

The Smiling Dead Thing

HOW TO USE THIS ADVENTURE

This is a system-agnostic adventure outline, a road map to get your imagination started so you can write your own story in your own setting. There are no maps, no concrete NPCs, no hard numbers — that's all for you to decide.

1. Overview

The Moneylender is an avid hunter and recently slew a truly great creature. The Taxidermist is a chronic gambler, indebted to The Moneylender. To alleviate the debt, The Taxidermist undertook a grand task for The Moneylender: to taxidermise the Guardian of the Forest. But The Taxidermist botched the operation and now needs the party's help to hunt the Guardian's mate as substitute and make amends.

2. Adventure hooks

But I'm not a hunter!?! The party sees The Taxidermist being taken away by The Moneylender's two goons. They're taking him to forest to hunt the Guardian's mate alone. When the Taxidermist sees the party, he begs for the party's help.

I need a favour. The Moneylender hires the party to recover a debt from The Taxidermist: either cash or a "special order". If he can't pay, The Moneylender wants the party to bring Taxidermist to his backstreet office to be "handled". The Taxidermist, of course, begs the party to help hunt the Guardian's mate.

3. The Smiling Dead Thing

When the party visits The Taxidermist's storefront, it's impossible to escape the terrifying visage of the botched Guardian of the Forest. It's a unique animal that the craftsman had never seen alive, and it's been preserved unnaturally, a smiling dead thing, mocking its own anatomy. It requires a Nature check to even tell basic facts about the creature. And even then, friendly Dungeon Master, try to maintain some mystery about the creature's origin.

The Taxidermist begs the party to help hunt the Guardian's mate — the last of a legendary pair. Keep in mind: The Taxidermist is almost useless in combat and a nervous wreck.

4. A Forest Skill Challenge

Abstract the forest travel into a skill challenge — don't make the whole party roll for every obstacle, just one player for each. The party needs to get four successes before three failures. Success means they arrive at the Guardian's Sanctuary without incident, but failure means they arrive with some kind of disadvantage or setback.

The kinds of obstacles the party could face include: a raging river, a looping paradox path, BEES BEES BEES, a predator, noxious spores, or even The Taxidermist having a panic attack.

5. The Guardian's Sanctuary

The final area is solemn, sacred site. There are rare plants here and animals behave unnaturally reverent — reminiscent of a fey place.

Ask the party to describe the way they carry themselves and how they approach. If they are threatening and ready for combat, the Guardian's mate will attack. If they are more peaceful, the Guardian's mate will observe before revealing itself.

The Guardian and its mate can be any creature you like — a Unicorn, a Basilisk? Perhaps there's a ritualistic way to activate a line of communication with the Guardian's mate. If it can communicate and the party is peaceful, it would be willing to offer a Druidic boon in trade for the Taxidermist.

6. Outcomes

If the Taxidermist lives, the party has access to a free trophy-maker, someone who can train the party in harvesting components from dead beasts. If The Moneylender is alive, the party has a criminal contact. If the Guardian's mate was spared, the party might receive some Druidic boon.

NPCs TO MAKE

- ★ The Taxidermist
- ★ The Thugs
- ★ The Moneylender
- ★ The Guardian's mate

COMBAT ENCOUNTERS TO PREPARE

- ★ Potential clash with the thugs
- ★ Potential challenge on the road
- ★ Showdown with the Guardian's mate

The Beast of Shitters' Creek

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1. Overview

A Meat Mimic has disguised itself as livestock in a rural area, slaughtering the herd. Whenever it strikes, it leaves just one animal alive, but that one animal is actually the culprit, the Meat Mimic in hiding. The monster's identity is a mystery — the community mistakenly think the culprits are local dire wolves. Exports of meat and animal produce from the region has slowed to almost nothing. Almost every attack has been against livestock, except one attack where a prized racehorse was slaughtered. The racehorse's death is a red herring, committed by a crooked gambling organization and framed to look like one of the Meat Mimic's attacks.

2. Adventure hooks

Where's the beef? When the party is ordering food or equipment, they could be denied due to shortages from the local agricultural region.

I need a favour. A local bookmaker or crime-person contacts the party to investigate the murder of their prized racehorse who was out for a spell in some local agricultural region.

3. The mimic hunt

The Meat Mimic recently slaughtered the farmer's entire flock and disguised itself as his prized animal, with a pretty little bow around its neck. It sleeps in the farmer's stable, disguised to the family is unaware of the danger they're in. If left alone with other animals, the Meat Mimic will attack again when it thinks it's unobserved. When it strikes, it leaves no survivors, then assumes the identity of one of its victims. It also habitually consumes the hearts of its prey.

The party could set some kind of stake out, or if they discover an early clue to the creature's identity, they could fight it before it transforms.

4. The slaughtered racehorse

A prized racehorse is slaughtered in the course of this adventure. It's a brutal crime committed in a private stable by a local criminal organization to remove a competing racehorse. To disguise their motive, the carnage happens in the middle of the night in the same manner as the Meat Mimic's attacks, but with three crucial mistakes: the Meat Mimic always leaves one animal alive, the Meat Mimic always eats the hearts of its prey, and there was a secret witness to the crime.

If the party investigates this crime and catches the trail of the perpetrators, they might be confronted, threatened, or bribed into silence by the criminals.

5. The starving wolves

If the party track down the dire wolves, they find an emaciated pack. The wolves are desperate and starving because their usual food sources have been taken by a more effective predator. The crucial information here is: the culprit in this scenario is not wolves. This is also a good opportunity for the party to meet a friendly wolf cub.

6. Outcomes

What if the party found evidence the Meat Mimic's egg sac was empty, indicating it had laid eggs somewhere nearby? You could make a mimic nest for your next dungeon!

NPCs TO MAKE

- ★ The Farmer
- ★ The Criminals
- ★ The Witness

COMBAT ENCOUNTERS TO PREPARE

- ★ The Meat Mimic ambush
- ★ The showdown with the thugs
- ★ The starving wolves



Nice Work, Skeleton!

HOW TO USE THIS ADVENTURE

Hey everyone! This is a little adventure I'm prepping for my friends for Halloween. It's also a pretty solid look into how much detail I put into my one-shots. This is loosey goosey, mostly relying on everyone around the table having a solid understanding of cheesy horror tropes and riffing off each other. The only things I would add to this prep-wise is thinking of specific kinds of fun scares from movies, just so I could provide suggestions to the players if necessary. (Which means watching some horror movies! Yes!)

1. Opening crawl

You are a skeleton. You and your friends are your master's favourite skeletons. You help him with chores around the lair and in return he showers you all with affection — but most importantly, he keeps you animated.

Master has been unwell though. His power is waning, and many of the enchantments around the lair have been fading. On Halloween, he calls you to his bedside.

"My children, I do not have the strength to renew the spells keeping you animated this year. Your very survival depends on this task I set upon you. Here is my Scare Jar, a powerful receptacle for pure terror. To power your enchantments, you each need to collect a scare from the village down the road tonight during their Halloween festivities. But be careful! The Onyx Paladin is in town, and he is mighty smitey. To help with your task, you will need to find disguises to move through town unnoticed, and the gift of speech will prove invaluable."

Master casts the spell of Lesser Tongues on you, allowing you to speak and understand Common.

"Now, let me hear your beautiful voices, my children!"

2. Skeletons

Everyone plays a seemingly-regular skeleton (or zombie) using the regular stat blocks. Intelligence is bumped to 10, and they can speak and understand Common. Each skeleton has a special talent — think like a circus performer. This is meant to be a simple little way to characterise each skeleton. Examples: fire eating, juggling, knife throwing, stage magic, comedy. The players have *insert session length here* to collect their scares.

3. What is a scare?

A scare is an intimidation check. Skeletons get a -3 to their Charisma checks, so the players need to set up scary situations to maximise their chances. Each target can only be scared once. A separate player takes the lead on each scare. A scare at any location causes such a ruckous that it's not viable for future scares.

- ★ The Onyx Paladin Base Intimidation DC15
- ★ Villager Base Intimidation DC10
- ★ -1 if target is alone
- ★ -1 for each scary element
- ★ +1 for each non-scary element
- ★ Advantage if it's a good jump scare
- ★ Disadvantage if the target is particularly brave

A successful intimidation check means the target runs away white-knuckled screaming. A failed intimidation check means the target runs to get help.

POTENTIAL LOCATIONS IN THE TOWN

- ★ A Costume Shop
- ★ A Tavern hosting a frat-house kind of party
- ★ A haunted house attraction
- ★ A hay bale maze
- ★ A bobbing for apples/eating competition
- ★ A pumpkin carving event
- ★ A campfire with kids telling stories
- ★ An abbey

4. The Onyx Paladin

This is our roaming threat: a 3rd-level paladin. If the party encounters the Onyx Paladin early in the adventure, perhaps he just Turns Undead. But if they encounter the Onyx Paladin towards the end of the session, feel free to start smiting these boney fools. Any skeletons who die can roleplay the scare victims moving forward. Play the Onyx Paladin as Lawful-Stupid, righteous as all heck.

5. Ending the adventure

Not all of the skeletons are going to survive — that's OK. The remaining skeletons can bring their collected scares to the Master who will use them to renew their enchantments for another year.



Men of Cloth (MOC)

1. The party

Players are all clerics and paladins. The mens' attire looks like Gregorian monks, the womens' attire look like Catholic nuns. They are agents of the Men of Cloth, a secret organisation dedicated to hiding and policing demons and angels in disguise on the material plane. Their codenames are things like Brother K and Sister J.

2. Special abilities

Every player character is given a special tool from the MOC. This tool can be anything the player wants, performing any function, so long as it's interesting and helps characterise their MOC Agent. Examples: A blasting wand like The Cricket, a modify memory wand like a neuraliser.

3. Goal

A creature named Mickey has gone AWOL, completely off grid. It's trying to make its way back to its home plane interrupting a holy rite at the temple in [session length] hours. Mickey has a history of being a danger to mortals, so it needs to be brought in. Mickey can be any kind of angel or demon you like — I would choose to make it a Drider.

4. Opening crawl

The Chief Priest slams his holy symbol down on the desk.

"Gosh dang-it people! We can't afford this kind of scrutiny right now! The Holy Commissioner's up for reelection, and if he finds out about this, it'll be on my ass — MY ASS! — but I'll make sure it's on YOUR ASSES too. Everybody's asses!"

He's upset.

"I swear to Gosh, that liability Mickey... He's shaken his tracking enchantment and ditched his cover identity. We don't know where he's gone, or what his plans are, but we know he's a danger to civvies. And NOT just danger to their health — can you imagine if there was a wide-scale event cracked this hidden world open? We couldn't modify memories on such a large scale. It would break society. And it would be on OUR ASSES!"

5. NPCs

- ★ Mickey: A dangerous villain attempting to escape back to the Nine Hells.
- ★ The Chief Priest: A holy cop stereotype. Try a Brooklyn accent. I dare you.
- ★ The Holy Comisioner: A politician stereotype.
- ★ Informants: Angels and demons in disguise within civilian society. Players can shake them down for informaton.
- ★ Civilians: People unaware of angels and demons in their society — they must not learn the truth.

6. Information

Seed this information throughout the adventure.

- ★ Mickey is alive and still in the city.
- ★ Mickey had help to break his enchantment.
- ★ Mickey would rather die than go back to his disguised life — and he'd rather kill.
- ★ Mickey is planning on returning to the Nine Hells.
- ★ Mickey is planning to crash a *very public* event at the temple during mass to achieve this goal.

7. The final showdown

Mickey's goal is to get to the temple during a holy mass-style event and intercept the holy energy so he can be transported back to the Nine Hells — beyond the jurisdiction of the Men of Cloth. Depending on the players' plans, they will be attempting to stop Mickey from achieving this goal behind the scenes, or will trying to minimize peoples' exposure to the demonic truth. I'd expect this to be a combat encounter.

