

THE UNMENDED WAY

A FANTASY SETTLEMENT BY MICHAEL PRESCOTT

THE SITUATION

At the apex of a mountain pass, high in the Strielwall Peaks, stands a ruined fortress.

Once a Seree garrison, it is now occupied by a peaceful band of giants and the assortment of people devoted to them.

Inside, the giants work to perfect a ritual of tea making, a task they see as essential to the well-being of the lowlanders.

Also, they abduct people.

RUMORS FOR NEARBY SETTLEMENTS

- Strielund tinkers know a shorter route to Wintwatch than by going via Tannöch.
- Rough folk have been kidnapping people and taking them into the mountains.
- At the head of the Serpentfork was once a pass to Noripur.
- South of High Kellan, you can be sure to dream of hot tea.
- It's said that giants live among the clouds in the Strielwall Peaks.
- The street urchins of Saltbride all vanish in the winter.
- The Lord of High Kellan went missing for a month last autumn.

INTO THE STRIELWALL PEAKS

There is indeed a path leading south-east through the foothills into the Strielwall, starting near the spring that gives rise to the eastern tributary of the Serpentfork river.

Once in the mountains proper, the trail winds around three jagged peaks before it reaches the foot of the Twining Stair (see below).

In all, the trek is nearly thirty miles.

THE CHANGEABLE WEATHER

The Strielwall mountains have extraordinarily changeable weather, each sort lasting only d12 hours. Roll d6:

1. Clear skies and a light breeze
2. Still air but constant, wetting rain
3. Thunderstorms from the north
4. Fluke southerly wind brings thick cloud in summer, snow at other times
5. Inch-diameter hail (lasts 5 minutes)
6. The blue sky darkens to starry black (the sun remains, if it's day)

ENCOUNTERS IN THE PASS

In winter, the winding pass fills with snow and is unused, but at other times, trackers may spot that it is regularly travelled by individuals and small groups.

Roads being what they are, most meetings are with people coming the opposite way, though especially fast or slow-moving adventurers may meet bands going the same way.

TINKERS & URCHINS

In late autumn, tinkers from throughout Strielund and the Border Lands head to Splitpeak to winter there; some bring d3 orphans or abandoned children, usually from the streets of Saltbride.

In spring, the tinkers descend to resume their dealings; the youngest children stay behind.

In summer, the pass is busiest - tinkers can expect silver prices for dried fruit, cloth and tools of all kinds.

All know the importance of keeping their dealings with Splitpeak secret, and will lie to dissuade explorers.

THE PRESSERS

Drawn from the outcasts of society (some unfortunate, some unpleasant), the pressers abduct people from the lowlands and bring them to Splitpeak; then return them.

Presser gangs number d6+1, and will be escorting d3+1 lowlanders, ranging from farming folk, villagers to the occasional townie.

Abductees will be docile and compliant, for the pressers keep them **drugged with water** from Lady Memory's Garden (see below).

By their dress, manner and speech, it will be obvious that the group is made of two different sorts, though the pressers will invent excuses.

Pressers are cunning ruffians, but will take great risks to return their charges safely (though without their valuables), as they have a superstitious fear of their employers' perception and influence. Most are armed with clubs or long knives. Some are very old, or very young.

Descending presser gangs will have a dozen small vials of well-water, and will have been paid in gold shavings.

THE TWINING STAIR

The trail enters a great fissure in the side of Splitpeak, a mountain whose top is cleft in two, diving it into northern and southern spires.

The Twining Stair winds its way up through the fissure, many hundreds of feet to the top of the north spire. Parts never receive direct sunlight, and can be icy even in the warm months.

This was once a Seree fortress, and the Twining Stair has many switchbacks where it is overlooked by fortified posts (now empty).

YANIGAL - MASTER OF ADMISSIONS

A gray-skinned man of great height (9'), gangly and long-limbed, but rounded by a many-layered bear-fur coat. He waits at the last switchback, listening for approaching groups.

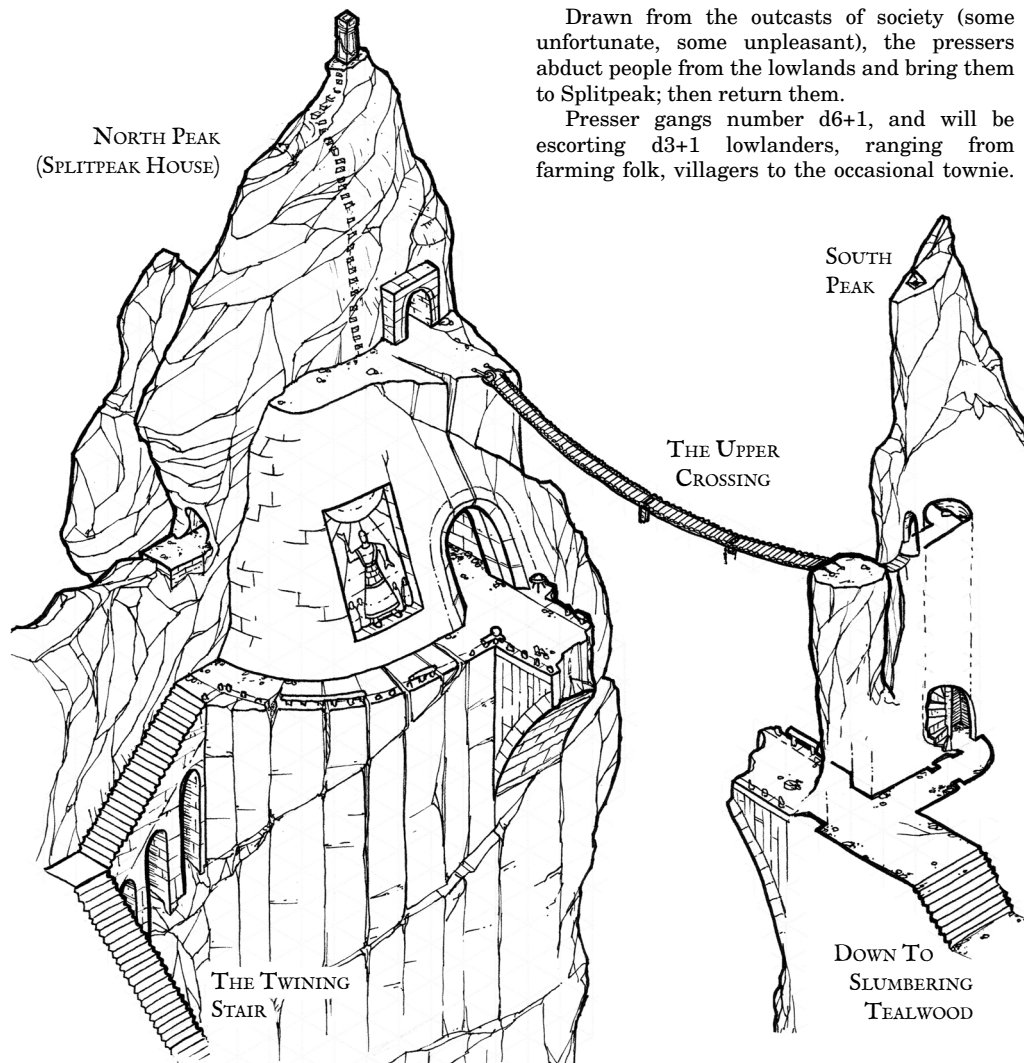
By his wrinkled face and drooping nose, he would seem to be very old, but he is fit and strong.

As with all the giants of Splitpeak, there is a deep calmness to his manner. He is, however, firm in his conviction that none may ascend armed or armored for battle, for this is a place of peace and good work.

If necessary, he will back up this position with stones hurled from a pile near his seat, and an iron-shod staff.

It's possible he will mistake adventurers for Pressers, if they look the part (lowlanders all look the same to him), and may mistake those who remain silent for 'students' (as he calls abductees).

If he senses no threat, he emerges to care for new arrivals - he knows the journey is difficult.

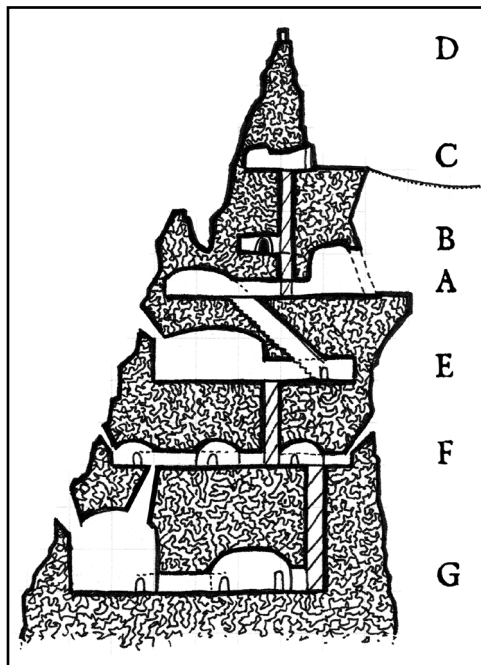


TRILEMMA ADVENTURES

SPLITPEAK HOUSE

The mountaintop fortress, once capable of housing several hundred soldiers, has been repaired and modified to fit the serene life the giants lead.

The corridors inside the northern peak are lit by dim lamps, but numerous windows and air shafts allow light in during the day; expertly fitted shutters keep out the wind.



Nineteen giants dwell within. They are patient beyond measure, gentle, and faintly superior - almost parental.

Visitors that surrender their weapons to Yanigal will be allowed to stay, and given leave to move as they please throughout levels A and E, but not further.

Those that stray will be shepherded back, like lost children. The violent are expelled.

A. THE GRAND ENTRANCE & HOSTEL

A firelit hall pierces the mountain. At the back is Yanigal's rest: a firepit, cauldron, and enough furs to sleep a dozen people. Smells of roasting goat and baking bread rise from E.

B. YANIGAL'S POST

A small side passage opens to a small platform that overlooks the Twining Stair. A small, locked armory secures visitors' weapons along with those of the giants: mattocks and swords,

massive leather coats sewn with metal plates.

In an earlier age, they were mercenaries, and can remember those ways when they must.

C. THE UPPER CROSSING

The giants deliberately destroyed the bridge, but maintain another way to the south peak: twin iron chains with wooden slats slung between them.

The first line across was carried by a brave, climbing gnome whom the giants remember fondly.

D. THE ACCORD

Both peaks are capped by accord stones, engraved obelisks that record Seree pacts with unseen powers, now broken.

E. HALL OF THE TEA MAKERS

A great stone hall lit by two roaring fires; the area between is arrayed with benches and tables. Sunlight streams through an airy shaft, bringing light to the plants: two great soil-filled troughs line the walls, brimming with vegetation.

Knobby tubers are boiled into a sticky gruel, flavourless but nourishing and is the staple food of Splitpeak House.

Bed rolls and mats are stacked in a corner: the giants' guests all live, eat and play here, and above all, practice the art of tea-making.

A good half of the indoor garden is given over to Analeaf, a bitter highland herb from which the giants make their tea.

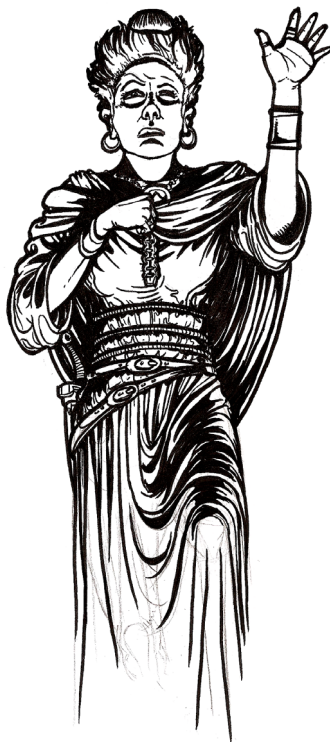
All may eat here, or sleep here, but the giants insist that before each of these things, one must make tea. It is the custom!

BUT FIRST, YOU MUST BREW TEA

Tea-making is done from fresh Analeaf. Guests are patiently instructed to pick three good leaves, to boil their own water, to brew the tea until it is good and strong.

Giants will watch beginners to ensure it is done correctly, in particular counting out the leaf-points to ensure it's actually Analeaf (there are many similar-looking plants). They fuss over those that learn well, and are stern with those who brew carelessly.

Drinking is less important - if adventurers refuse, the giants accept this with a shrug and their usual calm.



"It the making that is important, that is enough."

Eventually, they will begin gently waking visitors in the night, one at a time, to test their brewing while they are half-asleep.

"Let us see what you have learned."

THE LONG WORK

Once all the lands were ruled by the Sidhe. Lords of Memory poisoned the streams and rivers with their tears, and those that drank grew docile. Towns fell, roads grew over. Most folk lost their wits completely and returned to the wood to live as animals.

The Sidhe are not gone from the world, and the giants know they will try again. They know that Analeaf infusion protects against Sidhe poisons, clearing the mind. When one person awakens, others follow, and a tiny spark of civilization begins to grow again. This has happened many times.

By teaching people to brew, they hope to make it habitual for as many people as possible, thereby protecting the lowlanders from the snares of the Sidhe, who can wait forever.

This is the giants' long work.

F. HALL OF BREWING IN SILENCE

The abductees are brought here by the Pressers, where the giants tend to them carefully. It is eerily quiet, for the abductees are kept drugged with water from Lady Memory's Garden (below) and seldom speak.

The giants move among them, whispering to rise, to eat, to bathe, to sleep, and to brew tea, over and over again. (The final brew is always switched, to prevent them awakening.)

After several weeks the actions are automatic, and the giants summon the Pressers to return them home. "Safely, if you please."

When the process goes well, abductees remember nothing of their time here, but the habits remain.

A tapestry here shows a **map of Tealwood**, unwooded, and dotted with hundreds of villages (these are now all abandoned and hidden by the trees of the Tealwood).

SLUMBERING TEALWOOD

From the peaks there is an unobstructed view south for many leagues.

On a clear day, nearly the entire Tealwood valley system can be seen: the cascade of foothills leading down from the Strielwall, the enormous wooded swath stretching from the black trees of the Grinvolt and the steel-gray water of Near Soont, past the serpentine Nall river. On clear mornings, distant Wint Lake in the east catches the rising sun and turns to molten gold.

Occasional rainstorms can be seen marching up the valley from the Near Soont.

"It is asleep," the tea-makers say sadly, if asked about any of it, and warn that none who go there return.

YOU ARE NOT READY

The tea makers will be very firm that adventurers should not go to Tealwood, and should stay awhile to consider their decision.

"Your tea-making is not yet good enough," they may say. Those that insist are taken to the garden.

G. LADY MEMORY'S GARDEN

A high-walled garden: fruiting trees, many herbs, a natural spring, a stone bench.

Within is a Lady of Memory, a shade of surpassing power. In life, a Queen of the Sidhe, now an immortal herald of their return, poisoner of waters.

She can withstand the sight of the living, but like all Sidhe, if confronted she becomes aware of her deathly state and attacks with the fury of a sorceress beyond death.

(For this reason, the giants never allow more than one person in the garden at a time, and under no circumstances any weapons.)

Otherwise, she lives as ghosts do, lost and unaware of her surroundings, weeping.

Her tears have poisoned the garden, and any who drink from the water fall under the spell of the Sidhe, living placidly in the garden as animals. (Such folk do not trouble the Sidhe.)

Within the garden is firewood, a kettle, and many herbs (including Analeaf).

The giants have a test: abstain from tea for three days, then enter the garden and drink from the well. If you have learned brewing well enough, you will awaken within a few days.

Those that do are deemed ready to venture into Tealwood.

Those who do not emerge within a few days are retrieved by Yanigal, fed tea and a warm meal and put to bed until they come to.