

DUNGEON DELVE ADVENTURE #5

MYSTERY OF THE WOOD OF DARK BOUGHS

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



Farmers living near the sleepy, bucolic hamlet of Alfandi awoke one morning a little over a week ago to discover their crops ruined and their livestock sickened by an unknown blight. Word of the misfortune spread quickly throughout their community. The farmers met with the hamlet's leaders to uncover the 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 cutaway map, new magic items and monsters, and many exciting encounters.

DUNGEON DELVE adventures by Dungeoneers Guild Games are classic-style modules designed to fit into any campaign for 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. An optimal party totals about 18 levels. Good-aligned characters are 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 involving evil characters, or those motivated by greed, in the adventure's plot.

A party consisting of a couple of fighters, a cleric, a magic-user, and a thief provides the best class combination for a successful adventure. A druid, ranger, or a 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 soon. The adventurers will also explore wilderness locations and delve into 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 an unknown blight. Word of the misfortune spread quickly through their community. The farmers met with the hamlet's leaders to determine the cause, though little discussion 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 from 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 known as the *Cup of Gerdúhr* triggered the blighting of the farmers' fields. (See the "New Magic Items" section, p. 26, at the end of the adventure for a complete description of this item.)

This chain of events began when a pair of sirines, Vankær and Breihode, set out in search of a mate to reinvigorate their dwindling clan. Like their ancestors, the sisters dwell in a nearby enchanted forest called Scanthôi Wood. There, they safeguard the *Cup of Gerdúhr* in a subterranean lair beneath a hidden lake. Named for the giantess who imbued it with power, the magic cup maintains the forest's health and equilibrium.

It so happened that a down-on-his-luck cutpurse named Brand became their first and best prospect. Lost in the woods, the two sisters approached the man and offered him hospitality at 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 in search of rumored treasure. Therefore, the sisters have always charmed those they allow into their lair. They also have guests drink from their magic font (see AREA C12) before leaving, as the font's magic waters cause the drinker to forget ever visiting the wood or the sirines' lair.



This time it didn't work as it should. 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 learn what valuables they possessed. Made of ivory and encrusted with jewels, the *Cup of Gerdúhr* looked like a king's fortune. While the sisters slept, Brand took the cup and fled.

After finding his way out of the woods, Brand stayed for a few days with the farmer Gandur and his family. Every couple of days thereafter, he moved on to another farmstead, where he stayed as a guest. 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 would turn chaotic and malevolent. A few days after Brand left, the crops and livestock of the families who 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 where he had stayed. Then his trail went cold.

Realizing he must travel to a larger town to sell the cup for anything close to its true worth, Brand left Alfandi and headed south on the road. A few miles outside town, a group of bullywugs from the nearby marsh ambushed him. He managed 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 Ylizzissid.

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 searches 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 includes one or more section headings detailing its contents and/or occupants. Each type of section heading is described below. Note that numbered areas include only the headings pertinent to the area. Thus, an area with no doors will not include 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 any doors to the area are open, locked, or trapped when first encountered by the PCs. This might change on subsequent visits to the same area, so the GM should note any changes.

GM's Note: Alerts the GM to any special considerations in an area that might affect the PCs, occupants, or the 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 verbatim to the players but should instead paraphrase as they deem necessary. The area's description should be updated if its occupants or contents are destroyed, removed, or altered during the course of play.

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

Tactics: This section provides general notes on the tactics any monsters or NPCs use in combat when they first encounter the PCs.

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

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

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 Intelligence rating; **AL** = Alignment; **L** = Large size; **M** = Medium size; **S** = Small size; **xp** = Experience Point value; **THAC0** = the number to hit AC 0; **PsA** = Psionic ability; **C** = Chaotic; **L** = Lawful; **E** = Evil; **G** = Good; **N** = Neutral; **S** = Strength; **I** = Intelligence; **W** = Wisdom; **D** = Dexterity; **C** = Constitution; **CH** = Charisma; **CM** = Comeliness; **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 several ways to start the PCs on the adventure. While passing through the area, the party stops to rest in Ostenheim, where the villagers implore them to free their captive brethren. Alternatively, the party might have heard rumors from farther afield about the friction between the two villages and set out to investigate on their own. A local lord could ask the PCs to serve 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 begins with the party visiting Ostenheim. The locals tell of the farmers taken prisoner, which 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, prompting them to investigate Scanthô 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 cup's location is determined, the party will likely set off through the ErpKappe 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 listed above. That is all right. The GM should take care to point the PCs in the right direction, but not to straitjacket their actions to conform to the adventure outline.

Adventure Timeline

21 Days Ago: The sirine sisters come across Brand lost in Scanthô 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 Scanthô Wood for Brand.

16 Days Ago: Brand leaves Scanthô Wood and stays with the farmer Gandur.

14 Days Ago: Brand stays with the farmer Jenke.

11 Days Ago: Brand lodges at Torulf's farm.

9 Days Ago: Brand stays with the farmer Olev. The crops at the Gandur and Jenke farms begin to die.

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 at the drink hall to discuss the ruined crops and decide that the eight Ostenheim men are to blame.

5 Days Ago: Early in the morning, an angry mob of thirty Alfandi citizens goes to the homes of the eight and takes them prisoner. The search band recruited by Vankær finds evidence that Brand 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 launch a failed raid on Alfandi to free the eight captives.

2 Days Ago: The elders of Alfandi 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 search band prowls around Torulf's farm, alarming his dogs.

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

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

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



6 Days from Present: The search band enters Alfandi at night and attempts to kidnap a random citizen for interrogation. If the attempt fails, it tries again each night until it succeeds. The morning after a citizen disappears, Brand flees Alfandi for the nearest large town to the west.

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 well suited to 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 humans other than Brand. The band's fear of the sirine's powers helps keep them in line.

Search Band's Movement: As the party moves, the search band roams the countryside in search of 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:** Anders' 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 the surrounding environs.
- 6 Days from Present:** The band searches Alfandi again, this time moving into the town proper under cover of darkness. They attempt to kidnap a random citizen for interrogation. If the attempt fails, they try again each night until they succeed.

The Morning After a Citizen Disappears: Brand pieces together that the sirines are searching for him and flees Alfandi for the nearest large town to the west.

For the Next 3 Days: The band begins searching in the Erp-Kappe Marshes. Instead of returning to the wood at dawn, they camp there during daylight. On the third day of searching the marshes, the band locates the bullywug mound at AREA E. After capturing a few bullywugs for interrogation, they learn of the cup's location (AREA 20).

The GM should track the search band's movement each night. The party and the band might encounter each other if they are in the same area. Observant PCs can find clues left by the band, allowing them to track the band to its current location or to its makeshift camp.

Alternatively, the search band can discover the party and begin 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, leaving the ogres to watch over the captives. Once the sirine arrives, she personally interrogates the captured

PCs. Regardless of the party's story, she concludes that Brand has either sent them to steal more from her or that they are seeking Brand to steal the artifact from him. Vankær refrains from revealing her motivations regarding 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 honor the agreement's terms.

Search Band's Tactics: If melee erupts with the party, the band attempts to capture as many PCs as possible. Spénfjúd uses his *laugh* ability as melee begins, 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 whenever 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 has only a 60% chance of following these orders. If the roll fails, the ogre attacks to kill with its weapon.

In melee, Vankær uses her song ability to *charm* PCs. If that fails, she attacks with her weapons. She uses her *fog cloud* to disrupt missile fire. If reduced to half hit points or fewer, 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 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 causing the destruction of the crops, as he is unaware of the cup's curse. He also tells the party that one of the ogres killed the farmer Jenke (AREA A4).

If captured, the ogres provide little specific information. They tell the party that Vankær hired them to search for a human male with red hair and sharp features (i.e., Brand). The sirine seeks this human because he took something valuable from her. They know the sirine lives somewhere in the forest, but not exactly where. Additionally, none of the thickheaded ogres realize there are actually two sirines.

If the party captures Vankær, she reveals nothing about herself, her sister, the search band's goal, or the cup's existence. She attempts to escape using her *polymorph* ability at the first opportunity.

Search Band Statistics

Vankær, sirine: AC 3; MV 12"/24"; HD 7; hp 40; #AT 1 or 2; Dmg 1d6 short sword or 1d6+1/1d6+1 *short bow* +1; SA touch reduces victim's Intelligence to 2 (save vs. Poison to avoid), *charm person* by song (3" range; 1/day), *suggestion* (1/day), *polymorph self* (1/day), *fog cloud* (1/day), *improved invisibility* (1/day); SD save as 11th-level magic-user, +2 to poison saves, immune to all gas attacks, breathe water; MR 25%; INT high (13); AL N; Size M; xp 750; THAC0 13; MMII 109. She wears a light green shift with silver-thread trim, a moonstone necklace (500 gp value), an ivory armband (150 gp value), and a fur-trimmed green cloak. Vankær is armed with a short sword, a **short bow** +1, and a quiver containing 10 normal arrows and six **arrows** +2.

Humorless and taciturn, Vankær wears a constant scowl. She is condescending and demanding toward those she considers inferior. She assists any forest dweller as long as it helps maintain the equilibrium of the forest. Vankær uses force to stop those she believes thwart her goals. Vankær speaks her native language, Common, korred, ogriish, orcish, and green dragon.