

Negotiating the Dungeon

Count von Steinpapierschere has been running ... some sort of small business, quite successfully, for a long time. A very long time, But now he's proposing to take his business model Disc-wide. His problem is that establishing a franchising operation requires funding. Yours is assessing his proposal, and determining whether he's an enterprising businessman or an archaic blood-crazed evil resurgent from the dark depths. (Or maybe both - let's not be prejudiced here.) And are you the only people with an interest in the Count's operations?

A demonstration of the newly released 2nd edition Discworld Roleplaying Game, for five players.

Background

Count von Steinpapierschere discovered years ago that the old reliable vampire-castle-and-cowering-village routine could constructively be enhanced; by suckering adventurers into a deathtrap/maze, he could ensure a steady flow of saleable second-hand equipment, which he quietly recycled through shops in the nearby village. The occasional party who actually successfully threaded the maze would get a final confrontation with the Count himself, who'd then bug out through one of his half-dozen escape routes before the local villagers showed up to storm the place, thanked the adventurers, held a big party, and sent them on their way with many expressions of democratic intent. Then, a few months later, the Count would return.

This classic dungeon was originally mostly manned by downtrodden goblins, but even before goblin rights became a widespread cause, the Count began phasing them out – the replacement rate was a perpetual problem. Nowadays, he has a few not-very-bright zombies on the strength, with instructions to flee from any clear mention of religion; he can have them repaired most times when they get chopped up (his **Igor** is happy to assist), but there's long-term turnover issues there too. Hence, mostly, these days, he uses automatic mechanised systems. In fact, although he hates to admit it, the place has become a bit of a high-risk funfair. And now, the recent installation of a steam engine to run a lot of the more complex deathtraps is what's lead to him thinking up his new scheme.

Also, he's fairly recently gone Black Ribboner. He really doesn't like to discuss the fact that most of his unlife was spent preying on sapient food sources, but if pressed on this, he'll point out that (a) he made a point of drawing in people who (thought that they) knew the risks, and (b) a lot of now-very-respectable vampires have similar undiscussed histories – the honoured Lady Margolotta, just for a start. Anyway, he'd been sublimating most of his compulsive urges into running the dungeon business for *years*; now, he's just formalising it a little bit more. Instead of extracting people's blood to drink, he's going to extract their money – and, in best vampiric style, he's going to get them to thank him for exploiting them.

This doesn't just mean updating his own dungeon; it means franchising the whole concept. However, this plan needs funding. So he's been in touch with his bank, the **Royal Overseas Bank** on Heroes Street in Ankh-Morpork, asking about a line of credit. He hasn't gone into many details on his plan, though he's said that he'll be happy to do so once he knows that the Bank are interested in considering his proposal. The Bank politely pointed out that loans to vampires tend historically to be peculiarly high-risk, especially for clerks sent to negotiate the details, who are forever being locked up, predated on by vampire brides, and otherwise maltreated. The Count politely pointed out in return that he was now a respectable Black Ribboner, and hence not prone to such shenanigans. The

Bank checked this with the **League of Temperance**, who confirmed that, yes, the Count is now a subscribing member – but thought that they should perhaps send an agent to make sure that their good name wasn't being misused.

So the Bank has decided to send an agent to assess whatever the Count is proposing, along with that representative of the League, who should represent something of an insurance policy for the clerk, and a couple of freelance consultants, who may also, coincidentally, be able to assist in dealing with dubious *issues*. Also, someone decided to mention the whole business to a reporter from the financial pages of the *Ankh-Morpork Times* who's been sniffing around their taste for granting high-risk loans at usurious rates of interest, and agreed that, given a little agreement about confidentiality, this reporter could go along with the group and see if (a) this negotiation represented an example of the sort of high-risk business they sometimes engaged in and (b) the Count wanted to talk to the press about his ideas – whatever they are – thereby increasing the amount of (metaphorical or literal) sunlight that could be directed onto the matter if the Count caused problems (and getting said reporter out of the Bank's hair for a few days).

The Location and Environs

Castle Steinepapierschere is, these days, really just the cap on an underground complex, and the centre of a business operation. "Clients" are routed through the "secret" entrance at the foot of the hill, and so (if they make it) hit the castle cellars from underneath. Actual invited or welcome visitors just come in through the front door, which looks horribly inaccessible until someone lowers the elegant and well-made metal drawbridge and pivots the stark rock outcrop out of the way.

And at the foot of the hill sits **The Village**, which no longer goes by any other name. This runs (very comfortably) largely off the Count's business model, with shops (several more than in most villages) selling "*adventuring supplies*" and "*party rations*", a 10' pole factory tucked away behind the village watermill, and a very secure inn, with a golem bartender (to make sure).

The Count also has "**agents**" in every town and village within a 20 mile radius, whose job is to identify likely "clients" and direct them to the castle. They mostly do this by sitting around in the corners of taverns while wearing dark cloaks, asking if people "*seek the secrets of Castle Steinepapierschere*", dropping hints about wealth and loot, and selling "old" maps for AM\$1 each.

The Complication

As noted above, the Count has had a steam engine installed to power some of his more baroque and implausible boobytraps and mechanisms. It works fine, but the installation was performed by a team of engineers including a dwarf named **Galen Ironcrusher**, who learned a great deal about the Count's system and arrangements in the process. Galen then went away and described what he learned to his brother, **Groober Ironcrusher**, who considers himself to be an entrepreneur, looking for ways to profit from modern technology. Actually, Groober is a bit of a nerd, who thinks in old-fashioned terms about everything except technology. He's thus spent the last few months preparing to clear this dungeon out in a modern, rational fashion. He and his company were more or less set to go anyway, but now they've heard through Galen's contacts that the Count may be planning to expand his activities – which they think will dissipate his resources and make him harder to pin down. So they've decided to move *now* – putting them just behind the PCs.

(Galen, who is still along with Groober, is potentially a weak link in Groober's faction; he rather enjoys working with steam engines, and it's slowly crossing his mind that if the Count is eliminated, he won't be placing any more orders. Groober sometimes has to keep a certain amount of pressure

on him to keep him onside with the family tradition of digging stuff out of the ground. Which said, Galen does value family, and also much enjoys blowing things up.)

PC Involvement

The game starts with the PCs on a train heading out of Ankh-Morpork up the Ankh. The group has been thrown together somewhat briskly, and haven't had much chance to talk yet; describe each of them in turn, maybe combining this with the process of deciding who takes which character, and give each of them a quick explanation of why they're along, described more or less as a flashback:

- **Joyce Morrigan-Grenfall:** An employee of the Royal Overseas Bank of Ankh-Morpork. Can have a bit of a flashback to a briefing about this assignment, and a discussion of the occasional minor *peculiarities* of dealing with vampire clients. (“A client of long standing – very long standing ... given his noble title and Uberwaldian name, dealing with him might possibly prove *challenging* for an employee of the bank ... but we are assured that he is a member in good standing of the Uberwaldian League of Temperance, and you will be working with consultants who may be able to help with any little *misunderstandings*...”)
- **Dark Kravarkus the Truth-Splitter:** The Count's business proposal is a little vague – apparently he wishes to settle some terms of business with the bank before going into detail – but he has said that it involves “providing facilities and support to gentleman of high social status in their localities who operate as with a high degree of legal independence”, and Kravarkus's family have been doing that for generations; indeed, Kravarkus himself has recently been in discussion with the Bank about the complexities of adapting his family's traditional arrangements to the world of modern finance. So he's been commissioned on a consultancy basis to assess whatever the Count is proposing.
- **Yarrok the Consultant:** Whatever the Count is proposing, it's likely to involve security issues, and Yarrok offers consultancy in that field. He has also agreed to assist with ensuring the security of the group by whatever legal means may prove necessary, in the *unlikely* event of that becoming an issue.
- **Herbert Squireling:** When the League of Temperance were asked to certify the Count's *bona fides* as a member, they noted that (a) he is indeed a paid-up member with nothing questionable in the records about him, and (b) they don't actually know very much about him either way, as none of them have ever met him face to face. This suggests to them that it might be wise to make a castle call for a little chat. Herbert got the job.
- **Hagrid Bloomberg:** A dwarf financial journalist, who's been taking a *polite* interest in the Royal Overseas Bank lately. The bank has noted his interest in their loans policy – they really don't agree with the suggestion that they charge usurious rates of interest whenever they can claim that a loan is “high risk” – and suggested that he might like to go along when one of their people is negotiating such a loan, to see how above-board it is. He'll have to get the client to agree to any breaches of confidentiality, of course, but he can always write an anonymised story – and he may find this particular client interesting. And they'll even help with his travel expenses... Somehow, Hagrid let himself be talked into all this before he learned all the relevant details.

The PCs have also been told that the Count was sent a clacks message requesting that he permit a visit; he replied that this would be acceptable, and that visitors should “*Come to the front door and ring the bell.*”

After which, the PCs have a chance to talk if they wish, but otherwise, well, it's a long train ride with a lot of cabbages to be seen out of the windows. Joyce may have to restrain herself from running a book on the speed with which raindrops run down the window, flies run up it, etc., while Yarrok may want to go and quaff in the refreshment car (though his Compulsion is Barbarian Heroism, not Carousing.) Also, the train is a sleeper, and the party will spend a night on board; Joyce, being the bank's employee, and Kravarkus, being posh, get compartments to themselves, Yarrok and Hagrid share a bunk (Hagrid will presumably take the lower bunk), and Herbert gets a very nice coffin in the guard's van.

The train will get the party to Zemphis late in the second day, after which they can check into the **Station Hotel**, which is very comfortable; the railway staff will find a way to convey to the characters that the rest of the town is... a bit rough. Well, downright shady, actually. They *might* take a quiet night in before setting out on the morrow – but they do have various Compulsive Behaviours to consider.

In any event, any member of the party who ventures into any bar while looking dangerous (mostly meaning Kravarkus or Yarrok) will be targeted by one of the Count's agents, who will initially try to drop a few hints about the vast wealth of the Castle and sell them a map. If the PC says that they're going to do business with the Count, the agent switches mode; *"Oh yes, you'll need the upper door, then. If you're expected, they'll let you in."* These agents are naturally interested in any news about possible developments at the Castle, but aren't very close to the business.

The Next Day

The PCs have horses reserved for them at the livery stables attached to the Hotel, with all costs for up to two weeks' hire covered by the Bank. Directions for Castle Steinpapierschere are easily acquired, there or elsewhere, and are fairly straightforward – but anyone giving such directions will say "You do know what you're doing going there, don't you?" – then shrug and say "your choice" if pressed, or look worried if the PCs insist that they're going as the Count's guests.

The horses are okay for the c. 20 mile ride into the Carrack Mountains, but it's a bit bumpy; call for a Riding roll, with a failure meaning 1d Fatigue that can only be recovered by a night's sleep, and critical failure also meaning a sore backside that gives -1 to all tasks for the rest of the day. This will get the party to The Village a bit before nightfall, what with all the ups and downs and the time of year. They'll have to pass through, even if they decided to opt to head straight for the castle.

It's a prosperous-looking place, though all the buildings have roofs coming close to the ground and heavy shutters. There are more shops than most villages of this size, including one with a sign saying "WILDERNESS SUPPLIES" and another saying "HARDWARE AND MISCELLANEOUS EQUIPMENT". If they go in, the former has a good range of foodstuffs, including some excellent pre-packaged trail supplies, and the latter has a remarkable if rather miscellaneous collection of weapons and armour, plus lanterns, backpacks, and a whole bundle of 10' poles propped up in one corner. Lockpicks and the like are kept under the counter, for the sake of form.

There's also a substantial inn; if they go in *there*, they can meet the golem bartender, who doesn't say much but steps in to stop any trouble. And there's a water mill with a small woodyard attached; anyone looking closely will realise that this incorporates a 10' pole factory. All the natives do their best to sustain the illusion, which is very profitable for them, but not at risk to their necks.

Beyond The Village, the road gets rougher, and branches; a barely-visible, rocky track leads uphill toward the now-visible, very gothic castle, while the main route bends round the foot of the hill. If

the PCs follow that, they soon come to a door, looking battered but actually very solid, with a big, brass lock that is actually quite simple to pick (+3 to skill; note that the default is IQ-5, but lack of basic equipment gives another -4). This door is located below a steep slope with the castle looming at the top of it. (Climbing the slope would require skill and equipment.) If the PCs get through the door and insist on going on, the PCs will encounter a series of increasingly deadly traps, the occasional zombie, and so on.

Hopefully, they'll actually opt to head uphill, where they discover that the castle is located on an inaccessible rock pillar; the path leads up to a sharp rock outcrop opposite the door, though if and when they look round there, they find a small shelter tucked away with a big brass bell. Ringing that causes **Igor** to appear on the battlements and ask what they want in a suspicious tone, using a crude megaphone and an ear trumpet to pick up the answer. Once convinced to let the PCs in, he says "Excuse me" and disappears for a moment. Then comes a lot of creaking, and the rock outcrop *hinges down*, permitting the castle door to pivot down to act as a drawbridge. If anyone asks, this should be beyond the strength of even an augmented Igor; actually, although the task used to be performed by the golem who now works in the inn, the power is now provided by a steam engine.

Igor can then introduce our heroes to Count Steinpapierschere, who plays the classic vampire to near perfection and is very hospitable (though he himself "*does not drink... vine*" – he can offer a fellow vampire cow blood). He'll happily offer them rooms for their stay; these have at least two bolts each on the inside of their rugged-looking doors.

Then the Count explains his plans and ideas. He'll also show the PCs the dungeon set-up from his side, including all the downright Grimtoothian traps; he'll admit to being "*somevot Old School, but I zink zat iz due a revival, do you not agree?*". He'll also show them the valued centrepiece of his modernisation process; the blackened iron steam engine in the cellar, mostly tended by Igor, who, if anyone checks at all carefully, is showing a distinctly Igor-ish attitude to safety margins ("Is that pressure gauge right?" "Oh, ith on iths second time round...")

There's lots of opportunity for roleplaying here; all of the PCs should have *opinions* on stuff that the Count does. One thing to note is that the Count should get some opportunity to react to Hagrid's presence; he won't object at all to the idea of having his project publicised, but would like it to be on his own terms, which may lead to some verbal fencing.

Count Steinpapierschere: ST 19, DX 12, IQ 13, HT 11; Vampire; Combat Reflexes; Brawling-14, so Parry 11 and a casual backhand punch for 2d cr. Can transform into a flock of bats, but rarely does so.

The only other living inhabitants of the castle are a couple of goblins, who mostly cringe a lot and keep out of the way, though Igor may use them to help with his tasks. They're not actually wildly maltreated – these days – but the old cringe reflex is *deeply* engrained with these two.

Eventually, after a simple if slightly worrying dinner (it's amazing how unnerving Igor can make a simple salad look – "*I swear that boiled egg is staring at me*"), the PCs will get a chance to sleep for the night. Funnily enough, nothing bad or weird happens in the night.

The Next Day

The next morning, though, around lunchtime, anyone taking the air on the castle ramparts will see something new. (If everyone heads down to the cellars or hides in the Count's office to review his business plan, Igor will come down and say "*I think thith ith thomething you should come to see,*

mathter.”) A half-dozen pony-drawn carts have come into view and are stopping at the foot of the hill. (If anyone asks, it’s perfectly possible, if unusual, to get here by routes that don’t involve coming through Zemphis, so it isn’t too surprising that the PCs didn’t encounter this lot yesterday.) The Count declares that they must be clients; he admits that none of his agents has recently reported a large party incoming, which is a little curious – but never mind that detail.

“Zis is excellent! You may see my business model in zer full swing!”

In fact, the newcomers are of course Groober Ironcrusher and his associates, who set to work on their plan. If the PCs monitor them, they’ll see a number of dwarfs climbing the slope below the castle, carefully and methodically, and doing something with tools there. Closer inspection will note a lot of cables draped around the rock face – actually low-tech blast cord... Meanwhile, one cart is dragged up a low hill opposite that slope, and a couple of large structures are erected there, covered by tarpaulins. If anyone points this out to the Count, he blinks and shrugs; client groups try all sorts of surveys and such, but in the end, there’s just the one way in.

Groober Ironcrusher’s actual scheme is quite simple; tomorrow morning, once the sun is up, the demolition charges will take the front face off the slope, exposing the dungeon to methodical plundering and bringing down part of the castle on that side. Then, the tarpaulins will come off the solar mirrors, making life very unhealthy for any vampire in the target area. (The Ironcrushers don’t know about the Count’s shapeshifting ability, but that doesn’t matter; the flock of bats takes damage from sunlight too.) The dwarfs who go into the ruins of the dungeon will be carrying wooden stakes and a couple of photographic flash guns each, just in case of lurking aristocrats. They also have bellows and some incendiary materials; any dusted vampire they can identify is *not coming back*. Meanwhile, the arrangements will be scrupulously guarded overnight; the mirrors can have lights attached to act as searchlights, and some of the dwarfs have crossbows.

What follows depends very much on how soon the PCs work out what’s going on, and what they choose to do about it. Standing back and letting the bank’s client get dusted and his fixed assets get stripped would certainly be bad for business, but directly opposing this means taking on a couple of dozen well-equipped and surly dwarfs, which might lead to all sorts of messy grudges and business complications. It’s probably best to try and *negotiate* a solution here; Galen Ironcrusher may assist with this. Most of the dwarfs will go along with Groober’s decision, *provided that they get paid*; note that they’re mercenary demolition specialists, not engineers or businessmen, so a bit of constructive ingenuity is going to be required. This may, say, involve partially completing Groober’s plan and letting the Count get away, so that Groober and Galen can get a guaranteed and generous contract for the rebuilding.

Ironcrusher Dwarfs: ST 12, DX 11, IQ 10, HT 11, SM -1, HP 14. Dwarf. Axe/Mace-11, Crossbow-11; Axe does 1d+1 cut, crossbow (Acc 4) does 1d+3 imp. Move 4, Dodge 7, Parry 8 (unbalanced). DR 2.

Note also that, if things start getting loud or visible – like, say, if some or all of those demolition charges go off – or if anyone gets through to The Village, a group of villagers will appear at the castle wielding torches and pitchforks. They’ll probably initially assume that their job is to provide a crowd scene for The Defeat Of The Evil Vampire, but can be switched to being quite annoyed with anyone they are convinced is threatening their cash cow. 10 in all attributes, Move 5, Dodge 8; pitchfork with skill 7, 1d+1 imp, -1 to opponent’s Dodge, +1 to opponent’s Block or Parry.