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VILLAGE BACKDROP: BLACK WYVERN



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VILLAGE BACKDROP: BLACK WYVERN

The village of Black Wyvern has prospered from the surrounding woodland, producing high quality lumber for shipbuilding and the finest sea chests for a hundred miles. Founded by a retired pirate captain and his crew, who drove the Bone Snapper orcs from the site, the new villagers soon found something much worse lurking among the trees. Now, nearly 20 years later, the captain and most of his crew are long dead and the surviving inhabitants must pay a dark price for their wealth, forced into a twisted pact that allows them to harvest the forest's bounty.

Designed for use with the 5th edition of the world's most popular roleplaying game.

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BLACK WYVERN AT A GLANCE

Rulers Tahan “Clever” Kellem, Pirro Degroff and Yala Nimblefingers

Government Council

Population 153 (121 humans, 13 half-orcs, 7 halflings, 6 dwarves, 4 half-elves, 2 elves)

Alignments LE, NE, N

Languages Common, Orc

Resources & Industry Carpentry, lumber, hunting and trapping

Nomenclature *male* Andros, Faisal, Kurt, Saric; *female* Alfrida, Erika, Gerd, Ingel; *family* Buckland, Craddock, Ragcloth, Zaryan.

Straddling the trail leading from the pirate town of Deksport into the encroaching woodlands, Black Wyvern is well positioned to take advantage of the plentiful local resources: the main industries here are lumber and hunting. A stout, well-repaired stockade surrounds the village and its folk are vigilant against raids from orcs and goblins lairing in the nearby forest.

Like the other villages—Red Talon, Sea Bitch and Revenge—on the so-called “Picaroon Peninsula” Black Wyvern was founded less than 20 years ago by a pirate captain, and named after his ship. That pirate was Gabor Spindrift, a swaggering buccaneer who decided to retire from the seas and live out his golden years on dry land after losing his leg in an ill-advised confrontation with a kraken. The woods to the north of Deksport were full of bronze cedars and moon oaks, ideal timber for shipbuilding, so Spindrift and his crew set off into the forest to find an appropriate site for their new home. When they arrived at a crude orc village at the base of a wooded hill, the pirate captain and his men killed or drove away the inhabitants, seizing the location for their settlement.

A gnarled and leafless ancient moon oak, once used by the orcs for executions, dominates the hill above the village. Goblins captured in raids were tied to the oak and spears thrown at them. In time, the tree became awakened. Whether this was because of the dark magic practiced by the mysterious inhabitants of the nearby Forest of Gray Spires or because the moon oak drew power from the executions is unknown, but the newly sentient tree took the name Bitterroot and demanded a steady supply of blood. When the pirates displaced the orcs, the oak insisted they continued to feed it in exchange for access to the woods for lumber and game. Spindrift wasn’t prepared to take orders from a talking tree and led a group of fearsome sea dogs armed with burning torches to deal with Bitterroot. Only one man, the ship’s carpenter, survived what followed. Ever since that night, the villagers have lived in fear of the oak, keeping it sated with fresh blood every new moon.

VILLAGE LORE

A PC may know something about Black Wyvern, its history and surrounds. A PC making a DC 10 Intelligence check knows one or more pieces of information from the list below. A successful check gains all the information revealed by a lesser check.

DC 10: Black Wyvern produces good quality lumber for shipbuilding and the finest sea chests for a hundred miles.

DC 15: The woods around the village are infested with orcs and goblins, and the locals take a tough line with these vermin to stay safe.

DC 25: The villagers have made a strange pact with the forest to allow them to harvest its bounty.

WHISPERS & RUMOURS

While in Black Wyvern, a PC may hear one or more rumours. A PC making a DC 10 Charisma check learns one rumour from the table below. A PC exceeding this check learns an additional rumour for each 5 points by which he exceeded DC 10.

D6	RUMOUR
1*	There’s a dangerous orc witch locked up in the jail. She’s threatened to curse the entire village if she’s not freed.
2	Ida Degroff has had enough of her boorish husband and is planning to run off to the village of Sea Bitch where women are treated with respect.
3	Sometimes a face is visible in the scarred trunk of the old hanging tree on Execution Hill.
4	Somewhere in the forest is a cave with an underground lake. It is held sacred by the goblins; they throw treasure into it as offerings to their gods.
5	A pair of fierce giant badgers lives in a set under Execution Hill.
6	Shelgar Galak came here from the village of Revenge, on the run from some kind of trouble.

*False rumour



NOTABLE FOLK

Most of the population are nothing more than hardworking peasants. A few, however, are of interest to adventurers:

Bitterroot (location 6; NE **treant**) The evil tree demands blood sacrifices from the villagers in return for allowing them to take the forest's bounty.

Mairwyn Greenleaf (location 3; CG female half-elf **scout**) Hearty proprietor of Wyvern Mercantile, and an experienced tracker who knows the forest like the back of her hand.

Murgush Crowfoot (location 5; N female orc **druid**) In jail awaiting execution, Murgush has a plan to defeat Bitterroot.

Pirro Degroff (location 4; LE male human **thug**) Former ship's carpenter. Greedy and thuggish, he has made his fortune from lumber and sits on the village council.

Shelgar Galak (location 5; NE female half-orc **guard**) Watch sergeant and village executioner. She leads regular raids into the forest in search of fresh captives.

Tahan "Clever" Kellem (location 1; N[E] male halfling **commoner**) Cowardly ex-pirate and navigator on the *Black Wyvern*; nervous leader of the village council.

Yala Nimblefingers (location 2; N male human bard 2) Landlord of the Sting in the Tale Tavern, master storyteller and the third council member.

NOTABLE LOCATIONS

Most of the village comprises peasant homes. A few locations, however, are of interest to adventurers:

1. **Spindrift House:** The home of Black Wyvern's founder and now the village council meeting place and "Clever" Kellem home.
2. **Sting in the Tale Tavern:** At this lively local hostelry, the villagers enjoy swapping far-fetched sea stories at the end of a hard day's work.
3. **Wyvern Mercantile:** This well-stocked trading post, sells axes, saws and other wilderness gear to lumberjacks and hunters
4. **Degroff Lumber:** A busy carpenter's workshop and lumber yard, owned and run by Pirro Degroff.
5. **Watchhouse:** The village jail where law-breakers and captured orcs and goblins are locked up, awaiting punishment.
6. **Execution Hill:** A gnarled and twisted moon oak tree used for hangings stands atop this steep hill. This is Bitterroot.
7. **Lumber Run:** Trees felled by the loggers are skidded down this track to the Degroff lumber yard.
8. **Palisade:** This palisade protects the village from the local orcs and goblins.
9. **Forest:** The villagers make their living from the woods, but must be on their guard against orc and goblin attacks.



NOTABLE LOCATIONS

1: SPINDRIFT HOUSE

Built by Gabor Spindrift, pirate captain of the *Black Wyvern*, this sturdy wooden manor house was his home until his untimely death at the claws of Bitterroot. Decorated with nautical memorabilia from Spindrift's days at sea, as well as hunting trophies from the nearby woods, the house is now the abode of Tahan "Clever" Kellem (N[E] male halfling **commoner**), leader of the village council and former ship's navigator. Kellem is a nervy, portly little fellow with a balding pate, terrified of incurring the wrath of either Bitterroot or the domineering Pirro Degroff (location 4). He doesn't like the regular executions demanded by the tree, but is too scared to say so out loud in the council meetings that take place beneath a portrait of the village's founder in Spindrift House's great hall.

2: STING IN THE TALE TAVERN

Standing at the centre of the village, across the market square from the *Black Wyvern's* original weather-beaten wooden figurehead, is the popular Sting in the Tale tavern. The pub's sign depicts the deadly tail stinger of a wyvern, but the spelling of "tale" is a nod to its storytelling tradition. At least one evening a week, locals and visitors gather and take turns telling far-fetched sea stories and other tales, with each well-received yarn earning a free ale for its narrator. A stuffed owlbear's head hangs on the wall above the hearth.

The landlord is Yala Nimblefingers (N male human bard 2), an ebony-skinned, shaven-headed former pirate with a broad grin and over a dozen gold earrings. Yala was the shantyman on the *Black Wyvern*; a talented storyteller and fiddler, he now sits on the village council. Like Clever Kellem he would like to see the executions stop, and is hopeful that someone or something will put an end to Bitterroot's hold over the village.

3: WYVERN MERCANTILE

Catering to local lumberjacks and hunters, Wyvern Mercantile is a well-stocked trading post, selling axes, saws, traps, snares, knives and other useful wilderness gear. Its hearty, pipe-smoking owner is Mairwyn Greenleaf (CG female half-elf **scout**), an experienced tracker and woodsman, with copper hair tumbling over her pointed ears. On one of her many trips into the forest, she found the location of a hidden cave which the local goblins, the Tree Creepers, hold sacred. Sneaking inside, she came to an underground lake where she spotted coins and jewels twinkling on the bottom—treasure thrown into the water by the goblins as offerings to their gods. Mairwyn is contemplating returning to the cave to loot it, but is wary of the number of goblins in the vicinity. Perhaps the PCs would consider a temporary alliance?

4: DEGROFF LUMBER

Black Wyvern's most lucrative business, Degroff Lumber, comprises a busy lumber yard, carpenter's workshop, saw pit and stables, surrounded by a wooden fence. Its owner is the thuggish Pirro Degroff (LE male human **thug**), former carpenter on the *Black Wyvern* and sole survivor of Captain Spindrift's ill-fated attempt to destroy Bitterroot. After his captain's death, Degroff persuaded the other villagers they had to make peace with Bitterroot by promising the evil tree blood sacrifices in exchange for access to the forest. The sawyer has done extremely well for himself ever since—timber from Black Wyvern is in high demand in Deksport, and Degroff's sturdy sea chests are extremely popular amongst the town's pirates. Pirro's wealth has turned him into a fat, unpleasant bully who treats the men who fell trees for him and his fellow village councillors with a mixture of flattery and contempt. His long-suffering wife, Ida, is planning to leave him and is waiting for the right moment to make her escape to the coastal village of Sea Bitch.

The stream nearby is too slow-moving to power a mill so Degroff Lumber uses a saw pit to turn tree trunks into planks for shipbuilding. An ogre named Grunch (NE male **ogre**) does most of the sawing using a magical saw, plundered by the *Black Wyvern* on one of its pirating expeditions. This adamantite saw can slice through a thick tree trunk in 10 minutes, making it easy for Grunch to produce wagon loads of timber to be transported south to Deksport.

5: WATCHHOUSE

This small wooden building houses an office for the watch sergeant and the village jail. The watch sergeant is Shelgar Galak (NE female half-orc **guard**), a brutish ex-pirate hired by Pirro Degroff to conduct raids into the forest in search of fresh captives to sacrifice, and to act as Black Wyvern's executioner. Shelgar fled here from the village of Revenge after finding a piece of parchment bearing the infamous Black Spot nailed to her door. Sadistic and hot-tempered, with lank black hair and greasy greenish skin, she enjoys taunting her prisoners through the bars of their cell.

The current occupant of the jail, awaiting execution, is Murgush Crowfoot (N female orc **druid**), who was captured close to the village while on a mission to destroy Bitterroot. Murgush is willing to reveal her plan to sympathetic PCs in exchange for being rescued. She has a foul-smelling herbal paste in her medicine bag—if smeared on the tree's roots, it will poison the moon oak, weakening it and nullifying its ability to animate trees and cast spells. To get to the roots, a would-be poisoner needs to crawl into the badger set underneath Execution Hill and somehow get past its occupants.

6: EXECUTION HILL

A path leads up the steep slope of Execution Hill to where Bitterroot (NE **treant**), the “Hanging Tree”, stands. The evil tree takes sustenance (and twisted pleasure) from the blood of intelligent humanoids. Bitterroot has terrified the villagers into submission by threatening to use an army of trees to destroy Black Wyvern if its demands for sacrifices are not met.

On the first night of each new moon, a deputation led by its three councillors escort the condemned to their fate. Shelgar Galak throws a rope over one of the tree’s large limbs and hauls the victim up to slowly die from strangulation. No one hangs around to watch what happens next. Once the villagers have left, Bitterroot opens its glowing red eyes and sinks its sharp wooden claws into the poor dying soul to sup on its blood.

The oak does not normally reveal itself to strangers, preferring to remain motionless unless it senses hostile intent. PCs examining the tree while it is quiescent can detect the vague outline of a sinister face in its trunk (DC 10 Perception spots). A pair of irascible **giant badgers** have dug their set beneath the tree—its roots protrude into the main chamber of their earthen home. The entrance isn’t hard to find (DC 10 Survival spots) but the creatures fight furiously to protect their three cubs.

7: LUMBER RUN

Loggers working in the forest on the hills above the village use this lumber run to get felled trees down to Degroff Lumber (location 4). The steep run is lined with tree trunks, well-greased with deer fat. Logs are skidded down to the bottom and then hauled through the northeast gate.

8: PALISADE

An earth berm topped with a 15-foot tall wooden palisade surrounds Black Wyvern. The village’s three sturdy gates are barred between dusk and dawn.

9: FOREST

Moon oaks and bronze cedars are plentiful and the woods teem with game, including spotted deer and greenwood grouse. Unfortunately, the forest is also home to orc and goblin tribes who despise the villagers for their frequent raids for victims to satisfy Bitterroot. The Bone Snapper have vowed to reclaim their ancestral home. To this end, they sent their druid Murgush Crowfoot (location 5) to get rid of Bitterroot, but she has not returned. The Tree Creeper goblin tribe also live nearby, making offerings to their gods by throwing coins and other shiny things into the underground lake in their sacred cave. The cave’s location is a tribal secret—any non-goblins who stumble across it must die a painful, drawn-out death.

LIFE IN BLACK WYVERN

Most villagers go about their lives trying not to think about the monthly executions, their compact with an evil talking tree or what Bitterroot will do if they fail to deliver its blood sacrifices. As long as no one rocks the boat, the only thing they need to worry about are occasional orc or goblin attacks.

TRADE & INDUSTRY

While the pact with Bitterroot is in place, the villagers are free to fell trees and hunt game in the forest. Moon oak and bronze cedar wood is transported south to Deksport for use in shipbuilding, along with finished wooden goods such as sea chests and furniture. Deer, rabbits and grouse are hunted for their meat; wolves are killed for their pelts.

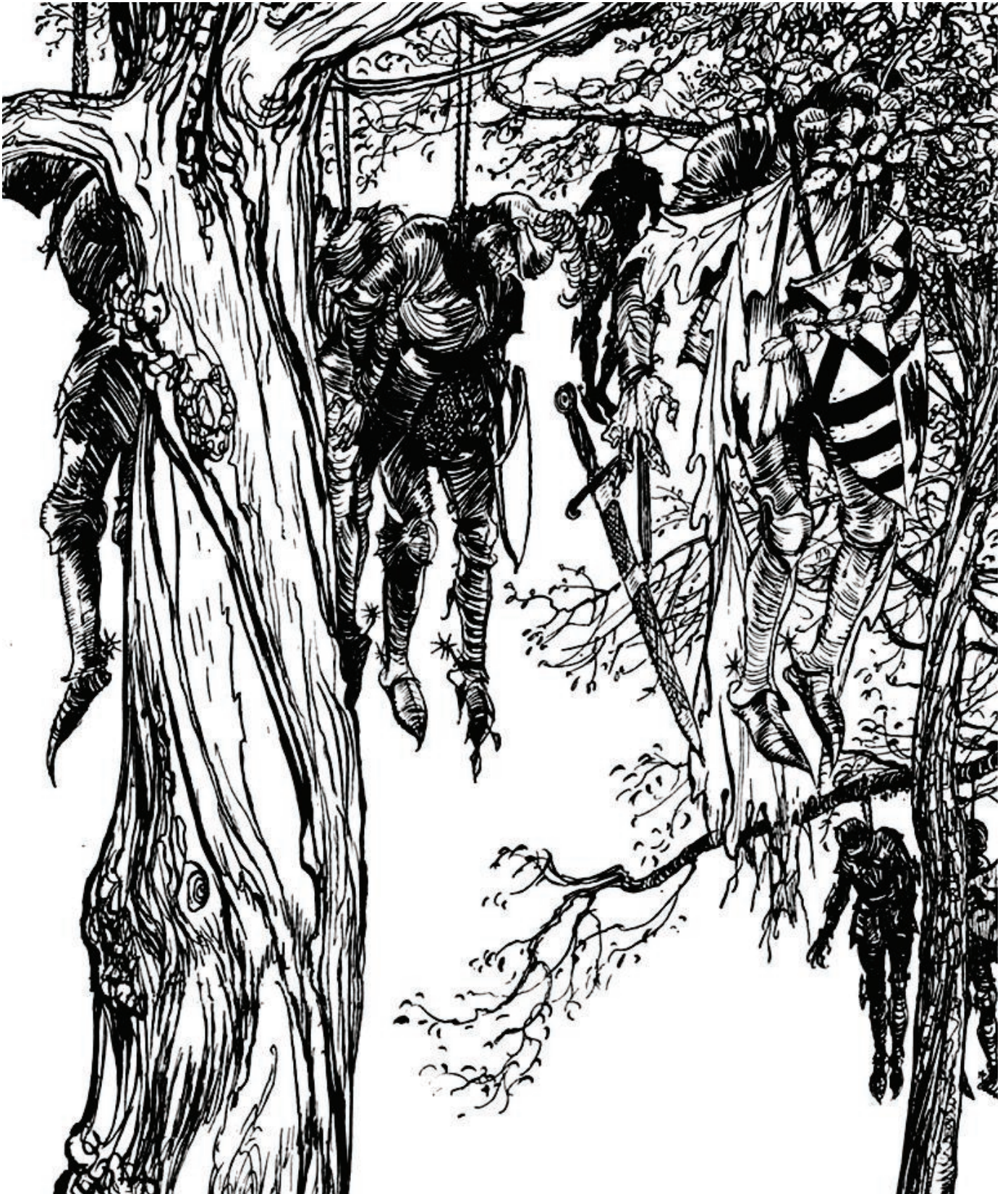
LAW & ORDER

Shelgar Galak and the ten watchmen (NE or N human or half-orc **guard**) under her command keep order, stand watch and conduct raids into the forest to capture humanoids. Dissent is not tolerated—anyone questioning the will of the village council is likely to end up swinging from the “hanging tree” for treason.

EVENTS

While the PCs are in Black Wyvern, one or more of the below events may occur. Choose or determine randomly:

D6	EVENT
1	The loggers are careless when skidding felled trees down the lumber run and two workers are seriously wounded (or even killed) by the out of control logs.
2	The PCs draw unwanted attention from Shelgar Galak and need to convince the watch sergeant they are not out to cause trouble in the village.
3	A group of Bone Snapper orcs climb over the gates at night, sneak through the village and attempt to rescue Murgush Crowfoot from the jail.
4	Six drunken villagers decide enough is enough and march to Execution Hill, carrying pitchforks and burning torches. Yala Nimblefingers tries to persuade them to go home before they end up dead. They end up dead.
5	Mairwyn Greenleaf has been missing in the forest for several days. Caught by the Tree Creeper goblins, they are planning to slowly torture her to death.
6	On the first night of the new moon the villagers take Murgush Crowfoot up Execution Hill to meet her fate.



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