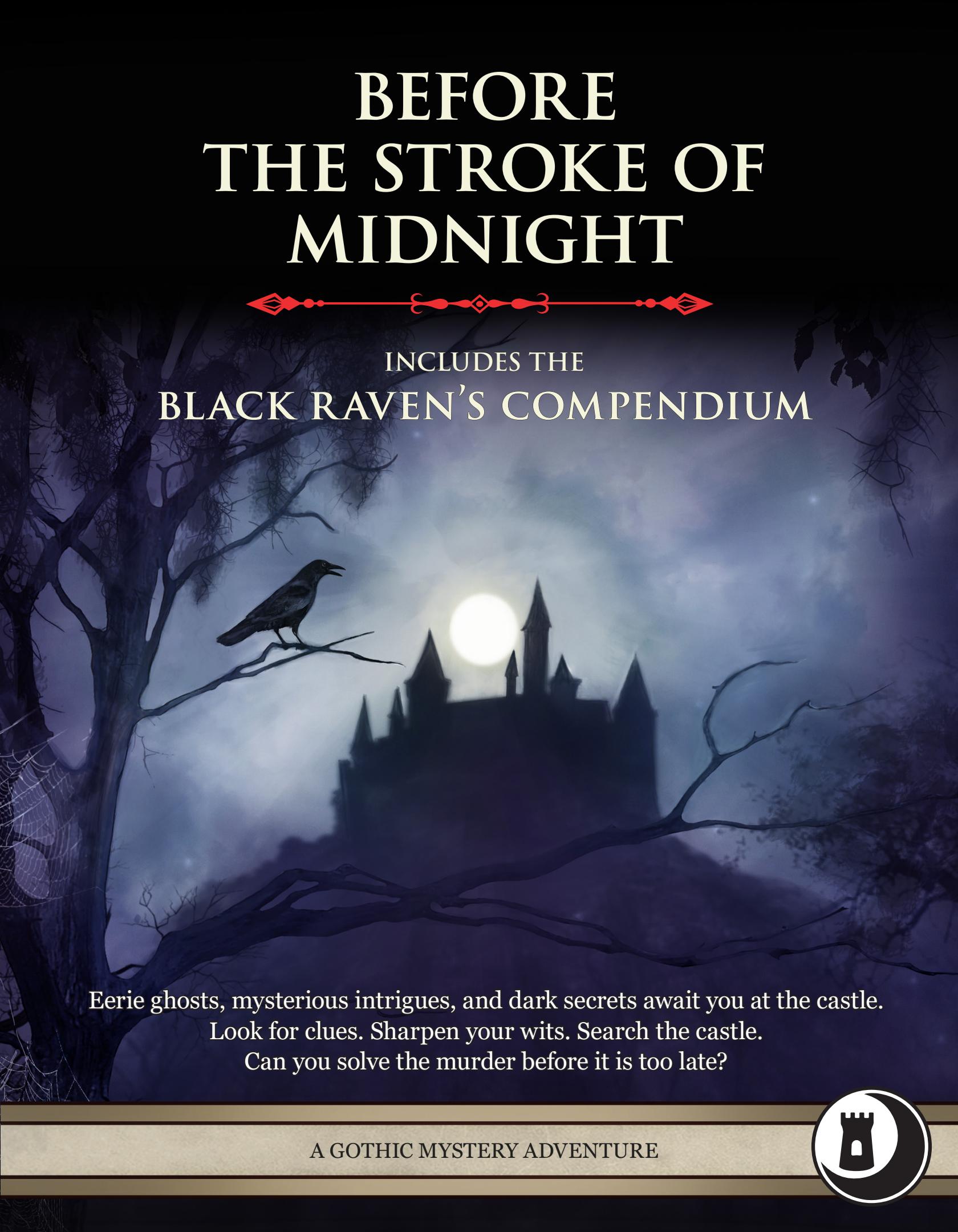


BEFORE THE STROKE OF MIDNIGHT



INCLUDES THE
BLACK RAVEN'S COMPENDIUM



Eerie ghosts, mysterious intrigues, and dark secrets await you at the castle.
Look for clues. Sharpen your wits. Search the castle.
Can you solve the murder before it is too late?

A GOTHIC MYSTERY ADVENTURE



BEFORE THE STROKE OF MIDNIGHT



The Duchess Rose Blackraven of Shieldsborg Castle is dead. However, her last will is missing, and it is unclear who will inherit from her.

You must find the will before midnight and identify the true heir to Shieldsborg Castle. Search the old castle for clues, interview the secretive residents, and investigate the mysterious surrounding areas.

But be careful – more blood will be spilled, and a new murder will occur before midnight.

*Look for clues. Sharpen your wits. Search the castle.
Can you solve the murder before it is too late?*



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EASTERN FARRAWAY

BASED ON THE ORIGINAL MAPS FROM AURORA GNMTRIX'S
TRAVEL CHRONICLES: EXPLORING EASTERN FARRAWAY REGION

THE HINTHERDALE REGION

ILDE VOLCANO

FROSTCLIFF OUTPOST

WHITEPORT

NORTH STAR REGION

WOLFBERG PASS

SHIELDSBORG CASTLE

HAMMERSONG

WESTERN HAMMERSONG
REGION

WINTERHOLD

HOLY HOLLOW

STENUR KEEP

COPPERTOWN

CRAIGHOLM REGION

OXGATE

BUCKWILD REGION



MAP LEGEND

MARSH

WOODLAND

WATER

HILLS

WINTER HIGHLAND

TOWN

MAJOR TOWN

REGION BORDER

TRADE ROAD

ROWANVALE

HILLSBY

SILVER WOODLANDS
REGION

PEATTOWN
VILLAGE

REDBRIDGE



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OVERVIEW

ABOUT THIS ADVENTURE

Before the Stroke of Midnight is an adventure for the world's greatest roleplaying game (5e). It is designed for a group of three to five 9th-level characters, but can be scaled up or down by adjusting the encounters.

This adventure is a murder mystery adventure inspired by Edgar Allan Poe and can be used in any campaign or as a side-quest adventure. Some towns and events used in this adventure mean that it works particularly well if played after the *Rise of the Ice Dragons Trilogy* adventures, but it can easily be adapted to suit other settings.

FEATURED CONTENT

- A classic Gothic murder mystery!
- Nine NPCs (including a ghost) with background descriptions, agendas, and secrets.
- An old castle with 34 different rooms and areas to search for clues.
- Open sandbox-style adventure with several different encounters.
- New unique monster: Dusk wolf.
- New magical item: Ring of Serpent's Tongue.
- Legend & Lore: Shieldsborg Castle.
- Original full-colour illustrations and maps.

ADDITIONAL DOWNLOADS

Maps, VTT tokens, and handouts for the adventure can be downloaded here: <http://midnight-tower.com/additional-downloads-btsom/>

SYNOPSIS

The characters find a black horse carriage that contains a dead solicitor and his terrified manservant. The manservant explains that they were attacked on the way. He suggests that

characters might receive a reward if they bring the carriage and an important letter to Shieldsborg Castle. The letter contains the last will of the Duchess of the Blackraven family, who recently died.

On their way to Shieldsborg Castle, the characters are attacked by dusk wolves (a new monster introduced in this adventure). When the characters arrive, they are asked if they can read the will in front of everyone present at the castle.

However, when the will is announced, one of the relatives claims that it is the wrong will. He hires the characters to find the latest version of the will, which has to be found before midnight. But soon after the characters start their investigation, the relative is murdered.

Ultimately, the characters must figure out who the killer is, as well as find out who is the rightful heir of Shieldsborg Castle.

OPTIONAL: A NON-VIOLENT FINALE

This adventure can be played as a murder mystery without the need for physical conflict. In this scenario, the main villain surrenders when their crime is exposed, and is taken to Northwind Gate to face trial.

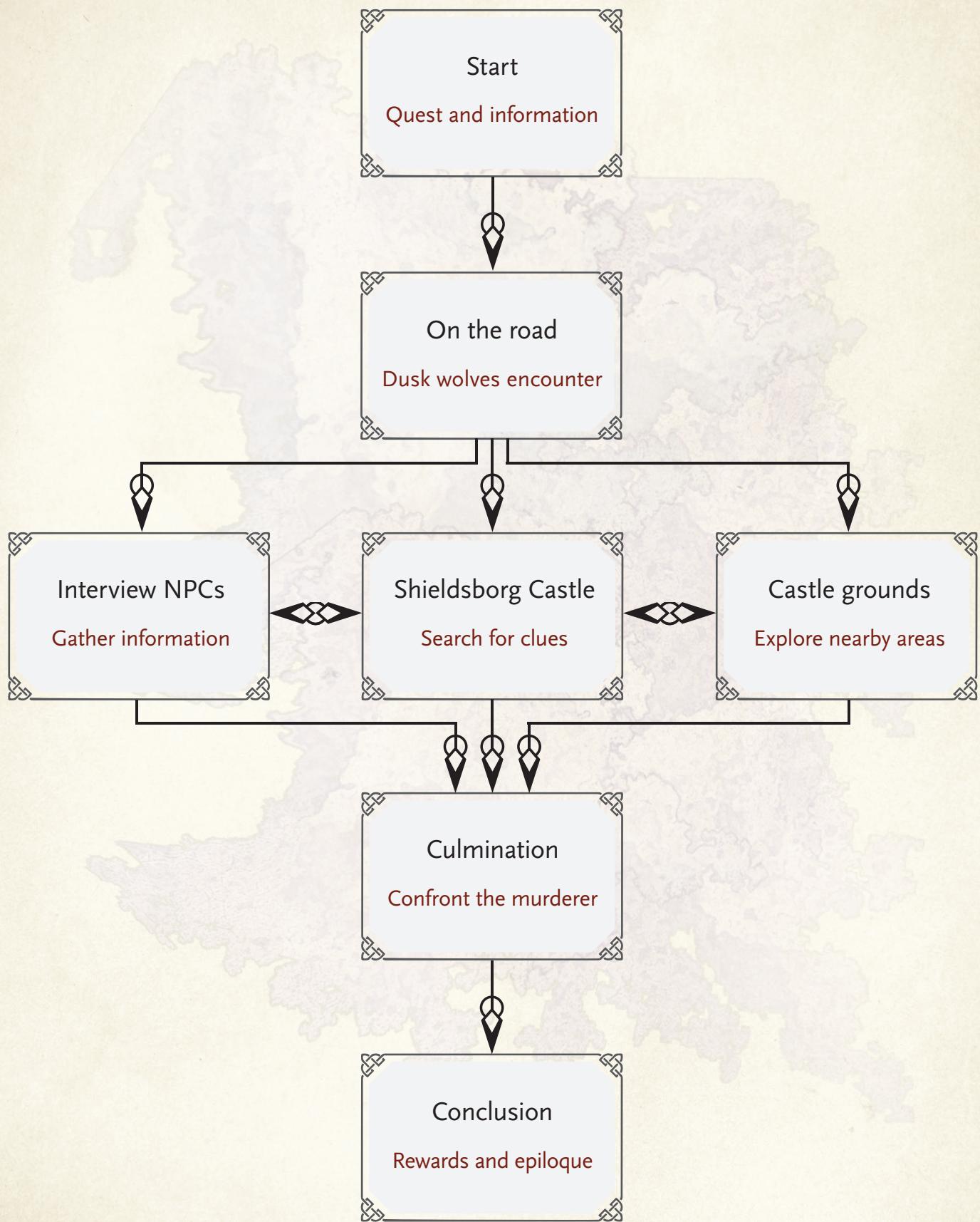
HOW TO RUN THIS ADVENTURE

This is an open sandbox-style mystery adventure. The characters are encouraged to interview the NPCs, search the castle for clues, and investigate the surrounding areas.

As Shieldsborg Castle is haunted, the DM is suggested to be generous with descriptions that emphasise the spookiness of the castle. For example, the DM can add creaking noises, hints of eerie music, restless shadows, or an unnerving feeling of being watched. Feel free to occasionally roll a couple of dice behind the DM screen for no reason at all!

The most important part of the adventure is to create a tense and eerie atmosphere. After all, the old castle is filled with old secrets – and there is a callous murderer on the loose.

ADVENTURE FLOWCHART



BEFORE THE ADVENTURE BEGINS

Shieldsborg Castle has been the home of the Blackraven family for generations. Once proud and grand, the castle's fortunes have declined over the years. The neglected dwelling is now filled with shadows and old memories rather than lively gatherings and lavish balls. (See chapter 12 for more about the castle's history.)

BACKGROUND

The Duke of Shieldsborg Castle died in battle long ago and left his wife, the Duchess Rose Blackraven, and their two children, Caspian and Celestia, behind. Prunellia Mills, who is the young ward at Shieldsborg Castle, grew up at the castle together with Caspian and Celestia.

Prunellia was never formally accepted into the family, and while Caspian and Celestia rarely got along, the siblings enjoyed reminding Prunellia that she was an outsider and often joined ranks to make her feel inferior. This caused Prunellia to erupt in fits of rage when she was young. However, as she grew older, her fury changed to cold manipulation.

THE MAKING OF A MURDERER

About a year ago, Prunellia stumbled upon an old letter and discovered the shocking truth: She is, in fact, the oldest daughter of Rose Blackraven.

The fact that she was born out of wedlock didn't stop Prunellia from deciding that she is the true heir to Shieldsborg Castle. Seething over the slight, she began to plot her mother's death and devised a plan to claim the castle that she deems is hers by birthright.

Prunellia is a keen botanist and soon found a recipe for a potent poison in the castle's extensive library. She grew White Star Lilies (also known as Death Lilies) in

the conservatory, which she dried and ground into a lethal powder that she sprinkled over the letters and documents in her mother's study. On the occasions when Prunellia was required to keep her mother company in the music room or the orangery, Prunellia also callously poisoned her mother's tea.

HOW A WILL GOES MISSING

Rose Blackraven was unaware of her daughter's deadly scheme. As her health gradually declined, she sent for the family's solicitor, Fenton, in Northwind Gate to set up a new will. In her previous will, the Duchess had disinherited Caspian due to his reckless lifestyle and instead left everything to his younger sister, Celestia. However, Rose reconciled with her son, and in her new will she reinstated Caspian as the heir to Shieldsborg Castle and the title.

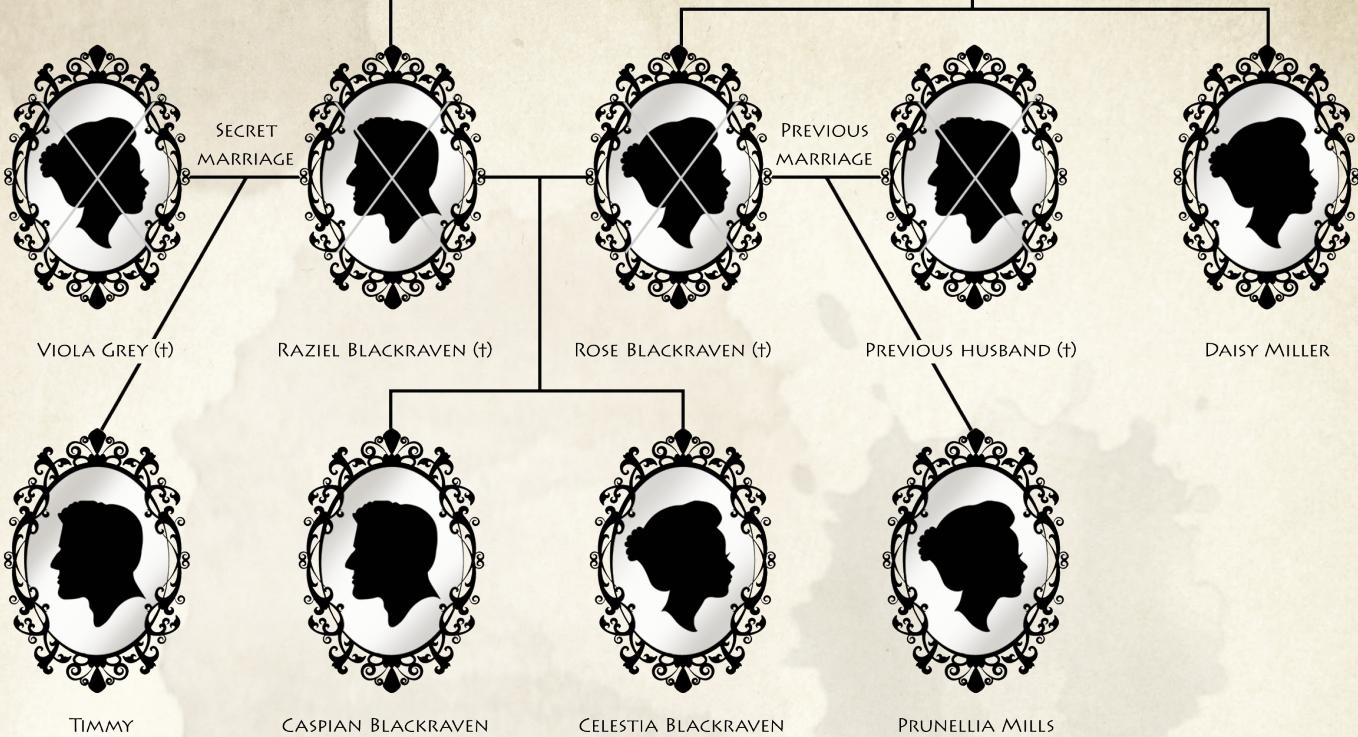
Just before Rose died, the castle's gatekeeper, Medrin, found out about the updated will by chance. Medrin is in love with Celestia and wishes her to inherit the castle, which Medrin hopes will secure her future and allow her to marry him. Therefore, Medrin stole the will and buried it in a metal box near the gazebo in the maze on the castle's ground.

AN UNFORTUNATE ACCIDENT

The Duchess eventually succumbed to the poisoning and passed away. Upon her death, the family's solicitor was invited to Shieldsborg Castle to read the will to those it concerns.

Fenton brought the old will, but he expected to read the new will that he had helped Rose Blackraven write at the castle. However, his carriage was attacked in Wolfberg Pass, and Fenton was slain by dusk wolves.





The Blackraven Family

Fenton's death and the missing will are unimportant to Prunellia. She intends to murder both Caspian and Celestia and then announce that she is the daughter of Rose Blackraven and the only surviving heir to Shieldsborg Castle. This claim will be supported by the housekeeper, Daisy Miller. Daisy is Rose Blackraven's sister and knows about Prunellia's true heritage, but has kept it secret to protect the Duchess from being disgraced.

When the dust has settled, Prunellia plans to get rid of Daisy as well, to tie up another loose end. The butler, Akeshi Kheltora, is also on Prunellia's list of targets, as she suspects he knows more about the Blackraven family than he admits.

THE HEIR UNAPPARENT

Unbeknownst to almost everyone, including Prunellia, the true heir to Shieldsborg Castle is the stable hand Timmy. He is the oldest son of the Duke of Shieldsborg, Raziel Blackraven.

Decades ago, Raziel fell in love with a servant called Viola Grey long before he met Rose. A marriage between a noble Blackraven and a common servant was unthinkable, and Raziel knew his overly proud parents would never agree to their union. Yet Raziel was passionate and

determined to follow his heart's desire. After a few months, they were married in great secrecy. Soon afterwards, Raziel and Viola had a son, but kept his identity secret.

Unfortunately, Viola was killed in an accident at the castle not long after their child's birth. Raziel was heartbroken and mourned her for the rest of his life. However, his parents had found a perfect bride for him: Rose Miller. Although she lacked a title, her family offered a substantial dowry, as they owned merchant ships and land near Coppertown.

Raziel and Rose were married after a year, but Raziel was never truly happy. As a keen rider and excellent strategist, he joined the cavalry and rarely visited the castle, even after the birth of Caspian and Celestia. Raziel fell in battle while commanding an army in the Hintherdale region more than fifteen years ago.

Timmy remained at the castle as a stable hand. The only one who knows about Timmy's true heritage is Akeshi and Timmy's dead mother, Viola. She is a ghost and haunts the castle and its grounds. Her concern for Timmy prevents her from departing this realm, and she will let no harm come to her son.

CHAPTER 1: THE BLOOD-DRENCHED CARRIAGE

The characters have accompanied the dwarven archaeologist Bjorn Amberclan, who is investigating a forlorn ruin a day's ride from the town of Northwind Gate.

The party is currently having a late lunch at the Curious Snow Fox, a small roadside inn. Spring is still far away, and winter holds the land in an icy grip. The wind in the mountainous region is biting, and occasional snowflakes drift from leaden clouds, but the blazing fire at the inn's hearth does its best to dispel the chill from the draughty windows.

HIDDEN DETAILS

Some details aren't immediately obvious or easily found. These details are marked “► On a closer look,” followed by the ability check and difficulty required to discover them.

DEAD ON ARRIVAL

Halfway through the meal, the character with the highest passive Perception hears the sound of galloping hooves outside, followed by a horse whinnying frantically. Read the following out loud when the characters look out:

A black carriage pulled by two dark horses stands on the road near the inn. The carriage seat is empty, and the leather reins hang loose. One of the horses tosses its head and whinnies. Their large eyes are filled with fear, and their flanks are slick with sweat.

Silence rushes in when the horse falls quiet, as if the surroundings were holding their breath.

The carriage looks abandoned. Its doors are decorated with an ornate coat of arms featuring a tower, a key, and two ravens.

The carriage was sent from Shieldsborg Castle to escort the solicitor

