

THE DM TOOL CHEST

CURSE OF THE HEADLESS HORSEMAN



A HEADLESS HORSEMAN HAUNTS A VILLAGE EVERY YEAR
AT HARVEST, DRAGGING HIS VICTIMS INTO THE FOGGY WOODS



CURSE OF THE HEADLESS HORSEMAN

C*urse of the Headless Horseman* is a Fifth Edition adventure intended for **three to five characters of 5th to 6th level** and optimized for **four characters with an average party level (APL) of 5**. The spirit of a headless horseman has haunted the village of Miremoor for centuries, appearing each year at harvest time to claim a new victim. The time has come for the horseman to ride again. Can the adventurers learn the truth of the horseman's curse and end his reign of terror? This adventure occurs in the Freelands campaign setting but fits any existing campaign with only a few modifications and name changes.

BACKSTORY

Once a year, the sleepy village of Miremoor has been plagued by a ghostly headless horseman that rides a midnight steed and drags those foolish enough to be caught into the night. Some say that he was a warrior killed centuries ago in the Great War who sought vengeance against the descendants of his killer. Others believe the village to be cursed for the sins of their forebears, and one family, in particular, believes themselves to bear the brunt of the curse somehow.

The Meadowfeather family has operated the village mill for generations and are well-respected members of the community. However, of all of the families in Miremoor, they have felt horseman's wrath the most, losing dozens of their bloodline over the years. They do not know why they are targeted so often but believe they are cursed for something that occurred in the past.

The hidden truth is that the horseman is under a curse placed on him by the wife he betrayed centuries ago. Teng Yang was an elven warrior who fought in the five hundred-year-long Great War. A fearless knight and cavalryman, he fought for years at the front lines of the war away from his home and wife, Li Yang. During that time, he fell in love with a human woman named Jillian Meadowfather, who bore him a child. When he was killed in battle, and Li Yang came to claim his body to bring it home, she was enraged to discover the truth of his betrayal.

Li Yang's heart burned with the desire for vengeance, and she used dark magic to summon the spirit of her unfaithful husband, using his decapitated head to control the specter. She has spent the last two hundred years living in Miremoor as an herbalist named Yennefer Moonbow, secretly summoning the horseman each year to target the Meadowfeather family and those who cross her.

ADVENTURE SUMMARY

The characters come to the village of Miremoor to root out the cause of the dark spirit that plagues them. After a careful investigation that leads them closer to the truth and fending off the apparently unkillable ghost, they find the horseman's still-beating heart buried in the nearby cemetery. The heart leads them to a dark temple hidden in the woods protected by the spirits of those he has slain. Inside the temple, the characters must defeat the horseman and lay his spirit to rest once and for all.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Here are a few ways to get your characters hooked into this adventure:

THE LEGEND OF MIREMOOR

Local legends speak of a ghostly headless rider that hunts down the wicked in the village of Miremoor once a year to drag them to the fiery pits of the Abyss. That time of year has come, whispers have begun to circulate the tavern rooms, and speculation of who will be taken this year is on everyone's lips. What is the truth behind the legend? Why does he choose the ones he takes away? Who is the headless horseman?

A CURSED FAMILY

The characters' patron has reached out to the party as a personal favor to their friend Octavian Meadowfeather in the village of Miremoor. The patron explains that the Meadowfeather family believes themselves to be the victim of a curse and are being targeted by the dark spirit of a headless horseman once every year. The patron asks the party to visit Octavian at the Miremoor village mill and help them end the curse.

INVESTIGATORS FOR HIRE

Caltina Wisewind, the mayor of Miremoor, has posted a request for adventurers to assist their village against a spirit that haunts them. The anxious mayor is offering a substantial reward of 200 gp to any who are brave enough to face the headless horseman and end his yearly reign of terror.

RUNNING THIS ADVENTURE

This adventure is set in the village of Miremoor over the course of a single adventuring day in which the characters must interview locals and search for clues in

different locations. While the theme and options provided in the adventure are presented as a ghost story, it is up to you to decide if this should lean more towards a spooky fun horror or delve deeper into a dark and gritty version. Horror-themed adventures such as this should be discussed with your players to determine the appropriate amount they are willing to participate.

RANDOM ENCOUNTERS

As the characters investigate and travel from locations within the village, they encounter random happenings that may also include an appearance by the headless horseman. The spirit of the headless horseman (see Appendix for more information) flees after a few rounds in these random encounters until the characters battle him in the corrupted temple (see page 9).

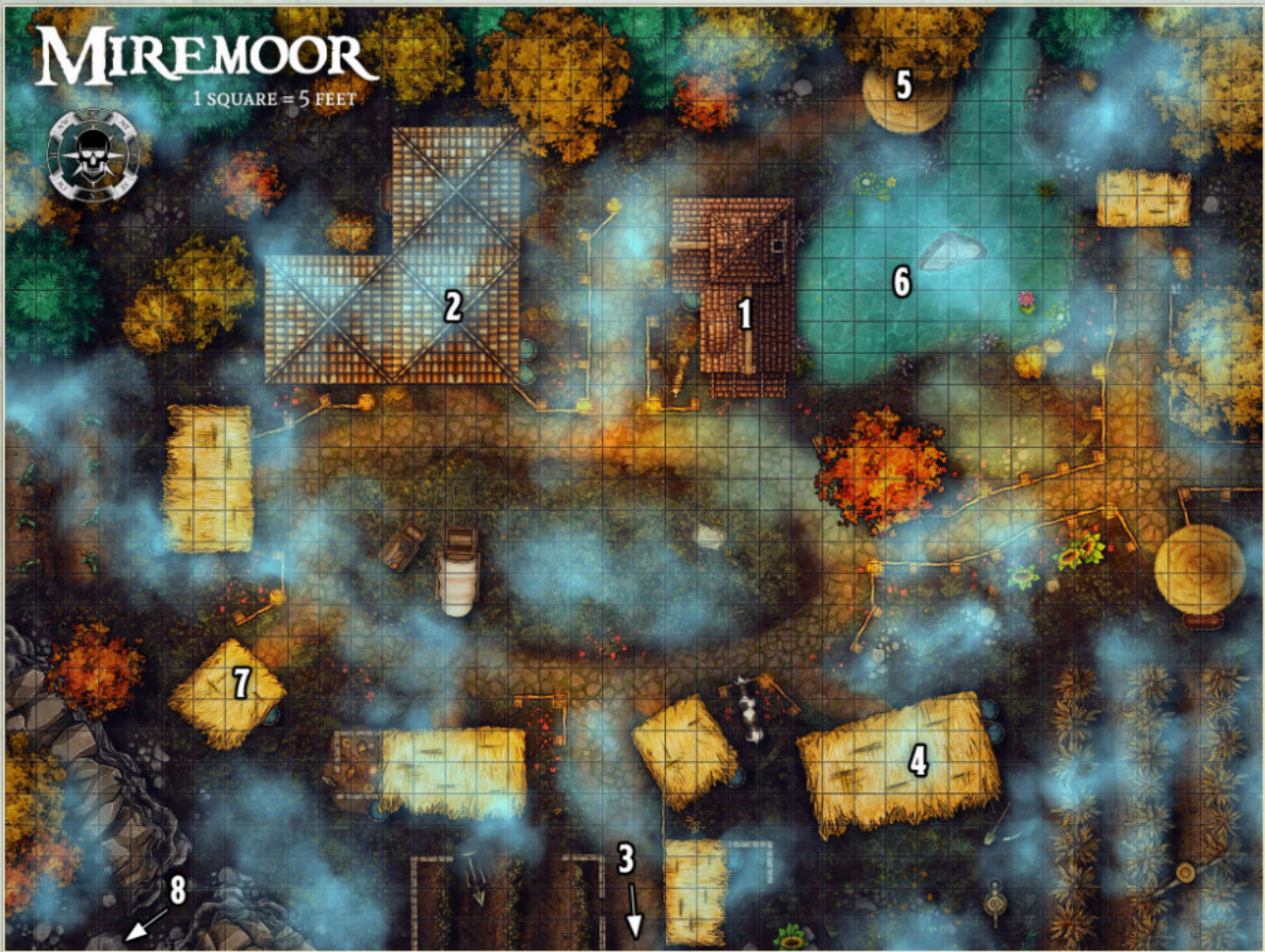
Each time the characters move from location to location, roll a d8 and consult the Miremoor Encounters table to determine what they come across or choose one from the list they have yet to encounter. You may also choose to remove the random encounters entirely or remove the horseman encounters and roll a d6 on the remaining options.

MIREMOOR VILLAGE

Miremoor is a small village sitting near the swampy forest that shares its name. The primarily human and halfling population that lives here are somber and stubborn people, tolerant of visitors but reserved in their actions. Even though they live under the yearly fear of the headless horseman's visit, they are determined to stay on the land of their ancestors and survive as best they can. Most farmers live on homesteads outside the village proper or tradesfolk who sell their wares at the village green.

MIREMOOR ENCOUNTERS

d8	ENCOUNTER
1-2	A dark cloud blots the sky above as the headless horseman (see Appendix) appears astride his nightmare steed from out of the swirling fog. He fights for 2 rounds of combat before dissolving into mist.
3	A frightened villager carrying a backpack stumbles towards the party, naked fear in her wide eyes as she cries, "The horseman! He rides!" She rushes past with a moan of terror and disappears into the fog, leaving only silence behind.
4-5	A large black cat quietly follows the party, stopping and watching their every movement. If the party makes any movement towards the cat, it quickly dashes away. The cat is Jinx, Li Yang's familiar, who she uses to spy on the villagers and the characters while in town. If the characters have visited Li Yang before this encounter, a character with a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 12 or higher or who succeeds on a DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check recognizes the cat.
6	Four swarms of ravens conjured by Li Yang (their creature type is Fey, and they disappear once defeated as per the <i>conjure animals</i> spell) attack the party as they travel.
7-8	A foul wind blows through the fog and carries with it the stench of death and decay.



GENERAL FEATURES

These general features are prominent throughout the village unless otherwise noted in the location descriptions.

Villagers. Most villagers keep themselves locked in their houses during this time, and most won't speak with the characters, preferring to hide during this time. Only the handful listed in the location descriptions is willing to let the characters into their homes and talk with them.

Buildings. The village is a sparse collection of roughly two dozen timber-framed wattle and daub buildings with thatched roofing. Only the mayor's home, the Sleepy Bee Inn, and the Meadowfeather mill are made of fired brick with clay-tiled roofs.

Climate. The sky above is dark with heavy storm clouds ready to burst, giving the air a damp and heavy feel. The ground is muddy from recent rainfall that could fall again at any moment.

Fog. Swirling fog envelopes the village and lightly obscures the entire area. Lampposts dot the village and provide points of reference to navigate the village.

ARRIVING IN MIREMOOR

However the characters decide to come to Miremoor, once they arrive, read aloud the following to kick off the adventure:

Your travels bring you to the sleepy village of Miremoor, which you find covered in a thick blanket of fog. Small farms surround the area, and a windmill sits on a small hill to the south, overlooking a cemetery to the west. Not a single soul can be seen, and the shutters are tightly closed on every home.

The characters may choose to visit any location they see in whichever order they may select. As they travel from one location to another, roll on the Miremoor Encounters table (page 3) to determine if they run into any oddities. When the characters speak to any of the villagers or for every hour they spend in the Sleepy Bee Inn's tavern room, roll a d6 and consult the Miremoor Rumors table to determine any additional information the characters learn beyond what is listed for them in the adventure text provided. If a rumor has been rolled previously, roll again or pick one the characters have not yet heard.

KEYED LOCATIONS

The following descriptions correspond to the locations on the provided map of Miremoor Village. Each location has NPCs for the characters to interview to gather clues that eventually should point them towards the village cemetery and the tomb of Teng Yang (area 8).

1. MAYOR'S HOME

This home sits right on the edge of a large pond and, unlike most of the wattle and daub homes in the village, is made of sturdy brick with a clay tiled roof. Colorful flowers sit in planters on the windowsills, and the smell of fresh baking wafts through an open window.

Caltina Wisewind is a happy-go-lucky elderly halfling woman with a crooked smile and a kind demeanor. She has a habit of twisting her gold wedding band on her finger when anxious but otherwise hides her nervousness behind a friendly smile and impeccable manners. Her husband died of a sickness years ago, and she lives alone with her old mastiff named Tiny.

Caltina is eager for the characters to get to the bottom of the headless horseman. If they are not already answering her posted request (see Adventure Hooks), she offers them the reward of 200 gp as an extra incentive. She can describe the horseman (see "The Horseman" sidebar) and shares the following additional knowledge when asked:

- "There are many stories about the horseman that have been passed down the generations. Some say he is a soldier who can't leave the Great War behind or seeks vengeance for some unknown slight. I think he is searching for his lost head, and only when he finds it will he leave us be."
- "The poor Meadowfeathers have gotten the worst of it. They're such kind folk, and they've lost so many over the years. They're stubborn, though, and cling to their mill."
- "Every year at harvest time, he comes, riding out of the fog, and we sit inside and wait for him to go away or find his next victim. Then we mourn for the lost soul that we never see again. 'Tis heartbreaking, it is."
- "Some have tried to fight him off before, aye, but he vanishes just as quickly as he appears. Poof! Gone into the fog. Only to reappear another time when you least expect it."

2. THE SLEEPY BEE INN

This sturdy one-story building is the largest in the village, with a three-peak tiled roof. The sound of conversation

MIREMOOR RUMORS

d8	ENCOUNTER
1	"I've seen the horseman standing at the edge of the pond. Ghosts can't cross running water, so I wonder why he was there?"
2	"Stay away from the cemetery if you value your life! The horseman haunts that place more than any other."
3	"Old man Garth says the horseman is a demon from the Abyss himself, who comes to collect the debts of those who sold their souls for wealth. It's no wonder that the Meadowfeathers are the wealthiest in town, and the horseman comes for them more than any other family."
4	"I've heard the armor the horseman wears is that of an elven nobleman. The elves were our allies in the Great War, and some were even buried in our cemetery. Why would one haunt us?"
5	"There's something about the water from the village pond that's always bothered me; the taste is slightly off."
6	"The new priest seems a bit too cheerful to me. There's something about her that I just can't put my finger on."

drifts through an open window, and a sign above the front door declares this to be "The Sleepy Bee Inn." A handful of rough and muddy farmers hunched over their mugs inside the tavern room while murmuring among themselves. A young man with curly hair stands behind the bar and smiles with a hand raised in greeting.

The Inn has enough room for the characters to spend the night for 1 sp each. Simple fare and good ale and wine are available for purchase for 2 cp.

The Inn is owned and operated by Beaman Longfellow, a large and lazy human with a bald head and bushy brown beard. He's often found dozing behind the bar—the origin of the Inn's name—while his son Andi deals with the customers. Andi Longfellow is a stocky young man in his early twenties with curly brown hair and a look in his green eyes that makes it appear he is always up to some mischief. He is engaged to wed the miller's daughter Laurlyn Meadowfeather and is particularly nervous about the horseman's visit this year. Beaman is not interested in talking about the horseman, but Andi eagerly shares what little he knows, including the following:

- "Aye, I've seen him once before, astride his midnight steed with eyes like fire. He wielded a battle axe in one hand like it was a feather. Even without a head, it felt like he was looking into my soul, and it chilled me to the core."
- "My Laurlyn lost her mother when we were just children. Her family knows only suffering from that

monster. So many of their kin have been taken for generations.”

- “Little Jim Calligan said he saw the horseman rise from a grave in the cemetery, but no one has ever seen the ghost there before. I think he was making up tall tales.”
- “You may want to talk to Yennefer, the village herbalist. She’s lived here longer than most, but be warned, she likes her solitude and doesn’t like visitors. Farmer Garth always has stories to tell, but he’s a difficult person.”

Characters spending an hour in the tavern room speaking to other residents will hear a rumor from the Miremoor Rumors table. At some point during that time, a loud whinny and the stamping of hooves come from outside of the Inn, but nothing is seen in the fog afterward.

3. MEADOWFEATHER MILL

The Meadowfeather Mill lies directly south of the village proper on a small hill overlooking the village cemetery. Once the characters decide to visit the mill, read aloud the following:

A three-story windmill idly turns on a hill overlooking the village. Sitting in its shadow is a small farmhouse with smoke drifting from the chimney. Firelight shines through cracks in the otherwise tightly shut shutters over the windows. Next to the door is a green banner with the crest of a blue shield bearing a white feather in the center.

Octavian Meadowfeather lives here with his daughter Laurlyn; his wife was taken by the horseman almost fifteen years ago. The pair is shut tight in their home, fearful of the curse they believe haunts their family. Octavian is a muscular human man with rough hands and the skin of one who works long hours in the sun. The heavy bags under his eyes make it clear he hasn’t slept in days. Laurlyn is a shy, slender human woman with long brown hair and hazel eyes. She does not speak much, and when she does, it’s barely above a whisper.

A character with a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 12 or higher, or who passes a DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check notices the Meadowfeathers have slightly pointed ears that speak to elven blood somewhere in their past. If asked about it, Octavian shares that one of his ancestors had some elven blood, but the ears are the only indication of that heritage remaining.

Octavian welcomes the characters into his home and offers them a seat at his table and food and drink. He anxiously answers any questions they may have regarding his knowledge of the horseman, desperate for their help as he believes his daughter to be the next target. He can share the following information:

- “The horseman has plagued my family for as long as we can remember. My ancestors have worked

this land for generations, and each time that specter appears, we lose another. Only Laurlyn and I remain; we are the last of our bloodline.”

- “We’ve considered leaving, but this we are the land. My ancestor was a knight in the Great War and was given this land as a reward for her services. It’s watered with our blood and sweat; we cannot leave it behind.”
- “I do not know why our family has been targeted more than others, but for two hundred years, we have been cursed. My wife was taken just fifteen years ago, and all we have is a gravestone over an empty plot in the cemetery to remember her.”
- “The only thing we have noticed is the horseman only takes adults, never children. Laurlyn is just coming into her adulthood, and I fear she will be taken next.”
- “Perhaps the new priest can help? She set up a shrine in the village recently. Or the herbalist Yennifer may know something; she is not the friendliest of people, though, so she may not be helpful.”

MEADOWFEATHER FAMILY TREE

The miller has a book showing his family tree, and Octavian points the characters to the dozens of victims the horseman has plucked from their family. A character who spends at least 10 minutes reading the book notices that most of the victims taken were women and descended from an ancestor named Jillian, the first to be taken. Octavian tells how she was a knight in the Great War who was given this land centuries ago. She had a half-elven son—Octavian’s direct ancestor—but no one knew the father. There is a monument in the cemetery dedicated to her along with the other Meadowfeathers who were taken.

4. FARMER GARTH

This farmhouse seems to have fallen into disrepair and is badly in need of maintenance. Weeds choke the grass on the lawn around the home itself. A wheat field stands off to the side, a decrepit scarecrow sitting in the middle and listing to one side.

Garth Kelrun is a cranky elderly halfling farmer who owns one of the farms in Miremoor. He lives alone and barely maintains the farm due to his age and dislike of paying others to help. The farmer yells at anyone knocking on his door to “go away!” and a character must succeed on a DC 12 Charisma (Persuasion) check to get him to answer their questions. He answers all inquiries through the door, refusing to open and meet them face to face. If the characters fail to convince him to talk to them, he tells them to make themselves useful, and maybe he’ll talk to them.

If the characters can spend 1 hour cleaning up the yard, milking his cow Olga, and fixing his scarecrow. Roll on the Miremoor Encounters table once the characters complete their tasks. Afterward, Garth answers their questions the best he can, and he knows the following information:

- “The horseman is collecting debts, don’t you see? Those poor fools sold their souls, and the demon has come for his due.”
- “Ever since Julian Meadowfeather came into town, the horseman has haunted us. She’s the one who brought the curse with her!”
- “Aye, I’ve seen the horseman many times. Standing by the pond, waiting for his next victim. And in the cemetery too, gloating at the monument to all those he took with him back to the Abyss.”
- “You want to defeat the horseman? Good luck! That heartless demon knows no mercy. I’ve been here longer than any except that old flower picker Yennifer, and no one is safe.”

5. HERBALIST’S HOME

If the characters have opened Teng Yang’s tomb (see area 8), Li Yang is warned by the triggered enchantment and locks herself in her hut, refusing to answer the door. If the characters have not yet opened the tomb, read aloud the following:

A small hut sits near a gently flowing stream that empties into a large pond. An elderly elven woman in a simple green dress sits on a rocking chair outside the hut, smoking a pipe and petting a large black cat on her lap as she stares thoughtfully out at the pond.

Li Yang (she uses the **mage** stat block and has a ring that allows her to cast *conjure animals* 3 times per day) has lived in Miremoor for two centuries under the guise of the herbalist named Yennifer. She has no interest in answering the characters’ questions and asks them to leave her alone. If the characters show an interest in purchasing any of her wares, Li Yang offers to sell two *healing potions* for 100 gp each but instead gives them *potions of poison*. If confronted about the poison, she plays it off as a mistake and a mixup between the brews.

The herbalist refuses to answer any questions about the horseman, insisting the characters leave at once if they persist. A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) or Wisdom (Perception) check notices that the herbalist shows no signs of fear of the horseman when he is mentioned.

6. THE POND

A large boulder juts from the center of this broad pond.

THE HORSEMAN’S SKULL

When not on her person, Li Yang keeps the horseman’s skull in a lead-lined box under the floorboards in her hut. A *detect magic* spell will not penetrate the lead; otherwise, the skull has an aura of necromancy magic. The skull can only be attuned to an evil-aligned creature. A creature attuned to the skull can spend an action to sacrifice 1 year of their life force and summon the **headless horseman** (see Appendix) for 24 hours. The horseman obeys the commands of the bearer of the skull. Once this ability has been used, the horseman cannot be summoned again for 1 year. If the horseman is given his skull, he is freed from its power, and it can no longer control him. If the horseman is defeated, the skull bursts into flames and is destroyed.

Small fish swim lazily in the water, and insects buzz in the shallows.

The water in the pond is four feet deep. The boulder can be lifted from the pond by a character who succeeds on a DC 17 Strength (Athletics) check or by multiple characters with a combined Strength score of 30 or higher. Under the boulder are the skeletal remains of a human woman—Julian Meadowfeather. Li Yang kept the remains here to look upon their resting place every day from her rocking chair.

If the remains are brought to Karya Sunswallow at the shrine (area 7), she casts a *speak with dead* spell that allows the characters to ask the spirit questions. The spirit of Julian Meadowfeather does not know that Li Yang is the reason behind her death or where the skull is but does know the following information about the horseman and her death:

- The horseman is the spirit of Teng Yang, a fellow knight in the Great War and the father of her child, Harlon Meadowfeather.
- She knew Teng Yang was married, and she kept their tryst a secret.
- Teng Yang was interred in a tomb in the Miremoor cemetery after he fell in battle.
- The horseman took her to a crypt hidden in the woods where her life was ended while a hooded figure watched.

7. SHRINE

Inside this small building is a shrine engraved with scenes of different crops being harvested sitting under a carved wooden statue of an oak tree. Wooden benches that look newly made face the altar. There is a sense of calm and peace in this room.

This shrine is dedicated to Amber, goddess of autumn and the harvest, a favored god among rural farmers. Karya Sunswallow (she uses the **priest** stat block and has the *speak with dead* spell prepared) is a calm and friendly halfling woman who maintains the shrine. She is new to the area, and this is the first year she is experiencing the terror of the horseman's annual visit. While she cannot share any direct knowledge of the horseman, she offers her assistance in any way the characters need. If the characters find the remains of Julian Meadowfeather in the pond, she uses her *speak with dead* spell to aid them (see area 6).

Karya can provide flasks of holy water for 25 gp each and spells for healing and cleansing for 25 gp plus the cost of any spell components required.

8. CEMETERY

Sitting atop a stony hill to the south of the village sits the Miremoor cemetery. Rows of headstones and a handful of larger tombs cover the hill. Many of the monuments are weathered and cracked with age, going back centuries. A statue of an angel sits on a large plinth in the center of the cemetery, with almost two hundred different names engraved onto the base.

The statue in the center of the cemetery is engraved with the names of those the horseman has taken over the years. The name Meadowflower stands out prominently on the list, and the very first name—Julian Meadowflower—is faint and appears as if someone attempted to scratch it out.

Encounter: The Horseman. The first time the characters visit the cemetery, they do not have a random encounter and instead face the **headless horseman** (see Appendix) directly. The horseman will vanish and flee when he is reduced to half of his hit points.

TENG YANG'S TOMB

A row of three overgrown above-ground tombs sits at the west of the cemetery. The center tomb bears a stone banner above the door engraved with the elvish words "Sir Teng Yang," and the door is carved with a rearing horse. A closer look at the entrance shows old scratch marks as if someone pried the door open a very long time ago. The door can be moved by a character who succeeds on a DC 15 Strength check or multiple characters with a combined Strength score of 25 or higher. Once the characters open the tomb, read aloud the following:

The door slides open with a blast of musty air and dust to reveal a single small room with a slab of stone sitting in the center. The walls are splashed with stains of long dried blood, and old melted candles sit on every surface. Ritualistic symbols painted in blood cover the stone slab, and a beating heart sits in the center. Suddenly the ground



explodes upwards behind you as corpses and skeletons begin to rise from the graves!

Encounter: Undead Guardians. Opening the tomb door triggers an enchantment animating five **skeletons** and five **zombies** that burst from the surrounding graves to protect the opened tomb.

Heart of the Horseman. The beating heart inside the tomb is part of Li Yang's ritual to bring Teng Yang back as the horseman. A character who touches the heart must make a DC 12 Intelligence saving throw, taking 14 (4d6) psychic damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a successful one. They receive visions of a gnarled and corrupted tree above a cave entrance in the nearby woods and flashes of the horseman inside a crumbling temple. The character holding the heart feels a mental pull that leads them unerringly to the corrupted temple in the woods three miles north of Miremoor.

CORRUPTED TEMPLE

This ancient shrine was abandoned centuries ago and claimed by Li Yang to conduct her necromancy in secret. The corruption of her dark magic has seeped into the nearby forest and twisted the trees that stand above the cave entrance. This room is the final resting place of all of the horseman's victims and where the horseman can be found when not hunting the foggy village.

GENERAL FEATURES

These general features are prominent in the temple unless otherwise noted in the location descriptions.

Ceilings, Floors, and Walls. The underground temple is built from crumbling stone blocks carved with

indecipherable runes. The tiled floor is cracked and uneven, but not enough to impede normal movement. The ceilings in each chamber are 10 feet high.

Desecrated Ground. The temple is considered desecrated ground, and undead within the area gain advantage on all saving throws. A paladin's Divine Sense ability and similar effects reveal the desecrated ground. A vial of holy water purifies a 10-foot-wide area.

KEYED LOCATIONS

The following descriptions correspond to the locations on the provided map of the corrupted temple:

1. CAVE ENTRANCE

Once the characters make their way through the forest and reach the entrance, read aloud the following:

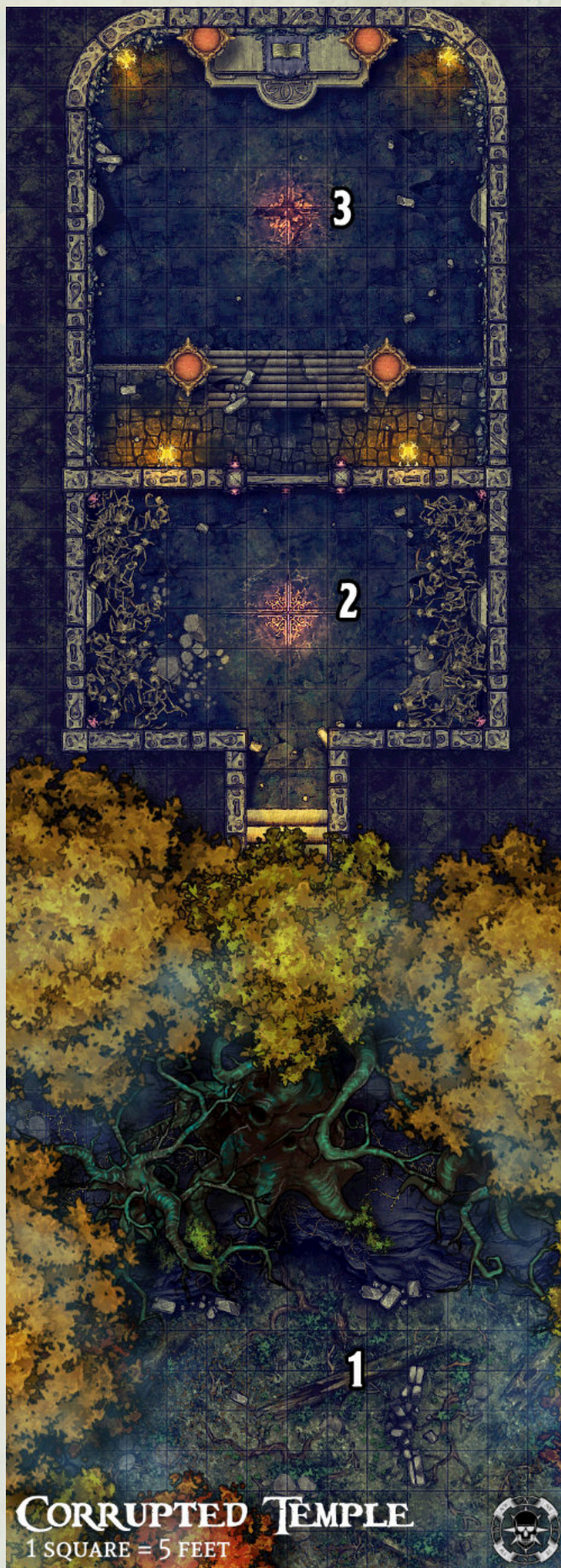
The pull of the beating heart leads like an arrow through the dark forest. The further the path leads, the sounds of life diminish further until the silence is deafening. The pull intensifies with each step, leading eventually to a massive twisted tree deep within the woods. The roots of this tree are gnarled and covered in thorny vines, and the bark is mottled with decay. Beneath the roots sits a small cave entrance and the smell of rot is heavy in the air.

Trap: Thorny Vines. The vines above the cave entrance whip out towards any creature who steps beneath them. A creature stepping into the area marked on the provided map must succeed a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or be restrained by the vines and take 2 (1d4) piercing damage. Up to two creatures can be restrained in this manner. A restrained creature takes 2 (1d4) piercing damage at the start of its turn and can break the restrained effect by succeeding on a DC 13 Strength check. The vines have 5 hit points and immunity to poison, psychic, and bludgeoning damage.

2. GRAVEYARD

A rough walled tunnel angles sharply downward below the corrupted tree leading to a flight of steps emptying into a broad chamber. The crumbling stone walls are held up by pillars covered in carved skulls. There are dozens of skeletal remains of all sizes scattered into every corner of this room, most yellowed with age and appearing hundreds of years old. An iron door adorned with skulls with glowing purple eyes sits in the center of the northern wall.

Encounter: Vengeful Spirits. Four specters rise from the bones of the remains and attack the party.



These spirits have been tied to this area by Li Yang and set as guardians of the temple.

Skull Door. The iron door is enchanted with an *arcane lock* spell and can be unlocked by a character proficient with thieves' tools who succeeds on a DC 25 Dexterity check. The door has an AC of 19, 18 hit points, and immunity to poison and psychic damage. When a character touches the door, a hollow voice emanates from a skull in the center that says, "What costs nothing but is worth everything, can be fleeting or last a lifetime, is a pain when alone but a joy for two to share?" The answer to the riddle is love, and when spoken out loud, the *arcane lock* spell is broken, and the door swings open.

3. TEMPLE

A cracked arched ceiling supported by pillars hangs thirty feet above this chamber. Torchlight flickers in each corner, casting dancing shadows against the crumbling stone walls. Against the northern wall sits an ornate stone altar with a large book sitting open on top. In the center of the room is the headless horseman with axe in hand and astride his nightmare steed.

Encounter: The Horseman. In this final confrontation, the **headless horseman** (see Appendix) and his **nightmare** steed fight to the death.

Li Yang's Book. The book on the altar is part spellbook and part journal of Li Yang and outlines the history described in the backstory and her quest for revenge. It also includes the spells *animate dead*, *arcane lock*, *bestow curse*, and *speak with dead*.

CONCLUSION

After the defeat of the horseman, his skull bursts into flames and burns down the herbalist's hut. When the characters return to Miremoor, they learn the fog that covered the village has disappeared and see the villagers sifting through the house's charred remains. They find the blackened and ruined skull in its hidden compartment, but there is no sign of Li Yang.

With the horseman defeated, the village is now safe and thankful to the characters for their help. The Meadowfeathers are shocked to learn the truth behind Li Yang / Yennifer's long-held hatred and quest for vengeance, and they now know to beware the elven necromancer and make plans for the future to protect themselves.

APPENDIX

HEADLESS HORSEMAN

The headless horseman appears astride a **nightmare** steed as a six-foot-tall headless suit of ornate black full-plate armor. He wears a billowing crimson cloak and wields a greataxe with one hand. The undead warrior only dismounts if his steed is destroyed.

HEADLESS HORSEMAN

Medium undead, unaligned

Armor Class 18 (plate)
Hit Points 93 (11d8 + 44)
Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	15 (+2)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Str +7, Cha +6

Skills Intimidation +6, Perception +4

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical weapons

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, poisoned

Senses blindsight 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages Common, Elvish

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Proficiency Bonus: +3

Undead Nature. The horseman does not require air, food, drink, or sleep.

Undead Fortitude. If damage reduces the horseman to 0 hit points, it must make a Constitution saving throw with a DC of 5 + the damage taken, unless the damage is radiant or from a critical hit. On a success, the horseman drops to 1 hit point instead.

Turn Resistance. The horseman has advantage on saving throws against any effect that turns undead.

Innate Spellcasting. The horseman's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

- 3/day each: *fog cloud*, *hunter's mark*, *pass without trace*
- 1/day each: *find steed (nightmare)*

Cavalry Charge. If the horseman is astride his steed and moves at least 5 ft. straight toward a target and then hits it with a vorpal greataxe attack on the same turn, the target takes an extra 4 (1d8) bludgeoning damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone. If the target is prone, the horseman can make another vorpal greataxe attack against it as a bonus action.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The horseman makes two attacks with its vorpal greataxe.

Vorpal Greataxe. Melee Weapon Attack: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 10 (1d12 + 4) slashing damage. When the horseman rolls a 20 on an attack roll, if the damage reduces the target to 0 hit points, the horseman cuts off the creature's head. The creature dies if it can't survive without the lost head.

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