

Shadows over
VATHAK

A DARK AND STORMY
BLIGHT

5TH EDITION HORROR

An Adventure for 2nd to 5th level characters for
Shadows over Vathak Horror Roleplaying Game

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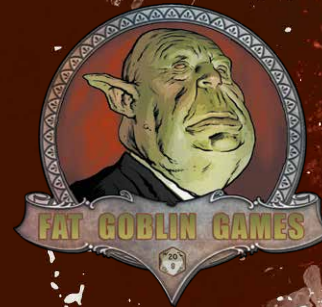
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Adventure Primer

Adventure Level: 2nd-5th Level

Estimated Duration: 1-3 hours

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The threat of a heavy storm threatens the colonies. In the coastal town of Valencourt, the citizens struggle to prepare for the storm, all while in the shadow of an oppressive regime. The regime continues to hoard food and supplies while the storm encroaches, and tensions rise. This tension is the backdrop for a case of murder, intrigue, and Faustian bargains that threaten to damn an entire city.

As the characters find themselves taking shelter from the storm, they become embroiled in the politics and intrigue of the city. First, the characters are ushered to a crowded shelter, where the people trade rumors and hearsay. Very soon, they hear of the murder of a prominent opposition leader who was working against Valencourt's mayor. With prompting, as needed, the characters soon go looking for evidence of foul play in one of Valencourt's libraries as they look for clues.

While at the library, the characters run afoul a strange creature that stalks them. When the dust has settled, the characters are either victorious or have failed and fled empty handed, but have attracted the attention of a dangerous group of monsters that have ties to the city's leadership. This attention could lead to future entanglements and danger.

ADVENTURE LOCATION

- ☛ Valencourt is a coastal town on a peninsula, and is exposed to storms and hurricanes. Though Valencourt is used to these tribulations, the political tensions complicate the safety preparations.
- ☛ Located on the eastmost part of the Colonies, Valencourt is often the first port reached by those approaching from the Eastern continents.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Valencourt is a large town with a vital role within the ecosystem of the Colonies. Not only is it vital for trade and fishing, but the local politics are of interest to several outside parties — some factions in Grigoria, in particular. Any number of causes or connections may link the party into Valencourt just before the encroaching storm. The GM is free to contrive any means necessary to get the characters to investigate the murder. Some possible ideas include:

- ☛ A patron has sent the characters to investigate the political tensions. During this investigation, the murder occurs. Solving the murder may yield invaluable information for the patron.
- ☛ A character has a backstory that ties them to Valencourt, or to a noble lineage with a stake in the court politics at play. Those with such ties might be inclined to intervene on behalf of the opposition, or to keep the peace amongst the gentry.
- ☛ A character has a connection to the deceased opposition leader, perhaps as a close friend, friendly rival, or even a bounty that was meant to be claimed alive. Such ties might call for vengeance, or at the very least for seeking answers to dangerous questions.
- ☛ A character with a background in monster hunting or occult lore needs to conduct research at the Valencourt library, and the murder investigation occurs in the process. Perhaps the library also holds information that is vital for the characters and their ongoing goals.
- ☛ Money. The suspicion is that a serial killer murdered the opposition leader, and the party is offered 500 gp each to turn in the killer, dead or alive. This may be the best option for a relatively dispassionate group with few ties to Valencourt itself.

SHADOWS OVER VATHAK

Welcome to the world of Shadows over Vathak, a realm of dwindling hope and despair. As players, your characters fight to survive in a land threatened with destruction by the rise of the ancient and evil Old Ones and their spawn. Your characters may represent points of light in the darkness or give in to wicked temptations. Most will fall somewhere in between — survivors struggling to eke out another day. Though the followers of the One True God speak of divine providence while battling the Old Ones, the sins of the Church often rival those of their enemies. In the world of Vathak, your character's perceptions of heroes and villains is a thin line drawn by their own personal morality and, of course, determined by the victor.

This adventure is set in the dark fantasy world of Vathak. As such there are references to the history, characters, and locations of that world. However, with a little bit of alteration, these adventures can be suited for any horror themed 5th edition game.

If you are new to Shadows over Vathak, make sure you join our [Patreon](#) and receive a free copy of the *Explorer's Guide to Vathak*.

RUNNING THIS ADVENTURE

To run this adventure, it is recommended that you have copies of the 5th Edition core rulebooks.

In this adventure you might come across spells, abilities, creatures, magic items, and other references to content from these corebooks. When this happens that item will appear in bold/red text, like this:

“The **goblins** are waiting to attack the caravan as it comes around the steep bend.”

If the content is new (such as monsters or equipment) and not included in one of the corebooks, we will make note of the source or include the item in an appendix to the adventure.

ABBREVIATIONS

The following are a collection of common abbreviations that might be used in this adventure.

AC	Armor Class	GP	Gold pieces
CE	Chaotic Evil	HP	Hit Points
CG	Chaotic Good	LE	Lawful Evil
CN	Chaotic Neutral	LG	Lawful Good
cp	Copper pieces	LN	Lawful Neutral
CR	Challenge Rating	N or TN	Neutral, or True Neutral
d%	Two d10s die one as the 10s the other as the 1s	NE	Neutral Evil
d10	A die of 10 sides	NG	Neutral Good
d12	A die of 12 sides	NPC	Non-Player Character
d20	A die of 20 sides	PC	Player Character
d4	A die of 4 sides	pp	Platinum pieces
d6	A die of 6 sides	sp	Silver Pieces
d8	A die of 8 sides	Stats	The statistical representation of a character
DC	Difficulty Class	XP	Experience Points
EL	Encounter Level		
EP	Electrum Pieces		
GM	Game Master		



Beginning the Adventure - The characters find themselves in Valencourt, either by coincidence or design, as outlined in the adventure hooks. When they arrive, they are more likely than not kept there by the encroaching storm, which threatens travel both by air and sea, and shuts down most of Valencourt itself. Captains refuse to sail, caravans take shelter, and even riding animals refuse to travel for fear of the storm. From the start of the adventure, the day is dimly-lit due to heavy cloud cover blocking out the sun. Torches similarly provide only dim light during stormy conditions, due to the adverse weather and wet winds.

As the characters enter Valencourt, they are given the option to stay at a number of different makeshift shelters. Within whichever shelter they choose, the characters are approached by Dalem Langley, a local wharfmaster. Dalem is a fatherly figure to the dock workers, and commands a great deal of respect, especially as he chooses to shelter with them and not with the middle class of Valencourt. Dalem takes a warm and patient approach with the characters.

A character with a noble background may secure a more upscale shelter for the group, as the nobility is seeking to watch out for their own. Within the upscale

shelter, the group is instead approached by Lady Evelin Burnley White, who is a renowned entrepreneur and philanthropist. Though she is also respected by the common folk, many of her peers dismiss her as eccentric and even a little mad. Lady Evelin tends to speak in circles, taking several sentences to say what might only require one.

No matter the petitioner, the characters are asked the same thing: to investigate a murder that occurred at the Valencourt Municipal Library. If the characters accept, they are promised 500 gold each for their troubles, as well as a letter of good standing with Valencourt, which could allow them to do business, trade, or even purchase land within the city limits. Make it known that those of lower and middle class labour for years for such an honor and privilege. If the characters are not interested, consider allowing them to gift the letter to one of their contacts or allies. Such a gesture would go a long way in securing both loyalty and influence.

If they agree, the petitioner explains that a local resistance leader, codenamed Rawls, has been murdered. Dalem doesn't support the resistance, but the murdered man was his cousin, and he wants to know who killed him for closure. Lady Evelin reveals to the characters that she secretly funnels funds to the

resistance, and wants revenge for the murder of one of her most prized cats paws. Rawls was allegedly on the verge of uncovering an important secret when he was murdered.

If this appeal is not enough to call the characters to action, the petitioner may “notice” that the murder victim’s next of kin has left the shelter and is on their way to investigate the crime. As an added draw, the kin may be a child wishing to investigate or avenge their parent’s murder. In this case, the characters may be guilted into going at the very least to save an innocent life. More importantly, the petitioner may point out that the innocent kin could give the “enemy” information on the resistance, and cause further senseless death.

HELLO GUTTER

Upon agreeing to make their way to the library, the characters are beset by the force of the storm. Navigating the streets would normally require no roll, but in the face of the storm it requires a DC 15 group Wisdom (Survival) check. A failure sends the characters for shelter in an old abandoned factory. As soon as they enter, they are beset by a **smog throttle** (see Appendix). Describe the smog throttles as disgruntled spirits that once worked in the factory, mimicking their former work before turning on the characters. This can be a slow boil horror, if you want to play up the tension, or it can be a quick encounter if the players are not interested in being scared. This could even have the potential for a jump scare as you describe the group looking into an old factory kiln, making your voice go quieter with each descriptive phrase, until you BOOM your voice and reveal the screeching **smog throttles** attacking by surprise.

An especially strong group may fight two **smog throttles**, but this fight is not meant to be challenging, only harrying. Once they have dealt with the smog throttles, they can either take a short rest in the factory, or move on to the library. It may help to cause a brief break in the storm to encourage them to move.

Provided that the group succeeds, or if they take care of the threat, they arrive at the library soaked to the bone. Impose a disadvantage to any Dexterity (Stealth) checks unless they spend a few minutes drying off. The lobby of the library has a few braziers filled with coal that could be employed for warming up and drying off.

STACKS ON STACKS

Once the characters are ready to investigate the library, describe to them the looming book shelves, the howling wind outside, and the dancing shadows made more disturbing by the occasional distant lightning strike. With the rain beating down every window, and the lightning growing closer, the characters may become artificially pressed for time as the pace of the storm urges them forward.

If the characters wish to search the book shelves for something interesting, allow them one group Intelligence (Investigation) check. Do not allow them to roll individually unless you want them to become distracted with books. The result will yield a book based on the check as follows:

1-5: *Baby’s First Bestiary*. This book is meant for children, and gives gross misinformation about a spawn of the old ones. If the book is researched later, it is revealed that the author has gone mad since writing the book.

5-8: *Wrath of the Spider*. A mystery novel about an assassin named “The Spider”. The inside cover alleges it was based on true accounts. The Spider is a boogeyman that may or may not have a 1000 gold bounty on their heads, dead or alive.

9-13: *Histories of the Vampire Lords*. This book is a revisionist history of the vampire lords, painting them in a humorous but unflattering light. One chapter alleges that they sparkle in the sunlight. Such a book is worth 200 gold to agents of the vampire lords, if only to ensure it is eliminated from circulation.

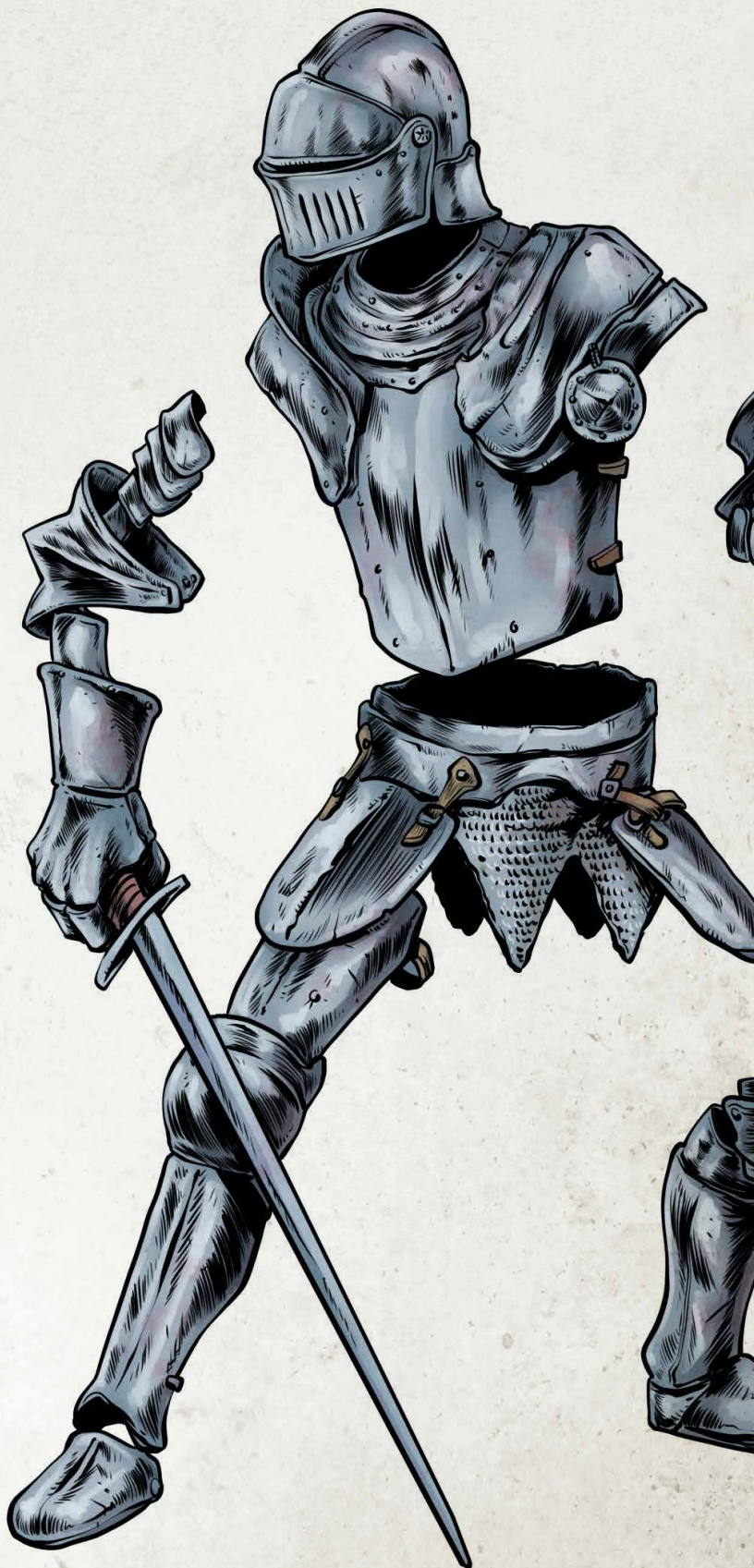
14-18: *Biography of a Saint*. This tome is written by a cloistered monk of the One True God, and is meant to be a mostly truthful telling of a given saint's life. The book has no intrinsic monetary worth, but a cleric of the One True God can use the book as a holy symbol, and may even be able to commune with the saint in question with an appropriate spell.

19+: *A blank book*. This book seems to be an empty journal. It registers as magic. But what could its magic yield?

If they try again after the first time, interrupt their attempt with an attack by a pair of **animated armor**.

If they press on with the investigation, the characters find the scene of the murder. Rawls has been left in a library atrium measuring 30 square feet, with 15 foot high ceilings, and the only entrance being a 10 foot wide doorless entryway to the south. As the murder occurred shortly before the storm began encroaching on Valencourt, Rawls is left face-down with a knife in his back, surrounded by a large pool of dried blood. If the characters can somehow contact the dead or bring Rawls back to life, the resistance leader is unintelligible (see below), and is of no help in revealing what happened or who the murderer is. It is possible to eventually heal Rawls' mind, but the characters have no time to do so now. Rawls is carrying a scimitar, a jeweled necklace worth 80 gold, and a letter bearing an eldritch seal.

If they choose to inspect the crime scene, a DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals that it has been tampered with in the last hour. Something has cut out the area between Rawls' neck and chin, and emptied out his brain. If the group reads the letter (see Appendix), Rawls' body comes to life as the letter glows green and is consumed by a strange eldritch flame. Rawls becomes a **wight**. If the group is especially strong, the wight has an additional 20 hit points, and can make three longsword attacks. Regardless of the outcome, the investigation yields at least one clue that points to the nobility in the town being responsible, and reading the letter proves that they employed dark arts to preform this murder and subsequent reanimation.



THE TRUTH IS OUT THERE...

This adventure is written with the assumption that the characters will get embroiled in the political strife brewing in Valencourt to some extent; although the way is open for them to withdraw from it if they wish. At this point the conflict is still in its fairly early stages, and therefore there is relatively little for the characters to learn beyond what is presented in this module. No explanations have been provided for Melba's involvement or what exactly is planned for the ritual, and realistically the characters will not have time to dig very deep during this adventure to learn the truth. After the storm clears (figuratively and literally) further investigations will be possible, and the GM is free to develop reasons for Melba's actions, as well as for the planned sacrificial ritual. Future products may explore this conflict in more detail.

OVERDUE

Once the characters have defeated Rawls' wight form, or if they conclude their investigation, they see an eerie light emanating from beneath the basement door. If they go downstairs, the characters find what appears to be Rawls deep in conversation with a well-attired woman. If the sight of a man the characters had thought they had found dead — who now appears to be very much alive — deep in conversation with an aristocratic woman was not strange enough, the two appear to be speaking in a strange, guttural tongue (Deep Speech), and in conspiratorial tones.

This scene is strange — and shocking — enough that the characters must succeed a Wisdom save at DC 12 or be Stunned for one minute. If the characters were trying to be stealthy, the two conspirators must succeed Passive Perception rolls (at 14) in order to notice the newcomers; otherwise they are too involved in their discussion, and too assured that no one could possibly track them down to the library, and continue to converse. Any character who understands Deep Speech knows that the two are plotting a sacrificial ritual at a high class party in a few weeks. It is likely that the sacrifices will be innocents plucked from the streets. Also, any character familiar with Valencourt high society will recognize the woman as Melba Krutz, the mayor's wife.

Melba is a **cult fanatic**, and has a summoned **chuul** minion hiding in the shadows. The man resembling Rawls decides to make an escape, and has the statistics for a **veteran**, should anyone decide to give chase. Melba and her minion fight to the death, and she appears quite bloodthirsty when engaged in combat, laughing

and taunting the characters. The imposter surrenders if surrounded or outclassed, and will go willingly.

If either the imposter Rawls or Melba are subdued they can be taken to the authorities, who brush the incident under a proverbial rug. If they are turned over to the resistance, it is possible that this could cause an intensification of the brewing civil unrest.

EPILOGUE

The characters can decide to either engage Melba and the second Rawls, or leave them to plot so they can report back to their petitioner and receive their reward. Once they have decided, have another break in the storm occur, perhaps accompanied with a proverbial silver lining. They return, to their benefactor, and are protected from any ensuing consequences until the morning of the next day.

The characters may have decided to ignore the second Rawls and Melba, or intercede and cause a stir. In either case, the conflict between the upper and lower classes boils over, and the characters may find themselves embroiled in it. Their witnessing of strange eldritch energies being controlled by Melba only complicates issues. The chuul disappears a minute after the fight ceases, apparently called back by some darker power, so its presence does not become implicated with Melba's ties to dark powers.

If the characters had revived the murdered Rawls, they can eventually try to cure his affliction, and he tells them that the nobility is trucking with dark forces, and the other Rawls is an imposter hired by

the nobility to discredit him. This won't sway any authorities, and Rawls only redoubles his efforts towards rooting out the corrupt gentry. If the second Rawls survives and is returned to the authorities, he makes a pompous spectacle of joining the gentry and betraying the resistance. This occurs even if the first Rawls is revived, and causes no small amount of drama between both Rawls, and both sides of the conflict.

Ultimately, the characters may find themselves frustrated and unfulfilled. If they kill Melba or the second Rawls, they are ultimately blamed for it, and must run to the resistance. If they do not, the authorities pretend as though nothing happened. It is clear that something is rotten in Valencourt, and the characters may either be motivated to leave quickly, or stay and get to the bottom of the corruption. The characters can ultimately decide which path to choose.



Appendix

Medium undead, chaotic evil

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit Point 75 (10d8+30)

Speed 0 ft., fly 30 ft. (hover)

Str	Dex	Con	Int	Wis	Cha
19 (+4)	15 (+2)	17 (+3)	2 (-4)	5 (-3)	1 (-5)

Skills Stealth +6

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 7

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained

Languages understands all languages it knew in life, but can't speak

Challenge 3 (700 xp)

Aura of Choking Smog. A creature that starts its turn within 20 feet of one or more smog throttles must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, the creature gains a level of exhaustion as its breathing is labored. Creatures that do not need to breathe are immune to this effect. A creature that intentionally holds its breath while in the smog throttle's aura has advantage on this saving throw.

Incorporeal Movement. The smog throttle can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. It takes 5 (1d10) force damage if it ends its turn inside an object.

Inured to Smog. When it is in smog, the smog throttle has truesight out to a range of 100 feet when perceiving creatures that breathe, and has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks. Ranged attacks against a smog throttle that is in smog are made with disadvantage.

ACTIONS

Choking Smog. Melee: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. **Hit:** 10 (3d6) poison damage.

TACTICS

Before Combat The smog throttle manifests in pea soup fog, and waits for a creature to attack. A lone smog throttle will seek out weak and single targets. A group of smog throttles, called a thickness, can be emboldened to descend on a group of people.

During Combat A smog throttle will usually seek out

MAGIC ITEM- A BLANK BOOK

Wondrous magic item, uncommon

The *blank book* is a magical item that was created to understand the dark powers that threaten mortal life. When the command word is spoken, the book can replicate any writing within 30 feet — whether it is a tome of forbidden knowledge, or the scrawlings of an ancient race upon a cave wall — and renders the text into the owner's native language. Reading these writings does not pose any inherent danger, even if the original source would cause madness or trigger a trap, magical or otherwise. This book has been passed down through the ages as a means of interpreting the darkness without succumbing to it. However, it is not without risk. Just because the reader is not directly exposed to eldritch energies does not mean that prolonged exposure to forbidden readings might not still cause a sliver of corruption to burn like a glowing ember.

MYSTERIOUS LETTER-

"Dearest Rawls,

If you are reading this, it is too late for you. We have already sent you a warning. No doubt, as you read this letter, you are filled with a sense of dread, and a migraine. It will all be over soon, and your death will be in vain. Perhaps you will find solace in the fact that we will control Valencourt, and enforce a peace such as it has never known. You will be the cornerstone of that peace, though you will never know it. Even now, your lifeless corpse is likely rising, and those who have come to investigate your murder are questioning their sanity. In death, you will kill far more of the resistance than you harmed our cause in life. Enjoy eternity as our dark servant.

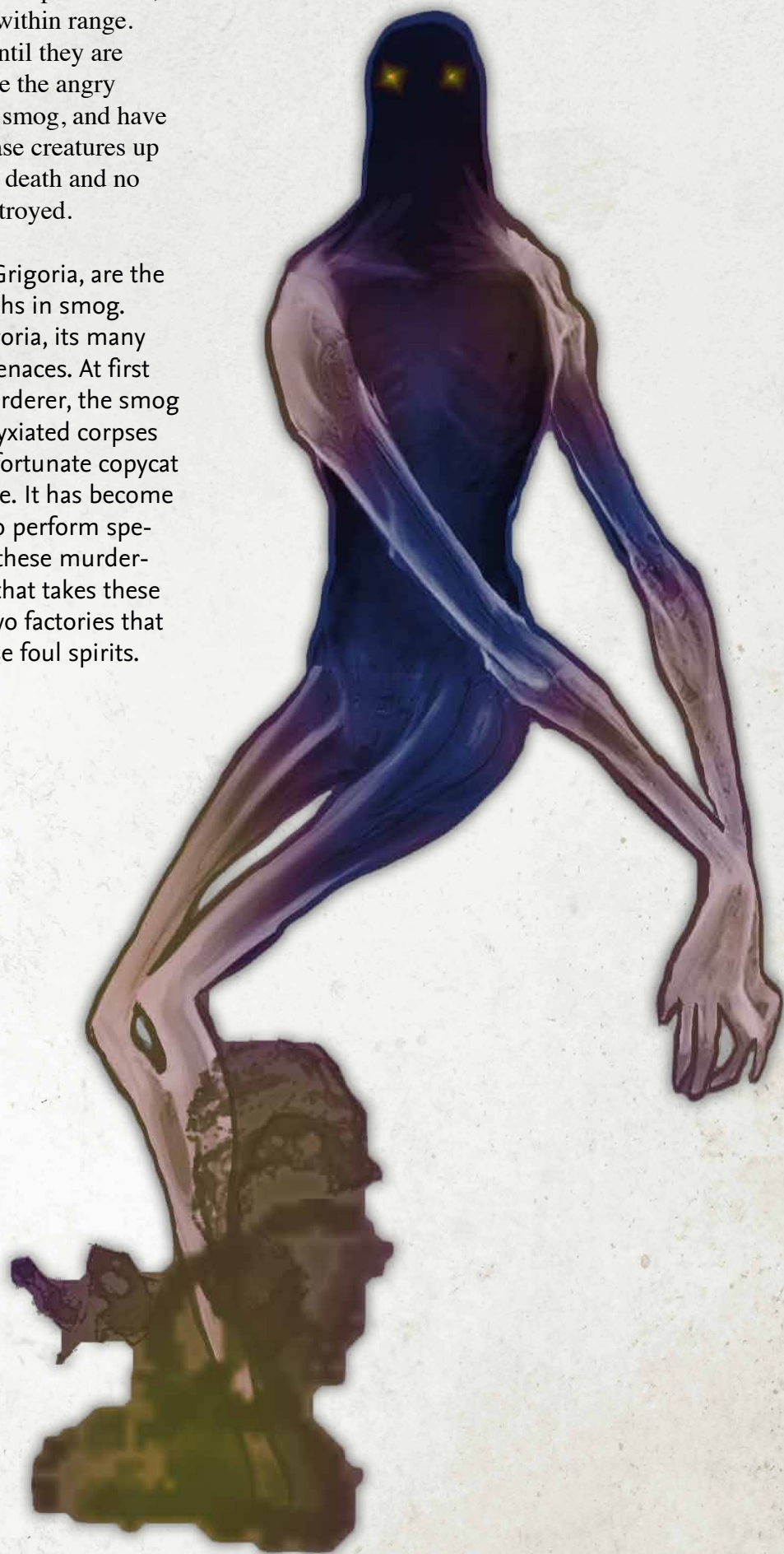
Signed,

A well wisher.

the nearest breathing creature and attempt to kill it, then move on to any other creature within range.

Morale Smog throttles tend to fight until they are destroyed, or their prey are. They are the angry spirits of those who die alone in the smog, and have no morals or remorse. They will chase creatures up to 200 feet away from their place of death and no further, but otherwise fight until destroyed.

Smog throttles, as they are called in Grigoria, are the evil spirits of those who die slow deaths in smog. Though they are seen outside of Grigoria, its many factories give rise to these undead menaces. At first thought to be the work of a serial murderer, the smog throttle tends to leave the same asphyxiated corpses behind. This has also led to some unfortunate copycat killers, further compounding the issue. It has become common practice at many factories to perform special rituals to prevent the creation of these murderous spirits. And yet, for every factory that takes these precautions, there are often one or two factories that indirectly cause the formation of these foul spirits.



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