



# FIRST SEASON IN THE MARCHLANDS

DESIGNED FOR USE WITH

**OLD-SCHOOL  
ESSENTIALS**



# First Season in the Marchlands: Adventure Compilation Volume 1

Published By: Sad Fishe Games, LLC

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# Marchlands Setting Primer

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## FOREWORD

This document is intended to be used to help frame the ongoing series of pocket adventures (1-2 relatively self-contained sessions) set in the Marchlands. As that series develops, so too will this guide, with additions and changes made as the lore and story of the world develops. Many things are, for now, left intentionally vague so accommodate for future divergence between the original vision and the end products. Enjoy.

## INTRODUCTION

Some might call the Marchlands a feral wilderness. Barbarian territory, unexplored, untamed, uncivilized, and inhabited by outlaws, exiles, and savages. Such people might be correct, in some ways, but the vast Marchlands are far from empty or lacking in history or culture. The people of the Marchlands live in roaming bands or pastoral clan communities, ranging from a few dozen to a thousand or so in population, though rarely do they sustain anything larger. These communities are governed by chiefs or councils of respected (or feared) members of the community. Sometimes one clan will come to dominate others and form an often short-lived kingdom, or several clans will come together to form a confederation for a time to address some common concern, but the tribal clan persists as the dominant level or organization for Marchlanders, and serves as an important part of individuals' identities.

Historically, the people that are now Marchlanders came from all directions, settling in waves from the surrounding regions, sometimes from far beyond what is now regarded as the known world: refugees from the frigid wastes of the far north, exiles from a once-young empire to the south, pioneers from the lands beyond the eastern nomad ranges, and most recently those fleeing the newfound tyranny in the west. Despite their varied origins, however, the Marchlanders have come to have a distinct and identifiable culture of their own, which serves as a unifying force among the many communities. Where many Marchlander



communities feud and ordinarily refuse to cooperate within this culture, the Marchlanders tend to favor their own over outsiders, and can typically set aside their grievances to address any such threats or issues.

Marchlander society is divided by profession and class, though such divisions are rarely treated as anything immutable. Thralldom is practiced by some, whereupon person's are deprived of legal status and put to work against their will for the good of the community, but such status is never hereditary among decent folk. Others, though, reject thralldom entirely and judge other communities harshly based on how they treat their thralls. Lacking any sophisticated system of currency, wealth generally is defined by the size of one's herd of cattle, sheep, and horses; farmers with substantial flocks are regarded as carls, those with less as cottars, and those with the most as thanes- the closest thing to nobility Marchlander communities have. Others, such as craftsmen, have wealth in the goods they produce and trade to others for animals and other goods. Others still are employed by communities full-time as warriors; while all are freedmen are expected to participate in community defense as part of the Fyrd, such thane-warriors take on a special status and need not farm or craft to generate their wealth or justify their place in the community. A few are permitted to spend their days hunting and scavenging from the unfarmed portions of a community's territory. A select few are given special roles in the community as lawspeakers, ritualmasters, or medicinefolk.

Marchlander's worship a variety of gods, with a vague, somewhat malleable pantheon that is regarded with different priorities in every community, sometimes with different names, mythologies, and local spirits or sub-deities, but almost always recognizable to other Marchlanders who simply accept the differences as one would a foreigner's accent.



## MAJOR MARCHLANDS COMMUNITIES

The people of the Marchlands are bound by a common, if mostly informal, system of law and social custom, but otherwise lack any sort of overarching institution or governance. As such, each tribe conducts its own affairs and is led by its own leaders with their own, often quite different structure. From time to time a federation will form or multiple tribes will join forces to combat a common threat, but such alliances are often short-lived and rarely last more than a generation. While most folk in the Marchlands like it this way, it makes fighting off persistent, organized threats from the outside all the more difficult, and dealing with an emergency is often just as much a crisis of getting the other tribes on board as it is actually dealing with the problem. The formation of the Northern Kingdom, once a mere collection of clan communities like the Marchlands, and the longevity of the grouping of the Federated Tribe has led to some evolution in the people's thinking on this matter; change is coming, and while folk still need convincing to join together, they are begrudgingly realizing that it may be necessary unless they are to be consumed by a growing Empire or any of their other neighbors.



## The Lost Tribe

Tribes come and go through the ages, some merging with others, some departing for a new homeland, and some scattered to the winds for one reason or another. Still, such an occurrence is a major event in the lives of those that remain in the region, often changing the social and political landscape in serious ways. The Lost Tribe is the most recent victim of the ages: they had only settled the region in the last generation, and met with an unfortunate fate whereupon its entire population, with a sole survivor, was struck first by a vile illness and those that failed to succumb later carted off by ratfolk for some nefarious demise. Their former domain has sat empty since, and while neighboring tribes venture in to hunt or forage no one has laid claim to it; the land is rocky and far from ideal for either farming or grazing, the surrounding spaces devoid of any special resources that would make patrolling the space worthwhile, with, simply put, nothing to make the extra expense and effort of settling the area a desirable notion so soon after the tribe met its end. Still, despite nature retaking the main settlement and criminals, outcasts, and monsters now calling the landscape home, there is little reason this territory could not be reclaimed.

## The Ambitious Tribe

A smaller tribe with tremendous aspirations. Long subject to the whims of other tribes, the members of this tribe now have an ingrained desire for more, something which shines through in their chieftain. They are easy to sway with credible promises of power and control- something which the Tyrant and Empire will readily offer in exchange for their support. Bringing this tribe into the fold without such promises will be an arduous task, and an unreliable prospect at best.

## The Ancient Tribe

Tribes come and go, and many remain for ages, but one tribe has remained a constant in the Marchlands for as far back as memory and records go- throughout every account, the Ancient Tribe is as close to the original inhabitants of the region as can be



ascertained. There are few corners of the Marchlands left unknown to the records of the Ancient Tribe, and through many trials and tribulations they have endured. However, this long history also tends to make its members resistant to change- why do something different if the way of things has gotten them through so much? This includes a staunch resistance to any newfangled ideas of confederation or whatever mess the folks up north have become involved in.

## **The Brewing Tribe**

Some mock this community as one of drunkards and layabouts. This is, of course naught but slander- while there is a fair amount of drinking and laying about among many members of this community, it is their business to do so, as there is nowhere in the Marchlands able to produce wines, ales, meads, and stronger spirits of the purity, quality, and taste as the Brewing Tribe. Mock as their neighbors might, it is to this community's palisades that their wagons up to when planning a king's feast or magnificent wedding. So renowned are this tribe's brews that even some of more refined taste in the Empire know of and seek out what few imports they can find. This skill has made the Brewing Tribe friends of a great many folks, with few willing to go out of their way to wrong them.

## **The Cattle Tribe**

Some tribes have cattle. Others have a great many cattle. The so-called Cattle Tribe by far has the most cattle per capita in all of the Marchlands, a fact that they are never slow to point out, but one with which they must also constantly cope; it should come as no surprise that where there are surplus cattle, there are thieves and raiders. This has forced this community to take on a special martial role, as well as to adapt to having to more aggressively patrol and police their pastures. Even when they fail to protect their herds, though, there are always more cattle forthcoming- for whatever reason their herds seem especially fertile, ensuring a steady stream of new and easily accessed wealth for the tribe by way of supplying cattle to those in need.





## **The Crusading Tribe**

It is from experience that the great many peoples of the Marchlands despise beings of chaos and corruption, but it is from a place of valiant passion that the members of the Crusading Tribe work seemingly tirelessly to root it out and cull it from their homeland. Whenever rumors of some kind of chaos reach the ears of this community's leaders, it is with grim promptness that they send envoys with axe and sword in hand to help. The resolve of such warriors is also a boon to their fellows—"gifts" from those they help are a happy and steady source of income for the community, and plenty necessary to keep their offerings to the gods robust and their blades sharp.

## **The Crusading Gecko Tribe**

Free lizardfolk, living out from under the yoke of any ancient celestial beings or other monstrous overlords. They carry an ingrained disdain for Chaos as fervent as any human community in the Marchlands, and would be one and the same with the human Crusading Tribe but for their species. While their scouring bands are less well-received and less kindly than their human counterparts, they are a potent force for the living world all the same. They are also devoted to their more peaceful kin in the Marchlands, leaping to their aid when others unduly wrong them. More than a few bands of roaming opportunists have made the mistake of seeing the peaceful lizardfolk as easy prey, only to have the righteous fury of these folk coming down on them.

## **The Egalitarian Tribe**

Where many communities vary with regard to how kindly they treat their men and women, least fortunates, and those that stand out as different from the rest of their community, this tribe stands apart in consistently treating all of their folk with consideration and kindness, for better or worse. Thralldom is a foreign notion to these people, as is having thanes with anything to spare while brothers and sisters of the tribe need blankets. Of course, such efforts at kindness do not always end well for the



tribe, with outsiders plenty willing to exploit such behaviors or make special targets of such frilly folk in raids. Embattled as they may be with such problems, this tribe carries on, persistent.

## **The Empire-Hating Tribe**

Few in the Marchlands can be said to have any fondness for the Empire, and more than a few have plenty reason to despise it and its folk. Only among this tribe, however, does such hatred become an identity all its own. So wronged was this community by the Empire that they now make the downfall of that accursed place the subject of their every celebration and prayer, and toward its people the majority of their aggression. Travelers are always advised to steer clear, or be prepared to prove their origin from elsewhere, lest they end up battered and stripped on the road- if they are lucky.

## **The Federated Tribes**

Federations never last long in the Marchlands, as unifying forces weaken and infighting leads once more to independent tribes. This federation of several tribes is nearing the age where falling apart seems inevitable- and yet, no signs of fracturing are visible to those looking inward to this federation. Perhaps a sign of the changing times in the Marchlands, the Federation has yet to sort out enough internally to fully leverage what five fully integrated tribes are capable of against their neighbors. This too will change, if they can keep this union together, and may leave these peoples poised for greatness in the coming decades.

## **The Field Tribe**

While most communities emphasize the importance of their herds, this tribe has adopted a more sedentary style of agriculture. They have traded their pastures for commodity cropland, refining their crop strains and growing methods to rival even the most advanced Imperial farms. Their produce is always to first to be gone at the common markets, and their commodities always spike the hardest when consumed. Many look upon them with disdain for their small herds- but those



same folk will time and time again choose their crops to add to the pot over the fields closer to home.

## **The Horse Tribe**

The people of the Marchlands are proud of their horses: light, hardy, brave things, able to handle the multitude of jobs they are tasked with in such savage lands. There are Marchlander horses, however, and then there are Horse Tribe horses, bred to be premium specimens among their fellows. This tribe keeps horses like many keep cattle, and it is always from this tribe that the finest warriors with they could obtain a prime mare as their steed. The proliferation of horse ownership among these folk is a source of frustration for others in the Marchlands that challenge them, as so other one community can bring quite so many horsemen to bear when pressed.

## **The Hunting Tribe**

The many communities of the Marchlands have their pastures and fields of which they are so proud, but this community prefers to stick to the old ways, minimizing the acreage of their territory that they clear or convert to more economical used. They prefer to forage and hunt, and as a result have a general mastery of survival in the wooded wilderness- as well as how to avoid being detected within it. This lifestyle works well for this tribe, as they have little that can be readily looted and less still that can be reached without detection followed by a flurry of arrows.

## **The Independent Tribe**

Where most communities form strong relationships with this or that neighbor and relies on a complex network of trade and travel to provide themselves with the best the Marchlands has to offer, this is not so for this tribe. As a people they are viciously unwilling to let outsiders meddle in their affairs, and strive tirelessly to sustain themselves all on their own, and to keep external influences on their culture and way of life to a minimum. This comes at a cost, with little of the prosperity of the region making its way to their benefit, but when times are hard due to



incursions by corruptive forces, war, or natural disaster, they are at least marginally more sheltered from the ill effects than most.

## **The Long-Suffering Tribe**

Among the most recent arrivals to the Marchlands, this community has a long history of abuse and oppression wherever they have traveled. Forced to migrate long ago by a long-forgotten threat, and later forced once again to depart their new homeland in the face of the earliest of Imperial expansion in what is now its core territories. For generations they endured the ravages of the nomads to the east, and some time ago were forced a final time to depart or face extinction. This persistent generational trauma has created a forlorn but hardy people, ever hopeful but equally suspicious of strangers. This has not dampened their generosity, and their arrival to the region was met with kindness by their neighbors. Times are still hard for this tribe, and as the Marchlands grow ever nearer to irreversible change they have grown worried that another migration will be necessary in their lifetimes. They have not given up on their new home yet, however.

## **The Northerner Tribe**

Folk immediately descended from the clans that now make up the Northern Kingdom, this community remains independent from their northern kin. For how long this will be the case is unclear, as diplomats from the north arrive regularly in an effort to court the local leaders. Such a decision would surely cause a ruckus in the region, and may be the trigger to much larger changes yet to come to the Marchlands.

## **The Pariah Tribe**

Few people are born wretched to the bone, and fewer still are beyond redemption. To many in the Marchlands, however, this community represents the worst that someone could be without succumbing to banditry and outlawdom. Ever unwilling to be held accountable for the misdeeds of their fellows and seemingly always at the center of every debacle in the region, the Pariah



Tribe has made themselves just that, with their folk largely unwelcome around the hearths of others. This has made this community a prime target for the foreign powers that be to find ready allies in the region, with no loyalty to their regional kin or and a strong desire for revenge against those that look upon them with such disdain.

## **The Peaceful Gecko Tribe**

This idyllic community is marked by eschewing the typical militance and fervency of their fellow lizardfolk. To bring these people to violence is to have forced the matter far beyond what one could expect to be tolerated. This has, over the years, led to many taking advantage of them, their non-human nature making them targets of ire among the less tolerant. Of course, few get away with such transgressions for long- this community has its ways of taking revenge without themselves lifting a spear. At the same time, they are ardently loyal to those that show them kindness.

## **The Pottery Tribe**

There are craftsmen in the Marchlands, and then there are true artisans. One can find more of such artisans among the so-called pottery tribe than anywhere else, and not merely potters but all trades. With inferior materials the members of this tribe somehow manage to make adequate goods, and their neighbors are more than happy to provide to them their finest materials in hopes of acquiring the finest of goods to be found in the region. This is itself a fine form of defense for this community, as they refuse to work with those who have wronged them, and will ensure their goods are sold at a premium if slighted.

## **The Powerful Tribe**

This tribe has grown large, cohesive, and powerful of late, in yet another sign of the changing times in the Marchlands. Historically, whenever one such tribe became too large or influential, a coalition would form to bring them back down to the same level as the rest, thus preserving the delicate balance in



the region. So far, no coalition against this tribe has materialized, but nor has this tribe attempted to unduly influence or abuse its neighbors with its newfound power. How long this will last is anyone's guess, but for now this community looms above the rest, a filling dam that may burst at any time.

## **The Raiding Tribe**

Communities raid one another in the Marchlands, and bandits rob and pillage. It is a reality, one known and accepted by all. For this community, however, raiding is a way of life, and something they have turned into a science. Though many accuse them of otherwise, they do not descend into banditry, following all the rules as closely as anyone else. Still, nowhere in the region seems safe from their envious eyes, and this tribe's herds are made of us long stolen livestock from all essentially every other pasture in the region. This behavior does not behoove their neighbors to look fondly upon such raiders, but their suits and fines are always paid and they are in all other respects fully upstanding as a people.

## **The Reforming Tribe**

All tribes, from time to time, are forced to exile their members for this or that offense, and all territories are plagued by troublesome travelers and bandits now and then. Most respond to such trespassers with execution or chasing them off, finding no place in their hearts or around their hearths for folk with such blackened souls. Not so for these reformers, who long ago were formed by one-time marauders wishing to put such bleak histories behind them. Where others may find no home elsewhere, they just may here. Some look down on this community as a den of thieves and murderers, but the reality is that those they take in are held to an even higher standard than the common folk elsewhere. While their efforts to reform the worst of humanity are not always successful, a great many folk over the years have found a second chance among this tribe.



## **The Trading Tribe**

No other tribe maintains as many caravans traveling along as many distant roads as the Trading Tribe, whose merchants supply much of the foreign merchandise that makes its way into the Marchlands, and who peddle much of the exported goods in Imperial frontier towns or neglected wilderness settlements of other neighboring nations. Where commerce is still a somewhat chaotic and hard to predict art for most of the Marchlands, the trading tribe have begun to understand it as a science, and this has left their coffers full with coin and bullion from near and far, which keeps their larders full and territory well-defended.

## **The Tyrant-Hating Tribe**

Long beleaguered by the lineage of tyrants and uprisings to the west, this tribe has a seething mistrust and hatred for the Tyrant and those that serve him. Where few tribes ever attempt to exert influence far beyond the edges of the Marchlands proper, it has become routine for members of this community to depart for weeks on end to engage in a sort of guerilla war against the Tyrant. This has naturally caused that cruel despot to similarly despise this tribe, with every intention of razing their territory to ashes and subjecting its people to the worst tortures he can conjure- eventually, of course, as for now he struggles to keep his own head from being lopped off by rebellious peasants.

## **The Writing Tribe**

Legends tell that this tribe was the first to begin writing things down, and it is a well-known fact that this tribe keeps the most comprehensive collection of historic, legal, and other writings in all of the Marchlands. They are proud and protective of this library, but plenty willing to share the wealth of knowledge it contains- though typically at some price. In general, others respect the task of maintaining such knowledge, with routine donations to its contents and care from other communities, and rapid vengeance on those that threaten it. This places the Writing Tribe into a precarious situation politically, having to be careful to retain some semblance of neutrality, except on matters of



learning.

## **The Troll Band**

Trolls come and go throughout the Marchlands, though typically in small, ephemeral groups of little concern to permanent residents. One large and persistent band roams the territories, however, and while they endeavor to stay out of trouble this is rarely a possible reality for them. Still, they are generally tolerated, if briefly, and only rarely get into serious fights with any human settlements. Many swear they will one day round up a party to exterminate this band, but none have ever been serious or brave enough to actually endeavor to do so, and so the trolls remain.

## **The Forest Elves**

The elves persist in the wilderness of the Marchlands, working constantly to limit the gradual eating away at the forest that humans inevitably succumb to. Most go their whole lives without seeing such folk, but every so often a story will circulate of elves attacking or bewitching those that dwell too near to their sacred groves. They know better than anyone that change is coming, and are seemingly paralyzed when it comes to finding a solution to it; their groves are in danger, and unless something changes will one day burn, whether it is from Marchlander axes, Imperial furnaces, or something else.

## **The Undermountain Dwarves**

Isolated under the few truly giant mountains of the Marchlands, the region's dwarves reside in peace and prosperity. So rarely do they traverse the surface world themselves that many forget or simply do not believe that they are there at all. They are, though, and simply choose to use a handful of trusted merchants to supply them with what little they cannot produce or forage for near their homes. As isolationist as they desire to be, they are a smart people, more than aware that the powers beyond their mountains' shadows will eventually threaten them if the Marchlands were to fall. To stop such a thing, they just might





come out from the undermountain.

## The Ratfolk Enclaves

The ratfolk are a vile bunch, and the handful of subterranean enclaves of their kind in the Marchlands are only marginally less vile than their kin abroad. However, so far from the undercities of which they are so fond, these enclaves are tempered some in their cruelty, preferring subsistence to certain eradication if they stir up too much trouble. Each den of these creatures has its own leadership, all dominated by a local king of sorts and ever infighting in the tunnels that connect all these dens. Still, there are a handful of such dens that come close to being civilized by the Marchlander's definition- and among such dens there is a growing desire to bring their people in line with the surface communities, and to cease the wretched scheming and service of darker powers that plagues their kind.



# THE FOREIGN FACTIONS

## CHAOS

It is simply the way of things, as it has been for as long as anyone can remember or find record, that this or that chaos horde or chaos champion emerges in the Marchlands every so often, bringing a period of danger of misery before being pushed back to the dark corners where they belong, or boring of their ravages and slinking off to a bleaker pasture. Today, Chaos once again festers around the edges of the Marchlands, looking for a chance to take hold and once again spread terror and corruption. Of course, in these changing times it is entirely possible that pushing back against Chaos may not be so simple as in eras long passed.

## THE EMPIRE

The cosmopolitan behemoth of a state ruled by an allegedly god-emperor. The Empire is undeniably the hegemon of the known world, and few even among its citizenry could tell you the true extent of its borders. Its inhabitants consider themselves quite civilized compared to most of its neighbors, and do not hesitate to tell foreigners as much. If the Empire truly wanted, it could conquer the Marchlands in half a year, but the region is fortunate that a number of more pressing concerns and internal politics prevent this. Still, only petty politicians, a mountain chain, and a few hardy, isolationist mountain kingdoms have spared the Marchlands from Imperial conquest to date, but a handful of plucky senators and oligarchs have turned their eye toward those barbarian lands, and successfully authorized a new expedition into the region at Fort Prudence. This expedition is small at its inception, but persistent lobbying diverts new funds and resources all the time toward what its advocates hope will eventually lead to a new Imperial territory to rule and exploit.

## THE NOMADS

Nomad raids are simply the way of things, but of late there has been quite the lull in such incursions. No one in the Marchlands knows it, but an upstart chieftain supposedly ordained by the



nomads' gods has set to work bringing many of the nomad clans under his personal rule. This is a protracted and bloody prospect, but one which this Upstart appears equipped to succeed in doing. Of course, once satisfied with unification of the clans he will need a soft target for his new battered but numerous subjects to loot to their desire to keep them loyal. The Marchlands are an ideal target, though conquest of the region is far from his mind (okay, perhaps suzerainty if it can be managed; the real prize will be sacking Imperial cities once his power is more established.

## **THE TYRANT**

The Western Tyrant has long despised the Marchlands for not supporting his conquest of their cousin tribes in his present domain several decades ago, and that hatred has only grown with every spear thrust at his half-hearted invasions since. His initial conquest was not kind to his domain, leaving it impoverished and his armies occupied with maintaining internal order, but at long last an opportunity has presented itself. What little resources he can spare, the Tyrant aims toward the Marchlands, knowing that his domain will not survive in the decades to come without more territory.

## **THE NORTHERN KINGDOM**

The hero-king of the young Northern Kingdom has taken a land not unlike the Marchlands and turned it into a burgeoning, prosperous powerhouse- and all to fend off chaos flowing in from the far north. He knows he can do the same in the Marchlands, if given a chance. The hero-king's motives are benevolent, if his ultimate approach heavy-handed; he will bide his time, currying favor with the Marchlanders to draw them under his protection- then forcing them if need be. His paternalistic approach has not yet been well-received by the people of the Marchlands, but he will be patient in bringing them around. However, he would rather see an independent Marchlands than one occupied by another power.





# LAW

Law in the Marchlands is rarely written, instead based on ancient oral rules simply understood by members of communities or based on how similar issues were resolved long ago, with dedicated lawspeakers whose jobs are to articulate and interpret the law, with the final decision resting in the hands of the chief, council, or sometimes community itself. While individual communities can vary in their law, the core principles among them remain the same.



When a wrong is committed within a community, the wronged person seeks to have the community hold them responsible. When a member of a community wrongs someone from another community or that community itself, the wronged community is able to hold the offending individual's community liable. It is then that community's decision as to how to punish their offending individual. While somewhat formalized courts exist, typically the law is enforced merely by going to the accused or their community and letting the offense be known, calling for the lawspeakers to hear on the matter.

Conflict among communities is common and may appear to outsiders to be anarchic, but in reality it is quite structured, with many restrictions on when and how it may take place- unless a community wishes to incur the wrath of the whole Marchlands for flouting the rules and pay substantial wergeld, or blood

money, for their wrongdoings.

Of course, while the rules may be well known, all things rely greatly on precedence, and will be argued in the context in which they occurred. Hals accidental maiming of a carl during a cattle raid will be less offensive if that carl was obviously striking to kill. Aeld's destruction of a cottar's property might mean far less if that cottar can be shown to have wrongly taken something of Aeld's or slandered his household unduly. All things have context, and all rules have exceptions, sometimes exceptions within exceptions- made all the more complex and malleable by the few comprehensive written texts on the matter, instead relying on common knowledge and oral history.

The following is a heavily abridged example of generally shared principles of law.

To help contextualize some of these principles, note the following common market values in common currency: **1 pig- 3GP, 1 Cow- 10GP, 1 Sheep- 2GP.**

- If any one be summoned before the Council or Chief, and do not come they shall be fined one cow.
- But they who causes another to be summoned, and does not come themselves, shall, if a lawful impediment have not delayed them, be fined 1 cow, to be paid to the person summoned.
- And one who summons another shall walk with witnesses to the home of that man, and make known to them or the others of the household that they have been summoned to court.
- If anyone steal pig, sheep, goat, chicken, horse, cattle, or other such animal, and it be proved against them, they shall be fined thrice the value of that animal.
- If anyone steal 25 of a herd or flock other than cattle, where there were no more in that herd or flock, and it be proved on them, they shall be fined five times the value of the taken



animals.

- If anyone, even one from another community, shall steal the preferred horse of a thane, such person shall be fined 10 times the value of that horse, and if they refuse to return such horse may be brought to trial by combat with the one from whom they stole or their representative.
- If anyone steal that bull which rules the herd and never has been yoked, they shall be fined tenfold the value of that bull.
- If anyone steal 25 of a herd of cattle, where there were no more in that herd or flock, and it be proved on them, they shall be fined 10 times the value of the taken animals.
- Anyone from one community who steals livestock from another community shall not be fined, so long as such theft is otherwise lawful; a community shall have a duty to safeguard the fields and livestock of its people, and make them whole when unable.
- If anyone finds cattle, or a horse, or flocks of any kind in his crops, they shall not at all mutilate them.
- If they do this and confess it, they shall restore the worth of the animal in place of it, and shall themselves keep the mutilated one.
- But if they have not confessed it, and it have been proved on them, they shall be fined, besides the value of the animal and the fines for delay, the same fine for as though they had stolen the animal.
- If any freedperson steal, outside of the house, something worth less than a sheep, they shall be fined twice its value if they can return it.
- If any freedperson steal, outside of the house, something worth less than a sheep and they are unable to return it, they shall be fined not less than two sheep, and up to tenfold its value.



- If they steal, outside of the house, something worth a sheep or more, they shall be fined twice its value, as well as the cost of replacement, or if unable to replace the stolen thing, up to tenfold its value.
- If a freedperson break into a house and steal something, they shall be fined tenfold its value.
- But if they have broken, or tampered with, the lock, and thus have entered the house and stolen anything from it, they shall be fined, besides the worth of the object and the fines for delay, twenty times its value.
- And if they have taken nothing, or have escaped by flight, they shall, for the housebreaking alone, be fined for any damage caused while entering and not less than one sheep.
- If a thrall shall steal something and cause another to pay their fine, the value of that fine shall be added to the debt that caused their thralldom
- If one should abduct another, or lay hands on them unlawfully, they shall be fined for the cost of harms and delays caused, as well as ten sheep.
- If anyone have assaulted and plundered a freedperson, and it be proved on them, he shall be fined any costs and not less than one cow.
- If anyone have assaulted and plundered a foreigner on the roads or in a Marchlander town, and it be proved on them, they shall be fined any costs and not less than one sheep.
- If anyone shall wish to migrate to a new community, and have made known their intent known by public hearing among their fellows and been accepted by their new community, the law shall consider them part of the new community and not the former.
- If anyone shall set fire to a house in which people were sleeping, as many freedpersons as were in it can make





complaint, and if any one shall have been burned in it, the incendiary shall be fined the costs of such injury and not less than one cow per complainant.

- If anyone have wished to kill another person, and the blow have missed, they shall be fined not less than one cow.
- If anyone shall have struck another so that blood falls to the floor, and it be proved on them, they shall be fined not less than a pig and sheep.
- But if a freedperson strike a freedperson with fists so that blood does not flow, they shall be fined not less than a horn of mead per blow.
- If anyone shall have struck another so that they are injured or maimed, they shall be fined wergeld proportionate to the injury or maiming.
- But if anyone shall have struck first, or gave cause to another to strike them, there shall be no fine.
- If any one have given herbs to another so that they die, they shall be fined, above and on top of any other fines, 10 cows, or else they shall surely be given over to fire.
- If any person have bewitched another, or otherwise used sorcery upon them, the person who is proved to have committed it shall be fined not less than a cow, or shall be given over to fire.
- If anyone shall have slain a child before their 13th year, they shall be fined 20 cows.
- If anyone shall have committed offense such that they can no longer be among the fellows of their community, or if they should be fined and refuse to pay, they may be cast out, and stripped of protection under the law.
- If anyone, man or woman, shall have made a false statement against another, and it can be proven false, the slanderous



person shall be fined one tenth of a sheep, in addition to costs.

- If any man shall have cut 3 staves by which a fence is bound or held together, or have stolen or cut the heads of 3 stakes, or moved such stakes, they shall be fined for the value of the land as though fertile pasture, and must make payment to remedy the damage or correct the border.
- If any one shall have drawn a harrow through another's harvest after it has sprouted, or shall have gone through it with a wagon where there was no road, they shall replace the lost crops twofold come harvest.
- If any one shall have gone, where there is no way or path, through another's harvest which has already become thick, they shall replace the lost crops threefold come harvest.
- If anyone have moved to a new community without permission and without hearing at their former community, and within 12 months no one have given them warning to depart, they shall remain as secure as the other neighbors.
- If any freedperson have made to another a promise to pay, then they to whom the promise was made shall, within 40 days or within such term as was agreed, go to the house of that person with witnesses, or with appraisers. And if the debtor be unwilling to make the promised payment, they shall be fined one sheep above that which was promised.
- If a debtor be unable to pay a promised sum or unwilling to do so, one-twentieth of a cow per cow of debt owed shall be added to the debt each year.
- If anyone shall have dug up and plundered a corpse already buried, and it shall have been proved on them, they shall be outlawed until the day when they comes to an agreement with the relatives of the deceased.
- If a person shall die, their spouse shall inherit, unless they shall have children by another, whereupon such children shall



first take an equal share of one-fourth the whole. If a person shall die and leave no spouse, their children shall inherit, in equal shares, and if they leave no children, their brothers and sisters shall inherit.

- The wergeld for a cottar shall be five cows.
- The wergeld for a carl shall be ten cows.
- The wergeld for a thane shall be twenty cows.
- There shall be no wergeld for outlaws or unfree persons.





## Old Lost Fort

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## FOREWORD

Some might call the Marchlands a feral wilderness. Barbarian territory, unexplored, untamed, uncivilized, and inhabited by outlaws, exiles, and savages. Such people might be correct, in some ways, but the vast Marchlands are far from empty or lacking in history or culture. The people of the Marchlands live in roaming bands or pastoral clan communities, ranging from a few dozen to a thousand or so in population, though rarely do they sustain anything larger. These communities are governed by chiefs or councils of respected (or feared) members of the community. Sometimes one clan will come to dominate others and form an often short-lived kingdom, or several clans will come together to form a confederation for a time to address some common concern, but the tribal clan persists as the dominant level of organization for Marchlanders, and serves as an important part of individuals' identities.

This adventure is intended to be written in a so-called "Old School" style. It may or may not include all things typically associated with what that moniker might imply, but what it does have is intended to accommodate that style of play. Not every instance where a die roll may be required is laid out, not every interaction or event is described in detail. Scenes and set pieces are provided, with stage directions on their use. Many things are intentionally left vague, and much in the "intended" story or path could easily go awry with just a few steps off-trail, so to speak. The Game Master is to set the scene, and the Players are to be permitted to run free in that scene, subject to the rulings and added details the Gamer Master needs to provide to make the world, game, and fun work.

Enjoy.

## INTRODUCTION

Tribes come and go through the ages, some merging with others, some departing for a new homeland, and some scattered to the winds for one reason or another. Still, such an occurrence is a major event in the lives of those that remain in the region, often



changing the social and political landscape in serious ways. The Lost Tribe is the most recent victim of the ages: they had only settled the region in the last generation, and met with an unfortunate fate whereupon its entire population, with a sole survivor, was struck first by a vile illness and those that failed to succumb later carted off by ratfolk for some nefarious demise. Their former domain has sat empty since, and while neighboring tribes venture in to hunt or forage no one has laid claim to it; the land is rocky and far from ideal for either farming or grazing, the surrounding spaces devoid of any special resources that would make patrolling the space worthwhile, with, simply put, nothing to make the extra expense and effort of settling the area a desirable notion so soon after the tribe met its end. Still, despite nature retaking the main settlement and criminals, outcasts, and monsters now calling the landscape home, there is little reason this territory could not be reclaimed.

When the dust settled from the raid that ended this community, only Abigail remained, then a young woman and now a kindly, aging survivalist. She continued to live in the ruins of her community's main settlement, first scavenging from the ashes, then hunting and gathering, and now farming a small field and flock to get by. Over the years she has remained alone, somehow able to fend off the threats that would do her harm, and able to trade for what she cannot personally make or obtain with travelers and the neighboring tribes. In all her time alone, the neighboring communities have largely left her territory untouched, both out of respect to her people, reverence and fear of what befell them, and a simple lack of desire or need to occupy it; the territory is, at its best, rather infertile and lacking in readily exploitable resources not found in closer locations. Hunters make occasional excursions, and herders in need of fresh pasture have more than once made short trips into the border fields, but by and large the cost of occupation has been too great for more intense use of the land- not to mention the inevitable political squabbles among those who would seek to claim it. These issues have not stopped vagabonds, bandits, monsters, and outcasts from occupying various stretches of the territory, however, and indeed this part of the region has become somewhat hazardous without wardens to keep such things



suppressed.

Abigail, in her age, is weary. Her tribe is gone, and she knows it, but she feels pride and custodianship in the land, and believes it need not be left fallow for robbers, monsters, and corruption to call it home, or to the other tribes to divvy up once she finally passes on. It is time for a new people to call it home- whomever is willing to spend the time, energy, blood, and resources fixing the many problems that plague it. She has little in way of payment but can offer a place to stay in her home, medical and all manner of survival aid, and, perhaps most importantly, legal right to use the former territory of the Lost Tribe, whatever that may mean; hunting, resource extraction, a home, or even the creation of a new community- a fiefdom of their own in the Marchlands, if they can convince others to settle these troubled lands.

## REMNANTS OF THE LOST TRIBE



### Abigail

Abigail is a dark-haired woman, well past her peak physicality but far from frail. She is not a learned person, but has many years of



experience alone, in the relative wilderness of her tribe's former lands. As such, she is a self-reliant survivalist, with skills to match. She is kind, and does her best to be pleasant and polite, but sometimes struggles with such things after spending so much time alone. She enjoys conversation with those that visit her, and especially endeavors to tell and hear jokes, even if she understands few and tells fewer that land well on her audience. She is no stranger to hardship or doing unpleasant or even amoral things; while she may be offended by grievous moral or legal offenses, she is willing to forgive more than many, even if she disapproves. There is always a pot of stew ready to feed guests.

### **Abigail's Home, Chieftain's Residence**

Once upon a time, these caves gave refuge to Abigail's people when they first arrived in the region, before Abigail herself was born. It was here that they first settled, ultimately carving into the caves to make a home for their leaders and a place of history and remembrance for the people. Abigail has lived here alone most of her life. This location is built into a gentle slope that meets a steeper hill, and the village of the tribe once was built along the downslope to the east; while the locations of these structures can still be detected, they were all burned long ago or have since decayed back into the earth, leaving mere foundations or treeless spots. Everything of value was picked over there long ago, either by Abigail or scavengers.

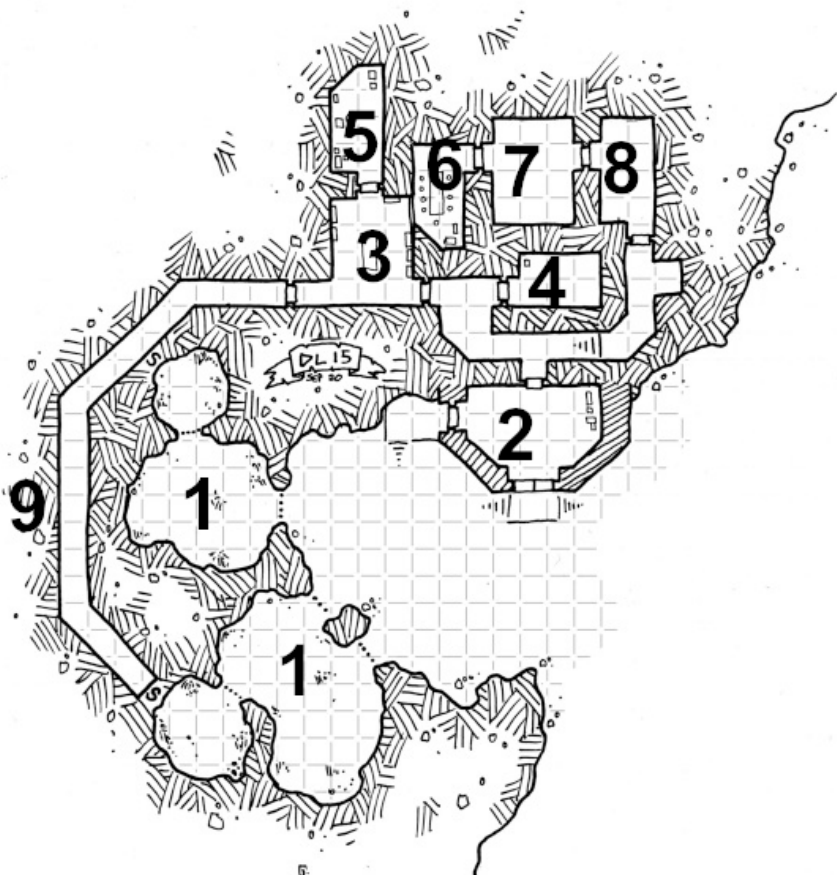
Abigail keeps a small flock of sheep and chickens around the caves, and a small field fenced off from those creatures.

### **The Caves- 1**

In all of these chambers there is evidence of former shrines to various deities or ancestors, as well as token offerings to such beings. The shrines themselves are all in such disrepair that they can barely be recognized, save for one Abigail maintains for her ancestors; she has little energy and no knowhow necessary to maintain them all properly, and thought it best that she simply leave it all be. The walls of the caves were at one time intended







to depict in paintings the growing history of her people, starting with their departure from their former homeland. Only a small part is actually so painted, depicting their arrival, a handful of quiet years, the sickness, and then a crude sketching by Abigail depicting herself, alone. There is much space left to be filled—depending on what the player Characters do, they may find themselves painted in by Abigail, or be given the honor of adding to the murals themselves.

## The Court- 2

This chamber would have once been used by the Chief and other



leaders to greet those seeking them out, and to hear disputes among the tribesfolk. Some ornamentation carved into the walls still serves as evidence of this purpose, but for some time Abigail has used it as a staging area for her various crafts and activities; she would be willing to move such things, if asked.

### **The Hearth- 3**

A place once filled with company, cooking, drinking, and being at home with one another around the large fire pit in the chamber. Smoke drifts out through a carefully carved channel in the ceiling, and the chamber is easily kept warm or cool depending on the time of year. Abigail still cooks here.

### **Armory- 4**

This chamber was once used to store important artifacts, records, and the personal armory of the Chief. None of that survived the raid all those years ago, and Abigail has little she feels is important enough to place in here. The shelves and racks remain, but most are empty or sparse. A few articles are stored within, locked inside carefully constructed chests and the finest locks Abigail could trade for.

### **Storeroom- 5**

Simple storage for sundries and preserved food, which is all that is present here now. Abigail keeps a well-stocked larder, attempting to be prepared for the worst- she has many common articles and foods, all of which she will share readily with her friends or as cheaply as she can with kind guests.

### **Meeting Hall- 6**

A room intended for serious talk among the leaders and elders of the community. A massive stone table remains where it was left after the raid, and the many chairs of the long-gone leaders are neatly arranged around it. It has gone largely unused since the community vanished.



## **Living Chamber- 7**

A large room, intended for the day to day living of the resident. Many of Abigail's effects are scattered throughout, and it is clear that she spends most of her time here when she is not sleeping, out in the field, or cooking. Even with her presence, there is ample room for bedrolls, beds, and storage, all used which she will gladly permit of guests and comrades.

## **Chief's Chambers- 8**

The sleeping room of the Chief, and now the sleeping room of Abigail. It is the one room she is uneasy with others entering, merely out of some sense of privacy. Still, she is willing to vacate is provided an alternative place to make into her home, if someone endeavoring to revive the community stated they needed the chamber. Other than pelts, crafts, and other articles of survival, there is nothing of particular value or interest- and so little reason to risk angering poor Abigail.

## **The Long Hall- 9**

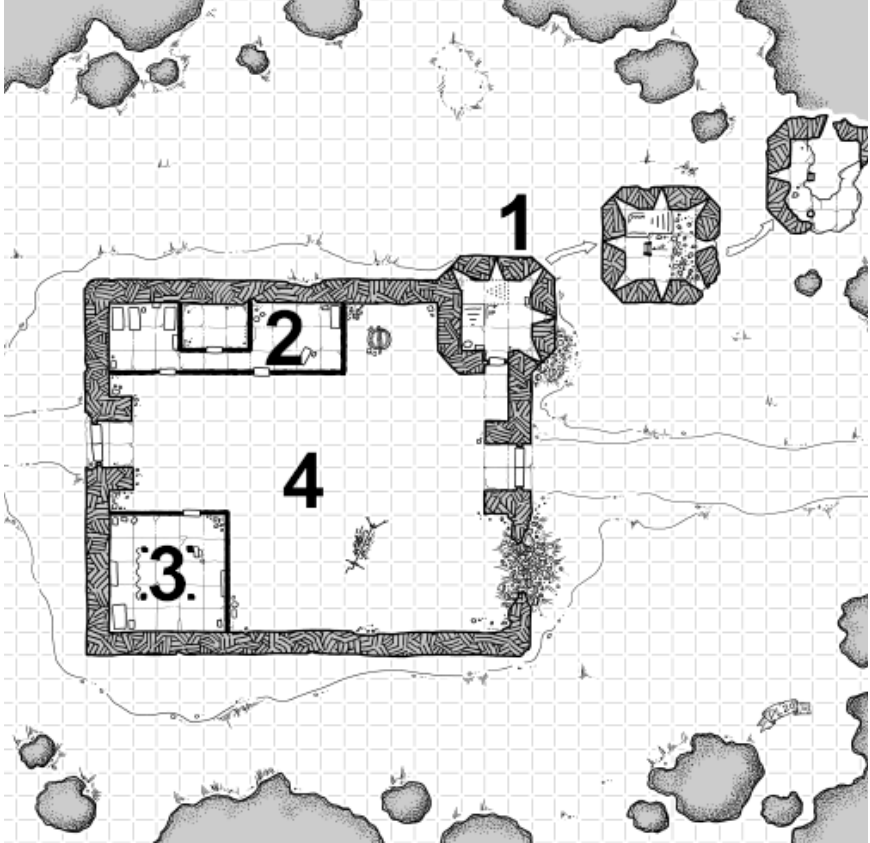
This long passage was carved out to prepare for eventual expansion of these chambers, and to serve as a place for further painting and record keeping. None of that ever came to fruition, the tribe ended before they needed to do further work, but in the meantime it served as a secret passage out of the abode if needed, with the passage emptying into a concealed passage into the Caves. That passage is still concealed and functional, and Abigail has always been ready to use it if needed.

# **THE OLD FORT**

The old fort lies near the edge of what was once the now Lost Tribe's territory, sat atop a small hill such the view from its tower allows one to survey much of the territory from above the treetops. The hill plateaus near the top, before the fort walls, making it suitable for the construction of a handful of outbuildings surrounding it. Its original constructions predates their arrival, and indeed the arrival of most folk in the region; no



one has record of who originally built it or why, and over the generations various people have occupied, added onto, and restored it with their own materials and methods. The outer wall is stone, with different sections being of different construction and marking: some evidence of efforts by the Lost Tribe to restore it are visible, as are brick and stone that could well be from the northern tribes, eastern hordes and even pre-empire southlander masonry. Today, it is in poor condition, with walls crumbling and loose, held together by patchwork masonry and an exterior wooden palisade, and the wooden interior structures in need of care after many years of complete neglect. Still, a fort is a fort, and with care and time it could become a proper fortification once more. If one were hoping to start the process of reclaiming the Lost Tribe's lands or just to carve out a secure home, this is as good a place to start as any.



## The Wall

The outer wall of the fortification was once entirely stone, approximately 12 feet high, but it has since been reinforced with brick and a wooden palisade, rather than someone taking the time and expense of restoring the stone. It is far from ideal, and is both simple to scale and would be simple enough to topple by a force dedicated enough to try. It has no proper rampart; there was once a wooden rampart surrounding the interior wall, but it is long crumbled or burned, having not survived the raid that ended the tribe.

The on the southern portion of the western wall, the stone has crumbled entirely. A palisade still stands facing outward, so no one can simply walk in through the gap, but topping or getting past this portion is a trivial ordeal for anything but wildlife.

The two gates may at one time have been proper heavy gates reinforced with metal, but now they are simple and wooden- still nothing anyone is hacking through too quickly, but not enough to stop a serious attack for long.

## The Tower- 1

This tall tower was once all stone, like the wall, but has over time had to be patched with various materials. It was once three stories tall, but the uppermost level has toppled entirely, leaving a staircase that leads to nothing and an open-roofed second floor. All along the stairwell and each floor are slats for viewing and shooting out.

## The Quarters- 2

This wooden structure is intended for the garrison or residents of the fort. An interior chamber serves as storage and an armory. Whatever was once stored here is long-gone, and only the handful of supplies and spoils of the current bandit residents are located within- little of particular value, perhaps enough random goods to peddle for a couple GP at market.



### **The Common Room- 3**

A one-time joint common space for recreation of the garrison and command room, it is now filled with rotting furniture and refuse from squatters, scavengers, and the most recent bandit residents. It would be a simple thing to clean it up and put it to whatever use desired.

### **The Courtyard- 4**

The inner area of the fort is flat, and filled with packed dirt that does a reasonable job keeping its form even after rain. It would be suitable for building a variety of small structures, or for making camp if there are too many staying within to all rest in the quarters. Recently, the bandit residents were using a small pit in the southeastern quarter to make bonfires and prepare food.

A well dots the northern portion of the courtyard, near the quarters. The well is as old as the fort, and goes deep, but is now dry and all but useless. Still, its stonework remains solid- more solid than the walls, at least, with no signs of collapse any time soon.

## **The Bandits**

While for many years the old fort was empty, save for the occasional traveler or hunting party that would make home of it for a time before heading back to where they came from, in the past few months a group has taken up residence on a more permanent basis. No one would particularly mind this, by itself, but the unfortunate reality is that these intruders are an unpleasant sort. Rumor has it that they are all branded on the face- something done in the South to demark those guilty of particularly heinous crimes, especially of those in military service, a short time before execution- which apparently never happened with these presumed escapees. Whoever they are, they are so marked and presumably guilty of something unpleasant. Giving the benefit of the doubt is a virtue, and one would be silly to trust the justice system of the Southlanders but their foul nature has been corroborated reflected by reported assaults and robberies



on those nearby. There are few enough of them not to cause any real concern, and they are far enough from any established areas that folks can avoid the old fort easily enough, but their removal would be a boon for the territory all the same.

There were originally quite a few of these bandit folk, but by the time the player Characters first arrive there are a mere 4+(1/2 player party) in the whole fort. They will be somewhat weary and frantic when the player party first arrives. If the player Characters eavesdrop on any of them they might hear any of the following:

- “Did you see what it did to Karl? Snapped his neck right there. What are we going to do without him?”
- “None of the others have made it back yet. I don’t think they’re coming.”
- “First my shit goes missing, now those horned fuckers do this too us. We’ve got to get out of here.”
- “The boss was so sure it was those goblins. We all paid for that moron’s mistake.”

The truth of the matter, which can be learned from the wounded bandit in the Quarters, Jake, is that the majority of the bandits went out on an expedition to take out some rogue goblins that have been troubling them. Having found a trail they believed to be that of the goblins, they followed it. Rather than the goblins, they found a den of Satyrs- specifically, a Minotaur, which promptly massacred them, slaying many bandits and their leader. A handful returned, rattled, tired, and unsure of what to do next, but going nowhere unless forced to do so.

When dealing with these bandits, violence is essentially unavoidable. Still, perhaps half can probably be convinced to pack up on their own. The rest will, more or less, fight to the death, motivated by a combination of bloodlust, despair, and world-weariness. All but one, **Alfonse**, in the common room, uses **Brigand** stats, though he is injured and starts at half HP.



**The Tower:** One bandit stands guard in the tower, but is doing a poor job of it. He has been on guard for some time, and was not relieved on time due to the attack that hit the bandits in the field. While he will spot careless or inept characters that attempt to approach the fort, timing getting past his sight should be simple enough, as should sneaking into the tower.

**The Quarters:** One bandit, Lucian, lay injured in the Quarters, having been treated to the best of the group's ability. He is badly injured, having been gored by a massive horn. He cannot put up a fight of any sort, but will plead for his life. If asked, he will provide any and all information he has, including that of the events that just befell himself and his comrades. Lucian's wounds will likely take his life within the day, unless someone with exceptional medical skills and the resources to fully close and clean his wounds are available. Perhaps this is for the best- Lucian is guilty of real atrocities, and cannot be trusted once healthy again.

**The Courtyard:** One bandit paces the courtyard, clearly rattled and stressed. He will mutter to himself as he paces, not paying close attention to his surroundings, occasionally stopping by the cooking pit to tend to a meal he is prepping for the group. This is one bandit that can readily be instructed to depart, though he will not hesitate to raise the alarm if not kept under threat before he goes.

**The Common Room:** The remaining bandits, including Alfonse, will be here, huddled around a table, attempting to decide what do to. If left alone, Alfonse will ultimately convince them to stick it out- fortify the walls, stick to ambushing barbarians on the roadside, and just endure the goblins. If confronted, they will attack, but half will do so less than enthusiastically. Intimidating or talking this half down should be reasonably simple for someone talented in those arts, after which they will scamper out of the fort as quick as they can, stopping only to retrieve their effects from the Quarters. The rest will fight, and fight hard- where else are they to go? It's a death sentence either way.





## End Matter

Once the bandits are dealt with, the fortress is the player Characters'. Once some corpses and filth are disposed of, they may well have themselves a cozy little encampment. At their choosing, they may well restore it to its ancient glory, or make it something more altogether- they have the resources and are willing to devote the time.

If they happened to let any bandits go, most likely died within the days that followed- they are marked men in a foreign land; if the elements or some creature did not end them, members of a community or a bounty hunter seeking easy coin to the South likely did. Still, letting them go should be considered carefully- they are people capable of horrific wrongs, and letting them go may well allow them to continue such acts.

If, at the end of the day, they have any prisoners, they will have to decide what to do with them. As above, they likely cannot be trusted or safely let go without endangering others. If outright killing them cannot be stomached, there may be a nearby community willing to pay for such prisoners, or a bounty hunter passing through may be willing to buy them in order to return them to the South for a reward and delayed 'justice,' whatever that may mean.

Seizing the fort is not the real end of things, however. Sooner or later, the following will have to be dealt with, of the fort is to be retained:

- **The Rats Among Us:** One day, something of value will go missing from the fort in the night, preferably something valuable among a number of less valuable items that may or may not have been noticed as absent. After the dust settles from the immediate concern over the theft and any accusations of theft among Characters are settled, initiate the Rats Below from its relevant section. There are ratfolk in the cistern below that are the culprits, and they must be dealt with. If the player Characters choose not to ever return to the fort, these ratfolk will ultimately take over the fort,



bolstering their numbers to perhaps two dozen total in the fort and the cavern below.

- **Goblinoids in the Shadows:** The goblins that the bandits were seeking before they were attacked are still out there, and they will continue to trouble the roads nearby until take care of. Whenever Characters are traveling to or from the fort from elsewhere, there should be an approximately 10% chance of a goblin ambush of 1d4 foes (**1 hobgoblin and the remainder being goblins**), until their camp is addressed. Once they set out on the hunt, refer to Goblinoids in the Shadows below.
- **Minotaur at the Gates:** The player Characters should have learned about the minotaur from the bandits at some point. They likely also learned where it is located, or at least where it attacked. Having such creatures around is a recipe for trouble in of itself. Refer to Minotaur at the Gates, as follows.

## THE RATS AMONG US

**The Truth of the Matter:** There are ratfolk warrens scattered throughout the region, and it is known that one destroyed the Lost Tribe all those years ago. Sometimes, members of these communities splinter off, either exiled for this or that or setting out on their own in hopes of achieving vile glory all their own. Years ago, such a splinter group found their way to the fort, and then into its well, where there are small caverns that are connected to a cistern that ultimately flows into a nearby creek. They have lived and bred here for years, venturing out to forage and scavenging the scraps of those that visited the fort ruin. Once the bandits arrived, they took on a more cautious lifestyle, fearful of being discovered. With the bandits gone, they grew bolder and bolder, eventually outright stealing from the new residents in the night. Now articles of value have been taken, and more and more things will go missing if this problem is ignored.

### Tracking the Rat



It will not be immediately obvious who stole whatever is missing. Allow the theorizing, accusations, and conspiracies to fly freely for a time. However, these ratfolk are not careful or clever. Depending on where the taken article was located, there may be dusty footprints, scrape marks, and other indicia of the intruder, but if nothing else there will be a long line in the dirt or mud in the Courtyard, leading from the taken item's location to the dried up well- the thieving rat did not lift their tail as they crept along, and this is the result. This trail is somewhat subtle and may not be readily noticed by the average person not looking for clues but will be simple to spot once the clue hunting begins.

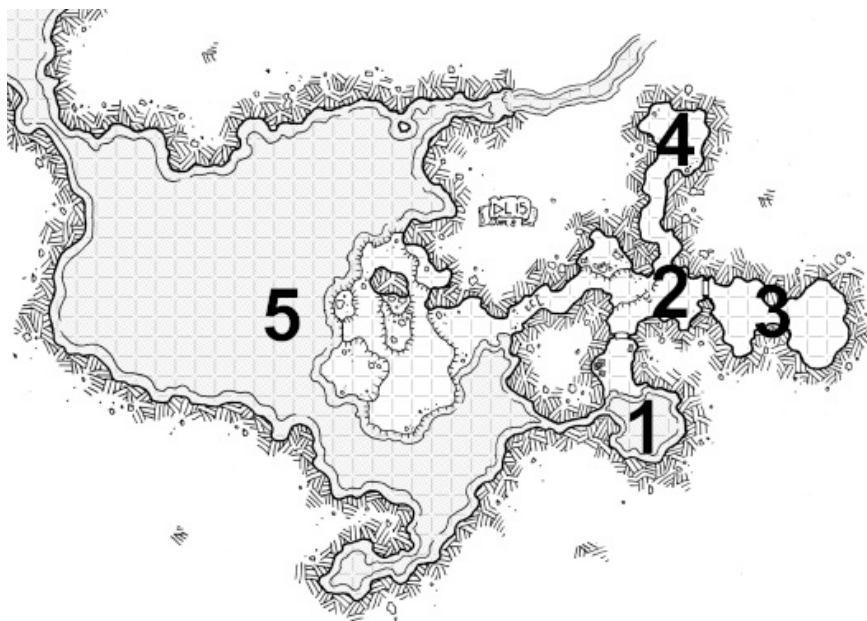
### Into the Nest

The well is ancient and in disrepair but holds firm and will not crumble. Looking into the approximately 60 foot well, the bottom is only barely visible by reflections from the light on slightly damp rock. From above, it is not immediately apparent that there are caves below. A character can descend via rope attached to the surface, if they have a long enough cord. The walls of the well are also easy enough to scale for a reasonably athletic character or a reasonably skilled climber; the interior stones are jagged, making for easy hand and footholds, and the ratfolk have taken care work to create better grips.

A cautious and minimally competent character should not fall either way. If climbing, the harder prospect will be descending quietly, which will require a bit more skill. If using a rope, this should not be an issue. Either way, if characters are noisy, the rats will hear them coming all the same, and be lying in wait rather than engaging in the activities described in the later sections

The ratfolk here are all typical **Brigand** sorts, and use those stats. The one quirk of these ratfolk is that all of their weapons are imbued with **Poison- Causes victims to become horribly sick for ten days (save versus poison): no physical activity possible except half speed movement-** a tradition of the enclave they fled from, and something they religiously reapply routinely. These are not quite the vile servants of chaos that





many of their kin are, but nor are they enlightened- they will be hostile and uninterested in treating, but also unwilling to be slaughtered if they can avoid it. They left their old home and occupied this place for a reason, that reason primarily being an attempt to avoid pointless and unsatisfactory fighting.

Their morale will be easy to break. They will fight with vigor at first, but will likely be easily intimidated and, if outright fighting begins and a few of their number go down, they will break unless victory seems well within their grasp, fleeing out the channel to the west.

### **The Underfort Cavern**

These caverns are naturally occurring and were encountered when the well was first constructed. Of course, at that time the cistern below was fuller, and the caverns were essentially flooded and unusable. At the time, this was a boon- large amounts of clean water just below. Since, the cistern level has fluctuated, and while there is still ample water throughout the western cavern,



where the cavern goes deeper, only a thin layer of water lies beneath the well itself. The air below is damp, but does not reek of rot, mold, or pond scum- until one gets close to the ratfolk, which are rather unclean and musky. One must be careful everywhere below, a noise echoes loudly off the stone and mineral deposits that make up the cavern walls and ceiling.

### **The Well's Bottom- 1**

There is little of interest in this chamber. The floor is slick with water, but there is no evidence of any habitation here save for the crude, unlocked door made to seal the exit to the north, more to dampen the sound and light coming from the other caverns. A small crevice to the west allows the water from the greater cistern to trickle in, but only an exceptionally small person or creature could possibly fit through that gap.

### **The Throughway- 2**

Ordinarily, this chamber is empty save for some baubles and necessary utensils of the ratfolk residents, but if the ratfolk were alerted to the Character arrival, it is here that they will ambush intruders. All seven will be lying in wait, concealed, and should be rather difficult to detect before launching their attack; this is their home, and sneaking is the one thing that the most mundane and inept ratfolk can excel at.

### **Hoard- 3**

It is here that all the supplies and stolen goods of the ratfolk are kept, stacked in haphazard piles throughout. The door to this chamber is nominally locked, but wiggling the lock is enough to make it become undone. However, attached to the ceiling of this chamber is a net full of old bottles, which the door will bump when opened, causing quite the jangling of glass; the ratfolk have had problems with their fellows sneaking extras, and have installed this to ensure that the whole cavern knows whenever the chamber is entered.

Whatever was taken from the player Characters will be found in



here. Additionally, there is a fair amount of largely inedible food, several doses of pre-prepared Weak Poison, several doses of antidotes for the Weak Poison (they cut themselves on accident, from time to time), about 30 GC worth of salvageable goods and random coinage, quite the haul of ruined and now worthless goods, especially of wood and metal, and a **Sword + 1 (Light)** that none of the Rats could quite get the hang of using.

#### Nest- 4

The ratfolk sleep here, in a messy ball of woven reeds, furs, and teeth-chipped wood. In fact, three will be sleeping there if they player Character entry was subtle. They have their weapons all within arm's reach, but they can be caught unawares simply enough.

One of the ratfolk here, Artemis, is not quite like his peers. If taken bur surprise and unable to immediately fight back, all three will beg for their lives, but only Artemis will be sincere in his pleadings, something that most onlookers should be able to observe. When Artemis and his comrades fled home, he was under the impression that they would be seeking out a new community, one with less violence and more willing to entreat with the surface world. He was mistaken, but still hopes to do this eventually. He will be nervous and has some vague loyalty to his comrades, but can probably be convinced to help in ousting them if he is allowed to live. What to be done about the other ratfolk in this chamber is another matter, but Artemis can propose that he run shrieking into the other chambers, telling the others that they have been found and must flee. This ruse will work, and the remaining ratfolk will flee out of the caverns to the west.

Artemis will not immediately follow, unsure he wants to carry on with them and uncertain as to where to go. He is overall trustworthy, and will stick around if desired- indeed, he may make for an ideal custodian of the fort. Otherwise, he will depart shortly, in search of more likeminded ratfolk- perhaps to make an appearance in a future adventure.



If Artemis is instead encountered in the Throughway as part of the ambush, he will outright surrender if the fighting gets to be a losing ordeal, and explain the same things as above.

### **Cistern- 5**

A massive chamber filled mostly with water, but with a ‘shore’ area where four ratfolk are loafing or working, where they spend much of their waking daytime before sneaking out in the night. These rats are more alert, and will be difficult to take by surprise

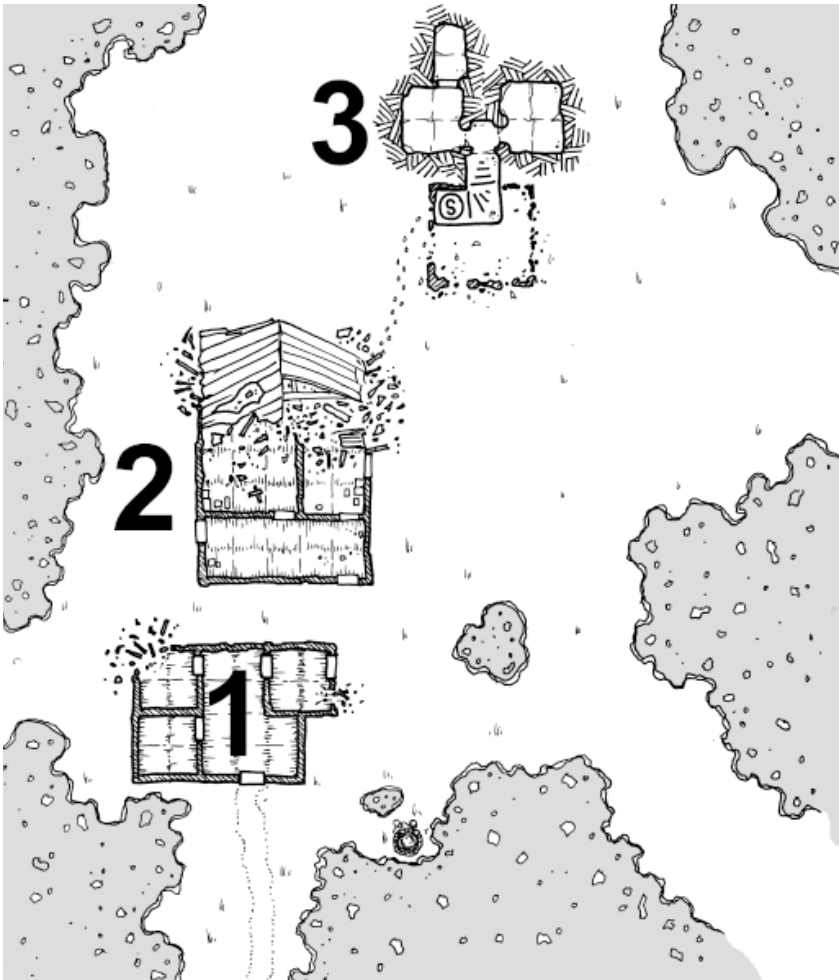
If one were to inspect this chamber seriously, someone with engineering or other relevant knowledge may note that it would probably be possible to easily modify the channel leading to the Well’s Bottom to increase the amount of water that ends up there, thereby making the well useful again.

To the west, a channel lets out into a nearby creek, in a place that would be very hard to spot if one were not looking for it. The rats have gone in and out here since their arrival. It requires a small amount of swimming, but it may be a useful entrance and exist from the fort in times of emergency.

## **GOBLINOIDS IN THE SHADOWS**

The Truth of the Matter: A small band of goblinoids has splintered off from another and begun using these lands as their own. Unfortunately, these are not farming folk or folk of knowhow, but inelegant martial folk who refused to play nice with their fellows. To get by, they have taken to robbery and rustling livestock from all over the region, but no one has bothered to track and stop them so far. The old fort bandits tried, after the goblins were intruding on their turf, so to speak, but found the wrong foes to disastrous results. This group would love to occupy the fort, but are of the opinion that remaining in the wilderness makes them harder to find by the folk they know are probably out to get them by this point.





## Finding the Band

The goblinoids are living in the ruins of a small farmstead in the territory, one now well-concealed in the wilderness and lost to everyone's memory. It would be unlikely to stumble upon this site by chance, or pick up a trail at without a firm place to start, but perhaps someone with superb tracking skills could do so by visiting sites of prior robberies or commonly used thoroughfares.

More likely, the player Party will first be ambushed as described by the trigger for this scenario, and from there be able to discern



a general trail that leads to the occupied ruin. These are not sneaky beings, and finding a trail from the ambush would be easy enough. If not careful, however, they may merely follow a trail to another ambush site, where another group is lying in wait for travelers- fortunately, this time the player Characters can likely turn the tables and ambush them instead. From there, either with a prisoner or just more tracking, finding the ruin will be trivial.

## The Farmstead Ruin

There are perhaps two dozen members of this goblinoid band. Most are mere **goblins**, but a handful are **bugbears** or **hobgoblins** and one, **Melon**, is a full-fledged warrior, and an arrogant one at that. They keep no proper watch, but the goblins will be milling about tending to camp, and the bugbears and hobgoblins lounging between structures 2 and 3. At night, the goblins sleep in 1 and the rest in 2- again, with no proper watch.

### Melon

The leader of the band is a bugbear named Melon- a fitting moniker for a rather bumbling warrior with big ambitions. He stands out among the others as slightly bigger and better equipped. Forming this band was all Melon's idea, and it is he alone that keeps the group cohesive, promising greatness to all its members at some non-descript time in the future. While Melon is a competent warrior and passable leader, his ambitions are far beyond his capacity, unable as he is to see the bigger picture of what forming his own warrior clan will require. He is no dummy, however, and is not particularly interested in dying if he can help it.

### Farmhouse- 1

This ruined structure was once a home, and now it is a messy den of careless goblins. Some twisted and worn hides are used as bedding, but otherwise the structure leans with decay and is increasingly battered and worn on the interior; for all the ravages



of time have done to the structure, its new residents are doing worse with their constant banging about and thoughtless use of the rooms.

## **Barn- 2**

This structure, despite half of it being completely collapsed, has fared better than its neighbors, with one of its rooms still rather intact and easily insulated from the elements. The leaders have claimed this as their quarters, and do not permit others inside, as it is where they keep the majority of their weapons and armor. If something were to happen to this building or its contents, the Bugbears and hobgoblins would be left without the majority of their armor or their weapons, aside from whatever they carry in camp. None of it is particularly valuable, all standard and worn at best, or ramshackle and shoddy at worst.

## **Cellar- 3**

There used to be a surface building here, but it is a mere foundation now. Concealed beneath some rubble is a (barely) locked cellar door, both it and the cellar still very much intact. The cellar door is itself quite well-concealed and would be hard to spot without digging. What is not well-concealed is the obvious trail leading to the cellar door from the barn, due to the leader's frequent tromps to and from the spot. The Cellar is where they keep their stash; a few day's worth of preserved food in case they cannot hunt or gather enough, other miscellaneous supplies, and a small (unlocked) lock box with about 200 GC worth of Imperial coinage; they got lucky on a recent excursion and stumbled upon a trader very much in need. They took the coin and left him to sort out his problems.

## **Dealing with the Goblins**

There are numerous ways the goblins can be dealt with. There are quite a few, but they are careless and poorly organized; an extended guerrilla campaign against them or burning their camp might whittle down their numbers or force them to consider relocating. Of course, desperate enough goblins might decide an



attack on the old fort is worth the risk, as the outlook of the status quo becomes grimmer for them.

More direct confrontation, whether at the outset or after some other plan disintegrates, would certainly work, though it may become a bloody ordeal. The goblins will enter into a frantic defense, and Melon and the bugbears and hobgoblins will let them wear out their foes, not caring too much if some get cut down. After several fall and the player Party shows no signs of stopping, Melon will call for a halt to it all, calling back his lackeys and attempting to discern what is desired of his band. If the player Party is willing to chat, see the next section.

They player Party can try to negotiate with the goblin band and try to get them to move on. The goblins will not immediately attack on sight, though they may not let the player Party leave without some offering. If asked to stop robbing and move on, Melon will not seriously consider the prospect and will not be easily intimidated or persuaded. What he will do, however, is offer a bit of single combat. If someone can best him, they will move on and stop robbing- at least around this area. If not, the party will empty their packs and pockets and scoot off. He will even do his best not to kill whoever fights him, just to beat them.

Whatever route is chosen, Melon is what keeps the band together; his demise will spell the end of the rest, who will lose their gusto to keep up the struggle and willingly disperse, perhaps heading back to their old band.

## End Matter

If sufficiently slain or beaten down, the goblinoids, if any are left, will eventually move on of their own will- if perhaps after a frantic attempt to seize the fort, for which they will not be particularly well prepared.

If someone can best Melon, he will hold true to his word and move on- taking with him their stockpile, however. Before he goes, though, he will mention that he and his band *are* for hire- they are not particularly disciplined or skilled as a group, and will



attempt to charge a higher rate than perhaps they are worth, but would be as diligent and trustworthy as hired hands can be, so long as they are paid on time. Perhaps the player Party needs some help in the coming days? IT would be best not to find out what repeated non-payment looks like, however. They will hold no grudges for those that were slain, as they understand it all as simply being the way of things. Local robberies, from this group anyway, will cease.

## MINOTAUR AT THE GATES

### The Truth of the Matter

The bandits made the unfortunate discovery of a minotaur den and paid for it. Leaving this problem unattended is a recipe for disaster, as it can only get worse, and so the player Party should be prompt in attempting to find a remedy. Th player Party probably learned the location of the den from the bandits, but if not then they can probably track the trail the bandits took if they look soon enough.

### Loafing Party

Some effort should be made to ensure they party recognizes this is an issue. If still they decide to ignore it, let them. Provide one opportunity for them to realize the issue before them within a few weeks of seizing the old fort: an attack of 5+(1/2 party size) Brays on the roads nearby at some point while traveling. Brays do not appear out of nowhere and are not likely to be from too far away.

If still they do not act, the problem will come to them, probably at the old fort. One morning, after a night of rest at the fort, the **minotaur and 10+(party size) brays** will show up. The brays will ineffectually attempt to climb the walls or break down a weak spot in the fortifications, while the minotaur will begin breaking down a gate- something it can do relatively easily if the same wooden gates the bandits installed are the best they have. Either way, it will probably have no issue breaking something down or even climbing to gain entry. They must all be slain, or the fort





abandoned for a time before it can be recovered- the beasts will call it their new home until it is cleansed, and then they will still have the brays, at least, to deal with back at the den.

## **On the Trail**

Picking up the bandits' earlier route is easy enough once the party sets out. A clear trail north can be spotted by anyone with basic tracking knowledge. Following it, it goes on for a long distance before another trail going the reverse direction can be seen, along with a swathe of broken brush and branches, and massive cloven footprints. A short while later, this swathe widens further, and the scene of the bandits' ambush is laid out before the player Party.

If this incursion is within a handful of days, the site is fresh and gory; a few bandits lie dead, in an appropriate state of decay and destruction by wildlife, apparently dead from more mundane stabbing and blunt force injuries. Several others, however, are strewn about in a more frightening condition: one apparently folded in half backwards, another utterly gutted (likely by a massive horn), and a trio with portions of their bodies utterly crushed.

If the incursion is delayed, mere scattered bones remain, picked clean by the elements, but the same conclusions can be reached upon examination.

Finding the den from here is trivial. A clear trail of underbrush crushed and toppled underfoot leads straight to it.

## **The Den**

This den consists of a simple cave, an opening just above ground level and a sharp incline downward for perhaps 40 or so feet, with no additional chambers or features. The inside is dark, too dark to adequately see into more than a few feet without a light source, but the sounds from within reveal all that is inside: the growling, hissing, wheezing, and moaning of the various cloven abominations that make it home, slaving over some meal they



have acquired or after one another. The occasional deep wheeze or bellow from the minotaur will echo forth.

The beasts are feral and rather distracted, so even a conspicuous incursion into the mouth cave will not immediately attract their attention, nor will a flash of light into the interior; there are a dozen brays and the minotaur gathered around some unfortunate prey. This idea of this sort of fight may well give a party pause—these are not paltry foes. Discretion is the better part of valor, as they say; it may be prudent to return with help or supplies for a plan. Say, one would not happen to know where some hired swords would be, perhaps of a goblin-like variety?

Someone with engineering knowledge or particularly adept skills of observation may notice the mouth of this cave is crumbling and unsteady—some carefully placed pickaxe blows or an even crudely placed explosion might cave it, trapping those within.

### **Knock Down Drag Out**

If the player Party elects to attack outright, either with help or alone, it will be to the death for the beasts within. They have no interest in retreat or self-preservation.

### **Cave-In**

Causing a cave in is easier than one might expect. If done carefully and with the right supplies, it can be done without the beasts knowing until it is too late. They will then be utterly trapped— or so it will appear. Their frantic panic might be heard through the rocks for a time before quieting, though they will be still very much alive.

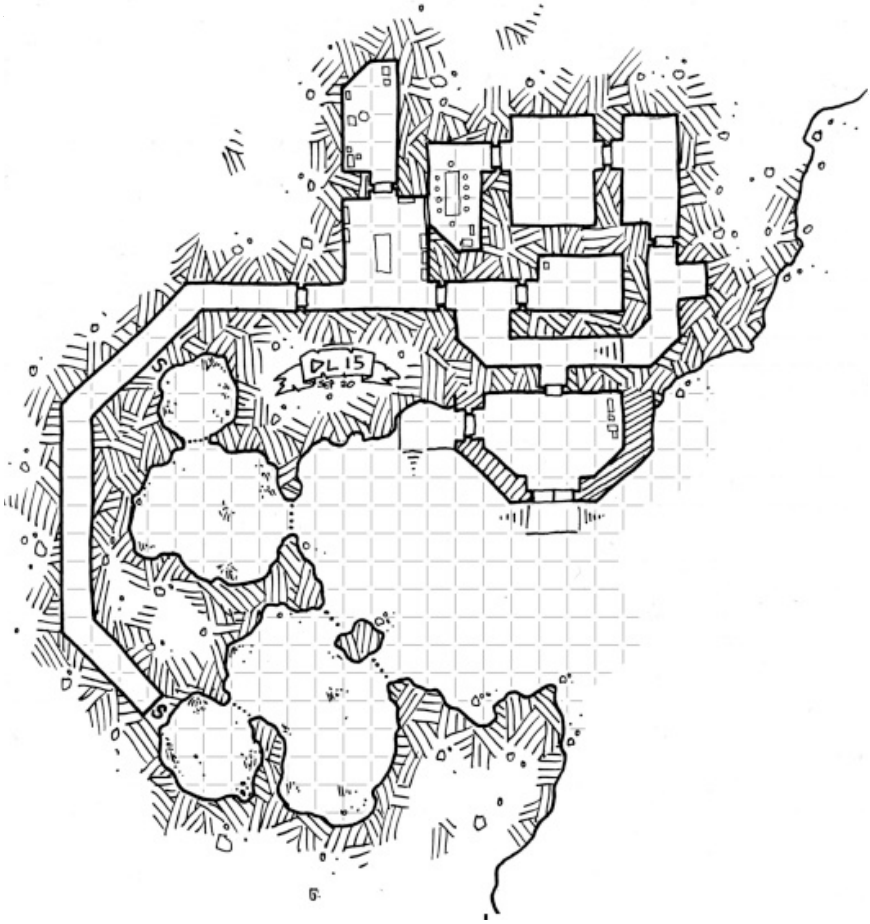
### **At the Gates**

If a cave-in was caused, the player Party will be better off for it. It will appear in the immediate aftermath that all the beasts will perish. This is almost true.

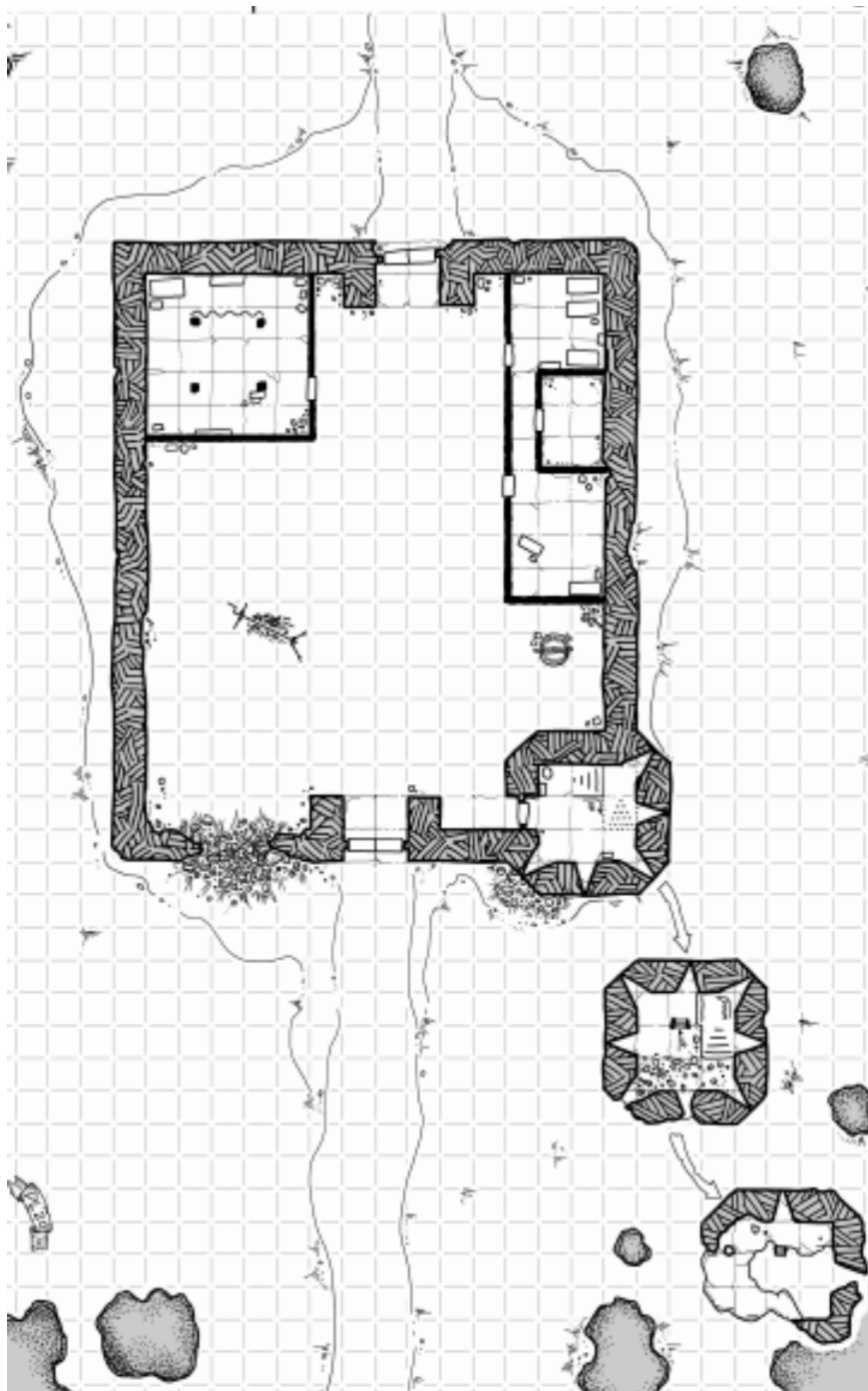
Days or perhaps weeks after the excursion to the cave, one morning the player Party will awake in the fort to a minotaur at

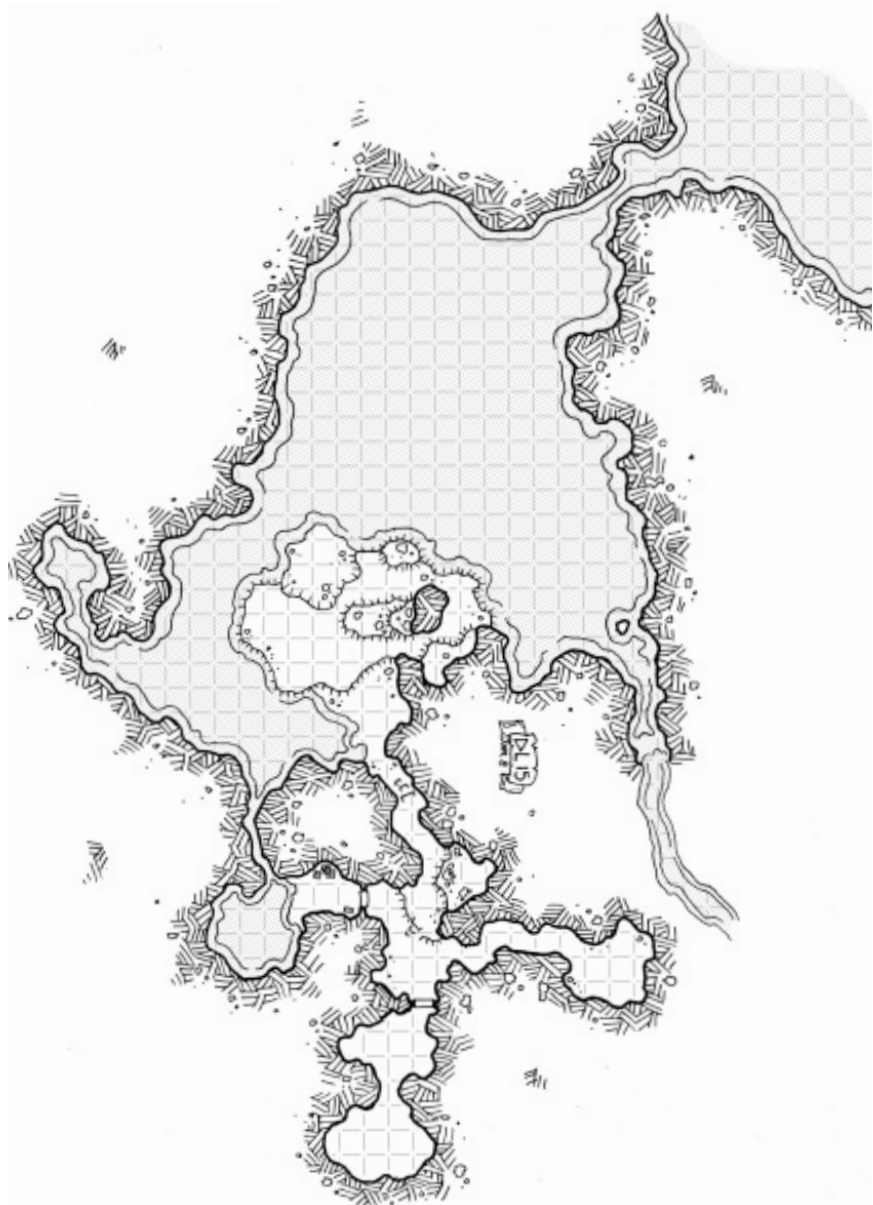


their gates, the very same from the cave. After consuming all of its fellows, it managed to work its way out of the ground, a bit worse for wear. It will be out for blood, but alone rather than supported by a host of its lessers, and already partially injured from its ordeals since the cave-in (down one step on both its condition tracks at the start).









# Brigand

*Outlaws and mercenaries who make a living by raiding settlements and attacking travellers.*

<b>Armour Class</b>	6 [13]
<b>Hit Dice</b>	1 (4hp)
<b>Attacks</b>	1 × weapon (1d6 or by weapon)
<b>THAC0</b>	19 [0]
<b>Movement</b>	120' (40')
<b>Saving Throws</b>	D12 W13 P14 B15 S16 (1)
<b>Morale</b>	8
<b>Alignment</b>	Chaotic
<b>XP</b>	10
<b>Treasure Type</b>	A

# Alfonse

<b>Armour Class</b>	6 [13] (chainmail)
<b>Hit Points</b>	6
<b>Attacks</b>	1 × two-handed sword (1d10)
<b>THAC0</b>	19 [0]
<b>Movement Rate</b>	60' (20')
<b>Saves</b>	D12 W13 P14 B15 S16
<b>Alignment</b>	Chaotic
<b>STR 10 INT 9 WIS 4</b>	
<b>DEX 4 CON 7 CHA 10</b>	
<b>Items</b>	<i>Ring of Fire Resistance</i>



# Goblin

Jump to:[navigation](#), [search](#)

*Small, grotesque humanoids with pallid, earth-coloured skin and glowing, red eyes. Dwell underground.*

<b>Armour Class</b>	6 [13]
<b>Hit Dice</b>	1-1 (3hp)
<b>Attacks</b>	1 × weapon (1d6 or by weapon)
<b>THAC0</b>	19 [0]
<b>Movement</b>	60' (20')
<b>Saving Throws</b>	D14 W15 P16 B17 S18 (NH)
<b>Morale</b>	7
<b>Alignment</b>	Chaotic
<b>XP</b>	5
<b>Treasure Type</b>	R

**Infravision:** 90'.

**Hate the sun:** -1 to-hit in full daylight.

# Hobgoblin

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*Larger and nastier relatives of goblins. Dwell underground, but commonly seek prey above ground.*

<b>Armour Class</b>	6 [13]
<b>Hit Dice</b>	1+1 (5hp)
<b>Attacks</b>	1 × weapon (1d8 or by weapon)
<b>THAC0</b>	18 [+1]
<b>Movement</b>	90' (30')
<b>Saving Throws</b>	D12 W13 P14 B15 S16 (1)
<b>Morale</b>	8
<b>Alignment</b>	Chaotic
<b>XP</b>	15
<b>Treasure Type</b>	D



# Bugbear

*Large, hairy goblins with an ungainly gait. Favour attacking by surprise.*

<b>Armour Class</b>	5 [14]
<b>Hit Dice</b>	3+1 (14hp)
<b>Attacks</b>	1 × weapon (2d4 or by weapon +1)
<b>THAC0</b>	16[+3]
<b>Movement</b>	90' (30')
<b>Saving Throws</b>	D12 W13 P14 B15S16 (3)
<b>Morale</b>	9
<b>Alignment</b>	Chaotic
<b>XP</b>	50
<b>Treasure Type</b>	B

# Melon

<b>Armour Class</b>	5 [14] (chainmail + shield)
<b>Hit Points</b>	16
<b>Attacks</b>	1 × war hammer (1d6)
<b>THAC0</b>	19 [0]
<b>Movement Rate</b>	60' (20')
<b>Saves</b>	D12 W13 P14 B15 S16
<b>Alignment</b>	Neutral
<b>STR</b>	14
<b>INT</b>	10
<b>WIS</b>	12
<b>DEX</b>	6
<b>CON</b>	7
<b>CHA</b>	11



# Bray

*Corrupted, mutant beastfolk, typically of a malformed nature. Neither intelligent nor strong, but vicious.*

<b>Armour Class</b>	7 [12]
<b>Hit Dice</b>	½ (2hp)
<b>Attacks</b>	1 × weapon (1d4 or by weapon – 1)
<b>THAC0</b>	19 [0]
<b>Movement</b>	60' (20')
<b>Saving Throws</b>	D14 W15 P16 B17 S18 (NH)
<b>Morale</b>	6 (8 with larger beastfolk)
<b>Alignment</b>	Chaotic
<b>XP</b>	5
<b>Treasure Type</b>	P (J)

# Minotaur

*Large, brutish, bull-headed men with a craving for human flesh. Dwell in mazes and labyrinths.*

<b>Armour Class</b>	6 [13]
<b>Hit Dice</b>	6 (27hp)
<b>Attacks</b>	[1 × gore (1d6), 1 × bite] or 1 × weapon (1d6 + 2 or by weapon + 2)
<b>THAC0</b>	14 [+5]
<b>Movement</b>	120' (40')
<b>Saving Throws</b>	D10 W11 P12 B13 S14 (6)
<b>Morale</b>	12
<b>Alignment</b>	Chaotic
<b>XP</b>	275
<b>Treasure Type</b>	C

**Weapons:** Prefer axes, clubs, or spears.

**Aggressive:** Attack same size or smaller creatures on sight. Pursue until the victims are out of sight.





## Cattle Raid on the Marches

Published By: Sad Fishe Games, LLC  
Written by: Tyler A. Thompson and Joshua Mahn

## FOREWORD

Some might call the Marchlands a feral wilderness. Barbarian territory, unexplored, untamed, uncivilized, and inhabited by outlaws, exiles, and savages. Such people might be correct, in some ways, but the vast Marchlands are far from empty or lacking in history or culture. The people of the Marchlands live in roaming bands or pastoral clan communities, ranging from a few dozen to a thousand or so in population, though rarely do they sustain anything larger. These communities are governed by chiefs or councils of respected (or feared) members of the community. Sometimes one clan will come to dominate others and form an often short-lived kingdom, or several clans will come together to form a confederation for a time to address some common concern, but the tribal clan persists as the dominant level of organization for Marchlanders, and serves as an important part of individuals' identities.

Raids are a way of life in the Marchlands, and while those on the receiving end do not appreciate them, they accept them for what they are, and at the end of a losing raid simply rest assured that next time they will reclaim what was taken and then some. So long as the laws are abided by and no unnecessary carnage ensues, the ill feelings are kept to a minimum and life goes on.

The necessary aspects of Marchland culture for this adventure are articulated herein, but for a more detailed document please see the Marchlands Setting Primer, Volume 0 of the Marchland Pocket Adventure series.

This adventure is intended for early level characters, Levels 1-4, but if at a higher level you should substitute commoners for guards and guards for veterans during the raid.

This adventure is intended to be written in a so-called "Old School" style. It may or may not include all things typically associated with what that moniker might imply, but what it does have is intended to accommodate that style of play. Not every instance where a die roll may be required is laid out, not every interaction or event is described in detail. Scenes and set pieces





are provided, with stage directions on their use. Many things are intentionally left vague, and much in the “intended” story or path could easily go awry with just a few steps off-trail, so to speak. The Game Master is to set the scene, and the Players are to be permitted to run free in that scene, subject to the rulings and added details the Gamer Master needs to provide to make the world, game, and fun work.

Enjoy.

## INTRODUCTION

Calubriga, the primary settlement of the so-called raiding tribe of the Marchlands, nestled in an unusual and sought-after hospitable corner of the rocky highlands which dominate this region. The inhabitants of Calubriga are also known as “The Bandit Herders”, a name which was used derisively by their neighbors, in reference to their constant raids; while, of course, such raids are a way of life in the Marchlands, none engage in such practices with the veracity and frequency as the members of this community. The inhabitants of Calubriga have instead accepted this title with pride and see it as a badge of recognition



of their martial prowess and skill.

The village itself is modest and of mostly old construction. Sturdy little buildings cobbled from fieldstones and daubed with mud stand alongside a few homes of rough-hewn, scraggly timber and leather yurts, as stubborn as the gnarled and dried-out trees which dot the highlands themselves.

What is far more significant than the buildings, however, is the lush and sweet pastoral land which surrounds this community on all sides, providing miles and miles of grassland and gently-bubbling creeks for their most cherished prize- Cattle!

However, the Bandit Herders are not satisfied with their current herds, their envious eyes turned once again to the rich fields of their neighbors, ignorant folks who don't appreciate their plump cattle highly enough.

It's time once again for Calubriga to partake in their rich heritage, and to conduct a raid, to commandeer what's properly theirs by religion and birthright, away from those fools they disdainfully acknowledge as neighbors. The local council has issued a call authorizing raiding parties to organize- including travelers and foreigners looking for honor and reward. To lead a raid is a true mark of courage, respect, and honor among the people of this community- not to mention a generous share of any prizes taken. The Player character party has been given an opportunity to garner favor among this community, and to generate some wealth to keep their swords sharp and bellies full in the meantime.

The Player character Party may venture out on their own, if they think they can handle the many moving parts of a delicate rustling operation whilst also fending off the entire might of their neighbors. Of course, there are many in Calubriga who are veterans to such raids, and may assist the Party with just a little convincing.



## RAIDING PARTY ROLL CALL

(1)

In the center of town, near the tannery and the Great House, there stand five imposing figures. Rugged raiders of these arid lands, these local **Veterans** are an imposing sight. Muscled, well fed, their hair dyed many unusual colors with local clays and micahs.

They are bedecked in supple leather and precious iron scales. Deeply familiar with their great iron axes and keenly honed seaxes.

As the Party nears, they may see that several of them are participating in exercises and tests of strength- sparring against logs, throwing stones, and wrestling one another.

As they draw nearer, they'll be heckled by one of the lot. He seems to be their leader, being older but no less fit than the others- his gray roots peeking out beneath his wild orange-and-blue streaked locks.

On his hip is a very old and strangely shaped bronze dagger, and his armor is a collage of iron ringlets and scales atop a hardened leather frame.

He says that he's heard the Party are thinking of partaking in a raid, but he doubts they have the strength, or the know-how, to do what it takes, and laughs rudely.

He says he'll need a lot more than rumors if he's to trust such a scrawny-looking cluster of shifty-eyed strangers. In fact, he'll reveal that he doesn't trust anybody until he sees how they fight.

His trust may be earned with a moderate strength check if one of the Party accepts his invitation to wrestle. If they pass, he'll insist he let them win, but that he can see they fight cleverly and honorably.

*(If any in the party seem particularly low-str or bookish, they may instead*



*impress him with an intelligence check regarding local lore, and schemes of banditry.*

*“You may not be the biggest bull, but you’re the one that rams the fence at its weakest link!”)*

(2)

When the party steps inside of the drink hall, they will be struck with the smells of cooking meats, spilled alcohol, sweat, and woodsmoke. The sounds are almost as varied, with laughter, roars, jokes, and arguments ringing loudly through the fairly-narrow space.

Amidst the tables full of the very elderly and the very young, the party will quickly notice a table where the wiry-muscled men and women sitting down are engaged in a lively argument.

Loud voices bicker over whether dry mead, sweet mead, or cider are “best.” Behind the table, leaning against the wall, are simple weapons of pastoral peoples, worn with use of many years- long spears, clubs, slings, and short bows, along with heavy leather coats- these are **Fyrdlings**.

They stop their argument as the party approaches, and regard them with some good humor. They’ll quickly mention the rumors that the party intends on bringing some good cattle in soon, and suggest that they’d be interested in knowing if “they’re the type we’d like to throw our lot in with.”

One of them, red-cheeked and tipsy, will jokingly suggest that the party could settle their little debate by buying each of them the three drinks which were the subject of the debate, and joining them in their deliberations.

The second, wearing many kinds of furs, feathers, and fangs as ornamentation, will be deeply impressed if a PC can join their conversation with in-depth knowledge of animals.



The third, wearing carved runic talismans and charms of bone and wood, will be intrigued if a Player Character can engage them in a religious discussion, pertaining to their own views, and those of Calubriga.

The fourth, bedecked in rich bronze bangles and wearing heavy iron earrings, nursing a nearly untouched drink, will be pleased if a PC can simply give their concise plan of the theft.

The last will simply request a joke appropriate to the situation.

If the Player Characters's can charm two of them, the two will convince another at the table to join them of their own accord, and, due to the table's "majority rule", the Cowherds will offer to cast their lot in with the Player Characters's on the raid.

(3)

Outside the mead hall, near the drying-fires, a group of five laborers (**Commoners**) are sitting about, eating a simple lunch. They're all able bodied and spry-looking, though seemingly antsy. They carry small axes or iron and bronze, and broad, short seaxes, with a pile of leather shields stacked nearby.

They'll heckle the party as they go by, suggesting that they'll need some help if they want to survive their own ambitions. If engaged in conversation, they'll cut to the chase very quickly—they're well connected to local rumors.

They've found labor in each of the local villages, and they each want two cattle of their own- enough to pull ploughs or wagons, or to sell to someone else who wants them for that. They're tired of this backbreaking effort for little payoff.

With a keen haggling skill, or a moderate intimidation, the laborers will lower their price to a single cow each.

If the Party declines their offer, one of them will hint that he just may raise the alarm in the targeted village in question.



## PLANNING IN THE SAND

The PC's, whether joined by their many friends, or riding solo, are now faced with the dilemma of getting all of the cattle “over there”, over here.

The party will receive some advice from their co-conspirators, if any are present.

One of the warriors will advocate for a brute-force raid in the middle of the night. He thinks that, with enough intimidation and guts, they may be able to frighten the

farmers into running for their lives- especially if they make an example out of any they catch. He argues that dealing sharply and swiftly with a few is the more

humane option than being made to deal with many at all, comparing it to slaying wolves rather than breaking their legs and letting them limp away.

One of the Calubrigan farmers will insist upon going slow-and-steady. He suggests that any cowherd worth their salt will be keeping constant eyes on their herd, and that the party would do well to observe the cowherds' rhythms.

He suggests that, with stealth, the Party may sneak in, grab many cattle, and then sneak away before being noticed. Another farmer will grimly suggest that they may do well to slay the cowherds with their backs turned, hoping for a cleaner and faster getaway.

One of the laborers will grin evilly. He suggests that, for the price of just one more cow, he will run over to the other village, and insist that raiders will be arriving the next day, from the other direction. He suggests that this will lower their guard and entirely change the direction of their focus.

If they ask for more advice around town, they will hear other clever ideas:

The town's religious leader will suggest that, with a certain





religious holiday coming up shortly, a disguise in the form of a locally feared demon may strike fear into the enemies' hearts- the Marchlands are a deeply superstitious place, particularly fearful of the spirits and demons that haunt the dark corners of the world. This disguise, especially when paired with religious knowledge, will prove fairly successful in scaring the cowherds and warriors, though they will raise the alarm.

Some children are playing “horsey” around town, and will ask the party to play if they cross paths. They’ll even offer some information if the Player characters will play, or if otherwise bribed or coaxed: while playing too far from home, they saw a whole bunch of “horseys” in the next town, and that they were hiding them behind some steep hills to the southeast of the cow’s pasture. The party may do with this information as they see fit.

## THE RAID

The target pasture is a relatively flat, rocky expanse, flanked on one side by a stretch of woodland only infrequently patrolled by hunters, and on the other by scattered farmhouses and cropland. Hundreds of cows graze and sleep here. A hill rises to the south, forming a small valley one cannot ordinarily see into without



cresting the hill- it is here that the village keeps a small herd of horses they are breeding for their thanes. At least one farmhand will be up, keeping watch over the pasture at all times, with several working during the day. The hill will have a perpetual watch of several farmhands, though they will take steps to conceal their presence. They may or may not be particularly attentive, but they all know a raid will come eventually- such is simply the way.

The goal is to steal cattle (or horses), but they will simply not be able to reasonably make off with the whole herd. A stealthy group may be able to enter the pasture and vanish into the night with a head or even two of cattle for each raid member. A more aggressive raid might involve half the crew rounding up and leading out up to five or six head a piece, while a particularly risky raid might see up to a dozen per hand. Of course, the more cattle being stolen the more likely the locals will notice sooner, and the more aggressively they will fight to keep their chattels.

Whatever route is chosen, depending upon preparations, timing, stealth, and general attention to detail, the neighboring village will likely eventually sound their alarm horns- Game Master Discretion is very important. Once the alarm is sounded, the local Fyrd (full of **Fyrdlings**) will rally quickly- again, this is all routine, and something folks are ready to do. The locals are armed with simple swords, javelins, spears, and instruments of labor. If the party was clumsy, loud, or attacked head-on without making satisfactory intimidation attempts, then the responding Fyrd party will be deployed quickly. Twelve strong villagers- five of whom are full-time warriors (**Veteran** stats), the others being hunters and farmers (**Fyrdling** stats)- will run to the pasture, slinging stones and firing arrows at the party and their friends.

More will come with each passing minute, and their targets will all be those attempting to make off with livestock.

These will be fairly quickly joined by some riders on horseback, leading with arrow fire, and closing in with spears. They will fight cautiously to protect their horses, but will quickly arc in broad circles, dealing damage.





They will fight harder, the more cattle the Player character party has in their clutches, but, like the Player characters' fellow raid members, will not be seeking to kill if they can avoid it, and will similarly not be hoping to get killed over some cows, fleeing, surrendering, or taking captives as the occasion may warrant. It is important for the Game Master to remind the Player characters of this fact; injuries and deaths are inevitable, eventually, but always come with the risk of a winning suit against the offending community, which must then exact punishment on the offending individual. For an offense in this context, this typically means money or property- depending on how egregious the slaying, even up to dozens of cows for the murder of a freedperson! Restraint is necessary and cutting losses may become prudent, something both sides know well. Only two young men (**Fyrdlings**) from the village will seem to forget these principles, and attack aggressively and foolishly- perhaps necessitating caution from the raiding party.

This attack will continue until the party has sent most of the cattle they can get their hands over the hills, and the enemy villagers recognize they had better live to fight another day,

OR

Most of the defenders have been maimed, killed, or terrified so thoroughly that further fighting is simply not a reasonable prospect.

If the party was clever, sneaky, or especially intimidating, they



will have time to round up most of the cattle and get them very close to the hilltops which guard their escape route back to Calubriga. If they were told about the horses by the children, or

if they noticed on their own through careful investigation, they will be able to snag the horses in the stable, gaining some valuable prizes to keep or sell.

## CONCLUSION

The raid will be a success if each member of the raiding party gets at least a head of cattle each (or the equivalent in horses or ransoms), after the leaders (the Player characters) take up to their share of 25% and another 25% goes to the village as a whole, the shares paid in coin if desired: 10GP per cow or 75GP per horse, with appropriate ransom payments if any captives were taken. If successful, the prizes will be divvied, a fattened bull will be slaughtered, and the party will receive the choicest cuts at a small festival. A bonfire will be lit, kegs of mead and cider will be opened, and dancing and singing will go deep into the night. The townsfolk will consider them fellows- a fine thing indeed if one wished to work with the town in shaping the future of the Marchlands.

If the party was not particularly successful in their raid, or if most of the villagers died, then they will not receive a heroes' welcome, but the village will instead dread the visitors sure to arrive the following day, as the victim community comes to make legal claims and settle scores. A reckless party may even find themselves in debt to the community, unless they are able to talk down the legal claims to a satisfactory level. For example, if the reckless youths ended up hurt or slain, it would be an easy thing to argue that they pushed too hard and that their demise was justified- as with all things in Marchland law, context and negotiation matter. Many of the villagers will scorn them as sources of bad luck, or simply s nuisances. If they endeavor to continue working alongside Calubriga in their good graces, they'll have to make it up to the village somehow...



# Fyrdling

*NPC commonfolk that serve as part time militia.*

<b>Armour Class</b>	6 [13]
<b>Hit Dice</b>	1 (4hp)
<b>Attacks</b>	1 × weapon (1d6 or by weapon)
<b>THAC0</b>	19 [0]
<b>Movement</b>	120' (40')
<b>Saving Throws</b>	D13 W14 P13 B16 S15 (T1)
<b>Morale</b>	8
<b>Alignment</b>	Any
<b>XP</b>	10
<b>Treasure Type</b>	U (J)

**Leader:** May have a leader of 2nd level or higher (any human class).

**Hoard:** Only have treasure type J when encountered in home village

# Commoner

*Ordinary folk, trying to get by.*

<b>Armour Class</b>	5 [10]
<b>Hit Dice</b>	1–1 (3hp)
<b>Attacks</b>	1 × weapon (1d6 or by weapon)
<b>THAC0</b>	19 [0]
<b>Movement</b>	90' (30')
<b>Saving Throws</b>	D8 W9 P10 B13 S12 (H1)
<b>Morale</b>	7
<b>Alignment</b>	Any
<b>XP</b>	5
<b>Treasure Type</b>	U (J)

**Hoard:** Only have treasure type J when encountered in home village



# Veteran

*Low level fighters, often on their way to or from war.*

<b>Armour Class</b>	2 [17]
<b>Hit Dice</b>	1 to 3 (4/9/13hp)
<b>Attacks</b>	1 × weapon (1d8 or by weapon)
<b>THAC0</b>	19 [0]
<b>Movement</b>	60' (20')
<b>Saving Throws</b>	D12 W13 P14 B15 S16 (F1 to F3)
<b>Morale</b>	9
<b>Alignment</b>	Any
<b>XP</b>	10
<b>Number Appearing</b>	2d4 (2d6)
<b>Treasure Type</b>	V

**Level and alignment:** A group may all be of the same level and alignment, or these may be determined randomly, per individual.





## A Gnawing Issue

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Maps by Dyson Logos under CC BY-SA4.0



# FOREWORD

Some might call the Marchlands a feral wilderness. Barbarian territory, unexplored, untamed, uncivilized, and inhabited by outlaws, exiles, and savages. Such people might be correct, in some ways, but the vast Marchlands are far from empty or lacking in history or culture. The people of the Marchlands live in roaming bands or pastoral clan communities, ranging from a few dozen to a thousand or so in population, though rarely do they sustain anything larger. These communities are governed by chiefs or councils of respected (or feared) members of the community. Sometimes one clan will come to dominate others and form an often short-lived kingdom, or several clans will come together to form a confederation for a time to address some common concern, but the tribal clan persists as the dominant level of organization for Marchlanders, and serves as an important part of individuals' identities.

## Introduction

The community of Merekfiede, the capital of the so-called Field Tribe of the Marchlands, sits on an idyllic pastoral landscape, accustomed to sleepy evenings and fruitful harvests, surrounded by a number of smaller satellite villages that watch and tend to the many fields for which their people are known. Seasonal festivals to various Harvest Gods have always been an integral part of the local culture, boasting a wide array of wines, jams, and baked goods in celebration of the bounty of the fields.

There has been no cause for festival this season.

The fields are being plagued by cat-sized reptiles called "Gnawers." They have been devouring entire wagons-worth of premium crops in the dead of night, all but vanishing by the morning sunlight. They are a common blight, but this year has been particularly plagued by them, and rooting them out entirely has proven an arduous matter.





These creatures must be stopped completely before Merekfelde's fields are doomed for good; Strange times such as these are no time for a shortage of trade goods or worse- famine. The very community and tribe may wither and perish in this era of change if they permit themselves to be weakened by packs of rodents. The community has sent out groups of their own folk and hired bands of outsiders to deal with various nests and stake out the targeted fields, but the injuries are stacking up and the toll is ever more concerning.

It is known that the Gnawers must be hiding somewhere safe and out-of-the-way during the daytime. There are many limestone caverns and aquifers in this mineral-rich landscape- the reason why this region is long-suffering from this problem, as it is in such places that the Gnawers tend to make their homes. Finding the occupied caves is an ordeal in itself, but hunters are certain they have found the site of such a nest, nestled in a riverside cavern in a quiet corner of the territory. Despite such certainty, the community has not been able to organize a band to eradicate

this cave just yet, and is eager to pawn the task off on outside folk- and willing to pay for such labor.

## Finding the Cave

There are a few well-known hunters in Merekfelde, a pair known as the **“Poorcrops,”** (**Fydlings**) who are among those that believe they know where the nest is located. They are easily spotted with their filthy clothing of animal hides, and talismans made of fangs, feathers, and teeth.

These superstitious brothers are certainly up to the task of leading the party to the hiding place of the Gnawers, if they can be convinced to do so. They are inherently wary of reptiles and rodents, fearing all scaled beasts which may be related to and under the care of, dragons or the underland ratfolk enclaves.

They may, however, be convinced to act for the good of the entire community, especially if their egos are stoked as being esteemed **“Dragon Slayers”** or the like- putting them on the pedestal they believe their hunting and pest control efforts earns them.

They are also, quite simply, hard up for money. They can be convinced to lead the party, albeit at a seemingly usurious price of coin or goods, and will ask for all of it up front, though they can be convinced to take only half to start with some difficulty.

## Tracking

The Gnawer tracks, similar to those of a huge rat, may be followed from a ravaged portion of a field, out and around some ransacked and dilapidated chicken coops, down along a creek bed, and through a mossy and swampy forest which sits just to the Southeast of the town proper. Spotting this trail is not particularly difficult, but is more than trivial with the hunters in tow to help, saving substantial time.





As the local ecosystem has been upset by the invasion of the Gnawers, the forest itself is ill-at-ease. Emaciated-looking ordinary mice dart across the party's path, with an entire swarm devouring the carcass of a dead deer that the Gnawers apparently got to.

The Poorcrops regard this as an ill omen and will insist their God is telling them to leave this place. They can be soothed with simple empathy, with coin, or with religion.

These rodents will not attack, unless the party bothers them, or they are carrying an abundance of food. They are more interested in their current meal, frightened the Gnawers will eat this, too. If they do attack, they are readily fended off, easily shaken from their frenzy by a little fear.

Deeper into the forest, a bray hunting-party lies in wait, another side-effect of the corruption in these lands. These brays are actually hoping to catch some Gnawers themselves, to turn over to some distant master to use for sowing further chaos. These are brays on the outs with their band, and not adequately supported or supplied.

In a small clearing, directly along the Gnawers' trail, a pile of apple-cores, pumpkin shells, animal bones, and fish guts molder in the sun.

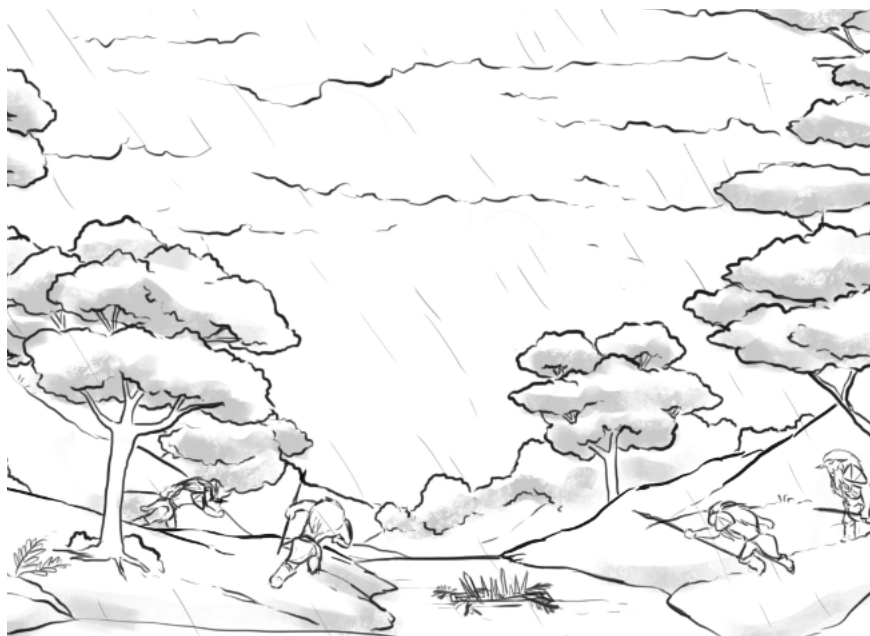
It will take only simple investigation to notice that this looks like bait laid out by a hunter, though rather poorly.

If this is approached, or if the party spends much time deliberating upon this sight, the brays will spring their trap! Whether they actually surprise anyone depends on the victims' perceptive skills- these are not subtle creatures, and they may accidentally signal their attack too conspicuously to reap the benefits of a surprise attack.

Wooden javelins and fist sized rocks will fly from the bushes around the player Party as well as from the tree limbs above.

The brays are impatient and cowardly, but also very hungry. They





look skinny, even by the standards of such creatures.

They will continue their assault from as much distance as they can manage. They do not have many projectiles, however, and will soon run out of their missiles. They will switch to their melee weapons, (pitchfork tines with rat-skin handles, the upper half of a discarded shovel, a broken axe-handle which terminates in a sharp point, and so on.) and will try to run or hide from the party, slipping back into the swampy surroundings. If any escape, one of the hunters will desire revenge, the other will wish to push on to the hunt at hand- both are serious problems that must be addressed at some point, lest corruption fester.

~

Any investigation of the bait, or of the brays themselves, will strongly indicate that they are very hungry, and trying to catch the Gnawers, as well. The trap, though poorly executed, lies at the juncture of several Gnawer-paths, and shows another rivalry against the reptilian invaders.



Each of these paths leads back to the same place- a small cavern, the opening of which is only three feet wide, nestled near to a small, burbling creek. The smooth stones around are all absolutely covered in muddy Gnawer footprints.

## The Cave

The narrow cave entrance leads sharply down to a large chamber, about eight feet tall, which stinks of feces and rot.

The room is covered with muddy prints, and strange sounds can be heard deeper within.

There are several narrow pathways along the stream that lead into the large chamber to the north. One entrance to another chamber lies along the stream to the east, but the Ratfolk within have taken efforts to conceal this entrance for their own safety. If the party is exceptionally loud, or lingers in any place for very long, some Gnawers may come to investigate. A stealthy or decisive party will have much less difficulty.

In the large chamber lingers a single Gnawer. It will hiss at any invaders and try to escape through their feet.

A passage south leads to a chamber which has four more sleeping Gnawers, apparently full from a recent meal. They are sluggish and may be easily dispatched by a careful party, but the ledge leading up to this passage requires some degree of skill to climb quietly.

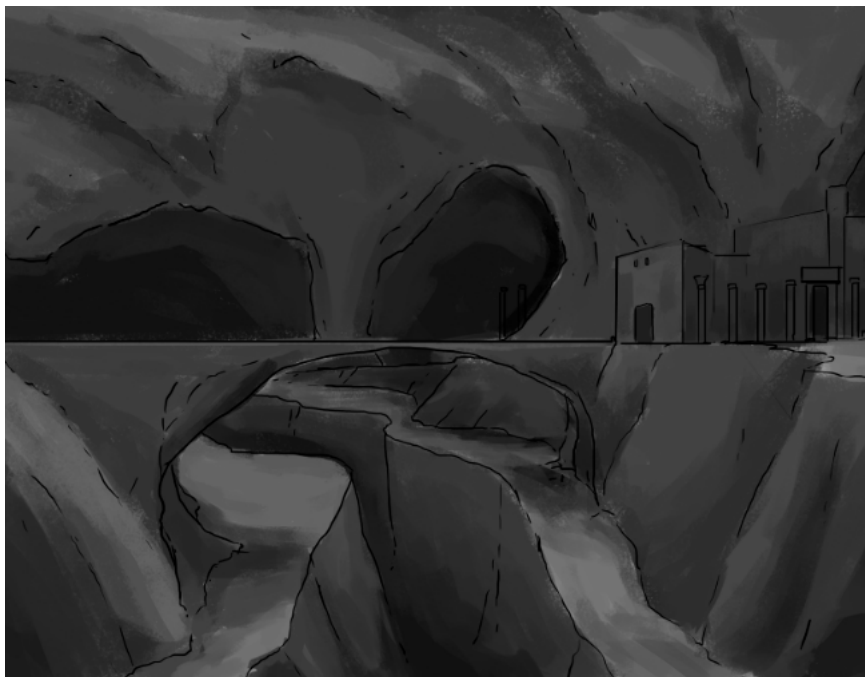
The Southwestern-most chamber, connected to the above chamber and another to the east, is absolutely riddled with the Gnawers. Dozens and dozens of them sleep in heaps, scuttle around the room, groom themselves, and pick over scraps. This chamber leads to another immediately east, which has another heap of ten more Gnawers.

The pathway Southeast from the entrance has obviously been hand carved in places, and shows signs it has been recently



North





inhabited by intelligent beings, and leads to the chamber furthest to the southeasternmost chamber, which is the home of four weary-looking Ratfolk (assigned Commoner statistics).

## **The Gnawers**

The Gnawers, for the most part, are not terribly fearful. A few of the younger ones may be more curious, but, as a rule, the majority will ignore the party unless they are disturbed.

If they are disturbed, the Gnawers attempt to escape, or terminate the threat, as a wild, ravenous swarm. Escape is typically their first instinct, unless their path is obstructed. They are not fearsome fighters on their own, but when they swarm, the risk to a human becomes very real. All told, several dozen are in the caves.



## The Ratfolk

Within the southeastern chamber, there live four humanoid rat-people (**Brigands**) residing in a crudely doored off section of the cave. They are filthy and smell horrible, but will not attack on sight, and indeed will be easy to surprise- they are not entirely well and rather unhappy with their lot in life. They do not seem terribly clever or kind, but they are also not bloodthirsty or mindless. They will regard the party with a tired curiosity and timid distrust.

Their chamber features a filthy oil lamp, along with a few horns full of oil, some blankets on which they sleep, a rusty spear and a small hatchet, and some curious “scrimshaw” made by biting hardwood branches and bones, and sculpting them into totems.

They will first attempt to ward off any intruders, but their threats are obvious bluffs. If called on them, they will give up on that notion quickly, instead trying to discern what any intruders want. With some coaxing, they will engage in conversation with the party, especially if they offer food.

They will express their anger at the Gnawer infestation, and explain that these caves were “theirs” first, and that food has become scarce for them, and they do not enjoy eating the filthy flesh of the Gnawers. They are mere “gate guards,” so to speak, to one of the many undercaverns that dot this vast region, in which more of their kind call home in various and often competing clans. It is a sucker’s duty given to suckers for ratfolk, and made all the worse by the infestation in the cave.

They will become more pleasant if the party explains that they are going to put an end to the Gnawers, and may even offer their assistance in the plans.

However, if the party reveals any intention of sealing the Gnawers into the tunnel with the Ratfolk, they will become defensive, and then enraged if any attempt to act on that plan is made. To trap the gnawers here would doom these ratfolk, and cause more problems for their kin far below- even if this



foursome survived the gnawers, they would surely be slain for their failure to secure this passage. The wounds they leave will be very prone to disease and infection, should things come to violence over this issue.

A party may have issues working with these ratfolk on this issue, and causing problems for the ratfolk below may be a good thing in the end, depending on how one views such enclaves. How they handle this is up to them- a fight with these guards is avoidable, and they may have potential allies for the rest of their task if they are willing to work with them. These ratfolk are sufficiently desperate that they will honor their word, generally, and not attempt to betray the party. Still, there are only four of these guards, and, while one can never know if they are part of one of the clans that always troubles the surface settlements of humanity, their kind are the cause of much ire and suffering.

## Stopping the Gnawer Infestation

As the party appraises their situation, there will be three clear possibilities for fixing the Gnawer issue.

### **Killing the Gnawers.**

Covering the exits from different chambers, the party may wish to go in, brute force, and slay the swarm head-on. They must be careful, though, as the Gnawers are plentiful, and may be whipped into a frenzy fairly easily. If a pregnant Gnawer escapes, this may have all been for naught, and another excursion to this cave to eradicate them may be necessary, or a whole new nest may be established.

If the Party has befriended the Ratfolk, they will position themselves with heavy rocks near all the narrow escapes which they know the Gnawers will attempt to use. Their intimate knowledge of the cave will make the slaying much more straightforward, and it never hurts to have more spears on hand.



## Sealing the Cave.

The Poorcrop brothers will point out to the party that the main exit of the cavern could easily be blocked with a few of the large river rocks. Much more easily, if they pack the cracks with clay. This will be the easier option, they reckon, starving or suffocating the entire infestation. They explain that they could wait nearby with their bows, slaying any stragglers or escapees over the next few days. This will, of course, trap the Ratfolk with the Gnawers, but the Poorcrops show little remorse, explaining that the Ratfolk also steal from the local fields on occasion, and that maybe they will slay each other faster, down there. The risk to the party will be significantly less, but if the Ratfolk catch wind of this plan, they will attempt to kill the party or escape.

This option will require some stealth to achieve without notice, as well as some dexterity to pick off any loose Gnawer rooting its way out. If the party begins doing this option without first slaying the ratfolk inside, the ratfolk will notice halfway through the operation and attempt to stop them, potentially disturbing the gnawers inside.

## Fire

If the party proposes fighting the Gnawers head-on, or if the party rejects the idea of sealing the cave with rocks and mud, the Poorcrops will suggest another option- the use of the Ratfolks' lantern and oil. The party could, if they were coordinated, pour flammable oil over the dense, writhing mass of Gnawers and at the chamber exits, hurling the lantern over the swarm, causing mass damage. Of course, this will lead to a frenzy of flaming Gnawers running in every direction, but each Gnawer will be much closer to death, individually, making the swarm easier to stamp out.

The Ratfolk may even be convinced to go with this plan, and agree to hand over their supplies and stand near any escape routes to destroy the stragglers. They will only agree, however, if the party is reasonably polite with them, and is sufficiently persuasive or offers them some sort of goods in exchange- they





need their oil and lantern, or will need to replace them, as a matter of survival for themselves..

## Conclusions

Either the Gnawers are squashed, buried, or burned, and the Party survives, with or without the Poorcrops and Ratfolk intact. If not completely exterminated, the escaped Gnawers will have more hatchlings in just a few weeks, restarting this whole mess, either here or elsewhere.

The Poorcrops will want their pay immediately after the job is done, and will insist on the “peltrights” of the Gnawers’ hides. They will also ask for a bonus if they had to kill the Ratfolk and brays, explaining that their payment was for hunting Gnawers, not anything else.

The town will be very pleased to hear their woes are coming to an end, if the Poorcrops seem confident that every Gnawer was killed. If the Poorcrops are not certain, the townsfolk, tired of their hopes being dashed, will act remarkably indifferent to the party.

## Bray

*Corrupted, mutant beastfolk, typically of a malformed nature. Neither intelligent nor strong, but vicious.*

<b>Armour Class</b>	7 [12]
<b>Hit Dice</b>	½ (2hp)
<b>Attacks</b>	1 × weapon (1d4 or by weapon – 1)
<b>THAC0</b>	19 [0]
<b>Movement</b>	60' (20')
<b>Saving Throws</b>	D14 W15 P16 B17 S18 (NH)
<b>Morale</b>	6 (8 with larger beastfolk)
<b>Alignment</b>	Chaotic
<b>XP</b>	5
<b>Treasure Type</b>	P



# Brigand

*Outlaws and mercenaries who make a living by raiding settlements and attacking travellers.*

<b>Armour Class</b>	6 [13]
<b>Hit Dice</b>	1 (4hp)
<b>Attacks</b>	1 × weapon (1d6 or by weapon)
<b>THAC0</b>	19 [0]
<b>Movement</b>	120' (40')
<b>Saving Throws</b>	D12 W13 P14 B15 S16 (1)
<b>Morale</b>	8
<b>Alignment</b>	Chaotic
<b>XP</b>	10

# Giant Rat

*Vile rodent-like creatures with an affiliation with corruption and decay.*

<b>Armour Class</b>	7 [12]
<b>Hit Dice</b>	½ (2hp)
<b>Attacks</b>	1 × bite (1d3 + disease)
<b>THAC0</b>	19 [0]
<b>Movement</b>	120' (40') / 60' (20') swimming
<b>Saving Throws</b>	D12 W13 P14 B15 S16 (1)
<b>Morale</b>	8
<b>Alignment</b>	Neutral
<b>XP</b>	5
<b>Treasure Type</b>	C

**Disease:** Bite has a 1-in-20 chance of infecting the target (save versus poison). The disease has a 1-in-4 chance of being deadly (die in 1d6 days). Otherwise, the victim is sick and bedridden for one month.

**Afraid of fire:** Will flee fire, unless forced to fight by summoner.

**Attacking in water:** May attack without penalty; excellent swimmers.





## Dragon's Dilemma

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Maps by Dyson Logos under CC BY-SA4.0



## FOREWORD

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### Overview

In this adventure, the player Party is tasked with addressing a local dragon problem. First, they must find the dragon's lair, setting a trap and then tracking her home. Then they must make the trek to its lair, and deal with its protective servants. Finally, the creature must be dealt with: will the party opt to slay it, as instructed, scare her off, or work out something else with the creature? And will the dragon's secret sway their decision one way or another?

### Introduction

More than anyone else in the Marchlands, the Herding Tribe has staked their future on the size, quality, and fecundity of their vast herds of cows and other livestock. Of course, having such herds to tend, protect, and ultimately peddle comes with risks and burdens. Substantial pastures must be procured and safeguarded, which invites all manner of labors and threats. Bandits rustle away livestock in the night. Raids from neighboring communities fill the pens of *other* people's barns and fields (potentially even at the hands of the player Party themselves, if Cattle Raid has been





played in advance). Creatures of chaos come from all sides, hoping to corrupt such beasts, and monsters come from the wilds to fill their bellies on easy, fattened prey. The work to protect such herds never ends, but typically it can be managed effectively. Sometimes, though, a threat gets out of hand and requires more active action to put things right and keep the loss of livestock at acceptable levels.

Everyone knows the ancient legends from a time when dragons lorded over humanity. Those days are forever gone, for the most part, but the dragons persist, and they too must eat. They love the hunt as any predator does, but once they settle in a region with herdsfolk providing quick and easy meals by way of their flocks, there are bound to be stolen livestock. Most folk try to tolerate these losses- a few lost cows are better than a village in flames. Most dragons know the rules too- better to skip out on an easy meal than be met with a mob of angry villagers they must then slaughter. Still, every so often this balance is tipped and something must be done.

The Herding Tribe has a dragon problem. The beast was first sighted some years ago, even then fully grown and fearsome. For a time there was no incident, but then the cattle began to vanish, followed by a sighting of the creature flying away, cow in claw. Now she takes cattle almost daily. Something must be done, though the locals are banned from taking action; better to let an outsider get roasted and maintain deniability should a mob have to negotiate. The local council has put forth a generous reward of **50gp** for anyone who can 1. Find its nest, and an additional reward, a fair fortune of **200gp** in addition for anyone who can 2. Deal with the problem, whether it means killing the creature, forcing her to move on. or otherwise.



## Of Hunters and Farmers

The primary complainants about the dragon problem are hunters and farmers; the hunters complain of decreasing prey animals and interruptions by the beast, and the farmers complain of lost livestock. It is a true rarity between these factions in every community to agree on much; much of the ancient hunting grounds have long been turned to pasture across the region, and there is always clamor to convert more prime forest to more “productive” uses, leading to much conflict and bad blood between these social strata. On this matter, however, they are

united in favor of removing the dragon, and coalitions of particularly concerned members of each have formed and created enough pressure for local leaders to put together a reward for anyone who can deal with it. These coalitions are mere handfuls of folks from each faction, but they broadly represent the interests of the entire local population of each.

**Balderic**, middle-aged son and heir of perhaps the wealthiest herder in the entire tribe, has become the spokesman of the farmers, and **Keil**, one of the most veteran hunters of the tribe has become spokesman of the hunters. Both are quiet, dour folk with hardheaded natures and an ardent pride in their own profession- and plenty capacity for violence in support of those professions' interests. Indeed, the two are very much the same person in every material way but one- their jobs.

It is with these two individuals that the player party should speak if they need help from the locals- both will be close at hand, having cleared their schedules to continue to whine to the local leaders and lounge around town with half a dozen or so of their cronies each. They will know the right names of the right people to provide assistance or materials for whatever the party is doing.

## Setting the Trap

The problem-causing dragon, a stunning, shimmering grey-blue creature, lives somewhere in the region, but where she calls home is uncertain- no one has been bold enough to risk tracking it, and the creature has been careful not to take direct routes home when leaving inhabited areas. She must be tracked if she is to be dealt with effectively, and the first step to tracking her will be determining in which direction the search should begin. One could simply begin tracking from scratch, searching the wilderness for any signs of her or waiting at random for her to attack a pasture- this is a genuine option the player party ought have, but one that will take days to weeks to pick up an adequate lead or be present in the right pasture at the right time to witness an attack. However, the local leaders and faction coalitions have put forth a better idea: a trap.



If a party is able to sufficiently take the beast by surprise or create a sufficiently dangerous scenario for her, she should take flight without regard for concealing its tracks, so to speak, and provide insight as to where to go from there. The degree of success or failure in this stage of the job will dictate how smoothly the following portion can be carried out; this is an important and dangerous stage of the task at hand.

Basic logistics for setting the trap have already been arranged for by the community, with a local farmer granting permission to use his pasture for the staging area. The remainder, however, is left to the player Party to sort out.

**Game Masters:** Several potential tools and aids are listed herein, but this encounter should be played creatively, so as to reward (reasonable) player's for any clever decisions or preparations. What is most important is that the Dragon is lured to their site and takes off in something of a hurry (whether actually threatened or not). Even if this trap is ultimately a failure, enough information will be gathered to let the party proceed, though the trek will be more arduous.

## Extra Hands

An adult dragon is individually among the most dangerous routine threats folk in the wider world must endure. Many would call it foolish for a group of 3 or 4 or however few to attempt to engage such a creature in any manner whatsoever. Such folks would probably be correct.

Still, there is some safety in numbers, and this problem is one of real concern to the locals. Perhaps some may be convinced to assist, both at laying this trap and in the greater journey to tackle the issue.

The local thanes have been prohibited from assisting with this matter; perhaps if matters get worse they will risk their hides and the ire of the dragon, but for now local leadership wants to

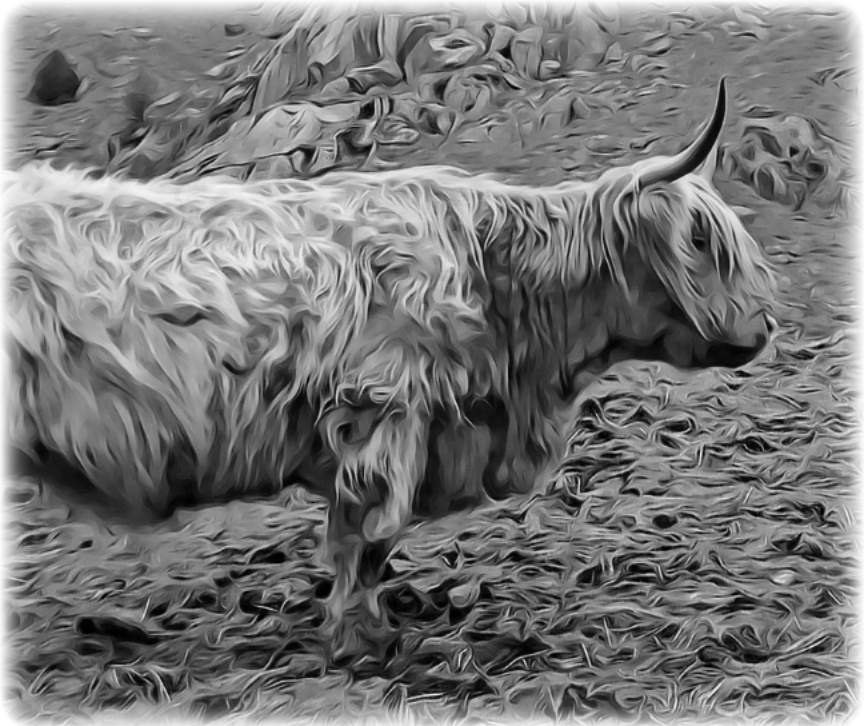




protect their warriors and maintain as much deniability as possible should this ordeal go terribly awry.

A handful of traveling warriors (**Veteran** stats) and other sorts are in the nearby villages, and can be paid an above-average rate to bother with this dangerous task- perhaps someone charming or persuasive enough can convince them to take a more typical rate, but anything better should not be hoped for.

Otherwise, various farmers and hunters (**Commoner** and **Fyrdling** stats) local to the Herding community are sufficiently upset that they might be stirred to action if the party talks to Balderic and/or Keil. A couple of each might be able to be convinced to participate cost-free, though this is a frightening prospect for them. A couple others of each could probably be brought on board, once again, with some above-average pay-including, unless they can be talked down from it, a cut of the reward, if not for them then for their families should they be slain along the way.



## The Bait

No farmer is going to leave their cattle unattended at pasture the day this trap is supposed to be set, the idea being to leave the dragon with few options to force her into the trap. Of course, no farmer has been willing to volunteer a healthy cow or even sufficiently appealing sheep or goats to sacrifice in this trap- not without being compensated, at least, since they likely will not be getting their livestock back. Creatures such as chickens are too small to be proper lures. Bait is necessary, leaving the player party a few options:

1. **A Façade:** Livestock are costly- sticks, dye, and labor-hours are cheap. Relatively speaking. The player party can attempt to assemble some sort of imitation cow or other livestock to coax in the hungry dragon- coordination with the locals will leave her with few options, so perhaps a façade will suffice.

Of course, dragons are not stupid. The chances of fake bait working well are slim. The possibilities for how one goes about assembling fake bait are unlimited, so assess their methods, tools, and skills to see what the quality of the end product may be. Something simple, crudely built, and without sufficient trappings will net the worst possible result. Something built with superior craftsmanship, care, and perhaps with blood, pelts, or other additions to make it of more interest will net the same result as The Lame Cow. Otherwise, only a desperate, curious, and cautious dragon will be making an appearance.

2. **The Lame Cow:** A local farmer, a cottar (small, poor farmer) has offered up her old cow to use as bait- for a price, a fraction of what proper cattle cost and easily negotiated down to a paltry sum. This cow is nearing the end of her days and has lived a long, productive life, but now limps, has a swayback, and no meat worth eating. She makes a poorly lure, but a lure all the same.

3. **Proper Bait:** A typical, healthy cow or handful of goats



or otherwise are just the thing necessary to do this right- but such things come at a price. Plenty of local folk are willing to offer up a cow to serve as bait, but require coin or trade. It will be difficult to talk any of them down from what would be a fair price at market0 perhaps one could appeal to their sense of the greater good to get a deal...but probably not.

**4. A Right Feast:** An ideal strategy would be to provide more than enough bait for the dragon- several cattle or a small herd of lesser creatures. Permit her to begin its feast, engorge itself, and then strike while distracted and sluggish.

**Jeering Onlookers:** All throughout the process of setting this trap, various locals will spend time watching, making comments, and perhaps antagonizing the player party. Some will offer advice- some good, some bad.

1. “Y’all should get some nets. Tie down the beast, slit its throat from there. No, no, its claws won’t just cut right through. My niece makes the finest fishing nets in town, if you need any...” (a large enough net to trap a dragon will be costly and not particularly impactful, even if this seems superficially clever).

2. “Keep some water handy, for the fire. Can’t have your corpses setting fire to the whole pasture.”

3. “Do you have enough arrows? Would hate to get too close to such a monster.”

## Springing the Trap

On the planned day, all the local animals will be either carefully herded or pulled from pasture into barns or elsewhere. It may take all day, but the dragon will come, hungry for an easy meal. Whatever plan has been devised, the player party and their cronies will need to put it all in place and conceal themselves nearby (concealment should be trivial, but is necessary; the dragon may fly overhead but if folks are loitering about she will move on, putting the party and village back to square one). Once she comes and the moment is right, the (dangerous) fun can



begin.



**Playing the Dragon:** See the **Dragon** stats in the core rules. Regardless of the plan and strategy used, play the dragon intelligently and carefully. It is not looking to die, will not act recklessly or foolishly, and is also not out to kill humans. Play her defensively, targeting only those that are most threatening, sparing those she wounds that back off the attack. This skirmish will not last long, with the dragon quickly getting her bearings and taking flight. It is theoretically possible to kill the dragon here and now, but if death seems likely or imminent, do everything possible to prevent it without cheating the party of their success- death here makes for a brief adventure that omits the majority of this adventure.

The course of the skirmish depends on which methods were used to set the trap (or which is approximately comparable, if the player party went way off book):

1. **A Façade:** The dragon is cautious and unwilling to fight for a fake meal; she is not Surprised and departs immediately on her second turn.



2. **The Lame Cow:** The dragon is surprised but is unwilling to fight for a paltry meal and departs immediately on her second turn.

3. **Proper Bait:** The dragon is surprised and wants this meal; she will immediately depart on its third turn, or on the next turn after taking 25% of its Hp in damage.

4. **A Right Feast:** The dragon is surprised and wants this meal badly; she will immediately depart on its third turn, or on its next turn after taking more than 25% of its Hp in damage. The primary benefit of this tactic is that the dragon will be sufficiently full/shaken that she leads the party straight to her nest even if she is not harmed.

## Tracking the Wretched Lizard

Once the skirmish at the trap is over, the dragon will take flight. Where she flies to depends on the outcome of the battle.

1. If the dragon was unharmed in the battle and the player party used any tactic other than A Right Feast for the trap, she will fly northeast- not directly home. Her flight can be observed for many miles, before it eventually dips low and is lost from view.

2. If the dragon was sufficiently harmed or if A Right Feast was used, the dragon will fly northwest, a much more direct route to its home. It will be visible for many miles before eventually dipping from view.

Option 1 makes for a longer ordeal. The dragon was of sound enough mind to make prudent decisions and not lead anyone straight to its home. Option 2 makes for a shorter trip and avoids **A Scavenger in the Clearing** that lies ahead.

Either way, a trek lies ahead. Even just by sight, the dragon fled many miles away, never mind the actual tracking that must follow once the trail runs cold. This section assumes foot travel, though



horses may expedite things some; a few days of supplies would be prudent.

Regardless of which path must be taken, consult the **Overland Travel** rules; the terrain is such that it will take about a day by foot to reach the point where view of the beast was lost. The way is a mix of hilly forest inter-mixed with prairie, meadow, and pasture; little of it is quite wilderness, having seen some degree of human use in one way or another, but nor is it entirely well-explored or safe. A handful of solitary residence might be passed along the way- if desperate, the residents may be able to provide assistance. It should be notable that much of the best land has been converted to grazing pasture, even if not currently being grazed (as herd are rotated in and out), and that much of the forest is of generally poor quality, having been logged and probably over-foraged and over-hunted in recent years. The



general condition of the landscape should improve as they stray from the town and more populated parts of the territory, but with the rise in pristine quality comes a rise in danger.

## A Scavenger in the Clearing

If the player party must take the longer tracking route, they will reach a small forest approximately where sight of the dragon was lost after the trap. Through this patch of forest a clearing is obviously visible, and anyone should be able to notice something amiss within that clearing- disturbed treetops and soil, and an animal corpse.

The treetops in the direction toward town are missing branches high up, as though something crashed through- this is easy to spot before entering the clearing.

More difficult to spot but still readily apparent to anyone observant are the similarly crushed branches and even a toppled dead tree heading westward out of the clearing- this time, an exit path for the very thing that slammed into the clearing, the dragon.

The corpse is also an important clue. It is a deer, or rather the top half of one. If the party was prompt in pursuing the dragon, it is reasonable fresh. If not, it is all but picked clean. Either way, the necessary evidence can be readily observed by someone with a modicum of survival skills or other relevant knowledge: this deer was swooped down upon by something large, crushing much of its torso. Large claw and bite marks are tell-tale signs of a predator larger than even a bear, and the rend separating the top half from the absent bottom half is brutal and thorough. It was the dragon, undeniably so, and it has left a trail of blood droplets heading westward from taking off while carrying the just slain bottom half of the deer. This trail, while it will run dry in time, is straight, relatively easy to follow with a modicum of tracking ability, and ultimately will lead to the dragon's lair.

**The Scavenger:** Unfortunately, there is a reason the dragon took flight with a mere half of its prey: among the dragon's own



damage to the deer carcass, there are smaller claw and bite marks. A **Rex Cat** is nearby and has antagonized the dragon for its meal— as a large and cunning feline animal, they are no real threat to a beast like a dragon but may be annoying enough to cause it to abandon a meal rather than risk a wound. The Rex Cat has concealed itself nearby, but wants its half of the deer (or, if the deer is long consumed, has decided to make this clearing its home, and would prefer the player party depart).

It will out of hiding while the player party investigates the clearing, perhaps by launching a preemptive surprise attack on the character furthest from the group, if not noticed as it approaches.



This attack is serious, but not supposed to be deadly or invite a fight to the death; it wants the party gone, and will disengage to see if its first attack is enough to ward everyone away.



Survival, culture, or natural lore knowledge (or a companion from the region) will let a character know at once what this creature is, as well as its significance: these animals are sacred as chosen of the Mother Goddess worshipped in the Marchlands, and it is unlawful to deliberately hunt them. If no Marchlander locals are present and no one in the party is particularly concerned with local custom, slaying it is of no concern. If Marchlanders are present or if the party is a respectful lot, slaying it is a bad omen indeed that may rattle companions. Still, no law will be violated- no one around here expects anyone to let themselves get eaten in the name of any god.

Of course, the fight can be avoided- if the party is confident they have gotten the information they require to continue their tracking anew, they will be able to carefully, slowly exit the clearing without inciting further violence. Any escalation by the party will, unfortunately, mean a fight to the death for the hungry Rex Cat.

Hopefully the player party can escape with the information they need and without injury or violating any serious social mores. Westward ho, though it will likely need to wait until morning if they came by foot, as it will likely be dusk.

## **Goblins at the Bridge**

If the party was fortunate enough to track the dragon via the more direct route, they will arrive at this encounter at approximately dusk after a full day of travel. If they took the longer route, stopping in the clearing, it is unfortunate that this encounter is approximately as far from that clearing as that clearing is from the town- another full day of travel by foot.

Whatever the case, a small ring of hills surrounds a patch of forest with a rocky formation in the middle poking through the treetops, with a creek that has eroded itself about 8 feet into the surrounding earth making almost a full loop around the patch of forest. From atop a nearby hill, it is easy to predict what this is: the dragon's roost, hidden somewhere in the rock formation. It is not a glorious den, but one easy to conceal and protect.



While crossing the creek or clambering some steep rocky hillsides will be necessary to enter the forest to get to the probable den, this would ultimately be trivial. However, there happens to be a bridge.

## The Bridge

Anyone with common sense will realize that there ought not be a bridge here; this area is far from major habitation by Marchlanders, and there is little reason to built a proper, well kept wooden bridge to pass a small stream into a patch of otherwise unimportant woodland. But here it is, and it is indeed a fine bridge, large enough for a cart to pass, no rattling planks, and complete with fine railing.

## The Truth of the Matter

The dragon has enlisted the help of half a dozen stray, homeless goblins and half a dozen stray, homeless geckofolk (**Brigands**, though not by trade) to help keep its home safe. This relationship is informal, amounting to little more than the dragon keeping other dangers away by its mere presence, and the trolls and gecko doing what they can to discourage human intrusion- as such the trolls and geckos know next to nothing about their overlord or its den.





The goblins take advantage of a truly ancient Marchland law, from a less civilized, less tolerant age: **the Right of the Toll**. This ancient law permits trolls who were at the time otherwise prohibited from settlement or more than a passing trespass into these lands, to settle if they dedicated themselves to maintaining a bridge or other crossing. Any who crosses such a bridge is required to pay reasonable toll, to be used to support the bridge and its keepers. To breach this law is to give rise to a serious legal claim, though few in living memory are aware of anyone using this ancient right these days. Here, the goal is to dissuade anyone from venturing into these small woods- who wants to pay some foolish trolls for bad business strategy?

The geckos stay hidden while guests are around the bridge, as they do not have the same ancient rights. Instead, they skulk the area at night, causing a ruckus, leaving markings that imitate predators, and otherwise frighten folks off both before and after they cross the troll bridge. Their ruses are clever, but not particularly difficult to see through.

## Crossing the Bridge

The party more or less needs to cross the bridge or find a way across without it. Because there is a bridge and the goblins are claiming the Right of the Toll, crossing without paying them is



technically unlawful, and could in theory bring a suit for damages from the trolls. Still, the party need not realistically worry about this. The bigger danger is that the goblins will pelt anyone they see crossing without paying the toll with sling stones (not seeking to kill), and will have the law on their side as they do so. If things come to real violence, the law is sufficiently vague that any dead troll will probably not result in a fine or payment of any weregeld, especially given the pseudo-official business the party is here on.

The goblins will be friendly, but insistent that any guests only cross using the bridge. Unfortunately, they will charge an outrageous toll for each person- what, exactly, will depend on who, but it should always be so much money or an item of such value that no sane person would pay up; the idea is to prevent anyone from crossing, of course. They will insist on this demand, and can only be talked down by reasonable discussion or citing of local custom. If refused or talked down, they will eventually, after much arguing, relent and accept a reasonable toll in the form of a trivial sum or paltry gift- they know the rules, and their façade depends on following them when pressured.

If the bridge/stream is crossed, whether by paying, violence, or otherwise, any remaining goblins will join the gecko friends in attempting to shoo off the player party.

## **Making Camp**

If the party makes camp anywhere near the patch of forest or the goblin bridge, they can expect an eventful night. Screeching, sling stones from the darkness, and a rotting carcass of an animal mutilated to appear as though a monster is present, though the damage is all done with knives. The geckos and goblins are to blame, and these tricks and faux-threats are all intended to scare the party off.

## **Dealing with the Goblins and Geckos**

Ultimately, the goblins and geckos can in theory be ignored once over the bridge. They are not going to outright attack with intent to slay, though their efforts to shoo off the player party may



result in things coming to blows. They will defend themselves and their friends, but as a group are not looking to die if they need not, and so will retreat if the pressure is on, though they will return once the threat has subsided- they have a good gig here and are not willing to lose it so easily.

## Into the Lair

The dragon's lair is simple: a large, open cavern directly inside the rocky formation at the center of this small forest. It has but one entrance, which curves upward into the chamber proper, plenty wide for even the full grown dragon to safely clamber in and maneuver about. The walls of the entrance and cavern are sturdy; it would be herculean indeed to penetrate them from without or cause a collapse, though the dragon could probably work its way out through the top if the entrance were to be irresolvably blocked. The cavern is dark, lit only by a small, smoldering pile of splintered wood and other tinder which the dragon keeps lit only for comfort.

The dragon will spend her time in the center of this chamber when not out hunting, and evidence of its prior prey is somewhat scattered about, though she makes an obvious effort to keep the den tidy. If wounded, she will be tended her wounds and resting, brooding over the trouble she can guess is coming.

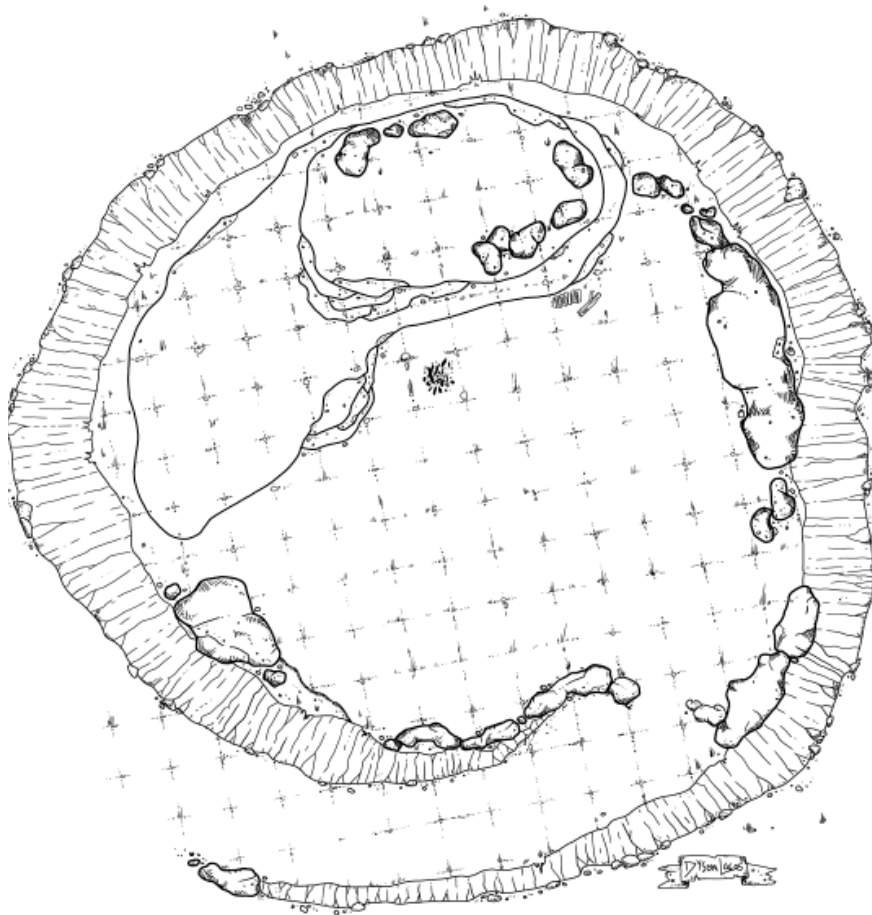
In the back of the cavern, along the elevated portions to the north, a trio of **wymlings**, her wyrmlings, fuss about. These child-like creatures are as capable of thought and speech as she is, but do not know their strength and lack much common sense. They are also perpetually hungry, and the number of recent meals scattered in this portion of the cave prove this fact.

In this area with the wyrmlings is a **Javelin of Lighting** (Javelin +1, may cast Lighting Bolt once per day) lay about; some wanna-be hero lodged it in the mother some time ago, and now it is used as a chewtoy by the wyrmlings. Despite the abuse, it is in pristine condition.

There is little cover in this cave, and its residents have little issue



seeing in the dark; sneaking around will not be easy, though perhaps it can be done if the creatures are all at rest. More likely, an intruder will be promptly spotted by the adult within. If the player party waits until she must depart to hunt once more, the wyrmlings are less observant and generally less equipped to fight or discuss with any intruders- though they should not be underestimated.



## The Truth of the Matter

This den is one that this dragon has used for decades, off and on, but one she has only in the past year or so settled into full time. She needed a safe, out of the way place to raise her brood to adolescence, at least until they could migrate together without putting the young at serious risk. Unfortunately, this time is still several years away, at best; the wyrmlings are too frail, sickly, and scared to make the move in their current state. She is a first time mother, in an era where her kind are in decline; raising this brood has proven more strenuous than she predicted, with prey less bountiful than predicted. This has necessitated her much more frequent taking of livestock than she ordinarily might have done. This decision was a matter of life or death for her young- and her own death is preferable to their own.

She wants to stay. Indeed, she needs to stay if she wished to be certain her brood survives. However, they also must feed. These two desires may irreconcilably conflict, if the player party cannot assist in reaching a compromise.



## Fight, Flight, or Parley

The dragon is located. The player party has several options from here:

1. The party is free to return to town and abandon the job; they have done their job, at least in part, and found the den. Perhaps better folk with more of a death wish can finish the job.

2. Starting a fight, either at once or after seeking additional help, is always an option. It may be a dangerous and deadly fight; the dragon will fight viciously, brutally, and to the death unless given the chance to flee with her young after being severely battered.

3. Wait until the dragon must leave to find food and sneak in to slay the young- they will be much easier alone. This will eliminate the reason the dragon needs to steal livestock or even stay in the region, but may the gods help the party and community if it can figure out who did it.

4. If given any chance, the dragon will try to talk. Her name is **Ka'Trinka** (play her bluntly, intelligently, and passionately; she is no dummy, has little energy for fussing, and cares deeply about the issue at hand), and she has lived a great many years, though is young for adults of her kind. She will lay out her dilemma of having young in need of more time to grow to support, and nowhere else safe to go. Fortunately, dragons are sky tyrants for a reason: the dragon is no fool, but can offer its guidance, ritual magic, and savage strength to the benefit of the local community- not to mention owing favors to the party members- if only they spare it and its young and enable them all to adequately feed. To be able to support themselves, though, this draconic family needs concessions: either acceptance that livestock will be taken routinely, sacrifices from the community, or a substantial swathe of wilderness to be left unused by hunters for a period of several years. All of these options come with issues which will either cost the community much money, cause the farmers to be angry, or cause the hunters to be angry, which





will lead to issues below.

What the player party does with this offer is up to them, but the dragon will hope they take word of its offer to the community and see what can be worked out.

## **Leave With Your Lives**

Ultimately, a confronted **Ka'Trinka** can be convinced to leave if promises of a large extermination party are made (whether already there or at some future date). A victory that day would be ultimately short-lived, as eventually enough rabble or enough angry thanes could be motivated to put the beast to the spear, now that its den is discovered. Still, the dragon will bare her fangs and do all it can to present its case and make a deal, and of course resort to savage violence if pressed.

## **Settling the Matter**

If the dragon is slain, the matter is settled.

If the dragon is forced out of its home and/or its wyrmlings slain, what is done is done, though there may be consequences in Conclusions.

If the player party wishes to work something out with the locals, things are complicated some. Local elders will be open to finding some way to tolerate the dragon's presence- the people less so. The dragon's offerings of its magic, counsel, and defense are prized gifts indeed. Still, the creature must eat, and must provide for its young- its request that either livestock offerings be provided or a vast stretch of territory cease being heavily hunted, or some combination thereto shall not fall upon pleased ears of farmers and hunters.

Routine offerings of livestock amount to a costly burden, even if the community as a whole chips in to lessen the blow on farmers. Marking off substantial woodland to reserve for the beast does not sit well with the hunters, both out of principal and a practical need to make their living. A mix of both satisfies neither side.



Dedicating some unnecessary public pasture to proper prairie and meadow is a minor blow to farmers and lessens the blow to the hunters- indeed, the hunters firmly believe the territory has been too thoroughly converted to pasture anyway, and can see the long term benefits of converting some back to wilderness over the coming years and decades.

The spokespeople, Balderic and Keil, need be talked down in order to bring this matter to a close, and neither will be all that willing to deal. **Talking them down is meant to be difficult, but not impossible;** let the debate and discussion take the direction it naturally falls into, and decide if the offer and persuasion are sufficient to ease one or both parties.

### **Assault on the Dragon's Den**

If one or both factions, the farmers and hunters, cannot be assuaged to accept the dragon's deal, a posse will leave in the night for the den (the player's trail back is easy enough to follow). About a dozen members of each unhappy faction (**Fydlings**) will join in this war party, which is of course unauthorized and unlawful- it must be stopped if any deal is to hold and,



potentially, if their lives are to be saved (assuming the dragon was not left on its metaphorical death bed by earlier attacks).

Where the war band can be caught depends on how prompt the player party departs and whether they use horses- the war band is on foot. Whether in the field or outside the dragon's den, they must be talked or beaten down. Only about half are all that motivated; even a casual reference to the chance of fiery death, brutal beating, or punishment by the law will make them think twice about their decisions (maybe living alongside a dragon isn't so bad...).

The other half will require a firmer touch. They could be beaten outright (and if any perish, no wergeld will be necessary given their unlawful behavior). They could also be generally talked or threatened to back down, though having rejected earlier proposals it may be hard to convince them on the same grounds. They may also be brought back to the table, so to speak, by renegotiation.

If this fails, they will eventually seek to slay the dragon and its brood, as well as the goblins and geckos if any are still around. They will likely (but not necessarily) die in the process, and unless the party actively helps the dragon defend itself, any deal it may have offered will be off the table without much prostrating and begging.

## Conclusions

Once the jobs are resolved, whatever method is used, the rewards promised can be distributed to the player party.

If the dragon is slain, any surviving young will also die in short order and the matter is concluded.

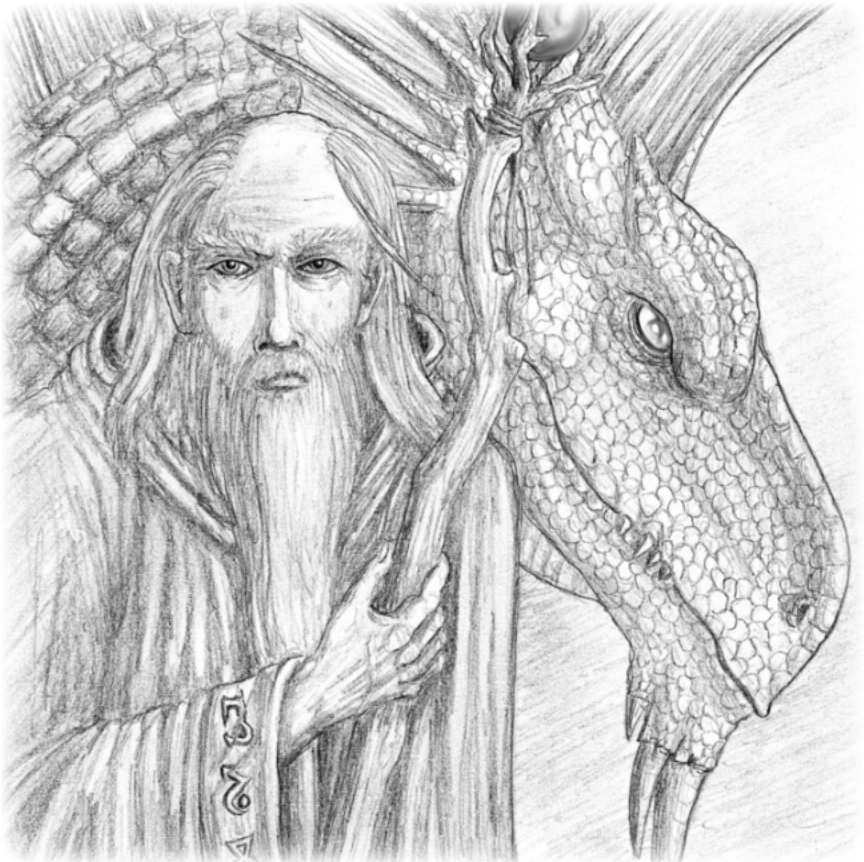
If a deal is worked out, the local authorities are ultimately able to hold their people to the agreement and the dragon and its young prosper, and after some years all move on. In the meantime, it holds its end of the deal and offers the locals various aid, and is forever grateful to the residents of the region.



If forced out, the dragon will move on and its young will die. It will forever despise the locals and their kin...perhaps one day it will return for vengeance.

If the wyrmlings are slain and the dragon remains, it will grieve briefly before beginning a fiery rampage across the territory. Farmsteads will be burned, entire herds slaughtered, all carefully done to elude any warbands. This will persist until it is slain.

If no resolution can be accomplished, a warband will eventually be dispatched after public outrage reaches a boiling point. After a bloody, deadly struggle, the dragons will all be slain.



# Fyrdling

*NPC commonfolk that serve as part time militia.*

<b>Armour Class</b>	6 [13]
<b>Hit Dice</b>	1 (4hp)
<b>Attacks</b>	1 × weapon (1d6 or by weapon)
<b>THAC0</b>	19 [0]
<b>Movement</b>	120' (40')
<b>Saving Throws</b>	D13 W14 P13 B16 S15 (T1)
<b>Morale</b>	8
<b>Alignment</b>	Any
<b>XP</b>	10
<b>Treasure Type</b>	U (J)

**Leader:** May have a leader of 2nd level or higher (any human class).

**Hoard:** Only have treasure type J when encountered in home village.

# Ka'Trinka

<b>Armour Class</b>	-1 [20]
<b>Hit Dice</b>	10** (45hp)
<b>Attacks</b>	[2 × claw (1d8), 1 × bite (4d8)] or breath
<b>THAC0</b>	11 [+8]
<b>Movement</b>	90' (30') / 240' (80') flying
<b>Saving Throws</b>	D6 W7 P8 B8 S10 (10)
<b>Morale</b>	10
<b>Alignment</b>	Chaotic
<b>XP</b>	2,300
<b>Treasure Type</b>	H

**Breath weapon:** 90' long cone of fire.

**Language and spells:** 3 × 1st level, 3 × 2nd level, 3 × 3rd level, any.



# Wyrmling

<b>Armour Class</b>	7 [12]
<b>Hit Dice</b>	3* (13hp)
<b>Attacks</b>	2 × claw (1d4)
<b>THAC0</b>	17 [+2]
<b>Movement</b>	60' (20') / 150' (50') flying
<b>Saving Throws</b>	D12 W13 P14 B15 S16 (3)
<b>Morale</b>	7
<b>Alignment</b>	Neutral
<b>XP</b>	50
<b>Treasure Type</b>	C

# Brigand

*Outlaws and mercenaries who make a living by raiding settlements and attacking travellers.*

<b>Armour Class</b>	6 [13]
<b>Hit Dice</b>	1 (4hp)
<b>Attacks</b>	1 × weapon (1d6 or by weapon)
<b>THAC0</b>	19 [0]
<b>Movement</b>	120' (40')
<b>Saving Throws</b>	D12 W13 P14 B15 S16 (1)
<b>Morale</b>	8
<b>Alignment</b>	Chaotic
<b>XP</b>	10



# Goblin

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*Small, grotesque humanoids with pallid, earth-coloured skin and glowing, red eyes. Dwell underground.*

<b>Armour Class</b>	6 [13]
<b>Hit Dice</b>	1-1 (3hp)
<b>Attacks</b>	1 × weapon (1d6 or by weapon)
<b>THAC0</b>	19 [0]
<b>Movement</b>	60' (20')
<b>Saving Throws</b>	D14 W15 P16 B17 S18 (NH)
<b>Morale</b>	7
<b>Alignment</b>	Chaotic
<b>XP</b>	5
<b>Treasure Type</b>	R

**Infravision:** 90'.

**Hate the sun:** -1 to-hit in full daylight.

# Black Bear

*Big kitty, savage, and sacred*

<b>Armour Class</b>	6 [13]
<b>Hit Dice</b>	4 (18hp)
<b>Attacks</b>	2 × claw(1d3), 1 × bite(1d6)
<b>THAC0</b>	16 [+3]
<b>Movement</b>	120' (40')
<b>Saving Throws</b>	D12 W13 P14 B15 S16(2)
<b>Morale</b>	7
<b>Alignment</b>	Neutral
<b>XP</b>	75
<b>Number Appearing</b>	1d4(1d4)
<b>Treasure Type</b>	U

**Camp raids:** Sometimes raid camps, for food (especially fish and sweet treats).



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