

CASTLES CRUSADES

TO THE DAMENHEIT BRIDGE



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Peter Boudry 2007©

THE DAMENHEIT BRIDGE

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An overland adventure designed
for characters for 3-5 Characters
Mid-Level



TO THE DAMENHEIT BRIDGE

To the Damenheit Bridge is an encounter area designed for 3-5 characters in the mid-level range. The bridge itself is portable to any locale. However, for those Castle Keepers that desire to begin an overland adventure To the Damenheit Bridge is the beginning of a journey from the eastern folds of the Darkenfold to the western. It begins in the town of Elne, which is outlined and the early stages of the Post Road with a separate encounter area

ELNE

Elne is built upon the eastern bank of the Danua River. Its walls stand against the Perth Timberland, a region of the Darkenfold Forest. Two major roads intersect in Elne. The Post Road which runs the length of the Darkenfold and crosses the river at the Elne Bridge where it passes through the town and on to the EldWood in the east. The Post Road ends at the coastal towns of Breilington in Kayomar. The Lundtrecht Road goes south from Kayomar, through Elne following the course of the river. It passes through the eves of the Eldwood where that forest joins the Darkenfold. Beyond that the Lundtrecht Road ends in Havershaw.

Elne is a Free Town. It is wild and filled with boisterous peoples.

Elne sprawls along the roads and rivers with no real discernible pattern aside from its apparent need to cling to the river and road. Only a small section of the town, the Ritter District, is walled. This area is roughly 60 acres in size, and houses several powerful merchants, a wizard, several nicer taverns, eateries and the like. It is cobbled as well.

The rest of the town consists of houses made of mud bricks and timber with thatch roofs, or in the very lucky instance, wooden shingles. It is rather dirty as only the two main treks are paved. The town experiences a constant flow of traffic, particularly during the Spring and Summer months when the merchants are carting goods north and south. During these seasons, the town overflows with people of all descriptions. Small bars and eateries spring up

everywhere and the place becomes something of a wild road house town. It is known for its open bars, rough crowds and good times.

Elne attracts the worst and best of all peoples. It serves as a major destination and starting point for people adventuring in the Darkenfold and Eldwood, both of which are rich in plunder for those bold enough to venture beneath their eves. As such many strange artifacts, jewels, gems and odds and ends are found in the bazaars of Elne. Mercenaries, freebooters, mendicants, traveling friars, wandering wizards and the like mingle with the locals. Merchants cart goods from Kayomar south or from the Vale of Oth and the City States of the south. Braying mules, oxen, carts, wagons and crowds of people fill the muddy streets during the day and crowd the bars at night.

Total Population: 2000 (seasonal 6000)

Human: 5000

Gnome: 50 +/-

Halfling: 500 +/-

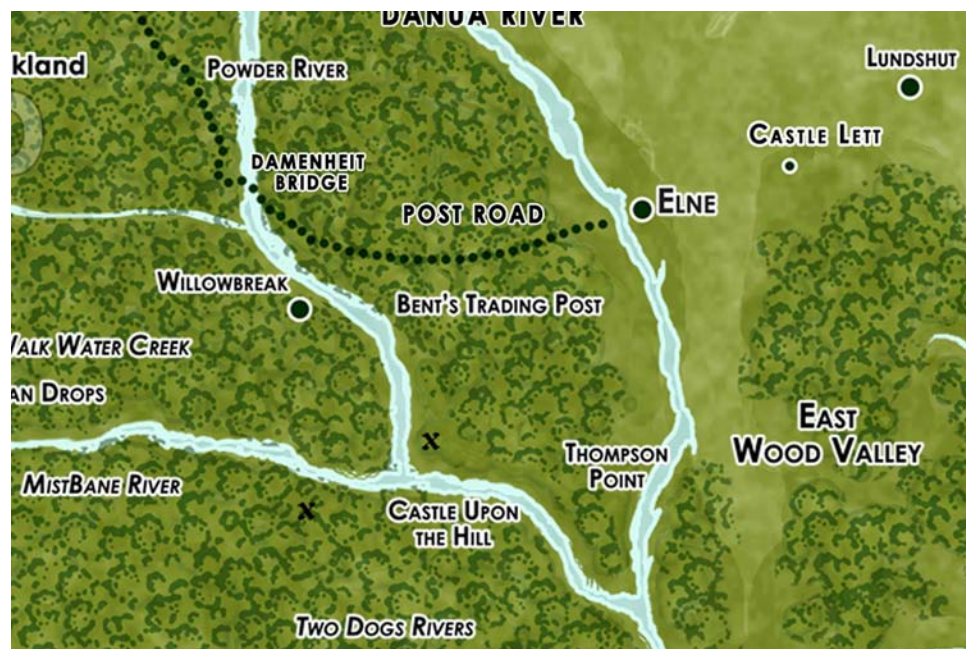
Dwarf: 100 +/-

Elf: 200 +/-

Government: The town is a Free City with no formal government. It has a council that oversees the town's wellbeing.

Military: Elne boasts no military, relying upon the Lords of Kayomar to the north to keep them safe. They do have a town guard. It comprises 100 able bodied mercenaries, paid for by the council themselves. They are commanded by a 8th level fighter, a member of the Cult of the Swords. Many of the mercenaries are part of this cult as well. They are well equipped with scale mail, shields, pole arms, crossbows and bows and swords and axes.

Economy: The economy of the town thrives entirely on trade. It sits upon the north/south trade road that carries goods from the lands of Kayomar to the City States of the White River Plateau. This route includes goods coming across the ocean and up the Danau River. The town boasts a large market for river boats and barges, wood being plentiful across the Elne Bridge and in the Perth Timberland.



Religion: No common religion. There is a small church to Ore-Tsar and a temple of the Og-Aust. This latter is little more than a cromlech built on the outskirts of town. But it is considered a holy place by many who follow the old gods.

Language: All Languages, most commonly the Vulgate or Common are spoken.

Major Guilds: The Cult of the Swords has a heavy presence here. There are no active guilds with power. But, there are several merchants, Carrigan the Boatswain being the most powerful.

THE ELNE BRIDGE

The bridge that spans the Danua River is monstrous, almost 400 feet long. The slaves of Unklar's armies built the mighty edifice,

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designing it to withstand major floods and a tremendous amount of traffic. The bridge itself is 60 feet wide with a ledge almost two feet tall. The solid structure supports its own small town, many people building houses and even shops along the sides, into the water and even above the bridge itself. About 500 people live out their lives here. It is crowded and very dirty.

On the western end of the bridge stands a single gate house and tower. The gate is almost always closed against denizens of the Darkenfold. A small troop of guards from Elne, usually 8 in number, keep the gate watch. They do not charge any toll, allowing free traffic to any and all, aside from monsters and other foul creatures.

THE PERTH TIMBERLAND

Many centuries in the past the Darkenfold and Eldwood were one great forest, called the Ethvold. Many years of wars and human expansion destroyed the forest and split the wood into two separate regions. The Darkenfold retreated beyond to the banks of the Powder River. The land between the two, utterly despoiled, housed little in the way of life. But during the waning days of the Winter Dark when the Dark Lord's power began to fail, the Darkenfold began to spread to its old haunts. The lands between the Danau River and the Powder lay largely abandoned. In small starts the forest began to return, trees growing along the banks of creeks, in small gulches, valleys and the like. Soon, it spread up the sides of hills and crept out from the waterways. Within a hundred years, much of the land lay covered in a thick growth of young trees. Men called it the Perth Timberland, for it was part of the Darkenfold, but different as well.

The trees within are younger oaks and elm trees. They grow tall and straight, much larger than their western kin. The country is open and easy to pass through as there is less underbrush. Few monsters from the Darkenfold make this place their home, as its open spaces make them nervous and there are few hiding places. The magic of the Darkenfold is missing as well, for these trees do not absorb the light of fires and torches as do those further west.

The Perth Timberland is rich in game, however. Deer abound, as do antelope and smaller game like squirrels and rabbits. It is a place of constant contention between those humans who consider the Darkenfold their home and the paladins of the north.

TO THE DAMENHEIT BRIDGE

If one follows the Post Road, they have roughly 30 miles to cross before they come to the Damenheit Bridge and the Darkenfold proper. The road is in decent shape and any well rested party not carrying too much traveling gear can cover about 15 miles in on a good day. Weather can also slow travel down as the Perth Timberland is subject to swollen water ways that often cover the road. Two days on foot or one day on horse should suffice.

Encounters are usually of the animal kind, but occasionally bandits, wolves, ogres and the like wander the road seeking easy prey. Roll a d20, six times daily. On a roll of 1 an encounter occurs.

YELL VALLEY

Roughly 20 miles down the road from the Elne Bridge lies the Yell Valley. Here the road dips into a wide, deep valley.

The road tops a small rise before it dips into a long, broad valley. Trees grow thick along the valley floor and for the first time little of the actual terrain is visible. Its a harbinger of the deeper forest beyond. The sounds of running water come to you, coming from a good sized stream hidden somewhere beneath the leafy canopy. Several miles on, the road winds out of the dim wood and up the far ridge. A haze of warmth covers all you see.

The road winds through the valley. However, when it reaches the bottom, it enters a thick patch of viny plant growth, all covered in orange-white flowers. The patch is clearly visible to the traveling characters. The vines and flowers hang off the surrounding trees, growing across the ground, overlapping each other and twined around everything. A sweet smell pervades the whole country.

These are live honey suckle vines. Their flowers are edible and when eaten in quantities can sustain travelers for a short time. Normally such plants are harmless, but these are enchanted.

As soon as anyone enters the patch, following the road, the sweet smell engulfs them. It is not overpowering, but very pleasant, driving out even the memory of the foulest smells. Anyone who spends more than four rounds in the patch of honey suckle becomes distracted from the task at hand (charisma save, CL 4). They need only save once before they reach the stream. If they fail their save, a strong urge to stop and rest overcomes them. The CK should play this up; don't force them to stop. Mention things like: the flowers seem to offer a peaceful spot to rest that promises to heal you.

It takes about 20 rounds to reach the stream. Here, a small foot bridge crosses a small rocky creek. The vines are everywhere. Everyone must make a second charisma save. Anyone who failed previously must roll against a CL 8. For anyone who did not fail, the CL remains 4. However, if someone fails here, the weight of their packs, the warmth of the sun or whatever other happenstance applies forces them to lie down and rest. As soon as they do they fall into a deep slumber; they are able to search for a spot off the road or under the bridge if they so desire. But the slumber comes on fast and remains.

Waking those who failed their save is impossible so long as they remain in the honey suckle. They must be carried out.

The trip from the stream to the far side of the honey suckle patch requires another 10 rounds, where characters must make a third saving throw; the CL remains as with at the stream.

For any who remain in the patch, their enchantment lasts for 2 days. They lie where they fell, sleeping. No animals molest them. However, the source of the enchantment, Gruble-Dir, a faerie of some mean disposition despoils them of one item, robbing them in their sleep. At no time does Gruble-Dir approach any characters awake or aware.

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When the characters awake they have a pounding headache but this particular patch of honey suckle does not plague them again.

It is only a few miles of forested road before reaching the Damenheit Bridge and the Darkenfold.

DAMENHEIT BRIDGE

The Old Post Road crosses the Powder River at the Damenheit Bridge. The bridge itself is extremely old, built by slaves of Unklar during the long Winter Dark. Its stone arches, three of them, span the river. The bridge is broad, about 40 feet wide, rises gently to the center from both east and west and is roughly 160 feet long. A stone lip, 24 inches high, serves as a small rail for the bridge.

The bridge has one significant flaw: it's not quite long enough. The engineers who constructed it did not account for the seasonal rain fall. Both the Spring and the Fall in the Darkenfold are long and wet; the average rain fall in a given month exceeding 10 inches. The pools, creeks, streams, and riverlets flood quickly, merging with the many small rivers that dump into the very large Mistbane and Powder rivers, both of which become flooded torrents. In short, though the bridge is well built and nearly indestructible, it is too short and is frequently under water.

The stone bridge looks much the same from either direction. Recent rainfall has made the river surge past its banks, but not so far as to block access to the bridge. It does however, lap up around the base of the bridge on either bank.

Any ranger, druid or anyone experienced in river craft will, upon a successful primary attribute check (CL 4) notice that the river is still surging and will not crest for several hours. At the rate the water is rising, it will cover the feet of the bridge within an hour or so.

The stone bridge is wide and long. Its thick, heavy stones seem a bulwark against the constant flow of the Powder River, but even so, the surging river, swollen with the recent rains, sends the waters lapping over the bridge's feet. Beyond it, the road twists off into the hazy forest, a mist clings to the branches and bowls of trees. A solitary figure stands upon the bridge's apex, using a long, curved dagger to hack and chop at something at his feet.

The creature is an allip, the undead spirit of the wizard Athul who killed himself by throwing himself into the river after his traveling companion Crel was slain by the Luvandgaurn (see below). The current swept his body into the foundation of the bridge where it remains, crumbled, torn, and wrapped in his magical cloak. Athul's unburied and unmourned spirit clings to the world of men. He has haunted the bridge ever since. Whenever the water surges, he crawls forth from the river and onto the bridge, where he attacks any living creature he encounters.

When the characters approach they notice the body of an elf lying upon the bridge. A crazed human with ghastly colored skin leans over the elf, hacking him with a blood covered tulwar.

As the characters approach, Athul turns, babbles, and mutters incoherently. Somewhere in the mix he mentions the waters, drown-



ing, the cursed bridge, the hated Darkenfold, and other references to his watery grave. He approaches the characters, babbling all the while. He stands in front of them for a moment, looking with a curious stare, he then attacks the characters with a wild abandon, hurling himself across the span at them, slashing with his tulwar.

The tulwar is a wounding weapon, dealing 1d6 points of damage upon a successful hit. Anyone hit loses one point of constitution. Further the allip is able to touch his victims, causing a temporary drain in wisdom. He fights until he is slain. If he is slain, he returns to his body, rising again when the waters surge. The only way to put a permanent end to the allip is to recover his corpse and bury it.

Allip (This neutral evil creatures vital stats are: 4HD, 15 AC, 39 HP. His primary attributes are mental. He attacks with a touch attack, causing loss of wisdom. He also babbles constantly, the inane ramblings acting as a hypnotism spell. The creature has treasure on his body, wrapped in his magical cloak.)

Beneath the bridge, upon the second pylon lies the wizard's body. It is wrapped in a cloak of displacement. On his person are mangled clothes, a satchel, and a belt with an empty tulwar scabbard on it. A small pouch holds 32gp and 71sp. His book is wrapped in leather cloth and has 5 first level, 3 second level and 1 third level spells in it. The book is titled Athul's Traveling Compendium; it is protected against water and other normal environmental conditions.

Assuming the characters dispatch the allip they notice the waters have continued to surge, and now cover at least the feet of the bridge, access to either bank is still easy enough to gain by a simple leap. However even a curious look over the side of the bridge reveals the body of the wizard, wrapped in his magical cloak. It bobs up and down in the water, grinding against the pylon. The body is in horrible shape, several weeks old at least, but the cloak, a rich blue, lined in gold, is in perfect condition. With a successful intelligence check (CL 1) any viewer makes note that the dye that would normally color such a cloak would have faded in such conditions, suggesting that it is more than a mundane item of apparel.

As this observation is made, they notice the body itself pulled violently under the water and then resurface; it happens again in rapid order. Something is tugging on the body, trying to bring it under the water. That something is an adolescent luvandgaurn, an aquatic beast that haunts these waters. The creature comes to the bridge whenever the rivers swell. The wizard's body attracts him immediately.

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In order to get to the body, the characters are going to have to negotiate the bridge, the surging waters, and the river monster. All of these promise to be dangerous.

THE BRIDGE

The bridge itself is easy to climb up and down. Made of local stone, it consists of many smaller, cut pieces that are joined together; where they join they offer plenty of purchase areas. Anyone trying to go up or down them need only make a successful dexterity check (CL 3).

THE RIVER

The river is another matter altogether. Its normally slow moving waters are cresting over the bridge, rising an inch or so every few minutes. Anyone who enters the water is immediately battered by the sheer force of it. Assuming the characters are holding on to something, they still must make a strength check to see if they maintain their grip. If they do not hold on to something and attempt to wade into it they must make a dexterity save every round (CL 12 in the middle of the river) or be swept downstream.

THE RIVER MONSTER

The luvandgaurn that hunts the bridge is about half of the size of a mature luvandgaurn. It is large, about 12 feet in length. The characters clearly notice, when it tugs the wizard's body under water what the creature looks like.

The body bobs for only a moment and is then jerked violently underwater. The cloak, caught in the motion, swirls in the churning waters. Even as you watch, a huge fish rolls over and out of the water on top of the battered body. The beast has four flippers, two on each side; a short bull neck and a massive, wide snout filled with a hedge of fangs. Its tail slashes the water violently, trying to wrest the body from the pylon. At this point it pauses, its eye, exposed to the air looking up at you as if sizing you up.

The luvandgaurn is an aquatic beast that occupies many of the deeper portions of the river. This one has learned that the area around the bridge offers easy hunting, so haunts the area, searching for food. It is aware of the party and lingers, hoping the swollen river will crest over the bridge and allow him to drag them into the water.

Luvandgaurn (This neutral creature's vital stats are 7d8 HD, AC 17, HP 50. Its primary attributes are physical. It has animal intelligence. The creature attacks with a single bite for 3d8 hit points of damage. It swims remarkably fast, moving up to 60 ft. in a round. The creature is not a normal animal and attacks until it has been killed. If it is killed, it yields only half the normal experience points, 1700x3. The creature is able to take short leaps onto land, grasping its prey in its jaws and thrashing about with its body until it reenters the water.)

The creature possesses little in the way of treasure, but did devour the wizard's companion, a maid called Crel, some weeks past. That unfortunate has long been returned to the river, all that is

except for her pouch which hangs half embedded in the creature's gum. Made of leather of superior craftsmanship, it has survived the battering; it has 12gp, a ring worth 100gp, and a large stone worth 5000gp inside it. She was a rogue and stole the diamond from a noble in Petersboro, far to the west. It had been her and Athul's design to sell it in Elne. The stone has a small rune etched into its surface.

Rune Stone: The stone is a magical rune stone, providing the wielder the ability to see brief distances into the future. Anyone who holds it in their palm can see what is going to happen 1 round in the future for every point of intelligence they possess. The magic is very untrustworthy as it often proves false, as those who see into the future attempt to counteract what it sees as soon as they do so the future changes. Designed for spell casters, it can serve as a useful tool for assassins or merchants.

The noble who owned the diamond, Lord Eric of Grange Street, is the master of the Stone Mason's Guild in Petersboro. He is powerful and used the stone in his negotiations with the other guilds.

KARAGHI ROAD

On the western bank of the river, about 200 feet down from the bridge, is a cut off. This rough road heads due north, following the bank of the river. The road is a 25 mile track that leads to Castle Eastfold, where the ranger Ki leads a group of forest wardens.

The road itself is about 20 feet wide, with two deep ruts cut into the ground made by wagons or carts. Limbs, brush, piles of deadfall, and other forest debris litter the path. Small stumps, never properly cleared, dog anyone traveling on it. The path is kept in a poor state by the rangers of the castle. They leave it thus as a line of defense, using it rarely themselves, depending more on river traffic for supplies and the like.

On foot it is a two or three day trek up to the Longbranch River. A few hours north of that is the castle.

WILLOWBREAK WAY

The road to the town of Willowbreak is a few hundred feet from the road to Castle Eastfold. It is clearly visible from that juncture.

The Post Road is clear of small growth and the trees seem pushed back from the road for a change. Some small distance past the bridge you spy a sign painted on three boards nailed to a large post. The post is covered in weeds and a long vine hangs from an overhanging branch, clinging to the top of the sign. On the sign is written the word "Willowbreak." Beneath that is another word, "Beer." It points the way to a grass covered track, the indentations of a cart's wheels barely noticeable in the thick growth.

Willowbreak Way is an old track and is relatively clear. Though the villagers do not use it often, they do keep it in some state of repair. It is roughly 12 feet wide, and winds through the forest in a southerly pattern. It is easy to follow and promises plenty of shade.

It is only about 12 miles to Willowbreak.

The Overland Adventure Continues Next Week . . .

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