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Avalon Adventures

Shade of the Never Wood

By

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A horror game of unknown Danger for adventuring parties levels 5-7

Adventure Synopsis

A wicked and mad Vampire for uncounted years has been abducting and turning the children from the villages her extraplanar haunted forest, the Never Wood, has landed in. She has done this slowly and with such stealth that instead of widespread panic; it has inspired only a few local fairy or cautionary tales and at least one annual festival to ward off evil spirits.

Something went wrong with a recent collection of her design in a foreign land to the east…and a slowly turning child has been lost in the world. Now, that child is in the wilderness village o Ladybug's Rest; on the festival of Shutter Night, when children are coddled and families cherished before homes are locked up tight for the night, for fear that if the mist comes from the forest this night then there will be one less child waiting in bed come morning.

It has been years since such abductions have actually happened, but seeking her wayward spawn the Vampire master of the Never Wood will bring her fell grove again upon the village of Ladybug's Rest. Unfortunately for her, or for your daring player characters, there is an adventure afoot. Leading them into the confusing, eerie, and dangerous forest of the Never Wood; into the eternally mist shrouded lair of a powerful vampire who appears to be a kindly old woman; and the terrible grandchildren that are in truth her vampire spawn.

On Running a Horror Adventure

The aspects of what makes a horror game or even a horror themed session of more action or role playing oriented game are subjective to the individuals involved, the situations they regularly face, and the ability of the game master to establish atmosphere. It is more likely than not your players have already faced snarling Orcs, cunning bandits, savage beasts, and maybe one or two fiends from down below of your preferred alignment variety. Player characters are, by their nature, hard to legitimately scare. Certainly you can wrap them up in fear effects that limit their abilities or prompt them to flee, but this doesn't reflect how they choose to play their character; it does not affect them at the table.

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It is important to remember that they need to have an investment in the situation, and to be aware of what the players fear about the game or for their character. Adventurers are powerful, more so than Joe the Farmer or Steve the Cooper from yonder town by the hillside. Play to their emotions, present choices whose outcomes may not directly affect the character but are difficult for the character to make and still be un-phased as per his or her personal morals (this is not an invitation to present an "impossible choice" scenario to a paladin).

You as the Game Master may do everything right, unless your players are willing to play ball and be scared then a horror scenario may as well just be "Oh, a ghost. Hey Father Roberts; bring over your holy symbol and make with the shiny." And with that, the fantastical becomes routine.

Beginning the Adventure

Either on their way to a dungeon or already standing plot point for an adventure already accomplished or looming around the bend far off in the Wilderness, your players come upon the village of Ladybug's Rest in the early morning just at the start of the festival known as Shutter Night.

Ladybug's Rest

This village, fortified by wall and rampart, is in a state of curious festivity, by the loud sound of music you first heard a mile out. As you are waved through the gate with little more than a quick once over by the patchwork uniformed guard at the wall, he offers that you get a room quickly at one of the inns, as rooms may be scarce if not gone by afternoon. His disposition seems cheerful as he takes back to his post once you are through.

The celebration seems almost immediately to be centered upon the children of the village, but not leaving the adults out of the fun, feast, or merriment. People are in good cheer, though the largest crowd is gathered by a stage in the center of town, where a man speaks as someone in a gruesome crone's mask lurches across the stage behind him as smoke is poured about by bellows. There are numerous stalls selling food, drink, and trinkets.

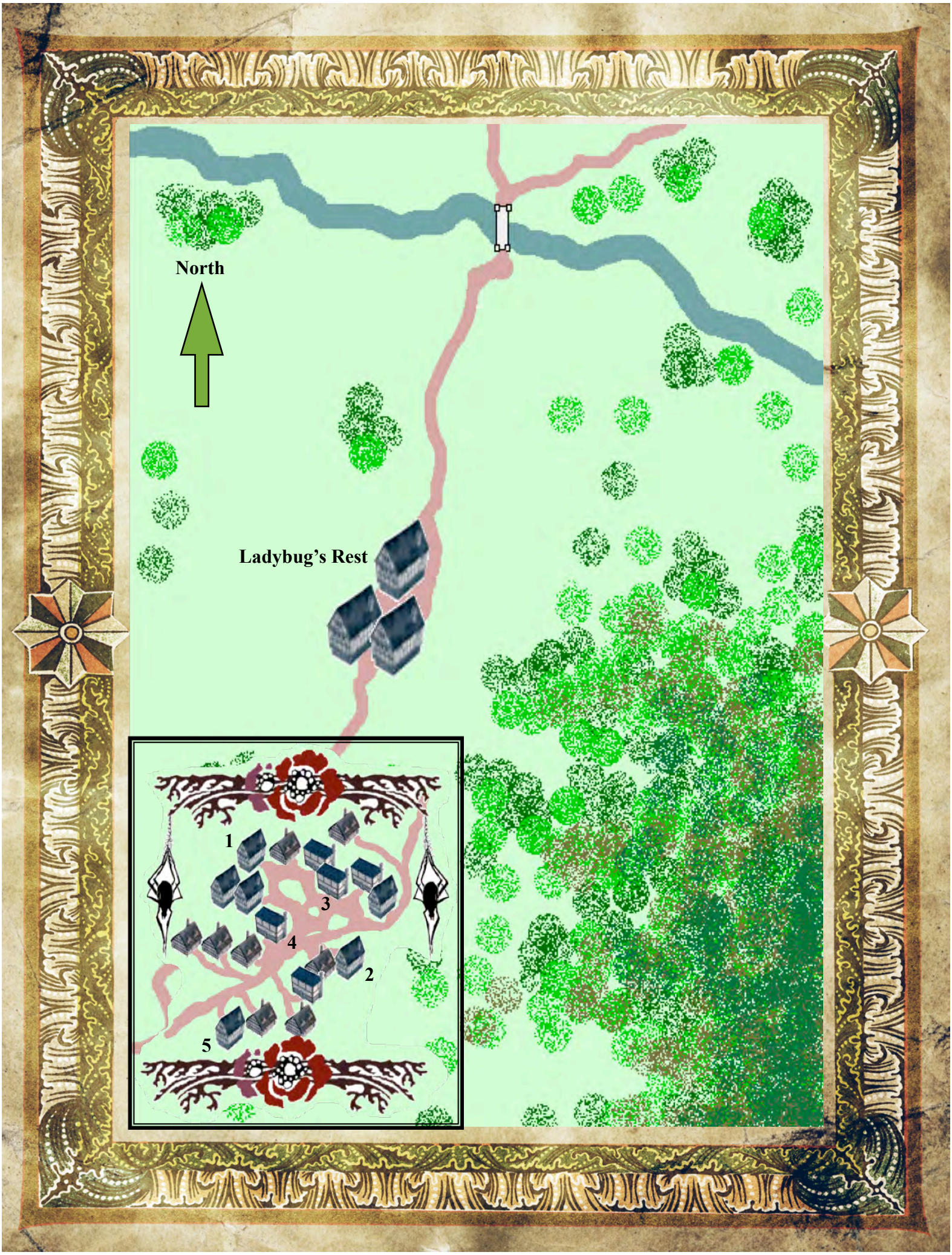
Ladybug's Rest is a small village on the edge of the eastern wilderness and is the hub for many farming villages without a direct affiliation to any regional kingdoms. It sits alongside the expansive Well Woods. It is a moderately sized village; fortified against bandit attacks with a stone wall and strong, if patchwork, local architecture. It boasts a sizable population of 658, only when including a few of the more reclusive folk and farmers immediately adjacent to and beyond the wall.

The town boasts a robust farmers market, a (small) standing militia, a skilled smith, an apothecary, a number of mundane craftsmen, and assorted farmers of fields and livestock alike. There are two traveler's inns in town, and the lodge house which serves as a main hall for the village. The inns are *Well's Waterhole* and *Traveler's Mercy*.

The main drag of the village is bustling and full for the festival of Shutter Night. Puppet shows are being performed; stalls have been set up to sell sweats and drinks for children and parents alike, and there is an atmosphere of greater peace and tranquility than one might normally find in a village so close to the boarders of civilization with brightly colored thin canvas banners hanging over the streets filtering the light above to whimsical colors.

If inquired about, the party easily learns about the festival, and can get a quick rundown of an old superstition "This festival is held every year to ward off evil; for there is an old fairy tale of children disappearing on this night or following days when the round moon is high and the mist falling over the hills and wood is so thick that you could forget the color of the sun."

The festival is revealed to last the whole of the day with games and entertainment for all until the first inkling orange in the sky heralds the arrival of sundown. Friends part ways; stalls pack in, and performances end. By sundown the village will become silent with each window shuttered tight.


North
Ladybug's Rest
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2
3
4
5