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VILLAGE BACKDROP
HORNWALL



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VILLAGE BACKDROP: HORNWALL

Five years ago, the bandits won. They overwhelmed the village of Hornwall, killed its citizens and looted their treasures. Then, they settled down. The bandits of Hornwall now reside within the very defences meant to keep them out. They have given up the sword and taken up the ploughshare, exchanging a life of danger for one of safety. The villagers hide their secret well, but bodies keep appearing—floating in on the current, dug up by dogs and even emerging from the thawing winter snows. And the citizens who wish to return to the old ways are murdered in their sleep by their loved ones and business owners who wish to keep the past dead and buried. If passing travellers learn the truth, they have a choice. Forgive and forget? Or avenge the uncaring dead and leave Hornwall nothing but ashes.

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SYSTEM NEUTRAL NOTE

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

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

CONTENTS

Credits	1
System Neutral Note.....	1
Contents.....	1
Hornwall At A Glance.....	2
Village Lore	2
Villagers.....	2
Whispers & Rumours	2
Notable Locations at a Glance.....	3
Life in Hornwall.....	4
Trade & Industry.....	4
Law & Order.....	4
Customs & Traditions.....	4
Village Dressing	4
The Surrounding Locality.....	5
The Ghosts of Hornwall.....	5
Notable Locations in Hornwall.....	6
1: Basile's Brews.....	6
2: Bloody Well	6
3: Dampé's Abode	6
4: The Gravepit.....	6
5: Green Lodge	7
6: The Hornwall	8
7: Lyeshop.....	8
8: Shrine of Flowers.....	8
OGL V1.0A.....	9

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HORNWALL AT A GLANCE

Ruler: Luchent Leroie

Government: Autocracy

Alignments: N, LE, CE

Population: 64 (43 humans, 1 elf, 9 half-elves, 11 half-orcs)

Notable Folk: Basile (Basile's Brews), Daleren Leroie (Green Lodge), Luchent Leroie (Shrine of Flowers)

Languages: Common

Resources & Industry: Hides, berry wine

Five years ago, the bandits won. They overwhelmed the village of Hornwall, killed its citizens and looted their treasures.

Then, they settled down.

The bandits of Hornwall, once known as the Thinner gang, now reside within the very defences meant to keep them out. They have given up the sword and taken up the ploughshare, exchanging a life of danger for one of safety.

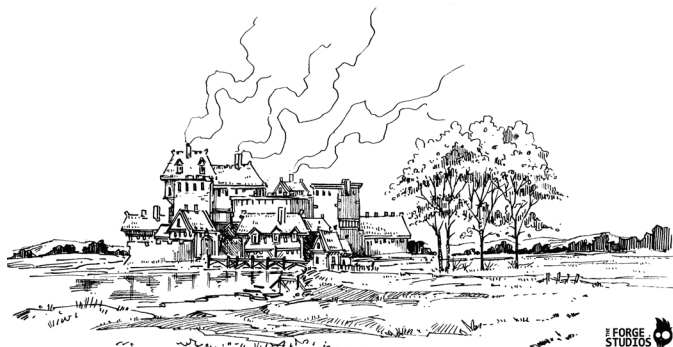
They try to toil as normal peasants, fish Shallow Lake and hunt the forests. They skin deer and drink sweet berry wine. The laugh and carouse among friends. However, it is hard to give up the old ways. Rifts form. Knives are drawn. And violence silences dissent.

While the ageing mayor, Luchent Leroie, tries to keep peace through whatever means necessary, his daughter, Daleren, sees no further value in this charade. She gathers followers and silently plots her own form of vengeance. If she gets her way, the villagers will become the Thinner gang once more—even over her father's corpse if it should come to that.

But until Daleren makes her move, all the villagers must play their parts. They keep their secrets and encourage visitors to move on. And the citizens who risk this balance are murdered in their sleep by their loved ones and business owners who want to keep the past dead and buried.

Despite the civilised facade, it's not so easy to move on. Corpses keep appearing—floating in on the current, getting dug up by dogs or even emerging from the thawing winter snows. Ghostly phantoms point accusing fingers and living nightmares plague the streets. Guilt stricken bandits walk into the freezing waters, never to return.

One way or another, Hornwall is headed for disaster.



THE FORGE STUDIOS

VILLAGE LORE

A PC may know something about Hornwall, its history and surrounds. Determine how knowledgeable the PCs are and then impart some (or all) of the information below:

- Hornwall is a sleepy, out-of-the-way village which exports hide and doesn't take well to strangers. Time has taken its toll on the village's once mighty walls.
- Hornwall had a bandit problem some years ago in the form of the fearsome Thinner gang. The walls were enough to force the ne'er-do-wells to move on, though.
- Most of the inhabitants of Hornwall left in the past decade, leaving room for a new crop of villagers.

VILLAGERS

Appearance: Hornwall's inhabitants are large, muscled and exhibit poor hygiene. Men greatly outnumber women, and children are few and far between.

Dress: The villagers are roughly dressed, some from hodgepodge leather clothing and others from finery patched up by hide. Most people are filthy.

Nomenclature: *male* Crouso, Gauthier, Julien, Lamber; *female* Alizée, Deni, Solenn, Thribaun; *family* Anoulith, Bouchand, Carrel, Rouzeit, Mignard.

WHISPERS & RUMOURS

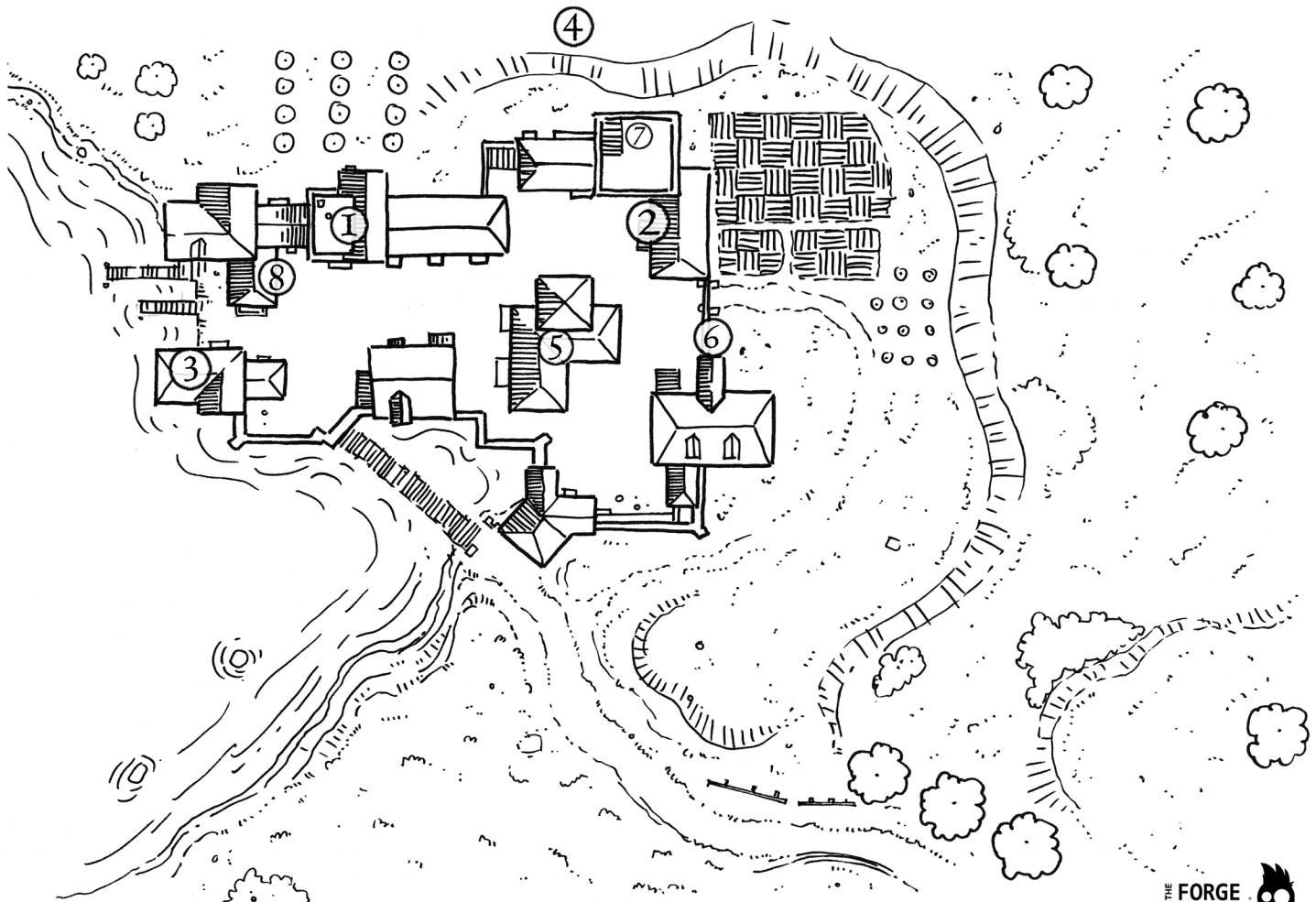
While in Hornwall, a PC may hear one or more rumours. The PC can learn this information in several ways: perhaps by overhearing two locals gossiping, chatting with regulars over a few drinks at the local taverns and so on. Use the table below, to determine which rumours the PC learns.

D6	RUMOUR
1	Daleren is perpetually furious with her father. This anger could turn to violence if the conditions are right.
2	Dampé has an imaginary friend who teaches him about fishing. The two are inseparable.
3	Philbaud the tanner is the most recent addition to Hornwall. He was hired by Luchent, but still does not feel welcome in the village.
4	Philbaud was once a savage bandit who has been reintegrated into civilised society. (False rumour).
5	Shallow Lake is slowly being poisoned by the tannery. It will be unusable within the year.
6	The village mason and carpenter both died years ago, leaving nobody to patch up the walls.

NOTABLE LOCATIONS AT A GLANCE

Most of the village comprises peasant homes. A few locations, however, are of interest to adventurers:

1. **Basile's Brews:** This dark, cramped home smells of loam and sugar. Basile the alchemist lives here, roaming from room to room in a psychedelic haze. She has removed all the doors to make carrying objects easier.
2. **Bloody Well:** The Bloody Well once provided water for Hornwall, now it dredges up only red, metallic muck. Luchent designated this area as a makeshift sparring ground, hoping to relieve some of the villagers' stress.
3. **Dampé's Abode:** Damp and dark, Dampé's abode is none-the-less homey. Here Dampé spends hours speaking with his imaginary friend and organising the possessions of the deceased villagers.
4. **Gravepit:** The Gravepit holds the remains of the pervious villagers. Despite the effort of time and wild animals, the bodies do not decay. Instead, they slowly seep to the surface, perpetually rotting in the breeze. The scent is noticeable for miles.
5. **Green Lodge:** The Green Lodge is both a tavern and staging area for hunting trips. Daleren Leroie and her lover Edrix live upstairs, while hundreds of human ears are kept in a secret trophy room. The building is decrepit and filthy, filled with the stench of deer entrails and spilled wine.
6. **The Hornwall:** The Hornwall surrounds the village in an unbroken ring. For a time, this wall protected the villagers from the Thinner gang. Now, the gates sit open and unmaintained. A single watchtower houses a large horn, once used for warning the villagers of approaching danger.
7. **Lyeshop:** The tannery (known as the Lyeshop to locals) is a small-time affair. It is manned by Philbaud the elf, the only villager who was not a member of the Thinner gang. Unfortunately, lye from the Lyeshop is slowly poisoning Shallow Lake. The waters will be undrinkable before long.
8. **Shrine of Flowers:** This tidy wooden room houses a statue of the god of the former inhabitants of Hornwall. Now, the shrine is all but abandoned. Luchent Leroie, the village mayor, is the only person who spends much time here. In the cellar, the villagers store grain, meat and gold.



LIFE IN HORNWALL

Life in Hornwall is tense, restless and uncertain. These are villagers unused to civilised life, a gang of bandits with terrible pasts being moulded into the role of a commoner. For many of them, the transformation has not been smooth.

TRADE & INDUSTRY

There is little commerce between Hornwall and nearby settlements. The villagers are used to self-sufficiency, and even after half a decade they salivate at the thought of the loot carried passing merchants.

Over the years, Hornwall has tried its hand at a variety of exports, including fish, grain, berries and lumber. However, the once-bandits have repeatedly found they were ill equipped for a life of honest labour.

As a result, Hornwall's one main export is more a by-product than anything else. The villagers are excellent hunters, but have little use for the excess hides. To earn gold, Luchent hired Philbaud the tanner to cure the unneeded leather. Now, the villagers play as tradesmen, spending what little they earn on things they cannot produce themselves.

However, the villagers' clothes and tools are slowly degrading, and no one has the skill to repair them. There is little doubt the villagers had access to better fineries when they took it from passing nobles and merchants.

LAW & ORDER

There are no codified rules or laws in Hornwall (except to keep the past buried). These once-bandits instead follow a generally understood set of ideas based on how they remember or imagine civilised life to be.

Though ultimately mob mentality wins out, Luchent is the de factor ruler. He is generally able to sway the populace to his side, and to quell troubles. However, villagers used to charismatic leaders are vulnerable to sudden changes. If Daleren takes charge, the villagers quickly bend to her will.

CUSTOMS & TRADITIONS

The villagers are uncultured and amoral. They abide by no gods and buried most of their traditions when they settled down.

When a hunting party returns from a kill, the party and nearby villagers engage in a short call and response: "We've got a fat one" "*What was his name?*" "*What does it matter?*" Daleren, the leader of the hunting pack, takes particular relish in this chant, which originated with the capture and ransoming of merchants.

On the anniversary of the taking of Hornwall, many villagers take to the lodge to try to pull a happy facade over a complex mix of emotions. On this day, they call each other Thinners once again.

VILLAGE DRESSING

Use this table to generate the minor sights and sounds the PCs experience as they move about Hornwall.

D12	DRESSING/EVENT
1	A fistfight breaks out by the Bloody Well to the delight of onlookers. When the smaller participant is knocked senseless, the spectators erupt into cheers.
2	A rotting hand beckons from the lake. If the PCs investigate, they find a bloated corpse riddled with arrows crafted by the local fletcher.
3	A small gentleman looks greedily at the most expensive item the PCs carry. Later on, three villagers laugh about the good old days. If the PCs approach, the villagers abruptly fall silent.
4	Thin purple smoke billows from Basile's home, but the villagers do not seem concerned. Later, Basile the alchemist walks off the dock, seemingly unaware of where she is. Dampé quickly jumps in to save her.
5	Bitter fumes from Shallow Lake blow over the village. A few of the older villagers faint.
6	Daleren and a few of her hunters confront the PCs, trying to size up and intimidate them.
7	Daleren and her party return from a hunt drunk and spoiling for a fight....
8	Daleren's lover, Edrix, swaggers forth from the Green Lodge. He throws a stone through a nearby window, then passes out in the street.
9	Dampé carries on a lengthy conversation about carp with his imaginary friend. When the other villagers lose their tempers, Dampé continues in a whisper.
10	Red liquid seeps up through the boards in the Bloody Well and oozes onto the ground. The PCs trip over a human bone partially exposed in the ground. It is robed in bits of rotting flesh.
11	Shadowy figures move in the shade beneath a tree. If the PCs investigate, they find a skeleton.
12	The horn on the Hornwall is blown, but the tower is empty by the time the villagers arrive. Whispers on the wind convey a message to the PCs, leading them to the Gravepit. "Behind the quartz rock," "Beneath the oak tree" and "Just a little further."

THE SURROUNDING LOCALITY

Hornwall is located in a pleasant, temperate land. The summers bring warm winds and the winters bring light snow, but by and large the temperature is mild.

This is a wild country, bursting with the game and berries which comprise the villagers' meals. Indeed, the villagers of Hornwall eat much as they did during their bandit days.

To the south, a trade route connects two distant cities. While not heavily trafficked, a handful of caravans, touring nobles and wealthy merchants make the journey every day. It's an ideal place for a good mugging, as the Thinner gang learned time and time again. Even now, it provides a tempting target for a few of the more restless villagers. Once or twice a year, a small group sets up an ambush and steals weapons or gold. If these rule-breakers are discovered by Luchent, they are swiftly put to death.

To the east of Hornwall, the Youngwood extends for many hundreds of miles. Blackberry bushes are plentiful, but otherwise the underbrush is light. No matter how many deer, elk and even bears the villagers hunt, the Youngwood always gives back more.

The old Thinner camp is only a day's walk from Hornwall. Nestled between two hills beside a stream, the camp still feels like home to many villagers. After all, nearly all of the bandits lived here for longer than they have lived in Hornwall. Against the wishes of Luchent, many hunting parties make camp here for the night and relive the good old days.

Hornwall is built on the banks of Shallow Lake. Only a few hundred feet wide, a tall man could walk from one side to the other with his chin above water. Fish are few and far between. The only person able to catch anything is Dampé.

Even worse, Shallow Lake is being poisoned by the Lyeshop. Even at such low levels of production, and with the extra precautions taken by Philbaud, some lye inevitably seeps into the waters. The grass on the banks near Hornwall is brown and orange, and dead frogs and worms float on the surface. The water, even when drawn from the other side of the lake, has a

bitter taste. Philbaud warns that in a few months, the whole lake will be unusable. Hornwall, however, lacks the capacity to plan this far into the future.

To the north, the land is littered with incongruous boulders deposited by ancient glaciers. Behind one such boulder, the fetid Gravepit emits a rotten stench and vomits forth corpses. A traveller wandering in this country could find the Gravepit from miles away just by following the smell.

THE GHOSTS OF HORNWALL

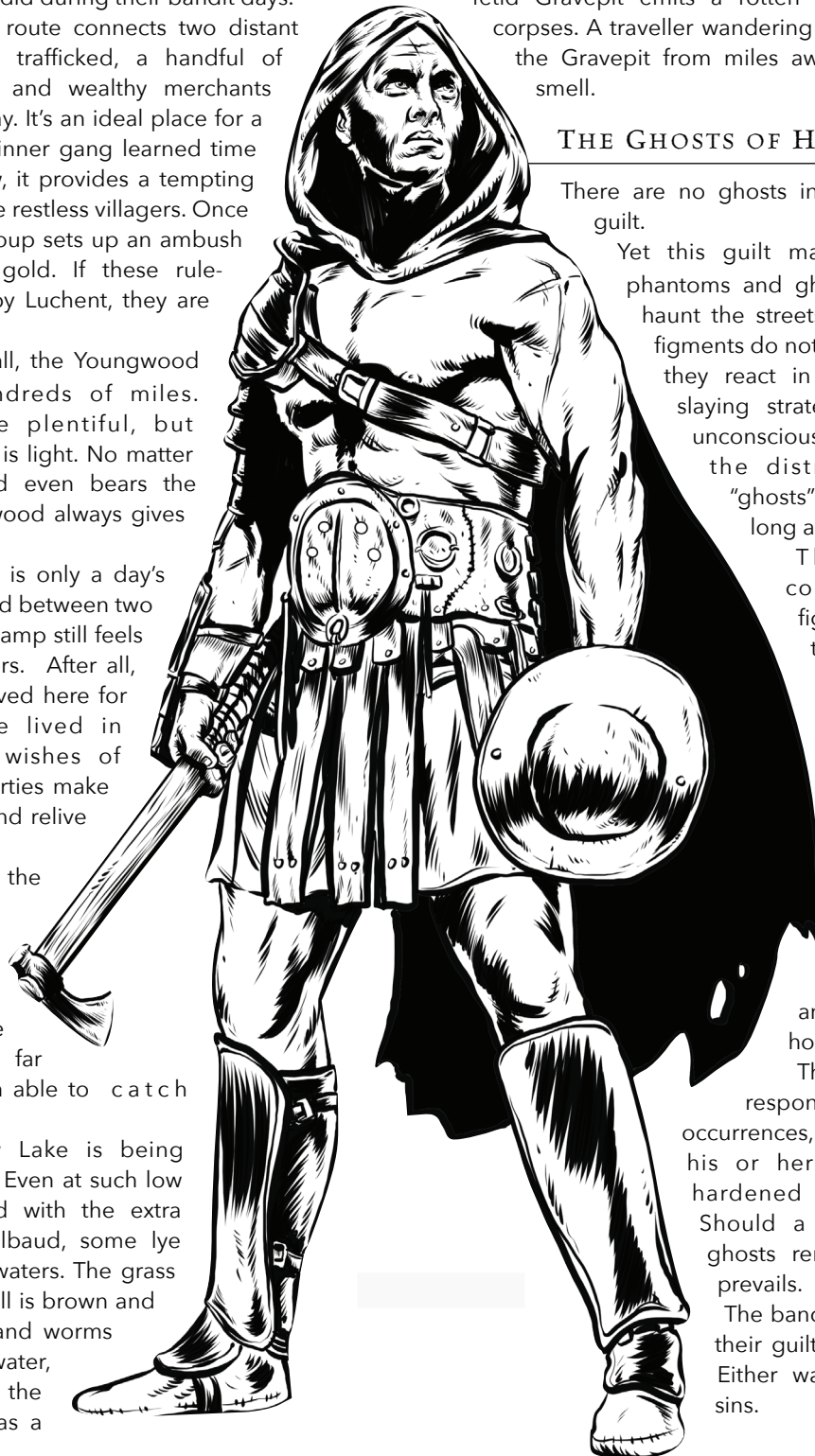
There are no ghosts in Hornwall. There is only guilt.

Yet this guilt manifests in the form of phantoms and ghoulish apparitions which haunt the streets and countryside. These figments do not detect as undead, nor do they react in normal ways to ghost-slaying strategies. Instead, they are unconscious psychic projections from the distressed villagers. The "ghosts" return night after night as long as Hornwall stands.

The haunting is not constrained to shadowy figures. Some villagers are taken with bouts of "possession" – sleepwalking fits in which they carve the names of the deceased on doorframes, or whistle Hornwall's ancestral songs in the dead of night. Psychic emanations break pottery, pull blood from the Bloody Well and even blow the great horn of Hornwall.

The villagers are collectively responsible for these strange occurrences, and every bandit bears his or her share of guilt – even hardened murders like Daleren. Should a mutiny break out, the ghosts remain regardless of who prevails.

The bandits must learn to live with their guilt. Or they will die from it. Either way, there is no bury their sins.



NOTABLE LOCATIONS IN HORNWALL

1: BASILE'S BREWS

Sugar and soil suffuse the air in these dark rooms. Potted mushrooms, leaking barrels and dripping candles take up every table and inch of floor.

Basile's (CN female human) alchemy lab and home are one and the same. Her halls burst with potted mushrooms. She uses barrels of fermenting berries as chairs and footstools. The doors between rooms are removed to make passage easier when carrying bottles or flasks.

Basile specialises in two concoctions, and they are the only items she brews. The first is a fermented berry wine made from local blackberries and raspberries. This sweet drink has replaced beer for most villagers. (Beer is hard to come by because of the minimal trade with nearby settlements.)

The second concoction is a liquid rung from psychotropic mushrooms. Though not particularly potent, it produces a consistent and noticeable high for many hours. Basile takes sips of the drink from a flask she carries around, and even spikes the village's wine stores with the stuff.

2: BLOODY WELL

Wooden boards cover the mouth of this well, and the ground around it is crimson with what appears to be dried blood.

Shortly after the massacre, Hornwall's well began to produce only red, acrid water. Luchent claimed it was a harmless mineral deposit, but ordered the well boarded up anyway. Now, the villagers draw their water directly from Shallow Lake.

The Bloody Well has another use now, and the red-stained dust is set aside as sparring ground. After years of violence, it can be hard to break old habits. Luchent would rather villagers channel their frustration in productive ways instead of risking the village's stability.

3: DAMPÉ'S ABODE

The shutters of this house's windows are kept always closed, locking in both damp and shadows. None-the-less, the strange trinkets hung from the walls fill the home with comfort.

Dampé (N old male human thief 4) has hundreds of dolls, boots and other items displayed on shelves and hung on walls within his house. These are the prized possessions of the inhabitants who once lived in Hornwall (though of course, Dampé would not disclose this to visitors). Though most other villagers hate seeing these relics, Luchent has placed Dampé under special protection. After all, the two are old friends dating back to before the Thinner gang was founded.



Dampé's bedroom is kept for two, even though he lives alone. The second bed is for Riemon, Dampé's imaginary friend and murder victim. Riemon taught Dampé everything he knows about fishing.

- **Accommodation** Common room free (Dampé offers his living room for free to strangers).

4: THE GRAVEPIT

Something is strange about this large patch of ground. The scent of rotting flesh seeps from the soil, and the earth is lumpy and freshly tilled.

The Gravepit is the resting place for Hornwall's original inhabitants. After the massacre, the Thinner gang dragged the villagers north and buried them in a shallow grave.

But even after five years, the bodies still give off a stench. Day by day they rise through the soil, rotting heads and feet emerging every season to a swarm of hungry flies.

MUTINY IN HORNWALL

There is trouble brewing in Hornwall, and the PCs' arrival may be enough to bring the whole village crashing down.

While the vast majority of villagers feel uneasy about their new arrangement, they are easily swayed by a charismatic leader. Luchent and Dampé wish to continue this farce, and to return to civilised ways. Daleren and Edrix wish to return to a life of crime.

If the PCs arrive with wealth and magic items, the temptation becomes too much. One night following the PCs' arrival, Daleren confronts Luchent. The inevitable altercation leaves one dead, and the other in charge of the village.

If the PCs have been pleasant, kind and helpful, it's likely Luchent is able to convince the mob and win the fight. If the PCs have been rude, abrasive or showy with their wealth, Daleren wins the day. The sounds of the argument and ensuing battle may be enough to alert the PCs.

Confronting the villagers with evidence of their misdeeds is also enough to spark a fight.

If Luchent is victorious, by morning his daughter and Edrix are dead. Luchent tries to hide the altercation but admits to everything if challenged. Defeated and hollow after the death of his daughter, Luchent begs for mercy from the PCs but refuses to defend himself.

If Daleren is victorious, she immediately rouses the bandits and marches on the PCs and Philbaud. Should the villagers survive the encounter, they move back into the woods and begin their raiding again, this time haunted by Luchent's memory.

When this phenomenon was discovered, the bodies were exhumed and burned. But even flame had no effect. The corpses only smouldered. They refuse to be consumed by cleansing fire, so back into the vomiting pit they went. No matter how eagerly the wildlife picks at the corpses, and how deep the villagers bury them, the bodies always return.

5: GREEN LODGE

This crowded bar is an utter pigsty. It stinks of wine and animal entrails, and the green paint seems held to the walls only by hastily mounted deer heads.

BASILE MEDLIE

CN female human

This stooped woman grins a manic grin, and swipes long black hair out her gigantic eyes.

Mannerisms: Basile's mind has been altered by the same chemicals she makes daily. She drums her fingers, gnaws on her knuckles, giggles to herself and generally bursts with uneven, crazed energy.

Personality: Basile's descent into pleasant madness has been slow but consistent. She's eager for friends and extremely talkative, but undeniably insane.

Background: Basile was once a kidnapped noblewoman destined for ransom. However, during her abduction she suffered a serious wound to her temple where she now bears a white scar. Basile was never quite the same, and refused to return to civilized life even when her ransom was paid in full.

DAMPÉ

N old male human thief 4

This older gentleman wears a quiet smile on his lumpy face. He smells of fish and vinegar.

Mannerisms: Dampé is old for a bandit. He shuffles about, talking quietly with Riemon, his imaginary friend. Riemon was the fisherman that Dampé killed, though the old bandit believes his victim has forgiven his crime.

Personality: Dampé is friendly, odd and strangely charming. He always smiles and is eager to help strangers. However, he is constantly bullied by some of the other villager, and grimaces when they approach.

Background: Dampé was once the most violent and avaricious Thinner in the gang. A soldier in Luchent's battalion, he originally introduced Luchent to a life of violence after the pair retired. The assault on Hornwall changed him. Now, all he wants is to fish off the docks and swap stories with Riemon.

The Green Lodge is the centre of hunting in Hornwall, and thus the crux of the village's food and economy. The building also doubles as a tavern for men and women to share ales and stories. Hunting parties, led by Daleren (CE female human ranger 5), meet here before heading out for the day.

The place is a mess. Chairs wobble, rain leaks through the ceiling and the tables are covered in splinters and dried blood. The patrons lack both the skill and interest to keep the place clean.

- **Food & Drink** meal (deer jerky [rancid] and wild berries [mouldy]) 3 sp, berry wine 5 cp, spiked berry wine 5 sp.

Adjacent to the bar, a small armoury stores bows and arrows for hunting, but also piles of swords and armour once used in banditry. A discerning eye would realise no two arms were crafted by the same blacksmith. Instead, they were looted during dozens of raids.

Daleren and her lover Edrix (NE male human fighter 4) live in the rooms above the lodge. Their abode is as messy and foul smelling as the rest of the place. They put no effort into maintaining it or keeping it safe. Edrix, constantly high on Basile's mushrooms, is prone to gleefully smashing walls or ripping chairs apart.

Behind a locked door at the back of the lodge lurks the bandits' trophy room. Here, Daleren and the other bandits hang hundreds of ears, ripped or cut from their victims. Most of these ears are but leather scraps now, but a few seem suspiciously fresh. Luchent despises this room, but destroying its contents would be a bridge too far for most of the retired bandits.

DALEREN LEROIE

CE female human ranger 5

This young woman moves like an agitated tiger, darting eyes and restless feet infused with a certain violent grace.

Mannerisms: Daleren picked up many mannerisms from her father. She grinds her teeth and fidgets with the dagger at her hip. She does occasionally smile, but only with a confrontational leer.

Personality: Daleren embodies the restlessness of Hornwall. She is eager to return to a life of banditry, and feels her time is being wasted. She lashes out at those who disagree, but finds herself under the protection and watchful eye of her father.

Background: Daleren's mother died in childbirth in the dust of the Thinner camp. She was raised to do violence, and gained none of the social underpinnings which village life provides. She resents the decision her father made to settle down, and resents it even more because the decision was made for her.

6: THE HORNWALL

This 30-foot high wall surrounds the village.

The Hornwall itself was built almost two centuries ago in response to raiding bandits from the south. In times of the village's greatest trouble, this watchtower was always manned. Now the villagers feel no need and the gates are always open. No great threats wander the woods, and other bandits know better than to disturb these settled veterans.

At Hornwall's highest point, within a small watchtower, an ancient ram's horn hangs suspended from leather straps. Though the watchtower is not occupied, the horn's wail echoes through the village every few weeks. No perpetrator is ever found.

7: LYESHOP

The tannery itself isn't much to look at—a few cauldrons of lye, two drying racks and a small pile of pelts on the earthen floor.

The Lyeshop is a small room in Philbaud's (NG male elf) basement. It is manned by the elf alone. The bare minimum of equipment is stored down here. There is no need for a larger operation with so few hides.

When Philbaud is done with his work, he stores the used lye in thick clay vats. It takes three men to move these vats, and, despite Philbaud's protests, they often just empty them outside the village gates. Rain washes the chemicals into Shallow Lake. The situation is unsustainable, and the lake will become unusable within the year.

Philbaud fears for the village's only water source, and has brought his concern up with Luchent several times. Luchent, however, is unable to convince the villagers to dump the lye farther afield. The former bandits seem unable to comprehend the long-term trouble they are in.



8: SHRINE OF FLOWERS

A small statue of a woman, surrounded by a dozen wildflowers, dominates this low-roofed wooden shrine.

The Shrine of Flowers used to be an appropriate name for this dismal little room. Once, the villagers heaped daisies and sunpetals upon the tiny wooden statue of Maren, the local god. Now only Luchent Leroie visits, and only when he is not busy with other work. Though he rarely brings flowers, his fidgeting only ceases when alone in front of Maren.

A cellar beneath the shrine holds the village stores—cured meat, purchased grain and a dwindling supply of gold coins.

LUCHENT LEROIE

LN male human fighter 4

This grizzled man's face is hardened by the sun and crossed with a dozen scars. His stark white hair reaches his shoulders.

Mannerisms: Luchent never smiles, and constantly grinds his teeth. He fidgets with the dagger at his hip when he is agitated—which is always.

Personality: Luchent is an intense man, prone to fits of brooding and has little patience for fools. He's unhappy with the way things have turned out, but sees no other options.

Background: Luchent was once a distinguished soldier and leader of men. He tried his hand at a few trades after retiring, with no success. Eventually, Dampé convinced him to take up banditry. Luchent led the Thinner gang for 15 years, but when his daughter came of age he wanted something better for her.

PHILBAUD MAYGLEAM

NG male elf

This thin elf is tall, proper and dressed far above his station (and farther still above the other villagers). Yet the gleam in his eye suggests a liveliness beyond these fancy airs.

Mannerisms: Philbaud has learned to keep his head down. Though invited here by Luchent, the tanner is treated like an outsider and potential threat by the other villagers.

Personality: Extremely intelligent and naturally cheerful, Philbaud now tries to keep a low profile. Even so, he is constantly poking his nose where he shouldn't. He'll eagerly engage any visitors with bawdy jokes and stories, quickly breaking through his prim and proper appearance.

Background: Philbaud is the most recent addition to Hornwall. He was recruited by Luchent two years ago to provide the village with a source of income. He has come to regret this decision, but feels pressure to stay. He does not know the details of Hornwall's past, but suspects they must be criminal.

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