

EAT THE RICH

ENVIRONMENT



4 ANTICAPITALIST
ADVENTURES
FOR 5E

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PRODUCERS' NOTES

After a brief spurt of hope that a global crisis might actually change something and foster the tiniest amount of compassion or humanity amongst our ruling elites, it turns out capitalism is back in full force. The UK government isn't even hiding the fact that it values workers' lives at slightly less than the cost of a takeaway sandwich (no really - "get back to work or the sandwich shops will go out of business").

However, lest we forget: it's not just workers' lives the rich fail to value, it's literally the entire planet. As I write this California's on fire and its prison labour force can't respond because they've all got COVID.

Hope you've all paid your Antifa subs, because there's never been a better time to #EatTheRich.

-- Cat Evans

Look, if you're familiar with my work, you know that environmental themes pop up a lot. So excuse me while I get on my soapbox.

Everyone talks about how in 2020 the world is on fire, but it's easy to forget that the planet is actually burning. Climate scientists have been warning us about the effects of human-induced climate change since at least the 1970s, but not enough of us have been listening.

Obviously the link between capitalism and the destruction of the planet is a close one. Industrial pollution, factory farming, the rise of the car, a culture of disposability: all are major players in the climate crisis we face.

We need to hold companies and corporations accountable for the damage they do to the planet. I am a major proponent of that. But we also need to recognize our role in the process. If we continue to consume, to demand more things faster and cheaper, the corporations aren't going to change their ways.

What D&D teaches me, and which you will find in each of the adventures in this issue, is that individual actions can and do make a difference. Whether it's getting out to protest, buying second hand, choosing to walk instead of drive, recycling, growing your own food, buying local, or going vegan...we can all find a way to help protect the Earth. It's the only one we've got. I hope you're inspired by the adventures in these pages to find one new way you can make a difference.

-- Alicia Furness

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How To Use This Zine

You can run all of the adventures Eat the Rich using only the 5e SRD. If statistics aren't shown in the adventure, you can find them at <https://5thsrd.org/>

New creatures, items, and maps are provided at the end of each adventure.

Now go forth and set the world to rights.

These adventures contain READ OUT TEXT (in orange boxes) and SIDEBARS (red boxes), for the DM's info only



ENVIRONNEMENT



WHAT WE eat

Level 2 Kevin Bryan

Kevin Bryan makes video games and traditional RPGs in police-occupied Seattle. While he has written plenty of homebrew and monsters, What We Eat is his first published adventure. In designing games, Kevin tries to provoke a range of responses, from wonder to dread to nostalgia. In addition to working on new modules, Kevin is experimenting with the intersections of traditional RPG design and VR/AR spaces. Kevin is unable to get legally married without his wife losing health insurance.

What We Eat focuses on survival and escape from The Iron Jungle, a bleak industrial complex.

This dungeon is optimized for four 2nd level characters.

Adventure Background

Iron rations are a necessary ingredient for every war and every adventuring party. Able to survive in hazardous conditions, easy to transport and debatably nutritious, iron rations are produced in mass at the cheapest prices possible to keep up with the continuing demand for portable, durable satiety.

The Iron Jungle industrial complex is where iron rations are produced the cheapest. Owned by the Goodseed family, the Iron Jungle cuts every corner, including concern for their workers and the environment, in the

name of more efficient production. People enter the Iron Jungle. Pre-processed meals leave.

Adventure Summary

Getting into the Iron Jungle is easy, because the factory is in constant need of workers. Smuggling weapons into the Iron Jungle is far more difficult. But the most difficult task of all is getting out again.

The heroes must navigate the complex and its system of rules and punishments to not only find those they seek, but then get them out alive. The heroes will have to either outwit the underworld or inspire the Iron Jungle workers to violent action to improve their chances of escape... or to destroy the jungle for good.

Hooks

The trail of a wanted fugitive leads directly to the Iron Jungle. The Goodseed family denies any knowledge of the criminal and have resisted any efforts to remove them thus far.

A missing child has found their way into the Iron Jungle. The Iron Jungle insists that this is impossible as all workers have signed sworn statements stating themselves to be adults of sound mind.

WHAT WE EAT

PART 1: BUSINESS AS USUAL

Getting into the Iron Jungle is easy. Surviving it is much more difficult.

Entering the Jungle

There are two main ways to enter the Iron Jungle: hiring on as a worker, or getting smuggled in.

A gang known as the Spider is able to smuggle people into the Iron Jungle. The Spider can be discovered either through the use of Thieves' Cant, the Criminal background, or through making a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check. The Spider charges 5 gp per individual wanting to enter the Iron Jungle, gets them into the complex, and provides them with new worker identification.

Heroes can hire on as new workers and get a signing bonus of 5 gp. They must claim to be adults with no criminal history, though the clerks don't care if the characters are criminals. Upon entry, martial weapons are confiscated and held in storage in the gate house. The clerks can be bribed; they are willing to allow martial weapons in for 10 gp, or 5 gp on a successful DC 10 Charisma (Diplomacy or Persuasion) check. All new workers are provided with new worker identification and a bunk assignment.



The Daily Grind

Whether or not they were smuggled in, workers are expected to work in the daily grind of the Iron Jungle. When the heroes first arrive, they are assigned to a work crew under the authority of Freddy Goodseed (NE halfling **cult fanatic**). The young spellcaster likes to break the will of new workers by assigning them a series of arduous tasks.

Recovery

After working for twelve hours, the heroes have a chance to recover. They are assigned to uncomfortable bunks in the worker barracks. The barracks is close enough to the slaughterhouse that there is a constant foul smell and screams all hours of the night. Resting is difficult; in order to gain the benefits of a long rest, a character must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw.

Debt

Workers earn 3 sp a day, which is tracked and held by the company store. Each day, a worker is charged 1 sp for their lodgings and 1 sp for food and water. If they oversleep their bunk shift, their lodgings cost is doubled for the day. Overseers issue fines for poor performance and sabotage, and if the overseers can't find the individuals responsible for an infraction, they fine the entire crew instead.

Notoriety

As the heroes resist the rules and orders of the Iron Jungle they gain Notoriety, which encompasses both the negative attention of the overseers and how thoroughly they inspire their fellow workers. Most groups start with 0 Notoriety, however if they smuggled in martial weapons they start with 1 Notoriety instead.

The Spiders

The Spiders are an organization of smugglers and thugs operating out of the Jungle, who work in the shipping department as their day jobs. Getting a job in shipping is difficult without the express approval of the Spiders. The spiders are led by the half-elf Sahansan, who is secretly an **aranea** who finds the gang name hilarious.

What They Offer

While the Spiders are unwilling to smuggle anyone out, they are able to get supplies in. They sell mundane equipment, drugs, and alchemical items at double the list price. They sell martial weapons at three times the list price.

They also offer a single quiet room that, for 2 gp a night, can provide a group with the space where they can take a long rest without any penalties or checks required.

Their Treachery

The Spiders are secretly in league with the Goodseeds. The Goodseeds allow them to operate without interference, but in return, the Spiders alert the Goodseeds of any potential problems. In addition, the Spiders perform the occasional crime for the Goodseeds. The Spiders alert the Goodseeds to any groups smuggled in, as well as the purchase of any martial weapon.



PART 2: JUNGLE

ENCOUNTERS

Freddy Goodseed saves the worst work assignments for the newest laborers, hoping to break down any will they have to resist. Pick one of the following assignments each day for the heroes:

Black Pudding Vats

Cramped stonework that requires the tallest to stoop over is painted black from smoke and grease. The room is filled with massive bubbling vats, with oil slicked boards providing the only safe passage between them.

The meat, blood and viscera that can't be dried and salted is poured out into the black pudding vats, where it is slowly boiled while being mixed with oats, grains, and sawdust. The vats are large enough to fully immerse a human, walkways are greasy and precarious, and the heat and steam is constant.

During a full shift on the Black Pudding Vats, each worker must make a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw to avoid getting splashed by the boiling viscera. On a failure, a worker takes 2 (1d4) fire damage. On a natural 1, the worker instead falls into one of the vats, taking 3 (1d6) fire damage. Escaping the vats requires a DC 15 Strength (Athletics check). On a failure, the worker takes an additional 3 (1d6) fire damage.

If inspecting the contents of the viscera, a worker should make a single Wisdom (Perception) check over the course of their shift. The information revealed depends on the check result, and all results are cumulative:

What's In the Viscera?

Check Result	Information
DC 10	The worker spots bone fragments and shards being added to the mixture
DC 15	The worker identifies some of the bones as humanoid in origin
DC 20	The worker skims tooth fillings and jewelry made of semi-precious metals worth 2d6 GP from the muck

If a worker raises an alarm about the bones, or the tooth fillings, or tells some of the other workers on their shift about it, the group's Notoriety increases by 2.

Baking Tombs

The baking tombs resemble a stone mausoleum, with nearly every surface caked with soot, sawdust, and flour. The only relief from the heat comes from troughs of water piped in from outside wells.

The Baking Tombs are a massive series of bakeries across the Iron Jungle, focused on the mass production of hard, long-lasting biscuits. The biscuits are twice baked, first in a conventional oven, and then again in a second oven to dry them out to make them longer lasting. Wheat and other grains are used as the primary base, though they are often mixed with sawdust and other fillers before being shaped into dough.

While the Baking Tombs are not as directly hazardous as some of the other work assignments, the heat is constant. Workers can try and fight against the heat by stealing some of the water intended for making dough, and either drink it or coat

their skin with it. The overseers disapprove of this sort of theft, and have a passive Perception of 12. Getting caught by the overseers attracts their retribution (see Overseers' Retribution).

Workers who don't cool themselves down with water suffer a lesser form of Extreme Heat and must make a DC 10 Constitution check or gain a level of exhaustion. Workers who slow down by gaining 2 or more levels of exhaustion are fined 3 gp per shift for their laziness.

Slaughterhouse

The Slaughterhouse is a haphazard affair, the cobblestones slick with blood that refuses to drain. Bladed implements are scattered throughout the room.

The slaughterhouse is the most dangerous of assignments. All workers are equipped with a variety of tools that could be used as comparable martial weapons. They are expected to quickly kill and butcher the confused and frightened animals brought into the slaughterhouse.

While most animals are docile or terrified enough to be killed quickly, the occasional one manages to resist.

Once per shift, roll on the table to determine the resisting animal:

Angry Animals

d6	Result
1	Mule
2	Elk
3	Giant Rat
4	Boar
5	Draft Horse
6	Warhorse

All animals act as if affected by the *confusion* spell.

During the chaos, characters can attempt to hide a butchering tool on their person by making a Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check against a passive Perception of 11. Getting caught by the overseers attracts their retribution (see Overseers' Retribution). If a worker is rendered unconscious the overseers intervene and kill the animal. The unconscious worker is then fined 5 gp for negligence.



The Overseers Retribution

Overseers usually work in teams of two (half-orc or halfling **guards**). Overseers are armed with clubs, torches, and a bell, which they usually keep in a bag.

Whenever an Overseer sees an act that they disapprove of, they issue a beating, delivering 1d6+1 points of damage. When issuing a routine beating they never try to kill, instead leaving a worker unconscious to put back to work later. Should the worker resist, they use additional force, and even risk killing the worker. Being witnessed

resisting a beating increases the group's Notoriety by 2.

Should one of the Overseers fall, or if both Overseers in a team is reduced to less than half their hit point maximum, they Disengage and draw their bell, and on their next turn ring the bell for backup.

Brute Squads

Should an Overseer ring their bell for backup, a brute squad arrives in 3d6 rounds.

A brute squad consists of 2 **thugs** and 1 **scout**. Brutes are commonly humans, half-elves, and half-orcs.

Notoriety Consequences Table

Score	Consequence
3 or below	Minor inconveniences.
4	The heroes' meals are burnt, oversalted and generally inedible. If they do not buy or find alternative rations, they go without food for the day.
5	5 The heroes are fined 6 gold each by the company store. If this takes them into debt, they begin to owe interest.
6	6 One of the heroes is selected by an overseer to receive corporal discipline for a crime (real or imagined). They are expected to endure 1d6+1 damage without resisting. The group gains +1 Notoriety.
7	7 The heroes meals are poisoned with viscera from the black pudding vats. Anyone consuming the food must make a DC 11 Constitution saving throw or become infected with Sewer Plague.
8	8 One of the heroes bunk mates is framed for a crime the heroes committed. If the heroes do not aid them the heroes lose 2 Notoriety. The punishment is particularly severe and the condemned take 2d6+2 damage. If the heroes intervene and either take the punishment or save the innocent, they gain 1 Notoriety.
9	9 The Spider Strikes: When waking up in the morning, the heroes discover an agent of the Spider, described on page (XX). This event only occurs once.
10	10 The heroes are assigned to the pudding vats and the overseers are instructed to make an example of the heroes. Overseers try and encourage the heroes to have an accident in the vats. The Dexterity Saving Throw difficulty is increased to 12, and any failure causes a hero to fall fully into the vat.
11	11 Fire in the Barracks. While they are sleeping, agents of The Spider attempt to burn down the worker barracks that the heroes are assigned to, as described on page 37. This event only occurs once.

Unlike the Overseers, the Brutes arrive ready to kill, and make no distinction between their primary targets and workers who get stuck in the crossfire.

Notoriety

As the heroes labor in the Iron Jungle, they gain Notoriety for their actions. The more Notoriety they gain, the more likely they are to suffer the abuses of both the Goodseeds and the Spiders. Notoriety can also serve to inspire their fellow workers, however, and (should the heroes survive) show that management can be actively defied.

- After reaching 5 Notoriety the heroes can start to make Charisma (Persuasion) checks to influence and inspire otherwise terrified workers.
- After reaching 8 Notoriety the heroes inspire aid and sabotage without having to make Charisma checks or even asking.
- If the heroes fail to assist their fellow workers who are in peril, their Notoriety falls.

Notoriety is not without its costs, however. Every morning, the heroes are beset by one of the following consequences. A minimum Notoriety is suggested for each consequence.

The Spider Strikes

When the heroes first arrived into the Iron Jungle, either the front gate clerks or the Spiders made note of any spellbooks, spell component pouches, or holy symbols the heroes brought in. This information was carefully recorded and filed away should it become useful later.

Now Velkaros, agent of the Spiders (NE human **spy**) is being sent to collect on that information.

If undetected, Velkaros sneaks in and begins rifling through the group's belongings, grabbing the first spellbook or holy symbol he can find. At that point he is spotted by one of the heroes' bunkmates.

Once the party is alerted, Velkaros's objective is to flee.

If subdued, Velkaros admits that he was sent by Sahansan himself, as a favor for the Goodseeds. Velkaros doesn't know how long Sahansan has been working with the Goodseeds, but does know that Sahansan isn't as human as he first appears.

In addition to his listed equipment, Velkaros carries a set of thieves' tools.

Fire in the Barracks

Two Agents of the Spider (high elf **spy**) sneak up to the worker barracks from the outside. The Agents bar the door and then retreat twenty feet. There, they and two members of a Brute Squad (half-orc **thug**) throw vials of *alchemist's fire* at the barracks.

If the heroes aren't keeping watch, roll initiative when the first vial of *alchemist's fire* lands. Otherwise, initiative is triggered when the heroes discover the Agents.

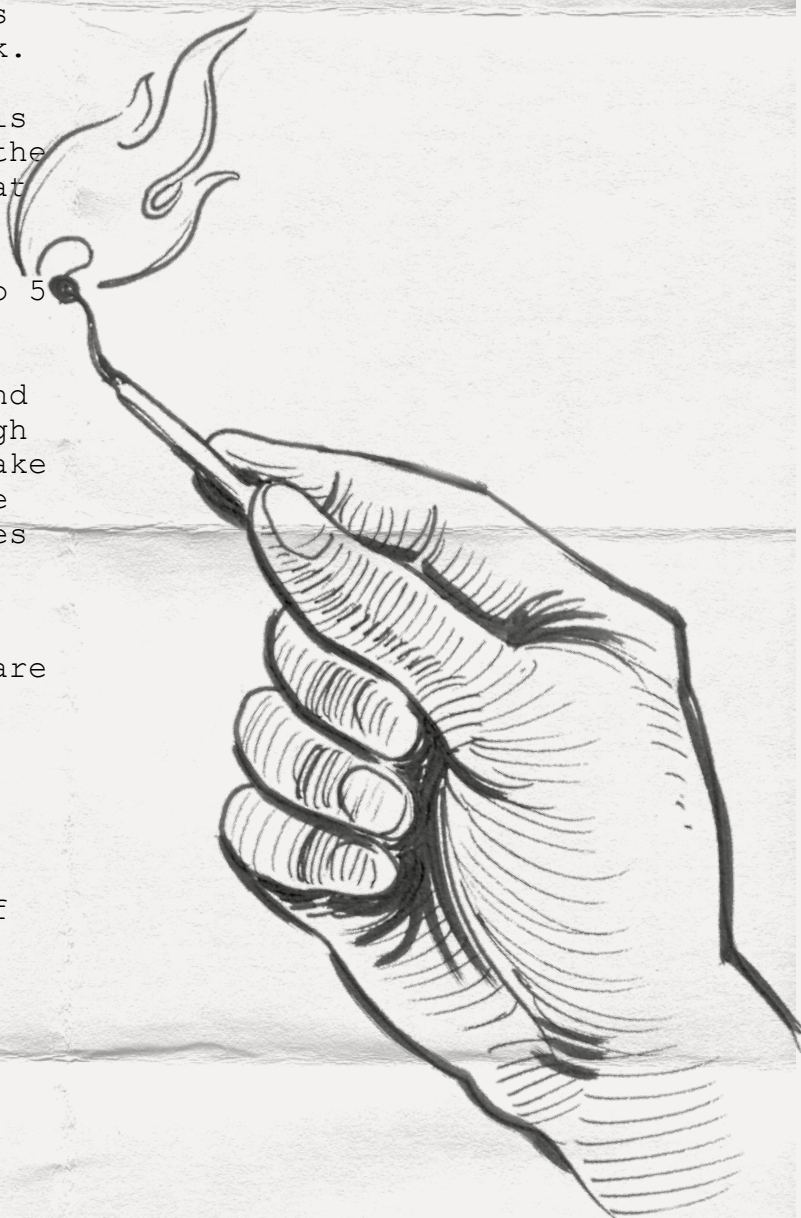
Notoriety

The door wasn't made to be barred from the outside and can be forced open with a successful DC 15 Strength check. Up to two characters can work together in the check. Additionally, creatures inside the barracks can escape through a window. Medium and larger creatures escape on a successful DC 10 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check. On a failure, a creature escapes but takes 2 (1d4) slashing damage from the broken window. Small or smaller creatures automatically succeed on the check.

After three rounds, the barracks is fully alight. Creatures still in the building take 2 (1d4) fire damage at the start of each of their turns until they escape. After three rounds the fire damage increases to 5 (2d4).

The Brutes move in to intercept and attack any creatures fleeing through the door or windows, wanting to make sure to silence all witnesses. The Agents move in to assist the Brutes after the barracks has caught on fire.

In addition to the heroes, there are six other workers (all **commoners**) asleep in the barracks when the attack takes place. The heroes gain 1 Notoriety for each worker who survives the fire. In addition to their standard equipment, the Brutes and Agents carry 5 vials of *alchemist's fire* each.



PART 3: RECOVERY

The heroes have arrived in the Iron Jungle searching for an escaped fugitive, a lost child, or both. Getting information on their quarry is more difficult than initially expected. The heroes have to do an investigation of their own as well as earning the trust of their fellow workers to find out the truth.

Asking the Workers

Each shift the heroes can ask their fellow workers if they have seen either of the two individuals, or where missing workers might have gone. Unless the heroes have amassed at least 3 Notoriety, workers are reluctant to speak with them, thinking them potential spies and informers for the Goodseeds.

If the heroes have at least 1 Notoriety, a DC 10 Charisma (Persuasion) check reveals that the fugitive was seen being escorted to the individual labor camp and has not been seen since. Additionally, the child was seen in the individual labor camp as one of the new guards posted on the walls.

Investigating the Jungle

Workers are not watched while off shift, so it's easy to sneak out of the worker barracks to try and observe the rest of the complex. However, avoiding guard patrols can be risky. If scouting instead of sleeping, a hero can attempt a DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check to explore and learn more about the compound. Each subsequent successful check gains an additional piece of information.

- The Iron Jungle is divided into multiple sections, with a worker barracks next to each major work area. The slaughterhouse barracks, where the heroes are assigned, is the least desirable barracks.

- The back overseer barracks conceals a door that leads to a second, restricted section of the compound.

- The restricted compound is where the more troublesome and expendable workers are sent. It is run by Otis's daughter Adelaide, who is feared for her cruelty.

- Entering the restricted section requires either a key (carried by one of the Goodseeds), a member of a Brute Squad, breaking in with thieves' tools, or climbing over the wall and bypassing the razor wire.

Failing an Intelligence (Investigation) check by 5 or more leads to the heroes being caught by a patrol of Overseers. The first time this happens, the Overseers are content with inflicting a light beating to one of the heroes for 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage. This increases their Notoriety by 1. On subsequent discovery, the Overseers become increasingly violent, and the damage increases by 1d6.

The Restricted Section

High walls crowned in razor wire do little to hide the smell of rot and the cries of agony from the restricted section, a recurring promise to all those who defy the Goodseeds.

Walls. The walls of the restricted section are 15 feet high and require a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check to climb. The DC is reduced to 5 if the heroes are using rope or climbing gear to cross. The walls are topped with razor wire, which if not cut with proper tools, requires a DC 10 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to

cross; on a failure, a character takes 2 (1d4) slashing damage.

Front Door. The front door is locked with a basic lock, which can be picked with a successful DC 10 Dexterity check made with thieves' tools. All Brute Squad members and every Goodseed carries a key which opens the lock.

After the heroes get inside the restricted section, security becomes more lax. Two Overseers patrol the entire area every 10 minutes, but in this part of the complex they don't bother carrying bells. Should the alarm be raised, however, a Brute Squad reaches the source of conflict within 6 rounds.

The Restricted section is made up of three main areas:

The Cells. Prisoners are held in the cells for weeks or months at a time, often given back-breaking repetitive tasks to perform lest they face greater punishment. All cell doors have basic locks, requiring a successful DC 10 Dexterity check made with thieves' tools to open. All guards in this section carry a complete set of cell keys. The fugitive the heroes seek is held in one of the cells, along with 12 other tortured and emaciated prisoners.

Adelaide's Barracks. The headquarters of Adelaide Goodseed and her specially chosen guards and enforcers. Adelaide is currently training the child the heroes seek as one of her new enforcers.

Adelaide (CE halfling **bandit captain**) is assisted by her two trainees, Ukotar (NE half-orc **bandit**) and the child (NE human **commoner**). Adelaide immediately attacks any individuals she doesn't know personally and urges her trainees to assist her. If reminded of their family, or convinced with a DC 15 Charisma (Intimidate or Diplomacy) check, the child backs down from the fight.

The Abattoir. Workers and prisoners who have outlived their usefulness are taken here, where they're killed, butchered, and broken down into viscera that is later delivered to the Black Pudding Vats for disposal. The Abattoir is currently haunted by the ghost of one of the recently deceased workers. The guards have learned to avoid the area for now.

Upon entering the Abattoir, the ghost (treat as a **specter**) attacks the party unless they have an Notoriety score of 6 or higher. If their Notoriety is 10 or higher, the ghost instead follows them, aiding them in combat against the Goodseeds, the Spiders, and their agents.



PART 4: ESCAPE & CONCLUSION

Getting out of the Iron Jungle is difficult. The Spiders only smuggle people in; they don't smuggle anyone out. If the heroes try to simply leave, they quickly find that they are deeper in debt to the company store than they expected.

Digging Out

The heroes can attempt to dig a passage out of the complex. This requires them laboring instead of sleeping, requiring them to make a DC 10 Constitution check each night they go without sleep. On a failure, a hero gains a level of exhaustion. They can request assistance for their digging project if they have a Notoriety score of 5 or higher. Digging out requires 20 nights of individual labor.

Fighting Out

The heroes can attempt to fight their way out. If going through the main gates they fight Goodseed Overseers who call for the Brute Squad as backup. If going through the loading docks, the heroes face both Overseers and Spiders.

Causing distractions first can make the escape easier, as it causes the Spiders and Goodseeds to spread their forces thinly. The heroes can recruit others to help cause the distractions if they have a Notoriety of 5 or higher, or cause the distractions themselves.

Rebellion

If the heroes have a Notoriety score of 8 or higher they can attempt to incite other workers to rebel and take direct action against the Goodseeds, both in direct sabotage of the Iron Jungle operations and in direct attacks on the Overseers. This incitement can take place in roleplay or through a DC 16 Charisma (Persuasion) check. The DC of this check is reduced by 2 for each point of Notoriety the heroes have in excess of 8.

Getting Revenge

If escaping through Digging Out or Fighting Out, arrange things so that Freddy Goodseed (NE halfling **cult fanatic**) catches the Heroes in the act and tries to stop them, giving the heroes a chance to get revenge on Freddy for all the petty indignities they've suffered over the past few weeks.

If escaping through Rebellion, have Otis Goodseed (LE halfling **noble**) himself show up with a Brute Squad to try and crush the rebellion. If Otis himself is killed, the Iron Jungle operation collapses, lacking Otis's unique combination of viciousness and planning.



AQUATIC INTERVENTION

Level 3

Blue Maelstrom

Blue is an RPG writer, software engineer, and Twitch variety streamer with a love for tabletop in all its forms. A longtime player and DM, Blue debuts as a 5e adventure writer in this zine, with "Aquatic Intervention," an exploration of capitalism's use of foreign interventionism and that ideology's negative effect on both indigenous populations and the environment. Blue also has writing credits on several indie RPGs, such as *Come With A Price: A Witchcraft RPG*. You can get in touch or follow Blue's work at [@silbmaerto](https://twitter.com/silbmaerto) on Twitter.

A wealthy bard recruits a group of adventurers to dive down to an aquatic elf village and aid the elves in their struggle against a powerful sahuagin tribe. There, they discover that the most deadly threat to the village comes not from below, but from above.

This adventure is designed for three to five 2nd-4th level characters, and is optimized for four characters with an average party level (APL) of 3.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The rivalry between sahuagin and aquatic elves is as old as recorded history. Countless battles have been fought between the two species, driven by territoriality and the eternal enmity between their respective gods: The Nightmare Shark and The Dolphin King.

Every corner of the ocean bears the scars of this perpetual war, and Petrieth's Bay is no exception. Situated far from any major ports and surrounded by sharp cliffs, the bay does not appear particularly noteworthy to the eyes of surface dwellers. Just under the surface though, there lies a priceless treasure. A huge coral reef lines this bay, decorating the sea floor with legions of diverse marine creatures and plants. The reef is breathtaking to behold, but what makes it truly special is the coral itself. Each vibrant red polyp of coral glows faintly with magical energy, hinting at the extraordinary healing properties that lie within. The coral's magic instantly heals a huge variety of injuries, from mundane wounds to poisoning to even blindness.

When the elves and sahuagin first reached this bay, each species

picked a spot where the coral was particularly sturdy, built a village atop it, and raised their armies to purge the other from the reef. The more they fought, however, the more they were forced to rely on the coral to heal their wounded. The more they harvested the coral, the weaker the reef became. Realizing that their war would destroy both their homes, the two sides agreed to a ceasefire. Despite their mutual hatred, they tolerated each other's presence for the sake of the reef.

This was the state of Petrieth's Bay for over two centuries, until Eristho Generee arrived. An entrepreneur of some fame and wealth, Eristho covertly rekindled the longstanding war, promising his aid to both species. Neither side suspects the man's true goal: Eristho plans to claim and harvest the entire reef himself. The stage is set for the final conflict between the elves and the sahuagin, and a group of would-be heroes unknowingly heads directly towards it.

ADVENTURE SUMMARY

The adventurers travel to Petrieth's Bay to meet Eristho, who hires them as mercenaries on behalf of the elves of Y'Petrieth.

Traveling to Y'Petrieth, the characters meet the village elder, Sariel, who gives the adventurers a mission to raid a sahuagin scout camp. One of Sariel's advisors, Malayna, asks the party to capture and question the scouts, while another encourages them to leave none alive. Regardless of their approach, the adventurers attack the camp and defeat the scouts.

Upon returning, the adventurers learn that the sahuagin have kidnapped Malayna from Y'Petrieth. The adventurers infiltrate the sahuagin village and discover that not only is Malayna a vehuagin spy,

but also that Eristho has been manipulating both villages into fighting each other. The sahuagin chieftess asks the adventurers to help defeat the elves, while Malayna requests that the adventurers confront Eristho while she stops the fighting between the two species.

The adventurers can support one village over another or confront Eristho. Their choice determines the fate of the villages and the reef.

WHAT ARE VEHUAGIN?

A vehuagin is a mutated sahuagin born with the appearance of an aquatic elf. They often infiltrate aquatic elf communities, acting as spies and saboteurs for invading sahuagin tribes.

HOOKS

- A local job listing calls for brave adventurers to assist in saving an aquatic elf village from sahuagin raids.
- Hearing of the adventurers' exploits, Eristho sends his right hand woman, Lena, to personally recruit the adventurers, requesting their aid in exchange for a generous gold reward.
- One of the adventurers has a relationship (familial or otherwise) with an aquatic elf villager, who asks that they take Eristho's job opportunity.

In each hook, the adventurers are instructed to seek out a camp on the shores of Petrieth's Bay, where they meet their employer.

AQUATIC INTERVENTION

PART 1: DIVE RIGHT IN

The adventurers travel towards the coastline, eventually reaching Petrieth's Bay. From atop the neighboring cliffs, they view the long beach that surrounds the bay as their nostrils fill with briny air. A particularly perceptive person might notice a faint reddish glow in the more shallow waters, but to most the bay appears fairly calm and ordinary. On the shore below, a small yet ornate encampment is visible. The flag flying above the camp depicts a golden tree bearing crimson apples, the insignia of **Eristho Generee** (Appendix A).

Eristho's Camp

If the adventurers approach Eristho's camp, they are met by two **guards** dressed in matching high-quality chain shirts. The guards lead them into the large tent that dominates the center of the encampment. Pushing aside the silk tent flaps, they see a youthful, attractive, half-elf man reclining on a crimson divan. The half-elf quickly rises to his feet and greets them with a warm smile as he vigorously shakes each of their hands:

"Ah, you must be the mercenaries I requested! I cannot thank you enough, you have arrived just in time! There is much work to be done, and we must get started immediately. Oh, but where are my manners? I am Eristho Generee. You may have heard of some of my philanthropic initiatives, or perhaps one of my operas?"

A tall, lean, and stoic woman with raven-black hair stands next to the divan, her armored hand resting on the hilt of a sword at her belt. Eristho introduces her as Lena Onara (LE human **bandit captain**, she/her), his right hand woman.

After introductions, Eristho selectively explains the situation to inspire characters to take his offer:

- For centuries, the villagers of Y'Petrieth have had a tenuous ceasefire with their sahuagin neighbors.
- That all changed a month ago, when the sahuagin launched a brutal surprise raid on the village, somehow evading the elves' best scouts and decimating the elven army.
- The village only survived because the village's religious leader, Agnaliann, struck down the sahuagin chieftain, throwing the sahuagin forces into chaos.
- Although the sahuagin retreated to lick their wounds, the elves expect another attack within weeks.
- With so many warriors dead, they expect to be overwhelmed.
- Eristho, hearing of the elves' plight, offered his philanthropic services, promising to hire experienced mercenaries to assist them.

Eristho offers the adventurers 200 gp to assist the elves in defeating the sahuagin. A successful DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) check convinces him to add an additional 50 gp.

Eristho hides several facts:

- He had been aware of the two villages' existences for several months before the raid
- Lena, under his orders, met with the sahuagin chieftain and convinced him to undertake the raid in the first place
- He magically confounded the

elven sentries so the sahuagin could sneak past them

Eristho has been intentionally pushing both villages towards open warfare in order to weaken them. His true goal is to wipe out or enslave both villages, allowing him unrestricted access to the coral, which he plans to wantonly harvest and sell to the surface world.

If the adventurers take the job, Eristho produces his *diver's tome* (Appendix B), offering to cast *water breathing* on anybody who needs it.

Once preparations are complete, Eristho leads the characters into the water, towards Y'Petrieth.

Features of the Area

Arms Vendor. Eristho uses one tent as a shop, stocking weapons suited for underwater combat. If the characters cannot afford weapons, Eristho offers to deduct their cost from the characters' reward. The vendor sells daggers, javelins, shortswords, spears, tridents, darts, nets, crossbows, and crossbow bolts. Remind players that attacks with other weapons are made at disadvantage underwater unless they have a natural swimming speed.

PART 2: HEROES OF THE DAY

40 feet below the surface, the seafloor is host to a legion of diverse marine creatures. Cerulean sponges mingle with peach-colored crustaceans, and swarms of pink planktivores dart around lazing starfish. Most striking, however, are the small colonies of vibrant red coral, each giving off a faint glow.

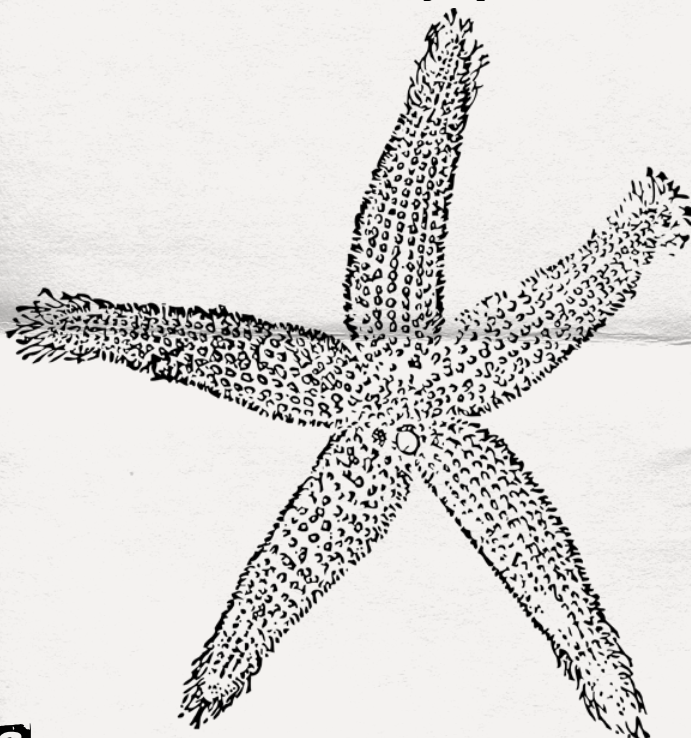
After 30 minutes of travel, the colonies become more frequent and dense, until finally a huge mass of coral stretches a mile across and dozens of feet high. The coral lights up the area around it like a beacon. Atop the reef, carved wooden walls and layered seaweed decorations mark the presence of small houses and other structures. Large patches of the reef appear inert, displaying few polyps and lacking the red glow of the rest of the structure. Green and blue skinned elves swim among the buildings, going about their day.

Y'Petrieth Council Room

Eristho leads the adventurers past the village guards, happily waving to villagers as he passes by. They cheer and wave back, clearly encouraged by his presence.

Inside a three-story tower of carved coral at the center of the reef is a plainly decorated assembly room, dominated by three massive stone chairs that face the entrance. Sariel Vadimion the village elder sits in the largest of the three, while his advisors, spiritual leader Agnaliann Amaral and scholar Malayna Liarenn, sit in the others.

Sariel greets Eristho warmly and introduces his council to the party. He thanks the adventurers for their aid and explains their first mission:



- A week ago, Y'Petrieth's sentries noticed the sahuagin had set up a scout camp on the edge of elf territory, which they believe is a prelude to an invasion.

- Suspecting a trap, the elves have avoided risking their remaining soldiers.

- Sariel tasks the adventurers with raiding the camp and incapacitating the sahuagin before they can flee or spring their trap.

Malayna encourages the adventurers to capture the sahuagin alive, suggesting that, once disarmed and bound, they might explain why and how they attacked the elves. She believes that if their reasons can be understood, a lasting peace might be established.

Agnaliann belligerently interrupts Malayna, mocking her. He warns the party that keeping the sahuagin alive puts them at risk of a treacherous trap and bringing them to the village would mock The Dolphin King.

Eristho agrees that the sahuagin are too dangerous to be kept alive, in case they might escape or unleash some trap. As an incentive, he offers the adventurers a 10 gp bounty per sahuagin head. A successful DC 16 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals that Eristho is hiding his reasons for wanting the sahuagin dead.

Before the adventurers leave, Sariel offers them four *coral polyps* (Appendix B), briefly explaining the history and nature of the coral. He mentions that the elves are reluctant to harvest too much, as they needed to harvest large amounts to heal their injured after the raid and too much additional harvesting would kill the reef. However, they must harvest what is necessary for survival. He cautions the adventurers against harvesting the polyps themselves, as an inexperienced harvester will destroy the polyp. Sariel also provides the

adventurers a map of the bay, with the two villages and the sahuagin camp clearly marked.

Features of the Area

NPCs

All aquatic elves and vehuagin have a swimming speed of 30 feet and can breathe air and water.

Sariel Vadimion (N aquatic elf **druid**, he/him): A wizened old elf. Desires safety for his village beyond all else. Highly spiritual, placing great trust in Agnaliann's counsel. Views Malayna as a good and wise friend, but finds her desire for permanent peace naive.

Agnaliann Amaral (LE aquatic elf **priest**, he/him): A religious zealot. Harbors deep hatred towards the sahuagin for their worship of The Nightmare Shark.

Malayna Liarenn (LG vehuagin **spy**, she/her): Intelligent and personable, Malayna infiltrated the aquatic elf village as a spy, befriended Sariel, and became his advisor. Years as a double agent have led her to sympathize with the aquatic elves, seeing them as family. Nevertheless, she doesn't wish for any of her fellow sahuagin to be harmed, especially Khella, her betrothed. Malayna wants to create a lasting peace between the two factions, so that she may live openly with both peoples and her beloved.

PART 3: A SIMPLE SCOUTING MISSION - THE COCONUT CRAB

Following Sariel's map to the sahuagin camp, the adventurers travel 30 minutes through open water before spotting a rotting hulk of wood and barnacles resting on the seafloor. This is the wreck of *The Coconut Crab*, a decades-old sailing ship that now hides the sahuagin spies. See **Appendix C** for a map of the 70-foot-long wreck.

Features of the Area

Seaweed. The floating pile of seaweed in the center of the wreck is *difficult terrain* for any creature that does not have a swimming speed.

Creatures

Four **sahuagin** and three **reef sharks** occupy the shipwreck. One sahuagin and one shark stand guard near each hole in the hull. The remaining two sahuagin and one shark relax near a pile of seaweed bedding and food scraps in the center of the wreck. Adventurers with a passive Perception of 13 or higher notice the guards near the holes.

A successful DC 13 Dexterity (Stealth) check allows the adventurers to approach the shipwreck unseen. Otherwise, the sahuagin notice anybody within 90 feet and attack anybody within 50 feet.

Tactics

One sahuagin flees towards their village. The other sahuagin rush into melee and fight to the death. They prioritize lightly armored targets, but if an adventurer is injured, nearby sahuagin focus on them in order to utilize Blood Frenzy.

The sahuagin direct the reef sharks to fight alongside them, utilizing their **Pack Tactics**. The sharks follow the commands of the nearest conscious sahuagin. If given no commands, the sharks lash out at anyone attacking them, but flee if reduced to 6 or fewer hit points.

Development

If a sahuagin is captured alive, the characters may interrogate them. The sahuagin of Petrieth's Bay speak Common, having been introduced to it while negotiating the initial ceasefire. With a successful DC 17 Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion) check, the sahuagin reveal they were told to make camp there by a human woman, who warned their chieftess of an impending elf attack. The woman's description matches Lena. An additional DC 17 check reveals that the woman assured the sahuagin that they would be undetectable to the elves' sentries.

For each additional sahuagin captured, reduce the DC of these checks by 2. Sparing the sharks grants advantage to these checks.

This encounter could be difficult for some parties. If necessary, encourage players to take a rest before returning to Y'Petrieth.

Difficulty Adjustments

Make the following adjustments if the party is weak or strong:

- If the party is weak, remove one sahuagin and one reef shark, and reduce the DC of checks made to interrogate the sahuagin by 2.
- If the party is strong, add one sahuagin and one reef shark. The DC of checks to interrogate the sahuagin cannot be reduced below 13.



PART 4: INTO THE SHARK'S DEN

Returning to Y'Petrieth, the adventurers notice the elves marshalling for war. Warriors bark orders while even the youngest elves grab spears and assemble into formation on the village outskirts. Anyone can tell the adventurers that, while they were gone, a group of sahuagin infiltrated the village and kidnapped Malayna. Eristho left the village and returned to the surface to summon more mercenaries from nearby towns, while Agnaliann marshaled the elf army in preparation to attack the sahuagin.

Sariel charges the adventurers with rescuing Malayna. He explains that the sahuagin village lies atop a similar coral structure in the deeper waters of the bay, one hour's travel away and 160 feet below the surface. He suspects that Malayna was brought to the chieftess' hut, a large domed wooden structure in the center of the village.

If the adventurers used all their *coral polyps*, they can convince Sariel to give them four more on a successful DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion or Deception) check.

Once Sariel is out of earshot, Agnaliann approaches and suggests that now would be the perfect opportunity to purge the sahuagin permanently. He asks the party to assassinate the chieftess, arguing that with her gone the sahuagin would be thrown into disarray, allowing him to lead the elf army into the sahuagin village nearly unopposed.

Village Outskirts

as the party dives deeper, the water grows colder and the sea grows darker, even with the coral bathing the sea floor in dim light. Unfamiliar fish and bottom feeders flit about the silent waters, while sharp toothed anglerfish pass by, paying the adventurers little mind. As the coral colonies become more dense yet again, the adventurers notice ominous dark shapes above them. Looking up, they see the familiar silhouettes of sharks.

The ocean around the sahuagin village is patrolled by trained sharks. With a successful DC 13 Dexterity (Stealth) check, the adventurers sneak past them. Alternatively, a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check pacifies the sharks. Otherwise, one **hunter shark** and one **reef shark** attack the party.

Once the adventurers bypass the sharks, they reach the outskirts of the village, where they notice patrols of 12 sahuagin each. A successful DC 13 Dexterity (Stealth) check bypasses these sentries. A successful DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check notices a gap in the patrols, giving the adventurers advantage on the check. Alternatively, a successful DC 13 Charisma (Deception) check distracts the sentries, allowing the adventurers to slip by undetected.

If the adventurers engage a patrol, the sentries attempt to incapacitate the adventurers and bring them before the chieftess.

Bek'orra's Hut

Once inside the village, the adventurers easily find the chieftess' hut.

Inside, Bek'orra, the sahuagin chieftess, sits atop a fearsome throne of shark cartilage. To the side of the chieftess, Malayna holds hands with Khella. She whispers to Khella, but too softly for the adventurers to understand. If they move closer, the chieftess notices them and commands them to come forward.

If the adventurers were captured, they are bound with manacles and tossed into the hut, and Khella takes their equipment.

Shocked, Malayna profusely apologizes to Bek'orra, explaining that she thought nobody saw her leave Y'Petrieth. Turning to the adventurers, she reveals her true nature as a vehuagin (see What Are Vehuagin? sidebar) and explains that she deduced Eristho's true intentions. She is now aware that Eristho engineered the initial sahuagin attack and has been pushing the villages into open warfare, and she believes that he intends to bring a large mercenary army to subjugate the survivors of the war so that he may claim both villages' coral supplies.

Bek'orra interrupts, revealing that her scouts tell her that Agnaliann's attack is imminent, and explains that, regardless of Eristho's treachery, the sahuagin will suffer severe losses if they do not strike first. Reluctantly, Bek'orra asks the adventurers to assassinate Sariel and Agnaliann, rendering the elf army leaderless, allowing the sahuagin to easily overwhelm them, and minimizing damage to both the reef and her people.

Malayna begs the adventurers not to doom the elves and offers an alternative. She plans to reveal her true nature to Sariel, expose Eristho's duplicity, and convince Sariel to re-establish the ceasefire with the sahuagin. She is confident that, despite her duplicity, Sariel cares for her enough that he would consider peace once she makes it clear that she knows personally that the sahuagin are not interested in war. She asks that the adventurers instead track down Eristho and deal with him before he can call for more mercenaries, as he could still harm the reef if given time to prepare. If the adventurers ignore these pleas and attack immediately, go to Part 5 and skip the decision-making process, as they have already made their decision!

While Bek'orra believes her plan is more reliable, she concedes that it hinges on the adventurers' consent and agrees to honor a ceasefire if Malayna is successful.

NPCs

Chieftess Bek'orra (LN sahuagin, she/her): Assumed command after her father died in the attack on the elf village. Unlike her father, she is open to coexistence with the elves, but still stops at nothing to protect her people.

Bek'orra has the statistics of a **priest**, except that she has a swimming speed of 40 feet, the spell *mass healing word* prepared, and the following special traits from the **sahuagin** stat block: Blood Frenzy, Limited Amphibiousness, and Shark Telepathy.

Khella (Appendix A): Champion of the village and Bek'orra's bodyguard. Extremely devoted to her chieftess and madly in love with Malayna, her betrothed. Does anything to protect them.

PART 5: A DIFFICULT DECISION

If the adventurers return to the surface to confront Eristho, he admits his true motives and bribes the adventurers with an additional 75 gp to go back to each village and kill their respective leaders, allowing his forces to take over. If they refuse, he and his guards attack.

If the characters antagonize the sahuagin, Bek'orra and Khella attack them. If the adventurers fight back, Malayna reluctantly assists the sahuagin.

If the adventurers agree to assassinate Sariel, they travel to Y'Petrieth and confront him in the council room.

Creatures

Eristho's Camp: Four **guards** patrol the perimeter. Eristho (Appendix A) and Lena (**bandit captain**) are in the main tent.

Bek'orra's Hut: Bek'orra (**priest**, with changes listed in Part 4), Khella (Appendix A), and Malayna (**spy**) occupy the hut.

Y'Petrieth Council Room: Sariel (**druid**) and Agnaliann (**priest**) reside in the council room, discussing the upcoming battle.

Tactics

Eristho's Camp. Eristho immediately casts *hideous laughter* to disable his opponents while Lena and the guards charge forward. He uses Create Diversion against the enemy he regards as the largest threat and expends his remaining spell slots before entering melee combat. If reduced to 6 hit points or less, Eristho begs for his life,

offering the adventurers all the gold he carries. Lena fights to the death unless Eristho surrenders. The guards flee if Eristho is incapacitated.

Bek'orra's Hut. Malayna and Khella fight side by side so Malayna can Sneak Attack. Bek'orra stays behind them, using damage-dealing ranged spells. She casts *mass healing word* as needed. Otherwise, use the sahuagin tactics from Part 3.

Y'Petrieth Council Room. Agnaliann and Sariel keep their distance, using *spirit guardians* and *entangle* to slow down enemies. They then use damage-dealing ranged spells such as *spiritual weapon*, *guiding bolt*, and *produce flame*, targeting spellcasters first.

Development

If the adventurers kill Sariel and Agnaliann, the elf army, demoralized by the loss of their leaders, is quickly overwhelmed by the sahuagin attack.

If the adventurers kill Bek'orra, the sahuagin army falls into chaos. Once the adventurers leave, the elf army arrives and slaughters the sahuagin.

Rewards

Eristho carries 370 gp and his *diver's tome*. Bek'orra and Sariel each carry four coral polyps.

Difficulty Adjustments



Make the following adjustments at each location if the party is weak or strong:

Eristho's Camp:

- If the party is weak, two **guards** immediately flee.
- If the party is strong, Lena has the statistics of a **knight**.

Bek'orra's Hut:

- If the party is weak, Malayna has the statistics of a **noble**.
- If the party is strong, add two **sahuagin**.

Y'Petrieth Council Room:

- If the party is weak, Agnaliann has the statistics of an **acolyte**, except that he has 18 (4d8) hit points and also has the spell *guiding bolt* prepared.
- If the party is strong, add two aquatic elf warriors. Each warrior has the statistics of a **scout**.



CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

If the party follows Malayna's plan, Malayna negotiates a ceasefire between the two factions and begins working openly to form a more permanent peace between the villages. After a week, envoys from the villages deliver this news to the adventurers.

If the party destabilizes one or both villages, Eristho arrives in force with an army of mercenaries that vastly outnumber the villages' surviving warriors. Eristho rewards the characters for their assistance and strongarms the survivors into an unconditional surrender. The terms of the surrender allow Eristho to brutally harvest the coral, using the surviving villagers as cheap labor. Left unopposed, the harvesting kills the reef, driving the coral extinct in a year.

CONTINUING THE ADVENTURE

If Eristho succeeded, the party can take revenge by sabotaging this harvesting operation, freeing enslaved villagers, assisting a rebellion against him, or attacking him in private. The villages and the reef never fully recover, but the adventurers can still stop Eristho from profiting off their devastation.

If Eristho failed, the adventurers establish a good reputation with the villages. Villager NPCs might assist the adventurers in future underwater escapades, or they might use the adventurers as intermediaries in establishing an equitable relationship between the villages and surface-dwelling polities.

APPENDIX A: MONSTERS & NPCs

ERISTHO GENEREE

Medium humanoid (half elf), neutral evil

ARMOR CLASS 15 (chain shirt)

HIT POINTS 27 (5d8 + 5)

SPEED 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11	14	12	10	13	14
(+0)	(+2)	(+1)	(+0)	(+1)	(+2)

SAVING THROWS Dex +4, Wis +3

SKILLS Perception +5, Performance +4,
Persuasion +6

SENSES darkvision 60 ft.,
passive Perception 15

CHALLENGE 1 (200 XP)

LANGUAGES Common, Elvish

SPELLCASTING. Eristho is a 2nd-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 12, +4 to hit with spell attacks). Eristho has the following bard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): friends, vicious mockery

1st level (3 slots): charm person, hideous laughter, thunderwave

CREATE DIVERSION (1/DAY). Eristho can use a bonus action on his turn to beguile one creature within 30 feet of him. If the target can hear or see Eristho, the target must succeed on a DC 12 Charisma saving throw or all attack rolls against the target have advantage until the start of Eristho's next turn.

FEY ANCESTRY. Eristho has advantage on saving throws against being charmed and magic can't put him to sleep.

ACTIONS

SHORTSWORD. Melee Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

SHORTBOW. Ranged Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, range 80/320, one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 +2) piercing damage.

KHELLA

Medium humanoid (sahuagin), chaotic neutral

ARMOR CLASS 14 (scale mail)
HIT POINTS 32 (5d8 + 10)
SPEED 30 ft., swim 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13	11	14	12	13	9
(+1)	(+0)	(+2)	(+1)	(+1)	(-1)

SKILLS Intimidation +3, Perception +4
SENSES darkvision 120 ft.,
passive Perception 14
CHALLENGE 1 (200 XP)
LANGUAGES Common, Sahuagin

BLOOD FRENZY. Khella has advantage on melee attack rolls against any creature that doesn't have all its hit points.

LIMITED AMPHIBIOUSNESS. Khella can breathe air and water, but she needs to be submerged at least once every 4 hours to avoid suffocating.

SHARK TELEPATHY. Khella can magically command any shark within 120 feet of her, using a limited telepathy.

ACTIONS

MULTIATTACK. Khella makes two melee attacks, one with her bite and one with her claws, warhammer, or spear.

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

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

WARHAMMER. Melee Weapon Attack: +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d8 + 1) bludgeoning damage or 6 (1d10 + 1) if used two-handed.

SPEAR. Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack: +3 to hit, range 20/60, one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) piercing damage or 5 (1d8 + 1) if used two-handed.

REACTIONS

GUARDIAN OF THE TRIBE. When a creature Khella can see attacks a target other than her that is within 5 feet of her, Khella and the target swap places, and Khella becomes the target instead.

APPENDIX B: ITEMS

Coral Polyp

Wondrous Item, uncommon

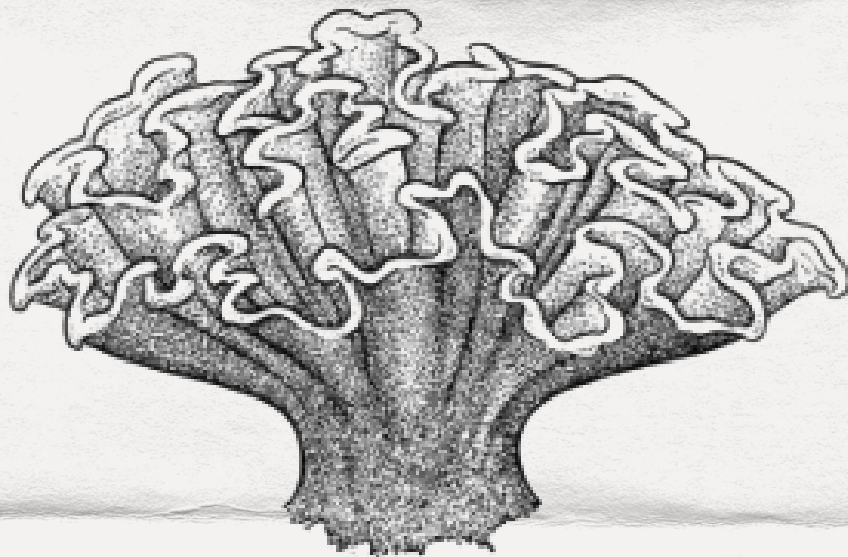
Harvested in Petrieth's Bay, this large, red polyp of coral gives off a dull glow, indicating its magical nature. As an action, you can expend the polyp and touch a creature, applying one of the following effects:

- The creature regains $2d4 + 2$ hit points.
- End one condition afflicting the creature. The condition can be blinded, deafened, paralyzed, or poisoned.
- Reduce one level of the creature's exhaustion caused by swimming.

Diver's Tome

Wondrous Item, rare (requires attunement by a spellcaster)

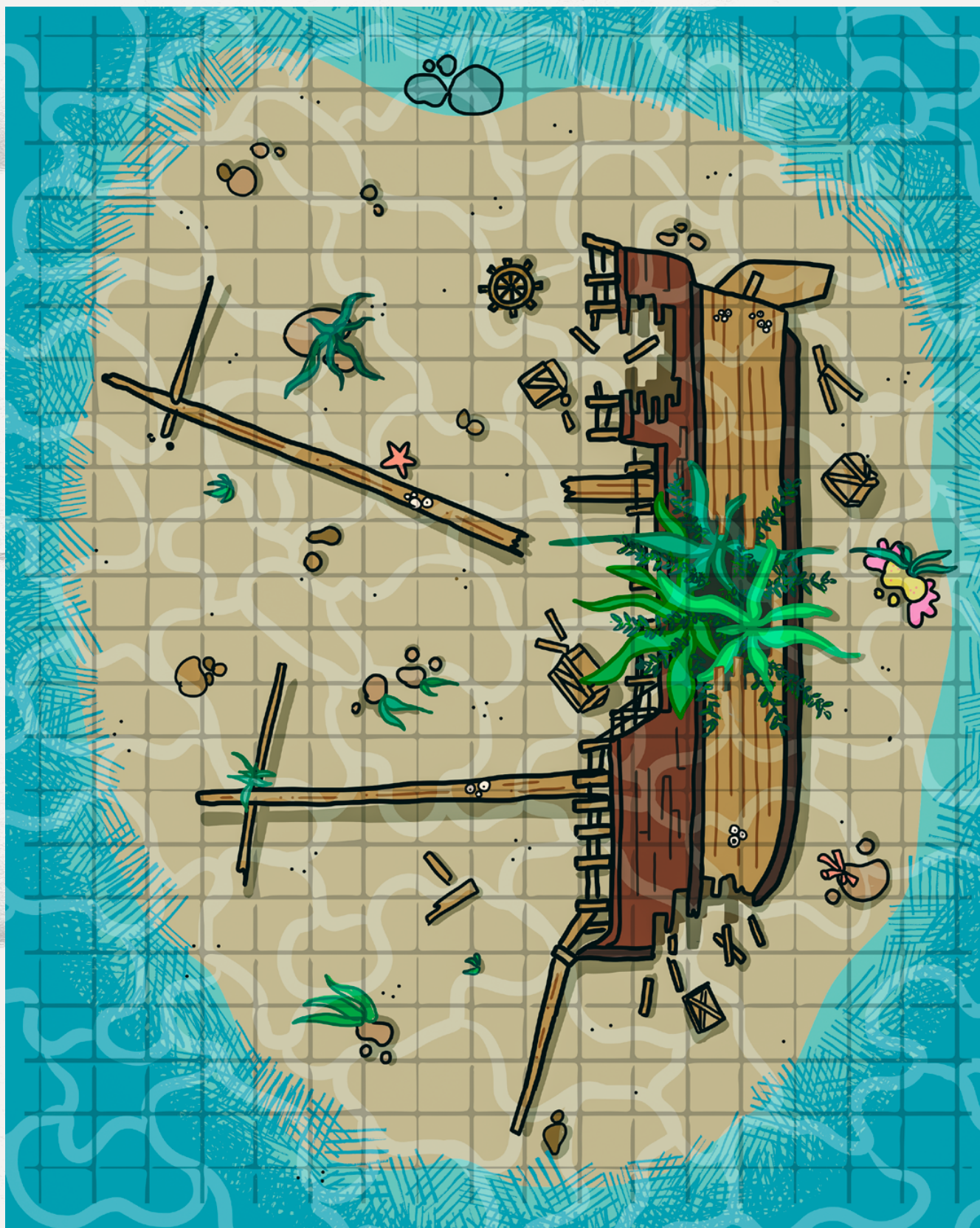
This leather-bound book is covered in arcane purple runes belonging to a long-dead language. Once per day, you can cast *water breathing* as a ritual by reading from this book.



APPENDIX C: MAPS

The Coconut Crab:

Key: The ship rests on its side. Each square is 5 ft. x 5ft, and the holes in the hull are entrances into the ship.





MONEY DOESN'T GROW ON TREES

Level 4
Oliver Clegg

Oliver does a lot of things and they're all very gay. One of his books was recently banned from the DMs Guild for having too many implied penises and a slime boi touching himself somewhere that was not a nipple. Strangely, nobody made a peep about the femme-coded mimic with a "loot me" sign. Oliver did not write this bio (Cat did).

Join his legion of fans on Twitter [@deathbybadger](https://twitter.com/deathbybadger)

The region of Cinderwood is ablaze, set alight by the magic of a vengeful treant determined to stomp out the humans who abused and mutilated its home. The characters are faced with a simple conundrum—can they find a way to placate the burning forest, or will they perish in the raging inferno? Spoiler: they perish in the blazing inferno.

This adventure is optimized for four 4th-level characters.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

a town of lumberjacks and their families moved into an Old Forest, despite the warnings of locals about the spirits that dwelled within. There, they began to harvest the forest's magical wood for use in industry. This proved more lucrative than any of

the lumberjacks had dared dream. The peaceful treants who lived in the forest begged the humans to stop, but the humans were driven by avarice and ignored their requests. One evening, the treant Splintermaw returned to his grove to find his companions slaughtered, taken away to be turned into logs. That night, the treant set fire to the forest and the world began to burn. Hidden in the smoke, the forest drifted away into the nightmares of the outer planes. The story drifts into the waking world on occasion, changing the actors, the scenery or the memories of those involved. Perhaps it is a cautionary tale. Perhaps it is simply cruel whimsy. Either way, the Cinderwood is doomed to burn over and over again for eternity.

ADVENTURE SUMMARY

The characters arrive in Cinderwood and enter the town of Loggerville, where they meet the villagers arguing about how to deal with the burning forest surrounding them. The fire is quickly spreading out of control, and the adventurers might choose to head into the woods to seek out and calm the nature spirits. If they do, they have a brief opportunity to interact with the murderous Splintermaw, a treant gone insane, and broker a terrible deal. Whether or not the characters head into the forest to find Splintermaw quickly enough is pivotal, as the adventure quickly reaches a tipping point after which there is no possible conclusion but fire and death.

HOOKS

Sinister Smoke. Cinderwood is a dark dream that haunts the edges of the world. The sinister smoke can steal away a party of adventurers at any time.

As you travel, you begin to smell smoke on the wind. Black, billowing smog rushes by you in a burning wave, boiling up from underneath the earth and drowning you in darkness. When it fades, you are somewhere altogether unfamiliar, though the tang of smoke still hangs heavily in the air.

Dreams of Smoke and Ash. You may prefer instead to play this adventure as a literal dream sequence. This is advised if you are particularly invested in your player characters not meeting a grisly end.

Your dreams are disturbing. Visions flash before your eyes of dark flame and silver teeth. Branches laugh at you, and the sound of metal on stone rings in your ears. The light grows bright, and you awaken with a start somewhere you don't recognize.

MONEY DOESN'T GROW ON TREES

The adventurers arrive in the burning domain of Cinderwood, spirited away to evil ends. They will undoubtedly be confused, so use Part 1 as a way to introduce the characters to the nature and grim severity of the region's woes before moving swiftly on to Part 2.

PART 1: SMOKE AND ASHES

The smoke deposits the characters within sight of Loggerville, a ramshackle wooden town of human lumberjacks trapped inside the burning domain. How the adventurers approach the humans, and what they learn from those to whom they speak, is likely to inform how they choose to handle the forest's present crisis. Be sure to keep track of time, because the fires won't wait for adventurers to talk to everyone (see *Cinderwood Ablaze*).

Loggerville

The settlement is surrounded by thousands of tree stumps, which have clearly been used to construct the town. Smoke clogs the air, making it hard to see and difficult to breathe. The town is filled with miserable-looking humans loudly and chaotically debating their next move. 500 feet away from the edge of the town in all directions is a burning forest—the source of the smoke and heat.

In the near distance, a sooty palisade wall surrounds an assembly of poorly wrought houses and businesses. People mill about dejectedly, and the sound of angry voices is disquieting even from this

distance. Smoke is heavy in the air, emanating from the burning forest which seems to surround the town on all sides. Between the forest and the town, forming a wide ring around the houses, lies a stretch of land filled with grey earth and thousands of tree stumps.

Features of the Area

Homes and Buildings. Loggerville is home to many houses and shops, poorly built of wood from the trees around the town.

Feuding Lumberjacks. The citizens of Loggerville are at loggerheads. The greedy woodcutters are debating their next move, having divided into three groups unable to reach a consensus on what to do. There are several hundred commoners in this camp (60 of them are noncombatant children), and roughly 100 in each faction.

What the lumberjacks know:

- We have been cutting wood for some time. The people who lived here before us said it would anger the forest, but we did it anyway.
- The native population had to be chased away. We built Loggerville on the ruins.
- The trees woke up and began to attack us. So we started cutting them down too.
- A few days ago, the forest started to smoke. Now it seems completely ablaze.
- There are still shadows moving in the forest. You can see them if you look closely.

Activists. One third of the lumberjacks are incredibly worried by the smoke, rising heat and threat of retaliation from the forest. They wish to address the problem, but have no idea how. They talk boldly of "strong, innovative solutions" and "coming together to tackle the problem head on" but never actually

act on these suggestions. Their leader is a human noble called Eloysius Funk, who spends a lot of his time trying to assert order over proceedings to little avail. The Activists have sent scouts into the forest, scouts who have been brutally murdered, their burned corpses hurled out from the woods by the unknown assailants behind the treeline.

Key phrases:

- "Something must be done!"
- "Won't anyone do something?!"
- "We must take action! Soon!"

Deniers. This group of lumberjacks utterly denies that there's a problem at all, despite the smoke, corpses, and other clearly present dangers. They willfully ignore all evidence to this effect. The Deniers are led by the incumbent mayor Twistimus Crump, who claims any evidence that danger exists is part of a calculated coup by the Activists to depose him and seize power. Characters who side with the Activists are accused of collaboration, conspiracy, and anything else Crump can think of to discredit them.

Crump is a foolish man determined to delay and frustrate the characters by any means possible, first by pretending to be deliberately obtuse, and later by whipping up the deniers into a violent, frenzied mob. He has made his riches from the wood Loggerville produces, and would rather die than pass up an opportunity for profit.

Key phrases:

- "But what if the fire is fake?"
- "They just want all the logs for themselves!"
- "Forest fires happen all the time, it doesn't mean a disaster"

Apathetics. The final group doesn't really mind much either way. They just want to get back to their normal lives, and are intractable in this. They accept the easiest answer to any question which allows them to keep acting as they always have, which means the majority of the time they abstain from making any real decisions at all. They are led by no-one in particular and become either anxious or defensive when questioned about their lack of action.

Key phrases:

- "Look, I'm just trying to get by here."
- "I can't afford to leave. I have kids! And there's no money."
- "I'm tired, okay? It's been a long day. Stop harassing me."

Development

The lumberjacks are arguing in the streets, with the Activists vainly attempting to raise some (as yet undecided) action from the rest of their cohort. Allow the adventurers to engage with the lumberjacks and ascertain the stalemate the town finds itself in.

Cinderwood Ablaze. For every 5 minutes of game time that pass after the characters arrive in Loggertown, take a moment to describe the state of the advancing fires. Use these moments to impress upon the players the dire gravity of the disaster, and the speed with which the fires are advancing.

5 minutes in. The smoke seems to be getting worse, and people are sputtering.

10 minutes in. The smoke is thick and noxious. It is hard to breathe properly.

15 minutes in. You can smell the burning wood from here. It reeks of death.

20 minutes in. The creaking of distant, burning trees is ever present now, like the rumbling of a thundercloud.

25 minutes in. The heat is stifling. Smog pours down the streets, you can barely see thirty feet ahead of you.

30 minutes in. A deep, rumbling laugh echoes through the air, as heat shimmers dance around. Embers float in the smoke. The ground shudders.

If the adventures head towards the Woods at any point before 30 minutes pass, proceed to part 2a.

If 30 minutes pass and the adventurers have yet to head into the woods, proceed to Part 2b.

PART 2A: INTO THE WOODS

If the adventurers quickly see that Loggerville is incapable of organizing to save itself, they may choose to head into the forest and see if they can help douse the fire in any way. As the characters enter the woods, they must make their way through the burning forest in search of a way to fix it.

The trees are filled with ominous shadows, and smoke drifts around them in coils. The heat is sweltering. Before you have walked far, a rasping, hollow voice echoes through the trees as if from all around. DEATH it cries. BURN. BURN WITH ME. CUTTING, SLASHING, YOUR NAMES I'LL BITE AND CUT WITH BURNING BURNING BURNING FIRE AND SILVER NAMES WE'LL BURN YOUR NAMES AND BURN AGAIN TOGETHER.

THE BURNING WOODS

The following features are present throughout the woods.

Lighting. The area is dimly lit, thanks to the smoke obscuring any light from above.

Vision. The smoke lightly obscures the area, and grants creatures disadvantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks based on sight, taste, or smell.

Heat. The heat is uncomfortable and sweltering, seeming to radiate from all sides.

When you are ready, run the following Complex Trap.

Burning Woods

Complex trap, (level 4, deadly threat)

Initiative. The trap acts on initiative counts 20 and 10.

Active Elements. The burning woods are filled with evil burning blights, and frequent blasts of fire.

Burning Blight (Initiative 20).

A burning blight (see Appendix) appears within 10 feet of a character.

Explosion (Initiative 10). Fire and earth run rampant in the woods. Choose one of the following spells, and resolve it at its lowest level (DC 8) targeting a random character - *burning hands*, *entangle*, *heat metal*.

Dynamic Elements. The threat this trap poses increases depending on how much time has passed - see Cinderwood Ablaze.

Shrieking Fires. For each 5 minutes that has passed since the



adventurers arrived in Loggerville, an additional burning blight appears each turn.

Increasing Despair. For each 5 minutes that has passed since the adventurers arrived in Loggerville, increase the DCs of this trap by 1.

Constant Elements. The forest is filled with choking smoke. The heat is unbearable.

Smoke. Creatures can see out to 10 feet, in which the area is lightly obscured. Beyond that is heavily obscured by the smoke. At the start of their turn, creatures that breathe must succeed on a DC 8 Constitution saving throw or lose their action to sputtering and hacking.

Heat. The heat of the fire is draining and wearisome. At the end of their turn, creatures that breathe must succeed on a DC 8 Constitution saving throw or gain a level of exhaustion. Creatures resistant to fire damage are immune to this effect.

Countermeasures. The forest is angry, and needs to be placated.

Druidic. Characters who can speak Druidic may draw Splintermaw's curiosity. A call to parley from a character speaking Druidic draws the treant's attention—proceed to "Splintermaw," below.

Dousing the Flame. Casting a spell that creates water or frost to douse some of the flame shocks Splintermaw into a degree of sanity, and causes him to investigate.

Splintermaw, who can speak throughout the forest, occasionally interjects with mad nonsense. He constantly uses the following words SILVER - BITE - NAME - BURN - TOGETHER over and over again in different iterations. This should hopefully imply to the characters

that a driving force behind the malevolence of the forest is watching.

Splintermaw

Splintermaw eventually investigates at the end of the 5th round, which ends the trap if it has not come to a conclusion already.

A lumbering, blackened tree with eyes of flame and rows of silver needles for teeth stalks towards you through the flame and smoke, which swirls around it like a funeral shroud. NAMES it cries, in the voice of all the small and quiet things ever slain by greed and ugliness. I SHALL TAKE YOUR NAMES AND BITE YOUR SILVER EYES OUT

The treant is curious at the strange intruders, and hears what they have to say. If they express sympathy with Loggerville, the treant slays them, but any offers of help or similar olive branches cause Splintermaw to give the characters once last chance.

KILL THE BURNING, TAKING, KILLING NAMES, the spirit of fire cries out. TAKE THEM TO THE BURNING GRAVE, OR MY EYES WILL TAKE THEIR SPLINTERED MAWS TO EARTH IN BURNING ASH WITH ME AND WE WILL TAKE THEIR MAW AND SILVER MAWS AND I WILL BURN AND THE WORLD ABLAZE WILL SEE. REGROW MY MAWS AND SEEDS AND BARK FROM THEIR ASHES AND NEW EYES WILL SEE YOU AGAIN. YOU HAVE MY SPLINTER MAW.

Splintermaw, in his madness, wants the worst offending citizens of Loggerville dead, and the forest regrown from their ashes. Treat Splintermaw as a treant, with the following additional changes:

- He regenerates 10 hit points at the start of every round.

- He is immune to fire damage, and cannot be set ablaze.

- His teeth are silver needles. This has no mechanical effect, it just looks cool.

- He has the Legendary Resistance feature, which he can use three times a day

Destroying Splintermaw. A lucky party might manage to destroy Splintermaw. The forest fire, in this case, spreads throughout the domain. Nothing is spared, and the town burns to the ground. Eventually, the domain falls into smoke.

Negotiating with Splintermaw. Splintermaw is not in a rational state of mind. The treant has been brutalized, and his friends murdered. His burning of the forest is a final act of desperation—an act of mutual destruction driven by grief. The treant cannot be saved from his own doom at this point; too many have died already at the hands of the fire, and he was long ago claimed by forces beyond our ken to relive these events over and over.

The treant barks seemingly meaningless sentences at the characters, but characters who succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check might be able to discern his meaning.

Splintermaw dictates the following terms to the characters:

- Splintermaw will spare any child of Loggerville who displays a woven band of bark around their wrist. No adult will be spared.
- The children will remain in the forest as his wards, and regrow the forest under his tutelage.
- The other residents of Loggerville will be sacrificed to the flames as penance for their sins.

Developments

Whether or not the characters manage to keep Splintermaw from killing

them, the choice he offers them is a grim one.

If the characters refuse Splintermaw's offer, he attempts to slay them.

If the characters agree, he allows them to safely return to Loggerville, and the forest fires ebb to a slow burn, leaving the forest wreathed in smoke.

PART 2B: THE END

This part of the adventure deals with the consequences of Splintermaw's offer in Part 2a. If the characters have been directed here from Part 1, proceed straight to Last March of the Treants.

Reactions to Splintermaw's Bargain

The townspeople react in horror to Splintermaw's request. None of the factions are willing to sacrifice their lives for their children without any hope of escape for themselves, and very few individuals desire to risk leaving the safety of the herd. The characters may be able to persuade certain factions to allow them to secure the wrists of children with the protective bands as directed by the treant (see Barkwoven Band) in Appendix B.

Deniers. The Deniers (and Twistimus Crump) do everything within their power to frustrate and bedevil the characters' efforts to prepare in time or make any changes, accusing them of trying to start a panic for no reason whatsoever. As time goes on, have the accusations levelled at the characters become even more ludicrous, from "they want to steal our roofs" to "I heard they asked a witch to ensorcel the forest so we'd give them money."

Apathetics. If any of the apathetic townsfolk agree to prepare for battle, or to make any preparations at all, they ask for payment. The lumberjack families are extremely

resistant to any arguments of good faith or common sense, insisting on financial recompense for their hardships. They are unwayed by the logic that if they are dead there is nothing to spend money on.

Activists. The activists are keen to do as Splintermaw asks, and immediately begin to round up children, much to the anger and dismay of the other factions. Arguments soon devolve into brawls and fistfights, and unless encouraged into implementing an organized system of some kind, the actions of the Activists soon cause the entire town to descend into child-grabbing chaos.

Last March of the Treants

This part of the adventure occurs at different times of day depending on the previous sections. If you come here straight from Part 1 (after the 30 minute expiration), it occurs in the late afternoon. If the characters negotiated with Splintermaw in Part 2, it occurs at sundown instead.

Disquieting rumbles are your first warning. Then the row of trees closest to the town move apart, revealing wooden monsters of withered black bark. The stalking, wretched figures begin to emerge from the treelines, spindly black branches withered by flames that crackle along their length. They hum a song, a song of mutual destruction. The walking trees each stand as tall as a house, and begin to move purposefully for Loggerville.

The attack on Loggerville has been orchestrated by Splintermaw, who is not in attendance. Instead, he has sent his legion of fell treants to attack the town and burn anything they find to ashes. Thirteen fell treants converge on the town, using

the stat block for a treant with the following additional ability:

Fire and Death. The treant is on fire, and takes 2 (1d4) fire damage at the start of each of its turns. It also deals an additional 7 (2d6) fire damage when it hits with a weapon attack.

Reaction of the Lumberjacks

Activists. The Activists move quickly to defend the town, though their clubs and axes are of little use against the burning boulders and murderous rage the treants employ. They are disorganized, and unless they are marshalled somehow to order, they are likely to meet a grisly end. They can be convinced easily to turn on the Deniers and turn them over to the Treants as per Splintermaw's demands in Part 2a.

Deniers. The Deniers flat out refuse to acknowledge the attack, and continue to accuse anyone who tries to warn or help them of perfidy. Whether this is genuine ignorance or mere stubbornness is unclear in many cases, but the point is rather moot.

Apathetics. It begins to dawn on the apathetics at this point that there is no going back to their old lives. Some of them despair and try to leave town, wandering straight into the burning woods. Others pick up weapons. Some even try to hide. Many blame the characters for bringing bad luck to Loggerville,



CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

If Splintermaw can be reached in time and his terms met, the children are allowed to continue to live in the forest under the care of the evil treant.

In any event, the treants murder every adult they can find, during which process the lumberjacks bicker, argue, and jostle for power. Some spend their last moments attempting to save their valuables, and many of them are killed whilst attempting to rob each other.

Should by some miracle the treants be defeated in part 2b, Splintermaw stokes the forest fire once more and the wooden town soon burns to the ground due to the plentiful ashes carried on the wind from the burning wood. There are no survivors.

CONTINUING THE ADVENTURE

It is very difficult to continue doing anything when you are a pile of ashes and fertilizer. Consider perhaps providing nutrition for any number of plants and weeds that might care to grow on your grave. Your bones might make a good climbing frame for a vine someday, and perhaps in the far distant future when strangers come once more to Cinderwood, they will take your lifeless, scorched skull as a warning not to exploit things they have no hope of controlling.

APPENDIX A: MONSTERS & NPCs

BURNING BLIGHT

Small plant, chaotic evil

ARMOR CLASS	13 (natural armor)
HIT POINTS	4 (1d6 + 1)
SPEED	20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
6	13	13	4	8	3
(-2)	(+1)	(+1)	(-3)	(-1)	(-4)

CONDITION IMMUNITIES	Blinded, Deafened
SENSES	blindsight 60 ft. (blind beyond this), passive Perception 9
CHALLENGE	1/8 (25 XP)

FALSE APPEARANCE. While the blight remains motionless, it is indistinguishable from a burning shrub.

SET ALIGHT. The burning blight is on fire, and deals an extra 1d4 fire damage on a hit (included in the Claw attack). In addition, it takes 1d4 fire damage at the start of each of its turns.

ACTIONS

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

APPENDIX B: ITEMS

Barkwoven Band

Wondrous item, uncommon

This small band is sized for the wrist of a human child. While you wear it, you're invisible to plant creatures and elementals.



THE BEASTS WITHIN

Level 10

Vlad 'Noa' Giulvezan

Vlad 'Noa' Giulvezan is a West Australia based freelance writer and TTRPG player, having travelled there all the way from Romania. He can be found cooking, plotting stories and adventures for the fun of it, and juggling between all sorts of books, comics, and movies in an ever growing backlog.

The Beasts Within is his first published adventure and marks a return to creative pursuits after a few years spent in the corporate mires. You can find him on Twitter at [@equilleps](#).

Out in the forest, someone—or something—is taking a stand against the greed of profit seeking merchants and it's up to the adventuring party to discover their goals.

This adventure is designed for 3-4 characters level 10-15, and is optimized for four characters with an average party level (APL) of 10.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Cedarvale, once a simple fort on the edge of civilization, has become the scene of a brewing conflict between those who have always called the land their home and the policies sent forth from the distant halls of the rich and mighty. With the new mayor's arrival, the townsfolk were faced with a choice between the old ways and bending beneath the weight of new taxes and rules vigilantly

enforced by the City Guard. In a matter of months the prosperous, thriving community has been cowed into submission, thanks to the mayor's enforcers and whispered rumors of strange creatures drawing ever closer to the town walls.

Deep within the ancient forests, those few followers of the old ways who remain have sought sanctuary in forgotten groves and hidden shrines, hunted by the guards whenever they attempt to warn of what is coming. An ancient dryad has awoken, angered by dwindling offerings and the destruction wrought upon the forest and its wildlife in the name of industry. As townsfolk turned on those who have sought to warn them of the knowledge gained through lost groves and eldritch whispers, they brought forth their own doom: the dryad has cast a curse upon the forest's enemies and a boon to those it considers friends.

With the forests turned wild, the mayor has turned her attention to tomes of knowledge, seeking to confront those forces set in the path of progress. And far beyond the town walls, a party of adventurers has made its way along the forest roads, unaware of the curse threatening to smother Cedarvale and return the region to the wilds once the confrontation between an ancient dryad and an ambitious mayor draws to an end.

ADVENTURE SUMMARY

The adventure plays out events taking place over the course of a single day built around the adventuring party's journey towards and arrival at the frontier trade town of Cedarvale.

Part 1: The Old Forest Road -

Journey to town. Abandoned travel coach. Guard encounter at the town's gate. Interview with the Guard Captain.

Part 2: Cracking the Keg - Arrival at a local tavern. Investigation of odd events. Pursuit of mystery halfling.

Part 3: The Smithy - Confrontation with Ada Greenleaf. The dryad's curse. Potential arrest and confrontation.

Part 4: Old Tree's Shadow - The dryad's attack. Confrontation at the Old Tree by the mayoral estate and securing aid against the curse. Pursuit into the woods.

Part 5: The Ancient Grove - Navigating the forest to the dryad's grove. Random encounters depending on the party's choices. Final confrontation with the new mayor and dryad.

HOOKS

h*orrendous Crash.* On the road to town, the party finds a wrecked stagecoach on an overgrown portion of road. Inside, they find a messenger's remains and a sealed lockbox meant for the town's mayor. An accompanying note promises payment upon delivery.

Nice Work - Here's More. If the party delivers the box to the Guard Captain, they are offered a job as investigators for her. Their first task is to investigate what happened at the Keg.

Close the Windows and Lock the Doors. If the party decides to keep the box or not work for the Guard Captain, they are directed towards the Keg and advised to spend the night behind the town walls for their own safety. Here they learn of three mercenaries pursuing a halfling who turned them into unnatural things in the yard out back.



THE BEASTS WITHIN

PART 1: DOWN THE OLD FOREST ROAD

After several days spent on the road, the party is drawing close to the town of Cedarvale. They have grown familiar with their surroundings. Ever since taking the Old Forest Road, they have experienced unease whenever venturing off the road to forage or make camp. With only a half-day's travel between them and the safety of the city walls, the adventurers are looking forward to a warm bed and a hot meal.

The Ruined Stagecoach

Up ahead, the path grows more challenging, despite being frequently used by trade caravans heading towards the mountain passes. Roots and fallen branches have taken over parts of the path. As the party arrives at a bend in the road, they find a ruined stagecoach next to a small waystation by the roadside. The area is littered with bodies.

By the side of the road, a stagecoach lies tilted on its side, its wheels broken by a tangle of roots and ivy. Though the overgrowth appears to have been there a while, the nearby battle scene tells a different story.

Features of the Area

The Ruined Coach. Under the heavy layer of ivy, the coach is clean, freshly lacquered. Its size (and the five dead guards spread out in a defensive formation) hint at the owner's prosperity. To investigate the inside of the stagecoach, a creature must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check or get

tangled in the ivy.

Five guards wearing matching armor are spread out in a defensive perimeter. Each shows a different cause of death, ranging from deep claw marks to fragments of wooden spears. Two of them lie covered in roots, crushed in their armor.

Development

A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) or Wisdom (Survival) check reveals that no animals are near the site and any animal tracks appear to be a couple of days old.

Inside the coach, a desiccated body is pinned to its seat by a short spear. Next to the body is a coin purse, a message case, and a lockbox.

If the corpse is touched or the spear disturbed, the corpse gasps and spasms as if alive. This is the result of roots rapidly spreading and growing from the spear through the body and carriage, forming into a tree. Creatures inside the coach must succeed on a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw or be trapped in the roots.

Moments later, the coach shatters! Creatures within 20 feet of the body must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw, taking 28 (8d6) piercing damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a success. Creatures trapped in the roots automatically fail this saving throw.

The message case contains a set of letters from the mayor of Cedarvale, **Ailene Baycrest** (CN human - Appendix B), promising full payment of 400 gp upon receipt of the maps and journals—from the time of the initial settlement of Cedarvale—in a sealed lockbox. The lockbox contains the maps and journals, which show ancient ruins and paths through the woods.

As the party departs towards the town, the forest seems to darken, the branches leaning heavier over the road, the foliage growing thicker. Behind them, a loud groan and crack draws their attention back to the coach's remains in time to see the debris and bodies being dragged into the forest by the roots.

Rewards

The messenger's coin purse contains 120 gp. Five serviceable shortswords can be salvaged from the guards.

At the Gates

at the end of the road lies Cedarvale, a town surrounded by stone walls with its gates large enough to allow for a single wagon to pass at a time. As they approach, the adventurers are signaled to the side of the road by a group of guards. Above the gate is the Guard Captain's office.

On a balcony above the gates, a figure looks out over the road, then goes inside as they notice your party. Up ahead, heavily armed guards signal you to stop for inspection.

Features of the Area

The Town Gates. Massive wooden doors are open during the day with guards checking travelers going in and out of Cedarvale. The guards are tense, ready to fight over the smallest slight. Having seen the forest move, they are suspicious of any druids, rangers, or nature clerics until assured that they are simple travelers. If necessary, the guards are convinced with a successful DC 10 Charisma (Persuasion) check. On a failure, the guards warn the party that news travels fast in town and there is no tolerance for troublemakers.

The Captain's Office. Overlooking the road, the captain's office is accessed from a staircase built into the gate tower. Inside, the setting is spartan—only a desk, a small bar, and weapon maintenance station. The sole concession to its owner's comfort is a large plush armchair by the fireplace.

Creatures

Six guards (treat as **knights**) and Guard Captain Guyenne (CN human - see Appendix B)

Tactics

If provoked, four guards engage in melee while two stay at range, focusing their crossbow attacks on obvious spellcasters while raising the alarm. Guyenne uses her heavy crossbow from her office balcony.

Development

The guards ask if the party has met any couriers on the road to town. If the party surrenders the lockbox, they are promptly taken to Guyenne. She asks the party if they met any obstacles on their way to town, offering a summary version of the challenges that her guards have been dealing with: sudden animal attacks, well kept paths becoming overgrown in a single night, hunters disappearing. As new arrivals to town, Guyenne offers the party the job of seeking out leads around town and investigating strange happenings. She notes the townsfolk are much likelier to talk to outsiders, but doesn't offer details on why this is the case. She provides payment for the lockbox regardless of whether the party accepts her offer.

If the party denies finding the courier through a DC 18 Charisma (Deception) check or refuses future employment, they are advised to spend the night at the Keg and resume travels during daytime. On a failed check, Guyenne shares that she finds it suspicious that the party would miss a coach on the sole road to town but that she has more pressing matters to deal with. However, her door remains open for anyone looking to make an honest wage, if the party recalls anything useful.

Rewards

Lockbox delivery reward (400 gp) and compensation for surrendering equipment taken from the stagecoach guards (100 gp). Guard tokens, if accepting Guyenne's commission.

PART 2: CRACKING THE KEG

The party's arrival at the local tavern does not go unnoticed with all conversation pausing once they step inside the Keg. Bertrand (CG dwarf **berserker**), the innkeeper, scolds his regulars and invites the party inside, keen for their custom.

The Keg

In the cozy tavern, conversations dry up whenever you pass a table. While Bertrand leads you to the bar, a young half-orc palms some coppers then helps two children sneak out the back of the tavern.

Features of the Area

The Keg Common Room. A central fire pit keeps the Keg warm with regulars drinking and eating while they swap rumors on what happened in the tavern's storage yard out back.

The Backyard. Accessible either by paying the young half-orc his fee or

asking for access as part of a Guard investigation. If the party did not accept Guyenne's offer, a successful DC 15 Charisma (Deception) check can convince him that the party deserves free access.

Development

Bertrand is an elderly dwarf, long past his prime. He admits that with caravans disappearing on their way through the woods, he doesn't see a future for Cedarvale, and the mayor's ambition means complaints fall on deaf ears. He shares that he was not surprised when mercenaries were charged with hunting alleged occultists, the moniker officially used for all druids. Offhandedly, he mentions the outcome of a scuffle that took place in the alleyway behind the Keg between some mercenaries and a halfling occultist—the mercenaries were turned into trees.

Out back, a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals that bricks have crumbled to clay and wooden planks have sprouted small branches. The gate blocking the alley doesn't look forced; was it inside help?

Getting Bertrand to Talk. A successful DC 18 Charisma (Persuasion or Deception) check persuades Bertrand that the party is not working for the guards. Alternately, a successful DC 15 Charisma (Intimidation) check frightens Bertrand. Either way, he reveals the halfling's identity as Ada Greenleaf and her destination, as well as his part in her escape, in a bid to avoid trouble for his inn and patrons. Bertrand assures the party that he has known Ada from childhood and she loves Cedarvale as much as any other settler. He urges the party to consider that there could be more at play than what the mayor or Guyenne may have shared.

PART 3: THE SMITHY

The smithy is a large walled-in yard near the mayor's estate that doubles as living and trade space for Kenneth Greenleaf (CG halfling **noble**). Around the property, several out of season trees appear to be in bloom. There are more warped buildings and items, the wood appearing to bloom despite having been processed.

Features of the Area

The Smithy Yard. The yard is mostly dark with a few smiths still working in the cooler evening. If the smiths are convinced that the party is there to help Kenneth and his daughter Ada (CN halfling druid - see appendix B) instead of simply enforcing Guyenne's will, they lead the adventurers to the old mayor. If you must use a check, a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion or Deception) check sees the party through. Otherwise, the smiths attempt to buy time for Ada to flee.

Development

When faced with the party, Ada and Kenneth share her plan and attempt to convince the party of her intentions.

The new mayor's efforts to further tame the forest have caused unrest and broken the agreements that led to Cedarvale's past prosperity. Without the counsel of her older peers, Dreama, the lone dryad acting as Keeper of the Forest, has decided that she must take extreme actions to protect her charge.

Ada intends to awaken the dormant dryad bound to the Old Silver Tree and obtain her aid in preventing Dreama from completing her curse-empowered attack on Cedarvale.

Creatures

Six smiths (treat as **guards**), one halfling **noble**, and Ada Greenleaf (see Appendix)

Tactics

If attacked, the smiths and Kenneth engage the party in combat to buy time for Ada to escape. Ada shapeshifts and leaves by the fastest route possible. Once she is gone; Kenneth calls the surrender. If cornered, Ada will fight by casting *shillelagh* on her quarterstaff.

Rewards

Kenneth offers, or surrenders, four *potions of healing* and 400 gp.

PART 4: OLD TREE'S SHADOW

Depending on the outcome of Part 3, the party is either escorting or pursuing Ada to the Old Tree a few streets away from her father's estate. Ahead, a shriveled silver tree trunk stands in front of the mayor's manor—the dormant dryad's tree.

The night does not prove peaceful. Following a thundering sound, whole sections of the town walls collapse, their stone no match for the roots breaching them. As wild attackers storm the streets and guards rush to meet them, your party moves unnoticed through the chaos.



Features of the Area

The **Old Tree**. Found in the open plaza before the mayor's manor, the tree is not unguarded. Guyenne is at the site with several messengers and guards as she marshals the town's defenses to hold off the onslaught. The Guard captain is distrustful of druids (considering recent events) and is fully intent on stopping any scheme that might contradict the mayor's orders. Ada rushes to the tree to commune with it.

Creatures

Four **guards**, Guyenne (CN human - Appendix B), and Ada (CN halfling - Appendix B)

Negotiating Peace

a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion or Deception) check convinces Guyenne that Ada means well and is looking to save the town, just like her and the guards. The tree offers an acorn to act as a message to Dreama, a call for a truce.

Failing to convince Guyenne to stand down or to deceive her into allowing Ada to reach the tree with a DC 18 Charisma (Deception) check causes Guyenne to use a flask of *alchemist's fire* to set the tree ablaze.

If the party intends to prevent Ada from communing with the dormant dryad's tree and warns Guyenne of the druid's intention without attempting to deescalate the situation, Guyenne will torch the tree. If the tree is set ablaze, Ada sacrifices herself to secure the acorn. The tree is consumed by the fire, a strong gust of wind scatters the ashes and reveals a translucent silver acorn containing a small

wisp. Anyone succeeding a DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check hears the wisp urge them to take it to the dryad's grove so they may calm her.

If the party sides with Guyenne, she tasks them with joining the mayor in the attack on Dreama's grove. If the party sides with Ada and they kill Guyenne, they learn from a letter retrieved from Guyenne that the mayor led an expedition to torch the grove earlier that evening. Ada begs the party for their help.

Tactics

if combat breaks out, Ada stays out of combat to commune with the tree. If Guyenne can't be persuaded to aid, the guards engage the party while Guyenne first sets the tree alight, then engages the rest of the party in melee.

Rewards

The guards have a total of 120 gp. Guyenne has 100 pp, two potions of healing, a +2 greatsword, a +2 shortbow, a ring of protection, and two flasks of *alchemist's fire*.

DIFFICULTY ADJUSTMENTS

For a more challenging combat encounter, add one veteran guard - **gladiator**. For a party of level 12+, consider adding one **mage**. For easier combat, the guards can be replaced by one **knight**.

PART 5: THE ANCIENT GROVE

The final area allows the party to choose different paths based on their previous choices. A few options are charted below in the development section.

Features of the Area

Forest Paths. Traversing the forest is done by either following Ada's guidance, trying to use Guyenne's map, or the retrieved acorn's strange compass-like glow.

While the adventurers travel, trees shift to block their progress. A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check ensures the party successfully navigates the forest. On a failure, the party is turned around by the shifting woods; each party member must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or take a level of exhaustion.

Dreama's Grove. The grove is located in a clearing, a space built around a massive tree that has grown through the remains of an ancient temple. Nearby trees and the charred remains of a treant show traces of damage from *alchemist's fire*.

The grove is littered with burned trees and the remains of druids and guards, some still locked in combat where they fell. On the steps of an ancient temple's ruin, the two rulers confront each other.

Creatures

Dreama (CN dryad - Appendix B), **Ailene Baycrest** (CN human - Appendix B), 2 **fire elementals**, and 1 **treant**

Tactics

There are many possible combat variants based on the party's choices. If the party has sided with Dreama, Ailene sends the elementals to fight them while focusing on the dryad. If the party sides with Ailene, they are faced with a treant that the dryad uses as a distraction.

Development

Guyenne Favored. This option is open if the party has previously sided with Guyenne, and the party is engaging in combat on behalf of Ailene. The goal is to finish off the dryad threat.

Ada Favored. This option is open if the party has sided with Ada and allows for the best outcome if Guyenne was persuaded to assist Ada after the attack on the town. A successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check convinces Ailene and Dreama to make peace. If Guyenne won't vouch for the party or Ada has died without the acorn being brought to the grove, the DC increases to 20. If all checks fail and combat begins, Guyenne sides with Ada and the party.

Neutral. If Guyenne and Ada have both been killed, it's still possible to broker a truce with a successful DC 18 Charisma (Persuasion) check. Dreama retreats deeper into the woods to tend to the acorn passed on by the Old Tree and Ailene goes back to rebuild what she can from the burnt forest and ruined town.

Rewards

The mayor's reward consists of 500 gp, a *brazier of commanding fire elementals*, gems worth a total of 500 gp, a +2 rapier, a +2 shortbow.

The dryad's reward consists of ancient coins worth 1500 gp, gems worth 250 gp, a *staff of healing*, a *ring of free action*, a *ring of protection*, and a *ring of the ram*

DIFFICULTY ADJUSTMENTS

Adjust the quantity of fire elementals or replace the treant with a minimum of four **awakened trees**.

CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

Guyenne *Favored*. In a scenario where the party fully supported the guards against the forest, Dreama and her forces are killed. The dryad's curse overwhelms the city, which collapses, most townsfolk transformed into forest creatures. Without dryads or druids to keep Cedarvale and the woods in check, Ailene uses her remaining forces to expand into the wilderness, despite frequent attacks from previously dormant creatures.

Ada Favored. In the most positive outcome, a new balance is reached. Ailene takes Guyenne's advice and takes a stand against merchant interests. If both Persuasion checks fail, the party must slay either Ailene or Dreama with the survivor taking over the fallen leader's role.

Neutral Outcome. Based on the party's choices and who is left standing, it's possible to reach a neutral result in which the flora and fauna around Cedarvale

becomes unwelcoming, rapid growth frustrating efforts to continue settlement. This is dependent on at least the acorn being delivered successfully to Dreama.

CONTINUING THE ADVENTURE

Possible complications depend on the outcome obtained by the party. The party can assist with resolving those consequences enduring beyond the battle between the mayor and the dryad, such as the recovery of an idol or item from treasure hunters (as a gesture of good will) or putting down an ancient cursed creature or ghost that can no longer be controlled. A final option could be for the party to leave the area, seeking their fortune elsewhere or to distance themselves from the ruined town's cautionary tale.

APPENDIX A: DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Dreama. Youngest of three sisters, Dreama has acted as the forest's keeper and voice in dealings with the druids and settlers of Cedarvale. Bound to her heart tree within a hidden grove, Dreama was awoken from her sleep by the pain of those who sought sanctuary in the wilds and the cries of those she had once sworn to protect. Her fury increased when she could not reach her sister's heart tree in Cedarvale. With her sister's fate uncertain, and shown that the people of Cedarvale cannot be trusted to respect the old pacts, Dreama has taken steps to ensure all debts inflicted upon the forest are repaid.

Kenneth Greenleaf. In the wake of his replacement, Cedarvale's former mayor has managed to retain some of his influence, given his status as a prosperous blacksmith. Since his forced retirement, Kenneth has retreated to his workshop, seen only by his apprentices and fellow tradesfolk. The gates to his small compound are open to all those seeking aid or shelter from the mayor's hunts for suspect occultists. While he cannot impede the guards' efforts, Kenneth and his crew do their best to help people escape the confines of the city and aid those being crushed by the new levies.

Ada Greenleaf. Since childhood, Ada has known that the life of a mayor's daughter was not what she wanted for herself. Faced with the prospect of a dreary existence surrounded by merchants and high society, Ada stole away in the night and followed her mother's footsteps, choosing to join a druid circle. Thanks to her cheery personality, along with her love of stories and the wilds, Ada quickly rose through the circle's

ranks, becoming a member of the grove guardians.

Bertrand Stonecrag. An original settler of Cedarvale and retired adventurer, Bertrand has kept himself out of the settlement's politics in the years since founding The Keg. Recently, the kindly innkeeper has taken to speaking out against the mayor's edicts, both out of fondness for the Greenleaf family and because he sees the increased disregard for nature as no good.

Guyenne. Guyenne found herself drawn to the sea until her path met that of Ailene Baycrest. The former mercenary has followed her once-captain across the seas and through the halls of politics, all the way to Ailene's new post as Cedarvale's mayor. Now, Guyenne finds herself torn between her duties as Guard Captain and her dislike of the changes she has seen sweep through Cedarvale—and its new mayor.

Ailene Baycrest. A former privateer can always count on the disdain of merchants and nobles alike, yet this did not prove an obstacle to Ailene. Having secured her appointment as mayor, she turned her determination and focus towards increasing the profits brought in from the far-flung outpost, as expected by her patrons. Hindered by the townsfolk's superstitions and rumors of strange omens and disappearances, Ailene turned her attention towards silencing the dryad spoken of in hushed whispers, proving that progress cannot be delayed.

APPENDIX B: MONSTERS & NPCs

ADA GREENLEAF, FOREST DRUID

Small humanoid (halfling), chaotic neutral

ARMOR CLASS 16 (hide armour +2)

HIT POINTS 98 (13d6 + 52)

SPEED 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10	14	18	10	20	14
(+0)	(+2)	(+4)	(+0)	(+5)	(+2)

SAVING THROWS Int +4, Wis +9

SKILLS Animal Handling +9, Medicine +9, Nature +4, Perception +9, Persuasion +6

SENSES passive Perception 19

CHALLENGE 10 (5900 XP)

LANGUAGES Common, Druidic, Elvish

SPELLCASTING. Ada is a 10th level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 17, +9 to hit with spell attacks). Ada has the following druid spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): druidcraft, mending, poison spray, shillelagh

1st Level (4 Slots): animal friendship, cure wounds, entangle, healing word, thunderwave

2nd Level (3 slots): heat metal, hold person, lesser restoration, moonbeam

3rd Level (3 slot): call lightning, dispel magic, meld into stone

4th Level (3 slot): hallucinatory terrain, polymorph, stoneskin

5th Level (2 slot): greater restoration, mass cure wounds

ACTIONS

STAFF. Melee Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage.

STAFF (SHILLELAGH). Melee Weapon Attack: +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d6 +5) bludgeoning damage.

CHANGE SHAPE (2/DAY). Ada polymorphs into a beast or elemental with a challenge rating of 6 or less, and can remain in this form for up to 9 hours. Ada can choose whether her equipment falls to the ground, melds with her new form, or is worn by her new form. Ada reverts to her true form if she dies or falls unconscious, or by using a bonus action on her turn.

In the new form, Ada retains her ability to speak, but her AC, movement modes, Strength, and Dexterity are replaced by those of her new form, and it gains any special senses, proficiencies, traits, actions, and reactions (except class features, legendary actions, and lair actions), that the new form has but Ada lacks. Ada can cast her spells with verbal or somatic components in her new form.

The new form's attacks count as magical for the purpose of overcoming resistances and immunity to non-magical attacks.

DREAMA, KEEPER OF THE FOREST

Medium fey (dryad), chaotic neutral

ARMOR CLASS 16 (natural armor)
HIT POINTS 141 (20d8 + 40)
SPEED 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12	19	14	19	20	21
(+1)	(+4)	(+2)	(+4)	(+5)	(+5)

SAVING THROWS Con +6, Int +8, Wis +9
SKILLS Animal Handling +9, Arcana +8, Nature +8, Perception +9
SENSES passive Perception 19
LANGUAGES Common, Sylvan
CHALLENGE 9 (5000 XP)

INNATE SPELLCASTING. Dreama's innate spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 17). She can innately cast the following spells, without material components:

At will: druidcraft
4/day: dispel magic, entangle, plant growth, spike growth
2/day: moonbeam, call lightning, blight

MAGIC RESISTANCE. Dreama has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

ACTIONS

MULTIATTACK. Dreama makes three attacks using her poison ivy staff, her longbow, or a combination both.

POISON IVY STAFF. Melee Weapon Attack: +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.
Hit: 12 (2d6 + 5) bludgeoning damage. If the target is a creature, they must succeed a DC 15 Constitution save or suffer an extra 7 (2d6) poison damage.

LONGBOW. Ranged Weapon Attack: +8 to hit, range 150/600, one target.
Hit: 8 (1d8 +4) piercing damage. If the target is a creature, they must succeed a DC 15 Constitution save or suffer an extra 7 (2d6) poison damage.

FOREST KIN (1/DAY). Dreama is linked to the forest, able to communicate with plants and animals. She can ask for aid in the form of two Awakened trees or a forest creature CR 6 or less to intervene in her favour.

AILENE BAYCREST, TOWN MAYOR

Medium humanoid (human), chaotic neutral

ARMOR CLASS 18 (chainmail +2)
HIT POINTS 128 (18d8 + 36)
SPEED 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16	20	14	10	10	14
(+3)	(+5)	(+2)	(+0)	(+0)	(+2)

SAVING THROWS Str +7, Dex +9, Con +6
SKILLS Intimidation +6, Persuasion +6, Perception +4
SENSES passive Perception 14
CHALLENGE 9 (5000 XP)
LANGUAGES Common, Elvish

SECOND WIND (RECHARGES AFTER SHORT OR LONG REST).

Ailene regains 20 hit points as a bonus action.

INDOMITABLE (2/DAY). Guyenne rerolls a saving throw that she fails. She must use the new roll.

ABLAZE. Ailene prepares for fights by igniting her weapons and utilizing special ammunition for her crossbow.

ACTIONS

MULTIATTACK. Ailene makes three attacks with her greatsword or her crossbow. She ignores the crossbow's Loading property.

BLAZING RAPIER. Melee Weapon Attack: +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8 + 5) slashing damage plus 7 (2d6) fire damage.

FIREBOLT CROSSBOW. Ranged Weapon Attack: +6 to hit, range 100/400, one target. *Hit:* 10 (1d10 + 5) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) fire damage.

VICIOUS STRIKE (3/DAY). When Ailene hits an opponent with a rapier attack, she can deal an additional 9 (2d8) necrotic damage and regain that many hit points.

GUYENNE, GUARD CAPTAIN

Medium humanoid (human), chaotic neutral

ARMOR CLASS 18 (chainmail, shield)
HIT POINTS 128 (18d8 + 36)
SPEED 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18	14	14	10	10	12
(+4)	(+2)	(+2)	(+0)	(+0)	(+1)

SAVING THROWS Str +8, Con +6
SKILLS Athletics +8, Perception +6
SENSES passive Perception 16
CHALLENGE 9 (5000 XP)
LANGUAGES Common

SECOND WIND (RECHARGES AFTER SHORT OR LONG REST). Guyenne can regain 20 hit points as a bonus action.

INDOMITABLE (2/DAY). Guyenne rerolls a saving throw that she fails. She must use the new roll.

ACTIONS

MULTIATTACK. Guyenne makes three attacks with her greatsword or her crossbow.

GREATSWORD. Melee Weapon Attack: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) slashing damage plus 7 (2d6) slashing damage if Guyenne has more than half her hit points remaining.

CROSSBOW. Ranged Weapon Attack: +6 to hit, range 100/400, one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d10 + 3) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) piercing damage if Guyenne has more than half her hit points remaining.

DISARM. As a bonus action, Guyenne locks her opponent's weapon in her grip and attempts to disarm them. The target needs to pass a DC 16 Strength (Athletics) check to free themselves and keep hold of their weapon. On a failure, they must give up control of their weapon or be grappled.

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