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VILLAGE BACKDROP: LADY CROSS



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VILLAGE BACKDROP: LADY CROSS

On what was once the lonely crossroads of two rarely used roads sits the village of Lady Cross, a tight community of stone houses surrounded by a high stone wall. Now a popular rest stop for travellers and merchants alike, Lady Cross is known for the heady spirits distilled in the village and sold at the local inn, The Lady's Rest. Unknown to most, it is a different type of spirit the villagers fear—a sinister secret wreathed in foul treachery and hysteria that speaks to the darkness and greedy lurking in men's souls.

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

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LADY CROSS AT A GLANCE

Ruler: Alderman Jarsson Trond

Government: Autocracy

Alignments: NG, N, LN, NE

Population: 86 (74 humans, 6 dwarves, 1 gnome, 1 half-elf, 4 halflings)

Notable Folk: Alderman Jarsson (location 1, The Lady's Rest), Markus Vorgmann (location 9, The Gates).

Languages: Common, Dwarven, Elven

Resources & Industry: Distilling, brewing and hospitality

Spellcasting: 3rd (Grindin Well-Read [location 4])

Several years ago, Adalbert Gall—a brewer—came to Lady Cross with his daughter, Eadith, a beautiful girl coming of age with a bewitching smile and mischievous eyes. Within a day all the young lads were vying for her attention. She, however, had eyes for only one: Pepin—the son of Jarsson the tavern owner with whom her father sought to trade spirit recipes. Late at night, while the men discussed business in the taproom, the two lovers sneaked into the cellars to conduct business of their own.

Struggles of two different kinds broke out at the same time; as the lovers fell to the floor so did the two brewers, fighting over the valuable recipes that each held. With dreams of wealth and prestige dancing before his eyes, Jarsson attacked Adalbert and struck him a fateful blow to the head with a heavy pitcher. He then dragged the heavy body down to the cellar to hide his treachery only to interrupt the youngsters in their passionate embrace.

Feigning innocence, he blamed the attack on Eadith and accused her of witchery and of beguiling his son. He dragged the screaming girl into the village square where a vengeful mob quickly formed, enraged at the attack on their friend. Eadith was tied to a large oak tree and burned whilst the frenzied mob watched. Even now, her burnt skeleton still adorns the tree, which has now gained the name “The Sorrow Tree”.

Hoping things would return to normal, Jarsson prospered using the stolen recipes whilst his son slowly descended into madness over the guilt from the deaths. One year later, as the village celebrated a successful harvest, Pepin hung himself from a tree overhanging the mill pond. Soon thereafter, whispers began to be heard in the taproom at night and guests began to complain of fitful sleep in the guest rooms and of seeing a white lady stalking the common areas late at night.

VILLAGE LORE

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

DC 10: The village of Lady Cross is a famed centre of distillery. It is particularly known for its gins.

DC 15: Stands of juniper and elder trees power the village's distilleries. Anyone caught damaging or stealing from the trees is viewed very harshly.

DC 20: Once nothing more than a rest stop for travellers Lady Cross is now a bustling community, attracting people from far away to sample its wares.

VILLAGERS

Appearance: Tall and dark haired, most villagers have tanned, leathery skin. Men are usually armed with bows and handaxes; women commonly carry long knives.

Dress: Villagers wear thick, windproof canvas over furs. Long scarves and coats are preferable to cloaks. Thick fur lined hats with a canvas covering have recently become popular. Women wear long trousers under open skirts and thick jackets; their hair is usually long and plaited or tied back. Blue and red patterns printed with ink made from local fruits adorn most clothing.

Nomenclature: *male* Jurian, Markus, Darien; *female* Bella, Mawgen; *family* Jarsson, Millsson, Morganarr, Huvlarr.

WHISPERS & RUMOURS

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

D6	RUMOUR
1	Alderman Jarsson once had a son, Pepin.
2	Sometimes a crying woman can be heard in the basement from the top of the taproom steps.
3	People shun the mill pond since the ghost of a young man was seen there.
4	Pepin, the Alderman's son wasn't right in the head and took his own life in the old mill ruins.
5*	No one enters the village after sunset. One day a lone traveller was found frozen to death with a look of sheer horror on his face just by the Sorrow Tree.
6	A network of tunnels under the inn and the ruins of the old mill hide sinister secrets.

*False rumour

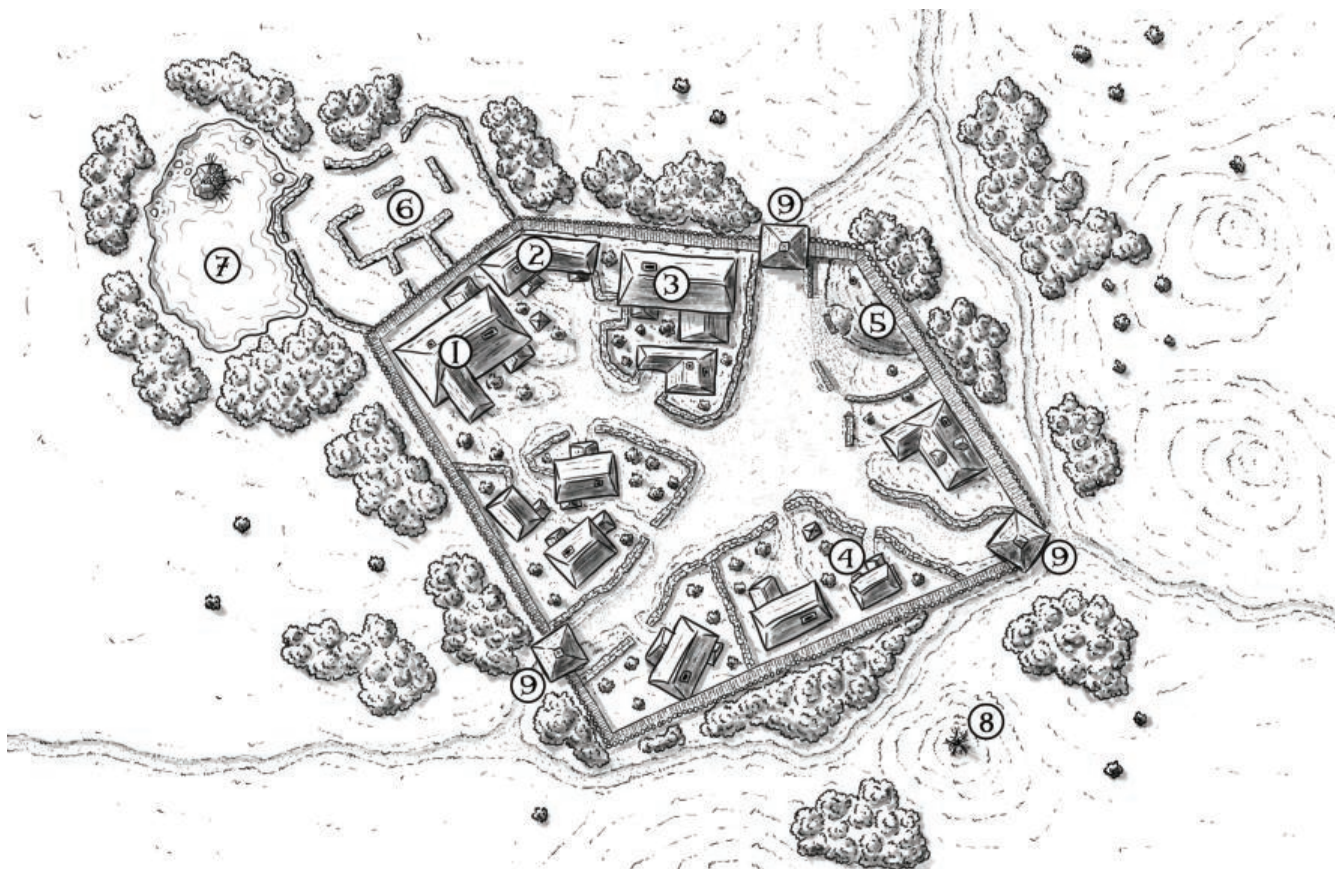
NOTABLE LOCATIONS AT A GLANCE

Most of Lady Cross comprises peasant homes. (Several of these are sturdy, single storey stone houses with large cellars for domestic animals to shelter in when the weather turns particularly harsh; every household has at least one cow or goat). Gardens are well tended and many have huts for chickens, rabbits or geese. Large, long haired dogs are popular as pets and guardians.

Scattered around Lady Cross are six wells which draw water from the maze of tunnels and passageways weaving below the village.

A few locations are of particular interest to adventurers:

1. **The Lady's Rest:** This squat stone, rose-covered building is the centre of village life. Bordering the village square on two sides, it, and the spirits sold here, are the reasons most people stop in Lady Cross.
2. **Harrigan's Stables and Forge:** This large open-air forge also doubles as the stables for the inn's many visitors.
3. **Stoneforge Distillery:** Built of thick black stone bricks, this typical dwarven building houses several gin stills
4. **The Book End:** Small and innocuous, like its owner Grindin Well-Read, this small shop holds many books and maps.
5. **Wundrel's Tea Shop:** Tucked away beneath tall juniper trees, this eatery provides accommodation for smaller clients as well as a larger common room and outdoor seating for all.
6. **The Ruined Mill:** Now unused, this old mill stands behind the village slowly decaying.
7. **The Mill Pond:** Hidden behind a large tangle of juniper bushes, this pond is now mostly ignored by the busy villagers.
8. **The Sorrow Tree:** Shattered by lightning in a savage storm, this burnt tree overlooks the village from a small knoll beside the road. Eadith's scorched and weathered skeleton is still chained to the tree.
9. **The Watchtowers:** Each of the three village gates are built inside a sturdy stone tower. From here, guards can use their crossbows to great effect through the arrow slits or from behind the crenelated wall.



LIFE IN LADY CROSS

Despite the cold wind and the rough terrain life in Lady Cross is good. Most people have their own gardens where they grow vegetables and berries and the yearly juniper harvest provides extra, welcome, income. Most people don't seem to have any greater ambitions than a simple life.

TRADE & INDUSTRY

In addition to the booming gin production several villagers are very successful at growing vegetables and smaller berry bushes. These provide the hard workers with more interesting food. Skilled hunters bring in venison and boar, at least once a week.

Some of the local women have started weaving cloth and using the various plants in the area as dyes to make more colourful clothing. An open market takes place outside the Lady's Rest at the weekends.

The village has no general store so Jarsson has started collecting items of equipment and weapons to sell to visitors.

LAW & ORDER

The Vorgmann brothers (location 9) are deadly serious about keeping the peace in the village, even standing up to Jarsson when it comes to defending people. They brook no trouble from anyone and do not allow troublemakers back in the village. They are incorruptible and do not take bribes.

The village gates are locked at night and many a disgruntled merchant has camped in the shadow of the walls under the guards' watchful eye.

Should the village be threatened, a militia of around 20 skilled fighters can be raised along with a cadre of skilled, crossbow-armed hunters.

CUSTOMS & TRADITIONS

On the winter and summer equinox, the villagers gather at the Sorrow Tree to pray and give thanks for the year's harvest. Handmade gifts are exchanged and each house sets up a stall to trade the years produce to other villagers. Officially named Lady's Day by Jarsson, the event has become highly anticipated by all, with people from other villages travelling to Lady Cross for the day. Commonly seeds from the nearby trees are woven into bracelets and necklaces and given to travellers in the village at the time. Other gifts of clothing, boots or bottles of liquor are also commonly passed around.

VILLAGE DRESSING

Use this table, to generate the minor sights and sounds the PCs experience as they move about Lady Cross.

D20 DRESSING/EVENT

1	Marissa leaves the Lady's Rest at night with a traveller but returns alone.
2	A servant from Wundrel's shop wanders across the village with a tray of food towards The Book-End
3	A traveller insults Wundrel and the villagers leap to her defence.
4	A fight breaks out over ownership of several juniper bushes growing on the boundary between two homes.
5	A heavily armed villager nods to the party, before heading out the northern gate.
6	A traveller complains about the noise from the room next to him disturbing his sleep. The room was empty.
7	A pretty woman is seen standing by the Lady's Rest. She smiles then disappears inside. She is never seen again.
8	A traveller is dragged out of the Lady's Rest by Markus before being escorted from the village.
9	Jarsson and Markus argue over something before storming away from each other.
10	New pipes are delivered to the distillery and normal work pauses while the dwarves install them.
11	A horse bolts from Harrigan's stables and runs around the village.
12	New guards are marched around the village, to get the lay of the land, by the Vorgmann brothers.
13	A large deer is brought into the village by a hunter.
14	Pretty women walk through the village carrying baskets of berries to the distillery.
15	A traveller arrives at the gates after sunset and has to stay outside until morning.
16	Several villagers set up stalls selling finely made cloaks and other cold weather clothes outside the Lady's Rest.
17	A parent berates their child for playing near the mill-pond.
18	Strong winds create a hollow wailing sound coming from the Sorrow Tree.
19	Lights are seen in the hills outside the village. Extra guards rush to the walls and gates, just in case.
20	A pack of wolves appears on the outskirts of the village before being driven off by the militia.

THE SURROUNDING LOCALITY

Set in a low, sheltered dell nestling between several hills, Lady Cross is a small walled community surrounded by trees and shrubs. Thick tangles of berry bushes and trees surround the village right up to the high stone wall. (The Vorgmann brothers want to cut and burn much of this growth back to increase the village's security, but thus far the locals have objected as the berry bushes provide much fruit in the autumn months).

The rough stony ground is less than ideal for growing traditional crops so the village has adapted to using the bounty nature provides for them there, bitter fruits, nuts and other plants form the villagers' staple diet whilst inside the village small gardens grow other vegetables and fruit.

The rugged, high moorlands surrounding the village are covered with similar bushes. Stands of conifers and thick patches of gorse fill the valleys and dells cutting through the upland. Herds of deer, goats and packs of wild boar wander the highlands while dodging packs of roaming wolves and wild dogs. Larger predators tend to stay within the thick pine woods or steep valleys near the rocky streams cutting through the thin soil and stony ground.

When the harsh, chilling northern wind blows, the moors are a horrible place. As many travellers have fallen prey to the biting wind and chilling rains as to the wild animals or the few humanoid tribes wandering the wilds. This harsh terrain is well

known to the villagers and their dress and manner indicates this well. Many a traveller has the needlework of the villagers to thank for their comfort (or even survival) on cold nights.

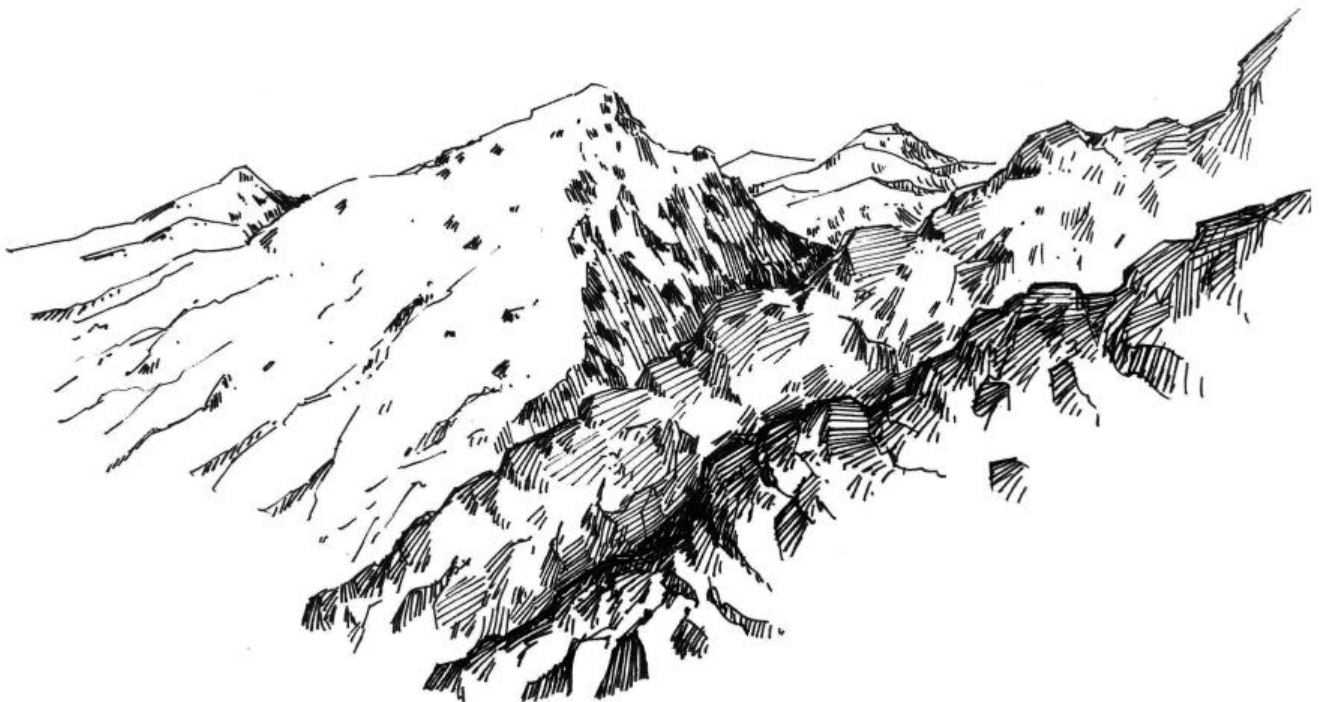
THE TUNNELS

Natural passages formed by the meandering path of the two streams feeding the villages six wells riddles the ground below Lady Cross.

When the villagers discovered these tunnels, they added rooms and inter-connecting passages, forming a maze under the hamlet. Used to store food and fuel for the harsh winters, or to stable their beasts, the tunnels were a necessity in the early years. Recently, however, due to the village's economic boom the cellars are not being used as originally intended and many tunnels now lie empty and forgotten.

Boarded up with wooden barricades or hastily laid brickwork, the tunnels now see little traffic and are mainly forgotten by the villagers (apart from the few who use them for their own nefarious deeds). The only sounds heard in the tunnels are the whispers of ghosts or the skittering of rats and spiders that call the underground its home. Small colonies of bats linger in the caves whilst snakes feed on unwary prey.

Buried somewhere in the darkness lie the decaying bodies of Marissa's victims, leaving their legacies silent and forgotten.



NOTABLE LOCATIONS IN LADY CROSS

1: THE LADY'S REST

A pretty blonde girl wearing an apron over her flowery dress waits by the door to this large inn holding a tray of drinks. Ivy and roses battle for space around the leaded windows and heavy black beams. A huge oval shaped, panelled stained glass window depicting a lady riding a massive horse overlooks the inn's door.

The Lady's Rest is named after a noblewoman who built the inn as a stop-over on the long road. (The now crumbling statue of the lady in question stands in the centre of the inn's courtyard over one of the village's many wells). Ironically, the inn has now become the haunt of an altogether different lady.

Jarrison Trond (NE male human **bandit captain**) is very strict in his running of the inn and the village alike. Most people staying here are showed around by Marissa (NE female half-elf **spy**) who masquerades as a human and welcomes all guests with a free drink. The food is decent, if unimaginative. The local gins usually accompany most meals.

- **Food** Thick stew 1 sp, grilled chicken or grouse 3 sp, venison or boar 5 sp.
- **Drink** Gin (see below), mixed flagon of gin and berries and fruit juices 4 sp, jugs of ale or beer 2 cp.
- **For Sale:** *ring of feather falling* (2,500 gp).

Eadith's spirit (location 8; NG female human **ghost**) sometimes visits the Lady's Rest. Not yet fully aware of her ghostly powers, she is content to watch those she hates. Sometimes her restless sorrow spills over into the world; hence the occasional sighting of a woman dressed in white and the complaints of strange sounds emanating from empty rooms.

GIN & OTHER DRINKS

The Lady's Rest sells several kinds of unique gin:

Lady's Rest Own (1 sp/glass): Distilled with juniper from the surrounding trees.

Genever (12 sp/bottle): Strong gin made with citrus peel and fennel from the local gardens.

Red Dragon Gin (25 sp/bottle): Distilled with fresh red berries and bark from the cassia tree this strong gin leaves a burning feeling in the drinker's throat.

Mimic's Bane (45 sp/bottle): Once jokingly thought of as strong enough to dissolve a mimic's glue this rare gin doesn't sell much in the village yet is popular with adventurers. Double distilled with cardamom and cassia bark each bottle contains a soaked woodworm larvae.

Sahti (4 sp/jug): Rye beer mixed with Lady's Rest Own, jugs of this village favourite are served with most meals.

2: HARRIGAN'S STABLE AND FORGE

This two-storey building comprises a forge and stables. A loft hangs over the stables to the right whilst a forge and several anvils stand to the left. A well-built blonde man works the forge.

Comprising several stone buildings with lofts, this place is always busy during the day. Whether making horseshoes or repairing the fittings for the village's various stills, Harrigan's (N human male) work is in much demand. Capable of producing almost anything in metal, this busy, talented smith rarely accepts commissions. His rates include:

- **Weapons and Armour Work:** 2 sp per hour.
- **Horse-shoeing:** 1 sp per hoof.
- **For Sale:** *+1 shield* (570 gp).

Arrowheads, swords and hammers lie on a table near his forge half-finished and a huge two-handed sword hangs above the anvil on the wall.

Harrigan, is a stocky blonde man with a bushy beard and a constant odour of sweat and smoke. He is very strong and short tempered which has led to several confrontations with Markus.

MARISSA

NE female half-elf **spy**

Small, blond and pretty this girl smiles welcomingly to you.

Mannerisms: She uses her youthful looks to trick people into thinking she is a child.

Personality: Naturally selfish and lazy she has few morals. She is not stupid and tries to get on well with capable looking adventurers in case she needs to call on them for help. Many of the villagers love Marissa and are overprotective of her.

Background: Marissa is an orphan who was found on the road and adopted by Jarsson.

Hooks: Occasionally, she lures solitary travellers to the mill pond where she kills them so she can loot their rooms (and person). As she is in charge of cleaning the rooms nobody has noticed these sudden disappearances.

Marissa know of a secret passage under the inn that leads to the mill. She has stashed a bag of belongings there in case she needs to escape. Her clothing is usually loose and contains several hidden weapons and pockets to hide things she pilfers as she goes about her work.

3: THE STONEFORGE DISTILLERY

Heavy oak doors stand open allowing a view of a tangle of copper pipes and hundreds of barrels inside. Several dwarves rush around wheeling barrows full of berries or sacks of rye to the huge vats. A heady smell of alcohol wafts from the place.

This dwarven-built building often seems cramped to taller folk. Inside, six dwarven “brothers”—Elrak, Falgar, Gillon, Kilbir, Malden and Thoric—work on the stills or preparing the next batch. Large barrels fill the extensive stone cellars beneath the main room. The dwarves sleep in the cellar on beds laid between the barrels; it seems the dwarves take their work seriously. They are always here or at the Lady’s Rest, enjoying the fruit of their labours

The “brothers” (all NG male dwarf **veteran** except Malden [NG male dwarf **knight**]), are actually four brothers and two cousins. They all have long hair and beards ranging from a reddish brown to black. Usually encountered unarmoured they all own fine chainmail, shields and dwarven axes. Being skilled engineers and stonemasons, they recently strengthened the tunnels under the inn and blocked off some of the unused passages stretching under the village. Jarsson swore them to secrecy after they built a strong room for him.

Malden Stoneforge is the eldest brother and he enjoys the peace of the village and distilling. He isn’t very fond of Jarsson or Harrigan. Whilst this doesn’t affect his working relationship, he does tend to favour the Vorgmann brothers in arguments between Alderman and Markus.

4: THE BOOK-END

This small cottage is in fact a shop as the little sign on the gate denotes. Books and maps clutter the windows and a studded oak door bears the sign “Welcome to the Book-End.”

ALDERMANN JARSSON TROND

NE male human **bandit captain**

This podgy man wears his hair back from his flabby face. He clutches a walking stick in one over-sized hand.

Mannerisms: Having to lean heavily on a staff when walking long distances, Jarsson usually stays near the inn and sends runners to do his work. He always has a flagon of steaming coffee within easy reach.

Personality: Alderman Jarsson is aging badly from the stress of the previous years and it shows in his stance and short temper. His natural selfishness causes him to continue his greedy lifestyle.

Background: Jarsson has lived in the village all his life. He is a murderer and is consumed by guilt over his son’s suicide.

Set back in a small, overgrown garden most people don’t realise this is actually a shop. Its low thatched roof holds the bedroom and living area above a cluttered shop. Inside, hundreds of books, maps and scrolls fill solid oak shelves. Behind a desk sized for a human, perched on a massive cushion-covered chair, sits the gnome Grindin Well-Read.

- **Grindin Well-Read (NG male gnome illusionist 3):** Small, even for a gnome, Grindin has a shock of white hair that seems to defy gravity. He wears thick-lensed glasses on his nose. He doesn’t wear the typical furs of the other villagers but rather a thin grey robe under a long black cloak. Being more of a scholar than a wizard, he also doubles as a notary for the village businesses and any other documents.

Always interested in buying maps or journals he happily spends most of his time recreating these personal treasures. His prized books include spellbooks containing many low-level wizard spells and an encyclopaedia on the differing types of juniper plants and their uses. He offers several services to his customers:

- **Local Maps:** 4 gp.
- **Book Copying:** 15 gp.
- **Map Copying:** 1 gp.
- **For Sale:** *potion of heroism* (500 gp), *potion of invisibility* (5,000 gp).

5: WUNDREL’S TEA SHOP

A scattering of tables and chairs around this building’s courtyard are filled with villagers happily eating and chatting. Halfling women weave in and out of the crowd delivering food and steaming trays of drinks. From the door, a matronly-looking halfling motions you towards an empty table.

Standing between four tall juniper trees, this low turf-covered house sports a paved area, set about a large fire pit, and decorative stone flowerbeds. Most villagers stop here for breakfast or lunch.

Wundrel, (N female halfling) is always busy and her sisters (Cora, Isseekina and Roylla) constantly scurry about serving food. The sisters are typical halflings (N female halfling), who wear thick bonnets and long white aprons over their floral dresses. Wundrel’s hair has lost the sisters’ signature luxurious blonde and is now turning a shade of grey silver rather than gold. The sisters are also skilled weavers and make the flower garlands for Lady’s Day.

- **Food:** In addition to standard fare the following are available. Scones and berries 4 cp, pancakes, berries and cream 1 sp, eggs and cakes 3 sp. Thick cream is available for an extra 3 cp.
- **Drink:** Various herbal teas (acorn tea, nettle tea and so on) 2 cp per mug, hot wine 1 sp, strong coffee 2 sp.

6: THE RUINED MILL

Tangled thorns and briars dominate this large ruin. Crumbling walls hold the remains of posts and beams and the fallen roof litters the floor with slate tiles. A warren of paths weaves through the ruins leading further into the undergrowth.

The old mill is unused except as a playground for the village's children. The remaining walls are of sturdy river stone and clay, now overgrown with moss and lichen. Birds nest in the thick ivy and bushes. The village children play in the narrow tunnels cutting through the thick bushes, when the sun is shining.

Squeezing through a gap in the walls, explorers can reach the mill's interior. Overgrown with brambles and weeds, small animals live in the undergrowth. Hidden under several piles of collapsed walls and timber, lurk cellars connected to secret tunnels leading to the Lady's Rest's cellars.

7: THE MILL POND

Choked with weeds, this large pond lies adjacent to the ruined mill. A broken and rotted water-wheel, half submerged in the brackish water lies broken and still. Flies skim over the water, chased by tiny birds. A rock breaking the surface provides home to several grey ducks.

Shunned by the villagers this large pond is overgrown and unused. A small path leads around the southern side. A large rock breaks the pond's surface; here Pepin used to sit during his many depressions. A long-limbed willow tree hangs over the rock, its longest leaves touching the water. Hidden in the mire at the bottom of the pond are the remains of two of Marissa's previous victims.

Unknown to anyone, Pepin's ghost (N male human **ghost**) haunts the mill pond. Morose, and consumed with guilt over his part in Eadith's death, he doesn't bother anyone, but those attuned to nature or to undead may sense a disquieting presence at the pond. Marissa has sensed the sadness here thinks it a fitting place for murder.

8: THE SORROW TREE

A twisted and charred skeleton wrapped in heavy chains and covered with soot and ash is yet attached to this tree's trunk. It adorns the lightning shattered tree like a grisly memento.

Blackened and split, this huge oak sits on the eastern side of the main road. Here was chained and burnt

Eadith. The tree was split in two by a lightning bolt hurled to the ground from a sudden storm that appeared as she died. This was seen as proof that Eadith was a witch.

Most villagers don't go near the tree until Lady's Day when small candles are lit and twists of heather and flowers are placed around its base. Eadith's spirit (NG female human **ghost**) yet lingers amid her bones. Angry and upset she hates the villagers, but has yet to grasp the full potential of her ghostly powers. She is also intolerably lonely. Sometimes, she visits the Lady's Rest (location 1).

9: THE WATCHTOWERS

A loft stone watchtower protects the village gate.

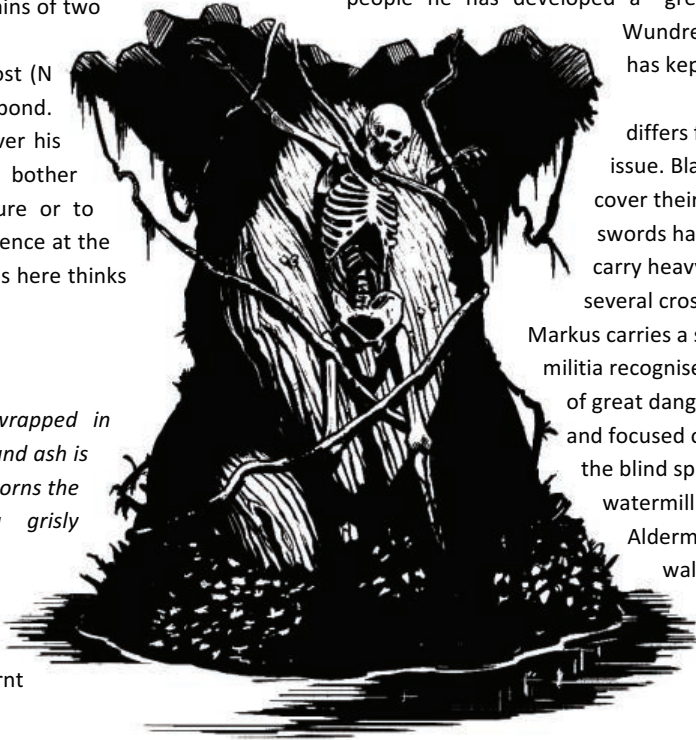
Watchtowers ward each of the village's gates. Manned by guards and closed at night, inside, a small armoury contains crossbows and hundreds of bolts alongside a warning bell. Each gate has a different sounding bell which is rung a single time whenever visitors enter the village. This alerts Marissa and Jarsson that customers are on the way.

Typically, two guards watch here day and night, their fellows resting in the second-floor barracks. Twin brothers Julius and Marius Vorgmann (NG male human **veteran**), along with their older brother Markus (NG human male **knight**) lead the guards. One of the brothers is always on duty.

Being tall, dark skinned and handsome the brothers enjoy much attention from the village women, something the other men mutter about. Julius and Marius have partners that live here, but Markus seems to avoid women. Unknown to most people he has developed a "great friendship" with Lorella, Wundrel's youngest sister, but so far has kept things quiet.

The brothers' equipment differs from the standard militia issue. Blackened steel breastplates cover their furs and heavy bastard swords hang from their belts. They carry heavy wooden shields and have several crossbows at each watch tower.

Markus carries a signal whistle which all the militia recognise; he uses this only in times of great danger. Being tactically astute and focused on security, he has identified the blind spot the Lady's Rest and the watermill cover. He has petitioned Alderman Jarsson to build a walkway along the walls there, but his request has fallen on deaf ears so far.



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