BOOK OF SEASONS

Equinoxes



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Equinoxes

A COLLECTION OF 20 ORIGINAL ADVENTURES
FOR 5TH EDITION DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS

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Table of Contents

Foreword 4

SPRING

Tier 1

The First Flowers of Spring 6

Green 12

Maidens 20

Tier 2

Spring Soiled 28

Revolution in Bloom 34

Dancing Queen 41

The Lies We Tell Ourselves 46

Sister Rabbit, Sister Spring 54

Tier 3

Germination, Pollination, Colonization, Oh My! 62

Tier 4

The Halted March 74

FALL

Tier 1

For Lorn Fathers 82

As the Leaves Turn 92

The Last Harvest 98

Tier 2

The Stifled Howl 106

Reep & Sow 116

A Sort of Homecoming 124

Tier 3

Eve of the Blood Tithe 130

The Wayward One 138

Heart of the Mountain 144

Tier 4

All Hallow's Eve 154

Appendix A: Statblocks 162

Artist Bios 169

Foreword

As a celebrant of the Wheel of the Year, the Equinoxes are my favorite holidays. They are times of perfect balance, when the passing boats of night and day are harmonious for but a moment. Despite this balance, equinoxes are a celebration of momentum, change, and all the excitement that comes with possibility. The held breath of balance and stillness means the pendulum is about to swing the other way.

In spring, with Ostara, we witness the rebirth of vitality, abundance, and growth. In fall, with Mabon, we honor that abundance as the world tucks itself in to lie dormant once more, but as it does so, it also plants the literal seeds that will manifest next harvest. It is in these moments of transformation that true adventures lie....

This Book of Seasons celebrates the Equinoxes, a time when all things are possible. In these adventures, be the savior of a verdant spring, or protect against green growth gone wild. Honor nature's harvest in fall, or face the dread of what comes next. When that pendulum is about to swing, anything can happen!

Lysa Penrose
Brand Manager for Dungeon Masters Guild,
Social Media Manager for Dungeons & Dragons,
and host of Behold Her

Producer's Note

What a joy it has been to bring these books to completion. The Book of Seasons was my first stab at producing, and I jumped into the deep end, coordinating almost 50 writers, artists, and editors. I'd like to start by thanking my co-lead, head of art direction, and co-cover artist Jenn Peig, for her creative vision and boundless energy. Thanks to our editors in-chief Cat Evans and Liz Gist for their diligence and enthusiasm. Thanks to layout and co-cover artist David Markiwsky, who made this book more beautiful than I could ever have imagined. Lastly, thank you to all of you for purchasing it. We hope the Book(s) of Seasons brings joy to your table all year round. Now, with adventures full of birth and death, light and darkness, let the Equinoxes begin.

Jessica Marcrum
Producer
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Introduction

Welcome to Book of Seasons: Equinoxes, a volume of twenty adventures featuring spring and autumn themes.

Volume Overview

Book of Seasons: Equinoxes features adventures designed for every tier. The adventures are not connected, but some feature crossovers of characters or locations. Game Masters are encouraged to weave them together into a longer campaign. Each adventure is designed to be a one-session module, playable in 1-5 hours.

General Notes and Safety

DMs/GMs will need the Dungeon Master's Guide (denoted as DMG) and the Monster Manual (denoted as MM) to run these adventures. Some adventures feature items or creatures found in Volo's Guide to Monsters, Mordekainen's Tome of Foes, and Xanathar's Guide to Everything; these are denoted with VGtM, MTF, or XGtE. Creatures/monsters that are bolded are found in the MM. Items that are italicized are found in the DMG. Stat blocks are included for new or reskinned creatures.

Due to the nature of the anthology, some adventures are preceded with a relevant content warning. We encourage you to set clear boundaries and expectations at your gaming table, ensuring that our hobby remains inclusive and inviting to all. Whether you utilise the X card, lines and veils, or another tool, keeping everyone safe while playing is paramount.

> Text that appears in a box like this is meant to be read aloud or paraphrased.


Spring



The First Flowers of Spring

Written by Samantha Lavender & Miranda Mels

Levels: 0

SYNOPSIS

A strange misfortune has befallen a mountain village on the morning of the Springtide festival. As the sun rises, no flowers, growing or plucked, open their petals to the dawn. A group of determined villagers—would-be adventurers, perhaps—venture into the forest to find the faeries usually responsible for the valley's flowers and save them from a terrible fate.

ADVENTURE HOOK

The characters begin the adventure without class levels, as ordinary people attending a Springtide festival in a small mountain village. They could have grown up in the village and been fast friends since childhood, or they could be simply passing through and were welcomed to join the festivities.

0-level Characters

Characters without class levels function very similarly to 1st-level characters, but they lack any proficiencies, features, or equipment granted by a character class. They determine ability scores just as 1st-level characters do, have a proficiency bonus of +2, and have any proficiencies, traits, and equipment granted by their race and background.

Characters without class levels start with 6 + their Constitution modifier hit points, and can regain any lost hit points by finishing a long rest.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

For all their lightheartedness and playful natures, pixies have a great responsibility to the woodlands they inhabit. The delicate spread of frost in winter, the turning of the leaves in fall, and the blossoming of flowers in spring all depend upon the invisible touch of a pixie's hand. Outside the mountain village of Afonwen, this natural process has gone undisturbed for as long as anyone can remember—until now.

A giant spider named Ulmog has recently crept his way into the nearby woods. Ulmog is a clever beast, and instinctively knows that the best way to attract an ettercap—a monstrous shepherd of spiders that can transform a verdant forest into a twisted wood of webs and fangs—is to tempt one with a feast of live faeries. To that end, Ulmog has been capturing local pixies and tying them up in his web. He hasn't killed any of them yet, but by the time the remaining faeries realized who was responsible for the disappearances, there were few enough of them left that a direct assault would be costly and dangerous. That is, of course, unless they have help.

CHAPTER 1: THE SPRINGTIDE FESTIVAL

When you begin the adventure, read or paraphrase the following:

> It is the night before the Springtide Festival in the mountain village of Afonwen, which means everyone is out picking fresh flowers for the celebration. In addition to being decorations, these will be used to make flower crowns that, at the end of the celebrations, will be thrown into the river and sent flowing downstream. Potential sweethearts can signify their interest by trying to pick certain crowns out of the current, so it is important to make each one distinctive.

Ask the characters if there is anyone in particular they are hoping will pick up their crown, or anyone whose crown they are planning to pluck from the river tomorrow.

Flower Picking

The party is out gathering flowers on the eve of the Springtide Festival and have wandered into the woods near the village while searching for the first wildflowers of the year. The evening is growing late, and as the characters cross into a small meadow dotted with flowers they see a glimmering trail of sparkling light weaving its way through the air above the grass. As it passes above the open wildflower blossoms, each flower dutifully closes its petals for the night.

What they are seeing is an invisible **pixie** (MM) at work. If the characters try to investigate, she avoids them as best she can, casting *sleep*—or, if the party makes themselves seem especially kind and welcoming, *fly*—before giggling and disappearing into the forest.

Festival Day

The morning of the festival dawns overcast and gray. Nevertheless, ask what the characters plan to wear to the festival and what they carry with them. By the time the party meets up, it is clear to the entire village that something is wrong. As the morning wanes, every single flower gathered for the festival is still tightly closed. The festival grounds look drab and bleak, and everyone's flower crowns are almost identical from a distance. If the characters ask around, a few other villagers noticed some spots up the mountainside where they saw flowers tightly shut, even in the middle of the day.

If the characters aren't sure what to do, ask the party to make a **DC 13 Intelligence (Nature) check**. If at least one of them succeeds, that character remembers that among their other duties, pixies are responsible for opening the buds of flowers each morning and closing them again at night. If none succeed, the characters at least remember Old Mabin (human **commoner**, MM, she/her, neutral good) having some stories about flowers and faeries. Old Mabin is sitting by the village well, and she is happy to tell the party about the relationship between flowers and pixies. The conclusion should be clear; something must be wrong with the pixies that live in the woods. Mabin is too old herself to investigate, but encourages the characters to find the source of the problem and set it right.

CHAPTER 2: INTO THE FOREST

Assuming the party heads out into the woods, it takes them a little bit of searching before they find a flower that has actually opened its petals for the day. From there, the characters must succeed on a **DC 15 group ability check** to follow the sporadic trail of blooming flowers. Characters don't need to all make the same ability check to contribute; **Intelligence (Investigation), Wisdom (Perception), or Wisdom (Survival)** could all apply. If half or more of the characters succeed, they follow the trail to where Wisteria and Caspian are resting. If less than half the characters succeed, they still make it there, but it was a frustrating enough endeavor that the faeries have heard the party arguing and are able to set up an ambush.

The Faerie and Her Knight

The haphazard trail of blooming flowers leads to two faeries, a **pixie** named **Wisteria** (she/her, neutral good) and a **sprite** (MM) named **Caspian** (she/her, neutral good), sitting on a heavy rowan branch thick with open blossoms. Caspian also has her steed nearby, a **pseudodragon** (MM) named **Mousebane** (she/her, neutral good).



If the party comes upon them unawares, the two faeries are having a worried conversation about Ulmog in a language that sounds like the burbling of a brook and the crunching of autumn leaves (they are speaking in Sylvan). When the characters make themselves known, the faeries rush to mount Mousebane while Caspian draws her sword in defense of her lady.

If Caspian and Wisteria hear the party coming, they mount Mousebane and both turn invisible, and, with a sprinkle of pixie dust, Wisteria makes the pseudodragon invisible as well. Characters with a **passive Perception of 12 or higher** notice the branch sagging as if an unseen weight is pulling it down. As soon as a character moves to investigate, Caspian takes the opportunity to attack with her shortbow, after which she, Wisteria, and Mousebane become visible.

Once the characters have seen the faeries, read or paraphrase the following:

> Two tiny, elfin figures ride on the back of a small dragon. The figure in front wears a fine dueling doublet and a fierce expression beneath short-cropped hair, and dragonfly wings extend from her back. Holding onto her from behind is a long-haired woman in a gown of purple flowers, with butterfly wings and a worried expression on her face. The faerie in front holds her weapon at the ready, and calls out in Common, "Hey, back off!"

Caspian's first priority is to protect Wisteria, and she is initially suspicious of the party. If the characters react violently, Wisteria casts *confusion* on them, and the faeries flee on Mousebane. Without the party's help the other pixies cannot be saved, and the forest gradually turns into a dark, spider-infested wood. On the other hand, if the characters try to talk with Caspian and make a good case for themselves, let Caspian use her *Heart Sight* trait on them, or succeed on a **DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) check**, Caspian relaxes somewhat and translates the character's concerns to Wisteria.

Wisteria tells Caspian to explain that the problem with the flowers is that her fellow pixies have all been captured by a terrible creature. She wants to ask the characters for help dealing with Ulmog, but Caspian still isn't so sure the characters can be trusted. The sprite tells the party that if they can come back with "some of Daisy's pirate gold," that will prove that they are up to the challenge.

Searching for Buried Gold

Caspian can point the characters towards the river where Daisy (she/her, neutral) lives, which isn't too far. Daisy is a river nixie (use **merfolk** stats (MM) with creature type of fey instead of humanoid). When the characters first approach, she is laying in the shallows of a swift-moving mountain river, humming to herself and wearing a crown of daisies upon her head. Daisy is in a playful mood, and if asked for her pirate gold, she first asks for an answer to the following riddle:

I come ashore from out to sea,
My knife in hand, a thief to be.
Gold you'll miss when I turn tail,
I'll steal a kiss, then off I'll sail.

Whether or not the characters can answer the riddle (the answer is "a pirate") is inconsequential. Daisy laughs either way and tells the party that she's buried her pirate gold in the hollow of an old oak tree close by, and points out the direction. In truth, her "pirate gold" is sitting on her head, but she wants to see how long it will take the characters to realize this.

The Terrible Trials

The tree and the hollow in its roots is easy enough to find, but all that is inside is a skunk burrow. Characters that succeed on a **DC 13 Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Perception) check** notice the telltale signs before looking inside. Any character that ventures into the hollow must succeed **DC 12 Dexterity saving throw** or be covered by the skunk's spray. Creatures who fail gain the poisoned condition for the next hour.

When the characters return to Daisy with no gold, she apologizes and says that she must have misremembered. She tells them that her gold is most definitely stored up in the branches of an alder tree just upstream.

With a description from Daisy, the alder tree isn't hard to find. From the ground, there is a space up in the branches of the tree that is obscured from view but looks like it could hold a small object. The tree is easy to climb, but all that is up in the tree is a beehive. Characters that succeed on a **DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Survival) check** notice the swarming bees beforehand, but if any character gets up to the hive the bees attack everyone near the tree. The bees have a +3 to hit and deal 1 piercing damage. The bees leave the party alone after dealing 1 point of damage to each character.

When the characters return to Daisy with no gold, she apologizes again and insists that her gold is actually stored at the bottom of the river. Characters can try and swim down to the bottom, but the river is heavy with spring snowmelt and the current is strong. Reaching the place Daisy points out requires a **DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check**. Characters that fail suffer one level of exhaustion, and succeed or fail, they find only smooth stones and riverweed in the water.

Each time the party comes back empty-handed, mention Daisy's crown of yellow blossoms during your descriptions of the nixie's delight. Any character who asks for her flower crown receives it with a laugh and a wink, and the party is spared any further trials. If the characters make it through all three trials without

realizing that the flowers on Daisy's head are all the gold she has, the nixie applauds their perseverance and gifts the flower crown to the character that has clearly had the worst time. Then, with a smile and a wave, she disappears into the river.

CHAPTER 3: WHAT FAERIES FEAR

When the characters return with the crown of daisies, Caspian and Wisteria satisfied that the characters possess the wits, determination, and strength to assist them in their quest. They lead the way to Ulmog's lair. Caspian begs Wisteria to wait outside where it is safe and joins the characters on Mousebane with her sword in hand.

The Spider's Lair

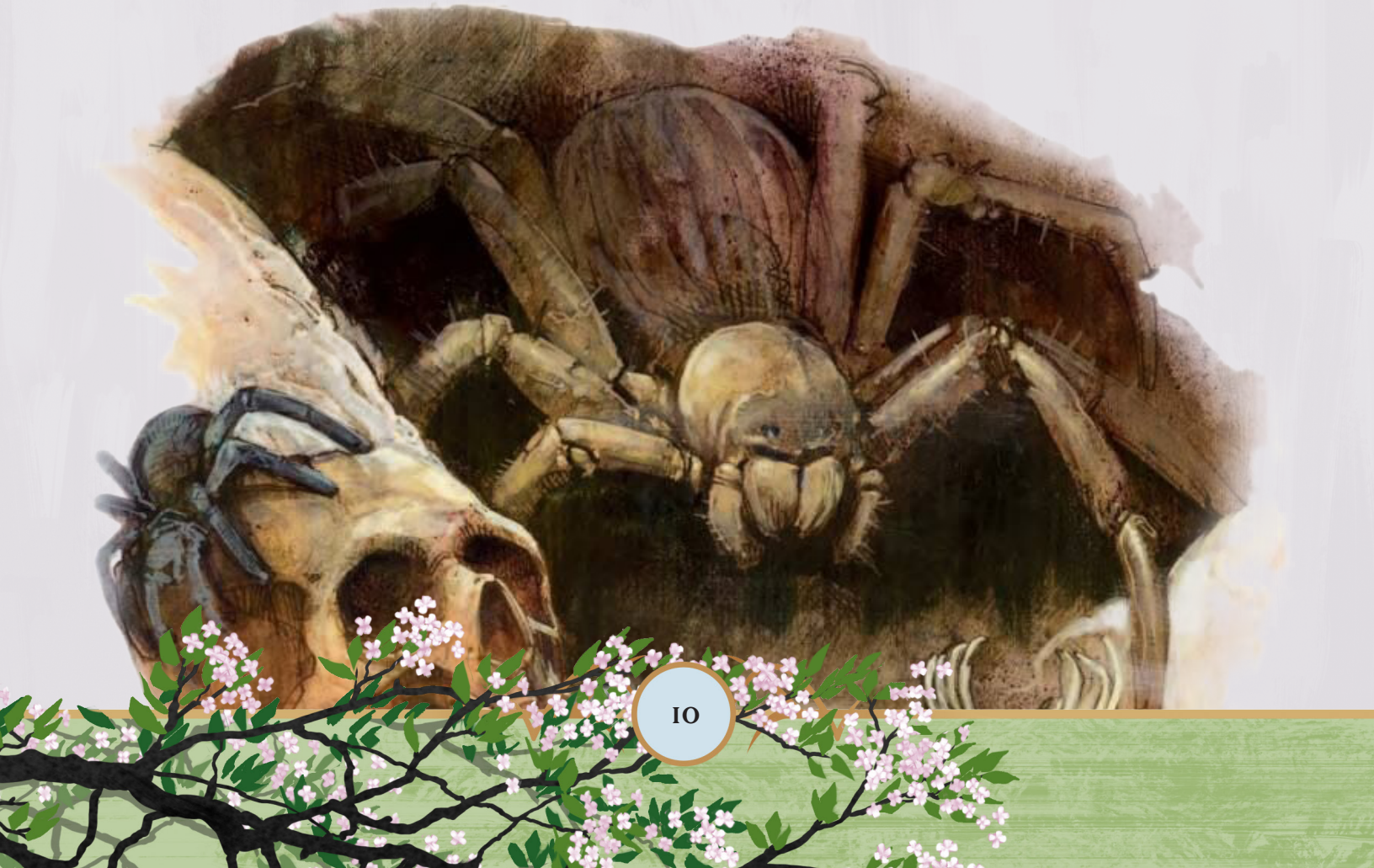
Ulmog has spun his web in a dark earthen cave at the top of a dry streambed. Gnarled roots from the trees above frame the entrance, which is about ten feet wide and six feet tall. Inside the cave is dim light, which means characters without darkvision have disadvantage on all Wisdom (Perception) checks made to see. It is large enough inside for the characters to move around in multiple directions, but the walls, floors, and other surfaces are thick with webs (DMG) that Ulmog can use with his *Web Sense* trait. Trapped in the webs are dozens of pixies, terrified but alive.

Caught in a Web

Ulmog, a **giant wolf spider** (MM), is hidden in a thin shelf of earth near the roof of the cave. The shelf runs along the circumference of the cave, which allows the spider to approach a fight from any angle. He waits until the characters try to free the pixies, and then attacks. Ulmog has only one mandible, having lost the other earlier in life, and does minimum piercing damage with his attacks (2 damage). His venom, however, is still strong.

If the party seems to be doing well against Ulmog during the fight, Caspian uses her action each round to start cutting pixies free from the webs. If the tide turns against the party, Caspian joins the fray with her longsword. As a controlled mount, Mousebane does not make attacks. Ulmog uses his superior mobility against the party with little regard for opportunity attacks, alternating his strikes against the characters and against Caspian.

As 0-level characters, it is unlikely that anyone in the party is proficient with any weapons. Characters can still attack with improvised weapons (stones, tree branches, walking sticks) or weapons they are not proficient with (such as hatchets or knives), they simply don't add their proficiency bonus to their attack rolls. Characters do add their proficiency bonus to attack rolls when making unarmed strikes.



With the spider slain, freeing the pixies is just a matter of time. Caspian is so moved by the party's performance in battle that she grants them all the honor of becoming her squires. Wisteria and the other pixies are also incredibly grateful, and before they rush off to return to their duties, Wisteria leads them in making a small gift for each of the characters (see Rewards, below).

CONCLUSION

When the characters return to the village, every flower in sight is in full bloom. The villagers can't explain what happened—it seemed to them that one moment they were closed, and then with a rush of wind they all bloomed at once—but there is no reason now that the festival cannot commence.

With the crisis averted, the Springtide Festival is a jubilant evening of feasting, singing, dancing, and playing games. The characters can have their fill of the following foods:

- Salads made from mountain lettuce, dandelions, and fennel tossed in oil and sweet vinegar
- Chopped turnips and spring onions fried with wild garlic, morel mushrooms, and elm seeds
- Catfish grilled in a gooseberry sauce and served over roasted cauliflower and early carrots
- Crusty, steaming bread smeared with soft, buttery cheese, and several rounds of hard cheeses next to salty strips of preserved pork
- Bowls of creamy chowder filled with new potatoes, parsnips, leeks, and river clams
- Apricot pie and biscuits with cherry jam
- Mulled apple cider and plenty of hot, green tea

Other than feasting, ways to spend time at the Springtide Festival include:

- Telling the story of what happened today to a crowd of enraptured children and a few disbelieving adults
- Playing a variety of increasingly obscure and potentially fictional versions of chess with the innkeeper husbands, Elias, Galen, and Medran
- Seeing who can throw stones the furthest with Kareva the blacksmith and Rowen and Rilsa, the carpenter sisters (Rilsa is deaf, but most of the village can translate for anyone who doesn't know hand-signs)
- Dancing with just about anyone from the entire village
- Helping Rhea, who can't dance, provide the music and occasionally helping make a path for her rolling chair when she needs to get around
- Playing at riddles with Old Mabin or games of tag with the village children

There is plenty of time for each character to take part in multiple games, dances, and songs (if you need statistics for the villagers, they are human **commoners** (MM) with proficiencies and higher ability scores appropriate to their professions). Let characters make appropriate ability checks, even if they are not proficient in Performance or with particular games, for the chance to earn friendly thanks, hearty congratulations, or an extra slice of pie.

When the sun sets, it comes time for everyone who made a flower crown for themselves to throw it into the river, and for anyone who so desires to wade into the river to fish it out again. Whether or not the romantic hopes of the characters come to pass is up to you (and up to the other characters, if they so choose), but consider what would be most interesting and dramatic for the length and scope of your campaign. Either way, the season is just beginning and full of possibilities.

Rewards

Each character who helped free the pixies from Ulmog receives a tiny pouch sewn out of flower petals. Inside is a single pinch of pixie dust, which functions as one use of *dust of disappearance*.

Because they do not have class levels, characters do not earn experience points for completing this adventure. However, their encounters with magic, mystery, and excitement may be enough to push them towards developing the skills of a true adventurer.

Author's Notes/ Acknowledgments:

Romance in Dungeons & Dragons is much-maligned, but like many aspects of the game, it takes just one thing to really shine—honest, emotional vulnerability. It takes a good amount of courage and faith to toss your flower crown into those turbulent waters, and we'd like to thank our playtesters and anyone else brave enough to try.

Author Bio:

Samantha Lavender has been playing Dungeons & Dragons for most of her life, and isn't sick of it yet. When she's not running or playing D&D, she is either working at a library or trying to ignore the ocean calling her to run away to sea.

Miranda Mels started playing D&D at Sam's table during the D&D Next public playtest. She now runs multiple games a week, and plays pretty much whenever she isn't serving espresso or slipping bagel crumbs to the local crows.



Green

Written by Cat Evans

Levels: 1

Content Warnings: sexual harassment, mild body horror

SYNOPSIS

A young nobleman is cursed: flowers grow wherever he walks. And on whatever, or whomever, he touches. It's embarrassing… and dangerous, when some of the things he creates come to life. His family need adventurers to unpick the knots of the ancient curse and restore their son to his former glory as a paragon of manliness. Of course, all is not as it seems.

ADVENTURE HOOK

Characters can become involved in the adventure in a number of ways:

- The Varley family have advertised widely for someone to solve their problem: adventurers may have seen one or more of these advertisements
- Local folk are well aware of the situation (it's hot gossip), so if characters are from the Varleys' lands, they might offer to help to earn status or reputation
- A friend or family member might have been affected by Conor Varley's curse

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Conor Varley is a young nobleman with an unfortunate condition, which came upon him suddenly a few weeks ago. Everywhere he walks, and everything he touches with his hands, sprouts flowers. Conor and his family believe that he is suffering from a curse inflicted by a witch (Aunt Toad, a **green hag**, MM) he offended. In fact, it was laid by Castanea, a **dryad** (MM) he claims to have "flirted" with (she would say frightened and assaulted). Characters meet both women in this adventure, with a choice of whether to take a hag's bargain and remove Conor's condition, or the dryad's advice on how to live with it.

CHAPTER 1: A BLOOMING NUISANCE

The characters meet Conor Varley and his mother, learn the details and dangers of his curse, and are contracted to help him.

People in Glass Houses

Read or paraphrase:

> The Varleys are a minor noble family. You wouldn't know that from their grandiose country home. Multiple wings, dozens of rooms, and the sort of architectural confusion one can only achieve with a dozen ancestors with too much money and not enough taste. What's inside the house remains a mystery, because it's the greenhouse you've been shown to.
>
> It's a riot of colour. Roses, lilies, orchids and tulips; creeping vines and sprawling bushes. A legion of brightly patterned butterflies flit between the blossoms and the smell - of ripening, blooming, and decaying flowers, all at once - is overwhelming and sickly.
>
> Amongst it all sit two people. A huge, muscular young man with the features of a young god, and a thin-lipped woman with steel grey hair. The young man perches on a chair too small for him, hands folded meekly in his lap and only the very tips of his toes touching the carpet of flowers. The woman stands to greet you; the man does not.

Lady Ffion Varley introduces herself, and her son Conor, and runs through the particulars of their situation:

- While out hunting a few weeks ago, Conor loosed an arrow at what he thought was a deer but was in fact the local witch, known as Aunt Toad. He didn't hit her, and therefore did not apologize when she asked him to.
- A few days later, this curse manifested: flowers bloom wherever Conor walks, and sprout on whatever or whomever he touches (except himself).
- It's caused considerable challenges:
  - Property damage
  - Inability to tend to himself: servants have to feed, groom, and bathe him, amongst other things
  - Confined to the greenhouse: he can't ride, hunt, shoot, and his friends do not visit because…
  - He's caused several injuries: affectionately punching a friend's arm, or flirting with a maidservant by stroking her face. In both cases, permanent damage and scarring were caused by the flowers that sprouted forcefully from their flesh
  - It's humiliating: Ffion knows, and Conor suspects, that people are making jokes about Conor's masculinity
  - Worst of all, sometimes the plants come to life (see A Thorny Problem for more detail). They're quite aggressive



Roleplaying Ffion and Conor

Lady Ffion takes charge of the meeting. She is polite and businesslike, presenting the situation factually. She does not find the situation funny, and if the characters attempt to make light of it she shuts them down with a frosty look. She tries not to look at her afflicted son at all.

Conor is sullen and withdrawn. He's clearly embarrassed by his condition: at some point while Ffion recounts the details he loses his temper, getting up and punching one of the steel struts that supports the greenhouse walls. True to expectations, a bouquet of orange and yellow flowers explodes out of the metal. Conor sits down when Ffion orders him to, but continues to fidget and glower for the rest of the encounter.

Rewards

Ffion offers the characters 150gp in total for a solution to Conor's problem. If characters haggle for a higher payment, she offers to instead gift them with 4 horses from her family's stables. Riding horses sell for 75gp each, so this is a high value reward.

A Thorny Problem

When the meeting is almost done, some of Conor's creations animate. Read or paraphrase:

> You hear a rustling, as if something moves through the foliage. Lady Ffion gasps and stands up, stepping quickly towards the door.
>
> "Ah. I warned you this might happen: sometimes the things he makes are… alive. Let's see what you're made of, then. Cut them down and I'll add another thirty pieces of gold to your reward."
>
> The creatures that step out of the thick, greenery are roughly humanoid, organically grown from twigs and vines with roses blooming like sores all over their bodies. With bristling thorns and outstretched claws, they don't look friendly.

The four **needle blight**s (MM) attack anything that is not Conor but do not leave the greenhouse. Lady Ffion exits as soon as she can, and Conor stays out of the way, leaving the fighting to the characters. If questioned, he admits to feeling guilty about hurting them: "I made them, you know?"

For a party of 3rd level or higher, use three needle blights and three vine blights (MM).

Development

When the blights are defeated, Ffion and Conor provide directions to the cottage in the forest where the characters can find Aunt Toad. Characters can take a short rest at the Varley family home, but if they want a long rest they must make their own arrangements.

CHAPTER 2: TOADS AND TREES

The characters track down Aunt Toad, and receive a lead that takes them to the dryad Castanea.

The Forest in Spring

The witch's cottage is a few hours away on foot. It's deep in the nearby forest but it's an easy journey: woodcutters, hunters, and others have made a number of paths through the forest. You don't need to make characters roll to navigate the woods, but if you want to do so some suggested complications/encounters are listed **Complications and Encounters Table** below. Results are better if the group includes a ranger or someone proficient in Survival.

The Trees Have Eyes

After some time in the forest, the character with the highest **passive Wisdom (Perception)** notices that there is an increasingly large number of birds around them. They perch on branches, flit between trees, and there are even a couple of fat partridges in the undergrowth. They're all watching.

If the characters are able to speak to the birds, they learn that:

- They work for Aunt Toad (she feeds them if they keep watch on strangers… and the characters are very strange)
- They are all very pleased that there are fewer hunters "since the big loud one messed up"
- The birds can direct the characters to Aunt Toad's cottage and, if bribed with food or nesting materials, tell them to "watch out for the snares"

Toad of Toad Hall

After the characters have spent a couple of hours traversing the forest, read or paraphrase:

> The scent of woodsmoke tickles your nose, and the path you've been following terminates in a thicket of brambles confronting you with wicked, sharp thorns. Beyond the brambles, through the trees, you see hints of a small, crooked, house; a lean-to made of old, mossy wood. It's where Conor told you the witch would be.

Complications and Encounters Table

D4	If the party has a ranger/someone proficient in Survival	Otherwise…
1	Characters get to watch a deer and her fawn grazing in a clearing.	A randomly chosen character trips over a tree root and falls flat on their face (1d4-1 bludgeoning damage).
2	Find three arrows lost by a hunter.	An injured deer. It will die slowly and in pain if not put out of its misery (or healed).
3	A bush of pretty, blue berries. Can supplement other food, and provide 1 extra day of rations per character.	A bush of pretty, red berries. A successful DC 13 Wisdom (Survival) check determines that they are poisonous (1d6 Poison damage if eaten).
4	A patch of small, white flowers. Successful DC 12 Intelligence (Medicine or Nature) check reveals they have painkilling properties. Add 1 use to a Healer's Kit.	A patch of small, blue flowers. The first person to discover them gets itchy hands and a runny nose for the next hour (no mechanical effect).

The Thicket

Aunt Toad does not appreciate visitors. She cultivates this thicket of brambles so that she can hear them approaching. Characters do not need to roll to cut them away, but if they choose to try and walk through the brambles without clearing them, they must succeed on a **DC 11 Strength saving throw** or be Restrained until someone else cuts them free.

The brambles hide Aunt Toad's snares. Characters with a passive Wisdom (Perception) below 15 do not spot them amongst the brambles, and are therefore caught in them, snatched up into the air with a rope around their ankles, and suspended helplessly from a tree branch.

The Witch

If the characters have been noisy or get caught in her snares, Aunt Toad comes out of her cottage to meet them.

If the characters reach her house unnoticed, they find Aunt Toad doing laundry in the creek behind the cottage.

Aunt Toad is a stout, gnarled, old woman who walks with a cane and is attended by an entourage of glaring, warty, toads who spend the entire encounter ribbiting angrily. The brambles move out of Aunt's way as though scared of her.

Aunt Toad is not pleased to see the characters, but can tell them:

- She did not curse Conor, but she's glad someone did. "Nasty piece of work, that one. Very tempted to turn him into a toad, I was."
- She can lift the curse. For a price. She'll take a year-and-a-day of service from Conor, or a precious secret from each of the characters. Oh, and a load of firewood, and she's got some shelves that need putting up
    - All she needs is one special component for the spell: a piece of dryad bark. She even knows a local dryad. "You don't have to skin the poor girl, obviously. Ask 'er for a bit she's shed."





Roleplaying Aunt Toad

Aunt Toad does not appreciate the characters' intrusion, though she warms to them after they tell her that Conor is cursed: this provokes a fit of wheezing, whistling laughter that ends with her doubled over and coughing. Aunt Toad likes to pretend that can't hear them, forcing characters to repeat things loudly and slowly, and choosing not to hear questions or details that don't interest her. Meanwhile, she mumbles - and gets cross if she's asked to repeat herself.

If the party initiates combat, Aunt Toad fights back. If she is reduced to 20 hit points or fewer she surrenders and offers to cure the curse for free. If she incapacitates two or more of the characters, she offers to let them surrender, but the price for her services goes up: she wants to give one of the characters nightmares for a month (succeed on a **DC 11 Constitution saving throw** or wake with one level of exhaustion each day).

If combat occurs, and you have a party of 3rd level or higher, a pair of Aunt Toad's toads turn into giant toads (MM) and fight alongside her.

"It's all gone wrong!"

Your party decided to fight Aunt Toad, turned down her deal, or refused to go and fetch the bark. When they return to the Varleys, Conor sheepishly tells them about another possible cause: a pretty girl he flirted with in the forest, the very day before the curse struck. She was so sweet and fair, he didn't think for a second it could have been her, but the time lines up.

And now the party is back on track to Castanea.

Development

Whether the characters go directly from Aunt Toad's cottage, or via the Varleys, Chapter 2 ends when they set off to find the dryad (or "fair maiden who lives in the woods," as Conor Varley believes) Castanea, armed with directions either from Aunt Toad or Conor.

CHAPTER 3: THE ROOT OF THE PROBLEM

The characters meet Castanea, and learn the real cause of, and solution to, Conor's problem.

Pick another encounter from the table in Chapter 2 if you wish to break up the characters' journey, or skip directly to finding the dryad if you prefer.

Silent As The Grove

The characters follow the directions they have been given to a clearing containing a circle of trees (one each of oak, ash, silver birch, black birch, and chestnut). There are no signs of human habitation, which may be confusing if they believe Conor's interpretation of events. Read or paraphrase:

The grove is empty of humans, but full of life. Birds sing in the branches of the surrounding trees, and rabbits, badgers, and even a boar roam freely, making no attempt to harm one another. In the center of the clearing, a ring of trees, each of a different type, forms a circle around a weathered standing stone.

The characters' challenge is to awaken the dryads and convince them to speak. There are several ways to do so:

- Attacking any of the animals in the grove, attempting to strip bark from one of the dryads (see below) - a HOSTILE response
- Mentioning Conor or Aunt Toad's name - a NEUTRAL response
- Singing to the trees, pouring fresh water onto their roots, or making some other respectful gesture. Characters may simply assume this will work or may learn it from a successful **DC 10 Intelligence (History or Nature) check**. This provokes a POSITIVE response

Allow any other reasonable attempt to get their attention to succeed. Most will receive a NEUTRAL response. When the characters get their attention, all five dryads step out of their trees, peeling away from them as though separating themselves from a loving embrace.

Roleplaying the Dryads

Each of the five trees in the circle is a dryad (oak presents as masculine, birch as androgynous, and the others as feminine). Castanea, the chestnut tree, is tall and brown skinned, with a wild cascade of mossy, leafy hair. The dryads could be mistaken for humans, but not easily.

If **HOSTILE**, the dryads attack immediately, using *entangle* and *shillelagh*. Make it clear that the dryads are trying to subdue/knock them out, not kill them. After a round of combat they ask if the characters will act peacefully; if the answer is yes, they stop attacking. Do not adjust the difficulty of this combat for a more powerful party.

If **NEUTRAL**, the dryads emerge from their trees suspicious, and wielding heavy branches that could easily be used as clubs or staffs. They are ready to talk, but not trusting.

If **POSITIVE**, the dryads are welcoming and not suspicious. They are happy to talk.

When it becomes clear that the characters are here on business relating to Conor, the others let Castanea take the lead in the conversation. She is confident, bold, and unapologetic. She explains that Conor found her alone in the grove, and assaulted her, trying to pin her against a tree and kiss her. She freed herself, and fled - she did not wish to risk combat without her siblings around her - and cast a spell on Conor to teach him a lesson.

Quid Pro Grow: The Dryad's Spell

Castanea cannot undo the spell: "It doesn't work like that." She and the others are not inclined to let the old hag Aunt Toad have some of their bark. If the characters insist on that, the dryads attempt to knock the characters out and leave them at the edge of the forest.

Castanea advises that Conor should simply learn to live with its effects. If he accepts them, and most importantly doesn't go

around touching people without consent - if, in other words, he abandons the sort of arrogant, entitled behavior that got him into trouble - he will be able to control the power. It is, in her words, "a gift, not a curse."

If the characters are 3rd level or higher, two **boars** (MM) and two **giant badgers** (MM) fight alongside the dryads if/when combat breaks out.

Development

Once Castanea has explained the function of the spell she cast, the chapter is over. The characters should return either to Aunt Toad (if they have a piece of dryad bark) or the Varleys. You may spend as much or as little time on Aunt Toad as you like: characters may have questions (e.g. whether she truly believes her counter-charm will work; Aunt Toad does believe this, but she is wrong), but ultimately the aim is to get the characters back to Conor and Lady Ffion.

Conclusion

Either with a foul-smelling potion made of dryad bark and parts of a toad, or with advice from Castanea, the characters return to the Varleys' greenhouse where they are received by Lady Ffion and Connor.

If the characters have a potion from Aunt Toad, there is much rejoicing. Lady Ffion hosts a feast in their honor, and they are asked to stay in the Varley manor house until the next morning, to make sure the potion is effective. If the characters leave immediately, Ffion is suspicious and sends them away without their reward. Of course, when the potion fails, celebration turns to bitter disappointment, and the characters are sent away without their reward anyway.

If the characters bring back only Castanea's advice and explanation, they meet a frosty reception. Neither Ffion nor Conor accepts that Conor was at fault. However, an angry outburst from Conor leads to another encounter with 5 needle blights, after which Ffion orders him to do as the dryad bid, and come to terms with his condition. The characters are asked to stay for a few days to see whether this is effective, before they are given their reward. In this time, Conor makes some progress (perhaps great progress if the characters help), begins to see the error of his ways, and Ffion grants the party the promised reward.

Rewards

Characters earn either 150gp or four riding horses (worth 300gp), and an additional 30gp for defeating the blights.

Author's Notes/ Acknowledgments:

This is the most explicitly feminist adventure I've ever written: toxic masculinity is terrible and it hurts people, not least the men at the center of it. It's not subtle, but it was a lot of fun. Hope you liked it too. My thanks go first to Ashley Warren, for leading the Uncaged Anthology that brought all of these authors together and made us into a family; and second to Liz Gist, my patient, brilliant, spouse who's been forced to read every word I write.

Author Bio:

Cat Evans writes RPG content on the DMs Guild and elsewhere. A lot of it has hags in, if you look hard enough. She's co-leading the Eat the Rich! anthology of D&D adventures with Alicia Furness, and constantly creating strange, dark fairy tales with her beloved Coven of co-creators.





Maidens

Written by Liz Gist

Levels: 3-4

Content Warnings: enslavement, self-mutilation, missing adolescent, commodification of women, reference to sexual assault

SYNOPSIS

Gulos is a thriving, bustling city, thanks to a deal made centuries ago with the night hag Matre Moon. The deal is simple: each year on the Spring Equinox, the city sends their most beautiful, talented, virtuous maiden up the mountain to the hag, never to be seen again, and in return, Gulos continues to prosper. But after watching this barbaric practice for many years, a rebel servant of the hag seeks to bring the deal to an end.

ADVENTURE HOOK

The adventure begins with the party arriving in Gulos, where they find an air of panic amongst the guards and town officials and are soon approached to find a missing girl.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

For centuries, the city of Gulos has lived in fear and servitude to Matre Moon, a night hag who, generations ago, promised the city prosperity in exchange for an annual sacrifice: the city's most beautiful, virtuous maiden, who is sent up the hag's mountain on the eve of the Spring Equinox each year, never to be seen again. Each year, the town goes along with this demand, and each year, Gulos sees bountiful harvests, thriving trade, and steady, sustainable growth.

Girls in Gulos who show any traditional beauty, any aptitude for "feminine" pastimes such as art or music, are treated as a commodity. It is a great honour to be chosen for Matre Moon, and the chosen maiden's family sees a significant rise in status. Each year contests determine the young women with the most potential, and a local academy is devoted to refining that potential.

Some young women buy into the myth of honour, but an increasing number are rebellious and refuse to be used for the city's gain. The fire of their rebellion was sparked by Aeris, a succubus who Matre Moon has kept in her service for decades to seduce the men of Gulos.

Dramatis Personae

- Tomas Pragsmoor (human **noble**, MM, he/him, lawful evil): Mayor of Gulos, Tomas is a handsome, middle-aged man who values tradition and sees the deal with Matre Moon as an excellent example of young people working for the greater good. He is increasingly fearful of what will become of the city, should Matre Moon not receive this year's maiden.
- Heather Palfrey (human **commoner**, MM, she/her, neutral good): She was chosen to be this year's maiden, but disappeared the morning before the Spring Equinox. She is conflicted between her duty to her family and her desire for freedom
- Adelaide Tantivy (human **commoner**, MM, she/her, neutral): She is currently imprisoned for scarring her face after learning she would be chosen as this year's maiden; Heather was chosen as her replacement
- Matre Moon (**night hag**, MM, she/her, chaotic evil): Matre Moon thinks she has an absolutely delightful setup here: she has a city murdering its children out of their own parents' greed
- Aeris (**succubus**, MM, she/her, chaotic neutral): Aeris hates the way Matre Moon uses her. She has watched how the city treats its young women and recognises the warped similarities in their lives, and seeks to bring an end to the cruel practices

CHAPTER 1: FESTIVE SPIRIT

Gulos is known throughout the region as a small, prosperous city. Resting in the shadow of Mount Esuren, it paints a pretty picture of well-tended houses, thriving farmland, and bustling docks. Currently, the city is preparing for some sort of festival: garlands of flowers and ribbons are being hung between the buildings and stalls are being set up.

Call to action

As soon as the party enters Gulos, anyone with a **passive Wisdom (Insight) of 12 or higher** detects that something is amiss. The city guards are moving briskly together to carry out quick, hushed conversations, while civilians are standing in tight clusters, exchanging nervous gossip.

If approached, the guards are distracted and dismissive.

The civilians are less terse, but still wary: they all know outsiders should never learn the price they pay for their prosperity. However, if any of the party engage in conversation with a group of gossiping civilians, they are directed to the Palfreys' home, where both Mayor Pragsmoor and the family may be in need of aid.

If the party dawdles, they are approached by one of the civilians with the suggestion that they seem a hardy group of folks who could offer some help, and are then directed to the mayor and Heather's family, as above.

The Job

Mayor Pragsmoor and the Palfrey family are all at the Palfrey home.

Even compared to the festive decorations throughout the rest of the city, the Palfreys' home stands out. Numerous garlands hang from the roof and windows, and bouquets and small baskets of fruit are stacked against the front of the house. On the door hangs a wreath of flowers with a circle of polished silver at its centre.

As the party approaches the house, the door opens and two guards step out, followed by Mayor Pragsmoor. If the characters do not immediately interrupt, they overhear the mayor promising Heather's parents that the guards will find her.

Both Pragsmoor and Heather's parents, Selene and Graham, gratefully accept any offer of help. They explain:

- Heather went missing from Azealia Academy at some point between dinner last night and breakfast this morning
- Azealia Academy is a prestigious school for young women, where they are taught the arts of beauty and virtue
- Heather is sixteen years old. She has never given any sort of trouble before, and is by all accounts a sweet, kind girl who cares dearly for her family and her city
- Though they don't say why, her parents insist Heather must be returned home before the Spring Equinox. If pressed, they will become cross for the characters questioning their concern for their missing daughter
- Pragsmoor suggests Adelaide Tantivy is somehow behind Heather's disappearance, but quickly realises the danger of letting outsiders talk to her and dismisses the notion
- If it seems the party are struggling for a lead, Pragsmoor will suggest starting at the academy
- If the party are reluctant to help, Pragsmoor offers them 300 gp if they bring Heather back unharmed, and an extra 300 gp if she is returned before the Spring Festival.

Development

By this point, the party should have their task - find Heather - and a couple of leads for more information: the academy, and Adelaide.

CHAPTER 2: PRETTY MAIDS ALL IN A ROW

The party can now decide which leads they want to follow up on. Azealia Academy is easy to find: it's the most decorated building in the city. Tracking down Adelaide is more difficult, as both Pragsmoor and the Palfreys are reluctant to speak about her.

Azealia Academy

Azealia Academy is a beautiful, four-storey building containing classrooms and living quarters for both students and staff. The surrounding gardens include a small gazebo and a space used for dining and lessons. The academy houses twenty young women - maidens, as they are officially referred to - between the ages of nine and nineteen, as well as three tutors and a headmistress, **Matron Judith** (human **commoner** (MM), she/her, neutral good). Matron Judith can be found in her office, consulting with three guards about Heather.

If the party visited Adelaide first, they may approach the academy with a greater understanding of the situation. June and Emily are quick to confirm what Adelaide says about the sacrifice, while Matron Judith denies everything.

The Maidens

- There are five maidens outside. All are fifteen or older, as the younger girls are currently being kept inside:
  - **June**, **Emily** and **Brianna** are quietly talking together in the gazebo
  - **Janine** and **Meredith** are fretting near the academy's entrance
- The maidens go silent as soon as they notice the characters approaching, cautious of outsiders
- June and Emily are close-lipped: they know where Heather has gone and don't want anyone to find her. They are part of a small group of maidens who are angry about the ritual and want it to end. If pressed, they tell the party that Heather ran off with the local baker's boy; no check is needed to confirm this is a lie
- A successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check** shows that Brianna is especially quiet and very pale; this is because she knows she is Heather's replacement if Heather is not found. Brianna knows where Heather and Aeris are - she is planning to flee to them, though she won't tell the party this unless she trusts them, for example if they seem sympathetic to the maidens' plight
- Janine and Meredith are quick to offer up information - a successful **DC 12 Charisma (Persuasion) check** convinces them to explain the following:
  - A woman named Aeris came to the academy recently as a music instructor
  - She took special interest in Adelaide, Heather, Brianna, the girls most likely to be chosen this year, and offered them extra, private lessons, unbeknownst to the staff
  - She was dismissed from the academy after Matron Judith discovered she was teaching them "uncouth, rebellious" songs; she disappeared from Gulos a week ago
  - Two days after she disappeared, Adelaide had "a flare of hysterics"
- If the characters ask about Adelaide, the maidens tell them to speak to Matron Judith
- If there are any attempts to intimidate the girls, they quickly shout for the guards inside the academy



Matron Judith

Matron Judith is easy to find: the moment any character sets foot within the academy, they hear raised voices coming from the headmistress' office, located right off the foyer. The door is ajar, and a successful **DC 12 Dexterity (Stealth) check** allows characters to approach without notice. The occupants are currently engaged in a heated conversation.

Inside, Judith is losing patience with three guards questioning her. If the characters eavesdrop, they hear Judith accuse the guards of doubting her commitment to Gulos and assure them that "a maiden will be ready for the equinox, no matter what."

She dismisses the guards from her office shortly after, and immediately notices any characters standing outside her door.

- Judith is agitated and anxious, and demands to know who the characters are and why they are in the academy
- She calms when she learns Mayor Pragsmoor hired the party to find Heather, at which point she tells them:
    - Heather was always an excellent, well-behaved student
    - Recently, she has grown distracted from her lessons and prone to arguing
    - She was selected for a highly coveted role within the Spring Festival, despite her recent rebellious streak
- If questioned about Adelaide, Judith says she is "a foolish, selfish girl and a troublemaker who failed to appreciate the honor bestowed on her"
    - A successful **DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) check** convinces her it is worth talking to Adelaide to find out where Heather has gone
    - She gives the party a note of explanation for the guards and tells the party that Adelaide can be found in the city jail
    - If questioned about why she was imprisoned, Judith repeats that Adelaide is a cretinous girl, and warn the party to take what she says with a grain of salt
- If the party mentions Aeris, Matron Judith dismisses her as a mischief maker and an outsider, who "failed to understand and appreciate how Gulos works." She does not know where Aeris went, or even where she came from - if pressed, she can't entirely recall why she hired her. This is because Aeris charmed Judith into giving her the position

Visiting Adelaide

Adelaide is located in the city jail. Five days ago, after learning she would be this year's offering to Matre Moon, she took a knife and cut her own face so she could no longer count as the "brightest, most beautiful maiden" by the ritual's criteria. She was arrested shortly after, and imprisoned on the grounds of "endangering the city."

Through private lessons, Aeris taught her that the rest of the world does not use its young women to such selfish ends. Eyes open, Adelaide is now angry and disgusted with the city.

If the party has a note from Matron Judith, the guards posted in front of Adelaide's cell let them through. Otherwise, a successful **DC 14 Charisma (Persuasion), Charisma (Intimidation) or Charisma (Deception) check** gets them through, with advantage if they explain that they are here to find out information pertaining to Heather's disappearance.

Once the party approaches her cell, read the following:

> You are let through to a small room containing a single cell. Inside the cell, a young woman stops her pacing. Her brown hair loose and unbrushed, she is dressed in a simple blue dress with blood staining the chest and neckline. A raw, stitched wound cuts across her left cheek and chin.

Unlike most of Gulos, Adelaide is excited to see outsiders. She engages openly in conversation, and tells them:

- She and Heather were both chosen for a ritual sacrifice, where each year, a young maiden is sent up Esuren Mountain to Matre Moon, in exchange for another year of prosperity for Gulos
- She doesn't know who or what Matre Moon is, only that she's existed as long as Gulos
- No one has ever returned after the ritual, though some say the mountain is haunted with their spirits
- The ritual has been going on for as long as anyone remembers, and no one has ever tested what happens if Matre Moon doesn't receive a maiden
- Aeris promised to help them end the tyranny that Gulos' young women live under, but disappeared shortly before Adelaide was chosen as this year's sacrifice
- Desperate, Adelaide cut her own face rather than let herself be used
- If the party asks where Aeris or Heather is, Adelaide hesitates. She wants assurance that the characters won't return Heather to be sacrificed, which requires a contested **Charisma (Persuasion) or Charisma (Deception) check** against Adelaide's Wisdom (Insight). Adelaide has advantage on this check. If successful, she tells them:
    - Aeris spoke of a house in the forest that the girls could hide in if ever they needed - Adelaide tried to flee there, but was discovered and arrested
    - She suggests it may be where Heather is, as she shared Adelaide's feelings about the ritual

Development

By this point, the party should have a stronger idea of what is happening within Gulos, and where Heather might be.

If they seem stuck or reluctant to visit Adelaide, Brianna approaches them, says she knows where Heather is and offers to take them to her, assuming Aeris will dispatch the party if they betray her.

CHAPTER 3: INTO THE WOODS

At this stage, the party can choose to either venture into the forest, following Adelaide's directions or Brianna's guidance, or they can travel straight up the mountain to seek out Matre Moon - if they do so, skip to Chapter 4.

Into the Woods

Aeris is using an old hunting lodge to hide from Matre Moon and take stock with Heather on how to proceed. Both Aeris and Heather are reluctant to leave the rest of the maidens to fend for themselves.

The forest is dense, but not especially dangerous for most travel. However, Aeris has taken precautions, leaving three **imps** (MM) to mind traps she's set and keep watch for any potential danger. These imps attack only if the traps fail and the party does not have any maidens from the academy with them. The imps remain invisible unless they attack.

If the party has ventured into the forest without Brianna or another maiden, they can track Aeris and Heather's travel with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check. On a failure, they have disadvantage on any checks for traps.

The traps waiting in the forest are:

- A **net trap** (DMG) located 300 feet to the south of the hunting lodge.
- Eight **bear traps** (DMG) spaced 50 feet apart around the perimeter of the lodge.

The Hunting Lodge

Aeris is in her human disguise when the characters arrive at the lodge, and keeps this form unless combat is initiated. Heather has seen her succubus form and knows her history with Matre Moon, but Brianna and the other maidens do not.



Aeris and Heather each know and believe the following:

- Both want to bring an end to the annual sacrifices
- Aeris wants to destroy Matre Moon for what the hag has done to her and to the young women of Gulos. She doesn't care what becomes of Gulos, believing they have earned their fate. She tells the party about how she was used by Matre Moon and reveals her nature to them
- Heather is afraid of the hag, and despite her anger regarding the city's deal with her, she does not hate the residents of Gulos outright. She does want to see those responsible, such as Matron Judith and Mayor Pragsmoor, brought to justice. She asks the party about how the city is doing - especially the other maidens
- Once Brianna learns who Aeris really is, she becomes even more horrified by Matre Moon and joins Heather in wanting bloody revenge
- If the party attempts to take Heather or Brianna back to Gulos, Aeris attacks. Both women leap to her defence, but all attempt to flee deeper into the forest if any of them reach less than half their hit points
- If the party express an interest in destroying Matre Moon, Aeris insists on joining them, and that Heather and any other maidens remain at the hunting lodge

Development

At this stage, the party could follow multiple paths. Chapter 4 outlines the most likely courses of events, summarized as:

- They try to take Heather from Aeris and return her to Gulos to ensure the ritual occurs
- Thy go straight up the mountain and attack Matre Moon
- They go to the city and try to persuade its people to help against Matre Moon

CHAPTER 4: FOR GOOD OR ILL

The party should have made a clear choice of who they are going to support: the city and its ritual, or Aeris and the rebel maidens. The sections outlined below offer guidance, depending on which route they seek to take.

Nothing Ever Changes

If the characters decide to simply return the maidens to Gulos and allow the ritual sacrifice to proceed, Mayor Pragsmoor pays what he has promised them and they are made honoured guests for the festival.

Breaking Tradition

- If the party decides to seek aid from the residents of Gulos, they find Mayor Pragsmoor waiting at the city gates upon their return, as well as five **guards** (MM)
- If there are any maidens with the party, Pragsmoor insists they be turned over to the guards and reminds the party of their promised reward. If the party prove hesitant, he doubles the amount offered to them. If there are no maidens present, he instead demands a status update
- If questioned about the festival's true purpose, Pragsmoor appeals to the party's sense of 'the greater good,' insisting that the sacrifice of one for the prosperity of many is a sacrifice worth making
- If the party resists, Pragsmoor orders the guards to arrest the maidens and the party. 1d6 more guards arrive every three rounds (up to a maximum of fifty)
- Should the party be arrested, they are placed in the same cell as Adelaide, who helps them in any escape attempt however she can

Esuren Mountain

The foothills of Esuren Mountain is located right at the edge of Gulos. Residents avoid the mountain, as travelling onto it is seen as trespassing on Matre Moon's land. Despite this, Matre Moon keeps a variety of pets on the mountain to protect herself. The climb to Matre Moon's cave takes five hours from its base; for every hour of travel, **roll 1d6** against the random encounter table below (all creature statistics are in the Monster Manual).

1D6	Encounter
1	1d4 **blood hawks**
2	1d4 **manes**
3	2 **dretch**
4	2 **darklings**
5	3 **specters** of sacrificed maidens
6	1 **banshee** of a sacrificed maiden



If the party is traveling with Aeris, she knows of these threats. Any **Dexterity (Stealth), Wisdom (Perception) or Wisdom (Survival) checks** to track or avoid them are made with advantage.

Matre Moon

Assuming the party reaches Matre Moon's cave on the same day as the festival, they find her preparing for the ritual. If they arrive later, they run the risk of encountering her making her way down the mountain to see what has become of her sacrifice. She is repellant to look upon, with waxy, pale skin, oily black horns and numerous, spider-like eyes.

Matre Moon greets the party warmly at first, if they do not attack her outright. She attempts to appeal to their worst natures and offer them false promises in return for allowing the ritual to take place. The characters can also convince her to move on if they have any of the maidens with them, showing her that the young women of Gulos are no longer willing to be sacrificed. If this happens, she simply moves on to tormenting another society.

Aeris presses for a fight in either circumstance, and outright attacks the party if they allow Matre Moon to leave. If there are any maidens with the party, they will fight alongside Aeris but flee once they reach half of their hit points.

Tactics: In combat, Matre Moon uses *sleep* in the first round and attacks anyone awake afterwards, going first for characters she suspects to be healers or spellcasters. If she is reduced to less than 30 hit points, she uses plane shift to escape.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this adventure is highly dependent on the party's choices throughout.

If Matre Moon is killed or forced to flee, Gulos has to adjust to the risk that their city's prosperity may dwindle, and come to terms with the blood that has been on their hands for centuries. Mayor Pragsmoor is furious with the party for their choices and attempts to arrest them, but every maiden from Azealia Academy comes to speak to their defence.

If the party allows the ritual to proceed, the maidens of the academy rebel the following week and flee en masse from Gulos, aided by many of the city's former maidens and led by Adelaide.

Author's Notes/ Acknowledgments:

Society has a tendency of vilifying and commodifying both the Virgin and the Whore, especially when it comes to adolescents. I wanted to write an adventure that brings that commodification into stark light and allow the victims to take power back into their own hands.

Author Bio:

Liz (they/them) is a rebel enby who spends most of their free time illustrating, writing and editing TTRPG content. When they aren't, they're swearing about capitalism and the patriarchy on Twitter @ crit_liz.



Spring Soiled

Written by Blinne Emersyn

Levels: 5

SYNOPSIS

The sleepy farming village of Earthwell is in peril. Where other towns in the region are shaking off the last dregs of winter, here the frost has melted away to reveal the dead earth beneath. Water is becoming undrinkable as the rivers turn to sludge, and the crops aren't sprouting. Even more horrifying- some of the townsfolk have become inexplicably aggressive towards one another. The violence and pollution is spreading quickly. Soon enough Earthwell will be consumed, and other towns will fall victim to these same horrors. What is causing it? And more importantly, who can stop it?

ADVENTURE HOOK

- Earthwell typically holds a Spring Equinox festival but neighboring towns have received letters saying it has been cancelled with no explanation. This is concerning and warrants investigation.
- A hunter is worried about the river that runs through Earthwell into their town. They don't know why, but the water has wisps of sludge and smells… off. Whatever this pollution is, the hunter suspects it might be originating in Earthwell or further upriver.
- An acolyte from Earthwell has sent out a call to adventurers to investigate the strange circumstances plaguing her village. The notice promises a handsome reward of 400 gp.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The source of Earthwell's recent struggles is a vengeful demon known as Strychnos. After a quarrel with Verdana, the patron goddess of the town, they decided their best path of revenge would be to take away what she loves most: her people. Acting as a plague of pollution and rot upon Earthwell, Strychnos is slowly but surely choking the life out of all who live there, be it person, plant, or creature. The further the demon's influence spreads, the more crops die, water becomes undrinkable, and the people themselves turn against each other with chaotic violence. More than delighted to watch from afar and watch their devious poison work its way into Earthwell, Strychnos resides upriver, relishing in their evils and confident that none have the strength to stop them.

CHAPTER 1: A WELL RUNNING DRY

> Spring is fully upon the land, and you have been travelling past lush fields and burgeoning orchards on this riverside road. The sky is clear, and you can hear the soft rustling of the wind and chirping of birds. Gradually, however, the birdsong is lost on the wind, the trees turn barren, fields are nothing but dirt, and the water becomes murkier with each step. The change is so slow that you don't even properly notice until you come upon the tiny farming town of Earthwell. Everything is dulled with a purple-grey hue: the people, the plants, the creatures, even the sky. This is a land without spring.

Villagers of Earthwell

No one knows the truth of what is happening; they only have testimonials to offer the party in hopes that this deadly mystery can be solved. They can share the following information:

- When the winter ice melted away, no green sprouted to take its place. None of the newly planted crops have taken root either and foragers have found nothing in the small span of woods upriver
- People are running out of the last of their winter stores of food
- Everyone is agitated, so much so that fights have broken out. Three people have died from this unusual violence
- The water in the river and even the wells has turned a murky purple color, but no one has been able to pinpoint any side effects
- Creatures from the woods have been unusually aggressive and covered in pulsing purple veins

Disputes and Distrust

Roll on the table below to assign NPC behaviors:

D6	Behavior
1	Clearly day-drunk, they slur and flip words without noticing. They haven't had water since it started turning dark.
2	While speaking with the party a passerby bumps shoulders with them. They spin around in a frothing rage and begin to scream at and push the other villager until they turn back around and continue speaking as if nothing happened.
3	Their stomach keeps rumbling.
4	Although they started the conversation pleasantly, they become more and more snippy with each question they are asked until they storm off in a huff.
5	They keep scratching at their neck and forearms where their veins are purple and engorged. If pointed out to them, they shrug as if they had not noticed.
6	They interrupt the party after every other sentence, accusing them of various things, from killing the crops to trying to steal their precious food supply. Supremely paranoid, they offer no true information.

The Goddess' Call

After interacting with some of the NPCs, the party is approached by a person in a wheelchair decorated with flowers who introduces themself as Flo'riel (flow-ree-ell, spring eladrin **acolyte** (MM), they/them, neutral good). They have long braided green hair, are dressed in light flowing robes, and have a flower tattooed on one palm with a sun on the other. Whether the party came to town because of Flo'riel's call for help or not, they are immediately pegged as people who can help. Escorting the party to their temple for privacy, they share the following:

- They are an acolyte of Verdana (ver-DAHN-uh), the patron goddess of Earthwell, bringer of springtime, and grower of crops. A successful **DC 12 Intelligence (Religion) check** confirms this as well as reveals Verdana's symbol to be that of a flower in front of a sun, which is mirrored in Flo'riel's tattoos
- Something is blocking Verdana from bringing spring to Earthwell, but they don't know what. Whoever or whatever it is must be powerful
- The Spring Equinox Festival was cancelled because they lacked the resources to run it and worried about belligerent villagers attacking festival goers
- Five days ago, Flo'riel had a vision of the woods, dark with slouching trees, and a pool of purple sludge spreading slowly outwards until it covered all of Earthwell and then the lands beyond
- Given how long spring has been delayed, it's a matter of days before people start dying of hunger. Or, even worse, before people start killing each other for food
- Flo'riel begs the party to go into the woods to investigate their vision of the purple pool. They do not have much in the way of wealth, but they are certain that Verdana would grant a magnificent boon for saving Earthwell
- With a successful **DC 16 Wisdom (Insight) check**, it becomes clear that Flo'riel is hiding something. If asked, they reluctantly admit that they know that Verdana has had clashes with a demon in the past. They do not know for sure, or even the demon's name, but maybe they are the source of the pollution

Something in the Water

The water and land of Earthwell is polluted. If a character consumes any water from the village or surrounding area without first purifying it, they must make a **DC 15 Constitution saving throw**. On a success, nothing happens. If they fail, then they take -1 to all rolls for 24 hours, and their veins take on a slight purple tinge. If they drink more water after failing the save, they automatically take another -1 to their rolls which stacks on all previous penalties. For example, someone who drinks the water four times in one day that failed the first save now has -4 to all of their rolls.

Development

After speaking with the villagers and Flo'riel, the party makes their way into the woods, a two hour walk upriver.

CHAPTER 2: THE POISONED POOL

Sporting that same dulled purple hue as Earthwell, the woods appear less than friendly. Here the river is even darker than in the village, an unmistakably purple depth that winds into the trees ahead. As you enter the woods you are struck with how quiet it is. There isn't even wind to shift the branches of the leafless trees.

Tracking Flo'riel's Vision

In order to find the pool, the party must make a series of DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) checks. If the party uses the river as a guide, they have advantage on these checks. On a failed check, the party has a random encounter rolled on the table below. After four successful checks, they arrive at the pool.

D6	Encounter
1	Someone's foot gets stuck in a puddle that they realize to be not water but a purple sludge.
2	A stag runs out from the bushes with crazed eyes and covered in purple veins. Snorting frantically, it charges. The person in front must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw. On a success they dodge the stag. On a fail, they take 1d4 bludgeoning damage.
3	The party finds a bush that drips with purple sludge where its berry clusters once were.
4	The party spots footprints leading back towards Earthwell, the tracks of someone desperate for food.
5	The party finds the corpses of two animals, a fox and a skunk. Both are covered in purple veins and are covered in bites, each taken out of their flesh by the other creature.
6	A birds nest fallen from a high branch. The broken eggs are filled with purple sludge.

At first the ground just feels damp, but then it turns muddy, and suddenly there are deep puddles. The ground itself has become saturated with the pollution you have been tracking, and it has all led to this: a pool of purple sludge has taken over the center of these woods. It sinks the trees into its terrible muck and crosses directly over the river. You can see on the far side where the water runs clear before it becomes polluted. For a moment as you gaze over what Flo'riel described in their vision, all is completely still and silent. Then you hear it. Like pulling a boot out of mud, there is a loud squelching at the center of the pool as something emerges from the sludge, back first in a terrible hunch. As they straighten up suddenly their horribly visible vertebrae crack like broken branches, and they slowly turn their head over one shoulder to gaze upon you with red eyes. A voice sickly sweet as rotting fruit whispers to you over the pool, "You all must be very eager to die."

The Source

This is Strychnos (STRICK-nohs) (see Appendix A, they/them, chaotic evil). They can be recognized as a demon with a successful **DC 13 Intelligence (Arcana) check**. Frighteningly bony, their skin is the same purple as their sludge and their dark hair extends in matted tendrils that trail behind them. Strychnos taunts the party, implying their powerlessness against a demon's pollution. If asked about Verdana, they giggle and whisper that the goddess cannot save Earthwell after how she had wronged them. They do not initiate combat unless the party tries to leave or presses on about Verdana.

Tactics. Strychnos summons 4 sludges to surround the party. They function as **gelatinous cubes** (MM) with these changes:

- The sludges are purple
- They lack the Transparent feature

Strychnos sinks back into the sludge until all of their minions are killed.

Squelching out of the sludge, Strychnos' gaunt face is wrought with a hideous snarl. "This has all been taking too long anyways. I am going to destroy those foolish mortals and pollute the entire river until all those who live near it die at my hand. That will show her." They slink back into the sludge, and you are left alone in this polluted pool.

Development

As Strychnos flees back to Earthwell, the party follows.

CHAPTER 3: HOSTAGE GAMES

The chaos is well underway by the time you make it back to Earthwell. Massive trails of purple sludge mix with the crimson of fresh blood in the footworn streets. In front of the temple of Verdana, Strychnos is crouched horribly over the form of Flo'riel curled on the ground, their wheelchair tipped over to the side. At your approach the demon whips their face towards you, hair splattering more of their pollution across the temple. With a flick of their wrist, villagers stumble towards you, fists and makeshift weapons raised, with pulsing veins of purple and glazed eyes.

The approaching villagers are under Strychnos' thrall and are unaware of what is happening. All they know is that the party is the enemy. With a successful **DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check**, the party can see that Flo'riel is just barely clinging to life.

Tactics. Strychnos sends 8 villagers (**commoners**, MM) stumbling towards the party along with 2 sludges (gelatinous cubes) that form out of the pools of pollution. After 3 rounds of combat, Strychnos joins. Once they reach 10 or fewer hit points, they attempt to bargain with Flo'riel's life.

Attempting to intimidate the party into leaving Earthwell, Strychnos threatens to murder Flo'riel before their eyes. The party may proceed however they choose, but if they continue their attack the demon attempts to drown the acolyte with their sludge. Characters within 10 feet of Strychnos can make a **DC 17 Dexterity check** using their reaction. On a success, they stop the pollution from being forced into Flo'riel. If they fail, Flo'riel is killed. Combat then resumes.

Development

If Flo'riel lives, proceed to Conclusion A.
If Flo'riels dies, proceed to Conclusion B.

CONCLUSION A

In the silence following the battle, it feels as if the whole world has stopped. Then, softly, Flo'riel coughs as they come to consciousness. Eyes wide in confusion and worry at the destruction of their little village, all they can do is whisper, "Verdana do not forsake us." Once they grasp the situation at hand, Flo'riel tearfully thanks you and Verdana for sending you to Earthwell. A warm yellow glow fills the temple, and inside a pearl ring wreathed in tiny vines and flowers is resting on the altar. This is Verdana's gift in thanks. Flo'riel goes about the village gathering those left alive and relatively well to gather the sick and dead to be cared for. Ever so slowly, the purple sludge turns to puddles of water on the street. Spring is finally coming to Earthwell.

CONCLUSION B

For a moment after the destruction of Strychnos, Earthwell is utterly still and silent. Then the rustle of villagers regaining consciousness and shuffling out of their hiding places builds into wails for the dead. Flo'riel's body lies curled on the steps of Verdana's temple, hands cupped in front of their chest with the flower tattoo over the sun. A warm yellow glow suddenly fills the temple and, on the altar within, there lies a pearl ring wreathed in tiny vines and flowers. In your minds you hear a whisper as gentle as the spring wind, "Thank you." This is Verdana's gift. Outside, the villagers are sorrowfully trying to care for their sick and dead. Ever so slowly, the purple sludge turns to puddles of water on the street. Spring is finally coming to Earthwell.

Rewards

Characters who complete this adventure may earn the following rewards:

XP Rewards

ENCOUNTER	XP
Per Sludge	450 xp
Per Commoner	10 xp
Strychnos	2,300 xp

Treasure Rewards

Regardless of the fate of Flo'riel, Verdana bestows a boon upon the party; a *ring of acid resistance*.

Author's Notes/ Acknowledgments:

It was so great to work again with my Uncaged family! I am still not sure where the inspiration came from but I have enough pictures on my moodboard to prove a fascination with pollution and how, despite its horrid nature, it can almost look like art. I would like to thank my partner for his support in my writing and Nichole Wilkinson whose art of Strychnos brought this silly little adventure to life.

Author Bio:

When not wearing their fingers to the bone on a new writing project, Blinne Emersyn can be found buried nose first in books of folklore and a fine glass of whiskey. They can be reached at @ blinnebee on Twitter.

Strychnos

Medium aberration, chaotic evil

Armor Class 17
Hit Points 75 (10d10 + 20)
Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	12 (+1)	14(+2)	13(+1)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)

Saving Throws Con +5
Skills Intimidation +5, Perception +5
Damage Resistances Bludgeoning, Piercing, and Slashing from Nonmagical Attacks
Senses Darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15
Languages Common, Abyssal
Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Innate Spellcasting. Strychnos' innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 13). They can innately cast the following spells:

3/day: *acid arrow*
1/day: *vitriolic sphere*

Amphibious. Strychnos can breathe air and water.

One with the Sludge. Strychnos slips into their pollution and effectively disappears. While within the pollution, they cannot be hit, targeted with any spells, or tracked. They also gain the ability to move up to 60 ft. per round, allowing them to travel great distances if connected by their pollution, whether it be in one pool or along a whole body of water that is afflicted by the sludge.

Actions

Multiattack. Strychnos makes two attacks with their claws.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 15 (3d6 + 5) slashing damage.

Enveloping Sludge. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 36 (9d6 + 5) bludgeoning damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 15) if it is a Large or smaller creature. Until the grapple ends, the target takes 8 (1d6 + 5) bludgeoning damage and 36 (9d6 + 5) acid damage at the start of each of the Strychnos' turns. They can't make attacks while grappling a creature in this way.



Revolution in Bloom

Written by Alicia Furness

Levels: 5

Content Warnings: environmental destruction, plant/human hybrid bodies

SYNOPSIS

As the region wakes from its winter slumber, the town of Khalin remains unheard from. Attempts to reach the town are blocked by massive, twisted roots and vines, nearly impossible to cut through. The town is a large industrial centre, and the small villages around it depend on it for vital resources of metals and coins. The party must venture into the overgrown town and discover what prevents it from communicating with the rest of the world. What they find is something that no one would have expected.

ADVENTURE HOOK

The party has most likely been hired by one of the small villages to investigate. They might have learned about the situation while travelling through one of the small villages, or are even residents in one of the villages that has put together a group to investigate.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Khalin is the economic powerhouse of the region. It is particularly well known for its production of colourful dyes that it creates from the beautiful and unique flora that grow around the town. As the reputation of the dyes grew, the town chose to increase production to keep up with demand. After significantly reducing the wild population of flowers and plants, producers in Khalin turned to creating vast fields of genetically modified flora. They produce thousands of larger, brighter, more fragrant specimens. While this satisfied the demand, it has devastated the local wild plants and flowers, along with the wildlife that lived in harmony with them.

Over the winter, the town was visited by a celestial being, a young kirin, who watches over and blesses the land. The kirin, distraught at the destruction that Khalin has wrought on the environment, sought to show the village how to live in harmony with nature. Her attempts to bring the village and the land into harmony have had an unintentional consequence: the villagers of Khalin have begun to morph into humanoid-plant hybrids, and plant growth has accelerated, taking over the town.

Now, Khalin is divided into two factions, those who have embraced harmony with nature, and those who will do anything to undo the kirin's magic.

CHAPTER 1: ENTER KHALIN

Find a way into Khalin and explore the town.

A Road Less Travelled

> The road leading to Khalin is surprisingly quiet. For such an important village, there is no one on the road traveling to or from, and it looks like few people have tried since the snow has melted. The smell of spring lingers on the air, stale mud mingles with the scent of fresh green growth. When the wind picks up, the faint scent of cherry blossoms blows from the direction of Khalin.

As the party moves close to Khalin, the trees and plants intensify. Bare twigs and vines covered in buds and spring growth snake up the road, twist around trees, and the foliage and trees and become significantly denser. It's not long before the road is completely covered, and the characters are faced with a wall of plants that seem impossible to pass. The area is under the effect of plant growth. Creatures moving through this area spend 4 feet of movement for every 1 foot they move. Casting enlarge/reduce or a similar to spell

to shrink the plant growth allows characters to travel increase their movement to half their walking speed. Characters may also hack their way through the plants using sharp weapons with a successful **DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check**.

The plant overgrowth continues for 100 feet, before it tapers off and the characters can see Khalin.

Khalin Awakens

Khalin is a picturesque town, almost too beautiful for words. Built around a rocky hill, with streams that weave throughout the town, filled with cherry trees and vibrant flowers exclusive to the region, Khalin looks like a painting. Several small wooden bridges allow residents to easily cross the streams, and the buildings rooftop gardens give the appearance that nature is perfectly entwined with the village.

> Despite initial appearances, not all of Khalin is at-one with nature. To the north of Khalin lies the industrial part of town. Nature here is less prominent, with large machines and warehouse buildings. Beyond, acres and acres of fields, perfectly laid out and groomed for industrial harvesting of flowers dominate the landscape. Industrial waste collects in a large vat. A close inspection reveals

As characters enter town, their attention might be drawn to the large colourful plants that have burst open with the spring. They are a dazzling array of colours. A character who moves within 5 feet of one of the flowers must succeed on a **DC 16 Charisma saving throw** or be compelled to touch the plant. A character who touches a flower receives a temporary boon as outlined below:

- **Purple Flower** - A creature who touches a purple flower is granted the speech of leaf and beast feature (firbolg race, VGtM). This boon lasts for 3 days
- **Yellow Flower**- A creature who touches a yellow flower can cast entangle twice per long rest. The spell save for this spell is 14. This boon lasts for 5 days
- **Red Flower**- A creature who touches a red flower gains access to the druidcraft cantrip, even if they cannot otherwise cast spells. This boon lasts for 3 days
- **Blue Flower**- A creature who touches a blue flower is gifted with heightened arcane senses. They gain advantage to arcana checks related to plants and nature. This boon lasts for 7 days

At first glance the town appears empty, however a successful **DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation) check** reveals movement in the bushes. If the characters succeed and identify the movement, a half-human half-plant creature emerges from the bush. The creature has a humanoid form, but her hair has turned to vines and a glimmering moss snakes over her limbs and torso. She approaches the group cautiously, and asks how they managed to enter Khalin.

The creature is **Hyeon** (human-plant hybrid, **druid** (MM), she/her, chaotic good), a resident of Khalin. If the characters are polite and ask questions, Hyeon has the following information:

- No one has been able to access the town since the fall
- With spring has come a rapid expansion of nature into town
- Some residents have begun to mutate into plant hybrids
- She believes that it is a sign from the gods that Khalin needs to live in harmony with nature, but not everyone agrees
- Hyeon's mutation began about 4 weeks ago, and it doesn't harm her. Since it happened, she feels an even stronger connection to the plants around Khalin
- Some residents who haven't mutated have run away and secluded themselves in the northern part of town in order to 'protect themselves' from the mutating residents

If the party remains respectful and non-aggressive, Hyeon invites them to explore Khalin, but cautions them not to disrupt or harm the plants or nature in any way. Key locations and NPCs the characters can interact with are outlined in Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 2 – Truth, Uncovered

Explore Khalin and gather information about what has transpired and the two factions.

The Greenhouse

> Cherry trees line the path to the greenhouse. Dense condensation on the windows makes it impossible to see in, but the joyful shrieks of children inside draw your attention. Inside the greenhouse, plants cover every possible surface, even vining up the walls and onto the ceiling. Huge colourful flowers burst from every nook and cranny. An elderly dragonborn with long white hair watches with joyful children as a pure silver flower opens a bud and releases a puff of purple mist.

The green house is where Khalin grows some of its most prized specimens. Nobles and rich business owners who wanted to flash their money could request dyes made from the rare plants inside the greenhouse.

The greenhouse is overseen by **Papa Lo**, an elderly gold dragonborn (dragonborn **druid**, MM, he/him, lawful good). He has looked after the greenhouse his whole life and now teaches his

grandchildren the art of caring for the rare plants. Papa Lo has the following information:

- He used to work in the fields, but he grew disillusioned with the lack of respect shown to the plants that gave Khalin its livelihood, so he took up work in the greenhouse exclusively
- He has not experienced the mutation, but he feels more compelled to care for the plants. He no longers wants to exploit them for dyes, but instead turn the greenhouse into a museum of rare plants to be cherished and protected
- Lo's sister, Lallin, is leading the group of unmutated residents who have moved to the northern part of town. He worries she is gearing up for violence in order to return the town to the status quo

The General Store

The general store is a small simple building that supplies residents of Khalin with fabrics, home goods, mail, and various other accoutrements. Called House of Potts, the store is run by a fat, elderly, green kobold named **Mrs. Potts** (kobold, **commoner**, MM, she/her, neutral good).

At the general store characters can stock up on basic gear, food, and supplies. Additionally, a successful **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check** reveals a *bag of beans* (DMG). Mrs. Potts will sell the bag of beans for 10gp, and refuses to negotiate.

Mrs. Potts knows the following information:

- Some of the people who have mutated have developed magical powers
- Plants have grown larger and more colourful than usual this spring
- No one has become ill or passed away from disease since the mutations or the plant growth began

The Hot Springs

The hot springs are the hub of Khalin. Situated on the West part of town, there are a couple dozen residents hanging around enjoying the natural hot spring formation. Some are soaking in the water, some are laying in the lush grass nearby, and some are participating in group meditation practice.

Most of the people at the hot springs show signs of plant mutation. Some are covered in moss, some have hair that has turned to vines, and some have sprouted flowers from the top of their heads. Someone in particular catches the party's eye, a young half-elf teenager, who is sprouting long, gangly vines from the joints of their arms, playing with a small group of children. He approaches the group cautiously, wanting to know if they belong to "those jerks who hide in the warehouse."

If the players confirm that they do not belong to the faction in the warehouse, the boy warmly introduces himself as Lahano (half-elf-plant hybrid, commoner, he/him, lawful good).

What Lahano knows:

- A strange creature moved into the hills in the fall, described as being a shimmering silver horse/dragon/unicorn hybrid
- Children keep sneaking to the hills to try and glimpse the creature. Each time, they return with a plant mutation
- There are rumours that the unmutated folks in the warehouse are going to launch an attack on the creature in order to stop the mutations
- He would like the adventurers to investigate the rumours about the creature in the hills, and protect

Once the group has explored the town and gathered information about what's been going on, one of the NPCs they have interacted with begs them to confront the people at the Warehouse, if they haven't already.

The Warehouse

> Looking at the warehouse, it's hard to believe that it wasn't abandoned years ago. The windows are boarded up, debris is scattered around the perimeter to be used as defences, and anti-mutation graffiti is sprayed all over the walls. Two large guards look you over as your approach. You are allowed through once its clear that none of you exhibit signs of mutation.

The warehouse is in the more industrialized part of town. Once used to reduce the vibrant flowers to dyes before they were exported for sale, the warehouse is now home to a group of Khalin residents who have not mutated. In total, about 50 residents have taken up the warehouse as their base. The leader is an aggressive, self-aggrandizing human woman named **Trask** (human **veteran**, MM, she/her, lawful evil), who loathes the recent changes to Khalin.



Trask has the following information:

- The changes to Khalin have made the economy completely unstable, and people are losing their income and security
- The plant mutants want to destroy Kahlin and rebuild it, even if the non mutants don't want that
- The town is surrounded by violent, killer plants. Trask believes that they are designed to keep people trapped in the town until everyone becomes a plant mutant and that they are controlled by a monster in the hills
- She will pay handsomely if the adventurers deal with the violent plants in the hills, so that the warehouse faction can confront the monster that caused this

Trask is set in her ways, and refuses to back down on confronting the creature in the hills. If the characters try to negotiate with her on behalf of the plant hybrids, a successful **DC 12 Charisma (Persuasion) check** convinces her to wait until the adventurers scope out the creature first.

Development

Once the characters have all the information, they move on to investigating the rumours, either of the violent plants, or of the creature in the hills. Both of these rumours take the characters to the base of the hills outside of town.

CHAPTER 3: FATE DECIDED UPON THE HILLS

Head to the hills and discover the truth.

Just as it was on the way in, the path to the hills is significantly overgrown with new plant growth.

If the characters are sympathetic to the plant-hybrids, the growth fades away as they travel through it.

If they are sympathetic to the warehouse faction, it remains difficult terrain and must be cut down or reduced with magic, just as when the party entered town.

The hills outside Kahlin are home to a **kirin** (VGtM), and are magically empowered by their lair. The following regional effects are in play:

- Animals, plants and good creatures within three miles of the kirin's lair gain vigor as they evolve toward an idealized form. Such creatures are rarely aggressive toward others and aren't normally prey
- A kirin can cast control weather within three miles of its lair. The spell's point of origin is always the point outdoors closest to the center of its lair. The kirin doesn't need to maintain a clear path to the sky or to concentrate for the change in weather to persist
- Water flows pure within three miles of the lair. Any purposeful corruption of the waters lasts for no longer than three minutes

The Garden

Once the characters have travelled through the growth that surrounds the mile perimeter around the kirin's lair, the space opens up into a beautiful garden. The garden space is filled with beautiful tree statues, large bright flower blooms, and an alluring scent.

If the characters are sympathetic to the plant hybrid people, they can pass through the garden with little issue. A successful **DC 16 Intelligence (investigation) or (nature) check** reveals the presence of plant creatures. There are 2 **wood woads** (VGtM) posing as tree statues, 3 **tri-flower fronds** (ToA), and a **Yellow Musk Creeper** (ToA). If the characters intend to harm the creature in the hills (the kirin), or if they enact harm on any plant in the garden, the sentient plants above attack the party. A character who isn't aware of the sentient plants' presence is surprised.

Plants that attack the characters will do everything in their power to block the characters from progressing. To increase the difficulty of the encounter, you can make the garden difficult terrain as a result of the plant overgrowth, add more plants, or have vines attempt to restrain the characters.

A character who is killed in the garden is reabsorbed into the earth, and birthed as a new sentient plant.

The Lair

Characters who are allowed to pass through the garden, or who fight their way through, find themselves in a paradise. A beautiful serene pool, cherry blossom trees, and all manner of beautiful flowers, plants, trees and shrubs adorn the space. The sunlight sparkles off every surface. A large, silver horse-like creature emerges from the pool, and is easily recognized as the creature described by Lahano and the children.

The kirin is **Wayu**, a relatively young creature, eager to make the world a better place, but lacking a strong understanding of how non-celestial creatures live or what drives them. Wayu saw the damage being wrought by the increasingly industrialized town, and believed that they could improve the residents' relationship with nature.

If the characters arrived with the intention to confront the kirin on behalf of the warehouse faction, Wayu explains why they moved in and will try to de-escalate the situation. Wayu only responds aggressively if outright attacked. It should be telegraphed to the characters that the kirin is extremely powerful, and violence

is most likely to result in their loss. Wayu will participate in a battle only until it is reduced to half its hit points, at which point they flee.

If the characters are investigating on behalf of the plant hybrids, the kirin explains what drew them to Khalin. A successful **DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check** convinces the kirin to expand the hybridization to the warehouse folks, in order to bring them on board with the idea of reverting back to a less industrialized state. The kirin is hesitant, preferring not to violate consent, but a strong argument in favour of the environment will convince them.

Characters who are neutral may negotiate with the kirin. This should be encouraged with creative roleplaying. Characters can present a plan for town unification that supports Khalin's economy while also putting in place environmental protections. They could also request that the kirin help find a suitable home for one of the factions, so the other can live in peace.

Development

When the characters have settled their interaction with Wayu, move to the conclusion.

CONCLUSION

If all the characters were killed in battle in the garden or by Wayu:
The characters become sentient plants in Wayu's garden. They are swayed to Wayu's arguments and are put to work defending the lair. If the characters never return to address the warehouse faction, Trask leads an attack on Wayu and their lair. They are all slaughtered, either in the garden or by Wayu, and Khalin becomes completely integrated with nature. All of the citizens become plant hybrids, and the plants around the town grow so thick that no outsiders can access the town ever again.

If the characters negotiated with Wayu:
They can take their proposal back to both the plant hybrids and the warehouse faction. A successful **DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check** convinces both factions that the plan will work. Trask oversees the warehouse faction, and Hyeon leads the plant hybrid faction.

If the characters killed Wayu:
With nothing more to fear, Trask leads her group in an attack against the plant hybrids. The plant-human hybrids are chased off or killed, and Trask and her group work to restore Khalid to its former glory. As years pass, the environmental devastation around Khalin increases, until finally the town has done so much damage that they cannot produce their dyes, and they face total economic collapse.

Rewards

If using XP, characters earn XP for each creature successfully defeated or negotiated with.

If the characters end on good terms with Wayu, they grant a *staff of flowers*, a *staff of bird calls*, and 1 *potion of greater healing* (each located in the DMG).

If the characters end on good terms with the plant hybrid faction, they each receive a valuable pot of ethically harvested dye, worth 500 gp.

If the characters end on good terms with Trask, she offers a favour: if the characters are ever in need of backup, she can lend them 3 mercenaries to assist in their task.

Author's Notes/ Acknowledgments:

I am obsessed with houseplants, and when conceptualizing this adventure, I wanted to bring in the idea of how adaptable plants can be. The idea of plant-human hybrids, who were changing and adapting to their environment was what I hooked on to. I wanted to contrast that with an idea of people set in their ways, unwilling to change even when confronted with the violent reality of their beliefs. Environmentalism and questions of who and what have rights under capitalism are lingering themes in the background of this adventure.

Author Bio:

Alicia lives in the frozen north with her partner and 2 cats. She makes games about feminism, queer identity, revolution, and social justice. She has over 50 houseplants, and too many opinions on twitter @aliciafurness. Shout at her there to talk plants, feminism, and RPGs.


10.2019
JOHANNA MATION

Dancing Queen

Written by Mellanie Black

Levels: 6

Content Warnings: exhaustion, starvation, implied harm to animals

SYNOPSIS

Copernicus Wretch, a ranger in the Elfar Forest, has lost her griffin companion, Quill. The people of Elfar Gate are ordinarily only too happy to help a ranger in need, but when she sought their aid, she was met with suspicion, panic and fear.

The annual dance around the Verdant Spire to welcome the coming of spring and brighter days was meant to conclude a week ago. The revels have continued, however, as dancers have been unable to stop, and what's more - others are regularly compelled to join them. Attempting to speak to those still dancing produces mixed results.

The few able healers in the town are occupied with trying to rejuvenate the dancers, who range in age from toddlers to the elderly. They are at constant risk of exhaustion or even death. The townsfolk are taking turns to walk amongst the dancers, risking being taken themselves, to provide sustenance to those desperately dancing around the spire.

Copernicus has pledged to help this small town that has so often helped her and try to avoid the curse while she does.

ADVENTURE HOOK

- **One of Us.** One of the characters is an old friend of Copernicus Wretch and owes her a great debt. She sends word that her griffin is missing and to meet her in the town of Elfar Gate.
- **I Have a Dream.** A character who is particularly in tune with nature or a higher power receives word in a vision or dream that something is terribly wrong in a small town called Elfar Gate.
- **S.O.S.** The characters meet an escapee from the town on the road. They describe the events of the spring dance and beg the characters to intervene.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The people of Elfar Gate gathered for their usual dance to welcome spring. They danced around a huge tower of green marble on the main street of the town. Flowers were thrown as people of all ages wound ribbons and vines around the spire. This year, however, most of the dancers couldn't stop. It has been almost ten days and those who survive are bloody and exhausted, nearing breaking point due to exhaustion. The Women's Council of the town has set up constant watches to help keep them fed and hydrated, but many are afraid to help because some of the helpers have been drawn into the endless dance too.

CHAPTER 1: ON AND ON AND ON...

The characters arrive to a scene of organized chaos on Elfar Gate's main street.

Read this text to characters as they arrive in town:

> A large spire of greenish marble dominates the wide, long street. Steady streams of people carry water and small bread rolls to dancers holding ribbons around the pole. However, these dancers are haggard, bleeding and limping, many of them hanging onto their ribbons for support as they stagger around the pole, seemingly unable to stop. Women are jogging around to hold water flasks to their lips and hand them rolls of bread stuffed with cheese and meat.

As the characters near the maypole, a woman dressed in practical hunting leathers approaches and introduces herself as Copernicus Wretch (half-elf **archer** (VGtM), she/her, neutral good). She explains that she came to the village for help with her missing griffin, but ended up trying to help the desperate situation here.

Constant vigilance. Copernicus warns the characters to beware, or else they will be dragged into the dance. Characters must make a **DC16 Wisdom saving throw** or be compelled to use all of their movement to dance for one hour. At the end of the hour, they must make the saving throw again or be compelled to dance for another hour. Success ends the effect. After every hour, the character takes a point of exhaustion.

Stop the music. A successful **DC 18 Intelligence (Arcana) check** reveals that moving compelled characters more than 100ft away from the Verdant Spire breaks the effect of the spell. This ceases to be effective for people who have been under the spell's effect for more than 12 hours.

A place to stay. A group of people are working to organize efforts to aid the stricken dancers and get to the bottom of the issue at The Eagle Tavern. The tavern is directly opposite the Verdant Spire and offers a good viewpoint. The leader, Tala Gill (half elf **commoner** (MM), she/her, neutral good), offers the characters rooms for free if they agree to help her.

The unending task. The characters may sign up to assist those helping the dancers. Katy Tungren, Lyla Smart and Uma Tywin (all true neutral human commoners) happily show them their duties. Taking night shifts to help in this way means it takes 12 hours to get the benefits of a long rest.

Development

- If they choose to stay at the Eagle Tavern or help the stricken dancers, the characters encounter Spooky Joyce.
- If they choose to stay elsewhere, the characters encounter the dryads.

CHAPTER 2: THE VISITORS

The characters' first evening in Elfar Gate is eventful and offers clues as to how to end the dancers' plight.

The Gospel of Spooky Joyce

As night falls, a commotion occurs outside the Eagle Tavern. It is loud enough to wake the characters if they have chosen to sleep rather than take shifts to help the dancers.

> Tala Gill is trying to restrain a heavily cloaked woman who is calling out indistinctly. Eventually, the woman breaks free, and turns to the characters, pointing a finger with many rings at the nearest person.
>
> "She mourns! She cries! She cannot accept what has become. They ruled as one, but now she grieves...as one. The dancing won't stop until her heart is healed...or broken. Face her if you dare, or as well join the dance for like your guilt it will never fade."

Tala Gill apologizes for Spooky Joyce (human **commoner** (MM), she/her, chaotic neutral) and tries to send her on her way unless the characters intervene. Joyce is happy to leave, having delivered her message.

- Joyce reveals that she is compelled to share her visions, or else be plagued by vile headaches
- She has dreamed about a terrible heartbreak and a cruel woman. She also sees a lot of trees, so she assumes the forest is involved, raising her arm to point to the Elfar Forest as she says this

Soldiers

While the dancers continue their unwilling procession overnight, some fey creatures make their way into Elfar Gate.

Area

Dimensions. The streets of Elfar Gate are around 30ft wide, and the buildings are 40ft tall.
Light. Orange lamps cast the streets in dim light.

Creatures

Soldiers of the forest. A group of creatures is skulking through the streets of Elfar Gate. Six **dryads** (MM) and three **redcaps** (VGtM) are headed towards where the dancers are held in their procession.

- If the characters aren't staying in the Eagle Tavern or helping with the dancers, they hear the laughter of the dryads and the stomping boots of the redcaps as they pass through the streets.
- If the characters are in the Eagle Tavern or helping with the dancers, they are attracted by screams and alarm as the creatures enter the main street where they clearly intend to go after the dancers.
- The redcaps and dryads carry thin staffs of wood, bound with vines and woodland flowers. They jab and

tease passers-by, demanding that they dance. They cackle as people stumble and flail in their panic. If the characters do not intervene they become increasingly violent.

- If the characters do not aid her, Copernicus Wretch intervenes, joined by a few **bandits** out on their nightly business.

If the characters intervene, read the below. If they do not, have them hear it paraphrased second-hand the next day from Copernicus Wretch.

> The procession of fey creatures is led by a particularly gnarled looking redcap. He sneers as people jump out of the way of his cane, and occasionally jabs with his sickle too.
>
> "Queen Ara Omaris would have you dance, and you will dance," he calls to the streets at large.

This **redcap** (VGtM) is named Bloodboots. If captured, he speaks reluctantly only of revenge in the form of an endless revel worthy of his queen. He will die before he divulges anything else.



Development

Spooky Joyce's words and the appearance of dryads and redcaps lead Copernicus Wretch to suggest heading into the forest at the earliest opportunity. She believes they will find the solution to the problem there.

Chapter 3: The Dancing Queen

The characters head into Elfar Forest to investigate the strange happenings in Elfar Gate. Copernicus insists on accompanying them. She has one potion of healing to be used in case of emergencies.

Orc Eyes

While heading into the forest, the characters overhear loud, argumentative voices. Anybody who can understand Orc overhears the following:

> "Shut up, Grommush. I told you it wasn't my fault."
>
> "Whatever, Gork. I knew you were a terrible war chief. I don't know what Gremla was thinking."
>
> "She was thinking, Grommush, that you needed oversight. You can't go leaving survivors around like that."
>
> "I notice her royal highness is still alive."
>
> "Yeah well, you weren't much more useful. I didn't see you get anywhere near her."
>
> "Well, I didn't want to shame the tribe by DANCING."
>
> "Cowardice shames the tribe just as much as...what was that?"

A small orc warband is making its way through the forest, comprising of two **orc warchiefs** (MM), an orc **Eye of Gruumsh** (MM), and six **orcs** (MM). The two warchiefs are the ones talking.

If they encounter the party, they attack, thirsty for blood to fix their bruised pride.

Copernicus can speak Orc and translates their conversation with a great deal of mirth after the encounter. Any characters that speak Orc can use their turn to persuade the warband to

pass them by. A **DC 16 Charisma (Persuasion) or Charisma (Intimidation) check** can be used to this effect. The check is made with disadvantage if the party member does not speak Orc.

Honey, Honey

The player with the lowest passive perception steps onto a beehive and is attacked by 4 **swarms of insects** (MM). While the bees attack effectively, the character with the highest passive perception notices after the encounter that the bees were humming melodically, and seemed to swarm in pleasing formations.

A successful **DC 18 Wisdom (Nature) or Wisdom (Animal Handling) check** allows the characters to follow other signs of small wildlife affected almost imperceptibly by the same magic that has affected the people of Elfar Gate. This allows them to find Queen Ara Amaris a couple of hours sooner.

Queen Ara Amaris

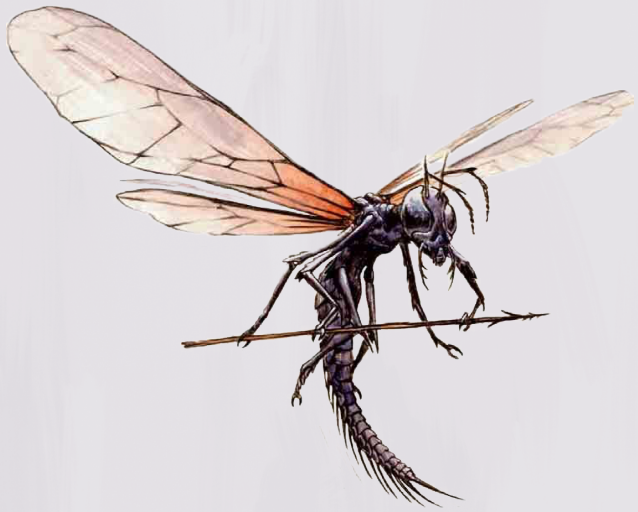
After about half a day's journey into the forest, the characters hear cruel laughter and a piece of strange, haunting music. If they move forward without stealth, they are immediately accosted by 4 **dryads** and 2 **redcaps** who appear from the trees. If they succeed on a group **DC 14 Dexterity (Stealth) check** they may approach the clearing without being spotted.

If the characters battle with the redcaps and dryads, the Queen calls on them to stop and come to speak with her. Her minions obey and go to her side. Copernicus Wretch urges the characters to do the same and learn what they can about the situation. The villagers deserve an explanation, she reasons.

Read this to the characters as the near the clearing:

> A large clearing opens out suddenly in the forest. Dappled sunlight falls onto a pale green meadow. About two dozen humanoids of every type, from bugbears to gnomes to humans to half-elves cavort in a circular dance. A griffin also appears to be held in the spectacle. Illusory ball gowns and finery flicker about their forms, small dancing lights swirling about them as they dance.
>
> In the middle of the circle a regal, green-skinned woman, dressed in silks and leathers of bright, leaf green laughs and cackles as they stumble and twirl to her whims.

- The woman introduces herself as Queen Ara Amaris. She rules a small nation in the Feywild, but she and her consort, Taranath, used to come to Elfar Forest for balls that lasted the entirety of spring
- She is curious as to why the characters are here
- She inquires as to whether they were the ones who destroyed the friends she sent into Elfar Gate



- She wants to recreate the balls she and Taranath used to throw before he abandoned her. When she speaks of the 'abandonment' her skin flashes briefly yellow
- She could not resist the dance around the Verdant Spire and thinks the villagers should be grateful for their everlasting dance. She gestures to her 'happy dancers' as she says this
- A successful **DC 12 Wisdom (Insight) check** reveals that Queen Ara Amaris is vain and susceptible to flattery

If the characters attack the Queen, the dryads and redcaps also join the fray. They are not cautious about catching the dancing commoners in the crossfire.

If the characters try to persuade the Queen to leave they need to make a successful **DC 25 Charisma (Intimidation) or Charisma (Persuasion) check**. For every gift of value they give her the DC will lower by 5, and all combined compliments and flattery lower by 3 to a minimum of 18.

Development

If Queen Ara Amaris is slain, the dancers in the clearing immediately stop. They are exhausted and many are too weak to leave the forest unassisted. Healing magic, Lesser Restoration or simply a long rest brings most of them back to health.

If the Queen is spared, many townsfolk (mostly those forced to dance) are enraged and on return to the town petition Tala Gill to make the characters unwelcome. How Tala reacts to this depends entirely on the characters' other interactions. Copernicus may leap to their defense, giving advantage on a successful **DC 18 Charisma (Persuasion) check**, or she may point out that the Queen made no promises to cease her festivities, and has only taken them elsewhere. This imposes disadvantage.

CONCLUSION

Copernicus immediately heals her griffin with a special blend of herbs and uses it to carry the exhausted dancers back to Eldar Gate for healing, food, and assistance to find their way home.

The characters meet the leader of the Women's Circle in a private room at the Eagle Tavern. They explain what happened with the assistance of Copernicus Wretch. Enraged townsfolk (neutral good, **commoners**) join them to complain if Queen Ara Amaris was allowed to live.

> Tala listens with great interest and consternation and hears everybody out before speaking.
>
> "The Elfar Forest has long been a mystery we were happy to let lie. A child could tell you that the name belies fey roots, but we have failed to unearth them, to our great cost. We would be grateful for any assistance you can give in strengthening our knowledge. Of course we must reward your efforts so far, as is proper. Let us see what we can find in our archives. We must have something befitting your status."

Additional Adventure Hooks:

Tala Gill has many leads to offer the players in learning more about the fey origins of The Elfar Gate.

- A mysterious script is carved behind the wallpaper of some of the town's more ancient buildings. It is Sylvan, and will lead the characters to an elven wizard with more than history books in his inventory
- A sentient weapon lies in the town's archives. It yells its need for vengeance against a Phoenix that dwells in the mountains to the south. It is chaotic good, and will provide directions and a promise of treasure, should the characters lend it aid. The sentient weapon is a +1 martial weapon of your choice. It has normal vision and hearing to 30ft, and speaks, reads and understands common and elven.
- Copernicus Wretch is appointed Chief Ranger of the Elfar Gate and requires assistance in clearing out the forest of some of its more dangerous quarry. Perhaps the characters can help with an evil archdruid or a dire troll that's ripping up trees and smashing new recruits

Rewards

If the townsfolk are all pleased with the characters, Tala Gill awards the characters:

- 7 gems worth a total of 500gp
- 1 Vorpal Sword which has lain in the archives for more than a century

If they are not, characters receive only the gems OR the sword. If the townsfolk are extremely enraged, you can choose simply to have her point them in the direction of treasure with the sentient weapon adventure hook (above).

Author's Notes/ Acknowledgments:

This adventure is a tribute to the everyday heroism of women's work. The Women's Council aid those stricken by the curse, mitigating an even greater disaster. The world tells us to look for the helpers for hope. So often those helpers are women. I also love an opportunity for disproportionate fey tricksiness , and the stomp of a redcaps' boots just makes me happy. I hope your adventures in Elfar Gate are thrilling, and that you remember the women.

Author Bio:

Mellanie Black is a bestselling, ENnie-award-nominated TTRPG writer from Newcastle-upon-Tyne in England. She believes in D&D inclusivity and homebrews a special place in the Nine Hells for gatekeepers. She's a feminist, fantasy writer, infernal enthusiast, and aspiring elf. You can find her over on Twitter @MissBox.



The Lies We Tell Ourselves

Written by Anthony Beal

Levels: 7-8

Content Warnings: child endangerment and death

SYNOPSIS

On the eve of the Spring Equinox, two desperate souls need help to end a heartbreaking curse. With help from an estranged brother, an archfey, and a silver dragon egg, they must lift the curse before midnight on the equinox or it will remain forever.

ADVENTURE HOOK

The town of Ennsmark can be inserted into any adventure. As it is a small town, the party may run across it in their travels or merchants who had passed through Ennsmark may share stories of the silver beast roaming outside and the bounty from the mayor.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Remember that this is intended to be a love story, one that can end in tragedy or happily ever after. It might be easy to slip into a thematically dark telling of this story, and you certainly can, but it is intended to be much lighter, like the first days of spring.

There are several tales of love in this story including romance shared by Iris and Sybilla who are star-crossed lovers separated by a terrible curse, Nathaniel's platonic love for both his sister and Sybilla, finally, the love Argyntyx has for her unborn child.

Featured Characters

Iris Metaxas (she/her, human **commoner**, MM): A young human woman in her late 20's, with long red hair. She is gentle, caring, and worried about Sybilla. She would do anything to break the curse, including seeing her brother Nathaniel, who she now hates.

Sybilla Verouche (she/her, half-elf, Appendix): A young woman currently transformed into a silver guard drake. Laid back with a wry sense of humor. She loves Iris fiercely and is protective of her.

Nathaniel Metaxas (he/him, human **commoner**, MM): A young man in his early 30s who looks just like Iris. He unknowingly cursed Sybilla. For ten years he believed they ran away together and hates himself for pushing them away.

Tav'laleer (they/them, fey, **see Appendix**): A powerful archfey, who is able to cross over to the Material Plane in the days leading up to the Spring Equinox. They have lied, telling Iris and Sybilla that they can end the curse. They are manipulating everyone involved in order to obtain a silver dragon egg. Their reasons for wanting a silver dragon egg are nebulous, but that does not mean that they cannot be reasoned with. Tav'laleer is not evil, but is selfish.

Argyntyx (she/her, **silver dragon**, MM): Argyntyx is an ancient silver dragon whose lair is close to Ennsmark. Wise and patient, she knows Tav'laleer and aids the party to try and devise what the scheming archfey is up to.

CHAPTER 1: OLD WOUNDS HEAL SLOWLY

You are drawn to a newly written notice that was placed on the job board at the center of the small town of Ennsmark. It reads:

> "By decree of the Mayor: A monster has been spotted near the ruins of the Metaxis Estate! A silver basilisk, come down from the mountains! 2,500 gold pieces to those that can kill or drive off the beast!"

You remember the ruins of a large mansion not too far from the road into Ennsmark.

On a successful **DC 14 Intelligence (Nature) check**, any character realizes there are no such things as silver basilisks. Asking around about the creature, the party finds out that it hasn't hurt anyone, and find a few folks who have seen it. They describe it as a large, silver scaled creature that moves on all fours and has a distinctive frill running down its back. On a successful **DC 17 Intelligence (Nature) check**, it is clear that the description is closer to that of a silver dragon than a basilisk.

The notice was posted by the mayor of Ennsmark, Colton Varn (he/him, human commoner) who is concerned about the beast. Colton says there have been more and more frequent sightings and it is scaring the townsfolk. At minimum, the mayor would like the beast to stop coming near town. He is genuine in his concern. Colton urges the party to head to The Metaxis Estate to find out more.

The Metaxis Estate

The ruins of the estate are located about a mile outside Ennsmark.

> As you approach, you hear a woman yelling,
>
> "By all the gods Nathaniel, I'll beat this door down! Open up you coward!"

When they come closer, the party sees a red-haired human woman banging loudly on what was once a grand estate. The main house is almost completely collapsed, with only part of the first floor still relatively intact.

The woman introduces herself as **Iris Metaxis**. This used to be her family home, although it's been ten years since she saw it last. She's trying to roust her brother, Nathaniel, who is inside.

The door is the only way inside. All windows have been boarded up from the inside, and debris prevents access in the collapsed sections. A successful **DC 16 Wisdom (Survival) check** reveals large tracks around the grounds, though they are not identifiable.

The door can be unlocked with a successful **DC 16 Dexterity check using Thieves' Tools** or it can be kicked in with a successful **DC 18 Strength (Athletics) check**. Kicking in the door wakes Nathaniel Metaxis, who is passed out drunk on the floor. Nathaniel has the same red hair as his sister, and looks haggard and worn down.

Nathaniel is belligerent until he hears his sister outside. He pushes past the party to get to her. As soon as she sees him, Iris starts yelling at him again, talking about a curse and what he did to Sybilla. Nathaniel doesn't know what she is talking about. As they argue, have the party make a **DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check**. Anyone who succeeds catches a glimpse of something large moving in the trees just out of sight.

A feminine voice suddenly enters the mind of all present, telepathically. She tells the siblings to stop fighting. Stepping out of the underbrush is a beautiful **silver guard drake**. She introduces herself as **Sybilla Verouche**.

Seeing Sybilla, both brother and sister fall quiet. Sybilla explains that she used to be a half-elven woman, but during the spring equinox ten years ago, Nathaniel cursed her into her current form. He protests, and each shares their version of the story as described below.

The Story

Sybilla, Iris, and Nathaniel were childhood friends. Over time, Nathaniel fell in love with Sybilla, but her heart already belonged to Iris. Both women hoped Nathaniel would outgrow his feelings or realize they were misplaced. As they became adults, they decided to tell him the truth.

According to Iris, they sat Nathaniel down one night to explain. Iris attempted to let her brother down gently, using allegory to try and make him understand she and Sybilla were in love. Nathaniel didn't say anything. Sitting in silence, both women, realizing the absurdity of the situation, broke into laughter and then Sybilla told Nathaniel the plain truth.

Nathaniel remembers that night differently. After drinks, Iris told confusing stories and stared at him. He silently waited hoping she would clarify, but the women started laughing, Sybilla blurted out the truth, and they started laughing harder. He thought they were laughing at him.

They all agree on what happened next. Nathaniel flew into a rage, cursing and yelling before storming out of the house and into the night. Sybilla fell ill and by morning she had transformed into the drake. Sybilla and Iris fled, and began searching for a cure. Nathainel assumed his drunken tirade caused them to run away together and blamed himself for pushing them away.

Iris explains that they have found someone who can lift the curse, but that it has to happen before midnight tonight, and they need Nathaniel's help to do it.

Now, Tav'laleer makes themselves known, stepping from the woods and introducing themselves.They say they are an elven spellcaster who, upon hearing of Sybilla's curse, decided to help and provide the following information,

- During the equinox, the veil to the Feywild thins, particularly in the woods near Ennsmark
- Nathaniel's strong emotions tapped into the magic of the Feywild causing Sybilla's transformation
- Breaking the curse requires Sybilla, Iris, and Nathaniel to be present
- Tav'laleer can help, but requires the party to help acquire a silver dragon egg
- A silver dragon, named Argyntyx, has a lair close to Ennsmark

If necessary, Tav'laleer reminds the party they can still claim the mayor's reward from Ennsmark by helping lift the curse. The current time is just past midday, giving the party about ten hours to acquire the egg and return to complete the ritual.

Tav'laleer's True Goals

Tav'laleer is lying about needing a silver dragon egg to break the curse. Any character who makes a successful DC 18 Wisdom (Insight) check to read Tav'laleer realizes they are not being fully honest, but it is unclear what they are lying about

What Tav'laleer wants is a silver dragon that they control.

A character can make a **DC 16 Intelligence (History) check** to recall information about Argyntyx. On a success, they remember that Argyntyx is known as The Sterling Minstrel, she has walked the world for a long time, usually under the guise of a bard.

Development

The characters depart for Argyntyx' lair. Proceed to Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 2: MISTS OF MERCURY LAKE

Traveling to Argyntyx's Lair

It will take the party 2 hours to reach Mercury Lake if they travel at a normal pace. Consult the tables below to provide encounters for their journey both to and from Mercury Lake. The party can only have one random encounter each way.

Random Encounter Chance

Pace	Percent Chance of Encounter
Slow	20%
Normal	50%
Fast	80%



Random Encounter Table

D6	Encounter
1	1d6 **giant spiders**
2	1d4+1 **owlbears**
3	1d6 +2 **bugbears**
4	2 **trolls**
5	1d6 **displacer beasts**
6	1 **shambling mound**

The party encounters thick mist 1 mile from the lake. The area is considered heavily obscured and the characters can see only 10 feet in any direction. Magic can disperse the mist for 1 round before it returns. A character needs to make a **DC 16 Wisdom (Survival) check** to navigate in the mist. On a failure, the party loses an additional hour before finding the lake. Once the characters enter the mist, Argyntyx can sense their approach.

Mercury Lake

An old mountain, worn by time, makes up one end of the lake, the water disappearing into a cave at its base.

Characters with a passive **Wisdom (Perception) of 14 or higher** observe the ruins of a fortress halfway up the mountain. This is Argyntyx's lair. However, it is impossible to climb up the mountain. There is a medium-sized boat tied to a small dock. When the boat is cast off from the dock, it drifts swiftly into the mouth of the cave, which has another dock inside. Carved in the stone behind the dock is a narrow set of stairs that lead up.

The lair is a mist-filled labyrinth, designed to confuse and slow intruders. The party must make a series of **DC 18 Wisdom (Survival) checks** to navigate their way through. On a failure, roll on the random hazard table below. Hazards are considered triggered by the party.

When the party accumulates **three successes** they safely navigate the mist. If the party accumulates **three failures** before three successes, a ball of light appears that guides them through, courtesy of Argyntyx, but they lose an additional hour moving slowly through the mist.

Random Hazard Table

D6	Encounter
1	spell trap (*ice storm*) save DC 21
2	dead end
3	spell trap (*stinking cloud*) save DC 21
4	hidden pit trap (DMG, Adventure Environments, Traps)
5	spell trap (*symbol: discord*) save DC 21
6	collapsing roof trap (DMG, Adventure Environments, Traps)

Argyntyx, The Sterling Minstrel

The chamber is large with giant stone pillars twenty feet across stretching upward. Thick mist covers the floor of the chamber and a layer of frost glistens on every surface. As the characters enter, Argyntyx steps out into the dim light.

The ancient dragon's head rises fifty feet into the air. Her long body stretches back forty feet, while her great wings have a two-hundred-foot span. When she chooses to appear as a humanoid, it is as a middle-aged elven woman with laugh lines around her large eyes.

Argyntyx is warm and friendly, greeting the characters like old friends. She asks about them first, learning their names and history. Eventually, she asks why they came to see her. As she is told the tale of Sybilla's curse, Agyntyx listens intently, especially if Tav'laleer is mentioned.

When the characters finish the tale, she pauses for a long time. A successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check** reveals that she has her head cocked as if listening to something. She nods, offering to help the characters, though her aid is not without sorrow.

> "What you seek is both noble and kind, to aid the lost love of a stranger. I offer you the most precious thing I can. I have many children, but this is my last."

If asked about Tav'laleer directly, Argyntyx tells the party that she knows of whom they speak. She warns that they are dangerous and not what they appear to be, and that the party must be wary of them. She will tell the party to allow Tav'laleer to begin their ritual, even though she has doubts about what their true intentions are, so that their plans can be undone. She will be close by, ready to intervene if things become dire.

She leaves and returns clutching an egg, five feet tall and three feet around. Argyntyx provides a cart to carry the egg unless the characters have some other means of transporting it. They exit through a corridor back to the shores of Mercury Lake.

The Silent Character

Though not ever seen or heard, the developing baby silver dragon is an important part of the story. The baby knows that it can bond with Sybilla, reversing the curse placed upon her, and decides to help. This is why Argyntyx gives up the egg freely.

Development

The characters return with the silver dragon egg. Proceed to Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3: THE LIES WE TELL OURSELVES

The Ritual

Returning with the silver dragon egg, Tav'laleer congratulates the characters for not dying. If told that Argyntyx gave the egg freely, they marvel at the characters.

They bring the characters to the spot where Nathaniel awoke in the woods and where the ritual will be performed. They must wait until nightfall when the connection to the Feywild is at its strongest.

For the ritual, Sybilla is tethered to the ground, at Tav'laleer's insistence, for her protection. The party is asked to stand outside of a stone circle containing the NPCs.

Tav'laleer's form changes revealing their archfey nature. Sybilla, Iris, and Nathaniel stand dazed and unmoving.

> Tav'laleer turns to the party, "Thank you, my friends. I have spent centuries trying to acquire a silver dragon of my own."

Tav'laleer produces a dagger, saying that they must sacrifice Iris in order for the ritual to work. They are not particularly interested in this, but magic is magic. Things must be done according to the ritual.

From here, the party can either attempt to convince Tav'laleer to give up the ritual or they will engage them in combat.

Convincing Tav'laleer to Leave

The fickle nature of the fey means that it is possible, if difficult, to talk down Tav'laleer from their plan. This requires a successful **Charisma (Deception, Intimidation, or Persuasion) check, starting at DC 22**. The party can raise or lower the DC, depending on how they approach the situation. The chart below gives some examples, but you should allow the party a lot of room to get creative in their approach to talking to Tav'laleer.

DC Adjustment Suggestions

Action	DC Adjustment
Threatening Tav'laleer	+3
Making excuses about the egg	+2
Caught lying to Tav'laleer	+1
Appealing to the romance of the situation	-1
Playing into Tav'laleer's ego	-2
Mentioning Argyntyx is nearby	-3

Combat

Tav'laleer and Sybilla's stats are below. When the battle begins, four **awakened trees** (MM) fight for Tav'laleer. Tav'laleer summons two **air elementals** (MM) on their first turn.

The air elementals and awakened trees try to hamper anyone who interferes with Tav'laleer. They stop fighting if Tav'laleer leaves the battle.

Unless aided by a character, it takes Sybilla two rounds to free herself and enter the fight. It takes an action to free Sybilla, who then moves to protect Iris and Nathaniel.

The combat ends in one of three ways: after five rounds Argyntyx appears; Tav'laleer drops below one-third of their hit point maximum; or Iris dies.

Development

Tav'laleer retreats to the Feywild. Proceed to the Conclusion.

CONCLUSION

Iris Dies

If Iris is killed, Tav'laleer seizes the moment. Bright arcane flashes of light arc from their body and into the egg. They grin, saying the ritual is complete, and then vanish into the Feywild, taking the egg with them.

Beside themselves with grief, after laying Iris to rest, Nathaniel and Sybilla go their separate ways. Nathaniel returns to his heavy drinking, and the Metaxis estate and name fall to ruin. Sybilla simply disappears into the wild and is never heard from again.

Though she accepts that the unborn wyrmling was willing to take the risk, Argyntyx grieves for her lost child. She decides to set out on her own, to see if she can find a way to release it from Tav'laleer's influence.

Argyntyx Appears/ Tav'laleer Flees

If wounded enough, Tav'laleer chooses discretion over valor, lamenting another lost opportunity to own a silver dragon. They can also be convinced to flee. If the combat drags out, Argyntyx intervenes, and her presence also makes Tav'laleer flee.

> Argyntyx turns to Iris, "Do you love her?"
>
> Iris: "With everything I have. Yes."
>
> Argyntyx: "Then kiss her."

Iris kisses Sybilla's scaled face. In that instant, Sybilla's body dissolves, becoming a sphere of silver light. The light floats into the silver dragon egg nearby. As the light fades, the egg is gone, and only Sybilla remains. Alive, and in her true, half-elven form, her eyes now a molten silver.

Argyntyx explains that her unborn child and Sybilla have now become one, their souls fused forever. It was the child's choice to help Sybilla, knowing that it was the only way to break the curse. The kiss was unnecessary, but Argyntyx couldn't pass up the chance for a little romantic flair. If encountered in later adventures, Sybilla has become a silver draconic bloodline sorcerer.

With either conclusion, there is some reconciliation between Iris, Sybilla, and Nathaniel.

Argyntyx says that it has been too long since she went out into the world. Nathaniel asks to accompany her to find redemption and a way to forgive himself.

Rewards

XP Rewards

ENCOUNTER	XP
Giant spiders	200xp each
Owlbears	700xp each
Bugbears	200xp each
Trolls	1,800xp each
Displacer beasts	700xp each
Shambling mound	1,800xp each
Defeating Tav'laleer	8,400 xp
Iris lives	2,000 xp

Treasure Rewards

Argyntyx awards each member of the party a piece of treasure from her horde, in thanks for intervening when they could have walked away. You can determine these items at random, or choose specific items for your players. If they successfully reunite Iris and Sybilla, she also gives each party member *Argyntyx's Tears*.

The party can also return to the Mayor Colton of Ennsmark and collect the 2,500 gp reward for driving off the creature in the woods.

Argyntyx's Tears

Wondrous item, very rare

Created by the ancient silver dragon, Argyntyx, this mercury colored potion vibrates slightly inside its container and smells like a crisp spring morning. When consumed, you gain the following benefits for 1 hour:

- You are immune to the charmed and frightened conditions
- You are immune to any effects that would read, alter, or affect your mind
- Creatures cannot communicate with you telepathically without your consent.

Author's Notes/ Acknowledgments:

I've always wanted to write a love story, both romantic and real. Love is messy. Anyone who's ever been in love knows that nothing is as perfect as it is in your head. The idea of a metaphor, that makes perfect sense to you but not to the other person, is based on personal experience. Never make professions of love with pop culture references the other person doesn't know. It does not go well.

I also wanted to write something about the power of words. We all say things we don't mean, and sometimes (in this case literally) those words do harm. But, I'd also like to believe that people are genuinely good, and deserve to try to atone for past mistakes.

Author Bio:

Anthony Beal lives in Northern Ohio. A hopeless romantic who enjoys a good slasher, when not writing he can usually be found reading a comic or singing a Taylor Swift song off-key. He can be reached @ajbeal85 on Twitter.

Tav'laleer

Medium fey (archfey), chaotic neutral

Armor Class 20 (natural armor)
Hit Points 160 (20d8 + 60)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	19 (+4)	16(+3)	14(+2)	14 (+2)	20 (+5)

Saving Throws Wis +6, Cha +9
Skills Arcana +6, Deception +9, Insight +6, Persuasion +9
Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from non-magical attacks
Condition Immunities charmed, frightened
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 16
Languages Common, Elven, Sylvan
Challenge 12 (8,400 XP)

Call Elementals. Once per day as an action, Tav'laleer can summon two elementals of their choice as if they had cast the conjure elemental spell, without the need for material components. They do not need to concentrate to maintain control of the elementals.

Fey Step (Recharge 4-6). As a bonus action, Tav'laleer can teleport up to 30 feet to an unoccupied space they can see.

Innate Spellcasting. Tav'laleer's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 18). They can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *charm person, command, hideous laughter, silent image*
3/day: *alter self, confusion, crown of madness, suggestion*
2/day: *awaken, blight, polymorph*
1/day: *conjure fey, mass suggestion*

Magical Resistance. Tav'laleer has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Tav'laleer's Dagger. Tav'laleer's Dagger can be thrown. It has a range of 20/60. At the end of the attack action, it teleports back to Tav'laleer's hand (no action required).

Actions

Multiattack. Tav'laleer makes two dagger attacks or they can cast one spell and make one dagger attack

Tav'laleer's Dagger. *Melee Weapon Attack*:+9 to hit, reach 5ft., one target. Hit: 7 (1d4+4) piercing damage. In addition, the target must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the target creature takes 7 (2d6) necrotic damage or half as much damage on a successful one. The necrotic damage cannot be healed except by taking a short or long rest.

Sybilla

Medium guard drake (silver), chaotic good

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)
Hit Points 52 (7d8 + 21)
Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	11 (0)	16(+3)	12(+1)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)

Skills Perception +4
Damage Resistances cold
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14
Languages understands Common, Elven, and Draconic; telepathically 60 ft.
Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Actions

Multiattack. Sybilla makes two attacks: one with her bite and one with her tail.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +5 to hit, range 5ft., one target. Hit: 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +5 to hit, range 5ft., one target. Hit: 6 (1d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage.



Sister Rabbit, Sister Spring

Written by Jessica Ross

Levels: 8

SYNOPSIS

A dryad and a trickster goddess find themselves at odds with an innocent town caught in the middle. The dryad, worshipped in Almiraj Grove as a goddess, feels her friend has finally gone too far with her pranks, and their discord threatens a cold and desolate spring. The townsfolk want to rid themselves of the devious forest trickster spirit once and for all, not realising that she is a goddess.

ADVENTURE HOOK

The Greengrass Festival

During previous travels, the party may have heard someone mention the lavish Greengrass celebration that takes place in Almiraj Grove to celebrate the start of spring. When they come to town to participate in the festival, they find a town in turmoil, and someone asks them to help.

The Foreboding Forest

The Forest of Flowers, also known as The Forest of Whispers, is known throughout the area as a beautiful but terrifying place which draws many curious visitors. They often want to discover for themselves why the forest has two such distinct names.
The party finds themselves traveling through this forest when they happen upon someone from Almiraj Grove attempting to clear out the last of the ruined flowers. This person invites them back to town to rest before they continue on their travels, lamenting that the forest isn't as beautiful as it usually is because the local goddess is furious.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

At the end of every winter, the people of Almiraj Grove gather flowers from the nearby Forest of Flowers and Whispers as part of a Greengrass celebration to honor a local goddess who keeps their spring, summer, and fall flourishing. This year, when the townsfolk went to the forest, they found the flowers covered in tar and fur. They blame a trickster spirit who lives in the forest and is known to play pranks.

The townsfolk don't know their goddess is actually a dryad or that the trickster spirit is a goddess in disguise and that it's their falling out causing trouble with the plants in town. A local shifter also lives in town and uses the Greengrass tradition to sow discord between the two powerful beings.

CHAPTER 1: ALMIRAJ GROVE

However the adventurers enter the town of Almiraj Grove, they arrive at midday to find dozens of townsfolk gathered in the center of town. All around, the shops and buildings have garland decorations of wilted flowers and dead plants.

With a successful **DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check**, characters see a red-haired man lean in to whisper into a green-haired elf's ear before the elf steps forward into the center of the shouting townsfolk.

The green-haired elf steps forward, and the shouting townsfolk quiet suddenly. The elf takes a deep breath, standing up to their full height, and they stare in disapproval at their neighbors.

"We know who was responsible for this trouble, and it's time we finally do something about it."

"What exactly are you suggesting?" The red-haired man mutters from behind the elf, and the elf whirls around to frown at him.

"You know what I'm suggesting. Someone must go into the Forest of Whispers, find that damned spirit, and rid us of it."

Murmurs rise up in response, but before long, the townsfolk are once more engaged in incomprehensible shouting, each trying to scream over the others to share their own ideas. The elf steps back, out of the center of the crowd, and shakes their head.

The green-haired elf sees the adventurers and breaks away from the crowd to address them. This is **H'lyk** (pronounced "hal-eck"; eladrin **scout**, they/them, neutral good) who explains the ruckus: the Greengrass celebration is ruined, thanks to the trickster spirit who lives in the forest. For years, fresh flowers and herbs are gathered from the nearby forest and brought into Almiraj Grove as an offering to the goddess who ensures the beauty and prosperity of their seasons.

Yesterday, when the townsfolk went to gather the first flowers of spring, they found them covered in tar and fur. When they arrived at the center of town this morning, they found what few plants they had been able to gather already wilted, suggesting they have incurred the anger of the forest goddess protecting them.

Past pranks have been minor annoyances and inconveniences, but nothing so bad as this. This affects the livelihood of the town—the Greengrass celebration draws visitors from far and wide who sometimes stay for days or weeks, and the Grove depends on that tourism. This is too far, and something must be done. Get rid of that forest spirit, H'lyk beseeches the party. They're willing to pay 20 gp each, as well as a collection of useful items they've collected over the past few years running the celebration.

A Greengrass Tradition

Any character who wishes to ask around in town before departing for the forest can try to ask any of the townsfolk about the troubles in the forest. Roll 2d4 for each interaction, utilizing the Villager table below. The first roll indicates how willing the villager is to speak with strangers (disposition), and the second roll determines what they know.

A Greengrass tradition involves providing cut flowers to everyone you speak to. Though the flowers are all wilted, everyone the characters successfully convince to share what they know hands them a cut flower. If characters attempt to investigate these flowers, they seem perfectly ordinary.

Development

If the characters didn't approach Spark to escort them, he seeks them out. He was watching from a distance while the characters spoke with H'lyk, and he knows the characters seek to enter the forest to defeat the spirit.

Villager Table

1d4	Disposition	What they Know
1	Friendly; happy to chat	The trickster spirit is the most likely culprit. The spirit has caused nothing but trouble in the Forest of Whispers, which is why townsfolk rarely go to the forest.
2	Annoyed; talks to strangers with a successful DC 12 Charisma check	The trickster spirit seems likely, but only because it doesn't make sense for anyone else to have done it. Still, the spirit has never done anything this cruel or terrible before. There are even rumors the spirit rewards pranksters in the forest.
3	Angry; speaks to characters with a successful DC 18 Communication check	It could have been the trickster spirit...or it could have been something worse. There's a reason it's known as the Forest of Whispers. Many go mad out there in that forest, and it's not a simple trickster that does it.
4	Furious/Scared; does not speak to strangers and walks away if pursued	Many fear the Forest of Flowers, and it's easy to become lost in the sprawling forest that seems to change and grow as you watch. If you must go, take a guide with you, like Spark.

CHAPTER 2: TRICKY FRIENDS

The Forest of Flowers and Whispers often has its name shortened. Those who fear the forest when they enter hear the whisper of the wind as it passes through the trees and the far-off laughter of a malicious spirit, and they refer to this place as the Forest of Whispers. Those who are more open to learning what the forest has to offer are greeted with unfamiliar beauty in the strange flowers and plants they see, and many who call it the Forest of Flowers do so because the flowers they gather here seem to bring them great luck.

Along the Path

Spark (longtooth shifter (WGtE) **bard** (VGtM), he/him, neutral evil) offers to lead the characters into the Forest of Whispers because it's so dangerous. He tells them about the cruel trickster spirit who lives there. If prompted, he regales them with summaries of past pranks the trickster has pulled, and if characters don't seem particularly put off by this, he gets quiet and leans in and tells them the worst prank of all. Read or paraphrase the following.

> "Many have died in this forest—the spirit is not the only danger. Some travelers arrive at Almiraj Grove alone and horrified. They say they watched their traveling companions die. And then they see a shadow moving, and it transforms itself into their dead friend and follows them through the forest, whispering its fears into their ears."

The Pranks

Use key items from players' backgrounds, traits, ideals, bonds, and flaws to create pranks that may seem especially interesting to them.

For example, if a character has a particularly strong bond to a physical item, perhaps one of the spirit's pranks was hiding a traveler's items in the forest so they were forced to wander the forest alone, searching for their supplies. Included among these supplies was an amulet the traveler received from their father before he died, and it's the only thing this traveler had to remember them by. They later found it at the bottom of a pond, rusted and damaged.

What the DM knows: Spark, a longtooth shifter, is a trickster himself. Kakena has been one-upping him since he arrived here and making him look foolish, and he lured **black puddings** (MM) into the forest to disrupt the Greengrass celebration and turn the town against Kakena.

If the characters wish to determine whether or not Spark is being honest at any point, they can make a **DC 17 Wisdom (Insight) check**. On a success, they think he seems somewhat shifty, like he might be hiding something, but that he honestly believes the spirit in this forest is a danger and must be dealt with. On a fail, he sees them studying him, and he insists on sharing another cruel prank he heard the trickster pulled on someone.

Forest Trickster

As the characters journey through the forest, they encounter various traps and pranks. Each player must roll 1d6 to determine what prank they suffer. If the prank description says it happens to a random character, either roll a die (roll a die equal to the number of players and assign each player a number), choose randomly, or go around the table to ensure everyone faces a prank.

If they succeed on a **DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check** to look for upcoming pranks, they see the prank coming and manage to avoid it. Often, they see a glimmer in the air with an arcane aura or a spring-loaded trap ready to launch a potion at them.



Pranks Table

1d6	Prank
1	Any character who has a staff or sword must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, their weapon turns into a snake, and they must drop it or take 1d4 psychic damage. This illusion lasts for 1 minute.
2	A random character grows flowers from their hair, creating a flower crown that releases a pleasant smell. This flower crown lasts for 1 hour, after which point, it disappears.
3	A random character's hands become sticky for half an hour. Every time they touch something, they stick to it for 1 minute. They can unstick themselves with a successful DC 19 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check, but the effect remains in place for the full half hour, giving them ample time to stick to many items as they travel.
4	The character grows a new body part. Roll 1d4. On a 1 or 3, the character grows a horn (this can't be used to attack); on a 2 or 4, they grow a tail. If the character already has a horn or tail, they automatically grow the other; if a character has both, roll 1d4 and they grow an additional horn or tail.
5	Each player most roll 2d20. Every character sees a number of almiraj (ToA) equal to the number they rolled. These almiraj aren't real; if a character approaches, the almiraj disappears. But if the characters simply observe them, the almiraj hop around and live their lives as normal. This illusion lasts for 1 hour.
6	A beautiful flower blooms nearby, visible only to the character who rolled it and the one they have spent the most time with. These characters must make a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened for 10 minutes.

The characters may have learned in town that the forest spirit is rumored to reward pranksters. Spark may encourage the characters attempt to prank one another, especially if they continue being caught in the forest's pranks. Spark suggests pranking one another may help the forest spirit see it has no reason to continue pranking the party.

If at any point a character tries to prank another character, they should describe the prank and make any **appropriate DC 12 checks** to set it up and then roll 1d6. On a 1, the prank succeeds as intended, and the character finds 1gp inside a flower. On a 2-5, the prank mostly works (per the DM's discretion) and the person being pranked is affected by prestidigitation in some way (maybe they smell strange or turn orange). On a 6, the prank backfires, and the character who tried to pull the prank's speed is reduced by 10 for half an hour.

Tar Pit

As they travel, the party notices dead plants with black tar on them, as well as tufts of fur stuck in the tar. A successful **DC 12 Intelligence (Nature) check** reveals this seems to be rabbit fur. With a successful DC 18 check, characters can determine it's from an almiraj.

With a successful **DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check**, the party sees a trail of black tar leading off to the north. If characters follow the trail, Spark flees, insisting the spirit is close by and that he's not strong enough to face it. Otherwise, he stays with them until the next time they see traces of black tar and fur. Near these ruined flowers sits what appears to be a small child covered in the black tar, and Spark runs away. As he leaves, he warns them against trusting anything the spirit says—she's a trickster, after all.

If the characters attempt to approach the child, they see the child seems to be sitting in a pit of the same tar they've seen on the flowers. If they touch the child, they take 1d8 acid damage, and it reveals itself to be a black pudding and attacks.

If characters attempt to investigate the child before approaching, a successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check** reveals it's not what it appears to be, and at their hesitance, the pudding turns and attacks.

The Unhappy One

After defeating the black pudding, an almiraj hops out of the forest toward them. She regards them curiously and then speaks.

> "Thank you for removing this blight from the forest. I have seen many of these monsters around lately, but they do not belong here. I've been trying to clear them out, but they multiply at a somewhat alarming rate. If you find another," she says, wrinkling her nose in distaste, "don't slash at it."

This is **Kakena** (she/her, chaotic neutral), a trickster goddess who made the Forest of Flowers and Whispers her home. She favors the form of an **almiraj**, but she does not reveal her true form to anyone.

Kakena doesn't provide clear answers, instead speaking in vague comments or riddles, though she's happy to provide her strange half-answers to the characters after they defeated a pudding.

She confirms some of what the characters already know and explains more: the black puddings have been terrorizing the forest for the past few days, and they destroyed the flowers the villagers intended to cut for the celebration. She doesn't know who would have done this, nor does she know who would have been foolish enough to lure black puddings into a forest where they will wreak havoc until they're destroyed.

If any characters experienced any physical changes (new body parts, a flower crown, etc.) as a prank, Kakena looks at the physical change and says, "you're welcome," confirming that she is, in fact, the trickster spirit H'lyk hired the party to kill.

If they continue speaking with Kakena instead of fighting, she tells them that though she doesn't know what's going on, she senses a darkness in the forest, and the best place to learn more would be in the heart of Yulania's Spring.

Kakena gives them directions, but she doesn't go with them. If pressed, with a successful **DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check**, she reveals that Yulania believes Kakena is responsible for bringing the black puddings into the forest, and they've had a fight. Yulania refuses to see her, and Kakena is angry with whoever did this.

If the characters attempt to fight her, use the stats for an **almiraj**. When they kill her, a large creature that looks like a monstrous rabbit with a long, wicked unicorn horn stomps into the area. This form of Kakena is an **abominable yeti** (MM), and it tells them "you should run" in Kakena's voice before attacking.

If they kill the yeti, three more appear and chase the characters through the forest to the spring. If they instead run from the first yeti, it chases them to the spring.

Any character with a **passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 12 or above** notices a red fox watching them as they head toward the spring. If characters attempt to approach the fox, it runs away and can't be found.

Sly as a Fox

The red fox now following the party through the forest is actually Spark, the shifter guide who ran away earlier. While he has no desire to confront Kakena on his own—he knows he's no match for her—he wants to see her defeated. He follows closely behind the characters, waiting for his opportunity to strike.

Development

Kakena directs them to a path that leads to the center of the forest (or she chases them onto that path and herds them along it). When the characters arrive in a great clearing with a huge spring in the center, the yetis disappear.

CHAPTER 3: A DRYAD'S TEARS

If the characters didn't fight Kakena, when they see the spring, they hear her voice in their heads.

> You hear the trickster's voice coming from everywhere at once, ringing in your head.
>
> "Take care," she warns, her voice heavy and serious. And then she laughs. "You seem to have picked something up in the forest." And when you turn around, you see that you have grown a tail.

Each character should roll 1d6 to determine what kind of tail they grew. If the character already had a tail, their current tail is transformed to look like a new one. As far as they can tell, these new tails are permanent.

Tails Table

1d6	Tail
1	badger
2	goat
3	large cat (panther, jaguar, lion, etc.)
4	wolf
5	rabbit
6	rat

Any character who makes the connection that Kakena is using the growth of a literal tail to suggest someone is tailing them has advantage on the **DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check** to look behind them. On a success, they see a red fox dart behind a tree.

If they fought Kakena, they receive no warning (and no tail), and they must succeed on a **DC 19 Wisdom (Perception) check** to notice the fox.

Yulania's Spring

Yulania's Spring, so called because it did not exist before Yulania (dryad (use **conclave druid stats**, GGtR) she/her, chaotic good) created it, seems lifeless. The plantlife surrounding the area is wilting and limp, and the spring is almost completely dried up.

While it's true this spring fills due to Yulania's tears, they are tears of joy and laughter at Kakena's pranks. Since the fight between them, Yulania dried up her spring, and she hides in her cove of trees, heartbroken.

When she sees them, she waves her hand at them and **awakened trees** (MM) (one per character) attack. She uses the distraction to cover her retreat.

With a successful **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check**, characters see an almiraj chase after Yulania as she retreats. Regardless of whether or not they see the almiraj, they see a fox run after the dryad (if the characters saw the fox watching them earlier, they surmise it's the same fox).

Misunderstandings

The fox was Spark in disguise. He stays behind as Yulania and Kakena talk. When the characters enter this cove, they can try to sneak up on him with a successful **DC 15 Dexterity (Stealth) check**. They can make a Strength contest with advantage to try to grab the fox.

Whether or not they attempt to grab the fox, he yelps in surprise when the characters arrive, grabbing Kakena and Yulania's attention, and both of them turn to look.

The characters can attempt to mediate the conflict, and with a successful **DC 16 Charisma (Persuasion) check**, they can convince Yulania of Kakena's honesty. If they attempt to show the fox that was following them as proof, they gain advantage.

After some mediation and discussion, Yulania finally begins to relent and asks, "If you weren't responsible, who was?"

If a character is holding the fox, he struggles and attempts to flee. The character holding him must succeed on a **DC 16 Strength (Athletics) check** to avoid dropping him. If no one is holding the fox, he attempts to flee. A character who succeeds on a **DC 18 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check** can grab him.

A Fox and His Friends

If the fox flees, he runs outside where he stops when he sees more **black puddings** (one per character) and transforms back into Spark. If he isn't successful in fleeing, he transforms inside the cove and demands to be released before he sets more black puddings on them all. A sound outside near the spring catches Yulania's attention, and she leads everyone outside.

Yulania summons two more awakened trees and Kakena summons another yeti; they contend with half of the black puddings while the other half engage the characters. Kakena and Yulania focus on Spark.

As the characters' fight with the black puddings comes to an end, they hear a loud fizzling sound and then a pop that echoes through the forest. They see Yulania and Kakena standing near a fox that cowers away from them. It barks once and then runs off into the forest.

Kakena had suspected another trickster entered her domain, but she couldn't find it. She transformed Spark and stole his ability to transform back. He'll live out his days as a simple fox in this forest as punishment for what he did.

Yulania thanks the group for helping her see it wasn't Kakena behind this, and she's grateful to be reunited with her partner.

Development

If the characters didn't fight Kakena in Chapter Two, she also thanks them and wishes to bestow a gift. **Go to Conclusion A.**

If the characters did fight her, she refuses to speak to them and demands they leave the forest at once. **Go to Conclusion B.**

CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION A

If the characters didn't attack Kakena in the forest and instead let her direct them to Yulania's spring, she thanks them for their help.

> "I noticed some strange things occurring in the forest, and I suspected there may be another trickster around. I never would have suspected a creature as simple as a Shifter would attempt to stand against a goddess. Well, it hardly matters now. Thank you for your troubles. I have a gift to show my gratitude."

Kakena bows her head, and each character feels a weight on their forehead. Any character with *true sight* can see it, otherwise their new horns are invisible. Each character now has a horn that grants +1 to Dexterity and Charisma checks as long as it is in their possession (they can remove it as an action, but once it's removed, it's destroyed and can't be replaced).

Kakena also offers to make any physical changes that occurred permanent, including the tails. If the characters don't wish to keep them, she removes the illusion; otherwise that character is permanently changed.

She also scratches at the forest floor and flowers (one per character) bloom, revealing a piece of black fabric inside: a *portable hole* (BR).

Yulania summons an awakened tree to escort them safely back to the edge of the forest. As soon as they see Almiraj Grove, they see the effect of Yulania and Kakena's reunion: the cut flowers decorating the buildings have come back to life, and the entire town seems to be in bloom.

H'lyk greets the party and provides the promised rewards.

CONCLUSION B

If they attacked Kakena in Chapter Two, Yulania, seeing Kakena's anger at them, thanks them for their help and summons an awakened tree to escort them back to town.

H'lyk greets the party and provides the promised rewards.

Rewards

XP Rewards

ENCOUNTER	XP
Defeat black pudding	1,100 xp per pudding
Defeat awakened tree	450 xp per tree
Defeat Kakena (almiraj)	10 xp
Defeat Kakena (yeti)	5,000 xp
Befriend Kakena	5,000 xp
Reveal Spark as the culprit	2,000 xp

Treasure Rewards

Conclusion	Reward
Conclusion A (from Kakena)	Kakena's Spectral Horn (+1 bonus to DEX and CHA)
	Portable hole
Both Conclusions (from H'lyk)	*Potion of healing* (one per character)
	Spell Scroll (Longstrider)
	Potion of Animal Friendship

Author's Notes/ Acknowledgments:

Thank you to everyone who supported me and helped me make this adventure happen, including my coworking buddies Jen Vaughn and Kat Kruger, my brainstorming friend Robin Michele, and my playtesting group at Outsider Comics.

This adventure is loosely based on stories my dad told me about fox and rabbit tricksters who sometimes took things too far.

Author Bio:

Jessica is an editor, writer, podcaster, and recovering procrastinator. She spends most of her time working because she's a freelancer and that's what freelancers do, but when she's not working, she's watching bad movies (and live-tweeting them) and learning and playing every game she can get her hands on. She has adventures and work in Uncaged Volume I, Beyond the Basics, Morty Corgi's Scroll of Mysteries, and more. You can find all of her work on her website writejess.com and you can follow all the daily nonsense she gets up to on Twitter @writejessr.



Germination, Pollination, Colonization, Oh My!

Written by Chris Nakamura

Levels: 12

Content Warnings: constricting vines and animals mind-controlled by fungus

SYNOPSIS

Spring is generally celebrated as a time of growth and renewal for nature and life. Which is a hard sentiment to echo when magic plant species see the village of Carnos as the perfect place to take root. And with Tardon, an old druid yelling about ruin and destruction, maybe it's time to do some local landscaping.

ADVENTURE HOOK

The party are experts on new plant and animal species, so are requested to visit the village of Carnos to investigate the claims of a druid on behalf of the village leader, Falora.

Alternatively, the party might have friends or relatives in Carnos, or be from the village themselves, in which case they are asked home to deal with unusual plant activity in the forest.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Carnos is a small, hundred year old village founded in the middle of a dense, magical forest. The forest soil, thick with magical residue from some ancient event, has resulted in large and complex magical flora growing in the area. When it was first founded, the druid Tardon made a pact with the sentient plants of the forest to leave the village and its people in peace for a hundred years. During that time, Tardon has cared for the forest, providing fertilizer and learning about the different magial species within. He has also loudly objected to the planned expansions of the village that go beyond the original village boundary.

With the pact set to expire on the Spring Equinox, three days from now, the plants are restless, each wanting to use the village for their own purposes. Around a month ago, the plants made their first move, growing up to the edge of the village and overtaking some of the structures beyond the village's original boundary. The villagers have misinterpreted this unusual plant growth as Tardon punishing them for ignoring his warnings.

In response, Guard Captain Falorna arrested Tardon and tried to intimidate him. Captain Falorna doesn't trust Tardon and is primarily concerned with the immediate safety of the villagers.

The three plant species in the forest have varying degrees of intellect and very specific needs that they want to fulfill using the village. It is up to the party to find a resolution before the village of Carnos is plunged into a plant frenzy.

Dramatis Personae

- Druid Tardon-- (human **druid** (MM), he/him, chaotic good), distrusted by the villagers
- Guard Captain Falora --(half-orc **guard captain** (MM), she/her, lawful good), respected leader, Captain of the Guard

CHAPTER 1: POLLEN ON THE WIND

Read the following as the players approach the village.

> A thick, sweet smell permeates the air. Bushes and trees shake despite a lack of breeze or animals in the underbrush.
>
> Before you is the village of Carnos, a modest settlement with thatched rooftops and well crafted pristine wooden architecture. However, right before you, where the road meets the village, are many tree stumps, their cuts still fresh. At the opposite side of the entrance you see a half-orc guardswoman with muddy blond hair yelling at a shackled old man in front of a half-built tower covered in vines.
>
> "Undo your foul magics, Tardon! Just because you disapprove of the expansion, that doesn't mean you get to infest our watch tower!"

Tardon calls out to the party, warning them of the danger of the plants and insisting that they don't stray from any of the paths through the forest. Guard Captain Falora interrupts him, apologizing for his shouting, and explains the following:

- The outskirts of the village are overrun with dangerous magical plants that she believes Tardon has summoned
- The village is looking for anyone who can help remove the plants
- Anyone who helps will be compensated handsomely
- On a successful **DC 14 Charisma (Persuasion) check**, Falora mentions the reward is 200gp
- She believes Tardon summoned these plants about a month ago because he didn't approve of the village's expansion

Tardon loudly denies the last point while Falora asks if the party could help with the situation.

Falorna assigns the party to take custody of Tardon while she checks on villagers who were injured during the "plant attack." While expressing great exasperation and dislike of Tardon, she thanks the party, passes over the key to Tardon's shackles, and heads further into the village.

Seeding the Plot

Tardon starts chattering the moment Falorna is out of earshot. He rambles continuously about how the situation is not his fault:

- He was not "summoning magical plants," he was trying to mitigate the damage
- There's no time for him to be shackled like this. He needs to be freed now to prevent catastrophe!
- This is not his fault. He's innocent, and the village should thank him for working out the agreement all those years ago

Tardon continues to rave about the unfairness of the situation unless the party calm him with a successful **DC 14 Charisma (Persuasion) check**, at which point he explains that three very powerful magical plant species are looking to invade the village and make use of the villagers and the extra space.

Planting the Problem

When questioned, Tardon tells the story of Carnos's founding.

> The thin-haired druid hunches his shoulders, eyes growing distant as he speaks.
>
> "When I was a young man, I and fifty others were included in the founding group of Carnos. We all had our jobs, and mine was to make peace with the forest life. To check for anything that might threaten the village! And threats I found…
>
> "The Stinging Willows, with their painful branches and many hungry mouths on their trunks.
>
> "The Blood-Rot! A terrible fungus that grows in the eyes of creatures, harvesting their essence.
>
> " The Night Eyes, vines that'd look to ensnare anything in their territory while it sleeps."

Tardon tells a story about how he used a favor from the Fey to meet with the three plant species. At the meeting, he negotiated a period of peace:

- The plants would not grow in the land designated for the village nor attack anyone from the village
- Tardon would provide a gift of fertilizer each year
- They would convene again on the hundredth Spring Equinox after the founding of the village, to discuss the future

The hundred years are up in three days, on the Spring Equinox. The "attack" that Tardon is accused of was the plant species moving in on the outskirts of village, taking over the structures that are

outside the original border. Tardon needs help to find peace or else the forest will tear apart the village.

If the party approaches Captain Falora with this information, she asks them to negotiate on the village's behalf as her current duties do not allow her to leave the village.

Development

The party now knows they have a limited time before the magical plants overcome the village. If they treat Tardon with hostility, he does not give them the rewards outlined in the conclusion.

CHAPTER 2: THREEWAY PLANT OFF!

The party may speak to the plants in any order. Tardon draws a map showing where the different plant species can be found. Tardon asks to accompany the party to guide the way and introduce them to the plants. If they follow his directions, he takes them to the plants in the order they are listed in this chapter.

The plants are in different areas of the forest. Reaching each plant requires half a day's travel from the village, and half a day to return - meaning it will take the party the full three days until the equinox to visit each plant.

To the North: Blood-Rot Fungus

As the party travels north, Tardon talks about the Blood-Rot Fungus. It is a maroon fungus that infects herbivores and feeds on the animals' ambient aura and magic to sustain the Blood-Rot's hive mind. This makes the animals apathetic, and if there is no food in the immediate area they will starve to death. The fungus can be spread by smaller creatures but it prefers larger animals for its host. If an uninfected animal moves close to the fungus, it directs its host to lash out in hopes of spreading the infection. The fungal hive-mind believes its presence makes the animals more beautiful.

If Tardon is not with the party, a successful **DC 17 Intelligence (Nature) check** provides the information above when the party encounters the Blood-Rot. The villagers also have a rough understanding of how the fungus thrives. If the party has already experienced the "Bloody Skewers" encounter, they recognize Blood-Rot Fungus from the skewer offered by the hunter.

Blood Fields Forever

> You move from weak sunlight filtered through tree branches to a large, open meadow with one massive dead tree in the center. Moving closer, you can see what looks like strips of red meat hanging from the branches. Small woodland animals mill around the trunk of the tree.
>
> Getting closer, you can see the 'strips of meat' are thick fungus and that all the animals milling about the area have a red patch on their back, resembling a giant fresh scab.
>
> A fox, a rat, and a rabbit walk away from the tree and up to Tardon.
>
> "Two Legs," they rasp in one wheezy voice, "why have you come?"

If Tardon is present, he dances around the question, inquiring as to the fungus's health before he slowly raises the question of negotiating the peace agreement.

If Tardon is absent, the fungus asks how the party found this meadow and if they have come to trade, boasting that its presence makes its host animals extremely nutritious. A successful **DC 14 Intelligence (Nature or Investigation) check** reveals that the infected animals, while slightly malnourished, have very well-developed muscles.

If the party has already experienced the "Bloody Skewers" encounter, they recognize the red markings on the back of the animals. If they ask the Blood-Rot about being eaten, it explains that when a host dies, the living spores leave its body anyway.

The fungus asserts:

- It has been too long since its kind has spread, and the structures humans build are interesting.
- It needs at least 50 mammalian bodies to occupy before it would be willing to agree to another time of peace.
- Predators actively hunt Blood-Rot Animals due to their nutritious meat. While this doesn't kill the fungus, it kills their hosts and they want a new environment where there are fewer predators.
- The village is home to many warm-blooded creatures, a desirable resource for the Blood-Rot.

If the party acts in a hostile manner, the Blood Rot insists they leave as more animals join the first. If the Party refuses 8 **Blood-Rot Animal swarms** (see Appendix) attack while the rest flee.

"Mush"-Room for Negotiations?

From here, the party can attempt to negotiate a peace agreement with the Blood-Rot. The fungus would be willing to compromise as follows:.

- The villagers could feed the animals already infected with Blood-Rot, preventing them from dying of starvation.
- The Blood-Rot Fungus would be willing to only inhabit livestock in the village, rather than the villagers. It would then move to the new generation of animals as older ones were butchered.

Eating Blood-Rot animals doesn't hurt the fungus, as the Blood-Rot departs when the host has no more magical life force to nourish it. A host's death is merely an inconvenience - and the Blood-Rot leaves the meat tender and delicious. If a peaceful agreement is reached, the Blood-Rot promises to consolidate the new agreement on the Spring Equinox.

To the West: Night Eyes

These quick-growing vines have yellow flowers that resemble eyes, and they cover any surface that allows them to receive more sunlight. Their leaves and vines are as sharp as blades, and they only grow at night, covering hundreds of feet at a time. They want to cover all of the new structures in the area, as most of the local trees have developed natural repellents to stop these vines from growing on them. Using the sap from local trees, the village could repel the Night Eyes from an area.

The Dead Grove

Deep in the forest, the party comes across several dead and withered trees scattered between live trees with white bark. Tardon explains that the **Night Eyes** (see Appendix) leech nutrients from the wood, living or dead, that they cover. On a successful **DC 18 Charisma (Persuasion) check** Tardon admits he doesn't know why the Night Eyes avoid the white trees. A successful **DC 20 Intelligence (Nature) check** reveals that the sap and insides of the white trees is highly acidic and probably toxic to the Night Eyes.

After half a day of travel from Carsos, the party arrives at the thickest part of the Night Eyes' growth.

> Vines cover every bit of vegetation, draping from branch to branch. Yellow flowers, like eyes, watch from above as you follow the path. Eventually you hear a slithering sound as vines cross the forest floor, stopping ten feet away from you all. The yellow flowers are wide open. Watching.

Tardon casts *speak with plants* and begins to translate for the vines. He explains who the characters are and why they have come, but the vines don't respond.

If Tardon is not with the party, the Vines simply observe the party, following them if they travel further into the forest. If anyone attempts to touch the vines, they pull back. If no one in the party has speak with plants, the Night Eyes talk with the players by weaving their vines into letters to write short words and phrases in Common.

The vines only respond to direct questions initially and have the following view:

- They want to be off the ground, the forest floor doesn't have enough light
- They're interested in the buildings, they're not shaped like trees
- They're curious what the cut wood feels like
- They're curious about the humanoids and what they do

The Night Eyes watch any movement or action with great interest and curiosity. If the party seems non-threatening, the Night Eyes slowly begin to ask questions about humanoid life.

Eye See What You're Saying!

From here, the party can negotiate a peace agreement with the Night Eyes. The vines would be willing to compromise as follows:

- The villagers designate structures specifically for the Vines to live on and watch the village. In turn, they would help defend the village.
- The Night Eyes, with direction from the villagers, could reinforce the structures, offering additional support and cut down on supplies needed.

As long as the Night Eye's can grow in the village, they are open to peace. If an agreement is reached, the vines state that they will consolidate the new agreement on the Spring Equinox.

To The East: Stinging Willows

Tardon warns the party about the Stinging Willows before they depart to meet them.

> "The leaves and branches of large violet willow trees lash out at, and sting, creatures without fur. They are symbiotic with the local direwolf population, eating their leftover scraps and protecting their den from predators. If others enter their reach, their branches lash out in an attempt to pull creatures towards the center of their trunk, where many mouths eat and digest the captured creatures. Careful, they are a proud species."

Bloody Skewers!

While traveling, the party comes across two hunters from Carnos having an argument around their campsite. One of them, Sampson, holds a skewer of unusually red meat, holding it out to the other, Fardin, and daring them to eat it.

> "No way! That squirrel had that big scab on its side before you hit it! It's probably infected with something!"
>
> The hunter holds up the skewer in fake disappointment. A grin materializes on his face as he spies the party.
>
> "And what about you fine folk?" he asks. "Are you willing to try this mystery meat skewer?

With a successful **DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) check**, the party can tell from the skinned pelt next to them that the meat is from a Blood-Rot infected squirrel.

If the Party has not encountered the Blood Rot Fungus yet, they recognize it as some kind of fungus. If Tardon is with the party, he names the fungus if any of the party points out the pelt to him.

Sampson continues to try to entice the party to eat the skewer, even offering five gold pieces to whomever eats it. If no one rises to his challenge, he declares the party cowards and eats it himself. He then loudly remarks how tasty it is.

Party members who eat the meat must roll a **DC 5 Constitution saving throw**, enjoying the taste of the meat if they succeed. On a failure, they find the meat to be unusually tender and not to their taste. Tardon remarks that the Blood-Rot is an edible fungus, though he has never tried it since he does not consume meat. Success on a **DC 13 Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Medicine) check** informs the party that the Blood-Rot fungus is not toxic and is quite nutritious.

Windy Willows!

Tardon leads the party through thick underbrush until they arrive in a clearing with four large stinging willows.

> Stepping out into a shaded clearing, you look past Tardon at a semi-circle of four large willow trees, their branches hanging down to the ground some fifteen feet away from their trunks.
>
> Tangled and ensnared in their dangling branches, you see a variety of dead squirrels, rats, and birds, their skin punctured with sharp leaves. Beneath the branches, watching from the base of the tree, are six dire wolves with violet eyes.
>
> With a deep breath, Tardon steps forward, "Well met, Willow Grove. It is I, Tardon."



The **Stinging Willows** (see Appendix) don't speak in words. Instead, the dire wolves are able to speak common. The wolves announce themselves as "Voice of the Home Tree" and translate between the trees and the party.

The Willows are a proud species and hold the following views:

- It has kept up the agreement , and now it wants to move to access the sunny break in the tree cover the village has created.
- They hunger for the large livestock kept at the village.
- They're curious about the dogs in the Village and want to "adopt" a new pack of canines.

The Stinging WIllows are mainly concerned with the wellbeing of their pack and have little interest in the humanoids of the village. Any sign of disrespect towards the Willows makes the direwolves growling a warning. The wolves attack if the perceived insult isn't retracted, attempting to drag the party in range of the Stinging Willows.

Stung by Splendor

From here, the party can negotiate a peace agreement with the Willows. They would be willing to compromise as follows:

- The villagers allow the Stinging Willows to move into the village and offer some of their livestock each spring

- The village gives the Stinging Willows all of their organic waste (bones, vegetable peelings, etc.) to eat
- The villagers cut down trees around the Willows' current grove to provide more access to the sunlight
- The village gives them stewardship of the village's dog population

As long as the Stinging Willows are able to continue caring for their wolves, or take care of new canines, they'll be open to peace. If an agreement is reached, the Willows state that they will consolidate the new agreement on the Spring Equinox.

Development

Once the party have met with all three sentient plant species, or three days have passed, the Spring Equinox occurs. Give the party some time to speak with Guard Captain Falora and obtain the village's agreement with the new terms proposed.

CHAPTER 3: AND THE FOREST GOES BLOOM!

The party may either negotiate a new peace agreement with the village, or convey the plants' intentions to the villagers. Guard Captain Falora can be found watching over the injured commoners and guarding the outskirts of the village.

Captain Falora's priority is the continued prosperity of the village. As long as that is secure, she's willing to listen and consider a reasonable plan. With a good argument and a successful **DC 16 Charisma (Persuasion) check**, Falora can be convinced to go along with the party's plan. Regardless of plan, Captain Falora requests to be present when the plants arrive on the day of the equinox.

The Spring Equinox

At around noon, Tardon leads Falora and the party to a small hill that overlooks Carnos. If the party has previously engaged the plants in combat, they arrive warily, only not attacking because they are within the boundary of Carnos.

> One by one, the plants begin to arrive. The Stinging Willows dig through the earth, accompanied by their dire wolves; a collection of bears with crimson wet fungus growing over their bodies, move lethargically between the trees; vines with yellow flowers snake over each other as they smother out the grass and arrive.

> Captain Falora tenses as slowly the bare hill is occupied with an assortment of different species, each approaching to consider her before moving to their own section of hillside.
>
> Eventually the sound of moving vegetation comes to a standstill as silence fills the space.
>
> With a deep breath, Tardon steps forward with a fake smile on his face and says, "W-well! Welcome friends!"
>
> The druid pauses, before glancing over his shoulder at you all, his face white. He doesn't know what to say next.

Peace: To Make Like a Tree

From here, the party can negotiate or implement any plans that they may have formulated. The plants are wary of each other and question what agreements were made with the other species. As long as the following terms are negotiated, all parties can agree to a peace treaty:

- No humanoids shall be harmed
- The Blood-Rot animals will not be fed to the Stinging Willows

If the party was unable to negotiate peace leading up to this moment with one or two plant species, whatever plants they have allied with vouch for the humanoids and explain their own intentions for the village. From here the party can attempt to renegotiate.

If the party is unable to come to an agreement with all the species, the unallied species will decide to simply observe the 'new peace' to see if they would want to make a similar agreement in the future.

> "And with this," Tardon says, confidently walking into the middle of the group, "A new peace is made!"
>
> The vegetation around you rustles and whips about. The Blood-Rot animals chitter loudly as the Stinging Willows' wolves let out a howl.
>
> Captain Falora watches the proceedings with a bemused expression on her face.
>
> "Peace." She says flatly, eyeing the large willow branch that scoops up a wolf ten feet in the air to rub its belly.

Combat: Please Leaf

If the party has planned for combot, or has attacked the plants previously, a tense standoff takes place as the one hundred year old peace ends. If the party has chosen to ally with the plants against the village, Captain Falora and two **guards** (MM) fight the plants and their allied creatures.

> "And with this," The Blood-Rot animals hiss in unison, "this time of peace is at an end."
>
> As the direwolves let out war cries, and the Night Eye vines thrash angrily, Tardon sighs next to you.
>
> "It was nice while it lasted."

The plants try to retake the land Carnos is built on. The following combatants are on the field:

- Four Night Eye Vines
- Three Stinging Willows
- Eight Dire Wolves
- Five Blood Rot Bears
- Guard Captain Falora
- Two guards

Two additional **guards** (MM) run up the hill and join on round 4 of combat.

Development

The Spring Equinox Summit concludes with a new understanding between the People of Carnos and the Plants of the forest, or all out war.

If any kind of peace was reached, go to Conclusion A.

If fighting erupted, go to Conclusion B.

If the party turned against the village, go to Conclusion C.

CONCLUSION

Conclusion A

With a shaky peace carved out between Carnos and the plants of the forest, the village celebrates. Captain Falora thanks the party for their help and compensating them as agreed upon. The rest of the evening sees the other plants integrating themselves into the village slowly.

For each plant the party negotiated a peace with, read the corresponding passage. Alter and paraphrase based on the variations in your party's plan.

Blood-Rot Fungus

> The Blood-Rot takes up residence in the livestock of Carnos, making the meat tender and tasty. As the village grows comfortable with their new tie to sentient fungus, both sides are able to optimize the livestock for their needs. Eventually Carnos meat becomes an exotic luxury, exported to the rest of the land.

Stinging Willows

> The Stinging Willows move into the center of Carnos. There, the Willows stand as quiet protectors, observing the area and enjoying the sunlight readily available. The additional protection the Willows offer soon makes Carnos a safe community, perfect for raising children. Within a year, all dogs in Carnos live under one of the Willow Trees.

Night Eye Vines

> Over the years the Night Eyes cover every rooftop in Carnos, reinforcing and protecting buildings against the elements. Once they cover every structure, Carnos successfully weathers storms and other natural disasters.

Tardon thanks the party for their help and remarks how they've inspired him during these twilight years of his life. He concludes that living at peace with nature doesn't just mean building a divide between the forest and the village.

CONCLUSION B

When the Spring Equinox battle concludes, the village of Carnos celebrates victory. However Guard Captain Falora and Tardon worry for the future. Falora warns the party to travel carefully when leaving Carnos. Tardon thanks the party for their assistance and mentions that they've inspired him to take a stand against the invading plants, and that it would have been a wise lesson to learn when he was younger. In the following months, the forest grows hostile to humanoid life as the village of Carnos comes under increasing conflict, gaining a reputation as a rough, wild village always in need of skilled fighters.

If Falora fell in combat, a guard goes into her office and fetches the party's reward in her place.

CONCLUSION C

With the Guard Captain dead and the peace broken, the village of Carnos is quickly vacated and becomes a ghost town within the week. Its only permanent resident is Tardon, who continues to plead with the plant species to allow a section of the forest for humans to live in.

Rewards

XP Rewards

ENCOUNTER	XP
Defeat Blood-Rot Bear	1,100 xp per bear
Defeat Night Eyes	700 xp per tree
Defeat Stinging Willow	1,800 xp per tree
Defeat Dire Wolf	200 xp per wolf
No Combat During Equinox	15,000 xp
Ally with Plant Factions against Carnos	5,000 xp

Treasure Rewards

Conclusion	Reward
Conclusion A (from Tardon) or Conclusion C (From the Plant's themselves)	**4 portions of Blood-Rot Fungus meat.** Eating one of these succulent cuts of meat bestows 5 temporary hit points until the next long rest.
	A vial of Stinging Willow venom. You can use the poison in this vial to coat one slashing or piercing weapon or up to three pieces of ammunition. Applying the poison takes one action. A creature hit by the poisoned weapon must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or take 1d12 + 4 poison damage. Once applied, the poison retains potency for 1 minute before drying. A creature who ingests this poison must succeed on a DC 18 Constitution saving throw or be paralyzed for the next eight hours.
	Night Eye Rope. 5 feet of rope of rope that can grow to 120 feet when placed up against the side of structures.
Conclusion A or B (from Falora)	500 gp (per character)

Author's Notes/ Acknowledgments:

This adventure explores both the divide between civilization and nature, and between indigenous people vs settlers/invaders. We are always intimidated by the strange and the unknown, but at the end of the day, it's a part of the world we live in, as we are to it. Feel free to use or revise this adventure to fit your world or your adventuring party. And yes, plants can smell. Yes, it's really weird.

Thank you to Sarah Harker for introducing me and showing me how to share my D&D ideas that would otherwise never see the light of day. And thanks to Jessica Marcrum and Jennifer Peig for the opportunity to participate in this anthology, my amazing editors Leon Barillaro, Lynne M. Meyer, Catherine Evans, and Liz Gist. Especially for giving your feedback and helping with how this adventure is structured. Further thanks to Austin Crawford, Bryan Nguyen, and Matt Bandoquillo for playtesting and breaking this adventure in the most unexpected of ways.

Author Bio:

Chris Nakamura is a strong environmental advocate, fascinated and determined to create areas of collaboration to offer new takes and possibilities on long old themes and issues. You can find his thoughts on the environment at https://lookingthroughtheseaglass.blogspot.com/ or follow him on Twitter @NakuDancingMan to see what else he's working on.

Night Eye Vines

Large plant, unaligned

Armor Class 13
Hit Points 85 (10d10 + 30)
Speed 10 ft., climb 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)	7 (–2)	10 (+0)	1 (–5)

Condition Immunities deafened, exhausted, prone
Damage Resistances cold, fire
Senses darkvision 30 ft., passive perception 10
Languages understand common, but cannot speak
Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Flower Eyes. The vines' yellow flowers act as its eyes. Without the flowers, the vines cannot see.

Keen Smell. The vines have advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell.

Actions

Constrict. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, reach 20 ft. Hit: 12 (2d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage. If the target is Large or smaller, it is grappled (escape DC 15). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained and takes 14 (4d6) poison damage at the start of each of its turns. The Vines can only target one creature at a time.

Entangling Vines. The Night Eye Vines spread out roots and vines on the ground in a 15 ft. square within 30 ft. of it. That area becomes difficult terrain. A creature in that area must succeed on a DC 14 Strength saving throw or be restrained. A restrained creature can use its action to make a DC 14 Strength (Athletics) check, freeing itself on a successful check. The effect ends after 1 minute.

Stinging Willow

Large plant, unaligned

Armor Class 19 (natural armor)
Hit Points 95 (10d10 + 45)
Speed 10 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	8 (–1)	17 (+3)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)	6 (–2)

Damage Vulnerability fire, cold
Skills Perception +6, Stealth +5
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive perception 16
Languages ---
Challenge 7 (2,000 XP)

Grasping Branches The Willow can have up to six grasping branches at a time. Each branch can be attacked individually (AC 19, 19 hit points). Destroying a branch deals 19 points of damage to the Willow. It takes 24 hours to regrow all six branches.

Stinging Leaves. When a creature comes into skin contact with a Willow or its branches, they must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 6(2d4+1) acid damage. On a successful save, the creature takes half damage. Creatures with thick fur are immune to this effect.

Actions

Multiattack. The Willow makes a number of branch attacks equal to its grasping branches, uses Reel and makes one bite attack.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 22 (4d8 + 4) piercing damage and 5 (2d4) acid damage.

Branch. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +7 to hit, reach 20 ft. one creature. Hit: The target is grappled (escape DC 15). Until the grapple ends, the target is restrained and has disadvantage on Strength Checks and Strength saving throws.

Reel. The Willow pulls each creature grappled by it up to 25 ft. straight toward it.

Blood-Rot Bears

Medium beast, unaligned

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 55 (7d8 + 17)
Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	9 (–1)	16 (+3)	9 (–1)	12 (+1)	6 (–2)

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, slashing from non-magical attacks
Senses passive perception 11
Languages common
Challenge 2 (450XP)

Blood-Rot Infection. When the bear is reduced to 0 HP, it explodes, and any creature within 10 feet of it must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the creature takes 14 (4d6) poison damage and becomes infected with Blood-ot fungus. Over the next 24 hours, the infected creature loses any desire to do anything and Blood-Rot begins to grow on their skin. In a week the creature is completely consumed by the Blood-Rot's will. The Blood Rot can only be removed by a greater restoration spell or by drinking the sap of a Stinging Willow.

Actions

Multiattack. The Bear makes two attacks: one with its bite and one with its claws.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. Hit: 9 (1d12 + 3) piercing damage. Target must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or be infected with Blood-Rot.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, reach 5ft, one creature. Hit 12 (2d8+3) slashing damage.

Blood-Rot Revenge. The bear drops to 0 hit points, triggering its Blood-Rot Infection trait.

Blood-Rot Animal Swarms

Medium swarm of tiny beasts, unaligned

Armor Class 14
Hit Points 36 (8d8)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (–1)	18 (+4)	11 (+0)	8(–1)	11 (+0)	3 (–4)

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, slashing from non-magical attacks
Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, prone, restrained, stunned
Senses passive perception 10
Languages common
Challenge 1 (200XP)

Blood-Rot Infection. When the swarm is reduced to 0 HP, it explodes, and any creature within 10 feet of it must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the creature takes 14 (4d6) poison damage and becomes infected with Blood-Rot fungus. Over the next 24 hours, the infected creature loses any desire to do anything and Blood-Rot begins to grow on their skin. In a week the creature is completely consumed by the Blood- Rot's will. The Blood Rot can only be removed by a greater restoration spell or by drinking the sap of a Stinging Willow.

Swarm. The swarm can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the swarm can move through any opening large enough for a Tiny beast. The swarm can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points.

Actions

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. Hit: 14 (4d6) piercing damage or 7 (2d6) piercing damage if the swarm has half of its hit points or fewer. Target must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or be infected with Blood-Rot Spores.

Blood-Rot Revenge. The Swarm immediately drops to 0 hit points, triggering its Blood-Rot Infection trait.





The Halted March

Written by Jessica L. Washburn

Levels: 17-20

Content Warnings: This module involves kidnapping, gaslighting, and implied starvation. These are elements that players and Dungeon Masters may find uncomfortable and wish to exclude from their game. The Halted March can be tailored to omit these themes. Be considerate of those who sit at your table.

SYNOPSIS

Another spring greets the realm, but it is forcibly stopped in its tracks by a dangerous and powerful cult, backed by Demeter, in an effort to have Hades return Persephone permanently to Mt. Olympus.

Left with no choice and her magic on the fritz from attempting to release her spouse from an enchanted coffin, Persephone stops a band of strong adventurers she meets on the road. Should they take up the task, they will save the region from certain death by starvation and earn favor from Queen of the Underworld - a boon, of which, no other mortals can boast.

ADVENTURE HOOK

Persephone, disguised by the Helm of Hades, confronts the adventurers on the road asking for help in exchange for the Golden Pomegranate - a magical fruit that never spoils. The adventure takes place at the Temple of Anoixi.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

This adventure is based on the concept of idolizing others and not accepting them as they are. Demeter sees Persephone as "her little girl," incapable of making her own choices about her life - thus tasking a cult that worships Persephone (the Cult of Anoixi) to capture Hades when he escorts Persephone from the Underworld.

The module has three branches of exploration that the party can do:

- a heist
- a diplomacy mission
- a legendary battle

CHAPTER 1: KATÁVASI (THE DESCENT)

You travel on a road through the countryside during spring. When the road takes you through a forest, birds sing to each other in the canopy as dappled sunlight smiles on each of your faces. A gentle breeze embraces you as a voice - coming from the entire forest - speaks to you.

"I am in need of your assistance. Will you answer my call?"

Rustling comes from the bushes ahead of you but stops as soon as it has started. In the middle of the road, an unconventionally dressed young woman suddenly appears as she pulls a helm from her head. Dressed in a gown that is an ombre of floral print and skull imagery, she gazes at each adventurer in turn.

Persephone (deity, she/her, chaotic good), the Goddess of Spring, introduces herself to the party and explains why she needs their assistance. At the seasons' exchange, Persephone was brought to the mortal realm by her loving spouse, **Hades**. Upon his return to the Underworld, he was kidnapped by the **Cult of Anoixi** (Cult of Spring) - leaving behind his helm. Incensed, Persephone confronted the cult, whose members believe that she is not their goddess.

Unsuccessful in freeing him from a large, enchanted calathus, her powers can now only force flowers to bloom, and she is unable to unleash her wrath directly on the kidnappers. The goddess of spring also declares that if this goes on for too long, the region may experience starvation in the coming months if the harvest is delayed or if it never arrives. **Persephone** addresses the party:

> "I am afraid that I will be of no use until my spouse and powers are returned to me. As an act of good faith, I present you with his Helm to assist in his release from that damned coffin. When you are successful in returning him to me, I'll give you a golden pomegranate - a fruit that will never spoil and has great powers."
>
> If the party asks how Persephone would like them to complete the task, she responds:
>
> "I care not for how you retrieve him - by book, by hook, or by crook. My patience has been worn thin. The temple has an open porch, but he is being held somewhere inside a smaller building."

Development

Persephone explains that in a day's time, the **Cult of Anoixi** will be holding the Lesser Mysteries - a ritual in which anyone is invited to participate. The three categories of participants are as follows:

- Priests, priestesses, and hierophants (typically dressed in white)
- Initiates undergoing the ceremony for the first time (typically dressed in light green)
- Others who have participated previously (typically dressed in dark green)

This ceremony provides the party with an inconspicuous arrival to the **Temple of Anoixi**. Persephone also gives the adventurers the *Helm of Hades* (see Appendix B).

- If the party chooses to set out on a diplomatic mission, refer to "By Book" sections in the later chapters.
- If the party chooses to set out on a warpath, refer to "By Hook" sections in the later chapters.
- If the party chooses to set out on a heist, refer to "By Crook" sections in the later chapters.

Chapter 2: Anazítisi (The Search)

By Book

The party can go to the temple and ask around to find the room where **Hades** may be hidden. The pronaos (the front of the temple) is a reception area where they will be greeted by **Priest Konstantinos**:

> Average height with dark hair and a thick beard to match, he greets you with a beaming smile and warm words:
>
> "Our dearest goddess has seen fit to bless us with a long spring. Come in and give thanks for her love!"

Konstantinos (human (**see Appendix A**), he/him, neutral good) leads the party into the cella (middle room) where a large marble statue of a teenage Persephone sits. A marble Demeter stands behind her, one hand on her daughter's shoulder, the other hand clutching reeds in front of her chest. A successful **DC 17 Intelligence (History) or Intelligence (Religion) check** reveals that the reeds are typically used in wicker baskets used for the autumnal harvest. If asked about anything strange going on, Konstantinos knows very little; he mentions that **Priest Vasilios** (Summer Eladrin (**see Appendix A**), he/him, lawful neutral) has been absent-minded. **Konstantinos** chalks it up due to an oracle telling them that there would be a 'spectacle' at the Lesser Mysteries. **Vasilios** took this to mean there would be a robbery of the temple's wealth and has stepped up security measures.

By Hook

Should the party choose this option, the encounter takes on the following form:

- Eight **gladiators** (MM) guard the outside of the temple (four are stationed north of the temple, four to the south)
- **Priest Konstantinos** is not a fighting man; he will first try to stop the party with his words
- There are 8 gladiators in the cell
- There are four additional gladiators in the adyton; one of which is **Priest Vasilios** in disguise, and the **hydra** (MM), Dóntia, that Demeter created

During combat, **Vasilios** yells at the party to not meddle in the business of gods, and that Demeter's maternal wrath is unparalleled. **Vasilios** does what he must to defend the door, using the magic he has to buff the hydra and gladiators.

By Crook

The party can go to the temple and use their cunning to rescue Hades. The Temple of Anoixi is unlike other temples; there are openings in the ceilings to allow the spring and summer sun in, and it is filled with plants. The party can also infiltrate the temple by pretending to be initiates for the ceremony.

On a successful **DC 18 Charisma (Deception) check**, the party portrays the cult believes the party's disguise as initiates and is led to the calathus by **Konstantinos** (who is under the impression that it is only jewels) - but first, they must answer a riddle.

Hades' calathus is hidden in the adyton, guarded by a fierce hydra under a simple, locked trap door. Inside the trap door, the calathus is made of wicker reeds (the same reed depicted in the Persephone statue). The calathus is locked and requires the Tooth Key from **Dóntia**. Once the hydra is slain, they can loot the mouths to find the key with a successful **DC 18 Intelligence (Investigation) check**).

Read the following text aloud:

> It cannot be seen, it cannot be felt
> Cannot be heard, cannot be smelt
> It lies behind stars and under hills
> It sits in the empty holes it fills
> It came first and will follow after
> It will end lives and it kills all laughter

The answer is "Darkness."

CHAPTER 3: ANÁVASI (THE ASCENT)

By Book

If the party continues to pressure **Konstantinos** for additional information, he mentions that it is odd that he has not been allowed to enter the adyton for the past few days.

Should the party mingle with the other initiates or acolytes, they immediately notice that two new acolytes are challenging each other to a drinking contest. The party can join in or they can idle near the two new acolytes as they talk about the cool new "pet" the temple has that Konstantinos doesn't know about.

By Hook

With the battle over, the party can commence getting into the simple locked trap door and searching for the Tooth Key left behind by one of **Dóntia's** many heads. The Tooth Key unlocks the calathus. The party needs to be careful as to who helps Hades out of the box; it could have adverse side effects for those who may be paladins or clerics.

By Crook

The party can employ creative solutions for getting the hydra and the gladiators out of the way: banishment, using the *Helm of Hades*, or causing a distraction in another part of the temple. However, if they banish the hydra, they will not be able to unlock the calathus, as they need the Tooth Key.

CONCLUSION

When the adventurers free a withered, sickly Hades from the enchanted calathus, **Persephone** appears at the **Temple of Anoixi** and gives the following praise:

> "Let it be known you have done me a great service by freeing my love. Now that my anger has washed away - I can tell I only have my mother to blame for these unfortunate circumstances. We will not remain here for much longer. As promised, the Golden Pomegranate. Stand back, dear ones."
>
> Persephone kisses her spouse on the cheek and sets to work. Kneeling to scoop loose soil into her hand, she whispers to it. The soil morphs into a golden orb, and as she outstretches her hand, it solidifies into a golden pomegranate.
>
> Once the treasure is taken, she violently slams her fists into the ground. The nearby plants shudder as the magic passes through them. They begin to produce fruit, vegetables, and grains. Numerous vines wind themselves together, forming little plant humanoids.
>
> "My children will help the mortals with the harvest. Once their task is complete, they will return to the soil. No one else should suffer for my parent's jealousy. Spread the word, as winter shall come early this year."
>
> She assists Hades, and the pair vanish from sight.

Rewards

Golden Pomegranate (also known as an 'Apple of Discord')

Magical fruit, legendary

A fruit that never spoils, it has 300-600 magical arils inside that - when planted - produces a random, chaotic magical effect. For best results, mix and match spells that are pertinent to the setting - including beneficial, detrimental, and inconsequential properties. Wild magic surge tables would be the best place to look; below are some examples of spells.

Helm of Hades

Wondrous Item, artifact (requires attunement)

This helm is typically worn by the god of the Underworld. While attuned, the wearer gains the following benefits:

- You can use an action to turn invisible. You can roll with advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks; however, you still make noise while wearing this item.
- If you attack or cast a spell on a creature, you remain invisible but will suffer a compounding 1d12 necrotic damage. (First attack/spell - 1d12, second attack/spell - 2d12, etc.)
- Anything you are wearing or carrying is invisible with you. You may take the Use Object action or drop or pick up items without penalty. When items are dropped from your hand, they become visible. When you pick up items, they become invisible. However, any creature can notice these things if they have a passive Perception of 17 or higher.
- You move up to your speed without provoking opportunity attacks while invisible.

Author's Notes:

This module was an attempt to paint Persephone as an independent god who makes her own choices as well as looking at the "idea" vs. "actuality" of someone - something that we've all encountered at one point in our lives.

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Author Bio:

Jessica is a writer and copy-editor who looks forward to releasing more projects and supplements for D&D 5e as well as some system-agnostic materials. She is the ENnie-nominated author of Uncaged Anthology Volume 1 module: The Tale of Two Sphinxes, and author of Book of Seasons: Solstices module: The Smiling Isles. You can find her on Twitter as @HealthPakStream. She may or may not be a halfling bard.

Appendix

Halted Marshes Wild Magic Table

1D10	Effect
1	For the next minute, you can see any invisible creatures if you have line of sight to them
2	You turn into a pomegranate tree until the start of your next turn. While a pomegranate tree, you are incapacitated and have vulnerability to all damage. If you drop to 0 hit points, your bark withers and dies, and your form reverts.
3	You are transported to the Underworld until the end of the next day, after which time you return to the space you previously occupied or the nearest unoccupied space if that space is occupied.
4	You become ghoulish in appearance and frighten the five nearest creatures until the end of your next turn.
5	Each creature within 30 feet of you becomes invisible for the next minute. The invisibility ends on a creature when it attacks or casts a spell.
6	Illusory butterflies and flower petals flutter in the air within 10 feet of you for the next 2 hours.
7	Each creature within 30 feet of you takes 1d10 necrotic damage. You regain hit points equal to the sum of the necrotic damage dealt.
8	You become invisible for the next minute. During that time, other creatures also can't hear you. The invisibility ends if you attack or cast a spell.
9	You are surrounded by faint, ethereal groans, pleas, and whispers emanating from the River Styx for the next 24 hours.
10	You cast Polymorph on yourself. If you fail the saving throw, you turn into a hydra for the spell's duration.

Priest Konstantinos

Medium humanoid (any race), neutral good

Armor Class 15 (breastplate)
Hit Points 117 (18d8 + 36)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	20 (+5)	15 (+2)

Saving Throws Int +6, Wis +9, Cha +6
Skills Arcana +6, Deception +6, History +6, Religion +6
Senses passive Perception 15
Languages Common, plus any three languages
Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

Premonition. Konstantinos receives a +3 bonus on initiative rolls.

Spellcasting. Konstantinos is a 10th level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 17, +9 to hit with spell attacks). He has the following cleric spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *guidance, light, sacred flame, spare the dying, thaumaturgy*
1st level (4 slots): *cure wounds, identify, guiding bolt*
2nd level (3 slots): *lesser restoration, silence, spiritual weapon*
3rd level (3 slots): *dispel magic, mass healing word, spirit guardians*
4th level (3 slots): *banishment, death ward, guardian of faith*
5th level (2 slots): *flame strike*

He can cast the following spells without material components:

2/day each: *detect thoughts, dimension door, haste, slow*
1/day each: *suggestion, teleport*

Actions

Multiattack. He can make one melee attack and cast a cantrip.

Mace. *Melee Weapon Attack. +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit*: 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage.

Priest Vasilios

Medium humanoid (any race), lawful neutral

Armor Class 15 (breastplate)
Hit Points 117 (18d8 + 36)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	15 (+2)	20 (+5)

Saving Throws Int +6, Wis +6, Cha +9
Skills Arcana +6, Deception +6, History +6, Religion +6
Senses passive Perception 12
Languages Common, plus any three languages
Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

Premonition. Vasilios receives a +3 bonus on initiative rolls.

Spellcasting. Vasilios is a 10th level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 17, +9 to hit with spell attacks). He has the following paladin spells prepared:

1st level (4 slots): cure wounds, heroism, searing smite, shield of faith
2nd level (3 slots): lesser restoration, magic weapon, aid
3rd level (3 slots): aura of vitality, dispel magic, revivify
4th level (3 slots): banishment, death ward, staggering smite
5th level (2 slots): destructive wave

Actions

Multiattack. Vasilios can make two melee attacks per turn.

Mace. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage.

The Cultivation of Life. A blessing from Demeter, the mother of cultivation, Vasilios can assist a creature in cheating death by providing it with a surge of life. This surge of divine magic can restore 10d20 or 183 HP to the creature, not to exceed the creature's maximum HP.





Fall


Fergs.art

For Lorn Fathers

Written by Chris Nakamura and Sarah Gray Harker

Levels: 2

Content Warnings: mentions of childbirth

SYNOPSIS

Pressed for time due to an imminent birth, a young couple have rushed to clear a patch of land just inside the Lorn Forest to build a magic school. As a result of them cutting down trees, the forest is in a state of turmoil. These ancient trees have spawned monstrous versions of woodland creatures. The party, tasked to help find a solution, find themselves in the midst of a family disagreement about what it means to be a good person and a good father.

ADVENTURE HOOK

- The Lorn Forest is known for being the home of a powerful and wise druid who may be able to teach magic to a variety of magic casters. One of the party could have heard about the druid previously
- Adventurers can be passing through the area and be attacked by a giant squirrel or hear about someone being attacked by one
- DMs can also include mentions about a new magic academy being built in this area

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The Lorn Forest is a sizable forest on the outside of the medium-sized town of Lorn that lies near a major trade route. The Lorn forest itself is named after the trees that grow in the forest, the Lorn Trees. Lorn trees resemble real-life baobab trees, but are adapted to a more varied climate and have large leaves and seed pods. As such, they are unique homes to several beasts in the area and attract many birds nests during the fall season.

The Lorn Trees themselves are magical and communicate through their interlocking root systems. When the Lorn Trees, as a collective, feel threatened, they harness their magic to enchant their fruit and branches to bless the local wildlife to help protect the forest. These blessed creatures are stronger than their regular counterparts and are able to fight in unique ways while near the Lorn Trees. The more trees that are felled, the more beasts the Lorn Trees recruit.

The forest is active again, much to the dismay of Marcindo, the forest's druid for the past 100 years, along with his husband. Their son, Alros, and daughter-in-law, Breemila Mulberry, have been building a school near the Lorn Forest to teach the magics found therein and honor Marcindo's lessons. Their timeline has been rushed as they are expecting a child any day now. Father and son, soon to be a father himself, need to figure out a compromise between the forest and the new school. Their current plan is to use a ritual to craft a magic axe that would let them speak with the trees.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

- ***Marcindo:*** (orc **druid**, MM, he/him, neutral good) He and his husband, Salix, who is away on business, are the druids of the Lorn Forest. He is a warm and friendly old man, but he does not compromise when it comes to the good of the forest

> Marcindo is a trans man who gave birth to his son Alros. While this module is discussing masculinity and what it means to be a good father, at no point should Marcindo's manhood be questioned. He is one of Alros' fathers AND he gave birth to him.

- ***Alros Mulberry:*** (half-orc/half-elf (see Appendix), MM, he/him, neutral good) son of Marcindo. A rather haphazard man trying his best to fit in with his wife's family. He means well but doesn't always think through the consequences of his actions
- ***Breemila Mulberry:*** (gnome (see Appendix), she/her, lawful neutral) The youngest daughter of the local trade lord and days away from giving birth to her first child. Bree is a shrewd but fair businesswoman. She loves her husband dearly but is fed up with his reluctance to talk to his father

CHAPTER 1: HOW BAD COULD THIS POSSIBLY BE?

The adventurers are traveling on their way to the town of Lorn.

> You've been traveling for about half the morning, when the chattering of the forest starts to fade. Through the murmur of the forest, you suddenly hear a cry for "HELP!!"
>
> There is a large clearing of tree stumps, the cuts still fresh. At the opposite side of it you see a man with light green skin and pointed ears desperately throwing magic at the beasts surrounding him. They are giant, with golden fur, beady eyes, and sharp teeth. They hop from tree to tree, chittering and lunging at the man. There is a solid thunk and an "ow!" as one of the giant squirrels hits the man squarely in the chest with a nut.

After helping **Alros** fend off 4 **golden-tailed dire squirrels** (see Appendix), he thanks the party. He asks them to help escort him to this meeting and offers 35 gp as payment.

He explains the following:

- He is on his way through the Lorn forest to meet with the forest's druid and set up a ritual
- He and his wife, Breemila, have paid for this area of the forest as an eventual location for a Magic Academy the two want to build
- The school has to be built in the Lorn Forest for its ambient magic and abundance of magical materials
- The dire squirrels have stopped their efforts to clear the area
- His wife is expecting to give birth any day now
- He is hoping the local druid can help him resolve this conflict in the forest

He's happy to talk about his wife, the pregnancy, and their excitement at being parents, but dodges questions about any other family. A successful **DC 13 Wisdom (Insight) check** draws attention to how quickly Alros glosses over the meeting with the druid and his unwillingness to talk about him. A successful **DC 16 Charisma (Persuasion) check** can lead to him alluding to troubles with his father.

He also comments on how the help and aid that his wife Breemila has given to the project and the leadership she's shown in organizing the funds to the project.

Oh... Pretty Bad Then

The party arrives at the druid's grove with little incident. A successful **DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check** reveals they are being followed by a dire squirrel.

> Sitting on a tree stump is an older orc man stroking a golden dire squirrel between her ears. When the squirrel sees you, she darts up the tree and starts chittering.
>
> "Now, you stop that." His tone is warm as he looks up at the squirrel. He stands, stepping towards you all, but then he stops, staying just out of range. He is leaning heavily on a gnarled staff with a satchel over his shoulder."Well met."

After brief introductions, Alros extends a formal invitation to Marcindo to attend the town hall discussing the planned academy. A successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check** reveals that they look very similar. The conversation quickly devolves after that.

Alros tries to be official and formal, but Marcindo often interrupts with counter-arguments. Their replies to each other become increasingly terse, quickly devolving into asides and snippets.

Alros	Marcindo
Paid for the forest and should be able to cut down the trees.	No one owns a forest or the land.
Cut down more trees to build a larger perimeter to defend from dire squirrels.	Further destruction will only invite further conflict.
Dire squirrels are dangerous and must be eradicated.	They are only the forest's natural defenses.
The construction must be completed quickly.	They must commune with the forest through a ritual.

After hearing the two argue, read aloud:

> "I need this school to be done in time to teach my child magic!" Alros snaps.
>
> Marcindo looks unimpressed and evenly says, "This what you're teaching my grandchild? That's it's okay to disrespect the land and the place you were raised?"

Alros storms off into the forest, despite any protest, and Marcindo, resigned, stays in the clearing.

Development

Marcindo and Alros go their separate ways having unsuccessfully resolved what the party now knows is a conflict that is both familial and environmental.

CHAPTER 2: ANY QUEST-IONS?

The party has a choice: follow Alros into the forest, or stay and talk with Marcindo. Both have different goals they want the party to accomplish, and each will further expand on the rift between the two. Afterward, both will direct the party into town to meet with Bree. **Depending on the party's actions, jump to either Arlos or Marcindo**.

Pick A Father, Any Father

Alros

Alros, frustrated with how badly the situation went, goes off the trail to clear his head. A successful **DC 10 Wisdom (Survival) check** reveals his path. If they fail the check, they search for a while before hearing Alros in the distance fighting 2 **gold tailed dire squirrels**. Otherwise they find Alros quickly, and see him brooding and trying to cast magic on a tree branch.

When asked, he explains that he's frustrated with his father. They agreed to work on a ritual together to create an enchanted axe, but his father's pace is too slow for him.

Additionally, he is hurt by his father's words, given that the magic academy was designed based on his father's principles. Alros wants to teach his child similar lessons and realized he could introduce forest wisdom to more people. It's why he's taking this extra time to come out himself and work on the ritual.

He needs help finding a particular tree in the forest, and needs help casting the magic, as it's a cooperative enchantment. He knows roughly where the tree is, but has become disoriented because he stormed off.

On their way to find a suitable tree, the characters run into two hazards. Roll 1d4 to determine the type of hazard, rerolling any duplicates.

Forest Hazards

D4	Description
1	A wide and cold river which players must ford on a successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) or Strength (Athletics) check**, or become sick (poisoned condition) starting the next morning.
2	Alros gets the party lost. **DC 12 Wisdom (Survival) check** to find the path again.
3	BEES! Players take 2d4 piercing damage, or half as much damage on a successful **DC 15 Dexterity saving throw**.
4	The journey takes longer than anticipated. Characters must make a **DC 15 Constitution saving throw** or suffer one level of exhaustion.

Once the party reaches the area, Alros quickly spots the correct tree. Read aloud:

> Alros starts to smile as he picks up his pace. "It's this way, I know it." His smile grows as he makes his way to the largest tree you've seen all day, easily fifty feet around. Then his smile falters. "I used to ask my fathers if I would ever be big enough to hug this tree. I can see why father would choose this tree."

Alros needs a minute to collect himself. If asked by the party, he shares a few fond memories from childhood. When he is ready, he asks for help setting up the spell and reciting the incantation. He asks the adventurers to hold the spell's component (a rope made from vine, hair, and twine) around the tree and repeat the incantation when asked. The party must overall succeed on a **DC 10 Intelligence (Arcana) check** to complete the spell. When the spell is complete, read aloud:

> As the spell comes to an end, there is a rumble of thunder and the sound of bark cracking. Then there is a loud yelp from Alros, who is rubbing his head where a perfectly formed axe handle has unceremoniously dropped.

Now with the handle, they head back to town. The journey back goes smoothly. At the end of it, Alros asks the party to go fetch the axe head from his wife while he carves some runes into the axe handle. He believes that Bree can be found at the blacksmith's.

Marcindo

Marcindo, glaring after his son as he leaves the clearing, sighs deeply and opens his satchel, rummaging inside it. If approached by the party, he apologizes for losing his temper and asks if they can accompany him on a short errand to pacify a golden-tailed dire squirrel. He pulls out some moss and begins to chew on it.

Marcindo mutters angrily under his breath as he leads the party further into the forest, mentioning to the party that if he'd only had more time he could have discovered why the Lorn Trees created the giant squirrels. Firm in his opposition to his son's plan, Marcindo asks if the party agrees, stating that his preferred plan was to replant the trees cut down and to slowly clear out an area over the next ten years by removing two trees a year. Then Arlos could build his school in time for his son to attend.



Marcindo's smile brightens his face and smoothing out some of the worried wrinkles.

"Oh! I can't wait to be a grandfather! You know, seeing Bree walking around the last few weeks, still working so hard on this magic academy. I have no idea how she's doing it! When I was pregnant with Arlos, I didn't have the patience for anything!"

He's proud of his son's ambitions but doesn't approve of how he's approaching it, stating that just cutting down the trees like this isn't standing right by "forest wisdom". Marcindo begins to express his concern about how Arlos is approaching the issue of building the school when he jumps.

Mid sentence, Marcindo jumps, magic glowing from his eyes as his arms reach into a dense tree branch above the party's head. There's the sound of panicked chittering before Marcindo drags a dire squirrel out of the tree and onto the ground.

"Hold it down! Hold it down!" Marcindo grunts, eyes glowing with magic as he begins to speak in Druidic.

Whoever helps hold down the squirrel must make a **DC 12 Strength (Athletics) check** to see if they are successful or if the squirrel scratches them for 3 slashing damage. Over time, the squirrels' struggles lessen until Marcido announces that it's okay to let go.

As he examines the squirrel, Marcindo asks the party if they could deliver a letter to Alros's wife in town.

To See Bree!

Whether they talk to one or both of Alros' fathers, the party is redirected to the forge in town to meet with Alros's wife. Breemilla has already picked up the axehead and the blacksmith tells them where they can find her office.

> You see a very pregnant gnome woman with dark brown skin leaning over a table. She doesn't look up when your party enters the room, but holds up a finger as she finishes writing a note on a sheet of paper. She straightens and observes your party. She holds herself proudly and it is obvious that she is a woman of power and position.
>
> [***If her husband is with the party:*** Once she sees her husband, her face warms and she holds out her hand to him. She kisses him hello.]
>
> "Right, don't have all day. What can I help you with?"

When the party asks about the axe head, she inquires as to how they know her husband and/or Marcindo. Asking how the meeting went, Bremilla talks about her husband's stubbornness to prove his father wrong and make the Lorn Forest location work. If Arlos is present, he objects that it's not that simple. She connects it to the father sharing the same stubbornness. Her hope is that tomorrow's meeting will allow the two to come to some kind of agreement.

Development

Bremilla asks if the party could help escort Marcindo to her office space when he enters town tomorrow.

CHAPTER 3: A SQUIRREL'S DESTINY

The next day while moving about the village, the party encounters Marcindo coaxing a large bushy tailed dire squirrel through town, using food to entice it. Marcindo introduces the party to Ruby, a golden-tailed dire squirrel that Marcindo has managed to separate from the Lorn Tree's influence. He hopes to use the squirrel as a medium between the forest and his son's work. While Marcindo talks to the party, Ruby grabs the food out of Marcindo's slack grip and scampers further into the town. The sounds of frightened screams herald her arrival.

> In a flash, Ruby the dire squirrel is 10 feet down the road, her cheeks stuffed with the handful of nuts and berries that were previously in Marcindo's grasp. Her nose twitching, Ruby darts further away as the druid calls out in shock.
>
> "Ruby, come back!" Marcindo cries, "The town isn't safe for a squirrel like you!"
>
> The druid spins to look at you all.
>
> "Please, I need your help!"

Squirrel on the Run!

Ruby with a mouth full of food is a force of chaos, setting off chain reactions that inhibit and stall the party without any doing any direct damage to the village. Have the party roll initiative (with Ruby having an initiative of 19.) Each turn, Ruby runs further into the town and out of danger while setting off a chain reaction that changes the battlefield. Unless grappled, Ruby does one of the following on each of her turns:

1. Bounds over and under passersby, causing them to fall in the road. The next 15 feet of the main road becomes difficult terrain
2. Scrabbles up the side of a merchant cart, claws digging into the ropes holding the goods together, Ruby knocks several large kegs of ale onto the street. They roll towards the party - Each character must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 8 bludgeoning damage from the kegs
3. Scaling up the sides of the buildings, Ruby begins to run from rooftop to rooftop After one large leap, the rooftop she's running on breaks, dropping her into the building below: Bremilla's office
4. Every round onwards, Ruby runs rampantly around the edges of Bremilla's office, kicking up papers and knocking furniture to the floor. Bremilla draws an arcane trap in the center of the room, but the party needs to either direct Ruby to the trap or subdue her

I speak for these three!

With Ruby contained and Marcindo running into the room behind the party, everyone catches their breath after the chaotic series of events.

There's a moment of silence as Ruby calms down, exploring the extent of her magical confinement as the pages and fragments of thrown furniture settles. Light from a new hole in the roof falls in the center of the room.

Marcindo shuffles his feet by the entrance, his eyes shifting from the hole in the roof to the mess around the room.

Arlos has his arms crossed, a stunned look on his face.

Bremilla stands up, looks around the room before promptly breaking out into a fit of giggles.

Arlos is quick to follow, joined by Marcindo as he moves into the center of the room and rests a hand on his son's shoulder.

"Oh my," Bremilla says, taking deep breaths as her giggles wind down, "So should we get this meeting started then?"

Dropping the magic circle, Bremilla tasks the party with watching Ruby while the three of them conduct the meeting. Bremilla casts prestidigitation and begins cleaning the room, expressing her faith in her husband to speak for both of them.

Arlos and Marcindo begin to debate, each proposing solutions while the other strikes it down due to flaws or holes in the plan.

Alros	Marcindo
Cut down the trees that are changing the squirrels	More trees will respond and turn even more squirrels
Construction would be damaged by weather	What if you cut down a little bit of the forest each year?
That would cost too much!	What if you get your wood from somewhere else and build around the trees?
What if we capture all the squirrels?	Then the Lorn Trees would change to another animal.

Their conversation is interrupted as Bremilla lifts a stack of papers onto the table between the two men and asks the party if they have any suggestions.

The Solution:

Here the party can negotiate any kind of solution towards the problem with their words influencing Alros and Marcindo. Depending on the roleplay and the solutions proposed, choose the appropriate elements from endings A and B.
Some potential solutions are:

- Alros and Bremilla will begin to harvest wood from another forest, and build within the clearing already cut out of the forest, replanting any cut Lorn Trees.
- Marcindo will work with Alros to ritually cast speak with plants to work with the plants to clear an area for the construction. It will add a year to the planned construction.
- Alros and Bremilla will relocate the main school on the outskirts of the village of Lorn, and repurpose the cleared area as a gathering place to take students on field trips.

Development

If the solution stops the destruction of the Lorn trees, go to Ending A. If the solution does not halt the Lorn trees destruction, go to Ending B.

CONCLUSION

If the solution leaves Alros and Bremilla satisfied, they approach the party and ask if they'd like to help settle on a name for theMagic Academy. If not, they settle on the name of Mulberry Magic Academy and grant the party the Lorn Axe in thanks. If the party did not damage Ruby, Marcindo approaches as the party leaves the building and asks if any of them would like to take Ruby along as an animal companion, stating that she enjoyed "playtime".

If the party stays in town, Breemilla gives birth three days later.

Over time, the Magic Academy is built and the town becomes a frequent stop for visiting wizards, gaining a wide reputation as the best place to learn about wild and nature based magics.

Ending A

Over the next year, the Mulberry Magic Academy for nature-based magic is raised in/ or on the edge of the Lorn Forest. There Bremilla and Arlos instruct classes using the forest to gather spell components for druids, sorcerers, and wizards. Lorn trees are planted around the structure. A plaque at the front of the building lists the names of the party.

The solution to the Lorn Trees works and, although there is now a small population of dire squirrels in the trees, no other creatures are transformed.

Ending B

> Over the next year, the forest grows increasingly dangerous as the Mulberry Magic Academy is slowly built. Construction is hindered by the dire squirrels that attack. Eventually, the school builds a 20-foot tall wall that encompasses the grounds.

Other larger animals are influenced by the remaining Lorn Trees and the forest becomes home to a dire wolf pack.

Rewards

XP Rewards

Obstacle	XP
Defeating Dire Squirrel	100 xp per squirrel
Surviving BEES!	50 xp
Fording the River	75 xp
Catching Ruby	125 xp
Resolving Family Conflict	150 xp

The Lorn Axe

This rustic axe has an inscription on the handle in Orc that reads "I speak to trees."

You gain a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this weapon. You can use an action to cast speak with plants without material components. Once this feature is used, it cannot be used again until the next dawn.

Ruby

A 3 foot tall dire squirrel who has large brown eyes. Ruby is friendly to you and your companions. She obeys any verbal commands that you issue to her (with no action required by you). If you don't issue any commands, she defends herself from hostile creatures, but otherwise takes no actions. Ruby uses the Gold Tailed Dire Squirrel stats.

Author's Notes/ Acknowledgments:

We are not liable for any pain or damage caused by the puns in this module. The other possible names for this adventure included such things as "Into the Dad Lands" and "Dad-Maggedon".

Feminist works can focus on toxic masculitinites and this adventure started as a desire explore other masculitinites, especially as they relate to Fatherhood and what it means to be a good father. Through Alros and Marcindo, we wanted to show how disagreements can happen between family without there being an antagonist or a "condemnation" moment.

We would like to thank Jess Marcrum and Jennifer Peig for the opportunity to participate in this anthology, our amazing editors Lynne Meyer, Jacky Leung, and Annamyriah de Jong who helped us make this adventure amazing, our incredible artist Andrew Ferguson for bringing the dire squirrels to life. We'd also like to thank each other for being patient with each other as we engaged in our first collaborative D&D module and for constantly challenging each other to add more Lorax and Dr Suess puns.

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Bremilla Mulberry

Small Humanoid, lawful good

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 24 (4d6 + 8)
Speed 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)	11 (+0)	11 (+0)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Cha +5, Con +4
Skills Insight +2, Nature +3, Persuasion +5
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive perception 11
Languages Common, Gnomish, Elvish, Orcish
Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Conductor of the Wind. Bremilla can use her bonus action to change the direction of the wind within a 100-foot radius around it. She can choose the direction but not the strength of the wind.

Gale Magic. When Bremilla casts a cantrip that deals lightning or thunder damage, she adds +3 to the damage.

Innate Spellcasting. Bremilla's spellcasting ability is Charisma (+6 to hit with spell attacks, spell save DC 14). Bremilla can cast the following spells innately:

At will: *gust, prestidigitation, shocking grasp, thunderclap*
3/day: *absorb elements, fog cloud, thunderwave*
1/day: *earthbind*

Actions

Lightning Dagger. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 2 (1d4) piercing damage plus 2 (1d4) lightning damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or be stunned until the end of its next turn.

Alros Mulberry

Medium humanoid, neutral good

Armor Class 10
Hit Points 15 (3d8 + 3)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)

Skills Acana +4, History +4
Senses passive perception 10
Languages Common, Orcish
Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Spellcasting. Alros is a 3rd-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 12, +5 to hit with spell attacks). It has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *mending, prestidigitation, shocking grasp*
1st level (4 slots): *shield, burning hands, disguise self*
2nd level (2 slots): *blur, gust of wind, web*

Relentless Endurance. When you are reduced to 0 hit points but not killed outright, you can drop to 1 hit point instead. You can't use this feature again until you finish a long rest.

Actions

Dagger. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 2 (1d4) piercing damage.

Gold Tailed Dire Squirrels

Medium beast, chaotic good

Armor Class 13
Hit Points 29 (4d10 + 4)
Speed 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	18 (+4)	13 (+1)	2 (–4)	10 (+0)	4 (–3)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Con +3
Skills Acrobatics +6, Stealth +6
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive perception 10
Languages –
Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Pack Tactics. The dire squirrel has advantage on attack rolls against a creature if at least one of the dire squirrel's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

Keen Smell. The dire squirrel has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell.

Actions

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. Hit: 10 (2d4 + 4) piercing damage.

Throw Lorn Seeds. *Ranged Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, range 10/50, one creature. Hit: 7 (1d6+3) bludgeoning damage.





As The Leaves Turn

Written by Allen Johnson

Levels: 3

SYNOPSIS

The nights grow colder and the villagers of Rukswood settle in for another harsh winter, trusting in a wondrous tree to provide for them during the long dark, as it always has. But as the last weeks of autumn draw near, the tree shows signs of sickness. The desperate villagers recruit adventurers to seek a cure before the tree succumbs.

ADVENTURE HOOK

The people of Rukswood offer free food, lodging, and gold for kind adventurers who will aid them in their plight. Alternatively, the players might be citizens of Rukswood themselves, either preparing for the winter along with the rest of the village or returning from their adventures abroad.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The Evergreen, a massive tree situated in the center of Rukswood, is actually an ancient treant named Deeproot, affectionately nicknamed 'Nana Green' by the children of the village. For centuries, she has provided for the village, first to fulfil an obligation to its founder and then out of genuine love for the people living there.

Every five years, the treant hibernated to recover her strength, 'dying' and then blooming once more when spring returned. However, as the villagers grew to rely on the tree, the treant went longer and longer without taking her much needed rest.

It has now been decades since Nana Green last slept and the long years of neglecting her own well-being have begun to take their toll. If she does not sleep through the coming winter, she will wilt and never recover. Even as the village healer rushes to find aid in creating a 'cure' for the ailing Evergreen, Nana Green has asked one of the children from the village, the young triton known as Fisheyes, to find others willing to help her rest.

CHAPTER : A SIMPLE TASK

The Town of Rukswood

> After many long hours on the road, the village of Rukswood comes into view. Picturesque cottages, cozy and quaint, stand amidst the tall oak trees, dead leaves carpeting the ground and fluttering in the frigid breeze. The villagers themselves, mostly humans and halflings, are cheerful and you receive your fair share of smiles as you make your way towards the center of the village.
>
> There, you are treated to an impressive sight; standing taller than any other tree in the village, a massive oak dominates the square. Young children play amidst its gnarled roots, some of them dangling from those branches that hang low to the ground. More surprising than its size is its dazzling color; even this late in autumn, the leaves are a bright, vibrant green.

A quiet village, Rukswood does not offer much in the way of commodities for wandering adventurers, but what it lacks in shops and entertainment it more than makes up for in rustic hospitality; the people here are kind and welcoming to outsiders, more than happy to direct them towards a small pub named Barnum's Place, the single building of note in the village.

The party may explore the village at their leisure, though there is not much for them to see. If they ask the villagers about the Evergreen, the following information can be shared:

- The tree has been there since Rukswood was founded. Some say the village was built around the tree, while others claim that it was planted later
- The tree is almost certainly magical. Its leaves never turn brown and die, it grows stone fruit throughout the year, and any branches cut from the bough soon grow back
- Some of the older folk in the village claim that the tree has wilted before, but such occurrences are extremely rare and usually seen as a bad omen; the last time this happened was well over forty years ago

A Heartfelt Plea

Once the party has had time to get settled in Rukswood, they are approached by **Harpin Keln** (half-orc **druid**, MM, she/her, neutral good), the village healer. An aging woman of below average height, she greets the party with hat in hand.

> "I'm sorry to bother you all, but… perhaps you could help an old lady with her problem."
>
> The half-orc looks towards the center of the village.
>
> "I tend to the people here, healing all of their cuts and bruises, comforting the sick. But the Evergreen… She cares for all of us. We eat her fruit, burn her kindling to get through the long winter nights, rest in her shade on hot summer days. She is the heart of this village."
>
> Turning back to you, she smiles sadly.
>
> "...And she is dying."

Healer Keln does not know exactly what is wrong with the Evergreen, only that the tree is clearly ailing. Over the last few months, some of her leaves have turned brown and begun to fall, and the normally bountiful fall harvest was noticeably lacking. While these symptoms may not seem severe, nothing like this has ever happened during the lifetime of anyone in the village.

The healer freely shares all of this information with the party before making her request. She requires two somewhat obscure materials for her work: a smooth stone from a spring touched by the fey and the egg of a peryton, a foul beast known to haunt the deeper woods around the village.

With these reagents, she believes that she can brew up an old folk remedy that she swears by, a mixture to help revitalize the Evergreen. However, while she provides players with directions to where these ingredients can be found, they are not easily recovered.

Keln knows that the task will not be an easy one, so in addition to giving them food, shelter, and gratitude, she promises the players that she will take a collection from the other villagers in order to provide a suitable reward.

An Unlikely Messenger

Shortly after the party comes to an agreement with Healer Keln, they will be approached by another resident of Rukswood. At some point before they leave the village, one member of the party becomes abruptly aware of something poking at their leg. Read the following:

> "Um… Hello."
>
> Two massive yellow eyes, watery and bright, look up at you, bulging out of a pale, youthful face. The child stops poking your side and offers a crooked smile full of sharp teeth.
>
> "Hi there. My name is Fisheyes. I've got a message for you. It's from Nana Green. The tree, I mean. The Evergreen? The big one." He points in the direction of the huge tree, then digs into the pocket of his dirty pants before fishing out a rolled up piece of paper, "She's not feeling so good, so she asked me to find someone to find some stuff. She, uh… I forgot. Don't worry, I wrote it down good."

Fisheyes is a young Triton child, a former orphan who now lives with an older couple in the village. Unlike many of the other children in Rukswood, he frequently speaks with the Evergreen and views her as a sort of kindly grandmother, albeit one made of wood. In turn, 'Nana Green' treats Fisheyes like a favorite grandchild, saving all the plumpest fruit from her branches for him. Although she does not speak to the players or the other villagers, she always has time to chat with Fisheyes

Due to their close bond, the Evergreen has entrusted Fisheye with an important task. Just as Healer Keln has asked the party to gather ingredients for her, the young Triton comes bearing a list of his own, one far more simple.

The list he hands to the party is written in the crude hand of a child, the blank spaces on the page filled with colorful drawings of trees and the requested items: a bucket of 'magic fairy water' and a single acorn from the greatwood trees in the forest beyond.

If pressed on where the list came from, Fisheyes tells the truth as far as he understands it. 'Nana Green' is sick and needs something to help her get better, so she asked him to find help to fetch what she needs. Fisheyes does not know that the Evergreen is a treant and does not even realize that she is magical.

Once his message has been delivered, he gives the party a clumsy salute and runs back towards the village square, eager to play with the other children.

Development

The party has two separate lists and directions for where the items they need might be found. There is no time limit for recovering the necessary ingredients, so players may take their time and even return to the village between tasks to rest and recover. If the party informs Healer Keln about Fisheyes' request, she sees no harm in indulging the boy, but is skeptical as to whether it will produce any actual results.

CHAPTER 2: INTO THE DEEPWOOD

The Deepwood is just that, the deeper woods beyond the edge of Rukswood. With the directions given to them by Healer Keln, it should prove easy enough for the party to find both the fey-touched pool and the roosting peryton over the course of a single day.

The Whistling Pond

Nestled amidst the towering trees of the Deepwood, the pool sits squarely in the center of a vibrant fairy ring, the mushrooms a colorful rainbow of different shapes and sizes. As you approach, the still water appears to shift, a ripple running across the mirror smooth surface.

Both the stone requested by Healer Keln and the water Fisheyes asked for can are found in the Whistling Pond.

A popular spot for the more daring youth of Rukswood, the Whistling Pond is named for the legends surrounding it. According to the villagers, the pool is actually a doorway to the realm of the fey-folk and the whistling often heard coming from the water is the voices of the fey, hoping to lure the unwary to a watery doom. In truth, they are partially correct.

The whistling sound is made by a **water weird** (MM), the pond's sole inhabitant and guardian. Placed here long ago by a spiteful fey, the weird was meant to defend the pool against any who might come seeking its waters, luring thirsty wanderers to the water's edge before bringing their lives to a sudden watery end.

However, after years of performing this grim task, the water weird is weary. It craves company and now whistles in the hopes of luring the villagers back. When the party approaches the pool, it makes no attempt to hide itself, rising up from the water like a serpent and watching them intently as it warbles and whistles anew.

The water weird allows the party to come as close as they like to the edge of the pond. Although a successful **DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check** reveals a lot of bones resting amidst the stones at the bottom of the pool, the creature does not appear hostile.

If the party takes water, a rock, or anything else from the pool without distracting the water weird, it attacks immediately.

The water weird simply wants to have fun, and hopes to coax the party into whistling along with its song. It whistles a chord or two of some cheerful, ethereal melody, then waits, watching the party expectantly. The water weird cannot speak, but a successful **DC 12 Wisdom (Insight) check** is enough to understand what it wants.

If the party plays along and starts to whistle, the water weird begins swaying back and forth happily, its own whistling becoming more enthusiastic in response. While the water weird is distracted, the party can attempt to steal some water or fish one of the stones from the pool with a successful **DC 14 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check**. On a failure, the creature realizes what is happening and attacks the unlucky adventurer. However, with a successful **DC 20 Charisma (Performance) check**, the water weird is entirely satisfied with the entertainment and slowly sinks back into the pond, warbling happily and allowing the party to gather what they require.

Shadows on the Wind

The egg requested by Healer Keln can be recovered from the peryton nest, and the acorn mentioned on Fisheyes' list can be found in large numbers on the ground near any one of the greatwood trees in the area. No check is required to find and collect said acorns. If the players decide to only complete Fisheyes' task, then the encounter with the peryton can be skipped.

The directions given to the party by Healer Keln are not precise, based off of reports of peryton sightings from the villagers. A successful **DC 14 Wisdom (Survival) check** allows the players to find the nest while the sun is still high in the sky. Otherwise, by the time the players locate the creatures, the sky is already dark as the early autumn night rapidly approaches.

The nest itself is easy enough to spot amidst the brown leaves of the canopy above; a sprawling mass of wood, bones, and other unidentifiable parts nestled against the trunk of one of the greatwood trees. When the party approaches the tree, read the following:

> An ear-splitting screech shatters the silence of the woods. You look up just in time to see a monstrous creature swooping down from the sky, wings stretched wide and talons flashing. The shadow it casts slithers across the ground; that of a humanoid figure, arms outstretched as if lunging for your throat.

The **peryton** (MM) does not hesitate to attack the party, immediately targeting whichever individual appears the least physically imposing, swooping down and slashing at them with its talons before flying a safe distance away. At the start of the third round of combat, a second peryton joins the fight; the creature's mate, drawn back to defend the nest by the other's cries.

Both of them are cunning creatures, staying out of melee range when possible, prefering to dive at the party and then retreat after attacking. However, they are also cruel, selfish beings. Once one of the peryton has been slain, the other remains in combat for only a single round longer before retreating for good, abandoning both mate and nest as it flies off into the sky.

Once the peryton have been dealt with, it is a simple matter for the party to recover the egg that they need. The nest has 10 hit points and an armor class of 14, and can be easily dislodged with a handful of well-placed attacks. Alternatively, the party can climb the greatwood tree with a successful **DC 14 Athletics (Strength) check**. There, they find two large eggs and a very angry peryton hatchling waiting for them. The hatchling is not a threat to the party and will only screech at them shrilly as they recover the egg they need.

If the nest is knocked from the tree, the eggs will survive intact, protected by their iron hard shell. Sadly, the same cannot be said for the hatchling.

Development

With the necessary supplies now in hand, the party returns to Rukswood to receive their reward and discover the fate of the Evergreen tree.

CHAPTER 3: AS THE LEAVES TURN

Back in Rukswood, the party finds Healer Keln eagerly awaiting their return. If they managed to recover both of the items she requested, her relief is immediate. After gratefully taking them from the party and storing them away somewhere safe, she offers them a slightly weathered leather pouch containing the reward money collected from the villagers. Additionally, she informs them that there is free room and board waiting for them at Barnum's Place, up to a week's worth of food and drink in thanks for their service to the town.

A Boy And His Tree

If the party comes looking for Fisheyes, they find the Triton boy sitting on one of the Evergreen's branches, little legs gently swinging in the air. If they do not, he will instead find the party shortly after they visit Healer Keln. He immediately asks them about their recent adventure, his curiosity palpable, his questions unending ("Was the pond full of fairies like everyone says?", "What did the bird guys smell like?", etc.)

Eventually, he asks the party if they brought what the tree asked for. If they did, he expresses his satisfaction with a firm nod and a thumbs up, giving them a crooked smile as he compliments their 'adventurey-ness'. If they did not, he instead shows some confusion, earnestly asking them if he was supposed to offer a reward or not.

In either situation, Fisheyes then informs the party that he has a second message for them: the Evergreen wants to speak to them directly. Urging them to follow, he leads the party to the base of the great tree, where they find a surprise waiting for them.

In Hopes Of Distant Spring

Where before there was a normal tree, the Evergreen now has a face of its own, a surprisingly human face shaped from the wood and bark of the tree's trunk. As the party approaches, read or paraphrase the following:

> "Ah, here they are… My courageous helpers."
>
> The gnarled features of the Evergreen shift into a kind smile, broad and welcoming.
>
> "Fisheyes here told me what you were sent out to do. I am grateful for it, truly. Not everyone would be so kind as to help a silly old tree. You are fine people."
>
> The Evergreen closes her wooden eyes, its face suddenly twisting as if pained. When it opens them again, the smile it gives is strained.
>
> "My name is Deeproot, but these days everyone calls me 'Nana Green'. It is a pleasure to meet you."

Nana Green is sincerely grateful for what the party has done and is happy to answer any questions about herself or the village. While she speaks, Fisheyes lingers nearby, just as happy that the Treant has other people to talk to now. However, if the party asks about her 'condition' and the purpose of her request or mentions Healer

Keln, she asks Fisheyes to give her and the party some time alone to speak. Only after he leaves does Nana Green continue. Read or paraphrase the following:

> "Such a kind boy… He wouldn't understand."
>
> "That lovely Keln girl is right. Every day, my branches grow weaker, my leaves fade and wither, and the winter cold cuts through my bark to the core. But this is not something she can cure, bless her heart."
>
> "It has been a long, long time since I last rested. In times past, I would sleep through the weeks of winter, letting the chill pass me by so that I could wake up and greet the summer sun, renewed. These days… There's no time. The people here, they need me. They suffered while I slept, deprived of my care, my love. What would they do without me?"
>
> "I suppose they will have to learn soon enough… But I can still help. There's still time."
>
> "Isn't this the right thing to do?"

Nana Green explains the situation to the party as plainly as she can. It has been too long since she last slept, hibernating through the winter to recover her strength, and she will not last through another. Initially, she asked Fisheyes to fetch the acorn and water as part of a simple ritual to help her sleep, allowing her to return to bountiful life in the spring.

However, as winter approaches, she has grown conflicted. She knows that the people of Rukswood will suffer if she sleeps, likely facing famine and strife in the absence of her aid. Unwilling to see this come to pass, she now considers continuing on as she has to help them, which will almost certainly result in her withering away.

With a successful **DC 15 Persuasion (Charisma) check**, the party can convince Nana Green that she doesn't need to sacrifice herself for the villagers, instead steering her back towards her original plan. If the party reassures Nana Green that the people of Rukswood will survive while she sleeps or offers to help the villagers in her stead, only a **DC 10 Persuasion (Charisma) check** is required. If they do not, she seems content to let things continue as they have, quietly satisfied that she can give the people of Rukswood this one last gift.

Development

Although the efforts of the party to aid Healer Keln have proved unnecessary, they still have a chance to influence the fate of Rukswood and Nana Green, resulting in multiple endings. If made aware of Nana Green's dilemma, Healer Keln all but begs the party to convince the Treant to rest.

Conclusion

If the party convinces Nana Green to go along with the ritual and rest through the winter, the Treant shows some trepidation at leaving the villagers to fend for themselves, but eventually relents and agrees this is the best course of action for everyone involved. She asks the party to help Fisheyes bury the acorn amidst her roots and water it with the water they recovered, reassuring the young triton and telling him not to be afraid while she sleeps. Over the next few days, the leaves of the Evergreen continue to turn, further worrying the village folk unless they are told of what has occured.

If the party agrees with Nana Green and her decision to help the village, she thanks them for understanding and for all the hard work they have done on her behalf, then apologizes for wasting their time. She then assures them that this is what she wants and that death is just another part of life, inevitable. Before they depart, she asks for them to send Fisheyes back to speak with her, so that she can gently prepare him for when she is gone.

Rewards

XP Rewards:

Obstacle	XP
Peryton	450 xp per peryton
Water Weird	700 xp
Helping the Evergreen Decide	500 xp

Treasure Rewards:

Pouch from Keln containing 34gp, 12sp, 5cp

Author's Notes/ Acknowledgments:

A big thank you to David Markiwsky for the wonderful art of Nana Green, to Hilary P. and Lane L. for playtesting this adventure, and to my incredible editors for all of their hard work!

Author Bio:

Allen C. Johnson is a writer of tales, singer of songs, and Chaotic Neutral DM for his unfortunate players at home. Based out of the Seattle area, he continues to write for the Dungeon Masters Guild and other tabletop systems alongside his faithful feline familiar, Catsonova.



The Last Harvest

Written by Eleanor Hingley

Levels: 4

Content Warnings: human sacrifice, animate plants, scarecrows

SYNOPSIS

On the way to the village of Cromcruach (pronounced 'crom-croo-ach'), the characters encounter a travelling merchant who plans to sell his wares at the Harvest Festival and are attacked by living plant creatures. At Cromcruach, they take part in games and performances as they meet the villagers. They are hired to kill stirges and a slithering tracker in the fields. The characters discover that the villagers have been sacrificing visitors to their dead goddess, the Harvest Queen, as part of a ritual to resurrect her and make their fields fertile. They must tangle with the cultists, save their merchant friend, retrieve the binding ritual from the scarecrow-infested orchard and bind the Harvest Queen once more.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

- The characters have heard tales of cider sold only at the Harvest Festival in Cromcruach that is valued for its healing powers - perhaps it is the only thing that can ease the suffering of someone they care about.
- Cromcruach is on the route to a city with a reputation for having the finest magical crafters in the region.
- One of the characters knows Ilana from her time travelling and has received an invitation from her to the Harvest Festival with an artificially cheery tone.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Centuries ago, the land where Cromcruach now stands was ruled by a powerful nature being called the Harvest Queen, who demanded blood sacrifices of her followers in return for fruitful harvests. A group of adventurers weakened her through combat and buried her remains, binding them with a powerful ritual of arcane and religious significance. A remnant of her cult founded Cromcruach and passed her story down through the generations. The trees of the orchard grew the runes of the binding ritual in their bark, magic carved so deep in the land that the apples that grew where the Harvest Queen was bound produce cider that strengthens and heals.

Five years ago, when storms, drought and disease threatened to starve the village, Dwyer Ramsey became the Village Elder and formed the cult of the Harvest Queen. The cult sacrificed one person every year for the last four years. Within the next few days, the fifth, and final, victim will be sacrificed and the Harvest Queen will be freed and returned to her full strength again. As a consequence of these ritualistic murders, the unnatural power of life from death has caused blights and scarecrows to animate and seek out blood.

A number of the villagers are directly involved with the cult, such as Elder Ramsey and Aldis, while others, such as Ilana and Mera, try to pretend nothing bad is happening. The Harvest Festival always attracts people from out of town who pass through - people who could disappear without a trace.

The only thing that can defeat the Harvest Queen is to use the binding ritual. The Last Sheaf, the final field that needs harvesting, has been turned into an altar to the Harvest Queen and it is there that her physical manifestation currently lurks.

CHAPTER 1: A RURAL IDYLL

The Road to Cromcruach

On the road to Cromcruach, the characters meet a merchant, who is attacked by animated plant monsters hungry for blood. At Cromcruach, they have the opportunity to meet the villagers and take part in games.

Finney and the Blights

> The road through the forest of Verdon is quiet and easy, too rural for bandits but still well travelled by merchants and woodcutters. Early morning sunlight filters through the red and gold leaves. The clopping of hooves sounds from the road behind you as a wagon driven by a dwarf approaches at a leisurely pace, and he slows to talk to you.

Finney, the merchant (dwarf **commoner**, MM, he/him, neutral good) is a personable fellow on his way to Cromcruach with earthenware goods he has crafted with traditional dwarven methods that he hopes to sell at the Harvest Festival. He hails from a city a few days to the west and intends to continue onwards to sell his wares at the villages further along the road.

Blights

After a short conversation, characters can make a successful **DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check** to spot 2 **needle blights**, 2 **vine blights**, and 6 **twig blights** (MM) stalking through the undergrowth beside the road. Any character that fails is surprised when the blights attack. Motivated by their hunger for blood, the blights have no sense of self-preservation and will fight to the death.

The encounter takes place on a forest road ten feet across, winding gently through an area of undergrowth (difficult terrain) to one side with trees beyond and a small stream (difficult terrain) to the other.

If they choose not to attack, the heroes can attempt to make a run for it with a successful **DC 12 Strength (Athletics) check**, with Finney spurring his mule to keep up with them. If they succeed at a **DC 14 Intelligence (Nature) check**, they learn that twig blights are vulnerable to fire and that fire is likely to ward off the others, even if it does not damage them to a greater degree. Warding off the blights with fire by non-magical means requires a successful **DC 12 Wisdom (Survival) check**. A successful **DC 14 Intelligence (Arcana) check** reveals that the Blights have a bizarre resonance of both life and death energy mixed together.

If the characters do not save Finney, he will be killed and the villagers will later attempt to kidnap one of the characters to use as a blood sacrifice.

If Finney survives the encounter, he will offer the characters 20 gp between them to accompany him to Cromcruach, as well as some fine dwarven-made earthenware for each of them that is extremely durable.

The Harvest Festival

> Cromcruach is a small village at the edge of the forest where it turns into rolling farmlands. The villagers greet you warmly, pressing food into your hands - pies filled with rich meat or vegetables, and warm seed cakes with fresh jam. The village green is bustling with activity, stalls with games and wares set out around a central tree hung with handmade trinkets and corn dolls.

The Harvest Festival is an opportunity for the heroes to play some games, have food and drink and socialise with the villagers. Finney sets up his stall on the village green and immediately attracts curious customers.

The villagers are genuinely surprised to hear of the blights, since there have been no reports of such creatures. They are troubled by vermin sometimes in the fields, small bat-like creatures with probosci, which a successful **DC 16 Intelligence (Nature) check** identifies as a **stirge** (MM). If the heroes mention the blights to the Village Elder, Dwyer Ramsey, a successful **DC 16 Wisdom (Insight) check** reveals that he knows something more about the blights than he is letting on, though asking him further about it will just result in him getting annoyed and finding an excuse to leave the conversation.

A number of activities and stalls have been set up around the village green:

The Shell Game - 1 cp per play
Mera Silside is running a Shell Game. Each participant makes an opposed **Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) or Intelligence (Investigation) check** against Mera's **Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check** of +7 until one of the characters wins or no-one wins. Mera gives the winner the *goggles of night* (DMG).

Archery Competition - 1 cp per entrant
Aldis Bowyer is running an archery competition. Each participant makes an opposed **Dexterity check** against Aldis' **Dexterity check** of +4. Any character who beats Aldis gets a Potion of Climbing (DMG) as a reward, to a maximum of one per character.

Bardic Performance - no cost
Ilana Silside is singing and playing the lute on a small stage. If any

character makes a successful **DC 14 Charisma (Performance) check**, they join in with her and gain 2d8 sp from the crowd.

Harvest Cider - 1 cp per pint
Seena Tavner serves Harvest Cider from a stall outside the Harvest Queen tavern. It allows the drinker to roll twice and use the better result on the next one hit die they roll to heal.

The Binding of the Harvest Queen - no cost
This is the last activity before the next encounter. A public performance of the story of the Harvest Queen takes place on the stage and all the villagers gather round. Seena plays the Harvest Queen. The Queen is surrounded by worshippers, who bring offerings of food and grain, and a white-dressed person who kneels before her. People with armour and weapons kill some of her followers and perform some kind of rite. The Harvest Queen falls to the ground and disappears through a trapdoor under the stage. The armoured characters leave and the followers of the Harvest Queen found the village of Cromcruach. Villagers explain, if asked, that this is the story of the Harvest Queen and the founding of the village, which is performed every year and has passed down the generations.

Villagers

Elder Dwyer Ramsey
(human **cult fanatic**, MM, he/him, neutral evil)
The village elder, Ramsey is an imposing but kindly man who is very busy most of the time and often hard to track down. He became Village Elder four years ago when poor harvests almost destroyed the village. Leader of the Cult of the Harvest Queen

Aldis Bowyer
(half-elf **scout**, MM, he/him, neutral evil)
Ramsey's cultist lieutenant, Aldis believes he will be next in line to lead the village when Ramsey dies and will kill for the cult. However, he is pragmatic and can be convinced to turn once Ramsey has been defeated. Aldis is a hunter and head of the ragtag local watch, which is really just the few villagers with a good sword arm or eye for the bow rather than a fighting force.

Mera Silside
(halfling **spy**, MM, she/her, chaotic neutral)
An alchemist with a history of thievery who is not involved in the sacrifices, though she and her wife, Ilana, have chosen willful ignorance to keep the peace.

Ilana Silside
(tiefling **bard**, VGtM, she/her, true neutral)
Prized performer at the local inn, Ilana is well known for her fine voice. She and her wife Mera moved here from a city.

Seena Tavner
(human **cultist**, MM, they/them, chaotic neutral)
Proprietor of the Harvest Queen, Cromcruach's only inn, Seena has been brought up into the worship of the Harvest Queen, even if they harbour doubts about Elder Ramsey and Aldis Bowyer. They will turn against Ramsey if they feel it is in their best interests.

Several other villagers are part of the cult. They are fanatically loyal, combat-capable members of the watch, and will alert Elder Ramsey or Aldis if they become suspicious. While the characters are not likely to encounter them except as nameless cultists in a fight, you can throw these NPCs in if it is useful:

- Deionerra Morn (human **scout**, she/her, neutral evil) - Hunter, Aldis' trainee and second in command in the watch.
- Boris Halfhand (half-orc **cultist**, they/them, chaotic neutral) - Baker.
- Ceryn Smith (dwarf **cultist**, they/them, chaotic neutral) - Smith.
- Maroph Bell (half-elf **cultist**, he/him, lawful evil) - Farmer.
- Jeanne Bailey (halfling **cultist**, she/her, neutral evil) - Miller.

Development
Following the performance of the Binding of the Harvest Queen, a farmer runs into the village with bloody patches on his clothes.

CHAPTER 2: BEHIND CLOSED DOORS

The characters slay the vermin in the fields and investigate the strange goings-on.

Vermin in the Fields
A successful **DC 10 Intelligence (Medicine) check** shows that Roland's injuries are puncture wounds. Roland describes tiny creatures with batlike wings and long probosci. With a successful **DC 14 Intelligence (Nature) check**, the characters identify these as stirges. Elder Ramsey offers the heroes 20 gp between them to go into the fields and kill the stirges.

Stirges and Slithering Tracker
When the characters arrive at the field, they are swarmed by 4 stirges. A **slithering tracker** (VGtM) lurks in the field as well, invisible when still. When the characters are distracted by the

stirges, the slithering tracker emerges and tries to latch on to one of them.

During the fight, any blood spilled on the earth here is absorbed with unnatural speed. A successful **DC 12 Intelligence (Arcana) check** reveals that this field has the same mix of life and death energy as the blights did.

This encounter takes place in a field with several bales of hay placed across it (half cover).

Investigations

Unless Finney is currently being taken for sacrifice by the cult, the characters may take short rests without consequence, though long rests will mean the cultists have a chance to abduct Finney.

At this point, the characters may choose to interact with the scenario in different ways. Be flexible about their approaches and order.

The key pieces of information they need to learn:

- The cult has been sacrificing outsiders who visit the Harvest Festival
- They have killed four people, one for every year since the poor harvests that almost killed the village
- Elder Ramsey is the leader of the cult and used the year of poor harvests to get his position
- The Harvest Queen has been partially freed and manifested in the fields
- The fifth sacrifice, Finney, will free her entirely
- The orchard has runes growing in the bark of the trees from the original binding ritual that can be used to bind her again when her physical form is slain, though she can be bound from anywhere in the village or fields

If the characters try to persuade the villagers to talk, each successful **DC 14 Charisma (Persuasion or Intimidation) check** reveals a rumour connected with one of the above pieces of information. If they talk to a villager who is sympathetic towards them, such as Ilana or Mera, they may learn these things through conversation.

Alternatively, they may sneak around the village investigating. If they do, they will have to make successful **DC 12 Dexterity (Stealth) checks** to avoid being noticed and successful **DC 14 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) checks** to break in. Most buildings in the village hold no clues to the cultist activity, but if they break into Elder Ramsey's house, they will find his journal detailing his crimes and plans. A successful **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check** reveals a hidden cupboard in his living room filled with 150 gp in it, as he has been skimming off the village's funds.

If the characters go to the orchard before they kill the Harvest Queen, they will fight the **scarecrows**. If they kill the Harvest Queen first, the scarecrows are no longer animated by her power and will have collapsed onto the ground in pieces, and they can traverse the orchard in peace.

If the characters confront the cult, through failing to follow them, using Finney as bait or lying in wait for the cultists to come and get them for the sacrifice (if Finney is not in the village), they will fight **The Cult of the Harvest Queen**. If they have already killed the Harvest Queen before they confront the cultists, the cultists will surrender.

If they take a long rest overnight without confronting the cult or killing the Harvest Queen, they wake the next day to find that Finney has gone and Seena claims that he left before dawn to return to the city. A successful **DC 14 Wisdom (Insight) check** reveals that they are lying and they can be talked into telling the truth (that the other villagers are going to sacrifice Finney in the last unharvested field) with a successful **DC 16 Charisma (Persuasion or Intimidation) check**.

Scarecrows

There are four **scarecrows** animated by the Harvest Queen's magic which attack the characters as soon as they go into the orchard.

The orchard is filled with trees at irregular intervals (¾ cover) and has apple picking tools such as ladders and empty wooden tubs strewn across it (difficult terrain). Low-hanging mist applies disadvantage to any checks reliant on sight or range beyond 10 feet around the character.

Runes have grown into the trunks of the apple trees and further investigation reveals that they go all the way through, like growth rings. The characters can copy these runes to learn the binding ritual for the Harvest Queen. For details of the ritual, see the section on **The Harvest Queen**.

The Cult of the Harvest Queen

If the heroes challenge the villagers, get caught poking around or work out how to bind the Harvest Queen once more, the villagers attempt to either restrain the heroes to use as a sacrifice or kill them, depending on whether they still have the option of sacrificing Finney. This encounter can also be used if the characters use Finney as bait, to waylay the characters if they seem as though they are going to charge straight at the Harvest Queen, or if the cult is taking Finney to the fields for sacrifice.

The fight is led by Eldar Ramsey, Aldis, and Deionerra, with four random **cultists**, but if the characters interrogate other cultists, select them from the village NPC list.

This encounter could happen anywhere that the characters are likely to encounter the cult, whether in the pub private rooms, the fields or the village green.

Development

The characters learn that they must kill the Harvest Queen's physical manifestation in order to cast the binding ritual that will stop her influence over this area.

CHAPTER 3 – THE BINDING OF THE HARVEST QUEEN

The characters go to the seat of the Harvest Queen's power, the Last Sheaf, to bind her. Alternatively, if they start the binding ritual without defeating her first, she will attack them.

The Harvest Queen

The Last Sheaf is a field of corn grown unnaturally high, burgeoning with life, but red at the roots. It waves and whispers in the breeze. The villagers have cut corridors through the corn leading to a central tree hung with corn dollies and other signs of the Harvest Queen, surrounded by offerings of food and grain. The tree looks as though it has been split open, violently, from the inside.

At the GM's discretion, the Harvest Queen - a **banshee** (MM) - may spawn further sets of 2 **twig blights** when she has none on the battlefield.



The Harvest Queen and twig blights emerge from the corn when they attack. The twig blights take the form of animate corn dollies, trailing ragged straw limbs and reaching for the player characters with breathy gasps. The Harvest Queen appears as a beautiful woman with abundant hair and a wide dress hung with fruit and ears of wheat. On closer inspection, her skin is withered like an old apple, her hair is mottled and straw-like, and her dress hangs in tatters covered with decaying food. Dry leaves swirl around her and she emits a scent like rotten apples and grain. The Harvest Queen's stats are a banshee whose powers are not shut down by sunlight; she is not undead but instead a nature being of life and death in a cycle.

This encounter is triggered by the characters going to the Last Sheaf or by starting the binding ritual elsewhere in the area of the village or fields. Friendly NPCs such as Ilana, Mera or Finney can be on hand to provide healing magic or healing potions if the Harvest Queen's Wail ability knocks all the characters down to 0 hit points. The characters can defeat the Harvest Queen by taking her to 0 hit points.

The Last Sheaf is the final field to be harvested, an area with patches of unnaturally high corn that act as difficult terrain and block line of sight. In the centre is a cleared area with a tree.

Four successful **DC 16 Intelligence (Nature, Arcana or Religion) checks** must be made with an action to sketch runes into the earth and channel power into them, though other skills may be used if appropriate. Characters may use the same skills multiple times in the ritual, and may repeat failed attempts, as long as they expend an action for each attempt. The characters may attempt to perform this ritual during the fight to bind the Harvest Queen and end it instantly, but will attract the attention of the Harvest Queen as they do so.

Development

Returning to the village allows the characters to punish the cult, reunite with friendly NPCs, and reap the rewards of their work.

CONCLUSION

If the cult is routed and the Harvest Queen is bound, the characters can choose what they do with the cultists - hand them over to the authorities in a larger settlement, leave them in the village for rough justice, or trust that those that remain are dispirited enough to recant.

If the characters have not already raided Elder Ramsey's illicit funds, Ilana and Mera hand them the 150 gp that Elder Ramsey had squirrelled away. They also provide a *potion of healing* (DMG) for each character and a single *potion of animal friendship* (DMG), and Mera gives them her old *robe of useful items* (DMG) as she no longer needs it, though half of the patches have been used.

If the Harvest Queen has not been bound and any members

of her cult remain alive, one of them will willingly give over their body to become possessed by the Queen and they will flee from the village, leaving the fields fallow and dead. If the cultists escaped but the Harvest Queen has been bound, they will leave the village, if possible, to find another god to worship (potentially for use as antagonists in the future) or surrender if escape is not possible. If the Harvest Queen has not been bound and all the cultists have been killed, she discorporates but a heaviness hangs over the fields. In the future, she will turn the forest nearby to her will, a haunted wood of hungry vines and mutated animals, perhaps something the adventurers must return to defeat once and for all in the future.

Rewards

XP Rewards

Obstacle	XP
Needle Blights	50 xp per blight
Vine Blights	100 xp per blight
Twig Blights	25 xp per blight
Stirges	25 xp per stirge
Slithering Tracker	700 xp
Scarecrows	200 xp per scarecrow
Cult Fanatic	450 xp
Scouts	100 xp per scout
Cultists	25 xp per cultist
Harvest Queen (banshee)	1,100 xp

Treasure Rewards

- *Goggles of night* from Mera's shell game
- *Potions of climbing* from Aldis' archery competition (up to one per character)
- *Potions of healing* (one per character)
- One *potion of animal friendship*
- *Robe of useful items* (half of the patches are used)

Author's Notes/ Acknowledgments:

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WINDBLOWN
LEAF

The Stifled Howl

Written by Jessica Marcrum

Levels: 5

Content Warnings: Religious persecution, self-harm, depression, distrust of outsiders

This adventure is optimized for four 5th level characters.

SYNOPSIS

Adventurers arrive in a theocratic town with a dark past and learn there is more to the mayor's daughter's illness than the locals suspect.

ADVENTURE HOOK

Shady Glen has a reputation for being a highly religious and insular town. The mayor's daughter has been stricken with an illness that not even the high priest's prayers have been able to heal, so any party with a cleric or paladin may be summoned by their order to step in. Adventurers with an interest in arcana or history may wish to research Shady Glen's checkered past. Adventuring parties with artificers and bards may be coming to sell their wares at the newly revived Shady Glen fall market. Otherwise, a party may be passing through and hear villagers excitedly speaking about the Harvest Festival.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Shady Glen is a town in recovery. Having been subjected to multiple monster attacks in the last century, the townsfolk have only recently opened their gates to neighboring farmers and resumed trade. The highly religious population is known for regularly hanging witches, and the local militia is well-stocked with silver bullets. The town's healers were among the early to hang, and they have been without proper medical care for decades, relying instead on the power of prayer.

CHAPTER 1: SCORCH MARKS

Shady Glen is a small forest town surrounded by farming communities. Though the farms are bathed in sunlight, the trees covering Shady Glen ensure that it is always cool and shadowed. A crisp wind blows, and colored leaves crunch beneath everyone's feet. A market closes up in the square as various farmers and artisans put away their wares. Villagers are overheard discussing the upcoming Fall Festival and ritual effigy burning. Several cottages line the streets, one with a sign bearing a teapot and bed. A slightly larger building made of stone breaks up the row of cottages. All buildings are overshadowed by the massive religious edifice at the end of the street.

Combatants and Non-Player Characters of Note

- **Assistant Mayor Lisbet Elmwood** (she/her, human **commoner**, MM) hard worker, devoted to Mayor Sybel
- **Borska Strakeln** (she/her, **half-dwarf shapechanger**, see Appendix) sickly and fearful, with a dark secret
- **Jasmine "Green" Hotkettle** (she/her, halfling **bard**, MM) Borska's friend, devoutly religious
- **Joseph "Joe" Hotkettle** (he/him, halfling **commoner**), tavern-keeper and Green's father
- **Mayor Sybel Strakeln** (she/her, human **noble**, MM) devout, determined to present a perfect family
- **Muffins Light Paw** (she/her, tabaxi **weretiger**, BR) neighboring farmer and secret weretiger
- **Teabiscuit Witherspoon** (they/them, gnome **werebear**, BR) neighboring artisan and secret werebear
- **Vicar Thaddeus Olpswitch** (he/him, human **priest/ Flame-Infused**, see Appendix) preaches the gospel of fire and fear

Exploring Shady Glen

The following locations are available to explore at this time: Hotkettle Inn, the closing Market, Sanctuary of the Purifying Flame, and the Town Hall.

Hotkettle Inn

The cozy inn is dimly lit and smells of cinnamon. Plush furniture surrounds small tables, around which patrons are enjoying hot drinks, liquor, and pastries. Joe Hotkettle stands behind the back bar and nods at all who enter, as Green sings while refilling patrons' teacups.

Joe

Joe is surprised to see new faces and is disinclined to offer a room to strangers. Characters must succeed on a **DC 10 Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion) check** to convince him to rent them a room. Joe repeatedly wipes his glasses and views characters cautiously, asking multiple times if they are hiding something. He warns that whatever they're up to, the mayor will find out, so it's best to come clean. If asked why he is so cautious, Joe shares that ten years ago the mayor's husband and several other townsfolk were revealed to be lycanthropes. Upon further investigation, a cambion, green hag, and vampire were also discovered. That coincided with the rise of the Sanctuary of Purifying Fire, and Vicar Olpswitch has had just as much authority as Mayor Strakeln since then.

Joe asks if the characters are in town for the Fall Festival. If answered in the affirmative, he sighs and expresses moderate enthusiasm about the church's success. If asked for information about the festival, he responds that it's a celebration of the cleansing ten years back. For more information, he suggests they speak to Vicar Olpswitch.

Characters who succeed on a **DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check** see that Joe is holding back something deeply painful. They must succeed on a **DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check** to convince him to reveal that he turned in his own husband. He wishes Green had grown up with two fathers, but couldn't take the risk of having a potential monster in his home. His husband Grey was a tiefling halfling, and that was too close to cambion for comfort.

Green

Green refills any drinks ordered and asks if the party is going to register as visitors at Town Hall. If they answer affirmatively, she begs them to ask Mayor Strakeln how Borska is doing. She laments she hasn't seen Borska in weeks, and is worried. She asks the party to tell Borska that she isn't mad and to please let her know she's ok. Characters must succeed on a **DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check** to convince Green to reveal that when Borska covered Green's shift at the inn a month ago, several varieties of rare teas and herbs went missing. Adventurers who succeed on a **DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) or DC 15 Intelligence (Medicine) check** convince Green to reveal that the day Borska worked, a moderate amount of chamomile, spearmint, and wolfsbane went missing. She directs the party to visit the Sanctuary and receive a blessing during their stay. Adventurers who succeed on a **DC 10 Wisdom (Insight) check** know that Green is devoutly faithful and truly worried about Borska.

Hotkettle Inn sells a variety of tasty drinks. Roll 1d10 on the Hotkettle Inn Daily Special Table for the daily special.

Market

Most of the market is closing and shopkeepers are putting away their wares. Muffins and Teabiscuit are packing their respective stalls together. If approached, they are excited to see new faces and remark that Shady Glen is becoming more welcoming by the day. If asked, they share that they live in an agrarian collective just outside town and have only recently been allowed in. They live with tieflings and others who are otherwise not welcomed by the community. Characters who succeed on a **DC 12 Wisdom (Insight) check** know that they are keeping back something about themselves. If asked about the church, they become somber and share that "frightened minds cause great harm." If pressed on the issue, they state that they are grateful to have found a welcoming community outside Shady Glen. After that, Teabiscuit presses Muffins that they must be back by sundown.

If asked about the Fall Festival, Muffins becomes very anxious. Teabiscuit flatly states they have no plans to be in town that day, and a wise traveler would do the same.

Muffins and Teabiscuit have mostly closed their shops, but are willing to sell the following items:

Hotkettle Inn Daily Special Table

Roll	Drink (2 sp)	Effect (1 hour)
1	Spicy pumpkin amaretto foamed milk	Relaxation in a cup. +1 Sleight of Hand
2	Honey cinnamon latte with butter cookie	Warm fuzzies. +1 Persuasion
3	Hot butternut rum	Strong and cozy. +1 History
4	Butterscotch coffee with lemon pie	Odd, but satisfying. +1 Insight
5	Red tea and currant cake flambé	Bloody good. +1 Religion
6	Hot chocolate with key lime swirl	Rich and refreshing. +1 Deception
7	Steamed creme, cream, and creamy liquor	Kind of a lot. +1 Arcana
8	Hazelnut tea with creamed honey	Toasty. +1 Perception
9	Orange tea with whisky, lemon, and nutmeg	Zingy kick. +1 Investigation
10	Peppermint tea, honeycomb, and jasmine pearls	Fortifying. +1 Athletics

Muffins and Teabiscuit Sale Table

Item	Cost
Freshly baked apple tarts	1 sp
Clockwork bear that growls	5 gp
Clockwork humanoid tiger with retractable claws	5 gp
Goat's milk soap (5 scents)	5 cp
Poisoner's ring (ring with secret compartment) made of silver	3 gp
Pumpkin loaf	5 cp
Wooden box with hidden compartment	2 gp



Sanctuary of the Purifying Flame

The large platform in front of the church is marred by a circular pattern of scorch marks. Adventurers succeeding on a **DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check** understand that multiple people were burned at the stake here, over the years. The sanctuary is massive, with a large red door. Stone carvings along the sides depict people staring outwards, praying, and burning.

Inside, the sanctuary is lit by dim, orange light from large, fiery lanterns and features stained glass windows depicting holy flames. Characters succeeding on a **DC 15 Intelligence (Religion) check** know this is a temple dedicated to Kossuth, or any other fire deity suitable for the campaign. At the altar, Vicar Thaddeus Olpswitch is preparing for service, assisted by two young **acolytes** (MM). He turns and welcomes the party, asking if they have come for forgiveness or guidance. Adventurers with passive Perception of

16+ see two other clergyfolk (**cult fanatics** (MM)) working in the shadows.

Vicar Olpswitch is haughty and believes he is always in the right. He grills the adventurers about where they came from, their religious backgrounds, and if they have been saved. He generously attempts to convert unsaved players and threatens their immortal souls if they refuse. If asked about the platform in front of the church, he tells the characters about the multiple burnings. His only regret is that the town so lost their way that "evil creatures" felt comfortable living in the community. If asked how he knew everyone he killed was evil, he nonchalantly states that he can never be sure, but better safe than sorry. The vicar is proud that he has brought the community into a state of grace and feels uncomfortable with newcomers, particularly those from the agrarian community who sell their wares at the market.

The vicar asks the party if they have visited Mayor Strakeln yet, and requests they ask after Borska as he hasn't seen her in church for the last month. He says he hopes Borska is not suffering the same spiritual disease as her father and that he plans to call on the Strakelns later this week. If asked to elaborate on the spiritual disease, he only responds that the town's wickedness has been purified by cleansing fire.

Fall Festival

Vicar Olpswitch is ecstatic to answer questions about the upcoming Fall Festival, seeing it as the tenth anniversary of his greatest triumph. He shares that this is the grandest of their yearly ceremonial burnings to celebrate the cleansing of the town ten years ago. Everyone in the town must attend and make confession before ritually burning away their sins by burning an effigy of a wolf.

Blessings

If asked for a blessing, Vicar Olpswitch asks the character in question if they believe in the one true faith. If answered in the affirmative, he places a hand on their forehead, which becomes uncomfortably hot as he casts bless without using a spell slot. If characters answer in the negative, he responds that he will pray for their souls and hopes their visit is short. After that, Vicar Olpswitch asks the party to leave so he can continue preparing for the celebratory commemorative bonfire later this week.

Tactics: If attacked, Vicar Olpswitch is joined by both acolytes and cult fanatics. The acolytes and cult fanatics fight to defend Vicar Olpswitch with their lives. If reduced to 7 hit points and out of spell slots, Vicar Olpswitch flees into the bell tower and calls the town to his aid.

Town Hall

Only slightly larger than the biggest cottage, the Town Hall is made of stone. Inside, various townsfolk wait in lines and fill out paperwork. A wooden door with the gilded words Mayor's Office is at the back. Sitting in front of it, Assistant Mayor Lisbet Elmwood is half-hidden behind piles of papers. If approached, she asks the party to show their visitors credentials and offers to give them visitor's papers if they have none. Lisbet implies that the mayor's daughter is sick and she has too much on her mind. Characters wishing to meet with the mayor must pass a **DC 15 Charisma (Deception or Persuasion) check** unless they have a cleric, druid, or paladin in the party, in which case Lisbet promptly introduces them to the mayor. Characters who fail to get past Lisbet receive an invitation to the mayor's house for dinner from another town hall employee as they leave the building.

Mayor Strakeln's office is simple but well-appointed. She encourages the party to visit the Sanctuary and receive a blessing. She asks the party if they know any healers, but does not disclose the reason. If asked why she doesn't ask the vicar, she shares that the matter is private and while she defers to him in all things having to do with Shady Glen, she has learned to keep family matters private. Characters must succeed on a **DC 18 Wisdom (Insight) check** to see she is holding back deep sorrow and regret. If asked about her daughter, Mayor Strakeln explains that Borska is very sick and she can't understand why. She invites the party to come for dinner, if they believe they can help. She offers to pay 300 gp to anyone who can discern the cause of her daughter's illness.

Development

Characters are aware of Borska's illness and Shady Glen's dark past. They have the opportunity to meet Borska and discern the cause of her ailment.

CHAPTER 2: SCARS

Mayor Strakeln's home is an average cottage in the center of town. It is two floors tall and appears homey from the outside. As the party approaches, a pale, feminine face is briefly visible through a top-floor window.

The Invalid

Mayor Strakeln welcomes the adventurers, saying she insists on meeting all newcomers and assessing whether they're the "right sort of people" for Shady Glen. Her home is full of religious iconography. One small corner houses a collection of dwarven artifacts gathering dust. If asked about them, she off-handedly mentions they were her husband's and she dislikes looking at them, but Borska won't let her throw them away. Succeeding on a **DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check** reveals a clockwork and stone wolf totem, as well as clean spaces amongst the dust denoting a missing battleaxe, handaxe, and light hammer.

She apologizes that Borska is feeling too ill to join them for dinner. She asks if the characters have medical training or healing skills and can help Borska. If answered in the affirmative, she leads

them to Borska's bedroom.

Borska is a small, pale, half-dwarven teenager with scars all over her arms, neck, and chest. She sits in a rocking chair, clutching a pillow and drinking hot tea. The room smells of chamomile and spearmint barely covering sweat and vomit. Adventurers who succeed on a **DC 10 Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Survival) check** know the scratches were made by claws. Adventurers who succeed on a **DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine) check** know that Borska is displaying signs of poisoning.

Mayor Strakeln advises Borska to "get it together," noting her absence has been noticed at church, before going downstairs to continue preparing dinner. She invites any adventurers not engaged in healing to help themselves to a drink downstairs.

Adventurers staying with Borska who succeed on a **DC 20 Intelligence (Investigation) check** find her father's missing weapons. Characters who investigate Borska's tea can tell immediately it smells like chamomile, but off. Succeeding a **DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Survival) check** reveals it is chamomile laced with wolfsbane and silver dust.

Speaking with the mayor, characters can tell she is primarily worried about how Borska's disappearance from public life makes the family look. Characters who succeed on a DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check convince her to explain that ten years ago, she turned in her husband Vargen to the church, under suspicion of being a werewolf. He was executed. She survived the public crisis, but cannot let another family member be "outed as a monster."

Note: If adventurers decide to break into the mayor's home instead of attending dinner, the lock can be picked with a **DC 15 Dexterity (Thieves Tools) check**. The door is AC 15 and has 17 (4d7) hit points. Breaking down the door alerts the city guard, composed of two cult fanatics and six **guards** (MM). Mayor Strakeln is not hospitable to anyone who breaks in.

Borska's Secret

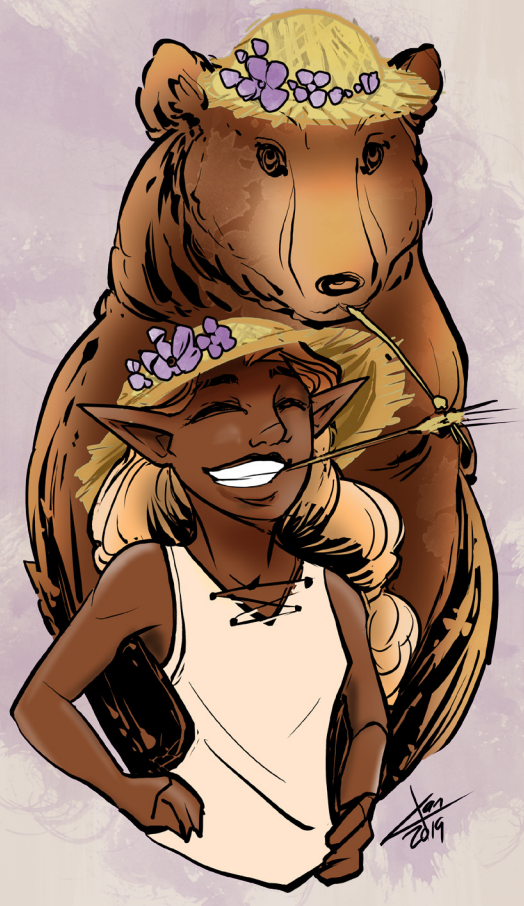
To convince Borska to reveal that she is a werewolf suppressing her lycanthropy, adventurers must succeed on a **DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check** or roleplay excellently. If characters confront her with the clawmarks, the tea ingredients, and/or her father's totem matching the clockwork totem sold at the market, they make this check with advantage. She tearfully reveals that she always blamed her mother for murdering her father without evidence, but now accepts that he must have been a lycanthrope, because after her thirteenth birthday, she began taking on wolfish tendencies. Terrified to reveal the truth to her mother, she prayed incessantly for help, but eventually stopped attending church due to fear of her secret being discovered. That was when she researched methods of killing werewolves and decided if she utilized a tiny bit of werewolf poisons, she could prevent her transformation. Damaging her health was an unexpected side effect, but one she believes she deserves for her sins.

Borska begs the party not to reveal her secret to her mother, the vicar, or even Green, saying they will burn her and begin the purges again. If asked what she wants, she reveals she hates herself and has no idea what would help. She wants to run away, but has no idea where she would go and not harm anyone. She knows she can only be cured by a wish spell, but the town would sooner execute her.

Tactics: If attacked, Borska shifts to hybrid form and uses her father's weaponry. She only bites as a last resort.

Development

Now aware of the reason for Borska's illness, adventurers must find a way to help her cope.



CHAPTER 3: HEALING

The following morning, the fall market resumes. Colored leaves fall on the cobblestoned streets and the air is brisk. Muffins and Teabiscuit repeatedly glance at the mayor's home while setting up their stands.

Unexpected Aid

Adventurers are approached by Muffins who purrs that they smell like politics. She meaningfully nods toward the mayor's home, saying what a pity Borska's situation is. If asked, she reveals the following:

> "We used to be neighbors, you know? I was married to Temperance back then, this was before I met Teabiscuit. Old Olmstead took Temperance and Vargen both. I barely escaped the fires myself." She sighs. "Too focused on saving my own skin to watch my wife and best friend burn."

Muffins shares that she insisted on selling goods at the market in order to check on Borska, "just in case." Teabiscuit sharply calls for Muffins' help. Characters can successfully press the issue by succeeding on a **DC 10 Charisma (Persuasion) check**. Muffins and Teabiscuit share the agrarian collective where they live is home to "all sorts" and they have kept an eye on Borska in case she needed a place to stay in a hurry.

Tactics: If Muffins and Teabiscuit are attacked, they first attempt to run, leaving their goods behind. If cornered, they shift into their weretiger and werebear forms. Their objective is escape.

Fall Festival

By the church, Vicar Olmstead is overseeing construction of a large pyre on the platform outside of the church. If characters have not previously asked, he shares the information under **Fall Festival** in **Part One**. He asks the party if they will still be in town by the end of the week, strongly implying they need to confess by the end of the week in order to stay. Off-handedly, he remarks that he knows they saw Borska last night, and if she's well enough to dine with strangers, she's healthy enough for a pastoral visit. He plans to visit her the following day to receive her confession and purge her soul.

Introductions (Optional)

Mayor Strakeln is out for the day, giving adventurers the opportunity to enter her home and introduce Borska to Muffins and Teabiscuit. Borska is shocked to have even more strangers in her home, but with prompting recognizes Muffins as her old neighbor.

Muffins and Teabiscuit gag upon entering Borska's room from the odor. They shift to their lycanthrope forms and explain that they have a perfectly happy, healthy life outside Shady Glen. Borska begins crying and praying. With adventurer intervention, she stops praying and listens. Muffins and Teabiscuit offer her a tour of the agrarian collective in order to show her that it's possible to live a productive, happy, love-filled life as a lycanthrope.

> **Note:** Refer to **Part Two: The Invalid** for information on breaking into the cottage.

Development

Having found a potential home for Borska, the party must decide whether to help her accept her lycanthropy (Conclusion A) or give her to the church (Conclusion B).



CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION A - HOWLING

Muffins and Teabiscuit help the party sneak Borska out under the cover of night. The agrarian collective is a short ride away in their carriage. Dozens of humanoids are sitting on their porches, enjoying the stars. After introductions, Teabiscuit points to the large harvest moon. Everyone in the community changes shape, revealing their true lycanthropic forms. Borska shifts with them, pain-free, and howls for the first time.

Muffins approaches in hybrid form and thanks the party for bringing Vargen's daughter home. She promises to help her feel like she always belongs. As a thank you, she offers her family's *moon-touched sword* (XGtE). Borska runs over and presses a *stone of good luck* (DMG) into an adventurer's hand, sharing it was from her father, but she doesn't need it anymore.

CONCLUSION B - SUPPRESSION

Borska, trembling, takes a large gulp of tea before Vicar Olmstead and her mother each take her by the hand. She confesses that she scratched herself with a blade because she missed her father, but knows she was wrong to do so. She admits she had impure thoughts and doubted the truth of the fire, but now she sees its light. Vicar Olmstead casts sacred flame on Borska, dealing 8 (2d8) radiant damage, and declares her purified. He invites Borska and the party to attend the bonfire and celebrate the cleansing of Shady Glen. He gives the party a potion of fire breath (DMG) as thanks.

Mayor Strakeln thanks the vicar for his eternal wisdom and hands a bag of coins to an adventurer. Borska's eyes appear empty. A stone of good luck rests on her nightstand.

REWARDS

XP REWARDS:

OBSTACLE	XP
Commoners	10 xp per commoner
Acolytes	50 per acolyte
Cult Fanatics	450 per fanatic
Vicar Olmstead	450 xp
Mayor Strakeln	25 xp
Green	450 xp
Muffins	1,100 xp
Teabiscuit	1,800 xp
Borska	700 xp

TREASURE REWARDS:

TREASURE	
Mayor's payment	300 gp
Moon-Touched Sword	
Potion of Fire Breath	
Stone of Good Luck	

AUTHOR'S NOTES/ ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

I grew up in a very religious house and felt deeply uncomfortable being myself. Even though Shady Glen is a very different environment than my own, I developed mental health problems as a teenager that I still cope with today. This adventure is for all the Borskas who haven't found a Muffins and Teabiscuit to show them they're ok, and also to those who maybe have met someone like that, but were too hurt or afraid to believe them.

AUTHOR BIO:

Jessica Marcrum is a lifelong fan of fairy tales, mythology, and fantasy. A former opera singer and current licensed social worker, she is thrilled to produce Book of Seasons: Solstices and Equinoxes. A contributor to several DMsGuild supplements including the Uncaged Anthology, Grandmother Crookbesom's Book of Hags, Bearthazar's House of Familiars, and has created the College of Caterwauling and the Cat Burglar. Though Chicago-raised, she currently lives in Pittsburgh with her spouse and their three fat cats. She can be reached at @Miss_Jess03 on Twitter, angrynerdgirl on Twitch, or at www.jessicamarcrumwrites.com.

Borska Strakeln

Medium humanoid (half-dwarf, shapechanger), lawful good

Armor Class 11 (in humanoid form, 12 in wolf or hybrid form)
Hit Points 67 (9d8+27)
Speed 30 ft. (40 ft. in wolf form) (currently 15 ft./20 ft. due to poisoned tea)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)	11 (+0)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)

Skills Medicine +4, Religion +4, Perception +4
Condition Resistances poisoned
Damage Resistances poison
Damage Immunities Bludgeoning, Piercing, and Slashing From Nonmagical Attacks Not Made With Silvered Weapons
Senses Darkvision 60 Ft., passive Perception 14
Languages Common and Dwarvish (can't speak in wolf form)
Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Dwarven Toughness. Borska has an additional 1 hit point per hit die.

Stonecunning. Whenever Borska makes an Intelligence (History) check related to the origin of stonework, she adds +2 to the check.

Shapechanger. Borska can use her action to polymorph into a wolf-humanoid hybrid or into a wolf, or back into her true form, which is humanoid. Her statistics, other than her AC, are the same in each form. Any equipment she is wearing or carrying isn't transformed. She reverts to her humanoid form if she dies.

Keen Hearing and Smell. Borska has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing or smell.

Guilt-Ridden Transformation. As a result of her medical treatments, Borska struggles with aspects of her transformation. When she transforms from humanoid into werewolf form, she must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or go berserk. While berserk, she must use her action each round to attack the creature nearest to her until it is Incapacitated, or take the Dash action to reach the nearest creature. If she has multiple possible targets, she attacks one at random. If she cannot reach a creature to attack it, she turns her anger inward, attacking herself. Borska's berserk rage ends if she starts her turn with no creatures within 60 feet of her that she can see or hear.

Sickly. Borska has been slowly poisoning herself for months, acquiring the Poisoned condition and two levels of Exhaustion. She has disadvantage on Attack Rolls and Ability checks and moves at half speed.

Actions

Bite (Wolf or Hybrid Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack*: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage. If the target is a humanoid, it must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or be cursed with werewolf lycanthropy.

Claws (Hybrid Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack*: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. Hit: 7 (2d4 + 2) slashing damage.

Battleaxe (Humanoid Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack. +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit*: 6 (1d8+2) or 7 (1d10+2) if wielded with two hands.

Handaxe (Humanoid Form Only). *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack. +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. Hit*: 5 (1d6+2) bludgeoning damage.

Light hammer (Humanoid Form Only). *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack. +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. Hit*: 4 (1d4+2) bludgeoning damage.

Flame-Infused Vicar Thaddeus Olpswitch

Medium humanoid (human), lawful evil

Armor Class 15 (breastplate)
Hit Points 44 (8d8+8)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)

Skills Medicine +8, Religion +5, Persuasion +5
Damage Resistances fire
Senses passive Perception 13
Languages Common and Ignan
Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Divine Eminence. As a bonus action, Vicar Thaddeus Olpswitch can expend a spell slot to cause his melee weapon attacks to magically deal an extra 10 (3d6) radiant damage to a target on a hit. This benefit lasts until the end of the turn. If he expends a spell slot of 2nd level or higher, the extra damage increases by 1d6 for each level above 1st.

Potent Spellcasting (Day 3+ Only). Vicar Thaddeus Olpswitch adds his Wisdom modifier (+3) to any damage he deals with a cantrip.

Spellcasting. Vicar Thaddeus Olpswitch is an 8th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). He has the following spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *control flames, light, sacred flame, thaumaturgy, word of radiance*
1st level (4 slots): *burning hands, cure wounds, guiding bolt, sanctuary*
2nd level (3 slots): *continual flame, prayer of healing, spiritual weapon*
3rd level (3 slots): *dispel magic, fireball, scorching ray*
4th level (2 slots): *fire shield, guardian of faith*

Actions

Mace. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 4 (1d6+1) bludgeoning damage.

Fire and Brimstone (1/day). As an action, Vicar Thaddeus Olpswitch preaches hellfire unto the undead. Each undead that can see or hear him within 30 feet of him must make a Wisdom saving throw (DC 14). If the creature fails its saving throw, it is turned for 1 minute or until it takes any damage.

Creatures CR 1 or lower who fail their saving throw are immediately destroyed.

A turned creature must spend its turn to move as far away from Vicar Thaddeus Olpswitch as it can, and it can't willingly move to a space within 30 feet of him. It also can't take reactions. It can use only the Dash action or try to escape from an effect that prevents it from moving. If there's nowhere to move, the creature can use the Dodge action.

Radiance of the Dawn (1/day). As an action, Vicar Thaddeus Olpswitch creates magical fire and all magical and non-magical darkness within 30 ft. of him is dispelled. Additionally, each hostile creature within 30 ft. of him must make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw. A creature takes 19 (2d10+8) radiant damage on a failed saving throw, and half as much damage on a successful one. A creature that has total cover is not affected.

Reactions

Warding Flare (3/day). When he or a creature within 30 ft. is attacked by a creature within 30 ft. of him that he can see, Vicar Thaddeus Olpswitch can use his reaction to impose disadvantage on the attack roll, causing light to flare before the attacker hits or misses. An attacker that can't be blinded is immune to this feature.

Vicar Thaddeus Olpswitch

Vicar Olpswitch's power increases through the prayers of the community. As Shady Glen grows closer to the Harvest Festival, his magical abilities increase.

- In Part One and Two (the first day), he uses the statistics of a Priest.
- In Part Three (the second day), see below.
- If adventurers return following the adventure but prior to the Harvest Festival (the third day), see below.
- Vicar Olpswitch returns to the statistics of a Priest one week after the Harvest Festival.



Reap & Sow

Written by Leon Barillaro

Levels: 5-7

Content Warnings: family neglect, abuse, and manipulation

SYNOPSIS

No one ever escapes the evergreen pines of Needlepoint Forest. That's because an otherworldly force keeps travelers in and prevents them from ever navigating their way out. The adventurers accidentally stumble their way in and must uncover some way to escape while trying not to fall prey to the monsters that lurk within.

ADVENTURE HOOK

This adventure fits perfectly into any point where the characters are traveling. Somehow, the characters take a wrong turn and end up in Needlepoint Forest. They come upon the walled town of Batstham, where they learn that they are trapped.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Long ago, in the heart of the Needlepoint Forest, a hag named Mother Leeds adopted a son. The child came out defiant and unruly and wished to leave home with the friends he'd made in town. Mother Leeds grew to resent her child for not wanting to stay, so she placed an enchantment upon the Needlepoint Forest so that no soul - alive or undead - could escape. A full decade of resentment has twisted this magic; the longer souls remain in the forest, the more they become corrupted by their despair. Mother Leeds's son in particular has taken on the fiendish guise of a chimerical devil, and all of his friends have taken on similarly monstrous appearances.

CHAPTER 1: BOG IRON BATSTHAM

The adventure begins when the party realizes they are lost in an unfamiliar forest. How did they get here? Perhaps they traveled a bit too late after sunset and lost their way. Maybe they were handed a poorly-marked map. It is up to the DM to decide how the adventurers lose their way, so long as they do, and they realize there is no going back the way they came.

Entering the Town of Batstham

The party finds themselves in the Needlepoint Forest, woodlands heavily populated by pine trees and characterized by a coarse, sandy soil. Dead pine needles and russet leaves litter the forest floor, crunching under every traveler's boot.

The characters wander towards Batstham, a small town in the middle of the forest. As the characters walk towards the town, read this aloud:

> The trees give way to walls piled high with brick and a reddish-brown iron. A five-foot gap in the wall appears to have served as a gate at some point, but instead the opening is manned by two sullen and weary dwarves.

The two dwarves are **guards** (MM), brandishing shields and wearing cloth hats, stationed in front of the town of Batstham on the lookout for threats to the town. They heave a sigh of relief when they see the party isn't a monstrosity out to get them.

The guards quickly usher the adventurers inside the city walls, which they claim is the safest place in the forest. They recommend the party go to the tavern to speak with people who know more about life outside the forest.

Characters who make a successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check** realize that the dwarves' skin looks brittle and chipping in places, almost like tree bark. The guards say nothing about it and pretend not to notice if the party asks.

Life in the Town of Batstham

The people of Batstham live their lives quite aware of the fact that they can never leave. They've given up on exploring outward and instead have shut themselves inwards, building up their walls with brick and the bog iron they harvest from the red-tinted river that flows through their town.

Magic Iron. The iron built into the walls is filled with abjuration magic that protects those inside of it from curses.

Iron River. A river that runs red with oxidized iron cuts the town in half. During the day, several villagers with quarterstaves wade through the shallow river and poke at the water, hoping to find some chunks of red bog iron. Curiously, following either end of the river out of town leads to the Cranberry Bog.

Glass Blowing Workshop. Several artisans spend their working hours blowing glass into decorative bottles. They're used to store the spirits made in the basement of Duck, Duck, Juice.

Duck, Duck, Juice

At the tavern, several people are enjoying their drinks, a respite from a hard day's work. If the characters ask for directions out of the forest, their request is met with a combination of laughter and pity. The people of Batstham confirm the party's suspicions: there is no escape.

Winterstyn (elf **commoner**, MM, he/him). There is an older elf with long, ragged hair and sporting an eyepatch nursing a hard drink by the fire. He is one of the very few people to ever attempt leaving the Needlepoint Forest. If asked about the experience, he tells the party:

> "I couldn't take living here anymore. I collected all of my valuables and gathered supplies and headed out into the forest. I didn't get very far, only a mile or so out. That's when it happened. The ground started to shake, and I heard screeching. I covered my ears to stop the noise from splitting my skull, but it was too late. I passed out and woke up with a huge pain where my eye used to be. The hunters had found me and were carrying me back to town. That was five years ago."

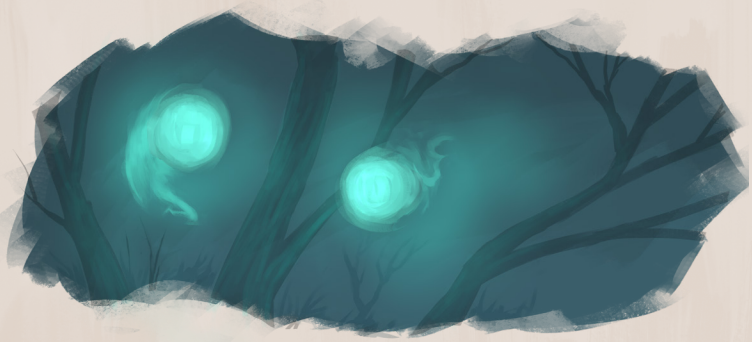
Jovi (orc **scout**, MM, he/him). Jovi is a middle-aged orc who always looks prepared and armed for battle. He is one of the braver members of the town who leaves the forest every so often to hunt for food. Jovi tells the party his little sibling Kalnoc wandered into the forest many years ago, when they were still a kid. Jovi took a job as a hunter in hopes of discovering what happened to Kalnoc, but he never found anything.

Jovi knows where the Blue Hole is and gives the group directions to it when asked.

> "One night I was out late. I thought I'd check the Blue Hole, the old swimming hole my sibling used to go to. Before I had the chance to make it, the ground started to shake so hard it knocked me off my feet. Startled, I crawled to a blueberry bush and waited for it to pass. That's when I saw it-- that weird devil creature! Barreling through the forest on all four hooves, bat wings flapping violently."

Clemence (human **commoner**, she/her). Clemence is a human woman with a knack for brewing. While she is no spellcaster, she knows which plants have which harmful and restorative properties and uses that knowledge for the good of the town.

> "Once in a while, I'll brave the forest during the day to forage for plants and fungi. The other night, I saw a tiny orb of light hovering in the forest. It looked like it was staring at me. I think it wanted me to follow it, but I know better than to chase after strange orbs of light!"



Development

The town itself is barely any help; the people only leave Batstham when they absolutely need to and never for long. The party makes the conscious decision to leave town, a decision the townspeople understand and admire, but ultimately believe to be foolish. The party might decide to pursue a lead they heard about in town: following the river, searching for the Blue Hole, finding the orb of light, or seeking the devilish creature in the woods.

CHAPTER 2: NEEDLEPOINT FOREST

This Forest Changes You

Spending any amount of time in the Needlepoint Forest proper could yield significant cosmetic results. While those who spend their time in Batstham are safe, protected by the bog iron walls, anyone outside of the city walls are subject to these effects. This slow-acting curse gets worse and worse over time.

All of the "lost kids" in the forest are affected: James Leeds (**Leeds Devil**, see Appendix), Kalnoc the **otyugh** (MM), and Geray the **shambling mound** (MM). Casting remove curse on any one of these creatures returns them to their original state: a distressed young adult in their mid-twenties.

After completing a long or short rest, a character must succeed on a **DC 15 Wisdom saving throw**. On a failure, the character is cursed and begins their transformation towards the monstrous. Roll on the table below to see which effect takes hold of them. At every dawn thereafter, the character no longer makes a Wisdom saving throw, but their curse begins to manifest in a more visible way little by little. The compounding effects can be determined jointly by the player and the DM.

Roll	Effect
1	Small fiendish horns begin to sprout from your head.
2	Your skin turns coarse and barklike, and plants begin to sprout from it.
3	Your hands and feet become webbed.
4	Parts of your body are starting to turn transparent, although you are still corporeal for now.
5	Your teeth and nails become sharper, and your hair is a little thicker.
6	Your eyes drastically change color, and your pupils disappear.

Traveling in Needlepoint Forest

The party may approach any of the locations in this section if they have a guide, have directions, or have been there before. If the party enters the forest without a lead, or if they get lost for any reason, a friendly **will-o-wisp** (MM) named Charlie appears and lures them towards Lucille's.

While the party is traveling, they may get the sense that they are being watched. A character with a **passive Wisdom (Perception) of 15 or higher** can catch a glimpse of fiendish yellow eyes in the woods before they blink and disappear. Other times, the ground may shake and the party may hear shrieking off in the distance. If the party chooses to follow these signs, they must make a **DC 18 Wisdom (Survival) check**. On a success, they approach Mother Leeds's home. On a failure, they become lost and travel in a different direction, either finding one of the other areas in the forest or being picked up by Charlie.

Lucille's

The dim glow of continual flame lanterns lights a small clearing in the pines. In this clearing lies a small wooden shack. The lights are on, and the inviting smell of baked pastries wafts from the window. A name is haphazardly painted above the doorway: "Lucille's"

Lucille's is so small it can't rightfully be called a tavern, but it is a welcome spot for weary travelers lost in Needlepoint Pines. The owner is the down-to-earth Lucille (goblin mage, she/her, neutral good), who has a talent for baking pies. Lucille has never turned a traveler away from her home.

Who Comes To Lucille's

James Leeds and his mother both visit Lucille from time to time. Lucille knows about their disagreement and prefers to stay out of it. The woman is unaware of James's monstrous appearance because her vision faded years ago.

If asked about the missing children, Lucille has this to say:

- "The Leeds boy's been around. He doesn't talk much. Sweet kid, though. Always brings me a hock of venison for my savory pies."
- "Kalnoc was always a hungry little kid. Worked up a huge appetite spending all that time in the old swimming hole. Haven't seen them around in a long time."
- "My garden out back is lovely, isn't it? A fine young woman named Geray helped me with it. That little dear used to come to me all the time, her hands stained red with cranberries."

Lucille's Lead

Lucille doesn't know how to leave the forest; she's never wanted to. But she does know that the curse is likely the work of Mother Leeds, whom she describes as a "powerful enchantress with plant-based spells." She does offer to help the party navigate the forest easier if they gather ingredients while they explore:

- cranberries from the Cranberry Bog
- freshwater fish from the Blue Hole

Lucille entrusts Charlie, her will-o-wisp companion, to guide the party. Lucille does not know how Charlie came to be, only that

he's very helpful. She sends him out to guide the townspeople of Batstham to her home but reflects aloud that he hasn't been the best advertising.

When the party returns with these ingredients, Lucille bakes them into a pie, which she then asks the group to deliver to Mother Leeds at her home. Lucille suspects that Mother Leeds can help the party leave the forest.

The Blue Hole

The Blue Hole is a perfectly-symmetrical 30-ft-radius watering hole filled with clear, blue water. It was once a popular swimming hole among the people of Batstham, but no one has touched it in years. That's because a mysterious creature lives at the bottom of it. The terror of the Blue Hole has the statistics of an **otyugh** (MM) with these changes:

- It has the amphibious trait
- It can speak telepathically and understand Bullywug

The otyugh is actually Jovi's little sibling Kalnoc (orc **commoner**, they/them, chaotic good), known for their voracious appetite and love of swimming. Kalnoc spent too much time outside the walls of Batstham and was changed into a monstrous creature whose insatiable appetite controls its actions.

When the party first arrives, they see two **bullywugs** (MM) spearfishing in the hole. The bullywugs are friends of Kalnoc's and know that feeding the otyugh prevents them from being eaten instead. They attempt to trick the party into getting near the hole to be fed to the otyugh. When the party approaches the hole, the otyugh bursts out of the water and attacks them with the intention of making them its next meal. The otyugh simultaneously telepathically implores the party to leave before it can succeed.

At the bottom of the 60-foot-deep Blue Hole are the personal effects of the otyugh's past victims, all items the creature did not have a taste for. These items include a dagger of venom, 23 gp, 114 sp, and 216 cp.

Collecting the Fish

There are many ways to catch fish; characters may opt to build a fishing pole out of rope or a basket out of twigs, or use a net or spear. Characters may make a successful **DC 15 Dexterity (Survival) check** when using any of these methods.

Cranberry Bog

Following the river or Charlie leads the party to the Cranberry Bog. The river opens up to a larger body of water filled with thousands of cranberries. Hiding in the midst of the brush and bushes at the edge of the bog is a **shambling mound** (MM), which the party can detect with a **DC 17 Wisdom (Perception) check**.

The party may choose to grab the cranberries, especially if they've been tasked with doing so by Lucille. Once their hands touch the berries, however, the shambling mound moves toward them and attacks.

The shambling mound is Geray (human **druid**, MM, she/her, neutral), the woman who once helped Lucille with her garden, now completely overtaken by the curse of Needlepoint Forest. Protective of her cranberry bog, Geray assumes bad faith of anyone who touches it. If the party indicates they come on behalf of Lucille, Geray lets them take some cranberries.

Leeds Home

Mother Leeds's home is a tiny shack built between two thick, leafless deciduous trees. A rope ladder hangs off the trees, inviting characters to climb up and enter. The home is cute and cozy and possesses three rooms: her immaculate bedroom, her homey living room, and her son's bedroom.

Mother Leeds is a **Pine Hag** (see Appendix), a reclusive elderly human-looking woman with long silver hair and striking yellow eyes. She welcomes the party into her home and offers them a cup of tea, which is delicious. Her stern face betrays a hint of worry at the mention of her son.

Mother Leeds tells the party that her son is, indeed, the devil that the people of Batstham are so afraid of. She explains that he's the reason why the forest's defenses are so high; so James cannot escape and cause harm to the world at large. Mother Leeds promises to lift the enchantment if the party delivers her son safely to her.

On a successful **DC 20 Wisdom (Insight) check**, the party realizes she is hiding something. Specifically, Mother Leeds leaves out the part where she'd set the enchantment long before her son was cursed and that this curse is a side effect of the resentment her enchantment has instigated.

Mother's Room. Several tree branches twist through the windows and ceiling of this otherwise unremarkable room. A thorough search reveals that one of the branches has been hollowed out. A character who breaks open the tree finds a small pitcher plant.

Unbeknownst to all but Mother Leeds, her son, and his friends, the enchantment on the forest is intertwined with the plant's life. Mother Leeds does not allow characters to enter her room unsupervised, and she definitely does not let them near the plant.

James's Room. Mother Leeds does not go into her son's room; it is the only room in the whole home that has escaped her touch. The bed remains unmade, papers are strewn across the desk, and the wooden floorboards creak with every step.

Hanging above the desk is a map of Faerûn with several locations circled in red pen: Waterdeep, Silverymoon, and Evereska. A successful **DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) check** reveals one of the floorboards is loose. Underneath is a small chest full of the treasures of a young boy: several gold dragons from Waterdeep, a snail shell, two pine cones, and a signed copy of Volo's Guide to Waterdeep. On the inside cover, Volo addressed the book to one James Leeds and wrote to him, "Adventure waits for those who seek it! -VG"

Mother Leeds allows the party to take what they want from James's room, hoping that it can help them find her son.

Development

The party, learning about the enchantment, must seek out and capture the Leeds Devil.

Chapter 3: Confrontation

The party is tasked by Mother Leeds with the burden of capturing the Leeds Devil. But he has a life and agency of his own.

Finding James Leeds

It shouldn't be hard to find James Leeds (or the **Leeds Devil**), as he's been watching the party from the trees. James angrily confronts the party if they took anything from his room. When the party encounters him, read the following:

> In front of you stands a seven-foot-tall chimerical fiend. His red skin is covered in thick fur. His cloven hooves dig into the dirt below him. His large, black bat wings and twisted horns create a powerful and terrifying silhouette. He towers over you, wings beating, fury in his eyes.

Because of the curse, James can only speak and understand infernal. If the party cannot understand James, all they see is a bloodthirsty devil beating his bat wings and poised for attack. On being attacked, James uses his action to call for help. If Geray and Kalnoc are still able to, they will come to his aid and join the initiative on the following round.

If the party can communicate with him, they have the opportunity to de-escalate the situation and get James Leeds to tell his side of the story: that his mother placed a curse on this fortress long before he ended up a chimeric fiend. James promises to aid the characters in lifting the forest's enchantment for his own freedom. If the party accepts, he tells them of the pitcher plant in his mother's room and urges the party to distract her so he can destroy it.

Confronting Mother Leeds

The party may decide to confront Mother Leeds instead of working with her. Mother Leeds refuses to give up without a fight, and as the entire Needlepoint Forest is her lair, she has the home-field advantage. Mother Leeds casts giant insect to blockade the door to her room. The party must dispose of them to grant James access to the pitcher plant.

Development

This chapter ends when the party either brings James to his mother or distracts Mother Leeds while James kills the pitcher plant.

Conclusion

If the party worked with Mother Leeds, the hag thanks them and lifts the enchantment herself. The nectar of the pitcher plant can be substituted for many key ingredients in existing potions, so Mother Leeds uses the remains of her plant to brew the party one potion of vitality, one potion of speed, one potion of invisibility, and one potion of mind reading.

If the party worked with James, he thanks them profusely before asking about his friends. He suspects a remove curse spell would help all three of them but knows Batstham is ill-equipped to cast that spell or find someone who can. If the party is able to cast the spell and cure all of the "monsters," James gives them his signed copy of Volo's Guide to Waterdeep and claims he won't be needing it anymore, because he'll be seeing the real thing soon enough. James leaves Needlepoint Forest to see the world and can return as a powerful ally for the party when they need him.

Rewards

When the party returns to Batstham, the townspeople are overjoyed. In addition to the rewards granted by Mother Leeds or James, the townspeople of Batstham express their thanks in the form of 600 gp out of their treasury. They also bestow the *Bog Iron Blade*, a reddish sword forged with the bog iron from their river. It is a +1 magic sword.

Author's Notes/ Acknowledgments:

The falls most firmly etched into my memory happened in the Pine Barrens of New Jersey: brisk autumn winds, prickly evergreen needles, and the sense that something was always watching, just out of sight. The Pine Barrens is full of rich history, magnificent flora and fauna, and the most committed-to-the-bit cryptid lovers of all time. Growing up I was afraid I might never get out of New Jersey. At the time of writing this, age 25, I still haven't managed it.

Thank you to the amazing Book of Seasons team, my lovely D&D friends in the NYC area, and Willy.

Author Bio:

Leon Barillaro is a genderfluid designer for tabletop rpgs and immersive theater. They live in Jersey City and make the pilgrimage back to the Pines no more than once a year if they can help it. You can find them on Twitter @barilleon.

Pine Hag

Medium fey, lawful evil

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)
Hit Points 90 (14d10 + 20)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Wis +6
Skills Arcana +6, Perception +6, Survival +6
Senses Darkvision, passive Perception 16
Languages common, sylvan
Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Pine Hopping. The pine hag can sense when a tree in her lair takes damage. As a bonus action, if the pine hag is in a space adjacent to a tree in her lair, she can teleport to a space adjacent to another tree in her lair.

Innate Spellcasting. The hag's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 15). She can innately cast the following spells:

At will: *hold person*
1/day each: *bestow curse, contagion*
2/day each: *blindness/deafness, giant insect*

Actions

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 10 (2d8 + 1) bludgeoning damage.

Lair Actions

On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), the hag takes a lair action to cause one of the following magical effects:

- The hag causes a sticky wax to appear on the ground in a thirty-foot square. Each creature that starts its turn in the area or that enters it during its turn must make a DC 10 Strength saving throw. On a failed save, the creature is restrained as long as it remains in the area. The sticky wax otherwise lasts until the hag uses this lair action again or when the hag dies.
- The hag calls pine needles to fly off of the trees, striking at up to three targets the hag can see within 120 feet of her. The hag makes one ranged attack roll (+4) against each target. On a hit, the target takes 7 (2d6) piercing damage.

Leeds Devil

Medium fiend, chaotic neutral

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)
Hit Points 85 (10d8 + 40)
Speed 30 ft., fly 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	15 (+2)	18 (+4)	11 (+0)	8 (-1)	17 (+3)

Saving Throws Con +7 Wis +2 Cha + 6
Skills Intimidation +6 Survival +2
Damage Resistances cold; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks that aren't silvered
Damage Immunities fire, poison
Condition Immunities poisoned
Senses darkvision 120ft., passive Perception 8
Languages infernal, telepathy 120 ft.
Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Devil's Sight. Magical darkness does not impede this creature's darkvision.

Devil's Fear. When this creature lifts off of the ground to fly, the ground begins to shake. Each creature within 120 feet of the Leeds Devil's starting position must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Actions

Multiattack. The devil makes three attacks: one with its bite and two with its claws.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 7 (2d4 + 2) piercing damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 6 (1d6 + 3) slashing damage.

Call For Help. The creature emits a loud shrieking distress signal that can be heard for two miles. Kalnoc and Gera enter the initiative order on the following round.





A Sort of Homecoming

Written by Ally Sulentic

Levels: 6-8

Content Warnings: cult activity, kidnapping

SYNOPSIS

When the party runs into a desperate young woman searching for her sister at a local academy's homecoming festival, they stumble upon a hidden conspiracy involving a secret cult and an inscrutable demigod waiting to be summoned. Only the intervention of the party can stop the destruction.

ADVENTURE HOOK

- One or more of the characters is an alumnus of the Mazewalker Academy and is reuniting with old friends or schoolmates at the festival
- An ally of the characters asks the party to travel to the festival and return a book they borrowed from the school library years ago
- The characters are passing through the vicinity of the Academy and are approached by Renetha in her search

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Mazewalker Academy is one of the most exclusive schools in the area, founded centuries ago as an institute of higher learning catering to the nobility. Now it no longer exclusively admits nobles, opening its doors to anyone with the cash and connections to secure admittance. For those brilliant minds that cannot pay the high tuition fees, the academy offers scholarships to select applicants, requiring that they keep their grades high to remain at the school. Failure to do so results in severe penalties for the unfortunate student, with expulsion following soon after.

Cinothe Micori is one of these lucky scholarship students. Initially excited, Cinothe quickly succumbed to the anxiety and pressure of both leaving her small village and being challenged academically for the first time in her life. Faced with the loss of her scholarship, Cinothe was desperate for a solution when a friendly student approached her with an invitation to a support group for struggling students, boasting a number of scholarship recipients amongst them who mirrored Cinothe's experiences at the academy. Soon, she was brought into an inner circle of dissatisfied students led by a charismatic warlock, who spoke of using the powers of her ancient patron to force the administration to change its double standards. Cinothe, pulled in by her words, joined the cult.

What she doesn't realize is the cult doesn't want academic reform--they want to destroy the school, and she is the final sacrifice that will allow them to do just that.

CHAPTER 1

Whether you're a student, an alumnus, or simply passing through, the great stone edifice of Mazewalker Academy decked out in the colors of the annual Homecoming Festival never fails to inspire a feeling of nostalgia with both the music and mayhem it creates. Children waving bright ribbon streamers weave through the crowds as vendors call out to potential customers, offering food and drink to passersby.

Mazewalker Academy's annual homecoming celebration is in full swing when the characters arrive at the school grounds. The crowd is bubbling with excitement about the evening's rugby match against their rivals from the next city over, and a marching band plays a fight song as it moves down the main quad of the campus. Stands line the quad, offering food, drink and games to anyone who wishes to test their luck or skill.

As the crowd begins to make its way toward the academy's stadium through the gates north of the quad, a young woman approaches the party. She holds a sketch of another young woman that shares her features in her hand and looks travel-worn and a bit desperate. She introduces herself as Renetha Micori (human **druid**, MM, she/her, lawful good), and she is searching for her sister Cinothe, a student that she hasn't heard from in over a month. Renetha is in her mid-twenties with warm brown skin and short, tightly curled white hair. Her eyes are ice-blue and marked with the dull sheen of exhaustion.

Renetha is desperate for any news of her sister. If the party shows her any kindness, she babbles that the academy's administrators won't allow her to enter her sister's room, Kildare 4D, pointing out the building across the quad, and she has no idea where to go next. Unfortunately, with the Homecoming Festival, the campus is glutted with people and she hasn't been able to find anyone who even recognizes her sister's face. She asks the party for help, promising to reward them with 200gp - her family's entire fortune - if they can help find her missing sibling.

Renetha hands them a copy of Cinothe's portrait and asks them to cover the northern side of the quad while she looks in the east, near her sister's dorm. She thanks them profusely and walks toward the block of dormitories to the east, questioning the few remaining people moving toward the stadium along the way.

A successful **DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check** catches sight of two robed figures approaching Renetha once she is clear of the party. They speak briefly with her and then guide her toward an alleyway located between Middlemiss and Fenric Hall. Shortly following their disappearance into the darkened alley, a woman's scream echoes out and is quickly silenced.

If the party follows Renetha immediately...

The party catches 4 **cult fanatics** (MM), in the act of lifting the unconscious woman onto their shoulders and moving toward the opposite end of the alley. All four wear deep crimson robes with bronze pins glinting on their lapels. If they spot the party, they drop Renetha on the ground and move to attack them. If they are reduced to half their number, the remaining two cultists flee down the opposite end of the alley empty-handed, leaving behind the bodies of their companions.

Renetha can be coaxed back to consciousness with a successful **DC 10 Wisdom (Medicine) check**, and is grateful for the party's help in preventing her capture. She says the robed figures claimed they'd seen Cinothe and would take Renetha to see her, but when she entered the alley, two other robed figures attacked her. After that, everything is black until the party revived her. She did manage to grab one of the cultist's robes when she fell; clutched in her hand is a small scrap of crimson fabric with a circular bronze pin still attached, bearing a labyrinth design.

If the party delays following for more than a few minutes...

Renetha's cultists make off with her unconscious body. A successful **DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check** to search the alley finds a small scrap of crimson fabric with a bronze pin attached to it; the pin is circular with a labyrinth design pressed into it. A successful **DC 10 Wisdom (Survival) check** reveals the heavy footprints of four humanoids leading toward the opposite end of the alley, probably carrying something heavy between them.

Development

If Renetha is with the party, she suggests investigating her sister's dorm room. She is reluctant to follow the cultists' footprints, but agrees to accompany the party if they promise to keep her safe.

If Renetha was captured, then the party has only the information she gave them before she was taken and the scrap of crimson fabric with the strange bronze pin to point them in the right direction.

CHAPTER 2

Following the Trail

The party has several leads to follow up on. They can follow the footprints out of the alley, investigate Cinothe's dorm room, or look into the bronze pin left behind by the attackers.

Item: Bronze Pin

This is a small bronze lapel pin, bearing the embossed design of a circular labyrinth with a flower at the center. A successful **DC 15 Intelligence (History) check** recalls that one symbol of the Mazewalker Academy was a circular maze with a rose at the center. Closer examination of the pin reveals that the flower is actually a knot of tentacles arranged to look unsettlingly similar to a blooming rose.

The labyrinth-and-rose symbol (without tentacles) is carved in relief on many of the oldest buildings of the Academy, easily spotted without a skill check. A successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check** reveals that the symbol carved above the door of the Academy chapel shows tentacles, like the pin.

Location: Kildare Hall, Room 4D

Cinothe's room is located on the fourth floor of Kildare Hall, the northernmost of the four large dormitory buildings on the western side of the Academy's quad. Room 4D is on the top floor of the dorm, located in a cramped hallway with tarnished number plates affixed loosely to the doors and a carpet that has seen better days. The door is locked, but a successful **DC 10 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check** pops the lock without any trouble. A successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation) check** also reveals a spare key hidden under the doormat.

Inside, the room is cold and shabby, with faded flowered curtains covering a small window in the northern wall, giving a good view of the rugby game in progress in the stadium. The bed is unmade but roughly covered with a faded quilt bearing panels embellished with embroidered flowers and names, and the cluttered desk looks well-used. If Renetha is with the party, she recognizes the quilt as a family heirloom, given to Cinothe as a good luck charm when she left for the Academy. The panel bearing Cinothe's name has been ripped and patched recently.

A successful **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check** reveals a few clues, one item per check:

- Hidden in a small cubby in the desk is a letter from the Academy, informing Cinothe that her mid-term grades are not high enough to justify keeping her scholarship, and that she has until the end of the semester to bring her grades up or she will be forced to pay her tuition in full
- Crumpled beside the desk are several half-finished letters from Cinothe to her family. A successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check** gleans from the letters that Cinothe is anxious, depressed, and does not want to disappoint her family by giving up and coming home
- Pinned to the wall next to her bed is a flyer for "The Threadbear Society," a social club and support group for students attending the Academy on scholarships. The group's mascot is a ragged teddy bear with patched fur and a wide smile, sewing a rip in its own arm with a thread and needle. Drawn on the bear's stomach is the labyrinth symbol seen on the bronze pin. The group meets at the Academy's chapel
- Hidden under her pillow is a crimson envelope bearing a broken wax seal embossed with the labyrinth symbol matching the bronze pin. Inside is an invitation welcoming Cinothe Micori to a gathering of the Bearers of the Thread at the Academy chapel, dated about two weeks ago

Investigation: Cultists' Trail

The cultists take one of two different paths to escape the party; which one they take depends on whether or not they have Renetha's unconscious body with them. In both cases, they end up behind the academy chapel, a building directly across the quad from Kildare Hall. Tracking the cultists is easier if they are carrying Renetha, forcing them to move slower and leave clearer tracks; otherwise, they attempt to lose themselves in the crowd and use the festival to their advantage.

If the cultists captured Renetha, they travel in the long shadows of the campus buildings, trying to avoid any remaining festival goers. Tracking them requires success on one of two **DC 10 Wisdom (Survival) checks**.

If the party scared off the cultists, they escape down the alley and attempt to blend in with a group of rowdy rugby fans, using them as cover to hide their movement. Tracking them requires success on one of two **DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) checks**.

If the party succeeds at both skill checks for either scenario, they catch sight of the cultists entering the secret entrance to the shrine behind the chapel, negating the need for a skill check to find the door and adding a minute to the ritual timer below.

The Chapel

When the party arrives at the chapel, a poorly-hidden trail leads to a blank section of brick wall at the back of the chapel. A successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check** reveals a loose brick which when pushed unlocks a secret door hidden in the wall.

The dark, narrow passage tilts downward, curving down in a wide spiral. The temperature rises as the passage spirals deeper and the smell of hot desert sand grows the further they walk. Near the bottom, the air grows bone dry and seems to leech the moisture from their breath, drying their mouths.

Eventually, the passage opens into a round chamber with a sandy floor twenty feet in diameter. Here, two cult fanatics from the alley report to their similarly dressed superior, a **priest** (MM) and two **cultists** (MM) guarding the door to their secret shrine. Remaining hidden from the group requires a successful **DC 10 Dexterity (Stealth) check**. The cultists fight to the death to preserve the secrets of their shrine.

If the party waits out the conversation, the priest and cult fanatics depart through the door after a minute, leaving the two cultists to continue to guard it (but losing a minute from the ritual timer as a result). The sounds of garbled chanting can be heard as the door opens, letting a hot dry breeze into the antechamber as it closes heavily.

A successful DC 15 Charisma (Intimidation) check convinces the cultists to reveal the inner workings of the Bearers of the Thread.

- The leader of their group is a half-elf named Quelon Ambermoon, a former scholarship student who was forced to leave the university. She venerates a creature known as the Walker of the Maze, whose prophesied arrival on the Material Plane is called 'The Advent'
- The Threadbear Society was once an unaffiliated support group founded when the academy began handing out scholarships. The cult infiltrated the Society and inflames the scholarship students' anger at the academy's lack of meaningful support to convince them to join
- Quelon and the cult are uninterested in bringing about scholarship reform--they simply wish to destroy the academy with the indiscriminate anger of the Walker. New recruits are not told this until they are fully indoctrinated, a process that takes several weeks
- Quelon just secured the final sacrifice needed to begin the Advent

Development

With the path into the hidden shrine finally open, the party can rescue the sacrificial victims and perhaps stop the Advent.

CHAPTER 3

The shrine is arranged as a maze, with the main ritual chamber at the center of the labyrinth. The air is dry and hot, carrying with it the smell of burning sand and the murmuring sound of chanting. The walls are rough stone ground smooth by the scouring winds that occasionally blow through the corridors, leaving behind small dunes of sand that gather at the edges of the floor.

Finding their way to the ritual chamber requires three **DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) checks**; failure on these checks means the party becomes temporarily lost, losing precious time with which to stop the ritual. Subtract one minute from the ritual counter below for every failed check.

The Ritual Chamber

> Flickering candles light this circular amphitheater, casting shadows along the stairs descending toward the sandy area in its center. Cultists in crimson robes line the steps, chanting in a strange, guttural language. A figure wearing an angular mask shaped like a bull head stands at a stone altar and raises her arms up, a wicked-looking dagger clutched in her hands. A limp figure sprawls on the altar, ready to be sacrificed.

From the moment they enter the ritual chamber, the party has five minutes (or 50 combat rounds) to stop the ritual and save the prisoner, minus any time lost earlier in the adventure. A successful **DC 15 Dexterity (Stealth) check** allows the party to stay hidden as long as they don't interrupt the ritual or attack.

If Renetha is with the party

When Renetha sees the ritual in progress, she gasps and points to the restrained prisoner on the altar, identifying her as her sister, Cinothe. She quietly but tearfully begs the party to let her help rescue her sister, offering her druidic abilities to the cause.

If Renetha was captured by the cult

The party easily identifies the unconscious prisoner on the altar as Renetha. Beside the altar, two **cult fanatic**s hold a tearful crimson-robed woman struggling toward the altar. This is **Cinothe** (human **kraken priest** ,MM, she/her, neutral good), and she's clearly horrified by the ritual taking place in front of her. The moment the party appears she breaks free and joins them to free her sister.

If interrupted, cult leader **Quelon Ambermoon** (half-elf **warlock of the fiend**, MM, she/her, chaotic evil) stops her chant briefly to call the cult to action. She remains at the altar attempting to finish her ritual until the party has defeated two waves of enemies, wherein she enters combat.

Wave 1

8 **cultists** and 2 **cult fanatics** head toward the party, aiming to kill them or slow them down enough that Quelon can finish the ritual. This group attempts to draw the fight out as long as they can, fighting to the death if necessary.

Wave 2

If the first group is defeated, Quelon takes another brief pause and summons a swirling dust devil, depositing 6 **magma mephits** (MM) and 2 **gargoyles** (MM) in the center of the room; each creature has cracked, dry skin that weeps sand in labyrinth-like patterns on the ground. They crumble into more sand when defeated.

Wave 3

Quelon joins combat only if the two previous waves are completely destroyed, snarling that the party will pay for interrupting her ritual and wielding her *mazewalker ritual dagger*. She fights to the death.

Development

At this point, the party has either stopped the ritual or run out of time, leading to one of two possible outcomes.

CONCLUSION

Coming Home

If Quelon dies, the rest of the cult loses their nerve and flees into the maze, using their superior knowledge of the shrine to escape the party to fight another day. Renetha and Cinothe reunite tearfully, happy to finally see each other again. Cinothe guides them out of the labyrinth and back up to the chapel, apologizing and explaining how she became embroiled in the cult. She also hands the party Quelon's ritual dagger, saying they should take it far from the school in case anyone decides to try the ritual again.

As they leave the chapel, the rugby game is just finishing; Mazewalker Academy is victorious, and the crowd celebrates. Renetha presses a purse of 200 gp into the nearest party member's hands and thanks them all again for their help. She and Cinothe bid the party farewell and then head toward Cinothe's dorm to help her pack up her things to finally return home. The party is free to return to the festival, try some of the local food, and play any games they missed out on the first time around.

The Walker Rises

If the party runs out of time, the scalding wind in the chamber picks up, whirling around the room and obscuring much of it with stinging sand. In a burst of heat, the Walker of the Maze (**goristro**, MM) appears, a towering minotaur-like behemoth thirty feet in height. The Walker's blood red fur leaks sand and its six glowing yellow eyes leave phosporent trails in the air while tentacles writhe where the rest of its face would be. It roars out a challenge and attacks indiscriminately. The outclassed party needs to flee the Walker, which destroys everything in its way until stopped, potentially making it a recurring antagonist in future adventures. Mazewalker Academy is decimated by the Walker's rise and never recovers, leading to its eventual closure.

Rewards

XP Rewards:

Add the total XP earned through play, then divide by the number of characters to determine individual rewards.

Obstacle	XP
Defeating the cultists attacking Renetha	3600 xp
Discovering the history of the bronze pin	600 xp
Investigating Cinothe's dorm room	600 xp
Successfully tracking the cultists to the shrine	450 xp
Successfully entering the shrine	2800 xp
Defeating Wave 1 of the ritual	2750 xp
Defeating Wave 2 of the ritual	3750 xp
Defeating Wave 3 of the ritual	2900 xp
Stopping the ritual and saving Cinothe	900 xp

Treasure Rewards:

Item	Value
Reward for saving Renetha and Cinothe	200 gp



Mazewalker Ritual Dagger

Weapon (dagger), rare

This wicked dagger is incredibly sharp, bearing a leather-wrapped hilt and a ruby pommel stone carved with a knot of tentacles. You gain a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls with this magic weapon.

If you score a critical hit with this dagger on a helpless opponent, you double the critical damage (dealing 4 times the normal damage instead of 2 times for a regular critical hit)

Author's Notes/ Acknowledgments:

Halloween was never my favorite holiday (blasphemy, I know), and so Sort of Homecoming was born out of a desire to write a fall adventure that was less 'spooky' and more 'back-to-school.' A college celebrating homecoming amid the machinations of a secret society is still a little spooky, of course, but enjoyably so, I hope. 'Homecoming' has several meanings here: The obvious festival, but also returning home after a failure, as well as the return of a dangerous creature banished millennia ago. I was inspired (just a bit) by the song "A Sort of Homecoming" by U2, which came to reflect the adventure more than I thought it would by the end of writing. As an aside, if your party fails to prevent the Walker's summoning at the crux of this adventure, please find me on Twitter and tell me all the gory details!

Thank you to my husband, Tom, for putting up with the stress of having an anxious writer for a spouse, as well as my parents for letting me use their house as an office when I needed a change of scenery. I love and appreciate you all!

Author Bio:

Ally Sulentic is a nerd from Massachusetts who lives in a tiny apartment with her husband and two annoying cats. She's been gaming for most of her life and writing for even longer, though she only recently combined the two into something more. You can find her on Twitter and Instagram (@theuselessbard) and read some of her work at the DMs Guild and Pelgrane Press.



Eve of the Blood Tithe

Written by Mellanie Black

Levels: 11

Content Warnings: starvation, infanticide, suicide, murder

SYNOPSIS

Each year, as the summer begins to fade and the chill begins to seep into their bones, terror seizes the citizens of Brightforge. Winters are particularly cruel in this small mountain community, as poor weather and mountain beasts stop all but the bravest merchants from selling their supplies.In recent years, the terrors have begun even earlier, as the time of the autumn equinox sees those who wander into the pine forests to gather firewood and winter stores return deeply traumatised, if they return at all.

Seized by desperation, the town has returned to the ancient practice of blood tithes to keep this new terror at bay. Seven young women walk to the Killing Circle to be taken. Fall is the time to prepare for the terror of winter, and reap the bounty of summer. But the bounty from the ground is not enough to stave off darkness that awaits, and so an additional tithe must be taken in blood. The loss of some lives, they argue, is worth it to save the village.

The new Mayor, Arianna Griffith, is trying to convince terrified townsfolk that they can find another way to stop this violence and unnecessary loss. She has summoned the party at the last minute to try and stop this year's tithe.

ADVENTURE HOOK

- **A desperate plea:** Given hope by tales of the character's previous exploits, Arianna Griffith, mayor of Brightforge, writes to them to plea for aid (see Appendix). She can offer a small amount of coin, promised by the monarch, if the town's woes are ended.
- **A panicked runaway:** Journeying near to the mountain pass, the characters meet a terrified young woman and her equally scared twin brother. They reveal that she was to be tithed, but that they couldn't bear to be separated so brutally. They have run from Brightforge, if only until spring, hopeful that they can return when the panic has passed.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Brightforge is a small but crucial stop for travellers crossing this treacherous mountain. Its population is small: about 500 or so. Its position on the trade route across the mountain means it is relatively wealthy, but its foodstores were decimated after a particularly bad storm a few years ago, which cut the town off from trade for months and resulted in the death of their previous mayor, **Umlos Adlen**. The strange changes are due to the influence of a coven of **Bheur Hags** (VGtM) whose love of selfish, greedy and depraved acts to make the most of autumn harvests leads them to target Brightforge.

CHAPTER 1: ICE IN THE BLOOD

The characters arrive in Brightforge, and meet Mayor Arianna Griffith.

The Chill Touch of Dread

Read this text aloud to the players, or paraphrase:

> The gritty, damp mountain path is littered with a deep red blanket of slimy fallen leaves. It eventually leads to a small town working hard to ward off an autumnal chill. The smell of roasting meats and burning wood carry on the damp air, and a cloud of vapour rises from the chatter as a crowd gathers around a noticeboard in a cobbled town square.

Town Bulletin

The town of Brightforge laments its need to sacrifice its proud daughters, but their sacrifice will not go without recognition.

These daughters have pledged their life to the blood tithe for the protection of Brightforge against the ravages of winter:
Ann Dalison
Phoebe Tothyll
Mariella Greenway
~~Marion Charlis~~
Temperance Follywolle
Avis Ashby
Patience Berdwell

Morris Knowell is the main gossip in the town, and the one who will step forward to speak to the adventurers should they try to interrogate the crowd.

Listening or speaking to the crowd, the characters can learn the following:

- Two new names have been added to the tithe list since last night.
- People are relieved and hopeful but conflicted at seeing the names of young women they've known all their lives.
- A few people are praising the women extravagantly, praying that theirs will be the blood that finally spares all of Brightforge.
- The name that has been scratched out from the list is a girl who ran away with her twin brother two days ago. Their father has been trying to find her ever since. They don't know anything else, but they give directions to their home.
- The mayor came earlier to try and stop Avis and Patience, two best friends, from adding their names to the list, but they wouldn't be dissuaded.

The mayor's offices are clearly signposted and are directly opposite the notice board. Arianna Griffith (human **commoner**, MM, she/her, neutral good) is grateful to the characters for their timely arrival and provides a warm welcome, but her quarters are in clear disarray. She appears to not have slept properly for some time.

She desperately wants the characters to investigate. She is certain something beyond bad weather is responsible for the horrific winters. She doesn't believe the blood tithe achieves anything, beyond a temporary sense that something is being done. Arianna Griffith provides the following information.

- Around this time of the year every year, people go into the woods around Brightforge to gather firewood or forage mushrooms. A few don't return at all; more come back unable to speak or coherently explain what has happened to them beyond an overwhelming sense of dread and fear. **Jerome Chanlis** and the previous mayor **Umlos Adlem** appeared to be the only ones to come out unscathed after they went to investigate the disappearances. They found nothing of note
- Brightforge used its autumn harvests to manage even the harshest seasons until just a few years ago, and were well equipped to manage whatever the unpredictable mountain weather threw at them. Tales even tell that they survived centuries of residence by a white dragon in the mountains, whose presence cast a year-round chill. However their latest Autumn preparations have been insufficient
- She wonders at Umlos Adlen's death; he was anxious and prone to over prepare. She cannot understand how he could have stocked too little food for the winter

Development

- Character could choose to visit the missing girl's father, Jerome Chanlis
- Characters could choose to investigate Umlos Adlen
- Characters could choose to head into the forest
- Characters could choose to speak to the women choosing to sacrifice themselves



CHAPTER 2: EXPLORING BRIGHTFORGE

The people and places of Brightforge may have information that reveals the way out of the terrors on the horizon.

Area

Lighting: Brightforge sits under relatively open skies, so is brightly lit during the day. The sun begins to set mid-afternoon. At night the copious lamps on the streets and buildings ensure dim, orangey light for most of the village, and bright light in close proximity to buildings.

Dimensions: Buildings in Brightforge are all built to similar dimensions, and while they vary in terms of storeys and square footage, they all have ceilings around 15ft high.

The Selfless Sacrifices

The women planning to sacrifice themselves all have their personal motivations. They are all **commoners** (MM) and appear to use she/her pronouns. If the characters choose to speak to them, they discover the following:

- **Ann Dalison (Chaotic Good).** Ann is 19 years old and can be found at work in the candlemakers shop. She was inspired by the second sacrifice last year and felt that the harvest and following winter did get a little better afterwards. She hopes that an early sacrifice this year will prevent unnecessary hardship, and that her life is worth less than an entire village. A successful **DC 17 Wisdom (Perception) check** reveals that she was slipping candles into her pockets before being interrupted by the characters. If confronted, she begs the characters not to say anything. The candles are for her mother who will need them to get through dark nights.
- **Phoebe Tothyll (Lawful Good).** Phoebe is at work re-thatching a roof for winter. She breaks to meet with the characters and tells them in no uncertain terms that these tithes work and that blood spilled warms the earth to ease the chill and nourish the soil for a bountiful spring.
- **Mariella Greenway (Lawful Neutral).** Mariella is at home with **Temperance Follywolle** and welcomes the characters inside her home. She seems keen to speak and avert the sacrifice if she can. Her family are great believers but she is suspicious that the sacrifices only started around the time that Umlos Adlen 'went strange'.
- **Temperance Follywolle (True Neutral).** Temperance is visiting **Mariella Greenway** and confirms her story about Umlos Adlen 'going strange'. He had been planning winter stockpiles as he did every year, but then began to talk of shortages and even propositioned her, promising extra provisions in exchange. She slapped him and it wasn't long afterwards that he died.
- **Avis Ashby (True Neutral).** Avis can be found in the stables. She was visited by **Jerome Chanlis** after his daughter went missing. He was asking if she knew anything, but somehow ended up talking her into replacing Marion in the sacrifice. Avis is nervous but seems to think it's for the best and a great honour.
- **Patience Berdwell (Neutral Good).** Patience can be found in the tavern. She was visited by **Jerome Chanlis** after his daughter went missing. He was asking if she knew anything, but somehow ended up talking her into replacing Marion in the sacrifice. Patience is nervous but seems to think it's for the best and a great honour.

Mariella and Temperance are willing to the characters if they ask. They are reluctant to visit Jerome or confront anybody directly, but attempt to gather information where needed.

The Mystery of Umlos Adlen

Arianna Griffith has access to all of Umlos Adlen's records and has never used his office at the Guild Hall in town because it feels impersonal to meet townsfolk there. Characters may get keys to his offices from Arianna Griffith.

The Guildhall

Various crafters and trade-folk use the Guildhall to conduct official business as well as socialise. With fewer travellers due to the changing season, and, therefore, fewer business opportunities, it is currently very quiet.

> The heavy oak door opens with a puff of dust. There are clear gaps in shelves where the new mayor has taken official documents for her records, but otherwise the shelves are stuffed with personal artifacts, scrolls and letters. A large portrait of a grey-haired mustachioed man, hangs over the cold fireplace.

- A map of Brightforge and its surrounding forest hangs on the wall. On a successful **DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check** the character notices a hastily scribbled cross deep within the forest
- The scrolls and letters are largely boring, business-related matters (Umlos appears to have been a keen jeweller) however a successful **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check** reveals a ripped off portion of a letter that appears to offer extra provisions to add to the harvest bounty. It does not appear to have been sent

- The desk has a locked drawer in it. It can be broken open with a successful **DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check** or picked with a successful **DC 17 Dexterity (Thieves Tools) check**. Inside is a lock of brown hair in a blue ribbon, 5 gp, and a large green button. When pressed, this button reveals a previously undetectable trap-door beneath the desk. It leads down some stairs into a darkened room, followed by the stench of rot
- If characters do not discover the letter or the hidden trapdoor, they will notice the smell of rotting food which begins to invade their senses after a few moments. It seems to be coming from underneath the floorboards. Any Strength (Athletics) check or attack roll of **10 or above** will break through the old, dry boards to reveal the hidden room.

If the party enters the hidden room, they discover the following:

- The room contains no light sources and is in total darkness
- Aside from a small area of around 20 feet square at the foot of the stairs, the entire space seems to be packed with boxes and barrels of old, rotten food. Dried meats that have not been properly stored are wrapped in thick mold, and it is clear that rats have feasted on almost everything
- A successful **DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check** uncovers the remnants of a letter to "Jerome." The bottom half is torn off, but the writing is similar to that seen on documents in Umlos Adlem's office upstairs. However, the writing is scratchy as though written in haste

The torn note

Jerome,

They suspect. They must all suspect. We both know that they cannot, must not be trusted with the provisions. They would only waste them, waste them and want more. How can we possibly, as upstanding citizens of Brightforge, allow this to be?

I know that the Follywolle's smothered their youngest this last week. They said it was a chill, but the babe was in full health not two days before. How can we allow them to waste our stores, knowing that more tragedies may yet come to pass. We must keep the stores a secret, must not allow them to fall into unworthy hands...

The Chanlis House

The Chanlis family lives in a modest dwelling on the edge of Brightforge, near the forest. Jerome Chanlis is home when the party visits. A sign on the door reads "Jerome Chanlis, Guild Master."

If the characters visit before the store cache is revealed to the town, the following can occur:

- Jerome is polite and invites the characters inside, but a successful **DC 14 Wisdom (Insight) check** reveals that he does not want them to be there. With a DC 16, the character can also tell that he is nervous almost to the point of panic
- Jerome claims his daughter Marion seemed enthusiastic about participating in the sacrifice despite the protests of her twin. He wanted to stop her and let some other family take the pain, but he felt guilt at putting his family before the village. A successful **DC 13 Wisdom (Insight) check** reveals that he is lying.
- If pressed on his lies, a successful **DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) or Charisma (Intimidation) check** forces him to reveal that his zealotry caused him to misinterpret her eagerness to participate, and Jerome admits that it was he who added her name to the list. Marion knew nothing until she saw it.

If confronted about the letters or store cache in the Guild Hall, or at any mention of the old mayor, the sudden change in winters, or the reason for the sacrifice, Jerome breaks down into sobs.

> Jerome slumps forward, heaving with heavy, panicked breaths that may be sobs. His words are indistinguishable, save for the occasional snatch of a phrase. "My girl…so many girls... forest...unnatural creatures...so afraid...made sense...all wrong….all wrong...Sorry...sorry...sorry…"

He remains so for a long while. If the characters wait until he has calmed, he simply cradles his head in his hands, and points through his window into the forest.

You may also choose to have the character discover a hag eye on a string around Jerome's neck. It has an AC 10 and 1 hit point. Jerome tries to prevent anything from happening to it, but if interrogated about it he will offer no more information than his apologies and pathetic pointing into the forest.

Development

- Characters could choose to immediately reveal the wasted store cache to the townsfolk
- Characters could choose to head into the forest

CHAPTER 3: IT CAME FROM THE FOREST

The brown leaves and warm air of Brightforge last only a short distance into the forest before the brittle crack of frosted leaves breaks underfoot and the gentle dance of exhaled vapour fills the air instead. A chill, unnatural breeze sends a shudder through you, and, as you look around, it begins to snow.

Area
Light: The closely gathered trees and heavy, unseasonal snow storm clouds plunge the forest into dim light.
Sound: Wind whistles through the branches, and the trunks of ancient trees creak under its weight. Ice and snow crunches under foot as it quickly settles on the loose carpet of leaves and pine needles.
Terrain: As soon as the snow storm begins, the forest becomes difficult terrain.
Survival: The characters must make a DC 10 Constitution saving throw every hour. On a success they are fine, on a failure they take a point of exhaustion.

A successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) or Wisdom (Nature) check** reveals the direction from which the poor weather seems to be coming and confirms that it started only recently.

Detect magic or similar effects reveal powerful transmutation magic. The weather is the result of the **Bheur Hag's** *control weather* spell (VGtM).

It takes half a day to find the hags' cave.

Potential Random Encounters
A disturbance in the natural order: An **air elemental** (MM), an **earth elemental** (MM), and an **water elemental** (MM) appear in the characters' path, seemingly riled up by the sudden shift in the balance of the forest.
An easy kill: A pack of six **winter wolves** (book abbreviation) stalk the characters and attack at an opportune moment.

The Winter Witches' Cave

A mound of rocks and rubble grown through with trees and vines surrounds the entrance to a cave. A soft blue light glows from within and the faint sound of laughter and voices comes from within, but no effort has been made to close off the entrance from the elements.

Area
Dimensions: The entrance to the cave is 10 feet high, and the cave itself is roughly circular hovel 80 feet in diameter.
Light: A pile of bones and entrails sits in the centre of the cave, which glow an unnatural blue
Sound: The storm still rages outside, and sounds within the cave echo and sing strangely. When the characters come within 20ft of the entrance, three high, croaky feminine voices start to speak.

"Ahhh, here are our friends from the village…"

"Not really friends"

"No of course not really friends. Really really bad bad bad, here to make us dead dead dead!"

"Oh like that poor baby!"

"Ohhhhh, it's tiny grave."

"Oh like that poor old man."

"Ohhhh, his poor bleeding gums."

"Oh, like that poor sweet young woman."

"Ohhh, her poor feeble bones."

"Ohhhh if only they mayor had shared his treats."

"HAHAHAHAAHAHAHAHAHAHAH."

It's not clear where the three voices come from at first. Several corpses, blue, emaciated and frozen stiff, are propped up around the cave, but there is no discernible movement.

Creatures

Among the pile of bones are three **bheur hags** who form a coven. One of them has already used a *control weather* spell to cause the snow storm.

- The hags are more than happy to reveal the details of what they've done to the village, if they can get the words out through their laughter.
- There is already one corpse in the lair, which is ready for a hag to use her *Maddening Feast* ability.

Characters with a **passive Perception of 18 or higher** notice one of the corpses start to slowly turn its head and look towards them grinning. All at once, the **bheur hag coven** leap from three opposite sides of the cavern and attempt to surround the party.

- The hags did not intend to stay quite so long near such a small village, but the mayor was so easily influenced to do terrible things that they stayed longer, and when somebody suggested the sacrifice they couldn't resist staying
- For every act of desperation, they made the Mayor and his assistant Jerome add more to the store cache. It was a feast of misery
- They were devastated when Umlos Adlem ended his life. He was such a source of deliciousness for them

Development

If the hags are defeated, the unseasonable weather stops and things can start to return to normal. The journey back to the village is uneventful as the snow begins slowly to melt away. The characters may find the listed items from the treasure section amongst the hags' belongings.

CONCLUSION: FROM GRIEF TO VENGEANCE

Upon returning to the village, the characters notice a scene in the square as Jerome Chanlis wails. If the characters did not previously destroy the hag eye, he can be seen whacking it with a boot and eventually squashes it into nothing.

Arianna Griffith is watching, covered in mud and dishevelled as though perhaps she has tried to stop his theatrics and failed.

At the sight of the characters' return, Jerome takes one look at the crowd and begin to run away in a panic.



Jerome is dragged back into the square by a gruff man who looks to be the smith, and Phoebe Tothyll, who was to be sacrificed.

"If we weren't suspicious of your actions before, Chanlis, we are now," Phoebe calls, throwing him to the ground. "You swore that our blood, my blood, was powerful and could stop the torment, that there was no other way, but now the chill has left the forest and my blood is firmly in my veins. Speak. Or perhaps these good folk can do it for you."

She gestures to the characters and the gathered crowd look on expectantly.

- All of the potential sacrifices are there. The reveal that Jerome told them they had the power to stop the curse and his sudden meltdown is clearly concerning them.
- If the characters reveal the hidden store cache, Jerome's deception with Umlos Adlem, and the role of the hags, the crowd is thrown into a frenzy. A successful **DC 18 Charisma (Persuasion) or Charisma (Performance) check** is required to persuade the crowd to calm down and listen to reason.

- If the characters do not intervene, the crowd turns on Jerome. Arianna Griffith and Phoebe Tothyll try and protect him, and beseech the party to do the same. There are 70 people in the crowd and they all use the **commoner** stat block.

Whether Jerome survives or not, Arianna Griffith thanks the party for unearthing the cause of their village's woes. If they did not help her efforts to spare him, she understands, and heads to the guild hall to retrieve a *+2 Shield* and a *Vicious Weapon*, both inscribed with the sigil of Brightforge.

Rewards

XP Rewards

The recommended XP reward for this adventure is 28,000xp. 17,400 of this is rewarded for dealing with the hags. The remaining 10,600 may be awarded and split as the DM sees fit.

Treasure Rewards

Vicious weapon - Choose the weapon type as best fits your party
Shield of Brightforge (+2 shield)
Staff of Withering
Bracers of defence

Author's Notes/ Acknowledgments:

This adventure wouldn't exist without the endless inspiration, kindness and patience of my fellow collaborators on this project, or the inestimable talents of our Seasonal Deity and overlord, Jess.

So often in stories we are told that women are powerful, but their power comes from their pain or sacrifice. If they are not suffering, we are told their powers are evil. I wanted an adventure where women like Arianna Griffith recognise that this isn't right and have a chance to challenge the corrupt people in power. Women do not have to suffer to be powerful. Also, how cool are hags?

Author Bio:

Mellanie Black is a bestselling, ENnie-award-nominated TTRPG writer from Newcastle-upon-Tyne in England. She believes in D&D Inclusivity and home-brews a special place in The Nine Hells for gatekeepers. She also wrote a place in the Nine Hells for D&D Adventurers League. She's a feminist, fantasy writer, infernal enthusiast, and aspiring elf. You can find her over on Twitter @ MissBox.

Appendix

Arianna Griffith's letter

Read or paraphrase, making it relevant to a recent heroic or useful deed.

Dear [character(s)],

It is unlikely you have heard of me, or the small town of Brightforge, but we were recently delighted by tales of your exploits, shared with us by a traveller of your recent acquaintance. Or so they led us to believe.

I truly hope that their tale was not a fabrication, because our town is in dire need of the strength of mind and perhaps of arms that you so clearly can provide.

There is a deep ache in my soul that I must be reduced to begging in such a way, but Brightforge has been cursed in recent years with truly savage winters and limited autumn harvests. The old have prayed to die before it grips them, mothers have smothered their children rather than watch them starve. I hope I do not need to go on.

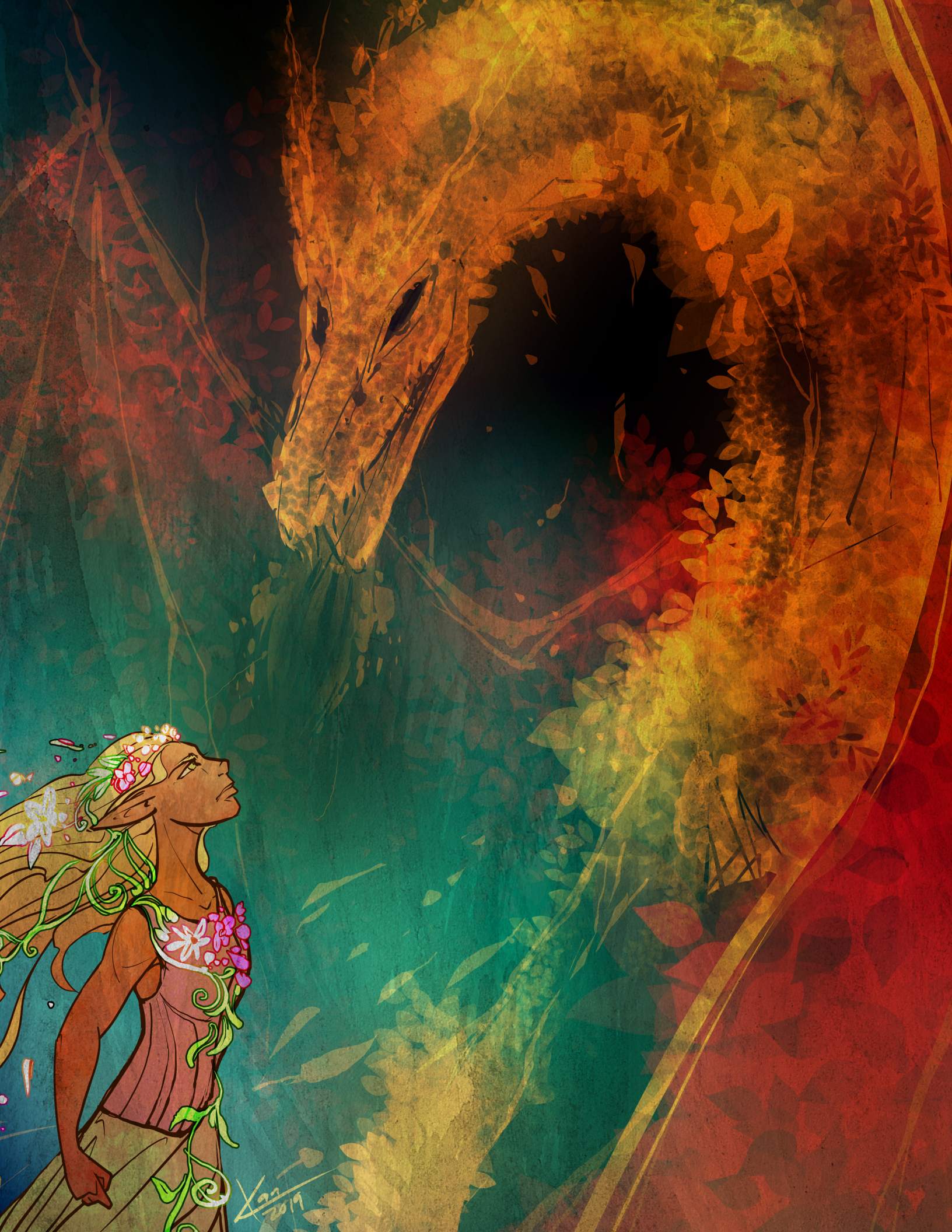
I did not hold with the idea of curses, but given our recent experience I find myself open to almost any explanation. I cannot bring myself to believe that the gods are so cruel. If you can find a way to end this curse by any means...I have heard tell of spells to change the weather, or make a patch of land bountiful where it was previously barren, if you...

Gods. Even to write it down sounds whimsical, the fancy of a child, not the strategy of a leader.

I would not debase myself to beg, but an old folk story of the town has turned to a bloody tradition. A blood tithe of young women has caught the public imagination, and worse, young women volunteer themselves. The future hope of our proud town is spilling its blood on the rocks on the slim hope that fewer people will die starving.

Please, come.
I would be forever in your debt.

Yours in hope,
Arianna Griffith
Mayor of Brightforge



The Wayward One

Written by Jesse Jordan

Levels: 11-16

SYNOPSIS

A strange wind blows, making the trees rustle. Their leaves change to vibrant reds and muted oranges, falling lazily to the ground. Can it be autumn already?

Something bellows in the distance, a roar of anger and frustration.

Breathless, a dryad stumbles out of the woods, eyes wide with fear and terror, begging for help. She says she has escaped her captors, and that even now they are coming for her.

Her would-be captors present themselves: regal looking elves in armor made from steel and fallen leaves. They are thankful that you have assisted them in their efforts to capture this dryad.

She has evaded them for some time.

She is the Wayward One.

ADVENTURE HOOK

The adventure begins, as many do, on the road, and is best introduced at a time when the party intends to travel peacefully (or 'fast travel', if you will) to a distant town, city, or village. The village of Jacksouse can be replaced entirely with any village your party is travelling towards so long as you include the Temple of Blossoms.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Hazel is a young and beautiful dryad from the Feywild. Seasons work differently there than on the prime material plane, but they exist nonetheless. Hazel has fled the Feywild in order to avoid The Change, or the turning of seasons that would change her very essence as a dryad - aging her, causing her to darken and wilt.

The Change is inevitable and must come to all fey creatures with a connection to the wilderness. By fleeing the Feywild, Hazel is attempting to circumvent the natural order. She has heard whispers of a sacred place called the Temple of Blossoms, created by druids and clerics to the gods of nature. It is said that the seasons cannot touch the insides of the temple, and that the trees and gardens within are forever in the full bloom of summer.

Greatly displeased with Hazel's actions, the Feywild primordials, ancient creatures whose power comes close to rivalling that of the gods, have sent their agents to capture Hazel and return her to the Feywild so that she may be subjected to The Change and order can be restored.

The primordials have sent the Wardens of Change, a gruff and tactless group of enforcers whose duty it is to capture wayward beings like Hazel, and unleashed one of their greatest assets - the undying Autumnal Dragon, an elemental dragon made entirely from fallen leaves.

The party will be faced with a number of challenges and threats, and will need to battle both unrelenting foes and pressing existential questions as they make their way to Jacksouse.

CHAPTER 1: FALLEN LEAVES

The road is empty and the skies are clear. A cool wind blows as the road winds its way through an increasingly dense forest, causing the deciduous trees to shake and dance. The wind picks up, causing a noticeable drop in the temperature. The leaves on the edge of the woods darken and change color, coming loose and blowing away in the breeze. In the distance, something roars - something large, something angry - and the woods begin to rustle nearby. Panting and visibly afraid, a dryad emerges from the woods and stumbles onto the road. She sees the party and begs with shaking breath for their assistance.

Hazel

While trying to catch her breath, the dryad introduces herself as Hazel (**dryad** (MM), she/her, chaotic good). Her appearance is that of a beautiful young woman who might be mistaken for an elf were it not for the green hue of her skin and the flowers and vines growing out of her shoulders and scalp, some of which have become intertwined with her hair to form a floral crown across her brow. She should be described as visibly nervous and fearful, eyes constantly darting to the treeline as she speaks.

Roleplaying Hazel

While Hazel is young by dryad standards, she is willful and sharp witted. She understands that her actions mean breaking thousands of years worth of tradition, but doesn't give a damn; she believes that she should be free to live her life the way she chooses. Still, she has been chased relentlessly across the Feywild and onto this plane, and she is nearing her wit's end.

While talking to the party, her exhaustion and desperation should be apparent. She may come across as rebellious to some, or as fiercely independent to others. Hazel should not be portrayed as a hapless damsel in distress, as she has managed to flee from her captors across at least two planes so far.

A Hasty Introduction

Once everyone has had a chance to react to Hazel's sudden appearance, she does her best to answer any questions the party may have while catching her breath. She can offer the following pieces of information:

- She doesn't know how long she's been running for. Time works differently here than it does on the Feywild
- She knows little about the Feywild primordials, only that they decide when The Change comes and that they are practically gods
- Her pursuers are not inherently evil, but they are strict devotees to the Feywild primordials; they enforce the primordials' laws unerringly and without question
- The tree to which she is bound remains on the Feywild, and The Change cannot come to it, or her, unless she is within it
- The Change is comparable to seasons; the agents of the Feywild primordials want to see her whither and darken, to lose her vitality and youth, because they will it to be so

Hazel asks the party to escort her to the town of Jacksouse, a small town that is no more than two days' travel from here. She has heard whispers about the Temple of Blossoms there, a place where plant life grows and flourishes regardless of the season, and needs help getting there. She is running on fumes and doesn't know if she can make it alone.

Hazel offers to give the party everything she has - a cloak of displacement, an Ioun stone of sustenance, and a pair of winged boots - if they can safely escort her to Jacksouse. She has no gold to offer, but swears to be indebted to the party until she can repay them.

If the party accepts, or if they spend more than a few moments considering, an elven warrior wearing armor covered in gilded leaves steps out of the woods. Two similarly dressed warriors flank him. Hazel whispers the name 'Vaeril' as the commander steps forward.

Vaeril of the Feywild

Vaeril (**gladiator** (MM), he/him, lawful good) is the leader of the Wardens of Change. By elven standards, his stature is impressive, and he wields a gilded spear and shield. His every movement exudes lockstep efficiency.

Roleplaying Vaeril

Vaeril has one objective only: to capture Hazel and return her to the Feywild. He should be played as firm, unyielding, and proper; his mannerisms make him seem as if he could be a paladin or a knight.

He assumes the party has captured Hazel and asks that they turn her over to him. He allows no compromises and accepts no bargains or substitutions. He makes it clear that they will take her by force if they must.

Encounter - Vaeril and the Wardens of Change

> "You stand in the way of the Change," says Vaeril. "This will not be tolerated. I have no qualms with you, but I will not hesitate to leave you bloodied on the roadside if you do not surrender the wayward one."

Whether the party moves to combat immediately or tries to bargain with Vaeril, he and his fellow wardens advance on the party.

Vaeril and the Wardens all use the **gladiator** (MM) stat block, except that Vaeril has a +2 spear. Whenever Vaeril or the Wardens throws their spears, the weapons crumble into a pile of leaves after the attack resolves and reappear in their hands.

Whenever Vaeril or one of the Wardens is defeated, they disintegrate into a pile of leaves that blows away.

Development

Once the party has completed the encounter, proceed to Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 2: RUN FROM THE WIND

As the body of the final warden breaks down into so many red and yellow leaves, they glare at the party. "You can't stop the Change," they say. "Even if you delay us, you'll never escape the autumnal dragon." The wind scatters the leaves that were once Wardens. The trees dance and quiver in the wind - a wind that begins to be filled with a chorus of howls. Hazel's eyes widen. "Bramblehounds," she whispers. "Run. Run!"

The Chase

As soon as she finishes speaking, Hazel starts running down the road, only to have the road disappear amid a tangle of impossibly thick plant growth that appears before the eyes of the party.

Bramblehounds are wolves made from roots, thorns, and brambles. They use the same stat block as **Winter Wolves** (MM) with these changes:

- Its primary breath weapon is replaced with Decaying Breath, requires a Constitution saving throw, and deals necrotic damage
- They do not have the Snow Camouflage trait
- They are considered elementals as well as monstrosities

Skill Challenge

In order to escape the Bramblehounds, the characters must complete a Skill Challenge.

To run the Skill Challenge, begin by having the characters roll initiative. Once the turn order has been decided, tell the party that they need to accumulate five successes before they accumulate three failures in order to succeed.

In order to complete the skill challenge, characters must succeed on a **DC 15 ability check**. Characters must be proficient in the ability they attempt to use and must be able to reasonably justify their choice. Here are a few possible examples:

- **Strength (Athletics) check** to run as fast as possible to get away from the horde
- **Dexterity (Acrobatics) check** to try and parkour their way through the woods
- **Wisdom (Survival) check** to try and scout out a clear path to run through
- **Intelligence (Investigation) check** to look for obstacles to put in the path behind them

Once a player uses a skill in which they are proficient to attempt the skill challenge, they cannot use that same skill again. Each failure results in a combat encounter against 1d6 Bramblehounds, which the characters must complete before they can continue trying to escape.

If the characters succeed the skill challenge, award each player Inspiration before reading the boxed text below and moving to the encounter with the Autumnal Dragon.

If the characters fail the skill challenge, read the following:

The earth shakes and the wind howls, causing flurries of leaves to pick up and blow. The leaves smash together and begin to form the outline of a creature - a great dragon made entirely from fallen leaves. The Bramblehounds retreat into the woods, their watchful eyes still visible just beyond the treeline. The Autumnal Dragon, now fully materialized, steps towards the characters and roars.

The Autumnal Dragon

While the Autumnal Dragon should be described as visually impressive, the party should be able to succeed in combat against it. The Autumnal Dragon uses **Young Bronze Dragon** (MM) stats with these changes:

- Its primary breath weapon is replaced with Decaying Breath, requires a Constitution saving throw, and deals necrotic damage
- It is considered an elemental as well as a dragon

Using Hazel in combat

When combat against the Autumnal Dragon begins, roll initiative for Hazel. She harasses the dragon in combat from afar and uses Goodberry to revive downed party members. The Autumnal Dragon does not attack Hazel.

Once the dragon is defeated, it bellows in rage and frustration before dissolving into a swarm of leaves and blowing away. The Bramblehounds growl and snarl, but they back away and retreat.

If all party members fall to 0 hp, they fall unconscious and awaken the next day. There is no sign of Hazel, the wardens, or the dragon - she has been taken back to the Feywild, and the characters have failed their task. .

Development

If the party did not defeat the autumnal dragon and hazel is taken back to the feywild, proceed to Chapter 3. If the party did not defeat the Autumnal Dragon, Hazel is taken back to the Feywild. The adventure is over.

CHAPTER 3: PEACEFULLY OR IN PIECES

With the immediate danger passed, the party continues down the road until nightfall. Hazel's strength falters. "We need to rest," she says. "There is a safe place here. I can sense it: a copse of trees blessed by my dryad cousins. We can rest there, and the blessings will ensure that we are not disturbed." Sure enough, a ring of trees grown impossibly close together comes into view; the trees part for Hazel the moment she approaches them, revealing an idyllic clearing within.

Resting Easy

The party should use this opportunity to take a long rest in order to prepare for whatever they might need to face the next day.

This scene may be an excellent opportunity to further enhance the story through roleplay. If the players want to talk to Hazel, try to work some of the following points into the conversation:

- Hazel believes that she should be the only one to decide her fate
- She knows that the Autumnal Dragon will return, larger and more powerful than before
- While she does not fully understand how it is that the dragon or the wardens are able to regenerate the way they do, she knows it has something to do with their connection to the primordials of the Feywild

If a player decides to investigate the clearing, on a successful **DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation or Nature) check**, the player finds a scrap of bark with runes scrawled across it. Treat it as a scroll of protection against elementals.

Then The Morning Comes

When the characters awaken the next morning, describe the trees of the copse as having their leaves colored and aged. Hazel pales visibly as she sees this, and whispers that the Autumnal Dragon must be close.

Leaving The Forest

Once everyone is ready to leave the clearing, Hazel tells them they have several more hours of travel through the woods before they reach its edge - once they do, they will be within sight of Jacksouse.

In order to avoid being tracked by the Wardens, each player must succeed on either a **DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check or Dexterity (Stealth) check**. One or more failures amongst the party causes a combat encounter against 1d6 Bramblehounds and 1d4 Wardens.

The Edge of the Woods

"Did you really think it would be as easy as all that?" Vaeril calls to the party as they reach the edge of the forest. "While I commend you on your dedication, I condemn you for your choices. Draw your weapons. Only one of us will be victorious this day." The trees around the party change color and shake off their leaves - leaves which flutter madly through the air before once again forming the shape of the Autumnal Dragon. It is significantly larger, with blackened branches protruding from its body like spikes. Vaeril leaps down from a tree and lands on its back. The dragon bellows, and the entire forest trembles.

In this encounter, the Autumnal Dragon uses the same stat block as an **Adult Bronze Dragon** (MM) with these changes:

- Its primary breath weapon is replaced with Decaying Breath, requires a Constitution saving throw, and deals necrotic damage
- If the dragon uses its Change Shape action, the new form it takes is formed out of swirling leaves
- The forest the party is in counts as its lair

Vaeril occupies the same space as the dragon so long as he is riding it, and he peppers the party with ranged attacks from his spear.

As before, if the party fails this encounter they awaken the next day with no sign of Hazel their adventure complete.

Development

After the party defeats Vaeril and the Autumnal Dragon, move to the Conclusion.



CONCLUSION

> "You're disrupting thousands of years of upholding the natural order," Vaeril says as he disintegrates. "Disrupt this," Hazel says, making a rude hand gesture. With a flick of her wrist, vines emerge from the earth and dash what remains of his form to pieces.

Once they leave the forest, the party is not harried any further by the Wardens. Upon arriving in Jacksouse, the party immediately spies the Temple of Blossoms - a cathedral with shining green grass and sunflowers in full bloom that stands out in stark contrast against the world around it.

The moment Hazel sets foot on the Temple Grounds, the air around her shimmers. Her skin becomes an even more vibrant green, and the plant life growing from her body thickens and sprouts. She smiles, a look of utter bliss on her face.

She thanks the party and rewards them as promised. An elderly woman who seems more gardener than priestess approaches. Hazel sheepishly asks if she can stay, and the woman welcomes her with open arms.

Rewards

Characters who complete this adventure may earn the following rewards:

XP Rewards:

Add the total XP earned through play, then divide by the number of characters to determine individual rewards.

Obstacle	XP
Warden of Change	1,800 xp
Bramblehound	700 xp
Autumnal Dragon (1st Encounter)	3,900 xp
Autumnal Dragon (2nd Encounter)	13,000 xp
Succeeding the skill challenge	750 xp each

Treasure Rewards:

Obstacle	Reward
Hazel's reward for a safe escort	*Cloak of Displacement*
Hazel's reward for a safe escort	*Ioun Stone of Sustenance*
Hazel's reward for a safe escort	*Winged Boots*
Potential find in Chapter 2	*Scroll of Protection (Elementals)*

Author's Notes/ Acknowledgments:

While this narrative was meant specifically to revolve around the inevitability of us all to resist change caused by the passage of time, I encourage you as a DM to reinforce whatever themes of Hazel's plight would more meaningful for you - so long as Hazel is fighting the good fight against those who would take her choices away from her, you're absolutely doing it correctly.

Author Bio:

Jesse Jordan is a Canadian author and game designer with an addiction to doing too many things at once. Having contributed to such publications as the Uncaged Anthology, Legendary Dragons, Vast Kaviya, Deep Magic, and more, he can be found alternating between looking for more projects and agonizing about something on Twitter dot com as @JesseNeon.



Heart of the Mountain

Written by Chai Power

Levels: 11-16

Content Warnings: child abuse, cult behavior, torture

SYNOPSIS

This adventure focuses on the story of worship in a small mountain village. It's about helping those in need, and making decisions about when others' freedom leads to harm.

Sunfury Hills was once a thriving village with an annual holiday: one week of the year, the peculiar warmth of their mountainside home vanished and left them to the natural cold. This event reminded them of the gift of their deity–a red dragon–that kept them warm during the year. But this year the cold stayed and took all forms of warmth with it. Unable to get heat from any flames they light, Sunfury Hills sinks into despair.

The villagers entreat the characters to help them. They need to right whatever wrong was done to their deity and regain the warmth that keeps them alive.

ADVENTURE HOOK

The adventure begins when the characters hear rumors about Sunfury Hills. How they find out is up to the DM; maybe a distressed resident is worried about the dragon leaving its lair, or a city wants to take in refugees from the suffering village, or a monster hunting guild has a job posting to slay the dragon threat. The DM can choose whether to give the characters directions to the village or have them search for it on their own, and how best to reward the characters for their work.

Holiday Ruined! Hook: After the characters' celebrations with the frost giants, they met miserable acolytes, searching for much-needed food and missing villagers who'd fled their homes ill-prepared for the elements. The acolytes spoke of their village's troubles, and begged for the party's help to remove the curse on the Sunfury Hills.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Sunfury Hills was founded when the valley below the mountain flooded. The community there fled up the mountainside and offered prayers to whatever deities might inhabit the mountain for permission to live there. To their shock the mountain quickly grew warm, and their temporary haven became a new home. The villagers established a tradition of offering food and coins at the entrance of a cave above the village, where they believe a dragon lives and keeps the mountain warm with its fiery magic.

Some young adults have been leaving town to seek adventure. Many of them doubt the truth of the village religion. The religious leader–the Cantor–fights this attitude. This stifling adherence to tradition makes younger people scared about the direction their community is taking.

One week each year none of the village lanterns light and the residents suffer in extreme cold. At the end of the week, warmth returns and they hold a celebration with a large feast for the whole town. This year the cold has persisted for over a month. Fires give off no heat, food won't cook, and their bodies are frozen. The villagers are desperate for help.

CHAPTER 1: FROZEN HOMESTEAD

The characters arrive in Sunfury Hills and discover the severity of its problems.

The first two encounters are optional. Skip one or both for a quicker adventure.

Up the Mountain

The mountain is part of a range above a valley. It rises steeply and is capped with snow and ice. A road leads around, rather than up, the mountain and locals say that no one goes up to Sunfury Hills because of its mysterious dragon worship.

> You make your way up the mountain. It's a rugged dirt path, packed down from many years of travelers just like you making their way through. Occasionally you see small dirt paths leading off the main road where forest animals search for food. Around you is a thick forest of evergreens, and you can hear birds chirping in the branches above.

When the characters near the village, point out the absence of animal paths or noises to impose a sense of foreboding on the characters. You may make parts of the forest difficult terrain to challenge the characters.

Fighting Zealots

This can be a roleplay or combat encounter.

> As you walk, you see figures up ahead and hear shouting along the forest path.
>
> You see three people; a young woman dressed in hardy traveling clothes and two men in long red robes. Each of the men has a hand on the woman and she is crying and shouting at them.

- The three people are **Preta** (human **commoner**, MM, she/her), **Fakir** and **Urann**. (human **priests**, MM, he/him). Preta has 20 hit points, and Fakir and Urann each have 50 hit points
- The woman is trying to leave the mountain. The men believe she's abandoning their village and won't release her
- A successful **DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check** or **DC 18 Charisma (Intimidation) check** convinces the men to let the woman go. She storms down the mountain path from whence the characters came. The men chastise the characters for not understanding the plight of their village, and return to Sunfury Hills
- If the characters ask for help finding the village, the priests are reluctant. With a successful **DC 16 Charisma (Persuasion or Intimidation) check** they offer directions to the village. The characters can also try to follow the men back. This requires a successful **DC 18 Dexterity (Stealth) check**. If the men notice they are being followed, they attack
- If the characters don't help Preta escape she draws a sword on the priests and attacks. After warding them off, she runs away as fast as she can

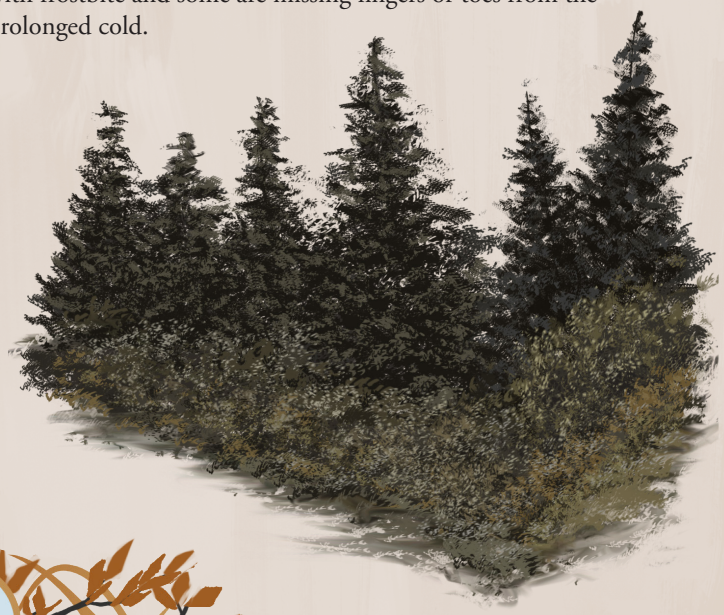
The Village

Walking to the village takes an entire day and the weather grows colder as the characters climb. Eventually they emerge from the thick pine forests to a cleared steppe. This is Sunfury Hills. The village has three levels: the base has small homes and farmhouses, the middle has shops and public service buildings, and the top has the village temple and housing for acolytes.

> As you pass the last of the great evergreens, you walk onto a flat steppe cleared of trees and are set upon by a sudden and vicious cold. It's deeper than the mountain's natural chill and bites under your skin, the world ahead of you doused in white. Through the snow flurry you see buildings; farmhouses, shops, and even a temple, all arranged neatly on rocky tiered cliffs. Stone stairs obscured by the snow lead from one level to another. No living creature can be seen outside.

If Fakir and Urann guide the characters to the village, the acolytes leave them at the village border and tell them they are free to explore but not to make trouble. No one is outside, and the characters can go wherever they wish inside the village.

Setting: The snow and freezing temperatures are constant. For added difficulty, call for a **DC 15 Constitution saving throws** for characters who aren't wearing suitable cold protection. On a fail, they take 1d4 cold damage for every two hours they stay in the village. Flames give off light but no heat: the villagers huddle around stoves and hearths, but they do nothing to abate the cold. Fire spells do half their normal damage. Most villagers are stricken with frostbite and some are missing fingers or toes from the prolonged cold.



Example village encounters are provided below. Follow the guidelines laid out in the "Development" section to guide the characters towards the ultimate arc of the story.

Village Encounters:

Those Meddling Kids

One house on the lowest level of the village stands out: an abandoned shed with its door tied shut by rope.

> Beyond the small homes of the village locals, you see a tiny ramshackle building with boarded up windows and an unhinged door, tied shut with flimsy rope. You can hear voices whispering inside.
>
> ***[If the characters go inside]*** Inside the shack are bits of broken wood, rusted farming tools, and an upturned wheelbarrow turned into a chair, upon which a teenager sits. There are five teens total ranging from fourteen to eighteen years old. This shack was likely a storage hut for the farms but has been left to rot.

If the characters approach, they hear teenagers inside. They are talking about their lack of belief in the local religion and wondering if they should try to run away for their own safety. They are skeptical of the characters but not unwilling to talk. The DM can add **DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) checks** to reveal exposition about the village from the teens as laid out in the Adventure Background.

Empty Bellies

The second level of Sunfury Hills consists of shops and service buildings, though most are closed. The buildings are similar to the houses, small and made of wood and stone. There are two places that might provide food or rest: a tavern and a town hall.

Tavern:

> The only building with a light on in this district is a one level building with a lantern lit above the front door. It's the only building with the snow shoveled away from the door. If you look in the window, you can see tables for patrons and a bar on one wall.

The door is partly frozen and requires a good shove to open. The lights inside lead you to expect a rush of warmth when you enter, but no such relief comes. The interior of the building is just as cold as the outside, and the only relief are the walls shielding you from the biting winds.

Kim Foshaw, tavern owner
(half-elf, **commoner**, MM, they/them, lawful good)
"There is as little food here as there is warmth."

Appearance: Tall, tan, a curved figure, light facial hair, long black hair tied in a ponytail
Habit: Leans on anything they stand next to (tables, wall, chairs)
Secret: Wants to abandon the village but is too afraid of the Cantor

Kim keeps the tavern open because they live in the back room. They talk freely about the town's history but are reluctant to offer personal opinions. They also know that the religious leader–a person called Cantor Blackpine–is suppressing any public doubts about their dragon deity. Kim won't offer this information without a successful **DC 18 Charisma (Persuasion) or DC 16 Charisma (Intimidation) check**.

The characters are welcome to stay in the tavern but Kim has no food. The cold weather has destroyed local crops and livestock.

Town Hall:

The town hall is where the village head spends her days.

> At the far end of the village's second level is a building taller than the others, made of the same pale stone as the mountain. Stone steps lead to a large doorway bordered by thick stone columns and windows too high to see inside. Snow drifts pile at the base of its walls, and the dark wood roof high above you almost disappears in the snow flurries.

The front room is empty but an office door at the back has a light behind it. If characters knock, the village head greets them. She is friendly and honest about their plight but doubtful the characters have the power to solve it.

Saturn Inkwell, village head
(gnome **commoner**, MM, she/her, lawful good)
"I'm serving my people, not their god."

Appearance: Short, dark skinned, cropped black hair, button nose
Habits: Busies herself with paperwork, crosses her arms when not occupied
Secret: She doesn't believe in the village deity but wants her people to be happy

Saturn advises against going into the dragon's cave unless the characters are fully prepared. She thinks something else defeated the dragon to rob them of their warmth and whatever being that is must be powerful. She also implies the curse might be the doing of local young people: they've been leaving the village to seek opportunity elsewhere. If the dragon is alive, it may be angered by the lack of devotees and punishing them. She offers the characters a reward from the town treasury if they can lift the curse and points them toward the town Cantor if they want more information about the religion.

Development

Ensure the characters obtain the following information:

- The village is usually unnaturally warm, and this is believed to be a gift of the red dragon to whom they prey
- They expect one yearly week of cold to remind them of their good fortune. This year, the cold has lasted a month and stolen all heat
- Debate/confusion over whether the dragon is dead, or offended by young people's decisions to leave the town

Every NPC mentions the cold curse and asks the characters for help solving it. They can stay overnight at the inn if they need to rest but if they do they wake up with 1 point of exhaustion from the persistent cold. For added difficulty the DM may choose not to replenish hit points or spell slots.



CHAPTER 2: CORRUPT GUIDANCE

The second arc of the adventure takes place in the village temple. It is a long, tall building where they hold sermons and where the acolytes and Cantor work during the day. Beside it is a communal house where acolytes sleep. Here characters discover the corruption of the village faith and Cantor's attempts to control villagers. For a shorter adventure the village faithful can simply play the role of aggressive protectors who are steadfast in their beliefs.

The Temple

You come to a wood building that rises high above any other in the village, with a towering spire and gabled roof. The windows are tall and thin, and light glows through the clear glass. At the back of the roof is a small chimney releasing thick clouds of dark smoke that stain the sky like ink on white paper. The front doors are made of heavy wood and shut against the cold winds.

[Once inside] The temple is one large room that runs almost a hundred feet end to end. The building is full of people, all dressed in thick red robes. Many are gathered in the center of the temple, heads bowed in prayer. A few tend to a hearth on the back wall, the floor carved out for a stone fire pit to keep the flames from spreading. One figure at the front stands before the praying crowd, leading them with whispered words of draconic that punch through the ominous quiet.

Inside the characters find a number of acolytes being led in a prayer service by the Cantor of Sunfury Hills. The characters can ask acolytes for general information about the religion and the village curse.

- Acolytes happily talk about their faith. Traditions include burning incense and throwing offerings to the dragon into hearths. They've abstained recently because supplies are low
- None of the acolytes believe the deity is directly responsible for the curse
- They direct characters to the Cantor for deeper information about their religion

Rose Blackpine, village cantor
(tiefling archmage (MM), he/they, lawful neutral)
"Our faith is our salvation."

Appearance: Tall and broad, brown skin, dark red hair in twin braids down his back, large curling horns.
Habits: Stands confidently, hands folded behind their back, faces the hearth when speaking
Secret: He thinks the village youth are ungrateful for the gifts of their deity and would sacrifice them to appease the deity if he had to.

- Rose believes in the dragon deity fully and wishes to figure out how the people of Sunfury Hills displeased them
- For a shorter adventure: Rose Blackpine specifically warns the characters not to go into the cave if they value their lives or respect the village faith. If challenged on this he orders characters to leave the temple and not return

Ritual Sacrifice

After speaking with the characters, Rose says they have religious matters to attend to and leaves down a stairwell built into the temple floor. Characters can choose to follow.

- For a more obvious hint, an acolyte NPC can ask the players to intervene. They claim the Cantor may have fallen to "unsavory" rituals to save Sunfury Hills. Since the curse befell them, Blackpine has locked the basement and won't allow acolytes into it
- Going into the basement can be as easy or difficult as the DM wishes. For simplicity the acolytes of the temple could be too distracted by prayer or resigned to the torture of the cold environment to notice them
- The DM can impose a DC 17 Dexterity (Stealth) check (individually or averaged through the party). If they are noticed, 3-6 acolytes try to kick them out of the temple. If a fight breaks out, use the acolyte (MM) stat block with the following modifications:
    - Each acolyte has 25 hit points

After sneaking or fighting their way into the basement, characters progress to the next stage of the encounter.

> Down the long set of wooden steps is a cellar dug out from the earth. The air smells of moss and damp dirt, and the walls give off a different chill than outside, a stagnant, wet cold that makes it hard to breathe. The cellar is filled with shelves piled high with boxes and barrels, though many are open and reveal nothing but empty darkness inside. Across the room is a door with no windows, but a small light creeps out from the bottom edge.

- The door is locked. A successful **DC 18 Intelligence (Investigation) or DC 14 Intelligence (Arcana) check** reveals it's magically bound. Dispel magic cast at sixth level or with a successful **DC 16 spellcasting check** unlocks the door. Attempts to pick or break the lock manually activates a trap that does 4d8 force damage to the target
- If the characters activate the trap, Rose opens the door to check the disturbance
- If they open the door themselves, they see Rose Blackpine performing a ritual inside

> Beyond the door is a small concrete room. It's dark, barely lit by the glow of embers from incense cones spread around the floor, giving off an acrid smell of heavy spices and wood. In the middle is a young girl, tied up with ropes and looking at you with wide terrified eyes. In front of her stands the Cantor, Rose Blackpine.

- Rose Blackpine tells the characters to leave, while the girl behind him begs for help. Any attempt to intervene leads to a fight
- After defeating Rose, the girl tells the characters that he was trying to appease the deity that lives above Sunfury Hills by burning her as a sacrifice
- If they loot Rose's body, characters can find a spellbook containing two random 5th level wizard spells, and 600 gold pieces
- Characters can free the girl and try to cover up what they did to Rose or confess to the other acolytes in the temple. The girl explains what happened if asked. The acolytes trust her as a fellow villager and go underground to clean up the remains of the ritual

Development

The characters have been prompted by different sources to inspect the cave, leading to the final arc of the adventure.

CHAPTER 3: SHACKLED DIVINITY

The dragon's cave entrance sits above the highest level of the village, up a small stairway on a stone plateau. The darkness inside permeates deeply and characters have trouble seeing without darkvision. The cave is even colder than the village.

> You walk up the small stairs carved into the side of the mountain, up to a plateau that juts out from the stone. The cliff overlooks the entire village and you can see every building, and how barren it looks covered in snow without a living soul daring to venture outside.
>
> The cave is set into the mountain face, as tall as a house and wide enough for a dozen people to walk comfortably side by side. Daylight only penetrates a few feet inside before darkness claims the cave, and its depths are masked in shadow.

The Cave

- Characters need light or darkvision to see inside the cave. Any torches or magical light give no heat due to the curse
- The cave is much colder than the village. Every hour, characters without cold protection have to succeed on a **DC 18 Constitution saving throw** or take 1d6 cold damage
- If the characters wish to stop and rest they can. For an extra challenge, the DM can choose to impose exhaustion for sleeping in the freezing cave
- After a few hours, the cold abates and the cave narrows, signaling the end of the path

The Lair

> You reach the end of the tunnel, where it narrows to a much smaller pathway. A sudden, intense heat issues from this entryway, and you can't tell if it's hot enough to burn or if it just feels that way on your frozen skin. A light glows from within this new chamber, and you hear a deep rumbling inside: the heavy breathing of a beast.

The characters can see inside the chamber. The floor is covered in gold and jewels, lit by a magical red glow. From the entrance the characters can't see the creature inside but they can hear its breathing.

- A successful **DC 18 Intelligence (Investigation) check** reveals the beast is a young red dragon
    - **DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check** to surmise from their breathing that the dragon is asleep
- If the characters succeed on a **DC 20 Dexterity (Stealth) check** they sneak inside without the dragon noticing. If they make it inside the lair undetected they find the dragon asleep atop a pile of jewels
- The lair is a large circle 200 feet in diameter with the dragon at its center
- If the characters fail stealth checks, the dragon awakes. She asks what the characters are doing in her lair and advises them to leave if they value their lives. On her neck is a glowing red amulet providing light
- If they didn't wake the dragon they can try to steal from her. Any loot not directly under her requires a **DC 20 Dexterity (Stealth) check** to grab without making noise. Removing the amulet on the dragon's neck wakes her
- The dragon doesn't want a conversation. A successful **DC 17 Charisma (Persuasion) check** is needed to convince her to explain her situation. On a success she gives the characters her name, **Carmine**, and tell them that she's the deity that Sunfury Hills worships. She loves and respects the villagers and wishes them no harm
- If the characters antagonize the dragon, steal her amulet, or speak long enough to learn that she is the village deity, they are interrupted by the appearance of an **arcanaloth** (MM) named Triche

> You see a flash of light and hear a loud, magical pop. When the light clears, standing before you is a new creature. She is humanoid, wearing deep purple robes and carrying a large bag stuffed to the brim with books and papers. Her eyes glow deep yellow and she turns to you with a large grin, allowing you to fully see her fox-shaped, furry face.

Triche
(**arcanaloth** (MM), she/her, Neutral Evil)
"Death is no obstacle in the pursuit of knowledge."

Appearance: A humanoid fox. Tall and slender, wearing fine purple and blue robes.
Habits: Grins and speaks in lengthy babbles, believing her words more important than others'.
Secret: She wants to kill the village to test the strength of their faith and record what happens to it.

- Characters can make a successful **DC 16 Intelligence check** to determine what type of creature this is and how arcanaloths travel the multiverse to collect knowledge. A check of 20 or higher yields information about her skills in magic and spellcasting.
- The arcanaloth introduces herself as Triche and claim she is Carmine's master.
- Triche is happy to explain her presence in the village. These details include:
    - Carmine was born in an empty dragon nest without a parent and lived alone in the mountains. She stole books from people to learn about the world and stumbled on a ritual to summon Triche
    - Triche promised to teach Carmine about the world if she was allowed to observe the village
- Carmine interrupts to explain that Triche tricked her into wearing the amulet and has been trapped in the mountain ever since. She was robbed of her ability to give the villagers the warmth they need
- It is possible, though difficult, to persuade Triche to leave the village and Carmine alone. She sees freezing Sunfury Hills to death as a way to learn about the Material Plane and its inhabitants. Characters can make a **DC 30 Charisma (Persuasion) check** to convince her to leave. Any **Intimidation checks** only sour her mood and raise the Persuasion DC by 5 each time. Convincing arguments or interesting roleplay can lower the DC by increments of 2 for each character that participates
- If their attempts fail or the characters attack, Triche tries to kill them

Development

Triche uses the Arcanaloth (MM) statblock with the following addition:

- As an action Triche can use the amulet on Carmine to completely control Carmine's actions as per the dominate monster spell
- The amulet has an AC of 25, 60 hit points, and immunity to all damage except thunder, force, or cold. It must be attacked directly: area of effect spells/damage inflicted on Carmine do not affect it.
- If Triche's concentration is broken or Carmine succeeds a **DC 17 Wisdom saving throw** against the spell, dominate donster ends but Triche uses her next action to cast the spell again. This uses the daily charge from the amulet and it cannot be cast again
- If Triche is brought below 20 hit points, she flees via teleportation

Carmine uses the young red dragon (MM) statblock.

- The amulet puts Carmine under Triche's control. Until the characters break the amulet or Triche's concentration, Carmine attacks as ordered
- If the spell ends by any method, Carmine attacks Triche

Triche's Amulet

Wondrous item, very rare, requires attunement

An amulet made of polished rubies set in a gold bezel.

Once per day, the attuned user can cast dominate monster on a creature wearing the amulet, without using a spell slot or component. The spell has a 50% chance of failing if the user's intelligence score is below 20. The spell is cast as a ninth level spell and ends if the amulet is broken or the users' concentration is interrupted.

Conclusion

When Triche is killed or disappears:

- If Carmine survives, she thanks the characters and offers a reward from her hoard of treasure. This includes the enchanted amulet if it wasn't broken during the fight. She is grateful to the characters and asks them not to let the village know about her presence. She wishes to remain an unknown factor so people won't hunt her
- Carmine explains that Triche told her the amulet would put a permanent weather spell on the mountain to help the people there
- If Carmine does not survive, the characters can loot her body and her hoard (see Rewards)
- If Triche is killed the characters can loot her body. In her bag they find research notes written in Infernal. The notes detail Triche's control of Carmine and how she forced Carmine to stop using her fire magic to warm the mountain region so she could watch the people of Sunfury Hills suffer until they all died or left the mountain. There are other notes about similar experiments in making living creatures suffer. Carmine can also provide this information

In the village, characters see people gathered around the town hall. The village head is lighting a small campfire to uproarious applause; the fire not only lights but gives warmth. The villagers celebrate the banishment of the cold curse with an impromptu party in front of the town hall.

Saturn Inkwell thanks the characters for what they did and asks about the source of the curse. This scene can unfold different

ways depending on the outcome of the final battle. The villagers might decide to stay in their cold home regardless of the weather, or they may concede to packing up their village and finding a new place to live

As the villagers celebrate the return of the warmth they so dearly missed, the clouds above part, and you see sunlight shining on the rocky lands around you. The cold light scatters across the snow drifts, muted by the grey, icy air that has captured the village in the past month. But unlike the dull skies that surrounded it before, this light contains hope for a new future. Sunfury Hills will live on because its people are determined to survive no matter the troubles that face them.

Rewards

XP Rewards

Obstacle	XP
Carmine	5,900 xp
Triche	8,400 xp

Treasure Rewards

5000 gold (or amount appropriate to the party) from the Sunfury Hills treasury
Treasure Hoard Challenge Table 11-16 (DMG p. 137)

Author's Notes/ Acknowledgments:

Thank you to my friends who brainstormed this adventure with me and helped me playtest it, and thank you to the project editors without whom this story would not be as neatly polished. I wrote Heart of the Mountain to play with the ideas of responsibility, sacrifice, and individual freedom, as well as the elements of hearth and home which I felt were underappreciated in stories centered around the autumn season. The world may grow colder as it passes through autumn to winter but if we work together we can protect each other and persist.

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All Hallows' Eve

Written by Natalie Wallace

Levels: 17-20

Content Warnings: kidnapping

SYNOPSIS

A quiet nook of a village is readying to celebrate their annual fall festival of night – All Hallows' Festival. As the party arrives on the eve of the festival, they learn that villagers have been going missing each year on the fateful night for the last decade, never to be heard of again. Plagued with fear and unable to celebrate, they beg the travelers to solve the mystery that has eluded them.

ADVENTURE HOOK

This adventure works great as an in-between quests narrative, or whilst traveling, the party can happen upon the town during the festival. This adventure can also be placed in a pre-existing town if required. Other ways this village could be introduced:

- Rumors spread in neighboring towns about the disappearances
- The party is contracted to investigate the disappearances by an outside figure
- Someone the party knows hasn't been seen in a year, and this was their last known location

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

There are intentional red herrings littered around by the true villain of the story – this may cause the adventure to go on for longer than a one-shot. If need be, tailor to your group. Should they be inclined to follow every lead they come across, you may want to remove some details to save time. This relies on proper detective work to get through, as well as participation from the coven to give them an edge. This adventure also takes place over the course of an evening, with the act of the villagers disappearing at the stroke of midnight. If the party tries to wait until morning to investigate, it is recommended that obstacles are thrown in their way that they cannot ignore.

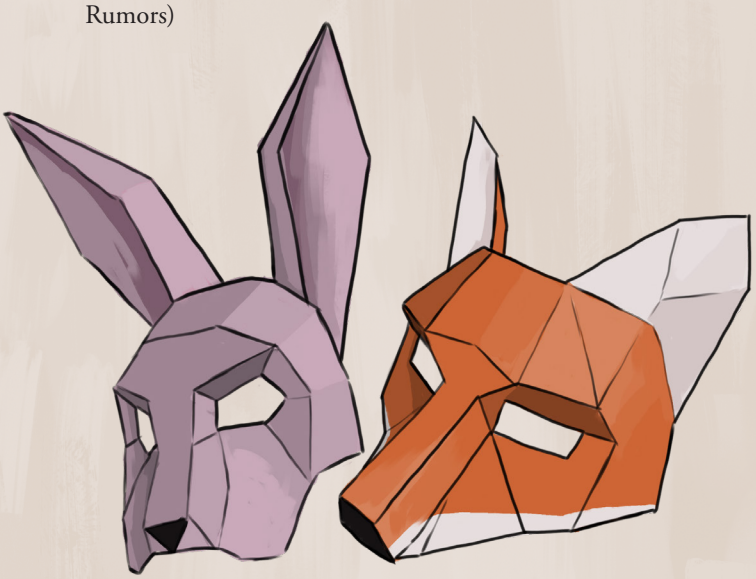
CHAPTER 1: FESTIVAL OF THE NIGHT

> Following the stone marked pathway through the dense, autumnal forest, you happen upon a quaint village entering into twilight. Upon first sight, the village is restless, buzzing with energy, both excited and anxious. Various small houses and simple buildings are built into this clearing, and the road appears as a major route through it. Villagers are about, hanging decorations from the awnings and the trees, dyed in blacks, reds, and oranges. From the entrance, you can see on opposing corners of the clearing, tall, wooden pillars that appear to be carved intricately. A plain wooden post appears to the right of the road, welcoming you to Osen.

Village of Osen

The village of Osen appears to be only a few hundred people, mostly humans, elves, and the occasional dwarf and halfling. The town is busy hanging decorations and festive lanterns as sky darkens into the evening, but also appears to be preparing for something else entirely. If inclined to look, on a successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check**, the party learns that the villagers are also setting up a means of protection. A successful **DC 20 Wisdom (Religion) or Intelligence (Arcana) check** reveals that the wards being placed above the doors are for protection and to ward off demons. The party may explore the village and talk to the various townsfolk; as they do, they may learn the following:

- Tonight will be All Hallows' Eve, the celebration of the night, and the start of Osen's festival. This is an annual festival that Osen has held for over a century, a time to celebrate the memory of those that have died and ensure the spirits have moved on
- The festival has historically been a time of merriment, honoring the memory of those who have passed, and celebrating the harvest which has come to a conclusion. Tensions have been growing over the past decade, due to a string of disappearances that occurs on this night every year. Anywhere from one to a dozen have gone missing each year
- The town believes it is protected by the four pillars surrounding it, and anyone who dares go beyond them on this night risks being taken. Hunters call in early, and the local sheriff rounds up volunteers each year to patrol the perimeter
- While they are unwilling to cease their celebrations, they've become more cautious over the years. No one has been able to accurately discern who is responsible for the disappearances, but there are plenty of rumors floating about (see Exaggerated Rumors)



All Hallows' Festival

The party notices that children and adults alike are running around with elaborate masks and dressed in black. There are vendors littered around the center square, which is the main intersection between the main road that runs north to south, and the side road going east to west. Should the party be interested in fitting in, they may purchase a mask for 10 sp. They learn that the masks are used as a way of hiding who they are from the spirits who rise during the festival. Use the mask table to determine the likeness that the mask is emulating.

Mask Table

D8	Mask Style
1	Fox
2	Rabbit
3	Cat
4	Troll
5	Wolf
6	Jester
7	Skeleton
8	Demon

There are also various vendors selling lanterns for 1 sp each, which the party notices villagers purchasing, lighting, and scattering around the town. Initials and names are etched in the dirt around the lanterns, and the party is warned to not disrupt them. If they wish to place any for fallen comrades, they will be directed to a small vacant patch where they can leave their own.

Exaggerated Rumors

If they choose to investigate the disappearances, the party can learn the following information, dependent on where they visit in town:

- **Red Leaf Tavern:** The party finds 1d10 villagers drinking in the tavern, all boasting drunkenly about how the rest of the townsfolk are mad, and that they're just suffering from a wolf problem. If the party reminds the townsfolk of the annual occurrence, they shrug it off as being a coincidence. The bartender provides no further information if interrogated.
- **Sheriff's Home:** Sheriff Thostrala Mountainheart (dwarf, **commoner** (MM), she/her, true neutral), a boisterous and passionate female dwarf who clearly loves her home, pins the disappearances on the witches. She's been convinced for years now that the Coven of Starlight are to blame but hasn't had any concrete evidence, and no one seems to agree with her. She reveals that the coven is often found on the outskirts of town,

just past the northern entrance. They can be found by following the dancing lights that appear

- **Village Elder's Home:** The village elder is revealed to be Naimiris Ianceran (elf **druid** (MM), they/them, neutral good), a gender-neutral wood elf who has been around for centuries. They saw the building of this village and refuses to see its fall. They are convinced that the spirits know who is responsible but are too afraid to speak. The spirits of the wood may lead to the source.
- **Dormant Dragon Inn:** Innkeeper Nemita (halfling, **commoner** (MM), she/her, neutral good), a cheerful but talkative halfling, talks non-stop about how the disappearances are caused by dark magic, and that the townsfolk would do best to not engage in protective rituals as they're having the inverse effect.

Development

Once the party decides to investigate the witch coven that resides just outside the village's perimeter, they can continue on to the next chapter. Until that point, they may keep exploring the town.

Chapter 2: A Witch's Wonder

The forest surrounding Osen is deep, and the north most pathway leading away from the village is winding and challenging to follow. Stones mark the first 20 feet of the path, but then suddenly cease. This pathway is seldom traveled, as most visitors come and go from the south entrance, and it is now dark, as night is upon them.

Forest of Bewilderment

The party may make a successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check** to stay on the path, or they get lost. Should they continue on the path, they begin to see faint lights in the wood. If they get lost, they are attacked by 8 **will-o'-wisps** (MM) who immediately attack. If the party manages to stay on the path, they may make a **DC 20 Dexterity (Stealth) check**, and if the majority of the party succeeds, they can instead surprise the gathering of will-o'-wisps. The last remaining will-o'-wisp attempts to escape, and if allowed, leads the party to a small encampment. If the party destroys all of them, Calliope (elf **Barovian witch** (CoS), she/her, neutral good), the leader of the coven approaches warily from the woods, having watched the encounter.

Calliope's Coven

Should the party follow the will-o'-wisp back or Calliope back, they discover a small circular encampment nestled amongst the trees.

> The smell of fire burning and sage greets you as you approach the clearing, a circle of shabby huts and tents surround a crackling pit, currently set aflame and lighting the area. Lanterns are scattered on the various tables and fixtures in the area for additional light, as six other women mill about without a care for your presence. Calliope, an elven woman of grace and eloquence, welcomes you to the Coven of Starlight.

- Calliope asks the intent of the party once they reach the coven. Should they bring up the disappearances in a peaceful manner, she responds calmly with the following information:
- The coven has been investigating the disappearances in Osen for three years now. They arrived after hearing about the disappearances and wanted to find a way to stop it. The coven tried to live amongst the villagers, but after a year, the villagers became convinced that the coven was responsible for the disappearances, and then exiled them. Not wanting to give up, the coven set up camp and have been on the outskirts ever since
- They believe some of the townsfolk have been coerced into casting suspicion on the coven, making it that much more difficult to aid them during the festival
- The disappearances are connected to the festival, and they believe that there is an undead force at play
- The four pillars surrounding the village were erected 10 years ago in celebration of the festival, which was the first year that anyone went missing. Calliope believes that they contain some sort of key to determining who is behind the disappearances. Unfortunately, due to being exiled from the village, it has been difficult to study them accurately
- If the party accepts the coven's help, the witches can provide guidance on how to properly investigate the pillars, in hopes of finding an answer. It is getting close to the peak of nightfall (about two hours out), which is when the disappearances have often occurred and is coincidentally also the climax of the festival

Should the party accuse Calliope and her people of the disappearances, she refuses to share information until they are willing to give the coven a chance to prove themselves. Should they press on, the party is asked to leave. If the party accepts the help of the coven instead, they receive a notebook of the coven's research on the pillars, and Calliope agrees to assist from the shadows.

Development

If the party accepts Calliope's aid, or leaves the coven without gaining their help, they can move on to Chapter 3. The end battle is much harder if they lack the assistance from the coven, and leads to alternate conclusions.

CHAPTER 3: THE DEAD AMONG US

Upon returning to Osen, it is getting close to midnight, and the villagers are in the midst of celebration. Most have been drinking at this point around the center square bonfire, and lanterns are all around, burning brightly. If the party did not accept the help of the coven, you can proceed to Summoning Death. If they did, the party may choose to investigate the four pillars, using the information received from the coven, and proceed to Pillars of Power.

Pillars of Power

The four pillars on each corner of the town stand 20 feet tall, losing the tips amongst the trees. Intricately carved wood, there are symbols of wildlife and plants, depicting nature in all its glory.

The party may make a **DC 15 Wisdom (Arcana) check** to analyze the pillars. On a success, they determine that hidden amongst the carvings of animals and nature, there are arcane symbols. Should anyone use detect magic, they find traces of necromantic and abjuration energy on all four pillars. Each one contains a puzzle that must be solved in order to dispel the magic. Use of *dispel magic*, is ineffective.

Pillar of Blood

The characters may make a **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check** to decode a message hidden amongst the carvings. On a success, they discover:

The key is found within your head
You need to try to paint one red
To undo shields within this frame
Draw the key derived from pain

Characters must use blood to draw an image of a key on the pillar. Upon doing so, a faint light flashes through the pillar, and then fades as it coalesces into a concentrated ball of light. The ball continues to hover in front of the pillar until all four puzzles are complete.

Pillar of Song

The party may make a **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check** to locate a message hidden amongst the carvings. They have advantage if they have solved another pillar puzzle. On a success, they find that there are five words written in different languages on the pillar:

- "Do" in Elvish
- "Not" in Draconic
- "Dare" in Dwarvish
- "To" in Undercommon
- "Tread" in Abyssal

If the phrase "Do not dare to tread" is spoken aloud in Common, it will unlock the pillar, causing a faint light to flash, and coalesce into a concentrated ball of light. Like the last pillar, it hovers in front until all four puzzles are completed. If a villager is passing by when this is said out loud, the party may be informed that it is the name of a local folk song, warning about the dangers of taking the northern passage out of town.

Pillar of Right

This pillar appears at first as carvings of door knockers. The party may make a **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check** to investigate the knockers. On a success, they discern that all of the handles are also carvings of snakes. The first time any of them are touched, a hissing noise comes from the pillar and says the following:

Touch again, regrets you'll have
Listen to us, though we're mad
Kill with kindness, cease to find
Knock the one not of this mind

After that has been said, if any snakes on the pillar are touched again, a snake door handle attempts to bite whoever tries to use it. The target must succeed on a **DC 15 Dexterity saving throw** or take 2d6 piercing damage and must make a successful **DC 15 Constitution saving throw**, or be poisoned. They can use speak with animals or detect thoughts to determine which door knocker is not a snake. Otherwise, the party may make a **DC 20 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check** to make a request of the snakes. On a success, the snakes point to the correct door knocker. Once the characters knock the correct one, the pillar illuminates in a flash of light, fading and coalescing into a ball of light, hovering in front of the pillar.

Pillar of Wrong

This pillar is filled with a variety of symbols and images, and none of it connects to each other. The party may make a **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check**, with advantage if the other pillars have been solved. If successful, the party finds a scrawled message that circles around the pillar.

Waste of time
You will find
Nothing more
An honest score

The party needs to collectively admit defeat in order to solve this problem. There is no answer to this one, and by being honest about not knowing the answer is the key. When that happens, they see the familiar illumination of the pillar, which forms the ball of light.

Once all four pillars have been deactivated, the ball of light floats towards the center from each pillar. The lights meet at the center square, merge, and then sink into the earth. Should the adventurers dig down 5 feet, they find a steel box. A successful **DC 20 Dexterity (thieves' tools) check** or a **DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check** opens it, revealing a signet ring. If they bring this back to Calliope, or if anyone casts the spell identify on it, the party learns that the ring is actually the phylactery of a lich. This can be destroyed with a successful **DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check**, or after three successful **DC 15 Strength (Athletics) checks**. If a magical weapon is used to assist, the character has advantage on the check. Use of dispel magic will have a **DC 20** in order to be successful.

Summoning Death

If the party did not find the phylactery, the grand **lich** (MM) Draxuas reveals himself at midnight, along with his two skeleton **knights** (MM). If they do find the phylactery, Draxuas strikes early, hurling a fireball into the bonfire, harming 1d12 villagers (and the party, should they have convinced Calliope to venture into the town and happen to be in the square for the discussion regarding the phylactery). The skeleton knights are under orders to go after whoever is holding the phylactery.

Development

Should the party destroy the phylactery and defeat Draxuas, proceed to Conclusion A1.

Should the party gain aid from the coven, do not destroy the phylactery, but still defeat Draxuas, proceed to Conclusion A2.

Should the party not gain aid from the coven, but still defeat Draxuas, proceed to Conclusion A3.

Should the party not defeat Draxuas, proceed to Conclusion B.

Conclusion

Conclusion Part A: Defeat the Lich

A1: After destroying the phylactery, Draxaus is not be able to return. The villagers are safe, and the coven thanks the party for their assistance. Calliope gifts the party the Starlight Pendant, a symbol of friendship with the coven. The villagers thank the party immensely, especially those villagers who are still intoxicated, and they spend the rest of the night celebrating the party's victory. The morning comes, and no one has disappeared. Convinced the curse is broken, the townsfolk honors the party with a feast prior to them leaving town.

A2: While the party received help from the coven, they were unable to recover any possible edge against the lich. After defeating him, they know it's only a matter of days before he returns. Calliope tells them that perhaps the phylactery is hidden elsewhere, and the coven thanks the party for their attempts to help the village. While no one disappeared that night, and the town still celebrates the party's victory, they know the curse isn't over. Calliope encourages the party to return next year to attempt again, and promise that the coven will keep an eye out for Draxaus in the meantime.

A3: The party defeated the lich, and the village celebrates their grand victory! The party leaves town, sometime later, and while no one was captured this year, the lich returns merely a week later, kidnapping those it was kept from taking. The village is sent into a panic, as now the disappearances have escalated and no longer coincide with All Hallows' Eve.

Conclusion Part B: Abandon the Village

Whether through abandoning the village altogether or by failing to kill Draxaus, the party flees the village of Osen. A dozen people disappear that night, and the village continues to be plagued for years to come.

Rewards

XP Rewards:

Players may earn the following experience points divided equally amongst the party, depending on their successes:

Obstacle	XP
Defeat the Will-O'-Wisps	3,600 xp
Solve Pillar of Blood	1,500 xp
Solve Pillar of Song	1,500 xp
Solve Pillar of Right	1,500 xp
Solve Pillar of Wrong	1,500 xp
Defeat Skeleton Knights x2	2,200 xp
Defeat Lich Draxaus	33,000 xp

Treasure Rewards:

Players may earn the following treasure, depending on their conclusion:

Starlight Pendant

Wondrous item, very rare (requires attunement)

On a thin silver necklace hangs a pitch-black stone, wrapped in silver wire that shimmers with tiny stars within it.You can use an action to cast the *crown of stars* spell. Once you use this feature, it cannot be used again until the next dawn.

Author's Notes/ Acknowledgments:

Nothing says Autumn quite like Halloween, so why not have a spooky missing persons case in the depths of a forest? Nothing is ever as it seems, and a Tier 4 adventure allows for the opportunity to include a lich in the mix. Shout out to Kannah and Derek who have very unknowingly provided inspiration for this tale. May this acknowledgment confuse you.

Author Bio:

Natalie Wallace is a nerd hailing from Toronto, Ontario, Canada, but more often found on Twitter @ChaoticRogue. In addition to streaming in TTRPGs on various channels and causing shenanigans wherever she roams, Natalie is a designer and editor with The Mage College (www.themagecollege.com).



Appendix A: Stat Blocks

Alros Mulberry

Medium humanoid, neutral good

Armor Class 10
Hit Points 15 (3d8 + 3)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)

Skills Acana +4, History +4
Senses passive perception 10
Languages Common, Orcish
Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Spellcasting. Alros is a 3rd-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 12, +5 to hit with spell attacks). It has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will)*: mending, prestidigitation, shocking grasp*
1st level (4 slots)*: shield, burning hands, disguise self*
2nd level (2 slots)*:blur, gust of wind, web*

Relentless Endurance. When you are reduced to 0 hit points but not killed outright, you can drop to 1 hit point instead. You can't use this feature again until you finish a long rest.

Actions

Dagger. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 2 (1d4) piercing damage.

Bremilla Mulberry

Small Humanoid, lawful good

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 24 (4d6 + 8)
Speed 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)	11 (+0)	11 (+0)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Cha +5, Con +4
Skills Insight +2, Nature +3, Persuasion +5
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive perception 11
Languages Common, Gnomish, Elvish, Orcish
Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Conductor of the Wind. Bremilla can use her bonus action to change the direction of the wind within a 100-foot radius around it. She can choose the direction but not the strength of the wind.

Gale Magic. When Bremilla casts a cantrip that deals lightning or thunder damage, she adds +3 to the damage.

Innate Spellcasting. Bremilla's spellcasting ability is Charisma (+6 to hit with spell attacks, spell save DC 14). Bremilla can cast the following spells innately:

At will*: gust, prestidigitation, shocking grasp, thunderclap*
3/day*: absorb elements, fog cloud, thunderwave*
1/day*: earthbind*

Actions

Lightning Dagger. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 2 (1d4) piercing damage plus 2 (1d4) lightning damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or be stunned until the end of its next turn.

Blood-Rot Animal Swarms

Medium swarm of tiny beasts, unaligned

Armor Class 14
Hit Points 36 (8d8)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (-1)	18 (+4)	11 (+0)	8(-1)	11 (+0)	3 (-4)

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, slashing from non-magical attacks
Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, prone, restrained, stunned
Senses passive perception 10
Languages common
Challenge 1 (200XP)

Blood-Rot Infection. When the swarm is reduced to 0 HP, it explodes, and any creature within 10 feet of it must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the creature takes 14 (4d6) poison damage and becomes infected with Blood-Rot fungus. Over the next 24 hours, the infected creature loses any desire to do anything and Blood-Rot begins to grow on their skin. In a week the creature is completely consumed by the Blood- Rot's will. The Blood Rot can only be removed by a greater restoration spell or by drinking the sap of a Stinging Willow.

Swarm. The swarm can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the swarm can move through any opening large enough for a Tiny beast. The swarm can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points.

Actions

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. Hit: 14 (4d6) piercing damage or 7 (2d6) piercing damage if the swarm has half of its hit points or fewer. Target must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or be infected with Blood-Rot Spores.

Blood-Rot Revenge. The Swarm immediately drops to 0 hit points, triggering its Blood-Rot Infection trait.

Blood-Rot Bears

Medium beast, unaligned

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 55 (7d8 + 17)
Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	9 (-1)	16 (+3)	9 (-1)	12 (+1)	6 (-2)

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, slashing from non-magical attacks
Senses passive perception 11
Languages common
Challenge 2 (450XP)

Blood-Rot Infection. When the bear is reduced to 0 HP, it explodes, and any creature within 10 feet of it must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the creature takes 14 (4d6) poison damage and becomes infected with Blood-ot fungus. Over the next 24 hours, the infected creature loses any desire to do anything and Blood-Rot begins to grow on their skin. In a week the creature is completely consumed by the Blood-Rot's will. The Blood Rot can only be removed by a greater restoration spell or by drinking the sap of a Stinging Willow.

Actions

Multiattack. The Bear makes two attacks: one with its bite and one with its claws.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. Hit: 9 (1d12 + 3) piercing damage. Target must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or be infected with Blood-Rot.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, reach 5ft, one creature. Hit 12 (2d8+3) slashing damage.

Blood-Rot Revenge. The bear drops to 0 hit points, triggering its Blood-Rot Infection trait.

Gold Tailed Dire Squirrels

Medium beast, chaotic good

Armor Class 13
Hit Points 29 (4d10 + 4)
Speed 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	18 (+4)	13 (+1)	2 (–4)	10 (+0)	4 (–3)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Con +3
Skills Acrobatics +6, Stealth +6
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive perception 10
Languages –
Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Pack Tactics. The dire squirrel has advantage on attack rolls against a creature if at least one of the dire squirrel's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

Keen Smell. The dire squirrel has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell.

Actions

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. Hit: 10 (2d4 + 4) piercing damage.

Throw Lorn Seeds. *Ranged Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, range 10/50, one creature. Hit: 7 (1d6+3) bludgeoning damage.



Leeds Devil

Medium fiend, chaotic neutral

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)
Hit Points 85 (10d8 + 40)
Speed 30 ft., fly 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	15 (+2)	18 (+4)	11 (+0)	8 (–1)	17 (+3)

Saving Throws Con +7 Wis +2 Cha + 6
Skills Intimidation +6 Survival +2
Damage Resistances cold; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks that aren't silvered
Damage Immunities fire, poison
Condition Immunities poisoned
Senses darkvision 120ft., passive Perception 8
Languages infernal, telepathy 120 ft.
Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Devil's Sight. Magical darkness does not impede this creature's darkvision.

Devil's Fear. When this creature lifts off of the ground to fly, the ground begins to shake. Each creature within 120 feet of the Leeds Devil's starting position must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Actions

Multiattack. The devil makes three attacks: one with its bite and two with its claws.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 7 (2d4 + 2) piercing damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 6 (1d6 + 3) slashing damage.

Call For Help. The creature emits a loud shrieking distress signal that can be heard for two miles. Kalnoc and Gera enter the initiative order on the following round.

Night Eye Vines

Large plant, unaligned

Armor Class 13
Hit Points 85 (10d10 + 30)
Speed 10 ft., climb 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)	7 (–2)	10 (+0)	1 (–5)

Condition Immunities deafened, exhausted, prone
Damage Resistances cold, fire
Senses darkvision 30 ft., passive perception 10
Languages understand common, but cannot speak
Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Flower Eyes. The vines' yellow flowers act as its eyes. Without the flowers, the vines cannot see.

Keen Smell. The vines have advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell.

Actions

Constrict. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, reach 20 ft. Hit: 12 (2d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage. If the target is Large or smaller, it is grappled (escape DC 15). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained and takes 14 (4d6) poison damage at the start of each of its turns. The Vines can only target one creature at a time.

Entangling Vines. The Night Eye Vines spread out roots and vines on the ground in a 15 ft. square within 30 ft. of it. That area becomes difficult terrain. A creature in that area must succeed on a DC 14 Strength saving throw or be restrained. A restrained creature can use its action to make a DC 14 Strength (Athletics) check, freeing itself on a successful check. The effect ends after 1 minute.

Pine Hag

Medium fey, lawful evil

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)
Hit Points 90 (14d10 + 20)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Wis +6
Skills Arcana +6, Perception +6, Survival +6
Senses Darkvision, passive Perception 16
Languages common, sylvan
Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Pine Hopping. The pine hag can sense when a tree in her lair takes damage. As a bonus action, if the pine hag is in a space adjacent to a tree in her lair, she can teleport to a space adjacent to another tree in her lair.

Innate Spellcasting. The hag's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 15). She can innately cast the following spells:

At will: *hold person*
1/day each: *bestow curse, contagion*
2/day each: *blindness/deafness, giant insect*

Actions

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 10 (2d8 + 1) bludgeoning damage.

Lair Actions

On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), the hag takes a lair action to cause one of the following magical effects:

- The hag causes a sticky wax to appear on the ground in a thirty-foot square. Each creature that starts its turn in the area or that enters it during its turn must make a DC 10 Strength saving throw. On a failed save, the creature is restrained as long as it remains in the area. The sticky wax otherwise lasts until the hag uses this lair action again or when the hag dies.
- The hag calls pine needles to fly off of the trees, striking at up to three targets the hag can see within 120 feet of her. The hag makes one ranged attack roll (+4) against each target. On a hit, the target takes 7 (2d6) piercing damage.

Priest Konstantinos

Medium humanoid (any race), neutral good

Armor Class 15 (breastplate)
Hit Points 117 (18d8 + 36)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	20 (+5)	15 (+2)

Saving Throws Int +6, Wis +9, Cha +6
Skills Arcana +6, Deception +6, History +6, Religion +6
Senses passive Perception 15
Languages Common, plus any three languages
Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

Premonition. Konstantinos receives a +3 bonus on initiative rolls.

Spellcasting. Konstantinos is a 10th level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 17, +9 to hit with spell attacks). He has the following cleric spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *guidance, light, sacred flame, spare the dying, thaumaturgy*
1st level (4 slots): *cure wounds, identify, guiding bolt*
2nd level (3 slots): *lesser restoration, silence, spiritual weapon*
3rd level (3 slots): *dispel magic, mass healing word, spirit guardians*
4th level (3 slots): *banishment, death ward, guardian of faith*
5th level (2 slots): *flame strike*

He can cast the following spells without material components:

2/day each: *detect thoughts, dimension door, haste, slow*
1/day each: *suggestion, teleport*

Actions

Multiattack. He can make one melee attack and cast a cantrip.

Mace. *Melee Weapon Attack. +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit*: 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage.

Priest Vasilios

Medium humanoid (any race), lawful neutral

Armor Class 15 (breastplate)
Hit Points 117 (18d8 + 36)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	15 (+2)	20 (+5)

Saving Throws Int +6, Wis +6, Cha +9
Skills Arcana +6, Deception +6, History +6, Religion +6
Senses passive Perception 12
Languages Common, plus any three languages
Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

Premonition. Vasilios receives a +3 bonus on initiative rolls.

Spellcasting. Vasilios is a 10th level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 17, +9 to hit with spell attacks). He has the following paladin spells prepared:

1st level (4 slots): cure wounds, heroism, searing smite, shield of faith
2nd level (3 slots): lesser restoration, magic weapon, aid
3rd level (3 slots): aura of vitality, dispel magic, revivify
4th level (3 slots): banishment, death ward, staggering smite
5th level (2 slots): destructive wave

Actions

Multiattack. Vasilios can make two melee attacks per turn.

Mace. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage.

The Cultivation of Life. A blessing from Demeter, the mother of cultivation, Vasilios can assist a creature in cheating death by providing it with a surge of life. This surge of divine magic can restore 10d20 or 183 HP to the creature, not to exceed the creature's maximum HP.

Stinging Willow

Large plant, unaligned

Armor Class 19 (natural armor)
Hit Points 95 (10d10 + 45)
Speed 10 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	8 (–1)	17 (+3)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)	6 (–2)

Damage Vulnerability fire, cold
Skills Perception +6, Stealth +5
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive perception 16
Languages ---
Challenge 7 (2,000 XP)

Grasping Branches The Willow can have up to six grasping branches at a time. Each branch can be attacked individually (AC 19, 19 hit points). Destroying a branch deals 19 points of damage to the Willow. It takes 24 hours to regrow all six branches.

Stinging Leaves. When a creature comes into skin contact with a Willow or its branches, they must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 6(2d4+1) acid damage. On a successful save, the creature takes half damage. Creatures with thick fur are immune to this effect.

Actions

Multiattack. The Willow makes a number of branch attacks equal to its grasping branches, uses Reel and makes one bite attack.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 22 (4d8 + 4) piercing damage and 5 (2d4) acid damage.

Branch. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +7 to hit, reach 20 ft. one creature. Hit: The target is grappled (escape DC 15). Until the grapple ends, the target is restrained and has disadvantage on Strength Checks and Strength saving throws.

Reel. The Willow pulls each creature grappled by it up to 25 ft. straight toward it.

Strychnos

Medium aberration, chaotic evil

Armor Class 17
Hit Points 75 (10d10 + 20)
Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	12 (+1)	14(+2)	13(+1)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)

Saving Throws Con +5
Skills Intimidation +5, Perception +5
Damage Resistances Bludgeoning, Piercing, and Slashing from Nonmagical Attacks
Senses Darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15
Languages Common, Abyssal
Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Innate Spellcasting. Strychnos' innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 13). They can innately cast the following spells:

3/day: *acid arrow*
1/day: *vitriolic sphere*

Amphibious. Strychnos can breathe air and water.

One with the Sludge. Strychnos slips into their pollution and effectively disappears. While within the pollution, they cannot be hit, targeted with any spells, or tracked. They also gain the ability to move up to 60 ft. per round, allowing them to travel great distances if connected by their pollution, whether it be in one pool or along a whole body of water that is afflicted by the sludge.

Actions

Multiattack. Strychnos makes two attacks with their claws.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 15 (3d6 + 5) slashing damage.

Enveloping Sludge. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 36 (9d6 + 5) bludgeoning damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 15) if it is a Large or smaller creature. Until the grapple ends, the target takes 8 (1d6 + 5) bludgeoning damage and 36 (9d6 + 5) acid damage at the start of each of the Strychnos' turns. They can't make attacks while grappling a creature in this way.

Sybilla

Medium guard drake (silver), chaotic good

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)
Hit Points 52 (7d8 + 21)
Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	11 (0)	16(+3)	12(+1)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)

Skills Perception +4
Damage Resistances cold
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14
Languages understands Common, Elven, and Draconic; telepathically 60 ft.
Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Actions

Multiattack. Sybilla makes two attacks: one with her bite and one with her tail.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +5 to hit, range 5ft., one target. Hit: 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +5 to hit, range 5ft., one target. Hit: 6 (1d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage.

Tav'laleer

Medium fey (archfey), chaotic neutral

Armor Class 20 (natural armor)
Hit Points 160 (20d8 + 60)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	19 (+4)	16(+3)	14(+2)	14 (+2)	20 (+5)

Saving Throws Wis +6, Cha +9
Skills Arcana +6, Deception +9, Insight +6, Persuasion +9
Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from non-magical attacks
Condition Immunities charmed, frightened
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 16
Languages Common, Elven, Sylvan
Challenge 12 (8,400 XP)

Call Elementals. Once per day as an action, Tav'laleer can summon two elementals of their choice as if they had cast the conjure elemental spell, without the need for material components. They do not need to concentrate to maintain control of the elementals.

Fey Step (Recharge 4–6). As a bonus action, Tav'laleer can teleport up to 30 feet to an unoccupied space they can see.

Innate Spellcasting. Tav'laleer's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 18). They can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *charm person, command, hideous laughter, silent image*
3/day: *alter self, confusion, crown of madness, suggestion*
2/day: *awaken, blight, polymorph*
1/day: *conjure fey, mass suggestion*

Magical Resistance. Tav'laleer has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Tav'laleer's Dagger. Tav'laleer's Dagger can be thrown. It has a range of 20/60. At the end of the attack action, it teleports back to Tav'laleer's hand (no action required).

Actions

Multiattack. Tav'laleer makes two dagger attacks or they can cast one spell and make one dagger attack

Tav'laleer's Dagger. *Melee Weapon Attack*:+9 to hit, reach 5ft., one target. Hit: 7 (1d4+4) piercing damage. In addition, the target must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the target creature takes 7 (2d6) necrotic damage or half as much damage on a successful one. The necrotic damage cannot be healed except by taking a short or long rest.

ARTIST BIOS:

Alison Huang

Alison Huang is an Australian based artist who loves to use her skills to bring more diversity and representation into the world. When she's not making illustrations, she's writing, and participating in too many game jams. She can be found on Twitter at @Drazillion.

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Kari Kawachi

Kari Kawachi is a freelance illustrator who currently lives around Seattle, WA. Originally hailing from Honolulu, Hawaii, she has been obsessed with art, storytelling, and role-playing for as long as she's been alive. She enjoys painting characters, scenery, and just about anything that sparks the imagination.
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Luciella Elisabeth Scarlett is an aromantic and asexual author and illustrator based in Naarm (Melbourne) Australia who obnoxiously publishes under a name the length of an entire alphabet. You can follow her on Twitter @luciellaes or at luciellaes.wordpress.com.

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