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PLACES OF POWER:
DEAD MAN'S RUN



5E



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PLACES OF POWER: DEAD MAN'S RUN

The glint of gold coin and flash of pale bone peek out from the dark timbers of sunken buildings as a sad ferryman slowly pulls his boat across the clear water. This is Dead Man's Run, the only safe passage across the wild Brimbrook; for miles in either direction river races over rocky rapids and steep waterfalls, carving an otherwise impassable chasm through the forested hills.

Any who pay the price of passage—two golden coins given as tribute to the river—find a berth on the wooden ferry. They also find the operators of the ferry, the sad survivors who can share the tale of the natural disasters that destroyed the two villages and fort that once stood here, and learn why they remain to tend to the dead.

Designed for use with the 5th edition of the world's most popular roleplaying game.

CREDITS

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DEAD MAN'S RUN AT A GLANCE

Ruler None

Population 11 (5 humans, 4 elves, 2 half-elves)

Alignments LG, LN

Languages Common, Elven

Resources & Industry Ferry services

This remote border between an elven kingdom and human realm may have never been settled had a human baron not seen it as a perfect spot to sneak troops into his neighbour's land for an invasion. The plan worked for a time, but the baron's forces were eventually repulsed, leading to several years of constant fighting that turned the Brimbrook's gently flowing waters crimson. In time, this stalemate led to a truce, and the truce eventually became a tenuous peace. Two villages grew, one on each side of the river, their growing friendship symbolized by the stone bridge erected to link them.

Dead Man's Run spans the graves of those two villages and almost all their inhabitants.

No one knows what caused it, but a single night of chaos ten years ago wiped the villages from the face of the earth. Nature itself seemed to turn against the inhabitants: the earth shook, the ground rising and cracking; lightning struck from the sky, igniting the fort and burning it to the ground; and the gentle creek became a rampaging river, sweeping homes from their foundations. When morning finally came, the villages were gone, and almost all their inhabitants with them.

Most of the few survivors fled the disaster, but a remnant of that remnant stayed to tend to the watery graves of friends and family. They bridged the divide, ferrying first themselves and later travellers across the river. With each passage, they offer tribute, a pair of gold coins, to the dead and the water in hopes that neither rise up again.

MARKETPLACE

The following items are for sale:

- **Weapons & Armour** Miscellaneous items have been scavenged from the area: Much of it is finely made or even magical—lesser weapons didn't survive their exposure to the elements—but most such items are in need of repair.

Additionally, the following services are available:

- **Spellcasting** 3rd-level cleric

LORE

A PC may know something about Dead Man's Run, its history and surrounds. A PC making a DC 10 Intelligence check knows one or more pieces of information from the list below. A

successful check gains all the information revealed by a lesser check.

DC 10: The ferry service at Dead Man's Run offers the only route across the Brimbrook for miles in either direction.

DC 15: The origins of the crossing's name come from a night of horror ten years ago, when the then-gentle Brimbrook's course was changed in a series of earthquakes, which turned it into a wide, rushing river that destroyed the two villages standing on its banks.

DC 20: A few of the survivors of the tragedy known as Nature's Night operate the ferry service, though they remain primarily to tend to the watery graves of their friends and family.

FOLK

Most of the residents of the villages died or fled, but a few remain at Dead Man's Run.

- **Appearance** Even after ten years, most of the residents of Dead Man's Run bear a haunted look, faces marked by deep lines, sunken eyes and pinched lips.
- **Dress** The residents of Dead Man's Run wear simple, utilitarian wool clothing, with straw hats to protect them from the sun.

WHISPERS & RUMOURS

While in Dead Man's Run, a PC may hear one or more rumours. A PC making a DC 10 Charisma check learns one rumour from the table below. A PC exceeding this check learns an additional rumour for each 5 points by which he exceeded DC 10.

| D6 | RUMOUR |
|----|---|
| 1 | The ferry charges an exorbitant fee: the silver piece per person or animal isn't too bad, but they also demand two gold coins for every passage across the water. |
| 2 | The ferryman always throws two gold pieces into the water before each trip. |
| 3* | Anyone who tries to cross Dead Man's Run without paying tribute faces death themselves, tossed by a sudden wall of water into the river to be smashed into the rapids downstream. |
| 4 | The lower levels of the fort that once guarded the area are inaccessible after it burned down. Who knows what secrets they hold? |
| 5* | The river is full of gold coins, but anyone who tries to recover them is hauled down by the grasping hands of the dead sleeping on the river bed. |
| 6 | A powerful nymph resides in the area; she may have been responsible for Nature's Night, but now helps keep the surrounding area mostly peaceful. |

*False rumour

NOTABLE LOCATIONS AT A GLANCE

Dead Man's Run is a small community, which makes the most of the space it has:

1. **Fort Essayas:** The remaining residents of Dead Man's Run avoid the crumbling ruins of this fort, believing that whatever caused Nature's Night stemmed from activities here and that it's cursed by its past use. The fort's cellars and dungeon have remained unexplored since it burned down.
2. **The Manorhall:** Once the centre of the village's local government, the Manorhall is now home to a young family: the widower farmer-turned-ferryman, Vyncis Potte, and the elf Adoleid Potte, who found comfort in each other's arms. Their two children are the light of most of the survivors' lives. They share their home with Oror Highbird, though the elf spends much of his time hunting.
3. **The Brimbrook:** Once a gentle stream, the wide river now rushes over the sunken graves of most of the villagers. On clear days, the remains of homes and bodies of residents can be seen on the muddy bottom. The nymph druid Millenaphi dwells downstream, but is rarely seen.

4. **Brimbrook Ferry:** The primary source of income for the remaining survivors, the cable ferry is typically operated by either Irennen Fairarrow or Vyncis Potte, though the former refuses to cross at night.
5. **Lumber House:** This building doubles as a home and a mill, used to ensure spare ferries are available. In addition to Irennan Fairarrow, husband and wife Exard and Dottry Lysalt call the building home, as do Cedia Borne and Wyan Sabil.

IN YOUR CAMPAIGN

Dead Man's Run can be placed in almost any hilly or mountainous region where a river provides an obstacle to travel. It should be fairly remote, but can serve as a quick interlude to break up a cross-country journey; an interesting place to rest and possibly resupply; or a potential adventure spot in its own right. The border aspect of the two kingdoms can be played down if you wish, as the end of the conflict returned the area around Dead Man's Run to a backwater of little interest to either side. If having bordering kingdoms of different races doesn't fit in your campaign world, the conflict can also be changed to make both sides belong to the same race and simply be between competing rulers.



LIFE IN DEAD MAN'S RUN

Life at a mass grave gives little time for merriment as the nine adults toil to remain alive and bring peace to the dead. The days are brightened by the two children who spend much of their time playing in the woods or on the river banks.

TRADE & INDUSTRY

Little industry takes place at Dead Man's Run, other than what's needed for the residents to survive and keep their ferry afloat. However, their efforts to tend the graves of the dead often lead the residents to items of value they are willing to sell to passers-by—mostly weapons and pieces of armour lost during the various skirmishes and battles fought in the area.

LAW & ORDER

No formal law covers the region. Residents of Dead Man's Run try to solve problems amongst themselves. Dottry Lynsalt often plays peacemaker while her husband, the oldest-appearing resident (he wilfully forgets the long-lived elves have many decades on him), tries to exert the authority of his age. The residents can chase off scavengers, but are ill-equipped to deal with a larger, more-organized threat. Fortunately for them, the area is not well-travelled enough to attract bandits or they would likely have to seek help to deal with the menace.

CUSTOMS & TRADITIONS

The strongest (and strangest) custom at Dead Man's Run is the two gold coins given to nature and the dead every time passengers are brought across the Brimbrook (the residents don't give coins when it's only them crossing). If asked, the survivors struggle to explain this tradition to outsiders, given that it's part thanks for their own lives, part offering to the dead that they may remain at peace as people pass over their graves and part bribe to nature itself so another disaster does not befall the region.

Similarly, residents mark the late-summer anniversary of the calamity that destroyed the villages with the Nature's Night vigil, in which they keep watch all night and offer prayers to nature and the dead to be at peace. They refuse to transport any passengers across the river the day before or after the vigil.



LOCATION DRESSING

Use this table, to generate the minor sights and sounds the PCs experience as they move about Dead Man's Run.

D20 DRESSING/EVENT

| | |
|----|--|
| 1 | A clear, sunny day reveals sunken buildings and bleached bones in the water. |
| 2 | Oror Highbird returns from a hunt with a deer carcass slung over his shoulder. |
| 3 | Wyan Sabil hacks small branches off a tree as he prepares to build a new ferry boat. |
| 4 | Adoleid Potte helps Dottry Lynsalt tend a small vegetable garden behind the Manorhall. |
| 5 | The smell of cooking meat fills the air as the residents slowly roast a wild boar brought in by Oror Highbird. |
| 6 | The hilt of a sword—spread eagle wings around theommel—pokes out of the soft ground. |
| 7 | Dottry Lynsalt and her husband, Exard, argue heatedly about a mysterious "she," but stop as soon as they realize they're not alone. |
| 8 | Vyncis Potte yells instructions to Irennan Fairarrow across the river as the elf works to repair the ferry mechanism on the western side. |
| 9 | The echoing clatter of falling stones comes from the crumbling walls of Fort Essayas. |
| 10 | A mangy canine scavenger gnaws on a bleached femur, seemingly unafraid of attempts to chase it off. |
| 11 | Two wet, muddy half-elven children come running excitedly from the river with a battered candlestick. |
| 12 | As night falls, Dottry Lynsalt and Adoleid Potte hang small lanterns outside the doors of the Manorhall and lumber house. |
| 13 | Several days of rain leave the river muddy and flowing high and fast. |
| 14 | Exard Lynsalt sits on a log near his home, fashioning a small boat from tree bark before setting it loose to float down the river. |
| 15 | Vyncis Potte braids long vines together, forming them into a spare cable for the ferry. |
| 16 | Adoleid Potte furiously scolds her seven-year-old son for allowing his younger sister to play too close to the water (again!). |
| 17 | A ruddy red glow, like firelight, flickers in the ruins of Fort Essayas. |
| 18 | The glint of gold on the muddy shore reveals itself to be a coin that appears to have washed ashore. |
| 19 | A pair of pixies cavort above the river, doing flips as they hang on the ferry cable. |
| 20 | Cedia Born leads a small service to the Goddess of the Dead as the residents gather to lay the recovered remains of a body to a more permanent rest. |

THE SURROUNDING LOCALITY

A seemingly pristine wilderness surrounds Dead Man's Run, a vibrant forest through which the Brimbrook has carved a deep channel splitting the area as thoroughly as any wall ever could. Even beyond the steep cliffs that must be scaled to approach or depart from the river, passage across the water is no simple matter. The river flows swiftly over rocky rapids and tumbles down steep waterfalls, its current too swift along much of its length to ford without magical help.

Once-warring kingdoms claimed opposite sides of the waterway but the region's distance from the hearts of those realms and the dangers now extant in traversing the river keep it from regular use. Even more so since the twin villages were destroyed, it now mainly serves as a thoroughfare, an area travellers pass through to get from one place to another, but not a destination on its own.

Fey and wild animals under the watchful eyes of the capricious nymph druid Millenaphi far outnumber the combined human and elves who live here. The powerful faerie duchess does not begrudge visitors to the area she considers her own, but acts quickly against those who abuse the land. She wields

more than enough power to have brought about Nature's Night and those few who know of her presence assume she was in fact the cause of the destruction—though they can only theorize why she chose to act. However, she has never claimed responsibility for the disaster.

In addition to its living inhabitants, the area holds many more dead than the remains of the villagers beneath the Brimbrook. The years of internecine warfare as superior numbers of human attackers couldn't overcome the woodcraft of elven defenders left the area for miles around the waterway littered with corpses. They mouldered away for a decade before Nature's Night tossed the land like a child's toy, in the process burying some bodies and unearthing others. Scavengers, human and otherwise, claim mementos and treasures in the woods, unwittingly bringing unlife to disturbed corpses. Most of those newly risen seek nothing more than a final resting place, but some remain infused with the spirit of the war and set out to continue their battle.



NOTABLE LOCATIONS IN DEAD MAN'S RUN

1: FORT ESSEYAS

Rubble covers the ground between the fire-blackened walls and charred timbers of this once-mighty stone fort.

Erected by the humans during the war, the fort housed a regiment of soldiers who watched over the area. Typically led by young officers getting a first chance to lead in a strategically unimportant area of the world, the regiment comprised mostly malcontents and poor soldiers who were assigned to the area as punishment. Less than a year before Nature's Night, the last captain to serve here, Geoddrey Ashmoor, arrived. Eager to whip his men into shape and impress his superiors, he began a campaign to control the fey in the area, an act the few scholars who have studied the calamity believe may have triggered Nature's Night.

Nothing remains of the fort above the surface but charred rubble thanks to the conflagration sparked by repeated lightning strikes on Nature's Night. What wasn't discovered by the survivors of that calamity when they went to help in the ensuing days is that an entrance to the fort's lower chambers remains, hidden and partially blocked by piles of stone. The residents of Dead Man's Run avoid the fort, which they fear is haunted in a way they can't lay to rest.

WHAT'S GOING ON?

Rise of the Underworld: Unknown to anyone on the surface, the earthquakes on Nature's Night opened a passage below the

OROR HIGHBIRD

LN male elf **scout**

This green-clad elf carries a longbow strung across his back, a quiver of arrows and short sword hang from his hip.

Mannerisms: Oror walks with a slight limp, but refuses to acknowledge his injury.

Personality: A tenacious hunter, Oror sets his mind to a task and then accomplishes it. He has limited use for other people, finding the solitude of his work and his home suit him well.

Background: A lackadaisical hunter before Nature's Night, Oror was in the woods during Nature's Night. He avoided the floods, but was injured when a tree felled by an earthquake pinned his leg. Crawling home, he was horrified by the destruction and found new purpose in his survival. He now provides almost all the fresh meat for the residents of Dead Man's Run, spending more time in the woods than in the home he ostensibly shares with the Potte family.

fort's ruins to a subterranean world. A **spirit naga** has slithered forth and begun to explore what this new area has to offer.

Rubble Trouble: Strange sounds from the fort lead the residents of Dead Man's Run to ask passing PCs to investigate: They discover a dire bear has taken up residence in the ruins and must find a way to relocate it without drawing Millenaphi's ire.

Walking the Razor's Edge: Geoddrey Ashmoor's nephew seeks a magic sword, a family heirloom that had been in his uncle's possession. He hires the PCs to search the ruins to find if it still exists. They must enter the haunted chambers below the surface and recover the blade while not alerting the nearby residents to their purpose in the area.

2: THE MANORHALL

Children's toys and other clutter lie around this well-made stone building. A neat vegetable and herb garden grows behind it.

Once the home of the richest man in the village, this well-built manor survived the destruction of Nature's Night. It now houses the Potte family—husband Vyncis (LG male human **commoner**; see location 4), wife Adoleid (LG female elf **commoner**) and their seven-year-old son, Ander, and four-year-old daughter, Irindel (LG young male or female half-elf **commoner**)—as well as the elven hunter Oror Highbird (LN male elf **scout**).

ADOLEID POTTE

LG female elf **commoner**

This attractive elven woman appears slightly unkempt, as if she has better things to do than worry about her hair and clothing.

Mannerisms: Adoleid always seems slightly distracted, her eyes scanning for whatever trouble her two rambunctious children are getting into at the moment ("it's their human half," she jokes) instead of focusing on whomever she's talking to.

Personality: The sweet-natured, understanding maiden's grief over Nature's Night subsided in the face of the love she found with Vyncis Potte. She's utterly devoted to him and their two children. Of all the residents of Dead Man's Run, she cares the most about the living over the dead; if her husband were willing, she would leave for a happier place, especially as her children get older and she worries what effect their sad home might have on them.

Background: After Adoleid's parents drowned in Nature's Night, she stayed to help tend the injured survivors. In time, she fell in love with Vyncis Potte, much to her own surprise, and now stays for his sake.

WHAT'S GOING ON?

Lost ...: Irindel Potte has gone missing, having wandered off into the woods. The ferry won't go anywhere until the girl is found.

... and Found: Ander Potte breathlessly presents a "treasure" he found in the woods: A battered, horned helmet. The only problem is it doesn't resemble anything worn by the old human or elf warriors, and the goblinoid blood on it is fresh.

- **For Sale:** antitoxin (50 gp), +1 short sword (500 gp), circlet of blasting (500 gp), potion of healing (50 gp), two suits of broken elven chain (2,500 gp each), potion of healing (50 gp), scroll of bless (50 gp)

3: THE BRIMBROOK

The river runs deep, fast and wide here, cutting through the stony cliffs. Below the surface, glimpses of golden coins and white bone flash among the remains of sunken buildings.

Once a shallow ford, this section of the river was transformed by the earthquakes of Nature's Night, making it far too dangerous to cross on foot. Below the surface, the remains of villagers who drowned before they had a chance to escape their sunken

MILLENAPHI

CG female nymph druid 8

Water seems to cling to this unbelievable beautiful woman like a shroud, the drops from her long, pointed ears twinkling like diamond jewellery.

Mannerisms: Millenaphi holds herself as a queen, giving any who approach her the opportunity to show obeisance as she feels she deserves.

Personality: Aloof and mysterious, Millenaphi holds herself above all others she meets. She is protective of the area, secretly invoking her wrath on any who travel through the region without offering respect to nature or the dead.

Background: Millenaphi arrived in the area after the conflict between human and elves subsided. She decided it would make the perfect new home and court for her, much to the chagrin of the soldiers stationed at Fort Essayas. During Nature's Night, Millenaphi rescued Exard Lynsalt as he was being swept away by the floodwaters. She returned him to his wife with a lock of her hair to inspire him and instructions to send her a signal when he sees something that may be of interest to her.

Special Note: No official statistics exist for nymphs in 5e. Instead of creating a new monster, simply use the stats for a **dryad**. Modify the dryad's abilities that focus on trees to instead work with water. Thus, treebound becomes waterbound and tree stride becomes water stride.

homes rest on the bottom, largely picked clean by hungry fish. The dead seem to reach for the surface, though in truth the largest underwater danger is getting trapped in a submerged structure or swept downriver.

The river is home to a powerful nymph, who dwells not far downriver from Dead Man's Run. She keeps watch over the ferry and its happenings for her own interests, using her spells to trigger the water's wrath against those she feels disrespect the area's sanctity.

WHAT'S GOING ON?

One Good Threat Deserves Another: A green dragon has moved into the area, leading to Millenaphi seeking help. Exard floats a bark boat down the river—their prearranged signal—when the PCs catch his eye and the nymph arranges to meet them to enlist their aid.

A Shock to the System: An electric eel is spotted in the water and eludes any efforts to catch it. If any of the PCs look like they are well-suited to deal with nature (such as a druid or ranger), the residents of Dead Man's Ferry ask for their help.

4: THE BRIMBROOK FERRY

A vine cable stretches from one bank to the other, supporting a wooden raft to ferry passengers across the river.

Designed by Vyncis Potte, the manually powered cable ferry is the only easy way across the Brimbroom for miles in either

VYNCIS POTTE

LG male human **commoner**

The burly, bearded man offers a faint smile, as he worries a ring and small pouch hanging from a leather cord around his neck.

Mannerisms: Vyncis is plain-spoken, his soft tone easing his sometimes blunt words. He wears a leather cord around his neck, a wedding ring from his first marriage and small pouch with a memento of his first-born son hanging from it.

Personality: On the surface, Vyncis is very solutions-oriented, with little interest in activities that don't have some point (such as small talk). Much of that masks his ongoing grief at the loss of his first family and fears of losing his new wife and children. Any perceived threats to his new life send him into a panicked tizzy.

Background: Vyncis lost his first wife and son in the Nature's Night calamity and threw himself into the work of surviving to avoid going mad with grief. Ironically his seemingly stoic approach to duty caught the eye of one of the elven survivors, Adoleid, and the two eventually fell in love, married and began a family.

direction. The simple wooden raft holds up to eight Medium creatures at a time. It's connected to vines braided together into a strong, stout cable.

WHAT'S GOING ON?

While the PCs are here, one or more of the below events may occur. Choose or determine randomly:

| D6 | EVENT |
|----|---|
| 1 | The cable, frayed by a mischievous fey, snaps as the ferry crosses the river, sending the wooden raft and its occupants spinning down the river. |
| 2 | One of the PCs' horses spooks as it crosses the river, repeatedly rearing up, threatening to destroy the raft if it's not settled (or sent into the water to a near-certain death) quickly. |
| 3 | A surge of water comes down the Brimbrook moments after the ferry launches, spooking Irennan Fairarrow, who turns around and refuses to transport the passengers across. |
| 4 | The cable mechanism jams, leaving the ferry raft and its occupants—including a frantic Vyncis Potte—stranded in the middle of the river as the sun sets. |
| 5 | The river is particularly low after a dry spell, and the laden raft scrapes against submerged ruins as it crosses the river. The sound is like claws grating against the wood. |
| 6 | One of the PCs catches Irennan Fairarrow's eye and, after a particularly smooth ride across the river, he invites the group to remain for a meal while he tries to impress the PC. |

IRENNAN FAIRARROW

LN male elf **commoner**

The tall, well-built elf's smile shows his white teeth, set off against his tanned skin and short, bright red hair.

Mannerisms: Cocksure, Irennan acts as if he's the centre of the world and any travellers should be more than grateful for his conveying them across the Brimbrook.

Personality: Still traumatized by his experiences during Nature's Night, Irennan Fairarrow takes any setbacks as personal slights. He is devoted to himself, the elven dead in the area and the rest of the residents of Dead Man's Run (in that order), and has a short temper with anyone else he meets.

Background: Irennan barely survived Nature's Night, clinging to a tree when he was swept away by the first storm surge. He stubbornly refused to be "beaten by the damn river," viewing each crossing he makes as a victory against his own personal devil.

5: LUMBER HOUSE

Sawdust, cut tree limbs and pieces of worked wood litter the ground near one side of this large wooden building. Several partially built rafts lie in a pile nearby.

This small sawmill had to be partially rebuilt after Nature's Night, and now doubles as a cramped home for half of the residents of Dead Man's Run. Exard Lynsalt lives here with his herbalist wife, Dottry (LG old female human **commoner**), as do fellow survivors Irennan Fairarrow (see location 4) and Wyan Sabil (LN male human **commoner**).

They're joined by Cedia Borne (LG female human **priest**), a priestess who arrived five years ago to help bring peace to the dead. Somewhat overwhelmed by the task (and secretly afraid of the river), the young woman nonetheless perseveres, inspired by the example of her companions.

When not helping recover and lay to rest the dead with Cedia, Wyan works the mill to the best of his ability. After the first time a ferry was swept away by the river, he decided to ensure there would always be spares and doggedly labours at that self-assigned task.

EXARD LYSALT

LN old male human **veteran**

A white beard does little to hide the deep lines in the face of this weathered man. His bears a deep scar along his scalp that stands out against his sunburned, bald pate.

Mannerisms: Exard acts as if he carries the weight of the world on his shoulders, frequently wiping the sweat (both real and figurative) from his brow.

Personality: Exard believes his age and experience make him the clear leader of Dead Man's Run and tries to exert his nonexistent authority whenever he can (this leads to strife with his fellow residents, which his wife tiredly tries to soothe over). Despite that, the former soldier cares deeply about the village that was his home for much of his adult life and is devoted to tending its dead. He further bears the weight of his service to Millenaphi, torn by her gratitude for saving him by his belief that she is the source Nature's Night.

Background: Having arrived as a soldier, Exard eventually settled in the village with his wife, only to see his children and grandchildren killed in the flood. Exard himself was swept away, plucked from certain death by Millenaphi. He begged her to spare him and she acceded, offering him his life in return for his service. He returned to the sunken villages to find his wife had also survived, and he persuaded her to stay when other survivors departed. He keeps an eye on passers-by for Millenaphi, sending a toy boat made of bark down the river if he needs to get her attention.

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