

LEVEL 1 ADVENTURE MODULE

FIFTH EDITION FANTASY #12

THE FORGOTTEN HIVE

BY BOB BRINKMAN



THE FORGOTTEN HIVE

BY BOB BRIKMAN • COVER ARTIST: DAVID GRIFFITH

EDITOR: RICHARD JANSEN-PARKES

ART DIRECTOR: JEREMY MOHLER • INTERIOR ARTIST: CHRIS YARBROUGH

CARTOGRAPHER: KEITH CURTIS • INTERIOR LAYOUT: JAMIE WALLIS

DEVELOPER: CHRIS DOYLE • PLAYTESTERS: (THE DUNGEON GAMES CREW) TIMOTHY "DICK TIM" BATES, BILLY JOHNSON, SARA MANGAN, AMY PETRIK, JOHN PETRIK, LARA SERRA, AND BLAKE SUTER



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THE FORGOTTEN HIVE

By Bob Brinkman

The *Forgotten Hive* is an adventure designed for use with the 5th edition of the first fantasy role playing game. It is intended for four to six characters of 1st level. A variety of character classes is suggested for exploring the subterranean catacombs and facing the threats they contain.

The adventure can be dropped into virtually any frontier locale, with the characters being given word about recent events from locals or perhaps having been drawn to the location to fight in the conflict that has now suddenly ended.

BACKGROUND

Not too long ago, goblinoid forces from a rival kingdom began laying siege to a border keep. The attackers dispatched sappers with orders to burrow through the ground and breach the walls of the keep, but to the shock of the goblins a large portion of the outer wall collapsed into the ground much earlier than expected, crushing them. The sappers, it seemed, had unwittingly burrowed under an already existing cavern system and had no idea of how rapidly things would collapse.

The battle was immediately joined and the defenders carried the day, but with the ruined keep providing little to no protection the human forces retreated and now the it lies abandoned. This leaves the newly exposed caverns ripe for exploration.

Meanwhile, beneath the earth...

It has long been known that the most feared and reviled enemy of elvenkind was driven below the surface, far away from the light of the sun. However, while that statement may be true, the drow were not actually the most feared or most evil of elven foes. Indeed, like other elves, the drow continue to live in harmony with their subterranean environment even while waging war on the lands above.

There was another race, elven in appearance yet more closely related to plant-based myconids, which posed a greater threat. These malltod were the true threat - true underground dwellers from history unwritten and a pestilent blight on the world above. Unrestrained they would lay vast areas to waste until, at long last, elven-kind waged war to wipe their horrific kin from existence. They very nearly succeeded.

Unbeknownst to the world above, several malltod colony hives survived, sealed away from the surface like traps waiting to be sprung. Like ordinary fungi, the malltod can lay dormant for hundreds of years before awakening and taking root when the conditions are right. Now, one such hive has been accidentally breached and an ancient evil begins to awaken.

While the malltod caverns may at first appear to be uninhabited by intelligent humanoids, the adventurers will gradually come to realize that the caverns harbor a grave threat that grows stronger by the day. The malltod are waking up and they – and their servants – are hungry.

Like a plague of locusts, their numbers are beginning to grow and, should the hive become strong enough, then torrents of malltod will flood onto the surface and devour all in their path.

MALLTOD HISTORY

The war against the malltod took place over a millennium ago, and much of the history of that time has been lost or forgotten by all but the most serious of sages.

When they first encounter evidence of the malltod, elf characters succeeding on a DC 20 Intelligence (History) check have heard of the species and may recalls scraps of information about when the GM deems it appropriate (such as first contact with them).

Such information should be very limited but certainly could include their locust-like propensity for swarming through an area and devouring all plant-life.

OVERVIEW

As they are probably unaware of the danger they are in, the party must piece together the evidence before them, sort legend from fact and act swiftly lest the blight of the malltod be unleashed.

In addition, there are cannibalistic kobolds - the last of a dwindling tribe, long trapped beneath the earth - who pose additional danger. There is no truly 'safe' haven for the characters within the confines of the caverns; they are hostile invaders in a place that was never meant for them. However, the malltod must be stopped, for if even one escapes, the dreadful chain starts anew.

The adventure is ripe with opportunities for expansion and has several potential threats that can return to bedevil the characters later. Ambitious GMs can allow the party to delve into the sappers' tunnels below, or explore the ruined keep above. There even exists the possibility of reuniting the cannibal kobolds with their long-lost kinsmen (to probably horrific result).

ADVENTURE HOOKS

The GM can choose where the adventurers first hear of the caverns, although it is recommended that the ruined keep be remote as this allows the travel to build suspense. The chance to be the first to explore a previously unknown cavern system in a search for riches should appeal to most adventurers just starting to try to make a name for themselves.

Beyond the obvious curiosity, there are a number of secondary reasons for the heroes to journey to the caverns. Some suggested adventure hooks are:

Escape. While escaping from a goblin war band, the characters stumble across the entrance to the cave system lying in the shadow of the ruined keep. The caves offer potential safety by providing the ability to assume a defensive posture against the goblins - so long as the caves are cleared out.

Quest. Rumors of the great treasures that must lie within such an ancient and hidden cavern system reach the ears of the characters. Certainly, if the caves were unknown and sealed away for so long they must have been intentionally hidden to protect some great secret. Perhaps rumors of the imperial burial chamber are real!

War. The siege of the keep was only one facet of ongoing hostilities. Characters may be working for either side of the conflict, have been conscripted into the military, or even be seeking to escape it as refugees. There are several military missions that could justify the characters being in the area, such as:

- Scouting out the crumbling remains of the keep in search of abandoned supplies.
- Setting up an ambush in hopes of disrupting goblin raiding parties.
- Finding maps of troop movements said to have been with the sappers.
- Exploring the sappers' tunnels for a concealed route behind enemy lines.

UNCHARTED AREAS

There are several areas included on maps and mentioned in the adventure that are deliberately omitted from the adventure text. These areas are not essential to the adventure itself but are included here to spark the imagination of the GM and allow them to expand into those areas as they wish.

BEGINNING THE ADVENTURE

The adventure does not delve into the various ways the characters could find themselves en route to the caves but instead focuses on what follows. Begin by reading the following text aloud.

The journey to the caves has been a long one. A week from the closest outpost of civilization, the now ruined keep lays along the disputed border with the goblin lands to the west. It has been a month since the keep quite literally fell and things in the area have quieted down. Troops have moved on to their next skirmishes and things seem safe enough for exploration into the newly revealed cave system.

Travel to the area, and the amount of time required, is left to the GM's discretion, although the journey should take at least one week if departing from a city or nearby village.

GENERAL FEATURES

Conditions. The cave system has long been sealed away, with only a small vent opening to the surface. While the air is safe to breathe, it is dank and foul smelling. The

atmosphere is warm and oppressively moist – most likely uncomfortable, but not dangerous. Emphasis should be given to the miserable conditions.

Walls. Unless otherwise noted, the walls of the caverns are naturally formed from limestone.

Passages. Unless otherwise noted, passages in the cave system are only 5 feet wide and tall. The tunnels are cramped and creatures more than 5 feet tall make attack rolls and dexterity saving throws with disadvantage while in them.. Certain foes, such as the kobolds, take advantage of this.

Chambers. In contrast to the passages, unless otherwise noted, the ceilings of the chambers in the cave system are 20 feet high.

Light. Unless otherwise noted, the interior of the cave system is unlit.

Resting During the Adventure. While it is possible to take both a short or long rest within the cave system, the occupants of the caves are not idle. Taking a short rest south of the river (area 5) incurs no encounter, while those taking a long rest have a 1 in 10 chance of encountering a **swarm of honey wasps**.

SWARM OF HONEY WASPS

Medium swarm of tiny beasts, unaligned

AC: 12 (natural armor)

Hit Points: 22 (5d8)

Speed: 5 ft., fly 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
2 (-4)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)	1 (-5)	7 (-2)	1 (-5)

Damage Resistances: bludgeoning, piercing, slashing

Condition Immunities: charmed, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, prone, restrained, stunned

Senses: blindsight 10 ft., passive Perception 8

Languages: -

Challenge: 1/2 (100 XP)

Fire Susceptibility: The swarm takes an additional point of damage from all fire attacks.

Swarm: The swarm can occupy another creature’s space and vice versa, and the swarm can move through any opening large enough for a Tiny beast. The swarm cannot regain hit points nor gain temporary hit points.

ACTIONS

Sting: *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 0 ft., one creature in the swarm’s space. *Hit:* 10 (4d4) piercing damage and the target must make a DC 10 Constitution save or be incapacitated for 1 (1d4-1) round. If the swarm has half of its hit points or fewer, the sting does 5 (2d4) piercing damage.

These thumb-sized wasps are devoid of color, even their faceted eyes are a sickly ivory color, matching their skin. Their buzzing can be felt as much as heard, and can carry for distances of over half a mile.

Taking a long rest once having crossed the river (area 5) does change the final encounter (in area 15) by allowing a malltod warrior to replace the malltod drones. In addition, once across the river, any party attempting a short rest have a 1 in 6 chance (increasing to 1 in 2 for a long rest) of encountering three **malltod drones**.

MALLTOD DRONE (BLIGHT ELF) (3)

Medium plant, chaotic evil

AC: 12

Hit Points: 14 (4d6)

Speed: 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	6 (-2)

Skills: Perception +4, Stealth +6

Condition Immunities: blind

Senses: blindsight 150 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages: Undercommon, Elvish

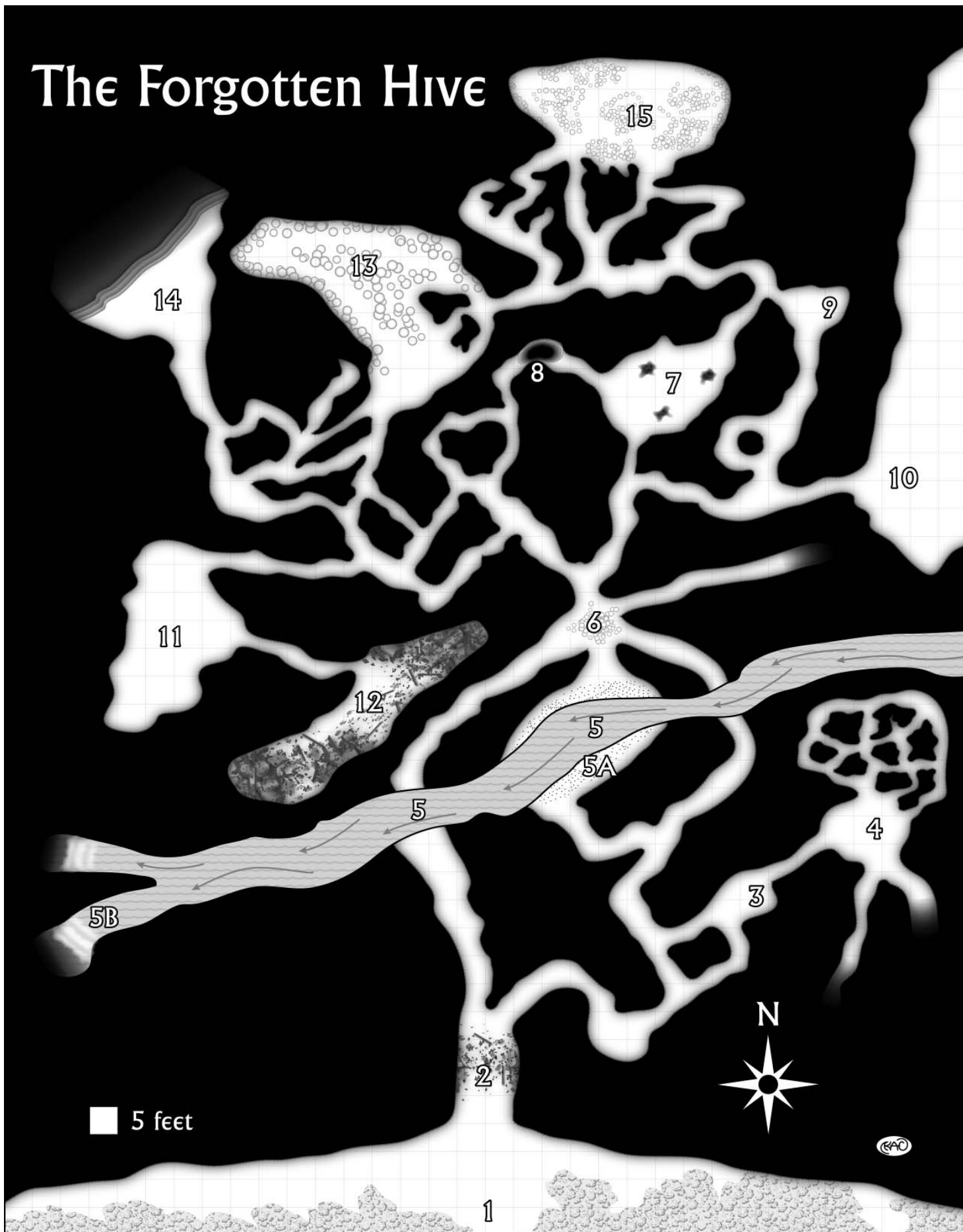
Challenge: 1/4 (50 XP)

Innate Spellcasting: The malltod drone’s innate spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 12, +4 to hit with spell attacks). It can innately cast *ray of sickness* once per day, requiring no material components.

ACTIONS

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

The Forgotten Hive



Swarm Breath (Recharge 6): The malltod drone exhales a 15-foot cone of biting insects. Each creature in the area must make a DC 10 Dexterity save, taking 5 (2d4) damage on a failure, or half as much damage on a success.

With a smooth, eyeless face and lungs crawling with vermin, the malltod drone is a horrifying sight. Wearing nothing over their alien and sexless forms, these

seemingly elven creatures carry no weapons, instead using their jagged, claw-like nails and the swarms of biting gnats that infest them to battle their prey. The smallest of mature malltod, these creatures stand just over 5 feet tall.

Adventurers can take a short or long rest outside the caves without incident.

WILDERNESS ENCOUNTERS

With a lengthy journey of a week or more through the wilderness, there is the threat of stumbling on one of the many scattered goblin warbands in the area. There is a 1 in 8 chance of randomly encountering a goblin war band once per day and a 1 in 10 chance in the evening - increased to 1 in 6 if the party is using a fire to light their camp. It is important to note that not all the encounters are immediately hostile; some may be curious or even friendly to the party.

GOBLIN SOLDIER (4)

Small humanoid (goblin), neutral evil

AC: 15 (leather armor, shield)

Hit Points: 9 (2d6+2)

Speed: 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	8 (-1)	8 (-1)

Skills: Stealth +6

Senses: darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9

Languages: Common, Goblin

Challenge: 1/4 (50 XP)

Nimble Escape: The goblin soldier can take the Disengage or Hide action as a bonus action on each of its turns.

Military Training: The goblin soldier has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the goblin's allies is within 5 ft. of the creature.

ACTIONS

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

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

GOBLIN SERGEANT (1)

Small humanoid (goblin), neutral evil

AC: 17 (chain shirt, shield)

Hit Points: 27 (6d6+6)

Speed: 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	8 (-1)	10 (+0)

Skills: Stealth +6

Senses: darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9

Languages: Common, Goblin

Challenge: 1 (200 XP)

Nimble Escape: The goblin sergeant can take the Disengage or Hide action as a bonus action on each of its turns.

Military Training: The goblin sergeant has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the goblin sergeant's allies is within 5 ft. of the creature.

ACTIONS

Multiattack: The goblin sergeant makes two attacks with its scimitar. It has disadvantage on the second attack.

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

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

AWARDING EXPERIENCE

If the characters manage to kill the war band, divide 400 XP among them.

AREA 1 – APPROACHING THE CAVES

Making your way through the woods towards the site of the newly uncovered caves, you nearly stumble over what first appeared to be several small piles of white flowers. A second glance reveals that they are parts of a once elegant dryad, bloated with venom and torn asunder. The fluttering is not flowers, but thumb-sized albino bees or perhaps wasps that are ripping chunks from the corpse and flying to the west.

The honey wasps that the characters have stumbled upon are recently emerged from the central hive and are just beginning to establish themselves in the wilds. While the honey wasps are easily dispatched, if left unchecked their spread could have terrible and long-lasting consequences for the region. Following the visible trail of honey wasps (either by following the line of flying insects or by pinpointing the origin of the buzzing) back to their hive is easy, requiring a successful DC 10 Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Survival) check.

Should the adventurers follow the trail to the hive, read the following:



Tracking the grisly insects you hear and feel an ominous buzzing, growing ever louder. Reaching the edge of a small clearing, you find the beginnings of a hive emerging from the trunk of a tree. The tree itself is showing signs of disease and rot while the hive glistens and drips a viscous pink substance that appears akin to honey mixed with fragments of meat.

If the characters enter the clearing, the **swarm of honey wasps** perceives them as a threat and immediately attacks, and continues to do so until destroyed. As tenacious as killer bees, the honey wasps do not let up until the threat is dead, or they are. Left behind in the hive is the swarm's queen, too precious to risk in combat. Should the tree (and subsequently the hive and queen) not be destroyed the queen births new generations.

SWARM OF HONEY WASPS

Medium swarm of tiny beasts, unaligned

AC: 12 (natural armor)

Hit Points: 22 (5d8)

Speed: 5 ft., fly 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
2 (-4)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)	1 (-5)	7 (-2)	1 (-5)

Damage Resistances: bludgeoning, piercing, slashing

Condition Immunities: charmed, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, prone, restrained, stunned

Senses: blindsight 10 ft., passive Perception 8

Languages: -

Challenge: 1/2 (100 XP)

Fire Susceptibility: The swarm takes an additional point of damage from all fire attacks.

Swarm: The swarm can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the swarm can move through any opening large enough for a Tiny beast. The swarm cannot regain hit points nor gain temporary hit points.

ACTIONS

Sting: *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 0 ft., one creature in the swarm's space. *Hit:* 10 (4d4) piercing damage and the target must make a DC 10 Constitution save or be incapacitated for 1 (1d4-1) round. If the swarm has half of its hit points or fewer, the sting does 5 (2d4) piercing damage.

These thumb-sized wasps are devoid of color, even

their faceted eyes are a sickly ivory color, matching their skin. Their buzzing can be felt as much as heard, and can carry for distances of over half a mile.

Despite - or perhaps because of - the unsavory origin of the honey of these creatures, it is highly prized as a delicacy among the hierarchy of various evil creatures as much for its flavor as its magical effects. If a buyer can be found the *bloodhoney* (see appendix A) present in the tree, roughly two doses, can be sold for 150 gp each.

AWARDING EXPERIENCE

If the characters manage to kill the honey wasps, divide 100 XP among them. If the characters destroy the hive and queen, divide an additional 50 XP among them.

AREA 2 – THE CAVE ENTRANCE

At last you approach the remnants of the border keep. Even at a distance you can see where the outer wall collapsed when the sappers undermined both the wall and the previously undiscovered cave system. You can hear what must certainly be the wind howling through the piled rubble, though in some dark part of your imagination it sounds like the screams of the restless dead. The entrance to the cave itself is followed by what looks to be a long tunnel filled with heaps of unstable-looking debris and, above the sound of the wind, the scraping noise of stone on stone.

As the characters may surmise, the pathway into the caves is fraught with the danger of falling rocks and debris. There are several ways to safely navigate this treacherous path.

A DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check allows a character to safely pick a route the party can take without disturbing the stones. Rangers with favored terrain (Underdark) receive their Natural Explorer bonus to this check.

A DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check along the route clearly identifies the weak points that would trigger the rock fall, allowing the party to pick out a safe path.

A DC 12 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check allows an individual character to spring, vault, crawl, and climb their way through the dangerous area.

Failure of any of the above rolls results in a mishap and a collapse. The character attempting the check must make a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw, taking (1d4) bludgeoning damage on a failed save, or half as much on a successful one.

AWARDING EXPERIENCE

Should a single character find a safe path through for the entire party, award them 100 XP. Individual characters that make their own way in and set off no rock-falls should be awarded 25 XP.

AREA 3 – SENTRY POINT

The air of the curving cave passageway begins to take on a strange odor - an animalistic smell, foul and heavy. The passage opens into a chamber, devoid of light, yet the sounds of furtive movement and a strange, soft clicking can be heard from within.

Three **cannibal kobold** sentries have hidden themselves behind a shelf of stone, concealed from sight. They attack if the party moves to within 20 feet of the sentries, or in any way discovers the presence of the kobolds. Despite hoping to not engage unless needed, these sentries fight to the death to protect the remnants of their people.

If possible the kobolds stay at range, pelting the party with egg-sized rocks from the cave floor. If this does not go well, they close and begin biting the party in a furious, starvation-fueled, frenzy.

In combat the kobolds make no attempt at silence, using the sounds of battle to warn their brethren in the tribal common room (area 4) of the danger.

CANNIBAL KOBOLDS (3)

Small humanoid (kobold), chaotic evil

AC: 13

Hit Points: 5 (2d6-2)

Speed: 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
7 (-2)	17 (+3)	8 (-1)	8 (-1)	9 (-1)	6 (-2)

Condition Immunities: blind

Damage Vulnerabilities: thunder

Senses: blindsight 100 ft., passive Perception 9

Languages Undercommon, Draconic

Challenge 1/8 (25 XP)

Echolocation: These blind kobolds have developed the ability to ‘see’ their surroundings using echolocation (represented by their blindsight). This ability is disrupted for 2 (1d4) rounds by any thunder effects. In addition, the kobold cannot use its blindsight while deafened.

Blood Frenzy: The cannibal kobold has advantage on melee attack rolls against any creature that doesn't have all its hit points.

ACTIONS

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

Rock: *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) bludgeoning damage.

These pale, emaciated kobolds stare sightlessly while making a series of sharp clicking sounds with which to navigate their dark world...

AWARDING EXPERIENCE

If the characters manage to kill the kobolds, divide 75 XP among them.



AREA 4 – TRIBAL COMMON ROOM

The passageway from the sentry-point is a short one, leading to what appears (and smells) to be the common room of the local kobold tribe. A flickering fire gives off wan light that illuminates tiny clawed handprints on the walls of the cave. The rapid clicking of the kobolds, combined with sibilant hissing from the back of the chamber make it clear that the kobolds are still in residence here.

If warned by combat in the sentry-point (area 3), these five **cannibal kobolds** have retreated to the northeastern portion of the cave and into the twisty maze of passages beyond. These tunnels are a mere three feet high and require most races to crawl through them, halving movement and giving such characters disadvantage on all melee attacks. If somehow caught unawares, the kobolds flee into the tunnels at the earliest opportunity, most likely leaving one of their number behind to slow down the adventurers.

Within the chamber itself are numerous signs of the disaster that the kobolds fell prey to untold time ago. The collapsed ends of both southerly tunnels show signs that the kobolds have been attempting to excavate them by hand for a very long time. Dwarves succeeding in a DC 12 Intelligence (History) check realize that these kobolds have been attempting to claw their way through the rubble and debris choking those tunnels for 20 years or more, based on how much progress is possible using only their clawed hands.

The common room itself has several disturbing signs of how far the kobolds have devolved during their time in the caves. Scattered around the small fire are a number of bones, easily identified as kobold bones. All show signs of having been gnawed on for marrow and a character able to make a DC 10 Wisdom (Survival) check while examining them readily notices the marks where flesh was scraped from bone using sharp stones. Emaciated, crazed, blind, and cannibalistic, these kobolds have struggled long for their survival.

Back within the catacombs can be found many tools, most likely having belonged to the kobolds originally trapped in the cave-in. These simple, but functional hand-tools are worth 2 gp. In addition, any sage studying the draconic races would pay from between 50-100 gp for the information about this tribe, how long they had been cut off, and their stunted development.

CANNIBAL KOBOLDS (5)

Small humanoid (kobold), chaotic evil

AC: 13

Hit Points: 5 (2d6-2)

Speed: 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
7 (-2)	17 (+3)	8 (-1)	8 (-1)	9 (-1)	6 (-2)

Condition Immunities: blind

Damage Vulnerabilities: thunder

Senses: blindsight 100 ft., passive Perception 9

Languages Undercommon, Draconic

Challenge 1/8 (25 XP)

Echolocation: These blind kobolds have developed the ability to ‘see’ their surroundings using echolocation (represented by their blindsight). This ability is disrupted for 2 (1d4) rounds by any thunder effects. In addition, the kobold cannot use its blindsight while deafened.

Blood Frenzy: The cannibal kobold has advantage on melee attack rolls against any creature that doesn’t have all its hit points.

ACTIONS

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

Rock: *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) bludgeoning damage.

AWARDING EXPERIENCE

If the characters manage to kill the kobolds, divide 125 XP among them.

AREA 5 – THE RIVER

The waters of the river are not overly wide, but there is obviously a fast current and, in places, white rivulets of foam where it flows over rocks hidden beneath. Black waters rush from east to west, filling the air with an angry elemental roar. Long stalactites jut from the ceiling, and the tunnel seems to continue on the other side..

Crossing the river can be dangerous. Despite being relatively shallow - it’s just 5 feet - the current is very strong. There are a few different ways to cross.

Characters looking to simply jump across the river should be warned that the stones along the bank look damp and slippery. If they make the attempt anyway they must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity save or slip up as they make the leap, falling back into the rushing waters.

Characters seeking to wade across must succeed in a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check or be swept away. Small adventurers make these checks with disadvantage, but if they are tied off by rope or other means and attached to the shore they make these checks with advantage.

It is possible for nimble characters to use stalactites above to cross, climbing from rock to rock. Crossing requires two DC 12 Dexterity (Acrobatics) checks with failure resulting in falling into the water. Characters roped off to the ceiling or otherwise similarly secured make these tests with advantage.

Characters rafting across the river must succeed in two separate DC 10 Strength (Athletics) checks as they battle the current, with failure causing them to capsize and plunge into the water. Using a guide-rope across the river or similar device allows them to make these checks with advantage.

Characters swept off their feet and away travel down river at a rate of 10 ft. per round. With a successful DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check, a character may hold themselves stationary by swimming against the current. A successful check on the subsequent round indicates that the character has found their feet and may attempt to wade through the water (as above).

Further downstream the river forks, with both streams leading towards waterfalls that plunge into the darkness. The spawning grounds (area 5b) provide some safety but characters carried over the falls in either point are forever lost.

The first time a character enters the water they are attacked by a **swarm of cave pacu**. Once subsisting on

a diet of vegetation and tree-nuts, fierce competition for resources has turned them voraciously omnivorous. Much like their smaller cousin, the quipper, a school of pacu can strip a victim's flesh and leave their bones to litter the riverbed.

SWARM OF CAVE PACU (1)

Medium swarm of tiny beasts, unaligned

AC: 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points: 28 (8d8-8)

Speed: 0 ft., swim 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	16 (+3)	9 (-1)	1 (-5)	7 (-2)	2 (-4)

Damage Resistances: bludgeoning, piercing, slashing

Condition Immunities: charmed, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, prone, restrained, stunned

Senses: darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 8

Languages: -

Challenge: 1 (200 XP)

Blood Frenzy. The school of fish has advantage on melee attack rolls against any creature that doesn't have all of its hit points.

Swarm. The swarm can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the swarm can move through any opening large enough for a Tiny beast. The swarm cannot regain hit points nor gain temporary hit points.

Water Breathing. The swarm breathes only underwater.

ACTIONS

Bite: *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 0 ft., one target in the swarm's space. *Hit:* 10 (4d4) piercing damage. If the swarm has half of its hit points or fewer, the bite does 5 (2d4) piercing damage.

The water seethes with the teeming masses of fish. These fish, visibly larger relations to the quipper, have large, molar-like teeth suitable for tearing flesh giving their mouths a disturbingly humanoid appearance.

AWARDING EXPERIENCE

If the characters manage to kill the swarm, divide 200 XP among them.

AREA 5A - THE RIVERBANK

The sound of rushing of water echoes through the cave. A narrow river has worn its way through the rock here, leaving a small rocky shoreline of gravel made damp from the misty spray.

Off to one side, her fingers trailing almost root-like into the water, is a woman covered in leaves. She is resting among the bodies of several others of her kind and is so still that one would think her dead save for the shallow movements of her breath. Her once green and verdant form is wasted, her leaves hanging lifeless, and her face is gripped in an angry rictus while her eyes stare wildly into the darkness.

A group of dryads, concerned about the recent release of honey wasps, entered the cave to explore and find the nature of the threat to the woodlands. While they were slowly exploring the caves and the keep above, honey wasps infested the tree of one of the dryads, killing it and driving her into a madness that saw her slay the others in a sudden rampage.

With her tree dead, there is no saving the **insane dryad**. She has staved off madness, for a time, but at the cost of her physical form.

At the slightest sound, she leaps to her feet, eyes wild with insanity, and attacks the characters.

Death. In death, the hold of her derangement fades, allowing her to communicate what she knows as her body crumbles into a pile of soft, rotten wood and leaving behind the dryad's final gift – made of her heartwood – a *heartwood staff* (see appendix A).

The dryad may tell the adventurers the following, though she only speaks Elvish and Sylvan and cannot communicate in Common:

- She is from the tree in area 1. The honey wasps had already killed the tree, beginning to hollow it out for their hive.
- The Blighted Wood was once a great and healthy forest, and home to many of her kind. It was destroyed by the burrowers beneath - the "malltod".
- The malltod, despite appearances, are not cousins of the elves but rather to myconids.
- The malltod are devourers of nature not its guardians. They were driven underground by their brethren millennia ago and thought destroyed.
- The recent activities of the sappers involved in the siege against the keep above breached a long sealed hive of the malltod, awakening them and pulling their hive from dormancy.

- If left unchecked, the malltod spread like a cancer across the land. A plague of man-sized locusts devouring all plant life they can reach.

INSANE DRYAD (1)

Medium fey, neutral

AC: 11 (16 with *barkskin*)

Hit Points: 22 (5d8)

Speed: 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)

Skills: Perception +4, Stealth +5

Senses: darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages: Elvish, Sylvan

Challenge: 1 (200 XP)

Blood Frenzy: The dryad has advantage on melee attack rolls against any creature that doesn't have all of its hit points.

Innate Spellcasting: The dryad's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 13) and the dryad can cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *druidcraft*

3/day each: *entangle*, *thunderwave*

1/day each: *barkskin*, *spike growth*

Magic Resistance: The dryad has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

ACTIONS

Life Drain: *Melee Spell Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 10 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 10 (3d6) necrotic damage. The target must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution save or its hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to half the damage taken. This reduction lasts until the creature finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0.

Her eyes are alight with madness, her leaves are wilted and browning, and her bark beginning to peel. What was once a creature of fey beauty is now caught up in the process of decay. Surrounded by the stench of corruption and rot, the branches of the dryad move menacingly, as if filled with a hunger of their own.

AWARDING EXPERIENCE

If the characters manage to kill the dryad, divide 200 XP among them.

AREA 5B – SPAWNING GROUNDS

The depth of this portion of the river suddenly rises to three feet before immediately dropping back down again. Despite the raging tide of water rushing over the falls here, the current is weakened by the presence of a deeper pool of water beneath the surface that is formed by a rocky lip at the water's edge. The echoing roar of the waterfalls is deafening, making even shouted conversation impossible. The walls around the pool are smooth and without shoreline.

Characters entering this chamber still feel the pressure of the water on their torsos, but the lower portion of the water is relatively still. The river's momentum does not reach the sheltered area caused by the sudden rise and subsequent drop of the river's bottom. In theory, characters may stand in the five foot deep water without being carried over the edge due to the rocky shelf that holds in the waters of the bowl.

Characters choosing to attempt to make their way back upriver via wading must succeed in a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check for every 20 ft. travelled or be swept away. Characters of less than 5 ft. make these checks with disadvantage, but those tied off by rope or other means can make them with advantage.

While not in immediate danger of going over the falls, the waters here are quite dangerous. These are the pacu spawning grounds and are filled with hungry fish. When coupled with the falls itself, this area presents a potentially deadly challenge.

Because of the swift moving surface current, coupled with the stillness of the lower waters and the slipperiness of the pool's slime covered bottom, characters are at disadvantage on all attack rolls for the first round, while they acclimate to these unique surroundings.

Two **swarms of cave pacu** can pursue the characters upstream, should they flee via the water. The pacu only pursue for 50 ft. however, before returning to the spawning pool. Characters may attempt to move onto the lip at the edge of the waterfall to avoid the combat. Standing on the ledge requires a DC 20 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check, each round, of the character is washed over the edge and almost certainly killed.

SWARM OF CAVE PACU (2)

Medium swarm of tiny beasts, unaligned

AC: 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points: 28 (8d8-8)

Speed: 0 ft., swim 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	16 (+3)	9 (-1)	1 (-5)	7 (-2)	2 (-4)

Damage Resistances: bludgeoning, piercing, slashing

Condition Immunities: charmed, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, prone, restrained, stunned

Senses: darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 8

Languages: -

Challenge: 1 (200 XP)

Blood Frenzy. The school of fish has advantage on melee attack rolls against any creature that doesn't have all of its hit points.

Swarm. The swarm can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the swarm can move through any opening large enough for a Tiny beast. The swarm cannot regain hit points nor gain temporary hit points.

Water Breathing. The swarm breathes only underwater.

ACTIONS

Bite: *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 0 ft., one target in the swarm's space. *Hit:* 10 (4d4) piercing damage. If the swarm has half of its hit points or fewer, the bite does 5 (2d4) piercing damage.

The water seethes with the teeming masses of fish. These fish, visibly larger relations to the quipper, have large, molar-like teeth suitable for tearing flesh giving their mouths a disturbingly humanoid appearance.

AWARDING EXPERIENCE

If the characters manage to kill the two swarms, divide 400 XP among them.

AREA 6 – FUNGUS FIELD

A smell of decay and rot fills the air and wisps of spores trail before your eyes. Giant fungi of all shapes and colors fill this chamber, while the floor shows several well-worn paths seemingly trodden smooth by the passage of feet. In fact, now that you look a little closer you can see that these paths are so well-trodden that they actually lie more than an inch below the rest of the chamber's floor.

A pair of **howling fungi** sits on either side of the central southern entrance. They are placed in such a way that at least one triggers when the room is entered from any of the three southern entrances, alerting the sentries to the north. Stepping into the chamber is all that is required to set these off, and the howling of one causes the howling of the other.

Two **malltod drones** arrive from the north, along with their two **giant cave lizards**, one round after the alarm. The malltods' first action is to grab their lizards and hurl them upwards into the air so that they are airborne and may immediately attack.

Characters interested in attempting to determine how long the paths have been used may make a DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) check to determine that it would take over a thousand years of foot traffic to wear the paths such as they are. Characters familiar with stonework (such as dwarves) make this check with advantage.

Like most malltod, the drone's diet consists entirely of plant life. The corpses of its prey are used to fertilize the mushrooms. Most of the mushrooms other than the howling fungi are all safely edible, although it requires a successful DC 12 Intelligence (Nature) check - per type - to know that for certain, and have no special effects other than a variety of exotic flavors.

There are three mushrooms, each with only a sole representative in this chamber, that have magical properties. Identifying them as safe (or not) requires a DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) check, per instance. A character may only be affected by each of those mushrooms once. Further eating of those mushrooms has no effect (including the poison).

Color of Mushroom	Flavor	Properties
Brown with green	Hot and spicy, with a slight fishiness	N/A
White	Near flavorless mushroom	N/A
White with red	Salty chicken	N/A
Blue with dark blue	Pineapple	N/A
Orange with brown	Human blood with a hint of pine	N/A
Yellow with white	Beef liver and lime	N/A
Green with Yellow	Rotting fish	Heals 7 points, but only once.
Black	Tangerine	Advantage on Strength checks for 1 hour.
Violet with white	Tomato and garlic	Poison - DC 12 Constitution save or 7 (3d4) poison damage.

HOWLING FUNGI (2)

Medium plant, unaligned

AC: 5

Hit Points: 7 (3d8-6)

Speed: 0 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
1 (-5)	1 (-5)	6 (-2)	1 (-5)	3 (-4)	1 (-5)

Condition Immunities: blinded, deafened, frightened

Senses: blindsight 10 ft., passive Perception 6

Languages: -

Challenge: 0 (10 XP)

REACTIONS

Disorienting Howl: Motion within 10 feet of the howling fungus cause it to emit a howl audible within 100 feet. The fungus continues its howling until the disturbance has stopped or moved beyond this range for 1d6 rounds. Targets within 30 feet of a howling fungus while the fungus howls must make a DC 12 Constitu-

tion save or be disoriented and make all attacks, saving throws, and skill checks at disadvantage for 2 (1d4) rounds.

These oversized toadstools have a distinctly bloated appearance due to the fluttering lamella on the underside of their caps. The howling fungi use these papery ribs to draw air into their caps, allowing for their unearthly howl. The caps are red, spotted with what merely look like white spots. In actuality, those spots are constrictive vents through which the air is released thereby creating the shrill and disorienting noise that makes the fungi so useful as sentries.

MALLTOD DRONE (BLIGHT ELF) (2)

Medium plant, chaotic evil

AC: 12

Hit Points: 14 (4d6)

Speed: 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	6 (-2)

Skills: Perception +4, Stealth +6

Condition Immunities: blind

Senses: blindsight 150 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages: Undercommon, Elvish

Challenge: 1/4 (50 XP)

Innate Spellcasting: The malltod drone's innate spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 12, +4 to hit with spell attacks). It can innately cast *ray of sickness* once per day, requiring no material components.

ACTIONS

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

Swarm Breath (Recharge 6): The malltod drone exhales a 15-foot cone of biting insects. Each creature in the area must make a DC 10 Dexterity save, taking 5 (2d4) damage on a failure, or half as much damage on a success.



GIANT CAVE LIZARD (2)

Small beast, unaligned

AC: 14

Hit Points: 5 (2d4)

Speed: 30 ft., climb 30 ft., glide 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
4 (-3)	18 (+4)	10 (+0)	2 (-4)	12 (+1)	6 (-2)

Senses: blindsight 60 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages: -

Challenge: 1/8 (25 XP)

Patagia: The lizard does not provoke an attack of opportunity when it glides out of an enemy's reach.

False Appearance: While the lizard remains motionless it is indistinguishable from a normal piece of rock.

ACTIONS

Bite: *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 1 piercing damage plus 5 (1d10) poison damage.

AWARDING EXPERIENCE

If the characters manage to defeat the combined opponents divide 170 XP among them.

AREA 7 – THE SMOULDERING CHAMBER

The air of this room swirls with flakes of soot and clouds of smoke rising up from multiple small fires. The flickering flames cast dancing shadows, nearly obscuring the other tunnels leading away from this hellish scene. A whiff of charred flesh hangs in the air.

Characters succeeding on a DC 10 passive Perception check see signs of movement around the base of the fires, which on closer examination will be revealed as boskout beetles writhing about as they feed. The source of the fires are small piles of dead albino bats and other cave vermin, stacked atop one another and burning away as the insects feast.

If the characters are careful not to disturb the beetles, they do not attack and the room may be passed through safely. If the characters simply pass through the room without bothering to be cautious the beetles will be disturbed and a number of them fly to the wall and, in the flickering light, form the word “WHO” in common.

If unanswered, a group of 10 **boskout beetles** launch into the air and attack. If responded to and bribed with offerings of meat, the beetles allow the characters to pass freely.



BOSKOUT BEETLE (10)

Tiny beast, unaligned

AC: 11 (natural armor)

Hit Points: 1 (1d4 -1)

Speed: 10 ft., fly 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
2 (-4)	11 (+0)	8 (-1)	6 (-2)	8 (-1)	2 (-4)

Senses: blindsight 30 ft., passive Perception 9

Languages: Common (written only)

Challenge: 0 (10 XP)

ACTIONS

Burn. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 0 ft., one target. *Hit:* 1 fire damage, and the target must make a DC 9 Dexterity saving throw or ignite, taking 2 (1d4)

fire damage at the start of each of their turns. They may repeat this saving throw at the end of each turn, extinguishing the flames on a success.

Black and red chitin covers these fist-sized beetles. While some of their larger cousins may glow, these industrious vermin burn, feasting on the carbonized remains of their victims. Their crude intelligence allows them a basic understanding of the Common tongue and they are known to collectively message their targets prior to feasting.

AWARDING EXPERIENCE

If the characters manage to kill the beetles, divide 100 XP among them. Should the characters manage to bypass the beetles without combat, divide 150 XP among them.

AREA 8 – SINKHOLE

The floor of this passage gives way to a yawning sinkhole that spans the breadth of the passage. The collapse seems relatively recent and the clicking of stone still falling below makes the danger of the sinkhole clear.

The sinkhole stretches down 60 feet into a collapsed portion of the sappers' tunnel system. It will take at least one week of work to clear that passage in either direction. Despite the presence of the sinkhole, it is possible to move through the passageway, but the risks should be made obvious.

Maneuvering around the sides of the sinkhole, without additional safety precautions, requires a DC 15 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check. Failure results in the character plummeting into the sinkhole and taking 21 (6d6) bludgeoning damage upon hitting the bottom.

The sinkhole has also destabilized the walls and remaining floor of the passageway. While anchoring with iron spikes and safety lines is certainly helpful, characters must still take care and succeed with a DC 10 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check or tear the spikes loose and suffer a similar fate.

AREA 9 – FLUTTERING CAVE

This chamber is notably taller than the others, its ceiling obscured by both distance and shadow. A gentle rustling sound comes from above, like the soft scraping of parchment or the sound of leaves blowing across cobblestones. In stark contrast to the mild sounds of the room, the stench is more than extreme. The reek rises from a floor covered in glistening guano and swarming with insects beyond count.

Torches in this room become dim, due to the collection of carbon dioxide caused by the rotting guano, however the room is not overtly dangerous to explore due to a small vent above (from which the bats come and go during the warmer months). The guano itself is over a foot thick and glistens with the wings of countless honey wasps - the bats' favorite food.

While the insects living in and feeding upon the guano are wholly harmless, they are very unsettling and the GM should play up the repugnant alien appearance of the insects to give an accurate 'feel' to the room. Characters who slog through the guano carry the smell with them and are at disadvantage on all stealth checks for one hour.

Any loud noises, or voices raised over a whisper, cause the bats roosting 100 feet above to form a pair of swarms

and rush down into the chamber. Should this happen, many of the insects on the floor take flight and the bats go into a feeding frenzy. While the characters are not the intended prey, while feeding on the insects each of the **swarms of albino bats** still attacks one character per round.

Visible on the surface of one of the walls is a small vein of gold. With proper tools it can be mined for a value of 200 gp, although a less thorough attempt (stabbing it with daggers or the like) will excavate 50 gp worth of gold.

SWARM OF ALBINO BATS (2)

Medium swarm of tiny beasts, unaligned

AC: 12

Hit Points: 27 (5d8+5)

Speed: 0 ft., fly 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
5 (-3)	15 (+2)	12 (+1)	2 (-4)	12 (+1)	4 (-3)

Damage Resistances: bludgeoning, piercing, slashing

Condition Immunities: charmed, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, prone, restrained, stunned

Senses: blindsight 60 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages: -

Challenge: 1/4 (50 XP)

Echolocation. The swarm cannot use its blindsight while deafened.

Keen Hearing. The swarm has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing.

Swarm. The swarm can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the swarm can move through any opening large enough for a tiny bat. The swarm cannot regain hit points nor gain temporary hit points.

ACTIONS

Bite. Melee Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, reach 0 ft., one target in the swarm's space. **Hit:** 4 (2d4) piercing damage. If the swarm has half of its hit points or fewer, the sting does 2 (1d4) piercing damage.

AWARDING EXPERIENCE

For the destruction of the swarms divide 100 XP among the characters.

AREA 10 – ARBORIAL ABBATOIR

The air in this colossal cavern smells mostly of dust with only hints of decay from long ago. Hanging from above, like so many corpses on a gibbet, are multitudes of massive tree roots, each bigger around than a man and each covered in ancient bite marks. From below, like hungry, grasping claws, rise massive stalagmites. For further than you can see, this cave stretches onwards seemingly without end.

The roots that hang above are the drained and lifeless taproots of what is now the Blighted Wood. Characters succeeding in a DC 10 Intelligence (Nature) check immediately recognize where they are. The wood above is a collection of fallen and dead trees that have never fully rotted away.

Said to be due to the dying curse of the druid of those woods, legend states that the land is cursed never to bring forth new life so as not to feed ancient evil. That story is, in fact, true. It was the druid's curse that has prevented the malltod from having a sufficient food source to grow in numbers and escape.

The cave here stretches for miles without any further exit. Should the characters wish to explore the massive cave, here are a small number of things they may encounter.

- The image of a dryad, silently screaming in pain, steps from within a stalagmite. She tears at her hair and leaves, ripping them from herself as sap leaks from her eyes. After a moment, she fades away.
- The chittering of a swarm of bats passes overhead.
- The characters come to a patch of ground that has recently been disturbed, as if something burrowed from beneath and emerged into the cave.
- A single green leaf lying on the ground.
- A pile of ancient acorns that turn to dust when touched.

AREA 11 – CAVE OF MEMORY

The walls of this cavern are covered in carvings. They are crude and very deeply carved, as if meant to be felt as opposed to seen. Each of the walls is covered with numerous carvings, seeming to tell a progressive story. A second tunnel leads eastward from here.

Characters wishing to spend time studying the carvings may learn a bit of the history of the malltod via examination of key scenes.

- The first set of carvings shows two groups of stick-figures. One group is linked in a circle amidst a grove of trees. The other group is beneath the ground and is suckling at the roots of the trees.
- The second carving shows a trio of figures carrying something - possibly a root - towards a bloated figure surrounded by mushrooms.
- The third carving shows even more figures suckling on tree roots, with no figures to be seen above ground.
- The next carving shows a large number of figures, appearing to hold swords and bows, slaughtering the underground dwellers. On the edges of the carving it appears that the underground dwellers are dragging away, and perhaps eating, fallen combatants.
- The final carving shows a single figure standing next to a wall, as if on guard. Pieces of stick figures are scattered about on the floor.

The cave pictographs detail the history of the malltod and their relationship with the elves. Characters succeeding in a DC 18 Intelligence (History) check may draw further insight from the carvings. This check should be made for each individual carving.

The first represents elves celebrating the forest and its life while the malltod are below, feeding safely from the verdant life above them. This is the time from before the great war when, despite not living in balance with nature, the malltod's numbers were small. They were a nuisance then, but not seen as a threat.

The second and third sets of carvings represent the malltod making an offering to their goddess, Madarch. Legend states that the malltod sacrificed a root from the world tree, Yggdrasil, and that it was this act of blasphemy that pushed the elves to wage war on the malltod.

The next carving depicts the malltod's war with the elves. As elves were felled by the malltod, their carcasses were dragged below to rot and devoured by the malltod queens as they turned out ever increasing numbers of drones and soldiers. It was this time when the population of the malltod reached its zenith.

This last carving represents the fate of this particular hive. Defeated and cornered, the last defending warriors collapsed the tunnels to the surface, shutting them off from the elves, and preserving their queen and her spores.

AREA 12 – REFUSE PILE

This dead-end cavern is piled high with debris and refuse, some of it appearing quite ancient. Stillness hangs in the air, as well as a strange sense of anticipation for the massive piles and what may be uncovered amongst the discarded items of centuries or more. Here and there, bits of bone stick out from the collected detritus, a stark reminder of where these heaps must have come from.

Long used as a dumping ground by the malltod, the collection of junk in this chamber is massive in its size and scope. In places the piles reach the ceiling and in others only small pathways wend between tottering stacks. Searching the room should be a lengthy process and any thorough search takes hours instead of minutes and poses its own hazards.

After each hour of searching, each character involved may make a roll on the table of useful items below. After four hours of searching, nothing more is to be found. The GM is encouraged to continue to let characters search, finding odd but useless item after useless item.

D20	Result
1	1d8 gp
2	1d20 cp
3	<i>Potion of fire breath</i>
4	Matched pair of daggers
5	1d12 sp
6	3 silvered arrows
7	Large sack
8	Flask of oil
9	Tinderbox
10	Yew wand
11	1d12 arrows
12	Short sword (rusty but functional)
13	+1 <i>shield</i>
14	Quarterstaff (showing teeth-marks)
15	Chain mail (dwarf-sized)
16	Holy symbol (Mare's Head – Demeter)
17	Wineskin (filled with vinegar)
18	Trade good (3 lbs. of iron)
19	2 hunting traps
20	Roll on 'hooks' sub-table

'HOOKS' SUB-TABLE

D10	Result
1	Map of a distant catacomb
2	A 300-year-old journal
3	A bottle with a dead djinn
4	A cursed ring (see appendix A)
5	An undelivered message
6	Compass that doesn't point northwards
7	An ancient carving featuring a character's face
8	A "modern" gold piece with the wrong monarch's face
9	A pixie mounted butterfly style in a box
10	Battle plans for the current conflict above

AREA 13 – THE SPOREGROUNDS

The musty air of this room dances with tiny motes that swirl through the air, complete with visible eddies. Giant mushrooms, towering 15 or 20 feet into the air, regularly vent small clouds of spores into the atmosphere here.

The spores in the air here create a truly dangerous condition that is readily recognizable to those who stop to ponder the situation. Characters succeeding on a DC 10 Intelligence (Nature) check or a DC 12 Wisdom (Survival) instantly recognize the multiple hazards caused by the spores in the air.

Carrying open flame into the room results in a localized explosion as the spores within 10 feet of the flame ignite. All creatures in this area must make a DC 10 Dexterity save, taking 5 (2d4) fire damage on a failure or half as much on a success.

In addition, fire-based spells cast in this room such as (*fire bolt*, *burning hands*, et al.) cause the caster to be immediately engulfed in a similar fire with no chance to save, though they also cause double the damage done to the target of the spell.

The second threat in the room is the inhalation of the spores themselves. Characters not taking precautions to prevent themselves from inhaling the spores must succeed in a DC 12 Constitution save or contract a fungal infection that causes *sight rot* (see *Dungeon Master's Guide* p. 257).

What appear to be mushrooms can, on closer examination, be recognized as some form of chrysalis. These 'mushrooms' house malltod drones and warriors, selected to mature into adulthood to serve the hive.



The room is guarded by a pair of **malltod drones** while a number of more dangerous malltod warriors are maturing to take over the role in a few weeks' time. There are one hundred and ten such pupae developing in this chamber. The spores from the mushrooms are by-products of the rapid maturation that the malltod undergo.

The malltod drones are concealed deeper in the room and immediately attack any character tampering with their developing kin or at the first sign of the spores igniting. The malltod fight to the death.

MALLTOD DRONE (BLIGHT ELF) (2)

Medium plant, chaotic evil

AC: 12

Hit Points: 14 (4d6)

Speed: 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	6 (-2)

Skills: Perception +4, Stealth +6

Condition Immunities: blind

Senses: blindsight 150 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages: Undercommon, Elvish

Challenge: 1/4 (50 XP)

Innate Spellcasting: The malltod drone's innate spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 12, +4 to hit with spell attacks). It can innately cast *ray of sickness* once per day, requiring no material components.

ACTIONS

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

Swarm Breath (Recharge 6): The malltod drone exhales a 15-foot cone of biting insects. Each creature in the area must make a DC 10 Dexterity save, taking 5 (2d4) damage on a failure, or half as much damage on a success.

AWARDING EXPERIENCE

For slaying the hatchery's guardians, divide 100 XP among the characters.

AREA 14 – CLIFF’S EDGE

Footfalls echo in this chamber and even the softest sound repeatedly resonates through the air. Midway across the chamber, the floor drops away, plunging down and out of sight. A faint cracking and hissing sound comes from below, as though there are things skittering unseen in the darkness. The ceiling of the cavern is lost in shadow, and not even the tips of stalactites are seen emerging from the gloom.

Below the cliff, a mass of five **swarms of giant cinch bugs** has been disturbed by the presence of a trio of **giant cave lizards** lurking above, moving amidst the stalactites that are shrouded in darkness. Their natural instinct for survival having been aroused, the cinch bugs are currently scaling the 60-ft cliff in an attempt to flee the area and escape. One hundred feet above, the lizards have identified the characters as potential rivals for food (which is a rare commodity in these caves). This puts the characters squarely in the middle of the situation.

In two rounds’ time, events come to a head as the cinch bugs reach the top of the cliff and start rushing towards the party. Seeing that, the giant cave lizards attack from above. Due to their being concealed by darkness, the soundlessness of their gliding approach, and the mad rush of giant cinch bugs - unless a character is specifically looking upwards this round - the giant cave lizards have surprise. The giant cinch bugs are more interested in escaping than combat but, if attacked, the swarms of insects retaliate against their attacker. If allowed to pass, however, they pose a great danger to the world outside the cave.

Any character succeeding on a DC 12 Intelligence (Nature) check recognizes the cinch bugs for what they are; giant versions of root-eating pests that can lay waste to entire fields. Giant versions allowed to escape into the wilderness could multiply and lead to widespread famine and deforestation.

Any light reaching the floor of the cliff base lights up a number of sparkling stones at the bottom of the cave. The area is scattered with small quartz crystals each worth 1 cp. There are one thousand such crystals scattered about for the taking.

GIANT CAVE LIZARD (3)

Small beast, unaligned

AC: 14

Hit Points: 5 (2d4)

Speed: 30 ft., climb 30 ft., glide 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
4 (-3)	18 (+4)	10 (+0)	2 (-4)	12 (+1)	6 (-2)

Senses: blindsight 60 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages: -

Challenge: 1/8 (25 XP)

Patagia: The lizard does not provoke an attack of opportunity when it glides out of an enemy’s reach.

False Appearance: While the lizard remains motionless it is indistinguishable from a normal piece of rock.

ACTIONS

Bite: *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 1 piercing damage plus 5 (1d10) poison damage.

SWARM OF GIANT CINCH BUGS (5)

Medium swarm of tiny beasts, unaligned

AC: 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points: 17 (5d8-5)

Speed: 20 ft., climb 20 ft., burrow 10 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
2 (-4)	15 (+2)	8 (-1)	1 (-5)	7 (-2)	1 (-5)

Damage Resistances: bludgeoning, piercing, slashing

Condition Immunities: charmed, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, prone, restrained, stunned

Senses: blindsight 20 ft., passive Perception 8

Languages: -

Challenge: 0 (10 XP)

Swarm: The swarm can occupy another creature’s space and vice versa, and the swarm can move through any opening large enough for a tiny insect. The swarm cannot regain hit points nor gain temporary hit points.

Spider Climb: The swarm can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

ACTIONS

Bite: *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target in the swarm's space. *Hit:* 2 (1d4) piercing damage. If the swarm has half of its hit points or fewer, the sting does 1 (1d4-1) piercing damage.

Each the length of a man's thumb and half as wide, these brown and white striped beetles wave their long, feathery antennae before them as they skitter along the ground in swarms. Mandibles audibly click open and closed as they rush forward.

AWARDING EXPERIENCE

If the characters manage to defeat the giant cave lizards divide 75 XP among them. If the characters manage to destroy all of the swarms in addition to the lizards, divide an additional 50 XP among the characters. If any of the giant cinch bug swarms escape, divide 10 XP (per swarm killed) among the characters.

AREA 15 – ROYAL CHAMBER

This large chamber is littered with what appear to be round puffball fungi of varying sizes. On the far side is a bloated creature, humanoid and near elfin in cast and yet wholly repulsive and unwholesome. Spores drift from the creature, adding to the fetid atmosphere of the chamber. Stalagmites and stalactites merge here to form towering pillars that give the room the appearance of a gigantic man, ready to devour the unwilling.

If the characters have not engaged in a long rest since crossing the river (area 5a) they encounter the **immature malltod queen** with two **malltod drones**, feeding the queen the pink syrup of the honey wasps.

If the characters have taken such a rest, the queen is accompanied instead by a **malltod warrior**, hastily hatched for protection. The queen will have absorbed the *blood-honey* and is immune to all disadvantage effects. The newly awakened queen's spores have been absorbing nutrients and are rapidly growing (the puffball fungi on the ground) and she fights to the death to protect them.

The drones do not engage in combat unless the queen herself is threatened, though the warrior attacks the characters if any of the puff-ball like egg growths is molested or if any creature approaches within 10 feet of the queen.

MALLTOD DRONE (BLIGHT ELF) (2)

Medium plant, chaotic evil

AC: 12

Hit Points: 14 (4d6)

Speed: 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	6 (-2)

Skills: Perception +4, Stealth +6

Condition Immunities: blind

Senses: blindsight 150 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages: Undercommon, Elvish

Challenge: 1/4 (50 XP)

Innate Spellcasting: The malltod drone's innate spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 12, +4 to hit with spell attacks). It can innately cast *ray of sickness* once per day, requiring no material components.

ACTIONS

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

Swarm Breath (Recharge 6): The malltod drone exhales a 15-foot cone of biting insects. Each creature in the area must make a DC 10 Dexterity save, taking 5 (2d4) damage on a failure, or half as much damage on a success.

MALLTOD WARRIOR (BLIGHT ELF) (1)

Medium plant, chaotic evil

AC: 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points: 15 (2d8+6)

Speed: 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	7 (-2)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)

Skills: Intimidation +2

Condition Immunities: blind

Senses: blindsight 150 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages: Undercommon, Elvish

Challenge: 1/2 (100 XP)

Innate Spellcasting: The malltod warrior's innate spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 8, +0 to hit with spell attacks). It can innately cast *ray of sickness* once per day, requiring no material components.

ACTIONS

Claw: *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d12+3) piercing damage.

Looking like an unusually powerful physical specimen of elf, and yet with a smooth, eyeless face and a trail of flying vermin dribbling from its mouth, the malltod warrior is a fearsome foe. Clad only in a rudimentary loincloth, these creatures require no weapons, relying on their bizarrely long claws and swarms of biting flies. Malltod warriors stand 6 feet tall.

IMMATURE MALLTOD QUEEN (BLIGHT ELF) (1)

Medium plant, chaotic evil

AC: 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points: 45 (6d8+18)

Speed: 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	6 (-2)

Condition Immunities: blind

Damage Immunities: poison

Senses: blindsight 150 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages: Undercommon, Elvish

Challenge: 1 (200 XP)

Innate Spellcasting: The malltod queen's innate spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 12, +4 to

hit with spell attacks). It can innately cast *ray of sickness* once per day, requiring no material components.

ACTIONS

Multiattack: The malltod queen makes two claw attacks.

Claw: *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6+3) piercing damage.


Memory Spores: Upon its apparent death, the queen's body releases a cloud of spores spreading out in a 50 foot radius. Each of those spores develops into a puff-ball style growth of its own, capable of releasing a new queen with all of the memories of the old one. If attended by drones, only one such 'egg' hatches and spawns a queen, with others being destroyed upon the birth of the new queen. If unattended, all the eggs grow and release queens. In such a case the hive is abandoned as the queens spread far afield and away from one another.

Looking like a bloated parody of an elf maiden, the queen's skin has not yet darkened, leaving her skin the brilliant white of angel wing fungi. Her form swirls with biting flies and exudes small puffs of heavy fungal spores that drop to the ground. Her eyeless face and gaping maw add to the unearthly and monstrous aspect of this long-forgotten horror.

AWARDING EXPERIENCE

For slaying the malltod queen (regardless of whether the drone or warrior are involved) divide 300 XP among the characters. Should the characters take the time and effort to carefully purge the fallen spores, add an additional 100 XP to be divided.

CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

he complete destruction of the malltod hive and honey wasps means that the area can breathe easily again, and that life will slowly begin to return to the Blighted Wood (becoming noticeable in the next several months as new greenery begins to form). Anything short of complete success allows these threats to re-emerge to harass the party and the surrounding countryside again and again, becoming more difficult to eliminate with each failed attempt.

So long as an immediate victory is achieved - halting the honey wasps and malltod at least temporarily - the dryads of the wood are grateful and give each character an acorn to identify themselves as 'friends of the wood'. The talismans grant advantage on any rolls involving social interaction with fey creatures.

APPENDIX A: NEW MAGIC ITEMS

BLOODHONEY

Potion, rare

Drinking this bloodstained syrup sends the imbiber into crimson rage, allowing them to avoid all disadvantage effects for ten minutes. If threatened the imbiber immediately rushes to enter melee combat with the nearest foe and continues to do so until all threats are neutralized. Fungi are immune to the negative effects of *bloodhoney*.

RING OF THE HEART'S KNELL

Ring, rare

Curse. The wearer of this ring becomes more and more uncomfortable around groups of people. Starting at a maximum of ten, the number of acceptable people reduces by one per month until the ring's owner cannot stand to be in the company of any intelligent being. Additionally, the wearer of the ring is at disadvantage for all Charisma-based skill checks due to their obvious unease. The ring may only be removed with the casting of *remove curse*.

HEARTWOOD STAFF

Staff, very rare (requires attunement)

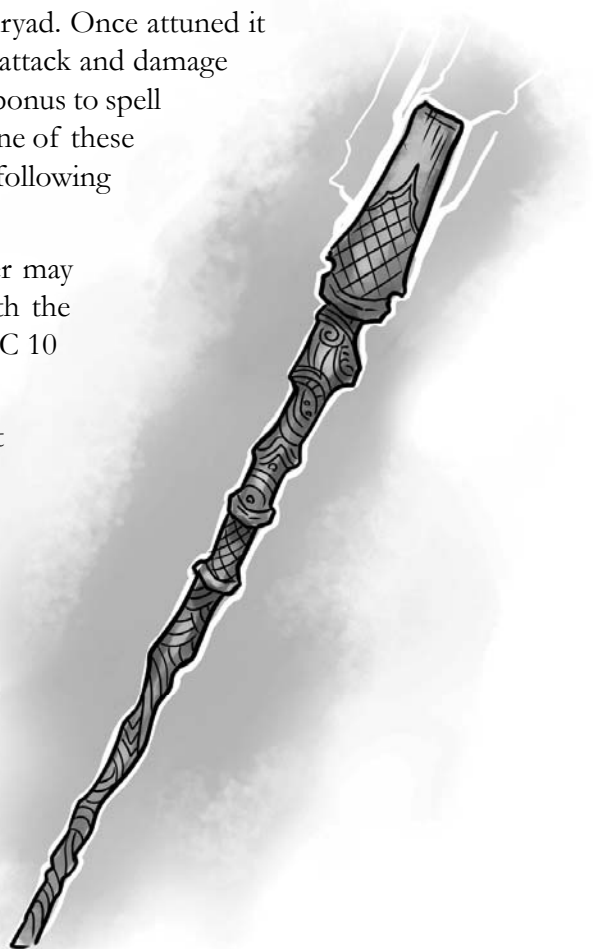
Attunement requires that this staff be willingly given by a dying dryad. Once attuned it may be wielded as a magic quarterstaff that grants a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls made against non-fey creatures. While it is held it grants a +1 bonus to spell attack rolls. It also has the following additional properties. When one of these properties is used, that property cannot be used again until the following dawn.

Entangle. Upon striking a target with a melee attack the wielder may cause a rush of plant-growth to spring from the ground beneath the target, entangling them. The target is held until succeeding on a DC 10 Strength save.

Goodberry. The wielder of the staff may cause the staff to fruit ten berries, each healing 1 hit point. A single berry also provides a day's required nourishment (for a herbivore or omnivore). Uneaten berries lose their potency at sunrise the following day.

Speak with Animals. The wielder of the staff can call upon this power so as to communicate with natural beasts for a period of 2 (1d4) minutes. The knowledge of the beasts is limited but they can disclose simple information and following simple instructions (at the GM's discretion).

Thunder. When making a successful melee attack using the staff the wielder can cause the staff to emit a clap of thunder audible out to 200 feet. The target must make a DC 15 Constitution save or become stunned until after the wielder's next turn.



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