

**5E**

# RIDE OF THE HEADLESS HORROR



**FIFTH EDITION COMPATIBLE**

Save a town from the menacing of a ghostly rider in this  
3rd-level adventure for the world's greatest roleplaying game



# Ride of the Headless Horror



*Ride of the Headless Horror* is intended for four characters with an average party level (APL) of 3. Characters who complete this adventure should earn enough experience to reach halfway to 4th-level. A headless undead soldier is menacing a local village and must be stopped. This campaign takes place in Arden in the Wildlands. Any party composition should be able to finish the adventure with intelligent play.

## Background

The crypts of Crowsmeet, ancient by most standards, have long held the remains of great heroes. Recently, a duo of graverobbers attempted to pilfer the remains of a cavalry soldier and unknowingly released his vengeful spirit onto the town as a whole. One perished within, while the other fled to the local inn, his ill-gotten gains hidden in his pack. Now, every night, the headless rider appears in the local graveyard and begins his ride through the town proper seeking his missing helm. Any who come across him find themselves at the sharp end of his blade. Thus, when the sun sets, the town shelters within the old church, waiting the rider out until the sun drives him back to his resting place. Unless someone can return the stolen helm or slay the specter, his reign of terror will continue unabated.

## Adventure Hooks

**He Comes at Night.** The characters enter the town just as the sun sets. They hear the local church bell ringing and see everyone racing for its front doors.

**A Frantic Message.** The characters are met on the road by a poor commoner, out of breath and frightened beyond belief. He explains that his village has been beset upon by a terrible specter that hunts for heads when the sun sets. Eager to help, they head for the village, arriving just as the sun slips below the horizon. They hear the local church bell ringing and see everyone racing for its front doors.

**Crypts of Treasure.** The characters heard of a disturbance in the crypts of Crowsmeet. Eager to explore the supposedly treasure filled halls, they arrive in town just as the sun sets. They hear the local church bell ringing and see everyone racing for its front doors.

## A Nightly Raid

Regardless of how or why the characters find themselves in Crowsmeet, they arrive just as the sun is setting. They hear a bell ringing above a large building and see everyone headed for its front door. If they don't make their way to the church in question, read the following.

"Quickly! You must get to the church! He's coming!" a passing commoner takes you by the arm and urges you forward towards the large wooden structure.

If they resist, the commoner eventually lets go and makes a run for it.

What happens next depends on if the characters enter the church or not.

**If they enter the church**, they're ushered in by the locals and the door is barred. Shortly thereafter, a man is heard shouting from outside begging to be let in. As he makes his way across the road, he suddenly locks up in place, his face frozen in fear. Moments later, a ghostly rider races past, and with a flick of his wrist, he separates the man's head from his shoulders. The **headless horror** then proceeds to race around the church, his **skeletal warhorse** neighing and rearing up in frustration. Eventually, he gives up and rides off into the night.

**If they remain outside the church**, they see the last of the commoners seal themselves inside the church. Shortly thereafter, a man is heard shouting from outside begging to be let in. As he makes his way across the road, he suddenly locks up in place, his face frozen in fear. Moments later, a ghostly rider races past, and with a flick of his wrist, he separates the man's head from his shoulders. The **headless horror** then turns to the characters, rears up on his **skeletal warhorse's** hind legs, and charges them.

**Encounter: The Ghostly Rider.** The **headless horror** and his **skeletal warhorse** fight until the horror takes 28 damage or his horse takes 10 damage. At that point, they flee off into the night towards the graveyard. The commoners then urge the characters inside the church.

Once the rider leaves, the characters are introduced to the following notable villagers.

- **Thorin Bronzebeard** a grumpy male dwarf. He owns the local inn and is currently seeing to the assorted unnamed villagers making sure everyone is present. He shares the following if engaged in conversation.
  - The rider began terrorizing the town a week or so ago.
  - The armor the rider wears is that of the Old Guard, the soldiers Crowsmeet sent to battle in the last war.
  - The inn hasn't seen anyone new since the rider arrived. The last two customers were a man named Cragis and his brother Florin.





- **Ellie Swiftthumb** a helpful female gnome. She runs the local shop. Her passion is herbology and she often finds herself out in the forests foraging for various plants. She shares the following if engaged in conversation.

- The rider was first spotted by a stranger from out of town, a man named Cragis. It was chasing him down the road. Luckily, the sun came up and the rider retreated.
- Judging by the mud his horse leaves behind on the road, she believes he's coming from the old crypts to the north of town.
- She saw two strangers out that way about a week ago while she was collecting grave moss. She didn't get a good look at them.

- **Tuela Waestrel** is a hardy female halfling. She's the town's blacksmith. Currently, she's helping reinforce the barricaded door. She's tough as nails and very blunt. She shares the following if engaged in conversation.

- Her business has all but dried up since the rider arrived. The last sale she made was to a man named Florin who was passing through. She sold him dungeoneering equipment.
- She can provide the characters with basic weapons if they need them, but only if they'll use them to defeat the rider.
- If they happen to defeat the rider, they should keep an eye out for his missing head. The helmets used by the Old Guard sometimes had powerful enchantments on them. It'd be worth a pretty coin.

- **Cragis Forsythe** a shady human male. He and his brother Florin stole the rider's magic helmet (and his skull which was inside it) causing the specter to rise from the dead and seek revenge. The rider's presence has caused other undead to rise up, and it was in fact these undead that killed Florin, Cragis' brother. Cragis is hiding out in town, waiting for the rider to give up his pursuit so he can flee with his stolen goods. He doesn't want to speak to the characters and will shoo them away if they try to talk to him. If the characters can deduce that Cragis and his brother were the ones responsible for what's going on and they confront him with proof, he'll admit to his crime, return the stolen helmet (and the skull inside), and beg the characters to return his brother's corpse.

**Treasure: Magic Helmet.** The helmet has an onyx visor and functions as a pair of *goggles of night*.

Regardless of whether or not the characters deduce that Cragis is to blame, the townsfolk will ask them to head for the crypts and deal with the rider once and for all. They'll recommend they head there during the day since that's when the rider is inactive. If the characters dawdle and fail to head that way before the next sunset, the rider appears in town as above, fighting and fleeing. He'll repeat this course of action until killed.

## Land of the Dead

The crypt lies in the center of a small graveyard an hour north of town. The road there is well traveled and it's easy to find. Numerous graves lie in front of three large stone structures. The gates to all three are locked. They can be picked with a DC 14 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check or forced open with a DC 14 Strength (Athletics) check. The staircase in the center building leads down into the crypt.

**Encounter: Skeletons.** As soon as the characters open one of the gates, the other gates to all three buildings burst open and nine **skeletons** come pouring out, three from each. They charge the characters, swords drawn.

**Treasure: Dead Belongings.** Each skeleton has a short sword, a shortbow, half a dozen arrows, and 2 gp. If the characters search the two buildings to the east and west they also find a chalice worth 25 gp and an ornate locket worth 50 gp.

## Crypts of the Dead

The crypts of Crowsmeet have existed for over a hundred years. They house the most honored heroes the town has ever produced. They have the following features unless otherwise specified.

**Ceilings.** The ceilings are made of stone and rise 10 ft. above the floor.

**Floors and Walls.** The floors are made of cracked tiled stone covered in a moldy carpet while the walls are made of cobbled granite.

**Doors.** The doors are made of a thick oak with metal banding. They're all unlocked unless otherwise noted.

**Lighting.** Assorted torches burn in holders along the walls.

### 1. Entrance

The stairs lead down into a well-lit chamber with hallways leading off to the east and the west.

**Encounter: Zombies.** Each of the eight coffins along the walls contains a single **zombie**. When the characters open their first door, the zombies break out of the coffins and begin moving towards the group. They try to grapple anyone they can and pull them to the ground so they can feast on them.

### 2. Collapsed Tunnel

The passage ahead is full of rubble and dirt. It appears as though the ceiling collapsed here at some point.

The passage is blocked off. It can be cleared if the characters spend eight hours digging.





### 3. Eastern Tomb

There is a single ornate coffin in this room. Torches bathe the room in a dim light.

**Encounter: Wight.** If anyone disturbs the coffin, a wight climbs out and attacks.

**Treasure: Tomb Belongings.** The wight has a longsword, a longbow, half a dozen arrows, and 5 gp.

### 4. Main Altar

This large room contains a giant stone altar and four coffins. Giant double doors sit to the north, east, and west.

**Encounter: Ghost.** The ghost of Florin Forscythe roams this room. The violent nature of his death at the hands of the rider caused him to be bound to this place. When the characters enter this room, he tries to convince them to help him. He explains that he and his brother came to this place in search of treasure. When they looted a magic helmet from the northernmost tomb, the rider appeared and chased him down while his brother escaped with the treasure. He begs them to bring his body back to his brother. If they refuse, he attempts to possess one of them to carry out his last wishes. If they do in fact return his body to his brother, his spirit will finally be at rest and pass on.

### 5. Western Tomb

There is a single ornate coffin in this room. Torches bathe the room in a dim light.

**Encounter: Wight.** If anyone disturbs the coffin, a wight climbs out and attacks.

**Treasure: Tomb Belongings.** The wight has a longsword, a longbow, half a dozen arrows, and 5 gp.

### 6. Grave Robber

A decapitated body lies here near the rubble. The head lies off to one side. It appears as though, prior to its death, it was trying to dig its way through the rubble.

This is the body of Florin Forscythe. He was slain by the rider as he tried to flee, but was cornered by the collapsed tunnel.

**Treasure: Tools of the Trade.** Florin has a backpack, crowbar, a hammer, 10 pitons, 10 torches, a tinderbox, 10 days of rations, a waterskin, 50 feet of hempen rope, and a +1 longsword

### 7. Tomb of the Rider

This large chamber contains two lit torches, two ornate coffins, and what appears to be a heavily reinforced coffin recently broken into.

**Encounter: The Rider.** When the characters approach the coffin, the headless horror rises up from the broken coffin and attacks.

If the characters present the skull and helmet that were stolen to him, he'll pause his attack. If they attempt to give them to him, he'll take them and return to his eternal slumber within his coffin.

If someone tries to take the the helmet again in the future, the rider will be summoned once more to seek it out and exact vengeance.

**Treasure: Rider's Gear.** The rider has an ancient suit of studded leather armor, an ornate longsword, and 50 gp.

### Aftermath

What happens now depends on the courses of action the characters took.

**If the characters returned the helmet,** the rider ceases his nightly raids on the town, the dead stop rising from the nearby graves, and life returns to some semblance of normal for the people of Crowsmeet.

**If the characters slayed the rider,** the rider explodes in a burst of holy fire and his bones clatter to the ground once again lifeless. The dead nearby stop rising from their graves, and life returns to some semblance of normal for the people of Crowsmeet.

**If the characters deduced that Cragis was to blame,** they return to find him in the stocks and the townsfolk deciding on his final fate.

**If the characters did not deduce that Cragis was to blame,** they're approached by him as they reach the edge of town. He offers them the magic helmet not to tell anyone he was to blame. They can decide whether or not to take it, and whether or not to report him to the townsfolk.

**If the characters returned with Florin's body,** Cragis is grateful. He apologizes for everything he did, and he thanks the characters profusely for bringing back his brother's corpse.





# Headless Horror

Medium undead, lawful evil

**Armor Class** 14 (studded leather)

**Hit Points** 112 (15d8 + 45)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	15 (+2)

**Saving Throws** Str +7, Dex +5, Con +6

**Skills** Athletics +10, Intimidation +5

**Damage Vulnerabilities** radiant

**Damage Immunities** necrotic

**Condition Immunities** blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, poisoned

**Senses** darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 11

**Languages** Common

**Challenge** 5 (1,800 XP)

**Brute.** A melee weapon deals one extra die of its damage when the headless horror hits with it (included in the attack).

## Actions

**Multiattack.** The headless horror makes two melee attacks or one ranged attack.

**Longsword.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) slashing damage. If this damage reduces a living creature to 0 hp, the attack severs their head.

**Flaming Skull.** *Ranged Spell Attack:* +5 to hit, range 60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (3d6) fire damage.

## Reactions

**Parry.** The headless horror adds 3 to its AC against one melee attack that would hit it. To do so, the headless horror must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon.

