

DUNGEON DELVE ADVENTURE #5

MYSTERY OF THE WOOD OF DARK BOUGHS

by R. Nelson Bailey

A FIRST EDITION ADVENTURE FOR 4-8 CHARACTERS LEVELS 2-4



Farmers living near the sleepy, bucolic hamlet of Alfandi awoke one morning a few weeks ago to discover their crops ruined and their livestock sickened by some unknown blight. Word of this misfortune quickly spread throughout their community. The farmers met with the hamlet's leaders to uncover its cause, though little talk was needed: all were certain it was the work of black magic!

This module contains three wilderness areas and four dungeon levels for characters to explore, maps of said wilderness areas and dungeon levels, a cut-away map, new magic items and monsters, and many exciting encounters.

DUNGEON DELVES by Dungeoneers Guild Games are classic-style adventures with minimal plot for use with the Advanced 1st edition game. With little effort they can easily be adapted to most fantasy role-playing games, including the Advanced 2nd edition game, the Original game, the B/X and BECM1 ("Basic") games, and most old-school renaissance (OSR) role-playing systems.

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Mystery of the Wood of Dark Boughs

Mystery of the Wood of Dark Boughs is a DUNGEON DELVE adventure for 4 to 8 characters of levels 2 to 4. About 18 total levels represent an optimal party. Good-aligned characters prove the best choice for this adventure since the party initially has little monetary incentive to get involved. Neutral characters can participate as long as they do not insist on payment from the villagers. The Game Master (GM) will have a harder time getting evil characters, or those motivated by greed, involved in the adventure's plot.

A party consisting of a couple of fighters, a cleric, a magic-user, and a thief provide the best class combination for a successful adventure. A druid, ranger, or character with the *Tracking* non-weapon proficiency proves helpful. Divination spells from clerics will also greatly aid the party.

This adventure requires the player characters (PCs) to exonerate eight villagers accused of a crime for which they will be executed before long. The adventurers will also explore wilderness locations and delve dungeons in the course of the module.

INTRODUCTION

Farmers living near the sleepy, bucolic hamlet of Alfandi awoke one morning a few weeks ago to discover their crops ruined and their livestock sickened by some unknown blight. Word of this misfortune quickly spread throughout their community. The farmers met with the hamlet's leaders to uncover its cause, though little talk was needed: all were certain it was the work of black magic! They also knew who was most likely responsible, none other than the citizens of the nearby hamlet of Ostenheim. These two communities have a long history of bad blood: in the past, they have argued over such things as pasture rights and accused each other of stealing livestock. An angry mob rushed to arrest the suspected citizens of Ostenheim. Eight men of that community were given a quick trial and found guilty. These men are now held in Alfandi. In five days' time, they are to be executed for practicing black magic on their neighbors.

BACKGROUND & NOTES FOR THE GAME MASTER

A few weeks ago, the theft of an ancient artifact called the *Cup of Gerdühr* precipitated the blighting of the farmers' fields. (See the "New Magic Items" section, p. 28, at the end of the adventure for a complete description of this item.)

This chain of events began when a pair of sirine sisters, named Vankær and Breihode, went in search of a mate to reinvigorate their dwindling clan population. The sisters, like their ancestors before them, dwell in a nearby enchanted forest called Scanthôi Wood. Here they safeguard the *Cup of Gerdühr* within their subterranean lair located under a hidden lake. Named after the giantess that imbued it with power, the magic cup maintains the health and equilibrium of the forest.

It so happened that a down-on-his-luck cutpurse named Brand became their first and best prospect. Lost in the wood, the two sisters approached the man and offered him the hospitality of their home.



However, the sirines were no fools, and knew well the greed of the average human. Should the locals hear of their lair, every farmer in the area would head into the wood searching for rumored treasure. Therefore, the sisters have always charmed those they allow into their lair. They also have the guest drink from their magic font (see AREA C12) before leaving, as the font's magic waters causes the drinker to forget ever visiting the wood or the sirines' lair.

This time it didn't work as it should have. Knowing something of the legends of sirines and the nature of magical charms, Brand mentally fought off the dweomer carried by their song, but acted as if the charm had taken hold. Once in their lair, the thief took stock of the wards and guardians the sisters kept. He also did his best to find out what valuables they possessed. Made from ivory and encrusted in jewels, the *Cup of Gerdühr* looked like a king's fortune. While the sisters slept, Brand took the cup and fled.

After finding his way out of the wood, Brand stayed for a few days with the farmer, Gandur, and his family. Every couple of days thereafter he moved on to another farm stading to guest there. At some farms, Brand worked for his keep. At others, he lodged in the barn without the farmer's knowledge.

What Brand didn't know was that without the sirines to perform the sacred rituals to placate the cup's will, the balance of its magic turns chaotic and malevolent. A few days after Brand left, the crops and livestock of the families that had housed him quickly withered and died.

While Brand moved from farm to farm, the sirine sisters bickered and argued amongst themselves. Each blamed the other for allowing a human to steal their precious magic cup. The more assertive sister, Vankær, called upon some of the forest denizens to aid her. She enlisted a korred, named Spénfjúd, and a band of ogres to search for the cup and its thief. Under cover of night the group tracked



Brand to the farmhouses he had stayed at. Then his trail went cold.

Realizing that he must travel to a larger town to sell the cup for anything close to its true worth, Brand left Alfandi on the road heading south. A few miles outside town, a group of bullywugs from the nearby marsh ambushed him. He was able to flee with his life, but not with his newly found treasure. The bullywugs took their prize back to their muddy lair in the marsh. The bullywug chieftain claimed the cup and promptly handed it over to their “god”, a wicked spirit naga named Ylzissid.

When the party arrives on the scene, the cup lies in the clutches of the evil frogmen and their serpentine lord, while the sirine’s band of monsters search near and far for the lost artifact. All the while the lives of eight innocent men hang in the balance.

ADVENTURE SECTIONS

Each numbered area on the module’s maps is keyed to a specific encounter description that has one or more section headings detailing its contents and/or occupants. Each type of section heading is described below. Note that numbered areas contain only those headings that are pertinent to the area. Thus, an area that contains no doors will not have a “**Doors**” heading.

Illumination: Notes the type of illumination in an area when first encountered by the PCs. Generally, the absence of this heading indicates that the area has no source of illumination.

Door(s): This section indicates whether or not any doors to the area are open, locked, and/or trapped when first encountered by the PCs. This might change with subsequent visits to the same area, so the GM should note any changes.

GMs Note: Alerts the GM of any special considerations of an area that might affect the PCs, occupants, or environment.

Description: This section provides a physical description of an area as it appears when first encountered by the PCs. The GM should not read this section to the players verbatim, but should instead paraphrase as they deem necessary. The area’s description should be amended if its occupants or contents are destroyed, removed, or altered during the course of play.

Encounter: Any monsters or NPCs located in the area are noted in this section.

Tactics: This section provides general notes on the tactics used by any monsters or NPCs in combat upon encountering the PCs for the first time.

Alert: This section informs the GM of any special considerations that might arise after the PCs enter the area.

Development: This section notes any consequences that might arise from PCs entering a particular area that could later affect encounters in other areas.

Treasure: Any treasure found within the area is detailed in this section.

ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations appear throughout this module:

AC = Armor Class; **MV** = Move; **MC** = Maneuverability Class; **HD** = Hit Dice; **hp** = hit points; **#AT** = Number of Attacks; **Dmg** = Damage; **SA** = special attack; **SD** = special defense; **MR** = magic resistance; **INT** = monster’s intelligence rating; **AL** = alignment; **L** = large size; **M** = medium size; **S** = small size; **xp** = experience point value; **THACO** = the number to hit AC 0; **C** = chaotic; **L** = lawful; **E** = evil; **G** = good; **N** = neutral; **F** = Fighter; **MU** = Magic-User; **C** = Cleric; **T** = Thief; **S** = Strength, **I** = Intelligence, **W** = Wisdom, **D** = Dexterity, **C** = Constitution, **CH** = Charisma; **d** = type of die; **rd/rds** = round/rounds; **cp** = copper piece; **sp** = silver piece; **ep** = electrum piece; **gp** = gold piece; **pp** = platinum piece.

STARTING THE ADVENTURE

There are a variety of ways to get the PCs started in the adventure. While passing through the area, the party stops to rest in Ostenheim where the villagers implore them to help free their captive brethren. Alternately, the party might have heard rumors from further afield of the friction between the two villages and set out to investigate the situation on their own. A local lord could ask the PCs to act as arbitrators between the two groups. One of the farmers sentenced to death could also be related to a PC. The GM should choose the method that works best for their campaign.

Adventure Summary

The adventure likely unfolds with the party first visiting Ostenheim. The locals tell of the farmers taken prisoner, and this leads the party to Alfandi, and then to the five afflicted farmhouses (AREA A). At the farmhouses, the PCs discover evidence of the sirine’s search band, and this should lead them to investigate Scanthôi Wood (AREA B). Searching the wood ultimately leads the party to the sirine lair (AREA C) where they learn of the missing cup and its thief. Once Brand is found and the location of the cup is determined, the party will likely set off through the Erp-Kappe Marshes (AREA D) before arriving at the bullywug mound (AREA E).

However, this adventure allows the PCs to determine their own course of action. Players may draw conclusions that lead them to explore areas in a different order than as listed above. That is all right. The GM should take care to point the PCs in the right direction, but not to straightjacket their actions to conform to the adventure outline.

Adventure Timeline

- 21 Days Ago:** The sirine sisters come across Brand lost in Scanthôi Wood and invite him into their lair.
- 18 Days Ago:** Brand flees the sirine lair with the *Cup of Gerdúhr*.
- 17 Days Ago:** The sirine, Vankær, begins scouring Scanthôi Wood for Brand.
- 16 Days Ago:** Brand leaves Scanthôi Wood and goes to stay with the farmer, Gandur.
- 14 Days Ago:** Brand goes to stay with the farmer Jenke.
- 11 Days Ago:** Brand lodges at Torulf’s farm.
- 9 Days Ago:** Brand stays with farmer Olev. The crops at the Gandur and Jenke farms begin dying.
- 8 Days Ago:** Brand stays at Anders’ farm for a night. Vankær enlists the korred, Spénfjúd, and six ogres to search for Brand.



7 Days Ago: Brand leaves Alfandi on the road heading south. Near the marsh, a band of bullywugs ambushes him. He drops the cup as he flees back to Alfandi. The bullywugs take the cup back to their lair.

6 Days Ago: The crops at the Anders farm wither and die. Alfandi citizens hold a meeting to discuss the ruined crops at the drink hall, and decide that the eight Ostenheim men are to blame.

5 Days Ago: Early in the morning, an angry mob of thirty Alfandi citizens go to the homes of the eight and take them prisoner. The search band recruited by Vankær finds evidence of Brand having stayed at the Gandur farm.

4 Days Ago: The korred and ogres follow Brand's trail to Jenke's farm. An ogre kills Jenke.

3 Days Ago: The men of Ostenheim lead a failed raid on Alfandi to free the eight captives.

2 Days Ago: Alfandi elders hold a trial for the eight men. They are found guilty of using sorcery to ruin crops and destroy livestock. The search band goes to Olev's and Torulf's farms. The ogres attack the Torulf and his family.

1 Day Ago: The search band returns to Torulf's farm at night.

Present Day: The PCs arrive. Brand arrives at Frekjil's drink hall.

5 Days from Present: Alfandi will execute the eight Ostenheim men at 4 pm.

7 Days from Present: Brand will flee Alfandi for a larger town in the morning. The search band enters the town at night.

The Search Band

The sirine, Vankær, has enlisted the services of six ogres (from AREA B9) and the korred, Spénfjúd, (from AREA B7) to search for the missing cup. In her desperation to find the artifact she has not considered that the korred and the ogres are not wholly suited for this task. Flighty Spénfjúd, the band's leader, has little command over the dimwitted and reckless ogres. The sirine has instructed the band to stay hidden, and to avoid contact with any other humans than Brand. The band's fear of the sirine's powers helps to keep them in line.

Search Band's Movement: Simultaneous with the party's movement, the search band roams the countryside looking for Brand. The band moves only at night, retiring to their makeshift camp (AREA B1) at dawn. The list below provides the GM with the location the band explores each night.

1 Day from Present: The area around Nissor Lake.

2 Days from Present: The area between the Strongflow River and the hillock.

3 Days from Present: Ander's farm (AREA A1).

4 Days from Present: The outskirts of Alfandi including the area between the bridges.

5 Days from Present: The shrine at AREA D1 and surrounding environs.

6 Days from Present: The band searches Alfandi again, this time moving into the town proper under the cover of darkness. They attempt to kidnap a random citizen to interrogate. If the attempt fails, they try again each night until they succeed.

7 Days from Present: Once a citizen disappears, Brand pieces together that the sirines are searching for him. He flees Alfandi in the morning for the nearest large town located to the west.

8 to 10 Days from Present: The band begins searching in the Erp-Kappe Marshes. Instead of returning to the wood at dawn, they camp there during daylight hours. The band locates the bullywug mound at AREA E on day 10. Once they capture a few bullywugs to interrogate, they will learn of the cup's location (AREA 20).

The GM should keep track of the search band's movement each night. It is possible that the party and the band might encounter each other if they are in the same area. Observant PCs can locate clues left by the band, allowing them to track the band to their current location or to their makeshift camp.

Alternately, the search band can discover the party and start tracking them. Once located, the band attacks the party (60%), or leaves to consult with Vankær (40%). (See "**Search Band Tactics**" below for details on their actions in melee). The GM should use the search band and Vankær as a wildcard encounter, especially if the party has had an easy time. Likely times for a showdown would be, a) after the party leaves the sirine lair; b) after they learn of the cup's whereabouts in the marsh; or, c) after they recover the cup from the bullywugs.

Spénfjúd interrogates any captured party members to determine Brand's whereabouts and the nature of their business. He then runs off to fetch Vankær while leaving the ogres to watch over the captives. Once the sirine arrives, she personally interrogates the captured PCs. No matter the party's story, she concludes that they have either been sent by Brand to steal more from her, or that they are looking for Brand to steal the artifact from him. Vankær refrains from revealing her motivations concerning Brand or the cup to the party.

If her sister Breihode made a deal with the PCs to recover the cup (see "**AREA C: Caves of the Sirines**" for details), Vankær does not respect the terms of this agreement.

Search Band's Tactics: Should melee occur with the party, the band attempts to capture as many PCs as possible. Spénfjúd uses his *laugh* ability as melee starts, then pulls his hair ropes from a pouch and tries to entangle party members. After this, he picks up rocks (2d8 damage) or hunks of wood (1d10 damage) to hurl, preferably at spellcasters. The korred avoids melee as much as possible, preferring to use his special abilities instead. He flees should the party get the best of the ogres.

The ogres try to overpower party members by pummeling or grappling them into submission. However, each ogre only has a 60% chance to follow these orders. If this roll fails, the ogre attacks to kill with its weapon.

In melee, Vankær uses her song ability to charm PCs. If this fails, she attacks with her weapons. She uses her fog cloud to disrupt any missile fire. If reduced to half hit points or less, she uses *polymorph self* or *improved invisibility* and flees.

Capturing the Search Band: If the party captures and interrogates Spénfjúd, there is an 80% chance that he gives them directions to the sirines' lair. He also tells the party that Vankær enlisted him and the ogres to search for a human thief named Brand. Spénfjúd denies