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VILLAGE BACKDROP: BYRNFORT



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VILLAGE BACKDROP: BYRNFORT

At the edge of the Barainwood lies the woodcutter's village of Byrnfort. Under threat from massive, vicious beasts and shadowy horrors emerging from the forest, the villagers put their faith in the Green Men, a druidic cult promising protection from the forest's dangers. Now valuable goods flow from Byrnfort and attacks have lessened, but the village's future remains uncertain. The cult and the local militia, the Brands, are increasingly at odds, and while prospects seem bright, there are costs to Byrnfort's prosperity. The villagers strive to protect their secrets and their way of life from prying eyes, but this grows ever more difficult as the village's prosperity increases.

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

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BYRNFORT AT A GLANCE

Ruler Evryiel Gliede
Government Overlord
Population 85 (34 humans, 24 elves, 27 half-elves)
Alignments N, NE, NG
Languages Common, Elven
Resources & Industry Alchemy, logging

Bristling sharp stakes and thick timber walls encircle the village of Byrnfort. Compared to the ancient trees of the Barainwood looming over it, the village is hunched and small, its houses clustered close together like fearful animals seeking shelter. The stout village gates are normally kept shut; the local militia, the Brands, armed with brightly burning torches and spears, keep careful watch from its towers. Monstrous beasts lurk in the shadows of the forest, and it is whispered the dead themselves rise from their graves to protect the forest's heart.

Byrnfort is more of a fortification than a settlement, but the freshly cut tree stumps and growing farms indicate the village is beginning to prosper despite the ever-present dangers. Seasoned timbers fill storage sheds, and the trading post is stocked with goods derived from the forest's bounty. Tension is rising in the village, however.

An increasingly popular cult, the Green Men, is at odds with the Brands, and Byrnfort's future hangs in the balance.



VILLAGERS

Appearance The people of Byrnfort are tall and well-muscled despite their typically slim builds. The elven and human population have intermingled for years, and most of the citizens show signs of that heritage, often possessing small features or differences more common to the other race.

Dress Sturdy, practical leather and fur clothing are common among the villagers. Most of the populace prominently display necklaces, bracelets or amulets made of twisted green vines. Members of the Brands, bear leather badges burned with the image of a torch.

Nomenclature *male* Mieken, Sanrial; *female* Evryiel, Lesi; *family* Gliede, Lieder, Vyanel.

VILLAGE LORE

A PC may know something about Byrnfort, 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: Byrnfort is a fortified village standing on the edge of the Barainwood. The forest is thick with monsters, and the citizens distrust outsiders. It exists only for the lumber it exports.

DC 15: Sapwood, a rare wood found around Byrnfort, is its most valued export. The town's woodcutters, the Green Men, are exceptionally good at retrieving it from the deadly forest.

DC 20: The Green Men are a cult and practically worship the Barainwood. They perform strange rituals and only harvest certain trees. Other woodcutters in the region are driven away with dire threats. Some disappear.

WHISPERS & RUMOURS

While in Byrnfort, 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	Vicious animals and undead prowl in the shade of the Barainwood, preying on anyone foolish enough to enter the forest. Many people have gone missing in its depths, over the years.
2	Mieken Charrel, the village alchemist, frequently deals with dwarves. They seek him out for his alchemical charcoals, since there's no better forge fuel.
3	The rare wood harvested from the surrounding forest, sapwood, is said to have precious magical and alchemical properties.
4	The Green Men, a secretive druidic cult, dominates Byrnfort. Its members are all woodcutters living in the village.
5*	Evryiel uses her authority over the Brands to keep control of Byrnfort, preventing the people from electing their popular choice, Sanrial.
6*	The villagers practice necromantic rites, filling the woods with zombies and making pacts with the dead.

*False rumour

NOTABLE FOLK

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

Evryiel Gliede (location 7; NG female elf ranger 6) Captain of the Brands, Evryiel does her best to keep the peace and defend the village. She has been in Byrnfort longer than most, and is fully aware of the forest's dangers.

Godre Wainwright (location 8; N male human **commoner**) Godre came to Byrnfort, searching for work as a woodcutter. After being shunned by the Green Men, he turned to farming (but plots his revenge).

Lesi Vyenei (location 1; NG female elf **druid**) Far friendlier than the other villagers, Lesi runs the Stout Draught and is a devoted member of the Green Men.

Mieken Charrel (location 3; N male human **mage**) Specialising in creating alchemical charcoals, Mieken settled in Byrnfort to secure supply of its special woods.

Sanrial Lieder (location 6; NE male half-elf ranger 5) Sanrial leads the Green Men, and is a former member of the Brands.

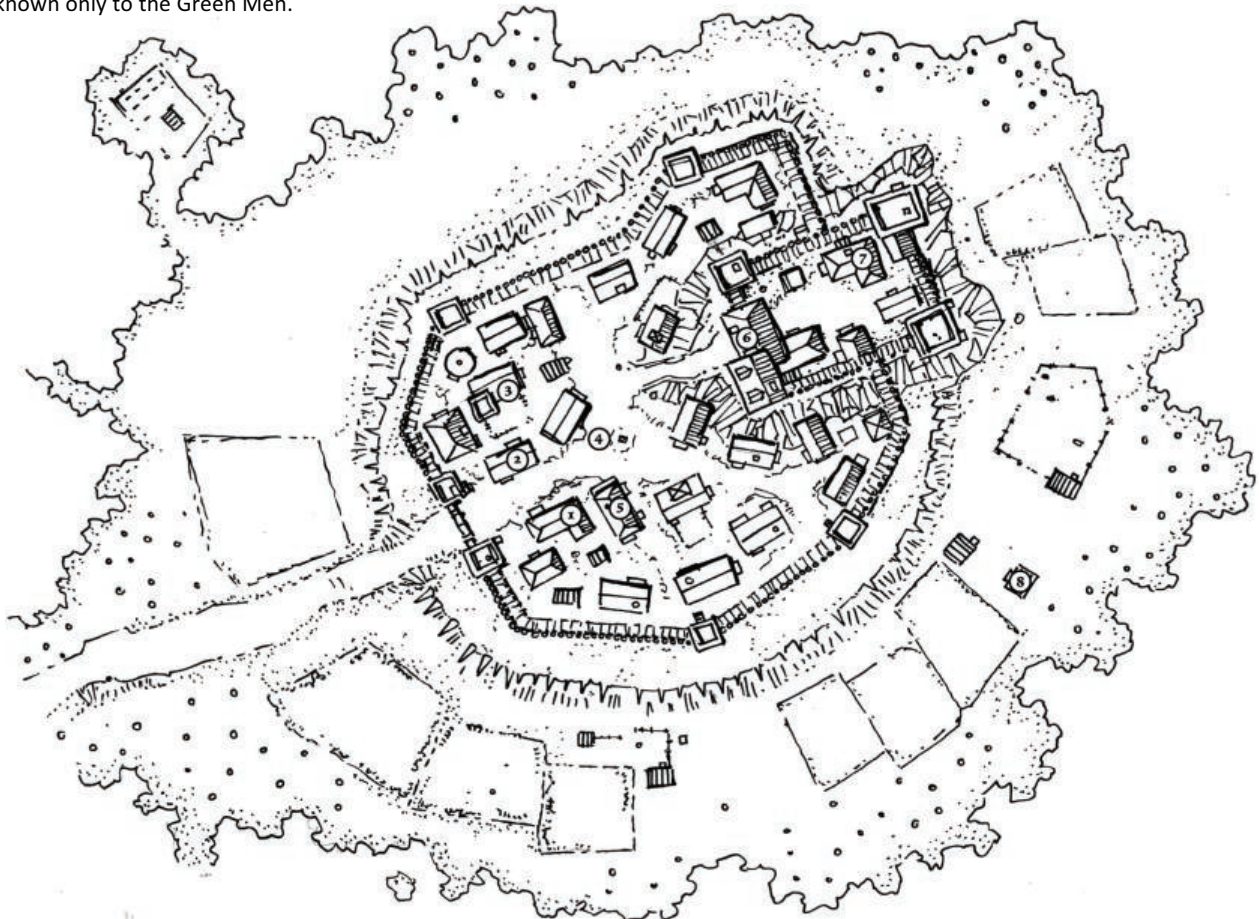
Serie (location 5; CN female human **spy**) A thief in trouble with the Brands, Serie has been given asylum by the Green Men in exchange for her assistance in certain rituals

Vigilant Bramble (location 5; NE ghost dryad druid 11) Vigilant Bramble died centuries ago, but continues to protect the Barainwoods with single-minded desperation. Her existence is known only to the Green Men.

NOTABLE LOCATIONS

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

1. **The Stout Draught:** The welcoming Stout Draught is the local tavern. It serves a popular local drink—sapbrew.
2. **Mieken's:** The alchemist Mieken owns this trading post and sells to both visiting merchants and the other villagers. Here can be had all his unique alchemical wares.
3. **The Charhouse:** Mieken's home is luxurious compared to most of Byrnfort. The smell of smoke is strong here.
4. **Hearth Tree:** Here stands a newly planted sapling, surrounded by a circle of stones. The sapling is sacred to the Green Men.
5. **Sanrial's Home:** Sanrial is rarely at home, these days. However, Serie is taking refuge in the cellar.
6. **Old Fort:** Old Fort is the largest building in the village, one of its first buildings and the most defensible position. Most of the time it serves as a meeting hall.
7. **Evryiel's Home:** Evryiel's home is spacious and militant. It serves as the Brand's unofficial headquarters.
8. **Godre's Farmhouse:** Here lives (and plots) Godre Wainwright.



NOTABLE LOCATIONS

1: THE STOUT DRAUGHT

The Stout Draught is Byrnfort's only inn, and it's here most villagers relax after a hard day's work. While rustic, it makes that characteristic charming and comfortable, putting care and effort into even its roughest aspects. The most popular drink drunk here is sapbrew, a sweet, thick mead-style drink fermented from local sap. Few of the villagers drink anything else.

Lesi Vyene (NG female elf **druid**) runs the inn cheerfully and tirelessly, serving the Brands, Green Men and visiting merchants or adventurers with a smile and welcoming word. Despite her even hand and friendliness, Lesi is a member of the Green Men and politely discourages those prying into the cult. However, she always keeps an eye open for potential recruits and might sound out seemingly interested or suitable visitors. To those she deems a threat, she is a clever and dangerous enemy.

- **Food & Drink** meal (mushroom and rabbit stew) 2 sp, ale 4 cp, sapbrew 5 cp, wine (pitcher) 1 sp.
- **Accommodation** small, sparsely furnished single room 5 sp.

2: MIEKEN'S

This store is owned by the alchemist, Mieken (N male human **mage**), who built the post for his business dealings with visiting merchants. Over time, though, he has stocked it with goods of interest to the villagers, and now turns a tidy profit selling essentials and small luxuries.

Mieken sells his specialist alchemical wares here. (See the sidebar for information about his unique items). As word spreads of his inventions, demand is drastically increasing; many smiths, artists and apothecaries now seek out his products and his growing requirements for raw materials could soon spark conflict between the Green Men and Vigilant Bramble.

3: THE CHARHOUSE

Smoke perpetually rises from Mieken's (N male human **mage**) home and the circular hut behind it, which he uses as a laboratory. A fine building, constructed entirely of stone and possessing an enormous chimney, the house is much grander than any other in the village and is furnished appropriately. Mieken's home is an island of wealth and luxury, even if it reeks of his trade.

An alchemist whose speciality is charcoal, Mieken moved to Byrnfort in pursuit of rare woods once the Green Men began producing a reliable supply. While he is not a cult member, they profit from their dealings with him and they appreciate minds his own business. In pursuit of his craft, Mieken has realized sapwood has several qualities he has only seen in wood associated with magical, often animate plants; this makes him

wonder about the nature of the Green Men and the wood they cut, even if he is incredibly reluctant to say anything about it.

4: HEARTH TREE

At Byrnfort's centre stands a small mound encircled by a ring of stones. A sapling no more than a foot tall grows within the ring, its green leaves unusually bright and eye-catching. The Green Men planted this tree and gave it its name only a few years ago. They treat it with reverence and use it as a gathering place for meetings and sacred rites. It is guarded jealously; any stranger approaching it is firmly turned away.

5: SANRIAL'S HOME

Sanrial Lieder's (NE male half-elf ranger 5) home is not much different from the houses surrounding it, save for being slightly larger. It is a sturdy construction of wattle and daub, roofed with thatch and equipped with a small chimney. Inside it is partitioned into two rooms, one containing the hearth and kitchen, the other a living area suitable for guests and relaxation. These days though, Sanrial is rarely home.

The Green Men use Sanrial's large cellar as a covert meeting place. Serie (CN female human **spy**) hides here, taking refuge with the Green Men after being caught stealing repeatedly from the village. The Green Men agreed to overlook her crimes if she assist them in their rituals, and she does, but she can't remember how. She is beginning to have gaps in her memories even outside the rituals, and suspects the deal she struck was

ALCHEMICAL ITEMS

Mieken has invented the following new alchemical:

Artisan Charcoal (Price: 5 sp; Weight: —): Available in a rainbow of colours, this soft stick of coal leaves bright marks on any surface, and is difficult to remove. It takes an hour of work to remove it by hand with normal methods. However, the *erase* spell removes it easily.

Byrncoal (Price: 1 gp; Weight: 20 lbs.): This charcoal burns bright and long, and is prized by smiths.

Voidcoal (Price: 50 gp; Weight: —): Dull grey and rock-hard, voidcoal can be used (as a move action) to neatly erase normal ink, chalk, artisan charcoal or similar substances.

In addition, it has drawing properties and can be used to combat poison. If a poisoned character ingests voidcoal immediately after being poisoned the character can make another saving throw to remove the poison condition. A failed save has no (additional) detrimental effect. A character ingesting voidcoal gains one level of exhaustion for one hour, no matter the result of the second saving throw.

poor. The gaps in Serie's memories are caused by Vigilant Bramble, who possesses her when she needs a body to guide or assist the Green Men in their rituals. She is often hidden nearby, working to erode Serie's unconscious defences so she can eventually possess the thief in a more complete and enduring manner. Serie is waiting for a distraction or opportunity that would allow her to escape Byrnfort.

6: OLD FORT

The oldest building in Byrnfort, the Old Fort is a defensible structure built of hefty stone bricks and stout timbers. It is as much a barracks as a manor, and over the years has been repeatedly expanded and altered. Sanrial Lieder (NE male half-elf ranger 5) has taken up residence in Old Fort's living quarters and frequently dispenses advice to the villagers in the main hall. Other times he occupies himself with reading or the business of running Byrnfort.

7: EVRYIEL'S HOME

Built in the older part of the village, Evryiel Gliede's (NG female elf ranger 6) home is sparsely furnished, containing only the necessities she needs to live and lead the Brands. A long table takes up much of her space, and is used by the Brands when they gather to discuss the state of the militia and the village in general. While they once met in Old Fort, Evryiel's home has become their unofficial headquarters in recent years.

Evryiel has little desire to govern Byrnfort, but she does want to protect it from the monsters lurking in Barainwood. She distrusts the Green Men. She dislikes Sanrial and is distrustful of how the Green Men elude the dangers of Barainwood, but knows the village's opinion is against her. She struggles to maintain control of Byrnfort, and knows she is slipping despite her best efforts.

8: GODRE'S FARMHOUSE

This dingy, thatch-roofed building is home to Godre Wainwright (N male human **commoner**) a failed carpenter and bitter man. Godre came to Byrnfort to join the Green Men, but was deemed unsuitable for membership. He is a stubborn man and tried to work the woods anyway. However, after a poisoning and beating, he gave up. Now he works for as a farmhand for one of Byrnfort's farmers. He is too stubborn to leave, and plots to join the Brands and have his revenge on the Green Men.

BARAINWOOD

The Barainwood is a vast, old forest once abundant with magical plant life tended by a grove of dryads who were more than guardians, they were gardeners. Their greatest treasure was their own grove and their sapwood trees. All of this is now lost to time. Only Vigilant Bramble remembers now, and even she has begun to forget the elder days.

Vigilant Bramble haunts the forest and viciously protects the faded glory of her ancient home. With her druidic magic, she enscrolls the beasts prowling the forest to hunt down anyone entering her realm. She also dedicates herself to the remaining handful of magical plants, chief among them a massive elder yellow musk creeper she feeds living creatures. With the Green Men's help, she tends the sapwood trees and ensures their continued existence, even as she prunes away the weaker and older trees.



LIFE IN BYRNFORT

The surrounding forest dominates life in Byrnfort. With the exceptions of the depredations of forest predators, the village is generally a peaceful place. However, Mieken's growing commercial success is leading to growing tensions between those advocating increased logging and those counselling against such a rash act.

TRADE & INDUSTRY

The primary trade in Byrnfort is woodcutting, and one of its most prized exports is a kind of tree known as sapwood. The colouring of sapwood is a warm, deep ochre, and its sap is thick and sugary, but the wood itself is excellent for use in magical items and alchemical goods. In addition, Mieken brews potions and create alchemical substances that sell well outside Byrnfort. Mieken's alchemical charcoals are particularly sought out.

LAW & ORDER

Under Evryiel's direction, the Brands enforce the law in Byrnfort. However, the villagers weigh in and take matters into their own hands increasingly often, with Sanrial's guidance. In addition, Sanrial has proven more adept and interested in the administrative work that governing a village creates, and has consequently gained more influence over Byrnfort.

THE GREEN MEN

The Green Men have agreed a pact with Vigilant Bramble. Broached by Sanrial, in exchange for helping protect the forest and performing certain rites, he and his followers may harvest certain trees. Few trees are allowed to the Green Men, though, because the rare sapwood they seek is the lingering remnants of the groves that once birthed Vigilant Bramble's sisters. She parts with each tree only with great reluctance and only those trees dying, crowding out others or those not part of the mystic groves.

The Green Men's pact protects them from the forest's dangers. Vigilant Bramble holds back the beasts and the corpses animated by the elder yellow creeper from anyone bearing the green vine amulets that are the cult's symbol. She is wary and suspicious of any she doesn't recognise, often testing new members of the cult or ferreting out imposters. In exchange, the Green Men aid her in attempting to restore the Barainwood's magic. Thus, they practice strange rituals reflecting Vigilant Bramble's past and help her maintain her ghostly ties to the woods. Finally, they give up their bodies to the yellow musk creeper when they die so that they can protect the forest even after death.

EVENTS

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

D6	EVENT
1	Thick, braided grey and green smoke bursts from Mieken's laboratory. Shortly thereafter he emerges with a new batch of charcoal.
2	A horn sounds as a few of the Brands rush out of the forest, pursued by a monstrous dire boar.
3	Serie enters the Stout Draught with a blank look on her face, and demands the Green Men follow her into the forest. She remembers nothing of this later.
4	Lesi broaches a new cask of sapbrew and offers a free round to everyone nearby.
5	The Brands are practising archery outside the walls under Evryiel's supervision, while a few Green Men watch nearby, muttering darkly.
6	A meeting is held in Old Fort to deal with escalation of violation and bad-blood between two villagers, with Sanrial presiding.

rites

While the PCs are in Byrnfort, they may encounter the Green Men performing one or more rites, though they may not be allowed to observe all the details, or understand them if they do. Choose or determine randomly:

D6	EVENT
1	One of the Green Men is dying, and he is led into the woods and given to the yellow musk creeper so his body can nourish and protect the forest.
2	The Green Men gather around the Hearth Tree and tend to it with expensive alchemical compounds, attempting to prompt the birth of a new dryad.
3	At the edge of the Barainwoods, the Green Men perform a series of violent pantomimes ending with the felling of a tree. This is a re-enactment of the Vigilant Bramble's death which helps her maintain her ghostly existence.
4	Serie sits beneath the Hearth Tree and speaks Druidic in a monotone while the Green Men respond. Serie is possessed by the ghost dryad, and remembers nothing after the ghost leaves her.
5	A sapwood log is brought back to Byrnfort, carried on the shoulders of six Green Men who sing a slow, sombre song.
6	A new member is inducted into the Green Men and given an amulet of green vines and a cloak of leaves, before being sent alone into the forest.

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