

The Fiddlers Lament

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SPECIAL THANKS: Erik Mona, Lisa Stevens, James Jacobs and the Paizo staff and to Michael Kortez for his excellent ghost-story adventure, *Haunting of Harrowstone*.

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The Fiddler's Lament (5ED)

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First published August 2014

Pathfinder version published July 2012



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This adventure is a part of our line of support materials for the Next edition of the world's most famous roleplaying game! This adventure doesn't feature any dungeons, nor any dragons for that matter, but it provides an excellent opportunity to introduce your characters into a campaign with more than a touch of the mysterious and the macabre. It is an adventure that can easily stand on its own, set in a small village where things go bump in the night, and it bows to some of the tropes of the horror genre as well as traditional adventure. The PCs have a chance to earn the trust and admiration of the townsfolk for their heroic deeds, and perhaps gain the favor of a lovely lass should they break her curse, building their sense of community with a town that may become their home base as they move on to their further adventures.

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The Fiddler's Lament is a short adventure designed to be set in any small town where low (1st-2nd) level PCs may find themselves, though it works best set in a village with a ruined fortress, cathedral, or prison nearby, a place of tragedy and sorrow with a fell reputation. The adventure may not provide enough experience for the PCs to gain in level, but it does provide several challenges and rewards.

Adventure Background

Alhindri's parents used to say she had her head more in other worlds than in this one as she sang and danced her way through life, sprightly even for an elf. When her parents died in a tragic boating accident, she was subdued for their funeral, but even that fugue was short-lived as she soon went back to her ways of prancing across meadows to stir the butterflies and singing nonsensical songs to the birds. Many of the elves thought her stricken or possessed, and ultimately none were anything but secretly relieved when upon reaching the beginnings of adulthood she upped and left her hedged community to explore the greater world outside.

Alhindri wandered for weeks before finally falling in with a band of Wanderers headed north. In this people of dusken skin and dervish dances, Alhindri had finally found a kindred spirit. They knew the ways of the night song and the dance of the moonlight upon the water; they too could hear the music in the crackle of the campfire and freedom of nature as it flowed through their veins in an expression of purest joy, devoid of thought or artifice. In turn, the Wanderers accepted her as one of their own and allowed her to dance to the sound of their fiddle and tambourine as they traveled the rugged countryside of the North.

For more than a decade, Alhindri danced among the Wanderers, and even they had to recognize something different about her—something special that transcended the mundane and touched on some other plane of existence where the troubles of life were a trifling thing next to the trill of the music and the thrill of the dance. More than one of the dusky men offered to take her in marriage and make her a respected matron of their tribe, but she gently rebuffed them all content in their company alone, seeking neither companionship nor station—known to all the towns they visited as the dancing elf maid of the Wandering Folk.

Unfortunately though the years of an elf are long, her state of bliss came to an end all too soon. One evening as their caravan camped in the wilderness, a Dark Stranger came into their midst. Swathed all in cloak, scarf, and wide-brimmed hat, though it was a warm spring night, he requested the hospitality of their fire. This was begrudgingly given but the elder matron of the tribe immediately made the ward against the Evil Eye at the stranger, and all fell silent in his presence. Perturbed at the end of the festivities the stranger demanded that the fiddler strike up a tune and that the elf maid dance for him. Alhindri thought that he seemed handsome enough from what she could see, but before she could acquiesce to his request—nay demand—the strangest thing happened. Lothiaro, the head of the caravan, took his fiddle and smashed it upon a rock claiming that none of the Wandering Folk would play for the Dark Stranger and that none under his protection would dance before him—as it has always

been among the Wandering Folk, and as it would always be.

Alhindri did not quite understand what was going on and watched in a strangely calm daze as the Dark Stranger proclaimed, "So be it," and proceeded to gruesomely slaughter the Wanderers—her kin of the last several years—with his bare hands before her very eyes. Some of them sought to fight; others tried to flee. It mattered not, for the stranger moved with a speed and savagery unmatched by mortal limbs. In moments, the gory massacre was done, and the blood-slicked stranger stood before Alhindri. She found that she could not look up into his mesmerizing eyes and only stared dumbly at the ground where she noticed the curious detail that he had cloven hooves instead of feet.

"Your adopted kin have purchased your freedom at a dear price this night," he intoned to her, "but the demand of the Stranger cannot be denied forever. We will meet again, you and I."

Then he was gone in the darkness, and Alhindri found that she couldn't bring herself to move for some time and simply sat and stared at the dew-stained grass where he had stood and the imprint of two cloven hooves that remained faintly visible.

When villagers from the nearby town of Raven came upon the scene of the massacre three days later, they found Alhindri sat there still, staring at the ground, silent and unresponsive, her cheeks hollow from hunger and thirst, and her brow burned from days in the unrelenting sun. The villagers buried the Wanderers in the consecrated ground of their town cemetery to prevent them from arising again to trouble the living and took the elven waif in out of the kindness of their hearts, thinking her one of the forlorn members of her race presumably in shock over what she must have witnessed. They nursed Alhindri back to health but soon learned that her injuries were more to her spirit than to her body. She never spoke nor emerged from her silent stupor. Finally, realizing that they could do no more for the young elf, one of the local councilmen paid out of his generosity to have her transported to a hospital in a distant city where she could be cared for in hopes that she would eventually emerge from her fugue and be able to tell what had occurred to the Wanderers she had been with.

There Alhindri waited, known only as the Raven Patient, passed from hospital to prison to asylum, silent and alone for 85 years...until today. In the darkest hour of the early morning, Alhindri opened her eyes to discover the Dark Stranger standing in her cell with her. He called her by name and told her it was time for her to return to her lost kin and dance for them once more. She was fascinated, as he spoke, by the pair of cloven hooves that peeked out from beneath his cloak but became even more astonished when he handed her a meticulously cared for viol that in her mind's eye she recognized at once as being that which had belonged to Lothiaro, made whole once more.

Immediately the color returned to Alhindri's face and her life as she took the beloved instrument in her hands. She didn't even notice when the Dark Stranger wrapped his cowl around her and she found herself no longer in her lonely cell but standing upon a hill covered in tombs, surrounded by ancient unmarked graves. In the pre-light of dawn she gave no thought to her surroundings but touched bow to fiddle and began to play. Though the fiddle had never been her instrument, as she played upon Lothiaro's beloved viol she found that it practically played itself. She soon lost herself to the music and began to dance as of old...and she did not dance alone as her long-lost Wanderer kin rose from the ground to join her.

MINI-ADVENTURE

The Fiddler's Lament takes place in the town of Raven near a haunted prison. The enigmatic Dark Stranger, for reasons of his own, has brought Alhindri back to the region where he slaughtered her adopted kin and has provided her not with the beloved fiddle of her former protector but an infernal instrument called the *Rebec Malevolenti*, crafted in the pits of Hell with the sole purpose to bring ruin upon mortals. With this instrument, Alhindri heedlessly summons forth the dead from their rest and causes them to descend like a plague upon the unsuspecting town of Raven nearby. Only with the destruction of the fiddle can the plague of zombies and worse be stopped.

The adventure begins as the PCs, who have already come to the town of Raven for their own reasons, make their way to the general store to gather supplies.

A FIDDLE AT DAWN

The early morning sun has barely peeked over the eastern horizon as you make your way through long shadows across the town square. The village is awakening around you as goodwives push their sleepy-eyed children out the door to begin the day's chores. The usual sounds of cock crows and dog barks are joined this morning by something unexpected. Floating lightly upon the morning breeze is the sound of a hauntingly beautiful melody, as if the world's saddest fiddler were out this dawn plying his bow to catgut in a dirge for the day to come. Who the mysterious player might be is unguessed and the music, though mournful, is not unpleasant.

Though it is morning, the PCs are assumed to be wearing their normal gear and equipment as befits an adventuring party. Their reasons for visiting the general store are unimportant and should just be to pick up some mundane supplies or equipment. Unfortunately, while there they learn that there is more to the fiddler's music than they know and that its effects have come to visit upon the town.



VISIT FROM GRAMMY

The storekeep and a local gaffer chat idly near the front counter talking about the strange music, which has apparently been heard across parts of town since before dawn, speculating as to who could be the source. The storekeep's wife stocks shelves while their giggle of young girls run around playing chase. You once again eye the suit of fine plate armor that stands near the back of the store, wondering what kind of coin it would take to get the storekeep to part with it—you've heard him mention that it belonged to his wife's long-deceased grandfather from back when he fought for his country.

As one of the young girls opens the cellar door to fetch a bag of herbs for her mother, you hear her small child's voice suddenly exclaim with delight, "Grammy?!" to which the storekeep's wife patiently explains, "No, dear. You know Grammy and Grampy passed on from the fever last winter. She's not waiting in the cellar for you."

Out of the corner of your eye you notice that the arm of the suit of armor seems to shift and slightly raise, as if it had been dislodged and the whole thing was about to fall over forward, but you are distracted from further investigation by the sound of the heavy, slow tread of bare feet climbing the cellar stair and the look of delight still on the young girl's face as she shouts, "It is Grammy!" at something behind the cellar door that you can't see yet. As the suit of armor clatters to the floor at your feet and you see standing in the alcove behind it the worm-eaten corpse of what was once a gray-bearded old man, you can only think to yourself, "And this must be Grampy."

Then the screaming begins.

The map shows the floor plan of the general store. The shelves hold only mundane equipment and supplies, though the waist-high shelves and front counter do provide cover to anyone behind them and require a DC 6 Strength (Athletics) check to leap over them headfirst (DC 12 without at least a 10-foot running start), or a DC 12 (DC 24 with no run) to leap atop them. They can be easily climbed over with a move action, but it provokes attacks of opportunity.

Creatures: The first of the undead brought forth by Alhindri's bone fiddle that the PCs encounter are indeed the zombies of Grammy and Grampy come back to visit their young folk. They crept into the store before light while the owners were busy elsewhere and instinctively took up hiding places as they had once done to play with their grandchildren. The sound of the young girls playing has brought them out of their hiding places but has also triggered their instinct to destroy all living creatures, so playtime is over. They lurch to attack whoever is closest. Hopefully this will be the PCs as the storekeep's wife grabs the young child and bolts for the stairs to the upper floor while the storekeep gathers up his four older girls and hustles them that way as well. The gaffer likewise scoots out the front door leaving the PCs to deal with the zombie menace. They attack and pursue until destroyed.

General Store



First
Floor



Second
Floor

One square = 5 feet

GRAMMY & GRAMPY, ZOMBIES (2)

Medium undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 8

Hit Points 22 each (3d8+9)

Speed 20 ft.

STR 13 (+1)	DEX 6 (-2)	CON 16 (+3)
INT 3 (-4)	WIS 6 (-2)	CHA 5 (-3)

Saving Throws Wis +0

Immunities (conditions) poisoned; (**damage**) poison

Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Perception 8

Languages Common (can't speak)

Challenge Rating 1/4 (50 XP)

Hard to Kill: If reduced to 0 hit points by damage other than radiant or from a critical hit, a zombie is instead left with 1 hit point if it succeeds at a Con save (DC 5 + damage taken).

ACTIONS

Slam Attack: melee, 5 ft. reach, 1 target. +3 to hit, 1d6+1 (4) bludgeoning damage.

Development: When the PCs have finished with the zombies, they can hear the sound of screams from out in the town square with a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check. However, immediately afterward they automatically hear the shrill screams of the storekeep's wife and their five little girls coming from upstairs. Encourage the PCs to stick together unless they have more than four PCs as they decide if they will go outside to see what is going on or if they wish to head upstairs to face the more immediate threat.

LINGERING SHADOWS

If the PCs head upstairs in the general store, they find it still dark and shuttered from the previous night's repose. The sound of whimpering cries and shrill little screams come from the master bedroom. A single candle lights the room and just a hint of dawn light leaks through the heavily curtained window. Across the room, behind the bed, huddle the storekeep and his entire family. They point wordlessly to the open closet door that stands near the exit. From within the closet, sinister shadows can be seen to move in unnatural ways.

Creature: Another dire visitor from the town cemetery has made its way into here. It is a lesser shadow, much like its normal brethren but weaker and more stunted in its power. It lurches forth to attack as soon as the PCs enter, trying to get at the helpless family but willing to take on adventurers if they interfere. As long as the room remains in dim light, the lesser shadow has concealment against the PCs. If anyone thinks to open the curtain (the storekeep can do so if they PCs think to tell him), the bright dawn light floods into the room and removes this concealment for the creature. In addition, it must make a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw each round to stay and fight or flee back into the closet and out through the walls of the house to find some shadowy corner of the town in which to hide. If it flees, it is not encountered again in this adventure.

LESSER SHADOW

Medium undead, chaotic evil

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 13 (2d8+4)

Speed 0 ft., fly 40 ft.

STR 6 (-2)	DEX 16 (+3)	CON 14 (+2)
INT 8 (-1)	WIS 14 (+2)	CHA 11 (+0)

Immunities (conditions) charmed, exhaustion, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained, unconscious; (**damage**) necrotic, poison

Resistances (damage) acid, cold, fire, lightning, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing and slashing from nonmagical weapons that aren't silvered

Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Perception 12

Languages Common

Challenge Rating 1 (200 XP)

Incorporeal Movement: A lesser shadow can move through objects and creatures but can't stop in their spaces.

Shadow Blend: The lesser shadow has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks in any light condition less than bright light.

Sunlight Sensitivity: A lesser shadow has disadvantage on sight-based Wisdom (Perception) checks and on attack rolls in bright light and sunlight.

ACTIONS

Strength Drain Attack: melee, 5 ft. reach, 1 target. +4 to hit, 1d8+1 (5) necrotic damage plus the target's Strength is reduced by 1 point (DC 11 Con save negates) and dies if this reduces its Strength to 0. This Strength reduction ends when the target finishes a short rest.

Development: If the PCs rescue the storekeep and his family, they receive a 10% discount off any items in the general store.



FIGHT OF THE OLD DOG

When the PCs emerge from the general store, whether they have defeated the zombies and lesser shadow within or not, they witness the following scene.

The mysterious fiddle plays on, barely audible above the ruckus that has arisen in the town square. Townsfolk flee everywhere with lurching undead horrors shambling along after them. Most people seem to be managing to lock themselves within their homes and businesses causing the walking dead to wander elsewhere in search of prey, but in the center of the square, where stands the old gazebo, a different scene unfolds. A number of disembodied, clawlike hands clamber across the ground towards the structure and up its rails. Within stands the town's mangy stray dog that has been adopted by the children. As the crawling hands approach menacingly the dog stands its ground growling at them and blocking the way towards a small group of children behind it who at the same time appear to be trying to get past the dog with their sticks and play swords in order to bravely defend it from the approaching horrors. None of the townsfolk seem to have noticed this yet, and it is only a matter of time before the dog and children find themselves in trouble.

Creatures: Just as it appears, the local mutt is trying to protect four small children from a group of four crawling hands, while the children try to protect their pet as well. If the PCs hurry, they will be able to intervene in time to save them. The crawling hands will turn on the newcomers while the dog will bolt causing the children to squeal and chase after it, leading them to safety.

CRAWLING HANDS (4)

Diminutive undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 4 each (1d4+2)

Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft.

STR 13 (+1)	DEX 16 (+3)	CON 14 (+2)
INT 2 (-4)	WIS 6 (-2)	CHA 5 (-3)

Saving Throws Wis +0

Immunities (conditions) poisoned; **(damage)** poison

Senses darkvision 60 ft., Perception 8

Languages —

Challenge Rating 1/4 (50 XP)

Hard to Kill: If reduced to 0 hit points by damage other than radiant or from a critical hit, a zombie is instead left with 1 hit point if it succeeds at a Con save (DC 5 + damage taken).

ACTIONS

Strangle Attack: melee, 5 ft. reach, 1 target. +5 to hit, 1d4+3 (5) bludgeoning damage, and the hand attaches to the target's neck. A target with a crawling hand attached cannot speak or cast spells with verbal components, and takes 1d4+3 (5) bludgeoning damage at the start of each of the crawling hand's turns

A crawling hand cannot otherwise attack while attached but can detach itself by spending 5 feet of its movement. A creature, including the target, can use its action to detach a crawling hand.

Development: Once the crawling hands have been dealt with, the PCs can take stock of the situation around town. A few zombies wander hither and yon but without any apparent real motivation, and with most of the villagers safely locked up in their homes they are out of immediate danger. Checking with the sheriff reveals that he is away at one of the outlying farms this morning and most of his deputies are currently off duty tending to their own farming chores. There doesn't seem to be anyone around in any better position to defend the town than the PCs themselves. All of the walking dead are recognizable to various townspeople as their departed family and friends who are supposed to be safely interred in the town cemetery to the north. No one knows why they would be up and about like this.

NOW HIRING: ZOMBIE FIGHTERS, SOME EXPERIENCE REQUIRED

To the south of the square, the moneylenders have stationed their troop of bodyguards outside the door to their establishment, and this group of eight veteran warriors (human fighter 3) has dispatched a half dozen of the walking dead themselves. They put the finishing touches on a seventh as the PCs watch. One of the moneylenders leans out the second-floor window of his shop and shouts to the PCs that he will pay them 50 gp each if they will stay and defend his shop alongside his guards. At the same time, the haunting music continues to drift from the north and the sounds of additional shouts and screams can be heard from that direction.

If the PCs choose to take up post alongside the moneylenders' mercenaries, they receive a chorus of boos from any of the villagers watching from their windows. Every 10 minutes another 1d4+1 zombies will wander through the town square and attack while the sounds of battle elsewhere in town will eventually die down to an ominous silence with only the fiddle music as accompaniment. This can go on for days with the sheriff and all his deputies eventually arriving and falling to the endless waves of zombies. At some point the PCs will need to either give the town up for dead or head north to try and stop the fiddling that seems to be somehow connected to the zombie plague.

If the PCs head north proceed with "Extra! Extra! Read All About It!" If they head south to reach the temple or some other area of town, see "A Slimy Skeleton in the Closet" for details of what is going on elsewhere.

EXTRA! EXTRA! READ ALL ABOUT IT!

This event occurs at the town's notice post at the east end of a covered bridge.

The town's notice post lies just ahead at the end of a covered bridge: a thick tree trunk, stripped of branches, sawn off at head height for a tall man, and set upright in the ground so that notices and broadsheets can be tacked to it for all to see. The young lad that you recognize as being responsible for hanging the notices crouches at the top of the post trying to stay out of reach of two clay-encrusted skeletons that swipe at him with jagged claws. His stack of bills and notices lies scattered on the ground. Sitting astride a skeletal horse nearby is another skeleton, this one armored in a rusted breastplate. A frayed noose dangles from its broken neck, and a cracked leather eye patch covers one eye socket. The other two skeletons likewise have the remains of nooses hanging from them.

Creatures: The town's posting boy has run afoul of a group of malevolent dead raised by the music of the *Rebec Malevolenti*. The bandit Kurchega was caught and hanged at the covered bridge by the townsfolk of Raven 40 years ago after plaguing the area with his bloody raids for an entire year. Two of his accomplices were hanged with him, and before he died he watched the townsfolk slaughter his prized mare. All were buried in the river embankment near the bridge in unmarked graves so that their memory would be forgotten by all. With the coming of the supernatural music, they have dug forth from their clay resting places. They came upon the posting boy unawares and have been making sport of him at Kurchega's orders until he grows bored and orders the kill. When they see the party they turn to attack. If the PCs have been having an easy go of things so far, include the skeletal mount as a combatant. Otherwise it serves Kurchega as a mount but does not enter the fray as a combatant itself and likewise crumbles to dust when the bandit chief is destroyed.

KURCHEGA THE SKELETAL BANDIT

Medium undead, lawful evil

Armor Class 15 (rusty breastplate)

Hit Points 22 (4d8+4)

Speed 30 ft.

STR 17 (+3) **DEX** 13 (+1) **CON** 12 (+1) **INT** 9 (-1)
WIS 10 (+0) **CHA** 12 (+1)

Immunities (conditions) poisoned; **(damage)** cold, poison

Vulnerabilities (damage) bludgeoning

Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Perception 10

Languages Common

Challenge Rating 1 (200 XP)

ACTIONS

Longsword Attack: melee, 5 ft. reach, 1 target. +4 to hit, 1d10+3 (8) slashing damage.

SKELETONS (2)

Medium undead, lawful evil

Armor Class 13 (armor scraps)

Hit Points 13 each (2d8+4)

Speed 30 ft.

STR 10 (+0) **DEX** 14 (+2) **CON** 15 (+2)
INT 6 (-2) **WIS** 8 (-1) **CHA** 5 (-3)

Immunities (conditions) poisoned; **(damage)** cold, poison

Vulnerabilities (damage) bludgeoning

Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Perception 9

Languages Common (can't speak)

Challenge Rating 1/4 (50 XP)

ACTIONS

Claws Attack: melee, 5 ft. reach, 1 target. +4 to hit, 1d4+2 (5) piercing damage.

SKELETAL HORSE

Large undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 14 (broken chain shirt barding)

Hit Points 30 (4d8+12)

Speed 50 ft.

STR 16 (+3) **DEX** 14 (+2) **CON** 17 (+3)
INT 2 (-4) **WIS** 10 (+0) **CHA** 5 (-3)

Immunities (conditions) poisoned; **(damage)** poison

Vulnerabilities (damage) bludgeoning

Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Perception 10

Languages —

Challenge Rating 1 (200 XP)

ACTIONS

Hooves Attack: melee, 5 ft. reach, 1 target. +5 to hit, 2d4+6 (11) bludgeoning damage.

Development: If the posting boy is rescued, he immediately runs to his father's restaurant at the river's edge and tells him everything that transpires. The heroism of the PCs will then appear in tracts on the notice post over the next several days.

A SLIMY SKELETON IN THE CLOSET

This event occurs as the PCs reach a crossroads west of the covered bridge. Here the PCs run into Rufio, one of the acolytes (see “Raven’s Rest” for stats) from the temple of the goddess of fate and prophecy, the deity venerated by the locals. He has a small cut across his forehead and is much disheveled but otherwise seems none the worse for wear. He is running north towards the cemetery, but sags to his haunches out of breath in relief when he sees the PCs.

In between gasps for breath, he explains that Father Grimble and most of the acolytes went to the cemetery early this morning before the ghostly music started in order to prepare for a funeral. They have not returned. Just a short while ago a group of walking dead overran the temple and killed the other acolyte there while he fled out the back. He says he has got to get to the cemetery to alert Father Grimble and bring him back. He says that on his way here he passed Councilor Murik’s home and saw that they were having some sort of trouble. He kept going but promised he would send help as soon as he found Father Grimble. He now begs the PCs to head to Murik’s house and help him while he goes to fetch the good father. He will not force the PCs to go that way but will give them a pouch of seven *scrolls of cure wounds* that he snatched before fleeing the temple if they agree to do so. He will also expend the last of his own cure spells and channel energies to heal the PCs (assume he has enough to bring them all to maximum hit points). If the PCs refuse to help Councilor Murik, Rufio will not give them the scrolls, but will still heal them.

If the PCs agree to head south, Rufio tells them to not bother going to the temple as it is overrun. As soon as they help out the councilor, he asks them to join him up at the cemetery so that Father Grimble and the other acolytes can link up with them to sweep the undead from the town.

If the PCs head south to Councilor Murik’s house, proceed with the following. If they instead follow the acolyte to the cemetery skip to “Raven’s Rest”.

The stately home of Councilor Murik stands among the trees beside the road. Several of the lower windows are broken and the occasional scream issues from within followed by the sound of shattering glass and breaking furniture. Soon the aged councilor himself hobbles out onto the front porch, slams the door behind him, and huddles behind a large flower urn to hide. Following him a slimy apparition that appears to be wearing the finery of a wealthy man—a wealthy man with a striking resemblance to the councilor himself—steps through the door as if it wasn’t there and leaves a spot of viscous ooze upon the hardwood. As the dripping creature lurches towards the cowering councilor, you see that the ghostly image of a hatchet protrudes from the back of the apparition’s head. When the councilor catches sight of you he shouts in a raspy, fear-choked voice, “Help me! I didn’t do it! He thinks I’m my father!”

Creature: Councilor Murik is currently being menaced by the ectoplasmic remains of one of his own ancestors, Pecrit Murik, foully murdered many years ago and now come back to visit revenge upon the wrong descendant. The ectoplasmic creature attempts to slay Councilor Murik unless the PCs interpose themselves between it and the feeble old councilor. If the PCs do not do so, assume that the creature manages to finish the

old man off in 3 rounds before wandering off to vent its rage elsewhere. If the PCs manage to damage the creature, it turns its attention towards them. The councilor’s servants remain hidden in the house and do not emerge to assist until the battle is over.

PECRIT MURIK THE ECTOPLASMIC MAN

Medium undead, chaotic evil

Armor Class 12 (natural armor)

Hit Points 7 (1d8+3)

Speed 30 ft., fly 30 ft.

STR 16 (+3)	DEX 11 (+0)	CON 16 (+3)
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INT 10 (+0)	WIS 10 (+0)	CHA 12 (+1)
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Immunities (conditions) paralyzed, petrified, poisoned; (damage) poison

Vulnerabilities (damage) slashing

Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Perception 10

Languages Common

Challenge Rating 1/4 (50 XP)

Phase Lurch: An ectoplasmic creature can move through objects, but can’t remain within them. It cannot move through creatures. Slimy mucus that lingers for 1 minute marks the locations on the object where the ectoplasmic creature entered and exited it.

ACTIONS

Slam Attack: melee, 5 ft. reach, 1 target. +3 to hit, 1d4+3 (5) bludgeoning damage, plus the target is frightened for 1d4 rounds (DC 11 Wis save negates).

Development: If the ectoplasmic creature is defeated and Councilor Murik survives, the old politician emerges from hiding and thanks the PCs profusely for their aid. He sheepishly admits that the creature was undoubtedly his grandfather, Pecrit Murik, a vile and abusive drunk. According to family lore, the councilor’s own father Alberit—himself dead now for over 40 years—waylaid his grandfather in the woods with a hatchet when he was drunk and buried him in a hidden grave somewhere on the property. The councilor has never known where the grave was or even if the legend was true, but based on the apparition that appeared seeking vengeance, it would seem that the old tale was true. Here the councilor clears his throat awkwardly and states that it would be quite an embarrassment to his family and the town if it was revealed that one of their councilors was the son of a murderer. He assures the PCs that he will do all he can to make their stay in Raven as welcoming as possible if they would, how shall we say, use the utmost discretion in any matters pertaining to what they have learned here. Regardless of their response, he then encourages them to hurry and help the acolyte who was heading to the cemetery to find Father Grimble and end this plague of undead.

RAVEN'S REST

The cemetery lies a short distance north of the town. If the PCs accompanied the acolyte, then omit the portion in parentheses from the following description.

The source of the day's trouble lies ahead: the Raven's Rest Cemetery. It rises from the moor like a well-tended garden of stone, rising beyond its gates past row upon row of headstones to a low hill crowned by a circle of ancient tomb vaults. The fiddling floats over the cemetery much louder than elsewhere in town and achieves an almost manic quality. Everywhere across the cemetery tombstones tumble over and the earth churns where things that ought to lie still struggle to emerge from the cold ground. Yet atop the hill a single figure can be seen racing around, jumping to and fro in time to the music. There lies your quarry, and a road runs straight to the top if only you can win past the emerging hordes of the unquiet dead. From the brush beside the gate steps a foul creature—obviously once a wolf—its skin hanging in ragged strips from its moldering hide with ribs showing through the gaps in its bloated, putrid flesh. There is fresh blood on its jaws, and the torn robes of a temple acolyte beside the road hide the remains of the wolf's recent handiwork.

If Rufio preceded the PCs here, he was paralyzed by the ghoulish wolf when he attempted to enter the cemetery. If the party instead accompanied him here, then his stats are included under "Development" below. He does not know exactly where Father Grimble and the other acolytes were making their funeral preparations but assumes the high ground at the boneyard's center is as good a place to start looking as any. He will assist in any combats unless you feel the PCs are having too easy a time of it, in which case he hangs back and stays out of any fights.

Creature: A wolf in the brush near the edge of the road after running afoul of a hunter's trap and developing infections in its wounds. With the summons of the *Rebec Malevolenti*, it has arisen as a ghoulish wolf and attacks anyone it meets, fighting until destroyed.

GHOUL WOLF

Medium undead, chaotic evil

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points 11 (2d8+2)

Speed 40 ft.

STR 12 (+1) **DEX** 15 (+2) **CON** 12 (+1) **INT** 3

(-4) **WIS** 12 (+1) **CHA** 6 (-2)

Skills Perception +3, Stealth +4

Immunities (conditions) charmed, poisoned; (damage) poison

Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Perception 13

Languages —

Challenge Rating 1/2 (100 XP)

Wolf Senses: A ghoulish wolf has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks to hear or smell.

Hunting Pack: A ghoulish wolf has advantage on attack rolls against creatures that are within 5 feet of one of the ghoulish wolf's allies.

ACTIONS

Bite Attack: melee, 5 ft. reach, 1 target. +4 to hit, 2d4+2 (7) piercing damage, plus the target is knocked prone (DC 11 Str save negates). In addition, if the target is a creature other than an elf or undead, it is paralyzed for 1 minute (DC 10 Con save negates). A paralyzed creature can attempt a new save to end the condition at the end of each of its turns.

Development: If the PCs did not accompany Rufio the acolyte here, then he is lying wounded by the edge of the road where he fell after being attacked by the ghoulish wolf. He is currently paralyzed, but the effect will wear off in 2 more rounds. He has a single *potion of cure light wounds* on him (which the PCs could use to cure his wounds if they so choose) plus the pouch of scrolls if he did not already give it to them. If he was with the PCs all along, then he is not wounded.



RUFIO THE ACOLYTE

Medium humanoid (human), lawful neutral

Armor Class 14 (padded armor, shield)

Hit Points 13 (3d8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR 9 (–1) **DEX** 12 (+1) **CON** 10 (+0)

INT 11 (+0) **WIS** 14 (+2) **CHA** 12 (+1)

Saving Throws Wis +4, Cha +3

Skills Medicine +4, Religion +2

Senses darkvision 60 ft., Perception 10

Languages Common

Challenge Rating 1/4 (50 XP)

Special Equipment: Rufio has seven *scrolls of cure wounds*.

Spellcasting: Rufio is a 2nd-level Wisdom-based spellcaster.

Attack +3, Save DC 12. He knows the following cleric spells:

- Orisons (at will): *guidance, light, spare the dying*
- 1st Level (3 slots): *cure wounds, healing word*

ACTIONS

Mace Attack: melee, 5 ft. reach, 1 target. +3 to hit, 1d6–1 (2) bludgeoning damage.

CEMETERY HILL

The Raven's Rest cemetery is large and sprawling with multiple pathways leading through ranks of headstones, but one path in particular leads directly to the crown of the hill at its center. Everywhere the PCs look they see graves churning as their occupants slowly unearth themselves or open graves where the occupants have already departed. Straying from the path or exploring the cemetery has a 50% chance of an encounter with an undead creature each round (see table in the "Rebec Malevolenti" sidebar to determine what kind). Searching for Father Grimble and the missing acolytes will likewise cause these random encounters.

When the PCs climb the hill read the following.

A cluster of aged stone vaults stand atop the hill overgrown with creepers and high wild grass. It seems this portion of the cemetery is older and gets less tending than other areas. Barely visible in the tall grass are a number of headstones, cracked and crumbling with age and canted at wild angles from their long years exposed to the elements. Dancing among them like a vision out of a fever dream is an elven maid. She is barefoot with long, lithe limbs and wears a tattered and stained hospital shift and the ragged remains of a straitjacket that no longer restrains her. In her arms she holds a narrow-bodied gypsy fiddle which she plays energetically as she dances about. Her face is the very picture of transported bliss as her eyes dance with gaiety, and unbidden laughs actually burst forth from her mouth from time to time.

Though the elf may be the image of grace and joy, the effects of her playing cannot be denied, as rotten and skeletal arms continue to rise from the ground around her, clawing their way to the surface as they sway in perfect time with the frenetic music.

The stone vaults all remain sealed, so no undead have come forth from them yet. The headstones around her are dated 85 years ago and simply say "Unknown Wanderer. Foully murdered." Wanderer is the name for the enigmatic gypsy bands that wander the North. A DC 20 Intelligence (History) check recalls tales of Alhindri's band massacred near Raven and of the lone elf maid survivor who never spoke a word and was eventually locked up and forgotten. The headstones do not impede movement but do provide cover to Small creatures.

Creatures: Here at the summit of the hill the PCs have found Alhindri, totally enthralled in joy as she plays the fiddle provided for her by the Dark Stranger. She is blissfully unaware of the effects it is having on the surrounding graveyard and cannot be interrupted in her playing. And since the fiddle provides her with unnatural vigor, she will go on playing it for days without stop until she actually dies of dehydration. As the PCs will soon discover, attacks upon Alhindri herself are pointless as it is the *Rebec Malevolenti* that must be destroyed to end the zombie plague. In the meantime, concealed among the tall grass at the points marked on the map are the skeletal remains of her former gypsy companions. They still wear the tattered remains of their distinctive Wanderer garb and rise up to defend Alhindri from anyone that attempts to interfere with her playing. She uses her move each round to dance about atop the hill and her action to play her fiddle. These do not provoke opportunity attacks unless she moves through a threatened square, which she will attempt to avoid doing if possible. She does not otherwise react to the PCs' presence. There are a total of seven skeletons guarding Alhindri. Every 2 rounds, another gypsy skeleton emerges from the earth. It provokes opportunity attacks and attack rolls against it have advantage in the round that it emerges, though it is lightly obscured by the tall grass. Choose the spot of its emergence at random. When the *Rebec Malevolenti* is destroyed, all remaining undead in the cemetery and nearby town fall dead once again and no more emerge.

Cemetery Hill



S Skeleton
A Alhindri

One square = 5 feet



ALHINDRI THE FIDDLER

Medium humanoid (elf), neutral

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 13 (3d8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR 7 (-2)	DEX 14 (+2)	CON 10 (+0)
INT 9 (-1)	WIS 6 (-2)	CHA 16 (+3)

Immunities (conditions) charmed, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, poisoned, restrained

Resistances (conditions) charmed; **(damage)** bludgeoning, piercing and slashing from nonmagical weapons

Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Perception 6

Languages Common, Elvish

Challenge Rating 1/4 (50 XP)

Special Equipment: Alhindri has the *Rebec Malevolenti*.

Elven Trance: magic cannot put Alhindri to sleep.

Faerie Lights: Alhindri can cast dancing lights as an Intelligence-based spellcaster without requiring the material component.

ACTIONS

Play: Alhindri plays the *Rebec Malevolenti* which summons an undead creature each round. Refer to the *Rebec Malevolenti* below for more details.

SKELETONS (7)

Use skeleton stat block in *Extra! Extra! Read All About It!*

MINOR ARTIFACT: REBEC MALEVOLENTI

This is a three-stringed fiddle made with a narrowboat-shaped body and a horsehair bow. Its finish has the cracked polish of old bone, and when stared at intently tiny glowing red letters can be seen to swirl about just beneath its varnish, never staying still long enough to be read. It weighs 1 pound. You must be attuned to the rebec to gain the following benefits and powers when it is played:

- The fiddler gains a +3 bonus to natural armor and resistance to damage by nonmagical weapons.
- The fiddler gains immunity to the charmed, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, poisoned, and restrained conditions.
- The fiddler becomes engrossed in the playing and suffers a -4 penalty to Wisdom (Perception) checks while doing so.
- If the fiddler is reduced to 0 hit points, the rebec grants 1d10+10 temporary hit points to the fiddler as a reaction. These temporary hit points remain for as long as the fiddler plays. There is no limit to the number of times the rebec can do this, and it can do so multiple times per round.
- The rebec sustains the fiddler without rest in order to allow the fiddler to keep playing.

The primary purpose of the rebec is to animate the dead to wretched unlife. Each round that the rebec is played, any corpses within range of its sound (including those buried in this range) are subject to reanimation. Even corpses that have rotted away can return as incorporeal undead. For each round of playing in an area where dead bodies are available, roll 1d6 to determine the type of undead creature that is created. These creatures do not attack the fiddler but are not otherwise under the fiddler's command; they remain true to form, attacking living creatures as opportunity presents. They remain animated until destroyed or the rebec is destroyed at which point all previously animated undead return to death once again.

D6	UNDEAD TYPE
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1-2	skeleton
3-4	zombie
5	ectoplasmic man
6	creature of GM's choice (lesser shadow or ghoul wolf in this adventure)

The effects and powers of the rebec cannot be dispelled or nullified by *silence*. The fiddler must use her action each round to play the instrument, which does not provoke opportunity attacks. The rebec can be destroyed by sundering it. It has an AC of 15, 20 hit points, and resistance to damage by nonmagical weapons. When reduced to 0 hit points, it crumbles to dust and is destroyed.

EPILOGUE

When the *Rebec Malevolenti* is destroyed, all undead created by it are immediately destroyed as well. The other powers it provides likewise end immediately. If still alive, Alhindri stops in her tracks. The expression of jubilation and total abandon vanishes from her face instantly and is instead replaced by the ashen pallor that once again leaches the color from her cheeks. She is visibly reduced to a shell of her former self becoming completely unresponsive and listless. She will offer no resistance and can easily be slain or led about. Alhindri has become one of the forlorn once again. The twisted work of the Dark Stranger is over for now. Who he was or what his purpose may have been remains a mystery to be solved for another day. The townsfolk recognize Alhindri from tales of the gypsy massacre and will wish to lynch her to prevent her from being able to come back and threaten the town again at some time in the future. If the PCs can change their attitude from hostile towards her to indifferent, they will agree to let the sheriff lock her up until she can be transported back to the asylum from which she escaped.

If the PCs search for Father Grimble and the missing acolytes, they find that one of the burial vaults at the eastern edge of the cemetery has been blocked shut with broken headstones piled against the door. This can be cleared in a matter of minutes, but clearly visible in the dust before this pile is a pair of cloven hoof prints much too large to be a goat or other natural creature. Father Grimble can only state that as he and his acolytes entered the vault in the predawn darkness to prepare it for the coming funeral, the heavy door slammed shut behind them and became held fast. They then began to hear the eerie fiddling and knew something foul was afoot.

Music fit to wake the Dead!

Music hath charms to soothe the savage breast, it's true, but some music truly is the devil's music. An orphan raised by gypsies, now full-grown but still lost and alone, must face once more the tragic curse that destroyed her past. Will her darkling music bring ruin to the village she now calls her home? Can the heroes earn the townsfolk's trust, or must innocence be sacrificed for the heroes to save town from the mysterious hauntings that plague a village huddled in the shadow of an accursed ruin?



This dark fantasy adventure is perfect for 1st-level characters using the 5th edition of the world's most famous role-playing game. The adventure can be played on its own or in combination with *The Murmuring Fountain*, or as part of the beginning of a horror-themed Adventure Path campaign.

