THE NIGHT WATCH

by Chloe Mashiter

Creatures: *Harpy & Dryad* | **Levels:** *1-3*

SYNOPSIS

A predominantly social adventure, for characters of 1st-3rd level designed to last four hours.

The Night Watch of the village of Vaxla has a simple task: patrol the nearby woods and prevent ambushes. However, when a member is discovered beaten and unconscious at the woods' edge, talk turns to monsters and help is needed…

ADVENTURE HOOK

Vaxla is a popular overnight stopping point for merchants and adventurers; characters could be passing through, actively looking for work, or seeking out merchants and wares in the village. Regardless of what brought them there, they will have spent the night at the Maul and Mead, Vaxla's only tavern.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Vaxla is a small village, surrounded by the River Tema to the west and the Myrkur Woods on the remaining three sides. The Tema is cursed and deeply dangerous to cross, but an enchanted bridge guarantees safe passage.

The Mykur Woods is a forested swamp, with an East-West path. Jega (dryad) and Sila (harpy) are a couple living together in the woods. They take care to evade travelers by day and patrols at night, for fear of attacks.

A fortnight ago, Night Watch member Roche Shin spotted Jega and made an offer to capture "the monster" and sell "it" to merchant Roscoe Montajay. Without the Night Watch leader's knowledge, Roche convinced the rest of the Night Watch to help capture Jega, in exchange for a cut of the takings.

Last night, Mattias Windriver saw Jega and gave chase, but Sila came to her defense. Mattias fled, fell, broke his leg and passed out at the woods' edge. The watch found him the next morning.

In the morning since the attack, Hisdri—through talking to local expert Katelyn Morningfall—has realized Jega is a dryad, information that has now reached Roche and Roscoe.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

- **Jega:** a female **dryad** who is violence-averse and patient, with skin that looks like that of a rainbow tree. Normally a careful planner, she leaps to action whenever Sila is in danger.
- **Katelyn Morningfall:** a half-elf woman (**commoner**), with calloused hands and muscular frame, who is Vaxla's blacksmith. A self-taught polymath, she speaks at the speed of thought.
- **Roscoe Montajay:** an unscrupulous male halfling man and merchant (**commoner**), forever selling dodgy magical items. He is flamboyant and cocky with painstakingly styled facial hair.
- **Sila:** a female **harpy** who is fiercely protective of Jega and distrustful of humanoids. She has red-brown feathers and golden eyes, coupled with a cutting sense of humor and formidable strength of will.

NIGHT WATCH MEMBERS

The Night Watch members' stats are on pg. 13.

- **Lesslen Torunn (leader):** a non-binary dwarf with a broad, rounded russet beard, Lesslen is well-intentioned, albeit sometimes tactless. Lesslen acts as a lookout during patrols, since stealth is complicated by the glow of their mage hand, used as a prosthetic right forearm.

- **Mattias Windriver:** a male human prone to overthinking and nerves, with a lean build and delicate glasses.
- **Roche Shin:** a young, highly competitive and confident male human with an interest in black-market magical items. Roche has poorly shorn dark hair and a handful of tattoos.
- **Valder Thorngage:** a shy male halfling with bitten nails and a concave chest, Valder has strong morals but little self-confidence. Pressured into compliance with Roche's plan, he's the most likely to help the characters.
- **Hisdri Folkor:** a female gnome, who considers knowledge power and hordes it. She is always seeking to add to her extensive savings, buried throughout the woods. She has neat, short blond hair and wears copious amounts of jewelery.
- **Laplan Liadon:** a non-binary half-elf who chases danger and adventure, with numerous scars and minor injuries to show for it. They joined the Watch for excitement and are delighted it's here.

Chapter 1 – Broken Bones and Fractured Stories

Lesslen Torunn—who does not know about Jega or Sila, nor Roscoe's plan—enters the tavern to hire the characters for the Night Watch.

The crowd in The Maul and Mead, Vaxla's sole tavern, is beginning to thin as the watchtower bells chime one o'clock. Most patrons are merchants and travelers passing through, keen to start their onward journey. A highly-strung barmaid serves your complimentary breakfast while you recover from last night's late arrival.

The door swings open, and fresh, cold air mixes with the smell of spices, the spilled mead coating the floor, and the dog asleep by the bar. A dwarf arrives, with broad, rounded russet beard and an amputated right forearm and prosthetic mage hand. Scanning the tavern, their eyes light upon you.

"I'm in need of some Watch members. There's been trouble with a creature in the woods—scaring folks, breaking bones, but you look like a capable lot. I can pay you two gold per day, with a bonus fifteen gold between you if you can kill or capture whatever it is. What do you say?"

Lesslen briefs the party with the following information:

- The creature broke Mattias' leg last night
- Before the characters start their shift they should gather what information they can, starting with Mattias
- Directions to Mattias' home, where he is recuperating
- Meet at Vaxla's watchtower at five o'clock for the night's patrol

Seeing Vaxla in daylight for the first time, you note the imposing watchtower, smoke from the blacksmith's, and lush surroundings. Winding through a scattering of homes, you soon find one with a distinctive green door.

The door is unlocked; if anyone knocks, Mattias calls for them to come in. The bedroom occupies the entire first floor and Mattias is in bed, his leg in a splint. Barrels and boxes are available as seats. Use the "Roleplaying Mattias Windriver" sidebar to help roleplay him.

A successful DC 12 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals Mattias is lying about last night; a success on a DC 12 Charisma (Intimidation) or a DC 17 Charisma (Persuasion) check can get him to reveal at least some of the truth. On a failure, Mattias challenges the party to investigate the woods themselves if they don't believe him.

A success on a DC 14 Intelligence (History) or (Arcana) check reveals that Mattias' seems to be describing a harpy; any character who succeeds on this roll is familiar with stereotypical harpy lore.

If Mattias feels exposed or threatened, he will feign weakness and say he must rest.

Roleplaying Mattias Windriver

Mattias' story:

- A winged monster with talons or claws attacked him
- He tried to escape but it broke his leg and knocked him unconscious
- He doesn't know how he reached the edge of the woods
- It stole money from him

What Mattias knows:

- The monster didn't attack; he ran at the sight of it
- He broke his leg while running, losing consciousness at the woods' edge
- He doesn't know how he lost the money in his pocket

What Mattias doesn't know:

- The monster's a harpy
- That Jega's a dryad
- That the two are linked at all

What Mattias knows but will never admit:

- The monster appeared while he was attempting to capture Jega
- Jega's existence

Development

As the party leaves Mattias' house, the bells chime at two o'clock. They only have three hours to find information before tonight's watch.

Chapter 2 — The Cold Light of Day

The rest of the afternoon is a chance for exploration and inquiry. Below are likely locations and encounters.

Throughout the afternoon, Valder watches the party; ask for occasional perception checks. On a successful DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check, the characters see him following them. If caught, Valder admits to trailing the party to see if they're trustworthy. On a successful DC 15 (Charisma) check, Valder shares Roche's plan. On a fail, Valder is too scared of Roche to say anything.

Vaxla's Blacksmith

If the party seeks equipment, or information on monsters, any local will point them to Katelyn Morningfall and the blacksmith's dual plumes of smoke.

> A wall of heat meets you at the blacksmith's doorway; twin fires burning at the back with spitting intensity as a white-haired woman hauls crates into some unknowable order. Her pointed ears prick up at your approach, and she smiles warmly.

Katelyn openly shares information, but has a habit of going off on tangents.

Roleplaying Katelyn Morningfall

What Katelyn knows:

- The contents of the *Monster Manual* (Katelyn lets traveling merchants pay for services in unwanted books, through which she's learned much).
- Hisdri visited her earlier in the afternoon, quizzing her on monsters—harpies, dryads, banshees, lamias and hags. Hisdri claimed she was merely curious, and thinks talk of monsters in the woods is hysteria.

What Katelyn doesn't know:

- Jega or Sila's existence

The characters may buy any medium armor or simple weapon for half the price listed in the *DMG*, since Katelyn is yet to master these. On any attack successfully made with a weapon, or sustained wearing armor, roll a d20. On a 1, it breaks irreparably.

THE MAUL AND MEAD

If the party want to buy magical items from merchants, or try to listen in on rumors about events, they should go to The Maul and Mead.

> The tavern's now peppered with small groups of locals, unwinding with games of chance. Most merchants have already moved on—except one, a flamboyantly dressed halfling propping up the bar.

Only a success on a DC 25 Charisma (Persuasion) or (Deception) check will convince Roscoe the party are allies and make him willing to talk about Roche's plan. If, following this, a party member says a demonstrable lie, they should make a further Charisma (Persuasion) or (Deception) roll against Roscoe's Wisdom (Insight). On a failure, he becomes suspicious of the group and feeds them misinformation about the plan.

Unless Roscoe views the party as allies, he'll attempt to sell them a *wand of viscid globs* (see *Rewards*).

ROLEPLAYING ROSCOE MONTAJAY

Roscoe's story:

- He's waiting in Vaxla for a friend, to travel on together

What Roscoe knows:

- Roche's entire plan, and who's involved
- Roche visited him earlier today, to explain the delay in delivering Jega
- The existence of a harpy (but he is only interested in purchasing the more "beautiful" dryad)

THE MYRKUR WOODS

> Entering the northernmost section of the woods, your feet disappear with each step beneath a foot of brush, grass, and wild plants, which camouflage the woods' swamp pits. Delicate branches stretch out like a web over the woods.

A successful DC 16 Wisdom (Survival) check reveals the footprints left by Mattias last night. Sixty feet from the tracks' endpoint is a tree with layers of red, orange, and brown bark; Jega is bound to this tree. Any character who succeeds on a DC 17 Wisdom (Perception) check spots a carving on a nearby, typical tree that reads "J + S.", 'J' shaped like a leaf and 'S' like a feather.

If the party fails the check or investigates the woods, roll 1d4 to see what they find:

D4	Result
1	A swamp pit: a successful DC 20 Dexterity saving throw avoids falling in, and any creature falling in must succeed on a DC 16 Strength saving throw to get out
2	Attacked by one **violet fungus**
3	Mattias' lost coins: three silver and six copper
4	A love note, signed 'Sila,' hidden in a hollow of a tree

THE NIGHT WATCH

Locals can direct them to the likely whereabouts of Night Watch members—Roche's house and the stables.

Roche and Hisdri are at Roche's, a modest home with a dark red door. Characters wishing to eavesdrop must succeed on a DC14 Wisdom (Perception) check. On a success, use the 'The Night Watch' sidebar for the information the party can overhear.

If approached by the party, Roche and Hisdri feign goodwill—a successful DC 16 Wisdom (Insight) check sees through this.

Laplan is at the stables, having just returned from a ride. A character who succeeds on a DC 12 Wisdom (Insight) check sees that Laplan's civility is artificial.

Roleplaying the Night Watch

Their story:
- There are no monsters
- Mattias was drunk and injured himself
- Mattias will lose his job if Lesslen finds out—the watch are covering for him and will pretend they've driven the monster away tonight

What they know:
- Roche's plan
- Last night's true events
- That Lesslen hired new watch members
- The above story was devised by Hisdri, in case anyone started asking questions

What only Roche and Hisdri know:
- There's a dryad and harpy in the woods
- Roscoe is getting impatient
- Cutting trees might lure the dryad out

Development

The bells chime five o'clock, calling the party to the watchtower for the night's patrol.

Chapter 3 — Watchful Eyes and Hidden Monsters

> Approaching the watchtower as dusk falls, you can see five figures gathered at its base, at least one whom you recognize.

Lesslen introduces everyone before splitting them into two patrols. The party will patrol the North Woods, and the NPCs the South Woods. Lesslen then ascends the watchtower.

Roche suggests switching patrols, claiming the North Woods have more swamp pits and are safer for a group that knows them well. A successful DC 16 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals he's lying; characters remember the last sighting of the dryad was in the North Woods. If the party won't switch, the NPC patrol heads for the South Woods swiftly.

Valder whispers in Halfling to follow the patrol, in the hope that a party member understands.

If this is the party's first time visiting the woods, use the read-aloud text from *Chapter 2* before continuing.

Unless the party is following the NPC patrol, they must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom (Survival) check, at advantage if they have been here before, to avoid swamp pits (use the stats in *Chapter 2*).

Choose from among the next three sections depending on the party's choices: "Patrolling the South Woods" if the party agreed to switch patrols; "Patrolling the North Woods" if the party refused; or "Following the NPCs" if the party abandoned their patrol to follow the NPCs.

Patrolling the South Woods

Jega observes the party, hiding amongst the trees. If the party succeeds on a contested Wisdom (Perception) check against Jega's Dexterity (Stealth), they spot her. Any character that spots Jega can attempt a DC 11 Charisma (Persuasion check). On a success, Jega treats the party as allies and offers to lead them through the woods if they protect herself and Sila from the Night Watch.

Roleplaying Jega

What Jega knows:
- The Night Watch is after her, but she doesn't know why
- They are damaging trees whilst patrolling right now
- Sila, her partner, was defending Jega last night
- Mattias' encounter with Sila was near Jega's tree
- Sila will do anything to stop the Night Watch from harming Jega's tree

Once the party reaches the North Woods, the NPC patrol is 60 feet away, and Jega disappears. The watchtower bell rings as Sila flies down, landing between the NPC patrol and Jega's tree. Proceed to "The Final Showdown."

PATROLLING THE NORTH WOODS

Succeeding on a DC 14 Dexterity (Stealth) check to enter the woods unheard, and a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check, the party overhears Jega and Sila near Jega's multicolored tree, arguing over whether the new watch members can be trusted, and Sila's preference for pre-emptive attacks over Jega's caution. (When role-playing Sila, she knows everything that Jega knows.)

On a failure, or if the party do not stealth, Jega and Sila are startled.

Tactics: Jega hides using *tree stride* and Sila sings a Luring Song (two Night Watch members are within 300 feet). If Sila lures any characters, she flies to a nearby swamp pit to trap them, then returns to Jega's tree. Sila warns everyone to leave; if attacked, she fights. If Sila reaches half HP, Jega aids her. The NPC patrol appear after two rounds and fights the party out of fear of interference or having to share the payment. Proceed to "The Final Showdown."

FOLLOWING THE NPCS

Characters easily track the Night Watch patrol; they are leaving an trail of chopped trees. The party must succeed on DC 9 Dexterity (Stealth) checks to follow them without being caught. If they are spotted, the Night Watch patrol runs, attempting to trick the party into falling into a swamp pit (see *Chapter 2* for how swamp pits work).

Any character with a Passive Perception of 10 or more overhears a conversation, learning the same information from eavesdropping on Roche and Hisdri in *Chapter 2*.

Jega observes the party during their tracking; she attempts to speak with them, sharing the same information as listed in "Patrolling the North Woods."

The NPC patrol heads to where Mattias attempted to capture Sila last night; once there, the bell of Vaxla's watchtower rings. Sila flies, landing between the Night Watch and Jega's tree. Proceed to "The Final Showdown."

THE FINAL SHOWDOWN

Jega and Sila fight the four Night Watch members, attempting to convince the party to help.

Tactics: Valder refuses to fight the party, Jega, or Sila. With a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check, he fights alongside the party. On a fail, Valder runs to alert Lesslen. Roche and Laplan focus attacks on Sila. Hisdri attempts to reach Jega's tree and threatens damage to it if Jega doesn't comply.

After combat, Lesslen arrives. They are horrified by any deaths of their co-workers but honor the agreement with the party. Valder cares for the dead or injured whilst Lesslen arrests Roscoe and impounds his wares. Jega and Sila, thankful, promise the party that they can call on them anytime for help. If the simply ask for them during a future adventure, it will not be long before their allies appear.

REWARDS

As a primarily social adventure, 300 XP per character is recommended, but down to DM's discretion.

- Besides their fee (bonus included), Lesslen offers some of Roscoe's seized wares as thanks:
- *Wand of viscid globs* (successful DC 13 Intelligence check reveals it shoots backwards, at the holder)
- *Potion of water breathing* (successful DC 13 Intelligence check reveals it's poorly made, with unknown side-effects. The drinker can breathe underwater, but when above water, water constantly spills from their mouth)
- *Wand of paralysis* (successful DC 13 Intelligence check reveals it's a disguised *immovable rod*)

Night Watch Member

Medium humanoid, unaligned

Armor Class **14 (studded leather armor)**
Hit points **22 (4d4 + 4)**
Speed **30 ft.**

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	9 (-1)	9 (-1)	11 (+0)

Skills Intimidation +2
Senses passive Perception 9
Languages Common plus any according to their individual race
Challenge 1 (200 xp)

Actions

Multiattack. The Night Watch member makes two melee attacks.

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5ft., one target. Hit: 5 (1d6+2) piercing damage.

Shortbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 80ft./320ft., one target. Hit: 4 (1d6+1) piercing damage.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

This is the first one-shot I've written for publication and reflects my fondness for social, flexible and improvisation-heavy games. As a queer woman, I wanted the one-shot not just to reframe *D&D* monsters in a feminist way, but feature a positive, loving all-female relationship at its core. It's also important to me to represent non-binary and disabled people in the worlds that I write. Thanks go to Shamini, Grace, Tom P and Tom J (aka Tosscobbles Insurance Inc.) who helped me playtest this one-shot and were instrumental in working out the pacing and structure for it.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chloe Mashiter is a London-based freelancer who works in theatre and gaming as a writer, director, and performer. She is one of the co-creators of Adventurers Wanted, a company running live and streamed shows based around *D&D* and other TTRPG systems. Reach her at @chloemashiter on Twitter.