

THE HOUSE ALWAYS WINS

A deadly vampire game show for a party of levels 3–10. One session, about four hours.

The party wakes inside Gloamglass Manor, on the stage of the longest-running game show in the world. The host, Lord Valerian Voss, is cheerful, theatrical, and utterly sincere about one thing: **the rules**. Survive five rounds and the contestants may claim any single prize from the House Inventory. Lose, and the audience has dinner.

The games are cruel. The system is unfair. But the rules are sacred, and the party wins by understanding them better than the vampires do.

THE HOST'S OATH

The single most important rule. Voss is **magically compelled** to answer truthfully any direct question about the **written Articles** of the Contestant Contract (page 6) or the **official game records**: what was recorded, issued, listed or scored.

- He may refuse only records the contract lists as **sealed** (Article Three). Anything not on that list, he must answer.
- He answers the question asked, not the question meant. Vague questions get gleeful, technically true answers.
- His oath covers rules and records, nothing else. He can bluff, tease and mislead in his announcements; he just can't state a falsehood about the rules or records.
- Never let him lie to dodge a clever question. If players ask the right thing, they get the right answer. That's the adventure.

THE BLOOD METER

Every contestant has six goblets. Penalties in every game are paid in blood: **mark a goblet**. It doesn't touch Hit Points, so it works at any level.

Goblets Effect (until a long rest)

2+	Disadvantage on Strength and Constitution checks.
4+	Speed halved, and Disadvantage on attack rolls.
6	Drained. The contestant collapses and is carried off (see Stakes).

Refreshment. After each round the party wins, Voss serves wine: every contestant clears one goblet. He wants a good show, not a short one.

Golden Goblets. When a player does something that genuinely delights Voss (a loophole, an unexpected spell, a perfect line), award a Golden Goblet: spend it to clear two goblets, or to reroll any d20 during a game.

STAKES

Pick one before you start, and tell the players.

The Cells (recommended). A drained contestant is locked in the manor's cells with the other prisoners. Their friends can still free them in Round Five.

Mortal. A drained contestant becomes dinner. Use only if your table wants real lethality, and never for a single failed roll; only a full meter kills.

RUNNING ORDER

Round	Game	Tests
1	The Price Is Blood	Observation, reading the host
2	The Unwelcome Guest	Social deduction, investigation
3	The Rising Tide	Movement, teamwork, hazards
4	The Traitor's Table	Trust, and reading the contract
5	Choose Your Prize	What the party truly values

DIFFICULTY

Levels	Easy	Standard	Hard
3–4	DC 10	DC 12	DC 14
5–7	DC 12	DC 14	DC 16
8–10	DC 13	DC 15	DC 18

Before you play: Round Four tempts the players to distrust each other. Agree beforehand that there's no secret traitor role and no player-versus-player fighting unless everyone wants it. The fun is in the temptation, not in betrayal.

LORD VALERIAN VOSS, THE HOST

Medium Undead, Lawful Evil

AC 16 **Initiative** +14 (24)

HP 195 (23d8 + 92)

Speed 40 ft., Climb 40 ft.

		Mod	Save			Mod	Save			Mod	Save
Str	18	+4	+4	Dex	18	+4	+9	Con	18	+4	+9
Int	17	+3	+3	Wis	15	+2	+7	Cha	22	+6	+11

Skills Insight +7, Perception +7, Performance +11, Persuasion +11, Stealth +9

Resistances Necrotic

Senses Darkvision 120 ft.; Passive Perception 17

Languages Common plus two other languages

CR 13 (XP 10,000, or 11,500 in Lair; PB +5)

TRAITS

The Host's Oath. Voss can't state a falsehood about the House's written Articles or its official game records. If he breaks an Article himself, he loses Legendary Resistance and takes 20 Radiant damage at the start of each of his turns until he puts it right.

The Show Must Go On. In the Grand Hall, Voss has Advantage on Charisma checks, and the audience is bound by Article Six. If the contestants attack Voss outside a game, Article Eight no longer protects them: at the start of each round, 1d4 audience vampires (use Vampire Spawn) leap down to join the fight.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day, or 4/Day in Lair). If Voss fails a saving throw, he can choose to succeed instead.

Misty Escape. If Voss drops to 0 HP outside his resting place, he becomes mist (as Shape-Shift) and must reach his coffin beneath the stage within 2 hours or be destroyed.

Spider Climb. Voss can climb difficult surfaces, including ceilings, without an ability check.

Vampire Weakness. He can't enter a residence without an occupant's invitation; takes 20 Acid damage if he ends his turn in running water; is Paralyzed by a stake through the heart while Incapacitated in his resting place; and takes 20 Radiant damage if he starts his turn in sunlight, with Disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks while in it.

ACTIONS

Multiattack (Vampire Form Only). Voss makes two Grave Strike attacks and uses Bite.

Grave Strike (Vampire Form Only). *Melee Attack Roll:* +9, reach 5 ft. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) Bludgeoning damage plus 7 (2d6) Necrotic damage. A Large or smaller target is Grappled (escape DC 14).

Bite. *Constitution Saving Throw:* DC 17, one creature within 5 feet that is willing, Grappled, Incapacitated or Restrained. *Failure:* 6 (1d4 + 4) Piercing damage plus 13 (3d8) Necrotic damage; the target's Hit Point maximum drops by the Necrotic damage, and Voss regains that many Hit Points.

BONUS ACTIONS

Shape-Shift. Out of sunlight and running water, Voss becomes a Tiny bat (Fly 30 ft.) or a Medium mist (Fly 20 ft., hover; Resistance to all damage but sunlight), or returns to vampire form.

Charm (Recharge 5–6). Voss casts *Charm Person* (spell save DC 19, no components, 24-hour duration).

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

Legendary Action Uses: 3 (4 in Lair). Immediately after another creature's turn, Voss can expend a use to take one of these actions. He regains all uses at the start of each of his turns.

Deathless Strike. Voss moves up to half his Speed and makes one Grave Strike attack.

Beguile. Voss casts *Command* (spell save DC 19, no components). He can't take this action again until the start of his next turn.

A Word From Our Sponsors. *Wisdom Saving Throw:* DC 19, each creature of Voss's choice within 60 feet that can hear him. *Failure:* the Incapacitated condition until the end of its next turn, politely watching a servant present a product that hasn't existed for three hundred years. He can't take this action again until the start of his next turn.

PLAYING VOSS

A 1930s radio host who happens to be a vampire. He is delighted by everything, introduces contestants with ridiculous titles, and narrates their failures with real sympathy. He is **never** secretly furious about losing. If the party beats him by the rules, he hands over the prize with a genuine smile. The only thing that truly angers him is cheating by his own side.

Fighting the host is a choice, not the plan. Below level 9, treat an attack as a dramatic disaster: the audience floods the stage and the attackers are dragged to the cells.

ROUNDS ONE AND TWO

ROUND ONE: THE PRICE IS BLOOD

Three treasures sit on velvet cushions: a **ruby crown**, a **diamond the size of a fist**, and a **small wooden horse** missing one wheel. Voss asks: *"Which treasure has the highest recorded value in my collection?"*

Win. Name the right item. The party has **two guesses**, agreed together.

Penalty. A wrong guess marks one goblet on the contestant who said it. (Brass tubes fill a goblet on the stage.)

The answer. The horse. It belonged to Voss's daughter, and the House records value by **what an object is worth to its owner**.

Clues the players can find

- **Ask about the method.** How the House records value is a rule, not a sealed record, so Voss must answer: *"By its worth to its owner, of course."*
- **Examine the horse** (Investigation, Easy): a name hand-carved underneath, worn smooth by a thumb.
- **Watch Voss** (Insight, Standard): his voice softens whenever the horse is mentioned.
- **Appraise the crown and diamond** (History or Arcana, Standard): enormously valuable, and a red herring.

Asking for the values directly. They're sealed (Article Three), so Voss refuses with glee. But a player who asks *"Do you record value by market price?"* gets a truthful "No."

ROUND TWO: THE UNWELCOME GUEST

Six guests sit at a candlelit dinner. Voss: *"One of our guests is not what they appear. Identify them, and you may proceed."* Hand out the guest cards (page 7).

Win. Correctly accuse **at least one** vampire. The challenge says "identify them", not all of them.

Penalty. Each wrong accusation marks one goblet on the accuser, and that innocent guest is led away screaming. (Under Cells stakes, they turn up in the cells in Round Five.)

Bonus. Naming both vampires earns a Golden Goblet, and Voss is visibly thrilled.

The twist. There are two vampires. **Lady Morwenna Ash** is the listed guest. **Tobias Quell** is a former contestant (season 612) who became Voss's favourite and has spent decades pretending to be human. He isn't on the guest list, so the official record shows only one vampire guest.

What the oath allows. The guest list is sealed, but a player who asks *"Is everyone at this table listed as a guest in the records?"* gets: "No."

Guest	Tells (DM only)
Lady Morwenna Ash	Vampire. No reflection in the silver (Perception, Easy). Hasn't touched her food. Her "sunny garden" story is rehearsed (Insight, Standard).
Tobias Quell	Vampire. Drinks only from his own flask, which smells of iron (Perception, Hard). Mentions the "sunrise chamber" (Insight, Standard). No pulse if touched (Medicine, Easy).
Brother Aldous	Human. Sweating, clutching a holy symbol: terrified, not undead.
Mirela Varn	Human. Pale face paint and red lips (Investigation, Easy, reveals makeup). A red herring.
Captain Hollis Grey	Human. A bandage hides an old bite scar. He survived a vampire once and hates them.
Pip Thornbury	Human. A jittery young poet with ice-cold hands, from fear.

Divine Sense, Detect Evil and Good, and similar magic work. Reward them: both vampires register as undead.

ROUNDS THREE AND FOUR

ROUND THREE: THE RISING TIDE

A ballroom fills with blood. The contestants must cross five zones to the exit stair before it rises too high. Run it in rounds; each contestant gets one action per round.

Zone	Obstacle	To cross
1. The Dais	A drop into the blood	Athletics or Acrobatics, Easy
2. Chandeliers	Swinging, greased chains	Acrobatics, Standard
3. Chain Platforms	Rise only while someone works the winch	One contestant winches (Athletics, Standard) so others cross freely; then a crossed contestant winches back
4. The Walkway	Collapses under weight	One at a time (Acrobatics, Standard), or two together with one carrying the other (Athletics, Hard, no further check for the carried)
5. Exit Stair	Safe	Reach it

The tide. Round 1: ankle-deep, difficult terrain. Round 3: waist-deep; anyone in the blood marks a goblet at the end of the round. Round 5: the ballroom is full; anyone still in the blood marks a goblet each round until out. After round 6, the game ends; anyone not on the stair marks two more goblets.

Teamwork. Helping gives Advantage. Voss offers a Golden Goblet to anyone who sabotages another contestant, but sabotage never helps the saboteur cross. Working together is simply better, and smart players notice.

Win. Every contestant who isn't drained reaches the stair.

Audience trouble (roll a d6 each round)

- 1 A chandelier crashes into Zone 2; its chains are now a ladder (Easy).
- 2 Two platforms swap places. The winch is now in Zone 4.

- 3 A vampire flings a goblet: one contestant is Blinded until the end of their next turn.

- 4 **Interference!** A silver grappling hook clatters down for a favourite. Voss stops the game and disqualifies the vampire (Article Six). As an apology, the tide drops one level.

- 5 The organist plays faster. Nothing changes, but it feels worse.

- 6 Silence. The audience leans forward.

ROUND FOUR: THE TRAITOR'S TABLE

Each contestant receives a sealed envelope (page 7). Voss: *"One of you may have received a private offer to betray the others. Before the final bell, you must deliver a unanimous and accurate verdict. Fail to agree, and the table loses!"* Turn over a **real ten-minute timer**.

The truth. No offer was made. The envelopes hold blank House stationery.

Win. A unanimous, accurate verdict before time runs out. Here that means declaring that **no betrayal offer was made**.

Penalty. No unanimous verdict, or a wrong one: every contestant marks two goblets.

How players can solve it

- **Ask the host.** Offers are recorded in the House's Ledger of Offers. Article Three doesn't seal it, so *"Has any contestant been issued a betrayal offer this round?"* must be answered: "No." The careful reader of the contract wins.
- **Magic.** *Zone of Truth*, *Detect Thoughts*, or similar on the contestants works perfectly.
- **Trust.** Everyone opening their envelope together and showing the blank pages is a fine solution.

Never secretly hand a player a traitor role. Let them argue, accuse and bargain; the reveal works because the paranoia came from them.

ROUND FIVE: CHOOSE YOUR PRIZE

The doors open on a treasury: mountains of gold, ancient weapons, jewels of forgotten kings. Behind an iron gate wait the House's prisoners, including any contestants drained under Cells stakes and any innocent guests led away in Round Two. Voss: *"One prize from the House Inventory is yours!"* Hand out the House Inventory (page 7).

The rule. Article One: any single listed prize, transferred to the winner outright. Voss answers any question about it truthfully, and is mildly offended at the idea that a prize could be temporary.

THE HOUSE INVENTORY (DM NOTES)

Lot	What it really does
One	The deed to Gloamglass Manor: estate, grounds, fixtures and legal title. See "Claiming the House" below. It has been on the list for three hundred years; nobody has ever chosen it.
Two	A chest of coin: 1,000 gp × the party's average level.
Three	The Crimson Crown (the ruby crown from Round One): a rare magic item of your choice, set as a crown.
Four	The freedom of one guest of the House: one prisoner walks free.
Five	The Host's Horn: an ornate brass speaking horn. Once per dawn, its holder can cast <i>Command</i> (save DC 15) without components.
Six	One Truthful Answer: Voss answers any one question about anything, truthfully, now or later.

CLAIMING THE HOUSE

- Ownership passes by the House's own magic, and legally. Voss signs without complaint.
- The owner can **revoke the House's hospitality** (Article Seven): every prisoner is free to leave, at once.

- The owner does **not** control the vampires. Each one holds a **tenancy agreement** that survives the change of ownership (also Article Seven).
- Here is the hook: a vampire can't enter a residence without an invitation, and each tenancy agreement *is* that invitation. Breaking or buying them out is your next adventure.

OTHER ENDINGS

Take the treasure. The party leaves rich. The prisoners stay. Voss waves them off warmly and means it.

Free one prisoner. Lot Four. Noble, limited, and exactly what most contestants who choose freedom pick.

Something else. If players find another clever reading of the Articles, check it against the contract. If the words support it, it works. Voss will be delighted.

Fight. Article Eight lapses, the audience joins in, and you'll want Voss's stat block. A brave or foolish ending.

AUDIENCE REACTIONS (D8)

- 1 A standing ovation from the cheap seats; a goblet shatters.
- 2 Lady Vespertine, a wealthy patron, loudly offers to "sponsor" a contestant.
- 3 An elderly vampire mutters strategy corrections nobody asked for.
- 4 Someone in the back chants "MORE BLOOD" until shushed.
- 5 A gasp, then frantic whispering and bets changing hands.
- 6 Polite, chilling applause in perfect unison.
- 7 A vampire faints dramatically. Nobody helps.
- 8 Total silence. Voss looks thrilled.

THE CONTESTANT CONTRACT

Read carefully. Every word is binding, on everyone.

ARTICLE ONE: PRIZES. Contestants who complete all five rounds may claim any single prize listed in the House Inventory. A claimed prize passes to its winner outright and forever.

ARTICLE TWO: THE HOST'S OATH. The Host shall answer truthfully any direct question concerning these Articles or the official game records of the House, save for records declared sealed in Article Three.

ARTICLE THREE: SEALED RECORDS. The following records are sealed until the verdict of their round, and the Host may decline to reveal them: (i) the recorded values of Round One; (ii) the guest list of Round Two. No other record is sealed.

ARTICLE FOUR: PLAY. Each round is won or lost by its stated rules. A contestant may attempt any lawful means of winning not forbidden by these Articles.

ARTICLE FIVE: PENALTIES. All penalties are paid in blood, as recorded on each contestant's meter. A contestant whose meter is full is withdrawn from play.

ARTICLE SIX: THE AUDIENCE. No member of the audience may interfere with an active round. Disqualification applies regardless of station.

ARTICLE SEVEN: THE HOUSE. Guests of the House may not depart without its owner's leave, and the owner may withdraw the House's hospitality at will. Existing tenancies of the House survive any change of ownership.

ARTICLE EIGHT: CONDUCT. The Host and audience shall not harm a contestant outside the rounds of play, provided no contestant first harms the Host.

Signed in the presence of the House. The House always wins. Exceptions are noted in the official records.

GLOAMGLASS MANOR

THE HOUSE INVENTORY

Prizes available to this season's champions. One per winning team.

Lot One	Deed (real property). Parchment, with seal.
Lot Two	A Strongbox of Gold Sovereigns, freshly minted and gleaming, enough to buy a small army or a very large ship.
Lot Three	The Crimson Crown, set with rubies, fought over by three kingdoms, enchanted by a forgotten court sorcerer.
Lot Four	The Freedom of One Guest of the House, to depart Gloamglass Manor unharmed and unpursued.
Lot Five	The Host's Own Speaking Horn, brass and gilt, whose words are obeyed.
Lot Six	One Truthful Answer from the Host, on any subject whatsoever, to be asked at the winner's leisure.

THE UNWELCOME GUEST: GUEST CARDS

Lady Morwenna Ash

A widowed countess. "I spend my days in my garden. The roses adore the sun."

Tobias Quell

A cheerful merchant. "Lovely house, isn't it? You get used to the stairs."

Brother Aldous

A monk, sweating. "Please. I only came for the soup."

Mirela Varn

A fortune-teller, very pale. "I foresaw this dinner. I came anyway."

Captain Hollis Grey

A soldier with a bandaged neck. "I've met their kind before. Never again."

Pip Thornbury

A jittery young poet. "Is it cold in here, or is it just me?"

THE TRAITOR'S TABLE: ENVELOPE INSERTS

GLOAMGLASS MANOR
HOUSE STATIONERY

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GLOAMGLASS MANOR
HOUSE STATIONERY

Print one insert per player, fold, and seal each in an identical envelope. They're blank. That's the point.