

Hindsight

Episode One: The Worms Turn

By Owen K.C. Stephens

"Hindsight" is a short adventure for four 15th-level characters that takes place in a lightly inhabited, mountainous region. The adventure has connections to the drow and an underground network of caves, making it particularly appropriate for the **Forgotten Realms** campaign setting, but is easily placed on almost any **D&D** world.

It should go without saying that the following information is intended for Dungeon Masters -- if you'll be playing "Hindsight," read no further!

Adventure Background: The Horror of Havenfast

The mountain town of Havenfast has suffered a great deal recently. A few months ago a monster killed a number of local miners. The sorcerer Zareph, self-proclaimed "sorcerer of Havenfast," hired a band of adventurers to deal with whatever had slaughtered the men, and the group reported the successful defeat of some sort of mage beholder, the likely culprit. A few weeks later, after the adventurers were long gone, new problems arose: The dire bears and dire wolves native to the mountains began feeding in the more populated hills near Havenfast. A pair of purple worms appeared, eating livestock and attacking caravans. The townsfolk near panic, and though everyone turns to him, Zareph doesn't know what to do about it.

What no one realizes is that the mage beholder the adventuring band claims to have destroyed was (and still is) in fact a beholder ghost.

If the horror ever had a name, it has forgotten it. The beholder had been destroyed in its home, a cavern in the mountainside, decades earlier while fighting a party of drow. The dark elves broke into the creature's home from tunnels below, seeking some magic item the beholder had taken. After killing the beholder, the drow

discovered what they wanted and left the cave, never to return. The beholder was a particularly territorial creature and was so enraged by the invasion that its ghostly spirit refused to leave this world, staying behind to guard what had been the monster's home in life. However, as long as the cave has been undisturbed and sealed from the outside, the ghost inside has made no effort to travel beyond it.

This changed when local prospectors, seeking access to the rich gold veins found sporadically throughout the mountain, broke into the beholder's chamber from the outside. This shocked and angered the spirit of the beholder, which killed many of the miners. This led directly to Zareph's employment of the adventurers who claimed they destroyed the creature.

In truth the ghost beholder threat cannot be ended until its cave is once again closed to the outside world. A few weeks after the adventures left town, the ghost recovered from their attack. Still enraged over the invasion of its home, the ghost ventured out from its lair, killing or driving away nearly every living thing on, in or around the mountain. This drove the dire animals that dwelt there down into the lowland hills, where they began to make trouble for people near Havenfast. The lack of prey forced subterranean purple worms away from their natural environment in the caves below the mountain, causing them to attack any large group of living creatures in search of food -- especially herds of animals and large caravans. In time, the ghost beholder itself will reach the town, which it will no doubt feel compelled to destroy.

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When the heroes enter the lands near Havenfast, they find a community in desperate straits.

Hooking the Characters

The easiest way to get player characters involved in the adventure is for them to simply pass through the area and witness a pair of purple worms attack a small caravan. For a little more personal motivation with PCs who are well-known heroes, members of an arcane society, or clerics of a prominent local god, send them a message from Zareph asking for their help. If the characters have connections with other bands of adventurers, the party that thought they had destroyed the ghost beholder could be allies of the PCs -- this gives Zareph or the earlier party themselves the chance to ask the heroes to look into claims of the monster's reappearance.

If you decide to give the PCs previous knowledge of the ghost beholder, it could spoil some of the surprise factor, so choose carefully how to bring the party into the action and how much information to give them beforehand.

Hunger Strike

On a cool autumn morning, as the characters travel the road either towards Havenfast or past it, they see a caravan coming towards them. This is small group of three wagons, each pulled by two horses and four mules. The town of Havenfast itself is visible in the distance, a collection of small wooden buildings and a single tall stone tower in the center of town. Beyond that a majestic mountain rises from the morning mist, looming over everything within miles.

The first sign of trouble is the snort of the lead caravan horse, followed quickly by other animals balking and refusing to move any further. A Listen check (DC 20) allows a character to realize the ground is rumbling very slightly, as if an extremely light earthquake were occurring. A truly remarkable Listen check (DC 35) allows a character to realize the sound is coming from deep beneath the earth and is moving quickly toward the caravan.

Two rounds after the first horse balks, a purple worm bursts out of the ground and attacks one of the lead wagon's mules. A round later, a second worm shoots from the earth and attacks another caravan animal attached to the second wagon (roll 1d4 to determine which mule is attacked on the first wagon, and 1d6 to determine which animal is targeted on the second wagon). These creatures have been driven from their natural habitat, and the lack of their natural food sources has left them in a ravenous frenzy. They are easily capable of swallowing all the mules whole, and remain even after that to eat chunks of whatever creatures are left. If any characters attack them, the worms fight to the death rather than leave their newfound food supply.

Assuming the characters manage to save the caravan, its owner, the merchant Aielle Dell, thanks them and offers what little money she has as a reward. She tells the characters of the terrible troubles plaguing the lands around Havenfast, and confesses that she left before selling most of her wares out of fear of losing her goods to dire wolves or some other creature prowling the lowland hills.

The Cliffhanger

While the characters are speaking to Aielle a voice appears in one of the character's heads (via a *sending* spell). The voice intones, "I am Zareph, sorcerer of Havenfast. Great danger surrounds you all. Come to my tower, and we shall speak of tremendous troubles and risky rewards."

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Episode Two: Havenfast

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Adventure Background: The Sorcerer's Call

In the first episode, the characters witnessed an attack by two purple worms on a small caravan, and were told by Aielle Dell, the caravan's leader, that the local area is rife with dire beasts and other monsters. As they spoke with Aielle, one of the characters was contacted by the sorcerer Zareph by a sending spell, and told to come to his tower.

The Sorcerer

Zareph spends most of his time these days watching the lands around Havenfast with a spyglass, trying to spot threats to the town before they arrive and, hopefully, discover the source of the recent problems. He spotted the characters fighting the purple worms through the spyglass, and decided to enlist their aid. Since he could see the characters, he was able to use a sending to contact them. Zareph conforms to the 9th-level human sorcerer in Chapter 2: Characters of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

When the characters approach Havenfast the locals seem agitated. A Sense Motive check (DC 15) made against any commoner tells the characters that most of the locals are scared, and their fear is beginning to blend with anger. The townsfolk don't seem to trust the PCs. Since the last band of adventurers to come through town only made matters worse by angering the ghost beholder, the townsfolk are afraid the characters will only make further trouble. Similarly, they're not happy that Zareph

seems to want to send another group into the mountains, rather than deal with the problem himself -- the town pays the sorcerer a reasonable stipend to protect them, and he doesn't seem to be holding up his end of things. The locals are not talkative, on this subject, but PCs that make a Gather Information or Intimidate check (either at DC 35) can learn the reasons for the locals' disdain.

Zareph's tower is the largest building in Havenfast, located in the center of the town square. None of the townsfolk come within twenty feet of it as the characters approach, but a small crowd gathers at the edges of the town square, watching as the characters enter the tower.

Within the tower Zareph awaits the characters. He is an elderly man, and has become quite rotund over the years. Once an adventurer in his own right, Zareph reached 9th level before settling in Havenfast to retire. Although he is most interested in divination and communication magic and lacks many offensive spells, Zareph has acted as a guardian of the town many times over the years. Recently, however, he has felt it wiser to reserve his resources to defend the town against direct threats and contract others for more dangerous problems.

Zareph explains the recent problems to the characters, beginning with the death of the miners some months ago. He doesn't realize that the horror that killed the prospectors and was later "destroyed" by his hired band of adventurers is the same one that is driving beasts and monsters away from the mountain, but he's sure that something is causing trouble up on the mountainside. He tells the PCs that the previous adventurers claimed to have killed a mage beholder -- but that some woodsmen have claimed to have seen a glowing "Evil Eye" floating on the mountainside at night.

If at all possible, he hires the characters to go find whatever is driving away the other creatures and destroy it. If the characters aren't willing to undertake that, he asks them to at least try to find out what is on the mountain, so he can arrange for other adventurers to deal with it.

The Mob

After Zareph has explained the situation to the characters, a loud commotion is heard from outside. Townsfolk are yelling and shouting and a Listen check (DC 20) allows characters to hear cries of "Zareph, send them home!" and "Adventure somewhere else!" mixed in with far fewer cries of "Stay calm!" and "Don't start trouble!"

As it happens, several of the town folk have decided that what Havenfast needs Zareph to take care of this problem himself -- the PCs had better keep out of it, in their opinion. The mob of around 40 individuals begins to throw clods of dirt and rotten food at a smaller group of 15 townsfolk who trust Zareph's judgment and have surrounded his tower to protect it. Zareph insists on going out to speak to the mob, but is greeted with catcalls and more rotten fruit by the angry mob.

If the player characters attempt to calm the crowd, it can be considered unfriendly to them. A Diplomacy or Charisma check might allow the PCs to convince the mob to let them investigate (see NPC Attitudes in Chapter 5: Campaigns of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*), or a bard might be able to calm the fearful crowd.

Of course the characters could easily attack and defeat the mob -- most of them are just commoners -- but doing so in a violent way earns the distrust of Zareph and all the people of Havenfast. If the characters use sleep or similar nonviolent means to disperse the crowd, the townsfolk can eventually forgive them and Zareph will be grateful.

The Cliffhanger

After the commotion, one of the characters discovers a small note slipped into one of his pockets. It reads: "I know where to find the "Evil Eye." Come to the North gate, after midnight, and I shall meet you." It is unsigned.

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Episode Three: Pack Attack

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Adventure Background: Looking into the "Evil Eye"

In the first two episodes, the characters witnessed an attack by two purple worms on a small caravan, and learned that the local area around the town of Havenfast is rife with dire beasts and other monsters. The PCs then spoke with the sorcerer Zareph, who asked them to look into rumors of a creature locals call the "Evil Eye." This monster, whatever it is, seems to be driving every living creature off the nearby mountain. The characters had to deal with a mob of townsfolk who didn't appreciate their presence, and someone slipped one of the PCs a note claiming to know where the "Evil Eye" can be found. The note instructs the heroes to be at the north gate of Havenfast at midnight to learn more.

The Informant

The note was slipped to one of the characters by Seirenn, a 10th-level half-elf rogue (use the generic NPC from Chapter 2: Characters of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*) who the previous band of adventurers had hired to gather information on the local situation for them. Seirenn dwells in Havenfast, and has found the current problems bad for business -- she only steals from merchants who come through town, never locals, and with the troubles fewer outsiders are coming through. She considers it to be in her own best interest to help the characters put a stop to whatever is happening on the mountain.

Seirenn hides by the north gate one hour before midnight (Hide skill +15) and waits for the characters to show up. She takes 10 on the check, so a Spot check (DC 25) must be succeeded to locate the rogue if she doesn't want to be seen. Seirenn is a punctual woman, and will hide from any PCs that try to scout the rendezvous point ahead of time.

Once the PCs arrive, she reveals herself and explains her association with the earlier band of adventurers. When asking around for them, she has discovered that many decades ago a beholder was spotted on the mountain, though some local heroes went to confront it and couldn't find it. She told this to the adventurers that went up more recently, and they were convinced that the creature was a beholder mage of some sort. After they came back from "defeating" it they were even more convinced, and claimed the monster was capable of becoming invisible and traveling to other planes.

Two weeks after they left, Seirenn began hearing the rumors surrounding the creature the locals called the "evil eye," a vaguely described creature that was occasionally visible up on the mountainside at night.

Seirenn knows where the earlier party faced their "beholder mage," and it is very near where the "Evil Eye" has been spotted. Seirenn doesn't know if the "Evil Eye" is a second beholder come to see what happened to the first, or if the first creature somehow survived, but she can direct them to a path that leads to the cave where the first beholder mage faced Seirenn's former employers.

The Pack

On the way up the mountain path to the cave of the "Evil Eye," the characters are jumped by a group of 5 dire wolves in hiding (Hide +11, Move Silently +11). These are the last dire wolves left on the mountain, and

are far tougher than typical members of the species (they have advanced to the maximum 18 hit dice possible for dire wolves). They have been harassed by the "Evil Eye" to the point that they attack anything that enters their territory, which of course includes the PCs.

(disintegrated by the beholder after it killed the bear with a *finger of death*).

Dire Wolves (5): CR 8; Large animal; HD 18d8+54; hp 135; Init +2; Spd 50 ft.; AC 14 (touch 11, flat-footed 12); Atk +19 melee (1d8+10, bite); Face/Reach 5 ft. by 10 ft./5 ft.; SA Trip; SQ low-light vision, scent; AL N; SV Fort +14, Ref +13, Will +7; Str 25, Dex 15, Con 17, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 10.

Skills and Feats: Hide +6, Listen +4, Move Silently +7, Spot +4, Wilderness Lore +2*

Special Qualities: Trip (Ex) -- A dire wolf that hits with a bite attack can attempt to trip the opponent as a free action (see Trip in Chapter 8: Combat of the *Player's Handbook*) without making a touch attack or provoking an attack of opportunity. If the attempt fails, the opponent cannot react to trip the dire wolf.

Low-Light Vision -- The creature can see twice as far as a human in starlight, moonlight, torchlight, and similar low-light conditions.

Scent (Ex) -- The creature can detect approaching enemies, sniff out hidden foes, and track by sense of smell.

Skill bonuses -- A dire wolf receives a +1 racial bonus to Listen, Move Silently, and Spot checks and a +2 racial bonus to Hide checks. *It also receives a +4 racial bonus to Wilderness Lore when tracking by Scent.

The Cliffhanger

Once the dire wolves have been dispatched, the heroes spy a dark cave opening at the end of the path. The corpse of a dire bear lies just outside the opening. Flies circle it, but from the PCs vantage point, there is no clear injury to indicate how the bear died. Once the heroes pass the corpse and approach the cave, they can see that the entire belly of the beast is gone

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Episode Four: The "Evil Eye"

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Adventure Background: The Cave Beckons

In the previous episodes the characters learned of a threat known as the "Evil Eye" - which may or may not be a beholder -- which is driving every living creature from the mountain near Havenfast. They have learned where the "Evil Eye" is most often sighted, and followed a path to its cave.

The Eye Has It

The creature now known as the "Evil Eye" was once an extremely ancient and solitary beholder of the highest power (many suspect it to be a beholder mage, but this is actually not the case -- it's ghostly properties are inherent, not the result of spellcasting). Its cave was breached from below many decades ago by drow seeking the considerable treasure it had accumulated. In a pitched battle the drow killed the beholder and successfully took its treasure. But the beholder was so fiercely territorial that its spirit refused to leave its home even in death, and eventually became the ghostly creature called the "Evil Eye" today.

As long as it remained in its cave home, the "Evil Eye" wasn't a threat to the local populace. However, a few months ago some miners found its cave and began prospecting for gold within. Although they found nothing of value, the miners disturbed the "Evil Eye" and it killed several of them. The sorcerer Zareph, guardian of Havenfast, hired a band of powerful heroes to make the mountains safe once more, and the party --

mistakenly thinking that the creature was a beholder mage rather than an undead horror -- thought that they had permanently killed the "beholder mage." Unfortunately, they simply defeated the ghost without alleviating the cause of its spiritual anger, so the "Evil Eye" returned.

Angered that it had been disturbed yet again, the "Evil Eye" decided it would drive away every creature residing in, on, beneath or near its mountain home. It killed most of the animals native to the mountain, and drove away the two purple worms that lived in the caves below it -- causing them to scavenge for food elsewhere and make the attack on the caravan that the heroes witnessed in Episode I.

The "Evil Eye" is a powerful opponent, and knows it. It has all the powers of a living beholder as well as additional abilities and immunities granted by its undead state. Though it no longer remembers much about its life except its home, it is still a thinking, reasoning creature capable of plotting against its enemies and taking advantage of their weaknesses.

The "Evil Eye" normally travels in a fully ethereal state, scouting out its enemies while invisible and incorporeal. It attacks only when it believes it has an advantage, and can usually gain surprise on its enemies. If attacked on the ethereal plane it can often use its antimagic field to drive enemies back to the material plane.

The "Evil Eye"

Large Undead (Incorporeal)

Hit Dice: 16d12 (104 hp)

Initiative: +4 (Improved Initiative)

Speed: fly 30 ft. (perfect)

AC: 20 (-1 size, +11 natural) ethereal, 13 (-1 size, +4 Chr) manifested

Attacks: Eye rays, +11 ranged touch, bite +6 melee

Damage: Bite 2d4

Face/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft./5 ft.

Special Attacks: Eye rays, horrific appearance, manifestation

Special Qualities: All-round vision, antimagic cone, rejuvenation, turn resistance +4

Saves: Fort +4, Ref +6, Will +14

Abilities: Str 10, Dex 10, Int 17, Wis 15, Cha 19

Skills: Hide +17, Knowledge (arcana) +12, Listen +25, Search +28, Spot +30

Feats: Alertness, Flyby Attack, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes, Shot on the Run

Challenge Rating: 15

Treasure: None

Alignment: Lawful evil

Special Qualities:

Eye Rays: The "Evil Eye" has the same eye ray attacks as a normal beholder, although the DC of any saves against them is 22. When the "Evil Eye" is fully ethereal these rays only affect creatures on the ethereal plane. When the "Evil Eye" is manifested, its eye rays affect material targets normally.

Corrupting Gaze: This is the same as a standard ghost's corrupting gaze, and the DC of Fortitude save against it is 22. The "Evil Eye" is considered to be gazing in all directions, and may replace any or all of its normal eye ray attacks with a corrupting gaze attack.

Horrific Appearance: Rather than look like it did as a living beholder, the ghostly evil eye appears as a huge, spectral bloodshot eye with ten bloody nerve ends trailing off behind it, each of these tipped with another bloodshot eye. This is the same as a standard ghost's horrific appearance, and the Will save DC against this effect is 22.

Manifestation: This acts as a standard ghost's manifestation.

Rejuvenation: The "Evil Eye" cannot be permanently destroyed by any normal means. If killed while manifested or by attacks on the ethereal plane, the eye returns after 2d4 days and again begins scouring the mountain clean. Even if the heroes use powerful means such as a *limited wish* to keep the creature dead it will return if it makes a level check against DC 16 (unless the ghost has somehow lost a hit die, it cannot fail this roll).

The only way to permanently destroy the eye is to kill it, and then seal its cave off from any further encroachment. Creating an avalanche or a similar cave-in is sufficient for this, but a simple *wall of stone* or similar easily bypassed barrier is not. Of course, the eye is unlikely to explain its desires to the heroes, making it difficult for them to discover exactly how to get rid of it.

All the "Evil Eye's" other special qualities work as normal for a beholder or ghost.

Cliffhanger

Although this is the end of your scripted adventures in Havenfast, you can certainly take your players through further adventures in this setting. Even if the characters seal the cave of the "Evil Eye," they may have more ghosts to deal with. One of the drow killed by the "Evil Eye" could return in spiritual form once it's sealed into the eye's cave, or the adventurers who dealt with the Eye before may disturb other ghosts in their future adventures, leaving the characters to clean up their mess once again. And just what were the drow trying to get from the "Evil Eye" when they killed it in the first place?