



IN Need of killing

Stumbling, shuffling figures emerge from the wheat fields to attack the people of Asylum. Zombies, these horrors were set loose on the community, but by whom and why? In this adventure, the player characters form a group to stop a deranged cultist from awakening the Ruiner, the darkness responsible for the zombies' creation.

In Need of Killing is an adventure designed for starting characters. It's an adaptation of one of the first I wrote for *Shadow of the Demon Lord*. Originally, it was a haunted house story, one confined to an old shack in the middle of a field and the darkness underneath it. Through dozens of demos, the story evolved into what you have here, a bizarre romp through a macabre and unholy place. I hope you enjoy running it as much as I did.

~CREDITS~

WRITING AND DESIGN: ROBERT J. SCHWALB

EDITING: RAY VALLESE

ART DIRECTION: ROBERT J. SCHWALB

GRAPHIC DESIGN: HAL MANGOLD AND KARA HAMILTON

LAYOUT: KARA HAMILTON

ILLUSTRATIONS: BRITT MARTIN, IVAN DIXON

CARTOGRAPHY: CECIL HOWE

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SCHWALB ENTERTAINMENT, LLC



PO Box #12548

Murfreesboro, TN 37129

info@schwalbentertainment.com www.schwalbentertainment.com



shadow of the demon lord

ASYLUM

The community known as Asylum stands at a crossroads of the Emperor's Road and the River Path, a few days north of Sixton, capital of the Northern Reach. Established as a trade hub for the farming families that hold the lands for miles around it, Asylum is quite small, home to a few dozen people who make their living tending to travelers passing through, who are growing less and less common. Wheat fields surround the community for miles.

Twenty buildings make up Asylum and include a blacksmith, a carpenter, the Weary Traveler (an inn with a taproom), a marketplace, a general store, a stable, and a shrine dedicated to the New God. The rest of the structures are small homes of the residents. Other than the blacksmith's shop, the buildings have stone foundations, wood walls, and slate-shingled roofs. The smith's shop is a forge with a roof but no walls. Behind it stands the smith's small home.

Where the two roads meet there stands an old statue of a man on a horse. The nameplate was stolen from it years ago, and no one remembers who he was or what he did to deserve a statue.

Asylum's people are all human, though they are no strangers to the other ancestries, as clockworks, dwarfs, orcs, and goblins drift into town en route to other places. The community leader and owner of the Weary Traveler is Samyra, a woman in her mid forties with brown hair, an easy smile, and an infectious laugh. The blacksmith, Peter, has her affections for now, though the lone watchman, Saul, has made attempts at catching her eye. Finally, Anise, a young acolyte of the New God with red hair and plain looks, tends to the shrine.

GETTING STARTED

Ask the players to come up with reasons for why they are in Asylum, using their professions and background information as guides. Also, you and the players should decide whether or not the characters know one another. Allow the players to add whatever details they like to the community, and provide additional information if you wish.

THE DEAD WALK

A few hours after sunset, a band of **8 zombies** emerges from the fields. They spread out singly or in groups of two and attack the locals. Not long after the fighting begins, a fire starts in one of the houses and unless put out, it will spread through the town. For each zombie the PCs kill, the townsfolk kill two zombies. The PCs should not fight more than 1 zombie at a time. Give Fortune to the first character who takes action to protect the community.

AFTERMATH

Anyone local to the community recognizes that six of the zombies are farmhands employed at the Randolph farm a few miles out of town. The other two are strangers.

Samyra asks for volunteers to check in on the Randolph family, looking to the PCs if they helped protect the town. If the PCs agree, the blacksmith gives a sword to a strong character, and Samyra gives a bow with a quiver of 10 arrows to an agile character. She also gives the smartest character in the group an incantation of the *arcane sight* Arcana spell. Finally, Anise gives each other character a *healing potion*.

MERIUS CLAY

Merius Clay, a cultist, came to the Randolph farm earlier in the day with four other cultists, believing, rightly, that the house stood atop an ancient tomb. They killed the farmhands and sacrificed the family members to their dark master. This act caused the dead to rise as zombies. Clay and his lackeys have since descended into the cellar, dug a pit, and through it entered the tomb.

Merius Clay is a twisted monster. He snarls when he speaks, and his eyes glow like embers. He wears stained and soiled vestments, and the symbol of the New God hanging from a chain around his neck has been bent and twisted into a lump of metal. If Clay sits in one place for more than an hour, all ordinary plants within a few yards of him wither and die.

MERIUS CLAY

DIFFICULTY 5

Size 1 human

Perception 13 (+3); **darkvision**
Defense 15 (mail); **Health** 20
Strength 12 (+2), **Agility** 11 (+1), **Intellect** 13 (+3), **Will** 9 (-1)
Speed 10; **Corruption** 3

ATTACK OPTIONS

Sword (melee) +2 with 1 boon (1d6 + 2)

MAGIC (POWER 1)

Necromancy *spectral grasp* (2), *animate corpse* (1), *grave grasp* (1)

THE FARM

Walking from Asylum to the Randolph farm takes an hour. The farm consists of a house atop a rounded hill, an oak tree, a silo, a barn, a shed, an outhouse, tents for the farmhands, and about twenty acres of grain fields.

Tree: A dead oak tree stands next to the house. Blue bottles hang from strings tied to its branches. A **zombie** also hangs by the neck from a stout branch. It's missing its legs, and odd symbols have been carved into what's left of its naked body.

The Fields: Wheat covers the land within a half-mile of the farm. Characters exploring the fields may encounter a

pack of $1d3 + 1$ wild dogs (as small animals with the Pack Fighting talent) worrying the corpse of a dead child. The child grips a bloodstained doll in her hands.

Barn: Characters within a few yards of the barn hear screams coming from inside. Edward, one of the Randolph sons, hid in the barn, but **2 zombies** found him. The zombies kill Edward 1 minute after the group hears the scream. If rescued, Edward reveals what happened to the family.

House: The house is a fine structure made of wood that stands atop an oddly rounded hill. It features a wraparound porch, numerous windows, a second story, and an attic. The interior is broken up into several rooms, including a parlor, a dining room, a hall, four bedrooms, and a kitchen. All have modest furnishings that have been strewn about and splashed with blood.

In the kitchen, an open trapdoor leads to the cellar. Listening characters can hear voices coming from below.

The attic holds trunks, manikins, a baby crib, a mirror, and a **poltergeist**. The spirit may try to scare off the characters or communicate with them by writing in the dust on the floor. If it communicates, it tells the characters that bad men tortured and murdered the family.

The spirits of the dead family linger in the house. At night, they manifest and replay the final moments of their lives. A character must make a Will challenge roll the first time she sees an apparition. On a failure, she gains 1 Insanity.

Cellar: The cellar is a bit smaller than the house, roughly 6 yards wide and 8 yards long, with the ceiling 2 yards overhead. The floor and walls are dirt, and wooden posts support the ceiling. Shelves loaded with canned goods cover the walls.

Here, **2 cultists** stand guard; one wears a porcelain mask of a grinning baby and the other a mask of a surprised baby. In addition, an **animated corpse** of a toddler is chained to a post. The cultists wear black clothing with metal bands cinched around their arms and legs. The bands only tighten and cannot be removed without cutting them free.

Two shovels and a lantern lie on the ground near a hole dug at the center of the cellar floor. A rope has been tied around one of the posts and hangs down into the hole, dropping 6 yards through the ceiling of the chamber below and ends at the dirt- and debris-covered floor of Area 1.

THE TOMB OF THE RUINER

The hill on which the house stands conceals the dome of an ancient tomb built nearly one thousand years ago. Locations within the tomb are dark. Paintings depicting horrific acts of violence and torture cover the plastered walls. The air is redolent with the stench of old blood. Passages are 2 yards wide and tall. Chambers are variously sized, and their ceilings are generally 3 yards above the floor.

Merius Clay and one **cultist** explore the tomb. The group may encounter them whenever you want.

KEY LOCATIONS

All locations correspond to the numbered places on the map.

1. Domed Chamber: A mural depicting lewd and profane acts covers the ceiling in this 10-yard-diameter chamber. Four statues carved from granite to look like naked men sporting grisly wounds hold up the dome. One of the statues is a **medium construct**. It attacks any living creature that moves within 2 yards of it.

A corpse lies splattered on the floor. The black clothing and shattered mask suggest it was once a cultist.

Each door leading out from the chamber opens inward and, once opened, closes slowly.

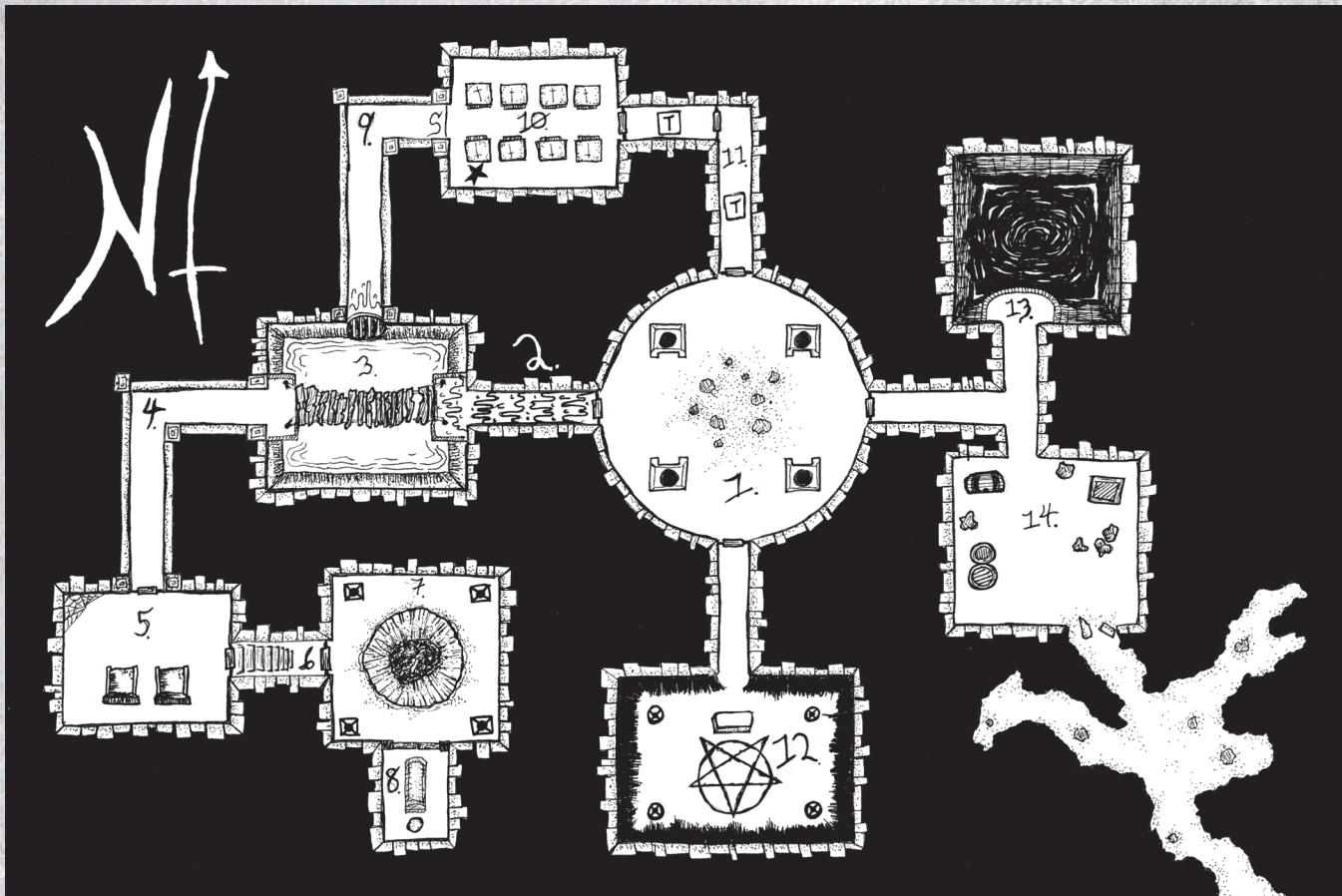
2. Slick Passage: Thin, clear oil covers the sloping tunnel's floor. A character moving at more than half his Speed down the tunnel must make an Agility challenge roll. A failure indicates that he slips, falls prone, and slides to **Area 3**, where he must make a Strength challenge roll with 1 bane. On a failure, the character slides over the edge, falls into the pit, and takes $1d6$ damage upon landing in the muck at the bottom.

3. The Pit: Two ledges connected by an old, rotting rope bridge overlook a pit. A reeking pool of bright green fluid covers the bottom. On the north and south walls are monstrous faces painted in yellow chalk.

When a Size 1 or larger creature moves across the bridge and reaches the middle, roll a d6. On a 1, the bridge breaks and drops the creature into the pool. The creature takes $1d6$ damage upon landing.

The surface of the water is 5 yards below the ledges and the water is 2 yards deep. A swarm of albino crabs (as an **animal swarm** with the aquatic trait) infests the water. An old iron grate, rusted and covered in slime, rises partly from the water on the north wall. The bars are brittle and easily broken.

To climb out of the pit, a character must get a success on a Strength challenge roll made with 1 bane.



4. Tunnel: The tunnel floor slopes downward. The walls show scenes of human sacrifice and animation into undead. The tunnel ends at a stone door that is carved to look like an armored skeleton. Stubs of candles sit in its eye sockets.

5. Guard Room: Webs stretch from floor to ceiling in this square chamber. Mummified rats hang from the webs. Behind the webs stand two high-backed chairs. In each one sits a skeleton (as an **animated corpse**). Small plaques hang around their necks. On one of the plaques is an incantation of the *spectral grasp* Necromancy spell. A **large spider** hides near the ceiling in the northeast corner.

The animated corpses attack anyone entering the room. The spider joins the fight on the third round.

6. Stairs: A staircase leads down to the tomb. Skulls line either side of the steps, and an unlit fat wax candle crowns each one.

7. Antechamber: Four iron statues stand in the corners and depict nude, corpulent women straining to have bowel movements. A wide pit commands the room's center. The pit's floor, littered with bones, lies 20 yards down from the room.

Double doors made of iron stand closed. Chains looped through the handles and padlocked keep the doors sealed. The lock can be smashed or picked. A character attempting to pick the lock makes the Agility challenge rolls with 1 bane.

When a creature touches the chains or the lock, four enormous centipedes (as **small monsters**) wriggle free from the statues' bottoms and attack.

8. Tomb: An iron sarcophagus lies on the floor at the room's center. Its lid shows a nude man with an expression of obvious pleasure. A pedestal made from porphyry stands behind the sarcophagus, and on it is a tiny clay statue of a humanoid figure with horns sprouting from its body.

A **tiny demon** is bound to the statue. If the statue is broken, the demon escapes and attempts to kill its liberator.

The sarcophagus holds the remains of the Ruiner. Unless its heart is destroyed (see **Area 13**), removing the lid awakens the remains as a **barrow wight**. Around the Ruiner's neck is the *Amulet of Shadows*.

9. Gas-Filled Tunnel: An old iron grate covers the southern entrance to this area, and a secret door blocks access from the east. From within the tunnel, the secret door is obvious and can be opened by pushing on it.

Noxious gas fills the tunnel. Bringing flame into the area causes it to explode, dealing $1d6$ damage to everything in the tunnel and within 2 yards of either entrance. A creature may make an Agility resistance roll. On a success, the creature takes half damage.

10. Garrison: Eight tombs, each 1 yard wide, 1 yard deep, and 2 yards tall, are arranged in two rows of four. Seven of

the tombs hold **animated corpses**, each with half Health. They wear masks of human faces nailed to their skulls that twitch and sneer as if alive. When one tomb door opens, the other tombs containing animated corpses also open.

Opening the door to the empty tomb causes the secret door to **Area 9** to swing open.

The corpses wear funerary linens and bronze plaques around their necks on which their names are inscribed. Each plaque is worth 3 cp.

AMULET OF SHADOWS

The amulet looks like a tiny iron cage and is 2 inches tall, 1 inch wide, and 1 inch deep. A human finger sits inside the cage. A creature wearing the amulet may use an action to turn light within 5 yards to shadows while the creature concentrates. The area of shadows moves with the amulet.

ii. Trapped Corridor: When a Size 1/2 or larger creature steps on a pressure plate in the north-south corridor, it activates a pit trap in the east-west corridor. Once that happens, the first creature to step on the plate in the east-west passage triggers the trap, causing a panel to open in the floor. The creature must make an Agility challenge roll with 1 bane. On a failure, the creature falls into the pit and takes 1d6 damage upon landing at the bottom, 5 yards down.

Triggering the pit trap also activates a trap in the north-south passage. Once that happens, the first creature to step on the pressure plate in that passage causes a heavy scythe to sweep down from above and then lock into the ceiling. Any creature in the indicated space when the scythe trap is triggered must make an Agility challenge roll with 1 bane. On a failure, the creature takes 1d6 + 3 damage. Once the scythe trap triggers, the pit trap in the other passage resets.

Due to the way the pressure plates work, PCs who enter the corridor from Area 1 might activate both traps, whereas characters who enter from Area 10 might not trigger either one.

Finding either pressure plate requires a success on a Perception challenge roll made with 2 banes. The pressure plates, once discovered, can be avoided easily or disarmed using a toolkit by getting a success on an Intellect challenge roll with 2 banes.

12. Ritual Chamber: A crimson pentagram inscribed on the floor fills this room with murky shadows. Black curtains covered with gold script hang from the walls. Four unlit bronze braziers stand in the corners and contain ashes and burnt bone fragments. A bloody altar stands before the pentagram.

Inside the symbol is a **small demon**. It has bright orange skin, a great slobbering mouth, and stocky limbs ending in thick, clawed fingers. The demon wants to be free but

speaks only in Dark Speech and High Archaic. If anyone crosses the pentagram's area, the magic sustaining it fails and the demon is free to rip the characters to pieces.

13. Killing Floor: A balcony looks out over a pit 10 yards deep. Bones stained black with old blood cover the pit floor to a depth of a few feet. Chains hang from loops screwed into the ceiling 3 yards overhead, and at the end of the chains are thick hooks that hold **8 animated corpses** about 1 yard from the top of the bones. At the center of the room, a black, pulsing heart hangs pierced on a hook. This is the Ruiner's heart. While it remains intact, the Ruiner can rise as a barrow wight. The heart has Defense 10 and Health 10, and it counts as an object.

14. Plundered Vault: This room once held the Ruiner's treasures, but now it holds empty racks, opened chests, and cracked urns. A break in the southern wall shows where enterprising gnomes breached the chamber to remove the valuables. Characters sifting through the rubbish find 13 copper pennies, 4 silver shillings, and 1 gold crown. Also, they find an enchanted lantern that emits light without needing oil, a pick, a graven skull, and a sacrificial knife.

If you want to extend this adventure, the tunnel leads to wherever you like. If not, it comes to a dead end at the edge of the map.

