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The Greydeep Marches

by Peter Schweighofer

A System-Neutral Fantasy Roleplaying Game Setting



Three hundred years ago adventurers from the Vilburg Kingdom forayed into the untamed border region and quickly drove away isolated, unorganized bands of humanoids. Many settled here under the watchful eye of the Sentinel Knights and have prospered in their enterprises. But dark powers left from a wicked empire 2,000 years earlier still lurk in dark forests, forlorn ruins, and subterranean labyrinths...and a growing threat in the Ostmaur Peaks to the east threatens to overrun the apparent peace and prosperity in the Greydeep Marches.

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This supplement contains a map of the Greydeep Marches; an outline of its major features; list of rumors; description of the Sentinel Knights; four new monsters; the Hammer & Tun, a tavern serving as a base of operations for adventurers; encounter tables for different regions within the Marches; three short adventures; and the Any-OSR Key, a system to easily convert stats in this supplement to your favorite OSR-style fantasy roleplaying game.

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A BRIEF HISTORY

This easternmost region of the Vilburg Kingdom remains only marginally civilized for those seeking to settle within its borders. Two millennia ago the area formed the western reaches of a vast and wicked empire. Although it faded long ago, vestiges of its power still lurk in dark forests, forlorn ruins, and subterranean labyrinths.

Three hundred years ago adventurers from Vilburg forayed into the untamed border region and quickly drove away isolated, unorganized bands of humanoids. They hunted down monstrous beasts prowling the countryside. Declaring the region "civilized," Vilburg's King Rancillard installed his cousin, Sarilov, as Duke of the Greydeep Marches, gave land grants to influential nobles, and offered new settlers rich incentives to farm the land. He also knighted the adventurers and organized them as the Sentinel Knights to maintain peace and security in the new duchy.

Framed by the Greydeep River in the west and the Darquald Forest in the east, the Marches primarily consist of rolling fields dotted with small forests. Streams flow from upland ponds and languish in lowland swamps before draining into the Greydeep's larger tributaries. The early settlers found ideal locations for villages, farms, monasteries, towns, castles, and enclaves, then tamed the surrounding land to best suit their needs. The eastern-most newcomers burned and cut back the Darquald Forest, though they stopped at the wooded foothills of the Ostmaur Peaks.

Even after 300 years as part of the Vilburg Kingdom, the Marches still retain wild regions that seem "untamed" to civilized people, though nothing compared with the monstrous forces slowly infiltrating from the Ostmaur Peaks. Ruins lurk in forgotten dales, strange standing stones crown lonely hills, and other oddities give evidence of the region's distant, wicked past. Ancient catacombs and long-lost secrets await just beneath the rolling green fields and wooded hills. Adventurers from the Vilburg Kingdom and the Marches themselves still wander the countryside seeking ancient sites to explore and pillage, though they're encountering more humanoids and monsters slipping into the region from the east. Duke Latikov himself encourages this activity, paying a bounty on magical artifacts delvers deliver to his keep in Turmhaven. Most assume he wants to keep these treasures out of the hands of ordinary people, lest they wreak magical mischief in his domain; but some suspect he's hoarding them for some unnatural purpose.

Any-OSR Key Stats

Creature ability text using the *Any-OSR Key* notations are followed by several blank lines on which gamemasters can jot notes converting these descriptions to stats for their preferred game system.

NOTABLE LOCATIONS

The Greydeep Marches consists of many loosely defined regions, some political, others geographical, with plenty of uncharted locales and open spaces left to explore and settle. This is not a comprehensive list but an overview of major features throughout the Marches to reflect the region's diversity of geography, settlements, and landmarks.

Greydeep River: The defining geographical feature of the Greydeep Marches forms the western boundary of the wild lands annexed by the Vilburg Kingdom three centuries ago. Several tributaries trickle down from distant mountain ranges (including the far-eastern Ostmaur Peaks) through Darquald Forest, the northern steppes, and the fertile grasslands along the river. It serves as a natural obstacle preventing incursions from monsters and other denizens seeking to infiltrate the Vilburg Kingdom proper. Passage across the river at the bridge at Turmhaven or the Northern Ferry occurs under the watchful eyes of the Sentinel Knights and their agents. Swimming or rafting across remains a dangerous proposition due to unpredictable undercurrents, submerged hazards, and the river's great breadth. Formations like the Lady's Jump, Old Man's Teeth, and Serpents Cauldron force travelers to take overland routes between the ferry and Turmhaven.

Turmhaven: The largest city in the Greydeep Marches remains the only point where a bridge spans the river. Situated on the western shore of the Greydeep River, the city serves as the capital of the borderlands and the seat of the elderly Duke Latikov of Vilburg, Warden of the Border Marches and cousin to the younger King Rusicus. His slowly deteriorating castle stands on a promontory high above the river. The Duke has a fascination with magical artifacts found in the more remote regions of the Marches; he has instructed the Sentinel Knights to confiscate powerful magic items they encounter on their patrols and sends his shadowy adviser Lord Orzusch into the Turmhaven streets to purchase any artifacts newly arrived adventurers have retrieved.

Keep of the Sentinel Knights: Across the bridge from Turmhaven on the borderlands shore rises a turreted castle, the headquarters of the Order of the Sentinel Knights. All traffic between Turmhaven and the Greydeep Marches passes through the keep's gates, subject to inspection and interrogation by knights or their agents. Pairs of armored knights and their crossbow-wielding sergeants patrol the Marches as couriers, justices, and guardians, making circuits between Turmhaven and the borderland's major towns and villages every month. Some disappear on the stretches of road that enter the Darquald Forest.

Great Boundary Road: Often more a track than a leveled surface, the road runs along the Greydeep Marches' borders, from the bridge at Turmhaven east to the Sinking Towns, then northward along (and often through) Darquald Forest, then westward skirting the steppes and Silverfrost Forest, and

ending at the Northern Ferry. It follows the western bank of the Greydeep River southward to Turmhaven, completing the circuit. Travelers on horseback take about a month to traverse the Great Boundary Road from Turmhaven to Northern Ferry, accounting for breaks, meals, overnights, and a little time spent in any settlements or diversions. (Those walking take twice that long, with wagons taking three times as long.) Sentinel Knights typically stick to the road, though messengers from interior settlements often intercept them when the need arises. Numerous branches lead to locations farther within the Marches, such as the Greenfields Path and the Redmount Track.

Croaking Swamp: Although the Greydeep River remains a navigable waterway in the west along the Ragged Coast, some of its waters meander off into the vast marsh, depositing silt, growing stale, and nurturing a tropical boggy habitat. The swamp gets its name from the constant noise from innumerable reptiles, amphibians, bugs, and the bubbling marsh gas. On clear days people can sometimes see distant ruins rising from the murky waters, though few risk the treacherous terrain to explore them.

Sinking Towns: These villages once stood several miles from the Croaking Swamp, close enough to take advantage of good fishing but far enough to grow crops in the fertile soil; but now the encroaching fens threaten to overcome them. Few who wander into the swamp ever return in their original forms.

Greenfields Township: This central town serves the surrounding countryside (known as Greenfields), a settlement for halflings and other farmers living in the relative safety of the Greydeep Marches' interior. Several smaller villages and manors dot the landscape within a few days' ride of the township. While the inhabitants enthusiastically welcome strangers, they quietly relieve them of whatever small items they manage to pilfer.

Redmount Hills: These iron-rich hills rise from the grassy plains between the river and Darquald Forest, providing an enclave for several reclusive dwarven holds. Most mine and refine ores exported to Turmhaven under a grant from the Duke; in exchange the Duke gives them a great deal of autonomy in governing the region. The mercantile town of Irongate encourages trade between the dwarves and outsiders. Runoff from the hills forms the Crimson Branch flowing into the Greydeep.

Darquald Forest: This dark wood forms the eastern border of the Greydeep Marches and a buffer against the foreboding Ostmaur Peaks to the east. In the earliest days of settlement colonists from the Vilburg Kingdom cut the forest back, but in recent years the dark trees and lurking underbrush have gradually returned, in some cases overgrowing the Great Boundary Road. Few venture within for it harbors bands of hostile humanoids and fierce monsters bent on claiming these lands for themselves. Several close-knit communities of woodmen operate in its southernmost regions.

Thornhedge: This town in serves as a commercial center for smaller villages and manors in the northeast corner of the Marches. Its name comes from the thick, twisted thorn-hedge growing atop the earthen mound serving as the town's wall. Docks just outside the wall serve a community of boatmen who ferry goods down the Straightwater Canal to other settlements and ultimately the trading enclave at the Northern Ferry. The town's noble, the sorceress Craetagia, cultivates an obsessive interest in plant magic.

Triune Lakes: These three perfectly round lakes occupy the highlands between Thornhedge and the northern Ostmaur Peaks. The deep lakes keep the water cold and clear before it flows into the Straightwater Canal. Although surveyed by adventurers in the early years of settlement, nobody alive today can remember the last time anyone ever returned from the lakes.

Frigid Steppes: A fugitive tribe of arctic barbarians from the distant west settled here when King Rancillard opened the Marches to settlers. They established a loose confederation of farmholds and villages dominated by herders, hunters, and small-scale farmers who manage to flourish in the vast grasslands. Most other people consider them unsophisticated and superstitious, following simple customs and maintaining a brutish demeanor. Rather than concentrate political power in one place, they gather each summer for a clan-meet to trade, marry, and settle scores.

Silverfrost Forest: The northernmost lands in the Marches consist of a dense pine forest hosting an elven enclave. Separated from Darquald Forest by the Frigid Steppes, the Silverfrost offers elves a secluded and bountiful home. Although outsiders can visit the interior, the elves gently encourage them to keep to Baumburg, a large town on the forest's edge along the Great Boundary Road. The Duke gives the elves free reign in ruling Silverfrost in exchange for the counsel of their greatest sage Lady Yvinia, who resides at court in Turmhaven.

Straightwater Canal: Several rugged watercourses tumble down from the Ostmaur Peaks, filling the Triune Lakes before meandering into what many believe was once a canal system constructed in the distant past. The calm waterway provides an easily navigable route between Thornhedge and the Northern Ferry, with several farming settlements along the way. Travelers and farmers avoid the ruins that occasionally cluster along the canal's edge. A guild of close-knit boatmen operates a fleet of shallow-drafted barges, controlling trade along the canal.

Northern Ferry: The broadest point of the Greydeep River also serves as the only place safe enough to operate a ferry, though the crossing often takes an hour each way. A small settlement on the western shore simply named "Northern Ferry" provides amenities for travelers and an enclave for merchants trading goods between Turmhaven, the Vilburg



Kingdom, and communities along the Straightwater Canal. A tower and reinforced timber-frame house serve as a post from which a Sentinel Knight and her sergeant monitor traffic traversing the river.

SETTLEMENTS

Numerous towns, villages, and farmsteads dot the open terrain of the Greydeep Marches. Most take advantage of fertile soil for growing crops and raising livestock, but some concentrate their efforts on gathering other resources from the land: timber from the woods, stone from quarries, even metal ores from within the Redmount Hills. Taverns serve travelers at key crossroads or just outside villages; inhabitants prefer their privacy and look on strangers with an understandable amount of suspicion. One might travel a day or two on foot between smaller farmsteads, perhaps three or four days between villages, and upwards of a week or two between major towns. Turmhaven remains the only city in the Greydeep Marches.

Various nobles receive grants from the Duke to hold authority over vast regions of the Marches, though the exact boundaries of their holdings often remains questionable. Some take an active hand in governance, others draw sustenance from their fiefs but pursue their own aims. Most settlements remain self-governing, with a core council of elders, a hereditary chieftain, or some other form of mutually agreeable authority. Those in larger towns near noble habitations defer to the local liege, though mundane authorities often oversee issues of daily life. The Duke allows various demi-humans to maintain autonomy in their domains as long as they pay tribute: dwarves gold and ores, elves the service of a learned counselor, halflings a portion of their harvest, including wine, ale, and mead, some of their culinary specialties.

Most settlements police their own citizens through volunteer watches, levied militias, or professional soldiers pledged to

serve a noble. Those accused of crimes await justice in locked strong rooms in lordly fortifications, public stocks in the open, hanging cages, or other improvised, secure accommodations...and they don't wait long. Local councils or lords hold court and determine guilt and judgments against offenders (short of murder, as noted below). Punishments usually involve restitution to the wronged parties and the community in the form of monetary fines, goods, and services (even indentured servitude) commensurate with the severity of the crime. Those convicted of more serious crimes, particularly theft of substantial property or violent, non-lethal harm of others (intentional or otherwise) receive orders to undertake a pilgrimage (usually to a location with the Greydeep Marches far from the scene of the offense) or receive sentences of exile from the region.

SENTINEL KNIGHTS

This order of wandering knights and their sergeants serve as the Duke's eyes and ears as well as a visible sign of his presence in the Marches. Some maintain watch at their Keep near Turmhaven or the post at Northern Ferry to ensure undesirables and powerful magic artifacts don't slip into the greater Vilburg Kingdom. Many traverse the Great Boundary Road and the paths leading to the interior settlements. The Duke has charged the order with maintaining law and order within the Marches and keeping them secure from threats within and without. In doing this, he's given the knights authority in several areas:

JUDICIAL: Knights serve as judges in matters of serious crime in place of or alongside local nobility. They can adjudicate disputes between localities. They also have the sole authority to investigate and decide cases of murder. The knights escort those convicted of murder to the Duke's citadel in Turmhaven to await execution.

MILITARY: Knights remain the first line of defense against incursions from the untamed lands beyond the Marches. Patrols watch for signs of such invasion. Knights can commandeer local militia to repel monsters or meet other threats.

MAGICAL: Although the Duke expects all citizens in the Marches to report powerful magical artifacts to the authorities, the Sentinel Knights investigate evidence of such items and ensure they're delivered to Turmhaven. While possession and use of minor and even moderately powerful magic items isn't a crime, only nobles may own more potent artifacts with the Duke's consent.

Sentinel Knights and the sergeants aren't all solemn protectors of the Marches; they come with all kinds of dispositions. Many take their oaths seriously but administer their duties with compassion, understanding, and an affable empathy for citizens. Others use their authority to quietly enrich themselves with wealth or influence.

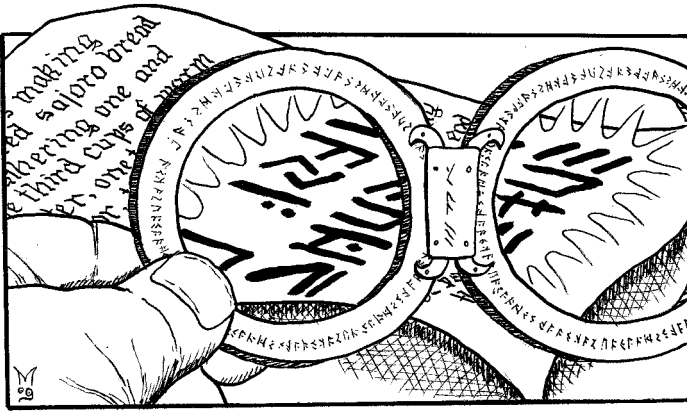
Sentinel Knight. Expert (4–9); AT: long sword; DF: plate armor, shield; Skills: command, intimidate; Morale: moderate; Gear: horse, saddlebag with provisions, knife.

Sergeant. Expert (4–9); AT: crossbow or long sword; DF: chain mail; Skills: intimidate; Morale: moderate; Gear: horse, saddlebag with provisions, knife.

MAGICAL ARTIFACTS & THE LAW

The Marches' past history as a part of an ancient and wicked empire left many magical items both mundane and extraordinary hidden in forgotten corners. Duke Latikov, through the Sentinel Knights, tries to remove the more powerful magical artifacts from the general population, collecting and sequestering them in his castle looming over Turmhaven. Aside from keeping them out of the hands of travelers who might cause trouble and discontent commoners who might even revolt, the Duke uses them to indulge his own arcane investigations into the ancient magic that once infested the region. To this end he retains the elven sage Lady Yvinia as his chief investigator to delve deeper into the mysterious nature of their powers.

Many people, even commoners, possess simple magical items with minimal powers: potions, scrolls, charms, weapons with an enchanted edge, enhanced armor. Powerful artifacts, however, often garner attention when used and eventually come to the attention of the Sentinel Knights through informers, gossip, and local elders. Everyone in the Marches has an obligation to turn in any powerful artifacts they uncover; the Sentinel Knights encourage this by offering modest sums for their return. Those bringing such powerful magical items into the Marches – or seeking to keep ones they find – must obtain a Writ of Possession from the Sentinel Knights at their keep near Turmhaven. Petitioners must first submit the artifact in question for evaluation; only those that do not interest the Duke and pose minimal threat to his rule receive writs. These documents allow citizens and foreigners to own of such artifacts but prohibit their use without the presence of a Sentinel Knight, noble, or other official representative of Duke Latikov. Many nobles received by right of their grant the ability to retain a single powerful magical item, ostensibly to aid them in governing their lands.



Spectacles of Arcane Sight

The Sentinel Knights use two pairs of ancient artifacts to monitor high-powered magical items at key locations. The Spectacles of Arcane Sight look like two magnifying glasses with their handles riveted together. The user peers through the polished blue-crystal lenses, which focus potent magical energies from nearby objects, giving them a luminescent glow in a magnitude according to their power. Viewers can see the glow through cloth and leather but not metal. One can only use the spectacles a few hours at a time before starting to see *other things*...and begin slowly losing one's mind. (The spectacles function as if imbued with spells intended to detect magic.) Many believe the spectacles are not lost relics but new magical items crafted by the elven sage Lady Yvinia, who serves Duke Latikov's court; however, many suspect their powers have some basis in early artifacts recovered from the Marches.

One pair of spectacles resides with the Sentinel Knights at their keep just outside of Turmhaven. Several sergeants have training in its use; they constantly monitor traffic between the bridge to the city and the Greydeep Marches beyond, alerting the knights to anyone possessing potent magical items. A second pair officially belongs with Baroness Fulette, the Sentinel Knight charged with guarding the passage at Northern Ferry. Her sergeants originally kept a discreet watch on travelers from her tower; but the pair has since gone missing and the baroness was too embarrassed to report the presumed theft.

FACTIONS & CONSPIRACIES

Most folks in the Greydeep Marches just try to get by, tending to their daily needs and perhaps working toward a slightly better future within their borderland communities. But some forces strive for their own covert objectives. They work behind the scenes to influence events in the Marches to wrest power from others and wield it over their adversaries.

Duke Latikov: The Duke remains content to sit in his fortress overlooking Turmhaven, adoring his treasury of magical

items, and reveling in each new one brought into his collection. He's lost all interest in the politics of the greater Vilburg Kingdom. He cares little for the machinations of his advisers. What few decisions he makes reflect his need to maintain order within the Greydeep Marches so he can immerse himself in his arcane research.

Lord Orzusch: The Duke's chief adviser oversees the regal household, supervises the discovery and acquisition of arcane artifacts, and serves as de facto mayor of Turmhaven. The short, swarthy man often hires agents to sneak around the city and the Marches, offering great sums to anyone possessing powerful enchanted items. He keeps a tight reign on Lady Yvinia, the elven sage charged with discerning the powers of magical artifacts brought to the Duke...and he makes free appropriation and use of those to protect his position and influence.

Sentinel Knights: Like Duke Latikov the knights strive to maintain the status quo, a situation in which they wield tremendous power over the populace as the most visible and active agents of order. Grand Sire Richter, head of the knights, worships the law as if it were a god; for him the administration of justice proves ample enough reason for any action on the part of his knights. He maintains suspicions against many of the more ambitious knights, but also suspects others in the Marches of specifically conspiring against him and the Duke, particularly demi-humans.

Lady Craetagia of Thornhedge: Though a noblewoman with allegiances to Duke Latikov, Craetagia realizes the Duke could easily order her to Turmhaven to harness her sorcerous powers to aid in arcane research, much like the imprisoned elven sage Lady Yvinia. While she allows the town elders to run Thornhedge as they please, she conducts her own magical experiments in her greenhouse and beneath the nearby eaves of Darquald Forest. She resents the brute authority the Sentinel Knights wield and has fallen in league with the elves (and the dwarves in a secondary capacity) in undermining their hold on people throughout the Marches.

Silverfrost Elves: The elves resent Lady Yvinia's forced servitude in Turmhaven and other indignities suffered at the hands of the Sentinel Knights. They've begun plotting a conspiracy to overthrow the knights and depose Duke Latikov. Their agents quietly travel among the Marches' communities, sowing dissent among commoners and making pacts with those groups prone to stirring up trouble. They've convinced Lady Craetagia she's in danger of becoming the Duke's slave for arcane research, motivating her to use her sorcery to aid the elves' plot. Their overtures to the Redmount dwarves have gained them only limited support. While no solid plot has yet evolved toward achieving their ultimate goals, the elves do their best to turn resentment into occasional action against Sentinel Knights and subversion of the Duke's rule.

Redmount Dwarves: These secretive dwarves maintain their relative independence through regular deliveries of refined ores as tribute to Turmhaven. They closely guard their holds from outsiders, causing some to speculate the deep mines hold more than just metal ore. Their smoldering resentment of the Sentinel Knights and the constant demand for tribute led the dwarves into a reluctant alliance with the conspiring elves. The support comes mainly in the form of arms and armor; some rumors claim newly discovered arcane artifacts also make their way from Redmount to Silverfrost.

Greenfields Halflings: It's no surprise that, as one of the more prosperous people in the Marches, the halflings like stability. They certainly chafe at the Sentinel Knights and their somewhat overbearing sense of "justice," but the halflings aren't too keen on the more ambitiously treasonous plans the elves and dwarves seek to perpetrate against Duke Latikov. Nonetheless they're not above profiting from such petty scheming as long as it doesn't endanger the prosperity and limited autonomy Greenfields Township enjoys. They realize, too, they can profit from the unknown secrets deep beneath the farms and towns; those with clues to such places are happy to sell information, maps, or artifacts to the Fellowship of Delvers if the money's good.

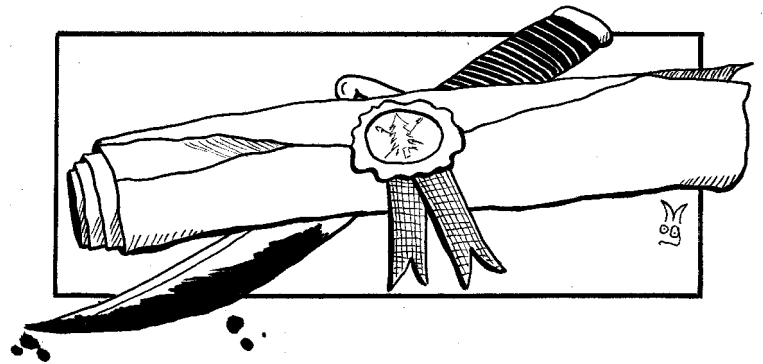
Canal Boatmen: Those plying the Straightwater Canal in their barges form a tight-knit community willing to help almost anyone...for the right price. They pride themselves in transporting contraband cargo and wanted men under the noses of the Sentinel Knights, from Thornhedge all the way into Northern Ferry. Although their regional influence remains confined to the canal, they have great familiarity with the waterway and the ruins along its shores. The boatmen maintain a rivalry with the Fellowship of Delvers, denying them access to the tumbled edifices and exploring (and exploiting) these for their own purposes.

Fellowship of Delvers: A relatively recent faction, this secret society believes arcane discoveries wait in lost passages deep beneath the peaceful lands of the Marches. Their members quietly follow leads, scour the countryside, and explore the ancient subterranean remnants of a long-dead empire, retrieving its secrets and keeping them from those who would abuse them. Current members evaluate and invite proven adventurers to join their ranks. They maintain safe houses in settlements throughout the Marches, keeping their findings hidden from the Sentinel Knights and the Duke's ever-growing collection.

Cult of the Lurking One: This shadowy cult waits in the Croaking Swamp, hoping a great water god will someday rise up and wage war against the land-dwellers. In truth it's more a political agenda in religious trappings. A core of lizardman priests have rallied bands of swamp-dwelling

humanoids; some people from more civilized lands have given up their ties to society to embrace the simplistic life the cult offers. Many believe the priests use magic to raise the marsh waters and expand the swamp northward in preparation for the coming war.

Drova & Ostmaur Forces: The remnants of a dwarven army King Rancillard sent to secure the Ostmaur Peaks 300 years ago succumbed to the wicked artifacts and tainted riches they found in ancient caverns beneath the mountains. These corrupted their bodies and souls, transforming their flesh into metal and their hearts into resentful fires without compassion (see "Drova" in "New Creatures" below). Over the years they explored their new realm, unearthing arcane powers and forming alliances with fell creatures. They assembled an army and forged weapons to wage war on the Greydeep Marches and those they felt exiled them to the remote wilderness. They've already begun conquering those mountain-dwellers who won't join their cause, driving refugees westward. They're sending feelers into the Marches, studying their enemies, marshaling their forces to strike when the time is right. That time has almost come....



RUMORS

Like most citizens of the Vilburg Kingdom the inhabitants of the Marches enjoy tall tales, news of far-off places, gossip about local scandals, and rumors both playful and sinister. Gamemasters can use such hearsay to tempt characters to follow certain paths, explore new mysteries, or meddle in local affairs. False rumors can serve to twist assumptions about established setting elements (all monsters are bad, all Sentinel Knights are noble) and lure characters into unpredictable situations. Such tales might also inspire gamemasters in preparing new adventures and players in choosing what mysteries to explore within the Marches. Like any good rumor, each one below contains some grains of truth, but most leave the actual circumstances up to the gamemaster to embellish. Roll 1d20 or choose from the table below whenever characters make the effort to befriend locals and get them talking.

d20
Roll Rumor

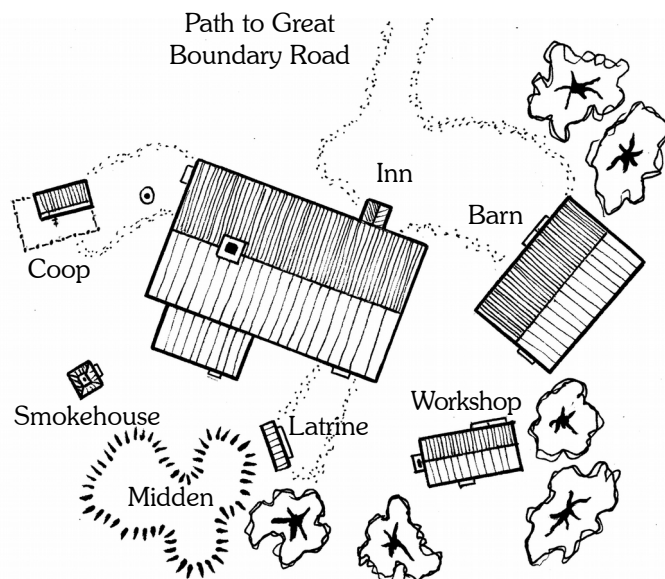
- 1 The waters flowing from the Triune Lakes contain special magic fostering the growth of crops around Thornhedge as well as the town's living wall.
- 2 The dwarves of the Redmount Hills mine more than ore; they excavate ancient magical artifacts from a long-buried city of ancient mages they hope to use in overthrowing Duke Latikov and enslaving everyone in the Marches.
- 3 A crazy shaman lives in a cave deep within the Darquald Forest worshiping a strange rat god with his bevy of sensuous female acolytes.
- 4 Horses from the Frigid Steppes are the best steeds in the Marches and well worth the price.
- 5 Overgrown ruins along the Straightwater Canal contain carvings revealing the secrets of the wicked empire that ruled this region in ancient times...but the boatmen discourage outsiders from exploring them.
- 6 Convicted murderers in the Marches suffer a lingering fate at the hands of the Duke's counselor, Lady Yvinia, who uses them to test the effects of newly discovered magic artifacts.
- 7 When the Vilburg Kingdom first settled the Marches, they sent an army of dwarves to establish a colony in the Ostmaur Peaks; it was never heard from again.
- 8 Some lone travelers and solitary inhabitants have made alliances with hostile forces in the Darquald Forest.
- 9 The ruddy waters of the Crimson Run possess healing properties.
- 10 A sinister cult dedicated to a god known only as the Lurking One maintains a fortified temple complex deep within the Croaking Swamp.
- 11 A haggard old wizard wanders the Great Boundary Road granting free wishes to travelers who treat him kindly.
- 12 The boatmen of the Straightwater Canal smuggle all kinds of goods out of sight of the Sentinel Knights, including forbidden magical items.
- 13 The Sentinel Knights are searching for something stolen from Duke Latikov's arsenal of powerful magical artifacts.
- 14 Ancient catacombs in the region around Greenfields Township leak magical powers into the soil, resulting in bountiful crops year after year.
- 15 The elves work very hard to protect a magical tree at the heart of the Silverfrost Forest.
- 16 Glowing blue mushrooms growing near the Straightwater Canal can heal any injury.

- 17 Herders from the northernmost reaches of the Frigid Steppes have reported finding a subterranean labyrinth built entirely of smooth metal.
 - 18 Duke Latikov has commissioned a pair of investigators to quietly travel the Marches posing as ordinary people, yet seeking out and confiscating magical artifacts hidden among the populace.
 - 19 The halfling farmers and artisans of the Greenfields Township area produce the finest food, drink, and household goods in the region...with some subtle magical assistance, of course.
 - 20 The sorceress Craetagia of Thornhedge dumps her failed experiments – mutated plant monstrosities – deep in the northern reaches of Darquald Forest.
-

THE HAMMER & TUN

This welcoming tavern stands near the gloomy eaves of Darquald Forest where the track to Greenfields Township branches off from the Great Boundary Road. It offers good food and drink, adequate accommodations, and a place for locals and travelers to gather, trading gossip and goods. Despite the reported influx of raiding humanoids from the forest, the Hammer & Tun has no protective walls or other defensive works. If it seems safer and more secure than most taverns or even settlements near the sinister boughs of Darquald, well, then, that might just be true thanks to the proprietor's mysterious connections.

An affable halfling named Gallard runs the Hammer & Tun with his brood, a seemingly innumerable number of dim-witted sons and daughters of varying ages, but none much into adulthood. His establishment consists of the sprawling tavern itself – a large common room, cluttered kitchen, well-stocked pantry, family quarters upstairs, a basement storeroom, and a few private sleeping rooms for guests – a barn serving as stable and storage, a smokehouse, chicken



coop, workshop outbuilding, privy latrine, and a sizable midden heap infested with surprisingly tame rats.

The Hammer & Tun's larder benefits from the tavern's location on the road to Greenfields Township. Many local farmers and cottage industries – particularly breweries and wineries – keep Gallard's pantries stocked with what some argue is the best food and beverage in the Greydeep Marches. He's rather generous with payments, leading many to believe he keeps a secret stash of gold coins somewhere on the premises; but nobody really cares much as long as the kitchen's open and the jovial spirits flows. The common room's size rivals that of some nobles' great halls. Great timbers rise up to form the rafters. Several fireplaces and pits provide warmth and an inviting glow. Trophies from Gallard's past exploits hang on the walls and dangle from the rafters. Although the morning and lunchtime traffic ebbs and flows, evenings always attract a crowd to enjoy Gallard's warm hospitality: area farmers trading gossip (primarily halflings), roving bands of minstrels seeking an appreciative audience, and an assortment of people passing along the Great Boundary Road and the track to Greenfields Township. A single gold piece can buy a weary traveler a sumptuous meal – roast pig, freshly baked bread, mutton stew, boiled eggs, choice cheeses and sausages, potato dumplings, apple pies – enough drink to induce slumber, and a place on the boards with an old blanket when the common room finally quiets in the morning's wee hours. For a few more silver coins discreet travelers can also rent one of the private sleeping rooms, some with bunks, others with single beds. Like many tavern and inn keepers Gallard maintains a private room for the exclusive use of itinerant Sentinel Knights and their sergeants.

Frequent Guests

Several notables from the region frequent the Hammer & Tun; each has a certain chance of enjoying the tavern's hospitality at the same time characters arrive:

Farmer Pike (1 in 4 chance): A nearby hog farmer who supplies the tavern with much of its pork, Pike presents a glum demeanor exaggerated by his overweight physique and short halfling stature. He's usually hunched over a drink muttering about difficulties with his farm or sick pigs or the gloom hanging over Darquald Forest or strange goings-on in the night. Gallard's tales of military misadventure seem the only things that brighten his spirits.

Merry Farthing Minstrels (1 in 10): This band of entertainers – two halflings, an elf, and a dwarf – travel the farmlands and up to Thornhedge with frequent stops at the Hammer & Tun. Their variety of song, poetry, dance, and bawdy comedy appeals to the basest instincts of tavern-goers and hence ensures their popularity. Both halflings are

accomplished pickpockets, though they fence their ill-gotten gains far from the scene of the crime.

Brother Fishback (1 in 8): This hunchbacked yet affable friar welcomes all who wish to share a table with him. A good listener, he loves hearing news from far-off lands, particularly the doings of Sentinel Knights, the ruling nobility, and other persons of influence. His bulging eyes blink now and then as he nods in assurance when folks tell their tales. Fishback secretly gathers useful information for the Cult of the Hidden One, an association of humans and humanoids in the Croaking Swamp seeking to control their portion of the Greydeep Marches for their own purposes.

Lausch (1 in 6): This elven dandy seems affable enough, gracious and good-mannered, but distanced enough to avoid becoming too intimate with strangers met at a tavern. Although he portrays himself as a wandering vagabond, Lausch really operates as a courier delivering messages from the enclave in the Silverfrost Forest to others throughout the Marches with whom the elves have business, particularly allies in the halfling and dwarven enclaves.

Shrewd Eremoll (1 in 6): This lone merchant carries his inventory in a towering backpack structure that also doubles as a small market stall with folding table and awning. His balding pate and graying beard betray his age, yet he hefts his wares with little effort. Most of his inventory consists of odd bits he acquires in his travels throughout the Greydeep Marches: small weapons and tools, household implements, books and scrolls, minor adornments, all of surprisingly high quality. Eremoll claims some have minor magical powers. He keeps his selling prices just high enough that potential customers take a second to reconsider how much they truly want his wares. He's picky about purchasing items to bolster his inventory, paying well below any semblance of fair market value or refusing to buy altogether. Eremoll's really a retired wizard of minimal accomplishment; however, his magical training grants him enough spellcasting power to protect himself in the often dangerous stretches of road skirting the fringes of Darquald Forest.

Sentinel Knight (1 in 8): The elderly Sir Keladrys can barely mount his horse anymore, but he enjoys a good meal and homey atmosphere. He and his sergeant Tivom sit in the corner eating, drinking, and playing stones, rebuffing anyone seeking an audience under the pretense of recovering from his arduous travels. (Gamemasters might also roll randomly on the "Sentinel Knight Encounters" table and modify the results as appropriate for a tavern encounter.)

The Plunderers (1 in 4): A rag-tag band of itinerant treasure hunters uses the Hammer & Tun as a base for forays into Darquald Forest seeking ruins, catacombs, and treasure. The group consists of several typical adventurer types all rallied

around a charismatic leader, a strapping mercenary warrior named Kolar. They're rowdy and boastful and more apt to cause trouble with potential rivals than with the more tame regulars from nearby farming communities.

The Haggard man (1 in 12): This towering, emaciated figure dresses in black armor, tunic, and cape, all battered and tattered with age. Gallard serves him personally with great respect, seating him in a secluded corner of the common room and preparing a private room for his overnight stays. While the Haggard Man quietly watches and listens to activity in the tavern, he rebuffs any inquiries with stern civility; Gallard goes out of his way to discourage anyone from bothering him. The man calls himself Laced of Gaunt, a deposed nobleman from the far western reaches of the Vilburg Kingdom. In truth Laced secretly serves the malevolent forces marshaling in the Ostmaur Peaks, gathering information about the lands they intend to conquer.

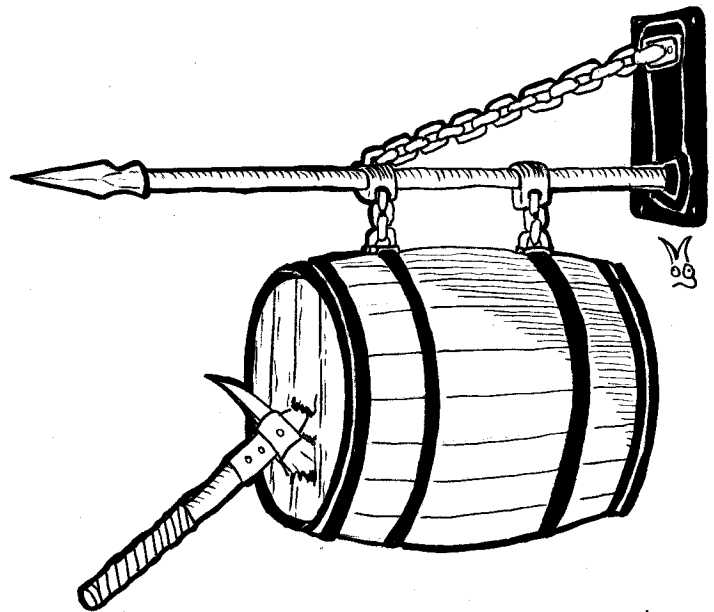
Gallard's Trophies

Gallard enjoys telling stories about the numerous trophies hanging from the walls and ceiling of the Hammer & Tun, especially when it gets his patrons to buy more food and drink to sweeten the tale. He's a natural storyteller, standing there on a table, pantomiming various actions from each tale, lowering his voice bit by bit, then exploding with an astounding revelation or hilarious punchline. Travelers often return for the entertainment as much as the hospitality. Each trophy has a story, though like any tall tale, most of Gallard's are more bluster than truth; some are outright fabrications, but make for entertaining conversation with gullible guests. Supposedly most came from his misadventures throughout the Vilburg Kingdom.

Serpent of the Rocks: A sea serpent head glares down from its perch on the wall, its features combining elements of a snake, dragon, and turtle. Gallard says he slew it when he was a young cabin boy sailing with Captain Bloat along the Ragged Coast. "Tough old thing, hacked away at it with a meat cleaver from the galley when it lunged its enormous neck over the deck."

Regimental Pennant: A faded banner, green with white letters of a strange form, hangs on the wall. "I was fighting with Graf Tyrival's armies in far-off Jyna, storming Warlord Xinj's mountain fortress," Gallard boasts. "Killed seven fierce bodyguards to get that old rag. Was supposed to be a lucky charm, but it didn't bring Xinj much luck."

The Hammer & Tun: A barrel with a war hammer smashed through the side hangs above the tavern's main door, a trophy that gives the establishment its name. "After I vanquished the Bandit King of Thistle Heath, staving in his



head with the hammer, I ripped into this tun of his choice wine to celebrate."

Head of Bramble Boar: This enormous boar head sports large, bramble-like deformities growing from its snout. "It gets those from eating the cursed berries of the acryspus bush," Gallard notes. "I slew this one with a long spear while hunting with King Rusicus in the Royal Preserve. Weird stuff growing in there, that's for sure."

Sundered Shield of Snorgad: This roundel shield with a crudely painted demon face belonged to the infamous orc chieftain Snorgad, slain during the Battle of Ashes Blight in the western uplands. "See that cleft on the left side? That's where my axe bit into it, gashed the brute's arm a bit, too, as I recall."

Lurking Bat of Veen: Gallard usually leaves the bat's tale for last (or avoids discussing it altogether if he can get away with it). The giant bat hangs from the highest rafters, wings extended into the shadows. Patrons can barely see it in the firelight. Gallard claims he slew it while exploring the extensive Caves of Veen in the northern mountains. "It fluttered out of the inky darkness, fangs bared, seeking to drain my life's blood from my very body. I cleaved its belly wide open with my axe, but the animal stuffer did a great job stitching it back together." Sometime each night it disappears while everyone's asleep and returns at some point during the afternoon...nobody really notices. Anyone who does assumes the mystical bat has gone out patrolling the area, warding off dangers. The bat actually does return to life – or rather unlife – each night, creeping out and flying back to report to its shadowy masters in the east about notable conversations, visitors, and events it witnesses in the common room

ENCOUNTERS

Gamemasters are invited to develop the Greydeep Marches to best suit their gaming style and their players' desires for medieval fantasy adventures...and encourage their characters to explore the region through their roleplaying exploits. The locations outlined above can serve as bases, adventure settings, and other scenario inspiration. The encounters below offer additional ideas keyed to general regions around the Marches; use them for single encounters or adventure hooks, determined randomly or by choice. Each of four general regions – the Central Farmlands, Straightwater Canal & Environs, Croaking Swamp & Sinking Towns, and Darquald Forest – has its own encounter table with a daily chance for encounters. Entries in each those tables also refer to two additional resources, “Sentinel Knight Encounters” and “Exceptional Encounters.” To skew results to favor low-, mid-, and upper-level characters, roll on the encounter tables using different polyhedral dice: low d8, mid d12, high d20. Gamemasters should adjust repeat encounters with subtle changes: different reactions, varied group composition, or even a familiarity carried over from previous meetings. Since many of these encounters might seem unique, feel free to check off those already used and move upward if random results point to a previously used one.

If you prefer a more traditional approach for more routine events, simply reference wilderness encounter tables from your favorite game system keyed according to the following terrain: Central Farmlands = inhabited; Straightwater Canal = river; Croaking Swamp = swamp; Darquald Forest = woods.

Central Farmlands

Daily chance of encounter: 1 in 8. Most encounters occur on roads and paths between settlements.

d20	Roll	Encounter
	1	Lost cow munching on grass; she runs if abused, follows characters if treated kindly. Becomes overly affectionate with one character, constantly lows at them and, if close enough, licks them.
	2	Feral pigs foraging for nuts and mushrooms; they ignore characters but become belligerent if bothered. Treat as slightly weaker wild boars.
	3	Ancient stone marker sticking out of the ground at an angle; an arrow with strange runs on one face points off the pathway into the overgrown brush.
	4	A small band of pilgrims (of various professions and social classes) headed to the shrine of Venda, goddess of justice, in Turmhaven to atone for assorted offenses. They seek donations of coin, provisions, or simple good wishes, and spurn those who chide them for their crimes.
	5–7	Roll on “Sentinel Knight Encounters” table.
	8	Roll on “Exceptional Encounters” table.
	9	A host of well-armed dwarves – some piled into a two-wheeled mule cart – pulls aside the road and stare suspiciously as the characters pass. They utter little more than a gruff “good day” and otherwise rebuff any attempt at pleasantries. They’re quite protective of something in the cart covered with an old canvas tarp.
	10	A band of merry elven troubadours breaks out in song to herald the characters’ approach; they encourage everyone to sing and dance, seeming unusually chummy with everyone. “Set all your cares aside / let nothing bother you / we’ll sing and dance and glide / all for a coin or two.”
	11	An odd puddle with an iridescent green shimmer lurks at the side of the road; is it moving or just a trick of the light and breeze?
	12–13	A disorderly crowd of mendicant doomsayers travels among the settlements, encouraging people to prepare for a great cataclysm coming from the east. They aggressively harass anyone who disagrees with their claims.
	14	A traveling brew wagon drawn by two oxen and tended by a troupe of overly jovial halflings; for a few coins they offer to set up their table and bench at the side of the road and serve up their best mead, wine, and ale with a platter of bread and cheese...and a helping of gossip if the characters seem affable.
	15	A herd of deer grazes quietly in the distance; a glint of sunlight suggests one of the bucks has antlers gilded in gold...or perhaps it’s just a trick of the light.
	16	Seated skeleton chained to an old tree, with “Please leave me alone” carved into the bark; if accosted it raises one hand and points forward, says “Hey!” then goes silent for at least another hour. Smashing the skeleton releases a spirit that haunts the offending character.
	17	A nearby field conceals something rustling through the wheat, skittering about and watching travelers from a distance.
	18	Crumbling stone foundation (probably once a cottage) with an old chest sticking out of the nearby midden pile. Moving or opening the chest disturbs a nest of angry rats living inside it, with no treasure within.
	19	A populous colony of black squirrels has taken over a tree-covered, rocky knoll with a small stream and pool of clear, cool water. They remain indifferent to travelers as long as they’re left alone, but pelt intruders incessantly with nuts and stones.
	20	The path crosses an old stone bridge. Something underneath growls, snickers, and shifts its weight as travelers cross; curious characters find only massive stone megaliths supporting the bridge span.

Straightwater Canal & Environs

Daily chance of encounter: 1 in 8. Some encounters occur on the Great Boundary Road and other pathways while others happen within sight of the canal; adjust results to reflect the appropriate circumstances.

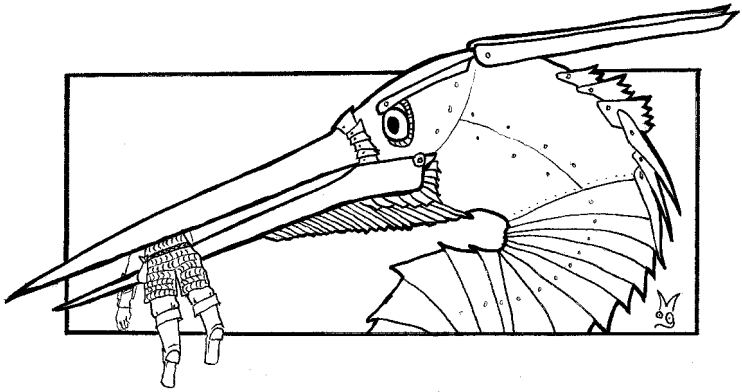
d20	Roll	Encounter
1		The path reaches a crossroads with an ancient signpost covered in vines; when cleared the signs pointing in each direction <i>all</i> bear the name of the characters' current destination (for instance "Northern Ferry," "Thornhedge," or "Baumburg").
2		A quivering pile of rags extends an almost skeletal hand holding a tin cup. The voice from behind the veiled cowl asks for alms for a lame mendicant. Those who pass receive a whispered "Curse you" while those who leave a coin hear a faint "Bless you."
3		A rusty pipe sticking out of an ancient stone edifice dribbles an oily liquid into the canal; it pools around the outflow in a scintillating sheen...but doesn't flow downstream with the gentle current.
4		A fair-haired trader from the Frigid Steppes stands with a herd of five fine horses grazing on the roadside grass; he's upset, however, because he's lost one horse and doesn't want to leave the others while he tries tracking it.
5		Two boatmen shout in a heated argument coming close to blows; one has maneuvered his barge to block the canal and won't move it unless the other pays him money owed from a past wager.
6		A solemn procession of elves from the Silverfrost Forest marches past. Some carry banners, but two bear an ornately carved palanquin containing a mysterious occupant. The elves ward off inquisitive travelers and intervene to ensure nobody peers behind the palanquin's curtains.
7		Roll on "Sentinel Knight Encounters" table.
8		Roll on "Exceptional Encounters" table.
9		The gentle canal current has pushed a long-abandoned, half-sunken barge into a side pool. Several skeletons sprawl over old crates and barrels as if keeping the cargo from slipping off the listing deck into the waters.
10		A band of six Sentinel Knight sergeants searches along the road for a velvet bag containing a pair of spectacles. Have the characters seen them? Do they know anyone who recently started using such glasses?
11		A stone-lined well sits in a rubble-strewn clearing near the path. The long metal chain bolted to the well stones ends not in a bucket for drawing water but in a large, barbed iron hook. Occasional splashing heard from the bottom of the deep well indicates something's down there.
12		A large wooden crate floats lazily down the canal. Is something banging against the sides from within, or is it simply knocking into obstacles beneath the water's surface?
13		A hulking, crude stone statue of a humanoid's head rises above surrounding ruins to stare at those passing nearby. Should anyone approach it, a booming voice utters, "Sindoo veedah geedo?" The stone head speaks only once each day.
14		A large, well-kept fountain stands amid weed-covered ruins. Cool, clear water burbles up from its center and numerous fish swim in its basin. A colony of feral cats lives in the ruins and protects the fountain – their source of constant sustenance – from intruders...though they might allow travelers to use it if offered sufficient compensation.
15		The canal opens to form a small lake with a ruin-covered island in the middle. A little girl wearing a gold circlet and tattered clothes waves to the characters from the island, giggles, then slips back into the overgrown ruins.
16		A massive stone chimney emerges from someplace deep underground. Inky smoke drifts up from the top. Should anyone touch, assault, or try climbing the chimney it belches a cloud of black soot into the air. Birds avoid it as it disperses into the atmosphere.
17		A wounded man drags himself out of bushes overgrowing a ruined foundation. As he reaches for the characters they realize a glowing blue fungus covers parts of his face and hand. "It's down there, deep, waiting to get us," he croaks. "The blue death!"
18		A group of hooded people gather at the edge of the canal, looking into the calm waters. The liquid coalesces into a face, which intones one of the characters' names in a booming voice, then, "They shall bring discord and fear." The face disappears and the hooded worshipers quietly debate its meaning.
19		A sprawling thorn bush grows around a stone pedestal with a gold-plated statue of a water nymph. Anyone venturing too close or trying to reach the statue causes the bush to animate, whipping jagged thorn vines and tearing at trespassers.
20		A giant catfish lurking in the canal surfaces and spits water at nearby travelers and whips his mouth feelers at them. Those on barges or along the canal edge might fall in if caught off guard.

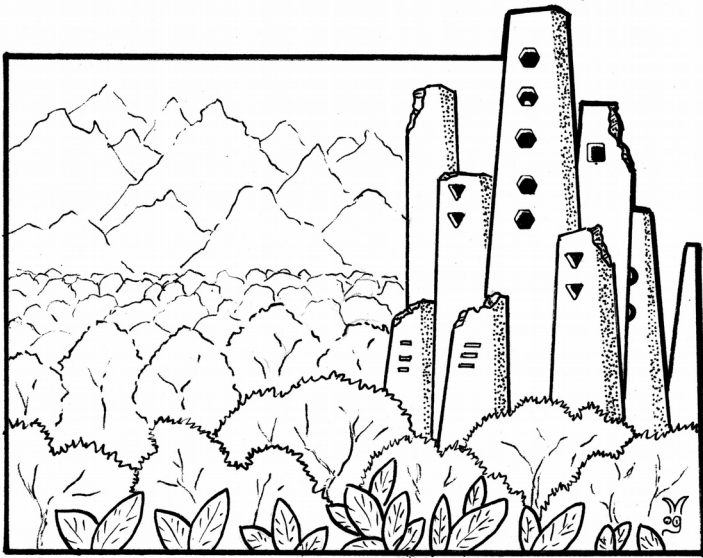
Croaking Swamp & Sinking Towns

Daily chance of encounter: 1 in 6. Some encounters occur on the Great Boundary Road and other pathways while others happen near the swamp itself; adjust results to reflect the appropriate circumstances.

d20

Roll Encounter

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>1 The path descends into marshy ground, then into a shallow pool before emerging in the distance. Several giant leeches writhe in the murky water.</p> <p>2 Abandoned farm buildings have sunk halfway into the soft, marshy earth; a cow, several sheep, chickens, a goat, and two pigs forage for food on drier ground nearby, but no human farmers remain. Only a small stone shrine to Favarda, goddess of the harvest, has somehow resisted sinking into the swamp.</p> <p>3 A huge, slimy log lies across the road. It's glistening bark undulates as characters approach; the giant slug attempts to continue its slow, slimy way toward the swamp.</p> <p>4 A small roadside shrine contains a single room with a slot near the altar for offerings. Carvings depict swamp reptiles swimming amid overgrown earthen mounds. Anyone dropping an offering into the slot (coin, food, or other items) hears it fall a while before splashing; whatever's down there utters an appreciative grumble.</p> <p>5 Horse-drawn wagons block each side of a bridge over a wide inlet; two merchants in the middle of the span fight over who should get out of the other's way. The bridge is narrow enough only one wagon can pass at a time.</p> <p>6 Roll on "Sentinel Knight Encounters" table.</p> <p>7-8 Roll on "Exceptional Encounters" table.</p> <p>9 An old stone watchtower leans precariously as it sinks into the swamp. No bridge or stones lead to its single door, the marsh having long ago consumed such access. From one of the lower windows a face stares out of the darkness, then disappears.</p> <p>10 A giant snake swims through the marshy pools within sight of the path. It seems to follow the characters, veering off occasionally to snap at convenient prey, but doesn't directly approach or attack travelers.</p> <p>11 A stray goat munches grass near one side of the path, while on the other a large crocodile sprawls on the muddy marsh bank sunning itself, each watching the other warily.</p> <p>12 A decrepit, shallow-draft boat drifts lazily in the water. The canvas tarpaulin covering its cargo actually conceals a small crowd of zombies waiting for the smell of living flesh to revive them.</p> |  <p>13 In the distance a party of fishermen sits on the bank of a pool, casting nets, lines, and spears to catch fish. As the characters approach they realize the fishermen are lizard folk who also mistook the travellers for their own kind.</p> <p>14 A fish monger guards several wooden racks upon which his salted fish dry in the sunshine; a horde of crabs have crawled out of the swamp and seek to steal the fish. Nearby his wife tends to scarecrows that don't seem to keep all the hungry birds at bay.</p> <p>15 An enormous toad sits on a flat rock at the side of the path, an iron kettle with coins between its forefeet. He attacks anyone who proceeds without adding a coin or two to the pot (and defends his pot should anyone try taking it).</p> <p>16 A bedraggled crowd of beggars draped with swamp moss accost travelers. Their bulging eyes, droopy jowls, and hunched backs give them an unnerving, fish-like appearance. They warn that those who don't join their cult should beware the Lurking One waiting to devour them in the night.</p> <p>17 A sprawling willow tree overhangs the path ahead. When the characters come too close the bark of the tree's massive trunk puckers and it spits a gout of sticky green goo at them. It continues spitting until the characters retreat to a respectable distance.</p> <p>18 A lone merchant desperately tries to heave his wagon from the muddy portion of the road where it has become stuck; he and his horses watch nervously as a mysterious brown mound slowly glides toward them in a nearby pond.</p> <p>19 A roiling cloud of sickly yellow marsh gas and swarming flying insects hangs over the pathway ahead...and it's slowly drifting toward the characters.</p> <p>20 A 30 foot-tall bronze statue of a heron rises from the marsh near the road. If passing travelers carry any fish (including salted and dried fish as iron rations) the statue slowly comes to life, swinging its head and snapping its beak with the sound of creaking metal, as if anticipating a meal. To slip past without coming under attack the travelers must toss all the fish toward the heron statue's beak for it to gobble up. (See "Heron of Zaralax" in "New Creatures" below.)</p> |
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Darquald Forest

Daily chance of encounter: 1 in 4. Assume most encounters occur on the Great Boundary Road and other pathways, though some might happen should characters wander into the woods.

d20

Roll Encounter

- | | | | |
|-----|--|----|--|
| 1 | Four mules harnessed in a team linger at the side of the road munching grass, with no wagon to pull or master to serve. Anyone investigating the road ahead or behind finds no sign of wagon or merchant. Each mule has the letters "AD" branded on their haunch. | 10 | A large woodpecker hacks diligently at a thick tree trunk; those taking a closer look notice patterns of past holes seem to spell out a single word: "Ostmaur." |
| 2 | A team of woodcutters works feverishly felling wood and hauling it off to their nearby settlement. They're building a palisade to protect against increasingly hostile creatures from the forest. Anyone stopping to help them cut wood receives an invitation to spend the night at their reinforced village. | 11 | Several dwarves work to repair a bridge enabling the road to span a large stream. They grumble that they should collect tolls considering all the work they do fixing things travelers routinely break. If asked why they're undertaking the repairs, one gruffly responds, "Well, who else is going to do this kind of work?" |
| 3 | An ancient altar lurks half concealed by heavy undergrowth. Rotted food and broken crockery cover its surface, evidence someone once left food offerings here, though the runes carved into the altar don't indicate whether they honor a benevolent deity. | 12 | A haunch of cooked meat sits on a platter in the middle of the road; a rope tied to the meat leads off into the bushes. Is it part of an elaborate snare trap, or ambush "bait" set by a band of naïve kids, hungry humanoids, or simple bandits? |
| 4 | A crazy wild man sits high up in a tree overlooking the road. His unkempt beard and long hair spill over like a bramble patch onto his tattered burlap clothes. He spews insults at anyone passing by, but kindly warns them against wandering into the forest if they toss up any food. | 13 | Faint drumming and chanting draws travelers' eyes to a huge, twisted tree atop a distant hill. The sounds emanate from a cave formed by the tree's massive roots. |
| 5 | Roll on "Sentinel Knight Encounters" table. | 14 | A band of elven rangers bursts from the forest, bows at the ready, glancing around warily and searching the ground for tracks. "Have you seen them?" one asks just before another points into the forest and shouts, "This way! Hurry, before they get away!" |
| 6-8 | Roll on "Exceptional Encounters" table. | 15 | A chest sits forgotten in the roadside underbrush, probably fallen off a wagon. Anyone picking the lock or bashing the lid off finds a tome in an archaic language, several burlap sacks of soil, and numerous parchment packets of seeds. |
| 9 | An ox team pulls a wagon laden with trade goods; the merchant offers a free week's worth of rations from his stores to anybody willing to accompany him to the next village and protect him from danger. | 16 | Halfway up a slope stands two stone posts and a lintel framing a cave entrance; an iron grate blocks the way and a gentle stream trickles from the darkness. |
| | | 17 | A small band of what at first look like misshapen children – actually goblins – labors in a field planting acorns and pine seedlings. They flee any aggressive travelers, but explain to peacefully curious ones the "forest spirits" have charged them with expanding its bounds. |
| | | 18 | A short obelisk marker covered in old runes points to another one up a slope, with a third faintly visible in the underbrush beyond that one. |
| | | 19 | A ruined tower overlooks the road from a nearby promontory. Careful listeners hear the clack of talons on stone and the dragging of a heavy, reptilian tail along the ground, suggesting something large and menacing lives in the ruin. |
| | | 20 | A covered wicker basket sits in the middle of the road; should anyone untie the cover they unleash an angry tangle of snakes and trigger an ambush from bandits hiding in a stand of trees nearby. |

Sentinel Knight Encounters

Use this table to randomly determine Sentinel Knights the characters encounter, both from the tables above and where appropriate in their wanderings throughout the Greydeep Marches. After initial encounters Sentinel Knights can serve as allies or adversaries depending on the circumstances surrounding their interactions with characters.

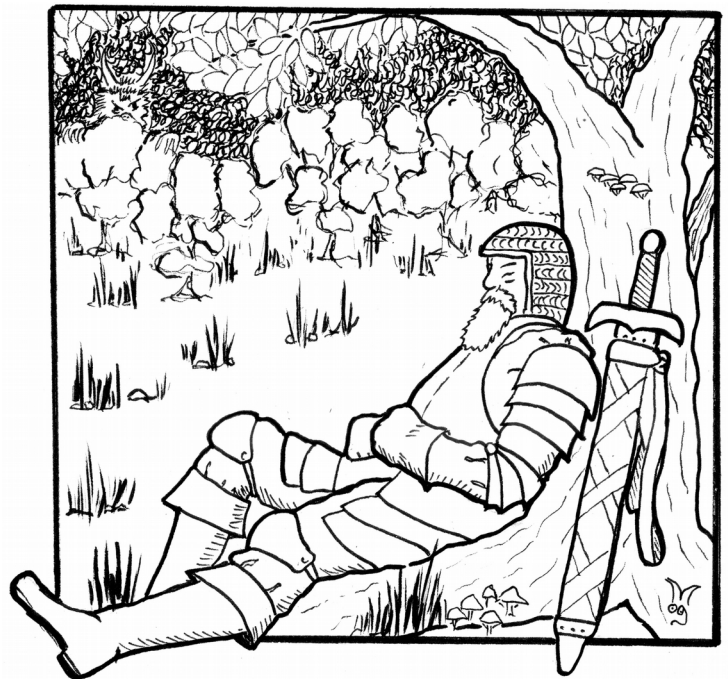
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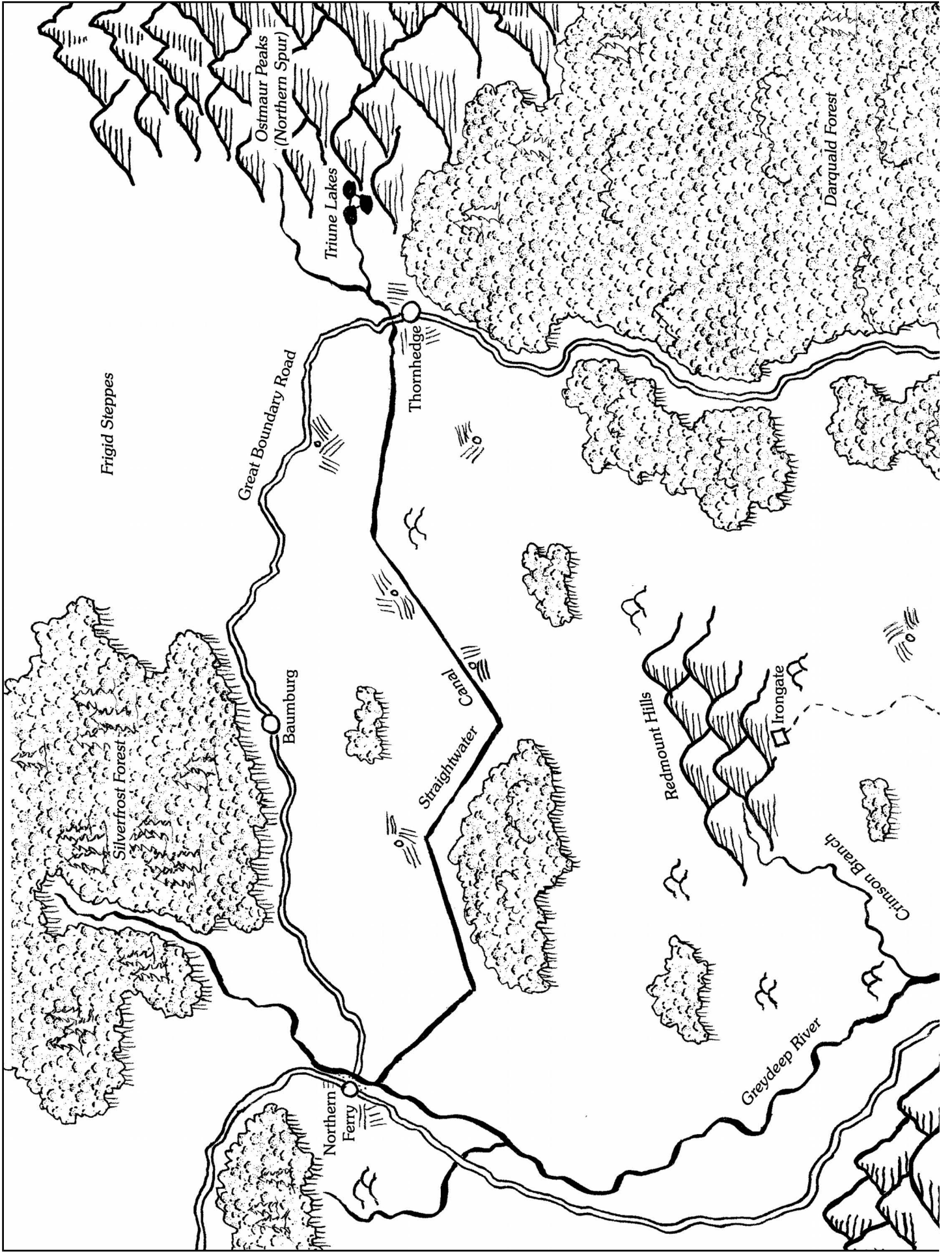
Roll Encounter

- 1 *Sir Leuchert*: A knight making his leisurely way down the road stops for a friendly chat. He kindly asks if passing travelers have any concerns and compliments them on whatever outstanding qualities he can find, just for the sake of courtesy.
- 2 *Lady Mortress*: A grim knight and a squad of sergeants escort a shackled prisoner sentenced to death for a murder he claims he didn't commit. She sternly forbids anyone from talking with the prisoner and has him hit for speaking out. They tolerate no interference on their trek back to Turmhaven to execute the prisoner's sentence.
- 3 *Sir Fressen*: A portly knight and his heavyset sergeant have set a small picnic feast in a roadside clearing. The knight invites travelers to join them (assuming they have something to contribute) and share tales of their escapades in the Marches.
- 4 *Sir Lovach*: Two liveried horses graze at the roadside while a sergeant stands guard. His elderly knight slumps against a comfortable tree, wrapped in his cape, dozing in the shade. The sergeant quietly motions for passers-by to move along with as little disturbance as possible.
- 5 *Sir Narmonn*: This knight and his sergeant stop everyone they meet and insist on searching for magical items. He's bound to suspect any extraordinary looking article as a powerful artifact he can confiscate. Those who resist or question his authority make a vindictive enemy; he turns the local populace against them and returns with an angry mob to force their compliance.
- 6 *Sir Glorych*: A glorious-looking knight regales a small crowd with tales of his heroic deeds defending the Marches: capturing the Bandits of Bittermarsh, vanquishing the Ogre of Tanner's Hill, retrieving the Lost Battlehorn of Rancillard, and slaying the Stinking Serpent. His sergeant stands off to the side, smiling, nodding, and accepting donations in appreciation of his master's service.
- 7 *Sir Ernodd*: A doddering old knight sits on his horse in the middle of the road. He's not quite sure which way he should ride nor where his sergeant has gone. After a few more minutes of disoriented debate, the

sergeant rides up, chastises the knight for dawdling, and leads him back the way he came.

- 8 *Sir Malvole*: A foul-tempered knight and his equally snide sergeant stop travelers and interrogate them about who they are, where they've come from, where they're going, and what they intend there. He openly doubts their honesty and warns them to stay out of trouble lest he report them to the Duke.
- 9 *Lady Svippet*: The scuffle ahead consists of a devoted sergeant desperately trying to get her drunken knight back on her horse, yet she keeps falling off the other side and complaining she just wants to sleep in peace...after just one more drink.
- 10 *Lady Ginaria*: A knight and sergeant gallop down the road, weapons drawn, and veer off into the wilderness. "How dare you evade the law, you scoundrels!" cries the knight as they plunge into the underbrush. Travelers notice no sign of evildoers either before or after the incident, yet the knight seems bent on chasing *something*...
- 11 *Sir Pinilek*: Two liveried horses graze at the roadside while a sergeant stands guard. He nods a greeting but encourages travelers to move along. After a moment or two those lingering see a knight scurry out from the nearby bushes, arranging his armor and tunic after having just relieved himself.
- 12 *Lady Tervall*: A stern-looking knight stops everyone on the path and insists each person pay a single coin tax to the Duke's treasury to maintain trails and roads. Her sergeant gladly deposits the coins into a locked strongbox tied to a mule. Those refusing to pay gain a scornful look from the knight and have their names and descriptions recorded on a scroll of known scofflaws operating in the Marches.





Ostrmaur Peaks
(Northern Spur)

Triune Lakes

Darquaid Forest

Frigid Steppes

Great Boundary Road

Thornhedge

Silverfrost Forest

Baumburg

Canal
Straightwater

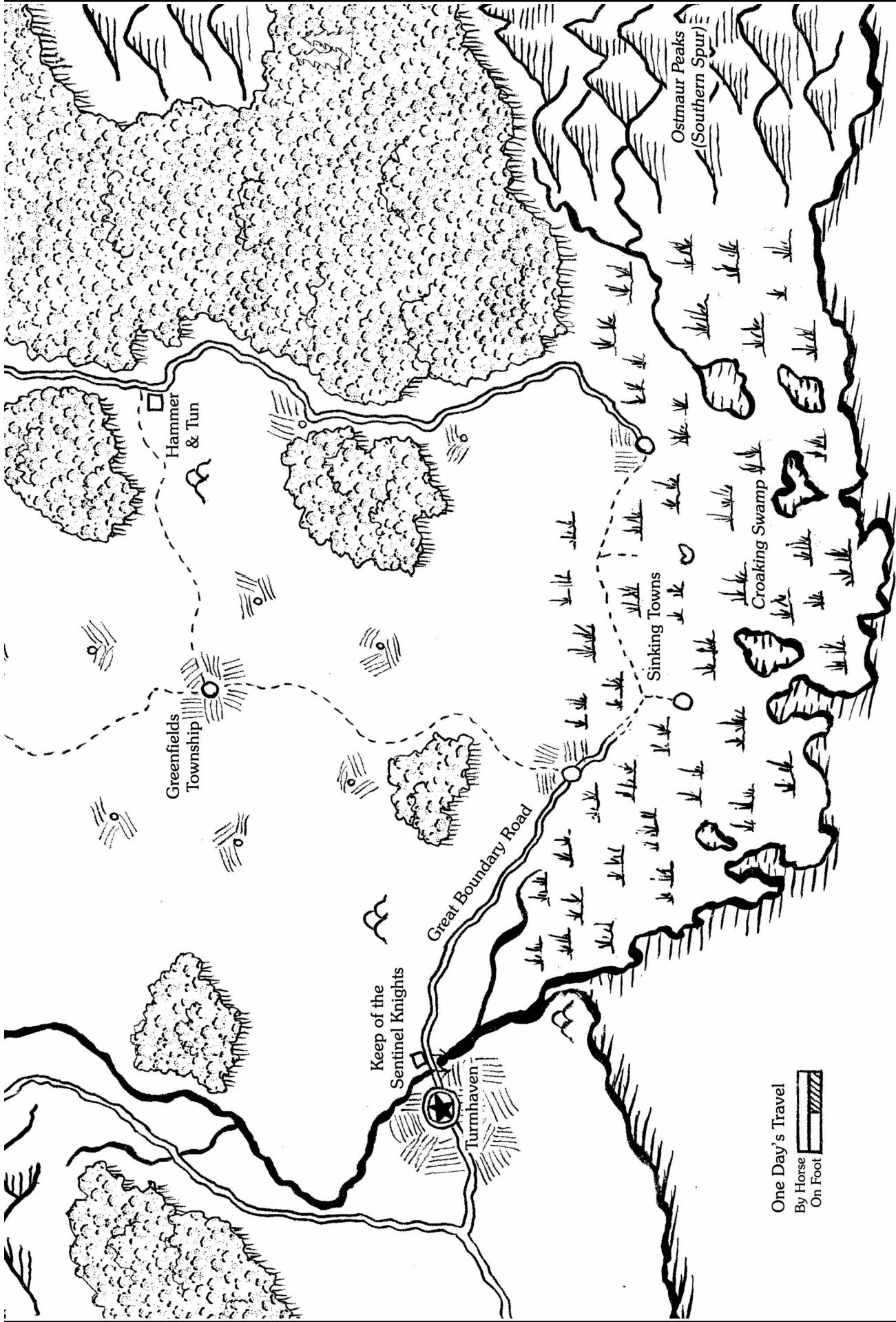
Redmount Hills

Irongate

Crimson Branch

Greydeep River

Northern
Ferry



The Greydeep Marches

One Day's Travel
By Horse
On Foot

Exceptional Encounters

These encounters reflect the growing crisis brewing on the eastern edge of the Greydeep Marches: a mysterious power rising in the Ostmaur Peaks, recruiting marauding bands of humanoids and other monsters to infiltrate the Marches, and causing other residents of the Ostmaur foothills and Darquald Forest to flee westward. For moderately experienced characters modify rolls by +2; very experienced characters modify results with +4.

d12

Roll Encounter

- 1 A rag-tag group of stragglers makes their way westward. They consist of kobolds, goblins, orcs, even a bugbear, all with tattered clothes and wrapped bundles of personal belongings desperately clutched in their fingers. Several possess weapons more suitable for hunting than fighting. If approached peacefully they explain they're seeking a safe haven where they might settle far from the eyes of civilized people, a place where they can live, hunt, and craft in peace. They're fleeing some unmentionable strife in the east, though they've managed to lose their ogre friend along the way. If attacked or intimidated they scatter and run off into the wilderness.
- 2 Travelers feel like something deeper within the forest is watching them. A series of seemingly out-of-place bird calls gives the impression a menacing force lies in wait in the shadows...when a flock of metallic-feathered birds erupts from the bushes to attack. They stab at opponents with long needle-like beaks and pummel them with clattering wings. (See "Bronzavia" in "New Creatures" below.)
- 3 A merchant atop his wagon has his hands up while he begs for mercy from a small band of humanoids: kobolds and goblins, mostly, but an odd orc and hobgoblin, too. He fears they're trying to rob him, even though their weapons aren't drawn or pointed at him and they haven't set their hands on the goods in the back of his wagon. A leader jangles a pouch with a few coins, then points to the goods in the wagon, then dabs his hand at his mouth. The merchant grows increasingly hysterical.
- 4 Several figures survey the surrounding region from a high point of land in the distance. Upon closer scrutiny the figures resolve into several goblins mounted on trained riding wolves; it seems one goblin jots notes on a scroll in response to the other goblins' observations, possibly taking stock of the terrain. The goblins pack up and flee if discovered, though they aren't averse to attacking to cover their withdrawal.
- 5 Something's rummaging through a cluster of dilapidated farm buildings in the distance. Should characters take note, the activity stops and several shadowy figures watch their movements. If adventurers approached with arms at the ready, the band of scavenging orcs fights to protect their paltry loot (a few utensils, a sack of freshly dug potatoes, an iron pot, and a silver pendant on a chain). If characters approach peacefully the orcs flee into the wilderness.
- 6 A weeping ogre sits at the side of the path, his huge, spiked club and a large wrapped bundle at his side. The appearance of others causes more hysterical weeping; questions evoke mumbled answers between mournful sobs. It seems he became separated from "my friends" and lost his way. He has no idea where they were going, only "Away from the angry mountain dwarves."
- 7 Travelers spot signs of a scuffle ahead: disturbed ground, broken weapons, bits of torn cloth and rent armor, a splintered shield, spilled blood...and a severed dwarf head! It's skin seems like pliant bronze with hair and beard of twisted wires, all nestled in a helmet of a dwarven style. The bronzed eyes suddenly open, its lips move, and it shouts, "The House of Drova shall have its revenge!" The head remains silent, though once each day, if handled, it utters this battle cry.
- 8 Four burly orcs carry a large wooden vat on two poles, much like a palanquin. As they fearlessly approach, characters see a viscous, deep-blue slime filling the vat, with tendrils reaching out to touch each orc. The porters present themselves, then speak simultaneously: "I am Shuchsuvar of Tsuch from deep below Drrgrevar. I flee in harmony. Take me to your establishment." If engaged in peaceful conversation, the slime continues speaking through its servitor orcs, even when separated. If attacked, the orcs set down the vat and defend their master, who slithers off if the fight goes against it. (See "Regal Slime" in "New Creatures" below.)
- 9 A giant, two-headed mountain eagle perches on a rock overlooking the road, attacking anyone passing nearby, though it has an arrow lodged in its side. Adventurers must calm it somehow to remove the arrow and dress the wound lest it continues clawing and nipping at travelers; it does not have much strength to fly away or retreat.
- 10 A busy host of humanoids builds a fortified wall around some ruined farmstead buildings they've claimed. An old Sentinel Knight sits on his horse nearby vainly ordering them to cease their activity and submit to capture by the Duke's forces...namely him and his sergeant. In his frustration Sir Wurmak turns to the characters and

- implores them to help him storm the fortification and evict the intruders.
- 11 Something's flailing about in the bushes nearby. Upon investigation the characters discover a headless body – probably a dwarf, based on the proportions and size – thrashing away with a battle axe. (Treat it as a zombie for combat purposes, though with a penalty for having no head.) It continues lashing out at anything nearby until dispatched. Its armor is tattered and nearly useless, but removing it reveals that the dwarf has a strange, pliant-bronze skin.
- 12 A minotaur drunkenly hacks away at trees with his massive battle axe; he's already felled several across the road. A large flagon fashioned from a barrel sits discarded nearby. Upon spotting travelers he bellows a challenge: fill his flagon with drink or treasure or face his wrath. He's just about as apt to topple to the ground in a drunken stupor as prove a worthy opponent in combat.
- 13 A smiling old man in opulent robes sits outside a gypsy tent, a sign propped up nearby declaring "Magic Items Wanted: Generous Price Paid." He offers to buy any magic items, paying double the estimated price in valuable and easily portable red rubies of varying sizes. As soon as characters conclude their business and turn their backs, the tent and its proprietor mysteriously vanish. The rubies' shimmering red tones are so entrancing that they inspire in the bearer increasing greed for more wealth with each passing day.
- 14 In the road ahead a dismounted Sentinel Knight repeatedly kicks a kobold curled up on the ground, shielding his head with his scrawny arms and pleading for mercy. The knight's sergeant keeps a small band of cowering kobolds at bay with his loaded crossbow. Anyone interfering diverts the knight's fury towards themselves, for he brooks no interference from those who aren't authorized to dish out the Duke's justice. He claims the kobolds are trespassers and thieves who've harassed the local peasantry, and hence need a strong message that they're not welcome here.
- 15 A shooting star screams through the sky and impacts nearby hill with a small explosion. Upon examination characters discover a large, blood-red ruby at the heart of the smoking crater. It remains cool to the touch despite its incinerated surroundings. The stone's size, clarity, and luster infects the character who possesses it with a raging paranoia that everyone else is trying to steal the ruby from them. If held for too long against bare skin the cursed ruby merges with the bearer's body and further corrupts their mind with violent greed.

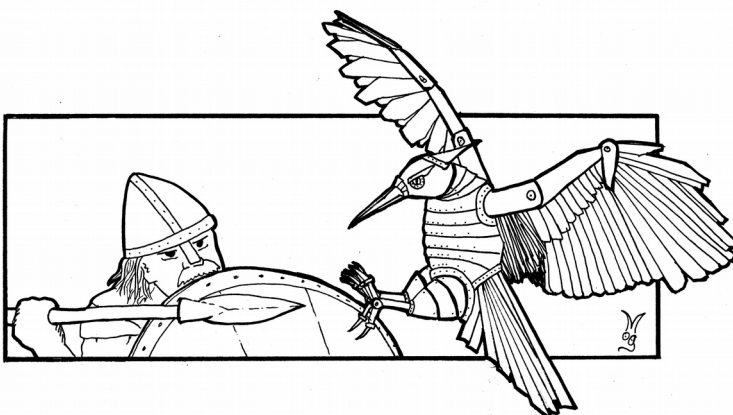
- 16 A Sentinel Knight and her sergeant oversee a levee of peasants from a nearby village constructing a stockade camp. Other villagers herd small groups of humanoids gathered from the surrounding countryside. They deposit any weapons with the sergeant standing near the gate. Inside the stockade they find crude shelters and a kitchen serving bowls of weak gruel. Any attempt to question or interfere with the knight's task arouses a stern rebuke from Lady Rithe, who claims the stockade will protect the humanoids from suspicious farmers.

NEW CREATURES

Bronzavia

Settlers in the Marches have never seen such strange, metallic birds until recent years. The creatures, about the size of a large crow, gather in small flocks (2–12 birds) and venture forth from the easternmost eaves of the Darquald Forest in the Ostmaur foothills. Their bodies consist of amazingly lightweight metal: a hollow-cast body, rigid, metal-foil feathers, razor-sharp talons, and long, sharp beaks. Despite their metal construction they manage to fly like normal birds, though they're almost always aggressive when encountered. They emit a raspy shriek when they squawk and make a squeaky crinkling sound when flapping their wings. Nobody knows if they actually must eat to survive, but they spend their time pecking away at trees, often killing them, and attacking any living creatures they encounter. They display an inexplicable aversion to attacking dwarves, halflings, and other short, stocky humanoids. When killed and torn apart their innards reveal a small ruby worth 5-10 gold coins.

Bronzavia. Basic (1–3); AT: sharp metal beak; DF: thin metal feathers and skin; Special Abilities: flying; Morale: moderate.



Drova

When King Rancillard first established the Greydeep Marches he mustered a small army of dwarves from throughout the Vilburg Kingdom and charged them with exploring and settling the high Ostmaur Peaks which defined the region's eastern border. The heavily armed, well-supplied column quickly disappeared into the Darquald Forest and was never seen again. The few brave enough to follow them never returned...and the lost dwarven expedition quietly faded from memory into whispered legend. Settlers focused on taming the new lands and slowly encroaching on Darquald Forest, but simply looked on the Ostmaur Peaks as distant mountains that defined the edge of their world.

Now 300 years later inhabitants are reporting strange encounters with dwarves ambling in from the east. Although they outwardly resemble normal dwarves equipped for war, their skin consists of pliant sheets of bronze. They also display more mechanical behavior than regular dwarves, being quite inflexible in their speech and actions, almost zombie-like in their relentless pursuit of some objective...usually involving interrogating others by force (asking about locations, soldiers, and fortifications in the Marches) and fighting anyone who questions them. Nobody's certain how much of their bodies beneath the skin contains metal, though they exhibit a resilience beyond that of normal flesh. Thus far nobody has captured one alive – if they can be said to be alive – but they're more frequently encountered these days, especially in the darker reaches of Darquald Forest. Anyone killing a Drova, removing its armor, and cutting into its chest can retrieve a blood ruby worth 50 gold coins...though it comes with a curse. (See the "Blood Rubies" sidebar in "The Ostmaur Dragon" below.)

Drova. Expert (4–9); AT: battle axe; DF: chain mail; Skills: mining; Morale: determined; Gear: small hammer, iron spikes, chisel, round wooden pegs, water skin.

Heron of Zaralax

Legends dating back 300 years tell of a towering metal heron statue somewhere in the Croaking Swamp. They differ about whether it was simply a static sculpture or an animated statue; but some traveling those reaches today relate harrowing stories of the giant bronze heron lurking near pathways, snapping at passers-by until they appease it with offerings of fish. The construct looms 30 feet tall with sturdy metal legs, a flexible neck, and a beak like a pointed battering ram. Nobody's seen it fly, but it's lanky legs give it a massive stride and firm footing in the swamp's uneven ground. Many believe a powerful sorcerer – living in a

distant time when a wicked forces ruled the land – constructed the statue and animated it with arcane magic. Rumors that the sorcerer's lair sits somewhere within the Croaking Swamp has led many adventurers to their doom.

Heron of Zaralax: Master (10+); AT: long metal beak; DF: metal feathers and skin; Special Abilities: smell fish; Morale: determined.

Regal Slime

Few have encountered the blue-tinted slimes dubbed "Regal Slimes" for their remarkable color and oddly polite demeanor. Some suspect they live deep in fissures far beneath the Ostmaur Peaks; their appearance in the Graydeep Marches hints at some upheaval serious enough to cause several to flee westward. Although they can ooze and flow under their own power like other slimes, they prefer to enlist the aid of other intelligent creatures to carry them in conveyances from simple vats to ornately decorated metal cauldrons. They also rely on other creatures to speak for them through their telepathic link, though their word choices aren't always quite appropriate. The slime controls others by touch, usually a thin, unobtrusive tendril to the back of the subject's head or neck; the telepathic influence often persists after contact has ceased if subjects remain nearby. Regal slimes rely on these mind-linked intermediaries for many physical tasks: carrying the slime, speaking for it, protecting it through combat or flight, and undertaking basic actions. The slime's attacks remain limited to lashing out with tendrils and overwhelming the victim's willpower to bring it under control, even if simply to stop attacking. Slime motives remain a mystery beyond basic self-preservation in unfamiliar environments. The few encountered seem intent on fleeing some unmentionable threat in the east and finding secure homes with servants; Duke Latikov's agents know better and maintain a suspicious watch on all known slimes in the area.

Regal Slime. Master (10+); AT: tendril with telepathic control; DF: none; Skills: telepathic control, diplomacy, arcane knowledge; Morale: moderate.

THE HOGS OF BURRHILL THICKET

The heroes come upon a village in turmoil while passing through halfling lands in the Greydeep Marches. The town's most prosperous farmer, a notorious bully, has the residents cowering with fear that something lurks within the nearby Burrhill Thicket. He's frightened them with tales of an unseen menace stealing his pigs but, he boastfully fears, might soon begin looting other farmers and the village stores. The townspeople implore the heroes to help lest this threat further endanger their farms.

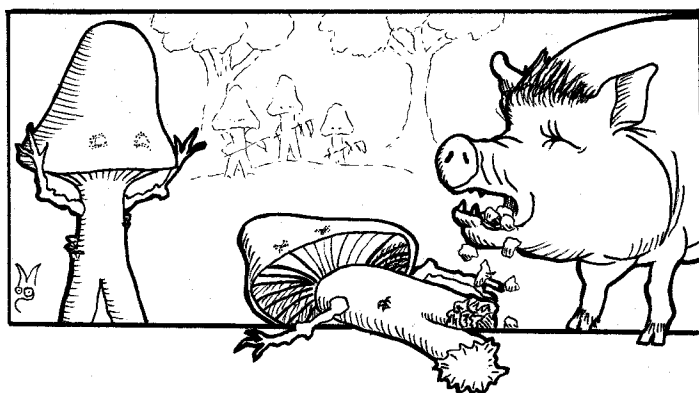
Farmer Torbelly runs a pig farm in Barleyholt, a village on the outer reaches of Greenfields Township. He believes something sinister in nearby Burrhill Thicket is stealing his hogs. Just last night somebody broke into the pen and ran off with two more hogs, including his prize porker Furg. He hires the heroes to follow their trail, root out the culprits hiding in Burrhill Thicket, and put an end to these disturbing disappearances.

Burrhill Thicket – as any villager can tell the heroes – stands about a mile from Farmer Torbelly's farm beyond the outskirts of Barleyholt. It's a low-rising hill covered in dense foliage, ancient trees, and thorny underbrush most villagers avoid. Lately it seems every week or so a few of Farmer Torbelly's pigs get lost and make a beeline for the thicket, though he usually manages to retrieve them with a great deal of fuss. A few have met strange deaths, becoming tangled in thorn bushes and strangling themselves with the sharp vines.

Villager Rewards

The simple townspeople of Barleyholt have little in the way of riches but still offer heroes items valuable in their own way. Roll 1d6 or choose one as appropriate rewards for the heroes:

1d6 Roll	Reward
1	Water skin that seems to magically refill itself.
2	Gold bracelet (worth 250 gold coins) lost along the nearby road by a rich and powerful traveler.
3	Highly prized livestock (chicken, goat, ram, pig, cow, or horse) of great worth in and of itself, possibly possessing magical powers.
4	Small leather pouch containing bean-sized seeds for a remarkable, possibly enchanted vegetable plant.
5	Fist-sized lump of milky quartz that occasionally radiates a faint glow, bright enough to illuminate a small room, though what causes it to glow remains an inconsistent mystery.



- 6 Gold-inlaid runes on the end of this wooden cooking spoon glow when stirred in liquid (water, broth, soup), heating it to a scalding temperature within 10 minutes.

If the heroes talk with villagers in Barleyholt they hear several rumors about mysterious occurrences near Burrhill Thicket that might affect their actions while investigating the porcine disappearances:

1d6 Roll	Rumor
1	A doddering old fellow puffing away on a pipe claims a small, fire-breathing dragon lives in a cave there.
2	The village drunk says he once saw mushrooms dancing in the moonlight in fields near the thicket.
3	A local hunter thinks small game avoids the thicket since it exudes a musty smell of decay.
4	Some local youngsters claim they once saw strange shadows when they were playing too close.
5	A neighboring farmer says this isn't the first time Farmer Torbelly's hogs have broken out of the poorly constructed paddock and wandered into the thicket.
6	The mayor says there was a story long ago about a treasure hidden deep within a cavern beneath the thicket.

Anyone examining the broken pigpen realizes the hogs easily pushed through the rotting fence on their own and wandered out into the fields, leaving a trail of smashed crops and disturbed soil while rooting about for food. Following the trail easily leads to the edge of Burrhill Thicket, where they discover the corpse of one hog sprawled near what looks like a path into the undergrowth; it looks like something rather heavy was dragged through the dirt. Numerous long thorns pierce the animal's sides. Several smashed mushrooms of extraordinary size (two or three feet tall) lie beneath the corpse and on the ground nearby.

Burrhill Thicket

The dirt path from the hog corpse up into the thicket leads the heroes through a shadowy wood of ancient trees and thorny undergrowth. Straying from the path slows their progress considerably as thorn bushes and vines tug at clothes and gear, though it may bring about a chance encounter with some of the thicket's other inhabitants. Roll 1d6 or choose an appropriate encounter.

1d6 Roll	Encounter
1	Mushcap Forager Patrol
2	Spider Tree
3	Irate Squirrels
4	Thorn-Whip Bush
5	Sucking Bog
6	Fugitive Bandits

Mushcap Forager Patrol: A band of 2d6 mushcap foragers ambles through the thicket collecting dead leaves and other decomposing underbrush to bring back to "2. Mulch Chute & Pile" (detailed below) to add to the compost heap. Unless the heroes previously established some kind of truce with the mushcaps, the foragers quickly retreat to warn others in their lair.

Spider Tree: An immense tree draped with sticky, hanging webs blocks the heroes' path. They can slowly pass through the dangling webbing, though they emerge covered in sticky strands that might restrict their movements; or they can stumble through the thick underbrush to hike around the tree. The tiny spiders living among the webs don't seem to mind folks traipsing through their territory.

Irate Squirrels: A sprawling oak tree serves as home for a band of squirrels who don't look kindly on trespassers. If the heroes ignore the squirrels' angry squeaks, threatening gestures, and thrown acorns and hike too close to the tree, the squirrels rally and attack the intruders.

Irate Squirrels Swarm. Basic (1-3); AT: thrown nuts, bite; DF: none; Special Abilities: evade, swarm, small (increases difficulty to hit); Morale: determined.

Thorn-Whip Bush: As the heroes push past a particularly lush thorn bush several spiny vines come to life and lash out at them! They have wandered too close to an aggressive thorn-whip bush that instinctively attacks any meaty food source within reach. Heroes who dig up the vanquished bush and probe the soil beneath its far-

ranging roots uncover a Shield of Thorns, a magical item quite possibly responsible for the mutation nurturing the thorn-whip bush. Like any shield it improves a hero's armor rating; a character can also use the spiked shield as a bashing weapon, inflicting damage similar to a battle axe.

Thorn-Whip Bush. Expert (4-9); AT: thorny vine-tentacles; DF: tough bark; Special Abilities: multiple attacks; Morale: determined.

Sucking Bog: While navigating through a dell the heroes come upon a wide bog; the lead character might inadvertently step in it first before becoming aware of its true size. Once they see it, heroes can slowly move around the muddy hole, but anyone stuck in it must struggle to free themselves. To pull themselves from the muck each stuck hero must make one appropriate skill or save roll, modified by the amount of metal armor they wear. Freed heroes may use nearby branches, rope, or other implements to aid those still struggling (which offer small bonuses to skill or save rolls). Those who fail to free themselves could drown in the bog.

Fugitive Bandits: A small gang of renegade thieves has encamped just within the thicket's wooded edge on the side farthest from Barleyholt Village and out of view of the nearby road. The band consists of two fugitives for each hero. They've wandered the region pilfering from outlying farms and waylaying lone travelers, but haven't grown in numbers or boldness enough to pose a more serious threat. They assume any armed party they encounter seeks to capture them and bring them to justice. They wait to ambush characters, assuming they don't view them as a threat beyond their capabilities to defeat. If vanquished their leader surrenders the group's accumulated wealth...a mere 27 gold coins.

Bandits. Basic (1-3); AT: spear or short sword; DF: leather armor; Skills: hide; Morale: fickle. Gear: burlap sacks, bundle of firewood, flint and steel, smoked ham hock.

Mushcap Caves

The path leads through dips and rises, winding around several earthy mounds that together form the illusion that the thicket consists of one large hill. Eventually the path leads to a large, muddy puddle outside a moss-draped cave entrance....

1. Toad Lair. Water drips down the moist walls of this dank cave into a small pool, eventually running out the cave entrance into the puddle beyond. Something lurking in the far shadows breathes heavily, then emits a growling croak. A large toad – three feet tall with green on top and a speckled red underbelly – lurches forward and attacks anyone entering its lair!

Fire-Belly Toad. Expert (4–9); AT: bite, flaming belch; DF: tough hide; Special Abilities: flaming belch, long jump; Morale: moderate.

Those searching the charred bones of the toad’s past victims find the remains of 23 gold coins melted together in a lumpy glob. Only if it’s broken apart or melted do the heroes find a gem hidden within (worth 200 gold coins).

2. Mulch Chute & Pile. Heroes exploring this mound off the main path eventually discover a small cave that slopes steeply down into the earth. It’s large enough for one hero at a time to cautiously climb down. Anyone failing an appropriate climbing skill roll or agility save loses their grip on the smooth, moist walls and slides down the chute, landing comfortably on a massive pile of leaves, dirt, twigs, and other mulch. Heroes in the mulch pile notice two exits from the cavern...and they sense something moving around beneath the decaying leaves. As they scramble to their feet, they see a brown, moldy pseudopod rise from the leaves to sniff at them; its reactions mirror the characters’ actions...if they attack, it retaliates; if they retreat, it slithers off to consume more leaves.

Mold Slime. Expert (4–9); AT: pseudopod; DF: none; Special Abilities: corrosive acid (permanently damages any gear it hits, increases pseudopod damage); Morale: moderate.

Mushcaps

The warren of caves houses a small colony of mushcaps, diminutive mushroom people whose size depends on their role in the community. They fall into three classes: foragers, warriors, and the shaman.

Foragers represent the general mushcap population, worker drones who wander the thicket seeking rotting organic material to toss down the mulch chute into the pile, nurturing the immature sporelings, undertaking missions deemed important by the shaman, and generally keeping watch for intruders in the area. They look like two foot-high mushrooms with thick stalks and wide caps of varying colors, sporting spindly, stick-like legs and arms. Armed with short spears of local thornwood, they go about their business, attacking intruders only long enough to raise an alarm in their low, humming voices.

Mushcap Forager. Basic (1–3); AT: thorn spear; DF: none; Skills: climb, forage, notice; Morale: moderate. Gear: forage basket, thorn knife.

Warriors protect the colony from intruders and deal with any direct threats. Far fewer in number than the forager drones, their three foot-high stature, stockier physique, and tougher hide make them slightly more formidable opponents.

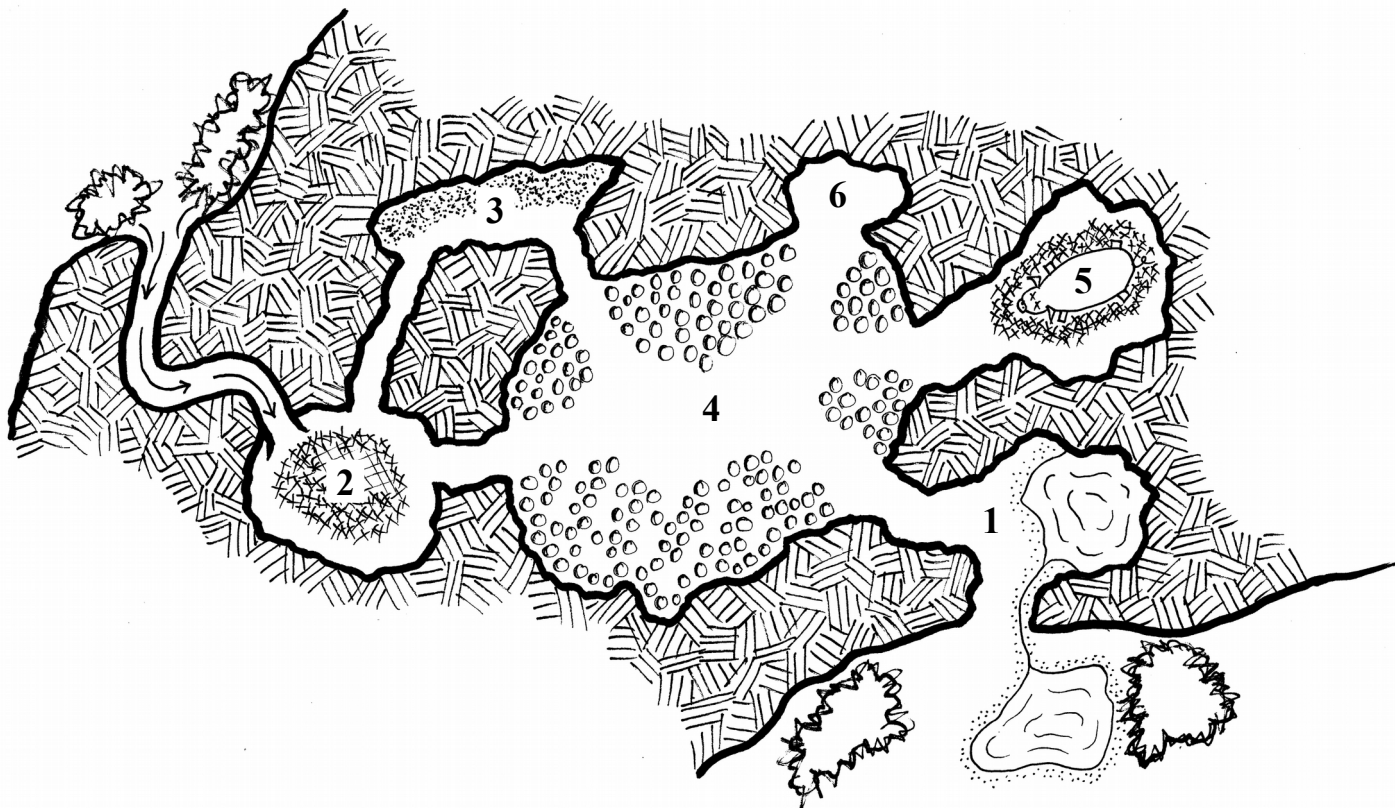
Mushcap Warrior. Basic (1–3); AT: spear; DF: tough hide; Skills: notice; Morale: moderate. Gear: thorn spear.

The Shaman serves as the mushcaps’ leader in all matters, teaching young sporelings, determining tasks for foragers, strategically deploying warriors, leading the community in spiritual pursuits (resulting in the occasional moonlit mushroom dances in nearby fields), and making decisions in the colony’s best interests. The shaman recently decided on a dire course of action to retaliate against attacks on mushcaps by Farmer Torbelly’s escaped hogs, resulting in a night-long ritual in “5. Mutation Pit.”

Mushcap Shaman. Expert (4–9); AT: staff; DF: none; Skills: decaying strike, nurture; Morale: moderate; Gear: pouch with herbs.

Decaying Strike (spell): Imbues any weapon it wields in combat with the ability to decay materials it strikes; any hits scored reduce the effectiveness of armor or shields by a small degree, potentially causing other materials (clothes and equipment) to similarly rot away.

Nurture (spell): Can inspire plant matter to grow or heal at accelerated rates.



The inhabitants of these caves forage throughout the thicket for organic materials to toss down the chute, where the mold slime churns and digests it into nutritious mulch, a substance the mushcaps consume as food. Rummaging through the bottom of the mulch pile takes time and might create enough noise to attract several mushcap foragers (see “4. Mushcap Village” below) to investigate the intruders. Anyone casually searching the mulch pile finds a variety of corroded metal junk the mold slime couldn’t digest: a tin cup, dagger blade, a fork and spoon, an old religious medallion. Anyone making a successful search roll (or similar check) discovers 2d6 enchanted elvish arrowheads one can fashion, with the proper instruction, into elven Vengeance Arrows (which ignore the effects of armor when determining hit chances and damage).

3. Sporeling Cave. A small forest of tiny mushrooms and patches of goeey proto-fungi cover the far wall and floor of this narrow chamber. Three mushcap foragers gently spread refined mulch from “2. Mulch Chute & Pile” among the larger mushrooms, but sense the heroes’ presence and challenge them with their thorn knives. They do not fight unless the characters attack or move to harm the sporelings. As they fight they hum menacingly, possibly bringing several mushcaps warriors from “4. Mushcap Village” to their aid.

4. Mushcap Village. This vast cavern contains what appears like a miniature village made from oversized mushroom hovels. A cloudy, fluorescent fungus covers the high, domed

ceiling, providing enough ambient light to see. Several open paths lead from passage entrances through clumps of massive mushrooms growing along the walls. Diminutive mushroom humanoids – ranging between two and three feet tall, with stick-like arms and legs – amble along the paths between the large fungi (presumably their houses) and other cave entrances. Upon spotting the heroes, however, the mushroom creatures hum loudly at one another, raising an alarm!

Two kinds of mushcaps approach the heroes, two foot-high foragers and the larger warriors. They respond to the characters’ actions in kind, though this deep into their home they remain suspicious of outsiders and overprotective of their territory. Their actions seek to at least delay the heroes – if not drive them from the caverns – long enough for the shaman in “5. Mutation Pit” to complete his ritual and re-animate the corpse of Furg, Farmer Torbelly’s missing hog.

5. Mutation Pit. At four feet high, the tallest mushcap stands alone in this chamber humming a malevolently melodious chant, waving his arms, and gesturing toward a low pile of mulch. Something within the pile beings quivering and growling in a rather unnatural way. Upon sensing the heroes nearby he concludes his ritual, grabs his staff, and quickly retreats.

The grotesque monstrosity the mushcap shaman created animates in the shallow, compost-filled depression in the cave; it soon smells the characters and charges forth in a violent frenzy. The heroes see the animated corpse of Farmer

Torbelly's prized hog, Furg, emerge from the slimy compost covered in mottled patches of sick-looking fungi, angry red toadstools growing from its eyes, and tusks gnashing in vengeful hunger to tear through living animal flesh.

Mutated Hog. Expert (4–9); AT: tusks; DF: tough hide; Special Abilities: frenzy, fungi mutation; Morale: determined.

Frenzy: The hog gains a moderate attack and damage bonus in close combat, but cannot attack for one turn between defeating one target and finding another.

Fungi Mutation: Attacks only inflict half damage on the hog's mutated corpse.

After escaping from Farmer Torbely's poorly constructed paddock, Furg and another hog made a beeline for the thicket, where they smelled delicious fungi growing. They immediately encountered a group of mushcap foragers which they ate, but several warriors arrived and killed both hogs. Having grown weary of recent attacks by Farmer Torbely's escaped hogs, the shaman ordered the larger of the two, Furg, brought back to the caves where he undertook a night-long magical ritual to mutate the dead corpse into a fungi monstrosity and unleash it back against the village. The pit in which it mutated previously served as a spare cavern used as an alternate composting area and sporeling nursery.

Upon successfully dispatching the shaman and mutated hog, heroes searching the room uncover a foot-square, baked-clay tablet inscribed with fluid lines and squiggles, apparently the ancient, written language of the mushroom creatures; for details on this and two others hidden in the caves see "6. Shaman's Corner" below.

6. Shaman's Corner. This niche carved from the main cavern serves as the quarters and council chamber for the mushcap shaman. It seems like little more than a place to deposit organic debris and trash, including a spare pile of compost, some rotting clothing, a pile of dry leaves, and several sticks. Heroes searching through the leaves might discover two other sun-baked tablets inscribed with curvilinear script similar to the one found in "5. Mutation Pit." The writing requires a great effort on the part of a sorcerous scholar to translate. The three tablets make a set preserving the mushcaps' most essential enchantments:

Recompose: This enchantment resurrects dead animal matter in a semi-living state similar to undeath (but not affected by the priestly abilities to repulse the undead) by infusing it with living fungi and magical energy. In using the ritual to re-animate the hog corpse the shaman demonstrated its purpose as the mushcaps' primary offensive spell.

Fertile Land: Mushcap shamans use this ritual to fertilize the surrounding region within 1d6 miles of the casting (usually the mushcaps' subterranean lair), nourishing all kinds of vegetation to grow and flourish, though particularly plants and undergrowth ideal for compost necessary to feed mushcaps.

Spore Cloud: Upon completing this ritual a shaman triggers all the fungus in the immediate area (both inanimate and animate) to release all their spores into a vast, airborne cloud, now magically imbued with the necessary mutations to grow into a new colony of mushcaps assuming the cloud lands in a relatively fertile area. The enchantment serves both as a means of colonizing distant areas and as a desperate measure should a mushcap community face extinction in its present location.

Making Contact, Forging A Truce

Insightful heroes might realize the origins of the mushcaps' hostility: Farmer Torbely's escaped hogs tore into the thicket seeking succulent mushrooms to eat and ultimately gorged themselves savagely on innocent mushcap foragers. If they interact with the mushcaps not with aggression but with peaceful intentions they might negotiate a truce between the villagers and mushcaps and defuse a delicate situation. To do so they must avoid combat with the mushcaps (though the mold slime and fire-belly toad are understandable casualties) and find some way of communicating, possibly through gestures.

Although this course avoids combat, it provides opportunities for some inventive roleplaying with the mushcaps, the villagers, and proud Farmer Torbely. The mushcaps refuse to venture very far from the shelter of Burrhill Thicket, but show a willingness to meet with representatives from Barleyholt to prevent future trespassing by livestock and curious peasants. A truce might offer an opportunity for future adventures involving Barleyholt Village and the mushcaps: tracking bandits who might threaten both groups, ranging for food sources during a famine, hunting down a ferocious monster seeking to use the thicket as a lair.

Heroes who successfully take this more diplomatic course should receive an experience point bonus in addition to any rewards for outstanding roleplaying or individual achievement.

THE SMOKING WELL

An old well a day's hike along the forest road south of a tavern has long served as a camping spot for the occasional traveler, providing cool, clean water and a safe clearing in which to spend the night. Several passing by recently reported smoke drifting up from the well and an oily smell emerging from the pit; many fear the well poisoned and thus the overnight spot and the surrounding portion of the road are no longer considered safe.

The tavern keeper hires the heroes (for a few gold each) to explore the well's environs, find the mysterious source of the smoke, and ensure the area returns to its former condition.

If the heroes talk with people at the tavern they hear several rumors that might influence their actions while investigating the well:

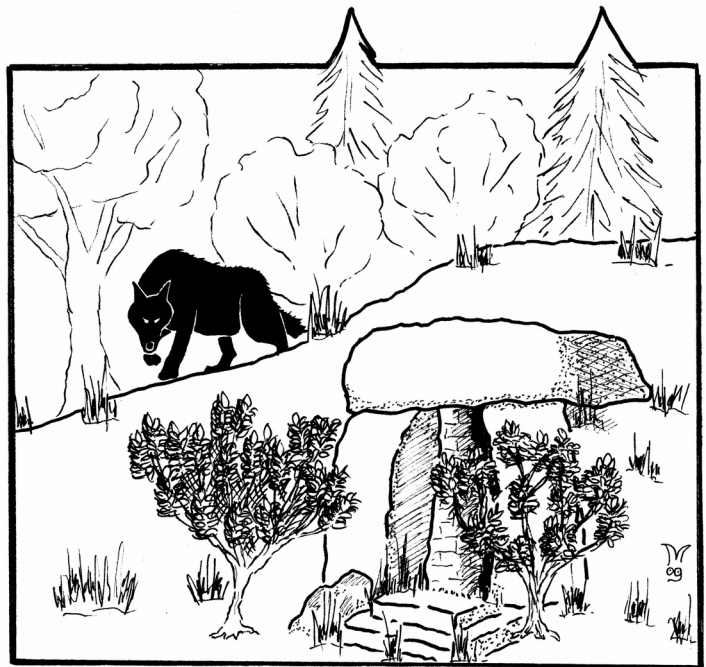
1d6

Roll Rumor

- 1 An oafish tavern regular claims he saw a small dragon lurking near the well once.
 - 2 A woodsman says wild game has fled that area and wolves were heard in the forest to the east.
 - 3 The tavern keeper believes old legends tell of a lost burial barrow in the area.
 - 4 A fellow traveler claims anyone who drinks from the well receives protection against poison for a week.
 - 5 Two peasants say the last time they visited the well they saw small, sinister footprints in the ground nearby.
 - 6 The tavern maid thinks this entire region was once part of an ancient civilization of mages that fell into ruin long ago.
-

The Well Clearing

The clearing sits along the road a day's hike south of the tavern. The trees part and open onto a grassy meadow sufficiently dry and flat for a small encampment. A ring of stones once contained fires, with several cut tree trunks providing adequate seats around long-extinguished flames. The well consists of a low stone wall around a three-foot-wide hole dropping straight into the ground. A metal ring set in one stone has several chain links attached to it, but they no longer connect to the rest of the chain and bucket that allowed travelers to draw water up from the murky depths. Foul-smelling smoke wafts up through the shaft and hangs in the air around the clearing. Those listening carefully at the well might hear noises far below, though they can't tell if they're talking, growling, or snoring.



If they find some means of lowering themselves into the well, the heroes emerge in "5. Goblin Camp," though unless they do so with extreme care and quiet, they find the goblins ready for them. They might simply jump down the hole, splashing into the pool below and startling the goblins into action.

Searching the woods around the clearing reveals a stone door set into a nearby rise hidden by underbrush. Two stone posts support a flat lintel, with a stone door sitting askew but still blocking access to the cave beyond. Characters may try forcing the door or attempt other plans to pry it open. A passageway leads a short distance into the hillside and a stairway leads down into the earth to "1. Welcome Chamber."

A wider search after finding the stone doorway uncovers a sinkhole camouflaged by thick undergrowth and vines. The hole's slopes lead deeper into the earth into "4. Wolf Post;" noisy progress down the incline might alert the wolves.

1. Welcome Chamber. The stairs leading down from the stone door end in a square chamber with carved passages leading left and right. A life-sized stone statue stands in a niche opposite the stairs; it probably depicted a man with arms outstretched in a welcoming gesture, though now it lacks a head, right hand, and left forearm. Searching behind the statue uncovers its chipped head, that of a smiling youth, beneath which sits a dried-leather pouch holding a single gold coin. The coin is a traditional offering to gods of the underworld paying for safe passage for the souls of the departed; a character who takes this coin suffers a minor penalty on all rolls for the remainder of this adventure.

2. Ruined Chapel. Splintered benches, piles of debris, and a few fallen stones litter the floor of this large, vaulted chamber. Several vignettes carved in bas relief on the walls depict people and monstrous humanoids bidding farewell to the deceased, who walk hand-in-hand with a tall, robed guide across a bridge spanning a chasm. Several giant centipedes lurk among the debris, but they only emerge and attack if characters disturb their territory. Searching the debris reveals nothing of value.

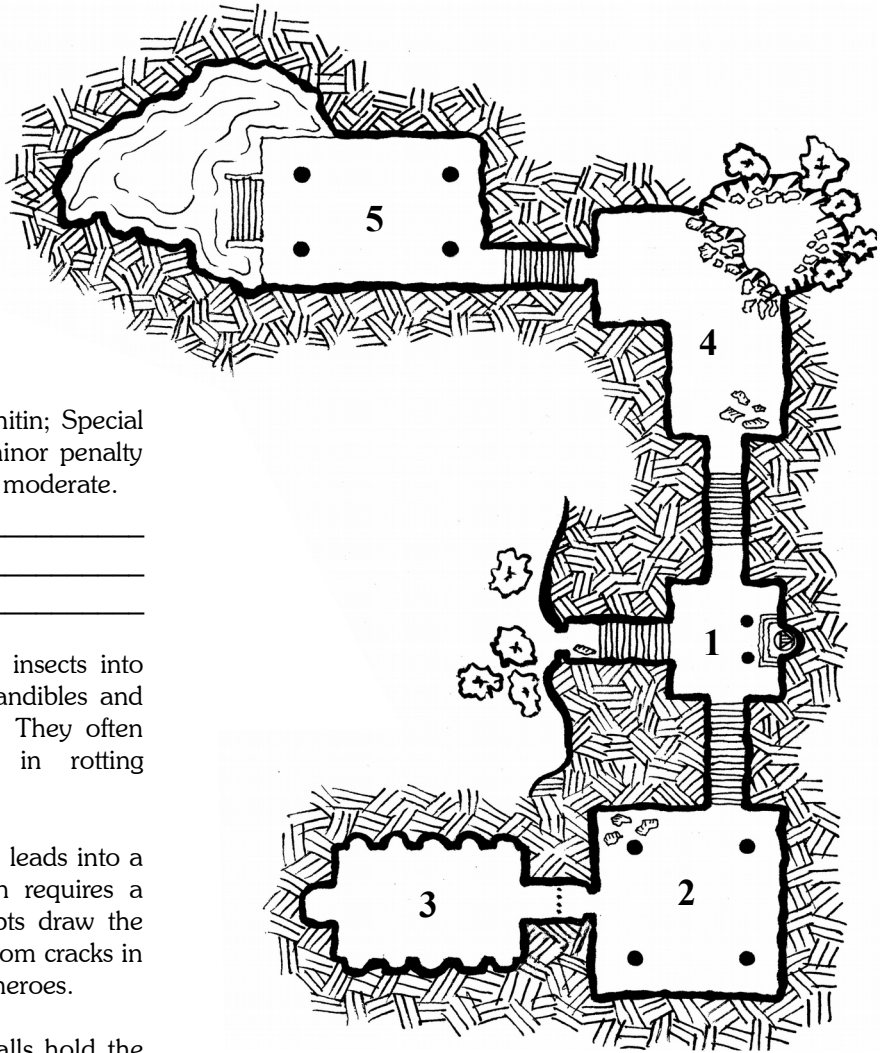
Giant Centipedes. Basic (1-3); AT: bite; DF: chitin; Special Abilities: stinging bite (gives hit characters a minor penalty on all rolls for six hours or until healed); Morale: moderate.

Magic and other tainted forces mutated these insects into three-foot long monstrosities with snapping mandibles and strong segmented chitin covering their bodies. They often lurk underground amid refuse piles or in rotting undergrowth.

An arched doorway with a half-rusted iron gate leads into a chamber beyond. Forcing the iron gate open requires a strength-related skill or save roll; failed attempts draw the attention of another giant centipede emerging from cracks in the walls to investigate the noise and attack the heroes.

3. Hall of the Dead. Upright niches in the walls hold the skeletal remains of the deceased honored long ago in the chapel. A low slab in the center might once have served as a bier for the embalmed dead during ceremonies in their memory to send them on their journey to the other side. Cobwebs, fallen ceiling stones, and dust cover the floor. A highly ornamented stone niche carved from the living rock dominates the far wall, an armored and axe-bearing skeleton of particular size standing within. Perhaps he was once a high priest of the dead or a noble revered by these people in antiquity. Should the heroes enter this chamber more than a few steps from the iron gate they anger the inhabitants; one animated skeleton steps forward for each character in the company. The first hero to defeat a skeleton in close combat must face the armored skeletal warrior who strides forth from the farthest arched niche hefting his massive battle axe.

Animated Skeletons. Basic (1-3); AT: sword, DF: none; Special Abilities: undead; Morale: determined. Gear: tattered clothing, worthless personal items.



Skeleton Warrior. Expert (4-9); AT: battle axe*; DF: leather armor; Special Abilities: undead; Morale: determined.

* The skeletal warrior wields a magical battle axe, the Blade of Brog. It allows the user to reroll a single missed hit on the first turn of combat with a new opponent; however, the axe's jealous magic renders other weapons the owner might employ clumsy, inflicting a small penalty on hit and damage rolls until the hero somehow disposes of the cursed axe.

Once the characters vanquish the skeletons they can search the room. Successful search rolls reveal the carved stone bier contains an ornately decorated slit at the foot suitable for inserting coins, presumably as tribute to the dead, their toll to cross to the other side, or to fund a treasury to maintain the tomb. The heroes must make a roll to find secret doors to find the secret catch to open the panel accessing the offerings. They could also smash the stone

bier to pieces, requiring some appropriate rolls. Inside they find 27 gold coins.

4. Wolf Post. The stairs lead down to what look like several boulders that fell from the ceiling; however, they do not completely block access to the chamber beyond, but hide the portal from those within while still allowing tight passage from the corridor. With caution heroes can peer around the massive stone blocks and survey the cave ahead without attracting the attention of its inhabitants. The ceiling in one far corner has collapsed, creating a ramp of loose dirt and rocks, a sinkhole leading to the surface in the woods beyond the well and the tomb entrance. Dirt, rocks, dead trees, and dried leaves have fallen through the sinkhole, littering the floor and creating a comfy lair for two wolves lounging here. Entering the chamber, crossing to reach the far corridor, or otherwise making noise rouses the wolves and their cunning curiosity.

Wolves. Basic (1–3); AT: bite; DF: tough hide; Special Abilities: notice; Morale: moderate.

5. Goblin Camp. Riotous laughter, shouting, and arguing alert heroes to the presence of a crowd of potential foes in this vast chamber. A horde of goblins (with their two pet wolves from “4. Wolf Post”) discovered these chambers through the sinkhole and have set up camp here. Their equipment – cook fires, nesting furs, broken furniture, and modest plunder from the surrounding countryside – litters the chamber amidst fallen ceiling blocks, broken flagstones, and other debris. Four pillars support the vaulted ceiling above a flagstone floor, but the far end descends down broad, shallow steps into a vast pool of water covering the rest of the cavern; the chamber was possibly used in antiquity as a feasting place where mourners celebrated the lives of their recently departed friends, perhaps using the pool for cleansing rituals, floating lanterns, or other such ceremonies. Smoke from the cook fires drifts toward the ceiling to a circular vent hole far above the water...what serves as the shaft to the well on the surface.

The number of goblins in camp depends on what would provide a challenging encounter for the characters; adding a wolf or two might give a new dimension to the encounter. The creatures stop their carousing when the heroes make themselves known (having trusted their wolf pets to sound an alarm if they detected intruders). They’re naturally upset with the heroes for spoiling their fun, more so if they’re told to leave their convenient camp here. The goblins won’t consider vacating the area without plenty of compensation – primarily food or treasure – or a fight. Should the matter come to blows, several goblins engage heroes in close combat while others take shots with their short bows at anyone using spells or ranged weapons.

Goblins. Basic (1–3); AT: short sword or short bow; DF: leather armor; Special Abilities: search; Morale: moderate.

The goblins have little wealth, having recently ranged into the area seeking food and plunder; roll 2d6 to determine how many gold coins the heroes find after a thorough search of the goblins’ belongings. Exploring the water – despite the danger of slipping and falling in – yields several interesting items to anyone making a successful search. Heroes might find the hilt of a broken sword (the pointy half missing) with a jewel in the pommel worth 50 gold coins, a small jar of clear yellow glass possibly used as a votive candle holder in antiquity, and a dented metal flagon holding 14 gold coins. Probing beneath the well shaft in the ceiling above uncovers a metal-banded water bucket with a handle and length of chain suitable for drawing water up to the surface.

Vanquishing the goblins and clearing out their camp quickly eliminates the cause of the smoking well on the surface and restores the well clearing as a relatively safe place for travelers to camp. Dealing with the ancient burial catacombs – preventing other creatures from inhabiting the chambers, cleansing the halls of any ancient evil taint, putting them to a new use, or destroying them altogether – could form the basis of future adventures.

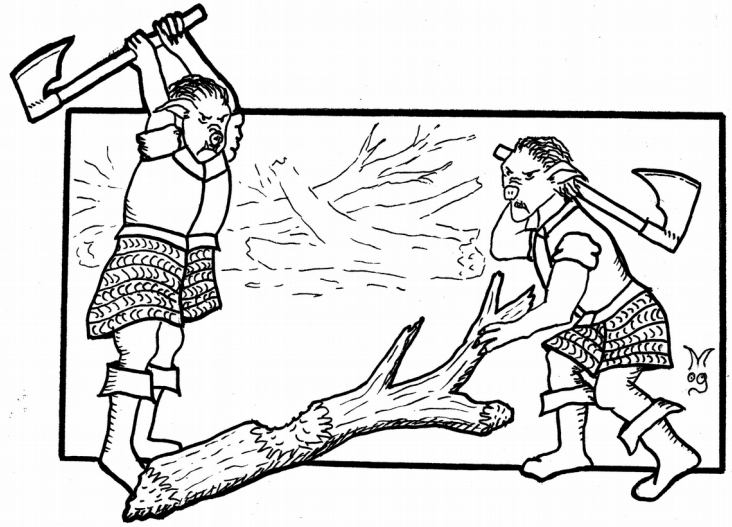
THE LOST VILLAGE

While traversing the Frigid Steppes the heroes visit Durm, a small village in need. The water supply flowing from the mountains has dried up, a consequence, villagers believe, of a longstanding feud with Groet, a rival settlement in the rugged foothills to the east. They petitioned for a Sentinel Knight to investigate, but he and his sergeant disappeared weeks ago. The villagers in Durm promise to replenish the characters' supplies and provide them with fine steeds if they travel east into the foothills to find the errant Sentinel Knight and discover why the other village has cut off their water supply.

The people of Durm rely on the land. The village serves as a central hub for several nomadic families of herders and hunters. It offers a few community resources – stables, common house, granary, smokehouse, smithy, workshops – and some private homes or established campsites. A stream they call Nasbock runs down from the eastern foothills, but it and the small pond it fed dried up earlier in a season when the watercourse normally would run swiftly. People and livestock here depend on the water. They admit they haven't always gotten along with the people of Groet, but can't imagine they would have dammed up the watercourse to intentionally deny them a vital resource.

The villagers provide each character with a horse, a heavy cloak for the colder mountainous terrain (if they don't already possess such clothing), and one week's supplies, enough to keep them fed and watered for the journey to Groet and back. They have little in the way of weapons and armor for purchase – though the smith can repair such items – nor do they have a provisioner to provide other sundries that might prove useful. If the heroes talk with people around the village they hear several rumors that might inform their investigation:

1d6 Roll	Rumor
1	Shortly after the stream started drying up some villagers claim they saw blood flowing in the water.
2	Several stray horses recently disappeared with no remains found in the surrounding countryside.
3	Years ago a dispute among villagers caused half to split away to form a new settlement in the highlands, Groet, where they might find better foraging for food and livestock.
4	Relations with Groet have always remained intermittent and chilly, but never erupted into outright hostility.
5	Hunters returning from the eastern foothills reported most of the game has fled the area.
6	A group of kids insist they've seen smoke rising from the distant mountains to the east...a sure sign of a dragon!



Into the Foothills

The heroes set out from Durm following a worn track alongside the now-dry course of the Nasbock. It leads through the grass up into the high valleys between two rocky ridges, arms of the nearest mountain in the Ostmaur Peaks. The journey to Groet takes about three days on horseback at a casual pace; at first the rolling hills seem safe to travel at a gallop, but as the ground rises into the mountains they must take greater caution and travel more slowly. The characters might have several short encounters during their hike up the path to Groet. Use as many of the incidents below as seem appropriate based on the adventure's pace and reactions from the heroes, all leading to the "Rockslide Dam" encounter:

Abandoned Camp Site: The heroes stumble upon the remains of a camp site at least two weeks old. Whoever stayed here cleared ground for a large tent, dug a sizeable pit for a cook fire, left a small pile of brushwood for the fire, forgot to retrieve two iron tent stakes, and tossed discarded waste downhill (cooking scraps and bones, a broken pipe, and half a moldy cheese). Closer examination of the nearby ground indicates the presence of at least two horses who grazed on the grass and pawed at patches in the ground; possible evidence that the Sentinel Knight and her sergeant stopped here.

Ursine Refugee: The characters spot a lone bear ambling down the valley closer to where one of the stony ridges rises from the green grasses. The old bear seems more intent on fleeing the higher pastures and forests than investigating the heroes or searching for food. Any attempt to engage the creature frightens it further and it bolts down the mountain.

Skirmish Site: As the heroes approach a stand of trees shielded by some rocks they come upon the scene of a skirmish...trampled, bloodstained grass, broken arrows, and assorted discarded bits (scraps of clothing fabric, cut leather straps, bits of chainmail, a broken dagger). Closer examination reveals some of the evidence – lost gear and footprints – probably came from orcs. Matted grass and scrape marks in the soil suggest the victors dragged the victims up toward the high valley.

Sounds of the Earth: At some point when the heroes are close to the ground – perhaps while bedding down for the night – they hear faint sounds in the earth...irregular thumping and cracking. They do not come from a group travelling on foot, but from some activity below ground. Those who make periodic checks realize the sounds grow stronger the closer they march toward Groet.

Stench: About two hours' hike from Groet the characters begin smelling a foul odor descending down the valley. At first it emerges from the rocky course of the near-dry Nasbock, reeking of sulphur and wood smoke. The stench's strength increases as they approach the settlement.

Rockslide Dam: As the heroes approach Groet they ascend into the low-hanging clouds clinging to the mountain. The ridges framing the valley draw closer here, increasing the sense of dread and channelling the sulphurous, smoky stench. Soon their path ends at a wall of loose stone that spans the narrowing valley from one ridge to the other. The rockslide, most likely from a crumbled promontory from the east ridge, collapsed across the narrowing valley, damming the Nasbock's flow. Only a trickle drains through gaps in the stones. The characters discover several headless, mangled corpses near the stream, those of the Sentinel Knight and her sergeant, plus a few errant hunters. Ascending the rockslide proves challenging for the heroes, who must leave their horses behind lest they hurt themselves on the unstable footing and loose rocks. When they crest the dam they find several heads mounted on sharpened poles, apparently warnings erected atop the rocks to ward off trespassers.

The High Valley

Once they climb the rockslide dam the heroes gain a bleak view of the valley beyond. The fallen stones blocked the narrow valley entrance, damming up the Nasbock and causing it to back up into a lake that flooded the upper dale. A cloud shrouds the valley in fog, the stench of smoke and sulphur still thick in the air. The vapor severely limits visibility. Characters see only the stubble of cut tree trunks where once stands of trees grew. The shadowy outlines of ruined buildings rise from the lake waters along the far shore: the remains of the village of Groet. Here everyone notices the faint sounds echoing through the earth, the thumping and cracking from some subterranean source.

As the heroes explore the valley, they may more closely examine the lake, burned village, deforested slopes, and the far rocky cliffs from which the stinking fog seems to emerge:

Deforested Slopes: Upon closer examination the heroes determine the once wooded valley slopes were savagely denuded. Some stumps bear marks of crude, hasty cutting, while craters show where other trees were cruelly ripped from the ground. Marks in the earth, including orc footprints, indicate someone dragged felled trees toward the far cliffs.

Vale Lake: A foul-smelling mist hangs low over the murky lake waters. Anyone drinking the polluted water becomes sick with stomach cramps for 1d4+1 hours. Luckily the dam and a few brooks trickling into the Nasbock down the valley help filter and dilute these detrimental effects before any water reaches Durm.

Burned Village: Travelling along the lake shore the heroes eventually reach a point where several charred ruins rise out of the waters like dark spectres. Only two complete foundations remain on dry ground, their timbers burned and their contents looted or destroyed. Orc footprints mingle with those of men on the muddy shores; other footprints and drag marks lead up the valley toward the smoke-enshrouded cliffs.

Cliffs: The newly formed lake laps the upper edges of the valley. Here the cliffs from the peak fall to the narrow upper reaches of the once-green dale. The stench of sulphur pours forth from a black crack in the rocks, a cave that delves deep into the mountain. Smoke wafts up from the crack, hanging low in the valley and clinging to the lake's dark waters. Someone carved a channel from the lake's edge down into the cave entrance, siphoning off the water into the dark depths beyond. The marks of felled trees dragged down from the slopes gouge the ground near the trench and lead into the cave. The sounds of mining – irregular thumping and cracking, metal tools hammering rock, grinding stone – echo up from the crevasse.

The Smoking Caverns

The caves hold the secret to the damming of the Nasbock and the destruction of Groet. A small band of orcs have enslaved the villagers and put them to work delving a mine in a warren of natural caverns. The heroes must explore the caverns, rid them of this menace, and free the captives. The cave entrance stands unguarded, the smoke, stench, and desolate nature of the valley trusted to deter intruders. The lake waters trickle through the trench and down into the cave.

1. Reservoir Cave. The entry passage eventually opens into a larger cavern where the lake waters pool in a depression in the stone: a subterranean reservoir. If they aren't paying close attention lead characters might fail to notice the cavern

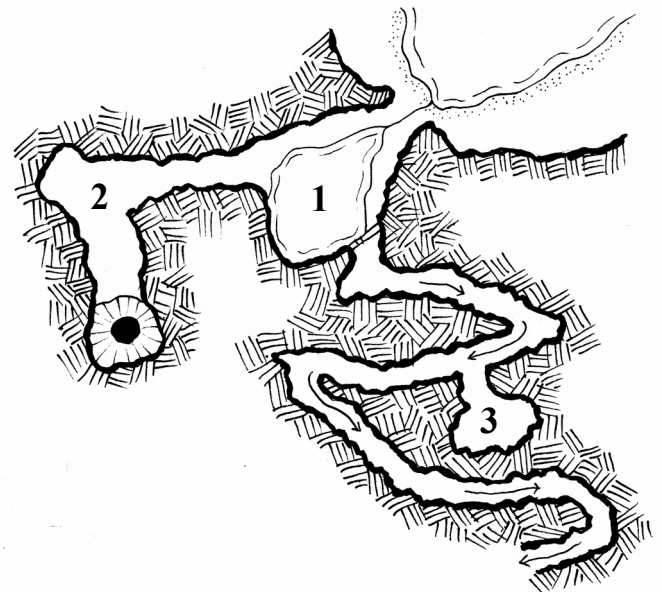
floor falling away into the pond; they slip and fall with a splash into the water (about four feet deep). The sound of their fall and subsequent struggle alerts the orc sentries at the far end. of the cavern. Another passage branches off to the right. Scrape marks and splintered wood on the ground indicate someone dragged trees toward that opening, from whence characters can hear the sounds of chopping axes punctuated by guttural barks.

The cavern narrows at the far end, where two orcs sit near a simple dam and sluice gate fashioned from boards scavenged from the ruined village. At times orcs from below call up for water; the two sentries oblige by opening the sluice for a time and draining the reservoir. The orcs require water for quenching the fires they set to split the rocks in the mines.

The guards focus their attention downward into the caves, listening for orders to open the sluice gate, and less on intruders foolish enough to enter the smoking cave. Should they notice the characters splashing in the reservoir one holds his position while the other quietly slips off to bring reinforcements from “3. Orc Nest.” If heroes somehow surprise the sentries they stand and fight; the orcs’ barks for assistance have a 2 in 6 chance of bringing reinforcements from the nest or “2. Wood Chopping.”

The main passageway slopes downward to “4. Work Cavern” in an uneven combination of gentle inclines and steep steps. A worn channel allows water from the reservoir to flow toward that area, making the way slippery with wet rock and puddles of water gathered in crags. Wood smoke wafts upward along its ceiling. Since only the orcs traverse this passage – and to discourage slaves from escaping – no light sources illuminate the way. Heroes must take care that noise and light do not alert orcs on guard.

2. Wood Chopping. In this large cavern the orcs stacked mangled trunks and branches of the trees they hacked from the forests surrounding Groet. Two orcs with large axes chop away at the wood, splintering it into smaller, more manageable pieces before tossing these down a pit at the back of the cave. The drop deposits the wood in a side cave accessed from “5. Work Cavern” after falling down a near-vertical shaft of 50 feet. (Should the heroes wish to descend this way, the pit provides enough room to maneuver yet presents a challenging climb.) The orcs focus on their work but frequently bark verbal abuse back and forth; given the



cover the tree trunks provide, characters have a good opportunity to ambush the woodcutting orcs.

3. Orc Nest. A narrow passage branches off the main, downward-sloping tunnel, with a slight wisp of smoke emerging along with a particularly foul stink. It brings the heroes to a cave serving as barracks for orcs who aren’t working elsewhere. Around the floor they’ve strewn furs, blankets, saddles, straw mattresses, and anything else of comfort they salvaged from Groet, now soiled with grit, sweat, and orc stench. A slight depression in the center holds a smoldering charcoal fire which provides dim light and warmth. A stack of shields clutters one wall; although the orcs have little use for them in the mine’s narrow confines, they take them on forays into the countryside to raid for game and patrol for intruders.

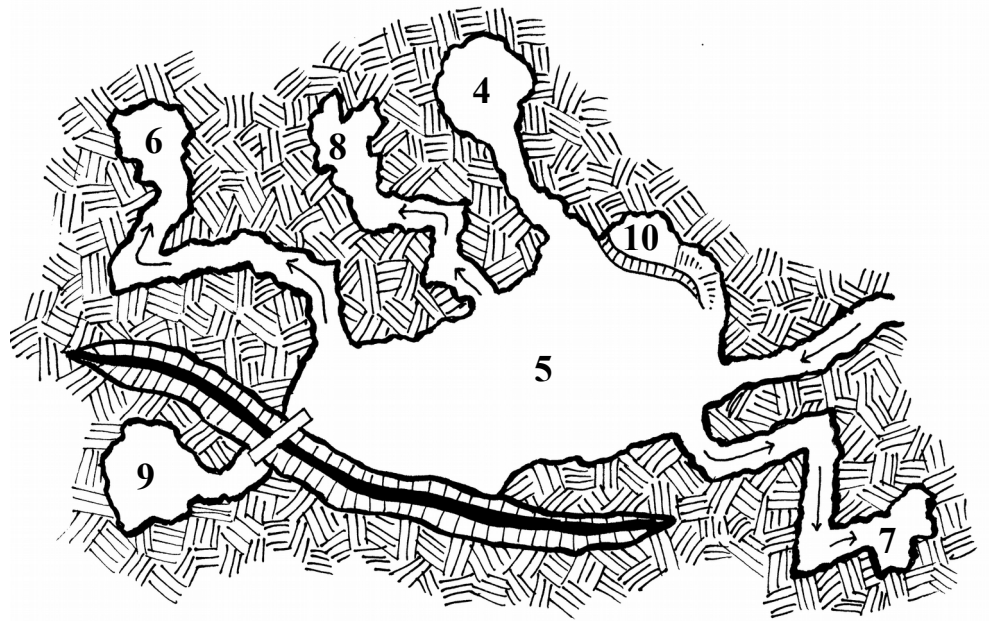
Seven orcs currently inhabit the nest (assuming none were summoned by the sentries at “1. Reservoir Cave”). Five sleep amidst the hoarded belongings of the Groat villagers, while the others squat in the corner by a chest, fawning over the pitiful treasure they’ve collected. The orcs here have little chance to respond to commotion in the reservoir cave or the work cavern below, but confront any intruders bold enough to invade their nest.

The sturdy chest contains what wealth the orcs retrieved from the villagers after their raid: a few sets of decorated metal bridles and stirrups, three iron pots, an iron skillet, and a small decorated box containing an ornamented silver cloak brooch (worth 5 gold pieces), two handfuls of copper pieces, 11 silver pieces, and a single gold coin strewn in among them.

4. Wood Cave. The orcs in “2. Wood Chopping” toss chopped branches and split tree trunk sections down the vertical shaft into a jumbled pile of wood in this side cave to “5. Work Cavern.” Assuming the orcs above still work

Orcs. Basic (1–3); AT: battle axe or sword, whip; DF: leather armor; Special Abilities: intimidate; Morale: moderate.

steadily, an occasional branch or trunk section falls from above to crash on the pile. Every few minutes an enslaved villager enters from the main cavern, looks upward to make sure nothing's falling, retrieves a piece of wood, and hauls it out toward "6. Wood Tunnel." Orcs rarely enter (they fear falling debris, too) unless they have cause to suspect a slave's wasting time or resting. If characters can quietly enter this cave – either by sneaking through the main cavern or climbing down from the wood cutting chamber above – the wood cave provides an ideal location where they can talk with villagers, figure out what's going on, and plan an attack to free the slaves.



5. Work Cavern. Eventually the downward-sloping passage opens into a vast cavern filled with firelight, smoke, guttural orc voices, and the sound of heavy labor. The trough that ran from the reservoir down the tunnel continues along a rough-hewn channel that branches out toward three downward-sloping side passages (the mines) and a deep crevasse that cuts across the far end of the cavern. Haggard human slaves – the imprisoned residents of Groet – shuffle between several tunnel entrances or crowd around part of the trough that runs into the crevasse. Orcs with whips stalk among them, keeping everyone in line. A long tabletop salvaged from the village bridges the chasm at a narrow point and leads to another tunnel. A fire pit along one wall provides illumination for a variety of activities here. The village's women and children hunch near a rock pile fed by basket-carrying slaves emerging from "8. Mined Tunnel." Two closest to the pile scoop crushed rock with their hands and toss it into a crudely gouged trench in the cavern floor through which a fickle stream of water runs. The others kneel along the trough, sifting through the silt and stones; once they examine a stone or handful of silt, they toss it downstream and into the chasm. While the heroes watch a young boy holds up a small, reddish, glassy stone, which a nearby orc snatches from his fingers, examining it closely before tossing it in a nearby strongbox. The heroes also notice two loose lines of villagers steadily shuffling along, the one hauling crushed rock out of the mined tunnel to feed the sorting pile and another hauling wood from the wood cave to "6. Wood Tunnel." A steady stream of smoke drifts from a third tunnel. Several orcs mill about making sure the slaves keep up a steady pace of work. The shadows cast by the bonfire along one wall provide good cover for characters to sneak around the cavern edges. The demoralized, overworked villagers have little energy; if the heroes begin attacking the orcs, some slaves come to their aid (mostly throwing rocks), but many swarm up toward

the surface instead. Anyone with knowledge of underground stonework realizes the orcs are mining for something; the orcs dig as much of the tunnel as they can, forcing their slaves to clear the rubble, then weaken and crack the next portion of the passage by heating it with fire and then quenching it with a flood of cold water from the lake. Given the small size of the strongbox the heroes guess the orcs aren't mining metal ore but are probably searching for some kind of precious stone.

6. Wood Tunnel. This tunnel snakes downward, a carved trough for water running down one side. Slaves bring wood from "4. Wood Cave" to the end of the tunnel, where two orcs stack it against the dead end.

7. Smoking Tunnel. Wood smoke drifts from the entrance of this passage and at times makes navigating difficult. A trough cut in the floor allows water to flow down here, though it remains relatively dry at the moment. As characters descend the sloping tunnel the temperature begins to rise. Three orcs at the end tend a raging bonfire from stacked logs and branches; one stokes the fire with a pole axe while the other two wind a massive bellows obviously taken from the village smithy. The heroes easily surprise them since the orcs remain focused on tending the fire.

8. Mined Tunnel. This passage smells of wood smoke and feels damp. The slick floor shows signs the trough here tried (unsuccessfully) to contain a flood of water; the slippery rocks make the climb difficult. Slaves descend with empty baskets to the tunnel's end, where four strong villagers toil under the watchful eye of two orcs; two hack away at the fire-and-water-weakened rock with picks while the other two load the rubble into baskets. The slaves then slowly climb the slick slope and deposit the tailings onto the sorting pile in the main cavern.

9. Slave Quarters. The salvaged tabletop spanning the chasm leads to a cavern the villagers use for their quarters. They subsist here in squalor on what little food the orcs spare them. A central fire pit smolders with bits of wood salvaged from the main cavern. It provides meager lighting and heat. Niches carved out of the cave walls contain crude beds lined with the few rags and blankets they've managed to scrape together or steal from the orcs. A handful of village women and children tend to several injured or sick men; seven other men catch some much-needed rest before the orcs summon them again to relieve exhausted slaves.

10. Overseer's Perch. A narrow step path leads up one wall of the main cavern to a cave overlooking the work area. To the casual glance the shallow niche only contains a metal statue of a dwarf seated in a throne next to a small chest. The figure isn't really a statue but Murtz, a bronze dwarf known as a Drova from a distant stronghold in the Ostmaur Peaks. With his orc allies he engineered the destruction of Groet and enslaved its villagers to delve in these caves, not for precious metals but for rubies. The Drova convert ordinary rubies to "blood rubies" used in forcibly transforming other living creatures into their substantially stronger bronze form (see "Blood Rubies" below for more information.) It's anybody's guess (including his orc servants below) whether Murtz is awake or dormant at any given moment. Despite his high vantage point, he doesn't notice anything amiss in the work cavern unless the orcs respond to something serious...like discovering the heroes. At that point, however, he leaps down from his perch and wades into the fray, battle axe swinging, barking commands to the orcs in an unnerving nasal voice. The chest beside Murtz's seat contains uncut rubies recovered from the mine. They're absorbing the malign power of a large, multi-faceted blood ruby sitting in the center of the pile, infecting the other stones with its cursed glow.

Murtz. Expert (4–9); AT: battle axe; DF: chain mail; Skills: mining; Morale: determined; Gear: small hammer, iron spikes, chisel, round wooden pegs, water skin.

Blood Rubies

The Drova rely on cursed blood rubies as both a source of their life-power and a means of corrupting others to serve their designs. Most carry a small ruby worth 50 gold coins embedded in their chest. It gradually corrupts the living tissues within their bodies, turning most flesh into bronze. It also makes them obedient to the will of the Drova chieftain. Over time a blood ruby can corrupt ordinary, uncut rubies by proximity; when cut they better focus their malevolent power over living creatures. The largest and most malevolent of the blood rubies, the Supreme Ruby, is embedded in the Drova chieftain's chest.

Those knowingly or unwittingly possessing a blood ruby cultivate a growing jealousy over it; they refuse to sell it for gold, act aggressively against those they suspect might steal it (essentially everyone), and make it the focus of their existence. They insist on keeping it close to their person at all times, frequently mounting it in a necklace or other piece of jewelry so it rests close to their skin. Eventually it embeds itself in their flesh, beginning the transformation to a bronze-skinned automaton. At this stage the ruby grants them greater strength and endurance, though robs them of their willpower and ability to deal civilly with others. Removing an embedded bloody ruby usually results in death.

Any OSR Key

The *Any OSR Key* describes characters and creatures in text descriptors easily ported to stats typically found in Old School Renaissance (OSR) games and “retro-clones” of early class-and-level medieval fantasy roleplaying games. These terms do not key into any one game engine but serve as general guidelines to give readers an overall sense of how they fit within their own game’s stat format. *Any OSR Key* publications from Griffon Publishing Studio provide settings, characters, adventures, and other source material adaptable to your favorite roleplaying game.

The *Any OSR Key* stat block consists of text descriptions outlining a character or creature’s abilities, ordered much as numerical stats would appear in an OSR game. Lines beneath the stats offer space for gamemasters to make notes on stats for their preferred game system. Here’s an example of how an *Any OSR Key* adversary’s stats might appear:

Goblin Guards. Basic (1-3); AT: spear; DF: leather armor, shield; Skills: perception; Morale: moderate; Gear: d4 silver pieces.

Each section offers guidance in creating stats corresponding to values in your favorite OSR game:

Name: This identifies the character or creature and might include the number or further tags, such as “6 Bored Goblin Guards.” You can look up a similarly named creature in your own game and use those stats, modified by subsequent notes in the *Any OSR Key* descriptions.

Level: The first notation after the name offers guidance about the monster’s level or hit dice. Three terms describe broad ranges for the level: Basic (levels 1-3), Expert (4-9), and Master (10+). Use your own judgment in assigning hit dice or refer to equivalent monsters in your favorite rulebook.

AT: The creature’s means of attack listed here corresponds to weapon damage and occasionally the number of attacks. Tool-using adversaries list weapons (“spear, dagger”) while animal adversaries list natural attacks (“bite, claw, tail, horns”).

DF: An adversary’s defenses listed here (“leather armor, shield” or “tough hide, dragon scales”) correspond to OSR equivalents for armor class.

Skills/Special Abilities: These “tags” provide suggestions for linking these extra specialties to their corresponding names and values in an OSR game. These could include thief skills,

cleric and magic user spells, or other special abilities the character uses.

Morale: Like level/hit dice, morale lists one of three tiers describing the creature’s willingness to endure hardship (usually in combat): fickle, moderate, and determined. You can estimate an OSR game morale value based on those descriptions.

Gear: List any additional gear, including magic and mundane items, treasure, and other assorted oddments. Most listings include two lines after each stat paragraph so you can customize *Any OSR Key* materials with your own notes.

Sample Monster Listings

Brigands. Basic (1-3); AT: bow, sword; DF: leather armor; Skills: sneak; Morale: moderate; Gear: d4 gold pieces.

Gargoyle. Expert (4-9); AT: claws, bite; DF: stone skin; Special Abilities: flying, perception; Morale: moderate; Gear: none.

Non-Combat Tasks

If characters face non-combat tasks the scenario text might indicate a particular difficulty level (and corresponding target number) for successfully overcoming the challenge. Tasks are Challenging (10), Hard (15), or Improbable (20). To succeed players must roll equal to or greater than the difficulty number on a d20, adding any modifiers based on the appropriate attribute. (Players may add the character’s level in addition to or instead of attribute modifiers at the gamemaster’s discretion.)

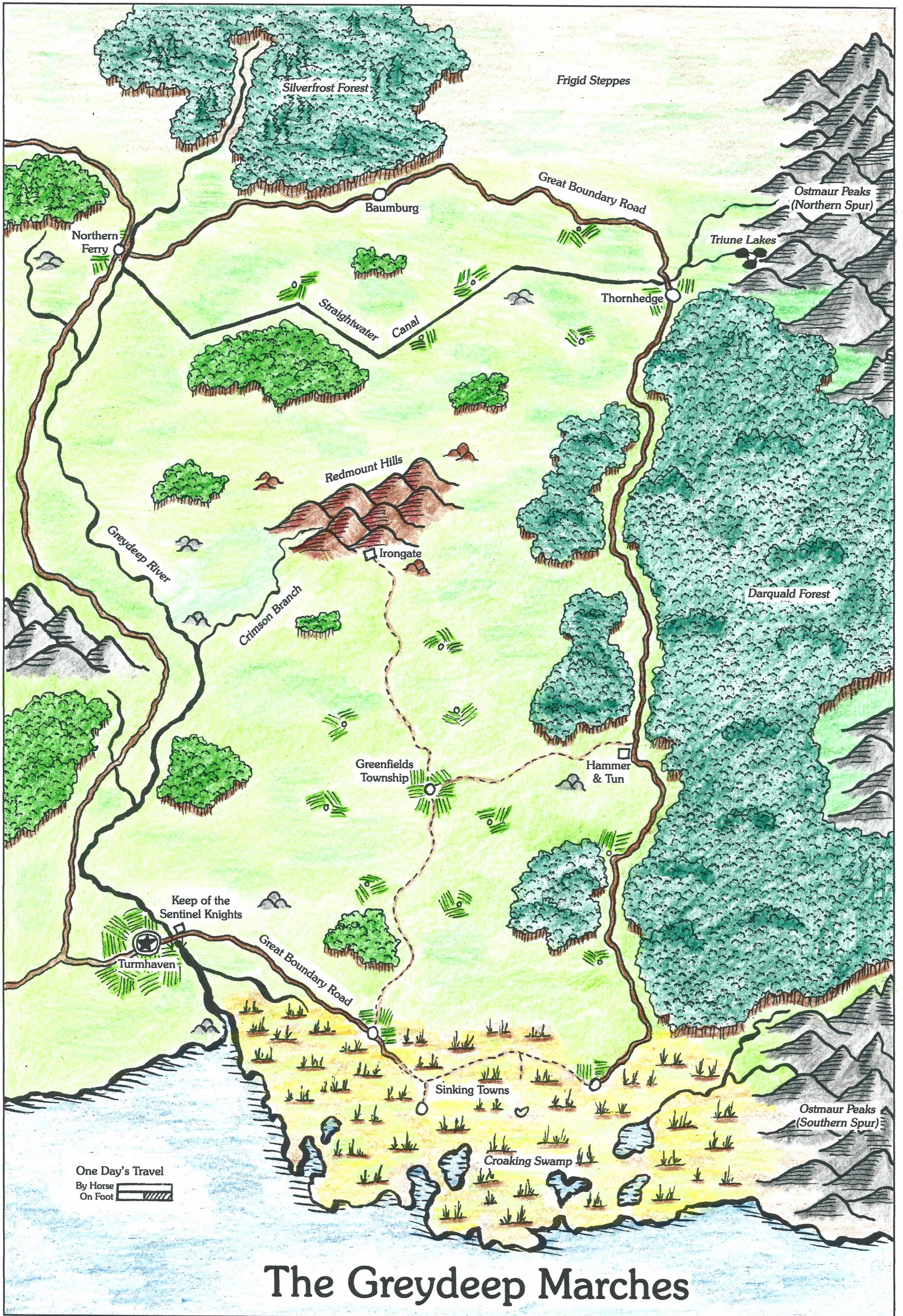
Alternately characters have a 1 in 6 chance of accomplishing a non-combat task, adjusted by the appropriate ability score modifier. For instance, a character with a Dexterity bonus of +2 would have a 3 in 6 chance to successfully complete a task with some possibility of failure.

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Griffon Publishing Studio



This supplement contains a map of the Greydeep Marches; an outline of its major features; list of rumors; description of the Sentinel Knights; four new monsters; the Hammer & Tun, a tavern serving as a base of operations for adventurers; encounter tables for different regions within the Marches; three short adventures; and the Any-OSR Key, a system to easily convert stats in this supplement to your favorite OSR-style fantasy roleplaying game.

Veteran game designer, writer, and editor Peter Schweighofer founded Griffon Publishing Studio as a platform to publish his own sourcebooks and games for adventure gaming enthusiasts, including roleplaying sourcebooks like *Pulp Egypt* and *Heroes of Rura-Tonga* as well as other projects like the solo wargame *Operation Drumbeat* and children's tabletop game rules *Valley of the Ape* and *Panzer Kids*. Known for writing and editing numerous *Star Wars* roleplaying game products for West End Games, his game design and publishing career has spanned more than 25 years.



The Greydeep Marches