

CIRCUS OF THE SHATTERED MOON

AN ADVENTURE FOR CHARACTERS OF 4TH TO 6TH LEVEL



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CIRCUS OF THE SHADOWED MOON IS A FIFTH Edition adventure for three to six characters of 4th to 6th level, optimized for a party of four 5th-level characters. After a ringmaster's attempt to infuse his circus with lunar magic went wrong, its performers were transformed into werebeasts with a thirst for blood. Will the party be able to discover the origins of this curse and the methods to reversing it, or will an entire circus be doomed for the hubris of its leader? This adventure is set in the world of Cartosia, but the names of people and places can be changed to easily place it in almost any other campaign world.

BACKGROUND

On the fringes of obscurity, the Wandering Weave of Wonders lingered, a once vibrant troupe now facing its inevitable demise. Its collection of threadbare tents and disillusioned performers wandered from town to town and village to village, barely clinging to the remnants of its former, though modest, glory. At the heart of this dwindling spectacle was Orionis, a sorcerer ringmaster whose ambition far outweighed his circus's modest fortunes. With the weight of impending bankruptcy bearing down upon him, Orionis vowed to save his circus at any cost.

His desperate search for salvation bore fruit in a distant land, where amidst the shadows of an ancient market, he encountered a peculiar trader. There, nestled among the oddities and relics, was an amulet of purest silver, its surface etched with the intricate sigils of Noctyra of the Silvered Veil, a minor lunar deity revered for her enigmatic wisdom and mastery over the night's hidden truths. Driven by a mix of greed and urgency, Orionis cunningly stole the sacred artifact, unaware of the profound consequences his actions would soon unleash.

As the Wandering Weave of Wonders set up on the outskirts of their latest village, preparing for their next performance, Orionis' eyes fell upon a secluded druidic circle. Convinced of its potency and appropriateness for his needs, he chose this hallowed ground for his most daring act yet; one he had been preparing for several months. Under the cover of night, with the full moon as his only witness, Orionis commenced his ritual. Intending to make an offering to Noctyra to harness her power and enchant his circus so that he may turn its fortunes around, he instead affronted the goddess's subtle and serene nature. His spell was ostentatious and arrogant, his dancing and chanting performative and irreverent. Though this offense was not intentional, it was ignorance bordering on blasphemy.

Noctyra's response to this sacrilege was swift and severe. The light of the moon darkened, and a curse swept through

the circus. Orionis and his performers were twisted into monstrous were-forms, their bodies becoming grotesque parodies of their deepest natures. The struggling circus was now a tableau of horror. The nearby village of Klonica is abuzz with rumors and fear, having witnessed the sudden silence of the once lively caravan on their doorstep. Orionis has retreated to the circus big top, seeking a way to undo what he fears is irreversible before his mind frays beyond recognition. The party arrives at the village outskirts less than a day after the affliction of the curse. Can they uncover the secrets to its undoing?

ADVENTURE HOOKS

There are numerous reasons the party may be compelled to investigate the curse afflicting the Wandering Weave of Wonders. A few of these reasons are outlined below:

A Cry for Help. The party encounters a lone survivor from the circus, possibly a young performer or a terrified animal handler, who managed to escape the initial chaos. They recount the horrific transformation of their friends and the once joyful life they led, now turned into a nightmare. Driven by a mix of fear, loyalty, and desperation, they plead with the adventurers to save their friends and end the curse that has befallen the Moonlit Caravan.

The Missing Boys. A pair of teenagers from the village of Klonica have gone missing after boasting about going to investigate the site. Other villagers have reported bestial sights and sounds, and many fear the worst for the two boys. Their mother is distraught, but none from the village are brave enough to follow the pair into the circus grounds.

The Curious Trader. A collector and trader of rare and mystical artifacts is a good friend to the merchant who Orionis originally stole the artifact from, and has traced it back to the thieving ringmaster. They inform the party of the theft and offer a substantial reward for the amulet's retrieval.

WANDERING WEAVE OF WONDERS

The circus grounds are approximately a quarter-mile beyond the outskirts of Klonica. If the party approaches the grounds from the direction of the village, they'll first encounter the main grounds; the big top is in its own separate clearing some few hundred feet beyond, further along the dirt trail that exits the village. In the aftermath of Orionis's ritual, all twelve members of the small circus were transformed into were-creatures and consumed by confusion and rage. Some turned on each other immediately, leaving bodies in the aftermath. The remaining performers linger at the site, stuck and tormented by their bestial forms. A minor exception is

Orionis, who in a cruel play of irony by Noctrya, has retained much of his sense of self. He commits himself in the circus's big top to undoing the curse.

THE MAIN GROUNDS

The dirt road to the main grounds is partially lined with half-assembled streamers and banners that the performers were preparing in advance of the show that they never ended up performing. When the party arrives at the grounds, read aloud the following:

The remnants of a small circus sprawl before you, an eerie tableau of abandonment. Colorful tents stand sentinel, their striped canvases flapping morosely in the breeze. Abandoned carts and stalls fill the grounds, their wares slightly scattered to the whims of the wind. To the north, a series of benches in anticipation of performers face an empty stage. An unsettling quiet hangs over the area, broken intermittently by the soft creaking of a lonely sign that sways over the entryway to the grounds, its faded letters spelling out "Welcome to the Wandering Weave of Wonders."

Upon entering the grounds, characters with a passive Perception of 14 or higher or any characters who immediately move to investigate their surroundings notice dark stains in the ground scattered throughout the circus. Further investigation quickly confirms these stains to be blood; none of the stains are particularly old, and some are connected to blood trails that wander into the tents around the perimeter. Characters also notice a repeating symbol conspicuously but not ostentatiously present throughout the grounds—painted on the side of tents and carved into the wood of stalls. The symbol depicts an eye cradled between two mirrored crescent shapes, their points directed away from the eye. A character who makes a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Religion) check recognizes this symbol as the emblem of a minor, little-known lunar deity named Noctrya, goddess of liminal spaces, silent languages, moonlight alchemy, and chimeric beasts.

Encounter: Vicious Wererats. Some moments after the party has entered the circus grounds, likely after they have had a minute or two to notice the blood stains or the symbols but before they have entered any tents or otherwise engaged with elements of the grounds, the lingering werebeasts

sense their presence and move to defend their territory. Five **wererats** (all in hybrid form) emerge from the tents and converge on the party to attack. Their faces are twisted into expressions of rage, their clothing is torn, and their eyes are blank and bulging. One wererat, the strongman of the circus, wears pinstripe pants and hulks over the others; he has 50 hit points and can make three attacks as part of his Multiattack action. The wererats fight until three of their number have been slain, at which point the other two flee the grounds. Alternatively, if the party flees the grounds, the wererats pursue only until they determine the party is a reasonable distance from the circus, at which point they return to their tents. The wererats cannot be reasoned with and speak no words to the party.

The following areas are keyed to the provided map of the main circus grounds:

I. CENTRAL STALLS

A small network of wooden planks are arranged in the center of the grounds to create a number of stalls for visitors. Spaces for portraits, costumes, baked goods, and other refreshments have been set up in a way that suggests their sudden abandonment. There is nothing of significant value here.

2. ANIMAL PENS

An empty birdcage rests atop a small wooden platform, adjacent are two larger iron cages. One hangs open and empty, but the other houses an adolescent **owlbear** (30 hit points). The owlbear is docile and non-combative towards the party unless provoked. Its cage can be unlocked with a successful DC 10 Dexterity check using thieves' tools or with the keyring that can be found hanging from one end of the nearby stage.

Encounter: Circus Cockatrice. The other empty cage had a rusty, defective lock mechanism, which allowed its unsupervised occupant, an ornery **cockatrice**, to escape its confinement. The cockatrice has only wandered as far as the nearby treeline; if the party starts poking around the cages, the cockatrice hears their presence and focuses its attention on them. It charges out of the treeline, squawking madly. If not calmed with a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check, it attacks, but fights only until it takes

powered by the ancient and mystical magic of the amulet. See the impossible become possible before your very eyes!"

5. STAGE

The stage is a sturdy wooden platform, elevated a few feet above the ground and draped around the sides with heavy canvas, dull and dirt-stained. Its modest size hosted regular magic performances from the circus's resident illusionist, Mistress Sheba.

Characters within a few feet of the stage with a passive Perception of 15 or higher or who spend any time investigating the stage area notice a small trail of blood terminating at a flap in the canvas under the stage.

The Lost Boy. A character who enters through the flap in the canvas finds a cramped space cluttered with props and spare equipment. Huddled between a pair of crates is a boy named Jakub (CN he/him human **commoner**). His hair is a tousled mass of dark curls that fall into his wide, watery eyes. His face is smudged with dirt. After investigating the circus grounds with his brother, Damian, they were attacked by the wererats. Jakub managed to hide under the stage, but heard his brother's final moments. He has been under the stage for over a day, and is frightened and thirsty. He is eager to be rescued, and willingly shares the story of what happened to him and his brother and laments their foolish exploration after hearing about strange sights from the circus grounds. If the party engages him in any way about the circus and the strange happenings, Jakub suggests that folk in his village of Klonica believe that the nearby druidic circle must have something to do with it. If the party prods further, Jakub can only clarify that for as long as anyone can remember, a strange circle of stones has rested in the forest nearby, and nobody knows its purpose—making it the first suspect for any strange local happenings. Jakub can direct the party to its location, but otherwise would like to return home as soon as possible if the coast is clear.

10 points of damage, at which point it flees back toward the treeline.

3. TENT OF MINIATURE MARVELS

The exterior of this tent bears a banner that reads "Miniature Marvels." Inside, the outline of intricate dioramas and detailed models becomes apparent. The sprawled body of a young man on the ground is a grim focal point, his stillness in stark contrast to the imagined bustle of the tiny figures around him. Spatters of blood fleck the displays, marring serene forest glades, busy villages, and organised battles with a macabre overtone.

During the hours in which the circus is open, the dioramas in this tent would be enchanted with minor prestidigitation-like spells that add elements of light and movement to the scenes. The body belongs to a young man named Damien, who was investigating the circus with his younger brother Jakub when they were attacked by the wererats. A DC 10 Wisdom (Medicine) check confirms the body is less than a day old, and bears almost too many slash and puncture wounds to count.

4. FACE PAINTING

The exterior of this tent is cheerfully decorated with images of smiling children adorned with vibrant designs, but the entrance flaps hang open, revealing a desolate interior. Inside, a solitary stool sits before a small table, which is scattered with an array of unused brushes, pots of paint in every hue, and small mirrors edged with intricate patterns. The air is heavy with the faint, musty scent of unused paint, and the once bright colors seem muted in the absence of laughter and excited chatter. A sign with the faded words "Choose Your Adventure!" leans sadly against the table.

Also placed prominently on the table are a stack of identical posters marked with a symbol identical to the one present throughout the grounds—an eye cradled between two mirrored crescent shapes, their points directed away from the eye. Text on the poster reads: *"Step right up as the veil between our world and the arcane thins! The Wandering Weave of Wonders presents an evening of unparalleled magic and mystery,*

6. BAR

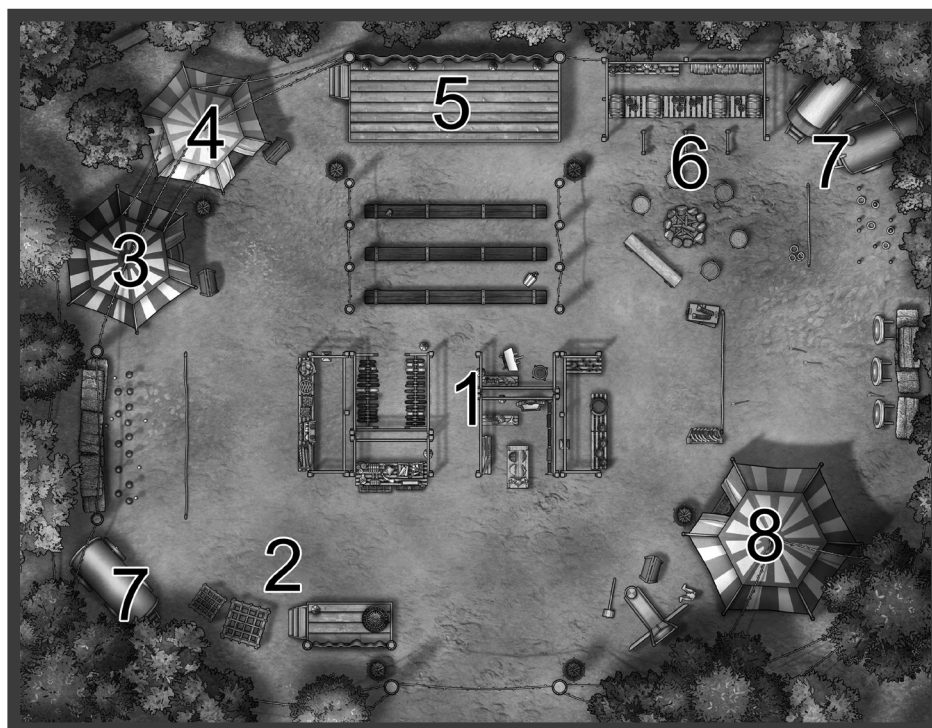
A hastily constructed bar has been set up on the north end of the grounds. Several casks are arranged on and behind its wooden countertop, and empty mugs await thirsty patrons. Each of the casks is full of cheap but serviceable ale.

7. PERFORMER WAGONS

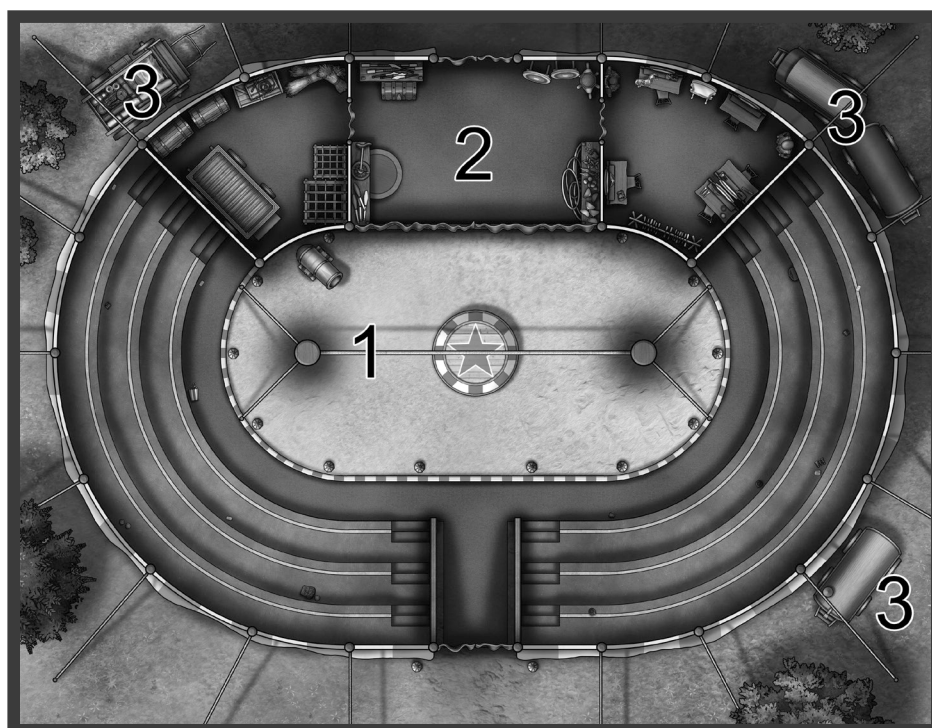
There are three wagons around the perimeter of the main grounds. These wagons contain the personal effects and camping supplies of the circus performers, who had not yet unpacked them for their stay outside of Klonica. Bedrolls, tents, and sequined costumes spill out from trunks. Small portable chests reveal half-unwrapped parcels of hard cheese and bread.

A character who spends any time investigating any of these wagons will find a leather-bound journal lying conspicuously

THE MAIN GROUNDS



THE BIG TOP



atop a jumble of other contents. Spending a few minutes reviewing the journal reveals the following information:

- The journal belonged to the circus strongman, named Houzlakis.
- A few entries detail the circus's ringmaster, Orionis, and his fascination with a silver amulet he came into possession of some few months ago.
- Orionis had been speaking vaguely about how he thought the power of the amulet could enhance the spectacle of their next show. He had ordered a lunar theme for their next stop near the village of Klonica.
- The last entry details the circus's later than anticipated arrival at their destination outside Klonica, and the frustration of having their set-up extend beyond sundown as a result. There is also mention of Orionis disappearing into the woods instead of helping with the heavy preparation work.

8. PUPPETEER'S CORNER

The exterior of this tent bears a banner that reads "Puppeteer's Corner." Inside, a small stage sits at the far end, scattered with a variety of puppets, each displaying an array of emotions from joy to sorrow, frozen pre-performance. The tent is lined with colorful curtains, and strings of faded bunting hang from the ceiling. A few wooden benches are set up for the audience, empty and coated with a fine layer of dust. In one corner of the tent, three large bestial forms huddle together, their eyes reflecting a mix of fear and confusion.

The three figures in this tent are **wereboars**, more performers of the circus transformed by Noctyra's curse. Unlike the wererats, however, these performers are not hostile to the party unless directly attacked. The curse holds them in bestial form and prevents complex thought or any coherent speech, the wereboars can communicate only with twitching snouts, shuffling hooves, and garbled grunts and whines. They remain huddled in the tent unless forcefully driven out by the party.

THE SPEAKING RAVEN

Noctyra is not an unforgiving goddess. She has planted a raven on the circus grounds that holds key clues to reversing the curse afflicted upon the circus, for those brave enough to intervene and astute enough to interpret its cryptic messages. At GM discretion, this raven may appear at any point during the party's investigation of the circus grounds, though it is suggested that the raven appears after at least a few minutes so that it has time to hear the party member's voices in order to mimic them. Its eyes shine bright blue, and it is larger in size than a typical raven. It makes its presence known to the party by landing or perching conspicuously within their field of view and then cocking its head at the closest party member within line of sight. Moments after a party member notices the raven, it speaks, mimicking a voice of one of the party members. The raven only passes on the following cryptic messages:

- "Under the eye of the silver sentinel, what once was bound may yet be unspun."
- "In a circle of stone and dew, kindle the seven where shadows grew. A humble heart, the goddess seeks, to mend the wrongs and heal the meek."

Any attempts to ask the raven questions or otherwise engage in conversation causes it only to alternate repeating the above phrases. The raven will switch between different voices of the party, if possible. After it has repeated its lines a few times, it flies away. The beginning of the first sentence (in a circle of stone and dew) hints at a curse wrought under moonlight, and indicates that it is reversible. The second phrase states that the ritual must take place at the nearby druidic circle in the early minutes of the morning, after dew has collected on the site. 'Kindle the seven' explains that seven candles or fires must be lit, and 'where shadows grew' refers again to where Orionis wrought the curse, at the druidic circle. The final sentence explains that during the undoing ritual, the transgression must be acknowledged and that there must be genuine desire to rectify the transgression. Characters can interpret all of this information correctly with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check. The difficulty of this check is lowered to 10 if the party has already learned of the druidic circle either through Orionis's drawings or by learning about it from the boy in the tent.

THE BIG TOP

The Big Top is a few hundred metres further down the road from the village of Klonica. It is a pin-stripe structure of patched and faded canvas that has seen much better days. It is flanked by wagons and has two entrances; one set of curtains that faces the main road and another, rear entrance for the performers which leads to non-public rooms. The ceiling of the big top is 30 feet high at its highest point, gradually sloping down to a height of 10 feet near its perimeter.

The following areas are keyed to the provided map of the big top:

I. MAIN STAGE

Hemispherical bleacher seating is arranged around a central pit. A tight-rope stretches across a central stage, and a colorfully-painted cannon faces toward the would-be audience. At the heart of the pit is a hulking, disheveled werebear wearing the tattered remains of a ringmaster's outfit. Its fur is matted, its eyes wild with a frenzied, rabid intensity. It paces the area, gesticulating wildly, its deep, guttural voice muttering incomprehensible incantations. Around him, candles of varying sizes and shapes are haphazardly scattered, dripping their wax into the dirt. Loose sheets of paper marked with charcoal drawings clutter the ground.

The main performance area for the circus, the pit has now been repurposed as a ritual site. A character who inspects the scattered sheets of paper finds that they all bear the same charcoal drawing—a circle of standing stones surrounded by

trees. The drawings are a manifestation of Orionis's confused torment in the aftermath of the curse. Characters with a passive Perception of 12 or higher notice a silver amulet bearing a symbol matching the one found throughout the circus lying on the ground some few feet from the werebear.

Encounter: Orionis. The **werebear** in the pit is Orionis, who has retained enough presence of mind to attempt to undo the ritual, but not nearly enough to do successfully. Unless the party bursts into the room and attacks immediately, Orionis does not even notice the characters. He is too engrossed in his work. Too frightened and confused to return to the original ritual site, he attempts the curse's undoing here. If a character attempts to engage in Orionis, they will find it is difficult to pull his attention away from his incantations. Successful attempts at doing so will result in Orionis fixing his gaze on the party and stammering, "The woods...can't go back...must undo it..." Attempts to wring more information from the ringmaster are met only with increasingly anguished variations of the same message. If the party is insistent to the point of aggressive interference, Orionis attacks and fights until he is reduced to 0 hit points. Though the amulet itself is not strictly necessary for undoing the ritual, the party may reasonably wish to acquire it for that purpose. Sneaking the amulet away from Orionis requires a successful DC 12 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check. Failing this check angers Orionis, but the ringmaster does not attack unless the party insists on taking the amulet. If Orionis notices the party taking the amulet and the party does not

surrender it, he cannot be persuaded or intimidated out of attacking them until he recovers it.

2. REAR ROOMS

The rest of the big top hosts three performer rooms separated by canvas curtains, including a storage area for mundane supplies such as rope, canvas, and tools, a dressing room complete with vanities, perfumes, and make-up, and an additional storage room for performance equipment such as juggling pins, blunted weapons, and circus game equipment. There is otherwise nothing of value or significant interest in these rooms.

3. PERIMETER WAGONS

There are four wagons around the exterior perimeter of the big top. These wagons, like the ones on the main grounds, contain more personal effects and camping supplies of the circus performers.

Treasure: Circus Cache. A small, iron-bound chest rests in the northwest wagon. The chest is locked, and can be opened with a DC 10 Dexterity check using thieves' tools or the key carried by Orionis. It contains 25 gp, representing the circus's total funds. There is otherwise nothing of significant value to be found in the wagons.

THE STONE CIRCLE



THE STONE CIRCLE

For as long as anyone can remember, a strange circle of stones has rested in the forest nearby Klonica, and though nobody can be sure of its purpose, many suspect it was originally built by an order of druids long since lost to time. If the party has gathered enough clues, such as from Orionis's drawings, speaking to Jakub, and interpreting the raven's riddles, they'll know or at least strongly suspect that the stone circle is key to undoing the curse afflicting the circus.

It rests approximately a mile away from the circus grounds, deeper into the surrounding wood. If the party didn't get directions to the circle from Jakub, and aren't already aware of its location, they can ask around Klonica, as it is common local knowledge. When the characters arrive at the circle, read aloud the following:

A circle of stones rises solemnly from the earth, their weathered surfaces telling tales of eons whispered by the wind, their purpose obscure to the uninitiated eye. The tallest monoliths stand around the perimeter, while a secondary inner circle suggests a coalescence of unknown power.

A casting of *detect magic* reveals an aura of divination magic subtly emanating from each stone that comprises the circle; a relic from their original creation, long ago. It was here where Orionis wrought Noctyra's curse upon the circus, and it is here where the curse must be undone.

Undoing the Curse. The following conditions are necessary, but not sufficient for a successful ritual:

- The ritual is conducted at dawn, within the stone circle.
- Seven candles, fires, or other light sources must be lit within the stone circle; their precise locations within the circle is unimportant.
- Ritual participants must profess attitudes of apology and humility on behalf of Orionis.

If all of these conditions are met, any ritual participants must make a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Religion) check. This becomes a group check if there is more than one ritual participant. If a single participant carries the amulet previously possessed by Orionis or has previous knowledge of Noctyra, this check is made with advantage. If all of the above conditions are not met, regardless of the result of any check, the ritual fails and there is no response from Noctyra. How the ritual proceeds is flexible; participants may sing a song, speak a prayer, or act otherwise as appropriate. As the GM, feel free to allow a wide range of potential methods, within reason.

If the ritual check fails, there is a flash of light that heralds the appearance of an emissary of Noctyra—a faceless, ethereal figure who wields a moonlit scythe. The emissary attacks the party and fights until it is destroyed, or until the party

flees the site. It uses **wraith** statistics, with the following modifications:

- It has 90 hit points.
- It can use its bonus action to cast *moonbeam* three times per day.

If the emissary is destroyed, the curse is lifted. Read aloud the following:

A feminine voice, stern and melodic, resounds through the circle. "You who reach through the veil of remorse, know that persistence begets grace. The path of penance is arduous, yet your earnest strides on behalf of another echo in the stillness of the night. You have stood unwavering in the face of my emissary. You have spoken the truth of repentance, and the shadows retreat from your sincerity. Let the curse that binds the Wanderin Weave of Wonders be lifted, and may the cycle of night and day begin anew."

If the ritual check succeeds, the curse is lifted. Read aloud the following:

As the final words of apology and humility are spoken, and the dawn's first light begins to touch the stones, a feminine voice fills the circle, stern and melodic. "The night has long kept the secret of contrition, a treasure rarely sought and even less frequently found. Your hearts have spoken the truth of repentance on behalf of another, and the shadows retreat from your sincerity." The surrounding woods seem to hold their breath as the voice continues, "By righting the wrongs with humility and respect, you have earned the night's forgiveness. Let the curse that binds the Wandering Weave of Wonders be lifted, and may the cycle of night and day turn anew."

AFTERMATH

If the party was successful in lifting the curse, they'll find any remaining performers dazed and confused in the aftermath of their return to human forms. Conversation reveals they have some memory of their time under affliction, though it is painful and hazy. Orionis is particularly somber as the only one with full knowledge of why the circus was afflicted in the first place. Though disoriented, he can quickly come to understand the party's intervention if they speak to him about it, and expresses deep remorse and self deprecation in reflection upon his failure, vowing never again to trifle with the power of the gods. He offers the party the entirety of the circus's wealth as a reward (assuming they haven't pilfered it already themselves), though it is a trifling 25 gp, as well as the amulet, should they wish to keep it.

If the party was unsuccessful in lifting the curse, its transformed performers eventually scatter into the woods to live scared lives of scavenging subsistence. The circus grounds remain untouched for months before eventually being dismantled by locals from Klonica.

REFERENCES

This work includes material taken from the System Reference Document 5.1 (“SRD 5.1”) by Wizards of the Coast LLC and available at <https://dnd.wizards.com/resources/systems-reference-document>. The SRD 5.1 is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode>.

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