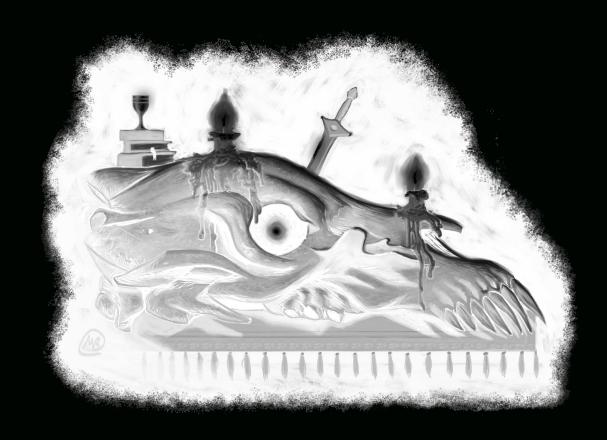
# Death in the Spindlewood Marsh



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# Death in the Spindlewood Marsh

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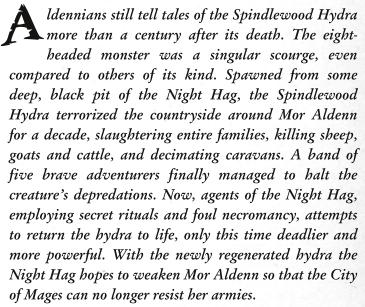
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DEATH IN THE SPINDLEWOOD MARSH is a *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game* mini-adventure designed for four 7th to 8th level characters. The adventure occurs in the great marsh just outside Mor Aldenn known as the Spindlewood Marsh. However, the adventure can take place in any area where swampland and forest meet.

## Adventure Background

The Spindlewood Hydra's death was a serious blow to the Night Hag. She has dreamed of recruiting another such creature. Recently, a green hag named Zanthike concocted a ritual to do just that. With the aid of her coven Zanthike restored the headless beast to life as well as imbuing it with the foul contagions of the Spindlewood Marsh. Only the hydra's lack of heads prevents it from attacking Mor Aldenn. The thing waits in the marsh while Zanthike attempts to discover a ritual that will restore it completely.



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## **Adventure Summary**

The PCs journey to the area where the Night Hag's hydra was killed. After some searching in the swamp, the PCs encounter powerful skeletons, born from the dead hydra's teeth. They then locate a copse of trees overlooking a large depression in the earth – the very spot they seek. Zanthike and her barghest lover attack the party before they can proceed. After defeating the hag and her defender, the hydra bursts from the muck and the PCs must battle and destroy it before the Night Hag can send it against Mor Aldenn.

## Expanding the Adventure

This short adventure can be turned into a longer session by adding some investigation before the PCs enter the Spindlewood Marsh. Zanthike can only fully restore the hydra if she possesses bones (skull, jaws) taken as trophies when the hydra was slain. These bones sit in vaults or above fireplace mantles around Mor Aldenn (see the Spindlewatch Inn).

Agents of the Night Hag set out to steal the bones, but in the process murder their owners. The PCs can be become involved when a friend is killed and their investigation leads them to conclude someone is collecting the dead hydra's body parts.

## Starting the Adventure

There are several ways to begin the adventure. The first could be simple treasure hunting. A hydra's bones, teeth and scales are often used in weapons, armor, wondrous items and alchemical solutions. These body parts could be sold for a nice profit. The deathgrounds of hydras are also known to aid in the performance of certain rituals. Finally, the PCs might receive word through spies, rumors or simply viewing the tapestry at the Headless Hydra Inn that the Night Hag hopes to return the hydra to life, an event which must not be allowed to occur.

A second, more involved way is to have the Night Hag dispatch agents to collect the parts of the hydra now held as trophies in Mor Aldenn. A set of jaws from the hydra sit mounted above the fireplace mantle in the Spindlewatch Inn. Teeth and scales rest in the homes of collectors and descendants of the original band that killed the monster.

## Scaling this Adventure

Death in the Spindlewood Marsh is meant to challenge PCs of 7th to 8th level. For more powerful parties or those of lower level or fewer than four characters make the following adjustments:

#### FOR 5TH- OR 6TH-LEVEL CHARACTERS:

- Change the skeletons to human skeletons
- Remove Zanthike's witch levels and make her lover a barghest instead of a greater barghest
- Reduce the hydra's Hit Dice to 5 and give it only 5 slam attacks instead of eight. Also, reduce by 4 the Fort save DC of its disease ability.

#### FOR 9TH- OR 10TH-LEVEL CHARACTERS:

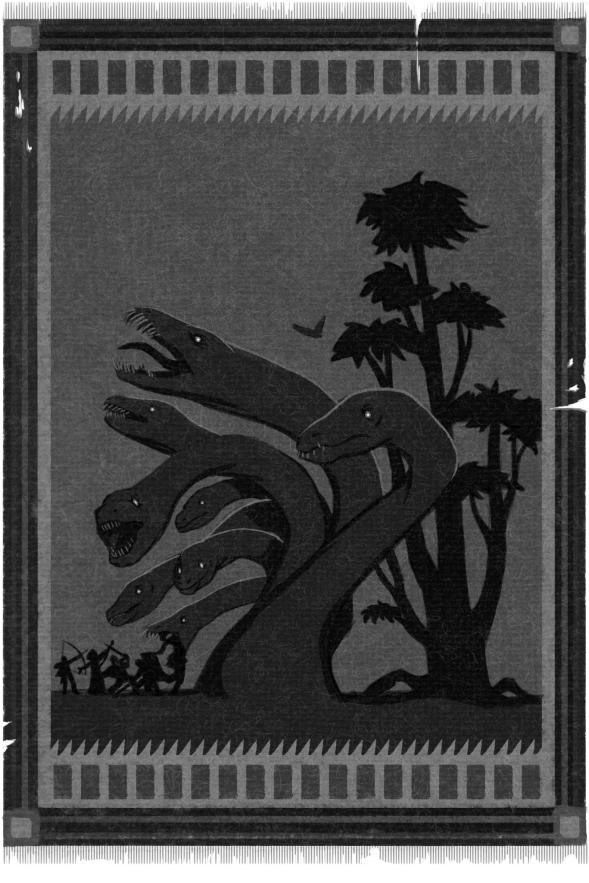
- Make the skeletons troll skeletons
- Give Zanthike 2 more levels in witch and giver her barghest lover the Advanced template
- Increase the hydra's Hit Dice to 10, add 2 to the Fort save of its disease ability and increase its natural armor bonus to 11.

While one or two thefts might go unnoticed, each subsequent robbery becomes more and more violent until the authorities take serious note and ask the PCs to investigate.

The tapestry hanging in the Headless Hydra Inn depicts the final battle with the hydra. Though most details in the picture represent a generic wilderness, one tree in the background is rendered with incredible detail. A little investigation, either questioning rangers who hunt in the swamp, interrogating a captured harpy, or talking to a friendly bog giant work yields some information about the general location of this tree.

#### LOCATING THE AREA

Even if the PCs have an idea of where the hydra was slain, locating the exact spot still poses a challenge. The Spindlewood is a morass of constantly shifting peat islands and waterways making most landmarks ill-suited as tools for navigation. Fog often obscures paths and the few stationary land masses that rise above the rank muck.





Quicksand is a danger and deep bogs hamper movement. (See the core rulebook for details on swampy marsh terrain). Then there's the threat of harpies, giant snakes, poisonous frogs and other creatures.

In order to begin the encounters in this adventure the party must come near the area. To do so requires five successful DC 25 Knowledge (geography), Knowledge (history), Knowledge (nature), Perception or Survival skill checks. These skills allow the PCs to recognize features of the swamp they have learned about from knowledgeable individuals, stories or history texts. No skill can be used more than twice. A successful check allows PCs to avoid hazards and dangerous creatures and also find the long-lost battleground.

A failed check results in one of the following (determined randomly):

- Roll a random encounter from the CR 7 swamp encounter table of the Bestiary.
- A party member falls in quicksand. The DCs for this quicksand increase by +5 above the DCs listed on page 427.
- The next check increases to DC 30. Failure results in a random encounter as described in 1).
- The party encounters 2d4+1 harpies. They have a 50% chance of alerting Zanthike to intruders if the party can not slay them all or avoid detection.
- The party wanders into a particularly marshy area of deep bogs. A dragon turtle claims this area as its lair and attacks all intruders. (This can only happen once. If rolled a second time treat it as if the result was 6.)
- The party must spend several hours slogging through particularly deep mud and razor ferns. Each PC takes 2d8+4 non-lethal damage from exhaustion and superficial wounds.

One success can also come from one of the following skills Knowledge (arcana), Knowledge (religion) or Spellcraft. This represents a character's ability to recognize areas that might contain flora and fauna affected by magic left over from the death of a hydra or recent ritual castings.

Even if the PCs fail all five checks they should begin Encounter 1 detailed below soon after the fifth check. The skill checks just allow them travel without incident or arrive depleted from combat and natural hazards.

# GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE ADVENTURE AREA

The hydra lies at the bottom of a depression in the Spindlewood at a spot where the marsh and forest meet. The ground here is firm so it does not hamper movement. The land rises a few feet before falling again into the depression, and is not visible except when the party reaches the edge or if a character is in the air.

The depression itself is 100 ft. across, the result of the hydra's taint slowing corrupting the supporting earth and causing it to sink. Along the southern edge of the sinkhole is a thick band of trees which conceal Zanthike's hut. Trees dot the other edge, but grow thicker and closer the farther one moves north.

## ENCOUNTER 1: Roaming Skeletons (CR 7)

The area is not safe. Evil creatures prowl the area, attracted by the Night Hag's corruption and the place's ancient perfidy. Sometime before the characters discover the site read the following:

All of a sudden the buzz of cicadas and the whooping of the marsh crane seem oddly absent. The land grows more solid and the ground rises gently to a thick line of trees about 200 ft. away. Near the trees you see a large twisted oak that resembles the tree depicted in the tapestry.

Three groups of five skeletons wander the area. They were created from the hydra's teeth dislodged during its final battle. The skeletons attack any creature they encounter. The skeletons do not enter the depression or attack the hag and barghest.

Skeletons (5)

CR 3

XP 800

CE Large undead

Init +7; Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +0

DEFENSE

AC 19, touch 12, flat-footed 16

(+3 Dex, +7 natural, -1 size)

hp 27 (6d8)

Fort +2, Ref +5, Will +5

DR 5/bludgeoning; Immune cold, undead traits

**O**FFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee 2 claws +8 (1d6+5)

Space 10 ft.; Reach 10 ft.

Special Attacks rend (2 claws, 1d6+7)

**STATISTICS** 

Str 21, Dex 16, Con —, Int —, Wis 10, Cha 10

Base Atk +4; CMB +10; CMD 23

Feats Improved Initiative<sup>B</sup>

The skeletons fight until destroyed. Combat in the area has the potential to warn Zanthike of intruders.

# ENCOUNTER 2: Tree Copse and Witch's Shack (CR 9)

Once the PCs reach the edge of the bowl read the following.

The land suddenly drops away into a depression in the swamp floor, forming what appears to be a natural bowl. The incline is not steep, but rather broad, and the bowl is 100 feet across. At the bottom lies muck and mud where swamp water has accumulated.

This natural sinkhole formed after the hydra's body lay here for a few days. Its caustic body fluids gradually ate away the land, causing it to sink. The hydra lies hidden at the center of the depression, covered in mud and mire.

When the PCs approach Zanthike's shack read the following:

A decrepit shack sits amid the copse of trees. Animal skins drape the walls where holes show through the poorly laid logs. From a tree limb by the entrance dangle charms made of bird feathers, beads and snail shells.

If warned of the party's presence Zanthike sends her barghest to circle around the intruders while she prepares for combat. She will use either *disguise self* to make herself appear as an old hermit woman or *tree shape* to conceal her presence. If the PCs proceed into the bowl she changes to her normal form and attacks.

Zanthike

XP 4,800

Green hag witch 3

CE Medium monstrous humanoid

Init +0; Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +20

DEFENSE

AC 19, touch 10, flat-footed 19 (+0 Dex, +9 natural)

CR8

**hp** 83 (9d10+18 plus 3d6+6)

Fort +7, Ref +7, Will +10

**SR** 18

**OFFENSE** 

Speed 30 ft., swim 30 ft.

Melee 2 claws + 15 (1d4+5 plus weakness)

Special Attacks hex (cackle, evil eye, misfortune)

Spell-like Abilities (CL 9th):

Constant—pass without trace, tongues, water breathing At-will—dancing lights, disguise self (DC 15), ghost sound (DC 13), invisibility, pyrotechnics (DC 15), tree shape, whispering wind

Spells Prepared (CL 3rd)

2nd—hold person (DC 17), scare (DC 17)

1st—burning hands (DC 16), ray of enfeeblement,

sleep (DC 16)

0 (at will)—bleed (DC 15), detect magic, read magic, resistance

#### TACTICS

Before Combat Zanthike uses *invisibility* to observe opponents unseen. She then chooses tactics based on what she believes will be most effective. She might take the form of an old crone and attempt to lure creatures away from the hydra's resting place or simply attack.

**During Combat** Zanthike attacks just as her barghest enters into combat. She stays out of melee, targeting opponents with *hold person* and *ray of enfeeblement*. She uses her wand against other spellcasters.

Morale Zanthike flees if reduced to 20 or fewer hit points.

**STATISTICS** 

Str 21, Dex 10, Con 14, Int 20, Wis 13, Cha 18

Base Atk +10; CMB +15; CMD 25

Feats Alertness, Blind-Fight, Combat Casting, Deceitful, Extra Hex, Great Fortitude

Skills Bluff +13, Disguise +13, Knowledge (arcana) +14, Knowledge (nature) +14, Perception +20, Sense Motive +12, Stealth +19, Swim +18

Languages Aklo, Common, Giant

SQ mimicry, witch's familiar (centipede)

6

Combat Gear wand of blindness/deafness (5 charges), potion of gaseous form; Other Gear amulet of natural armor +1

#### SPECIAL ABILITIES

Weakness (Su) Zanthike's claws sap strength from those she strikes. Each time Zanthike hits a foe with her claw attack, the victim takes 2 points of Strength damage unless he resists the weakness with a DC 20 Fortitude save. Alternatively, the green hag can attempt to inflict even greater weakness on a foe by making a touch attack—this variant requires a standard action, and cannot be attempted in the same round Zanthike makes claw attacks. The opponent touched must succeed on a DC 20 Fortitude save or take 2d4 points of Strength damage. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Mimicry (Ex) Zanthike can imitate the sounds of almost any animal found near its lair.

Greater Barghest

CR 7

XP 3,200

hp 85

Combat Gear potion of magic fang

#### **TACTICS**

**Before Combat** The barghest drinks his *potion of magic* fang and then uses *invisibility sphere* to move into a favorable position. Just before entering melee he casts *crushing despair* on as many opponents as possible.

**During Combat** The barghest focus his attacks on melee combatants. If possible he casts *bull's strength* on himself and Zanthike.

**Morale** The barghest fights to the death. If Zanthike is reduced to 20 or fewer hit points he uses *dimension door* to get her to safety and then returns to the fight.

# Encounter 3: The Beadless Bydra (CR 9)

Zanthike's ritual returned the hydra with one problem. The adventurers who slew it years ago took its heads as trophies. Without heads the hydra does not possess a bite attack or fast healing. However, it can spew acid from its bloody stumps, which constantly weep slime and mucous. The lack of sensory organs deprives the hydra of sight and smell,

but also makes it immune to mind-affecting effects.

Zanthike intends to experiment with other magic to see if she and her coven can restore the hydra's heads. If the PCs do not slay the creature now, they may later encounter the hydra with one or more regrown heads.

The hydra lurks in a shallow pool of muck and moss at the bottom of the depression. It lies just beneath the water's surface and blends into the surrounding turf (+20 on Stealth). It senses anyone who enters the range of its tremorsense or disease cloud and attacks. It fights until dead.

#### The Headless Hydra

CR9

XP 6,400

Advanced elite plague bearer headless hydra

N Huge magical beast

Init +7; Senses tremorsense 120 ft.; Perception +3

#### DEFENSE

AC 20, touch 10, flat-footed 16

(+3 Dex, +9 natural, -2 size)

hp 104 (8d10+56)

Fort +13, Ref +11, Will +5

**Defensive Abilities** diseased flesh, headless; **Immune** disease, gaze



#### Weaknesses headless

#### **OFFENSE**

Speed 20 ft., swim 20 ft.

Melee 8 slams + 12 (1d8+6 plus disease)

Space 15 ft.; Reach 10 ft.

**Special Attacks** acid spew, disease, disease cloud, quick incubation

#### **STATISTICS**

Str 22, Dex 16, Con 24, Int —, Wis 13, Cha 11

Base Atk +8; CMB +16; CMD 29 (can't be tripped)

Feats Combat Reflexes, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes

Skills Perception +3, Swim +14; Racial Modifiers +2
Perception

SQ carrier

#### SPECIAL ABILITIES

Acid Spew (Ex) Every 1d4 rounds the headless hydra can spray acid from its necks stumps in a 30 ft. cone.

Creatures in the cone take 5d6 points of acid damage, or half on a DC 21 Reflex save. The save DC is

Constitution-based.

Carrier (Ex) Although the hydra is immune to disease, it can still carry infections and it continues to do so regardless of magical healing or successful Fort saves.

**Disease (Ex)** A creature damaged by the hydra's slam attack contracts red ache, the shakes, or slimy doom (determined randomly, roll 1d3) if it fails a DC 21 Fort save.

- 1 Red Ache: Disease—slam, save Fort DC 21; onset 1 round; frequency 1/day; effect 1d6 Str damage; cure 2 consecutive saves.
- 2 *Shakes:* Disease—slam, save Fort DC 21; onset 1 round; frequency 1/day; effect 1d8 Dex damage; cure 2 consecutive saves.
- 3 Slimy Doom: Disease—slam, save Fort DC 21; onset 1 round; frequency 1/day; effect 1d4 Con damage, target must make a second Fort save or 1 point of the damage is drain instead; cure 2 consecutive saves.

The save DCs are Constitution-based. Anyone casting a *remove disease* spell to rid a creature of this disease my succeed on a DC 21 caster level check or be unable to remove the disease that day. The check DC is Constitution-based.

Disease Cloud (Ex) An invisible cloud of contagion surrounds the hydra. Any breathing creature that begins its turn within 30 ft. of the plague bearer must succeed on two DC 21 Fort saves. A failure on the first save infects the creature with cackle fever; failure on the second infects it with mindfire. The save DCs are Constitution-based.

Cackle Fever: Disease—inhaled, save Fort DC21; onset 1 round; frequency 1/day; effect 1d6 Wis damage; cure 2 consecutive saves.

*Mindfire:* Disease—inhaled, save Fort DC 21; onset 1 round; frequency 1/day; effect 1d4 Int damage; cure 2 consecutive saves.

Anyone casting a remove disease spell to rid a creature of either disease must succeed on a DC 21 caster level check or be unable to remove the disease that day. The check DCs is Constitution-based.

Diseased Flesh (Ex) The plague bearer hydra carries blinding sickness within its body. Any creature that makes a successful bite attack against the hydra or otherwise eats some of its flesh is exposed to blinding sickness. Anyone casting a remove disease spell to rid a creature of this disease my succeed on a DC 21 caster level check or be unable to remove the disease that day. The check DC is Constitution-based.

Blinding Sickness: Disease—ingestion; save Fort DC 21; onset 1 round; frequency 1/day; effect 1d4 Str damage, if more than 2 Str damage, target must make an additional Fort save or be permanently blinded; cure 2 consecutive saves.

**Headless (Ex)** The headless hydra is immune to mindaffecting effects. It is also blind, but possesses tremorsense as a result of Zanthike's ritual.

Quick Incubation (Ex) Each of the diseases that the plague bearer hydra carries has an onset period of 1 round.

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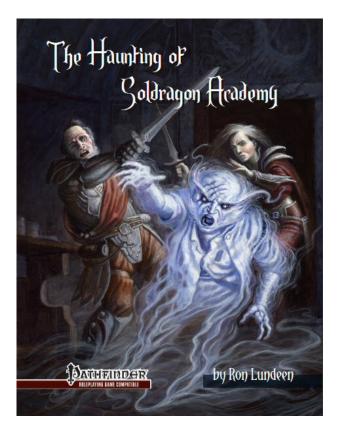
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