

## The Hollow

**Context:** *The Hollow* is a game I wrote and scripted in Unity for the month-long “Write a Game” game jam for June 2015. The theme was “Down The Rabbit Hole”.

*The game is a visual novel where the player may choose different paths and features four different endings. What follows is a “good” run-through, where all of the player’s choices have been made for the sake of clarity.*

OPENING – DARKNESS

NARRATOR

As my Queen commands! Here now is the story in its entirety...

FADE IN

EXT. COTTAGE AT FOREST’S EDGE – DAY

NARRATOR

It began not long ago, in a place not far from here, in a small cottage at the edge of the woods. There lived in this cottage a huntsman with his wife, Celeste, and together they had a beautiful daughter by the name of Molly.

CELESTE and MOLLY fade into view.

NARRATOR

For a time, they were happy! ... Until the fateful day Celeste took ill and never recovered...

CELESTE fades out and MOLLY takes center stage.

NARRATOR

Sadness reigned. The huntsman and his daughter grew increasingly distant, neither weeping, neither mourning. And then, one day...

MOLLY

I'm going out to play.

PLAYER

Where are you going?

MOLLY

To look for rabbits in the brush by the trees.

PLAYER

As long as you're back before sundown.

NARRATOR

And off she went to play.

MOLLY fades out.

NARRATOR

And off she went to play. The huntsman, busy with numerous tasks around the home, paid little heed to the sun creeping across the sky. Dusk arrived when he realized Molly had not returned.

The sky slowly darkens and soon the cottage is engulfed in night.

NARRATOR

And off she went to play. The huntsman, busy with numerous tasks around the home, paid little heed to the sun creeping across the sky. Dusk arrived when he realized Molly had not returned.

The player checks the brush.

NARRATOR

At first glance, there was no sign of her. He checked the brush, but only a few rabbits scattered in his presence.

The player investigates the edge of the woods.

NARRATOR

In the darkness through the trees it was impossible to see more than a few feet, but there was definitely something moving in there.

VOICE

Hey! Over here!

The player looks for the source of the voice but sees no one.

VOICE

Down here! In the mud!

NARRATOR

There, in the mud at his feet, lay Molly's little jester doll. She had found it a few years before and rarely parted with it. Creepy as it was, it was her most cherished possession.

MOLLY'S DOLL

I'm so glad you found me! I was afraid some vermin might take me away to its burrow, and THEN what would you do?

PLAYER

You... You can talk?!

MOLLY'S DOLL

Well, maybe not talk in the traditional sense of the word, but yes! Yes I can!

PLAYER

Where's Molly?!

MOLLY'S DOLL

Ah, that's the right question! I'm afraid it's bad news! We were playing when she heard a lullaby

from the woods. It was the same lullaby our dear departed Celeste used to sing to her before sending her to the Dream Realm.

PLAYER

Who was singing it?

MOLLY'S DOLL

I wish I knew! Certainly not Celeste, however... There's more to these woods than mere pixies and brownies.

NARRATOR

The huntsman knew the dangers of these woods. By the king's decree, they had been made forbidden for all to enter. Despite this fact, boldly and with little regard for his own safety, the huntsman plunged forward into the darkness.

NARRATOR

I suppose you might say that this is where our story *really* begins.

FADE OUT

“PART 1: THE HUNT”

FADE TO:

EXT. DARK FOREST -- DAY

VOICE

Well now, what have we here?

PLAYER

Who's there?

VOICE

You wandered into these woods with no idea what you might meet? Now's that's foolishness if I ever heard it.

A slightly pudgy satyr slowly fades into view.

SATYR

You need to give your eyes a moment to adjust to the darkness. You're obviously not from around here. The name's Slaw, and this here's my part of the woods. What's a huntsman like you doing here? Didn't you know you humans weren't allowed in here?

PLAYER

I'm looking for my daughter.

SLAW

Your daughter? Oh, you mean that little girl what came through here sometime before dusk.

PLAYER

You've seen her?!

SLAW

Yeah, and I'll give you this one for free. See that tree hollow over there? It's through there she went. If you want to find her, you'd best hurry on through.

PLAYER

Why would you help me?

SLAW

Because, between you an' me, having a human huntsman in my woods makes me nervous. Never know when you might try to cut open a wolf or kill a river spirit. The quicker I send you after your daughter, the better for me and mine. So... off you go, then!

NARRATOR

Although the huntsman had met few satyrs in his life, he knew he should be wary of them. But he figured it would be safer to play along rather than openly challenge the creature's intentions. Keeping a hand near his hunting knife in case the satyr tried anything, the huntsman approached the tree hollow. It seemed to grow bigger as he got nearer, becoming big enough for a grown man to clamber through. Which is precisely what he did...

FADE TO:

EXT. -- THE FOREST -- DEEPER IN

NARRATOR

... and climbed out in another part of the forest.

MOLLY'S DOLL

Be careful! That satyr works for the Hollow Queen. She's something of a big name around these parts.

PLAYER

Who's the Hollow Queen?

MOLLY'S DOLL

Tall, dark and spooky. Some say she has an interest in human emotions because she can't have any of her own.

PLAYER

You thought to warn me now?

MOLLY'S DOLL

It seemed inappropriate to speak up in front of the satyr! He might have taken me for a valuable trinket and tried to steal me!

The player continues forward.

NARRATOR

The smell of a nearby campfire drew the huntsman's attention. In a small clearing among the trees, he spotted a man equipped not unlike himself. Another hunter.

A hunter fades into view.

HUNTER

Hello there! How strange to see another human in these woods! You're the second one I've seen today!

PLAYER

Was the other a little girl?

HUNTER

Indeed she was! She was in the company of a very spooky lady, however, so I took pains not to reveal myself. These are not safe woods.

PLAYER

Where did they go?

NARRATOR

And here the hunter hesitated.

HUNTER

Well, I suppose I COULD tell you... but I imagine you'd then be on your way and THEN how would we ever know?

PLAYER

Uh... know what?

HUNTER

Why, who's the better hunter between the two of us, of course!

NARRATOR

A worrying glee appeared in the hunter's eye.

HUNTER

Here, then, is my proposal: there is a basilisk that roams these woods. Whomsoever 'twixt the two of us that can track it and kill first wins. If you win, I'll send you on the trail of the girl and her spooky escort. If I win, you must give me your bow and your knife and return home and tell all that you meet that I am the greatest hunter this land has known!

PLAYER

You don't leave me with much choice.

HUNTER

Wonderful! May the best huntsman win!

NARRATOR

The hunter went about preparing his provisions and the huntsman realized he had an opportunity: there, by the fire, unattended, was the hunter's bow. It would be effortless to sabotage it, and with the hunter's attention elsewhere, the huntsman had no doubt he could get away with it.

The player instead chooses to wish the hunter luck.

HUNTER

Oh! Well, thank you, though I don't expect I'll need it.

NARRATOR

And with that, the hunter disappeared. The huntsman began the hunt as best he could, but these woods were foreign and filled with magics. What he took for a group of fireflies turned out to be pixies, and the trees he marked would uproot themselves and change places when his back was turned. Then came a lilting voice from the bottom of a ridge.

VOICE

Help!

NARRATOR

Peering over the edge of the ridge, the huntsman saw a peculiar sight: a creature covered in

vines and leaves was stuck in a makeshift trap. Still unseen, the huntsman had the choice to get on with his hunt and leave the creature be, just as he could go down and help it or fire off an arrow now and end it.

#### MOLLY'S DOLL

Be careful! Creatures in these woods are full of trickery! You never know which might suddenly betray you! Not to mention that every second we spend here is another second the other hunter ahead of us!

The player decides to go down and free the creature from the trap.

#### NARRATOR

Well, my queen, you should have seen the huntsman. Down that ridge he slid, much to the creature's surprise, and by approaching carefully, helped it from its trap. The creature, grateful, revealed itself to be a dryad.

#### DRYAD

Brave huntsman, thank you for your aid. Without you, surely I would have perished. The trees whisper to me that you hunt the basilisk, a dangerous and elusive creature. To reach it before your rival hunter claims it, follow the dry riverbed and do not listen to the whispering trees for they will try to lead you astray. I understand there are stakes in this contest of yours, but I would also ask this of you: Do not kill the basilisk. Its presence is all that keeps the great Hunger Beasts from claiming these woods as their hunting grounds, and they are a much fiercer threat.

#### PLAYER

I will try to spare the basilisk if I can.

#### NARRATOR

The dryad, now freed, melted away into the trees, her laughter fading with the wind in the leaves. The huntsman continued his hunt, confident he was on the right trail. Sure enough, as he followed the dry riverbed, he heard the trees whispering and cajoling. Following the dryad's advice, he ignored it all.

#### NARRATOR

As he pushed through the trees, he came upon a remarkable sight: There was the basilisk, coiled and ready to pounce, but it had not yet noticed our huntsman. No, its attention was instead on the rival hunter who, in his fervor to be the best hunter in all the land, remained oblivious that he was about to become prey. The huntsman had little time to make a choice.

The huntsman attempts to scare away the basilisk.

#### NARRATOR

Had the situation not been so dire, I would have laughed to see the huntsman make such a loud and terrible ruckus. The basilisk, taken aback by this sudden cacophonous burst, turned tail and slithered back into the woods, fast as lightning!

HUNTER

I had him! You scared him away! He has our scent now... we'll never again find him!

PLAYER

Then there is no contest. Where did my daughter go?

HUNTER

I saw the little girl and the spooky woman head yonder through those trees...

NARRATOR

The hunter pointed to a nearby copse of dark and foreboding trees.

HUNTER

Best of luck on your hunt, friend... I don't think we will meet again.

NARRATOR

The huntsman, tired of these games and grateful to once more be on the trail of his daughter, thanked the hunter and gathered his things. He left without looking back.

NARRATOR

Following the trail given to him by the hunter, the huntsman found himself in a ring of thick trees with no obvious way forward.

VOICE

Well now, does our tracker need some help finding his way?

NARRATOR

Another satyr appeared before the huntsman. My queen would have recognized this one as Rudis, but the huntsman never did learn his name.

RUDIS

After all, at this juncture, what is a man-of-the-hunt such as yourself to do but follow the bread crumbs laid before him, so to speak?

PLAYER

You work for the Hollow Queen, don't you?



RUDIS

We're all servants of the Hollow Queen. Even you, in your own bumbling way, contribute to the workings of her will.

PLAYER

Is she the one that took my daughter?

RUDIS

To be entirely honest, I don't think "take" is the correct word. If your daughter is with her, then she must have gone of her own volition.

PLAYER

Take me to her!

RUDIS

Ohoho! Such rude demands! I haven no business going to her and I'm not your bloody guide, but I *can* put you on the right path... There are trees, here, that are hollow. When in doubt, climb through to find your path. And if you cannot find a tree hollow, why, simply ask the nearest satyr for help...

NARRATOR

With that, the satyr stepped aside, revealing a tree hollow behind him. He gave a bow and a flourish, inviting the huntsman to step through. The tree hollow grew in size, drawing the huntsman in until he once again found himself in darkness.

FADE OUT

TITLE: "PART 2: FORGET ME"

FADE TO:

EXT. -- ANOTHER PART OF THE FOREST -- DAY?

NARRATOR

Once more, the huntsman was in another part of the woods, but this time he was on a road. He traveled for some time before he came upon a pair of strangers: a set of twins.

THE TWINS

Stranger, hello there! Hello there stranger! Lost, are you? Are you lost?

PLAYER

I'm looking for the Hollow Queen.

THE TWINS

The Hollow Queen! She's a spooky one, that one! Well, you're on the right road, yes indeed! It's just a shame you'll never be able to get off this road!

PLAYER

What do you mean?

THE TWINS

At the end of this road is a fearsome beast that will only let you pass if you can pay the toll! It costs a single gold coin to pay the toll, but we don't have any coins! So we're stuck on this road until we find gold.

PLAYER

What about the other direction?

THE TWINS

That way lies the merchant! Yes, the merchant! He has gold! Gold he has! But we've nothing to sell! So here we're stuck! But maybe you? You could sell something? Yes! Get a gold and set us free! Go see the merchant! See the merchant! Go!

NARRATOR

The twins ambled off, hand-in-hand, leaving the huntsman on his own.

MOLLY'S DOLL

We should probably see the merchant before seeing the beast and try to get a gold coin.

PLAYER

But I've nothing to sell either!

MOLLY'S DOLL

You might have something he wants! The creatures of these woods don't just deal in trinkets. But if you find his prices too steep, well... you *are* armed, after all!

NARRATOR

So the huntsman turned in the other direction, climbing down the winding road until he came upon the merchant.

MERCHANT

A stranger approaches. A hunter. Have you come to trade?

PLAYER

I seek a gold coin.

MERCHANT

Then you have come to the right merchant. I can trade you one for something of equal or greater value.

PLAYER

I have nothing to trade.

MERCHANT

On the contrary. I see in you a vast richness even you yourself do not visit it often. In fact, it seems as though you have been trying to get rid of it, so perhaps my offer will seem a fair one.

PLAYER

What's your offer?

NARRATOR

The merchant hesitated.

MERCHANT

The memory of Celeste, your wife, and all the happy moments you spent together. For those, I shall give you a gold coin.

NARRATOR

As you can imagine, my Queen (or perhaps you cannot), the huntsman did not answer right away. Sensing this trepidation, the merchant went on.

MERCHANT

The memories would be gone from your mind. You would not miss her or remember the pain of her loss.

MOLLY'S DOLL

The road to getting your daughter back does require sacrifice. I can't tell you what the best choice is, but at least Molly would remember her mother.

The player has the choice to walk away, trade the memories or attack the merchant. He trades the memories.

MERCHANT

If it's any consolation, I can promise you won't regret this decision.

FADE TO WHITE

CUT TO:

EXT. -- SAME SCENE AS BEFORE

NARRATOR

The merchant was gone, but the huntsman found himself with a gold coin in his pouch. Feeling strangely lighter than before, he returned to the road. Back on the road, the huntsman ran into the twins once again.

THE TWINS

You saw the merchant, didn't you? Did you see the merchant? Do you have it? Do you have a gold coin? Without it we will remain stuck here.

PLAYER

Yes, I managed to get one.

THE TWINS

You did! Did you! What luck! What did you trade for it?

PLAYER

I don't actually remember...

THE TWINS

May we have it? We need it to pay the monster's toll!

The player hands them the coin.

THE TWINS

Hooray! Hooray! Home is where we're going! We're going where home is!

NARRATOR

And with a cheerful bounce in their step, the twins ambled ahead down the path, disappearing around the bend. The huntsman would not see them again, but I happen to know, my Queen, that they did make it home safely. The huntsman, on the other hand, now had a creature to face and no means with which to pay its toll. There was nothing left to do but go forward.

NARRATOR

The creature came into view. It was another satyr. My Queen would have recognized this one as

Kunna.

KUNNA

Well, well, what have we here? A father looking for his daughter. If you're made it this far, then you've passed my brothers' tests.

PLAYER

Tests?

KUNNA

We don't let just anyone see the Hollow Queen. But fear not, little huntsman, you've passed. You won't get to meet the Hollow Queen, but she approves of your actions and has decided you get to go home with your daughter.

PLAYER

What's the catch?

KUNNA

No catch. Step through this tree hollow and find yourself home.

NARRATOR

The satyr stepped aside and, sure enough, there was a large tree hollow behind him. Through this hollow, the huntsman could see his home and a small feminine figure. He stepped through, wondering what actually awaited him on the other side.

FADE OUT

TITLE: "PART 3: WOLF AT THE DOOR"

FADE TO:

EXT. -- THE HUNTSMAN'S COTTAGE -- DAY

The player finds himself back at his cottage with Molly standing there.

MOLLY

Father, hello! It's so good to see you back from the forest!

PLAYER

Molly? Is that really you?

MOLLY

Of course it is! Who else would it be? Shall we go inside, father? We still need to cook supper and it will be dark soon.

PLAYER

I am just glad we are together again.

Evening slowly falls onto the cottage.

NARRATOR

Inside they went to prepare dinner. The huntsman wanted very much for this all to be true, but he could feel that something was off. It was a fantasy. The logical part of himself knew he should reject it, and he convinced himself he would do so... in a moment. Maybe after dinner. Maybe after the dishes were cleaned. Maybe after everyone went to bed. The sun was long gone when the huntsman realized he wanted to stay more than he could bring himself to leave. He sat alone in the kitchen when he heard a sound from outside.

NARRATOR

Wolves!

The player sidles up to the window and peers outside.

NARRATOR

There was near-pitch darkness out there, but in it he could make out glowing eyes and flashing teeth. These were no ordinary wolves. The wolves spoke.

WOLVES

Little huntsman, little huntsman, you are very lost.

PLAYER

Get away from here!

NARRATOR

The huntsman's demand was met with laughter that surrounded the house.

WOLVES

This house you sleep in is not yours; it was built from your memories. The young girl that sleeps with the guise of your daughter is not your daughter. She is a simulacrum. A spirit there to steal your heart if you go to sleep. Let us in, little huntsman, and let us devour this spirit.

WOLVES

We promise you may walk away, unharmed, but you must leave the door open and take with you no lantern. The light repels us. If you stay, little huntsman, you will awaken tomorrow with no heart and no love, and the spirits will have gone.

#### MOLLY'S DOLL

These wolves may be right... this is not your home. But I don't know what's safest... staying here or going out there. What I do know is that these wolves cannot enter as long as you do not invite them in... but none of your weapons would be of any use against them.

#### NARRATOR

Without making a sound, the huntsman lit the lantern's wick and opened the door. Outside, at the edge of the light, he could see the black, formless shapes of the wolves swirling around him and the house. They moaned and they hissed at the light of the lantern, but made no move to enter the pool of light. The light gave the huntsman hope.

#### WOLVES

Leave us! Leave this place! Do not close the door... let us devour the spirits within!

#### NARRATOR

The huntsman shut the door tightly and the wolves snarled angrily. He held the lantern before him, and all around him he could feel the pack furiously trying to breach the light. The huntsman walked away from the house and the wolves, the sorrow in his heart tempered by a glimmer of hope. The wolves eventually dispersed from around him, fading into the darkness of the night itself, but by then the woods had once again swallowed up the huntsman.

#### FADE TO BLACK

The three satyrs, Slaw, Rudis and Kunna, all fade into view.

#### KUNNA

What do you think, brothers? Is he ready?

#### RUDIS

Look, he's managed to get a coin after all!

#### SLAW

That never happens, does it? He managed to get out of the house with a lantern, though. That's something.

#### KUNNA

It just means he wasn't a meal for those bloody wolves.

SLAW

Brrr... Hate those things.

KUNNA

I don't know about you, brothers, but I've no other tests to give him.

RUDIS

I suppose it's time.

SLAW

Right. Time to meet the Hollow Queen!

NARRATOR

And that, my Queen, is when we came before You.

FADE TO BLACK

TITLE: "FINAL PART: THE HOLLOW"

In the darkness, the Hollow Queen very slowly fades into view along with Molly at her side.

HOLLOW QUEEN

We feel a warmth approaching. A life that is not yet Ours. We did not summon this life, but We have been expecting it.

MOLLY'S DOLL

This is the huntsman, my Queen! This is the father of the young girl that summoned you!

HOLLOW QUEEN

Joquin, my most loyal of servants, what is this shape you hold? Take your true form we you speak to Us.

MOLLY'S DOLL

As my Queen commands!

Molly's doll, Joquin, suddenly transforms into a jester.

JOQUIN

And here, my Queen, is where you commanded us to tell the tale of how we came to be before You! So now that you have heard our tale in its entirety, what is your command?



#### HOLLOW QUEEN

To you, my subject, We bid thee to be silent! To this huntsman, however, We cannot issue commands for he is not one of Our subjects. We understand that you might believe we have stolen your daughter, but We have done nothing of the sort. For you see, We are the Hollow Queen, and We seek an heir to our kingdom. Only one who is hollow, devoid of emotions, may take this throne to rule over Our kingdom.

#### HOLLOW QUEEN

Your daughter, dear huntsman, has grown more and more hollow since the passing of her mother. It was this emptiness inside her that drew Us to her and We have invited her to stay with Us until she is able to take Our throne. She has followed Us willingly and has always had the choice to return home, should she wish it. However, she is not yet entirely hollow. We knew that you may come for her, and in anticipation We sent our loyal satyrs to test your spirit. Now that We have heard the tale, we can sense your daughter's spirit.

#### HOLLOW QUEEN

It is abundantly clear that she is not ready to stand by Our side. In fact, We now doubt that she may ever be fit to take over Our kingdom. We are very disappointed. It is Our wish that you quit this place and take her with you. We will have to find someone else to take Our place. Someone more hollow. Our satyrs will ensure that you return home safely, but We will not see you again. Good-bye, huntsman, and good-bye Molly.

The Hollow Queen fades into the darkness, leaving Molly behind.

FADE TO BLACK

Joquin suddenly appears.

#### JOQUIN

Before you go, huntsman, I wished to speak with you. I hope you do not feel that I have betrayed you! Your actions have been an inspiration to me. You had to sacrifice the memories of Celeste to save your daughter, and while I cannot return to you what you gave, I can give you the ones I have. As young Molly's doll, I heard every lullaby, every sweet word, and every happy sigh. It is the most I can do.

Joquin fades away.

There is a long pause, and then we hear two voices.

#### HOLLOW QUEEN

Tell me, Joquin, did the huntsman live happily ever after?

JOQUIN

He did, my Queen, and so did his daughter. She grew up to be a huntsman as well and there are many tales following her exploits. Perhaps Her Majesty would like to hear some?

HOLLOW QUEEN

Not now, my jester.

JOQUIN

In that case, my Queen, there is nothing else to say...

JOQUIN

... Except, perhaps, "The End".