

Secret Faces of Velsburg

A 5E-COMPATIBLE MINI-ADVENTURE FOR 4–5 PCs OF 5TH LEVEL



The hamlet of Velsburg sprang up seemingly overnight as a group of two dozen settlers swept in to build their homes. The out of the way backwater lies close to a trade route but otherwise offers little in the form of strategic value—so why would anybody want to live there? Velsburg has a secret, one that could potentially undo the new settlement if revealed. Unfortunately for the residents a dangerous woman named Bethara has uncovered that enigma and now wages war against the hamlet. In desperation the locals must

turn to outsiders for aid, but will these strangers become the heroes of Velsburg, or will they too stumble across the community's secret?

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BACKGROUND

Like many other creatures, doppelgangers run the moral gamut between good and evil. While most enjoy solitary lives of hedonism and deception, some grow to crave the company of their own kind. Several of these shapeshifters created the community of Velsburg, joined by their kin one by one, each assuming their favorite humanoid form and settling down.

Unfortunately, not all shapechangers are cut out for a quiet life. One resident of Velsburg robbed and murdered a merchant named Mischa, not realizing the consequences that would follow. Mischa's sister, a skilled warrior named Bethara, tracked down the doppelganger murderer and claimed her revenge—only to discover that he was one of many such monsters in the area. Convinced that all them have the same evil nature as her sister's killer, Bethara now wages a one-woman war against Velsburg. The locals find themselves in a serious predicament: can they turn to adventurers for aid without giving away the dangerous secret of their community?

OVERVIEW

The residents of Velsburg recruit the adventurers to defend them against Bethara—a woman most of the doppelgangers refer to as “The Ghost” for her ability to strike quickly and then disappear into the wilderness. During their time in the hamlet, the PCs may deduce that not all is as it seems in Velsburg. The party eventually tracks down Bethara and may either kill her or get her side of the story. Through either her

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NOTE

This adventure features the potential for combat but adventurers with diplomacy or investigation skills have a chance to solve many problems without violence (if they so choose).

testimony or their own investigations, the adventurers likely discover Velsburg's true nature. What they do with that knowledge is up to them.

CHARACTER HOOKS

The PCs find themselves in Velsburg for one of two reasons. If in the midst of travel they pass through Velsburg and hear about “The Ghost” that has violently harassed the hamlet in recent weeks. If they show interest in solving the problem, they discover that Yorik (the community's leader) can offer a bounty to those who end the killer's threat. If the party have a reputation for delivering results, they receive a written request for aid from the small community. As with the former scenario, the citizens of Velsburg offer a reward for Bethara's capture or death. Regardless of how the adventurers find themselves drawn into the conflict, Yorik serves as their primary point of contact. The adventure begins when Yorik meets with the PCs.

SCENE 1: ANSWERING THE CALL

The adventurers meet Yorik in a small schoolhouse that doubles as a town hall. There are few students—only three children and one teacher are present today—and little in the way of amenities. After escorting them into a sitting room, Yorik gets down to business.

The single window in the sitting room looks out over the dusty main road that leads through Velsburg and a community green that the locals have yet to fully reclaim from the surrounding wilderness. A few simple wooden houses and a couple market carts complete the image of a hamlet in its infancy.

“It's not much yet, but Velsburg has the potential to grow,” Yorik says after glancing outside. “With some

safety—and some help—we can prosper here. Unfortunately somebody seems to have it in for us. If you ask around you might hear people talking about “The Ghost.” I can tell you that she’s not undead, but a mortal woman who has it in for us.”

Yorik nervously wrings his hands before continuing. “She strikes at dawn or dusk, and has already claimed three of our neighbors. Their bodies were so burned with acid that we could barely identify them. I can offer you a 100 gp reward to stop these attacks—by any means necessary.”

A PC who succeeds on a DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check convinces Yorik to increase his reward to 125 gp, but the community doesn’t have the resources to offer anything more. Like the other citizens of Velsburg, Yorik is secretly a doppelganger disguised as a human. He can give the party a tour of the community and answer questions but does his very best to hide the true nature of the hamlet’s residents.

SCENE 2: SECRETS IN VELSBURG

If the PCs spend any significant time in the hamlet either before or after they track down Bethara, they begin to feel that there’s something not quite right about Velsburg. As the adventure progresses, allow the party to make DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) checks from time to time. Those who succeed notice some of the following:

- ▶ Residences in Velsburg seem devoid of personal features. No home has family portraits or pictures of loved ones, nobody wears locket or keepsakes, and there seems to be no effort made to remember deceased relatives.
- ▶ A PC who belongs to an unusual race (such as dragonborn or tiefling) notices somebody watching from afar and sketching on some paper with charcoal. If pressed, the stranger reveals that they were drawing a picture of the adventurer. A look at the sketch confirms this, but the sketch has notes written in shorthand emphasizing the unusual elements of the subject’s anatomy.
- ▶ A teenager playing a game with a friend rushes behind some trees. A moment later, a different

young woman emerges—and the teenager seems to have disappeared entirely.

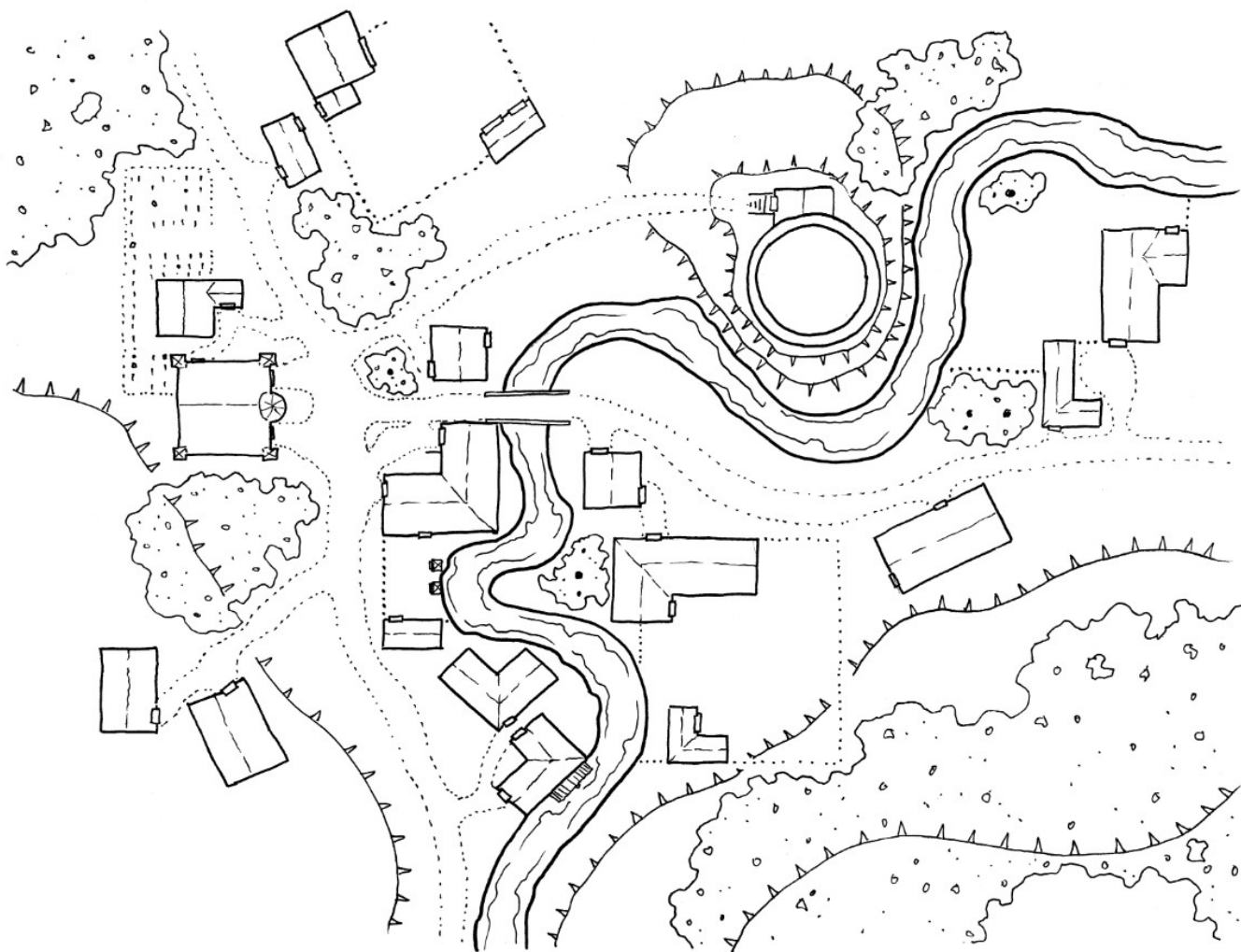
- ▶ A well-traveled PC notices somebody that they know to be dead, but on a second look the person they thought they saw looks completely different.

In addition to these potential hints, an investigation of the dead bodies reveals a more significant clue. At first it seems that the killer mutilated each victim beyond recognition with fire and acid—however PCs that make a DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine) check note that somebody seems to have burned the bodies with alchemical acids after the victims died. In truth Yorik was the one to mutilate the bodies after he realized that the doppelgangers needed to call for outside help. He hopes that this is enough to disguise the fact that the victims are not humanoid.

If the PCs press a resident for answers the individual they ask dismisses the observations as simply strange coincidences and make a flimsy excuse to leave the area when pressed further. Should the party question multiple residents they draw the attention of Metar, a paranoid doppelganger who believes no outsiders can be trusted to keep Velsburg’s secrets. Each time they question a resident after the first the adventurers notice somebody watching them from afar before breaking away suddenly and going about other business.

SCENE 3: HUNTING THE GHOST

Bethara is a neutral human **gladiator** (with Stealth +10 instead of Athletics +10) wearing a wide-brimmed hat and a scarf that covers her face in an attempt to keep the doppelgangers from copying her appearance. She also has a trained **ankheg** that aids her in combat when a fight turns against her. When she uses a bonus action to signal the creature it rushes to help her, joining the battle at the start of her next turn. Despite her skill in battle, Bethara remains painfully aware that she can’t defeat all the residents of Velsburg at once. Instead she relies on ambushes, striking in the early morning or late evening when shadows provide her with cover but not when it is so dark that the doppelgangers’ darkvision gives them an edge.



The PCs can potentially force “The Ghost” into an encounter in one of three ways.

- **Wilderness Tracking:** Bethara carefully covers her tracks but a PC that makes a DC 20 Wisdom (Survival) check can pick up the trail. On a failure by 5 no tracks at all can be found. An adventurer that fails by 4 or less does find the trail, but not before Bethara has realized that somebody is following her—in which case she sets up an ambush, gaining a surprise round when she attacks the party.
- **Bait and Switch:** If the PCs send a lone individual out near the edge of the hamlet around dawn or dusk, Bethara assumes the person is a doppelganger and targets them. This may allow the adventurers to set up an ambush of their own.

- **Magic:** The use of certain spells might give insight to Bethara’s location. Using *speak with dead* on one of the corpses allows the party to gain insight to the habits of “The Ghost.” If they glean useful information from Bethara’s victims, the PCs have advantage on any attempts to track her and on ability checks made to set up an ambush. When reduced to 20 hit points or fewer, Bethara throws down her weapons and shouts, “Go ahead and finish me, you shapeshifting scum!” If the PCs stay their hands she provides her side of the story. Although she believes the doppelgangers to be evil, she can be convinced to try a peaceful solution if the party is able to demonstrate that most people in Velsburg are peaceful.

SCENE 4: BETRAYAL OF THE DOPPELGANGERS

If the PCs capture or kill Bethara and return her to Velsburg, Yorik provides them with the promised reward and considers the matter closed. However, if the party have figured out that something is amiss in the settlement (either with the hunter's aid or through their own deductions), things may be far from over. Believing that anybody who knows the secret of Velsburg is a threat, Metar makes sure that he and his allies shadow the adventurers as closely as possible, including observing their meetings with Yorik.

Should the party directly confront Yorik with evidence of Velsburg's secret, Metar and a pair of compatriots attack. This leads to a battle against three **doppelgangers**—potentially more if the fight spills out into the streets. Honoring the adventurers' honesty, Yorik sides against Metar and seeks to prove that most members of the community are trustworthy.

If the PCs do not confront Yorik but did arouse suspicion during their investigation, the trio of aggressive doppelgangers ambush the adventurers shortly after they leave Velsburg. Any shapeshifters slain during the ambush revert to their true forms.

Finally, the adventurers may act as mediators between Bethara and Velsburg. In this case they need to arrange a meeting between the hunter and Yorik outside of the community (because the doppelgangers attack Bethara on sight if they recognize that the 'Ghost' is in Velsburg proper). Metar's gang attempts to interfere in these talks, attacking everybody present and hoping to frame the outsiders for Yorik's death.

Parties that arrange a negotiation between Bethara and Yorik can convince each individual to cease hostilities with two DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) checks—one for each side. With successes on both checks neither side forgives the other for the deaths that occurred but both agree that nobody else needs to die.

CONCLUSION

The final fate of Velsburg lies in the PCs' hands. They can choose sides or they can attempt to bring peace to the area—treating the doppelgangers as monsters or negotiating with them as people. Velsburg's future depends on the PCs, giving them the power to shape the settlement's fate as they see fit. 