

The Unholy Greyl

(with apologies to Fritz Leiber)

By G-Man

Greyl wood is considered precious. Easy to shape, yet durable, it can be polished to an ebony sheen, and when cut lengthwise displays a variegation of muted browns and reds. Nobility especially prize the wood for furniture.

Unfortunately, Greyl grows only in a coastal forest haunted by nocturnal horrors. Surviving loggers have spoken of yellow eyes winking in the night, and men found tied to trees by their own entrails. Through trial and error, work crews have learned to harvest Greyl during the day, then retreat to fortified galleys a short distance out to sea. Whatever the creatures are who stalk and slay under the dark boughs, they apparently cannot swim.

Still, conflicts with rival expeditions, cunningly erected traps, and the occasional nest of brown adders make the already dangerous work deadly, and lumber crews are often shanghaied from nearby towns to make up for casualties.

PC's can enter this adventure in several ways. They might be among the recently shanghaied, forced to cut Greyl as virtual slaves, or more likely, hired out as mercenaries to guard the work-

crews. They might also wish to arrange an expedition to the Greyl woods themselves—even a modest harvest would make them wealthy.

If they manage to survive, of course.

Information for the GM:

The Greyl forests are guarded by vicious primates, called Wodesk in their own tongue. They see humans as a blight come to plunder their sacred territory. The Wodesk had been man-like eons ago, but have since degenerated to their present, savage state. Despite their limited minds, they still have access to ancient sorcery .

The 'default' setting for this adventure assumes PC's are working with the merchant captain Saval Krael, aboard his galley the *Black Cormorant*. Whether as guards, slaves, or concerned investors, they have traveled with Saval and his crew from a coastal town, several days south of the Greyl forests.

PC backgrounds in Barbarian, Hunter, Mariner, Scholar, Soldier, Warrior, Worker (woodcutter), and tracking skills will likely prove useful.

Stats for the Wodesk, NPC's, and animal encounters follow.

Wodesk

These creatures look like large, black-furred tarsiers, standing 4' to 5' tall, with well-developed shoulders and long forearms for brachiating. Their saucer-shaped eyes reflect light. They have sharp claws on both hands and feet to assist in climbing, as well as rending their opponents. Wodesk often carry flint knives and javelins flung with atl-atl's. Nocturnal, they are blinded in sunlight and spend the day in ancient burrows beneath the tree-roots, but venture forth at night to hunt. Wodesk are difficult to track (-2) and near-silent when they move.

Attributes

Strength 1

Agility 2

Mind -1

Combat Abilities

Attack with 2 claws +1, damage d6-2, or weapon +2, damage d3+1 (d3+2 for atl-atl)

Defense: 1

Protection: d2-1 (fur)

Lifblood: 6

Large groups of Wodesk will have a tribal shaman with Mind 0 and 1-2 ranks in sorcery and/or 1-2 ranks in priest.

Wodesk can be treated as rabble (dropping their Lifeblood to 3) after their initial encounter with the PC's, especially when attacking in large numbers.

Brown Adders

2'-3' long vipers with a reticulated brown and black pattern down their backs. They are aggressive if feeling threatened (which is often). PC's struck make an initial hard (-2) strength roll to avoid 1d3 damage and paralyzing muscle spasms. If failed, PC's must make an additional tricky (-1) roll to avoid 1d6 damage the following round and a -2 penalty to agility. The penalty goes away after the damage from the venom is healed.

Attributes

Strength -2
Agility 3
Mind -4

Combat Abilities

Attack with 1 bite +3, damage d2+poison
Defense: 3
Protection: 0
Lifeblood: 2

Typical Woodsman

Rough and tumble Greyl loggers, these men also form the crew of the *Black Cormorant*. One in four has the career Mariner 1 and Worker 0. They are classed as rabble.

Attributes

Strength 1
Agility 0
Mind 0
Appeal -1

Combat Abilities

Brawl 1
Melee 0
Missile 0
Defense 0

Career

Worker 1

Lifblood: 3

Protection: 1d3-1 (very light leather or furs)

Weapons: Axe, 1d6+1, dagger d3. Woodsmen assigned to 'guard duty' will also carry bows (d6 damage)

Saval Krael

The nominal leader of the lumber expedition, Saval cuts a tall, handsome figure, though his appearance is marred by his missing right eye, lost to a Wodesk's atl-atl on his first expedition to the Greyl woodlands. In genteel company, Saval keeps his injury under a velvet patch, but among his men he leaves it uncovered.

Saval tries to solve morale problems among the crew by keeping the men roaring drunk at night. He is an iron-hard disciplinarian and totally committed to returning a profit for his investors.

At any given time Saval keeps his loyal bodyguards Jens and Mars Markel close at hand (see **Bodyguards**). He is classed as an NPC, and therefore has 8 LB plus his strength.

Abilities

Strength 1

Agility 0

Mind 1

Appeal 1

Combat Abilities

Brawl 0

Melee 1

Missile -1

Defense 2

Careers

Merchant 1

Mariner 1

Mercenary 0

Lifblood: 9

Protection: d6-2 (light armor)

Weapons: Rapier, d6+1

Bodyguards

These two scarred, stern-faced men hover near Saval whenever he leaves his stateroom aboard the logging galley. Neither drink. They are responsible for dealing out punishment among the crew and are therefore strongly disliked.

Jens and Mars Markel are both classed as NPC's.

Attributes

Strength 2

Agility 1 (0)

Mind 0

Appeal -1

Combat Abilities

Brawl 1

Melee 1

Missile 1

Defense 0

Careers

Mercenary 1

Hunter 1

Lifeblood: 10

Protection: d6-1 (medium armor)

Weapons: Cat o'nine tails, d6+1, and mace, d6+2 (Jens), greatsword, d6+4 (Mars Markel). Both also carry large knives (d6) and crossbows (d6+1).

The *Black Cormorant*

This is a single-masted galley with a single row of oars. Large shields line the gunwales. Saval sleeps in the only stateroom. Everyone else beds down in the hold or on deck. There are enough longboats to carry all the crew and haul lumber.

As none of the men are particularly skilled at sailing, the galley never strays far from the coastline.

Running the Adventure

What follows is a loose outline for the course of events, culminating in a pitched, desperate battle with the Wodesk. PC's will likely come up with unexpected detours, especially if magic and hero points are involved. Remember, BoL rules make running off-the-cuff situations easy. The main focus should be on generating tension and a sense of eldritch dread.

GM's can use the Daily Complications table below to flesh out encounters.

Daily Complications (choose or roll d6)

- 1) Mundane danger (falling tree, falling limbs, axe slips, etc)
- 2) Workers disturb nest of d3 brown adders
- 3) Concealed Wodesk trap (d6: 1-2 deadfall, 3-4 covered pit with punji stakes, 5-6 log-roll trap. These typically do d6+2 damage, but can be avoided by a tricky Agility roll. Spotting a trap is a tricky to hard Mind roll, with ranks in Hunter, Thief, and Barbarian added).
- 4) Brawl among workers
- 5) Attempted escape by worker
- 6) Tools/equipment damaged

Day One:

The fortified galley *Black Cormorant* weighs anchor a comfortable distance from shore. Even in early morning the Greyl woods looks formidable; dense, almost primeval forest with a thick canopy that cuts light and muffles sound. Very few birds can be heard .

Longboats are dispatched and workers set up a hasty camp in a nearby clearing. The men waste little time getting to work, felling the dark trees as if their lives depend on it—which it does. Dressed timber is ferried back to the ship and secured in the hold.

Roll or pick from among Daily Complications to round out the morning. In the afternoon, workers fell a rotting tree and expose a hole just below the roots. The opening is big enough for a man to wriggle down and leads to a Wodesk burrow. Any PC's who brave the hole (NPC's sure as hell won't) will eventually come to a large earthen chamber, reeking of musk. Countless bones litter the floor. After a few moments, soft voices begin to echo, and dozens of wide yellow eyes stare from the blackness. This is a cue to leave—fighting hordes of Wodesk in the cramped, dark conditions is suicide. Saval has the opening collapsed after any PC's get out.

At dusk, workers board the longboats and row back to the safety of the *Cormorant*. Saval orders his men to drink copious amounts of wine and encourages dice games before they fall into exhausted sleep.

Any PC's foolish enough to stay ashore at night are attacked by swarms of Wodesk (assume 5x the number of PC's present). Similarly, any boats approaching within 30' of land after nightfall will be showered with atl-atl fire.

Day Two:

Again, roll or pick an event from Daily Complications. As the nearby copse of Greyl is petering out, Saval organizes three scouting groups to search for a good place to set up a second day camp. PC's can volunteer (or are bluntly asked) to go along. Come dusk, one of the groups fails to return (unless PC's have split their number among all three, in which case several members of one group won't make it back—but the PC's will). No one knows what happened to the missing men, and no one offers to wait. Eyeing the tree line, the crews hurry back to the *Cormorant*.

Saval orders full rations of un-watered wine to calm the men. Around 3 A.M., a chill wind picks up and ruffles the ship's sail. The wind also carries the sound of strange chanting, ululations, and minutes later, the unmistakable screams of several human beings. Both the noises and the wind cease abruptly.

Day Three:

Saval doubles the number of men on guard duty, slowing down work, but managing to placate fears. Again, roll or choose an event from Daily Complications. Mid-afternoon, shouts echo as one of the crews (or the PC's) find a 6' dolmen of black basalt, etched with runes and pictoglyphs. Three more dolmens are arrayed nearby, forming a diamond-box pattern. At the center lies the stump of a once-mighty tree, stained with recent blood. Examination shows that someone, possibly several people, have been 'staked' in a spread-eagle pattern to the stump with large pieces of sharp flint, though the bodies are no longer there.

The runes are written in an obscure Elder Tongue (hard Mind roll to determine which one, modified by ranks in Scholar). If somehow deciphered, they reveal a number of entreaties to a being called 'Athaqu'aal of the Frozen Winds.'

Minutes after the dolmens are discovered, a huge brown bear missing both eyes blunders into the area, howling. Though blinded, it approaches nearby humans with unsettling accuracy and attacks in a berserk rage.

Brown Bear

This creature has been ritually mutilated and released by the Wodesk as a daytime sentry. It relies on supernatural senses to track prey.

Attributes

Strength 5

Agility -1

Mind -2

Combat Abilities

Maul with claws and teeth +1, damage d6+2

Defense: 0

Protection: d3-1 (tough hide)

Lifeblood: 25

After the bear attack, Saval orders the work crews to return to the ship, taking with them any harvested lumber. On board, the situation is near-mutinous. Most of the crew wants to leave. Saval argues for another day's work, to at least half-fill the ship's hold. With the sun going down soon, it's too late to set off now. Saval agrees to take a vote in the morning and abide by the crew's decision.

Just after sundown a sonorous chant echoes across the water from the forest. The chanting becomes louder as the night wears on. Shortly after midnight, the Wodesk's head shaman completes a powerful spell and summons an icy squall. The wind strikes without warning, ripping the mast from the *Black Cormorant* and hurling her ashore. As the storm continues to rage, the darkness surrounding the beached ship lights with hundreds of pairs of yellow eyes .

The Wodesk now attack en masse. Assume a total number of 400 (considered rabble at this point), against the *Black Cormorant's* crew of 40. It's easiest to have the PC's fight 'waves' of 10 Wodesk each, and interpret the larger battle based on how well they're doing. Any smart and/or creative tactical decisions (such as holing up inside the *Cormorant's* hull and letting the Wodesk come to them, or using ship's stores of cooking oil to start defensive fires, etc.), as well as a liberal expenditure of hero points should sway events in the party's favor. The Wodesk will retreat after taking large casualties.

Saval fights bravely (and probably dies, without the PC's intervention), while Jens and Mars Markel opt for the better part of valor, abandoning their patron. Neither makes it far.

Conclusion

By morning the storm is over. The *Cormorant* lies ruined, its hull breached and keel smashed. Most of the crewre lay dead among the black-furred bodies. Savvy PC's will realize they cannot survive another night. The easiest way to escape is to use the remaining longboats—some have been smashed, but there are a couple serviceable craft left (perhaps requiring hasty repairs). By using the boats, PC's can make good travel time and keep any vengeful Wodesk safely at bay. They can also transport some of the Greyl harvest back with them.

Of course, some PC's might want to take the fight directly to the weakened tribe, perhaps digging open the entrance to their burrows and mounting a daytime assault . . . good luck with that.

PC's examining Wodesk bodies in the daylight will notice some of them are wearing crude torcs and bracers of hammered gold. The creatures must have access to a vein! The adventure ends with yet another siren's call to these dark, accursed forests.

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