



The Gift

*A scenario for a band of
7th to 9th level explorers*

Two rare books on loan are on their way to Frandor's Keep in the care of an elven scholar named Cynr. They are a gift for a noble's daughter. Mercenaries are hired for the journey, but, their skill cannot stop the onslaught of merciless bandits and something else, more mysterious and much more deadly.

A lone, battered warrior stumbles for help. The books are gone, and so is the elf. His friends are dying and all he can do is mumble a few clues before his bleeding body can take no more and he slips into the dark place at the foot of death's door.

Who will answer this warrior's pleas? Who will save his suffering friends? Who will face the hideous creature? Who will return this valuable gift?

By Carolyn Stoddill



BACKGROUND

Greytar the sage is waiting for two rare books to be delivered from the library at Dorndern, old tomes penned by an acquaintance of his and intended as a gift for Lord Reyifor's secret daughter Alimira'. The books are a loan and must be returned at the end of the summer. They are in the care of an elf named Cyrn. He considers himself a scholar, not a fighter, so he hired three mercenaries to guide and safeguard him on the long journey through the Coniper Gap. Corbren and Nelata are honorable types and good fighters who came well recommended. They have done their best to keep Cyrn safe.

The third mercenary, Fornal, was hired both for his knowledge of the Baparan language and his claimed familiarity with the northern earldoms of that country. He does, in fact, possess both these skills for he grew up in the Earldom of Reyifor – albeit under the tutelage of the infamous Ravens. He fled that region years ago and now resides in Dorndern mostly working as a sword-for-hire but ever mindful of the next big score. He hired on as the pay was adequate but he hopes to profit even further from this venture by stealing the books.

When the party overnighted in Sabden, Fornal left the company to 'visit some old friends' before heading out in the morning. These friends were, of course, affiliated with the Ravens. He informed them of the valuables his travelling companions were carrying and arranged for a group of highwaymen to ambush them on the Borderland Road. Though having no skill at appraising books, anything destined for "that old coot Greytar" must certainly be worth a fair weight of silver. After negotiating their cut, the Ravens agreed to be a party to Fornal's plan.

Horsed Raven brigands attacked the travellers less than an hour from Kar Darkan. A tumultuous skirmish followed, during which Cyrn and the books were captured as the mounted thugs separated him from his bodyguards. Though they had no hope of overtaking the raiders, Corbren was a skilled tracker so following their fresh trail was a simple task. With Nelata and Fornal in tow, he proceeded to the Ravens' encampment.

Corbren and Nelata intended to spy on the camp and take the bandits by surprise. Fearing that this might tip the balance in favor of the two capable fighters, Fornal 'tripped' and fell cursing loudly at his 'misfortune'. Thus altered, the Ravens formed up to meet their assailants. Corbren and Nelata fought back

to back negating the Ravens' advantage in numbers while Fornal inexplicably broke ranks to engage in ineffectual swordplay with a pair of bandits.

Fornal had expected the Ravens to easily dispatch his partners and the librarian, but that eventuality seemed increasingly unlikely as the veteran fighters easily fended off their attackers dropping several at their feet. As it became apparent that he would have to intercede and turn on his 'allies', a monstrous creature the likes of which he had never seen before burst through the trees as the sun set.

The beast attacked everyone within its considerable reach. Corbren, Nelata and the Ravens were hampered in their defense as they feared attacks of opportunity from their human enemies while trying to muster a unified assault on this new and formidable opponent.

In this chaos, Fornal saw an opportunity to grab Cyrn's pack and take the books. He fled into the forest, counting on the monster's devastating attacks to divert everyone's attention while he made his escape.

The giant proved overwhelming, killing or incapacitating all its foes. Corbren regained consciousness to witness the three-headed giant seize Cyrn and a gravely injured brigand under each arm and trundle away. His right arm throbbed with pain and a quick glance at the mangled appendage told the story. Suppressing the urge to wallow in self-pity, he busied himself with assessing the situation. He was overjoyed to learn that Nelata survived the ordeal. She was, however, gravely injured and incapable of movement. Fearing the return of the enormous creature, he dragged his companion as far as his strength would allow. Utterly fatigued, he left Nelata by the side of the Borderland Road covered in woolen blankets. Desperate to get help for her and for his missing companions, Corbren mustered the last of his strength and staggered towards the nearby waystation for help.

LONE TRAVELER

It is a warm spring evening—one of the first since the cold of winter receded—and you and your friends have stopped at Kar Darkan for the evening. The food is delicious, especially a sweet white cake that was baked special for today. Since you are the only guests at the station this evening, there is plenty of dessert to go around. You find yourself sharing cake and swapping stories with the proprietor Ealon Pifor and his sweet wife Orena. Orena's disabilities keep her

Editor's Note: In 2013 we held a mini adventure/encounter contest online. Entries were to be designed for 6th to 10th level adventurers and situated somewhere in the region around Kar Darkan, one of the waystations along the road between Vew and Frandor's Keep (see page 2). This scenario was the second place winner and originally published in KoDT #199. Although this encounter is meant to expand the action of the **HackMaster** immersive setting supplement **Frاندors Keep**, it can easily be dropped and dragged into any setting.

from leaving the station so she is eager to hear about the world outside. As the last bits of cake and conversation are polished off, a weak thud sounds from the direction of the front door.

The Pifors do not initially react. A second thud, slightly louder, echoes through the common room. "Ealon, I think someone is knocking," Orena says.

Ealon goes to the door and swings it open. Glancing into the fading light, he nearly misses the man leaning on the doorframe until he slides down and lands in a heap at the stationmaster's feet.

"What is this?" Ealon says in surprise. He turns to your group and says, "Help me get him inside."

The man is battered and barely conscious. His right arm has been crushed to a pulp, leaving a broad smear of blood across the doorframe where he leaned. Gauging by his condition and the fact that he is clad in studded leather armor and has a worn but intact shield strapped to his good arm, you can readily assume that he is a trained combatant. Whether he's a man-at-arms, mercenary or even brigand is unclear. What is clear is that may likely never again swing a sword.

The gravely injured man mumbles something in a foreign tongue. [Continue only if a listener understands Brandobian] The only words you can make out are "big" and "my friends." He seems quite distraught and repeats the words "my friends" several times before falling unconscious.

The man's wounds aren't recent enough to treat with First Aid. Curative magic will certainly alleviate some of his horrific injuries but cannot remediate his complete and utter exhaustion. Barring application of something along the lines of a Rejuvenate or Invigorate spell, the man must sleep for no less than four hours before he is sufficiently coherent to interrogate.

If refreshed (either magically or through the passage of time), the man will wake and relate the following information in Brandobian. Read or summarize this information to anyone that comprehends that language.

"I am Corbren, a mercenary guard in the employ of an elven sage. Our company, which included an additional two guards, was pursuing some mounted highwaymen that had assailed us in numbers and made off with the elf. At their camp we encountered a... a... something big. I don't know what it was. It used a club. It smashed everything around it including the brigands we were pursuing. I did not get a good look. There might have been more than one monster—I swear I saw three faces. The monster killed the brigands, crippled one of my allies as well as myself and left the scene with the elf bundled under its arm. What fate befell my third comrade I cannot say, as I could not locate his corpse. Someone has to go... locate Nelata by the road where I left her as I

had not the strength to drag her here... find out if the others lived... send word to Greytar. He will want to know." He motions toward his knapsack with his one good hand.

A search of his belongings, either at his direction or while he is passed out, turns up a crumpled sheet of paper written in Brandobian signed by a librarian from the city of Dorndern stating that Corbren is on official business from the library, responsible for the safe delivery of a man named Cynr and two books.

Corbren does not know that Fornal planned the attack to steal the books and is very worried about his associate's fate.

The waystation's proprietor, though not heartless, has learned from long experience to detach from the suffering of travellers on the often-violent road. His interest in the matter is purely in securing Kar Darkan.

"Better find out what it is," Ealon says. "If there is



some monster running around out there, I don't want it getting to the horses. Will you sort this out? I know it's late."

MY FRIENDS

The party has a choice of leaving now or in the morning. Ealon will urge them to at least have a look around outside for any immediate threats.

▶ A Tracking skill check (Easy) reveals a clear blood trail. Covering his tracks as he staggered to the station was the last thing on Corbren's mind. The marks from his boots and the blood from his injury are easy enough to follow in the waning daylight. The blood trail leads back to the Borderland Road, heading back in the direction of Vew.

🔍 In short order you discover a sobering scene in the middle of the road. Four human bodies as well as those of two horses can be identified. One of the horses is evidently clinging to life and whinnies pitifully at your approach.

Three of the bodies are corpses of young men clad in leather armor. Each is most assuredly dead.

▶ A Scrutiny skill check (Average) will reveal that each body bears incision wounds from a hacking weapon. The horses bear similar wounds.

The fourth body is covered in a woolen blanket. Removing it reveals an armored woman with blood-matted ginger hair. She stirs and softly whispers in a foreign language (Brandobian). Should anyone comprehend this tongue, she relates a tale corroborating that told by Corbren. She too will stress the importance of finding Cynr.

"Please rescue him, if you can. He is a good man, but can't fight to save his skin. I expect Greytar will be very sad to lose him. I can offer you the silver I was paid to protect him. It is the least I can do as I failed to complete my mission."

Nelata offers a purse containing 50 silver pieces. She claims there would be a substantial reward for Cynr's return especially if it is done quietly.

The ambush site is less than half a mile from the way station. It is only a minor task to bring the woman—Nelata—back to be cared for by Ealon and his family.

Policing up the area reveals three sabres, presumably employed by the Raven brigands. The horses are equipped with standard riding gear (bit, bridle, saddle, et al).

This site was where the Raven brigands attempted their 'snatch and grab' of the elf and his valuable books. Unfortunately his bodyguards were more capable than they were led to believe and three of the Ravens were killed in the ambush.

▶ A successful (easy) Tracking skill check reveals the trail Corbren created by dragging Nelata here. It leads to the Ravens' camp an hour to the south.

Note: If the party waits until first light to set out, Nelata will have died from exposure and her corpse, along with those of the bandits and horses, will exhibit signs of having been gnawed on by scavengers.

SHATTERED TREES

The trail Corbren created by dragging Nelata's body runs south along an existing game trail, then follows the shore of a large pond before continuing into the forest. After less than a mile it continues through a clearing alongside a series of interconnected ponds. After perhaps another half mile, it turns sharply right and leads back into the forest.

🔍 A few hundred feet into the trees you find another battle site, this one more horrific than the last.

The campsite is smashed to bits. Two collapsed tents surround an unattended fire burning amid a chaotic mess of tossed bedrolls and the remains of a meal. A dead body is sprawled facedown near the tent, its skull caved in. The remains of several other humans are scattered about, although it is difficult to tell exactly how many as they seem to have been dismembered and some legs have been eaten.

Even the trees show signs of being hammered by something big and heavy. Small trees have been uprooted and large ones broken and splintered by something as certainly as powerful as a bolt of lightning.

Searching the site assuredly confirms both Corbren's and Nelata's stories. Something very big and powerful certainly was here. Almost everything in the campsite has been smashed or broken – seemingly capriciously.

There are between seven and nine corpses on the site. It is impossible to give a precise number as the number of heads, limbs and torsos do not add up. Were the party to spend a full day climbing trees and searching for body parts lodged within the upper branches, the count would reach ten.

Of the bandits' gear, much of it is smashed, torn or purposefully broken and ground into the mud. A few things have survived. Searching the area turns up the following items.

- Three sabres
- One long sword +1 (property of Nelata)
- A leather backpack, superior quality (property of Cynr)
- One dagger, well-worn but sharp
- Three copper pieces
- One boot, left, human sized
- Three bedrolls, extremely muddy yet salvageable

The backpack is of particular note for its fine craftsmanship. It is a style often carried by elf mages

and scholars. There are places inside designed to store spell components, scrolls, and books. A few sheets of paper and a bottle of ink remain inside the bag, which appears to have been opened and the contents shaken out. Despite the rough treatment and unlike the rest of the items in the camp, it is not covered in dirt. Stamped inside the front pocket in elven writing is the name "Cyrn." This is a featherpack (see *All Things Magic*).

▶ A successful (trivial) Tracking skill check reveals huge footprints – twice the length of a man's – interspersed throughout the site. They lead south via a recently blazed trail on which trees have been splintered, battered down or simply torn out by their roots.

TRAIL OF DESTRUCTION

Following the trail of destruction is not mentally challenging. However, it requires a fair bit of physical exertion, as it is quite steep in places.

👁 After perhaps a half-mile of vigorous hiking, you see a thin wisp of black smoke rising into the air above the trees further down the trail. Shortly thereafter, you hear a high-pitched wail.

Presumably the characters will choose to investigate these occurrences ahead in the direction they were already travelling.

👁 Following the smoke and the crying, you come to the entrance of a natural cavern. The cave mouth is quite large – easily the height of two men.

▶ An (easy) Mining skill check reveals that the walls appear to have been worked with mining tools, suggesting this area was once checked for its potential as a mine.

👁 From within the cavern, you can hear what sounds like several children crying loudly.

▶ An (average) Listening check will distinguish the sound of an adult voice over this caterwauling. The speaker is, in Brandobian, urging someone to keep quiet. This seems to be proving ineffective as another voice moans pathetically.

If they enter the cave, relate the following:

👁 The cavern has a high ceiling yet is not especially large, perhaps a thousand square feet in area. It is littered with branches and leaves and piles of dirt. A humanoid creature about the size of an adolescent human but with three hideous heads rests on a blanket at the center of the cavern. As you approach, the tri-headed creature cries louder.

A quick search of the cave reveals a 10 foot deep pit in the back that contains an elf and a human. This is Cyrn, the elf librarian, and a severely injured Raven named Molitin. Upon seeing potential saviors, the latter man will grow hysterical, begging or screaming for his release. This ruckus will further frighten the Ettin infant causing it to cry even louder in triphonic vibrato.

The cursory search will also uncover a large iron cauldron and pair of burlap sacks that "mama" stores her possessions in. These contain:

- a huge pewter bowl, battered
- a wheel of hard cheese, moldy
- 200 pounds of potatoes
- a wolf pelt
- Sabre +2 (used as a nice sharp knife)
- 400 sp
- 801 cp

Speaking of mama, she is particularly keen to the sound of her screaming infant. She was out gathering water from the nearby pond in anticipation of boiling Molitin alive in a stew but will come running should she hear her baby in distress. She can cover ground very quickly at a sprint and so will arrive at the cave two minutes after the baby begins crying. Any strangers will be deemed a threat and she will *Aggressively Attack* (+5 Attack bonus, -2 Defense). Woe to anyone standing guard outside the cave for they will instead endure a *Charge* (+4 Attack and any damage is doubled for purposes of computing a knock back).

Mama Ettin will fight to the death (ignoring tenacity) as long as she perceives there is a chance to save her baby. Should it somehow come to pass that the players can negotiate a means of returning her infant, she will have no qualms about vacating the cave or leaving her goods behind (*GM note: Should your players peaceably resolve a potential conflict with Mama Ettin, award them an 850 EP story award in lieu of 621 EP for killing her.*)

The Raven brigands had the misfortune of both choosing a camp near the temporary home of a lesser ettin and her baby and being too lazy to bother scouting the terrain. Lured by the noise and smell of their campfire, she came to get an easy meal – her appearance unfortunately coincided with Corbren and Nelata's attack. Cyrn and the surviving bandit were brought back to her cave and tossed in a pit at the back for a later meal. Though she normally would have eaten the elf immediately, she is saving him for the return of her husband so that she can shame his hunting skills. If it were not for the intervention of the PCs, this would be a something she could bring up for decades to come whenever he started getting too uppity for her taste.

It bears noting that the books Cyrn is responsible for are nowhere to be found in the cave...

Should the PCs flee this encounter, Mama Ettin will gather up her baby, her goods and the elf and depart immediately in search of her husband. Subsequent visits to the cave will only find Molitin's half eaten corpse.

"Mama", Lesser Ettin, Female (1242 EP³): HP 63; Init 0; Spd 6; Rch Long; Att +10 [+15 w/ Aggressive Attack]; Dmg *Right 6d6p+5 (club); Left 4d8p+5 (club)*; Def +2 [0 w/ Aggressive Attack]; DR 8; ToP save 11; Jog 15 feet/sec; Tenacity: Steady

Cyrn: CG sedentary elf; HP 16; Init +2; Spd -; Rch -; Att -; Dmg -; Def -1; DR 0; ToP 4/ 3; Jog 10 feet/second; Tenacity: Cowardly

note: Cyrn abhors fighting and will try to talk his way out of a situation instead. He has deliberately avoided learning how to fight and has no weapon proficiencies

Relevant Skills: Language, Elf 95; Language, Brandobian 66; Literacy, Elf 89; Monster Lore 88; History, Ancient 80; Diplomacy 25

Equipment: Merchant/Traveler bundle, 50 sp

Raven Bandit ('Molitin'): NE Kalamaran human brigand; HP 3 (23); Init +2; Spd -; Rch -; Att -; Dmg -; Def d8 only; DR 2; ToP 8/ 5; *immobile due to compound fracture of leg*; Tenacity: Nervous

Relevant Skills: Language (Baparan 66), Listening 11, Observation 11

FRENNEMY MINE

While the PCs are off investigating, Fornal makes his way to Kar Darkan with Cyrn's books in his knapsack. There he is startled to find Corbren and possibly Nelata recovering from their wounds. He is frankly surprised as he personally witnessed Corbren being lifelessly knocked back ten feet from a crushing blow to his shoulder and Nelata squaring off alone against the dreadful ettin when he took advantage of the opportunity to snatch the books and flee. That both would somehow survive was unfathomable to him.

Witnessing his gravely wounded companions and responding evasively to their earnest questions as to Cyrn's fate and how he managed to avoid being smashed to a pulp by the giant has severely addled Fornal. He feels responsible for their fate as well as that of the dozen dead Ravens he co-opted into his plan.

His intent was never for things to spiral so completely out of control. All he wanted was to steal the books and pocket enough silver to tide him over for several months. Why had the fools fought so tenaciously when they encountered the Ravens? Why opt to doggedly pursue them? Who knew that the rumor of a hill giant living near the keep was actually true?³ And for gawds' sake, why do battle with such an overwhelming opponent?

Owing to his nagging conscience, Fornal has begun to second-guess his plans to ransom or sell the books. While he decides what to do, he begins to drink heavily to calm his nerves (he should be considered as under the influence of an *Induce Drunkedness: Sloshed* spell for the duration of the adventure).

If the PCs succeed in rescuing Cyrn and returning to Kar Darkan, the elf displays a modicum of empathy for the fate of his companions before inquiring about the books in his charge. He begins with Fornal who has not yet decided to come clean. He denies knowledge of the books' whereabouts using his *Skilled Liar* ability to frame a believable excuse.

If the players rescued the brigand Molitin and were sufficiently compassionate to transport the invalid to Kar Darkan, he will be very motivated to get on their good side. If he overhears Fornal's denial, he will drop the dime on the villain. He personally witnessed Fornal dumping out the contents of Cyrn's backpack and absconding from the battle with the books. Fully cognizant of the fact that his story may not be given credence, he will challenge his rescuers (or captors) to expose Fornal's right forearm revealing the Raven tattoo he bears!

This damning evidence is too much for Fornal to bear and he immediately confesses to having the books in his possession. He admits to orchestrating the Raven attack but insists, between sobs, that he never intended for anyone to get killed. "Why didn't you just let us have the books? Were they really worth your lives?" He fervently denies any knowledge of the giant stammering, "When it rains, it pours – curse you Discordant One!"

If the PCs failed to rescue Molitin such that he cannot implicate Fornal, Cyrn will eventually turn to the PCs for help recovering his books. This may seem to be an impossible task for it is not unreasonable to suspect that the ettin destroyed them at the Ravens' camp given the wanton destruction there and the fact that they were not located within her cave. The PCs are, of course, free to decline and Cyrn won't press the issue.

Should they accept and forcibly interrogate Fornal, a successful Interrogation check (competing vs. his Resist Persuasion skill) will compel him to confess as above. Searching his knapsack (something he will resist) uncovers the books and also compels a confession.

Fornal: CN Kalamaran human fighter/thief lvl 4; HP 32; Init +2; Spd 9; Rch 3½'; Att +3; Dmg 2d8p+2 (longsword); Def +2; DR 2 (shield DR 4); ToP 11/ 5; Jog 10 feet/second; Tenacity: Nervous; 9 Luck Points
Relevant Skills as armored: Climbing 17, Current Affairs 29, Fast Talking 40, Glean Information 37, Hiding 29, Identify Trap 24, Language (Baparan 65, Brandobian 44), Listening 26, Lock Picking 21, Observation 30, Resist Persuasion 8, Skilled Liar 51, Sneaking 22

Quirks/Flaws: Selfish, Swindler, Nagging
Conscience, Raven Tattoo

Equipment: leather armor, small shield, longsword,
dagger, knapsack, 2 heavy books, 15 sp

AFTERMATH

The Ettin(s): If the female lesser ettin and her baby are slain, the players have rid the area of a very dangerous beast. However, unless they obliterate the evidence by say, weighting her body with rocks and sinking it in the pond, her corpse (and possibly the infant's as well) will be discovered by the ettin's partner. He will be absolutely incensed and proceed on a crazed rampage of destruction. If you wish to hold the PCs accountable for their actions, the poly-headed giant's first target of opportunity is Kar Darkan! He will bash down the gates the following evening and, unless stopped, proceed to level the place incidentally killing all inhabitants. A group of mercenaries already severely wounded from a prior encounter with his wife may not fare so well...

Alternatively he will cause trouble for the countryside around the Keep. Lord Reyifor might offer a substantial reward for killing this monster. Cyrn can supply information on its tactics if asked.

Defeating this monster might require putting together a group of fighters equal to the task. It is possible to continue this story line as the leaders at the keep and local mercenaries decide how to take on this creature.

If mama ettin and her baby escaped, they will join papa ettin. He will want to ravage the countryside but mama will put him in his place by shaming him with her elf captive and generally denigrating his ettinhood for leaving her and the baby alone to be assaulted by uppity little folk. The ettin family will wander back up into the Krond Heights never to be seen by mankind again.

"Papa", Lesser Ettin (1242 EP²): HP 84; Init 0; Spd 6; Rch Long; Att +10 [+15 w/ Aggressive Attack]; Dmg *Right 6d6p+5 (club)*; *Left 4d8p+5 (club)*; Def +2 [0 w/ Aggressive Attack]; DR 8; ToP save 11; Jog 15 feet/sec; Tenacity: Steady

Fornal: The PCs face a moral conundrum with respect to this villain. If he confesses to his crime, his nagging conscience will drive him to make amends. Groups inclined towards chaos may be excused if they choose to let him go on his own recognizance. If they do, he eventually learns to read and spends the next decade as a wandering scholar attempting to bring the gift of literacy to the poor and downtrodden. Law and order types may be inclined to incarcerate him and remand him to the authorities at Frandor's Keep. There he will be found guilty as an

accessory to murder and promptly hung. If Molitin accompanies the party as a witness, his testimony will damn Fornal but he will subsequently be tried for banditry and hung as well.

Should Fornal's secret go undiscovered, he will beg leave from Cyrn claiming that the purpose of the journey is now pointless. Surely this band of adventurers can serve as interpreters and guards in his stead. He may even offer a return of 10 sp from his fee for early termination. In truth, he does not wish to remain with the company and risk discovery. If permitted to leave, he will proceed to Sabden fearing trouble with the Ravens in Vew once the story of the butchery of the highwaymen begins to circulate. He will proceed to P'Bapar where he plans to sell the books.

Cyrn: If the books are recovered, he will proposition the party to act as guards and translators if possible. He wishes to depart immediately for Frandor's Keep to fulfill his mission. Corbren and Nelata are in no condition to travel and may need weeks to recover. If pressed for payment, he will offer 10 sp. If this initial offer is refused, he will offer 25 sp but will be a grumpy travelling companion and will quickly bid adieu once they reach the fortress. As for the gift, if all goes as planned, Greytar will take delivery of the books and that will be that.

Property Claims: The PCs may be in possession of Nelata's +1 longsword and Cyrn's featherback if they recovered these items from the wrecked brigand camp. Both items are distinctive and their owners will wish them returned. Failing to do so will sour any subsequent dealings with these individuals but they are not in a position to recover the items by force. They may, however, file a claim should they eventually reach Frandor's Keep and Greytar's influence may lend considerable veracity to their claims...

STORY AWARDS:

Rescuing Cyrn: 300 EP

Recovering Cyrn's books: 175 EP

Rescuing Molitin such that he implicates Fornal: 50 EP

Destroying evidence of the ettins' death: 100 EP

CREDITS

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Footnotes

1. Alimira is Earl Reyifor's illegitimate daughter who was held prisoner in Karinar Manor in the adventure "The Ransom" (Chapter 9 of *Frandor's Keep*).
2. Only half experience (621 EP) should be awarded for this monster as it is fighting alone
3. The presence of a hill giant in the Padiras valley is a long standing rumor. Fornal has assumed that the ettin is this hill giant as he has been gone so long as to be unaware of any information to the contrary. (A writeup of Nalagarl the giant is included as a bonus for you to employ as a possible follow-up encounter.)

Nelata is the daughter of a cleric of the True and a militia member. In her younger days, she was something of a rebel, loving to test boundaries and strike out on her own. She had an independent streak that troubled her family.

During one reckless escapade, however, Nelata and her best friend attempted to jump onto the back of a moving wagon, and her friend fell. The girl was permanently paralyzed from the fall, and died young. Nelata never forgave herself, and vowed from then on to live honorably and carefully. She became a serious student, and when it was clear that she was talented with a sword, became a member of her father's unit.

While serving the city's militia, Nelata met Corbren, a quiet, thoughtful young man who lived by the same moral code she did. They hit it off and became friends.

As much as she tried, Nelata could not fully quiet the restless spirit within her, and, to her father's dismay, announced that she would leave the militia and pursue a mercenary's life with her friend, Corbren. The two had dreamed of what it might be like to be on the road, camping under the stars, far from civilization, using their sword as they saw fit.

It wasn't long before the two friends were indeed making their living with their swords, taking jobs that felt right to them, and turning down anything that seemed beneath their dignity, or tinged with evil. Their latest job seemed like something that would be quite satisfying, both in coin and in principle. Nelata found their employer quite interesting. He was an elf of great intellect. She talked with him along the way, as Corbren and another mercenary named Fornal, conversed. Nelata didn't really like Fornal. There was something about him she didn't trust, but she never let on to Corbren. Her friend always seemed to try to believe the best in people. He would've dismissed her feelings as simple nervous energy and brushed them aside.

Nelata knew that Corbren wouldn't have minded a more intimate relationship with her, but he was honorable enough not to bring up the subject. She could see it in his brown eyes though. Since her friend's death, however, she never allowed herself to get too close to anyone. She had a nagging feeling that she was bad news for anyone who loved her too much.

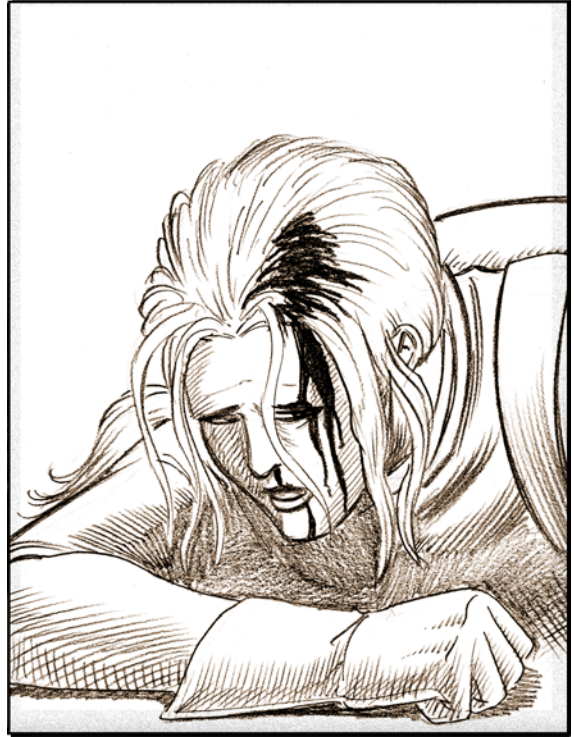
She was listening to Cynr the elf describe the amazing books he was delivering to the wise Greytar, when the caravan was attacked. Taking massive blows from something hideous, Nelata now floats in and out of consciousness, her mind a whirl of pleasant, and unpleasant, hallucinations.

by Barbara Blackburn and Carolyn Stogdill

ADDITIONAL NOTES: Although Nelata's weapon of choice is a longsword, it appears her sword is now missing, having either been taken or lost. If she survives her wounds, she would be anxious to find it. With her weapon, her combat stats are Spd 10, Atk +5, Def +7, Dmg 2d8p+4

Kingdoms of Kalamar

Denizens of Tellene



Nelata

<p>Race: Human Class: fighter Level: 4 Size: Medium Movement: 10 Alignment: CG Reared: Cosolen Hit Points: 0 (38)</p> <p>STR 14/55 INT 11/25 WIS 16/34 DEX 12/04 CON 14/58 LKS 14/28 CHA: 15/18</p>	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="background-color: #e0e0e0;">SPEED</td> <td style="background-color: #e0e0e0;">INIT</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="background-color: #e0e0e0;">8</td> <td style="background-color: #e0e0e0;">+2</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="background-color: #e0e0e0;">ATTACK</td> <td style="background-color: #e0e0e0;">DMG REDUCTION</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="background-color: #e0e0e0;">+3</td> <td style="background-color: #e0e0e0;">4</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="background-color: #e0e0e0;">DEFENSE</td> <td style="background-color: #e0e0e0;">THRESHOLD</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="background-color: #e0e0e0;">+5</td> <td style="background-color: #e0e0e0;">15</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="background-color: #e0e0e0;">REACH</td> <td style="background-color: #e0e0e0;">TOP SAVE</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="background-color: #e0e0e0;">1 ft</td> <td style="background-color: #e0e0e0;">7</td> </tr> </table>	SPEED	INIT	8	+2	ATTACK	DMG REDUCTION	+3	4	DEFENSE	THRESHOLD	+5	15	REACH	TOP SAVE	1 ft	7						
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<p>Possessions: backpack, 50 sp, knife, dagger, ringmail, medium shield, {longsword +1}</p> <p>Proficiencies: dagger, knife, longsword spec., heavy armor, shield, hiking, laborer, phalanx fighting</p> <p>Talents: parry bonus (longsword)</p> <p>Quirk: nagging conscience Flaw: slight limp</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Skills</p> <table style="width: 100%;"> <tr><td>listening</td><td style="text-align: right;">51</td></tr> <tr><td>observation</td><td style="text-align: right;">25</td></tr> <tr><td>tracking</td><td style="text-align: right;">26</td></tr> <tr><td>hunting</td><td style="text-align: right;">30</td></tr> <tr><td>survival</td><td style="text-align: right;">50</td></tr> <tr><td>literacy (Brandobian)</td><td style="text-align: right;">26</td></tr> <tr><td>language (Brandobian)</td><td style="text-align: right;">71</td></tr> <tr><td>riding (horse)</td><td style="text-align: right;">31</td></tr> <tr><td>jumping</td><td style="text-align: right;">43</td></tr> <tr><td>first aid</td><td style="text-align: right;">48</td></tr> <tr><td>direction sense</td><td style="text-align: right;">21</td></tr> </table>	listening	51	observation	25	tracking	26	hunting	30	survival	50	literacy (Brandobian)	26	language (Brandobian)	71	riding (horse)	31	jumping	43	first aid	48	direction sense	21
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Kingdoms of Kalamar

Denizens of Tellene



Corbren

Race: Human
Class: fighter
Level: 4
Size: Medium
Movement: 10
Alignment: CG
Reared: Cosolen
Hit Points: 2 (40)

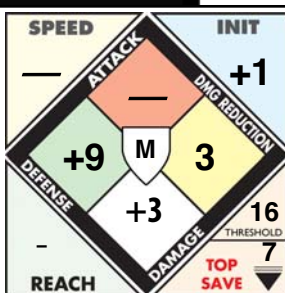
STR: 15/01 **INT:** 10/87 **WIS:** 9/78
DEX: 16/01 **CON:** 14/29 **LKS:** 13/25
CHA: 12/70

Possessions: backpack, 50 sp, axe hammer, studded leather armor, medium shield +1, longsword, cloak, letter

Proficiencies: heavy armor, longsword spec., shield, hiking, phalanx fighting, laborer

Talents: attack bonus (longsword), resolute

Quirk: chivalrous



Skills

listening	25
observation	26
tracking	76
language (Brandobian)	62
hunting	40
survival	51
climbing/rappelling	36
swimming	34
riding (horse)	33
literacy (Brandobian)	19
armor appraisal	31
weather sense	36

Corbren was raised to respect his elders, work hard, and love honor. His father was a soldier, and that is what he aspired to be all of his life. Having been a soldier for a year, in Cosolen, Corbren found himself wishing to see more of Tellene. His fellow soldier, Nelata, with whom he'd spent many a long night of guard duty with, agreed and they would talk about their plans as they stood watch. Eventually, they set out for Dodern to see the library and look for work as paid caravan escorts. They were thrilled to be hired right away.

Corbren is the quiet sort, but his humility is often what attracts attention. It is obvious, almost from just one meeting with the man, that he is a faithful, skilled worker whose honor and honesty can be trusted.

When he was eight, as an example, a group of his friends had decided to play a dirty trick on a merchant of sweets in town. They would start a fire in the back of the store, and when the adults had fled, they would snatch all of the candy they could hold and run away. Corbren refused to participate, telling his friends they would be sorry. The children refused to listen, and when they started the fire, it raged out of hand. Corbren rushed in to try to save his friends, and managed to get them all out. But, he had just gone in for one other boy when the authorities came. He refused to give the names of his friends, and was punished for the crime with three months of hard labor, and though his father's disapproval wounded his heart, he would not tell on his friends.

Later, as a soldier, his honor would constantly be tested, when unscrupulous comrades would tempt him to shirk responsibility. Nelata was the same, and because of this, they became fast friends. Their friendship could have evolved to something more romantic, but the two felt that a relationship would compromise their effectiveness in battle, and so they remained merely close friends.

Since setting out for adventure, Corbren and Nelata have made a name for themselves and have faced many dangers together.

Their latest job seemed pretty straightforward — escort an elf scholar through the Coniper Gap. A fellow named Fornal joined them as a guard on the trip. He seemed nice enough and Corbren liked him. Then, out of nowhere, the three found themselves fighting for their lives against bandits and something else big, monstrous and deadly.

The three were no match for such an attack, in spite of their best attempts. Now, Corbren struggles for help in spite of his life-threatening wounds, hoping to save his friends' lives. He knows Nelata is nearly dead, and Fornal is missing. What he doesn't know is how long Nelata can hang on to the thin thread of life left and where Fornal is. All he can do is pray a silent plea for their lives as he fades into blackness.

by Barbara Blackburn and Carolyn Stogdill

ADDITIONAL NOTES: Corbren's sword arm is mangled and useless. If he survives, he'll be forced to either retire from soldiering, or to learn how to use his other hand to wield a sword. His current stats reflect him using a *Shield Only* fighting style. Were he compelled to engage in melee, it would be via the *One-Handed Weapon Only* style with the following stats: Spd 8, Atk +3*, Def -3, Dmg 2d8p+3

*After d6 months of training, Corbren's Attack will become +6 as he gains familiarity in fighting with his off-hand

Featherpack

Featherpacks are fairly rare, even among elves, so it is not surprising that humans have little knowledge of these unique items. The few humans who have had the pleasure of examining one of these elven featherpacks were always sure to proclaim these items magical and/or miraculous. Any human who hears of or sees one invariably desires to own it.

Elves, on the other hand, attribute the packs' amazing attributes to fine crafting and elven know-how, rather than to any sort of arcane or divine intervention. That said, they are highly prized by many in elven society.

The packs are unique types of backpacks that allow someone to carry a heavy load, say of books, or similar items, with ease. They half the weight of all items placed inside them. It is especially nice for travelling with spell books or other similarly sized bulky gear.

Featherpacks are of unique design and recognizable by special decorative patterns stamped into the leather. Typical featherpacks are 20" high by 13" wide by 8.5 inches deep.

While the packs can, and do, lighten the loads of those who bear them, they do not have the ability to haul just anything inside of them. Items stored and carried inside one of these packs cannot exceed the volume of the backpack, for instance. The packs have no magical properties in regards to using extra-dimensional space or infinite items, like some legendary magical storage devices are said to do.



Featherpacks are usually personalized by the owner with a name, nickname, or symbol. Elf mages like them for the ability to carry more books than usual, along with spell components and a sack lunch. Some featherpacks even have the ability to keep food fresh for 1d4p days longer than normal.

Because each featherpack is unique, and personalized, it is easy for elves to recognize their own personal packs should they fall into the wrong hands or get mixed up with other packs in a group.

Featherpack owners have sometimes had to reclaim their packs at sword point when some greedy human somehow managed to abscond with them. There have been a few occasions when an elf has given a human his featherpack as a gift for exceptional friendship or service, so there are a few in human hands. Most of these humans prize these packs more than elves do, and would never sell them. If you see one for sale in a market, you can almost be assured that it is either stolen, or a fake.

by Barbara Blackburn and Carolyn Stogdill



Nalagarl

In Frandor's Keep, the existence of a hill giant is alluded to in specific rumors (QI 13, KI 1) and is discussed in the writeup of area Q13. One of his rocks landed within the Broken Hilt Tavern (M 12) and is now displayed near the bar.

A preliminary writeup of the creature was printed in KoDT #152, prior to the publication of Frandor's Keep. We ultimately opted not to include this giant in the adventure as confronting him was well beyond the capabilities of any 5th level characters — the top end of the scale for the challenges in this setting.

However, as this particular scenario involves confronting a Lesser Ettin (or two), the players have demonstrably acquired the capability of taking on greater challenges. With this in mind, it seems appropriate to 'reintroduce' Nalagarl to the Frandor's Keep setting.

You may employ this as a bonus scenario for your campaign.

— Steve Johansson

BACKGROUND: The inhabitants of Frandor's Keep have long endured many varied threats to their lives and happiness but an angry, some say crazed, Hill Giant is one danger that is quickly becoming tiresome. No one is sure what where the giant came from. Some call him Nalagarl as that is what it sounds like he's saying while hurling huge boulders down from the cliffs outside the keep into the middle bailey or quarrytown, killing many unsuspecting people going about their daily affairs. Most just call him "That Damned Giant".

For years, inhabitants of the Keep have demanded that something be done about the brute. The problem is that his attacks are infrequent and unpredictable. Months may pass between his appearances during which time the clamor to "do something" subsides as more trivial but persistent concerns focus the attention of the residents.

No one is exactly sure why the giant is so angry. Most chalk it up to the generally unpleasant disposition of giants. More insightful individuals, Greytar included, recall that years and years ago, a contingent of halberd wielding guards killed a female hill giant who was walking outside of the walls, menacing an inbound caravan. They conjecture that this giant was somehow related to Nalagarl and that the giant harbors a malicious grudge.

In point of fact, said giant was Nalagarl's girlfriend and her death at the hands of the puny humans has left him bitter and a bit deranged. He has become an outcast, banished from the local settlement of hill giants west of the Earldom of Reyifor, as even fellow giants cannot tolerate his moodiness. He now roams the mountains along the perimeter of the Archduchy eking out a meager existence. Whenever he passes by Frandor's Keep, his anger swells and he is compelled to inaccurately hurl a few rocks at the fortress.

Two years ago, Capt. Perit Kenidar — a royal officer detached to the keep after months of a sustained letter writing campaign by Earl Reyifor — and his troop of commandos came very close to ending the giant's reign of terror. They set up tripwires in the area where they had seen him most. The wires set off alarm bells alerting a team of artilleryists to fire their portable onager at the brute. Large iron balls covered in spikes were shot at Nalagarl. One embedded itself in his skull, right through his left eye socket, and a shout of triumph went up from the men.

A squad of young men, unofficial volunteers from the area who accompanied Captain Kenidar's men as porters and laborers, were granted the honor of traveling down to take the giant's head. By the time they got there, however, he was not lying where he had fallen. Though traumatized by the injury, he recovered and hid in a nearby stand of oaks carefully watching for the loathsome humans who had surprised him with their ridiculous (though admittedly effective) toy. When they closed and became distracted by rummaging through his enormous sack of goods, he sprinted from his hiding spot and mercilessly pounded them to death — knocking one

teenager twenty-five feet through the air! Before Capt. Kenidar and his veterans could close the distance to assist the helpless volunteers, Nalagarl had fled the scene.

The next day, spiked iron balls were hurled into the keep, one covered in blood with a gigantic eye impaled upon one of the spikes. The balls killed a mother and child who were out for a morning stroll.

A standing reward of 500 silver coins has now been offered for Nalagarl's head. Many have tried to earn this sum, but have failed and paid with life and limb.

Larzon Bayz (see *Frاندor's Keep location Q13*) does not plan to be one of those who fail. He is certain that he will be the one who finally succeeds. Killing giants is his specialty, he boasts.

Nalagarl is, of course, unaware of the bounty on his head. He has developed a grudging respect for groups of humans gained from his personal encounter with Capt. Kenidar as well as the death of his girlfriend. He is painfully aware that he is not invulnerable and now employs a certain degree of caution when encountering men. No longer will he simply rush into their midst certain that he can pound them to hamburger. No... too many nasty surprises. He has learned to sneak and hide — and if need be run away. It is ironic that by failing to kill the giant, the keep's leaders have bred a much tougher opponent who may well trouble them for decades to come.

*by Jolly & Barbara Blackburn
updated and revised by Steve Johansson*

<p>Nalagarl (1425 EP) a.k.a.: That Damned Giant Race: Hill Giant Size: Huge Movement: 15 (jog) Alignment: Chaotic Evil Reared: Legasa Peaks Hit Points: 83</p>													
<p>Possessions: big-ass club, gigantic sack filled with 6 rocks, iron cooking pot, half a wheel of moldy cheese, 2 dwarf skulls, 27 rutabagas, jar containing ~1 pound of ambergris (60 sp) used to soothe hemorrhoids, peacock feather quill (20 sp), 3 bunches of fresh lavender (4 sp) used as insect repellent, partial bolt of silk cloth (30 sp) used as toilet paper, very large silver barrette (115 sp) - remembrance of slain girlfriend, 8 weasel pelts (8 sp), scythe engraved w/ skeletons on rare blackwood shaft grasping gunmetal blue blade (66 sp) - souvenir from some creepy priest he crushed, ordinary short sword used as knife, 108 silver coins</p>	<p>Proficiencies: club specialization Talent: improved awareness</p>												
<p>Quirk: ornery Flaws: blind in one eye, facial scar</p>	<p>Notable Skills</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td>hiding</td><td style="text-align: right;">31</td></tr> <tr><td>hunting</td><td style="text-align: right;">30</td></tr> <tr><td>listening</td><td style="text-align: right;">24</td></tr> <tr><td>observation</td><td style="text-align: right;">33</td></tr> <tr><td>survival</td><td style="text-align: right;">43</td></tr> <tr><td>swimming</td><td style="text-align: right;">27</td></tr> </table>	hiding	31	hunting	30	listening	24	observation	33	survival	43	swimming	27
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<p>* roll one die-type lower</p>													



BAIT & TACKLE™

*Generic Adventure Hooks
and Encounters for
the GM to run with.*



After news of the mercenary group's success in vanquishing a lesser ettin begins to circulate, they will be approached with a new challenge. Who makes this advance and how quickly depends on the means of it becoming known.

HOISTED ON THEIR OWN PETARD

SETTING: Frاندor's Keep

BAIT: An appeal to vanity

TACKLE: Should the group be vigorous self-prompters, loudly and publicly exercising their bragging rights, they will be politely summoned the next day to an executive council meeting attended by Lord Reyifor, Prefect Ganitak and sundry staff. These leaders will heap praise on their accomplishment with the intent of buttering them up for a special mission they will 'request' the characters take on. Said mission is to hunt down and kill the hill giant Nalagarl.

Both the Earl and Prefect believe they have the perfect patsies to do the dirty work they themselves have failed at. No reward will be offered, as they plan to shame the braggart adventurers into killing the giant (and retain the reward money for other purposes). Upon concluding the meeting, should the characters voice hesitation or press for a reward, the Earl will hoist the PCs on their own petard by staging an impromptu celebration for the "giant killers" and publicly laud their accomplishment. This merits a reward of 1 Fame Point, but will prompt nearly everyone who congratulates the heroes to ask when they are going to deal with the giant Nalagarl. It may become very embarrassing if the vaunted giant killers play coy and insist to common citizens that they must be compensated in order to take on this mission. If things drag on, the Earl will up the ante by announcing a new tax to raise the requested reward money. This will immediately sour attitudes and the PCs will subsequently be treated

as pariahs anywhere in the Keep and even in Quarrytown. (In game terms, they suffer the loss of 2 Honor.)

RELUCTANT HEROES

SETTING: Frandor's Keep

BAIT: cash money

TACKLE: If your players are not braggarts or if they have deliberately kept quiet about their besting a lesser ettin, news of this may still leak out via ancillary NPCs that may have witnessed or heard of the killing at the scene. Reluctant heroes will be approached by either Greytar or Arbitrator Parato Romili depending on their past interactions (if any) with these individuals and their past demeanor whilst at Frandor's Keep. Whomever it is that approaches them, he will fill them in on the giant's interaction with the Keep and mention that a 500 silver coin reward awaits them should they bring in Nalagarl's head.

THE BOUNTY HUNTER

SETTING: Frandor's Keep

BAIT: ease of pursuit

TACKLE: If the bounty hunter Larzon Bayz is still in play in your campaign, he will eventually learn of the party's exploits vis-à-vis the ettins. The presence of these creatures is news to him but does explain some contradictory data he observed whilst toying with the idea of once again taking up the challenge of bringing in the giant he so long ago came to Frandor's Keep to bag. The idea that he might have another go at it should he recruit some competent assistance has sufficiently inspired him to set aside the bottle, clean himself up, and venture into the wilderness to gather preliminary intelligence.

Upon returning, he will approach the giant slayers with a 'unique opportunity' to team up with him and nab a bounty that will assuredly make them all famous. (PCs that have had prior interactions with Larzon will note that he has shaved, gotten a haircut and had his clothes laundered. He politely refuses any alcohol and contentedly sips water.)

If his proposition sparks interest, he relates all information he knows about the giant. He will initially ask for half of the 500 s.p. reward and a similar portion of any treasure recovered. If characters balk at this demand, he relates that he's bringing a lot to the table. He's spent months pursuing the giant and knows where to find him. "You could spend weeks aimlessly wandering the mountains trying to find this brute and who knows what else you'll run into. Surely your time has value. Consider my offer..."

If his terms are refused, he will listen to counter-offers but will not go below a third on the first go round. If a deal cannot be reached, he will leave, saying "You know where to find me." as he does so.

Should a week pass with no response, he will become so antsy (and fearful of falling off the wagon) that he will seek out the characters and agree to any reasonable terms (i.e. a full share).

The Hunt

Nalagarl is currently encamped at the base of Chayen Summit (far northwest corner of the Northern P'Bapar map featured on the front inside cover of *Frandor's Keep*.) Once characters get within five miles of the summit, they will begin to see evidence of the giant's destruction (uprooted trees, elk and moose carcasses, etc.) Should Larzon accompany the group, he will lead them directly here. If not, the characters may have to wander aimlessly in the wilderness until they stumble upon said evidence.

Each day's trek has a 25% chance of encountering a potentially dangerous creature. The following suggestions are appropriate but feel free to devise similarly formidable opponents as you wish (see *Hacklopedia of Beasts* for creature details):

1. Black Bear
2. Mountain Lion
3. Worg
4. pack of 5 wolves
5. Yeti
6. Nalagarl out hunting

Once at the summit, Nalagarl is permitted a [difficult] Observation check to spot the band of mercenaries out to kill him. If successful, he will approach to within maximum distance of his rock throwing capability (150') and begin pelting his foes (bear in mind his Attack bonus is a mere +1 due to his eye injury). There are sufficient stones around such that he need not fear of running out of ammunition. If alerted, Nalagarl will utilize his superior movement rate to maintain a healthy distance from the characters and avoid a four, five or six on one fight.

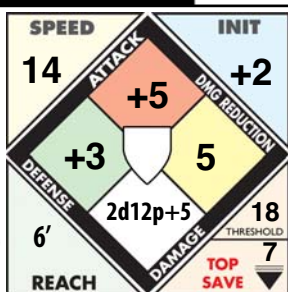
Should he fail to spot the posse, he and the characters will stumble into each other in the morning of the second day they are exploring the territory around the summit. Encounter distance is 60 + 2d4p (x10) feet. Roll initiative and take it from there...

Story Award: Slaying Nalagarl is worth a 700 EP story award and merits 2 points of Fame.



Larzon Bayz

Race: Human
Class: fighter
Level: 5
Size: Medium
Movement: 10
Alignment: LN
Honor: 60 (Average)
Hit Points: 44
STR 12/56 **INT** 11/24 **WIS** 14/70
DEX 14/25 **CON** 15/76 **LKS** 13/41
CHA: 9/33



Possessions: two-handed sword, studded leather armor +2, heavy crossbow, Everful Flascon (whiskey), Potion of Invisibility, coil of rope, merchant/traveler outfitting bundle, mess kit, axe-hammer, flint and steel, three iron spikes, miner's lantern, 19 sp, 5 cp

Proficiencies: heavy armor, two-handed sword spec., dagger, hvy. crossbow, shield, hiking, phalanx fighting, laborer

Talent: less sleep

Quirk: addict (alcoholism)
Flaw: tone deaf

Skills	
appraisal (arms)	18
current affairs	31
gambling	27
interrogation	26
intimidation	41
lang - Kalamaran	75
listening	22
monster lore	16
observation	34
rope use	32
tracking	35

BACKGROUND: Background: Despite the fact Larzon Bayz has been collecting bounties for years he has little to show for it. His gambling and drinking habits have thwarted his ability to save money and he always felt he was starting over from scratch. He didn't care. Getting rich was not his primary motivation. He loved the hunt. "No better quarry than some scum who deserves killin'" he often said over a beer.

When he heard rumors that Frandor's Keep had been having trouble with a crazed giant he was instantly intrigued. Besides the hefty bounty being offered he knew the man who could eradicate the beast would instantly be famous. When a merchant approached him about retrieving some stolen property from a gang of thugs operating near the Keep, Larzon saw an opportunity.

"Ah, two for one," he surmised, "perfect."

He has been at the Keep for several months. He found tracks and a lone hill giant's campsite about five miles northwest of the fortress but after staking out the camp for weeks there was no sign of the giant. Until quite recently, he has had no luck in finding any further signs — not even a single track, just a lot of wagging tongues and fingers pointing up to the slopes where it's claimed the giant was last seen hurling boulders down on the Middle Bailey of the Keep.

Eventually he moved out of the Keep (too expensive and he didn't much like the company) and set up his tent in Quarrytown. During the day, he would hunt for bounties to collect (mostly kobolds or the occasional orc). Each quarry he bagged seemed to calm the inner demons that haunt him. When not on the trail, he could be found sitting in front of his tent sharpening his sword or mending his armor. He's been known to frequent the Den of Delights.

Larzon has an intimidating appearance. Children run away from him when he walks down the streets, or hide in their mothers' skirts. That pains him a bit, but he would never admit that. His only friend is a grumpy dwarf named Gagee. They mostly sit by the fire passing a jug and exchanging battle tales.

He quickly runs off any woman who shows an interest in him - unless they're the kind he can pay for their affections. He shows no interest in romance or — until recently - anything much beyond hunting people, getting drunk and trying to win a few games of dice.

Long ago, Larzon had a wife and a very different life. The murder of his bride is what changed him completely. Hunting her murderers set him down the path of his current profession. He found them long ago, and made them pay.

Each person he hunted became those murderers in his booze-addled, grief-stricken mind. It was his obsession — a way to calm the demons within. He swore to continue hunting lawbreakers until he could no longer move. Some say he died long ago, and that what hunts them now is The Hunter, a ghost of the man who once was Larzon Bayz.

Sometime in the past few weeks, Larzon had "a moment of clarity" in which he saw through the drunken grief he's been mired in. He seems like a new man — clean and sober and with renewed purpose. He is determined to accomplish the mission that drew him to this gawd-forsaken place and then leave to start a new life. After much determined effort, he has determined that the giant Nalagarl is encamped near Chayen Summit. No longer emboldened by intoxicated hubris, he's aware that the giant is leagues beyond his capability and he's in desperate need of capable associates to assist him gather his final bounty. He will drive a hard bargain only because he is focused on leaving the earldom and wants to have sufficient money in his pocket to go far, far away and start over for the last time.

by Barbara Blackburn

edited and revised by Steve Johansson