

The Unicorn without a Horn



The Unicorn Without A Horn
 (Or, The Winter Wagon Ride of Death)
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 A Starting Fantasy Adventure
 Intended for beginning Adventurers

Written by the GagMen on the GagMen Adventure Writing Podcast
 Cover Art by Tyler Davis (42brushes.com)

Illustrations by Corbett Kirkley
 (Wolf from Public Domain Illustrations)
 Contact: shutup@gagmen.net

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1. Introduction

This adventure was created to work in a fantasy role-playing game, intended for use in Dungeons & Dragons Basic edition, but could also work with Labyrinth Lord, Savage Worlds, GURPS, or other adaptable fantasy role-playing games. It would be advisable to use a system with little or no skill required for the characters, as the adventure involves animal handling, survival, diplomacy, and creative problem resolution. Game systems that use skills may cause complications if the players did not pick particular skills effective to this adventure, or this could lead to one of the funniest adventures of all. The adventure is expecting that player characters will act in a heroic way and help the destitute family, and it is unlikely the adventure will happen if they do not participate in a heroic fashion.

The player characters will be outdoors and it occurs during a winter storm, so characters will have to quickly scrounge up winter gear. As with all our adventures, feel free to modify or change any parts you like or just ignore it all together. There are a gross amount of Christmas and holiday references, which may be adjusted to a more fitting symbol should you have a different cultural background or just hate Christmas.

2. On the Road, Again!?

The characters find themselves traveling along a major roadway, through the deep forest far outside of Brattleburg. Brattleburg is one of the largest cities in the country and is a prominent hub for commerce. A sudden winter storm has begun and there is a fine powder of snow on the ground and a bite of frost in the air. The party may not be wearing appropriate warm clothing to fit the season, at this point the characters should be reminded of the dangers of exposure. The road is a sludgy stiffened mud that can be difficult in parts, but is quickly getting covered in snow and freezing up.

3. A Pile of Greenbacks and Pretty Girls Always Spells Trouble

The party is about five days ride, on horseback from the city, when they come across a family of three, a mother and two little girls. The mother, Gela, is struggling to add snow skids to their cart. The cart is loaded down with lizard skins (greenbacks), that her husband had hunted over the summer. Her husband was lost in the summer hunts and this crop of skins is all that they have left to help survive the winter. Gela's oldest girl, Shala is twelve, and her youngest, Lydia (Lids for short) age five, are too small to help their mother repair the wagon. It is presumed that the characters help her attach sled runners to the wagon, but if not the family will be attacked by wolves forcing the groups hand (hopefully, the heartless jerks will help).

After saving the family they will offer their thanks and to share in the meal of fresh wolf meat stew. Gela will tell the party of the families' woes and further explain that there is a local wizard that also hunts reptile skins and has already left for the city earlier this morning. If the wizard makes it to the city and sells his skins it will drive down the price and the family will have a difficult time to make ends meet through the winter. The skins are well worth 300gp, but if the characters offer to buy them she will refuse, stating that she is willing to work for her keep and wants to spite Shemik. She will speak very coarsely about the wizard and she will die before

she lets him take anything from her family. Should the party offer to travel with the family, Gela will accept the help of the party to get her and her family to Brattleburg quickly and safely.

This will lead to a high speed wagon ride, by trying to cut corners through the woods along icy roads to catch up to, or sneak around, Shemik through various short cuts. Lids, the youngest daughter, will continually reassure the party that one of the horses pulling the wagon (the white one) is a Unicorn with magical powers that will help the wagon go faster. “He just needs to find his horn,” Lids will explain when asked.

4. Unicorn without a Horn?

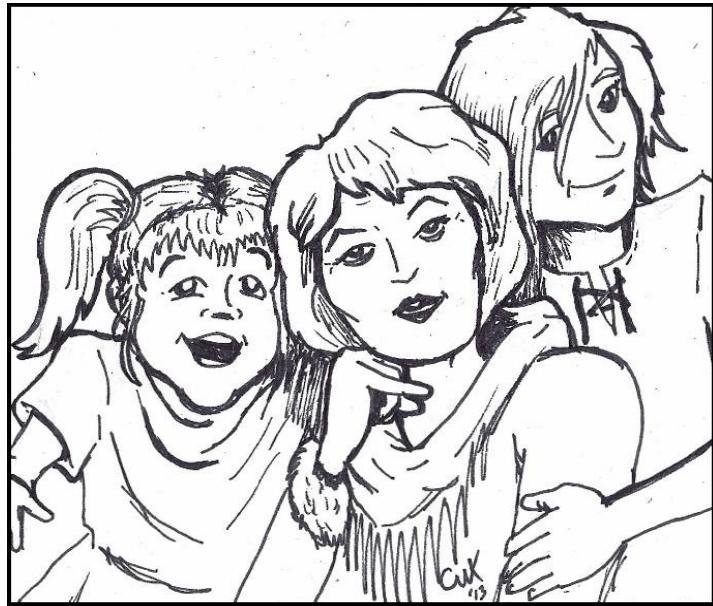
The “Unicorn” is actually a horse-thief, named Bernard, that was polymorphed by Shemik. For years Shemik and Bernard knew each other and had many dealing, but Shemik changed after he started using the unicorn staff. Eventually, Bernard hit on hard times and was forced to try and “borrow” a horse from Shemik. When he tried to leave with the wizard’s horse two years ago, Shemik cursed him to become a horse. The polymorph curse the wizard cast was used to punish the guilty and allows the transformed person to only be understood by the innocent, hence the only reason Lids can understand him.

Bernard was able to escape from Shemik while the wizard was trapping Gela’s husband in a magic box. Bernard was familiar with the hunter and went to his family’s house hoping to find a way to tell them of the terrible news. Shemik took his extra skins and headed off to the city, of course stopping along the way to taunt Gela and her children and by casting a winter enchantment over the land. With the sudden onset of winter it would be difficult for Gela to catch up, giving Shemik the lead.

Bernard is often talking to Lids, trying to explain that he needs the unicorn staff, that Shemik brandishes, but she will often get the story confused saying he is a unicorn without a horn. The characters should have a difficult time accepting her, and her older sister Shala will often put her hand over her little sister’s mouth and tell her to, “quit talking crazy!” Bernard should act and appear odd, as far as horses go.

5. The Innocent and the Infamous

Gela - in her mid-thirties, you can tell she was a very attractive woman that has had a trying life. Gela is a strong, independent woman and role-model for her children, but has become overwhelmed with the loss of her husband. She cares for her daughters and will protect them first, even before the greenbacks (their only livelihood). She is suspicious of Shemik, but has no proof of wrongdoing, and her husband (Staven) never goes near Shemiks' hunting grounds anymore.



Shala - As the oldest daughter she is the most responsible, however as a blooming young woman she may develop an innocent crush on any large strong manly characters. At other times she finds herself playing with Lids and ignoring her grown up duties. Shala is at the awkward age changing from a child into a woman, and at times she may even understand Bernard. Though she will ignore anything unusual from Bernard with the hopes of feeling more like a responsible adult.

Lydia (Lids) - As the youngest she is full of whimsy and wonder. She may often be found talking to Bernard, though innocent in nature, her mother is worried about this and will eventually may voice her concern that the loss of her father may have driven her mad.



Bernard - A former horse-thief that has learned a painful lesson that crime does not pay. He has been trapped as a slave to Shemik and has learned to hate him in every way. Bernard is driven to hunt him down and force him to change him back. When he first met Lids he tried to explain that he needs the dust of a unicorn horn, if confused her and she thinks he is a real unicorn. Bernard genuinely likes Lids but is very often frustrated by trying to relay any messages through her.

Shemik – A corrupted sage, Shemik is in his late fifties and a moderately accomplished magic-user/ alchemist. Shemik spent most of his life comfortably in his small stone tower, deep in the Thornlope Woods. The kindly old mystic came across an ancient unicorn staff in his trading in Brattleburg, and was soon overpowered by the deeply complicated magic item.

With a deeper knowledge of the arcane he found a way to drain reptiles of vital entrails, usable in various shape-changing spells, and makes his extra money by selling the skins in Brattleburg. Over the years Gelas' husband has wandered into Shemiks' hunting areas and the two have had many difficult conversations. Needless to say, Shemik found a shrinking elixir and tricked Gela's husband to take it. Once he was the size of a small toy, Shemik put him in a box and plans on selling him as a toy or slave to the highest bidder.



6. Road to Brattleburg

Large Upset Wolves



One of the first combat encounters are from the wolf pack that is stalking the family, as easy prey. They should attack in large numbers (3 - 6 depending on party size and level), but as damage is taken they should retreat. The wolves should be a constant threat, to help keep the group motivated to stay with the family and to keep them moving. Basic wolves should be in core rulebook for the system you are using. Try to use the wolves sparingly. A constant threat becomes tedious and will become very disinteresting to your players,

but it is always good to keep the players on their toes.

The Old Bridge

Gela will suggest a more dangerous path to have the party follow, in order to beat Shemik to the Brattleburg. By crossing the Atnas River and cutting through the Elgrink Woods they should save an extra day off of their journey and beat Shemik to town. However, the Atnas River is very wide and dangerous to cross, except at the old market road bridge. The road used to be traveled often until the elves in the Elgrink Woods became more aggressive to travelers.

The bridge is old wood spanning across over fifty meters, only supported by crumbling rock columns in the center of the river. The Atnas River is far from frozen, but still the bitter cold and large ice chunks do not make it hospitable. The bridge is falling apart but is not collapsing any time soon, there is a greater danger of the characters falling off from high winds, or characters falling through rotted boards large enough for a person. The Gela and her daughters will stay in the sled going over unless directed by the players to do otherwise.

As Dungeon Master it would be best to describe and emphasize the high, cold winds and the sway of the bridge with the sounds of crashing rapids below. Each character walking on the bridge should roll a six-sided die, on a roll of one that character should suffer a dexterity check to see if they will be blown over the side or fall through a rotting plank. The drop from the bridge, to the river, is ten meters which a normal fall into water would not incur falling damage, but due to the pieces of ice and bitter cold one point of damage (minimum) is unavoidable. Once they are safely across, it is into the dark and formidable Elgrink Woods.



Elves in the Woods



Upon entering the Elgrink Woods the characters should feel uneasy, like they are being watched. This is perfectly normal, since they are being watched. The Elves are watching them and planning an attack on the party. The Elgrink Elves have been leery of any one passing through the woods, since Shemik used a wish making the Elgrink Elves his willing slaves. They have been gathering supplies for him for years and dare not trust any others that should cross their path. The elves will be suspicious of any magic using characters and if they capture the party they will gag any magic user immediately.

The elves will attack at night since there are only a few available as Shemik has them constantly trapping and woodworking. The elves will quietly capture the family and each of the party members one by one. The elves will try to avoid a direct conflict or contact with characters. The elves are not as dangerous as the rumors that surround them, but they are very paranoid of outsiders and have closed almost

all ties with the outside world.

It will be difficult for the party to gain the trust of the elves, but the Dungeon Master should keep in mind the group he is dealing with and how important it will be to get the information of the elves enslavement to the players. If the party is captured then the elves may be more willing to listen. If the party captures the elves and then releases them, this may also help to gain trust between them. If the characters gain the trust of the elves they will tell them of their enslavement to Shemik and what he was like before.

Shemik was a kind alchemist that would often ask the Elgrink for assistance and gladly reciprocate. Several years ago he asked for components they did not have, he became furious and raised his staff against them. After that the elves were always compelled to do any task that Shemik ordered. The elves will further explain that Shemik uses this route to get to Brattleburg and he has already passed through just a half a day before the party arrived. Shemik took the last supply of skins and four able bodied elves to help him unload and sell his wares when he reaches town. The elves will warn the party that Shemik is a dangerous wizard and is far more dangerous than they may expect.

The Snow Golem

Realizing that he is being followed, Shemik will enchant a hat to create a snow golem to keep the characters busy so that he can escape and get a bigger lead on the group. The snow golem is a simple construct that will dissipate into powder after ten strikes against it or if the party uses fire/heat abilities against the creature.

Once the golem is defeated Lids will take the golem's hat and place it (on purpose or by accident) on Bernard. With



the magic hat on his head, Bernard will be able to speak normally with the players. Lids will be a little frustrated if no one acknowledges that she was right and that Bernard could talk. He will go on to explain the dangers that Shemik has started and disclose the cause of all the problems (the staff). The unicorn staff is the direct cause of the wizards' personality change and his sudden increase in power.

The Sleigh Fray

With the snow Golem out of the way and the group finally being able to understand Bernard they will push to catch up to Shemik. Bernard senses that they are close pushes harder, and the bonus speed from the hat helps the party catch up to Shemik. Shemik should be a short distance ahead making it simple for the party to catch up. As the party approaches Shemiks' sled, he will command the Elves riding with him to defend his sled while he focuses his efforts on the Unicorn Staff.

Hopefully, the players are now familiar with the Elgrink Elves and are aware of the forced servitude to Shemik. The characters should feel some form of sympathy for the elves and try not to fatally harm them. During the fight Bernard will continually try to force Shemiks' sled off the road by slamming into the side of the sled. Each time the sleds collide with one another any standing party members should roll a dexterity save or fall off the sled.

Bernard and Shemik will have a lively dialog going during the battle, they should be bickering like an old married couple that are now divorced. Shemik will act as spiteful as he can towards Bernard promising that he got what he deserved.

During the sled-to-sled combat the nose on the skull of the Unicorn Staff should be glowing brightly as the snow storm slowly grows into a full blown blizzard. The cold and wind will become unbearable after three rounds of combat (forty-five seconds), unless the player are protected. After six rounds (ninety seconds) of combat, all characters and NPC's should make a save vs. Death to avoid full exposure to the bitter cold (1d4 per turn). By the end of the sixth turn Bernard should successfully knock Shemik off the road and break his concentration.

Destroy the Staff

If no other character does it, Bernard will break the Unicorn Staff reverting him back to human and releasing the elves from his control. Shemik (presuming the PC's have not killed him) will bitterly remember how the staff took over his mind and promises to only help Gela and her family, vowing to remember and honor the day that he was freed from the staff by bringing gifts to Gela and her family every year on this day. He starts by giving a small box that was under the driver's seat in his sled to Lids saying, "I think this belongs to you."

The Gift of a Father

The PC's may be suspicious of the gift, not trusting recently reformed evil wizard, but Lydia will open the box without hesitation and a bit of a smile. As a box opens there is a flood of light, blinding everyone, and when it subsides Staven (Gelas' husband) stands hugging Lydia. Gela and Shala gasp and quickly join in the family hug.

Bernard will thank everyone for freeing him and promises to stay with Shemik, though he never wants to handle horses again. Shemik suggests using another animal to pull his sleigh, perhaps bears, moose, or maybe a deer. The Elgrink Elves will demand restitution from

Shemik, he will return with the elves and face his responsibilities and accept whatever punishment they see fit. Shemik will also return the stolen greenbacks that he took from Staven and wish them well and promises that he will always be welcome to hunt on the wizards land.

7. Baubles, Bangles, and Beads

Unicorn Staff

This five foot long wooden staff, bears a miniature unicorn skull on the top which the nose and eyes glow red when used. The powers of the staff would better suit the Dungeon Master to be left ambiguous. However, should any of the players decide to keep the staff and leave all the other parties cursed. The character that picks up the item can use the staff as a +2 magic weapon that can cast: Animate object (once per day), Animated Servant (once per day), Limited Wish (Once per user), Curse (once per day), Weather Control (winter affects only, must concentrate for use), Stun (once per day), Create Snowball (crystal ball made of snow) (once per day), and Enchant Item (once per month). However, anyone holding the item must make a save vs. magic every round or be taken over by the ego of the staff. The only reason Bernard is able to break the staff is because he should be wearing the Snow Golem Hat otherwise any character with a magical attack could also break the staff.

Snow Golem Hat

Shemik created this item from one of his old hats. The hat is made of a rugged worn material that hangs loosely about the head of the wearer. The hat grants the user the ability to make their normal attack to count as magic attacks, otherwise attacks do the same damage they would normally. Characters wearing the hat move at double normal speed. Any intelligent person or creature wearing the hat can be understood and can understand any other intelligent person or creature. The hat can be used to animate one snow golem every week, the golem will act as an animated servant that must be created out of fresh snow and will only live until noon (because at high noon he melts). The creatures' statistics are as follows:



Snow Golem

Appears as an eight foot tall creature, made entirely out of snow, with stone buttons/eyes and a carrot (or other natural root vegetable) as a nose, branches for arms (if area is wooded), and crowned with a floppy black wizards hat.

Armor Class: 5

Hit Dice: 4*

Move: 30' (120' on ice)

Attacks: 2 claw / 1 poke (carrot)

Damage: 1-3 / 1-3 / 1-4

No. Appearing: 1



Save As: Elf: 3

Morale: 7

Treasure Type: Nil

Alignment: Neutral (acts as servant, alignment of master)

XP value: 700

* After ten successful strikes (of any damage) the creature will no longer have enough body left to fight. Also if his hat is removed he will no longer be animated.

Dad in a Box

The personal storage box is a trap designed, by the evil mind inside Shemiks' staff, to capture a person and hold a miniature version of them in a suspended state. The person trapped in the box will not age or be damaged from movement caused by the box. The only way to restore the victim in the box is to open it by breaking the sealed paper covering it. Once the package has been opened the box will return to a simple wooden box with no magical qualities. While the box is holding a person or item, it is unaffected by all attacks that are not magical in nature and can only be opened by the original caster or gifted person of the box.