

THE VILLAGE OF WOE

Not every time the party passes through a town or village are they to find comfort at the inn. For in some towns, there is no comfort and no rest, for the wicked or the virtuous . . .

PREPARING TO PLAY: When you are all gathered to play, and every one of the Players is prepared, begin the adventure by following the steps given below.

Background: The Adventure will begin with your reading the following narrative, thus setting the stage for the adventure that is to follow.

The ever winding road of adventure has led you through a dark and foreboding woodland, and at last the trees part for the weather-beaten gates of a small town. The thatched gate creaks open and falls without sound into the soggy grass. Beyond it, the muddy lane runs through the center of an empty town. You only ramshackle houses and empty shoppes of a village long abandoned. It is a dark and lonely place, and no without the feel of an unseen evil stalking you from the shadows. There is without doubt a menace here no living eyes can detect.

The lonely hoot of an owl returns your mind to the reality that this is a town in this world, not one lost in the eternal light. The owl's call continues as you move through this silent village, watching every shadow, every window opening into darkness.

Finally you come to the center of town, the Church, and finally you see people . . . they leave the Church and wander away into the gathering gloom of night, yet they disappear long before it seems they should by shadow alone. More come, emerging seemingly from nowhere as they enter the glow of the Church's stained-glass windows, yet they too seem a deception, for no light of an earthly lantern could reveal someone so suddenly from even the darkest pits of Hell.

Rumors: There are no rumors to be heard. Indeed, there is quite literally nobody in town to talk to. Only at the Church can people be found, and there the Priest will dismiss any talk of curses as lunacy lest the villagers become aware of their plight.

The curse: The entire town is under a curse. Only the Priest is not yet affected—the Characters are. When he can speak to them alone (such as giving them communion before the congregation when the party first arrives) he will whisper to them that the curse affects everything and everyone, save for the hallowed ground of the Church itself. That is why he is not affected—he has not yet left the Church since the curse began, while the party has walked into its dark embrace simply by coming this far. The people are unaware they are cursed, and he is maintaining a masquerade while trying to find any possible way to end its evil. For the curse causes one's soul to disappear by dawn, collected by the devil who worked this black art, a devil which he believes is somewhere in town . . .

THE HAUNTED VILLAGE: There are very few clues in town as to the truth of the curse. Let the party search where they will. If they seek a place that is named by an Encounter, run it. If they go anywhere or do anything else, they risk vanishing themselves: A Simple Courage Check is required. If he fails, the next one is Challenging, then at the last Critical. If he fails that, he disappears just as the villagers did.

1) The owl

Following the hoot of the owl, you find it after a short time. Yellow eyes glare out at you from the shadows of a large tree, its massive roots all slithering through the brick foundation of a small shoppe. The owl stops hooting at your approach, and inches forward on its branch. Under the pale light of the moon, it appears wholly black.

Should anyone speak to the owl, it will speak back. But what it will say depends on one making his Charisma Check. For anyone with Black spells, it is Simple. For anyone with spells of any other kind, it is Challenging. For all others it is Critical. If successful, the owl will say "The evil who came from the depths of the night bears the face of the one it killed first. You will know him when you meet her. She will ask you to slay him". If failed, the owl will say instead "The twisted one awaits your soul come the rising of the impotent sun . . ."

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2) The well

The buildings stand close to the well, wherefrom flows a smell of evil so strong the grass as died within ten yards all around.

The well is 30' deep and dry. However, it is also empty—the evil has already escaped from it. Indeed, whoever is farthest from the well when the party comes here (but still in the immediate area) must make a Critical Intuition Check to avoid the ambush of this creature—a hairy arm busts through the rotten wall of the building the Character stands next to and throttles him for its initial attack, the arm of a Ghoul. When destroyed, this Undead will choke on its gurgling, black, chunky blood, and as it vomits up its dark innards, one can by way of a Simple Intuition Check discern what it was saying; “The heart of the curse can be found only by the one who walks blind in the silver light...”

3) The smithy

The old blacksmith's shoppe is perhaps the most dilapidated, ransacked and ruined of all in town. The ceiling is caved-in, the place looted, and the fireplace choked with coal.

A closer look at the coal (also found by way of a Searching Check) will find that it is not coal at all, but chunks of silver covered with the black ruin that is melted human remains. Lighting a fire in the hearth will invoke the face of the old blacksmith, its Ghost now speaking to the party: “They were coming. I knew. The others went to fight by means of faith and prayer. I busied myself forging a silver sword. Now it is broken. They locked me in my own forge and burned away my life. They used the wood of the Lost Forest to the north. It is there the skulls of trespassers are used to fuel the fires of the curse's dark heart...”

THE LOST FOREST: Just north of the village by a few miles, the road comes to the edge of a forest. Once the party dares enter it, they cannot avoid the following Encounters. Play them one and all and in the order they are presented, beginning with the entrance itself...

4) Forest gate

The road ends at the edge of a forest far older than the one explored by the road. The trees are colourless, gnarled, and menacing. Running under their tangled roots is an old tunnel masoned with moss-covered bricks.

The tunnel emerges after only 40' on the other side of the treeline, though completely out of view of those on the normal road. Once there, one will find he cannot return without being attacked by a horde of 3-6 Ghosts, rising from **within** the trees.

5) Forest maze

The forest path quickly branches, the beginnings of a maze. The moon above seems to delight in mocking you, casting light on stones and pools to strengthen the shadows and deceptions of the woods. The moon's very crescent seems to be a spectral grin, relishing your fleeting time.

There is no way to solve this maze, save for closing one's eyes. Once one does this, he will be able to sense hidden things, including the otherwise unfindable Encounter 6. Solving this puzzle merits 400 Experience Points.

6) Forest throne

You stumble into a glen, where the moon's pale light gleams upon a throne of skulls surrounded by a shallow lake of mist... which seems to be flowing **into** the mouths and eyes of the skeletal heads. Sitting in the throne is a humanoid figure, skinless, and swathed in robes woven of cobwebs and dried tears of starlight.

Each skull is one of the figure's ancestors in the village, and they are drawing souls into them in order to enhance their lord's longevity. This is a Beholder, and when it is destroyed, the curse on the village will be lifted.

FINISHING THE ADVENTURE: Once the curse is lifted, the party will each gain +1 to Legend.