
The
CROOKED
MOON
SOLD

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More at Avantris.com and TheCrookedMoon.com

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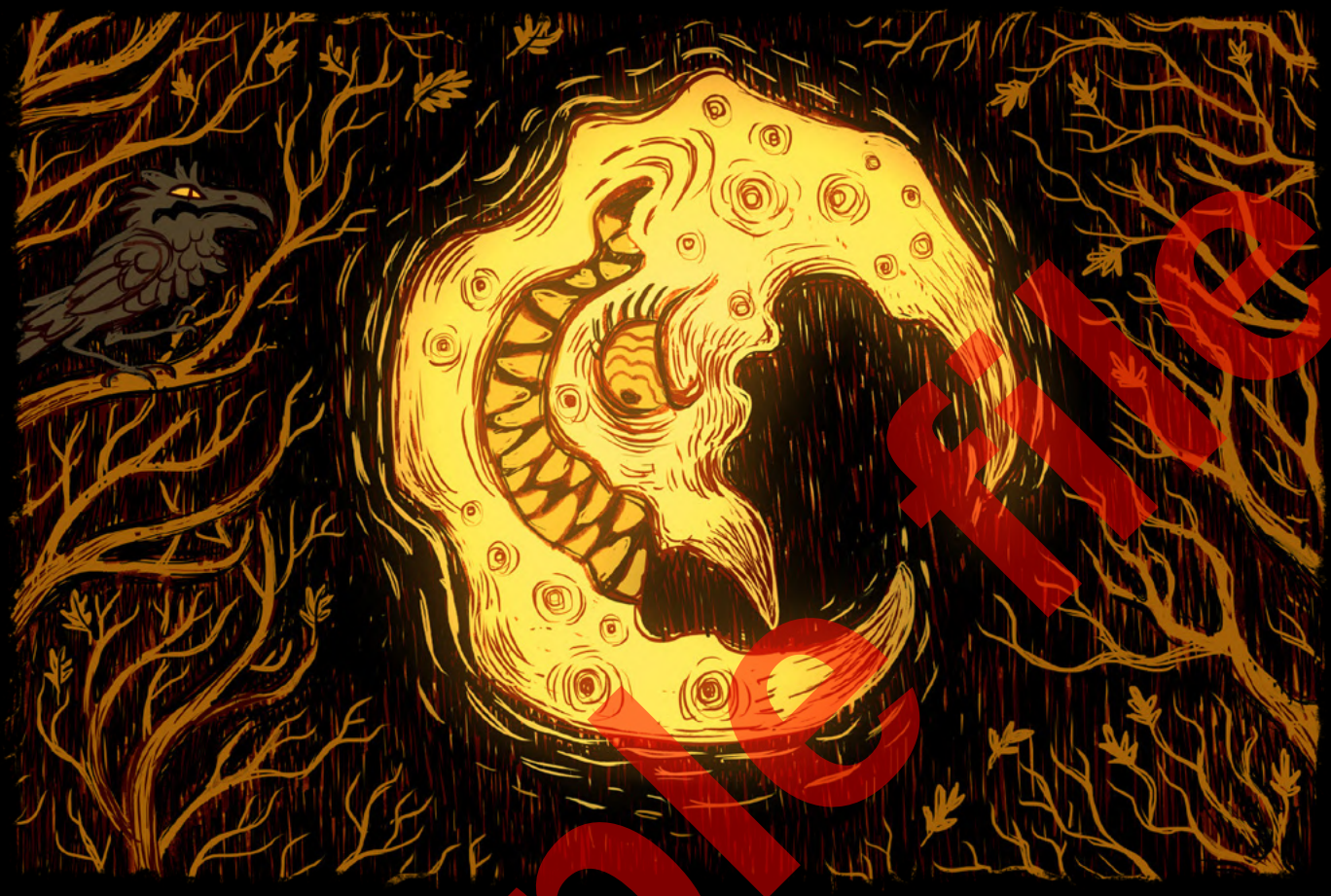
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Introduction:
A Dreadful Folktale

Somewhere, lost in the shrouded realms of death, lies a land of endless night where long-forgotten horrors are revealed to those who travel through the mist.

There, in a crooked house lives a Crooked Man with a crooked grin. He raises crooked arms to a Crooked Tree at the edge of midnight and hears the whispers of the Old Ones.

They speak of a beast that stalks the darkest woods and darkest hearts, a crown of horns upon its head. If you lose your way and feel a warm breath that chills you to the bone, run.

Follow the songs of harvest time, and before long, you'll find revelry in the dancing shadows of blazing wicker. No matter your story, these lonesome, misty rails will deliver you to where the hallowed cannot save you.

Now is the time to brave the dark wood, beware the witching hour, and weave your own dreadful folktale underneath the Crooked Moon.

You are about to embark upon a journey into the unknown, where uncanny folk with strange superstitions revere the Old Ways, and creatures of folklore lurk on the isolated fringes of civilization. *The Crooked Moon* is a tome intended to equip you with all the tools you'll need to bring Folk Horror to 5E and turn your game into a terrifying tale told among friends.

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USING THIS BOOK

Within these pages, you'll find a plethora of options, rules, mechanics, and inspiration to craft characters and campaigns rooted in Folk Horror. Whether you are taking up the mantle of the Game Master (GM) or facing the terrors that await you as a Player, this book offers the guidance to make your tabletop roleplaying game (TTRPG) experience an unforgettably dreadful folktale. *The Crooked Moon* consists of three parts:

PART 1. Chapters 1–7 feature an overview of the setting of Druskenvald, including its thirteen major provinces, and they provide the player options needed to create thematic and compelling characters either hailing from or destined to this realm of eternal night.

PART 2. Chapters 8–26 contain a robust and thrilling Folk Horror adventure campaign in which a group of wayward souls becomes stranded in the isolated valley of Wickermoor Hollow and must contend with the malign machinations and minions of the Crooked Queen, taking the characters from level 1 to 14 (and optionally all the way to level 20).

PART 3. The appendices provide additional options for GMs to enhance the horror in their games with folkloric monsters, eerie magic items, and a table of Chaotic Curses.

WHAT IS FOLK HORROR?

Despite being so deeply rooted in tradition and old superstition, the term "Folk Horror" is a surprisingly new articulation to describe a nebulously defined genre with a wide variety of media under its umbrella. *The Crooked Moon* looks to the work of writer and filmmaker Adam Scovell to help define Folk Horror and guide its influence throughout the book.

A work of Folk Horror might be one that utilizes folklore to instill a sense of uncanny dread (such as the 2015 film *The Witch*), presents the clash between the archaic and the modern (such as the 1973 film *The Wicker Man*), or creates its own folklore by weaving various elements of a culture's collective consciousness (such as the 2014 series *Over the Garden Wall*). However, Scovell's framework of the "Folk Horror Chain" unifies these archetypes and more into a broad but consistent definition.

THE FOLK HORROR CHAIN

To determine what constitutes a Folk Horror story, Adam Scovell denotes four key narrative, thematic, or aesthetic aspects of a work that form a cause-and-effect series of "links" in a chain:



LANDSCAPE. The first link is the prominence of the landscape or environment, often becoming a living, breathing character of its own. These stories most often take place in rural locations and commonly focus on nature or agriculture. Most importantly, these remote landscapes isolate the characters and communities within them.

ISOLATION. The people in these remote environments are cut off from the prevailing society and standard trappings of civilization. Whether a group of several characters or a small community, the folk of these stories find themselves separated from society physically, and most importantly, outside of its dominant ideologies and beliefs. The main action of many Folk Horror stories is initiated by outsiders, often representing modernity or urbanity, interloping into these communities.

SKEWED MORALITY. In these stories, the isolated communities and groups develop skewed belief systems, often manifesting in an adherence to ancient superstitions, the practice of the occult, or a hostile rejection of the morals of society at large. This strange and warped morality inevitably leads to a horrific action and the final link in the chain.

THE HAPPENING. Generally, at the climax of these stories, the skewed morality of the isolated groups living in remote landscapes manifests a supernatural or violent happening. This dreadful event might take the form of the summoning of an otherworldly entity, a ritual sacrifice, a demonic or ghostly possession, a bloody murder, or some other act of killing or occultism.

THE CHAIN IN PRACTICE

When defined in this way, Folk Horror is a broad but thematically consistent genre that can include works from any narrative medium, time period, or global culture. The chain encompasses archetypal Folk Horror stories such as the 2019 film *Midsommar*, as well as unexpected examples like the 1974 film *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and even genre-bending works like the 2007 film *Hot Fuzz*.

While *The Crooked Moon* leans heavily upon the aesthetics, tropes, archetypes, and plot threads found in quintessential examples of Folk Horror, this book also draws inspiration from the wide umbrella of works encompassed by the Folk Horror Chain, as well as elements of other horror subgenres such as Gothic Horror, Body Horror, Cosmic Horror, and more. You are encouraged to weave your own inspirations into your campaigns and characters to achieve a cooperative horror story best suited for your table.

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FOLK HORROR IN YOUR GAME

Horror as a genre has a notorious reputation for being difficult to execute in a game of heroic fantasy. The goal of this book is to provide as many tools as possible for you to strike the appropriate level of dread in your game, but there are many additional factors to be mindful of when setting off to weave a dreadful folktale with your friends.

ALIGNING ON GOALS

One of the biggest sources of friction between people at a table is a misalignment of what everyone is hoping to achieve in the game. This is especially true when it comes to horror. Some players may want a deeply serious Folk Horror story where the tone and tension are maintained by all at the table. Others may be interested in a more goofy, spooky flavor of horror with plenty of jokes. Certain gamers may prefer to focus on engaging with mechanics and striving for tactically and strategically optimal play.



These styles of play—and many others—are all valid, but if there is a misunderstanding between players and clashing goals, this can lead to interpersonal conflict and soured sessions. Before you begin a campaign that draws from The Crooked Moon, your group should meet for a "Session Zero" to discuss each player's goals for the game and strive to seek full alignment before the first session so that the game runs smoothly and is as fun as possible for all involved.

CREATING COMPELLING CHARACTERS

The quality of a Folk Horror story is inextricably tied to the "folk" who feature in it. A story driven by compelling, multi-dimensional, and thematic characters can elevate a fun game of roleplaying into a deeply moving experience you and your friends will remember for the rest of your lives. The adventure campaign included in this book provides a large cast of memorable NPCs, but the most important characters of the story are the protagonists piloted by the players. Below is guidance to create and roleplay unforgettable Player Characters:

COLLABORATE. The character creation process should be a collaborative experience between the players and the GM. Through working together, bouncing ideas back and forth, and iterating on initial concepts, the Player Characters who emerge from the process will be compelling and well-balanced, both thematically and mechanically, and the GM will be well-equipped to incorporate character-specific elements into the adventure.

PRIORITIZE THEME. The key to an exceptional character is a foundation based on theme first and foremost. Instead of starting with the mechanics of the character sheet, consider what theme you want to exhibit in a Folk Horror story, both aesthetically and narratively. Don't be afraid to leverage classic archetypes and tropes in fiction and borrow heavily from your favorite characters from various media. This will equip you with plenty of inspiration and ammunition to play a thematically rich and consistent character.

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INHABIT YOUR CHARACTER. Creating a compelling backstory for your character is useful, but far more important is knowing who they are. Remember that your character is a real person in an imaginary world and not just a collection of statistics, traits, and abilities. If you strive to understand who they are, you will be better equipped to roleplay a wholly realized and multi-faceted character and will know how they would react to any scenario. To help discover who your character is, answer the following questions:

- What are your character's defining personality traits?
- What ideals drive your character forward?
- What are your character's flaws?
- What does your character fear and desire most?
- Which archetype best applies to your character?
- How has your character's past shaped them?
- How would you describe your character without mentioning what they do, what they have, or what they look like?
- Are there any aspects of your character that are superfluous to the answers to the above questions or are thematically unfitting for a Folk Horror adventure?

ONWARD TO DRUSKENVALD

You are now prepared to venture through the Shroud aboard the *Ghostlight Express* and face the terrors that await you in Druskenvald. Nothing in this book is meant to be prescriptive, and you are encouraged to use its contents in whatever way works best for you and your table. With *The Crooked Moon* as your guide, you are well-equipped to craft an unforgettable and haunting Folk Horror story with your friends.

COMFORT AND SAFETY

Many of the themes and topics core to Folk Horror can be deeply distressing for some. While the most disturbing elements of the genre have been greatly diminished, much of the content within The Crooked Moon deals with serious and potentially unsettling themes that should be considered with care and caution to ensure the comfort and safety of everyone at the table. To achieve this, be sure to approach the following topics during your group's Session Zero:

CONTENT WARNINGS. The Crooked Moon contains elements of graphic and gory violence, depictions of mental health issues, cultural and religious conflict, endangerment of children and animals, grotesque body horror, family trauma, allusions to suicide, and more. Ensure that all players are aware of what awaits them so you can gauge everyone's comfort levels.

ESTABLISHING BOUNDARIES. Solicit the themes and topics that each player does not wish to engage with in the game. Once established, these boundaries should always be honored and considered hard lines that are never crossed.

SAFETY TOOLS. Utilize safety tools that are understood by everyone at the table, empowering players to safely flag when they're uncomfortable without judgment and enabling the GM to change topic, pause the scene, fade to black, or otherwise steer the game away from the source of discomfort.

REGULAR CHECK-INS. Make sure that all players check in regularly to gauge ongoing comfort levels and establish open and active communication to ensure that everyone feels heard.

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