

The Master of the Shambles



Basement

Approach: The smell of rotting meat permeates the air for blocks away, even the most hardened denizens of the street cover their noses and mouths when they come near, while the lazy drone of blowflies create the music of decay. The shambles rests in the basement of a meat market and sausage makers, Bloated haggis, covered with wax and bound with twine hang in the meat market's window, while loops of sausage stuffed into the entrails of sheep are curtained above them.

Entrance: A battered and scarred wooden door closes off the entrance to the shambles, the marks of the struggles of sheep mar the old wood and a darkened latch and lock allow entrance to the steep wooden stairs that end in a stone wall covered with the blood, brains, and a few tufts of wool from sheep slaughtered by the simple expedient of swinging the animal's heads at the stones, to then be tossed to the waiting stone tables.

Quick Glance: The room's underground location keeps the air cooler than the street above, what the smell would be like in the full heat of summer is a torment gladly avoided. What light there is comes from small barred windows set high near the ceiling, allowing a slight breeze to carry away some small portion of the stench. Three stone tables are escorted by blackened barrels that await the scraps of meat and bone that are discarded by the butchers, to be turned into sausage by the business upstairs.

Long Look: As eyes become accustomed to the gloom you realize how thickly the filth of slaughter cakes the floors and walls of the room, the squirming dance of maggots gorging themselves on the feast so kindly provided them is accompanied by the almost silent sound of their movements through the sticky foulness upon which they feed.

A desk sits beside a door hidden by a supporting wall, a lamp sitting next to the inventory lists and accounts of the day to day tasks of this place.

Barrels of scraps and bones are stacked behind the wall defining the stairs, flies buzzing in a muted symphony above them.

Sub-basement

Entrance: A second set of stairs fully as steep as the first lead into an enclosed stairway, ending with a sturdy door on the right. A lock, much newer than the one above would secure the door, but now remains unlatched, the door remaining slightly ajar, flickering torchlight, tinged with blue, spills through the cracks upon the landing.

Quick Glance: The door opens on silent, well oiled hinges, revealing the torches that you had seen hinted before, set so that all the light within the room is gathered near the entrance, leaving the rest in shadow while dazzling the eyes. At first the room seems empty, taking a moment for your eyes to adjust revealing the occupant of a chair resting at the far wall and the chalk line that is drawn through the dust and dried blood that has leaked down from the shambles above. “Come no closer than the line”, whispers a throaty, liquid voice from the obscuring darkness of the hooded and caped cloak that the figure has drawn about it as though fearing a chill.

Longer Look: The air here, while less foul than that in the room above, carries with it an older foulness, of blood that has fallen through the floorboards and dried into dust, and a strange waxy sent that teases the memory but refuses to come clear, perhaps tallow? Bone? The fresher stench of the blood that trickles slowly down the walls, caked in ancient layers fails to mask that older smell.

Through the old and dusty blood you can see the remains of previously drawn lines, erased hastily as the new ones were drawn, always, always closer to the door.

“Come no closer”, the voice repeats, “and tell me why you are here.” A brief red glimmer beneath the figure’s cowl may have been eyes, but if so they were shuttered in an instant. “What has brought you to bargain with the master of this place....”

Notes:

The exact nature of the Master of the Shambles is left to the Game Master to detail, balancing him to the needs of the campaign being more important than nailing down fixed abilities for this brief outline. In the original campaigns the Master is a not-yet-fallen Paladin infected with vampirism, using the stench of rotting blood to mask the scent of the fresh, living blood that mortals carry within... His discipline allows him to feed upon the blood from the animals slaughtered here, at times driving him to devour the scurrying rats that infest the place, or when driven beyond endurance to lap the blackening blood from the walls.

But with each passing night the hunger becomes greater, and at times he must move the lines closer and closer to the door. Soon he will no longer be sustained by the blood of animals, but still his spirit fights against his hungers.