



The House of Usher

INTRODUCTION

The House of Usher is an adventure module based upon the Edgar Allen Poe short story of the same name.

The adventure either begins with the player-characters arriving at the titular house or one of them receiving an urgent letter from their estranged childhood friend, Roderick Usher.

He is currently suffering from a serious illness and requests they come see him. He lives alone with his twin sister Madeline in their ancestral home, a decrepit manor sitting on the edge of a brackish tarn. The two siblings are the last remaining members of the House of Usher, a bloodline infamous for their wickedness and wrongdoing.

Present the following letter to the players:

*To My Best and Only
Friend,*

I hope this letter finds you well. I know it has been many years since last we met, however nary a day has passed that my mind has not wandered to those bright, happy moments we shared so long ago. I have thought of them more often of late, turning to them for solace as this sickness tightens its grip over me. I hesitate to ask, hate as I would to impose upon you after such a long absence, but it would bring me ever so much joy to see you once more, my old friend. I am convalescing at my family estate in the country with my sister, Madeline. We would so enjoy your company.

Fondly Yours,

Roderick Usher

ARRIVAL AND NIGHT PHASE

Arrival Phase

When the adventurers arrive, the House's sole servant Po will greet them and lead them to Roderick's Salon (2) where the last scion of the House of Usher awaits them. He is glad to see his old friend and is cordial - if shy - around their compatriots. He explains that he is suffering from ill-health, made worse by his sister's recent passing.

During the Arrival Phase, adventurers are free to explore the House's upper levels, but the lower levels are locked by keys only Roderick and Po possess. If they insist on venturing to the lower levels, Roderick is visually perturbed and will request they go down in the morning instead. During this Phase, the House's environs are gloomy and subtly disturbing, but nothing outright hostile stirs just yet. Once Roderick retires for the night, the Night Phase will begin.

Night Phase

As Madeline awakens and the hostile spirits of the House stir, an electrified mist will rise over the tarn and prevent anyone from leaving the structure. Terrified, Roderick will try to find his friend but 1d3 *Shadows* (pg. 8) are hunting him. Roderick will tearfully explain his sister was alive when he buried her and he must find her in the Usher Vault (12). Afterwards, he runs down to the Family Crypt (14) to free his sister, however the sight of her will cause his heart to stop and the House to begin to collapse.

During this phase, hostile spirits and the House's own dark consciousness will impede the adventurers. Whenever they enter a new area, there is a 1-in-6 chance of a Chilling Encounter (See the *Chilling Encounters Table* on pg. 6).

Additionally, each location will enter different states if the Night Phase has begun

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Roderick Usher

“The horrible white of his skin, and the strange light in his eyes, surprised me and even made me afraid. His hair had been allowed to grow, and in its softness it did not fall around his face but seemed to lie upon the air. I could not, even with an effort, see in my friend the appearance of a simple human being.”

Pale and gaunt, Roderick possesses gentle features and large, luminous eyes that have been ravaged by illness. Suffering from nervous ennui he attributes to his family’s long history of sickness and his sister’s own deterioration, it’s unclear whether he suffers from any physical ill or if his symptoms are psychosomatic. Nonetheless, he complains of bright lights and loud sounds, refusing to leave the home of his ancestors and spending his time painting or composing music. Strangely, he is convinced that the house itself possesses some sort of baleful intelligence.

Madeline Usher

“Our glances, however, rested not long upon the dead—for we could not regard her unawed. The disease which had thus entombed the lady in the maturity of youth, had left, as usual in all maladies of a strictly cataleptical character, the mockery of a faint blush upon the bosom and the face, and that suspiciously lingering smile upon the lip which is so terrible in death.”

Twin sister of Roderick, Madeline has long suffered a wasting disease whose cause baffled and intrigued doctors far and wide. Her condition often left her cataleptic, and it was in the throes of one of these episodes that her brother had her entombed in the Family Crypt (14), not realizing that she yet lived. Trapped in the dark, her panic has roused the spirits of the House who rise in her aid and empower her with supernatural fury.

Po

The Ushers’ lone servant, Po is a lowly scullion who performs his tasks swiftly and returns back to the safety of the Kitchen (7) with the minimum time spent in Roderick’s company. He appears afraid of the Usher heir and the House as a whole. He helped entomb Madeline in the Family Crypt (14) and urged his master that she still lived to little avail.

Sir Ethelred Usher

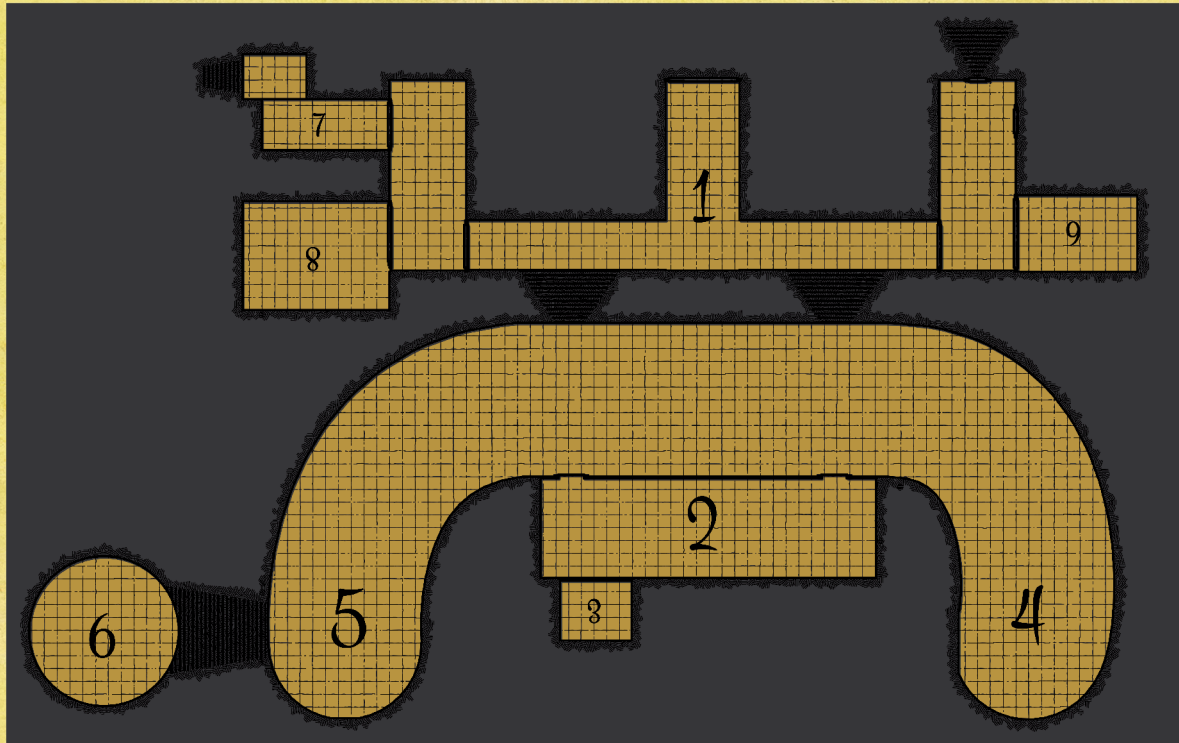
Spirit of a great knight who felled a Black Dragon and claimed its treasure, Sir Ethelred has possessed his golden armor and wanders the Usher Vault telling tales of his exploits and challenging passers-by to tests of arms (*Living Armor*, pg 8). If defeated, he will congratulate his opponent and tell them the location of his tomb that they may claim a prize from it.

Usher Wraiths

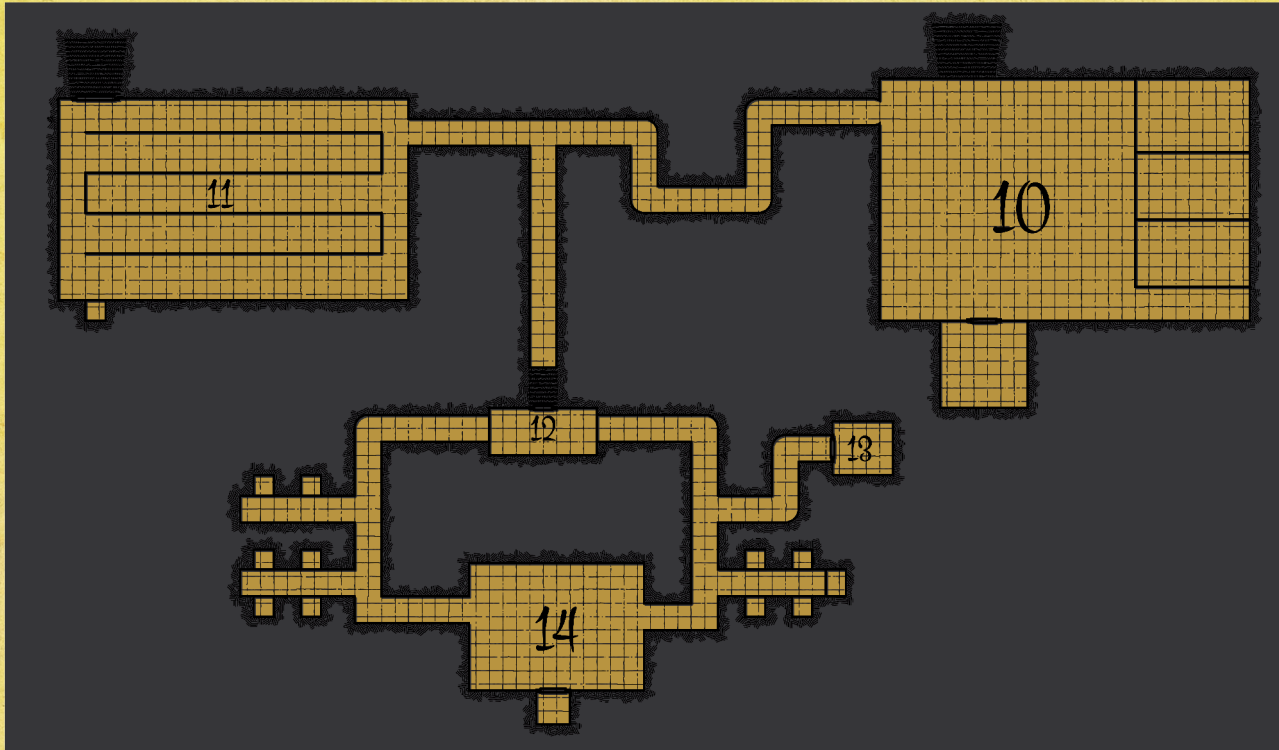
The Usher line is filled with criminals and murderers who are said to haunt the halls of the House, their sins buried along with their bodies beneath the foundations of the structure. If players try to communicate with the *Usher Wraiths* (pg. 8) or you wish to give them more personality, roll on the table below to determine which long-dead Usher they speak to.

D6	Rest in Peace...
1	<i>Anthony Usher, Usurer and Graverobber</i>
2	<i>Captain David Usher Feared Pirate</i>
3	<i>Bernard Usher, Cunning Jewel Thief</i>
4	<i>Frances Usher, Cold-Blooded Assassin</i>
5	<i>Vivienne Usher, Blackmailer and Murderess</i>
6	<i>Vincent Usher Artist and Actor</i>

THE HOUSE OF USHER - UPPER LEVELS



THE HOUSE OF USHER - LOWER LEVELS



THE HOUSE OF USHER - UPPER LEVELS

"I looked upon the scene before me—upon the mere house, and the simple landscape features of the domain—upon the bleak walls—upon the vacant eye-like windows—upon a few rank sedges—and upon a few white trunks of decayed trees—with an utter depression of soul which I can compare to no earthly sensation more properly than to the after-dream of the reveller upon opium..."

Familial home of the Ushers, the House is a gothic mansion situated on the slopes of a tarn, the dark waters of which reflect the imposing manor and heighten its sinister air. Surrounded by grey sedges and dead, white trees, the vacant windows resemble eyes peering down at visitors as they approach. Though decrepit, with moss and fungi covering the exterior stonework, the fundamental construction is sound save for a long, crooked fissure running from the roof down to the waters of the tarn.

The evil deeds of the Ushers have infected the structure down to its very foundations, and it in turn has cursed the bloodline with illness and madness. The injustice suffered by Madeline rouses the House and the dark spirits dwelling within.

Whenever the adventurers

enter a new room during the Night Phase, roll 1d6. On a 6, roll on the table below to determine a Chilling Encounter. On a 6, Madeline breaks free and begins wandering the House.

D6	Chilling Encounters
1	<i>A raven swoops down and perches on a doorway. It speaks and seems to have intimate knowledge of an adventurer's darkest secrets.</i>
2	<i>All objects in the area rise up and swirl forcefully, dealing 1d3 damage to any who can't avoid them.</i>
3	<i>1d3 Shadows (pg. 8) emerge from dark corners and attack.</i>
4	<i>A one-eyed black cat jumps out of the dark.</i>
5	<i>A loud thump-thump can be heard under the floorboards when a Zombie (pg. 8) bursts out and attacks.</i>
6	<i>A deafening crash can be heard from the lowest levels of the House.</i>

1. Great Hall

The House's grand entrance hall, the hulking double doors are crowned with a Gothic archway while sombre tapestries adorn the walls. Carvings on the ceiling depict the deeds of Ushers long past while the oaken floors are so dark they appear as inky night.

Night Phase - The decrepit Great Hall transforms into a bright and stately party room where 1d6 phantasms of the Ushers depicted on the ceiling mingle and chat. If caused to remember their death, they will morph into *Usher Wraiths* (pg. 8) and attack.

2. Roderick's Salon

A large and lofty room with long, narrow windows that cast feeble gleams of light only partially illuminating the vaulted and fretted ceiling. Dark tapestries are hung on the walls and the floor is made of black oak that absorbs light. Musical instruments (3xD6gp) and books (D6gp) are scattered around on the antique furniture. Roderick often lounges on a sofa, playing mournful tunes on his guitar.

The Mad Tryst lies on a footstool close to him, a romance telling the tale of Sir Ethelred who sought shelter from a storm from a hermit's hovel. When the hermit refused him entry, he broke the door down with his mace and discovered a Black Dragon within, guarding a magical shield made of shining brass.

3. Art Studio

Roderick's studio contains rows of canvases, painting supplies and half-finished works on easels. Regardless of their state, all the paintings seem to depict the House itself, both haunting exteriors and realistic renditions of its twisting halls and dark chambers. A large portrait of Madeline dominates the room. It depicts her lying in her coffin, though her cheeks carry a peculiar rosinness.

Night Phase - the portrait will now depict Madeline with her eyes open and angry.

4. Guest Wing

The eastern wing of the upper levels contains several guest chambers, enough for each of the adventurers. Though once

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grand and stately, the rooms have deteriorated with disuse, containing tattered, moth-eaten banners on the walls and narrow windows with cracked glass. Situated directly over the Usher Vault, sounds of rhythmic pounding can faintly be heard from below.

5. Family Wing

The family wing on the western half of the second floor contains a long hallway lined with portraits of fallen Ushers and suits of armor holding silver weapons. At the end of the Hallway is the Shield of Ethelred (+2, Magical, Immunity to Acid) inscribed with the caption "Who entereth herein, a conqueror hath bin; Who slayeth the dragon, the shield he shall win."

The shield is enchanted so that only someone who has defeated the skeletal dragon in Ethelred's Tomb (13) can remove it.

Night Phase - If the Shield of Ethelred is disturbed by one who has not proven himself worthy, 1d4+1 *Living Armors* (pg. 8) will come to life and attack.

6. Madeline's Bedroom

A round chamber sitting at the top of the house's turret, it is decorated spartanly with a bookshelf and large four-poster bed with black curtains. On the side table are medical notes that express consternation at Madeline's condition, and her frequent bouts of catalepsy that often left her still and pale as a corpse.

Night Phase - Soft weeping can be heard coming from everywhere and nowhere. Dark tendrils emerge from under the bed and grab hold of any nearby.

7. Kitchen

An expansive stone kitchen with two rows of wooden tables and a rack holding a row of wine barrels. However it seems only the central area containing the stone oven and black cauldron are in use. The rest of the area is covered in dust, save for a cot in the corner belonging to Po. The pantry in the back contains a smattering of foodstuffs and a hidden hatch leading into the Wine Cellar (11) below.

Night Phase - 1d3+1 *Animated Brooms* (pg. 8) come to life and beat Po to death before hiding

themselves in the corners inert.

8. Dining Room

A long, ornate dining table dominates the center of the room, though the thick coat of dust lying upon it suggests it has not been used in quite some time. Porcelain dolls with eerie expressions sit atop the white fireplace mantel, while portraits of past Ushers hang on the walls, their eyes seemingly transfixed upon the table.

Night Phase - A rich feast sits upon the table. However, any who sample the cuisine discover it's writhing with maggots. They must pass a saving throw against poison.

9. Drawing Room

Once a lavish parlour, the House's sitting room has not welcomed visitors for many years. The chaise lounges are covered with white cloth and the yawning fireplace is dark and cold. The walls are covered in peeling wallpaper and cobwebs wreath the golden candelabra. A piano forte sits in the corner, aged but well-made. Just outside the drawing room lies a door to the

estate's overgrown gardens and another to the Dungeon (10).

Night Phase - A beguiling piano melody tempts passersby to enter the drawing room, however no one sits at the piano bench.

10. Dungeon

The lower levels of the House are now used for storage, but previously served as a dungeon where the family's enemies were imprisoned and tortured. Cells contain the bodies of long-dead prisoners opposite the door to the torture chamber where spectral screams can be heard. Inside, the centre of the room is dominated by a deep pit across from a corpse on a rack with a bladed pendulum hanging over him and a mural of Father Time painted on the ceiling.

Night Phase - If the prison cells are disturbed, 1d6 *Zombies* (pg. 8) rise up and attack. Upon entering the torture chamber, the door slams closed and the walls become red hot and begin to close in, pushing inhabitants towards the pit in the centre as the pendulum recedes into an opening on the ceiling. The door can be opened with a difficult Strength Check. PCs can

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escape through the pendulum's opening with a Dexterity Check.

11. Wine Cellar

A well-stocked, maze-like wine cellar containing rich vintages now covered with spider webs (2d6gp). The southern wall contains a hidden niche crudely filled in with brick and mortar some decades ago. The distinction between the fine original construction and hasty addition can be seen with difficulty. The wall can be broken down, revealing a skeletal corpse wearing a jester's costume chained to the wall and a large Cask of Amontillado (300gp).

12. Usher Vault

A tight, winding staircase leads down into the Usher Vault where generations of Ushers are interred. The landing leads into narrow passages that peel off into individual crypts.

Night Phase - The first time a tomb is disturbed, 1d3 *Usher Wraiths* (pg. 8) emerge and attack.

13. Ethelred's Tomb

Sir Ethelred's Tomb is blocked off by a door of pure iron with no apparent locking mechanism. Adventurers may enter if they receive permission from Sir Ethelred (pg. 2) or succeed a difficult Strength check.

Inside lies a large stone coffin surrounded by riches (500gp in coinage and jewels) and the posed skeleton of a Black Dragon. If the riches are disturbed, the skeleton will come alive and attack (pg. 8), though it is too large to leave the room. Defeating it will allow the adventurers to claim the Shield of Ethelred in the Family Wing (5).

14. The Family Crypt

Located in the heart of the Usher Vault, this inner sanctum contains the resting places of Roderick's parents, grandparents and Madeline's tomb, which is blocked off by a heavy iron door. 1d6-1 *Usher Wraiths* (pg. 8) wander the crypt, though they are not hostile unless the adventurers attempt to desecrate the tombs. *Night Phase* - As the sun falls, Madeline breaks free of her coffin and begins trying to tear

down the iron door sealing her within the crypt. Attracted by her wrath, she has been possessed by the spirit of the House itself, which has roused the spectres of family to awaken.

A result of 6 on the *Chilling Encounters Table* (pg. 5) results in Madeline breaking free of the tomb and wandering the House in search of her brother. The crash of the iron door as it falls is audible to the adventurers no matter where they are in the House. If another result of 6 on the *Chilling Encounters Table* is triggered, their paths cross with Madeline instead.

With her white dress and hands covered in blood, Madeline exudes a baleful aura and adventurers attuned to magic can tell she is being kept alive solely by the powers emanating from the House.

She will initially ignore the adventurers unless they impede her progress, at which point she becomes hostile. She is largely unable to communicate, wandering as though in a daze, though she is attentive to any mention of her brother. If brought before him, Roderick's heart will give out due to fright and the energies empowering Madeline will fade, resulting in

the end of the Usher line and the fall of the House of Usher. If Madeline dies, Roderick will blame himself for her death and attempt to commit suicide, also resulting in the collapse of the House.

Once Madeline dies, the occult energies surrounding the estate will dissipate and the undead will be laid to rest.

BESTIARY

Madeline Usher

Alignment: Neutral

AC: 17 (2) **HP:** 27 (6 HD)

ATK: 1 x Touch (+5, 1d8, Paralysis)

MOV: 30' (10')

Paralysis: Successful attacks cause paralysis for 1d3 turns (save versus paralysis negates).

Usher Wraith

Alignment: Chaotic

AC: 16 (3) **HP:** 18 (4 HD)

ATK: 1 x Touch (+3, 1d6)

MOV: 120' (40')

Spectral: Immune to effects that affect living creatures. Can only be harmed by magic or silver. Fears light.

Shadow

Alignment: Chaotic

AC: 12 (7) **HP:** 11 (2+2 HD)

ATK: 1 x Touch (+2, 1d4)

MOV: 90' (30')

Spectral: Immune to effects that affect living creatures. Can only be harmed by magic or silver. Fears light.

Dragon Skeleton

Alignment: Chaotic

AC: 17 (2) **HP:** 31 (7** HD)

ATK: 2 x Claw (+6, 1d4+1) x Bite (+1, 2d10)

MOV: 15' (5')

Undead: Immune to effects that affect living creatures. Silent until it attacks.

Living Armor

Alignment: Neutral

AC: 17 (2) **HP:** 18 (4 HD)

ATK: 2 x Longsword (+3, 1d8)

MOV: 30' (10')

Magical Construct: Immune to status effects. Can be neutralized with Dispel Magic and similar effects.

Zombie

Alignment: Chaotic

AC: 11 (8) **HP:** 9 (2 HD)

ATK: 1 x Lunge (+1, 1d6)

MOV: 60' (20')

Undead: Immune to effects that affect living creatures. Silent until it attacks.

Animated Broom

Alignment: Neutral

AC: 11 (8) **HP:** 9 (2 HD)

ATK: 1 x Lunge (+1, 1d6)

MOV: 60' (20')

Magical Construct: Immune to status effects. Can be neutralized with Dispel Magic and similar effects.