# The Headless Horseman

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If you have further questions, you can contact us at mount.parnassus.games@gmx.net.

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# Monsters & Encounters

# Introduction

Some adventures start out of a simple idea. I already had created this adventure for my campaign group, but the thought of making it available to a wider public only came to me when I was contemplating how to better prepare an adventure for being run by a GM. One of my gripes with otherwise excellent commercially available adventure modules is that they may at times pose entertaining reads, but are not-so-easy to prep when running them myself. I rarely read intro texts to my players. I'm also an impatient reader and want the gist of a scene, room or even set of rooms when preparing a game of my own.

I come to an adventure module from differing angles. At times I want to just run the module as is and minimize my prep work. Other times I want to mine the module for ideas, like riddles, puzzles, traps, whole rooms, plots or sub-plots. The thing I personally do the rarest these days is to read an adventure from cover to cover for the sheer fun of doing so. So, I hope I'll be able to facilitate several things - reading, quick-referencing and running the adventure. You be the judge how it works out …

## Placement

This story can be set in a fantasy world or in a low-magic version of this world, just like for example in Tim Burton's movie Sleepy Hollow. If the player characters have powerful divination spells at their disposal, none of them will work within a mile of the forest cave. The effect is exact, i.e. the players could conceivably use it to triangulate the exact location of that forest cave. This requires crossing the border of the effect twice during a spell's duration at two different points and a DC18 Intelligence check to triangulate the center.

In principle this module would be well-suited to be set in the fictional Transylvania of S. Mathis' wonderful *Transylvanian Adventures* for the DCC roleplaying game. I might add conversion notes when the *Transylvanian Grimoire* becomes available.

## Playing it

I've arranged the adventure into three separate parts, and further divided them into scenes. This structure is mostly a suggestion, however. There is some advice in each chapter as of how to vary it. Take the scenes as inspiration, most of the events described therein don't have to happen. All that is needed is a trail of events leading from start to finish, constructed however you want. The players will receive conflicting information during the adventure, hopefully to be resolved at the end. But if your players decide to suddenly explore the Enchanted Forest before anything else – let them! Shape your game however you want.

# Background

There are two rich farmsteads within an half hour's march from each other - the Grendelstuir farm and the Bruildir farm. Bjorn Grendelstuir's eldest was a son, Urgmer. Ralf Bruildir's eldest was a daughter, Aennwyn. They decided to marry the children to each other. Urgmer would get a wife of good standing, and Ralf could leave his land to his son who was born second. If Aennwyn married someone not holding land of his own, her future husband could lay claim to the farm according to local custom, so Ralf Bruildir is very invested in this arranged marriage.

The Bruildir farm extends over rich land that borders both to a forest and a swamp, and in between these is nested the third farmstead to take note of - the Hurneson farm. The Hurnesons took the short end when farmland was distributed, and unlike the older farmer families of good standing, Werran Hurneson had no choice but to win some arable land by trying to drain a piece of the marshland. His farm is small, and he could only take one farmhand in: Wulffhard.

Wulffhard is from a more remote place. War and strife in his land of origin have lost him his family and the farm he was

heir to. He has left those lands and carves out his existence as a farmhand. Werran Hurneson has taken him in, recognizing the qualities of this man. As the Bruildir's daughter, Aennwyn, came to age, both took note of each other. He a man from another place, with several years of experience ahead of her, she a girl with an independent streak. They did their best to keep their affair secret, as Aennwyn knows her father would forbid it for the reasons mentioned above. It didn't help that her betrothed, Urgmer Grendelstuir, was not to her liking.

The arranged wedding loomed heavily over their heads the closer it came, but it took them a long time to resolve themselves to elope together. Every time it came up, Aennwyn would take up the task of gathering firewood so that she could be with Wulffhard for a short while and prepare their departure. The last time was to be the night before the wedding.

# A fateful moment

Urgmer had departed for Aennwyn's home that night. He wanted to meet her without a chaperon this time, which seemed possible with the wedding so close at hand. He was also bringing an engagement present.

When he arrived at the Bruildirs', they directed him towards the forest, where Aennwyn was supposed to gather firewood. He left his horse at the forest edge and walked to look for Aennwyn, only to find her in the arms of another man. Considered choleric by some, he charged his rival, and Wulffhard had no choice but fight back.

In the end the only way he could fight off the strongly built Urgmer was to hit him with a stone, but it was clear that he had hit him too hard. Urgmer lay dying, but with his last breaths he cursed both of them.

Wulffhard had to think fast, and so he remembered a legend from his homelands, the legend of the headless horseman. Indeed not all places were safe, and with the superstitious farmers it just might work well enough to help them escape. He had brought an axe to defend themselves and a big broad cloak to shelter them while on the road. It was the best he could do, and now it had to do as well. He cut Urgmer's head off, advised Aennwyn to wait a little before

returning home, donned the cloak and took Urgmer's horse. He rode as fast as he could, trying to recall his old skills as a horseman from his teenage years. He pulled up the collar of his coat, tucked his head into the big and unwieldy leather coat as best as he could, and peered out between the first and second button. The Grendelstuirs had called everybody to the long dinner table. The tall window at the end of the hall was open. He rode up to it, with a bowling motion threw the head in and rode off.

He couldn't have done better! He managed to hit the soup bowl outright, and there was big confusion and shock, and nobody managed to pursue him. Granny, sitting next to the window, told everyone in great agitation that she had seen a headless horseman. And the head was without doubt Urgmer's! Aennwyn hid the body under some leaves, calmed herself and returned home, pretending Urgmer had never arrived.

That night Wulffhard dragged the headless body to a nearby cave deeper in the forest to prevent it from being detected. The next night the fake headless horseman rode again, and "abducted" Aennwyn from her room. He made sure he was seen that night by a maidservant of the Bruildirs. He hid Aennwyn and the horse in the same cave, and asked her to wait for his return.

# Out of the frying pan, into the fire

Wulffhard bade his time the next day. At night he spread a stag's blood in the barn he was usually sleeping in, disturbed everything and left. The stag itself was meant for

their provisions. He prayed none had found Aennwyn at the cave. To no avail …

Something had found Aennwyn. A hag of an evil coven had responded to the dying curse. She took Aennwyn by surprise, and tricked Wulffhard by magic on his arrival. With the two lovers bound by magic sleep, she started to proceed with a spell of her own: She began to reanimate the body of Urgmer, to make him the true headless horseman. She would exploit the preparations made by the young couple to start sowing fear herself, needing it to power even stronger dark magic. Come the new moon she will sacrifice the young couple to make the spell permanent, and release the horseman forever unto the world.

## Hooks

Here is a small compilation of possible ways to hook your party into this adventure. This also allows for a little leeway regarding how to fit this adventure in your campaign setting. If your current area is sparsely populated or even a wild setting, a few farmsteads might be easy enough to fit in. The locations should be easy enough to fit in a sandbox campaign as well.

### Option 1: The isolated farmsteads

As you can see above the adventure requires few key locations. The three farmsteads can located in an isolated valley the players happen to traverse. In this case a good hook would be the players stopping by at the Grendelstuirs'. The big farmstead is located at the road passing through the

valley and offers a convenient stopover for rest, even if the players ask only to sleep in the barn. Approaching the farm they become witness to a ritual of mourning. The players are welcomed even in this time of sorrow to share in the memorial dinner and learn during dinner conversation of the headless horseman. If things don't get moving, Old Grendelstuir might offer a reward for anyone bringing to justice the horseman.

The Bruildir farm offers a similar option. The players are granted leave of the land and an overnight stay in the barn, but learn from the servants that the daughter of the household has been abducted and her fiancée killed. If things don't get moving, Old Bruildir might approach the party at evening with a proposal, obviously them "looking like capable lads! And gals, of course, if you don't mind me saying it."

Players then get to use the respective farm as base of operations while unfolding the story and connecting the dots regarding the clues. The atmosphere of isolation might add some urgency why players should involve themselves.

**Option 2: An inn in a farming town**

While the two bigger farms may border town, they don't need to. What do you think intrigues your players more? A farming town will offer an inn that the players will gravitate to, tavern rumors may do the rest.

**Option 3: Deputy to the Sheriff**

The players may either run into the Sheriff when he's patrolling the King's Highway or find a reward placard looking for "suitable deputies to bring to justice a vile, murderous creature." This hook is especially appropriate if the players look like they fit the bill or already have a bit of a reputation as handy "problem-solvers" in the general area.

**Option 4: Encountering the horseman on the road**

This is the most challenging option for the Judge. Encountering the real horseman the players might do a lot of things, including giving chase and setting all kinds of things into motion. Also hints to the fake horseman might get lost or prove more confusing.

But if you prefer to start with a bang, let them be stalked on the forest road by the unholy abomination. They might only hear his horse whinny and its hoofs clatter. Then a long-drawn eerie whine. On a full moon night he might show himself on a rocky outcrop, looking down on the players from above. If your players are suitably impressed, let the rider chase them.

Your main problem in this case is that many parties stand and fight. Given the setup of the encounter a fear roll or similar device should be appropriate. Whoever fails and runs gets chased. Even if only one of the party members fails this morale or fear roll a wild chase might break loose, with the horseman going for the first to break rank, and the rest of the party chasing the horseman. Let the horseman have a swing or two at this character and depart at speed. His first appearance is for setting the mood only.

**Major Background NPCs**

**The Maiden (Aennwyn Bruildir)**
Appearance: Young beautiful maiden coming of age.
First visual: Black hair in braids, a shapely face unburdened by age.
Trait: Independent.
Mannerism: If agitated, will draw sharp breath, then blurt out all statements in short succession.

**The Farmhand (Wulffhard Gundersson)**
Appearance: Beyond adolescence, his wiry body hardened by work and fate.
First visual: Full brown beard.
Trait: Rolls with the blows, keeps going, quick thinker.
Mannerism: Tends to stare a strangers a good while before speaking.

**The Rival (Urgmer Grendelstuir)**
Appearance: Young adult with muscular back but grim features.
First visual: Thick eyebrows.
Trait: Quick to anger.
Mannerism: Guffawed when laughing.

**The Hag (Aemeryl Gwondhyrr)**
Appearance: An attractive woman starting to show signs of age.
First visual: Cold, piercing eyes.
Trait: Lust for power, spreading terror.
Mannerism: Speaks in questions and uses plural when referencing to herself. ("And who do we've got here, we wonder?")

# Exposition: Chasing a fake headless horseman

Many of the scenes in Act 1 can follow in any order. Not all have to be played, especially if the proverbial penny drops early and the players start guessing that the horseman they're chasing is fake. When this happens, you can start introducing events of Act 2 and change the pace of the adventure from investigation to confrontation and chase. Alternatively you can mix Act 1 and Act 2, triggering the oncome of the real horseman at any time that feels appropriate to the game.

> **The Adventure in Bullets**
> (What happens after the players have arrived)
>
> * Hook: There seems to be a murderous headless horseman afoot.
> * Exposition: The initial clues point to the horseman being fake.
> * Twist: A real headless horseman shows up.
> * Conclusion: Entering the Enchanted Forest, confronting the witch behind this new terror, resolve the original fake horseman mystery.

## Scene: Mourning a son

A good opening scene for Grendelstuir farm is a memorial service held for the household heir, Urgmer. People will cluster around the tree under which Urgmer's head has been buried. They are dressed in robes and simple garments – either white or black, whichever you prefer, but all the same shade. Each one holds a candle, and people will take turns saying a few words about Urgmer, blowing out the candle when they are done. The mother will do so under tears, the father will look pale and haggard, the farmhands and siblings have distant looks.

Urgmer will be remembered as:
* A strong, capable man and hard worker.
* As someone helping to defend the farm when trouble arose.
* As stern, but also fair and honest in his dealings regarding the farm.
* As concerned about keeping his honor.

More specific anecdotes will include:
* Gisholm: "He held watch one night, all night, over my body. I hurt myself with an axe while we were in the forest. Wolves had gotten wind of us, but Urgmer kept his head and defended me even after I fell over from loss of blood. He could have saved himself, instead he saved me."
* Bjorn Grendelstuir: "When the weather turned sour all of sudden, and a torrent of rain was destroying our harvest, Urgmer worked day and night to save every bushel he can get a hold of. He lay in bed sick three days after, but without this, would there have been enough for winter?"
* Frikka Grendelstuir: "When I was but a slip of a girl and he my big boy brother, he hit a boy chasing me so hard, he didn't come back for years. Good that he did, he's now courting me after all." (Mournful laughter.)
* Affra Grendelstuir: "So many things could be remembered about my eldest. But I remember him sitting, helping me to spin the wool into thread, fascinated by the tales I wove at the same time of honor and valor that my mother had told to her boys. His attention would not waver and he would ask questions, again and again." (Starts crying.)

Characters could discover the following clues:
* Granny was sitting in her chair next to the window, as she often looks out a bit absentmindedly. She's the only to see the headless horseman and describes his horse as brown – as was Old Bill, Urgmer's horse.
* Old Bill, Urgmer's horse, went missing with him when he rode towards Bruildir farm that night.

**Grendelstuir farm NPCs**

* Bjorn Grendelstuir – Head of the household. Stricken with grief. Will pause in conversations and stare into the distance, especially when his son is the topic.
* Affra Grendelstuir – The mother. Tries to hold her family together after the loss. Will try to tone down any bad events in conversation.

- Halma Grendelstuir – Old granny. Doesn't mind a bit of foul language and excitement. Will elaborate wildly on the horseman.
- Frikka Grendelstuir – His slightly younger sister. Is catatonic since the incident and does not speak.
- Gisholm – A farmhand. Easygoing and carefree.
- Lothar – A farmhand. Fastidious and always after Gisholm to get the work done. Stutters.

# Scene: Taken from her room

Bruildir farm has a main yard with buildings enclosing it fully on all sides. To the east side there is a barn, and to the north-east is a double-door arched gate which is usually open during the day.

The arrangement of the farm is important, as Aennwyn's room faces towards the inner yard. So does its shuttered window. Characters interrogating the people on the farm about the events of the night Aennwyn went missing would notice several inconsistencies. Aennwyn herself simply made it appear she was taken from her room, then snuck out of the farm at night.

Characters could discover the following clues:
- Aennwyn would usually shutter her window, as required by her mother. Both shutters are open. They open from the inside.
- If any character insisted on taking full stock of Aennwyn's belongings they would notice travel clothes including cloak missing, enough clothes to total a full extra change of clothes, and also her favored jewelry (a necklace and a ring).
- Aennwyn's room is on the second story. While a climbing ivy does indeed grow on the wall, it's wholly undisturbed and could not carry a full-grown man.
- There are no special tracks on the ground.
- Aennwyn disturbed her room herself, including laying over a chair to its side. Nobody noticed the sound of knocking over the chair. If there was a struggle, no noise was made.
-     The farm gate opens from the inside.

**Bruildir farm NPCs**

- Ralf Bruildir – Head of the household. A nervous, anxious man that is in the habit of talking to himself.
- Jonda Bruildir – The mother. Usually forthcoming and jovial.
- Guntar Bruildir – The youngest. Snoops around a lot and always gets into troble. Kind of snarky.
- Helmut – A farmhand. Doesn't speak much to hide his lack of education. Can become aggressive over perceived slights.
- Ada – A maidservant, friend of Aennwyn, might flirt with an impressive adventurer. Saw the false horseman on the night Aennwyn was taken while picking flowers near the forest "to learn the name of my destined lover."



# Scene: A murder without a body

Approaching Hurneson farm will reveal its location between a swamp and a forested sharp incline. Following a small, soggy trail for walking and a small cart, one arrives at the farmstead. The fields are close by, won by hard work and draining the swamp just enough to plant the most sturdy crops. Old Hurneson and his eldest can usually be found out in the fields, while his teenage son and daughter are told to stick close to the house and help their mother. The Hurnesons are hard-working, and already miss Wulffhard who was a great help without asking for much.

Wulffhard used to sleep in the barn during all seasons except winter. This gave him some privacy, and someone was watching over the goats and chickens the household owns most of the time. He also used this to his advantage when staging his own "murder:" Wulffhard killed a stag in the forest and kept its blood in a waterskin. He disturbed his sleeping place during the night and spread blood over it. In front of the barn he left some horseshoe prints in the soft mud. He also left the stable door open and a few chickens wandered out. Seeing the chickens out on next morning made the Hurnesons check out the barn. By now talk had already spread from Bruildir to Hurneson farm, and the farm holders readily jumped to the desired conclusion.

Characters could discover the following clues:
- If there was a fight, there was surely no sound. The goats did not complain while an unnatural abomination slaughtered their keeper.
- While there are horseshoe marks in front of the barn, there's no trail. No trail matching a horse traveling at any speed.
- While there's lot of dried blood, there's no mark where a knife, sword or axe blade might have entered the ground if the slayer attacked Wulffhard in his sleep.
- If the attacker simply took down Wulffhard in his sleep, why is the blood not in one puddle, but spread? (Wulffhard was aiming for dramatic effect.)
- The body is gone, but there are no drag marks.

**Hurneson farm NPCs**

- Siglund Hurneson – Head of the household. The work in the swamp gives him lung trouble, he coughs noticeably.
- Anka Hurneson – The mother. Is chatty and ends sentences with "dear." Tends to deviate from topic.
- Janko Hurneson – The eldest, helps his father in the fields. Speaks little and prefers answering with "Ahum" or "Uh-uh."
- Pieter Hurneson – Teenage son. Has the broken speech melody of puberty. Will voice words either too high or too low.
- Britta Hurneson – Early teenager daughter. Shy. Answers to questions in terse sentences, but does not expand on the topic.



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# Twist: The true headless horseman emerges

The party will now have various encounters with the real headless horseman. This provides a twist towards what they have learned so far. If the party does not conclude the original horseman was a fake, you can still move the adventure along by letting the real horseman loose on them with little harm.

The structuring of the scenes should mimic impacts closer and closer to home - first a sighting of the real horseman, for example when he just kills a victim. Then at a later stage, a fight with the horseman. The party will learn that they cannot bring him down that way but have to fight the source of the evil. Finally, they will have to find a way to track the horseman to its lair, where the hag renews him every time. Doing that concludes Act 2.

## Scene: The horseman murders an innocent

The horseman will follow a predictable pattern, set inadvertently by Wulffhard: It tries to kill someone from Grendelstuir, Bruildir and Hurneson farmstead in this order, over and over. This can help parties to track the horseman.

While he might be seen near these farmsteads on those days, he might also murder innocents he encounters while approaching his target. If this person belonged to a farmstead, he or she will be reported missing, but if it was a traveler, nobody will notice at first. However, the horseman will not try to hide his crimes, but instead put them on display – leaving them on a pathway mutilated, sticking them to a tree or draping them over a bush.

The horseman prefers murdering young people over old – heirs to the farmstead or farmhands are especially at danger. The horseman only dismounts if a victim is sufficiently slowed down (hurt leg, foot, or ankle come to mind) to prolong the chase and terror a little – leaving a trail of blood and a decapitated victim at its end.

The party then learns of one of these incidents in the following ways:
- A disturbed farmhand comes running back to the farm to report what happened.
- While visiting one of the key locations it is noticed that one of the people living there is missing.
- While traveling the party finds one of the dead bodies.

## Scene: Fighting the horseman

This can come about in one of several ways:

- The horseman attacks a farmstead to kill a victim – but the players are present.
- He might go for the kill first and ride off with the head, if successful.
- He might try to drag off a victim to kill them later.
- The party encounters the horseman while traveling
- The party recognizes a pattern in the horseman's behavior and tries to bait or ambush him.

The horseman will either try to spread as much damage as possible or ride off after killing a victim. He does not collapse at 0 HP but flees the battle at speed. He will chose routes for evasion where his fast horse or its special magic abilities are to his advantage.

The horseman looks even bigger than the already broadly built Urgmer. He wears black garb and the long leather coat with high collar that Wulffhard used for his deception. His horse is black and its eyes sparkle red if looked into.

**Stat Block (DCC) - Headless Horseman:** Init +2; Atk +4 Heavy Woodman Axe (d8); AC 15; hp 4d12; hp 24; MV 30' (on foot) or 60' (on horse); Act 2d20; SP blindsight 60', immune to charm and sleep effects, immortal outside its lair, crit table III/d10 and will behead on 9 or 10 on crit table roll, fear aura 20' requiring DC13 Will save (1/day when first entered, victim paralyzed or runs away in panic for 1d4 rounds), can move 90' in fog when on horse, horse cannot be spooked, can turn horse to dust, can summon horse from dust; SV Fort +4, Ref +2, Will +0; AL C.

**Encounter steps for the real horseman**

1. Planning: The horseman has no will of its own. He is either set at a target of the witch's choosing, set loose to sow terror, or guarding the lair.
2. Preparation: The horseman needs to return to the lair to be renewed. After the witch has renewed her spell, the horseman can ride again.
3. Initiation: The horseman can be seen riding out towards its intended quarry. It might show itself to people if it can spread terror that way. It wants to be seen, but only in terror-inducing short increments.
4. Fulfillment: The horseman will pick a target, either according to its mission or by chance. He prefers targets being alone, and prefers young over old. He will either try to scatter a group or break one target loose to chase it down. The terror of the chase is part of the magic.
5. Achievement: The horseman will depart after having killed its target.
6. Aftermath: The horseman returns to the the lair in the forest. It will try to make use of territory and the properties of its horse to lose pursuers in swamps and forest areas.

Note: If the real horseman proves to be a pushover in the first encounter, level him up for the next one. The in-game explanation is the witch casting new spells on her undead abomination during the Preparation step. The real horseman should be a challenging encounter for the party. To make this apparent to the players, explicitly mention visual details like "He seems to loom higher now as before, as if he was a bit larger." (more HP) or "He seems to cast a light red glow around him." (higher AC).

The horseman's fear aura especially comes to play when a party first meets the real horseman up close – when there can be no more doubt that this is the real deal.

## Scene: Chasing the horseman

Of course you can foreshadow only for so long. Either by ingenuity or by force the party will be able to confront the horseman successfully. The horseman will flee any confrontation he's about to lose. He will flee at 0 HP, held together by the magic imbued into him. His instinct will be to return to the lair. However, this is no headless chase scene. The horseman will try to use any advantage he has – the magic nature of his horse or the dangers of the forest.

If your characters keep chase, let them follow through to the final confrontation. Succeeding under pressure has its own rewards. Most of the enchanted forest can be skipped if a group is determined and skillful enough to chase at speed.

Note: This scene concludes Act 2. The final confrontation and resolution of the story follows up in Act 3.

# Conclusion: Ending the terror

Act 3 includes the final confrontation with the Hag in the woods and the forest cave. It also includes the aftermath - hopefully freeing Aennwyn and Wulffhard, hearing their tale and then letting the players deal with the aftermath.

## The Enchanted Forest

Until recently this has been a rather unremarkable and safe region of light to medium forest. Now it seems suspect even to the casual glance. There is an unshakable feeling of something lurking in each shadow or thicket. Sometimes this is mere paranoia triggered by sensing the residue of the witch's spells. Sometimes it is real.

The witch brought several allies to the forest by the means of magic: lesser elementals of air, tree horrors, delusion newts and pit badgers.

> **Dangers of the Forest**
>
> Roll a d6 to determine which danger the party runs in.
>
> 1. Pit Badgers (see page 13)
> 2. Delusion Newt (see page 13)
> 3. Crazed Woodman (see page 14)
> 4. Tree Horror (see page 14)
> 5. Lesser Air Elementals (see page 15)
> 6. Combination of several options
>    (e.g. Delusion Newt and Tree Horror)

## Scene: Hot pursuit

The horseman will deliberately try to lead any pursuers into one of the dangers lurking in the forest to escape. See "Dangers of the Forest" side bar. Let the players make evasion rolls as given in the monster descriptions. Some evasion rolls require a decision to be made - like trying to outrun an axe-wielding madman - that may be at odds with pursuing a headless horseman.

If the players manage to evade the dangers they can keep pursuit. Skip to the Forest Cave.

**Note: Horse and Rider**

If players proceed on horse, for example in hot pursuit, many of the dangers given here can be applied to their horse instead. Let the player then roll for his horse if appropriate (falling into a badger pit, being attacked by a Tree Horror's tentacles), and let the horse be the primary victim. Other horses may rear. Having one's horse attacked or having its front hooves vanish in a pit calls for rolls to evading harm for oneself, same when a horse rears.

## Scene: Navigating the forest

If the players explore the forest, let their scouts roll for finding tracks.

Each scout gets a roll. A success takes one half till a full hour to track, a failure eats up 2-3 hours. 3 successes means the lair is found. If a scout roll is failed, one or several players need to evade one of the dangers (see Dangers of the Forest on pg. 14). If a scout roll is critically failed, apply two dangers at once without allowing rolls for evasion: Let a Lesser Air Elemental push party members towards a Tree Horror in a surprise attack, let a Delusion Newt occur in the vicinity of a Pit Badgers, etc.

Difficulty is as follows:
- DC12 for all hunter, trapper and forester occupations.
- DC14 for elves, thieves, and all shaman and woodcutter occupations.
- DC16 else.
- Add +2 if conducting this search at night with a light source. Assume "Proceeding cautiously." for all rolls regarding "Evading the horror" unless explicitly stated otherwise by players.
- Note for elves: You might consider granting the +4 bonus for "Heightened Senses" here. See pg. 57 of the rulebook.

# The Living Map

Instead of providing you with a finished map, let the players' rolls create the map. Think about where roughly you want to place the forest cave and pinpoint a starting location. Now consider the quality of the rolls to see how close the players come and how much they deviate. Place locations on the map, for example from those below. If the players trigger one of the more static encounters (like badger pits or a Tree Horror), mark it on the map after with a little icon.

The finished map could feature a brook and a road crossing through the forest, the brook running north-south and the road running southwest-northeast, for example.

**Evocative Locations**

Here's some locations you can describe to your players in order to give them a sense of the area they are passing through when searching for the Forest Cave:

- The Standing Stone: An ancient marker of a land border that seems to be older than the forest itself. It is a single monolith, strangely free of moss and lichen, marked with 3 circles.
- The Rift: As you walk upon a hill in the forest, it's as if it had been cut in two long ago. The cleft's walls are not straight, but somewhat slanted. You see a little brook run below, among the rocks. The cleft is 30' wide and 40' deep. Trees grow on both sides. You will have to detour. (Good place for a Delusion Newt.)
- The Burial Ground: In the center of three hills is a depression. In the center of the depression are three monolithic stone pillars supporting a vaguely triangular flat stone. A burial ground of old for sure. (Good place to shelter from a storm.)
- A Desolate Cabin: An old logger's cabin, empty, with the thatched roof rotting and partially caved in. (An uneasy resting place if the party needs to spend the night in the forest. Nothing special happened here unless you think otherwise. Poor shelter if trying to evade an air elemental.)
- A Fresh Campground near the Road: Several travelers camped here a night or two ago. It looks they left in a hurry. Somebody even kicked the fire over, but the rocks prevented spread. What did happen here?

# Horrors of the Enchanted Forest

The enchanted forest is now the home of some nasty beasties, attracted by the presence of the Hag or directly summoned by one of her spells.

**Pit Badgers**

*Badgers with jet-black fur.*

**Stat Block (DCC) – Pit Badger:** Init +1; Atk +1 Bite (d6); AC 12; hp 1d8; hp 5; MV 20' (on foot); Act 1d20; SP infravision; SV Fort +1, Ref +2, Will +0; AL N.

Note: Immobilized target counts as entangled (+1d die shift for attacking badger) and does not add its DEX modifier to AC.

**Encounter steps for Pit Badgers**

1. Planning: The Hag attracted several families of the creatures. A family of pit badgers (1d3+2) will start a new burrow by creating a few tunnels to live in.  (done)
2. Preparation: The badgers will then dig several six foot deep covered pits with sandy inclines. The pit covers are manufactured by using dirt and badger piss to create a sort of loose cement which will first support a creature, then suddenly give way. During this phase the badgers can still be encountered on nocturnal hunts.
3. Initiation: When the pits are ready, badgers mostly wait for their quarry in the tunnels connecting their pits.
4. Fulfillment: Once a victim falls into a pit, it is often at least temporarily immobilized. Part of the walls cave in with the quarry, while its lower body is exposed to a family of aggressive carnivores.
5. Achievement: Usually the victim dies quickly of inner injuries and blood loss. It gets dragged under. There is now a noticeable hollow. The badgers feed.
6. Aftermath: The badgers will start rebuilding the pit.

Evading the horror:
- While running: DC 16 Reflex saves until somebody falls in, DC 10 after.
- While walking without special caution: DC 12 Reflex save.
- While proceeding cautiously: DC 8 Reflex save.
- While proceeding probing the ground with a pole or stick: Automatic success.



**Delusion Newt**

*A newt, colored almost like the ground it sits on. Nothing remarkable really.*

**Stat Block (DCC) – Delusion Newt:** Init +0; Atk +1 Bite (d4); AC 11; hp 1d6; hp 3; MV 20' (on foot); Act 1d20; SP infravision, delusion vapors 20' radius for Will save DC13, hard to spot DC14; SV Fort +0, Ref +0, Will +0; AL N.

Note: The values for spotting the newt are if you are explicitly go looking for a creature causing this. Else the newt does not even get noticed. Leaving the area is the safest option.

**Encounter steps for Delusion Newts**

1. Planning: Delusion Newts will usually pick a location near a natural danger like a cliff side or a predator. In this case they are magically attracted, and they make especially use of  nearby Pit Badgers or Tree Horrors. (done)
2. Preparation: A lone Delusion Newt will devour any toxic prey or plant life it can hold of during regular hunts.
3. Initiation: The Delusion Newt picks a hiding location and will even slightly camouflage. It waits for prey.

4. Fulfillment: Once a victim moves into the vicinity, the Newt starts to emit potent yet not regularly visible vapors. These carry strong hallucinatory powers. Victims become highly irrational, imagine things that aren't there, have panic episodes and cannot discern real dangers anymore.

5. Achievement: The victims fall prey to the danger of choice - falling of a cliff breaking their necks, being slain by a nearby predator, stepping into a Pit Badger pit or are dragged in by a Tree Horror.

6. Aftermath: The Delusion Newt will nourish itself on the secretions of its panicked prey after its death.

Evading the horror:
- While running: Evade on a DC 8 Luck roll. (Passing too quickly through the vapor to be seriously at risk.)
- While walking without special caution: Evade on a DC 12 Luck roll.
- While proceeding cautiously: Evade on a DC 14 Luck Roll.
- While proceeding probing the ground with a pole or stick: Automatic failure.

**Crazed Woodman**

*A man with a crazed look to his eyes, frothing at the mouth, parts of his clothes in rags from wildly thrashing through the forest, with many cuts on his skin. Spouting out random accusations, he attacks wildly and relentlessly. He's certainly crazy, talking to himself in questions.*

**Stat Block (DCC) – Crazed Woodman:** Init +0; Atk +2 Handaxe (d6); AC 11; hp 1d6; hp 4; MV 30' (on foot); Act 1d20; SP can ignore first 2 hits; SV Fort +1, Ref +0, Will -2; AL depends.

**Encounter steps for a Crazed Woodman**

1. Planning: N/A
2. Preparation: N/A
3. Initiation: After an encounter with a Delusion Newt (see page 17) this poor sod got a full-blown psychotic break and is running through the forest, foaming at the mouth and ready for murder.
4. Fulfillment: When encountering the party, he will relentlessly attack. Did someone say axe-wielding maniac? He sure is.

5. Achievement: The woodman will be crazed for another full turn after encountering the players, unless either knocked out or otherwise be reduced to unconsciousness.

6. Aftermath: When waking from his newt-vapor-induced rage the victim will only have partial recall and feel remorse over all he did, either when he recalls an episode or when made aware of it.

Evading the horror:
- While running: DC 10 Reflex save.
- While walking without special caution: DC 12 Stamina check to outrun.
- While proceeding cautiously: DC 12 Stamina check to outrun.
- While proceeding probing the ground with a pole or stick: Automatic failure.

**Tree Horror**

*It's as if a nearby tree suddenly attacks with its roots. Tree Horrors emulate the color and texture of the tree they burrow under. The creature itself, usually not seen in full, is a vile black blob with many maws full of spit-covered fangs. Many tentacles go out of from the body, most are used for supporting the body, crawling, or pushing itself up to reach out of its cave. Only tentacles extended through tunnels outside take on the tree-like camouflage, all others remain as black as the body.*

**Stat Block (DCC) – Tree Horror:** Init +2; Atk +4 Entangle or +4 Crush (d8) or +2 Slam (d6) or +6 devouring maws (2d8); AC 15; hp 4d8; hp 18; MV 10' (crawl); Act 3d20; SP tremor sense 60', drag under victim (see Note); SV Fort +3, Ref +2, Will +2; AL C.

Note: Can apply its Crush attack only against entangled victims at +1d die shift. Drags a victim under if the victim fails 3 DC14 STR checks in consecutive rounds. Must check twice per round if entangled by two tentacles, three times if entangled by three. A single attack that makes 7 points damage or more removes a tentacle.

**Encounter steps for a Tree Horror**

1. Planning: The Hag called forth deep lurkers to come close to the surface. (done)
2. Preparation: The Tree Horror will dig out a lair under a tree for itself, and several tunnels for its tentacles for striking at prey. It will then cover the holes with leaves and moss. (done)
3. Initiation: The Tree Horror then waits until something steps into the close vicinity of its tree to strike.
4. Fulfillment: Once a victim steps close enough, the horror will try to grab the closest creature with several tentacles, and then start to drag it under earth to devour it with its many horrible maws. It will use other tentacles to slam at both victim and others present in order to harm and kill them.
5. Achievement: The victim gets dragged under and is eaten. The Tree Horror retracts its tentacles and will attack no further, unless sensing a clear danger to itself - like someone trying to attack it through the tentacle tunnels.
6. Aftermath: After several victims have been devoured, the Tree Horror will dig through the Earth for another tree to make its lair under. Anything non-digestible the victims had on them stays behind. Covered in an acidic slimy mucus.

Evading the horror:
- While running: DC 14 Reflex save.
- While walking without special caution: DC 12 Reflex save.
- While proceeding cautiously: DC 10 Reflex save.
- While proceeding probing the ground with a pole or stick: DC 10 Reflex save.

**Lesser Air Elemental**

*A gust of wind that has taken form. Is not visible by itself without magic or throwing dust or dirt. Will then appear to be the shape of a gnome with bulbous body.*

**Stat Block (DCC) – Lesser Air Elemental:** Init +5; Atk +4 Slam (d6) or hurled object +4 missile fire (d6, range 60'); AC 14; hp 3d6; hp 8; MV 50' (flight); Act 1d20; SP invisible, pick up opponent (STR 18 for opposed checks), elemental traits; SV Fort +3, Ref +5, Will +3; AL N.

Note: The elemental traits are listed on pg. 411 of the rulebook. However, the limit for half-damage does not apply to lesser elementals. Lesser air elementals cannot use the special power cyclone.

The elemental will pick up members of the party and drop them out of heights up to 30'. Reflex save of DC12 to hold on to a branch for half damage when being dropped. On a natural 20, no damage. (See pg. 96 of the rulebook for falling damage. No broken bones if the Reflex save was made.)

**Encounter steps for a  Lesser Air Elemental**

1. Planning: N/A
2. Preparation: The elemental was conjured by the witch who knows the true names of several. (done)
3. Initiation: Wind will suddenly pick up out of nowhere. Objects will be hurled at a distance.
4. Fulfillment: The elemental will slam into some party members or pick one of them up and carry them as far up as 30' before dropping them.
5. Achievement: The elemental carries out 1d3+3 rounds of attacks before leaving. The wind will cease. The elemental evaporates until summoned again.
6. Aftermath: The elemental returns to its home plane.

Evading the horror:
- While running: DC 14 Reflex save to dodge.
- All other: Automatic failure.

# Scene: The Forest Cave

When the heroes discover the Forest Cave, they may either encounter the witch or the horseman or both. The cave itself is dank especially after rainy weather. It is cool (refreshingly so in summer) and carries an echo beyond its size, a place of natural magic. Water drops are heard as they fall into a small pool. Light filters in from the entrance as if through a veil.

The lovers are held in magic sleep on the far end of the shallow pool. The witch uses the pool for scrying. She has carved many runes and sigils into the earthen walls to infuse her rituals and maintain her hold on the forest with the natural magic of the place. The floor is covered in moss that is soft to the touch, dry in some areas, wet in others. The witch will hide in the shadows beyond the pool, and if present, the horseman will step forward.

The horse is not present in the cave. It falls to dust when the horseman enters the cave, and emerges from earth when he leaves, rising under him to bear him. The bones of the Urgmer's horse Old Bill are buried under the cave entrance. The Hag let some of her allies strip the terrified horse of all its flesh and sank the bones into the ground, giving birth to the shadow mare the horseman rides.

**The Enemy at the Forest Cave**

The characters are in hot pursuit of the horseman:
- The witch may be out depending on the current encounter step.
- Confront the horseman in whatever state he is in.

The characters were delayed by the horrors of the Enchanted Forest, but could resume pursuit:
- The witch is in.
- If the characters were able to hurry, the horseman may be undergoing the ritual and out of commission.

The characters lost their pursuit or came here by search:
- If they encountered more than one horror of the Forest on their way, the witch is definitely in. Else it depends on the encounter step.
- The horseman has been fully restored and guards the cave.

The characters come by night, not in pursuit of the horseman:
- The horseman is out spreading terror. Depending on the encounter step he can be encountered in the forest.
- The witch is either practicing a ritual or sleeping, depending on time. She's asleep after 1 am when the witching hour is over.

**The Hag**

*An attractive woman starting to show signs of age. She has cold, piercing eyes. (See pg. 5 for more details.)*

**Stat Block (DCC) – The Hag (Lv5 wizard):** Init +2; Atk +2 Dagger (d4+1); AC 13; hp 6d4; hp 15; MV 30' (on foot); Act 1d20+1d14; SP ritual magic, spells: see below, spell check bonus +7, Luck modifier of +0 for table rolls, does not burn Luck, will spellburn 5 points if things go poorly; SV Fort +2, Ref +1, Will +3; AL C.

Note: Find the spells in the rulebook for easy reference under page ...
- Animal Summoning (Lv1), pg. 129, cast at +1d die shift due to affinity
- Color Spray (Lv1), pg. 135
- Flaming Hands (Lv1), pg. 142, cast at -1d die shift due to lack of affinity
- Magic Shield (Lv1), pg. 146
- Sleep (Lv1), pg.155, note: the hag cannot cast Sleep while keeping the lovers in a magic coma
- Arcane Affinity: Summoner (Lv2), pg. 162 (already cast at result range 16-19)
- Monster Summoning (Lv2), pg. 184, cast at +1d die shift due to affinity
- Ray of Enfeeblement (Lv2), pg. 190
- Planar Step (Lv3), pg. 225

**Encounter steps for the Hag**

1. Planning: On receiving the mystical reverberations of Urgmer's dying curse, the Hag set out to take advantage of the magical turmoil created by the murder. (done)
2. Preparation: The witch takes Urgmer's body and captures the Lovers, suspending them in magical sleep. The cave becomes her base of operations. (done)

3.  Initiation: The Hag unleashes the reanimated body of Urgmer to terrorize the farmers. She intends to weave the sorrow she creates into her final spell. (Act 2)
4.  Fulfillment: The Hag will depart the cave twice a day to gather spell components. She will leave the horseman as watch in the cave.
5.  Achievement: The Hag finishes her spell in the night of the new moon. That will create powerful wards on her abomination and remove the need for her to renew the spells. The ritual consumes Wulffhard's and Aennwyn's life force. They both die.
6.  Aftermath: The Hag will depart the local lands, having unleashed a powerful abomination on the locals which will continue to claim lives until stopped by powerful means.

There is a variation to step 4:

If the horseman returns wounded, the hag will have to renew the spells and wards on her abomination. She will not leave the cave during that time, but the horseman will be put to rest until she finishes her spells. Cunning players may surprise the witch while she enacts this ritual. If the witch is slain while the horseman is prepared for the ritual of renewing, he will not return from the dead.

The ritual takes half an hour, giving the players time to assess the situation and act. If the players don't act the horseman is renewed.
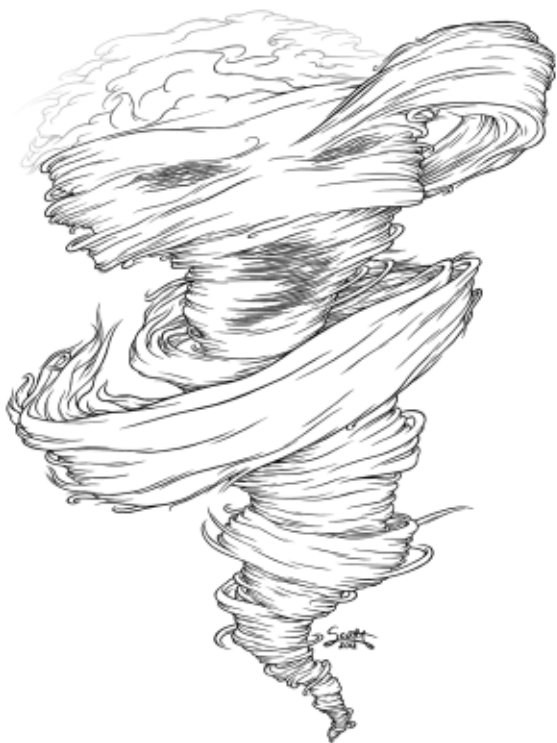


# Aftermath

When the bad guys have been dispatched, it is over. If the witch was not in the cave at the time, she will not return after. She departs the area, but she has a long memory... The horseman slumps to the ground. The evil energy is drained from the body and disperses into the pool. The cave seems a lot lighter. Also Wulffhard and Aennwyn will stir from their sleep. They have no recollection of what happened during their sleep, they had no awareness of their surroundings. During the rituals they would get nightmares, but everything remained in a strange haze. They recount their stories and answer questions to the best of their abilities.

## A question of morals?

Technically, Wulffhard is guilty of murder and Aennwyn his accomplice. At least the law of the land knows no other verdict. Should your group play with a system of nine-pointed alignment, then letting them go may be considered good, but not necessarily lawful. Turning them in might be lawful, but not necessarily good.

Will the players turn them in? Or let them go? Or even aid them in their attempt to get away to a better life of their own? And what about the sorrow of the families that lost each their firstborn? If the players aid the lovers in getting away, this will involve carefully leaving out anything to do with the events regarding the fake headless horseman. Explaining inconsistencies away or even constructing a different narrative could prove problematic if there are characters in the party obeying oaths – like a paladin, for example.

## Rewards

The witch left the implements she uses for her magic. Most of it is specific to her brand of magic, but her staff is elaborately carved, adorned with a snake's head and can aid anyone to master monster summoning so well that they cast it at +2. If you play with spell components, wizards will have a field day.

Undoing the distorting influence on the natural magic of the pool and cave is worth a +1 change in Luck for clerics

serving the principles of nature and balance, see also pg. 361 of the DCC rulebook.

Turning in proof of killing the headless horseman should yield a reward – but only if there is a quest-giver present who can pay such a reward, like when the local sheriff gave the quest. The runes and sigils over Urgmer's body can provide such proof. A magician or wizard could affirm their magic nature, but plain superstition does the trick, too. The body of the witch and her implements can also serve as proof. Or if they are clever enough to capture her alive, the bound and gagged sorceress will do as well. Turning in the lovers is also an option, but does not increase the reward.

A reward could total 200gp, unless such a high sum is inappropriate to your campaign world. In that case, the local sheriff might donate two suits of chain mail and 10gp per party member else.

If the players are considerate enough to return Urgmer's body to the Grendelstuir's for proper burial, the family is grateful. The father gives 100sp and a family jewelry that could be sold for 25gp.

If the players turn in Wulffhard, but spare Aennwyn jail and beheading, Ralf Bruildir will be grateful and give them two gems worth 15gp each. However, they have made an enemy in Aennwyn. The death of her lover would spur her on to finally navigate fate fully on her own at the first chance she gets. And one of her driving forces will be revenge. Others might consider the party heroes, but she will try to find a way they get their just rewards …

## What if they fail?

As you can see from the encounter steps for the Hag (see pp. 16), the headless horseman will be made permanent. He will ride every night and kill a victim until stopped by powerful magic. If no more victims remain, he will prey on travelers. He will not travel further than 5 miles of his cave. The forest and the swamp will be considered cursed. The farms will remain abandoned, because every new settler will be slain by the abomination as well. The horrors will remain in the forest until the horseman is dispatched.

Getting rid of the headless horseman will be much harder now, and will require stronger magic than at the party's disposal right now. Surely material for another quest ...

# Appendix

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