

LEVEL 7 ADVENTURE MODULE

FIFTH EDITION FANTASY #18

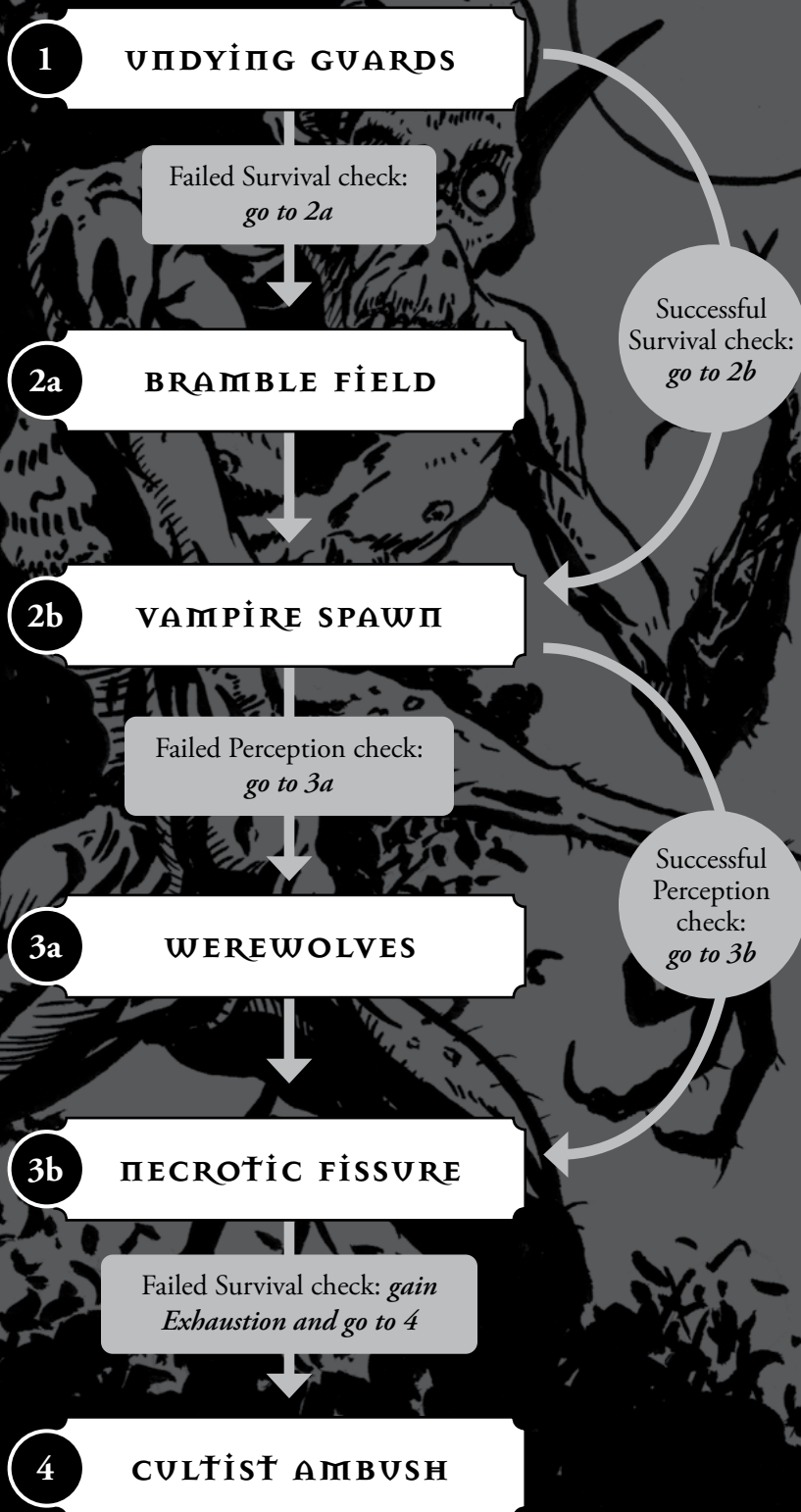
HORROR IN BLACKWOOD FOREST

BY JASON VEY



HORROR IN BLACKWOOD FOREST

DANGERS OF THE BLACKWOOD





HORROR II BLACKWOOD FOREST

BY JASON VEY

Cover Artist: Dave Griffith · **Editor:** Benjamin Hayward

Interior Artists: Chris Arneson, Cliff Kurowski, Will McAusland, Brad McDevitt
and Stefan Poag · **Cartographer:** Stefan Poag · **Developer:** Chris Doyle

Art Direction and Layout: Matt Hildebrand · **Publisher:** Joseph Goodman

William McAusland
WM

HORROR IN BLACKWOOD FOREST

By Jason Vey

Horror in *Blackwood Forest* is an adventure designed for use with the fifth edition of the first fantasy roleplaying game. It is intended for four to six characters of about 7th level. The adventure starts when the characters are new arrivals to the port town of Gullhem, but the events in the adventure can be modified to fit any frontier town on the border of a foreboding evil-tainted forest.

ADVENTURE SUMMARY

The heroes are summoned by the lord of a small coastal barony on the outskirts of the kingdom. His son has been kidnapped by what he believes to be a cult of the Lord of the Dead and spirited away into the heart of the bordering Blackwood Forest.

The forest is known to be under a curse; it is said the trees grow so thick that sunlight never penetrates the forest, and few who enter ever return. There are old stories as well as recent rumors of undead horrors and demonic entities who control the forest. The baron is desperate and needs brave souls to bring his son back. Thus far, his own men have proven inadequate to the task.

The adventurers set off on what seems to be a standard search-and-rescue mission, but after a harrowing trek through the dark wood, they uncover an undead cult and find themselves facing a powerful half-lich. In the end, the party must not only rescue the boy, but stop a conspiracy that connects back to the baron's inner circle.

BACKGROUND

Blackwood Forest is an ancient wood that encompasses hundreds of square miles, and it forms not just a bulwark between the town of Gullhem and the rest of the kingdom on the mainland, but a kingdom unto itself—a kingdom of the undead ruled by a powerful necromancer. The forest grows on top of a crack in the wall between worlds which allows negative energy to seep forth and corrupt the area.

For the crime of tearing open the portal to the negative energy plane centuries ago, the necromancer who rules the forest was in fact imprisoned within by a cabal of



white magi who used the necromancer as a focus to bind the dark energies to the borders of the forest. Since then he has lingered, going slowly mad, sustained by the energy therein, but obsessed with escape. Over the years, the necromancer has drawn a small contingent of followers, worshipers of death itself, to his tower, and he has learned to exercise a degree of control over the negative energy of Blackwood Forest.

For many years, the necromancer has sought the path to escape his prison, and recently he found it in the Von Gullhem family line. The baron's son has a unique quality to his blood from an ancient fey bloodline that has until now been recessive in the family. To gain access to it, the necromancer is in league with the baron's own seneschal and with a succubus who has murdered and replaced the baron's wife. The succubus is both the necromancer's lover and his link to the outside world; when he summoned her, he was able to bind a powerful creature who has the power to come and go from the forest as she likes.

The necromancer's sole obsession is to escape the forest in which he is imprisoned, but his path requires lichdom and spreading his influence across the lands. The blood of the baron's son is the last ingredient in a ritual the necromancer needs to cover the lands in darkness and escape the forest. To this end, the seneschal has taught the boy the beginnings of spellcasting to awaken his latent blood. To escape the forest, the necromancer must bond to the boy's blood and complete the ritual to create his lich's phylactery, which will require the slaughter of the whole town of Gullhem.

ACT ONE - BEGINNING THE ADVENTURE

ADVENTURE HOOK

The heroes come upon the Barony of Gullhem, a border fiefdom ruled over by the benevolent Baron Wolfgang Gullhem on the border of the cursed Blackwood Forest. Not long after arriving in town, the party finds themselves embroiled in a fight with a bunch of thugs, arranged by the baron himself. The town guard (tipped off to the situation and waiting nearby) arrive within moments and the characters are summarily arrested for what seems a misunderstanding. Instead of being taken to prison, they are called before the Baron himself, who wishes to task them with a job. This attack is presented in the Fog Wood Inn section, below.

Alternatively, the GM can devise a different hook suited to the campaign to get the characters an audience with the baron where he tasks them with finding his son.

The Baron's son has been kidnapped by a dark cult and taken deep into Blackwood Forest, a realm known to be cursed by the undead. He doesn't know what they want with his child, but his own resources are thin and his troops constantly engaged in defending his realm from humanoids that rage across the land. He needs adventurers to take on this quest. He offers a handsome reward for returning his son safely.

The Baron presents the party with a *diving rod* (see appendix B). His entire family has been attuned to various *rods* by special tattoos enchanted by his seneschal to enable them to be tracked wherever they go. The rod, the baron says, will guide them to wherever his son has been taken. If nothing else, it's the party's best shot to find the boy.

ARRIVAL IN GULLHEM

The adventure begins as the heroes land in the port town of Gullhem, a fiefdom on the edge of a dangerous forest, but one that thrives due to its strategic location on the local waterways. It's an important stopping point between two major ports of call and as such contains a bustling port of merchant sailors. It's also a rough town, a place that would quickly degenerate to a pirate's haven were it not for the presence of the baron's guard just about everywhere.

Gullhem

Medium port town

Population: 5,000 locals, up to 15,000 visitors on any given day

Demographics: 75% human, 10% halfling, 5% elf and half-elf, 3% half-orc, 3% dwarf and gnome, 4% other (dragonborn, tiefling, etc.)

Government: Barony, ruled by Baron Wolfgang Gullhem, nominally in the service of the local kingdom, but the barony enjoys a great deal of autonomy.

Crime and Punishment: The baron's guards heavily patrol the town at all times and maintain order with a fair but heavy hand. Those arrested are brought before the constable and held in local jails until their trial date. Major crimes, such as sedition and rebellion, are brought before the baron himself for judgment.

As a trading port, the Gullhem has a number of points of interest. Like many towns, it's divided into quarters and surrounded by a wall on three sides, the fourth side being waterfront and docks. The four quarters in town are the residential quarter, the merchant's quarter, the docks, and the noble's quarter. Visitors are generally restricted to the docks and the merchant's quarter.

Strangely, none of the buildings appear to be constructed of wood from the forest. They are constructed from exotic materials like marble and granite. Questioning locals about this yields no useful answers; everyone seems genuinely confused at the line of query, answering simply, "It's always been that way."

Asking about the forest yields a terrified gaze and a superstitious ward. Locals insist that nobody goes into that forest because nobody who ever goes in comes out again. The place, they insist, is cursed, and they won't discuss it further. "We leave it alone," they say, "and it leaves us alone."

In truth, the dark energies of the forest have also gradually sapped the knowledge of what once occurred here from the populace, who believe that things are simply as they always have been. As such, the entire history of this realm has been lost to time. Any mention of the necromancer, his crimes, or his imprisonment has been magically stricken from record and memory.

Characters who arrive in Gullhem may likely end up at the Fog and Horn Inn, detailed below, for room and board, but other areas of interest in the merchant's quarter include the following:

Aunt Milly's. This shop deals in esoterica and gifts purported to come from all over the world: the ideal jewelry piece for one's beloved, decorative statuary, figurines, knick-knacks, and other souvenirs. While Aunt Milly's is not a magic shop, many of the items she sells are lightly enchanted or otherwise touched by mystery. Use the trinkets table on page 150 of the core rulebook to populate her inventory. Aunt Milly herself is a grandmotherly human **commoner** who looks to be in her sixties. She's portly and wears glasses perched on the edge of her nose. She's quite friendly but won't hesitate to call the guard if anyone causes trouble. The guards have a soft spot in their hearts for Aunt Milly and keep close tabs on her. They arrive in 1d4 rounds to any summons.

Old Pritchard's Bakery. Old Pritchard is a retired **half-orc** bandit whose passion is baked goods. From his sourdough to stone ground wheat breads to his cakes and pastries, his goods are truly outstanding. His prices are a bit high, as much as a silver piece for six cupcakes, but they are worth it!

Spike's General Store. Spike is a slender halfling **commoner** who runs the local supply shop. Just about any sort of general gear can be found here, short of weapons. In fact, Spike demands that all those who come into his store surrender their weapons to his bodyguard, Leo, a large, reptilian, tortoise-like humanoid armed with two large swords. Weapons are always returned upon departure. His prices are fair and standard.

The Shoe and Horn. The Shoe and Horn is owned by a set of identical human triplets, all retired adventurers. Jaina (**veteran**) is the local blacksmith, and she can make anything from weapons to armor to horseshoes. Lisa (**scout**) is an outstanding carpenter and bowyer/fletcher, and her works are treasured far and wide. Mindy (**spy**) is a leatherworker who produces everything from jerkins and tunics to boots, armor, and even journals and hand-bound books. The prices here are 50% higher than those in the core rulebook, but the workmanship is very high quality, and if persuaded with a successful DC 15 Persuasion check, they can be negotiated down to only 30% higher than prices in the core rulebook.

THE FOG AND HORN III

As the party travels through town, seeing sights and possibly looking for work, they eventually find themselves at the town's only Inn, near the docks. It's a place that some-

how manages to combine a homely atmosphere with a rough-and-tumble clientele.

The place is dimly lit by orange lanterns hung at regular intervals on the walls and a blazing fire in the hearth. A rug made from owlbear fur decorates the floor before the hearth, and a comfortable seating area with couches and lounge chairs forms a restful place where old timers tell stories and bards perform to eager listeners. The long, oaken bar rests along the far wall directly opposite the main door of the commons room, and mismatched furniture decorates the place in the form of tables, chairs and stools of various sizes, shapes, and heights.

Sailors engage in card and dice games with names like Demon Dice and Twenty-Four, and any characters who wish to gamble or game could do so with the appropriate ability checks (using Intelligence or Wisdom and the corresponding Gaming Set proficiency). None of the games are sponsored by the house, all are of the pickup variety and could be a good way for characters to gather rumors (see sidebar).

THE SET-UP

At some point during the evening, a gang of thugs pick a fight with the heroes. If a character joins a gambling table, they are accused of cheating by one thug. If not, the fight could begin any number of ways: a thug bumps into a character and blames them, then insists they apologize by kneeling down and kissing his boot; a thug could approach the characters where they sit and insist, "You're in my seat, toady. Move!" Of course, even if the characters move, the thugs push the issue until combat ensues. These are bullies who are looking for a fight, and they've got blood on their minds.

They start by using unarmed strikes, enhanced with grapple attempts or improvised strikes with bottles. Other thugs target a restrained character with a bottle strike, attempting to knock them out. After 2 or 3 rounds, the overly aggressive thugs draw shortswords and close to attack. At this time, the town guard intervenes.

The characters may be suspicious why things got ugly so quickly. During the scum, a successful DC 17 Perception check reveals each thug has bloodshot eyes and a nervous facial twitch. These are slight side effects of the toxin affecting the thugs.

In truth, this is both a test and a means by which the Baron is seeking to solve a problem of his. The thugs are

RUMORS

The following are some rumors the characters might pick up about the goings-on around town. It takes about an hour and a few successful Persuasion checks or greased palms to obtain 1d3 rumors. A few are red herrings for this adventure, but could serve as hooks for future adventures in town.

- “I heard the baron's son went missing. Ran away with some dark elf girl in the woods!”
- “Stay away from the Blackwood. They say that place is cursed, haunted, and overrun with undead. Ain't nobody ever gone in has come out alive again.”
- “I'm getting out of this town as fast as possible. There's rumors that the king's eye has turned here, and he's out to secure his claim on this barony.”
- “Blackwood Forest? It's all rumors. My brother-in-law went in there just last week, did some hunting, and all he found was a naked girl dancing in the woods. So, he says, anyway. Then again, he also left for work yesterday morning at the docks and he ain't come home yet. Bah, I'm sure he's just out drinking his paycheck away.”
- “They say there's a sect of black wizards that's built a conclave just twenty miles north of here. They're planning something diabolical, but nobody knows what it is. One thing's for sure, it don't bode well for the people in these parts.”
- “Undead and dark spirits, eh? That don't surprise me none. They say the baron himself is under the thrall of a dark fey woman who took the place of the baroness, and she's planning to expand her evil influence as far as she can.”
- “There's a reason this town, successful as we are, never grew into a city, and there's a reason the king's never come south to enforce his rule on us. Nobody wants to expand beyond this port. We're happy with our little island of sanity. There's dark forces corrupting this entire region outside these walls.”

known troublemakers, and the Baron is tired of using tax money to lock them up, only to have them get out time and again. At the same time, they haven't done anything worthy of execution... yet. The Baron has paid his agents to dose the thugs with an anger-enhancing toxin and turn

them on the characters, whom he hopes are up to the task of disposing of the troublemakers. He also hopes that the party may be worthy of the mission he has in mind.

THUGS (1 per character)

Medium humanoid (human), neutral evil

AC: 14 (leather armor)

Hit Points: 32 (5d8 + 10)

Speed: 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	9 (-1)

Saving Throws: Strength +5, Dexterity +5

Skills: Athletics +5, Perception +3

Senses: passive Perception 13

Languages: Common

Challenge: 1/2 (100 XP)

Tavern Brawler: These thugs are accustomed to rough and tumble fighting. They are proficient with improvised weapons, unarmed strikes cause 1d4 bludgeoning damage, and on a hit, they can use a bonus action to grapple the target.

ACTIONS

Unarmed Strike: *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) bludgeoning damage and the thug has the option to grapple the target (escape DC 13).

Bottle Strike: *Improvised Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) bludgeoning damage and the target must make a successful DC 13 Constitution saving throw or be stunned until the end of its next turn.

Shortsword: *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

Development. When the town guard arrives, they promptly place the heroes under arrest for public violence. Even as the heroes protest their innocence, they find that nobody in the bar wants to speak up; they are all quiet and hanging their heads. While most of the town guard seem ready for a fight, the leader steps forward and very gently says, “Please, just put up your weapons down and come with us. We will get this sorted out. The last thing any of us wants is more trouble.”



He's being honest as anyone making a successful DC 12 Wisdom (Insight) check can confirm. He wants to defuse the situation, get the heroes out of there, and clean up the mess. Another successful DC 12 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals a bit more. If the characters press the issue, he'll just say, "Someone wishes to speak with you in gratitude, and with an offer of employment. I'm not at liberty to say more. Please just come with us. The last thing you want is to end up outlaws for attacking the Baron's guard on top of these thugs."

In the end, it's up to the GM to convince the heroes they should be taken into custody. This could be via social interaction, via innuendo with the Captain, or perhaps one of the unconscious characters is held hostage by the guards. The guard will not engage in lethal tactics themselves. If a character is reduced to zero hit points, they are knocked unconscious. If all the characters are neutralized

this way, they'll wake up in the throne room of the baron. If the heroes manage to defeat these guards, more will come until the party is overwhelmed.

BARON'S GUARDSMEN (2 per character)

Medium humanoid (human), lawful neutral

AC: 16 (chain shirt, shield)

Hit Points: 11 (2d8 + 2)

Speed: 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	13 (+1)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)	11 (+0)	11 (+0)

Skills: Perception +2

Senses: passive Perception 12

Languages: Common

Challenge: 1/8 (25 XP)

ACTIONS

Longsword: *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d8 + 1) slashing damage.

Heavy Crossbow: *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 100/400 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d10 + 1) piercing damage.

GUARD CAPTAIN JOHANN ERMSFORD

Medium humanoid (human), lawful neutral

AC: 16 (+1 *scale*)

Hit Points: 52 (8d8 + 16)

Speed: 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)

Saving Throws: Dexterity +3

Skills: Athletics +5, Perception +3, Persuasion +3

Senses: passive Perception 13

Languages: Common, Elven, Orcish

Challenge: 3 (700 XP)

Dueling: While wielding a melee weapon in one hand and no shield, the guard captain gains +2 to damage with that weapon.

Ready for Action: The guard captain is always ready for action. He gains advantage on initiative rolls, and his troops act on his initiative turn.

ACTIONS

Multiattack: The guard captain makes two attacks with his longsword. Either or both attacks may be the disarm action.

Longsword: *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (1d8+7) slashing damage, or 10 (1d10+5) slashing damage if used with two hands.

Heavy Crossbow: *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 100/400 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d10+1) piercing damage.

Defensive Action (Recharge 6): All allies within 60 feet under the captain's command can make a single attack as a Reaction.

Disarm: *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* The target must make a successful DC 15 Strength saving throw or drop one item of the captain's choice, which lands 10 feet away in a direction of the captain's choosing.

MEETING THE BARON

After being taken into custody, any unconscious or wounded characters are given medical attention. The party is then unarmed and bound for marching through town. To the heroes' surprise, they are marched right past the prison and into the Noble's Quarter to the very home of the baron himself.

The party is led to a beautiful villa with marble columns, stunningly-rendered statuary, fountains, silks, velvet, and other accessories at the height of luxury. They are shown into a sitting room where their bonds are removed, and they are instructed to wait. Guards are stationed outside, and the party's weapons are not yet returned.

After a brief interval, Guard Captain Ermsford returns and leads the characters into an elegant throne room where the baron sits with his wife by his side and his seneschal standing behind. Continue with the following read aloud text:

The baron is a handsome man in his fifties, with gray at the temples of his black hair and aquiline features. He is clad in the white robes of his office with a violet sash trimmed in gold. The baroness is a stunning woman who looks to be in her mid-thirties. Like the baron, she has raven black hair though hers shows no signs of gray. Her dark eyes seem to look right through those upon whom she gazes, and her

delicate features are nothing short of enthralling. She wears a violet gown that matches the baron's robes; her sash is white trimmed with silver.

Both the baron and baroness show clear signs of distress and concern on their faces.

Behind them, the seneschal is a plain-looking man with sandy blonde hair. He is dressed in simple gray robes and holds a great book; in his other hand is a fountain pen, which he holds at the ready to scribe the ongoing proceedings.

"Welcome, my friends," the baron says, "and I do apologize for the subterfuge, but I couldn't risk people knowing why you were being brought here." He nods to the captain, who bows and departs. "I have had Johann there looking for adventurers with the pluck to undertake an important task for me, and you have done us a great favor by disposing of that gang who have been causing mischief in the docks for some time."

He leans forward. "I'll come to the point: my son, Viktor, has gone missing, and I beg you to find him and return him to me. I would send my guards, but I fear he has been taken into the Blackwood Forest, and this may require more specialized skills than they have to offer. I can pay you one thousand gold coins each, or a pick of my enchanted items in the treasury, as well as the ongoing gratitude and friendship of my house if you will accept this charge. Will you hear more?"



Assuming the heroes are willing to listen further, he will provide what details he has. His son has been missing for less than 24 hours. The boy vanished out of bed at some point during the night last night. There were no signs of a struggle, but the boy's window was left wide open. His absence was discovered by a chambermaid just after dawn.

Continue with the following:

There's no way the boy could have climbed down the sheer wall for two stories, so the baron suspects dark magic, and his seneschal agrees. As to why he thinks his son has been taken to the forest, he nods to his seneschal, who steps forward with what appears to be a wand of some type forged from a glazed twisted stick. A crystal of dark purple quartz or fluorite is embedded in its tip.

"This," the seneschal says, "is a mystical divining rod. His highness was marked with a small, magical tattoo when he was an infant. That tattoo binds him to this rod. When the holder concentrates on the boy, it will point towards the boy's location. The baron, the baroness, and myself have all held

it, and all of us felt the pull towards the Blackwood."

He flips the wand over to display a small mark on the bottom end, a three-pointed star with straight lines coming off of each of the inverse vertices. "This is the symbol with which the boy is marked, so you will know him when you find him. It is on his upper neck, hidden by his hair. Show this item to him, and he will show you the mark to prove his identity."

The baron takes his wife's hand, his eyes welling up, and says, "My friends, I beg of you, find my son as soon as you can. I fear the horror of the Blackwood will be swift."

If the heroes refuse, they are free to go, and the adventure ends. If they agree, the baron is willing to help them with supplies and even horses. Checking the boy's room is possible, but it turns up nothing. Divination magic might reveal a winged woman carrying away the sleeping prince. As the baron said, there are no signs of a struggle and no signs of entry, forced or otherwise. No unusual tracks can be found outside the estate leading to or from the building.

ACT TWO

OVERVIEW

The party enters the forest and discovers its horrific secret: it has been poisoned by the negative energy plane and is overrun with foul creatures. As the characters track the boy through the forest, they find themselves contending with necrotic hazards, foul beasts, and eventually an ambush by necromantic cultists.

ENTERING THE FOREST

The heroes are allowed to exit the town through the back gate, which is almost never opened and largely exists as an emergency escape should the settlement ever need to be evacuated. The day the party sets out is overcast, the clouds blotting out the sun or the moon and stars. As the characters move closer to the forest, an almost overwhelming weight bears down upon their spirits with a sense of oppression, darkness, and melancholy that they cannot shake, no matter how hard they try. Still, the divining rod appears to be working, guiding them deep into the gloom.

The Blackwood Forest is comprised of hundreds of square miles of terrain. There are no clearings, only trails that twist and wind. Within two hours of walking, the party will feel well and truly lost. Their only guiding force is

the *divining rod*, which continues to move them forward. In this place, even rangers with forest as their Favored Terrain lose their sense of direction; it's a factor of the pervading negative energy.

Within an hour of entering the woods, it becomes pitch dark even if they heroes enter at high noon. The trees form a curtain of blackness that utterly blots out the light. A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Religion) check reveals that the forest weeps with dark energy as though the very negative energy plane has bled into the forest, infecting it like a disease.

GENERAL FEATURES OF THE BLACKWOOD

Darkness. Any natural or magical light that the characters employ only illuminates half the normal radius—even the *daylight* spell is partially squelched by this place. Darkvision can only peer into the dim light produced beyond the range of torches and does not work within the supernatural black of the forest.

The Trees. The Blackwood Forest is aptly named. The forest floor is thick with brambles, and the trees are vast, ranging over 300 feet in height. They appear to be of the redwood variety, but their needles and bark are as dark as midnight.

The wood from the trees can burn, but it's exceptionally difficult to get a fire going. Burning the wood from the blackwood trees requires a DC 20 Wisdom (Survival) check. When it does burn, the flame is a deep green color, and the wood burns very slowly.

The wood likewise is so hard that attempting to cut it from the trees can break weapons; each time a tree is struck, roll a d20, adding +1 for each point of enhancement bonus the weapon possesses. If the result is less than 7, the weapon shatters. A tree branch has an AC 16, 40 hit points, and resistance to bludgeoning damage. If a branch is successfully cut, the sap that runs forth is actually animal blood, and the tree lets out a scream that frightens all those within 60 feet who hear it unless they make a successful DC 17 Wisdom saving throw; frightened characters run away from the tree in terror for 1 minute. The save may be repeated at the end of each turn, ending the effect on a success.

Rest in the Blackwood. The evil of the woods pervades everything. If characters take a long rest in the Blackwood, they regain spell slots and class features, but each gains a level of exhaustion unless they succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw. Short rests are unaffected. Exhaustion caused by the forest cannot be removed by natural means while the characters remain in the Blackwood.

Navigation. The *divining rod* leads the party forward, but any other methods of navigation are near fruitless. If a character attempts to climb a tree, they must first succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom save, or become frightened of the tree. Climbing requires a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check. Climbers who reach the top of a 300-foot tree can see the town of Gullhem in the distance and nothing else but the Blackwood for miles. By the time they descend back to the forest floor, however, they will have completely lost their bearings again and will have no idea which way the town lies.

Time. With the sky blocked off, the party may lose track of how long they've been in the forest. Has it been hours, days, or even weeks? The only guiding star the characters have regarding time is when they feel too tired to continue. If the party presses on, the journey through the blackwood forest should require at least one long rest, but the DM is encouraged to mislead the players about the nature of time in the forest.

Turn Resistance. Due to the negative energy, all undead within the forest have turn resistance, gaining advantage on Wisdom saving throws against Channel Divinity attempts that turn undead.

BLACKWOOD FOREST

No map of Blackwood Forest is provided as it would be impossible for any traveler to map the woods. It is ever changing, the paths altering such that one can turn around to look down a path they just traversed and find only a wall of brambles behind them. Instead, there is a flow chart of the encounters through the forest en route to the necromancer's tower.

DANGERS OF BLACKWOOD FOREST

As though the oppressive darkness of the forest weren't bad enough, the region is overrun with creatures of the night. Few living beings survive here, and those that do are cultists who worship the force of death itself and are led by the very necromancer whose agents have kidnapped the young Lord Viktor.

Shortly after the characters enter the forest, they are attacked by undying guards sent to their doom by the seneschal to delay the party (see area 1). Near the necromancer's tower, the characters run into an ambush of cultists (see area 4). On the journey between these two set confrontations, the party may encounter two unique areas, each with a potential hazard and a potential combat. The party's skill checks determine if some of these encounters can be bypassed. The Dangers of Blackwood Forest flow chart outlines the order of these encounters as the party follows the *divining rod* through the forest, or the GM can use each encounter as they see fit.

AREA 1 – THE UNDYING GUARD

Shortly after the characters enter the Blackwood, they enter a clearing defended by a band of Gullhem guards sent to their doom in these forsaken woods by the seneschal. The group includes six guards, now undying warriors, led by Captain Ulfert. The undying warriors appear as desiccated zombie-like undead, although they don't have hampered movement.

Captain Ulfert is a **draugr** (see appendix C) with the following changes.

- He wears chain mail and carries a shield for an AC 18.
- Instead of an axe, he wields a longsword.
- He wears a tabard with the Gullhem crest.

UNDYING WARRIORS

Medium undead, neutral evil

AC: 17 (chain shirt, shield)

Hit Points: 13 (2d8 + 4)

Speed: 30 ft.

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

Damage Immunities: poison

Condition Immunities: exhaustion, poisoned

Senses: darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9

Languages: understands Common but cannot speak

Challenge: 1/2 (100 XP)

ACTIONS

Multiattack: The undying warrior makes two attacks: one with its longsword and one shield bash.

Longsword: *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 +2) slashing damage.

Shield Bash: *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) bludgeoning damage, and the target must make a successful DC 13 Strength saving throw or be pushed 5 feet and knocked prone.

Developments. After this encounter, the characters need to navigate a dense thicket. If the lead character succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom (Survival) check, the party avoids the bramble field and proceeds to encounter 2b. Otherwise they must face encounter 2a and then 2b. If the bearer of the *divining rod* makes a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check, the Wisdom (Survival) check is at advantage.

AREA 2A – THE BRAMBLE FIELD

The *divining rod* points into a particularly thick stand of thorny brambles. Each character needs to make a successful DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, or suffer 7 (2d6) piercing damage and 10 (3d6) necrotic damage. If less than half of the characters succeed on this saving throw, they all gain a level of exhaustion.

Developments. After this encounter, the characters proceed to encounter 2b.

AREA 2B – THE HUNGRY DEAD

Two vampire spawn hide among the branches of a massive tree using their Spider Climb trait to hold on. If the characters don't notice the danger with a successful Wisdom (Perception) contest versus their assailants' Dexterity (Stealth) check, which is made with advantage, the vampire spawn attack with surprise. Once reduced to 50% of their hit points, they use Disengage actions to flee back up into the trees to regenerate before continuing to fight. The bestial spawn are ravenously hungry and plague the party until destroyed.

VAMPIRE SPAWN (2)

Medium undead, neutral evil

AC: 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points: 82 (11d8 + 33)

Speed: 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	17 (+3)	16 (+3)	11 (+0)	11 (+0)	13 (+1)

Saving Throws: Dexterity +6, Wisdom +3

Skills: Perception +3, Stealth +6

Damage Resistance: necrotic; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Senses: darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages: Common

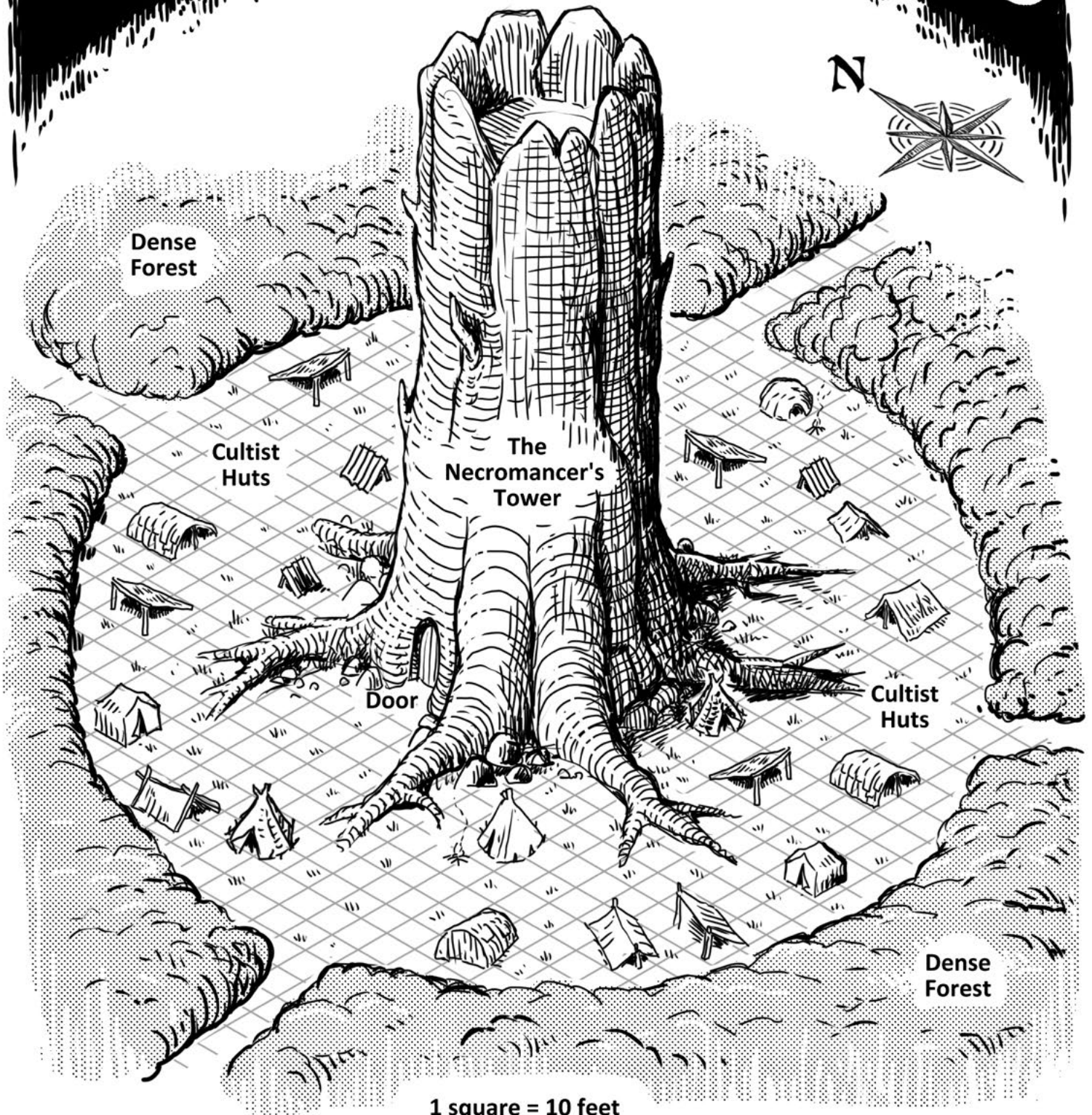
Challenge: 5 (1,800 XP)

Regeneration: The vampire regains 10 hit points at the start of its turn if it has at least 1 hit point and isn't in running water or sunlight. If the vampire takes radiant damage or damage from holy water, this trait doesn't function at the start of the vampire's next turn.

Spider Climb: The vampire can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down, without an ability check.

Vampire Weaknesses: The vampire can't enter a residence without an invitation from a resident. The vampire suffers 20 acid damage if it ends its turn in running water. The vampire is destroyed if a piercing weapon made from wood is driven into its heart while it is incapacitated and in its resting place. The vampire suffers 20 radiant damage if it starts its turn in sunlight. While in sunlight the vampire has disadvantage on attacks and ability checks.

THE CLEARING



ACTIONS

Multiattack: The vampire makes two attacks, only one of which can be a bite attack.

Claws: *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 8 (2d4 + 3) slashing damage. Instead of dealing damage, the vampire can choose to grapple the target (escape DC 13)

Bite: *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one willing creature or a creature that is grappled by the vampire, incapacitated, or restrained. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) necrotic damage. The victim's hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the necrotic damage suffered, and the vampire regains an equal amount of hit points. This reduction lasts until the victim finishes a long rest. If the effect reduces hit point maximum to 0, the target dies.

Developments. After this encounter, the characters may notice that they are being followed (see area 3a below). If they can evade their pursuers, skip to encounter 3b. Otherwise they proceed to encounter 3a and then encounter 3b.

AREA 3A – THE RELENTLESS PACK

While trekking through the forest, a pack of werewolves cursed in hybrid form begins to track the characters. If one of the characters makes a successful DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check, he notices that the group is being followed. If the group is willing to ignore the *divining rod* and gain a level of exhaustion, they can escape the clutches of this bestial pack. Otherwise (or if they fail the Perception check), the pack attacks sometime in the next hour.

WEREWOLF (HYBRID FORM) (4)

Medium humanoid (shapechanger), chaotic evil

AC: 12 (natural armor)

Hit Points: 58 (9d8 + 18)

Speed: 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)	11 (+0)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)

Skills: Perception +4, Stealth +3

Damage Immunities: bludgeoning, piercing and slashing from nonmagical weapons that aren't silvered

Senses: passive Perception 14

Languages: understands Common but cannot speak it

Challenge: 3 (700 XP)

Keen Hearing and Smell: The werewolf has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks relying on hearing or smell.

Trapped in Beast Form: Werewolves in Blackwood Forest are forever trapped in their bestial or hybrid form due to the infection of negative energy. Anyone infected with lycanthropy while in the Blackwood must make a successful DC 12 Constitution save after 3 days and every day thereafter at midnight or turn forever into beast form. If an infected werewolf can be transported out of the wood, it can again resume human form, but is still infected with normal lycanthropy, changing at the full moon.

ACTIONS

Multiattack: The werewolf makes two attacks: one with its bite and one with its claws.

Bite: *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage. Humanoid targets must make a DC 12 Constitution save or be infected with lycanthropy (see Trapped in Beast Form, above).

Claws: *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 7 (2d4 + 2) slashing damage.

AREA 3B – THE NECROTIC FISSURE

The characters come across a deep fissure that is 50 feet across and 30 feet deep. This fissure is a rift caused from the Negative Plane. It's impossible to go around the fissure due to the bramble overgrowth. For every 1 minute standing within 30 feet of the fissure, a character must make a successful DC 13 Wisdom saving throw, or suffer 7 (2d6) necrotic damage. Somehow the characters need to cross the fissure. If they climb down to cross, it requires two successful DC 17 Strength (Athletics) checks. Saving throws against the necrotic energy are at disadvantage if a character is in or falls into the fissure. Failure results in a 30-foot fall for 10 (3d6) bludgeoning damage.

Developments. Before the characters proceed to encounter 4, one character must make a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) to navigate the final paths toward the tower, or the entire party gains a level of exhaustion due to a circuitous route. If the bearer of the *divining rod* makes a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check, the Wisdom (Survival) check is at advantage.



AREA 4 – THE CULTIST AMBUSH

As the heroes get closer to the lair of the necromancer behind this dark conspiracy, six death cultists and a cult fanatic who patrol the forest have set an ambush for the party, who they know is approaching.

The ambush takes place in a perfectly circular 60-foot diameter clearing of scorched earth. No plant growth or brambles occur here. The soil is fine dust, ash, and charcoal fragments. The cultists have concealed a 30-foot diameter net in the middle of the clearing. A passive Perception of 20 is required to notice the net. Six ropes attached to the net are buried and lead to a main rope attached to a thick tree branch overhead. This rope is manned by two death cultists and is manually triggered when several characters are in its midst. Any characters in the area of effect must make a successful DC 14 Dexterity saving throw or become restrained by the net (escape DC 14). The net has an AC 10 and 5 points of slashing damage is suitable to free a Medium-sized creature.

Four more death cultists hide at the edge of the clearing and use shortbows to attack those restrained by the net.

They are led by a death cult fanatic. He uses spells to support the attack, such as *bane*, *hold person*, and *spiritual weapon* (a scythe).

What the cultists know. Questioning a cultist is one way for the characters to find out why the boy has been kidnapped and what the necromancer plans to do with young Viktor. The cultists can tell the characters the following, assuming a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) or DC 13 Charisma (Intimidation) check is made for each piece of information:

- The cultists can point the heroes to the location of the necromancer's tower, but this information is largely moot as the party has the *divining rod* that will lead them there.
- The cultists know almost nothing about the necromancer himself; to them, he is merely "the Master," and he seeks to "ascend." They cannot give the layout of the tower, as they are not permitted inside. Only the Master and his creatures are within, though the cultists don't know exactly what kind of creatures he keeps or how many.

- The boy is barely hanging on at this point; his blood needs to be slowly drained in a ritual over a week's time. The cultists have no idea how long he will continue to hold out.

In addition, the cult fanatic knows additional details, but these require a successful DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) or DC 15 Charisma (Intimidation) check for each piece of information:

- The necromancer who lives in a tower deep within the forest and who has been imprisoned here for ages (no one knows how long; time has little meaning in this place) is the head of the cult. The necromancer needs the boy's fey blood to complete a ritual that will allow him to complete the transformation into a lich and escape the prison of the forest. If the ritual is completed, he will be able to take control over all of the dark energy within Blackwood Forest and extend his domain across the kingdom as the embodiment of Death itself.
- A touch of fey blood runs through the Gullhem bloodline. Two generations prior, Viktor's great-grandfather fell in love with a nymph, and she with him; they spent a single night together, and the nymph later delivered Victor's grandmother to the town. The blood has since been passed to the boy.
- If pressed as to how they got the boy in the first place, the cultists brag that the necromancer has allies within the royal court: the seneschal is an acolyte of the cult and the baroness is no longer the baroness. She has been replaced by a creature bound to the necromancer. The nature of the creature is unknown to the cultist, but he speaks of her with reverence, even referring to her as a goddess.

Developments. If the heroes don't question any of the cultists, the same information about the intent of the necromancer can be gleaned from young Viktor when they rescue him from the basement of the necromancer's tower.

The cultists and the fanatic all wear dark brown cloaks, which could be used by the characters conceal themselves as cultists loyal to the necromancer.

DEATH CULTIST (6)

Medium humanoid (human), neutral evil

AC: 12 (leather armor)

Hit Points: 16 (3d8 + 3)

Speed: 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	11 (+1)	10 (+0)

Skills: Deception +2, Religion +2, Stealth +3

Damage Resistances: necrotic

Senses: passive Perception 10

Languages: Common

Challenge: 1/4 (50 XP)

Dark Devotion: The death cultist has advantage on saving throws against being charmed or frightened.

ACTIONS

Shortsword: *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) piercing damage

Shortbow: *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 80/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) piercing damage

DEATH CULT FANATIC

Medium humanoid (human), neutral evil

AC: 13 (leather armor)

Hit Points: 33 (6d8 + 6)

Speed: 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)

Skills: Persuasion +4, Perception +4, Religion +2, Stealth +4

Damage Resistances: necrotic

Senses: passive Perception 14

Languages: Common

Challenge: 2 (450 XP)

Dark Devotion: The death cultist has advantage on saving throws against being charmed or frightened.

Spellcasting: The fanatic is a 4th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Wisdom (Save DC 11, Attack +3). They have the following cleric spells prepared:

- Cantrips (at will): *light, sacred flame, thaumaturgy*
- 1st level (4 slots): *command, inflict wounds, shield of faith*
- 2nd level (3 slots): *blindness/deafness, hold person, spiritual weapon*

ACTIONS

Multiattack: The fanatic makes two melee attacks.

Shortsword: *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage

ACT THREE

OVERVIEW

The heroes infiltrate the necromancer's tower, interrupt the ritual, and rescue the boy, but the necromancer has gained just enough power to escape his prison, and he is headed for the castle.

THE CLEARING

Deep at the heart of the forest lies a strange sort of clearing; while there are no trees growing for at least 250 feet across, the canopy is inexplicably still as solid as it is anywhere else in the Blackwood. At the center of the dark clearing rises a tower carved from the blackened trunk of a massive tree that was once the home of a long extinct fey race but is now corrupted by the necromancer's foul magic. There are four trails that provide access to this clearing. Roll a 1d4 each time the characters come here to randomly determine which path they arrive from.

Surrounding the tower are a series of simple huts, tents, and lean-tos in which dwell members of the death cult. There are a total of 50 death cultists (see Danger in the Blackwood area 4 for statistics) that live in these structures. At any given time, there are 20 on active watch in the clearing tasked to observe each trail in groups of five. The remainder are in the forest patrolling, on a special errand for the necromancer, or asleep in their huts. The cultists are not permitted within the necromancer's tower save by special invite.

Taking out one or two groups quietly is the best option to get into the tower. Stealth is another viable alternative, or perhaps the cloaks from the cultists could be used to disguise them party. Once they get inside the tower, the death cultists will not follow as they are forbidden from entering the tower of the master.

GENERAL FEATURES OF THE NECROMANCER'S TOWER

Construction. The tower itself is built into the body of an ancient petrified blackwood tree. The top floor is open to the sky but hidden within the canopy above. Attempting to climb the tower to investigate carries the same difficulties as climbing any tree in the Blackwood. The trunk reaches 50-60 feet in diameter with the interior room diameters ranging between 45 and 55 feet across. Each floor

is at least 60-feet above the previous. The three floors of the tower are cavernous with a single enclosed spiral staircase reaching from floor to floor in the middle.

Illumination. Each room, except for area 1, is lit by a single torch sconce ignited with a *continual flame* spell.

Interior. The interior of the tower has a spartan layout with bare furniture and few amenities. The entirety of the tower is carved from petrified wood; even the stairs and furniture have been sculpted with magic. The interior reeks of death and rotting flesh, and there are dead animals and the corpses of humans and humanoids tossed about and left to decay in honor of the death god that the cult worships. It's damp, hot, and humid throughout and woefully unpleasant.

Entry Door. A stone door blocks entry into the tower, but it is neither locked nor trapped. The necromancer is overconfident in the Blackwood and his faithful.

AREA 1 – ENTRY

The first floor of the tower is dark, and the stench of death and rotting flesh assault your senses. In the middle of a 60-foot diameter room, a stone carved spiral staircase rises up from the middle but also descends below.

Lurking in the darkness are the first of the tower's guards: four shadows who know every cultist that is permitted to pass. They attack the characters as soon as they are within the gloom.

SHADOWS (4)

Medium undead, chaotic evil

AC: 12 (natural armor)

Hit Points: 16 (3d8 + 3)

Speed: 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
6 (-2)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	6 (-2)	10 (+0)	8 (-1)

Skills: Stealth +4 (+6 in dim light or darkness)

Damage Resistance: acid, cold, fire, lightning, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks.

Damage Immunities: necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities: exhaustion, frightened, grap-

THE NECROMANCER'S TOWER

1 square
= 5 feet



Door

SBP '19

pled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained

Senses: darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages: –

Challenge: 1/2 (100 XP)

Amorphous: The shadow can move through spaces as small as 1 inch without squeezing.

Shadow stealth: While in dim light or darkness, the shadow can hide as a bonus action.

Sunlight weakness: While in sunlight, the shadow has disadvantage on attack rolls, ability checks and saving throws.

ACTIONS

Strength Drain: *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5ft., one creature. *Hit:* 9 (2d6 + 2) necrotic damage, and the target's Strength score is reduced by 1d4. The target dies if its strength is reduced to 0 in this manner. The reduction otherwise lasts until the target finishes a short or a long rest. Non-evil humanoids who die from this attack rise as a new shadow 1d4 hours later.

Which Way to Go. Strangely, the moment the heroes enter the tower, they note that their *divining rod* seems to be pulling them both up and down. The necromancer (who has already begun the process of bonding to the boy's blood) is up above (in area 5), while Viktor is imprisoned in the basement, below (area 3).

AREA 2 – BASEMENT WORKSHOP

GMs Note. As the party descends the stairs, the *divining rod's* pull becomes ever stronger. Once on this level, the *divining rod* pulls toward the door to area 3.

The room is deathly quiet and encompasses half the tree, appearing to be some sort of personal quarters. To the left is a simple bed with a straw mattress, a wardrobe formed from the wall of the tree, and a writing desk with a journal and ink quill. To the right, are tables and shelves full of books, beakers, and other research paraphernalia.

Before exploring the area, the heroes must contend with the guardians the necromancer has left behind. There are four hell hounds waiting in the shadows for interlopers to arrive. Two rest on the opposite side of his bed while two lurk under his research tables. Spotting them before they attack requires a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Perception)

check. They are trained not to use their breath weapons near the shelf or the lab area.

In the bedding area lie the necromancer's personal effects: a pair of gold engraved bone dice; a gold locket with a painted portrait of a young girl inside; a small gold bracelet, sized for a child's wrist; a silver washing pitcher; and a copper chalice with silver filigree. These are each worth 25 gp.

If any characters take the time to examine the workbench, a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Medicine) check or DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals that there is blood in several of the vials. This blood is that of Viktor and was being used in experiments.

The books on the shelves detail magical research, and are valuable to a wizard. They contain wizard spells up to 5th level: all of those that the necromancer currently has prepared, plus 1d4 additional spells of each level (GM's choice). Finally, there is the spell *blood bond* (see appendix A), which appears to be a part of the ritual to become a lich.

On the workshop table are several potions mixed in with various other beakers, bottles, and failed chemical experiments. Finding the potions requires a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check, although *detect magic* will also do the trick. The potions include six *potions of greater healing* and a *potion of climbing*. Several *spell scrolls* are mixed in with the books on the bookshelves. These also require a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check or *detect magic* to locate. They include *blood bond* (see appendix A), *crown of madness*, *greater restoration* (x6), and *hellish rebuke*.

Notes on the workbench detail a ritual to achieve lichdom that requires draining a fey-blooded mage, infusing the would-be lich with the blood, opening a rift to the negative energy plane into oneself, and offering a massive sacrifice, wherein the victims sacrifice themselves in "blood and rage" to sanctify the phylactery.

Finally, at the desk is a *crystal ball of telepathy* used to communicate with the succubus and the seneschal in the baron's court. The *crystal ball* is also cursed such that anyone other than the necromancer who tries to attune to it must succeed at a DC 18 Charisma save or suffer 8d6 necrotic damage and become chaotic evil.

HELL HOUNDS (4)

Medium fiend, lawful evil

AC: 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points: 45 (7d8 + 14)

Speed: 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	6 (-2)	13 (+1)	6 (-2)

Skills: Perception +5

Damage Immunities: fire

Senses: darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15

Languages: understands Infernal but cannot speak it

Challenge: 3 (700 XP)

Keen Hearing and Smell: The hound has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing or smell.

Pack Tactics: The hound has advantage on attack rolls if at least one of its allies is within 5 feet of its target, and its ally isn't incapacitated.

ACTIONS

Bite: *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing plus 7 (2d6) fire.

Fire breath (Recharge 5-6): The hound exhales a 15-foot cone of fire. Each creature in the area must make a DC 12 Dexterity save, taking 21 (6d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much on a success.

AREA 3 – TORTURE CHAMBER

GMs Note. This stone door is locked, requiring thieves' tools and a successful DC 17 Dexterity check to pick. Alternatively, it can be bashed, having an AC 17 and 18 hit points.

The stench of old, rotted blood strikes your nostrils immediately on opening the door. The air is a cloud of flies and their accompanying droning buzz. Piles of rotted flesh lie all around, and every wall is hung with long chains ending in hooks that are covered in rotting viscera.

The only furniture in this chamber of horrors is a table with a cross-stirrup arrangement directly across from the door. Strapped to the table is a human boy of perhaps fourteen. He has blonde hair, though it's matted with sweat and grime.

Standing between you and the boy is a muscular, red-skinned creature cloaked in writhing, bladed chains that move like tentacles around it.

The creature is a **chain devil** and wastes no time attacking. A successful DC 18 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals that this is a chain devil. It animates four of the chains attached to the walls and then wades into melee to prevent foes from disturbing the boy.

CHAIN DEVIL

Medium fiend (devil), lawful evil

AC: 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points: 85 (10d8 + 40)

Speed: 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	15 (+2)	18 (+4)	11 (+0)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)

Saves: Con +7, Wis +4, Cha +5

Damage Resistance: cold; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks that aren't silvered.

Damage Immunities: fire, poison

Condition Immunities: poisoned

Senses: darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages: Infernal, telepathy 120 ft.

Challenge: 8 (3,900 XP)

Devil's Sight: Magical darkness doesn't impede the devil's darkvision.

Magic Resistance: The devil has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

ACTIONS

Multiattack: The devil makes two attacks with its chains.

Chain: *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) slashing damage. The target is grappled (escape DC 14) if the devil isn't already grappling a creature. Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained and takes 7 (2d6) piercing damage at the start of each of its turns.

Animate Chains (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest): Up to four chains the devil can see within 60 feet of it magically sprout razor-edged barbs and animate under the devil's control, provided that the chains aren't being worn or carried. Each animated chain is an object with AC 20, 20 hit points, resistance to piercing damage, and immunity to psychic and thunder damage. When the devil uses Multiattack on its turn, it can use each ani-

mated chain to make one additional chain attack. An animated chain can grapple one creature of its own but can't make attacks while grappling. An animated chain reverts to its inanimate state if reduced to 0 hit points or if the devil is incapacitated or dies.

REACTIONS

Unnerving Mask: When a creature the devil can see starts its turn within 30 feet of the devil, the devil can create the illusion that it looks like one of the creature's departed loved ones or bitter enemies. If the creature can see the devil, it must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or be frightened until the end of its turn.

The *divining rod* points directly at the boy. He is gaunt, with eyes half-closed, and his lips are dry and cracked. His clothes are filthy and worn. He writhes against his bonds, but only weakly. Coming out of each of his wrists and ankles are tubes, blood dripping from them into brass receptacles on the floor, and with each movement he makes, each pump of his fists or move of his feet, another spurt comes free.

Freeing Viktor is an easy task for anyone with proficiency in Medicine. Otherwise, he suffers 1d3 piercing damage. The boy is just strong enough to walk, but he suffers from 4 levels of exhaustion and currently has 4 hit points remaining. Another few hours of blood drain and he would have died. He requires several long rests or magical healing to fully recover from his ordeal.

Once freed, Viktor will warn the heroes of the necromancer's plan. The information he has is largely the same as they could have gotten from questioning a cultist (see Dangers of Blackwood area 4) with the additional information that it was his father's own seneschal and the fiend masquerading as his mother who arranged his kidnapping; the necromancer, it seems, already has agents within the court, and the boy is determined that they must be stopped to save his father's barony.

He'll show them the tattoo he bears that binds him to the *divining rod*. If asked why it pulled up and down when the heroes walked in, Viktor will speculate that it's because the necromancer has taken a quantity of blood somewhere upstairs to perform tonight's ritual. The boy will implore the heroes to stop the necromancer, for even at this stage of his ritual, he's well on his way to lichdom and could be a threat to the entire realm.

VIKTOR VON GULLHEM

Medium humanoid (human), lawful good

AC: 11

Hit Points: 9 (2d8)

Speed: 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)

Skills: Deception +5, History +4 Insight +4, Perception +3, Persuasion +5

Senses: passive Perception 13

Languages: Common, Elvish

Challenge: 1/8 (25 XP)

Spellcasting: Viktor is a 1st-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 12, +4 to hit with spell attacks). He has the following wizard spells prepared:

- **Cantrips (at will):** *fire bolt, minor illusion, prestidigitation*
 - **1st level (3 slots):** *mage armor, protection from evil and good*
-

ACTIONS

Dagger: *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6+1) piercing damage.

AREA 4 – RITUAL CHAMBER

To the left is a small, square pool embedded in the floor, approximately 6 feet long and 4 feet wide. It's full of congealed blood, and bloody footprints and splashes litter the entire room. Arcane sigils are scrawled upon the walls and floor, and at each of the corners of the tub, a brazier burns with purple fire, creating a strange psychedelic blend with the orange-red of the flickering illumination from the walls. Dead bodies in various stages of rot and decay litter the floor.

The *divining rod* pulls weakly towards the tub, as well as continuing to point up and down. A successful DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check or a DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals a fresh set of still-wet booted prints that head up the stairs towards the next level.

In this room, a pack of ghouls feasts upon the bodies. They pause their blood-soaked gorging to attack the characters, craving fresher meat.

GHAST (5)

Medium undead, chaotic evil

AC: 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points: 36 (8d8)

Speed: 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)	8 (-1)

Damage Resistance: necrotic

Damage Immunities: poison

Condition Immunities: charmed, exhaustion, poisoned

Senses: darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages: Common

Challenge: 2 (450 XP)

Stench: Any creature starting its turn within 5 feet of a ghast must make a DC 10 Constitution save or be poisoned until the start of its next turn. If the save is successful, the creature is immune to the stench for 24 hours.

Turning Defiance: The ghast and any ghouls within 30 feet of it have advantage on saving throws against being turned.

ACTIONS

Bite: *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 12 (2d8 + 3) piercing

Claws: *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) slashing damage, and non-undead creatures must make a DC 10 Constitution save or be paralyzed for 1 minute. A victim can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect with a success.

This humanoid creature has long, sharp teeth, and its pallid flesh is stretched tightly over its starved frame.

One or two rounds into the combat with the ghastrs, from the shadows comes a decayed, dead body, small in stature like that of a child. The thing moves swiftly, enraged and completely maddened. As it nears the group, they notice it's the remains of a little girl with blonde hair. Her wrists and throat have been cut, and mystical sigils carved into her skin. A successful DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check by anyone who has seen the locket in the basement will recognize the thing as what remains of the little girl in the picture. Such a realization requires a successful DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or the character is frightened of

the girl. The character may repeat the save at the end of each of their turns, ending the effect with a success.

The girl is a **draugr** (see appendix C). Unlike other draugar, however, she is incapable of speech or reason; she simply needs to kill in her sheer madness. In truth, she was once the necromancer's own daughter, but in his lust for power, he sacrificed her to dark forces as the first step on his path to becoming a lich. He keeps her as something of a pet, a reminder of his grief and all he has spent for his dark god.

AREA 5 – ROOFTOP CIRCLE

The stairs lead to the rooftop of the tower. Through the canopy, the heroes can see the clouds above, which roil with activity as lightning crashes down. On the stone floor is an engraved ritual circle with black, purple, red, and blue candles burning at various points. Four braziers burn with green fire at the four compass points around the circle. At the center is the master of the ceremony. He is an imposing figure, clad in black robes and drenched in blood. An unholy symbol of blasphemy hangs around his neck, and he calls out the name of his god to the sky.

To the left and right, horrific monstrosities approach with a sense of urgency. The two on the left are violet-skinned humanoids with pointed ears, wicket claws, and thrashing tails. Their faces are lined with horrible, writhing, serpent-like beards as they stalk forward, spinning wicked-looking glaives. On the right, a lanky, green-skinned humanoid creature moves forward, weaving to and fro in snake-like fashion. It's covered in razor-sharp spikes that run down its back, over its arms, and all the length of its long tail.

Before the battle commences, the necromancer points to the party and says, "You may have saved the boy, but you're too late to save his family and this realm!" He then turns to black smoke, which rises at great speed and departs into the night.

A successful DC 17 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals these creatures as two bearded devils and one barbed devil. The devils move into melee with the characters after the necromancer escapes. They fight to the death. Following this battle, proceed quickly to Act 4.

BEARDED DEVIL (2)

Medium fiend (devil), lawful evil

AC: 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points: 52 (8d8 + 16)

Speed: 30 ft.



STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	15 (+2)	15 (+2)	9 (-1)	11 (+0)	11 (+0)

Saves: Strength +5, Constitution +4, Wisdom +2

Damage Resistance: cold; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks that aren't silvered.

Damage Immunities: fire, poison

Condition Immunities: poison

Senses: darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages: Infernal, telepathy 120 ft.

Challenge: 3 (700 XP)

Devil's Sight: Magical darkness doesn't impede the devil's darkvision.

Magic Resistance: The devil has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Steadfast: The devil can't be frightened while it can see an allied creature within 30 ft. of it.

ACTIONS

Multiattack: The devil makes two attacks: one with its beard and one with its glaive.

Beard: *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing, and the target must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 minute. While poisoned in this way, the target can't regain hit points. The target can repeat the

saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Glaive: *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d10 + 3) slashing. If the target is a creature other than an undead or a construct, it must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or lose 5 (1d10) hit points at the start of each of its turns due to an infernal wound. Each time the devil hits the wounded target with this attack, the damage dealt by the wound increases by 5 (1d10). Any creature can take an action to stanch the wound with a successful DC 12 Wisdom (Medicine) check. The wound also closes if the target receives magical healing.

BARBED DEVIL

Medium fiend (devil), lawful evil

AC: 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points: 110 (13d8 + 52)

Speed: 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	17 (+3)	18 (+4)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)

Saves: Strength +6, Constitution +7, Wisdom +5, Charisma +5

Skills: Deception +5, Insight +5, Perception +8

Damage Resistance: cold; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks that aren't silvered.

Damage Immunities: fire, poison

Condition Immunities: poisoned

Senses: darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 18

Languages: Infernal, telepathy 120 ft.

Challenge: 5 (1,800 XP)

Barbed Hide: At the start of each of its turns, the barbed devil deals 5 (1d10) piercing damage to any creature grappling it.

Devil's Sight: Magical darkness doesn't impede the devil's darkvision.

Magic Resistance: The devil has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

ACTIONS

Multiattack: The devil makes three melee attacks: one with its tail and two with its claws. Alternatively, it can use hurl flame twice.

Claw: *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing

Tail: *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) piercing

Hurl Flame: *Ranged Spell Attack:* +5 to hit, range 150 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (3d6) fire damage. If the target is a flammable object that isn't worn or carried, it also catches fire.

ACT FOUR

OVERVIEW

The heroes must now race against time to stop the necromancer, but they have one weapon: the boy's blood is still bound to the *divining rod*, enabling them to find the most direct route to the necromancer and out of the Blackwood. The heroes return with the boy, but must foil the necromancer's plot as it unfolds. The final battle is a big showdown between the heroes, the necromancer, and his cohorts: the seneschal and succubus masquerading as the baroness.

AFTERMATH AT THE TOWER

Whoever possesses the *divining rod* feels a slight tug away from the tower and away from the boy. A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check allows a character to theo-

rize that the necromancer has covered himself in the boy's blood as well as having bonded to it over at least a week; he quite literally has absorbed part of the boy into his form. This can allow the party to use the *divining rod* to track the necromancer. Since Viktor is with the group, the *rod* is drawing them towards the next farthest source of "him." Viktor, who knows well how the rod works, can confirm this theory or possibly volunteer it if needed. This means the party have access to a direct path out of the forest.

In addition, within minutes of the necromancer's escape, the heroes suddenly feel the heavy burden of the Blackwood lift. Any characters with levels of exhaustion from the necrotic energy of the dark wood have one level of exhaustion removed. The forest surrounding them still seems dark and foreboding, but it's as though the necrotic

taint is being drained from it along with its effects. The necromancer has begun to draw this energy into himself, facilitating his transformation into a lich.

As the heroes emerge from the tower, they find themselves surrounded by scores of remaining cultists, ready to fight to the death. Just as combat is about to start, however, a number of inhuman screams of rage erupt from the forest, and undead creatures moving at blinding speed emerge to fall upon the cultists, ripping them to shreds. Assuming the characters have encountered draugar earlier in the forest, they recognize these creatures. All of the deceased souls who have perished in this forest have come to the characters' rescue. One of the draugar, a desiccated elf, turns to the heroes during the fight and croaks: "Go! End this eternal nightmare, that we may find our rest at last!"

From here it's a breakneck race back towards the palace. The connection between the *divining rod* and the half-lich necromancer is so strong that the heroes are pulled inexorably through openings and pathways, harmlessly through briar and bramble of the forest. No longer do pathways twist and close behind them; no longer do they feel lost. The curse on the forest has been partially broken, and a trek that potentially took a couple of days to make originally, now takes a fraction of the time to accomplish.

Continue by reading the following:

As you reach the town walls, the guards on the parapets open the gates and usher you inside. As you race along the dirt and cobblestone paths of the town, you notice the town has degenerated into chaos. Townsfolk are murdering each other in the streets, covered in blood with madness in their eyes.

Reaching the palace, you are met by Guard Captain Johann Ermsford, who looks over Viktor and nods to a couple of the men to take the child to safety. He turns to the characters and says, "I cannot tell you how glad I am to see you, my friends. Alas, I fear something is very wrong. An hour ago, a strange man walked into the throne room, cloaked in black and covered in what I can only assume is dried blood. As we moved to stop him, the baron ordered us to stand down, and ordered me out of the room. When I came down here, riots erupted in the town, and my men are all engaged trying to stem the chaos. I stand alone right now, and fear something nefarious is going on in that room."

Indeed, Johann is correct: the baron has been dominated by the necromancer through the machinations of the succubus and is under her control. In addition, a small contingent of undead now serve as the baron's guard, these

having been killed and resurrected by the necromancer.

Johann is willing to accompany the heroes, though he's aware he may not survive the ordeal.

THE FINAL BATTLE

Johann can lead the party to the throne room. When they arrive, the half-lich necromancer, the succubus, and the seneschal are waiting for them, protected by six undying warriors (for statistics, see Dangers of Blackwood area 1), who were the baron's former guardsmen.

The throne room is 60 feet wide and 100 feet long with a 20-foot high ceiling. Four stone pillars support the roof, and at the far end is a massive gold-gilded throne on a short dais.

GMs Note. This is a potentially deadly encounter for the heroes. Johann is able to participate, and if the heroes used *greater restoration* scrolls on Viktor, it's possible that he will be able to join them as well. This can change the tenor of the battle as Viktor works to end the charm effect on his father, but the necromancer will seek to sacrifice the boy. The undying warriors should not be included for a smaller-sized or heavily-depleted adventuring party. GMs should add or remove them as needed to keep the encounter balanced for their group.

The necromancer is a **half-lich** (see Appendix C). He opens the confrontation by casting *cone of cold* and then follows it up with *black tentacles*. He keeps his 3rd level spell slots available for *counterspell*, and saves at least one 4th level spell slot for *phantasmal killer* against an obvious fighter-type. He tries to hang back and let the succubus, seneschal and undying guards (if any) do the front line fighting.

The succubus plays the part of the baroness to the hilt. She cowers behind her "husband" but is ready to plant a draining kiss on him if it appears the necromancer is going to be defeated. This likely kills him, at which point she reverts to fiendish form and attacks with claws.

The baron has been *charmed* by the succubus, and behaves with outrage and confusion during the battle, calling for his guard, who are not there to answer. He will only get involved in the battle when someone attacks his "wife", in which he fights viciously to defend her.

The seneschal is an accomplished enchanter. If he can target only the characters, he uses *lightning bolt*, but prefers to use *confusion*, *hold person* or *hypnotic pattern* to hinder them. If the necromancer is defeated, he tries to flee.

BARONESS ILLYA VON GULLHEM (SUC-CUBUS)

Medium fiend (shapechanger), neutral evil

AC: 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points: 66 (12d8 + 12)

Speed: 30 ft., fly 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	17 (+3)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)	12 (+0)	20 (+5)

Skills: Deception +9, Insight +5, Perception +5, Persuasion +9, Stealth +7

Damage Resistance: cold, fire, lightning, poison; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Senses: darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15

Languages: Abyssal, Common, Infernal, telepathy 60 ft.

Challenge: 4 (1,100 XP)

Shapechanger: The fiend can use its action to polymorph into a Small or Medium humanoid, or back into its true form. Without wings, the fiend loses its flying speed. Other than its size and speed, its statistics are the same in each form. Any equipment it is wearing or carrying isn't transformed. It reverts to its true form if it dies.

Telepathic Bond: The fiend ignores the range restriction on its telepathy when communicating with a creature it has charmed. The two don't even need to be on the same plane of existence.

ACTIONS

Claw (Fiend Form Only): *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) slashing damage.

Charm: One humanoid the fiend can see within 30 feet of it must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or be magically charmed for 1 day. The charmed target obeys the fiend's verbal or telepathic commands. If the target suffers any harm or receives a suicidal command, it can repeat the saving throw, ending the effect on a success. If the target successfully saves against the effect, or if the effect on it ends, the target is immune to this fiend's Charm for the next 24 hours. The fiend can have only one target charmed at a time. If it charms another, the effect on the previous target ends.

Draining Kiss: The fiend kisses a creature charmed by it or a willing creature. The target must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw against this magic, taking

32 (5d10 + 5) psychic damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. The target's hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the damage taken. This reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0.

Etherealness: The fiend magically enters the Ethereal Plane from the Material Plane, or vice versa.

SENESCHAL

Medium humanoid (human), neutral evil

AC: 15 (mage armor)

Hit Points: 49 (9d8 + 9)

Speed: 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	1 (-5)

Damage Vulnerabilities: cold

Damage Immunities: fire, lightning

Condition Immunities: blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, prone

Senses: blindsight 80 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 10

Languages: —

Challenge: 2 (450 XP)

Spellcasting: The seneschal is a 9th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is intelligence (Save DC 14, spell attack +6). He has the following wizard spells prepared:

- **Cantrips (at will):** *friends, mage hand, message, prestidigitation*
- **1st level (4 slots):** *charm person**, *mage armor, magic missile*
- **2nd level (3 slots):** *hold person**, *invisibility, suggestion**
- **3rd level (3 slots):** *bestow curse, hypnotic pattern, lightning bolt*
- **4th level (3 slots):** *black tentacles, confusion**
- **5th level (2 slots):** *hold monster**

*Enchantment spell of first level or higher

ACTIONS

Dagger: *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.

REACTIONS

Charming Defense (Recharge: after casting an enchantment spell of 1st level or higher): The seneschal may attempt to magically divert an attack against him if the attacker is within 30 feet and the seneschal can see the attacker. The seneschal must decide to do this before the attack roll is revealed. The attacker must succeed at a DC 14 wisdom save or instead attack the creature closest to it that isn't the seneschal. If several creatures are closest, the attacker can choose which to target.

BARON VON GULLHEM

Medium humanoid (human), lawful neutral

AC: 15 (breastplate)

Hit Points: 9 (2d8)

Speed: 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	12 (+1)	11 (+3)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)

Skills: Deception +5, History +4 Insight +4 Persuasion +5

Senses: passive Perception 12

Languages: Common, Elvish

Challenge: 1/8 (25 XP)

ACTIONS

Longsword: *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d8 + 1) piercing damage.

REACTIONS

Parry: The baron can add +2 to his AC against one melee attack that would hit him. To do so, he must see the attacker and be wielding a weapon.

CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

If the heroes win the day, the spell over Gullhem will be broken. The draugar within the forest will crumble to dust, their souls released. The other undead therein will be freed to wander the realms, but the forest is no longer cursed, and new opportunities for adventure abound in the cleanup of the realm. The baron will be heartbroken at the realization his wife was murdered and replaced, but grateful to have his son returned.

The party will be paid as promised and will have gained the gratitude of the baron, who can serve as a powerful ally in future adventures.

APPENDIX A: NEW SPELL

BLOOD BOND

4th-level necromancy

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 50 ft.

Components: V, S, M (a vial of the target's blood)

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

You create a sympathetic bond with another creature whose blood you hold in a vial. While you are within 50 feet and line of sight of this creature, you can use an action to impose any of the following effects upon the creature:

Damage: The creature must make a Constitution saving throw, taking 5d8 necrotic damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Healing: The creature heals 5d8 damage.

Fright: The creature is frightened of you for the duration of the spell if it fails a Wisdom saving throw. It may repeat the save at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself with a success, but it rolls at disadvantage if it can see you. Creatures who successfully save are immune to the fright effect of this spell for 24 hours.

At Higher Levels: When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 5th level or higher, the amount of damage you cause or heal increases by 1d8 per spell level above fourth.



APPENDIX B: NEW MAGIC ITEM

DIVINING ROD

Wondrous item, rare (requires attunement to target)

This *rod* can draw the holder inexorably towards the person that is attuned to it. Wherever this person is, with no limit to distance as long as the target is on the same plane of existence, the *rod* will pull the holder in the most direct line towards the attuned person.

Attuning to this *rod* requires a tattoo that matches the symbol upon the *rod* to be inscribed on the attuned person by a spellcasting individual. The tattoo artist must use one spell slot for the day and succeed at a DC 12 Dexterity check (appropriate tool proficiencies may be used) to attune the item to a subject.

APPENDIX C: NEW MONSTERS

THE DRAUGAR

The draugar (singular draugr) are humanoids who met their doom at the hands of foul, necromantic forces, such as those in Blackwood Forest. These creatures, infected with the energy from the Negative Plane, rise again after death as cursed, empty, undead versions of the people they once were. Unlike most undead, however, they are not always evil, though they are bitter, depressed, and hateful towards the creatures that made them what they are. Their grim fate soon drives them mad, and they seek to be put out of their misery in battle, incapable of ending their own un-lives.

Draugar appear as rotten, desiccated versions of the people they were in life, and they carry the stench of rot and decay with them. They are truly foul and horrific creatures to behold, and the mere sight of one can drive the most stalwart warriors to quiver in terror.

Haunting Entities. The draugar are trapped within the confines of the region where they met their doom and cannot leave, for the moment they set foot out of its borders, they disincorporate, only to re-form within their haunting domain 1d10 hours later.

Vicious Warriors. Because of the sheer, mind-numbing, maddening horror of their existence, these cursed souls will viciously attack interlopers in the hopes that they will

be killed. It is part of their curse that they cannot simply ask to be killed. They must die in battle, though they beg madly for death while on the attack. If, however, the cause of their curse is ended, such as the necromancer who rules the tower at the heart of Blackwood Forest, they crumble to dust, able to at last move on to the next world.

Undead Nature. A draugr doesn't require air, food, drink, or sleep.

DRAUGR

Medium undead, unaligned

AC: 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points: 55 (10d8 + 10)

Speed: 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	17 (+3)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	7 (-2)

Skills: Perception +2

Damage Immunities: cold, poison

Condition Immunities: exhaustion, poisoned

Damage Resistance: bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical, non-silvered weapons

Senses: darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages: any languages it knew in life

Challenge: 4 (1,100 XP)

Aura of Fear: Any creature seeing a draugr for the first time must succeed on a DC 15 Charisma saving throw or become frightened of the draugr for 1 minute. Creatures may repeat this save at the end of each of their turns, ending the effect on themselves with a success. This save is made at advantage if the draugr is no longer within line of sight. Creatures who succeed on their save are immune to the aura of fear of all draugr for 24 hours

Crush: A draugr who strikes with both of its claw attacks can choose to grapple its victim (escape DC 15). Grappled victims are restrained, and the draugr's attacks automatically hit the grappled victim without needing to make an attack roll.

Lunge: The draugr has advantage on initiative checks.

ACTIONS

Multiattack: The Draugr makes three attacks: two with its claws and one bite. It may substitute a weapon attack

for one claw, but if it does so, it cannot crush.

Bite: *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 5) piercing damage.

Claw: *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 5) slashing damage.

Axe: *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 5) slashing damage.

REACTIONS

Giant Growth. Once per day, when reduced to half its existing hit points, the draugr can double its size for up to 1 hour. This has the effect of making it a size Large creature. The draugr gains 10 temporary hit points, +1 AC, and its melee attacks deal 2 dice of damage on a hit.

THE HALF-LICH

The half-lich is an undead monstrosity, a necromancer who is mid-way through the transformation into that most blasphemous of walking dead, the lich. A half-lich has achieved a state of undeath and wields a number of powerful magical abilities. However, it has not yet transferred its life essence into a phylactery.

The specific rituals for achieving lichdom are many and varied and are often the quest of dark spellcasters. For all methods, however, there is a half-lich intermediate state after achieving immortality via the sacrifice of one's life essence and before the placing of one's soul into a phylactery.

Dark Spellcasters. Though not all half-liches are necromancers, the vast majority follow the dark arts, which grant the readiest path to full lichdom. Some necromancers remain in half-lich state for a century or more as they seek the specific knowledge to take the final step, which legend says requires a horrific act of sanity-blasting evil resulting in a mass sacrifice, such as the unleashing of an incurable plague on a community, the breakdown of society so that an entire city destroys itself, or the use of doomsday magics.

Obsessed Seekers of Knowledge. Once a necromancer becomes a half-lich, they are obsessed with the secret to sanctifying a phylactery in which they can secret their soul. They will kill anyone and go to any lengths to achieve this end, for it is only then that they gain their true goal of absolute immortality and power. While they remain in their half-lich state, these spellcasters, though quite powerful, are vulnerable to death from normal assaults.



HALF-LICH

Medium undead, neutral evil

AC: 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points: 40 (9d8)

Speed: 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (-1)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	17 (+3)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)

Saves: Intelligence +6, Wisdom +4, Charisma +3

Skills: Arcana +6, History +6, Perception +4, Religion +6

Damage Resistance: cold, lightning; bludgeoning, slashing, and piercing from nonmagical weapons.

Damage Immunities: necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities: charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned

Senses: darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages: Common

Challenge: 6 (2,300 XP)

Legendary Resistance (1/day): If the half-lich fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Spellcasting: The half-lich is a 9th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Intelligence (Save DC 14, attacks +6). He has the following spells prepared:

- **Cantrips (at will):** *chill touch*, *poison spray*, *mage hand*, *prestidigitation*

- **1st level (4 slots):** *color spray, magic missile, shield*
- **2nd level (3 slots):** *blur, shatter*
- **3rd level (3 slots):** *animate dead, counterspell, lightning bolt*
- **4th level (3 slots):** *black tentacles, phantasmal killer*
- **5th level (1 slot):** *cone of cold*

ACTIONS

Staff: *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d6 - 1) bludgeoning damage, or 3 (1d8 - 1) bludgeoning damage with two hands.

Life Drain: *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (3d8) necrotic damage, plus 4 (1d8) necrotic damage for each spell level the half-lich chooses to sacrifice. Creatures whose hit points reach zero from a life drain attack die immediately, and the half-lich regains hit points equal to the total necrotic damage dealt.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

The half-lich can take two legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The lich regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Cantrip. The half-lich casts a cantrip.

Move. The half-lich moves up to its speed.

Frightening Gaze (Costs 2 Actions). The half-lich fixes its gaze on one creature it can see within 10 feet of it. The target must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened for 1 minute. The frightened target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a target's saving throw is successful, the target is immune to the half-lich's gaze for the next 24 hours.



HORROR IN BLACKWOOD FOREST

BY JASON VEY

COVER ARTIST: DAVE GRIFFITH • **EDITOR:** BENJAMIN HAYWARD

INTERIOR ARTISTS: CHRIS ARNESON, CLIFF KUROWSKI, WILL MCAUSLAND,
BRADLEY K. MCDEVITT AND STEFAN POAG

CARTOGRAPHER: STEFAN POAG • **DESIGN:** EDWARD LAVALLEE

DEVELOPER: CHRIS DOYLE • **ART DIRECTION & LAYOUT:** MATT HILDEBRAND

PLAYTESTERS: JULIETTE GOVIRAND-VEY, MIKE DEKLAON, DON VEV, HOWARD VEV, MIKE
VOGEL, ROBERT WARREN, TOM SMITH, BILL CHARLEROY, TAEJAS KUDVA, ROSS THOMPSON,
OWEN THOMPSON, ERIC KIEFER, TIM COOPER



VISIT US ONLINE AT:
WWW.GOODMAN-GAMES.COM



This printing of Fifth Edition Fantasy #18: Horror in Blackwood Forest is done under version 1.0 of the Open Gaming License, and the System Reference Document by permission from Wizards of the Coast, Inc. Designation of Product Identity: The following items are hereby designated as Product Identity in accordance with Section 1(e) of the Open Game License, version 1.0: Fifth Edition Fantasy #18: Horror in Blackwood Forest, all proper nouns, capitalized terms, italicized terms, artwork, maps, symbols, depictions, and illustrations, except such elements that already appear in the System Reference Document or have been released as Open Content. Designation of Open Content: Subject to the Product Identity designation above, such sections of creature and NPC statistics as derive from the SRD are designated as Open Gaming Content. Some of the portions of this book which are delineated OGC originate from the System Reference Document and are copyright © 1999, 2000 Wizards of the Coast, Inc. The remainder of these OGC portions of these book are hereby added to Open Game Content and, if so used, should bear the COPYRIGHT NOTICE "Fifth Edition Fantasy #18: Horror in Blackwood Forest, copyright © 2021 Goodman Games, all rights reserved, visit www.goodman-games.com or contact info@goodman-games.com" Fifth Edition Fantasy #18: Horror in Blackwood Forest is copyright © 2021 Goodman Games LLC. Open game content may only be used under and in the terms of the Open Game License. Goodman Games LLC is not affiliated with Wizards of the Coast™. Goodman Games LLC makes no claim to or challenge to any

trademarks held by Wizards of the Coast™. OPEN GAME LICENSE Version 1.0a The following text is the property of Wizards of the Coast, Inc. and is Copyright 2000 Wizards of the Coast, Inc ("Wizards"). All Rights Reserved. 1. Definitions: (a) "Contributors" means the copyright and/or trademark owners who have contributed Open Game Content; (b) "Derivative Material" means copyrighted material including derivative works and translations (including into other computer languages), potation, modification, correction, addition, extension, upgrade, improvement, compilation, abridgment or other form in which an existing work may be recast, transformed or adapted; (c) "Distribute" means to reproduce, license, rent, lease, sell, broadcast, publicly display, transmit or otherwise distribute; (d) "Open Game Content" means the game mechanic and includes the methods, procedures, processes and routines to the extent such content does not embody the Product Identity and is an enhancement over the prior art and any additional content clearly identified as Open Game Content by the Contributor, and means any work covered by this License, including translations and derivative works under copyright law, but specifically excludes Product Identity. (e) "Product Identity" means product and product line names, logos and identifying marks including trade dress; artifacts; creatures characters; stories, storylines, plots, thematic elements, dialogue, incidents, language, artwork, symbols, designs, depictions, likenesses, formats, poses, concepts, themes and graphic, photographic and other visual or audio representations; names and descriptions of characters, spells, enchantments, personalities, teams, personas, likenesses and special

abilities; places, locations, environments, creatures, equipment, magical or supernatural abilities or effects, logos, symbols, or graphic designs; and any other trademark or registered trademark clearly identified as Product identity by the owner of the Product Identity, and which specifically excludes the Open Game Content; (f) "Trademark" means the logos, names, mark, sign, motto, designs that are used by a Contributor to identify itself or its products or the associated products contributed to the Open Game License by the Contributor (g) "Use", "Used" or "Using" means to use, Distribute, copy, edit, format, modify, translate and otherwise create Derivative Material of Open Game Content. (h) "Your" or "Your" means the licensee in terms of this agreement. 2. The License: This License applies to any Open Game Content that contains a notice indicating that the Open Game Content may only be Used under and in terms of this License. You must affix such a notice to any Open Game Content that you Use. No terms may be added to or subtracted from this License except as described by the License itself. No other terms or conditions may be applied to any Open Game Content distributed using this License. 3. Offer and Acceptance: By Using the Open Game Content You indicate Your acceptance of the terms of this License. 4. Grant and Consideration: In consideration for agreeing to use this License, the Contributors grant You a perpetual, worldwide, royalty-free, non-exclusive license with the exact terms of this License to Use, the Open Game Content. 5. Representation of Authority to Contribute: If You are contributing original material as Open Game Content, You represent that You

Contributions are Your original creation and/or You have sufficient rights to grant the rights conveyed by this License. 6. Notice of License Copyright: You must update the COPYRIGHT NOTICE portion of this License to include the exact text of the COPYRIGHT NOTICE of any Open Game Content You are copying, modifying or distributing, and You must add the title, the copyright date, and the copyright holder's name to the COPYRIGHT NOTICE of any original Open Game Content you Distribute. 7. Use of Product Identity: You agree not to Use any Product Identity, including as an indication as to compatibility, except as expressly licensed in another, independent Agreement with the owner of each element of that Product Identity. You agree not to indicate compatibility or co-adaptability with any Trademark or Registered Trademark in conjunction with a work containing Open Game Content except as expressly licensed in another, independent Agreement with the owner of such Trademark or Registered Trademark. The use of any Product Identity in Open Game Content does not constitute a challenge to the ownership of that Product Identity. The owner of any Product Identity used in Open Game Content shall retain all rights, title and interest in and to that Product Identity. 8. Identification: If you distribute Open Game Content You must clearly indicate which portions of the work that you are distributing are Open Game Content. 9. Updating the License: Wizards or its designated Agents may publish updated versions of this License. You may use any authorized version of this License to copy, modify and distribute any Open Game Content originally distributed under any version of this License.

10 Copy of this License: You MUST include a copy of this License with every copy of the Open Game Content You Distribute. 11. Use of Contributor Credits: You may not market or advertise the Open Game Content using the name of any Contributor unless You have written permission from the Contributor to do so. 12. Inability to Comply: If it is impossible for You to comply with any of the terms of this License with respect to some or all of the Open Game Content due to statute, judicial order, or governmental regulation then You may not Use any Open Game Material so affected. 13 Termination: This License will terminate automatically if You fail to comply with all terms herein and fail to cure such breach within 30 days of becoming aware of the breach. All sublicenses shall survive the termination of this License. 14 Reformation: If any provision of this License is held to be unenforceable, such provision shall be reformed only to the extent necessary to make it enforceable. 15 COPYRIGHT NOTICE Open Game License v 1.0 Copyright 2000, Wizards of the Coast, Inc. System Rules Document Copyright 2000 Wizards of the Coast, Inc.; Authors Jonathan Tweet, Monte Cook, Skip Williams, based on original material by E. Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson. Fifth Edition Fantasy #18: Horror in Blackwood Forest, copyright © 2021 Goodman Games LLC, all rights reserved, visit www.goodman-games.com or contact info@goodman-games.com

FIFTH EDITION FANTASY

HORROR IN BLACKWOOD FOREST

A LEVEL 7 ADVENTURE

Fifth Edition Fantasy is here! This adventure module is fully compatible with the fifth edition of the world's first fantasy RPG, and is ready to play in your home campaign!

Situated on the shores of a major trade route is the town of Gullhem, a bastion of law and order in an all-too-often lawless world. Beyond the borders of this walled port town is the vast Blackwood Forest. After a barroom brawl, our heroes are tasked by the Baron of Gullhem to rescue his son, Viktor, who was mysteriously kidnapped from his room overnight, with no sign of intrusion save a mystical pointer directly at the forest. Now, the heroes find themselves facing the machinations of an evil necromancer, his legions of the undead and fanatical cultists, and a plot to overtake the entire city and spread the influence of the Negative Energy Plane across the entire world...



\$9.99
GMG55518

ISBN 978-1-950783-45-8



9 781950 783458 >