



DOMAINS OF DREAD: THE ENDLESS ROAD

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“Love and Fear—harsh taskmasters both. We dance to their whips on our backs, gallop at their goading. Insipid epics and silly priests would set them at odds, one against the other, but no! They are compatriots, secret conspirators, driving us, their beasts of burden, to darkest deeds.

“And it is these—neither Antipathy nor Ambition, neither Gluttony nor Greed, but Devotion and Dread—whose fetid rutting births the greatest evils in hearts both putrid and pure.

“Witness the gentle Talitha van Hassen, and the filial loyalty and childish fears that led her into loathsome betrayal and murderous lies...”

—from the opening chorus of *By Innocence Undone*, a lesser-known work of the tiefling playwright Semrael Engvar.

PARAGON

11-20

Like tendrils of the malevolent mists that surround them, some of the Shadowfell's domains of dread reach from the darkness to brush against the flesh of the mortal world—and, sometimes, to drag the inhabitants of that world back with them.

When clouds gather and the moon squints like the eye of an old leper, the great length of twisted highway called the Endless Road stretches itself across the face of the world just long enough to take travelers unaware into its grasp. There they wander, perhaps forever, along a road without beginning or end. They might find themselves torn apart by the claws of the hungry dead or the maddened living, enslaved to the man whose vile deeds spawned the Road itself...or cut down by the headless horror that terrorizes them all.

The Endless Road is a domain of dread designed for characters of low-paragon (or, if they're skilled, high heroic) tier. It might keep them only briefly—or it might never let them go, forcing them to unravel its secrets, and perhaps sacrifice others to save themselves.

THE ROAD THUS FAR

The tiny hamlet of Tranquility attracted absolutely nobody's attention. The nearby road produced only sporadic travel, and while Tranquility boasted an inn to provide travelers with shelter, it's doubtful that any would recall the town's name.

The villagers farmed, shepherded, gardened, and crafted under the watchful eyes of the van Hassen family. They'd never been elected or appointed, held no titles like "reeve" or "baron." No, the van Hassen line governed Tranquility because they owned more land (including the inn) and more coin than anyone else.

The latest van Hassen patriarch was a middle-aged man named Eli. His wife had died some years before, and he divided his time between his duties and his only child, his daughter Talitha. To Tranquility, Eli van Hassen seemed as respectable a landlord as the citizens could expect—if perhaps not as genial as his parents were.

Yet inwardly, Eli seethed, for Tranquility had no room for his ambitions. Standing as first citizen of a tiny hamlet wasn't enough; Eli wanted titles with *meaning*. He wanted to govern a community boasting more than a few hundred souls. From his estate, he watched the people scurry about, and he scorned them. He watched as suitors vied for his daughter's attentions, and he loathed them for trying to chip away at what authority he held, to steal the one person about whom he truly cared.

Still, Eli maintained his veneer of respectability, resigning himself to his lot. And perhaps, had the world continued to ignore Tranquility, he would have remained an unhappy man, but a blameless one. The villagers were woefully unprepared the day a monstrous hydra emerged from the surrounding forest. Something had driven it from its native fen, for its body was scarred, and one of its four heads missing. Though weakened, it was still far too terrible for the villagers to handle. They lost sheep, horses, and neighbors to its depredations. Tranquility needed a miracle—and, thanks to a small band of courageous citizens who traveled to seek help, it received one.

He rode into town like a conquering king, saber at his side, rich cloak falling across his back. He sat atop a dark steed, leading a small procession of soldiers. He appeared to have stepped from a fairy tale, and so far as the villagers were concerned he had, for he'd come to slay their monster.

Nobody today knows his name. In every tale of Tranquility, he is called only the Horseman.

Celebrating his arrival, the villagers put him up in the inn, plied him with food and drink, listened intently as he played a silver-stringed lute and sang the ballads that had inspired him to take up adventuring.

Talitha was smitten as only a teenager can be. She sat rapt, fascinated at the Horseman's every word, every move. The Horseman, in turn, was a perfect gentleman, yet he too felt a thrill of attraction that might grow into something more.

And Eli watched his people fawn over this newcomer, watched his daughter grow besotted, and his heart burned with a hatred that might have immolated the hydra itself.

For weeks the Horseman remained in Tranquility while his soldiers tracked down the hydra's lair. If he took advantage of the delay to spend ever more time with Talitha, then it must be said that not once did he step beyond the bounds of propriety.

Finally, his men found the beast's nest. With great fanfare, the Horseman and his entourage set out to rid Tranquility of their tormenter. For two days, the villagers waited, fretting and worrying, hopeful and afraid.

Tranquility erupted in jubilation when the Horseman and most of his men returned. And though they were bloodied and bruised, the three reptilian heads they carried left no doubt that they were victorious.

For weeks more the Horseman stayed, getting to know the people, walking with Talitha through fields and gardens. Slowly his men returned to their homes, but the Horseman remained.

A FORGOTTEN THOROUGHFARE

Tranquility survives today, though it's never been quite the same. The villagers abandoned the area around the van Hassen estate. The property stands abandoned, some few hundred yards from occupied buildings. The villagers dislike speaking of those events, and travelers who press the issue, or express any intent to explore the estate, receive cold stares and icy requests to continue on their way.

Tranquility itself has little to offer. A number of farmsteads might provide a loft or a barn in which to sleep, shops might provide a modicum of supplies, and the village temple—containing rude shrines to Erathis, Melora, Moradin, and Sehanine—might serve as a place to pray. The grave of the Horseman is long gone, filled in and planted over.

Assuming the characters ignore the villagers' wishes, however, the abandoned estate could prove a source of adventure. Such tragedy could well attract undead spirits, malicious fey, or students of necromancy.

In addition to the locations listed below, the estate has a number of outbuildings—primarily servants' quarters, groundskeepers' cottages, guest houses, and storage sheds—all falling into decay.

1. The Inn: This dilapidated building stands three stories tall. The shutters hang open, and the rooms are rank with mildew and rot. Floorboards and furniture have decayed in the rain, and several doors have been removed. Still, a few rooms are tolerable, if the characters are desperate for a place to sleep—and assuming nothing horrible now occupies the inn. The foodstuffs in the kitchen have rotted away, but a few barrels of ale and bottles of spirits have survived the years.

Eli van Hassen could take it no longer, yet neither could he simply order the Horseman banished or slain. He would have to turn the people against their savior, and that he could not undertake alone.

Talitha wept and argued, yet in the end, she acquiesced. It never crossed her mind to disobey, for she feared the loss of her own status within Tranquility—and in agreeing to her father's demands, she sealed not merely the Horseman's fate, but her own as well.

The following day, as he walked with Talitha through one of the van Hassen farms, the Horseman was set upon by a dozen of Eli's guards. The Horseman swept up a rusty sickle that lay beside the barn and fought, slaying several before they overwhelmed him by weight of numbers.

Before the gathered villagers, growing ever more puzzled, ever angrier, the guards dragged the battered Horseman to a block of wood. There, at her father's behest, Talitha told the people horrid lies, claiming the Horseman had taken terrible advantage, ravished her by force during their walks.

Eli waited until the crowd was utterly enraged before he waved his guards forward. Even as he screamed his innocence and begged Talitha to recant, the Horseman was forced down upon the wooden block. One guard raised a heavy axe, and the head of Tranquility's beloved hero tumbled across the grass.

The corpse was unceremoniously dumped in a shallow grave beside the river, and as the villagers returned to daily life, bitterly bemoaning their "betrayal," that should have been the end of it. One week passed. Through a ceiling of clouds, the crescent moon gleamed a sickly blue. The folk of Tranquility retired early that evening, for the air smelled of a coming storm.

Yet what swept over them that night was not rain and lightning, but fog. The mists crept furtively through Tranquility, filling the streets, sending prodigious fingers through doors and windows. The world ceased to be, buried under featureless gray.

A sudden, unending thunder deep within the fog resolved itself into the beating of a thousand hooves. Through the streets and fields of Tranquility they pounded, deafening in their fury, yet the villagers could see nothing moving in the mist.

When they emerged the following dawn, the villagers found their crops and gardens trampled under uncountable hoof-prints. The gates of the van Hassen estate hung from broken hinges, and the manor lay desolate, covered in the dust of decades. Eli and Talitha were never seen again. Neither was the estate staff, save a few who'd been elsewhere that night.

And the grave of the Horseman gaped open, a wound in the banks of the river.

LORE

A character knows an incomplete version of the previous history—perhaps believing the Horseman was guilty—with a DC 18 History check. With a DC 23 History check, she knows the correct version of the tale.

With a DC 18 History or Arcana check, she's heard rumors of a mysterious phenomenon wherein mists cover an otherwise normal highway, stealing away travelers between one step and the next.

Otherwise, no Lore is provided for the Endless Road or its inhabitants, for there is no way for the characters to have heard it. Only by speaking to inhabitants of the domain, or consulting magical sources, might they learn more of the Endless Road.

2. The Broken Gate: The fence surrounding the estate has definitely seen better days. Entire planks are missing, while others are so broken or loose that they might as well be absent. The wrought iron gate stands open, one hanging loose from broken hinges and the other lying flat upon the earth. The scent of rust is overwhelming. The gateposts are topped with divine symbols: Erathis on the left, Melora on the right.

3. The Manor: It stands like an icon of another age, out of place amid the humble structures of Tranquility. The manor's walls are stone, its entryway flanked by great columns, its windows boasting actual glass. The years have not been kind, however, for much of that glass is broken, the walls cracked and overrun with ivy. Inside, the dust lies far thicker than even decades of emptiness can account for. Cobwebs hang from the corners, the carpets are thick with mildew, and the furniture is decaying into a soggy mass. The greatest damage afflicts the portraits and tapestries: Every face is obscured beneath heavy layers of mold.

Behind the manor, a small rose garden is choked with brambles and weeds. A single rosebush yet thrives, its petals a rich, bloody crimson. Should the characters dig beneath it, they find a human skull buried below. The severed spine suggests that this may be the head of the Horseman himself.



4. The Stables: This rickety wooden structure held up surprisingly well, showing far less of the decay seen elsewhere. Inside, dried straw crunches underfoot, hiding scattered equine bones. In one stall, what was once a fine leather saddle with silver buckles lies cracked and tarnished, but no bones lie beneath it.

GETTING THE CHARACTERS THERE

Unlike some other domains, the Endless Road needn't wait for the characters; it can appear in the mortal realm, "overlapping" an existing path or highway. Thick mists rise, the moon gleams sickly through the clouds, and travelers hear the thunder of distant hooves. Often, a traveler's first hint that he's not where he was is the lightning-swift strike of the Headless Horseman, but even should the characters survive this attack—or if the Horseman doesn't appear—when the mist lifts, they find themselves on a new and unfamiliar road.

Still, the boundaries between the Endless Road and the mortal realm are weakest around the van Hassen estate. If you'd prefer to guide the characters there, here are a few adventure hooks.

The Story Beckons: The van Hassen story has spread. Several surviving members of the estate staff later admitted the truth of what occurred, but many villagers refused to believe them, perhaps because they could not accept culpability for allowing the Horseman's execution. Thus, many versions of the tale exist, some accurately detailing Eli's and Talitha's betrayal, others casting the Horseman as the villain. Regardless of which version they hear, the characters might be tempted to locate Tranquility and investigate what occurred—in part because many versions claim that the van Hassen wealth remains undiscovered.

The Haunted Manor: The tragedy that occurred here could attract all manner of spiritual horrors. While the villagers are reluctant to seek outside help after what happened, they might be forced to do so if the haunting spreads beyond the estate.

The Beast of the Swamp: Attacks on other roads or communities inspire the characters to set out into a nearby swamp and confront the beast that long ago drove the fen hydra into the woods around Tranquility. The characters might find themselves here as they look for a place to stay, or as they track tales of the beast's earlier rampages.

THE ENDLESS ROAD

Eli van Hassen knew something was very wrong. The estate was subtly altered: Buildings didn't stand where they should, and the grasses and gardens were wilted. The property's fence was of wood no longer, but wrought iron, and as he wandered that border, he saw no sign of Tranquility, but a wide highway that wound to the horizon, and a thick forest beyond.

Eli set out with a contingent of guards, hoping to explore this mysterious road. Yet he'd traveled barely a few dozen yards before the clouds and the mist plunged the world into darkness. The light gleaming sickly through the clouds was the faint glow of the crescent moon, not the noonday sun.

The thunder of hooves was his only warning before the Horseman fell upon them. Eli outran death, escaping back to the sanctuary of his estate, but he left behind him the headless corpses of a dozen men. Even though he never learned where he was, he understood his situation well enough: To leave the estate was to court death at the hands of the man he had murdered.

The true dark lord of the Endless Road is Eli van Hassen, but his power is limited as compared to the lords of most other domains of dread. His power extends only to the borders of his estate; if he leaves the grounds, he becomes as powerless as any other traveler.

Talitha shares some of her father's curse, though none of his power. And the Horseman, though technically not the domain's dark lord, is a manifestation of the Endless Road itself, and seems more powerful than the dark lord. Thus many who have heard of the Endless Road make the mistake of thinking that the Horseman is the region's sovereign.

THE DOMAIN

The Endless Road seems literally to have no end. While some travelers find themselves eventually returned to paths in the real world, or other Shadowfell domains, most who trod the Endless Road never reach any destination at all. They may walk until all traces of inhabitation are lost behind them, and still find nothing but woods or hills to either side, and the highway stretching—always stretching—before them.

The locations presented herein represent only a portion of possible sites along the Endless Road. Feel free to add your own, spread these out, move them around, or otherwise modify and expand the domain. Further, if the characters manage to depart the Endless Road and then return, or if they're caught outside when the Mists rise, they might discover that locations have actually moved. So far as the natives are concerned, nothing has changed, but the characters may find that familiar locales are no longer in the same order, or that the distances between them have altered. A few might no longer exist, while new ones might have appeared.

The Road needn't be a single winding path; feel free to add major forks and intersections, forming a small network of byways, the largest of which have no apparent end.

Eli and Talitha van Hassen are cursed by their imprisonment in the Shadowfell. Their estate remains an exile they dare not leave, for they know the hideous death that awaits beyond.

For Eli, who knows that many communities lie along the road but was never content with his status in Tranquility, ruling a single property is utter torment.

Talitha, meanwhile, comes slowly to understand that in acquiescing to her father's hideous demands, she did *not* secure herself future social gains. Rather,

she has sacrificed all opportunities for a greater life, doomed to live forever in her father's shadow. Today she does little more than aimlessly roam the estate, or listlessly tend the lush rose garden and hedge maze, and dream of making a different choice.

As to whether the Horseman suffers, whether anything of the man who died remains in the headless murderer that haunts the twisting road, none can know.

THE VAN HASSENS

Though many decades have passed since their arrival, the van Hassens and their staff have not aged; they believe only a few years have gone by, and no argument or evidence can convince them otherwise.

Eli van Hassen stands on the far end of middle age, his hair gray and his face heavily lined. He prefers fine clothes of rich colors, and his movements appear sudden or exaggerated, as though he were possessed by a constant angry frustration. The domain has granted Eli some measure of power over the land—accidents befall those who oppose him, the ground reaches up to impede his attackers, and so forth. Yet even this is more frustration than blessing, for while Eli revels in this power, he cannot consciously control it, nor exercise that power over any who dwell beyond his estate.

His daughter, Talitha, appears a young woman of around 18 or 19. Her dark hair hangs long down her back, and her features are willowy, almost fey. Formerly fond of bright colors, Talitha now wears dark blouses and skirts, as though in mourning. Unlike her father, Talitha has no special power over the lands of the estate—yet another cruel jest of fate ... or some other, darker power that holds them imprisoned. As such, Talitha's statistics are not presented here; if necessary she can be treated as a normal human lackey (*Monster Manual* 162).

ELI VAN HASSEN TACTICS

Eli remains distant, putting guards and other allies between himself and his foes. Eli's "powers" are not truly his own, but represent the land reacting to protect him (although, for all *mechanical* purposes, they are his powers and expend his actions). As such, they take different forms. *Fickle fortune* might manifest as debris falling from the ceiling, a stray arrow from earlier in the battle, the ground reaching out with roots to twist the ankles of the foe, or the sudden appearance of a swarm of insects tearing at someone's flesh. Make use of these powers as best befits the situation, but remember that Eli himself is never entirely certain what will happen.

Eli van Hassen		Level 11 Controller
Medium natural humanoid, human		XP 600
Initiative +6	Senses Perception +7	
HP 112; Bloodied 56		
AC 25; Fortitude 22, Reflex 23, Will 24; see also <i>cringe and cower</i>		
Speed 6		
⚔ Dagger (standard; at-will) ♦ Weapon +16 vs. AC; 3d4 + 4 damage.		
⌚ Fickle Fortune (standard; at-will) Close burst 5; targets one creature in burst; +15 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 4 damage, and one of the following effects (roll 1d6). 1-3: knocked prone 4-5: slowed until the end of the target's next turn 6: dazed until the end of the target's next turn.		
✦ Foul Fortune (standard; recharge ☐ ☐) Area burst 2 within 10; +15 vs. Fortitude; 3d8 + 5 damage, and the target is knocked prone and takes one of the following effects (roll 1d6) (save ends). 1-3: slowed 4: restrained 5: dazed 6: -2 penalty to all attack rolls and skill checks.		
Cringe and Cower Van Hassen gains a +2 bonus to all defenses when he's within 5 squares of at least two allies.		
Alignment Evil	Languages Common, Elven	
Skills Bluff +16, Diplomacy +16, Insight +12, Religion +14		
Str 9 (+4)	Dex 12 (+6)	Wis 15 (+7)
Con 16 (+8)	Int 18 (+9)	Cha 22 (+11)
Equipment dagger		

THE HEADLESS HORSEMAN

The Horseman and his entourage are forces of nature of the Endless Road. They appear almost anywhere, at any time, and seem to have no motivation other than slaughter.

The Horseman can sense either van Hassen leaving the estate, or if the estate's protections are broken, and appears instantly to seek his revenge. Otherwise, he appears seemingly at random. Sometimes he attacks instantly; at other times he harries foes for hours, letting them escape so that he might ride them down once more. He most frequently appears where the road is wide, or where numerous paths converge, allowing him a wide field of battle. (The road seems to accommodate him in this. Create tactical maps where the road is unnecessarily wide, or where terrain makes leaving the road difficult.)

In addition to being limited to the road's vicinity (see *bound to the road*), the Horseman cannot cross water wider than he or his mount can jump. Further, he can be held at bay by holy barriers, such as the symbol-bedecked gate of the van Hassen estate, if those barriers are maintained by powerful, or numerous, individuals of true faith.

The Horseman's arrival is heralded by a sudden clouding of the sky and a rising mist, until little of the world beyond the road is visible. Day or night, the light that shines through the clouds takes on the sickle-shaped blue of the crescent moon.

The Horseman appears amid thundering hooves, a headless apparition in black leather with silver embellishments, blood-red cloak fanned out behind. He stands in a saddle of blackest leather, and holds aloft a blood-stained sickle.

In life, the Horseman rode an aging warhorse he jokingly called Spitfire because she was “an old nag.” Spitfire has become a hideous beast, an enormous black charger of impossible ferocity. Flame erupts beneath her iron-shod hooves, blood drips where the reigns saw into the corners of her mouth, and her teeth come to carnivorous points.

Behind them, a crowd seems to move through the fog, heralded by hideous laughter and gibbering babble. What follows is a collection of the Horseman’s prior victims, an array of heads that bounce and roll as though having just fallen from the headsman’s block. Most snap and bite, clinging to a foe, but a few bear the malevolent power of the domain, spitting vile curses in shrieking voices.

THE HORSEMAN’S TACTICS

The Horseman normally remains mounted throughout combat, making frequent *executioner’s step* charge attacks. He uses *beheading slash* as soon as the opportunity arises, while Spitfire uses *run to ground* to keep victims from escaping. They come in fast, moving to attack before foes can leave the road.

The gibbering head swarm attempts to overrun one or more foes, while the cursing heads maneuver to catch the largest number of foes in their curses.

Gibbering Heads	Level 15 Soldier
Large shadow magical beast (swarm, undead)	XP 1,200
Initiative +15	Senses Perception +11; darkvision
Teeth and Tongues aura 1; any enemy that starts its turn within the aura takes 7 damage.	
HP 148; Bloodied 74	
AC 31; Fortitude 27, Reflex 28, Will 26	
Immune disease, poison; Resist half damage from melee and ranged attacks; 10 necrotic; Vulnerable 10 close and area attacks, 10 radiant	
Speed 8, fly 4 (altitude limit 3)	
⊕ Chomping Maws (standard; at-will)	
+20 vs. Reflex; 1d10 + 6 damage and the target is grabbed. The target takes 5 damage at the end of its turn as long as it is grabbed by the gibbering heads swarm. The swarm can continue to make additional attacks—against the same target or others—while maintaining grabs, and can sustain all grabs with a single minor action.	
Alignment Chaotic evil	Languages Common
Str 14 (+9)	Dex 23 (+13) Wis 19 (+11)
Con 20 (+12)	Int 7 (+5) Cha 14 (+9)

Cursing Heads	Level 15 Controller
Large shadow magical beast (swarm, undead)	XP 1,200
Initiative +12	Senses Perception +11; darkvision
Teeth and Tongues aura 1; any enemy that starts its turn within the aura takes 7 damage.	
HP 148; Bloodied 74	
AC 29; Fortitude 27, Reflex 27, Will 28	
Immune disease, poison; Resist half damage from melee and ranged attacks; 10 necrotic; Vulnerable 10 close and area attacks, 10 radiant	
Speed 8, fly 4 (altitude limit 3)	
⊕ Bite (standard; at-will)	
+19 vs. Reflex; 1d10 + 5 damage.	
↖ Curse of Stone (standard; encounter)	
Close blast 5; deaf creatures are immune; +19 vs. Will; the target is slowed (save ends). <i>First Failed Saving Throw</i> : The target is immobilized instead of slowed (save ends). <i>Second Failed Saving Throw</i> : The target is petrified (no save).	
↖ Curse of Plague (standard; encounter) ◆ Poison	
+19 vs. Fortitude; 3d10 + 6 poison damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).	
Alignment Chaotic evil	Languages Common
Str 14 (+9)	Dex 20 (+12) Wis 19 (+11)
Con 20 (+12)	Int 12 (+8) Cha 23 (+13)

Spitfire	Level 15 Skirmisher
Large shadow magical beast (mount)	XP 1,200
Initiative +14	Senses Perception +13; darkvision
HP 155; Bloodied 77	
AC 29 (31 against opportunity attacks); Fortitude 28, Reflex 27, Will 26	
Saving Throws +2 against immobilizing, restraining, and slowing effects	
Speed 12 (14 when charging); phasing	
⊕ Iron-Shod Hooves (standard; at-will)	
+20 vs. AC; 1d10 + 6 damage, and ongoing 5 damage (save ends).	
Phantom Rider (while mounted by a friendly rider of 15th level or higher; at-will) ◆ Mount	
The rider gains phasing. The mount and raider share all resistances and immunities, and may act together on the higher of the pair’s initiative.	
Run to Ground (standard; recharge ☼ ☼)	
Spitfire moves up to her speed. Each square she leaves becomes difficult terrain until the end of her next turn. Any enemy that hits Spitfire with a melee attack during this move is immobilized until the end of Spitfire’s next turn.	
Unholy Resilience (immediate reaction when Spitfire is subject to an immobilizing, restraining, or slowing effect that a save can end; encounter)	
Spitfire makes a saving throw against the triggering effect, even if it does not normally allow a save to end.	
Bound to the Road	
Spitfire is linked to the road. She treats all terrain beyond the road as difficult terrain, and she cannot move beyond line of sight of the road.	
Alignment Evil	Languages –
Skills Endurance +20	
Str 24 (+14)	Dex 20 (+12) Wis 13 (+8)
Con 27 (+15)	Int 6 (+5) Cha 16 (+10)

The Headless Horseman **Level 15 Elite Brute**

Medium shadow humanoid (blind, undead) XP 2,400

Initiative +12 **Senses** Perception +16; blindsight 10

HP 362; **Bloodied** 181

AC 27; **Fortitude** 28, **Reflex** 27, **Will** 26

Immune disease, fear, poison; **Resist** 20 necrotic;

Vulnerable 10 radiant

Saving Throws +2 (+4 against immobilizing, restraining, and slowing effects)

Speed 6

Action Points 1

 ⚔ **Sickle** (standard; at-will) ♦ **Weapon**

Targets one or two creatures; +16 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 7 damage (crit 4d8+7 damage, and the target is dazed until the end of the Horseman's next turn). This attack rolls a critical hit on an 18–20.

 † **Beheading Slash** (standard; encounter) ♦ **Weapon**

 Targets a bloodied creature; +16 vs. Reflex; the target is reduced to 0 hit points. *Miss*: 2d8 + 23 damage, and the target is dazed until the end of the Horseman's next turn.

Unholy Resilience (immediate reaction when the Horseman is subject to an immobilizing, restraining, or slowing effect; encounter)

The Horseman makes a saving throw against the triggering effect, even if it does not normally allow a save to end.

Executioner's Step

When the Horseman makes a charge attack (whether on foot or mounted), he gains combat advantage against the target of the charge.

Combat Advantage

The horseman deals ongoing 10 damage (save ends) on a hit against any creature granting him combat advantage.

Bound to the Road

The Horseman is linked to the road. He treats all terrain beyond the road as difficult terrain, and he cannot move beyond line of sight of the road.

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Understands all spoken languages; does not speak

Skills Athletics +19

Str 24 (+14) **Dex** 20 (+12) **Wis** 19 (+11)

Con 21 (+12) **Int** 9 (+6) **Cha** 14 (+9)

Equipment leather armor with steel breastplate, sickle

THE VAN HASSEN ESTATES

The van Hassen estate covers several hundred acres, consisting primarily of gently rolling fields and groves of trees. It boasts dozens of minor structures not detailed below, including guest cottages, servants' and caretakers' quarters, storage buildings, a few barns, and a variety of stables. Intruders wandering the grounds—and, on rarer occasion, invited guests—might find themselves facing not merely estate guards, but the wrathful ghosts and wraiths of those who died in Eli's service, or even Eli's herd of horses,

who turn monstrous and carnivorous on random nights (use stats for the celestial charger, *Monster Manual* 159, with a chaotic evil alignment).

1. The Sacred Gate: The estate is surrounded by a wrought-iron fence over twelve feet high. A single gate—also of iron, with marble posts—allows access to the grounds. The gate, and the entire fence, are interwoven with holy symbols (primarily of Erathis). The gates stand open during the day, but are locked and barred at night. They are manned by half a dozen estate guards, while additional guards patrol the grounds.



It is Eli's religious faith, and the mystical power he now wields, that prevents the Headless Horseman from entering the grounds. While Eli does not explain the specifics, he's not shy about proclaiming himself the source of everyone's protection, and that his death would leave them vulnerable to the Horseman's wrath.

2. Traveler's Rest: This building stands nearly a hundred feet across and four stories high. It can house scores of people, and the enormous kitchen can feed an army. It is here most "guests" of the estate reside (see "Life on the Endless Road," until they've earned sufficient trust to dwell closer to, or within, the main house. The inn is run by Carspen Rhenk (gnome bard 11), one of Eli's first servants in this strange realm. Carspen knows the various methods for ending or escaping the domain (see page 80). While he'll never tell the characters that they can escape by turning the van Hassens over to the Horseman, he might reveal other methods. In addition to Carspen, the characters can encounter just about any NPC of potency here, as "guests" who have chosen servitude over aimless wandering and possible beheading.

3. Van Hassen Manor: This house of stone walls and intricate columns contains over a hundred rooms throughout many wings and halls. The windows are heavy glass—some stained—and vibrant tapestries bedeck the walls. Guards and staff are everywhere, as are an array of constructs and golems that simply manifested from portions of the house to do Eli's will. It's remarkably easy to get lost—especially since the rooms occasionally move in response to Eli's unspoken desires.

4. The Rose Garden: An enormous rose garden thrives behind the manor, with graceful marble statues and fountains overlooking winding paths that eventually lead into a hedge maze several acres across. Talitha spends much time wandering these paths, wondering what might have been. All who die on the estate are buried here to nourish the roses, and rumor holds that the plants occasionally reach out to snare passersby, dragging them bodily into the soil to feed their roots.

Van Hassen Estate Guard Level 10 Minion Soldier		
Medium natural humanoid, human		XP 125
Initiative +11	Senses Perception +6	
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.		
AC 26; Fortitude 23, Reflex 22, Will 21		
Speed 6		
⚔ Halberd (standard; at-will) ♦ Weapon		
Reach 2; +17 vs. AC; 8 damage.		
🏹 Crossbow (standard; at-will) ♦ Weapon		
Ranged 15/30; +16 vs. AC; 8 damage.		
Combat Advantage		
If the estate guard has combat advantage against a target, a hit also knocks the target prone.		
Alignment Unaligned	Languages Common	
Str 21 (+10)	Dex 18 (+9)	Wis 12 (+6)
Con 14 (+7)	Int 10 (+5)	Cha 9 (+4)
Equipment leather armor, halberd, crossbow, 10 bolts		

ESTATE GUARD TACTICS

Van Hassen estate guards initiate combat with crossbow attacks, then move to flank individual foes. They are obsessively loyal to van Hassen and fight to the death.

LIFE ON THE ENDLESS ROAD

Over the decades, hundreds of poor souls have become trapped along the length of the Endless Road. Most band together for company and safety, sharing a grim and joyless existence of desperation and despair. The domain's citizens live beneath the heel of those strong enough to enforce their obedience: Eli van Hassen or the landowners (and mob rule) of Havenshire and similar villages.

Though nearly the size of a hamlet itself, access to the van Hassen estate is limited to the aristocrats who dwell within. Eli has not given up on his ambitions, and if he cannot obtain power elsewhere, he must bring others here to serve him. He does this via the *Traveler's Rest*, a Shadowfell "echo" of the inn he owned in Tranquility. Eli knows that his estate is a refuge from the Horseman—and, thanks to his guards, from other hazards of the road as well. He has built his personal kingdom by allowing travelers to stay at *Traveler's Rest* for as long as they like—but only if they swear fealty, becoming Eli's servants. His estate staff and guards have swelled in number, for many who have despaired of ever leaving the Endless Road consider this indentured servitude a small price for a safe home. After so many years, the van Hassen estate has become not merely the safest of the Road's various communities, but the largest and wealthiest.

In the other communities, people jealously hoard what they have. Resources are scarce, for people fear to travel more than a few hours from their abodes lest they be trapped on the road by the Horseman or the domain's other hazards. Everyone, from outsiders to neighbors, is viewed with suspicion, and few dare risk

their own good to aid others. Almost nobody who's dwelt here for more than a few years believes that escape is possible, and anyone claiming that it is can expect to find themselves met by doubt, disdain, and even violence for daring to hope.

HAVENSHIRE

The oldest of the Endless Road's communities, and likely the largest, is Havenshire.

Havenshire occupies a modest area of farmable land between a sluggish expanse of river—which protects the town from the Horseman—and the edge of the Wailing Wood. The community has spread to cover the entirety of the available land; the streets are cramped and narrow, and buildings often have upper stories built outward, overhanging the alleys and casting claustrophobic shadows. Resources are running low, no room for expansion remains, and newcomers are seen as competitors for space and supplies. Thus, while Havenshire might seem the characters' best option for comfort and safety, the truth is that nobody wants them there. The people are afraid, hungry, and forlorn, and while a powerful party might frighten them into keeping their distance, they may find themselves facing a lynch mob of desperate villagers.

The only means of reaching the village, unless the characters want to ford the wide waters, is a roofed bridge of heavy wooden planks.

THE STONE ORCHARD

Along an otherwise featureless expanse of the Endless Road stretches a vista of rolling hills. Scattered across them, as far as the eye can see, is a crowded array of gravestones, punctuated by crooked trees and the occasional aboveground mausoleum. This is the Stone Orchard, the cemetery of the Endless Road.

HAVENSHIRE

Havenshire is the size of a small town, though it lacks resources that normally delineate a town from a village.

Population: 3,400. The townsfolk are mostly human, with a smattering of other common, civilized humanoids.

Government: A council of landowners—including both original occupants and their heirs—led by Marandice Haverbrook (human), daughter of the town's founder.

Defense: Havenshire is protected by a citizen militia, accompanied by a few dozen professional soldiers and adventurers.

Inns: None. Citizens occupy all available land, and they don't want outsiders staying.

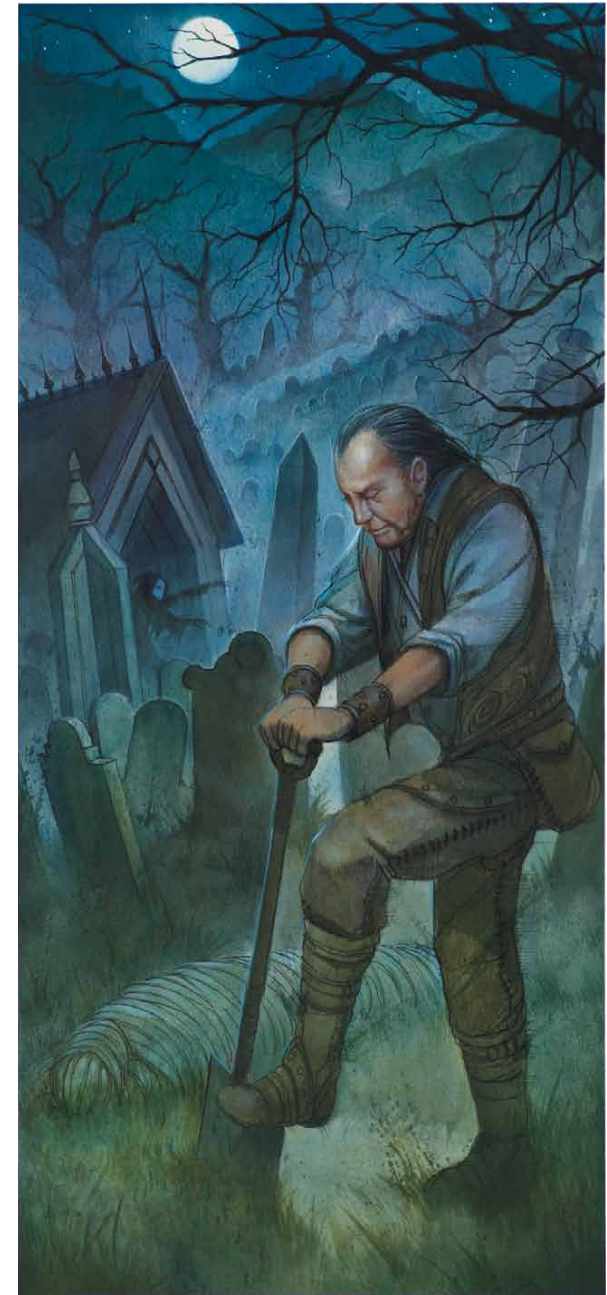
Taverns: The Wet Whistle, the Running Hart; both sometimes refuse to serve outsiders.

Major Guilds: None.

Supplies: Havenshire has few "shops" per se. The people shop and trade with individual craftsman within the population; most standard, non-magical trades—smithing, carpentry, pottery, what have you—can be found here.

Temples: Havenshire boasts one temple, with shrines to Avandra, Erathis, Moradin, Pelor, the Raven Queen, and Torog (the last in hopes of propitiating him and winning their freedom from the domain).

One old man, his flesh darkened and leathered by the sun, has maintained the Orchard since the graveyard first appeared. He spends his time wandering in a mule-drawn cart, collecting those who have died along the Endless Road, as well as the corpses from the various villages, most of whom lack sufficient room to bury their own. Perhaps because they appreciate his service, the Groundskeeper (his real name is unknown) travels undisturbed by either the Horseman or the cemetery's undead.



The Stone Orchard has a stronger connection to the Shadowfell proper than does the rest of the domain. Any who die within, and a small percentage of all corpses buried here, rise as citizens of the Village of the Dead, while the rest serve as food for the wights and ghouls. These undead wander the Road at night, attacking travelers and even infiltrating living communities, for the so-called White Reeve has designs on the entire domain.

The Rusted Gate: The Stone Orchard is surrounded by a fence of rusted iron posts and occasional wooden patches. The main gate resembles a pair of wings, and is carved with symbols of the Raven Queen. It hangs open at all times, allowing anyone to move in—or out. Other, smaller gates stand locked and chained throughout the property, but it requires little effort to get through them.

The Groundskeeper's Shack: Some dozens of yards from the main gate stands a rickety, three-room shack. This is the Groundskeeper's home, though he spends little time within. A primitive lean-to stands beside the shack, providing shelter for his mule and cart.

The Village of the Dead: Beneath the Stone Orchard sprawls an enormous warren, miles of twisting passageways and earthen-walled chambers. Access to the tunnels can be gained via several aboveground mausoleums or empty graves.

This “village,” as the warren is called by its denizens, is inhabited by hundreds of undead. Ruled by the White Reeve, a pale creature with traits of both ghouls and wights, this necropolis boasts populations of horde ghouls, greater ghouls (*Dungeon* #156), wights, and skull lords who serve as the White Reeve's lieutenants.

The White Reeve rules from an underground palace, replete with audience chambers, sweeping balconies, and winding stairs—all somehow holding their shape despite being dug from the dirt and soil. The White Reeve and Tavnanda, his “court magician” (a lich), know all the secrets of the domain, including how to destroy the Horseman and the van Hassens, but the White Reeve doesn't wish to undertake such an effort until he knows he can usurp their power and keep the Endless Road—or at least the Village of the Dead—in existence.

The White Reeve		
Level 13 Elite Soldier (Leader)		
Medium shadow humanoid (undead)	XP 1,600	
Initiative +14	Senses Perception +9; darkvision	
Shroud of the Grave aura 5; undead in the area lose vulnerable radiant.		
HP 262; Bloodied 131		
AC 29; Fortitude 25, Reflex 26, Will 25		
Immune disease, poison; Resist 15 necrotic; Vulnerable 5 radiant		
Saving Throws +2		
Speed 8, climb 4		
Action Points 1		
⚔ Claw (standard; at-will)		
+20 vs. AC; 2d8 + 6 damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends). If the target is a living creature that is already immobilized, stunned, or unconscious, the attack deals 1d8 extra damage.		
⚔ Ravenous Bite (at-will; recharge ☹ ☹ ☹)		
Targets an immobilized, stunned, or unconscious creature; +18 vs. AC; 2d6 + 6 damage, and the target loses a healing surge and is stunned until the end of the white reeve's next turn.		
⚔ Ravens Claws (standard; at-will)		
The White Reeve makes two claw attacks.		
Morbid Inhabitation (free, only on the White Reeve's turn, 1/turn; at-will) ♦ Teleportation		
The White Reeve swaps places with one undead creature within 10 squares.		
Alignment Evil	Languages Common	
Skills Insight +14, Stealth +17		
Str 18 (+10)	Dex 22 (+12)	Wis 16 (+9)
Con 19 (+10)	Int 14 (+8)	Cha 19 (+10)

WHITE REEVE TACTICS

The White Reeve focuses on one or two targets, rendering them weak and hideously wounded before either finishing them off or leaving them for his allies while he moves on to fresher game. He normally uses *call of the grave* after several rounds, and uses *morbid inhabitation* not merely to avoid dangerous foes, but to appear next to tempting targets.

THE WAILING WOOD

The Wailing Wood occupies much of the wilderness beyond the road, the ominous canopy casting thick shadows over an even thicker carpet of brambles and underbrush. Narrow trails snake through the trees, providing paths not merely for wanderers, but for beasts of the wood—and even for the Horseman, who treats these paths as part of the road.

It is said that, no matter how far one travels into the Wailing Wood, or how carefully one maps the pathways, one eventually finds oneself back on the road, or else is lost forever in the darkened reaches. (But see “Escaping the Endless Road,” page 80.)

Many of those lost in the wood have given up, lying down to sob in frustration until death releases them from their torment. From these bodies grow the weeping boles, trees with humanoid features whose tears nourish their own roots, and who reach out in their undying grief to grab at all who pass. The Wailing Wood is also home to dire beasts, lost spirits, predatory plants, and malicious fey who enjoy leading travelers into the grasps of the boles or other hazardous creatures.

Weeping Bole Hazard
Level 13 Obstacle
 800 XP

The knots on this tree's trunk weep copious tears even as the tree's jagged branches lash out to grasp at all who pass.

Hazard: This hazard appears to be a tree, occupying either a single square (Medium) or 4 squares (Large).

Perception

◆ DC 18: The character notices something peculiar about the tree—perhaps the face-like markings in the trunk or the clear tears it slowly weeps into the forest floor.

Additional Skill: Religion

◆ DC 23: The character recognizes the true nature of the bole before moving within 6 squares of it.

Trigger

When a creature enters or begins its turn in a square within 3 squares of the tree, it attacks.

Attack

Opportunity Action **Melee 3**

Target: The triggering creature

Attack: +18 vs. AC

Hit: 1d10 + 6 damage, and the tree pulls the target 3 squares to an adjacent square and grabs the target. The tree automatically sustains the grab each turn. The target takes 5 damage each time it ends a turn while still grabbed.

Countermeasures

- ◆ A character can move through a threatened square without triggering the bole's attack by making a DC 23 Acrobatics or Stealth check.
- ◆ A character can attack the tree itself. Medium boles have AC and Reflex 5, Fortitude 10; hp 20. Large boles have AC and Reflex 4, Fortitude 12; hp 40. Both sizes have resist 10 to all damage types except fire and radiant.

OTHER LOCATIONS

The domain can include almost sort of feature you choose to add, but it certainly includes towns besides Havenshire (perhaps even an echo of Tranquility), abandoned camps and primitive buildings, roadside shrines, hazardous stretches of the rivers that appear and disappear from alongside the Road, and wilderness other than the Wailing Wood. (This last might include a murky fen where an undead remnant of

Tranquility's hydra dwells.) Small encampments might be the home of bandits—called Toll-Takers—who wander the road, eyes ever alert for the Horseman, in search of travelers to rob and villagers to extort.

A few of these appear below, but this is hardly a comprehensive list.

THE ABBEY OF CHERISHED JOCALURITY

The monks who dwell within this walled monastery are friendly, even jovial, offering passersby a night or two of safety, to pray in their great chapel or join the monks in the commissary. The monks, and their abbot, are constantly smiling, jesting, and laughing aloud.

The monks of Cherished Jocalurity believe that it is their laughter and good spirits, not their religious faith, that keep the Horseman at bay. As such, they view any visitor who cannot maintain a constant façade of mirth and good cheer as a threat to their safety. A visitor who so much as frowns, or fails to laugh at the abbot's jesting, finds himself set upon as the monks attempt to murder him, laughing all the while.

The monks' homicidal madness has allowed the domain to distort them. While they appear normal to casual inspection, their bodies are twisted and distended beneath their robes. In all respects except size and reach, the monastery's leader—called the Laughing Abbot—has the stats of an oni mage (*Monster Manual* 201), while various monks are treated as either ogre savages or skirmishers (*Monster Manual* 199).

THE CROSSROADS

Although the Endless Road includes many intersections, "the Crossroads" refers to one in specific. This junction connects several of the Road's largest branches, and legend states that fey powers gather here when the moon and stars are right, to tempt mortals into horrid bargains.

While locations along the Road might change from one visit to the domain to the next, the Crossroads always stands 149 miles from the Horseman's grave.

THE HORSEMAN'S GRAVE

This patch of ground beside a gentle curve in the river is a near perfect echo of the Horseman's grave in the mortal realm. It's said that the Horseman often rises here after being slain, and that he appears to slaughter any who disturb the grave. Why this should be so, and what might be found in the grave itself, remains unknown.

THE WHISPERING WELL

This old stone well is falling into disrepair. Bricks are missing, the roof is full of holes, and a frayed rope barely supports a rusty bucket. *Something* dwells within the well's abnormal depths, and it occasionally whispers taunts or threats to passersby. Legend claims that many who dare linger here vanish entirely, but also that the thing dwelling within knows all the domain's secrets, including how to escape or to slay the dark lord.

ADVENTURES ON THE ENDLESS ROAD

The Endless Road is capable of appearing almost anywhere, at any time, making it far more flexible than most other Domains of Dread. This, combined with the fact that it contains multiple populations of trapped souls who have given up on escape, makes the Endless Road a perfect framework for an adventure—or even a series of adventures—in which the characters struggle desperately to find a means of freeing themselves, all while surviving the Domain’s many hazards.

But a “survive and escape” plot is far from the only potential tale to be told within the confines of the Endless Road.

Tracking the Lost: The characters are looking for someone who vanished years before. Perhaps it was a friend or loved one of one of the heroes, a local champion or religious leader, or someone with knowledge the party can find nowhere else. Despite their greatest efforts, the characters cannot pinpoint a location, and even divination magic suggests that the person “can be found in no place, but only on the route between places.” The characters must determine that this person has been trapped by the Endless Road—and then somehow find their way to this bizarre domain, track down the individual in one of the many grim communities, and find a means of returning their quarry to the world.

A Twisted Love: If the characters spend any time at all on the Endless Road, they might find themselves within the van Hassen estate—and once there, interacting with both Eli and Talitha. Despite her deep despair, Talitha is still a teenaged girl, and still drawn to powerful, heroic men who remind her of her lost love or who rekindle her ability to hope. Whether or not the chosen character returns her affections, Talitha does everything she can to aid him, and even risks following should the adventurers attempt to leave. Unfortunately—perhaps due to the influence of the Shadowfell, perhaps because of her own issues—Talitha has not learned from her past mistakes. When pressed by her father, her fear of being turned out and losing what position she has on the estate inspires her to betray the characters to Eli at the worst possible moment.

Lost Tranquility: A moment of planar bleed between the world and the Shadowfell has strengthened the spiritual ties between the Endless Road and the village of Tranquility. The entire region surrounding the community begins to slowly die: crops wither and animals grow ill. Only by finally ending the curse of Eli van Hassen and putting an end to the Endless Road, severing the region’s ties to the Shadowfell, can local heroes hope to undo this growing blight.

What Cannot Die: If the domains of dread are intended as prisons, then perhaps the characters can make those prisons work for them. Upon discovering that they lack the means to defeat some enemy of theirs—perhaps a lich whose phylactery remains hidden, a fey horror vulnerable only to weapons they cannot locate, or a semi-divine creature that is truly immortal—the characters might set out to learn if there is any way to *deliberately* call the Endless Road to a particular spot in the mortal world, or at least to predict where it will next appear. If so, and if they can lure their foe to the right spot at the right time, perhaps they can cause this “unkillable” enemy to become imprisoned, if not forever, then at least long enough for them to discover some means to defeat it permanently.

Holes in the World: Perhaps the road itself is not the only overlap between this domain and the mortal realm. The underground warren of the White Reeve might open into catacombs and graveyards throughout the world, allowing that foul undead to establish a scattered kingdom from his throne deep within the Shadowfell.

The Road Between Worlds: Because the Endless Road can appear anywhere in the world—indeed, in almost *any* world—it’s actually possible to use it as a road. If the characters (presumably after several harrowing adventures within the domain) manage to find a reliable means of escaping it, or even of influencing where it appears, it could become a viable means of travel to distant locales that they could not otherwise reach—if they can survive long enough to get there, of course.

ESCAPING THE ENDLESS ROAD

If Eli or Talitha are slain, they awaken the next morning in their beds, without memory or sign of their deaths. If the Horseman is killed, he reappears at the rising of the next moon. Thus, if slain before or during the new moon, up to three days might pass before he rises, but normally it takes only until the following night.

To truly slay any of the trio, the web of hate binding them must be sundered. The easiest way is to deliver the van Hassens up to the Horseman, for if they die at his hands, their deaths are permanent. If he slays both, the Horseman, and indeed the entirety of the Endless Road, ceases to exist at the rise of the next new moon, and all those trapped within find themselves returned to the mortal world. The characters might accomplish this by tricking or forcing the van Hassens off their estate, or by finding some means of allowing the Horseman to enter the grounds.

If they do so, however, they are not only committing deliberate murder, but they are also leaving all the other inhabitants of the estate vulnerable. Without Eli's protection, nothing stands between them and the Horseman's wrath.

Alternatively, the characters can try to convince the Horseman to confront the van Hassens not to kill them, but to forgive his betrayal at their hands. If they can do this, the Horseman and the domain fade instantly away, depositing everyone back on the mortal world (where Eli has no power).

Of course, the Headless Horseman seems to lack any personality save for a ceaseless, towering rage, barely showing signs of sentience let alone memory or mercy. Nor has he ever shown any indication of listening to what anyone has to say as he slaughters them. There's no telling how the characters might accomplish such a tremendous feat, but if it was easy, anyone could do it. (You might require them to first return the Horseman's head, if only so he has some means of communicating his forgiveness should the characters miraculously convince him to offer it.)

While these are the only means of *ending* the Endless Road, there are other means of escape. In some rare cases, the Endless Road randomly deposits travelers back into the mortal realm after weeks or months of wandering, often dozens to thousands of miles from where they started. (You can use this property to transport characters into foreign regions of the campaign world, using the domain as a conduit as much as a source of adventure.) However, the Road rarely releases travelers for long; anyone lucky enough to simply walk out is likely to be picked up by the Road again in the future.

Similarly, while most who wander the Wailing Wood or explore the twisting tunnels beneath the Stone Orchard find themselves back where they started, a rare few find pathways out of the domain. (This might occur at your whim, or as the result of a prolonged and difficult skill check.) Alas, these paths take them not back to their own world, but deposit them elsewhere in the Shadowfell, perhaps even another domain of dread.

However, the characters are not entirely reliant on luck; there is one deliberate way to escape, but it requires an almost superhuman effort. If the characters slay the Horseman within site of his grave, and then reach the Crossroads before he rises once more, they find themselves treading a similar junction somewhere in the mortal world. Of course, given the distances involved, this requires slaying the Horseman just before the new moon, and running themselves ragged on a three-day hellish race to the Crossroads.

About the Author

Ari Marmell was born in New York, moved to Houston when he was a year old, moved to Austin when he was 27, but has spent most of his life living in other worlds through a combination of writing and roleplaying games. He has been writing more or less constantly for the last dozen years, though he has only been paid for it the past five. He is the author of multiple roleplaying game supplements including work on *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS*®. Ari lives in Austin with his wife George and two cats.