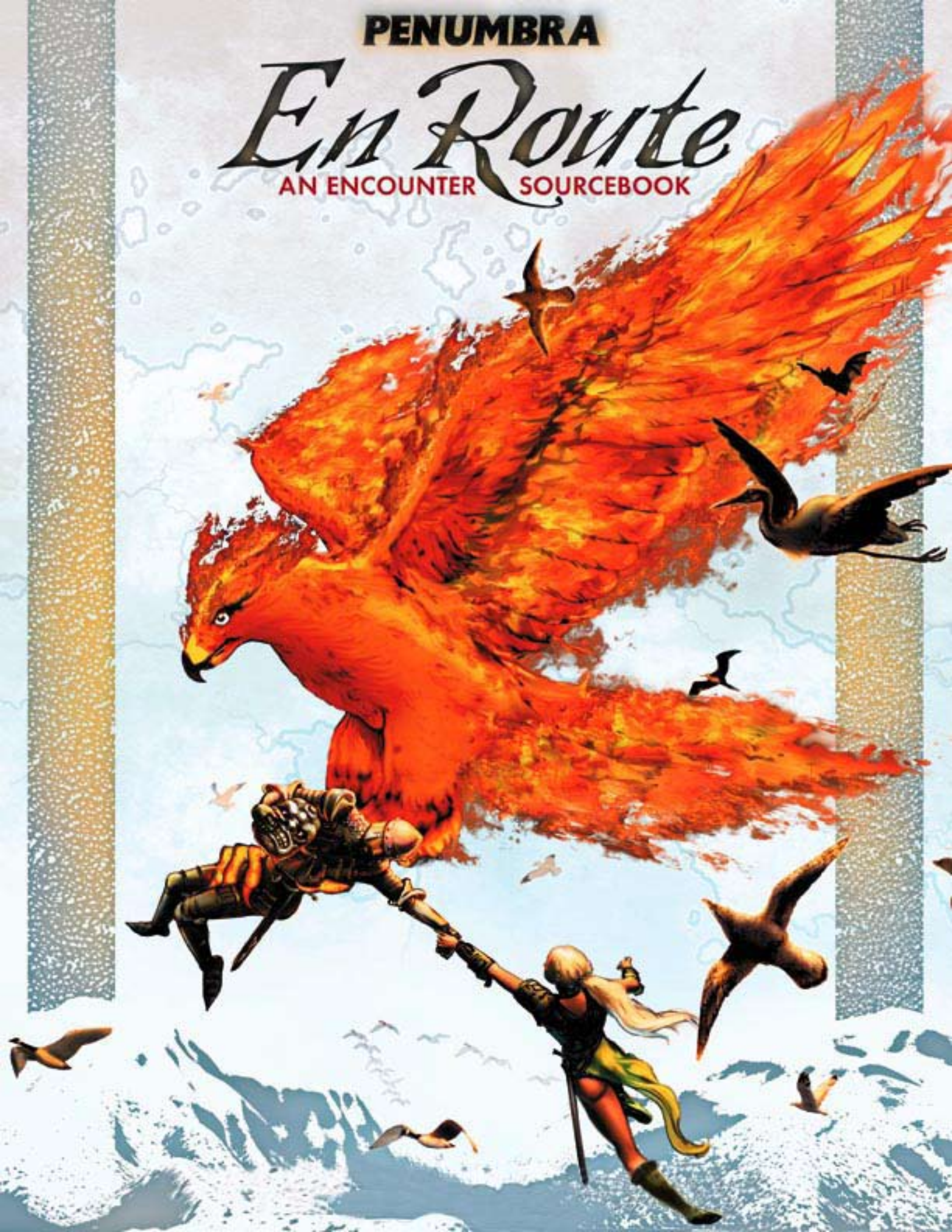


PENUMBRA

En Route

AN ENCOUNTER SOURCEBOOK



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Introduction

BY MICHELLE A BROWN NEPHEW

Your party has just vanquished the Evil Wizard and looted his mage tower, and now they're all off to the nearest city to cash in their piles of treasure. No! They're NOT there yet! First they have to make their way across the countryside looking much like a traveling buffet to any nasties who take a shining to them ...

That's where this sourcebook comes in. *En Route* is a collection of twenty-one short encounters that GMs can easily insert into longer adventures of their own design, or use as transitions between published modules. It offers a host of obstacles to complicate your PCs' journey, ranging from quick combat scenes to plot-oriented sidelines to mini dungeon crawls. Whatever situation your characters find themselves in, *En Route* is ready with a variety of fully fleshed-out encounters designed to be played at a moment's notice. With *En Route*, you won't be wasting valuable game time searching for monster stats and drawing perfunctory maps; everything you need to run the encounter is included in the text, leaving a minimum of work for the GM to do. And *En Route* even makes finding that perfect encounter or your favorite crunchy bits fast and easy with quick-reference appendices arranged by rules material, encounter location, and Encounter Level.

But can't I just keep using my handy wandering monster table, you ask? No, we reply, and here's why: because after a few months, roaming hordes of goblin warriors get to be routine, and lurking kobolds somehow lose their aura of menace. Lets face it, even the most dense players eventually catch on to the notion that a well-placed spell can charm the viciousness out of

any ravaging beast of the forest. *En Route* goes beyond glorified battles with random monsters; the encounters strive to be innovative concepts that can stand on their own merits, and that can be played in about one hour's time or less. Won't your players be surprised when the "dungeon" they unearthed by the side of the road turns out to be the inside of a crashed alien spaceship; when they stumble upon a camp of goblins attacking each other with handfuls of feathers as a result of the hallucinogenic effects of ergot poisoning; when one of the PCs is possessed by a drunken poltergeist; or when they discover that the local circus is using magic to create its freaks from unwilling patrons. Try to find that on a random encounter chart!

And despite the compactness of its encounters, *En Route* doesn't filch on providing new rules material for GMs to scavenge for their own adventures. *En Route* features new magic items and artifacts like *fairy gold* and the *spirit mine*; poisons and potions from ergot to *liquid sunshine*; weapons both magical and mundane, some even with extraterrestrial origins; magic traps, monsters, and special abilities like Permanent Invisibility, Rebirth, Engulfing Slam, Poltergeist, and Drunk; new rules for dealing with a shaken faith; and a bevy of NPCs ready to enthrall your players on short notice.

So once your characters have scoured the dungeon, looted the dragon's horde, and lived to tell the tale of their brave deeds, crack open your copy of *En Route* to give them a rude awakening. Even more fortune and glory await ... but they have to get there first!

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All That Glitters

BY MICHELLE NEPHEW • ILLUSTRATED BY HELENA WICKBERG

Encounter Level: 3

Setting: Forest

Summary: The PCs come across a tree with leaves of gold and fruit made of gems. When they come too close, they are compelled to battle with each other, as the mischievous forest gnome responsible for the illusion laughs at them from the boughs of the now quite mundane tree.

Phase One

As the characters make their way down the forest path on their way to the next village, they hear a faint “tinkling” sound. It’s as if a hundred wind chimes were stirred by the same breeze.

As they walk further, the sound grows louder, and a Listen check DC12 can determine that it is coming from a dense spot in the woods about 100 feet off of the path to the left.

If the PCs investigate, they find the dense underbrush soon thins into a cleared glade, with a single tree situated prominently in the center of the open space. This tree, however, is quite a sight to behold. The tree itself is about 20 feet tall and has branches stretching out about 8 feet from the trunk. The trunk and branches are made of ebony, and the leaves they bear glint pure gold in the sunlight, chiming as they brush against each other in the light wind. A multitude of deep red fruit dangles enticingly from the boughs of the tree, and the characters can see that each one harbors the familiar sparkle found only in the heart of a flawless ruby.

The tree is actually a *minor image* illusion. If a character touches the tree or otherwise interacts with it, he gets a Will save DC 15. A successful save lets the subject ignore the effect, revealing a very ordinary oak tree beneath the figment.

On one of the lowest boughs — about 10 feet above the ground — lounges a hugely grinning forest gnome. The gnome is a bit under 2 1/2 feet tall, with

gray-green skin, dark hair, and green eyes, and is wearing a simple but finely-made commoner’s costume decorated with intricate stitching.

A Wilderness Lore roll DC 10 can identify the creature more specifically as a forest gnome; this is a shy and elusive race known for its tendency to avoid contact with other peoples unless their forest homes are in danger.

This particular forest gnome, however, considers heavily-armed barbarians and fighters tramping about near his burrow to be a definite danger, and is intent on teaching these intruders a lesson. If the PCs see through the illusion before getting within range for the second part of the trap (described below), he’ll talk ingratiatingly to them about what clever adventurers they are to see through his meager magics, and ask them questions about themselves and their journey until they get within 15 feet of the tree.

If the PCs don’t interact with the tree or fail the Will save, they aren’t able to see the gnome hidden behind the illusion in the mundane tree and the figment persists until two rounds after the caster (the gnome, whose name is Dimfoodle) becomes distracted and loses his concentration. This is likely to happen when the next stage of his trap is put into action ...

Phase Two

When the characters get within 15 feet of the tree, Dimfoodle uses his *ring of rage* to compel the PCs to fight with each other, while he remains safely in his tree.

When the characters start to attack each other, the gnome quickly progresses from his silent giggling to a stifled chortling, and finally isn’t able to contain his mirth any longer — he falls out of the tree when his belly-laugh overtakes him. This means his illusion of the golden tree is broken, and the characters can now see their tormentor — if they’re not too

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busy rough-housing. Dimfoodle takes cover behind the now very unexceptional trunk of the oak tree that is revealed.

When you think your players have done enough damage to each other's characters, or if one of the PCs manages to shake off the effects of the ring and starts to move menacingly toward the gnome, Dimfoodle gets bored (or scared) and makes a break for his burrow, which is about 10 feet behind the tree, and protected by some bramble bushes. When he gets more than 15 feet from the characters, the enchantment is broken — until they come within range again, that is. Unless the party has an abnormally small halfling or gnome among their number, they won't be able to follow the forest gnome underground. This is a good tactic for GMs to use to keep the party from gaining the ring as loot. On the other hand, the PCs might just manage to grab (or brutally slay) Dimfoodle before he can scurry back to his burrow.

In this case, taking the ring by force breaks the spell, but the characters will have to find someone with the Forge Ring feat to enlarge the ring before it will even be able to fit a halfling or gnome PC; there's no way that the ring can be refitted to a Medium-sized character without destroying it.



Dimfoodle, Hidden Trickster

Male Forest Gnome, 3rd-Level Wizard

CR 3; SZ S (humanoid); HD 3d4+12; hp 24; Init +3 (+3 Dex); Spd 20 ft. (x5 Run); AC 14 (+3 Dex, +1 Size); Atk +2 melee (1d4, dagger), or +5 ranged (1d4+3, sling with bullets); SA spells; SQ gnome traits, speak with animals, forest gnome traits; AL CG; SV Fort +5, Ref +4, Will +7 (+2 Iron Will); Str 10, Dex 16, Con 18, Int 16, Wis 14, Cha 15.

Skills: Appraise +5, Craft +8, Hide +11 (+15 in woods), Intimidate +4, Knowledge (arcana) +8, Knowledge (religion) +9, Listen +2, Move Silently +3, Spellcraft +9, Spot +2

Feats: Scribe Scroll, Iron Will, Run

Languages: Dwarven, Elven, Gnome, Goblin, Orc, Sylvan

Gnome Traits (Ex): Low-light vision, +2 bonus to saves vs. illusions, +1 bonus to attack rolls against kobolds and goblinoids, +4 dodge bonus against giants.

Speak with Animals (Sp): Once per day gnomes can use *speak with animals* as a 1st-level druid to speak with a burrowing mammal.

Forest Gnome Traits (Ex): Forest gnomes can move over any kind of terrain without leaving footprints or a scent. Tracking them without using magic is impossible. (As for the spell *pass without trace*.) Also, +1 bonus to attack rolls against kobolds, goblinoids, orcs, and reptilian humanoids.

Spells: (4/3/2*)

0 Level — *daze, flare, light, read magic*

1st Level — *sleep, magic missile, spider climb*

2nd Level — *invisibility, minor image*

*Gnomes can also cast *dancing lights, ghost sounds, and prestidigitation* each once per day as a 1st-level wizard.

Possessions: 2,500 gp in basic gear and household goods (hidden in his burrow); includes a spellbook with all 0-level wizard spells and his memorized 1st- and 2nd-level spells plus *unseen servant, identify, and enlarge*. He has a dagger, sling with 20 bullets, and forest gnome-sized *ring of rage* (5,040 gp) on his person.

NEW MAGIC ITEM:

Ring of Rage

This is a ring made of red gold with a ruby chip mounted into its face. When activated by a command word, the gem glows darkly and the ring causes all living creatures within a 15 foot radius fight each other without noticing any danger they might be in, as in the spell *emotion (rage)*. The enchanted creatures get a +2 morale bonus to Strength and Constitution scores, +1 morale bonus on Will saves, and -1 penalty to AC. The ring does not affect the wearer. The effect lasts until a second command word is spoken, or the ring is removed from the wearer's finger. A Will save DC 16 (not including the morale bonus) negates the effect. The ring can be used once per day.

Caster Level: 7th; **Prerequisites:** Forge Ring, *emotion*; **Market Price:** 5,040 gp

Burlap Children

BY KEITH BAKER • ILLUSTRATED BY DAVID INTERDONATO

Encounter Level: 4

Setting: City

Summary: A group of children steals a valuable object from one of the characters. The party must track the children down to regain the stolen object — but will they fight children with swords and fireballs?

Nyleena stepped out of the Black Eagle Inn and blinked in the noon sunlight. When her eyes adjusted to the bright light, she found that she was staring into a sea of young faces. She was surrounded by eight children, six boys and two girls, all dressed in tatters and rags. Each held out one hand covered with a piece of rough cloth, begging for offerings. All around her they bumped and swarmed, pleading and cajoling in an incoherent wave of noise. At this point the door opened behind her and Krogar stormed out of the Eagle, snarling at the children. At the sight of the half-orc, the beggars screamed and ran in all directions, fleeing for the safety of the shadows. Nyleena shook her head, somewhat overwhelmed by the experience. Then she noticed — where was her pouch of components?

Child's Play

This encounter can occur in any city or village large enough to have a begging community. It can be used at any time that the party is passing through a city, whether at the beginning, middle, or end of an adventure. For best effect, the party should have encountered harmless beggars a few times before. The goal is for them to think “Oh, more beggars,” when this occurs, and to not immediately suspect foul play.

The average city has its share of the poor — unfortunates who have fallen on hard times, or simple peasants who have never known luxury. In a world where a gold piece is more than a week's wages for a common laborer, the wealth that passes through

the hands of an adventurer makes him an inviting target for a desperate scam artist. The technique described below is a tried and true method that is used on a regular basis in cities across our world; of course, in our world, most victims aren't packing swords and spells. But is the party prepared to unleash their full force of arms on a group of defenseless children?

The basic nature of this encounter is simple: a group of poor children select one of the adventurers as a target for a bit of larceny. While it is possible that the children will approach the entire party, they will try to look for a moment that meets as many of the following conditions as possible:

- They will choose a character who looks reasonably wealthy, preferably one who is neither physically imposing nor well armed. Wizards and sorcerers are obviously promising targets, although a cleric of a good-aligned god may be picked even if she is armed, because of her perceived soft heart.
- They will try to pick a character who is not native to the city. If one is available, they will target a character who cannot speak the local language, so that it will be more difficult for her to call for help.
- They will attempt to catch their target at a time when she is separated from her allies, even if just for a moment — for example, if she steps out of a tavern ahead of the others or lingers outside of a store that the others have entered.

When the ideal moment is at hand, the children will strike. There are eight of them, undernourished and dressed in rags. Their hair is matted and skin is covered with dirt and scabs. As the target steps into an open area, the children move in and surround her, all pleading for food or assistance, muttering sad stories about sick parents or starvation or mad dogs. Each child grasps a piece of dirty cloth in one hand, holding this out to the character in search of offerings. Some touch her and pull at her clothes, or try

to use the cloth to polish her armor if she is wearing any. The overall effect is a torrent of noise and activity. Focus the attention of the player on how pathetic the children look; try to play up to the character's sympathy, so that far from suspecting robbery, she sees this as being a challenge to her conscience. Of course, robbery is what it actually is.

The stream of noise and the constant touching are both tools to distract the target from multiple Pick Pocket attempts, and the pieces of cloth can be used to hide small stolen objects. In any given round, three of the children will be attempting to use Pick Pocket while the other five work on distraction; all told, the children will make two pick pocket attempts at +10 and one at +12 each round, and the target will receive a -8 to her Spot checks due to the distractions.

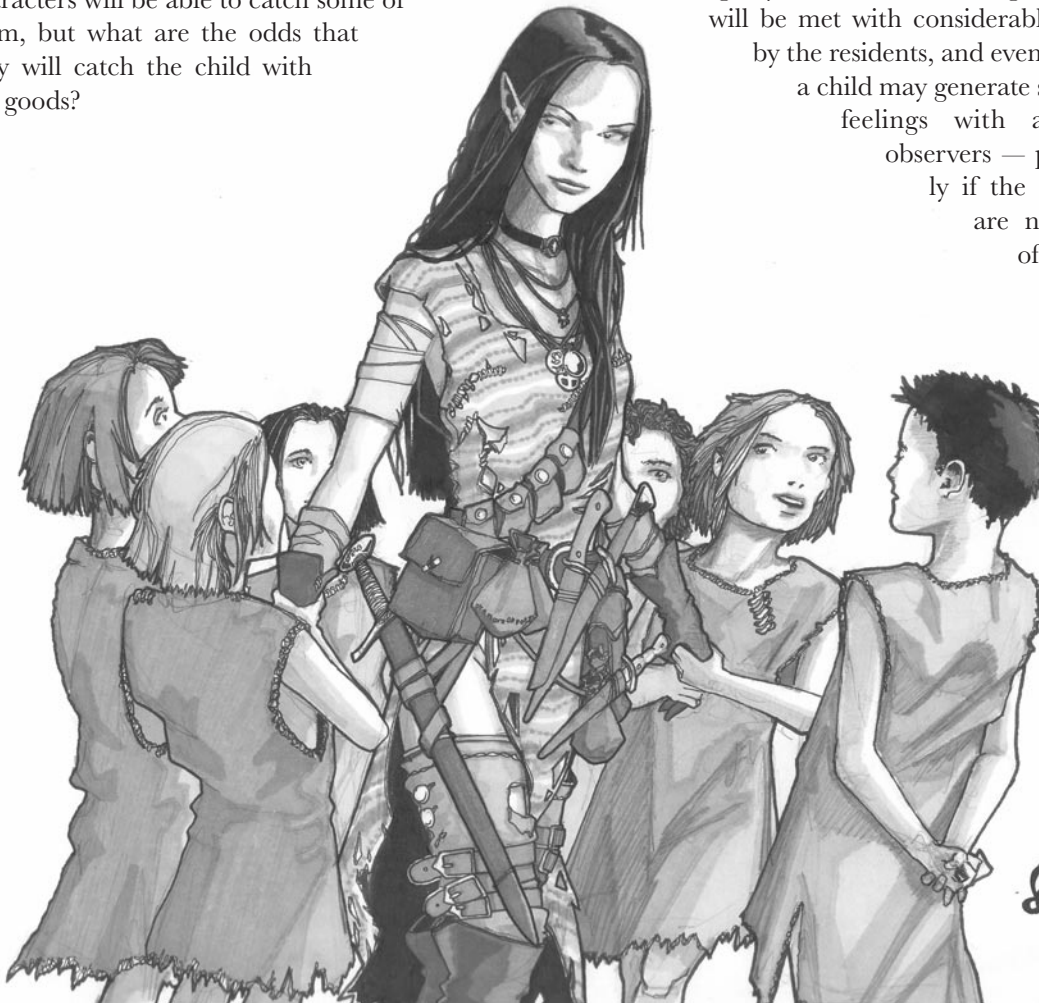
As soon as one of the children finds something that feels particularly valuable, the thieves will split up and head off in eight different directions. Unless they are actually being chased, they will try to make this seem natural — they've been scared off, they've given up on the target, and so on. If the party has caught on to the scam it is more than likely that the characters will be able to catch some of them, but what are the odds that they will catch the child with the goods?

Recovering the Loot

It shouldn't take long for the party to discover the theft — even if they don't catch the children in the act, it won't take too long to notice a missing purse. Ideally, the children should have obtained something valuable enough that the characters will feel a need to recover it; if the object is difficult to identify, all the better. For example, a purse with eight gold pieces and a magical figurine is a prime catch. Eight gold pieces will mean little to the characters, but will be a fortune to the children; while the figurine is something the young thieves will not have the skill to identify, and thus they will not recognize its inherent value.

There are a number of ways the party could go about finding the children. The simplest way is to catch one of the young thieves before he gets away. But how does the character go about doing this?

Using any sort of lethal force against a child will be met with considerable hostility by the residents, and even punching a child may generate some hard feelings with any local observers — particularly if the characters are not natives of the area.



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Assuming the party does capture a child using subdual damage or immobilizing magic, the next challenge is to get the kid to talk. Again, violence could get the characters into a great deal of trouble. *Detect thoughts*, *charm*, or similar spells will work — but these can also generate ill will if they are used publicly or if the child starts screaming for help once the spell wears off.

Further, this is also the time to lay on the sad story of these children — after all, under the influence of spells the child will tell the truth, which is that he and his friends were hungry, desperate, or ill, and saw the party as a group of stuck-up adventurers waltzing in and out of the town with purses overflowing with gold. Depending on what was stolen, the simplest approach may be to offer to buy it back; in the case of something like a magic item, the kids will have no idea of its real value and will be happy to get a few gold pieces.

Assuming that the characters failed to catch a thief, here are a few other techniques they can use:

- A character with the Track feat can follow one of the children with a check against a DC of 18; eventually, the trails converge, as they return to their home neighborhood.
- A Gather Information check against a DC of 15 will turn up a little information about the children; other people have seen or suffered the same trick before, and can point the party towards the part of town where the children can be found.
- Checking with the city guard will not be terribly helpful, unless the party has prior connections with the guard. This sort of thing happens a lot, and its not really worth the guards' time to investigate (particularly if the characters are outsiders). However, a Diplomacy check against DC 15 — or a bribe — will at least get the party pointed in the direction that “that sort of riff-raff” can be found.
- On the other hand, the local thieves' guild doesn't have any particular reason to support these independent operators; a rogue with ties to the guild can easily get sent in the right direction. The guild-master may suggest that the character kill the kids, to set an example.

- If skill won't work, magic may do the trick; *locate object* will allow the party to track a stolen object. You will have to decide if any of the characters had a clear enough view of the children to use *locate creature* on one of them.
- If nothing else works, the characters can always spy one of the children later on, running around the street.

If the party scouts out the area where the children live, they shouldn't have too much trouble finding one or more of the kids. Then it is simply a matter of how they go about convincing the children to return the stolen goods, which brings up most of the same issues described in the earlier paragraph about interrogating a child. If you really want to make things difficult, the children may have already fenced the object — but it is probably enough to draw the characters into the squalor of the children's world. The goal is to make the players think about the people around them, and to make them realize the kind of wealth that they deal in without even thinking about it — as well as to present them with an opponent that cannot be overcome by force alone. Paladins and good-aligned clerics should be especially easy targets for this — try to make them question what they're really doing to help those in need!

Aftermath

Depending on how the party handles the situation, they may have made a lot of enemies among the poorer inhabitants of the city ... but, on the other hand, this also gives them the opportunity to make some valuable friends. If they treat the children with kindness, if they try to solve their problems, they may actually be able to gain a group of allies; perhaps the children would work for the party as hirelings, or provide the characters with useful information occasionally. On the other hand, if children are killed or publicly mistreated, the party may find that it gets poor service from local hirelings or establishments — bartenders spit in their drinks, blacksmiths do substandard work when repairing armor or weapons, and the like.

Burlap Children

Apprentice-Level Rogues

CR: 1/2; SZ S (humanoid); HD 1d6; hp 2; Init +1; Speed 25 ft; AC 12 (+1 size, +1 Dex); Atk melee –2 (1 point subdual, fists), will typically flee; Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; AL N; SV Fort +0, Ref +2, Will +0; Str 6, Dex 13, Con 10, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 11

Skills: Pick Pocket +8, Hide +6, Bluff +5, Balance +4, Escape Artist +4, Move Silently +4, Innuendo +3, Listen +3, Spot +3, Climb +3 (skills include size, statistic, and synergy modifiers)

While hungry and destitute, these children have actually developed a considerable amount of skill at working their particular scam; in a few years most of them could be working for the local thieves' guild, assuming that they live that long. They have learned to skulk in the shadows while picking out a target, honed their ears and eyes to spot valuable goods or vulnerable people, and mastered the art of the cutpurse — and, of course, they have a child's ability to bluff when caught with a hand in the cookie jar.

For most intents and purposes, the children are identical. A few suggestions are given below for personalities or sob stories for these thieving tykes, but the GM should feel free to adjust these to meet the needs of the campaign; depending on the location of the game, they might all be humans or halflings, for example. Otherwise, here are a few ideas:

Devan: Devan is the organizer of the children. He is an orphan — his parents were killed by the city guard during a riot — and now he lives on the streets, doing what he can to survive. He is a human child of 13 years; if it wasn't for the fact that he likes being with his friends, he might be able to find some sort of junior position with a more organized group of rogues.

Mari: A twelve-year-old half-elven girl, Mari is cute as a button even under the dirt — except for her left arm, which was removed just below the shoulder due to an infection. As a result, she specializes in distraction. She lives with her human mother and has no memory of her father; she is stealing money so that her mother “won't have to be with the bad men.” She has a Charisma of 13 and a Skill Focus in Bluff, giving her a total Bluff modifier of +8.

Joh: Joh's mother was a barmaid; she was killed when a brawl erupted between a barbarian and a sorcerer, and as a result he has developed a deep hatred for all adventurers. His father is a manual laborer; he has sunk into drink since the death of Joh's mother, and pays little attention to his son. Joh also suffers from rickets; as a result, he can only run at a speed of 15 feet, making him the most likely child to be caught in a chase (for this reason, he tends to specialize in distraction as opposed to theft). He is a nine-year-old human boy.

Boran: A seven-year-old half-orc, Boran was abandoned at birth by his disgusted mother. He is devoted to Devan, who is largely responsible for his survival. He is not very bright, but he is the strongest of the band. He suffers from an orcish skin disease, and as a result he is typically covered with boils and oozing sores. He has a Strength of 12 and a Constitution of 13, but his Dexterity is only 10 (–1 to all related skill checks) and his Intelligence and Charisma are both 8. He has 4 hit points.

Shara: Shara is a fourteen-year-old halfling girl — while she is technically older than Devan, the age variation between humans and halflings is such that she defers to him. Like Joh, Shara's mother is dead; in Shara's case, it was due to the actions of her abusive father. Her younger sister is suffering from consumption, and Shara is trying to gather enough money to pay for a *cure disease* spell so that she and her sister can run away from their father. Shara is the most accomplished thief in the group; she receives all of the usual halfling skill modifiers, and between having a 14 Dexterity and a Skill Focus in Pick Pocket, she has a total bonus of +9. However, she can only run at a speed of 20 feet, and has a miserable 5 Strength.

Char: The eldest son of a poor family of smithies, Char has little interest in the family business. His parents don't make enough to feed their seven children, and don't ask questions about where Char gets the money he comes up with. If the characters do end up helping the children, it may turn out that Char's parents are actually decent smiths (just bad at marketing), in which case the players could take advantage of their services. Char is ten years old.

Cinder: One of Char's younger brothers. Char has been showing him the basic ropes of thievery. Cinder is seven years old; his face and left arm are severely scarred from an accident with the family forge.

Dog: Dog's history is a mystery. Some of the children believe that he was abandoned as a child and raised by wild dogs, while others think that he was bitten by a mad dog or a werewolf. He cannot speak or read, but Devan has learned to communicate with him using basic signs; like Boran, the strange boy is incredibly loyal to Devan. He does not possess the thieving skills of the other children, and works solely as a distracter and watchdog; he is an apprentice-level barbarian with four ranks apiece in Listen, Jump, Climb, and Handle Animal. He can move at a speed of 35 feet and rage once per day, and has 5 hit points. He is a human child and appears to be around ten to twelve years old.

Dance the Night Away

BY JOE CROW • ILLUSTRATED BY MIKE DUTTON

Encounter Level: 7

Setting: A forest road

Summary: A traveling party is charmed into serving at a pixie's dance and must escape.

Fool's Gold

This encounter should be placed on a road through a forested area, a little before nightfall. The encounter begins as the party is travelling through the forest. The sun is setting behind the trees as the party starts looking for a place to set up camp for the night.

Have each party member make a Spot check, DC 10. Whoever makes it sees a small pile of gold coins glittering at the side of the road.

The last rays of the sun glint off something gold and metallic to one side of the road. It's a pile of coins! If the party chooses to investigate more closely, they notice a trail of coins leading down a path into the forest.

Any party member who touches the coins must make a Will save, DC 20, to avoid a compulsion to follow the trail and gather up all the coins. Alternatively, if the party suspects a trap and ignores the coins, have whoever first saw them make the same save to avoid leaving the road to investigate.

As various party members begin frantically gathering up the shining gold coins, other party members may attempt to dissuade them. Good luck. Those struck with the compulsion ignore any non-physical persuasion, and attempts to physically restrain them prove difficult as the compelled PCs struggle wildly to free themselves.

The compelled PCs receive a +4 luck bonus to any grapple checks.

Eventually, the PCs end up either chasing each other or the gold a few hundred feet down the path to a small clearing, about 30 feet across. Despite the oncoming darkness, the PCs can see that in the cen-

ter of the clearing is a single standing stone, approximately 15 feet tall. Atop the standing stone swirls a multicolored pattern of light and huddled around the stone stands a small crowd, staring up at it. The crowd is made up of several human peasants, a few goblins, and two hobgoblins.

The pattern of light functions as a *hypnotic pattern* except that there is no upper limit to the HD that may be entranced by it. Have the PCs make a Will save, DC 25, to escape being mesmerized. Any PC who makes the save must continue to make it every round she is within the clearing. Looking away from the stone gives a +10 situational bonus to the Will save, but will impede efforts to rescue other PCs or observe events within the clearing. Mesmerized PCs are aware of their surroundings, but nothing matters to them except the lights.

NEW MAGIC ITEM:

Acorn of Geas

Many fey creatures use these silver acorns to provide themselves with free labor. Once per day, the acorn can place a *lesser geas* on any non-fey creature who touches it, unless the creature makes a Will save, DC 20. This effect continues as long as the acorn remains in physical contact with the creature. When placed under the tongue, the acorn prevents speech. Those looking for more vocal servants string them about the target's neck. Some fey also place triggered *permanent image* spells on the acorns to disguise less aesthetically pleasing servants or to maintain a specific décor. These illusions remain in place even when the acorn is removed, but will wear off 24 hours after the acorn is taken out of the victim's mouth.

Caster Level: 13th; **Prerequisites:** Craft Wondrous Item, Heighten Spell, *lesser geas*, *permanent image* (optional triggered illusion), creator must be fey; **Market Price:** 36,400 gp, or 38,875 gp with triggered illusion

DANCE THE NIGHT AWAY

Anyone who has escaped being mesmerized can try to wake up his companions, but it won't work. The mesmerized victims ignore her, and violently resist any attempt to physically remove them from the clearing.

Unmesmerized PCs may make a Spot check against a DC of 15 (or DC 13 if they have Low-light Vision or Darkvision) to notice that there are six other trails of gold coins leading into the clearing from various paths.

About a half-hour after the PCs arrive, as the moon rises, three small winged figures appear in the air around the stone. As they swoop down and begin examining their captives, the PCs can see that they are pixies, two females and one male. The three sprites flit about, discussing the relative merits of the various members of the crowd, mostly in terms of strength, attractiveness, or unusual appearance. The male pixie is carrying a small bag over his shoulder, stuffed full of little round objects. Eventually, they make their decisions, and select one peasant, two goblins, one hobgoblin ... and, of course, the PCs.

Arno is a peasant herdsman from a nearby village. All his life, he's heard stories about the fey stealing babies and cursing those who cross them. He's not too bright, but very strong.

The two goblins, **Maak** (*mahk*) and **Vegg** (*vej*), are part of a bandit gang that haunts the roads to the north. They know of the fey presence in the deep forest and are terrified by the tales they have heard. Their first response to virtually everything here is immediate panicked flight. Maak and Vegg have standard goblin stats.

Takkav (*TAK-kav*) is one of several hobgoblins who are trying to take over the goblin bandit gang and make it more efficient. He knows little about the area, almost nothing about the fey, and is unlikely to listen to any PCs. Violent fury is his most common response to the unexpected.

The **three pixies** mean no harm to those they choose, but generally regard the larger races as fuddy-duddies who need more chaos in their lives. This particular group of pixies is more chaotic than is usual for their kind. A night spent lugging heavy things around and being the subject of some amusing pranks is good for the big ones, and makes the pixies' lives easier. See? Everybody wins.

The male pixie, whose name is Gwydd (*gwith*), begins taking silver acorns out of the bag and tucking them under the tongues of the chosen few. As he

Arno of Bestford

1st-Level Human Commoner

CR 1/2; SZ M (humanoid); HD 1d4+1; hp 5; Init +0; Spd 30 ft.; AC 10; Atk melee +3 (1d3+3 subdual, fist); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; AL N; SV Fort +1, Ref +0, Will -1; Str 16, Dex 11, Con 12, Int 7, Wis 9, Cha 10

Skills: Handle Animal +6

Feats: Skill Focus (Handle Animal)

Goblins (Maak & Vegg)

CR 1/4; SZ S (humanoid); HD 1d8; hp 5, 3; Init +1 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 15 (+1 Size, +1 Dex, +3 studded leather); Atk melee +1 (1d8-1, morningstar, or 1d3-1 subdual, fist), ranged +3 (1d6-1, javelin); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; AL NE; SQ Darkvision 60 ft.; SV Fort +2, Ref +1, Will +0; Str 8, Dex 13, Con 11, Int 10, Wis 11, Cha 8

Skills: Hide +6, Listen +3, Move Silently +4, Spot +3

Feats: Alertness

Darkvision (Ex): Goblins can see in the dark up to 60 feet. Darkvision is black and white, but otherwise like normal sight, and goblins can function with no light.

Hobgoblin (Takkav)

CR 1/2; SZ M (Humanoid); HD 1d8+1; hp 6; Init +1 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 15 (+1 Dex, +3 studded leather, +1 small shield); Atk melee +1(1d8, longsword/1d3 subdual, fist), ranged +2 (1d6, javelin); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; AL LE; SQ Darkvision 60 ft.; SV Fort +3, Ref +1, Will +0; Str 11, Dex 13, Con 13, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 10

Skills: Hide +1, Listen +3, Move Silently +3, Spot +3

Feats: Alertness

Darkvision (Ex): Hobgoblins can see in the dark up to 60 feet. Darkvision is black and white, but otherwise like normal sight, and hobgoblins can function with no light at all.

EN ROUTE

does this, the two female pixies, Niamh (*nee-AV*) and Rhian (*REE-an*), disarm the chosen ones, taking their weapons and backpacks and piling them at the base of the stone. When they are finished, Rhian waves her hand and the pile shimmers and is replaced with what appears to be a pile of leaves.

As each acorn is placed in a captive's mouth, he or she is shrouded in the illusion of shimmering pastel flames. As soon as the flames appear, Gwydd whispers in the captive's ear, "You will serve us tonight at the dance, and we will reward you well on the morrow."

If any PCs have escaped being mesmerized and conceal themselves in the trees at the edge of the clearing, they may try to interfere with the pixies. The likely response is a *confusion* touch attack, after which the pixies wait for a passive moment and slip a magic acorn in the PC's mouth (see effects in insert on page 12).

If the PCs successfully resist the *acorns of geas* and the *hypnotic pattern*, they're likely to get a *sleep* arrow in the back as they run for the trees. The pixies don't pursue anyone into the woods if the arrows miss.

As soon as Gwydd finishes, Niamh and Rhian fly up to the stone and reach into the swirling light, removing a crystal from atop the stone. The light show ends. The rejected members of the crowd sigh in disappointment and begin to wake from their trance. The pixies lead their (now glowing) captives into the forest before any of the rejects are completely awake, leaving them with only dim memories of luminous figures vanishing in the darkness ... and several confused and frightened enemies standing next to them.

*Welcome to the
Party... Now
Get to Work!*

The pixies lead their shining train down the path to another clearing further into the forest, in which a small crowd of grigs scurries about. This clearing is about 50 feet wide and 70 feet long, and three other

The Pixies (9)*

CR 4; SZ S (fey); HD 1d6; hp 6, 5, 3; Init +4 (Dex); Spd 20 ft., fly 60 ft.; AC 16 (+1 Size, +4 Dex, +1 natural); Atk melee +5 (1d4-2, dagger), ranged +6 (1d6, composite shortbow); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SA spell-like abilities, special arrows; SQ natural invisibility, SR 16; AL CG; SV Fort +0, Ref +6, Will +4; Str 7, Dex 18, Con 11, Int 16, Wis 15, Cha 16

Skills: Bluff +7, Concentration +4, Craft (any one) +7, Escape Artist +8, Heal +6, Hide +12, Listen +8, Move Silently +8, Ride +8, Search +9, Sense Motive +6, Spot +8

Feats: Dodge, Point Blank Shot, Rapid Shot, Weapon Finesse (dagger), Weapon Focus (shortbow)

Natural Invisibility (Su): A pixie remains invisible even when it attacks. This ability is constant, but the pixie can suppress or resume it as a free action.

Special Arrows (Ex): Pixies sometimes employ arrows that deal no damage but can erase memory or put a creature to sleep.

Memory Loss: An opponent struck by the arrow must succeed at a Fortitude save (DC 15) or lose all memory. The subject retains skills, languages, and class abilities but forgets everything else until he or she receives a *heal* spell or memory restoration with *limited wish*, *wish*, or *miracle*.

Sleep: Any opponent struck by the arrow, regardless of Hit Dice, must succeed at a Fortitude save (DC 15) or be affected as though by a *sleep* spell.

Spell Resistance (Ex): To determine if a spell or spell-like ability works against a pixie, the spellcaster makes a level check (1d20 + caster level). If the result equals or exceeds 16, the spell works normally, though the target still gets a saving throw.

Spell-Like Abilities: 1/day *confusion* (the pixie must touch the target), *dancing lights*, *detect chaos*, *detect good*, *detect evil*, *detect law*, *detect thoughts*, *dispel magic*, *entangle*, *permanent image* (visual and auditory elements only), and *polymorph self*. These abilities are as the spells cast by an 8th-level sorcerer (save DC 13 + spell level). One pixie in ten can use *Otto's irresistible dance* once per day as cast by an 8th-level sorcerer.

Possessions: Bow with quiver of *sleep* and *memory loss* arrows, bag of *acorns of geas* (see description below)

* Six more pixies join the first three later in the night. This number can be adjusted to fit the strength of the PCs.

DANCE THE NIGHT AWAY



paths lead out of it. The grigs are stringing lamps between trees, piling food and drinks on tables and setting up a tiny bandstand at the base of a huge oak. They greet the newcomers with shrill cries of “Hey!! The waiters are here! Finally!!” They immediately swarm about the enthralled PCs and NPCs and begin ordering them about, having them move tables, carry heavy kegs, reach tall branches to string up more lamps, and the like.

At some point during this, one of the PCs (ideally the most excitable one) feels something land on his shoulder and a voice whispers in his ear: “My friend, you are in grave danger! These are not the harmless sprites they appear to be. They are of the Shadow Court, and at the close of the dance they intend to sacrifice you and your friends to the Dark Powers! I will give you what aid I can, but I cannot reveal myself to them.” An unseen hand reaches into the PCs mouth and removes the silver acorn, replacing it with what feels like a small stone (However, for now the PC still feels the same effects

as with the now-removed acorn). “This will free you during the dance, while they are distracted. You must free your friends and flee ... or, if you choose, strike back!”

A successful Sense Motive check (DC 20) suggests that the voice does not seem trustworthy. A successful Bardic Lore or Knowledge (arcana) check, DC 20, reveals that, while there is a Shadow Court of darker fey creatures, this isn't their style.

This is Amadan (*AH-madan*), a pixie of more than usual mischievousness. He's not exactly *malicious*, but his sense of humor is a bit rough.

As the full moon illuminates the clearing, the party gets underway. About five more pixies arrive, as well as a throng of grigs, all chattering merrily away.

The grigs are here to party, plain and simple. They'll play loud music, get sloshed, and dance like crazy. What else is there to live for? Any extra rowdiness is just icing on the cake.

The newcomers spend several minutes complimenting Niamh, Gwydd, and Rhian on their décor, especially the illusions shrouding the servants. The pixies place their bows against the oak tree behind the bandstand. Several of the grigs take their place on the bandstand and begin playing a merry jig, and soon everyone is dancing, drinking, and making merry. Everyone, of course, except the PCs, who are running back and forth filling glasses, fetching plates of food, and providing free illumination.

It Ain't a Party 'til Something's Broke

About two hours after the party starts, the real fun begins. The false acorn stops working and one of the PCs is free (though the flame illusion is still active for another 6 hours ... Amadan's a bit slipshod with his enchantments). At this point, events follow the PC's lead and in all likelihood, wacky hijinks ensue.

The Heroic Option

Presumably, the freed PC attempts to help her comrades escape, but this is complicated by the fact that all the enthralled servants are shrouded in illusionary flames. The flames make correct identification of the other characters problematic, as all that can be determined visually is height.

The difference between Small and Medium-sized creatures is obvious to the naked eye, but further differentiation requires a hands-on Search check, DC 15.

Freeing the wrong servant is likely to happen sooner or later, and moves things into high gear. While the guests are by this time well into their cups, Gwydd has remained fairly sober and is likely to notice PCs who are not careful about their liberation attempts.

Opposed Hide vs. Spot checks should be made for the faeries to notice careful PCs, but the GM should modify this based on *how* subtle they're being. Apply a -6 modifier to all Spot checks by the sprites due to their intoxication, except for Gwydd.

Consequences of freeing one of the other servants are as follows:

Grigs (15)*

CR 1; SZ T (fey); HD $\frac{1}{2}$ d6+1; hp 3; Init +4 (Dex); Spd 20 ft., fly 40 ft.; AC 18 (+2 size, +4 Dex, +2 natural); Atk melee +6(1d4-1, dagger), or ranged +6 (1d4, composite shortbow); Face 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ ft. x 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ ft.; Reach 0 ft.; AL NG; SA spell-like abilities, fiddle; SQ SR 17; SV Fort +1, Ref +6, Will +3; Str 5, Dex 18, Con 13, Int 10, Wis 13, Cha 14

Skills: Craft (any) +4, Escape Artist +8, Hide +16, Jump +9, Listen +7, Move Silently +8, Perform +6, Search +3, Spot +4 (Grigs receive a +8 racial bonus to Jump checks and a +5 racial bonus to Move Silently checks in a forest setting; both are included in these stats.)

Feats: Dodge, Weapon Finesse (dagger)

Fiddle (Su): One grig in each band carries a tiny, grig-sized fiddle. When the fiddler plays, any non-sprite within 30 feet of the instrument must succeed at a Will save (DC 15) or be affected as though by *Otto's irresistible dance* as long as the playing continues.

Spell Resistance (Ex): To determine if a spell or spell-like ability works against a grig, the spellcaster makes a level check (1d20 + caster level). If the result equals or exceeds 17, the spell works normally, though the target still gets a saving throw.

Spell-Like Abilities: 3/day *change self*, *entangle*, *invisibility* (self only), *pyrotechnics*, and *ventriloquism*. These abilities are as the spells cast by a 9th-level sorcerer (save DC 12 + spell level).

Spell Resistance: To determine if a spell or spell-like ability works, the spellcaster must make a level check (1d20 + caster level). If the result equals or exceeds 17, the spell works normally. The grigs are still allowed a saving throw.

* There are five grigs setting up the party, and ten more join the festivities with the pixies who show up later.

DANCE THE NIGHT AWAY

- If the human peasant is freed, he drops the tray he's holding and begins shouting and rolling about on the ground, attempting to put out the "flames."

At this point, Gwydd flies over to the bows stacked by the bandstand and readies a *sleep* arrow.

The grigs begin laughing uproariously and attempting to tie the unfortunate man down with garlands, streamers, and vines from nearby trees as the pixies begin crowding around, clapping and laughing. Clever PCs may be able to free more of their comrades before Niamh starts calling for the enthralled servants to help restrain the peasant.

- If either of the goblins are freed, they throw the bottle that they're holding at the PC who freed them and run shrieking for a nearby pathway, most likely knocking over a nearby table en route. This attracts the attention of the guests, at least half of whom troop after him, laughing and shouting. The rest continue dancing, under Gwydd's watchful eye. He is particularly attentive to the servants now, making further rescue efforts that much more challenging.
- If the hobgoblin is freed, he immediately lashes out at the PC who freed him, hurling the keg in his arms at his rescuer before charging into the dance floor, swinging wildly at everyone.

The keg is large and awkward, and so the hobgoblin takes a -2 to his attack roll with it in addition to the -4 non-proficient penalty. If it hits, it does 1d8 damage, x2 on a critical hit.

The pixies immediately scatter and begin flying around the clearing, hurling insults and cups at the hobgoblin as several of the grigs try to tie his legs together. Gwydd watches carefully from near the bandstand, going for his arrows if things get too far out of hand. The commotion should prove a helpful distraction from further PC efforts to free their comrades.

The Gutless Option

Should the freed PC choose to abandon her comrades and take off into the woods, several of the guests notice and give chase. The fugitive has a difficult time hiding, given that he is glowing brightly enough to illuminate a 15-foot-wide circle. The pixies and grigs pursuing the PC aren't serious about apprehending her; they just want to have fun with

her. This fun consists mostly of attempting to trip her, tying her feet together, throwing nuts and glassware at her, slapping her in the face with branches, and that sort of thing.

The pixies also *polymorph* themselves into various wild critters and jump out of the bushes at the PC, and put *permanent images* of bridges over handy streams. The grigs have a lot of fun with *ventriloquism*, as well.

The fugitive PC can expect a long night of running, splashing, and tripping before the pursuit ends at dawn. The rest of the PCs are out of luck. They spend the rest of the night stepping and fetching.

The Psycho Option

If the freed PC decides to attack the partygoers instead of trying to free her comrades, the sprites react like they would to the hobgoblin. The pixies fly around throwing things at the PC and the grigs try to tie her legs together. Gwydd keeps an eye on things from the bandstand, ready to grab his shortbow if it becomes necessary. So long as the PC doesn't actually cause real harm, the sprites treat it as just part of the show.

If the PC actually hurts somebody, in other words, does real damage rather than subdual damage, the pixies get serious. Niamh casts *entangle* on the clearing and Gwydd begins firing *sleep* and *memory loss* arrows at the offending PC.

Picking Up the Pieces

No matter what option the PCs choose, there are three ways this can end.

The "Running Man" Ending

If the PCs manage to release most or all of their comrades and run into the forest, then the end looks a lot like the Gutless Option, but with more than one quarry and most of the partygoers joining the chase. The sprites don't really try to catch the PCs; they're just in it for the chase. By dawn, the PCs find themselves back at the edge of the road, exhausted, muddy, and aggravated. When they reach the clearing with the standing stone, they find their equipment at the base

with several bags of what *look* like gold coins. The coins are fairy gold (see insert below). As long as they spend it within 24 hours, they'll be fine ... if they don't plan on staying in that town very long.

Sadistic GMs may also insert whatever entertainingly cursed items they'd like to try out into the PCs' equipment as parting gifts from the pixies.

The "Butch Cassidy" Ending

PCs who opt for the violent response and actually hurt or kill any of the sprites are in trouble.

After being peppered with *sleep* and *memory loss* arrows, the guilty PCs awake back at the side of the road with no memory, no equipment, and *permanent images* of animal heads replacing their own features. Donkeys are always a favorite, but a full-body werewolf illusion is also popular.

The "Scooby Doo" Ending

If the PCs decide to try talking their way out of this mess, Gwydd is willing to listen. If the PCs mention their "invisible friend," Gwydd turns to look with narrowed eyes at a pixie standing at a nearby table, stuffing his mouth with food. Upon noticing the scrutiny, the pixie (Amadan) swallows, grins broadly and says, "Wait, I can explain ..." before vanishing into thin air. Gwydd rolls his eyes and mutters "That Amadan's got a drubbing waiting for him ..."

The results of Diplomacy or Charisma checks depend on how the party has behaved. The pixies start as Friendly towards PCs who have provided good entertainment and accepted the pixies' japes with some humor. They are Indifferent toward PCs who either haven't played along or try this option first (DC 15 to change to Friendly). They are Unfriendly (DC 15 to change to Indifferent; DC 25 to change to Friendly) or Hostile (DC 20 to change to Unfriendly, DC 25 to change to Indifferent, DC 35 to change to Friendly) to PCs who offend or hurt the sprites. Having a bard, a druid, or an elf among the PCs will give a +2 modifier to the check. Mentioning Amadan's involvement will add another +2. If the pixies end up as Friendly or Helpful toward the PCs, then they agree to release the PCs from their "volunteer work" and invite them to stick around. At this point the party becomes self-serve, and the PCs have made some useful if irritating allies. An Indifferent response will result in the pixies grudgingly releasing the PCs with a bag of fairy gold for their troubles. An Unfriendly or Hostile response will lead to one of the first two endings, depending on the PCs' reaction.

NEW MAGIC ITEM:

Fairy Gold

A favorite trick of fey creatures everywhere, fairy gold is simply a bag of 10d10 illusionary gold coins that disappear in 24 hours, and are replaced with dried leaves. The Will save to detect the true nature of the gold is DC 18.

Caster Level: 11th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Wondrous Items, *permanent image*, creator must be fey; *Market Price:* 3,300 gp

Wrap-Up

Experience for this encounter is based on making it through the night rather than "beating" the pixies, especially considering the non-lethal nature of the encounter. If the PCs actually manage to defeat them, multiply their XP award by 125%, since they did it without equipment. The reward for making it through the night depends on how the PCs did it. The "Running Man" Ending should give them 50% of the XP for defeating the three pixies and ten of the grigs. The "Butch Cassidy" Ending should give them only 25%. The "Scooby Doo" Ending should give them the full award.

Further Consequences

Unless the PCs actually kill someone, Amadan is likely to take a shine to them and follow them invisibly, trying to make their lives less dull. That's what friends are for, right?

Scaling the Encounter

This encounter is designed for PCs of 6th to 7th level. Lower-level parties should have little difficulty, but the arrows could actually kill 1st- to 3rd-level PCs. Replacing the normal arrows with blunts doing 1d4 subdual damage should keep the encounter non-lethal.

Higher-level PCs, up to about 10th level, can still be challenged by the encounter, although they're likely to challenge the GM right back. The setup will be complicated, since PCs are likely to make their saves. This will most likely lead to a chase through the woods before the celebration. Giving the pixies a few levels of rogue or sorcerer can balance it out, but runs the risk of moving the encounter into lethal combat.

Dead Drunk

BY KEITH BAKER • ILLUSTRATED BY STEVEN SANDERS

Encounter Level: 5 or the average level of the party, whichever is lower.

Setting: An inn or tavern; the characters may be waiting to meet a contact, relaxing after a challenging adventure, or simply stopping for the night in the midst of a journey between critical locations.

Summary: While visiting an inn, the party runs afoul of a drunken poltergeist that possesses one of the players.

Smudge leaned back in his chair and let out a contented sigh. That last encounter with the White Hand had been a close shave, but thanks to his usual brilliance he and his companions had come through with barely a scratch. And here he was back in his favorite chair at the Black Eagle, with some hard-won gold in his purse and a little time to relax.

He heard the barmaid set something down on the table. "There you are, sir," she said, "though I think you've had about enough."

Smudge opened his eyes and started to tell the barmaid that he'd had but one glass of ale, and then shut his mouth in surprise. Clay mugs were scattered around the table — apparently someone had been having a few drinks right under his nose! He sat up and almost lost his balance — his head was swimming, and he found that he was having trouble counting the mugs on the slowly-spinning table.

A few minutes later, the brawl began ...

Background

The power of alcohol is a mysterious thing. For some, it is the only thing that makes life bearable. For others, it is a slow road to an untimely death. All too often, it is both. But in this case, it is a bridge between life and death. For this is the story of a thief who was too dumb to live, and too drunk to die.

A week before the party arrives at the scene of this encounter, a halfling rogue — call him Joe, for now

— found his life cut short in the common room of an inn. Joe's love of drink and gambling outweighed his means, and he had turned to thievery to pay his debts; but he wasn't much of a rogue, and if he hadn't died on the floor of the inn he probably would have been killed by a would-be victim or by the forces of the law. But as it was, he was up late celebrating one of his rare successful heists; after a few too many rounds of grog he decided to go cupboard diving in an attempt to impress a young lady with his acrobatic skills. One broken neck later, he should have been on his way to halfling heaven. But he wasn't. Somehow, his state of inebriation was so complete that it extended to his soul itself. As a result, his spirit has been lurking around the inn for the last few months, trying to get a barmaid's attention to order another round.

Of course, there is another wrinkle in this mess. This drunken rogue's name isn't actually Joe; this is simply a placeholder for the sake of convenience. He actually has the same name as one of the characters in the party. And by a fluke of sympathetic magic, when this character enters the inn Joe is drawn into him. For the duration of the visit, Joe will live again — which will cause more than a little trouble for the host of the ghost.

Choosing a Host

In preparation for this encounter, the GM will have to select a character to serve as a host for the poltergeist. The critical elements in selecting a host are as follows:

- The most important thing is to select a player who will enjoy a roleplaying challenge. Some people hate to lose control of their character on any level, and if all of the players are like this, than this encounter may not be suited to the party. Hopefully one of the players would enjoy a chance to play a new personality for a brief period of time.



EN ROUTE

- If there are multiple players who fit the bill, the next step is to look at the characters themselves. Generally speaking, the encounter will be more entertaining if the character in question is not one of the more physically powerful members of the party. A barbarian can probably hold her own in a bar brawl, and may be a heavy drinker in the first place; whereas the scrawny, teetotaling sorcerer will have a much more interesting time dealing with the challenges posed by the encounter. As the host is not given a saving throw or other form of protection against the possession, she should not be penalized for her actions while under the influence of the spirit — specifically, a paladin should not be held accountable for lying, cheating, and so on while the spirit is in control, although she may be wise to perform acts of penance and reparation once she is freed of the ghost.
- If, after the above options are taken into consideration, there are still multiple characters who are suitable for possession, pick the one with the least exotic name. It's more likely that there would be two William Fletchers in the world than two N'Graani li TiGaara IIIs.
- Finally, while Joe was male, this doesn't mean that the host has to be male as well; perhaps Joe just had an unusually girly name. Joe is so drunk that he won't even notice if his host is female or not.

Party Time

Prior to the session, photocopy the notes provided at the end of this encounter.

A short time after the party enters the Inn, have everyone make a Spot check. Give the host the possession note; give the other notes to the two players who made the best Spot rolls. Since multiple characters receive secret information, the fate of the host should not be immediately obvious to the other members of the party.

Next, give the newly-possessed character a little time to play with the role. For instance, the host could join the game of dice going on in the corner. The three players include:

- **Trom**, a young dwarven blacksmith. Trom is surly and pessimistic, and is the least likely to give the host any trouble, since he expects to lose. He has a shaved head and a braided black



beard that he tucks into his belt, and he speaks in a grumbling rumble. He has coins worth a total of three gold pieces on his person.

- **Barran**, a middle-aged human merchant, is a gambler's dream come true — a reasonably wealthy man with no common sense and a complete inability to play any sort of game. He is always joking about his luck, and swearing that things can only get better. He is a portly man with thin red hair and a narrow goatee, and his voice is high-pitched and reedy, seemingly at odds with his bulk. He is wearing purple robes, and has a total of twelve gold pieces in his belt pouch.
- **Ida**, a human girl with blonde hair in a page-boy cut. She is intently focused on the game and will not engage in small talk. Ida is actually following in Joe's footsteps — she has fallen into debt due to her love of gambling, and needs to win at least four gold by the end of the night. She has two gold at the time any of the characters join the game.

The game itself is called "Stars" and is much like a cross between poker and a slot machine; it costs four silver pieces to sit in for a round, and the winner takes the pot. The actual rules are fairly irrelevant, because Joe can't help cheating. The GM should briefly describe the action, giving a fictionalized account of the rolls of the other players, ending with: "Ida rolls a low streak, which is the current high roll on the table. You roll, and for a moment it looks like you'll have two stars and a moon ... but at the last instant, the third die rolls over to net you triple stars. Again." Given Joe's telekinetic powers, the host can't lose — even if he wants to, the spirit won't cooperate. After four or five rounds, the other players will dejectedly call it a night. Ida and Trom will be very suspicious of this drunken stranger with his astounding run of luck, while Barran will cheerfully shrug it off.

Alternately, the host may try to flirt with the cute halfling sitting across the common room. Her name is **Del Adara**, and she is a local seamstress. She has no interest in cross-racial dating, and will politely rebuff any advances the character may make. If the character is a halfling, she will be even more polite, but she still isn't interested in getting involved with anyone right now, especially a drunkard — she still feels somewhat guilty about Joe's death, as he died trying to impress her. If the character addresses her by name (or something close to it) she will become very suspicious and demand to know if she is the target of some sort of practical joke.

Tavern Patrons

1st-Level Commoners

CR 1/2, SZ M (humanoid); HD 1d4; hp 2; Init +0; Spd 30 ft.; AC 10 (natural); Atk melee +0 (1d3 subdual, fist); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; AL N; SV Fort +0, Ref +0, Will +0; Str 10, Dex 10, Con 10, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 10

Skills: Craft (varies) +4, Profession (varies) +4

At any given time there will be around fifteen commoners in the inn. The primary reason for providing their statistics is in case the party incites them to a brawl. There are a few notable exceptions to these basic statistics:

Trom, the dwarven gambler, is a 2nd-level commoner. He has a Strength and Constitution of 14, and as a result attacks with a +3 bonus to hit for 1d3+2 damage, and he has 10 hit points.

Del Adara is also of 2nd level; she has a 13 Dexterity and 14 Charisma. She has an AC of 12 and 6 hit points.

Ida is actually an apprentice-level rogue. Her skills include Spot +4 and Listen +4. It is possible that she will notice some useful detail and stand up to support the party — unless, of course, Joe took her for a lot of money while gambling.

The Affair of the Dagger

Between gambling, romance, and heavy drinking, the host has probably drawn a little attention to himself. The other members of the party may be beginning to wonder what is wrong with their friend. But cheating at dice is just the beginning for Joe. He has a professional eye for shiny objects, and combined with a telekinetic reach, he suddenly has the power to pick a pocket from across a crowded room. There's only one problem — he was never very good at picking pockets.

After the character has had a little time to play with his new personality, a large group of people enters the building. There are six soldiers; these grim warriors are dressed in chainmail emblazoned with a coat of arms (a black sword set on a white field) and have longswords at their belts.

They are escorting a young noblewoman, Lady Elisa Martiese; the lady is dressed in elegant traveling clothes of black and white, and looks rather put out at having to share her lodgings with commoners. She is wearing a narrow belt, which supports a leather purse and a jeweled dagger in a plain scabbard. It is this dagger that begins the trouble — for as the host character glances at it, it slips out of its sheath and flips through the air to land directly in front of the character. Joe likes the looks of the dagger — and didn't bother to think about the guards.

Only the host gets a clear view of the dagger floating through the air towards him, although the other members of the party will see that it came from the direction of the lady and landed on their table. But the action was not nearly as subtle as Joe had intended, and the lady turns with a glare. "My dagger! Thief!" she cries in rage. The hands of the guards go to their swords.

Martiese Guardsmen

2nd-Level Human Warriors

CR 2, SZ M (humanoid); HD 2d8+2; hp 11; Init +1; Spd 30 ft.; AC 16 (+5 chainmail, +1 Dex); Atk melee +4 (1d8+2, longsword), or melee +4 (1d3+2 subdual, fist); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; AL LN; SV Fort +4, Ref +1, Will +0; Str 14, Dex 12, Con 12, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 10

Skills: Handle Animal +4, Intimidate +3, Ride +4

These guardsmen are completely loyal to their lady. They have no interest in conversing with the common folk of the inn. Needless to say, a competent party of 2nd- or 3rd-level characters should have little difficulty dealing with the guards if they choose to fight — the issue is what the long-term consequences of such an act would be.

Lady Elisa Martiese

2nd-Level Human Aristocrat/2nd-Level Sorcerer

CR 4, SZ M (humanoid); HD 2d8 + 2d4-4; hp 12; Init +4; Spd 30 ft.; AC 10 (natural); Atk melee +2 (1d3 subdual, fist); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SA spells; AL LN; SV Fort -1, Ref +0, Will +6; Str 10, Dex 11, Con 9, Int 13, Wis 11, Cha 15

Skills: Bluff +5, Concentration +4, Diplomacy +5, Intimidate +7, Knowledge (arcana) +6, Knowledge (nobility) +3, Knowledge (history) +3, Listen +2, Sense Motive +7, Spellcraft +6, Spot +2

Feats: Improved Initiative, Skill Focus (Sense Motive), Spell Focus (Enchantment)

Mystical power flows through the blood of the Martiese family; the lore of the family claims that this power was given to the first Martiese as a sign of his right to rule, and the magic remains as a sign of their elevation over the commoners. Elisa is a typical member of her family; proud, quick to anger, assured of her superiority over the lower classes. However, if one can get past her fiery temper, she is quite intelligent and a keen judge of character. Depending on the campaign setting, Lady Martiese may be a member of the local aristocracy; otherwise, she can be assumed to be passing through the area with her retinue.

Lady Elisa is a human woman, 19 years of age. Her black hair is slightly curly and scented with oils; she wears it shoulder-length, except for a single braid in front that drops to her waist. She is tall (5'11") but slight of build; her features are finely sculpted, and carefully accented with cosmetics. Her voice is clear and piercing, and she carries herself with a sense of grace and power.

Spells: (6/5) Lady Martiese's spells have a save of 12 + spell level, +2 if the spell is an enchantment. As a general rule she uses her magic for personal comfort — *prestidigitation* to flavor food, *mending* to keep her clothes in good repair, and *detect poison* to keep from having to pay a food taster. Notable spells are listed below:

0 Level — *detect magic*, *detect poison*, *disrupt undead*, *mending*, *prestidigitation*

1st Level — *charm person*, *sleep*

Possessions: Elisa is carrying a pouch containing her signet ring, 30 gold pieces, and a lock of her betrothed's hair. She is wearing a sapphire pendant worth 150 gold pieces. Her dagger, should the party manage to keep it, is a +1 dagger of spell storing, currently holding the spell *sleep*. Gems in the hilt add an additional 300 gp to the market value of the weapon.

DEAD DRUNK

Now would be a good time to suggest to the players that combat is not an ideal solution to this problem — at least, not using lethal force. They appear to have robbed a woman of noble blood (or simply great wealth, if the country in question does not have an aristocracy). Slaughtering her and her guards in a public place will not help their reputation in the area. A few courses of action are available:

- The host character may simply wish to return the dagger. If this is the case, point out that it's REALLY COOL, and besides, where's Elisa's proof that it's her dagger? Aside from the empty scabbard and the symbol on the pommel that matches her signet ring? In any case, even if the character does return the dagger, the GM shouldn't let him off the hook immediately. Lady Martiese does not take kindly to thieves practicing their trade in public, and she will want to see justice done — preferably the severing of the hand of the thief who dared filch her property.
- If someone in the party has a clear head, he may step in to mediate the confrontation.

Provided that the host is willing to give up the dagger, another character should be able to resolve the situation peacefully with a Diplomacy roll against a DC of 17. The results of failure should vary based on how badly the character botched the roll; a result of 15 should result in very tense success, while a result of 5 means that the speaker has somehow insulted the Martiese dynasty. The GM should call upon the player to talk out the action; a particularly creative explanation as to how the dagger found its way over to the party's table should be worth a bonus of one to three points to the roll. Bluff is also a possibility; use the same base difficulty, but the character will also have to overcome Lady Elisa's +7 Sense Motive modifier.

- Another possibility is to start a brawl and run for it. There are a number of patrons in the bar who aren't that fond of the high and mighty nobles (notably Trom the dwarf, from the gambling table). Drawing weapons and shedding blood is likely to cause trouble, but if a party member claims that they've been framed, calls upon the crowd for support, and throws a chair or a mug, a chaotic melee would ensue. The wisest course of action would be to slip out during the chaos.
- Alternately, the rest of the party may have decided that the host is out of his head (which he is, really) and take action to restrain him and return the dagger themselves.

These are just a few of the possible solutions. But avoiding the wrath of Lady Martiese is only the first challenge. By now, the party should know that something is very wrong with the host character — the question is, what can they do about it?

Giving Up Spirits

The first thing the party needs to do is to determine what is wrong with Joe's victim. If any of the characters happen to mention the victim's name, one of the barmaids or another patron may remark "Hey! Didn't he die last week?" — followed by an explanation of the halfling's demise. Or Del Adara might recognize some of the victim's mannerisms as belonging to Joe, who was always pursuing her. The following spells may be useful:

Detect lies and *zone of truth* will not be as useful as one might think; aside from his drunken confusion, Joe believes that he IS the character he is inhabiting, so questions like "Who are you" won't yield any sort of useful information.

Detect thoughts will give the spellcaster a greater insight into the mind of the victim. She will be able to determine that there are two distinct thought patterns, although one seems to be suppressed. Of course, the thoughts of the ghost are very chaotic and confused. However, combined with the right questions — "Who are you," "What have you done recently" — the caster may be able to pick up images of Joe's earlier life and untimely death.

Detect undead will register a faint undead aura around the victim.

Disrupt undead will cause the host to cry out in pain. If 12 points of damage can be inflicted in this way, Joe will be temporarily forced out of the host; however, he will remain in the inn, and if the character returns the trouble will start all over again.

Delay poison will temporarily block all effects of alcohol in the character's system. Due to the sympathetic link, this will also clear the booze from Joe's spirit — causing him to realize his current condition. "What — who are you?" he will mutter. "Wait, this isn't me ... did I ... Ohhhh ..." And with that, the character's mind is returned to him as the spirit fades away.

A priest or paladin can attempt to turn Joe, but his close link to the host character makes it surprisingly difficult; Joe is considered to have 8 hit dice for purposes of turning. If the check is successful, Joe is expelled as if the player had used *disrupt undead*.

If magic fails to solve the problem, there are a few more mundane ways to handle the situation. For one thing, if the character sobers up, it will have the same effect as using magic to block the effects of alcohol in his system; Joe will be purged of drink as the host is, and will fade away when he is fully sober. Alternatively, forcing the victim to drink himself senseless or simply knocking him out may cause the spirit to become unglued. Perhaps, since Joe got himself killed trying to impress Del Adara, a kiss from her will send him to his rest. And if worse comes to the worst, the GM can simply rule that Joe's spirit is bound to the inn — and that when the party leaves, they leave Joe behind.

Aftermath

The results of the encounter will vary considerably based on the actions taken by the party. If they killed Lady Martiese or her guards, they may find themselves in trouble with the law, not to mention the innkeeper. If Joe's spirit was simply expelled as opposed to being laid to rest, it will continue to lurk in the inn, ready to possess the host again the next time he returns. On the other hand, if the characters solve the mystery and set Joe at peace, they may gain the sympathy of the other patrons — which would be worth a free round of drinks, at the least.

In addition to the experience reward for making it through the encounter there are two bonus awards: if the character who was possessed did a good job of roleplaying, she should receive an additional 100 XP for rising to the challenge; if Joe was successfully laid to rest, the party should receive an additional 300 points divided up amongst the group.

Joe

Drunken Ghost

CR 3; SZ n/a (undead); HD 3d6; hp 12; Init +1; Spd n/a; AC n/a; Atk n/a; Face n/a; Reach n/a; SA sympathetic possession; SQ poltergeist, drunk; AL N; SV Fort —, Ref —, Will —; Str —, Dex —, Con —, Int 8, Wis 8, Cha 13

Skills: Bluff –2, Pick Pocket +2, Tumbling –2 (after penalties)

Joe is the spirit of a drunken halfling. He is only loosely bound to the material world, and as such does not possess all of the powers of a typical ghost. He has a special bond to the host character due to their shared name, and as a result he is allowed to immediately possess that character when he or she enters the inn.

In life, Joe was a decent enough fellow, for a stupid thief. The regulars at the bar remember him with a certain fondness — poor dumb Joe, who killed himself jumping off the shelf.

While he does not possess all of the abilities of a standard ghost, Joe does have a few useful powers:

Sympathetic Possession (Ex): Joe will immediately possess anyone within 30 feet of him who shares his name. This is an entirely unconscious action, and the victim does not receive a saving throw. The effect is similar to magic jar, except that the victim's soul is not actually expelled from his body; instead, it is simply pushed down, with Joe's muddled thoughts becoming the dominant force in the shared mind. While the victim is possessed, he cannot make use of any of his own skills or spells. He will gain access to Joe's abilities — such as they are. While in a host body, Joe resists attempts to turn or rebuke undead as if he were an 8 HD creature.

Poltergeist (Su): As a spirit, Joe possesses the ability to manipulate objects at a distance — briefly leaving the host body to snatch something across the room. Effectively, he can cast magic hand at will. However, he is not really conscious of what he is doing; he sees something he wants, and the next thing he knows, he has it.

Drunken (Ex): Due to his drunken condition, Joe receives a –4 on any sort of skill check. This has already been taken into account in the skills listed above.

Additional Materials

The following notes should be photocopied and provided to the players when they enter the inn. The first note is for the host character; the others are distractions for the two other characters who are most observant.

Possession!

When you step into the inn, you are suddenly overcome by a wave of drunken euphoria. You feel great! Wow, have you been passed out or something? Well, time to get a drink ...

You have been possessed by the ghost of a drunken halfling rogue. This ghost shares your name, and it's so drunk that it doesn't realize that it's not really you. Have fun with this — see how long you can run with it before the other party members realize what's going on. Your immediate priority is to get a drink — no, make that LOTS of drinks. After that, try to have some fun. You love to gamble — maybe you should join that game of dice in the corner. Or see if you can impress that cute halfling over there ... what was her name again? Belle Aflora? Something like that. And hey, if the opportunity presents itself, you are the world's greatest pickpocket ...

While you are possessed, you cannot use any spells or any of your usual skills (at least, not at their usual level). The ghost considers Pick Pocket, Tumble, and Bluff to be its greatest skills. The ghost can draw on your memories to a very limited extent — it's too drunk to realize that they aren't its own memories — so you can still vaguely recall that you are friends with the other members of your party ... but it doesn't have any solid memory of any of your recent activities.

Gambling!

You notice three people in a corner of the room, playing some sort of dice game. The players include a burly dwarf in laborer's clothes, a young woman wearing a peasant dress with a slightly panicked look on her face, and a middle-aged man wearing a nice robe — a successful merchant by the look of it. The merchant smiles and laughs, although it looks like the dwarf just won the round.

A Depressed Halfling

An attractive young halfling lady catches your eye. She is sitting alone at the back of the common room, drinking a mug of spiced cider. She is wearing a plain brown dress, and seems lost in thought — something must have happened recently to bring her down.

The Draftsman's Pen

BY ALEX KNAPIK • ILLUSTRATED BY HELENA WICKBERG

Encounter Level: No restrictions. The monster in the final battle is chosen by the GM.

Setting: Any environment; city, country, desert, forest ... anywhere is fine, whenever the PCs have reached a spot as deep as possible within it. The heart of a jungle, the most parched region of a desert, the darkest part of a city, or the most arcane corner of an astral plane are the ideal places for the players to find the Draftsman's Pen.

Summary: When the PCs are in the deepest, darkest heart of an adventure, there are shocked to discover ... a bright, cozy inn surrounded by fantastically colorful flowers? They soon discover that the inn's owner, a former royal architect, has made a dark pact with an even darker evil. The adventurers will have to contend with the architect's drawings made real.

Background

In the middle of another scenario, when the adventurers have traveled far into some location, this encounter can be run. It is ideal if the adventurers are on a tension-filled quest searching for an obscure artifact or person, or if they've somehow become lost in a dangerous, unfamiliar area. At the point that the adventurers are deeply lost, confused, or otherwise in plight, tell them the following:

As you look to your left, you suddenly see a large painted canvas, with some sort of prairie scene, which was not there before. It is at least as tall as you are and twice as wide.

If any adventurer looks closer, tell them:

Inspecting the painting further, you can tell it has exquisite design; a true master must have produced this work. In fact, you've never seen a picture this incredibly detailed and lifelike before. There is green grass painted over most of the canvas; it's as though you can see every blade. The large flowers at the bottom of the canvas, which look very close to you due to the perspective of the painting, are brilliantly vivid violets, reds, blues, and yellows. Only now do you notice, far off in the

painting's distance, some kind of house or inn — it's the only manmade thing painted on the canvas.

Characters with either the Appraise or Craft (painting) skill can use them to determine the value of the painting. (Characters using the Craft (painting) skill can use it exactly as if they had Appraise.) The DC for this check is 15, and the actual value of the painting is judged as 1,000 gp. Feel free to change this value depending on your campaign and the level of the characters, but it should clearly be considered an extremely valuable piece of art.

If a character tries to strike, touch, or otherwise come in contact with the painting, read the following:

As you come in contact with the canvas, your [fist, sword, etc.] suddenly swipes into the painting! Even more startling, a flower, from right up front in the painting, falls out of the canvas and lands on your feet!

Let the characters fiddle around with or stare at the painting for a while. It now seems normal, aside from its remarkable level of detail and realer-than-real colors. They can still reach into the painting and even grab flowers or grass out of it, though.

Characters attempting to discern if the painting is magical or not can use Spellcraft (DC 25). Magical information-gathering options, like the *detect magic* spell, work as well. Success results in sensing a great magic surrounding the aura of the canvas, though little specific information can be gleaned.

At some point, preferably when some urgent danger presents itself to the characters, tell them:

Suddenly, you see a tiny dot in the painting slowly becoming larger. It seems to following the perspective in the picture, and it ... it ... it's a man! He seems to be waving his arms like a madman as he comes closer. It now looks like a facial portrait of an elderly craftsman. "Hey! Whatter doin' to mah flowers!?! Rascal kids, no respect for yer elders," the painting bellows at you. The man in the painting turns his head left and right, seemingly looking out at the scene you're in. "Well, donta jest stand thar, get inside, get inside!"

The characters should decide that their only option is to enter the painting. If all of the characters are hesitant, the old man can grab the nearest one and pull him in with an “Aww, don’t be such babies ...”

Once inside, the characters have seemingly entered another world, albeit a small one. To their left or right, about a hundred paces away, the adventurers can see nothing but pure white, like a wall that goes higher than they can see. Straight ahead, in the distance, the characters can see the building, which seems to be a cozy-looking inn. They are surrounded by the brightly colored flowers and are standing in the grass. Directly behind them is another completely white wall, except for a crudely sketched box in black. Through that square they can see the world that they just left.

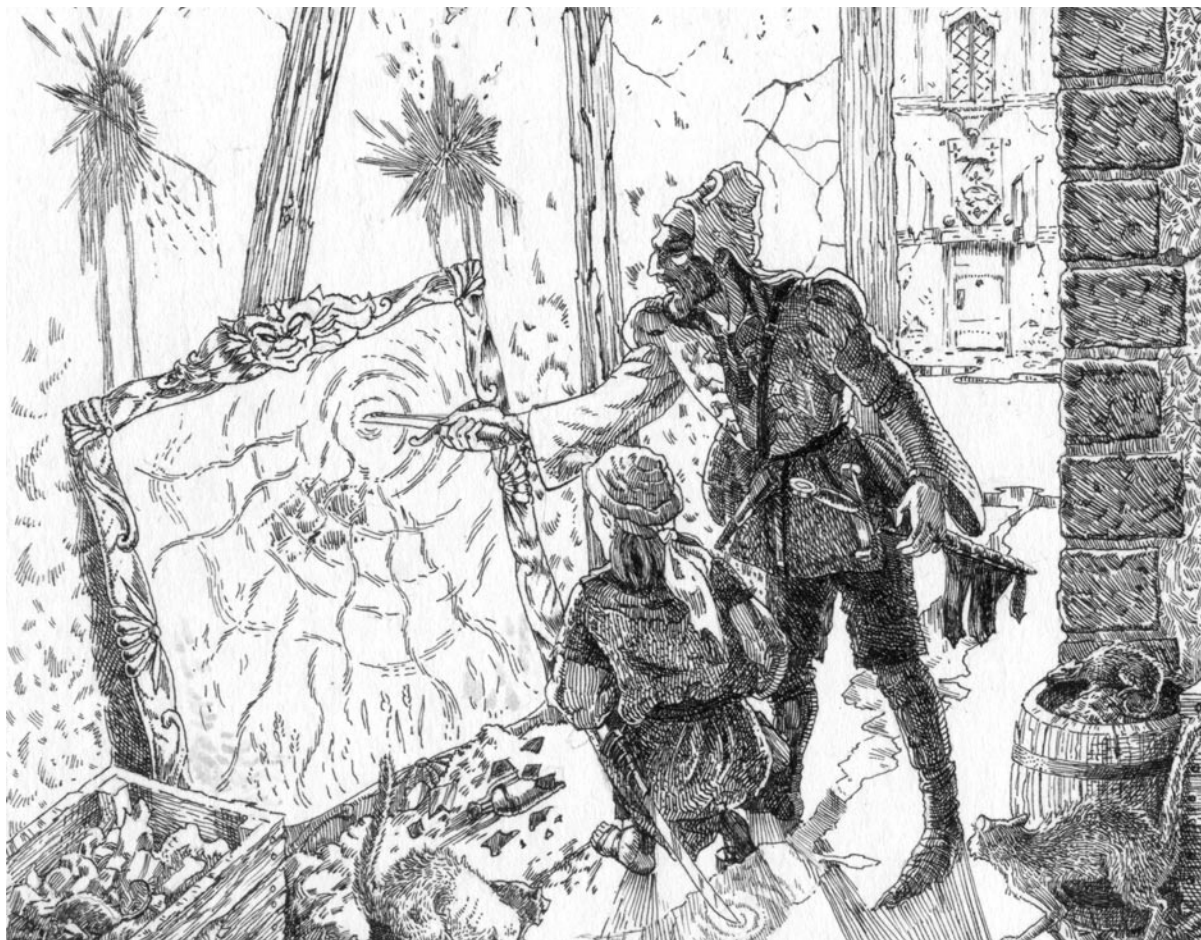
The elderly man walks up to the square in the white wall, saying “Well, we won’t need that fer now,” and smears it with his hand. Black ink seems to cloud over the world you just left until there’s nothing but a big smudge. “I’ll wash et out, later,” he says. “So, watter ye all doin’ round my inn?”

Strokes of Genius

The elderly man, who introduces himself as Wellis but will say no more, leads the characters to the inn. When they get there, they notice their boots and/or shoes are green, like paint has rubbed off on them. (Well, it has.) He starts fishing around in his pockets when the characters get to the front door of the inn.

“Blag it! Can’t find me keys ta get in!” Wellis starts to hop a bit, seemingly in frustration, until he pulls some sort of inkpen from his pocket. “This’ll havta do, for now,” he says as he moistens the tip on a massive gray tongue. “No ink on me now, but ya can always do a little wit a pen if ya gotta.” He puts the pen onto the door, swipes it around in expert fashion, and you see a large blue key now sticking into the keyhole. Wellis turns the key and opens the door. “Little trick about the inn,” he winks, “the pen is boss here, and I own the pen.”

Wellis proceeds to the inn’s entrance desk, where he takes down the characters’ names and begins to set up rooms. He won’t take no for an answer; the adventurers will have to stay at least one night, if only to repay him for letting them come through the canvas.



During this time, the PCs may have a few questions for Wellis. Here are a few they may bring up, and Wellis' responses:

- **Where are we?**
Yer at my inn. Seems rather obvious.
- **How are we inside the painting?**
You walked into it. I made a deal with a royal magician for this canvas. It's a prime property in extra-planar space.
- **How is all this stuff here — did you paint it?**
Yep, got this inkpen and a well-trained eye, and I use 'em both to good effect.
- **What kind of inkpen can do this?**
One that 'cha get from a royal magician, you dolt. I was a royal draftsmen, back in my day — I drew up everything for the king, from building designs and battle plans to portraits of both royalty and wanted criminals. For my good service, I was allowed to retire here and make a new life.
- **How much ink do you have left?**
Inquisitive little rats, aren't cha ... I've got a jar of it, well-hidden from the likes of you. Every morning, as the sun comes up, the jar refills. (quietly) At least, most of the time ... Well, DON'T be gettin' any ideas; the pen only works fer me.
- **Does anyone else come here/live here?**
Not many come around — once in a while I find a few lads and lasses like yerself, and let 'em stay in my inn. It was always our dream to run a little hotel ... er, what was I asaying now? No, just me, and my wife, of course. But she's ill right now. Hard stuck in bed recoverin', she is.
- **Can we take a look around?**
Not much to see, I'm afraid. Like the outside, many of the rooms here aren't done yet. All you'll see is a boring shade of white. Now, how's 'bout I rustle up a few drinks and then show you to your rooms ...

After bringing the characters to their rooms (he has three times as many rooms as there are characters, so everyone can have their own), Wellis departs and comes back with bright yellow drinks for everyone. "It's liquid sunshine," he explains, "horribly difficult to get under normal circumstances. Course, I'm not exactly under normal circumstances, am I?" He laughs, bellowing mightily, and pushes the PCs to drink.

NEW MAGIC POTION:

Liquid Sunshine

Liquid sunshine is the reduced essence of the sun's energy; it manifests as a bright yellow draught. If characters are suspicious of the drink, they may make an Alchemy, Profession (cook), or Profession (brewer) check with a DC of 20. If they succeed, they note that the drink is not poisonous, though it is exceedingly intoxicating.

This potion causes those who imbibe it to add +5 to the DC for *all* checks they make, which is cumulative with each drink they have. This effect begins one hour after the potion is drunk, and lasts for 20 hours minus the character's Constitution ability score; for example, a character with a Constitution of 14 has this modifier for 6 hours.

It does have a benefit, as well — treat each drink as a *cure serious wounds* spell with a caster level of 6. This draught is extremely expensive, due to the rarity and danger of collecting sunlight in its liquid form. It is usually reserved for only the most ceremonial occasions of royalty.

Caster Level: 3rd; *Prerequisites:* Brew Potion, spell-caster level 6th+, ability to reduce sunlight to liquid form; *Market Price:* 8,000 gp (due to rarity)

Bumps in the Night

In the time after Wellis has left the characters' rooms for the night, one of the three following events occurs (GM's choice). It's also possible that the characters could have more than one occur, especially if they split up during the night.

I. The Gift in Return

Long into the middle of the night, read the following to one of the characters:

You hear it faintly, at first mistaking it for the wind. Then you remember you haven't felt any breeze since falling into this strange world — but by then it's getting louder anyway. There's some sort of moaning — it's becoming a wailing — coming from down the hall.

If the character does nothing, eventually the noise will stop. If he goes to investigate, though:

Leaving your room, you can tell the noise has to be a person, and it's coming from down the hall! You creep down there and find that the door to the room is unlocked. Inside ...

THE DRAFTSMAN'S PEN

Inside, you find an elderly woman writhing in bed — or what's left of her, at least. Even in the darkness, it's clear that she's gravely injured — she actually looks dead, and has been for some time, you'd guess. Open wounds fester across her body, as do clear signs of rot. She turns to look at you with half-crazed eyes and croaks, "Let me go, let me go ..."

"Toldja there was no needin' for snooping," you hear a voice say flatly behind you. It's Wellis, and he's got his pen held tightly in his hand. "She's my masterpiece," he explains, sounding sightly defensive. "It's not going as well as I'd hoped, but I'm getting there. It's just that the organs need to be so detailed to work, so detailed ... you're not going to ruin my sweet Bellatine ..."

II. Refill

One of the characters has fallen fast asleep, presumably from having too many drinks earlier in the night. He is woken very abruptly to see the following:

Wellis is standing over you — knife in one hand, pen in the other — and a razor-sharp cut is already oozing blood from your arm! As soon as you wake up, Wellis hastily tries to touch his pen to your wound. He's clearly terrified of what you could do to him. "I'm sorry, I'm so sorry, sir, I'm ... the pen, the pen ... sometimes it needs some fresh blood, jus' a little bit, to keep the inkjar flowin' ev'ry morning. I kin, I kin make it worth yer while, jus' a little bit of blood ..."

Wellis offers the PC 1,000 gold pieces to keep quiet and give him a few drops of blood. If the character refuses or attacks, Wellis panics and runs from the room.

III. The Dark Masterpiece

During the night, if any of the PCs decide to investigate the inn, they come across a room, far down a winding hall, that has a soft red glow coming from underneath the door. If they open the door or otherwise peer into the room, read the following:

It's just a sketch, you tell yourself; something Wellis is fiddling around with. In your heart you know that's just not true. Oh, it looks like a sketch all right; no color, except a spot of pulsing red on the head — the rest looks like regular pen and ink work. Except that it's three-dimensional and fills the entire room! Except it's clearly a dragon, though more loathsome and fiendish — more corrupted — than any you've ever seen. Except that it turns its illustrated head towards you and stares with more hatred than you've seen in real life.

If Wellis was out due to the one of the other encounters, he comes up behind the character. Otherwise, he pokes his head up from the side of the beast.

"Well, well, din't 'spect anyone to come here. Thought you'd have tha sense to keep to yerselves." Wellis is trying to talk big, but he seems on the verge of panic. "It was part of the deal, I din't have a choice," he explains, his voice wavering. "Get the pen, save m'wife, build my own paradise ... all I had ta do was work on designing this demon-spawn as well."

"I'm no proud of it, no sir. But a had no choice. It's, it's not done yet; it can't hurt a fly yet, but it's comin' 'long. When I take a job I do it right."

Crossing the Line

After any or all of these events occur, Wellis tries to eliminate the characters the only way he knows how: with his dark pen. He hastily sketches a monster into the air that, despite looking phenomenally realistic from the front or back, is only two-dimensional. It soon becomes apparent, though, that the creature lacks none of its power or malice as it immediately attacks the characters. The GM is free to choose any monster that fits the adventurers' abilities.

When the creature is defeated, it's clear that Wellis used all but his very last drops of ink on it. He pleads for his life, saying "but, but, only I kin draw you a door out of me canvas! You need me! Please ...". Although he's a treacherous old man, he's also right. Only Wellis can use the pen to open another portal out of the pocket world. He'll do so readily, blubbering for his life and mumbling about his wife; "doin' wat I had to do, I wash jus' doin' wat I had ta do ..."

(Note that Wellis is an 8th-level expert, but due to his advanced age he is not a viable combat opponent; he can be felled with a single stroke from any of the PCs.)

Quick-thinking characters may force Wellis to use a little ink to scribble out the demon. They may also make sure to break the inkpen before they leave; it simply clanks against the portal and back into the canvas if they try to take it out with them. He won't, under any circumstances, do anything to harm his wife.

After the PCs leave the canvas, it shimmers and slowly fades from view. The threat they faced in the outside world is nowhere to be seen. Now they only need to worry about the revenge of an elderly royal artist — and the dark master who was waiting for a masterpiece.

The Dream-Temple of Darkest Varath

BY JOHN SEAVEY • ILLUSTRATED BY DAVID INTERDONATO

Encounter Level: 6

Setting: Any wilderness area

Summary: The party camps on a site once occupied by a temple to the dream demon Varath, and must avoid his snares when they sleep and dream.

Long ago, Varath was a powerful god ... or demon, depending on how you look at things. His area of responsibility lay in giving nightmares to people, and many worshipped him in the hopes of placating him. His central temple was a vast complex, filled with priests, and Varath's avatar inhabited the center of it like a spider in a web ... and indeed, his avatar was a man with the face of a spider. At first, he was a fair deity, if somewhat cruel, granting nightmares to those who needed warning or who had guilt on their consciences. However, over time, he grew bored and capricious, forcing nightmares into the sleep of every individual he could and making sleepless nights for everyone. Eventually, they rebelled against him, defeating him in a mighty battle, slaying his avatar, and burning his temple to the ground. The stones of it were shattered, the rubble reduced to dust, the dust mixed with salt that no living thing would grow there, and the parched earth abandoned. Varath's name passed from living memory, and then out of all but the dustiest of books, and now all that remains is a piece of cleared earth where no being ever goes ... especially not to sleep. For Varath is still waiting, on the edges of the world, and his only path to return is through the minds of sleeping humanity ...

Background

Varath's temple and avatar may have been destroyed ages ago, as the legend states, but the demon still exists in the realm of dreams, living in a dream-image of his temple. He has been waiting all this time for some way back into the physical world,

but the only such path would be through the mind of a sleeping mortal, and unfortunately, no mortal has ever been foolish enough to stay the night where his ruined temple once stood.

Recently, though, the legend has been forgotten; not even the bards remember the old warnings about this place. Soon, Varath hopes, a mortal might be careless enough to sleep here ... and the demon will then force him to open his mind, through trickery or fear, so that Varath's return will begin.

This adventure can be run with characters of any level, since the challenges contained within are tests of will and courage, rather than of skill and combat ability. A few tests are designed for characters specifically of good alignment, and others specifically for characters of evil alignment (the majority, however, are not alignment-specific).

No stats are given for Varath, since the characters will only be encountering him in dreams — in that state, he is simply unkillable, and can manipulate the dream “reality” at will. Varath is bitter and vengeful on the surface, but beneath that, he is deeply lonely — thousands of years of exile from human minds have left him desperate for company. He will try to conceal all of these emotions from the party, attempting to portray himself as a kind and pleasant deity; however, he has great difficulty hiding the bitterness, and it will occasionally flare up in outbursts of pique. The loneliness is even deeper hidden than the other emotions, only coming out at the very end, when the characters refuse him.

The location of the temple has been long-forgotten; it shouldn't be near a town or city, but beyond that, you can place it anywhere you want. It'd be wise not to set up this adventure by planting rumors or legends of the temple site along the characters' journey — after all, if the characters hear about a place where it'd be a very bad idea to go to sleep, and then find it, they're not going to go to sleep there, which will kill the adventure before it starts.

Finding the Temple

The party will find the temple site along their journey, just as dusk approaches (or, if you think your players will be paranoid about the apparent coincidence, they can find it shortly before dusk). If they're traveling through plains or grasslands, it will seem only a little odd — it'll be a rough circle of ground, 200 feet in diameter, where no grass is growing. In a forest, it'll seem more out of place — no trees will be growing there, causing it to stand out more against the surrounding area. In any event, it'll seem like a good place to pitch tents ... the lack of cover means that the party will be easily able to see approaching monsters, and the flat, even ground is perfect for sleeping on. If you have an NPC ally within the party, you can make him be the mouthpiece for the suggestion, if the PCs don't make it on their own.

The trickiest problem to this encounter is making sure that the PCs sleep on the temple site. If they are a little too paranoid for their own good (or, at least, for you to do anything interesting to them), then you can decide that Varath retains the power to force sleep on those entering the temple site; if that's the case, use the rules given below for night sentries.

On the off-chance that one of the PCs does ask if there are any legends or lore about the area, you can have them roll a Knowledge (religion) check with a DC of 30 (the legend is very obscure, and thousands of years old). If they do make the check, say, "You remember reading somewhere of a god whose temple was razed to the ground, some thousands of years ago, by his former worshippers ... it was reputed to have happened somewhere in this area."

Eventually, the PCs will make camp and settle in for the night; when they finish their meal and go to sleep, they'll almost immediately wake right back up again to the sound of loud chanting. (Actually, they're still asleep, and sharing a group dream, but you can let them figure that out for themselves.) They'll find themselves on the edges of the circle of earth (no matter where they'd chosen to sleep), fully dressed and with all their equipment, and facing the center of the circle. The area that was barren is now occupied with a temple made of white marble, carved and polished to look like bone. A tall, narrow tower, 150 feet tall and 50 feet across, occupies the center of the area, while various domes and gardens occupy the outer areas. The chanting continues, seeming to come from within the center temple ...

the chorus of voices say, "Naresh Babu Varath Venkata" over and over again. (If you can make a sound file of this and set it to 'Repeat,' it'll greatly add to the mood. If not, simply remind the players from time to time of the sound of the chant.) Behind them, when they eventually look, there is nothing beyond the edges of the circle but darkness. If any of them attempt to step into the darkness, an elderly voice will interrupt with, "I wouldn't do that ..."

If there are any members of the party who try to stay awake (such as for watch duty or the like), they'll find a wave of unnatural exhaustion hitting them, and will have to make a Constitution check with a DC of 30 to stay awake. If they do make the check, they'll find themselves unable to rouse the sleeping characters by any means.

Mallakai's Warning

The source of the voice in the darkness becomes visible at that point (or, if the PCs simply head towards the temple, he'll call out to them and make himself visible then). He is an elderly man, dressed in white robes that have elaborate designs embroidered upon them in white thread — the overall effect being that the designs are very difficult to see, making the robes seem almost alive. He has a sad, resigned expression on his face, as though an unpleasant-yet-inevitable event has come to pass ... which, in fact, it has.

"I suppose I should have expected this sooner or later," he says. "There was a warning, carved into stone, but the stone was worn smooth by wind and rain long before your grandparents were born, and the legend has passed out of memory. Eventually, someone would come here to dream again. Just your bad luck that it was you. There's nothing to be done about it now ... you must go into the temple and seek the fate that awaits you. If you do not, well ... you'll stay here for a long time."

Mallakai will only answer a few of the PCs questions; he'll tell them not to try crossing the boundary into the darkness, explaining that their dream-selves will be lost there; he'll explain what the temple is (quoting the legend given in the first paragraph of "Background"); he'll also give the following warning: "Varath seeks entry into your minds, but he cannot force his way in. He must be allowed entrance, by word or by deed. If you hold fast to courage, then the worst that can happen is that you

simply die. If not, well ... have you ever wondered where the expression 'a fate worse than death' comes from? It comes from him. They built temples to him once, to placate and pacify him. It didn't work."

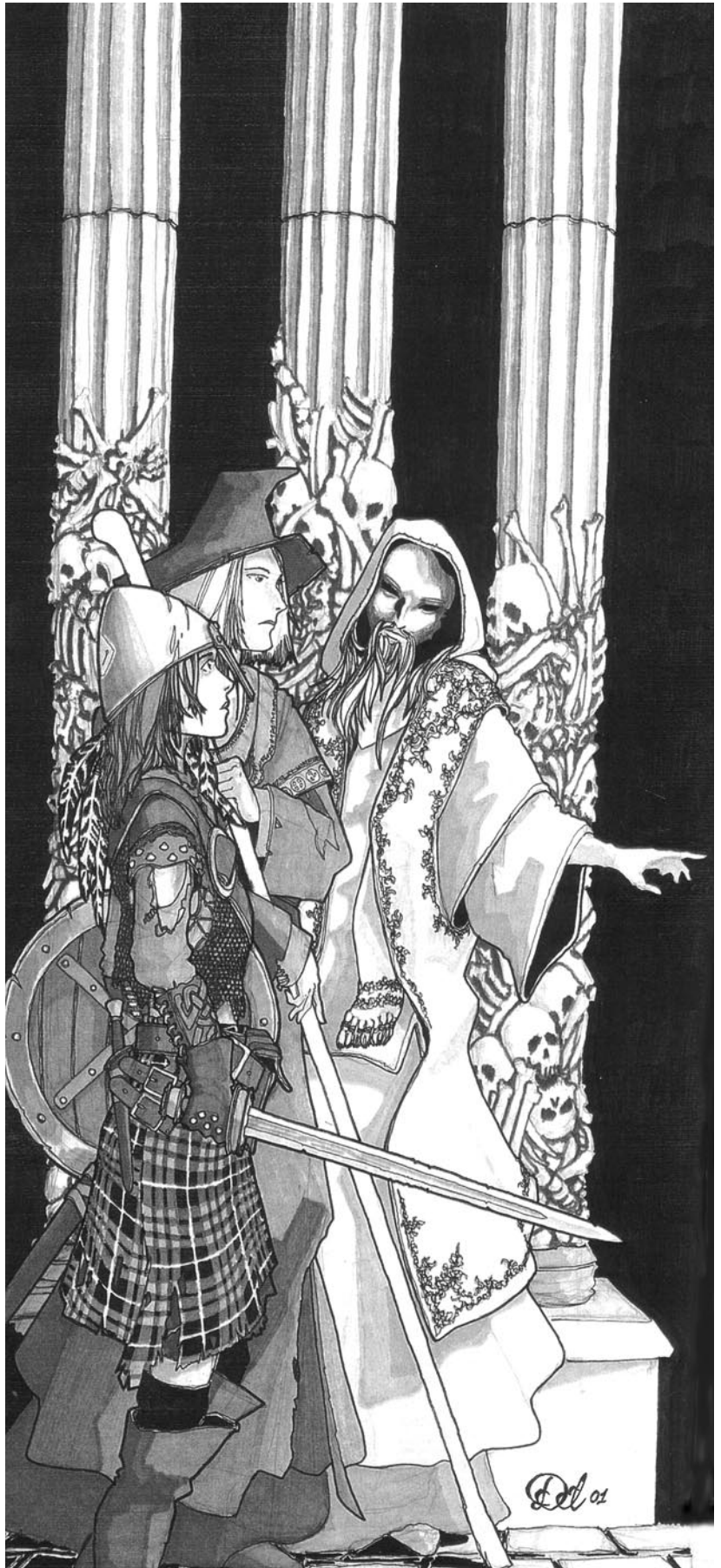
Any other questions will be met by variations on the statement, "I can't tell you. This place has rules, like any other dream. No, I can't tell you those, either. You never get to learn the rules of dreams. That's what makes them dreams."

Eventually, Mallakai will vanish again, after telling the PCs once more to enter the temple and confront their fate.

The Tests

From this point on, you'll want to run each player through their tests individually. If they don't decide to split up on their own and investigate the buildings, they'll find themselves suddenly alone in the location of the test — remember, this is a dream at heart, and reality is essentially what you choose it to be. If you want the group split up, they'll be split up. Have the rest of the party leave the room, excepting the person who is being tested, so that they don't get any hints about their test before it begins.

Six tests are given, with one designed specifically for good characters and one for evil characters. If you have more than six members in your party, then you can re-use tests; after all, each player is receiving his test alone, so they have no way of knowing if you've cheated. Try and match the tests to the personality of the party members, if you can; if you know a particular character is afraid of falling, or of insects, for example, you can choose a test that will be specifically tailored to that.



THE DREAM-TEMPLE OF DARKEST VARATH

Test #1

The character is in one of the gardens outside of the central tower. There is a low fence outside of the garden, about waist-height, and the gates are closed. Beyond the fence is more darkness, of the sort described when the characters first entered the dream. The flowers are beautiful at first, grown in neat rows, and fill the air with a pleasant scent; however, with every minute that passes, they grow more wild and tangled. Weeds begin to choke the buds off, growing out over the paths and over each other, and the scent rapidly becomes one of rotting vegetation. There is a gardener, dressed in a simple hooded brown robe, who is digging in the earth. His back is turned to the PC, and he will not acknowledge anything the character says.

After only a few minutes, the weeds will begin to entangle the ankles of the character, causing him to have to make a Strength check and a Balance check whenever he attempts to walk. Both checks have a DC of 5. With each minute after that, the DC of the check will increase by 5, as the weeds reach higher, constricting up to the knees, waist, and so on; as they reach up to the arms, a Strength check will have to be made for any kind of movement at all. After ten minutes, the weeds will reach the character's neck, and begin constricting there; at that point, the PC will have to make a Constitution check every round, starting with a DC of 5 and increasing by 5 each round, simply to stay conscious.

When the character begins to have real difficulties moving and breathing, then the gardener will stand up and go over to him. Any weeds in his path instantly wither and die, but he won't approach any further than arm's length from the character. The hood continues to hide his face, but his voice seems quite pleasant and normal. He asks if the character needs any help (addressing him by name), and offers a hand to pull him free of the weeds.

If the character accepts the hand, the weeds constricting him instantly wither and die, and he'll be pulled free of the mass of rotting vegetation. The gardener helps him stand, and then the PC sees under the hood ... the face beneath it is that of a spider's with fangs dripping venom. If he refuses the hand (it will be offered several times, as the weeds slowly strangle him), the character will eventually have his vision obscured by weeds, and feel the last of the air leave his lungs as he slowly suffocates ... either way, he wakes up to find himself back in the real world.

Test #2

The character is in one of the domes outside of the central tower; the door shuts behind him, and the floor drops out from under his feet, plunging him into a ten foot by twenty foot pit. (The fall is painful, but not actually damaging.) After a few minutes of exploration, it becomes evident that the walls of the pit are too sheer to climb, and that there are no handholds. After a moment, though, this problem is rectified by the foot-long razor-sharp spikes that pop out of the walls on the short sides of the pit.

If the character wants to try to climb using the spikes as handholds, it is theoretically possible; however, the spikes are sharpened along their edges as well as at the point. The DC for the Climb check is 20, and a character without very good protection for his hands (such as gauntlets) will take 1d6 damage per round and have to make a Constitution check with a DC of 20 to keep from losing his grip involuntarily due to pain. In any event, climbing the wall is an exercise in futility, as this is a dream — no matter how high he climbs, the top of the pit never gets any closer. The bottom gets further away, though ...

Each set of spikes gets closer at the rate of two feet per minute, meaning that after one minute, there's 14 feet of space between the two rows of spikes; after two minutes, there is 10 feet; after three minutes, there's 6 feet; and a very thin character might survive a full four minutes. You might want to play this out in real time, using a kitchen timer to simulate the march of the spikes. As soon as they begin moving, a man in a hooded brown robe appears at the edge of the pit, dropping down a knotted rope to the character to climb. The light obscures his face, of course ...

If the character accepts the rope and climbs up from the pit, he'll find himself pulled up face-to-face with the man with the spider's face. If he does choose to ignore the rope and the repeated entreaties to climb it, go ahead and describe the slow, painful agonies of impalement ... either way, the character wakes up to find himself in the real world.

Test #3

The character is at the base of the central tower. The door is shut behind him, and will not open by any means (magical or mundane). The center of the tower is empty, but the walls are ringed by a spiral staircase leading upwards. At the top of the staircase, there is a central platform supported by a number of struts and beams, on which is placed a throne; Varath sits on this throne, wearing a hooded robe that keeps his face in



EN ROUTE

shadows. The platform is reached from the staircase by a small walkway; however, once the character steps onto this walkway, it collapses, as do the stairs behind it. The whole thing seems to happen in a dreamlike slow motion, giving the character time to grab hold of the edge of the platform; however, every time he tries to grab a second handhold, or to pull himself up further, the platform becomes slick, forcing him back into his former position.

Holding onto the platform is tiring; every round, the character must make a Constitution check. The DC begins at 5, and increases by 5 every round.

Varath gets up from the throne when the walkway collapses, heading over to the edge of the platform. He offers, as many times as needed, to pull the character up to safety. If he accepts, he is pulled up to Varath, and see the spider's face up close. If he continues to refuse until he falls, he drops the 150 feet to the ground, and feels his bones pulp and splinter under the impact ... either way, he wakes up to find himself back in the real world.

Test #4

The character is in one of the domed buildings outside of the central tower; the room is empty, and the door is shut and locked, but there is a sculpture over the top of the door, barely reachable by the testee, of a hand. The hand holds a key in its stone grasp.

Picking this lock is completely impossible, even on a natural 20; the lock's parts shift around, and tumblers snap back into position as if the lock were a living thing. Obviously, since this is a dream, that's entirely possible.

As the character examines the lock and the empty room, a white mist begins to cover the floor. The mist smells acrid, and the character instantly knows it's poisonous. Every round, it rises another foot. If the character gives in to temptation and grabs the key from the stone hand, the hand comes to life and grabs his; if he refuses, the mist rises up and he feels it burning his lungs ... either way, he wakes up to find himself back in the real world.

Test #5

This test is designed for a good character. He notices a woman (or a man, if the PC is more likely to respond to that) on the temple grounds, being attacked by goblins. The goblins immediately flee on

seeing the character approach, and the woman thanks the character profusely. She offers a bag of coins as a reward, insisting that the PC take it; if he accepts the bag, it turns out to be filled not with jangling coins, but with spiders that crawl out of the bag by the hundred. If he refuses money, she asks if he can't at least give a kiss to show her gratitude. If he accepts the kiss, he notices as she leans in that she has the fangs of a spider, just before he feels the fangs bite into his cheek. If he refuses both offers, she simply frowns, and says, "You should have accepted. Now you've hurt my feelings ..." and with that, she transforms into a vast, monstrous spider. No matter which of these happens, the PC wakes up at that point to find himself back in the real world.

Test #6

This test is designed for an evil character. Varath dispenses with all the testing, simply offering him a place as his first disciple if he will accept the nightmare demon into his mind and lure others to the temple site to give entry into their minds as well. He will conjure visions of great rewards, power, women, men ... whatever the character seems likely to want most. If the character accepts, he simply re-awakens. Refusal brings on threats, rants, and nightmare visions of pain and suffering ... however, eventually, the character re-awakens even if he refuses.

Wrap-Up

Give each character who refuses Varath's "offer" a 500 XP story bonus; give each character who accepts a 250 XP consolation prize. They'll have enough problems ...

If any of the characters accepted Varath's help or reward, then they'll soon have cause to regret it. Every night they sleep from that point on, they'll find themselves back in the temple, forced to listen to an endless stream of demands from Varath that they bring more people to the temple site to dream. Varath has no power to control them, but they will receive the dreams every night for the rest of their lives ... or, at least, until they manage to find some way to remove Varath's influence from their minds. This might become a quest in and of itself. If they do give in to his demands, and enough people wind up dreaming at the temple site, his avatar will be able to re-enter this plane of existence ... this, too, might become a plot point in and of itself.

Duel

BY WILL HINDMARCH • ILLUSTRATED BY STEVEN SANDERS

Encounter Level: 6

Setting: An exotic city

Description: A feud between angry intelligent daggers draws new blood.

It is said that some ancient magic was used to imbue the holy daggers of distant lands with life. Tales are told of willful weapons fighting on their own, guarding their owners through death or destruction. Seldom spoken of is their cunning. In their steel bodies are ageless intellects and limitless memories. They plot, and they never forget.

Fiery-Hot and Coal-Black

This encounter takes place on a sticky, hot night in an exotic foreign city. As many of the PCs as possible should be strangers to the land and its customs. They could be in the city for any reason, but should be staying the night in a local inn for the purposes of the encounter. Before the night is done, the PCs will have a chance to end a hot-blooded feud almost a century old. All that stands in their way are the egos of two bitter daggers.

Deep amid the knotted streets of an unplanned city, the PCs sweat in their sleep. Their home for the night is a simple inn of unfinished wood and flaking slate. The inn's first floor is an open-air affair with worthless wooden furniture and no walls. Heavy posts support the second floor and its staircase. This higher floor is where visitors and the innkeeper sleep on feather mats in wooden cells. It's a good place to get splinters.

In the quiet night, all manner of city sounds poke through the PCs' weak sleep. Clay jars tap against each other in a nearby yard. A bird whistles somewhere. Bare, uncertain footsteps slap along the street. A sharp, metallic scrape echoes off the buildings outside ... there it is again, the rap of steel against steel!

With the humidity, assume that none of the PCs are sleeping very well. Give the players some ambient description of the environment (like the preceding one) before the sound of fighting emerges to cultivate their interest. Let them take the initiative as roleplayers to investigate when they notice your descriptive clues.

If no one in the party thinks to observe, have everyone make Listen checks. The character with the highest check result distinctly makes out the sound of two men fighting, punctuated by swordplay.

You should determine now if the PCs have had enough rest to begin preparing new spells. If not, they will be at a disadvantage during the encounter. Of course, it's their wits that are being tested, so you may prefer it that way. On the other hand, the PCs may have had the rest, and just need the time to prepare their spells. That gives non-spellcasters an interesting job in the meantime: stall the daggers.

Outside the room's open window two men are battling back and forth with ornate daggers. Each has a desperate but skillful stance, wide-legged and low. With each swing the men move around and about on the street stones. They parry away each other's strikes, sometimes shouting in their attack. When one of the men stumbles on the stone, the other takes advantage of the opening and stabs for the neck.

In the span of a breath the stabbed man erodes into wet, black ash. His bones, visible only a moment, scatter like soot across the stones. His dagger clatters to the street.

The feuding daggers have met, by chance, within earshot of the PCs. They are called Kijal and Naruk, and they have each found someone to wield them in combat against the other. Tonight, Naruk has won and Kijal lies in the street, mulling over its options. Both daggers want to keep fighting, but Naruk's wielder is shocked by what he has just done.

It's important that one of the combatants be killed before the PCs intervene. Afterwards, Naruk's combatant stands swaying in the lane, staring at the burnt waste of his foe. This gives the PCs time to get down there.



Facing Naruk's Combatant

Naruk is in control of its wielder. When the PCs talk to him, they are talking to Naruk, which defends its actions, blaming the other dagger for “what he did.” Unless the PCs can get more information out of it through clever roleplaying, everything Naruk says could be misinterpreted. Let the PCs think the battle was between the two men for as long as they will.

Diplomacy checks (DC 18) allow PCs to calm the combatant a bit and get Naruk talking. Intimidation checks (DC 18) get Naruk talking, but defensively. It begins to shake in its combatant's hand. The GM should grant up to +4 circumstance bonuses for good technique during the dialogue with Naruk.

This first part of the encounter is a mistaken identity scene, which will end when the PCs figure out some part of what's really going on. This might take some time, if the characters are sheepish. To move things along, Kijal takes the initiative.

If no one has retrieved Kijal from its wielder's ashes, it uses its *fly* ability to charge Naruk's combatant. While flying, Kijal has a +10 bonus to Move Silently checks. If no one is watching for the dagger, and no one succeeds at a Listen check to hear it approach, it surprises Naruk's combatant and attempts to use its *slay living* power during the surprise round. (See Kures Dagger insert and individual dagger inserts for special abilities.)

If one of the PCs picks up Kijal, he immediately attracts the attention of Naruk's combatant. He begins shouting. “You selfish monster! Do you want to fight? Do you have it in you? I'll see you broken and scattered across the city!” And so on.

Once Kijal and Naruk have begun to face off again, in any capacity, the encounter's outcome depends on the PCs' actions. Many different situations could develop on the street this night, as the characters attempt to negotiate with, battle, or outwit the magical daggers. It would help to know something about them ...



Semfuol, Naruk's Combatant

1st-Level Male Human Commoner

CR 1; SZ M (human); HD 1d4; hp 3; Init +1; Spd 30 ft.; AC 11 (+1 Dex); Atk melee +4 (1d4+4, Naruk *kures* dagger); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; AL N; SV Fort +0, Ref +1, Will +0; Str 12, Dex 12, Con 10, Int 9, Wis 10, Cha 9

Skills: Climb +2, Craft (basket weaving) +3, Listen +1, Spot +1, Use Rope +3

Feats: Endurance, Skill Focus (Use Rope).

Naruk happened on this simple commoner just this evening. Naruk was taken by the fellow's worldly look and thought he might have some heroics in him. The dagger is wrong, and now this fellow is unlikely to survive the night without the PCs.

Semfuol is dressed in simple peasant clothing and wooden sandals. He knows virtually nothing of these daggers, except that he tried to flee when Naruk approached him. Legends of daggers like these are common here in Semfuol's lands, though. Anyone consulting with Semfuol for local knowledge gains a +2 bonus to a single Bardic Knowledge or Knowledge (local) check (DC 20) to learn something about the daggers.

The Holy Daggers of Ganji

Ninety years ago, there was a prince in the lands of Kalam, a young boy eager to take up a life of adventure and nobility. His name was Ganji. As is customary, the young boy was to receive a *kures* (COO-res) dagger on his thirteenth birthday. The dagger would be spiritually bound to him, acting as his closest bodyguard. The magic of a *kures* dagger requires it to be made for a single, specific owner and, although the holy daggers may be passed as gifts from one owner to another, they may never be sold or stolen.

Traditionally, a boy receives his dagger as a gift from his father, but Ganji's father was dead. So Ganji's dagger would be made by one of his uncles. Once Ganji was of age to take up a dagger, he would be king. But Ganji's uncles were both proud, jealous

men. Each commissioned a dagger for the boy, and each delivered it on the boy's birthday, demanding that his be the dagger carried by the king.

Unwilling to turn either of his uncles away, Ganji retired to his chambers to consider his options. He was just a boy, after all, so he struggled with the decision all night, and eventually fell asleep. While the prince slept, the uncles each had servants bring the daggers to Ganji's room, hoping to make the choice easy for the boy. But when the daggers were brought together so near the child, they each mistook the other as a threat and leapt into the air to do battle.

The servants who carried the daggers fought in the boy's chambers, until each was dead. Then the daggers fought, flying throughout the house, and somehow a fire was started. As Ganji's wing of the palace burned, the daggers dueled. House guards and soldiers attempted to stop them, trying to take possession of the weapons, but each time the wielder's will was beaten by the dagger in his hand and he was drawn into the battle as well.

By the night's end, the palace was in ruins, and the prince was dead. The daggers, without having been bonded to an owner, vanished into the night. Each had failed in its role, and each blamed the other.

Kijal

Kijal (KEE-jahl) is a slender, wavy *kures* dagger with bright, shining details over a darker, rougher metal. At the base of its seven-inch blade is a wide, sweeping curve of steel designed to strike away other weapons. Its grip is modeled on the art style of Ganji's palace, focusing on stylized lions and birds of prey; the motif of the weapon was envisioned as a stately, contemporary look. It is clearly a valuable item of the highest quality.

Commissioned by Ganji's uncle Lejam, the dagger Kijal was made to defend the boy prince. Lejam hoped that Ganji would be a calm, domestic ruler content to live about the palace and deal with political matters. So it is that Kijal thinks of itself as a graceful, learned house guard for the boy. It is Kijal's responsibility to keep Ganji from harm. That other, feral dagger's short-sighted ignorance of tradition led Ganji to his death and brought the nation to ruin, though it would be improper for Kijal to say so.

In the time since Ganji's death Kijal has been laying low. It occasionally involves itself with some would-

be hero from the area, hoping to find some direction in its existence. Such unions always end in ruin, typically through a confrontation with Naruk. Kijal has little interest in leaving the city, and would fight anyone trying to remove it without a royal decree.

Kijal is persuasive, regal, and formal. It seldom rushes into anything. In the event that it can get into the hands of a PC, it will try to lure Naruk into an easy strike and slay its combatant. If Kijal can get Naruk out of enemy hands and curb its sharp tongue, then Kijal figures any honorable sort would see Naruk as the treacherous dog it is. Ideally, this would be followed by Naruk's return to the royal family in disgrace, where it would be melted down for scrap metal.

Naruk

Naruk (NAIR-ook) is a magnificently-crafted tool. Simple artistic details and sensible functional elements have been made with the finest materials and richest metals. The dagger's blade begins as a

strong, dark sweep of metal before forming into the steel waves often seen in *kures* daggers. Near the grip, the blade forms into a hand guard, broken with deep notches to catch the blades of enemies. The short grip is designed for balance and complete control during fighting. It is a sturdy weapon, handsome in its simplicity and craftsmanship.

Designed by peasant artisans and forged by the finest weapon smiths in Kalam for Ganji's uncle Rajay, the dagger Naruk was meant to protect the boy prince. Rajay, the youngest of the king's brothers, believed that Ganji should embrace not just his most common subjects, but all the people in the world. Naruk was intended to go with Ganji on great, kingly adventures to distant lands and tell tales of Kalam. Thus, Naruk thinks of itself as a worldly guide, ready to face any exotic challenge with wisdom and strength. It is Naruk's responsibility to slay those enemies who would face the young king. If not for that other, courtly showpiece blade's blind loyalty to tradition, Ganji would be alive, and Naruk tells this to anyone who asks.

NEW MAGIC WEAPON:

Kures Dagger

In some ways, a *kures* dagger is just a specific array of magical powers collected into a +3 *dagger*. What makes this combination of magical powers a *kures* dagger is the bonding of the dagger to an owner, and the cultural beliefs involved with that bonding. Individual *kures* daggers may have special powers imbued in them by their creators, so each dagger is unique. Only a few powers are common among them.

As mentioned above, a *kures* (COO-res) dagger is a +3 *dagger* in the hands of any user, displaying its enchantment as an augmentation of the wielder's skill. It is also intelligent, and uses its other magical abilities at will. When not wielded by hand, it can *fly* at a speed of 30 feet with perfect maneuverability. While airborne, the weapon has AC 14 and a +3 attack bonus. Whenever one *kures* dagger is within 300 ft. of another, it hums, rattles, or shakes involuntarily. This functions as the *locate object* spell with a range of 300 ft. Most *kures* daggers are compelled to locate others within this range, and do so unless commanded otherwise by their masters.

Most *kures* daggers have magical sheaths. When sheathed, a *kures* dagger is asleep, and only its *locate object* ability functions. These sheaths also bestow the *Quick Draw* feat on the dagger's master automatically. Sheaths are created as separate magical items from daggers.

A *kures* dagger's master must be declared when the weapon is crafted, and cannot be changed thereafter. Individual *kures* daggers each have their own special powers and extraordinary abilities. Only the most noble or important daggers have special purposes. What constitutes a special purpose might vary, but should always focus in some way on the weapon's master. This relationship with its master is what makes a *kures* unique, not its intelligence or magical powers.

All normal item creation rules should be followed when crafting *kures* daggers. In addition, the item's creator must have at least 5 ranks in Knowledge (*kures* daggers) to understand the peculiarities of bonding the dagger to its owner. If these requirements are met, and its intended owner draws the dagger from its sheath even once, then they are bonded. No special magic is necessary because the dagger's bonding has its own drawbacks. If a *kures* dagger is ever sold, either by its owner or anyone else, its magic is lost and the dagger is "dead." Thieves had best beware: *kures* daggers seldom go peacefully.

Caster Level: 15th minimum; **Prerequisites:** Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *fly*, *locate object*, and by individual effects; **Market Price:** 28,000 gp or more (non-magical if sold); **Weight:** 1 lb.

NEW INTELLIGENT
MINOR ARTIFACT:

Kijal
Defender of Ganji

Kijal is a *kures* dagger intended for a newly-crowned king, to serve as his weapon and guardian. It has all the special abilities of a standard *kures* dagger, as well as a special purpose to defend its master, Ganji. Since Kijal was never formally bound to its intended owner and its special purpose can never be fulfilled, it struggles to make sense of its place in the world. It acts as if its purpose is to fill some semblance of its intended role in life, but its real motivation is to avenge itself on Naruk, its counterpart and nemesis.

At will, Kijal can bestow the effects of the Mobility feat on its wielder. Twice per day it can grant the effects of a *cat's grace* spell, lasting eight hours or until Kijal ends it. As part of its original purpose, Kijal could slay anyone attacking Ganji directly, as per the spell *slay living* (DC 15). Now this ability extends to anyone wielding the dagger Naruk.

Kijal has the following ability scores: Intelligence 19, Wisdom 15, Charisma 16, Ego 20. It is magically enchanted beyond the capacity of normal *kures* daggers and has Damage Reduction 30/+3. It does not "wield" itself, and so is immune to Naruk's *disintegrate* ability.

Caster Level: 19th; Weight: 1 lb.

NEW INTELLIGENT
MINOR ARTIFACT:

Naruk
Protector of Ganji

Naruk is a *kures* dagger also meant for Prince Ganji. Since Naruk's purpose was nullified before it could even be attempted, the dagger is now devoid of a real goal to its existence. It focuses its energy now on the elimination of Kijal, the dagger it blames for Ganji's death and its own lot in life.

Naruk possesses all the powers of a standard *kures* dagger. Twice per day it can cast *bull's strength* on its wielder. Each use lasts eight hours, though Naruk can end the spell at will. It also grants its user complete use of the Combat Reflexes feat. Originally, Naruk was given the power to eliminate its master's enemies in the wild. It has refocused that ability, so that it can now *disintegrate* upon contact (DC 15) anyone wielding Kijal.

Naruk has the following ability scores: Intelligence 15, Wisdom 19, Charisma 16, Ego 20. It is magically enchanted beyond the capacity of normal *kures* daggers and possesses Damage Reduction 30/+3. It is not truly living, so it is immune to Kijal's *slay living* ability.

Caster Level: 19th; Weight: 1 lb.

Since Ganji's death, Naruk has tried to leave the city more than once. It hopes to find some meaning for itself out in the trackless wilds. Still, it always returns to the city and it always finds Kijal waiting for it to fight again. More than once Naruk has taken up with a band of adventurers, and every time it finds itself with some battered idiot limping back to town, drunk with gold. If it could find someone interested in the glory of life's deeds, it might be able to leave the city.

Naruk wants to find some sort of nobility in common men, and the only place it knows to look is in combat. It will rally allies to its cause with promises of success, renown, and pride. It feels the rush of battle is its own reward, and it wants to share that rush with anyone interested. If Kijal wants to stay in the city, that's fine with Naruk. Naruk will fight any battles Kijal can start, but would ultimately like to see Kijal sunk in the river, immobile for all time. That should make the cowardly dagger happy, figures Naruk.

Dagger Tactics

First, the daggers grant their feats to a wielder in hopes of impressing him. They communicate telepathically with anyone holding them, or whisper very softly to those nearby. Neither is very proud of what took place almost a century ago, so each reveals only shreds of the story to motivate the PCs against the other.

In the event that words do not work, the daggers attempt to bribe those who wield them with *cat's grace* or *bull's strength* spells as appropriate.

The daggers only waste all of their magic on a single character if they are sure that character is valuable. Otherwise, they cancel one spell before moving on to the next character. When the daggers run out of things to bargain with, they get desperate.

This is when the daggers start taking control of the PCs. Each dagger will attempt to overpower the will of a character with its Ego and steer that character into battle.

The daggers need only be in contact with a character to attempt control, so they may attack the PCs just to turn them around and fight with them. If a character takes even 1 hit point of damage from a dagger, he must make a Will save (DC 20) or lose control to the dagger. Likewise, if a character takes damage while under a dagger's control, he can attempt a new Will save.

Once in control, the daggers speak with the voice of their wielder. If made to talk, each dagger tells its side of the story in hopes of winning allies or sympathy. If ridiculed, insulted, or belittled, the daggers respond the only way they know how: they fight.

Tempering Steel

The standoff between the daggers is only tense if the lives of the PCs are at stake. Players whose characters are under a dagger's control can feel cheated by an encounter like this, though. Both the roleplaying encounter and the drama of the scene will be enriched if you find a way for those players to participate. Allow controlled PCs to engage in telepathic debate with their dominating dagger, or give the dagger and the PC simultaneous control over the character's mouth.

A player who enjoys villainous or eerie roleplaying might like to play his character under a dagger's influence. Pass him notes with the dagger's lines and let the PC deliver them. The party might start to distrust characters who seem voluntarily aligned with sentient steel.

The daggers have been doing this for ninety years and nothing has changed. How this confrontation finally plays out is entirely up to the PCs. They might come up with any number of ideas for dealing with the situation, and no one way is correct. Here are a few possibilities you should prepare for:

Picking Sides

The PCs might choose to befriend and forgive one or both daggers. Picking sides is easy, since the daggers are already polarized. All the PCs need to do to gain a dagger's favor is proclaim the other one wrong, mistaken, or otherwise invalid. This approach works with either dagger, and most likely leads to a fight with the opposing dagger. How to subdue a *kures* dagger is the real challenge. Whichever dagger they befriend might end up as treasure, but the other will eventually come looking to finish the feud. And what if one of the PCs is spotted with a dagger legend says killed Prince Ganji?

True Neutral

In order to maintain a peace between the daggers, the PCs must all keep their hands off the daggers and be exceptionally good with words. They'll have to get the daggers talking and learn as much of their story as possible. This could make both daggers flee from the awful truth of their tale, or it could result in them fighting in the air around the PCs. Neither is good. Fleeing daggers may seek the PCs out again for help or vengeance. Fighting daggers invariably try to draw human hands into the fray, because that's what daggers do. Really phenomenal roleplaying might find some way to keep the daggers apart forever, but they're cold, stubborn beings not capable of forgiving.

Elimination

There is no way to truly settle the feud, but it could be ended. If one or both daggers are buried deep enough, they might never be found. A large enough spell could destroy the daggers, but they are unlikely to wait around for such an event. Just like taking sides, if the PCs decide to destroy the daggers they'll have to choose one to start with. Once one is destroyed, the other becomes quiet, reserved, and sorry for itself. It now has nothing to dwell on but poor Ganji.

Selling the Daggers

Simply exchanging money for the daggers may not kill them. The buyer must truly be giving money in exchange for ownership. Alternately, the seller must be parting with the dagger for the purpose of gaining money. This might be true of PCs who use this tactic to defeat the daggers, but it may not. Magic is funny. If it makes for a fitting conclusion for the PCs, let it happen. Otherwise, they'll have to find someone willing to buy one or both daggers, which may not be such an easy task in this exotic land.

Experience

Give the PCs experience points for Semfuol if he manages to survive. Treat each dagger as a CR 5 foe, but do not grant the XP for "defeating" a dagger if it is kept as treasure. Likewise, you should award XP if the PCs manage to change the state of the feud in some way, not just for destroying a dagger.

Faith of Stone Apes

BY SCOT H P DREW • ILLUSTRATED BY JENNIFER MEYER

Encounter Level: 6

Setting: Jungle

Summary: After a peaceful visit to an old forgotten shrine, the party must come to terms with faith-shaking revelations.

“This koostisosa flower better be as potent as you claim, wizard,” grumbled Sojakas for the umpteenth time since entering the stifling confines of the rain forest. The quest for Liidetav’s rare spell component had led the party deep into the unknown depths of the jungle.

“Not to worry, O Brawny One of Little Patience,” jibed the mage, “you shall be truly astonished, astounded, bewildered, and many other such words you are no doubt unable to spell.”

Before Sojakas could resort to mild, yet not entirely painless, violence against the frail spellcaster, Brother Usaldus began singing a calming hymn to ease his companions’ growing fatigue and irritation. As the perspiration beaded and ran down his prodigious cheeks, the cleric’s rich baritone worked its divine

influence, and the party made swift and quiet progress until Liidetav called a rest-halt at the sound of running water. Parting the wide curtain of fronds to their left, the group stepped into a clearing dominated by a crumbling stone shrine sporting two grotesque statues of orangutans cavorting above the archway. The interior promised shaded relief from the unremitting heat, cool fresh water to wash away the taste of jungle clinging to their tongues, and easily guarded sleeping quarters for the night. Thankful for this boon, the party entered the cool, quiet structure and immediately felt relief from the oppression of the jungle.

A Much Needed Respite

This encounter is best suited to a tropical environment. It is intended to ease a trip through the unforgiving heat and humidity of a jungle or rainforest. For full effect, the party should have some sort of faith-based character(s) — cleric, paladin, or one

RULES SUMMARY:

Dehydration & Heatstroke

A character can go without water for one day plus a number of hours equal to his Constitution score. After this time, the character must make a Constitution check each hour (DC 10, +1 for each previous check) or sustain 1d6 points of subdual damage from dehydration.

Characters taking subdual damage from lack of water are fatigued (cannot run or charge, penalty of -2 to Strength and Dexterity; eight hours of rest ends this condition). Dehydration damage may only be recovered by drinking water — even magic will not heal it.

The intense heat and humidity may also impact the characters’ health, possibly causing heatstroke. The jungle’s very hot conditions require that PCs make a

Fortitude saving throw each hour (DC 15, +1 for each previous save) or sustain 1d4 points of subdual damage. PCs wearing heavy clothing or armor of any sort incur a -4 penalty. A PC with the Wilderness Lore skill may receive a bonus to this saving throw and may be able to apply this bonus to other characters as well; he gains +2 to his Fortitude save if he makes a Wilderness Lore roll DC 15, and the same bonus applies to one other PC for every point by which the result of the roll exceeds 15.

PCs reduced to unconsciousness begin taking normal damage (1d4 points per hour). Any PC taking subdual damage from heat exposure now suffers from heatstroke and is fatigued. Penalties end when PCs recover subdual damage taken from the heat.

whose faith grants him special abilities or belief in himself and his abilities (for example, a sorcerer who gained his magical powers when touched by divinity as a child, or a rogue who can ascribe his skill mastery to following the examples of a roguish deity).

After many hours marching in this oppressive environment, the characters hear the sound of bubbling water. Following the sound, the party discovers a small primitive stone shrine standing alone in a clearing, promising both an end to their thirst and shelter from the unrelenting sun and insects.

Characters may find ample fruit to eat throughout the area, but water may be a problem if they did not prepare, and some might experience dehydration or heatstroke (see rules summary on page 41).

The crumbling stone structure is the size of a small guardpost, with room for the party to make a comfortable camp. Although pitted with age, the domed ceiling has lost none of its structural integrity and provides complete shelter from the elements. The bubbling sound issues from a natural spring flowing up into a small unadorned fountain in the middle of the floor. Stone benches ring the interior, providing cool, firm beds. The exterior appears to have been covered with primitive bas-reliefs depicting all manner of tropical beasts, some mundane and others decidedly exotic. Most are worn down by the harsh environment to nearly unrecognizable swellings on the stone surface. Guarding the doorway from perches above the lintel, a pair of perfectly matched stone apes leers down at the entrants. Worn almost as severely as the bas-reliefs, these statues, on closer inspection, appear to have originally been orangutans. Interior bas-reliefs on the walls and pictographs on the floor have weathered the years with considerably more success than their fully exposed counterparts.

NEW MAGIC POTION:

Mystical Water

Drinking the water removes mundane effects, such as fatigue, caused by heat or dehydration. The water also benefits any illness by either granting a bonus of +4 to the next save or, if no follow-up save is imminent, granting the afflicted a bonus save (no modifier) to recover naturally. Only one drink per day grants such benefits.

Caster Level: 1st; *Prerequisites:* Brew Potion, bless, create water; *Market Price:* 500 gp.

The stone floor is dusty but otherwise clean — oddly, no jungle detritus seems to have made its way into the Shrine of the Stone Apes over the years. Scattered across the floor is a handful of various dust-covered gemstones. Also dotting the stone of the floor are a variety of desiccated tropical fruits. The five gems have an average value of 100 gold pieces; fruit includes mangoes, bananas, papayas, and a coconut. These gems and fruits are previous offerings left behind as an impetus to others to give generously (much as one never passes around an empty collection plate during worship services).

A night's sleep in the cool, shady confines of the shrine provides considerable restoration to one's body.

Eight hours of sleep within the shrine restores as many hit points as two days of complete bed rest (restored hp = [character level x 1.5] x 2 days).

Drinking the pure, clear water fully refreshes the PCs, removing all fatigue immediately, clearing the mind, and easing any illness (see insert below).

Feeding the Guardians

The wizard and priest studied pictographs on the stone floor, regarding the dusty gems and desiccated fruit with unanswered question on their lips. "The people responsible for this shrine must have passed into oblivion generations past," Liidetav postulated to Brother Usaldus. Then with a wide grin to Sojakas, lounging with a freshly desiccated wine-skin under one arm, "Obviously they had the power to pierce the veil of time to discern the twin beauties of your wife and her sister."

An appreciative wine-whetted whistle cut across the big warrior's teeth at the thought of his wife, not long with their first child, and her twin sister visiting as midwife. Then he caught the unspoken hint riding under the wizard's tone. "Where're you reading that?" His drink-moist eyes scanned the floor at Liidetav's feet.

"Why, all who enter here in need of succor," he flourished one long, robed arm toward the entryway, "must needs pass beneath the sublime gaze of the ladies' most exquisitely graven likenesses." Sojakas' eyes as he regarded the wizard were dangerous and red-rimmed, whether from drink or from simmering rage, Liidetav knew not.

FAITH OF STONE APES



Brother Usaldus interrupted the staring match to bring the matter of the ancient gems and fruits to his more scholarly companion. “Apparently these are offerings left to the shrine’s guardians, *Liidetav*, the ones around which your recent *jape centers*.”

Thankful for rescue from the glare of *Sojakas*, the mage inclined his head slightly to better view the glyphs at the priest’s feet. “Guardians? Is that symbol perhaps ‘*avatar*’ and not guardian?”

Despite the stony coolness afforded the party by the Shrine of the Stone Apes, beads of perspiration slowly began dotting Brother Usaldus’ round face.

With time, study, and some luck, the pictographs on the floor relate the tithing requirement obviously matching the long-ago offerings scattered about the floor — each visitor is required to offer a modest gemstone and a piece of fruit. Also discernable is the role the stone apes play as guardians.

Bards and rogues with the Decipher Script skill may spend 1d4 hours making an attempt to understand the glyphs. One check per day is permitted, as long as the character rests within the confines of the Shrine of the Stone Apes — the divine refreshment of the shrine clears the mind for a normally prohibited retry. The DC is 20 due to the ancient nature and slight weathering of the glyphs. Success indicates the character has gleaned a general understanding of what is to be offered and why. Failure indicates a chance to draw a false conclusion — GM makes a Wisdom check (DC 5) for the character to avoid misinterpretation.

Any character with ranks in an appropriate field of the Knowledge skill (religion, history, etc.), may also spend 1d4 hours making an attempt to connect what he already knows with what he is able to discern in the glyphs. The DC remains 20. Again, one check per day is permitted where normally a retry is prohibited — the divine refreshment of a night’s rest within the shrine brings fresh insight and sharpens recollection. These glyphs are not subject to spells such as *comprehend languages* and *read magic*.

In the dark of the night after offerings are left, the stone apes awaken and enter to collect and eat the previous offerings, making sure to leave behind a handful of the newest leavings. Consuming the gemstones provides recuperative aid to the stone apes, allowing them to mend naturally while they perch above the doorway. Eating the fruit is a symbolic gesture acknowledging that these creatures are formed in the likeness of their mortal creators. Should any detritus blow in from the jungle or be deposited upon the stone floor by visitors, the stone apes also devour this in order to keep the shrine as pristine as possible, symbolizing their ability as guardians to meet any affront to the faith.

The stone apes move silently to avoid waking any slumbering visitors, while also hiding in the shadows to avoid detection by any wakeful visitors. If unopposed, they perform their duties quickly and quietly, paying only the most perfunctory attention to any visitors. Should they be opposed in the completion of their duties, however, they do not hesitate to attack the interlopers.

If visitors find shelter and comfort within the shrine, but neglect to leave offerings matching those noted upon entering, the stone apes attack once the last person has passed out of the doorway.

Tenets of the Faith

Pooling their intellects, Liidetav and Brother Usaldus set themselves to the task of studying the ancient bas-reliefs covering the walls. After a score of minutes, the cool silence was gently broken by the wizard. "Note this symbol," with one narrow finger, the mage traced a stylized man-like figure, "it appears to be bridging these two." The cleric watched in mounting fear as the wizard's finger traced first a sun symbol and then an orangutan. "It has been many years since I studied anything resembling religious practices of primitive peoples," the old mage admitted, "but does it not seem to you as well that these are meant to be three separate incarnations of one being, possibly a divinity?" Trembling noticeably, the big cleric replied only to the first part of his companion's question, "It has not been quite so long ago for me."

Characters studying the various bas-reliefs covering the walls of the shrine have the potential to unlock faith-shaking revelations. Some characters may simply shrug off this information, while others may be left reeling spiritually.

NEW MONSTER:

Stone Ape* (2)

CR 4; SZ M (magical beast, earth); HD 4d10+16; hp 38; Init +2 (Dex); Spd 30 ft., climb 40 ft.; AC 16 (+2 Dex, +4 natural); Atk melee +6 (1d4, 2 claws), melee +4 (1d6, bite), melee +4 (1d6, gore); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SQ damage reduction 15/+1, freeze; AL N; SV Fort +8, Ref +6, Will +1; Str 11, Dex 14, Con 18, Int 6, Wis 11, Cha 7

Skills: Hide +9*, Listen +4, Move Silently +6, Spot +4; *Stone apes receive a +8 racial bonus to Hide checks when concealed against a background of weathered stone.

Feats: Multiattack, Weapon Finesse (claw, bite, gore)

Language: The stone apes speak an ancient regional dialect, understandable only through magical means such as the spells *comprehend languages* and *tongues* or select enchanted items. Merely guardians, these creatures are unable to impart any information other than the *what* and *why* of the shrine's tithing requirements.

Damage Reduction (Su): The stone apes ignore damage from most weapons and natural attacks; the weapon bounces off harmlessly. Damage dealt by an attack is reduced by 15 points, but a +1 weapon or better deals full damage.

Freeze (Ex): A stone ape can hold itself so still it appears to be a statue. An observer must succeed at a Spot check (DC 20) to notice that the stone ape is really alive.

*The stone apes are based on the standard gargoyle monster.

As with the floor, bards and rogues with the Decipher Script skill and PCs with appropriate Knowledge skills may spend 1d4 hours making an attempt to understand the bas-reliefs on the walls (DC 20). One check per day is permitted, as long as the PC rests within the confines of the shrine. Success indicates the PC has gleaned a general understanding of this ancient, long-forgotten religion.

This shrine's glyphs hint at the fact that the world's foremost races (humans, elves, dwarves, etc.) evolved from a race of sentient orangutans. The gist of the legend characters are able to discern describes how these orangutan People of the Jungle were created by a simian deity who fell into obscurity with the evolutionary decline of his followers.

Spellcasters may have the means to magically unlock deeper secrets in the Shrine of the Stone Apes.

These pictographs are not subject to spells such as *comprehend languages* and *read magic*. *Commune* will not work in this shrine. *Contact other plane* may enable to caster to receive answers from a non-divine entity. A PC casting *legend lore* within the shrine has a casting time of 1d4 x 10 minutes.

Magic unlocks the knowledge that this simian Creator believed he could do better and so set about remaking his faith by allowing his new races to be born upon the existing world — a form of divine evolution as opposed to mere biological evolution. Those previous followers of the Creator were slowly stripped of their sentience while the Creator caused them to, over generations, give birth to ever more human-like children. Eventually the world was populated by sentient life in its currently familiar forms, while the People of the Jungle became the simple apes characters know of today.

Losing Faith and Favor

As undeniable connections and inferences presented themselves via the worn stone bas-reliefs, the beads of cold sweat tracing paths down Brother Usaldus' cheeks were joined by unseen tears of doubt.

Learning the secrets behind this shrine has the potential of leaving a character spiritually adrift in a quagmire of questions and profound doubt. All races and classes have a potential for this spiritual riving. While some character classes or races may resist the impact of this knowledge better than others, GMs are encouraged to use the examples at the end of this encounter to affect as many characters of as many faiths and races as possible.

Seeking Salvation

"Hey, wissard," Sojakas slurred, "lookey here." The warrior thrust one unsteady finger toward a pictograph on the floor near the fountain. "Mightn't that be your pretty little flower, milady?"

Ignoring the childish jibe about his declining masculinity, Liidetav stepped closer and smiled broadly at the obvious image of a koostisosa blossom. "The flower must be indigenous to this region, wouldn't you assume, Usaldus? Brother Usaldus?"

"Yes. Indigenous, I assume." Brother Usaldus appeared to be fighting to hold himself together, staving off some form of disintegration by the sheer force of his prodigious will. His gaze hardened, took hold of his companions, and then softened only fractionally. "Let us procure for you this flower, and then I humbly beseech your companionship on a journey to my homeland. I fear I will be of little use to this party until I speak with my former mentor."

Characters suffering from a shaken faith must seek atonement from another cleric of their faith in order to restore their lost connection with divinity, or else suffer the effects of their loss of faith. (See the insert at the end of this encounter for specifics.)

NEW RULES: *A Shaken Faith*

EFFECTS OF A SHAKEN FAITH

All PCs must succeed at a Will save (DC 20) to avoid a shaken faith or a sense of spiritual loss. Characters who lose faith suffer indecision in their actions, question their own insights, and display a general lack of trust in themselves and their world-view; in game terms, PCs who fail their Will save suffer from a divine form of the *shaken* condition: a -2 morale penalty to all rolls for attacks, weapon damage, saving throws, and skill checks. They also suffer a divine form of an *inherent* -2 Wisdom penalty.

In addition, any divinely-granted powers or abilities cease to function — clerics lose domain powers, spells, and class features, and cannot gain levels as a cleric of that god; druids may lose all spells and druidic abilities, and cannot gain levels as a druid; paladins are stripped of their special abilities and spells, including the service of the paladin's warhorse, and may not progress in levels as a paladin, etc. (they effectively become an "ex-" of their class). Characters retain abilities based on training, such as a ranger's tracking and a rogue's lock-picking.

MODIFIERS TO WILL ROLL

The faith-, race-, and class-based saving throw modifiers given below are all cumulative. Multi-classed PCs must take all the modifiers applicable to them.

PCs of **little or no faith** or those following a **faith not at odds** with what has been learned in the Shrine of the Stone Apes gain a bonus of $+2$ to the shaken faith Will roll. PCs of **modest faith** have no save modifier. Those PCs of **strong faith** suffer a penalty of -2 .

Humans and **half-elves** vary widely in belief systems, but those who do hold faith often consider it more dear than life, no matter their profession. These races are adaptive, however, and overcome spiritual upheaval more quickly than other races, even going so far as to establish a new faith or revisit an old faith with renewed vigor. Because of their flexible natures, these races receive a $+4$ bonus.

Due to their small stature in a large-stature world, **gnomes** and **halflings** hold a stronger faith in their Protector deities than in Creation myths. As such, they are more readily able to adapt to new creation beliefs, so long as they remain under the watchful eye of a divine Protector. These races receive a $+2$ bonus, reflecting the schism between Protector and Creator among followers' needs.

Dwarves and **elves** are quite devout in the beliefs regarding their respective Creation myths. These races are long-lived and slow to adapt, at times holding to falsehoods simply because they have lived too long with such beliefs. Change, when it comes, does so over the course of many generations. These races receive a -2 penalty to their Will save, reflecting their unyielding natures.

Barbarians can be the most fiercely devoted followers a deity may know. Most are more likely, however, to eschew organized religion for a devotion to natural forces. Barbarians expressing a devotion to a particular deity may find themselves affected by the shrine's secrets, while those barbarians devoted to natural forces may simply shrug off such knowledge. Barbarians receive no modification.

Bards can be among the best missionaries a deity has, spreading the word through music and poetry. Most are more likely, however, to forego individualized worship for a devotion to whichever deity suits their needs at any particular time. Unless uncharacteristically devout, bards will probably view the shrine's secrets as divine inspiration for a new song or poem. Bards receive a $+2$ bonus.

Clerics and **paladins**, as the mortal agents of a deity's will, are the most fiercely devoted of characters, and thus the most likely to be affected by the shrine's secrets. Some clerics and paladins, however, are devoted to causes or ideals (such as Law or Protection) and may not fare as poorly as their more restricted brethren. Clerics and paladins both receive a -6 penalty.

Druids and **rangers** may serve particular nature deities, but most are more likely to be devoted to nature and nature's forces. Druids and rangers expressing devotion to nature deities might find themselves somewhat affected by the shrine's secrets, while those devoted to nature and its forces may simply shrug off such knowledge. Druids and rangers receive a -4 penalty to their Will save.

Fighters, like barbarians, can be fiercely devoted followers. Most are more likely to worship a war god or a deity of strength, never giving any particular thought to creationist theories. Fighters expressing a devotion to a particular deity may find themselves affected by the shrine's secrets, but only if the creationist aspect impinges upon their god's suzerainty. Fighters receive a $+2$ bonus.

NEW RULES:

A Shaken Faith, con't

Monks are more likely than other classes to shun religion for a devotion to inner-directed spirituality. Even those few monks expressing devotion to particular deities will probably not find themselves affected by the shrine's secrets. Their origins matter not — only their present state of being carries import. Monks receive a +6 bonus.

Rogues are likely to hold no devotion other than to themselves and their purses. It is not unheard of, however, for some rogues to hold faith in a god of thieving, trickery, or even murder or death. More likely than not, rogues of any devotion will suffer little from the shrine's revelations. Rogues receive a +4 bonus.

Sorcerers have no motive other than personal desire to devote themselves to a particular faith, although some may claim their sorcerous natures arise from divinity. Sorcerers paying homage to a divinity in a scholarly capacity do not suffer much from the shrine's revelations, while those claiming divine heritage may find themselves shaken to the very foundations of their being. Sorcerers suffer a -2 penalty to their Will save.

Wizards in general have no need of faith in divine beings other than to fulfill a personal need or as a means to further their magical studies. Rarely are wizards shaken to their cores by faith-based revelations, rather this information is merely something to be studied further. Wizards gain a +6 bonus.

ATONING FOR A SHAKEN FAITH

The spell *atonement* must be cast upon a character who has lost his faith. It must be performed by a cleric of the same faith and at least four levels higher than the PC. The PC may be required to perform an act of penance (GM's discretion — this can lead to a larger adventure).

Some characters may accept their shaken faith as a sign to switch faiths or to give up structured religion altogether. Any PC choosing the former continues to suffer the effects of a shaken faith until a connection can be established with the new (or ancient, but new to the PC) deity. The deity should give the PC a sign (in the form of a *geas* spell) detailing how to establish the faith. After this condition is met, the shaken condition lifts.

Any PC choosing to forego religion altogether continues to suffer the effects of a shaken faith until his own determination drives doubt from his mind and heart. Once successful, the character no longer feels the compulsion to place faith in a divine being, instead counting only on the here and now and his own capabilities to affect his future. To acquire this attitude, a PC must make a daily faith-shaking Will save similar to the previous one, but with a cumulative bonus of +1 per day. This will lift the morale and Wisdom penalties of a shaken faith, but a character of a class requiring a religious attachment (clerics, paladins, and possibly clerics, etc.) become a true "ex-" of that class.

Modifier Summary Table

CONDITION	MODIFIER	CONDITION	MODIFIER
Ye of Little or No Faith	+2	Barbarian	0
Faith Not at Odds with New Info	+2	Bard	+2
Ye of Modest Faith	0	Cleric	-6
Ye of Strong Faith	-2	Paladin	-6
Human	+4	Druid	-4
Half-Elf	+4	Ranger	-4
Gnome	+2	Fighter	+2
Halfling	+2	Monk	+6
Dwarf	-2	Rogue	+4
Elf	-2	Sorcerer	-2
		Wizard	+6

The Fox's Fraud

BY SPIKE Y JONES • ILLUSTRATED BY HELENA WICKBERG

Encounter Level: 6

Setting: A well-traveled road

Summary: A small party meets a waylaid traveler alongside the road, who is really the leader of a bandit troupe that uses subterfuge to mask its small size.

Vulpis, the fox, is a fraudulent and ingenious animal. When he is hungry and nothing turns up for him to devour, he rolls himself in red mud so that he looks as if he were stained with blood. Then he throws himself on the ground and holds his breath. The birds, seeing that he is not breathing, think he is dead and come down to sit on him. Thus he grabs them and gobbles them up.

Background

The key to successfully running this encounter is deception. The con artist Vulpis and his small band of bandits prey upon unknowing travelers, taking their goods and possessions through cunning rather than strength. A well-equipped party of comparable level could easily defeat Vulpis and his band of thieves in a straight-up fight, but a crafty GM should be able to trick them into paying Vulpis his tribute in order to save their skins. And if they then circle around to exact revenge on the bandits, their embarrassment at having been defeated by a smaller group will be all the more delicious.

Warning: A group with access to divination spells such as *detect thoughts* or *discern lies* could easily short-circuit this trap.

Waylaid Traveler

As the party travels along a moderately well-traveled road leading to a market town, they find a man lying bound and unconscious in the ditch to one

side. He is easily revived, and they can see that he has been recently beaten, from the lumps that are darkening into bruises and the cuts that are freshly clotted over.

In a halting voice, Vulpis tells the party that he is a mercenary on the road looking for work. In an inattentive moment, he was set upon by bandits who said that they'd let him pass unharmed if he simply gave them his money pouch and weapons. Since there were only two of them, he foolishly decided to resist, only to discover that there were more thieves hidden in the woods on either side of the road. Well-placed arrows took the fight out of him, and then the angry crooks beat him, took all his belongings, his money, and his horse, and left him to die in the ditch.

He thanks the adventurers for releasing him from his bonds but refuses magical healing (if it is offered), saying he needs only some water and some time to recover. If someone will lend him a sword, he says he will feel more secure as he makes his way to town.

Doubts

If the heroes question Vulpis about his story he must make a Bluff roll, opposed by the questioner's Sense Motive skill, to convince them with his hurried responses. On a failed roll, the GM should tell the players that his answer seems forced or unconvincing.

Indeed, there are a number of holes in Vulpis' story. Some of them are listed below:

- Vulpis says he was struck by arrows, but there are no arrows in him now. (Since the illusion spell used to create his "injuries" is only visual, he couldn't take the chance that a PC would try to help him with the arrows.) He suggests that the bandits were so poor that they couldn't afford to leave even a single arrow behind.



- While Vulpis appears to have bled a good deal, there is no blood on the ground in the road or the ditch. (This was simply an oversight on his part.) Vulpis says that he can't be sure the fight was in this exact spot; maybe there's more sign of the combat somewhere nearby.
- While the thieves took just about everything else, they left Vulpis with a ring on his left hand. He claims that he begged them not to take this token from a distant lover.

(The *ring of self changing* Vulpis wears can change any aspect of his appearance, and indeed has created his current disarray, but cannot alter its own form.)

- He protests against magical healing (because he would have to make use of his magic ring in order to simulate the effects of the spell). He says that he really wasn't hurt too badly beyond being knocked out, and that the PCs should save their spell in case they should need it later.

The Ambush

When Vulpis finishes his tale (and after he has received any aid and equipment the party offers him), he says, "I'm sure they're long gone by now, though." As if on cue, a woman's voice says, "Not necessarily," and two bandits come out of the woods, weapons drawn, demanding tribute. The bandits (a male half-orc and a tough-looking female human) make the same demand they did of Vulpis: drop or sheath any drawn weapons and hand over their ready cash and they may pass otherwise unmolested.

While the rest of the band can't be seen directly, they can be heard moving on both sides of the road, and they'll shout encouragement to their comrades and commands to the adventurers.

The Twist

Despite Vulpis' story, the bandit group is only four strong: the two obvious members; a fighter-wizard who stays in the woods, making himself look like more with illusion spells, arrows fired from multiple locations (including stationary crossbow emplacements), and the help of his raven familiar; and finally a fourth member, Vulpis himself.

If Vulpis has convinced the PCs with his tale, they may comply with the bandits' requests immediately. The bandits will be true to their word, only taking readily accessible purses before disappearing into the woods. Even if the heroes have other obvious valuables, including magic items or weapons, Helena and Harrdawz leave them alone; the gang reasons that by keeping their takings small and avoiding the most prized possessions of their victims they reduce the chances of victims tracking them down for the return of their belongings before the thieves can get safely out of the area.

If the PCs hesitate to hand over their money, the wizard Muntisar looses a crossbow bolt at them (fired by the wizard himself, who is south of the party, at the party member with the weakest armor). Vulpis pipes up with, "That's exactly how it started with me."

If the party decides to fight (remember: drawing a weapon doesn't provoke an attack of opportunity), Helena and Harrdawz stay together as much as possible to allow Muntisar to attack at range at the backs of the PCs without having to worry about hitting his own compatriots.

If Vulpis has been revealed as a bandit, he fights alongside them, using whatever weapon he can acquire. If he is still ostensibly on the same side as the PCs, he pretends to help while actually doing his best to hamper them, all the while keeping up his patter about how things are getting worse and that they should surrender before the bandits are angered again.

The Escape

If the bandits manage to take the PCs' valuables without a fight (or with a fight that the thieves win decisively), Helena and Harrdawz take a semi-direct route through the woods to the bandits' hideout. Muntisar stays behind, both to retrieve the expensive crossbows as well as to confound any

pursuit by the PCs. Vulpis declares that he is going to make his way into town. If the heroes are traveling in that direction, he accompanies them until the first opportunity to sneak away, making for the hidden camp; if not, he simply journeys a prudent distance from them and then leaves the road to make for the camp.

Knowing that the authorities will soon be upon them, the bandits don't dawdle. Before daybreak they break camp and leave in search of another place to set up their scam at least a day's travel away. They avoid the road upon which they'd set their previous trap.

If they find another road they can use, the brigand with the most distinctive features, Harrdawz, wears the *ring of self changing*, Vulpis has merely to take the ring off to change his appearance from that he wore when the PCs saw him, Muntisar will ideally never have been seen by them, and Helena uses her Disguise skill.

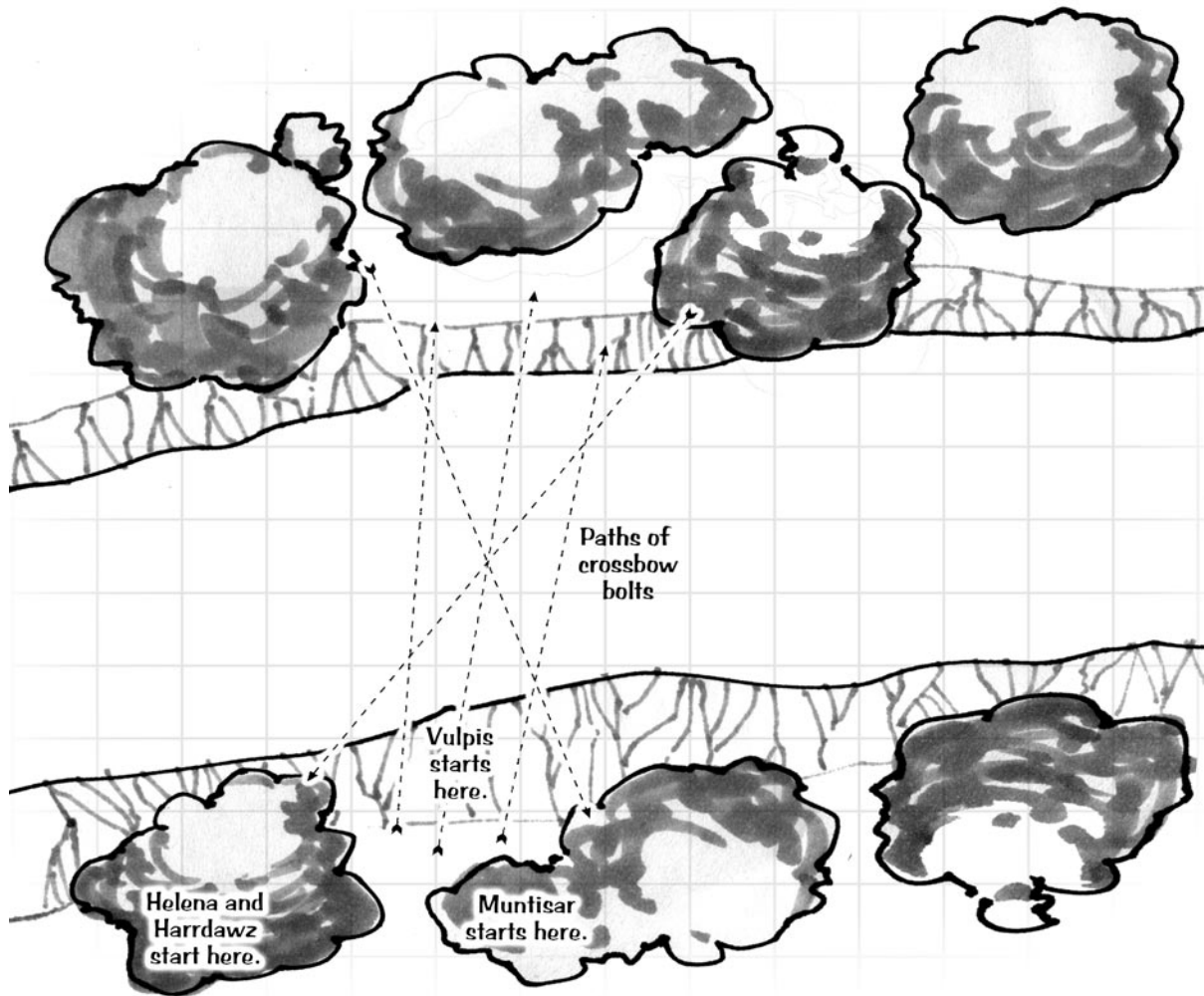
If there was a fight and the bandits didn't fare well, instead of making for the camp, each survivor heads immediately to a rendezvous point two days' walk away. They'll abandon the gear stored at the camp, assuming that they'll be able to replace it all in due time if they only escape.

Rewards

The total experience for defeating the bandits is 600 XP for a 1st- to 3rd-level party. If the PCs submit to being robbed by the bandits, thus suffering no major injury or irreplaceable loss, the GM can award them 50 XP for making a prudent decision. However, at the next town they may hear of the bandit band's trick and their true number.

The treasure of the bandits is divided between the cost of their gear (most importantly the *ring of self changing*, the crossbows, the armor and weapons of the bandits, and their horses and tack), stolen goods (jewelry, mundane weapons), and cash. With the exception of Vulpis, each thief carries a pouch with 100 gp worth of coin and gems. The equipment at their camp is worth a total of 2,000 gp, although resale might only bring in half to two-thirds that.

Crossbows fire from the north.



Repeating crossbows fire from the south.

Harrdawz

1st-Level Half-orc Fighter

CR 1; SZ M (humanoid); HD 1d10+2; hp 15; Init +0; Spd 20 ft.; AC 17 (+7 half plate); Atk melee +3 (2d4/crit 18–20/x2, falchion), or ranged +1 (1d6/crit x2, throwing axe); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; AL LE; SV Fort +4, Ref +0, Will –1; Str 15, Dex 11, Con 14, Int 7, Wis 9, Cha 7

Skills: Hide +1, Wilderness Lore +0

Feats: Power Attack, Toughness

In a fight, Harrdawz acts just as one would expect a cognitively challenged half-orc to act: he wades in with his falchion, using his Power Attack feat to trade his +1 base attack bonus for a +1 damage bonus. Despite the combat value he lends to the group, in some ways he is also its weakest link; if Vulpis' charade is still in place when fighting breaks out, he avoids addressing Harrdawz or even coming close to him in the melee, for fear the half-orc will reflexively refer to him as “Boss” at an inappropriate moment (roll a Wisdom check for the half-orc with a DC of 10, remembering Harrdawz's –1 modifier).

Helena

2nd-Level Human Fighter

CR 2; SZ M (humanoid); HD 2d10+2; hp 18; Init +4; Spd 20 ft.; AC 16 (+5 chainmail, +1 small shield); Atk melee +4 (1d8/crit 19–20/x2, longsword), or ranged +2 (1d8/crit 19–20/x2, light crossbow); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; AL NE; SV Fort +4, Ref +0, Will +0; Str 14, Dex 10, Con 12, Int 9, Wis 10, Cha 11

Skills: Appraise +1, Bluff +1, Climb +4, Disguise +1

Feats: Alertness, Endurance, Improved Initiative, Run

Helena serves two important functions in an encounter. First, her Appraise skill can be used to determine which valuables of the victims to keep and which ones to avoid taking. Vulpis is more skilled at quick appraisals, but if the charade is still in place Helena has to rely on her own evaluations.

Secondly, she tries to manage any fights so that she and Harrdawz stay together, both for their own good and to give Muntisar a clear shot with his crossbows and spells. She knows that the crossbows on the north side can only fire a single volley, so she tries to stay on that side of the battle *after* that volley has been loosed, apparently blocking the subsequent shots of her comrades in the woods, and also preventing the heroes from charging into the northern woods and discovering the truth.

If Vulpis is fighting openly on the side of the bandits, Helena maneuvers to get herself and Harrdawz on either side of the unarmored and lightly armed thief. Conveniently, Helena wears a sheathed rapier at her hip; not for herself, but for Vulpis to draw and use.

Helena must make a Wisdom check (DC 12) in order to resist coming to her lover's aid (spoiling the charade if he is still playing the victim) if Vulpis' life is seriously threatened.

Possessions: Caltrops (used only during escapes)

Cawrl

Raven Familiar

CR 2; SZ T (animal); HD 1d4+1 + 1d10+1; hp 6; Init +2; Spd 10 ft., fly 40 ft. (average); AC 15 (+2 size, +2 Dex, +1 natural armor); Atk melee +6 (1d2–5, claws); Face 2 1/2 ft. x 2 1/2 ft.; Reach 0 ft.; SQ alertness, empathic link, improved evasion, share spells, speak common; AL N; SV Fort +3, Ref +4, Will +2; Str 1, Dex 15, Con 10, Int 6, Wis 14, Cha 6

Skills: Listen +6, Spot +6

Feats: Weapon Finesse (Claws)

Cawrl (Carl, pronounced with a raven's caw) speaks common and provides a voice to the hidden crossbows on the north side of the road, delivering short messages ("Don't move," "Not so fast," "Don't try it") transmitted from Muntisar, and warning the mage if anything untoward happens out of his eyesight.

Alertness: The presence of the familiar sharpens its master's senses; Muntisar gains Alertness while Cawrl is within arm's reach.

Empathic Link (Su): The master has an empathic link with the familiar up to one mile; the two can communicate telepathically.

Improved Evasion (Ex): If Cawrl is subjected to an attack that allows a Reflex save for half damage, he takes no damage on a successful save and half damage even if the save fails.

Share Spells: Any spell Muntisar casts on himself can also affect Cawrl. Cawrl must be within five feet from the wizard.

Speak Common: Raven familiars speak one language. Cawrl's language is common.

Muntisar "Two-Talent" Battlespell

1st-Level Gnome Illusionist/1st-Level Fighter

CR 2; SZ S (humanoid); HD 1d4+1 + 1d10+1; hp 12; Init +5 (Dex, Improved Initiative); Spd 20 ft.; AC 12 (+1 Dex, +1 size); Atk melee +2 (1d6/crit 19–20/x2, short sword), or ranged +3 (1d8/crit 19–20/x2, light crossbow); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SA spells; AL NE; SV Fort +3, Ref +1, Will +1; Str 11, Dex 13, Con 12, Int 13, Wis 9, Cha 10

Skills: Concentration +3, Handle Animal +1, Heal +1, Hide +2, Move Silently +2, Spellcraft +3

Feats: Ambidexterity, Combat Casting, Improved Initiative, Scribe Scroll

The gnome's task is the least dangerous but the most complicated within the troupe. From his concealed position on the south side of the trap, he casts spells, fires his own crossbow, and operates three repeating crossbows set on posts and aimed at the site of the ambush. In addition, he uses magic to control two post-mounted crossbows located on the north side of the site. His primary purpose isn't to injure the defenders; it's to convince them that there are a half-dozen more bandits hidden in the woods.

The post-mounted crossbows are fixed to fire along lines of sight determined by Muntisar in advance. Muntisar waits until a victim moves into approximately the right place and then fires (a 1d20 roll, +2 for the "attacker" being effectively invisible) against the target's AC (no Dexterity bonus) to hit; a hit is followed by another 1d20 roll DC 10 to simulate the 50% chance of a miss because the attacker is effectively firing blind. (If using miniatures, the GM should have a number of faint guidelines predrawn on the map, some of them fakes, but some the real lines of sight, so as to determine who the crossbows target.)

He fires the northern crossbows via his *animate rope* spell, commanding a rope already looped around the triggers of the loaded crossbows to knot. Because of the spell's duration, he can only do this one time, usually early on in the fight, but his *dancing lights* spell can be used to create the impression of sunlight reflecting off the armor of archers in the woods, while his raven familiar provides a voice for the illusion, forcing the defenders to divide their attention between real and counterfeit threats.

Positioned to the south of the PCs, Muntisar fires his own crossbow at the start of the fight (+2 to hit, no Dexterity bonus for the defender because Muntisar is effectively invisible). After that, he fires his three repeating crossbows (using the same rules of the northern stationary crossbows) using the one-hour duration *prestidigitation* spell (cast while Vulpis set the party up for the ambush). Unlike the northern crossbows, which must be fired in tandem, he can fire one, two, or all three of the repeaters per round; with each of these loaded with five bolts, he has anywhere from five to 15 rounds worth of attacks prepared. Using the magic of his *prestidigitation* spell to pull triggers is a free action, so Muntisar can also cast other spells or reload and fire his own crossbow in the same round.

From the south he can also use his short-range illusion spells to multiply his numbers via shouted commands between the nonexistent crossbowmen (*ventriloquism*), the rustling of leaves and grass as they move (*mage hand*), and the clink of armor and the ratcheting of reloading crossbows (*ghost sound*). He casts the illusions a short distance to the right and left of his real position to divert PC return fire (he has three-quarter concealment because of the dense foliage he hides within), and sometimes moves to fire his own crossbow from these illusory crossbow emplacements, moving back to within ten feet of the repeating crossbows (the range of *prestidigitation*) on the next round.

Spells: (7/2) Muntisar's school specialization is in Illusion. His prohibited schools are Divination and Necromancy. Three of his seven 0-level spells must always be those below marked with asterisks.

0 level — *dancing lights**, *ghost sound**, *prestidigitation**, *daze* (x2), *ray of frost*, *mage hand*
1st Level — *animate rope*, *ventriloquism*

Possessions: scroll with *detect magic*, *grease*, *change self*, and *silent image* (as 1st-level caster); smokesticks, thunderstones, and tanglefoot bags (used only during escapes)

Vulpis

3rd-Level Human Rogue

CR 3; SZ M (humanoid); HD 3d6+3; hp 16; Init +2 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 12 (+2 Dex); Atk melee +4 (1d4/crit 19–20/x2, dagger), or ranged +4 (1d4/crit 19–20/x2, dagger); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; AL LE; SV Fort +2, Ref +5, Will +1; Str 11, Dex 15, Con 12, Int 14, Wis 11, Cha 13

Note: If encountered when not pulling his scam, he'll be wearing a chain shirt, AC 16, and be armed with rapier (melee +4) and light crossbow (ranged +4).

Skills: Appraise +7, Bluff +7, Climb +2, Diplomacy +2, Disguise +4, Escape Artist +7, Hide +7, Move Silently +6, Open Lock +4, Perform +5, Pick Pocket +3, Read Lips +6, Sense Motive +5, Spot +6, Swim +2, Tumble +6, Use Rope +3, Wilderness Lore +2

Feats: Quick Draw, Weapon Finesse (dagger), Weapon Finesse (rapier)

Vulpis is the leader of this bandit gang, and he takes the most dangerous task upon himself. Unarmored and unarmed, he attempts to deceive the PCs into voluntarily giving up treasure that his band can't take on its own strengths.

Before the PCs arrive at the ambush site, Vulpis relaxes in the shade at the roadside. When Muntisar receives the signal from the high-circling Cawrl that likely prey (Cawrl can count well enough to warn the thieves away from over-large parties) is approaching, Vulpis moves into position, using his Use Rope and Escape Artist skills to bind himself in a way that looks convincing, but which will be easy to escape from if he needs to free himself at a moment's notice.

Vulpis' primary weapon is his gift of chatter. Whether he is playing the victim or the bandit leader, he never seems to stop talking, constantly insinuating to the heroes that their cause is hopeless and that they'd best surrender and hope for leniency from the robbers.

If Vulpis was given a weapon, he "fights" on the side of the heroes, using his injured condition to explain away the fact that he not only fails to hit the bandits, but also tends to get in the way of the PCs (juggling the aim of PC archers and the manipulations of spellcasters). If he has no weapon, he does his best to get in the way. If he has a good opportunity, Vulpis uses the *ring of self changing* to fake a massive injury, which allows him to fall out of harm's way and may suggest to the defenders that they're in dire straits themselves.

If the PCs ever turn on Vulpis, he defends himself with the weapon they gave him, or else either draws the small knife concealed in his boot or tries to snatch a weapon from a PC. If he can maneuver close enough to Helena, he uses his Quick Draw feat to draw the extra rapier that she carries for that purpose.

He and Helena are lovers, and if she is seriously imperiled (even armored and armed), he sets aside his own safety to protect her, grappling unarmed with an opponent to prevent her death.

Possessions: *ring of self changing*

NEW MAGIC ITEM:

Ring of Self Changing

This magical ring, carved from a single semi-precious gemstone, grants the wearer the benefits of a *change self* spell six times per day. Unfortunately, the appearance of the ring itself never changes, and its powers are negated if the ring is covered with gloves or other wrappings.

The ring is activated by being twisted around the wearer's finger. This can be accomplished easily enough with two hands, but doing it surreptitiously with only a single hand requires a Dexterity check (DC 8).

Caster Level: 6th; **Prerequisite:** Forge Ring, *change self*;
Market Price: 2,000 gp.

The Glass House

BY KEITH BAKER • ILLUSTRATED BY DAVID INTERDONATO

Encounter Level: This encounter is more of an unusual occurrence than a true challenge. As long as it distracts the party for a time, it should be considered have a Challenge Rating of half the average level of the party, with a maximum value of three.

Setting: An inn; the Glass House is best used when the players are visiting the inn with a purpose in mind — either meeting a contact at the start of an adventure or seeking to claim a reward at the end. However, it can be used as a random event any time the party is passing through a city.

Summary: The experiments of a demented wizard have turned an inn and all of its inhabitants permanently invisible. The party is caught up in the chaos that follows the transformation.

Raindrop skipped down Crown Street, struggling to keep up with Krogar's long strides. "We're late," the warrior growled. "We'll be lucky if she's still there." Raindrop chuckled and shrugged. "She'll wait for us! I know it! Besides which, it's just around the corner."

Krogar scowled and picked up the pace. They turned the corner, and stopped short. Where the Black Eagle had been, there was — nothing. Suddenly, something struck Krogar — a person, running at full tilt, and yet he could see nothing! Suddenly he realized there were shouting voices all around, and found himself being shoved by multiple unseen hands. He glanced over at Raindrop, who was sprawled flat on her back — "Do you still think she's waiting for us?!?"

Background

Someone has to push the boundaries of mystical theory. New spells don't write themselves, after all. Most people think that this sort of work occurs in distant towers and underground laboratories — and most of it does. But what of the wizard engaged in dangerous and unpredictable work who doesn't wish to put her own castle at risk?

The archmage Tiera Dela was just such a wizard, and she came up with a simple solution. For the most unstable part of her experiment, she decided to rent a room at a local inn. That way if something went wrong, she wouldn't have to worry about the mess. As it turned out, she was wise to take such precautions. She was working with a number of experimental sequencers and mystical amplifiers to create a new form of permanent invisibility; but as it turned out, she miscalculated the power of the amplifiers. Oops.

The Vanishing Inn

This event occurs as the party is traveling through a town or city. Either the group is just approaching the inn where they expect to meet a contact, or they are passing by the inn on the way to another location. Either way, read the following paragraph:

As you are walking down the narrow street a tingle runs through your skin, like a wave of static electricity passing through you. Suddenly, without any sound, the inn just ahead and to the left dissolves into nothingness. The score of people who were standing in front of the inn vanish as well, leaving no trace of their existence.

The ground itself is left visible, but all man-made structures, textiles, and other worked materials vanish. The GM should hold this for a moment to give the characters time to react; the goal is for the party to believe that the inn has actually been destroyed. However, after a moment passes, go to the next stage:

After a long moment of silence, the air is rent with screams of terror. You can't see the source of the cries; it is as if the air is filled with tormented souls. Suddenly an unseen force strikes (name one of the characters)!



EN ROUTE

Needless to say, the people who have unexpectedly become invisible are panicking. They race around the street trying to escape this nightmare, and in the process trip over one another and run into the party.

This first attack should be resolved as a bull rush against one of the characters; make an opposed Strength check, with the attacker receiving a +6 bonus for panic, surprise, and speed. The invisible crowd is composed of 1st-level commoners.

For the next five rounds, each player will be targeted with a bull rush attack (subsequent attacks only receive a +4 bonus) or a physical attack for 1 to 3 points of subdual damage. Attack rolls are made at a bonus of +3 and the defenders lose any Dexterity bonus to AC. Even if they avoid the attacks, characters will be shoved and buffeted by the invisible crowd. So, what can they do?

Magic offers the most possibilities. Spells such as *sleep*, *hypnotism*, *color spray*, *web*, or other forms of magic that incapacitate a large area will stop the riot in short order. *Invisibility purge* will cause the peasants to become visible while in the area of effect of the spell, and *see invisibility* or *true seeing* will allow the caster to see the rioters. Otherwise characters can begin striking out wildly at their invisible assailants; these enemies have an AC of 10 and 3 hit points.

Of course, if the characters use lethal force they may have to deal with a certain amount of guilt and hostility when it becomes clear that they just cut down a group of panicked peasants.

Within five rounds the panicked crowd will either have dispersed or been subdued by the party. It is possible that the characters will choose to move on at this point; if this is the case, the GM may wish to use one of the additional story ideas provided at the end of this encounter. Of course, if they are trying to meet someone in the inn, they will have to go inside.



Invisible Crowd

1st-Level Commoners

CR 1/2, SZ M (humanoid); HD 1d4; hp 2; Init +0; Spd 30 ft.; AC 10 (natural); Atk melee +0 (1d3 subdual, fist); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SQ permanent invisibility; AL N; SV Fort +0, Ref +0, Will +0; Str 10, Dex 10, Con 10, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 10

Skills: Craft (varies) +4, Profession (varies) +4

Permanent Invisibility (Sp): This person has been rendered permanently invisible. The effect is similar to *improved invisibility*, with a few notable differences:

The effect cannot be removed. *Glitterdust* or *invisibility purge* will temporarily negate the invisibility, but as soon as the duration of the blocking spell expires, or the affected victim leaves the radius of the spell, he will become invisible again. A character under the effect of *true seeing* or *see invisibility* will be able to see the affected person.

The condition also does not affect objects that the character touches or carries. That is to say, all of the equipment that the victim possessed at the time of the change is invisible (see insert on applying the special ability to weapons and armor) — but it's invisible whether it is in contact with the character or not. Any new objects the victim comes into contact with will not be affected. So each affected character has one set of invisible clothes and whatever objects he had on his person. If he buys new clothes or wears a mask, he can interact with others normally.

Inside the Inn

Entering the inn is not as simple as it might seem.

Unless the party has the benefit of *true seeing* or *see invisibility*, they will probably begin by walking into the building.

By feeling his way along the wall, a character should be able to find the door; of course, he might also run into someone trying to find his way out.

Once inside the inn, the party is greeted with another scene of invisible chaos; characters are going to be constantly stumbling over invisible furniture and running into people. The innkeeper is shouting, trying to restore some semblance of order and calm to the situation; but his voice can barely be heard over the cries of the panicked patrons. As the only visible people in the area, the characters will stand out; people will grab them and call out, asking for help or some sort of explanation.

Again, the simplest way to calm the crowd would be through the use of a spell such as *sleep* or *hypnotism*. At this point, people are beginning to calm down; as a result, a spell such as *invisibility purge* or *glitterdust* — which will allow the people to see themselves (or in the case of *glitterdust*, to see the people affected by the spell) — would go a great ways towards restoring order.

Magic aside, the players can try to fight their way through the crowd — with all of the issues as fighting outside of the inn — or they can try to talk the crowd down.

A character could use Diplomacy to try to calm the crowd while she tries to get to the root of the problem, use Bluff to assure the patrons that the condition is only temporary, or Intimidate just to get them to SHUT UP; in any of these cases, calming the crowd will have a DC of 18. The speaker should receive a bonus of +1 to +3 for a well-thought-out speech, and a similar penalty if she can't come up with a good way to get the attention of the crowd. If the first attempt fails, a different speaker may make another try; each successive attempt lowers the difficulty by 2 as the crowd slowly calms down.

Aftermath

If the party can calm the patrons they should have little trouble finding their contact (if they are looking for someone specific). When all of the people in the inn are accounted for, the innkeeper will note that a guest named Tiera seems to be missing. If the characters grope around her room, they will discover a variety of mystical equipment — alembics, beakers, and sheets of parchment, mostly damaged beyond repair (ever try to read an invisible scroll?). Tiera herself teleported away when the experiment went sour, taking the undamaged gear with her. Perhaps the party will encounter her at some point in the future.

If the party helped to bring order to the situation, the innkeeper will be extremely grateful; at the least, they will be treated to a few rounds of invisible drinks. In the long term, there are a number of things that could be done with the location:

- If the owner purchased new furniture, new mugs, a new door, and new clothes for the barmaids and staff, the inn could return to business. It might even become a tourist attraction — the Glass House, for the ultimate in outdoor indoor dining.
- Most of the patrons of the inn were simple commoners. However, it is possible that a few more talented individuals were caught in the area of the spell, or that a few of the victims will learn a new trade. A guild of invisible thieves could prove quite troublesome to the party ...
- As a result of the spell, there are a number of permanently invisible objects floating around. While few of the patrons were armed, there were certainly a lot of knives in the inn. There could be a significant black market for invisible daggers or the rare set of invisible armor ...
- At the very least, the city now has a small population of invisible people. If it is a place that the party frequents, they should occasionally run into these invisible merchants and craftsmen, as a reminder of the strange event.
- While most people would panic if they suddenly became invisible, some folk are quick to seize any opportunity. Either inside or outside the inn, an invisible cutpurse accosts one of the characters. The victim feels a slight tug on her belt, then looks over to see her purse flying away through the air — the thief didn't realize that the purse would remain visible!
- A mother has become separated from her son during the chaos; now both are invisible. If someone in the party has tracking skills or some way to detect invisible objects, the wailing mother will beseech them to help her find the invisible infant. Tracking the child across the city will be a difficult task, given the chaos of the riot that occurred outside; the DC for such an attempt would be 19. If no one in the party possesses tracking abilities, perhaps the child is simply lost within the inn; in this case, a careful search of the premises should turn the child up eventually.
- The party encounters Tiera Dela as she is cleaning up the room she used as her workshop. Needless to say, Tiera came prepared with a *see invisibility* spell, so she is not terribly inconvenienced by the situation. She will defend her actions as a legitimate attempt to further the bounds of the mystical arts. As for the other people caught in the backlash, well, them's the breaks. With that, she teleports away. Curse you, invisible archmage!

Story Ideas

Here are a few options that can stretch this encounter out, if you'd like to have it last for a longer period of time:

NEW MAGIC WEAPON OR ARMOR SPECIAL ABILITY:

Permanent Invisibility

If an object has been rendered permanently invisible, the effect is similar to *improved invisibility*, except that the effect cannot be removed, except by *wish* or similar high-level spell. *Glitterdust* or *invisibility purge* will temporarily negate the invisibility, but as soon as the duration of the blocking spell expires, or the affected object leaves the radius of the spell, it will become invisible again. A character under the effect of *true seeing* or *see invisibility* will be able to see the affected equipment.

This quality can prove useful in many ways when applied to weapons and armor. Invisible equipment can be easily smuggled into secure locations, and can provide an unpleasant surprise to an opponent; an initial attack with an invisible weapon should receive a +2 bonus to hit due to the unexpected nature of the threat. Invisible armor does not make its wearer invisible, though an alert observer may notice that the wearer's clothes seem unnaturally compressed.

When permanent invisibility is applied as a magical weapon or armor spell-like special ability, the stats are as follows. The market price modifier is slightly high, indicating that these objects are particularly rare; in addition to the prerequisites listed below, the caster would require rare experimental equipment designed to amplify the effect.

Caster Level: 13th; *Prerequisites:* *improved invisibility*, *mass invisibility*, *permanency*; *Market Price:* +2

Goblin Trippin'

BY JUSTIN ACHILLI • ILLUSTRATED BY MIKE DUTTON

Encounter Level: 2 (as written; actual level varies by monster type)

Setting: A goblin encampment

Summary: Although goblins and men rarely coexist peacefully, one particular band of goblins has more than a malicious gleam of hatred in its eyes. What has stoked these wicked creatures' fury so greatly?

Zim chewed hungrily at the blackened rabbit's leg he pulled from the spit and stuffed the remaining space in his mouth with tough hardtack. After snapping at Frek (who was trying to steal Zim's rabbit leg by distracting him with pine cones to the forehead), he washed the whole mess down with swamp-water brew. Frek tried his miserable stunt again, pelting Zim with pine cones ...

... and then Frek boiled away into a green puddle. The starry night sky became a purple canopy seeping into a deep red. The fire looked to the sky, then to Frek-puddle and then to Zim, laughing. Zim reached for his knife, but found only feathers. They'd have to do — Zim knew that the only way he could escape the purple night goblin puddle was to slit the fire's throat, and if he had to do it with a handful of feathers, so be it.

The Fantasy Trip

This encounter is suitable for a low-level party in a wooded or wilderness environment. Because of the nature of the threat — tainted foodstuffs — it can be scaled to suit a group of characters with practically any level of accomplishment. Simply alter the monsters affected by the affected food to a more appropriate group of foes. Indeed, the creatures affected by the tainted food don't even have to be monsters: a human caravan's grain supply could have been affected, as could the meal carried by a dwarven scouting party or an entire cadre of halfling slingers.

The introduction to “Goblin Trippin'” is fairly straightforward. While looking for a place to settle during a journey, the party inadvertently stumbles across a goblin encampment. Four goblins dash madly about the campsite, screeching at each other and acting utterly irrationally. It shouldn't be any trouble at all to hear the goblins before the little monsters have a chance to become aware of the party. They're causing quite a ruckus, arguing with each other, hurling rocks, menacing their comrades with crusts of bread, and generally behaving like some connection between brain and body isn't quite right. Don't bother rolling any dice unless the party insists on trying to drown out the goblins' din with one of their own creation.

Seriously. The goblins are making a hellacious racket all their own. Don't even think about making Spot checks for them unless the characters do something completely overblown, and even then, give the goblins a DC of 20 to turn their addled attentions to whatever lunacy the PCs are perpetrating.

When the goblins finally do notice the characters, their reactions vary, but none are logical. Assuming the characters don't ambush the goblins outright, all of the goblins stop suddenly in the middle of various acts of strangeness and turn their attentions to the party simultaneously. After a few moments of blinking, the goblins resume their previous courses of action, mainly tormenting each other.

Characters who ambush the goblins without waiting to see what their reactions are can have at it. Consider the goblins to be flat-footed. In their hopping and sprinting escapades, concealed characters may even have an attack of opportunity if the little freaks move past them.

If the party doesn't ambush, they may attack the flat-footed goblins during the long pause while the monsters look at them uncomprehending.

Even after the goblins acknowledge the party and return to their antics, the party will be able to attack at least one of them flat-footed, and arguably more at the GM's discretion.



EN ROUTE

In any case, the goblins should not receive their +1 Dexterity bonus in defense against the characters' attacks. They're worrying about other things.

Only the densest of PCs will fail to get an inkling that something bizarre is going on. A quick survey of the goblins' campsite doesn't reveal anything out of the ordinary. Two dingy tents stand pitched a few feet away from a campfire, at the center of which broils some hapless forest creature on a spit. The goblins — well, most of the goblins — have cast their weapons aside. Packs lie strewn about, a wolf's muzzle perches atop one of the tents, shreds of bread and splashes of liquid refreshment are everywhere.

Those aren't the only things rotten in the campsite. Characters whose players succeed in a DC 15 Spot check notice that the goblins' eyes are dilated and a few of them seem to be frothing at the mouth. Suggest to characters whose players succeed on a DC 10 Wisdom check (and feel free to let them take ten) that the goblins look as if they're perhaps in the midst of a very mean drunken bender. Characters with suitable Craft or Profession skills (such as herbalist, barber, brewer, etc.) may make a DC 10 check against that skill to recognize that while they *look* drunk, unless the brew they're drinking is powerfully fermented, they might have been poisoned, sickened, or somehow driven completely mad.

Discerning this last requires a bit of interpretation on the GM's part. A brewer, for example, probably wouldn't immediately believe that the goblins were mad, but he might know that only the strongest of brews can make a creature act so strangely, while an herbalist might get an inkling that the goblins may have smoked some loco weed or ingested some other noxious herb with their sustenance.

- The seeming leader of the group (he has the most interesting helmet), **Frek**, stands warily but skittishly opposite the campfire from his companions. Frek wields an unsheathed knife, menacing the other goblins and occasionally himself with it.
- **Zim**, seemingly the cook (he's wearing a grubby apron) is apparently in the worst condition. He's foaming at the mouth and attempting to kick enough dirt from the campsite into the fire to arouse the ire of the dirt and fire gods, who will mightily spring forth from the meager flame and smite his treacherous fellows.

- **Spiv** has a handful of feathers (from where, no one can tell, as there don't seem to be any birds around) and a *rod of lordly might*. Okay, so it's not a *rod of lordly might*. It's a stiff, dead snake. He can't tell the difference, though, and he's waving it at Zim, no doubt casting potent sorceries in his mind.

- **Gakk** has wrapped himself in a grimy blanket and flaps around the fire, believing himself to have transformed into a dreadful flying creature, about to rain death down upon the shrieking goblins below.

Goblins (4)

CR 1/4; SZ S (humanoid); HD 1d8; hp 4; Init +1 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 15 (+1 size, +1 Dex, +3 studded leather); Atk melee +1 (1d8–1, morningstar), or ranged +3 (1d6–1, javelin); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SQ darkvision 60 ft.; AL NE; SV Fort +2, Ref +1, Will +0; Str 8, Dex 13, Con 11, Int 10, Wis 11, Cha 8

Skills: Hide +6, Listen +3, Move Silently +4, Spot +3

Feats: Alertness

Darkvision (Ex): Goblins can see in the dark up to 60 feet. Darkvision is black and white only, but otherwise like normal sight, and goblins can function with no light at all.

For Whom the Bread Molds

The problem with these goblins isn't that they're possessed by demons, ensorcelled by wizards, or even animated by the powers of the dead. No, they're all as high as kites, tripping on a primitive hallucinogen that's causing them to react badly — well, very badly — with their environment. This wouldn't be so bad in and of itself: a handful of doped-up goblins is enough for even the most unskilled or warriors. The real problem is that the goblins' supply of grain was stolen from the nearest human (or other relatively civilized) settlement.

Right. Assuming the party doesn't just behead the addled goblins and go on about their merry way, several things may happen:

GOBLIN TRIPPIN'



- Characters who go the extra mile to determine exactly *why* the goblins went berserk learn a little bit about the environment themselves.

Assuming they find out about the ergot, the party receives the full experience-point value of the goblins, plus 150 more experience points for figuring out the reasons behind the episode.

- If the party, for whatever reason, eats the goblins' bread, they must determine whether or not it affects them, as described in the insert on page 62. Okay, fine; fair enough. Nobody in their right mind would eat goblin bread. Of course, the goblins have stolen their grain from some hapless farmer whose fields lie close to this very camp — that means *his* grain is contaminated with the stuff, and if the characters don't do something about it, there's no telling what can happen if an entire village consumes it.

- A party that goes to the nearest village and discuss the problem with its policy-makers earns the standard experience-point value of the goblins, plus another 300 experience points for its aid to the community. Characters who actually “get their hands dirty” and help the village, sorting good grain from bad, replanting fields, etc., earn an additional 100 experience points *each*.

NEW POISON:

Ergot

Ergot is a naturally-occurring fungus that lives in various grasses and grains (such as rye). It is harmful to the host plant, as well as any poor fool who ends up eating it, to whom it acts as a poison. At risk of being overly technical, ergot interferes with the functions of neurotransmitters, which can be used as the basis for positive effects (such as enhancing dopamine, providing temporary relief from the symptoms of Parkinson's disease) or ... um ... *other* effects (it's the basis for LSD). Some historians suspect that the "bewitched" girls who testified at the Salem witchcraft trials might have actually been suffering from ergot poisoning rather than maliciously condemning their fellows.

Ergot can kill. Lesser side effects include the obvious hallucinations, but also fever and violent muscle spasms. That's pretty much what's happening here with the goblins.

Any skilled farmer or other trained agricultural specialist (a 3rd-level commoner, or certain vocations of 1st-level expert) can identify ergot on sight when it attacks a grass or grain; it appears as a large, blackened knot on the stalk itself. Anyone else is going to have to have some special circumstances. Characters with the skills of Alchemy, Heal (ergot can be used in some pain-inhibiting treatments), Knowledge (nature), Craft (herbalism), Profession (baker), or any other skill the GM deems suitable may make a skill check at DC 15 to identify ergot as something abnormal, and DC 20 to identify specifically.

The following spells will also identify ergot, as well as possibly having some other effect, based upon the spell's description: *detect poison*, *legend lore*, and *speak with plants*. *Control plants* can be used to negate the effects, as can *diminish plants*, *goodberry* (which actually converts the ergot cysts to functional *goodberries*), *heal*, *neutralize poison*, and *purify food and drink*.

Any person or creature ingesting ergot, such as in bread or grain feed, must make a Fortitude save, DC 18. Success indicates the ergot does only one hit point of damage. Failure indicates that the person or animal ingesting the ergot suffers a temporary 2d4 point loss to his Wisdom score, with no secondary damage. Wisdom returns at one point per hour until fully restored. Additionally, if the character fails the Fortitude save, she suffers one randomly generated hallucination as generated by the table below for 1d4 hours. If, after that period, the character's Wisdom has fully returned, the hallucination ends. If the character's Wisdom has not returned by the end of the hallucination, roll for another hallucination that lasts for another 1d4 hours. If the character fails the Fortitude save by 10 or more, he suffers body-wracking convulsions that temporarily reduce his Constitution score by 1d4. Constitution returns at a rate of one point per hour.

D20 HALLUCINATION

- 1 The sufferer is an animal.
- 2 The sufferer becomes paranoid.
- 3 The sufferer's companions turn into devils.
- 4 The sufferer's skin becomes agonizingly itchy.
- 5 The sufferer's arm comes to life and attempts to strangle sufferer.
- 6 Walls, trees, and other obstacles melt into the ground or "drip up" into the sky.
- 7 The sufferer is tormented by monstrous creatures. Why can't anyone else see them? Why? Why?
- 8 The sufferer's skin sloughs off, exposing bone and organs.
- 9 The sufferer suddenly realizes that he is very, very attractive.
- 10 The sufferer's inhibitions vanish and the id runs rampant.
- 11 The sufferer sees his own face on every passing being and animal.
- 12 The grim reaper comes for the sufferer.
- 13 The sufferer finds boundless humor in anything anyone else says.
- 14 See those belongings of yours? They actually belong to the sufferer. Thief!
- 15 The sufferer can grant *wishes*.
- 16 The sufferer is immune to physical damage. All of it. Fighting an ogre while unarmed? Jumping into a gorge? No problem.
- 17 You'll never take the sufferer alive, *do you hear me?* Never!
- 18 The sufferer sees only one shade of colors.
- 19 Synesthesia — the sufferer "hears" tastes, "sees" sound, "feels" odors, etc.
- 20 The sufferer has a conversation with a deity.

Characters of suitable inclinations, such as druids, herbalists, and their ilk may make a rudimentary healing poultice out of the ergot buds. Such a task calls for a suitable skill and a check of that skill against DC 18. Success indicates that the poultice works — if applied to a wound, it will heal 1d2 hit points of damage. If the check fails, well, it's like rubbing LSD into an open wound. Check for the Fortitude save and go through the whole debacle again.

Anyone trying to purchase a "dose" of ergot will probably be looked at with a cocked eyebrow, but certain unscrupulous farmers or black marketers may let some go for 150 gp. Characters who are actually *trying* to make hallucinogens ... no, never mind. We'll leave that up to the GM's discretion.

The Hellcow

BY KEITH BAKER • ILLUSTRATED BY STEVEN SANDERS

Encounter Level: 2

Setting: A country road

Summary: After a strange encounter with an old man and a cow, the party has to deal with a troublesome spirit that possesses animals.

Krogar charged over the crest of the hill, his axe gleaming in the sunlight. But instead of the foe he expected to find, he saw an old man leaning against a complacent cow. As he drew to a halt, the elderly farmer feebly struck the cow with a walking stick — creating the thwack of wood-on-flesh that had drawn Krogar’s attention to begin with. Turning, the old man saw the warrior descending the hill; instead of surprise or fear, he showed only impatience. “Hurry up now!” he cried in a cracked, reedy voice. “Help me slay the beast before it kills us all!”

The cow continued to chew its cud.

Random Encounter

This encounter is best suited to rural environments, but it can occur on any road. It is intended to spice up an otherwise dull trip between two locations. For full effect, the party should have some sort of animal companions — horses, trained animals, or other non-magical beasts traveling with them.

The set-up for “The Hellcow” is simple. The adventurers are traveling along a quiet road. All of nature seems at rest. But then danger rears its ugly head!

Have each character make a Listen roll against a DC of 12; anyone that makes it will hear sounds of a struggle just ahead, over a slight hill.

Specifically, they hear the sounds of a club striking flesh and the grunts of a man in pain. If they wait, these sounds will continue — sporadic thwacks accompanied by pained moans and grunts.

If the characters charge over the hill expecting a battle, they find something else entirely. An old man in his early sixties stands in the middle of the road. His skin is wrinkled and tanned from exposure to the sun, and he is wearing the mud-stained clothes of a simple farmer. In one shaking hand he holds a gnarled walking stick, which he is waving in the air; he is supporting himself with his other arm, which rests on the back of a rather pathetic-looking brown cow. Given a moment, he will smack the cow with his cane, crying out with the effort, thus revealing the source of the sounds of ‘struggle’. For her part, the cow doesn’t seem to mind; it’s hard to say if she is even aware of the farmer’s feeble efforts.

If the adventurers approach the unlikely pair, the farmer turns towards them. He reacts with great impatience, as if the characters were late for an appointment. His voice is thin and cracked, and as he yells, alert players will note that most of his teeth are missing. “Hurry up now!” he cries out. “Help me slay the beast before it’s too late!”

If the adventurers ask questions, or hesitate to help the old man, he reacts with a rising level of hysteria. “There’s no time! We’ve got to kill it now, before it can harm anyone else! Can’t you see? Just look at it! LOOK AT IT!” He continues in this vein for a time, deflecting any questions with crazed ranting. Meanwhile, the cow chews her cud and swats at flies with her tail.

Eventually, one of three things will occur:

- If the adventurers continue to try to talk to the old man, or if they begin to leave, he flies into a rage: “You’re working with the beast, aren’t you?! Well, you won’t get past me! No, I’ll put a stop to the evil right now!” He charges at one of the characters with his stick and promptly dies of a heart attack. Any attempt to raise or resurrect the farmer fails; his soul is weary and has no desire to return to the world.



EN ROUTE

- If anyone attempts to use magic to restrain or calm the man, he likewise collapses and dies — the only thing keeping him going was pure adrenaline and hysteria.
- If someone decides to humor the old man and kill the cow, she doesn't put up much of a fight. After the battle is finished, the farmer claps his hands with glee, shouts "It's over! At last it's over!" and dies of a heart attack.

So sooner or later the party will find itself with a dead old man and a cow (which may be dead as well). If anyone searches the corpse, the farmer's only possessions were his clothes, his stick, and three copper pieces sewn into his shirt. If the cow is still alive, she will continue to chew her cud and ignore the characters. And so the encounter is over, right? The party encountered a crazy old man and his cow, the old man died, end of story. Right?

Wrong.

As it turns out, the old man wasn't crazy. A mischievous spirit known as the speng has possessed the cow. Shortly before the party encounters the farmer, the speng killed his family and destroyed his farm by kicking over a carelessly untended lantern. This incident unhinged the old man, and when the characters encounter him he is wild and hysterical. His shoulder-length gray hair is tangled and matted, and there are twigs and flecks of saliva in his beard. His eyes are a startling blue brought out by his bloodshot whites. He is dressed in a loose shirt and

baggy breeches, which are torn and covered with mud. Needless to say, his statistics are irrelevant, as he will die before he gets a chance to do anything.

If the characters leave the cow alone, she will start to follow them around. If they are traveling swiftly, she appears whenever they set up camp: *Chakkas is on first watch. He hears the sound of something heavy moving through the bushes. He draws his blade from its scabbard and kicks Raindrop to stir her from her sleep. And then a dark shape bursts into the firelight. It's — a cow.*

If someone killed the cow at the farmer's request — or kills her later on — things simply get more complicated. The speng will move into a new host, preferably an animal that has some value to the players. It cannot possess an intelligent or mystical creature like a familiar or a Paladin's warhorse, but any other beast is fair game.

So?

So. Either the cow is following the party around, or the speng has taken up residence in another beast. What's the big deal? Well, the speng will try to find ways to cause trouble for the party. It is sly and will try to keep the characters guessing — did the cow mean to do that, or are they just imagining things? Possible tricks include:

NEW MONSTER:

The Hellcow

Dumb Animal

CR 1; SZ L (animal); HD 3d8; hp 15; Init -1; Speed 30 ft.; AC 10 (-1 Dex, -1 Size, +2 natural); Atk melee +2 (1d6+3, 2 hooves); Face 5 ft. x 10 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SQ supernatural sustenance, SR 22 (speng); AL CN; SV Fort +6, Ref +2, Will +10; Str 16, Dex 9, Con 16, Int 18, Wis 18, Cha 17

All right, there's nothing remotely infernal about this cow. She's an old, rather saggy cow with matted brown fur and a bad case of flies. If she is attacked, she will just sit there and put up with it, looking at her assailant with big innocent brown eyes. Note that the cow's alignment and mental statistics are actually those of the speng, and that its host benefits from the following of its special qualities:

Supernatural Sustenance (Ex): The speng sustains its host with mystical energy. A creature possessed by the speng does not need to eat or sleep, although it may eat or pretend to sleep if the speng chooses to.

Magic Resistance (Ex): The speng transfers its natural spell resistance to its current host (SR 22). To determine if a spell or spell-like ability works against a it, the spellcaster makes a level check (1d20 + caster level). If the result equals or exceeds 22, the spell works normally, though the target still gets a saving throw. In addition, the speng is completely immune to any sort of enchantment spell. For purposes of *holy word* or *dismissal*, the speng is considered to be a 10 HD creature.

- Stepping on a character's toes

This gives the victim a -2 to all Dexterity skill checks and combat rolls for 1d6 minutes

- 'Accidentally' kicking supplies into a campfire
- Sitting on fragile objects
- Eating inappropriate things
- Acting spooked when a character is on watch — "That cow sure seems to think there's something over yonder, Burt."
- Making noise when characters are trying to be stealthy.
- Chewing or defecating on prized possessions.

Other tricks will depend on the nature of the speng's current host. A formerly trusty hound might lead the party on a wild goose chase, while a carrier pigeon could deliver messages to the wrong people and return with strange responses. Initially it should be possible to dismiss these incidents as accidents — but sooner or later it should become clear that something just ain't right with that critter.

Dealing with the Speng

Eventually the party will determine that the creature — be it the cow or the speng's next host — is up to no good. The first beast will go down without a fight, but the spirit will simply move on to a new host; in time, the cycle will start all over again. So what can the characters do? Any one of the following methods might work as a way to stop the predations of the spirit:

- The party could sell the beast to an unsuspecting person. Of course, the speng will do its best to make itself unattractive to a would-be buyer — kicking shins, limping and so on — and if it is sold, the buyer may later return seeking vengeance.
- There may be a way to trap the beast without killing it, and leave it behind. Of course, if there is any reasonable way for the creature to escape, it can always turn up again later; "Is

NEW MONSTER:

The Speng

Parasitic Outsider

CR 2; SZ — (outsider); HD — ; hp — ; Init +1; Speed — ; AC — ; Atk as for animal host; Face — ; Reach — ; SA animal possession; SQ supernatural sustenance, SR 22, telepathy; AL CN; SV Fort — , Ref — , Will +10; Str — , Dex — , Con — , Int 18, Wis 16, Cha 17

Skills: Bluff +8, Listen +7, Sense Motive +8, Spot +7

The speng has no physical characteristics; it is a creature of pure spirit that can only manifest in this world by possessing other creatures. It possesses a handful of useful powers:

Animal Possession (Ex): The speng can take complete mental control of any animal with an Intelligence of 5 or less. Once it has attached to a host, the speng can only leave if its host dies or if the spirit chooses to return to its home plane (which it is loath to do, as it can only come to the material plane under special circumstances). If the host dies, the speng can take control of any suitable subject within 1000 feet. The only way to detect the speng when it is possessing a creature is through use of *analyze dweomer*, *legend lore*, or through use of other magical effects with a similar level of power.

Supernatural Sustenance (Ex): The speng sustains its host with mystical energy. A creature possessed by the speng does not need to eat or sleep, although it may eat or pretend to sleep if it chooses to.

Magic Resistance (Ex): The speng transfers its natural spell resistance to its current host (SR 22). To determine if a spell or spell-like ability works against it, the spellcaster makes a level check (1d20 + caster level). If the result equals or exceeds 22, the spell works normally, though the target still gets a saving throw. In addition, the speng is completely immune to any sort of enchantment spell. For purposes of *holy word* or *dismissal*, the speng is considered to be a 10 HD creature.

Telepathy (Su): The speng can *detect thoughts* at will; it uses this ability to anticipate the plans of the party and to come up with ways to annoy them.

EN ROUTE

this your cow? I found it chained to that fence, but I got it loose and it led me straight to you! Lucky break, huh?”

- A clever character might be able to convince the spirit to leave voluntarily — probably by presenting it with some sort of greater opportunity to cause trouble elsewhere; “Look, cow, if we gave you to the king, think of all the fun you could have.”

- *Dismissal* or *holy word* will force the spirit to leave, but the spell will have to get past the speng’s spell resistance and it will get a normal saving throw against the effect.

- Finally, the speng hates the sound of the violin. If someone is playing the violin, the speng must roll a Will saving throw with a DC of 20 every three rounds; if it fails it must flee to its home plane. How will anyone figure this out? Well, once the

party is taking the idea of a possessing spirit seriously, a bard or a loremaster could remember the tale of the speng with a Lore roll against a DC of 25. Alternately, a spellcaster could find out the spirit’s nature and weakness by using *legend lore*. And if worst comes to the worst, the party could always be saved by a traveling minstrel ...

Rewards

The reward for getting rid of the speng should be based on the challenge that it presents to the party. Assuming it takes the PCs some time to get rid of the spirit, they should be given the full 600 experience points for the speng’s CR 2 (for 1st- through 4th-level characters). If the characters manage to dispose of it quickly or without much trouble, halve this reward.



Heroes' Feast

BY SCOTT REEVES • ILLUSTRATED BY STEVEN SANDERS

Encounter Level: 0 (no XP award)

Setting: Anywhere

Summary: A supernatural feast appears before the characters and grants them extra strength for a difficult quest.

Attempts to *detect magic* will meet with mixed results. The feast is obviously swimming in supernatural energy but its exact nature is impossible to determine. Experienced PCs may recognize it as wild magic, pre-dating the first wizards and possibly even the gods themselves. Although unpredictable, it is not particularly malevolent.

Finding the Feast

The Heroes' Feast usually appears just before a band of adventurers embarks on a particularly difficult and heroic quest. The players enter an innocuous door or building, possibly following the scent of food, and enter an enormous feasting hall set with a meal fit for the wealthiest of kings.

The feast is on a long table piled high with hearty foods, exotic dishes, and strong drinks. Everything is fresh, as if it has just been pulled from the oven. If they look closely the PCs will find every imaginable delicacy. The food is served on elaborate platters and accompanied by fine china and silver.

Although the meal was apparently prepared and set out by army of cooks and servants, there are no attendants present. No matter how diligently they search or how long they wait, they will not encounter another soul in the feast hall.

The table itself is a plain affair made from ancient beams and timbers. Engraved on nearly every surface are the names and quests of a thousand heroes. Here are some examples:

Hrefna Ironguts, who goes to slay the voracious Wyrms of Scoville.

Arturs of Emeria, future liberator of the Huls and destroyer of their captors.

Among the many unfamiliar names and achievements, the PCs may recognize some the most celebrated heroes of their region.

A Hearty Meal

Once the PCs set to they will be unable to stop eating. Time passes in a blur of rich foods and surprising flavors until every scrap is devoured.

The Heroes' Feast is so nourishing that everyone who eats gains the benefits of 24 hours of rest. Wounds heal, fatigue dissolves and spells leap back into the characters' minds. Those who sit timidly to the side, watching others enjoy the feast, receive no benefit.

In addition to the benefits listed above, certain dishes in the Heroes' Feast can grant diners extraordinary powers. These powers last until the characters complete their current quest. Usually this means slaying a particularly difficult foe, but GMs may choose anything that has an easily defined ending point.

Example: *Before they attempt to steal the idol of Inestimable Og from his jungle temple, a group of PCs partakes of the Heroes' Feast. The GM decides that their gifts will last from the moment they finish the feast until they emerge from the temple, carrying the gem-encrusted idol.*

If the characters stray from their quest they will not receive the benefits of the Heroes' Feast until they return to their true path. The gifts will return immediately whenever a character takes an action that directly helps them on their quest.

Example: *On their way to the Temple of Inestimable Og, the PCs stop to rid a village of hob-*

EN ROUTE

goblin invaders. Since this is not part of their original quest, the characters do not receive the benefits of the Heroes' Feast for this encounter.

Every gift of the Heroes' Feast is accompanied by a penalty. Like the gifts, these penalties last until the end of the character's current quest. Unlike gifts, they remain in effect even when the character isn't directly pursuing his quest. If the PCs decide to abandon their quest altogether, the penalties will fade at the end of one month.

Penalties from the Heroes' Feast cannot be removed by most spells, although *wish* or *miracle* will eliminate both the penalty and its corresponding gift.

No matter how many special dishes he consumes, a character may receive only one gift and corresponding penalty. Gifts and penalties appear at the end of the meal, once everyone has finished eating.

If a character decides to partake in the feast, roll randomly to determine which special dish grants him a gift:

D10 SPECIAL DISH

1	Aged Wine
2	Baked Fish
3	Boiled Beef

NEW MAGIC CONSUMABLES:

Today's Specials

Aged Wine

A fragrant red wine, so dark it's almost black.

Gift: In the span of a minute the character gains all of the insight and understanding of a lifetime. He receives mental bonuses to reflect this (+3 to Intelligence, Wisdom and Charisma).

Penalty: The character's body ages along with his mind. He suffers a -6 penalty to Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution.

Baked Fish

A large fish baked whole and covered with a sauce made from tomatoes and bay leaves.

Gift: The character may breathe water as if it was air.

Penalty: While on land, the character suffers a -2 morale penalty to all attack rolls, saves and checks. If the character is within sight of a sizeable body of water — or anything sufficient to fully immerse himself — he must make a Will save (DC 15) every ten minutes to avoid sprinting towards the water and diving in. Once a character has failed a save he may not willingly leave the water for ten minutes, after which he must make the Will save to exit the water.

Boiled Beef

A whole haunch of beef boiled and served in a deep bowl of broth.

Gift: The character receives a +3 bonus to his Strength and Constitution.

Penalty: The character becomes very complacent. He suffers a -3 penalty to Intelligence and Wisdom. In addition, he has trouble switching from one task to another. Whenever he wishes to stop one activity and begin another, he must make a Will save (DC 15) or continue with his current task.

Fried Eels

Finger-sized sea creatures sautéed with butter and garlic.

Gift: Once every other round, the character may cast *shocking grasp* as if he was a 7th-level wizard.

Penalty: The character's skin becomes extremely slippery. Whenever he tries to grasp or manipulate an item with his hands, he must make a Reflex save (DC 15) to avoid dropping it. During combat he must make this save successfully every round to keep hold of his weapon.

Honeyed Cakes

Sweet, bite-sized cakes glazed with honey. They taste slightly of licorice.

Gift: The character becomes exceptionally glib and charming. He receives a +10 bonus to all Bluff and Diplomacy checks. He also receives SR 10 against magical attempts to detect falsehood, such as *discern lies*. The caster rolls 1d20 + caster level, and the result must beat 10 for the spell to work.

Penalty: The character and his possessions stick to everything they touch. If he touches anything for more than one round, the character must make a Strength check (DC 15) to separate it from his body. When using tools or weapons, the character receives a -2 penalty.

- 4 Fried Eels
- 5 Honeyed Cakes
- 6 Leg of Goat
- 7 Sparrow's Eggs
- 8 Spicy Drake
- 9 Turtle Soup
- 10 Player's Choice*

* When allowing the player to choose, the GM should read the descriptions of each dish and allow the player to choose which one he would prefer. The GM should not tell the character about the effects or penalties of a dish until the end of the meal.

The Roll of Honor

If the players wish to add their names to the impressive list of heroes carved into the table, they will find ample room to do so. Future adventurers will read their names and take heart from their courageous words. The GM should encourage the players to devise a properly heroic and mythical inscription. This is no time for "Umm ... we're going to kill the Archduke and take his stuff."

NEW MAGIC CONSUMABLES:

Today's Specials, con't

Leg of Goat

A whole leg spit roasted over an open fire until the skin is nearly black. Served with a sauce made from yogurt and green onions.

Gift: Once per round, the character may make a charging attack against any target within a full running move from his current position; roll to his as for an unarmed attack. If successful, the attack does 1d10 + Strength bonus damage and the target must make a successful Fortitude save (DC 10 + damage inflicted) or be stunned for one round. Creatures more than one step larger than the PC cannot be stunned by this attack. Charging attacks are considered full-round actions; the character ends the round next to the charged opponent.

If the PC attempts a charging attack and misses he will overshoot his target by 10 feet and must make a Reflex save (DC 15) to avoid stumbling and falling down.

Penalty: The PC grows an impressive set of horns; he cannot wear hats, hoods or helms. NPCs may mistake him for an evil supernatural creature.

Sparrow's Eggs

Small blue eggs served scrambled on pieces of crisp toast.

Gift: The character can fly at a speed of 90 feet per round (60 feet per round if wearing medium or heavy armor).

Penalty: Whenever he suffers a hit, the character must make a Will save (DC 10 + damage taken from the hit) or spend the next round flying at full speed in a randomly determined direction.

Spicy Drake

Generous chunks of meat, stewed for hours in a spicy curry.

Gift: The character may exhale a powerful jet of fire three times per day, as per a *potion of fire breath*. Each jet deals 3d6 points of damage to a single target up to 25 feet away. The victim may make a Reflex save (DC 12) for half damage.

Penalty: These goutts of flame are difficult to control. Whenever the character speaks he must make a Will save (DC 12) to avoid shooting a jet of flame at a randomly determined member of his audience. Treat this as a normal flame attack with the accidental target receiving a save as normal. Inadvertent flame attacks count against the daily maximum.

Turtle Soup

A thin, clear soup seasoned heavily with exotic spices. It contains small shreds of meat and wide, translucent noodles.

Gift: The character receives 10/+5 Damage Reduction. Weapons bounce off him harmlessly; every time a foe hits him with a weapon, the damage dealt is reduced by 10 points, though a +5 (or better) weapon deals full damage. He still takes normal damage from energy attacks, spells, spell-like abilities, and supernatural abilities, however.

Penalty: Like a turtle, the character becomes extremely slow. He always attacks last in combat, regardless of initiative. In addition, his speed is halved until the end of the current quest.

If the GM deems that the inscription is suitably heroic he may grant the PC's a 10% bonus to the experience points they earn from their quest. This bonus carries with it a heavy obligation. If the characters abandon their quest they will suffer a -10% penalty to the experience they gain from their next adventure.

Leaving the Feast

When the characters emerge from the feast hall, only seconds have passed in the real world, while the PCs have experienced hours around the feasting table. Once every character has left the hall, the entrance disappears, leaving no trace. Players who try to bring food, table settings, or other items from the hall with them find that they are holding only ash and small bits of lint when they pass through the doorway. If the players question passers-by about the feast hall they will receive confused, non-committal answers.

The Heroes' Feast is a once-in-a-life-time experience. No character may visit it twice.



The Idol

BY WILL HINDMARCH • ILLUSTRATED BY DAVID WHITE

Encounter Level: 7

Setting: A sea voyage by ship

Description: The servants of a sleeping demigod are loose aboard a small ship.

Background

This encounter unfolds as the characters are traveling exotic waters aboard a cargo-hauling caravel. The ship offers passage to any who can pay a cheap fare and abide sleeping in a hammock on rough seas. On this particular journey the little ship houses only the crew, the characters, and a sleeping idol from a distant jungle. The ship is headed to an unspecified. Wherever that port is, it is not where the idol wants to go.

Choppy seas and nosy crewmen wake the idol while the ship is at sea with no sight of land. Angry, confused, and afraid, the idol wants to go home and immediately uses its powers to call for help. The reach of its magic is vast and its allies plentiful. It summons animal servants from its faraway home onto the ship. Their task is to protect the idol, free it, and take it home. It will let no one stand in its way.

Crew (12)

2nd-Level Male Human Commoners

CR 1; SZ M (humanoid); HD 2d4; hp 6; Init +1 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 11 (+1 Dex); Atk +2 melee (1d4+1, dagger or 1d6+1, club); Face 5 ft. X 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; AL N; SV Fort +2, Ref +1, Will +0; Str 12, Dex 13, Con 11, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 8

Skills: Climb +4, Profession (sailor) +4, Swim +5, Use Rope +5

Feats: Endurance, Great Fortitude

Note: the Captain, Jurno, has the Skill Focus Feat in place of Endurance. His Profession (sailor) skill is +6 in total.

The Ship and Its Crew

The crew is too poor to paint the ship, so its name appears nowhere on her hull or sails. They call her the *Deea* and joke that it's the name of the captain's mother. Her hull is a deep red-brown and rides low in the water.

The crew are a simple folk but dedicated to their trade. A love of the sea fuels their lifestyles and their greed. They are law-abiding for the most part, above piracy, but occasionally sink to the depths of quiet thievery when times get hard. Like many sailors, they're a superstitious lot.

The *Deea* is a once-sturdy ship that is rapidly aging into a loose-planked hazard. In places, her decks offer up handfuls of painful splinters. The nails that hold hammocks are apt to slip out of the wet, tired posts. Pools of salt water collect not just in the lowest portions of the ship, but sometimes run in watery ribbons between planks and squirt from the walls below decks.

In places where the ship receives regular upkeep, planks are regular wood, with a Hardness of 5 and 42 hit points, Break DC 28. In various battered or over-worked areas, where the ship's planks are water-logged and weak, ignore the Hardness score and make the Break DC 20. Deem any areas weak that you feel should be, or flip a coin any time the question of weak planks arises.

The ship is something of an exotic locale itself. Strange wooden crates are stacked haphazardly throughout the hold. Some are empty, some bristle with packing hay, and all suggest unusual cargo from strange ports. Much of the ship smells like curry, from the crew's spicy diet. Both the men and the ship are decorated with complex knotted ropes and strings of worthless beads.

Use these details to distract your players and direct their interest at the ship. Try to present this as the start of a breezy sea voyage. Let them think the passage is going to pass idly by.

The First Attack

One humid night, as the ship rises and falls on the sea and nothing can be seen off the sides but night skies and black waters, a crewman cries out below decks. His panic lasts only a bit, then abruptly quiets. For a moment the whole crew stands tense and terrified. It is most likely that the characters will spring into action first.

Below deck, just off the main hold, is the corpse of a crewman named Fen. The body is easy to find, slumped in a smear of blood. He has been mauled.

Characters succeeding at a Heal check (DC 12) confirm that Fen was in fact mauled, and that this damage killed him. Characters succeeding at a Wilderness Lore check (DC 15) identify some features of Fen's attacker: a large mouth, one-inch teeth, and strong forepaws. Another Wilderness Lore check (DC 22) reveals the animal's trail through the puddles and planks of the deck. Simple Listen checks (DC 12) reveal only that the creature is headed aft into the hold.

On these turbulent seas, the sleeping idol has awakened. Trapped in a dark crate rocking back and forth in the hold, it has summoned a lion from some distant savannah to search the area and, if possible, free it. Upon arrival the lion found Fen poking about the cargo hold with a candle in one hand. The lion slew him and fled back to the hold to protect the idol.

Unfortunately, the lion is unable to free the idol. Unless the characters interfere, the idol will send it to scout the rest of the ship and slay any enemies. The lion is furious that its master has been imprisoned, and takes to the job with great fervor.

When the characters find the lion, it is prowling between crates in the hold. There are no lanterns lit in the hold, so the lion will attempt to move about in shadows and attack with surprise. Unless the characters have brought ample light with them, they may find the lion difficult to hunt in the dark belly of the ship. In the interests of the idol, it fights to the death.

The lion is not magical, so a *Speak with Animals* spell will affect it. The lion is sure the characters are involved in the idol's imprisonment. "My master must be free of this place," it declares. "Home, or I will kill you." That's about all it's willing to share.

Lion

CR 3; SZ L (animal); HD 5d8+10; hp 34; Init +3 (Dex); Spd 40 ft.; AC 15 (-1 size, +3 Dex, +3 natural); Atk melee +7 (1d4+5, 2 claws), melee +2 (1d8+2, bite); Face 5 ft. x 10 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SA pounce, improved grab, rake 1d4+2; SQ Scent; AL N; SV Fort +6, Ref +7, Will +2; Str 21, Dex 17, Con 15, Int 2, Wis 13, Cha 6

Skills: Balance +7, Hide +4, Jump +5, Listen +5, Move Silently +11, Spot +5

Pounce (Ex): By leaping onto its target during the first round of combat, the lion may make a full attack action regardless of its movement that round.

Improved Grab (Ex): When the lion hits with its bite attack it may attempt a grapple for free. This attempt draws no attack of opportunity and allows the lion to rake its opponent if successful.

Rake (Ex): Once the lion pounces or gains a hold it can make two rake attacks (+7 melee) with its hind legs. These do 1d4+2 damage each.

Scent (Ex): The lion can detect those within 30 feet by sense of smell. It can take a partial action to note the direction of the scent. If it moves within 5 feet of the source, the lion can pinpoint that source. The lion can also follow fresh tracks with a Wisdom check DC 10. Creatures tracking by scent ignore the effects of surface conditions and poor visibility.

Agents of the Idol

From this point on, the idol and the characters are the primary forces at work aboard the ship. As the characters attempt to figure out what's going on, so too does the idol. It brings animals to the ship to act as its eyes and ears (and teeth). The idol and the characters could easily settle their problems if they work together, but communication through animal go-betweens makes such progress rather difficult.

If the characters were particularly kind to the lion in some way, the idol may send another animal to face rangers, druids, or other nature-aligned folk. It especially favors any characters who possess *Speak with Animals* spells.

THE IDOL

Animals who communicate with the characters have very little frame of reference, so they can't say exactly where they want to go or where they're from. They likewise don't understand why they're on the ship in the first place. Note that even if the characters make a breakthrough in communication with the idol through its agents, the idol doesn't know which crate it's in. What's worse, the sailors may not be cooperative. They are extremely wary of any character who claims to be acting on the word of the lion that killed Fen, for example.

The Idol's Plan

The idol knows of things like boats, but is unfamiliar with any lands outside its own. It needs more information about its surroundings and its situation. So it summons scouts.

The idol has a variety of animals available for summoning, but does not summon them randomly. It knows that the giant wasps are good for scouting out the ship and that crocodiles keep men away. What precisely the idol summons is up to you, but should be based on the actions of the PCs and the crew.

If no one's careful, the whole encounter can dissolve into an ongoing, messy combat. The idol doesn't want that any more than the crew or the characters do. Its animals won't attack unarmed messengers, for example. It should be a creepy experience, nonetheless, wandering amongst the wild animals on board.

More than anything, the idol wants to return home. If possible, it would prefer to express its displeasure at the crew before it leaves, but it's not truly a murderous entity. It just associates with a ferocious kind of crowd. Having the crew of the ship devoured by jungle animals won't solve the idol's problem anyway. It needs someone to open the crate or turn the ship around and take it home. If it can even just manage to get into the sea, its chain of loyal followers can carry the idol home underwater.

BOARS

The idol summons up to five boars if it becomes necessary to do battle with the crew or the characters. They're territorial, lazy, and not interested in pursuing fleeing enemies. Instead, they form a guard around the ship's hold to keep people away.

Boars (2-5)

CR 2; SZ M (animal); HD 3d8+9; hp 20 each; Init +0; Spd 40 ft.; AC 16 (+6 natural); Atk melee +4 (1d8+3, gore); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SA ferocity; SQ scent; AL N; SV Fort +6, Ref +3, Will +2; Str 15, Dex 10, Con 17, Int 2, Wis 13, Cha 4

Skills: Listen +7, Spot +5

Ferocity (Ex): Boars are stubborn, tough opponents. They may continue to fight normally even between 0 and -9 hit points.

Scent (Ex): The boars can detect those within 30 feet by sense of smell. They can take a partial action to note the direction of the scent. If they move within 5 feet of the source, the boars can pinpoint that source. The boars can also follow fresh tracks with a Wisdom check DC 10. Creatures tracking by scent ignore the effects of surface conditions and poor visibility.

Giant Crocodile

CR 4; SZ H (animal); HD 7d8+28; hp 59; Init +1 (Dex); Spd 20 ft., swim 30 ft.; AC 16 (-2 size, +1 Dex, +7 natural); Atk melee +11 (2d8+12, bite); melee +11 (1d12+12, tail slap); Face 10 ft. x 20 ft.; Reach 10 ft.; SA improved grab; AL N; SV Fort +9, Ref +6, Will +3; Str 27, Dex 12, Con 19, Int 1, Wis 12, Cha 2

Skills: Listen +5, Spot +5

Improved Grab (Ex): When it bites a Medium-sized or smaller foe, the crocodile can attempt to get a hold. Every round it maintains the pin it deals bite damage again.

Giant Wasps (3)

CR 2; SZ L (vermin); HD 5d8+10, hp 30; Init +1 (Dex); Spd 20 ft., fly 60 ft. (good); AC 14 (-1 Size, +1 Dex, +4 natural); Atk melee +6 (1d3+6 and poison, sting); Face 5 ft. x 10 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SA poison; SQ vermin; AL N; SV Fort +6, Ref +2, Will +2; Str 18, Dex 12, Con 14, Int —, Wis 13, Cha 11

Skills: Intuit Direction +7, Spot +9

Vermin: Immune to mind-influencing effects.

Poison (Ex): A giant wasp's poison has a Fortitude save DC of 18, and damage of 1d6 Dex.

GIANT CROCODILE

Used primarily for intimidation, a giant crocodile summoned by the idol is happy to roam the ship. It is, however, limited to whatever deck it is summoned to until it manages a way up or down the ship stairs.

GIANT WASPS

A squad of three giant wasps serves as the idol's scouts. They will move swiftly out of the hold and throughout the ship, memorizing everything for the idol. While happy to pester the crew, the wasps are not interested in combat. They can be baited with food, though.

Journey of the Idol

How the idol came to be aboard is complicated. Any crewman aboard the ship could relate part of the story. Other parts of the tale are known to the idol, but only through vague memories.

What the idol knows can be learned through its servants. It fell asleep in its jungle temple sometime after all the people left. It was awakened by a woman making magic sounds. For a long while it was scratched with steel and prodded with wizardry, until it finally managed the strength to summon one of its greatest friends to free it. The idol was plunged into darkness until it awoke again, aboard the ship.

The crew remembers the woman who shipped the crate as a bookish old sort. They thought her wealthy by her precious jewelry. They put the crate on board and hauled it off to their next port, where they took on the PCs. When no one came to pick up the crate, they kept it. They thought it might be valuable, so Captain Jurno sent Fen down to find out what was in there. Then a lion ate him.



The Idol's Prison

The crew doesn't make the connection between the woman and the animals on their own. They blame cursed seas before they think to blame their cargo. The player characters will have to investigate.

If the player characters can get a lead from one of the animals, then they'll have reason to search the hold for the crate containing the idol. A successful Search check (DC 15) turns up a crate painted with instructions to be delivered to the port the ship just sailed from. The crate is of a visibly different style than much of the cargo, so any leads from the crew or the animals can grant up to a +4 circumstance bonus to this check. The easiest means of locating the idol is probably by using a *detect magic* spell.

The crate that the idol resides in is a wooden cube, 4 feet by 4 feet by 4 feet, constructed of sturdy wood. It has a Hardness of 5, and 7 hp. A Strength check (DC 20) is required to open it up by hand. A crowbar or other form of leverage affords a +5 bonus to this check.

When they finally make the connection between the idol and the animals, the crew can easily be persuaded to share what they know about the box in the hold with the player characters. They also begin whispering among themselves. A new confidence begins to sweep through them, brought on by greed.

NEW ARTIFACT:

Idol of the Jungle Temples

The history and powers of the idol are unknown to most living humans. Information might be revealed to PCs by servants of the idol, or gleaned through research. A Bardic Knowledge check (DC 15) reveals the most superficial details: rumors of its distant origin and the immense jungle temples where artifacts of its sort dwelt. A *legend lore* spell reveals as much information as a carefully-worded question should allow, in the GM's opinion.

A handful of lovingly-detailed stone idols like this one were crafted by a long-forgotten ancient people. The idols depict figures composed of animal features in a roughly humanoid shape, seated in a contemplative pose. Each idol is unique.

The idol aboard the *Deea* shows an elephant-headed man with a lion's mane and a round belly. He is dressed in a kilt of fish scales, parted to show his enormous crocodile tail, tipped with a wasp's stinger. Course fur runs along his back and arms, and his hands end in powerful, pudgy fingers. The base of the idol is decorated with a pattern of animal shapes. Some vanished language is carved within those patterns, leading to clearer inscriptions along the idol's edges. The whole work stands over two feet high.

Each idol is an entity, housed within the sculpture as an intersection of men and beasts. In its day, the idol would draw all variety of jungle life to the temples to

commune, mingle, and learn from each other. There were once a handful of these idols, each residing in a separate temple, serving as guardians, diplomats, and guides. Through this union of civilized and feral folk, a great culture arose in the jungle. What happened to its people is unknown, even to the idol.

The idol's powers are designed for use within the temple, but it is capable of using its magic anywhere. Traditionally, the idol would be activated with offerings or requests, but there is a means of forcing activation. The carvings on the idol are spells, inscribed like permanent scrolls. These spells can be cast by anyone who is in contact with the idol and capable of casting from a scroll. All normal scroll spellcasting rules apply. The spells available on this idol are: *animal friendship*, *awaken* (animals only), *charm animal*, *dominate animal*, *speak with animals*, and the idol's special summoning spell, *idol's ally* (see insert for more on this new spell). Each spell has a caster level of 12 and was inscribed as a divine spell.

Individual idols also have distinct spell lists, with varying caster levels. There may be plant idols, or idols focusing on *cat's grace*, *bull's strength*, and similar spells, at the GM's option. Idols may have any combination of arcane or divine spells inscribed on them.

Caster Level: 18th, *Weight:* 200 lbs.

Tug of War

Once the crew has a notion of what the idol is, they start scheming. They are happy to seal off the hold and carry the idol to the next port to sell to the highest bidder. By their reckoning, it is unclaimed cargo, it is in their hold, they own it. No amount of talk will change their minds. This is their big break, and if the characters don't like it they can feel free to leave the ship. There are too many crewmen to easily persuade magically, and if the characters kill them they will find themselves adrift at sea.

If the player characters help the crew they will get a cut of the money. There might be some trouble with the animals, sure, but the crew is confident that the brave, tough adventurers on board can handle it. Boars and wasps can just be locked up below decks.

When it comes down to this, give the characters their chance to make a decision. Will they risk their lives for possible riches or will they befriend an ancient spirit and grant it freedom? This question is the real core of their encounter with the idol. It could draw lines between characters of different moral codes and spark some tense roleplaying. Don't rush them, but don't let the scene fizzle out either.

Elephant

CR 8; SZ H (animal); HD 11d8+55; hp 110; Init +0; Spd 40 ft.; AC 15 (-2 size, +7 natural); Atk melee +16 (2d6+10, slam); melee +11 (2d5+5, 2 stamps); melee +16 (2d8+15, gore); Face 10 ft. x 20 ft.; Reach 10 ft.; SA trample; SQ Scent; AL N; SV Fort +12, Ref +7, Will +4; Str 30, Dex 10, Con 21, Int 2, Wis 13, Cha 7

Skills: Listen +6, Spot +6

Trample (Ex): Medium-sized characters trampled by the elephant suffer gore damage. Opponents may either make an attack of opportunity (if available) or attempt a Reflex save (DC 20) for half damage.

Scent (Ex): The elephant can detect those within 30 feet by sense of smell. It can take a partial action to note the direction of the scent. If it moves within 5 feet of the source, the elephant can pinpoint that source. The elephant can also follow fresh tracks with a Wisdom check DC 10. Creatures tracking by scent ignore the effects of surface conditions and poor visibility.

NEW SPELL:

Idol's Ally

Transmutation

Level: Drd 7, Rgr 8

Components: V, F

Casting Time: 1 full round

Range: 50 ft.

Effect: One or more transported animals

Duration: Instantaneous

Saving Throw: Will negates

Spell Resistance: No

This spell transports mundane animals from their natural habitat to the location of the magical idol that is the spell's focus; the spell only functions when inscribed on the idol. Animals arrive within 50 feet of the idol and stay until sent back with another casting of the spell. The animal to be summoned is chosen at the time of each casting. Summoned animals are naturally loyal to the idol, though the use of other spells could change that.

Transported animals are not truly *summoned*, but *teleported*. They are real animals, brought across space by magic. If returned to their original location, they arrive in whatever condition they departed. Only animals may be transported with this spell.

The location of a particular animal must be known in order to summon it. Locations must be specified by the common or formal name of a small, distinct habitat. "Wat Smith's wheatfield" might be acceptable, but "the coast of Tir Iona" might not be. The final say is up to the GM. If no animals of the specified type are living within the stated bounds, the spell fails. A number of like animals may be summoned at once, provided their total Hit Dice do not exceed the spell's caster level.

Focus: A stone idol at least 1 foot high, into which the spell is carved.

When the PCs have had some time to choose sides, the idol provides the consequence to their actions. No matter what the players choose, the idol is desperate. It brings in the muscle to confront its enemies, or it brings in muscle to support the characters. Either way, it summons one of its greatest subjects ...

THE ELEPHANT

This is the idol's majestic and dangerous icon. It will arrive near the idol and make its way to any location on board by smashing out walls and floors. The elephant will work with anyone who has helped the idol. It is furious with anyone else.

THE IDOL

The elephant tries to scare characters into throwing the idol overboard. The crew panics once the elephant appears, though. It's up to the PCs. If they chose to help the idol, they've been granted a powerful ally. If they chose the crew, they've got a powerful enemy.

If the characters will not be persuaded, or cannot throw the idol overboard for whatever reason, the elephant proceeds to destroy the ship. Of course, it begins inadvertently trashing the ship as soon as it arrives to confront the crew. The idol is difficult to move, but the idol's allies will help if they can. Once someone agrees to take the idol home or throws it overboard, the elephant settles down.

Once the elephant has done 42 points of damage to the ship (see ship stats under The Ship and Its Crew), or succeeded at smashing the hull (Break DC 28), the *Deea* begins to take on water. How long it takes the ship to sink is up to you. If the encounter has come down to this, take advantage of your dramatic license. If you want the PCs' success to depend totally on their actions, start the countdown at 20 rounds when the elephant breaks the hull. If they appease it in time, the crew can keep the ship from sinking.

If the ship is sinking, the crew will deploy their rowboat. It can hold up to 14 persons safely. They'll save PCs if they can, but they don't go out of their way. They're not murderers, remember. They're just terrified.

If the idol goes into the sea, it vanishes. First it becomes a dark, sinking spot beneath the waves. Then that dark spot is carried off by an enormous, tentacled shadow.

What Comes Next?

If the ship is saved and the idol set free, the characters might manage some reward from the crew for saving them from their greed. Once the elephant arrives, the crew considers themselves indebted to the characters if they or their ship survive. They offer free passage whenever it suits the characters.

Characters who aid the idol and are thought drowned might turn up alive in some nearby port, washed ashore. Allies of the idol might encounter friendly animals in future adventures that also serve it. Such animals might even seek the characters out. The PCs could even stumble on the idol again one day, in the right hands or the wrong hands.

If the characters somehow manage to keep the idol, they have an angry treasure on their hands. Or, they could embark on a journey to take it home, and earn its favor. As long as they have the idol, danger, adventure, and animals will surround them.

This encounter does not take sides regarding the idol. Animals defeated and animals befriended should both be worth experience points. Experience points for the elephant should be awarded if it is defeated or the idol is set free.



Just a Bit of Fun

BY JOHN SEAVEY • ILLUSTRATED BY STEVEN SANDERS

Encounter Level: 3

Setting: Countryside or forest

Summary: A mischievous pixie snatches one of the group's prized possessions, and leads them on a wild goose chase to get it back.

Background

This adventure is designed for low-level characters, but there's no reason why it can't be run for characters of higher levels, as the events presented are more of a nuisance than a genuine threat. It can be run with characters of any alignment, but characters with a good sense of humor and a relaxed attitude towards practical jokes will be more likely to be rewarded at the end.

Ru`etha is a forest pixie who enjoys playing tricks on travelers, and has been doing so for quite some time (she's very long-lived). Her favorite trick is to steal small items from groups, and then lead them on a little chase for the item. She is not evil, just mischievous, and always has every intention of returning the item she steals. Of course, it's not her fault if people give up before she's done with the game, is it?

When selecting an item to be the bait for the chase, she keeps the following criteria in mind (and so, as the GM, should you). First, the item should be small. Ru`etha is only about a foot tall, and doesn't want to carry anything big and bulky. Rings, gems, and bracelets are perfect for this, but if she has to, she'll take things as large as a scroll or a wand. Second, it should be something valuable enough for the PCs to want to continue the pursuit. This usually means magical items, which Ru`etha has a taste for in any event, but if the party has none that she considers valuable, she'll snatch something else, like a signet ring or gemstone. (If the players wonder why Ru`etha seems to have such a detailed knowledge of what items they have, she'll freely vol-

unteer the fact that she's been following them for a while, listening to their conversations and watching to see what items they cherish most). Thirdly, if there are any items that would give the PCs a major advantage in catching Ru`etha, she'll nab that one. She's no dummy.

The forest she inhabits can be any forest from your existing campaign; after all, you don't need to worry about whether your PCs have heard of Ru`etha or not. Many stories about mischievous fey exist, and you can presume your party has already heard them no matter which forest they head into. However, if you already have a forest that's considered to be "enchanted," Ru`etha will fit perfectly into that setting. Also, circulating a few extra rumors about haunted forests or tricky fairies in the inns on the edge of the forest will help to set things up, if you want to do so.

First Event: Discovering the Theft

The best moment for beginning this adventure is in the morning, after the party has finished a night's encampment in the forest. Unless they've set some sort of magical ward to alert them to intruders, Ru`etha will have stolen the item already, but she won't immediately alert them to this fact. Instead, she'll let the party get prepared to go, waiting in the branches of a nearby tree for them to discover the loss of the precious item.

In order to see if the characters notice the loss of the item, roll a Spot check for each character. The DC of the check is 5 for the character whose item it is, and 10 for all other characters in the group. Success means that they immediately notice that the item is missing. Noticing Ru`etha herself, before she wants to be found, has a DC of 30.

JUST A BIT OF FUN

As soon as the PCs notice that the item is missing, or if they seem like they're about to leave, Ru`etha will draw attention to herself with a series of catcalls, waves, and high-pitched giggles. She'll wave the item over her head, and say, "Looking for this?"

At this point, role-playing the situation depends on the PCs. If they attempt to cajole Ru`etha into giving up the item, or negotiate, she'll tell them that they have to catch her first, and zip down from the tree to begin the chase. Threats and anger will usually be met with a loud raspberry and more giggles, and then a similar flight.

You can draw out the initial encounter as long as you want ... depending on how diplomatic and kind

the characters are, Ru`etha might pretend to let herself be persuaded to return the item immediately. (If the players flatter her in any way, she'll definitely draw out the negotiations.) However, no matter what they say, she'll eventually begin the chase. It's the reason she's doing all this.

If the players do set up some sort of magical ward to alert them to the theft of the item, then you'll need to start the adventure in the middle of the night; the alarm, whatever form it takes, will go off, and the PCs will find themselves chasing Ru`etha in the dark. (She won't mind one bit; in fact, she'll make herself glow in order to give the PCs a little help in finding her. It won't help them stumble through treacherous terrain in the dark, but that's what they get for being so paranoid.)

Ru`etha, Clever Pixie

CR 4; SZ S (fey); HD 3d6; hp 9; Init +4 (Dex); Spd 20 ft., fly 60 ft (good); AC 16 (+1 size, +4 Dex, +1 natural); SA SR 16; Atk melee +5 (1d4-2/crit 19-20 x2, dagger), or ranged +6 (1d6 or special [see below]/crit x3, composite shortbow); Face: 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SA natural invisibility, special arrows, spell-like abilities, SR 16; AL NG; SV Fort +0, Ref +6, Will +4; Str 7, Dex 18, Con 11, Int 16, Wis 15, Cha 18

Skills: Bluff +7, Concentration +4, Craft (bowmaking) +7, Escape Artist +8, Heal +6, Hide +12, Listen +8, Move Silently +8, Ride +8, Search +9, Sense Motive +6, Spot +8

Feats: Dodge, Point Blank Shot, Rapid Shot, Weapon Finesse (dagger), Weapon Focus (shortbow)

Ru`etha is always giggling; everything, it seems, strikes her as funny. Try to cultivate a distinctive giggle when you play her ... it should be cute, not annoying, but the things she's laughing at probably won't strike the characters as funny anyway. Behind the cute giggles, she's deceptively smart and centered. If at any point the situation turns serious, and the PCs are in danger of getting hurt, she'll assist them with a surprising amount of competence. To this end, she carries a reduced *wand of levitation* with her at all times, to stop people from injuring themselves in a fall.

Natural Invisibility (Su): Ru`etha can become invisible at will, and remain so even when attacking. This ability is constant, but she can suppress or resume it as a free action.

Spell Resistance (Ex): To determine if a spell or spell-like ability works against the pixie, the spellcaster makes a level check (1d20 + caster level). If the result equals or exceeds 16, the spell works normally, though the target still gets a saving throw.

Special Arrows (Ex): Ru`etha's arrows deal no damage, but she can use them to erase memory or to put a creature to sleep.

Memory Loss: An opponent struck by the arrow must succeed at a Fortitude save (DC 15), or lose all memory. The subject retains skills, languages, and class abilities but forgets everything else until he or she receives a *heal* spell or memory restoration with *limited wish*, *wish*, or *miracle*.

Sleep: Any opponent struck by this arrow, regardless of Hit Dice, must succeed at a Fortitude save (DC 15) or be affected as though by a *sleep* spell.

Spell-Like Abilities: 1/day — *confusion* (she must touch the target), *dancing lights*, *detect chaos*, *detect good*, *detect evil*, *detect law*, *detect thoughts*, *dispel magic*, *entangle*, *permanent image* (visual and auditory elements only), and *polymorph self*. These abilities are as the spells cast by an 8th-level sorcerer (save DC 13 + spell level).

Second Event: A Hive Of Activity

Ru`etha will fly ahead of the PCs for a time, always keeping in sight of them. If she's much faster than the PCs, she'll occasionally stop on a low-hanging branch, shouting encouragement and taunts back at the party; she probably will be faster than the party, too, because she's deliberately picked a path that leads through lots of brambles, bushes, and other entangling vegetation.

The vegetation slows down movement by one-third; in addition, for every five minutes of travel, all characters must make a Balance check (DC 10) or fall into the bushes and have to spend a round freeing themselves from whatever branch or root impeded their movement. This fall causes no damage, but Ru`etha will find it immensely amusing, and a source of much discussion.

The flight can last as long as you, the GM, want it to, but it will eventually end at a large, gnarled oak tree. Ru`etha will zip up the tree, landing on a branch and teasing the PCs to come up after her. When they do, she will continue to go upwards, one branch at a time, always matching the PC's rate of ascent. As they climb, the branches will grow more numerous; this will make climbing easier, but it will make vision more difficult as the greenery gets obtrusive. Ru`etha will stay in sight, though, eventually allowing the PCs to get closer and closer. Finally, she'll halt just out of arm's reach, and mention casually to the PCs how good they are at climbing up trees fast. She'll then wonder, out loud, at how good they are at getting down trees fast ...

Climbing up the tree is DC 10, while trying to drop down from the tree without being hurt is DC 20. (This involves slowing your fall by catching and letting go of branches very quickly). For every five points they fail the dropping check by, the PCs take 1 point of damage — presumably, they missed a branch and let themselves fall a bit too fast.

At this point, the PCs will probably expect a push or shove, and hopefully, one of them will give you a straight line about wanting to know why they'll need to get down the tree in a hurry. Whether they do or not, Ru`etha will say, "Because the bees are great at it!" and pull aside a cluster of leaves to reveal a big beehive. (That's big, not giant). She'll then give the

branches a good shake, causing dozens of highly aggressive bees to swarm out of the hive, and then she'll zip past the PCs, right back down the tree.

At that point, the chase becomes three-fold; Ru`etha will take the lead, shouting to the PCs in a mock-helpful manner that she knows how to get rid of the bees, and that they should just follow her; the PCs, whether pursuing her or running from the bees, will be just behind; and the bees, of course, will be taking up the rear.

The bees have a speed of 25 feet, but you can assume that they are moving at the equivalent of a full-out run, if need be, to keep up with the party. (They won't bother Ru`etha ... generations of bees have learned that tangling with the pixie is a bad idea.) The PCs won't have any trouble crushing individual bees; don't make them bother rolling to hit or rolling for damage if they actually try. Just tell them they got a bunch, and point out the fact that there are plenty more to take their place. PCs who slow up and get caught in the swarm take 1 point of damage per round from stings, regardless of Armor Class, as per the 5th-level spell *insect plague* (although creatures are not forced to flee). Invisibility does not help avoid stings. Spellcasting while actually within the swarm is impossible; however, once ahead of the bees, mages can try to stop the bees through spells like *wall of force*, *repel vermin*, or anything their imagination desires. Any spell that endangers the forest, however, will tick off Ru`etha, reducing the party's chances for a reward at the end. (See Event Four: Just Rewards, below.)

You can draw out the bees' chase as long as you wish, but it'll eventually end when the party reaches the river.

Third Event: The River Mild

After a period of being chased by the bees, the party will finally come to a small river about 12 feet across with chest-deep water; Ru`etha will hover about mid-way out, and beckon the PCs to jump in. When they do, the bees will cease pursuit; however, this isn't necessarily the end of their problems. The water, although not very deep, is very fast-moving, and there's a waterfall about 100 feet downstream (which should be obvious from the rushing sounds, and from the fact that the river seems to end abruptly right about there).

JUST A BIT OF FUN



Ru`etha will fly across to the other bank, shouting encouragement to the players in their efforts to cross. As soon as they get to the other bank, she'll wink, grin, and zip off again.

Even though the water is shallow enough to walk in, the current makes it difficult to keep one's footing; the PCs will have to make a total of three Balance checks, one for every four feet of distance, in order to cross safely. The first and last checks have a DC of 10; the middle check has a DC of 15 to reflect the fact that the water is slightly deeper and faster mid-stream. Failure means that the character loses his balance and is dragged 10 feet downstream, at which point he can attempt another check to regain his footing; this check is at +5 to the DC of the check the player originally failed (DC 15 or 20, in other words).

Other PCs can try to grab the off-balance character; this requires making an attack against an AC equal to

the DC of the Balance check the character failed (DC 10 or 15). If the attack succeeds, the PC has successfully grabbed the character before he is dragged downstream; the PC must then make a Balance check of his own at DC 20 to keep his footing under the added weight. Failure to make this Balance check means both party members are off-balance and dragged downstream.

Ideally, this will be played for a lot of tension; if one party member gets dragged downstream, make sure to play up the nearness of the waterfall, the pounding of the rushing waters, the pull of the current, etc. However, damage for going over the waterfall isn't given, because if worst comes to worst, Ru`etha will keep people from falling or drowning. She doesn't want anyone getting hurt. She will not, however, jump in until the character is about to go over the falls, and she'll give no sign of wanting to, either. The PCs should think that they're in danger.

Fourth Event: Just Rewards

The terrain on the other side of the river is substantially easier to move through, and the characters should have no problems pursuing Ru`etha towards the cavern she's heading to. She waits for them to arrive before entering, and makes herself glow (if she hasn't already, see "Event One: Discovering the Theft" above) so that she's easy to follow.

It's a good thing she does; the cavern has a tunnel system within it, and she flies down a number of twists and turns. Occasionally, there are some rather ... sharp ... slopes in the cavern, and characters who are moving fast (which, presumably, everyone is) might have problems keeping their footing.

Treat this as an uneven floor for purposes of making Balance checks (this adds +5 to the DC of any Balance checks they have to make). You can also treat areas as having angled surfaces as well, according to your preferences as a GM.

Eventually the tunnel dead-ends, which is Ru`etha's cue to end the chase. She'll be very happy, at least at first, and cheer the players on for a good effort (unless they've endangered the forest somehow), and she'll immediately return the magic item to them. If the players attempt violence or act extremely outraged, she'll be perplexed at first ... after all, it was all just in fun, right? If they really get upset, she'll fly into a crack in the wall and sulk for a moment or two, complaining to the party about how they're no fun, and then make her way through the crack to where it rejoins another tunnel. The party won't see any more of her, and will have to find their own way out of the caverns.

If, on the other hand, the party reacts with grace and good humor, she'll be even happier, probably giving them a peck on the cheek for good measure. She'll ask them to wait there a moment, and she'll fly off. When she returns a moment later, she'll have an armful of minor magical items (one for each member of the party, unless one particular member was rude to her — if that happens, she'll waggle her finger in that person's face, telling them, "And none for you!") Feel free to roll on any of the minor magical items tables, but keep size in mind — even if there are minor wands, she's probably not going to want to carry them. Rings and potions are the most likely items. She'll then escort the party back out of the cavern, and to their original campsite by a far less circuitous route, taking

only a few minutes to get them to their belongings.

If the PCs did anything to endanger the forest in the course of the chase, such as casting flame spells, she'll lecture them loudly on all the cute little animals they could have hurt, and she won't give them any items at all. She'll escort them back to their belongings with bad grace, and suggest that they get out of her forest at the earliest possible opportunity.

Give the PCs 100 XP if they persisted with the chase all the way to the end and recovered the item, with an extra 50 XP bonus if they treated Ru`etha well and got another item out of the deal.

Wrap-Up

There are two problems that can arise in this encounter; the first is that the PCs give up too early, and the second is that they manage to come up with something clever to catch Ru`etha before the end.

In the first case, it helps a lot to be able to judge the mood of the party. If they seem to be getting too angry or disillusioned about the chase, cut down on Ru`etha's taunts, and even have her give encouragement (don't forget, she wants the chase to continue). If the characters seem to be failing a lot of their checks, adjust the difficulties downwards so as to keep them from getting discouraged (but not so much that they become too easy). And, in the end, if they do give up, let them. After all, it's their item they're losing ...

The second problem is much easier to solve — after all, Ru`etha always intended to let herself be caught. Just skip straight to the "Just Rewards" section, and have her hidden "treasure chest" be closer. Above all, though, don't stifle your players' attempts to be creative about getting the item back just because the book says the chase ends in the cavern. Ru`etha might be a little disappointed that the chase ended early, but she'll be impressed by clever players.

Depending on how the players handled the pixie, there might be potential for future adventures. If they were polite, they've gained an ally who knows the forest like the back of her hand ... something that might be handy if they pass through here again. (Ru`etha remembers people who were good sports.) If, on the other hand, they were rude and violent — or worse, if they endangered the forest and its inhabitants — well, let's just say they'll have even worse problems if they pass through again. (Ru`etha also remembers people who were bad sports.)

A River Runs Through It

BY MATT SPRNGELER • ILLUSTRATED BY MIKE DUTTON

Encounter Level: 5

Setting: A bridge across a river, ideally within a few days' travel of a town.

Summary: Religious fanatics and a pack of mischievous pixies block the party's progress across a swollen river, demanding that they submit to an embarrassing ritual before crossing the only bridge.

The shaven-headed fanatics crowded around the foot of the stone bridge, their clothing spattered with mud from sleeping outdoors. Beyond them, the bridge arched over the river, swollen and wild from the recent rains. Crossing wouldn't be easy ...

Take Me to the River

This encounter adds an interpersonal element to wilderness travel, and gives players an obstacle that they can't just fight through or sneak past. Diplomacy and a sense of humor will carry the day here. It works best with parties who would find a wide river swollen by recent rains to be an obstacle, and who won't be able to easily see invisible creatures.

If players are coming from a nearby town, any Gather Information roll performed there that succeeds against DC 10 lets them know that "a buncha kooks" headed for the river two nights ago. A DC 15 indicates that "they were on some kinda pilgrimage or something. That woman was one heck of a preacher. Some cleric went to talk 'em out of it, though." When the characters reach the river they find that the water is almost impossible to cross (Swim checks with a DC of 20 every round), but fortunately there's a stone bridge.

Unfortunately, a large crowd of people is between players and the bridge, and they have no intention of letting the party pass. The crowd at the bridge pays no mind to the party at first, as they're riveted

by the fiery oration of a half-elven woman in their midst. She exhorts them to stand firm, to stay true to their beliefs, and to show the path of righteousness to the unbelieving. She's a charismatic speaker, and the crowd nods their freshly shaved heads at everything she says. Most of them look like common townsfolk, but they're grubby as if they've been sleeping outside and all of them are barefoot. They've crowded right up to the foot of the bridge, as the woman is preaching from its span, and the party won't be able to pass them. A motley collection of tents and bedrolls implies that these people are sleeping here, and have been for a few days.

Any attempt to move through the crowd, rifle the belongings of these people, or to talk over the woman will draw immediate attention. The crowd isn't happy at having its concentration disturbed, and the woman plainly resents the interruption. Without preamble, she demands to know who the party is and what they intend by approaching "this sacred, sacred water." No answer seems to satisfy her; she has the air of a woman accustomed to getting her way.

Black Magic Woman

"And now that you have cast your odious footwear into the sacred river," thundered the half-elven woman on the bridge as her armored bodyguard scowled, "you must further purify yourselves by allowing your heads and faces to be shorn!" The party looked at the approaching razor-wielding zealots, unsure whether to laugh it off or defend themselves. One thing was certain — old-time religion wasn't all it was cracked up to be.

Her name is Shoshanna, and she's a low-level sorcerer whose power manifests most strongly in enchantments. A few nights ago, she was overcome with a vision of nature spirits manifesting in this river, and her oratory convinced several of her fel-

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low townsfolk to join her. They've been out here for the last several days, worshiping and praying, and Shoshanna has them all believing that their task is to protect the holy river from being profaned by having impure people pass over or through it. To this end, she'll confront the party and demand that either they turn back or they consent to a "purification," as described later.

If possible, Shoshanna uses her special "prayer of conversion" (her *charm person* spell) to "convince" one or two party members of the rightness of her cause.

To complicate matters, a playful bunch of pixies is also at the bridge. These mischievous woodland sprites were drawn by the intensity of Shoshanna's oratory, and have decided to turn their power toward making events more interesting. They have been hovering invisibly around Shoshanna, whispering new taboos that must be obeyed. While not evil, the pixies are having a lot of fun, and won't let the party pass until they've played through this little game.

Players can attempt to get past the crowd with the customary methods, but it won't be easy. Fighting is messy and uncertain, especially as the crowd outnumbers the party five to one and a handful of them are trained in combat (including Shoshanna's charmed cleric bodyguard, described below). Indiscriminate slaughter of innocents can

also have repercussions at the GM's discretion. Sneaking past the group is nearly impossible, as they keep a well-lit nightly vigil. The zealots also have the assistance of the pixie band in either case, which has no desire to see their entertainment spoiled by a group of hairy-headed shoe-wearing louts without a sense of humor.

Assume that crowd members automatically make any needed Spot and Listen checks, and that nothing the players do can catch them flat-footed, thanks to the pixies' whispered guidance. Moreover, anyone who does manage to get onto the bridge without being "purified" is hampered by the pixies' power, as described below.

Only two things can get the party over the bridge without waiting another fortnight, when the enthusiastic crowd finally becomes disillusioned and disperses.

One is to talk their way past the mob; a series of well-reasoned theological points demonstrating the wrongness of Shoshanna's arguments and the true intention of the gods might do it, but it requires several successful checks of Diplomacy, Knowledge (religion), and Knowledge (nature) against a DC of 20.

This first option is only recommended for parties with several clerics and druids, or with players who really enjoy discussing religion; pixies don't normally hang around for this kind of arcane debate. The best choice is to submit to the purification.

Shoshanna, Fanatical Preacher

4th-Level Half-elf Sorcerer

CR 4; SZ M (humanoid); HD 4d4; hp 13; Init +2 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 14 (Dex +2, bracers +2); Atk melee -1 (1d4-1, dagger); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SA spells; AL CN; SV Fort +1, Ref +3, Will +5; Str 7, Dex 14, Con 10, Int 11, Wis 13, Cha 18

Skills: Concentration +5, Knowledge (arcana) +5, Alchemy +2, Scry +2

Feats: Dodge, Still Spell, Spell Focus (Enchantment)

Spells: (6/7/4)

0 Level — *abjure*, *arcane mark*, *daze*, *detect magic*, *disrupt undead*, *mage hand*

1st Level — *charm person*, *hypnotism*, *sleep*

2nd Level — *hypnotic pattern*

Shoshanna currently believes her power comes from the gods, and this lends vigor to her preaching. A few nights ago, powerful voices came in her dreams and commanded her to lead the faithful to this bridge so that they could worship the gods of nature. She used her spells to help convince her followers that she was correct, but has had enough time since then to regain them. To her, spellcasting is just a form of praying, and she will approach it as such. She honestly believes the whispers of the pixies, and even if their deception is uncovered, will use her compelling dreams to bolster her case. Shoshanna is a brash soul, prone to flights of fancy with rhetoric to match. She wears *bracers of defense* +2, and carries a *wand of sleep* and a *dagger* +1. She will attempt to charm one or two of the party early on, and might use *mage hand* to perform an impressive trick or two, but will otherwise not use magic unless a fight breaks out.

People are Strange When You're a Pixie

"Shhh! Shhh!" tittered Flitterbell the pixie to the rest of the group hovering along the river's far bank. "Rainfeather's about to stop them from crossing!" A pair of weary adventurers had managed to sneak onto the bridge, bypassing the zealots' guard, so the little sprites were taking a direct hand. Before the two travelers' wondering eyes, Rainfeather appeared in the form of a hulking figure in a cloak of leaves and a stag-antlered helm. "Go back and finish the purification, lest the wrath of nature fall upon ye!" Rainfeather intoned as her waiting cohorts nocked tiny arrows to their bows.

Being purified isn't painful or dangerous; the intent here isn't to threaten the party. But they shouldn't pass over the bridge without at least losing a little of their dignity. Shoshanna has a list of demands, arbitrary taboos that must be obeyed to cross without falling afoul of the pixies. As the zealots have obeyed these commands already, the pixies allow them to cross the bridge at will. She'll present two or three

strictures to the party right off the bat, but the pixies will quietly suggest more if the PCs agree to everything too easily or if characters are not showing proper reverence:

True Believers

1st-Level Commoners

CR 1/2; SZ M (humanoid); HD 1d4; hp 3; Init +0; Spd 30 ft.; AC 10; Atk melee +0 (1d6, club); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; AL various; SV Fort +0, Ref +0, Will +0; Str 11, Dex 11, Con 11, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 10

Skills: Craft (any one) +4, Listen +2, Spot +2

This is the band of zealous townsfolk that follow Shoshanna; they are just standard NPCs of the commoner class. GMs are encouraged to make one or two of them individuals that the party already knows. The group numbers five for every member of the party. One of each five has moderate combat training; each of these warriors has a score of 13 in Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution, and has leather armor and a shortspear that he can use without penalty. Their other relevant stats are as follows: HD 1d8+1; hp 6; Init +1; AC 13; Atk melee +1 (1d8+1, shortspear)

Andros, Bewitched Bodyguard

2nd-Level Human Cleric

CR 2; SZ M (humanoid); HD 2d8+4; hp 19; Init -1 (Dex); Spd 20 ft. (30 ft. base); AC 17 (-1 Dexterity, +7 armor, +2 shield); Atk melee +3 (1d8+2, heavy mace); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SA spells; AL N; SV Fort +5, Ref -1, Will +4; Str 14, Dex 8, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 9

Skills: Concentrate +5, Heal +5, Knowledge (religion) +5

Feats: Power Attack, Scribe Scroll

Spells: (4/3+1)

0 Level — *detect magic, guidance, resistance, virtue*

1st Level — *bless, divine favor, endure elements (domain), magic weapon*

Andros is a cleric with Strength and Sun as his domains. Not the most able cleric around, he was "converted" by Shoshanna just a few hours ago while he tried to persuade the zealots to see the error of their ways. Andros is used to bull-rushing problems, and if released from the spell, he's likely to leave in a huff and then sulk in the nearest tavern for a couple of days. He wears half-plate armor, and carries a large steel shield and a heavy mace. He also has a scroll with *divine favor* and another with *cure light wounds*. He'll stand near Shoshanna and keep others away from her, but won't say much beyond agreeing with her and parroting her points. While charmed, he sees himself as her divinely-appointed bodyguard and will do whatever is necessary to protect her.

EN ROUTE

- All the hair on the party members' heads and faces must be shaved. The zealots have done this to themselves, as well.
- All footwear must be cast into the river. This includes any worn on the feet and any carried otherwise. Footwear is swept away by the river and will probably never be seen again. The zealots have done this themselves, and several have bleeding soles to prove it.

Sadistic GMs can require barefoot characters to make a Reflex save (DC 10) for every hour of barefoot wilderness travel, or suffer -1 to their Dexterity modifier due to bruised and painful feet. This penalty is cumulative for multiple failed rolls. They'll regain this at +2 points for every eight hours they stay off their feet.

- Each member of the party must compose and perform an original song celebrating the majesty of the river spirits.
- Anything wooden in the party's possession must be left behind. This includes shields and weapon hafts as well as items like torches. They will allow paper items to cross, including spellbooks.

However, the zealots make no exception for wooden magical items, including those affected by the *ironwood* spell.

- To become true children of the river, the party must drink deep of its waters.

In game terms, each PC must drink so much that he has to make a Fortitude save against DC 15 or suffer mild water poisoning for the rest of the day, lowering his Constitution modifier by 2. This is recovered with 8 hours of rest.

- Wild designs will be drawn on their hands and faces with a bright red ink-like substance. This is a paste made from a vari-



A RIVER RUNS THROUGH IT

ety of noxious berries in the area; it stinks when applied and leaves stains that last for up to a week.

This lowers the recipient's Charisma modifier by 2; anyone making a Knowledge (nature) roll with a DC of 10 knows of this effect.

- The members of the party must replace all of their mundane equipment — clothing, bedrolls, and the like — with similar items belonging to the zealots. Not only will zealot items not fit quite right, but they aren't of very high quality, and some of them have fleas.
- Each party member must stand before everyone and confess a deep, dark secret — about one of the other party members. This shows the “sincerity of their desire to approach the river with pure hearts.”

The pixies will use their *detect thoughts* power on the party as the secrets are shared, and will prompt Shoshanna with specific questions on any funny or scandalous secrets. Note that Shoshanna is not using magic herself to get this information, so party attempts to use *detect magic* on her will have no result.

- To prove that they understand their place within nature, the party must name several creatures that live in the river (fish, crawfish, turtle, etc.) or around it (snake, wading bird, etc.). One creature per party member is a good number, because then Shoshanna will order them to imitate these creatures. Each character in turn will be assigned a creature to impersonate, and the rest of the party must critique them. Assuming you have enough space in the room, get the players to stand up and actually perform the impersonation while their comrades in arms provide stage direction.

Stick-in-the-mud players can also try making skill checks to pass the requirement, at the GM's discretion. Possible skills include Perform or Knowledge (nature) (DC 15).

- Those who would cross the bridge must first understand its burdens — the party has to make a human bridge along the edge of the riverbank and allow Shoshanna and 1d6 other interested zealots to ‘cross’ over them, bearing the weight without complaint. This isn't intrinsically difficult, as most parties have enough muscles to share this kind of

load, but the invisible pixies can't resist such tempting targets. They pick the two strongest-looking party members and begin tickling them; this can be described as an unusual prickly feeling, perhaps caused by insects or an embarrassing rash.

A simple Will save (DC 5) allows PCs to stifle their giggles as the first zealot passes over them. The tickling intensifies with each subsequent passenger, increasing the DC by 2. Shoshanna, going last, will graciously ignore all but the most sustained outbursts. Unfortunately, the pixies ratchet up the torture when she crosses — failure by any victim to make his Will save results in the human bridge buckling and collapsing, sending Shoshanna into the mud.

Shoshanna will not be amused, and will likely add a couple more requirements for the party to meet if she is thrown into the water. If the afflicted party members think to check themselves later, they'll discover a rash-like series of marks, almost as though several tiny swords had been lightly jabbing them.

Characters who meet the taboo requirements are allowed to pass through the crowd and walk across the bridge to general accolades, as Shoshanna calls them “mighty pillars of pure faith, their flame burning to show all the true holiness.” When such a character first crosses the bridge, everyone briefly sees a tall, broad-shouldered figure standing at the far side. The figure is wearing a cloak made of leaves and wears a helm ornamented with stag antlers, and it moves aside as if allowing passage before fading away.

This is a pixie using *polymorph self* to make a grand gesture. Alert players who make a Listen roll against DC 20 can hear faint giggling coming from all around them.

Of course, it's possible that the players will manage to get onto the bridge without meeting the taboo conditions. If this happens, the pixie pack takes a direct hand in stopping them.

One of the pixies will appear, *polymorphed* into the form of the leaf-cloaked individual above, raising its hands in an ominous gesture of warning before disappearing. If that fails to halt the players, another one of the pixies will use its *permanent image* power to create a mist that rises from the river to block all sight. The fog will make faces and eerie moaning sounds, but is otherwise powerless to stop anyone.



Characters who persist in advancing through the fog will be met with invisible pixies using their *confusion* spells and sleep arrows to stop them, and one of the pixies will be able to use *irresistible dance*, as well.

Characters who fall asleep from pixie arrows will be hauled into the river by pixies working in tandem, who help them float to safety. The pixies will try to make the players feel as though they are going mad for incurring the wrath of the gods, with appropriate histrionics, as they don't want anyone to realize what's actually causing these effects.

Eventually, the party will make it over the bridge and continue on their bald, barefoot, embarrassed way. If the GM desires, this can hook into a number of religion-based plots, and any of the NPCs could reappear down the road. While the pixies were responding to Shoshanna's prayers, they didn't cause the dreams that drew her out here in the first place — perhaps the gods have been watching this little drama play out. And if nothing else, it serves as a reminder that not every religious person is as helpful as Bob the Generic Cleric back in town.

The Pixie Pack (2 per PC)

Playful Sprites

CR 4; SZ S (fey); HD 1d6; hp 3; Init +4 (Dex); Spd 20 ft., fly 60 ft. (good); AC 16 (+1 size, +4 Dex, +1 natural); Atk +5 melee (1d4–2, dagger), or ranged +6 (1d6, composite shortbow); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SA spell-like abilities, special arrows; SQ SR 16, natural invisibility; AL NG; SV Fort +0, Ref +6, Will +4; Str 7, Dex 18, Con 11, Int 16, Wis 15, Cha 16

Skills: Bluff +7, Concentration +4, Craft (any one) +7, Escape Artist +8, Heal +6, Hide +12, Listen +8, Move Silently +8, Ride +8, Search +9, Sense Motive +6, Spot +8

Feats: Dodge, Point Blank Shot, Rapid Shot, Weapon Finesse (dagger), Weapon Focus (shortbow)

Pixies love to play tricks on travelers, and this bunch will keep the joke going as long as they can. They're always flitting around, trying to think of new ways to embarrass the party. They have no desire to hurt anyone, and will use only non-lethal abilities unless attacked first or unless the party begins to slaughter the worshipers. The joke is over when innocents start dying. Assume the presence of two pixies per party member. They have the following abilities:

Spell Resistance (Ex): To determine if a spell or spell-like ability works against a pixie, the spellcaster makes a level check (1d20 + caster level). If the result equals or exceeds 16, the spell works normally, though the pixie still gets a saving throw.

Natural Invisibility (Su): A pixie remains invisible even when it attacks. This ability is constant, but the pixie can suppress or resume it as a free action.

Special Arrows (Ex): Pixies sometimes employ arrows that deal no damage but can erase memory or put a creature to sleep. These pixies will refrain from using memory loss arrows.

Sleep: Any opponent struck by the arrow, regardless of Hit Dice, must succeed at a Fortitude save (DC 15) or be affected as though by a *sleep* spell.

Spell-like Abilities: 1/day — *confusion* (the pixie must touch the target), *dancing lights*, *detect chaos*, *detect good*, *detect evil*, *detect law*, *detect thoughts*, *dispel magic*, *entangle*, *permanent image* (visual and auditory elements only), and *polymorph self*. These abilities are as the spells cast by an 8th-level sorcerer (save DC 13 + spell level). One pixie in the pack can use *irresistible dance* once per day as cast by an 8th-level sorcerer.

Sideshow of Doom

BY MATT FORBECK • ILLUSTRATED BY HELENA WICKBERG

Encounter Level: 4

Setting: A small village

Summary: An evening's entertainment turns to terror when the heroes discover that the freaks in a sideshow have been created from former spectators.

“Ladies and gentlemen!” cries the strangely garbed bard from the stage on the side of his garishly colored wagon. “Step right up! Here, for one night only, are the wonders of the modern age: strange creatures, the likes of which have never been seen outside of the darkest dungeons or the dankest dales!”

The bard twirls the end of his waxed and curled moustache and then continues on. “I see that there are some doubters in the crowd, perhaps some well-traveled sorts who might think that they’ve seen things more bizarre, more horrific. Well, I’m here to tell you that you’re wrong! The horrible wonders contained in that tent” — here, he gestures dramatically behind him, toward a red and yellow striped canvas structure the size of a small house — “are so earth-shattering! So mind-blowing! So outrageously amazing! That I am willing to personally guarantee the price of your admission that you have never yet seen anything like them!”

The bard rubs his white-gloved hands together at this. “All it takes, friends and neighbors, is six pieces of silver. For that paltry sum, you can cross over the threshold from the mundane into the extreme, from the pastoral into the exotic, from your world into another!”

At that, the crowd that has been gathering about the bard cheers. With a flourish, he leaps from his stage and dashes toward the front of the tent, his outstretched hand ready to collect the price of admission.

Step Right Up!

“Sideshow of Doom” can be used wherever there are enough people gathered together to make for a good-sized audience — at least 20 or so paying customers. The sideshow is most likely to be found in small villages, but it could just as easily set up shop in a square in a large city or even near an inn on the side of a well-traveled road.

The purpose of this encounter is twofold. First, it can be a good break in an otherwise dull journey or a long stay in an unexciting locale. After all, it’s not every day something like the sideshow comes to town.

Second, this encounter can work as a prelude to *Circus of Fear*, a Penumbra adventure due out from Atlas Games in 2002. You don’t have to have that product to get full use out of this adventure, though, or vice versa. The idea here is to plant the notion of the larger circus in the heroes’ minds by means of the sideshow. Then, whenever they happen to run into the circus, they should be on their guard.

On With the Show

If the heroes pay their money and step into the tent, they’re in for an interesting show. When they enter the tent, they find it filled with three different cages, each covered by a large, red cloth. They are asked to stand to one side, at least ten feet away from the cages, “for the sake of your loved ones, who would certainly miss you if news of your demise were to reach their ears.”

One by one, the bard unveils the contents of each cage to the horror and delight of the audience, members of which gasp in amazement or scream in outright terror. For effect, you might even have one woman faint outright, or a young child might start crying in fear before being hustled off by a parent who didn’t think that anything in the tent could be all that scary.

EN ROUTE

In the first cage, there's a two-headed hippogriff. It screeches once the cover is taken from its cage. It looks just like a regular hippogriff except that two heads sprout from its neck.

The second cage contains a mutated barghest (apparently stuck in lupine form) that paces its cage like a trapped tiger. The face of an orcish infant pokes from beneath the fur at the top of the creature's chest. The baby wails loudly when revealed, and the barghest answers with a blood-curdling howl.

The last cage features an animated dragon skeleton. It tries to spread its bony wings, but they clack against the bars of its cage.

Each of the creatures wears a huge, spiked collar of black leather that holds it in its cage by way of a massive chain. They all look like they've seen better days too, although only sharp-eyed heroes are likely to notice this (Spot, DC 10). Captivity apparently hasn't treated any of them well. Whether that's due to malice on the part of their captor or simple neglect is impossible to say. However, truly observant characters (Spot, DC 15) may note some scarring on the creatures that looks like it could have been left by the whip the bard has at his side.

The bard, who introduces himself as the Great Gadrian, knows his stuff, and he makes a big show of his three attractions. Using bits of cooked meat, he persuades the creatures to perform small tricks for the crowd, each time rewarding them with a treat.

The Great Gadrian

5th-Level Human Bard

CR 5; SZ M (humanoid); HD 5d6; hp 18; Init +6 (+2 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Spd 30 ft.; AC 12 (+2 Dex); Atk melee +5 (1d8+2, +2 *longsword*), melee +3 (1d2 subdual, whip), ranged +5 (1d6, crossbow); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SA Spells; SQ bardic knowledge, inspire courage, countersong, fascinate, inspire competence, suggestion; AL N; SV Fort +1, Ref +6, Will +4; Str 10, Dex 14, Con 11, Int 15, Wis 10, Cha 16

Skills: Balance +4, Bluff +13, Concentration +3, Diplomacy +5, Disguise +7, Escape Artist +5, Hide +6, Listen +3, Move Silently +4, Perform +10, Sense Motive +3, Spellcraft +5, Tumble +5, Use Magic Device +10

Feats: Exotic Weapon Proficiency (whip), Improved Initiative, Spell Focus (enchantment)

Languages: Common, dwarven, elvish

Bardic Knowledge: Gadrian can make a special bardic knowledge check with a bonus of +7 to see whether he knows some relevant information.

Inspire Courage (Su): Allies receive +2 morale bonus to saves against charm and fear effects and +1 to attack and weapon damage rolls. This mind-affecting ability is in effect while and for five rounds after the bard stops singing.

Countersong (Su): Gadrian may make a Perform check every round to make any creature within 30 feet able to use the bard's Perform check result in place of his saving throw if the Perform check result is better. The bard can perform the countersong for 10 rounds.

Fascinate (Sp): This mind-affecting charm ability allows the bard to cause a single creature to become *fascinated* with him for up to 5 rounds. The creature must be within 90 feet and within view of the bard; the bard then makes a Perform check, and the target can negate the effect with a Will saving throw equal to or greater than the bard's check result. The creature suffers a -4 to Spot and Listen checks, but any obvious threat breaks the effect. That creature can't be fascinated by the bard again for another 24 hours.

Inspire Competence (Su): If the bard is within 30 feet of an ally, his music can give the ally +2 competence bonus on skill checks with a particular skill. The effect lasts for 2 minutes.

Suggestion (Sp): Gadrian can make a suggestion to a creature he has already fascinated. A Will save (DC 16) negates this mind-affecting effect.

Spells: (3/4/2)

0 Level — *daze, detect magic, light, mage hand, prestidigitation, read magic*

1st Level — *charm person, expeditious retreat, hypnotism, sleep*

2nd Level — *hold person, Tasha's hideous laughter*

Possessions: Lyre, whip, +2 *longsword*, *wand of polymorph other* (10 charges), pouch with 20 gp

SIDESHOW OF DOOM

Occasionally, a monster acts up a bit, and Gadrian corrects the creature with a crack of his whip.

Play Gadrian as a huge ham, someone who's done this routine a million times before but still gets a kick out of how much the audience likes it. He knows what every line is by heart. Even his seemingly improvised patter is prepared down to the last syllable. He may seem a bit too smooth to more urbane characters, but out in the sticks, he's usually considered to be a perfect example of how "those city slickers" operate.

Show 's Over!

As the show is about to reach its finale, the barghest suddenly starts clawing at his chest, tearing at the infant's face. The child has fastened its tiny fangs on the beast's neck and is refusing to let go.

Apparently startled by this turn of events, the Great Gadrian quickly goes for his whip and cracks the barghest several times across its shoulders. When that fails to get the creature's attention, the bard casts a spell (*hold person*) on the creature, causing it to stop in its tracks. Any spellcaster watching this can determine the exact spell cast by making a Spellcraft check, DC 17. Those who succeed may be intrigued by the fact that the bard successfully used on a monster a spell designed to only affect people.

As soon as the mutant barghest has been stalled, the Great Gadrian turns to his audience and says with a nervous smile, "Thank goodness I was able to put an end to that. The next thing you know, he would have gotten loose. I lose more audiences that way."

With that, he mops his brow and says, "Ladies and gentlemen, that concludes our show. I'm sorry to say that this is our final engagement in the area, but we are sure to be back this way again.

"In the meantime, the rest of the circus should be following fast on our heels, no more than a week or two behind. If you were amazed and delighted by the paltry sights of my little sideshow, just imagine how wonderful the full act is! Please tell your friends! Thank you, and good night!"

As the people applaud the bard's efforts, he bows graciously before reaching up and dropping a curtain that cuts off the half of the tent in which the creatures are being held.

If anyone offers to lend a hand to the obviously injured barghest creature, the Great Gadrian smiles and waves the person off. "No need," he demurs with a slightly condescending air. "There was no harm done. It's all part of the show!"

Those who successfully use Sense Motive to overcome Gadrian's Bluff detect that he is indeed lying about the situation. Although he covers it well, the barghest's attack on itself was entirely a surprise to him, certainly not "part of the show."

If anyone attempts to inquire further, the Great Gadrian gets his nose bent out of shape about it. "Friends, while I can certainly understand your curiosity, there is one rule that performers everywhere are bound to heed: you never reveal your secrets!" With that, he bids the curious heroes a good day and disappears behind the curtain.

A Midnight Sideshow

That night, as the characters and the rest of the town is sound asleep, there comes a great hue and cry from the direction of the sideshow wagons. Something is obviously wrong, and since the sideshow is mostly packed up for an early morning departure, it's apparently not "part of the show."

When the heroes arrive on the scene — along with whatever excuse for the local law there might be in the area at the time — they find the Great Gadrian standing over the body of a peasant.

"I was awakened from a dead sleep by the sound of someone rummaging around my camp, trying to break into my cages. I found this scoundrel trying to break open the cage of the barghest. When I called out for him to stop, he attacked me with that sword. I bested him easily, of course, but in the process of defending myself, I'm afraid that I may have caused him to pay the ultimate price for his trespass."

On first glance, the bard's story checks out. The man at his feet is, in fact, stone dead. However, that's about the only truth in what the Great Gadrian has said.

Before the heroes can really investigate too much, there's a scream from off in the distance. This time, it sounds like a woman.

Missing!

When the heroes finally track down the source of the screaming — which isn't that hard to do, since it seemingly goes on forever, alternating occasionally with wails of despair — they find an older woman kneeling outside of her home (or room or tent or wagon or whatever), her head in her hands. Once someone manages to end the woman's nearly uncontrollable sobs, she tells them that someone has stolen her son.

"I was sleeping in my room when I heard some noises going on in my son's room. Jako's only 16 years old, so I thought maybe he was trying to sneak back in after being out with his friends. I walked up to his door and knocked. The noises stopped, so I knocked again.

"When there was no answer, I opened the door to see my son standing there, his jaw hanging open like some kind of zombie.

"The next thing I know, I'm waking up on the floor of his room — and he's gone! His father died last year. He's all I have in this world! Can't someone help us?"

With this, the woman — whose name is Barbata — begins sobbing again until someone reaches out to comfort her. She then collapses into that person's arms.

A quick investigation in the house reveals that little is out of place except in the son's room. There the single window that looks out of the back of the house stands unshuttered, and there are dirty footprints on the bed.

A successful Spot roll (DC 10) reveals that there are two sets of footprints on the bed, although this is hardly a surprise, given the woman's story. Someone with the Track feat can try to follow the trail out of the room. The ground is firm, so the DC is 15. The trail leads out toward the Great Gadrian's campsite.

The boy is nowhere to be found. If there is a guard about (or any other representative of the law), she guesses that the boy was attacked by the same man who was killed by the bard. What happened to the boy, though, is anyone's guess.

What's Going On?

The creatures in the Great Gadrian's sideshow aren't really creatures at all. In fact, they're innocent people that have been *hypnotized* by Gadrian and then transformed into strange beasts by means of his *polymorph other* wand. This leaves Gadrian with amazing creatures who are intelligent enough to be bullied and ordered around but who don't have any of the spells or spell-like abilities they would have if they were legitimate members of their apparent species.

Gadrian is careful to always transform his victims into creatures that are unable to speak properly, limiting their ability to give him away. He keeps them chained up constantly and caged as well. When they get out of line, he beats them without mercy.

Whenever any of his creatures is near to the end of its life, Gadrian waits until his next road trip to take care of the matter. Then, when he's entirely alone, he executes the creature and disposes of the humanoid body into which it reverts.

Sometimes Gadrian doesn't wait that long to get rid of one of his creatures. The circus he's attached to is always looking for creatures to fill out its own acts, so whenever the circus catches up with him on his route, Gadrian makes "donations" from his collection to the crew.

Gadrian has space for up to three creatures in his menagerie. When there's an opening, he goes out and finds himself a healthy, weak-minded subject and uses the wand to work the *polymorph other* spell on the victim. Many of the creatures that are being imitated are magical in nature anyhow, so if someone was to cast *detect magic* on the creature, they wouldn't be surprised by the results. However, they might be concerned by the fact that the strength of the aura fits that of the spell, not the creature, although there's only a small chance that they would notice this (Spot, DC 15).

Gadrian is careful with his use of the wand. For one, he doesn't want anyone to figure out exactly what he's doing, for the consequences would certainly be dire. Secondly, he only has a limited number of charges in the thing, and they tend to go more quickly than he would like. He can always get a new wand, fully charged from the circus, but they're expensive to make, and the ringmaster watches over their use carefully.

SIDESHOW OF DOOM

What Really Happened . . .

The mutant barghest couldn't take it any more. While Gadrian was distracted with the show, the creature tried to kill itself by ripping its own throat out. Gadrian was able to stop it while it was in the act, but not before the creature was knocking on death's door.

This left Gadrian nearly one freak short of a full sideshow, and he was determined to make up his losses before he left town. In the dead of night, he crept into the village (or camp or whatever) and found Jako creeping into his open window, having been out carousing with his friends, just as his mother suspected.

Peering out of the shadows, Gadrian got Jako's attention and *hypnotized* the young man. It was about this time that Barbata knocked on the door. When that happened, Gadrian fell back into the shadows. Once the mother entered the room to see her son standing there slack-jawed, Gadrian hit her with a *sleep* spell.

After that, Gadrian led young Jako off into the darkness and to his campsite. When he got there, he gagged Jako and fitted him with a spiked, chained collar. Then he dragged the mortally wounded barghest out of his cage, swapping Jako into his place.

Gadrian used his *wand of polymorph other* to transform Jako into another mutant barghest. Due to the limitations of the spell, the two creatures don't look exactly alike, but it takes a successful Spot check (DC 20) to notice this. It's easier (Spot, DC 10) to notice that the new barghest doesn't seem to have the wounds the other barghest inflicted on itself this afternoon. If questioned on this, Gadrian tells his interrogator that he used a *potion of cure serious wounds* to heal the creature, since nothing is too good for the stars of his show. After all, where would he ever be able to find another barghest like this?

With the Jako-barghest in place, Gadrian ran his sword through the neck of the other barghest, gor-



ing the same area the creature had damaged itself. Just for good measure, he stabbed it in a few other places too.

As he did this, Gadrian screamed for help, trying to attract as much attention as he could — something he’s well-practiced at. Before anyone could arrive, the original barghest was long dead. Its death lifted the spell cast upon it, and it returned to its original form, that of another young man that Gadrian shanghaied a long time ago and many miles away.

When the characters arrive — accompanied by any law in the area — they find the body, and Gadrian tells them that the man attacked him. He’s confident that no one around here is ever going to have seen the man, which should help prop up his story.

The outcry from Jako’s mother helps throw any suspicious busybodies even further off Gadrian’s track in two ways. First, it gets the heroes away from the scene of the crime before they can get a good look at the new barghest and the body of Gadrian’s “attacker.” Second, it may give them the idea that the so-called attacker was on some kind of a crime spree.

Figuring It All Out

There are a number of ways the characters can discover what’s happening. While any single clue may make them suspicious, the more they investigate, the better they’re going to feel if and when they finally get around to confronting Gadrian face-to-face.

Here are the clues:

The Body

The body of the innocent who plays the part of the attacker in Gadrian’s wild, fictional tale belongs to a young man who grew up in a village far from his current location. The fact that no one around here has ever seen him before — not even today — may tip off the heroes to the fact that something strange is going on.

The wounds on the body aren’t all that consistent with the supposed cause of death: Gadrian’s sword. In fact, a successful Heal check (DC 10) or Spot check (DC 15) by someone examining the body can pick this out. While there are certainly sword wounds around the neck, there are also a number of bite marks that look like they were made by a small mouth — that of the infant orc face, of course.

The Mutant Barghest

The new mutant barghest doesn’t quite look like the old one. A Spot check (DC 15) picks this out right away.

If anyone asks about this difference, Gadrian claims that the nature of the beast is to subtly change itself around on a more or less constant basis. “In fact,” the bard says, “for a long while there, the baby orc face was located in the middle of the beast’s back. This kind of thing is common with the species.” Gadrian is relying on the fact that the heroes have probably not had a whole lot of experience with barghests and are hopefully gullible enough to buy into his story.

This is a good time for a test of Gadrian’s Bluff against the characters’ Sense Motive skills.

The Nature of the Beasts

Of course, characters who really do know a lot about barghests are likely to find even more problems with the mutated variety Gadrian has on display here. This goes for the other two beasties too.

A Knowledge (arcana) check (DC 10) reveals that these creatures aren’t exactly typical of their kind, even above and beyond the obvious strangenesses. The mere fact that they are each unable to work the amazing powers that they should have is a tip to this.

If questioned about this, Gadrian claims that the collars that hold the creatures in their cages are actually enchanted to prevent them from escaping their bonds. These wondrous items dampen any magical powers the captive beasts might otherwise have.

Of course, a simple *detect magic* spell should uncover this particular lie indisputably.

SIDESHOW OF DOOM

The Tracks

Anyone who wishes to can try to compare the footwear of the dead man with the tracks found leading from Barbata's home to the sideshow camp. They clearly do not match up. No rolls are needed to figure this out.

However, the boots that Gadrian is wearing are a perfect match. Of course, determining this beyond a doubt requires getting either Gadrian's shoes or his cooperation. He's not likely to give either to the characters.

The Grande Finale

Once the heroes figure out that something fishy is going on, they likely confront Gadrian or — better yet — report him to the local law. Either way, once it looks like the jig is up, Gadrian does his best to fly the coop. He can always make himself a few more beasties for a brand-new show somewhere down the road, after all.

Gadrian is no idiot. If he's outnumbered or outpowered, his first instinct is to run away as fast as he can. As a spellcaster, he turns toward his magic to help him out with that.

Of course, if the heroes spend too much time poking around, they find that Gadrian leaves town first thing in the morning. "Places to go, people to scare!" he says proudly as he waves good-bye to the characters (or anyone else in the area at the time). "Too bad about that incident last night. I do hope someone finds that missing boy, although I'm afraid it's most likely that he's already dead."

With that, he snaps the reins on his team of horses and drives his massive wagon off.

If the heroes confront Gadrian before he manages to get in a good night's sleep, they're doing themselves a favor. In the course of the eventful day, Gadrian has already cast two of his 2nd-level spells and one of his 3rd-level spells. This leaves him with only 3/2/1 to cast. Of course, if he has a chance to refresh himself, he's at his full capacity instead.

Given a chance, Gadrian casts *sleep* on any group that confronts him, then *Tasha's hideous laughter* or *hold person* on anyone left. Instead of killing anyone already rendered helpless, he simply takes the opportunity to get away.

If forced to, Gadrian retreats on foot, leaving his beasts and his belongings behind. To help himself out, he casts *expeditious retreat* on himself and gets out of the area as fast as his feet can carry him.

Only in a real bind does Gadrian use his *wand of polymorph other*. If this is what he ends up doing, he prefers to turn the characters into things like giant snails (about their Size, but really slow moving). He starts with the most dangerous heroes and works his way down.

Dropping the Curtain

If Gadrian is captured or killed, the heroes can hopefully determine what's happened to the creatures and find the means to restore them to their rightful forms. The three people are extremely grateful, as they literally owe the heroes their lives.

If Gadrian gets away, this may not be the last the heroes see of him or his friends. Be sure to pick up *Circus of Fear* to find out what horrors might still be in store for the characters.



Spirit Mine

BY ERIC TAM • ILLUSTRATED BY DAVID WHITE

Encounter Level: 2, 7, or 11 (dependent on party level)

Setting: Temperate grasslands or any wilderness

Summary: The PCs stumble upon a man trapped behind a strange porthole in the ground that turns out to be an ancient magical prison.

Tap, Tap, Tapping

When one or more PCs approach within 50 feet of the *spirit mine*, have them roll Listen checks against DC 13. PCs who succeed on their Listen checks hear a faint but regular series of taps.

If the PCs get within ten feet of the *mine*, or if everyone stops to listen, they are able to clearly hear a chain of faint taps. Tap–tap–tap ... tappity–tap–tappity– tap–tap–tappity–tappity–tap–tap ... tap–tap ... tappity ... tap–tappity–tap ... and so on. PCs concentrating on locating the tapping’s source find that it’s coming from somewhere low in the grass.

If the PCs track down the source of the tapping, they find what looks to be a glass window embedded in the ground. The PCs can only see a small section of the window at first because it is caked with dirt and surrounded by long grass. If the PCs push aside the grass, they find that the window has a diameter of three feet and is completely bordered by an intricately wrought ring of iron. If they clean the dirt from the window, they see a man’s face on the other side of the glass. Although the man seems to be pounding on the window with all his might, the PCs only hear a quiet tap, tap, tap ... tappity, tap, tap, tap ...

Background

In this encounter, the PCs come across a hapless merchant who has been imprisoned beneath the ground for several centuries by an ancient magical trap known as a “*spirit mine*.” Assuming the PCs are curious or kind–hearted enough to try to aid him, they face several difficulties. Besides the problems involved in determining the motives of a mentally unstable prisoner who speaks an older dialect of common, the PCs also have to contend with the *spirit mine*’s potent magical protections. The easiest way to free the prisoner is to use the *mine*’s control panels. Unfortunately, the panels are labeled with a foreign set of pictograms, and misinterpreting them may trigger the *mine*’s defense mechanisms — or worse, release another, much less friendly prisoner.

The encounter can be placed in any uninhabited setting that has solid ground. It can also serve as a convenient way to (re)introduce an NPC, as the encounter is still challenging if you replace the trapped merchant Shiriaz with someone else of your choosing.

Determine a location for the *spirit mine* before starting the encounter. You should also prepare a description of the terrain in which the *mine* has been set — most importantly, the extent of the underbrush and the hardness and type of soil. The description that follows assumes that the encounter takes place in a temperate grasslands setting.

The Spirit Mine

The PCs have stumbled upon an ancient magical trap created to ensnare spies and scouts. Once nicknamed a “*spirit mine*,” the device was irresponsibly embedded in the ground during an ancient war and forgotten. The tapping sound comes from an innocent victim of the *mine* (see “The Prisoners”). The *spirit mine* can hold a single prisoner in each of its three cells, which coexist simultaneously in an intradimensional space created by the *mine*. Only one cell is visible through the window at the top of the *mine* at any given time because only one cell

SPIRIT MINE



can be “in phase” at any given time. Although hundreds of years old, the *spirit mine* is still functional, but by no means entirely safe to operate.

Because the *spirit mine*'s magic is ancient and has not been maintained for many centuries, its activation is now dangerously erratic.

The first time any of the *spirit mine*'s powers are successfully activated or its *eldritch trap* is triggered, there is a 1% chance that the *mine*'s magic will overload: it will unleash a final blast of eldritch magic (identical to that released when the *eldritch trap* is triggered), release all of the prisoners within its cells, and forever lose its magic. Assuming the *mine* survives its first activation, each subsequent activation of the VISION power adds a 1% cumulative chance to overloading the *mine*, and triggering the *eldritch trap* or any of the *mine*'s other powers adds a cumulative 2% chance.

Attempts to repair the *spirit mine* are for naught, as the required magical knowledge has been utterly lost to antiquity.

If you're wondering how the *spirit mine*'s ancient builders were able to activate and deactivate the trap without being caught by it, note that the *spirit mine*'s trapping range only has a 25-foot-radius.

To safely activate or deactivate the *spirit mine*, a wizard need only stand 30 feet away from the *mine*, cast a *mage hand* on a small object such as a coin or a stick, and then use that object to shift the appropriate studs into position.

The Prisoners

When the PCs find the *spirit mine*, it holds only two prisoners. One of the prisoners is the frantically tapping man who first drew the PCs to the *mine*. The second is a decidedly unfriendly spirit. However, the aspect of the *mine* that ends up causing the most problems for the PCs might ultimately be the *mine*'s empty third cell ...

NEW MINOR ARTIFACT:

Spirit Mine

This ancient trap is an 8-foot-long cylinder made of 1-inch-thick *glassteel* — an enchanted material that has the weight and transparency of glass but the hardness and flexibility of metal — and topped with a 6-inch-wide engraved iron ring. *Detect magic* reveals very powerful abjuration and transmutation magic. The *mine's glassteel* face has Hardness 15 and can withstand 30 hp of damage before it shatters. Breaking the *glassteel* face causes the mine's magic to dissipate entirely, and releases the prisoners within. The iron ring has Hardness 10, and every 15 hp of damage done to it will incidentally ruin one of the “control panels” (see “The Spirit Mine's Controls” below). If the PCs specifically target a control panel, it has Hardness 3 and 10 hp. Ruining a control panel destroys the cell linked to it and releases the prisoner within. In addition, each time the iron ring takes damage, the *mine's eldritch trap* is triggered.

The Eldritch Trap

Damaging the mine's iron ring or shifting the *mine's* control studs incorrectly will cause the symbols engraved on the iron ring to glow and release a torrent of crackling blue eldritch energy at the PCs. The effect of the eldritch energy should be adjusted to fit the party's average level, as follows:

PARTY LEVEL 1–3

Eldritch Spray: CR 1; 15-foot-long x 10-foot-wide cone in the direction of the PC that triggered the trap (1d6), stuns for 1d3 rounds; Reflex save (DC 13) halves damage and negates stunning; Search (DC 27)

PARTY LEVEL 4–7

Eldritch Burst: CR 3; 15-foot-radius burst (3d6), stuns for 2d4 rounds; Reflex save (DC 15) halves damage and negates stunning; Search (DC 28)

PARTY LEVEL 8+

Eldritch Blast: CR 4; 30-foot-radius burst (6d6), stuns for 2d4 rounds; Reflex save against (DC 17) halves damage and negates stunning; Search (DC 30)

A successful Search check (DC given above) allows a rogue to detect the *eldritch trap* and learn how the trap is triggered. The trap cannot be disarmed through non-magical means, but a successful *dispel magic* against DC 28 renders it inoperative for 1d4 rounds.

The cells within the *spirit mine* are enchanted with even more powerful magic. Creatures trapped in the cells do not age, or need food, water, or sleep. The magic also prevents the operation of all magic and psionics emanating from within the cells, although mind-affecting spells, psionics, gaze attacks, and sonic effects can enter through the barrier from the outside and affect the occupant of the cell that is “in phase.” The *spirit mine's* magic also prevents teleportation, dimensional, and ethereal travel through the *glassteel* barrier from either side. Because of the *mine's* antimagic effects, no adverse effects occur if an interdimensional device (such as a *bag of holding*) is drawn into the *mine*.

If a PC attempts to *dispel magic*, make a separate check at DC 28 against each of the following targets: each of the three cells, the *eldritch trap*, and the *glassteel* cylinder. A successful *dispel* against any of the three cells will deactivate it for 1d4 rounds and cause it to immediately release its prisoner; a successful *dispel* against the *eldritch trap* will render it inoperative for 1d4 rounds; and a successful *dispel* against the *glassteel* cylinder will change it into normal glass for 1d4 rounds (Hardness 1, hp 1).

The PCs can attempt to dig the *mine* out of the ground, although it may take quite a long time if they do not have magic assistance. The *mine* weighs 750 pounds (*glassteel* is very light).

The Spirit Mine's Controls

Three magical control panels for the *mine* are set into its iron ring (see Diagram #2). Each panel has four circular studs, each of which is inscribed with an ancient sigil. From top to bottom, the studs' sigils (followed by their translations) are: an oval inset with a circle (“VISION”); a circle with eight radiating lines (“POWER”); an empty circle (“VOID”); and a circle crossed with intersecting lines (“WEAKNESS”).

The sigils can be translated with a *comprehend languages* spell or a successful Decipher Script check against DC 25. Make a separate Decipher Script check for each sigil; reduce the DC by 3 for every sigil that the party has translated correctly and increase the DC by 3 for every sigil that the party has falsely translated. If at least one PC makes a successful Knowledge (ancient history) check against DC 15, characters gain a +2 circumstance bonus to the party's Decipher Script rolls; the bonus increases to +4 if the PC's Knowledge skill specifically pertains to the ancient civilization at hand.

SPIRIT MINE

NEW MINOR ARTIFACT:

Spirit Mine, con't

Each stud is set in a horizontal groove and can slide into one of two positions, each of which is marked by an ancient sigil inscribed at the top of the panel: a semi-circle intersected by a horizon (“DAWN”); and a crescent (“DUSK”). These sigils can be translated in the same manner as the sigils inscribed on the studs. DAWN corresponds to ON and DUSK corresponds to OFF, although you should *not* explain this to the PCs.

A successful bardic knowledge check or a Knowledge (ancient history) check against DC 25 will reveal that in the culture of the ancient civilization that created the mine, “dawn” had connotations of activity, whereas “dusk” had connotations of passivity.

Each panel controls one of the mine’s three “prison cells.” The PCs, being who they are, may try playing with the studs.

VISION

If a cell’s VISION stud is set to ON, the mine’s “window” swirls with mist and brings that cell “into phase.” When the mist clears, the PCs can view and possibly communicate with the prisoner within that cell (see “The Prisoners” for details). Only one VISION stud can be set to ON at any time. If a PC tries to set a VISION stud to ON when another VISION stud is already ON, the mine’s *eldritch trap* triggers and the stud the PC tried to shift snaps back to OFF. When all of the VISION studs are set to OFF, the window at the top of the mine remains clouded with an opaque gray mist.

POWER

If the POWER stud for an empty cell (or a cell that becomes empty) is set to ON, the mine activates with a pale blue glow and attempts to imprison an intelligent creature (Intelligence of 4 or higher) that is within a 25-foot-radius of the mine. Starting with the creature with the highest Hit Dice (in the case of ties, start with the creature further away from the mine), each intelligent creature within range must roll a Will save at DC 22 or be drawn into the mine. Once a creature has failed its saving throw, or all creatures within range have succeeded on their saves that round, the mine does not affect anymore creatures until the next round. The mine activates every round until all of the cells whose POWER stud is set to ON are filled, or there are no intelligent creatures within range. The *spirit mine* can affect incorporeal creatures and creatures in the ethereal plane. The *spirit mine* has an initiative modifier of +3. If a cell is occupied, the setting of its POWER stud has no effect.

VOID

If the VOID stud for an occupied cell is set to ON, the iron ring gives a brief pale green glow, and the trapped creature materializes in an unoccupied space within 10 feet of the mine. The VOID stud then snaps back into the OFF position. If a PC tries to set the VOID stud of an unoccupied cell to ON, the spirit mine’s *eldritch trap* is triggered and the VOID stud snaps back to OFF.

WEAKNESS

If the WEAKNESS stud of an occupied cell is set to ON, the creature within the cell must make a Fortitude save against DC 22 at the beginning of each round or be stunned. This effect generally renders the creature incapable of communication or any action until the stud is switched to OFF. Creatures released from a cell whose WEAKNESS stud is ON must make a Fortitude save against DC 22 or be stunned for 2d4 rounds after being released. Creatures that cannot normally be stunned (such as undead) are still affected by the mine’s stunning power if they fail their saving throws (it disrupts their energy circulation), but are only stunned for 1d4 rounds after being released.

Initial Panel Settings

Note that the initial settings for Shiriaz’s control panel are depicted in the diagram of the trap at the end of this encounter.

PANEL 1 (SHIRIAZ’S CELL)

VISION: ON
POWER: ON
VOID: OFF
WEAKNESS: OFF

PANEL 2 (ANGRY SPIRIT’S CELL)

VISION: OFF
POWER: OFF
VOID: OFF
WEAKNESS: OFF

PANEL 3 (EMPTY CELL)

VISION: OFF
POWER: OFF
VOID: OFF
WEAKNESS: ON

Caster Level: 17th; *Weight:* 750 lbs.

Cell #1 (*Shiriaz*)

The man the PCs hear banging frantically within the *spirit mine* is Shiriaz, a long-forgotten merchant.

The PCs are likely to have a difficult time communicating with Shiriaz for three reasons. First, the *mine*'s "window" muffles sound quite effectively — because of the portal's thickness, even the hardest banging produces only a low *thud* or *tap*. Second, Shiriaz is quite mad. Although the *mine*'s magic protects the inhabitants within from all physical deprivation, the psychological effects of being trapped in a small tube for 250 years are enormous — attentive PCs who look closely at the man's eyes immediately notice that something is not quite right. Shiriaz flickers back and forth between confused babbling and spells of lucidity. However, when the PCs first meet Shiriaz, he has been shaken into a desperate clarity by the realization that someone has heard his tapping.

Third, Shiriaz speaks an older dialect of common that is more similar to ancient common than that familiar to the PCs, so the merchant and the PCs' understanding of each other will only be partial even in Shiriaz's most lucid moments. Despite these impediments, the PCs may be able to communicate with Shiriaz by working out some sort of rudimentary tapping code or sign language.

The PCs can also try to communicate with Shiriaz using a mind-affecting spell or telepathic ability, but such an attempt will force them to contend with the tide of insanity that is constantly washing in and out of the merchant's tortured mind. A PC using such an effect must make a Will save against DC 15 each round; if the PC fails, he or she suffers 1d4 points temporary Wisdom score damage and is forced to break off mental contact.

Cell #2 (*Angry Spirit*)

If the PCs shift Cell #2's VISION stud to the ON position, they see a cell that seems to be filled with layers of smoky blackness. If the PCs stare at the blackness for a while, they see the chilling sight of a tortured skeletal visage coalescing and dispersing within the smoke.

The smoke within the cell is the trapped spirit of an ancient warrior who fought during the *mine*'s original era. He ran dishonourably from battle, but was caught by an officer and tortured for his cowardice until he was driven insane and allowed to kill himself. Yet even then, Kaduz was unable to escape the battlefield, as the shameful nature of his death

Shiriaz the Merchant

1st-Level Human Expert

CR 1/4; SZ M (humanoid); HD 1d6+1; hp 4; Init +1; Spd 30 ft.; AC 11 (+1 Dex); Atk melee +0 (1d4/crit 19–20/x2, dagger); Face 5 ft. by 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; AL LN; SV Fort +1, Ref +1, Will +0; Str 11, Dex 12, Con 12, Int 12, Wis 10, Cha 14

Skills: Appraise +5, Bluff +6, Diplomacy +6, Gather Information +6, Knowledge (ancient commerce) +5, Profession (merchant) +4, Ride +5, Sense Motive +4

Shiriaz is a minor merchant who was trapped by the *spirit mine* over a century ago. He was making a short journey with his wagonload of goods and had stopped for lunch when he spotted something glinting beneath the grass. Curiosity got the best of him, so he wandered over to investigate and was trapped by the *mine*. He is a frantic-looking man in his mid-30s with dark hair and eyes. He is wearing a fine-looking — although rather out-of-date — set of clothing, and has 75 gp, 27 sp, a 250 gp red garnet, and a 250-year-old map.

caused his spirit to rise again in undeath. But ironically, before he could cause too much trouble for his superiors, he was trapped by one of his own army's *spirit mines*. Now, after centuries of imprisonment, Kaduz is quite insane and ready to injure someone.

If released by a party with an effective character level of 3 or less, Kaduz manifests, uses his *frightful moan* on the first round (but deactivates his *corrupting gaze*), blasts the strongest PC with his *corrupting gaze* on the second round, and then flies away into the night babbling madly to himself.

If released by a party with an average level of 4 to 7, Kaduz's insanity causes him to use his *frightful moan* on the first round and every odd-numbered round that follows (even though it is ineffective against any PC who successfully saves). He only attacks during even-numbered rounds and tries to engage the closest PC in melee. He wants badly to best someone with his blade, so he consciously deactivates his *corrupting gaze*, and does not use his *telekinesis* or his ranged attacks. If all of the PCs have fled or have been reduced to 0 hp or less, Kaduz ceases attacking, roars in victory, and flies away.

If released by a party with an effective level of 8 or more, Kaduz's insanity causes him to have a lethal hatred for the party, and he will try to kill them using all of his abilities to maximum tactical effect.

SPIRIT MINE

Although Kaduz is enraged enough to fight until he is destroyed, he is not so stupid as to allow the PCs to gang up on him right away. Immediately after the PCs start to get the upper hand, Kaduz will revert to ethereal form and retreat for awhile. If the PCs do not or cannot pursue Kaduz, he tries to lull them into thinking that he has fled, allowing them to return their attention to the *spirit mine* for awhile before launching the first of a series of guerilla attacks. You should be able to harrow the PCs for quite some time with an enemy that can constantly slip in and out of ethereal form and can reposition himself anywhere on the battlefield with impunity.

Unless the PCs can see ethereal creatures, Kaduz is completely undetectable when he is not manifested — whenever Kaduz manifests to attack, the first round of

combat is always be a surprise round, and any PCs who do not make Spot checks at DC 20 (assuming broad daylight) are surprised. Kaduz tries to eliminate PCs who have been separated from the rest of the party (especially those who have been panicked by his *frightful moan*) and spellcasters first. Also remember that Kaduz can activate his *telekinesis* ability every round as a free action, at a maximum range of 880 ft.

Cell #3 (Empty)

If the PCs shift Cell #3's VISION stud to the ON position, they see only the inside of an empty glass cylinder and the earth that surrounds it ... unless, of course, a PC has become trapped in this cell because someone started playing around with its POWER stud.

Kaduz the Undying Coward

8th-Level Ghost Fighter

CR 10; SZ M (incorporeal undead); HD 8d12; hp 55; Init +7 (+3 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Spd fly 30 ft. (perfect); AC 15 (+3 Dex, +2 deflection) or 20 (+3 Dex, +5 breastplate, +2 large shield); Atk melee +13/+8 (1d6+3 [1d6+5 vs. ethereal]/crit 15–20/x2, *scimitar* +1), or ranged +12/+7 (1d8+1/crit x3, longbow with 24 +1 arrows); Face 5 ft. by 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SA manifestation, frightful moan, corrupting gaze, telekinesis; SQ undead, incorporeal, +4 turn resistance, rejuvenation; AL CE; SV Fort +6, Ref +5, Will +3; Str 14, Dex 16, Con —, Int 12, Wis 12, Cha 14

Skills: Climb +13, Hide +14, Listen +14, Ride +13, Search +12, Spot +14

Feats: Improved Initiative, Weapon Focus (*scimitar*), Weapon Specialization (*scimitar*), Improved Critical (*scimitar*), Power Attack, Cleave, Point Blank Shot, Rapid Shot

Manifestation (Su): As an ethereal creature, Kaduz can't affect or be affected by anything in the material world. When they manifest, ghosts become visible but remain incorporeal, but a manifested ghost can strike with its touch attack or a ghost touch weapon. A manifested ghost can be attacked by opponents on both the Material and Ethereal planes.

Frightful Moan (Su): As a standard action, Kaduz lets loose a terrifying battle cry. All living creatures within a 30-foot spread must succeed at a Will save (DC16) or become panicked for 2d4 rounds. This is a sonic, necromantic, mind-affecting fear effect. A creature that makes his save can't be affected by it for one day.

Corrupting Gaze (Su): Kaduz can blast living beings with a glance, at a range of up to 30 feet. Creatures must make a Fortitude save (DC 16) or suffer 2d10 points of damage and 1d4 points of permanent Charisma drain. Kaduz can deactivate this ability as a free action.

Telekinesis (Su): Kaduz can use *telekinesis* once per day as a free action, as a sorcerer of 12th level. If Kaduz directly targets a creature with this ability, it may make a Will save at DC 17 to negate the effect.

Undead: He is immune to mind-influencing effects, poison, sleep, paralysis, stunning, and disease. Kaduz is not subject to critical hits, subdual damage, ability damage, energy drain, or death from massive damage.

Incorporeal: Kaduz can only be harmed by other incorporeal creatures, +1 or better magic weapons, or magic, with a 50% chance to ignore any damage from a corporeal source. He can pass through solid objects at will, and his own attacks pass through armor. He always moves silently.

+4 Turn Resistance (Ex): Treat Kaduz as a 12 HD creature when resolving attempts to turn, rebuke, command, or bolster him.

Rejuvenation (Su): Kaduz reforms himself 2d4 days after being destroyed if he makes a level check (1d20 + 8) against DC 16. To ensure that Kaduz does not *rejuvenate*, a cleric must *consecrate* the area surrounding the *spirit mine*.

Possessions: the corporeal versions of Kaduz's equipment have long ago disintegrated underground.

EN ROUTE

A PC who is drawn into the *mine* feels the ground and sky rush up past as body and soul are shoved forcefully into the waiting cell. If the VISION stud keyed to his or her cell is ON, a PC trapped inside the *mine* sees the surrounding earth, as well as whatever is above the top of the cylinder, and can very faintly hear sounds of the outside world. The PC can also bang on the top wall of the cylinder, which produces a dull *thud* or *tap*. If the VISION stud keyed to his or her cell is OFF, the sides of the capsule are a smoky gray and there is complete silence. As long as the *spirit mine*'s magic is not disrupted, a PC who is trapped within one of its cells is effectively powerless, as magic does not function within the *mine* and it is nearly impossible to do damage to the inside of the cell.

Resolution

If the PCs manage to release Shiriaz and do not harm him, they receive experience for overcoming both the *eldritch trap* and the angry spirit (assuming that they were of sufficient power that the ghost would fight if they released it), whether or not they triggered either of those encounters.

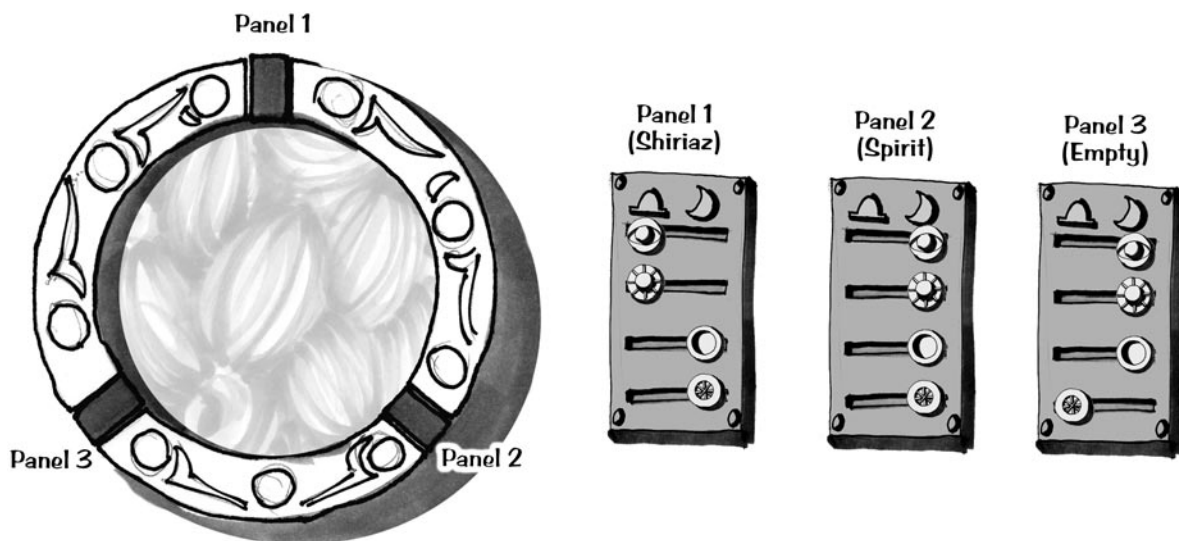
If the PCs cure Shiriaz's insanity (*restoration*, *heal*, or *limited wish* will all work equally well), he tells his story and then asks the PCs how much time has elapsed since he was first trapped. If the PCs tell Shiriaz the truth without preparing him adequately, he may again lose his grip on reality due to shock.

If the PCs are able to stop Shiriaz from slipping back into insanity and are kind enough to accompany him to the nearest city, you should give them an additional 50% XP reward, and perhaps a map or document carried by the merchant that leads to a 250-year-old treasure or secret.

Responsible PCs can earn an additional 25% XP reward if they purposefully do something to ensure the *spirit mine* does not trap more innocent passersby. Possible solutions include setting all of the Power switches to OFF and then burying the *mine*; destroying it; or petitioning high-level local spellcasters to deal with it.

If the PCs attempt to remove the *mine* for use as a weapon, or to employ it repeatedly as an ambush trap, let them have their fun — for now. Just be sure to keep track of the *mine*'s cumulative probability of overloading when its powers are activated.

Selling the *mine* is also feasible, although the PCs will need some way of unearthing and transporting it. Depending on the amount of damage the PCs have done to it, the salvaged *mine*'s worth ranges from 250 gp (if its magical capabilities have been lost), to 25,000 gp (if the *mine* is undamaged). The *mine* may also be of significant historical value because of what it reveals about the ancient civilization that created it. Note that the PCs will not be allowed to keep or sell the mine if they alert the local authorities or high-level NPCs of its presence, as it's considered too dangerous to allow artifacts of such power to fall into private hands. If the PCs deal cordially with the authorities or NPCs, however, they should feel inclined to provide the party members with a generous monetary reward for making and reporting this important discovery.



Toll Bridge

BY RICK NEAL • ILLUSTRATED BY STEVEN SANDERS

Encounter Level: 10

Setting: Swampland

Summary: A small tribe of lizardfolk have set up camp on the King's Road, and have started charging a toll for crossing the bridge at Loram's Crossing.

Background

On a journey through a swamp, the party stops at a coaching inn for the night, and discovers that the small village is being torn apart by a new controversy. A small tribe of lizardfolk has settled just across the bridge that gives Loram's Crossing its name, and they have begun charging a toll to all who cross.

While the toll is not onerous, the caravans that pass through the village don't want one more expense, and have been complaining to the King's Sheriff in town. The locals are somewhat nervous about their new neighbors, but the lizardfolk have been spending their money in town, giving a welcome boost to the economy, and have gone out of their way to appear non-threatening. Aside from barring the King's Road and charging an unauthorized toll, they aren't doing any harm.

The Sheriff, Airic Telandrum, doesn't like conflict, and hates being forced to make a decision. The merchants who pass through Loram's Crossing are the life's blood of the town, and the lizardfolk are technically in violation of the law, but Airic is none too sure that he could force the lizardfolk to leave with the small militia he can muster. The local shopkeepers like the extra money coming in, as well, and the lizardfolk are getting downright civilized. Airic knows that the law says that he should take action against the lizardfolk, but he doesn't see them as a pressing danger, unless he happens to press them.

Loram's Crossing

Loram's Crossing centers on a coaching inn called the Black Tree, which serves as an overnight stop for travelers on the King's Road through this swamp. In addition to the inn, there is a smithy, a lively stable, a few shops selling dry goods, a cooper, and an outfitter. Most of the locals either work in one of the businesses catering to travelers or live by hunting and farming in the local area.

The village is typical of the type of settlement that grows up in a relatively isolated locale. The inhabitants tend to be somewhat insular, friendly to visitors, but not overly so. They see many strangers come through town, and this makes them fairly cosmopolitan, considering their location. Armed men, priests, magicians, and stranger beings have sat beside them in the Black Tree, and it takes a fair bit to shock them or frighten them.

The village is the only civilized place to stop on this section of the King's Road when evening falls. As usual, the inn is crowded, but there are a few rooms to be had. The only alternative for the characters is sleeping rough.

NEW HAMLET:

Loram's Crossing

Size: Hamlet; **Power Center Alignment:** Lawful Good; **GP Limit:** 100 gp; **Assets:** 850 gp

Population: 168 humans, 8 dwarves, 1 elf

Authority Figures: Airic Telandrum, the King's Sheriff (3rd-level male human fighter)

Important Characters: Acomond the innkeeper, Palosk Bel the smith, Ibeliand Sparrowflight the bard.



The Black Tree

The Black Tree is the coaching inn that forms the heart of Loram's Crossing. It is the largest building in town, a fortified stone manor house three stories tall. The gates lead to an open court, surrounded on all sides by the public rooms, stables, kitchens, and staff quarters on the main floor, with guest rooms on the upper two.

The public room of the inn is the town's social center. Most inhabitants come in at least a couple evenings a week, to drink and gossip with neighbors and travelers.

If the characters don't want to sleep on the cold, marshy ground, this is the place to stay. Aside from a crowd of locals, a merchant caravan is passing through, and the merchants and their guards are settled in the public room.

THE MERCHANT CARAVAN

There are two tables of people from the merchant caravan. One is filled with the merchants themselves, who are loudly bemoaning the extra expense of the lizardfolk toll. The other is a quieter table, where a few hardened caravan guards talk softly and drink heroically.

It is impossible to spend more than a few moments inside the public room without hearing about the lizardfolk toll from the merchants. The merchants accost any travelers who don't look too dangerous, asking their opinion of the toll, and criticizing the sheriff who allows it. If they receive any encouragement at all, they go on to state that something should be done to drive the dangerous beasts off the King's Road and make an example of them.

The guards are much less upset: they get paid the same either way. Their prevailing opinion, which they only share quietly and after being bought several rounds by another military type, is that the matter is the sheriff's business, and his decision should be enough. He is the sheriff, after all.

If the merchants get too loud in condemning the lizardfolk, the locals join in on both sides of the discussion.

THE LOCALS

There are several local farmers and trappers in this evening, and they have their own opinions about the lizardfolk. There are a number who agree with the merchants, mainly out of fear of what the lizardfolk might do if they decide to turn against the villagers. These join the merchants in loudly inquiring why the sheriff hasn't done anything about the creatures.

Balancing these voices are other locals, including some shopkeepers, who maintain that the lizardfolk

haven't hurt anyone, and bring good money into the community. Indeed, there are stories about their leader, a wizened old creature with healing abilities, helping out with sick livestock and leaving potions at the doors of sick families. These last tales are widely disbelieved, and no one present has been the beneficiary of such healing, which results in the speaker being shouted down.

THE SMITH

One table in the corner is surrounded by dwarves, drinking peacefully and keeping out of the argument. This is Palosk Bel, the local smith, and his household. They come in most evenings for a tankard of ale after the day's work, and are notorious for keeping to themselves.

If pressed for an opinion, Bel states that this is a matter for humans to decide, as this is a human village. The truth of the matter is that he has profited nicely by making armor and weapons for the lizardfolk, and doesn't want to lose this source of income. On the other hand, he can't afford to antagonize any of his neighbors, and so remains carefully neutral.

THE INNKEEPER

Acomond rules from behind her bar with an iron hand. She doesn't mind what people say, but she doesn't allow violence in her establishment. She can generally quell any rumblings by threatening to cut off service, but one of her potboys runs for the sheriff if that doesn't do the trick. Any violence offered to her causes every local, including Palosk Bel and his family, to close ranks against the outsider.

Her opinion on the lizardfolk question is complicated. She feels that the creatures have done no harm, and therefore don't deserve slaughter, but they do make the locals question their safety. They have also placed her friend the sheriff in a very difficult position, as they are clearly breaking the law, but are only collecting tolls from outsiders, not locals, and are bringing some prosperity to the community.

THE BARD

Ibeliand Sparrowflight is performing tonight on the raised stage at the rear of the bar, playing quiet music to underlay the conversation. She is also keeping her ears open, making sure that she keeps up on the gossip. She knows everything that goes on in town, and generally keeps her mouth shut about it, as she hasn't been here long enough to truly be considered a local.

She knows, for example, that the story about the potion is true: Darak the farmer found a clay pot out-

side his door one morning, and the contents saved his wife and son. She knows the lizardfolk are dangerous, but they seem to be behaving themselves. She's curious to see how things turn out, but is only a bystander.

THE SHERIFF

Airic Telandrum comes in late in the evening, and is beset by merchants demanding to know what he intends to do about the lizardfolk. He is a middle-aged man, retired from active military service, and was given this post as an income in his declining years. He thought this would be a quiet, relaxing duty, and is somewhat affronted when his peaceful village is disturbed.

His answer to the calls for action is that he's considering the matter, and he may need to send to the local lord for instruction. This earns him a chorus of cat-calls, which makes him lose his temper, a rare thing for Airic. He wheels on the crowd, asking them if they're really ready to arm themselves to slaughter the entire encampment, including the babies they've all seen playing in the water. He goes on to tell them the odds of surviving if one of their pet crocodiles gets its teeth into a leg, and points out that they don't even know what sorts of magic their healer might be able to unleash. In the quiet wake of his outburst, Airic leaves.

If approached by the party, Airic readily admits he doesn't know what to do. He latches on to whatever

solution the party offers, as long as it takes the matter out of his hands, and reluctantly agrees to accompany the party on any mission concerning the lizardfolk, whether for combat or negotiation. He refuses to muster the militia unless negotiation fails utterly and they are needed to put down hostile lizardfolk.

The Bridge

The bridge at Loram's Crossing is a stone structure 20 feet wide and 150 feet long. It begins just outside the town boundary, and runs over a series of deep streams and mires to the King's Road on the other side. The railings on either side of the span are three feet high.

The lizardfolk have set torches in the ground at their end of the bridge, and their toll collectors can be seen clearly, even at night, from the village side.

The Lizardfolk

The lizardfolk have followed their leader, Silstanss (sihl-STAHNSS), to this new land of prosperity. As Silstanss aged, he realized that he could no longer see to the needs of his people if they continued their current hunter-gatherer lifestyle. This led him to the conclusion that they would have to settle down and become civilized.

He chose Loram's Crossing as the site for their new home because of the easy access to money, and he intends to live out his days here, training a successor to

Sheriff Airic Telandrum

3rd-Level Human Fighter

CR 3; SZ M (humanoid); HD 3d10+6; hp 30; Init +5 (Improved Initiative, Dex); Spd 20 ft.; AC 18 (+5 breastplate, +2 shield, +1 Dex); Atk melee +8 (1d8+3 crit 19–20/x2, longsword), ranged +4 (1d10/crit 19–20/x2, heavy crossbow); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; AL LG; SV Fort +5, Ref +2, Will +2; Str 17, Dex 13, Con 15, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 12

If pressed, he could muster ten men from the populace to lead into battle, but he really doesn't want to do that. Not only would it mean work for him, but any deaths would lessen his standing in the community.

Skills: Handle Animal +2, Ride +7, Swim +6

Feats: Weapon Focus (longsword), Improved Initiative, Power Attack, Cleave

Possessions: Airic wears a breastplate and uses a large steel shield. He wields a masterwork longsword and heavy crossbow in combat, and owns a *potion of cure moderate wounds* and a *potion of endurance*.

Crocodiles (4)

Medium-size Animals (Aquatic)

CR 2; SZ M (animal); HD 3d8+9; hp 26, 25, 18, 16; Init +1(Dex); Spd 20 ft., swim 30 ft.; AC 15 (+4 natural, +1 Dex); Atk melee +6 (1d8+6, bite), or melee +6 (1d12+6, tail slap); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SA improved grab; AL N; SV Fort +6, Ref +4, Will +2; Str 19, Dex 12, Con 17, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 2

Skills: Hide +7, Listen +5, Spot +5

These four crocodiles are the animal companions of Silstanss, and act to protect him and the tribe.

Improved Grab (Ex): The crocodile must hit a Medium-size or smaller opponent with its bite attack. If it gets a hold, the crocodile grabs the opponent with its mouth and drags it into deep water, attempting to pin it to the bottom. The crocodile automatically deals bite damage each round it maintains the pin.

guide his people when he is gone. To this end, he has learned to speak Common, and taught his people to understand a few phrases; just enough to collect the tolls and to barter with the humans.

It is important to note that this is the last chance for Silstanss and his supporters. They have left the bulk of their tribe, defying the edict that the old and infirm should be left to the mercies of the swamp. They have nowhere to run, and fight fiercely to defend themselves.

The Toll Collectors

The first lizardfolk the PCs encounter, whether they're representatives of the townsfolk or merely travelling on the road, are the toll collectors at the far side of the bridge. They are wearing metal scale armor, carrying large steel shields, and are armed with steel battleaxes. All in all, they are an imposing sight. Swimming in the water below the bridge are a number of crocodiles and lizardfolk children.

The toll collectors ask for their payment in awkward Common. The toll is one copper piece for a man, one silver piece for a horse, and one gold piece for a wagon. This money is placed in a clay jar on the bridge railing. At the first sign of trouble, one of the lizardfolk drops the jar down into the water below the bridge.

Remember, the lizardfolk can't understand them if the PCs try to communicate beyond the basics of the toll exchange.

The Village

The village is a collection of eight huts made of woven reeds. It strings out along the water's edge to the north of the river and is fairly active, with lizardfolk coming and going, working on the huts and other tasks, and fishing in the water. Four crocodiles swim under the bridge, sometimes pulling themselves up on shore to bask in the sun. A quartet of young ones frolic in the water, sometimes riding the crocodiles.



sanders

The Healer

Silstanss spends his days basking near his hut, and preparing potions from ingredients his people bring him. He is very old, and not very mobile anymore, but still considers himself the guardian of his people. He has been teaching them the way to behave if they are to be accepted in this place, and strives always to set an example of civilized behavior, as he understands it.

This means that he welcomes anyone who comes to talk with him, and offers food and drink. He speaks about the weather, inquires about family, and plays the good host. If approached with the purpose of negotiating an arrangement between his people and the people of Loram's Crossing, he is attentive, receptive, and shrewd; no one is going to take advantage of his tribe. He does his best to settle things without violence, going so far as to agree to lend his healing aid to the humans.

Resolutions

The ending of this encounter is up to the party. They may elect to ignore the problems of Loram's Crossing, pay their toll, and go their way. On the other extreme, they may decide to end the lizardfolk

threat once and for all. Between the two ends of the spectrum, they can become peacemakers, negotiating a proper agreement between the lizardfolk and the inhabitants of Loram's Crossing.

Paying the Toll

Easily the simplest solution, the characters can pay their toll and continue on their journey. No one stops them, and no one threatens them if they do so. The situation in Loram's Crossing remains unresolved, and can resurface later in the campaign.

Killing the Lizardfolk

This gets bloody quickly, as the lizardfolk are fighting to protect their young as well as their own lives. The battle is not an easy one; the entire adult lizardfolk population fights back, with the support of a powerful druid and his animal companions.

Should the battle go very badly for the lizardfolk, a pair of adults breaks from the battle, herding the children away into the swamp while the remainder fight a holding action. A hunt through the swamp is required to kill the refugees, and the adults know

The Lizardfolk (16)

Medium-size Humanoid (Aquatic, Reptilian)

CR 1; SZ M (humanoid); HD 2d8+2; hp 11 each adult (total of 12); Init +0; Spd 20 ft.; AC 15 (+5 natural); Atk melee +2 (1d4+1, 2 claws), or melee +0 (1d4, bite), or ranged +1 (1d6+1, javelin); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; AL N; SV Fort +1, Ref +3, Will +0; Str 13, Dex 10, Con 13, Int 9, Wis 10, Cha 10

Skills: Balance +4, Jump +7, Swim +9

Feats: Multiattack

Two lizardfolk on toll collecting duty stand at their side of the bridge and bar the way of anyone trying to cross without paying. The adult lizardfolk of the settlement take the duty in turns, and there are always two on duty, even at night. The lizard folk only have two suits of scale mail suitable for their forms, and only two large steel shields and two battleaxes. The armor and weapons are given to whoever is on duty at the time. With the armor, the toll collector lizardfolk are AC 21, and the axes do 1d8+1 damage, with a x3 threat range. The armor and shields reduce their Balance skill to -2, their Jump to +1, and their Swim to -1.

The ten other adult inhabitants of the lizardfolk settlement are all ready to pitch in to defend themselves, their young, and their livelihood. If the toll collectors are attacked, the remaining adults grab javelins from convenient piles around the village and provide missile support. Two arrive each round of combat after the first, until all have arrived.

There are also six non-combatant lizardfolk, four young and two elderly cripples. Normally, the old ones would be left to fend for themselves, but the prosperity of the new settlement has allowed the tribe to continue supporting them. The non-combatant hit points are 4 each.

Treasure: The clay jar used to collect the tolls contains 55 gp, 53 sp, and 60 cp. In another clay jar beneath the water (DC 25 to find), the lizardfolk have hidden 609 gp, an opal worth 540 gp, and a chalcedony worth 80 gp. Retrieving the clay pot means facing the crocodiles.

EN ROUTE

this area very well. Expect difficult tracking, and a couple of deadfalls to discourage pursuit.

Also keep in mind that killing helpless children and old folks may have serious repercussions for any paladins or clerics in your group. It is definitely not a good act.

Negotiating an Agreement

Brokering an agreement between the lizardfolk and the people of Loram's Crossing is possible, and may be the safest way to resolve the concerns. Both Silstans and Airic are willing to deal, but there are some points that they need to satisfy to come to an arrangement.

First, Airic cannot allow the lizardfolk to continue collecting a toll on the King's Road without authorization. He is empowered to grant such authorization,

but needs the lizardfolk to turn over a sizeable portion of the tolls collected for upkeep and taxes. The actual percentage is negotiable, but the overall point is not.

Second, Silstans requires a binding commitment that his people can remain in Loram's Crossing. He doesn't back down on this point, because he has no other place to go, and is too infirm to return to a nomadic lifestyle. He offers assurances of mutual protection, and agrees to use his healing abilities to help the community.

The lizardfolk and the humans have much to offer each other. Aside from the access to refined goods, the humans provide the lizardfolk with education, protection, and acceptance. The lizardfolk are invaluable when it comes to navigating in and living off the swamp, and Silstans is a great treasure in himself. A little creative bargaining should see the two sides reach a mutually beneficial agreement.

Silstans the Healer

6th-Level Lizardfolk Druid

CR 7; SZ M (humanoid); HD 8d8–16; hp 24; Init –3 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 12 (+5 natural, –3 Dex); Atk melee +3 (1d8–2/crit x3, shortspear), ranged +2 (1d8–2/crit x3, shortspear); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SA spells, wild shape; SQ nature sense, woodland stride, trackless step, resist nature's lure; AL N; SV Fort +3, Ref +3, Will +11; Str 6, Dex 4, Con 6, Int 17, Wis 18, Cha 13

Skills: Animal Empathy +10, Balance +1, Heal +13, Jump +4, Knowledge (nature) +10, Listen +9, Profession (herbalist) +13, Sense Motive +7, Spot +9, Swim +6, Wilderness Lore +13

Feats: Brew Potion, Iron Will, Multiattack, Alertness

Silstans is the leader of the small tribe of lizardfolk. He is incredibly ancient for his people, and only his shrewd mind has kept him from being a burden on the others. Although his body has withered almost to uselessness, he holds power in his cunning and his druidic abilities. Despite his age, Silstans does not sit idly by and let his people fight alone. He joins any combat within two rounds, calling his crocodile companions and using his summoning spells. Once his spells have been expended, Silstans takes the shape of a crocodile and attacks physically.

Nature Sense (Ex): Silstans can identify plants and animals (their species and special traits) with perfect accuracy, and can tell whether water is safe to drink or dangerous (polluted, poisoned, or otherwise unfit for consumption).

Woodland Stride (Ex): Silstans can move through natural thorns, briars, overgrown areas, and similar terrain at normal speed without suffering damage or other impairment.

Trackless Step (Ex): Silstans leaves no trail in natural surroundings and cannot be tracked.

Resist Nature's Lure (Ex): Silstans gains a +4 bonus to saving throws against the spell-like abilities of feys (such as dryads, nymphs, and sprites).

Wild Shape (Sp): Twice per day, Silstans may use this ability to *polymorph self* into a Small or Medium-size animal (but not a dire animal) and back again.

Spells: (5/4/4/3) Silstans casts spells as a 6th-level druid. The save DC, where applicable, is 14 + spell level.

0 Level — *detect magic, detect poison, mending, resistance, virtue*

1st Level — *entangle, faerie fire, obscuring mist, summon nature's ally I*

2nd Level — *hold animal, produce flame, resist elements, summon swarm*

3rd Level — *contagion, poison, summon nature's ally III*

Possessions: In addition to his shortspear, Silstans carries a number of potions that he has made for his tribe. They are five *potions of cure moderate wounds*, two *potions of neutralize poison*, and two *potions of remove disease*. He also wears a *cloak of resistance +1* made of colorful feathers.

The Trembling Hill

BY JOHN TYNES • ILLUSTRATED BY MIKE DUTTON

Encounter Level: 6

Setting: Hilly countryside

Summary: A cave in a trembling hill proves to hold a wrecked ship from another world.

The Earth Moves

The party is traveling in a rural, hilly area that can't make up its mind whether it's composed of forests or fields. The road meanders over and around the uneven terrain, occasionally shaded by a copse of trees. In the distance, a thin column of smoke rises from just over the horizon — perhaps a farmhouse. It's a warm day and all is well.

If the party has animals with them, including familiars or magical beasts, the creatures become nervous. Horses balk, cats yowl, and crows trace erratic circles overhead. Should one of the party have the ability to communicate with any of their animals, they'll learn that the animals can feel the earth trembling. Their behavior persists for the rest of the day.

By that afternoon, the party can feel the vibration as well. There's a low tremble in the ground beneath their feet, and it grows stronger as the party travels further along the road.

The next time the party stops — perhaps to gather water at a stream — call for Spot checks at DC 12. PCs who succeed notice something peculiar: there is a subtle distortion in the air all around. It's reminiscent of heat waves on a long road, but this has a definite pattern similar to a fishnet. As long as they stand still and focus on nothing in particular, they see a faint lattice of energy overlaying everything. Should anyone check, there is no magic aura or invisible creature present.

As dusk comes on, the party reaches the source of the vibration. There is a great quarter-mile furrow in the earth that begins narrowly in a grassy field and ends wide and open atop a house-sized hill of disturbed earth. The hill is visibly vibrating, and

within the jumble of fresh earth and stones there is a dark hollow: a cave.

Another Spot check reveals that the shimmering lattice is still present, and in fact can now be seen to resemble a funnel whose curves fold directly into the mouth of the cave.

If the PCs decide to avoid the hill and continue their trek, the encounter is over. The vibration and the lattice grow fainter with every mile, and by the time they make camp for the night even the animals have calmed down again.

Of course, most PCs will inspect the cave. In fantasy campaigns, monsters, treasure, and excitement are indigenous cave-dwellers, the narrative equivalent of blind albino fish whose eyes never see the sun.

The Hill's Secret

The hill isn't covered in grass — just raw earth, presumably unsettled by the earthquake that sank the furrow in the soil. It's hollow, and the opening is only about four feet tall. Clods of moist earth hang overhead and there is no sign of habitation: no footprints or gnawed bones. The entire scene looks like it appeared just yesterday.

Which it did; this hill is in fact a wrecked spaceship, and the furrow marks its crash landing. The craft ditched at sufficient speed to bury itself in the ground as it skidded to a halt, and now appears to be a smallish hill. The vibration is from the ship's engine, and the shimmering lattice is a distortion of the area's electromagnetic field caused by that engine, sufficiently strong to affect the eyes of most creatures and produce the optical illusion.

The cave opening is the hatch to the craft, which popped open after the crash landing. The PCs can enter freely, and of their own will.



Inside the Hill

Within the spaceship, things are rather different. For starters, the ship is larger on the inside than on the outside, thanks to the usual alien extra-dimensional super-science. The atmosphere is also different. It's much denser, making breathing and movement more difficult. Finally, the peculiar nature of the ship's dimensionality affects some kinds of magic.

While in the craft, PCs are at a -2 Dexterity modifier due to the oppressive atmosphere and strange gases. Conjunction spells of the Calling, Creation, and Summoning types always fail, although Healing types work normally. In addition, Transmutation spells have no effect on any part of the ship, although they can affect the humanoid inhabitants.

Upon entering the apparent cave, the PCs find themselves in a dim, moist chamber with a layer of greenish mist partially obscuring the floor about a foot off the ground. The walls are azure, uneven and slightly soft to the touch. There is a mildly unpleasant smell reminiscent of the smoke from burning hay or vellum. Should anyone check for the presence of magic, there is none to be found.

This first chamber — marked as "A" on the nearby diagram — is only about ten feet by ten feet, with hallways going off in three directions. Something is obviously wrong, though: even just glancing around, the PCs realize that there's no way these hallways could go as far as they appear. The trembling hill just isn't that big. Nonetheless, this isn't an illusion or the product of magic: it's simply larger on the inside.

Call for Listen rolls at DC 12. Success indicates that the sounds of a cow are emerging from all three hallways — the sound is identical from each direction.

Ye Caves o' Mysterie

Most of this encounter consists of exploring the interior of the alien ship, and this section provides a room-by-room description of what the PCs can find. Keep in mind that you should always refer to this place as a cave, not a ship — describe it with the terminology of caves and dungeons and emphasize the strangeness without giving away the true nature of the encounter. The players probably guess the truth right away, but their PCs certainly don't. The

more you keep them talking in the PC frame of reference — that this is a cave, not a spaceship — the better they'll be able to roleplay their exploration. They might think they're in some region populated by deep gnomes, or who knows what else. Encourage and reward their characters' rationalizations of the experience, and adopt the vocabulary that they themselves provide for you.

Except where noted, all areas in the ship have fifteen-foot ceilings.

Allow them to explore the "caves" for as long as it's fun, using the following room key as a guide. When you're ready to wrap up the encounter, jump to the conclusion.

About the Diagram

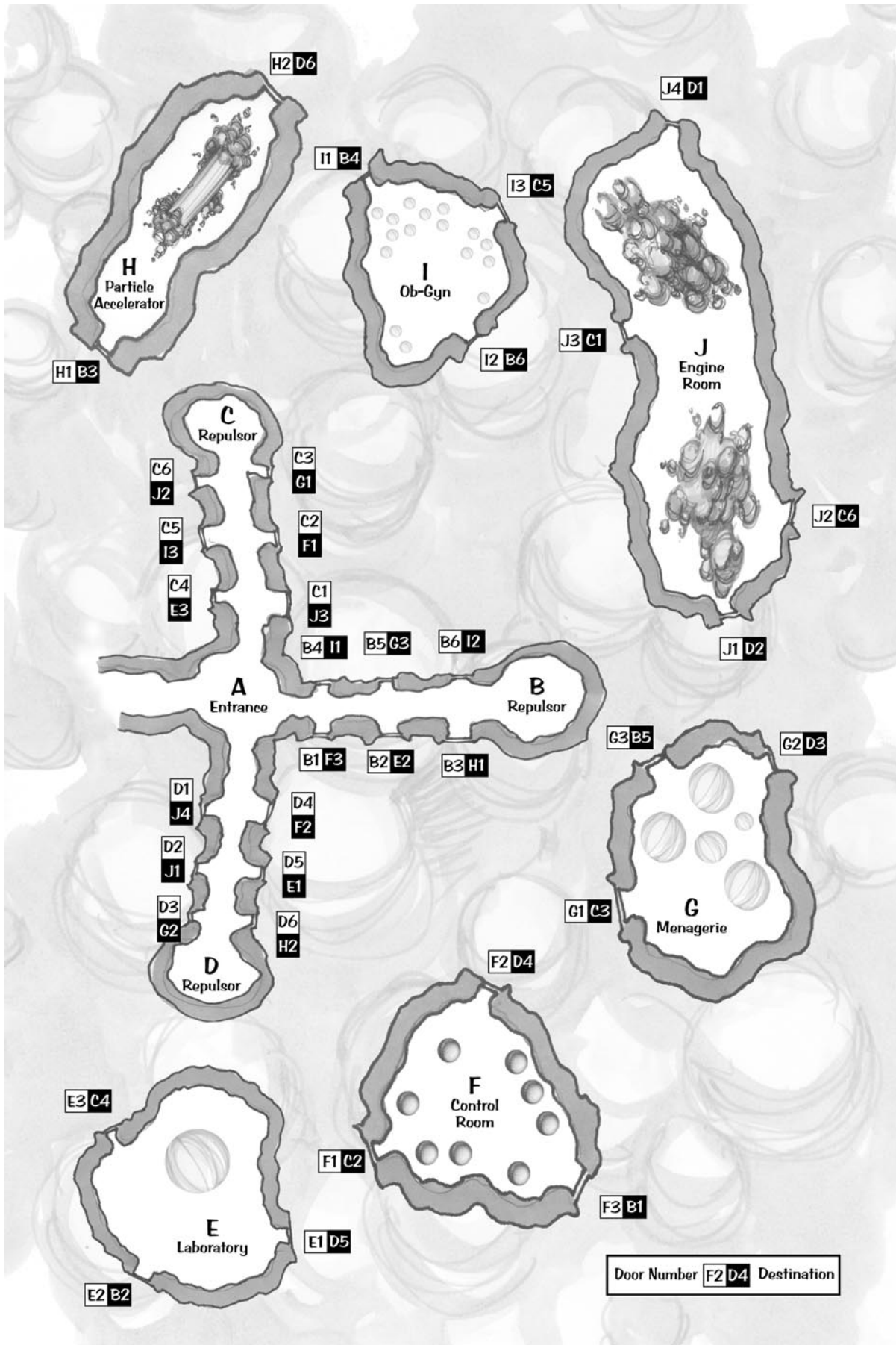
The spaceship only has ten chambers and three hallways, but there are eighteen doors. These doors are open archways with no form of seal. Four of the chambers connect normally via hallways, but the other six are extra-dimensional spaces that can be entered from multiple doors in ways that make no sense in three-dimensional terms.

To represent this on the diagram, each chamber has a letter and each door has a number. (The three hallways have letters corresponding to the chamber at their terminus.) Next to each door is a letter-number combination that tells you the other door it connects with — chamber letter plus door number equals destination. Doors are paired with each other, so you can walk reliably between the same two doors no matter which direction you start from.

Because the doorways are all wide open, you can sometimes see through to the room beyond and into another part of the hallway you're standing in past a far door. For example: standing in hallway B in front of door B4, you can see through door I1 into chamber I. Across chamber I you can see door I2, and through that is door B6 — which is just down the hall to your right. If another PC stands in front of door B6, the two of you can see each other across room I as well as down hallway B, which of course is impossible.

Encourage the players to make a map. Avoid laughing at them when they do.

THE TREMBLING HILL



Room A. Entrance

As noted, this is a roughly ten foot by ten foot room with three hallways leading off into the interior of the hull. The opening in the south wall leads back outside.

Hallways B, C, and D

These three hallways are the main arteries of the ship, providing access both to the repulsor chambers (B, C, and D) and the various working rooms of the craft. Each is about ten feet wide and sixty feet long.

The hallways resemble room A in that they are damp and irregular, with a slight give to the surface that suggests toughened flesh. The same mist drifts over the floors as in room A.

For PCs in search of the cow sounds, they are issuing from room E. Since there is a door to room E in each hallway, the same sounds come from all three hallways at once.

As the PCs walk along a hall, they pass three doorways in each of the two walls spaced about ten feet apart. These open directly onto the various rooms.

Room B. Repulsor 1

If you could see the outside of the ship, you'd know it was triangular with three big glowing discs on the bottom near the corners. These discs are the repulsors that generate lift and thrust. Rooms B, C, and D are nearly identical chambers where the machinery for each repulsor is located. Unlike the other rooms, these repulsor chambers exist in normal three-dimensional space for ease of propulsion within our subset of reality — hence the stable hallways and the core set of rooms. Only the other rooms exploit the features of extra-dimensional reality.

Each repulsor room is about 20 feet by 20 feet, and is dominated by a floating matrix of reflective metal tiles — describe them as mirrors, although they aren't made of glass. Each tile is about two feet square. The matrix of floating tiles has no visible means of support, and it drifts inwards and outwards very slowly in a pattern similar to breathing. In the heart of each matrix is a glow-

ing, levitating crystal whose light is reflected countless times by the tiles, all of which face inwards towards the crystal. The floor beneath each matrix holds a glassy disc 15 feet in diameter that resembles a lens; the disc is currently dark. (When the ship is in motion, the matrices change configurations rapidly to direct the crystals' energy through the lens at whatever angles are needed for navigation.)

Repulsor room 1 is unoccupied.

Room C. Repulsor 2

Identical to room B.

Room D. Repulsor 3

Identical to room B, except that the giant lens is badly cracked. Little rivulets of dirt driven through the cracks during the crash mar the finish.

Room E. Laboratory

This large room — about 50 feet by 60 feet — is an elaborate laboratory and surgery. Large machines line the walls and occupy random positions on the floor, while counters are littered with curious tools, bowls of bubbling liquids, and so forth. Describe it as an alchemist's lab, or a wizard's workshop.

The center of the room contains the surgery. It's a sealed bubble made of transparent gel that holds its shape. However, there is enough stuff jumbled around the room that the PCs can't really see this structure until they get well into the room.

The surgery bubble contains the cow they may have heard. It's a normal cow, but it's doing something abnormal: the cow is floating in mid-air and rotating very slowly, as if it were impaled on an invisible spit over a bonfire. The cow isn't alone, either. Five humanoids are standing around it, working busily.

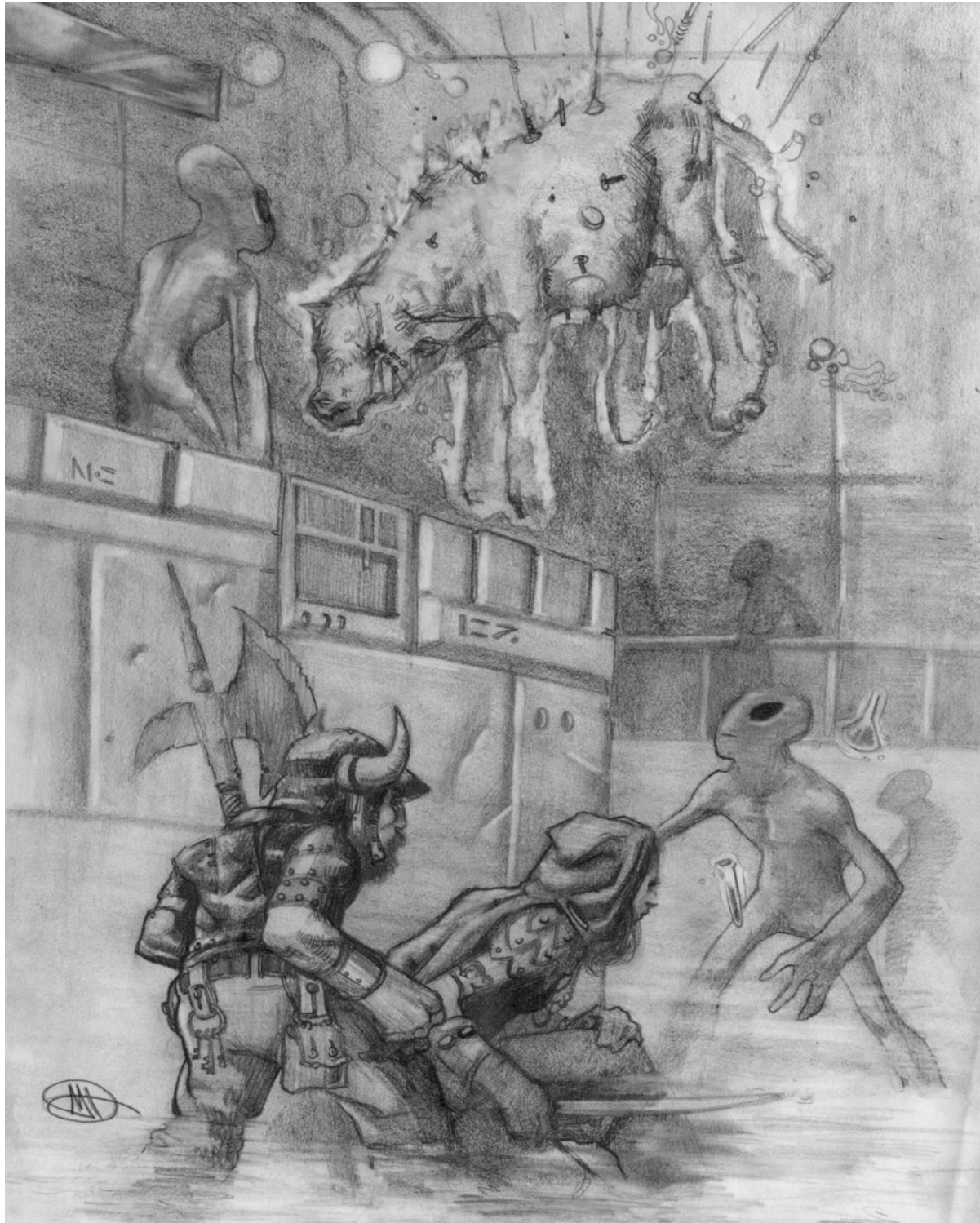
On closer inspection, the PCs see that the cow has been vivisected. Its belly is cut open and the entrails are drifting in the air, rotating in place with the cow they're still attached to. The creatures around the cow poke and prod at the organs, shining lights through them and inspecting them.

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The humanoids are about five feet tall with pale gray skin. They are naked and hairless, with no recognizable genitalia or other sexual features. Their heads are larger than a human's, and their eyes are the size of small fists, jet black in color. They have no noses and their mouths are lipless slits. Some wield curious instruments of science or madness. As they work, the cow moans sleepily.

So intent are they on their grisly work that they don't notice the PCs unless someone makes noise, tries to talk, or otherwise calls attention to the party. If this happens, all five creatures whip around to look at the PCs. They begin mewling to each other but make no immediate aggressive moves.

After a few moments, they go back to their work and ignore the party. The only exception is if the



NEW WEAPONS:

Alien Technology

Philosopher's Gun: Instead of inflicting damage, make a Fortitude save vs. DC 10 or be transmuted into a pure, lifeless element. Any element can be selected by proper manipulation of the weapon's settings — gold, uranium, etc. It only affects living tissue, so clothes, hair, scars, and so forth remain.

Disruptor: Inflicts the equivalent of acid damage, causing the affected flesh to bubble and cook.

NAME	DAMAGE	CRITICAL	RANGE	WEIGHT	TYPE
Philosopher's Gun	Special	—	10 ft.	1 lb.	Special
Disruptor	2d6	x3	60 ft.	5 lb.	Special

PCs make an attack, interfere with the vivisection, or begin damaging equipment. If this happens, the creatures make some more sounds and a phase beast emerges from the ceiling to chase the PCs out of the ship (see stats in insert box). The little humanoids avoid combat if they can, using their phase beast servitors to do the dirty work, but they defend themselves if attacked.

Room F: Control Room

This slightly oblong chamber is the control room for the ship. It contains five spheres, each about eight

feet in diameter, that float in mid-air in no particular configuration. Touching any sphere causes it to lower to the floor and split open, revealing a compartment that can hold a slender person up to six feet tall. The interior of the spheres is smooth, soft, and featureless.

If someone of appropriate size climbs inside a sphere, it closes shut around them and then resumes levitating. Inside the sphere, the now-weightless occupant suddenly finds himself buried alive, surrounded on all sides by dirt and roots, lit by an unknown light source. He'll quickly realize it's an illusion. (Normally, he'd be see-

NEW MONSTER:

Gray Humanoid

CR 1; SZ M (humanoid); HD 1d8; hp 4; Init +1; Spd 30 ft.; AC 11 (+1 Dex); Atk ranged +1 (special, Philosopher's Gun; or special, Disruptor); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SQ blindsight 60 ft., damage reduction 10/iron, resistance to electricity 30; AL N; SV Fort +0, Ref +1, Will +4; Str 10, Dex 13, Con 10, Int 22, Wis 18, Cha 8

These strange visitors from another galaxy mostly just want to be left alone so they can mutilate cattle, gather bizarre specimens, and perhaps one day enslave the entire planet. Meanwhile, they're just poking around. They have a couple of advanced tools at their disposal that can be used as weapons. No one else can make these items function, although any experienced wizard, alchemist, or gnome inventor would pay 200 gp for the chance to examine one — the materials and construction are astounding by this world's standards.

Blindsight (Ex): Using nonvisual senses, the gray humanoids can see the invisible and they can see in darkness up to 60 feet. They don't need to make Spot or Listen checks to notice creatures within range of the blindsight ability.

Damage Reduction (Su): The gray humanoids ignore damage from most weapons and natural attacks; the wounds heal immediately. Damage dealt by an attack is reduced by 10 points, but an iron weapon or weapon with +1 or better magical bonus deals full damage.

Resistance to Electricity (Ex): The gray humanoids ignore the first 30 points of electrical damage dealt to them each round.

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ing the outside terrain or the vastness of space, but since the ship is temporarily buried, he just sees the dirt around the craft. It's your basic 360° holographic viewscreen.)

The gray humanoids operate the ship from inside these spheres, using combinations of voices and gestures. The PCs are unlikely to recreate any of these through happenstance, though you can have the ship make some strange sounds in response to a fumbling occupant, if you like. Violent motion such as banging your fist against the interior of the sphere — which can be felt, though not seen — causes the sphere to lower to the floor and open up again.

As with the surgery, destructive action by the PCs triggers an attack by a phase beast. Ordinary monkeying around does not provoke this response.

Room 9: Menagerie

This chamber is a menagerie of creatures the gray humanoids have collected from this world. It holds a large number of floating spheres similar to those of the control room, but these are transparent and of differing sizes. Each sphere holds a being of some sort in a weightless, timeless suspension. PCs cannot move or open the spheres through physical force, as they respond to combinations of voice and gestures similar to the control-room spheres; lacking that, they remain in place and impervious to harm.

At least in theory; if your players are determined to open a sphere for some reason — perhaps to slay the hapless occupant for some quick experience points — you can allow any ludicrously overpowered attack to do so. If this happens, the sphere pops open and the occupant is released, but it's unconscious for two rounds. A phase beast shows up

NEW MONSTER:

Phase Beast

CR 2; SZ M (aberration); HD 2d8+2; hp 9; Init +2; Spd 40 ft.; AC 12 (+2 Dex); Atk melee +2 (1d8+2, 2 polyps); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SQ amorphous, blindsight 60 ft., damage reduction 10/+2, resistance to electricity 30, rebirth, spell resistance 30 (Transmutation only); AL N; SV Fort +2, Ref +2, Will +0; Str 15, Dex 14, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 8

These amorphous masses of flesh and organs are generated from the living ship of the gray humanoids. They are servitors who perform basic defense duties, but they do not leave the ship if at all possible owing to their Rebirth special quality.

Amorphous (Ex): A phase beast is not subject to critical hits. It has no clear front or back, so it cannot be flanked.

Blindsight (Ex): Using nonvisual senses, the phase beasts can see the invisible and they can see in darkness up to 60 feet. They don't need to make Spot or Listen checks to notice creatures within range of the blindsight ability.

Damage Reduction (Su): The phase beasts ignore damage from most weapons and natural attacks; the wounds heal immediately. Damage dealt by an attack is reduced by 10 points, but a weapon with +2 or better magical bonus deals full damage.

Resistance to Electricity (Ex): The phase beasts ignore the first 30 points of electrical damage dealt to them each round.

Spell Resistance (Ex): To determine if a spell or spell-like ability works against a phase beast, the spellcaster makes a level check (1d20 + caster level). If the result equals or exceeds 30, the spell works normally, though the target still gets a saving throw. In phase beasts, spell resistance works only against Transmutation spells.

Rebirth (Ex): If a phase beast is reduced to 0 hp or less within its ship of origin, its flesh is immediately absorbed by the craft's living walls. Two rounds later, the phase beast reemerges from the wall with full hit points. Each such rebirth causes the replacement creature to be tougher: +1 HD, +1 Str, +1 Dex, +1 Con. The ship can have up to 20 HD of phase beasts active at one time; the more HD per creature, the fewer creatures it can keep active. Rebirth can be triggered by the ship at will, not just when a given Beast has been defeated.

PCs receive XP each time they "kill" a phase beast. However, if they hang around just to kill phase beasts and earn XP, the ship maxes out all 20 HD at once and sends ten 2 HD beasts at once to drive them off.

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immediately, however, to harass the PCs. It's followed by the gray humanoids, who corral the released creature back into a sphere for safekeeping — assuming it's not already dead, in which case they haul it off to the surgery.

What creatures are in here? It's up to you. The room is 60 feet by 30 feet, so stock it with whatever you want — big monsters, random people, hordes of pixies, etc. Unlike most other areas of the ship, the menagerie has 40-foot ceilings. You can chuck a lot of different spheres in here. And if you need something dramatic to happen or just want to wrap things up, assume a PC stumbles on an accidental combination of voice and gesture that causes every sphere to open at once. Time to go!

Room H. Particle Accelerator

This is a long chamber containing a sort of particle accelerator. It looks like a glass tube, 10 feet in diameter and 50 feet in length, that floats unsupported in the middle of the room. Each end is capped with a morass of slightly damp, pulsing material that looks more than a little alive. The tube is packed full of repulsor crystals, through which pass a back-and-forth wave of near-blinding light. This wave starts slow and accelerates rapidly, infusing the crystals with energy. It's accompanied by a throbbing hum.

Under normal circumstances, this tube is impervious to harm. But once again you should feel free to let determined players bust it open, should they feel the need.

If this occurs, the crystals smash to the floor. Their splintered shards cause 2d6 damage to anyone in the room, and 1d3 to anyone standing just outside the doorways. In addition, anyone who takes damage also suffers from short-term radiation poisoning. Their Constitution is reduced by 4 for the next two weeks, during which time all their hair falls out. After that, Constitution is recovered at 1 point per week; hair grows back as normal. There are no long-term effects, though PCs should avoid getting pregnant during the radiation period.

Room I. Ob-Gyn

This room is full of immature gray humanoids. That isn't to say they're laughing at fart jokes — they're all just very young and small, about one foot tall. Babies, really. Each is contained in a slightly translucent sphere reminiscent of the Star Child from the end of *2001*. The spheres are quite small and the ceiling is 100 feet tall, so there's something like 100,000 gray humanoid infants in here. All are held in stasis for retrieval and accelerated-maturity treatments when needed, perhaps for colonizing a pig-ignorant but unpolluted world where the inhabitants still believe in elves. But for now, they're just hanging around.

Monkeying with the babies, of course, brings the phase beast.

NEW MONSTER:

The Alien Engine

CR 9; SZ G (aberration); HD 24d8+168; hp 222; Init -1 (-1 Dex); Spd — ; AC 22 (-4 size, -1 Dex, +17 natural); Atk — ; Face — ; Reach — ; SA amorphous, engulfing slam; AL N; SV Fort +8, Ref +0, Will +5; Str 34, Dex 9, Con 24, Int 4, Wis 13, Cha 13

Amorphous (Ex): The engine is not subject to critical hits. It has no clear front or back, so it cannot be flanked.

Engulfing Slam (Ex): When crossing the mound, PCs move at half speed. Each round, roll an attack against the PC using the equivalent of a +3 slam attack. If successful, the attack does no damage. Instead, the PC's move is halved again. After four successful attacks, the PC is engulfed, immobile, and suffocates until dead or freed by companions who inflict at least 10 hp of damage to the engulfing material in a single round; an engulfed character cannot attack the engine from within. A suffocating character can hold his breath for two rounds per point of Constitution, after which a Constitution check DC 10 must be made each round to continue holding his breath, with the DC increasing by +1 for every success. When the character fails one of these suffocation checks he falls unconscious (0 hp), and the next round drops to -1 hit points and is dying; in the third round, he suffocates. Don't forget the -2 Dexterity modifier for the dense atmosphere.

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Room J. Engine Room

This is a mammoth chamber, about 25 feet wide by 100 feet long, that looks like nothing so much as the inside of a colossal gibbering moulder, or the trash heap of an abattoir. It's piled high with mounds of shifting, mewling, protoplasmic flesh, where eyes and tendrils spawn and collapse and small bolts of lightning ripple across the surface. It would be completely disgusting except that it doesn't smell any different than the rest of the ship — perhaps a clue to the alert player that the entire craft is some form of organism.

The engine, such as it is, poses no direct threat to the PCs. But trying to cross the room is dangerous because the mounds of oozing flesh have a consistency not unlike quicksand. There is no way to skirt the edge, since the mound begins to rise just a few feet inside each doorway. The only way through the room is over the mound.

Of course, the only reason anyone would try to cross the engine room is if they were being chased. And the PCs only get chased by the phase beast if they do something rude, like trying to damage the engine. So everything will be just fine ...

Conclusion

This encounter concludes when the PCs leave the trembling hill. The only question is *how* they leave it.

If at any point they do something destructive, they'll probably leave at a full run to escape one or more phase beasts. Since the beasts are formed from the living mass of the ship itself, and their corpses just get reabsorbed and regenerated, the gray humanoids are unlikely to ever run out of the things. This means the PCs will eventually beat a hasty retreat. Once they leave the hill, the beasts remain inside on guard but do not pursue anyone outside the ship, since if they die in the outside world they won't get reabsorbed by the craft. A few hours later, the ship flies away as described below.

It's possible the PCs don't do anything destructive and just get a meet-and-greet with their future alien masters — uh, that is, interstellar cousins. If so, at some point you need to kick them off the ship and get them back to the campaign.

The way to do this is to launch the ship. The gray humanoids occupy the command spheres, the engine mass starts screaming, and the mirror matrices in the repulsor rooms begin realigning. If the PCs don't get the hint and leave, the crystals ignite, light blasts through the lenses, and they all travel into space at heart-clenching speed — but then the gray humanoids decide not to pick up more hitchhikers and zip back down long enough for the phase beasts to chase the PCs out. Then the ship flies off to the stars, somewhat shakily thanks to the broken repulsor disc.

If the players deserve a little reward, perhaps they find chunks of newly formed diamond in the remains of the earthen mound, forged from chunks of unearthed coal by the energies of departure.





Wayfarer's Rest

BY JOHN SEAVEY • ILLUSTRATED BY MIKE DUTTON

Encounter Level: 5

Setting: Any wilderness

Summary: The party stops at an out-of-the-way inn, which turns out to be owned by a bunch of murderous maniacs.

Background

It's been several centuries since Marc Cayne first set up Wayfarer's Rest, the tavern his descendants still operate today; he built it himself, they say, drawing up the plans, digging the foundations, and lifting the timbers with only a small group of men to help him. Those men, in turn, died screaming in the night with no one to hear them, and their bones were buried in the earthen cellar of the inn. They soon had lots of company.

Marc Cayne was but the first in a very long line of murderers, thieves, and brigands, and Wayfarer's Rest is (and has always been) their home. Occasionally, one or another of the family will set off to seek their fortune, but someone always stays at home to keep up the family tradition; it's a point of pride, in fact, that nobody who has ever learned of their secret lives to tell of it. The current owners and operators, Shanson and Yanu Cayne and their three sons, are part of this long tradition, and Wayfarer's Rest, far from being of any help or aid, is nothing but a killing field for travelers.

This adventure is intended for low- to mid-level characters, of any alignment; characters of very low level might find it a bit too challenging simply to escape the tavern, whereas characters of levels higher than eight or nine will find it too easy.

Arrival at the Inn

When the characters first spot Wayfarer's Rest, it will seem quite inviting, especially if they have been traveling all day; a lantern in the doorway shines like a beacon, beckoning in weary travelers, and the sign (a man lying in a bed, with the tavern name on top) swings gently in the breeze. The building itself has two floors, but there are no windows to be seen; instead, solid oaken timbers make the inn seem like a small fortress. The characters will spot a barn on the south side of the building, and there is a pigsty on the west side of the barn, opposite the doors, that they will certainly smell if they do not see.

When the characters enter the inn itself, Shanson is behind the bar, and Zak is sweeping the floor; apart from that, the inn seems entirely deserted. However, when the party enters, they're given a cheery wave, and invited to take a seat.

The ground floor is composed, basically, of two halves. The front half contains the common dining area with six tables and a bar. There is a large staircase in the middle of the north wall, leading up to the second floor. The common area is open to the second floor, and there is a walkway that leads from that staircase around to the rooms on either side — in other words, patrons with a room in the front half of the inn can walk out and jump down into the common area, if they're so inclined.

The door to the rear half of the inn is behind the bar — this is where the Cayne family actually lives.

Zak makes chit-chat with the party, while Shanson asks them if they want food and drink. If they do, he'll call back into the kitchen for Yanu to begin preparing stew for their new guests, and he'll serve up tankards of ale. It all seems very ... homey. (Try to extend this for a bit, in order to lull the players as well as the characters into a false sense of security.)

The ale is mildly drugged, as is the food, with a tasteless drug; the poison has a save DC of 16, with an initial damage of 1 Str, and a secondary damage of 1d6 Str and Con. It is suggested that you make these rolls secretly, so as not to tip the players off that they've been drugged.

After a short while, Shanson will offer to show the party to their rooms; he'll explain that luckily, there are enough vacant rooms so that each member can have his own private room. (Unless, of course, there are more than ten members of the party, in which case he won't try anything with the group; he's no fool when it comes to odds.) At least a few members of the party should be more than happy to accept, given the sudden exhaustion they'll feel after eating.

The front three rooms are fairly small, and are entered through the walkway previously mentioned. The back four rooms are more spacious.

Night Terrors

Once the characters are settled in for the night, Shanson will go and get his other two sons, and they'll get ready to ambush the characters in their beds. The walls between the rooms are filled with wood shavings, which muffle and deaden sounds, but even so, they'll try to knock them unconscious quickly and drag them down to the cellars.

The Caynes usually have an easy time of overcoming their guests, in large part because of the hidden passages that were built into the length of the eastern and western walls of the inn. Because of this, the rooms are a little smaller than they seem looking at the inn from the outside, and there are no windows along these walls. The passages are accessed through the staircases in the kitchen and living room, respectively. All rooms have a secret entrance through these passages. The passageways them-



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selves are best described as “spartan”; there is no decoration of any sort on the walls, and the floors are dusty, despite being walked frequently by the Caynes on their nighttime ambushes. Combined with the lack of windows, it adds up to a very gloomy atmosphere; when the Caynes use the passages, they bring a hooded lantern, but there is no other source of light.

The family will always go two to a room; they have very little interest in facing even odds. They will try to knock the character unconscious under almost all circumstances; killing them within the rooms gives them very little sport.

If the PCs are knocked unconscious, they’ll awaken to find themselves locked in cages in the cellar.

The cages crude, but sturdy, and take some doing to break out of (Hardness 5, 19 hp, and Break DC of 16).

However, the locks aren’t the most complex, and can be picked with relative ease and a few tools. Unfortunately, a few tools are exactly what the characters don’t have at the moment; Yanu always takes a few moments to strip the prisoners of anything they might use to break out. (These items can be found later on in the storage room.)

The cellar is an open area with an earthen floor, with a few rooms built out of rough timber over the years. A few torches that have been stuck into the ground, well away from the wooden rooms, provide the only light ... and a fair number of shadows as well. Just past the cages, one of the rooms contains a haphazard collection of loot taken from victims over the years, and the other contains gruesome mounted trophies of the family’s kills; these are

mainly heads, but even a few full human bodies on display. Just across from the stairs is the larder, where food is kept cold ... the exact food that’s being kept cold is left to the imagination. Next to that room is the tanning room, where Shanson makes leather out of the skins of his victims — it contains a wide variety of dyes and chemicals, as well as human skin in various stages of tanning.

Finally, on the south end of the cellar is a twelve-foot-deep pit, from which grunting noises can be heard. The pit is used for gladiatorial contests; the Caynes love dropping animals that Kort has captured into the pit, and watching them duke it out. The current place of pride is held by a very unhappy minotaur; if the PCs do get captured, they might find themselves down in the pit with him. (He’d prefer to get out and wreak havoc on his captors, of course, but the pit is just a little too steep to get out of, so he takes his frustrations out on the unhappy souls thrown in to him.)

Exploration

A few very paranoid characters might search the room thoroughly enough to find the secret passages themselves. This will lead them to the parts of the inn that only the family is supposed to be in ...

Finding the secret passages in each room requires a Search check with a DC of 25; the “soundproofing” of the rooms themselves adds +10 to the DC of any Listen checks made by people in other rooms.

If the players manage to find the secret passages before they’re attacked, they’ll find themselves in the

The Minotaur

CR 4; SZ L (humanoid); HD 6d8+12; hp 35; Init +0; Spd 30 ft.; AC 14 (–1 size, +5 natural); Atk melee +4 (1d8+2, gore or 1d3+4, fist); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 10 ft.; SA charge; SQ natural cunning; AL CE; SV Fort +6, Ref +5, Will +5; Str 19, Dex 10, Con 15, Int 7, Wis 10, Cha 8

Skills: Intimidate +5, Jump +8, Listen +8, Search +6, Spot +8

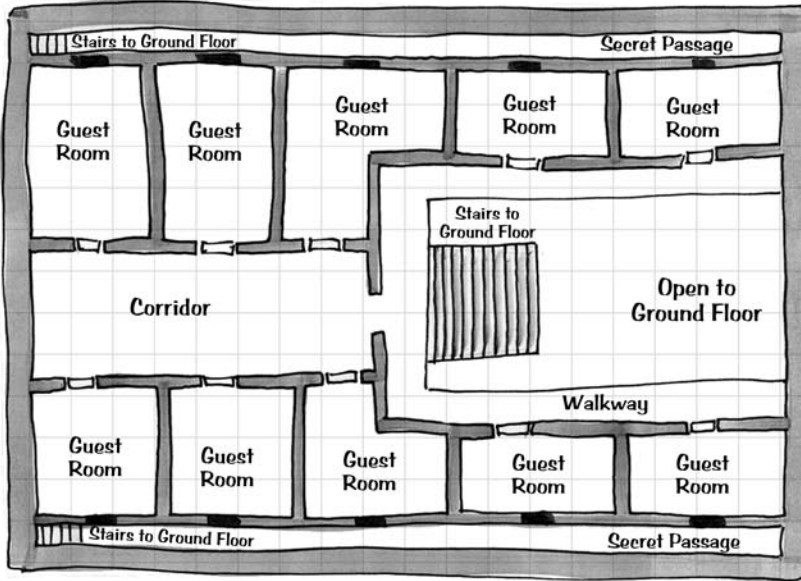
Feats: Great Fortitude, Power Attack

The minotaur tends to try to slam its opponents into the walls of the pit, using its horns to impale them against the sides; once it has done this, it will simply pummel its foe with its mighty arms. The drawback with this strategy, of course, is its tendency to slam headfirst into the walls when it misses.

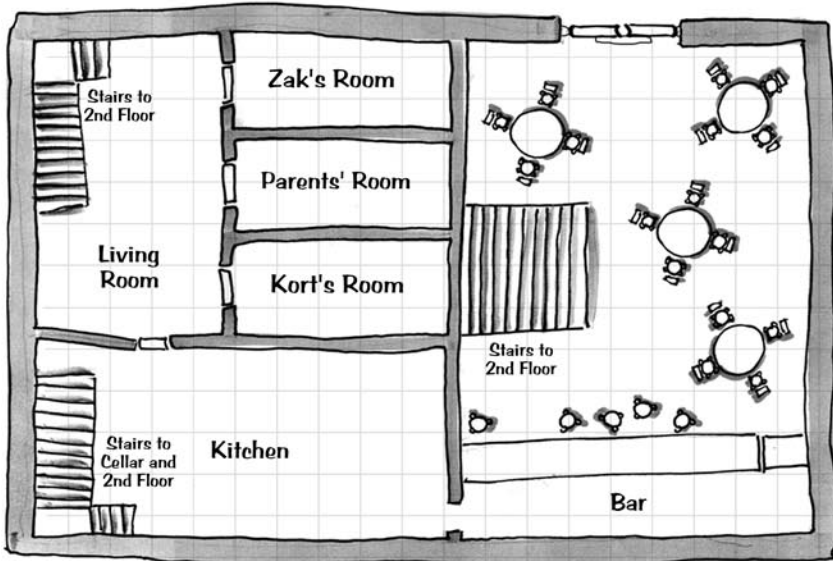
Charge (Ex): When the minotaur charges its opponent, in addition to the normal hazards and benefits of a charge attack, its gore attack does 4d6+6 damage.

Natural Cunning (Ex): Minotaurs are immune to maze spells, and never become lost, due to their innate cunning. This and their sense of acute smell allows them to track opponents. Further, they are never caught flat-footed.

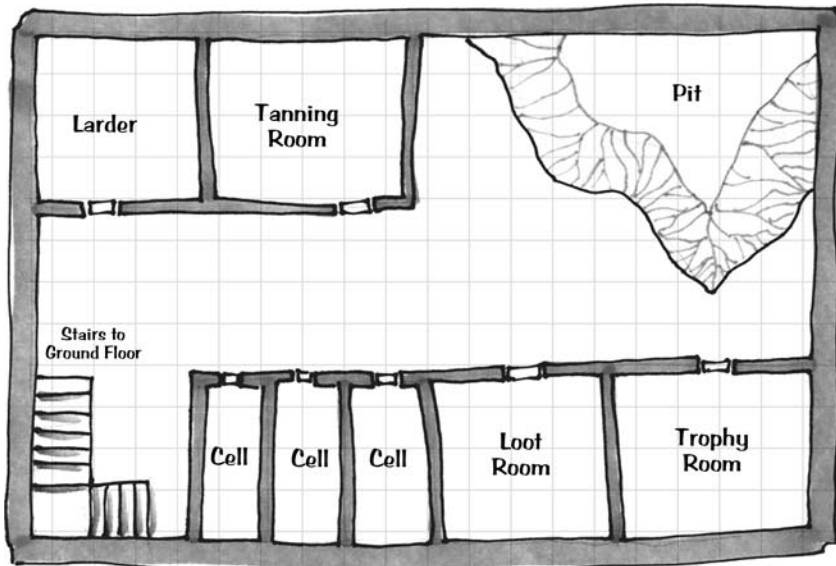
WAYFARER'S REST



Second Floor



First Floor



Cellar

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private, back half of the inn; the kitchen has a double staircase at the north end, leading both up to the upper rooms, and down to the cellar. This room is best described as strange and disturbing. Recognizably human body parts lie on the carving boards, ready to be cooked, and bubbling pots contain meat which the characters, by this point, probably won't want to taste. (It's best to leave the contents of the stew they ate earlier to their imaginations.)

South of the kitchen staircase, on the east wall, is the door to the living room. This room looks fairly normal; besides the entrance to the kitchens, it has a staircase leading to the upper floor, a door leading out of the inn, and on the southern wall three more doors, each leading to a narrow bedroom — the left bedroom belongs to Shanson and Yanu, the middle to Zak, and the rightmost to Kort, although he rarely uses it.

Of course, if the characters explore, sooner or later they'll run into the family as they prepare to ambush them in their beds — if this happens, the whole family will attack the intruders, attempting to render them unconscious. Characters who are too curious are usually given to Arl, who takes them out into the barn; he enjoys letting the pigs finish off the characters when they're too weak to put up any resistance.

Getting Out Alive

If the characters figure out early enough that there's something wrong with the Cayne family and their

inn, it'll be simple enough to escape. The longer they wait, though, the more chance that one member or another of the party will wind up either in the cages, the pit, the barn, or unwillingly answering Kort Cayne's challenge to get to the river before he can get to them. If this happens, they'll have a struggle on their hands, as the family fights very dirty, and has a secret to protect. They also have a better knowledge of their surroundings, and will flee if they find themselves totally overmatched.

Whether or not the party manages to finish off the Caynes, there are still family members out there. Relatives travel the globe for years on end, sometimes, before returning to the tavern to resume the family business. In other words, the party might find themselves returning to what they assume is a deserted inn, only to find it open for business once more. If the party notifies the authorities when they get back to civilization, though, a military detachment will be sent out to investigate. They'll kill any family members they find, and burn the inn to the ground. (Not that this will necessarily stop the family from rebuilding, of course. They've had to deal with fire and flood before.)

A worst-case scenario involves the party leaving some members alive, either through kindness or through the Cayne family's cunning. If this happens, word will spread along the family grapevine, and the PCs might find themselves with enemies in odd places. A feud like this can create some useful recurring enemies for you to sprinkle throughout your campaign.

Zak Cayne, Middle Child

4th-Level Human Fighter

CR 4; SZ M (humanoid); HD 4d10+8; hp 33; Init +2 (Dex); Spd 20 ft.; AC 17 (+2 Dex, +5 chainmail); Atk melee +8 (1d10+3/crit 19–20 x2, bastard sword), ranged +6 (1d6/crit x3, composite shortbow); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; AL NE; SV Fort +6, Ref +3, Will +2; Str 17, Dex 14, Con 15, Int 12, Wis 12, Cha 13

Skills: Climb +10, Jump +10, Ride Horses +9, Swim +10

Feats: Dodge, Expertise, Mobility, Spring Attack, Weapon Focus (bastard sword)

Zak has already decided in his own mind that he will be the one to carry on the family business once his father dies; his elder brother, after all, is uninterested in anything save hunting, and his younger half-brother will never gain his father's favor. Hence, he tries to make himself as useful as possible to his father, trying to pick up as much knowledge as possible. Shanson, however, still sees Kort as the future of the Cayne clan, and has taught him how to hunt and track with the assumption that someday Kort will settle down to run the inn. This is already beginning to cause some friction between father and son, but for now, Zak merely tries that much harder to please Shanson.

Possessions: Chainmail armor, bastard sword, composite shortbow and quiver of arrows

Shanson Cayne, Patriarch

8th-Level Human Ranger

CR 8; SZ M (humanoid); HD 8d10 + 8; hp 67; Init +3 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 18 (+3 Dex, +5 for +2 *studded leather*); Atk melee +8/+3 (1d8+2/crit 19–20x2, +1 *longsword*, 1d6+1/crit 19–20x2, masterwork shortsword), ranged +11/+6 (1d8/crit x3, composite longbow); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SA spells; SQ favored enemy; AL NE; SV Fort +7, Ref +5, Will +5; Str 13, Dex 17, Con 13, Int 11, Wis 16, Cha 11

Skills: Animal Empathy +8, Climb +5, Craft (bowmaking) +2, Craft (leathermaking) +2, Craft (taxidermy) +2, Handle Animal +10, Innuendo +8, Intuit Direction +9, Ride Horses +13, Wilderness Lore +8

Feats: Far Shot, Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot, Rapid Shot, Track

Shanson is a quiet man, who listens more than he talks; he has a friendly smile, though, and keeps it permanently on display when he's working at the bar, which keeps his silence from seeming sinister. He's a stern father to the boys, and a stern husband to the wife; this means, of course, that he's not afraid to let any of them feel the back of his hand when he's angered. From time to time, though, he feels the pressures of family life too strongly, and will head off into the woods to the local orc tribe, with which the family has an uneasy love-hate relationship. At the moment, however, he is at home, taking care of the inn.

Shanson enjoys making things out of the former customers; he is the one who keeps and maintains the trophy room in the basement which contains stuffed mementos of prior visitors to the tavern. He also enjoys tanning hides for clothing; the hides which he tans are, perhaps, best left to the imagination.

The horse in the barn is Shanson's, and tries to buck and bite anyone who tries to ride it. It also tries to buck and bite Shanson, but he enjoys the challenge and hasn't tried to tame it overmuch.

Favored Enemy: Shanson Cayne gains a +2 bonus to Bluff, Listen, Sense Motive, Spot, and Wilderness Lore checks against orcs, as well as a +2 bonus to all damage rolls against those creatures. He gains a +1 bonus to those same rolls against humans.

Spells: (2/1) The save DC is 13 plus the spell level; Shanson usually keeps the following spells prepared

1st Level — *entangle*, *resist elements*

2nd Level — *sleep*

Possessions: +2 *studded leather*, *ring of evasion*, +1 *longsword*, masterwork shortsword, composite longbow and quiver of arrows

Arl Cayne, Secret Shame

3rd-Level Half-orc Fighter

CR 3; SZ M (humanoid); HD 3d10+6; hp 24; Init +2 (Dex); Spd 20 ft.; AC 19 (+1 Dex, +8 full plate mail); Atk melee +8 (1d8+4/crit x3, battleaxe), ranged +5 (1d4+4/crit 19–20 x2, thrown dagger); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SQ darkvision, orc blood; AL CE; SV Fort +5, Ref +3, Will +2; Str 18, Dex 14, Con 15, Int 7, Wis 13, Cha 10

Skills: Climb +7, Swim +7

Feats: Cleave, Dodge, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (battleaxe)

Arl Cayne is the result of one of Shanson's trips out into the forest; nine months after this particular trip, a half-orc baby was left on the doorstep of the inn, bearing a suspicious resemblance to Shanson. Yanu and Shanson never spoke of it, but they did raise the baby as a member of the family ... well, sort of. Arl sleeps in the barn, and isn't allowed into the inn excepting when they capture new prisoners. He's allowed to take one or two into the barn, where he works out his frustration on them, but for the most part, he's not acknowledged as anything more than an unfortunate accident. Arl broods over this constantly, flying into wild, bitter rages that usually end with something dead.

Darkvision (Ex): Arl can see in the dark up to 60 feet.

Orc Blood: For all special abilities and effects, Arl is considered an orc.

Possessions: Full plate mail, battleaxe, 3 throwing daggers

Yanu Cayne, Matriarch

7th-Level Human Rogue

CR 7; SZ M (humanoid); HD 7d6; hp 26; Init +4 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 17 (+4 Dex, +3 masterwork studded leather); Atk melee +6 (1d6/crit 19–20 x2, masterwork shortsword), ranged +9 (1d4/crit 19–20 x2, thrown dagger); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SA sneak attack, evasion, uncanny dodge; AL NE; SV Fort +2, Ref +9, Will +3; Str 10, Dex 19, Con 11, Int 13, Wis 13, Cha 18

Skills: Bluff +14, Diplomacy +14, Forgery +11, Hide +14, Innuendo +11 (+13 to transmit a hidden message), Move Silently +14, Open Lock +14, Pick Pocket +16, Read Lips +11, Spot +11

Feats: Alertness, Dodge, Mobility, Spring Attack

Yanu is the avaricious one of the group; she is uninterested in killing, although she certainly has no intention of keeping the others from their fun. Instead, she prefers to act as a con artist and grifter, scamming travelers out of their belongings before the others take their lives. The fact that she could simply wait, and take the money off their corpses is immaterial to her — she enjoys the challenge of taking suckers for everything she can. She brings the food out to the tables and flirts with the customers — despite having three teenage children, she's kept her figure and looks quite well, and isn't above using that to her advantage.

Sneak Attack (Ex): If Yanu can catch her opponent when he is unable to defend himself, she gains +4d6 to her damage roll.

Evasion (Ex): Any time Yanu successfully makes her Reflex saving throw for half damage (for example, against a fireball spell), she takes no damage instead.

Uncanny Dodge (Ex): Yanu cannot be flanked unless the person attempting to flank her is a rogue of 11th level or above; she retains her Dexterity bonus to AC even when caught flat-footed or struck by an invisible attacker.

Possessions: 6 throwing knives, masterwork studded leather, thieves' tools, masterwork shortsword

Kort Cayne, Primogenitor

6th-Level Human Ranger

CR 6; SZ M (humanoid); HD 6d10+18; hp 65; Init +4 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 18 (+4 Dex, +4 for +1 studded leather); Atk melee +7/+4 (1d8+2/crit 19–20 x2, masterwork longsword, or 1d6+2/crit 19–20 x2, shortsword), ranged +12 /+13 at under 30 feet (1d8+2/crit x3, mighty [+2] longbow); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SA spells; SQ favored enemy; AL LE; SV Fort +8, Ref +6, Will +5; Str 15, Dex 18, Con 16, Int 12, Wis 16, Cha 11

Skills: Climb +15, Craft (bowmaking) +5, Intuit Direction +9, Jump +5, Listen +11, Move Silently +12, Search +4, Spot +11, Swim +5, Wilderness Lore +11

Feats: Dodge, Mobility, Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot, Track

Kort is somewhat aloof from his family, preferring to live in the wilderness that surrounds Wayfarer's Rest. This is not to say that he isn't as cruel or bloodthirsty as the rest of the family; he is. However, he sees no sport in killing people as they lie asleep in their beds. He prefers to let them loose in the wilderness, and hunt them down using his knowledge of the area and his skills at tracking. He does make the people he hunts one promise, though. If they can reach the river, seven miles south of the tavern, he'll let them go free — a promise he'd actually honor, if it came to it. The other members of the family are less than thrilled by this, but as nobody he's ever hunted has survived to reach the river, the situation hasn't come to a head yet.

Favored Enemy: Kort Cayne gains a +2 bonus to Bluff, Listen, Sense Motive, Spot, and Wilderness Lore checks against humans, as well as a +2 bonus to all damage rolls against those creatures. He gains a +1 bonus to those same rolls against orcs.

Spells: (2) Kort Cayne keeps *pass without trace* and *detect snares and pits* prepared on most occasions; save DC for his spells is 13+ the spell's level.

Possessions: +1 studded leather armor, ring of climbing, masterwork longsword, shortsword, +2 mighty longbow and quiver of arrows

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