

# LOST VILLAGE OF JANUS GULL

BY GLENN MCDONALD

*illustration by Ryan Barger*



**I**N THE WANING DAYS OF THE PURGE—an attempt by the Church of the Silver Flame to eradicate all lycanthropes from the face of Eberron—Aundairian paladin Cormac Mael was dispatched to the Eldeen Reaches to lead a retinue of hunters. In the year 880 YK, just before being recalled to Aundair, Cormac and his band took shelter in the fishing village of Janus Gull on the northern shores of Lake Galifar.

To his surprise, the zealously ascetic paladin met and instantly fell in love with a local villager, Esme, the teenaged daughter of the town's sole smith. Cormac found that, despite his allegiance to the Church, he was dangerously fixated on her. Making matters worse, Esme spurned Cormac's advances, as she counted many shifters among her friends and found the Church's genocidal campaign against lycanthropes to be abhorrent. When Cormac attempted to force himself on her, the town rallied to her defense—driving the paladin from town and into the surrounding forest.

Cormac, mad with obsession and grief, fell from grace, embracing evil and vowing that if he could not have Esme, no one would. He sought the counsel of a local “water witch,” the demented cleric Sidheag (SHEE-ak) Ros. Sidheag, a fanatic who had long harbored a hatred for Janus Gull, believed that the fishing village was defiling the natural order of “her” lake. The fallen paladin, further seduced down the path of darkness by the mad water witch, resolved to destroy the entire village of Janus Gull. Under a harvest moon, on a windswept bluff overlooking the village, Cormac and Sidheag performed a blasphemous ritual.

By morning, the entire village had been swept away by fire and flood, lightning and rain. An elemental storm of unprecedented proportions blew in from the lake, laying waste to the village in a single night. Where Janus Gull once stood, nothing remained. No ruins, no survivors. It was as if the village had been pulled entire into the watery depths of the lake.

Cormac and Sidheag’s wicked amalgamation of divine magic created a reality storm of such power that Janus Gull was ripped from the world. As the storm reached its peak just before dawn, Janus Gull splintered off as a demiplane.

Janus Gull now exists in a temporal and spatial loop, its inhabitants reliving the same night over and over again. During the time the demiplane has existed, other beings have stumbled in from various other planes, times and worlds. Every year on 23 Sypheros on the anniversary of the great storm, the village manifests again in its proper place in the world on the shore of Lake Galifar for a single night.

The demiplane of Janus Gull, now a semisentient entity, has only one hope for final peace and rest. Heroes must enter the village of their own volition, during its brief coterminous phase with Eberron proper. There they must survive the storm and confront the fallen paladin and the water witch. If the ritual can be disrupted before dawn, Janus Gull will collapse in upon itself, releasing its inhabitants.

## GETTING THE PCs INVOLVED

PCs in the vicinity of Janus Gull’s former location—the eastern, agrarian region of the Eldeen Reaches—may stumble onto the story of Janus Gull any number of ways. Many older residents of the nearby town of Cree tell the tale of a ghost village that appears once a year on the rocky shores of the lake. Many local folk with experience with forestcraft (rangers, woodcutters, herbalists) or fisherfolk can direct PCs to the general location of the village.

The site of the former village is a shallow, rocky lagoon on the shore of Lake Galifar. Regardless of the local weather, some form of precipitation falls in this area beginning every sundown. At sundown of 23 Sypheros, the village of Janus Gull reappears, replacing the lagoon, until sunrise the next day.

PCs can only enter Janus Gull on the night of 23 Sypheros. Whether they scout out the location and wait, or simply happen to be in the right place at the wrong time, the PCs encounter the ghost of Esme. Trapped in the tragedy of Janus Gull for more than a century, Esme wanders the nearby roads of the Reaches once every year on 23 Sypheros. She hopes to lure heroes back to the village. Esme knows that the village can only be saved if the heroes confront and defeat Cormac and Sidheag.

DMs can choose to reveal the backstory upfront or let it unfold as the PCs explore the village. For instance, patrons of the PCs or NPCs that the PCs often lean on for information can disclose much of the story, suggesting that the PCs must enter the village and confront Cormac and Sidheag to and lift the curse. Alternatively, DMs may have the PCs work out the situation on their own after crossing the boundaries of the demiplane and getting trapped in Janus Gull. Within Janus Gull, Syn-Tallow, Brother Iannis, Taffy, Keener, and the ghost of Esme can all fill in some or all of the tale, and communicate the goal of the adventure.

## RESIDENTS OF JANUS GULL

**Villagers:** Most residents of Janus Gull are villagers that survived the night of the great storm and exist as they were previous to the splintering off of the village into a demiplane. However, due to the temporal loop of Janus Gull, they neither age nor have any awareness that they are living the same night over and over. When forced to interact with others, or prevented from performing their repeated actions, they turn hostile and aggressive or simply become catatonic. They dimly perceive the PCs as being “outside” of their reality. In fact, the former villagers are gradually surrendering their individual identities to the demiplane itself (see Esme/Janus Gull, below.) While villagers can be killed, they can never permanently die. They resume their place in the order of things, reappearing upon a new iteration of Janus Gull’s endlessly looping night.

Some exceptional villagers (and ghosts—see below) have intuited the truth and become aware of their situation. These individuals have varying degrees of lucidity and free will. Some know the nature of the temporal loop but are unable to break out of their repeated actions. Some have achieved limited free will to roam the village looking for an escape. The DM can choose to populate Janus Gull however he or she sees fit to create opponents or allies appropriate to the level of the party.

**Ghosts:** The ghosts that haunt Janus Gull are those unfortunate souls who were killed during the storm, but whose souls did not escape before the demiplane was created. Ghosts encountered in the village function as outlined in *Monster Manual*. Phantom warriors (MM 116) linger in the areas where they died and may attack the PCs in the belief that they are outsiders who were responsible for bringing the disaster to the village. Trap haunts (MM 116) attempt to possess PCs in order to escape their fate. Some

ghosts in Janus Gull are helpful. They hope that by aiding the PCs that the village can be liberated and their souls be freed to move on.

**Visitors:** Visitors to Janus Gull are entities and creatures that have wandered into the lost village as it briefly touches and becomes coterminous with other planes and worlds. Some visitors are described in the Encounters section below, and the DM should feel free to populate Janus Gull with other planar hitchhikers. Denizens of any plane in the Eberron cosmology could potentially be found in Janus Gull.

**Esme/Janus Gull:** In the years that the lost village has been wandering as a demiplane, the demiplane has achieved a primitive sentience built from the collective consciousness of its inhabitants. When the entity that is Janus Gull wishes to communicate with visitors, it speaks through the ghost of Esme, the young maiden whose story is at the heart of the Janus Gull tragedy. (In fact, all natives of Janus Gull—living and dead—are gradually surrendering their individual identities to the collective personality of the demiplane.)

When manifesting as Esme, the demiplane is lost in despair and nearly incoherent, desperate to know why the storm is endlessly destroying the village. (“Why does it keep raining? Why won’t it stop?”) In her fear, she is also prone to tantrums and may attack the PCs (“You did this! You killed my family!”) While it is hostile to the PCs, the Esme personality is a tormenting ghost (MM 117).

PCs will likely encounter Esme several times in the village. While the Esme personality is unstable, the collective consciousness of Janus Gull knows the circumstances of the village’s curse. In her moments of lucidity, Esme provides the PCs with hints that they must confront the paladin and the water witch to escape the doomed demiplane. Having only recently come into self-awareness, the demiplane is inexperienced in communicating with other beings, and Janus Gull may also choose to communicate with the PCs by other means than Esme.

## ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS

The demiplane of Janus Gull is a replica of the actual village just before it splintered from the natural world. It exists as both a temporal and spatial loop. The same 12 hours, from dusk to dawn of the night of the storm, are replayed endlessly. If the PCs survive a full night within the demiplane without confronting Cormac and Sidheag and resolving the adventure, reality fades to a bright white for several seconds at daybreak and then instantly resets itself to dusk. The village is reformed as it was before the storm. When this reset occurs, the PCs are affected as if they had just taken an extended rest, regaining all action points, healing surges, hit points, and powers.

Spatially, the demiplane is self-contained and recursive—it has wrapped edges, so that beings walking through the fog on the east end of the village find themselves entering the village again from the west.

It is constantly raining in Janus Gull, and as the night progresses, the storm increasingly worsens. DMs should use their discretion as to the effects of weather-related magic and powers. Any magic—especially any ritual—that affects weather conditions in general, regardless of type or level, is prevented from working in Janus Gull. It is an unalterable fact of existence on the demiplane that the storm rages continuously and exactly as it did on the night the village was lost. (However, it is possible that a gust of wind might be created or a specific bolt of lightning invoked.) In Janus Gull, reality always reforms to replicate the events of the night of 23 Sypheros.

The storm conditions of Janus Gull create special challenges. DMs can use the guidelines for weather-related encounters in the *Dungeon Master’s Guide* (page 158) to create various terrain obstacles and hazards or unique skill challenges. The PCs should be contending with extremely adverse environmental conditions while in Janus Gull, including flash floods, mudslides, flying debris, and lightning strikes.

As the eternally repeating night progresses, more of the village is washed away in floods or consumed by fire from magical lightning strikes. In hour before daybreak, there is almost no shelter to be found.

## ENCOUNTERS

Following are potential encounters for the PCs. Specifics are deliberately open-ended. DMs should adjust levels and encounters to make them appropriate to the level of the party.

### SYN-TALLOW AND BROTHER IANNIS

Syn-Tallow (unaligned tiefling rogue) and Brother Iannis (unaligned human cleric) are two planar refugees that have taken shelter in the floating demiplane. They live together in the wine cellars beneath the former town hall. A true odd couple, theirs is a partnership of convenience. Syn-Tallow is a fugitive, fleeing an authority he chooses not to name. Whatever the circumstance, he is frightened enough to have holed up in Janus Gull for more than a decade, eluding enemies that otherwise would be chasing him across the planes. Charismatic and charming, Syn-Tallow is elusive and vague to an extreme about his past.

Even less is known about the background of Brother Iannis, an ascetic cleric who has spent years silently meditating beneath the surface of the village. Iannis deliberately sought out the demiplane, and he is attempting to forge a spiritual bond with the emerging sentience of Janus Gull. Iannis does not speak, but instead communicates with Syn-Tallow in a complex system of chants and body language. Iannis uses his psychic bond with the demiplane to keep Syn-Tallow concealed from planar pursuers while the tiefling physically guards their wine cellar abode from interlopers. Iannis is fully aware of the nature of the curse on Janus Gull, and he has no wish to see the plane liberated. It’s possible that he might side with Cormac and Sidheag if the PCs attempt to break the curse.

## GITHYANKI RAIDERS

This small githyanki raiding party literally stumbled into Janus Gull during a foray on the Astral Plane. Unable as of yet to figure a way out of the village's planar boundaries, the githyanki have endured Janus Gull's perpetual storm for many years. They are extremely frustrated, hostile, and wet. They have excavated a system of trenches, caves, and tunnels beneath the village square.

## KEENER, WARFORGED BANSHEE

Keener, a ranger, was Janus Gull's sole warforged resident at the time of the catastrophe. Keener was killed by a savage lightning strike at the height of the storm. Now he wanders the demiplane as a wailing ghost (MM 117) haunting the village with his plaintive, eerie, and slightly mechanical wail. Keener is not necessarily hostile to the PCs, but attacks if provoked.

## FERAL SHIFTERS

A group of feral shifters roams the fens and marshes on the outskirts of Janus Gull. The shifters were originally a diplomatic contingent from the Eldeen interior. They were caught in the destruction of 23 Sypheros and have since descended into madness and savagery, attacking anything on sight.

## TALLY'S BUNKER

Previous to the night of 23 Sypheros, Taffy Yoram was a feeble-minded old half-elf who subsisted on the villagers' charity and tolerance. Perhaps because of his mental state, Taffy has retained a measure of free will relative to the fate of Janus Gull's other permanent residents. Taffy keeps a well-maintained bunker within an abandoned stone grain silo: one of the few structures to withstand the nightly storm. Taffy may offer the PCs shelter and information about the rest of the village, though his counsel is cryptic and hard to decipher.

## ANGELS AND DEVILS

On the same evening that the PCs enter Janus Gull, two groups of bounty hunters—one composed of angels, and other of devils—also make their way to the demiplane via the shores of Lake Galifar. These teams have been tasked with hunting down the tefling rogue Syn-Tallow, whose luck has finally run out. DMs should feel free to use angel and devils of any appropriate level or swap in any two groups instead of angels and devils whose interests are typically opposed. Depending on whose story they believe, the PCs could find themselves allied with either side in this conflict—or caught in the middle of it—and the mystery of Syn-Tallow's fugitive status could spark yet another adventure.

## THE FINAL CONFRONTATION

The curse of Janus Gull is such that the demiplane is forced to wander the universe unless heroes can defeat the two prime architects of its fate. Sidheag, once a cleric but now a bog hag, and the fallen paladin Cormac can be found on the bluffs overlooking the village of Janus Gull, where they endlessly conduct their vile ritual during the night of 23 Sypheros.

Unlike the other residents of Janus Gull, these two villains can be permanently defeated in combat. In fact, their defeat is the key to resolving the fate of the lost village and breaking the time loop that the village is entangled in. The PCs must disrupt the ritual before its completion to save the lost village and earn their own escape from the wandering demiplane.

When encountered, Sidheag and Cormac are tending to their ritual on the bluffs. Scattered around the clearing are defiled Silver Flame symbols and strange, animalist icons. The showdown with the villains should coincide with the peak of the storm's fury.

Sidheag the bog hag (*Monster Manual* 150) is a wild and ferocious presence who believes she is the very

wrath of nature. She is has several water creatures and elementals under her command. Sidheag is quite mad and utterly without compassion for the civilized races. She is robed in a hideous patchwork of pelts, scales, shells, skins, and seaweed.

Cormac (evil human paladin) is both a tragic and frightening figure. Lost in despair and rage, he is maniacally focused on the destruction of Janus Gull. He attacks with savage abandon any who would stand in the way of his mad quest. He still wears the garments and armor, now filthy and soiled, of his former paladin order.

## RESOLVING THE ADVENTURE

When the PCs defeat Cormac and Sidheag, the curse is broken and the village of Janus Gull returns to the world in its previous place. Ghosts trapped within the demiplane are released to continue on the afterworld where their destinies await. The living residents of Janus Gull—returned to the natural timestream—begin aging normally.

The sentient aspect of Janus Gull, after depositing its various residents back into Eberron, may choose to continue its wanderings throughout the universe. The demiplane feels a certain gratitude to the PCs. The PCs find they have a powerful ally for future adventures—a sentient planar village that, when contacted, can offer refuge and transport between planes or other worlds. 🌀

### About the Author

**Glenn McDonald** is a freelance writer and game designer. He has been writing EBERRON® content for the D&D® website and print for some time now, as well as writing as a freelancer for numerous other professional publications of all sorts.