

Veil
of
Darkness™



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❖ PRELUDE ❖

The Forge of the Evil Heart

A hand had been nailed to the library door. It appeared gaunt and shrunken, a thing all but withered to the bone. And before it, Kairn of Csarda paused.

When he examined its lines in the morning air, a sharp and almost irresistible urge began to build in him. He found himself wanting to touch it, to place his own hand — fingertip to fingertip — against the decaying flesh.

The hand was positioned so that anyone standing before the entrance could not fail to see it. Beyond this the building itself loomed, fortress-like. Its massive stones dominated the hill upon which it stood, its columns, towers, and windows of colored glass giving it first one aspect then another.

A man approaching the rise from one angle might perceive a stronghold, yet from another he would swear the ruins of a church were standing in his way, while from still a third an impression would come over him that this could be nothing more cheery than some vast mausoleum.

And though the hand upon the door added to the building's stark character, it was not alone. High above, resting in the shadow of the battlements and confined within a cage, lay the decomposing body of a man. Its clothes were gypsy tatters. Its arms, having been thrust through the bars, hung loosely before it. The hands were still clasped together; it seemed to Kairn that the wretch, to his last, must have been pleading for his life.



Gazing at the corpse, Kairn wondered what it would be like to be trapped there, to be confined so near the remains of a man whose heart, at least once, must have beat with the same cowardly rhythm as his own.

Such thoughts were not the norm for Kairn, but this day his heart and lungs were filled with a new energy. It was defiant and yearning. Like a great tide it swept over his fears to bury them beneath murky waters, leaving behind a taste for forbidden things. It was willing to move him into danger, this energy.

Pushing the strangeness of these thoughts aside, Kairn reached for the handle. He placed his hand, pale as it was, over the black iron and felt the mysteries of the building rush out to meet him.

He knew now why his brother Michael loved this place, gaining in a single touch, some intimation of the power held behind these walls. Perhaps, Kairn thought, it was a power only scholars and monks might truly measure.

There were no guards. And the last man to breach the sanctity of the library, to enter it without permission, smiled down at Kairn from the battlements. That broken-toothed grin was now the only expression the gypsy would ever bear.

It was dark, and the smell of decaying books overtook the rancid scent of death from outside.

Kairn opened the door. Its hinges protested loudly against each burst of his strength, but once inside he could hear the librarian working no more than an aisle or two away. It was dark, and the smell of decaying books overtook the rancid scent of death from outside. He limped forward.

"Are you there?" Kairn asked, cautiously. "Is it you?" There came a pause in the sound of books being moved along the shelves, and suddenly, as if there had been no reason to fear all



along, an old man came out to greet Kairn, moving with a vitality that belied his age. Even in his gray years, the librarian seemed everything Kairn was not. Funar was large and moved

“Don’t be afraid, boy. Walk like the son of our lord. You are that, aren’t you?” Funar’s voice assaulted and buoyed Kairn’s spirit all at once. “Even the Master’s fifth son should go where he pleases!”

with the presence of a warrior: his garments hung on him as if each tatter had occurred but recently, and in the heat of battle.

In one hand he carried a small volume, bound in leather. In the other — but he had no other. His right hand had been replaced by a bit of metal some three years earlier, and was now a hook from which a lantern hung.

“He isn’t here, is he?” Kairn asked. He continued to look cautiously about. “Michael, I mean.”

Funar shook his head negatively, causing an amulet about his neck to rattle against its chain. “Our royal scholar is off putting quill to paper. The quill itself is exquisite, a divine piece inlaid with gold — a gift from your father. I believe Michael is in love with it.” Funar laughed. “Ah, the pity. You should have been the scholar Kairn. You’ve the heart for it. But I suppose he’s made a horseman of you?”

In response Kairn gave but a weak smile, fighting as best he could the urge to turn and run. But then something caught his eye and he remembered his reason for coming.

“Don’t be afraid, boy. Walk like the son of our lord. You are that, aren’t you?” Funar’s voice assaulted and buoyed Kairn’s spirit all at once. “Even the Master’s fifth son should go where he pleases! But let’s have a look at you. Haven’t really seen you since you became a man. Eighteen now, eh?”



“Is that it?” Kairn asked. His eyes fixed on the book in Funar’s hand, on its worn cover and the rough edges of the paper within. He licked his lips. “Were my messengers clear about what I wanted?”

“Clear enough. Though I wish you’d come to me yourself. These days even trusted servants can’t be trusted. Your father’s spies are everywhere. I had my own men verify the story.”

“Is that it?” Kairn repeated. “No, not this,” the librarian answered. “This is a simple book of curses. Your father ordered it from the city of Cluj, and I have yet to inform him of its arrival. But what you want, that I have at my desk. Come.”

As Kairn took a stride to follow, he found Funar swinging about suddenly to block his way. “But remember, Kairn, it’s not enough for you to be the good boy. You were always that, always obeying your father and those howling brothers of yours.

“If you want what I have to give you, you’ll have to find the creature you’ve curled and hidden away inside yourself. It’s time for you to be a true man.”

“I have no beast inside,” Kairn said honestly. “Not like what you mean, Funar. I’m hollow.”

The big man laughed and led them deep into the building. It was difficult for Kairn to keep up, and when at last the light of the lantern seemed lost, he hurried along behind it into the vaulting darkness.

“This woman you seek to win,” Funar asked, “does she mind that leg of yours?” They had arrived. Deep in the recesses of the library, they stood about Funar’s desk. It had been set into a small vault which served for the librarian’s office, and there were iron gates for doors. It was cold, and the few candles burning at the edges of the desk and the lantern on Funar’s hook gave no heat.

On one side of the desk lay a huge tome, almost hidden in the shadows, and yet it caught Kairn’s eye immediately. From



what he could see it was a thick-ribbed volume bound in leather, and it worked an impression on him more deeply disturbing than the hand which had been nailed to the library door. It gave the illusion that it was absorbing the light of the candles without reflecting it.

Though it was all but impossible to see clearly under such circumstances, Kairn believed the book had been chained to Funar's desk. He had to get closer.

"What is that?" Kairn could not resist asking. As he moved toward the edge of the desk, the librarian blocked his way, snuffing out those few candles nearest the volume.

"Nothing you want to be involved with," Funar boomed critically. "Something newly arrived. Came in from Cluj with this book of curses, and I haven't had time yet to take its measure. Now, I asked you a question, boy. Does she mind that leg of yours?"

"I told her I fell from a horse," Kairn answered. "And that's true enough. Once I failed to clear a hurdle, and father threw me from the saddle in a rage. But, old man, you've teased me long enough. Do you have it?"

"Yes, Kairn, and there are few enough of these in the world." From the darkness at the foot of his desk, from some secret drawer, Funar pulled out an almost tiny book whose golden lettering seemed to glow, adding its own light to the room. "The verse of Po Chu, translated from the ninth century Chinese into Romanian. Love poetry."

Kairn reached quickly for the work, but Funar pulled it aside. When Kairn tried again it was with the same result.

Puzzled, then thinking it a matter of the agreed-upon payment, Kairn reached to his belt. The purse he had tied there jingled as he loosed it. The coins within made a musical sound as they were tossed out upon the desk.



"Take the advice of a wise man," Funar said. "Forget this woman and your schemes. You will bring only harm to yourself and to her. Leave now and word of this will never pass my lips."

"No!"

"How goes it, then," Funar asked, "teaching your love to read?"

Without answering, Kairn tried again for the book, yet this time the librarian secured it within the folds of his tattered cloak. The hook and lantern moved threateningly to guard it.

"Fool!" boomed the big man. "First, make me believe she's worth the risk. I lost a hand betraying your father's interests once, and all the silver in your purse won't bring it back. There's a gypsy out front, a poor caged bird whose only daughter was burned alive on a pyre of books I'd sold him.

"Now, helping you win the heart of a peasant girl is treachery. Yes it is! And if all that weren't bad enough, you've chosen, I hear, a Hungarian sweet — a descendant of Magyar dogs!"

Kairn's blood stirred.

"Do you deny it?"

His eyes flashed, yet Kairn's voice did not rise to anger. Instead he paused as if in thought, forming for himself the words that might break Funar's resistance.

"Now, helping you win the heart of a peasant girl is treachery. Yes it is! And if all that weren't bad enough, you've chosen, I hear, a Hungarian sweet — a descendant of Magyar dogs!"

"Nothing," Kairn said, "nothing which we are to know in this world equals the power of her beauty. She is a stem of glass, a fragile rose, a petal locked in a crystal. All that is frail and weak and wanting in this world can be perceived in her eyes. And when her hands arrive in mine, they come to me silent as the winter, more gently than snow."



"I will teach her to read, to be Romanian, and to charm my father's heart."

"Ah, it is I who am the fool," Funar admitted. "For believing such dreams, and for letting you hang us all."

"It has no power, this small one. Your father bade me acquire it because of the stories surrounding it. You understand; how it helped one king curse his enemies, or another to see his future in the stars. But true books of power have no such tales."

"I know you, old man," said Kairn. "You would defy my father with your last breath."

"You're right." With that, Funar brought forth the gold-leafed volume and handed it to Kairn, who quickly hid the treasure within the folds of his own garments.

At the door of the library, Kairn turned back to the larger man, meeting Funar's gaze, eye to eye.

"That book in your hand," Kairn said, "the one of curses. Will you use it against my father?"

"No," Funar assured him. "It has no power, this small one. Your father bade me acquire it because of the stories surrounding it. You understand; how it helped one king curse his enemies, or another to see his future in the stars. But true books of power have no such tales."

"How do you know?" But Funar only laughed and sent Kairn on his way.



A mournful wind accompanied Kairn on his way to the village. After taking a horse from the stables of the Keep, he rode out (as he told the stableboy) to practice for the Autumn Fair. There was soon to be yet another race his father would expect him to win.



He passed graveyard and monastery, always keeping the library and his family's stronghold to his back.

The Keep (with its portcullis and many battlements) and the library — when taken together — appeared to rise above the mountain pass like sentinels. They were gray and resolute guards of Csardan independence. And yet what shadows, what chained darkness the valley possessed seemed to be focused there, between the two of them.

Elsewhere sunlight fell as fluid as laughter, and it cheered Kairn greatly to reach the limits of the town. He first passed the garrison, a small stone building where the guards bowed slightly and let Kairn pass without question. Next came a silversmith's shop, then a tavern. Kairn smiled as he heard from within the strains of a bawdy drinking song. It was one his brothers had taught him.

Harvests were in, and the streets had become thick with carts. Everywhere, knots of farmers and villagers engaged one another in rounds of lively bartering.

Yet as Kairn's mount trotted about the corner where the apothecary stood, he noticed more than a few of the faces glancing his way with suspicion. His family was not well-loved, and the appearance of a prince, even the fifth and by reputation the most harmless of the seven sons, did not go unnoticed. Nor did it fail to arouse concern.

In return, Kairn smiled. They had seen him in town and that in itself was fit enough for his plan. Now he brought his horse about toward the crossroads and open land, slipping out through a back street where few eyes might see him pass.

Barns, pitchforks, and the tents of a gypsy camp glittered in the noonday sun. But Kairn rode on, spurring his mount toward one of the most distant points in the valley.



Along the way he looked up into the snow-covered mountains and found himself distrusting them, as though their stones, even now, might be in cold communion with his father. The trees themselves seemed to whisper evil things at his passing, their voices eager to reveal secrets — his secrets — to anyone who asked.

At last, after leaving many an unsuspected turn in his path through fields, woods, and mountain streams, Kairn came out along the holdings of Jakab the farmer. From miles away he could see the house, a column of smoke rising from its chimney.

But Kairn had not gone far before he realized something was wrong. He noticed that even his mount tensed, as he had been taught horses do before the onset of battle. But where ahead was the enemy waiting for his charge?

With his heart rising in his throat, Kairn tried to reason. The smoke from the chimney — as he drew closer it seemed wrong somehow, brutish and thicker than normal. Now he could see horses where no horses should be. They were tied before the house.

He spurred his mount, commanding it headlong into the aura of danger that lay before them.

As the distance closed, Kairn realized that he was utterly unprepared. No sword hung at his side and no blade lay hidden beneath his cloak. At his belt his purse hung hollow, swinging empty with each jounce of hooves against the hard ground. It told him there would be no bribes he could pay this day, and yet with all that was in him he beheld the face of Deanna as he had last seen her.

Green eyes and soft lashes beckoned him. The innocence of her voice, like light on a distant sea, drew him on.

Closer, closer, and Kairn prayed for some new and violent strength to overtake him, to drive him victoriously through whatever enemies lay ahead. But the opposite proved out, for what little determination remained in him failed, vanishing in the instant he recognized the horses.



Golden bridles and silver bells, the expertly stitched saddle leather that only a royal family might afford. These looters, these pirates, these wanton criminals who had invaded the household of his love — they were his family. His brothers and his father were here.

Kairn dismounted in a single, jarring action, practically flying from the saddle. His injured leg stabbed at him as though freshly broken, but he paid it no more attention than the scratch of a thorn in passing, nor did he stop to tie his horse before the little home, nor to catch his breath as he flew headlong through the open door. The scene which greeted him was that of a tavern torn apart by drunken bullies. A table, overturned, blocked his way, while the floor lay strewn with food, with bits of bread and half-eaten pieces of fruit. Someone had broken a cask of wine to flood the place, and every tapestry, oil lamp, and small household treasure had been torn or smashed with that same cruel and invincible delight he had often seen his brothers use.

A corpse lay near the fireplace, its right arm outstretched into the fire. And those flames which — in roaring — had once filled this room with life and warmth, now ate away the flesh of the arm, searing it to its immortal bone. Kairn recognized the half-turned face. It was Deanna's father.

With his heart rising in his throat, Kairn tried to reason. The smoke from the chimney — as he drew closer it seemed wrong somehow, brutish and thicker than normal. Now he could see horses where no horses should be.

Waiting in the depths of the scene, with the stench of burning flesh all about, a shadowed form looked up to meet Kairn's gaze. In one hand it held a cup, in the other a half-empty flask of wine.



Its eyes were remorseless and restless all at once, pale orbs lit only by the reflection of the flames, and its entire countenance was everything that is the worst in predators. To this creature, breathing and causing pain were one and the same, a truth Kairn knew all the more precisely because he knew its name.

“Kairn, Kairn!”
Deanna called his name. Her lips were swollen, her eyes red with tears. Bruises lay like tattooed patterns on her forearms and her cheeks.

“Father,” Kairn said. Instinctively, he almost bowed, forgetting for an instant his concerns for Deanna. He could see only the scars, the anger, the inner, living hatreds that had spent their years redoubling within the heart of this man, the Lord of Csarda.

“You disappoint me,” said his father, Nikolae of Csarda. “I expected you far earlier than this.” With the empty cup in his hand, he motioned about the room. “The lesson is all but done.”

Now, only upon the drawing of his next breath did Kairn sense the others, only as his heart ceased to thunder in his ears could he detect the laughter echoing from deeper in the house. He heard the muffled screams. While, like the crack of bone, his father’s voice brought silence once again.

“Bring her here!” Deanna! Two of his brothers brought her in, while two more came along behind. Beside her they were giants, laughing gods of the mountains, warriors whose berserker rage no regular army might hope to tame. But each knew the pride of their father, holding it more dearly and deeply to themselves than their own lives.

There was Khristian, the minstrel, with his lute dangling at his belt, and Nathan the huntsman with his most beautiful cap set jauntily above his brow.



And with the jeweled sword of their ancestors ready in his hand, Aleksander did no more than smile at Kairn, giving him that same, knowing smile he had borne on the day of his knighthood.

All these sights might have comforted Kairn in another place, at another time. Even the drunken leer of Feodor, the vainest of them all, might have seemed comical if in his hands, and with all his strength, he were not holding Deanna.

At the sight of her, Kairn rushed forward, but two of his brothers pinned him, holding him against one wall while his father watched. If he could have expended all the life in his heart and lungs, used it in a single rush to break his brothers’ grip, he would have. He tried.

But while Kairn’s thoughts leapt like tongues of flame, and while — in all his life — his soul had never burned more brightly, the strength of his arms proved no equal to the forces holding him, nor even to the evil laughter in the room.

“Kairn, Kairn!” Deanna called his name. Her lips were swollen, her eyes red with tears. Bruises lay like tattooed patterns on her forearms and her cheeks.

“Feodor, Khristian, let her go!” Kairn screamed. Yet suddenly it became clear to Kairn that the forces surrounding him were caught up in some terrible frenzy, a blood-lust that grew all the stronger for his protest, that fed upon his fear. Though they wore leathers and swords, though their beards were trimmed and their rings jeweled, and though golden chains dangled about their necks — here were animals.

Whatever kinship may once have bound these creatures to Kairn was gone. In their hands now he was no relation, but prey, trapped and held in that instant before the killing blow.

“So Kairn wants a woman!” his father exploded in rage. “A Hungarian animal to dilute our proud Dacian blood!” Reaching out, the ruler of Csarda tore the sword from Aleksander’s hands.



Its point surged wildly toward Deanna. "What wouldn't I have given you, but this!"

Tears flowed freely down Kairn's cheeks. He could hear nothing but Deanna's frightened breaths, their quickness like that sound, so small — the cry that escapes a deer whose throat is in the jaws of a lion.

In her eyes were wild, unknowing flames, and with each moment her struggles became more rhythmic, pulsing. It was as if something inside her knew it could not escape and now wished only to hurry the inevitable along.

Kairn wished he could talk to her. But they were beyond all words. The forces of darkness held them both, and they might come together now only in so far as their twin, racing hearts might burst, each upon the same instant.

The jeweled blade rose between them. And suddenly Kairn lost all sense of himself and of her, and of the raging, mad voice of his father which overtook them all.

"This then is the only marriage you will have, Kairn of Csarda!" But to Kairn the words meant nothing, and before him the universe went black.

Warmth. Later he would remember the warmth of it, and the brightness, deeper than all roses, as they poured the wine down his throat. The cup was pressed against his lips.

Voices urged him on. Drink! His throat opened, and once again Kairn swallowed, swirling in a darkness, almost drowning in the glory of the wine.

But it was not wine. It was blood. It was Deanna's blood.



Without identity, Kairn soared above a darkling sea, skimming ever closer to unseen waters — almost remembering. After a time the slightest of sounds came to him. He recognized the hushed movement of servants. He heard a centipede make its hurried maneuvers against the wall.

Was it days or years since his thoughts last came together? Kairn couldn't say, but at last and without opening his eyes, he knew his name. Once again he took possession of his limbs, his breath, and his beating heart. He flexed the fingers of first one hand, then the next. And he knew that he was whole.

By the sound and scent of things, by the very feel of the room about him, he was home. This room was his. The bed upon which he lay was his own. But something immutable had changed, or something he once thought to be immutable.

It was Kairn he did not recognize. The familiar was now unfamiliar. No thought, no emotion, no sample from the cold

schemes inhabiting his brain seemed like the Kairn of old. And most certain of all he knew . . . his every weakness and hollowness had been filled.

In her eyes were wild, unknowing flames, and with each moment her struggles became more rhythmic, pulsing. It was as if something inside her knew it could not escape and now wished only to hurry the inevitable along.

Where there had once been uncertainty now there was stone.

Where once passion flared, ice grew in fields of hoarfrost and of rime, and all in him that had wanted kindness now wanted to be unkind.

It was not revenge he sought. That word, in its slightest intimations, never occurred to Kairn.



Instead he most vividly remembered how it felt to be held against his will, to be powerless, to be the weakest reed whose will is nothing beneath the tread of man, under the boot of his brothers. This he would never again endure.

“It’s alive!” Khristian shouted at the sight of him. Kairn wanted to curse them all, but he could not.

Power. He would have power. He would have more of it and wield it more certainly than ever his father had thought to do.

By the time he rose and dressed (with mechanical, unthinking motions), Kairn had his plan more than half-complete. He made for the stairs and the downward spiral to the hall.

He heard the laughter of men sitting about the table. Sunlight was pouring in through slits in the stone (meant for firing arrows) and Kairn

realized his family was breaking their fast in the hall below, greeting morning with a hearty meal.

The smells assaulted him. There was roast meat, garlic and onions. The scent of blackened bread constricted his throat. He grew dizzy and nearly vomited, but still he forced his way along, maneuvering his feet down the curving stairs.

“It’s alive!” Khristian shouted at the sight of him. Kairn wanted to curse them all, but he could not. When he opened his lips, he found he had no voice, and the steaming, roiling scents of food which only a moment before had repulsed him, now drew him on.

Stumbling forward he pushed his youngest brother, Peter, aside and — to the sound of a chair falling, dishes smashing, a cry of protest — Kairn pulled a steaming shank of meat to his lips. Hands, throat, lips, they all burned at the passing of the juices. His teeth tore at the roasted flesh.



When Feodor raised a dagger in alarm, Kairn raged at him through his clenched teeth. It was a wolf’s growl, and it elicited howls of laughter from around the table.

Kairn’s father, his laughter overshadowing the rest, filled a chalice with wine and brought it around the table. He thrust it into his son’s hands, and though half the contents were lost to the violence of the gesture, Kairn drank the rest in a single gulp.

“We thought the devil had you,” his father said. “That you might never wake.” A shade of regret seemed to come alive in his father’s voice. And was that a hint of shame manifesting behind those soulless eyes? If the cup in Kairn’s hand had deigned to provide him but one additional drop of wine, he could not have cared the less.

“Welcome back, brother,” said Nathan the huntsman. “Never saw a man sleep like that, days and days of it, and hardly one breath out of you for each sunrise. But we’ll ride today, you and me. It’ll put the wind back —”

“No!” Kairn yelled, or thought he yelled. The effect upon those who heard him was as if the king himself had issued a command. Indeed his father met his gaze with the curiosity of one ruler taking his measure of a fellow king.

Kairn filled his chalice and emptied it, throwing back his head as the liquid rushed in cool swallows down his tortured throat. He barely knew what he was about, but the plan, his plan, had to be attended to. The first steps were already overdue by an age or more it seemed.

“I have decided,” Kairn said, “to take over the duties of the royal librarian. Funar will be dismissed, and my own staff appointed. Father, do you. . .” He had almost asked if his father agreed. Instead he finished, “do you understand?”

But whatever reactions he might have anticipated, laughter was not among them. Yet that was precisely what they did. It was somehow a great joke to them. Was it his agony? His transformation? Was it the sternness in his voice which caused



them to double over in delight? It was as if the court jester were at hand, or as if he himself had taken over that playful task.

Looking one to the other, they laughed. And of them all, it was his father who laughed the loudest and the longest.



When Kairn reached the entrance to the library, he tore the hand from the door. First he broke its wretched grasp from the nail securing it, then, using all his weight and leverage, he eased the iron itself from the planks. This he threw as far from the door as he was able. And in that action, Kairn's attention was caught by a glint from above, by a reflection of light on silvered metal.

He looked up. The gypsy corpse no longer inhabited its cage alone, but shared that space with a new apparition. This creature, though bloodied almost beyond recognition, sported a hook in place of one long-gone hand. The glint which had caught Kairn's

eye was Funar's amulet, now hung — perhaps in jest — about the neck of the gypsy corpse.

"You look so small now," said Kairn. At last he understood his father's good humor. And though it took him the balance of the morning and more daring than Kairn at first realized, he climbed the battlements and, once there, leaned dangerously away from the ancient stones to retrieve the amulet. His injured leg stabbed at him. It became an agony which he welcomed and, strangely, sought to extend.

He put the chain about his neck, but paused before pulling himself back to safety. Bringing his lips near to Funar's ear he asked, "Was it worth your life?"

"You were a fool," he continued. "I shall not make the same mistake."

He descended into the depths of the library, making his way without delay toward Funar's vault, the desk, and the mysterious book he had last seen chained there.



After gathering lanterns from around the library, lighting them, and opening as many window screens as he could reach, Kairn approached the book. The library beyond Funar's vault was alive with light. Bright patches of red and blue, falling from the stained glass, decorated the heavy timbers of the shelves and the dark volumes resting there. And in those beams, throughout their length and breadth, stirred the dust of ages past.

Even Funar's vault was aglow with the yellow flames of the lanterns. To Kairn the place seemed a tomb, ancient and untouched. With a dry sound, the bodies of beetles, dead for centuries, crunched beneath his boots.

"I must stop thinking of this as Funar's place," Kairn said aloud. It was as if the words he spoke were meant to break a spell, to dissolve the feeling in his heart that he was intruding into a place that was not his. "This is my desk now. The mysteries of this great book are mine to unravel."

And the book itself had not moved, nor had it grown any less mysterious. Measuring three feet by two, with a ribbed spine thick as man's outstretched hand, the book seemed to weigh down the desk where it sat. To Kairn's amazement, the rough-hewn timbers had actually begun to sag.

"I must stop thinking of this as Funar's place," Kairn said aloud. It was as if the words he spoke were meant to break a spell, to dissolve the feeling in his heart...

Then there was the matter of the chains. The links themselves were heavy, forged of a dark iron, and of a weight Kairn had seen used at Csarda's Keep, to raise and lower the portcullis. And it was not the desk to which the book had been chained, but in this light it became clear that the holding spike had been driven into the floor of the vault.



"Were you trying to keep this from being stolen?" Kairn mused. He ran his fingers across the cold chains; he found the lock. "Or is all this to restrain the book itself? To prevent its escape?"

"From one aging librarian to another," the correspondence read. It spoke of the Agrippa. Ancient and dangerous, it was a book of power that no man had been able to tame.

Then, suddenly, it didn't matter anymore. Kairn had to open the volume. His patience had vanished long ago, but as if recognizing that fact upon the instant, he tore at the chains with bare hands. They came taut. They jangled.

But they did not budge. Where had Funar hidden the key? Quickly, Kairn fumbled through a dozen items on the desk, through folders and small wooden boxes. Then the drawers. In one

envelope, its wax seal unbroken before Kairn opened it, there was a letter.

"From one aging librarian to another," the correspondence read. It spoke of the Agrippa. Ancient and dangerous, it was a book of power that no man had been able to tame. And what was known of its history could be told in a few words.

It had entered Romania in the first century of the Christians, smuggled in by a general who commanded the conquering armies of Rome.

Much later, the Agrippa fell into the hands of barbarians. From among them, the book brought to power a great leader, a warrior who set the tribes against their Roman conquerors. No more merciless, more maniacal fighters had ever before opposed the standard of Rome. And in 271 A.D., the Imperial Eagle was driven from Dacia.

But always, it seemed the book itself was in control of the events surrounding it. No one dared to destroy it, but in time wise men chained the monstrous work in



dark and hidden places, keeping all knowledge of it from ambitious men. In closing, the writer assured Funar that he was delighted to be rid of the Agrippa. The silver he received for it would ease the nightmares of his waning years.

Kairn opened the glass of the nearest lantern and set the note to flame. As he watched the paper burn, it came to him where Funar would have placed the key, and in reaching down he found that he was right. In the same hidden compartment from which Funar had drawn the book of poems, Kairn felt the steel of a key as long and cold as the finger from a dead man's hand.

Though the key turned with difficulty, Kairn released the Agrippa from its chains within seconds. He brushed the restraining links aside. Then, holding his breath, he opened the cover. He might as well have pulled back the lid of a coffin, or turned away the sealing stone from some ancient tomb. There was a breeze, more known than felt, as if it were a cold wind of

the heart. And yet the flames of the lanterns faltered and grew dim. The scent was the scent of animals.

Each black letter on the page, drawn by hand, caught and held his attention. They struck Kairn as if all truth were embodied in their straight, dark runs of ink. And yet he could not distinguish a single word. This was no Romanian alphabet, nor were they Hungarian letters, nor even the ancient Latin of the Romans. They were utterly and irresistibly alien.

Heavy, rough-edged pages turned beneath Kairn's hands. His eyes searched for repetition, for some sense of letters used in the pattern of a language. But every turn of the page and every drag of the quill upon these pages revealed no more to Kairn than a thousand upon a thousand different, individual symbols.

For his understanding, there was only the wind, that strange and featureless stirring of the air. It called to him. It whispered his name. From within the leaves of



the Agrippa, an evil light began to seep forth. The whole, enveloping strangeness of the situation was such that Kairn could not distinguish what of it was real, or what of it — if any — was not.

Like the glint of unexpected gold, the light of the Agrippa drew him closer. Bathed in its glow, his eyes began to make sense of the words upon the page. He saw his name. And then, without warning, it seemed to Kairn that a knife was driven through his teeth, the sudden, murderous force of the blow throwing him away from the desk.

As he fell, the sense of the blade stayed with him. It drove into his tongue, filling his mouth with blood. Still he saw nothing, his hands finding no enemy in the emptiness before him, no hilt of the knife at his lips. Yet the cut continued. It burned in Kairn's throat and twisted into twin, unstoppable blades. One rushed upward to impale his brain. The second divided him into two equal rivers of pain. With relentless force, it cut open his heart, lungs, and gut, mixing their blood along its razored edge.

On hands and knees, Kairn pulled himself from the chamber. Sunlight had disappeared from the corridors, and it was through a cold, musty darkness that he made his way. The light of the vault flickered behind him like yellow laughter.



Coming to his feet near the library door, Kairn found himself enveloped in a blind rage. The pain of the unseen knife was gone, but in its place there came a remarkable sense of death. This sense — it was not of peace at the end of life, nor of the horror of dissolution, nor of rotting in the earth. It was instead a driving force, the death that dwells in the oceans of eternity and knows the passing of all mortal things — the death which eats them whole.

With a single leap, Kairn grasped the bars of the cage in the battlements. He tore them open and reached within. When he descended again to the ground, it was with the cold heart of Funar in his hand. He had torn it from



within the ribs of the corpse as if he were brushing aside a wall of reeds. He had leapt to the battlements and returned with the ease of stepping from his bed. His leg no longer knew the pain of having been broken, nor of having healed badly.

Yet this improvement Kairn did not notice. With no trace of revulsion, he brought the dead flesh to his lips. He began to eat. And with each swallow, with each dread morsel that fell, like ice, down his throat, the valley dimmed. Step by step, it fell beneath a curse more powerful than any mere words could have conjured.



Kairn did not see his family for the rest of that day, nor for all of the next. He wandered about the valley. In a fever, his thoughts raced. Images and schemes filled his skull until it became like a hive, a humming thing alive with the bits of disconnected but deadly plans. He ventured into the cemetery and there watched another rush of clouds overtake the sun.

It did not seem enough that in the course of a day he had unalterably changed. Where once there had been timidness and the hollow uncertainties of youth, now nestled a dread cruelty. It filled and infected him. Not only had Kairn the power to inflict great harm, the desire for it now overwhelmed him.

This sense — it was not of peace at the end of life, nor of the horror of dissolution, nor of rotting in the earth. It was instead a driving force, the death that dwells in the oceans of eternity and knows the passing of all mortal things — the death which eats them whole.

So strong became the urge to kill that Kairn shook from its force. It exhausted him. Laying down amid the carved stones, he fell immediately into a fevered sleep.



Sleep it was, yet a sleep without rest. Almost from the first instant, Kairn found himself at the center of a terrible dream. He looked out upon the world through the eyes of another man, a nameless creature whose heart beat as coldly as his own. The man was walking the dirt streets of Csarda, approaching the tavern with even, unhurried steps.

"Come now!" said Aleksander. Turning to the barkeep, he added, "an ale for this dim fellow who travels our night in ashen robes."

Through the windows, lanterns and torches could be seen burning. And the silhouettes of many customers, raising their tankards of ale, could be seen blocks away through the misty night. A lighthearted music filtered into the streets.

The stranger entered the tavern. He looked about. Kairn, it seemed, watched through those same eyes. He heard the music fade and cease. He knew the sudden quieting of voices as the many faces in the tavern turned his way. And overriding all was the immense knowledge of a nightmare unfolding.

Before he saw him, Kairn knew he was there, or the stranger knew. It was one and the same. Somewhere in the crowd sat his brother Aleksander. But before it became necessary to expend any effort in the search, Aleksander made himself known. He introduced himself, coming forward through the crowd as though he owned the place.

"What land hail you from?" asked Aleksander. His left hand rested on the hilt of his jeweled sword. He came close, and by the angle of his eyes it seemed to Kairn that the stranger must be taller.

"From the dens of wolves," answered the stranger. "From the darkness across the sea."



"Come now!" said Aleksander. Turning to the barkeep, he added, "an ale for this dim fellow who travels our night in ashen robes. But, Sir, I ask again and urgently, from where do you hail?"

The stranger accepted the ale proffered and seated himself with a sigh at the nearest table. He drank deeply and sighed again, but in Kairn's dreamy union with the man it seemed the bitter dregs from the bottom of all barrels had become lodged in his throat.

"The roots of mountains," the stranger said. "I come from the grave of the sun."

"Were you drunk when you entered, man?" Aleksander asked. "It's poor practice to insult us so. And wherever you're from, how did you pass the Keep without answering to my guards? No one makes it up that pass without our knowing."

"I did," the stranger answered. He drank again. "Or rather, I sailed in from the north."

A timid laughter erupted in the tavern. Men were making way, moving without hurry, perhaps even without thought toward the lanterns along the walls. They left Aleksander and the stranger alone in a circle of their shadows.

"To the north, my friend," said Aleksander, "lie the Carpathian Alps. You'll find we show little love to our unannounced guests." He stood suddenly, drawing his sword. "And damned little courtesy to liars!"

It was as if a red shade had been pulled down across Kairn's dream. The world swam in its crimson light, and the stranger prepared to stand. But though his muscles tensed, to everyone else in the room he appeared motionless.

"I say again," Aleksander growled, "what business have you in Csarda?" Kairn's brother rested the point of his blade on the table. With the turn of his head, he signaled one of his men to bring reinforcements, guards from the town's garrison.



As he watched the man exit the tavern, the stranger smiled. "Are you afraid then, of a teacher?"

"I fear no man!" Aleksander howled. He raised the sword. "And I need no lessons." The blade flashed, glinting yellow in the tavern's light. With preternatural speed, the stranger was out of his chair. He rose. Somehow he avoided the blow, and Aleksander's strength sent the edge of his weapon into the table, deep in the wood.

In the next instant the stranger had his hands about Aleksander's waist. Their faces came close, and as their cheeks touched, the stranger drew in Aleksander's breath, feeling the heat of the exhalation rise through his own nostrils. In that closeness, he made his move. His hands, like scythes, moved through Aleksander's chest, brushing aside mortal bone and ribs as if they were willow branches.

Aleksander's face went rigid with astonishment. His rage vanished in an instant, to be replaced by the unseeing mask of death.

Withdrawing those hands, the stranger moved, turning his gory grip to the hilt of Aleksander's sword and pulling at the blade — wrenching it from the table. Next he brought it around, neatly severing Aleksander's head from his shoulders with a single blow.

Silence. Kairn heard the pounding of soldiers' boots in the street. Yet from the stranger he knew only a coolness to match the snow of the mountain peaks.

"A lesson for Csarda," the stranger said, laughing as he lifted Aleksander's head from the floor. He moved to the bar, there depositing the severed head as though he were tossing a bag of coins upon the wood. "An ale, you pigs. I'm paying for an ale!"

But before the dark one could drink, Aleksander's man was through the door and the soldiers behind. Their blades surrounded the stranger. With leather strips they bound him in seconds, handling his strength as if arresting a common brawler. Indeed it seemed as if the



stranger had lost whatever strength he had, or had exhausted himself in the killing of Kairn's brother.

The stranger's only response was to laugh. And it was to the music of that laughter, hysterical as it was, that he was pulled from the tavern to be hanged.

Then Kairn passed from the dream and back into the cold night of the cemetery. There he lay, face down among the gravestones. His teeth were bared, his tongue cold against the earth.



When morning came it was as if the sun were dying. For though it remained aloft, it seemed stricken with some mortal wound. Above, the sky rushed with clouds, scudding gray and black monsters which did all they could to blot out the failing light.

Still, though only a remnant of that sun (a dim shield struggling to remain fast behind the clouds) rose into morning, it hurt Kairn. His blood burned. And rising from the mists of the cemetery, he hurried home.

The Keep was familiar and unfamiliar all at once. The stones were the same. The same guards stood before it with their knives

The stranger's only response was to laugh. And it was to the music of that laughter, hysterical as it was, that he was pulled from the tavern to be hanged.

and their bows. Yet the feeling of the entire place had been transformed into a scene of such startling emotion that it took Kairn off his guard. He paused, and to his amazement the guards backed away.

No longer was the gate strong, the walls formidable, the tower impregnable. Their illusions of power had vanished. To his right and to his left, the guards watched him, backing away like frightened dogs. And in Kairn's imagination it was as if the Keep had been



replaced by the painted props of a stage. All was now backdrop and paper — to be torn through as easily as if he were a child at play.

“Leave here,” Kairn said simply. He pulled her up and pushed her toward the door. She stumbled over the broken planks and vanished into the Keep, leaving behind only her blood and the soft, fading sound of her sobs.

But Kairn was no child, and this was no game. What he was feeling was the reality of what he had become, something unknown, something new and — he had to admit — immensely evil.

It was a truth others seemed to grasp at once. Serving women screamed as he entered the hall, and men scurried into hiding. For all the world it was as if a predator were now prowling the Keep. Yet it was not Kairn’s

concern to sow terror among such unimportant beings. He headed straight for his father’s room.

Inside the Keep, away from the light of the sun, it appeared to Kairn that he grew stronger still. His blood no longer burned. And as he approached the oaken door of his father’s room, a determination grew in him that was like the ice of glaciers breaking into the sea.

Placing his hands upon the door, Kairn tensed. He heard the voice of Nikolae, the Lord of Csarda. His father was shouting and screaming within. The sound of a whip cracked in the air.

Without a pause, Kairn dug his fingers into the door. The hinges creaked. Planks of solid oak buckled and sent streaks of dust into the air as the door gave way. Kairn burst into the room.

So suddenly and with such supernatural speed did Kairn enter the room that — for an instant — he saw things as though he were a thief in the shadows. A girl lay tied and bleeding. From the few words he



had been able to discern, Kairn knew her situation: She had been accused of theft.

It was then that the townsfolk had brought her before their Lord — Kairn’s father. And now he sought the truth of things at the end of a whip. When he burst through the door, that whip had been arcing back. Now it lashed near Kairn’s cheek. Yet to his new eyes, the blood-flecked tip crawled forward, providing little challenge when he reached to snatch it from the air.

He pulled the whip from his father’s grasp, spinning the older man around. With a growl Kairn moved forward, past his father. His fingernails, like razors, cut through the leather straps binding the girl.

She looked up at him. She was golden-haired and fair-complexioned, a beauty in the perfection of her youth. Yet her lips contorted as her eyes caught his. Her gaze filled with fear.

“Leave here,” Kairn said simply. He pulled her up and pushed her toward the door. She

stumbled over the broken planks and vanished into the Keep, leaving behind only her blood and the soft, fading sound of her sobs.

In a heartbeat, Kairn turned his attention to his father. The Lord of Csarda had drawn a knife, taking up a defensive crouch as though he were about to combat an assassin. In fact, though his motions seemed as slow to Kairn as those of a corpse, his father was circling, getting ready to lunge.

“It’s you!” his father said as a beam from a lantern revealed Kairn’s face.

“Yes, Father,” said Kairn. “I am back.” The Lord of Csarda smiled. Suddenly the tension disappeared from his face and he began to laugh. “Is this some lesson you hope to teach me,” he said, “by saving a peasant girl?”

Kairn too smiled. Yet for him it was more a baring of teeth, that moment of tension in which a predator unsheathes its fangs before the lunge. Toward his father he felt no fear, no love. No



emotion whatever coursed through his veins. There was only blood which rushed without rhythm. It filled him with a cold to rival the mountains and their icy peaks.

"No lesson, Father," Kairn replied. "I hadn't thought to save her, only to thwart you. If I had caused her pain, you would have thought I was joining in your pleasures."

"Perhaps so." Kairn's father kept the knife he had drawn level with his waist. As he turned it, Kairn could see light glinting off its finely-honed blade. He watched his father's eyes move quickly to take in the shattered door with a single glance. Then they grew pale, as they always did in the moments before someone was to die.

"Your brother Aleksander died last night. They say the man who took him was possessed of great strength."

"Did they say they hanged that man?" asked Kairn.

"So they say. I would have had the guards impaled for saying less."

Kairn made his move. Like the fall of a shadow, he stepped forward. The blade flashed. Kairn caught the hand that held it, feeling his father rush in against him.

Now no more than a hand's-breadth separated the two, and Kairn found his father's strength more than he had anticipated. The old lion was testing him, feeling him out with each twitch of muscle and every bending of the joints. For a mortal he was immensely strong. But Kairn held him, nearly lifting him from the floor.

From his deepest parts, Kairn felt a surge of desire, of some new realization. No hope, no wish, no plan for the future would ever hold this same promise. At last he had become his father's master, and never again would he be afraid.

Yet even in this victory, in the instant of his realization, an image of Deanna came to him. That part of him which had loved her remembered. Alone in him, isolated, it knew that she could never love him as he was now.



Kairn growled. The thought disturbed him. It worked curiously against the joy of his new-found strength, and he despaired.

With that despair cold inside him, Kairn released his father's hand, letting the blade drive deep. It cut. It entered him like fire and turned between his ribs.

"Kill me," he whispered, his lips all but caressing his father's ear. "You destroyed my love. You tried to destroy me. Destroy me now!"

Yet the strength of the blade, tearing inside him, did little to weaken Kairn. Its presence became as nothing, a touch of winter air — and the futility of it angered him.

At the height of his anger, Kairn's lips came against his father's skin. His teeth, like blades, tore the neck, the hot flesh — once more he held the Lord of Csarda motionless. And the blood rushed into his mouth. It enveloped his tongue and coursed like wine down his throat. And though his father struggled, all his force was without meaning against the cold, iron strength that Kairn possessed.

And when at last he felt his father's heart about to burst, Kairn let him go. He let him stumble back, drunk with fear, into the shadows.

With that despair cold inside him, Kairn released his father's hand, letting the blade drive deep. It cut. It entered him like fire and turned between his ribs.

"Oh, I will kill you, Father," Kairn promised, "but not today. Many years will pass, with you dreading the hours, the days until I come again." With one hand Kairn reached to his side, there to pull the blade of his father's knife from his ribs. He held it before him. The edge glinted in the light, bloodless. "Perhaps I'll use this. Or perhaps a stranger will, another of the dark ones — of the kind who found Aleksander.



"But first I want you to see the others die. Nathan and Khristian, Feodor and the rest. Watch them die. And when each son falls, you'll know your own time comes closer still.

I know you, father, you'll use the time well. Try to find me, try to hunt me down, to learn what I've become. You won't succeed and you won't run. And near

the last, perhaps you'll find some wise man to give you a hopeful Prophecy — or perhaps you'll write one yourself. But always, I will be there, in the shadows, remembering the taste of your blood."

And with that, Kairn turned, stepping without sound across the shattered beams, stepping beyond his father's door and into history.



✦ EPILOGUE ✦

Returning to the library, Kairn gathered up the book and its chains, intent on placing the volume beyond the reach of man. As he did this, a gleam of gold caught his eye. It was one of the lanterns. Yet he was not certain it remained a lantern, for some force, some power beyond his understanding had transformed the glass to shining panels, the brass to iron hinges. And within burned a fire, barely seen through the finest of cracks.

Without words, a sense of understanding passed between the Agrippa and Kairn. He knew what lay hidden behind the glint of the strange coffer. Imprisoned there was the light of Csarda, the very warmth of sun and heaven captured in a box. With a laugh, Kairn gathered the lantern to him, carrying it along with the book and its chains out into the midday dark.

What lay before him now he could barely imagine. Centuries of strength, of an unyielding,

merciless strength — a veil of darkness which would fall forever over his soul and the valley both. Like a disease the dark would spread, relentless as it sought to bleed the men and women of the valley, transforming them without pity into creatures of an evil night.

From time to time Kairn himself would seek release. In the heat of battle he would hope an opponent might take him down, praying that one — at last — might destroy his tortured form and send his soul to hell. And when this did not happen, for long ages he would forget and settle into an evil rule.

Unconsciously, it began. One by one, sometimes centuries apart, Kairn would lure brave men into the valley. He challenged those few who might at last set him on the road to hell. But none, it seemed, proved ever more than diversions. From their agony he gleaned but the joy of brief and deadly games. . . .



THE GAMING ENVIRONMENT

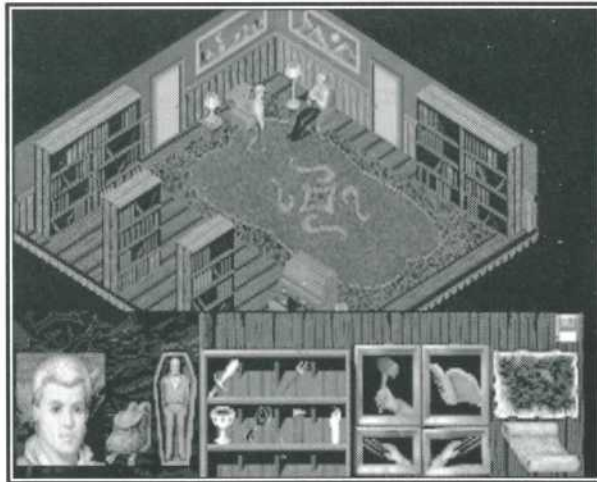
VEIL OF DARKNESS is a true "real time" horror adventure game played from three screens, the 3-D overhead map, the character screen, and the full-screen map of the valley in which the game takes place. The term "real time" means that everything in the game is happening instantaneously with no breaks in game play. Portions of both the 3-D overhead screen and the character screen are displayed at one time. This prevents the need to switch from one screen to another during game play. The full-screen map of the valley is displayed whenever you wish to go from one location in the valley to another.

All of the important icons and character information are displayed on the top portion of the character screen. This allows you to have the top of the character screen visible, while your character moves on the 3-D overhead map. The character screen can then be moved up to reduce the size of the 3-D overhead map, thus increasing the amount of the character screen displayed.

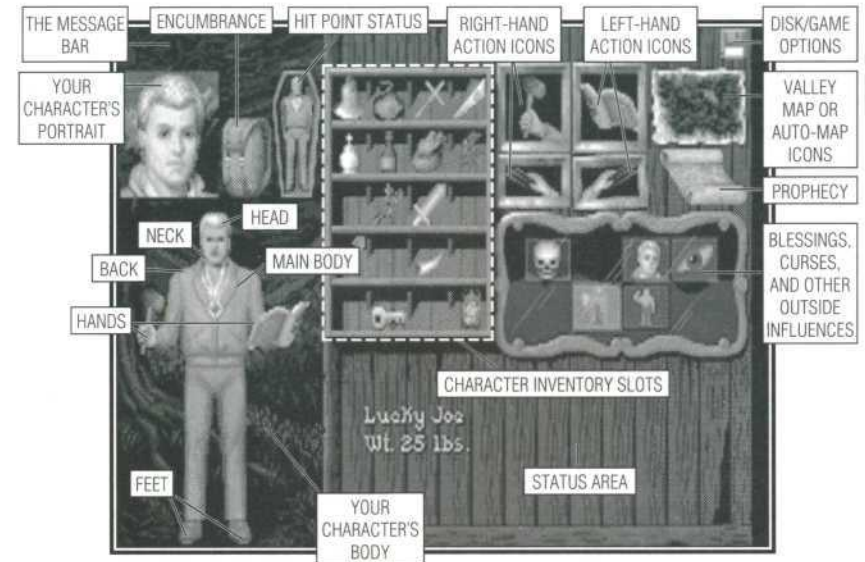
THE 3-D OVERHEAD MAP

The 3-D overhead map portion of the screen is used to display the map of the game upon which your character moves around. The maps are displayed in an overhead three-quarter perspective.

3-D OVERHEAD VIEW



CHARACTER SCREEN



THE CHARACTER SCREEN

All game play icons and pertinent information are displayed on the character screen.

The Message Bar

This is where various text is displayed while you are playing the game.

Your Character's Body

This is located in the lower left-hand corner of the character screen. When you wish to use an

object, it must be placed in its appropriate position on the character figure. Objects are placed as follows:

NECK.....necklaces
talismans

HANDS.....majority of objects that
your character can use

Your Character's Portrait

This is a picture (portrait) of your character's face.



Hit Point Status

Hit points are represented by a small picture of your character's body inside a coffin. As your character takes damage, the body turns into a skeleton, starting from the feet. Your character is dead when there is a complete skeleton in the coffin.

Encumbrance

Encumbrance is displayed as a knapsack. As your character carries more and more weight, the knapsack becomes fuller. You know when your character has become encumbered, because a red glow will surround the outside of the knapsack (now in its fullest state).

It is also possible to call up a numerical representation of your character's hit points and the amount of weight he is carrying. Do this by clicking on the area where the knapsack and coffin are displayed (to the right of your character's portrait). The information is displayed in the text message bar at the top of the character screen.

Right-hand Action Icons

Action icons display the available actions of an object when it is placed in your character's right hand.

Left-hand Action Icons

Action icons display the available actions of an object placed in your character's left hand.

Valley Map, Prophecy, and Auto-Map Icons

Icons representing these game features are located in the upper right-hand corner of the character screen. At the very start of the game, there are no icons in this corner. The Auto-map icon replaces the Valley map icon when your character is in one of the several mazes found in the game. The Prophecy icon appears after the Prophecy is given to your character early in the game.

Character Inventory Slots

These appear as wooden shelves. These slots consist of five rows of four, allowing your character to carry a total of twenty objects without the use of containers. When you want your character to carry an item, it must be placed somewhere in these inventory slots or on his figure.

Status Area

The status area is located in the lower right-hand corner of the character screen. This area is used to display various types of information.



Blessings, Curses, and Other Outside Influences

These icons are displayed in the mirror on the right side of the character screen (above the Status Area). Throughout the game your character will be: bestowed with blessings, cursed, or affected by various other outside influences. When this happens, an icon appears in the mirror. There are many different things that can affect your character. Some of these effects last until they are counteracted, and some are temporary.

Clicking on one of the icons displayed in the mirror displays important information on the blessings and curses. For example, when your character is poisoned by a creature, an icon appears in the mirror. If you click on this icon, information that describes what the poison is doing to your character appears in the Status Area.

When an object is chosen (the picture of the object replaces the white pointer), information about the object is displayed in the status area. Likewise, if you put a container in your character's action hand (left hand), the container's inventory slots are displayed. Also, information about the various blessings, curses, and other outside influences are displayed in the status area.

Icons

For users with a three-button mouse, the middle button "uses" the object in your character's action hand.

To quit the game, first click on the disk icon located to the far right of the text message bar. This displays the Disk/Game Options window. Click on the **Quit** selection to quit out of the game.

To pause the game using the mouse, click on the disk icon located to the far right of the text message bar. This displays the Game Options Menu which effectively pauses the game.



GAME PLAY INFORMATION

The following information explains the basic "how to play" operation for VEIL OF DARKNESS on an IBM or IBM compatible machine.

Additional system-specific information can be found on the VEIL OF DARKNESS data card that is included with your copy of the game.

MOUSE INSTRUCTIONS

To move your character with the mouse, place the pointer to the edge of the screen in the direction that you wish your character to move and press the left mouse button. Your character attempts to walk in that direction as long as you hold down the left mouse button.

When you want your character to move, be careful that the mouse pointer is not positioned over the top of a Non-Player Character's (NPC) icon. In this case, the

pointer becomes a talk bubble, and pressing the left mouse button throws you into an interaction with that NPC.

To move the character screen up and down, move the mouse pointer off of the 3-D overhead map and onto the text message area on top of the character screen (this is the area above your character's face, inventory slots, and action icons). This area is where various messages print out. Hold the left mouse button down (keeping the button pressed) and drag the character screen to the desired position.

The character screen cannot be pulled all the way to the bottom of the computer screen. At its lowest position (approximately $\frac{1}{3}$ of the entire screen) you can still view the action icons and a portion of your character's inventory slots.

To perform an action with an object in one of your character's hands, left-click on that action's icon to initiate it.



To pick an object up off of the map, position your character directly over the object and left-click with the cursor directly on your character. The mouse pointer transforms into the object that you have picked up. To place the object in your character's inventory or onto your character, move the mouse pointer to the place where you want to put the object and left-click.

To drop an item, pick it off of your character's figure or from his inventory slots, move the cursor on top of your character on the 3-D overhead map, and left-click. The item is dropped where your character is standing.

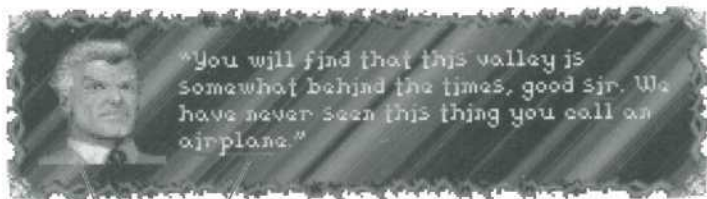
† Special Note †

The right mouse button may be used to swiftly transfer objects from the map into your character's inventory. If the mouse pointer is the shape of an object, pressing the right mouse button places the object into your character's inventory slots. If the mouse cursor is shaped like a white arrow (the normal mouse pointer) and your character is standing on an object, pressing the right mouse button tries to pick up the object and immediately place it into one of your character's inventory slots.

If your character has no available inventory slots, this shortcut will not work.



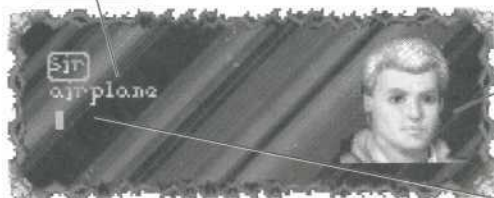
▼ NPC Interaction Window



PICTURE OF NPC

KEYWORD
(UNDERLINED)

KEYWORDS



PICTURE OF YOUR
CHARACTER

HIDDEN KEYWORD
TEXT AREA

▲ Keyword Window

NPCs

In order to interact with an NPC, position the mouse pointer over the top of the NPC's icon on the 3-D overhead map. The mouse pointer transforms into an interaction bubble. Left-click to talk to that NPC.

There are three windows involved in the interaction process:

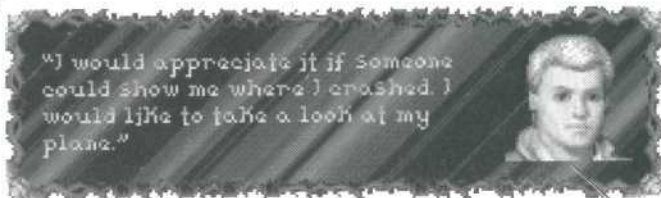
1. The NPC interaction window displays a picture of the NPC and the text that he or she is saying.

All keywords in the NPC text are underlined.

2. Your character's response window. This appears after a keyword has been selected. The response window contains the picture of your character's face and a question based on the keyword that you have chosen.

This part of the interaction process was added to give the feel of conversation taking place between your character and an

▼ Character Response Window



PICTURE OF YOUR
CHARACTER



NPC. In addition, the question usually helps you to better understand the NPC's reply to a chosen keyword. Not all keywords have a response attached to them, so there are times, after a keyword is chosen, that the NPC's reply is immediately displayed.

3. This is the keyword window in which a picture of your character's face is displayed with a list of keywords and a text area in which you can type in hidden keywords.

When it appears, the keyword **Bye** always appears last in the list of keywords in this window. Choosing the **Bye** keyword removes you from the interaction with the NPC. You may also type **Bye** to end a conversation early. Also, at any time during a conversation you may press the Escape key or right-click to end the conversation.

In order to select a keyword using the mouse, you can do the following:

1. Position the mouse pointer on the underlined keyword in the NPC text displayed in the NPC interaction window, and left-click.

2. Position the mouse anywhere on the screen, other than on the underlined keywords in the text, and press the left mouse button. This displays the keyword window. To select a keyword in this window, position the mouse pointer on the desired keyword and left-click.

At any time you desire, cancel interaction by right-clicking, or by pressing the Escape key.

Hidden Keywords

In addition to the keywords included in an NPC's conversational text, select NPCs have hidden keywords. These hidden keywords never come up in regular conversation with an NPC. You learn of hidden keywords by interacting with some other NPC.

For example, at the beginning of the game your character interacts with an NPC named Kirill. At the end of the conversation with Kirill, he tells you to ask his servant for some coins. When you encounter Kirill's servant, you should ask him about "coins". Do this by typing the word "coins" in the text area of the keyword window.



All hidden keywords are single words — not a combination of words. You never have to guess at a hidden keyword, simply remember the word as it is given to you in a conversation. Now, this is not to say that hidden keywords are always given straight to you. There are times when you have to be creative to find the source of a hidden keyword. For example, there may be a case where instead of learning a hidden keyword from another NPC, you will find it within the pages of a book.

Note that hidden keywords play a very special role in *VEIL OF DARKNESS*.

‡ *Special Note* ‡

There are certain interactions that you cannot escape out of until they have run their full course. An example of this is the very first interaction between your character and Deirdre at the start of the game.

KEYBOARD INSTRUCTIONS

In order to move your character on the 3-D overhead map, you can use the number keys 1-9 on the keypad.

The available action icons associated with an object in your character's hands are tagged to the number keys 1-4 (at the top of the keyboard). The numbers 1 and 3 are for using or throwing an object in your character's right hand, and 2 and 4 are for using or throwing an object in the left hand.

While interacting with an NPC, you can use the up and down arrow keys to move the highlight up and down the list of keywords listed in the keyword window. You must use the keyboard to type in hidden keywords while interacting with an NPC.

There is a second method of choosing a keyword with the keyboard. While the NPC interaction window is displayed, the keywords in the text are underlined. You may select a keyword by pressing the first letter of that keyword.

A complete list of the keyboard commands available at ALL times can be found on page 43.



Keyboard-only Operations

These keys are only available when you are not using the mouse.

The spacebar toggles control from moving the character on the screen to manipulating objects in your character's inventory. Pressing the spacebar enables you to move the white arrow pointer on the inventory portion of the character screen. The arrow keys on the keypad are then used to move this pointer around the inventory slots and onto the character figure. Pressing Enter while the pointer is over an item changes the shape of the pointer to the shape of the selected item. You may then move that item to a new place. Also, when the pointer changes to look like an object, information pertaining to that object is

displayed in the Status Area in the lower right-hand corner of the character screen (which can only be seen if the character screen is pulled to the top of the computer screen). To return control to moving your character's figure on the map, press the spacebar again.

You may place an item onto your character's figure by selecting that item, moving the pointer over to your character's figure, and pressing Enter. Notice that placing an item in your character's hands changes the current action selection.

To drop an object, position the mouse pointer over the item to be dropped, and press the D key. Remember to press the spacebar if you wish to return to moving your character around on the map.

To pick up an item off of the map, press the T key while your character is standing on top of the object. The T key may be also used while playing with the mouse as well.

Please see the following page for a listing of keyboard commands.



Keyboard Commands

NUMERIC KEYPAD

- (minus)
+ (plus)
Shift-Minus

Shift-Plus (or 5)

PLAYER MOVEMENT CONTROLS

scrolls the character screen up
scrolls the character screen down
moves the character screen to
topmost position

moves the character screen to
its lowest position

Other Keyboard Commands

Alt-Q.....quits game (exits to DOS)
Alt-A.....terminates current game
F9.....toggles sound ON/OFF (see note below)
P.....pauses game
C.....converses with the nearest NPC
T.....takes the item(s) your character is standing on
O.....game options (including Save/Restore)
1.....uses object in right hand
2.....uses object in left hand
3.....throws object in right hand
4.....throws object in left hand
F1.....displays Valley map (if available)
F1.....displays Auto-map (if available)
F1.....prints out a map from the Auto-map screen
F2.....displays the Prophecy (if your character has it)
V.....version information
Alt-T.....displays time



DISK AND GAME OPTIONS MENUS

Disk Options Menu Contents

SAVE.....saves the current game
RESTORE.....restores a saved game
DELETE-SAVEdeletes an old saved game
CHANGE.....changes the name of an old save game to a new name
GAME.....goes to the Game Options Menu

Game Options Menu Contents

LOGGING.....conversation logging options
MAGNIFY.....turns Magnify mode on or off
TEXT.....turns battle text on or off
START.....starts a new game
QUIT.....quits the game and returns to DOS
DISK.....returns to the Disk Options Menu

Logging Options Menu Contents

ON.....turns logging on
OFF.....turns logging off
PRINTER.....sets output to go to printer
DISK.....sets output to go to disk file
FILENAME.....sets disk file name
RETURN.....returns to the Game Options Menu



Saving and Restoring the Game

When playing VEIL OF DARKNESS on a hard drive, games are saved into the **SAVES** directory. If you like, you may save your game in a different directory, or onto a different drive.

You may save or restore the game at any point. If using a mouse, click on the disk icon located to the far right of the text message bar (or press the O key). This brings up the Disk/Game Options Menu. From here you can save or restore the game.

There are an "unlimited" number of possible save positions. You are limited only by the amount of space on your hard drive or by the number of floppies you wish to use for saved games.

Printing Out NPC Text

In order to allow you to look over the various interactions that you have had with NPCs, a print text option is provided. Text can be printed out as you play the game, or you can save the text to a file. If you save the text to a file, you can edit it at a later time using a word processor, and print it out at your convenience. There is a print on/off selection on the logging options screen. When in the **on** position the program prints text (provided your printer is on and set up correctly). You can turn this option on and off at any point during the game.

Printing Out Maps

The only maps that can be printed out in VEIL OF DARKNESS are the mazes. You are in a maze that can be printed when the Valley map icon in the upper right hand corner of the character screen is replaced by the Auto-map icon. As matter of fact, you can only print out a map from the auto-map screen. This print option can be of great assistance to you while exploring some of the more complex mazes in the game.



Please make sure that your printer is on and set up to print before you attempt to print a map. You can print a map from the auto-map screen by pressing the F1 key.

Note that when the maps are printed, they are not angled like the auto-map displayed in the game.

The Magnify Option

The game provides an option called Magnify. This feature allows you to configure the game so that objects are always displayed in their larger form. This option may make some parts of the game easier, but it proves most useful for anyone having a hard time seeing the smaller objects when they are on the ground.

Containers

Several of the objects in VEIL OF DARKNESS act as containers, allowing you to place other objects inside of them. Some examples of containers are pouches and sacks.

To place an item in a container, select the object and place it on top of the container that you want to put the object into. This can be done whether the container is in your character's action hand or in one of the inventory slots.

To see what objects are in a container, it must be placed in your character's left hand — the action hand. A picture of the container and its accompanying inventory slots is then displayed in the Status Area in the lower right-hand corner of the character screen.

Not every object can be placed in a container. For example, common sense would tell you that you cannot put the large farmer's pitchfork into a small leather pouch.

Note that if you attempt to put an object into a container while it is in your character's inventory or on the character's figure, and the object is too big to fit in the container, the object is swapped with the container.



THE VALLEY MAP

Use the Valley map to travel from one location in the valley to another. At the very start of the game, the only location that appears on the Valley map is the village where the game starts. You may click on the Valley map icon in the upper right-hand corner of the character screen or press the F1 key to call up the Valley map.

New locations appear on the map whenever you interact with an NPC that tells you about another location. For example, after your character retrieves the hammer (the first quest in the game) and returns it to Kirill, he should return to the tavern. He should initiate an interaction with the NPCs there and they will mention a farmer named Boris plus the location of his farm. The next time you call up the map of the valley, Boris' farm will appear.

When you place the mouse pointer over top of a location on the Valley map, the name of that location is displayed. You can then choose to go to that location by left-clicking.

‡ Special Note ‡

There are special mazes in the game, such as the catacombs beneath the village and the hedge maze. When you enter these maze locations, the Valley map icon is replaced with the Auto-map icon. It is *important* that you remember where you entered a maze. To leave the maze, you must find and walk to the edge of the maze's entry point. This takes you back to the Valley map.



THE PROPHECY

The Prophecy is given to your character after a hammer is returned to the NPC named Kirill. Once the Prophecy is given to your character, a small Prophecy icon appears in the upper right-hand corner of the character screen. When you click on the Prophecy icon or press the F2 key, a full-screen picture of the Prophecy is displayed. From the full-screen display of the Prophecy, you can right-click or press the Escape key to return to the game.

The Prophecy is intended to give hints to some of the things your character must accomplish to win the game. It also helps you gauge how much of the game you have completed.

Whenever you fulfill a part of the Prophecy, the next time you view the Prophecy screen, a line (or lines) will glow bright red and then fade into the parchment. This means that you have successfully completed that part of the game.

For example, look closely at the parchment the first time it is displayed (this is after you bring Kirill the hammer). You will notice that the first few lines, which describe your plane crash, have already faded. Note that the next line, which describes your character finding the hammer, glows red and fades into the parchment.



AUTO-MAPPING

During this adventure your character has to make his way through several mazes. The Auto-map feature should make exploring these maze-like areas much easier to play through and less confusing.

When you enter a maze, the Valley map icon is replaced by the Auto-map icon. Press the F1 key, or move the mouse pointer on top of the Auto-map icon and left-click to call up a map of the maze that you are currently in.

A special feature of VEIL OF DARKNESS that makes the Auto-map option more useful is the print map function. A map layout can only be printed out from the Auto-map screen.

† Special Note †

Please make sure that your printer is ON and set up to print before you try to print out a map. In order for the print function to work, the printer must be set up to print the IBM character set. See your printer instructions for information on how to set up your printer. If you use a laser printer, you should be aware that you might have to change the printer font to the IBM character set.

The maps that are printed out are not angled the same way as they are displayed on the Auto-map screen.

It is important that you remember where you entered a maze. To leave the maze, you must find and walk to the edge of the maze's entry point. This takes you back to the Valley map.



COMBAT

Combat in VEIL OF DARKNESS is implemented in "real time." This means that everything is happening instantaneously with no breaks in game play. To hit a creature, your character's icon on the map must be next to and facing the creature. If you successfully hit a creature, a small blood smear is briefly displayed with a number in the center. This number represents the amount of damage inflicted by the hit.

There are three combat modes that you can choose. Before the start of the game, you are asked to select the combat mode you wish to play in.

† Special Note †

Once a combat mode is chosen, it **cannot** be changed at any point during that game. If you wish to change the combat mode, you must start a new game from the beginning. There are several combat encounters early in the game. If you find these encounters too easy or too difficult, it is a good idea to start over before you get further into the game.

FULL COMBAT

In this combat mode your character is given no added bonuses or modifiers, and is given a lower number of hit points. Veteran role-players who enjoy the combat aspects of computer gaming most often favor this combat mode.

In full combat mode it is up to you to find objects, potions, and other objects that will increase your character's effectiveness in combat.

SIMPLIFIED COMBAT

In this combat mode your character is granted small bonuses and combat modifiers that make it easier to defeat the creatures that your character encounters. Your character is also given more hit points, which allows him to take more damage before healing is required.

If you enjoy combat, but you want the upper hand, then simplified combat is a good selection. Combat encounters are shorter and easier than those found in full combat mode.

Various objects that increase your character's effectiveness can be used to make your character even stronger.



EASY COMBAT

This combat mode is ideal for game players who really enjoy the adventure aspects of the game and don't really care for combat. In easy combat mode your character is given a lot of hit points, making it hard for him to be killed. Your character is also given high bonuses and modifiers that make combat very simple.

Of course, your character must still fight creatures that he encounters, but easy combat makes those encounters much shorter and easier to win.

Combat Text

Combat text is turned on by default. When you attack a creature with a weapon, information pertaining to that attack appears in the text message area. If you find this text distracting, you can turn it off at any point during the game from the game option menu selections.

ENCUMBRANCE

Your character is physically capable of only carrying so much weight before he begins to tire. As fatigue sets in, your character moves and reacts more slowly.

There may be times when you wish to carry all sorts of objects, but it is not possible because the weight is too much for your character. Choose wisely what objects you wish your character to carry.

Your character's encumbrance status is represented by the knapsack in the upper left-hand corner of the character screen (beside your character's face). As your character carries more weight, this knapsack becomes more full. When your character is fully encumbered the knapsack is completely full and surrounded by a red glowing outline.

If you left-click in the area where the knapsack is displayed, a numerical representation of the weight your character is carrying appears in the text message area.



OBJECTS

There are many different kinds of objects that your character can find and use during the course of play. These objects range from keys, potions, and silver coins, to some unique magical items. Objects can be found on the ground, hidden in chests and sacks, given to your character by an NPC, or dropped by a creature when it is killed.

To be used, objects must be placed somewhere on the large figure of your character in the lower left-hand corner of the character screen. Some objects are worn, such as necklaces, but most are placed in one of your character's hands. When an object

is placed into one of your character's hands, the actions that your character can perform with that object are graphically displayed in the right or left hand usage icon. These are located to the right of the graphic encumbrance representation.

There are some objects that need to be used in a certain location or combination of objects that must be used together. If an object needs to be used in a certain location, it can be used anywhere in that location. Simply put the object in your character's hand and click on the correct hand usage icon. An example of objects used in combination is the lighting of an oil lamp. You must put the oil lamp in one hand, an object to light it in the other, and click on the usage icon for the object being used to light the lamp.



DOORS

During this adventure your character will come across many doors. Some of these doors are unlocked, and your character can simply walk through them. Other doors are locked, and require a special key to open them.

If a door is locked, your character is able to walk through that door as long as the key required to unlock the door is somewhere in your character's inventory. Note that the key does not have to be in one of his hands.

† Special Note †

There are some doors in the game that are there for decorative purposes and have nothing behind them. When you first attempt to go through one of these doors, an interaction window appears and tells you that there is no reason to go past that door.

From then on, whenever you try to go through one of these doors, the following message is displayed in the text message area: "There is nothing important behind this door."

WEAPONS

There are a variety of objects that your character can use as weapons. Some of these weapons cause more damage than others. Be aware that some weapons are very effective against some creatures, but useless against others.

A select few creatures can only be harmed by a special weapon. For example, zombies can only be harmed by a silver blade, so don't fight them until you can get a silver sword forged.

You will notice that when you use a weapon, the icon in the hand usage area turns gray. You cannot make another attack with the weapon until the icon returns to its normal colors. Some weapons can be used more quickly than others. But keep in mind, some of the smaller weapons do not inflict as much damage as the larger and heavier weapons. Also, if your character is encumbered or fatigued, his attacks become even slower.



NPC INTERACTION

One of the most important aspects of VEIL OF DARKNESS is the process of interacting with the many NPCs (Non-Player Characters). It is through this interaction process that you learn many secrets and information pertaining to the quests in the game.

Allowing you to interact with the many different NPCs makes the game a rich story-telling environment. Be sure to completely search out all of the different locations of the game and talk to as many NPCs as you can. The NPCs hold the knowledge that you need to successfully complete the game.

Refer to "Game Play Information" on page 37 for a detailed description as to how to interact with an NPC using the keyboard or a mouse.

PRINT FEATURE

Since there is a considerable amount of interaction in VEIL OF DARKNESS, a print option has been implemented. This feature allows you to print out all of the interaction text in the game. You can print the text out as you play the game or save the text out to a file that you can edit and print at a later time. Refer to "Logging Option Menu Contents" on page 44 for the various print feature selections.

CREATURES OF THE NIGHT

The following section is provided to offer you a general description of the creatures that your character encounters within VEIL OF DARKNESS.

† Special Note †

You may not want to read the following section because it contains information that gives you an advantage over the creatures in the game.

While some game players may find this information useful, veteran gamers may find that reading the descriptions may take away the challenge of fighting some of the creatures.



✦ CREATURES OF THE NIGHT ✦



Banshee

The banshee is a supernatural creature that can take on many forms, but the one it favors most is that of a beautiful woman. In this guise, it lures unsuspecting men into its grasp. Once a victim gets close to this entity, it transforms into a swirling distorted band of supernatural light, circling the victim and drawing forth his life energy until there is nothing left but dust.

often making their home in underground caverns and catacombs.

Because these bats crave the taste of blood, they often attack any warm blooded creature that crosses their path. Though they are very quick and agile (making them a harder target to hit), giant bats must attack in number to be any real threat to a full grown man.



Bats, Giant

These creatures are a larger variety of the nocturnal bat. Like all things in the valley, they have been touched by Kairn's evil. Giant bats are a lowly creature and, therefore, easily controlled by the vampire lord. For this reason, giant bats are often used by Kairn to perform menial tasks.

Like their master, the giant bat is a creature that hunts in the hours of darkness. They shun the light,



Ghosts (Apparitions)

These are the spirits of mortal men who have been summoned back to serve Kairn's will. They are hard to control so these supernatural entities are rare, but they are extremely powerful.

It is said that the mere touch of a ghost ages a man years in a single moment. There are probably magical means to counter the ghost's aging touch, but no one is sure if these creatures can actually be killed or sent back to the grave.



Shades

This bizarre creature is another supernatural entity that feeds upon the living. It is said that a shade's touch is like that of ice and that it weakens the human spirit. Not many shades are known to exist, for they lurk in the most remote areas of the valley. Although no one has killed one of these entities, it is said that they abhor the light of fire.



Statues

Within the mighty strong walls of Nikolae's castle, now Kairn's stronghold, there are many wondrous stone statues of warrior women. Legends tell of these statues marching forth from the castle to kill or capture those who live in the valley.

It is believed that Kairn uses his dark magic to give life to these statues, so that they can punish those who have offended the vampire lord. These statues are supposedly crafted from granite and almost impossible to defeat with mere mortal weapons.



Skeletons

Human flesh is weak and frail, so Kairn rarely uses human servants. Instead, the vampire lord uses his magic to animate the bones of those who have already died.

These animated skeletons have no will or life of their own, so they carry out their master's command without question. Even though these creatures are hard to kill, a few have been destroyed by villagers. Because they have no life force, a skeleton must be smashed into pieces by repeated blows with a bludgeon-like weapon.



Topiary Creatures

These animated shrub-like creatures are one of the few valley's horrors that Kairn is *not* responsible for. They are found only within the walls of the hedge maze protecting the ancient mansion. This leads many to believe that these topiary creatures are the creations of the family (which was known to delve into magic themselves) that once lived in the mansion.



No one really knows much about these creatures except that their thorns are poisonous, and that they attempt to kill anything that sets foot in the hedge maze. The poison of these topiary creatures can be counteracted by a rare herb known as the carline thistle.



Vampire Women

The vampire's bite often brings death, but it can also grant immortal life. Throughout the ages, Kairn has cursed his victims to become a part of him. These women feed upon human blood, but unlike Kairn, they retain a small part of their former humanity. This, perhaps, makes their existence even worse than that of the vampire lord. Although vampire women are susceptible to the effects of holy water, they do not fear the garlic plant like their master.



Werewolf

The origins of the man-wolf are lost in legend. When or how this monster came to be is a complete mystery. It is believed that the werewolf is, at times, a man or woman that is a member of the local community. At night, the werewolf transforms into its bestial form, leaving its home to hunt and kill. The valley has been plagued by this beast for ages, and none have been able to find or slay it. It is said that if a werewolf is confronted in man-form and accused of being a werewolf, that it cannot resist its transformation into the wolf. And as long as the one who knows lives, the werewolf cannot turn back to its human form.



Will-O-Wisps

Will-o-wisps are often found in dark or damp areas such as lake shores, swamps, and forests. They are believed to be the tormented souls of evil-doers who refused to leave the earth after they died. They feed on the souls of the living. The only thing that these creatures are known to fear is the magical wood of the ageless rowan tree.



Wolves, Wild

Wild wolves are sly and cunning. They stay clear of the larger populated villages, but are often nearby waiting for whatever prey they can overcome. Occasionally a foolish villager wanders alone into the forests or hills and is torn apart by these wild beasts.



Zombies

Zombies are the walking dead, spiritless souls, doomed to walk the earth for an eternity craving the flesh of man. Those who defy Kairn's will are often cursed to such an existence. Zombies cannot be killed by any normal weapon of iron or steel, but they seem to fear silver. The bite of a zombie is dangerous, for the wounds fester with disease, and kill within a matter of days. Those who die in such a manner, in turn, find themselves rising once again as a dead one. There is, however, a plant known as motherwort that is said to cleanse the diseased wound caused by a zombie's bite.



✦ DESIGNER'S NOTES ✦

A Few Words from Chris Straka, Creative Designer



VEIL OF DARKNESS is unique because it blends design elements of both role-playing and adventure games. Flexibility was the key to ensuring that a gamer who favors either, or both genres of games, would feel right at home with VEIL OF DARKNESS. In the end all sorts of features, such as the combat modes, the magnify option, and printing options, were implemented to allow you to set up the game so that it suits your individual playing preferences. I truly hope that no matter what type of games you have played in the past, whether they be role-playing or adventure games, you enjoy VEIL OF DARKNESS.

The foundation of any game is the interface. When you buy a game and load it onto your computer, you want to get right to it and play, don't you? I know I do. I don't think that any

gamer should have to read a long, complex manual before they begin playing a game. Countless suggestions and recommendations from numerous gamers, (and many others), have allowed us to fine tune the RTV (Real Time Visual) interface that drives VEIL OF DARKNESS. I hope that this allows you to spend all of your time *playing* and not learning *how* to play the game. The data card and manual should enhance the game, but only by serving a supplemental role. As matter of fact, I hope that just about anyone could play VEIL OF DARKNESS without ever reading a line from this manual.



One trap that we have tried as hard as possible to avoid is a situation where you know what to do, but are restricted by not knowing exactly how the task has to be done. In



VEIL OF DARKNESS, if you have an object that has to be used in a certain area, you can use that object anywhere in that general area. I don't want to make you stand in a specific spot, at a specific time in order to get something to work. There are also times when I prevent you from doing something, or using an object, such as the gun. Although this may detract from realism, it is done to prevent you from using something you need at later point in the game. Of course, this simplifies play, but it is my desire to keep you from becoming overly frustrated.

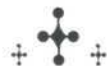
As a designer, I always want to implement just about everything and anything that I think is neat (ie: anything I can get away with). With the capabilities of today's high end machines, you can do so much more now than you could a few years ago. More importantly, and we always keep this in mind, it is our goal to make sure a game is bug free and runs efficiently on a wide range of machines. You, and even someone who has never played a computer game before, should be able to install VEIL OF DARKNESS and begin playing without any problems.

With this in mind, VEIL OF DARKNESS is a very complex game, but not so complex that the end product is filled with bugs. Of course, this is also a credit to an absolutely fine and talented group of playtesters. This might seem like an obvious fact, but believe me, some games are so complex and large that not all the testers in the world, no matter how talented, are going to be able to track down all the bugs. Unfortunately, it is the game testers that some people blame, when in fact, it is the designer who is responsible — a designer must keep things in scope from the very start.





The artists have done a wonderful job, and have created some stunning artwork for VEIL OF DARKNESS. In the same light, the musicians have orchestrated a very good soundtrack. All of this truly enhances the game. I can only hope that I did as good of a job with the story and design. When you are finished with VEIL OF DARKNESS, it is important that you feel that your money was well spent.



Finally, I always feel the need to mention this, but I truly hope that VEIL OF DARKNESS offers each and everyone who plays it more than just good graphics and impressive sound. VEIL OF DARKNESS is a game, and it is meant to entertain you. If all VEIL OF DARKNESS has to offer is good graphics and sounds, which it surely does, it will only hold your attention for the first few moments. BUT, if it is truly a good game, then it will captivate and hold your interest from start to finish. When you are done, you will say, "Now that was a fun game." And I hope that you look forward to the next grand adventure to come your way from Event Horizon and SSL.

✦ CREDITS ✦

EVENT HORIZON SOFTWARE, INC.

Producer	James Namestka
IBM Lead Programmer	Thomas Holmes
Additional Programming	Don Wuenschell
Designers	Chris Straka, Thomas Holmes
Art & Graphics	Jane Yeager, Frank Schurter
Music	Pete Smolcic, Tony Molllick, Ed Puskar
Story Author	Scot Noel

STRATEGIC SIMULATIONS, INC.

Rule Book Editors	Eileen Matsumi, André Vrignaud, Al Brown
Editing Support	Kym Goyer
Producer	Nicholas Beliaeff
Associate Producers	David A. Lucca, Rick E. White
Playtesters	Mike Gilmartin, Sean House, Chris Warshauer, Christina Watson
Test Support	Sandy Sturtevant
Compatibility Testing	Top Star Computing Services
Graphic Design and DTP	Louis Saekow Design: David Boudreau, Leedara Sears
Printing	A&a Printers and Lithographers, Inc.

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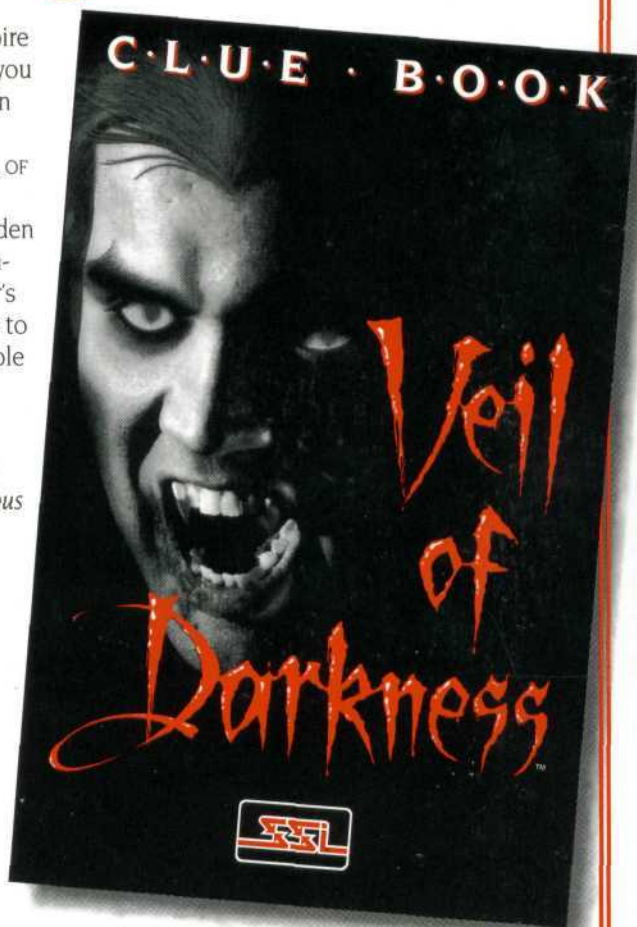
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