

The cellar was cold and dark, rain poured incessantly outside, as it had for days. The lantern hung at the top of the stair revealed naught of the dark abyss below, yet still he walked. Down into the whispering darkness.

Unknowable tongues wailed as he stumbled blindly, he clung to the silver dagger and proceeded forth, muttering a prayer for protection as his steps felt impossibly loud in the stony void. Finally he caught sight for the faintest moment of something, a distant, dim red light.

And so he proceeded and the voices grew louder and he forced himself to slow. Ahead laid a door cracked and his very mind howled to run but he forced himself to open the door. Within was madness.

Four men stood 'round a fifth gagged upon the floor, one of them held a bowl below the bound man as one used a dagger and slit his throat, draining his blood into the bowl as he repeated some unknowable chant over and over and the cellar seemed warmer, somehow. Two men held the sacrifice's arms down as the ritual blade dragged down his chest, a sickening cracking and whining sound filling the air as the bound man died gagged and pinned. The dagger stopped and now he noted the blade seemed to drink in the dying man's blood.

The Ritualist now brutishly took his hands and wrenched open the wounds made. He found himself petrified by this act. It was too late. He must wait to strike. The Ritualist seized something and took his dagger cutting away at something for a minute that lasted an eternity, the mewling groans and whining screams of the sacrifice turned now to pitiful half-sounds as his life fled him. Now the man with the silver blade took note of the source of the red malevolent light, a circle lined with candles lit with some dark flame that spat forth a black smoke that seemed almost hungering for light. The flame itself was deep red, like blood. And now he noticed the one with the bowl of blood slowly and methodically pouring it as he walked the circle, whispering something he could not truly put to word but invoking a deep fear.

Something in him knew what was happening even if he wished it not to be so. Yet before he could act the Ritualist pulled forth a still-beating heart still oozing blood in slowing currents, his chant rising to a crescendo as he spoke some horrible words in language better left to memory and spirits and plunged the hungering dagger into the heart. Now the heart convulsed and beat faster and the room seemed to sear with heat and he heard whispers of a different kind and unwittingly he stepped forth into the red candlelight, though the four took no note of his presence as he stood there, terrified of the darkness that now seemed... changed.

The sound of rain above stopped, leaving the world empty for but a moment before-

It smells like sulfur.

And suddenly the air shimmered in the bloody circle's center and then it *bled* and shifted and warped and changed and now it was no longer empty air but was eyes.

Eyes that hungered. Eyes that knew him. Eyes that watched him.

And more than eyes it was shape, incomprehensibility given form. Shimmering darkness and dancing shadow and faces a thousandfold and a great horned bestial head silently laughing at what he knew at once was his own imminent annihilation.

So he resolved and filled the hungering and foul air with a wild cry and rushed forth, wrenching sword

from sheath and swinging and slashing open one of the four's throat though he couldn't say whose as he rushed ahead with the silver dagger in hand and stabbed forth and struck nothing but air as the thing shifted and the malevolent cellar filled with the laughter of a terrible thing toying with its food. Before he could truly understand he felt a cold in his back. And when he looked he saw impossibility. Shadow solidified as blade and thrust into his back and emerging from his gut. Yet as he grew heavier and colder he felt a distant growing heat, sulfuric smell so thick now he could hardly breathe.

When he looked up he saw the same eyes now filled with joy and joined by a hungering and vast maw. And soon he felt nothing at all.