

DRAGON WARRIORS

THE MILLER'S TALE



A Tale of Death and Vengeance
By Kieran Turley

DRAGON WARRIORS

The Miller's Tale

Written by
Kieran Turley

Editing
Ian Sturrock and Gareth Hanrahan

Layout
Jerry D. Grayson

Dragon Warriors logo
Mark Quire

Publishing
Jon Hodgson
Gareth Ryder-Hanrahan
Ian Sturrock

Art
Jon Hodgson

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Serpent King Games Ltd.
2 Cherry Tree Cottages,
Westminster Rd. Brynteg
Wrexham, Wales. LL11 6DL
info@serpentking.com

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INTRODUCTION

ABOUT THIS BOOK

The Miller's Tale

This adventure can be run at any time when the PCs are travelling by land. The scenario opens late one evening just outside the large village of Jib's Hollow (Population 1021). The location of the village is left deliberately vague so that the GM can slot the game into any region. The game runs in "freeform" format, with the PCs investigating the Miller's death over the course of a few days if necessary. This scenario is roleplay-heavy, and the PCs' actions could result in the death of more villagers, depending on how they handle the nervous sorcerer, the despairing miller's wife, and Mary Thorpe. As GM, play up the NPCs' willingness to misdirect the PCs and the petty village feuds. The main challenge in the adventure comes from the investigation, and the GM should adjust Vodenus' power level to suit his group. As written, the adventure should challenge a group of Dragon Warriors characters of 2nd to 5th rank.

Plot Summary

A month ago, a miller with "the Sight" was slain by a dark sorcerer in order to protect his secrets. The PCs are asked by the miller's ghost to track down his murderer. The PCs have to navigate a web of lies and misdirection to find the true murderer, and hopefully stop a plot that extends beyond this small village.

CHAPTER I

THE ADVENTURE BEGINS

The Beginning

The PCs approach the village of Jib's Hollow, perhaps hoping for shelter from the night's chill or a few spoonfuls of warm broth. The settlement is large for a village and on the cusp of becoming a full-blown town. It's placement on the banks of well-travelled river ensures a brisk trade. On the mud track leading to the village, the PCs behold a terrible apparition: the ghost of Martin the Miller.

The miller begs the PCs to find his killer and thereby allow his soul to rest. Martin doesn't know who killed him, nor does he recall most of his life such as his "bad feeling" about Godfrey Thorpe. He is sure of only two things; firstly that he was murdered, and secondly that his wife is in danger. These things are unconnected...Anne is in danger because of her suicidal feelings rather than because Martin's killer is out to get her. If the PCs agree to help Martin he thanks them and vanishes, only reappearing if they fail to uncover his murderer. If the PCs don't agree to help him he grows angry and vengeful, threatening to haunt them forever.

Scenario Pacing

As with any investigation scenario the PCs may run into brick walls and become discouraged. If this happens, have Vodenus kill another NPC, preferably one the PCs had a strong positive or negative reaction to.

The motive for the killing could be simple paranoia or the victim might have discovered genuine evidence, such as one of Vodenus' rings mashed into the mud beside the mill path. In the latter case, another NPC mentions that the victim was looking for the PCs just before his death and the evidence can be uncovered by searching the victim's house. If the motive was paranoia the murder is sloppy and Vodenus leaves behind something that points to his involvement, such as the aforementioned ring.

If your PCs zero in on Vodenus as the murderer early on, he stages the murder to point the finger at another NPC. In this case the framed NPC should have a strong alibi which may point to some other sordid secret unrelated to the murders. A secret or forbidden relationship might make a good alibi.

Jib's hollow NPCs

The Ghost – Martin the Miller

Martin was an upright and honest man, a rare thing since millers are traditionally the villains of village life. Martin had a touch of “the Sight” and felt something wrong with Godfrey. He gave Vodenus more too many strange looks, and Vodenus murdered him for it by drowning him in his own millpond. As far as anyone is concerned, Martin died by accidental drowning, falling into the millpond while returned home drunk. Martin is angry at his death and wants the players to find out how he died. The miller appears as a slightly bloated and transparent corpse.

The Widow – Anne Miller

Anne is devastated; she loved her husband dearly and her entire life centred on him. Anne is also overwhelmed by the mill; Martin took care of everything about their business while she dealt with their home. She has already received a number of offers of marriage from locals wanting to take over the mill (the fact that Anne is quite a beauty is an added bonus). The local tanner, Mathus Horl, has

been particularly aggressive in his advances. She is in the depths of despair, and may act on her despair unless the players intervene.

Anne tells the PCs her troubles willingly, though mentioning Martin's ghost makes her wildly upset. The PCs may meet Mathus or Horace coming down the path from the mill, immediately drawing the men's ire as they worry that the PCs are attempting to capture Anne for themselves. Anne knows that her husband had a touch of the Sight, but doesn't mention it unless asked directly if Martin was unusual in any way. If asked about the night Martin died, Anne can tell the PCs that he went into the village to have a drink with his friend Balin at the tavern, and never returned.

The Sorcerer - Godfrey Thorpe (Wine and Ale Merchant)

Godfrey Thorpe was the bastard son of one of the king's courtiers. Godfrey grew up a mean-spirited wastrel, unlikely to get far on his own merit. He was able to charm a local girl into marrying him, and took over her father's business after murdering the poor man.





Godfrey's drinking increased as time passed, and he took to wandering far and wide through the nearby woods while inebriated. The locals claim he met the devil in the woods one night a few months ago and he scared the wayward lad straight. This isn't true of course, Godfrey Thorpe doesn't exist anymore; he had the misfortune to find an ancient amulet while face-down in a stream after an evening of heavy drinking. The amulet contained a spirit trapped within – a malevolent Sorcerer called Vodenus – who took over the wastrel's body with ease.

Vodenus lived two hundred years ago in a place not far from the village. He was a cruel and brutal man who enjoyed nothing more than to inflict pain and suffering on others. Vodenus was finally slain by a young chieftain and his body cast into a river. The long years brought the amulet containing Vodenus' black soul to the foolish Godfrey Thorpe, and now, Vodenus lives again. The long years trapped in that amulet were torture for the sorcerer and he only held onto a shred of sanity by plotting vengeance on his slayer. The chieftain's family became nobility and as fate would have it control this very barony. Vodenus intends to slay every living descendant of the chieftain, and has already killed off one or two minor scions using poisoned wine.

Vodenus won't like the PCs poking their noses into the miller's death, and tries to draw suspicion onto Lugh, since he saw the shoemaker in the woods that night and suspects that the brawny foreigner saw him too. Vodenus' defining feature is his abject physical cowardice; he runs at the first hint of trouble, only attacking from ambush or if there is no other option. Vodenus' last resort is to poison Mary Thorpe with an elixir that makes her hallucinate, and then claim she is a witch while she is too debilitated to defend herself. He does this if his laboratory is exposed, or if he feels the PCs are getting too close.

The Wine Merchant's Wife - Mary Thorpe

Vodenus tries to avoid outsiders, and so, PCs visiting his shop are likely to encounter his wife Mary. Mary Thorpe is shy by nature, and terrified of her husband yet still in love with him. She tends the business and is the only reason it is still making money. Her father's contacts have allowed her to keep the business running despite Godfrey's disinterest. She's noticed her husband has become more violent and secretive over the past few months but is too scared of him to say anything. At least he seems to have quit drinking to excess, and taken more of an interest in the family business... he has even built a new storage shed and started going to fairs in towns around the country. The shed contains Vodenus' (locked) laboratory, though he claims it is Mary's if it is exposed, saying she is a witch. When the PCs first visit, Mary sports fresh bruises; she says a hanging wine pitcher fell on her head, but the truth is that she asked Vodenus one question too many about the storage shed.

The Tanner – Mathus Horl

Mathus is a fat greedy man who looks at the widow miller with envy for his wealth. Nobody in the village has a good thing to say about Mathus who is both wealthy and notoriously stingy. Mathus has an intense dislike of Horace the weaver, and makes up a story about seeing him leave the mill the night Martin was killed. He actually did see someone walking down the mill path arm in arm with Martin but he's not sure who it was since he was pretty drunk but is certain it wasn't Horace. As a tanner, Mathus smells terrible, and can be detected by scent alone from thirty paces. Despite to his stench, Mathus is always dressed in the finest clothing. Horl dislikes adventurers and is hopelessly rude to these "homeless bandits". Intimidation works well on the tanner, getting him to tell the truth. If threatened he does contact the local lords and reports the PCs as dangerous vagabonds.

The Weaver – Horace Tunbridge

Horace is another of Mary's suitors. He is a thin weasel of a man with a serious aversion to cleanliness, which he mentions frequently when talked to. "Washing is ungodly," he is fond of saying. Horace saw Lugh the Shoemaker sneak out of the village heading to the woods the night Martin died, but unless the PCs charm, bribe, or intimidate him he is unlikely to tell them. Horace may throw in some reference to Balin, saying that the "blow in" is always

looking over his shoulder as if afraid that someone is coming after him. If asked about his argument with Martin, he says it was over the sum of 5 florins that he owed to the miller. Horace was the one who discovered the body of the miller when he went to the mill to pay back the money the following morning.

The Shoemaker – Lugh of Glissom

Lugh is from Glissom (or any country in your campaign with a strong Druidic tradition), but refuses to speak of his time there. He is a powerfully built man who looks incongruous hunched over his wooden last. Lugh was out in the woods practising his pagan religion the night Martin died. A male figure stinking of wine (Vodenus) passed him in the woods but he was too busy hiding his small altar to the old gods to notice who it was. A smart PC may realise that this means that the figure could not be Mathus since he can easily be detected by scent. Getting Lugh to talk may take some diplomacy... admitting to pagan rites is not wise.

The Innkeeper – Balin of Saxton

Balin was born in the next barony, and bought the tavern a decade ago with money he received as a reward for turning in a criminal. Despite marrying a local woman (she died in childbirth three years ago) and living in the village for over ten years, he is still referred to by the locals as “that blow-in”. The tavern has a single room with six sleeping pallets upstairs that Balin rents out to travellers at a silver piece a night per person. For a few silvers extra Balin will give up his own bed. Balin is a little paranoid that the man he turned in will come after him, and has a habit of staring at people’s faces trying to figure out if he recognises them. Balin and Martin were good friends, and Balin is sympathetic to the PCs in their attempts to solve the murder.

If questioned about the night Martin died, Balin can tell the PCs that Horace, Mathus, and Godfrey were all present in the tavern that night. He notes that Lugh was not present early in the night, though he came in after Martin left for a nightcap. Horace and Martin exchanged some harsh words that night - Horace owed Martin a small sum of money and was slow in paying it back. Anne can confirm the debt but the sum is trifling and not worth murdering someone over. Balin knows that Martin went home early but cannot say when the others left. Balin also knows that Martin didn’t trust Godfrey because the young miller had warned the innkeeper not to get Godfrey angry.

Locations

Jib’s Hollow

Jib’s Hollow is very large for a settlement lacking the title of town. The village also lacks law enforcement outside of the elders and Sir Browson, the knight whose land it rests on. Sir Browson is an elderly man, infirm, and likely to die in the next year or so. The village is blessed with a rich river trade and expected to expand to become a town in the next few years. Already some of the more outspoken citizens are calling for a proper wall to be built to replace the decaying ditch and palisade that now only surrounds half the village.

The Mill

A typical example of a mill, complete with mill-pond and water wheel. Anne Miller spends much of her time here, lying on bags of flour and grieving for her lost love. The mill stands just outside of town and has a short path leading to it. The PCs may come here looking for tracks but the logs that serve as a path around it show no details.

The Tavern

The center of village life, the tavern is a small, smoke-filled place that sells ale and cider. Wine is not available; Balin and Godfrey Thorpe never got along since Godfrey was a nasty drunk and was barred until recently when he cleaned up his act. A damp loft upstairs offers six sleeping pallets.

The Wine Merchant’s Shop

This shop has a small shop front, a stable for a cart and horses, an extensive cellar for the wines, and a living area above. Most of the merchant’s business is done at fairs with orders coming in and being sent out using the cart. The business does reasonably well with almost every noble and churchman within 100 miles ordering from the shop. A newly constructed shed at the back of the premises contains Vodenus’ alchemy laboratory and his extensive notes on the family tree of the man who killed him a century ago. Those that he has already killed have been crossed out.

The Shoe Shop

The shoe shop is the only stone building in the village. Lugh the Shoemaker lives and works here with his apprentice Fredrick. The only evidence of Lugh's religion is a small charm dedicated to his goddess hung over the inside of his door. Lugh has quite the reputation as a shoemaker and requests for his work come from towns and castles for miles around.

The Tannery

The tannery is large rectangular building filled with stinking vats filled with leather in various stages of production. Mathus Horl can be found here - when he isn't pestering Anne Miller - berating his apprentices for wasting materials or for some perceived laziness.

The Weaver's House

Horace Tunbridge's house is part workshop and part home and it is hard to tell where one ends and the other begins. The weaver is fond of pigs ("Godly creatures they is") and a dozen of the creatures wander around the house and garden.

The Graveyard

Located just outside the village, this small cemetery is surrounded by a loose stone wall and boasts a newly thatched lichgate. Villagers working the nearby fields often use the lichgate as a shelter from the elements. Though the PCs are unlikely to be allowed to dig up Martin's corpse, they may take it upon themselves to do so anyway. A character with knowledge of poisons might be able to tell that Martin was given a toxin. Vodenus cast a Command spell on Martin, and while his mind was befuddled, gave him some Black Sally Root poison to drink. Once Martin was out of his mind it was a simple matter to drown him in the mill pond.

Aftermath

Once the PCs have figured out the true murderer, they will presumably bring him to justice by whatever method they choose.

Appendix: NPC and Item Statistics

Vodenus

7th Rank Sorcerer

Attack 13, Defence 8

Magical Attack 23, Magical Defence 13

Armour Factor 0

Movement 10m (20m)

Evasion 5, Stealth 15, Perception 9

Health Points 11, Magic Points 23

Strength 9

Reflexes 14

Intelligence 10

Psychic Talent 13

Looks 14

Equipment

Pouch containing 50 florins

Dagger (d4, 3)

Amulet of Soul Storing

Strong Poison (Stored in a small brandy flask)

Black Sally Root Poison (See below, also stored in a small brandy flask)

New Potion:

Black Sally Root Poison

This incapacitating Poison functions as Average Poison, except as follows. If the Strength roll is failed, the victim does not die but instead is incapacitated, unable to speak or act in a coherent manner. The victim staggers about in a nightmare-filled haze, unable to focus on anything and randomly spouting gibberish. A PC affected by this poison becomes an NPC under the control of the GM until the poison wears off 1 hour later. Black Sally Root poison must be imbibed to be effective. A seventh rank sorcerer can make this poison at a cost of 120 crowns.