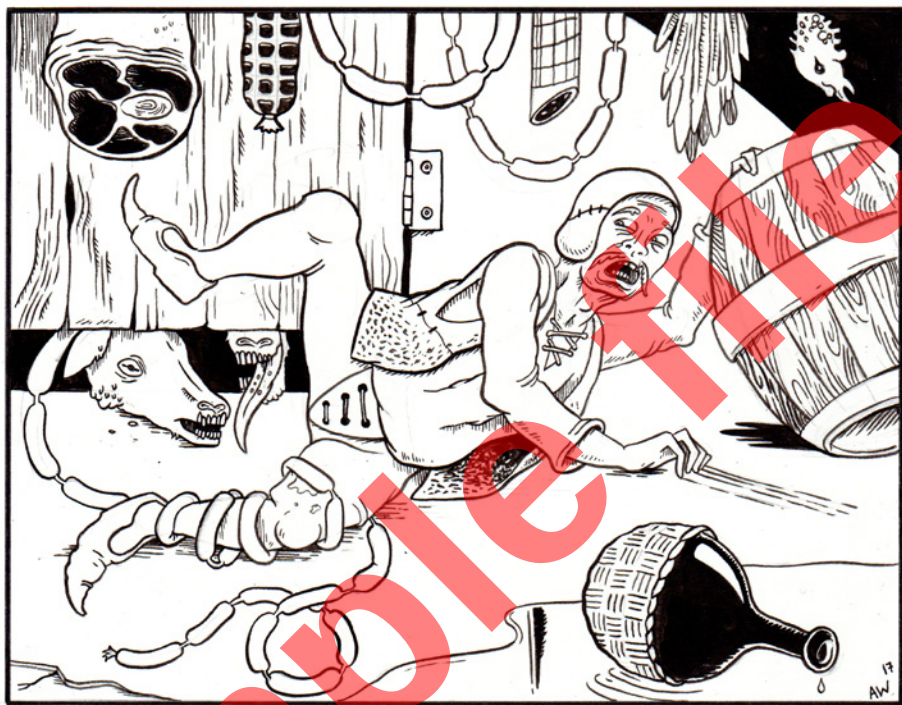


# The Weird That Befell Drigbolton



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# The Weird That Befell Drigbolton

*The Weird That Befell Drigbolton* is an investigative, event-based scenario for characters of experience levels 3–5, set in and around the quaint rural hamlet of Drigbolton, on the northern edge of Dolmenwood (hex 0702 on the campaign map). The sequence of events happening around the adventurers is, to an extent, predetermined, but the player characters may alter the outcome if they manage to unriddle what’s happening in Drigbolton.

## Not in Dolmenwood?

If you’re not running a game in Dolmenwood and want to set this adventure in your own campaign world, you can simply locate the 6-mile hex described in this module in any backwater region, close to a moor or forest. The events and encounters described in these pages are largely campaign-agnostic, though, as referee, you will need to give some thought to the wider repercussions of these strange events in your campaign world.

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# Background

This is a description of events prior to the PCs' arrival in the area:

☾ An occult ritual to summon the spirit that inhabits the pale star Wermuth has backfired on the summoner. A dabbler named Alhoyle Spinnewith, the latest Hearth-Laird to preside over the moor and woodlands around Drigbolton, has made fundamental errors in his research. Instead of calling forth the daemon that resides in the star, he has brought down both that malign intelligence and the burning, eldritch hull that houses it.

☾ Wermuth's fall was perceptible for many miles around. Heralded by a brilliant flash in the middling hours of night, those sleepers who did not witness the star falling were certainly aware of the resultant tumult when Wermuth crashed into the moor.

☾ Its flames doused by the cold winds of space, the star's fragmented, black core is all that remains. The core rests in a crater on Bolton Moor (area 2 on the regional map on p8) and from its wounds exudes a bitter, phosphorescent jelly. Three important organs of the star broke off during its descent and are located at the Oath House (area 3B), Nob's Spinney (area 4), and Bolton Bog (area 5). These organs possess a certain degree of independent consciousness and seek to return to the core of the star to make it once more whole and fully potent.

☾ Smaller fragments that broke from the hull during the star's fall lie scattered throughout the locality of Drigbolton—these are formed of a metallic substance greatly valued by earthlings.

☾ Locals have mistaken Wermuth's gelatinous vitae for a gift from Heaven in response to the famines that the area has been subject to for the last several winters. Since the star's fall, they have been collecting the stuff in buckets and using it to bake their breads, glaze their meats, and flavour their beers and ciders. Wild animals, too, have taken to slurping up the star-jelly. Despite its underlying bitterness, the stuff is palatable and somewhat nutritious. This is by design. Wermuth wants these creatures to consume its essence for, once inside them, it exerts its will over their bodies, effectively turning them into new limbs and sensory organs.

☾ The presence of the core of Wermuth, the jelly, the star-metal, and the separated organs has begun a process of transformation in the area and the men and beasts which inhabit it. Left unchecked, the unseemly contact between celestial and terrestrial will transform the area beyond recognition.

# Hooks

**An odd event has been noted.** A week ago, there was an unnatural illumination of the night sky that lasted for an instant—or several minutes—it's hard to remember. Most witnesses agree that the unaccountable light shone with an array of colours that have no earthly analogues. This phenomenon was followed by a series of tremors that persisted until dawn. If the player characters were in the Dolmenwood region, they will have heard of this matter and may have witnessed it themselves.

Following are a few ideas for hooks which can be used to draw the PCs to the region where the star has crashed (or indeed to the Dolmenwood region, if they are currently elsewhere). The journey to the hex where the events of this module take place may be played out as a prelude to the adventure. Alternatively, the referee may simply begin play with the PCs arriving from the west, on a poorly tended and deeply rutted road called the Cart Way (location 9 on the area map, p8).

## I: *Star-Metal Salvage*

Magic-users of all stripes, astrologers, seers, and would-be prophets are mumbling about a star falling from the sky. And where there's a fallen star, there's bound to be something of great value: star-metal. The stuff's as rare as hen's teeth and known for its utility as an alchemical agent. Fist-sized fragments are valued at five times their weight in gold/diamonds/mithril/unobtainium.

**A patron offers the player characters a contract:** Find the site of the star-crash and retrieve as much of the star-metal as possible. This patron has even managed to pinpoint the location of the impact and has marked it on a map. However, before s/he can feel good about handing the map over to a bunch of cutthroats, the patron requires some kind of assurance that the party won't break their contract and attempt to sell the star-metal to the highest bidder. She or he will offer them a considerable reward, of course, but ask that they submit to a *geas* that would bind them to the letter of the deal.

Possible patrons within Dolmenwood include the sorceress Ygraine (hex 1802) and Mostlemyre of Prigwort (hex 1105).

**If your campaign doesn't do *geases*:** Then the patron will need to have some kind of leverage over the party that would compel them to keep their word. Or be offering them something that no other can provide.

## 2: *In Search of the Black Book*

*The Black Book of Llareggub*, kept in secret by the master of the Oath House (3 on the area map), is a rare tome of notorious repute, said to contain candid instructions for occult rituals of great power. It is, naturally, suppressed by the religious orthodoxy of the Church of the One True God and greatly sought after by those who lust for occult power.

**The player characters are on the trail of a copy of this book:** For whatever reasons suit the campaign—most likely either to destroy it or use it—the PCs seek this tome. Their freshest lead suggests that a copy of the book was recently purchased by a Mr Spinnewith of the hamlet of Drigbolton. This information draws the PCs coincidentally into the backwater region where the star has fallen, where they will find a somewhat more complicated situation than they had perhaps imagined.

## 3: *Uncover the Arch-Mage*

To those in the know, it is clear that a supernatural agency of great potency must lie behind the fall of the star *Wermuth*. But as no arch-mage is known to dwell in the region where the star fell, suspicions are aroused.

**A powerful individual or institution commissions the player characters:** They are charged with travelling to the region of the arcane disturbance (which has been pinpointed as emanating from the vicinity of the obscure hamlet of Drigbolton) to investigate goings on, uncover the perpetrator, and report back. Various orthodox institutions such as the Church, the Duke of Brackenwold, or organised guilds of wizards would be the most likely to feel threatened by this occurrence and thus wish to send a party to investigate. An individual wizard in the region may be another possible patron.

# The Passing of Time

This is an event-based scenario, meaning that, as time passes, a predetermined sequence of events will take place in the various locales described. Many of the areas detailed have a section entitled “*Happenings in...*”—these sections describe what occurs there each day. The events are on a daily basis, with the first day being the day of the PCs’ arrival on the scene (whenever that may be).

Of course, the presence of the PCs has the potential to completely alter the course of events, depending on the level of involvement/meddling they engage in. The referee must judge which of the listed events would be delayed, altered, or prevented by the actions of the group of adventurers.

This module only describes events during the first week after the PCs’ arrival. By this stage, if the PCs have done nothing to interfere, the organs which broke away during the star’s descent will have found their way back to the core of the fallen star, restoring its full consciousness and potency (see **p20** for details). What exactly the reawakened star does next is left for the referee to decide.

If, on the other hand, the actions of the adventurers prevent the star from reassembling itself, it will remain in the crater which it gouged out as it fell, inert. Again, the referee should decide what repercussions the presence of the dormant core will have, in the long term. It may well be that when, after several years, the protective pools of star-jelly have all been consumed, the core of the star will simply dissolve into a toxic mass of exotic matter and seep into the earth, to be forgotten.

It is also worth noting that the module does not describe any predetermined way in which the player characters may eradicate the star Wermuth and its doings in the region. The fall of the star is intended as a major event in Dolmenwood with potentially wide-ranging repercussions. Indeed, the events of this module may lead to a continuing series of adventures, as the PCs (and/or other concerned parties) wrangle with the presence of Wermuth.

A few ideas for some directions in which the events of the module could be taken, suited to different tones of campaign, follow.

## *Apocalyptic: A Hole in the Sky*

In the long term—whether the star Wermuth successfully reassembles itself or not—the hole which its fall wrought in the firmament may cause problems on a much wider (possibly global) scale. If the referee wishes to take things in this direction, there is potential for a whole series of adventures: unless the fissure is somehow repaired, it will have repercussions of a most grave nature. Initially, the rupture in the heavens grows large enough to be visible at night and during the day, appearing as a sickly violet nebula, growing larger over the coming weeks. Powerful alien entities from the void may begin to gather around the rupture

in the firmament, attracted by the scent of the escaping planetary radiations and proceeding to enter the upper strata of the atmosphere and slowly descend to earth. They are visible during the day as black spots in the sky, gradually descending and growing larger. In the long term, if the rupture is not repaired, the unseemly mixing of cosmic and terrestrial energies will radically and permanently alter the nature of reality across the entire world.

### *Political: Wermuth as Weapon*

The fall of the star into the outer reaches of Dolmenwood did not go unnoticed by the Drune, that brotherhood of ascetic occultists whose hold on the wood grows ever stronger, like brambles engulfing a ruin. The ominous signs of the star's descent to earth galvanized the Drune to action: on the following morn, several groups under their sway were already on their way to investigate and report back. Upon hearing that significant parts of the star's body have, in fact, survived the impact, larger, more overt parties will be despatched to the scene, their goal: to seize or enslave whatever cosmic entities are to be found and to bring them to the Drune Lodge for analysis. In all things, the Drune remain coldly neutral, their only interest being the hoarding of occult knowledge and the expansion of their own power in Dolmenwood. A being of cosmic origin, such as the daemon of Wermuth, if it could be psychically enslaved, could be used as a weapon of great potency, tipping the delicate balance of power in the forest strongly in favour of the Drune. In a short period, they may begin to challenge and overthrow the forces of Law (the Church and the Duchy of Brackenwold) and Chaos (Atanuwë) in the region.

### *Whimsical: The Nag-Lord's Ball*

The Nag-Lord, Atanuwë, is to host a great ball in his court in Dolmenwood and invitations have been streaming out on many planes: to fairy lords, time travellers, petty gods, elemental princes, and arch-wizards around the cosmos, including the daemon inhabiting the star Wermuth. Such an event is rare and not to be missed; the small matter of a few trillion miles' travel through the howling void of space is no obstacle to an immortal star-daemon! So, unbeknown to any of mortal birth, the fall of the star to earth was purposeful, arranged by the star itself by means of temporal manipulation (...that the book containing the instructions to summon it should fall into the hands of one who will perform the ritual at just the right moment). Following its reassembly, the star thus makes haste into Dolmenwood, arriving in perfect time (that is, fashionably several days late) for the ball. (If the star is not complete, emissaries of the Nag-Lord may emerge from the forest and attempt to carry the pieces of the star individually, to be reassembled at the ball, no doubt to the delight of the other guests.)

# The Local Region

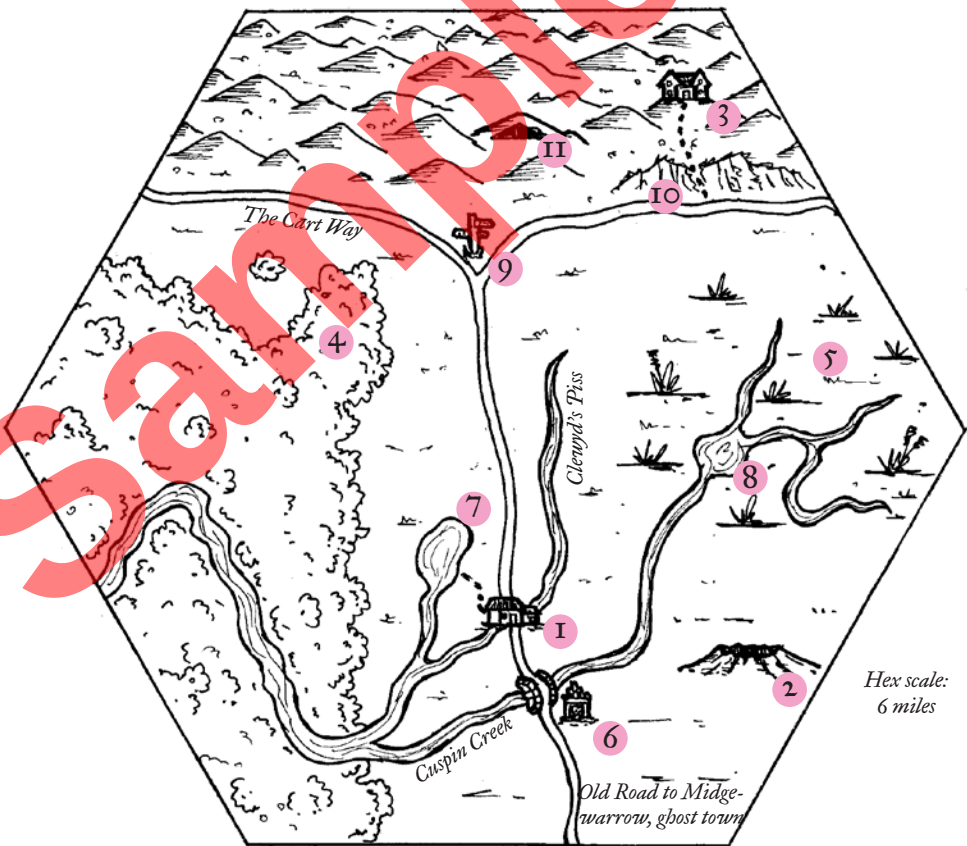
The events of this module take place within a six-mile area of sodden heathland on the northern fringe of Dolmenwood. The map below shows the areas of greatest interest to the strange goings-on. Each numbered area is described in detail, in the coming pages.

## Random Happenings

As the player characters wander through the area, they may come across lesser fallen fragments of the star or may encounter other wanderers, local people, or monsters. Tables for determining random encounters and events in the area are provided later in the book.

## A Note on Boxed Text

Each of the descriptions of the areas noted on the map commences with a short section of boxed text. This *is not* intended as read-aloud text for the players! It merely exists to provide the referee with a quick summary or overview of the area being discussed. More detailed notes on various features may follow.



# I. The Hamlet of Drigbolton

A backwater settlement barely worth placement on maps of the region. The hamlet consists of a cluster of cottages among small divisions of pasture. A wooden, cone-roofed church stands on a hill at the north of the hamlet and a water mill sits by the river at the east. Many of the buildings in the hamlet are bedecked with colourful flags.

Dashing adventurer types would have almost no reason to visit Drigbolton, if it were not for the chance falling of the star Wermuth in the vicinity. It is now a hotbed of activity and the villagers self-proclaimed experts on the lore of the fallen star.

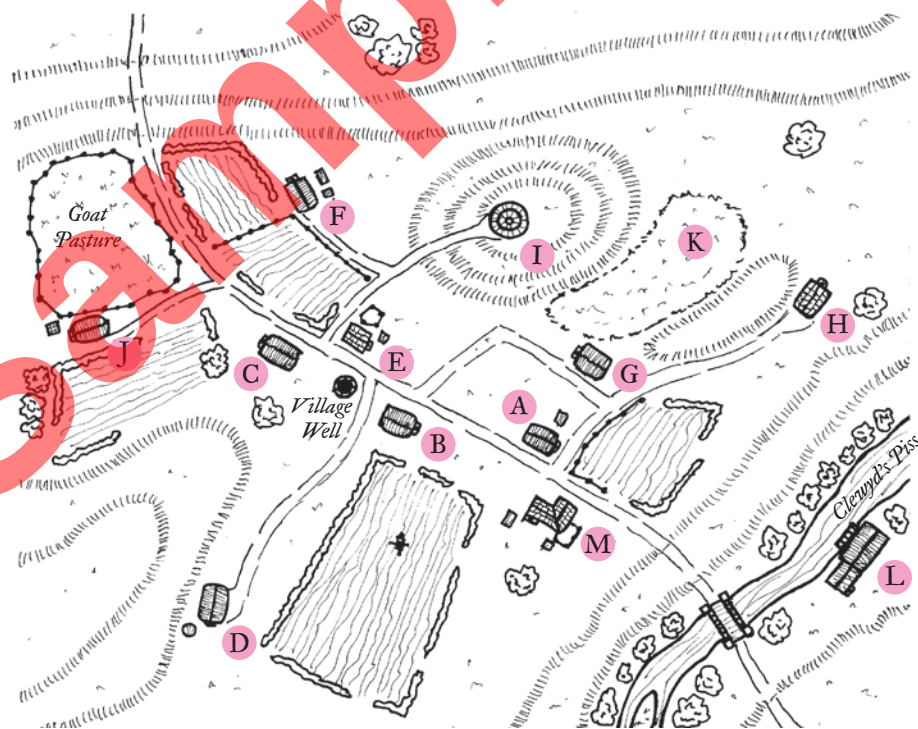
**Population:** 24 adults (human)

**Wealth:** Poor (subsistence farming)

**Government:** Consensual petty-lordship under an Elected Headman who pays fealty to the laird of Oath House (see area 4).

**Production:** Goat's milk, goat-flesh, einkorn (wild wheat grain), eggs, breads, chicken-flesh, crabber (crabapple mead), simple tools, and textiles.

**Threats:** Starvation, disease, wolves, frostbite (in winter), infertility.



## *The Manna Feast*

Since their discovery of the jelly surrounding fallen core of Wermuth, in the crater to the east of the village, the folk of Drigbolton have experienced a time of plenty, religious fervour, and great hope for the future of their small settlement. Each day, groups of villagers make their way to the crater (area 2), laden with whatever vessels they have at hand (crocks, buckets, baskets, jugs, etc), scoop up copious quantities of the star-jelly, and return to the village. Practically all of the food and drink in the village is now infused with the stuff.

As a large part of their sustenance is now being provided by the star-jelly, many of the villagers have ceased to ply their normal trades as farmers, hunters, or fishers. They believe that they have been provided for by heaven and that the village, the Church, and the nearby shrine of St Craven are to become centres of pilgrimage, famed throughout the Duchy. Consequently, the village has taken on an air of festivity. Ecstatic music and dancing is commonplace, the Sunning crockery is permanently on tables, people walk through the lanes in gaudy dress, animals are allowed to run loose, and the cottages (except cottage D—the home of Griya the Crone) are bedecked with gaudy flags.

### *Effects of Consuming Star-Jelly*

Anyone who consumes star-jelly will come under the spell of the fallen star. All of the folk of Drigbolton (with the exception of Griya the Crone) are wolfing down copious quantities of the stuff. As long as daily consumption is kept up, the effects are as follows. Abstaining from jelly for a week reverses all changes.

**First day:** A giddy desire to gaze up into the sky at night, as if awaiting a missive from the heavens.

**Second day:** A 50% chance of rising at night to wander through the wild woodlands in search of star-metal to take to the crater (area 1).

**Third day:** The dreams of those who remain asleep (50% chance) encroach upon the objective world in the form of phantasms which may be observed by any who are abroad.

**Fourth day:** Eyes glaze over with drifting, iridescent hues.

**Fifth day:** The flesh of the thighs and forearms begins to squirm and vibrate. In the evening, long, metallic-violet hairs emerge.

**Sixth day:** Jelly-eaters undergo a more extreme physical transformation, sprouting rainbow-hued, feathery appendages from their backs.

**Seventh day:** At midnight on the seventh night, those who have continued to consume the star-jelly awake, transformed into rainbow-feathered angelic beings, and drift off toward the core of Wermuth singing beautiful, wistful songs.

