1 The House of the Veil

The House of the Veil is famous in the Realm as one of the best establishments available for an evening's entertainment. In addition to providing excellent food and drink, the House boasts some of the best doxies available in the Realm. It's ladies have become the *creme de la creme* of the guilded doxies.

What is unknown about the House is that it is in reality a cover for the Black Hand, a coven operating in the Realm, but rooted deeply in the traditions of Eastern witchcraft and and herblore. It is composed of witches of Chthonic allignments, bound to either the Lord Lucifer or the Lord Kryssonyx, as well as a number of agents and assistants who are not witches, but share those allignments.

The Hand was created seven years ago by Seamist Sweetwater, an Eastern witch, and several fellow Clanswomen who chose exile in the uncertain habitat of the Realm to certain death in the Clanlands should they be discovered. A superb cook and good listener, with a eye for what men found beautiful in girls, Seamist was quickly able to establish and licence a restaurant, Veil House, and the House of the Veil bordello.

Besides a keen eye for business, Seamist also kept her hawk's eyes (literally; her familiar was a gold-crested hawk) peeled for prospective initiates to the coven; she took several of the girls who worked in either her restaurant or brothel, and taught them the ways of the coven, initiating many into the Black Hand. Of the old guard, trained by Seamist, only three remain: Rose Bluemist, once a Clanswoman and prisoner of war, then a Realm archeologist; Charity Goldenfield, who arrived from the Clans as a youngster in Seamist's company, now serving as an anthropologist in addition to her activities with the Veil and the Hand; and Lilith, the only Realm doxy to be initiated by Seamist, and the best alchemist any of you have ever heard of.

Seamist's Hand existed in the Realm for two reasons. The first was to allow her and her disciples some more freedom in the use of their witchcraft; the second was to function as an advance guard for Seamist's coven back in the Clans. The Black Hand used their magics to spy on Realm activities and, when war between the Realm and the Clans was declared, to sabotage them wherever possible, to secure a Clan victory.

Clearly Lilith earned Seamist's interest -- when Seamist departed the Realm, Lilith was left in charge as CovenQueen of the Hand. This occured a little less than five years ago, shortly after Seamist led a ritual to slay the Justiciar. Lilith also managed to obtain the position of Mistress of the Doxy's Guild, thus smoothing the way for the Hand's deception. There are uses to having Realm Citizens in the organization...

However, since then the Hand has had some problems. The new Justiciar has remained protected from the rituals you have conducted, through some power greater even than your own. You have thus been forced to maintain mystical silence for the most part, curtailing your use of witchcraft. Luckily for the Hand, Lilith is primarily an alchemist, and has hit upon a scheme that will shatter the Realm's war effort, using only a minimum of witchcraft.

At first glance, the scheme appeared unreal -- raising an undead army, under your command, to function as unbeatable soldiers and assassins. They would be the perfect pawns: strong, loyal, and mindless, under no circumstances could they be traced to you. Best of all, they would instill a level of fear in your enemies that would cripple their hearts...

The ritual to create your undead army consists of 4 parts.

- First, a potential victim must imbibe the Deathbrew, an alchemical concoction devised by Lilith, on at least two separate occassions. This has no effect in and of itself but prepares the victim to properly receive the next step of the ritual.

- Next, the Danse of Morganna must be performed on the victim. The Danse separates the victim's soul from his body; performed on an unprepared victim it results in death, but the Deathbrew keeps the body in a state of catatonic unlife. The Danse is a spell discovered by Rose Bluemist, whose magical skills are perhaps the most well-developed of your Hand. According to Rose, it is originally from the Tome of Chthon, the ultimate book of dark magic lore.
- The soulless body must be steeped in the Deathbath, another alchemical brew that preserves it and grants it strength and flexibility, so that the animated corpse will serve adequately as a servant.
- Finally, the Ritual of Animation must be performed over the body. This will restore it to a state of unlife, wherein it will obey the commands given it by whoever leads the Hand in the final Ritual.

Since it was much easier to perform the two spells for a number of victims at once, you arranged to do exactly that. First, you started functioning as a market for illegal drug dealing. Between Lilith and Charity, as well as a number of Veil girls and employees who were unaware of the Hand's existence, you started concocting mind-altering chemicals and distributing them to your customers. Every once in a while, as well, you would slip in the Deathbrew -- it was designed to have certain aphrodesiacal effects, so that your victims would keep coming back for more.

After a while, you had targetted 13 prospective victims, those who appeared to have no real family or friends to speak of. These included Hadoram Madai, one of the Veil's workers who discovered more than he should have and tried to blackmail Lilith, as well as a Guard of the Realm (you didn't realize what he was until you searched his clothes and found his Badge, which has since vanished). This group was drugged and bound and subjected to the Danse of Morganna, which worked perfectly. Four days ago, they were placed in the Deathbath, in tubs in the basement of Veil House.

Three days ago they disappeared, and were found by the Guard of the Realm, still soulless and dead, but each with a single swordstroke through the heart. Or rather, twelve of them were. Hadoram Madai is currently on the Castle, apparently in the best of health. Something is going on, and whatever it is you *aren't* pleased.

Luckilly, Lilith managed to pull a few strings and get some of you onto the Castle, where the bodies have been brought for study. She, Rose and Charity are here, as well as Mitrani Lyon, perhaps your most unusual member. Lyon joined the House of the Veil a few months ago, and remained associated with it for a while until Lilith brought her into the Hand. You have all since discovered that Lyon is in truth an undercover Guardian, who was assigned to infiltrate the House of the Veil but has now defected to your side.

You were suspicious at first, but she's passed every test you've handed her. She's even been warning the Hand about the Guard's occasional investigations into illegal drug dealing; this has been extremely useful in staying out of their hands and one step ahead of the Thieve's Guild (who are probably also upset at the competition). As yet she has not been initiated into the service of either of the Chthonic Lords, although she may be granted that honor this week if she earns it.

Madai was recruited into the Veil several months ago, as well, and has been working as hired muscle for the most part. It's possible he doesn't remember what happened, and you should probably try to figure out how he survived -- this could be crucial. Also on the Castle is a Realm counsl, Abimael Eve, who has been trying to join the House of the Veil... almost too hard. Initially she was rejected by Lilith, despite her rather impressive credentials as a doxy, since she didn't seem to have the makings of a really good witch. But she's been extremely insistent since then. On the other hand, your House *is* the best there is; maybe you should have expected this to happen earlier.

Unfortunately, the teleport platforms on the Castle stopped working almost as soon as you arrived, so the four or five of you are the only ones here. The twelve bodies that had the decency to stay dead are in the morgue and difficult to get at; you've tried over the last two days but lle-Victory Sorsha, the forensic biologist, has been watching over them practically 24 hours a day. They've been out of the Deathbath for over three days now; in another day or two they will be utterly useless to you. If you can't get them back in that time, you'll have to start over again with the men on the Castle.

Another problem is the Guard of the Realm -- it appears that Nimrod, the Head of Internal Security, has become suspicious of the Veil. So far, he doesn't appear to have any clue what you are really up to, but care should be taken to keep it that way. Luckilly, the twelve deaths have been attributed to the Circle of Bloodletters; if you can maintain that assumption you should have a better chance of success.

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