

THE HAUNTING OF TROLLSKULL MANOR



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MAMA'S HOME

THE HAUNTING OF TROLLSKULL MANOR

“Don’t fret, honey. No matter how bad it gets, we’ll always have something to eat,” – Mama Esther

RUNNING THE ADVENTURE

The Haunting of Trollskull Manor is a short adventure to be set in *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist* or any gothic setting—any time you needed a haunted manse or tavern.

The module spans three acts, ramping up to a single macabre night. Either the spirits that have long since haunted the manor are put to rest or add new victims to the pile. It is an event-based adventure rather than an exploratory one, being stretched across days or even weeks as the adventurers renovate the manor.

Level. Act I of this module coincides with Chapter 2 of *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist*. The adventurers will be at 2nd level. Act II & III can occur later on in your campaign or sooner, but before Chapter 3 begins. This module can accommodate 3rd level characters as well as 2nd.

Map. This module corresponds with the map of Trollskull Manor displayed in Chapter 2 of *Dragon Heist* as well as the map provided in appendix C.

BACKGROUND

Trollskull Manor has changed hands many a time, but its darkest master was an old crone by the name of Esther Greybrow. She repurposed the manor into an orphanage, welcoming the lost and unfortunate into her home. By all outside accounts, she was a sweet, loving widow—but to her charges, the woman was cruel and sadistic. It would shock all Trollskull Alley to learn that a hag had crept in amongst the flock and had been slaughtering the lambs one by one.

Nothing delighted Esther more than to trap these children in a cannibalistic nightmare from which there was no escape. At the height of this debauchery, she had eighteen orphans, but never all the same by month's end. Whenever the City Watch came a-knocking, Esther insisted the child ran away, but the orphans knew the black truth, although far too late—for no matter how dire things got, no matter how cold the winter, no matter how many coppers had to be pinched, Esther could always scrounge up some meat for the weekly stew.

Esther would face justice one day, but the shadow of her crimes has haunted Trollskull Manor ever since. The souls of her victims can never find rest, and a sliver of her evil yet stalks the halls.

STORY OVERVIEW

The Haunting spans three acts, to be completed across several days or weeks according to the whims of your players.

THE AMBULANT DEAD

Malicious and tormented spirits yet haunt Trollskull Manor. While they might spend years aslumber, the intrusion of the living wakes the dead and reignites the nightmare.

Lif. The poltergeist (**specter**) is but one of many souls that haunt this wretched place. Driven mad by the nightmare of this place, the half-elf committed suicide. His soul has since joined the dark choir of Trollskull Manor. Now in the afterlife, the poltergeist seethes against newcomers—and it only so happens that his antics drive new tenants out before they can fall prey to the Hag-Shadow, sparing them from a far worse fate.

Unbeknownst even to the poltergeist, his presence holds shut the black gates from behind which the shadow of Esther's evil hungers. Once the poltergeist is destroyed, the Hag-Shadow returns to its hunt.

Orphans Black. Those that were not given the mercy of death were instead forced to live in this nightmarish prison, watching as friend after friend disappeared... and dinner always came on time. The souls of three orphans can be found by the adventurers and are hunted by the Hag-Shadow.

The Stew. While the hag dabbled in cannibalistic bakery or barbeque, no other means of cooking delighted her as much as dicing up her victims and boiling a stew with the remains. The nightmare has, in turn, spawned a manifestation (with the statistics of a **gibbering moulder**) that appears in the then-flooded basement in Act II that calls for new victims.

The Hag-Shadow. Though Esther Greybrow was torn to shreds ages yonder, a shadow of the hag's evil yet permeates this place. So long as it yet exists so too can the souls of the dead never find rest. If the **Hag-Shadow** is destroyed, her ghostly victims escape into the afterlife and the shadow of Trollskull Manor withdraws. Until then, however, she stalks the halls in Act III with the intention of devouring those that escaped her gluttony in life: the Orphans Black.

The adventurers can placate the Hag-Shadow by sacrificing the orphans' souls.

ACT I: NEW BLOOD

New Blood spans several days or weeks, planting the seeds from which the nightmare will bloom. The paranormal nature of otherwise inconspicuous events soon become clear and sinister in hindsight while poltergeist's rage mounts.

Changes to *Dragon Heist*. As described in *Dragon Heist*, the manor must be renovated—a task that requires consultation and approval of several guilds. However, it is recommended that even restoring the tavern cannot appease Lif, who seeks only to drive away new tenants, even with violence, if necessary.

ACT II: A NIGHTMARE BEGINS

Days or weeks after Lif's destruction—just enough time for the adventurers to feel safe in their new home—the nightmare closes its jaws around the manor, cleaving the adventurers from reality into a small demiplane of woe and fear. Therein, they find the Orphans Black, the remnant spirits that were killed by Esther but not devoured.

ACT III: WELCOME HOME MOTHER

On the heels of the nightmare comes the Hag-Shadow. It hungers for the souls of the Orphans Black. Once the three have been devoured, the Hag-Shadow turns its wrath on the adventurers, unless they sacrificed the children to her.

If the adventurers can destroy the Hag-Shadow, the nightmare ceases forever—however, every orphan soul lost to her gnashing teeth restores hit points and strengthens that evil.

SEASONS

The season in which this module occurs influences the tone of Trollskull Manor in a minor way:

Spring. Recent rains in the manor's roof has rotted the third story floor—although not enough to break without Lif's telekinetic influence.

Summer. Despite the heat wave, the manor is oddly cool. Characters can feel a tangible chill and see their breath whenever Lif is awoken and nearby.

Autumn. Every so often, riding the shrill winds, are the ethereal screams of ghostly children, that can only be discerned by characters with a passive Perception score of 14 or above. An investigation of why or how turns up nothing.

Winter. Until the hole in the roof is fixed, the adventurers cannot find warmth on anything but the first floor and must shelter before the fireplace in the kitchen. Distant screams and delectable smells can be perceived from the oven by a character while his or her companions slumber nearby.

I: NEW BLOOD

Act I sets the stage for the nightmare to come, ending with the destruction of Lif—who, in actuality, is the pseudo-warden of this wretched place. In his madness, the poltergeist attempts to warn off new tenants in the only way he now knows: violence. Yet once the poltergeist is destroyed, the true terror begins.

When the adventurers arrive to Trollskull Manor, they find it a wreck. A cursory exploration of the grounds provides a chance for a few of the paranormal occurrences described in below.

As described in Chapter 2 of *Dragon Heist*, the adventurers are required to solicit the surveyance of and approval of several guilds. While inspectors make their rounds and, later, when laborers work to repair the manor, more paranormal events occur.

Act I can span several days or weeks and has three phases in which the events occur:

Under New Management. The adventurers inspect their new property, unaware of the strange days to come.

Last Call! Inspectors finish their surveyance and laborers begin restoring the manor. Inexplicable accidents, however, plague the worksite until all laborers call it quits.

Closing Time! Lif's murderous tendencies boil to the surface, forcing the adventurers to finally confront the poltergeist.

1A. UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT

In the days after the adventurers acquire Trollskull Manor from Volothamp Geddarm, a number of events occur that warn them that all is not well. Lif's rage is a slow burn, and no two events happen on the same day unless several hours pass in between.

The events occur in the following order:

1. A LESSON FROM HEAVEN

That morning as you leave the front door, you hear the scraping of stone from above—before you can even react, a brick falls from the manor's turret, crashing towards your head!

While an adventurer is passing under an awning within 10 feet of the Turret Peak (Area 19), a loose brick falls. The character must make a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw or take 1d4 bludgeoning damage, all while being reminded that masonry should be left to bona fide professionals.

2. A HARMLESS PRANK

While an adventurer is busy in the basement, Lif plays a harmless prank by locking them in the basement, preferably while the others are off running errands across the city. Read:

The basement needs work. The old bricks molder while a steady drip of water leaks from wall. The air is stale, stuffy, oppressive. As you turn towards the stairs, the hatch slams shut, sealing this place in darkness.

Lif exercises his will upon the hatch, which can only be opened with a successful DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check. No other harm comes to the character but Lif watches invisibly. No matter how long passes—hours, even days—the poltergeist continues to press upon the hatch with his will until the character is finally freed.

1d4 **rats** scurry and squeak in the darkness while the character is trapped. Every 10 minutes, the character can reattempt the Strength (Athletics) check, and after 3 attempts, Lif causes the rats to band into a **swarm of rats** to attack the character.

3. VERMINTIDE

The next day, as you sweep the floors upstairs, you hear something in the walls—feet, claws, and frenzied squeaking. Just as you turn towards the sounds, the wall cracks and buckles as rats swarm forth, gnashing their teeth ravenously!

While an adventurer is busied upstairs, they hear scurrying in the walls and a chorus of shrieks. One round later, a **swarm of rats** bursts from the wall. Chased by Lif's murderous hands and his psychic cloud of hate, the terrified vermin attacks the closest adventurer. After two rounds, Lif withdraws and the rats flee.

The Carpenters', Roofers', and Plasterers' Guild will be required to repair the broken wall, for an added 10 gp.

4. "DO IT, YOU COWARD."

This event is, truly, a red herring: later, during Act II's "Pitter Patter of Little Feet" event, it serves to cast doubt on whether the sounds heard by the adventurers are from living children or ghosts.

Early in their time at Trollskull, the adventurers happen across the three urchins described in Chapter 4 of *Dragon Heist*. They include: Nat, a lanky 10-year-old human girl; Jenks, a pudgy 9-year-old human boy with dreams of being a wizard; and Squiddly, a reckless 9-year-old tiefling boy.

The urchins don't often visit North Ward but have heard that Trollskull Manor is haunted. Unaware of the adventurers' presence, the trio stand outside,

daring one another to go in. Even rambunctious, reckless Squiddly is too afraid to go in, and pressures Jenks in. Clutching his "wand," Jenks enters the darkened taproom and screams when he encounters the first adventurer.

The urchins know nothing of Trollskull beyond the rumor that it's haunted by the spirit of Lif, the previous barkeeper, who died mysteriously. They vacate the premises if warned off by the adventurers, or can be put to simple work for 2 cp each, such as washing windows or sweeping floors.

Ultimately Lif, who has a soft spot for children even in his nightmarish afterlife, does not attack or endanger the children and makes no appearance.

1B. LAST CALL!

As the poltergeist's outrage mounts, his antics turn violent, all while the dark history of this manor becomes more apparent.

These events occur in the following order:

1. FALL FROM GRACE

As you mop up years of dust and dirt, the floorboards beneath you begin to groan and squeal—wood splinters and cracks, and gravity welcomes you to a new chapter in your life.

While a character is on the second floor or above, Lif uses his Forceful Slam attack on the floorboards above. The character must make a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw, otherwise they fall 10 feet to the story below, taking 1d6 bludgeoning damage. The hole in the ceiling gapes like a jagged maw and dust chokes the room they fell into.

2. HATEFUL HURL

While the adventurers are in another room, split up, or away, Lif seizes the opportunity to attack a character—either an adventurer or a laborer hired to refurbish Trollskull. He uses his Telekinetic Thrust ability on one character. Against a laborer, the poltergeist automatically succeeds.

On a success, Lif hurls the character 20 feet away, dealing 2d6 bludgeoning damage. If this damage reduces a character to 0 hit points, it is nonlethal damage. This is but another warning by the spirit to vacate the premises before blood runs.

If the victim is a laborer and is questioned by the adventurers after he regains consciousness, the man can't recall what happened. Only that a force seemed to surge against him as he was working.

3. “LAST CALL!”

While a character is busying him or herself with clearing out the debris in the taproom, Lif leaves one last warning in the dust on the surface.

You stand upright, a hand on your hip while your back groans. Wiping sweat from your brow with a rag, your eyes fixate on the taproom countertop: written in ragged letters in are the words, “Last Call!”

4. BONES IN THE BASEMENT

If the adventurers seek to refurbish the basement, there is a 25% chance that the laborers from the Cellarers’ and Plumbers’ Guild find the skeletal remains of the children devoured by Esther Greybrow.

If the remains are found—tossed in a hole hidden beneath a loose tile in the basement—a successful DC 12 Wisdom (Medicine) check determines that they’re the bones of children. A successful DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check is necessary to notice the teeth marks on some bones.

If the bones are found, roll a d100. On a roll of 11-100, this dark secret is unearthed by a laborer (N **commoner**), who can be silenced with a bribe of 2 gp, or a successful DC 14 Charisma (Intimidation) check. On a roll of 1-10, an inspector or overseer (LG **commoner**) is present and is compelled to report the discovery, unless silenced with a DC 15 Charisma (Intimidation) check. If word gets out, Trollskull Tavern is investigated by the City Watch the next day, and the basement is closed off for a tenday, postponing the necessary work. Ultimately, no other corpses are found and the City Watch blame it on Esther Greybrow, relaying the grisly story of this accursed manor.

5. FIRST BLOOD

If the adventurers hire laborers to assist in the renovation, Lif makes his first lethal strike. While a laborer (a **commoner**) is atop a ladder, the poltergeist breaks one of its legs. The laborer crashes to the ground, taking 2d6 bludgeoning damage.

If the laborer lives, he’s rushed off to an infirmary. If he dies, morale for all other laborers diminishes, especially as Lif continues his “pranks” until finally, the entire company deserts, cursing Trollskull as a “haunted coffin determined to swallow up us all.”

The company refuses to return, and the rumors run rampant. The adventurers can find recourse in a court of law for breach of contract, but that can take weeks. Those that remain face Lif’s continued wrath.

1C. CLOSING TIME!

After the events of “First Blood” above, Lif resorts to murder if the adventurers have not yet abandoned Trollskull. That night—or the next night the adventurers are within the manor—the poltergeist strikes, taking one of the two methods below.

If reduced to half his hit points, Lif flees to the Turret Peak. With its last ethereal breath, the specter simply warns, “Mother.”

A. THE NIGHTMAN COMETH

If the adventurers have been sleeping in the manor—which is possible, at this point in the repairs—then one adventurer awakens in the middle of the night with an iron grip about their throat. Read:

Your dreams become a watery nightmare. The world itself darkens as you plunge through the waves, the sun growing distant and the sea swallows you up. Down and down you go, drowning until Death’s embrace—

Your eyes fling open, spiriting you from nightmare to another. Hands throttle your throat, but you can see no attacker, can feel no weight on your bed... and as your lungs bloom with pain, you hear a whisper:

“Closing time...”

Roll initiative; the adventurer can thrash away from Lif, a **specter** (poltergeist), who attempts to grapple the adventurer on his first turn. The adventurer’s shrieks or shouts are enough to wake characters in nearby rooms.

Once others arrive, Lif attacks in full force, demanding that the characters “begone from this place” and that they’re not welcome.

B. BEGONE, SPIRIT!

If the adventurers never present an opening for Lif, such as sleeping in the manor, the poltergeist dances around the manor until he can corner one to attack.

Once Lif attacks, read the following:

A shrill cry pierces the night: “Begone from this place!” The dust in this place rustles as some figure moves unseen, and out from the dark comes hurtling an object with lethal force!

Lif opens with a telekinetic thrust using an object. His tactics include hurling creatures through windows with the same action option.

Unless destroyed, Lif attacks any creature that enters the manor with lethal intent. It takes 2d4 weeks for the poltergeist’s rage to subside, after which he returns to less deadly antics. Inevitably, however, this cycle of violence is doomed to repeat until the spirit is destroyed.

II: A NIGHTMARE BEGINS

Act II begins days or weeks after Lif's destruction—just enough time for the adventurers to feel safe and secure, unaware of the shadow above. By now the adventurers may have reached 3rd level by completing other *Dragon Heist* quests.

Grand Opening. If the adventurers intend to open the tavern to the public, rather than repurpose the manor for something else, Act II begins on the eve before the grand opening.

Dark Dreams. The nightmare is heralded by darkened dreams that plague at least one character; others are woken by other insidious sounds echoing throughout the manor. Choose at least one adventurer for each event and allow them to investigate the disturbances.

Setting the Scene(s). Narratively, you as the Dungeon Master can “jump between” separate scenes of each event. Don't be afraid to tell the party wizard, “As you're studying by candlelight in the library, you hear a whisper...” or anything of the like so as to set the scene.

1. DARKENED DREAMS

An adventurer is woken from troubled sleep, but not before the last whispers of a nightmare warn of the horrors to come:

The nightmare has you in its jaws. Down through the depths you fall, tasting salt and blood on your lips while water rushes into your lungs. The depths are dark but not empty and the dead wail together as one haunting chorus. As the seas churn and drag you deeper, you burst free from the nightmare with a sheen of sweat on your flesh.

The night is cold. Try as you might, there's no more sleep for you tonight so long as you can taste that blood on your tongue and the salt on your lips.

Should that character see themselves in a mirror, they find blood on their face—the sea was a cruel mockery of Esther Greybrow's cooking pot. Read:

As you try to drift off to sleep, your tongue scrapes against something in your mouth—a chunk of flesh. Salted, wet flesh. And it isn't yours. Sickness blooms in your belly as you reach into your mouth and pull out a small, wet chunk. You hold it up to the moonlight—and sure enough, its viscera. Actual viscera.

The flesh is metaphysical, a manifestation of the nightmare with the taste and texture of actual human flesh. The character must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or become so repulsed they must wretch. On a failure, the character has one round to reach either privy on the second floor, otherwise they vomit in their space at the end of the turn, likely all over themselves.

2. A TALE TOLD LONG AGO

A studious or restless adventurer is reading the library when a memory of the past plays itself nearby: Esther Greybrow reading a faery tale—*Three Billy Goats Gruff*—to the orphans. Read:

You find yourself in the library, studying by candlelight. Midnight has come and gone. As you pour over old tomes and scabbled notes, your eyes begin to droop. As darkness presses in on your vision, a chill wind sweeps through the library... And on it, rides a voice:

"Who's that trip-trapping over my bridge?" roared the troll, "an old woman crows to a crowd of restless, aweing children. "Why, I'm off to eat sweet, green grass!" said Little Billy Goat Gruff. 'No, you're not,' roars the troll, 'Because I'm gonna gobble you up!'"

The library erupts into a tangle of children's shouts and surprise as the old woman snatches up a youngster, laughing, cackling—but when you lift your eyes from the desk, you find nothing and no one in the library but you. Was it all but a dream?

A cursory exploration of the library finds a tome open on the floor: *A Hundred Tales of Fae*, and it's opened on *Three Billy Goats Gruff*. No harm befalls the character, but a wind sweeps through the hall when a character picks up the tome, causing all the pages to flutter to an inscription written on the first page. It reads, "*Children, know that Mama Esther will always love you.*"

3. THE PITTER PATTER OF LITTLE FEET

On the eve of the nightmare, the spirits of the dead come back to cower from the Hag-Shadow.

On your way to the privy, you hear the ceiling groan under the pitter patter of little feet upstairs. Have the urchins come back for yet another dare? Or have cat burglars infested your manor?

The footsteps come from upstairs; every time a character tries to investigate, the steps lead them on until finally terminating in the attic. Therein, they meet the **Orphans Black**, the ghostly survivors of Esther Greybrow's carnage and the target of the Hag-Shadow's ravenous hunger. Read:

Your eyes narrow on children: their very flesh seems to shift, not wholly transparent but not wholly solid. Their voices come from another world, echoing off every floorboard and wall with an ethereal quality.

The three orphans are Gron, a nervous half-orc boy of 8; Matilda, an 11-year-old human girl; and Victor, a 13-year-old human boy. All are hiding behind old furniture or behind sheets. Unless calmed with a successful DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) check, they won't willingly come out of hiding and try to run from the adventurers. In this form, they are solid.

Roleplaying the Orphans. The orphans are scared witless, for they know deep in their hearts that the Hag-Shadow has come to finish the job. Victor tries his best to keep the others come but is doing a piss-poor job of it. He constantly promises the others that "All will be well." The orphans do not yet know they're dead, nor that this ethereal night was repeated before Lif died. If questioned, they can explain that "Mama Esther" has been eating the other children and that she's come home to finish the job. Their only hope is to wait until "the grown-ups" (the City watch) arrive as they did last time.

4. THE SONG FROM THE BASEMENT

As you try to drift off to sleep, you feel a vibration running through your headboard and from the wall. Something is sounding off in the distance but cannot discern its nature. Dare you investigate it?

A character is woken by a strange song or hears it as they go to bed. A successful DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check can lead the character downstairs to the taproom. Read:

Through the manor you creep, the gloom pressing in from all directions while that noise—a song, you're certain—babbles from the dark. Craning your ear, you can tell that it echoes from the taproom below.

No interior staircase connects the ground floor of the manor to its second- and higher levels. The character must brave the outside night, the weather of which is determined by the season:

Spring. Rain crashes against the cobblestone streets while thunder rumbles above.

Summer. Cicadas screech in some shivering choir, drowning out all other noises.

Autumn. Autumn winds howl like frenzied ghouls as the character ventures outside.

Winter. The wind leaves strange shapes in the snow as the character passes through the alley.

When the adventurer reaches the taproom, the noise leads the character to the hatch that opens upon the basement. Read:

That dreadful noise leads you through the taproom. The very floorboards shudder from that unnatural song. A foul stench drifts up from between the cracks and water drips loudly below. The hatch to the basement rattles in its frame as the song draws you closer and closer.

The basement has been flooded not by water, but ectoplasm spilled from the weakening between the Material Plane and the Hag-Shadow's demiplane. Once a character descends into the basement, the **gibbering moulder** lairing there sings and babbles incoherently, making use of its Gibbering feature.

The character must make a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw or fall prey to the madness.

The gibbering moulder is an amalgam of the orphaned souls cooked by Esther Greybrow, all screaming in some unnatural soup animated by the Hag-Shadow's ravenous hunger. It pursues creatures from the basement but can't use the doors to teleport to the other floors like the adventurers can; it's effectively confined to the basement or first floor.

III: WELCOME HOME MOTHER

The nightmare closes its jaws as the Hag-Shadow returns to stalk the spirits and adventurers. Soon after encountering the Orphans Black and/or the gibbering moulder, Act III starts.

Once Act III begins the adventurers cannot leave Trollskull Manor until the Hag-Shadow has been destroyed or all three orphans devoured; the spirits carve them from one world into the cruel mockery of another: a demiplane of woe and abject fear. The characters find that all windows are bricked up and all doors to the outside open upon new hall ways that lead only to another door in the manor while outside a violet storm rages, embodying the chaos and carnage that plagued Esther Greybrow's orphanage.

The following changes occur to the manor:

- The windows are all bricked up and impervious to the characters' attacks and spells.
- The interior walls of the manor become brittle and rotten. Rats scurry within. 5-foot sections of a wall can be destroyed (5 hit points, AC 10, immunity to poison and psychic damage), releasing a **swarm of rats** that attack the nearest character before dispersing.
- Whenever a character opens a door to the outside (with exception of the front doors to the Taproom, described below), such as to get onto the balcony, roll a d6 to determine where the door leads, referring to the table below.
- The front doors to the Taproom open onto the Common Room on the second floor, and vice versa, as no interior staircase connects the taproom.
- Only the hatch to the Turret Peak can open on the outside. A character that surmounts the peak beholds a swirling maelstrom of light (centered on the turret) that bathes Trollskull Alley in hues of violet and sickly yellow. That character must succeed on a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened until it leaves the turret peak for the "safety" of the manor.

DOORS TO NOWHERE

d6	Door leads to...
1	Kitchen (1st floor)
2	Library & Study (3rd floor)
3	North Privy (3rd floor)
4	Master Bath (3rd floor)
5	Bedroom (2nd floor)
6	Attic Bedroom (4th floor)

THE HAG-SHADOW

The shadow of Esther Greybrow's evil walks yet again to hunt both the dead. While the Hag-Shadow will defend herself against attackers, her goal is to devour the three Orphans Black: Gron, Matilda, and Victor. She has no interest in the living—not tonight, at least.

The Hag-Shadow can be placated or defeated in several ways:

Sacrifice. The Hag-Shadow hungers; if the adventurers offer a live sacrifice of a humanoid, preferably one of size Small or smaller, the Hag-Shadow ends the nightmare. The sacrifice must be stuffed in the oven or burned to death in the fireplace of the kitchen.

Fire. If the adventurers raze Trollskull Manor, the souls of the dead are freed, and the Hag-Shadow banished. However, if a new building is constructed on the foundation, the souls are wrenched back into this nightmare after 2d6 months.

Destruction. If the Hag-Shadow is reduced to 0 hit points, the entity is shattered. The souls of the dead are then free to escape to the afterlife.

Full... For Now. If the Hag-Shadow succeeds in devouring all three orphans' souls, she dissipates and the storm outside ceases. The boundaries between the demiplane and the Material Plane settle into their correct positions.

MAMA'S HOME

The Hag-Shadow heralds her presence by singing a nursery rhyme. Read:

A crone's voice slips through the manor—both a whisper and thunder, both omen and off-key:

"Hush little orphans, don't cry no more—Mama Esther's at the door. Winter's quite long and money's tight, but Mama made dinner for to-night."

If any adventurer is with an Orphan Black, the spirit begins to scream and thrash. They can be calmed with a DC 14 Charisma (Persuasion) check.

The children scream, clinging to your limbs or hiding behind furniture as Matilda warns, "Mama's home! Mama's home!"

Meanwhile, the Hag-Shadow's song continues:

The crone continues that wretched song as the floorboards—all floorboards—squeal and groan and the winds outside worsen into a gale:

"So, hush little orphan, the stew is hot. Hush little orphan, get in the pot. Hush little orphan, Mama's got you. I've got you right where I want you."

The **Hag-Shadow** starts from the kitchen but can ooze through the floorboards of the ceiling to reach the second floor via her Amorphous feature—a noise that sounds like squealing stairs and groaning wood. She makes her way towards the attic, or the location the orphans screamed from if they moved elsewhere.

Unless calmed, the orphans bolt from the room upon hearing the Hag-Shadow's song: Gron hides in the north privy on the third floor; Matilda cowers in the bathtub of the Master Bathroom; Victor prefers the attic but might chase after a friend.

When the Hag-Shadow is first seen by the adventurers, read:

Out from the gloom comes a form half of shadow and half of a corpse: a hunched old woman that staggers on, a ravenous smile painted her ripped lips. Her eyes are cloudy discs of red and milky white, and her voice gets your very skin crawling:

"They're mine," she whispers, "they've always been mine. Now and forever." Her smile stretches as she calls out, "It's supptime, children!"

The Hag-Shadow hungers for children but won't ignore dangers to reach them. If an adventurer places itself between her and a spirit, she will fight. When hurt, she prioritizes reaching an orphan to use her Devour Spirit ability so as to restore hit points. If she successfully devours an orphan, read:

The Hag-Shadow's withered hand snatches at the screaming. The crone's jaws unhinge and stretch impossibly far as she swallows up half the child, ripping and tearing at flesh that turns to smoke. With a sigh, the crone smacks her lips and whispers a single word: "More."

A KITCHEN OF DELIGHTS

Should the adventurers find themselves in the kitchen, they notice several changes, reflecting Esther Greybrow's orphanage:

- The fireplace is lit, if it was not already.
- Atop the stove, a stew boils. Characters that open the pot find bones floating in blood and broth. Opening the pot emits a foul stench; creatures within 10 feet must make a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or use their action to wretch. The disturbance causes a handful of eyeballs to the stew's surface.

EPILOGUE

The ending of this module is determined by the actions (or failures) of the adventurers.

THE ORPHANS RED

If the adventurers fail to keep the children from the Hag-Shadow's clutches, and do not destroy the Hag-Shadow, it dissipates but does not fully leave Trollskull Manor. After 1d4 months, she awakens again to feed on the living, repeating the nightmare until she's finally destroyed.

THE ORPHANS WHITE

If the Hag-Shadow is destroyed, any surviving orphan souls escape to the afterlife, but not before thanking the adventurers for this salvation. The nightmare ceases and the bleeding lines between worlds dry up, delivering the adventurers from the demiplane back to the real world.

The shadow over Trollskull Manor is cleansed. Nevermore will the dead toil in misery, nor do the living fear it. Over the next week, rumors of "the haunted pub" spread across Waterdeep and curious patrons show up to see it for themselves. The character experience a surge of business for their grand opening, and can add an additional 20 to their profit roll, as described in the Tavern Keeping Expenses sidebar in Chapter 2 of *Dragon Heist*.

Stonemarrow Stops By. A few days after the events of the adventure, Ulkoria Stonemarrow (a female shield dwarf **archmage**) checks out the tavern. (For more information, see "Open for Business?" in Chapter 2 of *Dragon Heist*).

Ulkoria relays the dark history of the tavern, clearing up any questions or doubts the adventurers may have. Read:

The dwarf leans back and sips at her ale. "Back in the day, you know," Ulkoria says, "I used to own this place. Did pretty well with it too, I think, but the time to move on came and I sold it to a family of shield dwarves. They didn't do well, and sold it to a woman by the name of Esther Greybrow.

"The crone turned the manor into an orphanage, but the kids kept going missing. Turned out that Esther was a hag... And no matter how many pennies had to be pinched, there was always meat for the stew."

REWARDS

Before departing, Ulkoria tells the adventurers that she hopes they can make something good out of Trollskull Manor and leaves them a 50 gp tip.

If the adventurers reveal to Ulkoria that they defeated the Hag-Shadow, the archmage also inscribes a *glyph of warding* on Trollskull Manor imbued with a spell of *detect evil and good* and warns them to activate it with the command word ("Shalgaddah") if they ever suspect that Esther Greybrow's evil has returned.

APPENDIX A: NPCs

The following creatures are used in this module:

HAG-SHADOW

Medium undead, chaotic evil

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 19 (3d8 + 6)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
6 (-2)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	8 (-1)

Skills Stealth +4

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison

Damage Resistances acid, cold, fire, lightning, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons

Damage Vulnerabilities radiant

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages Common, Elvish

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Amorphous. The Hag-Shadow can move through a space as narrow as 1 inch wide without squeezing.

Bound. The Hag-Shadow cannot willingly leave the grounds of Trollskull Manor.

Shadow Stealth. While in dim light or darkness, the Hag-Shadow has a +2 bonus to Dexterity (Stealth) checks and can take the Hide action as a bonus action.

Sunlight Weakness. While in sunlight, the Hag-Shadow has disadvantage on attack rolls, ability checks, and saving throws.

ACTIONS

Mother's Touch. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 5 ft., one. *Hit:* 6 (1d8+2) necrotic damage. If the target is reduced to 0 hit points, the hag-shadow adds its soul to her foul collection. If the hag-shadow is destroyed within 24 hours, the creature's soul escapes to the afterlife.

Roast (Recharge 5-6). The Hag-Shadow targets one creature within 15 feet of it that it can see, subjecting it to a DC 13 Charisma saving throw. On a failure, the creature is teleported to the kitchen of Trollskull Manor and imprisoned in the oven. While in the oven, which is alight, the creature is grappled (escape DC 13) and it takes 5 (2d4) fire damage at the start of its turns while in the oven.

Devour Spirit. The Hag-Shadow makes a melee spell attack (+4 to hit) against one incorporeal undead creature. On a hit, the target takes 8d6 force damage. If this damage reduces the target to 0 hit points, the Hag-Shadow regains 3d8 + 6 hit points.

GIBBERING MOUTHER

Medium aberration, neutral

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 67 (9d8 + 27)

Speed 10 ft., swim 10 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	8 (-1)	16 (+3)	3 (-4)	10 (+0)	6 (-2)

Senses darkvision 60 ft. passive Perception 10

Languages -

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Aberrant Ground. The ground in a 10-foot radius around the moulder is doughlike difficult terrain. Each creature that starts its turn in that area must succeed on a DC 10 Strength saving throw or have its speed reduced to 0 until the start of its next turn.

Gibbering. The moulder babbles incoherently while it can see any creature and isn't incapacitated. Each creature that starts its turn within 20 feet of the moulder and can hear the gibbering must succeed on a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, the creature can't take reactions until the start of its next turn and rolls a d8 to determine what it does during its turn. On a 1 to 4, the creature does nothing. On a 5 or 6, the creature takes no action or bonus action and uses all its movement to move in a randomly determined direction. On a 7 or 8, the creature makes a melee attack against a randomly determined creature within its reach or does nothing if it can't make such an attack.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The gibbering moulder makes one bite attack and, if it can, uses its Blinding Spittle.

Bites. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 17 (5d6) piercing damage. If the target is Medium or smaller, it must succeed on a DC 10 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone. If the target is killed by this damage, it is absorbed into the moulder.

Blinding Spittle (Recharge 5-6). The moulder spits a chemical glob at a point it can see within 15 feet of it. The glob explodes in a blinding flash of light on impact. Each creature within 5 feet of the flash must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or be blinded until the end of the moulder's next turn.

LIF THE POLTERGEIST

Medium undead (specter), chaotic evil

Armor Class 15

Hit Points 22 (5d8)

Speed 0 ft., fly 50 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
1 (-5)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison

Damage Resistances acid, cold, fire, lightning, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons

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

Senses darkvision 60 ft. passive Perception 10

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

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Incorporeal Movement. Lif can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. Lif takes 5 (1d10) force damage if he ends his turn inside an object.

Invisibility. Lif is invisible.

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, Lif has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

ACTIONS

Forceful Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., *Hit:* 10 (3d6) force damage.

Telekinetic Thrust. Lif targets a creature or unattended object within 30 feet of it. A creature must be Medium or smaller to be affected by this magic, and an object can weigh up to 150 pounds.

If the target is a creature, Lif makes a Charisma check contested by the target's Strength check. If Lif wins the contest, he hurls the target up to 30 feet in any direction, including upward. If the target then comes into contact with a hard surface or heavy object, the target takes 1d6 damage per 10 feet moved.

If the target is an object that isn't being worn or carried, Lif hurls it up to 30 feet in any direction. He can use the object as a ranged weapon, attacking one creature along the object's path (+4 to hit) and dealing 5 (2d4) bludgeoning damage on a hit.

ORPHAN BLACK

Small undead, lawful good

Armor Class 11

Hit Points 10 (3d6)

Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
7 (-2)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	17 (+3)

Damage Immunities cold, necrotic, poison

Damage Resistances acid, fire, lightning, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft. passive Perception 11

Languages any languages it knew in life

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Not All There. Whenever the orphan must make a Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to escape a grapple, it can add a bonus 2d4 to its roll.

ACTIONS

Grave Touch. *Melee Spell Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6+3) necrotic damage.