

A TRICK ON THE TAIN

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INTRODUCTION

At ‘The Shared Debt Inn’, in border country, a wizened and weather-beaten old man leans across the table, staring; his one intense black eye boring into you:

‘Ah! The Tain! That name makes my heart chill – travelers hearing that shiver and fumble for the blessing of their gods – be careful where you speak such a word. It is a cursed place, a wilderness, fickle and cruel and blighted. What would any sane person want with such a forsaken place? Dragon hoards and native wisdom – ha! Crumbing legends, you mark my words. If the awful cold doesn't kill you, then the terrible beasts will. Then there are the snow-going humanoids and the outlaws with nothing to lose – not to mention the Shum. You would have to be desperate or mad to head out there. That or very well paid – traveling the Tain means certain death.’

NOTES FOR THE GAME MASTER

This stand-alone tundra-themed adventure is designed for Swords & Wizardry™ and is intended for use with 4-6 adventurers of 1st -3rd level (it can, of course, be adapted to suit the GM's needs). The aim of this module is to provide a memorable challenge, emphasizing drama and narrative, reward and risk. In various places throughout the adventure, less detail is consecrated to some of the new items and spells introduced. This is deliberate with the intention to open up starting points for your own imaginative interpretations of the material. Feel free to play it in any manner you choose, with only one deeply ‘old-school’ condition - have fun!

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The action within this module takes place in a tundra wilderness beyond the Kendrick mountains. Given this, the GM is invited to house-rule extreme weather events. This could be the effects of prolonged exposure to cold, navigation and transport issues, and a range of other environmental aspects. It should be noted that the Tain is extremely harsh, even in summer, and that all necessary pre-cautions must be taken. Any ill-equipped or hurriedly deployed party will suffer in this place. Some patrons may contribute to the cost of proper equipment and preparation. The initial phase of this adventure requires the PCs to explore the Tain, moving north, and gives the GM an opportunity to use random encounters and party dynamics as drivers of action. Remember, the Tain itself is a character of sorts – a vast, moody, unforgiving wilderness that PCs must learn to respect.

PLOT HOOKS

Adventurers may be drawn to the tundra region for a variety of reasons and GMs may rework suggestions to fit with their own needs. A few starters are:

- The party is sent out into the tundra to prove itself by exploring this unforgiving place (with vague instructions like, 'bring me a sabretooth's pelt' or 'I need a bierd-yeti for my circus – fetch me one').
- The party is fleeing north out of Doggerland and passes through the Tain. They may be fleeing religious persecution, punitive taxation, or to elude capture and punishment for crimes they committed in Doggerland. They may be pursued or simply think that they are.
- A party member has been sent to the tundra (by a wise adviser or mentor) to find the Shum, to atone for something or to discover some secret healing art (such as a certain type of rare flower much prized in alchemy and medicine, though little understood).
- The party is hired to map, reconnoiter and report back to Doggerland guilds on levels of humanoid activity in the tundra region. There is a plan to open a salt mine in the region but the initial investment depends upon creating secure caravan routes.

OF RIGERLAND & DOGGERLAND

The icy and volcanic landscapes of Rigerland sit far to the north and even lies beyond the loose confederacy of Doggerland. The lands of Doggerland hang together under the brutal rule of the High King Vendelin 'Snagtooth'. Many who have fled to Rigerland in recent years wished to escape Vendelin's oppressive religious cruelty, exorbitant taxes, or both. The High King broods angrily – eager for the time when his wild northern neighbor will be bent to his will. To this end there are vessels and caravans out of Doggerland, with traders and spies, assassins and political enforcers, all out for gain, information, and other ways to please their High King. Fueled by fear and desperation, as well as a zealous lust for power and wealth, these followers of the North Way seek the Rigerland 'edge'.

Rigerland itself is a vast and empty place, defined by a volcanic massif (Grimsnes), a huge glacial plateau (Viggo glacier), and countless wild rivers and spectacular cataracts – chief among them, the mighty Kratonfoss. The land is fertile in places, utterly barren and rocky in others, and for six months of the year the polar darkness defines life. In summer, the sun barely grazes the horizon, and these endless days are the high time for Rigerlanders to provide for themselves before winter. Terrible storms are also commonplace and they come whipping in off the open sea. Travel is sometimes cut off for months at a time confining to harbor the merchant vessels and whalers of Rigerland's small but robust maritime fleet.

There is but one sizeable town, Ylva (known as Eyja to the Doggerlanders) which is nestled on a sheltered bay and bestrides the Senlac River. Here, a population of several thousand works in the town's few productive industries – whaling and fishing, producing finished goods from metallic ores mined further inland, and the fur trade. Other than these occupations, only farming, smuggling, or the path

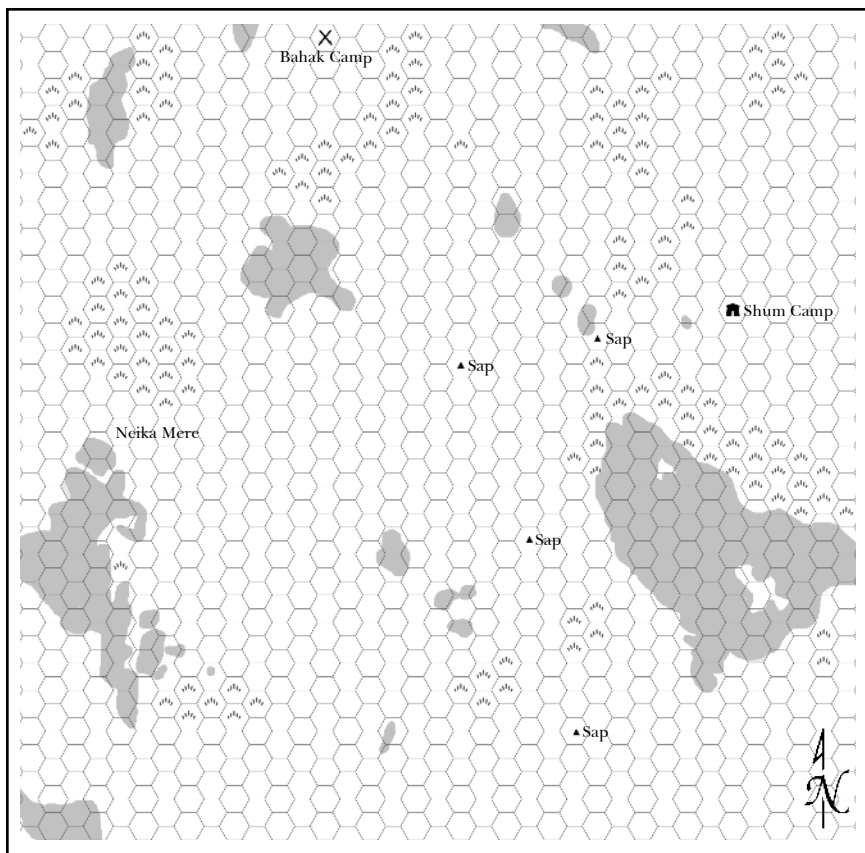
of the mercenary remain, and these too feel weighted with decline. There is also a burgeoning, though small, enclave of 'free-religionists' – holy men and women who have shed the clerical mode in order to approach their gods directly. They are tolerated by their Rigerland neighbors and many have fled to these communities from Doggerland though not without attracting Vendelin's unwelcome ire. The largest of these 'free-church' settlements is at Vellir, and the people there are peaceful and without dogma – a beacon of the 'live and let live' ethos at the edge of the world.

Rigerland has rivers of boiling water and steam flowing up from the underworld, lava flows both ancient and hardened, as well as new eruptions and fissures – all wreak their wild fingers across the land. Four high peaks dominate the plateau, rising steeply from the glacial ice. They are known as Angg, Reyka, Sna and Latra and these vast mountains remain a source of wonder and awe. Many stories speak of the vast and ancient forces that dwell there to this day and they tell of giants, dragons, and other antediluvian creatures.

Located in the far reaches of the ice at Lagarfolt is the last bastion of a once dominant race called the Yngern – their number now long since fallen into abandoned and despairing decay. These 'Cracked Yngern' and their brethren remain at their fortified station, aware of their time passing away. Leaderless and unconnected to their kind over generations, they hold tenaciously to their lot out of loyalty and narrowness of choice. Lagarfolt is a stone built fortress though its current form is largely carved from the covering ice sheet and changes with the seasons. GMs are encouraged to work up their own map for this area, should the players wish to explore it further.

Ylva is the seat of Rigerland's government, a largely symbolic convocation of farming gentry from outlying lands, loosely confederated under the office of the Vassal King. The current incumbent, Alois, is but twelve years old and it is his mother, Queen Lenka, who wields what power there is in the land. Protective and secretive, the queen fears the arrival of a seaborne crusade or conquest out of Doggerland the most. Meanwhile, the Rigerland estate continues to decline – the mining lands near Askja, once so abundant, now yield but a trickle of ores and the workforce of dwarves and gnomes has all but vanished. Some say a darkness walks the land, emerging from below. Others think that the land itself rebels and puts forth monstrous forms to punish those who plundered her riches. In any case, the wealth of the area is declining and an attitude of subsistence now characterizes the outlying farmsteads and hamlets. People try to scratch a living from the thin soil, catch enough fish, seal, or even whale, to make it through another six-month winter. These are the preoccupations of many and hard times have brought suspicion and even blood-feuds between neighbors covetous of another's store, or just fearful of their own dwindling resources. Only in Ylva is there any semblance of prosperity and power left.

Ylva then is a town of trade withering on the vine. It is increasingly starved of raw materials and the inflow of capital that was once its lifeblood. The bankers speak of crisis, the town guard warn of depleted defenses, and the political class chatters



to itself even as ennuï wraps around them like a sea fog. It seems that the land is ripe for Vendelin Snagtooth to pluck, though as yet he makes no move – preferring machinations behind the scenes to direct intervention. Waiting.

Rigerland is reached by two means. If conditions permit and the season is light, travel is possible by ship to the harbor of Ylva. Several whaling ships make the journey from the Doggerland port of Thulagi. In addition, there may be small merchant vessels making the trip who might be willing and able to transport passengers and their equipment for the right fee. Such sailings will take at least a week, perhaps much longer depending on events.

Alternatively, the journey could be undertaken by the overland route, from Thulagi again, along the coastal plain and the edge of the ice sheet. This is a more arduous proposition and should only be attempted during the summer months. Even in ideal conditions the going is hard and the time taken is likely to be measured in weeks, if not months, of strength-sapping trudging. True, there are caravans that make this journey, but these are slow and laden with beasts of burden, and often the victim of attack by bandits, outlaws and barbarians dwelling in and around the Kendrick Mountains in north Doggerland. This is to say nothing of the beasts of the tundra beyond. This is the land called the Tain.

INTO THE COLD DESERT

Entry into the Tain is gained through the Bellicose Pass in the Kendrick mountains. The Tain is wide and flat, shaped by wind, frost and melt water rivers that snake through hundreds of brackish lakes. Vegetation is mainly grasses, mosses and lichens, and sedges and there are very few trees once the pass is cleared. The few trees that can be found are typically a few birch and willow copses with long stands of ghostly dead trees. Fauna consists of lemming, caribou, hare, fox, wolf, bear and a variety of bird life. There are also an abundant number of fish species such as salmon and trout. The short spring and summer brings a superabundance of insect life such as mosquitoes and flies. Seasonal variations are huge, daylight varying from 20 hours in high summer to about 5 hours at midwinter. Temperatures also vary hugely, dropping as low as -30 °C (-22 °F) in winter, averaging 12 °C (53.6 °F) in summer. The permafrost of the Tain endures year round and the many lakes, pools and meres sit on top of frozen subsoil. Routes through the Tain are sketchy at best, and many who brave this place come to a desperate end lost, disoriented, and cut off among treacherous expanses of bog, marsh and mere.

SETTLEMENTS

There are no permanent human settlements within the Tain, although humanoids find shelter herein. The indigenous human population (the Shum people) is nomadic and tribal. They also herd reindeer and are seasonal hunters. Clan groups of 10-30 move several times each season and live in portable dwellings (yurts, gers, and lavvu). In summer, trading caravans move between Rigerland to the north, and Doggerland to the south, though these days the traffic is light. Contact between traders and Shum does occur and trade usually involve the exchanges of furs, worked ivory or bone, dried meat for metalwork (especially bladed weapons) or high status objects, like jewelry. Most trade takes place at established 'barter spots' known to the Shum as Saps and marked by stone cairns. Shum often camp near saps to await the summer caravans and in winter these offer some shelter. They follow a shamanic tradition and are gifted healers and seers, as well as hunters and artists; their shaman-elders are known as Noas.

Apart from the Shum, various bands of humans dwell in the Tain out of necessity. There are groups of 'free religionists', fleeing north from Doggerland's religious pogroms, and also bands of outlaws hiding out or raiding caravans. The free religionists en route to Rigerland are desperate refugees. If encountered, they will be wary but well disposed to their fellow humans with an unshakeable faith in their gods. They do not believe in hierarchy nor defining roles by gender; all work and power is equally shared. At the high point of summer, the refugee groups may number up to 40 to 50 persons as various clans and families band together for safety and aid. They represent a tempting target to outlaws and various humanoids. Despite their rejection of violence, the refugees defend themselves with limited magic and animal companions.

Bandit activity in the Tain is entirely seasonal and sporadic, characterized by opportunism and ruthlessness – outlaws here tend to be the most brutal and desperate of their kind.

ENCOUNTERS IN THE TUNDRA

The past century has seen the influx of a strain of winter-adapted orcs (known as bahaks to the Shum) onto the Tain. They populate remote inland areas around larger mere-pools where they build chaotic earth structures and live in permafrost warrens.

Other humanoid species use the Tain as a migration route which include goblins (the ellyon to the Shum) and the occasional band of lusty ogres. Others still have been displaced here through the actions of humans, particularly in Doggerland. As such, the Tain has a considerable number of Neanderthals and owlbears.

The Tain is home to a variety of other monstrous creatures, in particular the sabertooth, a large cat which preys upon a dwindling population of woolly mammoth. Snow-spiders do well here, as do strange derivations of the yeti (known to the Shum as bierds) along with the usual retinue of ogres, trolls and cold-loving wilderness beasts.

Allow some seasonal variation – check at dawn, dusk and twice during darkness. Encounter occurs on a 1 on a d6. Roll d12 to determine encounter:

RANDOM ENCOUNTERS	
1-2	Two Snow Spiders
3-4	Mosquito Swarm
5	Two Bahak-Orc Scouts
6	A herd of Woolly Mammoth
7	A solitary Bierd-Yeti
8	A dozen grazing Reindeer
9	Four Ellyon-Goblin berserkers
10-11	Sudden prolonged blizzard
12	Ogre



Snow Spiders: *HD 3+2; AC 4[15]; Atk 1 bit (1d6+poison); Move 18; Save 16; AL N; CL/XP 5/240; Special: paralyzing poison, 5 in 6 chance to surprise prey.*

These spiders will be buried in the snow and waiting to surprise their next meal.

Mosquito Swarm: *Anyone caught within a mosquito swarm will suffer from 2 dmg per hour. The swarm will disperse and avoid dense smoke from a fire but nothing else will deter them short of magic. There is a 10% base chance of contracting a blood disease each hour spent in such conditions as a result of bites and infections.*

Bahak-Orc Scouts: HD 2; AC 6[13]; Atk 1 by scramasax sword (1d4+1) or spear (1d6); Move 9; Save 17; AL C; 2/30; Special: 1 in 6 chance to be surprised.

Herd of Woolly Mammoth: HD 12; AC 5[14]; Atk 1 trunk (1d10), 2 gore (1d10+4), 2 trample (2d6+4); Move 12; Save 3; AL N; CL/XP 13/2300; Special: None.

This herd of mammoth consists of 2d6 adults and are content in traveling in peace. Anything seen approaching will provoke a hostile reaction from part of the herd seeking to defend their numbers.

Solitary Biedr-Yeti: HD 5; AC 6[13]; Atk 2 fists (1d6); Move 14; Save 12; AL N; CL/XP 7/600; Special: Immune to cold, hug, fear.

Dozen Grazing Reindeer: HD 1; AC 5[14]; Atk 1 antlers (1d6); Move 14; Save 17; AL N; CL/XP 1/15; Special: None.

If the party is diligent, this herd can be tracked back to the sight of a Shum camp in 1d6 hours.

Troop of Ellyon-Goblin Berserkers: HD 1d6 hp; AC 6[13]; Atk 1 spear (1d6); Move 9; Save 18; AL C; CL/XP 1/15; Special: +5 hit points and +2 to all attacks, damage, and saves in berserk state.

These goblins attack and cry out loudly in booming voices for glory (alerting other goblins for a mile or more around). Once engaged, they will fight to the death.

Sudden Prolonged Blizzard: Risks associated with being caught in a blizzard include becoming lost or separated, disorientation, and generally slow movement and progress. There are attendant risks of frostbite due to prolonged exposure if not sufficiently protected.

Albyn the Ogre: HD 4+1; AC 5[14]; Atk 1 maul (1d10+1); Move 9; Save 13; AL C; CL/XP 4/120; Special: None.

Albyn is depressed. Being in a foul mood, he will readily cheer himself up by wanton violence and brute force.

EVENTS WITH THE SHUM

GM's Note: you may wish to have the party sight a small trading caravan, before contact is made with the Shum:

The party observes the caravan a mile or so ahead of them on the trail. It has 1d8 wagons and 1d12 horsed men. At a rise on the trail, the caravan is attacked by a horde of bahak-orcs. By the time the party arrives at the scene the bahaks have gone, leaving a wreck of burning wagons, dead pack animals, and slaughtered humans. If examining the tracks, they will suggest that the bahaks are heading north, and have taken slaves. Only one human can be found alive, his crushed legs trapped under a wagon wheel.

His name is Eldon Blantis and he knows of a Shum sap is within a mile or two and begs to be taken there. He speaks very basic Shum, and has traversed the Tain a number of times before – should he survive he may prove a useful NPC ally. If the party do deliver him to the Shum, they readily accept and help him.

Eldon Blantis of Rigerland: HD 3; AC 5[14]; Atk 1 longsword (1d8); Move 12; Save 14; AL G; CL/XP 3/60; Special: None.

Alternatively, you may wish to have the party happen upon a group of Shum children playing – if so, they will happily lead the party to the camp.

However it occurs, the party has now arrived in the Tain proper, a Shum encampment alongside a stone cairn. A disheveled collection of yurt-like structures is arranged in a semi-circle around the sap. The sap itself is 8 feet high and beehive shaped. There is woodsmoke from a scrubby fire, and various people are busy with leather-working, carving, sewing and food preparation. If the party approaches they will be made welcome though warily at first. The Shum do not speak Common, preferring their own tongue, but any character with combined wisdom and intelligence above 25 is able to recognize enough phonetic content to begin a pidgin conversation. If no character manages this, gestures, body language and sounds (or the crafty use of magic) will have to suffice in these early exchanges. Very astute observers will notice that the Shum tend to be blonde, though one in ten have reddish hair coloring. The red-heads are viewed as especially blessed, their hair color being seen as connection to the extra-planar spirits who created the race.

There are 2d4 adult males, 2d4 females, and 1d6 children. One of the women is very aged, silver-haired and wild looking; this is Ailu, the shaman (or Noa). She will not speak and seems deep in thought. With her is Sussu, Ailu's apprentice; she is in her mid-thirties and attends to her elder with great care. There is also Rastos, a red-haired teenage Shum boy who suffers tremendous physical tics and verbal eruptions (a kind of Tourette's syndrome) and Hegon, his father and clan leader.

If communication is established, the Shum are open and helpful. They invite the party to stay, advising against travel in the dark with bahak-orcs around. The Shum provide basic healing to injured PCs (with herbalism and **cure light wounds**). A few haunches of reindeer over the gorse fire and the playing of bone-pipes, rattles, and drums signal a feast. The following information may be gleaned:

- The Shum are waiting at the sap for a trading caravan, expected before now (this was the caravan attacked above)
- There are packs of ellyon-goblins in the area, foraging south toward the Kendrick mountains
- There is a mere-pool nearby sacred to the Shum and it lies at the center of an ancient burial ground

After the feast, Ailu stands and addresses the PC with the highest Charisma, and becomes suddenly intelligible to them. She says:

*“You have come, and I see you truly
Drink of the Gare and see fullness rise
Rastos depends on your veracity”*

She produces a skull-cup filled with a murky reddish brew (the Gare) and proffers it to the character. The Shum stare with great attention and interest. The PC feels drawn to the brew, a concoction of poisonous mosses and lichens stewed into an hallucinogenic infusion, and will need to make a successful save to avoid Ailu's magnetism. Should the Gare be swallowed, Ailu and Sussu begin a dance with trance-like singing and drumming in complex hypnotic rhythms, whistles and claps come from the others. The character must roll under their constitution score or begin vomiting and have feverish sweats within 1d4 rounds. PCs are likely to be uncertain of what is occurring and may regard events as hostile (though actually a great honor). Play up their fear and uncertainty and the alienness of the situation. Should they become aggressive, the Shum produce their own weapons but do not retaliate. They merely indicate to the party that all must sit and wait.

The character who drank the Gare will then grow calmer and have the following vision (or a version of it):

Bathed in bright green light... staring into a pool... a ragged arm, a brightly painted red and gold wooden mask... taking the mask, turn away - a terrifying beast, all fur and teeth and butchering claws. Must bring the mask to safety... a chase... the drumming of pulsing blood, a hissing voice – 'Vardo Bedisa never forgets'.

Two hours after this vision, the PC regains consciousness, with a +3 bonus to Wisdom related checks and saves for the next day but a -2 penalty to any Constitution rolls.

The next morning, Rastos serves the party breakfast as he curses and twitches more than ever. Despite this, his eyes stay soft and meet each PC's for a moment. Ailu appears shortly thereafter – she has not slept and has a wild look about her. She ushers Rastos away then speaking clearly by telepathic force, she says simply: *'Go now, to the mere-pool. The boy will not live out the day'.*

Ailu: HD 6; AC 5[14]; Atk 1 spear (1d6); Move 12; Save 10; AL N; CL/XP 6/400; Special: As per 6th level Druid. Ailu carries 1d6 poultices of **cure light wounds**, 1d4 preparations of Gare, and wears a **ring of protection +2**

Sussu: HD 2; AC 7[12]; Atk 1 spear (1d6); Move 12; Save 14; AL N; CL/XP 2/30; Special: As per 2nd level Druid. Sussu carried 2 poultices of **cure light wounds**.

Typical Shum: HD 1; AC 7[12]; Atk 1 spear (1d6); Move 12; Save 17; AL N; CL/XP 1/15; Special: None.

THE LEGEND OF MIGAS & LEMEK

A hundred years ago, two sons of the Shum reached the test of manhood and were sent into the Tain to fend for themselves seeking a life-vision, as custom demanded. The adolescents were strong friends, golden haired Migas, son of Gufl and red-headed Lemek, son of Oyt. Neither boy ever returned. Shamans in trance scryed the pair drowning in the mere pool but no bodies were ever found and their spirits were held to be lost. The visions did not reveal the manner of the boys' deaths at the hands of the possessed hag Vardo Bedisa. She first killed Migas with her bare hands, then used him as bait to lure Lemek to the mere, hoping to force him to raise the long-lost Neika mask to save his friend. However, Lemek realized the trick and chose to drown rather than serve Bedisa. Later she interred the corpses in a barrow, with a polarizing curse, so that if the mask was ever raised from the mere, it would have to be placed on one of the boys to activate its powers. The boys were magically preserved - Migas holding a negative charge became the key to Bedisa's plans for demon-summoning, if the mask ever touched him, the Shum would perish. Lemek held the positive polarity, and the key to the destruction of Bedisa herself. Though some of the Shum hold vague intuitions, none are aware of the full detail as it is deliberately veiled from them by powerful magic. If asked, Ailu can be persuaded to share two locks of hair she keeps, one from Migas, the other Lemek. These are the only direct link to the lost boys and prove the truth of the hair color. Ailu also notes that Lemek was her ancestor. The Neika mask itself is far older and more mysterious, its origins lost in time, totemic of the Shum way of being. It is believed to have been left by extra-planar spirits at the dawn of this age and it was placed in the mere for protection many centuries ago. Vardo Bedisa exists only to get her hands on the mask. Legend has it that only a charismatic stranger, a non-Shum, can raise the artifact.

PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER

When revealing parts of the legend to the party, be sure to not give the full story to them too easily – just enough to piece it together in fragments or fire up their intuition.

Depending on how travel goes across the Tain as the adventurers make their way to the Neika Mere, there may be opportunities to spread various clues. Perhaps the party might find some clues to the legend of the mask or to Migas and Lemek in the form of paintings or carvings on rocks dotted about the Tain. These could be lithographs from the past, perhaps intact in places and defaced in others, using an ancient pictograph script of sorts. The character who drank the Gare could also experience other 'visionary flashes' which could grow in strength as the party draws ever closer to the mere.

In any event, as the party comes closer to the Mere they may very well end up running into Bedisa's guardian sent on patrol to sniff out intruders. It will attack without hesitation and target spellcasters first.

Sabretooth: HD 7; AC 6[13]; Atk 2 claws (1d4+1), 1 bite (2d6); Move 12 (Swim 6); Save 10; AL N; CL/XP 8/800; Special: Rear claws.

Once defeated, the party will find a spiked war-collar on the cat with the name 'Chuckler' inscribed upon it. The collar has a blue lapis lazuli gemstone set into it. Any attempt to pry the gem off (or using some sort of spell on the collar) triggers the gem to produce a shimmering blue-tinged vision. It shows the Neika Mere and a sense on how to reach it. In this vision, Vardo Bedisa is seen strangling and drowning two boys which ends with fading whispers:

*'To my rightful place return...'
'Blue with red to soothe the dead'*

The gem shatters. Should the collar be taken as a trophy, the party effectively becomes cursed (-1 penalty to all saving throws and checks) until Bedisa is defeated.

THE NEIKA MERE

The party can reach the mere within an hour at a brisk pace. It is a green lake, the size of a football pitch, surrounded by low rises in the flat ground. Up close these are clearly barrows and burial mounds, and further bumps and indentations mark the ground. There are rags fluttering from sticks, cairns, antlered reindeer skulls marking the four directions, and a pair of sabretooth skulls sit either side of a short wooden jetty at the western edge of the mere.

Whoever drank the Gare swoons between waking and trance in this place – but can tell the others this is the pool of the vision. Drawn to the jetty the character remains focused, staring. A strange silver sheen on the surface of the water becomes the tip of a red-and-gold kite-shaped mask, with eye holes and a rough mouth-slit, borne aloft by a ragged green arm. As the PC leans forward and receives the mask from the aquatic figure, an unspeakably chilling scream fills the air. At the far side of a barrow comes a cone of fog and a tall female form emerges, masses of red and black hair blowing in crazed billows. Waving a terrible bony digit she howls *'I am Vardo Bedisa – who dares to take my Neika?'*

From her finger shoots filthy green spectral lightning – forking into the ground where six skeletal warriors spring up, covered in mosses and lichens and brandishing scramasax swords. A hulking mass of brute fur and frenzy also appears, a small but stocky bierd-yeti, which rapidly closes on the party.

Tain Skeleton: HD 1; AC 8[11]; Atk 1 scramasax sword (1d4+1); Move 12; Save 17; AL N; CL/XP 1/15; Immune to sleep and charm spells

The mosses and lichens provide additional protection to these undead. There is also a 10% chance that any wounded by the skeletons will also become infected as a result of the wound's contact with black or orange moss and lichens. Those so infected will eventually lead to limb paralysis and gangrenous rot if not quickly treated (saving throw to negate).

Vardo Bedisa, the Demi-Annis Hag: HD 7, AC 1[18]; Atk 2 claws (2d8), 1 Bite(1d8); Move 12; Save 8; AL C; CL/XP 10/1400; Special: Hug and rend, polymorph, call mists.

Vardo Bedisa, once a Shum a minor demon centuries formed into an Annis banished to his plane of the ancestral burial is directly responsible and Lemek to their unable to obtain the an ethereal guardian place. If she ever did would increase drama-summon her demonic planes. It would likely Shum and the triumph of Ailu knows this lore well of her people. She has been to raise the Neika guardian in order all time. However, Bedisa has recently been leeching the Shum's heir, Rastos, magically sucking away his Charisma and destroying his prowess as a young man. If she succeeds, he will suffer an alignment shift to Chaos within 48 hours of the events unfolding here.



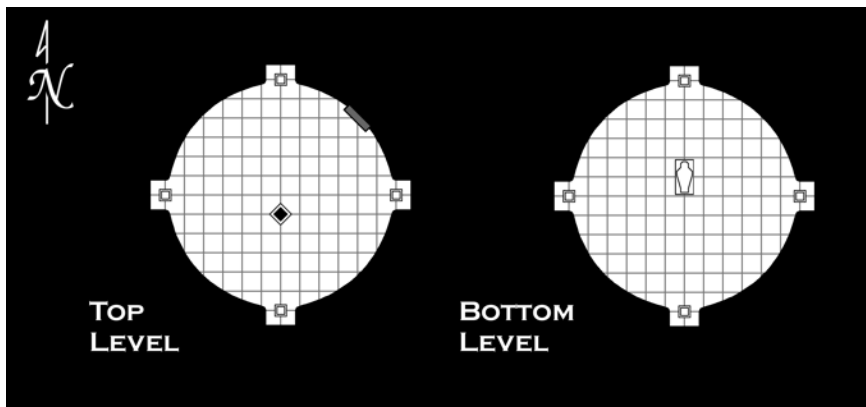
shaman, became possessed by ago, and eventually trans-Hag as the demon was origin. She has haunted grounds ever since and for luring both Migas deaths. She has been Neika mask since it has in its aquatic resting possess it her powers tically and she would overlord from the hell-spell the end of the her malign vengeance. and is an avowed protector waiting for one of innocence to lift the curse of Vardo Bedisa for

Bierd-Dwarf Yeti: HD 5, AC 4[15]; Atk 2 claws (1d6+1); Move 12; Save 12; AL C; CL/XP 7/600; Special: Immune to cold, hug, fear

This dwarf tundra yeti is a familiar to Bedisa and unquestionably loyal as a result. About 1d4 rounds after Vardo Bedisa appears, a loud drumming is suddenly heard. Ailu appears playing the reindeer-drum and wailing. She throws her bone hammer at the nearest barrow with all her might, and with an ear-shattering wrench the turf parts to reveal a massive cleft in the earth. She yells for the party to enter this barrow, and continues to pound on her drum (it imparts a magical protection to those who hear it, keeping Vardo Bedisa at bay). The party have a moment of choice – stay and fight or disengage and run for the barrow? 1d6 rounds after opening the barrow begins to close. The skeletons and the bierd-yeti will attempt pursuit but will not enter the barrow, Vardo Bedisa remains outside in magical combat with Ailu).

THE BARROW

Any PCs who entered will be accompanied by Sussu, who followed Ailu here – any remaining outside will have to flee, fight (the bierd-yeti and skeletons will press on with attacks) or hide (they witness a long and intense battle of magic between Ailu and Vardo Bedisa, leaving both figures apparently dead).



Inside the barrow there is no light, though Sussu has a lantern which she can light. As soon as there is light, the party is attacked by a cloud of angry red mosquito-like forms. These are magical in origin and are known as *Heksquitoes*. All characters caught within the cloud suffer a total 2 points of damage in the course of 3 rounds. Only a **dispel magic** or similar effect will destroy them as they are impervious to physical attacks. As the heksquitoes fade, the light reveals a large circular chamber (60' diameter) made of earth and rock, dome-vaulted with four niches in the cardinal directions. The ground is permafrost – ice blocks and crystals within subsoil imparting a chill atmosphere. If the PC holding the *Mask of Neika* is present, the mask begins to speak in thought-forms. It pleads with the PC to be put on. If they decide to put on the mask, roll a d6 – a result of 1 indicates a heart attack and instant death (saving throw to negate and go comatose instead). Any other result yields no effect.

Sussu begins to move towards the center of the chamber and indicates a rough wooden trapdoor in the permafrost floor – ‘we go down’ she tries to communicate. Meanwhile, the niches flicker into life bearing coloured witchlight – one is green, one blue, another red and the fourth, a golden yellow. If the niches are examined, the following items will be found:

The northern niche emitting green light has a wooden case containing a scroll – a **scroll of invisibility**. The eastern niche emitting yellow light has a black ring – a **ring of protection +1** which also bestows the wearer the ability to understand other languages. The southern niche emitting red light has a ceramic flask containing a red liquid – a **potion of cure serious wounds**. The western niche emitting blue light has a quiver of six faintly glowing orange arrows – these are **6 arrows +1**. There is also a small locked box behind the quiver of arrows. A spell such as **detect magic** will reveal the box to be magical but it is also trapped.

***Backhander** : Unless dispelled or disarmed, the first character that makes an attempt to open the box will cause a magical hand to emanate and slap (1d4 dmg per slap) the opener in the face. There is no save for the first slap but a saving throw is permissible afterward. After 4 slaps, the hand dematerializes.*

The contents of the small box includes a phial of **neutralize poison**, 20 gp, and a **Dagger of the Tain +2**. The magical dagger allows the wielder to cast **speak with plants** and **speak with animals** once per day on use of the command word 'Aamu'. The command is inscribed on the pommel in raised lettering.

Sussu tried to lift the trapdoor but only a combined Str of 30 or more will open it. Success will permit a powerful damp smell to rise up from the chamber below along with a striking chill. The newly opened chamber is about 12 feet down with no apparent means of descent. Jumping in will incur 1d10 points of damage (saving throw to negate half), otherwise the party will need to use rope as trying to climb down without one would be extremely hazardous.

The first character in immediately comes under attack by an unseen force (actually a projection of Vardo Bedisa's lord, an ice-demon). A hideous voice intones deep droning sounds and PCs suffer a slam attack (1d8 dmg) and may well fall (Str check to retain grip). There is a sensation of shadow and fast movement but nothing tangible. Once the first conscious character reaches the floor of the next level, the demon becomes visible and even more terrifying. Any who sees it will be overcome with a paralyzing fear (saving throw to negate). If it is struck by a magical weapon (AC 4[15] to hit), the form shimmers, and dissipates immediately with a disgusting hissing sound. Those who witnessed the demon disappear will realize the illusory nature of their wounds it inflicted and will recover within 1d4 rounds. Even if the party possesses no magic weapons, the shadow-form will dissipate after 1d6 rounds.

In the center of the lower chamber is a large ice sarcophagus without a lid. The chamber is the same size as the higher one, unlit, with the same four niches. The sarcophagus itself contains two bodies, two teenage males, laid with their feet in the middle and heads at each end of the space. Neither shows any signs of decay or wounds and they seem asleep. From the ceiling above the east niche an **Ochre Jelly** extends a curious pseudopod, sensing a feed.

Ochre Jelly: HD 6; AC 8[11]; Atk 1 acid-laden strike (3d4); Move 3; Save 11; AL N; CL/XP 6/400; Special: Lightning divides creature.

If Sussu survived to witness the sarcophagus, she becomes highly emotional. She speaks the following (which may or may not be understood by the party):

"Here are Migas and Lemek, a century dead. May the Mask of Neika fit the bright star and bless my people. Release for Rastos!"

The mask must be placed on a face – blonde Migas to the left, red-haired Lemek to the right – the party must choose.

PLACING THE NEIKA MASK ON MIGAS

A horrible laughter is heard, Sussu screams hysterically and the niches burst into brilliant black-light. From each emerges a Tain-zombie, covered in irritant lichen

and moss, attacking at once. During this time, if the Ochre Jelly hasn't been discovered yet, it begins to move about as it stalks living prey.

Tain-Zombie: HD: 2; AC 7[12]; Atk 1 strike (1d8); Move 6; Save 16; AL N; CL/XP 2/30; Special: Immune to sleep and charm.

There is a 10% chance that any preexisting wound will become infected as detailed with the encounter with the skeletons due to the moss and lichens.

In 1d6 rounds of placing the mask on Migas, the permafrost begins to melt and the chamber turns to a slushy mud-ice slurry. Escape upwards is imperative or drowning is inevitable. The only way out is to dig, which will take a minimum of 3 hours heavy work (though the zombies and jelly must be dealt with first). Breaking out in this matter invites a 30% chance of the roof collapsing causing crushing damage (GM's discretion as to the precise amount). Once outside the party will find Ailu dead. Vardo Bedisa has gone to claim Rastos and back at the encampment the party finds her killing Hegon, and seizing the delirious boy. Sussu will not leave Ailu's corpse, and will sit with the body for days, praying and drumming, her hair falling out in clumps. The other Shum melt away into the Tain, leaving no trace – they cannot be tracked. The party finds itself alone once again and marked for pursuit by all that is malign in these parts (Vardo Bedisa has seen to that). If Eldon Blantis was left with the Shum he is still at the sap, slowly dying, speaking wildly of demons and damnation.

PLACING THE NEIKA MASK ON LEMEK

Lemek slowly sits up and speaks in ancient Shum. Sussu prostrates on the ground, and the niches emit a soft rose-colored glow. From the west side, a wrenching sound is heard and the barrow roof parts – rough hewn steps appear. Lemek stands, radiating rainbow-like light, and climbs the steps (if the ochre jelly is still alive, it recoils and shrivels). He finds the bodies of Ailu and Vardo Bedisa. He kneels and kisses Ailu, resuscitating her while Sussu's hair turns a vibrant red color). Lemek then blazes as though made of liquid light – he performs an intense series of movements then descends into the earth itself. Where he stood remains only a golden torque through which green shoots of willow sprout. Vardo Bedisa's corpse hisses and sizzles, leaving a permanent dark scorch on the Tain.

Ailu rewards the character who made the choice with her **reindeer-skin drum**. This drum is highly magical though only truly accessible to a shaman or druid. However, its immediate properties to any character is to impart them with the ability to **polymorph** themselves or another once per day. In the hands of a shaman or druid, playing the drum can produce a healing effect akin to **cure light wounds** twice a day or **bless** once per day for all those within earshot when the appropriate rhythm is played. There are many other properties and powers which will remain to be discovered and control of all drum magic must be learned through study and practice. A character willing to learn can spend a week under Ailu's tutelage to learn the effects already listed.

This is a solemn moment, the party is being accepted into the Shum world in a profound manner and those who understand this (at GM's discretion) gain a +1 to their Wisdom score (this may be permanent, or last for a predetermined period, say, whilst in the Tain). Any PC requiring healing will be freely healed by Ailu, using herb poultices and the drum. The drum is the balance-restoring gift the Shum give for lifting the curse of Vardo Bedisa. The GM may 'invent' other properties significant to the drum, or have the drum removed or destroyed altogether in an encounter, but the gift will be given by Ailu at this juncture (its magic is most potent within the Tain itself, and is always accessed by rhythmic playing – the sigils and runes upon the drum glow in varying colors (blue for healing, red for polymorph, white for blessing etc) depending upon the effect and may vanish altogether if the drum is ill-treated or put to evil use).

Back at the encampment, Rastos runs to greet the returning party and speaks fluently in Common – he looks radiant and self-assured. He explains that a great curse has been lifted from him and his people, and he is now free to follow his destiny and become a spiritual leader for his people. Sussu is to be his wife, and she now wears the golden torque (+3 bonus to her AC plus an effect of spell-storing up to 10 levels worth of spells). A celebration is hurriedly organized. If Eldon Blantis was left with the Shum, he is now fully restored to health and eager to repay his rescuers.

THE BAHAK-ORC CAMP

Should the party track the orcs who destroyed the caravan (CL 3), they may discover a camp about ten miles west of the sap. The camp consists of a dug-out barrow, surrounded by a rough ditch, about 100 yards in diameter. Behind the ditch about twenty bahak-orcs are camped in three big hide-tents. They are holding six chained humans as prisoners outside the barrow itself in another makeshift tent. These prisoners are being guarded by 4 sentries.

Bahak-Orc Sentries: HD 2; AC 6[13]; Atk 1 by *scramasax sword* (1d4+1) or *spear* (1d6); Move 9; Save 17; AL C; CL/XP 2/30; *Special:* 1 in 6 chance to be surprised.

Among the prisoners are a trader and his wife, two badly wounded guards, a wealthy adventurer named Redu Stela and a novice illusionist named Jeemar Gentor.

Redu Stela: HD 3; AC 9[10]; Atk 1 *fists* (1d2); Move 12; Save 12; AL C; CL/XP 3/60; *Special:* As 3rd level fighter.

Jeemar Gentor: HD 1; AC 9[10]; Atk 0 (*will not engage in battle*); Move 12; Save 15; AL N; CL/XP 1/15; *Special* As 1st level magic-user with *Light spell* memorized and without spell book.

The largest of the 3 tents belongs to Oomf, the bahak-orc chief. He is accompanied by 2 sentries at all times. The orc chief is in league with Barnes Gentor, a human

wizard. Oomf is most likely in his tent enjoying his 'share' of some of the spoils. There are an additional 2 sentries that stand guard outside his tent.

Oomf the Bahak-Orc Chief: HD 4; AC 3[16]; Atk 1 with Tusk-Cleaver (2d4+1); Move 9; Save 15; AL C; CL/XP 4/120; Special: 1 in 6 chance to be surprised. Tusk-Cleaver is a massive cleaver mounted upon an ivory shaft from a wooly mammoth's tusk.

Barnes Gantor: HD 3; AC 9[10]; Atk 1 with staff (1d6) or dagger (1d4); Move 12; Save 13; AL C; CL/XP 3/60; Special: As 3rd level magic-user.

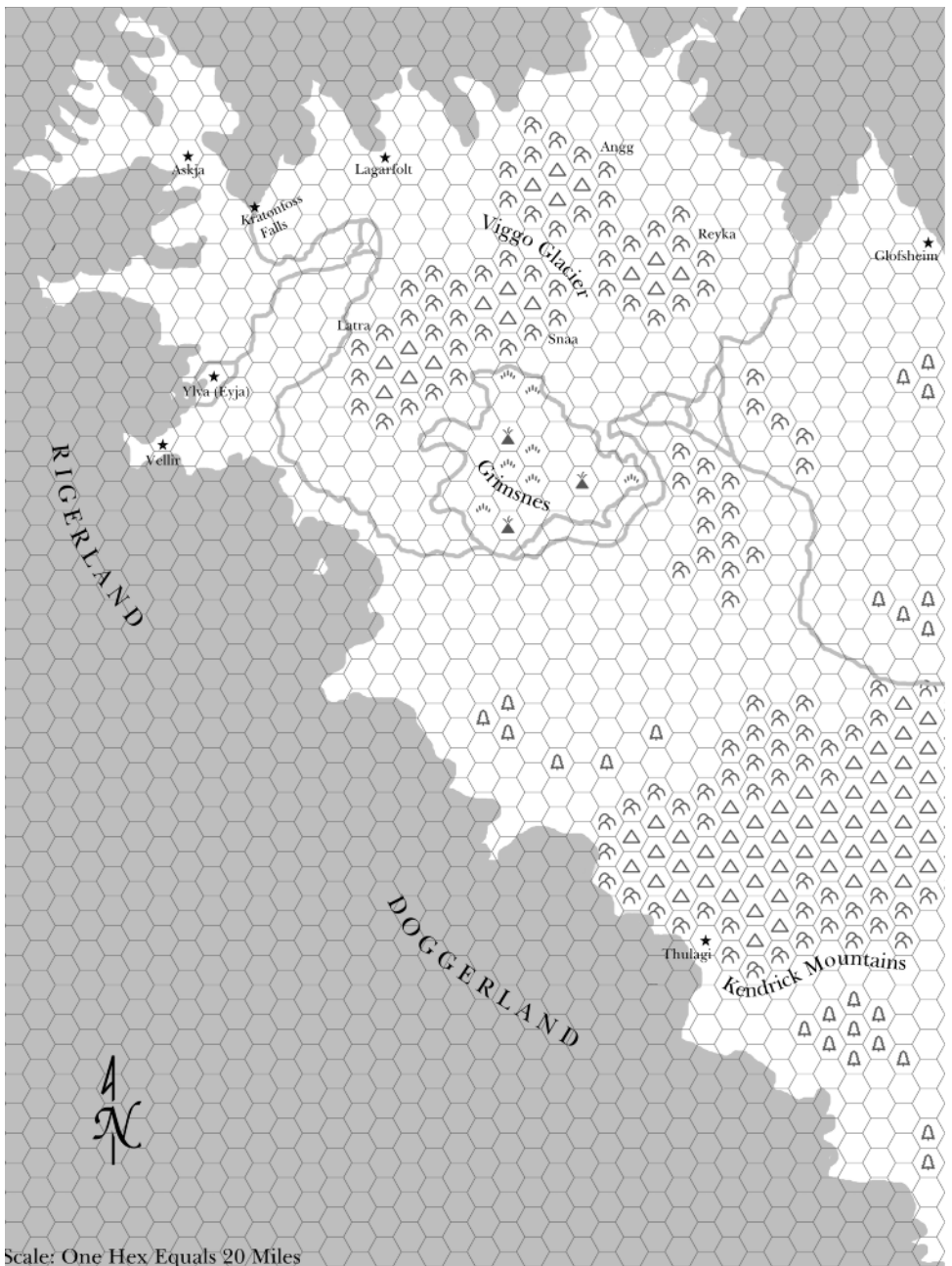
This Doggerlander wizard sold out the caravan, and wife, to the Bahaks and is awaiting his cut of the spoils. He has a bodyguard and guide, Mimmel, a ranger. Both the wizard and the ranger are located inside the barrow and are currently haggling.

Mimmel: HD 3; AC 5[14]; Atk 1 with shortbow (1d6) or **dagger +1** (1d4+1)l Move 12; Save 13; AL C; CL/XP 3/60; Special: As 2nd level range without access to magical abilities.

The loot from various raids on caravans is stockpiled in a chamber of the barrow and includes many metal-worked objects, barrels of salt, bundles of cloth and two of silk, pottery, jewelery (1d10x100 gp equivalent), cut stones (d100 for number, each of a 1d10x6 gp value), tin-ware, wolf and reindeer skins, a chest full of carved mammoth tusks and a sizable amount of weaponry (especially bows, spears, and maces), as well as food stuffs (cheeses, salted beef and pork, sacks of cereals and barrels of ale and wine). At any given time there are 4 Bahak sentries on guard at the single barrow entrance.

The remaining 8 orcs unaccounted for can be found in the other tents and there are a further dozen Bahaks currently on patrol up to five miles from the camp.





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