

The Abandoned Homestead

Many years ago this homestead was home to a successful family of farmers. For generations, this plot of land has been in their hands and tended to diligently and year after year, the fields would bear plenty of produce which ensured the family's growing prosperity. The family's fortune is by no means a blessing of the gods or fate. The once prosperous homestead harbors a dark mystery, meticulously hidden away from outsiders.

When the family first bought the land with the little remaining money they could muster, they found it barren. Undeterred and with no other option left, they went to work. Though regardless of how hard they tried, the land could not bear fruit. The family's patriarch found himself desperate. He could not bear the thought of failing his family, or worse, leave them to starve over the winter. The patriarch knew of the old ways one should not tread. But to ensure his family's well being no price was too high to pay. The man made use of the rites of the old ways and forged a dark pact with a Hag, Otrud with Oogly eyes at the following new moon. "This land is without life" she said, "it must be given new life, but before life can be given, it must be taken." Along with these words, the hag handed the man a tool of malign implication. The man knew what had to be done to ensure his family's survival and the dark pact was forged.

Though this homestead stands abandoned, its family long gone, its dark history remains to be uncovered.

HOMESTEAD OVERVIEW

The homestead features vast barren fields that have not been worked in decades and are surrounded by broken fences. A trail leads to a decrepit farmhouse and an empty shed on the verge of collapse behind it. A **tall willow tree** stands in front of the farmhouse with three lifeless bodies hanging within its branches. Unless a player has a **Passive Perception of 15 or higher**, the players will not see the bodies until they reach the end of the trail and are in front of the farmhouse, as the hanging willow branches make it hard to notice the bodies from afar. Upon a close inspection of the hanging bodies, the players will notice that they were not hung by ropes, but by the willow's branches instead.

The farmhouse itself is a two story building in a state of disrepair. It has one main entrance in the front, as well as a back entrance. The farmhouse has been standing abandoned for years, and the players can find clear signs that they were not the first travelers to find this derelict building. Lots of the windows have been smashed in and much of the furniture found in the house is damaged, has been toppled over, or destroyed by pillagers. A few windows that were nailed shut and some arranged blankets and mattresses indicate that passing travelers have been using this building for shelter. The players will be unable to find anything of worth in these ruins during a superficial search, but an **Investigation (Intelligence)** and **Wisdom (Perception)** check will reveal more.

When a player succeeds on a **medium Investigation check**, the player will confirm that this building must have been frequented by vagabonds. If the player is aware of the bodies hanging from the willow tree outside, they conclude that these poor souls most likely

came to this place to seek shelter. The player won't be able to tell who exactly killed them, though it might be plausible that someone put these bodies up there to keep people away from the house so the shelter won't be contested.

A player that succeeds a **hard Investigation check**, they will notice that a set of windows facing the front yard have been smashed in from the outside. Considering the fact that many of the destroyed windows of the farmhouse have been at least nailed up with boards indicates that this must have happened recently. A player that **beats the hard difficulty Investigation check by 5 or more** will additionally notice that all the smashed have the willow tree in direct view.

When a player succeeds on a **medium Perception check**, they will find a random item belonging to an Explorer's Pack wrapped up in one of the blankets, likely forgotten here by a past traveler. A player that succeeds on a **hard Perception check** will notice that among the disarray of the farmhouse's common room, the central carpet appears to be unmoved. Upon closer inspection they will find that the carpet has been nailed to the floor tiles below.

After clearing the carpet of rubble and fallen furniture the players can tear the nailed down carpet off the floor tiles. They find a trapdoor underneath that is locked with a **hard difficulty lock**. Because of the rotten wood, the players can easily break the trapdoor open with an **easy Strength check** or by dealing 5 damage to it. The trapdoor gives way to a wooden ladder that leads into **the cellar** below.

THE HANGMAN TREE

The dark rituals that infused the soil transformed the **tall willow tree** that stands in the homestead's yard is into a cursed **Hangman Tree** that claimed four unfortunate victims not more than a week ago. The four victims were a group of vagabonds that met by chance and decided to travel together. In a sense of false security, the vagabonds all slept inside of the abandoned farmhouse and fell victim to the hangman tree who snatched them in their sleep. The bloated bodies that hang from its branches reek of decay and have attracted buzzing flies. The hangman tree will remain dormant for the time being, even if a player attempts to climb it or closely investigates the bodies. The hangman tree will attack though as soon as someone attempts to remove one of the hanging bodies from its branches. Once in combat, the hangman tree will fight to the death.

If the hangman tree is left alone or is not agitated, it will remain motionless until nightfall. If the players decide to sleep inside of the farmhouse, the hangman tree will make stealthy use of its long vines to have them creep into the farmhouse to grab and strangle unaware characters while they are asleep. The hangman tree's creeping vines will enter the house through the windows closest to itself. If a character is on nightwatch, the hangman tree will attempt to grapple that character first and will try to choke it quickly so they can't warn the others. The moment the players become alerted to the hangman tree's attack, it will forgo its stealthy approach and start an all out attack.

Treasure: The four victims carry different nicknacks with them that can collectively be used to create an entire Explorer's Pack, with one item missing, which can be found wrapped in a blanket inside the house.



THE CELLAR

The ladder descends 10 feet downwards to what seems to appear a common cellar of similar dimensions as the common room above, still in the same state when it was left behind. It is filled with caskets of fermented cabbage, shelves filled with pickled foods, and other non-perishable foods. Further the players can find a crate filled with sheets of paper, drawing coals, and tins of lamp oil.

A character that has a ***passive Investigation of 13 or higher*** will conclude that the inhabitants of this homestead must have been in a hurry to leave, if they left so much food behind. On top of that, the inhabitants judged it to be more important to lock and hide the trap door before leaving. Surely something important must be down here.

Players that take a closer look around the cellar will find that two empty shelves cover a break through in the cellar's masonry that leads into a second room. The second room is in stark contrast to the adjacent cellar. The floor has no tiles, but floor tiles guide into the room along the northern walls. The room expands into a dug out cave towards the south. Three man sized depressions, each 2 feet deep, are dug out at the southern end of the room. Two barrels stand between these depressions, their wood discolored with long since dried bodily fluids. Anyone that dares to take a look inside of the barrels will find a few humanoid bones at their bottom. At the center of the north wall hangs a board at eye height. Dozens of faded charcoal drawings of men and women are pinned along its edges. "By their sacrifice, we thrive" is written in bold and wide letters on the center of the board.

A ***medium Perception or Investigation check*** will reveal that the board covers an alcove with a small shrine. Hanging over the shrine hangs the hag's hair wrapped around a bundle of murkwood sticks. Underneath it lies a dagger with a curved blade, ceremonially arranged on a

soft velvet cloth. If a character in the party is a hagspawn, they will immediately notice that the dagger is infused with a hag's essence. This magical dagger is the ***Hag's Bloodletter*** and was used for the ***dark rituals*** performed in this room.

THE DARK COVENANT

To infuse the barren land with new life, the soil had to be soaked in blood every month. The family would find victims through a variety of ways; either by employing vagabonds temporarily on their farm as a helping hand or stalking lonely travelers on the nightly country roads. They would bind and bring their victims into the extended cellar, where they are placed within the depressions. The sacrificial dagger had to be used to slit their throats and allow them to bleed out. The victim's body would be left in the hole until its body was fully liquified and its blood had sunken into the ground. The remaining bones were placed in the barrels and ground down to dust and used as fertilizers for the fields.

Each member in the family was taught from a young age that this ritual was necessary for the continued existence of the family. But they were also taught to respect the victims. After all, it is their blood that brought prosperity to the family. To ensure that victims are not forgotten, drawings of each victim would be placed on the board that covers the shrine. Speaking thanks to the people whose life they took became an integral part of the ritual. Many members of the family learned to draw portraits with coals for that purpose.

NIGHT TERROR: BLOOD SOAKED SOIL

If the players decide to sleep inside the abandoned homestead, one of them will have an eerie nightmare. Read the following segment out loud, or describe a similar nightmare to one of the players:

You find yourself in a two feet deep hole, staring at two illuminating orbs that float above you and illuminate the dank cave-like room you find yourself in. Your body feels sluggish. No matter how hard you try, your limbs do not obey you.

You hear scribbling from the other end of the room - you are able to lift your head to barely enough to make out a man wearing fine clothes sitting at the foot end of your hole. He sits in a chair, sketching something on a canvas with coal. His face is hidden behind his work.

The scratching sounds of coal suddenly stop. The man gets up and turns towards the wall behind him.

Behind him a group of people have been patiently waiting for him to finish his work. The dim light obscures their features. They step aside and reveal a board filled with coal sketches. Each depicts the scared visage of a stranger.

The artist hangs his drawing on the board - it is your face on the piece of paper. It was sketched with terrifying detail, every fold, every scar, every pore of your horrified

face rendered in coal. The group stares at the newly added drawing. After a few seconds their monotonous voices break the silence "thank you, by your sacrifice, we thrive". The artist then reaches for the board and lifts it off the wall. When he turns towards you, he holds a glistening dagger in his hand. Its blade is tender and curved.

He slowly climbs into your hole and is now looming over you. The orbs illuminating above him casts his shadow over you, his features remain obscured.

He lowers himself on one knee. You can now hear his breaths. He reaches behind your head and places the blade upon your neck. With a swift motion he severs your throat. You don't feel pain, but you feel the blood rush out of your neck and drench the earth below you. Your stare becomes transfixed at the two orbs on the ceiling. You think they are closing in, as everything around you fades into darkness. As they approach you notice: they are not lights, they are eyes rolled back. And now they are moving to look at you. A pair of bright and curious eyes are looking at you - they are round, bulging, and filled with otherworldly malevolence. You feel gangly hands cup your face and cooing. Otrud with Oogly Eyes is sending you on your way to sleep. "Hush my child and let it happen... good night."

HAG'S BLOODLETTER

As part of the covenant forged with the ancient hag Otrud with Oogly Eyes, the Hag bestowed the family with two items: a trinket and a dagger.

The trinket was a simple knot of Otrud's hair that was wrapped around a bundle of murky wood sticks. A traditional symbol of a bargain struck with a hag. The dagger on the other hand is a magical instrument that holds a place of almost religious reverence in the family. It is carefully stowed away, presented ceremoniously on a hidden shrine. The dagger holds some of Oogly Eye's essence and must be used to obtain the hag's dark boon.

Hag's Bloodletter

Lesser Artifact, dagger (optional attunement)

This dagger deals 1d4 piercing or slashing damage on a hit. You can choose which damage type this weapon deals when attacking. A creature that takes damage from this weapon can not regain hit points until the end of your next turn.

Rogue: When a character that has levels in the rogue class and has the sneak attack feature is attuned to the weapon, you can choose to have your additional sneak attack damage deal necrotic damage instead. When you score a critical hit against a creature that is paralyzed or unconscious you roll the damage of the attack twice and choose the higher result.

Warlock: When a character that has levels in the warlock class and has the spellcasting feature is attuned to the weapon, you can use the Bloodletter as your spellcasting focus and use your Charisma in place of Strength or Dexterity when attacking with this weapon.

When you are missing spell slots provided by your warlock spellcasting feature you can use an action to take damage equal to 1d4 + your warlock level that cannot be reduced or negated by any way and your hit point maximum is reduced by an equal amount until you finish a long rest. When you do so you regain one spell slot granted to you by your warlock spellcasting feature. If your maximum hit points are reduced to 0 with this feature, you die.

Curse: While not exactly a curse in of itself, Otrud with Oogly Eyes is always aware of the Bloodletter's exact location and can see through the blade's reflection. In addition, Otrud with Oogly Eyes learns the name of each creature that is slain with this weapon. If a creature slays one or more humanoid with this weapon, Otrud with Oogly Eyes will learn of the wielder's name and will be able to invade the creature's dreams.

LOOSE ENDS?

The Abandoned Homestead leaves a few questions unanswered. Who exactly was the family that lived here? What caused them to flee so suddenly? Did the local constabulary investigate them for the disappearance of travelers? Did they perhaps kill someone with more influence than they anticipated? What is the hag Olga with Oogly Eyes doing now? These questions are for you to answer, or not.

HANGMAN TREE (MONSTER)

In many rural areas of the land, hanging was a preferred method of execution. To set an example for any potential future miscreants, the bodies were left hanging on these trees to show that the law in the area is unforgiving.

Locations and objects brought in association with horrific deeds such as slaughter and torture are prone to be afflicted with curses and hauntings. Thus country folk made sure to mark designated trees to be used for hanging, as they wanted to make sure that only a few select trees become corrupted.

A hangman tree is an old tree that was frequently used for executions in the past, but finds its branches now void of bodies that used to rock so gently in the wind. Its accumulated corruption makes the tree yearn to be adorned with cold bodies once again.

THE HANGMAN TREE

Huge Plant, chaotic evil

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)

Hit Points 115 (22d12 + 60)

Speed 0 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
21 (+5)	9 (-1)	19 (+4)	5 (-3)	10 (0)	5 (-3)

Proficiency +4

Damage Condition Immunities charmed, frightened

Senses blindsight 30 ft. (blind beyond), passive Perception 10

Languages Understands Common but doesn't speak

Challenge 11 (7,200 XP)

False Appearance. While the tree remains motionless, it is indistinguishable from a normal tree.

Immobile. The hangman tree has disadvantage on dexterity saving throws.

Mighty Bark. When the hangman tree takes bludgeoning, piercing, or slashing damage, the damage is reduced by 3.

Pull. When the hangman tree has creatures grappled at the beginning of its turn, it immediately uses a bonus action to pull them up to 20 ft. towards itself. Creatures that are size large or bigger are pulled half as far.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The hangman tree makes 4 vine attacks and then uses choke.

Vine. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 30 ft., one target.

Hit: The creature is grappled, escape DC 15. A vine can be attacked (AC 15; 5 hit points; immunity to poison and psychic damage) or can be broken if a creature uses an action to attempt to succeed on a DC 15 Strength check against it. The hangman tree can have up to 6 creatures grappled at one time.

Choke. Each creature grappled by the hangman tree must succeed a DC 15 Strength saving throw. On a failed save a creature takes 18 (4d8) bludgeoning damage and the target is restrained and choked for the duration of the grapple. A choked creature is unable to breath, unable to talk, and cannot use vocal spell components.

*"You are climbing the old willow with ease.
With a quick strike of your handaxe you
sever the first vine and send the lifeless body
falling. With a wet thud the body lands on
the ground below.*

*But as you are taking another swing, you
suddenly feel movement! The tree is coming
alive and reaches out to you with
its thin branches!"*



*Sly: "Damn it Lukas, I knew
something like that was gonna
happen!"*