

# DOLMENWOOD

Welcome to Dolmenwood



Gavin Norman



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Version 2.0



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# About Dolmenwood

*A wanderer's first steps into the tricksome and beguiling world of Dolmenwood.*

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## WELCOME TRAVELLER!

The forest of Dolmenwood lies in the little-frequented northern reaches of the kingdom, under the rule of the Duchy of Brackenwold. Though mortals, with their towns and towers and cathedrals, now claim dominion over this stretch of tangled woods, fungus-encrusted glades, and fetid marsh, other powers held sway here in ancient times and—some would say—remain the true masters of the realm.

Within Dolmenwood, the magical and otherworldly are always close at hand. Rings of standing stones loom in glades hallowed by pagan cults of yesteryear; the energy of ley lines pulses beneath the earth, tapped by those in possession of the requisite secrets; portals to the perilous realm of Fairy allow transit between worlds, for those charmed or fated by the lords of Elfland. Even the herbs, plants, and fungi of Dolmenwood have grown in odd directions, absorbing the magic which infuses the place. Some say that the waters are enchanted. Some say the stones and the earth are too.

Step then, bold or foolhardy adventurer, into the hoary forest realm of Dolmenwood and beware, for little here is as it seems!

## WHAT'S IN THIS DOCUMENT?

This document consists of an introduction for players to the people, places, and factions of Dolmenwood, including a gazetteer of the most famous locations. All information presented here is common knowledge that can easily be gleaned by talking with the folk of the Wood.

## DOLMENWOOD PLAYER'S BOOK

This document is an excerpt of the *Dolmenwood Player's Book*—the complete player's guide to campaigns set in Dolmenwood. In addition to the introductory material in this document, the following topics are elucidated in the *Dolmenwood Player's Book*.

## Character Classes

Full descriptions—including all relevant tables—for eight classes of adventurer recommended for use in the Dolmenwood setting:

- ▶ **Dolmenwood Elf:** Ageless denizens of Fairy who have crossed over into the mortal world for reasons that they seldom reveal.
- ▶ **Dolmenwood Knight:** Warriors who serve one of the noble houses of Dolmenwood, doing their bidding and upholding their honour.
- ▶ **Friar:** Wandering monastics who spread the gospel of the One True God.
- ▶ **Grimalkin:** Mercurial feline shapeshifters, native to the Fairy realm.
- ▶ **Hunter:** Adventurers who are at home in the wilds of the forest, hunting for food or trophies. Expert trackers, stalkers, and killers.
- ▶ **Minstrel:** Musicians and poets drawn to a life of wandering and adventure.
- ▶ **Moss dwarf:** Stocky demihumans who dwell in the dank reaches of the Wood. As moss dwarfs age, their flesh becomes overrun with plants, moulds, and fungi.
- ▶ **Woodgrue:** Bat-faced goblins, renowned for their love of music, revelry, and arson.

## Character Races

Rules for creating characters by selecting race and class separately, for those who prefer this method.

## Additional Character Details

Dolmenwood-specific details for use in creating characters, such as a catalogue of the languages spoken in the region, the influence of the phases of the moon on mortals, and tables noting the most common names used by folk of various races.

## Expanded Equipment

A greatly expanded selection of equipment—including a miscellany of herbs, pipeweeds, and spirituous beverages.



## OTHER DOLMENWOOD BOOKS

**The Dolmenwood Campaign Book:** An exhaustive tome detailing the secrets and lore of Dolmenwood, suitable for referees who wish to run campaigns in the setting. Included are full descriptions of what lies in the 180+ hexes of the Dolmenwood campaign map.

**The Dolmenwood Monster Book:** A selection of weird beasts, fickle fairies, and strange spirits that inhabit the wild places of the Wood. Each monster is presented with a colour illustration, stats and special abilities in a quick-to-use format, and random tables of traits, lairs, and encounters.

**Dolmenwood adventure modules:** A series of adventures set in Dolmenwood is also available, presented in an easy-to-use format for the time-pressed referee.



## A NOTE ON GENDER

While orders of knights and friars in the real world only accepted men, such restrictions do not exist in Dolmenwood.

## A NOTE ON RELIGION

It is intended that the referee should locate Dolmenwood in a wider campaign setting, with its own deities and religious orders. The specifics of the dominant religion in Dolmenwood—the Church of the One True God—are thus left deliberately somewhat vague, allowing it to act as a placeholder for an evangelistic monotheistic sect that exists in the wider campaign setting. In semi-historical campaigns, the real-world Catholic church is an easy match.

### INSPIRATIONAL MEDIA

- Goblin Market*—Christina Rossetti
- Gormenghast*—Mervyn Peake
- Here is Where We Used to Sing*—Fovea Hex
- Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell*—Susanna Clarke
- Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell*—BBC series
- Krabat*—Ottfried Preußler
- Lyonesse*—Jack Vance
- Lud-in-the-Mist*—Hope Mirrlees
- Mio My Son*—Astrid Lindgren
- Musick to Play in the Dark (Volumes 1 and 2)*—Coil
- Over the Garden Wall*—Patrick McHale
- Princess Mononoke*—Hayao Miyazaki
- Smith of Wootton Major*—J.R.R. Tolkien
- Spirited Away*—Hayao Miyazaki
- Stardust*—Neil Gaiman
- The King of Elfland's Daughter*—Lord Dunsany
- The Ladies of Grace Adieu*—Susanna Clarke
- The White People*—Arthur Machen
- Thunder Perfect Mind*—Current 93

# The Journey Begins

*An overview of the Wood and the people and monsters that dwell there.*

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## THE WOOD

### The Tangled Wilds of Dolmenwood

Sprawled at the foot of the accursed Table Downs in the northern reaches of the kingdom, Dolmenwood consists of a swathe of tangled, partly inhabited forest a hundred-odd miles across at its widest point. When one steps beyond the maintained roads which connect the few settlements within the forest's bounds, the trees and brambles of Dolmenwood draw in close. Moss, lichen, and weird fungi proliferate in the dank undergrowth. Stretches of treacherous marsh lurk concealed in the lowlands, waiting for unwary travellers to stumble to their doom.

### Hamlets, Inns, and Homely Hearths

A thread of rustic civilisation runs through the heart of Dolmenwood, with hamlets and inns dotting the handful of roads that penetrate the Wood. The people of the forest are a quaint and superstitious lot, but welcoming of outsiders.

### Beasts, Spirits, and Monsters

The time-honoured exhortation “do not stray from the path!” refers not only to the dangers of becoming lost in the dark and befuddling wilds of Dolmenwood. Fell beasts, tricksome fairies, restless spirits of the long deceased, great and terrible wyrms, and weird fungal monstrosities also lie in wait, eager to lay hands on foolhardy mortals who wander into their clutches. Those who step from the well-worn path must truly be wary!

### Standing Stones

Scattered in every obscure corner of Dolmenwood are standing stones of all shapes and sizes—lonely, moss-covered obelisks, altars traced with runes long illegible, glades ringed with mighty dolmens. It is said that these stones were erected by the cults of gods now long forgotten, for use in their heathen rites. Travellers in Dolmenwood would be wise to not tamper with these stones nor set foot within the glades they ward, for the sinister Drune claim them as their own and do not suffer trespassers.

### Fungi and Strange Herbs

The otherworldly energies that permeate Dolmenwood promote the growth of all manner of strange (some say magical) fungi and herbs in the undergrowth. Foraging for rare specimens can prove a lucrative business!

## MORTALS AND FAIRIES

### Fairies of the Undying Realm

Dolmenwood sits at a place where the boundary between the mortal world of men and women and the immortal realm of Fairy grows thin. It is thus that fairies of all stripes—both wicked and benign—haunt the deeps of Dolmenwood. Some even venture into the towns of mortals and mix with common folk.

The mighty lords of Fairy have an ambiguous relationship with Dolmenwood. Some have no interest in it whatsoever, some view it with curiosity and tread its paths at times, while others view parts of the Wood as their own property and resent the trespass of mortals.

### Elves, Grimalkin, and Woodgrues

Among the myriad races of Fairy, a small number have a trustworthy enough reputation that they may sometimes be found openly in the company of humans: elves, otherworldly and beautiful, the little cat folk known as grimalkin, and bat-faced woodgrues are the most commonly encountered fairies.

It is exceedingly rare for such beings to permanently set up home in a village or town among mortals, but the sight of them—an elf perusing the wares of a peddler, a grimalkin dancing a jig upon a tavern table, or a woodgrue blowing smoke rings from a long pipe—is not so unusual as to raise too many eyebrows.

### Moss Dwarfs and Goat-People

Humans are not the only sentient mortal race to call Dolmenwood home. The dank, fungal-infested lowlands of the central eastern woods is home to a shy and stunted race called moss dwarfs, part mortal flesh and part plant or fungus. The reaches of south-western Dolmenwood are goat country, with human settlements ruled since ancient times by cruel, aristocratic goat-people.

### Other Sentient Beings

If one ventures off the beaten track in Dolmenwood, creatures of a wide variety of other kinds may be encountered. Goblin tricksters peddle Fairy fruits and other questionable wares; scrabies emerge from their network of tunnels, eager to trade; even a bird, animal, or fish may surprise travellers by greeting them from the wayside, spinning a riddle, or cursing their intrusion.

## FACTIONS AND POWERS

### The Duke of Brackenwold— Lord of the Realm of Dolmenwood

Ruling from the (supposedly) impregnable Castle Brackenwold on the south-eastern verge of the forest, the Dukes of Brackenwold trace their line back to the earliest settlers in the region. All mortal folk within the Wood—from the humblest beggar to the highest lord—pay fealty to the Duke and the whole forest is his property, at least in principle (there are those who dispute his absolute rule). In recent generations, the Dukes of Castle Brackenwold have taken a belligerent bent, undermining (and sometimes outright attacking) the other factions which hold sway over Dolmenwood.

### The Church of the One True God— Pious Ally of the Duke

The monotheistic religion sanctioned by the Duchy and widely spread throughout Dolmenwood and beyond. Worship focuses on the pantheon of saints, rather than on the God himself, who remains somewhat abstract.

The Church's presence in Dolmenwood is, in modern times, somewhat diminished; many shrines and chapels that once saw regular worship have fallen into ruin and been reclaimed by the forest. Some within the Church—in particular, the Bishop of Brackenwold—wish to rediscover and re-sanctify the lost shrines.

### The Cold Prince— Banished Fairy Lord of Winter

Where now mortals reign, great elf lords once held court. The entirety of Dolmenwood was once the domain of a fairy noble known as the Cold Prince. According to legend, he ruled the Wood from a castle of ice on a high cliff overlooking the frozen waters of Lake Longmere (for winter ruled eternal in Dolmenwood while the Cold Prince had dominion).

When humans began to settle the wild glades of Dolmenwood, a great war between fairy and mortal ensued, wracking the forest. After years of combat, mortals prevailed and the Cold Prince was banished to his domain in Fairy. Fearful tales of the Cold Prince's return to Dolmenwood and his icy wrath weave a common thread through the folklore of those who dwell within the bounds of his erstwhile domain.

### Drune—Masters of the Standing Stones

The Drune are a cabal of sorcerers who roam the wood, cloaked in black. They claim the magical energies of Dolmenwood as their own and are self-appointed masters of all standing stones and ley lines. What gods they worship is a matter of conjecture—for they guard their secrets with their lives—but in the eyes of the Church they are heathens to be eradicated. The rustic folk of the Wood fear to speak the name “Drune”, for they believe it is accursed. Instead, they refer to the cult by euphemistic titles such as “the Hooded Men” or “the Watchers of the Wood”. Kidnap by the Drune is among the greatest fears of the simple folk of Dolmenwood. It is said that the sorcerers deal in devil worship and human sacrifice.

### Witches—Worshippers of Ancient Gods

Witches are mortal women who worship the ancient wood-gods that lurk in the forbidden depths of Dolmenwood.

Their aims are obscure, but it is known that they gather beneath the moon to conduct their heathen worship and to work magic. In folklore, witches are variously portrayed as depraved practitioners of human sacrifice, lustful seductresses (for they are said to be eternally shapely and young), and ministers of potent cures and charms.

### The King of the Wood—Depraved Unicorn God

A wicked, trickster figure of local folklore, said to keep unholy court in the twisted northern woods, where his armies of wicked goat-people and other creatures of chaos lair. The King is known by various names; common epithets are “the Nag Lord” and “Old Shub”. In folktales, the King is depicted as being part man, part unicorn, with nine legs (nine being regarded as an especially accursed number).

### Ygraine the Sorceress— Mysterious Lady of the North

A reclusive figure, nominally the ruler of the village of Meagre's Reach and head of the noble House Mordlin. She dwells in a many-tiered manse overlooking a black lake and it is rumoured that her sprawling home is haunted by fairy folk. Her guests are infrequent but well-coiffed, so the people of the Reach say. The sorceress herself no longer makes public appearances, though it is said that she is a woman of patrician beauty, refined in all aspects and wealthy beyond measure.



# A Dolmenwood Gazetteer

*The most commonly traversed or spoken of regions of the Wood.*

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## CASTLE BRACKENWOLD

The seat of the Duchy of Brackenwold and ancestral home to the nobility of the line. Within the castle, alongside the mighty garrison maintained by the duke, is a great cathedral, making this fortress-town also the centre of the Church's power in the region. Indeed, the bishop of Brackenwold is said to hold equal sway over Dolmenwood to the duke himself. Castle Brackenwold is an ancient place whose foundations are thought to have been built before the Brackenwolders came to Dolmenwood. Some even say that the castle was originally of fairy construction.

## DREG

A rough port-town and fishing village on the marshy banks of the Hameth. Dreg has a seedy reputation as a haunt for thieves, smugglers, charlatans, and rascals of all stripes, made only worse (in the eyes of right-minded outsiders) by its proximity to the island of Shantywood, a notorious port of ill-repute run by the seductive and ruthless Madame Shantywood. Aside from its profusion of taverns and gambling dens, Dreg is known for its fine sausages, made from the flesh of the swine kept in the bogs to the north of the village.

## DWELMFURGH AND THE WITCHING RING

Those who wander far in the western reaches of Dolmenwood speak of a vast ring of frost-rimed stones, erected by the ancients for purpose now unknown. The folk of Dolmenwood know these sister-stones as the "summerstones", the great ring which they demarcate as the "witching ring", and the woods contained within as "Dwelmfurgh".

## FORT VULGAR

A dilapidated palisade and crude keep overlooking the northern end of Lake Longmere. Occupied and (poorly) maintained by Sir Osric the Gaunt and a small retinue of mounted knights, boatmen, and domestic servants. Osric is a vassal of the Duke of Brackenwold and responsible for assessing and collecting taxes from all boats and barges travelling south across the lake. This intake is not insubstantial given the regular river traffic to the Woodcutter's Encampment and Dreg (and popularity of lawless Shantywood Isle among the bargemen, sailors, and travellers who drift along the waterways south of the lake).

## HAG'S ADDLE

A region of mazy swampland around the banks of the River Hameth as it drains from Lake Longmere into southern Dolmenwood. The place is shunned not only due to the natural hazards of the marsh, but also because of the hag who haunts its sodden expanse. It is said that she has the power to see into the past and future and to raise the dead, but that the price she demands in return is perilous.

## THE HIGH WOLD

A barony which encompasses the south-western corner of Dolmenwood. The High Wold is noted for the ancient line of aristocratic goat-people who rule in tandem with the human lords of the region. (Some even say that nobles of the two races have interbred.) The barony has become somewhat wild of late under the lax rule of Baron Hogwarsh: highwaymen ply the roads and charlatans peddle questionable wares. Locals fear that the avaricious hand of the Drune is creeping out of the forest and into the High Wold, taking advantage of the baron's laxity.

## LAKE LONGMERE

Known colloquially as "the heart of the wood", the great lake Longmere—twelve miles broad at its widest point—is said to be the seat of an ancient magic in Dolmenwood. The bold anglers and barge-men who frequent the shores and waters speak fearfully of strange beasts in the waters and of the mind-melting wailings of the Big Chook—a water monster said to be as large as an island. Other legends speak of the ruined fairy castle—Hoarblight Keep—whose frost-crustled towers may be espied looming above the lake's western shore. The castle is believed to have belonged to the Cold Prince—who once ruled the Wood—and to hold many secrets of the past.

## LANKSHORN

The northernmost settlement in the High Wold, the market town of Lankshorn lies within a bowshot of the forest's border, acting as one of two "thresholds" into Dolmenwood (the other being Castle Brackenwold, in the east). Rumours speak of the odd culture of Lankshorn, as the traditions of the civilised south meld with the quaint, superstitious ways of Dolmenwood. The respect held by the Lankshorners for the goat-lords is an apt example of the cultural *mélange* in this border-town. It is also said that the finest bladesmith in the High Wold makes his home in Lankshorn.





## MULCHGROVE

The southern-central region of the Wood is a dank lowland riddled with fungal forests, treacherous bogs, and twisted willow-woods. The region is little traversed by all save the moss dwarfs who are native to the place, loving fungi and moulds and all that is dank. Mulchgrove is a paradise for mycologists, as a profusion of magical fungi can be found there. Many an adventurer wanders into Mulchgrove on a fungus-foraging errand for a wizard or herbalist, seeking rare specimens, while hoping to stay out of the clutches of the sentient, fungal monstrosities that also lurk there.

## PRIGWORT

The largest settlement within Dolmenwood proper (that is, beneath the eaves of the forest). The town of Prigwort is the centre-point of trade in the region, being located at the crossing of the main north-south and east-west roads. Prigwort is especially famed, even in the wider region of the Duchy, for its breweries and distilleries. Fine Prigwort spirits, flavoured with the wild herbs of the forest, are to be found on the tables of connoisseurs far and wide. Of interest to adventurers, it is also known that a wizard of commercial bent makes his home within the town.

## THE RUINS OF ST CLEWYD'S

East of Lake Longmere, in the depths of Dolmenwood, a great monastery was founded, of old. Following a night-time raid of unknown provenance some centuries ago, the abbey has lain in ruins. The Church has endeavoured on several occasions (if rumour is to be believed) to re-sanctify the ruin, but to no avail. The place is said to be haunted. Indeed, many say that the Wood itself rejects such ostentatious doings of men. Still, stories of the treasures which may lie untouched in the chapel crypts abound.

## THE VALLEY OF WISE BEASTS

In the northern reaches of the forest, this long valley, though uninhabited by men, is said to be ruled by an odd consortium of speaking beasts. The origin of these creatures is unknown, but their numbers appear to be ever increasing. There are those who fear that the valley may come to overflow and the whole of Dolmenwood be taken over by sapient animals.

# Rumour and Folktale

*Tales which may be heard on the lips of minstrels and common folk.*

## SPIES OF THE COLD PRINCE

Local folklore is stuffed with cautionary tales of the former fairy lord of Dolmenwood tricking a feckless mortal into liberating him from exile in Fairy. There are those, however, who take such stories with more than a grain of salt, reporting of frost-clad fairies upon the roads—undoubtedly servants of the Cold Prince. It is claimed that these frigid elves will pay icy jewels and fairy silver in exchange for information about what goes on in the deep woods.

## RICHES OF HOARBLIGHT KEEP

Anglers and hunters who ply their trade around the western shores of Lake Longmere sometimes speak of a pale white keep spied atop the cliffs. Those of especial sagacity knowingly refer to the place as Hoarblight Keep. Legend has it that this is the accursed palace of the Cold Prince, lain in ruins for many centuries, shrouded in fearsome wards and bans. It is said that the earthly hoard of the Cold Prince still lies untouched in the catacombs of the keep.

## THE NAG-LORD MOVES

### SOUTH

Wicked goat-folk in the employ of the King of the Wood have been sighted in the vicinity of the ruins of St Clewyd's of late, far to the south of their master's dominion. The folk of Prigwort mutter fearfully of war. Word has it that the Duke's forces are massing in the town in anticipation of an attack.



## GOAT-LORD RIVALRIES

It is well known that the goat-lords Ramius and Malbleat—half brothers—are bitter rivals, scheming to undermine the other's reputation and influence. Rumour in Lankshorn says that both lords are amassing troops in secret and that their animosity will soon erupt into open war. The Lankshorners fear that their town may be the stage upon which the two goat armies clash.

## THE VENGEANCE OF THE DRUNE

It is common knowledge that Bishop Sanguine despises the Drune above all. The witch-hunters of the order of St Faxis are said to now be fully focused on rooting out the cult of sorcerers. The reprisal of the Drune cannot be far off, however. Red-eyed ravens and ghostly owls have been spied congregating around churches—an omen that the wrath of the Drune is turning toward the Church.

## THE HAG'S EYE

Those who venture into the stinking marshes north of the village of Dreg speak in fearful tones of the Hag, an ancient and terrible sorceress who haunts the region. According to legend, bold Sir Hankley skewered her left eye upon his lance and cast the horrid organ into the bog. After devouring the impudent and ill-fated knight, the Hag began to search for her plucked eye. It is said that her search continues to this day and that she would be greatly indebted to one who locates her lost eye.

## RISE OF THE TALKING BEASTS

The number of sapient beasts in Dolmenwood is growing. Such creatures are said to be especially multitudinous in the northern reaches of the Wood. Locals fear that some unknown force is rallying the talking beasts, preparing to overrun the forest and wrest town and bower from their rightful human owners.

## THE WITCH'S PROPHECY

Legend speaks of a prophecy concerning the downfall of the noble house of Brackenwold. According to the tale, the Dukes of Brackenwold made pact in ancient times with the secret gods of the Wood, being granted rulership over all of Dolmenwood for forty-four generations, in exchange for their souls after death. The most popular telling of this tale has it that the pact has almost expired and that ruin will soon fall upon the Duke and his family.

## THE DREAM THIEF

Folk in Castle Brackenwold speak of recent nights of restless sleep in which they dream only of drifting upon a vast body of purple water. This is portends the workings of the fairy lord known as The Duke Who Cherishes Dreams. It is said that he steals the dreams of mortals and—with the aid of the sorceress Ygraine—plots to drag the whole of Dolmenwood into his somnambulant domain.

## FAIRIES IN PRIGWORT

Word has it that the Bishop suspects the evil influence of the fairy Prince Mallowheart upon the leaders of Prigwort, the Brewmasters. It is said that the Brewmasters have secret congress with fairies during nights when Mallowheart's jaded entourage is sighted nearby. The people of Prigwort vehemently deny this rumour, of course.

## THE LAIR OF BIG CHOOK

Fishers' tales abound with accounts of the lake monster Big Chook which haunts the waters of Lake Longmere. Most of these tales linger on the horrific deaths meted out on those who encounter the beast, but a smattering speak of its lair. It is claimed that Big Chook slumbers in a crystal cavern deep in the lake, where it guards a hoard of fabulous treasures. Among the hoard is said to be the long lost Mirror of the Witch Queen—a magical doorway to the realm of the witches' dark gods.

## DEWIDORT OF SMERNE

Those who travel the roads of Dolmenwood speak fearfully of the ghostly highwayman Dewidort of Smerne. This phantom has haunted the roads of the Wood since the village of his origin—situated in the wild moors north of Dolmenwood—was submerged in the black ooze of the ever-expanding bog. The secret location of his treasure hoard is a topic of great interest to adventurers, rogues, and the law alike.

## THE DEAD IN DOLMENWOOD

A curious property of Dolmenwood is that the souls of those who die there are believed to retain their connection to the corpse indefinitely. This is known, in scriptural terms, as "mortalism" and is a phenomenon of some dispute within the Church. It is only through the careful ministrations of the order of Saint Signis the Silent (also known as the order of lichwards) that the dead are put to rest.

## BE WARY OF THE OWLS

The common folk of the Wood fear owls of all kinds, for they are regarded as an omen of death. Many a folk tale speaks of mortals who were driven mad by the gaze of an owl or disappeared after encountering one of the birds by surprise. It is perhaps no coincidence that the chosen symbol of the Drune—found carved into rocks and trees wherever they gather—is an owl in flight.



# DOLMENWOOD

## Want More Dolmenwood?

The complete Dolmenwood setting will be published as a 3 book set packed with fairy tale magic and eerie folk horror.

**Book 1: The Dolmenwood Player's Book:** A complete player's guide to Dolmenwood, including an easy-to-digest setting intro, new classes and races, and reams of new equipment, random tables and rules to bring a fairy tale flavour to life in your games.

**Book 2: The Dolmenwood Campaign Book:** The essential referee's guide to running campaigns in Dolmenwood, including full info on history, secrets, and factions, plus detailed write-ups of the 180+ hexes that make up the Dolmenwood campaign map!

**Book 3: The Dolmenwood Monster Book:** The companion to the Campaign Book, this tome details a host of weird fairy tale inspired monsters that lurk in Dolmenwood.

Support the Dolmenwood Patreon for access to cutting edge (and heavily moss-coated) Dolmenwood content!

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