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REALITY BLURS

OLD SCHOOL FANTASY

ADVENTURE FOUR

SLAVE PENS OF MOSS STONE

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SLAVE PENS OF MOSS STONE

INTRODUCTION

On the gentle, rolling slopes of the Emerald Hills, in a picturesque landscape of natural beauty, one of the vilest forms of tyranny has taken root. Gnoll slavers, operating out of the nearby Moss Stone Keep, work their "cattle" to their deaths tilling away at the unyielding soil. These poor souls, men and women, humans and elves, all live and die under the yoke of their treacherous masters — all to cultivate a difficult weed for the gnolls to sell on the black market. Who dares stand against these terrible creatures? Who dares to free the captives from their bleak fate? Hopefully your heroes!

Slave Pens of Moss Stone serves as a continuation of the **Old School Fantasy** series. It can easily be played on its own, but there are connections to the previous modules (see **An Adventure Unto Itself**). In this scenario, the heroes must track down a vile group of gnoll slavers in the forested Moss Stone Hills, where slaves are being worked to death cultivating a rare weed from the merciless soil. They have a chance to gain some allies before breaking the slavers' yoke, and must confront the Master of Moss Stone, a ferocious gnoll of demonic descent, in the lower corridors of Moss Stone Keep. A challenge worthy of any party of heroes!

AN ADVENTURE UNTO ITSELF

This scenario works very well as a jumping off point for a new group of heroes, but if you've played through the previous installments in the Old School Fantasy series — particularly **Darkness Over Keryhk Nhor** — there are special ways you can entice your players to pick up the trail of the gnoll slavers of Moss Stone.

In the ruined hall of Keryhk Nhor the heroes faced off against gnoll pawns of Lord Gravespawn and their leader Ormigorg. They could have been sent from Moss Stone by Master Nurghaal, though on whose orders is left up to you. Is Master Nurghaal in league with Lord Gravespawn? What is the connection between the slavers of Moss Stone and that terrible lich's secret and mysterious plans? The details are left up to you, but more suggestions are found in **Epilogue** of this scenario.

In the same adventure, the heroes also had a chance to revive the elven princess Emilee of Silver Vines. Her kin play an important role in this scenario, including her young sister Hanalee, who leads a group of elven freedom fighters. How this plays out depends on how the heroes handled Emilee in Keryhk Nhor, but hopefully things ended well. Hopefully!

SYNOPSIS

When traveling on the road, the peaks of the Jagged Reaches behind them, the heroes are suddenly ambushed by a band of fierce gnolls. The creatures are opportunistic and see a chance to expand their current stock of slaves. How wrong they turn out to be! After dealing with the ambush, the heroes discover the gnolls have a wagonload of fresh slaves, men and elves they are taking northeast to a place called Moss Stone in the Emerald Hills.

If the heroes don't take it upon themselves to root out this most foul form of evil, one of the freed slaves begs the heroes to free her family, who had been taken a few weeks ago by the vicious gnolls. No one knows exactly where Moss Stone is located, but one of the freed slaves is a ranger named Aiden. He can be an ally, joining the heroes on their quest, or he could just as easily draw a crude map and let them find their own way.

On the trail of the slavers, the heroes must travel through a sparse forest, where they may run into bad weather and dangerous wildlife, including angry bears and giant wasps.

They eventually stumble upon the ruins of the village of Jaskers, long ago picked barren by the slavers of Moss Stone, but the dilapidated buildings hold a pack of feral ghouls, hungry for fresh meat. Defeating them is ancillary to freeing the slaves of Moss Stone, but does yield some treasure the heroes can use.

Continuing, the party comes to the end of the forest that gives way to the rolling slopes of the Emerald Hills. And that's when arrows begin to rain from the trees! A small group of elven freedom fighters led by a warrior-mage named Hanalee have been hitting the gnoll slavers bit by bit, but they don't have the strength for a full-on assault. How the heroes deal with Hanalee and her band is a roleplaying hurdle they must overcome. The elves can be a strong force in helping to free the slaves of Moss Stone, but if angered or insulted, the heroes may find themselves on the wrong end of elven archers.

Either way they eventually discover Moss Stone Keep and the surrounding fields of witch weed. The slaves are held in pits in the ground and monitored by gnoll guards, so the heroes are going

to need a good plan to free them. Alternately, they can first sneak into Moss Stone Keep and take out the leader, Master Nurghaar, in a surprise attack.

The gnolls' best defense is the witch weed itself, as one of its properties is an uncanny and almost intelligent sense of self-preservation. When bundled together, as the gnolls have done in places across the field, the witch weed rises in a shambling form that craves the flesh of the living. A few gnoll shamans control these shamblers, but if they are killed, the things go on a rampage and attack everyone — slave, gnoll and hero alike.

Moss Stone Keep is a simple compound of a few buildings and an inner courtyard surrounded by stone walls, with a second level below ground, where the gnolls live. Fierce dogs are also kept, along with Master Nurghaar's accomplice, a spell-casting demon named Vorokish.

The slavers were cultivating the witch weed and sending it to the great harbor city of Steelport. How much did they manage to send away? Who has received it on the other end? Who is involved in this conspiracy? The ultimate questions are left up to you, but your heroes can rest in a job well done once Moss Stone Keep's masters have been defeated.

LORE

MOSS STONE KEEP

A small fortress of stone built on the slopes of the Emerald Hills, the site now known as Moss Stone Keep was originally constructed by a wealthy nobleman on the fringes of a nearby human kingdom. He was bequeathed the land encompassing the Emerald Hills and knew he would need a point of command in this relatively untamed wilderness. He decided the first building would be a small but formidable keep made of stone hauled over from the nearby Jagged Reaches mountain range.

It would be the only building built by the ambitious new nobleman. A combination of aggressive political strategies and poor allies left the newly appointed lord dead on the streets of the capital city. The newly finished keep lay unoccupied, save by travelers passing through the Emerald Hills. Whatever name was attached to the site was lost, and it became known as Moss Stone Keep for its lack of a permanent resident.

WITCH WEED

Amongst the flora of the world there are a few uncommon specimens of natural beauty, grace and lethality, one of which is the exceedingly rare and difficult to harvest witch weed. It grows only in the harshest of soils, and once taken root does not yield its vines to just anyone. Those who brave pulling up the weed must face off against the plant's thorny defenses.

This natural defense mechanism suggests some form of intelligence, but to date wizards and sages have yet to determine its exact nature. What is known is that witch weed makes an excellent ingredient in golems of any variety, and if left alone, a skilled spellcaster can actually summon a shambler from a pile of the harvested roots. As such, it is highly sought after.

The essence of witch weed can be distilled from its roots, and can create a potent unguent. The exact effects of this drug are unknown, but stories of wizards rampaging recklessly through the countryside, impervious to harm and pain under the effects of a witch weed haze are a common old wives' tale.

PLACES OF INTEREST

RUINS OF JASKERS

A small village in the sparse forest separating the Jagged Reaches from the Emerald Hills, at its height, Jaskers was a farming community of fifty hard-working souls. There were a dozen or so families, most of whom were related to one another, living and working in the forest in a peaceable sort of way. Unfortunately, though they were skilled at repelling the odd forest creature or stray pack of goblins, a well-armed force of gnoll slavers from Moss Stone Keep successfully captured or killed everyone in a single evening of bloodshed and terror. Or so they thought, as one family managed to escape by hiding away in their basement, only to be driven mad after seeing the carnage left behind by the gnolls.

EMERALD HILLS

Pastoral and picturesque, the Emerald Hills are an untapped resource of low rolling hills covered in great swaths of green grass that seem to sparkle in the sunshine. Unfortunately, it is just a natural illusion — the grass is the only thing that grows in the harsh soil, and animals won't eat it.

WITCH WEED FIELD

The area surrounding Moss Stone Keep has become home to the witch weed, which grows wild in the unyielding soil of the Emerald Hills. It is a rare plant, so to find a large patch of it is almost unheard of. The witch weed is a coiling, dark green plant with hideous yellow growths that pass as flowers dotting its extent. These growths have thorns that can extend out to those who try to grab the root.

MOSS STONE KEEP

Standing defiant on the rock-hard ground of the Emerald Hills, Moss Stone Keep maintains a lonely vigil atop one of the taller sloping hills of the area. While having a good view of the surrounding area for several miles, the natural valleys created by the hills means that even an army could sneak up to the keep if it so intended. The keep is surrounded by a twenty-foot high stone wall, but most of the small buildings inside are built of wood. Only the forge and the interior keep itself are also constructed of stone, and the keep has a lower level below ground.

ADVENTURE OVERVIEW

SCENE ONE: ROAD RAIDERS

While traveling along a stretch of road through a lightly forested area, with the peaks of the Jagged Reaches behind them, the heroes are suddenly set upon by a band of savage gnolls! Once the gnolls are defeated or routed, the heroes discover they were transporting a wagon full of imprisoned slaves to a site called Moss Stone Keep in the Emerald Hills to the northeast. The freed slaves beg the heroes to rescue their enslaved loved ones.

SCENE TWO: ON THE SLAVER'S TRAIL

The Emerald Hills and Moss Stone Keep are some distance to the northeast from where the heroes are attacked. While traveling through the forest, the characters may face some of the natural perils of the wilderness, such as an angry bear, a nest of giant hornets, or even a bit of inclement weather.

SCENE THREE: RUINS OF JASKERS

Halfway between the road and the Emerald Hills are the ruins of a small village. It was long ago raided by the gnolls of Moss Stone Keep and its citizens forced to work the witch weed fields. The buildings can provide a shelter from the rain, but the one family able to avoid capture have become dangerous feral ghouls now living in the ruins of their former home, eager to attack and eat any trespasser. Gnolls know to keep away from the ruins.

SCENE FOUR: THE FOREST'S EDGE

At last the heroes breach the evergreen forest and look upon the Emerald Hills. They are then peppered with arrows from the trees, where a small group of elven freedom fighters lie in wait. They don't attack to kill, only to get their attention. Their leader, Hanalee, comes forward, and the heroes have a chance to learn what's going on. and possibly gain allies in their efforts.

SCENE FIVE: BREAKING THE CHAINS

Having finally arrived at Moss Stone Keep, the heroes must choose their plan of action. The witch weed field is located outside of the keep on the western slope, while the dug out holes in the ground that serve as slave pens are on the eastern slope. Gnolls and their fierce dogs guard the area at all times, though it is less guarded at night. How the heroes approach their assault on the area is up to them.

SCENE SIX: MOSS STONE KEEP GROUND LEVEL

The small fortress of Moss Stone Keep awaits the heroes, for even if the slaves are freed the danger of the gnoll slavers remains everpresent for as long as they hold the keep and surrounding area.

SCENE SEVEN: MOSS STONE KEEP LOWER LEVEL

Now that they've managed to make it past the ground level of Moss Stone Keep, the heroes are ready to descend into its lower depths. This is where the gnolls sleep and keep their accumulated treasure. It is also home to Nurghaal, the Master of Moss Stone.

Scene Eight: Master of Moss Stone

Having navigated their way through Moss Stone Keep the heroes are ready to face its leaders — a cruel and powerful black-furred gnoll named Nurghaal and his demonic sorcerer companion, Vorokish! The two do not give up without a fight to the finish, or at least that's what it seems. Vorokish is too clever to be simply put down with spell and blade, and though it seems he falls in battle, his fate is not quite so sealed. Who is the true Master of Moss Stone afterall?

SCENE EIGHT: MASTER OF MOSS STONE

Having navigated their way through Moss Stone Keep the heroes are ready to face its leaders — a cruel and powerful black-furred gnoll named Nurghaal and his demonic sorcerer companion, Vorokish! The two do not give up without a fight to the finish, or at least that's what it seems. Vorokish is too clever to be simply put down with spell and blade, and though it seems he falls in battle, his fate is not quite so sealed. Who is the true Master of Moss Stone afterall?

SCENE NINE: EPILOGUE

The primary goal to keep in mind is the freeing of the slaves. The gnolls of Moss Stone Keep are a threat, and Nurghaal and his demonic sorcerer are villainous creatures with evil intent, but the party should be realistic about their capabilities. On the other hand, fortune favors the bold and a confident group with the aid of a band of elven freedom fighters stands a solid chance of taking out all of the gnolls in a single battle.

MENACE

Slave Pens of Moss Stone assumes a Menace of II (Routine) or III (Challenging), though you can easily adjust that if you like. Keep in mind that a higher or lower Menace will adjust the number of Dramatic scenes.

SLIDING DCS

To allow for play at any Threat Level, this adventure features sliding DCS (see Fantasy Craft, page 370).

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Aiden, Enslaved Human Ranger: Aiden is a healthy thirty-five year old human who has lived in the wilds most of his life. He's capable with a blade and bow, as his weathered hands and normally calm demeanor attest. He was ambushed by gnolls several days before **Scene 1** while out hunting small game, and thus only had his dagger and bow with him. The gnolls overwhelmed him, took everything of value, and threw him into the slave wagon to take to Moss Stone Keep. Now Aiden wants revenge.

Elven Freedom Fighters: These elves, under the leadership of Hanalee, hail from Silver Vines far to the south, but are a rougher breed. They have bronzed complexions and brown tattoos across their arms and chest depicting birds, hawks primarily, poised to strike some unseen foe. They dress simply in cured animal hides that make little sound as they glide effortlessly through the forest.

Hanalee, Elven Warrior-Wizard: Much like her sister Emilee, Hanalee is a beautiful elven woman with long flowing blonde locks, high cheekbones, and large almond-shaped eyes the color of a spring rainstorm. When her sister was lost a hundred years ago in the depths of Keryhk Nhor, Hanalee had to be strong, so there are unusual, just barely perceptible worry lines spidering out from her otherwise flawless eyes. She carries herself with a weighty purpose — she knows the gnolls of Moss Stone Keep are foul, degenerate creatures, but she also knows she doesn't have enough people for an all-out attack. Or at least she doesn't think she does. She carries a sword at all times, a slim blade of elven design, and her pouch of spell components is never far from her belt.

Gnoll Shaman: Dressing in furs and hides, the Gnoll Shaman often has bones tied into his blackish-brown fur, and wears a bone cap on his head. If not the leader of their tribe, the Gnoll Shaman serves as a counselor to his leader. Connected mystically to the spirit world, he possesses powers often disconcerting to his more barbaric brethren. He speaks both Common and Gnoll.

Gnoll Slaver: Gnolls are hyena-headed, evil humanoids that wander in loose tribes. Most have dirty yellow or reddish-brown fur. A gnoll is a nocturnal carnivore, preferring intelligent creatures

Nurghaal, Master of Moss Stone: Nurghaal, self-proclaimed Master of Moss Stone, is a huge and particularly vicious gnoll. He has bulky shoulders, a thick neck with a relatively small head, and he is covered in unusual black fur.

Vorokish, Demon Sorcerer: Vorokish is an honest-to-goodness demon, with deep purple skin, swept back horns on either side of his head, and furry goat legs. He dresses in a simple black robe with a hood so as not to scare some of the gnolls of Moss Stone Keep, though he does so with just his piercing, soul-rending crimson eyes.

THE ADVENTURE PROPER

SCENE 1: ROAD RAIDERS

A road in the Jagged Reaches

OBJECTIVES

Defeat the gnolls that are hell-bent on killing them, and then free the captured slaves. Once freed, they should feel obligated to rescue the rest from the slavers at Moss Stone Keep.

CHALLENGES

Defeating a marauding horde of gnolls and freeing the slaves.

SYNOPSIS

Scene Type: Standard

GM Briefing: Starting an adventure with a bang is always a good idea! It gets the blood pumping, and lets the heroes know what's at stake early on. If you are running this scenario for a group of experienced heroes, consider having the gnolls use better tactics — perhaps they actively set up a trap in the form of a covered pit in the road. Gnolls are clever and resourceful, but also tend to be lazy. Once they are defeated or routed, make sure to draw the heroes' attention to the slave wagon a short distance away from the road. Cries of help should work nicely, and once the slaves are freed make sure to play on the heroes' guilty side — they are heroes after all, so it shouldn't take much prodding to get them to rescue some imprisoned slaves.

If the heroes have a tough time with the gnolls at the beginning, consider having Aiden offer to join them once he is freed. He is handy with a blade and bow and knows the woods well. Though he has not been to Moss Stone Keep, he has heard rumors of it for several years.

Gear: The heroes are traveling with all their normal gear.

LOCATION

The road cutting through the Jagged Reaches is a major trade route, though this far north there is not a lot of traffic. With those foreboding and dangerous mountainous peaks behind, the land gives way to slight hills and light evergreen forestation.

The tranquil scene is interrupted by the feral yowls of savage gnolls that break from the treeline surrounding the road! They are chaotic, disorganized creatures, rarely taking advantage of group tactics. A short distance away their slave wagon sits, a rickety, rundown thing with straw barely covering the wooden boards of the floor. Iron bars keep the occupants inside, and the door can be unlocked with a key found on one of the gnolls or by a skilled larcenist. The slaves are famished, beaten, but otherwise alive, and are overjoyed at being freed.

Ambiance: Birds chirp as they flutter between the branches and the sun shines bright overhead on what appears to be a pleasant afternoon in late spring (or early summer, or whatever is appropriate for your campaign).

Terrain: Indoors/settled

Cultural Interests: GM Preference

ACTION

Perhaps traveling from Enclave after saving it in the previous *Old School Fantasy* scenarios, or just traveling to some other destinations, the heroes find themselves on a major trade route, with the high peaks of the Jagged Reaches behind them. A lightly forested region surrounds them, with seemingly no malice in the lurking shadows, but gnolls lurk ready to spring into action.

While enjoying this fine day, have each hero make a Notice check to avoid being surprised by the gnoll slavers that leap out from all sides. There is one mob of gnolls, and another mob hangs back from the initial charge to pepper the heroes with arrows from their shortbows.

If more than half of their number is killed, the gnolls turn tail and run away. Their greater speed means they can outrun most opponents, but they take a few potshots with their shortbows as

they flee. Once defeated or routed, the heroes hear cries for help a short distance away. Investigating, they find a slave wagon filled with a dozen people — men and women, humans and elves, old and young. They beg to be released. One of the gnolls has a key around his neck, otherwise it can be opened with a successful Disable check (Tricky DC; treat as a padlock for purposes of Disabling the lock) to open the lock on the wagon.

The freed slaves are grateful, and explain they were captured a few days ago from their village a short distance to the south. One of the group is a hearty man named Aiden, who steps up and thanks the heroes personally. He explains he's a woodsman and trapper who has lived in the area for some years, and that the gnolls have never come this far south of the Emerald Hills in that time. He speaks some Gnomish, and heard their captors refer to Moss Stone Keep. Characters can make a Knowledge check (DC 15) to learn the basic information about that keep (as detailed under **Lore: Moss Stone Keep**). Aiden knows a little of the history.

A few of the slaves have family members taken by the gnolls in the past week and they beg the heroes to free them from Moss Stone Keep. If the heroes need combat help, Aiden can be of assistance. He can use a shortbow, spear and leather armor left by one of the defeated gnolls as gear.

CAST

AIDEN, ENSLAVED RANGER (STANDARD NPC)

"Dirty stinkin' gnolls!" "Ain't no one gonna lock me up for long. No one!"

Race: Human

Description: Aiden is a healthy thirty-five year old human who has lived in the wilds most of his life. He's capable with a blade and bow, as his weathered hands and normally calm demeanor attest. He was ambushed by gnolls several days before **Scene 1** while out hunting small game, and thus only had his dagger and bow with him. The gnolls overwhelmed him, took everything of value, and threw him into the slave wagon to take to Moss Stone Keep. Now Aiden wants revenge.

Aiden can be a useful ally to the heroes, especially if they lack a party member skilled in the wilderness. He can also be a thorn in their side if they choose a more deceitful path to free the slaves, as his natural heroic nature demands an immediate confrontation. Ultimately how you use him is up to you.

Motivations: Revenge on the gnolls.

Aiden, Enslaved Human Ranger (Medium Folk Walker — 41 XP): Str 10, Dex 10, Con 10, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 10; SZ M (1×1, Reach 1); Spd 30 ft. ground; Init IV; Atk II; Def II; Res III; Health IV; Comp II; Skills: Medicine IV, Search IV, Survival VIII; Qualities: *Class ability (Scout: rough living I), feat (Pathfinder Basics (forest/jungle. plains), Pathfinder Mastery), superior traveler II*

Attacks/Weapons: Dagger (dmg 1d6 lethal; threat 19–20; qualities: *bleed, hurl*), short bow + 20 standard arrows (dmg 1d6 lethal; threat 19–20; range 20 ft. × 6; qualities: *AP 2, cavalry, poisonous*)

Gear: None

Treasure: None

CAPTIVE SLAVE (STANDARD NPC)

"Please help us!" "We're so hungry."

Race: Elf

Description: These are the poor captured slaves of the gnolls — men and women, elves and humans, young and old. They are dressed in rags, with mud-covered bodies. Those at Moss Stone Keep also have numerous scratches and gouges on their hands and arms from toiling in the witch weed fields.

The slaves are in no condition to do much, but if rallied under a capable leader they could be convinced to rebel — if they could be convinced that they wouldn't die in the process. Otherwise they are a hopeless, helpless lot whose spirit has been broken by the gnolls.

Motivations: Escape from the gnolls.

Captive Slave, Elf (Medium Fey Walker — 34 XP): Str 10, Dex 10, Con 10, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 10; SZ M (1×1, Reach 1); Spd 40 ft. ground; Init IV; Atk V; Def II; Res II; Health II; Comp I; Skills: Ride III, Search V, Sneak III; Qualities: *Attractive I, burden of ages, feat (Bow Basics, Bow Mastery), improved sense (hearing, sight)*

Attacks/Weapons: Slam I (dmg 1d6 lethal; threat 20)

Gear: None

Treasure: None

CAPTIVE SLAVE, HUMAN (STANDARD NPC)

"Please help us!" "We're so hungry."

Description: These are the poor captured slaves of the gnolls — men and women, elves and humans, young and old. They are dressed in rags, with mud-covered bodies. Those at Moss Stone Keep also have numerous scratches and gouges on their hands and arms from toiling in the witch weed fields.

The slaves are in no condition to do much, but if rallied under a capable leader they could be convinced to rebel — if they could be convinced that they wouldn't die in the process. Otherwise they are a hopeless, helpless lot whose spirit has been broken by the gnolls.

Motivations: Escape from the gnolls.

Captive Slave, Human (Medium Folk Walker — 28 XP):

Str 10, Dex 10, Con 12, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 10; SZ M (1×1, Reach 1); Spd 30 ft. ground; Init II; Atk III; Def I; Res IV; Health V; Comp I; Skills: Athletics IV, Crafting IV, Survival IV; Qualities: None

Attacks/Weapons: Slam I (dmg 1d6 lethal; threat 20)

Gear: None

Treasure: None

SLAVERS (STANDARD NPC, ADVERSARY)

“Kip, Kip . . . you will become slaves!”

Race: Gnoll

Description: Gnolls are hyena-headed, evil humanoids that wander in loose tribes. Most have dirty yellow or reddish-brown fur. A gnoll is a nocturnal carnivore, preferring intelligent creatures for food because they scream more. Gnolls speak Gnoll. A gnoll is about 7 1/2 feet tall and weighs 300 pounds.

Gnolls like to attack when they have the advantage of numbers, using horde tactics and physical strength to overwhelm and knock down their opponents. They show little discipline when fighting unless they have a strong leader; at such times, they can maintain ranks and fight as a unit. While they do not usually prepare traps, they do use ambushes and try to attack from a flanking position.

Motivations: They seek to replenish their slave stock.

Gnoll Slavers (Medium Folk Walker — 22 XP): Str 12, Dex 10, Con 11, Int 8, Wis 10, Cha 8; SZ M (1×1, Reach 1); Spd 30 ft. ground; Init II; Atk IV; Def II; Res I; Health III; Comp I; Skills: Notice II; Qualities: *Darkvision I, feat (All-Out Attack), nocturnal, swarm*

Attacks/Weapons: Throwing Spear (dmg 1d8+1 lethal; threat 19-20; qualities: *hurl, poisonous, reach +1*), short bow + 30 standard arrows (dmg 1d6 lethal; threat 19–20; range 20 ft. × 6; qualities: *AP 2, cavalry, poisonous*)

Gear: Partial studded leather (DR 2; Resist —; DP –1; ACP –0; Spd +0 ft.; Disguise +0)

Treasure: 1A, 1C, 1G

NEXT STEPS

The heroes must track down the remaining gnoll slavers and rescue the captured slaves.

SCENE 2: ON THE SLAVER'S TRAIL

The forest trails leading to the Emerald Hills

OBJECTIVES

Traverse the pine forest to reach Moss Stone Keep in the Emerald Hills in order to free the slaves from the yoke of their gnoll masters. And survive the journey.

CHALLENGES

Surviving the journey through the Emerald Hills.

SYNOPSIS

Scene Type: Standard

GM Briefing: Traveling through the pine forest to the Emerald Hills can be as interesting and engaging as the GM determines. It is suggested the heroes run into at least one of the random encounters outlined below, but if pressed for time the scene can be shortened to just one encounter, rather than a chance each day of having a random encounter.

Gear: The heroes are inside Enclave with all adventuring gear on their persons.

LOCATION

While this evergreen forest doesn't really have a name, it provides a natural buffer between the Jagged Reaches and the Emerald Hills. The land itself is almost as rugged as the Emerald Hills.

If the heroes are on foot, it takes four days to reach the Emerald Hills (however, it's only two days to reach Jaskers, which is halfway between the road and the hills). If they are mounted on horseback, the journey is halved.

Ambiance: Small sloping hills covered with pine trees that sway in the mid-day breeze coming off the mountains to the west. There's no proper road through the forest, but a few game trails left by stag and other forest creatures can be seen and followed here and there.

Terrain: Forest/jungle

Cultural Interests: GM Preference

ACTION

Hopefully the heroes have food and water to make it through a journey of several days. Refer to the **Starvation and Thirst** rules in the *Fantasy Craft* core rulebook, page 217, if the heroes aren't able to find enough food out in the wilderness.

The GM should use the rules for Travel Encounters (*see Fantasy Craft, page 372*). The GM may either spend an action dice to interrupt the journey with an encounter as normal or may make random encounter checks (*see Fantasy Craft, page 372*) during this time to see if there is an encounter. If there is a random encounter, roll on the table below to determine the heroes' peril!

1D4 RANDOM ENCOUNTER

1 Bad Weather. The clear skies open up and a rainstorm lets loose its fury on the surrounding area. The storm lasts for 2d12 hours, during which the heroes suffer -2 with hurled attack checks, -5 ft. Speed against the wind, and -20 ft. to visual range increments.

2 Bear on the Loose. A ferocious dire bear lives in this evergreen forest, patrolling for food and intruders. The heroes have the unfortunate luck of running into it. Heroes can make a Notice check (Average DC) to spot the dire bear ahead before it notices them. Avoiding it is an opposed Sneak check versus the dire bear's Notice, even if the heroes simply stand still as the creature passes them by. On a failure, or if they actively attack the dire bear, it fights with ferocity. If the heroes track the dire bear's lair down with a successful Tracking check (Tricky DC), they find a small treasure cache from previous victims (already figured into the dire bear's Treasure statistic).

3 Gnoll Hunters. A mob of gnolls (use the same stats as gnoll slavers) from Moss Stone Keep are out hunting stag and other animals for food. They have a small wagon with an assortment of killed game (boar, deer, even a bear). If the heroes are clever, they have a chance to follow the gnolls back to Moss Stone Keep, but they must be especially sneaky to avoid detection (Complex Task: Three successful opposed Sneak checks versus the gnoll's Notice). In this case, skip **Scene 3: Ruins of Jaskers** and go straight to **Scene 4: The Forest's Edge** after a few days of travel.

4 Giant Hornet Nest. This particular forest contains nests of giant hornets, and the heroes have the misfortune of stumbling upon one by accident. This random encounter can be worked into an event a character might perform — for instance, a hungry (or simply angry) character might throw a rock at nothing in particular out of frustration, only to disturb a nest of giant hornets! There is one mob of the giant hornets and they fight until the heroes are driven away at least 200 feet from their nest. The hornets have no treasure.

CAST

DIRE BEAR (SPECIAL NPC, ADVERSARY)

“Rrrroooooaaaaarrrr!”

Description: Dire bears are voracious, predatory distant relations to black and brown bears. They have a primeval look to them, with bony protrusions along their spines and joints.

Dire bears are tough opponents, and for some groups of heroes, discretion is the better part of valor.

Motivations: Protect its territory.

Dire Bear (Huge Animal Walker — 98 XP): Str 18, Dex 12, Con 16, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 10; SZ H 2×5, Reach 2; Spd 40 ft. ground (Run 200 ft.); Init III; Atk IV; Def II; Res VII; Health VI; Comp —; Skills: Athletics VI, Intimidate V, Notice III; Qualities: *Damage reduction 1, grappler, improved sense (scent), menacing threat, superior runner I, tough III, unnerving*

Attacks/Weapons: Bite II (dmg 1d12+4 lethal; threat 17–20; upgrades: *grab*), Claw II ×2 (dmg 1d10+4 lethal; threat 19–20), Squeeze II (dmg 2d8+4 subdual; notes: Grapple benefit)

Treasure: 1G, 1L, 1M

"Bzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz."

The giant hornet encounter in the woods can begin almost comically, but these dangerous forest denizens quickly prove to be an actual threat, even to armed and armored heroes. Use them to present the wilderness as a wild and unpredictable place.

Hornet, Giant (Small Animal Flyer — 30 XP): Str 10, Dex 10, Con 10, Int 1, Wis 6, Cha 2; SZ S (1×1, Reach 1); Spd. 40 ft. winged flight; Init I; Atk IV; Def II; Res II; Health III; Comp —; Skills: Notice III; Qualities: *Improved sense (scent), swarm, tough I*

Treasure: None

The heroes continue to search for the gnoll slavers.

SCENE 3: RUINS OF JASKERS

Inside the town of Jaskers

OBJECTIVES

Essentially survive, but curious characters may want to discover more about what happened here. A bit of investigation can reveal the gnolls are responsible for taking everyone in Jaskers.

CHALLENGES

Surviving the fight with the feral ghouls!

SYNOPSIS

Scene Type: Standard

GM Briefing: This scene can be used to inject a bit of horror into the typical fantasy game. It's not entirely a surprise given all of the hints about the area that there might be some undead hungry menace lying in wait for a group of eager heroes to stumble in. But it can still be a lot of fun to spring a pack of feral ghouls on the characters!

Gear: The heroes are traveling with all adventuring gear on their persons.

LOCATION

As the noon day sun peaks overhead, signs of habitation appear in the forest. Tree stumps stand as silent testimony to the presence of logging, though not in abundant numbers. After a short distance, a few wooden buildings can be seen through the trees. Upon further investigation, the site of a small village, consisting of a half dozen small homes built of wood from the indigenous trees, along with several larger buildings that might serve as a church or village common is discovered. A sign above one of the largest buildings reads in faded painted letters, "Jaskers."

Ambiance: The entire area is deserted. Not a single sign of habitation can be seen. Even the birds seem to fly around the village.

Terrain: Indoors/settled

Cultural Interests: GM Preference

ACTION

Jaskers is a small village that was home to only about eight families. They built a small temple to a god of nature, whom they venerated on a weekly basis. Things were going well, at least until the gnolls showed up a few months ago. They raided and pillaged, and took half of the residents. Those still living afterward did not have long to ponder their fate, as the very next night the gnolls returned to capture the rest.

All except for the Brightwell family. They managed to hide themselves in the hidden cellar below their home, as their neighbors were beaten, savaged, stolen, and killed in that final, horrifying raid on Jaskers. The Brightwells did not leave the cellar for many days, and madness took over. The kind of madness brought upon by a dark tragedy and drove them to kill each other in that cellar.

But they did not die. Their damned souls were chained to the village where they had lived, and now their undead bellies hunger for the flesh of the living. The Brightwell family has become a pack of feral ghouls. As the heroes explore Jaskers, the ghouls follow their movements through the buildings, using narrow tunnels dug below each as a means of avoiding detection. Have each hero make a Notice check against a ghoul's Sneak. The ghouls try to lure the heroes into a building, as they dislike sunlight. Perhaps the youngest daughter, a girl of only ten, could lead them into a trap.

There is one ghoul mob in the ruins of Jaskers. They stay together as much as possible.

Investigating the village for clues as to what happened requires an Search check (Average DC). A success indicates the hero finds recent axe marks on the sides of some of the buildings and most of the doors. Beating the DC by 5 or more reveals a spear-head matching the ones used by the gnoll slavers in **Scene 1**. The heroes should be left with little doubt that Jaskers was the victim of a Moss Stone raid.

CAST

GHoul, FERAL (STANDARD NPC, ADVERSARY)

“Grrrrrr . . .!”

Description: Ghouls are undead menaces traveling in small packs. They generally feed off carrion, though they do hunt down living creatures if their numbers are strong enough. Feral ghouls are desperate, emaciated versions of regular ghouls, with wolf-like faces, long dirt-encrusted fingernails, and tongues that hang out. The feral ghouls in the ruins of Jaskers are desperate, vile creatures that strike from the shadows and fight together as a team. They try to drag a paralyzed victim into one of the abandoned buildings and down into the cellar for quiet consumption.

Motivations: Kill any living thing it encounters . . . and eat it!

Ghoul, Feral (Medium Undead Walker — 115 XP):

Str 11, Dex 12, Con 10, Int 11, Wis 12, Cha 11; SZ M (1×1, Reach 1); Spd 30 ft. ground; Init IV; Atk IV; Def III; Res V; Health V; Comp I; Skills: Acrobatics V, Athletics IV, Notice VI, Sneak V; Qualities: *Achilles heel (divine)*, *condition immunity (bleeding, paralyzed, sickened, stunned)*, *contagion immunity*, *conversion (infectious — ghoul fever)*, *damage immunity (Constitution damage, stress, subdual)*, *darkvision I*, *feat (Two-Hit Combo)*, *feral*, *light-sensitive*, *swarm*

Attacks/Weapons: Ghoul Fever (Bite I: dmg 1d8 lethal + yellow fever; threat 18-20; upgrades: *diseased*), Claw I (dmg 1d6 lethal; threat 20), Paralyzing Bite and Claw (paralyzing attack I: Will DC 10 or become paralyzed 1d6 rounds; upgrades: *supernatural attack (bite and claw)*)

Treasure: None

NEXT STEPS

Having successfully defeated the threat of the feral ghouls, the heroes are free to continue their quest.

SCENE 4: THE FOREST'S EDGE

Edge of the forest near Emerald Hills

OBJECTIVES

When the arrows start flying, try to determine who or what is doing it. Once Hanalee and her elves reveal themselves, however, the heroes are left to their own machinations. They should at least consider this an opportunity for some information gathering.

CHALLENGES

Convincing the elves that the heroes mean no harm and possibly enlisting their aid!

SYNOPSIS

Scene Type: Standard

GM Briefing: Here is a chance to throw some more help towards the heroes. They are about to assault a major stronghold filled with savage gnoll slavers, so a little help might go a long way. Hanalee and her elven freedom fighters are not many, but they are skilled at hiding and stealth, so they can be useful in the upcoming battle in a variety of ways. Alternately, if the heroes are not kind or too coy, they could miss out on a potential ally.

Gear: The heroes are traveling with all adventuring gear on their persons.

LOCATION

After several days of traveling, the forest gives way to the soft, rolling landscape of the Emerald Hills.

Ambiance: Patches of deep green grass sway in the breeze, but only a handful of trees can be spotted beyond the perimeter of the forest itself, only small hills and the valleys they create.

Terrain: Plains

Cultural Interests: GM Preference

ACTION

The journey through the forest to the Emerald Hills should have been interesting, and now the heroes encounter a change of scenery. There is still the issue of not knowing exactly where Moss Stone Keep is located, but as the edge of the forest is reached, they have a chance to gain some insight.

During the last day of traveling through the forest (or the last few hours if they are on horseback) have each character make a Notice check (Tricky DC). A success indicates they spot some movement in the trees; beating the DC by 5 or more means they discover that the things in the trees have been following them for some time. Under orders from Hanalee, the elves do not engage the heroes until they reach the forest's edge.

Once the heroes reach the edge an arrow sings out from one of the nearby trees and strikes the ground at the feet of the lead character — just missing, but shot with perfect aim. At that moment have everyone make Notice checks (Average DC) as a mob of elven freedom fighters descend from the trees with arrows notched in their longbows. They speak broken Trade with heavy accents but order the heroes to lay down any weapons.

After a few moments, an elven woman clad in form-fitting leaf-green chain armor appears— Hanalee. Her long blonde hair is tied back in a ponytail, and she carries a long sword in her hand, the tip pointed at the heroes. She has a steely blue-eyed gaze and waits several moments for the heroes to make their first move.

Hanalee's starting Attitude is Neutral. If the heroes try and entreat with Hanalee in good faith, they may each make an Impress check – only the highest result is taken. Add a +2 insight bonus if the heroes have been straightforward and honest, and add a +4 discretionary bonus if the characters rescued Emilee from her slumber in *Old School Fantasy #2: Darkness Over Keryhk Nhor*, since Hanalee is her sister.

If the result is Unfriendly, perhaps due to some horrible insult, Hanalee remarks that the heroes are as bad as the gnolls and departs without much else. The heroes would really have to make some mistakes in their roleplaying for this to happen though!

With any positive shift in Attitude of Intrigued or better, Hanalee and her band of elves are willing to listen and deal with the heroes. She can inform them of the location of Moss Stone Keep (less than a day's walk to the northeast), the general layout of the area, and the significance of the witch weed plant the slaves are harvesting. She doesn't know where the shipments of harvested witch weed go, however, and she explains that the gnolls take a path east through the Emerald Hills when they have gathered "enough."

She and her compatriots are from Silver Vines, an area sacred to the elves to the south and east. The gnolls have been so brazen as to attack elven caravans from Silver Vines, and thus the need for Hanalee and her freedom fighters. But her numbers have dwindled much in the past weeks, and she no longer has the force to take on the gnolls of Moss Stone Keep by herself.

If Hanalee's Attitude can be improved to Intrigued, she would consider an offer to aid the heroes in their assault on Moss Stone Keep (successful Persuade check to convince her). If her Attitude can be improved to Friendly, she actively offers aid. Either way she only has ten elven freedom fighters at her disposal.

CAST

HANALEE, WARRIOR-WIZARD (SPECIAL NPC)

"Make this quick. We've been tracking a band of gnolls for two days and I don't want to lose them."

Race: Elf

Description: Much like her sister Emilee, Hanalee is a beautiful elven woman with long flowing blonde locks, high cheekbones, and large almond-shaped eyes the color of a spring rainstorm. When her sister was lost a hundred years ago in the depths of Keryhk Nhor, Hanalee had to be strong, so there are unusual, just barely perceptible worry lines spidering out from her otherwise flawless eyes. She carries herself with a weighty purpose — she knows the gnolls of Moss Stone Keep are foul, degenerate creatures, but she also knows she doesn't have enough people for an all-out attack. Or at least she doesn't think she does. She carries a sword

at all times, a slim blade of elven design, and her pouch of spell components is never far from her belt.

Hanalee's attitude toward the heroes can make the assault on Moss Stone Keep harder or easier depending on how they choose, so she should be dealt with carefully. Even if the heroes offend the elven woman and she stalks off with her band, consider having them make a re-appearance — but with a "debt" hanging over the heroes' heads.

Motivations: Defend the Elven forest and its surroundings.

Hanalee, Elven Warrior-Wizard (Medium Fey Walker — 76 XP): Str 14, Dex 10, Con 10, Int 14, Wis 14, Cha 10; SZ M (1×1, Reach 1); Spd 40 ft. ground (Run 200 ft.); Init V; Atk VI; Def VI; Res III; Health III; Comp II; Skills: Investigate IV, Resolve VI, Sneak IV, Spellcasting V; Spells: Entangle, Goodberry, Haste, Mage Armor, Magic Missile; Qualities: *Attractive I*, *burden of ages*, *class ability (Mage: arcane wellspring I)*, *feat (Bow Basics, Bow Mastery, Casting Basics)*, *improved sense (hearing, sight)*, *spell defense II*, *superior runner I*

Attacks/Weapons: Magical Longsword (dmg 1d12+3 lethal; threat 20; upgrades: *poisonous*), long bow + 30 standard arrows (dmg 1d6 lethal; threat 19–20; range 40 ft. × 6; qualities: *AP 2*, *poisonous*)

Gear: Partial leather armor (DR 1; Resist Fire 3; DP –1, ACP –0, Spd +0 ft., Disguise +0), Mage's pouch, mana potion

Treasure: 1C, 1L, 1M

ELVEN FREEDOM FIGHTERS (STANDARD NPC)

"Don't make a move. We've been watching you for the past day."

Description: These elves, under the leadership of Hanalee, hail from Silver Vines far to the south, but are a rougher breed. They have bronzed complexions and brown tattoos across their arms and chest depicting birds, hawks primarily, poised to strike some unseen foe. They dress simply in cured animal hides that make little sound as they glide effortlessly through the forest.

Naturally suspicious of strangers, these hardened warriors obey

Hanalee unquestioningly.

Motivations: Defend the Elven forest and its surroundings.

Elven Freedom Fighter (Medium Fey Walker — 34 XP):

Str 10, Dex 10, Con 10, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 10; SZ M (1×1, Reach 1); Spd 40 ft. ground; Init IV; Atk V; Def II; Res II; Health II; Comp I; Skills: Intimidate III, Sneak III, Survival V; Qualities: *Attractive I, burden of ages, feat (Bow Basics, Bow Mastery), improved sense (hearing, sight)*

Attacks/Weapons: Longsword (dmg 1d12 lethal; threat 20; upgrades: *poisonous*), long bow + 30 standard arrows (dmg 1d6 lethal; threat 19–20; range 40 ft. × 6; qualities: *AP 2, poisonous*)

Gear: Partial leather armor (DR 1; Resist Fire 3; DP –1, ACP –0, Spd +0 ft., Disguise +0)

Treasure: 1C, 1G

NEXT STEPS

The characters arrive at Moss Stone Keep and must determine how to enter the keep through the Gnoll forces.

SCENE 5: BREAKING THE CHAINS

Moss Stone Keep

OBJECTIVES

Now is the time to free the imprisoned slaves of Moss Stone Keep. They shall feel the cruel whip of the savage gnolls no longer!

CHALLENGES

Surviving the infiltration of Moss Stone Keep!

SYNOPSIS

Scene Type: Standard

GM Briefing: The best way to handle this scene is to let the heroes devise their plan and react accordingly. Understand the layout of the area, and the difference between night, day, and the switching time in between. Also keep in mind the towers in the keep itself, though they are manned by only a single gnoll at all times.

Gear: The heroes are traveling with all adventuring gear on their persons.

LOCATION

Moss Stone Keep sits atop one of the hills of the area like a king squatting on a low throne. It is the only construction visible in any direction and stands out like a jagged blade on the horizon. The walls are stone, and at each of the three corners making up the outer perimeter a guard tower stands, commanding a good view of the surrounding area — which extends only to its adjacent valleys. Beyond that, the rolling terrain of the Emerald Hills takes over and movement becomes much easier.

On the western slope of the hill outside of Moss Stone Keep is a field of gnarled, deep-green colored plant studded with hideous yellow flowers. It grows in patches across the field.

Opposite the witch weed field on the eastern slope of the hill are a half-dozen pits dug into the earth. Each is about twenty feet

wide by twenty feet across and twenty feet deep. This is where the slaves of Moss Stone Keep are held in between shifts and at night. Six ladders long enough to reach to the bottoms of the pits are piled nearby.

Ambiance: Summer-like weather, warm and breezy. Smells of wild flowers and pine permeate the air around the keep.

Terrain: Indoors/settled

Cultural Interests: GM Preference

ACTION

Moss Stone Keep has a total of eight mobs of gnoll slavers, two mobs of gnoll shamans, and two mobs of fierce dogs. Of those, some are outside during the day and some are inside.

During the day, four mobs of gnoll slavers, one mob of gnoll shamans and two mobs of fierce dogs keep watch and patrol the area surrounding Moss Stone Keep. Four mobs of the gnoll slavers, one mob of shamans and one mob of dogs watch the witch weed field as the slaves toil away in the sunlight, while the other four mobs of gnoll slavers and one mob of dogs keep an eye on the slave pens. The gnolls watching the pens are bored and distracted; they suffer a -2 penalty to Notice checks to detect anything (the dogs do not suffer the penalty, however).

The slaves are brought out of their pens at first light, switched out at noon, and then returned to the pens at dusk. There are a total of six dozen slaves held at Moss Stone Keep, so at any given time during the day there are three dozen working the fields and the remainder still in the pens. During the switching period the gnolls also change positions, with some coming from the keep and the rest shuffling around. For brutish, uncivilized creatures, the gnolls work on a pretty tight timetable.

There are six pens, each holding a dozen slaves in cramped quarters. Dead slaves are hauled to the kitchen in Moss Stone Keep to be made into a special meal for the gnolls.

At night, two mobs of slavers and one mob of dogs are left to guard the pens. They rely on their *darkvision* to see any intruders, keeping only a single torch burning so they can gamble. The gnolls

are distracted at night and suffer a -2 to Notice rolls (this is not the case for the dogs).

The three towers are each manned by one gnoll slaver with the simple job of alerting the rest of the keep of any intruders. They are, however, extremely lazy, and tower duty is seen as the easiest position. Gnolls use this time to sleep the day away, so unless there is a large commotion the tower guards won't notice. At night they are more vigilant, but rely on their *darkvision*, not torches or other light sources, and do not suffer a penalty to Notice rolls.

If a large scale assault occurs, a relief force of gnolls (two mobs of slavers and one mob of shamans) emerge from the keep, pouring out in 1d6 minutes. The remaining gnolls stay inside and ready for an attack on the keep itself. The door is shut and barred, and the tower guards are now alert.

If the gnolls are defeated or driven off (they flee to the hills in a panic rather than retreating to Moss Stone Keep) the heroes are left to free the slaves. The tower guards yowl and fire arrows with their shortbows, but given the range, their shots always fall short. The slaves are ecstatic to be freed, but next to worthless in a fight (mainly because they don't have weapons). They pick up armaments from fallen gnolls after combat.

Even if the heroes were not aided by Hanalee, she and her elves arrive after the gnolls have been defeated or routed. They thank the heroes for a job well done and offer to escort the freed slaves through the evergreen forest to the nearest town. Hanalee can be convinced to stay and help attack the tower itself where Nurghaal, the Master of Moss Stone, awaits.

Alternately, the heroes may want to attack the interior of Moss Stone Keep first. In that case, adjudicate their actions as necessary, but otherwise move on to **Scene 6**.

NOT INTERESTED IN THE KEEP

Why should the heroes attack the keep? A legitimate question. The primary goal of the heroes is to free the slaves from the tyranny of the gnolls, so once this is accomplished, the heroes can walk away. Of course, doing so would leave a fortress in the control of Nurghaal and his demonic ally. If your heroes begin to wander from Moss Stone Keep, consider having one of the freed slaves beg for them to return and rescue a loved one (mother, father, brother, sister, etc.) who was taken inside the previous day. Or have the gnolls hurl insults from the towers — that usually works (make sure to reference elderberries).

CAST

DOG, FIERCE (STANDARD NPC, ADVERSARY)

“Ruff! Ruff! Grrr . . .”

Description: The dogs kept by the gnoll slavers of Moss Stone Keep are mangy, filthy creatures, just as likely to bite your fingers as look at them.

The fierce dogs in Moss Stone Keep can be a real pain if not dealt with, which is why the gnolls keep them around. A hunting party sent to retrieve lost slaves would contain a small pack of these dogs if the heroes flee Moss Stone Keep after freeing the slaves.

Motivations: Protect its masters.

Dog, Fierce (Small Beast Walker — 44 XP): Str 12, Dex 12, Con 12, Int 2, Wis 11, Cha 6; SZ S (1×1, Reach 1); Spd 40 ft. ground; Init V; Atk I; Def I; Res IX; Health IV; Comp —; Skills: Athletics VI, Notice IV; Qualities: *Darkvision I*, *improved sense (scent)*

Attacks/Weapons: Bite II (dmg 1d6+1 lethal; threat 17-20)

Treasure: None

SHAMAN (STANDARD NPC, ADVERSARY)

“In the name of the ancestors, you will perish!”

Race: Gnoll

Description: Dressing in furs and hides, the Gnoll Shaman often has bones tied into his blackish-brown fur, and wears a bone cap on his head. If not the leader of their tribe, the Gnoll Shaman serves as a counselor to his leader. Connected mystically to the spirit world, he possesses powers often disconcerting to his more barbaric brethren. He speaks both Common and Gnoll. A gnoll is about 7 1/2 feet tall and weighs 300 pounds.

Gnolls prefer to attack when they have the advantage of numbers, using horde tactics and physical strength to overwhelm and knock down their opponents. They show little discipline when fighting unless they have a strong leader; at such times, they can maintain ranks and fight as a unit. While they do not usually prepare traps, they do use ambushes and try to attack from a flanking position.

Motivations: They seek to replenish their slave stock.

Gnoll Shaman (Medium Folk Walker — 30 XP): Str 12, Dex 10, Con 11, Int 8, Wis 10, Cha 8; SZ M (1×1, Reach 1); Spd 30 ft. ground; Init II; Atk IV; Def II; Res I; Health III; Comp I; Skills: Notice II; Spells: Consecrate, Cure Wounds II, Restoration I, Scare II; Qualities: *Darkvision I, devoted IV (Evil II, Life II), feat (All-Out Attack, Bandage), interests (Alignment), nocturnal, swarm*

Attacks/Weapons: Throwing Spear (dmg 1d8+1 lethal; threat 19-20; qualities: *hurl, poisonous, reach +1*)

Gear: Partial studded leather (DR 2; Resist —; DP -1; ACP -0; Spd +0 ft.; Disguise +0)

Treasure: 1A, 1C, 1G

NEXT STEPS

If the heroes decide not to attack the keep, proceed to **Scene 9: Epilogue**. If they do decide to continue to assault on Moss Stone Keep, proceed to **Scene 6: Moss Stone Keep Ground Level**.

SCENE 6: MOSS STONE KEEP (GROUND LEVEL)

Moss Stone Keep

OBJECTIVES

Clear Moss Stone Keep of its gnoll slaver infestation so that no one has to fear the whip of these cruel and dangerous taskmasters.

CHALLENGES

Navigating Moss Stone Keep and defeating the perils within.

SYNOPSIS

Scene Type: Standard

GM Briefing: Most of the action in this scene is driven by the actions of the heroes. They need to get past the gates regardless, but if they have defeated or routed the gnolls outside the keep, the force on the inside is much smaller and contained. If they take the approach that cutting off the head of the snake leaves the snake dead and decide to go after the Master of Moss Stone before dealing with the outside force, they find more opposition. But if they can act stealthily they may find themselves facing less threats. Ultimately the choice is up to the heroes.

Gear: The heroes are traveling with all adventuring gear on their persons.

LOCATION

Varies by area

Ambiance: Varies by area, generally dank and musty inside Moss Stone Keep.

Terrain: Indoors/settled

Cultural Interests: GM Preference

ACTION

A1: GATES OF MOSS STONE

DESCRIPTION

This is the entrance to Moss Stone Keep itself. A pair of ten-foot-tall wooden double doors, scarred from many years of assault, stand defiantly in front of any intruders.

DETAILS

The door has a Construction of Hard 4 unbarred. If barred, it is considered to have a Construction of Hard 6.

A2: STONE WALLS

DESCRIPTION

The stone walls of Moss Stone Keep are twenty feet tall, and though show signs of age, were built with the best materials available and will hold for a hundred years or more if left alone. Clingy green moss hangs to the side, which has given the site its namesake.

DETAILS

Attacking the thick stone walls of the keep itself is a tough prospect. The wall has Construction of Hard 6. However, it is easily scalable (Climb DC 10). The moss can be burned, and burns for a total of 1d6 minutes before consuming itself. The stone is scorched in this case but otherwise unharmed.

A3: TOWERS

DESCRIPTION

The three watch towers stand fifty feet tall. Four openings, one facing each cardinal direction, give any occupant in its crown a good view of the surrounding valley. Spiral wooden stairs lead up to the crown from a single wooden door at the base facing the courtyard. A tarnished bell can be seen hanging from the center of each tower cap.

DETAILS

During the day a gnoll slaver sits in each of these towers sleeping their cares away. They have plenty of arrows, but are only armed with a shortbow and a spear. Each also has a warning bell with which to alert the entire keep if they spot an attack. At night they are not asleep and are in fact quite vigilant. They do not use a torch or other light source, instead relying on their *darkvision* to spot any intruders.

A4: COURTYARD

DESCRIPTION

This is the interior of the keep itself. Several stone buildings can be seen against the interior walls, with the eastern one pumping out a plume of smoke from a top chimney. A large muddy pen in the center holds the fierce dogs of the keep. Countless booted and pawed tracks mar the dirty, straw-covered ground of this main courtyard. A terrible funk of wet fur and excrement hangs over the entire area like a mist.

DETAILS

During the day, gnoll slavers usually only occupy this courtyard during the guard switch-ups (morning, noon, night). Once the sun goes down and most of the gnolls are inside, however, they lounge about and relax in this area with the dogs, having informal combat matches, barking contests, eating loudly, and otherwise just being savage gnolls. Sometimes they bring up a slave to tease and eventually eat.

Three harvested witch weed bundles sit in front of Area 7 ready for transport. They usually wait until they have five bundles under orders from Nurghaal. However, if a fight breaks out, one of the gnoll shamans runs over to the bundles and summons a witch weed shambler. The process takes two rounds, afterwards the shaman suffers one grade of *fatigued*. However, the witch weed shambler is completely obedient and obeys every order to the best of its ability. As a golem creature it understands basic commands.

A5: DOG PEN

DESCRIPTION

This large open fenced area smells even worse than the surrounding courtyard. The fence is a gnarled, twisted stretch of wire between wooden posts, though it is truly ineffective at keeping things out or in.

DETAILS

Moss Stone Keep boasts two mobs of fierce dogs loyal to the gnoll slavers. This pen is their home, but during the day all of the dogs are kept outside guarding either the slave pens or the witch weed fields. At night, one mob of the dogs is found here, curled up in one large mass.

A6: SMITHY

DESCRIPTION

This stone building sits lower than the surrounding wall at only about seven feet tall with a ragged, thatched straw roof. A stone chimney pumps out smoke at irregular intervals. The occasional clang of hammer on metal, but more often than not raucous, barking laughter can be heard. Inside is an open area that clearly was meant to be a smithy, but has not seen the practiced hand of a skilled smith for quite a long time. Anvils, broken hunks of metal, spear hafts, and other miscellaneous pieces of work in various states of completion lay haphazardly across the floor.

DETAILS

Gnolls are not great at metalwork, and few have the patience for it. The gnolls of Moss Stone Keep are no exception, and the condition of the smithy bears that out. Usually a place for a pair of gnolls to get away from the sun and lie in the shade, rarely will an enterprising slaver get up the nerve to try repairing a broken spear or arrow. There are, however, plenty of tools and implements of destruction that can be used as improvised weapons in a pinch.

A successful Search check (Average DC) uncovers a treasure cache (1C, 1G, 1L) buried amongst the junk.

A7: STABLE AND CARRIAGE HOUSE

DESCRIPTION

Half of the stone building set against the northeastern wall of the keep is an open carriage house. Currently it holds three slave wagons but has room to hold six comfortably. There are three rundown horses tied to posts against the wall as well.

DETAILS

This is where the slave wagons are kept. The missing wagons can mean as much as you want them to mean. Perhaps they were destroyed over the months of occupation at Moss Stone Keep, or perhaps they are out gathering more slaves to work the fields. The decision is ultimately up to you.

A8: MESS HALL

DESCRIPTION

This dimly lit stone building contains the mess hall for the keep. Three long wooden tables with a bench on either side run its length. Bent plates, discarded bones, crusty gruel and various cast-off bits and ends lay scattered over the tables and floor. In the northeast corner a staircase descends to a lower level.

DETAILS

Most off-duty gnolls can be found here, lounging on the tables, gambling or having inane strength competitions. Shamans have the final say outside of Nurghaal, and most gnoll slavers obey their command. Most. The staircase leads down to the lower level of the keep (**Scene 7**).

CAST

WITCH WEED SHAMBLER (STANDARD NPC, ADVERSARY)

“” Silent shuffle

Description: This creature appears as a vaguely humanoid-shaped, ten foot tall pile of animated dried weeds. It moves with determination, though it is by no means agile, and its gaping maw and eyeball-less sockets mock the life that created it. Witch weed shamblers are malevolent, golem-like creations understanding nothing beyond the basic commands of those who summon it. Witch weed shamblers stand about 10 feet tall.

Witch weed shamblers obey the word of those who summon them, which is a process involving a specially prepared pinecone wrapped in herb-soaked witch weed. They are large, tough brutes.

Motivations: Obey its summoner.

Witch Weed Shambler (Large Plant Walker— 107 XP):

Str 16, Dex 6, Con 16, Int 2, Wis 10, Cha 9; SZ L (3×3, Reach 2); Spd 20 ft. ground; Init II; Atk VI; Def V; Res IV; Health IV; Comp I; Skills: Notice III; Qualities: *Achilles heel (fire)*, *chameleon I (forest/jungle/swamp)*, *critical hesitation*, *condition immunity (baffled, enraged, fixated, frightened, paralyzed, sickened, stunned)*, *contagion immunity*, *damage immunity (critical injury, electricity, sneak attack)*, *fearless II*, *feat (All-Out Attack, Two-Hit Combo)*, *light sleeper*, *lumbering*, *spell defense II*, *tough II*
Attacks/Weapons: Slam II (dmg 1d8+3 lethal; threat 19-20; upgrades: *grab*), Squeeze II (dmg 1d12+2 subdual; threat 19-20; notes: Grapple benefit)

Treasure: None

NEXT STEPS

Now that they've managed to make it past the ground level of Moss Stone Keep, the heroes are ready to descend into its lower depths.

SCENE 7: MOSS STONE KEEP (LOWER LEVEL)

Moss Stone Keep

OBJECTIVES

Whoever or whatever controls Moss Stone Keep must be in here — it's the lower level, and therefore it's got the big bad guy. Time to gird up the loins and do a room-by-room check.

CHALLENGES

Vary, depending upon the room accessed by the heroes.

SYNOPSIS

Scene Type: Standard

GM Briefing: Here we find our intrepid heroes taking a small delve into a dungeon, so let them enjoy the room-by-room sweeps. If they start to get too cocky, throw a witch weed shambler or two at them from **L5**.

Gear: The heroes are traveling with all adventuring gear on their persons.

LOCATION

Varies by area

Ambiance: Musty and dry, with little air flow and strange echoes in the passageways of Moss Stone Keep.

Terrain: Indoors/settled

Cultural Interests: GM Preference

ACTION

L1. HALLWAY

DESCRIPTION

A narrow stone passage lit only by whatever light the heroes bring along extends beneath Moss Stone Keep. The passage is barely five feet wide.

DETAILS

The hallway that serves as the main lower level path is only five feet wide but made of solid stone set into the tough ground.

L2. KITCHEN AND PANTRY

DESCRIPTION

An open archway in the hall leads to the kitchen, or at least what once served as such. A counter runs along the outer edge of this fifteen by fifteen foot square room, but little else identifies itself anymore. Piles of trash lie in great heaps, dented iron pots with muck-caked sides sit untended, and a foul, rancid odor wafts offensively from a corner where the wood burning stove sits alone.

DETAILS

This was indeed the kitchen and pantry for Moss Stone Keep, but gnolls are not creatures of civility and it now serves a new purpose — garbage and dirty dish depository. The stove in the corner hasn't been used for some time, and a search around inside with a successful Search check (Average DC) uncovers some treasure (2C) hidden buried in the ancient ashes.

L3. SLEEPING QUARTERS

DESCRIPTION

The door to these rooms have been bent and twisted to the point where they no longer shut correctly. Beyond these shattered entrances the smell of wet dog makes eyes water and nostrils

burn. Heaps of soiled straw and blankets so ragged most orphans would reject them lay in piles across the floor of these thirty foot by thirty foot chambers.

DETAILS

This is indeed where most of the gnolls of Moss Stone Keep sleep. During the day, at night, catching a nap, whenever they can gnolls steal time away from their duties if the keep is not being threatened and catch some shut-eye in one of these two chambers. Searching for valuable goods requires several minutes of work, but turns up a treasure cache (1C, 2L) in each room.

L4. DESERTED STOREHOUSE

DESCRIPTION

This chamber is unlike the others, for the door is still intact! It is locked and trapped with a magical seal that has kept the gnolls out of the hallway for the time being. If bypassed the room beyond holds an ancient storehouse for Moss Stone, built long ago and abandoned just as quickly. Rusty weapons crumble to the touch, but a little diligent searching might prove fruitful.

DETAILS

The door to this storehouse is locked with both a large and complex mechanical trap and a magical enchantment. A hero with both Prestidigitation and Search can make a Search check opposed by the trap's Stash check. With a success, he finds the trap after a few rounds of searching, with a failure he finds nothing, and with a critical failure the trap is triggered. Disarming it is tricky, as it is magical, but it can be done with three successful cooperative Disable checks opposed by the trap's Difficulty. Failure with even one Disable attempt triggers the trap, as does failing to disarm the trap. Anyone trying to simply open the lock triggers the trap automatically, preventing it from being picked. The trap must be disarmed before the door can be opened.

Acid Trap (55 XP): Mechanism: tripwire; Difficulty: Sophisticated; Concealment: Average; Target: Entire party; Effect: Acid damage (1d6 acid damage per 2 TL, Ref DC 15 for 1/2 damage)

Inside is what at first appears to be junk. A careful search taking about an hour, however, uncovers a treasure cache (2C, 2G, 2L) amidst the dust and worthless pieces.

L5. WITCH WEED STORAGE

DESCRIPTION

The stench of wet gnoll is overpowered by the fragrant aroma of wilted roses and sage — the smell of witch weed. This door stands open, revealing several barrels piled up against the left wall and a heap of harvested witch weed against the opposite side. A closed door leads beyond this storage chamber.

DETAILS

This is where the gnolls deposit the harvested witch weed for bundling and transportation. They don't leave it out in the sun and elements, so it is stored in this special room, which is also closest to Nurghaal's chamber (see **Scene 8**). As a defense mechanism, enough witch weed is left here at all times to summon a witch weed shambler should anyone save Nurghaal or Vorokish attempt to enter Nurghaal's chamber, so the heroes must deal with one of those creatures before continuing. The creature arises silently, so unless watched specifically, it has a chance to surprise the heroes if they fail a Notice check opposed by the creature's Sneak.

NEXT STEPS

Having navigated their way through Moss Stone Keep the heroes are ready to face its leaders — a cruel and powerful black-furred gnoll named Nurghaal and his demonic sorcerer companion, Vorokish!

SCENE 8: MASTER OF MOSS STONE

Moss Stone Keep

OBJECTIVES

This is where heroes are separate from those who simply lust after treasure. In these kind of moments, who will step up to stand toe-to-toe with a monstrously tough combatant backed by a powerful sorcerer? Here is where legends are forged — and the bodies of the unworthy litter the ground.

CHALLENGES

Defeat the powerful Gnoll and his demonic sorcerer companion, Vorokish!

SYNOPSIS

Scene Type: Dramatic

GM Briefing: Give the heroes an ending fight worthy of their struggle! Nurghaal and Vorokish are at the ends of their ropes if the heroes made it this far, so escape is not much of an option for them (at least not physically). Alternately, the pair can make an appearance elsewhere in the keep if the heroes' plans have gone in other directions. Ultimately, though, they fight together, and they fight well as a team.

Gear: The heroes are traveling with all adventuring gear on their persons.

LOCATION

This room was designed to be home to the lord and lady of the keep, and it's one of the few chambers that still bears resemblance to its original purpose.

Ambiance: Tapestries depicting random acts of violence in a slipshod artistically poor manner hang on the stone walls. Furs and rugs in clashing colors and motifs that make one's head spin

line the floor. The two beds have been pulled together in one corner to form one giant bed. Silver and gold coins lay scattered all about.

Terrain: Indoors/settled

Cultural Interests: GM Preference

ACTION

There are many variables leading up to this scene, so it could play out in any number of ways. However it does, try to engage the heroes in a bit of villainous banter before the deadly combat. Nurghaal is an arrogant yet powerful gnoll, considered marked by demons by his tribe, due to his naturally black fur. Vorokish is an actual demon, keeping to the shadows as much as possible and speaking only when spoken to directly. Nurghaal puts up a fierce front and it doesn't take much to push him over the edge; giving him and the demon sorcerer a bit of flair can go a long way toward making the final confrontation memorable.

Once their foes are defeated, the heroes are free to search the room, which contains the bulk of the keep's wealth (hoarded by Nurghaal specifically). There are a number of treasure caches (already taken into account in the NPC stat blocks) and random magic items (GM's discretion) scattered about the room, as the gnolls have been quite successful in their trade of the witch weed to "foreigners," who sometimes deal in strange baubles.

CAST

NURGHAAL, MASTER OF MOSS STONE (SPECIAL NPC, ADVERSARY, VILLAIN)

"You will die, intruder!"

Description: Nurghaal, self-proclaimed Master of Moss Stone, is a huge and particularly vicious gnoll. He has bulky shoulders, a thick neck with a relatively small head, and he is covered in unusual black fur.

Nurghaal is not overly intelligent or creative, but he does like to brag and claims to be the mastermind behind the whole witch weed operation. He singles out the strongest or toughest looking

hero for single combat, though he does not fight fair, using any underhanded tactic he can to get the best of his opponent before letting loose with his berserker rage.

Motivations: Increase personal power.

Nurghaal, Master of Moss Stone (Large Folk Walker — 64 XP): Str 20, Dex 12, Con 16, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 8; SZ L (1×1, Reach 1); Spd 40 ft. ground; Init VI; Atk VI; Def V; Res III; Health V; Comp I; Skills: Intimidate IV, Notice II; Qualities: *Darkvision I, feat (All-Out Attack, Axe Basics, Axe Mastery, Great Fortitude), feral, frenzy II, nocturnal, swarm*

Attacks/Weapons: Bone Ripper (dmg 2d6+7 lethal; threat 19-20; qualities: *AP 2, massive, poisonous*)

Gear: Partial studded leather (DR 2; Resist —; DP -1; ACP -0; Spd +0 ft.; Disguise +0)

Treasure: 2A, 2C, 2G, 2L

VOROKISH, DEMON SORCERER (SPECIAL NPC, ADVERSARY, VILLAIN)

“I shall fulfill my master’s wishes...”

Description: Vorokish is an honest-to-goodness demon, with deep purple skin, swept back horns on either side of his head, and furry goat legs. He dresses in a simple black robe with a hood so as not to scare some of the gnolls of Moss Stone Keep, though he does so with just his piercing, soul-rending crimson eyes.

Vorokish is likely to be the heroes' first encounter with an extraplanar threat, so they are unlikely to be prepared for it at first. Cold iron weapons are hard to come by, so unless the heroes have prepared thoroughly, this sorcerer could present something of a problem. Use his powers wisely — Vorokish does not like to get its hands dirty, preferring to let Nurghaal do the brute work while he stands back and lets loose spells. Vorokish hangs around for a few rounds after Nurghaal is defeated (if the gnoll master is killed first), teleporting away with a sigh and a resigned shrug after that. How much of the plan is actually Vorokish is up to you.

Motivations: Sowing chaos and discontent.

Vorokish, Demon Sorcerer (Medium Outsider Walker — 174 XP): Str 12, Dex 10, Con 19, Int 18, Wis 16, Cha 14; SZ M (1×1, Reach 1); Spd 30 ft. ground; Init II; Atk IV; Def III; Res VI; Health IV; Comp III; Skills: Intimidate V, Investigate V, Notice VIII, Resolve VIII, Sneak V, Spellcasting VIII; Spells: Blindness/Deafness, Command II, Counter Magic I, Expeditious Retreat, Harm, Scorching Ray, Searing Ray, Teleport I; Qualities: *Achilles heel (cold iron, good aligned attacks or weapons), contagion immunity, damage reduction 3, darkvision II, feat (Casting Basics, Casting Mastery, Casting Supremacy, Night Fighting, Spell Conversion: Area, Spell Conversion: Casting Time), fearsome, interests (chaos, evil), natural spell (Detect Magic), spell defense IV, tough I*

Attacks/Weapons: Claws II ×2 (dmg 1d6+1 lethal; threat 19-20; upgrades: *aligned (chaos, evil), grab*), Squeeze II (dmg 1d10+1 lethal; notes: Grapple benefit), Soul Drain (soul draining attack III: Fort DC 20 or die (standard character), lose 1 action die and 10 max. vitality (special character); upgrades: *supernatural attack (squeeze)*)

Treasure: 2A, 2L, 2M

NEXT STEPS

The heroes have defeated a great evil, making Moss Stone Keep a safer place, and return to their home with news of their fortune and adventures.

SCENE 9: EPILOGUE

AFTERMATH

The primary goal to keep in mind is the freeing of the slaves. The gnolls of Moss Stone Keep are a threat, and Nurghaal and his demonic sorcerer are villainous creatures with evil intent, but the party should be realistic about their capabilities. On the other hand, fortune favors the bold and a confident group with the aid of a band of elven freedom fighters stands a solid chance of taking out all of the gnolls in a single battle.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Someone has been paying these gnolls to harvest witch weed. The trail can be as hot or as cold as you need it to be. Of course, a recently freed slave may just have some information to share with the heroes regarding some treasure cache in the vicinity, and Hanalee and the elves of Silver Vines owe them a debt of gratitude as well. Heroes who clean out Moss Stone Keep may be eyeing it for a new home base, in which case the quest for rightful ownership can take them deep into the recesses of history to determine who actually has claim over it. Or they could just move in, much as the gnolls did.

REWARDS AND PENALTIES

Don't forget to add XP for adversaries (listed in their stat blocks).

SCENE 1: ROAD RAIDERS

- A. Freeing the slaves and killing or running off the gnolls 25 XP
- B. Decide to find Moss Stone Keep and free the slaves 25 XP

SCENE 2: ON THE SLAVER'S TRAIL

- A. Successfully navigate the perils of the wilds 50 XP

SCENE 3: RUINS OF JASKERS

- A. Successfully clear out the ghoul infestation 50 XP
- B. Determining the gnolls are behind taking the townsfolk captive 25 XP

SCENE 4: THE FOREST'S EDGE

- A. Successfully enlisting elven assistance in raiding Moss Stone Keep 75 XP
- B. Unsuccessfully enlisting elven assistance in raiding Moss Stone Keep 25 XP

SCENE 5: BREAKING THE CHAINS

- A.** Successfully defeating gnoll forces with no aid and freeing slaves 200 XP
- B.** Successfully defeating gnoll forces with elven aid and freeing slaves 100 XP
- C.** Successfully freeing the slaves without attacking the keep 50 XP

SCENE 6: MOSS STONE KEEP GROUND LEVEL

- A.** Successfully clearing the ground level of occupying gnoll forces 50 XP
- B.** Defeating the Witch Weed Shambler 50 XP

SCENE 7: MOSS STONE KEEP LOWER LEVEL

- A.** Successfully bypassing the acid trap 25 XP
- B.** Defeating the Witch Weed Shambler 50 XP

SCENE 8: MASTER OF MOSS STONE

- A.** Defeating Nurghaal 75 XP
- B.** Defeating Vorokish 125 XP
- C.** Forcing Vorokish to flee 50 XP

PRIZES

These are a few of Prizes the party may earn in this adventure. This is, of course, just a limited example, as heroes with enough ambitions might earn a Favor from Hanalee and the elves of Silver Vines. Heroes might also earn a Holding in the form of Moss Stone Keep.

BONE RIPPER

Item: Large Broad Axe (2-handed item)

Essence: Vitality (+10 Vitality)

Charm: Greater Damage Bonus (+2 at Level 1–2, +3 at Level 3–6, +4 at Level 7–10, +5 at Level 11–14, +6 at Level 15–18, +7 at Level 19–20)

Reputation Value: 22 (Level 1–2), 32 (Level 3–6), 42 (Level 7–10), 52 (Level 11–14), 62 (Level 15–18), 72 (Level 19–20)

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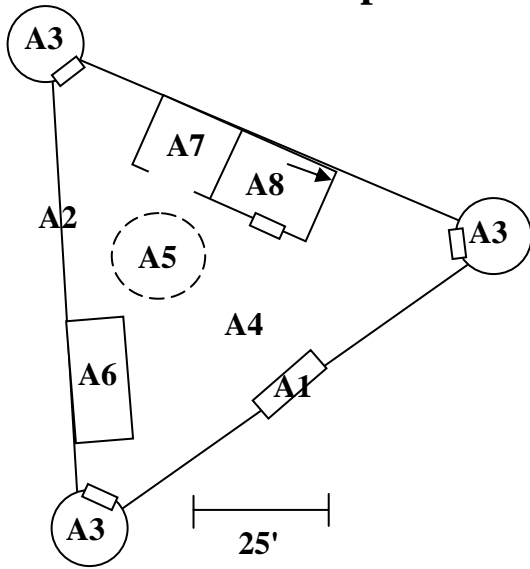
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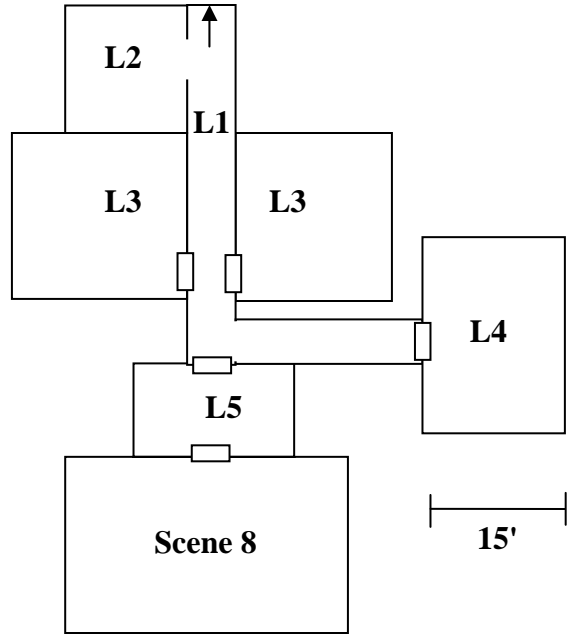
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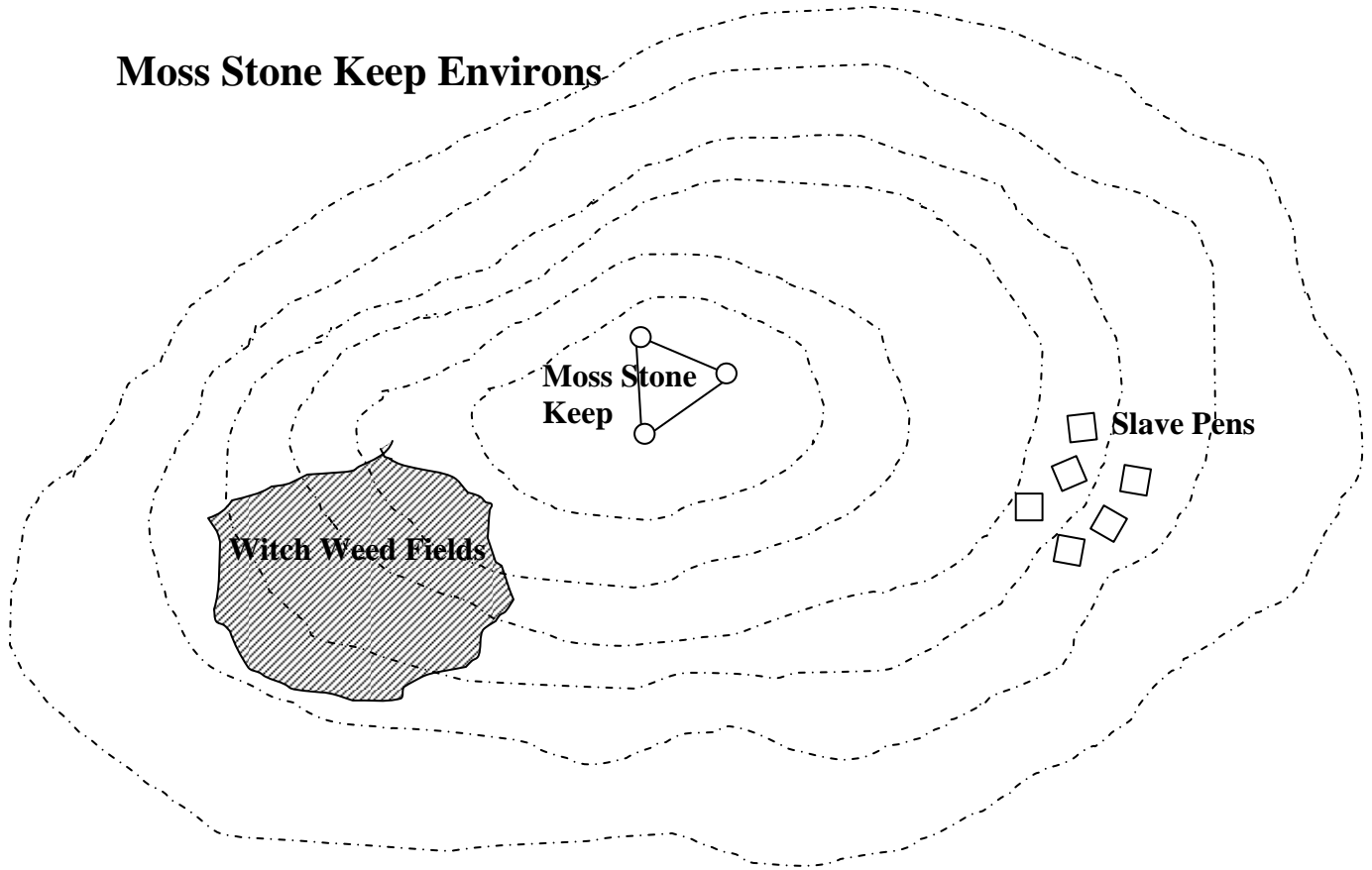
Moss Stone Keep Ground Level



Moss Stone Keep Lower Level



Moss Stone Keep Environs



100'

10' elevation