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WHISPERS & RUMOURS:
BORDERLAND TOWN





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WHISPERS & RUMOURS: BORDERLAND TOWN

After surviving a long, dangerous stint in the untamed regions of the world, the PCs find themselves back in civilisation. Upon entering a settlement, the players decide to scope out the area and get a feel for the local goings-on by talking to inhabitants and gathering information. At this point, they ask “so what are the local rumours around here, anyway?” Whispers & Rumours: Borderland is here to answer just that question, providing the time-pressed GM with hundreds of local rumours suitable for fleshing out the society of almost any borderland settlement. These rumours can serve as flavour text, adding depth and dimension to your campaign, or can serve as plot hooks, suggesting future paths that PCs may wish to follow.

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SYSTEM NEUTRAL EDITION

Welcome to this Raging Swan Press System Neutral Edition Village Backdrop. Herein you’ll find evocative, inspiring text designed to help you—the busy GM—run better, quicker and easier games.

This book is compatible with most fantasy roleplaying games. It’s impossible to create a truly system neutral book, though, and some generic game terms—wizard, fighter, human, elf and so on—lurk within. These generic terms are easily modified to the GM’s system of choice.

One special note about the NPCs in this supplement. While some are wizards, fighters, clerics and so on, others are simply normal folk. Because different game systems handle normal folk differently we’ve made no attempt to note their “class” leaving them simply as “female human” and so on.

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USING WHISPERS & RUMOURS

Rumours are a bit like wandering monsters. In the Good Old Days every adventure had both a rumour table and a wandering monster table. Now, they both seem to be few and far between.

It won't surprise you to know, this is a bad thing. Rumours are an essential component of any decent adventure that features anything more than a series of related combats. (And actually, adventures that are nothing more than a series of combat encounters could still do with rumours!)

Some might think rumours are merely an obstacle to fun; after all they slow down the PCs' quest to "find the fun". Essentially, that's not the case. Rumours do several things at the table:

- **Reward Good (or Thoughtful) Play:** Players taking the time to learn rumours can often find useful pieces of information that may help their adventure. For example, if the party learn rumours of a hidden or forgotten entrance to a dungeon they could gain a tactical advantage when they assault the place. They could also learn of a monster's fatal weakness or of the location of a lost treasure.
- **Changes the Pace:** Learning rumours not only requires a different skill set to whacking things with a sword, but also suits a different play style and players more interested in role-playing. Bards—obviously—are particularly suited to learning rumours, but any charismatic PC can be skilled in this area. Remember, it's important for the GM to provide opportunities and campaigns designed for players of all ilks.
- **Build Verisimilitude:** The party's adventures don't happen in a vacuum. The world is a living, breathing place. Even the smallest settlements have minor events that have no affect on the party, but are important—or at least interesting—to local inhabitants. Births, marriages, deaths, thefts and affairs all happen, and are often the subject of rumour, gossip and innuendo. Having such rumours come to the party's ear build a sense of a real community.
- **Provide Depth:** Related to verisimilitude, rumours allow the GM to build depth to his campaign world. They help build a sense that the world doesn't revolve around the party's adventures and that other things do actually happen.
- **Enable Foreshadowing:** Great events don't just happen (most of the time). Using rumours to foreshadow upcoming events allows the GM to give a sense of the developing campaign instead of just dumping news of the orc invasion (or whatever) in the party's lap. In this way, events seem more organic and—of course—the party may even decide to act before the major event comes to pass. This works best in sandbox style games and enables the party to affect or direct the course of events (and their adventures).

TYPES OF RUMOURS

All rumours are not created equal. There are several types of rumour:

- **Adventure-Critical:** These rumours are rooted in the PCs' adventure. They are of particular use to the party and the GM can use them to warn of particularly dangerous monsters, hint at hidden locations, a monster's weakness and so on.
- **Red Herrings/Local Interest:** These rumours are rooted in the local community, but essentially have no real impact on the adventure. That might not be immediately obvious, though, to the party which could "force" them to interact with NPCs to discern the truth. They can also lead to interesting and fun (impromptu) side quests.
- **False:** Not all rumours are true. Sometimes, a person unknowingly spreads a false rumour while other times they lie. Wise and clever PCs don't believe everything they are told. In particular, while an adventure-critical rumour can give the party an edge, they would do well to check its veracity before basing their tactics on it.

WHERE TO GET RUMOURS?

A PC can learn rumours pretty much wherever people gather together. Particularly good places to do so include:

- Taverns & inns
- Docks
- Marketplaces
- City gates
- Temples

Often the PCs can learn rumours by buying folk drinks (in a tavern or inn), feigning interest in a merchant's goods (at a market), talking with priests (at a temple), overhearing the gossip of other travellers (while waiting to enter a city) or by loitering on the docks to hear the sailors talking. These are just a few examples of how a PC could learn rumours; inventive players should be able to learn them pretty much anywhere.

Some settlements—particularly larger settlements—may even have people who make their living learning what is going on and selling this information. Such rumourmongers may ply their trade in any of the above locales and will doubtless charge the obviously wealthy adventurers extra to learn what he knows!

RECENT LOCAL EVENTS

D%			
1	The nightshade crops are weak this year. It might be the bad weather, but the herbalists are accusing each other of sabotage.	16	A controlled burn cleared part of the forest last year. It was meant for farming, but something has been stirring beneath the ashes, according to the Alaric family.
2	Aelfric has always been the local idiot, but he's been carving messages in the woods. The messages are disjointed and nonsensical, but is it really some kind of code?	17	Aenor Rose has always claimed to have a touch of witch's blood in her. No one really believes it, but they go to get their fortunes told all the same. Some people even listen to what she says.
3	The town gravedigger has been losing at cards, but he never seems to run out of coin. Where is he getting it?	18	The wild boars have been unusually active. While an organized hunt will thin their numbers, no one seems to be asking why so many of them have been driven out of the deeper forest.
4	Small rings of toadstools have been cropping up around town. Are they signs of fae activity, or is that just superstition?	19	A troupe of traveling musicians has set up in town. Colourful and ribald, they have a lot of classic tunes, but they're also spreading the latest news from the capital.
5	The smith's son has disappeared. His father maintains the boy ran away, but is the metalworker's gruff demeanour hiding his hurt, or something else entirely?	20	A group of wandering mercenaries busted up the tavern last night. The owner is offering food and drink to anyone willing to stand up to the gang of bullies calling themselves the Black Guards.
6	A figure in a black cloak has been seen moving through the woods, carrying a hooded lantern. He flashes it three times, and then vanishes into the shadows.	21	Someone defaced the statue in the centre of town with red paint. Is it simple graffiti, or is there a more dire implication?
7	A tiny stone shrine was found in a clearing, black with soot and wet from spilled blood. Who was praying there, and what were they worshipping?	22	A shop was broken into, and the alchemical items looted. Who would do this, and why?
8	Farnam Craigs got so drunk he had to be carried home. The guardsman was muttering something about how it wasn't his fault while he was being carted off, but no one could quite make it out.	23	A notice has been posted in the town square detailing the lord's latest proclamations. Some of them are...unusual.
9	Iboni Darkhair has begun wearing a red silk ribbon around her throat. It means she's spoken for...but who is her mysterious suitor?	24	Shooting stars lit up the sky, last night. According to witnesses, some of them crashed close to town.
10	A man calling himself Saul Strongarm has come to town, and bet a purse of coins no one can defeat him in an arm wrestling match. Thus far that's been true, but is there more to his strength than meets the eye?	25	Kevan Lorn and Cedren Krupt were the best of friends, but they've had a violent falling out recently. Neither will apologize, and every time they see each other, a fight breaks out.
11	A peddler has been hocking love potions. They seem harmless enough...but are they?	26	The well on the east end of town has gone brackish. Some people say if you're near it when the sun goes down, you hear more than the babble of water coming from the darkness.
12	Swarms of aggressive hornets seem to be everywhere. The only person happy about this is Arnulf Janx, because he gets a silver piece for every hive he removes from someone's home.	27	Heggerd Vance was digging a new outhouse, and turned up a fully intact human skull.
13	Nordburt Gaul, resident alchemist and occasional crank, hasn't come out of his workshop for a week. The lights are on, and loud noises come from within, but anytime someone knocks he shouts at them to go away.	28	Someone's been leaving flowers for the Widow Winshiff.
14	The annual Flight of Arrows archery competition is coming up. No one knows what the secret prize is this year, but speculation is rampant.	29	A horse wandered into town today. It had no saddle, but it was shod, and the brand on its flank was unfamiliar.
15	If you go to the tavern and ask for a "special import," the barkeep will pour you a glass of something you've never tasted before. Be warned, it isn't cheap.	30	Several gravestones have fallen over in the town cemetery. Did they fall on their own, or did they have help?
		31	The husband and wife who own the livery stable are fighting again.
		32	Old man Darandell is telling war stories again. People are starting to suspect his tales of valour are more than just exaggerated; some think they're completely made-up.

33	The village children have started playing a new game. It looks harmless enough, but there's something unsettling about the chanting that happens every time a player falls down.
34	The tax men have come again; never have so many half-truths been told with so many straight faces.
35	A call has been put out to form a local militia. Many of the town youths are eagerly signing up.
36	The mayor's wife has lost her wedding ring, and there's a reward for anyone who finds it. There's already whispered suggestions the best place to look is in the bailiff's bedchamber.
37	A knight rode into town recently, lance held high, and banner waving. His name is Sir Rentiss, but there's nothing noble about his bearing.
38	There's going to be a lunar eclipse soon. Some people are excited, but there are others who seem a little on edge wondering what the darkness will bring.
39	A small company of gnomish prospectors came into town, trading all kinds of stones for fresh supplies. No one knows where their claim is, but it seems to be a rich one.
40	A dispatch rider came to town, and delivered a letter to the mayor. No announcements have been made, but its wax seal bore the local lord's sigil.
41	Strange howls have been heard in the night. Skilled woodsmen have no idea what kind of creature makes such horrible noises.
42	A farmstead has been left empty. The animals are still in their pens, and the crops are coming in thick, but the family who lived are gone.
43	Flint Hardwell paid for his drinks, meal and a set of provisions with coins of an unfamiliar stamp. No one knows where the old pauper found such exotic gold, and he isn't telling.
44	A tinker recently came to town. She's making repairs, mending things and putting an extra hone on blades. There's a rumour she has more for sale, though.
45	Soldiers from the local garrison are riding through on a patrol. They claim their presence is just routine, but there's something off about their visit.
46	Kraddick Anvilson has begun construction on an unusual building. When asked its purpose all he'll say is, "It's for keeping important things safe. For a fee."
47	Crane's Curiosities is a dank little shop run by Aria Crane. While no one would call her a witch where she could hear them, those seeking strange components, or the occasional potion, often knock at her back door.
48	The Smoking Pot's food has recently seen an uptick in quality, which is odd because the price of their meat has gone down.

49	A man was recently found on the road, beaten and left for dead. He's recovering his health, but can't remember his name or anything else.
50	The constable has nail up Wanted posters. It seems a few outlaws have been too successful and a reward's been offered for their capture.
51	A traveling priest has set up a tent on the edge of town, and is preaching wild, energetic sermons.
52	Livestock have gone missing in the night and strange tracks have been left in their fields.
53	Spiders have spun huge webs in the tops of several trees deep in the forest.
54	A pseudodragon is roosted above an inn, and refuses to move. Anytime someone gets too close to her, they get stung, and their sleeping bodies have to be dragged away to safety.
55	Three shallow graves were dug in the woods. No one is buried in them, but there was a spatter of blood along nearby stones.
56	Someone's been trapping the forest. The traps are bigger than anything that lives around here.
57	Darius Longstrider has made one of his bi-annual stops in town. A recluse who lives far away, some suspect him of being a druid.
58	A broad-shouldered man recently came to town with his willowy daughter. Their accents are thick, but they're friendly, and practice an unusual trade: tattooing.
59	Lights have been seen in the old hunting lodge. Has the lord come back to use it, or is something else going on?
60	A strange rumbling has been heard underground. It seems random, but what does it mean?
61	Roosting ravens have begun speaking. It's never more than a word, or a short phrase, but it's unnerving all the same.
62	A freak storm rolled in out of nowhere. It isn't leaving, though, which has several people wondering how natural the downpour is.
63	Strange geometric designs have been found in local crops and meadows. No one knows what they mean, or who put them there.
64	The rivers are running high. They've already damaged several bridges, and fording them has grown incredibly risky.
65	A stranger has set up in the corner of the tavern, offering to teach anyone who wants to learn an unusual game involving pipped, rectangular tiles. Once you know how to play, he might ask to wager on a game.
66	Sharrock spends most of his time on his roof, staring up at the stars. If you tell the old man when you were born, and grease his palm with a coin, he may even reveal your fate.
67	A sword and scabbard were found in the forest. It's a quality blade, but there's no sign of the owner.

68	Half a dead bear was found in the woods. The other half is nowhere to be found, but the body looks like it was bitten in two.
69	Creeping killers, vines that grow along trees and slowly strangle them to death, have invaded the forest. They're a bad omen, and some people are waiting for what they're heralding to arrive.
70	A traveller came to town, and has been asking a lot of questions. He has the air of a sage, but no one can work out what he's looking for.
71	Two boys were exploring a cave, and found a strange statue. The idol is small, but has a distinct, disquieting air.
72	A plague of nightmares has swept the town. What, if anything, could be causing so many unpleasant dreams?
73	A wagon was found abandoned on the road. The cargo is still locked in strong boxes, but the driver and animals have disappeared.
74	An unused forester shack caught fire. No one knows what started the blaze, but that shack was completely destroyed.
75	Cords of firewood have gone missing from several homes and businesses. Residents have taken to branding or marking their wood, hoping to catch the thief in the act.
76	The town fathers have started discussing opening a stone quarry. Some people are in favour of the decisions, others are opposed.
77	A bird with a message tied around its leg fell out of the sky. No one knows what the coded message means, or who it was meant for, but speculation is rampant.
78	A group of local actors are putting on a play. No one's sure what it's about yet, but everyone involved in the production says it's based on a legend most of the town has all but forgotten.
79	Someone, or something, has been digging through trash piles and midden heaps. The mess is frustrating, but the townsfolk are more concerned with what is prowling the streets after sundown.
80	A strange mist has been creeping closer to the town. It's unusually thick, and rarely dissipates until the sun is high in the sky.
81	Someone burned an effigy in the town. No one's sure who the target was, but the event has made people a little jumpy.
82	Dreamcatchers are being left on doorsteps in town. Some people are hanging them up, but the gifts make others uneasy.
83	The carpenter has been making some truly elaborate coffins, but he won't say for who. In fact, he's been secretive about the whole affair.
84	Someone tied a yellow ribbon around a tree in the town square. Every person you ask has their own theory about who did it, and why.

85	A local holiday is coming up. Flags are being raised in places of honour, and dozens of small celebrations are planned.
86	Aginor fell into the river when the boards on the bridge snapped. He got wet, but things could have been a lot worse if the river had been swollen.
87	Hervath the barman shaved off his beard. Without it, he looks years younger, and some are saying he did it to catch a certain someone's eye.
88	Some of the local youth are trying to go off on adventures of their own. Someone may need to intervene before they get into trouble.
89	A group of out-of-towners have been asking questions about your group. Are they bards looking for new tales to tell, or are they seeking you out for a more malevolent purpose?
90	A sculptor came to town a week or so ago, and and he's begun work on a new statue. No one's sure what it is, but he emerges from that shed covered in rock dust and grime every, single day.
91	The town is having a yard sale. While merchants are using this as a way to drum up additional business, everyone in town is getting in on the opportunity to rummage, barter and bargain.
92	The Riddle and Rhyme contest is fast approaching. Prizes are awarded to those who construct the cleverest riddles, and to those who solve them.
93	There's talk of a bonfire in a few days' time. The reason why seems uncertain, but perhaps there is no reason except to come together for a night of merriment?
94	Plans are underway to renovate the old mill. There's even talk of importing a new mechanism, so it takes less effort to turn the stones.
95	Something has been marking its territory in the woods. Something big, with a particularly pungent aroma.
96	The old hanging tree hasn't been used in years, but someone found a noose swinging from it. Was it a warning?
97	Fruits and vegetables have gone missing from orchards and gardens. The owners have set watches, but haven't caught the thieves.
98	Hunters have seen a pair of feral children in the forest. Is someone playing a joke, or is there something else going on?
99	Caldwick Venn is the town's resident philosopher. While his rambling lectures are something to be endured, doing so might grant the listener the privilege of examining his personal library.
100	The annual shearing is taking place. While it's hard work, lots of the shepherds and townsfolk have turned it into a series of games.

RECENT REGIONAL EVENTS

D20			
01	<p>Traffic along the river has become dangerous, thanks to increasing number of pirates. Bands of sellswords have seized the opportunity, offering their services to protect travellers and merchants alike. There are some riverfolk who are growing suspicious, though, because the pirate attacks seem to fade into the mist as soon as a mercenary band is given regular employment. Some whisper there are no pirates, but that clever captains created a problem, then showed up to sell the embattled merchants the solution.</p>	07	<p>Rumours of a plague have swept through the countryside. Many towns and villages are quarantining visitors and merchants to be certain they aren't bringing sickness; many others are keeping their gates until the pestilence passes. Hucksters selling miracle cures and false blessings are traveling the roads, as well, trying to make a profit from the suffering.</p>
02	<p>Poachers' pits, huge holes where the unwanted pieces of carcasses are thrown after they've been cleaned, are a common sight in the woods. Human bodies have been found among the cast-off hooves and horns, though, and the bodies are never in one piece. Most of them aren't even complete. Once-friendly communities have begun barring their gates, and outsiders are being met with increased suspicion.</p>	08	<p>Burly toll takers have been sighted on the road, demanding money from travellers. Anyone who refuses the toll is attacked, if not immediately, then not long after. No one knows who is coordinating these extortionists, but in any area where the toll takers are reported all other criminal activity seems to dry up. So whoever is controlling the roads, they're at least providing protection.</p>
03	<p>Foxes have been considered good luck for centuries, but there's a rumour the curious little beasts may not be all they appear. Black foxes have been stalking through the town, and watching the caravan trails as if they're looking for something. They almost seem to be listening to nearby conversations. But why?</p>	09	<p>Lumber is currently at a premium. While the forests are as fertile as they've ever been, the fae creatures lurking within have become quite aggressive. This has led to problems for woodsmen, as well as for travellers. If someone could discover what roused the fae's ire, and find a way to placate them, it would greatly ease the region's tensions and make it safe for woodsmen to return to the forest.</p>
04	<p>Several small villages have been completely destroyed; their people killed and buildings razed. The loss of life, and disruption of regional trade is bad enough, but people in the surrounding communities have begun to panic. Some blame roving bandits, while others claim only goblin raids could be that savage. A few believe it's a power grab by orc tribes. Patrols, both of men-at-arms and of volunteer militia, have increased...but no one seems to know what they're guarding against.</p>	10	<p>There has been talk of a new punishment for criminals. Convicts who possess certain skills will have the opportunity to serve as part of specialized units in the army, and to use their talents as a way to pay their debt to society. While regarded as a great mercy by some, there are others who aren't sure putting blackguards and murders in uniform and giving them weapons is a good idea.</p>
05	<p>A new religious sect is bringing the good word of their faith to the land. They seem harmless at a glance, dressing in comfortable, modest clothes and preaching tenets of love and tolerance. Members of the faith are close-mouthed about the rituals expected once you become a believer, and there are whispers their faith is much, much older than it appears.</p>	11	<p>A royal wedding is happening soon. Lots of people are traveling to the capital, some as guests, and others merely as witnesses to a new chapter in the nation's history. Everyone from inn keeps to peddlers is taking advantage of the increased flow of people, and there are a lot more armed bands on the roads. Some of them are seeking employment as guards, but others have more nefarious deeds in mind.</p>
06	<p>Bandits have begun attacking wagon trains and supply caravans. What was once a problem only for merchants and their guards has grown, and shortages are becoming common. Worse, because of these shortages, prices are climbing faster than most can pay. A price has been offered for the most notorious bandit leaders, but there are those profiting from the shortages who'd rather not see them end just yet.</p>	12	<p>Roads are being improved all over the region. Trees are being cut back, paths are being straightened and crews are laying gravel along with paving stones to create genuine highways. The endeavour isn't cheap, either in terms of materials or manpower. Some people are glad to see their taxes at work, but others are giving the roads nervous looks, and whispering that soldiers can move just as fast as trade goods down a proper highway. They also point to the local lord's warlike demeanour and his rivalry with one of his neighbours.</p>

13 Severe storms have raged across the locality, leaving destruction in their wake. While most people are trying to recover their losses, and repair the damage, there were marks left behind that no storm could cause. Livestock torn open, claw marks down doors and trees snapped in half. The tracks were completely wiped out, but people have begun to wonder; did these creatures simply use the storm to camouflage themselves, or did they somehow bend nature to their wills?

14 Gold was recently discovered in the area. What were once quiet hills or slow-flowing rivers have now been set upon by prospectors, all of them hoping to strike it rich. Some have, and others haven't. Shanty towns are springing up and the droves of hangers-on and followers have come as well. From money-changers and tinkers, to whores and claim-jumpers, the metal fever is coming to a boil.

15 There are rumours of escaped slaves fleeing their masters, and using this area as a safe haven. Bounty hunters and slave takers have also heard the rumours, and practitioners of these rough trades have been seen searching for escapees. There are reports some people have been led away in chains, but there's argument about whether they were escaped slaves, or simply people destined to take an escaped slave's place.

16 There are whispers of dark cults infiltrating towns and villages. There's been talk of stolen children, blasphemous rituals and the offering of souls, but no one seems to have any real proof. It's always something that happened in another town, to someone else. The talk is beginning to stir real fear, though, and there have already been accusations. None of them have come to anything, yet, but it's only a matter of time before people start searching for these cults...whether or not they exist.

17 A drought has come, and shows no signs of leaving. Tempers are running nearly as hot as the days themselves, and some lords have signalled their intentions to start damming the rivers crossing their lands. A few have indicated they will do this without receiving permission from those higher in station than themselves, which could quickly escalate to more than harsh words if the rains don't come soon.

18 Farmers unearthed relics from a bygone age, during this year's plowing. Some have found arrowheads, and others coins of a strange mint, but a lucky few have turned up jewels. It's rumoured there may even be enchanted items lurking beneath the ground, just waiting for the right set of hands to dig them up. While there's a rush to be the first to find the treasures, more experienced hunters know it's only a matter of time before someone digs up a curse. Or something worse.

19 There are some people who believe, at the end of this calendar year, the world is going to end. Several communities are divesting themselves of physical possessions, letting their fields go fallow and releasing most of their animals into the wild. Several of these doomsayers have taken to the roads to bring word of the coming apocalypse to those ignorant of it so they can prepare themselves for judgment. Most ignore them, but every now and again, a new convert joins their sackcloth ranks.

20 Dissent has been fomenting against the current government. While it's just a few grumbles right now, there have been some who've suggested the power should be in the hands of the people, and not the gentry. While no torch-wielding mob has formed yet, there has been a suspicious increase in the number of guardsmen those in power feel are necessary for keeping the peace.



LOCAL LEGENDS

D20

01	<p>The lord who once ruled these lands was a perfect gentleman, both well-bred and well-married. Behind the silent walls of his fortress, though, he indulged in depraved, bloody rituals. Though his castle was razed during a revolt, no one ever found his hidden Screaming Chamber. That's why the forest around the site is filled with whipporwills; they're still seeking the souls of his victims, to guide them to their rest.</p>	06	<p>There's a huge oak tree in the centre of a grove outside town. Every spring the branches are filled with strips of cloth fluttering in the wind. According to myth, the tree holds the spirit of a powerful dryad, and anyone strong and pure enough to climb the tree, and tie the name of their true love to one of the branches earns the dryad's blessings in matters of the heart. No few suitors have broken their arms climbing the tree, but many unions come from the tradition.</p>
02	<p>The Band of the Red Brand were some of the most infamous local brigands. They were vicious, killing every member of any merchant train they targeted, before vanishing into the woods with their loot. When the band was finally captured, though, none of their spoils were recovered. They were hanged to a man, but the legend says there's a hidden grotto or forgotten cave somewhere in these woods, rich with the band's plunder.</p>	07	<p>There's a faded marker in the cemetery that simply won't fall over. The grave sits apart from the others, and the head-high obelisk refuses to bow to wind, rain or time's remorseless march. Here Kerowyn Brooks, the Cut-Wife of Sorrow Marsh, was buried. If you circle her grave three times at midnight, chanting her name and spreading a circle of salt, her ghost will rise and answer three questions. A few townsfolk claim when they did it nothing happened, but others stay strangely quiet, claiming a little too loudly that it's just a stupid story.</p>
03	<p>Happy is the home whose hearth bears a cat. The saying is a common one, but there's an older myth behind it. The grimalkin, a fae cat-like creature, once roamed these woods. It warred against the men who entered its domain, but after years of ill fortune and bloodshed, they reached a truce. Humans could live in its domain, as long as they respected the forest, and opened their homes to the grimalkin's children. It's why so many houses have cats and why so many people leave dishes of water or cream out. It's also why it's considered ill fortune to kill a cat.</p>	08	<p>The Cracked Caverns have always been a mystery. Their black, weathered mouths have been used for shelter by foresters and for privacy by lovers, for as long as anyone can remember. The caves go deep, though, and no one claims to have fully explored them. The stories say if you go beyond the fire pits left by travellers, you'll find walls covered in strange paintings. And if you go back far enough, those paintings seem to show fire-breathing beasts battling stick-men.</p>
04	<p>The Black Rock Inn can't boast anything too special. The food is good, the fire warm and most nights there are at least a few locals drinking and gaming. There is a room on the second floor, though, the inn keep hasn't let out since he was a young man. Footsteps can be heard through the door on quiet nights along with the creak of a rope, and whispered words just loud enough to be heard, but not loud enough to be understood. The inn keep won't say what happened in the room, but speculation rages about what haunts the room just above the common room.</p>	09	<p>Tattered Hawthorne is a flower that only grows in certain parts of the woods, blooming no more than once a generation under a full moon. While the ragged petals give the blossom a tragic beauty, it's said these rare plants are the key ingredient to some of the most powerful potions ever devised. Tended by druids and greatly prized by healers, in the right hands they can cure any illness, break curses or if enough is harvested, bring back the recently deceased.</p>
05	<p>Babies born under the Hero's Star are destined for great things. The Scarlet Knight, champion of a hundred duels, Arlan Faine, the Fist of the Faith who stood alone against a horde of demons and General Karela Longthorn, who led the Shining Legion to victory a thousand years ago, were all Hero Born. While some townsfolk try to have their children born underneath the red star, others do their best to avoid it. Because, while the heroes are the ones that stand out, people tend to forget great people sometimes do terrible things.</p>	10	<p>A thousand years ago a great champion patrolled the lands. A black-clad warrior mounted on a black destrier, it was said his honour knew no bounds. When he was ambushed by a force of invading foes, even death would not make him lie down. He fought on, and on, throwing back wave after wave until, finally, he was the only one left standing. If you travel the north road during certain times of the year, you'll hear the ring of steel, and the beat of heavy hooves. And if you ever meet the black warrior, and he issues you a challenge, do not accept it. He cannot be defeated, and only one who would take up his mantle can release him from his duty.</p>

11	<p>There's a fire-blackened clearing deep in the woods. Animals avoid it, and nothing grows there. A circle of dark stones sits in the middle of the aged char, and no one knows where they came from, or how long they've been there. The whispered tales among the elders say it was once a place where some unfortunate soul made a deal with a devil. They can't seem to agree on <i>which</i> devil it was, but they do agree the barriers between the planes are thin there and if the proper name is spoken within that circle, the devil appears to those seeking to beg a bargain.</p>	16	<p>The Dragon's Lair is an ancient ruin no one, even the scholars who study it, truly understands. It remains half-submerged in the ground, making the crude, draconic bust capping the pyramidal structure look like it's trying to tear itself from the earth. On certain days of the year, when the sun hits it just right, the stone head appears to grow a shadowy body. While the trick of the light is impressive, some believe it's only when that shadow form is present the lair can be entered...or exited.</p>
12	<p>The Fall of Tears is a place of beauty. The waterfall, and the small surrounding lake, draws swimmers in the summer, and skaters in the winter. However, in the fall and spring, on equinox nights when the spray is chill, and the base of the falls is shrouded in mist, it's said those who leap from the peak, and dive into the unknown, surface in the fae's realms. A few people try every year. Some survive, while others don't. A few disappear, but where they go is something no one has been able to determine.</p>	17	<p>If you wander the paths in the deeper forests, you may stumble upon an Elfhome. These unusual structures are formed whenever trees grow together in just the right way to merge, creating an elevated shelter for canny travellers and weary woodsmen. Some Elfhomes are little more than hammocks made of branches, while others are the size of small houses. Most seem natural enough at a glance, but there are campfire stories of travellers who climbed into an Elfhome to rest and vanished.</p>
13	<p>It's bad luck to give old clothes to a scarecrow. The garments we wear pick up the stains of our lives, and those bits and pieces can sometimes worm their way into the sticks and straw making up these cornfield guardians. The story of Pumpkin Head Jarro tells the tale of how a farm wife dressed her scarecrow in one of her foul-tempered husband's old shirts, and how she found dead birds, slaughtered livestock and wrecked crops every morning. The cruelty of the garments had leached into the creature, and it was only when she set the scarecrow aflame the terror ended.</p>	18	<p>The Babel Brook is a noisy little stream that brings fresh water straight from the mountains. Always clean, clear and crisp, travellers make certain to fill their waterskins from the brook. It's said the closer to the source the water comes from, the purer and clearer it is for the drinker. There are even legends that water taken straight from the spring can wipe away the weight of years, returning youthful strength and vigour to those few who find its source.</p>
14	<p>When husbands and wives wed, one of the gifts they exchange is cold iron daggers. They gently press the blades against each other's skin, and seal their union with a kiss. The tradition goes back to the tale of The Maiden in The Tower, who was suspicious of the handsome suitor with honey in his voice, and silver in his tongue. When he pressed himself upon her in the dark, the cold iron revealed he was a demon in disguise, and she drove him from her bed with the blade. No one really believes it...but you can't be too careful on your wedding night.</p>	19	<p>The spring winds bring piper's nights with them. The wind whistles through the trees, and sings through the mountains, creating the illusion of a far-off song that comes and goes with the evening breezes. There are some nights, though, when there is no wind. On those nights, if you strain your ears, you might hear the mournful notes of the piper. You shouldn't do that, though, because it's said if you can hear the piper, then he's close enough to hear you.</p>
15	<p>There's a half-collapsed temple along the eastern road, but the stone walls keep out the wind if travellers need to shelter. There's also a deep pool, fed by streams from the open mouths of three stone faces. It's said some of the old spirits the place was once dedicated to still remain, and that they'll bless you if you leave a coin in the pond. Those who take instead of giving, though, have been cursed until they've made restitution to the water's guardian spirits.</p>	20	<p>The old ruined mill has been silent for many years. While the stones no longer turn, the scorch marks along the heavy, leaning beams are a testament to what happened. Some people said it was an accident, but others whispers about what the miller was doing to his wife and daughters. And about the monsters his depravities brought forth. According to half-remembered local lore, the miller's wife tied him to the stones before torching the mill.</p>

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