

MASQUE OF THE WORMS



5TH
EDITION

MASQUE OF THE WORMS

Masque of the Worms is a single-session adventure for five or six players of 1st-level characters using the fifth edition of the world's greatest roleplaying game.

They who dream by day are cognizant of many things which escape those who dream only by night.

-Edgar Allan Poe, *Eleonora*

BY KELSEY DIONNE



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SYNOPSIS

- The group begins in the meeting hall of Baron Henrik Rennet. The baron asks the party to bring his wife home from Moldavia Manor. Baroness Elenore attended a masque there two nights ago and hasn't yet returned.
- The characters arrive at Moldavia Manor, the estate of Count Lebrim Moldavia. They explore the estate, learning more about the horrific events that happened the night of the masque.
- The characters find their way to the wine cellar below the manor. There, they confront a brood of conquerer worms that burrowed through the floors and claimed the lives of the masque attendees, including Elenore Rennet.

BACKGROUND

- Two nights prior to the start of the adventure, Baron Henrik Rennet's wife, Elenore Rennet, attended a masque at Moldavia Manor in honor of the newly ennobled Count Lebrim Moldavia.
- Count Lebrim Moldavia threw the masque to celebrate his inheritance of his father's title. Unbeknownst to anyone, Lebrim murdered his father after being driven mad by echo fever. In his madness, Lebrim believed his father's blue glass eye watched him day and night through the floors and walls of Moldavia Manor.
- A subterranean brood of conquerer worms, drawn to Lebrim's insane presence, erupted through the floors in Moldavia and slaughtered the masqueraders and household staff.
- A few of the conquerer worms remain in Moldavia's cellar. They view Count Lebrim as kindred and won't attack him.

A WORD TO THE GM

This adventure is meant to be run at a glance with **minimal preparation** and a **natural delivery**. This required re-thinking the normal adventure presentation a bit. Here's what you'll find included:

- Each encounter contained on one page.
- Bulleted lists. **Bolded** keywords.
- Hyperlinks to monsters and rules online for quick reference.
- Printable cards for each monster and PC so you can run encounters using a card stack. A short video walkthrough of this method can be found [here](#).
- Printable cards for special treasure handouts.
- Short room and area descriptions. No paragraphs of droning flavor text — set the scene naturally and embellish as desired.
- Briefly explained non-encounter rooms. Again, embellish as desired!
- GM maps and player-safe digital maps for use with virtual tabletops.
- A short video walkthrough of the adventure can be found [here](#).

PACING/TRANSITIONS

A dramatic question is presented with most scenes. Once that question has been answered, the tension of the scene is resolved. That's your cue to work toward the **transition** provided at the end the scene — even if that means summarizing the end of a clearly decided combat, or in the case of clever players, skipping combat altogether. Keep the game moving toward the next challenge!

Room descriptions that are usually long blocks of literary read-aloud text have been left short and informational in this adventure. Many Game Masters prefer to paraphrase read-aloud text and set the scene based on what tone and level of detail his or her group finds engaging. Anything listed before the **Development** sections is safe to share however you prefer to do so.

THE BARON'S BELOVED

The characters begin in the sunlit meeting hall of Baron Henrik Rennet, the well-respected lord of the nearby towns and farm holds.

The baron sits in his chair with his head in his hand, having just explained to the players that his beloved wife, Baroness Elenore Rennet, is missing. She attended a masque at Count Lebrim Moldavia's estate, Moldavia Manor, two nights past. She has not returned home, nor has any word arrived from the manor.

Ask the players what their characters' relationships are with the baron and why he has chosen them from his people to help. Then present one or more of the following hooks:

APPEAL TO REWARD

Baron Henrik Rennet asks the characters to go to Moldavia Manor and bring his Elenore home. He offers them a **knighthood**, **pardon** for crimes, or **100 gp** each if they accept.

APPEAL TO HEROISM

Baron Henrik Rennet appeals to the **heroic nature** of the PCs, saying that Elenore is his life and greatest love. He needs her by his side in order to lead the barony with a true and honest heart. For the good of he and his people, he begs them to bring his Elenore home.

APPEAL TO DISCOVERY

Baron Henrik says Moldavia Manor is shrouded these last years in dark rumor and mystery. The death of the former count, Fortuno Moldavia, was sudden and suspicious. Elenore attended the masque only out of duty to the newly ennobled Count Lebrim. Baron Henrik fears Fortuno met his fate due to foul play, and the truth, whatever it may be, must be brought to light.

Baron Henrik Rennet, LG human **noble**

"Without Elenore, I am a lion made a mouse."

- *Appearance.* Red beard and strong jaw. His tall, commanding presence is crumpled by worry for his wife.
- *Does.* Places his head in his hand when talking about Elenore's safety.
- *Secret.* The baron and his wife recently lost their eldest daughter, Elisa, further deepening his sadness.

TRANSITION

After answering their questions, Baron Henrik supplies the characters with horses and directions for the full-day journey to Moldavia Manor. The roads are safe and the group arrives without incident. Go to *Dark and Dreary*.



DARK AND DREARY

MOLDAVIA MANOR

- The weathered, gloomy **manor** sits among dense, sickly trees. Mold and moss collect along its stone walls and under the eaves.
- High, tall **windows** ring the manor's walls. The wooden front **door** is closed.
- **Stables** and additional **housing** lurk along tree-covered paths behind the manor.
- A dark **pond** next to the manor ripples in the chilly wind. Low clouds gather overhead.

DEVELOPMENT

- The front **door** of the manor is unlocked.
- Players can climb the damp **walls** with a DC 12 Strength (Athletics) check. All **windows** except those in Area 3 are barred and shuttered, requiring a DC 20 Strength check to **open**.
- A well-kept **garden** of carrots, peas, and potatoes grows behind the house.

Sidebar: Echo Fever

- The ancient, twisted presence of Moldavia Manor can provoke an unusual disease from those who are experiencing mortal fear.
- A humanoid creature who is on the manor grounds and experiences strong fear (gauged by the GM) must make a DC 12 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, the target contracts echo fever. If already ill, the target's disease progresses by one failure instead.
- The disease begins with a fever and the victim hearing a soft, pounding heart. The target repeats the saving throw each day, with the disease ending on a success and the pounding heart becoming louder on a failure. Each failed save after the third inflicts a random form of **long-term madness**.

STABLES

- Fifteen **horses** are tethered here. Some have died from terror; the others spook easily.

- **Horse tack** and **carriages** from various noble houses line the walls. Baroness Elenore's tack and carriage are present.

STAFF AND GUEST HOUSING

- Rows of stone buildings house seven **apartments** for Moldavia staff and guests.

DEVELOPMENT

- Internal **doors** are unlocked. Each apartment has **4 gp** worth of mundane valuables.
- A six-year old **girl** hides under the bed in one of the rooms, shivering in fear. Players whose passive Perception is 12 or higher hear her. She is slowly succumbing to **echo fever**.

Jennie Alsby, NG human **commoner**

"Is mommie coming home soon?"

- *Appearance.* Curly brown hair. Torn and stained nightgown.
- *Does.* Won't come out of her hiding place unless offered food and water.
- *Secret.* Worries her mother got taken by "The Willowman" (a folk story) because Jennie stole cookies.

DISCUSSION WITH JENNIE

Jennie will share the following information with anyone who treats her kindly:

- She has been hiding for two days after she heard a lot of **screaming** in the manor house.
- Her **mom** worked in the kitchens. Her name is Bessie. She hasn't come home yet.
- **Count Lebrim** is mean and strange. His dad was nicer, but he had a scary, blue glass eye.
- Lots of important grown-ups came to the masque and made lots of noise, but now the only sound she hears is the **loud heartbeat**.

TRANSITION

When the characters enter Moldavia Manor, go to *In Halls of Gloom*.

IN HALLS OF GLOOM

AREA 1: ENTRANCE HALL

- Moldavia Manor's doors open to a wide **entrance hall**. Dark tapestries, curtains, and suits of armor decorate it.
- A **passage** leads into the great hall.
- A pale **man** in a torn costume lies on the floor on his back. **Blood** pools around him. He clutches a **bottle** of Amontillado wine.

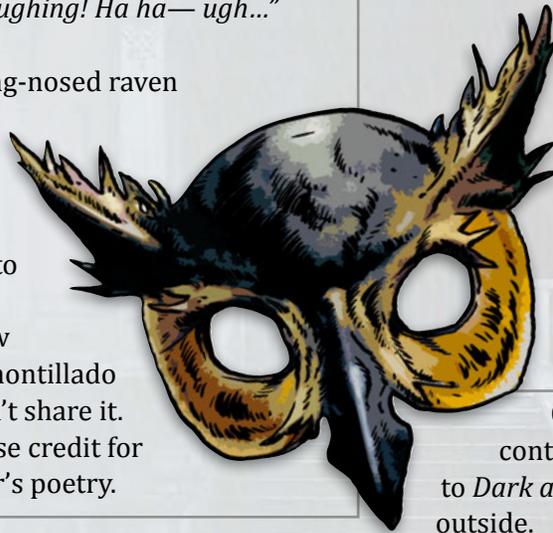
DEVELOPMENT

- The man is Montresor Wend, a masque attendee who is nearly dead from a conqueror worm **bite** on his back. He suffers from **echo fever**.
- Montresor is very **drunk** on wine. Even if healed, he remains almost incoherent.
- Between gales of laughter, he mutters about "the **beasts** in the cellars" and the "ungodly beating of the heart."

Montresor Wend, LN human **noble**

"I wish only to die laughing! Ha ha— ugh..."

- **Appearance.** Long-nosed raven mask and black, shredded robes.
- **Does.** Demands to be told jokes. Raves about how excellent the Amontillado wine is, but won't share it.
- **Secret.** Takes false credit for his dead brother's poetry.



AREA 2: GREAT HALL

- The **hall** is draped in fine white curtains; the walls are freshly painted white to match. Red smears and handprints dot the walls.

- Chairs and musical instruments are broken and strewn around the room.
- Long **tables** are laid with rotting food. Black **rats** squirm on top of the plates.
- Five bloody, costumed **bodies** lie on the floor.
- Three **doors** lead from the main hall.

DEVELOPMENT

- The bodies are masque attendees who have died from jagged, circular **wounds** the size of plates. Baroness Elenore is not among them.
- If the characters **touch** the bodies, all five rise as **worm fiends** (*Appendix B: New Monsters*) and attack.

DRAMATIC QUESTION

Can the players survive the worm fiends?

COMBAT

- The worm fiends each take turns using their *Mask of Violence* action on players within range.
- In the second round of combat, the **rats** coalesce into a **swarm of rats** and attack. The swarm flees if reduced below **half** its hit points or if damaged with **fire**.

Treasure

The worm fiends wear masque finery and jewelry worth a collected **120 gp**.

TRANSITION

Go to *A Madman* if the players continue exploring the manor, or return to *Dark and Dreary* if the characters go outside.

A MADMAN

AREA 3: KITCHEN AND LARDER

- Rotting **food** congeals inside pots and pans hanging over a cold hearth.
- The high **windows** are open, creaking in the cold breeze.
- Three dead **cooks** and one masque attendee lie on the floor. They all have large, circular wounds.

DEVELOPMENT

- Among the dead is **Bessie Alsby**, Jennie Alsby's mother. The bodies twitch if touched, but do not rise as worm fiends.
- If inspected, the **door frame** has gash marks as if something large forced its way through.

AREA 4: LIBRARY

- The library is furnished in all **black**.
- A massive **pendulum clock** clatters and hisses along the center of the rear wall.
- A **book** titled "Tamerlane and Other Poems" is open on the reading desk.

DEVELOPMENT

- If a character opens the clock door, a harmless swarm of **rats** boils out and flees.
- A **secret door** that leads to Area 6 is behind a bookshelf. Characters can find it by passing a DC 18 Intelligence (Investigation) check.

Treasure

A magic dagger called **Ghost Eye** (see *Appendix C: New Magic Items*) is inside the clock cabinet.

AREA 5: MASTER BEDROOM

- Luxurious carpets, paintings, and antiques adorn this shadowy **bedroom**.
- A **young man** sits at a desk, hands over his ears. He rocks back and forth and mumbles.
- A five-foot wide **hole** surrounded by rubble sits in the center of the floor.

DEVELOPMENT

- The man is **Count Lebrim Moldavia**. When he notices the PCs, he jumps to his feet. Characters may be able to **reason** with him.
- The count has a severe case of **echo fever**.
- The **hole** in the floor is gently sloping, 30 feet long, and leads to Area 6.

Count Lebrim Moldavia, LE human **noble**
"You think I am mad? A madman cannot plan!"

- *Appearance.* Twenty years old. Short, black hair. Vivid blue eyes.
- *Does.* Flinches and slaps his ears. Raves to himself (see *Appendix D: Mad Monologue*).
- *Secret.* Murdered his father, Fortuno, and hid the body behind a wall in the cellar.

DRAMATIC QUESTION

Can the group reason with Count Lebrim?

REASON WITH A MADMAN

Success if the conflict score reaches 0. Lebrim flees down the hole in the floor if it reaches 4.

- Lebrim begins with a **conflict score of 2**.
- Agreeing with him that there is an audible **heartbeat** reduces his score by 1 (once only).
- Lebrim is craven. A successful Charisma (**Intimidation**) check reduces his score by 2, while a failure increases it by 1.
- Any other DC 15 **Charisma** check reduces his score by 1. A failure increases it by 1.
- Wisdom (**Insight**) DC 13 reveals one of the above details or his current conflict score.

SUCCESS

In a moment of lucidity, Lebrim reveals any information from the adventure **background** section the players wish to know. He won't resist or fight the characters.

TRANSITION

Go to *In Halls of Gloom* if the PCs go to the main hall, or *The Pit* if they go to the cellar.

THE PIT

DRAMATIC QUESTION

Can the characters defeat the conqueror worms?

AREA 6: CELLARS

- Casks and bottles of wine are stacked around the damp **cellar**. Several are destroyed. Pungent **wine** pools around the room.
- Two red **conqueror worms** feast on the mangled bodies of twelve masqueraders.
- A blood-stained **tunnel** in the wall leads up to the ground floor of the manor. There's another **tunnel** in the floor at the rear of the cavern.

DEVELOPMENT

- If Count **Lebrim Moldavia** fled here, he rocks back and forth on the ground behind a wine rack. He screams for the worms to attack the characters.
- If Lebrim is in **Area 5**, he climbs down the tunnel to watch the confrontation.
- Baroness **Elenore Rennet's** body is here among the dead.
- The **tunnel** in the floor drops for 10 feet before hitting a severe collapse. It would take days to excavate.
- Lebrim's murdered **father** is trapped behind a **secret wall**. Characters can find it with Lebrim's direction or by passing a DC 18 Intelligence (Investigation) check.

COMBAT

- **Lebrim**, if present, does not join the combat. Instead, he raves loudly during the fight (see *Appendix D: Mad Monologue*).
- The **conqueror worms** lunge to attack, smashing any barriers out of their way. They attempt to **swallow** the largest characters and fight until slain.
- Every two rounds, two of the corpses rise at the beginning of initiative as **worm fiends** and join the fight. The worm fiends **collapse** into dead husks if the conqueror worms are defeated.

A MOMENT OF LUCIDITY

- Once the characters defeat the conqueror worms, if Lebrim is present, he has a moment of lucidity where he reveals any information from the adventure **background** section the group wishes to know. He won't resist or fight the characters.

Treasure

The surviving collection of fine wines in the cellar is worth a total of **250 gp**.

TRANSITION

Once the group has defeated the conqueror worms and dealt with Lebrim Moldavia, move to the *Aftermath* section.



AFTERMATH

NEWS OF ELENORE'S DEATH

- Baron Henrik Rennet thanks the characters grimly for bringing him the news of his wife's death. He **rewards** them as promised, adding an additional **50 gp** each if they recovered her body.

LEBRIM MOLDAVIA

- The characters may have taken Lebrim into custody. Baron Henrik will gladly **imprison** the mad count in his dungeons and offers the group an appropriate bounty in exchange for him.
- If the characters killed or captured Lebrim, Baron Henrik declares it an act of justice and grants them each the title of **constable** in his barony. He awards them each a cloak **pin** and a **writ** denoting their status as law enforcers.



THE VICTIMS OF THE MASQUE

- The characters may have rescued **NPCs** such as Jennie Alsby or Montresor Wend. Baron Henrik takes any injured or homeless **NPCs** into his charge and makes sure they are treated well.

FUTURE ADVENTURE HOOKS

- After losing his wife, Baron Henrik Rennet spirals into destructiveness and cruelty. His alignment changes to **neutral evil** over the next few weeks. The baron's closest associates may ask the characters to inspire his **redemption** by bringing a powerful paladin or priest to his side.
- If the characters saved **Montresor Wend**, he seeks them out in the weeks following the masque. There are a few casks of Amontillado wine left in the cellars of Moldavia Manor; he'd pay handsomely for them.
- **Moldavia Manor** is now an open grave. Baron Henrik may ask the characters to return to the property and seal or explore any tunnels the worms left behind.
 - Perhaps the hideous, **blue glass eye** of the deceased Count Fortunio Moldavia really was watching Lebrim through the walls, after all...

APPENDIX A: MAPS



APPENDIX B: NEW MONSTERS

Conqueror Worm

The floor erupts in a blast of rubble. A blood red worm rears above you from the pit, its maw opening and closing like grasping fingers.

Drawn By Madness. Nobody is certain where conqueror worms originated, but some scholars believe demons brought them to the Material Plane to aid in the destruction of organized societies. The worms are drawn to madness, and they show up in places where the rule of law and reason is already at its most fragile.

CONQUEROR WORM

Large monstrosity, chaotic neutral

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points 25 (3d10 + 9)

Speed 40 ft., burrow 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	7 (-2)	16 (+3)	1 (-5)	8 (-1)	3 (-4)

Condition Immunities frightened

Senses blindsight 30 ft., tremorsense 60 ft., passive Perception 9

Languages —

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Servant of Madness. The conqueror worm can sense any creature within two miles that is suffering from any form of madness. It is drawn to such creatures and regards them as allies.

Tunneler. The conqueror worm can burrow through solid rock at half its burrow speed and leaves a 5-foot-diameter tunnel in its wake.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d10 + 4) piercing damage. If the target is a Medium creature or smaller, it must succeed on a DC 11 Dexterity saving throw or be swallowed by the worm. A swallowed creature is blinded and restrained, it has total cover against attacks and other effects outside the worm, and it takes 5 (2d4) acid damage at the start of the worm's turns. The worm can have only one target swallowed at a time. If the worm dies, a swallowed creature is no longer restrained by it and can escape from the corpse by using 10 feet of movement, exiting prone.

Worm Fiend

Raw, circular wounds cover the body of the creature that writhes to its feet before you. It's neither alive nor dead, and red madness burns bright in its eyes.

Vessels Of Chaos. Creatures killed at the epicenter of a conqueror worm attack sometimes rise again as vessels of madness and chaos. Fiendish power fills the victims' bodies as their souls depart, reanimating them into demonic puppets.

WORM FIEND

Medium fiend (demon), chaotic evil

Armor Class 12 (natural armor)

Hit Points 11 (2d8 + 2)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	7 (-2)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities poisoned, frightened

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

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

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

ACTIONS

Mask of Violence. The worm fiend twists its face into a terrible rictus of hatred and violence. Each creature within 10 feet of the worm fiend must succeed on a DC 10 Charisma saving throw or be frightened for 1 minute. A frightened target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a target's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the target is immune to all worm fiends' Mask of Violence for the next 24 hours.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (2d4 + 1) slashing damage.

APPENDIX C: NEW MAGIC ITEMS

GHOST EYE

Weapon (dagger), rare

You get a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls with this bone-handled magic dagger.

While holding this weapon, you have darkvision to a range of 60 feet. While this ability is active, your eyes are milky white as though covered in cataracts.

APPENDIX D: MAD MONOLOGUE

Lebrim Moldavia is thoroughly insane and raves to himself day and night. Use the below categories as a guide for what he's saying.

For each round that Lebrim rants unimpeded, he may target one character within **30 feet**. That character must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or contract **echo fever**. If the target already has echo fever, the disease progresses by one failure instead.

FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH PCS (RAVING)

- "I knew what I was doing when I killed the old vulture. I was so careful that night, so very careful not to make a sound as I entered his room. It had to be done. He watched me with his eye, watched me through the walls!"
- "The worms? You will like the worms. They are noble creatures. They will triumph in the end. They will reduce the world to red powder and white bone — and the blackness of the pit. Only then will the incessant heartbeat stop! Only then!"

LOST IN THOUGHT (MURMURING)

- "Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there, wondering, fearing, / Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before."
- "It is true! Yes, I have been ill, very ill. But why do you say that I have lost control of my mind, why do you say that I am mad? Can you not see that I have full control of my mind? Indeed, the illness only made my mind, my feelings, my senses stronger, more powerful!"

IN COMBAT (CHANTING)

- "It writhes!—it writhes!—with mortal pangs / The mimes become its food, / And seraphs sob at vermin fangs / In human gore imbued."

- "Through a circle that ever returneth in / to the self-same spot, / And much of Madness, and more of Sin / And Horror the soul of the plot."
- "While the angels, all pallid and wan, / Uprising, unveiling, affirm / The play is the tragedy, 'Man,' / And its hero, the Conqueror Worm!"

ANGRY (SNARLING)

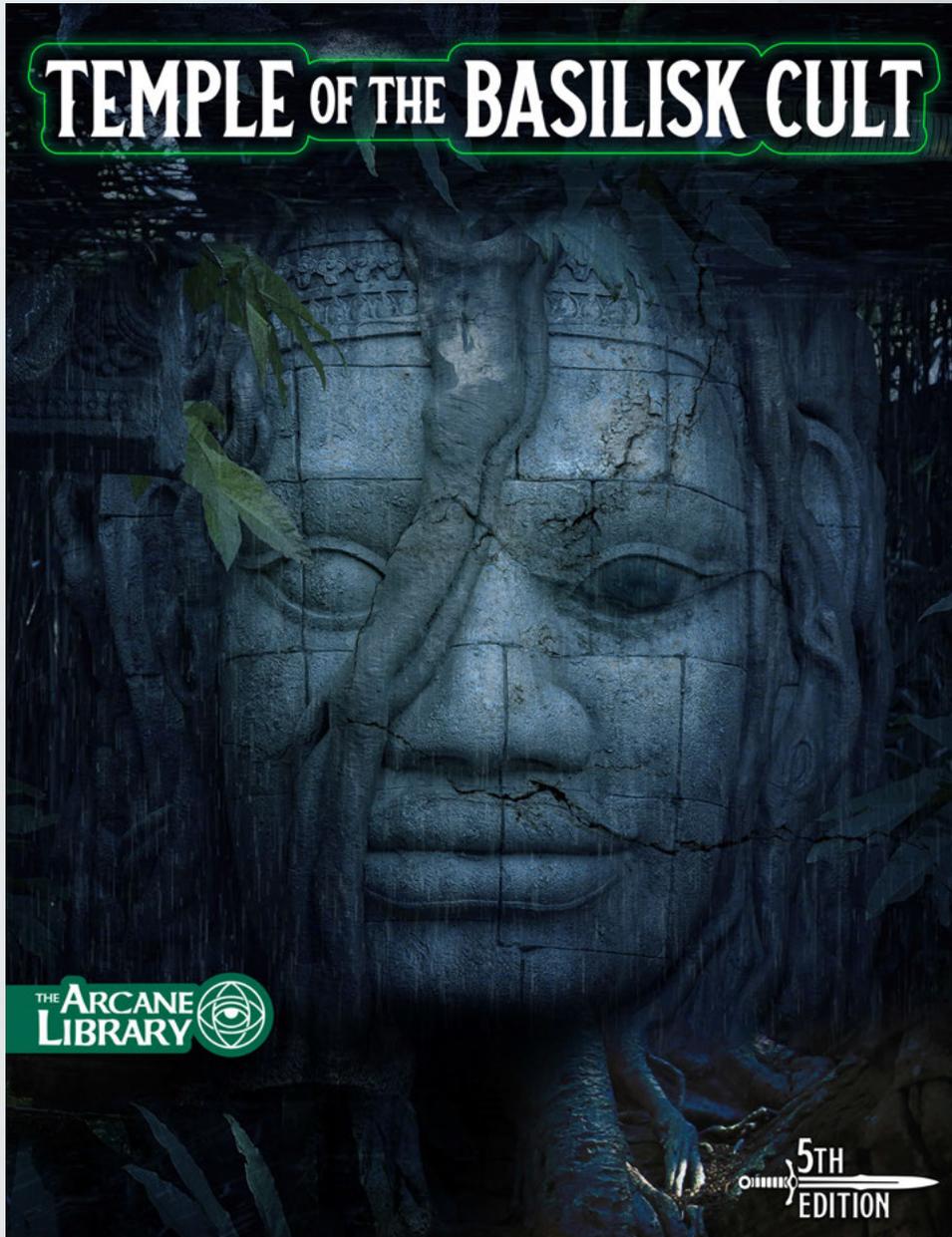
- "I killed him. But why does his heart not stop beating?! Why does it not stop?!"
- "So I am mad, you say? You should have seen how careful I was to put the body where no-one could find it!"

FRIGHTENED (WHIMPERING)

- "The eye, the eye, the hideous eye! It watches even now — it knows we are here!"
- "Louder it becomes, louder! I cannot bear it!"
- "Nevermore, nevermore, nevermore..."

THE ARCANE LIBRARY

If you [join The Arcane Library's](#) newsletter, you'll get a FREE copy of *Temple of the Basilisk Cult*, a 1st-level adventure set in the jungle!



Acknowledgements

This adventure was inspired by the works of Edgar Allan Poe. It was written in partnership with the incredible **Castle Mac** crew for their livestream in the Edgar Allan Poe Museum in Richmond, VA, on August 18, 2018. I can't thank them enough for giving me this writing opportunity and for making the adventure into something greater than the sum of its parts though their epic performance and talent.

This adventure is dedicated to my mother. Mom, thank you for instilling a love of literature in me from a young age, and also for borrowing a now-infamous box set from a friend so I could try a game that would end up transforming my life.

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