THE CURSED
CHATEAU

BY
JAMES
MALISZEWSKI

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a fantasy roleplaying adventure
for 4-8 characters of levels 4-6
by James Maliszewski

CREDITS

Writing: James Maliszewski

Editing: Ninja Editing Team X
Art Direction: Tim Hutchings
Cover Art: Aaron Acevedo
Interior Art:

       Pixie Bledsaw
       Chris Bors
       Olaf Breuning
       Jeffrey Brown
       Kitty Clark
       Erol Otus
       Siebren Versteeg
       Todd White
       Sherry Wong
       Steve Zeiser.

Cartography: Robert Conley
Graphic Design and Typography: Jason L Blair

Special Thanks: Kevin Brennan, Daniel Proctor, Allan Grohe, Tim Hutchings, Richard Iorio II, Mary Maliszewski, Dave Martin, Chris Steward

DEDICATION

This adventure is dedicated to the memories of Bob Bledsaw, Tom Moldvay, and Clark Ashton Smith, all of whom excited my youthful imagination in ways I can never hope to calculate.

ADVENTURERS AT THE GATE   4/09

INTRODUCTION

The Cursed Chateau is an adventure module written for use with any old school class-and-level-based fantasy RPG. It's largely self-contained, enabling referees to drop it into an ongoing campaign without much difficulty. Background information has deliberately been kept to a minimum in order to facilitate this. Likewise, game mechanics, while present, are as "broad" as possible so that the material contained herein is easily adaptable to your favorite old school RPG or retro-clone of the same.

The Cursed Chateau is a difficult adventure, which is to say, it contains a lot of monsters, tricks, and traps that could prove fatal to the characters of inattentive players. Furthermore, the curse under which the chateau has fallen "changes the rules" of the game in certain ways, both subtle and obvious. These changes punish certain types of behavior and rewards others. Players who either fail to grasp the nature of the curse or who choose to act against that nature will soon find their characters suffering under great disadvantages. This is by design.

The original version of this adventure won Honorable Mention in the Fight On!/Otherworld Miniatures Adventure Contest in the summer of 2008. Since then, the adventure has been expanded slightly and generally tightened up to make it more useful to a wider audience. The Cursed Chateau is my homage to the classic adventures Tegel Manor (by Bob Bledsaw) and Castle Amber (by Tom Moldvay), as well as to weird tales of Clark Ashton Smith and I hope it may prove even a tiny bit as inspiring as the works of those three fine writers were to me as a younger person.

BACKGROUND

Lord Jourdain Ayarai was the scion of a long line of aristocrats. His family had been wealthy and influential for longer than any could remember. An only child, his parents died when he was four years old, entrusting him to older relatives and servants, who cared for his education and upbringing. A precocious, charming boy, Lord Jourdain matured first into a vain, dissolute youth and then a jaded, venal adult. He had the power, money, and influence to satisfy his every desire and did so – but it was not enough to overcome his ennui.

Lord Jourdain turned to necromancy, black magic, and eventually demon worship as means to alleviate his world-weariness and boredom. He communed with elemental spirits, slew his servants and raised them from the dead, and even summoned dark beings from the netherworld, but he found no pleasure in any of these activities. Lord Jourdain eventually came to the conclusion that the mortal realm offered him nothing but tedium and so committed ritual suicide in the hope that the next world might prove more interesting than the present one.

Lord Jourdain's spirit survived his death as he had hoped, but it was bound to his earthly home by a curse he could not explain. Thus, he could not move on to whatever reward – or punishment – awaited him in the afterlife. Instead, he remained forever linked to his chateau. Unable to manifest himself in a visible form for long, Lord Jourdain can now influence events within his old home and command his now-undead servants (q.v. Jourdain's Fun, below). He can also create a magical barrier that prevents entrance and egress from the chateau's grounds. This last ability is the primary way Lord Jourdain now seeks to entertain himself: trapping foolhardy adventurers and tormenting them. As soon as the characters enter the grounds of the chateau, they are Jourdain's prisoners and he intends to make full use of them for his own purposes.

INVOLVING THE CHARACTERS

The characters can become involved in this adventure in several ways. First, they may simply stumble upon the chateau while traveling through the wilderness and then enter it, unaware of its curse. Second, the characters may have heard tales of the chateau, Lord Jourdain, or the curse affecting both and seek it out to see for themselves. Finally, a distant relative of Lord Jourdain to might employ the characters to explore the chateau so that he or she might lay claim to an inheritance. Other possibilities exist, of course, and the referee is encouraged to use the chateau and its inhabitants in any way that best fits the current needs of his or her campaign.

JOURDAIN'S FUN

Though dead, Lord Jourdain is still bored. He seeks diversion and (he hopes) release from his earthly bondage by toying with any living beings that enter the ruins of his former home. Unfortunately, Jourdain has become, if anything, more fickle and malicious in death than he was in life. Just what he believes will divert him from his own suffering at any given time is thus seemingly random, at least as far as outsiders are concerned. Once every turn (10 minutes), the referee should make a roll. A roll of 1 indicates some random event has occurred as a result of Lord Jourdain's intervention. Roll again on the following table to determine exactly what has happened:

///	table
1	Lord Jourdain briefly manifests as a ghostly apparition of himself as a child (see Room 7 on the ground level for a description), points at a random character, and laughs before he fades away. (Repeatable)
2	A *deck of many things* appears on a convenient nearby table or shelf.
3	The characters hear the baying of a dog or wolf. (Repeatable)
4	The characters hear a loud creaking noise, either beneath their own feet (if on the upper level) or above their heads (if on a lower level). (Repeatable)
5	A character looking into a nearby reflective surface (a mirror, water, etc.) sees not his or her own face but a red-skinned demonic one instead.
6	A statue, painting, or other work of art speaks the name of a random character and tells him or her, "Flee, while you still can!"
7	The characters hear a woman scream. The sound appears to be coming from a level other than their current one. (Repeatable)
8	A broom, rake, shovel, or other similar implement springs to life briefly and smacks a nearby character on the head. The implement has 5 hit points and AC 7. Its attacks do 1 point of damage per hit and continue until it is destroyed. (Repeatable)
9	1-12 skeletons assemble out of a nearby pile of bones and attack the characters. (Repeatable)
10–11	Lord Jourdain briefly manifests as a ghostly apparition of himself as an adult (see Room 7 on the ground level for a description), stares intently at a random character and sighs deeply, before he fades away (Repeatable)

///	table (cont'd)
12	The characters hear disembodied cackling coming from behind the closest non-secret door (Repeatable)
13	The characters see glowing red eyes in the nearest darkened area. The eyes fade from view as soon as the characters get within 10 feet of them. (Repeatable)
14	A colony of normal bats flies about the characters' heads for 1d4 rounds, confusing them in the process. If engaged in combat, the confusion caused by the bats exacts a −2 penalty to all attack rolls and saving throws and no spells may be cast until the bats disperse.
15	A number of dancing, purplish lights appear and briefly circle about the characters before winking out of existence (Repeatable)
16	The closest non-secret door suddenly swings open with a loud bang, increasing the likelihood of the next wandering monster roll by one (i.e. on a roll of 5 or 6).
17	The character briefly feels as if dozens of crawling insects have gotten under his or her clothing or armor, when in fact no such thing has occurred.
18	Fresh blood drips from a nearby wall and pools on the floor. (Repeatable)
19	The next step a random character takes breaks through a wooden floorboard and causes a black slimy substance to bubble out on to the surrounding area. The slime is not dangerous but it has a noxious odor. This event can happen even on the upper level, but obviously not in the caverns below, in which case nothing happens.
20	Lord Jourdain briefly manifests as a ghostly apparition of himself as a youth (see Room 7 on the ground level for a description), lunges at a random character with a spectral sword, which passes right through him or her, before he fades away. (Repeatable)

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Unless a result includes the word "repeatable" in parentheses after it, the random event can only happen once. If rolled again later, no random event occurs.

WANDERING MONSTERS

At the end of each turn (10 minutes), the referee should consult the same die used for Jourdain's Fun (q.v.) to determine if the characters encounter a wandering monster. A roll of 6 indicates such an encounter. Use the following table to determine the type and number of the monster:

///	table
1	2-8 Hell Hounds (5 HD)
2	3-18 Giant Rats
3	Hervisse the Cook (now a wight, 20 hit points)
4	Landri the Majordomo (now a spectre, 43 hit points). Landri carries a key that will enable entrance beyond the locked door in Room 10 of the chateau's first level, as well as into several other locked areas of the chateau.
5	Rixende the Maid (now a wraith, 27 hit points)
6	1 Gelatinous Cube
7	3-12 Skeletons
8	2-8 Zombies
9	1-6 Ghouls
10	1-8 Shadows

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If any of the named creatures above (Hervisse, Landri, Rixende) are destroyed, any roll indicating that they appear as a wandering monster should be treated as no result, meaning no wandering monsters appear that turn.

ESCAPING THE CHATEAU

As noted above, Lord Jourdain traps anyone who enters the grounds of his chateau in the hope that they might entertain him sufficiently to free him from his spiritual bondage to his former home. Thus far, he has no evidence that this is even possible, but he continues to try nevertheless. Fortunately for the characters, Lord Jourdain is in fact correct, but freeing his spirit requires that those trapped not merely suffer misfortune at his hands but that they survive long enough to suffer enough misfortune to divert him and end the supernatural ennui that has cursed him.

To do that, the referee should keep track of the number of diversion points the characters accumulate during their exploration of the chateau. Once they reach 100 diversion points, Lord Jourdain is sufficiently entertained that his connection to this place weakens and he is free to move on to the afterlife. When this happens, the magical barrier that prevents the characters from leaving the chateau grounds breaks and they too are free to move on as they wish.

The characters start at 0 diversion points and accumulate points as follows:

///	table
	+1 per 2 points of damage suffered by any player character
	+1 per room explored in the chateau
	+1 per combat in which the party engages
	+1 per failed saving throw by a player character
	+1 per prohibited spell a player character attempts to cast (see Front Gate, below)
	+1 per random event that occurs (q.v. Jourdain's Fun, above)
	+1 per wandering monster encountered
	+1 per time a player character utters a curse (+2 if he or she curses the gods)
	+1 per time a player character expresses fear
	+2 per ability point lost/drained by any means
	+10 per level drained
	+20 per player character death
	-1 per 1 point of damage healed
	-2 per successful saving throw by a player character
	-2 per time a player character exhorts his or her companions to be brave
	-3 per ability point gained/restored by any means
	-3 per time a player character praises the gods
	-15 per level restored by any means
	-25 per character restored to life by any means
	///

The above list is not exhaustive by any means. The referee should add his or her own conditions to the list, using those here as a guideline. In general, positive or beneficial actions bore Lord Jourdain and thus lower the running tally of diversion points, while negative or harmful actions entertain him and thus increase it.

If, through their actions, the characters achieve 100 diversion points, they hear a disembodied voice shout out, "The curse is lifted! I am free!" The chateau continues as it did before except that the referee no longer rolls for Jourdain's Fun. Likewise, any creatures created through the agency of Lord Jourdain (such as his undead servants) collapse immediately into dust. Its master now free to move on from the Material Plane, the chateau could in theory be permanently cleared of its foul denizens and claimed by the adventurers (or anyone else) as their own. In addition, the magical barrier preventing escape is now lifted and the characters may leave the chateau grounds if they choose to do so.

MAP KEY

The chateau grounds are divided into the ground level and the upper level, each of which is keyed separately below. The caverns beneath the chateau likewise have their own key.

Ground Level

The chateau's ground level consists of the lower level of the chateau itself, as well as the grounds located behind its walls.

1. Front Gate

A wrought iron gate bars entrance to the chateau's grounds. The gate squeaks loudly and takes some effort to push open. Once all the characters have passed through it, though, it quickly snaps shut and radiates powerful magic to those who can detect it. Neither brute strength nor magic (such as knock or passwall) will breach the front gate, which remains securely shut until the conditions specified in Escaping the Chateau above are met.

The magical barrier generated upon entering the grounds extends 40 feet above the top of the chateau's highest point and 40 feet beneath its lowest and prevents all egress. In addition, the barrier neutralizes the functioning of the following spells (though Jourdain enjoys seeing the characters attempt to cast them, as noted above):

> *astral spell, dimension door, find the path, passwall, phase door, teleport, wish,* and *word of recall.*

In short, most spells that enable quick and easy movement across distances do not function on the grounds of the chateau until the curse holding Lord Jourdain is lifted. The referee is the final arbiter of what spells are thus prohibited from use and he or she should feel free to add or subtract to the list above.

2. Fountain

In the courtyard is a circular pool in the center of which is an ornate fountain carved from a bluish stone not native to the region. The pool once contained water that has long since dried up, leaving behind only a thin layer of sediment and dead leaves. The fountain is a three-tiered affair supported by carvings of four hippocampi. When a character approach-

es the fountain, it will spring to life, spewing a greenish liquid from the fountain itself and from the mouths of the four hippocampi.

The liquid looks as if it were algaefied water, but it is not. The liquid is in fact magical in nature, brought into being by Lord Jourdain's power and its effects are different each time someone dares to drink it. Each time someone drinks the liquid – even if it is the same person – roll 1D8 on the following table to determine its effect:

///	table
1–2	No effect. Treat as water in every respect except coloration.
3	Treat as *potion of healing*.
4	Treat as *potion of diminution*.
5	Treat as *potion of growth*.
6	Treat as poison.
7	Treat as poison, with a −2 to saving throw.
8+	No obvious effect, but for the next hour, the chance of a random event occurring is increased by 1. Thus, a wandering monster appears on a roll of 5 or 6, while an event from Jourdain's Fun (q.v.) occurs on a roll of 1 or 2.

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The liquid continues to flow from the fountain for as long as the characters are on the grounds of the chateau. Should they stay long enough, the entirety of the pool will fill with the green liquid but will not overflow it. Liquid subsequently taken outside the grounds of the chateau has no effect on its imbiber whatsoever, except tasting like the algaefied water it appears to be. Liquid taken in waterskins and imbibed later while on the grounds has a random effect as noted above, but the referee should add 3 to any result (i.e. a roll of 3 should be read as 6, etc.). The green liquid dries up should the curse be lifted and the fountain will not function until the pipes beneath the surface (see Room 9 of the underground level) are repaired.

3. Well
There is a stone well located in a corner of the courtyard. The shaft of the well extends close to 40 feet below the chateau's grounds, where it meets an underground fresh water lake. There is in fact nothing of value in the well shaft. Characters who climb down the well in an attempt to escape the magical barrier will find that it leads to the caverns beneath, specifically Room 9 of the chateau's underground level (see below).
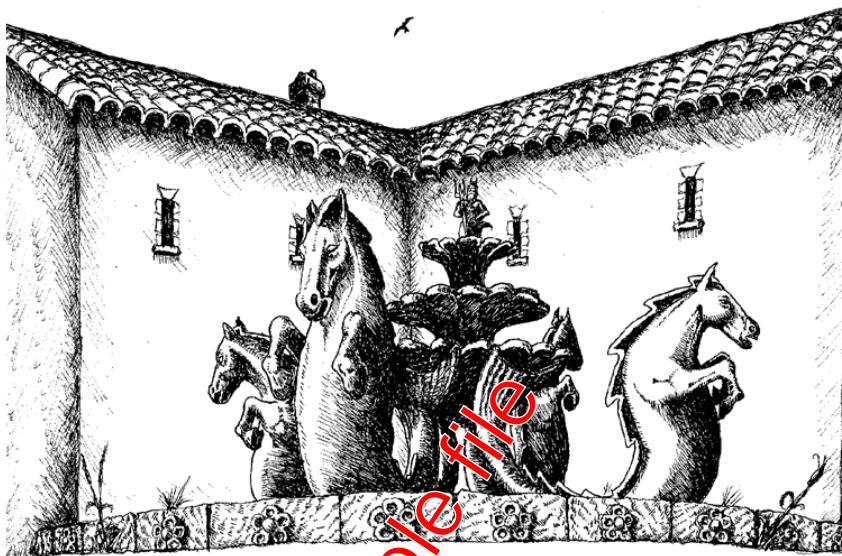
4. Smithy

This small building once housed a smithy used for fashioning metal items used by the inhabitants of the chateau. Lord Jourdain also used the smithy in crafting items he would later enchant and for that purpose he conjured minor fire elementals to stoke the flames in the forges. The two forges are currently cold and inactive, but if anyone should per-form any action within the smithy that generates flame, heat, or light (whether normal or magical), the fire elementals will spring to life once more and attack. Being minor, these fire elementals have only 4 Hit Dice each (29, 25 hit points), but otherwise are identical to more powerful examples of their kind. Should one of the elementals come into contact with a flammable substance – by a successful attack against a cloth-wearing opponent or by being struck by a wooden staff, for example – there is a 3 in 6 chance that this attack will generate another minor fire elemental that can attack the next round.

The elementals attack until either they or their opponents are destroyed. The elementals possess no treasure of their own, but there are two swords in the smithy that, while non-magical, are serviceable enough to use in battle.

5. Stable

This larger building was the chateau's stable, as evidenced by a variety of rotting saddles, reins, and other riding gear to be found within. Also to be found are the bones of three horses, each within a stall bearing its name (Galien, Jakelin, and Vuissance, respectively). The bones are just as they appear to be and there is nothing of value here beyond the aforementioned equestrian accouterments.

6. Kennel

This small building is the kennel where Lord Jourdain kept his "hunting dogs" – hell hounds he had summoned to the Material Plane. There is a 50% chance that four hell hounds (5 HD, 34, 33, 27, 23 hit points) can be found in the kennel. The remainder of the time, the kennel is empty, since the hell hounds patrol the chateau grounds, looking for intruders. The kennel otherwise contains nothing of value, but the building smells of smoke and brimstone.

7. Main Hall

The main hall of the chateau was once richly furnished and decorated, but all its finery has moldered away, leaving this large room bereft of almost anything of real value. Besides ruined furniture, shattered plaster, and the bones of small animals, the only other things that remain are three statues of grotesque, winged creatures. These statues are, of course, gargoyles (30, 26, 21 hit points) and all three will spring to life if anyone comes within 5 feet of any one of them.

8. Parlor

The parlor was where Lord Jourdain greeted guests and conversed with them while they waited for dinner to be served. The room contains the remnants of many luxurious chairs and sofas. The curtains and other decorations are similarly damaged and decaying. The only items in the room seemingly immune to the passage of time are three different portraits of Lord Jourdain, each one depicting him at different ages – as a child, as a youth, and as he was at the time shortly before his suicide. These portraits hang on the north, west, and south walls and show no signs either of damage or of age. They are firmly ensconced on the walls and cannot be easily removed by any means without also damaging the walls on which they hang. Removal of a portrait destroys any magical qualities it possesses (see below) and angers Lord Jourdain, resulting in an immediate roll on the Jourdain's Fun table above.

If any character stares intently at one or more of the portraits for longer than a round (1 minute), there is a possibility he or she may gain a bonus or suffer a penalty. The characteristics of each portrait are as follows:

Childhood Portrait: This portrait shows a young boy with long, curly, blond hair dressed in blue velvet clothing. He is seated in a large, cushioned chair and has several dogs arrayed at the foot of the chair. One small dog rests on the boy's lap. If the youngest character in