means of seeing in the dark are Blinded.

The characters are not alone in the ruins of Goring Street after dark. Felix Quisen is there when they arrive. He immediately takes cover behind some broken chunks of masonry. Allow the character with the highest passive Perception to see him. Thinking himself unobserved, Felix sneaks over to the trapdoor, opens it, and descends into the cellar beneath.

Helena Fisher is still watching the characters (they have a chance to spot her, as above). If the characters interact with Felix, she enters the ruins and joins them. If Felix escapes, she runs into the ruins, orders the characters to follow her, and chases Felix through the trapdoor (triggering the glyph of warding placed on it).

Felix Quisen

If the characters prevent Felix from leaving through the trapdoor, they have the opportunity to interrogate him. He won't call for help: he doesn't want to call attention to himself or his activities. If intimidated, charmed, or persuaded that the characters are potential allies, he shares the following information:

- The Cult formed from a group of artists and musicians obsessed with discovering the

cosmic ideal of Truth, which they equated with Beauty

- They progressed from philosophical discussion to occult theory and then to practice, eventually devising a ritual that would allow them to summon an entity known as The Cosmic Beauty, a force of mind-shattering, glorious, Truth

- They summoned the creature into a suitable vessel, the most beautiful woman they had access to, and proceeded to worship it

- They used Johanna Egremont, against her will, as a host for a creature known as The Cosmic Beauty: a being of Enlightened Truth, which grants insight into higher wisdom than the minds of men are meant to comprehend. Unfortunately, the being feeds on the adoration of men. The worship of the cult was enough, until a group of short-sighted fools known as the Order of the Balefire burned out their headquarters

- Johanna escaped, and has been satisfying her hunger elsewhere, rebuilding her strength. Johanna visited him recently; she will return to her loyal worshippers soon, and bless them with secrets that will unravel their tangled minds

- She needs to finish just one more conquest, then she will return to him. She is on her way back to York, to finish her work there

The Trapdoor

The trapdoor is marked with a glyph of warding, which requires a successful **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check** to spot and, when the door is opened, casts wind wall, surrounding the trapdoor and causing 3d8 Bludgeoning damage (halved on a successful **DC 15 Strength saving throw**) to anyone caught in or entering the area. Felix does not trigger the glyph.

The trapdoor opens onto a narrow stone staircase leading down into a low-ceilinged, thirty feet square cellar. The room smells strongly of smoke and is coated in a fine layer of ash. The far corner of the cellar wall is collapsed, creating an exit from the room. The characters hear Felix Quisen's running footsteps in the tunnel beyond the collapse.

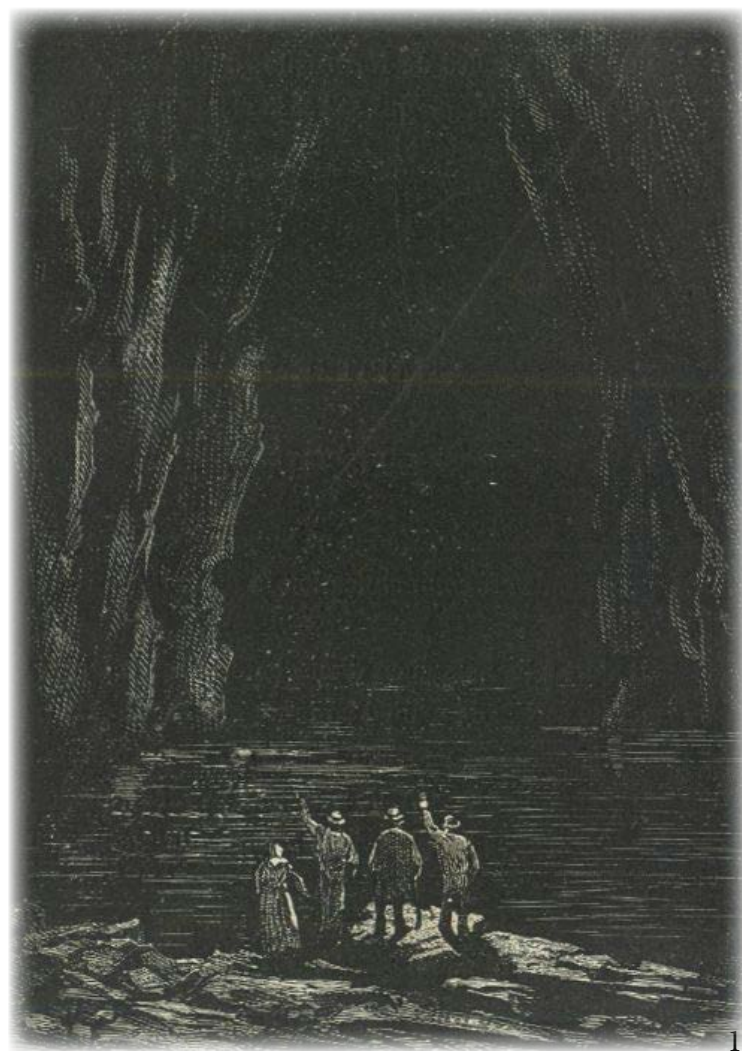
The Tunnels

The tunnels beyond the cellar are ancient, the stone rounded and worn smooth from age. The same crude, yet detailed, sigils are

marked on the walls here as up above (use the same guidelines for interpreting them with Arcana or spells), both scrawled in paint and etched into the stone. The tunnels give the same sense of impending doom, and also twist and turn in needlessly complex patterns; characters who succeed on a **DC 14 Intelligence saving throw** navigate them normally, but those who fail feel mild panic and can't concentrate on finding and following the correct route (they make all Survival checks to navigate the tunnels at disadvantage).

Helena Fisher is immune to this effect, which the characters can infer with a successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check** if she is with them. She does not realise, unless prompted, that the characters are having an unpleasant experience but does offer directions through the tunnels (giving advantage on the roll, or at least counteracting disadvantage).

The journey through the tunnels is an ideal opportunity for the characters to learn what Helena knows (see Helena Fisher, page 13).



Call for three **DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) checks**, each representing several minutes of travel. If the characters succeed on all three, they follow Felix's footsteps directly to the Cult Sanctuary (see below). On a failed check, they wander off Felix's trail and encounter some of the Cult of the Cosmic Beauty's Hosts to Truth: disgusting, semi-functional creatures, the result of summoning abstract ideas into flesh. Some are still close to human: many eyed, many mouthed, bipeds singing wordless hymns to the Cosmic Beauty (**cult fanatics**). Others have progressed further in their communion with Beautiful Truth, and are shapeless, tentacled things that gibber incoherently and drag their bulk from place to place by attaching some of their many mouths to the ground and propelling themselves forward (**gibbering mouthers**).

- **Fail first check:** hear distant, voices. If the characters investigate, they find three cult fanatics gathered around a small bonfire eating... some sort of roast meat. The cultists attacks upon seeing the characters

- **Fail second check:** stumble upon five cult fanatics singing and dancing, celebrating another of their number becoming a gibbering moulder. The group attacks upon seeing the characters

- **Fail third check:** The characters are thoroughly lost. On turning a corner they are confronted by three gibbering mouthers singing at each other; two cult fanatics then ambush the characters from behind

The Cult Sanctuary

Felix flees into the cult's sanctuary, intending to gather up the badly injured Hosts to Truth that are sheltering down there. Unfortunately, whether the characters arrive promptly or not, he still hasn't managed to corral the keening, inhuman monstrosities.

Features of the Sanctuary

The Sanctuary is a natural chamber that has been further carved out to make a round room. The ceiling, walls, and floor are all stone and every inch is marked with the same sigils as before. Scorched stone, burned debris, and the lingering smell of char give evidence of a great blaze at some time in the past.

In the centre of the chamber, the darkness gives way to a ragged slit like a tear in a curtain, through which unfamiliar stars shine brightly. Characters who focus on the tear (e.g. make any ability check relating to it) or come within five feet of it must succeed on a **DC 18 Intelligence saving throw** or lose the ability

to speak coherently or cast spells with Verbal components until they complete a Long Rest. The only sound they can make is a wordless, discordant, ululating song.



The Remains of the Cult

Felix and three Hosts to Truth await the characters here. There are numerous exits from the sanctuary, but they stay and fight: Felix assumes that the characters won't let them escape, and the Hosts are hungry. Felix has a pistol, and the Hosts all fight in close combat. The tear in reality in the centre of the chamber functions like the *hunger of hadar* spell, except that its area of effect is lightly, rather than heavily, obscured due to the starlight emanating from the slit. The tentacles that lash out of the slit whenever creatures get close (as per the spell) attack the characters, Helena, and Felix, but not the Hosts.

The Hosts fight to the death, but Felix attempts to flee back down the passages towards the Goring Street cellar if two of the Hosts are killed or if he is reduced to 20 hit points.

Part Three: York

Debrief

Either on the way to the sanctuary, on the way back to the surface, or – if neither of these is practical – later, in a quiet, secluded, park a few streets away from Goring Street, Helena tells the party what she knows. She is more friendly if she has already seen the characters take on the cult, but forthcoming and ready to talk however previous events have played out.

She tells them about:

- the Order of the Balefire: its history and goals (see Appendix C)
- tracking an American occultist (Joseph Mark Guest) to London and finding he had joined the Cult of the Cosmic Beauty
- attempting to destroy the Cult's sanctuary, and the business that shielded it (and, as unfortunate collateral damage, the ones to either side)
- losing track of the Cosmic Beauty's host in the fight, and being unable to locate her
- the True Song that, if sung to the Cosmic Beauty, will dismiss her back to her home beyond the stars; without it, killing the host will expel her, but she may remain in this world

The True Song

Helena knows the True Song: she and her colleagues intended to capture the Cosmic Beauty, and sing the song themselves, but never had the opportunity

She can teach the song to one or more characters. Characters who are proficient in Performance learn the song with eight hours of practice and instruction, and a successful **DC 16 Charisma (Performance) check**.

Helena will not return to York with the characters: she has work to do in London, stamping out the last traces of the cult in the city. The characters may have learned from Felix Quisen that Johanna is on her way back to York. Whether they know this or not, they should be ready to return there and save Captain Hurt. By now they should have learned

either Alfred Horne or Helena Fisher's version of the true song. They must face the Cosmic Beauty, and decide whether to save her host or simply kill her.

With All Due Haste

If Rose Ashton has any way of knowing the characters have returned, she meets them at the railway station in York; otherwise, the characters will find her anxious and tense when they call upon her. She explains that Jolene Eldon has returned from wherever she has been, and "sunk her claws into Roger once again."

She is with him now. Rose implores the characters to tell her what they've learned on the way to Roger's home.

Alternatively, if the characters don't call on Rose but go straight to Roger's home, they find Jolene/Johanna there, as described below.

By His Side

The characters arrive at Roger's house to find both Mrs. Armstrong and Mary-Ann Ashton in a state of distress. Jolene has arrived, they explain, and is walking with the Master in the grounds. They fear for his delicate health, but when they tried to object to her taking him, found themselves powerless to stop her. When the characters go looking for the two, read or paraphrase:

Light snowfall converts the overgrown grounds of Captain Hurt's home to a series of looming threats: half-hidden outbuildings and shrouded trees. Their voices lure you to them, and you are granted your first sight of Jolene – Johanna – The Cosmic Beauty. She is just like her photographs: red-haired, pale, and almost impossible to look away from. Dressed in a smart, fur-collared coat, she is pushing Captain Hurt in a wicker-sided wheelchair along a path around a frozen, icy, pond.

Roleplaying the Cosmic Beauty

Jolene is distant, and does not speak except to answer questions using the fewest words possible. Even so, she has a powerful presence: a terrible beauty that makes it difficult to oppose her. Any Charisma checks against her are made with disadvantage, and she makes any Charisma checks against the characters with advantage.

Unless the characters initiate conversation (or combat) her attention remains on Roger, to whom she whispers sounds that sound almost like speech, but are in no language the characters can understand (even with magic).

Roger seems to be fading fast, becoming weaker – but happier – with every sound she makes. The Cosmic Beauty does not attack the characters unless she feels threatened (i.e. they attack first, attempt to subdue her, separate her from Roger, or begin to perform the True Song).

Roleplaying Roger Hurt

Roger is semi-conscious when the characters arrive: he is far too frail to be outside in the snow. If the characters wake him, which will require physical force or healing magic, he is as incoherent as when they last saw him. He reaches constantly for Jolene's hand, and ignores the characters' presence entirely.

Tactics

Unless the characters simply let Jolene sap the last of Roger's life from him, and leave, this encounter is likely to end in combat.

The Cosmic Beauty (see Appendix A) is in fact two creatures: "Jolene," and the entity itself. Jolene exists in the material plane, and the entity in the ethereal plane. As its first action, it manifests in the material plane: a humanoid, vaguely feminine shape made of stars and coloured gases, in which voiceless mouths open and close and a thousand eyes blink in sequence. At this point, Jolene is fully enveloped by the entity, and effectively exists only as a pool of hit points the entity uses to regenerate.

Once it has manifested, the entity attempts to kill the characters. It does not fear for its life, knowing it will only be banished back to its plane of origin if it is reduced to 0 hit points.

It stays close to Roger's wheelchair, going so far as to use it as half cover. Roger is fully in

the thrall of the Cosmic Beauty's Obsession ability, and can therefore be used for Replenishment (see Appendix A).

The True Song

Unless the characters successfully perform the True Song, their only option is to kill the Cosmic Beauty, which will also result in Johanna's death (this may or may not worry the characters).

The True Song is a one-use magic item (with no material form). It requires thirty seconds (five combat rounds) to activate. While singing the True Song, the character must use their Action to perform it, and cannot use their bonus action or reaction for any purpose that involves speaking or vocalising (e.g., no spells with a vocal component). The True Song requires focus and attention, and characters must make Concentration saving throws when they take damage, the same as if they were casting the spell.

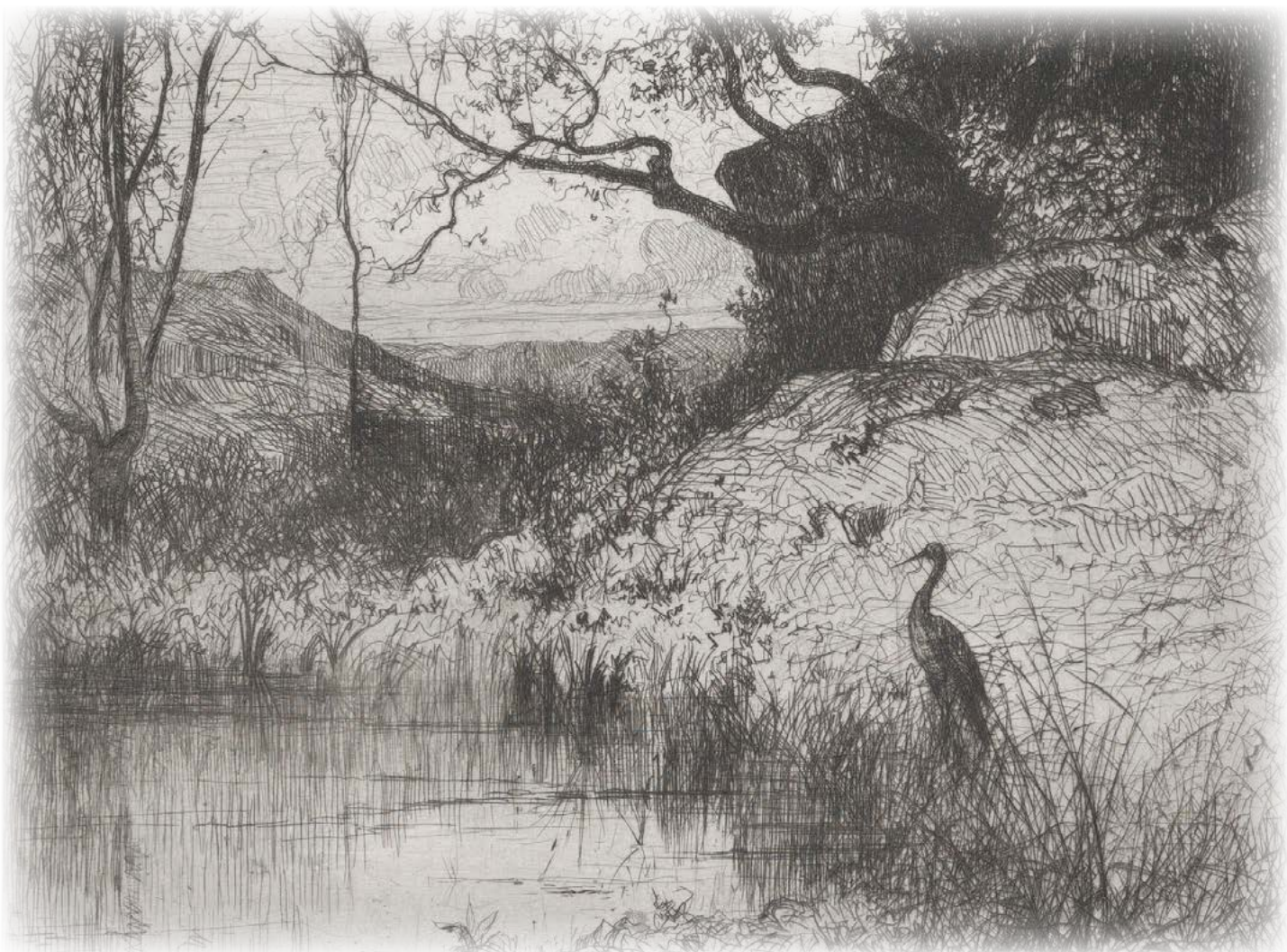
If the performer is using Alfred's version of the True Song (a poor and inaccurate copy) they must succeed on a **DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana or Performance) check** to begin casting it. If they fail the check, they may repeat it in following rounds until they succeed once, or fail three times.

If a character successfully performs the song to its conclusion, a tear opens in reality, just like the characters saw in the cult's temple (once again, it functions like the hunger of hadar spell, except that the area is only lightly obscured). The Cosmic Beauty is immediately grappled by writhing black tentacles, as are any characters in the area of effect, who fail a **DC 14 Strength saving throw** (the Cosmic Beauty fails automatically). The following turn, on initiative count 20, anyone grappled by the tentacles is sucked through the portal, which closes after them. They are, to all intents and purposes, dead.

Killing the Cosmic Beauty

If the characters do not attempt or complete the True Song and instead reduce the Cosmic Beauty's hit points to zero, it detaches from Johanna and attempts to use its Possession ability to move into the nearest character or NPC. This is a very visible process.

Once the creature has successfully pos-



essed a host, or has tried and failed to use the ability twice, it cannot do so again: if the characters kill its new host, or it does not find one, it disperses as faintly coloured gases into the air.

acters to offer them membership in the Order of the Balefire

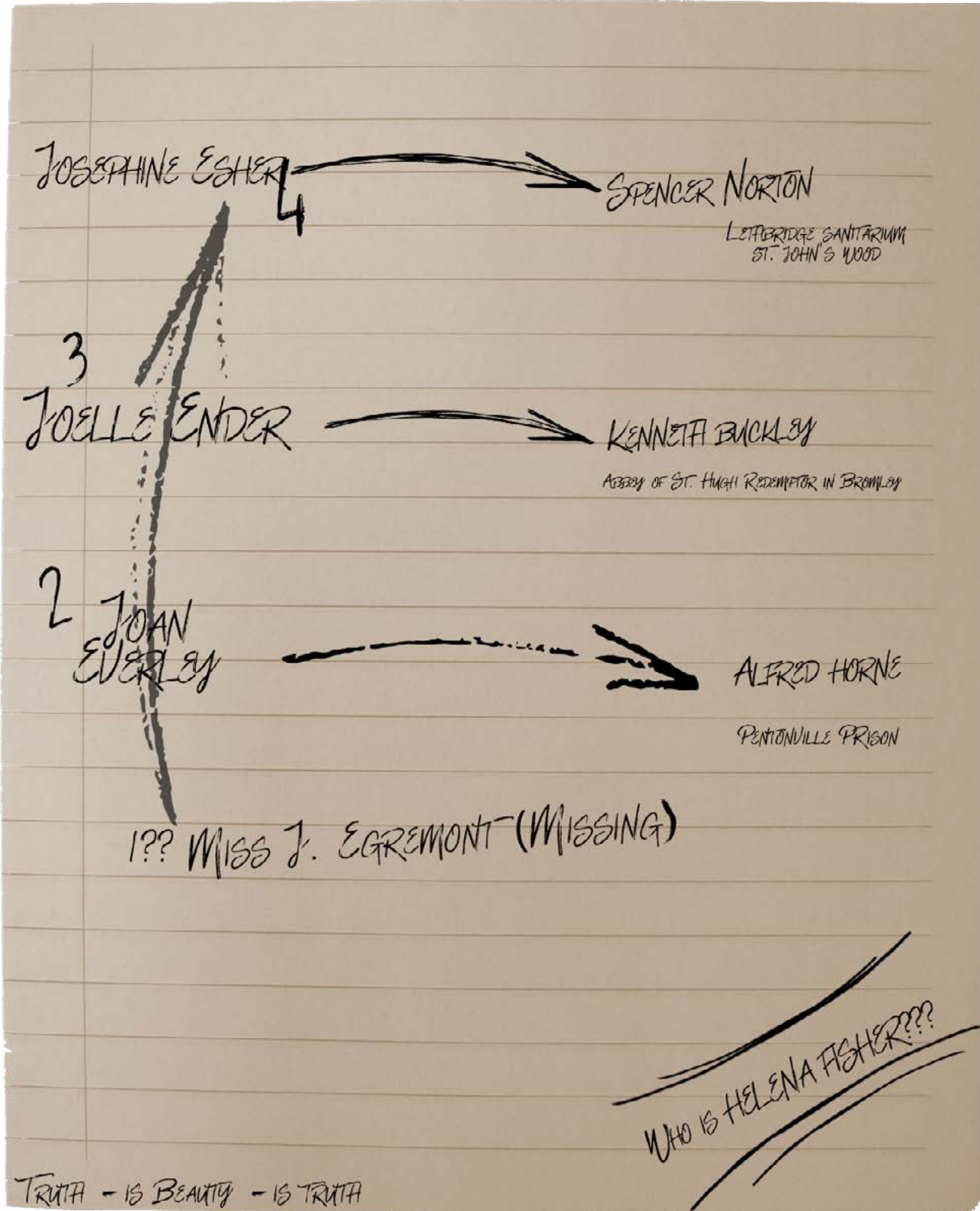
Conclusion

With the Cosmic Beauty dealt with, it is time to tally the characters' achievements.

- If Rose is still alive (which is likely) she pays them the promised reward
- If Roger survived, she is grateful, and the characters can count on her as a future ally
- If Felix Quisen died in London, the Cult of the Cosmic Beauty no longer presents a threat; otherwise, their work continues in secret
- Helena Fisher returns to America, but if the characters successfully banished, or killed, The Cosmic Beauty, she will learn of it eventually and may, at your discretion, contact the char-



Player Handout A



Appendix A: NPCs & Items

The Cosmic Beauty

large aberration, chaotic evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armour)

Hit Points 204 (24d10 + 72)

Speed 30 ft.

Str	Dex	Con	Int	Wis	Cha
14 (+2)	16 (+3)	17 (+3)	20 (+5)	15 (+4)	19 (+4)

Saving throws Intelligence +8, Wisdom +7, Charisma +7

Skills Deception +7, Intimidation +7, Insight +5, Perception +5, Persuasion +7

Damage Immunities Poison

Condition Immunities Restrained Stunned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15

Languages English, Deep Speech, Telepathy 60 ft.

Challenge 10 (5,900 xp)

Legendary Resistance (3/day). When the Cosmic Beauty would fail a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Obsession. The Cosmic Beauty can, after ten minutes of conversation, cause one humanoid who would normally be romantically or sexually attracted to a host of the Cosmic Beauty's current gender, to become obsessed with the Cosmic Beauty if they fail a DC 15 Intelligence saving throw. The target may repeat the saving throw once each week, but it is made at disadvantage if they have spent at least an hour in the Cosmic Beauty's company that week, and at advantage if they have received qualified psychotherapeutic treatment, or spent time in prayer.

Once Obsessed, the victim must succeed on the saving throw for six consecutive weeks to throw off its effects.

The Cosmic Beauty derives sustenance from the victims of Obsession (see Replenishment).

Probing Telepathy. If a creature communicates telepathically with the Cosmic Beauty, the Cos-

mic Beauty learns the creature's greatest desires if the Cosmic Beauty can see the creature.

Possession. One humanoid that the Cosmic Beauty can see within 5 feet of it must succeed on a DC 15 Charisma saving throw or be possessed by the Cosmic Beauty; the Cosmic Beauty then disappears, and the target loses control of its body. The Cosmic Beauty now controls the body but doesn't deprive the target of awareness. The Cosmic Beauty uses all of the game statistics listed here, not the target's.

The possession lasts until the body drops to 0 hit points, the Cosmic Beauty ends it as a bonus action, or she is turned or forced out by the True Song. When the possession ends, the Cosmic Beauty reappears in an unoccupied space within 5 feet of the body. The target is immune to Cosmic Beauty Possession for 24 hours after succeeding on the saving throw or after the possession ends.

Regeneration. When a victim of Obsession is within 10 feet, the Cosmic Beauty regenerates 10 hit points each round. The victim's maximum hit points are reduced by 5 each time the Cosmic Beauty regenerates.

Replenishment. The Cosmic Beauty feeds on the victims of its Obsession. One hour of company and conversation provides it with enough sustenance to remain in the Material Plane for another week; the Cosmic Beauty prefers to feed much more often, for the pleasure it derives from the process, feeding on the victim's secret desires and most radical ideas.

Each time the Cosmic Beauty feeds, the victim of its Obsession ages by 1 full year.

Victims often suffer psychological complications from Obsession and Replenishment. No mechanics are offered here, as psychological trauma is offered here: the process affects people differently and is best handled by narrative/roleplaying.

Spellcasting. The Cosmic Beauty is a 10th level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). She can cast the following spells without the use of Material components:

- Cantrips (at will): *blade ward, chill touch, eldritch blast, minor illusion*
- 1st level (4 slots): *cause fear, charm person, chromatic orb*
- 2nd level (3 slots): *crown of madness, hold person, suggestion*
- 3rd level (3 slots): *enemies abound, hypnotic pattern, hunger of hadar*
- 4th level (3 slots): *shadow of moil, sickening radiance*
- 5th level (2 slots): *enervation, synaptic static*

Actions

Unarmed Attack. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 3 bludgeoning damage plus 10 (3d6) psychic damage, and the

target has disadvantage on the next attack roll it makes before the Cosmic Beauty's next turn.

Legendary Actions

The Cosmic Beauty can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The Cosmic Beauty regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Attack. The Cosmic Beauty makes an unarmed attack.

Cantrip. The Cosmic Beauty casts one of its cantrips.

Cast a Spell (Costs 2 Actions). The Cosmic Beauty casts one of its spells.



Appendix B: Amended Spell List

Cantrips to 6th Level

	Bard	Cleric	Druid	Paladin	Ranger	Sorcerer	Warlock	Wizard
Cantrips	Blade Ward, Dancing Lights, Friends, Light, Mage Hand, Mending, Message, Minor Illusion, Prestidigitiation, True Strike, Vicious Mockery	Guidance, Light, Mending, Resistance, Spare the Dying, Thaumaturgy	Control Flames, Druidcraft, Guidance, Gust, Infestation, Magic Stone, Mending, Mold Earth, Resistance, Shape Water, Shillelagh			Blade Ward, Control Flames, Dancing Lights, Friends, Gust, Light, Mending, Message, Minor Illusion, Prestidigitiation, Shape Water, True Strike	Blade Ward, Friends, Infestation, Mage Hand, Magic Stone, Minor Illusion, Prestidigitiation, True Strike	Blade Ward, Control Flames, Dancing Lights, Friends, Gust, Light, Mending, Message, Minor Illusion, Prestidigitiation, Shape Water, True Strike

	Bard	Cleric	Druid	Paladin	Ranger	Sorcerer	Warlock	Wizard
1st level	Animal Friendship, Bane, Charm Person, Comprehend Languages, Cure Wounds, Detect Magic, Disguise Self, Dissonant Whispers, Feather Fall, Healing word, Heroism, Identify, Longstrider, Illusory Script, Longstrider, Silent Image, Sleep, Speak With Animals, Hideous Laughter, Unseen Servant	Bane, Bless, Ceremony, Command, Cure Wounds, Detect Evil & Good, Detect Magic, Detect Poison and Disease, Healing Word, Protection from Evil and Good, Purify Food & Drink, Sanctuary, Shield of Faith	Absorb Elements, Animal Friendship, Beast Bond, Charm Person, Cure Wounds, Detect Magic, Detect Poison and Disease, Earth Tremor, Entangle Fog Cloud, Healing Word, Jump Longstrider, Purify Food and Drink, Snare Speak with Animals	Bless, Ceremony, Command, Compelled Duel, Cure Wounds, Detect Evil and Good, Detect Magic, Detect Poison and Disease, Divine Favor, Heroism, Protection from Evil and Good, Purify Food and Drink, Searing Smite, Shield of Faith, Thunderous Smite, Wrathful Smite	Absorb Elements, Alarm, Animal Friendship, Beast Bond, Cure Wounds, Detect Magic, Detect Poison and Disease, Ensnaring Strike, Hunter's Mark, Jump Longstrider, Snare Speak with Animals, Zephyr Strike	Absorb Elements, Catapult, Cause Fear, Charm Person, Comprehend Languages, Expeditious Retreat, Hex Illusory Script, Protection from Evil and Good, Unseen Servant	Cause Fear, Charm Person, Comprehend Languages, Expeditious Retreat, Hex Illusory Script, Protection from Evil and Good, Unseen Servant	Absorb Elements, Alarm, Catapult, Cause Fear, Charm Person, Comprehend Languages, Expeditious Retreat, Detect Magic, Disguise Self, Expeditious Retreat, False Life, Feather Fall, Find Familiar, Identify, Illusory Script, Jump Longstrider, Mage Armour, Protection from Evil & Good, Silent Image, Sleep, Snare Tasha's Hideous Laughter, Unseen Servant

	Bard	Cleric	Druid	Paladin	Ranger	Sorcerer	Warlock	Wizard
2nd level	Animal Messenger, Blindness/Deafness, Calm Emotions, Crown of Madness, Detect Thoughts, Enhance Ability, Enthrall, Hold Person, Invisibility, Knock, Lesser Restoration, Locate Animals or Plants, Locate Object, Magic Mouth, Phantasmal Force, Pyrotechnics, See Invisibility, Silence, Skywrite, Suggestion, Warding Wind, Zone of Truth	Aid, Augury, Blindness, Deafness, Calm Emotions, Enhance Ability, Find traps, Gentle Repose, Hold Person, Lesser Restoration, Locate Object, Prayer of Healing, Protection from Poison, Silence, Warding Bond	Animal Messenger Beast Sense Darkvision Dust Devil Earthbind Enhance Ability Find Traps Gust of Wind Hold Person Lesser Restoration Locate Animals or Plants Locate Object Pass Without Trace Protection from Poison Skywrite Spike Growth Warding Wind	Aid, Branding Smite, Lesser Restoration, Locate Object, Magic Weapon, Protection from Poison, Zone of Truth	Animal Messenger Barkskin Beast Sense Darkvision Find Traps Lesser Restoration Locate Animals or Plants Locate Object Pass Without Trace Protection from Poison Silence Spike Growth	Arcane Lock Blindness/Deafness Blur Crown of Madness Darkvision Detect Thoughts Enhance Ability Hold Person Invisibility Knock Locate Object Magic Weapon Phantasmal Force See Invisibility Spider Climb Suggestion Warding Wind	Crown of Madness Darkness Earthbind Enthrall Hold Person Invisibility Mind Spike Ray of Enfeeblement Shadow Blade Spider Climb Suggestion	Arcane Lock Blindness/Deafness Blur Crown of Madness Darkvision Detect Thoughts Dust Devil Earthbind Hold Person Invisibility Knock Locate Object Magic Mouth Magic Weapon Nystul's Magic Aura Phantasmal Force See Invisibility Spider Climb Suggestion Warding Wind

	Bard	Cleric	Druid	Paladin	Ranger	Sorcerer	Warlock	Wizard
3rd level	Bestow Curse, Catnap, Clairvoyance, Dispel Magic, Enemies Abound, Fear, Feign Death, Hypnotic Pattern, Major Image, Nondetection, Plant Growth, Sending, Speak with Dead, Speak with Plants, Tongues	Animate Dead, Beacon of Hope, Bestow Curse, Clairvoyance, Create Food and Water, Daylight, Dispel Magic, Feign Death, Life Transference, Magic Circle, Mass Healing Word, Protection from Energy, Revivify, Speak with Dead, Tongues, Water Walk	Call Lightning, Dispel Magic, Feign Death, Plant Growth, Protection from Energy, Speak with Plants, Water Breathing, Walk, Wind Wall	Aura of Vitality, Blinding Smite, Crusader's Mantle, Daylight, Dispel Magic, Magic Circle	Flame Arrows, Plant Growth, Protection from Energy, Speak with Plants, Water Breathing, Walk	Animate Dead*, Bestow Curse*, Clairvoyance, Counterspell, Dispel Magic, Enemies Abound, Erupting Earth, Fear, Feign Death, Haste, Major Image, Protection from Energy, Sending, Slow, Tongues, Water Breathing	Counterspell, Dispel Magic, Enemies Abound, Fear, Hunger of Hadar, Hypnotic Pattern, Magic Circle, Major Image, Tongues, Vampiric Touch	Animate Dead*, Bestow Curse*, Catnap, Clairvoyance, Counterspell, Dispel Magic, Enemies Abound, Erupting Earth, Fear, Feign Death, Haste, Magic Circle, Major Image, Nondetection, Protection from Energy, Sending, Slow, Tiny Servant, Tongues, Water Breathing

	Bard	Cleric	Druid	Paladin	Ranger	Sorcerer	Warlock	Wizard
4th level	Charm Monster, Compulsion, Confusion, Dimension Door, Freedom of Movement, Greater Invisibility, Hallucinatory Terrain, Locate Creature	Banishment, Control Water, Death Ward, Divination, Freedom of Movement, Locate Creature	Charm Monster, Confusion, Control Water, Dominate Beast, Elemental Bane, Freedom of Movement, Giant, Insect, Grasping Vine, Guardian of Nature, Hallucinatory Terrain, Locate Creature	Aura of Life, Aura Purity, Banishment, Death Ward, Locate Creature, Staggering Smite	Freedom of Movement, Grasping Vine, Locate Creature	Banishment, Charm Monster, Confusion, Control Water, Greater Invisibility, Locate Creature	Banishment, Charm Monster, Elemental Bane, Hallucinatory Terrain, Shadow of Moil, Sickening Radiance, Summon Greater Demon	Arcane Eye, Banishment, Charm Monster, Confusion, Control Water, Greater Invisibility, Locate Creature, Faithful Hound, Private Sanctum

	Bard	Cleric	Druid	Paladin	Ranger	Sorcerer	Warlock	Wizard
5th level	Animate Objects, Awaken, Dominate Person, Dream, Geas, Greater Restoration, Hold Monster, Legend Lore, Mass Cure Wounds, Mislead, Modify Memory, Planar Binding, Scrying, Seeming, Skill Empowerment, Synaptic Static	Commune, Contagion, Dispel Evil & Good, Geas, Greater Restoration, Hallow, Holy Weapon, Insect Plague, Legend Lore, Mass Cure Wounds, Planar Binding, Raise Dead, Scrying	Anti-life Shell, Awaken, Commune with Nature, Contagion, Control Winds, Geas, Greater Restoration, Insect Plague, Maelstrom, Mass Cure Wounds, Planar Binding, Reincarnate, Scrying, Transmute Rock, Tree Stride, Wrath of Nature	Banishing Smite, Circle of Power, Dispel Evil & Good, Geas, Holy Weapon	Commune with Nature, Steel Wind Strike, Swift Quiver, Tree Stride	Animate Objects, Control Winds, Dominate Person, Hold Monster, Mislead, Seeming Skill, Empowerment, Synaptic Static, Telekinesis	Contact Other plane, Danse Macabre, Dream Hold, Monster Infernal, Calling Scrying, Synaptic Static	Animate Objects, Contact Other Plane, Control Winds, Danse Macabre*, Dominate Person, Dream Geas, Hold Monster Infernal, Calling*, Legend Lore, Mislead, Modify Memory, Planar Binding, Telepathic Bond, Scrying, Seeming Skill, Empowerment, Synaptic Static, Telekinesis, Wall of Force

	Bard	Cleric	Druid	Paladin	Ranger	Sorcerer	Warlock	Wizard
6th level	<p>Eyebite, Find the Path, Guards and Wards, Mass Suggestion, Otto's Irresistible Dance, Programmed Illusion, True Seeing</p>	<p>Create Undead, Find the Path, Forbiddance, Harm, Heal, Heroes' Feast, Planar Ally, True Seeing, Word of Recall</p>	<p>Find the Path, Heal, Heroes' Feast, Investiture of Wind, Move Earth, Primordial Ward, Wall of Thorns</p>			<p>Eyebite* Mass Suggestion Mental Prison* Otto's Irresistible Dance Scatter True Seeing</p>	<p>Eyebite Flesh to Stone Mass Suggestion Mental Prison Scatter Soul Cage True Seeing</p>	<p>Contin-gency Create Homunculus* Create Undead* Drawmij's Instant Summons Eyebite* Globe of Invulnerability Guards and Wards Magic Jar* Mass Suggestion Mental Prison* Otto's Irresistible Dance Programmed Illusion Scatter Soul Cage* True Seeing</p>

Appendix E

Order of the Balefire

Overview

There are many secret societies in Gothic Earth; some date back to the middle ages or even the classical world. Some are secret cabals who try to exploit the Red Death, using it to gain power. Others fight against it, however futile the attempt. The Order of the Balefire is one of the latter. They walk a risky path: they gather arcane knowledge, and use it to combat the sorcerers and occultists who worship the darkness... and their own members, should they ever fall to fantasies of power.

They are mostly active in North America, specifically the east coast of the United States. However, they go where their work takes them, and they have plentiful resources: if they need to send members to Europe, Central or South America, or further afield, they will do so.

Origins

The Order of the Balefire is a relatively young secret society, formed in the early 1800s in New York, by Gerhard Van der Velden, a wealthy gentleman and inheritor of a large fortune. When Gerhard was forty, his brother Rene became embroiled in a 'hellfire club' that formed in New York. Members of the Order say that Rene fell quickly into occult practices that corrupted his very soul; Gerhard spent a substantial amount of the family's money uncovering, and counteracting, his brother's evil.

Alone, he wasn't capable of dispersing an entire cult. He gathered others around him: magical practitioners he felt he could trust, and paid them well to research his brother's club and work to disrupt and destroy it, scouring New York clean

of its influence. Rene and many others lost their lives in this crusade. Afterwards, Gerhard and the allies he had gathered were all too aware that there was more work to do: many more warlocks and monsters to take on. And so the Order of the Balefire was born, funded by the plentiful, and growing, Van der Velden fortune.

Occult Secrets

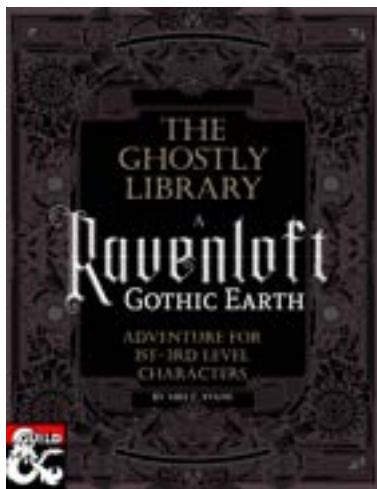
Members of the Order are all able to cast a few, select spells. They gain the Ritual Caster (Cleric) or Ritual Caster (Wizard) feat.

Advantages of Membership

Members of the Order always have access to a secure, moderately comfortable, place to stay in New York, Boston, New Haven, and most large New England towns. These are usually fronted by private members clubs or, in the smaller locales, inns or small hotels. Members' clubs are secured against magical scrying: no one sees what goes on within their walls.

The New Haven club also offers a sizable library of arcane knowledge and North American secret history (+5 to relevant ability checks made using the library).

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GOTHIC EARTH

Masque
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PLAYER'S GUIDE



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