

To the Manor Born

This isn't an adventure as such, more of a wrapper for another adventure. It can be used for any level party.

The party in question is traveling through the countryside from point A to point B. They should be traveling through somewhat of a backwoods region, an area that's less sophisticated than what they're used to. Ideally, the party should come from a city that has the equivalent of the Library of Alexandria, but any large city would probably do.

It's approaching dusk when the party arrives at a small village, the Barony of Gordham. If the party stops at the local inn – or if they are just passing through – they will be spotted by the Baron's castellan. He will invite them to stay at the castle. He will say the Baron would very much like to meet them, and might have a profitable proposition for them. The castellan will be most anxious to have them stay, using any means short of force.

If the party accepts his invitation, they will be brought up to the castle and treated to a sumptuous dinner. The Baron is quite young, only nineteen or so. After dinner, he will explain his request.

The Baron's family is under a curse. Almost two hundred years ago, his family established their barony by ridding the area of an evil necromancer who had his laboratory in the hills above the village. The necromancer was killed, but with his dying breath he cursed the Gordham family and all their male heirs. Since then, upon taking the title of Baron, each male head of the family has been overcome by a horrible wasting illness. They get severe headaches, pains in various parts of the body, convulsions and sometimes sink into dementia before dying. It sometimes takes years, but the end is always the same. The Baron's own father died just recently, after a mere ten years on the throne, and the new Baron is due to officially assume the leadership of the family at a ceremony two days hence. Naturally, he would very much like to avoid his father's fate.

This is where the party comes in. Some time ago, a soothsayer gave a prophecy describing a group of adventurers that would come to the village. By a massive coincidence, the party almost perfectly fits that description. She said these people would "find the answer to lift the curse".

Prophecy being what it is, nobody is quite sure what that last bit means, but they believe it refers to the door that still guards the necromancer's secret lab. Whenever anyone approaches the door, a mouth appears in it and asks them a riddle. It is assumed that if they guess the riddle, the door will open. Nobody knows what the riddle is, because their minds are clouded when they give a wrong answer, and each person only gets one try. After all these years, nobody has yet been able to get past the door or into the lab by any other manner. The Baron would like the party to attempt to get through the door, deal with whatever is inside, and lift the curse.

He will offer the party whatever inducement you feel is necessary. He is in a bit of a desperate situation, but won't bankrupt himself either. If the party accepts, the Baron will provide guides to the necromancer's former lair, which is about a half days march from the village. The guides will not enter with the party.

This is where you come in. Design the necromancer's lair as you wish, keeping in mind the party should finish in time for the investment ceremony. The creatures living there should mostly be monsters that wandered in, although there might be a few undead still hanging around. The door to the lab will ask a riddle, and a minor confusion spell will affect anyone who gives a wrong answer. This effect will be broken and the door will open if somebody should give the correct answer. Put whatever climactic encounter you feel is appropriate inside the lab.

You may make the riddle as hard or as easy as you like, since it actually doesn't matter whether they answer it or not. One of my favorites is:

Q: What's the first thing you know?

A: Old Jed's a millionaire.

Ahem. Anyway, if they do answer the riddle they will be welcomed back with great fanfare and invited to the coronation feast as honored guests. If they don't answer it, they will be invited to stay anyway, although the proceedings will be much gloomier.

At the baron's investment ceremony, a cup will be brought forth for him to drink from. After he takes a sip of wine, the party will be invited to do so as well, since they saved/valiantly attempted to save the family from the evil curse. It will be explained that this cup is drunk from whenever a member of the family comes of age, and whenever a new baron is invested.

The cup is quite ancient, and bears a stylized dragon with ruby eyes. As it is passed to them, the party members will notice that it's a lot heavier than it should be, and seems to be made of some gray metal. If they try to scratch the surface or bend a part of the cup, they will notice the metal is quite soft. If asked for more details about it, family members will say the cup is the mark of the head of the household, and the ruling baron drinks from it each day in the morning ceremony (to greet the day) and the evening ceremony (to wish a good rest to all).

Unless the party is exceptionally dim, they should quickly realize that the cup is made of **LEAD**. That of course is the true source of the curse – **lead poisoning**. One or two drinks won't hurt anybody, but since the baron drinks from it twice a day, fatal lead poisoning is the inevitable result. (Historical note: the use of lead drinking and eating utensils is considered to be one of the causes of the fall of the Roman Empire.)

Since the party comes from a more cosmopolitan area, they could reasonably be expected to know about lead poisoning (without having to make a die roll), while the residents of this somewhat backwoods area would not. They might have a bit of a problem getting the idea across, but the family will believe them eventually and stop using the cup.

That's the adventure. The whole necromancer thing is just a massive red herring to give the party something to do. Hope you like it.