
GIFT OF THE SILENT GOD



Gift of the Silent God

Rumours & Hooks

A week ago, a party of twelve hunters set out on a hunt for meat and furs, and to rid the *Drennor Forest* of an owlbear menace known as *Big Beak*. The party are now a week overdue, and the *Hunter's Guild* (and their families) are anxious to know their fate. As a reward, they are offering one year's tracking and path finding services, plus a substantial fee.

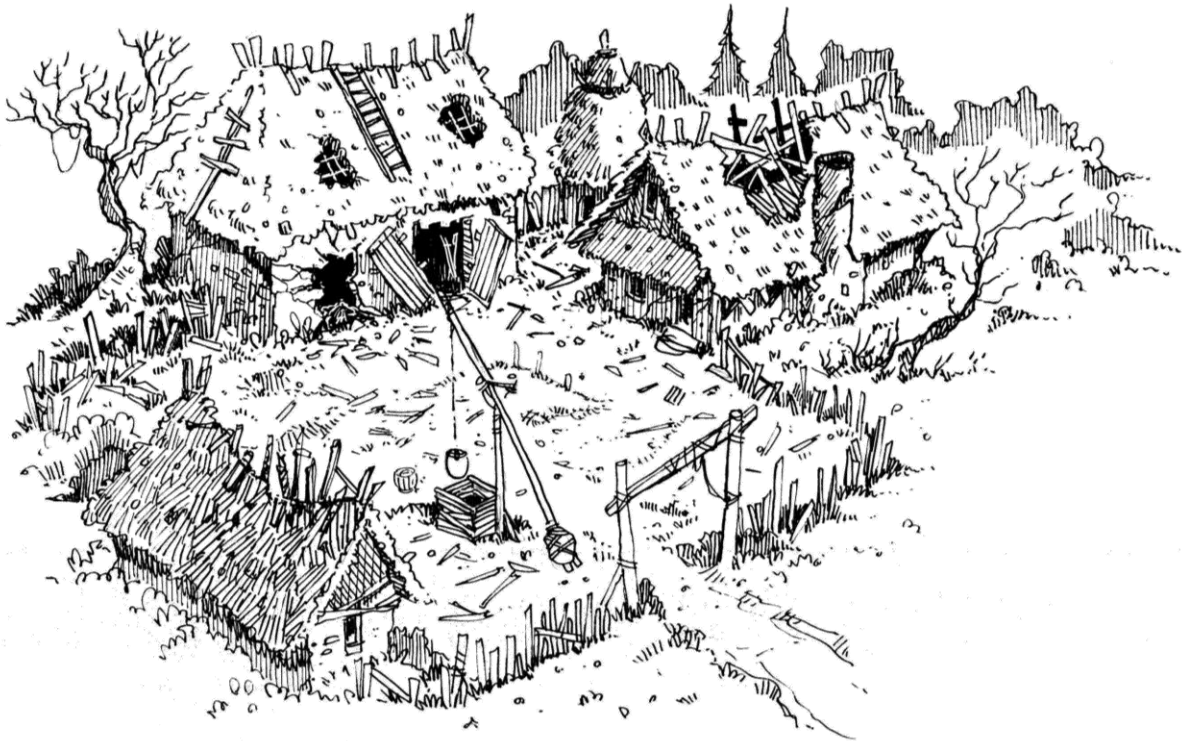
Big Beak, an enormous and spiteful owlbear, has been rampaging through the outer fringes of the *Drennor Forest*, disrupting caravans, foragers and woodsmen. The *Merchant's Guild* is offering a generous bounty to deal with the beast, which is said to lair near the ruins of an old hermit's lodge.

As the first rumour suggests, a party of twelve trackers and hunters did set off into the *Forest of Drennor*, but not all for the same reasons.

Six of the group, *Arran*, *Horne*, *Ethan*, *Darak*, *Larwig* and *Rudgar* are secret cultists, and have orchestrated the trip to isolate and murder the other six hunters in bloody sacrifice to the supernatural entity known as *Ulnek-Sorg*, the "*Silent God*".

Of the six, *Rudgar* is the leader, and has acquired an ancient and corrupt text on strange and long forgotten beings. He and his cabal believe that by offering sacrifices, *Ulnek-Sorg* will bend reality to reward them with riches and unnatural luck. *Rudgar* has already been touched by the spirit's power; a boon that allows him to see in darkness as in light.

As planned, the hunting party camped at a ruined farmhouse (an old hermit's home, long since lost to beastmen and abandoned), two days' trek into the forest. There, five of the six oblivious hunters were murdered, their hearts cut out and offered up on a dark altar hidden a further day's travel deeper within the wood. The bodies of the five were left outside *Big Beak's* cave, to be eaten by the owlbear, which would serve as a convenient excuse later.



Unfortunately for the cultists, things did not go to plan. One of the ambushed hunters, *Farric* (in his 20's, powerfully built but with a surprisingly quiet step), escaped the attack and now hides in the forest nearby. He has a serious leg injury, knows he cannot outrun the cultists, and is hoping for a miracle - or to at least take as many of the backstabbing curs with him as he can. So far Farric has managed to avoid being caught, but it is only a matter of time before he is killed, his heart extracted, and Rudgar's ritual completed.

Random Encounters

As the adventurers trek through the forest to reach the hunters, there is a 30% chance of a random encounter every eight hours. If an encounter occurs, roll 1d8 (plus 2 during the last day of travel):

1. For the next few hours, the winds pick up dramatically, shaking the canopy above. Shortly thereafter, a wildfire breaks out, sending smoke and embers into the sky. The fire front quickly spreads such that it cannot be skirted, with a 75% chance of intercepting the party. If that occurs, any adventurers caught in the fire suffer 4d6 damage and one random limb is incapacitated due to burns. Seeking refuge in water, lying in a ditch covered in soil, wearing wet face masks and similar precautions grant a *Luck* (Int) save to avoid any adverse effects.
2. 5d10+100 *Barbarians* (as *Berserker*, LFG p.114, only 10% have berserker abilities) are moving through this area, searching for a lost child.
3. 4d6 *Beastmen* (LFG p.100) are sleeping here under the thick forest canopy. 1d4 sentries keep watch and will wake the others if given the opportunity.
4. Massive webs span the trees and scrub in this narrow valley pass. A colossal 10 ft *Giant Spider* (LFG p.125, but 8 HD, S18 and poison causes 1d4 Dex loss) is hiding on the web periphery, hoping the adventurers will try and pick their way through.
5. 2d6+2 *Scouts* (as *Guardsmen* LFG p.114, but with short bows and short swords, led by a 3 HD sergeant) from a hostile border nation cross paths with the adventurers.
6. A 15 ft deep pit trap, lined with 2 ft wooden stakes, is concealed here, probably set by barbarians hunting something large and dangerous. A Perc (Detection) test notices branches hidden beneath the undergrowth covering. A person walking on the trap must make a *Luck* (Dex) save or suffer 5d6 damage, and a Con check to avoid rolling on the *Injuries & Setbacks* table (LFG p. 54)
7. 2d12 *Giant Centipedes* (LFG p.114) are feasting on a fallen bear carcass, procreating and laying eggs.
8. 1d12 *Wild Boars* (LFG p.101) are fighting here, hoping to earn a mate. Their snorts, squeals and thundering hooves can be heard well before they are seen. There is a 50% chance the boars are downwind and detect the party. Any humanoid intruders must be driven off before the males can continue their contest.
9. *Arran* (if day) or *Rudgar* (if night) appears from the trail up ahead, looking for Farric. He is surprised to find the adventurers here, and attempts to warn them off with claims that the perilous Big Beak is nearby. Rudgar does not carry any light source with him if encountered at night. If queried, he simply says his family has always had exceptional night vision.

10. *Farric* appears from nearby scrub, limping with a clearly bloodied leg. He is overjoyed to see the adventurers, and asks for help to kill Rudgar and his evil crew.

When the adventurers arrive on the scene, the cultists are not expecting them, and they are nervous. The inside of the ruined farmhouse was cleaned after the murders as best it could, but there are tell tale signs that something untoward has gone on.

The cultists are standoffish, but feign welcome, explaining that the other six hunters were killed by Big Beak and they need the party's help to slay the beast. They have two sentries set at all times - ostensibly for the owlbear - but actually on the lookout for *Farric*.

If the adventurers do some scouting of their own, they might find signs of a humanoid (*Farric*) lurking nearby the farmhouse (a Perc (Wilderness) check is required). There are no signs of owlbears.

Area 1 - Chicken Coop

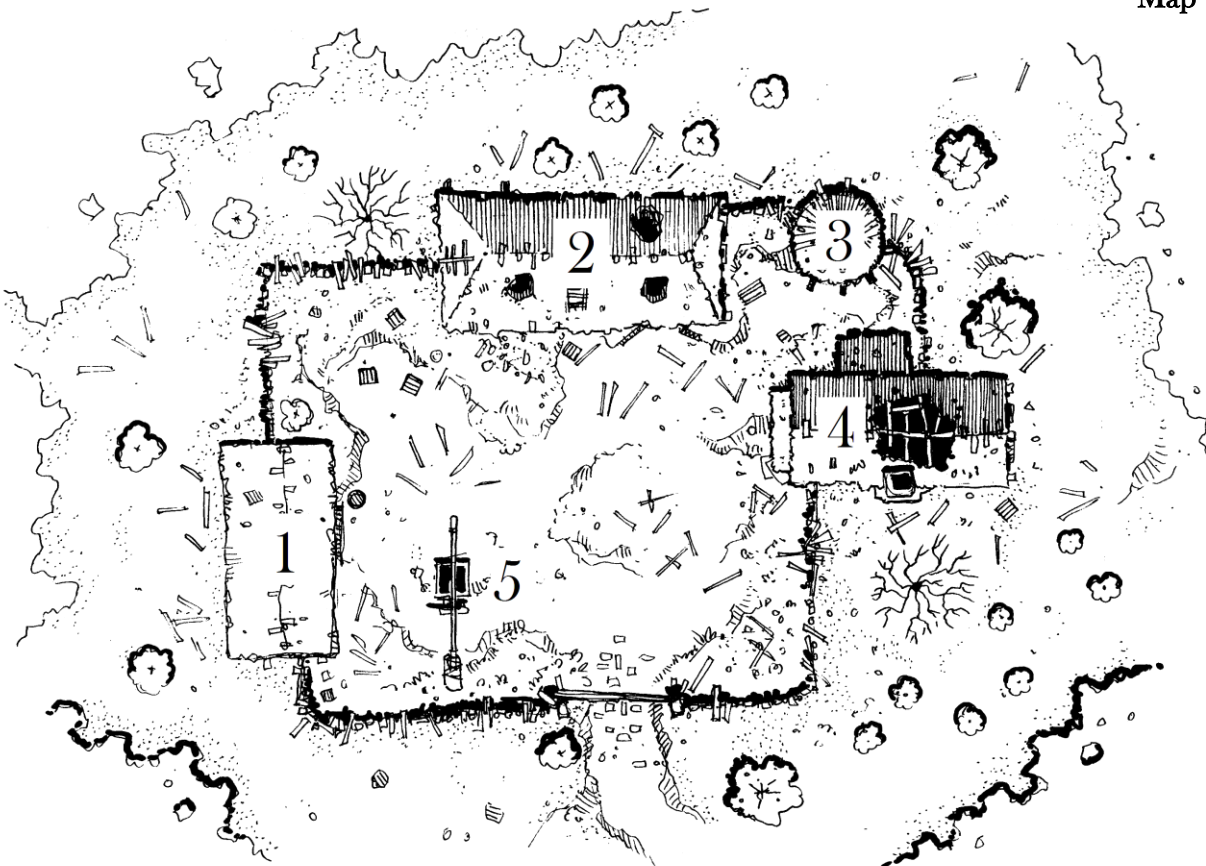
The western building was once an enclosed chicken coop, and is one of the more intact structures. The inside is overgrown with mould and foul weeds, and littered with small animal bones.

Area 2 - Barn

The northern barn is the biggest of the four structures and in a poor state of repair. Hooked chains hang from the beams lined with recent deer and boar carcasses, and thin strips of salted meat are lined up on side tables or stowed in backpacks.

A general examination of the area does not reveal anything untoward, but a thorough search locates a twin bladed, cold iron knife with a bloodstone gem inside a leather satchel, hidden at the bottom of the one of backpacks of cured meat. The knife was used in the ritual to cut the hearts from the victims, but is immaculately clean now. An Int (Arcana) check suggests it is a ritualistic blade of some kind.

Map



The corpses were on hooks when their hearts were cut out. Blood still stains the floor, but is mixed with animal blood, with no obvious way to tell the difference. In between two floorboards however, where a wide crack has developed, is a black signet ring with a twin stag motif. A Perc (Detection) test at a -2 penalty notices the ring.

The ring slipped unnoticed from the hand of one of the corpses, and was trod upon, lodging it firmly between the floorboards. A bard or adventurer with the General Lore skill and familiar with the local town recognises the ring as a valuable heirloom of *Tennan Greyson*, one of the missing hunters.

Area 3 – Smokehouse

The smoking hut is actually the most intact of all the buildings, and still functions as a smokery to preserve meat. A number of carcasses are hanging here for that purpose, and a slow fire burns in the kiln. There are no windows in the hut, and the door still operates.

Closer examination of one drying carcasses reveals several chunks of meat have been hastily cut from its back (which faces the wall). Farric snuck into the hut and quickly stole himself some food the night before.

Area 4 – Farmhouse

The eastern building has holes in the roof like the rest of the structures, but the shutters and doors are secure, and the chimney works. Inside are the cultists' bedrolls, utensils and other personal items.

Contrary to Rudgar's orders, the greedy Horne kept a number of the victims' valuables. Stashed in his socks in the bottom of his bedroll are a plain silver necklace, an ivory ring and an ornate bronze bracelet (total 170 gp). If the party spoke with any family members before setting out, they might recognise these keepsakes.

Area 5 – The Well

The well is workable and draws water. The cultists replaced the rope when they arrived. If Rudgar suspects the party are onto him, he poisons the well, hoping to kill or weaken the adventurers.

The Cultists

After the party settle in, the cultists implore them to deal with the owlbear, Big Beak, as soon as possible. At least three of the cultists will accompany them, on the lookout for Farric, while the others will remain behind at the farmhouse. Once the fight with the Owlbear begins, the cultists turn on the party, hoping the beast will help finish them.

There is a 20% chance every few hours that Farric makes himself known, either on purpose or by being found by one or more of the cultists. The cultists attack immediately, hoping to silence him and conceal his body for later heart extraction. Farric on the other hand does his best to attract attention, and accuses the cultists of murder most foul. If the party appears to believe Farric's account, the cultists attack.



Cultists, AC 11, HD 1, Short sword 1d6 or Bow 1d8, 19: as weapon, S12 D11 C11 I10 P10 W10 Ch10, L 4, Mv 30 ft.

Rudgar, Boss Monster, AC 11, HD 3 (30 hp), Short sword 1d6+2 or Bow 1d8+2, 19: weapon, S12 D11 C11 I10 P10 W10 Ch10, L 4, Mv 30 ft. Rudgar lost his family years ago in a barbarian raid, and the years following turned him cruel and selfish. He is the first of the cabal to receive *Ulnck-Sorg's* blessing, and can see as well in

darkness as in light (an ability he will use to his advantage, if possible). Rudgar is a Boss Monster with all the usual benefits (LFG p.95). The cultists possess 1 x Carry Loot (LFG p.136).



Big Beak's Cave

An Int (Wilderness Lore) check tracks down Big Beak's cave a few miles distant. The mighty beast greets interlopers with a ferocious assault, enraged that such puny bipeds would dare to encroach on her domain!

Big Beak, Owlbear, AC 13, HD 6+3, 2 Claws 1d6+2 and Bite 2d4, 19: bear hug, S19 D12 C16 I3 P10 W15 Ch4, L8, Mv 40 ft. A hit with both claw attacks draws the victim into a crushing hug, forcing the victim to roll on the *Injuries & Setbacks* table (a *Luck* (Con) save resists). Big Beak causes 20 hp damage on critical hits and has a 10 ft reach. The cave contains the strewn remains of many past victims (1 x Lair Treasure, LFG p.140).

There is a 50% chance Big Beak has eaten the corpses of the murdered hunters, leaving only a few scattered weapons behind. Otherwise, the

bodies are still here – obviously murdered and absent hearts.

The Hidden Altar

About a day's trek further into the forest is a grim altar, hidden within an overgrown copse of trees. The altar is set into a dead trunk, decorated with a horned skull, bones and a bronze bowl. Fourteen humanoid skulls lie at its base. The five hearts of the woodsmen sit in the bowl, untouched by animal life in the area. The altar is not magical in itself.

Adding a sixth heart to the bowl from a person known to the supplicant unwittingly completes Rudgar's ritual, granting a permanent supernatural gift (roll 1d6):

1. The blessed now eats only stones and drinks sand or fine dirt. Normal food and drink provide no sustenance.
2. The blessed's bones become preternaturally hard, granting a +3 bonus when rolling on the *Injuries & Setbacks* table.
3. The blessed's flesh heals unnaturally swiftly at night, restoring 1 hp per hour between dusk and dawn.
4. The blessed unerringly senses the presence of the living within 30 ft (does not pinpoint location).
5. The blessed may extinguish small fires such as torches and lanterns within 60 ft by making a Will check.
6. Once per adventure, the blessed may touch a target to impart a *Charm Person* effect (as the spell).

Anyone blessed by Ulnek-Sorg develops a moderate madness (LFG p.91) over the next month. If the madness is cured, the blessing ends.

Aftermath

Rudgar has not brought the forbidden tome with him on the hunt; he has committed the unholy rogations to memory and performs them by rote.

The book is hidden in his home back in town, concealed in an empty barrel in his cellar. It is worth 5d100+500 gp to the right buyer. The book is not magical in itself, but details genuine, cruel and disturbing rituals, which if properly performed, might invoke Ulnek-Sorg's favour at the GM's discretion.

If Rudgar and his cult are not killed, they soon recruit more cultists, and slowly seek to infiltrate positions of power within the town.



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