

JOURNEY TO RAGNAROK

THE RUNE THIEF
6. WITH BARE CLAWS



CREDITS

JOURNEY TO RAGNAROK is an Adventure and Setting inspired by Norse Mythology, compatible with the 5th Edition of the most famous role-playing game, designed by Michele Paroli

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MANA PROJECT STUDIO



WITH BARE CLAWS

Journey To Ragnarok: The Rune Thief

Adventure #6: With bare claws

For characters of 5nd level

The Rune Thief is a campaign set in the world of *“Journey to Ragnarok”*, and it will take the characters from 1st level up to 7th level, by exploring the heart of Midgard and trying to stop a mysterious threat. Albeit the adventures are designed to be played one after the other in order to produce the most enjoyable and consistent narrative, each adventure can be played as a one-shot, with minimum effort on part of the narrator to portray the events leading up to that point to the players.

INTRODUCTION FOR THE NARRATOR:

Alrekr Sigthollr (pp. 130, JTR corebook), Jarl of Uppsala, has always been somewhat suspicious of the Icy Crows, despite having to deal with them on daily basis. As a consequence, he has recently banished a diviner, called Ydreg Drufilsson, because he could not provide the Jarl with the divinations he craved.

A resentful Ydreg was forced to leave Uppsala in a hurry. When he reached the shore, buffeted by icy winds, he met a lonely fisherman that offered to take him to the Fenmark where he would be safe.

The journey went on for several days, due to the frequent stops along the shore, until they got to the island that sits in the middle of the channel between Svjtiod and the Fenmark. Chasing a myth that the old fisherman told him, Ydreg pushed into the heart of the island and rediscovered there a forbidden knowledge: a forgotten ritual aimed at stealing the runes from Midgard.

The journey then resumed towards the Fenmark, without the Old fisherman who in the meantime seemed to have vanished like a snowflake in the sun.

PREVIOUSLY, IN THIS SERIES OF MODULES

The characters had the opportunity to witness a divination ceremony that however displeased the jarl once more. They learned that the jarl was expecting a new diviner, a well known expert coming from Skjult Borg, but that he was late. Since the weather was getting worse, one of the Jarl’s servants recruited the adventurers so that they

would go and check on the diviner, Thorgest, to make sure he didn’t find trouble along the way. The characters rescued him and took him to Uppsala, as expected.

Unfortunately, Thorgest soon detected a disturbance in the energies of the cosmos, as if something interfered with the correct divination of the runes. Thorgest had to inform the Jarl that he needed time to perform a long, complex ritual, aimed at investigating the cosmic energies looking for tears, flaws or other problems.

The heroes are therefore staying at Uppsala, waiting to hear the answers of the diviner, when suddenly grim news arrive from the Fenmark: smoke and fires were spotted along the shore, across the channel. The heroes hurry over there, and they discover that the attackers wielded strange and formidable powers, granted by the runes that were branded on their skin.

Once back in Uppsala with the survivors, the heroes are presented by the bad news that Thorgest’s ritual did not give the desired results: he failed to obtain anything but partial information regarding how the runes are supposedly vanishing from reality and from the minds of men. The Rune Master however suggests the heroes go to the nearby town of Varmrfors, where one of his old mentors resides, hoping that he will be able to explain what is happening.

Along the way through the Great Forest, the heroes meet the ghosts of a group of Odhinn’s Eye soldiers and those of a Wolves of the Shadow patrol; in life, the two rival groups had forged an alliance to defeat a dangerous troll. To put the spirits to rest, the heroes ventured into the cavern of the very old and blind troll, to defeat it.

After a few hours walking, they finally reach Varmrfors, where they realize the situation is tense between the Wolves of the Shadow clan and the Odhinn’s Eye clan. With remarkable diplomatic ability and a good dose of cunning, the heroes manage to solve the issue, obtaining the favor of old Starri. He reveals that someone is stealing the runes, obtaining a power that doesn’t belong to them. The heroes have barely come to grip with this revelation when a tawny owl, sent by the Bear Warriors clan, proclaims that the clan is coming down the mountains,

straight towards the Great Forest. “Ready your weapons”, this is the message of the owl... is it a threat, or a warning?

THE RUNE THEFT

To steal a rune, Ydreg has to sacrifice an individual who happens to personify its essence (see Runic Divination, pp.306 JTR corebook), through a dark and evil ritual.

When that happens, that rune disappears, leaving no trace of its existence in Midgard and in the mind of its people: any representation of that rune vanishes; inside rune satchels like the ones runemasters use for their divinations, the rune stone crumbles, leaving behind only a pinch of fine, flour-like dust (if a PC is a runemaster or for some reason owns a satchel of runes, they can notice the missing rune only if they check that all 24 of them are there). No one remembers the name of the stolen runes, all that's left is a blurred memory, the feeling that something's missing and there's a void where there shouldn't be, nothing more. This feeling is much stronger for those individuals that used to embody that rune and its meaning.

As far as Runemaster PCs, their features and abilities are not affected by this from a mechanics point-of-view (ie. All their features work normally);

however, Futhark circles that they summon appear incomplete, their features with visual effects like light, auras or energy bursts now become flickering, unstable or weakened from a visual point-of-view (again, their mechanics are unaffected).

If someone performs a divination and the result happened to be one of the runes that have been already stolen, you should just ignore that result and look at the next available rune. This method is very useful if you are using a runic die; if you are using an actual bag of runes, just have the Narrator take away the stolen runes without showing the players how many and which ones are being removed.

WHO WAS THE OLD FISHERMAN?

The Old Fisherman was no other than a manifestation of Loki, who conceived a complex plan against Midgard and its people. He manipulated Ydreg into stealing the runes, and in so doing blinding all divinations, smothering all knowledge and in turn undermining the faith of the Norse in their old traditions.

RUNES STOLEN SO FAR:

The Aett of Freya, 01 to 08, and the Aett of Heimdall, 09 to 16.



INTRODUCTION

Read or paraphrase what follows:

“A strong gale shakes the canopy of the trees today, while large dark clouds loom high in the sky, as if boiling with the promise of a furious storm. The people of Varmrfors are slowly resuming their ordinary lives, after the tension of the last few days. Farlan, the Icy Crows druid, sitting on a log near the water pool, is petting a large brown tawny owl. He is sweetly whispering to the owl words you cannot make out, due to the unrelenting noise of the cold waterfall plunging into the warm thermal spring. There is no doubt that it is the same owl that has brought you the fateful warning of the Bear Warriors. This reminds you immediately of the importance of your mission: you must intercept the Bears before they march all the way to Varmrfors, learn their motives and avoid a battle.”

The characters are free to leave immediately; alternatively, they may want to talk to some NPCs before leaving the village – they could get advice, opinions, or if they are lucky, even some help for their mission.

It is important that the GM makes the PCs realize that time is of the essence, therefore talking to more than a couple of NPCs would go against their interests. In fact, every important NPC knows about the heroes mission and, if the group carries (i.e. they have already interacted with two NPCs), they will invite the group to stop wasting time and go on with their mission.

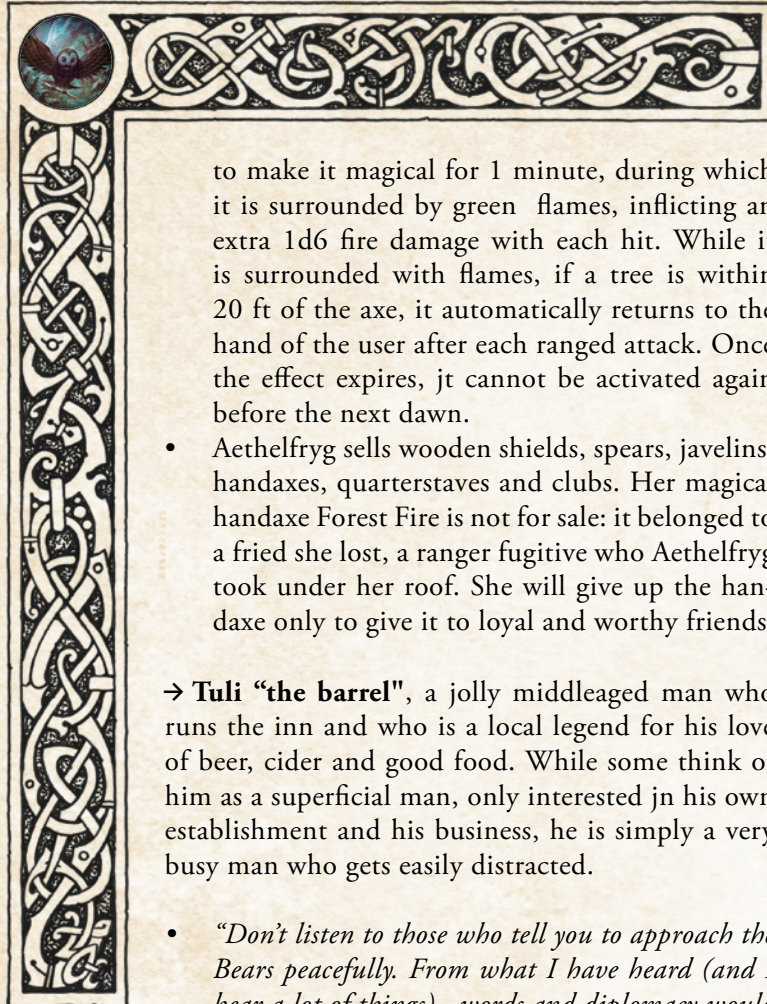
For those who have not played the previous entry in *The Rune Thief* series, “*The Eye and the Wolf*”, and to ease things for the GM, the important NPCs are describe here. Some NPCs may have already interacted with the group during the previous episode, and will act accordingly; the GM is encouraged to reward good roleplay by conceding the NPCs’ special favors to the group, even if they haven’t played the previous module.

→ **Wise Starri**, the oldest among the **Icy Crows**, does not perform ceremonies at the temple anymore, but he is the spiritual leader of the community, on top of being an example and a mentor for the younger **Crows**. He is friendly and generous but also an idealist that sometimes loses his focus on the present while his mind is probing the future.

- “*The Bear Warriors are ferocious and bloodthirsty clan... but they can be honorable, in their own way. I reject violence, so it is easy for me to suggest you avoid any battle with the Bears. Their sight is enough to make veterans of a hundred wars cower in fear.*”
- Starri is willing to give the group a potion called Heart Droplet, that is created from the thermal spring water of Varmrfors, blessed by no less than Starri’s own rune magic: this potion works as a Healing Potion (4d4+4 HP) as well as a flask of Holy Water. Once used one way or the other, it is considered consumed.
- Starri, just like his brothers, can cast spells (up to level 3, from the Rune Master, Cleric and Druid lists) for 100 gp for spells of level 1 or lower, 250 gp for spells of level 2, and 500 gp for spells of level 3. They also sell special potions called Heart Droplet, for 250 gp each (they have 4).

→ **Aethelfryg Uthirsdottir**, a woman stronger and taller than most men, she is a woodcutter and only her expertise with the axe can compare to the respect her community has for her. She is straightforward and knows no compromises; she is honorable, brave and an example for everyone.

- “*The Bear Warriors? They say they live in secluded mountaintop villages, in the most harsh and inhospitable places. They say some of them can uproot a tree with their own hands and that some can transform into terrifying man-eating bears! I wish I could see one up close, but I would keep my axe at the ready, just in case.*”
- If the characters gained Aethelfryg’s trust in the previous module, giving proof of their strength, they will find a trustworthy ally: to help them on their journey, she will give them her own throwing axe, Forest Fire: an ordinary axe with a jagged blade shaped like a conifer branch. However, with a Bonus Actions it is possible



to make it magical for 1 minute, during which it is surrounded by green flames, inflicting an extra 1d6 fire damage with each hit. While it is surrounded with flames, if a tree is within 20 ft of the axe, it automatically returns to the hand of the user after each ranged attack. Once the effect expires, it cannot be activated again before the next dawn.

- Aethelfryg sells wooden shields, spears, javelins, handaxes, quarterstaves and clubs. Her magical handaxe Forest Fire is not for sale: it belonged to a friend she lost, a ranger fugitive who Aethelfryg took under her roof. She will give up the handaxe only to give it to loyal and worthy friends.

→ **Tuli "the barrel"**, a jolly middle-aged man who runs the inn and who is a local legend for his love of beer, cider and good food. While some think of him as a superficial man, only interested in his own establishment and his business, he is simply a very busy man who gets easily distracted.

- *"Don't listen to those who tell you to approach the Bears peacefully. From what I have heard (and I hear a lot of things), words and diplomacy would be wasted on their kind. Of course, the final decision is yours, I am just saying that you should keep in mind your goal: do not let the Bears get to Varmrfors, no matter what the cost. If that means spilling blood, don't hold back. They surely won't."*
- If the characters, during the previous adventure, managed to befriend Tuli "the barrel", they will be given a bottle of his favourite liquor, a strong spirit called Screaming Boar. Drinking a good gulp of this liquor will protect one from the effects of extreme cold: a character who drinks it has Advantage on saving throws against cold for 24 hours. The bottle is enough to protect the whole group for a week. The bottle can also be used as a flask of Alchemist's Fire, but Tuli says that would be a terrible waste!
- Tuli can sell rations, water, food and drinks. His favourite liquor, the Screaming Boar, is on sale for 200 gp a bottle and it is particularly helpful during winter times.

→ **Mannfred Longway**, a foreigner from the distant lands of the Englars, he has been living here a while now, yet his past is shrouded in mystery.

Nonetheless he is appreciated by everyone for his arrowmaking skill. He is reserved and level-headed, he works hard, he is proud of his craft and he doesn't want any trouble.

- *"The people of my lands, beyond the sea, say that Norse raiders are incredible warriors, fierce and fearsome. I wonder what the Englars would say if they saw a Bear Warrior, then. I hope I won't ever face one of them again. It was truly terrifying. They know no fear, no caution, no forgiveness. They are a force of nature, literally."* Mannfred keeps straightening the feathers of an arrow, putting it in front of his nose to check that it isn't bent. *"You want my advice, lads? Don't fight the Bears. If you really have to, do so from far away. Very far away."*
- Mannfred is grateful towards the PCs that, during the previous module, helped him. He will give them a quiver of his best arrows: 12 Longway arrows, that ignore the long range disadvantage on attack rolls.
- Mannfred can sell bows, either short or long, and arrows to his heart's content. His special arrows, Longway arrows, cost 25 gp each, and he owns 40.

→ **Edval Norvirsson**, who despite his young age is considered the most skillful hunter in town, thanks also to the wolves that he raised since they were cubs and now hunt with him. Although some think he may be a little presumptuous, his expertise is undeniable, and he earned everyone's love by often providing fresh game, especially in winter.

- *"I've never met a Bear Warrior, and from what I've heard... I'd rather keep it that way. The Wolves of the Shadow tell stories about them. They say they are a straightforward and brutal clan, almost animalistic in how they act on their instincts; maybe it's just hearsay and prejudice, but if not then their behaviour can perhaps be interpreted like that of any other beast: if a predator is moving towards a new area, it's either hunting... or fleeing from some bigger predator. I am not sure which one is the worse."*
- Edval remembers with gratitude the PCs that helped him during the previous adventure, and gives them a fetish crafted out of a wolf ear, some eagle feathers and some weasel hair. This item is called "Nature's Soul", it requires attunement and

it can be carried either around the neck, as a pendant, or held in hand. As an action, it grants the Keen Senses of the animals for 1 hour, granting the owner Advantage on any **Wisdom (Perception)** checks based on sight, smell or hearing.

- Edval can just sell furs, meat and not much else. He may give up his fetish if a character shows they know enough about nature, by beating a **DC 20 Intelligence (Nature)** check. A character who fails the check cannot try again for a year. Edval only has one “Nature’s Soul” fetish.

Once they are ready, the characters can leave Varmrfors to go meet the fearsome **Bear Warriors**.

PART I

The GM can read or paraphrase the following text:

“As soon as you leave the border of the clearing where the village is, and the noise from the waterfall becomes more distant, you are abruptly embraced by the terrible winter that you had almost forgot about, thanks to the comfortable climate of Varmrfors. The wind blows violently, shaking the trees and their snowy canopies, taking with it the damp sleet that makes it difficult to orient yourselves and proceed. The snow at your feet shows no tracks of any kind, human or animal: it’s as if you are the first mortals to leave a footprint on this eternal snow, so perfect that it could have been painted by the Gods themselves.”

Each character must immediately make a **Wisdom (Survival)** check with **DC 15**.

For each character that succeeds, the group gains a +1 bonus to the roll to determine what dangers they will encounter along their path through the forest.

The GM should determine the number of encounters for this part of the adventure; one or two seems reasonable, depending on how long the first encounter takes to overcome.

The characters can take a short rest after the second encounter, but not after the first. (This means that if they only have one encounter, they don’t get a short rest).

Roll 1d8, adding the bonuses for the characters that succeeded in the Survival check:

ÆTT / D8	EVENTS
0 OR LESS	See paragraph Frozen Pond.
1	See paragraph Icy Rain.
2	See paragraph Hungry Couple.
3	See paragraph Landslide.
4	See paragraph Intense Cold.
5	See paragraph Wolves of the Shadow trap.
6	See paragraph Giant Deer carcass.
7	See paragraph Crumbling ruins.
8	See paragraph Hidden ruins.
9	See paragraph Friendly Spirit.
10 OR MORE	See paragraph Viridian Witch.



Frozen Pond

The group ends up, without realizing it, on a little frozen pond, covered in a thick layer of fresh snow. Every PC has to make a **Dexterity (Acrobatics)** check with **DC 12**, moving at half speed on a success. On a failure, the character slips and falls through the ice into the freezing water below.

The pond is not deep, reaching 5 ft at its deepest spot, but the extreme cold forces the unlucky adventurer to make a **Constitution** saving throw with **DC 11**. On a failure, that character takes one level of exhaustion.

Any characters swimming in the water take 1d4 cold damage at the beginning of their turn. Dragging yourself out of the water costs one Action and half movement, unless someone else is using their Action to Help; in that case, one needs only to spend half movement to get out.

Below the ice hide 4 mischievous Ice Mephits, elemental spirits of the winter; they froze the pond to trap a **Water Elemental**.

Once the water is disturbed, the monsters emerge and attack: the **Elementals** are furious, attacking whoever is closer, while the **Mephits** try to stay away and surround the characters to push them towards the **Elemental**.



Icy Rain

The group walks under some trees with high canopies that intertwine, forming something like the ceiling of a cathedral, several feet above the ground. Hiding among the foliage are 10 **Ice Mephits**, winter elemental spirits, that can be spotted, just before they attack, with a successful **Wisdom (Perception)** check with **DC 18**.

The **Mephits** shake the trees, singing a mystic melody, and cause several pointy ice stalactites to fall hard on the group.

Roll initiative. On initiative 20, every character must make a **Dexterity** saving throw with **DC 10** + half the number of Mephits still alive (rounded up); on a failure, the character takes 1d6 piercing damage for each **Mephit** still alive.

On a success, this damage is halved. Hiding among the foliage, the **Mephits** have a +2 AC due to Cover. If the characters want to run away, the **Mephit** won't pursue.

Hungry Couple

Two fearsome winter wolves are hunting around here, and are taking advantage of the sleet storm to sneak around and surround the characters. If the characters succeed on a **Wisdom (Perception)** check with **DC 18** they will spot the threat before being surprised.

The first **wolf**, the male (91 HP), will attack the most isolated character trying to push it towards the rest of the group. Only then the second **wolf**, the female (68 hp) will target the group with her Cold Breath.

The male will immediately use his own Breath attack trying to get the group's attention, while the female tries to move away until her Breath is recharged.

Note: A **Winter Wolf pelt** can be taken from its carcass with a successful **Wisdom (Survival)** check with **DC 13**, and it can be sold for 150 gp. Alternatively, it can be worked into a cloak, a pair of mittens and a pair of winter boots. A character wearing a full set of these winter clothes benefits from the Snow Camouflage feature of the **Winter Wolf** (the character has Advantage on **Dexterity (Stealth)** checks made to hide in snowy terrains).

Landslide

By mistake, the group ends up on a dangerous path, where suddenly the ground below their feet fails to hold their weight and drags them downwards, almost burying them.

Every character must make a Strength Saving throw, or a **Dexterity (Acrobatics)** check, with **DC 14** to avoid being dragged away by the landslide. Even on a success, the character takes 1d4 cold damage. On a failure however, the character takes 2d6 bludgeoning damage and 1d6 cold damage.

On top of that, a failure means the character will lose one item that will end up buried under the snow and the dirt; they will realize this loss only when they are too far away to go back. The exact item lost is at the GM's discretion, but our suggestion is to give priority to small yet important items, like coin pouches, necklaces, bracelets, daggers, potions and so on.

Intense Cold

The winter cold gets even worse and digs its claws all the way to the characters' bones. They can barely proceed against the wind, flayed by the sleet storm.

Characters can find temporary shelter with a successful **DC 16 Wisdom (Survival)** check. Each character then makes a **Constitution** saving throw with **DC 14**, taking one level of exhaustion on a failure; on top of that, the character takes 2d6 cold damage, and their maximum HP are reduced by the same amount until they complete a long rest.

If the characters find temporary shelter, they have Advantage on the saving throw.

If the characters are wise enough to light a fire, they will ignore the reduction to the maximum HP should they fail the saving throw (they still take 2d6 cold damage).

Wolves of the Shadow Trap

Hidden beneath the snow, a trap placed by a **Wolves of the Shadow** patrol poses a serious threat for the unwary characters that are about to walk on it.

With a successful **Wisdom (Perception) DC 14** check it is possible to notice some red marks on a tree trunk, despite them being half covered in snow. Once the snow is removed, it is easy to recognize the **Wolves of the Shadow** symbol, painted some time ago with red paint.

Just a few feet ahead, between two trees, a troll trap has been set up. With a successful **Wisdom (Perception)** check with **DC 20**, a character will notice the trap: the snow has covered most of the ropes, pulleys and mechanisms so it is hard to detect. Once noticed, the trap is easily avoided, deactivated or sprung, without requiring any other ability check.

The trap itself consists on a very powerful snare that snatches the victim's leg, throwing them to the group and then finally holding them upside down in mid air (to avoid the trap, one must succeed on a **Dexterity** saving throw with **DC 14**; on a failure, they take 1d6 bludgeoning damage and are considered Restrained); at the same time, two heavy tree trunks, pointy and reinforced with sharp rusty metal spikes, come crushing down from the two trees like massive pendulums (**Dexterity** saving

throw **DC 12**; 4d6 bludgeoning damage, 2d8 piercing damage on a failure; damage halved on a success).

Finally, from the highest branches, six Acid Flasks are thrown onto the victim, with the intention of preventing the Troll's regeneration: make a separate ranged attack with a +4 to hit bonus for each Acid Flask, dealing 2d4 Acid damage on a hit).

Obviously, a creature failing the first saving throw against the snare will find themselves in trouble with the following parts of the trap, as the Restrained condition means the character has Disadvantage on Dexterity saving throws and is attacked with Advantage.

Once the trap is sprung, it is not a danger anymore. If the characters notice the trap before it springs, they can find the 6 Acid Flasks and take them.

Giant Deer carcass

Turning into a clearing, the heroes encounter the carcass of a giant deer: when it was alive, its antlers must have reached 15 feet. It is covered in snow and ice, and it seems to have been here quite some time.


The rear right leg has been almost completely devoured, and the entrails of the beast have been eaten too.

The front part of the body, on the other hand, seems to have been preserved by the cold temperature: the head and the torso are in good condition. Superando una prova di **Saggezza (Sopravvivenza)** con **CD 11** è possibile tentare di estrarre carne, o materiali utili come corna, ossa, tendini o pelle, dall'animale.

With a successful **Wisdom (Medicine)** check with **DC 11**, it is possible to determine that the animal died because it broke its leg and fell down, letting the winter take its life.

With a successful **Intelligence (Nature) DC 14** check, it is possible to understand that it was a magnificent specimen, and its acceptance of its death was an honorable decision: whoever beats the check obtains Inspiration (only one character).

Finally, the characters must succeed on a **Constitution** saving throw with **DC 11** to avoid taking one level of exhaustion due to the effects of the cold.



Crumbling Ruins

The group finds shelter inside some crumbled ruins. Not much has been left standing by the erosion of time and the elements, however inside the ruins the characters do not need to make any saving throw against the cold.

With a successful **Wisdom (Investigation)** check with **DC 15**, the characters find a hidden cache among the stones. It contains a wooden tablet with arcane scribbles: it is considered a scroll that contains a level 1 spell, a level 2 spell, and a level 3 spell, all from the Wizard list. The character may choose the spells, or the GM may choose them for the character.

Hidden Ruins

A wrong step by the group's vanguard makes him fall inside a chasm hidden by the snow. They will find the entrance to an underground chamber, what remains of one of the many ruins that can be found in the Great Forest.

The inside is in excellent condition, the walls are decorated with geometric patterns and the ceiling is supported by four columns, near the center, that make it possible to climb back up. The opening on the ceiling through which the character fell used to be a skylight, before the earth swallowed the whole structure. The interior is comfortable, no saving throw against cold is required.

Along one wall there is a huge stone sarcophagus, showing a woman figure with long hair topped by a little crown; she wears a graceful tunic embellished by various jewels. Some writings on the side of the sarcophagus are unintelligible.

Inside the sarcophagus, the characters can find the skeletal remains of the woman, still wearing a precious gems necklace (75 gp), a gold bracelet (25 gp), and three silver rings (10 gp each). The most attentive heroes will notice that the crown is missing. It is actually invisible and it can be found by touching the top of the skull, or by making a successful **Intelligence (Investigation)** check with **DC 15**.

The crown has three swallows sitting on some tree branches. It is made of silver and it is exquisite. It is

called the Crown of the Silver Spring, and it allows the wearer to cast Magic Missile at 1^o level: when the spell is cast, the three birds appear to animate and fly against the enemies with unerring precision, only to then fly back to sit on the crown, in a slightly different pose.

If the spell inflicts less than 12 damage when it is cast, the crown immediately recovers its magic and it is ready to be used again. If instead the spell inflicts 12 or more damage, the crown loses its magic, and the birds will shatter on impact instead of coming back to the crown.

Friendly Spirit

The group walks up to a large fir tree, with a wide canopy, that appears to provide some shelter against the sleet storm. However, once below the lowest branches, the characters hear a voice: *"Howdy travelers! Please, do not light fires in the forest... it is dangerous, and they scare off the animals."* With a successful **Wisdom (Perception)** check with **DC 18** it is possible to notice that the voice comes from a pinecone that is faintly lit with a golden glow. Touching the pinecone will make it open up, revealing a tiny winged humanoid fairy.

He has wings like a butterfly and he sheds a warm golden glow. He has no name, but he has always lived on this tree. Once there were many of his kind, but not anymore. If the characters promise not to light up any fire in the forest, he will bestow one of them with his blessing.

The mere presence of the friendly spirit warms the heroes' hearts, granting them advantage on the **DC 11 Constitution** saving throw they must make against the cold, to avoid taking one level of exhaustion.

The blessing of the Friendly Spirit will make it so that all the weapon attacks of the target are considered magical for 24 hours. If however the vow is broken before the blessing expires, it will turn into a curse: the character will be vulnerable to one type of damage randomly determined among bludgeoning, piercing or slashing.

This curse can be removed only with a Remove Curse spell, and it persists until the character falls unconscious and fails two Death Saving throws.

Viridian Witch

Wandering around the forest, the group suddenly finds an area that is clearly infused with magic.

The wind, the sleet, the rain don't seem to affect a circular area with 20ft diameter centered on a tiny stone hut.

On top of the hut grows a tree with golden, green and orange leaves, as if all seasons except winter can dwell in this place. It feels as if an invisible dome protects the hut and the tree from the elements.

If the characters wish to get closer and ask to take shelter from the winter cold, they will meet **Dyrinna, the Viridian Witch**: she is one of the ancient guardians of these places, one of the last of her kind to not be corrupted by evil, by hatred for the humans and by the madness for this cruel and unforgiving winter. If she is treated with respect and she is not threatened, **Dyrinna** recognizes the characters as honorable people, so she will allow them to take shelter at her hut. This means that no saving throw is necessary to resist the cold.

In addition, if the characters succeed at a **Charisma (Persuasion)** group check with **DC 15**, they can convince her to help them on their mission.

She will give the characters a quarterstaff, a dagger and a sickle: they appear to be crude objects, made out of twigs and sharp stones, but within the Great Forest and for as long as the **Witch** is alive, they are considered magical with a +1 bonus to hit and damage rolls.

PART 2

Read or paraphrase the following text:

"You have been walking for a few hours now, sinking your boots into the muddy snow, when a sudden low growl startles you. It is undoubtedly a large beast, but it is difficult to understand the meaning of that passing cry carried away by the howling wind. You advance with caution, careful not to give up your position and trying to stay upwind. All of a sudden, you spot a dark mass ahead making its way sluggishly among two white

birch trees: it is a black bear, exceptionally large for its species, dragging himself through the snow. You don't have the time to take your weapons that you notice the wide trail of red and warm blood that the animal is leaving behind itself. The bear gazes over to you for an instant before exhaling some vapor from its nostrils and falling to the ground."

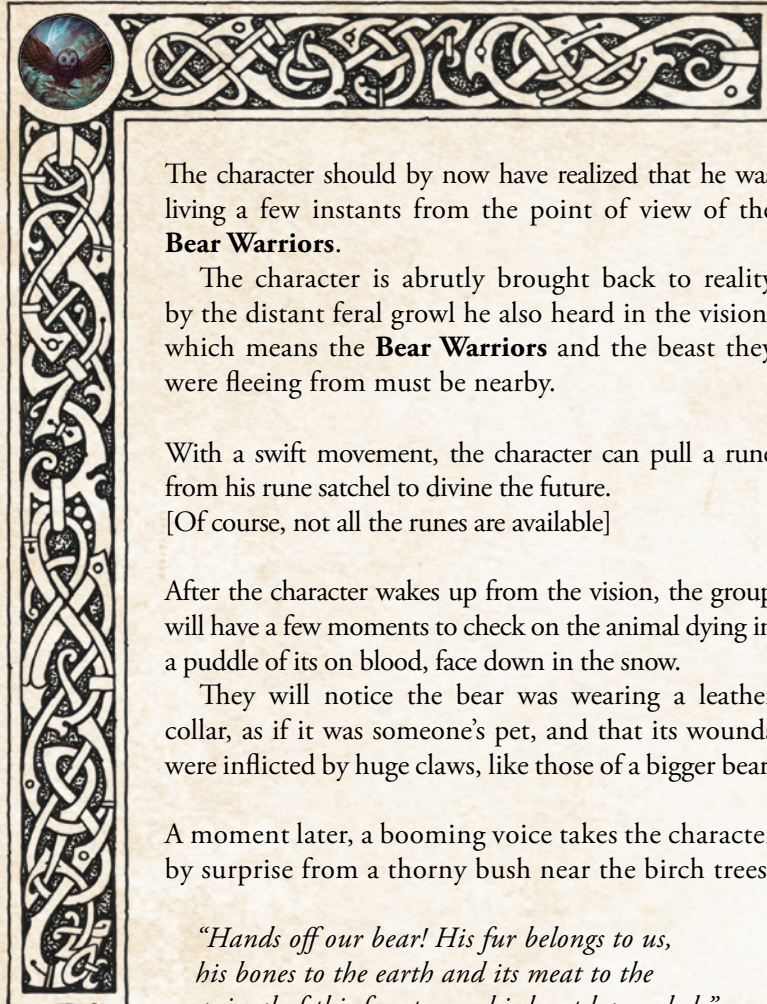
At that precise moment, one of the characters may have a vision: it is best to pick a Runemaster, if present, or someone who is proficient in Asatru and who has a rune satchel.

"Pain. Rain. Blood. Fear. Cold. Blurry vision, a whistle in your ears, the pungent smell of blood filling your nostrils. You see in front of you two large birch trees, and instinctively you seek shelter behind them. You heard some noises ahead, and you hope it isn't another foe like the one you are running from... otherwise you have no hope. You thought you were the biggest and strongest of bears. You were wrong."

With a successful **Wisdom (Asatru)** check with **DC 14** the vision continues, on a failure the vision stops. It is likely that the character will interpret the incomplete vision as a scene narrated from the point of view of the dying bear, up until its encounter with the PCs and its death.

The vision continues as follows:

"You turn around and you see your companions, those who made it this far. They also wear the bear furs of your clan, but they are covered in blood, you are all exhausted. You nod to each other, you tighten your grip on your weapons getting ready to fight, but your eyes wander to the large blood-soaked bag you are carrying with you. Maybe, despite being wounded and exhausted, you may have a chance at scaring off whoever is ahead, should they be looking for a fight. For once, may the Gods be your witnesses, you'd rather not have yet another battle. Far away, a feral cry carried by the wind forces you to move forward and face the unknown, before the source of the cry can finish what it started."



The character should by now have realized that he was living a few instants from the point of view of the **Bear Warriors**.

The character is abruptly brought back to reality by the distant feral growl he also heard in the vision, which means the **Bear Warriors** and the beast they were fleeing from must be nearby.

With a swift movement, the character can pull a rune from his rune satchel to divine the future.


[Of course, not all the runes are available]

After the character wakes up from the vision, the group will have a few moments to check on the animal dying in a puddle of its on blood, face down in the snow.

They will notice the bear was wearing a leather collar, as if it was someone's pet, and that its wounds were inflicted by huge claws, like those of a bigger bear.

A moment later, a booming voice takes the character by surprise from a thorny bush near the birch trees:

"Hands off our bear! His fur belongs to us, his bones to the earth and its meat to the animal of this forest were hi shunt has ended."



Solemnly, a large man wearing a shredded bear fur stained with blood moves forward, followed by a group of equally imposing fellow warriors: they are all almost 7 feet, with broad shoulders, scruffy full beards and mean weapons in their hands.

It is no other than Bjerik the Stone-claw, leader of the **Bear Warriors** who travelled all the way here from the mountains (See Appendix for advice on how to roleplay this NPC).

One of his soldiers, less muscular, with ash blond hair and beard, goes near the corpse of the black bear, takes off its collar and prays to the Gods, gently closing the eyes of the animal.

Bjerik makes yet another step forward. *"Are you friends or foes? Speak! We have no time to waste!"* the man can barely hide the pain and fatigue that burden his every word *"Choose your next words carefully, you don't want to end up like the last who tried to stop us."*

Bjerik follows his words by throwing towards you the large blood-soaked bag he was carrying.

The bag spills its contents all over the ground, and a couple of human heads roll out, their eyes empty and their mouths agape. One of them still wears a **Odhinn's Eye** helmet.

The characters are free to face this situation however they see fit: they may want to fight the **Bear Warriors**, even if such a course of action has been often discouraged; they may ask the **Bears** what is their business in the Great Forest; they may demand an explanation regarding the **Odhinn's Eye** soldiers' heads, especially if some characters belong to that clan.

FIGHTING THE BEAR WARRIORS

If the characters wish to fight the **Bear Warriors**, Bjerik Stone-claw is with four **Berserker**, two **Tribal Warriors** and one **Druid**.

Bjerik fights with its menacing stone pick, on the front line, without ever hiding behind his men.

The **Tribal Warriors** are the youngest and are tasked with protecting the druid at all costs. The **Berserkers** fight savagely at Bjerik's side.

The **Bears** do their best to conclude the fight quickly, knowing they are pursued by a fearsome foe.

At the beginning of round 3, on initiative 20, the **Atallbjorn**, the **Dreadful Bear**, makes its thundering entrance, attacking indiscriminately.

The **Bear Warriors** then will insist that the group help them fight that giant monster.

ASKING THE BEARS WHY THEY'VE COME TO THE GREAT FOREST

Bjerik knows he has but a few minutes before the monster that has been chasing him for days will catch up. For this reason, his answer will be *"There is no time, either come with us or move aside. We need to get to the reinforcements!"*.

If the characters are successful in a **Charisma (Persuasion)** check with **DC 13**, Bjerik will quickly tell of the dreadful monster that is pursuing them and that won't give up despite all their attempts at hiding their tracks. They managed to survive the massacre that went on in their village when a mysterious figure with incredible powers came with an army of men and monsters of the mountains, all covered in runes pulsating with power.



The **Bear Warriors** had to choose: bend the knee to their new master, or die. After the great majority of the Bears was defeated, the least honorable surrendered, accepting the yoke but also the runic powers of their new master. Bjerik and his companions ran away to warn the **Icy Crows** of the Great Forest of what happened and to ask for help: according to the **Bear** druid, the very foundations of Midgard are in danger, as those that are being unleashed are powers that only the Gods should get to know.

Bjerik won't have time to finish his last sentence, when the roaring **Atallbjorn**, the **Dreadful Bear**, will make its entrance and the fight will start.

PRETENDING AN EXPLANATION FOR THE KILLING OF THE ODHINN'S EYE SOLDIERS

Bjerik knows he has but a few minutes before the monster that has been chasing him for days will catch up. For this reason, his answer will be *"There is no time, either come with us or move aside. We need to get to the reinforcements!"*

If the characters are successful in a **Charisma (Intimidation)** check with **DC 15**, Bjerik will tell how along the way they found a village that was burned to the ground, at the centre of which there was the encampment of a small group of **Odhinn's Eye** soldiers. When the two groups met, Bjerik was telling the **Eye soldiers** to move aside, when the young **Odhinn's Eye** sergeant began to accuse Bjerik and the Bears for the destruction of the village.

He was rambling about how *"the Bears and the Wolves are in cahoots, those wild beasts"*. After a series of accusations, it came to threats and finally the situation turned violent when the **Eye soldiers** put their hands to their weapons... the result of the confrontation is the bag of heads that now Bjerik carries around as a trophy.

It seems that the **Bear Warriors** quickly took care of their foes without breaking a sweat.

Once Bjerik finishes talking, the **Atallbjorn**, the **Dreadful Bear**, comes into the scene roaring, ready to murder everyone.

PART 3

The **Atallbjorn** is a humongous bear, as tall as 20ft at the shoulder, with bones spikes coming out of its fur, blood-shot eyes and curved fangs as long as daggers. Its physical structure is almost humanoid, although clearly feral, and it moves among the trees moving them aside as he leans on them, uprooting them with its claws and breaking branches, trampling bushes and overturning the ground as if his hindlegs were giant plows.

The **Atallbjorn**'s whole body is suffused with a crimson luminescence that makes it even more terrifying.

It fights with fury, attacking whoever dealt it more damage in the previous round. It doesn't seem to be able to reason, and it could be tricked, cheated or befuddled by illusions, diversions and well thought-out battle tactics.

Note: It is not advised to attack the same PC with more than two attacks in a row, unless the GM wants to kill them. The **Atallbjorn** is a truly challenging foe that can deal out massive damage.

The **Atallbjorn** is immune to non-magical weapons that aren't silvered. The characters may own some magic weapons, or they may be able to make them so for a time (e.g. with the spell *Magic Weapon*); moreover, if they were lucky during the previous encounters, they may have received blessings and enchantments along the way (see *Friendly Spirit* or *Viridian Witch* encounters)

[The Challenge Rating for the **Atallbjorn** is 13 due to its damage immunity. Once the group can consistently deal damage to the monster, thanks to magic weapons or spells, its CR is reduced to 8, a tough but manageable challenge.]

It is very probable that the **Bear Warriors** will join the characters in fighting the **Atallbjorn**. However, the four berserkers and the two **Tribal Warriors** have no way of hurting the monster, since they have no magic weapons. Bjerik has his magic pick, and the druid can use its cantrips and spells to hurt his foe.

The **Atallbjorn** will always devote one attack per round (be it part of *Multiattack*, or one of its *Runic Legendary Actions*) to the **Bear Warriors**, if possible. For simplicity, we advise to consider that the **Druid** and the **Tribal Warriors** die after a single hit (they have AC 12); the berserkers die after two hits (They have AC 13); and finally Bjerik dies after three hits (he has AC 13), dropping his magical pick – which could be a lifesaver for

characters who don't have any means of hurting the bear. A critical hit of the **Atallbjorn** against an NPC will kill the target regardless of who they are or how wounded they are.

Every time the **Atallbjorn** spends a Rune Point, the red glow that surrounds him flares up, and his fur begins to burn. After he has spent 3 Rune Points, all his fur will be almost completely gone and his skin beneath will reveal the incandescent runes carved into it, source of the red glow.

If the **Atallbjorn** spends all 8 Rune Points, the red luminescence will cease abruptly.

The **Atallbjorn** will burn through his resources and features with violence and ferocity, trying to take out as many foes as possible. An example round can be as follows:

- It scares one target with its Bonus Action, preventing them from coming closer
- It uses *Multiattack*, it grapples the target with its claws and Bites the same target.
- It uses a *Runic Legendary Action* to reply to the attack of whoever got close.
- It uses a Reaction to resist a debuffing spell.
- It uses a second *Runic Legendary Action* to hurt all the enemies nearby and slow them down.
- It uses its third and final *Runic Legendary Action* to move away from the enemies surrounding him, to jump on a spellcaster or an archer far away.

This guidelines are meant to provide a furious, quick and bloody fight, filled with tension.

Once it is defeated, the **Atallbjorn** will start to writhe, slowly reducing its size down to its human self. The naked body of a man, covered in wounds and runes carved into his skin, lies on the ground, inside the giant depression left by the bear body when it came crashing down. The size of the man's body is still remarkable, not unlike that of the Bjerik and his companions.

At the end of the fight, if all the **Bear Warriors** were defeated by the **Atallbjorn**, the group will still hear a faint voice coming from Bjerik: it is possible to heal him to save his life with a healing source, like a spell or *Lay on Hands*, or it is possible to just keep him alive a little longer with a successful **Wisdom (Medicine)** check with **DC 10**. In that case, Bjerik will die when he is done telling what happened to his people.

If instead at least one of the **Bear Warriors** survived, he will be the one to tell the group what happened to the Bears before they arrived in the Great Forest.

If Bjerik and other **Bear Warriors** survived, Bjerik will be the one to speak.

CONCLUSION

Read or Paraphrase the following text

“The Bear Warrior widens his eyes, vividly reliving the events that he is about to narrate. With broken voice he tells you what happened to his village and his people.”

“An army of madmen covered in incandescent runes, pulsating with power, came to our village about 7 days ago, with the fury of an unexpected storm. Their leader, shrouded in robes as dark as the night, had malevolent and cold eyes, colder than the eternal snow that covers the highest peaks. With a low, heavy voice that was nonetheless perfectly audible for all of us, as if he was speaking to our very souls, he announced himself as the Rune Thief. He forced us to make a choice: giving up our freedom and join his army to march on Heill Hofn, or giving up our lives. We are... we were... brave and honorable people, we fought the invaders but their power was unfathomable...” his gaze lingers on the corpse of the man who was the Atallbjorn *“Many died fighting. Others bent the knee, giving up their honor for but a fragment of that diabolical power.”* He points to the body on the ground *“He was my borther. To give us the time to escape and go warn the Icy Crows, he let himself be corrupted by the forbidden magic of the Rune Thief. Then, in a cruel twist of fate, he went mad and changed into the dreadful monster we just fought. He chased us all the way here, while the army of the Rune Thief resumed his march towards Heill Hofn. I fear that if the other members of my clan have been transformed in maneating bears, we are all doomed.”* The man coughs blood: *“Our duty towards Midgard has been fulfilled, there is nothing more we can do. We pass on to you this responsibility... Find the Rune Thief, warn Heill Hofn of the danger. Take this pick, it's all we can give you.”*

After these words, the surviving **Bear Warriors** will go to Varmrfors to tell the **Icy Crows** what happened in the forest, and to recover from their wounds.

The character will however notice that a strange crow, glowing blue, was sitting on a branch. Without any check, they can tell it's a spy of the **Icy Crows** that allowed them to see and listen to what was happening.

The heroes are now ready to go to Heill Hofn, hoping they'll make it in time and warn the King. What will the Rune Thief have in store for them?

REWARDS:

Each character gets 3.500 EXP

- **Stone-Claw:** the magical warpick that belonged to Bjerik, it was given to the heroes to help them on their mission. The pick's head is made of enchanted stone that keeps on cracking and crumbling, but nonetheless remains on the whole intact and sharp, without compromising its effectiveness.

This is a magical warpick with a +1 bonus to hit and damage rolls. It requires attunement.

Once per day, as a Bonus Action, the owner can obtain the effects of a Stoneskin spell that does not require concentration but only lasts 2 rounds.

THE ADVENTURE CONTINUES!

Something terrible is about to subvert the order of things in Midgard, threatening the true foundations of reality and knowledge.

The Rune Thief is a series of 9 adventures set in the world of Journey To Ragnarok, which will be published monthly starting from the 1st of September.

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Dare you face the Rune Thief?

APPENDIX

ATALLBJORN, DREADFUL BEAR

ATALLBJORN

Medium Humanoid (Human, Shapechanger) –
at the moment in the shape of a Huge Monstrosity

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	12 (+1)	19 (+4)	7 (-2)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)

Armor Class 16 (Natural)

Hit Points 188 (18d12+72)

Speed 40ft (Climb 30ft)

Skill Perception +8, Intimidation +8

Damage Immunities Bludgeoning, Piercing and Slashing damage from non-magical weapons that aren't silvered.

Senses Passive Perception 17; Darkvision 60ft

Languages Common (can't speak in Bear form)

Challenge 8

Simple Minded. AtallBjorn is more susceptible to illusions and deception. He has Disadvantage on saving throws against illusion spells and effects, and on Wisdom or Intelligence checks made to resist or investigate illusions and deception attempts.

Keen Smell. AtallBjorn has Advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks based on smell.

Madness of the Bears. AtallBjorn has Advantage on saving throws against fear or charm effects.

Power of the Runes. AtallBjorn has a reserve of 8 Rune Points, that are visually represented by the same number of incandescent red runes engraved on his skin. Some of his features use Rune Points; once used, these points are restored after a long rest.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The AtallBjorn attacks with its Claws and with its Bite.

Claws. *Melee weapon attack:* +9 to hit, reach 10 ft, one target. *Hit:* 20 (3d8 + 6) slashing damage. If the Atallbjorn spends a Rune Point, the target is Grappled and Restrained (escape **DC 17**).

As long as a target is Grappled, the AtallBjorn cannot use its Claws attack against a different target.

Bite. *Melee weapon attack:* +9 to hit, reach 10 ft, one bersaglonge target. *Hit:* 17 (2d10 + 6) piercing damage.

REACTIONS

Runic Resistance. When the AtallBjorn fails a Saving throw, it can spend a Rune Point to instead succeed. The Atallbjorn cannot use this feature against illusion effects.

BONUS ACTIONS

Death Stare. One target within 60ft that meets the bloodshot gaze of AtallBjorn must make a **Wisdom DC 12** saving throw, being frightened on a failure until the end of the next turn of AtallBjorn.

RUNIC LEGENDARY ACTIONS

(they work exactly like *Legendary Actions*,
but require spending one Rune Point to be used)

- AtallBjorn moves 40ft and makes one Bite attack.
- AtallBjorn furiously slashes the terrain around it with its claws. Every creature within 10ft of AtallBjorn must make a **Dexterity** saving throw with **DC 17**, taking 13 (2d6+6) slashing damage on a failure. Moreover, the terrain in the area of effect becomes Difficult Terrain for creatures other than the AtallBjorn.
- AtallBjorn makes a powerful Claw attack. *Melee weapon attack:* +4 to hit, reach 10 ft, one target. *Hit:* 30 (3d8+16) slashing damage.

BJERIK STONE-CLAW

“Stand aside, or I shall shatter your skull. I have no time to waste.”

Description: Bjerik is almost 7ft tall, and he is extremely robust, weighing around 275 lbs. He is muscular and quite imposing, he keeps his hair at middle length, quite unkempt. He wears heavy clothes made out of bear fur. His face is marked with a scar that never healed properly. He wields an incredibly heavy stone warpick, all crumbling and covered in cracks.

Roleplaying Bjerik: Bjerik is a fierce and powerful warrior, but not a fool. He fights with a purpose and without losing sight of his goal. He is not an expert in military tactics, but he makes up for that with keen senses and by reading the situation. In a fight he throws himself on the frontline, side by side with his men, but he never lets the fury of battle overcome his wits: if necessary, he knows when to make a tactical retreat. He is used to fighting in tight mountain gorges, and he knows not much beyond close-quarter combat, but in that, he is a master. Bjerik has a strong sense of duty towards his village, his people, his clan, but also towards Midgard and all its people. He is devoured by a visceral hatred with regards to the Rune Thief for what he has done to his village, but even more so for what he has done to his brother. He hopes one day to be able to crack open the Thief's skull with his warpick, releasing Midgard from his clutch.

Bjerik goals: At the moment, Bjerik's goal is to reach Varmrfors and warn the wise Icy Crows. Nothing and no one will be able to stop him from reaching his goal, even if that means losing his own life or that of his companions.

BJERIK STONE-CLAW

Medium Humanoid (human), chaotic honorable

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	10 (+0)	19 (+4)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)

Armor Class 13 (hide armor)

Hit Points 85 (10d8 + 40)

Speed 30 ft

Senses Passive Perception 15

Language : Common

Challenge 5 (1800 xp)

Brave: Bjerik has Advantage on saving throws against fear effects

ACTIONS

Multiattack: Bjerik makes two attacks with his Stone-Claw warpick.

Stone-Claw warpick. *Melee weapon attack:* +8 to hit, range 5ft, one target. *Hit:* 10 (1d8 + 5) piercing damage.

BONUS ACTIONS

Stoneskin: Bjerik gains the effects of a Stoneskin spell for two rounds, without the need to maintain concentration. This feature can be used once per day.

REACTIONS

Ignore the Pain: when he takes damage, Bjerik can use his reaction to reduce them by 1d12+4. If damage is reduced to 0 or less, Bjerik takes no damage. Bjerik can use this reaction once, then he must complete a short or long rest to regain its use.

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