

THE BOUND ONE'S FAVOR

A DARK BOON

A reward for the one who found the four skulls and read the cipher to the end.

A cursed mini-pack · 4 tables + 3 signature items · 5e-compatible (SRD 5.1)

FOR THE ONE WHO FOUND THE FOUR SKULLS

You braved the dark. Here's the boon that bites.

You went looking in the dark places of this site, you found four crimson skulls, and you read the cipher to the end. Most people don't. They skim, they bounce, they never notice the thing grinning at them from the corner of the page. You did. So here's the favor you earned — a boon, the kind that bites.

That's the whole conceit of this pack. Every treasure has a creditor. Every dead thing remembers exactly who wronged it. Every bargain reads fine until you get to the part nobody reads. These are the rewards you hand a party when you want them to win and lose in the same breath — the loot that's also a leash, the rescue that's also a recruitment.

The other half of the favor is real-world and dull by comparison: the token at the bottom of this file, **STRAHD-FALLS**, takes a founder's cut off a booking with me. Use it or don't. The tables work either way.

A real person wrote these, the same way the Field Kit got written — every row had to hand you a hook or a decision, or it got cut. Curses with no story are just minus signs on a sheet. These have stories. Flavor's up top, the mechanics that need a number are penned off where you can find them under pressure.

YOU BRAVED THE DARK

You braved the dark. Here's the boon that bites.



CURSED TREASURES

Roll when the party earns loot you want them to grab fast and regret slow — every piece is genuinely worth taking, and every piece comes with a string, a cost, or somebody coming to collect.

Treasure that's just treasure is a number. Treasure that's a problem is a plot. Each row is tempting enough that a sensible party still takes it, and each one has a hook that doesn't show until later. Read the bold part as what they see; the dash is the bill, for you.

D20 THE TREASURE...

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 | A ring of plain iron that stops you bleeding out — and the wound it healed reopens on the next person who lies to your face |
| 2 | A purse that's never empty of copper — it refills overnight from the nearest grave, and the dead notice the shortfall |
| 3 | A signet that gets every door in a dead lord's holdings to open — his heirs are still hunting whoever holds it, and they're patient |
| 4 | A wineskin that turns water to wine — anyone who drinks owes the maker a single honest answer, asked at the worst time |
| 5 | A locket with a portrait that ages instead of you — leave it behind and the years arrive all at once |
| 6 | A blade that never dulls and never misses a killing blow — it keeps a tally only the wielder can read, and it expects to be fed |
| 7 | A cloak that hides you from the living — and shows you, plainly, to everything that isn't |

D20 THE TREASURE...

- | | |
|----|---|
| 8 | A coffer of cut gems, flawless, fenceable anywhere — each one is a soul put up as collateral, and the lender wants them back |
| 9 | A bell that calls one dead servant to obey for an hour — it answers a different name each time, and one night it'll answer its own |
| 10 | A deed to a manor, fully furnished, sitting empty and cheap — the previous family is still inside, and still sets the table for supper |
| 11 | A quill that signs any name in a perfect hand — every forgery it writes comes true in some small, ruinous way |
| 12 | A music box that calms any frightened creature — wind it three nights running and it stops calming and starts summoning |
| 13 | A mirror that shows the room as it was a hundred years ago — keep looking and the room starts preferring the older version |
| 14 | A crown of black glass that makes crowds love you on sight — they love the crown; take it off in front of them and find out fast |
| 15 | A key that fits the lock you most need open — and unlocks one thing, somewhere, that should have stayed shut |
| 16 | A vial of blood that heals any wound when you drink it — you heal as the donor did, scars and all, and the donor was not whole |
| 17 | A ledger that lists where every nearby corpse is buried — write a new name in it and that person has a year, no more |
| 18 | A child's toy soldier that fights for you, fearless and tireless — it was a real soldier once, and it's still trying to get home |
| 19 | A candle that burns without wax and lights the way through any dark — it burns down the life of whoever lit it, an hour a night |
| 20 | A chest of unmarked gold, no curse the party can find, no creditor, nothing — and that's what'll keep the paladin up at night |

THE MECHANICS, FOR THE ROWS THAT NEED THEM

Keep the flavor above; reach down here only when a player demands the number. **(1)** While worn, the next creature that lies to the wearer within 30 ft takes the damage the wearer would have taken. **(6)** On a critical hit the wielder gains temporary hit points equal to the damage dealt; if a full day passes without the blade drawing blood, the wielder takes that much necrotic damage at dawn. **(16)** Drinking restores hit points as a potion of healing, then the drinker rolls on a “lingering scars” effect of your choice. **(19)** Each night the candle burns, the lighter loses one hit die from their maximum until they finish a long rest away from it.

ROLL TWICE AND COMBINE

Roll twice for a treasure with two hooks: the first roll is the gift the party can't refuse, the second is the catch they don't read until it's load-bearing. (The never-empty purse **and** the bell that answers its own name is one bad week.)



OMENS OF THE DAMNED

Roll when the party has crossed something bound or cursed and you want them to feel watched before they're ever touched — small wrongnesses, then larger ones.

The bound don't announce themselves. They leak. Drop one of these the session after the party desecrates the wrong tomb or stiffes the wrong debt, then escalate down the list as they keep ignoring it. Each is a thing a careful player flags and a reckless one rides past.

D12 THE OMEN...

- 1 Their shadows are a beat slow — they arrive where the body already is, like they walked the same road tired
- 2 Every dog they pass sits and watches one party member leave, and won't look at anyone else
- 3 A name they've never heard is carved fresh into doorframes wherever they sleep, and it's almost one of theirs
- 4 The coins in their purse have gone cold, and stay cold, no matter how long they're held
- 5 One of them keeps catching their own reflection a half-second after they move
- 6 The dead they pass on the road — gallows, graves, battlefield — are all facing the party's direction
- 7 Milk sours, fires gutter, and bread goes hard the moment the party walks into an inn; the keeper has seen this before and won't say so
- 8 A child points at one of them and asks their mother why that one is "carrying somebody"
- 9 They wake with grave dirt under their nails and no memory of the digging
- 10 The same crow, missing the same two feathers, is wherever they stop, and it's started repeating words back
- 11 One of them answers to a name that isn't theirs without noticing, until the others point it out
- 12 At the next threshold they cross, every candle in the building leans toward the doorway, and stays leaning after they've gone

QUICK KEY

Rows 1–4 are **wrongnesses** a player might write off as flavor. Rows 5–8 are **escalations** a paranoid party can't ignore. Rows 9–12 are **the thing is close now** — pull these out when the debt's nearly due and you want the table to feel the cold before the reveal.

WHAT THE DEAD REMEMBER

Roll when the party meets the restless dead — a ghost, a bound servant, a corpse that won't settle — and you need to know, on the spot, what it wants, what it remembers, and the lever that lays it down or lets it loose.

A ghost with no want is a jump-scare. A ghost with a want is a scene. Each row is one small tragedy and the thing the party can do about it — the right move puts it to rest, the wrong move makes it worse. Read the want aloud; the dash is the lever, for you.

D20 THIS DEAD ONE...

- 1 **Wants its name said correctly, just once** — nobody got it right in life; say it wrong here and it stops being sad and starts being angry

D20 THIS DEAD ONE...

- 2 **Is still waiting for someone who promised to come back** — bring proof they died too, or proof they didn't, and it goes either gentle or wild
- 3 **Doesn't know it's dead** — it'll keep the routine until shown the grave with its name on it, and then it has to choose to believe you
- 4 **Remembers exactly who pushed it** — it wants the party to carry the name to the living, and it'll haunt them until they do
- 5 **Guards a thing it was buried with** — it doesn't want the thing back, it wants to know the party won't sell it; lie and it knows
- 6 **Is reliving its last hour on a loop** — break the loop at the right moment and you can change what it does next, once
- 7 **Wants the debt it died owing paid off** — settle the coin with the living creditor and it's free; tell it the creditor's dead too and it despairs
- 8 **Hates the party for looking like the ones who did it** — it can be talked down only by someone who admits to a wrong of their own
- 9 **Is keeping a child quiet and hidden, decades after the danger passed** — convince it the danger's gone and it finally lets go
- 10 **Knows where the body is buried, and it isn't the body in this grave** — it wants the swap undone before it'll rest
- 11 **Was promised a song at its funeral and never got one** — sing it, badly is fine, mean it, and it goes
- 12 **Wants to confess** — to anyone, about a thing it did, and it can't move on until someone hears it and doesn't flinch
- 13 **Is bound to finish a task it died mid-doing** — let it guide the party's hands to complete it and the binding snaps
- 14 **Remembers the party from a life none of them recall** — it's owed an apology that one of them, somehow, can give
- 15 **Won't leave until the one who wronged it suffers the same way** — and it'll take a substitute if the party offers the wrong person
- 16 **Is the only one left who remembers a dead town** — it wants the town remembered, written down, told; do it and it fades grateful
- 17 **Wants its murderer's grave dug up and the bones scattered** — do it and it rests; refuse and it starts arranging accidents
- 18 **Thinks the party are the dead and it's the living** — convince it otherwise and it has to face a hundred years alone in an instant
- 19 **Is holding a door shut against something worse on the other side** — free it and you free what it was holding back
- 20 **Wants nothing, asks for nothing, simply watches** — and the watching is the threat; it's deciding whether the party is worth following home

ROLL TWICE AND COMBINE

Roll twice for a dead thing pulling two ways: what it says it wants (the first roll) and what it'll actually do when the party tries to give it (the second). A ghost that "wants its name said right" but is secretly the one "holding a door shut against something worse" punishes the easy fix.

THE PRICE OF A FAVOR

Roll when a desperate NPC — or a desperate party — sits down to bargain with a thing that should never be bargained with. What it offers, and the cost buried where nobody reads.

The deal always sounds fair. That's the craft of it. Each row gives the offer the supplicant hears and the price they don't, until it's collected. Lead with the offer; the dash is the fine print.

DIO THE BARGAIN...

- 1 **"I'll bring back the one you lost, whole and breathing."** — it comes back wrong in one small way that grows, and only the bargainer can see it
- 2 **"Name your enemy and they'll be ruined by spring."** — the ruin spreads to everyone who ever helped that enemy, the bargainer included, eventually
- 3 **"You'll never want for coin again."** — every payment is taken from someone the bargainer loves, a little luck at a time, until there's none left
- 4 **"I'll make them love you, truly, forever."** — they will, and they'll stop being able to love anyone else, including their own children
- 5 **"Your wound will close and never trouble you."** — it closes, and the next wound the bargainer takes, someone nearby takes instead, chosen by the thing
- 6 **"Ask me one question and I'll answer it true."** — the answer is always true and always told in the way that does the most harm
- 7 **"I'll give you twenty more years."** — taken in full from the end of someone younger, and the bargainer will meet them, and like them
- 8 **"Your name will be remembered for a thousand years."** — it will, attached to a crime they haven't committed yet but now will
- 9 **"I'll keep your secret to the grave."** — it keeps it by killing, quietly, everyone who already knows, starting with the closest
- 10 **"No cost. A gift. I only ask that you take it."** — taking it is the cost; the thing now has a claim, and it will be back to name the price itself

QUICK KEY

Rows 1, 4, 5, 7 cost **someone the bargainer loves** — best when the party can still intervene. Rows 2, 8, 9 cost **the bargainer's own future** — Faustian slow burns. Rows 3, 6, 10 are **open hooks** the thing leaves dangling so it can collect on its own schedule. **Roll twice** when the party tries to outsmart the deal — the second cost is the one waiting behind the clever loophole.

THREE DARK BOONS

Signature cursed items — the centerpiece.

Three originals, written full. Each is worth taking. Each will cost the party something they didn't price in. Hand them out when you want a reward the table argues about for the rest of the campaign.

THE WIDOW'S PATIENCE

Appearance. A wedding band of tarnished silver, sized to no finger in particular — it shrinks to fit whoever puts it on. A single black pearl sits where a stone should, and the pearl is warm, always, the temperature of a hand that just let go of yours.

What it does. While worn, you cannot die from a wound. Reduced to 0 hit points, you drop to 1 instead and stay standing. Plain enough.

The catch. The ring is keeping someone else dead in your place. The first time it saves you, an NPC you've shared a meal with dies that night, peacefully, in their sleep, somewhere else. You won't be told. You'll just hear, weeks later, that they passed. The ring saves you every time, and someone you've broken bread with pays every time, and the ring picks them in the order you'd miss them least — which means it knows you better than you'd like.

Origin. A woman buried four husbands and could not bear a fifth grave, so she struck a bargain to never bury anyone again. She never did. Everyone around her did the burying instead, until there was no one left to do it for her.

THE HONEST COIN

Appearance. A heavy gold coin, blank on both faces, smooth as a worn tooth. Flip it and a face appears as it lands — a stranger's, frightened, looking up at you. A different face each time. They never repeat.

What it does. Once per day, flip the coin and ask a yes-or-no question about something within a mile. It answers true, every time, no save, no trick, no riddling. The most honest oracle a party will ever hold.

The catch. The face on the coin is a real person, somewhere, and asking the question kills them. They die the instant the coin lands, wherever they are, of nothing in particular — a stopped heart, a missed step on a stair. The coin spends a life to buy a truth. The party will not connect the deaths to the coin for a long time, because the dead are strangers, far away, unmourned by anyone the party knows. That's the design. It only gets expensive when they realize, and by then they'll have asked it a dozen things they could have figured out themselves.

Origin. A spymaster who valued certainty above every other thing commissioned a tool that could not lie. The smith warned him truth has to be paid for in the same coin as a life. He paid. He got his certainty, and a kingdom of small unexplained funerals, and at the end he flipped it one last time to ask whether he'd been a good man, and saw his own face come up.

GRANNY ASHFALL'S STITCH

Appearance. A bone needle threaded with a single grey hair too long to belong to any living head, wound around a spool of the same. The thread never runs out. The needle is always faintly warm and a little damp, like it's been held in a mouth.

What it does. With ten minutes and the needle, you can sew a wound shut — any wound, on anyone, even a fatal one, even a few minutes after death. The stitched return to life or to health, breathing, talking, themselves. No magic anyone can detect. No catch a healer can find.

The catch. Whatever you sew up is now sewn to you. You feel their pain, faintly, always — and if they die again, properly, you take the death you spared them, on the spot, no save. Sew up a friend and you've roped your life to theirs. Sew up a stranger to be kind and you've handed a knife to anyone who learns the trick. There is one way out: cut the thread with the same needle, and the binding breaks — but cutting it kills the person you saved, then and there, the death you'd held off finally landing. So you're never free for nothing. Free yourself and they die; leave it and your life hangs on theirs. Either way the scar stays, a line of grey stitching under the skin that never fades, marking everyone you've ever saved — and everyone who can still kill you by killing them.

Origin. A midwife in a plague year refused to let the children go. She learned a stitch from something that came to her door offering to help, and she saved every child in the village, and tied every one of their small lives to her own. When the plague took them anyway, one by one, it took her with each. They found her at her table, needle in hand, with two hundred grey scars and not a mark of illness on her.



YOU BRAVED THE DARK. SPEND THE FAVOR.

YOUR FOUNDER'S TOKEN

Here's the token, as promised. Use **STRAHD-FALLS** when you book a session with me — a founder's cut off the price, because you're the kind of person who reads to the end and notices the skull in the corner. That's exactly the kind of player I like at a table.

The rest of it — a complete, run-ready adventure every week, villain with a reason and a twist already built — is **The Weekly One-Shot**. Open it Thursday, run it Friday. Same deal as everything here: every reward has a story, and none of them are filler.

You found the four skulls. You read the cipher. Whatever you summon at your table next, summon it on purpose. See you in the dark.



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