

Designed for use with
ShadowDark RPG



The Beast of Black Keep

A Short Fantasy Campaign by J.C. Connors

Introduction

About the Adventure

The Beast of Black Keep is a folkloric, dark fantasy campaign for *Shadowdark*, likely taking 3-5 sessions to complete. It's set in on the edge of a mysterious, cursed forest, and can easily be adapted to other OSR settings and game systems. A *GURPS Banestorm* version set in a more generic specific world is available at 1shotadventures.com.

The campaign begins with a simple setup—the PCs are hired to travel into the cursed forest, the Blackwoods, to recover a duke who has lost his memories and transformed into a horrible monster. They'll find the dark woods sprawling, and filled with many dangers and subplots. While the players are free to explore at their own pace, *The Beast of Black Keep* will likely take several sessions to complete.

The Beast of Black Keep is suitable for four-to-six 1st to level characters, but will likely level them up to level 3 or 4 by the end.

Characters introduced for the first time in the adventure are noted in ALL-CAPS. Sections marked with a map icon are side-quests and adventure hooks, and not important to the overall plot of the adventure.

Adventure Tone

The tone of *The Beast of Black Keep* is one of eerie folklore and creeping dread. Most of the adventure is set in a wild, half-forgotten forest where ancient magic stirs beneath moss and ruin. Though filled with grim humor, odd characters, and strange beauty, danger always lingers at the edges. Players who ignore omens or blunder blindly into the dark woods will find the forest swift and merciless in its judgment.

The Backstory

A scattering of small towns lie just a few miles north of the Blackwoods, a cursed and creeping forest that has slowly devoured the empire's land for centuries. However, the northern boundary of the forest, the Grimhollow, has remained relatively quiet over the last decade or so. Aside from the occasional raid by dark elves or desperate, blue-skinned kobolds, the farms and villages have learned to forget the woods.

Recently, the small town of Moriel was struck by a hidden calamity. Its heir, Duke Oswald Laskaris, returned from his studies in the south twisted into a monstrous, ogre-like form. Unable to live among his people, he fled into the forest and began raiding settlements alongside two similar beasts—known now as the Grimhollow Thools.

Duke Oswald's fate was kept secret by his sister, Duchess Catherine Laskaris, who outlawed any harm against the brothers in hopes of one day reversing the curse.

Unbeknownst to her, a deeper darkness has taken root. A two-headed ettin called King Chutter, a creature steeped in sorcery, has claimed a corner of the Blackwoods. He discovered a portal that leads to an ancient spelltower located in the lonely peaks of the North Mountains. There, he's been studying powerful magic and inventing a strategy to conquer the northern towns and carve out his own kingdom. His goal: seize Moriel's Black Keep and control the vital northern trade route of the empire. With the Grimhollow Thools as his lieutenants, King Chutter recruited others to his cause. First, he convinced an upstart necromancer, Choir, to join him. Choir promised the sorcerer-ettin an army of undead constructs to attack the towns. However, the necromancer has been slow to deliver his promises, and the alliance is now fragile.

In response to Choir's missed deadlines, King Chutter installed a puppet leader among the kobolds that live in the Blackwoods. Chutter was delighted when the kobolds were able to capture one of the most powerful druids who lives in the woods. He's now ordered the kobolds to prepare for battle, although small, disorganized bands of insurgents are fleeing the forest.

Realizing he needs an effective general for the kobolds, he sent messengers to recruit the Antlered Man, a mysterious and cursed woodsman who lives in the Blackwoods.

Within weeks, King Chutter expects to be able to mount his attack on Moriel. But before his war truly begins, King Chutter sends a vanguard—animated scarecrows lurching from the fields—to destroy the Arbor Aeterna, an ancient tree said to guard the land from the dark magic that Chutter would wield to aide in his conquest...

Adventure Synopsis

The Beast of Black Keep spans three parts. In Part One, the PCs enjoy the outdoor market near Moriel during the Feast of St. Phanourius. Moriel is a small settlement ruled by Duchess Catherine Laskaris. The market is attacked by magical minions, and the PCs are hired to track down the Grimhollow Thools, the monstrous warlords thought to be behind the attack. There is a twist, however. One of the Thools is Catherine's brother Oswald—cursed and twisted into a monster that she is unwilling to see hurt. The duchess' man-at-arms, however, asks the PCs to track the Thools to their lair, and gives the PCs permission to kill Oswald if that would stop the attacks.

In Part Two, the PCs enter the vast, brooding Blackwoods in pursuit of the Grimhollow Thools. This section is a sandbox—there's no single path forward. Players are free to explore the haunted forest, uncover ancient ruins, and survive its many dangers, which range from cunning dark elf raiders and ethereal spiders to wicked manticores and sinister crones.

As they journey deeper, the PCs will uncover the cursed history of the forest and its inhabitants. They'll learn that the Thools serve a two-headed sorcerer-ettin known as King Chutter, who plans to launch a conquest against the northern towns. With the help of the Thools, a growing kobold army, a mysterious necromancer named Choir, and forgotten magic, Chutter's invasion is only weeks away. The PCs are the only ones close enough to stop it.

Along the way, they may also discover a way to restore Oswald to his human form. The cure lies in the hands of the great druid of the Blackwoods, who can prepare a powerful ritual using three rare herbs: gillshade, greybane, and mushrooms grown near a Log-Wife spirit. Unfortunately, the great druid is missing, and finding those herbs will require the PCs to face some of the Blackwood's most insidious dangers.

Eventually, clues will lead the PCs to the Thools' lair: a ruined temple hidden deep in a forgotten ravine. There, in the adventure's final act, they must confront King Chutter and his allies.

A portal within the Thools' temple leads to Chutter's stronghold—a millennia-old tower perched atop a lonely mountain peak, where he studies ancient magic and prepares for war. With courage and cunning, the PCs can defeat him, shatter his ambitions, and return Oswald to Moriel in triumph.

How to Run This Campaign

While the beginning and end of the *The Beast of Black Keep* are largely set, the entire middle of the adventure is open-ended. There's no one way through it. Be aware that some of the encounters are only loosely connected to the plot, like the dark elves and the various ruins. Others, like the crone, her son, and the kobolds are very central to the mystery of the Thools.

Be prepared for your players to wander their way through the adventure. It doesn't matter what direction they set out in, the locations, NPCs (helpful or not), and the random encounters will slowly but steadily guide them towards the Thools and their leader, King Chutter. And if they ever get stuck, have the crone appear to push them along; she knows the woods better than anyone else.

Embrace the Eerie Tone and Atmosphere. The tone of the adventure is one of eerie folklore and creeping dread. Never let your players feel safe while they are in the Blackwoods. Describe the strange noises of the forest, make the players feel like they are always being watched, and add your own unexplained events.

Increase the urgency over time. While King Chutter's plans to invade the north do not have a strict timeline, as the PCs discover more about his plans, increase the pressure on them. Describe patrols of armed kobolds patrolling the woods, or dragging back spiders to Kobold-Town to milk them for their venom. The king's attack should feel imminent, so by the time the PCs confront him, they will feel as if they just barely saved the day.

Finally, **embrace the folkloric tone of the adventure.** The Blackwoods are eerie, dangerous, and always creeping outwards. Many of its weird and strange events are unexplained. This adventure is ripe for expansion. If your players get especially interested in a mystery, unravel it for them, invent new angles, and let them explore deeper. A cursed wood is an easy setting for new stories. I've seen players lead a rebellion against the kobolds' chief, take over as caretakers of Cnoc na Ríthe, and ransom the Antlered Man to his mother for a king's ransom. In the Blackwoods... everything is possible!

The Feast of St. Phanourios

On the Feast of St. Phanourios, the people of Moriel gather beneath the vast canopy of the Arbor Aeterna to celebrate the harvest. The ancient tree towers above them, its gnarled branches draped in flowering moss, its golden leaves whispering with the voices of lost seasons. Beneath its sheltering boughs, a sprawling farmer's market bustles with life. Merchants across the empire stack crates of ripe fruit, the scent of roasted nuts and fresh bread mingling with earth and wood. Artisans lay out woven tapestries and silver trinkets, while children dart between the tree's ancient roots. Nearby, traders barter in the eternal tree's shade, and an old bishop blesses the bounty while cramming his mouth with a handful of famed Moriel hazelnuts.

The Arbor Aeterna tree is the pride of Moriel's root and nut farmers, who credit its magical roots for fertilizing the soil every year. There is some truth to this — the area around the tree is very magical, and every year elven pilgrims visit, cast spells, and tell millennia-old stories about the great events that took place under its canopy.

The adventure begins soon after the PCs arrive in the market. Whether they are travelers or locals, they will be impressed by the quality of goods, the feasting songs, and the camaraderie of the people.

As the PCs peruse the market on this holy day, they notice DUCHESS CATHERINE LASKARIS shopping at the market. Accompanied by a single handsome bodyguard, GREGORAS PELLOS, she moves lightly through the crowd, purchasing foods and flowers from farmers who seem delighted to sell to her. Also present is the joyful FATHER METHODIOS, an elder who has lived his entire life in this area of the empire.

Evil from the Fields

Suddenly, a child screams from behind one of the farmers' stalls. The crowd quiets. Then, a terrifying figure slashes its way through the nearest tent. It is a *harrowed scarecrow*, a magical construct of rotting burlap and broken branches. Wielding a scythe in its hands, it launches itself into the crowd, attacking anyone nearby. Within seconds, many more have appeared from the nearby fields. Some attack the townsfolk, others loot vegetables from stalls, and still others start to claw at the great tree. Witnessing this shocking event requires a FRIGHT CHECK!



There are five *harrowed scarecrows*, although there are others nearby attacking merchants. The scarecrows are clumsy but vicious constructs, and always attack by all-out attacking their foes. If the PCs look like they need help, the bodyguard Gregoras Pellos or a burly farmer or brave merchant might jump in to assist.

During the fight, one of the PCs will see three large, hunched figures watching from a low hill to the south. They carry what looks to be large staves or spears. They are at least a mile away, but as the fight reaches its conclusion, they amble down the hill's far slope and quickly disappear from sight. Some amongst the crowd see them too, and whisper their name, "The Grimhollow Thools have returned."

After the battle, the PCs can chat with the scared locals:

- **On the Thools...** the townspeople say the Grimhollow Thools are brothers who have terrorized the town for years, and that no one knows their background or motivation. Some men think they are ogres, others theorize that they are hobgoblins grown to twice the usual size through dark magic from the Blackwoods. "*There used to be two of them, but in the last year, a third appeared...*"
- **On defending themselves...** They also say that there is a newer law in the town that the Thools are not to be interfered with. "*The last man who went after them ended up in the stockade for two days in the town square.*"
- **On the scarecrows...** the townsfolk have not seen anything like these creatures before. All the townsfolk agree

Moriel

The adventure begins near the town of Moriel, a small settlement that lies along the Northern Imperial Trade-way, a road that cuts east-to-west from the great city of Arnov to the Quarter-City, the city closest to the north and the Emperor's Wall. To the north of the town are the high peaks of the North Mountains; to the south the creeping, cursed Blackwoods.

The hills around Moriel are bountiful with root and nut farms. Moriel hazelnuts are prized at Yuletide every year across the land. The fertile land is said to come from the roots of a massive and ancient tree, the Arbor Aeterna.

Moriel is a town of about 1,200, including a hundred dwarves, and is ruled by the young Duchess Catherine Laskaris. She governs from the **Black Keep**, a granite fortress built by dwarves over five centuries ago. The keep makes Moriel one of the more well-defended towns in the north. Catherine inherited power two years ago after her brother Oswald vanished en route to the southern city of Bannoch, with rumors claiming he was slain by bandits just before reaching the city.

that this was a very brazen attack compared to the Grimhollow 'Thools' usual methods of ambushing carts and isolated homes by themselves and without allies. A few locals have theories. One farmer suggests that someone visit Mac Rónán the druid who lives in the Blackwoods to ask him for protection. Another says the druid is too hold to be of use anymore. Finally, a nut seller claims that the scarecrows must be the work of the witch who lives in the woods.

If the PCs propose chasing the brothers, they will be quickly stopped by the Duchess Catherine Laskaris and her bodyguard. She will remind them that it is the law of Moriel that the Grimhollow Thools are not to be interfered with. If asked why, she simply states that attacking the Thools will no doubt bring more powerful enemies upon the town. She does, however, encourage the PCs to bring her information on the attack should they find it.

Searching the Fields

Several of the farming men suggest searching the fields for any more signs of scarecrows. Meanwhile, merchants ask the PCs for help repairing their damaged stalls. Several more guards

Harrowed Scarecrow x5

MAGICAL MINIONS (LEVEL 2)

AC 10 HP 9
MV Near AL: C

Attacks 1
Sickle +0 (1d6)

Abilities
S +0, D +0, C +1, I -2, W +0, Ch -1

Gear: Scarecrows wield cheap farming sickles but one in three carries a reaping scythe (1d8 damage).

One scarecrow also carries a fuming apple, which when thrown creates a cloud. Anyone within near range must make a CON check (DC 12) or be nauseated and suffer disadvantage for 1d6 turns. They also carry burlap sacks for looting.



from the Black Keep soon arrive to escort the Duchess back to town while her bodyguard Gregoras Pellos leads the clean-up efforts.

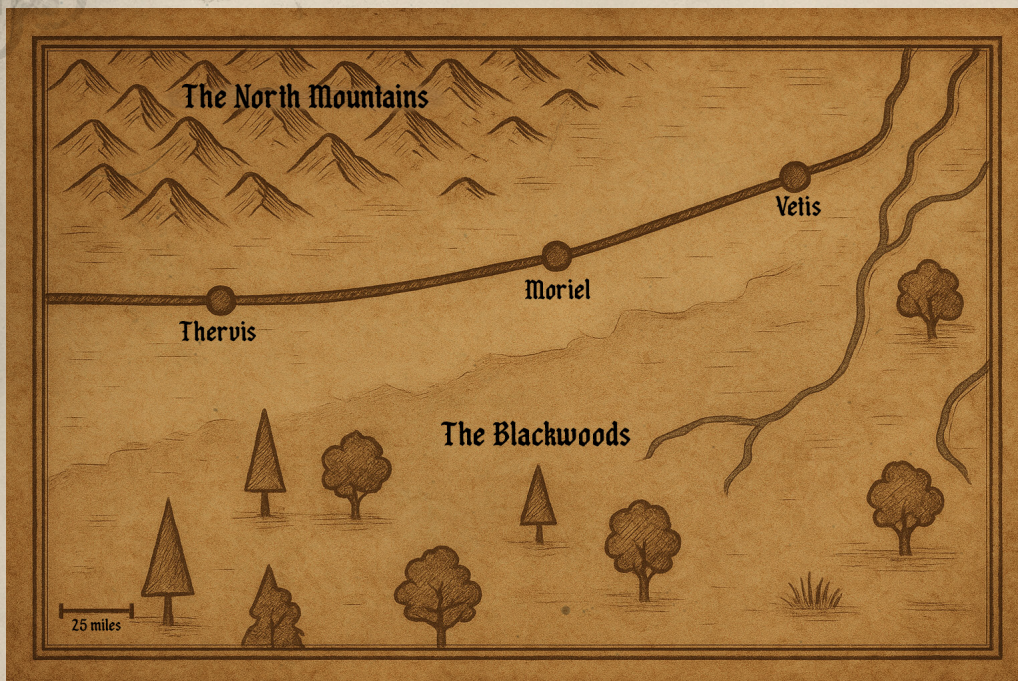
Searching the fields finds the remains of three more scarecrows. Unlike the others, which were small, these scarecrows are larger, easily a head-taller than a man. These scarecrows seem to have been poorly made, as they fell apart before arriving at the merchant stalls, although priests and spellcasters likely concludes that the Arbor Aeterna unraveled some of their dark magic.

One scarecrow, carries a large, **black-bladed woodsman's axe**. The axe is magical and deals +d8 damage to living trees. Clearly, this scarecrow was meant to attack the Arbor Aeterna itself.

Tracking the scarecrows is difficult; they were too lightweight to leave many marks. An INT check (DC 15) reveals their tracks generally came from the south.

Gregoras' Request

As the PCs search the fields and help cleanup the market, they will be approached by Gregoras Pellos. He hands each PC a cup of cold cider and asks them to join him at the edge of the market. There, he explains the situation:



woods, identify which one is Oswald, and then either capture him cure him, or put an end to the man's misery. The PCs will likely have questions...

- **On Dendybar the Mottled...** Gregoras shrugs and says that he resides in the town of Bannock, 400 miles to the south. He warns the PCs from engaging the mage, as Dendybar is clever, capricious, and has many powerful friends.

- **On the Blackwoods...** he describes the woods as tangled and gloomy, home to werewolves, dark elves, and worse. He advises the PCs to enter the wood during the day, and set up a fortified

"Duke Oswald was once a bright and gifted lad, eager to wield magic like the great wizards of old. He dreamed of mastering the arcane, of bending the elements to his will, and for a time, it seemed he might. But he placed his trust in the wrong hands. Dendybar the Mottled, a cruel and capricious master, saw him not as a student but as a nuisance, too slow, too unworthy of the power he sought. Instead of sending him home from the guild in Bannock, instead of allowing him to seek another path, the wretch twisted Oswald's fate—cursing him, warping his body into something monstrous, stripping him of all but the faintest echoes of the young man he once was.

"Now, two years have passed, and Oswald has roamed the land as a brute in both flesh and mind, tearing through villages alongside two others of his kind, the Grimhollow Thools.

"But something in him remembers. His path has led him back to Moriel, drawn by memories, perhaps a flicker of the life stolen from him. And yet, I fear he does not return as a lost son, but as a raider. There are whispers of dark forces lurking in the Blackwoods, shadows that seek to claim this town, to turn him against his own sister, the Duchess. I ask you—find these Grimhollow boys in their lair, discover which one was once Oswald. If there is a way to break the curse, to bring him home, the Duchess would see it done. But if the prince is lost, if the man he was is buried too deep beneath the beast he has become..."

The bodyguard exhales, his grip tightening on the hilt of his sword. "Then may the gods have mercy on him, for I do not think we will."

Gregoras' instructions are clear. He asks the PCs to track the Grimhollow Thools to their undiscovered lair in the Black-

camp at night. *GM's Note: Everyone in the land knows the Blackwoods, and everyone has heard stories in them. Have each PC make an INT check (DC 15). Give each PC one rumor from the rumor table (p. 7), two if the roll was a success, and three on a critical success!*

- **On the location of the Thools...** Gregoras knows they live in the Grimhollow, the northernmost section of the Blackwoods. But he does not know exactly where. "Our previous trackers have been lost, give up, or — in the case of poor Pietre — never return..."
- **On how to identify Oswald...** Gregoras says the duke had a hayberry-shaped birthmark on his shoulder, but he does not know if it still remains after his transformation. He also says that he loved to carve wooden toys as a boy, which he would gift to the children of Moriel's farmers every year.
- **On cures...** he suggests that a druid camp lies deep in the forest, and that perhaps the high druid who protects the place may know of a cure for Oswald's condition.
- **If asked for aid...** he can supply them with horses and provisions, and point them to a local who might be willing to act as a guide for a reasonable price (5 gp) or lend them a crude map (10 gp, see [Handout A](#)). See next page for one such hireling, HOBBLEBOOT SAM.

Finally, as for a reward, Gregoras says that the town merchants will pay the PCs a small fortune (500 gp) if they put an end to the Thools' attacks. And, if they can somehow do it without Oswald being hurt, the Duchess will grant knighthood to whoever completes this quest, along with land north of here along the mountains, big enough to build a modest farm or an estate.

Hobbleboot Sam

LOCAL GUIDE (LEVEL 0)

AC 12 HP 4
MV Near AL: L

Attacks 1

Hatchet +0 (1d6)

Abilities

S +0, D +0, C +0, I +0, W +1, Ch +0

Gear: He carries a hatchet and a walking stick. He wears medium leather armor, and brings a backpack with group basics and a hand-drawn map of the northern Blackwoods (see [Handout A](#)).

Personality: Hobbleboot Sam is friendly and loyal to the people of Moriel. He has a slight limp, hates heights, and loves foraging for mushrooms.



Sir Gregoras

DUCHESS' BODYGUARD (LEVEL 3)

AC 12 HP 14
MV Near AL: L

Attacks 2

Mace +3 (1d6)

Abilities

S +3, D +0, C +1, I +0, W +1, Ch +1

Gear: Ill-prepared for battle during the festival, Sir Gregoras carries a mace and wears padded cloth armor.

Personality: Gregoras is secretly in love with Duchess Catherine, and will protect her with his life. He cares deeply for the people of Moriel.



Rumors of the Northern Blackwoods

1. Dark elves can be found everywhere in the Blackwoods. Their wizards draw power from the evil magic there.
2. They say there's a mad mantichore stalking the northern Blackwoods now—fangs dripping with venom so foul it can melt a man into red jelly before he hits the ground.
3. Watch out for the old crone who lives a few miles into the Blackwoods. She lures handsome men into her cottage and dines upon them.
4. A meteor landed in the forest centuries ago. It is hot enough to still cause forest fires every few months.
5. An elven bounty hunter named Aelar Eisenli hunts the woods. She is the best in all the empire... don't cross her.
6. The rains from last season have turned the forest into a breeding ground for giant spiders.
7. Choir, a failed apprentice from one of the great mage colleges, was recently seen in the woods collecting bones of dead animals.
8. The crows of Cnoc na Ríthe, the druid-protected camp for outlaws, perch silently on its shelters, one for each soul in the camp. When one vanishes, so does someone in the night.
9. A settlement of kobolds can be found deep in the woods... hundreds of them!
10. There's a fellow, a strange Antlered Man, who lives out east in the woods. They say he eats elves and then weeps.
11. There's a drowned ruin in a lake in the woods, remnants of the land before the Blackwoods conquered it.
12. Some say there are strange, magical plants in the Blackwoods. Powerful healing herbs, yes, but also poisonous things that can make you sick, or worse.
13. The dark elves are getting bolder. They attack merchant wagons and even grab folks right out of their homes for... well, no one knows exactly what for, but it can't be good...
14. Some of the spiders in the woods can trap your very thoughts and fears before they eat you.
15. A decade ago, the Grimhollow Blackwoods saw the death of Jariella the sea elf, a cunning warrior with a sword crafted by the ancient waves. No one has ever found her grave.



Navigating the Blackwoods

The Dark Southern Woods

The woods below the purple line are shadowy and dim. PCs need torches even during the daylight here.

Travel Time and Getting Lost

Parties can typically travel one hex (two miles) in an hour in the woods if they stay on a trail (if they leave the trail, this cuts in half). However, the twisted paths of the Blackwoods mean that even skilled outdoorsmen can get turned around and lost. Every hex traveled, the lead player must make a navigation roll. Roll 1d12 modified by:

- +2 if they have a good map or guide
- +2 if they have a skilled outdoorsmen in the group, like a ranger or druid
- -5 if they are traveling at night
- -2 if they have traveled south of the purple line

If the roll is a 5+, the party maintains their direction. If they roll 1-4, they drift one hex in a random direction. The party has a 50% chance of realizing they are lost. Unless they are traveling with a skill outdoorsmen, on a roll of 1, the PCs suffer outdoor maladies such as twisted ankles, insect stings, and worse, and suffer 1d2 damage.

Random Encounters

When the PCs enter a hex or camps at night, roll 1d6. On a roll of 1, they encounter a wandering monster or random encounter (p. 46-48). However, if the party is lost, this increases in odds to a roll of 1-2.

1. Entrance to the Wood

An ancient, stone archway, covered in moss and shadow, marks the entrance to the Grimhollow section of the Blackwoods. Weathered etchings on the archway show it to be at least a thousand years old, likely crafted by the oldest elves of Yrth. A frayed rope dangles from the arch.

Under the archway on the ground is a wet and dirty parchment (see [Handout B](#)):

Here hangs Fariborz the Pyromancer, flame-hearted traitor, oathbreaker, wretch. Condemned for the burning of fair Simithari, whose silver spires once touched moonlight. Let his cursed soul burn where no stars shine, in flame unending and without song.



There is no sign of this Fariborz, and an investigation of the hangman's rope finds that its end is not just frayed, but also singed. Tracking finds several prints in this area, and more recent tracks of a man that head southwest into the woods about a day ago. It also finds recent tracks of heavy individuals — certainly the Thools — heading to the southeast.

An INT check (DC 12) roll recalls that Simithari was an old elven outpost in this area, but that it fell to ruin when the cursed forest consumed it centuries ago, choking the groves that supported it.

Another INT check (DC 12) recalls that Fariborz the Pyromancer is a wanted man. He was a local from the nearby town

of Vetis, who trained as a mage in the southern courts. He wandered too far into forbidden rites and began whispering to fire as if it were alive. He killed two priests, was excommunicated, and fled for the mountains, swearing the the dwarves there would teach him spells that would blacken the bones of bishops and scorch God's altars.

As the PCs enter the forest, they the uncanny quiet in the air:

The woods breathe with an unnatural stillness. Gnarled trees loom like sentinels, thorned vines strangle the undergrowth, and twisted roots jut from the earth like broken bones. Even at mid-day, only a dim, sickly light seeps through the canopy. No birds sing and only the slow creak of unseen things can be heard.

2. The Overturned Wagon

On the road ahead is a toppled merchant's wagon. Two bodies are lying atop the debris, their eyes being pecked by crows, and broken crates and boxes are strewn everywhere. There is no sign of the wagon's horses.

This merchant wagon was attacked by Azzika Fren and the dark elves just a couple of miles before they exited the Blackwoods for the northern towns. The two merchants, a husband and wife, are now dead, fine black arrows piercing their hearts. A bloody, dwarf-crafted fine hatchet is still in the woman's hand. It is carved with the name "Dvalinn."

The PCs can find the tracks of the horses running towards the crossroads, and also the tracks of the raiding party heading to

the west. If the PCs wish, an INT check (DC 15) allows the PCs to track them all the way back to their camp.

An inspection of the ruined wagon finds that these were glass merchants. Crates of fine wine glasses, bowls, and other glassware can still be found in the wreck. The dark elves had little use for such things, so left them here. Many of the pieces are shattered and cracked, however. If the PCs search the area, they'll find a small pouch of silver coins (worth 5 gp) inside the wagon, missed by the raiders. A careful search also uncovers some fine bottles of southern wine hidden in the wagon, and a woman's pearl necklace worth 15 gp.

3. The Crossroads

At the crossing of three mossy trails stands an ancient signpost, weathered by wind and time. In three languages — English, Elven, and Latin — it says “Beware of spiders!” A crooked finger of wood points southward toward “Cnoc na Ríthe — 9 miles” an old name for a woodland sanctuary for penitent outlaws and outcasts, usually protected by a druid.

Without warning, the underbrush splits with a terrible crash—a wild boar bursts forth, shrieking like a thing bewitched. Its coarse hide is matted with fresh blood, and a broken boar-spear juts from its back—but what chills the bones is the severed arm still clinging to the shaft, the gauntlet locked tight on the splintered wood.

The boar is angry and berserk, attacking the nearest large target in sight. Once defeated or subdued, there PCs may discover a few clues.

First, the spearhead is *fine* quality. If attached to a new shaft (which is easily done by fighter-type classes), the PCs can gain a fine boar spear as a new weapon (treat as a regular spear, but cannot be thrown due to its crossbar). Also, the gauntlet is good quality and can be worn. Oddly, there is no severed limb inside the gauntlet, nor blood to be found.

Also near the crossroads, the PCs find signs of day-old wagon tracks heading to the northwest (leading to the ruined wagon attached by dark elves).

The Fallen Hunter

The boar can be tracked with an INT check (DC 10) roll. This leads to a small clear a few hundred yards from the crossroads. In the clearing is an elderly **dead hunter** with a severed arm and a grievous gut wound. Upon inspection, it is discovered that the hunter's arm had been lost years ago and healed over. He had fashioned some kind of primitive, artificial arm to allow him to hold a boar spear.

On the corpse the PCs will find a large hunting knife, a leather helm, and a primitive hunter's map of the woods which shows the crone's hut on it as well as a few other landmarks (see [Handout C](#)). It also has scrawling that indicate the man was looking for his lost brother near a lake.



Blackwoods Boar

WILD ANIMAL (LEVEL 3)

AC 12

MV Near

HP 14 (10)

AL: N

Attacks 2

Tusks +3 (1d6)

Abilities

S +3, D +0, C +1, I -2, W +1, Ch -2

Gore: Does an extra die of damage if it hits the same target with both tusks

Notes: This angry boar charges the biggest and strongest foe it can see, especially horses. Wounded by the boar spear, it is berserk and will fight to the brutal end.



4. The Weeper's Well

The Weeper's Well slumps forgotten in the strangled heart of the Blackwoods, its crumbling stones half-swallowed by vines. Once a jewel of elven craft, the well's faded runes are the only thing that remembers its old secrets. A rotted bucket, bound in blackened iron and dangling from a frayed length of old rope, still sways gently above the mouth of the well.

If the PCs are near the well at disk, they'll hear the sound of soft weeping rise from the depths, echoing like a voice trapped far below. There is nothing down there, but anyone who risks climbing inside might find themselves trapped by the slick walls of the well.

The well is magical and wizard recalls that such wells may have the ability to create *essential water* at certain times a day. Such water is many times more effective than ordinary water, quenching thirst, extinguishing fires, etc. Studying the old runes (which requires 1d4 hours and knowledge of the elven language to decipher the faded writing) identifies that the water becomes magical for exactly ten minutes starting at sun-up.

If someone drinks from the Weeper's Well at any other time, they are briefly burdened with the sorrow of the ancient elves — but also granted a glimpse beyond the veil of time. For the next two hours, the drinker can see “memory-echoes,” translucent visions of the past lingering in places touched by grief, love, or violence.

These echoes appear like faded ghosts replaying their final moments, visible only to the drinker. The visions are wordless and fragile—one harsh sound, a sudden movement, or even direct eye contact can cause them to unravel like mist. While under the effects of the water, the drinker gains advantage to rolls to search, track, or know occult secrets. However, each time they gain such a bonus, they fall into a deep melancholy for an day, and will be miserable to be around.

Visions of the Grave of Jariella

Furthermore, if the drinker is *lost* while under the effects of the water, they may be led to the grave of the fallen sea elf warrior, Jariella, who fell to the manticore of the woods ten years ago. She is now a mournful skeleton resting against a tree, blue and white flowers surrounding her resting place. She still holds her magic sword. She is protected by the magic of the woods, and if the PCs approach her corpse, the flowers

pull her under the ground and she reappears near another tree within sight. Only if the PCs dig a grave for her will the flowers let them touch her body. In this event, she will drop her sword, *Selvimar*, a blade said to have been crafted by the waves of the most faraway oceans.

Selvimar is an enchanted +1 longsword. It has three turquoise gems set in its hilt which allow the wielder to breathe water and resist lightning (halving such damage).



5. The Dark Elf Camp

In the middle of a clearing filled with fallen stone pillars is a half-finished, man-sized statue. The statue rises from the broken earth, his twisted form frozen mid-scream, a single finished arm reaching skyward in desperate agony.

Hundreds of years ago a dark elf sorcerer named Hooded Voorn tried cast an elaborate ritual here in an attempt to build a hidden underground fortress. The spell failed spectacularly. Misshapen pillars jut up from the earth and Voorn was turned to stone. His body then exploded into a thousand shards, each carved with a word.

Seventy years ago, a group of dark elves rediscovered Voorn's grave site and began the laborious process of rebuilding his petrified form, hoping the combined words would reveal an eldritch secret. So far, the elves have found half the shards and thus reconstructed half of Voorn's body, which is now displayed in the middle of the camp.

About fifty dark elves live and work in this camp. They are led by PRINCE KALOS, a scion who is eager to finish the job and return to his leaders with Voorn's riddle deciphered. He has about thirty years left, he figures.

To keep his elves entertained, he occasionally sends them out on raids, led by his rusted lieutenant, AZZIKA FREN. Sometimes, the raids suggested by the crone of the woods, Mutter Grimmhaar, who seeks captives to eat. But they also attack merchant caravans that come through the woods, and sometimes venture away from the woods to attack a farm or small settlement. Kalos is smart enough to know not to anger the locals enough that they enter the woods to destroy his camp.

As the PCs enter this area, a Wisdom check (DC 20) will spot a small stone shard of Voorn on the ground. On its own, each acts as a small 1-point powerstone. However, they can be used to bargain with Prince Kalos, who will need every last one to finish his mission.

If the PCs approach the camp, there's a reasonable chance they'll encounter dark elf patrols searching for shards on the ground (any wandering monster encounter will be a patrol).

The dark elves hate non-elves and will attack on sight unless they are overwhelmed, in which case they'll retreat back to their camp. The only time they'll talk to the PCs is if they have a shard to bargain with, or claim that they are on a mission

from Mutter Grimmhaar or the Antlered Man, in which case they'll be brought to the camp to meet Prince Kalos. He is haughty, and has few kind words for strangers:

- **On the wrecked wagon...** Kalos admits that Azzika and her raiders ambushed the wagon and *"stole some trinkets from some hapless human merchants."*
- **On the statue of Hooded Voorn...** he'll show them the half-finished statue, and tell its story. *"He was counted among our greatest sorcerers, a master who could conjure fortresses with but a few words — yet, alas, even his brilliance could not withstand the corrupting stench of humans skulking within a hundred miles."* He does not know (or pretends not to know) what his men will discover when they finish the statue, only that it will indeed be ruinous for mankind.
- **On Mutter Grimmhaar the crone...** he'll show disdain and call her a disgusting crone who at least pays well. He'll fully admit to kidnapping maidens for her, saying that he cares little for humans. He'll also refer to the Antlered Man as her son.
- **On Wulfram, the Antlered Man...** he'll say that he knew his father, Charles of Valeer, and that he actually had respect for the knight. *"Of the countless humans I have had the misfortune to encounter, only Charles displayed anything resembling true prowess. I witnessed him once — quite by chance — dispatch four wraithweaver spiders without so much as a mark upon him. A rare flicker of competence in an otherwise wretched race."* He says he is disgusted that Charles had a son through the crone, and even more appalled that Wulfram was tricked into murdering Charles. *"But I keep quiet, lest the ugly witch grow agitated..."*
- **On the sea elf Jariella...** he scoffs, *"By the pitiful standards of the sea elves, I suppose she could be called a warrior, though she scarcely measured against my own prowess. Small wonder, then, that a mere manticores made a meal of her those decades ago."* He has no idea where her grave might be located.

Finally, if the PCs have a stone shard of Voorn, the prince will eagerly trade it for something valuable. He offers them a fine, elf-crafted sword, knife, or mail shirt in exchange. If the PCs drive a hard bargain through great roleplaying or Merchant rolls, he'll offer a magic staff (a +1 ironwood staff that twice a day can cause frostbite for +1d3 damage). Note that if the PCs refused to trade a shard that they own, he'll send out a large band of elves to kill them; he cannot afford to let a single shard escape.

The Dark Elves of the Blackwoods

Prince Kalos

DARK ELF SCION (LEVEL 4)

AC 16 HP 19
MV Near AL: C



Attacks 1

Silvered longsword +4 (1d8)

Abilities

S +2, D +3, C +0, I +1, W +1, Ch +1

Gear: The prince carries a silvered longsword (he fears werewolves), a magical Helm of Seeking (advantage when searching for small things), fine tailored mail (worth double), and a dagger.

Personality: Callous, intolerant Kalos is obsessed with both restoring Hooded Voorn and keeping his searchers happy and well-paid.

Azzika Fren

DARK ELF HUNTRESS (LEVEL 3)

AC 16 HP 17
MV Near AL: C



Attacks 1

Broadword +2 (1d8)

Longbow +2 (1d8)

Abilities

S +1, D +3, C +0, I +1, W +1, Ch +1

Watchdog Charm: Azzika knows a secret spell that increases her alertness. She is never surprised and can never be ambushed.

Poisons: If prepared for battle, she poisons her sword and her arrows. DC 15 or sleep.

Gear: She carries a fine sword, mail, and a black backup daggers. She also has a hand-crafted longbow.

The Voornsworn x2d6

DARK ELF WARRIORS (LEVEL 3)

AC 16 HP 14
MV Near AL: C



Attacks 1

Longsword +1 (1d8)

Longbow +1 (1d6)

Abilities

S +1, D +3, C +0, I +1, W +1, Ch +1

Poisons: If prepared for battle, these dark elves poison their arrows. DC 15 or sleep.

Gear: The dark elves carry fine swords, mail, and backup daggers. Many also carry longbows.

6. The Crone's Hovel

In a clearing that seems always shrouded in twilight, sits a hovel, a thing that sits like a rotting toad in the woods. Its roof sags with webs and mildew, and the air is heavy with the stink of boiled flesh.

There are many crones that live in the Blackwoods. The soil is ripe with dark magic, old secrets, and small tasty grubs that are said to grant precognition. The crone that lives in this clearing is named MUTTER GRIMMHAAR.

Mutter Grimmhaar is a towering but frail woman who dresses in a shabby black dress and fashions hats made from spider webs and amphibian skin. She is a cannibal and pays the dark elves to the north to capture young maidens every year for her to dine upon. The dark elves do not like her, but they like that her presence keeps humans away, and besides, she pays them well and even enchants their weapons from time to time.

There's a 50% chance that Mutter Grimmhaar will be home when the PCs stumble across her hovel; at all hours, she's out in the nearby woods looking for unique herbs and grubs.

If she's not home, she has trapped the doors and windows of her hovel with a hex. Anyone who passes through will feel dizzy and nauseous and must make a WIS check (DC 15) or be *hexed* (-1 to all rolls until a 20 is rolled). Furthermore, the crone will be able to divine the victim's location with a mere thought, and later hire dark elf assassins to capture or kill them.

The interior of her home is cramped, its walls draped in half-finished tapestries, and dangling bones. Its floor is covered in fresh straw. A splintered table slick with old blood stands at the center, surrounded by rusty cauldrons and jars of shriveled organs. In one corner is a stained, leathery **trunk**, and in the other is a man-sized **cage** loosely covered by a blanket.

Mutter Grimmhaar's trunk is locked (DC 15 to lockpick) and enchanted with another hex. If opened by a man, the chest lets out a cloud of sleeping gas. All male creatures within 10 feet must succeed on a CON check (DC 15) or fall into a deep, magical sleep for 2d6 hours, unable to be awakened by normal means. If opened by a woman, the trunk comes to life



and follows the opener around like a stupid, loud dog for 1d6 minutes. Inside the trunk are gems worth 300 gp, a locked box stained with blood (with something *rolling* inside it, see inset), a magic amulet (gives +1 STR at night), and a tattered red dress. If the dress is worn, it transforms the subject into a slim, beautiful woman with eyes like smoldering coals.

Morwenna

Inside the cage is young woman, MORWENNA, unmoving and seemingly frozen in a light covering of frost. She is still alive, but cursed to remain frozen until the cage is opened. The lock can be picked with a successful DEX check (DC 12) using thieves' tools, or it can be broken open with a successful STR check (DC 14).

If free, Morwenna explains that is the daughter of a southern rug merchant. Their wagon was ambushed by the dark elves two weeks ago. Her father was killed and she was captured and sold to the crone, who plans to eat her at the next full moon. She is desperate to escape.

- **On the crone...** the girl is terrified of the witch, saying she is a cannibal and delights in the pain and suffering of men and animals alike.
- **On the Thools...** she says that shortly after she was captured, the crone was visited by the three Thools, who asked for her help making scarecrows. "*She sang and sewed them together for several nights.*"
- **On Wulfram, the Antlered Man...** she says that he visited once, but he and his mother got in an argument over his father, the man who abandoned them both.

Note that Mutter Grimmhaar has hexed Morwenna, and if she escapes, can magically track the girl. She'll quickly hire the dark elves to recapture her.

Mutter Grimmhaar

If Mutter Grimmhaar is home, she is delighted to meet the travelers, and invites them inside her house for warm bone broth. She asks them to regale her with tales of the woods, and asks if they've seen any giant grubs around. She likes to think of herself as an expert on the woods, and shares general information, along with some specifics:

- **On the scarecrows that attacked Moriel...** the crone is curious but says she knows little about them (this is a lie — she crafted the scarecrows for the Thools before they were animated). *"Such foul things reek of a necromancer's hand, they do."* If pushed, she blames the necromancer Choir for their creation.
- **On the dangers of the wood...** she warns the PCs about the manticore, the only creature in the wood she fears. She says that decades ago, a famed sea elf warrior named Jariella fell to the beast. *"Ashamed too, she carried an ancient magic sword I would like to study..."* She hopes to one day find the elf's bones, but has had no luck.
- **On Wulfram, the Antlered Man...** she acts as a proud mother, calling him her "sweet thorn-crowned boy." She says that he and his wicked axe can sense ill in people, and that he has cut down many ill-mannered sorcerers who have wandered in the woods, including a few greedy black robed alchemists who are stealing all the forest's rarest ingredients.
- **On the dark elves...** she thinks their leader, Prince Kalos, is an intelligent and attractive young elf. He is searching for small stone shards that belonged to a clumsy sorcerer. She says she occasionally finds shards in the northern area near their camp, and trades them for favors.
- **On King Chutter...** she only knows that Chutter is an ambitious sorcerer who replaced the leader of the kobolds recently. She doesn't know that he plans to attack the northern towns, or that he tried recruiting her son.
- **On Choir the Necromancer or his alchemists...** she spits and curses the name. *"He's gone and pledged himself to those misshapen Thools, he has—and now his little bottle-rattler apprentices skitter through the woods snatching up every rare root and petal, leaving naught for me!"* She'll promise a reward for his death, offering a magical amulet that provides "nighttime vigor" (+1 STR at night) in exchange for his head.
- **On Morwenna, the girl in the cage...** she makes up some story about why the girl is useless and deserves to be punished. *"Bah! She's a stupid, savage thing, that one. Snapped the necks of a whole farm's chickens, she did. Blood and feathers everywhere, like a fox gone mad. Her own father sold her to me, he did, said she was a curse upon his house and begged me to*

Mutter Grimmhaar

CRONE OF THE BLACKWOODS (LEVEL 6)

AC 14 HP 28
MV Near AL: C

Attacks 2
Claws +4 (1d8)

Abilities
S +3, D +2, C +1, I +2, W +2, Ch +2

Curses: She can cause agonizing pain on a target (DC 12 CHA to deal 2d4 damage); she can also cause people to trip and fall down, or to fumble their gear (DC 12 CHA).

Gear: She carries a fine small knife, a potion of invisibility; ointment of healing (heals 1d6 HP); an onyx ring (worth 150 gp); poisonous powders; gillshade; greybane.



mete out the punishment. Pay her no mind, lest her madness catch you too."

- **On grubs...** she is obsessed with them, and uses the organs, particularly the midgut, in her recipes. She'll pay well for a good-sized midgut (at least 50 gp).
- **On herbs...** she knows much of the magical herbs of the woods, and will share the rough location of herbs that PCs inquire about. Also, while she has greybane and gillshade in her pocket, she will only part with it if the PCs trade her the midgut of a giant grub.

Note that if the PCs have already freed Morwenna, the crone will be anxious and annoyed, and pry to figure out if the PCs were the ones responsible for her escape. Unless the PCs are good liars, she'll first try to sneak poison into their bone broth. Tasting it requires a CON check (DC 15) or the eater will become nauseated after two hours and take 1d4 damage; repeat after three cycles. She'll then promise death if they don't admit they were the rescuers. If somehow the PCs escape her wrath, she'll send hired dark elves to capture or kill them.

The Head of Charles Skipton

Charles Skipton was a minor noble from Valeer who enjoyed hunting in the Blackwoods. Through illusions, he was seduced by Mutter Grimmhaar, who gave birth to his antlered son, Wulfram. The strange birth drove Charles mad and he disappeared for twenty years. But he eventually had a change of heart, and returned to visit his son and beg forgiveness. However, Mutter Grimmhaar discovered his impending return, and she poisoned her son against him, telling him that Charles was in fact a haggard sorcerer who craved his antlers for his evil potions and spells.

When Charles entered Wulfram's home, Wulfram struck him with his axe, decapitating him. But the woods' magic is weird and strong, and every fortnight his head comes to life and whispers a secret. Now, Grimmhaar and Wulfram trade the head back and forth, sharing its knowledge, with Wulfram never knowing the man was actually his father.

If the PCs open the crone's box and observe the head at night, its eyes pop open, and it whispers a secret of the woods. GMs should have fun with this, but here are some examples:

- "The midgut of the great grub makes a man an ox!"
- "The drinker of the well is lost but sees the grave!"
- "A necromancer walks the woods, creating servants from the skulls of elves."

The Crone's Favors

Additionally, the crone will only part with the following information once the PCs have done a *favor* for her (see below):

- **On the Grimhollow Thools...** she'll laugh to herself and says she knows much about them. She knows that they live in a canyon to the east. She also knows that they were all once men, stupid apprentices transformed by a wizard who specializes in monstrous shapeshifting spells.
- **On Duke Oswald...** she knows that one of the Thools is Oswald, although she doesn't know which one. She suspects that the only way to free him from his curse is to either kill the wizard who cast the curse, or to get the aid of the high druid who lives at the camp at Cnoc na Ríthe.
- **On Log-Wives...** she explains that ancient spites have taken up homes in mushroom-covered logs in the woods. They are very rare she explains, and their mushrooms are priceless. She knows that one lives northeast of Cnoc na Ríthe, but will only divulge that if the PCs do a favor for her.
- **If asked about specific locations in the woods...** she'll give vague information and offer directions, but require a *favor* in return for truly valuable information. For example, she knows that a water spirit has occupied the castellet in the Drowned Grove, that the kobolds are preparing for an invasion of the north, and that the high druid of Cnoc na Ríthe has been captured by the kobolds.

For a favor, she'll first request that the PCs **kill the manticores** to the east. She hates the thing and fears it. She honestly doubts that they'll be able to kill it, but if they ask for help, she'll give them an enchanted boar spear she has hidden on her roof (treat as a cheap spear that breaks on any roll of '1', but one that gives advantage to hit the manticores).

If the PCs refuse such a task (or do it and return), she will lecture them as cowards, and ask them instead to **bring a parcel to her son**, the Antlered Man to the east.

If this favor is agreed upon, she opens her trunk and pulls out the small, stained box — nailed shut — that contains the head of Charles Skipton, the Antlered Man's father. If asked what it is in the box, she simply lies and says that the Antlered Man enjoys pumpkins this time of year. She warns the PCs not to open the box, lest the pumpkin inside turn them to stone. This also is a lie, of course, but the PCs may not doubt it.

Under no circumstance will she reveal that the box contains the head of her former lover and father of the Antlered Man, Charles Skipton (see inset).

7. The Ruins of Simithari

Long ago, an elven outpost stood upon a hill, a proud walled keep set high above the endless plains, before the Blackwoods began its gnawing creep across the land. Now, the stone walls lie broken, the stairways shattered, and the air is thick with the harsh cries of a vast murder of crows that have made their kingdom here.

The ruins have been looted long ago, but would-be treasure hunters still visit to look for the old rings and amulets that once adorned keep's garrisons.

Climbing up to the keep requires two STR checks (DC 12)—one to get started, and then a second 50' up. A first failure means nothing, the climber can't find a foothold. A failure on the second causes a 50' tumble down the slope for 3d6 damage!

Atop the hill is the old, pentagonal keep, its walls pulled apart by vines and roots. Until recently, the keep had an intact tower, but it is scorched and burned, its interior now collapsed. Anyone with spellcasting ability will detect the familiar whiff of fire magic.

Although the ruins are just crumbling walls and debris now, it is a good place to take shelter from rain and the night chill. It is also a good place to gain one's bearings. At night, the PCs will be able to see the soft, fiery glow of the Vulkrundshard Deposit to the south. Also, sighting from the hill may help avoid any ambushers or wandering monsters in the vicinity.

The ruins, however, have become home to two marrowwithers—boneless sacks of living flesh. When Choir, a necromancer in service to King Chutter, raised two skeleton servants, he discarded the flesh, unaware it too had stirred to life. The marrowwithers slithered through the woods and seeped into an old larder beneath the keep, squeezing through cracks in the stone to claim it as their lair.

During the day, the marrowwithers stay in their lair. At night, they sneak out to suffocate the living. After surviving their ambush, the PCs will find a few clues. First, both the marrowwithers have the name "Choir" roughly tattooed on their flesh along with symbol showing tall trees (see [Handout E](#)). Spellcasters recognize it as the mark of a necromancer.

Second, a WIS check (DC 12) can find the marrowwithers underground lair. Getting in requires moving hundreds of pounds of stone debris, and then climbing down a broken



ladder into the hill under the keep. There is an old larder here, filled with rotted wood containers. However, there are three things of value here:

- A basket of a dozen rare *glutten_spike* nuts is still somehow fresh. Eating a nut fills a man's belly for a day.
- A vial of *ashsalt* can be found on the shelf, with three shakes left. When eaten, the salt makes the subject immune to fire for an hour.
- A pair of *enchanted cut-resistant gloves* made from the finest mail. They were originally designed to protect a chef's hands during meal preparation. They also give advantage to any rolls involving cooking, butchering, or preparing meat.

Fariborz's Lost Wand

If the PCs thoroughly search the ruins, they may find a magic wand discarded in some burned brush near the scorched tower. This wand is difficult to spot as its normal look is a charred and cracked, lightning-struck pine branch. It belonged to Fariborz the Pyromancer, and was lost in his battle here with an elven bounty hunter.

The charred wand is enchanted with two defensive spells — **Blink** and **Return Missile**.

8. The Hunting Grounds

There are two especially-dangerous areas in the northern Blackwoods, one hunted by preternatural spiders, the other by the deadly albino mantichore.

GM's Note: Remember that each hex traveled in a hunting ground has a chance of encountering its inhabitants. Don't roll on the random encounters table; the encounter will always be either a clutter of spiders or the mantichore itself. The chance is typically a 1 or less on 1d6 (see p. 8), but GMs can always modify this for reckless behavior.

Spider Hunting Grounds

Lurking in the northeastern part of this section of the Blackwoods are the Wraithweaver Spiders, monstrous bone-white spiders with eyes like frozen embers and legs that move in total silence. Unlike the ordinary giant spiders of the Blackwoods, Wraithweavers don't spin webs of silk—they weave veils of spectral thread, nearly invisible to the eye, that snare not the body, but the soul. Victims who pass through its haunted webs are paralyzed with visions of their own death, allowing the Wraithweaver to feed on fear and memory before it devours the victim's flesh.

Anyone moving into the hunting grounds will immediately feel a sense of dread, with thoughts of their demise penetrating their minds. If a random encounter is encountered in this area, the PCs will attract a clutter of spiders, typically one or two wraithweavers plus a handful of more typical dog-sized Blackwoods spiders, but PCs will often more if they venture deeper into the hunting grounds.

If the PCs encounter a clutter, searching nearby may discover a web-wrapped corpse, typically a lost merchant or a brave kobold trying to harvest the venom of the spiders. Kobolds will only have a primitive spear and knife on them, but roll randomly to see what a merchant body may have on him: 1) some rope and a hatchet; 2) a bag of coins (5 gp); 3) a fine pair of elf-crafted boots; 4) an emerald ring worth 30 gp; 5) a fine shortsword named "Stabber," which may have a minor enchantment or two on it.

Mantichore Hunting Grounds

An aggressive, albino mantichore hunts in this area, preying on the black deer that are native to this part of the forest. This area of the wood is also home to *greybane*, an herb said to improve memory. It can be found with a WIS check (DC 12).

Also in this region is the grizzled imperial hunter, VAL-MORIEN, and his young teenage apprentice, YSORIA. They are seeking the to slay the mantichore and sell its valuable parts to the wizards of the land. Both hail from the far-away southern city of Tibbur.

They are traveling with a skittish and very concerned patron, FATHER HALRIC, who was talked into this hunt on the promise of "one last adventure." He's exhausted and sick of traveling, but cares about his two companions enough not to abandon them. On a Good reaction or better, the PCs can get some information out of the hunting party:

- **On mantichores...** The hunters explain that the mantichore's horns are especially valuable to alchemists, and sell for 300 gp apiece. Also, the mantichore's white tail spikes are prized by healers and tailors alike, carved into fine, durable needles.
- **On the Grimhollow Thools...** The hunters have not seen the Thools, but mention that they had to pay a small toll to an Antlered Man to the south, who said he knows all comings and goings in this wood. *"He was a mysterious and sad creature, and we're unsure whether he was man, elf, or spirit."*
- **On Fariborz the Pyromancer or Choir the Necromancer...** they say that they saw a man in robes wandering towards the west, but they kept hidden, fearing it was a sorcerer who could do them harm.
- **On ruins...** they say they've seen other elven ruins during their time in the Blackwoods, but none in the area.
- **If asked to help...** they will accept help tracking and killing the mantichore, though they can only pay 10 gp for any assistance up front. Their plan is to hang a black deer carcass in a craggy glade to attract the thing. If successful, they'll let the PCs keep the creature's black heart, which can be sold for 50 gp in town to an alchemist or farmer — it's rumored that planting the heart in a field will fertilize the ground for years. Also, nervous Father Halric is a talented herbalist who has prepared bandages soaked in **viethorn** root tea. This gives advantage to any rolls to resist the mantichore's putrefying bite. (A fellow outdoorsman can make a WIS check (DC 15) to procure viethorn root themselves.)

Without the hunters' assistance, the PCs can easily lure or track the mantichore. If they are on their own, they can come up with a clever plan or just stumble around in this area until it gets hungry and attacks!

Creatures of the Hunting Grounds

Wraithweaver Spider

Horrifying Arachnid (Level 3)

AC 14 HP 14
MV Near AL: C

Attacks 1

Bite +3 (1d4)

Abilities

S +2, D +3, C +0, I -2, W +1, Ch -2

Venom: CON DC 12 or suffer terror, fleeing randomly for 1d4+1 turns, and then on the final turn, sitting down and weeping.

Notes: While they do not use their webs in combat, stumbling into the ethereal strands also causes terror, and traps the victim (DC 12 to escape). Scattered near any wraithweaver lairs will be remains of prior victims, often kobolds or dark elves. GMs can roll for loot: 1) ordinary hand weapon; 2) 1dx10 silver coins; 3) elven helmet; 4) provisions or supplies; 5) hatchet or short bow; 6) a spell scroll.



Blackwoods Spider

Large Arachnids (Level 3)

AC 13 HP 12
MV Near AL: N

Attacks 1

Bite +3 (1d4)

Abilities

S +2, D +3, C +0, I -2, W +1, Ch -2

Venom: CON DC 12 or nauseated (suffering disadvantage) for 1d4 hours.

Notes: These colorful dog-sized spiders will be found near any clutter of wraithweavers; they often scavenge from the webs of the larger, stronger spiders. They lurk in the branches of the trees and will attack from above, especially targeting any victims that are paralyzed in fear from a wraithweaver. The bite of a Blackwoods spider causes only mild sickness.



Albino Manticore

Cursed Beast (Level 5)

AC 15 HP 28
MV Near AL: C

Attacks 3

2x Claw +5 (1d4)

1x Bite +5 (2d4)

Abilities

S +3, D +3, C +1, I -1, W +1, Ch -1

Tail Spike: Can shoot at near range (+5, 1d8 damage).

Notes: Manticores sneak up on their prey and then shoot their tail spikes to wound or stun. They then pounce, biting and clawing at their victims' soft parts. While the manticore's bite is not venomous, it does putrefy and dissolve flesh easily. Those bitten must make a Con check (DC 12) or develop an infected wound. These wounds do not heal naturally and even typical magic healing can only heal 1 point per day.



9. Vulkrundshard Deposit

Here, in a quiet hollow, lies a massive boulder of black stone, glassy and strange, veined with flickers of red light that move like fire trapped beneath skin. The air is hot here, and tastes of copper and thunder.

Dwarves and wizards recall that two hundred years ago, a dwarven enchanter in the North Mountains drew power from inside a small volcano. His spell succeeded, but the volcano let loose a great explosion, sending magical rocks across the landscape. While the dwarves recovered most of them, one large deposit landed in the Blackwoods and has remained undiscovered for centuries.

The half-mile around the Vulkrundshard is very magical, and any spellcaster will sense it; the entire immediate area around the boulder is a *very magical*. However, the Vulkrundshard resists most magic spells, especially Earth spells intended to transform or move it.

The creatures of the wood avoid this area. Even the crone and the dark elves do not like it, for they believe that powerful dwarven cabals are watching the place with scrying spells. This is not true, but the thought is enough to keep other magic-users away. So, this place makes for a good camp.

Curious players may attempt to interact with the boulder. Taking away a chip of it requires care and skill. If the PCs are not careful, the rock spews a spray of fiery molten lava when damaged, doing 3d4 damage to anyone nearby. Success, however, produces a magical stone that has a fire spirit inside it, giving advantage to cast any fire spell, once per day. A chunk of stone can also be fashioned into an arrowhead or spearhead, which does +1 damage due to the burning damage in the stone.

Fariborz the Pyromancer

FARIBORZ THE PYROMANCER knows of this place and is drawn to it. A week ago, he climbed up the tower at the ruins of Simithari to find the Vulkrundshard; he spotted it, but as he climbed down he was accosted by the elven bounty hunter, AELAR EISENLI. A fight broke out, and one of Fariborz's fireballs damaged one of the structures.

Disgusted, Eisenli took the pyromancer captive. Noble of heart, the elf decided to march the man to Moriel for trial for his various crimes. However, upon leaving the wood, Fariborz



was able to escape his bonds and again attack the bounty hunter. Again, Fariborz lost the fight. Tired of the man's antics, Eisenli hanged him at the entrance of the woods.

However, Fariborz knew much about the magical herbs of the Blackwoods and had recently picked some gillshade, which he swallowed ahead of the fight. This herb, which can allow someone to hold their breath for hours, allowed him to survive and escape his hanging. He returned to the woods to find the Vulkrundshard.

It is up to the GM whether Fariborz comes across this place at the same time the PCs do. Otherwise, he might be found in a random encounter later in the adventure.

If Fariborz meets the PCs, he will be suspicious. He knows he's a wanted man and does not wish to get caught again. However, he does not have his powerstone or his magic wand which provided some protective spells (both were lost to Aelar Eisenli), so he's hesitant to attack the PCs.

Instead, he may threaten the PCs, trying to chase them away from what he sees as his prize. But if the PCs converse with him, he may decide that they can be useful to him.

- **On his capture and hanging...** he'll explain his capture much as it is described above, but he'll describe the bounty hunter Eisenli who caught him as a cruel tormentor, someone who delighted in torturing him for his magical knowledge, and watching him hang. He also accuses her of stealing his powerstone (which is true, she confiscated it).

- **About his crimes...** he claims that the priests of Vetis were intolerant of mages. He says that they came to take his magical knife away from him, but mishandled it. The fiery enchantment on the knife ended up burning down several houses and killing two of the priests. While he claims no responsibility, nor does he claim remorse. *GM's Note: The truth is he murdered the priests and then burned down an entire neighborhood to cover his crimes...*
- **On the Vulkrundshard...** his eyes will burn with obsession, and he'll describe it as perhaps the most powerful and perfect "artifact of fire" on the continent. He explains that he thinks it holds the secret of controlling fire demons, and says that he wishes to make a burning crown out of the molten metal in its interior.
- **On the ruins of Simithari...** he'll admit his defeat at these ruins, and direct the PCs to it, if asked.
- **On his lost magic items...** he believes the elf Eisenli confiscated both his powerstone and his wand. He does not know that his wand was lost at the ruins of Simithari. If the PCs offer him his wand back, he'll be delighted, and will do what he can to help them with their quest, including giving them hints as to how to identify and restore Oswald (see below).
- **On gillshade...** he says he retrieved some of it near the drowned grove; he'll give the PCs vague directions there.
- **On the Thools...** he has seen them in the woods conversing with kobolds. He only knows the kobolds live to the east. He describes them as "stupid and useless" creatures.
- **On Choir the Necromancer...** Fariborz says he met the man once but found him foul and untrustworthy. He says that he heard the Thools hired Choir to create undead servants for them, but that this job probably exceeded Choir's skill. *"Choir is a braggart. He accomplishes little what he says he can do."*
- **On Oswald...** Fariborz knows Dendybar the Mottled, the cruel wizard who transformed Oswald into a monster. Even Fariborz is scared of Dendybar. However, if the PCs help Fariborz somehow (either healing his wounds, returning his wand, or helping him secure a new powerstone), he'll explain that Oswald's memory can be temporarily restored with an alchemical *potion of wisdom*, or perhaps a tea made from *greybane*, a pale blue vine that grows in the Manticore Hunting Grounds (once described, a DC 12 WIS check in that area can find some). If asked how to restore Oswald to his human self, Fariborz knows less, though he suspects that if Dendybar is killed, his spells will dissipate.

Although Fariborz may come across as helpful, he is selfish and dangerous. If the PCs are not careful, he may grow jealous of them and try to kill them (but only if he feels he has the upper hand).

Fariborz

WANTED PYROMANCER (LEVEL 3)

AC 11

HP 15

MV Near

AL: C

Attacks 1

Fiery knife +2 (1d4+1)

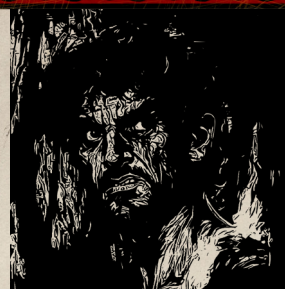
Abilities

S +1, D +1, C +1, I +2, W -1, Ch -1

Fireball: INT DC 13. Far range. All creatures in a near-sized area take 4d6 damage.

Fire Cantrips: With a snap, Fariborz can ignite fires, control fires, and extinguish fires.

Gear: He wields "Fyredaemon," a fine knife enchanted with a spell that can ignite its metal. He wears fire-proofed cloth robe and takes half damage from fire attacks.



Thamazul

Unknown to all, the Vulkrundshard actually contains the consciousness of a demon inside it, a result of the massive supernatural explosion that happened in the original volcanic casting. The demon's name is Thamuzel the Thief and it's been simmering in anger for two centuries. Anyone approaching the Vulkrundshard must make a CHA check (DC 20). On a success, the listener hears the demon begging for help from the inside of the boulder. Thamuzel pretends to be a goodly dwarven king, trapped inside by an evil summoner. It then asks the listener's name.

If the true name of the listener is given, the demon attempts to free itself by possessing the listener. The subject must make a CHA check (DC 15). If failed, the subject is possessed and essentially gains a split personality disadvantage, gaining new character quirks up to the GM and player (but good ones include bloodlust, kleptomania, and pyromania!).

If the PCs leave Fariborz alone with the Vulkrundshard, there's a strong chance he'll be possessed by Thamazul. Once bound, he'll either head north to spread chaos in the towns or ally with King Chutter—replacing Choir as his right-hand sorcerer, all while plotting to kill Chutter and claim the Black Keep for himself.

10. Twinfold Hollow

Twinfold Hollow broods in silence, its trees carved with shifting faces and moods. One moment the canopy glows with golden light and sweet blooms; the next, it twists dark, branches clawing, thorns weeping black sap. The forest listens—and chooses.

Twinfold Hollow is an area of the Blackwoods that has awakened—and fractured. The forest here is sentient, but changes personality on a whim. One aches to protect, the other thirsts to consume.

When the PCs arrive in this area, the GM should roll 1d6, and then again every couple of hours here:

If the result is odd, the air is heavy with hush and shallow. The trees lean in close, their bark etched with faces that seem both full of sorrow and malice. Some whisper false directions, close the path behind, and reach with thorned limbs to drag the unwary deeper into the wood. All rolls to avoid getting lost or finding food are at -5 in this section! Furthermore, the PCs must all make a DEX check (DC 12) to avoid accidentally brushing against blood ivy, a poisonous plant that causes painful, leaking sores (make a CON check (DC 12) each day to recover or else take 1 point of damage and -1 to all physical rolls). The PCs will encounter ROOTFLAYER.

If the result is even, the trees glow faintly with golden moss. They gently nudge lost travelers towards safety. All wilderness type rolls are at +5 in this section. Also, there is no chance of wandering monsters while the trees are maintaining guard of the hollow. The PCs will encounter BRISH LORR BLACKELM.

The Rootflayer

Rootflayer was born when an ancient druid's soul, torn by grief and vengeance, seeped into the roots during his burial. He will appear as a face in the bark of a nearby tree, calling out to sentient beings nearby. His voice is broken and weird, omitting words at random. He demands to know the PCs' purpose in these woods, and then demands a blood sacrifice, lest he command the woods to tear the PCs apart:

"Hmm... trespass... yes... roots felt you. Purpose? Speak. Wind carries lies, and I—I drink truth. You come—cloaked in sweat, steel, and want. No tithe, no token... no offering to the old heart?"



Then give. Blood, flesh, name—one must feed me, or I wake the briars, call the barkthreshers, tear you from sky to soil. Choose... or be chosen."

That said, the mouth on the tree opens hungrily. If someone touches the tree, it will drain blood from the subject at a rate of 1 hit point every second! It will only be satiated if it drinks 10 hit points worth of blood.

Once sated with blood, Rootflayer will speak to the PCs and tell them some of the lore of the wood (see Knowledge of the Hollow). But Rootflayer is still very much evil and insidious, and if the PCs demand too much or overstay they'll welcome, he will summon Barkthreshers to flay them and grind their bones into the soil.

Similarly, if the PCs refuse to sacrifice blood to Rootflayer, he will let out a long moan of anger. Within 1d6 hours, the PCs will find themselves followed by several Barkthreshers (1, plus 1 per two players), who follow the PCs relentlessly, waiting until they grow fatigued and then attack to destroy them, dragging their bodies to fertilize the soil under Rootflayer.

Brish Lorr Blackelm

Brush Lorr Blackelm was also born when the ancient druid of the hollow died. The druid's grief and empathy seeped into his roots when he was buried. She appears as a round face in the bark of nearby tree. Her voice is reedy and whispery, and she also asks why the PCs have come to the wood.

Barkthresher x3

SPITEFUL SENTIENT TREES (LEVEL 4)

AC 14 HP 20
MV Near AL: C



Attacks 2

2x branches +3 (1d8)

Abilities

S +3, D +1, C +2, I -2, W +1, Ch -2

Bark Skin: Barkthreshers take half damage from arrows and other small, piercing style attacks.

Sap Spit: They can spit sap at a target within near distance. This is a +3 attack, and if hit, the subject's AC becomes 10 as they are slowed by the sticky substance, until washed off.

If the PCs are kind and convincing, Brish Lorr Blackelm will try to help them. She will impart her knowledge of the woods (see inset), but also ask that the PCs do her a favor and destroy three Barkthreshers that are devouring a field of purple-dotted healing flowers to the south. While she cannot give the PCs a reward for such a task, she promises to teach them how to use the flowers for goodly purposes, including curing Duke Oswald's transformative curse.

The Starshade Bloom Field

In the middle of the hollow is an acre of beautiful purple-dotted flowers. Their speckled petals shimmer like stars caught in silk, and the air is thick with a sweet-smelling mist.

A WIS check (DC 15) roll identifies the flowers as *starshade bloom*, a rare flower that only opens beneath moonlight, exhaling a vapor that halts bleeding and cures even magical diseases—but causes vivid, prophetic dreams if inhaled directly while the flower is still in the fertile soil of this field. In game terms, the flowers provide advantage on rolls to resist disease, and if inhaled while still planted in the ground, the PC gets vague, precognitive hints as to their future for 24 hours. Starshade can also cure Duke Oswald's transformation, but he must inhale the flowers' vapor. Removing a plant from the ground requires great skill (e.g., a DC 15 DEX or WIS check).

Knowledge of the Hollow

Both Rootflayer and Brish Lorr Blackelm have similar knowledge about the Blackwoods, although each has their own requirements to impart that knowledge.

On King Chutter... they both know that a new necromancer has risen in the woods, and that he has enslaved the kobolds of Kobold-Town.

On Mutter Grimmhaar... she visits the hollow often to find rare herbs. Rootflayer finds her fascinating, but Brush Lorr Blackelm says she is a thing of evil illusions.

On druids... They both know the druid Mac Rónán who lives to the south. Rootflayer hates him and hopes to devour him. Brush Lorr Blackelm is friends with the man. Neither have seen him in some time, however.

On evil things... They have felt that a fire demon named has "recently" taken up residence nearby to the east. While they do not know the details of the demon, they have sensed the presence of Thamazul inside the Vulkrundshard. Rootflayer would love to learn more...

On herbs... Both know the magical herbs in the hollow, and that there is a field of very rare purple-dotted flowers, starshade, which can cure diseases and curses. Rootflayer hates the flowers, saying they cause his soil to rot; he also speaks of the vile blood ivy, which can act as a poison.

In the middle of the blooming field stand three *barkthreshers*—gnarled, spiteful trees that walk on twisted roots and thrash with limbs of thorn and malice. Rootflayer has given them a hatred of the starshade blooms, and if the PCs delay, soon there will be nothing left of the field but trampled petals and bitter sap.

11. The Antlered Man

In a shadowed clearing where the trees lean close and no birds sing, stands a crooked cottage crowned with a roof of horns and antlers. A weathered wooden sign hangs askew, etched in trembling hand: "Guard thy soul, for the Antlered Man shall claim it." From within, through the shuttered windows and bone-laced smoke, comes the sound of weeping—long and low.

This cottage is the home of WULFRAM, the son of the crone Mutter Grimmhaar and the bewitched noble, Charles Skipton. Soon after he was born, he grew antlers on his head and all of his dreams of visiting the cities of the empire vanished. He's become a recluse, only taking joy in hunting and talking to the few merchants who wander across his home and are brave enough to converse with him.

Wulfram has recently been visited by King Chutter, who wants him to lead the kobolds in the attacks against the northern towns. King Chutter believes Wulfram is a capable leader and has stoked his loneliness into a desire for revenge against the men who would shun him.

Wulfram is torn by the decision he must make. While he longs for a life free from the woods, he also knows that attacking the towns north of the Blackwoods would make him a pariah, and forever prevent him from living a normal life. His mother has been encouraging him to side with King Chutter, saying it will bring him glory that might result in his father hearing of his deeds and returning to him.

To help him make a decision, he recently asked his mother to send him the box that contains the head that can see the future. He has no idea that the head belongs to his murdered father.

Wulfram the Antlered Man

If the PCs approach the cottage, Wulfram will assume they are merchants and bark at them to go away. If bothered more, he comes out in a rage, brandishing an wicked-looking axe, and tries to intimidate them to leave. He does not desire to fight anyone, however, and will quickly abandon any combat that begins.

If treated with respect, he'll invite them inside for some fresh water and boar stew. The PCs will find him morose and always over-thinking his problems:



"The giant king came to me, y'know. Sat by my fire like we were kin. Said I was born to lead—said the kobolds would follow me, strike the towns to the north, and I'd have glory enough. And part of me... part of me wants it. Wants the chance to burn the names of those highborn swine into ash. But if I do it, there's no going back. No quiet life, no hearth, no roof that isn't nailed shut against me. My mother says my deeds might call my father back from whatever hole he's vanished into. But I reckon not all fathers come when called."

Wulfram goes on to say that he should know better than to trust sorcerers. Years ago, he says, one came into his house to cut off his antlers to use in his spells, but he dispatched him with one blow to the neck with his axe.

Wulfram will also mention that he is expecting a gift from his mother, something that will help him make the decision on whether to support King Chutter. But he's anxious and impatient. If the PCs do not have the crone's box, he will ask them to go to her and retrieve his gift, though he will not say what it is other than it relates to the sorcerer he slew those years ago. If they do have it, he will thank them and put the box aside for use later.

- **On King Chutter...** Wulfram describes him as a great "great ogre-of-man, shrouded in cloaks and mystery." He says that he at first he was tempted by the creature's offer to lead his kobolds. But a few days, he says he spoke to a pale man named Choir, who told him how leading kobolds was a task for fools, and surely would end in his ignoble death. He's on the fence, and doesn't know who to trust.

- **On Mutter Grimmhaar...** he acknowledges that his mother the crone is hard-nosed, unusual, and often unbearable. He says that he moved away from her because she sometimes made him uncomfortable. He will not, however, accept that she is evil.
- **On Mutter Grimmhaar's box...** he thanks the PCs. If pressed, he says it contains the head of a wicked sorcerer he slew years ago.
- **On the kobolds...** Wulfram rolls his eyes. *"I know they are a stupid lot, but stupider still is their king, Blunkin the Brain-Smasher. No wonder King Chutter is looking for a leader for them."*
- **On his father...** Wulfram says that Charles Skipton was a great knight, noble and brave. He points to the man's banner which hangs on his wall. *"Even the dark elves respected him."* He goes on to explain that soon after he was born, Charles had to return west to serve the emperor. Wulfram longs for the day when his father returns to the Blackwoods and reunites with him.
- **On the dark elves...** he says that they are friendly enough with him, but that they rarely come this far south. *"Prince Kalos and his kin have been obsessed with rebuilding some statue for decades... I doubt they'll ever finish."*
- **On his fine axe...** he says that it was a birthday gift from Prince Kalos of the dark elves on the fifth birthday. He calls it "Biting Kalos."
- **On the Grimhollow Thools...** he says that they loyally serve King Chutter, but they aren't bright enough to be a war-leader like himself. He heard that the Thools live in a cave not too far from the kobold village.
- **On Jariella the Sea Elf...** he says that once when he was a boy he found her grave near the Weeper's Well. *"She was a skeleton resting against a tree, surrounded by flowers and holding a magnificent sword."* But when he reached for the sword, she vanished.
- **On ruins...** he warns the PCs to stay away from the sunken castellet at to the north, as it's been occupied by a succubus. He says the ruins of Simithari are peaceful, however.
- **On druids or Cnoc na Ríthe...** he shrugs and says they keep to themselves, and he leaves them alone, though sighs that their autumn pumpkins make amazing soup.
- **If asked the leave his cottage...** He says that he's hesitant to since he is expecting a merchant wagon in the coming days that carries a gnome named GERRIE, a woman who is always happy to chat with him. She often gifts him citrus from the far south. He loves his citrus baskets.

Wulfram

THE ANTILERED MAN (LEVEL 4)

AC 12 HP 16
MV Near AL: N

Attacks 2

1x Headbutt +4 (1d4)
1x Magic Long Axe +5 (1d10+1)

Abilities

S +2, D +1, C +1, I +0, W +1, Ch +0

Gear: Wulfram wears leather armor and wields "Biting Kalos," his fine dark elf enchanted long axe.

Traits: Wulfram is morose, bad tempered, and indecisive. He feels a sense of duty towards his mother and will not betray her unless he knows that she killed his father.



Wulfram's Rage

If the PCs somehow convince Wulfram that the severed head in the box belongs to his father (something they might have found out from Prince Kalos of the dark elves), this discovery will break the poor man. He'll go into a rage, smashing furniture and attacking the PCs, then swearing to kill his mother. But after a few moments, he'll give up, collapse, and beg the PCs to kill the crone, saying he has not the strength. He'll happily give up his axe to the man who would take her head.

12. Cnoc na Rithe

When the Blackwoods first began their slow, creeping conquest of the land, many druids walked willingly into its deepening gloom, seeking the cause of its growth. None ever returned with answers—some vanished, others were changed—but a few raised quiet sanctuaries beneath the boughs, small rings of stone and earth where firelight could hold back the dark for a time. These hidden refuges, known in the old tongue as Cnoc na Rithe, were built to shelter outlaws, the lost, and those cast aside by crown and kin.

The Cnoc na Ríthe in the northern Blackwoods is kept by an aging druid named Mac Rónán and his quiet aide, Muirenn. A dozen reed-and-moss shelters house some thirty souls—outlaws, wanderers, and the excommunicated—who tend to hayberry thickets, twisted apple trees, and wild rye. Ravens circle overhead and perch near the camp, unafraid of human presence, as if they too are under the druids' care.

When the PCs approach the area, they are greeted by one of the residents in the traditional greeting of such druid camps:

"Do you come with quiet hands or hunted heels? Speak the word, and if your heart be true, the grove shall shelter you."

As long as the PCs are not hostile, they will be offered shelter for the night, but must help with some of the chores around the camp, such as fetching water from a nearby stream or picking the stubborn fuzz off of the ripe hayberries.

Muirenn

Soon, the druid's assistant MUIRENN will introduce herself. She is quiet but friendly and tells the PCs that it's unfortunate that her master, Mac Rónán is not in the camp; he recently traveled north to speak to the living trees in Twinfold Hollow. *GM's Note: Unknown to all, he has been captured by a band of kobolds and is being kept at Kobold-Town.*

- **On the Grimhollow Thools...** she says that she knows they live to the northeast, but knows not where. She says that Mac Rónán would likely know, and that he has been concerned lately because a necromancer has come to the woods and recruited the kobolds. *"I have glimpsed him from afar, a massive hulking man buried in cloaks and shadows."*
- **On the Weeper's Well...** she says that she visits it often, fetching magical water from it, and that it is near the



grave of a sea elf champion, though *"no one finds that grave on purpose..."*

- **On the manticore and spiders...** she sternly warns the PCs away from their hunting grounds. *"The only thing the manticore fears is Mac Rónán himself..."*
- **On Duke Oswald...** if told about Oswald and his condition, she says that Mac Rónán would surely know how to cure such a curse. She expects the druid back in a day or two.
- **On Mutter Grimmhaar or Wulfram the Antlered Man...** she shudders and says that the witch is cruel, but seldom travels south. She tells the story of the time the crone seduced Wulfram's father, a passionate knight named Charles Skipton (p. 16). While the official story is that Charles left soon after his son was born, she suspects that the crone had him killed. She describes Wulfram as a sad man *"as lonely as he is strong."*
- **On the northern woods...** She knows nothing of the dark elves, the woods' ruins, or the Volkrundshard.
- **On herbs...** Muirenn knows many of the woods' secret herbs. If asked specifically about gillshade, she'll direct the PCs about ten miles north to the Drowned Grove, but she'll warn them that it's become haunted by a spirit who is dangerous. If asked about greybane, she'll say it is found on the west-sides of hardwood trees in the Manticore's hunting grounds.
- **On Log-Wives...** she says a woman in the camp heard the tell-tale sounds of a woman weeping from behind a tree a few miles to the north. Muirenn warns the PCs that Log-Wives are dangerous, known to lure innocent folk to their logs, and then crush them with old roots.
- **On healing...** Muirenn is a talented healer and can cast healing spells on wounded PCs (effectively healing them

back to full hit points). She can also cure most minor illnesses or afflictions.

If the PCs appeal to the villagers for help, perhaps telling them that evil is afoot and that their village is in danger, a good speech or great roleplaying will prompt one of the woodsmen to agree to travel with the PCs to help:

Rostam of Dafra: AC 12 (leather), HP 5, ATK 1 club +1 (1d4) or 1 sling (Far) +1 (1d4), MV near, S +1, D +1, C +1, I +0, W +0, Ch +0, AL N, LV 1.

As time goes on, the camp grows increasingly concerned that Mac Rónán has not returned. If the PCs leave the camp and return, word that the druid has been captured by kobolds has spread, and Muirenn is assembling a small group of ex-outlaws to rescue him.

Choir's Attack

If the PCs spend the night in Cnoc na Ríthe, they will witness an attack on the camp. Choir the Necromancer, believing that the druids can eventually undo his work, dispatches skirmishers to destroy the camp. His attack is intelligent and coordinated. At least a dozen skeleton spearmen rush into the camp, knowing that half the camp will flee into the woods.

There, outside the camp, is one of Choir's newest creations, "Mother Clutch" — a tangle of horrifically connected limbs that rolls outside, grabbing folk and tearing them apart, adding their limbs to its own. Seeing Mother Clutch is *terrifying*. PCs must make a WIS check (DC 12) or suffer disadvantage for 1d4 turns.

Once the skeletons have observed Muirenn, one of the skeletons who carries a bell attached to his spear will loudly start ringing it. This will attract Mother Clutch who will target the druid, hoping to kill her and add her to her collection of limbs.

Mother Clutch

ROLLING UNDEAD (LEVEL 4)

AC 13 HP 19
MV Near AL: C



Attacks 3
Creeping hands +3 (1d4)

Abilities
S +2, D +2, C +2, I -1, W +0, Ch -3

Undead: Immune to morale checks.

Tangle of Arms: The horrific tangle of arms that is Mother Clutch rolls around the outskirts of the camp, grappling victims and then tearing their limbs off to add to its own. Each victim it kills adds +1 attacks to Mother Clutch.

Skeletal Spearman x12

CHOIR'S SERVANTS (LEVEL 2)

AC 12 HP 11
MV Near AL: C



Attacks 1
Spear +1 (1d6)

Abilities
S +1, D +0, C +2, I -2, W +0, Ch -1

Undead: Immune to morale checks.

Gear: These skeletons are equipped with rotting leather armor and spears. One of the skeletons has a large bell attached to his spear, and will ring it loudly when he sees one of the druids, attracting Mother Clutch; the bell has Choir's sigil carved on to it.

13. The Drowned Grove

In a mist-cloaked hollow lies the half-sunken ruin of Castellet Malvoisin, once the stone jewel of a noble knight who broke bread with the elves of Simithari. Now, its crumbled towers lean from the center of a still, reedy lake, the remnants of its halls drowned beneath dark water. The shore is choked with a long-bladed grass whose green-and-yellow stripes shimmer faintly in the gloom. Floating near the reedbed drifts a bloated corpse, a bow still strapped to his back. Beneath the water, something stirs—and then the lake goes quiet again.

Centuries ago, a small castellet was established near the elven watchtower of Simithari. It was founded by the knight Giraud de Malvoisin, who was a staunch ally of the elves. He hosted them regularly at his manse, they shared knowledge and customs, and grew fond of each other.

Years later, as the Blackwoods crept over the fields that were once here, the de Malvoisin's left their family manse. The land grew marshy and the castellet was flooded and sunk into the soft earth. Now, only some of the castle is visible, jutting from the middle of a shallow lake.

Long green-and-yellow striped grass surround the lake. An WIS check (DC 12) roll identifies it as **gillshade**, a magical herb that if swallowed makes the subject able to breathe water for an hour. Spellcasters will likely know that if brewed into a tea, gillshade's effects increase to 1d6 hours.

The corpse floating in the water is that of a local hunter who wandered into Blackwoods to catch game, but was captured by the creature who lives here. She discarded him after he accidentally drowned in her lair. Recovering his body found large claw marks on his ankles, and a fine short bow slung over his shoulders.

The Bones of the Alchemist

Gillshade is not native to the Blackwoods, but was planted here years ago by a mage and naturalist who wished to explore the castellet here. Unfortunately, he never got a chance, as he was killed by a giant bullfrog and his bones can still be found on the south side of the lake, hidden by grass and reeds. If discovered, the bones have an **alchemist's kit** still on them, with seeds for a variety of plants, **two potions of healing**, and a **universal antidote**, which instantly cures any poison. In



the man's small diary is a **scroll** of that invokes a 30' fungal fence. It also contains his story about his search for Lady Pomellina's Wand of Artistry, still rumored to be in the castellet (see [Handout D](#)).

Ruzalka

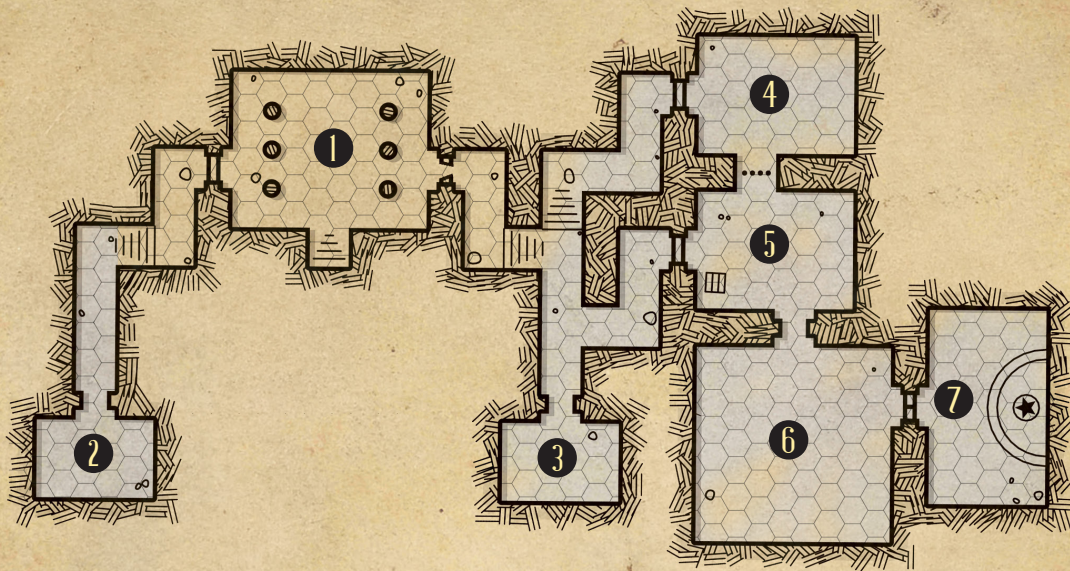
The grove has become the home of RUZALKA a white-haired spirit maiden who kidnaps fair men and keeps them underwater in her ruins. While her kiss grants the ability to breathe underwater for a short time, she often forgets to give it when she becomes moody, and her captives drown.

Ruzalka telepathically commands a force of giant mud crabs, which she uses to grab victims and bring them to her lair. She also has enchanted an insidious type of monster, a corpse grab, which can grab hold of a corpse's head and turn it into a sort-of zombie.

If the PCs spend more than an hour near the lake, Ruzalka will send a handful of her crabs to see if any of them are worth kidnapping. She'll target the most attractive male PC (roll randomly on a tie), but will not target anyone of Unattractive appearance or worse. The crabs come out at night, grapple the victim, and drag them into the lake.

Much of the Wane-Deep is submerged and dimly lit by magic lanterns. For most physical and weapon attacks, non-amphibious PCs will be at disadvantage. Swinging weapons do -1 damage as well. Short weapons like daggers and short-swords, however, ignore both to-hit and damage penalties. Thrown weapons do half damage and divide range by 10; bows, crossbows, and fire spells are useless underwater.

THE WANE-DEEP OF GIRAUD DE MALVOISIN



The Wane-Deep

Getting to the submerged castellet requires a swimming or building a makeshift raft. There are no dangerous aquatic creatures in the woods at this season, though in the autumn, giant bullfrogs make their home here.

1 - The Entrance Hall. The pillared entrance hall is covered in an inch of water. Algae-cloaked tapestries still hang on the walls, and a toppled suit of old plate armor rests on the stone floor. The armor is rusted, but oddly its right gauntlet is still shiny and new (long ago protected by a spell). The door to the west is warped but shut, requiring a STR check (DC 12) to open. The door to the east is open.

2 - The Knight's Study. Hundreds of rotted pieces of parchment float in this room, obscuring vision. A large desk is still intact underwater, preserved due to its elven-make. Inside its drawers is a bronze seal of Sir Giraud de Malvoisin, worth 50 gp if sold to the right person. There's also a folded love letter, never sent, addressed to "Lady Naelira of Simithari." It is written with unmistakable longing, and may be valuable to a historian.

3 - Quay Grabber's Room. Ruzalka keeps a servant, a mischievous half-troll who runs errands for her in the woods. He has adorned his room here with stolen trinkets from all over the wood, including dark elf knives, jewelry, and rings. Altogether, the collection is worth about 300 gp. One of the rings is magical, and

4 - Mud Crab Room. This room once held the kennels of Giraud de Malvoisin. Now, several giant mud crabs make their lair here. At any point, 2d4 crabs can be found here. If Ruzalka knows about the PCs in her lair (they have made a reasonable amount of noise), they'll be telepathically controlled and will attack. Otherwise, they'll just scurry out of the way.

An algae-encrusted portcullis to the south separates this room from another one. It's gears are long rotted away, but it is heavy and can be lifted by a combined STR of 25.

5 - Pomellina's Paint Room. Faded, dreamlike murals still cling to the stone walls. Anyone with Magery will detect faint magic coming from each of them. They were painted centuries ago by Giraud de Malvoisin's mage wife, Pomellina. On the floor is a 3-yard diameter mosaic of a great octopus, its eyes containing two large red rubies.

Locals recalls that the Pomellina family used an octopus as a crest for many years. With a knife and several minutes, the large rubies can be pried out of the mosaic. They are worth 75 gp.

However, Ruzalka knows a spell that can animate the mosaic octopus and grab people within its range! Once animated, the octopus cannot leave the floor, but can extend its tentacles to grab at those nearby with its STR 14, grabbing and squeezing victims for 1d3 damage. It cannot be killed, but each of its eight arms can be effectively disabled by taking 6 HP of damage (AC 14).

6 - Dining Hall. While the chairs in this debris-strewn room have rotted away, a beautiful table is still intact. If the debris is searched, the PCs can find valuable, but tarnished silverware worth 30 gp.

However, hiding in the debris are several corpse crabs, black crabs that look similar to ordinary ones. If disturbed, they will crawl away and burrow themselves into the skull of a nearby corpse (perhaps either the Quay Grabber and the body of the hunter found in the lake). These bodies will come back as undead "crab zombies" who will swim into the structure to attack the PCs).

A heavy bronze-covered door, decorated with images of saints, leads to the castellet's chapel to the east.

7 - Ruzalka's Chapel. Malvoisin's old stone chapel has a beautiful vaulted ceiling, but it's now cracked and draped with veil-like strands of pale algae. At the far end, stands a weathered statue of an old saint—her hands outstretched in silent benediction. A school of silver fish circles reverently around her feet.

This room is the lair of Ruzalka. She adores the statue of the saint (though unaware of who it represents), and uses her animal control powers to bring beautiful fish to surround the statue. Hidden under a stone on the statue's base is Pomelina's **Wand of Artistry**.

This slender wand is carved from laurel wood and tipped with a fine silver ferrule shaped like a stylus. When held by someone with artistic ability, the wand grants advantage for appropriate skill rolls. In addition, the wielder may invoke the wand to instantly dry, preserve, or

set pigments, plasters, or inks; smooth rough stone or wood into a ready canvas for art, within a 6' radius, and; illuminate a work area with soft magical light an hour (as per the Light spell).

If the PCs have entered Ruzalka's home with violent abandon, killing her crabs or her servant the Quay Grabber, Ruzalka will be ready to kill the trespassers. She is smart enough not to fight alone though, and will hide in the ceiling here while she summons mud crabs to defend her, then cast spells from within hiding, boiling the water around the PCs, while using Shape Water to keep them away from her.

If the PCs have not done too much damage to her home, and try parlaying with her, she'll be willing to talk... while still plotting to keep the most attractive male in the party with her, perhaps using Shape Water to slam and bar the heavy doors shut and trap him inside this room as the others leave.

- **On the drowned hunter...** she sadly says his name was PIETRE, and that he was handsome and kind, but she became angry at him when he ate one of the curated fish in this room. She refused to kiss him that night, so he drowned. *"Again, another terrible mistake of mine," she admits with a sigh.*
- **On the Grimhollow Thools...** she says that she once spoke to one of them, and that they make their home in a cave near the kobold village to the east. But she warns that the brothers are under the influence of a darker force named King Chutter, a two-headed ettin who has become skilled in ancient magical arts.



Creatures of the Wane-Deep

Mudwallowers x1d6

GIANT MUD CRABS (LEVEL 2)

AC 17 HP 9
MV Near AL: N

Attacks 2
Claws +2 (1d6)

Abilities
S +2, D +1, C +2, I -3, W +1, Ch -3

Claw Grab: If a claw attack is successful, the victim is automatically grappled until they can break free with a STR check (DC 12). If outside the Wane-Deep, the crab will then try to drag the victim into the lake, towards Ruzalka. Otherwise, it will squeeze and pinch the victim with its other claw, rolling with advantage



The Quay Grabber

DEVILISH FISHROLL (LEVEL 3)

AC 12 HP 14
MV Near AL: C

Attacks 1
Claw +3 (1d6)

Abilities
S +2, D +2, C +0, I +1, W +1, Ch -1

Nerve Toxin: The lurker's claws have a toxin that causes intense pain. Anyone it hits suffers disadvantage on their next attack, as they writhe in agony from its toxin.



Crab Zombie

POSSESSED UNDEAD (LEVEL 2)

AC 8 HP 11
MV Near AL: C

Attacks 1
Old hatchet +2 (1d4)

Abilities
S +2, D -2, C +2, I -2, W +2, Ch -3

Undead: Immune to morale checks.

Brain Crab Getaway: If the crab zombie is reduced to 0 HP by a non-magical or non-critical attack, DC 12 or its crab will scurry from a defeated zombie and look to burrow into the next nearest corpse.



Ruzalka

CAPRICIOUS WATER SPIRIT (LEVEL 4)

AC 13 HP 19
MV Near AL: N

Attacks 1
Claw +3 (1d4)

Abilities
S -1, D +2, C +0, I +1, W +3, Ch +4

Spells: She can shape water, control fish, and influence the emotions of people (DC 12 CHA to change someone's emotion). She can also cause foolishness (DC 12 CHA to reduce INT to -3 for a minute). Finally, she can boil water, which creates a small area of scalding water, dealing 1d4 damage to anyone in that area.



14. Kobold-Town

Here in the rocky hills of the forest is a shanty town of a few hundred blue-skinned kobolds.

For years the kobolds of Kobold-Town eeked out survival in the Blackwoods. They mostly kept to themselves, although every few years a leader would emerge and convince a few of the tougher ones to raid the farms north of the woods. They were almost always defeated and chased back into the woods.

Recently, however, the Grimhollow Thools took over the town, strong-arming the town's current leader Blunkin the Brain-Smasher (so named because his habit of blurt-ing out bizarre statements would confuse even the most patient of Ytarria's monks). Now, the town is growing more organized, training for guerilla warfare, and planning a series of raids that will distract the levies to the north so that King Chutter can conquer Moriel and the Black Keep.

Some of the braver kobolds have fled the town, but they have not gone far. They gather in small camps of a dozen or so at the base of the hills, too afraid to venture north (the spiders) or to the south (the deeper Blackwoods). They are scared and confused.

The Surrounding Hills

If the PCs enter this area, they'll likely encounter one of these bands. Kobolds are skilled at trap-building, so getting close may trigger one or more of their clever snares:

Spring-Snare: Requires careful observation walking into the area. Thieves can usually and sometimes rangers can disarm it with ease. If triggered, the victim is pulled up into the air by one leg. A dangling person must make a DEX check (DC 15) to reach a weapon to cut the rope (failure drops it). The fall afterward does 1d6 damage!

Spiked Branch and Net: Requires careful observation walking into the area. Thieves and sometimes rangers can usually disarm it with ease. If triggered, the victim may make a Dex check (DC 15) or else get by the spike (1d8 damage) and then have a net dropped on them from above.

Once a PC triggers a trap, the kobolds will circle up, laugh at their ingenuity, and threaten the PCs with their javelins... but will not attack unless provoked. Instead, they'll try to bargain



with the PCs, demanding food or supplies in exchange for their dangling or trapped friend.

If the PCs can successfully parlay with the kobolds' leader, KRINK, they'll hear the sad story of Kobold-Town:

"The Grimhollow Thools came up from their chasm not long past, all muscle and snarls, and they shoved out our king. Now Blunkin the Brain-Smasher does their bidding. Blunkin! He of the backwards wisdom, who spoke in circles until even the great druid wept! Now our town crawls like a soldier-ant hive—training, sneaking, plotting to pull the human levies away while King Chutter takes the Black Keep for his glory. Brave kobolds like us ran, yes, but not far—not north (spiders eat our skin), not south (Blackwoods eat our souls). So we camp here, waiting."

- **On the druid Mac Rónán...** she says that the kobolds captured him a week ago, and are keeping him in a cage in Blunkin the Brain-Smasher's abode.
- **On the Grimhollow Thools...** the kobolds say they know where their cave is. They'll want a trade (at least 25 gp) to guide the PCs to it, although clever PCs may be able to trick the kobolds out of the information.

- **On King Chutter...** they have not seen the man, but have heard he's an ogre and a great sorcerer, who uses the Grimhollow Thools as his lieutenants.

Entering Kobold-Town

The kobolds of Kobold-Town are suspicious of outsiders. While they won't attack humans and elves on sight, they send their most brutish guards to confront visitors and demand their purpose in the town. The only real acceptable answers are "we're here to trade" or "we're here to see your chief."

If asked to trade, the kobolds will escort them to the brick merchant house located along the main road.

If asked to see Blunkin the Brain-Smasher, the kobolds are more thoughtful. Paranoid that any outsiders would try to assassinate the chief, the kobolds will demand what business they have with the chief. They'll only be granted an audience if the PCs say they are with the Thools, or can otherwise trick the kobolds into thinking their visit is important—and they mean no harm to their leader.

Anything else will be met with orders to leave the town. If the PCs resist, they'll quickly be surrounded by a dozen or more aggressive kobolds, who will first throw stones to chase them away, and then throw javelins to kill them.

Kobold-Town has a handful of patrols at night; bullying guards with good night vision and who carry sharp javelins and glow-grub lanterns.

Drizzle

DRIZZLE is a kleptomaniac kobold who lives in town. He has exceptionally long ears and a darting tongue. The other kobolds have beat him over the years for stealing, but he can't help himself.

If the PCs enter Kobold-Town, he'll approach them with the other kobolds, but will be friendlier, grinning at them like he has a purpose. However, he is an uncontrollable pickpocket, and if he gets a chance will steal as much as he can from the PCs while the other kobolds are distracting them. He is quite good at stealthily pickpocketing victims.

Even after the PCs leave town, he'll follow them to continue to rob him. He may even pretend to be a friend, saying he can help them, though the other kobolds are too smart to have told him anything useful. There is little chance the PCs won't eventually catch on to his thievery. However, if the PCs threaten him, he'll scream that the PCs cannot kill him, saying "*if I dies, the prophecy says doom will come rainin' across the forest!*"

Blue-skinned Kobold

BLACKWOODS OUTCASTS

AC 13

HP 1

MV Near

AL: N

Attacks 1

Javelin +0 (1d6)

Abilities

S -2, D +2, C +0, I -1, W +0, Ch -1

Dodge: Once per day, a kobold can dodge any attack that would hit.

Notes: These kobolds represent the ones with some training, such as the outcasts or the guards inside Kobold-Town. The chief of the kobolds, **Blunkin the Brain-Smasher** is dumber, and has the habit of inserting long non sequiturs into conversation. If forced into combat, he attacks with a ceremonial knobbed club (+0, 1d4 damage).



Oddly, this is true; he *does* carry such a curse. If he dies, his blood will seep into the earth, and a great thunderstorm will drench this area of the forest. This woods will plummet into darkness and great rains will pour down for three days, causing muddy, slippery paths (disadvantage on most wilderness and melee rolls for bad footing). Those caught in the rain must make a WIS check (DC 12) or suffer a temporary curse of depression and callousness. And, after a day, the rains will cause flooding in Kobold-Town, perhaps causing enough distraction for the PCs to more easily sneak into town.

Murznut the Merchant

MURZNUT is the richest merchant in Kobold-Town, and the only one allowed to trade with outsiders. He has a ramshackle mud-brick store along the main road into town. It smells of old onions and moss.

Murznut is fluent in English and more intelligent than most other kobolds. His goods are limited however. He has a few clay trinkets, mushroom powder (he claims it sharpens the mind, but it is ordinary), well-crafted snares, fish-hooks, and hunting supplies, "elf-repellent" (merely fish oil), and jars of glow-grubs, which the kobolds use as lanterns in many parts of their settlement.

Murznut will be careful to be overly friendly the PCs, but he dislikes chief Blunkin and the influence the Thools hold over him. If the PCs can get him alone, he may help (but only if the PCs bribe him or shop from him):

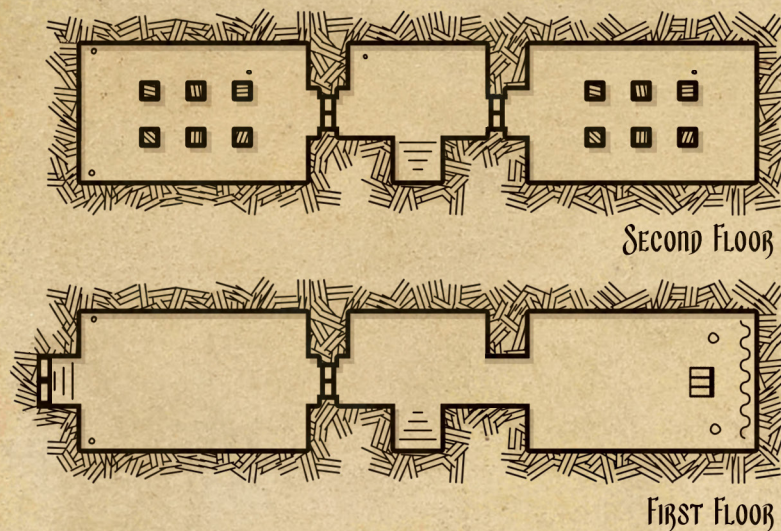
- **On the Thools...** he knows that they live to the east near the ravine, but he avoids the area himself.
- **On King Blunkin...** Murznut thinks he's stupid and going cause the death of many kobolds. *"Big mouth, tiny brain. Yells louder than thunder and calls it 'strategy.' Can't count past seven, too."*
- **On King Chutter or Choir the Necromancer...** a week ago, he sold some glow-grubs to the sorcerer, a man he found "as cold as a lizard egg in winter clay." Choir said King Chutter had angered him over a disagreement in payment, and that he was unlikely to return anytime soon.
- **On the druids...** he confirms that the kobolds have taken the high druid prisoner. While the official story is that the kobolds raided Cnoc na Ríthe and captured the druid, he says the real story is "that fool man just walks right into town, like we'd ever listen to him. Starts jabberin' at the chief—didn't even see Snatchtail creepin' behind. WHACK! Down in one minute, talkin' all done. Not so wise, right?" But he goes on to say he fears reprisal from the towns in the area, as he knew the druid was well-liked.
- **On Drizzle...** he warns that it was prophesied at his birth that should he die in the Blackwoods, a great cataclysm would occur.

Audience with Blunkin the Brain-Smasher

If granted an audience with the chief, the PCs will be led through the ramshackle Kobold-Town to Blunkin's abode, the only two-story building in the town (and one that looks dangerous at best). The abode is well-guarded, especially at night, with at least six kobolds guarding the door, which will be locked.

The chief's audience chamber is a crooked, smoke-stained room hung with threadbare banners, its throne a sagging pile of bones and rusted shields lashed together with sinew. On top of the throne is a cracked crystal orb that seems to be leaking some kind of yellow ichor. Unknown to the kobolds,

BLUNKIN BRAIN-SMASHER'S ABODE



King Chutter and Choir his necromancer use this crystal to spy on the kobolds.

Blunkin the Brain-Smasher is a fat kobold who is less intelligent than most of the others in his camp, but whose dumb statements and non-sequiturs have charmed much of his fellow kobolds over time.

- **On King Chutter...** Blunkin proudly declares his alliance with King Chutter and the Grimhollow Thools. He confirms the story the other kobolds have told about Chutter's plans. He says that King Chutter has long had eyes on Black Keep and that he and his kobolds will reap rich rewards for helping him. He does not, however, know where the king lives, and only says he and the Grimhollow Thools only visit Kobold-Town on rare occasion.
- **On the attack...** He does not know when the attack to the north will happen. He says that the Grimhollow Thools have commanded his bravest kobolds retrieve venom from the spiders to make their attack more potent. He admits that at least three parties of kobolds have not returned from the spider hunting grounds in quite some time...
- **On the Grimhollow Thools...** Blunkin *does* know where the Grimhollow Thools live, and will dumbly blurt out that they live in a cave one mile to the east. He'll then look horrified that perhaps he said too much.
- **On the druid Mac Rónán...** he admits he has the druid captive on the second floor. "He tried to convince me to ignore the orders of King Chutter, and I had him

clunked on the head and thrown into a cage!" He goes on to say that he expects King Chutter to reward him greatly for the druid when he next arrives. He'll only release the druid if the PCs offer him a very handsome payment (at least 250 gp worth).

- **On Cnoc na Ríthe...** it occurs to the kobold king that the settlement is vulnerable to attack without the druid present. He'll immediately dispatch a small war party!
- **On his throne's cracked crystal...** he proudly says it was a gift from King Chutter, and it is delicious. He licks the ichor leaking from it to demonstrate.

If the PCs insult the kobold king in any way, he will order them grabbed and held captive on the second floor's cages.

If the PCs kill or capture the kobold king, the camp breaks into chaos. The dozen kobolds inside the abode are loyal to him and will attack the PCs. The hundreds of kobolds outside the camp will flee in confusion and terror at the death of their king.

Rescuing Mac Rónán

The druid of Cnoc na Ríthe is held in a sturdy wooden cage on the top floor of the kobold king's abode. There are other captives here too, mostly kobold troublemakers who made some petty insult to the king.

There is also a captive dwarf named DVALINN, who was traveling with the glass merchants found in the north part of the woods. He challenged the dark elves after they killed his friends, but was wounded by an arrow and forced to flee into the woods. He got lost, fell into a snare, and was captured by the kobolds.

Five kobold guards are posted on the second floor, entertaining themselves by playing jokes on the prisoners. Their favorite is to offer them food that is "seasoned" with various disgusting ingredients found around the camp.

There are many windows on this second floor, so rescuing any captive simply requires freeing them from their cage, and then climbing down the building (which requires a rope or careful climbing). The cage doors are tied shut with sturdy rope, requiring them to be either cut or untied. The cages of the valuable prisoners, however, are also armed with many bells attached to the rope, requiring finesse to open without making a sound.

Once rescued and away from Kobold-Town, Mac Rónán the high druid will thank the PCs:

- **On his capture...** he says that he lied to the residents of Cnoc na Ríthe about visiting Twifold Hollow. Instead, he traveled here to convince Blunkin to break his alliance with King Chutter.
- **On the kobolds...** he finds it sad that the creatures so easily fell under the sway of the Thools. He bears no ill-will against them, though warns that one among them bears a prophecy that if killed, disaster will come to the woods.
- **On King Chutter and the Thools...** he is a powerful necromancer who arrived in the Blackwoods a few months ago. The necromancer easily convinced the Grimhollow Thools to ally with him, who then forced the kobolds into service. Mac Rónán does not know where the king lives, though he's been trying for months to find out.
- **On Duke Oswald...** the druid is surprised and says that he had no idea that the creature was anything more than an ogre. He does know a spell that can remove the creature's curse, but says that it must be cast with an hour-long ceremony with the creature present. However, to cast the spell he needs three rare ingredients from the wood: gillshade (not native, but some grows found near the drowned grove), greybane (found on the trees near the manticore) and Mushrooms from a Log-Wife (very rare, he hasn't seen any in years).
- **On healing...** Mac Rónán is a talented healer and can cast both healing spells on wounded PCs (effectively healing them completely). He can also cure most minor illnesses or afflictions.

The druid will not tarry long near Kobold-Town. Fearing his settlement at Cnoc na Ríthe is defenseless, he immediately set out to return to it.

Dvalinn the Dwarf

If the PCs rescue Dvalinn, they will find the dwarf forlorn and angry at himself for not protecting his merchant friends. He blames his poor hearing on the ambush, and he deeply desires to get revenge on the dark elves who led the attack. With good roleplaying or on a Very Good or better reaction, he can be convinced to accompany the PCs to help in their quest.

Dvalinn is a newcomer to the woods, and knows little of its other locations. However, he does know the legend of the Vulkrundshard, and if it is mentioned, will warn the PCs that there's likely a demon hiding inside its fiery interior.

Dvalinn: AC 10, HP 9, ATK 1 hatchet +2 (1d6), MV near, S +2, D +0, C +1, I +0, W +0, Ch +1, AL L, LV 2.

15. The Great Grub Carcass

Here a ruined wall shattered, its ancient stone split and upheaved as if something monstrous had torn through it—and indeed, it had. The corpse of a massive grub sprawls across the wreckage, its pale, bloated body half-collapsed and weeping thick, amber fluid. Its mouth, a gaping ring of soft, worm-like teeth and torn flesh, yawns wide enough for a man to walk into upright.

This massive grub was cursed by the necromancer Choir. Once it died, he intended to recover its carcass and use his magic to zombify it. It's been a week, he has not returned, and it reeks.

Anyone approaching the carcass must make a CON check (DC 15) or become nauseated (disadvantage on most rolls) for an hour. Once up close to the thing, the PCs will see necromantic runes carved into the creature. Wizards identify them as a death curse.

PCs may recall that grubs are known for their valuable midguts. Someone entering the maw can carefully carve out the great midgut of this grub. The organ will fetch quite a prize from the crone or alchemist (at least 150 gp). Or, it can be cooked and eaten in which case it gives the eater +1d6 STR for 24 hours. However, the eater must make a CON check (DC 15) or be nauseated for the same amount of time and suffer disadvantage to most rolls.

A careful investigation finds evidence that a man was crushed under the grub; fingers can barely be seen underneath the thing. If the PCs come up with a plan to move the grub (it requires a combined ST 50), they'll find the crushed corpse of a black-robed alchemist, one of Choir's men. The man has a knife on him, a **Control Zombie scroll**, a **bronze amulet with Choir's sigil** (see [Handout E](#)), and a **Powder of Reanimation**. If sprinkled on the mouth of a fresh intact corpse, the corpse will answer one question to the best of its ability. Unfortunately, this corpse is too damaged for it to work.

If the PCs take the magic amulet, they'll be tracked that night by seven animated skeletons (p. 45)—sent by Choir to follow his alchemist and retrieve the grub.

The Log-Wife

As the PCs investigate the area, they'll hear the faint weeping of a woman nearby. The sound comes from behind the ruined wall, but then moves quickly to behind a tree, and then finally behind a large, mushroom-covered log nearby.



Druids and rangers may identify this tactic as belonging to a Log-Wife, a woodland spite who blames mankind on every misfortune that occurs in the area. This spite, indeed, mistakenly blames the PCs for the death of the grub.

If the PCs approach the log, the ground grows soft and fills with worms, as the Log-Wife tries to drag the PCs under the soil. Make a STR check (DC 12). On a failure, the PC is dragged under and starts to suffocate, suffering 1 HP damage per turn, and hearing her crying sobs up close. The PC can try to escape every turn, but rerolling against DC 15; the Log-Wife is stronger under the earth.

Wizards may recall that mushrooms from the Log-Wife's log can grant someone who eats them additional attractiveness (for 2d6 days).

The Crone

If the PCs have not yet met Mutter Grimmhaar, they may encounter her here. She is obsessed with mammoth grubs, and will happily play the PCs a few coins to recover the grub's midgut (she's a cannibalistic witch, but even she doesn't like climbing into the mouths of grubs).

However, during this encounter, Mutter Grimmhaar will be less talkative than when she's at her home. She'll focus on ordinary topics — the rains that somehow bred larger spiders, the best way to cook a midgut (and how her son likes them broiled), and the unusual lack of bats this season. But she'll invite the PCs to her hovel for "fine bone broth and shared stories" at a later time.

16. Gloamreach of the Thools

Before you yawns a jagged chasm—a claw-mark in the earth plunging into a still, purple-hued crater. Worn steps spiral down its sides, carved by hands long vanished, leading to a vast cavern mouth flanked by cracked pillars etched with runes so old no living elf dares claim their meaning. Once, a massive stone door sealed this place, etched with wards and bound by silence, but the Thools shattered it with brute force. It is in this forgotten hollow that the Thools have made their lair—like kings of some broken underworld whispered of in the forgotten myths of the world.

A deep chasm marks the forest here, but the PCs can find narrow steps that wind a hundred yards into the earth. At the bottom is a temple carved from walls of the rock canyon. The temple's ancient stone door was smashed open by the Thools years ago. Elves automatically knows that the temple is elvish design, and over a thousand years old.

When the PCs arrive, the Thools will be inside their sanctuary, celebrating their recent victory against the town of Moriel. One of the monstrous Thools is Oswald, the once-duke that the PCs were asked to identify.

Observing the Entrance

If the PCs observe the entrance from the bottom of the chasm, they will soon see one of the Thools emerge to relieve himself against the walls of the chasm. He then returns inside, calling to his brothers to wait their turns before continuing whatever game they've invented this day. This may be an opportunity to attack a Thool by themselves, but the PCs may not know if it is Oswald (it is).

Inside the Gloamreach

1 - Entrance Chamber. Ages ago, this was a beautiful elven temple carved into the stone. But it was shattered by a catastrophic magical storm, its mosaics crumbled, tiles broken, and pillars split down the middle. Today, the temple interior is an awkward fusion of natural cave and elven ruin, lit only by dim, kobold-made lanterns hammered into its walls.

2 - The Chapel of Sighing Bronze. This chamber is crowded with dozens of small bronze death idols, their features worn smooth by the touch of many hands.



Along the walls, makeshift tables hold glass vials, flasks, and alchemical reagents. A soft, wind comes from hidden vents in the rock, sounding like a low, disembodied sigh. Investigation identifies a few useful salves: a **Potion of Healing**, a **Potion of Fetching and Carrying** (adds 4 gear slots for an hour), and a **Powder of Wisdom** (raises INT by 1 for 1d6 hours). Note that if Oswald is given a dose of the powder, he will be smart enough to recall his real identity.

This is the room where Choir's five necromancer apprentices do their work for King Chutter. Two animated skeletons created from the remains of dead dark elves assist them mindlessly in their tasks. Unless alerted, the PCs will find five dark robed men with painted faces silently working at the tables, mixing alchemical ingredients with precision. If disturbed, however, they turn their dark magic on the PCs.

The animated skeletons (p. 45) here are ill-made and will be useless for d3 turns before they attack intruders. However, a skeleton rolls a 1, its first instinct is to grab a random concoction from the tables and toss it at the nearest foe, doing 2d6 damage.

GM's Note: If a skirmish breaks out here, one of the Thools will lumber in from deeper in the cave to investigate. But they despise the alchemists—calling them “stink-bottlers”—and won't interfere. Instead, the Thool will watch the fight, then growl a warning: leave the cave, or be dragged out by broken ankles.

A plain bronze door is set into the eastern wall, heavy chains sealing its handles. Opening it requires breaking the chains or picking the lock.

THE GLOAMBEACH OF THE THOOLS



3 - The Vault. This room is a store room for the Thools. They keep crates of stolen goods here, mostly fruit and vegetables, a chest of gold coins from the far lands (holding 300 gp), and a massive suit of plate armor for King Chutter that takes up 3 gear slots. It's far too big to be worn by a human, but could be sold for 500 gp. There's also a collection of necromantic books that Choir has been studying. Wizards can learn manywell-known necromantic spells from these books.

4 - The Hall of Thrones. Seven broken dwarven stone thrones haphazardly decorate this room, the prize of an ancient war fought beyond memory. One of the thrones bears a large cracked crystal in its armrest. Touching it allows a person to hear what is going on in Blunkin the Brain-Smasher's hall, where a matched crystal is present.

On two of the thrones, lifeless scarecrows sit limply, their eye sockets scorched by failed magic.

Barrels with water and ale are stacked against the western wall. A dead kobold is tossed into the corner here, a loud-mouthed messenger who was rude to the Thools.

5 - The Thools' Lair. Once the center of the temple, this area has now become the home of the three Thools. Three stone pillars and a cracked stone altar decorate this room. The Thools have turned the altar into their supper table, and it's strewn with metal plates, fish bones, and bent silverware. Three dozen Karnoffel playing cards with suits of acorns,

leaves, hearts, and bells, are strewn on the table and on the floor. It's clear the Thools were trying to play the game, but either gave up or became angry and threw the deck.

In the northwest corner of the room are three mattresses filled with straw. Three fishing rods lean against the wall.

Usually the three Thools are in this chamber, resting, sparing, eating, or whispering about how bad Choir and his apprentices smell. PCs may hear a few important tidbits from them if they can stealthily listen to their conversation:

- "King Chutter says them kobolds near done training. Ha! I'd wager me best gold coin they'll bash their heads on Moriel's walls 'fore they even find the gate."
- "All of Choir's servants are daft. I seen a few of them swinging at a tree like it owed 'em coin. Ain't no way that sorcerer is half as mighty as the King says."
- "I ain't fishin' no more for Choir's stink-bottlers. Let 'em catch their own worms. King Chutter said that pond's not for fishing anymore, anyways."
- "Choir's off sniffin' round that old crone again. Remember when he messed up them bone-walkers real bad? Skin just up and slithered out the door like it had better places to be. Pah! Fool can't even bind a skeleton proper."
- "Sure is quiet around here when King Chutter's in the tower. Suppose he'll be back any day now."

The Thools are hostile to intruders! While tricking them isn't impossible, the PCs won't get much information out of

Identifying Oswald

There are a few ways the PCs can identify Oswald among the three ogre-ish Thools. However, being identified means nothing to Oswald. He, like the other Thools have no memory of their past lives, and he'll continue to act like a brute, loyal to Chutter, unless he is affected by magic that can unwind his curse.

His toes. If the PCs have encountered Finn Willowheel the cobbler, they may know that Oswald's pointer toes are much longer than his big toes. While all of the Thools wear boots, if the PCs can get a glimpse of their feet, they'll easily identify Oswald.

His hayberry birthmark. If the PCs were wise enough to ask Gregoras on how to identify Oswald, they discovered that he has a hayberry-shaped birthmark on his shoulder. While the Thools are usually clothed and armored, PCs who find a way to see their bare shoulders may see the very-faded mark.

Powder of Wisdom / Greybane. If the PCs can affect Oswald with the Powder of Wisdom, tea made from greybane, or a similar spell that increases his intelligence, his brain will unfog long enough for him to recall his true identity. Such magic will begin to bring back memories and confuse him. This confusion will make turn him into a pacifist, unclear as to who his friends and enemies are, until the effects of the magic wear off (typically 1d6 hours).

them before they decide to attack anyone they don't know and trust. Furthermore, if the PCs have not yet dealt with the alchemists, any fight that breaks out here will attract them to come to the Thools' aid.

6 - The Forge and Bone Pit. This chamber is being shaped into a magical forge. A massive brick furnace stands half-built at its center, its base scorched with early test fires. At the back of the room, a wide stone vent snakes upward—unfinished but clearly carved with the aid of magic, its edges unnaturally smooth. Wizards will know that this room is being designed for the enchantment of weapons and armor.

A wide crevasse splits the floor—left behind when Chutter's magic created furnace bricks straight from the stone. It's filled with bones, raw material for Choir's necromantic spells. The bone pit is only about 10' deep, so anyone falling in will suffer 1d6 damage.

Alchemist x5

CHOIR'S APPRENTICES (LEVEL 2)

AC 12 HP 9
MV Near AL: C

Attacks 1
Knife +1 (1d4)

Abilities
S +1, D +0, C +0, I +1, W +2, Ch +0

Poison: The alchemist's poison-tipped knife requires a DC 12 CON check or +1d4 damage.

Spells: The apprentices have mastered a spell that lets them fling balls of writhing tentacles. This is a ranged attack +1 for 2d4 damage. Also, if hit, the subject must make a CON check (DC 12) or write in pain, giving disadvantage to all rolls on the following turn.



7 - The Moat Room. The south side of this room is filled with water. Wizards will sense that the water is magical, and if studied, they will discover that it is enchanted with some kind of powerful portal or teleportation magic.

One wall in this room has a mosaic that shows a portal appearing in the water. The portal glows yellow, dimly illuminating the room. A second frame shows the same mage standing atop a tower. See [Handout F](#).

The portal is enchanted to open once a day, at dusk, for 60 minutes. It leads to a forgotten tower far north atop one of the peaks in the North Mountains.

All of the Thools know about the portal, but they'll be unlikely to tell unless captured and interrogated. Or, if the PCs have somehow made an ally of Oswald, he will share the information about the portal. The alchemists know that there is a portal in this room that leads to an ancient wizard's tower, but do not know the secrets of when the portal; they are disallowed from this room.

If the players wait until the right moment, a swirling yellow portal appears inside the water. The PCs can wade to the portal, and they'll find themselves inside the tower.

The Startower of Limm

Perched on a jagged peak of the Granite Mountains, a forgotten tower rises tall, its stone blackened as if by ancient fire. Weirdly, the tower's shadow stretches in the wrong direction from the sun.

This 100' tower was raised a century before a catastrophic magical storm brought chaos to the world, but it was designed to act as observation tower for the event. It was built by Limm, the powerful temple-keeper of the place that now lies in ruin. He used the tower as a quiet refuge, but also to teach his apprentices secrets by starlight.

Those who teleport here via the portal find themselves at the base of the tower; the portal will close at sundown, approximately sixty minutes after dusk. Twin doors of blackened oak stand half-open, warped with age but held by hinges that never creak—enchanted, though long untended. Elves immediately identify the architecture as elvish, but almost a thousand years old. There are few surviving examples of such design left in the world anymore.

While the tower looks at least a hundred feet tall, it is comprised of only two sections: its grand entrance hall, and upper-most parapet.

Entrance Chamber and King Chutter

The interior stone walls of the tower are carved with faded glyphs that flicker dimly when passed. Giant shelves sag under the weight of ancient tomes and scrolls, while broken instruments litter nearby tables. An elegant, central spiral stair climbs upwards.

Inside this room King Chutter, a massive, two-headed Ettin who has become skilled in spellcraft. He has been using this tower and its artifacts to enhance his abilities, growing more powerful ahead of his planned attack of the northern cities of the empire.

Upon detecting any intruders, Chutter shows himself. Seeing the hulking ettin likely terrifies anyone who did not expect him!

At first, King Chutter will suspect that the PCs are working for Choir, the necromancer that he has been working with that he no longer trusts. He'll challenge the PCs on their intentions with his more well-spoken head:



"Welcome, little worms, to Chutter's Crown, my tower of teeth and thunder," growls King Chutter, one head grinning wide while the other narrows its eyes in suspicion. "But don't go wriggling too far just yet—I smell Choir's stink on you. That bone-fondler's always sending spies, thinking me too thick to notice. Speak quickly and plainly, or I'll toss your twitching corpses off the mountainside."

- **On his upcoming conquest...** Chutter happily admits that he has plans to conquer Moriel, block one of the empire's biggest trade routes, and rule from the Black Keep.
- **On the Thools...** he calls them loyal and hard-working. He loves them like kin, he says. If pressed on their origin, he'll admit that he paid the wizard Dendybar the Mottled to transform his worst apprentices into the creatures. *"Funny thing, the worse the apprentice, the better the Thool! It's the dumb ones that turn out just right,"* he laughs. If the PCs admit to hurting or killing the Thools, King Chutter will roar in outrage and attack them.
- **On Choir the Necromancer...** he spits and explains that the necromancer promised him an army of undead

constructs to help him take Moriel. However, his magic proved unpredictable and often ineffective, and Chutter had to instead recruit kobolds to his cause. *"I threatened that bone-fondler that he was on his last chance. My boys say he scurried south, tail tucked, instead of bringing me what was owed."*

- **On the tower...** he pulls out a small dusty book and tosses it on the floor. *"Built by a fellow named Limm, centuries ago, to watch the worse magical storm in our history, if you'll believe that. I found his bones in the temple, ground them down to dust and swallowed him down."*

Eventually, King Chutter will grow annoyed at the PCs' presence and decide to end them. His first tactic is to use his staff (one he stole from the tower) to create two *parchment golems* made from the old books that surround him.

With a rush of wind, the tower's strewn pages twist and bind together, forming limbs of layered script and a torso of bound tomes, as a parchment golem rises—ink bleeding like veins across its skin.

As they engage, he'll cast protective magic on himself, then he'll switch to offensive magic. However, if he is wounded, he'll retreat up the stairs to the tower's top, hoping he can use his spells and strength to toss the PCs from the tower's height. If he has time, he'll try to cast his earthquake spell to shake the PCs from the steps. If he succeeds, PCs on the stairs must make DEX checks (DC 12) to avoid falling off. This could re-

sult in moderate injury (2d6 damage) if the PCs aren't far up the stairs, or a deadly fall (4d6 damage) if they are mostly up.

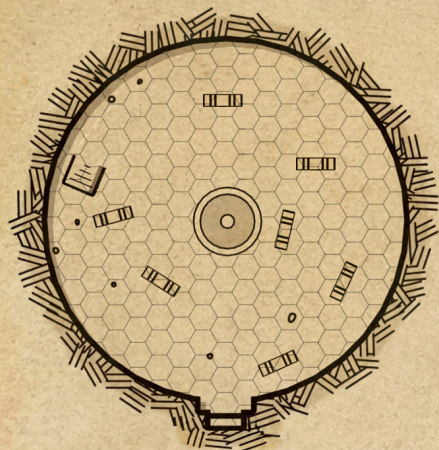
The Parapet

From the parapet, the PCs see the North Mountains sprawl to every horizon, jagged and endless. The tower peeks above the clouds, and overhead, constellations shimmer, mirrored in the tower's polished black floor. Here is where Limm and his students studied the magic of the universe.

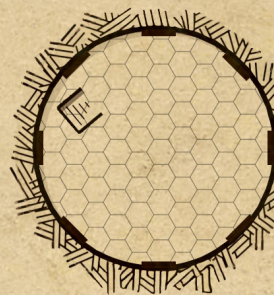
The polished floor is magically polished and slippery. Any attack that does 5+ damage (10+ damage vs. a large creature like King Chutter) automatically knocks someone across tower. Anyone pushed into a crenellation must make a Dex check (DC 10) to avoid falling off the tower. Furthermore, if King Chutter used an Earthquake spell, the tower will start to lean, making all DEX checks at disadvantage!

If King Chutter has effectively blocked the PCs from following him up to the top of the tower, he'll take his time and try climbing down the tower, trying to return to the portal that will take him back to the temple.

THE STARTOWER OF Limm



Entrance



Parapet

King Chutter and the Thools

King Chutter

ETIN SORCERER (LEVEL 7)

AC 12 HP 36
MV Near AL: C

Attacks 2

1x Limm's staff +7 (2d6)
1x spell

Abilities

S +4, D +0, C +3, I +3, W +1, Ch +2

Key Spells: King Chutter can shield himself (INT DC 11 for +2 AC) and cast conical **sand jets** to do 2d4 damage and knock people backwards or blind them (INT DC 12). He can create and fling sharp stones (INT DC 12 for +4 to hit, 2d8 damage), walk through earth and stone (INT DC 13), and create earthquakes that shake the room (DC 12 or fall down).



Gear: Limm's Staff, which he usually uses one-handed like a spear. The staff gives the wielder the Psychic Guidance perk that allows him to throw stone missiles with his effective spell skill, vs. his Innate Attack skill. Once a day, if pointed at enough nearby books and grimoires, it can magically create a parchment golem. He wears hardened leather armor and carries Ointment of Regeneration, which can restore a lost limb and his worth 300 gp.

Tactics: Chutter likes to impress his foes, and he'll always try summoning a parchment golem at the start of combat. He especially loves his sand spells, and tries to blind and push back opponents. When he senses his foes are exhausted, he'll rush in and crush them with his staff. Once he loses half his hit points, he'll retreat up to the top of the tower, to use his spells and great strength to toss foes from the tower.

Parchment Golem

ANIMATED CONSTRUCT (LEVEL 6)

AC 11 HP 30
MV Near AL: N

Attacks 3

Slam +5 (1d8)

Abilities

S +3, D +1, C +4, I +0, W -1, Ch -3

Reflection: Parchment golems can reflect spells back upon foes. If they are hit with a spell, roll 1d6. On a 5+, the golem knows the spell and casts and rebounds in on a random nearby target.

Flammable: Parchment golems take double damage from fire attacks. If a golem dies from fire, it rushes the nearest foe, grappling and burning itself and its victim (+5 attack for 1d6 damage).



Grimhollow Thool x3

MALFORMED BROTHERS (LEVEL 6)

AC 12 HP 30
MV Near AL: C

Attacks 2

Great spear +6 (2d6)

Abilities

S +4, D +0, C +3, I -2, W -1, Ch -1

Gear: The ogreish Thools typically wield great spears and carr 10' whips (only 1d4 damage, but cause great pain, causing disadvantage on the next turn). They wear layered leather armor.



Finale

With careful planning and bold action, the PCs can defeat the King Chutter and return Duke Oswald back to Moriel.

If Duke Oswald was captured as a Thool, he's kept in one of the towers of the Black Keep. Duchess Catherine spends years hunting for the rare ingredients to restore her brother back into a human. Unfortunately, her quest fails and Oswald succumbs to illness and dies in the keep. Moriel is saddened and holds a well-attended funeral for the cursed duke.

If Duke Oswald's humanity was restored, he struggles with his actions. Embarrassed by his failure to become a mage and his behavior as a bestial Thool, Duke Oswald abdicates his position to his sister Catherine. He travels west to the magic-starved west to become a priest, although he secretly plots revenge against his original tormentor, Dendybar the Mottled.

Either way, Duchess Catherine Laskaris is deeply thankful to the PCs for stopping the King Chutter's plot against Moriel. As promised, she'll reward the PCs with 500 gp apiece for stopping the attack, and if Oswald was returned alive, knighthood and 100 acres of land north of Moriel — big enough to build a modest farm. If the PCs restored Oswald into a human again, she offers to instead build them estates on their new land.

Completing the Adventure

For completing the adventure, the PCs should receive typical experience awards for finding treasure and making discoveries. GMs should freely confer appropriate reputations, contacts, enemies, or patrons for interacting with any of the influential folk in the adventure.

Loose Ends

This adventure doesn't tie everything up in a bow. GMs can incorporate the following plot hooks into this adventure, or use them for the basis of future adventures!

Choir the Necromancer

Though the necromancer Choir never appears directly in this adventure, his influence is felt everywhere. After a bitter falling-out with King Chutter, Choir fled south, betting that the kobold-led conquest of the northern towns would fail. To speed the king's downfall, he even tried persuading Wulfram the Antlered Man to reject Chutter's offer to lead the kobold army.

Restoring Oswald's Humanity

There are only a few ways to restore Oswald and the other Thools back to their human forms.

The simplest way is to procure starshade from Twin-fold Hollow. When carefully removed from the ground and inhaled at moonlight, the bloom destroys curses of transformation.

Second, Mac Rónán the druid knows a spell to reverse the curse, but he requires three rare herbs from the wood (see p. 49 for more details on each):

- **Gillshade** - Found at the Drowned Grove.
- **Greybane** - Found on harwood trees in the Manticores Hunting Ground.
- **Mushrooms of a Log-Wife** - Found near the grub carcass.

Also, Mutter Grimmhaar also owns gillshade and greybane, and will trade some in exchange for the midgut of a giant grub. Once these herbs are found, the druid or his apprentice Muirenn can use their Herb Lore skill to prepare the spell that restores the duke.

Finally, the PCs can kill Dendybar the Mottled, the mage who originally cast the curse on the Thools. However, he lives in Bannoch, hundreds of miles away from Moriel, and out of the scope of this adventure!

Now hidden in a secret lair south of the Grimhollow, Choir spies on unfolding events. His alchemists, posing as loyal servants of Chutter, are in fact still loyal to him—feeding him reports on the Chutter's movements and plans.

Choir believes the kobolds and Thools will suffer a crushing defeat, leaving Chutter dead. When that happens, he intends to claim Limm's tower for himself and raise it as a new seat of power. To prepare, he's already animated dozens of undead servants and crafted his most terrifying creation yet: Mother Clutch, built to wipe out the druids guarding the Grimhollow, and then chase the dark elves from the woods.

The GM can easily extend the campaign with Choir as the next major threat. The PCs will soon realize he's still lurking in the woods, raising monstrosities and laying claim to forgotten magic. To stop him, they'll need to find his hidden lair and end his dark work—before it spreads.

The Other Thools

If any of the other Thools were transformed back into humans, they'll join Oswald and also become men of the cloth. One was a minor noble named WARIN, who joined Dendbar as an apprentice, but changed his mind and told the mage he was going to quit to instead study metallurgy with the northern dwarves. Dendbar was aghast and transformed him into a Thool.

The second Thool was a poet named SAMIR. He was a good apprentice, but would frequently get drunk. During one event, he covered Dendbar's study in ice, ruining many scrolls. Dendbar was enraged and transformed him into a Thool.

Dendbar the Mottled

Though elusive and rarely seen, the southern wizard Dendbar the Mottled casts a long shadow over the events in this adventure. Hailing from the libraries of the southern town of Bannock, Dendbar was hired by King Chutter to reshape men into monsters. It was his warped experiments that turned his failed apprentices into the twisted, hulking Thools.

Dendbar cares little for conquest. To him, Chutter's war is just a field test for his grim craft. After creating the Thools, he returned to his secret library. From there, he sends arcane pulses and binding sigils to monitor his "sons," watching how they evolve under pressure.

Rumors suggest Dendbar has begun shaping more Thools, this time for a different buyer, ones pieced together from the remains of men, beasts, and perhaps worse.

Should the PCs defeat Chutter or encounter the Thools' twisted nature firsthand, they may seek out Dendbar to stop the origin of these transformations.

Special Thanks

Special thanks to Liam Connors for his help with some of the characters and encounters. Dungeon maps were created with One Page Dungeon (watabou.itch.io/one-page-dungeon).

For more free one shot adventures, please visit 1shotadventures.com. If you enjoyed this adventure, or ran it for a group, all the author asks is that you give a shout out and let me know how it went. Post a note on 1shotadventures.com or give a shoutout to @1shotjc.bsky.social on Bluesky.

Miscellaneous

This adventure uses the *Knowing Your Own Strength* optional rules for damage (see *Pyramid* 3/83).

Disclaimer Stuff

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Change Log

v1.0 - Original release.

Denizens of the Grimhollow Blackwoods

Marrowwither

BONELESS GHAISTS (LEVEL 3)

AC 11 HP 15

MV Near AL: C

Attacks 1

Grapple +3 (1d3)

Abilities

S +2, D +1, C +1, I -1, W -1, Ch -3

Undead: Immune to morale checks.

Notes: Born from the discarded flesh of the dead, these boneless ghaists slither and seep through the cracks of the world. Marrowwithers attack by grappling, enveloping, and suffocating the prey. The turn after they successfully grapple, they try to envelop. This pins the victim automatically and drains 1d4 CON damage. The victim dies if they reach 0 CON. Each turn, the victim may try to struggle free with a DEX or STR check (DC 15).



Bugbear Cutthroat

AMBITIOUS THIEVES (LEVEL 3)

AC 14 HP 14

MV Near AL: C

Attacks 1

Knobbed club +3 (1d6)

Abilities

S +3, D +2, C +1, I +0, W +0, Ch -1

Notes: Shadowy bugbears lurk in the Blackwoods and sometimes venture out of the forest to murder the rich folks of the northern towns to raid their houses and steal their belongings. They are clever but paranoid, and almost always set up alarms and traps around their camps.



Skeleton

UNDEAD SERVANTS (LEVEL 1)

AC 10* HP 11

MV Near AL: C

Attacks 1

Shortsword +1 (1d6)

Abilities

S +1, D +0, C +2, I -2, W +0, Ch -1

Undead: Immune to morale checks.

Gear: The servant skeletons inside the alchemists' lair are ill-equipped. They carry shortswords and have no armor or clothing. Ones who are on a mission, such as tracking the PCs, will be better equipped with rusted chain armor (AC 13).



Blackwoods Troll

HUNGRY MONSTER (LEVEL 5)

AC 12 HP 24

MV Near AL: C

Attacks 2

1x Bite +1 (1d10)

2x Claw +4 (1d6)

Abilities

S +3, D +2, C +2, I -1, W +0, Ch -1

Indomitable: Immune to mind controlling spells.

Regenerate: Regains 2d6 HP on its turn unless its wounds are cauterized with fire or acid.

Notes: Blackwoods Trolls are known for kidnapping men while they sleep and roasting them alive over fire pits. Fortunately, they are rare this far north in the woods. When they appear, townsfolk unite to quickly drive them away.



Random Encounters

North Woods

1. Dark Elf Patrol (p. 15)

The PCs near one of Prince Kalos' scouting parties. If the PCs are near the dark elf camp, the elves are looking for shards of Voorn. Otherwise, they're heading towards the road to look for merchants to ambush. A typical scouting party is composed of 1d6 stealthy dark elves (minimum 2).

Twists: The dark elves have cornered a woodsman who was loading his cart with medicinal herbs to bring back to his family. Disappointed the man carries no wealth, they have him tied to a tree and are debating what to do with him. If the PCs rescue him, he'll tell them that the previous night he saw "bags of flesh" moving towards the ruins of Silithari. They terrified him, and he made quickly to leave the forest.

2. Spider Ambush (p. 7)

A handful of giant spiders attempts to ambush the PCs. Typically, this is 1d6 spiders, but roll 1d8 if in the Spider Hunting Grounds.

Twists: One of the spiders is a rare mutation, and bright green in color. A WIS CHECK (DC 15) roll recalls that such spiders have potent blood. If applied to an open wound, it stitches it shut (healing 1d6 HP) and also gives the subject great climbing strength for a day (advantage on climbing checks).

3. The Crone

The PCs may spot Mutter Grimmhaar shuffling through the woods, hunched beneath a shawl, muttering to herself as she gathers herbs and hunts for giant grubs. Outside her hovel, she's less talkative. She sticks to simple topics the habits of wolves, the spite of crows, which roots soothe fever, and proud stories about her son, the Antlered Man. She avoids deeper question and instead invites the PCs to visit her home for "bone broth on the fire, rich and full of secrets."

4. A Madman in Love

The PCs come across a handsome, wild-haired fellow named GEORGIE RATCLIFFE. A year ago, he stumbled upon Ruzalka at the Drowned Grove. He had a few words with her, but got nervous and fled. Now, months later, he has fallen in love with the spirit and believes that he can make her his wife. However, he's gotten a bit lost and is looking for directions to her grove.

Georgie is obsessed with Ruzalka, and will describe her as a beautiful nymph, witty and with a fiery temper. He won't ac-

company the PCs unless they assure him they are heading towards her grove. He'll grow suspicious however, of any man who expresses interest in Ruzalka. He's also brought a brilliant necklace of green emeralds (worth 150 gp) that he plans to gift to her.

Twists: If the PCs have not yet visited the Drowned Grove, the corpse of the woodsman in the water will turn out to be Georgie's.

4. A Murder of Scarecrows (p. 5)

Not all of Choir's harrowed scarecrows made it through the forest. Some were manufactured with lower intelligence and got lost in the woods, randomly attacking animals, and sometimes even the trees themselves. If the scarecrows spot the PCs, they'll attack with abandon, all-out attacking for maximum damage. Roll 1d4 to see how many scarecrows the PCs encounter (minimum 2).

Twists: One of the scarecrows has gained sentience somehow. He has INT +0 and seeks vengeance on Choir, who he claims abandoned him after he was made because he wouldn't follow his commands. His memories are ill-formed; he recalls being sewn together by an old crone, and brought to life by Choir and his black-hooded assistants. This sentient scarecrow can be convinced into an alliance, but he's a fickle and dangerous friend who will prioritize his own revenge over the PCs' needs.

6. Ankle-snappers

The PCs stumble into an area of "ankle-snappers," carnivorous trees with living roots that wrap around ankles and knees and squeeze them, crippling victims, and then pulling them into the earth to be absorbed by the trees. The roots attack at +3 for 1d4 damage to a foot or leg. A second STR or DEX check is then required to escape the area, else another root attacks. PCs who are crippled are soon entangled and dragged beneath the earth in a few minutes, to be suffocated and slowly devoured.

Twists: Trapped nearby is Fariborz the wanted pyromancer (p. 21). Cursing and burning the ankle-snappers, he'll soon free himself and turn his attention to the PCs, who he'll be suspicious of. His primary goal is to find the Vulkkrundshard, and in exchange he'll provide some hints about the woods.

Random Encounters

South Woods

1. A Massive Grub

The PCs behold a grub the size of a wagon. While these things can be dispatched easily, one of their organs, the midgut, is valuable to some. The crone and other alchemists will pay handsomely for one (50 gp). If cooked and eaten, a midgut gives the eater +1d4 STR for a day (though also forces a CON check (DC 12) not be nauseated at the same time!).

Giant Grub:: AC 9, HP 25, ATK 1 mildly acidic bite +4 (1d4), MV near, S +3, D -2, C +2, I -3, W +0, Ch -3, AL N, LV 5.

2. Kobold Rebels (p.33)

A small group of 2d6 kobolds has set up a small camp. They are fiercely opposed to Chief Blunkin, but have no good plans to overthrow the tyrant. While they do not know the location of King Chutter or the Thools, they will be able to share basic information on Kobold-Town, including that the high druid of Cnoc na Ríthe has been captured.

3. Willowheel the Cobbler

The PCs encounter an elderly elven cobbler, FINN WILLOWHEEL. He bears an enchanted satchel which holds two dozen pair of beautiful shoes, keeping them in pristine condition despite his long journey through the Blackwoods. He is friendly and energetic; he knows the forest well and can give the PCs advice on avoiding some of its dangers, especially the dark elves who he distrusts.

Willowheel is en route to Moriel, where he plans to visit Duchess Catherine Laskaris. He's made fine shoes for her since she was a child. He also knows her brother Oswald and is upset about his curse. If asked more about Oswald, especially how the PCs might identify him, Willowheel says that the duke's pointer toes is larger than his big toes, which required a bit more care when it came to making shoes for him.

4. The Lantern Herd and Sleeping Druid

As the party moves through the woods at dusk, a soft jingling is heard ahead. Emerging from the mist are seven floating lanterns. They move on their own, slowly weaving between the trees. If followed, they lead the PCs to an gloomy grove where an old man with a long beard sleeps eternally on a wooden altar. This man is OLD FATHER TADGÁN, the druid and original founder of the nearby Cnoc na Ríthe.

The druid will slowly awaken to the PCs' presence and speak in a forgotten dialect of Anglish that is difficult to understand.

He knows little of the Blackwoods today — he has not awakened for over a century. However, he does know about the Twifold Hollow. He explains that he and his twin brother, Bréanainn, were prophesied to bring great anguish to the woods upon their deaths. When Bréanainn died in the hollow, killed at the hands of a forest demon, the hollow gained sentience and split into Rootflayer and Brish Lorr Blackelm. Fearing his own death would follow a similar path, Tadgán opted to create this wooden altar, which puts him to eternal sleep unless visited by “men with good intent.”

Tadgán will not leave the grove under any circumstances. He will, however, give aid to the PCs, healing their wounds. He'll also give them a “word of power” to use against Rootflayer. If the PCs speak Rootflayer's true name (“Bréanainn”) he will be unable to harm them for 24 hours.

5. Bugbear Cutthroats (p. 45)

A small group of three bugbear thieves are making their way south through the woods. They recently snuck into a the manor of a minor noble in the town of Thermis, strangled him, and stole his heirlooms. They are all wanted now, with rewards of 50 gp for each of their heads. They know little of the forest, although they recently had a run-in with the Antlered Man who terrified them with his great, sharp axe, and chased them away.

Twists: The leader of the Bugbears, GOAMTOAD, wears the flesh of a boneless marrow-wither as a bloody cloak. If the PCs steal this item, they will be able to be tracked by Choir, who will send one of his stealthier alchemists (p. 39) to spy on the PCs and bring back word on their intentions. This may result in fortification of Choir's lair.

6. The Blackwoods Troll (p. 6)

A loathsome troll, “Moss-Belly,” has wandered in the woods. It is a moss-skinned brute with bark for bones and eyes like wet stone. It is always hungry and loves to catch folk, stuff them in his bag, and roast them slowly over a fire.

Twists: A dark elf named Shayyla has been captured and stuffed into Moss-Belly's satchel. If freed, she'll make her way back to the dark elf camp to the north. There, she will tell the store to Prince Kalos, who will be more gracious and kind should the PCs visit his camp in the future.

Random Encounters

Nighttime

Camping during the night in the Blackwoods can be a dangerous affair. Each night spent in the south woods, roll 1d6. On a 1, the PCs have a nighttime encounter.

1. A Failed Skeleton

One of Choir's necromantic experiments crawls towards the PC's camp. The thing is legless, but its torso is human, and its skull is from a deer. Shreds of skin still cling to it, and black night crows surround it, landing on it long enough to tear pieces off. The skeleton will crawl towards the PCs, hating the living, but is unlikely to pose any real threat to them.

2. The Dying Kobold

A blue-skinned kobold suddenly lurches into the PC's camp. The creature is pale and shivering and has clearly suffered a bite from a large spider. It croaks a few words and passes out. It will soon die from the spider's venom unless saved with a spell, or a INT check (DC 15) roll.

If saved, the kobold FERF is thankful. He says that he's been ordered by his chief, Blunkin the Brain-Smasher to retrieve vials of poison from the spiders of the wood. He only knows that Blunkin is planning an attack soon, and wanted to better arm his warriors. He is loyal to his chief, and will not divulge much additional information, but he will point the PCs towards Kobold-Town if they ask. Ferf carries a dagger, a few silver coins, and four vials; one of them is filled with spider venom.

3. Mother Clutch

The PCs hear the sound of something crashing through the undergrowth. Near them rolls Mother Clutch (p.27), a horrifying tangle of pale arms. Seeing the thing causes great fear.

Mother Clutch is moving towards the ruins of Simithari. Her master, Choir the Necromancer, sensed that a magical artifact has been lost there (this is Fariborz's wand), and he is sending her to recover it. She'll ignore the PCs (unless interfered with), and can easily be tracked towards the ruins.

4. Night Crows

A murder of large, hook-beaked night crows has taken an interest in the PCs. First one, then two, then a dozen surround the PCs in the branches above them. The birds caw and shriek, annoyed by the PCs' presence.

This, in itself, causes no harm to the PCs. However, unless scattered, their cacophony may attract nearby forest denizens. If the PCs delay too long, roll a die to see what appears to investigate the noise: 1) a patrol of dark elves determined to take hostages; 2) the hungry Blackwoods troll; 3) a band of armed kobolds, determined to kill the PCs and steal their equipment; 4) a clutter of spiders; 5) Fariborz the Pyromancer; 6) the Antlered Man.

5. Orc Bandits

A small band of four orc bandits has made their way north in the woods. They heard that wagons sometimes come up through this part, but have not had any luck finding any. Now, they are exhausted and irritated, but will be thrilled to stumble upon the PC's camp. The orcs sneak up carefully, then try to surprise the PCs with an ambush of arrows from the dark.

Orcs: AC 13 (leather + shield), HP 4, ATK 1 hatchet +2 (1d6), MV near, S +2, D +0, C +0, I -1, W +0, Ch -1, AL C, LV 2.

6. Aelar Eisenli the Bounty Hunter

Spying on the PC's camp is Aelar Eisenli, the famed elven bounty hunter. She is careful and stealthy (Stealth-14) and will listen to the PC's words to discover their intent. If she thinks they mean well, she'll approach them as a friend. Otherwise, she'll skulk off in the woods.

Eisenli is in the woods to recapture Fariborz the Pyromancer after she learned he survived his hanging at the entrance to the Blackwoods. She asks the PCs if they have seen him. If they have, she demands directions, warning them that he is a sadistic and dangerous man. If they have not, she informs them that there is a bounty on his head worth 50 gp, and that while the towns want him alive, she recommends killing him due to his unstable and dangerous nature.

Otherwise, she knows the western woods well and warns the PCs of the dark elves, and the weird dangers of Twinfold Hollow. She knows well of the Thools, but is law-abiding and obeys Moriel's law against interfering with them.

Eisenli: AC 14 (chainmail), HP 28, ATK 3 sword +3 (1d8), MV near, S +2, D +2, C +1, I +0, W +1, Ch +0, AL C, LV 5.

Herbs of the Black Wood

There are many magical herbs in the Blackwoods. While these are all described elsewhere in the adventure, they are summarized here for convenience:

Blood Ivy

A rare ivy marked by its oozing red veins.

Found: A WIS check (DC 12) will find blood ivy anywhere in the south forest.

Effect: When prepared, blood ivy acts as a potent poison. Someone who ingests the poison must make a CON check (DC 15) roll or suffer 1d6 damage and dangerous hallucinations for 1d6 hours.

Gillshade

Long green-and-yellow striped grass that grows near some magical lakes. Fariborz the Pyromancer used it to survive his hanging.

Found: Not native to the Blackwoods, some was planted near the Drowned Grove years ago. It can be spotted with a WIS check (DC 12). Mutter Grimmhaar carries some on her as well.

Effect: If eaten, the subject can breathe water for an hour. If prepared and boiled into a tea, the effect increases to 1d6 hours. This is also one of the three ingredients that the druid Mac Ronan can use to restore Oswald's true form (someone making a Herb Lore roll can do the same).

Greybane

A rare, purple-grey moss that grows on the west-sides of hardwood trees.

Found: Only found on some hardwood trees in the manticore's hunting grounds. A WIS check (DC 15) can find some. Mutter Grimmhaar carries some on her as well.

Effect: When prepared, Greybane is said to improve memory. If ingested, this will temporarily restore Oswald's memory. This is also one of the three ingredients that the druid Mac Ronan can use to restore Oswald's true form.



Mushrooms of a Log-Wife

Large, freckled mushrooms that only grow on a log occupied by the spirit of a log-wife.

Found: Near the grub carcass. WIS check (DC 15) check will identify them.

Effect: Eating the mushrooms increases attractiveness by one level for 2d6 days. This is also one of the three ingredients that the druid Mac Ronan can use to restore Oswald's true form.

Starshade Bloom

One of the rarest blooms in Ytarria. Starshade is a beautiful, purple-dotted flower that shimmers like stars caught in silk.

Found: Only found in a specific field in the Twinfold Hollow. A WIS check (DC 15) identifies them. Removing a starshade plant from the ground requires great skill — either a DC 12 INT or DEX check. However, it is very difficult to keep such blooms alive after removing from the ground. Roll every day to care for it.

Effect: Starshade blooms open in the moonlight and emits a sweet-smelling vapor. This halts bleeding and cures magical diseases and curses (including Prince Oswald's curse!). If the plant is still in the ground of the field, if inhaled, the blooms grant the Precognition advantage for 24 hours.

Virethorn Root

Long, segmented roots that are attached to some of the Blackwoods' most common thorn bushes.

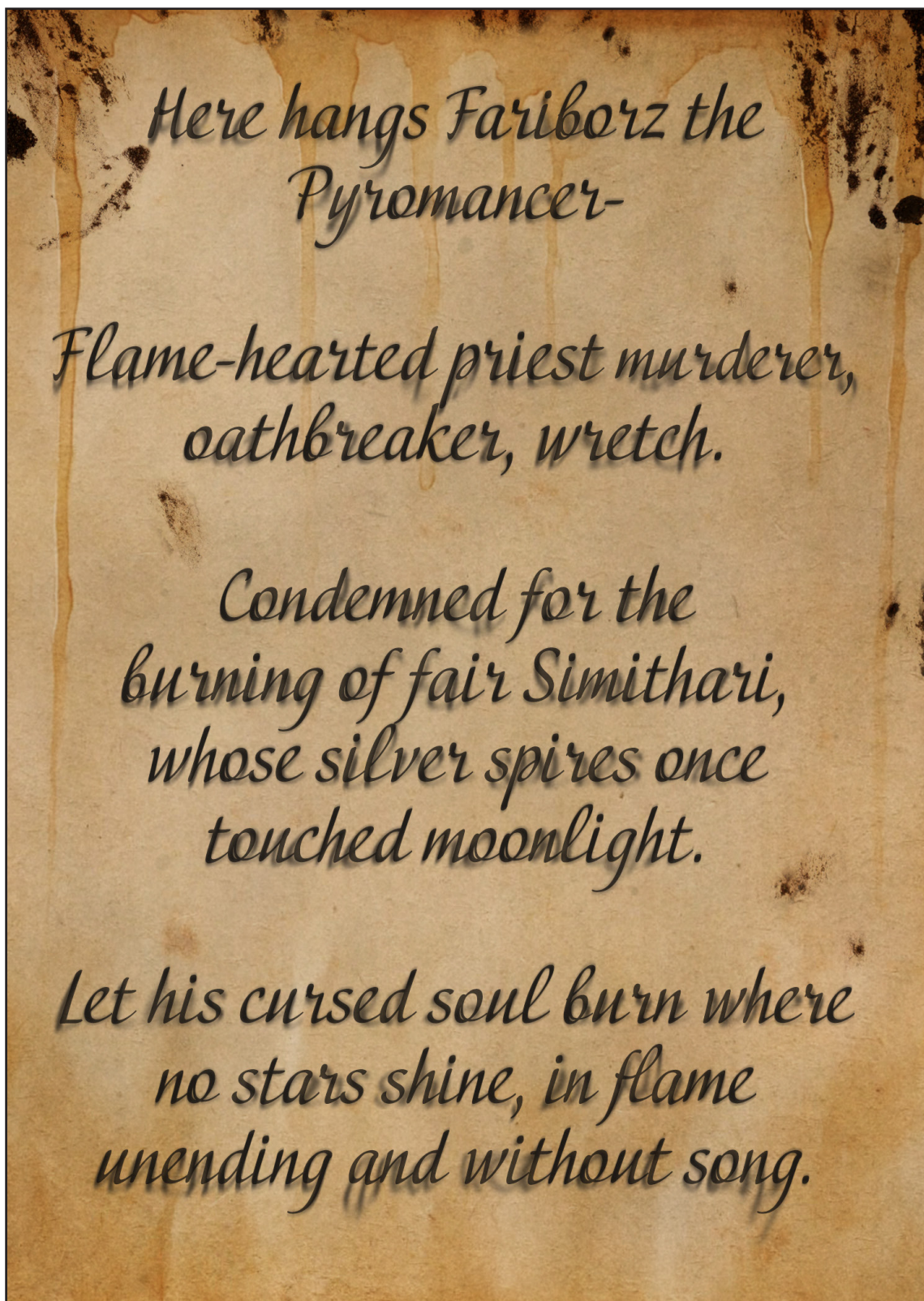
Found: Anywhere with a WIS check (DC 12).

Effect: When prepared, virethorn tea provides +2 on rolls to resist some venoms, but also the manticore's putrefying bite.

Handouts



Handout A - The best map of the northern Blackwoods that can be had in Moriel. It only shows a few real locations.



Handout B - The bounty hunter Eisenli's fallen note found on the ground at the entrance of the Blackwoods. She posted this as she hanged Fariborz, although he survived.

Handouts



Handout C - Crumpled woodman's map found on a dead man killed by a Blackwoods boar.

Handouts

June 17

Last night I dreamed of Lady Pomellina. She beckoned me into her husband's grand entrance. With light fingers she showed me her paintings and mosaics. Ah, to have been here before the Blackwoods swallowed this legendary hall!

June 19

Remarkable progress today! I have planted Gillshade - a most delicate aquatic herb, not native to these woods - along the marshy ring of the lake. Though it's a fragile species, this lake's waters seem faintly enchanted... lightly phosphorescent at dusk and oddly tepid at dawn. I suspect ancient runoff from the sunken castellet lies beneath.

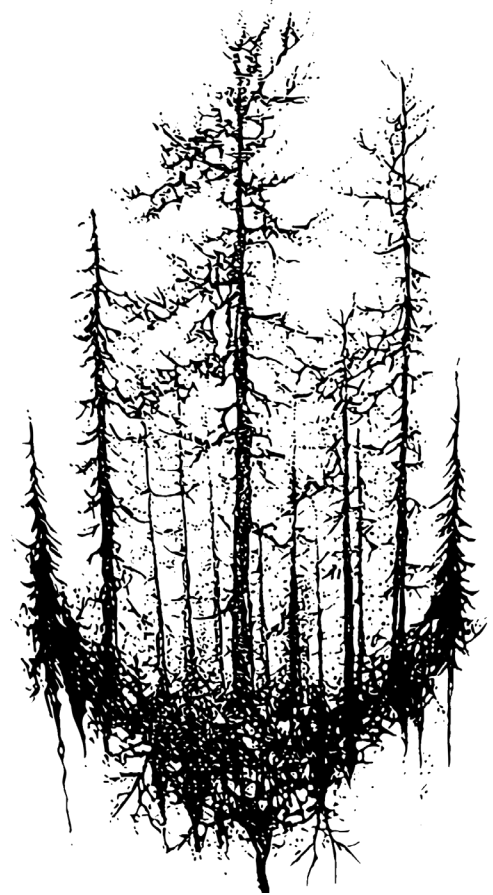
June 21

Still no sign of the artifact. Locals scoff, of course, but I remain convinced that Lady Pomellina's wand of artistry lies somewhere beneath the collapsed halls of Giraud de Malvoisin's castellet. The wand is said to grant inspiration to even the dullest chisel (like me). Tomorrow I dive again, with rope, mirror, and stronger tea.



Handout D - Diary page from FENDREL MOSSROOT, an acclaimed wizard and naturalist. He died years ago while exploring the Drowned Grove, looking for Lady Pomellina's wand.

Handouts



Handout E - Various marks of the necromancer Choir, including one tattooed on his boneless servants (with his name), and ones found on his alchemist servants.

Handouts



Handout F - The mosaic on the wall of the Thool's moat room.
It shows how the archmage Limm was able to teleport from the
temple to his tower in the Granite Mountains.