

OVER THE NEXT HILL

THE VILLAGE OF DROOD

THE FOLLOWING IS THE FIRST PART OF *Over the Next Hill*, a multi-author series focusing on small settlements that can be dropped into a campaign with minimal preparation. Each article in the series presents several detailed NPCs, points of interest, and loose plot hooks that can be developed during play. Beginning the series is *The Village of Drood*, a small village that rests beneath the stars...

THE SETTLEMENT

An ominous tower looms over the chilly waters of the Virago River. Its silhouette can be seen for miles over the flatlands, guiding travelers towards a village known as Drood. Shebara Agog, a traveling wizard, carefully chose to build her tower on Drood's vast flatlands because of its unhindered view of the starry night sky. The stars and their movements were (and remain) immeasurably important to her studies of conjuration. Drood borders the dark, verdant Gloamingwood, which the friendly forest gnomes of the Olive Pact tend like a majestic and temperamental beast.

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THE WIZARD

Shebara Agog has endured great loss. Many long years ago, she witnessed the deaths of her beloved husband and son, the grief of which led her to the life of an adventurer. Only the friendships she formed on the road kept her alive in those dark times. A dire injury she sustained on her last adventure forced her to abandon her adventuring life and settle down. The evening stars had long inspired her, and she decided to create a village where she could focus on teaching her craft and studying the mysterious heavens above.

Agog is a female half-elf with dark red hair, light hazel eyes, and a star-shaped birthmark on her left cheek. She appears to be in her early thirties, is average height and limps slightly due to the injury to her left knee. Shebara is inquisitive and aloof, easily lost in thoughts of spells and the moving heavens. The wizard is rarely without her emerald cloak, the last gift her husband gave to her before his murder.

Shebara financed and oversaw the building of the entire village, naming it Drood after her young son, who along with her husband, was slaughtered by orc raiders. The village was completed before the coming of winter that first year, but it took nearly four years to complete her tower, which she named Egress.

As Shebara has more deeply explored the School of Conjunction, she has grown more aware of the mysterious extraplanar presence that haunts the area. She has gathered her old adventuring companions, El Escudo, Micah Serkosian, and the Smokeanvil siblings to secretly investigate with her.

THE VILLAGE

Drood has grown to 167 villagers, comprised of 122 humans, 20 dwarves, 10 half-elves, 5 elves, 4 gnomes, 3 dragonborn, 2 halflings and 1 tiefling.

Shebara's tower, **the Egress**, is visible for miles around, and is composed entirely of basalt. It stands forty feet high, and a four-winged gargoyle sculpture perches at its apex.

The **Gilded Frog Inn** is a huge, three-story building with four fireplaces and plenty of rooms. The Frog is a stout building of stone bricks and has become the heart and soul of the village. It has proven to be a safe shelter against both a tornado and blizzard in the last decade.

The rest of the village consists of a numerous homes, a **smithy**, an **apothecary**, a **seamstress**, a **baker**, a **brewer**, a **wise woman**, and a **general store**. Most buildings are made of oak and walnut timber with thatched roofs. The smithy has a limestone foundation from the nearby Dove Hills (named for the giant riding doves the Olive Pact gnomes breed there) and has been enchanted for protection against heat and flame. The center of the village features an open air pavilion with a sundial, which is a shrine to a sun god—or another deity of light in your campaign setting.

Large tracts of land along the river are used for farming to grow potatoes, wheat, corn, turnips, and beans. Farther inland are more than a dozen homes, barns, and pens focused on raising chickens and pigs, while the pastures they overlook support cattle and herds of oxen.

VILLAGE ELDERS

Drood is run by a village council. Each member is chosen by Shebara, but she chooses not to serve on the council as she has little interest in the village's day-to-day affairs.

Micah Serkosian is a human male in his late-fifties, and is stoutly built with a growing gut. He was an adventuring man-at-arms for nearly a decade with Shebara and several others in the village. His grim looks—dark eyes, thick black hair, and hooked nose—belie his jovial personality. Serkosian has a wry sense of humor, is open and frank, and puts his wife and eleven sons above all else. His official role in Drood is as constable, with his four oldest sons acting as deputies. Since the village has few emergencies, most of his time is taken up with the family glass-blowing business.

Juniper Agnew is a human female and in her late thirties, tall and lean with platinum blonde

hair, icy blue eyes, and a crooked smile. Agnew is Shebara's apprentice and has grown into a fine conjurer. She is a natural leader, a historian, and a terrible gossip. Juniper has taken the lead amongst the Elders and proven to each of them that she is more than willing to stand up to her teacher when required, creating a growing rift between teacher and student.

Nickel and Sapphire Smokeanvil are a dwarven brother and sister who also adventured with Shebara, Micah, and El Escudo. They relocated to Drood at Shebara's request, and now manage and operate the Gilded Frog Inn. The Smokeanvils' are generally the most informed about current events in Drood, as everyone in town tends to visit the Frog at least once a day.

Sapphire is tall for a dwarf, with frizzy orange hair, a piercing in her nose and lip, and dark brown eyes. She hardly ever stops talking and often finishes Nickel's sentences. The wait staff respects her, though they often joke about the way she seems to shout everything she says. If danger ever arises in town, Sapphire is always the first to find a blade.

Nickel is shorter than his sister and smaller in frame, has black eyes, and shares Sapphire's orange hair. Due to injuries on their first quest with Shebara, he has scars preventing him from growing a beard. He is generally quiet, and gets frustrated when Sapphire speaks for him. The staff often prefers to go to Nickel first when there are problems with customers, as he rarely raises his voice or loses his temper. Nickel sculpts marble figurines in his free time, and uses them to decorate the Frog's many hearths.

El Escudo is a male halfling apothecary and priest of the sun god. Ages ago, he shared several adventures with Agog, Serkosian, and the Smokeanvils. He is tall and thin for a halfling with raven black hair and a goatee. He has constant bags under his eyes due to extreme insomnia. The sun god blesses him with visions from time to time, but El Escudo has mixed feelings about his deity's gift and quietly resents them. He dismally jokes that it's bad for his sleep.

OTHER VILLAGERS

Keela Serkosian is a curvaceous human female with brown hair and eyes. Keela is in her very early twenties, and is married to Micah Serkosian's oldest son, Dante. She is the apprentice to Beatty Bernside, the village wise woman, and practices divine magic with her on the outskirts of town. For the last month she has been plagued by dreams of strange beings coming from the night skies, dreams which always culminate with her awakening naked in an empty pasture. While she has confided in Dante about her experiences, she has also sworn him to secrecy, and is terrified of whatever is happening to her.

Memphis Vert is a dragonborn male whose dusky scales bear an ankh-shaped birthmark, and has yellow teeth and orange eyes. He is a deserter from the armies of the far-off Cromosi Dynasty and guards this secret tirelessly. The dragonborn is one of the village's scouts and about a month ago, he discovered an ancient series of underground aqueducts that crisscross the region. He immediately brought it to Shebara's attention. He and Shebara have explored the aqueducts twice now but found nothing, leading the wizard to believe they are somehow connected to the extraplanar visitors in the area.

Ogden Hemingway is a half-elf male widower in his mid-thirties with four children. He is stooped, with a sallow complexion and trembling hands. Ogden has a small scar on his chin, a permanent sneer on his face and is harsh with his children. He is a talented mason, and all town-folk reluctantly rely on him for new constructions. The widower has been experiencing nightmares and encounters similar to Keela Serkosian for over five years. Unlike Keela, Ogden has learned over the years that the dreams are caused by extraplanar travelers, known as the onnunocki. The stress of his secret manifests as bitterness and cruelty.

Kioto of Phet is a male tiefling with small goat horns on his bald head, a ruddy complexion, deep violet eyes, and a green tear drop tattoo below his right eye. He is almost seven feet tall with long

arms, a lanky build and a short spiked tail. The tiefling is a farmhand for the village. He came to Drood seeking a new life, one free of duplicity and senseless violence. Sorrow seems to follow Kioto, though; for the last several months, an imp named Truffle has been convincing the tiefling that Shebara intends to turn her tower, Egress, into a permanent gateway to the Abyss. Truffle is fulfilling a task given to him by the Iron Duke of Hell to destroy Shebara's tower, but she does not know who formed such a pact with the Lord of the Second Circle. Truffle has given Kioto nearly one thousand gold to buy equipment and helped him to recruit four other allies. The tiefling used to gold to hire a group of sellswords—the Company of the Red Wyvern—to attack Drood in the coming week.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

STRANGE VISITORS

For as long as the forest gnomes of the Olive Pact can remember—and they have long memories—strange lights have always been seen in the skies surrounding the site of Drood. The gnomes fear the lights, and have warned the wizard that these unknown beings may be unhappy with her village and tower being built there.

Several millennia ago, the onnunoki—the Watchers of Light—took notice of this world and watched as wretched creatures called formorians dominate this region. They witnessed the brutal actions the formorians took against the other intelligent races for centuries. Finally, when they could watch no more, they took action against the monstrosities, and destroyed their city of Foudre and imprisoned the surviving formorians deep

underground with powerful wards.

The Watchers make no attempt to communicate unless there is danger that the fomorians will be freed from their prison, either by meddling adventurers or by the Iron Duke's agents.

BURIED PAST

The aqueducts are the only ruins of Foudre, the ancient formorian city, and lead to direct interaction with the wards that make up the prison that the onnunoki invoked. Shebara has incorrectly inferred that the aqueducts that she and Memphis have begun to explore are remnants of a civilization belonging to the extraplanar beings. She is focused on exploring them in hopes of understanding what drives them and finding a way to make contact with them. The onnunoki are weary that the aqueducts will lead Shebara to discover the wards of that imprison the formorians, and that the wizard might weaken or break them.

LURKING DANGER

An ancient formorian named the Ebon Colossus was once a leader of his foul kind, but was sealed away after the war. Unbeknownst to all, the wizard Shebara accidentally lowered the ward that sealed him away in her second expedition to the aqueducts. The Ebon Colossus returned to the depths of Foudre and formed a contract with the Lord of the Second Circle, the infamous Iron Duke of Hell, to free his imprisoned brethren. The Iron Duke views the contract as a minor squabble, and delegated the task to a lowly imp named Truffle. The imp has learned that Shebara's tower gathers and amplifies the strange planar energies of the region and believes that destroying it will destroy the wards that imprison the formorians deep underground.