

WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW...

*An introductory MIDNIGHT adventure for
2nd - 3rd level characters, by Rob Vaughn*

Midnight is a world of grim survival. Its occupants, once peaceful and proud, have been trampled under the heel of a divine warlord of hatred and evil. This being, Izrador, was barred from the heavens and cast down by his fellow gods to the world of Ayrth... and in the ultimate trickery stole their world from underneath them. Now he is the only god that answers prayers, and is the only rule in a world cast deeply into shadow.

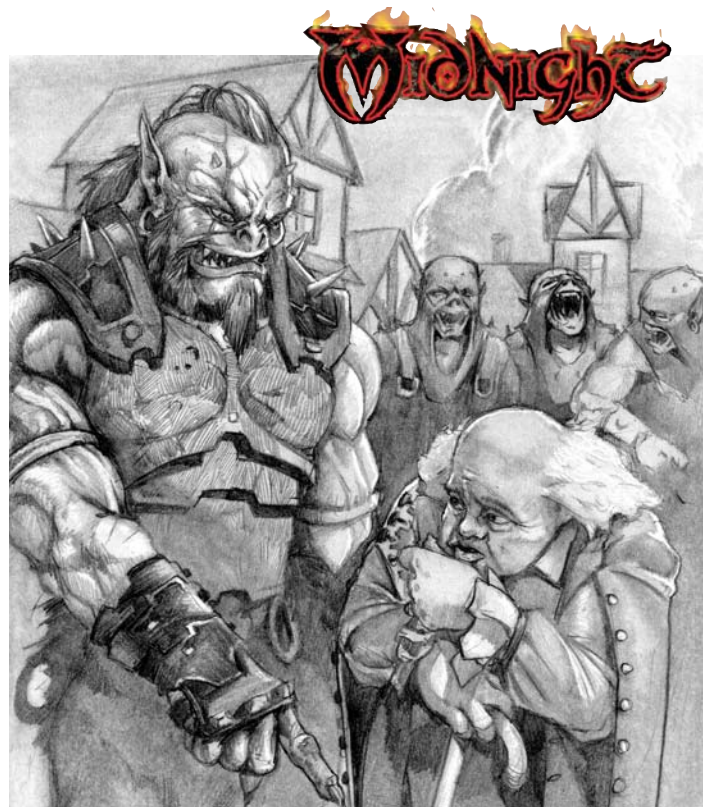
NOTE: MIDNIGHT characters are more powerful on average than core D&D characters. If this adventure is played with characters not created using the midnight core rulebook the party should be at least 3rd level.

INTRODUCTION

It's been a hard autumn, as seasons in the Northlands go. First the brutal end-of-summer rains churned up the ground and washed next year's thin planting soil into the rivers. Then the first cold froze the ruts in the roads into deep troughs which now hide beneath snow, eager to trap wagon wheels and break the legs of horse and man alike.

The scything cold is at least a benefit in that it's not strange for one to travel covered head to toe in furs, cloths, and bundles. Underneath all that clothing, who can tell whether any man is in fact a hunted elf, any child a halfling slave on the run. Even weapons, contraband as they are, can be carried without much trouble.

Whatever a person's reason, Sickle is an easy place to hide and a good place to meet. The small hamlet lies at a crossroads just south of the enemy-controlled Keep Nalford, east of the elvish forest of Veradeen, and northwest of the sacked city of Cale. It's dangerously close to the enemy's homeland, true... but that's the last place they'd think to look.



The characters have come, together or alone, to meet with a man named Audmid, a supposedly simple herbalist that scrapes a living from gathering the moss, lichen, and hardy roots and herbs that grow in the Northlands. In reality the man is an ally of the underground that resists the Shadow in the North. Feel free to work with the players to determine the precise reason for their attempt to contact Audmid. Unfortunately, an informant has sold Audmid out for knowing the locations of nexuses of power as well as the identities of several rebels. He has been taken prisoner by a hunter squad of orcs lead by Grigg, an ogre fighter who plans to deliver him to a legate the next morning at a pre-arranged meeting place. The goblins garrisoned at the town have instructions to watch Audmid's home.

ENCOUNTER 1 (EL 6): COLD RECEPTION

The characters should all arrive in town at about noon of the day they are to meet with Audmid. There is very little to the hamlet: several houses, the goblin garrison, two taverns, a boarding house, and a wainwright (see Map 1). Those that stop and gather information in the town will be able to avoid the following encounter; proceed directly to Encounter 2. Audmid's hovel is off by itself to the northwest of town. Any characters approaching the hovel will see the following:

Audmid's hovel is constructed of the same heavy white limestone that all Northland buildings are made of, though its covering of sod make its look ruder and meaner than most. From the edge of town you see that it's surrounded by muted patches of green and brown: a last crop of resilient herbs and tubers grows around the structure in a makeshift garden, the smaller plants spreading onto the sloped walls and roof of the home itself.

Let the characters take whatever precautions they wish as they approach. When they get closer, read the following:

Now that you're closer, you can see that it looks partially collapsed, as if a very large club bashed in one of the walls. The door is broken open and there is a distinctly red patch of snow outside. Several of the town's goblins seem to be roaming the area on their wolves, not-too-subtly keeping an eye on the hovel. It might be best not to approach just now, but changing direction at this point might be suspicious. Luckily, you're also passing directly by the back door of a seedy looking tavern.

Ducking into the tavern (Mill's Tavern) is the characters' best option at this point. The goblins are under orders to question anyone approaching the hovel and to apprehend them if they seem suspicious. Let the characters describe how they react to noticing the goblins, but make it clear that engaging the goblins in melee is tantamount to signing their own death warrants. It is understood that attacking Izrador's forces in civilized areas is suicide. Should they do so anyway, let them battle the goblins, but keep in mind that the characters will be branded outlaws and hunted tirelessly from that day forward. Surviving in occupied lands should become nearly impossible for them as soon as one week from the day of the battle. Survival in Midnight is not just about fighting well... it's about choosing your battles.

Creatures: Running, attacking, or attempting to investigate Audmid's hovel will draw the 4 goblins present after the character, followed eventually by reinforcements. A new goblin wolfrider will arrive every round, attracted by the sounds of combat and the goblins' high-pitched shrieks, until the entire garrison of 12 goblins arrives.

Goblins (4): hp 4, 5, 5, 7; MM 107.

Wolves (4, trained for riding): hp 12, 14, 16, 18; MM 204.

ENCOUNTER 2: THE SKINNY

If the characters willfully enter combat with the goblins, the townsfolk will become violent after the battle and go so far as to begin pelting them with rocks and attempting to drive them away. They do so because the PCs' actions will probably cause the hamlet to be razed within the month. If the PCs avoided combat the townsfolk will still be close-lipped and fearful. The only exception will be Halbjorn, an aging and crippled Dornish resistance fighter. The PCs will encounter him in Mill's, the dirtier of the town's two taverns.

Mill's is a dirty, dark, stuffy, stinking hole with watered down ale and overpriced food. In fact, it's quite similar to a goblin hovel, and therefore the one place the goblins do not wish to go. Halbjorn and the few others with fight left in them come here for just that reason.

You choke on a cloud of acrid smoke as you enter. There is no light in the low-ceilinged room except for a meager blaze in the hearth, fueled by dung. A few bloodshot pairs of eyes look up at you from their solitary stations about the room, glaring at you until you wrestle the door shut against the wind. Before you can make a move toward the bar, a slurred voice mutters "Outsiders. C'mere." Turning, you see an old man with a warped wooden crutch stationed in the corner. His pale blue eyes and large frame, though emaciated by age, mark him as a pureblood Dorn.

Halbjorn was part of the nomad resistance band under the deposed Dornish lord Roland Redgard, until an axe wound to the

leg crippled him. He has continued to participate in the resistance by reporting troop movements and hiding criminals. If the PCs can convince him that they are friends of the resistance he will explain that Audmid provides healing herbs and supplies to the resistance. That in itself will get you killed, but not taken prisoner. The more important fact is that Audmid has also discovered several local nexuses of arcane power in his roaming for herbs. Nexuses are the few places left in the world where magical power can be harnessed and used, and are essential for the resistance.

The legates, the priestly servants of Izrador, value such information highly, and it's Halbjorn's opinion that this knowledge is what got Audmid captured. He can tell the PCs that Grigg is the legates' local muscle, and that he and his band of orcs smashed up Audmid's home earlier this morning, about 4 hours before the PCs arrived. Audmid managed to get a few arrows into Grigg before the orcs clubbed him into unconsciousness. They killed Audmid's wife, stuck Audmid himself in a sack, and marched off with them to the north. Before they left, Halbjorn saw Grigg remove a medallion from his neck and hold it up to the sky for several minutes; eventually a crow descended, landed on his fist, and seemed to receive some instructions from the ogre before flying off again to the north. Halbjorn has sent word to Redgard and his band of the event, but doesn't believe any help will arrive in time to prevent the transfer of Audmid from Grigg to the far more dangerous legate.

He will end his conversation with this:

"I say this, outsiders: a legate is coming. Grigg and his man-eaters are going north to meet one, and there Audmid will be lost. The places he found are our places. My comrades need those places to heal and rest, and to forge weapons against the man-eaters. If the legates find those places they will either use them up or twist them, sure as snow is cold. And then we'll be done." Halbjorn leans in more closely and looks at you intently. "Even if you could rescue him," he says, seeming to head off any such suggestion, "the legate is on his way, and he'd track you down. No, by the old gods no, there is only one thing to do." The old man pauses, places his hands flat on the table as if for emphasis and stability, and says "You must kill Audmid before he can be made to talk. It is what he would want."

Of course, being heroes, the PCs should probably balk at this course of action. Whether they accept his strategy blindly and pragmatically or

resolve to rescue Audmid alive will depend on the mettle of the characters. Halbjorn will be doubtful about any other alternatives, but is helpless to do anything if the characters refuse his suggestion. Either way, he will tell the PCs that Grigg is likely headed for Balnida's Helm.



ENCOUNTER 3 (EL 5): THE RESCUE

Grigg and his minions have followed a snow-covered path northeast to a small rock outcropping called Balnida's Helm. Their trail will be fairly easy to Track (DC 10) or Spot (DC 14) as the humanoids are breaking a trail through fresh snow. It should take the PCs six hours by foot to reach Balnida's Helm, longer if any party members move slower than 20 ft. per round. Either way, by the time the PCs arrive night will have fallen and the enemy will have set up camp and posted sentries. The PCs have one night to rescue Audmid before the legate and his company arrive at dawn.

Balnida's Helm is a dirty white outcropping of the same limestone that is quarried throughout the northlands and used to build homes. This particular rock is part of legend, being the place to which the Dornish maid Balnida evacuated her town's women and children after the men fell in combat with marauding orcs. From their high vantage point the women and children defended themselves for days. Rather than escaping when the orcs relented, they taunted their opponents suggestively, using their bodies as bait and their children's flesh as potentially tasty meals, driving the orcs into such a fury that they threw themselves against the defenders and were destroyed to the last man.

The rock itself is 30 ft. high and scalable, though not easily. It is also the only windbreak for miles around, which is why Grigg and his group like to camp on the western side, despite the strategic superiority of camping on top.

Creatures: Grigg and his troops are gathered around the fire, happily tormenting Audmid and munching on his wife. The ogre is overconfident from having had the run of the Northlands for so many years, and has only posted two sentries with the band's 10 javelins atop the rock. Their position will be more of a hindrance to Grigg than help, as they will be unable to enter combat immediately. The bright fire and the orcs' laughter will alert the PCs as to the whereabouts of the camp long before they might be spotted. Anyone within 30 ft. of Grigg will be able to make a Spot check (DC 12) to see that he is wounded; a Heal check (DC 15) will reveal that he is at less than half his normal hit points.



Orc Warriors (5): hp 7, 7, 8, 10, 10; see Grigg's Gang at end of article.

Grigg, Male Ogre Fighter 1: CR 2; Large Giant; HD 4d8+1d10; hp 12 of 27 (wounded); Init +1 (Dex); Spd. 30 ft.; AC 18, touch 10, flat-footed 16; Atk +8 melee (2d8+6, Huge greatsword) or +4 ranged (1d8+2, mighty composite longbow); 5 ft. by 5 ft./10 ft.; AL NE; SV Fort +4, Ref +1, Will +1; Str 19, Dex 13, Con 11, Int 10, Wis 8, Cha 7.

Skills: Climb +6, Listen +2, Spot +2. Feats: Combat Reflexes, Iron Will, Weapon Focus (Huge greatsword).

Possessions: *Amulet of Animal Messenger*, Huge greatsword, mighty composite longbow (+2 str bonus), large studded leather armor, camping equipment.

Audmid, Male Human Expert 3: CR 2; Medium-size Humanoid; HD 3d6; hp 9 (11 subdual); Init +3 (Dex); Spd. 30 ft.; AC 13, touch 13, flat-footed 10; Atk +2 unarmed (1d3, unarmed); AL CG; SV Fort +1, Ref +4, Will +5; Str 10, Dex 17, Con 9, Int 11, Wis 15, Cha 10.

Skills: Alchemy +6, Knowledge (Arcana) +4, Knowledge (Herbalism) +6, Knowledge (Nature) +6, Listen +4, Spellcraft +4, Spot +4, Wilderness Lore +8. Feats: Track, Magecraft (Spiritual: cure minor wounds 5/day).

Tactics: If the PCs take out Grigg immediately, the fight should be difficult but winable. If they do not, they will have a very difficult time and may need to retreat or strongly consider Halbjorn's suggestion of assassination. The orcs at the campfire are oblivious, while the sentries' darkvision is somewhat inhibited by the glare of the fire. Characters attempting to sneak closer than 60' must make Hide and Move Silently checks (DC 10) to escape the sentries' notice. If alerted, the sentries will cry out and begin to throw javelins; if the sentries begin to miss consistently they will take 2 rounds to clamber down the rock so they can enter melee. Grigg and the others will most likely keep their backs against the rock, Audmid behind them, and wait for the characters to come into melee. The orcs will suffer a -1 to attacks the first round since they were looking into the fire. Grigg prefers

to let enemies come to him so he may make use of his reach and Combat Reflexes. Note that even if he is caught flat-footed Grigg will be able to take attacks of opportunity. If the characters stand back and fire missile weapons, Grigg will order his orcs to charge while he picks up Audmid and moves around the rock for cover.

Development: If the PCs revive Audmid and explain what occurred, he will be grateful but despairing. He saw his wife murdered before his own eyes, he has lost his home, and he sees no chance of escaping the soon-to-arrive legate. He will know enough about the Amulet of the Crow to tell the characters its basic capabilities, but also that the legate will be able to track anyone carrying it thanks to his astirax demonic companion (astiraxes can sense magic up to a mile away).

The PCs have several options, all of which will lead to further adventures. First, they can stand and fight. The legate, who should be a 5th-8th level cleric, will arrive at dawn with a squad of orcs and likely kill the heroes and capture Audmid. Second, they can try to escape. If they take the Amulet with them the legate will be able to track them with his astirax. If they do not take amulet the legate will track them with worgs, just more slowly. Their best escape route is west to Veradeen in the hopes that they can make it to the defended lands of the elves.

Finally, the characters may try to escape while using the Amulet as bait. A familiar or animal companion, for instance, could be instructed to carry the Amulet south as the legate draws near, leading him past the PCs so they may escape. Of course, the animal's life may then be forfeit. PCs with the Track feat (DC 18) or that Search (DC 20) may notice orc footprints that lead to a small break at the southern base of the rock. Inside this break flows a small but rapid underground stream. The amulet is light enough that it may be tied in a bundle and dropped within to flow south toward the Sea of Pelluria, leading the legate and his forces with it. This is the most likely tactic to succeed without losing Audmid or a party member.

Whatever their choice, the PCs are now inescapably embroiled in the fight against Izrador for the freedom of Aryth. They are fugitives in the world of Midnight.

GRIGG'S GANG

Orcs in MIDNIGHT are much more dangerous than the run-of-the-mill d20 System variety. They are huge, brutal, and organized; in short, they are bred purely for war. They also tend to be better-equipped than traditional tribal orcs. Grigg's orcs use the following statistics:

Male Orc Warrior 1: CR 1; Medium-size Humanoid; HD 1d8+2; Init +0; Spd. 20 ft.(breastplate); AC 16, touch 9, flat-footed 14; Atk +5 melee (1d8+3, longsword), or +0 ranged (1d6+3, javelin); SQ +1 attack vs. dwarves, +2 to saves against spells and spell-like effects, cold resistance 5, darkvision, light sensitivity; AL CE; SV Fort +4, Ref -1, Will +0; Str 16, Dex 11, Con 15, Int 6, Wis 10, Cha 8.

Skills: Climb +6, Listen +1, Spot +1, Wilderness Lore +2.
Feats: Weapon Focus: longsword.

Possessions: longsword, 2 javelins, scale mail, large steel shield, camping equipment.

AMULET OF THE CROW

This useful amulet consists of a crow skull attached to a leather thong. Once per month, the wearer may call down the nearest crow from the skies and whisper a message in its ear. It will go to the place that the possessor is envisioning while whispering the message and wait there for 3 days or until someone approaches it and extends his hand. When this occurs, the crow will hop to the shoulder of the person and whisper the message into his ear, then depart.

The amulet radiates faint enchantment magic.



Maps by Scott Nicely, Illustrations by Tyler Walpole, Scott Schomburg, and Mitch Cotie

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