

WELCOME TO
**DOLMEN
-WOOD**



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Dolmenwood is an enchanted forest campaign setting — creepy, whimsical, and psychedelic in equal measure — for B/X and other vintage fantasy games. In-depth detail on the setting, suitable for referees, is furnished in the *Wormskin* zine. This document is a guide for players taking their first footsteps under the forest's eaves.

The forest of Dolmenwood lies in the little-frequented northern reaches of the kingdom of _____, under the rule of the Duchy of Brackenwold. Though men, with their fortresses 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 the forest, 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 developed in odd directions, absorbing the magic which infuses the place. Some say that the waters are enchanted. Some say the stones and the earth itself. Perhaps both are right.

For those who plan to visit this magical, monster-haunted forest, the information in this short guide will prove an indispensable companion on the way, elucidating the most commonly known people, places, legends, monsters, and races which call Dolmenwood their home.



CONTRIBUTORS

Gavin Norman [words & editing]
the-city-of-iron.blogspot.com

Matt Hildebrand [layout]
bigbaldmatt.com

Greg Gorgonmilk [words & graphics]
gorgonmilk.blogspot.com

Andrew Walter [illustrations]
andrewwalter.co.uk

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Sentient Races

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 not only folk of mannish origin or kindred races who dwell there; fairies of various kinds are also drawn to the forest and some even make their permanent home there. The most common races of sentient beings — benign, malign, and indeterminate — are described below.

Mortals

Humans: in modern times, men and women can be found throughout Dolmenwood, dwelling in a profusion of woodcutter's shacks, isolated hamlets, fortified keeps, and thriving towns and villages.

Goatmen: rough-furred humanoids with the heads and twisted horns of goats. Goatmen claim to have dwelt in Dolmenwood since before the arrival of humans and maintain the haughty belief that the wood is, in fact, their own. They generally regard humans as an inferior species to be used as convenient. Two main branches or subspecies of goatmen are found in Dolmenwood: in the north, bestial wild goatmen who live as bandits and marauders; in the south, noble families of ancient aristocratic lineage.

Moss dwarfs: stunted manlings who dwell in the deepest woods where tangled vines and dank fungi dominate. Moss dwarfs have a kinship with such places, being formed partly of mortal flesh and partly of vegetable matter. The species is seemingly unrelated — apart from in stature — to the dwarfs of the mountains. Indeed, it is hypothesised that they are related in some way to forest gnomes or stump dryads.

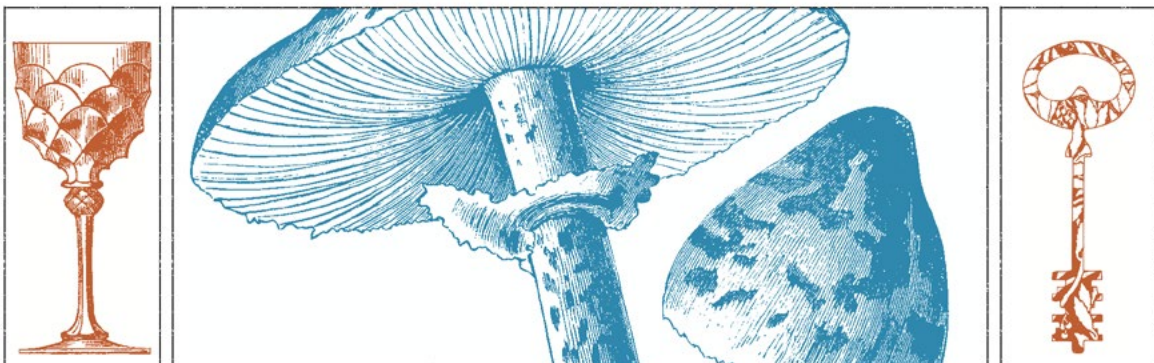
Talking animals: aside from the goatmen and other less common beast-like humanoid races which inhabit the wood (sheep men, ratlings, deerlings, etc), it is also not uncommon to encounter sentient, talking animals of various species. The birds, reptiles, mammals — and even fish — of Dolmenwood may at times surprise travellers by greeting them from the wayside, spinning a riddle, or cursing their intrusion. Of course, not all the beasts of the Wood have the wherewithal to speak, but the number that do is increasing. Such creatures are said to be especially multitudinous in the northern forest.

Fairies

Elves: the elves of Dolmenwood are natives of Fairy, that timeless realm which lies parallel to the mortal world, just beyond the reach of everyday folk. They are alike to humans in form, though often have some unusual feature which marks them as “other”. Being fairies, they are ageless and driven by desires which often seem odd to mortal folk.

Grimalkin: shape-shifting cat fairies of capricious, whimsical, and vengeful nature. Grimalkin commonly take the form of bipedal, humanoid felines, 3-4 feet in height. According to folklore, they sometimes also disguise themselves as fat moggies or take on a bestial, shadowy aspect for hunting.

Woodgrue: diminutive, furry humanoids with the faces and great, sensitive ears of bats. Woodgrue prefer to be active at night and have a great love of music, cavorting, and capering in moonlit glades. As a fairy race which has migrated entirely to the mortal world and is now subject to the ravages of time (though still very long-lived), they are classified as demi-fey.



Factions and Powers

The Church of the One True God

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 resanctify the lost shrines. [Note: the precise details of this religion are left deliberately vague, allowing the referee to tailor it to the setting in which Dolmenwood is located.]

The Duke of Brackenwold

Ruling from the (allegedly) 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.

Fairy Lords

The 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. According to legend, the whole of Dolmenwood fell under the dominion of a fairy known as the Cold Prince, long ago, until he was ousted by the old kings of Brackenwold. The Prince's return and wrath are a constant source of fear and folktale.

The King of the Wood

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

The Watchers of the Wood

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 the ley lines. What gods they worship is a matter of conjecture — for they guard their secrets with their lives — but the Church treats them as heathens to be eradicated. Kidnap by the Watchers is the greatest fear of many rustic folk in the forest.

Witches

Witches are mortal women who have made covenants with one of the ancient wood-gods that lurk just beyond the material periphery of Dolmenwood. Their aims are obscure, but it is known that they gather beneath the moon to conduct their strange worship and to work magic. In folklore, witches play an indefinite role, variously portrayed as depraved practitioners of human sacrifice, lustful seductresses (for they are said to be eternally shapely and young), and ministers of potent charms and cures.

Ygraine the Sorceress

A reclusive figure, nominally the ruler of Meagre's Reach and properly called a Lady. She dwells in a many-tiered manse overlooking a black lake and it's rumored that her sprawling home is haunted by fairy folk. Her guests are infrequent but well-coiffed and oddly familiar, 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.

Gazetteer

Castle Brackenwold

The power hub 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 rumours 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 public houses 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.

Fort Vulgar

A mostly 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 the Duke of Brackenwold's vassal and responsible for assessing and collecting taxes from all boats and barges travelling south across the lake. Its intake is not insubstantial given the popularity of lawless Shantywood Isle and regular traffic with the Woodcutter's Encampment and (to a lesser extent) Dreg.

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

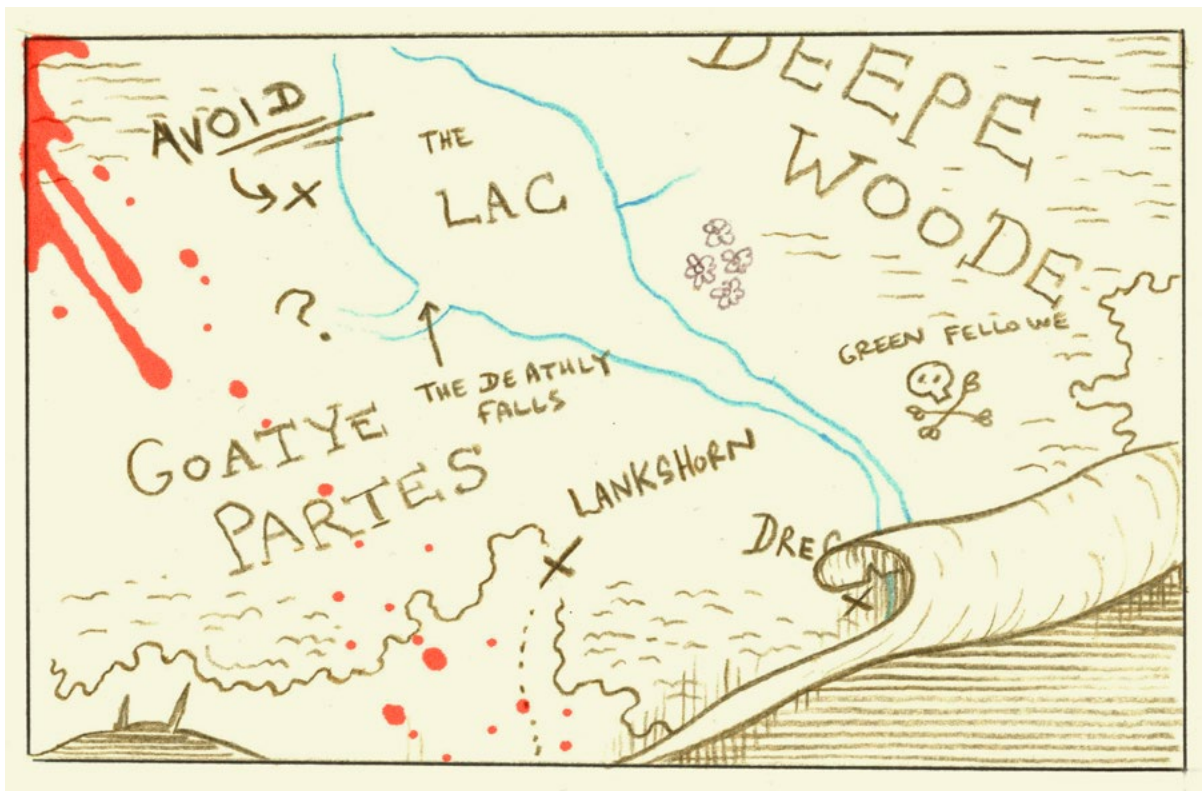
A barony which encompasses the south-western corner of Dolmenwood. The High Wold is noted for the ancient line of aristocratic goatmen who rule in tandem with the human lords of the region. (Some say that nobles of the two races are even believed to have interbred.) The barony has become somewhat wild of late, under the lax rule of the Baron Hogwarsh: highwaymen ply the roads and charlatans peddle compounds of questionable morality. Locals fear that the avaricious hand of the Watchers 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 keep — Castle Lily-white — which stands upon 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 largest settlement in the High Wold region of Dolmenwood, the market town of Lankshorn lies within a bowshot of the forest's border, acting as one of the two main "thresholds" into Dolmenwood (the other being Castle Brackenwold, in the east). Rumours talk 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 of the wood is an apt example of the cultural melange in this border-town. On a different note, it is also said that the finest bladesmith in the High Wold makes his home in Lankshorn.



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 Ruined Abbey of St Clewd

East of Lake Longmere, in the depths of Dolmenwood, a great monastery was founded, of old. A nighttime raid of unknown provenance brought about the utter destruction of the abbey, some centuries ago. The Church has endeavoured, on several occasions (if rumour is to be believed), to resanctify the ruin, but to no avail. The place is commonly believed 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 a strange 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.

The Witching Ring and Maghsword

Those who wander far in the western reaches of Dolmenwood speak of a vast ring of stones, spread so widely that the connection between them is almost imperceptible. Yet the ring is possessed of an arcane force which binds the stones so strongly together that the area which they encircle has supernatural qualities quite distinct from the rest of the forest. Modern folk know these sister-stones as the "summerstones", the great ring which they demarcate as the "witching ring", and the woods contained within as "Maghsword". The purpose and arcane function of the ring is unknown and a topic of much myth and speculation.