

The Edge of Civilization

Two nations, side by side, have been at odds for all of time. To the North, Sangranit: a land of broad flooded plains and perpetual rain and red stone, hemmed in by the Orthodoxy to the North and the Sangranit Mountains to the South. Past the mountains is Kaldskog, called Hjemlandet by the natives: a seemingly-endless expanse of hills and cliffs covered in woods and brambles, and dotted by longhouses. The largest of these forests, the Kaldskog or Foret Froid depending on which side of the mountains you're on, has been contested land for at least the last four hundred years.

Sangranit, named for the mountains, is perhaps twelve days travel across (300 miles, or 475 km) and eight days travel from the Northern to Southern borders (200 miles, or 325 km). The capital city, Courbleu, sits across the Courbleu River, which terminates into the sea on the North and East of the peninsula.

Sangranit is, at least nominally, a close ally of the Ekletheon Orthodox Church and its associated lands, and they obey many Church laws that other nations don't. Folk magic, like druidism, is outlawed, and those carrying holly or mistletoe can be fined. Warlocks are outlawed on pain of imprisonment, sorcerers and wizards are distrusted, and essentially any religious ceremony or practice is expected to conform to the Church's guidance on the matter.

The farthest city South and East, butted against the Sangranit Mountains at the source of the River Noire, is Pluville, the Rainy City.

Pluville is a city built of great blocks of red stone quarried from the Sangranit Mountains. It sits atop a hill through which the River carves, some forty or fifty ft above the river. A series of bridges span the gap, with elegant lancet arches below and slick round arches above. The Marquis' castle, the Chateau Rouge, is itself built atop a kind of platform that crosses the River. The tall houses seem to pile up on the hillsides, with neighborhoods segregated by walls that, themselves, top terraces down the hillside such that the interior of the rings of walls are maybe 8 ft (2.5 m) high but from the outside are almost 20 ft (6 m) to climb. White iron¹ spikes and decorations top the walls, as well as the gates and houses of the wealthier parts of town.

As one might imagine, Pluville has a vampire problem.

Stone steps wind in switchbacks up and down the hill – often without guards or handrails – and the slick stone is navigable only by natives. Visitors are cautioned to wear big goofy boots to prevent slipping and falling, and to only hire local porters to move their goods. Channels cut into the sidewalks move waste through the city, a kind of open-air sewage system that dumps everything in the River to the North of the city, while drinking water is drawn from the South. Near the bridges large warehouses jut out over the River, with doors and winches attached to the bottoms of the overhangs. Goods are brought by boat to the center of the River, and from there platforms and nets are dropped from the warehouses and goods are winched up into the warehouses. The Chateau Rouge has its own platforms, as well as complex water pumps that provide private drinking water in the case of emergencies.

A days walk to the Southeast of Pluville, up the River, is the Lac de Sang. The Lake is 25 miles (40 km) long and half that across. From there one looks straight up at the Sangranit Mountains. The Sangranits are extremely rich in white iron, and thus are a pale gray stone with streaks of red rust shot through them.

The mountains are rippled and ragged, presenting sheer faces to the North and piles of foothills to the South as though the land were rumbled and folded fabric. Several passes cut through the mountains, often steep-sided canyons that wind through as though the mountains had split away from each other.

The pass near to Pluville winds across fifty miles (80 km) of territory but takes more than twice that (125 miles, or 200 km) to do so – a trek of around ten days due to the rocky road, or twenty with a cart or caravan. It terminates near an antique town – the name lost to time – and a hard-packed earthen road that leads into the Foret Froid. The road crosses a narrow plain between two rivers, exceedingly fertile where it is not rocky hills. Two days travel (50 miles, or 80 km) by road one comes to the ruins of a Sangranit town.

The Foret Froid is dotted with the remnants of wars between Sangranit and Kaldskog: towns and forts long abandoned, overgrown by brush and vines. There are those in both nations that dream of reclaiming the forest, and with it those towns. For now, though, those ruins are occupied by the inhabitants of the woods. The Foret Froid is home to a number of goblin colonies, the usual beasts of the forest, and most notably the members of the Unseelie Court of Faerie, sometimes called the Winter Fey.

The nation farthest from the Church's grasp on this continent is sometimes called Kaldskog, but is referred to as Hjemlandet by its own folk. They are organized into hundreds of clans in many dozens of settlements, none larger than 5,000 inhabitants between the town and the outlying farms, ranches, and settlements. Each settlement is headed by a jarl, a kind of chieftain, often advised by a skald. Skalds are often mages or priests, but always storytellers and wise folk. There are only twenty or twenty-five jarls that lead settlements large enough to send a representative to great moots, the meetings of jarls and skalds to share grievances and set laws agreed-upon across Hjemlandet.

1: White Iron: Precisely what it sounds like. This is the name of both the stone and the iron extracted from it. Unlike normal black iron this produces a milky white metal. It can be forged into a fine steel that, too, has a white tint to it and looks more like ceramic than steel. Like black iron it rusts to red, but this is much more perceptible in the white stone and metal, looking not unlike blood. The white stone, left unworked, often develops a patina of dusty bloody red if left exposed to the elements.

Overview

Act I

Player characters (PCs) vie for a rare Writ of Settlement, offered by the Marquis Armand de Bateau of Pluville, authorizing the holder(s) to occupy, settle, and lead a portion of the Foret Froid encompassing a

day's walk in every direction from the abandoned Fort Courage. Thieves, part of an infernal cult dedicated to a fiend called Scent of Carnage, attempt to steal the writ in the streets, involving both cutpurses and guards nearby.

The PCs travel almost two weeks² across country to the Vielle Eglise on the borders of the Foret Froid. Bandits threaten the trading post, necessitating a confrontation – including a tussle with the same thieves from Pluville. From there they execute a search of the forest to find the abandoned Fort Courage, battling goblins and fey.

After finding the ancient fort PCs will need to clear it of its ancient fey curse, fighting through the various pixies and blights that occupy it.

Act II

Re-taking Fort Courage provokes a small war with the Unseelie Court of Faerie. PCs will need to withstand sieges and attacks while searching for the paths the fey are using to reach the Material Plane. They are assisted by agents of the Ekletheon Orthodox Church, dispatched from Pluville and surrounding lands, and awaiting reinforcements from Shavill to the North.

The agents of the Church are revealed to be under the sway of a vampire-succubus in service to a fiend called Scent of Carnage, and the fey compelled to their war by a contract with the skalds of Kaldskog.

Act III

To end the war PCs will need to force the skalds to end their contract with the fey should they ever wish to keep the Fort. The skalds, however, have begun disappearing, captured by the fiendish swamp dragon Soksathar on the island Terroroya as a favor to Scent of Carnage.

PCs will travel through Hjemlandet to fight Soksathar's bullywug servants, eventually trekking across the swamp-isle Terroroya and confronting the dragon directly, freeing the skalds captive there.

Act IV

The skalds reveal that their contract with the fey cannot be invalidated without the physical representation of the contract – a tree of glass – being destroyed. The 'tree' is in the center of the glade of Ailbhe, the Queen of the Unseelie Court. PCs will need to travel to the realms of Faerie, assisted by the skalds, and then accomplish nine tasks, confronting Ailbhe in combat as part of the last. They can then end the contract and return to the Material Plane.

Act V

In the Material Plane a full year has passed rather than a few days, and the war between Sangranit and Hjemlandet is fit to begin. The Church has forces massing at the border, and the jarls are preparing to defend their woods in brutal guerrilla warfare. The war seems to be precipitated by the devil Scent of Carnage, an Erinyes that seems to be behind many of the causes of the confrontation. The war can only be diverted – likely – by defeating Scent of Carnage and using her own terrible powers to undo her foul works.

Scent of Carnage has taken over Fort Courage, turning it into a bastion of Hell filled with dark mirror versions of the folk of Vielle Eglise and dozens of fiends.

2: That is, fourteen days. In Sangranit or Hjemlandet they might call this a week-and-a-half, as each week is ten full days.

Act I – Into the Woods

On a rainy day – like every day in Pluville – the Marquis Armand de Bateau makes a public announcement via his cryers and signposts. He will be offering a Writ of Settlement to some lucky party, allowing them authority, as agents of Sangranit, to travel to the Foret Froid South of the Sangranit Mountains; to establish a headquarters at Fort Courage; and to settle and tax the lands a day's travel in every direction from the Fort.

This writ, of course, will make the fortune of whomever holds it. The decision will be by lottery, with entry to the lottery by contests, purchase, and random grant. Thirty citizens of Pluville, randomly selected from the past year's tax records, will be granted one entry. The first twenty individuals in the city to purchase an entry can do so for 100 gold castles each. Finally, the winners of ten contests will be granted one entry each. From that pool of thirty to sixty individuals one will be selected.

That individual will be tasked with putting together a crew to travel to, survey, and secure the Fort. Once a message has been sent back to Pluville that assures the Marquis that the Fort is secure a group of persons and supplies will be sent to settle it properly, under the command of the new duke.

Reasons to be invested in obtaining such a writ include:

1. **Fortune!** The writ will be worth thousands of gold castles all on its own, but the wealth that could be generated over years is difficult to measure. After all, it comes with the title of duke (should the settlement thrive, of course), and the taxing powers that implies.
2. **Legacy.** The title of duke is an unthinkable lofty goal for, say, the child of a chimneysweep, scullery maid, or even merchant. If one were looking to improve one's station, look no further.
3. **Adventure.** Before the duchy is established the Fort has to be discovered, goblins fought, Kaldskoggers confronted, and excitement had by the bucketful.
4. **Freedom.** Pluville operates under the sometimes-too-heavy hand of the Church, which grinds down on a certain kind of person. No love but that the Church sanctions³. No speaking back to nobles. No strange behavior, even. It's enough to drive a soul mad, and this writ would give one the authority to make a new duchy with laws barely constrained by Sangranit, over the mountains as they are.
5. **Belief.** Even more restrictive than the Church's limitations on public life are the Church's limitations on private religion. For nine of every ten folk the worship of the Orthodox pantheon is all they need, but some feel a powerful calling to the old religions that they can't deny (or else,

maybe, you've made a deal with a devil and need very much to get out from the Inquisitors' view ASAP).

6. **History.** Perhaps your family, a few generations back, were Sangranese settlers in the Foret Froid. Maybe they fought the Kaldskoggers – or even were Kaldskoggers – and you'd very much like to live where your kin once lived.
7. **Adrift.** Maybe you're not so much looking for something as you are looking for... something else. For the fifth or sixth child of a merchant, say, life in Pluville can be difficult. Perhaps no calling called you, no passion entranced you, no course of life leapt up and said "this is it! This is what you've been waiting for!" So perhaps it's time to stray until you find a purpose and a passion.
8. **Camaraderie.** You may not want to trek to the middle of a frozen forest to fight berserkers and goblins, per se, but someone you love wants to and you'd rather chew off your own thumb than leave them in the lurch. Pick another PC and work with them to determine a relationship, however unlikely and of whatever kind, that keeps the two of you close to each other.

3: Not every game group will want to incorporate things like gender or sexuality discrimination into their roleplay, and it should be something only undertaken with the express, enthusiastic participation of everyone at the table. The Church, as written, has no view on same-sex relationships or transgender matters. However, your table may be interested in playing counter-cultural rebels, in which case the Church makes a very good villain. In this case use the Church as a kind of dark mirror of our real-world conservative religious organizations, with overt prohibitions against same-sex relationships, gender & sex transitions, or even subtle misogyny.

If you choose to play things this way tread carefully. Note that the gods have no stance on such matters, and some (Senya and Mithron, for example) are even vocally pro-love-in-any-form and pro-trans-bodies (most gods, and most obviously these two, have manifestations as both sexes and as androgynous or non-binary deities). If you're playing the Church as oppressive, moralistic, and conservative in these ways it should be obvious that they are the villains for it; that there are elements of the Church that oppose these views, perhaps covertly and perhaps overtly; and that there is the possibility to Change Things.

One or more PCs may get their names into the lottery for the writ in any of the ways mentioned above. If a PC has 100 gold castles to spend allow them to purchase a ticket this way. If a PC wants to engage in one or more of the contests encourage it. If no PC takes this kind of bait – or if you want to drop the plot on them like the proverbial ton of bricks – have them drawn randomly from the tax lots. However their names get into the drawing, a PC will be the one to win the random draw. Such is the nature of being main characters.

Only one PC needs to be granted the writ, though the others should be invested in accompanying them. If several PCs are interested in being 'the duke' then select one to receive the writ and have the group figure out a way to decide ducal authority among them – perhaps the one to end the adventure with the most XP, or the most wealth, or with the most efforts of derring-do under their belts.

The Marquis

Armand de Bateau is the Marquis of Pluville, granted his authority by King Aurumn. He is a vain and shallow man, both, given to every vice in which a man might indulge. He gained his post not for his brains or military skill, but for his wealth: he was chosen because his family is the wealthiest in the South of Sangranit, with a fortune built on controlling the shipping of every river in the nation.

Some ten years ago the Marquis engaged the services of an infernalist, a magician named **Pfennig**. This summoner helped the Marquis gather blackmail material and exert fiendish influence over his peers, with the small demand that the Marquis participate in his dark rituals, as well as the Marquise of the time (the Marquis' first wife). Four years into this life of debauchery, blood ritual, and casual crime the Marquise threw herself from the top of the Chateau Rouge and into the river below. The Marquis remarried shortly after.

Pfennig had initially suggested the Marquis seek a bride with, ah, a *fiery* disposition and powerful connections, but the Marquis demurred and chose a normal human spouse instead. Nevertheless, a year ago Pfennig succeeded in placing a fiendish mistress in the Marquis' bedroom: a vampiric succubus that goes by the name **Marguerite Cagliostro**, but is known in Hell as Idle Treachery.

Shortly after installing his compatriot Pfennig begged off on 'business,' and has not been seen by the Marquis since – though they remain in contact via a set of magical journals which mirror each other's writing and, when necessary, via impish messengers.

The Marquis is excited to once again expand Sangranit's borders. It has been over a hundred years since the last scuffle with the Kaldskoggers and it seems high time to the more patriotic and enterprising leaders of Sangranit that they take what's always been rightfully theirs: the logging and farming rights of the Foret Froid. Of course, the Marquis is being manipulated by his consort Marguerite at the behest of her fiendish master, the Prince of Darkness, Betrayer of Hope, Asmodeus himself. The Marquis, and a number of other influential figures, are being manipulated into precipitating another round of the perpetual on-again-off-again war between Sangranit and Hjemlandet.

Vampiric Succubus

Like their undead relatives these fiendish vampires are blood-drinking terrors of the night. Unlike their lesser kin, however, they are not cursed humanoids but are infernal beings of their own kind, a strain of succubus. They are able to create vampire spawn, have many of the same powers of the undead, and dislike holy symbols and water, but are not repelled by garlic or by daylight or any of that silliness.

The most shocking feature of a fiendish vampire is their bestial appearance. Until the moment of their feeding they walk about like beautiful, if eerie, men or women, only changing when they are overtaken by bloodlust. When they feed their humanity slides away like paint off a mannequin and they become horrible fiends with faces split down the middle to reveal row after row of fangs and a slick prehensile proboscis-tongue that punctures their target and drains them of blood.

Vampiric Succubus

Medium fiend (devil), neutral evil

Armor Class 16 (Natural Armor)

Hit Points 144 (17d8 + 68)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	18 (+4)	18 (+4)	17 (+3)	15 (+2)	20 (+5)

Saving Throws DEX +9, WIS + 7, CHA +9

Skills Deception +9, Insight +7, Persuasion +9, Stealth +9

Damage Resistances Cold, Fire, Lightning, Necrotic, Poison; Bludgeoning, Piercing, and Slashing from Nonmagical Attacks

Damage Vulnerabilities Radiant

Senses Darkvision 120 ft., Passive Perception 12

Languages Common, Infernal, any 2 others, Telepathy 60 ft.

Challenge 13 (10,000 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +5

Fragile Heart. If a piercing weapon made of silver or with the magical quality is driven into the succubus' heart while it is incapacitated it remains paralyzed until the weapon is removed.

Hellish Escape. When it drops to 0 hit points the succubus is banished to Hell rather than being killed, reappearing at 0 hit points in a coffin in an infernal manor. It is paralyzed until regaining at least 1 hit point. After spending 1 hour in its resting place with 0 hit points it regains 1 hit point. If the succubus is reduced to 0 hit points in Hell it is truly killed.

Hunger. The fiend must drain a living creature (or creatures) of at least 10 hit points each night using its bite attack. It can drain up to 50 hit points at a time, spending 10 hit points each night to satisfy its hunger. If the succubus is unable to satisfy its hunger its hit point maximum is reduced by 10 hit points. This effect occurs each night it goes hungry, and the effect is cumulative. If its hit point maximum is reduced to 0 it starves to death.

Legendary Resistance (3/day). If the succubus fails a saving throw it can choose to succeed instead.

Regeneration. The succubus regains 20 hit points at the start of its turn if it has at least 1 hit point. If the succubus takes radiant damage or damage from holy water this trait doesn't function until the vampire ends its next turn.

Shapechanger. The fiend can use its action to polymorph into a Small or Medium humanoid, or back to its true form. Other than its size and claw attack its statistics are the same in each form. It reverts to its true form if it dies.

Spider Climb. The succubus can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

Telepathic Bond. The succubus ignores the range restriction on its telepathy when communicating with a creature it has charmed, and does not even need to be on the same plane of existence.

Actions

Multiattack. The succubus makes two attacks, only one of which can be a bite attack.

Claw (fiendish form only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) slashing damage. Instead of dealing damage the succubus can grapple the target (escape DC 18).

Bite (fiendish form only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one willing creature, or one that is grappled by the succubus, incapacitated, or restrained. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage plus 10 (3d6) necrotic damage. The target's hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the necrotic damage taken and the succubus regains hit points equal to that amount. The target increases their maximum hit points by 10 each time they finish a long rest, to a maximum of their normal maximum hit points. The target dies if this necrotic damage reduces its current or maximum hit points to 0. A humanoid slain in this way rises three nights later as a vampire spawn under the control of the succubus.

Charm. The succubus targets one humanoid it can see within 30 ft. of it. If the target can see the succubus it must succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw against this magic or be charmed by the succubus. The charmed target regards the succubus as its trusted friend to be heeded and protected. If the target's sexual orientation allows it also perceives the succubus as an alluring romantic prospect. Although the target is not under the succubus' direct control it takes the succubus' requests or actions in the most favorable way it can, and is a willing target for the succubus' bite attack.

Each time the succubus or the succubus' companions harm the target, other than with the succubus' bite attack, the target can repeat the saving throw, ending the effect on a success. Otherwise the effect lasts 24 hours, until the succubus is destroyed, or until the succubus uses a bonus action to end the effect. A creature that is already charmed and is targeted with this ability again to extend the duration makes its saving throw with disadvantage. A creature that ends the effect by saving after being harmed by the succubus or the succubus' allies has advantage on saving throws against this effect for the next 24 hours.

A creature that remains under the succubus' charm for three full days finds that they can no longer resist the succubus' commands. They will not do something suicidal, except perhaps to protect the succubus from bodily harm, but otherwise will attend to their every trifling need as though it were of the utmost importance. A creature so charmed can no longer make saving throws to end the effect unless harmed by the succubus or the succubus' allies, excepting the succubus' bite attack. The succubus can only have one creature so enthralled at one time.

Legendary Actions

The succubus can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The succubus regains spent legendary actions at the beginning of its turn.

Move. The succubus moves up to its speed without provoking attacks of opportunity.

Claw. The succubus makes one claw attack.

Bite (Costs 2 Actions). The succubus makes one bite attack.

Starting on the 21st day of Premtemps (the first month of summer) posters begin appearing on every empty surface. The vermillion-streaked columns of Pluville announce the Marquis' plan; the windows of wealthy shops are plastered from the inside with the news; the much-abused job boards in the backs of seedy bars catering to the grimmest kind of adventurers are suddenly empty of near-all-else but the announcement: the King, via the Marquis, will be making one lucky citizen a duke of the land.

Beginning on the 31st of Premtemps and lasting through the 40th (the last day of the month), the Marquis will be hosting ten games of skill and chance. One entry to a lottery will be granted for each winner. Two additional entries will be sold each day for 100 gold castles apiece, and thirty entries will be made from the random citizenry of the city. On the 1st of Ventrevosseur the Marquis will make a drawing from the names in public on the front steps of the Chateau Rouge, and that person will be awarded a Writ of Settlement for the long-abandoned-but-once-glorious Fort Courage on the edges of the Foret Froid. The excitement! The allure!

The ten games of skill and chance are as follow:

1. Melee
2. Archery
3. Arcanum
4. Piety
5. Sagacity
6. Endurance
7. Obstacle Course
8. Rochambeau Tournament
9. Poker (Tarobacc)
10. Risk of Life

Contests

In many cases having the non-participating players at the table take the roles of competitors is advised, as this keeps them engaged and saves you rolling dozens of checks yourself. In each contest rules are presented to add NPCs competing against the PC or PCs engaging in the challenges. If your players at the table are taking the places of the NPCs simply have them make the rolls and let them know what modifiers they have to those rolls.

If most or all of the PCs participate in *all* of the contests under the assumption that they might get lucky, this won't work, of course. In these cases use the NPC rules and apply them against all competing PCs. In some contests, like the Arcanum contest or the risk of life, having your players at the table roll for NPCs is not practical or sensible – use your best judgment.

Melee

To kick things off in style the Marquis will host a melee for any able-bodied individual over the age of 16. The rules are simple: light and medium armor only are allowed, weapons must have blunted edges or otherwise be less-than-lethal, magic is right out (even 'buff' spells are prohibited, and the Marquis' mages have *detect magic* running to identify violators). Anyone that strikes another dead will be immediately disqualified and fined 100 gold castles as a blood payment to the family of the deceased. The last person standing is the victor, and their name will be entered into the lottery.

There are 140-ish participants in the melee, gathering in a massive market square converted for the purpose. Barriers of wood are erected, with tiered benches behind. An inch of wet straw and sawdust covers the paving stones. The rain drenches all participants in moments.

Because running a combat for 140-plus individuals is absolute madness we'll assume that all individuals are facing off against one another just as the PCs are. The PCs will go up against an equal number of NPC combatants, plus or minus two (roll 1d6: 1 means two fewer, 2 means one fewer, 3 and 4 is equal numbers, 5 is one more, 6 is two more than the PCs; if three or fewer PCs participate treat 1 as one fewer and 6 as one more, to prevent one side being too outnumbered). Once the last of that group is downed the next gaggle of NPCs arrives ready to tangle.

Due to the nature of the melee half the combatants will be downed by then, reducing the pool to 70. After the second round it'll be down to 35, and after the third it'll be down to 18-ish. If the PCs survive three rounds they face off against the very last of the melee. For each of the rounds, two through four, use the same calculation above to find the number of opponents. Reduce the enemies' hp by a quarter for round two, by a half for round three, and by three-quarters for round four to represent the beatings they've taken. If more than one PC survives the melee have them battle each other. The last figure standing – player or NPC – is the winner of one entry to the lottery.

Treat the NPC combatants as a mix of Guards and Nobles. If the PCs are struggling swap a few out for Commoners with chain shirts (AC 13) and short swords (1d6 slashing); and if they are mowing through them trade a few out for Thugs or Soldiers, especially in later rounds. All NPCs aim to follow the rules and knock PCs out at 0 hp rather than killing them. PCs that are reduced to 0 hp stumble and fall, dazed, and are dragged off the pitch by spectators, friends, and guards.

Players should remember the restriction against killing as well. Encourage them to describe how they knock out their targets rather than killing them, and take note of anyone stating that they strike for the vitals. If a PC does more damage than double their targets' *maximum* hp in one hit (likely only possible as the result of a critical or sneak attack against a commoner) then that target is dead – the hit was so hard they had a bad concussion or heart attack or snapped their neck, etc. That PC is disqualified unless they can slip away quickly enough. Have them make a Dexterity (Stealth) check DC 16 or be identified as killing an opponent. That's 100 gold castles on their tab, oops!

Archery

The second day of festivities is a simpler task, but with no less fanfare and excitement. The fair-like environment has really begun in earnest and street vendors are out hawking their wares for hours before the event, with buskers and stilt-walkers and the like moving through the crowd (as well as cut-purses). Some forty or fifty archers have lined up with a

The longest bridge in the city has been set up with targets along it and on the rooftops beyond at distances of 50 ft., 100 ft., and 250 ft. (15 m, 30 m, and 75 m, approximately). This means that the wielder of a light crossbow or shortbow will be disadvantaged right off the bat: they'll make one attack at normal range and two at long. A longbow or heavy crossbow will make two attacks normally and one at long range.

Contestants will line up and take three shots, one after another with no break in between. Crossbows (heavy or light), shortbows, and longbows are allowed, and nothing else. Magic is prohibited, both spells and magical weaponry. The first target has an AC of 10, the second an AC of 14, and the third an AC of 18. Attacks that meet the AC get 1 point, with an additional 1 point per point the attack scores above the AC to a maximum of 6 points. This means, for example, an attack of 19 against the last target earns 2 points, or an attack of 19 against the first target earns 6 points – the maximum. Points will be totaled after three shots, with ties broken by a shoot-off on the farthest target until a victor is decided.

Rather than rolling attacks for all forty or fifty competitors to determine the point total to beat just roll three d20s for each round, selecting the highest of the bunch and adding +5 for the archer's skill. You only need to record the highest result each round, as we assume that there is some expert archer out there excelling in every round. If the PC, or PCs, cannot exceed the point total this method creates then the lottery entry goes to some nameless archer – probably a farmer with a grand destiny or something.

Arcanum

A test of magic is harder for the lay person to judge, but very flashy. This competition is undertaken by performing a spell from each of the eight schools of magic in controlled circumstances. These are undertaken consecutively, with no chance to regain spell slots in between, and must all be undertaken. If a competitor does not have a way to satisfy a specific challenge they simply mark a zero for that challenge and move on. The challenges are thus:

Abjuration: A guardsman steps forward and strikes at the competitor in a measured way – no dodging allowed. Treat this as an attack with a result of 1 over the target's AC, dealing 10 bludgeoning damage with a greatclub. Reducing the damage with magic like *blade ward* or temporary hit points grants one point; reducing the damage entirely with temporary hit points or similar grants 2 points; avoiding the attack entirely via *shield* or a similar spell grants 3 points.

Conjuration: The practitioner is required to manifest a physical object of some kind. An ephemeral manifestation (anything with a duration of instantaneous or 1 round, like *acid splash*) earns 1 point; while a persistent effect grants 2 points; any teleportation effect earns 3 points.

Divination: Contestants must predict the result of a coin flip as many times in a row as they can manage. It is admitted, among skilled practitioners, that this is pretty much chance. Feel free to do this at the table. Predicting one correctly is 1 point; three in a row is 2 points; ten in a row is 3 points.

Enchantment: A large rat is placed before the contestant and they are told to get it to do a set of tricks. Spells like *animal friendship* or *charm person* will do the job (these rats are bred to count as humanoids

for the purposes of enchantment). A Charisma (Animal Handling) check DC 15 will earn 1 point; a *charm* effect will get 2 points; and an effect that *dominates* will earn 3 points.

Evocation: Destroy three clay skeets with magic at 50 ft! They have AC 13 and 1 hp each, and each is worth 1 point. Several non-evocation spells, like *ice knife* or *acid splash* would work here, and the judges are inclined to let it slide.

Illusion: This requires only that a convincing illusion be created, anything from *minor illusion* and up. It must be a persistent illusory effect, not something like *color spray* or *distort value*, but effects like *invisibility* work wonderfully. If the effect allows a saving throw – such as *minor illusion* might when the judges interact with it make three saving throws with a +2 bonus. For each that fails award 1 point. If the effect does not allow a save, like *disguise self*, grant 3 points automatically.

Necromancy: Necromancy, as it relates to harming others or raising the dead, is outlawed by the Church and looked upon unkindly by Jagus. Ergo the only spells that are allowed here are spells like *false life*, *blindness/deafness*, or *speak with dead*. Proving your ability with any such effect gains 3 points automatically, but also the suspicion of all onlookers. Most magicians simply throw this event.

Transmutation: This challenge requires effecting a change on some present, physical substance. A table littered with small piles of sand, pitchers of water, and other such knick-knacks is laid out before the competitors. An effect that is negligible, easy to miss, or arguable earns 1 point. An obvious effect that lasts less than a minute, such as *control flames* or *gust* earns 2 points. A permanent or long-lasting like *mold earth* earns 3 points.

Once all contests are finished by all the twenty-ish contestants the judges pause to mark scores and total them up. To produce a target score for your PCs to beat simply roll $4d6 - 3$ (as the contestant throws or fails the necromancy challenge). If you want you can roll $1d4 - 1$ per each contest, though this will result in a very similar number (an average of 14 versus 12).

Piety

The contest of piety is essentially a highly-public test on Church doctrine, scripture, and theological thought. Over a hundred contestants sing religious songs together, with priests plucking contestants out as they make errors until a dozen or so remain to be quizzed and trade theological arguments in public.

This is represented as a set of five Intelligence (Religion) tests against the competition. The competition, here, is represented as three d20 rolls in each 'round' of quizzing. The NPC competitors have bonuses of +5. If you are able to, track each NPC competitor separately (by rolling differently-colored dice or rolling the dice in separate boxes, for example). In each round only one point is awarded, to the highest roll result. At the end of five rounds the contestant with the most points has proven their piety most superior.

Sagacity

This is a competition of history and literature. Treat this precisely as the test of piety using Intelligence (History) rather than religious knowledge.

Endurance

Contestants are suspended from pull-up bars and dipped up to the chin in the River Noire's freezing water. As each falls off they are caught by nets and dragged back up into a warehouse above as though they were trade goods, there to be given a warm blanket and a hot bowl of broth.

Treat this as a series of Constitution saving throws against a DC of 15. Characters with resistance to cold check against a DC of 10, and those with immunity make it against a DC of 5 as they only have to fight the current of the river rather than the chill. Contestants make these saving throws every 10 minutes. Each failure imposes a level of exhaustion. When a contestant reaches exhaustion level 5 or fails a saving throw by more than 5 they lose their grip on the bar and are out of the contest.

To represent the competition roll for a single entity. This figure has advantage on the saving throws due to their cold weather training and has a Constitution saving throw modifier of +5. Be sure to track their exhaustion, if they reach it, eliminating their advantage on the saving throw if they reach exhaustion level 3. If this NPC fails to outlast the PC or PCs participating assume that they are the last left hanging.

If you are including Blanc's Bastards in these competitions remember that Nic Moreau is participating here. For the purposes of this competition assume that his duergar resilience extends to this as well and grant him advantage, but note that he is not proficient in Constitution saving throws.

Obstacle Course

This is simply an acrobatics course over difficult terrain. There are two jumps, a climbing wall, a mud pit, and a rope climb. Rogues and monks are likely to have a natural advantage here with their ability to dash and their focus on athletics and acrobatics. Note that rangers cannot ignore this difficult terrain as it is not natural, unless they are urban rangers⁴.

To represent the challenges here have contestants make a series of checks. Assume that there is one round of foot race, then a challenge, then one round to cover distance again, then another challenge, etc., with the 'finish line' at the top of the rope climb in the form of a small brass bell.

For each participant calculate how many ft they can cover – including dashing and other speed increases (magic is, as always, prohibited) by the end of the first round. If a contestant can move over 75 ft. in a round they are able to attempt two contests per round.

For the first challenge all participants make a Strength (Athletics) check to complete a long jump with a DC of 15. If a character fails they must attempt it again next round.

The second challenge is a climbing wall 30 ft. high. Each contestant must make another Strength (Athletics) check, DC 12, advancing 15 ft. each round they succeed. A contestant that has a climb speed or does not reduce their speed for climbing can typically complete the wall in one round.

The third challenge is a mud pit beneath a net of ropes. To progress through the slog a character must make a DC 15 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check, moving 10 ft. on a success. The pit is 30 ft. long. A contestant that does not reduce their speed for difficult terrain or does not reduce their speed for moving prone may move 20 ft., or 30 ft. in one round if they reduce their speed neither for moving prone nor for difficult terrain.

The fourth challenge is another long jump, this time with a DC 20.

The fifth and final challenge is climbing a 50 ft. greased rope with a DC of 15.

A contestant that finishes the competition within 5 rounds takes the prize. If you prefer to have greater interactivity consider having them competing against a ratfolk thief. This thief can move 90 ft. per round, and so can make two skill attempts each round. They have a +3 to Strength (Athletics) checks and +6 to Dexterity (Acrobatics) checks, and they ignore speed penalties for moving prone.

Rochambeau

Also known as rock-paper-scissors this is a single-elimination best-of-three tournament between all participants. It's essentially completely luck based. You can choose to actually play at the table, or may choose to represent it as a single d20 roll with a DC of 18 to win. Consider reducing the DC to 15 if the contestant has a +3 or better in Wisdom (Insight), representing their ability to 'read' their opponent. If more than one PC participates the one that rolls the highest wins, if it's over the DC. Otherwise an NPC wins.

Cards

Sangranit's most popular betting card game is tarobacc, a form of poker suitable for two to a dozen or so players competing for a pot, with betting at the beginning and end of each hand. If you wish to make this an immersive experience, and your players know the game, consider playing Texas Hold'em, Five Card Draw, or Seven Card Stud – any classic poker game will do.

However, to simulate this at the table it is easier to use dice rolls. Contestants with proficiency in card games can apply it here. Contestants should choose whether they'll be playing the odds using Intelligence or playing the table using Charisma or Wisdom. If they choose to use intelligence forego the d20 roll, instead using 11 any time they would roll dice.

The game proceeds across several rounds of play. In each round a player antes 1 point, then receives their hand – roll a flat d10 to represent the strength of their hand. Mark this number down for later. Each participant then bets 0 to 5 points based on their initial hand, seeing the highest bet to stay in the game or folding to drop out and leave behind their ante.

All participants then make a Charisma (Cards) check or use their flat Intelligence (Cards) bonus + 11. Competitors can then make another round of bets, from 0 to 5 points. Anyone that folds now forfeits their initial ante and their first bet. To determine the winner of a hand total the d10 and the later check. The highest result wins and adds the points in the pool to their own.

To produce bets and plays for NPC contestants use one 'prime' competitor that rolls with advantage and has a bonus of +3. Assume that this figure always rolls rather than taking a flat number, and that they bet 1d6 – 1 each round, this being the standing bet unless the PC contestant(s) raise it. This competitor always sees a raise unless the result of their d10 was a 1 or 2, or their d20 result was 5 or lower, in which case they fold and allow the PC to walk away with the pot.

All contestants start with 10 points to bet, and the first to 25 wins the contest.

Risk of Life

This contest is for the truly desperate, and so there are only a few gathered in the square. By taking this chance a contestant truly takes their life in their hands. The challenge is laying down, blindfolded, beneath a chandelier of a dozen sharp swords suspended by threads. The Marquis' executioner cuts all the threads

in a single sweep of their own greatsword, and the blades fall. If the participant below survives they move on to the next round – if there is one.

If a PC truly wants to try this let them know that there is a real chance their character could die right then and there with a poor roll. Even a barbarian rage is not proof against the damage, as they won't know when the swords will fall and so won't be able to 'turn on' their rage when the blades fall.

Participants are struck by 1d10 – 3 blades, which deal 1d8+1 damage each. Keep in mind that if a character is struck several times they will likely have automatic failures on their death saving throws.

For example, a character with 16 hit points that is struck by 5 blades could take 6 damage from the first, 6 from the second, and 7 from the third. They are now at 0 hp. The next two blades each mark one automatic failure on their death saving throws. At this point they are more likely to die than to survive.

Contestants that are reduced to 0 hp will not be stabilized by judges or onlookers, and anyone that interferes is dragged down to the river and tossed in. Onlookers wait 1 full minute, then retrieve either the body or the survivor.

There are six desperate individuals that try this out. They each have 10 hp. You can roll their results yourself, or use the following: the first is struck by 5 blades and dies; the second is struck by 3 and is unconscious; the third is struck by 2 and survives to round two with 1 hp; the fourth is struck by 7 blades and dies; the fifth is struck by none and survives to round two; the sixth is struck by 6 and dies. In round two the individual with 1 hp is struck by no blades and continues; the previously unharmed individual is hit by 3 blades and is knocked unconscious. In the third round the survivor pushes their luck too far and is hit by 5 blades, dying (unless they were the last participant after round 2, in which case, alright!).

4: A ranger subclass that specializes in tracking and fighting in the city.

Including Blanc's Bastards in The Contests

If you want to foreshadow the appearance of Helene Blanc and her band of infernalist miscreants before they appear to rob the PCs you may have them participate in the events. Win or lose, the Bastards still plan to mug whoever the winner is, but they'd rather just win outright – less likely to be arrested.

Helene will participate in the Baccarat games, Nic will attempt the Endurance test, Sable will be in the obstacle course, Roi will be part of the Arcanum contest, and Yvonne will be in the melee. Each will attempt to cheat whenever they think they can get away with it though they'll be wary of the judges and guards (e.g., Yvonne will have a mage cast *Nystul's magic aura* on her *Bloodspear* to hide its magical aura, but won't be able to use her divine smite ability in the melee lest she be disqualified; and Helene will use her ability to grant her allies bardic inspiration and then steal it without an action to grant herself up to 3 uses of it for herself without taking actions; etc.).

If the PCs face off against one or more of the Bastards in the contests try not to draw *too* much attention to them while still making them unique. That is, they should recognize them later, but not be able to pick them out as recurring villains right from the start.

Celebrations and Outfitting

The night after the contests are finished the Marquis presents the real main event: a public drawing of the name of the winner. Each contestant with a drawing in the lottery has their name printed onto a large silver coin (worth 1 golden castle each, and given out to their 'owners' after the ceremony as a kind of consolation prize) and the coins are dropped into a large velvet bag. The Marquis stands at the top of the East Plaza of the Chateau Rouge and draws a name, holding it close to his face in the gloom of the day. The crowd holds their breath until a PC's name is read, and then the celebration begins in earnest. If more than one player had a lottery entry decide it randomly (for example, if Damien had 2 entries, Claudia had 1, and Jay had 1 roll a d4 and assign the victory like so). Consider adding one lottery entry for each PC as the random tax lot entries, especially if you'd like to get a PC involved that didn't participate in the contests or buy a lottery entry for themselves. Whoever it winds up being, make it clear that there are still riches, freedom, and adventure to be had as part of the survey crew no matter who winds up with the noble title.

The night proceeds with many handshakes and shoulder-pats, not least by merchants, traders, and politicians looking to dig their claws into the potential duke well before they have their wits about them. There are also muttered cautions to be careful of pickpockets, thieves, and murderers as the Writ of Settlement is handed over – the writ is a bearer document with no name on it, and anybody could claim the right if they held the writ.

The lucky winner is informed that they'll need to report to the Finance Minister's office the next morning along with their chosen crew of companions. There they'll be given an outfitting budget and prepared to leave the city. The night can be spent in celebration, or in contemplation. If players choose to go out on the town they'll be approached by a number of people offering to hire onto their expedition. Some of these are town drunks looking for quick coin, some are sleazy thieves that are likely to rob the PCs and split at the first opportunity, and some are contestants from the competition that see an opportunity to make their fortune even though their names weren't drawn.

If players choose to hire on one or more of these NPCs treat them as sidekicks⁵ except that they won't level up as the PCs do. If the PCs develop a strong bond with them consider turning them into sidekicks proper, just remember to account for the extra help when balancing challenges in the future. You can use your own NPCs or select from some of the options here:

Rosevelt/Rosie Roux, a young adult halfling carpenter. They hate feeling dirty with mud, grit, or muck. Use the statistics of a **commoner** with 7 hp, a Dexterity of 14, studded leather armor (AC 14), and a short sword (+4 to hit, 1d6 +2 slashing), as well as the halflings' Lucky, Brave, and Halfling Nimbleness features.

Will/Wilhelmina Situ, an adult gnome tanner. They have a compliment for everyone they meet. Use the statistics of an **apprentice wizard**, with the addition of the gnomes' Darkvision and Gnome Cunning features.

Arlo/Annetta Martin, an adult human whitesmith. They constantly polish any metal they can get their hands on. Use the statistics of a **commoner** with 7 hp, an Intelligence of 13 and proficiency with smith's tools, tinker's tools, and thieves' tools.

Benny/Bernadette Garnier, a middle-aged elven engraver. They try to rhyme their sentences, but aren't particularly skilled, poetically speaking. Use the statistics of an **acolyte**, with the addition of the elves' Darkvision, Fey Ancestry, and Trance features.

Elwin/Estelle, an adult human potter. They have long bangs and are always blowing their hair out of their eyes. Use the statistics of a **guard** wearing studded leather armor with no shield (AC 13) and wielding a quarterstaff (+3 to hit, 1d6 + 1 bludgeoning). They can also brew up an old family remedy once per day for 1 gold castle's worth of ingredients. This brew restores 1d4 hit points as a potion and lasts 3 days before going foul.

Nathaniel/Mercedes Rousseau, an old elven launderer. They have a pipe perpetually hanging out of one side of their mouth with a sweet incense smoke smell. Use the statistics of an **apprentice wizard** with addition of the elves' Darkvision, Fey Ancestry, and Trance features.

Fate Rober, a young adult human farmer. They have no sense of personal space. Use the statistics of a **guard**, but with hide armor (AC 15).

Lonnie/Lucinda Mercier, an adult elven baker. They have some kind of complex family drama and often move those complicated emotions onto people they travel with. Use the statistics of a **commoner** with 6 hp, a Dex of 14, leather armor (AC 13), a dagger (+4 to hit, 1d4 + 2 piercing) and the ability to sneak attack (+1d6) once per round, as well as the elves' Darkvision, Fey Ancestry, and Trance features.

5: Sidekick mechanics are presented in *Unearthed Arcana*. Each of the figures above should be easy to translate into a sidekick.

Any of these companions will travel with the PCs for a weekly stipend. All of them are considered skilled hirelings (2 gp per day, or 20 per tenday). PCs can also hire up to 1d6 + 1 unskilled hirelings (2 sp per day, or 2 gp per tenday; use the statistics of a **commoner**).

At the Financial Minister's offices the next morning the group is given a budget with which to equip themselves for the trip, a rough map of the territory and path they'll be taken, and further instructions on what's expected of them.

The budget includes two ornery pack rams (use **goat** statistics, but the carrying capacity of a **mule**) and their packs, as well as 10 days of feed for them (they can forage anywhere but in the mountains); two **potions of healing** per PC; a **scroll of sending** to be used to let the Minister know that the Fort is claimed; and up to 100 gold castles worth of credit to be spent on mundane supplies in the town market. Only vendors at the town's primary market square will take this credit, so it can't be used to purchase, say, small gems – only adventuring supplies, arms, and armor.

The responsibilities of the bearer of the Writ of Settlement are simple: to find the abandoned Fort Courage, to reclaim it, and to make the land suitable for settlement. As soon as they report that the Fort is found and ready for repairs and inhabitation the Marquis will send along a few dozen volunteers to clear the land, fix up the castle, and set to living. In all of these actions the bearers of the writ should be conscious that they are representing Sangranit, and act in such a way as to defend their people and their lands, and do so with professional comport and honor – as much as a gaggle of random individuals can, at least.

With these expectations outlined and a small book of receipts to grant to merchants for the Marquis' credit, the PCs and any companions are turned loose into the market.

The market of Pluville roams at random throughout the streets and alleys, but always under canvas and oilcloth tarps and awnings. The perpetual rain creates both a sense of urgency in moving from stall to stall and a sense of privacy as the sounds of the crowds are muffled. To attract shoppers the vendors paint their stalls bright colors and use noise-makers that cut through the sounds of rain, like clappers and bells. Some traveling merchants scuttle across the streets like hermit crabs, with massive awning-umbrellas on contraptions around their shoulders and trays of wares hung around their hips. The shoppers move with tall umbrellas done in complex patterns and held by servants and butlers – or for the poor, just wide straw hats.

Ambush

As the PCs move through the market collecting the goods they need they may notice that they are being trailed by someone. A crew of thieves, Blanc's Bastards, is preparing to pickpocket or mug the PCs to steal the Writ of Settlement. Make a Dexterity (Stealth) check for Sable Guillaume (he has a +7) against the party's Passive Perception scores. Anyone that Sable cannot best is not considered surprised if combat breaks out, and is aware of the positions of Sable, Nic, and Yvonne in the crowd.

Have whoever is holding the writ make another Wisdom (Perception) check against Sable's Sleight of Hand check (+5) as he attempts to bump-and-grab the Writ. Give him disadvantage if the PCs have stated that they are cleverly hiding the Writ (e.g., it's in their sock or something). If the PC does not see Sable execute the move a nearby vendor shouts out, "Hey, that gent nicked something off you!" and Sable gets 15 ft away in the crowd before being spotted. If Sable is called out before stealing the writ he, Yvonne, and Nic attack the PCs and their group. If he is spotted after stealing the writ then Yvonne, Nic, and their hirelings attempt to screen him as he runs.

The shoppers in the market quickly clear out, leaving behind the two sides. Yvonne, Nic, and Sable are near the party. Helene and Roi occupy opposite sides of the street about 30 ft. away from the conflict. Four **bandits**, hired by the Bastards, crowd in from either side. Coming to assist, though, are three **guards** that face off against the bandits or, if Sable seems to be getting away, pursue him.

If the PCs are badly pressed – either Sable seems to be getting away or most of the party is in danger of being downed – more **guards** arrive three at a time until the tide turns against the bandits. The bandits run if reduced to 3 hp or less, and any of the Bastards leaves if they are reduced to a quarter of their hp (5 or 7 hp, for most of them).

Once the Bastards and bandits have run or been arrested the PCs can seek healing and/or continue their shopping, albeit with a strange quiet around them.

If there has been any fuss amongst the players about who 'owns' the Writ of Settlement, or is in charge, this is a great opportunity to equalize things. The Marquis' Minister hears about the scuffle and declares that each person involved that was not on the city's payroll (so all of the PCs) is now entitled to equal ownership of the Writ, as it would have been stolen if not for their intervention. They will still elect a duke from among their number if and when the territory is sufficient to support a duke, but until that time they are all equal owners of the Writ per official records.

It will take at least two days for the Marquis and the various merchants to put together the necessary orders for delivery to the party, and so there is some time to explore Pluville or rest up. A series of possible encounters in the city is below; use some, none, or all of them as best fits your needs. They are all short, and many of them work best for just one or two PCs, so consider running one for each player alone.

Pluville Encounters

Cuckold!

As the character or characters sit down to a cup of tea at one of Pluville's many cafés they hear a hollering from a short distance away. A red-faced and middle-aged human figure breaches out of the rain and bellies up to the white iron fence around the café's covered patio, shouting from beneath a broad leather hat. This is Brou, a local gem-cutter and jeweler from the nice part of town.

While baffling for a moment it soon becomes clear that the figure is shouting to anyone that can hear that the character has cuckolded them, cheating on the figure with their spouse! Whether this has any truth is left up to the player, but Brou seems confident and unrelenting. They are unwilling to entertain anything but a pure admission of guilt, which – they assure the character – will then be followed by a knife fight in the street.

The PC can talk the figure down to normal speaking tones with a DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) check, and from there attempt to convince Brou that they are not their spouse's lover. If the PC is from a far away place or has a solid alibi for the recent past they automatically succeed. Otherwise they must make an Intelligence (Persuasion) check to present a logical alibi; a Charisma (Persuasion) check to convince Brou that they're not a bad person; and finally a Wisdom (Persuasion) check to convince Brou to go sort things out with their spouse. The DC for these checks is 11, and if the PC succeeds on at least two of the three Brou goes white-faced, realizes their error, and backs off into the rain in a rush. If they are not able to convince Brou of their innocence then it's time for a knife fight in the rain.

Brou is a **commoner** with 6 hp, an AC of 11, and wields a dagger (+3 to hit, 1d4 + 1 piercing).

Drunken Charm

While strolling down a Pluville street in the early evening an otherwise pleasant walk is interrupted by the unmistakable sounds of someone falling into a body of water, coming from around an alley corner. This is curious, as the River Noire is a few minutes' walk away. A PC that turns down the alley sees a small figure up-ended in a large rain barrel, looking like a child or a halfling. Their feet kick gently, but they seem to be at real risk of drowning.

Removing the figure reveals that it is, indeed, a halfling that fell into the rain barrel. The halfling vomits up a truly horrendous amount of rainwater and cheap beer, and drunkenly introduces themselves as Ivren. They offer to tell you a great joke as a thank-you. If the PC accepts they must make a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or be entranced for the duration of the joke as though *enthralled* coming to their senses to find that Ivren has left.

All the character recalls afterward is laughing harder than they have in years at some very risqué humor. If the PC failed their saving throw they lose 1d6 x 10 silver raindrops (up to a maximum of as much as they're carrying, of course), but they have a great mood and a bit of good luck; see the boon below.

If the character succeeded on their saving throw they sit soberly through an awkward joke about a sheep dressed in ladies' clothing mistaken for a noblewoman and her three suitors, etc. etc., which ends with a nobleman married to a sheep and dressed all in wool. They don't lose their silver, but neither do they gain the boon.

Drunkard's Boon. A character with this boon has a d6 that they can add to any attack roll, saving throw, or ability check after they have rolled but before the result is revealed. This boon can be used only once, and is spent.

Rambunctious

A veritable wall of bleating announces the presence of hundreds of curly-horned sheep moments before they burst out of the rain and fog: it's a stampede! The sheep run roughshod over vendors, messengers, town criers, and the character or characters as well. Have anyone caught in the stampede make three Strength (Athletics) checks in sequence against a DC of 11. If they fail one they are knocked **prone**, and make further checks at disadvantage. For each failed check, including the first, they take 1d6 bludgeoning damage.

After the sheep have done their damage and gone off, chased by a crying gray-bearded man with a long shepherd's crook, the second stampede arrives. This one is a gaggle of cheaply but soberly dressed individuals with greasy grins and sodden white wigs. They are barristers (lawyers) approaching anyone that seems bumped or bruised, offering to press damages against the wayward shepherd for pain and injury: ten silver raindrops for every scrape and ding, guaranteed! If the PC took no damage the barristers slink off, visibly disappointed.

In game terms this equates to 1 gp per hit point lost to the sheep, if the PC is willing to go before a minister for the city and tell the story of getting knocked down by a stampede of sheep. Across the court from them is the shepherd, one Roman Berger, brow furrowed as the charges are laid one after another. The total cost to the shepherd ends close to 75 gold castles, more than a farmer might make in four full months (160 days). This will ruin the farm. If a PC is so moved by their plight they can turn over some gold, or perhaps the remainder of the Marquis' credit if it was not all spent, helping the shepherd out immeasurably.

Middling Fortune

In the midst of a crowded market street a lurid purple umbrella weaves back and forth, its holder wearing many rings and silks and smelling of patchouli and incense. A little sash hung from the edges of the umbrella announces to every side that this is Madame Futura's Stall of Seers. As a potential patron approaches her she reaches up and hangs her umbrella, still open, across a few nearby stalls so that she can grip a crystal ball tight with one hand and take some change with the other. A street urchin, perhaps

13 years old, darts out from behind the nearest stall and snatches the umbrella before collapsing it and dashing off into the crowd.

Madame Futura (one presumes) shouts, "Thief!" and runs awkwardly after the urchin, trying at once to keep her silk turban on her head and her tuck her crystal ball into a satchel, to dodge raindrops and run in heels. It's immediately apparent that she will not be able to catch up with the young scoundrel. If the PCs give chase on behalf of the beleaguered seer they'll need to make a set of checks to catch them: first a DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check to spot the urchin among the crowd, then a Dexterity (Acrobatics) or Strength (Athletics) check to chase the kid.

This second check is contested by the urchin's Dexterity (Acrobatics) to bounce from rain-barrel to roof, over and under bridges, and dodging around individuals in the crowd. The urchin has a +3 bonus. The checks are contested and sequential, and the first party to get two consecutive successes wins. If the urchin wins they get away; if the character wins they catch the urchin, umbrella still in hand.

The character can choose whether to turn the kid in to the guards, though Madame Futura advises against it if asked. She offers to perform a palm reading as a reward for the return of her umbrella. This process takes five minutes and is surrounded by transparent flim-flam and theatrics, but there seems to be a kernel of true foresight in her fortune telling. The character gains the following boon.

Portentous Boon. The character can, when called upon to roll a d20 for any check (an attack, saving throw, death save, ability check, or random luck check) instead substitute an 11 as though that were their result. This boon functions once, and then is spent.

Into the Mountains

As the characters prepare to venture out of the city they receive the last loads of rations, rope, and what-not that they ordered from the merchants of Pluville. Bags and boxes are loaded onto the pack rams and the Eastern gate of the city is cleared to see the adventurers off on their path.

The lands surrounding Pluville are gentle hills guiding lakes and rivers down toward the River Noire. There is a little-used path running South-Southeast that runs up over the hills and alongside the River for just over a day's travel (30 miles, or 50 km). It then curves around the Eastern side of Lac de Sang for another day-and-a-half of hiking (25 miles, or 40 km over occasionally difficult terrain). The road terminates in the remains of a little roadside inn marking the entry to the pass through the Sangranit Mountains. Little is left of the inn but a square of stones where the first floor was, and the gigantic posts of pine that once supported the walls of the inn, with a standing brick chimney half fallen-over.

The pass has no name now, but is marked on the characters' weathered map as Recontrer Pass. It traverses some fifty miles of mountainous land but must wind and turn along the bottom of a chasm for the majority of the trip and a hiker will walk over 125 miles on rocky ground and through small rivers and rivulets when it rains. The trip takes a well-outfitted group ten days from the first step to reaching the opposite side of the pass. The rams will consume five days worth of feed each during the trip, foraging for the rest of the time. If the group needs to stop for a day roll a d20; on an 11 or higher the rams can forage for their feed, otherwise they'll need to be fed.

During the travel your players may come across a few, or all, of the following encounters, either in order or at random. You can also run random encounters per the usual rules for travel if you wish to provide more combat for your players.

Perytons On the Prowl

A pair of **perytors** circle overhead, aggressively attacking travelers that come too close to their nest. They are difficult to spot before they attack – a character can see them with a Wisdom (Perception) check against a DC of 16 – and then swoop in to assault the band. They'll retreat if reduced to 5 hp or less, returning to their nest.

In combat the perytons take advantage of surprise and their Flyby and Dive Attack abilities to cycle up and down, slamming into ranged attackers first to eliminate the threat and then attacking the rest.

The nest is a tangle of twigs, scraps of fabric, bones and remains of people and animals. In the center of the nest is a single gigantic oblong egg of pure, matte black. The egg of a peryton will, if given time, hatch a peryton – an evil and unnatural creature. Characters may choose to leave it, to destroy it, or to take it. Also in the nest, hidden, are two gems worth 25 gp each. These can be found with a DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check.

Should they choose to take the egg and incubate it they can hatch it in 30 days with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Nature) check. It hatches into a peryton chick: a hateful little bird-deer that devours almost a pound of raw meat every day until it grows to adulthood. They can also seek to sell it to a collector for 100 to 250 gold pieces.

Chwinga Play

As the characters come around a bend the path stretches away under a stone arch and off to one side preceding this stone gate is a small, still pool fed by snowmelt. Surrounding the pool are a half a dozen ancient pine trunks, all split fifteen or twenty ft from the ground by past rockfalls or avalanches. On the still ground are a series of tiny figures, dancing.

The figures are **chwinga**, fey spirits about the size of a human hand. These are mountain chwinga, and have the appearance of little stones with stubby legs and arms that traipse about with little clicks. A collection of the wee figures are moving in three circles in a simple dance, but there's frequent bumping and stumbling.

A character that watches for a minute or two can see that three circles can never come together smoothly, just like three turning gears. Characters can help them out by forming a fourth circle of dancers, or can eliminate one circle and separate its dancers into the other two circles by gently tapping them and pointing them to the others.

If the characters play along the chwinga will proceed smoothly through their dance and, eventually, resolve it. They then bow to each other and most of them vanish into the nearby stones and logs. The few that remain clamber over the characters, opening rations and examining packs, tugging at clothing and riding their shoulders. After ten minutes, provided the characters play along and indulge them, the last chwinga vanish and leave a boon for the characters.

Boon of the Mountain. When a character with this boon falls more than 10 ft. the spell *feather fall* is cast on them automatically, slowing their descent. After it is used three times this boon is spent.

Icy Shrine

Atop a tiny, rocky hill sits the most forgotten shrine one could hope to see: a quartet of stone columns topped by a crumbly pyramid of white iron. Underneath the little roof is a square of deep, deep shadows that remains even colder than the chilly mountain air. Ice crawls across the interior of the columns.

In the dark shadow under the shrine a small boxy satchel. Players that go up to, or around, the shrine will find that behind it is the body of a traveler, reduced to bones by the wildlife. Those that touch the satchel or the corpse provoke the misplaced anger of the **ghost** of that individual. The ghost does its level best to kill anyone that it can find.

A character can recognize some of the limitations of ghosts with a DC 14 Intelligence (Religion) check. The most pertinent here is that ghosts cannot be banished without something like a *hallow* spell or by resolving their unfinished business. Inside the satchel is a writing desk – battered but serviceable – with a set of pens, dried-up pots of ink, a coin box with 17 copper scales, and a note to someone named Evelyn with an address in Pluville. The letter is a heartfelt apology from an absent father to his daughter. Should the characters deliver it at any point the ghost's business is considered resolved, and Evelyn will happily reward them with her father's old hat, a *hat of wizardry* in the shape of a beaten old leather forester's hat.

Avalanche

As the winter freeze lifts from the mountaintops the snow is on the move. It's rare that a full-blown avalanche occurs in the high peaks of the Sangranit Mountains, but smaller avalanches occur with some frequency in the lower reaches of the mountains. As the characters traipse along the path they hear a low and distant groaning. Characters can make an Intelligence (Nature) check to identify the beginning sounds of an avalanche.

All characters must roll initiative. Twice each round, on counts 10 and 0, the avalanche travels 300 ft. When an avalanche moves any creature in its space moves along with it and falls prone, and the creature must make a DC 15 Strength saving throw, taking 1d10 bludgeoning damage on a failed save, or half as much on a successful one.

The avalanche begins 900 ft away, up the mountain, and moves to a point 900 ft further down the path than it encounters the party. Characters can attempt to avoid the avalanche by finding cover in the time before it reaches them. There is a rock outcropping 100 ft away that characters can get behind to take cover. Even with cover it requires a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw to avoid being caught by the huge rush of snow and ice.

When the avalanche stops the snow settles and buries creatures that were carried along with it. A creature buried this way is blinded and restrained and has total cover. The creature gains one level of exhaustion for every 5 minutes it spends in the snow. It can try to dig itself free as an action, breaking the surface with a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check. A creature that fails this check three times cannot attempt to dig itself out again. A creature can spend one minute to free another creature buried in the

snow if it can find it. Finding a buried creature requires a DC 20 Wisdom (Survival) check that takes one minute and can be attempted any number of times.

Raccoon Raid

At night the biggest threat is not predators but scavengers. An enterprising troupe of four giant raccoons (use the statistics of a **black bear** with Intelligence 3, Dexterity 12, AC 12, and proficiency in Stealth) approach and rummage through the group's packs. They are perfectly willing to grab and pin down the pack rams, and perhaps eat them too, and will take or destroy anything that is not nailed down. The raccoons are aggressive scavengers, but will retreat if reduced to 5 hp or less.

Remember that they approach at night and quietly. They have a +3 in Stealth, which they roll against the Passive Perception of any sentries. Sleeping characters have a -10 to their Passive Perception or to Perception rolls, so it is possible that the raccoons will get all the way to the rams before being spotted. Characters are unlikely to have their armor on, perhaps even if standing watch (it takes ten minutes to put on heavy armor and five to take it off – that's a lot of time in a two hour watch shift).

If the characters follow the retreating raccoons or kill them and search for their den they'll find it quite nearby. Inside are scraps of garbage, as well as two fine matched daggers and 14 silver raindrops.

Cave-(with Snake)-In

A late winter storm sweeps in, presaged by moisture on the wind. Deep between the mountains it's impossible to see the cloud cover rolling in until it's directly overhead, and once it is there's little time to hide. The freezing rain is not unlike that which pours across Pluville at all times of nearly all seasons, but here in the cold mountains it becomes a truly life-threatening event. This is especially true where the characters find themselves, in the deep ravine of what will become a small river in the rainy season.

As the rain comes down characters can feel the water rising around their ankles with startling speed, fed by runnels and rivulets pouring down the mountains. The only place nearby that will keep them dry is a small cave ten ft up a scree-littered slope. Climbing to the top requires a DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check, which someone can assist with from the bottom or from the top. In most cases it will not be difficult enough to roll for, you can simply assume that everyone gets to the top. However, in combat that time matters.

Already occupying the cave is an **amphisbaena**, a two-headed snake. The huge beast is curled in the back of the small cave and takes any intrusion as a threat. Once it has sensed warm prey it will pursue, chasing and fighting the characters. If it is cornered it fights to the death, and if it is not it retreats at 5 hp or less.

There is a collection of animal corpses in the rear of the cave, including that of a trapper. The trappers' effects include furs worth 5 gold pieces and a few amateur scrimshaw pieces worth 25 copper pieces.

Goblin Search Party

Dusk sets quickly in the mountains, and just before bedding down for the night the characters must cross a creek. A rickety and ancient wooden bridge lays over the narrow, deep, and rapid creek – one of the eventual tributaries of the River Noire – and represents the only sensible way forward. Around from a tight section of the path appear a gang of four **goblins**, a **goblin boss**, and one **darkling**. They reach the

opposite side of the bridge just as the characters reach the near side, and pause briefly. The darkling shouts a command, which is then echoed by the goblin boss, and the fight is on.

The opposition is aware that their size presents a disadvantage on a bridge where they can be knocked over the side, but they have the benefit of Nimble Escape. Each goblin takes a disengage action before moving on its turn, moving to the front of the bridge and attacking in twos, then retreating again. In this way they can use the Help action when necessary to hit a target with a high AC, or to attempt a shove action against a weaker target (like a spellcaster). The darkling maintains its distance and throws knives. The goblins fight to the death, driven by the boss, though the darkling and goblin boss will both retreat at 3 hp or less.

The bridge is only large enough to accommodate one Medium creature abreast. Firing over someone's shoulder or through their space provides the target half cover (+2 AC), and firing through two or more allies provides full cover (+5 AC). If a figure is pushed off the bridge they fall 20 ft., either onto rocks or into cold water (roll a d20; 1 through 5 is into the water, 6 and up is onto the rocks). Falling onto rocks deals 2d6 bludgeoning damage, while falling into the water deals only 1d6. However, figures in the river must make a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check to get to the shore. For each round they fail this check they are carried 50 ft. down the river's course and dealt 1d4 bludgeoning damage as they are thrown against the shore and hidden rocks.

The gang of goblins seems to have been coming back from some kind of haul, theft, or something. They carry between them a small but heavy wooden chest. The darkling carries the little brass key, or it can be picked with a successful Dexterity (Thieves' Tools) check DC 20. Inside the chest are 1,198 copper coins and 20 electrum pieces. The chest itself is 10 lbs (4.5 kg), for a total weight of 28 lbs (13 kg) between the chest and the coinage.

Big Lizard

The megafauna of the mountains include gigantic subterranean lizards that hibernate all through the winter, waking woozy and hungry. One such specimen has emerged in the early morning light, drawn by the scent of breakfast and warm-blooded creatures. It approaches crawling down the steep mountainside headfirst, barreling into the characters' camp.

The lizard approaches rapidly and as stealthily as it is able, making a Dexterity (Stealth) check against the group's Passive Perception. Anyone that does not spot the lizard scurrying down the mountainside is surprised as combat begins. The lizard is not smart enough to retreat. It is old and scarred all over, and has sticking out of its back an old curved dagger with a garnet in the pommel worth 10 gold castles.

Rime-Rash

A boot of red leather, dyed by the sun and the rain, pokes out of a narrow crevasse broken into the rock. The boot belongs to a body, which itself once belonged to a half-elf named Klaus Gluck – the name is written in the inside of each boot, as well as on his cloak collar. The half-elf has been dead for some time, but it is difficult to tell how long, as the body is well frozen. Despite the warm weather a glassy sheen of ice covers the skin, and a white spiderweb of frost extends from the corpse onto the rocks around it as though it were radiating cold.

Klaus died of a magical disease called rime-rash. It is communicable by touch. Anybody that handles Klaus' goods or body must make a Constitution saving throw, DC 11, contracting the disease on a failure. An infected creature becomes symptomatic 2d6 hours after contracting the disease as small patches of frost begin to appear on their fingernails and around their joints. When the frost first appears an infected creature reduces their maximum hit points by 1d6. Every 24 hours their hit point maximum is reduced by another 1d6. If their maximum hp is reduced to 0 by this disease they freeze solid and remain so indefinitely, never thawing.

If a creature spends a full 24 hours beside a fire or wrapped in warm blankets, resting, they may make another saving throw against the disease, ending it on a success. The DC for this saving throw increases by 2 for every 24 hours that have passed since the disease was contracted (meaning that it will be at least DC 12). A creature may make this saving throw with advantage if they have someone assisting them in staying warm. This aide is likely exposed to the disease (unless they are wearing a complete plague-doctor outfit) and must make a DC 10 Wisdom (Medicine) check to provide adequate medical assistance.

Klaus' body and goods should be disposed of, preferably by burning. A dedicated looter could salvage 20 gold coins from a foreign land from his purse, and a tiny library of beaten quarto folio pamphlets. There are four of them: *Memories From Beyond the Blue Veil*, *A King's Ransom Part I*, *A King's Ransom Part II*, and *Shame! on the Widow Fullbody!* *King's Ransom* is a well-known play in two parts, often assigned as required reading on what *not* to do in a modern play but a venerable example of its kind. *Widow Fullbody* is a raunchy comedy typically cast with all women and popular in universities. *Memories* is a trudging and fractal conversation between two figures that don't even get named.

The concepts in *Memories* are mathematical and historical, which makes it an absolutely terrible play to sit through, but someone with a background in theory and academics might enjoy reading it, if not seeing it performed. Dedicated study and a successful DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals that it is, in fact, a coded spellbook. The quarto contains spell formulae for *unseen servant*, *summon shadowspawn*, and *dream of the blue veil*⁶.

6: *Dream of the Blue Veil* is a powerful, high-level spell that allows characters to travel between not just planes but realities, such as from Toril (the Forgotten Realms) to Eberron, or from Krynn (Dragonlance) to Oerth (Grayhawk). If your campaign will never reach this level, or you don't want to provide any kind of access to these shenanigans, or it simply doesn't fit in your world consider replacing it with *teleportation circle* or *demiplane*.

Clash

A boom and crash in the distance gives way to a loud and prolonged roar. As the characters crest a hill and look out over a shallow valley they see a **frost giant** locked in battle with a **bulette**. Why they are fighting is a mystery, but the battle is terrible. The bulette strikes from below several times, retreating to dive into the rocky earth. One time it turns too slowly and the giant lays a hand on its hind leg, dragging it back out of the earth like a man with a badger. With his other hand the giant brings around its huge axe and lays into it, crippling it. When the bulette is reduced to lying there on broken limbs and with shattered armor plates the giant buries its axe into its skull. It drags the beast off by its back legs, leaving a huge furrow in the earth. A glint and glitter catch the PCs eyes in the wrecked earth left behind.

The players may choose to do several things here: leave without investigating; go and gingerly nose around the wreckage of the fight; choose to aid the giant or the bulette; or they may even choose to track the giant, attempting to slay it while it is weakened.

If your players leave without investigating, no further information is necessary.

If they choose to trek down into the valley and look around they find that the giant left behind a few pieces of jewelry, thrown off in the fight: a massive golden ring worth 50 gp, a howlite comb worth 100 gp, a dagger sized like a shortsword and worth 25 gp as a curiosity, and a truly massive *tankard of plenty*. The giant will return for its lost jewelry after an hour, and the PCs would be better off gone with their salvaged goods.

Should your players choose to assist the bulette and fight the giant it will defend itself from the bulette and turn its attention to the humanoids. The bulette will attack whoever winds up closest, seeing no difference between the giant and the humanoids other than edibility. This course will likely result in the death of one or more PCs.

Players that choose to assist the giant may be able to communicate to it that they wished to help. This is made much easier if anyone knows giantish, but can be accomplished through charades. Once it understands it will reach into its purse and produce a beaten copper crown worth 25 gp, a brick of silver worth 100 gp, and a **scroll** of *aid*. The giant deposits these items into the hands of its tiny accomplices and drags the bulette away into the hills.

Finally, attempting to assault and slay the giant once the fight is finished may result in the death of one or more PCs, but is possible. The giant has 75 hit points left after its fight with the bulette, and will retreat if it is reduced to 15 hp or less.

Crossing Borders

It's well-known that there are places in Mura where the borders between planes are tattered and frayed, a little threadbare. In the areas around the Foret Froid these borderlands lead to roughly analogous places in the realm of Faerie. In the narrow mountain pass through the Sangranits there are plenty of places that one could cross over to Faerie by accident. The characters stumble upon just such a place: a small stand of pines with black needles surrounding a little curl of creek.

This spot would be perfect for a stop for lunch or tea, or just to rest momentarily. Anyone that spends more than ten minutes in the ring of trees might look away from and back at the stream to see that it now runs in a circle, or that the mountains seem to have fallen away into darkness, or that the dark sky above is rippled with an icy blue aurora borealis. The PCs have, by accident, made their way into the wilds on the other side of the mirror.

This small part of Faerie is impregnated with shadow in every corner. Places like this are sometimes called the Shadowfell by occult scholars, though like Faerie the Shadowfell is not cohesive enough to be called a plane in itself. Travelers here are subject both to the Memory Loss effect of Faerie and the Despair of Shadowfell⁷.

This portion of Faerie is separate from Faerie proper. It is a disc perhaps a half of a mile across, bordered on all sides by a roaring river of dark water that seems to run in a circle, mirroring the small stream in the center of the demi-plane, and which extends out forever. The only features on this small plane are the

copse of pine trees at the center and an elegant but dilapidated mansion halfway between the center of the demi-plane and the edge. Rather than mountains the landscape is a dusty plain with fragile scrub scattered about.

There are only a few inhabitants of this demi-plane: the lady of the manor and her pet hounds. Cliona, the fey lady of this demi-plane, has been banished here by Ailbhe, the Unseelie Queen of the forest. Evidence of the hounds is apparent: characters will hear distant baying and howls, and can spot their huge paw-prints with a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Survival) check. The paw-prints become more apparent closer to the mansion. The mansion can be seen from anywhere on the demi-plane by the pale yellow pinpricks of light shining from the windows – the only light or color other than the glittering blue curtain of the aurora above.

Characters will find that there is now way off the demi-plane but that in the mansion. Approaching the mansion will likely bring the group into conflict with one or more of the hunting pairs of Lady Cliona's hounds. There are five hunting hounds out, roaming the demi-plane. If characters approach without attempting to avoid notice they'll encounter first one **shadow mastiff**, then two, then another pair, each about a minute apart. Should PCs attempt to proceed without notice they'll need to make three group checks⁸ using Dexterity (Stealth) or Wisdom (Survival). On a failure they encounter one or two mastiffs (one for the first check, two for the others). On a success they simply come close to the spectral hounds, perhaps pausing amid the scrub and holding their collective breath while the beasts pass within feet.

Upon reaching the manor characters can choose whether they wish to enter the mansion covertly or ring for entry. The mansion itself is a massive construction of dark gray stone trimmed with silver and black paint. To the rear is a simple maze of black-leaved hedges with small silver thorns throughout. The doors of the mansion are not locked, and in fact don't even have locks on them. The windows are narrow leaded glass, through each of which shine pale candles.

If the players decide to break in use the map and room descriptions attached. Should they ring the bell for entry proceed with the information here.

When the bell is rung for entry a black-and-blue liveried **winter eladrin** elf appears to open the door and blandly ask the visitors if they are expected. This servant, and the other three that occupy the mansion, are all mannequins enchanted via illusion to appear as noble servants (use the statistics of a **constructed commoner**). The thing's responses are bland and clearly scripted – there is no soul, nor intelligence, behind those eyes – and no matter what the characters say they are ushered into the mansion.

Upon the balcony overlooking the foyer is a tall and voluptuous woman dressed entirely in black silk and trimmed with pounds of silver jewelry set with dark blue glittering stones. The Lady Cliona's most distinct feature, however, is that her entire face has been flayed by fey magic, showing only a skull beneath her long black hair. She wears a sheer black veil over it, of course, but the outlines of hollow eyes and white bone are apparent.

Cliona welcomes visitors more warmly than she might in better days, as she's had very few visitors since her banishment – and most of those were eaten by the dogs. Characters that keep their manners in mind can engage in pleasant and polite conversation with the Lady to get what they need: exit from her demi-plane. Several things to keep in mind about Faerie are below, as well as several notes about Lady Cliona.

- Cliona is the queen of the bean sidhe, better known as **banshees**. She herself is also a banshee, with several additional powers.
- The Lady is starved for attention and especially for praise. Anyone that compliments her beauty can immediately make themselves welcome, as can anyone that takes her side against Queen Ailbhe. References to her skeletal visage, or expressions of horror at her appearance, put the characters in danger.
- Cliona demands respect in the manner of most fey. Individuals that are rude, dismissive, or disrespectful will be asked to leave (and thus, may have to break into the mansion to get out of the demi-plane). If they refuse to leave Cliona will set her hounds and servants on the individual (four constructed commoners and two shadow mastiffs). If her servants are dispatched Cliona will enter the fray herself, likely killing one or more PCs.
- Lady Cliona and Queen Ailbhe had a disagreement some time ago (how long? Hard to say) over a contract that was drawn up between the Unseelie fey and the skalds of Hjemlandet. The Queen desired to offer the forest folk protection and service in their conflict with Sangranit in exchange for power enough to enter the Material Plane; Cliona desired to side with Sangranit and extend their reach over the mountains and up the rivers to come into direct conflict with the Church. Cliona embarrassed Ailbhe in public and was struck down and banished.
- Anyone that eats or drinks in Faerie will be trapped there indefinitely. The Lady offers a tray of fruits and cheeses, as well as small glasses of sweet wine. PCs are advised to turn these down politely. A successful Intelligence (Nature) or Intelligence (Arcana) check DC 13 can be taken if a PC is about to eat or drink to remind them of this fact. If one or more characters do eat or drink Lady Cliona will use this leverage against them later (see below). If a creature eats fey food and stays in Faerie too long (a month, or a year, or forever) they will start becoming fey themselves, slowly adopting the nature and statistics of the type of fey most appropriate to their attitude and behavior (a satyr for a lover of drink and music, a pixie for someone mischievous, etc.).
- Giving one's name to another in Faerie has its own danger. Lady Cliona will announce her own name while introducing herself and ask, "and may I have your names?" Anyone that responds right away has 'given away their name' to the Lady. A response like "You may call me...", or "I'll keep my name, which is..." is safer. As with above, a character that is about to step into this trap may make a DC 13 Intelligence (Nature) or Intelligence (Arcana) check to recall that this is a risk of Faerie. Should someone give away their name Lady Cliona will use it against them later (see below). If a name is lost in this way and the PC is unable to 'retrieve' it have them choose a new name for their PC. They won't recognize their old name, and other characters will feel it fade from their minds after mere moments – the name is simply no longer theirs.
- Deals made in Faerie are binding in a very absolute way. An agreement of a small matter made by a slip of the tongue or by accident may not be so bad to break, resulting in something like the effect of *bestow curse* for an hour or a day. A formal agreement is treated as a *geas*, and so breaking it may be deadly at low levels. Anyone that makes such an agreement is aware of this, feeling a pressure around their head if they think of violating their promise. These effects cannot be removed by magic of lower than 9th level, or by forgiveness by the other party (which is anathema to the fey – allowing a deal to end without satisfaction is against their very nature).

Lady Cliona's punishment is not simply isolation, but to be separated from the praise and adoration that her vanity demands, and reminded of her hideousness at all times. To that end she has no real, living

attendants and nothing in her rudimentary mansion other than a gigantic silver mirror. The mirror is an oval of silver rope covered in thin, hammered silver leaves and flower petals, standing on great clawed feet. The glass inside reflects not this world but the real, Material world as though viewed at the bottom of a well. The mirror is the only way out of the demi-plane, and does not work for Cliona. Instead she sees only her own face, even more terrible than it is in reality – and sometimes Queen Ailbhe, gently admonishing her.

Cliona will reveal that she has a way out of the demi-plane for the characters, but expects something in return. She will argue and wheedle to make a deal allowing the group to leave, but they have no real obligation to offer anything and she has no leverage against them. As long as the characters have given her sufficient respect throughout their visit she must treat them as guests and will, grudgingly, allow them exit. If any of the characters has eaten fey food or given up their names, however, Cliona has leverage.

A character that no longer has their name or that has eaten fey food will bounce off the surface of the mirror. Cliona can grant them passage out of the demi-plane, but will extract from them a formal promise. Her priorities are to 1) see Ailbhe brought low: slain, her contract with the Kaldskoggers broken, embarrassed in public, 2) to escape the demi-plane herself, 3) to have her beauty restored, and 4) to have a retinue of mortals or fey sent to her so that she can once again rule, even if it's over a small and pitiful land. She'll attempt to get PCs to agree to bend their efforts toward as many of these as she can, for example by demanding one of the above of each PC. Cliona doesn't think to put restrictions on the time or manner in which these are accomplished – these things are immaterial to her.

Once a way has been negotiated Lady Cliona will guide her guests to the center of the hedge in the rear of her mansion, where the mirror sits in the center of a small fountain. A thin trickle of black water drips from the bottom of the mirror into the fountain below.

Creatures can pass through the mirror easily, as though dipping themselves into water. They emerge at the bottom of a tiny pool of dark water in the Sangranit Mountains. The pool is only 10 ft deep. Anyone wearing heavy armor must make a DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check to swim up to the surface. The pack rams must make the same check, which a PC can Help with if necessary. The water is very nearly freezing, and unless a character gets out of their wet clothes and builds a fire immediately they must make a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or gain a level of exhaustion from the chill.

The pool sits at the back of a small overhang of white iron at the top of a fifteen ft cliffside that deposits characters back onto the rocky path through the mountains. Climbing down the cliff requires a single DC 11 Strength (Athletics) check or a rope secured to a small boulder at the top of the cliffside. If a climber fails by more than 5 they slip and fall, taking 1d6 bludgeoning damage on the way down.

The exit from Lady Cliona's demi-plane may deposit the characters near the end of the pass, or may set them back several days closer to Pluville. If you wish to end the trip more quickly you can put them a mere hour's travel from the end of the path, or you may have them make most of the entire trip *again*, perhaps seeing familiar sites like the bridge on which they fought goblins or the valley where a frost giant and bulette fought.

If your players choose to break into the mansion or to search around it use the keyed locations below:

The Hedge Maze: This simple hedge maze of black-leaved bushes sits behind Cliona's mansion. It is patrolled by two shadow mastiffs that keep intruders out. Have the players make a group Dexterity

(Stealth) check against the mastiffs' Passive Perception score to move silently through the hedges. If they are discovered the mastiffs will attack. If combat goes longer than 3 rounds Lady Cliona will hear and approach, calling off the dogs but demanding to know what intruders are doing in her home. Return to the conversational cues above, but keep in mind that the PCs have started off on a bad foot.

The thorns in the hedge are poisonous. Anyone attempting to move through the hedge or shoved into it must make a Strength saving throw as they push through or be scraped by the thorns and take 1 piercing damage, and then make a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or be **poisoned** for one minute. At the end of the minute they must repeat the saving throw, taking 1d10 damage and falling **unconscious** for 1d10 hours on a failure. This magical sleep is considered a curse, and so cannot be ended by spells like *lesser restoration*, requiring something like *remove curse* instead. The inhabitants of the plane are immune to this poison, but still take 1 point of damage if they are shoved against or have to move through the hedges.

At the center of the maze is a small fountain with an eight-ft-tall silver mirror atop it. See the description and use of the mirror above.

The Foyer: This mansion was clearly designed by someone with a sense of what looks right but no familiarity with humanoid construction. The foyer could be copied from any noble mansion, all in black marble and silver fittings, but it has the wrong things in it. Rather than standing plants, seats, and small tables topped with ornaments the room contains artifacts of the Material Plane like huge jars of dirty river mud, an old Bissell vacuum, a half-finished painting of someone's daughter or niece, a miniature potted olive tree, a small stack of board games that have never been used, and so on. A balcony overlooks the foyer and two gigantic curved staircases reach up to meet it, all with silver railings.

The Cavern of Tears: This room is a barren room of gray clay and earth, with roots coming down through the ceiling. A successful Intelligence (Religion) check DC 15 may help a character recognize the similarity to the afterlife of Hades. The room is empty except for a small wooden stool of humble construction and a little silver-backed hand mirror. The aura in this room is oppressively, unrelentingly depressed. Any creature that remains in this room longer than one minute must make a DC 10 Charisma saving throw or be overtaken by misery. A character so affected has disadvantage on all Charisma and Wisdom ability checks and gains the following flaw: "I cannot recall being happy, and do not believe I will ever be happy again." This effect ends after 24 hours or if dispelled via *remove curse* or *calm emotions*, or a similar effect.

The Revenge Salon: In this room hundreds of paintings have been hung, each of which has been defaced dozens of times, and some of which have been repaired only to be defaced again. Small buckets of paint litter the floor, having been splashed on paintings. Knives and hatches are buried in walls and their effects on the paintings can be seen clearly. Messages of hatred and anger have been scrawled or cut into certain paintings. Each of these paintings seems to be a portrait of someone that wronged the owner of the manor in some way. Anyone that looks into the faces of these portraits for one minute or more can suddenly feel the rage pouring back out of it, and must make a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw or be **frightened** for 1 minute, fleeing from the room howling. This will likely alert Cliona, who will be upset to find figure snooping around her home.

The Chamber of Adoration: This would normally be a boudoir for the lady of the manor and her guests or cohabitants, but there is nobody here but Lady Cliona. It has, thus, been transformed into a temple of self-love. Dozens of tools and implements are displayed or litter the room, the centerpiece of which is a massive bed with silk sheets. Small cabinets line the walls, many of them the right size and structure to

support one or more individuals. Anyone that handles the tools here or sits down on the bed is suddenly struck with a powerful frustrated lust and must make a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw or immediately grab the nearest willing partner to indulge said lust. If no willing partner presents themselves they instead can make do with the various tools littered about the room. This brief rush of lust ends quickly if they are restrained or leave the room, fading after 1d10 minutes with nothing but a bad case of embarrassment.

The Kennels: Lady Cliona's prized hounds have to live and sleep somewhere, and this is where they make their homes. Dozens of large cages line the walls, with space set aside for grooming supplies and a place for breeding and raising puppies. There is a 1 in 6 chance that there are 1d4 – 1 shadow mastiffs in the cages here, which will growl and bark if anyone enters the kennels, alerting Lady Cliona. There is also a 1 in 6 chance of there being a litter of 1d6 shadow mastiff puppies here. These dogs can be raised by a careful hand into loyal and dangerous protectors, though Lady Cliona will not allow anyone to leave with them and will make a point of hunting them down if ever given the chance.

The Hall of Frozen Memories: This room is behind the balcony on the second floor of the mansion, and contains dozens of small pedestals. Atop each pedestal is an icicle shaped like a stalagmite with planed sides. Each one shines with a very faint deep blue glow from inside and tiny shapes can be seen moving inside, beneath the layers of frost. A creature that gazes into an icicle feels themselves suddenly occupying Lady Cliona's body in a trapped memory of hers. These are Cliona's favorite memories to recall, and so almost all feature her hunting or chasing some poor figure – mortals, fiends, fey, anyone was fair game to Cliona and her pack of hounds. In her capacity as queen of the banshees Cliona was often a portent of death, and so chased down reluctant souls to bring them to their rightful end. Anyone that lives through one of these scenes must make a DC 10 Intelligence saving throw or have their intellect buried beneath their instinct. An affected creature makes Intelligence ability checks and saving throws at disadvantage, and gains the following flaw: "I cannot resist chasing when someone runs, and I would like someone to run. I will hurt or goad others if it leads to a good chase."

7: Creatures that spend more than an hour in the Shadowfell must make DC 10 Wisdom saving throws, becoming subject to a Despair from the table below on a failure. Characters in the Shadowfell may have to make this save more than once, though typically not more often than once a day. Any effect that, like *calm emotions*, can regulate an individual's emotional state can counteract this Despair.

Creatures that leave Faerie must make a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw or forget everything from the time they entered Faerie to the time they left it. They may have hazy recollections, or feel as though that time was in a dream.

Remove curse or a similar effect can end both or either the Despair or Memory Loss caused this way.

d20 Result	Despair Effect
1-10	Apathy. The character has disadvantage on death saving throws and on Dexterity checks for initiative, and gains the following flaw: "I don't believe I can make a difference to anyone or anything."
11-17	Dread. The character has disadvantage on all saving throws and gains the following flaw: "I am convinced that this place is going to kill me."

18-20	Madness. The character has disadvantage on ability checks and saving throws that use Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma, and gains the following flaw: “I can’t tell what’s real anymore.”
-------	--

8: Group checks can be made in two different ways. Guidance in the Player’s Handbook recommends having all members of the group in question make an appropriate check, earning success if at least half of the group passes the check, and failure otherwise. However, in the case of Stealth checks and some others I recommend the following alternative:

Have the member of the group with the worst modifier for the roll make the check, but provide them advantage under the assumption that the more skilled individuals in the group are Helping. Should the group be moving with NPCs exclude them from the check (it’s no fun if the GM rolls rather than the PCs) unless you wish to have one of them take the blame.

After the Pass

On the other side of the pass through the Sangranit mountains the landscape ripples away, like crumpled cloth. Ridges of hills pile up at the base of the mountains, but the distinction is clear. Tucked between the hills are small ponds and tall grasses, and everywhere rich, dark red earth. The PCs can see the landscape stretched out before them, including two lakes, one directly East and one directly South; between the lakes are a small mountain – or taller-than-average hill, depending on your perspective – to the East, with signs of an abandoned town on the hill’s face; and a gigantic, dark forest to the Southeast.

The forest is the Foret Froid, called the Kaldskog by the natives – thus their common description as Kaldskoggers, though they call their land Hjemlandet. The Foret Froid is famed for its unnatural cold, for its ties to Faerie, and for its numerous dangerous beast inhabitants. A perpetual fog rolls out from under the treeline, with the chill of the forest pouring into the hills and plains surrounding it.

Beyond the woods to the South is Hjemlandet proper: a hilly expanse of cold land dotted with stone circles and longhouses. Hjemlandet reaches all the way to the edges of the peninsula, and Hjemlanders ply the icy steel-gray sea beyond.

The old and beaten map – perhaps even further roughed up by the characters’ adventures through the pass – shows that the recorded location of Fort Courage is directly to the South of the largest hill in the plains, and just at the edge of the forest. The woods must have expanded since then, however, as the Fort cannot be seen in the young growth at the edge of the forest. A road over and through the hills leads toward the trading post, marked Ville Eglise, out at the very Northernmost point of the woods. The Vielle Eglise is the best place to rest and resupply before searching for the Fort. Its’ about 65 miles away, or two-and-a-half days walk.

The PCs may suffer random encounters on the plains, rolling once during each day and once each night. However, the plains are typically quite quiet and random encounters can be ignored for expediency without sacrificing the pacing of the story.

d20	Day	Night
1-5	No encounter	No encounter
6-10	No encounter	5 giant rats that attempt get into the supplies, one of which is trainable and averse to violence
11-15	Tinker caravan (2 commoners with a 50% chance of having any given mundane item in their inventory, selling at 200% of book value)	1 dire wolf and 4 wolves
16-18	Goblin raiding band (1 goblin boss and 5 goblins)	
19-20	Bandit patrol (1 bandit captain and 2 bandits)	Hunting owlbear

Vielle Eglise

The Vielle Eglise was once a border town of Sangranit, now decrepit ruins at the edge of the encroaching forest. The town was established perhaps five-hundred years ago, abandoned a hundred years after, and re-occupied sporadically since. The only recognizable structure is an ancient church known as the Old Church, or Vielle Eglise. The Church and adjoining buildings have been turned into a trading post by the same name.

The trading post is populated by only ten individuals informally led by the elf Camille, the quartermaster and farmer that first started squatting in the Church some twenty years back. Other inhabitants include:

Claude, an old halfling farmer much given to superstitious behavior.

Wayman Locke, an old dwarven guard (retired) with a hoarse voice.

Lafayette Saltz, an adult human trapper-furrier that keeps a tank of leeches for his many ailments.

Mabel Saltz, Lafayette's daughter. She's ten and likes dolls and climbing trees.

Gabriel, a middle-aged human fruitier that has a vendetta against the goblin tribes of the Foret Froid.

Forrest, a middle-aged gnomish scribe that's a little deaf and shouts all the time.

Morgan Bigger, a young adult human hunter who may be slow of wit and is certainly slow of speech.

Cora Archer, an elderly human angler that is constantly prodding people to speak clearly, stand up straight, stop snapping and tapping and fiddling with their thumbs.

Hildegard Bristol, an old human tanner and taxidermist, who's always sweating under piles of furs and sits always by a roaring fire.

The folk of the Vielle Eglise ply their trades in service to themselves or of the various isolated furriers, trappers, hunters, and oddballs that live in the forest, or beyond it. They spend summers either trekking back and forth to Pluville or serving traders that do the same, and spend the winters huddled indoors with

fires burning. The town has enough traders through to keep some supplies in reserve, but only just and only the necessities: medicines, tea and tobacco, alcohol, spare rope, thread, and cloth, that kind of thing.

When the characters arrive at the Vielle Eglise they find the place shuttered, doors closed, and nobody out and about. Camille responds to individuals knocking on the door with some suspicion, asking them to identify themselves and to set aside their weapons before she lets them in. If they comply she brings them inside, tells them to put their pack rams into the rickety stable out back, and pulls the kettle off the fire to brew tea.

The interior of the Church is made up like a humble inn common room, with a loft visible above where Camille makes her home. Hildegard sits next to the fire in a rocker with blankets over her knees braiding thread into string, string into rope. Wayman occupies one of the two tables, a tiny model house, set of paints, and mug of beer before him.

“If you came here to resupply before adventuring out – y’all look like adventurers, or brigands – you’re out of luck. The Marquis’ so-called tax collectors came through two days back and took damn near everything we had.”

Camille explains that for the last three weeks a group of armed individuals wearing the Marquis’ colors and bearing his badge have been visiting and demanding a weekly tax. The first week they took nearly all the coin the Vielle could put up. The next week they came for the rest of the coin and all the jewelry they could find. This last week they came with carts and loaded up all the trade goods that hadn’t been hidden away. Camille refers to them as tax collectors, but Wayman grunts, “Thieves,” whenever she does so.

If the characters wish to resupply before striking out for Fort Courage – advisable, as they’re likely running low on rations, potable water, and other necessities – they’ll need to recover those goods from the ‘tax collectors.’ Any PC that’s spent time in Pluville can make a DC 11 Intelligence (History) check to recognize that the Marquis does not, and has not for hundreds of years, claimed or taxed these lands. In fact, the Writ of Settlement the PCs hold gives them sole discretion to levy taxes in this area! The tax collectors are more likely a group of bandits that have mocked up or stolen some of the Marquis’ guards’ livery.

The farmers and trappers at the Vielle Eglise don’t know precisely where the tax collectors are, but do know that they always come from and return to the Northwest via the same road the PCs took in. They are likely to be making their homes near the abandoned town up on the hillside – not likely in the abandoned town, as it’s rumored to be extremely haunted. Traveling back to that destination will take a little less than a day, so if the PCs start early in the day they can return just at nightfall – hopefully with the stolen goods in tow. Camille lets the group know that though all of their coin and goods have been stolen they can pay by helping the PCs survive in the woods. She hopes that’s enough to inspire them to do the right thing.

Finding the Bandits

Searching for the bandits is a simple matter, as there’s really only one place they could be that the PCs wouldn’t have encountered them on the road already. The road forks seven or eight miles back from Vielle Eglise, and then forks again five miles up that path. A successful DC 10 Wisdom (Survival) check will reveal that the right fork – to the East – is the more trafficked by far. If the PCs get a 15 or higher on the check

they can see that there's a lot of foot traffic to the East, and just two sets of cart-wheel-tracks to the left fork, toward the abandoned town.

The right fork winds back and forth up the hillside and is hemmed in closely on both sides by low brush and scrub. The vegetation becomes denser as the PCs continue through the last two miles of road, until there's more tree than not. The bandit camp is a set of three makeshift wooden cabins, clearly not suitable for wintering in the cold of the deep South. The smell and sounds of hunting dogs is apparent, as is the scent of unwashed bandit. The locations below are keyed to the map to be described as PCs encounter them in scouting or combat.

When PCs get within 100 ft they are automatically perceived by the dogs unless they are attempting to approach quietly. If they are making their approach quietly have them make a group Dexterity (Stealth) check against the Passive Perception of the bandits and dogs. The bandits and dogs have a -2 to their Passive Perception for each 20 ft of distance between them and the PCs, so they may not notice the group until they are quite close.

If and when a dog or bandit sees or smells a character they set up a cry, and all of the bandits and dogs join combat as soon as they are able. Bandits farther than 30 ft away will take their movement each turn and then use the Dodge action and find cover as they close to limit taking arrows (half cover grants a +2 to AC, while the Dodge action imposes disadvantage on attacks against them).

Road: The road is ten ft wide and level, of packed earth. It terminates into a barricade of halved logs five ft high, behind which bandits will take cover if able. The hillside rises sharply to the left (West) and falls gently to the right (East). Thick brush makes nearly everything off the road difficult terrain. The brush and trees also provide half cover to any creature more than twenty ft away and not on the road, and anything beyond 40 ft is considered lightly obscured.

Small House: To the left of the road and twenty-five ft away is a 15 x 15 ft shack with a door in the center of the South wall and the center of the East wall. An outhouse built half into the hillside sits twenty ft back from this shack. In this cabin are three sleeping pads or cots.

Inside or nearby this house are a **thug** (Fredrick), the lieutenant of the bandit crew, and three **mastiffs** (Bigfoot, Spike, and Evil). The thug closes as quickly as possible along with the mastiffs to take advantage of his Pack Tactics ability and multiple melee attacks.

Behind the small house, on the North side, is a cellar door that leads down 10 ft. of rickety wooden stairs to a collapsed cellar dug out of clay. The cellar door is locked with a padlock, which can be opened with a DC 20 Dexterity (Thieves' Tools) check, or broken. The padlock has an AC of 12, 20 hp, and resistance to piercing and slashing damage, immunity to psychic and poison damage, and resistance to cold damage.

Inside the cellar are the valuables collected by the bandits: a large lock-box (also padlocked, in the same way as the cellar door) filled with 1,755 copper coins, 701 silver coins, and 90 gold pieces. The lockbox weighs 10 lbs and the coins inside weigh 51 lbs in total. The lockbox also contains a small wooden **Quall's feather token (whip)**. Wrapped in muddy burlap are three beautiful silver urns worth 25 gp each, and weighing 5 lbs each, and a **decanter of endless water**. Tucked inside one of the urns is a thick glass flask filled with a **potion of diminution**, a clear fluid with a tiny bead of red liquid that expands and contracts continuously. Finally, taped down to a thin panel of wood is a **spell scroll of hallow**.

Medium House: Twenty ft behind the barricade is a log cabin 15 x 15 ft with a 5 x 10 ft attachment and an outhouse some 15 ft downhill to the East. On the West side of the house is a stack of firewood enough to keep these homes warm for a week, covered with a tarp and staked to the ground. There are three cots or sleeping pads inside.

Two **bandits** (Carmelia and Lester) are inside or nearby. They take cover and fire upon the characters, only moving in to provide support to their lieutenant if he seems to be having trouble. They prioritize frontline fighters to allow their lieutenant to focus on spellcasters and archers.

Big House: The largest structure in the camp, this house is approximately 15 x 25 ft and has a set of stairs on the North side exterior that lead up to a flat roof. The roof is ringed with a low slatted fence behind which a crouching or kneeling creature can take three-quarters cover. Three **bandits** (Verona, Mavis, and Emile) are in or near this house, and they rush to the roof to take cover and make ranged attacks on the PCs.

Inside the big house are a few small pallets of dry goods, including 60 rations, a 50-gallon barrel of drinking water, and enough wool to make a dozen blankets or sets of clothing. There's a lot of empty space nearby, implying that there may have been a lot more supplies here recently. There are also six cots or sleeping pads.

The bandits have, among them all, 15 silver pieces, a filthy gold chain necklace worth 10 gp, and a single syringe of **fighting chance**⁹.

Should the players leave any of the bandits alive they'll make threats and boasts, warning the PCs that they'd better be gone by the time their boss gets back. They will also let the characters know that it's too late to recover the goods from the Vielle Eglise – their boss is just coming back from having sold the whole lot. Should the PCs leave any of the mastiffs alive they can be retrained to stay loyal to the characters, though it's a long process. If one the PCs feed and care for the dogs they may make a DC 11 Charisma (Animal Handling) check at the end of each week. After three consecutive successes the dogs will accept the PCs as their new family. A natural 20 counts as three successes automatically.

The warnings of the bandits are not hollow: after just over an hour the rest of the bandits return. If the PCs have set an ambush they may be able to use the same cover that the bandits used on them. Approaching bandits will be cautious, having recognized the lack of barking dogs and the scent of blood, and so they will make a group Dexterity (Stealth) check against the PCs' Passive Perception to get close. If they are able to get within 30 ft they move up through the brush to the West (uphill), trying to circle around and catch the PCs by surprise.

If the PCs choose to leave with what information they have they'll encounter the returning bandits a quarter mile down the road. In this case each side becomes aware of the other at about a hundred ft away. Have all parties involved make a Wisdom (Perception) check DC 15 as combat begins, with anyone failing being **surprised** at the start of combat.

The returning group of bandits include the bandits' leader (named Henderson; use the statistics of a **pirate first mate**), four **bandits** (Margaret, Edmund, June, and Charley), and three more **mastiffs** (Champion, Montagne, and Pog). The leader and mastiffs close as soon as they can to rush any melee fighters. The leader will use its ability to disarm a target to take shields off of likely targets, giving the dogs and archers a better chance, after which he'll focus his attacks on the spellcasters and archers. The bandits will hang

back and focus their fire on one target at a time, starting with anyone that looks both easy to hit and likely to put out a lot of damage (e.g., barbarians, monks, and rogues).

If any bandits are left alive they'll reveal that they sold their stolen goods to a group of crazy adventuring types holed up in the abandoned village around the hillside. They're led by a tiefling with skin like milk. If the PCs press for additional details they may recognize Blanc's Bastards from back in Pluville (if any of the Bastards other than Helene died in their prior scuffle she's replaced them with an equally unsavory ally; remember that even if one or more of them were downed in Pluville that doesn't mean they died, merely that they were knocked out). The buyers are probably on their way back to the abandoned town presently, and the PCs can likely catch up to them on the road before they have the chance to make it back and hide their goods away.

The bandits' leader has five small gems in a pouch (worth 10 gp each): the payment for the stolen goods. The leader's longsword is a wonderful example of a hand-and-a-half sword, worth 50 gp for the quality and decoration of the pommel, quillions, and lowest few inches of the blade – all decorated in a motif of hawks.

9: **Fighting chance** is a potion mixture typically contained in a large glass syringe with a silver needle and plunger. The syringe is double-barreled, one side containing a **potion of revivify**, the other a **greater potion of healing**. The healing effect only works, of course, if the creature is alive, so the syringe as a whole is only helpful if the target has died in the last minute.

Beating the Bastards

If the PCs follow immediately they can reach the Bastards an eighth of a mile from the abandoned village on the Southwest face of the hill. They are traveling with two of the **bandits**, now followers of theirs (Dollie and Lillian). The Bastards will see or hear the PCs coming automatically about a hundred ft out, unless the PCs attempt to approach stealthily. If the PCs approach quietly they will likely not catch the Bastards before they reach the abandoned village (as they'll have to move at half speed), but they can attack just as the Bastards reach town. If the PCs attempt to move quietly have them make a group Dexterity (Stealth) check against the Passive Perceptions of the Bastards. If the Bastards see them first they call out and attempt to parlay.

The Bastards, headed by Helene, try diplomacy before assault. She'll feign ignorance of their previous, murderous meeting. The PCs can make their Wisdom (Insight) check against a DC of 17 with advantage – they are likely to remember the attempted theft quite clearly. Even if the PCs all fail they are sure that this is the group that jumped them in Pluville, but may be convinced that there was nothing personal about it and it was a coincidence that they're meeting again here. If called out on her prevarication Helene admits it with a smile, shrugging and saying, "Ah, it was a long shot. No hard feelings, I hope?"

Helene and her accomplices have recently purchased the supplies they'll need to make camp here in this abandoned village, and intend to spend most of the summer here. She claims that they are out on an adventure for their own purposes, and have nothing to do with the PCs. If the PCs demand the stolen supplies back Helene points out, quite reasonably, that they purchased them fair and square, and had no way to know that they were stolen. She even produces a receipt that shows the purchase, for 50 gold castles, of these supplies, complete with the bandit leader's barely-legible signature at the bottom. If the

PCs offer to buy it back she declines no matter the price, noting that gold is no use if they have nothing to eat or drink, nor bedding on which to sleep. The PCs may be stymied here, and Helene invites them to come back any time to continue the conversation or trade survival trips out here in the hills.

The confrontation is likely to come to blows, either for past wrongs or because sometimes it's the only way to beat an evil bureaucrat. Helene starts combat with *mirror image* and providing inspiration to Sable to help land a sneak attack. She then moves back, hoping her mirror images take any opportunity attacks, and spends the next rounds using *dissonant whispers* and *shatter* to control the battlefield. Yvonne uses her Conquering Presence to try to scatter the group, relying on her high AC to keep her alive until the next turn, when she uses Guided Strike and a Profane Smite to take out her most heavily-armored opponent. Nic and Sable move to take out any weak-looking targets, using Flurry and Sneak Attack to reduce their hp as quickly as possible. Nic takes hits without concern, using Touch of Death wherever possible to stack up temporary hit points as his primary defense. Roi already has *flock of familiars* cast, and his several imp familiars are invisible at the start of combat. He keeps them close to defend him, and they take opportunity attacks if anyone moves close to him, coming out of invisibility one at a time. He maintains concentration on *flock of familiars* and uses *eldritch blast* to disrupt other casters if he can. If he loses concentration on the spell he instead casts *bane* to reduce the efficacy of his enemies. Dollie and Lillian, the **bandits**, keep their distance and fire on easy targets.

Helene and all the Bastards are self-interested at their core, and so will lay down their arms and surrender at a fifth of their hit points or so: 4 or 5 hp for most of the group. If they see opportunities to turn the tides for their allies they'll immediately recant their surrender. If the entire group surrenders or is knocked unconscious the survivors will go along with whatever precautions the PCs choose – manacles, spells, ropes, whatever. They are one and all awful folk and all but one are dedicated to Asmodeus willingly and entirely. During their captivity they'll play the part of the dutiful prisoner, but ensure that they are a constant irritation to their captors, demanding humane treatment, food, drink, and bedding. The more cunning members of the group will even attempt to ingratiate themselves with the PCs, with the aim of becoming a trusted part of their crew and, eventually – maybe even weeks or months later – betraying them.

If the PCs do execute them they'll go silently, mostly (Roi is a coward at heart). Helene simply looks at her executioner and states flatly, "my grandfather won't like this." The group is bedecked by Asmodean symbols, it doesn't even take an Intelligence (Religion) check to recognize to whom she is referring. Note that Helene wears a **ring of mind shielding**, and so her spirit and mind will be kept safe even if she is killed. The ring becomes visible on her death, and someone that puts on the ring will be able to communicate with her post-mortem. She asks them to take a finger from each of her companions so that they can be *resurrected* at a later date – after all, it costs the PCs nothing and provides them some leverage over her. Helene is well-informed and has exceptional cunning. She will provide help to her mind partner as long as it takes to build up credibility and goodwill, and then will attempt to leverage that to get herself and her companions restored to life or turned over to the Church of Asmodeus. She may even try to convert the character to devil worship, perhaps framing an infernal deal as the only way out of an impossible situation.

If the PCs wait until the Bastards have returned to the abandoned village they will find the fight much the same. If they wait until after dark to attack they will have an easier time of it, though the Bastards will use their familiarity with the terrain and their darkvision to their advantage.

The prizes for the fight are substantial: Helene carries a purse with ten gems worth ten gold pieces each, and another ten hidden in the linings of her boots. The group have 45 silver raindrops spread across their purses, as well. Roi's golden collar with a ruby setting is, in fact, just gilded with a piece of red cut glass. The whole piece is worth 10 gp, but also marks the wearer as a devotee of Asmodeus. The group has a variety of weapons and armor as well, of course. Helene has a **ring of mind shielding**, as noted above, and Yvonne has a **bloodspear**.

The bloodspear is an evil sentient item with an Intelligence of 9, a Wisdom of 12, and a Charisma of 13. It has blindsight and hearing out to a range of 15 ft and can communicate with its wielder telepathically in Common or Infernal. It acts as a +1 spear unless it is attuned. Only an evil-aligned paladin or cleric can attune to the bloodspear, and must make a binding agreement with a fiend or devote themselves to a fiendish cult. The bloodspear itself must also accept a hopeful partner. It is a bloodthirsty, violent intellect: that of a bound fiend that was hammered into the metal of the spear's blade. For an attuned individual the bloodspear functions as a +2 spear which grants 2d6 temporary hit points to its wielder when it is used to reduce an intelligent creature (Int 4 or greater) to 0 hp.

The supplies on the way back to the abandoned village are loaded onto two two-wheeled carts pulled by four shaggy mountain pack rams. The rams will put up a bit of a fuss if asked to immediately turn back around and return to the Vielle Eglise, but will do so after sufficient prodding. The supplies include hundreds of gold pieces worth of furs and pelts, rations, kegs of beer and casks of fortified wine, bales of cotton, tobacco, and wool, spare pots and pans, tindertwigs, leather tanning chemicals and supplies, and all the other knick-knacks of a trading post.

When the PCs return to the Vielle Eglise with the supplies in tow – assuming they do – Camille's shoulders visible relax. She and the rest of the traders express sincere gratitude and set about unloading the supplies back into their various cellars and store-rooms. Morgan brings out a freshly-slaughtered sheep and Cora presents a dozen fish smoked that day. Camille opens up one of the kegs of beer and the entirety of the small trading post crowds into the common room to have a simple feast, made fine by the relief and gratitude of the people there. Camille and the others talk together briefly and let the PCs know that whatever the trading post can spare they'll give free of charge. PCs should not need to worry too much about rations, water, rope, and the like while they are at the trading post (within reason).

At this point, if you are using milestone character advancement, the PCs should advance to level 3. If you are using experience point advancement they may have gained that level a short time ago; this is an appropriate time to grant them the benefits of leveling up that require resting or training (such as new spells for wizards, new proficiencies, and the like).

Finding Fort Courage

The Foret Froid has several unique characteristics, listed below:

- **Fey Chill.** The entire forest is supernaturally cold, no matter the season. During the day it is 40 degrees at most (4 degrees Celsius), and at night it ranges from 20 degrees to 30 (-6 Celsius to -1). These are summer temperatures, and the weather gets much colder in winter. The flora and fauna here both seem unnaturally resilient, such that there are insects and reptiles active when they would normally be hibernating or absent entirely. Creatures that spend more than an hour

in the forest without cold winter clothing must be making DC 10 Constitution saving throws each hour, gaining a level of exhaustion for each failure. Creatures with immunity or resistance to cold damage ignore this effect.

- Faerie Fire. There is an illumination at all hours despite the density of the foliage. The fog itself radiates dim light during the day, such that there is rarely true darkness. At night the blue of the aurora in the sky above seems to slip between the pine needles, lighting everything in a dim blue light.
- Dense Foliage. The fog, scrub and trees severely limit visibility. Creatures more than 30 ft away are considered to have half cover, beyond 60 ft have three-quarters cover, and beyond 90 ft have total cover.
- Fey Fog. A chilly fog hangs beneath the pine branches at all times. Creatures and objects more than 50 ft away are lightly obscured, and more than 100 ft away are heavily obscured.

The map the characters have marks the location of Fort Courage, and so they have a general idea of where the Fort was some four-hundred years ago. That narrows down their search from 'anywhere' to 'the Northwestern-most fifty miles of the woods.' Searching for the Fort will require several DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) or Intelligence (Navigators' Tools) checks. Each time the PCs choose to make the check have the group choose one individual to make the check. Members of the group that are proficient in the selected check can Help the character making the check.

On either a success or failure the PCs will have an encounter from the list below. Running these encounters in order is recommended. After three total successes or five checks total the characters locate Fort Courage. Each check requires a trek into the forest taking $2d6 + 4$ hours. Between setting up for the trek, stopping for rests and meals, and returning to the Vielle Eglise a party can spend up to 8 hours per day searching. If the characters choose to spend the night in the woods and make camp roll on the random encounters table below four times during the night.

Successful Encounters

Waystone Circle

A small glade sixty ft across opens up in the woods, and in the center stands a ring of five white iron pillars. These standing stones are eight or nine ft tall each, and two ft on each side, roughly squared off. The weather just over the glade suddenly turns from a clear day to a storm, and a lightning bolt skitters through the sky, coming to ground in the center of the stone circle. It blows away moss and soil from the center of the circle, revealing a plane of white iron stone buried beneath. There is a symbol and a rough map carved into the stone, with an arrow pointing to a spot some 150 ft away.

If the PCs follow the symbol they find a tiny cache buried in the roots of a tree with a stone plate laid atop it. In the cache are a water-damaged text of a forest god named Porvyt, some bone, stone, horn, and leather jewelry sized for a small character (worth 5 gp to a collector, perhaps), and a large clay jar sealed with wax. Inside the jar are ten huge berries preserved in sweet liqueur. These berries are identical to those produced by the spell *goodberry*, but will last indefinitely as long as they remain in the sealed jar.

Chwinga Waterfall

A beautiful, tiny waterfall is struck by midday sun and throws small rainbows across the forest. Surrounding the little waterfall are a gaggle of **chwingas** playing out the vignette of a band of hunters.

They wield little twigs as spears and leaves as shields, and are engaged in stalking a palm-sized beetle across the moss. If a character comes within fifty ft the chwingas notice them and, after an initial startle, wave them over.

Once the PCs are nearby they will begin to stab at them with their twigs and gesture for the PCs to run. They act out the hunt of a PC in a way reminiscent of humans hunting a mammoth or some other unthinkably giant prey. If the character plays along they are herded gently to a small pool up the stream, where the chwingas fearsomely leap upon their ankles and stab vigorously, eventually bringing them down. If the PC continues to play along and 'dies' by laying down (sticking out their tongue, closing their eyes, etc.) the chwingas celebrate in a little circle. The chwingas then fade into the rocks, creek, and logs around the pool. From a hole in the rocks near the pool emerges a large bright blue frog with wings, which accompanies the PCs as a familiar. Use the statistics of a **frog** with a flying speed of 40 ft, the fey type, and the ability to cast *frost fingers* once per day with a DC of 11.

Satyr Revel

A troupe of five **satyrs** and one **satyr reveler** pipe and party, audible from only sixty or seventy ft away in the dense forest. Almost as soon as they can be heard the PCs come across the revel. The satyrs sit around a circle of logs like benches, with each taking turns to hop up and dance about the circle, and the rest clapping or piping. If the PCs make themselves seen the satyrs wave them over to participate in their merry-making. The reveler will use its Enthralling Performance to encourage the PCs to sit and spend time with them, though it has no other agenda at this time.

They chat amiably, sharing skins and pots of wine and offering the characters pipes as well. They'll dance with anyone that wishes to. If, during the course of the conversation, it comes up that the PCs are searching for Fort Courage the mood changes slightly. PCs may notice this discomfort with a DC 20 Wisdom (Insight) check unless they have been charmed by the Enthralling Performance. The wine begins to flow more freely after this, with the satyrs breaking out the good stuff and trying to get the characters drunk. Anyone that is under the satyrs' Enthralling Performance will partake without question. Anyone that drinks, willingly or by charm, must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be **poisoned** for an hour.

Once the PCs are poisoned the satyrs launch an attack against them. PCs may make another Wisdom (Insight) check, this time at a DC of 15 but likely at disadvantage from the wine. Characters that fail the Insight check are **surprised** when combat begins.

After the dust has settled it becomes apparent that there is a gigantic structure nearby. What first appeared to be a ravine and a hill are revealed to be a shallow moat, filled with brush and sludge, and a wall overgrown with ivy and moss. The PCs have found Fort Courage!

Failure Encounters

Goblin Gang

A raiding party of goblins crashes through the underbrush and right into the PCs, and combat begins almost before anyone can gather their bearings! One **goblin boss** riding atop a **worg** and five **goblins**

follow along. Have all participants – PCs and goblins both – make a Wisdom (Perception) check as combat starts. Any creature that fails is **surprised** when combat begins.

The goblin boss wears a colorful leather thong around its neck, strung with 10 electrum coins that have had holes punched in them (but are still good as currency, mostly).

Serpent Shrine

Bowed underneath several tree branches and almost tipped over on its side by roots is a little wooden gazebo structure in the woods. The floor is flat stones, bucked and cracked by age and tree roots. In its center is a waist-high wooden platform topped by a brightly-painted but much weathered wooden statue of a serpent, coiled up and staring fiercely ahead. If an evil-aligned creature prays at this shrine it can gain a small blessing (see the boon below). A non-evil creature can gain the same benefit if they make an offering worth 10 gp or more. This can be gold, food and drink, incense, or mundane goods, so long as they are offered to the serpent and left there to rot amid the moss. A creature that defiles the shrine may regret it immediately: a poisonous cloud encircles the shrine. The fog has a 50-ft radius and obscures as the spell *fog cloud*. Creatures that enter the cloud or are in it at the end of their turn must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw, taking 2d10 poison damage and becoming **poisoned** for one hour on a failure, or taking half as much damage on a success.

Boons of the Serpent. The creature may choose from the following effects, or gains one randomly: a bite attack, with which it is proficient, that deals 1 piercing damage and 1d6 poison damage; a **snake** familiar; or immunity to the **poisoned** condition and poison damage. Any of these boons lasts until the next new moon, fading at dawn the day after.

Snake Hole

Sometimes, when traipsing through the woods, one will stumble across a truly horrifying number of snakes. In a deep hollow covered over by moss and leaves and pine needles and hidden by the surrounding scrub a gigantic nest of snakes has gathered for hibernation and breeding. Have the PCs make DC 12 Wisdom (Survival) checks to spot the pit before they stumble into it. Anyone that fails must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or fall into the pit, taking 1d6 bludgeoning damage.

The pit is 10 ft deep, 10 ft wide, and 20 ft long. Inside the pit are three **swarms of poisonous snakes**. The snakes will attack anyone in the pit first, and emerge from the pit to pursue the perceived threat if no creatures fall into the hole (or once the creatures in the hole are dead). It takes the snakes 30 ft of movement to get out of the pit. They won't pursue prey farther than 50 ft from the hole – they are territorial, but not aggressive predators. The forest is difficult terrain, which the snakes ignore, making it a more even race than it might otherwise be.

In the bottom of the pit are eggshells, cleaned bones, a very nice dagger, and 19 copper coins rubbed shiny by snake scales.

Darkling Assassins

As the PCs have made their presence known in the forest the Unseelie Court has taken notice. A gang of three **darklings** and one **darkling elder** have set up a sniper's nest in the branches of trees over a path the PCs are likely to use. They make a single Dexterity (Stealth) check against the PCs' Passive Perception scores at +9. Anyone that spots the darklings is not **surprised** when combat begins.

These darklings are equipped with little faerie blowguns. The darklings attack at +5 to hit, dealing 4 piercing damage on a hit and dealing 2d6 additional damage if it had advantage on the attack. The elder has a shortbow, with which it attacks at +5 and deals 1d6 + 3 piercing on a hit, dealing 3d6 additional damage if it had advantage on the attack. For the first round of combat the darklings all fire on a different target, attempting to down one or two PCs from stealth. On the first round of combat creatures that did not spot the darklings consider the darklings unseen attackers, so those attacks are made with advantage.

Once the first shots have been taken the darklings drop from the branches into the group, while the elder stays in the branches. When the darklings are reduced to 0 hit points their Death Flashes will likely blind one or more PCs, allowing the darkling elder to take shots with advantage (and thus bonus damage) again.

The darklings have little of worth on them except for their blowguns and daggers. The darkling elder's Death Burn destroys all its goods.

Quickling Guards

After days of searching and wandering through this unnaturally cold forest of eerie pines and deep fog the players come upon what must be the Fort: a wall of white iron stone rises ahead of them, almost completely obscured by moss, fungus, and vines. Before they can get close enough to touch it a squadron of five **quickling** guards zips through the underbrush and into the PCs. Have characters make a DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check to avoid being **surprised** for the first round of combat.

On each turn the quicklings move sixty ft, attack, and move sixty ft farther. This zipping back and forth means that they provoke opportunity attacks on each pass (which their Blurred Movement ability will enable them to dodge most of the time), but also means that they benefit from three-quarters cover behind the trees and brush. They stay twenty or thirty ft away from each other as well, to ensure that no more than two are hit with area effects at once.

With their high AC, good cover, and their Blurred Movement ability it will be very difficult to land hits on the quicklings until they come close to attack. Keep in mind that readying an action requires a character to use their reaction to trigger it, thus a character will get *either* an opportunity attack *or* can ready an action, not both. Grappling them one at a time avoids the disadvantage from Blurred Movement and denies the quicklings their primary advantage, and so readying an action to grapple may be your PCs' wisest option.

Each quickling wears a tiny backpack with a set of instructions written in Sylvan, requiring them to guard Fort Courage but never step inside, and 10 gold pieces each.

d20 Result	Camping Encounter
1-5	No encounter
6-9	Five swarms of insects roll over the camp, an army of voracious ants consuming everything they can.
10-12	Two stalking forest cats (use tiger statistics) try to make an easy meal of a sleeping PC, dragging them away as soon as it can and back to their cave.
13-15	A yuan-ti pureblood and its yuan-ti malison bodyguard approach. There's a 50/50 chance that they'll attack or engage with the party to extort them of their goods.

16-18	A single wandering redcap attempts to get close and kill a sleeping character before attacking the rest.
19-20	A harpy song wakes the sleepers gently and lures the camp to a <i>web</i> 100 ft out from the camp where three ice spiders lie in wait.

Gathering Courage

Pausing before continuing into the Fort will allow PCs to get their breath back, and PCs that camp in the shadow of the Fort only need to make two random encounter checks during the night. There is an open area near the Fort's main gates, where one can see in, if just barely through the ever-present fog.

Fort Courage consists of a rectangular stone wall enclosing a bailey 145 ft by 110. The walls are five ft thick and twenty ft tall, with thirty-ft-tall towers at each corner and a gatehouse at the center of the Southern wall. The walls are crenellated and the towers have arrow slits at their top-most level. Around the outer wall is a ditch fifteen to twenty-five ft across and ten ft deep, except in front of the main gate. The main gate is eight ft wide and ten ft high, a set of double-doors set deep in the gatehouse with murder holes above it.

Inside the outer wall are several small structures: a long farmhouse, a small barracks, a workshop, and a well-house. Each building is of white stone and painted pine, with steeply peaked rooves. In addition to these, of course, is the keep: a sixty ft by seventy ft structure with three stories and a tall peaked roof, with a tower at each corner. The front entrance to the keep is on the second floor and requires one walk up a narrow stone stairway set against the wall to enter. Directly in front of the keep is a thirty by thirty ft yard of rust-red gravel, tramped to a perfect level by generations of soldiers but now covered by a thin layer of weeds and vines. The bare and wicked-looking crown of a huge and terrible red tree thrust up through the roof of the keep, having thrust aside shingles and grown around the rafters. Its branches thrust through the windows of the upper levels, and its roots can be seen, blood red, wrapped around the lowest parts of the keep.

At the end of the last war between the Kaldskoggers and the kingdom of Sangranit the Fort was not taken by Kaldskoggers, but by Unseelie fey fighting on their behalf. The Unseelie rampaged through the castle slaying everyone there. They laid a terrible curse on the castle and ran as quickly as the job was done, eager to be out of the presence of so much white iron. The curse took the form of a cutting from the Gulthias tree: a legendary plant with a vampiric intelligence. The Gulthias tree took root in the center of the Fort and began splitting off blights and other terrors, which stalk through the halls of the keep still.

The locations of the keep are described below. Each night, at midnight, the Gulthias tree can replenish up to two **vine blights**, five **needle blights**, and ten **twig blights**. Because these creatures return, again and again, the PCs are best served by attempting to clear as much of the keep as they can, resting only when they need to. The fog, cover, and illumination effects of the forest are present in the courtyard of the Fort, but not inside the structures. The presence of the Gulthias tree, however, imposes an effect similar to the Despair of the Shadowfell. A creature that spends more than ten minutes in the Fort must make a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw or be subject to the effects below. A creature must repeat this saving throw each time it ends a long rest in the Fort. A creature that succeeds on the saving throw ignores the effect until the end of its next long rest.

- When a creature regains hit points through rest, natural healing, or magic they regain one fewer, to a minimum of 1.
- An affected creature has disadvantage on saving throws against being **frightened**.

The Gulthias tree is a part of the setting here. It is present throughout the keep, but can only be harmed from one location – the topmost floor, the attic of the keep. Its bark elsewhere is too hard. If the PCs attempt to harm it treat it as an object with an AC of 15, 300 hit points, and a damage threshold of 20. The work of cutting such a tree down would take a full day of work with a powerful weapon, during which time all the inhabitants of the keep could gather and attack the assailants. This is an unwise course of action.

The Front Gate: This door is a double-door of two solid blocks of ancient pine almost a ft thick, set ten ft back into the gatehouse. The door is ten ft tall and eight wide. It is barred from the inside by a counter-weighted iron beam that swings down from one side to cross the doors, making them almost impossible to open. The counterweights make it easy to raise or lower the bar, with a lock when it's in the 'down' position that can be released with a DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check. The doors are ajar when the PCs arrive.

The Courtyard: The main courtyard of the Fort is about fifty ft from the gate to the keep, and 65 ft from side to side. The well-house sits to the left (West) of the courtyard, and the workshop and barracks sit side-by-side opposite. In the center of the courtyard is a thirty by thirty ft gravel yard where soldiers might train or muster. The fog chokes sound in the courtyard, but a groaning can be heard as several of the small trees and bushes begin to move.

One **vine blight**, three **needle blights**, and four **twig blights** patrol about the courtyard. They leap at any intruders as soon as they get ten ft into the courtyard, rushing from thirty to fifty ft away.

There are small relics scattered across the courtyard: an old helmet here, a chalice there. PCs can spend up to ten hours here scouring the courtyard for small treasures, turning up 1d10 silver coins for each hour spent searching.

The Walls: A set of stone stairs lead up to each tower on the outer wall, counter-clockwise from the towers. These lead up to the walls to walk along the top. Doors in the towers at that level allow entry to the towers, and each tower has inside a spiral staircase of old and rusted white iron, so that defenders can get to the rooves of each tower. A post gate at the Northern side of the Western wall is a fifteen-ft-tall pine door that lowers like a drawbridge via a capstan on one side.

The Well-house: This ten by ten house has nothing inside but a well six ft across with a two ft lip around it of more white iron stone. A five-gallon bucket suspended from an axle with a hand-crank is set at four ft from the ground. The well still holds water, and in fact holds a **water elemental**. The water is blood red from the rust of the white iron. The elemental will trickle upward along the stones on the inside of the well with a dripping sound, suddenly lurching forward in a rush of water when it reaches the top. The sound will likely give its presence away. The elemental will not move farther than 50 ft from the well, but will vigorously defend its territory.

If the water elemental is slain it leaves behind an enchantment, turning the well's bucket into a **decanter of endless water** in a flash of blue light.

The Barracks: The barracks is a two-story building fifteen ft by twenty-five, and suitable for sleeping ten. Inside the barracks are six **needle spawn** living in a mockery of military life. They are waiting sedately, three on the first floor and three on the second, and respond only when the door is opened. They attack immediately, crowding around the door or spilling out into the courtyard. If the door is blocked they leap out the windows, attacking the PCs outside the building.

Each one is wearing a large yellow leaf like a badge, in which is set a tiny diamond worth 50 gp.

The Workshop: The workshop is a two-story building fifteen ft by twenty-five. The first floor is dominated by a pair of forges and their accompanying equipment, while the second is filled with weapon racks and armor stands and all the raw materials of a functioning forge. Unexpectedly, perhaps, one of the forges is hot.

On the first story is an **azer** smith, turning a sharpening wheel to put an edge on a handaxe. The azer bears no animosity against the PCs, but was charged long ago to fight the soldiers of Sangranit and has never had those orders changed. After a bare moment of pause it lifts its warhammer from inside the forge and moves into combat. Inside the forge are two **magma mephits** that leap up and join the azer smith, following its lead.

The second floor has a dozen daggers and shortswords, some piecemeal suits of armor, but nothing worth taking. If anyone has lost thrown weapons, damaged armor, or is running low on arrows this is a perfect place to resupply. On the first floor is the azer's latest and finest work: a rapier and a main gauche (dagger) with matched basket hilts and grips decorated with gold wire. The pair are worth 100 gp if sold as a set.

The Farmhouse: This two-story building has three wide stable stalls on the first floor and chicken coops lining either side of the second floor, looking down over the stables. The place smells of hay, dung, and sulfur. The descendants of the original chickens still roost here, as do their fey-tainted kin. The coops contain four **swarms of chickens** and four **abyssal chickens** that attack intruders immediately.

In one of the nests is a fairy chicken egg. A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) or Intelligence (Arcana) check will determine the uses of such an egg. It can be eaten, raw or cooked, to regain 1d20 hit points. It can also be incubated beneath a person's pillow for seven nights, hatching at dawn the day after as a **homunculus** bound to the incubating individual like a familiar.

Second Floor

Entry Hall: The entryway of the keep is a fifteen ft by ten ft chamber at the top of a narrow staircase. The door in is ajar, but the elegant double-doors into the keep proper are closed and locked. They can be opened with a DC 15 Dexterity (Thieves' Tools) check or a DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check. The entry hallway beyond is a hall ten ft deep and forty ft across, nearly the whole width of the keep. There is another set of double-doors across the way, leading into the great hall, and hallways extend from either side of the entry hall lead deeper into the keep. There are numerous swords, shields, and pennants hung across every available wall, relics of ancient wars. Four of the swords are **flying swords** that attack intruders as soon after they have been in the hall more than ten or twenty seconds. Due to the nature of

the swords they are likely to catch PCs unaware. Have PCs make DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) checks, being **surprised** on a failure.

Great Hall: The great hall was once opulent, now ruined. Stairways lead up to the second floor from either side of the main doors, and a low dais takes up most of the far side of the room. The room is thirty ft wide and 55 ft long. In the very center of the room is a huge tree trunk over ten ft in diameter. The bark is slick and red, and oozes a sap that looks very much like blood.

Sitting in a throne on the dais is a **needle lord**, and accompanying it are three **needle spawn**. The spawn keep their range as long as they are able, launching needles at their enemies, while the needle lord wades into combat with its raking vines.

The needle lord has accumulated as much of the keep's treasure as it can here. Beside the throne is a small accountant's desk piled with 277 silver coins of antique minting and 80 gold coins. There is also a stoppered **potion of climbing** set among the inkpots.

Dining Hall: The dining hall, more commonly used to prep the luxurious feasts that would be served in the great hall, has been taken over entirely by a **yellow musk creeper**. The plant has covered every available surface, kept from progressing farther only by the pruning of the needle lord. Five **yellow musk zombies** are pinned to the walls, nothing more than husks of humanoid shapes, and they lurch to life in the service of their creeper as soon as new prey is spotted.

Buried under the foliage of the creeper are a copper chalice with silver filigree, an embroidered silk handkerchief with seed pearls sewn into the edges, and a small gold bracelet. One of the zombies wears a surprisingly-sturdy set of vestments of cloth-of-gold. Each item is worth 25 gp once it's been thoroughly cleaned.

First Floor

Living Quarters: Much of the first floor is taken up with ten ft by ten ft cells, once living quarters for the staff of the keep. A butler's suite and a small office are also tucked into one corner. In the middle of the largest open hall of the first floor is the trunk of the Gulthias tree, fifteen ft across. The flagstones of the floor are humped up and cracked around it, and the roof sags in toward it from above.

A gang of four **vegepygmies** and a **vegepygmie chief** occupy several of the living quarters in the first floor of the keep. There is an even chance that they are awake or resting. If they are resting they have little time to prepare, simply emerging from their rooms and attacking as soon as they hear PCs coming down the stairs. If they are awake they gather together and attempt to approach by stealth. Have PCs roll DC 18 Wisdom (Perception) checks, starting the combat **surprised** on a failure.

Little remains in these old offices and guest rooms, but a dedicated search and a DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) turns up scattered coinage: 1 gp, 1 ep, 3 sp, and 6 cp.

Kitchen: The kitchen that once fed the keep is a huge room thirty ft by twenty-five, set with stoves and ovens on several sides. The dark fey curses here have animated one of the stoves, turning it into an **animated stove** accompanied by two **animated knives**. The stove is given away by being bright and burning despite no mortals living in this keep. It is not very smart, though, so will lie in wait until a creature walks within five ft, when it will Belch Fire and waddle forward to assault the intruders. If PCs begin to leave the room without fighting the stove it will break its camouflage and trundle after them aggressively.

A secret door at the back corner of the kitchen is hidden behind a dilapidated rack of spices and foodstuffs long rotted to nothingness. It can be found by moving the rack or by a DC 18 Intelligence (Investigation) check seeking hidden doors and the like. The door leads directly out of the keep, putting someone in a great place to run to the postern gate.

In the kitchen are several cabinets as yet untouched. The prizes inside include a set of crystal drinkware worth 80 gp and weighing 10 lbs (4 kg), and a gigantic fire-proof recipe book of (old) Sangranit specialties worth 20 gp to a collector.

Basement

Stairs up to the first floor and down to the larder and vault are arrayed on one side of the large basement chamber of the keep. Rows and rows of ruined wine racks, storage shelving, and old furniture litter the room, all tipped and crushed. Opposite the stairs a ten ft wide semi-circle fountain is set against the wall, the stagnant water within now fouled with a thick layer of algae and scum. In the center of the chamber, having crushed several pillars in its growth, is the base of the Gulthias tree. Its roots spread out underneath the floor, bucking it and twisting it, turning the area into difficult terrain (as would the litter).

Slouching through the grime and wreckage is a **shambling mound**, a parasite of the Gulthias tree. It defends its territory by attacking any visitors.

The shambling mound's eyes are, in fact, a pair of emeralds each worth 80 gp.

Larder

This chamber, twenty ft across and forty wide, has been crushed in at the sides by the roots of the Gulthias tree. The roots form a natural vault over the ceiling, and thin questing tendrils of root wave as though alive and aware. The red sap drips down the walls and smells of iron and rotting vegetation. The remains of the food that stocked this room four hundred years ago is long, long turned to dust, but the mushroom colonies that took over at some point have been given a dark intelligence by the proximity of the Gulthias tree. In this room are 4 shambling fungal figures (use the statistics of **myconid adults**) and a gigantic blob of congealed sap that pulls itself from the walls to pursue fresh blood (use the statistics of a **gelatinous cube**).

Should anyone be desperate enough to sift through the garbage in this room for treasure they'll find a wooden box with a full set of silverware inside worth 15 silver pieces.

Vault

The vault's reinforcement of white iron and enchantment protected it from the worst of the Gulthias tree's depredations, but may also prevent the PCs from entry. The door is set with three locks, each of which requires a DC 20 Dexterity (Thieves' Tools) check to open. Failure on one check resets any locks that have already been unlocked with a loud clunk. Should two locks be re-set this way at the same time it triggers a hidden *symbol* with the fear effect and a linked *glyph of warding* that itself triggers a *modify memory* spell. The *modify memory* spell simply erases the last hour of the target's memories, likely leaving them in a confused stupor. The spells target all creatures within 60 ft and both have a DC of 15.

If and when the PCs break their way into the vault they find a truly grand pile of treasure, under which sits a coiled **iron cobra**. The construct waits until the thieves have their hands filled with treasure, and then

strikes. PCs that investigate the treasure will automatically uncover it; otherwise have all characters roll a DC 17 Wisdom (Perception) check, with characters that fail being **surprised** on the first round of combat. The PCs can also avert combat immediately if they present their Writ of Settlement, signed by the King of Sangranit. The iron cobra certainly isn't intelligent, but with a few moments of whirring and concentration it will make the logical assessment that these are the new owners of the keep. Once it accepts the PCs as its new masters it will curl up underneath its treasure pile again, or take whatever orders are given to it by its masters. It understands Common, but cannot speak, and lacks the creativity to act out charades.

The treasure in the vault includes a dozen small chests of darkwood bound in brass, each weighing 10 lbs. The chests feature built-in locks that require a DC 25 Dexterity (Thieves' Tools) check to open. The chests contain, spread out more-or-less evenly between them, 600 cp, 11,000 sp, 2,300 gp, and 170 pp in coins from five-hundred and more years ago. A set of crates nearby contain a large tapestry; a box of turquoise animal figurines featuring a hawk, owl, goat, wolf, pike, and trout; a carved ivory statuette of a robed woman in prayer; and two bronze crowns – for the rulers of the keep, one presumes – each item of which is worth 250 gp if sold. Another crate also contains a **cloak of the manta ray**.

Third Floor

On this floor the branches of the Gulthias tree begin to spread, wending their way through every room and breaking out of the few windows. Treat movement through the hallways, as well as the library, gallery, and sunroom as difficult terrain as PCs have to duck and shimmy through the network of iron-hard vegetation. The trunk of the Gulthias is impossible to reach through the tangle of branches, and the entirety of the gallery room is impassible.

Sunroom: Hung from and weaving through the branches nearest the wide bank of windows to the South of the keep are three **assassin vines** that will tangle up and attack any living creatures they can find. Two **vine blights** use this opportunity to pile on, weaving through the branches to attack intruders. The vine blights ignore the difficult terrain caused by the Gulthias tree.

Master Bedroom: The office and attached master bedroom both have spiral staircases to the attic. The office's stairs go into the attic proper, while the stairs from the master bedroom go to a narrow hidden chamber in the attic where one could hide or make an escape. The master bedroom also has a hidden door at the rear of a small closet, accessed by removing the wall from small indentations on each side. An Intelligence (Investigation) check DC 20 can find this feature, or anyone prodding at the rear of the closet. The hidden door opens into the guest suite.

At the foot of the fragile, rotted king-sized bedframe is a copper chest filled with 100 sp and a tiny set of figurines of the Ekletheon gods: one each of Zhako, Senya, Mithron, Obeccai, Protiorius, Jagus, Ceremar, Umain, Xvim, and Avaleya. Each figurine is made of platinum, and worth 5 gp each or 100 gp if sold as a whole set.

Attic

The attic is a chamber thirty ft across and cramped, with the peaked roof directly overhead. The five feet closest to the sides of the room have only 4 ft of headspace, 8 ft for the next aisle over, and 12 ft at the peak. In the center of the attic is the crown of the Gulthias tree, thrusting up through the roof. The shingles are knocked off across most of the roof, and the tree's branches reach into the windy sky.

From this room the tree's only weakness is apparent: a huge and jagged split in the bark where lightning struck it some time ago. The tree is, however, much more active in this room as well. It attacks as a **tree blight**. If reduced to 0 hp it goes dormant, recovering 1 hit point an hour later and restoring 10 hit points per hour after that. It can be truly destroyed by burning or by an effect such as a *hallow* spell centered on the tree.

The centermost corewood of the Gulthias is a twisted length of black wood that oozes red sap. It is a **gulthias staff**, which can be reclaimed from the core of the tree either before or after it is burnt or otherwise destroyed.

In the attic are hundreds of old boxes and crates. They contain miscellaneous goods for the upkeep of the keep: thousands of rusted nails, bags of cement mix, thirty sets of servants' clothing, six sets of courtiers' clothing, and ten tapestries and paintings of dubious quality which can be sold for 20 gp each.

There are four tower rooms not connected to the attic which have their own tiny pyramidal rooves and views on three of four sides.

If the Gulthias tree is destroyed by burning it gives rise to a vengeful spirit of fire at the next sunset (with the statistics of an **oread**). The spirit attempts to burn down what can be burnt down of the keep, and assaults the PCs that destroyed the tree if they remain in the keep.

As the oread dies its heart crumbles to charcoal, revealing a small diamond worth 150 gp.

With the tree, and its 'ghost,' dead the keep is clear of its curse. The PCs attain 4th level and can rest safely in the keep for a time.

Act II

The Vielle Eglise trading post is fully functional. Fort Courage is reclaimed, though in rather shoddy condition. The next step of carving out a bastion of freedom and adventure is to find some wayward individuals willing to settle the land. If the **spell scroll** of *sending* provided to the PCs has already been used Forrest, the scribe, offers to send a few messenger ducks back to Pluville with word that the Fort has been wrested from the clutches of the foul fey curse.

The response may be a surprise: the Marquis, presumptive of the characters' success, sent the settlement party ten or fifteen days after their departure, and so they should be arriving no more than ten days from the present. They have been sent with things to repair the Fort, though there may need to be another shipment of goods and building supplies.

At dusk of the day that message goes out a different messenger arrives: a glittering blue heron sails out of the sky to land before the PCs and announces in a clear Common voice, "Hark! I bear a message from Queen Ailbhe, Lady of the Winter Court and ruler of the Unseelie fey." It then reaches up one slender clawed leg and deposits a thick leather roll into their hands, and flies away. When the leather roll is

unfurled it reveals inside a piece of vellum with a clear and flowing hand in Sylvan, with the translation in Common below. It is a formal declaration of war by the Unseelie fey on the new rulers of Fort Courage.

In accordance with the ancient treaties of our Court, we declare war on the rulers of Fort Courage.

This war shall persist until one party has been vanquished, until the last of the blood of the jarls is vacant of the forest, or until the end of all things.

War begins at the dawn twenty-eight hence.

Ailbhe, Queen of the Unseelie Fey, Ruler of the Winter Court

The Contract

Queen Ailbhe and her Unseelie Court have a clear reason for their war: they are required to by ancient agreement.

The folk of Sangranit and Hjemlandet have been at war on-and-off for hundreds of years. The most intense period of this conflict extended beyond the usual skirmishes and could be properly called a war. It was during this period, five to six-hundred years ago, that Fort Courage was built. Facing the greater and wealthier army of Sangranit the Hjemlanders relied upon their superior knowledge of the territory to hold back the invaders. After some time, though, that was not enough. The skalds and jarls of Hjemlandet consulted for days before deciding to ask aid from Faerie.

The skalds spoke with Queen Ailbhe and the rest of the nobles of the Unseelie Court, eventually coming to an agreement: the fey would go to war on behalf of the inhabitants of the Kaldskog, and in return the skalds would dedicate the better part of their power in perpetuity to making the Kaldskog a home to the fey. This agreement was written in the ice of a pool in Faerie, in Queen Ailbhe's own glade, to be frozen there forever or until one side or the other fail in their obligations.

Queen Ailbhe's responsibilities are simple but strict: the fey must go to war against the forces of Sangranit, or other invaders from over the mountains, on behalf of the jarls and their progeny. Their duty is discharged when all military places of Sangranit – such as Fort Courage – are abandoned and ruined and all the nobles of Sangranit – like dukes or those holding a Writ of Settlement – are driven from the forest, slain, or captive. The fey, on the other side, are vanquished when Queen Ailbhe falls in battle, or when no one of the old jarls' blood lives in the Kaldskog.

In return the skalds and jarls were to pass down their knowledge of Faerie and their dedication to the old ways. The magic of the contract draws the magical power of the skalds to Faerie, where it is used to keep the Kaldskog and the Winter lands of Faerie open to each other. Wanderers in the woods may easily slip across the border by accident or by intent, and the fey traipse back and forth without thought.

The agreement will stand until such a time as it is broken.

This message may be something of a shock to the PCs, or they may intuit that the Queen is planning revenge for her slain liege – the needle lord – or may simply be at perpetual war with Sangranit, or perhaps she has some other reason. Whatever the cause, the PCs must prepare for war against the fey. There are three courses your players are likely to take: immediately take the offensive, prepare their defenses, or seek more information. These options are detailed later.

The caravan of settlers arrives 1d6 + 4 days after the PCs send their message back to Pluville. The settlers include six craftspeople: masons, smiths, and carpenters; fourteen apprentices to the craftspeople; eight of the Marquis' own guards; two quartermasters; one barrister and tax specialist; and sixty various persons and families including farmers, loggers, weavers, and the like (91 souls, all told).

The caravan also comes with supplies including: food and wine for a hundred for fourteen days; carts, pack animals, and feed; nails, tools, cement mix, leather, cloth, lumber, and various supplies for construction in huge amounts; and the varied personal effects of the settlers. Finally, the caravan comes along with 500 gold castles to deposit to the treasury for trade with the locals and Kaldskoggers; a **spell scroll** of *move earth*; a **spell scroll** of *wall of stone*; three **spell scrolls** of *stone shape*; and three **spell scrolls** of *fabricate* to be used to assist the reconstruction and repair of the keep.

Notable Settlers

Treat the below settlers as **commoners** except where noted otherwise. If a settler is said to have a profession or specialty assume that they have a +4 bonus to tasks related to that specialty, unless their statistics provide a better bonus.

Marie-Claude Chevalier: An elderly human woman that has decided to get in some adventure at the end of her life. She acts and speaks like a stern grandmother to everyone she meets. She is the nominal leader of the caravan and is intended to be the minister and aide to the PCs. Her background is in law, finance, and bureaucracy.

Sally Gano: An old dwarven mason. Her hands are always moving, taking care of small tasks even while she's thinking of something else.

Joseph Arnaud: An adult human smith. He's hard of hearing from years banging an anvil, and talks with his hands as much as with his words.

Evyn Blanchard: An adult human engineer. They're perpetually covered in shaving nicks, paper cuts, bruises, and the like from clumsiness. Uses the statistics of an **apprentice wizard**, and is the most likely to cast the necessary spells from the scrolls the caravan brought if a PC doesn't.

Coy Vincent: A middle-aged human carpenter. He believes in love at first sight, and becomes passionately enamored with a different person every week depending on his moods.

Rosa Hartzell: An ancient human baker that takes the role of head chef. She rules the kitchen with an iron fist. She's full of great stories – all things that her parents, siblings, children, and grandchildren have done. In a family of adventurers she chose to keep the home.

Antoinette Porras: A middle-aged **yuan-ti pureblood guard** that often cries after a fight ends from the adrenaline rush. It's not sadness or fear, just a side effect of the rush of battle.

Moody Meza: A middle-aged human apothecary. They're quite out of shape and often out of breath, but their services are invaluable in keeping the medicines stocked and identifying and preparing herbs.

Elberta Gilpin: The young gnomish foreman of the loggers. She veers in between Gnomish and Common when she's cussing out her crew.

Rene Nava: An adult elven **scout**. Ignores most of what people say by nodding along and agreeing, then doing whatever he feels like. A better scout or woodsman would be hard to find.

Stuart Picard: An adult half-elf quartermaster. He feels the need to one-up others in conversation when it comes to how bad he's had it over his life – the number of relatives that he's lost seems to be the entirety of a large family tree.

Viola Charles: The halfling butler that takes over the fort's upkeep and cleaning. She spends her spare time in the high corner towers of the keep feeding crumbs to birds.

Joseph Rolland: A middle-aged dwarf farmer. Has a folksy manner and hooks his thumbs behind his belt when he's thinking.

When the settlers arrive they are greeted with the news that there's to be a war shortly – a difficult thing to come into. Nevertheless they are game for it and are entirely willing to set to work bettering the fort for defense.

Whether the PCs choose to reconnoiter, to take the offensive early, or to fortify in advance of the war they'll likely request help from Pluville. If the PCs don't think of this immediately Marie-Claude Chevalier, their minister, will remind them that this is the prudent course of action and will almost certainly save lives. A messenger duck from Forrest's coop can reach Pluville in just one day, though it will take much longer for a military force to return from the city. The earliest they should be expected is just before, or perhaps just after the war begins, up to thirty days out. This may help the characters choose not to provoke the war before its scheduled start, hoping to limit casualties before backup arrives. Details on the reinforcements are found under the defense section below.

Gathering Information

If your players choose to gather more information they have limited resources with which to do so. An Intelligence (Nature) check reveals the following:

DC	Information Gained
10	The lands of Faerie exist alongside, and sometimes touch, the Material Plane.
12	There are places where Faerie is closer to the Material Plane, and the Foret Froid must be one of those places. Perhaps that's the cause of the freezing cold and the fog?
15	Fey are divided into different Courts, like Winter, Spring, or Summer that mean something about their attitudes and nature.
18	Fey are further divided into Seelie and Unseelie. The Seelie are typically good neighbors, if mischievous, but the Unseelie are dangerous and unpredictable even when not at war.
20	Queens of Faerie, even the Unseelie, do not declare war lightly. Fey logic may be difficult to see from a mortal perspective, but there's always logic there. She has some reason to go to war.

23	There are old, old stories of exceedingly lucky Kaldskogger sailors and soldiers that attributed their success to their queen, but the Kaldskoggers have always been ruled by clan leaders rather than nobility. These references may have been to a Queen of Faerie that was somehow allied to the people of the Kaldskog.
----	---

As well, an Intelligence (Arcana) check provides the following information:

DC	Information Gained
12	The lands of Faerie exist alongside, and sometimes touch, the Material Plane.
14	There are places where Faerie is closer to the Material Plane, and the Foret Froid must be one of those places. Perhaps that's the cause of the freezing cold and the fog?
16	Fey magic is unlike mortal magic: it is all based on illusions, contracts, and stories.
19	Illusions and stories are very real in the realms of Faerie. A traveler in those halls is wise to avoid speaking lies, casting illusions, or altering anything, because what <i>seems</i> real can become real very suddenly.
21	Fey, when summoned and bound, are assiduous in carrying out their duties to the letter of the contract. An agreement between a powerful faerie and another party can last for immeasurable time and have a great span of terms.
24	An agreement with a Queen of Faerie could very well cause effects like fog, strange lights, and space distortion in the Material Plane, though the actual substance of the contract would likely be something different: something to bind the people and land of the Material Plane to the creatures and space of Faerie, and vice versa.

Finally, an Intelligence (History) check will help provide some context to the ancient history of the area.

DC	Information Gained
10	Sangranit and the Kaldskoggers have been in conflict for at least seven hundred years, though rarely at active war. More commonly it's border raids and the like. Kaldskoggers call their land Hjemlandet.
13	The Hjemlanders are scattered across the forests, hills, and plains in the far South. They group together in clans, each led by a chief, or 'jarl.'
16	The jarls are guided in spiritual matters by skalds, a kind of poet-priest class. The skalds keep an old, heathen religion that has been outlawed by the Church for time immemorial.
18	The conflict between Sangranit and the Hjemlanders started when both nations were living in log cabins, but intensified when the Church brought proper religion to Sangranit. The major conflicts between the two nations have always been most intense when the Church backed Sangranese invasions.
20	The last major conflict in the Foret Froid, known by the Hjemlanders as the Kaldskog, ended with a mysterious army of magicians, ghosts, or fey – depending on who you ask – materializing from out of the woods and wiping whole Sangranese armies off the map.
25	Neither Sangranit nor the Church have paid much attention to the Kaldskog for many, many years. As trade routes opened from Sangranit to the North with the advent of more complex sailing ships a few hundred years ago the need to tap the resources of the Foret Froid declined. There is no obvious reason Sangranit would want to expand into the forest beyond, perhaps, ambition on the part of the Marquis.

There are no easily accessible writings or research resources to consult if the PCs are unable to meet the check DCs above. The folk of the Vielle Eglise, though, do have some knowledge of the area and its history. The half-deaf gnomish scribe Forrest has a +3 bonus to Intelligence (History) checks, and Claude the superstitious farmer has a +4 bonus to Intelligence (Nature) checks as it relates to the fey, and either is willing to share their knowledge with the PCs, making a roll on their behalf.

Trappers and hunters in the Vielle Eglise can also tell PCs about some of the threats of the forest that they may run into, either during the war or while exploring. These threats are described briefly here:

- A reclusive hermit type lives a day's travel Southwest of the Fort. Lafayette Saltz has gone by his little compound from time to time and the people there look dangerous and hungry, and there are always animal corpses out in the open with bite marks all over them, and hangs raw and bloody hides from a huge stone arch in the middle of the camp.
- Hildegard, back in her younger days, traveled all over the forest and advises against going anywhere between the two rivers to the Southeast. The land there is swampy and treacherous, and besides that even experienced foresters go missing around there, and those that came back sometimes talked about fairy lights and will-o-wisps. Somewhere in the swamp is a standing stone arch that means something to the fey.
- Claude knows plenty about the fey lore of the woods, though he couldn't point out the difference between a fir and a pine. He knows some of those trees are tended by the fey, and some may walk themselves, and has heard that out South of the rivers are faerie rings, walking trees, and other fey galore. He says there are standing stones scattered throughout the woods that the fey use to walk back and forth between Faerie and the Forêt Froid, one of which is the home of the white witch of the woods, a kind of ghostly magical figure.
- Gabriel rings his orchards with snares and traps and angry dogs not because of thieves and pests, but because of goblins. The little bastards have camps scattered all over the woods and they won't hesitate to steal your fruit, your things, your spouse or your kids. Gabriel's taught them to stay away from his orchard, but they have camps at the least due South near the edge of the woods, dead West in the hills, and Southeast of the trading post near-ish a little lake.

Further information on the war and its cause can only be provided by faeries or by Kaldskoggers, neither of whom are likely to be accessible. The Kaldskoggers mostly live in the Southeast of the forest, toward the coast, and are many days' travel away through or around the woods. The fey are, as of now, at war with the PCs and their allies, and difficult to find on purpose besides. Seeking information from the fey will quickly turn into an offense against fey homes and bases, as described below.

Go on the Offensive

If your players choose to pre-empt the war and make a sneak attack against the forces of Faerie they'll leave behind an unprotected Fort Courage, have no reinforcements, and perhaps provoke retaliation on their settlers. Make sure that they understand this before proceeding, though it is a fair strategy.

The military targets that are detailed later in this Act are in the process of being established during the 28 days leading up to the war. Fey allies and creatures are gathering, structures are being built, illusions are being given reality. Early attacks against these will be ineffectual: the PCs won't be able to find them since they don't yet exist. Those targets that do exist are below:

- Goblin Camps. Three or four goblin camps are scattered through the forest.
- Treant Grove. Though there is no military importance to this and the treants are not yet committed to aggression against the Fort's inhabitants, the PCs could theoretically find the treant grove and attack it – a suicidal mission, likely.
- Werewolf Camp. Father Moon-eye has not yet been 'recruited' to the Queen's cause, but he offers at least lip service to the old ways and already has his camp built around one of the fey trilithons.
- Hag's Village. The green hag coven in the swamp have been luring travelers for years, and they're members of the Unseelie Court besides. They, too, control a trilithon.
- Blue Ice Glade. The winter witch dryad and her winter wolves wait in the glade with another of the trilithons. The glade is well-hidden, and so unlikely to be one of the first targets the PCs pursue.

If the characters set out to find and assault one or more military targets use the rules presented later in this Act for finding these locations and fighting the inhabitants. Ailbhe, however, won't let this go without response and will move her sortie up to two days after the aggression rather than starting the war 'on schedule.' This will almost certainly cause many deaths among the settlers at the Fort. If you wish to press the severity of this on your players even further have the attack take place while the PCs are out, such that they return to find only a few survivors of the initial settlement party huddled within the still-wrecked keep.

However, the advantage to this tactic is that the players may rack up victory points (again, see the rules for running this war later in the Act) before the conflict truly begins. If they are lucky and aggressive they could take out one, or even two, of the trilithon locations before the war begins in full swing – all for the cost of their first hundred settlers.

Defending the Innocents

If the PCs instead choose to use the twenty-seven or so days before the war begins to improve their defenses then the settlers set to their work with grim determination. The following changes are made to the keep:

- The moat is dredged and drained, and the scrub is cut back, restoring its use as a defensive measure.
- The forest is cleared for 150 ft in every direction from the keep's walls.
- A path is beaten and marked between the Vielle Eglise trading post and Fort Courage. The woods are still dangerous, but it's harder to get lost.
- The fort's courtyard and buildings are cleared, put into good repair, and cleaned.
- The well in the courtyard and the fountain in the basement are cleared and purified for drinking water.
- The spell scrolls are put to use repairing the worst of the damage to the masonry in the keep, though the fixes are ugly.
- The keep is cleared out and brought up to admittedly bare standards of living, and the settlers move into the barracks and living quarters of the fort.
- The master bedroom and guest rooms on the third floor are put into working order, though left a bit spartan, for the masters of the fort.

- The decorations from the attic and vault are, if the PCs choose, set around the fort to make it look a little more presentable as a seat of government. The PCs can make whatever cosmetic choices they like around the fort.
- The settlers are drilled with simple weapons: spears, wood axes, and the few crossbows available to them. They are also given instructions on how to make use of the fort's defenses, from murder holes to arrow slits.

With the fort repaired and the settlers prepared for the oncoming attack they will have a much better chance of surviving the first fey assaults before reinforcements arrive from Pluville. This course of action is the one assumed in the later section of this Act, and the course advised by the guards and by Marie-Claude.

War

Combat in and around the keep can get complicated. Keep the following in mind during sieges of the keep:

- Defenders on the walls and the top floors of the towers have half cover (+2 AC and Dex saves) from attackers on the ground, and three-quarters cover (+5 AC and Dex saves) if they are Small or crouch. A character can only crouch while fighting effectively if they are using a shortbow or crossbow – a longbow, sling, or throwing weapon requires standing upright.
- The fog of the forest presses in close to the walls. Creatures and objects more than 50 ft away are lightly obscured, and those more than 100 ft away are heavily obscured.
- The woods have been cut back to 150 ft away from the keep's walls. Creatures more than 30 ft into the woods have half cover, and those more than 60 ft away have three-quarters cover. At 90 ft away creatures have total cover, and cannot typically be targeted (but neither can they target others more than 90 ft away).
- The moat around the outer wall is 10 ft deep, meaning that creatures attempting to climb or leap the walls must climb 30 ft rather than 20, or find some way to avoid the moat.
- The aurora provides dim illumination at night, so there is never true darkness around the Fort except through magic or indoors.

Another way to simplify combat is to reduce large groups of combatants to single units. In most cases this will only be necessary if the PCs put their settlers into combat, in which case use a **swarm of commoners** to represent every ten or twenty commoners. For every 4 hp lost by the swarm mark one settler dead if you are keeping track of the Fort's population.

Offense, Defense, and Trouble at Home

There are three pretty complex things happening at the same time during this act: the PCs take the offensive by finding and attacking Faerie military targets; the PCs and their Church allies must defend themselves from attacks on the Fort; and the Church pursues its own agenda behind the scenes, which will cause trouble for the PCs.

It is advisable to separate these things from each other. While PCs are out adventuring in the forest the defense of the Fort can be forgotten for the most part. When they under attack the focus should be on casualties, and preventing casualties. When there are no enemies nearby the

interactions with other people in the Fort should be overshadowed by the movements of the Church through its priests and soldiers. If you can keep the scenes separate, or even dedicate entire sessions to only offense, defense, or downtime, it will be easier to keep track of the Siege Score, Victory Points, and the actions of Lt. Integritas and his people.

In the rest of this act things are set out in three separate sections. The first focuses on defending the Fort against the attacks, keeping track of the Siege Score to determine how and when the next one happens, and the rules around calculating casualties among the soldiery. The second section has to do with expeditions into the woods to seek military targets and end the conflict quickly and rack up Victory Points.

The third, and shortest, section has to do with the agenda of Lt. Integritas, Alfred Greenberry, and the Church as a whole. These scenes usually trigger after PCs return to the Fort following an expedition.

The First Strike

The first combat of the war is small enough to play in detail, with players and the GM controlling all parties through a normal, if complex, combat. Future combats will quickly grow to a scale that cannot be reasonably modeled except by the most die-hard psychotic wargame veterans. In these cases guidance will be presented to help limit the scope of the combats.

The first action of the war comes at dusk on the date promised, 28 days after the declaration was delivered. The sortie consists of three **dryads**, six **darklings**, two **darkling elders**, sixteen **goblins**, four **goblin bosses**, and a **green hag**. They arrive two days before reinforcements, and so the PCs must face them with only the resources they have. Should the players decide to mount as complete a first-line defense as they can (all eight **guards**, all of their settlers, and themselves) they'll repel the attack easily, but may lose more lives. Should they put the settlers, children, and other non-combatants in the keep and take only the guards to the walls and towers they'll be in thicker fighting but save lives.

If you wish to keep things simple for the offense consider having the darklings and goblins move as swarms. Statistic blocks for a **swarm of darklings** and two **swarms of goblins** can be found below.

During this initial fight the Unseelie Queen's forces are testing out the Fort's defenses, and so will attack several parts of the wall in sequence. The fight starts with the goblin bosses and goblins attempting to swarm up the walls with grappling hooks and climbing kits. The goblins may make DC 15 Strength (Athletics) checks to climb as part of their movement, advancing half their movement on a success. If they fail by 5 or more they fall, likely taking damage. The first goblins to the top drop ropes to their allies, and the goblin bosses wait to scale until last. If the goblins find their passage to the top continually stymied they will settle on the ground and launch volleys of arrows at the defenders, moving and hiding in the fog after each shot to attempt to avoid retaliation using their Nimble Escape ability. If this becomes their pattern the dryads cast *pass without trace* to improve the goblins' chances of staying hidden.

The darklings and darkling elders will attempt to do much the same but will move even more slowly and trying to avoid notice. Have them make a Dexterity (Stealth) check against the Passive Perception of the PCs or of the guards (at a +10 bonus due to the dryad's help, see below), depending on where the PCs

place themselves. On a success the darklings remain undetected as they climb, though they still need to make Strength (Athletics) checks just like the goblins. Should the darklings reach the top of the wall they will immediately attempt to move into the courtyard and find ways to sabotage or strike from concealment.

The dryads are not strong combatants, and will stay on the ground rather than climb the walls. One accompanies the darklings, casting *pass without trace* to keep itself and the darklings under cover. The other two pick likely spots and attempt to use their Fey Charms to target guards or commoners on the walls and encourage them to retreat. When combat breaks out they cast *entangle*, potentially sacrificing *pass without trace* in one case, to lock down and confound defenders. The hag, similarly, keeps her distance. Her claw attacks are dangerous but she does not want to climb the wall to put it to use, instead casting *vicious mockery* from the ground. Should the goblins reach the top of the wall they will attempt to throw targets over the crenellations with a Shove action, at which point the hag will kill them if the falling damage does not. If the hag has no good targets or needs to retreat she uses her Invisible Passage ability to turn invisible and harass defenders verbally.

Goblin bosses attempt to escape after losing half their health; dryads and the hag after losing three-quarters. The goblins and darklings fight to the death.

If the PCs restricted the fighting to themselves and the guards it should be easy to mark losses. If they included the settlers reduce the number of settlers by one per 4 damage each swarm of commoners took, as noted above. Assume that key individuals, like the master craftspeople and Marie-Claude, are the last to enter combat and die.

In the aftermath of the conflict the settlers are rattled, but quickly shake it off. If such small-scale poking and prodding is what the fey have in mind then the Fort will be an impenetrable bastion as soon as the reinforcements from Pluville arrive. This attitude is not shared by Marie-Claude, who is aware that the first clashes of a war simply presage future battles in miniature. The reinforcements arrive down the path from Vielle Eglise two days later at midday, accompanied by riding horses and pack rams and underneath three banners: Sangranit, Pluville, and the Ekletheon Orthodox Church.

The military force is made up of six platoons of sixteen each (96 individuals). Each platoon is made up of twelve **guards** and four **soldiers**. There are two ensigns (use the statistics of **knights**) in addition to the count, each of whom has informal command of two platoons. The last two platoons are under the direct control of Lt. Integritas, the commander of the reinforcements. Integritas is a half-orc **ordo pugilis lieutenant**, a soldier of the Church's Order of Battle. He and his soldiers are members of the Church, most of whom grew up in Sangranit, and who are on loan from the Church to the King of Sangranit, and from the King to the Marquis of Pluville. Accompanying the military are three **priests** from the Ordo Fidelius and their three **knights radiant**. The priests are technically separate from the military, and are here to heal and aid the soldiers and settlers alike. Finally, there are two quartermasters and six aides-de-camp (use the statistics of **commoners**, excepting for Alfred Greentree – see below). In total 113 members of the Church have come to Fort Courage to aid in the war.

Notable Soldiers

Lieutenant Integritas: A middle-aged half-orc **ordo pugilis lieutenant** that has been with the Church since his birth. He is slow to speak but quick to act.

Alfred Greentree: This old and wrinkled elf is Lt. Integritas' personal aide-de-camp, and has been part of the Church since he was a boy. He is now a vampire, though he keeps this entirely secret and feeds primarily on the lieutenant, whom he has charmed, so as not to raise suspicion.

Knight Radiant Chastity: A young hobgoblin **knight radiant** of the Ordo Fidelias. He paints and draws in his spare time, and seems to view fighting as more of a frustrating chore than a calling.

Knight Radiant Piety: A middle-aged human **knight radiant** that feels he missed his calling to be an academic priest, despite being no great genius. Has the wild-eyed and ferocious faith in doctrine that makes others uncomfortable with the Church.

Knight Radiant Admirabilis: An old human **knight radiant** that spent some time in the planes of shadow. He giggles unpredictably from time to time, but is otherwise somber and responsible.

Priest Debellis: A young human **priest** from Pluville. He seems to come from wealth and wears all the latest fashions under his alb and chausible (priest clothes), though it looks rather silly.

Priest James: A middle-aged human **priest** from the far-away Northern continent. She was once a rat-catcher, and gets on well with the common folk. She often forgets others' names, even while talking to them.

Priest Orlando: A venerable dwarven **priest** who is still uncomfortable around non-dwarves, trying to fit in by sprinkling his speech with Elven and Gnomish words.

Ensign Leona Diamond: A middle-aged human **knight** that always seems nervous and uncomfortable in social situations, but totally at home in combat or working with her hands.

Ensign Gale Talltree: A halfling **knight** that's missing one finger on both hands and likes to use these missing digits to startle others and do silly 'uncle tricks' (making it look like he's picking his nose all the way to his last knuckle, or doing the separating thumb trick with an extra twist, etc.).

Lt. Integritas is able to provide advice on defending against a siege, as well as warfare in general. He will act as an advisor and do as the PCs order unless it will clearly cost the lives of his soldiers without gain (so he will not endorse any plan that includes a suicide run of Ordo soldiers, nor commoners for that matter). Integritas' first order is to get soldiers on the walls and towers at all hours, and to prepare a staging area in the courtyard to respond to any attacks quickly. He also sits down and offers the following notes on warfare:

- War is more often a challenge of supplies and logistics than bodies and combat. If the fey can prevent the Fort from getting food they will win in time, and if the Sangranese army can find what supplies the fey need and destroy or block it, they will win.
- There must be sites from which the fey operate, even if they live in Faerie. Some kind of Material Plane staging ground, or grounds, are necessary for them to pursue war.
- Timing is everything. The quicker the PCs and their allies can identify and attack these sites the greater their success will be, while still being conscious of drawing back all resources to defend against attacks from the forest.

During the rest of Act II the PCs will seek to earn victory points. These points represent their damage to the supply lines, resources, and key individuals of the army of Faerie. At the same time they will be fending off attacks on the Fort that cost them the lives of soldiers and, eventually, settlers. The targets that provide victory points are out in the forest, and must be sought out and attacked.

Rules for the order, frequency, and details of attacks on the Fort follow, and after are the rules for expeditions into the Foret Froid to pursue the offensive side of the war.

Under Siege

Food and water are not likely to be a problem for some time, despite the siege. The soldiers brought sufficient rations for their number for a month, and the road between the Vielle Eglise and Fort are open intermittently. Supplies run from Pluville through Vielle Eglise to the Fort often enough to keep the settlers and soldiers fed, albeit fed on bread and jerky alone. Water can be drawn from the wells in the Fort, and so is not a concern.

While at war there is an ebb and flow to the attacks on the Fort. There is typically some time between the assaults, and the longer it has been the more severe the attack is likely to be. The pattern of attacks are determined randomly with the following system. Feel free to share it with the players so that they can make educated guesses on when to defend and when to attack.

Each day roll a d6 (or have a player roll a d6). On a one through five add the number to the Siege Score. On a six there is an attack. Consult the Siege Score and run the attack indicated by it. Some siege events will add to or subtract from the Siege Score, indicating that a more or less dangerous assault is coming soon. If a specific event is indicated that has already occurred once run that event *and* another event (noted in that event's entry). The first event, in these cases, becomes a smokescreen or distraction for the second. Some expeditions undertaken by the PCs can also reduce the Siege Score as supply lines are disrupted and soldiers killed.

Siege Score	Event	Siege Score Change	On Additional Occurrences
0-5	No event	-	n/a
6-8	Sortie	-2	Future sorties cover a pair of goblin bombers infiltrating by stealth.
9-11	Fog of Glamours	+3	The second fog covers darkling assassin; see the entry below. On the third and future fogs roll a d20 without modifiers and run the matching event on this table.
12-13	Goblin Bombers	-2	When this event is duplicated roll a d20 without modifiers and run the matching event on this table.
14-16	Frosted Treants	-5	
17-18	Terrible Storm	-	
19-20	Winter Witch	-5	
21+	All-out Offense	-10	-

In most of these attacks PCs have the choice to take the role of defense or offense. Should they choose offense they may have a more difficult fight, but they will also redirect fey combatants and potentially prevent the deaths of their soldiers and settlers and could, potentially, kill one of the key figures of the opposing army. If they choose defense they will be fighting side-by-side with their allies, but will lose the chance to do lasting damage to key figures of the Faerie army.

Sortie

Defense: A series of hoots and howls go up from the forest on different sides of the Fort. Shortly after small assault groups swarm the walls, very much like they did in the first conflict. The PCs must hold the wall against two **darkling elders**, four **darklings**, 6 **goblins**, and 2 **bugbears**. Similar parties make their attempts at other points of the wall.

The darklings and bugbears throw small thorny wooden grappling hooks with vine ropes up the walls to grant all climbers advantage on their checks. Should the PCs attempt to dislodge or cut the grappling hooks off it requires a DC 12 Strength (Athletics) check to uproot it from the stone of the crenellations, or an attack against the rope with an AC of 14 and 10 hp to cut the magical vine rope. If the hooks are dislodged or cut the goblins begin firing shortbows at PCs while they are exposed, readying their actions if they need to.

The bugbears wear arm wraps of vines covered in a thin layer of frost that help them to grapple. They make unarmed attacks on vulnerable targets (+4 to hit, one target, 1d4 + 2 bludgeoning damage), and on a hit the target and the bugbear are both **restrained**. The target may use their action to make a DC 14 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to escape the grapple, ending the effect on a success. The darklings will focus their attacks on restrained targets to deal additional damage while goblins crowd around and position themselves to benefit from opportunity attacks.

Offense: The PCs either rappel down the side of the wall or rush out of the front gate to engage the apparent enemies. The nearest target is a **bugbear chieftain** in the middle of a crowd of eight **goblins**. The bugbear chieftain has the following actions:

Fling. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 20 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage and the flung goblin **grapples** the target. A target can make a DC 9 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check as an action to remove the grappled goblin. Goblins have advantage on attacks against targets they are grappling.

Terrible Shout. The bugbear roars and all creatures within 30 ft. (goblins included) must make a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw, becoming **frightened** on a failure.

Phobophagy. As a bonus action on each of its turns the bugbear may target one **frightened** creature within 30 ft. of it and eat its fear. This ends the frightened condition on the target creature and restores 6 (1d8 +2) hit points to the bugbear.

The bugbear chieftain starts combat by maneuvering to use its Terrible Shout ability to catch as many PCs and as few goblins as it can. On each subsequent turn it uses Phobophagy to restore hit points by consuming the fear of a goblin, and attacks melee combatants with its morningstar. If ranged combatants cause trouble the bugbear flings goblins at them, especially targeting spellcasters.

After mere minutes the fight is over, whether the PCs chose offense or defense. The remaining fey withdraw into the forest, seeming to melt into the fog and trees. The soldiers get their breath and dress their wounds. If the PCs took a defensive position there are only 1d6 casualties. If they were on offense there were 1d8 casualties.

A Note on Casualties

Keeping track of the number of both soldiers and settlers is optional throughout this Act, but recommended. It both gives the war a sense of urgency and puts a real cost on the attacks. If your PCs are treating the loss of soldiers and settlers casually consider removing one of the named NPCs that they have interacted with, having the PCs walk past them as they are being covered by a shroud or attending their all-too-perfunctory burial. Otherwise assume that named NPCs or those with higher CRs are the last to die.

Each attack has a number of casualties attached. The scenario begins with 99 soldiers and Lt. Integritas. There are also three Knights Radiant and three Priests, but they won't get engaged in the defense of the Fort unless it's terribly necessary, instead providing blessings and healing where they can. These contributions are already accounted for in the casualty calculations. There are also 91 settlers, counting both named and unnamed NPCs, and seven non-combatant members of the Church's support staff, plus Alfred Greentree.

In a mechanical sense, the fewer soldiers remain the harder it is to defend the Fort. This has no mechanical effect until half of the defenders have been dispatched, at which time casualties are doubled for each additional encounter as the defense of the Fort suffers. Should the settlers ever be called upon to help with the defense they die at a rate five times higher than that of the professional soldiery. This means, for example, if there are only ten soldiers left and the roll of the dice dictate twelve casualties then the ten soldiers will die in addition to ten settlers (twelve minus ten is two, two times five is ten).

Double the number of casualties, as well, if the PCs are not able to help in the defense of the Fort. If they are beaten, neutralized, or most likely out on an expedition, the toll is seen in bodies fallen.

Fog of Glamours

The fog, always faintly reflecting the blue glitter of the aurora above, begins to creep out of the treeline with intent of its own. The colors are richer and tiny motes of purple and green light flicker within. The fog reaches the outer walls of the Fort and then ascend vertically, pouring over the top like a waterfall and pooling in the courtyard. The mist slides in through holes in the roof and through broken windows, infiltrating every room. It smells of pine and woodsmoke, hellebore and winterberry.

The fog obscures as *fog cloud* within the keep. Any creature that spends ten minutes in the fog begins to exhibit erratic behavior and gains a short-term madness. They must also make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or be subject to one of the effects below.

d20 Roll	Result
1-5	The character cannot turn to the left. Any time they must look or move left it takes an additional ten feet of movement as they spin around in a tight turn. If you do not use facing rules at your table reduce their speed by 15 ft in combat.

6-10	The character believes that they are phasing into and through solid objects – and they are, a little bit! They can use 15 ft of movement to pass through one ft of solid matter. They take 2d10 force damage if they end their movement inside or intersecting with a solid object and are shunted to the nearest open space.
11-15	The character becomes irresistible to small animals. Mice, birds, and bugs convene from all around and crawl on them. This is a little gross and a little charming, and very distracting. The character must make a DC 10 Concentration check each round on initiative count 20 if they are concentrating on a spell, cannot take reactions, and reduce their movement speed by 10 ft.
16-20	The character's voice becomes impossibly loud, creating a <i>thunderclap</i> whenever they speak, even in a whisper. The spell has a DC 13 and can be used in combat as a bonus action each round.

After two or three minutes in the fog the PCs, or the largest group of them if they have split up, are approached by Knight Radiant Chastity. His eyes are clouded by ice, with frost collected on his eyelashes and eyebrows, and it is clear that he is not seeing anything real. He whispers, “fiends...” distractedly, then brings his sword and shield up and attacks the characters.

If the PCs kill Chastity rather than knocking him unconscious his body splits into pieces like clay as he falls and turns into three tiny copies of himself, with tiny armor and swords. Use the statistics of a **xvart** for each. Should these tiny figures be killed they pop as well, each becoming three yet tinier copies of the knight. These hand-high men have AC 10, 1 hit point each, attack with a +1 bonus and do 1 slashing damage on a hit. If slain these smallest figures crumble. Both the small and tiny copies can be knocked unconscious rather than killed, which prevents them multiplying.

All of these effects end after an hour. If Knight Chastity was rendered unconscious he awakes shaking his head with no memory after the fog poured into his room. If at least two of the small copies of himself (or six of the tiny copies) he awakes with 1 hit point and missing an arm from the elbow down and a chunk of his abdomen but without any gore or pain. If more copies than that were killed he is deceased, scattered into large fleshy chunks that do not bleed.

There are 2d6 soldier casualties and 1d6 settler casualties from such events in the fog of glammers, each story bizarre and dangerous. If the PCs performed especially competently in their own dealings or were quick to go search the keep and help the fog-tripping settlers only 1d6 soldier casualties occur (mostly from falling off the walls).

If the hag coven has been destroyed by the PCs this event cannot occur.

Goblin Bombers

Under cover of night and a casting of *invisibility* a dozen **goblin bombers** sneak over the walls and into the courtyard, and then the keep. They are fanatics hopped up on psychedelic cocktails of fey wine and carrying small, glowing red goblin bombs. They split into teams of three, one of which the PCs encounter just as their *invisibility* wears off.

The goblin bombers know that their greatest advantage is their ability to do large amounts of damage several times rapidly in an area. They keep their distance, lobbing bombs and then retreating around corners and behind furniture and using their Nimble Escape ability to avoid retaliation.

Elsewhere in the keep the other teams of goblin bombers make their own attacks. One is quickly caught by soldiers and paladins and slay them before a single bomb goes off. The other two make wreckage of a few rooms, leaving behind smoking flinders of furniture and many dead. The attack causes 3d6 casualties in a few frenzied minutes of explosions.

If all three goblin camps have been destroyed by the PCs this event cannot occur.

Frosted Treants

At noon on a gray and cloudy day where small flurries of snow whip down from the mountains a few treetops shake from side to side. Shortly after four **treants** emerge from the treeline, looking very much like overgrown juniper trees covered in a thin layer of ice and frost. They split up as the soldiers take to the walls and prepare makeshift fire arrows, each treant taking a side of the Fort and beginning to fling huge stones and tree stumps at the walls and people.

The treants have the Siege Monster ability and deal double damage against the walls. The walls are five feet thick at their tops and seven feet thick at the bottoms. They have 2,500 hit points per ten ft section of wall. It takes one treant ten minutes of uninterrupted assault to bring one ten ft length of wall to rubble.

Each treant is attended by dozens of **needle blights** and **vine blights**, as well as a pair of **dryads** each. The dryads simply focus on channeling energy into the treants, healing them each turn and taking cover behind the treants. The blights rush the walls, with some staying back to fire needles up at the soldiers defending the walls.

The soldiers deal an average of twenty fire damage per turn to the treants with their fire arrows, and the dryads heal an average of fourteen hit points in return. After five minutes the treants move to focus on only two walls and redouble their efforts. The treants and dryads retreat when death looks likely, but two are caught on fire and die, crashing into the ground and burning like bonfires. However, the damage is done: one wall has a ten ft wide gap in it all the way down to the ground. Another wall has a ten ft by ten ft section taken out of the top of the wall. The two remaining walls have taken 1,000 points of damage each, though they still stand.

Defense: The PCs can deal as much damage as possible with fire spells and similar effects to the treants, but after that their energy is best spent fighting blights to give the soldiery free shots at the treants. Volume matters more than accuracy or damage in this circumstance.

There are ten needle blights and four vine blights on whatever side of the walls the PCs choose. The vine blights use their Entangling Plants effect on the walls of the Fort, providing the equivalent of a climbing net for themselves and the needle blights to use to ascend. They move up the walls as quickly as they can, moving 10 ft up the wall as part of their movement and Dashing on the first round to make further progress. The needle blights cover their ascent by firing on the defenders, then follow the vine blights. Unlike the vine blights the needle blights must make DC 15 Strength (Athletics) checks at advantage to climb the wall, falling if they miss the DC by more than five and advancing at half their speed on a success. Even at the top of the wall the needle blights do their best to keep their distance and fling needles rather than closing to melee range.

Offense: The PCs may launch themselves from the tops of the walls or out of the front gate to engage one of the treants and its attendants. The blights swarm up the walls behind them, more eager to get to the

soldiers than defend their charges. Each treant has two dryad attendants healing it for 1d8 + 2 per turn; is taking 10 fire damage (20 with their vulnerability) per turn from the soldiers; and is guarded by four **darklings**.

The treant ignores the PCs until they are reduced to half their hit points or less, trusting their allies to take care of the problem. At half hp the treant focus their attacks on the characters, and at 25 hp the treant will flee. The dryads will use *entangle* and their Fey Charm ability to attempt to slow the PCs, and may use *shillelagh* and enter combat if it seems they can distract the PCs from the treant that way. The darklings will target **restrained** targets to do additional damage.

After the treants' offensive there are 5d6 casualties, mostly crushed by flung stones or caught in the collapse of the walls. If the PCs took the offensive and drew the treants' attention reduce it to 3d6 casualties. If they performed exceptionally and were able to assault two or more treants reduce it to 2d6 – mostly lives lost in the first moments of the blight attacks.

If the PCs have already attacked the treant grove this event cannot occur.

Terrible Storm

The dawn never comes. Instead, the darkness of night is replaced with the darkness of clouds hanging from horizon to horizon, dimmer than the night even because the stars and the aouura cannot be seen. Freezing rain begins immediately as the clouds appear, and swiftly changes to hail, sleet, and snow. The temperature outdoors drops beyond freezing, beyond zero degrees (-17 Celsius). Fires roar in the keep, but even so the stones radiate cold.

Anyone without cold-weather gear must make DC 10 Constitution saving throws each hour or take a level of exhaustion. Visibility and movement outside are virtually impossible due to the wind, precipitation, and darkness, and those outside must make DC 10 Constitution saving throws every ten minutes instead of every hour to avoid exhaustion.

The storm continues throughout the entire day and the night following, breaking just in time for dawn. In the frigid cold everyone that could huddled into the keep, with the animals in the basement and the people clustered around fires and even candles. The snow and ice takes a day to clear out of just the paths the settlers commonly use, and 2d6 + 2 days to fully melt. During this period the area surrounding the keep is considered difficult terrain.

There are 2d6 casualties among the soldiers and 2d6 among the settlers. Halve these if the PCs found a clever way to provide warmth to their people.

Winter Witch

Defense: The Winter Witch stops her narrow sled a hundred feet back from the treeline (with total cover) surrounded by her pack of wolves just before dawn. Five **winter wolves** rush through the darkness to the edges of the wall and then vanish with two claps of thunder that draw guards to the spot just in time to see a white tail disappearing in a shower of blue sparks. The wolves are now inside the castle.

The **winter witch** extends her consciousness into one of the wolves. She can switch which wolf with an action. While riding along with a wolf she can communicate with it telepathically to give it orders, and the

wolf can use its action to channel her spellcasting. Treat this as though the winter witch were casting the spell on the wolf's turn and using the wolf as the origin point for the spell.

The wolves have orders to seek out key people and kill them while causing as much havoc as possible. The PCs will encounter one wolf, which will howl on its first action to call the others. Roll 1d4, 1d6, 1d8, and 1d10: one wolf arrives on the round indicated by the d4, another on the round indicated by the d6, etc. The winter witch has already used two 3rd-level spell slots casting *thunder step* twice, and one 2nd-level spell slot casting *misty step* to get the wolves into the keep, as well as her 5th-level spell slot to power the ride-along and spell sharing effect.

The first wolf begins combat with *lightning bolt* if it can line up a good shot. It attempts to stay alive until more wolves arrive, using *shield* as necessary. When one or more wolves show up to help it will try to move out of direct melee and use *blindness* to hinder spellcasters and rogues, and *ice storm*, *shatter*, and *ice knife* to deal area damage when it makes sense. The other wolves will use their Cold Breath attack to deal damage to multiple combatants in melee quickly, especially since their allies are immune to the cold.

If the fight begins to turn against the PCs the three Knights Radiant (or two, if Chastity died in the Fog of Glambours event) may show up to assist them. This presents a great time for the lead wolf to use *ice storm* to great effect. The Priests of the Ordo Fidelius may also make an appearance, though they have no offensive spells prepared and can offer only healing.

Offense: If the PCs go out looking for the witch as soon as the alarm is raised or the first wolf spotted they can follow the howling of the pack in the pre-dawn light into the woods. She is a hundred ft behind the woodline, which means 250 ft from the keep, and she has three winter wolves in addition to the normal wolves that pull her sled. The winter wolves will almost certainly spot the PCs before they are spotted due to their high Perception and Snow Camouflage ability. They'll attempt to intercept the PCs between the edge of the woods and the witch's sled, approaching as quietly as possible.

While the three winter wolves are dispatched the winter witch will move toward the sound of combat, cast *barkskin*, and take a position to keep herself behind three-quarters cover before casting *ice storm*. She'll follow it up right away with *lightning bolt* if she can get a good line of effect – unlikely in the forest, since her targets will have the same degree of cover she does. If her targets have good cover she'll instead save that spell slot and cast *ice storm* again or *sleep* at 4th level if it seems likely to drop most of her opponents after the fight with the wolves and the *ice storm*. If the PCs continue to move toward her after her spells are spent she'll retreat before taking any damage, knowing that she is not a powerful melee combatant even after accounting for her **ring of evasion** and **cloak of displacement**.

Note that the witch starts combat with only one 2nd-level spell slot, one 3rd-level spell slot, and no 5th-level spell slots, because she's cast *barkskin*, *misty step*, and *thunder step* twice, as well as used her 5th-level spell to mind-link with her wolf pack in the keep.

If the PCs chose defense there are 2d6 casualties plus any allies that died in combat fighting alongside the PCs. If the PCs chose offense there are 4d6 casualties, all found frozen or torn apart by wolves but none dead by magic as the PCs took the witch's attention and spell slots.

If the winter witch is already dead this event cannot occur.

All-out Offense

The inhabitants of the castle are startled by the sound of a distant and awful-sounding horn. The note it sounds is like fingernails on chalkboard or a knife on a plate: a long, sustained screeching. This horn signals the beginning of an all-out offense making use of all of the resources at the Queen's disposal. Three forces move toward the castle, each from a different direction: one of Kaldskogger scoundrels, bandits, and beasts, led by Father Moon-eye and a pack of werewolves; one of goblins, bugbears, and satyrs driven by the hag coven of Violatia, Stench, and Bogclaw; and one force of frozen blights surrounding the winter witch and the avatar of Queen Ailbhe herself.

In this scenario there are three forces approaching, and so PCs can make the choice of which to address *and* whether they want to take the offensive or the defensive against their chosen threat. If the PCs finish one quickly they can even move to another, either switching from offense to defense or choosing a totally different threat to address.

Werewolf Pack

Defense: The werewolves and their company approach from directly before the keep. The bandits and rabble are meant to be more of a threat than an effective force, and they do not even play at the pretense of scaling the walls. Instead they rush across the open ground with shields held overhead and cluster as close as possible to the front gate. It is only then that the werewolves transform, lifting an oversized battering ram with their supernatural strength. There are eight **werewolves**, fifteen **bandits**, and fifteen **commoners** participating in the assault, led by **Father Moon-eye**.

There are murder holes immediately over the front gate that the PCs can use to pour boiling oil (kept close to hand) or similar onto the werewolves below. A full cauldron of oil deals 4d8 fire damage to the targets below on a failed DC 12 Dexterity saving throw, or half as much damage on a success, and deals half that damage (2d8 or 1d8) at the end of the target's next turn. The murder holes are small enough that targets have half cover from attacks even if the attackers are standing directly above, since attackers are limited in the angles they can make use of. Attackers using melee weapons from above must use polearms to stab through the murder holes – nothing much wider than two inches can fit through.

The werewolves below were chosen for their immunity to damage from nonmagical, non-silvered weapons, and so they ignore the assault from above to focus on bringing down the front gate. The ram they carry is a whole pine tree trunk with a white iron point, and will shatter the door and its stone bar in five minutes. The ram requires at least four werewolves to use, so if six are brought down the remaining three will retreat. By the time the werewolves are beaten or the door brought down the bandits and commoners are scattered or have surrendered and laid face-down in the open plain, shivering.

Offense: Attacking the werewolves is a simple matter of coming down the outer wall behind them and landing in the mass of their bandits. If the PCs choose to battle the bandits directly consider treating them as three **swarms of commoners** instead for ease of combat. Only three werewolves will join in initially, the others keeping to their work at the gate. If the three werewolves all fall then the rest will briefly pause their work with the ram and turn to engage the PCs.

This combat is especially deadly owing to the number of enemies that can sustain extraordinary amounts of damage. If any of the PCs fall consider having the werewolves take them alive, to be later turned into werewolves by Father Moon-eye.

If the PCs have already encountered and neutralized Father Moon-eye and his cult this encounter cannot occur – the assault includes only the other threats.

Hag Rabble

Defense: The hags Countess Violatia, Dame Stench, and Lady Bogclaw to the East of the castle the fight will be fairly straightforward. A swarm of nine **goblins** rushes the wall with tiny vine grappling hooks, whipped forward by three **goblin bosses**. The three **green hags** remain below. One of the goblin bosses wears the coven's hag-eye (a big knot of wood carved into an eye with a black pearl for the pupil, worn on a hemp rope around the goblin's neck like a lanyard). The hags are able to see through the hag-eye, as well as cast necromancy, illusion, enchantment spells through it. They cast spells on their own action, but otherwise do not participate in this combat. If the PCs realize that the hag-eye is the conduit to the hags and attempt to attack it it has an AC of 17 and 24 hit points. The goblins will attempt to play keep-away, tossing the eye up to thirty ft as an action on their turn. If a PC with at least one free hand is between the two goblins throwing and catching the hag-eye that PC can use a reaction to make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw to catch it. The hags can still cast through the hag-eye if a PCs catches it, but it will be easier to dispose of.

The hags start the combat by casting *eyebite*, *bestow curse* cast at 5th level, and *phantasmal killer* immediately. These are all concentration spells, and one hag concentrates on each. They otherwise use *vicious mockery* to deal minor damage during combat. The goblins target creatures weakened by *bestow curse* or *eyebite*, trying to get easy kills. If all the goblins are killed or the hag-eye is broken the coven use their Invisible Passage ability to escape the battlefield, going to make another hag-eye.

If the hag-eye is destroyed the black pearl comes free. It is a **pearl of power**.

Offense: The hags are 250 ft away, hiding in the trees while the goblins carry their particular brand of vileness into the keep. If the PCs rush out of the castle to attack them they'll allow the PCs to get close before five goblins drop from the trees around them. The hags use their spells liberally early in the combat to reduce the power of the most dangerous combatants, such as using *bestow curse* to remove half the actions of a rogue, *eyebite* to put a fighter to sleep, or *hold person* to keep someone at a distance. If they have a good opportunity to cast *lightning bolt* they'll do so, but always keep at least two 3rd- or 4th-level spell slots available to *counterspell* anything that seems threatening.

The hags do not fight to the death. They retreat when the coven as a whole has 100 hit points or fewer remaining, using their Invisible Passage ability to effect an escape.

The Queen's Avatar

A complex ritual has given Queen Ailbhe a way to manifest on the Material Plane, a feat simple for her subjects but difficult for her due to complex fey reasons and her ties to the lands of Faerie. A crowd of blights approach from the South, accompanied by the Queen's avatar and the winter witch. The avatar is a human-sized figure that looks like an elf with a permanently distant look and surrounded by a glittering blue fog.

Defense: The Queen's avatar (use the statistics for a **winter eladrin**) first casts *fog cloud* to cloak the whole South wall top in fog, then uses her Fey Step ability to move to the top of the wall in a crackle of light. Eight **twig blights** come along with her, seeming to grow out of the mist. Her Sorrowful Presence makes

the guards clumsy and stupid, and they reel in her presence. She starts combat by catching as many of the PCs and guards as possible in a *cone of cold*, and moves using Fey Step whenever she can. She uses *ice storm* only when she can catch most of the party in the area, otherwise relying on her longsword and Frigid Rebuke to deal damage. The Queen is only here in a tenuous kind of way and fights 'to the death,' vanishing in a cloud of glitter if she is reduced to 0 hit points.

Offense: The Queen's avatar is impressive, but is only held in the Material Plane by the winter witch's magic. Treat an offense against her in the same way as the offense option in the Winter Witch event, except that the witch has spent all of her spell slots of 2nd-level and higher on the ritual to bring the Queen's avatar to the Material Plane, and she is accompanied by a **tree blight** in addition to her three **winter wolves**. The tree blight is a new cutting of the Gulthias tree being brought to the Fort on a huge sled covered in earth. The tree blight has only 100 hit points at the start of combat, a result of it being uprooted to be moved.

This event cannot occur if the PCs have already encountered and killed the winter witch.

The all-out assault as a whole event results in 6d6 + 30 casualties. Of this 2d6 + 10 can be attributed to each 'prong' of the offense. If the PCs were able to avert one or more of the threats during their expeditions – by killing the hags, the werewolves, or the winter witch – reduce the casualties by an appropriate number.

Darkling Assassin

Under cover of a disorienting fog a darkling elder assassin creeps into the Fort. Use the statistics of an **assassin**, but with the following changes: It has the Death Burn feature of a darkling elder; it's type is fey rather than humanoid; it can cast *darkness* once without any components and regains the ability to do so after finishing a short or long rest; it has a Stealth bonus of +11. It has drunk a **potion of freedom of movement** and has a small padded, silenced grappling hook and thin cord that provides it advantage on climbing the castle walls.

The assassin advances to the top of the wall while the guards are distracted by the mystifying fog, keeping completely to stealth where possible while taking opportunistic strikes to kill guards where it believes it will be able to kill them in one shot. Its target is to find any key individuals that are disoriented by the fog, especially the PCs. It will then attempt to approach using the concealment of the fog and will do as much damage as possible, seeking to kill at least one person.

Whether it is successful or not it splits immediately – it knows that it is at a severe disadvantage in a straight fight, and it will throw itself out of a window if necessary to effect its escape (though it keeps the grappling hook and line for just such a purpose).

All of these encounters have their dangers. Those of the All-out Assault, especially, are deadly. Remember that there are three **priests** in the keep, all of whom are likely to use their 3rd-level spell slots to prepare *revivify* each day during the war. If a PC is dropped in or near the castle a **knight radiant** and associated priest are likely to rush up and revive them, staying around to provide healing as necessary. If the priest seems to be in danger the knight will drag them back out of the fight, even against their orders.

Remember also that there are dozens of soldiers to hand. Should a fight seem to be going against the PCs they may ask where their allies are, or cry out for assistance. For the most part these allies are occupied. In each combat the forces arrayed against the PCs are meant to represent only a portion of the enemy force, with the rest engaging the soldiers. However, typically a few individuals can come to their aid. If you are keeping track of the number of casualties and surviving soldiers use the following guide to see who can respond within a round or two.

Number of Soldiers Remaining	... answer the call
75 +	1d6 guards , 1d4 soldiers , and one of the knights radiant or Lt. Integritas (ordo pugilis lieutenant)
50 – 74	1d6 guards , 1d4 soldiers , and 1d3 – 2 knights
25 – 49	1d6 guards and 1 soldier
1 – 24	1d4 guards
None	1d6 commoners come to help in 1d4 rounds

Consider having persistent allies, like Gale Talltree, Antoinette Porras, or another recurring character be their most common savior. This might be a guard, or even knight radiant, that has decided to stick nearby to the Fort's commanders as they seem so prone to need saving. If this figure takes severe damage or dies they'll at least die knowing they died doing something important.

Expeditions

When the players are not responding to the assaults on the Fort they'll need to make trips out into the forest to strike military targets and bring the fey forces grinding to a halt. These expeditions can make the assaults on the Fort much less deadly, as well. Killing all the werewolves in the forest, for example, mean there are no more werewolves to attack the Fort.

If the PCs took the time to speak to the folk at the Vielle Eglise trading post they may have heard several important stories about the woods and the fey already. If not, they can gather some information from captured enemies – even the goblins are bound to know something. As the PCs identify these military targets they can go out scouting to find them specifically.

Just as with the trips to discover the Fort initially, each expedition takes 2d6 + 4 hours to discover the target, plus time to return. Between setting up for the trek, stopping for rests and meals, and returning to the Fort a party can spend up to 8 hours per day searching. If the characters choose to spend the night in the woods and make camp roll on the random encounters table below four times during the night.

As each expedition begins have the characters make a single Wisdom (Survival) check. A proficient party member can Help the primary individual rolling. If the PCs meet a DC 15 they find a military target. If they meet a DC 20 they can pick *which* military target they find, either from the list below or from rumors they've heard, depending on whether the GM wishes to share the list with them. If the PCs fail to meet the DC they instead encounter a non-military target. Each military target grants a certain number of victory points, and some will reduce the Siege Score used to calculate the attacks on the Fort.

If the PCs roll randomly and encounter a unique event again simply reroll, or move to the next event up or down the table. Some expedition targets, such as supply depots, are common and can be encountered

multiple times. Others, like the reflecting pool, are unique and there is no sense in running the encounter again.

Players can cede some control over military matters, including expeditions, to Lt. Integritas. However, it becomes apparent that the Church's soldiers are just as interested in driving Kaldskoggers out of the territory as they are in defending settlers against the fey. PCs can take Church soldiers along with them, up to a half a platoon (6 **guards** and 2 **soldiers**) if they want. The soldiers are surly, superior, and refuse to fight to the death. Church-only expeditions are one-half platoon each. Should an expedition go out with only Church soldiers and no oversight roll on the table below.

d20 Result	Non-military Target
1-4	Reflecting Pool
5-8	Goblin Runaways
9-12	Lost Loggers' Ghosts
13-15	Ancient Graveyard
16-18	Shrines of the Sun & the Moon
19-20	Kaldskogger Refugees

d20 Result	Military Target	Siege Score Change	Victory Points
1-4	Goblin Camp	-1	+1
5-8	Supply Depot	-3	+1
9-12	Faerie Ring	-2	+1
13-15	Dryad Tree	-	+3
16-18	Treant Grove	-3	+2
19-20	Trilithon (choose or roll randomly between Father Moon-eye's Camp, the Hag's Cabin, or the Blue Ice Glade)	-10	+10

d20 Result	Church Expedition
1-4	No luck. Most of the soldiers come back drunk, but safe. 1d6 – 4 of them do not come back: deserters.
5-11	No luck. The soldiers come back safe, but without anything to show.
12-14	The soldiers find a Kaldskogger raiding party and eliminate it, losing 1d6 soldiers.
15-17	They find a Kaldskogger settlement or trading post, losing 1d6 + 3 soldiers.
18-20	The soldiers find one of the military targets above. They lose 1d6 + 5 of their number. They have a 5-in-6 chance of eliminating a goblin camp or supply depot, a 4-in-6 chance with a dryad tree or faerie ring, and a 1-in-6 chance of success at the treant grove. They have no chance of addressing the threats at the trilithons. If the Church's soldiers defeat a military target the Siege Score is still affected and the Victory Points still awarded.

d20 Result	Camping Encounter
1-8	No encounter
9-11	One ettercap , two ice spiders , and three swarms of insects spin webs encircling the sleeping PCs, then attack from the tree branches above.

12-14	One winter wolf and four wolves approach by stealth, trying to drag a sleeping PC off into the darkness.
15-16	A banshee leading two zombies with spectral collars and chains come across the camp and attempt to kill them and drag their souls to Faerie.
17-18	Two babaus on a scouting mission for Scent of Carnage seeks the PCs and tests their strength, fleeing if seriously hurt.
19-20	A flameskull that deals cold damage rather than fire, wreathed in blue flame, screams into camp.

Military Targets

Goblin Camp

Goblin camps are messy affairs, more like extended burrows than military encampments. Most are centered around a goblin nursery: a single chamber or structure filled with layers and layer of fungus from which goblins spring, and to which they feed organic materials to nurture the next crop of goblinoids.

A typical goblin camp includes 24 **goblins**, three **goblin bosses**, two **bugbears**, a **goblin stick of Maglubiyet**, and four **worgs**. These groups are often separated into a few groups, for example: four goblins and four worgs in one area; six goblins, a boss, and a bugbear in two different areas; and six goblins, a boss, and the stick of Maglubiyet elsewhere.

The goblins are likely to set traps. In their homes goblins are prone to set up rock falls, snares, pits, falling nets and the like. They are also likely to have tunnels built for small creatures through which they'll circle around PCs to get attacks from the back. They also use their Nimble Escape feature liberally to strike and then move back into a cramped space¹⁰, or to fire arrows and then hide and surprise their foes again.

When combat breaks out the goblins stay more-or-less in their groups, as they are cowards. They will advance to a place where they can see the fight, but only join in if victory seems certain. Goblins are even hesitant to use their overwhelming numbers because they could be the ones that die. The only creature with unique strategies is the stick of Maglubiyet, who will first cast *spirit guardians* and *spiritual weapon* to deal maximum damage against its targets. If it is targeted with even one attack it will end those spells and cast *sanctuary* instead, spending its time healing any goblins that survive one attack with *cure light wounds* to prolong the battle, and prioritizing goblin bosses, bugbears, or worgs if they are involved in the battle. It will use *dispel magic* if the opportunity presents itself to end effects that the PCs might use like *entangle* or *shield of faith*.

When the goblins fight they are prone to break and run. If an individual goblin is reduced to half its hit points or fewer (3) and not healed. If the leader of a given group (like a goblin boss or the stick of Maglubiyet) falls the goblins of its group must make DC 8 Charisma saving throws or turn and bolt.

In the goblin camp are eight or nine tents, each with its own tiny treasure hoard hidden away from the rest of the band. Everything is crusted with mold, moss, and old food scraps - not uncommon in goblin camps. Assume half of the coins are hidden (Investigate DC 16) in each tent, as are any magical items.

Tent 1: The tent of three goblins named Stupid, Idiot, and Moron, with their faces and names in charcoal on the walls. Contains 150 cp strung up as decorations, plus 150 cp and a 50-gp gemstone buried in a shallow hole in the back of the tent.

Tent 2: A tent with five little goblin beds, one of which has clearly not been slept in. Under that bed is a fox-trap (DC 11 to avoid or disarm, or it makes one +5 attack for 1d4 piercing) and a series of tiny cloth purses containing 200 sp.

Tent 3: A huge tent with ten goblin 'nests', scattered variously with little chicken and rat bones and with 100 cp and 100 sp, plus 100 more sp 'hidden.' In one corner is a little vanity with drawers filled with berries and colored mud. Seeded throughout the drawers are 4 gems worth 25 gp each.

Tent 4: This tent is appointed almost with a sense of style. There is a safe - something like a child's toy with a simple lock (DC 10) - in which are several mock 'deeds' for imaginary properties and patches of the forest, and 70 gp in little rolls of ten coins. Hidden under one of the hay mattresses haphazardly are 60 sp and 100 cp.

Tent 5: A tent of three or four goblin nests, used for the rearing of children (so very covered in mold). There are strings of copper and silver pieces hung above like decorations, worth 100 cp and 100 sp.

Tent 6: The bugbears' tent is filled with furs and pillows, with a firepit built in the center. In the embers of the firepit are 30 silver pieces and a large ruby (a fire elemental gem).

Tent 7: The goblin Stick of Maglubiyet's personal tent, along with 3 'servant' goblins. A collection of holy books - stories of Maglubiyet that read like the fables you'd share with a psychopath child - hides a thick, folded sheet of vellum in an envelope: a scroll of revivify. As well there are 100 sp in a little coffer-box and another 100 sp seeded throughout the goblins' nests.

Tent 8: The goblin boss' tent has wealth laid out in the open, like a challenge to steal from him: 300 cp and 300 sp in messy piles. Hidden (just in case) are 5 gems worth 50 gp each. On the goblin when he fights are a potion of fire breath and a potion of necrotic resistance.

10: A creature can squeeze into and through a space suited for up to one size smaller than itself. When squeezing through such a space a creature's speed is halved, and they have disadvantage on attack rolls and Dexterity saving throws, and attack rolls against it have advantage.

Supply Depot

The supply depots of the fey army deal in mundane goods such as rations, building materials, and weapons of fey make – often for their allies in the Material Plane – but also with emotion bundled in bricks, bottles, and buckets. These depots are haphazardly placed and managed, as the fey truly are not experienced in mundane war and its mechanics.

Supply depots are typically guarded by four **darkling elders** mounted on four **wolves**. They are fast-moving enemies with good damage output but poor defenses, and know this. If combat seems to be turning against them they will disengage and move back into the trees to hide, then change positions and move back in to harry the PCs and attempt to get advantage on their attacks to deal additional damage.

The 'treasure' here are crates and crates of faerie goods: fairy dust, goblin gold, toadstools, emotions (little crumbly bricks of disappointment, phials of comfort, spicy jawbreaker candies of anger, that kind of thing). There are also faerie weapons: shortbows and shortswords subtly misfit to human hands (made for, say, a 14-year-old or a 4' 9" person), hundreds of arrows fletched with brightly colored feathers, and

other more boring supplies: parchment, canvas, rope, flint-and-steels, chalk and charcoal, string, and the like. There are also 'comfort' goods: a few decks of playing cards or chess sets, a cask of tobacco and stacks of papers or a handful of pipes, and 5 bottles of fine wine (10 gp each).

Faerie Ring

These are places where Faerie is especially close to the Material Plane, notable even in the Foret Froid. Typically they are demarcated with small rings of stones decorated with carved triskelions or knots or runes, or circles of toadstools, or something similar. Guarding the Material side of a given faerie ring are four **pixies**, four **darklings**, and two **satyrs**.

The darklings take advantage of the fog to hide when they can and then leap into combat to get one attack off with improved damage, hopefully. The satyrs barrel into melee with spellcasters, relying on their Magic Resistance to keep them safe while they deal damage. The pixies start combat with *confusion* to catch as many of the PCs as possible at a disadvantage, then use *entangle*, *sleep*, and *polymorph* to attempt to control the battlefield and allow their allies to deal damage easily. The pixies are sensitive to their own weakness, however, and will use their Superior Invisibility and flee if they seem to be in real danger.

For those interested in monetizing this experience, pixie wings can be sold to alchemists for five gold coins per matched pair in good condition. As well, one of the satyrs carries a little round-bodied lute that would be suitable for casual play or as a child's practice instrument.

Dryad Tree

Dotted throughout the forest are a number of trees that grow above the rest, each one an exceptional specimen of its kind. These are dryad trees, plants that are the source of life for a specific dryad and which benefit from their care. A typical dryad's tree is guarded by a menagerie of animals, beasts drawn from nearby, like an **elk**, two **brown bears**, a pack of three **wolves**, and of course the dryad themselves.

Dryads often collect little trinkets and prizes. One might find a set of old mosaic tiles turned into beads and strung on slim vines or leather strips, each piece worth one gold piece to an interested collector and with usually eight or ten in a cache.

Treant Grove

The Foret Froid has an extraordinary connection to Faerie, and that has seeped into the trees here. There are treants that stride through the forest, caring for the pines. If the PCs seek out or encounter a treant grove they will likely catch a **treant** by surprise.

The treant makes use of its Animate Trees ability immediately, calling a pair of trees to accompany it into battle. Thereafter it slams targets without much thought for tactics or strategy – it is big enough to not need to think. The exception to this is if anyone deals fire damage. That character will instantly become the primary target of the treant, who will immediately pursue them to the exclusion of others.

This combat is particularly deadly to the PCs, not because the creature has more hit points or unique abilities, but because it can animate two more allies of its own and put out four attacks per round, any one of which could drop a PC in one hit. If the PCs come across this encounter by accident make clear that

they may be at real risk without a backup of Church soldiers. Should they be accompanied by soldiers have the treant attack them first, excepting the note on fire damage earlier.

This treant is an amateur alchemist, of sorts, and PCs find several natural 'vials' nearby that are essentially thick-skinned berries full of glowing fluid. The berries can be opened by twisting off the stem, and then drunk like potions. The treant's cache includes a **potion of hill giant strength**, a **philter of love**, a **potion of fire breath**, and a **greater potion of healing**.

Trilithons

In the forest are three trilithons (two standing stones with a third laid across them like a doorway) of white iron stone, dating from a time far, far before written histories. These are the lynchpins of the connections between Faerie and the forest, and each one is guarded by one of the Queen's most dangerous lieutenants.

One is in the middle of the swamp between two rivers, under the sight of the hag coven. One is near the edge of the forest in the middle of the werewolf camp where Father Moon-eye's cult lives. One is in the center of the barren Blue Ice Glade where the winter witch broods by her wrecked stump.

Trilithon – Hag's Cabin

A coven of three green hags named Lady Rotclaw, Dame Stench, and Countess Violatia have made their home in the flooded, swampy part of the forest between the two rivers at the heart of the woods. The hags are high-ranking vassals of Queen Ailbhe, and as such may have a little more decorum and style than the more common hags out and about in the world.

Unique Hags

The three hags all have their own stories, personalities, and voices – and these are reflected in their statistics. If you want to give the hags a little more personality than those found in a random encounter, see their details below.

Countess Violatia: Violatia is the youngest of the three, at least in appearance, and terribly vain. She is the most likely to use her Illusory Appearance to seduce mortals and ruin their lives with charms and curses from within their circle of friends. She delights in mentally abusing people and causing them terrible social trouble. Violatia has the following ability:

Poison Sweetness (3/day). When a target within 60 ft. that Violatia can see rolls a saving throw against being *charmed* Violatia can force them to roll it at disadvantage.

Dame Stench: The middle sister of the coven is a grotesque example, always covered in manure and algae and with breath that could kill a goat at a dozen paces. She is voracious and bestial, while speaking and acting like everyone's favorite aunt. She delights in using illusions to convince mortals to eat raw meat, dung, and other such inedible terrors. She has the following ability:

Resilience. Dame Stench has advantage on saving throws that would move her, change her shape, or that would impose a condition, such as **prone**, **blindness**, or **stunned** on her.

Lady Bogclaw: The eldest of the coven and the first in the forest, Lady Bogclaw has passed through the needs for frippery and fluff in her victims' misery in her long life, and she now takes the very

direct approach of just hurting mortals. When under the veil of illusion she seems to be a stern and demanding grandmother. Bogclaw has the following ability:

Bloodlust. When Lady Bogclaw is attacking a target that is not at their maximum hit points she gains a +2 bonus to her melee attacks and melee damage.

The hags have, by their nature, changed the landscape around their lair and laid it under a huge and far-ranging illusion. The territory within one mile of their cabin looks like a pleasant river glen of hundreds of hills rising up from out of the damp earth, some of them with little huts or cabins atop them. Because the ground here is so water-logged the trees are sparser here, and smaller. In the center of the village is a pleasant-looking log cabin with a bright thatch roof, from which a little chimney peeks, pumping out woodsmoke. The white iron trilithon is nowhere to be seen.

In these huts are a few families, maybe a dozen people in total. These people are actually enchanted **scarecrows** and **brooms** (six of each). Under their illusions they totter about making the motions of normal, woodsy life: cutting and stacking wood, cooking, and darning socks. However, the illusions of the hags are not perfect and some seams show. PCs that walk through the little village find that the people are vague in their speech and distant in their eyes. As well, there are horrible moments like the following:

- A pair of children have dragged a little gray cat out to one side of their cabin by the stacked wood, and one of them brings a cleaver down, killing the cat.
- A wife serves her husband porridge filled with metal shards and razor blades, and looks on as blood drips from his mouth.
- A pig in its pen screams like a human in pain, and PCs can almost make out words.
- A cockerel stares at the PCs with cruel eyes and attacks them. It keeps attacking them even after it's killed, right up until it's dismembered.

If a PC goes to investigate these events, each time they find that they were momentarily dazed or saw something wrong. It's just a pig, or two kids playing with a kitten, or a husband and wife sharing a meal. Each time the PCs see something troubling or wretched around the village they can make a DC 20 Wisdom saving throw to snap free of the illusion, or realize that the illusion is on *everything* around them. If another PC points out that it's an illusion the DC is decreased to 15. After ten minutes the illusion re-asserts itself and reality fades like a bad dream *unless* all PCs are aware of the illusion at once, in which case it fades for good.

Beneath the illusion is a stretch of patchy woods sunk in poisonous, muddy ground. Tiny huts made of rotted wood sit on hillocks of mud and river rocks, and among them move animated scarecrows and brooms. A few surly, dirty boars or rams peer out of the woods, making it clear that animals *do* have the capacity to hate people. The only complete cabin in the village is right at the center, a short stone's throw from a trilithon of white iron wrapped in moss and algae and sunk in three or four inches of stagnant black water. The cabin has dirty thatch atop it and is chinked with foul-smelling mud.

In the hut at the center of the village live the hag coven. Things can go two ways here depending on whether the PCs are under the effects of the illusion or have shaken it off.

If the PCs are under the effects of the illusion when they arrive (even if some, but not all, of the group had gotten free, the illusion re-asserts itself at the door of the hags' cabin) the door is opened by a round-faced motherly figure that introduces herself as Mama Roma. Inside the cabin at the fireplace is a whip-

thin older woman introduced as Granny Rottie, and in the back with an embroidery hoop is a beautiful young woman named Viola. The hags chat with the PCs in a friendly manner, though they say they don't know anything about this big rock they're looking for. They offer tea and biscuits (actually small cups of pig urine and pucks of wormy mud), and say that the PCs should go check in a spot they know. They send the group on a wild goose chase – perhaps to a **roper** lair, or to find a **banderhob** in the woods, hoping someone else will deal with the problem.

If the PCs approach with clear eyes or, during their conversation with the hags the illusion falls apart, the hags will be happy to start a fight. They call out for their scarecrows and brooms to come attack the intruders, then use their Invisible Passage ability to slip out of the cabin and go to regroup around the trilithon. Once the PCs have gotten rid of their animated servants the hags engage in combat. Lady Bogclaw casts *bestow curse* on her first target and wades into the fight, claws out. Dame Stench stays at the edges of combat to line up good shots with *lightning bolt* and *counterspell*. Violatia attempts to control the biggest damage-dealers among the PCs with *eyebite*, *polymorph*, or *phantasmal killer*. The hags are not inclined to risk their lives, though. When they reach 20 hit points the hags disengage or use Invisible Passage to retreat, running to the trilithon and vanishing as though they walked through an invisible curtain.

When the fight is done the trilithon has to be made inoperable. It can be destroyed only with extraordinary effort but can be easily defaced. Anything like sprinkling with holy water, a *hallow* spell or similar, or just graffiti will do it. It's connection to Faerie is preserved, in large part, by its metaphysical purity.

In the hags' cabin is a small treasure trove of magical stuffs, collected over years of trickery and theft. There are jars and pots of herbs, potions, poisons, and preserved animals. Among the dross are several valuable items. A series of beautiful clear glass jars with copper, silver, gold, and platinum fittings are filled with formaldehyde and show the growth stages of a faerie dragon (an egg with a translucent shell, an infant with furled wings, a young adult, and a skinned specimen with white muscle tissues). A matching set of jars show the life cycle of a cockatrice (an egg with a translucent shell, a tiny naked lizard-thing, a young adult, and a skinned specimen with white muscle and connective tissues). Each of these jars would be worth 250 gp to a particular kind of person (wizards, of course, and anyone deeply goth - so anyone in Pluville, basically). A banjo stood in the corner is actually a **doss lute instrument of the bards**, though it's out of tune from long disuse. A heavy hand-carved wooden spoon in their kitchen is carved all over with Celtic knots and tiny runes - maybe the work of pixies, it's so fine - that functions as a **wand of magic missiles**. Finally, a pair of old muddy work boots by the door, if cleaned, have images of feathers embossed into their leather all over. These are **winged boots**.

The hags also have a hag-eye that they trade back and forth: a 2-inch diameter carved wooden eye with a black **pearl of power** at the center. It is always uncomfortably warm, and is likely to have gone through the trilithon back to Faerie with a fleeing hag.

Trilithon – Father Moon-eye's Camp

Father Moon-eye is a troubled individual that leads a cult of other lost souls. Some years previous Moon-eye was a professor at a university far away in a city called Talmussin, but he became fed up with the hustle and bustle of a huge city. He became disillusioned with everything: government, capitalism, anarchy, communism, the Church, everything, and began to romanticize what he viewed as primitive peoples.

After a particularly nasty break with reality Moon-eye raided an alchemy lab, made himself a serum of wolf hair and various reagents and poisons, and ran into the woods. He has since espoused a radical anti-civilization philosophy and recruits fellow members for his cult from among the disaffected and confused that have a rather bloody-minded view of what living in the woods means. Adherents of Moon-eye's brand of primitivism are very much of the 'red of tooth and claw' interpretation of nature: the strong eat the weak, all of that.

Father Moon-eye has set up a rude camp on the West side of the forest where the ground is cleared and the outer fence is of sharpened stakes. Dozens of small walls, pits, ditches, and snares dot the fort, making it dangerous for visitors to walk through. The pack know where all of these dead ends and traps are, such that they have the advantage over visitors. The camp is decorated with skins and bones from the pack's hunts – mostly beasts, but some human. At the center of the camp is a white iron trilithon covered in red and brown layers of blood, old and new.

There are four **werewolves** at the camp at any given time, along with two **commoner** supplicants that have come to learn from Father Moon-eye and earn the right to be turned into werewolves themselves. On the first round of combat one of the werewolves will put up a howl that is returned by something out in the woods. Another four wolves appears in 1d6 + 3 rounds. Both the first and second group of werewolves have a 2-in-6 chance to be accompanied by **Father Moon-eye**, in which case there are only three other werewolves.

If the werewolves are killed the commoners will attempt to lure in the PCs before betraying them somehow. They have been completely brainwashed by Father Moon-eye and now need some very dedicated deprogramming before they can re-enter society.

In combat the werewolves will attempt to maneuver PCs into the hidden pits, snares, and other traps in the camp. The werewolves are not concerned about the traps, as they are immune to mundane damage from falling, sharpened sticks, and the like. If the PCs did not think ahead to have their weapons silvered¹¹ they are in for a nearly impossible fight.

If the PCs do not encounter Father Moon-eye here he makes a point of hunting down and ambushing them at a later point. The next time they are out on an expedition he attacks them with three other werewolves, rushing out of the forest with his axe.

The real prize in the camp, or on Moon-eye, is his **berserker axe**, though it is a cursed item. He also wears a thick chain of gold as a necklace with a series of coin-sized gold tokens and cartouches all along it, centered around a gigantic fang. The necklace is worth 100 gp.

The trilithon here is already defaced, but still needs to be disabled. It can be destroyed only with extraordinary effort but can be easily defaced. Anything like sprinkling with holy water, a *hallow* spell or similar, or just graffiti will do it. It's connection to Faerie is preserved, in large part, by its metaphysical purity.

11: Silvering a weapon is a simple process. Bladed weapons require only enough silver to make up a quarter of their total weight (e.g., a longsword weighs three pounds, or one-and-a-half kg, so it needs about twelve ounces, or 37 silver coins at 50 coins per pound). Blunt weapons like staves and clubs can be 'silvered' by adding silver caps to them or driving silvered nails through them at a similar rate. The smiths at the keep will do this for no charge.

Trilithon – Blue Ice Glade

Far to the South in the woods is an empty glade where trees don't grow, a half a mile across. It is the site of an old forest fire, started by Sangranese soldiers during the last war four hundred years ago. The ground here is uneven, cracked and full of crevasses hidden by drifts of snow and layers of crispy ice. At the center of the glade is the burnt stump that was once a dryad's tree, overseen by what once was a dryad and is now the **winter witch**.

The glade has little in it besides the stump, the witch, and four **winter wolves**. The area is virtually all difficult terrain due to the snow, which the wolves ignore. There are a number of pits covered by thin drifts of snow that an unaware PCs may fall into. Unless the PCs are exceptionally careful they are likely to be spotted by the wolves and witch immediately, and attack.

The wolves move to melee right away, using their Cold Breath to deal a lot of damage as quickly as they can. They maneuver to draw melee fighters into banks of thorns or snow-covered pits when they can, attacking their allies while these characters pull themselves back out of the traps. The winter witch keeps her distance and uses both *cone of cold* and *ice storm* freely, knowing that the wolves are immune to the cold damage. If she is reduced to 15 hit points or fewer she turns and runs, using *misty step* to get out of combat, then running to get back to her little burrow and through the trilithon back into Faerie.

In the center of the glade are the burnt and blackened roots of the dryad's tree, all that still remain. The dome of roots is covered in snow and ice, making it something like a round cabin inside. Set into the back wall, wrapped in dry roots, is a white iron stone trilithon. It can be destroyed only with extraordinary effort but can be easily defaced. Anything like sprinkling with holy water, a *hallow* spell or similar, or just graffiti will do it. It's connection to Faerie is preserved, in large part, by its metaphysical purity.

After the fight PCs can skin the wolves with a Survival check. It's DC 10 to recover one, 15 for two, and 20 for all four. The pelts can be sold for 25 gp each at the Vielle Eglise trading post, or 100 gp in a city. In the witch's lair under the tree are her furs and knickknacks, as well as grisly trophies from Sangranese soldiers for the last few hundred years (a few skulls from before she realized she didn't have the space for hundreds of skulls, then dozens and dozens of pinky-fingertip bones, often carved with a place or a date where they were killed).

In the corners of the chamber are five paintings depicting the rise and fall of an ancient kingdom (a young warrior at 25 carving out his kingdom, then the same figure 15 years later ruling over his people with his two ten-year-old sons in the background, then his boys at 30 arguing over his grave, then the two brothers going to war with each other on either side of a battlefield, then the ruins of the castle reclaimed by nature a hundred years later). The paintings are grim, in stark colors and deep blacks, with omens and figures of disaster worked into every spare corner. A collector with a gothic sensibility (anyone in Pluville, say) would pay 100 gp each or 1,250 gp for the whole set.

Hung over the door like a charm or a lintel is a **belt of dwarvenkind** (a wide gray leather weightlifter's belt with a spread-hand-sized pewter device on the front of a dwarf king's face). The witch wears a **ring of evasion** and a **cloak of displacement** (both accounted for in her stat block) that can be recovered if she was killed. Driven into the stump above is a **+2 battleaxe** (a five ft long haft of oiled wood stained almost black, with a big crescent-moon shaped head of black metal and a cut-in device of three falling raindrops over a leaping frog, the device of House Headless in Pluville. A DC 20 Int (history) check [or DC 10 for a

Pluville local] identifies this as Duty, the ancestral weapon of the house and worth 2,500 gp inherently, but 5,000 gp to the House - or the equivalent in favors, land, or the like).

Reflecting Pool

After hours of searching and scouting for a target the PCs come to an open space in the woods with a shallow, perfectly clear, and almost-precisely-round pool of dark water with thin fragments of ice at the edges. Patches of the pond freeze and melt as the PCs watch. If examined by *detect magic* or a similar power the pond radiates powerful auras of illusion and necromancy magic.

A PC that submerges themselves into the deepest part of the pool – it is only five ft deep at the center – will be subjected to freezing cold. This requires three DC 10 Constitution saving throws in quick succession, with a PC gaining one level of exhaustion for each failure. When they emerge from the water again they are doubled: two copies of the same person walk out of the pond at the same time. When a PC touches their copy one of them vanishes, turning to water and pouring back into the pond.

The next time that PC dies (not falls unconscious, but dies) the PC awakes again back at the pool, walking out of it naked but with all of their memories intact and full hit points. This functions as the *clone* spell, with the following changes: it does not take an hour to cast; it does not take 120 days to grow the clone; and the clone is treated as having the fey creature type rather than humanoid. The clone must immediately make three DC 10 Constitution saving throws against the cold again, gaining one level of exhaustion for each failure.

This pond only works once for any given creature, so a PC cannot return here again and again to proof themselves against death.

Goblin Runaways

A small band of goblins have defected from the Winter Court and are on the run from the Queen and her war. They cower before any threat and beg mercy. A DC 10 Charisma (Persuasion) check and, of course, mercy will convince them to give whatever information they can to the PCs. The information they provide grants advantage on the next three Wisdom (Survival) checks the PCs make to navigate the woods and find targets. If the Charisma check meets a DC of 20 one of the goblins – named Kernel, but who believes it is a military rank – will ask to join them as a companion. Treat Kernel as a level 1 sidekick. It can be a warrior, expert, or spellcaster at the PCs' discretion, though its stats don't make for a very good spellcaster.

Lost Loggers' Ghosts

In a little wooded glen the skeletons of a crew of loggers hunch against the bases of pine trees, with axes overgrown with moss and roots laying close to hand. The uneasy spirits of the loggers remain here as eight **shadows**. The figures circle this glen, reenacting their own last days of wandering through a snowstorm, then arguing, then fighting, then killing... then eating the others in desperation. If a PC interrupts their macabre reenactment the shadows all turn on the living at once.

The shadows in this glade have the following action:

Steal Body. The shadow may target a living humanoid that is **unconscious** or **paralyzed** and take its body. When this occurs the original inhabitant of the body is ejected as a shadow, which also has this ability. If the shadow – the original occupant of the body – is reduced to 0 hit points it dies with no death saving throws allowed.

If one of the shadows is able to reduce a PC to 0 hit points another will immediately steal the body and try to run away with its prize. The shadow has access to all of the physical and magical abilities of its host, and will make use of them to escape into the woods. If this happens and a PC cannot reclaim their body as a shadow they will persist, as a shadow under that player's control, until they can find a new body to occupy. If they move into a body that is not their own they gain the physical statistics of the new body, including Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution scores and any unique features or abilities, but they retain their own knowledge, class level, and proficiencies. Have them re-roll hit points using their class' hit dice and their new body's Constitution bonus. Any equipment their body ran away with is lost.

In one of the skeletons' rib cages is an old hunting knife somehow clean of moss and rust. The dagger will never get dull or dirty. It is worth 10 gold pieces if sold.

Shrines of the Sun & the Moon

On the edge of the woods over a narrow river is a slender bridge of white iron stone, and at either end are two domed gazebos of the same stone, the domes covered in hammered copper long since turned green. At the peak of either dome is a small symbol, one on a sunburst, on the other a crescent moon. In each little gazebo is a sort of pedestal made of dark wood that has somehow ignored the elements, with more copper at the top and bottom, and capped with a hemisphere of clear crystal or glass almost four feet across.

The hemispheres in each gazebo are actually the exposed halves of full spheres layered like onionskins, each layer with a single letter on it and with a complex series of holes cut in each sphere. These are a kind of lock. Assembling the right word out of the letters carved on the spheres arranges the holes in such a way that one can reach into the spheres and withdraw their contents.

On the West side of the river is the moon shrine. The letters there are E, M, H, T, A, C, and N. The word for this side is "enchantment." On the copper at the base of this pedestal are three tiny carvings: a pair of lovers, a creature running in wide-eyed terror, and a figure greedily examining a gem (all examples of enchantment, like *charm person*, *cause fear*, and *incite greed*). Inside the sphere is a needle-sharp, thin, shortsword of silver in the shape of a three-sided spike. There are six little straight posts that form the guard, and the pommel is a heavy silver ring. In all the shape suggests a huge piton, or a syringe. The shortsword's name echoes when a creature picks it up, *Lunacy*. It is a magical shortsword that has three charges. The wielder can use one charge when it hits a target creature to cast *confusion*, targeting only the creature, with a DC of 15. This effect still requires concentration on the part of the sword's wielder.

The sun shrine, on the East side of the river, bears the letters G, W, N, A, E, K, and I. The word is "awakening." Around the copper base of the pedestal are three carvings depicting a tree with eyes, a sunrise, and a meditating monk (a reference to the spell *awakening*, to a literal awakening, and to a spiritual awakening). Inside the sphere is a small round steel shield with a brass image of a smiling sun on the front and a little dial on the rear. The rear of the shield has its name carved into it: *Daywatch*. Daywatch is a +2 shield. When the dial on the rear of the shield is turned it emits light, casting bright light

out to 10 ft on the first setting, to 30 ft on the second, to 60 ft on the third, and turning off on the fourth setting. Changing the setting on the shield is treated as interacting with an object.

If the PCs are having trouble with coming up with the right words they can make the following checks to get a better idea of what to try.

A DC 15 Intelligence (Thieves' Tools) or (Tinkers' Tools) check will let a PC ascertain that the answer has to include all seven letters, but could use some letters more than once. In this way it kind of mimics a combination lock.

A DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals that the spells relate to magic, either schools of magic or specific spells.

A DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check reminds PCs that the answers are probably somehow aligned with the sun and the moon, either by a word game or in some sympathetic way.

If your PCs don't get both, or even either, prize don't worry about it too much. These are very powerful items, and are meant to be something of a stroke of luck for your PCs. They'll have the chance to return to the shrine later if they want to, and if they wrestle with the issue for a while maybe an NPC like Marie-Claude can lend them a hand when they return to the Fort.

If the PCs solve both puzzles without too many hints from the GM they'll also receive the following boon, as will everyone within 50 ft of either shrine.

Charm of Heroism. The PC can use an action to receive the effects of the spell *bless* for one hour. After this charm is used once it is spent.

Ancient Graveyard

Separate from the forest proper is a small cluster of woods, maybe ten acres in total. In the middle of it is an ancient graveyard for Hjemlanders, studded with ancient gravestones and markers. This cemetery, once pleasant, has been corrupted by the dark energy pouring out of the forest. The remains of a small shrine to Hyla, an aspect of Jagus worshipped by the Hjemlanders, abuts one side of the graveyard, with the rough statue of Hyla knocked over and cracked.

When the PCs enter this stand of woods a **will-o-wisp** appears and guides them through the trees, eventually turning on them as they reach the graveyard and attacking along with twelve **skeletons**. The skeletons will attempt to attack with surprise, bursting up from open graves, and if given the opportunity they will try to drag PCs down into open graves. In these cases they often team up with one Helping the other on the Strength (Athletics) check to grapple a PC, then move them into the grave to fall in.

When the PCs defeat the restless dead there is a glow from the elder tree beside Hyla's statue, wrapped in wormwood bushes. As a reward for sending her people back to the afterlife Hyla produces five potions for the PCs, each collecting as dew on an elder leaf. The PCs can collect the glowing dew in spare vials or flasks, or in water or wineskins. These act as a **potion of see invisibility**, one of *enhance ability (Charisma)*, one of *protection from poison*, one of *lesser restoration*, and one of *augury*. Each potion tastes of fiery wormwood 'bäsk' liquor (like Malört).

If the PCs rummage among the dead they can also find treasure on the bodies, but it is all rusted weaponry and ancient jewelry of silver and stones. Stealing from the graves makes PCs feel uneasy in the pits of their

stomach, and if they do so they will find that Hyla has turned all five of the potions she gave them into **potions of poison**.

Kaldskogger Refugees

A gang of a dozen Hjemlanders (treat them as **commoners**), their village burnt down by the Ordo Pugilis' soldiers, march to the South to find safety among their people. They will defend themselves against attackers, but would rather avoid threats. If the PCs hail them and attempt to talk rather than fight, and are not wearing obvious Church garb, they will stay a while.

They provide information: the Church's soldiers came to their little village on the edge of the forest, and they took no prisoners. The Hjemlanders ran, and are going to Hjemlandet to attend a war council. If asked about this they explain that a war can only be started by the jarls and ended by the skalds, and that war is rare in Hjemlandet's history. The Hjemlanders are an independent people, more dedicated to their clans than their nations, but if a war is declared they will all come to the aid of their country's people.

If the PCs are generous and offer supplies worth 25 gold or rations and water for twelve for five days the eldest Hjemlander grants them a charm that glows when within fifty ft of the fey and can be used by its wearer as a reaction to end the **charmed** or **frightened** effect on its owner once, breaking after this use.

The Church's Movements

The soldiers, priests, and other people of the Ekletheon Orthodox Church are not at the Fort by coincidence. Their presence has been orchestrated by Scent of Carnage through Marguerite Cagliostro, the favorite consort of the Marquis of Pluville. Marguerite, a vampiric succubus, has planted one of her vampire spawn among the people of the Church in the person of Alfred Greenberry, the aide-de-camp to Lieutenant Integritas. Greenberry was a willing convert, as he was desperately afraid of death at the end of his long life, and undeath presented a way out.

Lt. Integritas is aware of Greenberry's condition, but the priests and knights radiant are not. Greenberry wears a **ring of mind shielding**, and the priests and knights radiant have grown too used to their magical detections of fiends and the undead to be wary of him. Integritas is a good person, but has been *charmed* by Greenberry and cannot think rationally about him and the threat he presents, nor is he able to mentally grapple with the cognitive dissonance of serving the Church and trusting the undead. This tension presents as a growing frustration and erratic outbursts by Integritas throughout the time at the Fort.

Each time the PCs leave the Fort and come back have Greenberry make a Charisma (Deception) check with advantage against the Passive Insight scores of the PCs. If he fails this check the PCs begin to progress their understanding of the situation at the Fort. Communicate the first section below to the PCs when Alfred first fails to cover his deceptions, the next one the second time, etc.

1. The first time the PCs begin to sense the situation around the Fort they see that most of the forces were levied from the Church's legions near or in Pluville, but the commanders are from Shavill, the Southern Gauntlet of the Church – all very dedicated, intense believers. Integritas is an able commander, but seems to be harsh with his soldiers and growing more tired by the day. His aide, Alfred, seems to be his lone support and takes on a heroic amount of work, running the operations of the Church and the war with boundless energy despite his age.

2. The Church seems to be prioritizing attacks on Kaldskog targets and bandits rather than goblins and fey. The leadership believe that the Kaldskoggers are going to use this conflict as an opportunity to move into 'rightful Sangranese lands.'
3. Very few of the big decisions seem to get made here. Frequent communiques, all handled by Greenberry, move the resources and the people. Someone, perhaps in Pluville, has an agenda they are pursuing, and Greenberry may be their tool whether or not Integritas is.

If the PCs are not actively investigating by now there is a double-cross. The next expedition that includes Church soldiers results in disaster. The soldiers hang back at a vital moment, exiting combat before taking any damage, or they lead the PCs into active danger and then vanish. If this news is brought to the Church the soldiers are said to be acting without any support from their leadership and are imprisoned or put to death, depending on the severity of their crime (whether they abandoned their duty or actually attacked the PCs).

When the PCs begin investigating, especially if they are literally looking around the quarters of the Church's command, have them make Intelligence (Investigation) checks against Greenberry's passive Dexterity (Stealth) score. The clues turned up here appear only after certain points, most of them in letters and record books in Greenberry's quarters.

1. After the first trilion is taken records in the keep can be found that indicate that the number of civilians is decreasing at a greater rate than the attacks would indicate. The official explanation is that they are deserting, being attacked by animals, or that the counts immediately after the battles were wrong. However, recently a body was found exsanguinated, with puncture marks on its neck.
2. Several notes and complaints indicate that the rank-and-file soldiers were led to underestimate the severity of the fey threat, and told that the entire war was a Kaldskogger pretense or tactic. These complaints haven't been voiced aloud, as the soldiers are professionals, but the sentiments seem to be widespread. In all cases Lt. Integritas came down severely on the whiners.
3. Letters back and forth from Marguerite Cagliostro and Alfred Greenberry refer to the necessity of keeping the war going, using such language as, "this flame must not burn out – our plans depend on it," or "it is of utmost importance that you continue to stoke discontent with the Kaldskoggers, even in the face of their indifference, in our new dukes-to-be. Without this conflict our path forward is unclear. For my part I shall ensure that the priests and preachers are at arms within the season." It is evident that the Marquis' consort is attempting to draw Sangranit, Kaldskog, and the Church into war.

Should the PCs confront Greenberry about these letters, about the missing settlers, or about the soldiers' apparent split loyalties he denies and obfuscates as much as he is able. If things come to blows immediately he transforms into his fiendish shape and fights. Lieutenant Integritas will come to his aid, compelled by the vampire's *charm*. If bested Alfred attempts to withdraw and flee, even flinging himself out of a window and counting on his resistance to damage to survive a fall. He leaves Integritas behind to cover his escape. If he is able to put off suspicion for even a day he will take the opportunity to attack the PCs as they sleep, creeping into their bedrooms to attack them, or attempting to *charm* anyone that is not asleep.

If Greenberry is killed his *charm* on Integritas ends, and the Lieutenant falls unconscious for an hour before waking with garbled and fuzzy memories of the last month or so. His neck is covered in tiny puncture marks from Greenberry's feeding, going back some time. Integritas' sense of authority is shaken, and while he continues to lead the military in whatever capacity is necessary he now looks to the PCs for leadership and guidance.

Ending the War

After the PCs collect twenty-five victory points the army of Faerie is bested, unable to continue mounting attacks. While they fully intend to pursue the war – they must, until the contract is fulfilled – they cannot continue it at this time. They will withdraw for some time, perhaps months or perhaps years, but a few months at minimum. The feel of the forest changes in a way that is perceptible to everyone: the chill lessens and the summer sun comes back in; the fog begins to finally burn off; the fey begin to leave the forest.

The impasse in the war is made clearer by a glittering blue heron soaring across the sky and landing at the top of the Fort's gatehouse. It has, in one long, elegant claw, another message from Queen Ailbhe. The message makes evident that Faerie is withdrawing from the field of battle for the moment, but promises a return. "As long as Hjemlandet and Sangranit are at war, so too must we be," the message says.

The PCs level up to 5 at the close of the war, and can mourn their people.

In the aftermath a few things may bear investigation or repetition:

- One or more forces in Sangranit are investing in creating a war against the Kaldskoggers.
- The Kaldskoggers have declared war in return, or are about to.
- Behind one or both factions are some kind of supernatural forces: vampires, maybe, or fiends.
- These forces are either involved with or are manipulating the Church, which has control of the largest army on the continent by a wide margin.
- The fey cannot cease their war against Sangranit. Their involvement seems to be somehow tied to Kaldskog's.
- The fey war will be delayed at least a month, maybe more, as they gather their strength again.
- It will take at least two months for the Church to muster forces and move them from Shavill, their fortress city, to the Sangranit Mountains, and probably closer to three or four months.
- If the Kaldskog and fey army at full strength and the Church's army meet in open battle the bloodshed will be immeasurable.

Based on this the PCs may decide to travel among the Kaldskoggers – Hjemlanders, to be more correct – to learn more about the other side and avert war. They may also choose to go to Pluville to root out the undead influence at its source. They may even choose to reinforce their Fort and attempt to hold out against both sides, or let the war rage on around them. If the PCs seem to be wavering, making an unproductive choice, or if they seek advice from trusted individuals they get the following:

- Marie-Claude has seen wars come and go, but never at this scale. She suggests doing whatever is necessary to avert the war. She thinks that the PCs will be best put to work in Hjemlandet, trying to delay or avert the war from that side while others with more sway try the same in Pluville.
- Camille and the folks at the trading post want to avoid more war at whatever cost, even if that means packing up and moving. They left 'civilized life' once, and can do so again. If Pluville is under the control of fiends or undead, then they're headed South, to settle in Hjemlandet as far from the war front as they can manage.
- Integritas is troubled by the betrayal of his aide, and unsure of how deep the rot goes in the Church. He intends to return to the Church and attempt to delay war as long as he is able, taking Greenberry's documents to his superiors and to the nobility of Pluville if necessary. He would appreciate if the PCs went to Kaldskog to inform them of the betrayal behind the war, as well.

The general consensus seems to be that the individuals of the Church cannot be trusted, nor those in Pluville – clearly. This means that to find out more about the war the last option is to go to the jarls of Hjemlandet and see if more information can be found, or if the people of the Fort can join them in defending against Pluville and the Church, perhaps.

It is entirely possible that, after all the advice is weighed, the PCs choose to go to Pluville rather than Hjemlandet. In that case the third and fourth acts of this book will be delayed or skipped entirely. Use the information provided here and elsewhere to continue the campaign in Pluville and Courbleu. The main beats of such a story might be something like:

- The PCs must make their way back through the mountains to a now-heavily-fortified Pluville.
- Infiltrate the city, which is gloomier and more gothic than ever, patrolled by vampire spawn secret police.
- Make contacts among the nobility of Pluville, each with their own petty vendettas and desires, to get access to the Marquis.
- Avoid the notice of – and agents of – the Marquise-to-be Marguerite's fiends and undead.
- Infiltrate and sabotage the wedding of the Marquis and Marguerite in a showdown with dozens of fiends.
- Struggle against the Church and the nobles to ensure that the control of the city goes to righteous people. Fail, almost certainly.
- Lead a peasants' revolt against the corrupt, now undead or fiend-possessed, nobility of Pluville and, eventually, the entire kingdom.
- Travel to Courbleu at the head of a peasant army and dethrone the king, and turn the nation into a democracy or take leadership for themselves.
- Fortify Sangranit against an attack from Kaldskog to the South (since they never averted the war) and from the Church to the North.

While this would make a rewarding campaign, the acts presented here presume that PCs go to Kaldskog instead and do their best to bring the war to a halt. Rooting out the undead from Pluville and facing off against the Church are adventures for a later time.

Hjemlandet is a huge territory, sparsely populated, of clans and small villages. They have no great cities. Their wealth is their people, their land, and their many, many sheep. Raiders and traders along the coast sail in their longships to plunder parts North and sell their wares even farther North. Settlements lining the Kaldskog hunt, plains villages farm, and all of them keep to the old ways.

Despite their isolation the Hjemlanders have a kind of rough political structure. Each clan follows their jarl, and the jarls meet at important times to decide matters that affect the whole nation. War is one such matter, and war has been declared for the first time in four-hundred years in response to the unprovoked Sangranese invasion.

Traveling to Hjemlandet from Fort Courage is a tricky matter. There are no proper roads, so the two choices are to travel around the edge of the Foret Froid – more properly called the Kaldskog on this side of the mountains – or to break a path through the forest and brave the beasts and other monsters there. The trip around the woods is a hike of just over 175 miles (280 km) taking eight days of travel. To go through the woods to the nearest settlement is a trip of only a hundred miles (160 km), but through difficult terrain, so takes almost ten days of hiking.

If the PCs travel around the forest they can avoid most random encounters. The beasts and people have drawn back from the conflict with the fey, and the hills and plains at the edges of the woods are curiously abandoned. A trip through the forest is similarly uneventful, but fiends still crawl through the woods at night. Roll on the table below for random encounters once per day and once per night of travel. Treat repeated encounters as a result of 1 (no encounter).

d20 Result	Daytime Plains Encounters	Nighttime Plains Encounters
1-3	No encounter.	No encounter.
4-6	No encounter.	Two giant boars snuffle through camp, looking for food.
7-9	No encounter.	A swarm of cranium rats with a <i>dominated hill giant</i> come through, hoping to 'trade up' their dominated servant.
10	A goblin blue tinker and its four goblin attendants with a little cart flee the destruction in the forest. The tinker has a 25% chance to have a mundane item, and carries 1d4 of the magic items on Magic Item table B for sale or trade (40 + 10d6 gold for a common item, 1d4 x 100 + 1d100 gp for an uncommon item).	
11-13	A group of 1d6 + 3 Hjemlander commoner refugees travel from their home in the forest toward Elkthorp.	A pack of eight hungry, hunting dire wolves .
14-16	A swarm of velociraptors approaches like locusts over the hills.	A wounded mammoth with only 90 hit points left tramples through the camp, dazed and enraged.
17-18	A troop of undercover Ordo Pugilis and Ordo Veritatis inquisitors including a spy , a veteran , and eight soldiers on a scouting mission into Hjemlandet.	A deva angel lights up the landscape. It asks to share the PCs' campfire for the night, and offers to cast its spells or help them for a day, but it must soon depart to continue hunting fiends.

18-19	A cambion riding a nightmare comes through with five Hjemlander commoners on a chain behind it, slaves for Soksathar.	Three neogi seek new slaves in the aftermath of the forest's brutal battles.
20	A Theran chimera roams the plains in search of prey.	An imp with two barlgura attendants moves across the plain, carrying a message to Matchstick.

d20 Result	Daytime Forest Encounters	Nighttime Forest Encounters
1-3	No encounter.	No encounter.
4-6	No encounter.	No encounter.
7-9	No encounter.	Two giant boars snuffle through camp, looking for food.
10-12	A group of 1d6 + 3 Hjemlander commoner refugees travel from their home in the forest toward Elkthorp.	A pack of eight hungry, hunting dire wolves .
13-15	A troop of undercover Ordo Pugilis and Ordo Veritatis inquisitors including a spy , a veteran , and eight soldiers on a scouting mission into Hjemlandet.	A venom troll seeks easy prey.
16-17	A nagi serpent drops from the tree branches.	A deva angel lights up the landscape. It asks to share the PCs' campfire for the night, and offers to cast its spells or help them for a day, but it must soon depart to continue hunting fiends.
18-19	A frost giant walks through the forest. It may talk, or it may fight: it starts as hostile, but can be talked down.	Three neogi seek new slaves in the aftermath of the forest's brutal battles.
20	A gnoll fang of Yeenoghu and five gnoll flesh gnawers roam through the forest's edge.	

The nearest Hjemlander settlement to Fort Courage is Elkthorp, a hunting and farming village at the edges of the forest. Elkthorp is a humble village of a few hundred inhabitants, counting all of the outlying farms and homes. The village is ringed with a wooden palisade and a shallow ditch. In the village are only a few buildings, the largest of which is the longhouse in the center of town. The longhouse serves as a combination town hall, communal kitchen, and marketplace depending on the needs of the town.

Visitors to Elkthorp are most commonly greeted by Bo Knudson, the jarl's husband, and a group of six huskarlen (use the statistics of **scouts** for the huskarlen, and an **archer** for Bo. Bo has a +5 bonus to Wisdom (Survival) checks, and a +6 to Dexterity (Stealth) rather than Dexterity (Acrobatics) in addition to the statistics of an archer). These archers are likely to spot and sneak up on travelers about a half mile (1 km) from the town. They appear from out of the woods or the tall grass, raising their bows but holding their shots. "Friend, foe, or fiend?" Bo calls out. They do not attack unless the PCs do, but are cautious now that war has been declared. If the PCs are upfront about their intent to avert the war the archers put down their bows and bring them back to the town.

The PCs are guided to the longhouse, where they meet the jarl, Frode Arnesson. The jarl welcomes them and is happy to answer any questions they have. He shows visible relief that these visitors are not here for war. PCs can learn the following from the jarl:

- The jarl, and all his people, are worried about the coming war. They remember stories from many, many generations back of the Church coming for their people, to kill or to convert. They have heard that this still happens, from time to time, in the more Northern parts of Hjemlandet.
- Seven nights ago their skald, Eld Gammel, went missing. Or, rather, was taken. The jarl is wrestling with whether this could have been the Church or not, but it's unlikely. The skald's neighbors reported a great beating of wings in the middle of the night, a crunching sound, a scream, and then more wings.
- Gammel's hut is just outside the palisade, to the South. The roof has been torn off. A DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) check reveals a partial reptilian claw mark inside the hut – almost certain sign of a dragon.
- Bo and his folk attempted to track the beast that took their skald, but there was simply not enough to go on. The neighbor said it sounded like the wings went South, maybe.
- The jarl sent two runners to Stein, the town to the South and West, but they have not returned. Their skald is said to be an expert in dragon lore, and might help them understand what happened to Gammel and why nobody else was taken.
- The jarls met several weeks ago for a formal declaration of war. In light of the obvious coming invasion the votes were quick, and war was begun, at least in theory.
- In Hjemlandet only the jarls can declare war, but traditionally only the skalds can end it, acting as negotiators for their jarls to formally conclude a war.

Jarl Frode is occupied with preparations for the war, which is the only thing stopping him from seeking his skald. He recommends the PCs go to Stein to consult with their jarl and their skald, both on the topic of the war and to help find Eld Gammel.

People of Elkthorp

Jarl Frode Arnesson: Frode is as calm and wise as one could be with war on the horizon. He is, like most of the jarls, wary of going to war against a superior military, but has put out the call to raise his army nevertheless. He uses the statistics of a **blood hunter** with proficiency in Charisma (Persuasion) rather than Dexterity (Acrobatics), and with the ability to cast *bleed* rather than *hex* for his Innate Spellcasting ability.

Bo Knudson: The jarl's husband and leader of the hunters and scouts of the village. He is also the second in command of the military of the town, such as it is.

Birgitte Frodesdottir: The jarl and Bo's daughter, a girl of three or four years old. She has endless questions for visitors once she gets over her initial shyness.

Skald Eld Gammel: The skald of the town, who went missing seven days ago.

The PCs can buy rations and simple goods – rope, common clothing, etc. – in Elkthorp, but there truly is not much more there than a small community of people that live off the land and keep to themselves.

Stein

The road to Stein is plain and straight, riding over the hills. It's twenty miles (30 km) or so to the town, and the trip is uneventful. As the PCs travel they pass a few little farmhouses, many of them empty of both people and animals. It's apparent that those people have come to the town, which is crowded to bursting with wide-eyed individuals and animals. Warriors stand in the open in armor and with spears ready.

Stein sits atop a low hill ringed with a five-ft-high retaining wall of rough stones, and at the center of the hill is a circle of standing stones of white iron. Right beside the circle is the log longhouse of the village, and the hut of the jarl. Like Elkthorp the majority of the people live on the outlying farms and ranches, but the village is a little larger and counts somewhere between one thousand and two thousand among its population.

Stein's jarl is Ygraine Ulfsdottir. She is a hard-faced older woman, Ygraine is prone to bitter words and angry outbursts, but her actions and decisions are always intended to produce the best results possible for her people. She is frustrated with the recent miseries that have fallen upon her people: not only has her skald gone missing, but the dead have been walking – a plague both embarrassing and deadly. She gladly lays out her worries to visitors, though she does so in private. What she could not say to her people she is willing to say to strangers, in this case.

Ten days ago a stranger wearing all red robes came and introduced himself as Pfennig. He spoke to jarl Ygraine and said that he saw dark skies ahead, and not just the war. He offered power and alliances with agents that could help the people in their war and against the encroaching dangers of the world. The jarl and her skald, Longstride Laksdottir, consulted and decided without much trouble that this Pfennig could go stuff himself down a hole in a damp field. The man took his nonsense and left looking like he'd been fed a bitter fruit.

The next day skald Laksdottir went missing. Nobody has seen her since, nor does anyone know what might have happened. She lived some way from the center of the town and could have wandered off, been killed, or gotten lost. Jarl Ygraine suspected that the stranger had done something and set her warriors to immediately scour the countryside for the man and her skald to bring them back to the town. However, they turned up nothing on the first day.

That night at dusk the sound of a tolling bell was heard from the barrows to the West of the town. It put everyone's hair up but nobody thought further of it until a farmer came running into town to report that his neighbors' farm had been attacked. The animals were slaughtered and the people were missing. The jarl called all of her warriors to investigate, and they came back two people fewer. They reported that something worse than they could have expected had happened: the dead had risen from their graves and begun to walk.

Every night since, at dusk, the sound of a gigantic bell has been heard from the Cairnbarrow miles away to the West. More and more of the dead buried there have 'come back,' and the farms from the barrow to the town have been abandoned. The people and animals have been brought back to the town, and the warriors ring the town at night defending the people from ghouls and skeletons with spears, maces, and fire. Every night a few of their people fall and are burnt on a pyre each morning. The best of the growing

season is passing with farmers locked inside and frightened to go out. Unless she finds a way to stop this, jarl Ygraine will watch her community die of either starvation, by undead incursions, or by war.

After laying out these grim events she says, “I do not have anything to give you, truly. I have given what I can to my people. Nevertheless, I beg of you a huge task: please help us. Find my skald, or find this man in red, or please for the sake of my people stop the dead from rising. If you do this for us then whatever we have is yours. Please.” The jarl has already sent birds to Matchstick and Frukthage for help, but she is not certain anyone will arrive at all, or that if they do arrive that it will be before her people are slaughtered.

The tolling of the bell is audible each night at dusk. It is coming from the direction of the Cairnbarrow to the West. The Cairnbarrow is a small hill covered almost entirely in stacks of flat stones, the resting place of the Hjemlanders here for many, many generations back. The barrow is only fifteen miles away, a long walk but a person could push themselves to get there and back in a day if they started at dawn.

The dusty path to the Cairnbarrow is full of fiends and undead. For each hour of the journey roll on the table below for encounters. At a normal walking speed the trip takes five hours.

d20 Result	Encounter
1-3	A small pack by the side of the road contains: three rations, a waterskin, a stuffed doll, and a healing potion .
4-5	A friendly troll under a round bridge over a creek passes the time with riddles, but doesn't offer trouble nor help in the long run.
6-7	A small circle of toadstools contains a group of satyrs and bipedal hedgehog warriors arguing fiercely.
8-9	A standing stone circle with two ravens .
10-11	Three saber-toothed tigers and their five pups (panthers).
12-13	A hill giant and its two giant boars .
14-15	A trio of manticores .
16-17	A gang of six imps and a shadow demon harass a caravan.
18-19	A bulezau conducts a silent dance with three ogre skeletons .
20	Two wights with eight zombies set up an ambush.

Trollbridge

A river once ran back and forth across the plains between Stein and the Cairnbarrow. The largest crossing was a simple stone arch bridge from a time long before memory, which now curves over the dry riverbed. Beneath the bridge lives a **troll**, which once waylaid travelers here when the river still ran – it has been here a long, long time. Now that the river is dry the troll has little opportunity to waylay or entrap: travelers could simply walk across the dry riverbed a quarter mile in either direction. The troll's toll, then, is some company.

Passers-by that clamber over the bridge hear from beneath a booming voice uttering words so ancient that they are nearly part of the ancestral memory of adventurers: “Ho, travelers! Before you cross my bridge you must answer me these questions three!”

The troll will ask three riddles, but in between each riddle will ask about the adventurers' quest, or how their day has been, or what great things they've seen recently. Its life is very simple and boring, and it would very much like to have a nice chat. Whether the travelers answer the riddles correctly or not is immaterial, so long as they answer them.

The troll is resistant to initiating combat but will defend itself if necessary. It has no proper name, but has been called the Troll of Akrrarbridge before, back in the days when it regularly ate folks. The riddles it asks are not complicated. Below are some examples to use, at your discretion.

What has to be broken before you can use it? An egg.

I'm tall when I'm young, short when I'm old. A candle.

What is made of near nothing but holes, but still holds water? A sponge.

What question can you never answer 'yes'? "Are you asleep?" (or "are you dead," or something similar)

What is always before you but can never be seen clearly? The future.

You speak it, and you destroy it. What is it? A secret.

What can you only keep once you have given to someone? Your word.

What's light as a feather, but can't be held for more than a few minutes? Your breath.

The more you take, the more you leave behind. What is it? Footsteps.

Faerie Ring

Even a ways from the Kaldskog the border to Faerie is stretched thin.

A cadre of 6 **hedgehog warriors** and 3 **satyrs** face each other across the road, and above them looms some elder fey spirit in the shape of a gigantic deer with the face of a man and antlers draped with ivy vines. All of the hedgehogs and satyrs are arguing loudly, speaking over each other and gesturing broadly. As the characters come into view the parties quiet, for the most part, and the elder spirit gestures to beckon them closer (where did its arm come from? Where did it go after?).

In a voice like the wind over rough water the elder spirit explains that the two parties here have a disagreement and need help to resolve it fairly. The problem is thus:

Historically both this clan of satyrs, the Tumanals, and the hedgehog battalion, the Erina Warriors, have had equal claim to a nearby faerie glade. These glades provide access to the Material Plane, from whence the faeries can engage with the worlds of mortals and reap the glamour from these interactions. However, some many many generations ago the patriarchs of the two clans had a scuffle which resulted in the slaying of the Major Hedgehog and the severe wounding of Old Goat-eye the satyr. Since that time the two have been at odds, unwilling to share anything. For a hundred years (perhaps, faerie time is flexible) the two clans warred over the glade until the elder spirits of Faerie stepped in and laid out a compromise:

the two would alternate their use of the glade on whatever span of time suited them each, such that they never encountered each other.

Until recently the two parties traded at each new moon, turning over 'possession' of the glade and its spring each time, with nobody occupying the glade during the night of the full moon. The ability of the fey to appear in the Material Plane, though, is limited and they can typically only appear in the light of the full moon – the trade at the new moon is something of a formality. However, during the most recent full moon the elderly Old Goat-eye was terribly injured (perhaps as part of the war in the forest) and the new Major Hedgehog was in a position to aid him. The hedgehog leader spent several days easing Old Goat-eye, though the ancient satyr did die afterward.

During that short time the Major Hedgehog missed his opportunity to visit the Material Plane, and it would have been his month. He says that Old Goat-eye offered to forsake his next month, giving it to the hedgehogs – which would give them two visits to the Material Plane in a row. The satyrs contest this sequence of events, stating that they have this month's full moon visit to the glade and the hedgehogs missed their turn.

The hedgehogs must visit the glade to collect sacred acorns from the oak trees around the glade, which are their currency and nourishment. The satyrs must visit to gather flowers from among the reeds, which are their nourishment as well. Going without access to the full moon and their flowers or acorns for a month is a terrible hardship for either group.

The elder spirit of the fey lays out these facts and the representatives of the two groups plead their cases. The elder spirit states that the characters must help them choose the correct course of actions to take: there are no neutral parties in Faerie due to the complex web of alliances and debts common to the fey. If the characters attempt to shirk the responsibility that has been thrust upon them the spirit quietly informs them that they *will* give judgment, one way or another, or they will be whisked away to Faerie indefinitely. Luckily, there are no repercussions to a casual or 'wrong' decision, aside from the guilt of sentencing these poor fey to a moonless existence.

The characters may ask as many questions as they like to help determine a wise course of action.

The hedgehogs hate the satyrs because they believe that generations ago the pet goat herd of the satyrs got loose and consumed everything before them, including the thorn bushes from which they craft their spears and their stores of acorns.

The satyrs have contempt for the hedgehogs because generations ago Old Goat-eye was stopped from completing a task set to him by Queen Ailbhe by a lazy hedgehog that would not move from his post and remained curled up in a ball, presenting a prickly barrier. The details are lost, but it's clear that the hedgehog's idleness caused Old Goat-eye terrible embarrassment.

The schedule that was set out for the two parties by the elder spirits has been followed up until now, first the satyrs and then the hedgehogs each moon for an indeterminate period of time.

The hedgehogs have a sufficient store of acorns to survive for a time. The satyrs, likewise, have enough flower cuttings to wait some time should they need to. The real issue is that each group must get an equal time at the pool.

Neither group is willing to work with the other. Because of the changes in the fey courts since their initial agreement neither side can compromise with the other or make sacrifices lest they lose face.

The hedgehogs maintain that Old Goat-eye offered willingly to give up the satyrs' next turn at the glade, as he appreciated Major Hedgehog's sacrifice. Major Hedgehog is off helping to build Queen Ailbhe's armies back up and cannot come to make a statement, and Old Goat-eye is now deceased and thus cannot corroborate. Whether or not Old Goat-eye offered this up, the hedgehogs feel that they deserve this in return for Major Hedgehog's kindness.

The satyrs take the position that Old Goat-eye may never have said this, and even if he did he didn't speak for all satyrs, and that there's no formal proper rightful reason to give up their turn at the glade. They hold that the Major's poor decision doesn't affect them and that the hedgehogs' complaint is with their leader, not their adversaries.

There are many solutions to this problem. The fairest, mostly, is to change the period at which the 'possession' of the glade changes hands. If the hedgehogs and satyrs agree to trade bimonthly (or annually, or semi-annually, etc.) with the satyrs essentially starting their period recently then they can continue to maintain equal time at the glade. Characters could, of course, flip a coin or dictate that one side gets *no* access going forward, or any other choice they like. Whatever they decide, fair or not, the elder spirit will uphold. An exceedingly unfair interpretation may earn the characters the enmity of a band of fey, though, who may harass them in the future.

Whatever the decision the elder spirit will reward the group with a blessing from Faerie. Each character will receive a treasure of their choice from the following list: a **bag of tricks**, **boots of elvenkind** or a **cloak of elvenkind**, **bracers of archery**, a **quiver of Ehlonna**, a **hat of disguise**, a jar of **Keoghtom's ointment**, a **ring of warmth**, a **robe of useful items**, or a **stone of good luck**. If you or your players prefer you can roll randomly, of course (numbering the items 1 through 10).

Two Birds

The landscape of Hjemlandet, especially around Stein, is littered with circles of standing white iron stones, cairns, and various other monolithic structures. On the way from Stein to Cairnbarrow the path is washed out at one point and the easiest way forward goes right beside a circle of six stones. Each standing stone is about ten ft tall and two ft on each side, roughly square. On each one is marked four runes, one on each side a few inches from the top, for twenty-four runes total. One of these runes has been scratched or scrubbed out.

Atop two of the stones, across from each other, are two large white **ravens**. They seem to be bickering with human voices, each one flapping its wings and gesticulating with its beak and claws to punctuate its argument. When others come near the two pause their disagreement and turn to speak to the newcomers. "Hail, and warnings of terrible times," one squawks.

"The wise would turn back from here," the other croaks. The birds explain that a miserable ruffian came through recently and defaced this group of standing stones. The ravens have been flying about for a few days to find other examples of these runes so that they can restore this circle, but are having a disagreement on what's missing.

This ‘riddle’ can be solved quite simply with player knowledge if someone knows the Futhark rune alphabet. Present them with the below groupings showing what they can see on each column.

Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4	Column 5	Column 6
ƿ	ᚢ	ᚦ	ᚱ	ᚱ	ᚨ
χ	ᚱ	ᚱ	ᚦ	ᚱ	ᚨ
ᚱ	ᚱ	ᚱ	missing	ᚱ	ᚱ
ᚱ	ᚱ	ᚱ	ᚱ	ᚱ	ᚱ

If nobody at your table is fully conversant with the alphabet it’s likely that one of their characters is. A simple DC 15 Intelligence check can provide the answer, as can anyone that’s fluent in Giantish.

The missing character is *sōwilō*, meaning the Sun. It looks like this: ᚱ. If this symbol is carved into the column – a task simple enough that it doesn’t require a check, just 10 minutes of scratching – the remaining runes glow with a fuzzy golden light. The birds look it over and thoughtfully nod a few times, then flap off.

Any characters within 50 ft when the rune is carved into the column gains the effects of the spell *death ward* until the sun next sets.

Ambush in the Brush

The path toward Cairnbarrow winds between hills through its entire length, revealing new landscape around every turn. At one of these turns the path runs between two small hills, each topped with a standing stone. To the East (right) of the path a patch of woody brush, brambles, and thorns fills a shallow hollow.

Behind the hill to the West (left) of the path waits a **saber-toothed tiger** and two cubs (use statistics of a **panther**) and crouching in the edges of the woody brush are two more saber-tooths and three more cubs. The saber-tooth tigers are hungry, but cautious, and exploring this area that’s normally occupied by humanoids. They attempt to attack from ambush, making a Dexterity (Stealth) check against the characters’ Passive Perception scores to **surprise** the PCs.

If the tigers have trouble dealing major damage to the PCs they’ll select a single character and focus, with the cubs using the Help action to grant their elders advantage on their attacks. As soon as they reduce a character to 0 hp half the beasts will disengage and depart, trying to drag their prey away. The others will attempt to bring down and drag off another meal. The beasts retreat if they are reduced to 7 hp or fewer, with or without their meal.

If the PCs choose to salvage any slain enemies for loot they can skin and de-fang the big felines. Each adult pelt is worth 10 gold coins and the cubs’ pelts are worth 5 gold pieces each, and the fangs are worth 5 gold castles or 3 for the adults and cubs, respectively.

Giant Trouble

A small cluster of fruit trees surround a hut some 90 ft to the North (right) of the path. Behind the hut, reaching through a broken window, is a **hill giant**. Two of its pet **giant boars** lean against trees in the orchard, shaking them to loose the fruit and then snuffling up huge mouthfuls.

The giant and boars are distracted, and if the players attempt to sneak past they can make a group Dexterity (Stealth) check against the giant's Passive Perception score. If the giant spots the PCs it will quickly move toward them and attempt to hold them up for all their goods – gold pouches, weapons, and packs.

If the PCs engage the giant and its pets, or the giant spots them and they engage in combat, it will start by hucking stones while the boars engage the group. Once it picks out its greatest threat – probably a spellcaster, as the giant is cautious about magic – it will run to approach that character and thrash that target.

The giant carries a sack full of head-sized stones, at the bottom of which are 99 gold coins, 312 silver coins, and 80 copper pieces. All of the coins are dented, dirty, and scratched, but still legal tender. The cabin is abandoned and most useful goods have been salvaged, but there's a nice wall-mounted mirror that would be worth 100 gold pieces if sold. The mirror weighs 50 lbs and is fragile, not really suitable for lugging through a dungeon.

Manticores

The path cuts through a long hill, running through a shallow dry riverbed. The little gulley is hedged on both sides by old, dry woods. This area is the territory of a family of manticores that hunt in the woods and harass travelers.

As the characters walk the path the manticores ambush them. They fly 20 ft overhead in passes back and forth over the path, firing spines at random targets on each pass. If they run out of spines they land, trying to flank the party, and fight to the death.

The riverbed is only 5 ft deep, and clambering up onto the hill takes 15 ft of movement but requires no check. The brambles and woods are about 25 ft back from the riverbed. Movement through the brambles is difficult terrain, though a character can make a DC 10 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to ignore this, taking 1d6 piercing damage on a failure and treating it as normal terrain on a success.

The manticores carry no treasure but do have a lair nearby. If the characters go seeking the lair it takes a Wisdom (Survival) check to find. A DC of 20 finds it in 1 hour; a DC 15 finds it in 2 hours; and a DC 10 finds it in 4 hours. In the lair are many, many bones of beasts (and a few humanoids), and some treasure mixed in. This includes 30 silver coins, 15 electrum coins, and 20 silver mark notes from the far-away city of Talmussin. These notes are squares of colored cloth magically protected from damage and decay. They're a curiosity more than anything else, and could be sold for 1 copper per note if sold – the exchange rate is not great this far from the city.

Fiendish Banditry

The terrible troubles of Stein and its surrounding lands have obviously not been communicated far and wide yet. A tinker-trader with two carts is held up here on the road. Both carts are slightly aflame, and the two horses harnessed to each cart are panicking, rearing and whinnying and kicking at random. Beside the carts stand two **commoners** and two **guards**, and above it circle three **imps**. Each imp carries a tiny book of alchemical matches and giggles as they add to the fire consuming the carts. One of the guards attempts to control the horses so that they can be unharnessed from the carts while the other guard holds a shield up, trying to protect the two merchants from the tiny devils.

Three more imps wait, invisible, to cut off any escape. A **shadow demon** slides beneath the carts and horses, moving from shadow to shadow. Its dark and incorporeal nature has kept it hidden from its victims so far, but player characters may spot it. Have the demon roll its Dexterity (Stealth) against the characters' Passive Perception scores to see if they are aware of it at the beginning of combat.

Once the PCs have come in view of the burning carts (at a distance of about 120 ft) the imps will consider them their new playthings as well and will not let them get away without engaging in combat.

The imps use their invisibility to make unexpected attacks against vulnerable targets. They're fiends, and don't care for a fair fight. If threatened, especially by a combatant with a magical weapon, they'll disengage, get behind cover, and turn invisible again when able so they can launch an attack from concealment again. The shadow demon pursues the same tactics for the most part. Like the imps it is best able to hurt an unaware opponent, and so it keeps to the shadows, hides, and seeks to create advantage in any way it can to double its claw damage. The fiends are not native to the Material Plane and have no fear, so they fight to the death.

During the fight the merchants keep their distance and the guards focus on controlling the horses, putting out the fire, and protecting the merchants. They'll be of no use unless the fighting gets too close to them, in which case they'll do their best to avoid direct confrontation with the fiends.

After the fight is done the traders – assuming they survived – introduce themselves as Lionel and Delydd, a pair of elderly elven traders. Lionel is nervous when talking about anything but prices, routes, and haggling. Delydd has piercings all over their face and body, often with quite elaborate little charms and patterns incorporated into the jewelry. The guards, Royal and Cole, are a hobgoblin and a half-elf. Royal is a flirt, and Cole is insecure about their appearance.

Lionel and Delydd are exceedingly grateful for the rescue. They're hauling mostly goods for sale rather than treasures: mead, quality white iron, a few casks of tobacco and whiskey, fabrics, nails, that kind of thing), but also have 10 items of simple jewelry worth 2 gold each and a lock box (DC 20 to open, AC 10, 30 hp, damage threshold 10) filled with 65 copper coins, 15 silver, 6 electrum pieces, and 34 gold. They'll offer their saviors all the coinage but 10 gold willingly, keeping the last few coins to feed themselves in case of emergency. They can be persuaded to part with all their coinage if pressed or threatened, though that makes this less a rescue and more a stick-up.

Vile Concert

At several points the path comes near short, rocky bluffs, usually no more than 10 ft, and must curve around until an easy descent is available. At one of these where the bluff drops off sharply, creating an

overhang studded with rocky outcrops, a **bulezau** holds a silent concert with three **ogre skeletons** ‘performing.’

The scene can be seen from a great distance: the bulezau stands atop a wide rock and the skeletons cluster around. As the fiend moves its hands the skeletons move with them, like giant marionettes. The sight can be seen from the bottom of the hill leading up to the bluff, around 120 ft away. The fiend spots the characters as they spot it, and combat begins immediately.

Because the fiend and skeletons lack ranged attacks they are likely to charge the foremost figure of the player characters, engaging as a mob and then moving on to other targets if possible. If the characters halt and draw ranged weapons the bulezau leaps down off the bluff and moves along it until it can reach the party by leaping back up. It can’t be targeted unless someone comes right to the edge of the bluff (in which case the fiend likely still has three-quarters cover) due to the overhang, and at that point it will spring up and tackle the exposed target.

The short cliff is only 10 ft high, but the stones at the bottom are sharp. Anyone that falls (or is pushed) off the cliff must make a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw, taking 1d6 piercing and 1d6 bludgeoning on a failure, or 1d6 bludgeoning on a success. The bulezau will make use of its ability to leap up and down without danger by shoving weak targets off the cliff, then following them down to engage them one-on-one while the ogre skeletons tangle with the rest of the group.

The bulezau carries a single **soul coin** of tarnished silver, showing the face of the trapped soul – a crying dwarven woman – on one side and the skyline of Minauros, the Sinking City, on the other, with Mammon standing above it.

Wight Snipers

The path to Cairnbarrow follows, at many times, an old dry riverbed. As travelers crunch over the rounded river rocks and thick dust they are often walking between the walls of the old riverbed. At one point where the walls become particularly narrow and high a gang of the undead have set up an ambush.

Eight **zombies** have roughly burrowed themselves into the old river silt in two groups of four. This hiding place is not particularly effective. Treat it as a Dexterity (Stealth) roll against the party’s Passive Perception score. The characters spot the hidden zombies from a distance of 5 ft per point by which the zombies missed their target (assuming they did so – their penalty to the roll makes it unlikely they stayed concealed).

When the zombies are attacked, or once living creatures have moved into the area between the two clusters of hidden zombies, they rise from the ground to attack. When combat begins the real threat appears. Two **wights** pop up, one on each side of the riverbed, and begin firing their longbows into the targets below. Each wight likely makes its first attack with advantage, as they would be virtually undetectable except to flying creatures or a group of adventurers traveling alongside the riverbed rather than in it.

During the fight the wights keep their distance, using the banks of the dry riverbed to gain three-quarters cover after every shot, moving back and forth to target their enemies while never letting them out of their sight. The zombies, of course, lurch toward the nearest living thing and try their best.

The undead carry little treasure, other than the bloody and moldering swords and bows the wights carry. One of the zombies still wears a golden wedding band worth 5 gold pieces.

The Cairnbarrow

The jarls, skalds, and people of Stein and the surrounding lands have been buried here for hundreds of years. Each small pile marks a grave, or a memory. Families from the area come here each year on important anniversaries to add a stone or to spend time with their loved ones. Now, though, it has been turned to a place of evil.

The evil priest Pfennig has placed a magical construct, a huge bell of black iron called the **twilight bell**, in the center of the Cairnbarrow. This magical item is raising the dead each night, as mentioned earlier. Each night at sundown it animates dead as though casting *create undead* at 9th level. Despite its powerful magic it is fragile as any physical thing and can be destroyed with a hammer and a few minutes. That assumes, of course, one can pass through its many undead guardians.

The Cairnbarrow is a hill 200 ft or so across with sides that rise sharply. It is covered almost completely with stacks of wide, flat stones that form little cairns all over it. These cairns sometimes have names painted or scratched onto them, or little grave offerings. Other cairns spread out from it for hundreds of yards in every direction. The barrow has three entrances: two arched entrances on either end – the North and South – are connected by a tunnel that runs through the entire hill, and one smaller entrance is hidden among the cairns toward the Southwest of the hill. This smallest entrance can be found if characters spend an hour clambering over the hill and make a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check successfully.

Patrolling through the barrow, most likely in or near the **ceremonial chamber**, are an **allip** and 3 **specter** attendants. The shadowy form is preceded by its susurrating gibbering and a faint green light shed by the specters. The formless undead will use their incorporeal movement to their advantage to encircle their targets, preferring to take damage by ending their turn in solid objects rather than expose themselves to multiple attacks if it makes sense – especially if they are being struck by magic or magical weapons.

The incorporeal undead have no treasure, of course – the goods on their bodies were left in the ceremonial chamber.

The Tunnel

The tunnel is about ten ft wide and six to seven ft tall and curves organically through the hill. At either end the entrances are supported by rounded arches of old white stones. Throughout the tunnel stacks of stones and huge logs of wood peek from the earthen walls, supporting the hill overhead.

Ten ft in from each entrance are alcoves on both sides of the walls, cut from about waist level to head high for a grown human. Stacked in each alcove are simple torches (1d6 in each alcove), as well as a handful of tinder in a clay pot and a set of flint and steel.

Tablet of Honor

On the East wall of the tunnel 30 ft from the South entrance is a rounded chamber about 10 ft deep and 15 across. It is 3 ft higher than the tunnel floor and narrow stairs cut into the ground are placed at either end of the chamber. In the back of the oval chamber is a simple stone table, atop which are tiny figurines, a few stone tablets, a rolled tapestry. These all depict various jarls and warriors that were considered especially worthy of remembrance. Each line is just a name, a dash, and a very brief description of their deeds, e.g., “Yrsa Gudrunsdottir – killed a wyvern, bore ten children.”

Ghoul Tunnels

On the West side of the tunnel 45 ft from the Southern entrance a narrow arch of stone leads to stairs downward. This side tunnel descends 8 or 10 ft into cold earth before opening into a hallway that splits into two directions. Back to the South stairs lead back up, and to the West it opens into a ring-shaped chamber (or circular hallway, if you prefer).

In and around these tunnels 6 **ghouls** and 2 **ghasts** make their lair. They are typically waiting near their little narrow tunnel waiting to ambush creatures, but they will hear and attack anyone that comes down the stairs into these tunnels. The undead don't have anything to loot, and their grave goods should be left alone, but an unscrupulous character might note that one of the ghouls wears a (somehow undamaged) dress of fine silk worth 40 gold pieces if cleaned up.

The stairs up lead up 10 ft to a chamber 10 ft by 15, from which more rude stairs lead up another 15 ft. This narrow stairway leads to an exit hidden among the cairns atop the hill. From any angle but straight-on the entrance is invisible, but light still filters down to the chamber below (though not the hallway beyond the stairs farther down into the main barrow).

The ring-like chamber has two exits: one is the continuation of the hallway curving to the North and the **crypt hall**, which is lined all over with small niches and hollows, in which rest the bones and personal effects of jarls – those that have not been raised by the tolling of the **twilight bell** (each niche has a 25% chance to be ‘occupied’ – the rest have been raised). The other exit is a narrow tunnel, fresher than all the others, that goes up through the ceiling and ends in a grave niche in the main **ceremonial chamber**.

Crypt Hall

The crypt hall is five-ish ft wide and runs North from the **ghoul tunnels**. Both walls are lined with burial niches, only a quarter of which are occupied. The rest of the occupants have been raised by the tolling of the bell and are now harassing Stein. At the end of the crypt hall a set of rough stairs descend 5 ft and twists about to end in the **hall of jarls**.

Hall of Jarls

The largest chamber in the barrow is the hall of jarls. The crypt hall terminates in a narrow doorway that opens into a roughly circular chamber 50 or so ft across and domed, with the ceiling 20 ft up at its highest. Two tiers rise around the edges of the room, each 5 ft deep. The farthest ring out is about 10 ft off the ground, the nearer 5 ft up from the floor of the hall of jarls. The floor of the hall's main room, then, is about 30 ft across, and it's covered in several inches of sand. Tiny standing stones, like tombstones, are arranged in rings that leave the central 10 or 15 ft of the room clear but crowd the rest of the sand of the hall and the tiers near the walls.

In this room a **deathlock wight** stands dead center, and two **wights** flank the door standing on the first tier up from the floor. The undead attack anyone that enters the room. The deathlock uses *hold person* on the first person in the doorway, readying its action if it must, to trap that target in the doorway and trap the rest of the adventurers behind them. The two wights then lay into the target, attempting to bring them down while they're stuck. The deathlock will use *fear* to try and break any formation if the fight turns against it, but all the undead fight to the death.

The wights have no treasure of their own, but the wealth collected here could be salvaged by someone unafraid of desecrating a holy site. There are 54 silver coins scattered through the sand, and the deathlock wears a round silver pendant of a many-branched tree strung on a beaded necklace, worth 10 gold pieces to a collector.

Ceremonial Chamber

Opening off the West side of the tunnel some 70 ft from the South entrance or 75 ft from the North entrance is the ceremonial chamber. It's a square room a little over 30 ft on each side, with the entire East side open to the tunnel running through the barrow. Four huge timber pillars are scattered irregularly around the room, supporting the ceiling joists that hold the earth overhead, with the ceiling about 10 ft up.

On each wall of this room, from floor to ceiling, are shelves about 2 ft high, 6 ft long, and 3 ft deep. In each shelf is laid one or more bodies – or they were, before the dead began to walk, now only half are occupied – and their effects. In the center of the room is a 10 ft square platform one ft off the ground. This is the room in which burial rites and ceremonies are performed, from formal funerals to burial preparations to memorials.

In the Southwest corner of the room one of the shelves has been dug out, with the rear of the niche collapsed into a rough tunnel leading down into the **ghoul tunnels**. The 6 **ghouls** and 2 **ghasts** that lurk in the tunnels can rush through this little space with startling speed to ambush anyone that gets too close. The tunnel will be found by anyone spending 20 minutes searching the room diligently, or can be spotted by anyone that walks within 15 ft with a DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check.

Someone that wanted to loot this room – though the shame would be great, stealing from the dead – can find 51 copper coins among the deceased, as well as one figure wearing rotted finery and ten copper finger rings, each worth 25 silver if cleaned up. The body bears resemblance to the **allip** that haunts the barrow (likely already encountered).

Reliquary

The only proper doors in the barrow appear on the East wall of the tunnel 105 ft from the South entrance or 65 ft from the North entrance. This set of wooden double-doors is modest, around 6 ft high and 3 ft across, held shut with nothing but a simple wooden latch. Inside is a little round chamber six or seven ft across. Inside are all the elements of ceremony that might be called for in the Cairnbarrow: candles, bells, a set of animal-pelt vestments, boughs of dried flowers and herbs, two flasks of **holy water**, and ceremonial shields, axes, swords, brooms and staves carved with runes and decoration, stacked in front of a woolen tapestry depicting the entrance to the underworld.

Hidden behind all of this miscellany is a secret door behind the tapestry. It can be spotted with a minute's investigation and a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check, or by anyone that moves the tapestry. The secret door is just a panel of wood four ft by two, through which a character can squeeze, which opens into a small tunnel 15 ft long. Anyone in the tunnel is squeezing, which halves their speed and imposes disadvantage on attacks and Dexterity saving throws. At the end of this short tunnel is the **outcasts' grave**.

Outcasts' Grave

The opposite in intent from the tablets of honor, the outcasts' grave is a mass grave pit into which are tossed the bodies of those that erred severely in life. This chamber is a square 30 ft on a side, with a 20 ft square pit dug in the center (leaving a 5 ft wide walk around it). The pit is about 5 ft deep and filled with sand. The bodies here are buried haphazardly, with dust and sand tossed atop them just to dampen the smell and rot. Among them are 2 **mummies** and 8 **skeletons** that scramble out of the pit with clouds of dust and sand behind them and attack characters as they emerge from the narrow tunnel.

On the back (East) side of the chamber is a ten-ft-wide, five-ft-deep alcove with an altar dedicated to Hyla, the Hjemlandet aspect of Jagus. Her image is smithed in white iron and set in the back of the alcove, over the altar. Atop the altar is a molded vellum scroll containing the names and sins of the dishonorable dead: a name, a dash, and their sins or reasons for execution, e.g. "Knud Hafsang – burnt the house and orchard of Signe and her family." The statue of Hyla is decorated with tiny black gemstones and would be worth 25 gold pieces, but nobody in Hjemlandet will buy it – it's clearly grave goods.

In the Northwest corner of the chamber is a short tunnel leading North to the **bell chamber**.

Bell Chamber

At the end of a 15-ft-long tunnel from the **outcasts' grave** is a roughly circular room 25 ft across. Half of the room is raised up a tall step perhaps 3 ft high. The ceiling is higher than elsewhere in the barrow, a dome 10 ft at its highest. Atop the shelf are scattered stone tablets that were part of inducting a trainee skald into the mysteries of burial rites, pushed aside to house a huge black iron bell in a wooden frame. A **flameskull** attends the bell, zipping around the chamber, and six **swarms of crawling claws** creep around the room covering the walls and the floors and the bell itself.

The flameskull is leery of using its *fireball* until at least half the swarms of crawling claws are dealt with or it is in terrible danger itself, knowing the spell will more likely deprive it of allies than harm its enemies. If it can line up a shot where at least some of the characters are in the area of a *fireball* with no more than one or two of the swarms of claws it will take the opportunity. Otherwise it will simply use its 3rd-level spell slot to cast *magic missile* or *flaming sphere* at a higher level. It is likely to have *blur* cast at the beginning of combat (and thus cannot concentrate on *flaming sphere* until that concentration is broken) and will use *shield* liberally to defend itself. The claws are less clever and simply swarm and scratch any living beings they can reach.

There is no treasure here except the **twilight bell** itself. The bell is a three-ft-high church bell made of black cast iron, with the design of a screaming skull on each side in white enamel. It has no tongue (clapper) and is hung from a gigantic frame of wood that was clearly constructed around it. The bell weighs somewhere near 2,000 lbs. Its cast-iron construction is relatively fragile, and it can be broken with a bit of beating. It is an object with an AC of 10, 50 hp, a damage threshold of 10, immunity to poison and psychic damage, and resistance to cold, electricity, fire, piercing, and slashing damage. Once it has taken at least

25 points of damage its magic is broken and it is no longer a threat, though it isn't completely shattered. When the magic of the bell is broken all of the dead it has animated fall where they stand.

Shrine

On the West wall of the tunnel 145 ft from the South entrance and 20 ft from the North is a deep alcove. The alcove is wider at the back, creating something like a small chamber 15 ft deep and 10 across at its widest. In the back of the alcove is a small altar and shrine to Donst, the Hjemlandet interpretation of Zhako. Donst appears as a brawny individual with raven wings, wielding a gigantic two-handed sword and flanked by two great curly-horned rams.

This little shrine is littered with small offerings: ceremonial knives, a fine helmet inlaid with enamel in artistic designs, a short poem lauding Donst's strength and virility (in pretty direct, lewd terms at points).

With the **twilight bell** destroyed the adventurers can return to Stein. Jarl Ygraine greets them gratefully. The town already knows that their mission was accomplished, as the dead surrounding the town fell where they stood. The Steiners don't relish the task before them: gathering the corpses of their kin and ancestors, perhaps gorged with the flesh of other townsfolk, and bringing them back to Cairnbarrow. Nevertheless, this is what they must do. Ygraine is relieved beyond words, though she has already moved onto the next issue. She feels they must find their skald, or another, to *hallow* the Cairnbarrow so that nothing like this can happen again.

As the jarl mentioned before, the town has little to give. They can resupply the adventurers with simple things like rations and rope, but what coin they have has already been spent to hire mercenaries for protection from the dead and committed to buy food for the people while the townsfolk get their farms, ranches, and orchards back in order. Jarl Ygraine does have a few personal goods that she offers, however. The jarl's mother was a witch priestess, and her personal effects are certainly worth something.

Her little hoard includes a 10-inch-tall carved ivory statuette of Var (the Hjemlander face of Senya, goddess of romance and debts) worth 300 gold pieces, a large well-made tapestry depicting the landscape around Stein in between of depictions of the afterlife above and the underworld below worth 200 gold pieces, a silver necklace with a crimson coral pendant worth 250 gold pieces, a large gold bracelet worth 100 gold pieces, and a gold ring set with rubies worth 400 gold pieces. Her mother's cache also includes a few magical items. There is a small wax-paper packet of **dust of sneezing and choking** labeled with little spell-runes indicating things like 'affliction,' 'hacking,' and 'coughing'; a quiver with ten **+1 arrows** of beautiful make, fletched with white dove feathers; a fist-sized conch shell with painted golden runes of binding all over that functions as an **elemental gem** of water; and a tiny clay pot with a skull drawn on one side containing a **potion of poison**.

The morning after the adventurers return to Stein a flag appears on the horizon, and soon after a small column of warriors from Matchstick march to town. The jarl of Matchstick, the hobgoblin Brann Brannsson, received word of Stein's trouble a few days ago and quickly gathered his karls and marched to the town's aid. Jarl Ygraine welcomes Brann but lets him know that the trouble has already been averted, and they are now beginning the harder process of mourning, and rebuilding.

The jarl of Matchstick asks if his people can stay for a day, but notes that they must depart shortly and cannot stay to help rebuild. The skald of Matchstick, Njaleif, and his apprentice Tove, have both gone missing. Brannsson believes that he knows who took them or caused their disappearance. A week or ten days ago an infernal priest named Pfennig visited Matchstick and offered them protection and power. The jarl entertained the idea but at the urging of his skald rejected the man. He believes that Pfennig took insult at Njaleif's argument and arranged to have the skald and his apprentice abducted, or even killed.

Jarl Ygraine shares the story of the same person arriving at Stein just before her skald, Longstride Laksdottir, went missing. That cements the theory in the two jarls' minds. The players may, here, volunteer that Elkthorp also lost their skald amid the sounds of great wings and in a scuffle of clawmarks. If Brann Brannsson hears this he'll pound his fists on the table and announce that he knows just what has happened.

There is a dragon that lives on an island to the South, Soksathar. The wyrm is a sickly, swamp-dwelling thing, and exactly the type to have partnered with a devil-worshipper, or even to have recruited the priest as a servant. Brannsson's knowledge of dragons and fiends is greater than that of the jarls Frode or Ygraine, as Matchstick is the village with the greatest military might and the responsibility to track and fight such threats. Jarl Brann declares his plan to confront the dragon without hesitation, though he notes that he'll have to stop in Frukthage and Soveby – nearby towns – to raise more warriors. Brann and Ygraine both turn to the adventurers, silently asking if they are willing to join this expedition with Hjemlandet's safety on the line balanced against near-certain death.

Assuming that the players are willing to put their lives on the line to beard the beast in its lair, the party leaves the next morning. If the players need a push to make the choice Ygraine reminds them that this may be the only way to get back their skalds, assuming they still live – and getting back the skalds is the only way to officially cease the war with Sangranit, thus releasing the fey from their duty to harass or destroy Fort Courage. Brann steps in to speak briefly of glory, as well, and a bit longer of the immense treasures Soksathar has added to its hoard throughout the last century or two: mountains of coins, pools of gemstones, and enough artifacts to purchase a kingdom all their own should they wish. He'll offer to split the entire pot 50/50, half to the adventurers and half to himself and his various warriors, in recognition of the group's prowess in destroying the **twilight bell**.

The path Brann proposes to get to Soksathar's lair on Terroroya runs back Southeast to Matchstick to resupply, then South to Frukthage to gather more bodies, then East up the coast to Soveby for yet more recruits and to make their way to the island. Terroroya can only be reached from Soveby or parts East – the sea becomes exceedingly deep, dangerous, and wild just off the coast of Frukthage, which historically has kept it very safe but also isolated by sea.

The trip to Matchstick will take just under two days; from Matchstick to Frukthage another two days; and then two-and-a-half or three to Soveby. The trip by longboat from Soveby to Terroroya should only take a half a day, Brann thinks, though this is hard to judge as nobody goes to or comes from the island. It is the exclusive domain of Soksathar, and there is nothing there worth visiting.

The group led by Brann includes himself (use the statistics of a **hobgoblin warlord** with scale mail armor (AC 18) and a **+1 longsword**), 24 huskarls (10 **scouts** and 14 **soldiers**), and 18 pack rams (with the statistics

of **goats** that count as Large creatures for the purposes of determining their carrying capacities). The folk are a mix of mostly humans, a few half-elves, and a few hobgoblins.

The trip to Matchstick is uneventful, as such things go. A few wandering **sabertooth tigers** get uncomfortably close but a few volleys of short arrows from the twenty-four soldiers with Brann send them off shortly. At one point in the great distance a **giant eagle** appears at great height. The soldiers point to it excitedly, taking it as an omen of good luck on their venture. Moments later the eagle turns mid-flight, fighting an invisible attacker, and falls to the ground. The soldiers are silent after that, and nobody comments on it further.

The one night spent on the road is spent among folk that camp with military efficiency. Camp is stood up and broken down in minutes. Characters are invited to dine in the jarl's tent, and to sleep there if they have no tents of their own. In his tent furs drape over everything, both functional and trophies of his many hunts. The furniture is all camp furniture, simple and sturdy chairs and a single table. Tucked into one corner is his traveling chest. As supper begins the jarl tosses a pelt over the chest. Call for, or roll secretly, a DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check. Any character that succeeds gets a peek at the chest and sees that there is a second, smaller chest behind it. The smaller chest is made of blood-red wood with black iron fittings and a gold or brass lock decoration that looks like the face of a grinning horned devil.

If asked about the chest the jarl attempts to brush it off as an old heirloom. If pressed on the topic he sheepishly admits that perhaps Pfennig's anger at the residents of Matchstick wasn't just because their skald insulted him, but was because the jarl confiscated the chest from him before sending him packing. The jarl admits that he hasn't been able to open it, but keeps it close to him to ensure nobody else tries either. If the characters continue to press or demand a Wisdom (Insight) check have Brannsson oppose it with a bonus of +5 and advantage on his Charisma (Deception) attempt versus the party member with the highest Wisdom (Insight) bonus. Should the party succeed they determine that Brann is *still* lying, but that the embarrassment is real. The jarl will resist revealing the full truth unless the characters press him on his honor or his duty as a leader – this is an easy way to Brann's heart, and he'll talk. He won't respond to threats of violence, and any fight with the Brann will suddenly become very dangerous as his twenty-four soldiers hear the scuffle and pile on.

The full truth is embarrassing because it shows weakness. The jarl *was* visited by Pfennig a week or two ago, but things didn't proceed quite as he said. Instead he fought with skald Njaleif, even becoming so frustrated that he shoved apprentice Tove out of his chambers. He feared for the safety of his people and took the Asmodean priest up on his offer, accepting Pfennig's offer of power and safety. The deal was phrased in such a way that he didn't understand what he was accepting, and believes that he accidentally caused his skald and young apprentice to be taken. The guilt of it has been eating at him since, and he's determined to find Pfennig and have him break the deal. The chest was the 'power' that Pfennig left for him, and a physical symbol of the deal. It is a small chest sealed with an *arcane lock* that is opened by a key on a leather loop around Brann's neck. The key looks like a golden horned devil face with its mouth open, tongue protruding and twisted into the shape of the key's bit. The chest is an **infernal coffer**¹². Brann has not yet 'spent' any of the **soul coins** within. Nobody else knows, except Njaleif, and he's gone.

12: The **infernal coffer** is a new magical item. It is a chest 12 inches long, 6 inches tall, and 8 inches deep, with 1-inch-high feet on each corner. It is made of blood-red wood and bound in black iron, and enchanted to be nearly invulnerable. It is locked with an *arcane lock* that is always linked to

a matching key. The lock is surrounded by a decoration that looks like a species of devil – in this case, a horned devil. The key typically looks the same.

Using the key requires attuning to the coffer. A character must have the key to attune to the coffer, but need not be holding or near the coffer to attune to it, though the pair are a set. Each time a creature unlocks the box the key bites the holder, drawing a tiny drop of blood. Only the attuned creature can open the coffer, and they must have the key to do so.

Inside the coffer is whatever the holder bargained for, most often a cache of 100 **soul coins**. The coffer smokes constantly as though something inside is burning, and the smoke is proportional to the number of soul coins inside. If a creature dies while attuned to the coffer and key its soul is automatically turned into a soul coin and deposited to the coffer with a little clink, no matter where the creature and coffer are.

Near afternoon on the second day the characters and their escorts come to Matchstick. Matchstick is visible from a great distance: it sits atop the highest hill in sight and is built around the old remains of a tall circular tower. The tower has six stories, the first five intact and the last a ragged ring of broken walls exposed to the sky. The top of the tower is blackened from some fire hundreds of years ago, or perhaps a gargantuan lightning strike – thus the name of the village, Matchstick. Around the tower are scattered barracks where the tiny standing army of the town bunk, and those are then surrounded by the rest of the village.

Compared to Elkthorp and Stein Matchstick is a veritable city, with 1,500 permanent residents and another 1,500 farmers and ranchers in the few miles surrounding the town. The town even has a relatively large town square near its center where several permanent shops are set up and another dozen or two stalls and booths. Small raised structures of rough timber dot the town and surround it, each with a warrior or two atop wearing a horn and a longbow. From the tops of the tallest buildings and hung from the highest windows of the matchstick tower are narrow pennants of green showing a broken tower with the bottom half white and the top half black.

Jarl Brann leads his little band back to the tower where he puts the characters up for the night. As the group settle in and the rest of the soldiers unpack in the square around the tower they have another chance to spot the **infernal coffer**, again making a DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check. Treat the encounter just the same as that described above if the characters spot the coffer and were unaware of it before, with jarl Brann taking them to his own chambers before having the discussion.

Whether or not the group is aware of the jarl's failing and the infernal influence in Matchstick they become targets of the devilish influence Pfennig left behind in the town. A **master of cruelties** occupies the tower, hiding in the trophy room near the top. It uses its telepathy to attempt to corrupt the inhabitants of the town from its hiding place. At night it creeps around the town in the shadows, using its Aura of Blood Lust to incite barroom brawls and domestic fights.

The devil is unknown to even the jarl, who left shortly after the master of cruelties arrived. It has been waiting for him to return so that it can attempt to charm him. The fiend's plan is to have the jarl call a town meeting and gather together as many of the townsfolk as he can, then to use its Captivating Presence and Aura of Blood Lust to create a huge melee, watching the town devastate itself. There are three soldiers

and two servants in the tower that it has already converted to devil worship through promises tailored to their darker urges: sex, wealth, and violence. These worshippers don't know that the fiend is nearby, they only know that a powerful patron has promised them there is an opportunity coming for them to live out their most gruesome fantasies, and that they will be protected from the consequences of taking whatever they want.

The master of cruelties will attempt to make contact with the player characters throughout their overnight stay. After one or two are contacted they are likely to either confront the jarl or to go seeking whatever is contacting them. Treat this as a hide-and-seek scenario throughout the tower. The fiend is hungry for violence, but knows that its mission is best served with secrecy, so it will use its knowledge of the tower's hidden recesses to try to evade or isolate characters. If it is faced with one or two opponents it will use *crown of madness* and *Aura of Blood Lust* to control the fight, looking to drop its opponents as quickly as possible and then vanish to ambush others again. If it cannot arrange an unfair fight like this it will instead pursue tactics more natural to it, leaping into the center of the group from hiding and spearing opponents at every opportunity.

Matchstick Tower

First Floor

Entryway

Servants' Hall

Kitchen

Pantry & Larder

Servants' Room

Second Floor

Great Hall

Third Floor

Guest & Guard Chambers

Fourth Floor

Jarl's Chambers

Fifth Floor

Study

Trophy Room

Sixth Floor

Rooftop

If the master of cruelties is able to execute its plan it will attempt to use *charm person* on the jarl when he awakes the next day. Since the jarl had already intended to gather his soldiers for the trip it's not difficult for the master of cruelties to get him to gather all the armed people of the town in the square near the tower. In the early morning light the master of cruelties leaps from a window, landing in the middle of the people and using its Captivating Presence to freeze as many as it can, then using both Aura of Blood Lust and *crown of madness* to get the maximum number of soldiers striking each other. The panic and violence won't play out quite like the fiend wants, but will still cause immeasurable damage.

If the fiend is stopped overnight the jarl is distraught by what his fear has allowed into his town, but his dedication to tracking and dismembering Pfennig is redoubled. He gathers the warriors he was traveling with and the others that were waiting at Matchstick and prepares to leave with 40 huskarls behind him (15 **scouts** and 25 **soldiers**). If the fiend is allowed to gather the soldiers and wreak havoc that number will be reduced by $4d6 + 10$ (give or take depending on how well the fight goes) of injured, slain, or shaken fighters.

With whatever force he can muster the jarl prepares to travel to Frukthage with his soldiers and pack rams. If the fiend was mostly successful he's not confident that he'll return to lead Matchstick again – he'll either aim to lose his life doing his duty, or else to step down when he comes back and become a farmer or a hunter.

The trip to Frukthage takes two days and, like the trip to Matchstick, is uneventful. The scouts hunt for deer, rabbits, and ducks on the way. A few beasts and monsters put their heads up and are chased off by rains of arrows. The sky above darkens as the soldiers march, heading into a windy and dark storm that seems to hover over Frukthage.

Frukthage

The trip to Frukthage is nowhere near as calm as previous journeys. The fiendish influences in the area may be to blame, or perhaps something else. Scattered across the countryside under cloudy skies are a few cadres of bullywugs.

The first day of travel is uneventful except for short spatterings of rain and increasing wind. Overnight the rain comes down, and breaking camp in the morning is a miserable affair of sucking mud and wet furs. The pack goats seem totally unconcerned.

Bullywugs!

In the mid-morning of the second day of travel the edges of Frukthage are just visible from the highest hills. Much closer, though, are a band of bullywugs preceded by croaking and sloshing. The sounds of bullywug cries echo around the hills and shortly after a band of them appear.

If the characters are scouting ahead of the jarl's forces or are otherwise separated then four **bullywugs** riding **giant frogs** appear, accompanied by two **bullywug croakers** without mounts. If the soldiers are lined up on the road as well then there are another 25 bullywugs, 5 more croakers, and 25 more giant frogs. This larger part of the bullywug warband occupies themselves with the soldiers and vice versa, leaving only the aforementioned threats to combat the player characters. The bullywugs will attempt to turn and run at 5 hp, though the frogs are too stupid to retreat.

The main road is covered in a few inches of mud and is not difficult terrain but is very slippery. When a character takes the dash action while on the road they must make a DC 8 Dexterity saving throw or fall **prone** after covering half the distance of their dash. The ground for ten feet to either side of the road is deeper mud and counts as difficult terrain with the same additional rule as the road itself. Beyond that the hills rise up a little and the ground is still wet, but not muddied. The bullywugs and frogs are swamp natives and treat mud as normal terrain, with no risk of slipping.

The bullywugs are carrying purses and coin pouches with 96 silver coins between them, and one of the croakers has a tiny wooden box with five polished lapis lazuli gems worth 25 gold pieces each.

As the fighting wraps up the soldiers check each other's wounds and holler back and forth bragging about the coins, precious stones, and other loot they find on the bullywugs' bodies. The jarl's soldiers have a fighting style heavy on defense, and only lost 1d4 soldiers in the scuffle.

More Damn Bullywugs!

The trouble with the bullywugs was hardly an isolated incident. This becomes evident when the sound of their croaking language starts up again less than an hour later, partially inaudible under the sounds of thunder. The clouds above continue to roil, and rain starts just as the bullywugs arrive.

This time there are six **bullywugs**, two **bullywug croakers**, and a single **bullywug royal** and its attendant pet **giant frog**. The six bullywugs are carrying the royal and its giant frog on a makeshift palanquin of tree branches and piles of moss. They quickly drop it when they sight enemies and the entire group rushes to fight. Again, if the characters are accompanied by 10 additional croakers and 25 more bullywugs, who all split off to tangle with the jarl's people.

The croakers use their Glaaar-pat ability to wound as many targets as they can at once, turn after turn, using Rooooo-glog to restore health to their allies as soon as the royal loses hit points. The bullywug royal mounts its giant frog to get the most advantage possible from its Frog Rider ability, then starts combat with a Croaked Decree before leaping into melee. The royal carries a **wand of entangle** that it uses to restrict exceptionally mobile opponents. The bullywugs flee if they are reduced to 5 hp.

In the rain the mud is just as bad as during the previous encounter. The main road is covered in a few inches of mud and is not difficult terrain but is very slippery. When a character takes the dash action while

on the road they must make a DC 8 Dexterity saving throw or fall **prone** after covering half the distance of their dash. The ground for ten feet to either side of the road is deeper mud and counts as difficult terrain with the same additional rule as the road itself. Beyond that the hills rise up a little and the ground is still wet, but not muddied. The bullywugs and frogs are swamp natives and treat mud as normal terrain, with no risk of slipping. The rain that's coming down renders creatures and objects beyond 60 ft lightly obscured, and those beyond 120 ft heavily obscured.

When the mud and blood settle the jarl's soldiers have lost 1d6 individuals, but the bullywug forces are broken.

The looting reveals the **wand of entangle** that the bullywug royal wielded, as well as a copper crown too broad for any human head worth 10 gold pieces. The other bullywugs carry purses with a total of 101 silver pieces and 72 copper between them all.

A Truly Baffling Number of Bullywugs

Near evening, with Frukthage in sight, it becomes clear that the town has been overrun by the bullywug invaders. While there may be survivors still in the town the only visible creatures are frog-men crouching and slouching about the town. Surrounding the town are orchards, from which the town derives its name. Brann and his folk prepare to drive into town as quickly as they can to find a defensible place to rest, as setting up camp in the midst of these bullywugs is suicidal. Overhead the rain continues to pour down.

While darting between exposed areas the group comes upon a gang of bullywugs lying in wait, hidden by the rain and mud until it's too late. Three **giant frogs** with three **bullywug** riders spring up, and behind them is a single **red slaad** commanding them. The slaad's abilities make it a dangerous and resilient melee combatant, and it wades into the fight to claw as many separate targets as it can. As before, there are another 20 bullywugs and 10 croakers there that occupy the jarl's soldiers.

The tangled roots of the orchards around Frukthage have prevented the area from turning as muddy and wretched as elsewhere, but characters must still make a DC 8 Dexterity saving throw when they dash or fall prone halfway through their dash. As well the rain has kept up, rendering anything beyond 60 ft lightly obscured, and anything beyond 120 ft heavily obscured. The trees of the orchard can be used to gain half cover by either the bullywugs or the characters, depending on who's taking the defensive at a given moment.

There are 90 copper coins in purses spread among the bullywugs, but the slaad carries greater treasure. Its control gem is with Scent of Carnage, so can't be claimed, but it has 4 **potions of healing**, 1 **potion of greater healing**, and a **potion of climbing**.

This time the jarl's soldiers fare well, and only lose 1d4 – 1 warriors in battle, though others are bumped, scraped, or sport broken noses.

Frukthage is a village with a decent population but spread out across acres and acres of fields. The orchards are famous for their crisp, sour apples and there are endless fields of berry bushes with any kind of berry one could want. The town proper has a paved square in the center surrounded by buildings of

stone and wood. These are the buildings that the townsfolk ran to when the bullywugs attacked, and hundreds of villagers are crowded into businesses, larger homes, and the longhouse with whatever food, drink, and valuables they could grab on the run.

The bullywugs only arrived two days ago and seem to have no interest in laying siege to these isolated buildings. They know that they can outwait the townsfolk and simply keep patrols moving back and forth around the town, returning every few hours at most to catch townsfolk off-guard. The bulk of their forces, however, may have been dispatched by the jarl's soldiers and the player characters, who have now handled more than a hundred in total, plus dozens of giant frogs. The bullywugs initially came from the East, up the coast toward Soveby. It seems likely that they've also overtaken that town, perhaps more thoroughly than they did to Frukthage. While Brann had hoped to gather more warriors from Frukthage it seems that they have few to spare, not even enough to replenish the losses suffered on the road here.

Bullywug Ambush

While the characters speak with the folk in the longhouse a rustling sound comes from the thatching overhead. As everyone present looks up the rain pours in, followed swiftly by a stealthy bullywug assault force. The jarl's soldiers gather townspeople to the walls, attempting to create an open space in which to engage the attackers.

Two **giant frogs** with **bullywug croaker** riders come through first, and immediately after two hideous low-slung **black guard drakes** slither through. The bullywugs attempt to create chaos, attacking at random. The guard drakes launch themselves toward the most present threat, however, attempting to bring someone down.

The bullywugs have 66 silver coins between them, and one wears a silver ring around one bulbous finger, which was probably originally a child or halfling's bracelet, and is worth 1 gold piece.

The bullywugs have spent their numbers almost completely in the assault, but also shown that there is nowhere safe in Frukthage without armed guards and soldiers. Jarl Brannsson divides his remaining forces, stating that he'll take ten of his most capable (**soldiers** with shortbows, +3 ranged 80/240 ft 1d6+1) to continue toward Soveby, and leave the rest here to guard Frukthage against any further bullywug incursion.

The journey toward Soveby was initially judged to be a two-and-a-half day jaunt up the coast from one friendly settlement to the other. Instead it will be a trudge through rain and mud along a coast populated with enemies. Jarl Brannsson is open in his disappointment, but also resolved in his quest to find the diabolist Pfennig and to save as many Hjemlanders as remain in Soveby.

The conditions for the camp are consistent, constant rain. Despite it being summer the temperature is chilly, and in Hjemlandet that means near to freezing. Making and breaking camp is miserable, and sleeping in the rain is cold and wet. Any fragile items or equipment that can be ruined by poor conditions

likely are, or require frequent attention. The road is mostly washed out and the mud slows a march to a crawl. The trip should have been a little over two hours, but instead takes almost four full days.

During the trip there is evidence of the bullywug invasion, but little left living. At one point the road passes a pile of bullywug bodies slowly melting into the mud, and scattered around them a cadre of Hjemlander soldiers and civilians. Abandoned homes and farms dot the landscape, many of them ransacked. However, the characters don't encounter any living enemies – even the scavengers are mostly driven out of the torrential rain, though ravens do croak in distant trees and perhaps a few damp foxes appear near the piles of dead.

The lone encounter is with a **gray slaad** stalking through the damp. The slaad has the ability to change its shape, as per *polymorph*. It first appears to travelers as a wretched survivor: a young adult human. It takes the name Forrest Marcum and claims to have survived the bullywug attack by huddling underneath the bodies of family and friends in its farm and is now out for revenge with his father's sword. "Marcum" gathers as much simple tactical information as it can (identifying spellcasters, gauging who's the best attacker and who's the best defender, etc.) before attacking.

The slaad begins the fight by casting *fireball* in the middle of the group, trusting that its resistance to fire and Magic Resistance will protect it from the majority of the damage while eliminating the ten **soldiers** traveling with the group. It then lays about with its greatsword. Its Shapechanger ability requires an action to end, so it is likely to stay in its humanoid form. It will use *fear* to disrupt attackers if it is dramatically outnumbered or outmatched, but prefers to simply kill threats to it. If it finds a convenient cluster of enemies it will use its second *fireball*. If the end of the fight is inevitable the slaad may *plane shift* away from the fight.

It is possible that the characters will identify that something is wrong with Marcum. The young man acts erratically and speaks with a strange accent. These things could easily be chalked up to recent trauma, but a few things stand out. If players grow suspicious have them make a group Wisdom (Insight) check against a DC of 17. On a failure they get that Marcum is deeply ashamed of his failure to fight and die with his family. On a success they get that Marcum is not who he claims to be (though there is no real way to identify that he's an interplanar evil frog monster). Abilities and spells that allow characters to identify the location or identity of aberrations or similar (though note: the slaad is chaotic, not evil – it has simply been controlled by Scent of Carnage) will reveal that Marcum is a monster.

The slaad has an old greatsword of foreign make, disguised until it dies. The greatsword is made of wood hardened with a lamination of mucous. It is worth 100 gold pieces to a collector, but otherwise is simply a serviceable blade. It also wears ten thin chains of gold worth 5 gold each around its neck.

This is the only encounter on the way to Soveby, but presages the awful destruction found there. Like Frukthage, Soveby has been decimated by the bullywugs and other minions of Soksathar and its allies. Soveby was previously the largest port in this stretch of the coast, with trade going up the coast and even looping around Terrorya to the fjords Southwest in Hjemlandet. Soveby was also a town of raiders: freebooters, pirates, and reavers that threatened the sea trade of this whole ocean. The docks, boats, and homes have been burnt, razed, and wrecked. The bullywugs moved through and stole whatever they

could to fuel their army, then left. Now the town is populated by Soksathar's more trusted minions, including its kin.

Jarl Brann (presuming he survived the slaad's attack), on sighting the town's wreckage, recognizes that there is likely nobody here and nothing left to save. The only thing left is to avenge the dead by killing whoever they can and, eventually, Soksathar itself. Traveling through the town's wreckage undetected is not particularly difficult. There is plenty of cover and few creatures that still patrol the town. The docks must be the characters' goal. If there are any ships remaining they'll be there.

In moving through the town toward the docks characters will have to pass the drake pens, which have been set up in what was once the town's square immediately facing the docks. The paving stones are covered in a thick layer of mud, dung, and slime, and where dozens of little stalls once stood a pair of great pens have been set up. One contains three **black guard drakes**, and the other two **black dragon wyrmlings**. The characters can attempt to sneak past but will have a real challenge due to the wyrmlings' Blindsight. Have anyone proficient in Arcana make a DC 14 Intelligence (Arcana) check, revealing that most dragons have Blindsight on a success. If the characters are aware of this fact they can sneak past the drakes and wyrmlings with a DC 15 Dexterity (Stealth) group check; if they are unfamiliar they'll need to meet a DC 20.

If they end up engaging the dragons the wyrmlings will of course start by flying into the air before using their Acid Breath, allowing the guard drakes to stay on the ground. The black guard drakes are less sophisticated and simply leap onto the nearest prey to gang up.

The drakes and dragons exhibit the same kind of hoarding behavior as their elders and kin, and the drake pens have small goods piled up beneath the rubble and mud. A dedicated searcher can find little artifacts like small brooches, pins, and rings, a single die, a few coins, or a pen nib in small caches. All the items are gold, as the lesser metals have been corroded by the dragons' acid breath. Searching the mud requires at least 10 minutes and recovers a little over a pound of gold, worth 60 gold coins if melted down. The goods are in too poor a condition to be sold for more than their weight in gold.

The final barrier between characters and the docks is a little tent set up on the docks themselves before the last two unruined ships, a pair of **keelboats**. One is clearly of Hjemlander make: it has a pair of bright blue eyes painted near the waterline toward the front and flies a single blue and white sail (furled, of course). The other is foreign, and occupied. It is painted black and sports mottled green sails, with a larger-than-average cabin in the stern. The foreign boat is from Terroroya and is the semi-permanent home of **Soksathar's Get**¹³.

The draconic cambion is at work at a small desk in the aftcastle cabin of the Terroroya keelboat, with two **black guard drakes** curled at its feet like dogs. Soksathar's Get is almost certain to spot characters that move along the docks, and will definitely notice the theft of its own keelboat or the keelboat next to it. It leaps to attack the intruders, opening the fight with its Acid Breath and following up with its greatsword. If spellcasters or ranged combatants prove dangerous it will use its Fire Rays to target them, relying upon its Draconic Rebuke to get damage on close-range combatants. The guard drakes stay close to Soksathar's Get like loyal dogs.

Soksathar's Get carries a greatsword and wears dark green **dragon scale mail** armor (which grants resistance to acid damage, of course). It also wears a tiny golden locket with a portrait of itself inside, worth 25 gold pieces.

13: Soksathar's Get is a draconic cambion, the progeny of Soksathar – a fiendish dragon. Its statistics are presented below:

Soksathar's Get

Medium Humanoid, Chaotic Evil

Armor Class 20 (dragonscale mail)

Hit Points 116 (15d8 + 45)

Speed 30 ft., fly 30 ft., swim 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
21 (+5)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws STR +8, CON +6, INT +5, CHA +6

Skills Deception +7, Intimidation +6, Perception +4, Stealth +7

Damage Resistances Acid, Cold, Fire, Lightning, Poison; Bludgeoning, Piercing, and Slashing from Nonmagical Attacks

Senses Darkvision 60 ft., Passive Perception 14

Languages Common, Draconic, Infernal

Challenge 7 (7,200 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +3

Amphibious. Soksathar's Get can breathe air and water.

Fiendish Blessing. The AC of Soksathar's Get includes its Charisma bonus.

Innate Spellcasting. Soksathar's Get's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 14). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

3/day each: *alter self*, *command*, *detect magic*

1/day: *plane shift* (self only, to the Material Plane or a fiendish plane only)

Actions

Multiattack. Soksathar's Get makes two melee attacks or uses its Fire Ray twice.

Greatsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 12 (2d6 + 5) slashing damage, plus 3 (1d6) fire damage.

Fire Ray. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +7 to hit, range 120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (3d6) fire damage.

Acid Breath (Recharge 6). Soksathar's Get breathes an acidic fog in a 60 ft. cone. Creatures in the cone must make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw, taking 24 (7d6) acid damage on a failure or half that on a success.

Reactions

Draconic Rebuke. When Soksathar's Get takes damage from a creature within 5 ft. it may use its reaction to deal 17 (3d10) acid damage to that creature. The creature may make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw for half damage.

The keelboats each have the capacity to carry 7 people total, and function best with 3 crew. Jarl Brann Brannsson and all of his soldiers have proficiency in sailing water vehicles and can crew the boats (if any survive). Even without proficiency the characters can make their way to Terroroya safely, it simply takes twice the time to travel. The boats are well-made and even in the rain and choppy seas it is difficult to fail to navigate them a few miles. The trip to Terroroya takes a full day (or two with incompetent sailors). The boat will have to travel around the whole island to get to the only safe place to dock on the South side of the island.

In the middle of the trip a single **wyvern** circles overhead a few times before diving down to prey on the characters. The footing aboard the keelboat is considered difficult terrain due to the rocking and rolling and rain on the deck. The wyvern will attempt to shove weak characters overboard to snatch up later or to let them drown.

In the sea movement costs are doubled for creatures without a swim speed and swimming creatures must make a Strength (Athletics) check at the beginning of each of their turns. If the character wears more than 50 lbs of equipment or wears medium or heavy armor they make the check with disadvantage. The character's check determines their ability to act on their turn. If they meet a DC of 15 they can get back into the boat as part of their movement (if they are adjacent to it); if they meet a 10 they can act normally but cannot get the momentum to return to the boat; if they meet a 5 they can only tread water and cannot take actions or reactions until their next turn. A character that rolls a natural 1 or gets a result of 4 or less sinks 15 ft down into the sea and is considered 'out of breath' from fighting the waves.

While in or underwater creatures without a swimming speed have disadvantage on melee weapon attacks unless the weapon is a dagger, javelin, shortsword, spear, or trident. Ranged attacks normally miss at long range, and have disadvantage on attacks except for crossbows, nets, or thrown weapons including spears, tridents, or darts. Creatures that are in water have resistance to fire damage.

A creature can hold its breath for a number of minutes equal to 1 + its Constitution modifier (minimum 30 seconds). When a creature is out of breath or choking it can survive a number of rounds equal to its Constitution modifier (minimum 1 round). At the start of its next turn it drops to 0 hp and is **dying**, and can't regain hp or be stabilized until it can breathe again.

The wyvern wears a gold ankle cuff worth 50 gold pieces. The cuff is marked with its name, Princess (it is Soksathar's pet).

As the group prepares to land on the island they level up to 6.

Terroroya

After a potentially harrowing trip by sea the characters see the low crescent island of Terroroya hove into view. The rain lets up, though the clouds persist. The island is rocky on the North and sandy on the South, making it nearly impossible to safely land a boat anywhere but the bay on the South side of the island where the water is deep but the shore is level. All over the island are low trees and thick foliage that grow up out of saltwater marshes and swamps.

The only safe place to set a boat on Terroroya is Fryktbyen Bay, beside which is the only 'town' on the island, Fryktbyen. If characters opt to swim to shore or run their boat aground elsewhere – despite knowing that they may not be able to use that boat again to leave the island – they may avoid Fryktbyen entirely. In this case they must navigate through dangerous waters (use the water rules noted above for the wyvern fight) ending in a rocky shore. The last fifty feet of water is filled with jagged rocks – the ship founders and begins to sink immediately, and anyone that swims must exceed a DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check at the beginning of each round or take 1d6 bludgeoning damage and make no progress as they are bashed against the rocks. Once on land they must contend with frigid water, quicksand, and razorvine in the swamps, as well as monsters like **shambling mounds**, feral **black guard drakes**, and **swarms of rot grubs** and other foul critters.

Should the characters approach Fryktbyen they see a small village perched atop tall stilts standing out of the silty shore of the bay. A single crooked dock of black wood completely coated in sticky tar sticks out into the deep water of the bay. The few buildings in the town might support a population of a few dozen. The inhabitants of the town are essentially Soksathar's priesthood, a gathering of kuo-toa that worship the dragon as a god.

In town are 32 **kuo-toa**, 7 **kuo-toa whips**, a single **kuo-toa archpriest**, and 20 of the kuo-toa's young (if necessary use the statistics of a kuo-toa with no weapons and 3 hit points). Their faces can be seen peeping out of windows as the keelboat approaches and several of them emerge onto the docks. They do not seem to be aggressive, and in fact will help to pull in and moor the boat at the dock. About a quarter of the kuo-toa, including several whips and the archpriest, speak Common in a croaky, burping voice.

The fish-people will speak with the characters and exhibit some curiosity about their origins and purpose, as nobody intentionally lands on Terroroya. The kuo-toa refer to Soksathar often, invoking its name like a god, and it becomes quickly apparent that they worship the thing. Provided that the characters don't reveal that they are there to kill their god the kuo-toa are peaceable and credulous, even accepting explanations like "we are here to visit your god and bring it tribute while heavily armed and armored."

The kuo-toa archpriest will invite the visitors to rest in the abandoned home of one of their people, and to dine with it later. The dinner is fresh (raw) fish and various swamp foliage. Over dinner the archpriest will express excitement over all that's happening lately. One of Soksathar's descendants has recently gone to the mainland along with dozens of frog-people recruited from the swamps of the island – the archpriest may even assume that the characters know Soksathar's Get if they arrived in the Terroroya keelboat.

The outward friendliness of the kuo-toa covers their fanatical obsession with their god and their divine rites. The characters don't need to make any kind of check to get a sense of unease from the intense stares of the fish people. If they ask to make a Wisdom (Insight) check to identify the aims of the kuo-toa have them make a group check against a DC of 12. Success reveals that the kuo-toa have some nefarious purpose and should not be trusted, though it's difficult to gather any additional details. Characters that are familiar with kuo-toa, or make a DC 15 Intelligence (Religion) check, may recall that the kuo-toa often make ritual sacrifice part of their worship.

If the characters stay overnight in Fryktbyen they are awoken in the night by a swarm of three **kuo-toa whips** and twelve **kuo-toa** rushing in to grab them and carry them to the tiny center of town. The burbling chanting of a dozen more kuo-toa comes from a circle they have created around a ten-ft wide cauldron of poisonous, acidic seawater ten feet across and five feet deep in which they intend to drown their guests. Surrounding the cauldron are censers that waft foul smoke out in a 50 ft radius around the cauldron, covering almost the whole village. The smoke is the poison Malice. Creatures that enter the smoke must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be **poisoned** for 1 hour. While poisoned by Malice a creature is also rendered **blind**. The kuo-toa are acclimated to the poison and are not affected by it. The smoke lightly obscures anything beyond 20 ft, and heavily obscures anything beyond 40 ft.

The **kuo-toa archpriest**, two more **kuo-toa whips**, and four more **kuo-toa** wait nearby to complete the ritual. If the characters attempt to escape the town this second cadre will follow, chasing them. The remaining kuo-toa that are not accounted for in these numbers retreat to their homes with the young, seeking to protect them. These are non-combatants, though the characters could certainly eliminate them without difficulty.

There is little treasure in Fryktbyen, as Soksathar collects all of their wealth regularly. Among the cabins are 37 silver coins and 146 copper pieces. The archpriest wears a crown of polished coral pieces set in silver worth 100 gold pieces, and has a set of four platinum finger rings worth 40 gold pieces each.

On leaving Frkytbyen the path forward is obvious: there is only one road that leads into and out of the village, pointing toward the highest point on the island, a tiny mountain to the West.

The trip from Frkytbyen to the mountain is a short one, taking only a day if characters keep to the trail. The trail weaves between pools of reeking water and tangles of razorvine. There are few places to pause on the trail but the characters can set up a rudimentary camp provided they have rations. Foraging in the swamp is difficult, as everything living in it is salty, poisonous, and aggressive, but a dedicated character can certainly scrounge up a disappointing meal.

The swamps are eerily quiet through much of the trip, and both the flora and fauna show signs of warping and mutation. This will be apparent to characters that spend time investigating their surroundings, but may go unremarked by those without an interest in it. The mutations are mostly small: flowers with petals that rot before even blooming; frogs with six legs; hives of ants with too many eyes or no eyes at all. These are all signs of a nearby star spawn enclave to which Soksathar has offered refuge.

The star spawn include nine **star spawn grue** and a **star spawn mangler**. These things can sense the characters moving near their territory and arrange an ambush. A shallow pool of water interrupts the path, hiding beneath it a patch of quicksand. The grue rush out of the dense underbrush and attempt to

herd their targets into the quicksand. The mangler drops from the trees above in an attempt to ambush its targets, then rips into the nearest target. All of the creatures are adept at hiding in the brush. The grue make a group Dexterity (Stealth) check against the Passive Perception of the characters, as does the mangler. Any character with a Passive Perception less than or equal to both Stealth checks is **surprised** on the first turn of combat.

The quicksand pit covers the ground in a roughly 20-ft-square area and is 10 ft deep. When a creature enters the area it sinks $1d4 + 1$ ft into the quicksand and becomes **restrained**. At the start of each of the creature's turns it sinks another 1d4 ft. As long as the creature isn't completely submerged in quicksand it can escape by using its action to make a Strength check with a DC of $10 +$ the number of ft the creature has sunk into the quicksand. A creature that is completely submerged cannot breathe and may suffocate.

A creature can pull another creature within its reach out of a quicksand pit by using its action and succeeding on a Strength check with a DC of $5 +$ the number of feet the creature has sunk into the quicksand.

Small creatures get advantage on checks to free themselves and grant advantage on checks to pull them out, and only sink half the distance ($2d4 + 6$ inches) when initially stepping onto the silt.

The grue carry no treasure, but the mangler has with it a crystal plane cut in bizarre shapes that are unhealthy to the eye. Any creature that spends 1 minute examining it must make a DC 10 Intelligence saving throw or become disoriented and **poisoned** for 1 minute or until it spends 1 round taking no action with its eyes closed, reorienting itself. The plane is worth 250 gold pieces to a collector or a mage. The mangler also has an old and battered farmer's almanac written in Dwarven, and dated one year in the future. It is dog-eared many times in the chapter showing the movements of stars and comets. A printer would pay 200 gold pieces to copy this book, or a mage might pay a similar amount to add it to their library as a curiosity or astrological aid.

The trail toward Soksathar's lair terminates in a clearing in the swamp with a half a dozen wattle-and-daub huts a few hundred feet from a ragged entrance to the hill beyond: the presumptive entrance to the dragon's lair. This little thorp is the home of a **black abishai**, a single kuo-toa priest (use the game statistics of a **cult fanatic** with the Amphibious, Otherworldly Perception, Slippery, and Sunlight Sensitivity traits of a kuo-toa), and two **kuo-toa** servants. The abishai is Soksathar's 'voice,' and the priest is its attendant. All of these figures stand to protect the entrance to Soksathar's cave and will attack anyone that attempts to pass. Depending on how they are approached they may attack the characters before anything has been said.

The priest has 13 gold coins in a purse and a **staff of the adder**, which it may use during combat. The abishai sleeps on a hoard of 1,000 copper coins with 30 electrum pieces mixed in, piled atop a cot in one of the huts. The kuo-toa have 68 silver pieces between them in purses in their hut.

The hill beyond the huts is a two-hundred-ft-high dome of earth and mud, supported by roots and vines. The side of the hill facing the huts has a ragged circular entrance ten feet across. Inside the hill and

surrounding it are dozens of small pools of saltwater. Some are just saltwater, some are quicksand, and some are narrow cave passages that connect to pools inside the hill.

Inside the dome is a two-hundred ft wide circular chamber taking up the entirety of the hill. It is unlit (if it is daytime bright illumination reaches 10 ft from the front entrance, and dim illumination reaches another 20 ft). The ground is dirt and dotted all over with pools of water ten ft across. Some of these are filled with silt and treasure, some are filled with enchanted potion reagents, and others are exits from the hill that lead to the little pools outside of the hill. Around the walls of the hill are ten cages made of vines, wood, and earth, and in these cages are twenty skalds and apprentices abducted from all over Hjemlandet. At the far side of the huge chamber is Soksathar: a **young swamp dragon**¹⁴.

The fight against Soksathar will be dangerous, as it can dive into a number of the pools to retreat to outside the hill or to move around the interior of the cave. It can also shove characters into pools filled with quicksand, and can fly within the boundaries of the cave, or exit to get more room to fly. The dragon will start a fight with its breath weapons, likely starting with Paralyzing Breath. If it is pressed it will attempt to hold the skalds in the cages hostage, aiming to turn them over in exchange for its life. It also knows a great deal about Pfennig and Scent of Carnage that it might share, if asked, in exchange for its life.

Scattered through the treasure pools are 100,000 copper pieces, 90,000 silver coins, 11,000 gold coins, and 1,300 platinum pieces, all from the last few hundred years of minting and from kingdoms far and wide. There are also 9 gems worth 1,000 gold pieces each, 4 **potions of healing**, one **greater potion of healing**, a **philter of love**, a pouch of **dust of sneezing and choking**, an envelope of **dust of disappearance**, and a **spell scroll of teleportation circle**.

The dragon's task, assigned by Scent of Carnage, was to abduct or kill the skalds of Hjemlandet. It went above and beyond its mandate and took the opportunity to test an alchemical brainwashing technique of its own design using kuo-toa blood and various potions. Soksathar has managed to turn six of the twenty to its side – these skalds are feral and distant from reality and talk of Soksathar as a divine being. The other fourteen are whole in mind, though badly abused physically.

All of the skalds are eager to return to their homes, though they likely won't fit on the keelboat the characters arrived in. Any of the skalds can use the scroll of *teleportation circle* to return themselves and their rescuers to any stone circle in Hjemlandet, including that of Stein or one near Matchstick. The weight of the treasure in Soksathar's lair may be prohibitive to move now but it can remain here to be collected later. There are over 4,000 lbs of coinage, and each of the fourteen sane skalds can only travel with 50 lbs of goods due to their weakened state (for a total of 700 lbs, or 35,000 coins).

Among the skalds, and unconverted by Soksathar, are Eld Gammel, Longstride Laksdottir, and apprentice Tove. Njaleif, the skald of Matchstick, has been converted by Soksathar's brainwashing but can be returned to sanity with a month of care in Matchstick. Longstride Laksdottir takes charge of organizing the escape and speaks with the characters during most of the rescue. The skalds' preferred destination, perhaps because Lakdsottir is speaking for them, is Stein. It is central enough to the territory of Hjemlandet and far from the devastation of Soksathar's brief war against the coastal towns.

The skalds' return is met with joy, though their condition is cause for concern and regret. The wealth built up in Soksathar's lair would go a long way toward strengthening Hjemlandet if the characters are willing

to follow through with the split offered initially by Jarl Brann Brannsson, or to give some of their enormous wealth to the wrecked towns, like Frukthage and Soveby.

After the simplest necessities are taken care of – escape, food, water, and a night of rest – the skalds are willing to collaborate with the heroes to solve their problems. Their initial problem, at least, was identifying a way to end the war between Hjemlandet and Sangranit.

The skalds explain that they are happy to end the war with Sangranit through an official vote of the surviving skalds of Hjemlandet, virtually all of whom are already here and recently rescued. They regret to inform the characters, however, that this won't solve their problem with the fey. The agreement with the fey, written in the ice of Queen Ailbhe's glade, does not allow for any kind of discharge or end. The fey will always be at war until the agreement is broken.

The good news is that this is very literal: if someone can visit Faerie and physically break the ice in the pool in the glade then the agreement comes to an end. The skalds would welcome this, as the bulk of their power is committed to the agreement – their magic flows weakly and is drawn into the forest where they cannot use it, and in return they gain the protection of the fey that does not help them except at war with Sangranit.

The skalds can, together, send a group of individuals to Faerie in an attempt to break the agreement. This is a ritual that allows the skalds to cast *plane shift*, transporting up to eight willing creatures to the Nearward side of Faerie.

At this time in the adventure there is another inflection point at which players may choose to do a number of things and may spend some time talking with NPCs. It is possible they will choose to give up on their attempt to establish a new Sangranit duchy, or elect to stay in Hjemlandet (Kaldskog, for foreigners), or choose to take their newfound wealth and travel the world.

The motivations individual characters might have had to run from Sangranit are still present, likely, and the end goal of creating a new territory may be even more vital than ever with all the refugees from throughout Hjemlandet and the Kaldskog forest. As well, the figures they've met throughout their travels have their own reasons for wanting the Faerie contract broken: the magic of the bloodlines of Hjemlandet is choked by the agreement; the forest is unsafe for foreign travelers, putting an end to trade; war with Sangranit is unavoidable as long as old grudges persist.

During this time don't hesitate to have these figures feel out the characters' sentiments and even influence their decisions. The gathering in Stein includes a number of characters that have already been introduced, and other new people as well.

Hjemlanders of Stein

Jarl Ygraine Ulfsdottir

Jarl Brann Brannsson

Skald Longstride Laksdottir

Skald Eld Gammel

Apprentice Tove

Knud One-foot

Skald Revna Gilten

Apprentice Astrid

Ashbo of Stein

Act IV

Into Faerie

When the characters are prepared to travel to Faerie the way is simple. With three skalds together the gate to Faerie can be opened at any place where the way between planes is well-trodden. The stone circles are common crossing places, as are a number of natural features in the landscape. The closest way into Faerie to Stein is an old trilithon at a place where three hills come together. The trip takes a half a day of hiking uphill through sparse woods, among which the most dangerous threats are mundane beasts.

The trilithon is not kept up as well as some others, and is covered in the red rust dust common to white iron stone. The color leaches into a small pool at the foot of the trilithon, dying it red. The clay surrounding it is red as well, and even the reeds and bushes that grow around the edges of the pool. The entire vignette is painted in a monochrome, excepting the color that peeks through the trilithon. The landscape through the stone arch sometimes wavers or shimmers, and seems to be of a bluer tint than the oppressive rust red surrounding it.

The ritual to pass through to Faerie here is simple. In fact, the skalds don't seem to do anything. Each walks by the stone archway in turn and lays a hand on it, and the blue-green light shining out of the trilithon grows brighter each time. After the third it remains stable. There is a knife-edge separation in the pool as it passes under the arch where the water turns from rust-red to blue with thin sheets of ice floating across it. As characters walk through the shallow pool – never deeper than two ft – it grows colder and colder, and when they pass through the arch they are in Faerie.

Leastward to Mostward

The part of Faerie in which the characters find themselves is that nearest to the 'real world' of the Material Plane. In Faerie this is known as Leastward. Things here have a kind of impermanence, lacking both the steely solidity of the Material Plane and the overwhelming glamour of the deep Faerie. In this way the

things, the creatures, and even the landscape here is the least real of anything that the characters might encounter.

The pool persists, here, but is a freezing cold shallow pond coated in drifting slivers of ice. Crispy winter grasses and reeds ring the pool, and just beyond that a foreboding forest of black pines with black needles covered in drifts of powdery snow. The sun above shines thinly through dark clouds and everything is painted in varying levels of shadow.

The ring of pine trees is broken directly ahead of the characters as they exit the trilithon, and a beaten path through the reeds and grass appears to wind through the forest. Those familiar with Faerie, or who make a DC 10 Intelligence (Nature) check, know that it is unwise to leave the beaten path in Faerie or you may wind up far, far from your destination.

Food and Drink, Lies and Deals

In Faerie there are three unique features that bear remembering. Creatures from the Material Plane cannot consume the food and drink of Faerie without becoming bound to it. They cannot lie or break promises without terrible retribution. Illusions don't reflect reality, but replace it.

Food and Drink

When a creature eats or drinks anything in Faerie they are bound to Faerie. The owner of the food and drink – or Queen Ailbhe, if there is no other owner – can grant their permission for the creature to leave Faerie again, but will not do so without recompense. Without this permission a creature cannot leave Faerie. Instead they are bounced off of any portal back to the Material Plane just as though they were fey themselves. If a creature spends too long in Faerie and continues to eat and drink fey foodstuffs they will eventually become fey.

If they become fey they will need to pledge allegiance to a fey noble, learn the rules of Faerie, and so on. A character in such a condition is likely no longer a suitable player character, and should be replaced unless there is a compelling story arc to bring them back to the mortal world.

Deals, Lies, and Promises

In Faerie one of the fundamental truths is that reality reflects imagination. This is expressed most clearly in the importance of agreements, deals, lies, and oaths. Breaking a promise or telling a lie is tantamount to violence against Faerie itself. Fey become immensely adept at verbal games to avoid lying, and are quite willing to simply say "I won't tell you," or to make a deal for information if pressed.

The consequences of lying or breaking a promise in Leastward Faerie are fairly mild. The world will seek to punish the violator. At some point within the near future the result of one of that character's rolls will come up as though they had rolled a 1. This occurs at the GM's discretion, but never on something trivial.

In Someward Faerie things are slightly more dangerous. Treat characters that make deals as though they are under the effects of a *geas* spell. Characters that deceive do so with disadvantage on any roll to lie (though not to omit information, mislead, etc.) and cannot eliminate this

disadvantage in any way, and if the lie is perceived the individual takes 1d10 psychic damage. These effects are in addition to the poor luck suffered in Leastward Faerie.

In Mostward Faerie creatures simply cannot lie, nor break oaths made there. The world does not permit it. An oath made in Faerie cannot be unmade or violated anywhere, at any time, excepting by the mutual ending of the agreement by both parties.

Note that creatures can feel these rules, even if they don't know them consciously. When a creature considers lying, or breaking an oath, there is a prickling of their hairs and a pressure on their heads. If they are in Leastward or Someward they can intuitively sense the consequences of such an act, and may choose whether to proceed based on this.

Fey creatures make deals and arrangements as a matter of their nature. When they give something like advice, or goods, or anything at all it becomes an implied deal and must be returned with something of equal value. The complicated network of debts and obligations between fey is part of the reason for their impossible-to-understand governments and courts. It also means that characters must be careful of either offering or asking anything from fey creatures. Just as with lying they will feel the pressure of obligation as soon as they make a deal, witting or unwitting, which eases when the deal is balanced.

Illusions

Reality is malleable in Faerie, and affected by illusion magic. When something changes in seeming, it changes also in fact. When a creature casts an illusion spell or otherwise creates an illusion it comes with a degree of real effect depending on how deep in Faerie that individual is.

In Leastward Faerie the reality is difficult to detect, but certainly there. When creatures would normally automatically disbelieve an illusion by interacting with it there is a 50% chance (10 or lower on a d20) that they instead *feel* the illusion and treat it as a real object or effect. If the effect would cause damage it deals 1 point of damage per spell level of the effect.

As a creature journeys deeper into Faerie this effect becomes more apparent. The effects, objects, and the like created by illusions are real and physical. If an effect would deal damage it deals 1d6 damage per level of the spell. If it creates an object that object is approximately half real, and interaction with it will treat it as real 75% of the time (on a 5 or lower on a d20). If it creates a creature that creature has the statistics of a creature with a CR of the spell's level or lower (so a gigantic dragon created by *major image* might have the statistics of a wyrmling instead). If an illusory creature or object persist to the end of the spell's duration it has a 50% chance of becoming independent from the caster and continuing its existence after the spell ends.

In Mostward Faerie illusions are completely real. The objects, effects, and creatures created cannot be disbelieved. If the effect would deal damage (such as a wall of fire, a lake of acid, falling rocks, or similar) it deals 2d6 damage per level of the spell or effect. Creatures created by the spell can have a CR of twice the spell's level at most. Creatures and objects that are created by the illusion persist afterward as long as the spell reached the natural end of its duration, and are independent from the spellcaster.

Getting Lost, or Found

Leaving the path is very dangerous. When a creature takes even one step off the beaten path they are lost in the forest. They can find their way back to the path easily as long as they can see another character easily or are touching someone, but the moment they are behind cover, lightly obscured, or in dim light they vanish from view.

Characters lost in Faerie can be more or less lost. When a character first becomes lost they are Slightly Lost (or “Lost 1” if you prefer). If they continue to misstep or dive deeper into the woods they can become Quite Lost (Lost 2), and eventually Completely Lost (Lost 3).

When a lost character attempts to return to the path they must make a DC 20 Wisdom (Survival) check. If they succeed they reduce their degree of lost-ness by a step, or find the path they were seeking if they reduce it completely. If they fail they remain lost in the woods. If they fail by 10 or more they become more lost, or if they were already Completely Lost they get Found (see below). Making a check to navigate through the forest takes 1d4 hours each time.

Anywhere off the path is considered difficult terrain.

The temperature in Faerie seems variable, but is only tolerable on the path. The forest is considered to be extremely cold. Creatures that walk through the forest must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw at the end of each hour or gain a level of exhaustion. Creatures with resistance or immunity to cold damage do not need to make this check. Creatures wearing cold weather gear do not need to make this check while active but must check once every two hours that they rest unless they have a fire nearby.

The sun overhead is weak, and at night the aurora glows in a bright curtain of blue and purple light. The path is considered brightly lit during the day, and dimly lit at night. The woods are considered dim in the day, and dark at night.

The forest is dense and filled with fog. Creatures more than 20 ft away are considered lightly obscured, and those more than 60 ft away are completely obscured by the fog. Creatures that are 30 ft away have half cover from the trees, those more than 60 ft away have three-quarters cover, and those over 90 ft away have total cover.

While creatures are Lost in the forest they must make a check every hour to see what they encounter, or once every two hours while resting to see what encounters them. Uniquely, in the wilds of Faerie a character’s force of personality matters and characters can add their Charisma bonus to their roll (as well as bonuses like Jack of All Trades, or use effects like Lucky or Portent). If you roll a natural 1 you do not add any bonuses, though you may still reroll it if you have access to a feature that allows you to.

d20	Daytime	Nighttime
1	You step the wrong way and become more Lost than you were already.	The Wild Hunt is riding, and you are Found by them. See below.
2	There is a creaking and cracking, and you come to the terrible realization	

	that the entire section of forest you were walking through is grown atop ice over a frozen lake of unimaginable scale. The ice breaks and you, as well as several tons of trees, rocks, and snow, are dumped in. You are in freezing water, immediately sink 1d10 x 10 feet deep in a rush of detritus, and must make a DC 10 Wisdom check each round you are underwater to orient yourself or risk swimming downward or parallel to the surface. Drowning is a real possibility, and there is a dragon turtle somewhere down here...	
3	A kelpie emerges from the weedy bank of a frozen river, and does its best to lure you into the water. At first it poses as though it will help you ride through the woods, but soon it dives into the river to drown you.	
4	Two redcaps tour the forest, looking for fresh blood – like you!	
5	A flail snail slimes through the forest, and spots you as an available meal.	
6	A patch of razorvine hangs between the pine trees and catches you, the unwary traveler. An assassin vine curls through it as well.	
7	A green hag lurks in a rotted stump, and attempts to lure you through the forest back to her cabin to be chopped up for stew; or she'll chop you up here.	
8	A polar bear walking on its hind legs and talking invites the character to wrestle it (best of three Strength (Athletics) checks). If the challenger wins it will follow them as a companion until it has saved their life once or performed some similarly vital service.	
9	A satyr reveler pipes forlornly in a frozen glade. There is a 50% chance (10 or lower on a d20) of animosity, otherwise it will be companionable and provide advantage on the character's next Wisdom (Survival) check to find their way.	

10	A gigantic shard of crystal (or ice?) juts from the ground through the pine tree canopy above and emits bright light in a 20-ft radius, channeled from above the forest. A	
11	You stumble across a medium-sized ship from a bygone era, somehow capsized in the middle of this forest. It may or may not be haunted by the spirits of its crew.	
12	You find a tree in which a dryad has been trapped for crimes against the Winter Court. If you free it you'll earn its assistance, but also the ire of the Winter Queen.	
13	You come across a monument: an elven face carved into a cliffside twenty ft tall.	
14	You come across a monument: an obelisk to unrecognizable fey nobility.	
15	You come across a monument: the ruins of a huge stone wall with towers every half mile.	
16	You come across a monument: a fountain, somehow still pouring water into a shattered pool.	
17	You come across a monument: a circle of standing stones that you almost recognize.	
18	No encounter. Time seems to pass in an instant, leaving you with a haze of memories at the end of your time wandering but feeling as though only minutes have passed.	
19	You encounter a small campfire burning merrily with nobody else around, and can gain the benefits of a short rest if you wish.	
20	You come across a companion, or reduce your Lost level if nobody else is Lost, potentially finding the path.	

Being Found

A creature in Faerie is much better off finding something than being Found. When a creature is Lost and is Found by something there is a worse-than-even chance that it is by a powerful figure with dangerous things in mind. The most likely figures to find a Lost character are the Wild Hunt,

a Fey Noble, or a Genius Loci. Roll randomly or select from those below to determine what finds a Lost character.

The Fey Noble uses the statistics of **Nintra Siotta** and travels with a retinue of 1d6 **winter eladrin** and a few dozen (5d10 + 10) various **redcaps**, **pixies**, and other such small fey. The noble has a name like “Earl Pinaceae, Serendipitous Surgeon with Six Swifts,” who might be covered with tiny birds shaped of silver wires and speak only through its own reflection held up in an ornate black hand mirror. Go wild!

Fey nobles that wander the forest have a single commonality: they view mortals as playthings. They are unlikely to offer lost mortals the usual considerations of hospitality that one might have in a fey court. Mortals are best advised either to run – immediately making another Wisdom (Survival) check to reduce their Lost level or else be caught – or to establish themselves as someone deserving of hospitality. If a character chooses to fight they are best simply removed from play and replaced with another character, like another mortal found wandering the woods, perhaps.

The Wild Hunt is the name for those fey that rampage about in a violent, raucous celebration of hunting and blood and intoxication. These hunts are typically headed by a fey noble wearing an aspect of Xvim, the bloody god of the hunt. The figure is almost always mounted, and wears a full helm with huge antlers protruding from it. The hunt contains dozens or hundreds of fey of all kinds, as well as mortals, beasts, and other creatures. All of them are drunk on blood and wine. When one encounters the Wild Hunt there are only two options: to join or to become prey.

If a creature joins it spends the next 1d6 x 10 hours running with the hunt in a daze, perhaps even hunting one’s allies. After the hunt is done the creature gains one level of exhaustion for every 10 hours hunting. Many of the hunters collapse, or even die on the spot, when the fierce energy of the hunt has left them.

If a creature faces against the hunt and fights or flees they face the beasts of the Hunt. This can be best represented with one last Wisdom (Survival) check. A success indicates that the creature has escaped the Hunt, while a failure puts them face to face with a hunter. Use the statistics of a **storm giant** mounted atop a **mammoth** and wielding a gargantuan spear (+14 to hit, reach 15 ft or range 60/240 ft, 29 (3d12 + 9) piercing damage) for a generic member of the Hunt. A figure that is found by, and fights, the Hunt is almost certainly dead.

A Lost creature can also be Found by a genius loci, a kind of catch-all term for all of the natural inhabitants of the forest that accrue power to themselves. These are all fey creatures, but may take the forms and use the statistics of creatures like an **adult white dragon**, a **djinni**, or an **arclight phoenix** that replaces electricity damage and immunities with cold.

The genius loci of the forest are unpredictable. Each is a jealous guardian of its own territory and power, which are often built around unique places in the forest. They may see intruders as a threat, or may see them as an opportunity to gain influence beyond its little glade. Many are willing to direct a creature back toward the path (as though automatically succeeding on two consecutive Wisdom (Survival) checks) in exchange for favors that will bring it power. These favors

may bring the character into direct conflict with other powers in Faerie, and are almost always detrimental in the long run.

Walking the path through Faerie is a simple thing. It seems to almost carry travelers forward through the landscape. The black trees rush by and occasionally a hiker can spot the crest of a mountain or the expanse of a frozen lake through the trees on either side. Howls, cries, and roars sometimes echo through the woods at a great distance, but for the most part the silence is total, muffled by the snow.

While walking toward Queen Ailbhe's frozen glade the trip is interrupted by a handful of tests set by Queen Ailbhe. Being Faerie, these arrive in threes. There are three encounters in Leastward Faerie, three in Someward, and three in Mostward. In each case one tests their manners, one their mind, and one their mettle. Should the characters succeed at all of the tasks their confrontation with Queen Ailbhe will be easy, but should they fail they will have a tougher time accomplishing their task. Each task notes one or more conditions that would cause a failure, and each failure adds one Threat to their final showdown with the fey Queen.

Groceries

From nearby to the path the characters hear a voice cry out to them, "Halloo! Help an old woman?"

Just off the path is an old woman sitting on a stump, with a few burlap sacks beside her. She rubs at her hip and gestures with her walking stick. She explains that she's coming back from trading at the local market and she needs help to get her goods home. She asks the characters to lend her a hand as a matter of hospitality and respect for one's elders.

Stepping off the path to help her does not constitute walking into the woods to become Lost.

If the characters refuse to help her she hollers and curses as they walk away, and they are considered to have failed this challenge.

If the characters assist her she lets them know that it's a short walk back to her home and begins to lead them further down the path, the same way they were going. The sacks are arbitrarily heavy – anyone that lifts one will feel as though they are at their limit. The hut is three hours away, and for each hour of travel the characters gain one level of exhaustion.

If a character looks into a sack they see and smell humanoid remains: severed hands, loose organs, eyes in jars, etc. At the same moment the illusion around the little old granny drops, revealing her to be the **green hag** Countess Violatia that the group may have already encountered on the Material Plane. If Violatia died in conflict against the characters it's another hag from the coven, or a random green hag if none of the hags lived through their confrontation.

The hag says that the goods are hers by trade, and part of a project she's performing, and that they shouldn't be snooping. She refuses to elaborate on what the project is for. She does not start a conflict, and will run rather than defend herself if she is attacked.

If the characters refuse to go farther, or if they attack the hag, they are considered to have failed this task of hospitality.

Bugbear Bandits

As the characters are hauling the hag's goods they are accosted by a gang of bandits: one **bugbear chief**, plus one additional **bugbear** per each character. This happens when the characters are exhausted and have disadvantage on their attacks (presuming they are still carrying the sacks).

If the characters abandon the hag, lose to the bugbears, or otherwise flub the combat they are considered to have failed this task of mettle.

Pixie Puzzle

The hag's cabin comes into view at the terminus of the path. She makes a grand show of patting her pockets and purses before turning to announce that she's lost her key. What luck, though, she has a spare! She's left it with one of the five **pixies** that live in the garden behind her house. Unfortunately, she can't recall which, and the pixies are flighty. They'll only stick around long enough to ask one – rude little bugs.

What she does remember are a few facts about the various pixies. Each has a court affiliation, a favorite thing to collect, a differently colored toadstool on which they live, a favorite drink, and a favorite emotion to feel. This is a logic puzzle. The following is presented to the characters by the hag, and the characters must put together which of the pixies has the key.

The courts include spring, summer, autumn, winter, and courtless.

The five toadstools are lined up in the back garden, and are red, green, white, yellow, and blue.

The pixies like to collect things, each favoring one of beads, coins, quills, pins, and keys.

The drinks they love include coffee, milk, whiskey, water, and tea.

The pixies have favorite emotions, including anger, sadness, jealousy, anxiety, and joy.

- The spring court pixie lives atop the red toadstool.
- The summer court pixie collects beads.
- The autumn court pixie drinks tea.
- The green toadstool is to the left of the white toadstool.
- The green toadstool's pixie only drinks coffee.
- The anger addict collects coins.
- The pixie from the yellow toadstool enjoys feeling sad.
- The center toadstool's larder is always well-stocked with milk.
- The winter pixie lives in the first (leftmost) toadstool.
- The pixie that loves jealousy is next to the quill collector.
- The pixie that collects pins is next to the pixie that revels in sadness.
- The anxious pixie drinks whiskey, of course.
- The courtless pixie is joyful.
- The winter pixie lives next to a blue toadstool.
- The jealous pixie lives next to a neighbor that drinks nothing but water.

The solution is thus:

	Pixie #1	#2	#3	#4	#5
Court	Winter	Autumn	Spring	Courtless	Summer
Toadstool	Yellow	Blue	Red	Green	White
Drink	Water	Tea	Milk	Coffee	Whiskey
Emotion	Sadness	Jealousy	Anger	Joy	Anxiety
Collection	Quills	Pins	Coins	Keys	Beads

If the players are having a tough time getting things in the right order, remember that they don't need to fill out every element, they simply have to be certain that they know who collects keys. As long as they can identify that the pixie on the fourth toadstool has the keys they can complete the puzzle.

If they are still struggling the hag will offer up to three hints, as though she'd suddenly remembered them. She'll offer one piece of information at a time, such as "Oh, yes, the little whiskey-drinking sot is always talking about their Summer court friends, I'm sure that's what they are."

Should the players not be able to resolve the puzzle they can guess at random, attempt to break down the door – which requires just a DC 15 Strength check – or even pick the lock with a DC 20 Dexterity (Thieves' Tools) check. Should they take one of these routes the story can progress, but they'll be considered to have failed this test of mental acuity. Note for these checks that the characters are likely exhausted and have disadvantage on the rolls.

Inside the hut they find a large stained table laid out and covered with needles and thread. The hag quickly lays out all the bits to a humanoid figure and sews them together, resulting in a young man that stirs to life and thanks her profusely before leaving and heading back the way they all came. She then brews up a spicy tea that eliminates their exhaustion. This tea is given as payment for services rendered, and so is not considered Faerie food. The hag then guides the characters to the side door of her cabin, which leads to the path deeper into Someward Faerie.

Gruff Goats

The path continues into deeper, weirder, darker woods. Peeks through the foliage overhead reveal weird beasts of immense size that 'walk' through the aurora above; rivers of ice that are actually millions of snow-white beetles flying together; and stars that blink like living eyes.

The characters soon come to a river a mile wide and clearly as deep, with a long arched stone bridge that crosses it, fading into the fog at the distant end. Before the bridge, in a semi-circular opening with a fifty-ft radius, stands a huge goat with intelligent eyes.

The goat blocks the way forward, and is polite but firm that they cannot pass until and unless they defeat it and its brothers. It fully intends to stomp them into the muddy snow. The first goat is **Gruff the Small**. When he is beaten there is a quick clapping sound as his elder brother, **Gruff the Big**, comes across the bridge to avenge his sibling. When *he's* defeated there is an echoing thumping as **Gruff the Huge** crosses

the bridge, intent on defending the Gruff family's honor. In between each fight the characters can call for a brief reprieve, which the goats are glad to grant, and take a short rest. They are impatient, though, and will not wait for a long rest.

The statistics for each goat follow:

Gruff the Small

Large fey, neutral

Armor Class 16 (Natural Armor)

Hit Points 136 (13d10 + 65)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	17 (+3)	20 (+5)	9 (-1)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)

Saving Throws STR +8, CON +9, WIS +5

Skills Athletics +7

Damage Resistances Cold, Fire; Bludgeoning, Piercing, and Slashing from Nonmagical Attacks

Condition Immunities Charmed, Frightened, Petrified

Senses Darkvision 60 ft., Passive Perception 11

Languages Common, Sylvan

Challenge 9 (5,000 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +4

Magic Resistance. The gruff has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Charge. If the gruff moves at least 20 ft straight toward a target and then hits it with a ram attack on the same turn the target takes an extra 7 (2d6) damage. If the target is a creature it must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be knocked **prone**.

Immutable Form. The gruff is immune to effects that would *polymorph* it, **petrify** it, or otherwise change its form.

Actions

Multiattack. The gruff makes two attacks: one ram attack and one hoof attack.

Ram. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 15 (2d10 + 4) bludgeoning damage.

Hoof. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) slashing damage.

Reactions

Trample. When the gruff knocks a creature **prone** it may immediately make two hoof attacks on that creature.

Gruff the Big

Large fey, neutral

Armor Class 15 (Natural Armor)

Hit Points 177 (15d10 + 90)

Speed 45 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
23 (+6)	15 (+2)	22 (+6)	11 (+0)	15 (+2)	13 (+1)

Saving Throws STR +10, CON +10, WIS +6

Skills Athletics +9, Intimidation +5

Damage Resistances Cold, Fire; Bludgeoning, Piercing, and Slashing from Nonmagical Attacks

Condition Immunities Charmed, Frightened, Petrified

Senses Darkvision 60 ft., Passive Perception 12

Languages Common, Sylvan

Challenge 10 (5,900 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +4

Magic Resistance. The gruff has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Charge. If the gruff moves at least 20 ft straight toward a target and then hits it with a ram attack on the same turn the target takes an extra 11 (3d6) damage. If the target is a creature it must succeed on a DC 17 Strength saving throw or be knocked **prone**.

Immutable Form. The gruff is immune to effects that would *polymorph* it, **petrify** it, or otherwise change its form.

Actions

Multiattack. The gruff makes two attacks: one ram attack and one hoof attack.

Ram. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 21 (3d10 + 6) bludgeoning damage.

Hoof. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 17 (3d6 + 6) slashing damage.

Reactions

Trample. When the gruff knocks a creature **prone** it may immediately make two hoof attacks on that creature.

Gruff the Huge

Huge fey, neutral

Armor Class 14 (Natural Armor)

Hit Points 217 (17d10 + 107)

Speed 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
23 (+6)	13 (+1)	24 (+7)	13 (+1)	17 (+3)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws STR +10, CON +11, WIS +7

Skills Athletics +10, Insight +7, Intimidation +7, Perception +7

Damage Resistances Cold, Fire; Bludgeoning, Piercing, and Slashing from Nonmagical Attacks

Condition Immunities Charmed, Frightened, Petrified

Senses Darkvision 60 ft., Passive Perception 17

Languages Common, Sylvan

Challenge 11 (7,200 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +4

Magic Resistance. The gruff has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Charge. If the gruff moves at least 20 ft straight toward a target and then hits it with a ram attack on the same turn the target takes an extra 11 (3d6) damage. If the target is a creature it must succeed on a DC 17 Strength saving throw or be knocked **prone**.

Immutable Form. The gruff is immune to effects that would *polymorph* it, **petrify** it, or otherwise change its form.

Innate Spellcasting. The gruff can cast the following spells requiring no material components. Wisdom is its spellcasting ability (DC 15, spell attacks +7).

3/day: *entangle*, *healing spirit*

1/day: *freedom of movement*

Actions

Multiattack. The gruff makes two attacks: one ram attack and one hoof attack.

Ram. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 24 (3d12 + 6) bludgeoning damage.

Hoof. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 20 (3d8 + 6) slashing damage.

Reactions

Trample. When the gruff knocks a creature **prone** it may immediately make two hoof attacks on that creature.

With all of the gigantic goats dispatched the group can move forward. Traversing the bridge seems to take moments, though surely walking a full mile should be a trek.

Riddle Door

On the other side of the bridge is a small clearing, but the riverbank is hemmed in almost entirely in an impassable wall of black thorny vines and brambles a hundred feet high. Set into the wall of vicious vegetation is an archway of frosted stone, and within that archway is a closed door. On the door is carved a riddle, the test of wits:

More valued than gold,
More precious than silk,
Pouring like wine,
Flowing like milk,
A sharp blade's feast,
Offer me to the door,
Or it will be closed to you,
Forever more.

The answer to the riddle is "blood." Any character that wishes to pass must spread blood onto the door. As they spread blood on it the door becomes more and more transparent, but only to that character. Once half of their hp maximum has been 'spent' on the door it is passable.

Through the door is a tight corridor of black thorns, pressing in on all sides around the path.

Vulpes Vulpes Schubert

After a half hour of walking beyond the blood door the characters hear a small yapping, then a tiny voice with a posh accent calling out, "Oh, ho, travelers! Lend me your aid!"

The voice belongs to a small red fox caught in the thorns.

Gatekeeper

Queen Ailbhe

Breaking a Contract

Act V

At War

Help Wanted

Taking Courage