THE NECROMANCER'S BROTHER

by Jameson Hampton

Creature: *Banshee* | **Level:** *3*

SYNOPSIS

Rumors that the Alabaster Mansion is haunted by a vengeful banshee have all of Levinbolt gripped with fear—though the mansion's owners are more afraid it will drive away all their business! They hire the party to take care of their ghost problem and investigate the local legends of the mysterious necromancer siblings of Levinbolt. But when not everything about the Alabaster twins is as it seems, perhaps the party can help the necromancer's brother rest in peace at last. The *Necromancer's Brother* is intended for characters of 3rd-5th level.

ADVENTURE HOOK

Stumbling upon Levinbolt is meant to be a random encounter, so this module works well as a one-shot or can be dropped into an existing campaign as a fluff session. Since Levinbolt is the only town around for many miles, the party has little choice but to stay there. For an inquisitive party, it can be framed as an interesting mystery to solve; for more business-minded characters, it can be framed more as a job in need of an adventuring party.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The party may have already heard of Levinbolt, a strange, radiant village powered by lightning. If any characters are historians, they may also know that it was the home of a famous pair of necromancer twins, Henriette and Julian Alabaster, the original inventors who brought light to Levinbolt—and died under mysterious circumstances.

Levinbolt is illuminated by magical-mechanical hybrid lights. The light is diffused by a spell with *permanency* cast on it together with a mechanism that can interrupt and resume the flow of magic so they can be turned on and off. High-quality lamps in public buildings use *lightning bolt* as the source and actually crackle and hum. Low-quality lamps use the *light* cantrip and lack that aesthetic.

CHAPTER 1 – THE RADIANT VILLAGE OF LEVINBOLT

Darkness and fog have settled over the highland as you anxiously search for a town or safe place to make camp for the night. In the distance, a strange, otherworldly glow emanates through the fog. As you draw closer, it gets brighter and stranger. Cresting a ridge, you are greeted by a small hamlet, nestled cozily amongst the hills, and the unfamiliar glow and soft humming sound of the electric lights that illuminate it! Electric lights line the main roads, and most of the public buildings and many of the private homes are lit from the inside with these strange bulbs.

THE CITIZENS OF LEVINBOLT

Upon entering the town, it becomes apparent that the superstitious citizens are worried about ghosts. The party encounters townspeople who try to sell them chintzy (non-magical) amulets as protection from spirits. Towards the tavern in the middle of town, another group insists on checking them for necromantic possession using strange electric devices, which do nothing except blink. Despite these silly tactics, the townsfolk seem genuinely shook up over ghosts—and pleased to see competent (and non-possessed) new adventurers in town.

A successful DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check gives the party three potential sources of information: Fennel Stormspinner, Charlene Audrey, and Lt. Lionel Rourke.

Fennel Stormspinner (CG female gnome) is a friendly but slightly strung out alchemist, found hanging out at the tavern. She's easily convinced to tell a very dramatic, if embellished, story about being at the mansion and hearing the ghost screaming and crying. She also says:

- Hattie and Julian Alabaster rarely appeared together publicly.
- They secretly hated each other and only stuck together because they were famous.
- Julian was an asshole and possibly killed Hattie.
- She has been to the mansion but is reluctant to give directions. Her aunts are the current owners, but she doesn't like to admit it because they're currently on the outs.

Charlene Audrey (CN female elf) is a fortune teller with curly black hair wearing scarves and trinkets. She runs her divination business out of a tiny corner store which smells heavily of incense. Her demeanor is initially mystical, but she drops the act when she realizes the party aren't customers. She says:

- Julian was gregarious and manic, while Henriette was quiet and reclusive.
- They were secretly incestous lovers and didn't like being seen together because they were afraid people would figure it out.
- She admires them because they were great marketers.
- The mansion isn't haunted and it's probably just a racket by the current owners for publicity, which she also admires.

Lt. Lionel Rourke (LG male human) is in his early thirties and comes across as straight-laced but affable. He is on duty at the constabulary and tells the party:

- He has no opinion on the Alabasters. Why dredge up the past?
- He's worried about the current residents of the mansion, Maggie and Eleanor Stormspinner. They have a ghost problem and may be in danger, but they're too stubborn to let him help.
- The mansion is on a hill north of town and he'd appreciate if the party would try to reason with the Stormspinners.

CHAPTER 2 – THE ALABASTER MANSION

Catching your first glimpse of Alabaster Mansion, you almost feel silly for asking for directions. On the outskirts of town and elevated on a hill, it looms over the rest of Levinbolt, huge and foreboding. The front doors are flanked by tall pillars and dramatically illuminated by a gently buzzing electric chandelier. The mansion emits a diffused glow in the darkness, but whether it's welcoming or sinister is for you to decide.

When you knock on the door, a woman's voice shouts from inside, *"ROURKE, I TOLD YOU TO COME BACK WITH A WARRANT!"* The door edges open, still latched, and you see a sliver of an elderly gnomish woman, who looks embarrassed. She hastens to unlatch and open the door for you, saying, *"Oh my goodness, dearie, I'm so sorry, I thought you were someone else!"*

Maggie Stormspinner happily invites the party inside and introduces them to her wife Eleanor, also an elderly gnomish woman, if a bit calmer and less of a spitfire. They are both thrilled that the party is interested in the mansion and the Alabasters, although they chafe a bit if anybody admits to being sent by Lt. Rourke or acts too concerned for their safety.

Eleanor brews tea as they explain how they came into possession of the mansion. As big fans of Hattie and Julian, they recently bought the house at auction and intend to turn it into a bed and breakfast and museum of necromancy and electricity. Esoteric and creepy trinkets of various sorts adorn the mansion. The crown jewel of the collection seems to be a full-sized taxidermy **doppelganger**. Eleanor mentions it was the last piece Julian added to his collection before his death.

Maggie and Eleanor speak affectionately about the Alabaster twins. If the party relays any of the rumors they've heard, the Stormspinners shut them down and express that they find the rumors distasteful. They insist that the reason they didn't appear much together in public was because Hattie was deathly ill and Julian

was the devoted brother taking care of her, and was so heartbroken over his sister's death that he died shortly after.

They also show the party a large portrait of the twins together hanging over the fireplace. The Alabasters do indeed look very much alike, and share the same facial structure, eyes, and straight black hair with a platinum blonde streak. They're slim half-elves and both strikingly handsome. Hattie wears an ornately laced black dress and looks somber while Julian wears an old-fashioned black suit and has more of a spark in his expression. Somehow, he feels like a mad genius just by looking at him.

When asked about the haunting, the Stormspinners confirm they've spotted shadows and heard screaming from the basement, but they seem more pleased than scared. Part of the reason they wanted to buy the house was because they suspected that the Alabasters had some sort of secret bunker, and they recently found the entrance. That's when the undead activity started—they suspect they broke some sort of seal. Julian was obsessed with banshees in the later parts of his life. The Stormspinners have theorized there's one down in the bunker—and they even suspect it could be Hattie, fueling Julian's obsession. They desperately want to see the bunker for themselves, but who knows what else is down there?

The Stormspinners ask the party to go through the bunker and make sure it's safe and clear of traps and ghosts. They insist that they'd love to do it themselves but lament that they're not as young as they used to be! They hope to preserve the Alabasters' belongings for their museum, but they offer to pay 3000 gp.

CHAPTER 3 – THE NECROMANCER'S LAIR

The Stormspinners eagerly usher you down to the basement, where you find a large, heavy steel door, ever so slightly ajar. You swear you can see shadows flickering around the edges.

"We finally figured out how to open it, but it was trapped!" Maggie tells you enthusiastically, and shows you her left arm, which is marred by dramatic burn scars in the shape of lightning bolts. *"I know, I look amazing, but it also hurt like hell! That's when we decided to leave it to the professionals."*

THE FOYER

There is a *glyph of warding* on the door, but it has already been sprung by Maggie, so the party can pry open the door and pass through without incident. They find themselves in a surprisingly cozy foyer, which is illuminated by electric lights, as is the rest of the dungeon. A coat hangs on the wall near the door, with a pair of boots below. Countless tomes line a multitude of bookshelves, as well as most other surfaces.

Two **spectres**, drawn to this place by the necromantic energy present in Julian's lab, lie in wait behind the door. (If your party is large or particularly powerful, you can adjust the difficulty of the encounter by scaling up the number of enemies.)

A single exit across from the steel entrance door leads to a long, narrow hallway. It, too, is furnished primarily by books. At some points, they reach so far up the walls that the stacks connect, forming a rounded tunnel of books.

A trap lies in wait in the hallway, but is not designed for living beings, so if the party doesn't notice it, it won't react to their presence. They can spot the trap with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check. A successful DC 18 Intelligence (Arcana or Religion) check bestows knowledge of the trap's function—ensnaring undead spirits while leaving living creatures alone—and the wisdom to leave it be instead of playing with it. Attempting to disarm the trap with a Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check allows four **shadows** to escape and attack the party.

THE DUNGEON

Behind a heavy, unlocked wooden door on the left lies a plain, rustic dungeon, featuring jail cells holding the remains of several monsters, including a **minotaur skeleton**, a **mummy** and a **bone naga**. Only one is still active and breaks through the rusty bars of its cell to attack the party. (The minotaur skeleton is recommended, but feel free to use the others for a more difficult fight if desired.)

There is also a plain treasure chest in a jail cell by itself. The **mimic** does not bother the party unless they attempt to find a way inside the jail cell to loot it.

THE READING ROOM

On the right of the hallway, a revolving bookcase hides a secret room. Luckily, the bookcase is ajar, making the door obvious and able to be pried open. The hidden room, Julian's reading nook, is small, cozy, and full of even more books. A comfy plush chair sits across from a small, round table, on which rests a journal, lying open, a quill next to it.

Before the party can investigate further, a small brood of approximately ten **crawling claws** appear from out of the walls and attack. Some of them are holding dusters and other cleaning supplies. Once dispatched, the party can read the journal, which outlines Julian's obsessive research regarding banshees.

"I am certain that my latest attempt at a cure is finally correct—and divinatory magic confirms this notion—but I fear the universe is conspiring against me. I already feel the wrath and sorrow of the banshee coursing through my blood, corrupting my thoughts, and still I wait impatiently for the delivery of the doppelganger eye I need to complete the formula.

Who is this cruel arbiter of beauty? I am sure Corellon has empathy for the quandary of their child, so which deity disfavors me? Who dares tell me that I have scorned my former beauty? Who decides what is WASTE and what is CREATION? Scarred as I may now be, I have never looked or felt more divine—does that count for NOTHING? I cannot, will not, accept such a fate. I WILL be free to live as I wish."

The next page contains a detailed account of the aforementioned cure and how it works. The rest of the journal contains the ravings of a mad scientist—mainly musings on banshees and the nature of beauty, but also some notes on his electrical experiments.

A successful DC 12 Intelligence (Arcana) check shines more light on Julian's words. Common understanding of banshees says they are the spirits of beautiful women with elven blood who became corrupted by their own beauty when they failed to use it for the greater good—and were cursed to eternal despair and rage as a result.

A successful DC 10 Wisdom (Insight) check at this point notes that despite supposedly being the Alabasters' shared lair, everything the party has come across down here has been Julian's alone and even the journal had no mention of Hattie.

THE LABORATORY

The hallway ends in a large laboratory, spacious and cluttered with half-finished experiments magical and mechanical alike. Clearly, the owner of this lab worked with a frenetic energy. One section of the room is taken up by a giant, impressive—and extremely magical—machine, currently humming and producing occasional bolts of lightning. A successful DC 12 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals that this is the "battery" that powers most of the electricity for the town.

The party can look around, but if they interact with anything, they are attacked by a **flameskull**, which intones, "You must leave this place. I will protect Julian Alabaster."

The flameskull is intelligent and converses with the party, and even answer questions, during the fight. If the party insists that Julian is dead: "No. Julian is here. I will protect Julian."

If Hattie is mentioned: "There is no Henriette Alabaster. Julian was born Henriette. Then he lived as both. Now there is only Julian."

If asked about the banshee: "My master suffers unfairly. I will not let you hurt him."

If the party tries to convince the flameskull they mean no harm: "I cannot take that risk. My purpose is to protect Julian."

With a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check, the party locates and identifies the unfinished banshee cure Julian had been working on, a tinderbox containing a bird's nest woven with herbs and soaked in various oils. They can finish it by adding the doppelganger eye from the Stormspinners' taxidermy piece, which the couple gives up willingly if the situation is even rudimentarily explained to them.

While in this room, the banshee can be heard wailing on the other side of the final door, which is locked and warded by a lightning trap. The trap can be spotted with a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check and disabled with a successful DC 18 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check. When triggered, it erupts in a 10-foot-radius centered on itself. Each creature in the area must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw. A creature takes 2d10 lightning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. Breaking the machine disables the trap, but also cuts off power to the town!

THE INNER SANCTUM

Once past the door, the party enters Julian's personal room, which is cozy but cluttered with books, crystals, multicolored fairy lights and, surprisingly, houseplants kept alive by magic.

The banshee is within and barely recognizable as an Alabaster from the painting. They look like they are in anguish, long hair unkempt, ghostly suit torn and tattered.

If the cure is completed before entering the final room, the party can administer it immediately upon encountering the banshee. Otherwise, the banshee attacks and dramatically chases them back through the dungeon into the mansion, where they acquire the doppelganger eye. (If this happens, the Stormspinners are ecstatic to see Julian's ghost with their own eyes.)

CONCLUSION

The party administers the cure, once fully assembled, by lighting the tinderbox in the vicinity of the banshee, which they know from reading the journal. Magenta smoke pours out of it and surrounds Julian, who stops attacking as a sense of tranquility washes over the room. He momentarily regains his senses, now looking just like the man in the painting. He calmly thanks the party and bestows on them a charm of *conjure minor elemental* before fading into nothingness. The smoke turns grey and dissipates, leaving only the faint smell of ozone behind. Julian's charm allows each player present to cast conjure minor elemental at 4th level one time each before vanishing from them.

Killing the banshee also solves the problem, although at a greater price—Julian dies with an anguished wail and explodes into wispy smoke in a 10-foot-radius. Each creature in the area must make a Constitution saving throw. A creature takes 2d10 necrotic damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Either way, the Stormspinners are delighted by the discoveries about Julian and stories of the artifacts found in the lair. They happily discuss how much of a success their museum is going to be, but they agree that they will still dedicate it to both the Alabasters, as they're not comfortable outing him to the public after his death. They ask the party to do the same. They pay the party 3,000 gp (or 2,000 if they broke the machine).

Upon returning to Levinbolt, the townspeople are hostile to the party if they broke the machine and cut off power to the town, but are otherwise happy to be regaled with stories about the ghost.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jameson is a social justice Tremere antitribu from Buffalo, NY who wishes they were immortal so they'd have time to visit every coffee shop in the world. They're a professional plant liker and software engineer, as well as an unprofessional comics writer.

The Necromancer's Brother is important to me because it's a reflection of my personal experiences as a transmasculine person. The banshee's curse really represents transphobia: it afflicts Julian based on his birth gender because it perceives him as "misuing" his beauty by choosing to transition, which is an attitude from others I have often received and struggled with. For me, the fact that he has the confidence and talent to stand up to the curse and develop a cure is empowering, and the fact that the party has a chance to right the wrongs done to him feels like justice. I want to thank *Uncaged* for giving me an opportunity to tell my story in this way.