**Resources**:

<http://www.gutenberg.us/articles/eng/Leshy>

Dixon-Kennedy, Mike, *Encyclopedia of Russian Myth & Legend*, ABC-CLIO Inc, 1998

Kononenko, Natalie, *Slavic Folklore Handbook*, Greenwood Folklore Handbooks, 2007

<http://folklorethursday.com/regional-folklore/serbian-folklore-his-majesty-the-zmaj-and-her-majesty-the-vila/#sthash.tFA8X5tZ.dpbs>

Muzeum Etnograficzne <https://twitter.com/ethnomuseumwars>

Machala, Jan . *Slavic mythology* . Olomouc: Votobia, 1995. [ISBN](https://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Standard_Book_Number) [80-85619-19-9](https://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Speci%C3%A1ln%C3%AD:Zdroje_knih/80-85619-19-9) .

Bath, Zdeněk . *World Slavic gods and demons* . Praha: Panorama, 1990. [ISBN](https://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Standard_Book_Number) [80-7038-187-6](https://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Speci%C3%A1ln%C3%AD:Zdroje_knih/80-7038-187-6) .

**Introduction**:

If you’ve ever been intoxicated with the arboreal sensuality of leaves glowing in the sunshine, of mottled sunglow and cool shadow on forest paths and the eons of decay and rebirth in rich black soil, then you’ve participated in a perceptive complex of emotions that, perhaps, is an intuitive register of the ancient relationships in a forest ecosystem. During a time in which I was deeply obsessed with the invisible workings of forests, I listened to a podcast episode describing the complex relationship between a vast complex of nutrient-delivering microscopic fungi and the tree roots they feed - and I was struck by the sheer intelligence, the absolute genius of the exchange between tree and fungi.

Perhaps our ancestors also intuited this uncanny intelligence. And in the face of this how could one not see the presence of the locus genii, of tutelary spirits - those incorporeal beings that reside in and protect their woodland realms? And how could one not hear, as Alexander Porteous so eloquently put it, ‘a voice heard in rustle of leaves or murmur of the breeze.’

If profound emotional experiences can be had in managed woodland, then what of those ancient stretches of primeval forest that covered much of Europe? That covered gigantic swaths of the Slavic lands that will be our focus this episode?

What intelligences might be found there?

Indeed, in wild forest, in real wilderness where one can wander for days without even the slightest hint of civilization, is it any wonder that, perhaps, fey and uncanny spirits might shift and lurk in moon-shirking shadows or run and bask in mottled sunlight and shade?

During my forest obsession, I also read a novel of brooding forest terror called ‘The Ritual’ and in it Adam Nevill portrays the sinister, human-defying forces of primeval woodland: portrays the biting thorns and sucking muck and panic-inducing thickets of a Swedish forest that not only disorients...but terrorises. Indeed, the primeval forest, left to its own devices, will fester and flourish - perhaps not just it’s flora and fauna but also it’s lurking spirits and preternatural creatures.

**Inspirations & Approaches**

A common thematic thread binding all these stories together is the sublime, that ‘greatness beyond all possibility of calculation, measurement or imitation’ - and in nature - that which is connected with awe, terror and danger. One of my favourite authors, Arthur Machen, was a master of the sublime, particularly the terror-inducing manifestations. You will perhaps have noticed two refrains repeated in many of the stories: ‘darkness of darkness beyond the stars’ and ‘in the deep folds of dream.’ This are quotations from Machen’s famous work ‘The Great God Pan’ and are my tribute to this artist.

Story 1 is a conflation of two fascinating pieces of folklore - the burning of the death goddess effigy in Poland and Dziwitza the Huntress, who is said to induce absolute terror in those who encounter her. The ending was also inspired by Machen’s story, in which a mind that reaches beyond the veil snaps and descends in gibbering idiocy. In the original lore, such Romantic notions aren’t necessarily present - nonetheless, I saw a creative connection between the terror the huntress induces and the fact that she is part and parcel of the sublimity of the forest wilderness.

Story 2 is focused primarily on the Serbian version of the viles legend, largely because I became very interested in the kolo, a folk circle dance of immense speed and energy. In a moment of delicious serendipity, I also happened to be reading a story by Machen called ‘The White People,’ in which a character describes: ‘another very ancient game of dancing and winding and turning, by which you could take a person out of himself and hide him away as long as you liked, and his body went walking about quite empty…’ This inspired the rather terrifying moment of accidental astral projection at the end of the story in which the young man’s spirit is loosed from his body and is lost in that ‘darkness of darkness beyond the stars.’

Stories 3 and 4 largely follow the original lore with a narrative fleshing out based on research of local culture and landscape.

**Further Reading, Viewing & Playing**

Leshy in popular culture: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leshy>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supernatural_beings_in_Slavic_folklore>