

## to do

- Make up other artifacts for the party to find at the observatory.
- Stats for the kings.
- Make up spirit who will help Aeris find the phylactery...it needs a name.

## Questions for players

- Did any of the characters take rockets from the observatory?**Aeris is ready for the ritual, right?**
- 
- **We know from Aeris' background that he's horrified by forests and wolves, right? Is there anything else?**

## Creating the phylactery

When the party arrives back with Noreste, Ishild asks if Aeris is ready to make the phylactery.

If so, he asks the party to bring the meteor near a special device that he's constructed. It looks like a potter's wheel with an axle coming up from the center of the wheel. He breaks off a small piece of Noreste and affixes it to the top of the axle, then places a jar with a vacuum pump over the device. He pumps the air out of the jar, then starts to spin the wheel, which is geared to spin extremely quickly. As the device spins faster and faster, a cylindrical shell of distorted light forms around around the meteor piece. When the device is spinning fast enough, the shell makes the piece almost completely invisible -- then Ishild takes a little rubber mallet and taps gently on the jar. The shell starts to precess, more and more, until the space-time shell becomes spherical -- the device suddenly explodes from the force of the spherical shell, which unceremoniously bounces off the table and into a corner. Ishild jumps to run and retrieve the shell from the corner, then taking n a second to regain his dignity, presents it to Aeris with a bow.

If Aeris does not object, Ishild says he will reconstruct the device and make a second phylactery for himself after Aeris' upcoming ritual.

## The royal mummy cache

Ishild says that deep under the Mooncalf and its labyrinth basement, there's an ancient site, a cache containing the bodies of dozens of Gradskan kings. During a Gradskan civil war, the bodies were hurriedly moved there and dumped in crude coffins, without ceremony or marking, to protect them from desecration. The ancient royal dead make the site one of power and gravitas, and perfect for Aeris' ceremony. If Aeris agrees, he would like to perform the ritual

there, and he will ask friends from the small community of immortals in Hollin to help with the ceremony.

Ishild says that Aeris will die during the ritual. Is there a particular weapon Aeris would like them to use for this? Is there anyone else Aeris would like to bring, like his parents or his gang?

So, Ishild and Aeris travel to the Mooncalf basement. As you go deeper and deeper into the basement, you find that many parts of the basement seem to have been unvisited by anyone for a long time. Some parts are filled with a standing fog of opium smoke that not have been disturbed for years. Ishild takes you through long corridors, then caverns, filled with fog until finally you arrive in a cramped, musky cavern.

When you arrive, the room already lit by hundreds of flickering candles -- some on the ground, some on natural shelves in the contours of the cavern. Inside the mass of candles, there's a coffin-sized slab of granite for Aeris to lay on during the ritual. Outside the candles, there are dozens of crude coffins -- some stacked on top of each other, some dumped or overturned in the corners of the cavern. A few mummies are also nearby without the dignity of a coffin. Ishild says these are the coffins and mummies of the Gradskan kings, the most important of which was the founding king Marduk, who helped drive the Kirsi from High Hill.

## **The immortals**

### *Kirchner House*

You're maybe surprised to see three pale women dressed in low-cut velvet dresses already there, finishing lighting the candles. Two young-looking men are there with them, and when they see you, they come over and one introduces himself as Carlin. He bows slightly to Ishild, and tells Aeris he's happy to meet him. Glancing at the other man, he says he's pleased to introduce Kirchner, the sire of their clan, Kirchner House.

Soon after, a little away from Carlin and Kirchner, Ishild explains that Kirchner House ruled the countryside south of Hollin before the Anhalt Charter Company grew to rule the continent. While the Kirchners still maintain some of their ancestral lands from the day, Kirchner House lives on primarily as one of modern Hollin's great trading houses, which they run out of several grand townhouses and warehouses. Kirchner House has always been plagued by sensational and hurtful whispers among their competitors that they are unclean vampires, which they are. Over the centuries, Kirchner has selectively bred his own descendants, often selecting himself, and has mated with many generations of his own daughters. The selective breeding has produced a House of very powerful individuals, with some unique powers resulting from inbreeding.

### *The Kirsi*

As Ishild is finishing this description, three human-looking fairies arrive. Two of them are hauling a crate, which they set down near the entrance. They introduce themselves as Yellowjacket, Duster, and Hackles. They say they are happy to be there for Aeris' ritual, and please let them know if they can be of further service.

Turning to the crate, Yellowjacket opens it with a flourish, revealing a pale, soulless-looking child, maybe 10 years old, inside the crate in the fetal position. Yellowjacket says that over the years the Kirsi have often exchanged their own children for human children, and one purpose for this was to eliminate the church of Gradska by replacing children of the hereditary priesthood with fairies. Usually the stolen human child was raised as a fairy and treated with honor, but evil fairies never subscribed to that tradition. Instead, Yellowjacket has raised this child inside this crate, on steady diet of milk and beatings. He says if it pleases Aeris, and he hopes it will, they would be privileged to sacrifice this child for Aeris today. They can drink his blood to celebrate the completion of the ritual, and/or Aeris can take him as an undead servant.

### *The Ninety-Nine*

After introducing themselves to Aeris, the fairies also shake hands and exchange pleasantries with the Kirchner House vampires, who they have known for long ages. While this is happening, another man comes in. Ishild introduces him to Aeris as As-Sabur, also called The Patient, one of the Ninety-Nine gods of the Caliphate living in Hollin. Soon after, two other of the Ninety-Nine come in, Ad-Darr, The Afflictor; and Al-Mumit, the Destroyer. Small talking with Aeris and Ishild, these Ninety-Nine tell Aeris that among themselves, Ishild is known as , The HiddenAl-Batin.

- As-Sabur, The Patient.
  - He's been preserving his own descendants in the bog east of Hollin.
- Ad-Darr, The Afflictor.
  - Travels the world causing misery because the human condition is meaningless without it.
- Al-Mumit, the Destroyer.
  - Name says it all -- he'll eventually destroy the world.
- If the characters asks, Ishild tells him that his name among the Ninety-Nine is Al-Batin, The Hidden.

### **The ritual**

About becoming a lich, Monster Manual says:

“A mortal becomes a lich by performing a dark and terrible ritual. In this ritual the mortal dies, but rises again as an undead creature.”

Also:

“You...transform your body into a skeletal thing, undead and immortal, and bind your life force within a specially prepared receptacle called a phylactery....At the conclusion of this ritual, you die, transform into a lich, and gain the lich template.”

And:

“If you destroy a lich, its spirit returns to its phylactery unless you also destroy the phylactery. Its body reforms in 1d10 days at the location of the phylactery.”

Ishild says that everyone has arrived, and asks Aeris if he's ready to begin. He says that he and the other immortals will perform a dark ritual in which:

- They will bind Aeris' life force to the phylactery and kill Aeris. Aeris' spirit will have to return to the life force in the phylactery, and Aeris will rise again in his body, now as a skeletal undead.
- They will then drink the blood of the boy in the box in celebration of Aeris' new, unclean life.

When Aeris is ready, Ishild asks him to lay down on the granite slab, and they tie his hands to the slab. Ishild puts the phylactery on a separate granite stand behind his head. He then leads the immortals in singing a rhythmic, chanting dirge (song of lamentation) with several verses. The first verse welcomes Aeris to the family of immortals, and tells him that although he'll be immortal, as a lich he'll also gain the steely wisdom of those who have faced death. The second verse is a warning, to protect the phylactery and to avoid danger in the spirit world. The third verse -- also a verse of warning -- talks specifically about the bittersweetness of being immortal, that all is vanity -- a fact that will be laid bare once the distraction of your own death has passed. The fourth verse instructs Aeris' soul. It says that the souls of normal mortals who die are like a confused newborn without parents, whereas Aeris should collect his wits in the afterlife and return to the phylactery. The last verse calls on spirits in the afterlife to protect Aeris' soul and help guide him to the phylactery.

When the verse of protection is finished, an appalling silence settles on the cavern. Ishild takes the weapon and slits one of Aeris' bound wrists. As Aeris' blood runs through the guide groove and off the table, Ishild collects it in a cup and takes it to the phylactery behind Aeris' head. Aeris can't see but can hear Ishild chant while he pours the blood onto the phylactery. Some blood rolls off the space-time shell and onto the floor, but some sizzles as it burns off.

Aeris can still hear the sizzling when Ishild steps over and plunges the weapon into Aeris' heart.

As Aeris' life slips away, he can hear the immortals start to sing a requiem for him.

### **Aeris' spirit regathers: Bardo, liminality**

#### *sensory deprivation*

- Sensory deprivation amplifies the person's expectations. Ask Derek what Aeris expects to experience when he dies, then work it into the sensory deprivation description.

When Aeris' consciousness first stirs again, he has a feeling of timelessness, and feels like there's no boundary separating him from his surroundings. After a little time, he starts to imagine faces -- both people he knows and faces he's never seen before. He's at peace, but vaguely feels a presence of evil.

Following this logic:

These usually follow a particular sequence of degeneration from, just after death, the clearest experiences of reality of which one is **spiritually** capable, and then proceeding to terrifying hallucinations that arise from the impulses of one's previous unskillful actions.

Aeris should be rewarded with some insight here -- possibly that the universe is an illusion.

Ultimately, Aeris starts to see lights that remind him of cave drawings. He exists in a cave to find himself in a forest -- like the kind of winter forest a Roman might find itself tramping through in the barbarian lands. He sees a shed there; nearby he's horrified to see some spirit wolves are eating a corpse. What else interesting can we do with wolves in the forest? Werewolves? Aeris' brother is a werewolf? Skeleton wolves? 4 columns are attacked by wolves

#### *peace, then horror*

Aeris is afraid of wolves, forests -- maybe a fight here.

#### *Lawrence of Arabia gate*

Aeris finds himself on a wasteland stretching in all directions. In the distance he sees four columns of beaten soldiers marching towards him...they pass him and Aeris can follow them to an abandoned fort. Most of the buildings have been brought down by time. He comes to a flimsy screen door beating in the wind, making a constant beating noise. A sign on the door says that the place is shut down and not to enter.

He looks over and sees the witches chorus there. They tell him about "firestorm" and "yawning graves." If he asks, they tell him this place is Bardo, the place of between two existences.

### **Aeris' spirit in the mummy cache**

Aeris' spirit becomes conscious in the cache. He finds the immortals fighting heatedly over what happened to the phylactery -- which is missing.

The fairies suggest that Aeris had many enemies, including the West Wind, and maybe the East Wind came in here and stole it. Ishild ridicules the idea that the wind blew the phylactery away; instead, he says that the tinkerbelle fairy Ivy has been "watching over" Aeris since he freed her, and when she saw what he was doing alerted the other fairies. One of them must have stolen it.

The other fairies give a tell -- one of them touching his face -- confirming Ishild's suspicion. Ishild says accusingly that as fairies they should have noticed. Yellowjacket objects that they were busy torturing the human boy to death, with Hackles adding dejectedly that torturing the human boy to death is what Aeris would have wanted.

When asked who did it, they say that the fairy Lacewing is the most likely culprit. She is a profound master of stealth, who can eavesdrop on people, pickpocket them, or stalk them by hiding in the darkness of their own shadow. Sometimes when you think you saw something out of the corner of your eye, that was Lacewing sidestepping out of your view. She could have come in here and taken it.

### **Fight with the Gradskan kings**

Taking a second to look beyond the arguing immortals, as a spirit Aeris can also see a ghostly crowd standing around the outside of the ritual ring -- the spirits of the Gradskan kings whose mummies are here. The founding king Marduk steps forward from the front row, saying, "We've only seen part of your story Aeris, but we've seen enough to know that your plan portends great evil. Death is the place where mighty kings are brought low, but fortunately, in death we can prevent you from finding the phylactery."

But as he and the kings near him loosen their swords, another on the other side of the circle, Shakkan, steps up. He says instead, "Marduk, the dirge called for the dead to protect and guide Aeris, and we answer that call." He and a few other kings spread throughout the crowd then loosen their swords.

In response, Marduk says, "Shakkan, you betray your forebear and liege lord. I call you traitor and heinous, and we will destroy you along with Aeris." He and the kings with him get on one knee to pray for Gradska's blessing in the fight, and Shakkan's kings attack.

## *Powers*

- Protections from mummification ceremony
- power from the reverence of their feudal subjects
- Royal weapons and royal raiment
- Gradska's blessing
- Ghost powers

Good kings: Marduk, Anshan

Evil king: Shakkan

## **Find the phylactery at Lofton Castle**

When Aeris experience Hollin as a spirit, he sees it as a ghosttown. -- people working their daily lives in a town that looks abandoned to him. He also sees ghosts generally hanging around dead bodies.

Here, Aeris finds that the fairies have created X extra phylacteries and he has to play Let's Make a Deal to find the right one.

## **Leading the immortals against Lofton Castle**

Once Aeris picks the right phylactery, his body wakes up back at the mummy cache. He can tell Ishild where the phylactery is and they can attack the fairies at Lofton Castle to get it.

--

Lawrence of Arabia gate -- history of hell lists some items (bridge, river) that always appear in these things. can things in death tempt him to stay? does he meet a ruler of death there? Does the ruler of death ask him to do something to return?

god with head back to front

maybe when Aeris first “lands” in the land of death he falls in with 4 columns of dead, untalking.

first man to die would have come here first? What about my undying adam? Some of the 99 who never left nonexistence? Or, these would have been extra beyond the 99. I guess time doesn't pass here, that's one thing to keep in mind. So, these extra-99 are not cognizant that the 99 have been on earth for 1000's of years.

soul will die also, else Aeris cannot experience non-existence. It's a mystery how one in non-existence can experience anything or come back -- but coming from nothingness is the sign of a god.

image of hell: p 44 would be good for nonexistence

### **to do (pre game)**

### **questions for players**

### **recap from last time**

### **post game summary**

Aeris and Ishild go to the Gradskan royal mummy cache under the Mooncalf, where Ishild performs the ceremony to turn Aeris into a lich, ritually killing him. Aeris' spirit regathers at the cache so that his body can reform at his phylactery, but he finds that the fairy Lacewing has stolen it. The spirits of the Gradskan kings there attack Aeris to stop him from seeking out the phylactery, summoning their angel of death Kidu for help. Aeris is beaten, but his animal spirit, Isaf the Black Worm, appears and destroys them.



treasure given out

**to do (post game)**

- player questions to answer
- requests to send players after the game