

Light in the old mill

A simple adventure for a first session. One village, one abandoned mill, a missing boy and a creature that does not have to be a monster to kill.

LENGTH	PLAYERS	SYSTEM	PREP
2-3 hours	3-5	any fantasy	15-20 minutes

This adventure is written so that somebody running a game for the first time can use it. It needs no particular system, no battle map and no three pages of statistics. If your game calls for rolls, use the ordinary difficulties from your rulebook. If it needs an opponent, take the stats of a young griffon, a large wolf or any other easy creature, and treat it as wounded.

For the Game Master

Everything below gives away the mystery. If you are going to play in this adventure, stop reading here.

In short

The party arrives in Birkendorf, a small village on the road. For three nights, light has been seen in a mill that has stood empty for years. Chickens have gone missing from a couple of yards, and last night Janek Malec disappeared - a young baker's assistant who decided to prove to everyone that there is no monster in the old mill.

Janek is alive. He is stuck on the upper floor after the stairs collapsed. Downstairs hides a young griffon, wounded after tearing itself out of a steel trap set in the woods. The creature has been stealing poultry because it is hungry and cannot fly far. It does not hunt people and will only attack if it feels cornered.

That is the whole mystery. The rest of the session depends on what the players do.

What to prepare before the game

- The name of the village: Birkendorf.
- Three NPCs: Marta Kessler, Janek Malec and the old forester Rudi Falk.
- One location: the Old Mill.
- One item: a broken steel trap with a torn chain.
- One creature: a wounded young griffon.

If you use Talehaven, that really is enough. One scenario document, one location, three characters, one item and one creature. Do not build the rest of the village until the players give you a reason.

Three things to keep in mind

- Janek is alive and wants to get out of the mill.
- The griffon is wounded, hungry and frightened. It does not want a fight.
- The players do not have to kill the creature to finish the adventure.

If the players do something you did not plan for

Do not go looking for the answer in this text. Go back to those three facts and work out what would naturally happen next. That is enough to handle most unplanned situations.

The beginning: Birkendorf

You do not need a complicated reason for the characters to be in Birkendorf. They may be travelling the road, looking for a bed, escorting a wagon, or simply starting the campaign in this village. Once they arrive, they hear about the old mill and the missing boy quickly enough.

Marta Kessler

Marta runs the bakery and a small inn. She is the one who asks the party for help. Not because she believes in ghosts. Janek works for her, and he has not been home since yesterday.

Marta is direct, tired, and increasingly angry at people who stand around the square telling stories about a cursed mill instead of looking for the boy. She offers food, a bed and as much money as makes sense in your system. If the party does not need a reward, better still.

She knows three things: Janek was asking about the mill last night, two chickens went missing from the yard next door, and several people saw a light in the upper window after dark.

Rudi Falk

Rudi is the old forester. He does not believe in ghosts, but two days ago he found a large feather and a broken steel trap at the edge of the woods. He did not follow the tracks, because it was getting dark, and for the last few years he has had a bad knee and an even worse temper.

If the players talk to him, he will show them the place. If they do not, no harm done. They can find the feather or the marks of a dragging chain themselves on the way to the mill.

Important for a first-time GM

Do not lock an important clue behind a single roll. If the characters are searching sensibly, they find it. The roll can tell you how fast they do it, whether they notice something extra, or whether a complication turns up along the way.

The road to the old mill

The mill stands a quarter of an hour from the village, above a narrow river. The path is overgrown, but hard to lose. The closer they get, the more signs there are that something large really has been

moving around here.

What they can find

- A large feather, grey and white with a dark tip. It belongs to no ordinary bird.
- Claw marks in wet ground. One side is noticeably deeper, as if the creature were sparing an injured leg.
- A few chicken feathers by a low stone wall.
- A broken steel trap. The chain has been torn out of its anchor, and there is blood and a couple of feathers on the teeth.

All of it points the same way: there really is a large creature in the mill, and it is hurt. You do not have to give the players every clue. Two are plenty.

The Old Mill

The building has stood by the river for many years and has not worked for a long time. The wheel is still, several windows are boarded up, and the door facing the road stands ajar. Inside it smells of damp, old timber and something animal.

Ground floor

The main room holds the remains of the milling gear, sacks of rotted grain and a staircase to the upper floor. The stairs have collapsed somewhere around the middle. Every so often, Janek's voice carries down from above.

Under an old platform, in the darkest part of the room, lies the griffon. It is roughly the size of a large dog or a small pony, depending on how fantastical your world is. One wing hangs low, and there is a deep wound from the trap on its hind leg.

When the characters come in, the creature rises, spreads its good wing and hisses. That is a warning. If nobody moves towards it with a weapon, it does not attack.

Upper floor

Janek is sitting upstairs with a lit lantern. That is the light they saw from the village. He has a twisted ankle and a few scratches, but nothing serious. He cannot get down, because the stairs gave way while he was running from the griffon.

He is more embarrassed than frightened. He went to the mill to prove to his friends that the monster stories were nonsense. Once inside, he stepped on a loose board, made a noise, and the griffon lunged towards him. Janek ran so fast that he nearly did himself more damage on the stairs than anything else could have.

Getting Janek out

There is no single correct method. The party can climb the beams, build a makeshift ladder, throw a rope, come in through a window, or think of something considerably stupider and probably more interesting. If the idea makes sense, let them try it.

What about the griffon?

This is the most important decision in this small adventure. Not because it changes the fate of the world. It is simply the first time new players see that a roleplaying game does not have to have one solution prepared by the author.

They can fight

If the characters attack, the griffon defends itself. Use easy statistics suited to a beginner party, and remember the creature is already wounded. Once it takes a serious hit or sees a clear way out, it will try to break out of the mill rather than fight to the death.

They can calm it

Food, calm behaviour and lowered weapons may be enough for the griffon to stop treating the party as a threat. Anyone who knows animals may notice that the creature is suffering more than it is hunting.

They can help it

If they clean the wound, get the last of the chain off, or simply leave food and a wide open door, the griffon will leave the mill before long. It does not have to become the party's magical friend. It is a wild animal.

They can invent something else

Let them. If they want to lure the creature out with a chicken, throw a blanket over it, ask Rudi for help or pull Janek out through the roof and leave the griffon in peace, the adventure still works.

If you need to move the scene along

Janek starts shouting that the floor upstairs is creaking. The griffon edges towards the doorway. The rain outside gets heavier. Pick one thing and give the players a reason to stop debating for another twenty minutes.

Ending

Once Janek is back in Birkendorf, the important part of the job is done. What happens next depends on the players.

If the griffon flew away

Rudi confirms that the creature probably came down from the mountains and walked into somebody's trap. The village stops losing chickens. For a few days, Janek tells everyone that he "had the situation under control", which is obvious nonsense.

If the griffon was killed

The villagers are safe, and some of them treat the party as monster hunters. Rudi, looking at the wound from the trap, only mutters that the creature had a spectacularly bad week. Do not turn this into a moral punishment. The players made a decision based on what they knew.

If they left it in the mill

That is fine too. The creature may leave on its own a few days later. Or the old mill becomes a place you will come back to one day. Not every thread has to be closed before the end of a first session.

The reward and a small hook for later

Marta pays what she promised, feeds the party and gives them a place to sleep. If you want to encourage the group towards a second session, add one detail: while patching Janek up, they find a silver coin in his pocket that he has never seen before. One side carries a mark nobody in Birkendorf recognises.

You do not have to know yet what the coin means. If you play again, you will work it out later.

Quick reference for the GM

Element	What to remember
Problem	Janek disappeared after going to the old mill.
Truth	He is stuck upstairs. A wounded young griffon is hiding below.
NPCs	Marta Kessler, Janek Malec, Rudi Falk.
Location	The Old Mill by the river.
Clues	A large feather, claw marks, chicken feathers, a broken trap.
Conflict	How to get Janek out and what to do about the griffon.
If the scene stalls	Janek calls for help, or the griffon tries to escape.
Ending	Janek goes home. What happens to the griffon is up to the players.

Moving this adventure into your own system

Do not force the mechanics. If your system has griffon statistics, use them and weaken the creature. If it does not, pick a large predator with a threat level suitable for beginning characters. Handle everything else with the ordinary rolls from your rulebook.

Pace matters most. When a failed roll would stop the whole adventure, do not stop it. Give the information, but attach a cost: lost time, noise, a minor injury, a dropped item or a worse position. The players still move forward, and the situation simply becomes more interesting.

If this was your first session

Afterwards, do not immediately ask whether you did everything right. Ask what was the most fun, what was unclear, and whether they would like to play again. That will tell you far more than picking apart every roll after the fact.

If the answer is "when are we playing next?", you already have the best review a first session can get.