



THE DREAD BELOW

AN ADVENTURE FOR *ROMANCE OF THE PERILOUS LAND*,
WRITTEN BY SCOTT MALTHOUSE

This is a quest for four to five first level heroes.

It's a dreary October night and Gregory the Farmer peers out of the window, terrified. At first it was the chickens. He counted them several times but three were missing. Then the sheep started to disappear. Believing foxes or wolves to be the problem, he set several animal traps around the perimeter, but by morning two more sheep had gone and the traps were still set. What's more is the presence he feels when he goes into his barn - like something dark touching his soul. Then something much worse happened. His friend and farmhand Martin Morden disappeared two days ago. Rumours spread throughout the village of the cause and many fingers pointed to Everdene, the village cunning woman and healer, who was seen at night near the farm five days ago. Now at noon tomorrow Everdene will meet the hangman's noose unless someone can clear her name. Despite protests from some of the villagers, the landholding squire Rulf is adamant of her guilt, but in reality he's taking revenge on Everdene after she was unable to heal his son from a disease that eventually killed him.

What none of the villagers know is that three weeks ago a crone called Herga moved into the old shelter tunnels beneath the barn on Pheasant Farm, seeing an opportunity to gorge herself on the village produce and people. In order to stay hidden while carrying out her activities, Herga made a deal with a family of redcaps to split the ample food supply with them. Once eaten, she disposes of the corpses in an underground stream that leads out into the sea.

BEGINNING THE ADVENTURE

The adventure takes part in the deep rural parts of Ascalon, just off the Ascalon Way that leads north to Eastland. There are several ways the players can get involved with the mystery of Millet Village, some of which are tied to any factions they're tied to.

Knights of the Round Table: A merchant from the village crosses the Knight of the Round on the road and explains the situation: a cunning woman from Millet Village is to be hanged for cursing its people and causing the disappearance of livestock and a local lad. The merchant isn't convinced and asks the knight to investigate.

Iron Hawks: A member of the Iron Hawks has heard mention of rumours coming from the village of strange disappearances, some people putting it down to an evil witch or some kind of beast that's invading the village. They will likely want to investigate and rid the place of such a creature, as is their code.

Merry Men: Hearing that someone who is potentially innocent is being tried for black magic by a wealthy landholder should be enough to pique their interest.

Fellowship of Enchanters: If Everdene is innocent, the Fellowship can't stand by to watch a healer be killed. They will also want to get to the bottom of what potential magic is behind the disappearances.

Order of the Fisher King: A healer is a useful asset to the Order and could be helpful in finding a cure for the Fisher King's curse.

ADVENTURE TIMELINE

This adventure has a time limit, with Everdene the cunning woman due to be executed the day after the heroes arrive. Use the timeline below to determine the order of events.

- **1st October:** The crone moves into the tunnels beneath Gregory's barn.
- **2nd October:** Gregory's chickens begin to disappear. Everdene goes to harvest moonberries at night and sees several redcaps around the farm.
- **3rd October:** Two of Gregory's sheep disappear.
- **5th October:** Martin vanishes.
- **7th October:** Everdene is arrested for using dark magic to curse the village.
- **8th October:** The heroes arrive in the village.
- **9th October:** Everdene is set to be executed at noon.

RUMOURS

When the heroes are investigating, roll a d6 on the list below for a rumour:

1. "My gran once said she saw Everdene speaking with a demon in a fairy ring" (False)
2. "Gregory refuses to leave his house. He won't have visitors anymore, poor bloke" (True)
3. "I seen witches in the sky and I bet Everdene was one of them. Cackling they was. Out causin' mischief." (False)
4. "My mate saw an imp running around the other night. Had a weird hat on. Said it had a chicken in its hands" (True)
5. "I think this is Gregory's fault. I think he's been dealing with forces he doesn't understand. It wasn't Everdene, it was him!" (False)
6. "The squire loves Everdene, so it must be difficult for him to find out she's in league with Morgan Le Fay" (False)

MILLET VILLAGE

This cosy village sits near the Ascalonian coast close to the Ragged Woods, a small woodland inhabited by deer and the occasional bear. A stone bridge greets those who approach from the west, flanked by trees in full autumn hues of purple and orange. The Pheasant Farm sits on this side of the village, with well-trodden dirt paths leading to the farmstead and the village proper.

When coming into the village, the heroes should get a sense of unease. People are quiet and have a nervous quality to them. They are particularly distrustful of magic-users and anyone using magic in the village will very likely be questioned by the local guard. If asked about the current situation most villagers will explain about the farmer's livestock going missing, and two days ago Martin the farmhand disappearing - but nobody seems to know where they went. Some will blame Everdene, even claiming to have seen her one night a week ago near the farm, and others will be sympathetic to her. There are several key locations to explore.

THE CROSSED GATES INN

A homely inn whose dimensions could be politely said to be 'cosy', but perhaps cramped is a more apt description. Lucy Walden is the inn's proprietor, running it with her vastly inquisitive 13 year old daughter Madeline.

- There are rooms available, costing just 1gp per night. They're as cramped as the rest of the place, with low sloping ceilings and a fragrance of incense.
- Lucy is stout and pragmatic. She doesn't like what Rulf is doing to her friend Everdene. She's always been a friend to the village and has healed Madeline when she came down with a sickness last spring. Lucy believes that Rulf is bitter that Everdene turned down his proposal.
- Madeline was friends with Martin. She says she went out at night a week ago and saw a little man heading towards the farm, but nobody believes her. If any of the heroes are Knights of the Round Table she will have lots of questions for them about adventuring, King Arthur and monsters.
- Several patrons are sat snugly by the fire drinking mead. A one-eyed, white bearded man called Fallow believes that fairies are involved (although his drinking partner interjects that he blames everything on fairies).



THE MORDEN HOUSEHOLD

This squat building is the home of the Morden family, Martin's mother, father and baby brother. The father, John, is beside himself with grief and can barely articulate a sentence. The mother, Joan, believes Martin's still alive somewhere as they haven't found a body.

RULF'S MANOR

Sitting half a mile outside the village, Rulf's manor is fairly modest, with a large wooden door and brass dragon knocker.

- Rulf's servant Winifred answers the door. Unless someone succeeds a difficult check in Intimidate, Persuasion or Bluff, she will explain her master is busy at the moment and they should come back in a few days.
- Rulf is a heavy-set man with a waxed moustache and a sickeningly charming demeanour that's evidently fake. If asked about Everdene, he explains that he has zero tolerance for users of dark magic and believes that she is in league with Morgan Le Fey. Probing further about his relationship with her requires a regular Persuasion or Intimidate check, where he will explain that, yes, he once had an affection for her but he now believes that this was a charm spell she put on him to humiliate him.
- Unless anyone can bring him hard evidence that Everdene hasn't cursed the village, she will be executed at noon tomorrow. Evidence includes the head of the crone beneath the barn or evidence that redcaps took Martin. He is not easily persuaded to go into the tunnels, requiring a severe check, although he may send a servant.

THE SMITHY

Dimia the weaponsmith is a sweet and soft-spoken woman, a demeanour that's at odds with the hammering of molten metal and her clear handiness with a blade.

- The farmer Gregory came to her a week ago to ask for several animal traps to be forged. He seemed out of sorts at the time and looked like he had barely any sleep.
- She doesn't know who to believe about Everdene. She tries to stay out of politics as much as possible. She has heard people say Everdene has imps who do her dirty work for her.
- Dimia can forge any light or medium melee weapon for a quarter of the market cost. She can craft up to three weapons in a 24 hour period.
- She knows that Martin was good friends with Madeline from The Crossed Gates and feels quite sorry for her loss. Madeline has mentioned stories about little men in the village, which some have said could be Everdene's imps, while others put it down to her overactive imagination and obsession with monsters.

THE LOCK-UP

A small round building with a conical roof. A guard called Dain stands outside the locked door. One can peer inside and see darkness and hear soft sobbing.

- This is Everdene's holding cell. Inside is filthy and she's fed mere scraps from the guard's plate, which generally isn't much.
- The door's lock can be picked with a tough thievery check or the door can be bashed in with a severe athletics check. Dain holds the key.
- Dain is a young lad, barely sixteen, who speaks in a croaky, recently broken voice. Despite appearances, he's fiercely loyal to Rulf and wants to make a good impression, so he can't be easily persuaded to let Everdene go. This would take a severe Persuasion or a tough Intimidate. However, he will report that Everdene has been released and the rest of the guard (five in total) will come looking for the heroes.
- If Everdene is released she will explain her innocence and her reasoning for being near the farm five days ago to pick moonberries.

EVERDENE'S HOUSE

Nestled in the corner of the village green, Everdene's house is skewed and squat, like many of the homes in the village. The wooden door can be picked with a regular thievery check or busted open with a simple athletics check.

- There are two rooms, one for sleeping and cooking, and the other used as a shop front, with all manner of jars and tinctures lining the shelves. There are three potions of vitality, a hag stone and a mole's foot among the dusty bottles and pickled creatures. A bowl of juicy moonberries is sat on the counter.
- In the sleeping area rodent bones have been cast on the floor as a means of divination and a scrying mirror is on her pillow. A small leather book is placed on the dresser containing sketches of a small, hairy creature with sharp teeth and a cone-like hat. A regular nature check reveals this to be a redcap. She spotted two of the creatures a week ago around the farm at night as she went to harvest moonberries, but people didn't believe her.

PHEASANT FARM

On the border of the village sits the farmstead owned by farmer Gregory, a widower and now sole worker on the farm. He is now nervous to leave his farm, having locked himself inside, keeping a dagger close by at all times. The barn sits 200 yards away from the farmhouse. Several chickens run around, pecking at seed in the dirt.

THE FARMHOUSE

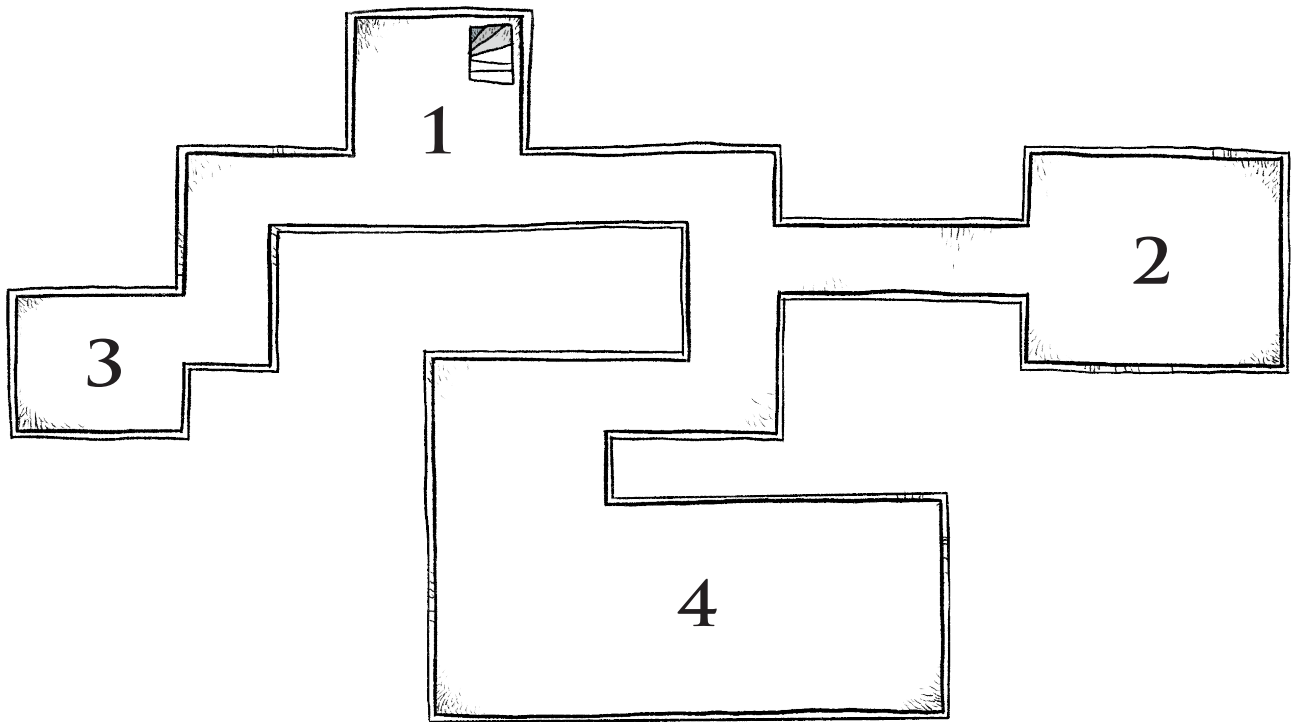
- Gregory is unkempt and has obviously not been sleeping, given the dark circles around his eyes. He is on his guard and won't let anyone in unless they give him a good reason.
- He explains his experiences up to this point and mentions that since Everdene has been locked up he doesn't know whether any of his animals have vanished because he refuses to leave his house. In reality, several more chickens have gone, as has a pig.
- He's sprinkled iron filings at the entranceway to stop evil from entering. This, in fact, does nothing to stop a crone or redcaps from entering.
- If the heroes were to wait out after midnight, they would see three redcaps emerging from the barn to steal away the livestock. If they spot the heroes, they will attack.

THE BARN

- Hay bales are piled up in here and there's a pungent stench of rot, which is particularly strong around one of the bales. If moved it reveals a trapdoor into the tunnels. There are telltale signs the bale has been moved as the floor is less dusty in that area. The trapdoor can easily be lifted, revealing stairs going down into dark tunnels below. Gregory is aware that these tunnels exist, having dated back hundreds of years to the wars fought in the Great Expansion. They were used to keep enemy forces from finding the farmer's family at the time, and in later years became a route for smugglers from the coast.
- Four lavellans are hidden in a heap of hay, having been attracted by the corpse smell. If anyone comes within 10ft of them they jump out and attack.
- There is no blood on the ground because the redcaps dragged their prey down into the tunnels. However, there is a string necklace that belonged to Martin on the ground, which can be found with a regular Perception check.



THE BARN TUNNELS



1. Entrance

The stairs descend 30ft into the ground in total darkness. At the bottom is a man-made shelter with walls of stone. There are sconces along the walls that can be lit. The sound of running water can be heard echoing throughout the tunnels. The air is rotten, like gone-off meat and salt.

2. Sleeping Area

Four dishevelled cots lay against the walls of this rancid-smelling room. This is where the crone sleeps. Four jars of liquids are dotted around the floor: yellow, blue, brown and purple. Yellow is a potent poison that smells of ammonia. It can be used on a weapon once to gain +1d4 damage. Once damage has been dealt the poison is used up and has no further effect. Blue smells of sewer water. It gives the drinker invisibility for one round and has one use. Brown smells of moss. It transforms the drinker into a rat for 1 minute and has one use. The purple smells of elderberry. It allows the drinker to fly their speed for three rounds and has one use. Three redcaps are rummaging through a barrel of offal.

3. Store Room

During the Age of Doom villagers would have used this as a pantry, with mouldy barrels, empty jars and crates littering the floor. The corpse of a wandering merchant is against the north wall (a regular healing check suggests the body is fresh, probably a day old). Two redcaps are gnawing at its extremities. The merchant has a pack containing 10gp and several silk garments worth 40gp.

4. Crone's Lair

A stream runs from east to west on the back wall off this cavern, leading all the way to the coast. The scent of rot lingers in the air and bones, animal and human litter the ground. The crone, Herga, is stooped over a pig, eating it raw, surrounded by several bone charms she's been using in her rituals. If she hears anyone she immediately looks up and attacks unless they come with a bargain that's beneficial to her and her eating habits. She's joined by three redcaps who are dragging several chickens across the floor. One is chewing on a human arm.

CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

If the heroes vanquish the crone, any remaining redcaps will retreat into the woods (becoming a menace to travellers). Presenting evidence of the crone to Rulf and the villagers will lead to the release of Everdene and some form of closure for the Morton family. Everdene will show her gratitude with a gift to the party - four bottles of herbs that, when added to food, heal 1d6 HP. Each has one use.

If Everdene has already been executed, then Rulf has to answer to a mob of angry villagers who blame him for her death. If unchecked, the villagers will take their own vengeance, so the heroes may have to get involved to de-escalate the situation. Or the heroes may help depose Rulf and have a new landowner installed, which could make a mortal enemy of Rulf.

If the heroes were to follow the stream to the coast they would find bones and clothing washed up on shore belonging to Martin and the wanderers the crone had killed.

NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS

The following NPCs are specific to this adventure. Other creatures can be found in the bestiary of the Romance of the Perilous Land rules.

Dain, young village guard

HD: 1 TN: 11

HP: 4

Armour Points: 3

Attack: Spear (melee)

Damage: 1d4+1

Special: None

Dimia the Weaponsmith

HD: 2 TN: 12

HP: 9

Armour Points: 2

Attack: Shortsword (melee)

Damage: 1d6+2

Special: Dimia gains an edge on melee attacks as long as she's adjacent to two or more enemies.

Everdene

HD: 1 TN: 11

HP: 5

Armour Points: 0

Attack: Fists (melee)

Damage: 1d4+1

Spells Prepared: Replenish the Battered and Bruised x2

Special: None

Rulf the Squire

HD: 2 TN: 12

HP: 9

Armour Points: 2

Attack: Dagger (melee or ranged)

Damage: 1d6+2

Special: Rulf can call the guards as an action once per combat. Within 2 rounds 1d4 guards will turn up.

Rat

HD: 1 TN: 11

HP: 4

Armour Points: 0

Attack: Bite (melee)

Damage: 1d4+1

Special: Ranged attacks against the rat get a setback if the rat is 25ft or more away from the attacker.

Village Guard

HD: 1 TN: 11

HP: 6

Armour Points: 3

Attack: Spear (melee) or Sling (ranged)

Damage: 1d4+1

Special: The village guard gets an edge when attempting to restrain an enemy.

