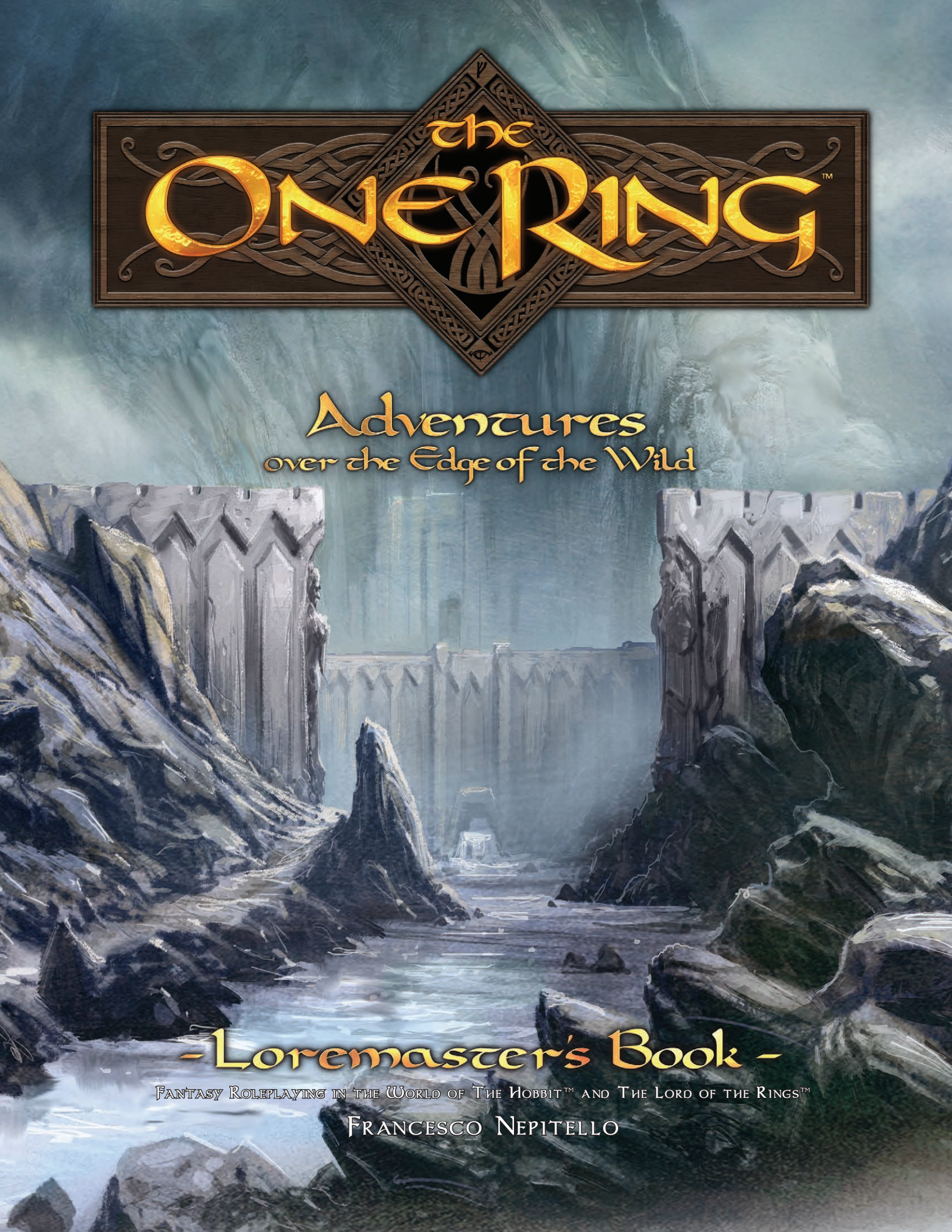




the ONE RING™

Adventures
over the Edge of the Wild

- Loremaster's Book -

FANTASY ROLEPLAYING IN THE WORLD OF THE HOBBIT™ AND THE LORD OF THE RINGS™

FRANCESCO NEPITELLO



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Dedicated to Anita, who was born when The One Ring was first discovered.

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- Part 1: The Role of the Loremaster -





the - LOREMASTER -

Then a minstrel and loremaster stood up and named all the names of the Lords of the Mark in their order...

The Adventurer's Book shows players how to create their characters and provides the basic rules for playing the game. This book is aimed at the Loremaster, the person who will run the game. It contains advice on playing successful games and more details on Middle-earth and its inhabitants, and presents the rules of the game in a greater depth. The Loremaster's Book expands on information contained in the Adventurer's Book, and so Loremasters should read that book first. If you are not going to take the part of the Loremaster, you do not need to read this book, and you definitely shouldn't read the introductory scenario *The Marsh Bell*, as it will spoil the adventure for you if you know its secrets.

WHAT DOES THE LOREMASTER DO?

The Loremaster has a more complicated role in the game than the players. While they are in control of their characters, the Loremaster is responsible for the entire game world: the description of locations; the actions of the people and creatures encountered; and the chain of events in the ongoing adventure. It is the Loremaster's responsibility to introduce players who are new to roleplaying to the basics of the game. He is going to organise and oversee all gaming sessions, and must juggle the roles of storyteller and impartial judge, all the while playing the parts of the multitude of characters that the players encounter.

In practice, during a game session, the role of the Loremaster goes a little like this:

- **1. Set the scene:**

At the start of a game session, the Loremaster gives a short summary of what happened in the previous

session, then describes where the characters are and what is happening around them. This should provide some immediate prompts to action, making sure that the game gets off to a quick and involving start.

- **2. Listen to the players:**

The players will react to the scene setting, possibly deciding on a new goal for their company or reminding themselves of their current goal. The Loremaster will play the parts of the other people present, who the players will interact with.

- **3. Describe the consequences of the players' actions:**

The Loremaster responds to the players' interactions with people, calls for dice rolls for any necessary tasks or tests and describes the outcomes of the players' actions.

- **4. Describe events from the ongoing plot:**

The Loremaster will involve elements of the adventure's plot as appropriate. These can be triggered either by the players' actions—for example, confronting a thief might lead to the villain revealing information that leads the players to the next part of the adventure—or by a timeline of events, for example such as the Loremaster deciding that Orcs will raid the settlement the players are staying in just after midnight on the third night of their stay.

The episode then proceeds using a combination of the last three steps, until it is resolved. This could mean that following this the players may begin a journey, or the Loremaster may quickly skim over a period of time when not much happens or where there are no real significant opportunity for players to take action. Both of these take place in narrative time (see page 19 in the Adventurer's Book) – basically this means that a period of time is covered quickly, without the need to play through every action or every hour of each day.

When a new episode begins, the Loremaster goes back to step one of the list above and the flow of time reverts to normal.

THE MIDDLE-EARTH LOREMASTER

Arguably the most important task of a Loremaster is to act as the interface between the players and Middle-earth. Getting the Middle-earth "mood" right is essential in order to give the players the feeling that they are a part of the unfolding events at the end of the Third Age. Many players will be no strangers to this much-loved setting, and so familiarity with the source material will be important for the Loremaster.

In addition to helping create an authentic Middle-earth experience, taking another look at Tolkien's books will remind Loremasters of the many small details which can provide the seed of an adventure plot.

When choosing who will take the role of Loremaster, it would be sensible to choose the individual whose 'Tolkien lore' runs the deepest, as nothing ruins a good session of play as a player questioning the Loremaster's knowledge of the source material.

It can seem a daunting prospect at first, but being the Loremaster is an immensely satisfying role through which a Tolkien enthusiast can truly experience the world of Middle-earth as its own creator did: by orchestrating all the elements of the setting to produce their very own epic tales.

THE QUALITIES OF A GOOD LOREMASTER

One of the most enjoyable features of all roleplaying games is the creative collaboration between the Loremaster and his players, but it is also true that the Loremaster has much more to do than any one else. He is in charge of setting the atmosphere and tone of the game, describing what is happening and helping the players resolve their characters' actions. This book aims to equip Loremasters with the rules and advice they need to run successful and enjoyable games of *The One Ring*.

The Loremaster's duties can be broken down into three roles: Director, Referee and Narrator.

The Loremaster as Director

When he is setting up an Adventuring phase for his group of players, the Loremaster's job can be likened to that of a theatre or movie director, choosing and arranging the basic elements of the 'stage' that will see the characters act during the next session of play. By selecting the locales where the action is going to take place, and determining the nature of the problem that the characters will endeavour to solve, including the personalities and opponents that will try to hinder them (or help them), the Loremaster provides his players with the rough outlines of a plot, ready to be turned by the actions of players into a full-blown narrative.

The Loremaster must be a flexible Director, ready to follow the players' improvisations when they take a route that he didn't anticipate. Loremasters who create their plots around a series of loose events that can be approached in a wide variety of ways are well-placed to deal with the tangents that players often embark on. The last thing a Loremaster should do is restrict his players unreasonably in order to make them conform to his idea of how the game should progress. Players must feel that their characters can attempt any action, no matter how limited the chances of a successful outcome.

Consistency

A Loremaster makes for a good director when he is able to weave a consistent storytelling experience out of a great number of elements, including the members of a company, their goals and ambitions, the places they visit and the people they meet. It is best not to plan to the smallest detail in advance, but to let the plot develop naturally, session after session. It is in fact easier, and probably wiser, to set each session up as if it was a separate Adventuring phase, with each new one building upon the consequences of the previous ones' using the prepared plot outline as a general guide.

The Loremaster as Referee

Roleplaying games are composed of rules combined with a set of social and storytelling conventions. While these conventions place roleplaying games outside the constraints of traditional board or card games (which



are defined solely by their rules) the fundamental game mechanics used to regulate most of the situations encountered by players require the presence of an impartial moderator: the Loremaster.

The Loremaster must be ready to adjudicate the rules at all times, whether he is testing the mettle of the characters during the Adventuring phase, or helping the players determine the outcome of their choices during the Fellowship phase.

Behavioural issues amongst the players may also be handled by the Loremaster. Everyone involved in the game is there to have fun, but sometimes one person's sense of fun can impact on other people's enjoyment. This could include a player who is working against the interests of the company, or a player who tries to argue with the Loremaster's interpretation of Middle-earth. In most cases, a quiet and friendly word in private explaining the issue will sort things out, especially if the issue is raised quickly and courteously.

Fairness

When acting as a referee, the Loremaster should strive to be fair and to apply the rules properly and impartially. Tasks are meant to provide players with a challenge. The rules governing them are there to judge whether a character was up to the test or not, and to reward him with success if he was, or to punish him with the consequences of failure if he wasn't. A partial Loremaster can easily ruin a game, as an unfair call when applying a rule brings the rules themselves to the players' attention and their immersion in the game is interrupted.

Conversely, the Loremaster shouldn't allow the rules to spoil the fun of the game. This generally happens in one of two ways. The first is the over-use of rules. Making players roll the dice for every action their character makes becomes boring and also takes some of the drama out of the tests that really matter. Secondly, structuring an adventure so that key discoveries or achievements depend on the result of a single roll is a recipe for frustration. There should always be another way of making progress.

The Loremaster as Narrator

A large part of the Loremaster's role is that of a storyteller, using words to portray what is happening to the group of heroes. He is the eyes and ears of his players, the main source of information to be fed to the collective imagination of the group. Luckily, the Loremaster is far from being alone in this task, as the entire group will have some knowledge of the source material, and the Loremaster can draw on a range of images and details that the players are already familiar with: often, a few well-chosen words are enough to give a vivid picture of what is going on, as the situation reminds the players of a scene from the books.

Creativity

A quick and, rich imagination is a precious quality for a Loremaster, especially when coupled with strong communication skills. Evocative descriptions focus the attention of all players and encourage their interaction, and the ability to build the players' reactions and plans into the ongoing adventure will lead to the most involved and enjoyable games.

TOLKIEN'S CANON

For many years, fans of the literary works of J.R.R. Tolkien have debated the existence of a consistent canon that firmly defines the world and history of Middle-earth, as described in *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings* and later publications. This has often been cited as one of the major hurdles to roleplaying games set in Middle-earth, as it is very likely that the characters' adventures will 'interfere' with the actions of the saga's known protagonists and 'break' the canon's consistency.

While a quick and easy answer to such concerns might well be that 'there is no such thing as an established Tolkien's canon,' it is interesting to delve into the subject a little bit more, as there is a lot that a Loremaster may learn from tackling this apparently insurmountable obstacle.

SUBJECTIVE SOURCES

When facing the dilemma of altering facts perceived as being part of canon, a Loremaster could consider the information that Tolkien related in his stories not as ascribed to an infallible, all-knowing narrator, but to witnesses of the times, individuals who are subject to errors and personal bias (for example, *The Hobbit* relates the content of Bilbo Baggins' memoirs). This literary device served Tolkien well in his effort to create a believable 'ancient history' which includes the inevitable inconsistencies that might come from it being composed by different chroniclers, and there is no reason why a Loremaster cannot do the same, especially if he needs to change an 'established' date or the details behind a known 'fact' or 'historical' figure.

To get an idea of how much the writer's perspective can distort perceptions, and possibly facts, one need look no further than the books: for example, *The Lord of the Rings* can find it difficult to reconcile the image they have of Gimli, the redoubtable axe-wielding warrior of Erebor, and the Dwarven companions of Bilbo, who, captured by Trolls, Goblins, Spiders and Wood-elves, more often than not end up being saved by their Hobbit burglar, Bilbo...

FILLING THE BLANKS

Tolkien wove an incredibly rich narrative tapestry, composed of believable characters set against a vivid landscape and moved by motivations firmly grounded in myth and tradition. But even such an extensive and intricate chronicle does not explore thoroughly every nook and cranny of this imagined world and period; far from it. As the narrative focus in the books shifts from one region to another, many locations and the events related to them are left in the dark, or are only briefly touched upon.

This approach, aimed to give a subjective perspective to the protagonists of the stories, who are not familiar with every corner of Middle-earth, gives the Loremaster the freedom to create his own stories. The setting provided in this book is an example of this – the

Wilderland area is introduced in *The Hobbit* but is then virtually unmentioned when the narrative advances to Frodo's days. Armed with the knowledge from the stories, and supported by the many hints and notes found in the appendices, a Loremaster has everything he needs to create a credible and exciting setting for his own chronicles.

IT IS ALL ABOUT CHARACTERS

Another interesting view on the canon comes from the author himself. While certainly very protective of his own creations in general, Tolkien stressed several times that what was ultimately dear to him were the integrity of his characters and their motivations, more than the preservation of his plots or other details. By applying this perspective to a The One Ring roleplaying game chronicle, it would be probably not far from the mark to say that the game will remain true to its literary sources if the Loremaster pays due attention to the treatment of the canonical characters, and if its players strive to create and play plausible heroes.

LAST, BUT NOT LEAST...

When approached today, the bulk of Tolkien's Middle-earth-related publications give the impression of an immutable and consistent corpus. But when the author was alive, he was constantly rewriting and rearranging his own material, even going to the point of making substantial changes to existing publications to be inserted in new, revised editions. These changes were sometimes aimed to correct inconsistencies, but more often than not they were introduced to accommodate later plot changes and alterations. It is thus possible to assume that not even Tolkien looked at his own work as being bound by any sort of established canon, and that even the chronologies he carefully created were to be considered provisional at best.

In light of these considerations, all new Loremasters are encouraged not to feel intimidated, and simply go ahead and add their own storytelling thread to the Professor's wonderful and epic narrative tapestry.



- Part 2: Game Mechanics -





the - adventuring - phase

Even the good plans of wise wizards like Gandalf and of good friends like Elrond go astray sometimes when you are off on dangerous adventures over the Edge of the Wild ...

Right-minded, respectable folk know that adventures are disturbing, uncomfortable things. Not only do they make people late for dinner, but they often imperil the lives of those who embark upon them.

Those who dare to cross the borders of the Wild are another breed entirely. Some are enthusiastic explorers seeking the last remaining artefacts of a forgotten age.

Others are valiant defenders of their people, venturing forth to defeat the forces of the dark that still plague the land. Yet more, perhaps the most heroic, are common folk putting aside their reluctance to leave their homes to do what needs to be done for the greater good. Regardless of their motivations, they are destined to confront the unknown, to brave dangers deemed insurmountable and face foes thought invincible. Such is the life of adventurers.

HOW AN ADVENTURING PHASE WORKS

The Adventuring phase is by far the largest part of the game. It is here that the adventures take place, as opposed to the Fellowship phase, where the events in between the characters' adventures are described. During this phase, the Loremaster presents to the players the situations that the characters find themselves in, and

weave the world of Middle-earth around them as they interact with it and attempt to achieve their objectives.

The Loremaster will challenge the players by putting them in difficult circumstances, setting fiendish plots for them to attempt to solve and confronting them with formidable opponents. This isn't achieved by steering the players along a pre-determined road, but by setting the world before them and helping them to create the path they choose to follow. One way to do this is to structure each game session as a series of problems to be solved.

As a story, an Adventuring phase is composed of many twisted plot threads: they can be unravelled gently and smoothly through clever gameplay, or can end up tied in knots if players stumble and produce new problems for themselves by making less than ideal choices.

A successful adventure should be a dynamic narrative, created when the players begin to explore the situation that the Loremaster presented them with. After taking in the information they have received, they will choose their courses of action. The Loremaster will describe what happens as a result of these actions, and the players will react to these developments, and the story begins to unfold. Once the game is under way, the Loremaster keeps the story flowing with a mixture of preparation and imagination.

BE PREPARED

Before the game begins, the Loremaster should have at least a generic idea about how the plot of the adventure should unfold. For example, when the players arrive in a small woodland hamlet and discover that an unknown and unnatural predator has been preying on their livestock, the Loremaster should know the precise nature of the threat, and have prepared a rough sequence of events around which the adventure should flow.

Perhaps the beast will attack the hamlet every night, or follow a pattern which the players can identify to help them capture or track it? Maybe the beast will carry off a child, instigating a race against time to try and recover the infant alive? The Loremaster needs to have an idea of when these events will happen. In addition, he will need to make sure that he and his players are familiar with any rule-related information specific to the adventure. If the characters are expected to subdue the beast in combat, the Loremaster will need to have decided on its statistics in order to make that part of the game flow well.

BE CREATIVE

However, the key to a great game of The One Ring is to leave the players in control of their own actions. The Loremaster should not frustrate the characters' efforts or prevent them from taking a certain direction just because he was not prepared for it. On the contrary, if their proposed course of play is interesting and appropriate to the situation, then the Loremaster should favour it over his own predesigned intentions. This might require the Loremaster to make up details as the game progresses, based upon his knowledge of the world and the general sequence of events in the adventure. While maybe a little intimidating at first, this gets easier as the Loremaster becomes more and more familiar with the game and its mechanics. Preparation also helps a great deal in these situations – the better the Loremaster knows the area the story takes place in, and the actions and plots that are going on in the background, the better he will be able to give the players their freedom while keeping the adventure coherent.

STRUCTURE

For fans of Middle-earth, the game can be much more than overcoming a series of tests and challenges: it is a way to interact with a well-loved world, its history

and its inhabitants. This section presents a number of questions to help a Loremaster create adventures that grab the players' attentions and hold it to the end of every session. The questions don't all need to be answered if one or more don't seem appropriate to the adventure being created.

WHEN?

When is the adventure taking place? Is the season going to be relevant to the course of events? Or do the events described in the chronology determine when the adventure occurs? Time is a very relevant element for players in The One Ring, as whatever happens to them is going to become an episode of their characters' lives. Moreover, important events involving the company will eventually find their rightful place in the game's tale of years, along side the historical facts composing of the Twilight of the Third Age.

Current Season

The passing of the seasons is a powerful descriptive tool. Wilderland goes through dramatic transformations from summer to autumn, and from winter to spring, allowing the Loremaster to choose from wildly different palettes of colour and descriptive moods, resulting in a panorama that is always changing, and always new. All cultures living in the North follow different lifestyles across the twelve months of a year, and honour the passing of time with seasonal festivals and ceremonies.

Adventurers can witness seasonal activities, such as the gathering in of the harvest. There is a lot of flavour that can be added to an adventure by simply keeping a calendar and reflecting the changes as the seasons pass, but the seasons can also have a direct effect on the game. Crossing the Wild in winter is going to pose a much more serious challenge than doing it in spring, as trails disappear and wolves prowl the land in search of food.



The mountains themselves seem to heed a more wicked call when the passes are thick with snow, and the winds rage around their peaks...

It is for good reasons that most companies will sit out the winter months in the warmth and safety of a Fellowship phase.

Current Year

The Tale of Years chapter provides a timeline for the first years of the The One Ring campaign. There is nothing like the passage of time to make the players feel they are part of a living world: year after year, the inter-weaving of player-generated events and timeline entries creates a campaign with depth and texture.

There are many ways to incorporate wider events into the characters' adventures. They could witness a great gathering, cross paths with groups involved in the events or discuss the goings-on with the people they encounter on their journey. Every game session can benefit greatly from making the company's exploits part of the chronology, provided that the focus of the

narration remains firmly set on the deeds of the player-heroes.

WHERE?

Where is the action going to take place? This question may be answered in two ways: either the precise location of the adventure is so vital to the action that the Loremaster must choose a specific place from those described in this book or in the source material, or the setting requires simply a generic setting and any ruin, forest glade or river will do. In any case, the Loremaster should take into consideration a place that is either close to the current location of the company, or one that they can reach conveniently (using the Journey rules). In the latter case, the journey itself gives the Loremaster the chance to set up a challenging situation, one that could be worth playing out for an entire session.

Exploring Middle-earth

Once in a while, the adventure will bring the company to one of the places described in Tolkien's books: for some players, this is what role-playing in Middle-earth



is all about. Having the company enter the great hall of Beorn for the first time, or seeing the Lonely Mountain on the horizon, can turn an ordinary Adventuring phase into a particularly meaningful experience.

When this happens, the Loremaster should let the players interact with the setting. What the players remember of a place they have read about should be brought to life for them and incorporated into the narrative. One way to achieve this is to challenge their skills with some simple tests. For example, while the company is in the halls of the Elvenking, a roll of Song might let a character recognise that the litany he hears tells of the deeds of the Hobbit burglar who spent some time there, or a roll of Search might reveal a Hobbit rhyme scratched on a wall in a shadowy corner.

WHAT?

What is the adventure about? This question pretty much defines the heart of the Adventuring phase, and summarises the information that the Loremaster presents to his players at the beginning of the first game session. So, what is going on? A treasure was recently stolen and now the previous owner is looking for someone to bring it back; an important personality the group was meant to meet was kidnapped or killed by an unknown threat; the adventurers arrive at a village hours before enemies put the place under siege, and now the heroes can't get out. Any situation putting the heroes in the right place at the right time in a moment of crisis is a good starting point.

Often, the Loremaster might find it effective to begin an Adventuring phase with a direct challenge, something that provokes the players into action right from the start. Then, as already stated in the introduction to this chapter, the Loremaster doesn't even need to plan a complete series of events, as the players will eventually give him material to improvise upon as the game progresses: as the players overcome an obstacle, their actions will give the Loremaster ideas for the next challenge, leaving him free to keep the plot as open-

ended as possible, with every step depending on the result of the one preceding it.

Simplicity

The object of an Adventuring phase does not necessarily have to be tied to an epic endeavour or be about a world-threatening menace – at least not every time. In *The One Ring*, an epic level of gameplay is reached by playing through many smaller events that reveal their greater significance only when woven together. The Loremaster can compose his own retelling of the Twilight of the Third age without worrying too much about making it truly 'epic' right off the bat: in time, everything a hero endures will be easily raised to a greater importance, especially when set against the game's overarching motif; the struggle against the Shadow. Adventures can be kept simple, especially in the early years of the timeline, to let the players savour the experience of discovering Middle-earth. For example, simply picking a worthy opponent or an interesting location from the *Adversaries* or the *Wilderland* chapters will provide the Loremaster and his players with enough material to keep the game going for multiple sessions.

Plot Twists

Once in a while the Loremaster might want to complicate things by adding a twist or two to an otherwise simple plot. The players will then have to figure out how to 'solve' the adventure, instead of simply being asked to endure or overcome a series of difficulties. In some cases, the Adventuring phase might end without having provided a clear answer, opening the opportunity for investigating the matter further during the subsequent Fellowship phase, or during a following Adventuring phase.

Why?

Why should the heroes get involved in the adventure in the first place? Is there something that interests them personally? This question directly addresses the reasons why the characters composing a group have chosen to become adventurers: heroes brave



dangers that other individuals normally try to stay clear of, usually because they have a personal stake that pushes them to do it. While the very concept of adventuring provides a simple answer to the question, the Loremaster should consider with attention which motivational 'buttons' are more effective in capturing the attention of his players.

During the first few games, it can be useful to consider the callings chosen by the players for their heroes, or even their distinctive Traits. Once all heroes have a number of entries in their personal 'Tale of Years' on the backs of their character sheets the Loremaster will find it easy to give them personal reasons to get involved in an Adventuring phase. As the game progresses, the players themselves will start exploring their characters' individual goals and callings, and might even end up suggesting personalised adventures that centre on these factors.

Who?

Tolkien has populated his stories with a multitude of memorable characters and the Loremaster will have to do the same for an adventure to be successful. Will one or more known personalities feature in the story? Will the adventure introduce a new recurring character to the heroes? The personalities controlled by the Loremaster are a fundamental element of any game, as their words and actions enliven the adventure.

Role Models

The deeds of a renowned character can be a powerful inspiration for a player looking for an example of what it means to live in Middle-earth. There is nothing like getting to meet a favourite hero to help integrate player-heroes into the epic tapestry of the campaign, as it adds an additional layer of involvement with the events that the players are witnessing.

Supporting Cast

Loremaster characters should be used sparingly, and with careful judgement. Players do not like to see their heroes play second fiddle to a powerful Loremaster

character. To avoid this risk, the Loremaster could try the opposite, with the famous character in need of the heroes' help, or even needing to be rescued outright (a twist that the author himself often resorted to).

Patrons

During play, heroes may adopt one or more important personalities as their company's patrons. A source of plot hooks and support for the group, and an easy way to make a known individual a recurring motif in their characters' adventuring, a patron should not be reduced to a simple gameplay asset, but should be worked into the narrative as an active element.

The descriptions of Beorn and Radagast starting at page 112 contain several suggestions on how to introduce these important characters as patrons in the game. The Loremaster should be careful here though, as using the same patron to quickly set up a mission-based Adventuring phase may quickly turn into a cliché.

PRESENTATION

Simplifying things a bit, every Adventuring phase session can be said to unfold along a similar structure:

Introduction

At the beginning of the first session of play, the Loremaster presents the current situation to his group of players. This usually sets the date (*When*), a location (*Where*) and defines an introductory situation (*What*), including the information currently available to the heroes and containing story hooks for involving the company of adventurers personally (*Why*) and helping them in choosing their Company objective.

Gameplay

The game unfolds with the players reacting to the introduction and taking action to investigate and resolve the challenges set before them. During the session, the Loremaster is responsible for every element of the narration that doesn't depend directly on the player-heroes and their choices. The players have full control over what their heroes do and how they do it, but the

Loremaster interprets the success of their actions and how every part of the world, from Loremaster characters to creatures and the environment, reacts to them.

End

At the end of the gaming session each hero receives **one Experience point**. Moreover, if the group of heroes has made significant progress toward the completion of the chosen Company objective, each character receives an **additional Experience point**.

If the Adventuring phase didn't reach a satisfactory conclusion by the end of the session, the gameplay will resume at a later date with another Adventuring phase session; when this happens, the players proceed to recover some of the Hope points they spent during the game, making use of the company's Fellowship rating and each hero's individual Fellowship focus (if any). When the group of players meets again the Loremaster will start the new session by summarising what happened previously, and his players will choose a new Company objective (or keep the same if it wasn't achieved by the end of the previous session).

If on the contrary the current story has reached its conclusion, the Loremaster draws the final curtain on the Adventuring phase by awarding the company with a number of **supplementary Experience points**.

Generally, this bonus should not exceed an approximate ratio of one Experience point for every two game sessions in the Adventuring phase (for example, a four-sessions adventure should yield a final reward of 2 supplementary points).

This final bonus is meant to reward the group of players for their commitment to the game, especially if they achieved something remarkable. Players who solved a difficult situation in a clever and unexpected fashion, or interpreted their characters with conviction, or constantly showed respect for the source material certainly deserve the bonus.

When the Loremaster is done adjudicating the number of supplementary Experience points, the Adventuring phase is finally over, and the game progresses with the Fellowship phase (or the Fellowship phase is planned to start at the beginning of the following session, depending on the time available).

- ROLLING DICE -

'He is bold and cunning. Even now he plays a game with peril and wins a throw.'

The rules of the game are a framework used to interpret the actions of the characters. The rules help to determine what a character can achieve, as well as providing a way for the themes of the game like Hope, Wisdom and Valour to directly influence the story.

Rules also support the game by helping the Loremaster to provide players with a believable environment, where actions succeed or fail due to tangible reasons such as the characters' level of ability and the difficulty of what they attempt to do; a world where the choices that players make for their characters have real consequences.

Managing the game system properly is absolutely vital for the creation of a truly cooperative role-playing experience, and one of the ways to do it is to apply its rules consistently and fairly, to dispel any doubts about the role of the Loremaster as an impartial interface between the players and the game world. As previously stated, nothing is more destructive to a player's suspension of disbelief and immersion in the game than the feeling that his player's fate is being dictated by the Loremaster's choices and not his own. This doesn't mean that the rules must be rigidly applied all the time and at all costs, though. The system for The One Ring has been designed to be as flexible as possible, to allow room for the Loremaster and players to customise it and tailor it to model their style of play.



The rules are meant to support the game, not to constrain it, and so Loremasters and players are invited to use all the mechanics as they prefer, keeping what they like and changing or throwing away what they don't – although it's probably not a good idea to do it in the middle of a game session, or without first agreeing upon what should be changed: as the presentation of the game in two books reflects, the game rules are not the province of the Loremaster alone, but are an invaluable resource to be shared with all participants.

RESOLVING ACTIONS

One of the fundamental duties of the 'Loremaster as referee' is to assist the players in determining the outcome of their characters' actions, whether they are being resolved as tasks or tests (see page 148 of the *Adventurer's Book*). An action is a player's foremost means of interacting with the game world – in gaming terms, it is a player's way to make a 'move,' or to react to a challenge. The characters' differing levels of abilities with different actions are an important factor that distinguishes one adventurer from another, and what makes each of them a valuable member of a company.

Not all actions must be resolved using dice: characters should be allowed to succeed automatically whenever they are attempting routine or dramatically irrelevant tasks, or whenever their capabilities should reasonably place them beyond the risk of failure.

A sparing but considered use of dice helps in speeding up the game and reinforces the players' trust in the neutrality of the Loremaster.

As a consequence, the rules concerning action resolution should be applied when the outcome of a task or test is uncertain, or when it is not enough to simply know whether a character succeeds or fails, but the quality of his performance. When this is the case, there are two factors that must be determined: which ability is the correct one to use, and the Target Number the player must match or beat with the roll.

SELECTING THE RIGHT SKILL

Sometimes it might be difficult to decide which of the eighteen Common skills is the most relevant for the roll. It might be easier to first identify which skill group best fits the action.

Does the action sound like something better solved through a character's potential for personality, movement, perception, survival, custom or vocation?

For example, Bruno's player-hero, Ted the burglar from Bywater, has been invited to address a gathering of Dwarves in an attempt to secure their assistance in a future raid against an Orc-fastness. The player is unsure about which skill to use, and asks the Loremaster if it should be a custom or a personality skill? Claudio, the Loremaster, decides that it is not the moment for pleasantries and determines that a personality skill will be used.

When the skill group has been identified, the acting player or the Loremaster selects a skill from the group that best describes the action. If the choice still proves to be difficult, consider how the character is approaching the action: is the character relying more on his Body, Heart, or Wits?

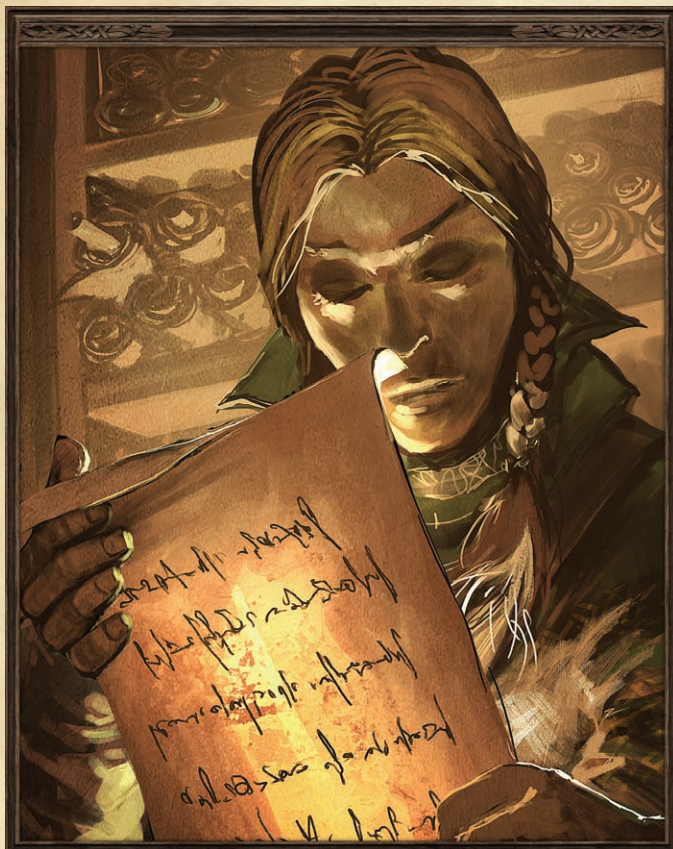
The Personality group contains the skills: Awe, Inspire and Persuade, all skills almost equally suited to reproduce Ted the burglar's address to the Dwarven council. After a quick look at his character sheet, Bruno decides that Ted will try to move the bearded listeners with a heartfelt plea for alliance. The Personality skill related to Heart is Inspire, and the Loremaster agrees with the choice.

MODERATE DIFFICULTY (TN 14)

The One Ring is a game about the deeds of a group of heroes. For this reason, the rules for resolving actions concentrate on the protagonists' strengths and weaknesses, leaving aside the need to highlight every minutia of the odds they face.

As a rule of thumb, the majority of actions attempted during a session of play should be set at a moderate difficulty level (TN 14).

This rating makes for a challenging obstacle. Less-talented heroes will often be required to spend a point of Hope to succeed, or should consider buying a higher level of proficiency soon. The Loremaster is advised to apply this default level for most actions, especially tasks proposed by players. He should only consider using different difficulty levels when the circumstances strongly suggest that the task should be easier or harder.



Changing the Difficulty Level

When the Loremaster tinkers with the Target Number of an action, he is making an important statement about the relevance and purpose of the roll. By using a TN lower than 14, it is very likely that a character is going to succeed, especially if a player is willing to spend Hope to get an Attribute bonus; the outcome remains uncertain only when the acting hero has a poor rating, is out of Hope points or is Weary.

When a Loremaster sets a TN higher than 14, he is making it very hard for characters rolling less than three Action dice to succeed, and should only consider doing so if the circumstances clearly call for it, or when the consequences of a success are going to be very positive for the acting hero — nothing is more frustrating than making a very good roll, or spending a Hope point, just to find that the outcome of the action is barely relevant. Additionally, overcoming challenges set at a severe or daunting difficulty should almost always guarantee an Advancement point (see Awarding Advancement Points, on page 30).

The descriptions found below can help determine if a task or test requires a higher or lower difficulty level.

Target Number Levels:

TN	Difficulty (skill rank ♦♦♦)
10	Very Easy
12	Easy
14	Moderate
16	Hard
18	Severe
20	Daunting

As the table above shows, Target Numbers are organised along six levels of difficulty, from *very easy* (TN 10) to *daunting* (TN 20).

When the rules mention the raising or lowering of a TN *tier* or *level* they refer to the six TN levels above.

For example, when a **moderate** TN is raised by one level, it becomes a **hard** TN.

The six difficulty levels should not be seen as a rigid framework, to be memorised and rigidly applied, but as a set of flexible guidelines. A Target Number can be set at any value ranging from a weak rating of 5 to an almost unbeatable 30, or even more.



Very Easy Actions (Target Number 10)

These are the actions that most adventurers can accomplish effortlessly and that under most circumstances should not require a roll.

Examples of very easy actions include influencing a weak-willed individual intoxicated by a strong wine (use of a personality skill), or climbing a wall as tall as the character climbing it (roll of Athletics), and so on.

Easy Actions (Target Number 12)

These are actions that require a certain familiarity within a specific field (a skill score of at least 1) or a modicum of concentration. Easy actions can often be resolved automatically instead.

These are actions like hiding a small object among the folds of a robe without being noticed (roll of Stealth), recognising and following the tracks of a large animal in the wild (roll of Hunting), or reading a book written in a known foreign tongue (roll of Lore).

Moderate Actions (Target Number 14)

The default difficulty of most actions, this TN reflects a situation where success is uncertain for the average adventurer. This could include actions that require a specific expertise, or that can be accomplished only through effort and concentration (and possibly an expenditure of Hope).

Spotting a well-hidden trap (roll of Search), impressing a local militiaman (roll of Awe), or gaining a stranger's aid in the face of a common threat (roll of Persuade) are all examples of moderate actions.

Hard Actions (Target Number 16)

These are actions presenting a serious obstacle to any adventurer not possessing a high level of ability or knowledge.

Actions that require such a Target Number could include opening a new path through a dense wood after a rainstorm (roll of Explore), or guessing the secret

password that unlocks a magic door from the cryptic inscription carved upon it (roll of Riddle).

Severe Actions (Target Number 18)

Severe actions are tasks demanding the formidable abilities of experts.

Singing a Hobbit song in a way that could impress an Elven prince (roll of Song), understanding the opening mechanisms that operate an ancient Dwarven gate (roll of Craft), or spotting a great eagle flying high in a stormy sky (Awareness roll) are examples of actions requiring a severe target number.

Daunting Actions (Target Number 20)

These are actions whose level of difficulty places them barely within the capability of most adventurers, and that can usually only be completed thanks to a stroke of luck or by invoking a substantial Attribute bonus.

Examples of daunting actions include breaking free of sturdy Orc-chains (roll of Athletics), reading an ancient and ruined text compiled in a barely-known tongue (roll of Lore) or improvising a riddle worthy of a Dragon while being threatened at sword-point (roll of Riddle).

EPIC FEATS – AN OPTIONAL RULE

As rolling a **Þ** rune results in an automatic success, every player-hero has always at least one chance in twelve to succeed at any action attempt, no matter how arduous the challenge. This rule makes for faster action resolution, and helps in building a positive 'heroic' atmosphere for the game ("Can I shoot an arrow through the window slit to give a signal to my friends? Daunting difficulty? Cross your fingers, I'll try anyway...").

If the Loremaster wants to present his players with an extremely difficult task but also wants the different levels of abilities of the characters to be reflected in their chances of success, he may present the action as an Epic feat.

An Epic feat is an action considered to have a Target Number set beyond the capability of any player to match or beat, but that can be overcome if the player attempting it rolls a $\mathbb{P}$ rune AND at least one special icon τ .

Only actions attempted in the face of overwhelming odds and that add drama and excitement to the story should be made into Epic feats. The adventure definitely shouldn't be structured to rely on a player succeeding at an Epic feat, and the Loremaster shouldn't punish a player who fails at one.

An Epic feat should be inserted in the game only if the story benefits from simply allowing a hero to attempt it.

Picking a Stone-troll's pockets or stealing something from the hoard of a sleeping Dragon without leaving a trace are good examples of Epic feats. Succeeding at an Epic feat should be considered a phenomenal achievement, beyond the normal tiers used to define the quality of a success (simple, great or extraordinary success).

OPPOSED ACTIONS

When a character is attempting to accomplish something in direct opposition with another hero, or when the goal of the action is resisted by a major Loremaster character, the action roll becomes an opposed roll (when an action roll is opposed by an individual of lesser relevance than heroes and major characters, it should be solved normally by rolling against a Target Number).

Opposed tests are resolved in two ways, depending on the circumstances:

A character attempts an action, and another character then tries to nullify its outcome. The contestants might use different abilities, or the same one, depending on the nature of the opposed roll.

Examples: a hero hides to spy upon a Loremaster character who might discover him (Stealth vs Awareness); an adventurer addresses a listener to rouse him to action while another orator tries to calm his spirits (Persuade vs Persuade).

When this happens, the active character rolls first to see if he succeeds in the first place: the action is resolved normally, by rolling against a TN. If the roll fails, then the second character succeeds automatically. If the acting character succeeds, the challenging character rolls against the same TN: if the roll fails, then the consequences of the acting character's roll are resolved; if it succeeds, the two successful results are compared and the better roll takes effect (see below).

If the action features a direct confrontation, then all individuals involved roll simultaneously. Again, the contestants might use different abilities, or the same one, depending on the nature of the opposed roll.

Examples: one character is discussing a learned topic while another challenges him with witty remarks in front of an audience (Lore vs Riddle), or two characters are arm-wrestling (Athletics vs Athletics).

When this happens, all rolls are resolved simultaneously and their results compared (see below). If both rolls fail, roll again or, if more appropriate, the contest is tied.

Comparing Results

When two characters have both scored a successful roll, their results are compared and the roll that scored the higher quality of success is applied to the action:

The character who obtained the highest number of τ icons on his roll is considered to have overcome the opposition.



Ties are broken by comparing the results obtained on the Feat die roll, where a roll of **ⅴ** is the highest possible result for player-heroes and other characters belonging to the Free Peoples, and a roll of **◁▷** is the highest possible result for monsters and characters serving the Shadow.

REPEATING AN ACTION

A die roll made to resolve a normal action doesn't necessarily indicate a single act, but possibly a series of efforts (for example, an attack roll doesn't generally simulate a single sword swing). When a player succeeds or fails at a roll he has just resolved his hero's best attempt at doing something.

In other words, players are not allowed to repeat a die roll aimed to resolve the same action.

This is one of the reasons why choosing whether or not to spend a Hope point on an action attempt is such a critical one: the acting player is not going to get a second chance.

PROLONGED ACTIONS

The Loremaster may determine that an action requires more than one roll to be completed. This usually happens when a challenge is more aptly represented as a series of rolls, with each successful roll representing a step towards its final achievement. For example, digging a tunnel or persuading a council of elders could be a prolonged effort, with each successful attempt bringing the company of heroes closer to the accomplishment of the overall task.

The number of successful rolls required should be set by the Loremaster before players start to roll their dice, and should be between 3 (a moderately complicated test) and 9 successful rolls (a difficult and time-consuming affair).

The Loremaster should reward players whose rolls have produced a superior level of success by equating a great success to two successful rolls, and an extraordinary success to three successful rolls.

When to use Prolonged Actions

Prolonged actions are particularly suited to evoke an atmosphere of tension, but may also be employed when the acting characters want to tackle a difficult task with caution, and have time to do it.

When a conventional action is turned into a prolonged action, the TN is lowered and the number of rolls required to complete the attempt is increased.

When turning a conventional action into a prolonged one, the Loremaster should apply the following guidelines:

- **TN reduced by one level:** the action requires now three successful rolls
- **TN reduced by two levels:** the action requires now four or five successful rolls;
- **TN reduced by three levels:** the action requires now six or more successful rolls.

A prolonged action may also be called upon to present a challenge that would be otherwise translated only by choosing an excessive target number. A high TN, especially with a group of relatively inexperienced characters, may produce a series of failed rolls quickly leading to frustration or, on the contrary, could see the characters winning too easily, thanks to a single and anticlimactic lucky roll.

For example, finding the exit of a maze is better presented as a prolonged action with a TN of 14 requiring six successful Riddle rolls to figure out, than making it a single test with a TN of 20.

Cooperating on a Prolonged Action

By their very nature, prolonged actions allow for multiple attempts, whether they are been resolved by the same character, or by more than one character acting together or in succession.

The precise details of a prolonged action might allow a group of heroes to use different skills toward the same goal, for example heroes trying to impress an audience (use of different personality skills), or entertaining a

guest (use of different custom skills). The TN for different skill rolls could be the same, mirroring the general difficulty of the situation, or be adjusted to reflect the relative appropriateness of the chosen skills to the goal of the action.

Examples of Prolonged Actions

The table below provides examples of prolonged actions, including a suggested number of successful rolls required to complete them:

Prolonged actions:

ACTION	# OF REQUIRED ROLLS	SUGGESTED SKILL(S)	COOPERATION
Breaking down a door	3	Athletics	Max 3 characters
Convincing an unwilling individual to help	5	Persuade, Awe, Courtesy	<i>allowed</i>
Researching obscure lore	4	Lore, Riddle, Song	<i>allowed</i>
Finding the way again when lost in the wild	4	Explore, Hunting	<i>allowed</i>
Swimming across a wide river	5	Athletics	<i>not allowed</i>
Scouting a wide area	4 to 6	Explore	<i>allowed</i>

THE PASSAGE OF TIME

When the Loremaster is helping his players to resolve actions, he might sometimes need to take into consideration the passage of time. In a narrative game like *The One Ring*, it is difficult to provide detailed rules concerning how long it takes to do something, as a single die roll may be used to represent several attempts at an action (trying to persuade someone during a lengthy council) or a single, brief effort taking a few moments (trying to prevent someone from jumping off a cliff in desperation): the Loremaster will be often required to exercise some common sense when trying to determine how long it takes a hero to do something.

Time and Quality of Success

A great or extraordinary success could mean that an action took less time to complete than it would have with an ordinary success: As a rule of thumb, a great success takes approximately half as long as a normal success, and an extraordinary success takes a third as long as a normal success.



- LOREMASTER - CHARACTERS

Loremaster characters are possibly the best tools to help create a believable setting. During the game, heroes meet a number of individuals whose purpose and description has been tailored to suit the adventure being played – from the Beorning boy who meets the adventurers when they enter his village to deliver a message to them from his lord, to the aloof Elven emissary who contacts them to offer them a mission. In addition, the adventurers interact with even a greater number of minor Loremaster characters, an army of ‘extras’ that populate the villages they enter, crowd the streets they cross and frequent the inns they stop in to get some rest.

Most of the time, the interaction of a player-hero with Loremaster characters is resolved without die rolls – natural conversation and knowledge of the setting are all that is required.

No die roll is required when the Bride addresses a Woodman boy she meets on a path near a farmer's homestead, to tell him to go and get his father – the boy can be assumed to recognise the Bride as belonging to his own folk, and the sight of a group of armed adventurers is certain to send the boy running to find his father, regardless of his strength of spirit.

But at times the Loremaster needs additional information about an individual encountered by the company, either because the interaction develops (or degenerates!) during play thanks to the course of action chosen by the group of players, or because the purpose behind the introduction of the Loremaster character was of greater importance in the first place.

When this happens, the Loremaster has a number of ways to manage the interaction with a Loremaster character: to treat it simply as a normal action with

an uncertain outcome and thus requiring a die roll (see *Loremaster Characters as Obstacles* below), or to develop the character further and give it the stature of a *Named Loremaster character*, or even to turn it into an adversary, giving him the necessary characteristics to use the character as an opponent in combat (see *Loremaster characters as Opponents* below).

LOREMASTER CHARACTERS AS OBSTACLES

When the actions of the players or the purpose of a Loremaster character puts an individual in conflict with the goals of the heroes, the Loremaster can resolve the situation using the normal rules for action resolution:

- First, the ability deemed to be most appropriate to settle the situation is selected (by the player if the roll is a task, or by the Loremaster if it is a test) and then the Loremaster chooses a difficulty for the die roll, usually setting it at the default TN of 14. The default TN can be altered to let the challenge better reflect the description of the individual given by the Loremaster.

Lifstan joins in a boasting contest with a group of Bardings at the court of the King. His player proposes an Inspire roll, and everyone approves it. The Loremaster proceeds to select a difficulty for the roll and settles for a TN of 16, justified by the presence of a grizzled veteran of the Battle of Five Armies.

- If the Loremaster character has been given an Attribute level for any reason (either because it is an adversary or a Named Loremaster character – see below) then the TN can be made equal to the character's Attribute level plus 10.

In the example above, if the veteran of the Battle of Five Armies was a named Loremaster character – Reinald, one of the King's advisors, statted at having a superior Attribute level of 8 – the difficulty would have been set at TN 18 (10 plus Reinald's Attribute level).

Sneaking past someone, trying to persuade or intimidate him, attempting to judge whether someone is lying, even outrunning an individual are all examples of actions that do not need to be turned into opposed actions against a fully detailed character, but that can be handled simply and quickly as rolls against an appropriate Target Number.

Traits

A quick way to customise the description of a Loremaster character is to choose a Trait picking either a Speciality or one or more Distinctive features those available to heroes (or even inventing one on the spot). Such Traits define an individual at a very simple level (a *trusted* servant, a *keen-eyed* guard, a wise man learned in *herb-lore*) and help the Loremaster in portraying the character. Additionally, the Trait has a game-related effect:

If a Loremaster character possesses a Trait that is applicable to a die roll that a hero is making, then the default difficulty level of TN 14 should be raised by one level if the Trait can be deemed to positively benefit the Loremaster character, or lowered if the Trait can be considered to favour the hero's intent instead.

If Lifstan is trying to get some information out of a Smith of Erebor encountered in Lake-town, he might find it complicated, as the Dwarf is described as secretive (raising the default TN to 16).

NAMED LOREMASTER CHARACTERS

Sometimes, describing a Loremaster character as a "young and *clever* Beorning woman" isn't enough, especially if the heroes push the interaction with an individual to the point that the Loremaster needs some more detail to keep the conversation going: they might try to persuade her to guide them through a forest they never explored before, but that she knows perfectly well as she was born in a village nearby. Or they might

beg her to help them with a wounded and unconscious companion that happened to be the only hero in the group with some knowledge of healing...

If this happens, the Loremaster should give the character an individual name, and make up some details using the following guidelines (most of the rules presented here are similar to those employed to describe adversaries in Chapter Three).

Attribute Level

The first clue to the general 'power level' of a named Loremaster character is their Attribute level score. This numerical rating replaces the normal ratings of Body, Heart and Wits. The Loremaster can refer to this score in three ways:

- When setting the difficulty of an action made by a hero that is directly affected by the Loremaster character (see Loremaster characters as Obstacles above);
- Adding it always as a bonus to a roll when a character or creature uses an ability indicated as favoured;
- If the character is an adversary or is described as a fighter, the Attribute level is applied as a Damage bonus when the creature or individual hits an opponent rolling a great or extraordinary success (non-fighters do not get any Damage bonus).

The Loremaster determines the Attribute level of a character by choosing it from the table below (unless it was already specified by the adventure being played or the character is an adversary).



Attribute level:

RATING	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLES
1-2	poor	Weakling, young man, puny monster
3-4	average	Seasoned merchant, witty innkeeper, attentive city guard
5-6	good	Royal envoy, experienced guide, worthy warrior
7-8	superior	Veteran warrior or captain, fearsome monster
9-10	outstanding	Outstanding hero, Elf-lord, lethal monster
11-12	prodigious	Dragon, creature from another age

Abilities

A Loremaster character can be given a number of skills if the Loremaster needs to make die rolls on their behalf (even if this only happens rarely). When this happens, the Loremaster should determine which skills are appropriate to the character, looking at the list of Common skills (or Weapon skill list in case of a fighter).

Skills for Loremaster characters can be made favoured. Whenever a Loremaster character uses a favoured skill the roll receives a free bonus equal the individual's Attribute rating.

Next, the Loremaster assigns a rating to each skill required. To do this, consider if the ability in question can be said to be *directly related* to the main activity of the Loremaster character, *partially related*, or *not related* at all, and then refer to the table opposite.



Skill ratings:

RATING	DESCRIPTION	THE ABILITY IS...
—	unskilled	Not related to the character's trade.
♦	poor	Partially related to the character's trade.
♦♦	average	
♦♦♦	good	Directly related to the character's trade.
♦♦♦♦	superior	

The Loremaster can adjust the proficiency level of a Loremaster character to better reflect his or her experience level by choosing the higher or the lower rating in a category. Exceptionally proficient characters might be attributed even more superior skill ratings, up to the usual maximum score of 6.

The Loremaster needs to choose the skills possessed by Niping, the young son of a Dwarf trader that the company has encountered in

a tavern in Lake-town. The Loremaster needs to assess his proficiency at Courtesy, as the companions have persuaded him to introduce them to Balin son of Fundin, as they don't know him and he would like to be properly introduced. As Niping is a trader, the Loremaster determines that Courtesy is directly related to his activity, and attributes to the Dwarf a good skill a rating of ♦♦♦.

Endurance

The Endurance rating of a Loremaster character is really needed only when an encounter degenerates into an armed confrontation. Loremaster characters involved in combat are treated as adversaries, and are knocked out at the end of a round if they are reduced to zero Endurance, or are killed outright when wounded once. The usual rules for Encumbrance do not apply to Loremaster characters, and they are equipped as the Loremaster sees fit considering their occupation and the circumstances of the encounter.

The Endurance rating of a Loremaster character is found using the table below. Characters that can be described as being fighters by trade (soldiers, warriors, guards, etc.) add their Attribute level to the scores indicated by the table.

Endurance:

CULTURE	ENDURANCE
Bardings	14
Beornings	16
Dwarves	18
Elves	12
Hobbits	10
Woodmen	12

- resolving tests -

Tests are used to resolve unexpected occurrences that befall the group of heroes during an adventure, from the effects of fatigue on a travelling adventurer to those of cursed gold on its unfortunate owner. Actions resolved as a result of the Loremaster's intervention (as opposed to actions instigated by the player) are dealt with as tests.

ANNOUNCING A TEST

The Loremaster calls for a test when he needs to resolve a situation that directly challenges the abilities of the adventurers. Before a test can be resolved, the Loremaster must decide on a number of elements:

First, he announces who in the group is going to roll; then he determines the ability that will be tested.

Lifstan and Caranthir are marching on a path leading north from Beorn's House. When they finally approach a small patch of oak trees, the Loremaster announces that both adventurers must make an Awareness test.

The Loremaster should call for a test only when the players have a reasonable chance of failing it: if the test can plausibly be considered too easy, the Loremaster should treat it as an automatic action, letting the players succeed without wasting time on unnecessary rolls.

More importantly, before a test is called for, the Loremaster should consider the impact of both successful and unsuccessful outcomes. If a test must be succeeded in order for the adventure to carry on, then the action should probably not be presented as a test (and, importantly, the Loremaster should consider if the adventure is being presented in an appropriate way).

In either instance the Loremaster narrates the outcome of the roll, as in most cases only he knows the reason why the test was announced. As previously stated, the Loremaster should always make sure that both a success or a failure produce tangible effects on the ensuing gameplay.

TYPICAL TESTS

Many dangerous situations require a hero to overcome a test to avoid negative consequences. Below are some common tests that the Loremaster can use to challenge the mettle of his players. Usually, heroes don't get additional benefits for overcoming tests with a greater degree of success: what really matters here is if they pass the test or if they fail it.

Corruption

The Loremaster may call for a Corruption test when a hero faces something that could taint his spirit (see *Stars and Shadows*, page 56).

A Corruption test is made using the Feat die plus a number of Success dice equal to the character's Wisdom rating.

Most of the time, the Target Number for the roll is 14, but it can be raised or lowered by the Loremaster depending on the severity of the source of corruption.

If the roll is successful, then the test has been passed, and the character does not suffer any negative consequences. If the roll is failed, the character gains a number of Shadow points based on the severity of the event (see Stars and Shadows, starting on page 56).

Players keep track of Shadow points by entering their current total in the smaller box found along the one used to record a character's Hope score on their character sheet.

Corruption tests are related to the Heart attribute and can profit from a Heart Attribute bonus.

Fatigue

Every time that the company is journeying, its members must pass one or more Fatigue tests.

A Fatigue test is accomplished by rolling the Feat die and a number of Success dice equal to a character's **Travel** skill rating.

The Target Number for all Fatigue tests is 14. (The Loremaster may use the table at page 34 to set the TN to a value representing the danger of the traversed areas).

When a player-hero fails a Fatigue test, he increases his Fatigue score by a number equal to the Encumbrance value of his Travelling gear. If at least one player fails the roll and the Feat die ends up showing the  icon, a Hazard sequence has been triggered (the failing character loses Endurance normally).

Fear

Players make a Fear test when the adventurers face something capable of striking fear or terror into their hearts.

A Fear test is accomplished by rolling the Feat die and a number of Success dice equal to a character's Valour rating.

The difficulty for the roll is usually TN 14, but it can be raised or lowered by the Loremaster to better represent the level of threat.

If a player successfully overcomes the test, his character resists and doesn't flinch. If the roll is failed, the character is daunted and cannot invoke an Attribute bonus for as long as the hero is subjected to the source of fear.

Fear tests are related to the Heart attribute and can profit from a Heart Attribute bonus.

Orientation

The Loremaster may call for an Orientation test whenever there is a possibility that a character loses his sense of direction for any reason (for example the company is travelling across an unexplored area, or a hero is exploring a dark underground complex, or has been running after someone in a forest at night).

An Orientation test is made by rolling the Feat die plus a number of Success dice equal to a character's **Explore** skill rating.

If the roll is successful, then the test has been passed and the character makes sense of his surroundings and recovers his sense of direction. If the roll is failed, then the hero is confused and risks becoming lost.

Perception

The Loremaster may ask for a Perception test whenever there is a chance that a hero might fail to perceive something significant in his surroundings or in an individual.

When the test is made to check whether the hero was able to perceive an unusual sound, sight or smell, the Perception test is accomplished by rolling the Feat die and a number of Success dice equal to a character's **Awareness** skill rating.

If the test is required to see if a hero notices anything unusual in the behaviour of another character, the Perception test is made by rolling the Feat die and a number of Success dice equal to a character's **Insight** skill rating instead.

Protection

Whenever a hero is hit by a Piercing blow (an attack capable of inflicting lasting damage) he must make a Protection test to check whether his armour protected him from serious harm.



Players make a Protection test by rolling the Feat die plus a number of Success dice equal to the Protection value of their character's suit of armour, taking into consideration the bonus provided by any worn headgear.

The Target Number for the test is equal to the Injury rating of the weapon used by the attacker.

If the test is passed, the Piercing blow has been stopped; if the roll fails, then the hit has drawn blood and the character has been wounded. (The player must check the **Wounded** box on the character sheet as a reminder.)

Protection tests are related to the Body attribute and can profit from a Body Attribute bonus.

awarding - advancement - points

During the Adventuring phase, heroes can achieve extraordinary feats and grow in prowess as a result. In gaming terms, they may be granted a number of Advancement points. Advancement points are used by players to advance their Common skill ratings later on, in the Fellowship phase.

BASIC REQUIREMENTS

It is the Loremaster's duty to judge whether a hero deserves an Advancement point or not (even though players are free to ask for a reward when they feel their characters have achieved something meaningful, or have learned something in failing to do so).

When considering the award of an Advancement point, the Loremaster should bear the following points in mind:

- If a player succeeds at an action he may invoke a Trait to gain an Advancement point: if the Trait is deemed to be pertinent to the action, the player earns the point and checks the appropriate box.
- If the acting character was told prior to the roll that failing the attempt would have resulted in seriously negative consequences, then a successful roll should be considered always worthy of an Advancement point.
- Finally, rolls that overcame a severe or daunting difficulty should be worth of an Advancement point under most circumstances.

LIMITATIONS

The three circles that follow each Skill group on the character sheet indicate that each group can receive a maximum of three Advancement points. No more Advancement points can be awarded to skills from that group until after the next Fellowship phase.

Additionally, the number of Advancement points already granted by a given group increases the requirement for earning additional ones:

- If no circles have been checked yet in a Skill group, the Loremaster should feel free to award an Advancement point as soon as a player makes a roll satisfying the requirements described above.

When a skill group has already been granted an Advancement point, the Loremaster should only grant a second point when something out of the ordinary has been achieved, and a third point only in exceptional cases.

While the distinction between simple successes and great and extraordinary ones may be used as a guideline, it is always up to the Loremaster to assess whether a hero should get an Advancement point or not.

- JOURNEYS -

There were many paths that led up into those mountains, and many passes over them. But most of the paths were cheats and deceptions and led nowhere or to bad ends...

The company will often travel across Wilderland during the course of their adventures. But the journey is not simply a means of getting to a destination. A great part of the life of a hero is spent on the road. Often, what distinguishes an adventurer from a common villager is the skills they possess to help them survive while on a journey.

Travelling shows a hero the world outside the boundaries of his native lands, and lets him seek out and confront threats to his people. In short, travelling is synonymous with adventuring.

The rules presented in this chapter help the Loremaster to make a journey a significant part of an adventure. Travelling requires the use of a number of dedicated abilities whose use adds variety to the game and can provide many interesting story hooks.

While it is not necessary to use these rules every time that the company is travelling, they are very helpful in giving substance and meaning to an important element of adventuring that is too often overlooked.



JOURNEY RESOLUTION

The rules for journey resolution can be used either to quickly summarise the effects of a journey on a group of travellers and allow the Loremaster to rapidly resume the gameplay with what befalls the adventurers when they reach their destination, or to play out the journey in a detailed way. In both instances, the Loremaster should apply the following five steps.

1. Set Route

As soon as the company has made a decision to reach a specific destination, the players should use their map of Wilderland to show the Loremaster the road they intend to follow.

Trotter and his companions recently stopped by the Old Ford on the Great River. Now they are going south, to Rhosgobel, as they want to get in touch with Radagast the Brown. The players locate the locations on their map, and show the Loremaster the route they intend to follow.



If a company is travelling for a week or more across different terrain types or traversing several regions, the Loremaster could consider splitting the itinerary into a number of legs, making the calculations and rolls for each leg separately. The sample journeys described at page 37 show several examples of journeys divided into separate legs.

2. Distance

To measure the distance the Company will travel the Loremaster should use the map on the page opposite. He counts the number of hexes separating the two locations (1 hex represents 10 miles), including the hexagon containing the destination, but not the one containing the starting point.

To get to Rhosgobel, the company might walk along the southern eaves of Mirkwood. The Loremaster finds that the distance between the two landmarks is equal to 15 hexes (corresponding to 150 miles).

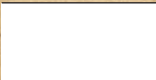
The Loremaster must consider that travel distances should rarely be measured 'as the crow flies,' connecting the starting point to the destination in a straight line, but taking into due consideration the lie of the land instead. For example, high mountain ranges and swift-running rivers can be traversed only through passes or over bridges or fords.

3. Terrain

Following a well-trod path or an ancient road makes for steadier progress than trudging over hilly ground or through a marsh. For this reason, the Loremaster checks which type of terrain the company traverses for the majority of the journey (at least half the distance) and then multiplies the total distance travelled by the appropriate modifier from the table below.

Trotter and his friends will be walking for 150 miles along tracks and ancient paths in the green vales of the Great River; the area is considered open terrain, and thus gets a multiplier of x1 (leaving the 'effective' mileage unchanged).

Terrain Difficulty:

MAP KEY	DIFFICULTY	THE TRAVERSED TERRAIN IS MOSTLY...	MODIFIER
-	very easy	good road*	x0.5
	easy	open terrain, well-trodden track or path, plains, meadows, on a boat along a navigable river	x1
	moderate	pathless wilderness, hills, sparse woods, bogs	x1,5
	hard	marshes, wastes, fells, woods with good tracks**	x2
	severe	dense woods, very rough ground, any road or path in Mirkwood**	x3
	daunting	densest wood, desert, blighted or ruined land, mountain passes	x5

*Travelling across a distance on a good road gives a modifier of x0.5, halving the time needed to cover the entire route, regardless of the terrain the road traverses.

**A company cannot advance through woods or dense woods riding horses. The travelling characters must dismount and proceed by leading their horses on foot.

ONE KING - Wilderland -



- Free Lands
- Berber Lands
- Wild Lands
- Shadow Lands
- Dark Lands
- Empty
- Madness
- Hard
- Severe
- Dangerous
- Impossible

Miles 0 50 100 150





4. Speed

The Loremaster now divides the distance measured in the previous steps by the travelling speed of the Company – rounding all fractions to the nearest whole number. The result is equal to the expected length of the journey in days. The table below shows the distance covered in miles by a Company in an average day of travel:

Speed:

COMPANY TRAVELLING...	MILES PER DAY
On foot	20 miles
Riding horses	40 miles
Using boats on a river	20 miles downstream, 5-10 miles against the current

The Bride, Trotter and the others will walk for 8 days before they arrive at the house of the brown wizard.

5. Fatigue Tests

Journeys can be arduous, and there is a chance that the adventurers become wearied by the length of their trek or the difficulty of the terrain they travel across. Each player must make a number of Fatigue tests to

resist becoming worn out, depending on the duration of the journey (as calculated above) and the weather conditions of the season (see the Season Table below). A Fatigue test must be made for each full or partial number of days shown in the table that the characters travel for.

Season Table:

SEASON	ONE FATIGUE TEST EVERY...
Winter	3 days
Spring	5 days
Summer	6 days
Autumn	4 days

If the company is travelling in winter, the journey to Rhosgobel will require three Fatigue tests.

The Target Number of each Fatigue test is usually 14. If the Loremaster prefers to reflect the characteristics of the traversed region in the difficulty of the Fatigue test, he can use the Region table below (the same table can be used to affect the TN of any roll concerning actions accomplished when on a journey).

For each failed Fatigue test, an adventurer sees his Fatigue score increased by a number of points equal to the Encumbrance of his Travelling gear.

Region Table:

REGION TYPE	MAP ICON	TN	DIFFICULTY
Free lands	⌂	12	easy
Border lands	℥	14	moderate
Wild lands	ψ	16	hard
Shadow lands	λ	18	severe
Dark lands	⌘	20	daunting

For journeys crossing different areas, the Loremaster should apply the Target Number that characterises the longest part of the route. If the journey requires multiple rolls, the Loremaster may attribute different TNs to some of the rolls, to better represent the difficulty of traversing different areas.

HAZARDS

Hazards represent unexpected hindrances and obstacles that travellers may encounter, or accidents that they might provoke, maybe when made careless by tiredness.

A Hazard episode is triggered when the players fail at one or more Fatigue tests and produce at least one  icon.

When this happens, the Loremaster chooses a number of episodes among those provided as examples, equal to the number of  icons produced (or improvises them, based on the company's current circumstances).

Selecting the Target

Usually, a Hazard episode requires one or more players to overcome a test. Each test is associated with one of the four roles that heroes can perform when on a journey (Guide, Scout, Huntsman or Look-out). The Loremaster selects which companion will face the test by rolling a Feat die and using the table below:

	Players choice
1-3	Guide
4-5	Scout
6-7	Huntsman
8-9	Look-out Man
10	All Companions
	The Loremaster chooses one role not currently covered (if available)

If at least one character has been assigned to the selected role then the test is resolved normally. If no hero assumed the duty beforehand, or other heroes

want to join the active character(s), one hero may spend one point of Hope and temporarily take up the role and attempt the test (players should remember that there can be only one hero acting as the Guide for the company). If no-one does so, the hazard test is considered a failure.

Sample Hazard Episodes

The sample Hazard episodes below show the Loremaster how a Hazard episode should be presented. Each episode title includes in brackets the role targeted by the accident, and the text indicates the nature of the test triggered by it. Most descriptions depict the Hazard episode in broad strokes: the Loremaster should tailor each hazard event to the current adventure.

Lost Direction (Guide)

The guide has lost the path he was meant to follow and must rely on his skill to keep heading in the right direction while traversing a trackless area.

The Guide makes a **Travel** test. On a failure, all companions double their penalties due to failed Fatigue tests for the length of the journey. Additionally, the group takes an additional day to get to its destination as the guide scrambles to recover the lost trail.

Uncomfortable Lodgings (Guide)

The guide repeatedly makes poor choices regarding where to camp and find a shelter for the night.

The Guide makes a **Travel** test. On a failure, all companions sleep miserably and are not considered to rest properly for half the length of the journey (they do not recover Endurance).

Cruel Weather (Look-out)

The company is surprised by the changing weather and is repeatedly caught in the open by rain or snow.



All Look-outs make a Perception test (**Awareness**). If no hero overcomes the test, all company members lose a number of Endurance points equal to the length of the journey in days.

Monsters Roused (Look-out)

The company travels close to the lair of a perilous monster or a colony of wicked creatures.

All Look-outs make a Perception test (**Awareness**). If no one succeeds, monsters are made aware of the company's presence before any companion realises that a threat is imminent, and attack. With at least one success, the company spots the enemy while unobserved, and may manoeuvre to avoid making contact.

From Hunter to Prey (Huntsman)

A dangerous predator has followed the tracks or the scent of a hunting companion.

One Huntsman makes a **Hunting** test. If he fails, the company is attacked by an unusually dangerous creature (for example, a Troll smells the blood shed by the hunter as he skins his prey and follows him, or a large, old spider has been disturbed in its sleep).

Scanty Provisions (Huntsman)

The reserves of food have been spoilt, or prove to be too scarce to feed all companions.

All Huntsmen make a **Hunting** test. If no one succeeds, all companions are considered temporarily **Weary** until they eat properly (for example by succeeding at a Hunting roll each). If a Huntsman character failed his roll by producing a  result, he is accidentally **Wounded** during the hunt.

No way forward (Scout)

The company faces an unexpected obstacle in its path and the companions must find a way around it.

All Scouts make an **Explore** test. If no one succeeds, the company loses one day, and the Scouts must repeat their test rolls (and so on, until at least one scout succeeds).

Out of the Frying-pan into the Fire (Scout)

Careless scouts endanger the company with their negligence.

All Scouts make an **Explore** test. If all rolls fail, the company has been put in danger by the wrong choices of its scouts; for example the group enters a dangerous



region and someone targets the company with a volley of ranged weapons and then disappears, or rocks fall on sleeping companions, or a rotten tree falls on them as they march: all companions roll the Feat die, and lose a number of Endurance points equal to the result; if a hero gets a  result he is Wounded, or even cut off from his companions.

Worn with Sorrow and Toil (all Companions)

The company travels across a region tainted by the corrupting touch of the Shadow, threatening to make the companions feel miserable and downcast.

All companions make a Corruption test, and gain a Shadow point in case of a failure. This roll is in addition to any roll that might already be required if the company is crossing a blighted place (see page 57).

ACTIONS WHILE TRAVELLING

When the Loremaster is using this rules to deal with a group of travelling adventurers, he might need to determine how many action attempts a hero can make while on the road.

During an average day of travel, players are entitled to make a maximum of two die rolls (basically, one action attempt in the morning and one in the afternoon).

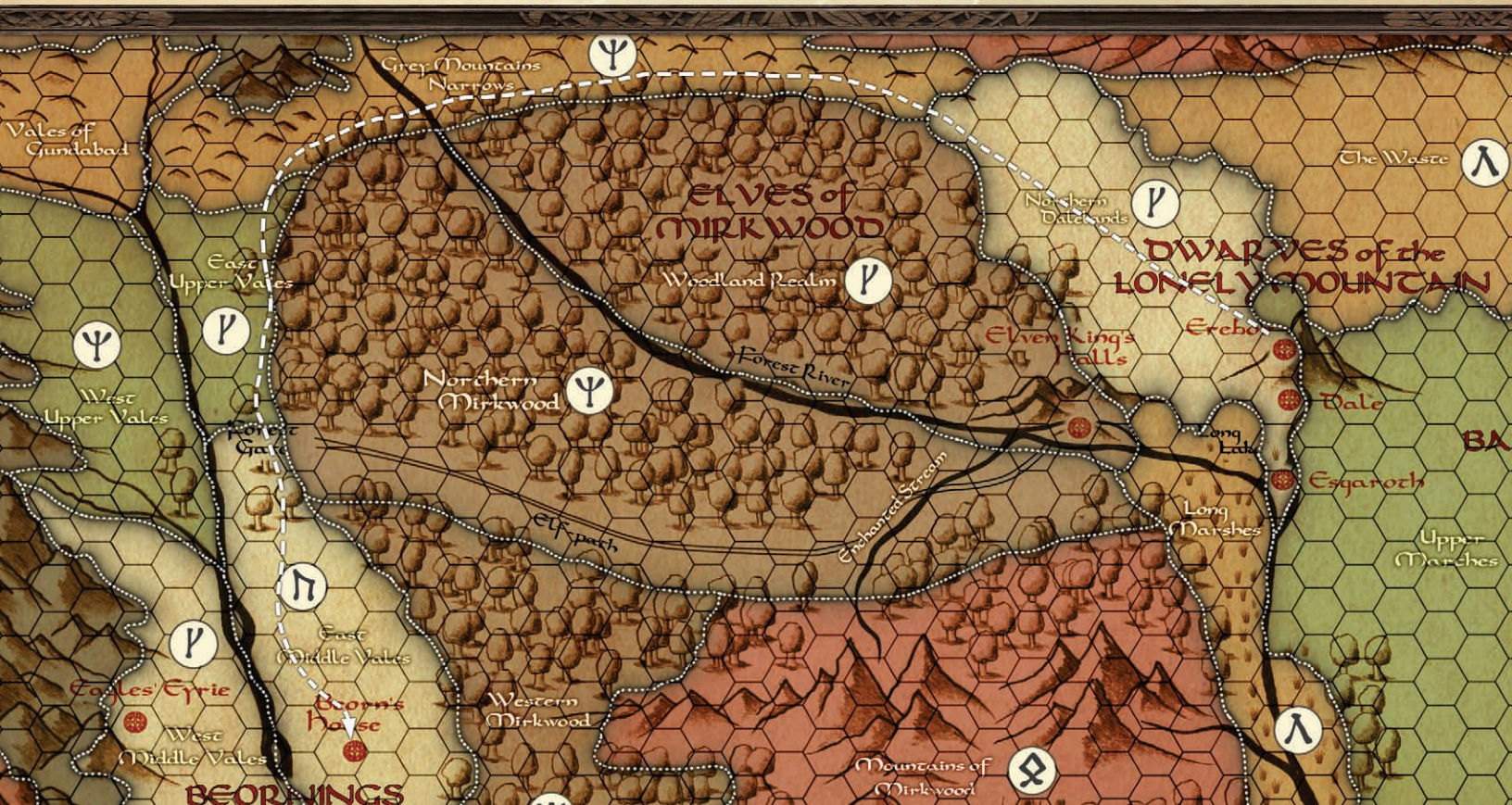
A hero who is looking for signs of the recent passage of Orcs along the path he is treading may be allowed two Hunting rolls a day.

SAMPLE JOURNEYS

Below are some sample routes that every group of companions will likely undertake at some time in their adventuring career. All journey lengths are indicated in days of march unless otherwise specified.

From the Lonely Mountain to Beorn's House
They intended to go along the edge of the forest, and round its northern end in the waste that lay between it and the beginning of the Grey Mountains.

This is the route Bilbo took after the Battle of Five Armies to reach the house of Beorn. It covers a distance of more than 130 leagues (400+ miles), across different types of terrain.





First leg: Northern Dalelands (Border Land)

Ninety miles across open terrain (5 days).

Fatigue tests: 2 (Winter), 1 (Spring),
1 (Summer), 1 (Autumn).

Second leg: Grey Mountains Narrows (Wild Land)

One hundred and seventy miles across wasteland (17 days).

Fatigue tests: 6 (Winter), 3 (Spring),
3 (Summer), 4 (Autumn).

Third leg: from the Upper Anduin Vales to the House of Beorn (Border Land, Free Land)

Fifty miles across rugged terrain and eighty miles across open terrain (8 days).

Fatigue tests: 3 (Winter), 2 (Spring),
1 (Summer), 2 (Autumn).

From the Halls of the Elvenking to Lake-town

...he hastened now down the river to the Long Lake.
He had not boats or rafts enough for his host, and they
were forced to go the slower way by foot...

This journey covers the distance that the Elvenking travelled on foot along the Forest River when he went to the rescue of the Lake-men after the destruction of their town by Smaug. The trek sees a company travelling across the upper portion of the Long Marshes for fifty miles.

From Mirkwood to the Long Lake (Border Land, Shadow Land)

10 miles across dense woods, forty miles across marshes (6 days).

Fatigue tests: 2 (Winter), 1 (Spring),
1 (Summer), 2 (Autumn).

From Beorn's House to Rivendell

At last they came up the long road, and reached the very
pass where the Goblins had captured them before.

This journey brings a company from the house of Beorn to the Last Homely House on the other side of the Misty Mountains, going across the Old Ford. It covers a distance of 190 miles.



First leg: to the High Pass (Free Land, Border Land)

Thirty miles across open terrain to the Old Ford, sixty miles on road to the mountains' feet (3 days).

Required Fatigue tests: 1 (any season).

Second leg: Across the High Pass (Wild Land)

Sixty miles across mountain path (15 days of march).

Required Fatigue tests: 5 (Winter), 3 (Spring),
3 (Summer), 4 (Autumn).

Fourth leg: to the Last Homely House (Border Land)

Forty miles across rugged terrain (3 days of march).

Required Fatigue tests: 1 (any season).

From the Lonely Mountain to the Iron Hills
... he began reckoning the distance to the Iron Hills
and how long it would be before Dáin could reach the
Lonely Mountain...

This journey traces the route going from Erebor to the dwarven settlement in the Iron Hills, following (backwards) the road taken by Dáin when he answered Thorin Oakenshield's call for help.

From Erebor to the Iron Hills (Wild Land)

One hundred and forty miles across rugged terrain (11 days).

Fatigue tests: 4 (Winter), 2 (Spring),
2 (Summer), 3 (Autumn).





- COMBAT -

**Thorin wielded his axe with mighty strokes,
and nothing seemed to harm him.**

Combat is a common occurrence in the career of any adventurer, but its frequency doesn't make it in any way an ordinary experience: the life of a hero and that of his companions is at stake, and they can consider themselves fortunate if they see the end of even a victorious fight without someone suffering from the consequences of the blows they received.

In the books, the episodes featuring fights and battles vary wildly in presentation, as they are set in diverse locations and are born out of differing narrative needs. When he is setting up a combat encounter, the Loremaster should try to accomplish the same results as the books, and use all violent confrontations as means to an end. By threatening the companions with death, the Loremaster is giving the players the opportunity to demonstrate the heroic stature of their characters; by putting their lives in danger, he is making the grim desperation of the times they are living in much more real, giving depth and context to whatever else the characters are trying to achieve in their lives.

In the game, one in every two sessions of play will probably see at least one combat encounter. Whenever such a situation arises, the normal flow of play is interrupted, as the Loremaster and players collaborate in creating a tense description of how the heroes and their foes confront each other. The rules for combat are presented from page 156 of the Adventurer's Book. In this chapter, the Loremaster can find supplementary rules and advice that should help structure combats and make them into an exciting and inspiring part of the ongoing story.

ONSET

Combat is a dramatic and momentous event for a group of players, a recurring gameplay motif that should not have its significance dulled by simple repetition.

During the opening phase of combat, called the onset, the Loremaster defines and details a number of elements to ensure that all battles do not end up feeling the same.

While some of these elements are fundamental, and must be necessarily determined for all combat encounters, other elements can be selected by the Loremaster only when he deems it necessary. The Loremaster should always ground his choices in the ongoing story, paying



particular attention to the input of players and their choices for strategies.

Determine Initiative

Usually determined by the events leading up to the combat or by the characters' actions, the nature of a combat encounter dictates whether the companions will resolve their attacks before or after their opponents. This will have repercussions on how opening volleys will be handled, and influences how hard it will be for them to exploit their position in an advantageous way (see the Resolving Opening Volleys and Assign Combat Advantages paragraphs below).

The Company is Defending

This is probably the most common combat situation faced by adventurers. Both the company and its opposition are aware of the coming battle, and are armed and ready.

Defending companions will hold the initiative and may easily manoeuvre to profit from an advantageous terrain feature, like a hill or a ruin if outside, or a narrow passageway or room.

The Company is Attacking

A rarer occurrence, this could involve player-heroes trying to free captured prisoners, or trying to get hold of a prized possession. As in the previous instance, both the company and its enemies are armed and ready.

The company's enemy is holding the initiative, and the heroes will find it more difficult to make use of advantageous terrain features.

Uncertain Situation

When the setup of a combat encounter doesn't let the Loremaster determine clearly who is the attacker and who's defending, an opposed roll between the highest **Battle** ratings in the opposing sides may be required to sort things out (the Loremaster should note that the **Battle** rating of a creature is represented by its *Vocation* score – see the Adversaries chapter at page 64).

The side that wins the opposed roll is considered to be fighting as if defending (and thus holding the initiative and profiting from advantageous terrain features).

Resolving Opening Volleys

The descriptions of the different combat types given above show situations where the sides involved in the confrontation are separated by a short distance, allowing for the brief exchange of volleys using ranged weapons.

The precise circumstances of the combat encounter should let the Loremaster judge how many volleys to allow (if any at all). - normally, all combatants are entitled to one single volley using a bow or a thrown weapon (a spear). If the two sides are separated by a greater distance, then the Loremaster might allow characters using a bow to let loose more than one volley with their weapon.

The difficulty of all volleys is equal to TN 12, plus the Parry rating of the target, modified by a shield if one is carried by the target.

If a target is aware of an incoming ranged attack (a warrior advancing to join a confrontation definitely would be) a shield doubles its modifier, as the carrier deftly protects himself.

Unless there are reasons not to do so, the exchange is considered to take place simultaneously, and so its effects are applied to player-heroes and their opponents at the same time.

Assign Combat Advantages

The location of a battle, the weather conditions affecting it and the time of the day are all elements that may be exploited by heroes to their advantage: a tree trunk may help in blocking an incoming blow, a boulder may be used to attack the enemies from a vantage point, and kicking a fire may raise a cloud of sparks able to temporarily blind an enemy.



Before combat at close quarters is joined, all players may make a roll of **Battle** to determine if their characters spot features of the battleground that may be exploited to gain an edge over their foes.

The difficulty of the roll depends on the type of combat, as a group of companions is probably in a better position to gain an advantage when making a stand in a defensible position than when charging headlong its adversaries.

- If the company successfully ambushed the enemy, the roll is made against an *easy* difficulty (TN 12). (See Surprise Attacks below).
- If the company is defending, the roll is made against a *moderate* difficulty (TN 14).
- If the company is attacking, the roll is made against a *severe* difficulty (TN 18).

Based on the quality of the result, every successful **Battle** roll grants a hero a number of bonus Success dice to use in Combat.

Each ordinary success grants one Success die, a great success grants two dice, while an extraordinary success grants three dice.

Exploiting Combat Advantages

Heroes may spend one bonus Success die to add it to any one of their rolls made during the ensuing

confrontation (to boost an attack roll for example) or he may give it to another hero to spend it on one of his own rolls (the hero who receives the die must spend it immediately when his turn to act comes). A player may only spend one die per turn.

Players are free to describe the advantage granted by a free Success die in any way they see fit, but should conform to the description of the battleground given previously by the Loremaster.

Surprise Attacks

It can happen that the group of player-heroes is caught by surprise by a foe that successfully waylaid the company, perhaps because of a carefully plotted ruse, or that the company succeeds in springing a trap upon unsuspecting enemies. In all cases, the Loremaster should consider the circumstances, and first decide whether a test should be required to resolve the situation or not; for example, a planned ambush made against completely unaware enemies without individuals on watch can let the opposition attack automatically with the benefit of complete surprise. If the Loremaster considers that a test is required, then he should always let the players make the roll, whether they are being ambushed or are ambushing someone.

Being Ambushed

When the company is being ambushed, the Loremaster should call for a test of **Awareness** from all players. Other plausible choices for the test can be the **Battle** skill (representing a soldier's preparation) or **Hunting**

Being Ambushed:

THE COMPANIONS ARE...	TN
Alert, with all heroes on the look-out, or advancing in an area unfit for ambushing.	12
Moderately alert , with at least one hero on the look-out, as when advancing in enemy territory, but not expecting an immediate threat.	14
Marching with no look-outs or scouts opening their way, or encamped without set watches.	16
Completely unaware of the coming attack and involved in a task requiring concentration (opening a door, setting a trap), etc.	18

when in the wild (especially if the ambush is being attempted by a wild creature). The Target Number for the action can be set at 14, or the Loremaster can select a difficulty from the Being Ambushed table.

A companion who fails the test has been completely caught off-guard by the sudden aggression and is surprised.

A surprised companion doesn't get to roll **Battle** to gain Combat advantages (see Combat Advantages above) and is not allowed to make opening volley rolls.

When a companion overcomes the test, he has noticed that something is going on and is ready when all hell breaks loose. If he rolled a superior level of success he has been able to warn other companions.

A character who obtained a great success on his roll can warn another character who failed his own roll, or two characters on an extraordinary success. A warned hero is considered to have succeeded in his own roll.

If at least half the heroes in a company are not surprised (counting those who have been warned), then the fight is resolved as if the company was defending as far as the roll to assign combat advantages is concerned and holding the initiative. If on the contrary more than half companions have failed their rolls and are surprised, the company

will be considered as if attacking to assign combat advantages and the opponents will fight holding the initiative.

Ambushing Enemies

When it is the turn of the company to waylay its enemies, the Loremaster may treat it as a task and let his players choose their course of action. The skills listed below are probably the ones that best suit an ambush.

- The **Battle** skill should be used when the situation involves larger groups, if the chosen place doesn't offer obvious opportunities for triggering an ambush and only if there is sufficient time for careful planning.
- The **Hunting** skill is most useful in the wild, in areas offering ample opportunities for hiding, and when the encounter wasn't expected and didn't let the ambushers prepare beforehand.
- **Stealth** is usually used when the ambushers need to move to get close to their opponents, and in situations when remaining silent is most important, as for example could be the case when the action is taking place inside a building, or underground.

The Target Number for the task can be set as usual at 14, or the Loremaster can select a difficulty from the Ambushing table below.

Ambushing:

THE ENEMY IS...	TN
Completely unaware of the coming attack, is sleeping, etc.	No roll required
Marching with no scouts opening their way, or encamped without set watches.	12
Moderately alert, as when advancing in enemy territory, but not expecting an immediate threat.	14
Alert, with set watches, or advancing in an area unfit for ambushing.	16
Extremely alert, and includes creatures with heightened senses, like the ability to scent enemies or to see in the dark.	18

If the ambush attempt is successful, the attacking companions will fight automatically holding the initiative. Additionally, the surprised enemies won't be able to make opening volleys using ranged weapons. If one or more companions fail their rolls, the enemies notice in time the presence of the company and the fight is resolved normally, with the defending enemies holding the initiative.

When the onset has been resolved, the fight at close quarters begins. Before a combat round sequence is initiated, players choose a stance and engage the enemy.

The Loremaster now assists the players as they select their stance, choosing among the four available options. As explained in the Adventurer's Book on page 158, characters may attack using a ranged weapon after engaging only by choosing a rearward stance. Under most circumstances, for every character fighting in a rearward stance there must be two other characters fighting in a close combat stance (forward, open or defensive). Moreover, players are not allowed to choose a rearward stance for their characters if the total number of enemies is more than twice the number of characters in the company.

A particular situation, like fighting on a narrow ledge, a mountain path or another condition enabling fighters to make ranged attacks at greater ease might lead the Loremaster to allow more characters to assume a rearward position.

For example, if the company severely outnumbered the opposition – at least three companions are engaging every enemy involved in the fight, the Loremaster may allow his players to assume a rearward stance without the need of having two characters in close combat for every hero in rearward.



If the full company of six adventurers was facing a Mountain Troll, three heroes might attack the creature at close combat, while three other companions stand back and aim at the monster with their ranged weapons.

Players choose their stance before a combat round sequence starts - they change stance simply by choosing a different one before the following combat sequence.

Combat Stances:

STANCE	BASIC TN	ORDER OF ACTION	NOTES
Forward	6	1	<i>Close combat</i>
Open	9	2	<i>Close combat</i>
Defensive	12	3	<i>Close combat</i>
Rearward	12	4	<i>Ranged Combat</i>

Engagement

When every player has determined the stance his hero will fight in, all combatants must engage one or more opponents.

More Enemies than Heroes

When the opposition outnumber the company, the Loremaster first assigns an opponent of his choice to every companion in a close combat stance (heroes in rearward cannot be engaged).

When all such heroes have been paired with one opponent, there will be a number of enemies left.

The Loremaster must determine what the enemies in excess do, choosing among a) engage a hero who is already engaged, or b) stand back, possibly to attack using a ranged weapon.

Usually, up to three human-sized creatures or two large creatures (such as trolls) can engage a given hero during the same combat round. Heroes engaged by multiple foes may choose freely which adversary to attack. Enemies that chose to stand back and use a ranged weapon may attack any hero involved in the fight.

The companions are outnumbered, and thus the loremaster is in charge of assigning adversaries to each companion in a forward, open or defensive stance. As Trotter is safely preparing to shoot his bow in rearward, Lifstan and the Bride are paired with a Wild Wolf each and Caranthir is engaged by an Orc soldier; this leaves the Loremaster with two Orc soldiers and the Messenger of Lugbúrz: the Loremaster determines that the two unengaged Orc soldiers stand back and aim at the fighting companions with their bows, while the Messenger of Lugbúrz lifts his heavy scimitar and joins the Wild Wolf as he gnaws at the Bride in her forward stance.

More Heroes Than Enemies (or sides equally matched)

When the companions outnumber their foes or match them in number, each player chooses an adversary for his hero in a close combat stance among those introduced by the loremaster as eligible targets.

When all heroes in a forward, open or defensive stance have been paired with one opponent, there might still be companions in close combat left without an adversary.



When this happens, the players may assign them to attack a creature already engaged by another companion.

Usually, up to a maximum of three companions may engage a human-sized opponent at the same time, while up to five companions can engage an enemy greater than human-sized (such as a Troll). When a creature is engaged by multiple companions, the Loremaster may choose freely which companion to attack when the turn of the creature comes.

After a bitter fight that left two Wild Wolves and two Orc soldiers on the ground, Trotter is still shooting his bow and the Bride and Caranthir are still engaged, respectively fighting the Messenger of Lugbúrz in a forward stance and the remaining Orc soldier in an open stance. Lifstan is weary, as killing the Wild Wolf has worn him down considerably: he chooses a defensive stance and joins the Bride as she duels with the evil minion of Mordor.

It is possible that the choice of stances made by the players or some special fighting ability (such as a Virtue) might determine that there will be enemies left

when all companions in close combat have engaged an adversary.

If this happens, the Loremaster chooses whether the 'spare' enemies engage a hero who is already engaged or stand back, possibly to attack with a ranged weapon.

COMBAT ROUND SEQUENCE

A combat round is an abstract unit of time, representing instants of intense fighting, the time needed for the fighters involved to exchange a series of blows.

During each combat round, all combatants belonging to the side holding the initiative take their turn, followed by the other side.

Player Turns

When it is the company's turn to act, the players take their actions in the order determined by their stances. Each player chooses an action for their character to perform. The action could be an attack, a task like those described from page 162 of the Adventurer's Book, or a different action determined by the current turn of events, like rescuing a fallen comrade, sending out a warning, and so on.



Loremaster Turns

The Loremaster chooses the actions attempted by the company's opponents, considering that normally creatures can only make close combat attacks against characters in forward, open or defensive stances, and can use a missile weapon only if they stood back and remained unengaged.

The description of a creature, and especially its special abilities, should guide the Loremaster in making his tactical choices (see Chapter Three) but most information comes from the context of the adventure being played: what is the enemy trying to do, apart from harming the heroes? Are they defending a place? Or are they looking for something? Having the sketch of a plan in mind can provide the Loremaster with a lot of helpful twists that can make combat exciting and fun.

Attacks

The rules governing the resolution of all attack tests are described from page 159 of the Adventurer's Book, but can be summarised as:

- Attacks are made using the Weapon skill or Cultural weapon skill appropriate to the weapon used.
- The TN of a close combat attack is found by adding the defender's Parry rating (modified by a shield if they are using one), to the basic TN of the player character's stance (whether they are attacking or if the foe is attacking, the hero's stance is used to calculate the TN).
- The TN of a ranged attack is found by adding the defender's Parry rating (modified by a shield if they are using one), to a basic TN of 12 (whether the ranged attack is made to attack a hero in any stance, or is made by a hero in a rearward stance).

Non-combat Actions

A number of non-combat action options are presented in the Adventurer's book, but players will always surprise their Loremaster by proposing unusual or unexpected tasks.

This is a good sign that the players are enjoying the game, and should be encouraged wherever possible. The factors to consider when resolving these actions are time, difficulty and consequences:

- **Time** – can the character perform the task in one round, or will it take more? This is up to the judgement of the Loremaster, but for these cases consider a round to be a maximum of 30 seconds long.
- **Difficulty** – if the action requires a roll to resolve, the difficulty of the task is assigned as usual, with a default TN of 14 unless the Loremaster decides otherwise.
- **Consequences** – as with any task, success or failure should have consequences. For example, a player who describes his character as leaping from a boulder to reach an Orc-chieftain issuing orders from the rear of battle could be allowed an **Athletics** roll (TN 14). As a consequence of success, the character should be able to engage the commander in the following round unless one of the foul creature's companions can intervene (or might even attack immediately if he scored a great or extraordinary success). If the character fails, he should lose his next action as he picks himself up from the ground and is immediately engaged by opponents as if fighting in a forward stance.

Complications

The difficulty of an attack can be affected by a range of factors such as shooting an arrow or throwing a spear at long range, fighting during a rainstorm, or while knee-deep in icy water, in mud, or in other difficult terrain.



The values listed below should be subtracted from or added to the TN of an attack. The column to the far right details a number of modifiers that may be applied to a

ranged attack; the same attack can be affected by more than one more modifier

Complications:

ATTACKER IS...	MODIFIER TO TN	EXAMPLES	RANGED ATTACK CIRCUMSTANCES
moderately hindered	+2	standing on difficult terrain, suffering from unfavorable weather conditions, or in cramped quarters	target is at medium range, or is under good cover (trees in a sparse wood)
severely hindered	+4	almost blinded by heavy snow, knee-deep in mud or swift-running water, or in darkness	target is at long range, is very small (a bird), or protected by darkness or ample cover (trees in a dense wood)
DEFENDER IS...	MODIFIER TO TN	EXAMPLES	RANGED ATTACK CIRCUMSTANCES
moderately hindered	-2	against a wall, in a corner, obliged to fight in cramped quarters	target is greater than human-sized (a Troll)
severely hindered	-4	blinded by the sun, attacked while trying to flee, immobilised by deep snow or mud	target is huge (a giant, a Dragon)

EXTENDED EXAMPLE OF COMBAT

Onset

Trotter, Lifstan, Beran and the Bride are ambushed by a group of six Attercops, as the company advances on a path deep inside Mirkwood. The Loremaster narrates as several large spiders suddenly descend from the treetops or emerge from the darkness surrounding the path...

Check for Surprise

The Loremaster asks all players to make a test to check for surprise, and allows them to choose between either **Awareness** (the default choice) or **Hunting** (as the approaching enemies are wild creatures).

The Bride chooses to roll Awareness, as her faithful hound supports all her Awareness rolls: she is successful. Lifstan rolls his **Awareness** too, but fails. Lifstan is

surprised. Beran chooses to roll Hunting: he obtains a great success, a result that allows him to warn another character who failed his roll; Beran's player chooses to wait and see Trotter's roll too before he makes his choice.

Finally, Trotter rolls Awareness and fails too! Since he is the better archer, Beran's player determines that the Beorning warns him to allow him to roll for opening volleys. As a consequence, the young Barding is the only character in the company who is surprised by the ambush: the company will fight holding the initiative.

Opening Volleys

Considering that the company is being attacked from different directions and that they are in a dense forest, the Loremaster determines that the group will be allowed only one ranged attack volley, and that each

attack will be directed at a different opponent. The six Attercops are not capable of ranged attacks, so they are not going to respond.

The Bride throws her spear at an approaching Attercop. Her TN is 16 and her roll is a 14, a failure by a mere 2 points! The Bride's player chooses to spend a point of Hope, to add her Body score to the roll as an Attribute bonus, and turn the failure into a success: she hits, even scoring a Piercing blow! The Loremaster rolls for the spider's Protection and fails: the Attercop is skewered by the Bride's trusted spear.

Beran casts his spear and spends a point of Hope too, and the spear finds its target for an Endurance loss of 5 points. Trotter bends his bow and lets loose an arrow and hits! Another Attercop loses 5 points of Endurance. Lifstan was surprised, and thus could not throw his spear at the approaching enemies.

Combat Advantages

Before close combat is joined, the Loremaster requires all players to make a Battle roll to determine eventual Combat advantages: all players roll against TN 14, again with the exception of Lifstan who was surprised. With a stroke of luck, Beran succeeds with his measly Battle 1, and his player records 1 extra Success die! All the other heroes fail at their roll.

Choose Stances

The spiders are upon the company. All players choose a stance for their characters as the heroes grab their weapon of choice: Beran and the Bride choose to fight forward, Lifstan assumes an open stance, and Trotter chooses to fight in rearward (his companions allow him to do so by fighting in close combat).

Engagement

Since there are more enemies than heroes, the Loremaster proceeds to engage the company as he sees fit: Beran, the Bride and Lifstan are first paired with one Attercop each (the three spiders that weren't hit before). Of the two remaining damaged spiders, one Attercop is sent against Beran who is the most exposed with his Parry rating of 4, and the other is left unengaged (the Loremaster intends to send it to attack Trotter using the creature's Great Leap ability...).

Combat Rounds

Since the company is holding the initiative, the players will get to resolve their attacks before their opponents get a chance to respond. Each combat round is resolved following the order of action set by the stances chosen by the players.





First Round - Players Turn

The first hero to attack is the Bride - her TN for the roll is 10 (6 for the forward stance, plus the spider's Parry rating of 4). She swings her long-hafted axe with one hand and scores a hit, reducing the Attercop to 7 Endurance. Then it is the turn of Beran to attack with his Great axe (again against a TN of 10): he swings his two-handed weapon at the damaged Attercop, hoping to cut it down before it attacks him on its round: his roll produces a normal success, inflicting 9 points of damage to the spider, enough to squash it!

Now it's Lifstan's turn, his chance to prove his worth; his TN is equal to 13 (9 for the open stance plus Parry 4): he raises his sword and lets it fall on the Attercop, for a great success! He inflicts damage for 10 Endurance points (5 for the sword and 5 for his Damage bonus) as he plunges his sword deep into the spidery monster.

Finally, Trotter acts. He is unengaged and free to attack at leisure. He chooses to try and finish off the Attercop that Lifstan hit with a serious blow, hoping to get rid of it once and for all: Trotter's TN to hit is equal to 16 (12 for the rearward stance, plus Parry 4) but the roll produces a result of 8! A sure failure, as not even an Attribute bonus might turn it into a success!

First Round - Loremaster Turn

The Loremaster now proceeds to resolve the attacks of the four surviving Attercops. He starts with the one engaging the Bride: the Woodman slayer is *woodcrafty*, and that makes her even more difficult to hit as the fight is being fought in a forest: her Parry is raised to 10 as she moves deftly using every branch and root to her advantage, bringing the TN to hit her to 16.

The Attercop's primary attack is *ensnare*, a favoured ability: it adds its Attribute level of 3 to its roll against its TN 16, scoring an extraordinary success! Unfortunately for the Bride, not only she is caught in the sticky web of the Attercop using its Seize Victim power, but the spider tries immediately to sting her! The Loremaster rolls for the *sting* attack, again a favoured ability: the roll is a hit. The Bride loses 3 points of Endurance (luckily, the

attack wasn't a Called shot; otherwise the Bride would have been poisoned!).

Now the Loremaster turns to Beran of the Mountains. The Beorning has finished one of his opponents with one blow, but the other tries to ensnare him. The TN to hit Beran is an easy 10 (6 for the forward stance plus Parry 4) — the spider hits, winding its thread around the warrior, closing in to sting him in the following round.

Now resolving the engagements for the heroes in an open stance, the Loremaster rolls the dice for the heavily damaged Attercop facing Lifstan. Its TN to hit is equal to 14 (9 for the open stance plus Lifstan's Parry of 5) — the roll is a miss!

As his final action for the round, the Loremaster chooses what the unengaged Attercop will do. He decides to spend a point of Hate, to send the spider against Trotter with a Great leap! The TN to hit Trotter is 17 (12 for the rearward stance, plus the Hobbit's Parry rating of 5 — the buckler is not considered, as Trotter is using his bow, a 2-handed weapon), but the Attercop rolls at +3 as *ensnare* is a favoured ability. The roll is a hit, and Trotter is caught in the creature's sticky thread.

The first round of combat is over. The company face a difficult challenge in the following rounds, as the Bride, Beran and Trotter won't be able to change stance and their Parry is reduced to half its usual rating, as the spiders they face have successfully seized them.

OTHER SOURCES OF INJURY

There are several ways for a hero to get hurt outside of combat. Adventurers can fall from a mountain path, be trapped in a hall set on fire by enemies, or be caught in the frigid waters of a raging river.

Falling

When a hero falls he loses 2 Endurance points for every 3 feet of height fallen; if he passes an **Athletics** test (TN 14), the damage is halved. If the character falls for at least six feet, he must also pass a Protection test to avoid

being wounded, rolling against a TN equal to 10 plus 1 for every 3 feet of height (armour applies its benefits).

*When a hero falls from a fir tree 30 feet tall he will lose 20 Endurance points (or 10 points if he passes the **Athletics** test) and must pass a Protection test against TN 20 to avoid a wound.*

Deadly Fall

When a hero falls from a distance that is likely to be lethal, or when he falls upon a surface capable of causing extremely serious harm (falling on rocks, or a stone floor), and he is wounded and reduced to zero Endurance points as a consequence, the character dies instantly.

Fire

Being accidentally exposed to fire causes a hero to lose a number of Endurance points for every round of exposure to heat, based on the intensity of the fire source. A character exposed to an open flame must pass a Protection test every round or be wounded (armour applies its benefits). The amount of damage suffered every round and the TN for the Protection tests is determined using the Fire damage table below.

Fire Damage:

SOURCE	END LOSS PER ROUND	PROTECTION TEST TN
Torch flame	3	12
Camp-fire	5	14
Brazier of charcoal	8	16
Funeral pyre	12	18
Dragon fire	20	20

Drowning

When a hero is immersed in water, or is otherwise unable to breathe for long periods (for example if he failed an **Athletics** test to swim across a swift river, or is trying to get across a room filled with noxious fumes) he loses 5 Endurance points for every round of suffocation.

- encounters -

"Ugh! here they are!" he said to the horses. "They don't look dangerous. You can be off!" He laughed a great rolling laugh, put down his axe and came forward.

The success or failure of a company's quest can often depend on the people the adventurers meet along the way. There are many powerful individuals who at first appear to be simple denizens of the Wild, whose help or counsel could prove invaluable, and many cunning foes who are best avoided can at first appear friendly. Adventurers must soon learn that not all that glitters is gold, and all that is gold does not glitter...

When the company meets one or more Loremaster characters that do not qualify immediately as enemies, an *Encounter* occurs. While much of an encounter is played out in the dialogue between the Loremaster and his players, the rules presented in this section and on page 163 of the Adventurer's Book are used to determine the progress of the meeting and its consequences.





Roleplaying Encounters

An important issue concerning gameplay will sooner or later be faced by any Loremaster and group of players: how much of an impact should the interaction between the players and the Loremaster have on the final outcome of an encounter? Should good roleplaying be allowed to affect the course of the game as much as the result of the actions attempted by players and resolved using dice? For example, can a player counteract the effects of a failed Inspire roll delivering a convincing speech? Or, reversing the point of view, should a bad die roll ruin an otherwise clever performance on the part of a player? The answer is not an easy one, as it heavily relies on subjective things like personal taste and playing style, but as it often happens the truth is probably in the middle of things: a balanced gameplay, relying evenly on roleplaying and on the input provided by good and bad die rolls.

TOLERANCE

When the adventurers enter the Hall of Thráin to petition the King under the Mountain, or step into the courtyard of the house of Beorn, they usually have an objective in mind. Sometimes, this goal is in conflict with the intentions of the people they meet. When this happens, the Loremaster sets up a *Tolerance* rating for the encounter, indicating the maximum number of rolls that the companions may collectively fail before their behaviour puts an end to their chances of getting further assistance or cooperation.

When the company fails a number of rolls in excess of the tolerance rating set for the encounter, the meeting is essentially over: from that moment on, the players may not propose or attempt any further tasks.

The Loremaster and his players may continue to play the scene, but from a gaming perspective everything has been said and done. The adventurers will be left to deal

with the consequences of the encounter, whether their aims have been fulfilled or not.

Based on the circumstances, running out of tolerance may signify different things: that the encounter is simply over, or that the words exchanged during the meeting have aggravated the situation so much that the heroes should be ready to make reparations.

Basic Rating

Since an adventurer often has only a bold stare and a weapon of worth to distinguish him from a rascal, the basic tolerance rating of an encounter is based on Valour or Wisdom, and is equal to the rating of the companion with the highest value in the group. The Loremaster chooses which characteristic is most valued by the opposing party members, considering their customs and personalities.

As a rule of thumb, individuals who prize courage, renown or prowess will favour Valour (like warriors, soldiers or captains, etc.) while peace-loving folks, or people not especially familiar with warfare or heroic deeds will favour Wisdom (common folks, merchants, Elves, Hobbits and Wizards, etc.).

The company encounters a group of wandering Elves. They prize Wisdom above all, and thus the basic tolerance rating for the encounter is equal to 2 (the highest Wisdom score in the group).

The Loremaster may then further tailor the Tolerance rating of the encounter around the current situation by taking into consideration one or more modifiers, selecting them among the ones detailed below.

Should a modified Tolerance rating decrease to zero or less, it is considered to be 1 instead.

Standing Modifier

If at least one companion present at the meeting belongs to the same culture of the encountered party, his status among his folk positively affects the encounter:

The highest Standing value among those of any companions belonging to the same cultural group of the encountered party is added to the basic Tolerance rating for the encounter.

In the preceding example, if a companion in the group is an Elf, then his Standing rating (or, if there is more than one Elf in the company, the highest Standing rating among them) can be added as a positive modifier to the basic Tolerance rating of the encounter.

Prejudice

Even the Battle of Five Armies has not completely eased the relationships between the people counted among the Free Folks of the North, as some preconceptions are too old or too deeply buried to be forgotten easily.

If an encountered group or individual can be considered to harbour a prejudice against a culture represented in the group, the Tolerance rating of the encounter suffers a negative modifier equal to -1.

Different individuals may have several reasons to hold a culture or group in contempt, but characters belonging to the following cultures commonly display the following prejudices:

- Beornings are prejudiced against Dwarves.
- Dwarves are prejudiced against Elves.
- Elves are prejudiced against Dwarves.

In the example above, the tolerance of the encounter would be decreased if the company encountering the Elves counts among its members one or more Dwarves.

Additional Modifiers

If the Loremaster deems it necessary to improvise additional modifiers based on the current circumstances, he should go ahead and choose a value between +1 to +3 or -1 to -3. Here follow some examples:

- The adventurers' arrival in a place recalls some local legend or song (+3)
- The adventurers are already known and appreciated among the people they meet (+2)
- The company is carrying a message or is on an errand from someone respected by the people encountered (+1)
- The adventurers are coming from a area feared or shunned by the people they meet (-1)
- The company insists in carrying their weapons in a hallowed place (-2)
- The adventurers are asking for passage across forbidden territory (-3)

AWARDING ADVANCEMENT POINTS DURING ENCOUNTERS

In addition to giving players a chance to achieve an objective, most encounters provide their characters with ample opportunities to shine, through creative roleplaying and a clever application of their abilities. From a gaming perspective, it is also a very favourable occasion to earn Advancement points through the use of their Common skills, as an encounter is certainly a 'safer environment' than other circumstances such as journeys or combat (although the Loremaster should make sure that all tasks proposed during an encounter have tangible consequences on the story, whether the adventurers fail or succeed).



- Part 3: the Shadow -



- STARS and - shadows

"I have seen three ages in the West of the world, and many defeats, and many fruitless victories."

Middle-earth has been under attack by the forces of darkness since its creation. Through each age, the world has been threatened by the designs of a Dark Lord, a powerful Enemy relentless in the desire to dominate all. Sauron the Great, an evil spirit of immense power, might already be far closer to victory than any dare dread. The presence of the Enemy weighs upon the hearts of most inhabitants of Middle-earth, with the exception of a fortunate few living in the havens of the northwest. Multitudes living to the east and south worship him as the only god they have ever known.

The Free Peoples of the North are among those few who have cherished a glimmer of hope: the knowledge that, as powerful as he appears to be, Sauron can be resisted and even defeated by steadfast opposition. Countless battles have been won or lost by alliances of the peoples of Middle-earth, and though the Shadow has never failed to return in a new shape, even after the most resounding defeats, neither has hope ever fully deserted the hearts of those who fight against it.

But the Shadow does not solely rely upon instruments of war and the devious deeds of its servants to breed fear and doubt in its enemies. The temptations that dwell even in the hearts of the brave have ever been the ally of the Shadow. Valiant warriors, adventurers and kings can all stray from their path willingly, given the right circumstances. No matter how pure they believe their motives to be, or how just the ends, giving in to their darkest desires will eventually lead them to exert their power for personal gain or the domination of others.

SOURCES OF CORRUPTION

Adventurers accumulate Shadow points to represent the growing burden of grief, doubt, weariness and self-interest that comes to rest on the hearts and minds of those who oppose the Shadow. While much corruption can be attributed to the anguish caused by the Dark Lord's deeds, the Shadow can only work to exaggerate and nurture weaknesses that are already present.

As the Twilight of the Third Age approaches, the sources of corruption multiply and increase in severity. Heroes mainly risk gaining Shadow points in four ways:

1. Experiencing distressing events (see Anguish);
2. Crossing or dwelling in an area tainted by manifestations of the Shadow (see Blighted Places);
3. Committing despicable or dishonourable deeds, regardless of the end they sought to achieve (see Misdeeds);
4. Taking possession of a cursed or tainted item or treasure.

ANGUISH

...suddenly he knew that he was imprisoned, caught hopelessly; he was in a barrow.

Living the life of adventurers in a world where the light is fading, heroes will often be reminded of their own fragility, and that of the world they know and love.

When a character witnesses a distressing event or directly experiences a disturbing situation, he is required to make a Corruption test (see page 28).

The table below provides a number of examples to help the Loremaster decide if a situation requires a Corruption test. The column to the right indicates how many Shadow points a character gains if he fails the test.

Anguish:

SOURCES OF ANGUISH	EXAMPLE	SHADOW GAIN
Natural but unexpected tragic event, or very grievous occurrence	<i>Serious or mortal accident, death in the family, natural catastrophe</i>	The hero gains 1 Shadow point only if he fails the Corruption test AND gets a  result.
Gruesome killing, dreadful experience, Orc-work (senseless destruction), display of the power of the Enemy	<i>Awakening in a haunted tomb, discover a traitor among friends, discovering villagers savagely mutilated, seeing the mustering of a Shadow army</i>	1 Shadow point
Harrowing experience, physical and spiritual torment, Sorcery	<i>Slavery, torture, the Black Breath, haunted by a Wight, seeing the Eye</i>	2 Shadow points
Experience directly the power of the Enemy	<i>Interrogated by the Eye, captured by the Nazgûl</i>	Gain 1 Shadow point regardless of the outcome of the Corruption test. Then, gain two additional points if the test is failed.

BLIGHTED PLACES

There was no movement of air down under the forest-roof, and it was everlastingly still and dark and stuffy.

Darkness seems thicker in the lair of a wicked beast, and the air itself hangs gloomily where black treachery was once committed. Grief and suffering never abandon the pits once inhabited by servants of the Dark Lord or the plains where bloody battles were fought.

When a character enters or lingers in an area that has been infused with malice by the darkness and has become blighted, he must make a Corruption test. If the test is failed, the character gains one point of Shadow.

Adventurers will usually only enter a blighted place when they really need to, but they could also stumble inadvertently into one in the course of a journey. The Loremaster can represent this by asking the players to make a Corruption test when travelling through regions where the Shadow falls more strongly. The Blighted Lands table below shows the frequency of tests needed for different types of regions.

Blighted Lands:

REGIONS	FREQUENCY
Free lands, Border lands	Only when required by the current adventure
Wild lands	Once every week
Shadow lands	Once a day
Dark lands	Twice a day

MISDEEDS

'You can say that I was too strong and took it by force. For I am too strong for you, halfling,' he cried; and suddenly he sprang over the stone and leaped at Frodo.

Even the most virtuous heroes can find themselves in circumstances that tempt them to do something that would call their integrity into question. Such misdeeds can be the result of an accident or misunderstanding, but could also result from the temptation to achieve a noble goal by nefarious means. In a time when the Darkness is growing ever stronger, those who fight it must master and overcome the darker impulses within themselves.

If the Loremaster determines that a misdeed has been committed, the guilty character automatically gains a number of Shadow points (see table below). Characters do not make a Corruption test when committing a misdeed, as they are not being tempted by the Shadow: they are willingly embracing its ways.

It is important to note that merely attempting to do something despicable is a misdeed, regardless of whether the action achieves its intended objective or not. If the action is classed as a Misdeed due to circumstances that the players are unaware of, for example if they ambush someone they completely believe to be guilty of a heinous crime (unprovoked aggression), but who later turns out to be innocent, they should not immediately gain the Shadow points. Instead, their behaviour when the mistake comes to light determines if they take the points or not. If their reaction is one of contrition and an earnest attempt to put the situation right, then the points can be waived at the Loremaster's discretion. This shouldn't be too easy an option, and could result in a side-quest for the characters.

ACTION	SHADOW GAIN
Accidental misdeed	-
Violent threats	1 point
Lying purposefully, subtly manipulate the will of others	1 point
Cowardice, theft and plunder	2 points
Unprovoked aggression, abusing own authority to influence or dominate	3 points
Breaking an oath, treachery	4 points
Torment and torture, murder	5 points

He did not go much further, but sat down on the cold floor and gave himself up to complete miserableness, for a long while.

Adventurers who dare to challenge the encroaching darkness face the risk of being overcome with grief. In gaming terms, a hero must be careful not to accumulate more Shadow points than he is able to get rid of.

When a hero's Shadow point total equals or exceeds his Hope score, he has been made *Miserable*, as his spirit is weakened by too much grief and sorrow.

...a cold fury rose in him, so that all speech failed him for a while. A fey mood took him.

A Miserable adventurer risks to react violently to his condition and to start a downward course towards degeneration.

When a character that has been made miserable by the Shadow gets a  on his Feat die, he experiences a bout of madness.

When this happens, the player relinquishes control of his character to the Loremaster for a short period of time. The Loremaster plays out the crisis, making the character do something he will later regret. Here are some examples of the consequences of a bout of madness:

- *Rage* - the character broods over real or imaginary wrongs until he reacts aggressively to a perceived threat or source of opposition;
- *Wretchedness* - the hero descends in a deep state of depression. He cannot propose any task for the length of the crisis;

- *Desperation* - the hero cannot find a trace of hope in his spirit, and thus cannot spend points of Hope until his heart is again lifted;
- *Lust* - the character feels an irresistible desire for an object not belonging to him, and tries to secretly take it.

If at all possible, the Loremaster should ground the consequences of a bout of madness either on the reason required the roll that triggered the crisis, on the character's Shadow weakness, or on one of his negative Traits (see Degeneration below). More often than not, the crisis provokes an aggression of some type, verbal or physical, upon the most likely and available target (a character's Fellowship focus might often qualify). The Loremaster should pick the most appropriate pretext and build the episode upon it.

Usually, a bout of madness is resolved right after the character got the  result, but the Loremaster can choose to postpone the reaction, letting the player keep control of his character, only to snatch it from him at a later, more appropriate moment. (the Loremaster might choose to do so especially when the roll that provoked the bout of madness wasn't dramatically relevant).

A Miserable Lifstan has entered a ruined tomb in Mirkwood with Trotter and failed an Awareness test producing an . The young Barding has been feeling uneasy since he descended the rotting steps leading to the underground chambers, and he secretly blames Trotter, his fellowship focus, for leading him in such a situation. When a spider suddenly emerges from the inky darkness, the Loremaster decides that Lifstan flees the place immediately, leaving Trotter to face the critter alone.

When a bout of madness finally passes, the character regains control of himself and sees his mind finally

cleared of the tangle of fear and doubt he fell into before facing the crisis.

In gaming terms, a player who suffered a bout of madness cancels all the Shadow points he accumulated so far, and replaces them with a single 'permanent' Shadow point.

Permanent Shadow points may not be removed, but are considered as normal Shadow points for all purposes.

Players keep track of permanent Shadow points by writing their Shadow score as X/X, where the value after the slash is their permanent Shadow.

DEGENERATION

In addition to 'resetting' his Shadow score, every time a hero suffers a bout of madness he develops a Flaw, a negative distinctive feature. Their calling determines the precise nature of the degeneration, as the trait is taken from a list corresponding to the calling's Shadow weakness:

A Shadow weakness represents an individual's main inner fault; their susceptibility to a certain kind of temptation or behavioural flaw. This vulnerability is exploited by the corrupting power of the Shadow, gradually twisting the hero's behaviour. Each list presents its four Flaws in order of increasing seriousness: the first time a hero fails and is taken by madness he develops the first Flaw in the list, then the second, and so on.





Degeneration:

SHADOW WEAKNESS	1	2	3	4
<i>Curse of Vengeance</i>	Spiteful	Brutal	Cruel	Murderous
<i>Dragon-sickness</i>	Grasping	Mistrustful	Deceitful	Thieving
<i>Lure of Power</i>	Resentful	Arrogant	Overconfident	Tyrannical
<i>Lure of Secrets</i>	Haughty	Scornful	Scheming	Treacherous
<i>Wandering-madness</i>	Idle	Forgetful	Uncaring	Cowardly

A flawed adventurer has not lost the possibility of being a hero. Many of the characters described in the books display the influence of the Shadow to some measure. In most cases, they were able to keep their weaknesses in check, avoiding corruption's direst consequences.

Invoking Flaws

Using rules similar to those governing the use of Traits, the Loremaster may invoke a character's Flaw whenever it would have a negative effect on the situation at hand.

In other words, it must be reasonably plausible that the character would have fared better if he didn't possess the negative feature depicted by the Flaw.

The Loremaster may invoke a flaw to apply a *Feat reroll* or a *Failure aggravation*. Usually, the Loremaster cannot apply the effects of the same Flaw more than once during the same scene, and certainly not to the same action.

Feat Reroll

When a player is attempting an action using one of his common skills, he may suffer from a Flaw and produce a poorer result.

If the Loremaster rules that a Flaw is affecting the performance of a hero, the acting player must roll the Feat die twice, and keep the lowest result.

An arrogant hero is making a Courtesy roll. The Loremaster considers that his pompous conduct may worsen his chances to succeed and so requires that the player rolls the Feat die twice and keep the lowest result.

If a hero was already entitled by a special ability to roll the Feat die twice and keep the best result, then the Flaw neutralises the ability and lets him roll the Feat die just once.

Failure Aggravation

When a hero fails at an action, a flaw may dramatically worsen its already negative outcome.

If the consequences of a failed roll may be affected by a Flaw possessed by a hero, the Loremaster can severely aggravate the outcome of the action, turning it into a truly catastrophic effort.

A brutal hero attempts to impress a crowd using Awe. The player fails the roll, and the Loremaster determines that the adventurer actually drew his sword and harmed someone in his overzealous attempt to intimidate.

Other Uses

In addition to the mechanics explained above, and their worth as opportunities for roleplaying, Flaws can be used as triggers for custom-made sources of trouble.

When circumstances can be affected negatively by a hero's Flaw, the Loremaster may weave into the narration an obstacle provoked by the hero himself.

A mistrustful hero might need to make a test of Insight to avoid reacting with hostility to a stranger, or a plot twist might be triggered by the absent-mindedness of a forgetful adventurer. When the Loremaster is improvising an unforeseen hindrance such as these, they might even briefly take control of the flawed hero, possibly against the will of the controlling player.

SHADOW WEAKNESSES DESCRIPTIONS

Every time a hero develops a Flaw, he is taking a step towards his complete defeat at the hands of the Shadow. He is renouncing his higher ambitions and embracing simpler, more primitive emotions. He is trading respect for arrogance, love for lust, trust for suspicion.

This section describes each shadow weakness and flaw presented in the game. The Loremaster can use the definitions listed here to determine the effects of a bout of madness, or to decide whether or not a flaw should affect the behaviour of a hero.

Curse of Vengeance

"I wish I had Gandalf here! Curse him for his choice of you!... As for you, I will throw you to the rocks!" he cried and lifted Bilbo in his arms.

Individuals who live by the sword are ever tempted to draw it, either literally or figuratively, when their will is thwarted or when they deem their honour to have been impugned by an insult. As corruption spreads in the hero's spirit, his behaviour worsens, leading to more extreme violent reactions.

Spiteful

The hero often repays real or imagined wrongs with vicious rudeness. Depending on the provocation, the hero may be simply very impolite, or downright insulting.

Brutal

A brutal hero reacts violently to provocations and shows little restraint under most circumstances.

Cruel

A cruel adventurer doesn't care if his actions cause pain and suffering to others, and is needlessly savage with his enemies.

Murderous

A hero becomes murderous when he starts to consider killing as a perfectly natural way to achieve a goal or simply to make things go his way.





Dragon-sickness

...he fell under the Dragon-sickness, and took most of the gold and fled with it, and died of starvation in the Waste, deserted by his companions.

Adventurers who find themselves on the road to seek lost riches run the risk of catching the age-old disease capable of turning a pile of enchanted gold into bitter ashes. As the shadow tightens its grip on their hearts, the world shrinks around them and their closely-guarded possessions.

Grasping

Grasping describes the desire to accumulate gold and precious items above all else, just for the sake of possessing them.

Mistrustful

When your prized possessions start to weigh you down and become a treasure to be guarded, even the good advice of friends appears to mask dubious intentions.

Deceitful

A deceitful adventurer feels no shame in misleading others with lies and stratagems, as long as his machinations further his ends and needs.

Thieving

A thieving adventurer has discovered that anything he desires can be his – he just has to take it. He earned the right to take all he wants when he sacrificed the love of his peers and his own self-respect.

Lure of Power

"It is by our own folly that the Enemy will defeat us," cried Boromir. "How it angers me! Fool! Obstinate fool! Running wilfully to death and ruining our cause."

When a man is given a position of authority, either by rank, lineage or stature, he may end up mistaking his own wishes for those of the people he should be guiding or keeping safe. Power is the quintessential temptation,

and provides the Shadow with an easy way to win the hearts of those who desire it.

Resentful

A resentful adventurer is often bitter and angry with the people he ought to protect, as he feels that he risks his life for individuals that fail to recognise his actions on their behalf.

Arrogant

An arrogant hero doesn't miss an opportunity to underline his own importance, often belittling his peers and companions.

Overconfident

Overconfidence denotes overweening pride, a sentiment that blinds a hero to his own limits and weaknesses. He will set out to do anything he sets his mind upon, regardless of the consequences that might befall others.

Tyrannical

A tyrannical hero escalates his actions and desires to the level of a just cause. His disregard for the lives of others is so profound that he will go to any length to achieve his ends, regardless of the cost or methods employed to accomplish them. Any dissenting opinion is considered as utter betrayal.

Lure of Secrets

"The roots of those mountains must be roots indeed; there must be great secrets buried there which have not been discovered since the beginning."

Inquisitiveness and curiosity are desirable virtues in an individual, but knowledge can be put to malicious use and learned individuals can look down on others as ignorant fools. Secrets are dangerous, as the very desire of uncovering them may corrupt the heart.

Haughty

A haughty character doesn't recognise easily the wisdom found in the words and actions of others, and tends to turn aside all advice and offers of help.

Scornful

A scornful hero treats the propositions of others with disdain, making use of every opportunity to mock them for their presumed inadequacy.

Scheming

A scheming adventurer keeps his thoughts and intentions to himself at all times, never giving advice and heeding only his own judgment. He might sometimes agree with the propositions of others, but only to be free to follow his own choices later.

Treacherous

When an adventurer becomes treacherous he cannot be trusted to keep his word. He is ready to betray his own friends and allies if it would be to his advantage.



Wandering-madness

"I feel I need a holiday, a very long holiday, as I have told you before. Probably a permanent holiday: I don't expect I shall return."

Wandering without ever really settling down might be the destiny of most adventurers, but it carries the risk of never finding something to live for. The road goes ever on and on, it's true, but whither then?

Idle

It takes a lot to stir an idle adventurer into action. He is easily distracted, and must be cajoled to fully participate in endeavours.

Forgetful

Forgetful indicates that a hero is often daydreaming and absentminded, and finds it difficult to remember even important things.

Uncaring

An uncaring adventurer is losing touch with the world outside of himself. He can't bring himself to feel compassion and quickly loses interest in matters that do not concern him directly.

Cowardly

A cowardly hero cares only for his own safety under any circumstances, and will go to any length to save himself when a threat arises.

SUCCUMBING TO THE SHADOW

When a hero has developed the full complement of four negative Traits related to his Shadow weakness, he is in risk of totally succumbing to the Shadow.

A hero already displaying four negative Traits who suffers yet another bout of madness is hopelessly lost and is taken out of play.



What happens to a character that falls under the Shadow is up to the Loremaster, who might find a way to incorporate the fallen hero's destiny into the plot of the ongoing story. Generally speaking, a character that succumbs is likely to disappear quickly from the game, probably as a consequence of one of the following events:

- *Return to Valinor.* When the burden of the Shadow overpowers an Elf, he will seek to leave Middle-earth as soon as possible, to sail for the Uttermost West and be healed of the sadness and misery of this world.
- *Madness.* When a Man, a Hobbit or a Dwarf falls under the shadow, he succumbs to madness. More often than not, this will result sooner or later in the death of the hero as the madman kills himself, threatens others to the extent that he must be killed or starves to death in some solitary place, forsaken by men and animals.

- ADVERSARIES -

"Before you could get round Mirkwood in the North you would be right among the slopes of the Grey Mountains, and they are simply stiff with Goblins, Hobgoblins, and Orcs of the worst description."

The Free Folk of the North have long been beset by many enemies. Numerous wars have been fought in the lands between the Misty Mountains and the Running River, and the Free Peoples have celebrated many victories, but to no avail: the shadowy corners of Wilderland hide countless cunning creatures, endlessly scheming for their own dark purposes or waiting for the return of their Master.

This chapter presents a selection of monstrous creatures belonging to the various intelligent and evil races populating Middle-earth.

CREATURES DESCRIPTIONS

All entries in this chapter are divided up by type (eg. *Orcs*) and sub-type (eg. *Orcs of the Misty Mountains*, *Mordor-Orcs*). Each grouping then presents the game details for one or more individual creatures (eg. *Orc soldier*, *Orc guard*) to be used as ready-to-play adversaries.

PRESENTATION FORMAT AND SPECIAL RULES

To make the life of a Loremaster easier, all game information regarding creatures is presented in an 'information box'. The capabilities of a monster are described using a set of terms and characteristics that are similar to those used to define heroes, but that make use of simplified rules meant to speed up the gameplay.

Die Rolls for Adversaries

When the Loremaster is making a die roll to determine the outcome of an action attempted by a servant of the Shadow, it has been considered more appropriate to the theme to switch the meaning of the two special icons: the  icon becomes the highest result possible and yields an automatic success, while the  rune becomes the lowest result possible and produces a value of zero.

Attribute Level

This replaces the three Attributes used to describe player-heroes. It is added as a bonus every time that a creature attempts a roll using a characteristic indicated as favoured (without the need of spending any point to invoke the bonus) and as a Damage bonus to be applied when the creature hits an opponent in combat rolling a great or extraordinary success.

Endurance

This value represents the Endurance rating of the creature. Unless a special ability prevents it, a creature is knocked

out of combat at the end of a round if it is reduced to zero Endurance, or is killed outright when it is wounded once. The usual rules for Encumbrance do not apply to creatures, and neither can they opt to be knocked back to reduce the severity of a loss of Endurance.

Hate

The Loremaster uses a creature's Hate points rating to gauge its resolve and to fuel its special abilities. If a creature begins a round without Hate points, it is considered to be weary.

Parry

A creature's Parry rating is used to calculate the TN to hit the creature in combat.

Armour

A creature's armour rating works the same as a hero's – it is used to make a Protection test when the creature is hit by a Piercing blow. If its rating is underlined, the creature adds its Attribute level to all protection rolls.

Skills

The skills possessed by a creature are represented by six collective Skill group ratings. Whenever a roll requires a skill, the Loremaster rolls a number

of Success dice equal to the rating possessed in the corresponding Skill group. If a Skill group name is underlined to mark it as favoured, the Loremaster adds the Attribute level of the creature to the roll.

Weapon Skills

These are a creature's means of attack. Weapon skill descriptions always correspond to a weapon or attack type featured in the creature's weapon table.

Common Weapons

This entry lists the characteristics of the weapons or attack types commonly employed by the creatures.

SPECIAL RULES

Called Shots

The rules for triggering a Called shot work differently for creatures confronting a Company of heroes.

A creature automatically attempts a Called shot using the weapon it is currently wielding as its next action whenever the companion attacking it fails his attack roll and obtains a  result on his Feat die.



SPECIAL ABILITIES

Bewilder

Reduce the creature's Hate point score by one to reduce the Parry rating of a hero to the basic combat TN of their chosen stance.

Commanding Voice

Reduce the creature's Hate point score by one to restore one Hate point to all creatures of the same kind involved in the confrontation (not including the creature using the special ability).

Craven

If at the beginning of a round the creature is found without Hate points, it tries to flee the battlefield.

"There's only one thing those maggots can do: they can see like gimlets in the dark."

A dark, atmospheric illustration of three skeletal, undead faces. The faces are pale, almost white, with visible bone structure and glowing yellow eyes. They are arranged in a cluster, with one face in the foreground and two slightly behind it. The background is dark and moody, with some faint, glowing light sources. The entire image is framed by a decorative, ornate border.

Dreadful Spells

Reduce the creature's Hate point score by one to force one companion to make a Corruption test. If he fails it, he gains a Shadow point and suffers the effects of the creature-specific spell (as detailed in the creature's description).

Fear of Fire

Wolves are afraid of fire at all times...

The creature loses one point of Hate at the end of the first round of combat fought against a direct adversary wielding a torch or other sort of burning item.

Fell Speed

...the bat-cloud came, flying lower, over the shoulder of the Mountain...

Creatures capable of flight or possessing a great agility can choose which heroes to engage at the beginning of every turn (even when in inferior numbers), can attack heroes in any stance, and can choose to abandon combat at the beginning of any round.

Foul Reek

...the worm-stench was heavy in the place, and the taste of vapour was on his tongue.

An overpowering stench forces any hero engaged with the monster to spend a point of Hope to attempt any action other than an attack (including combat tasks).

Great Leap

The wolf snarled and sprang towards them with a great leap.

Reduce the creature's Hate point score by one to attack any one companion, in any combat stance including Rearward.

Great Size

There in the shadows on a large flat stone sat a tremendous goblin with a huge head...

The creature is so resilient and tough that it is not knocked out or killed when reduced to zero Endurance or if wounded once. The creature keeps fighting at zero Endurance or when wounded once, until wounded twice, or reduced to zero Endurance AND wounded.

Hatred (subject)

...the hatred of their race for the dwarves had been rekindled to fury.

When the creature is confronted by the object of its hate, all its Weapon skills and Attack forms are considered to be favoured.

Hate Sunlight

They were flagging in the rays of the bright sun, winter sun shining in a pale cool sky though it was...

The creature loses one point of Hate at the end of the first round of combat fought while exposed to the light of the sun.

Hideous Toughness

A hail of dark arrows leaped up and snapped and rattled on his scales...

Reduce the creature's Hate point score by one to reduce the Endurance loss caused by an enemy's attack by a number of points equal to the creature's Attribute Level.

Horrible Strength

The strength in his long arms and shoulders was terrifying.

Following a successful attack, reduce the creature's Hate point score by one to increase the target's Endurance loss by a number of points equal to the creature's Attribute Level.

No Quarter

...these fell creatures would bite the throats of those that they threw down.

If the creature has just knocked out a character, reduce its Hate point score by one point to immediately roll a second attack on the same target using the creature's secondary weapon (against the usual TN): if the roll succeeds with a great or extraordinary success, the target is considered to have been administered a coup de grace and is killed (regardless of damage inflicted).

Savage Assault

Like a storm they broke upon the line of the men...

If the creature's main form of attack has just hit producing a great or extraordinary success, reduce its Hate point score by one point to immediately roll a second attack on the same target using the creature's secondary weapon.

Seize Victim

Frodo felt something seize him by the ankle, and he fell with a cry.

If the creature's main form of attack has hit, the creature may hold on to the target to reduce the mobility of the victim: a seized victim cannot change stance, and sees its Parry rating reduced to half (rounding fractions up).

The seizing creature cannot attack with its main weapon as long as it is seizing the target (but can freely use a secondary attack if it possesses one).

Snake-like Speed

Diving under Aragorn's blow with the speed of a striking snake he charged into the Company...

When a hero has rolled for an attack against the creature, reduce its Hate point score by one to double the creature's basic Parry score (not including the bonus due to a shield). If the TN to hit the creature is now higher than the roll, the attack missed.

Strike Fear

All of a sudden they heard a howl away down hill, a long shuddering howl.

Reduce the creature's Hate point score by one to force all companions to make a Fear test (against TN 14, unless a different difficulty is included in brackets in the ability description).

Thick Hide

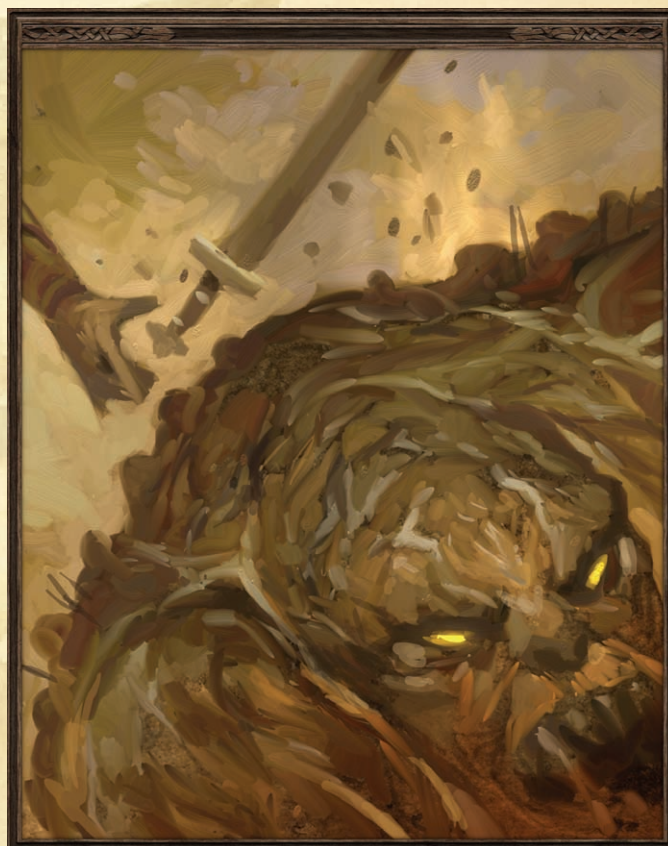
...his sword rang, glanced aside, and fell from his shaken hand.

When the creature succeeds in a Protection test against a close-combat weapon, obtaining a great or extraordinary success, the attacker drops his weapon (under normal circumstances, the dropped weapon may be recovered spending an entire action).

Thing of Terror

...he saw suddenly, issuing from a black hole of shadow under the cliff, the most loathly shape that he had ever beheld, horrible beyond the horror of an evil dream.

A hero facing such a terrifying creature must make a Fear test at the beginning of every round of combat, until he fails or he succeeds with a great or extraordinary success (the test is made against TN 14, unless a different difficulty is included in brackets in the ability description).





- ORCS -

Bred by the first Dark Power in the early years of the world to serve him in many wars, Orcs are an evil race of intelligent creatures. Their malicious spirit is full of hatred for all living things including their own kind, and when left to their own devices they often end up quarrelling fiercely over futile questions. They are usually strong and agile, quick and robust, and ready to learn or devise new methods or instruments of torment. Their appearance and size differs from tribe to tribe, but many prominent features are common to all Orcs, such as swarthy skin, short legs and broad, slanted eyes, wide mouths and long fangs.

COMMON WEAPONS

Orcs may be equipped with the following weapons.

Orcish Weapons:

WEAPON TYPE	DAMAGE	EDGE	INJURY	CALLED SHOT	NOTES
Bent sword	4	10	12	disarm	<i>A one-handed weapon with a crooked and blackened blade, it is favoured by most breeds of Orcs as it is a nasty weapon in the hands of a crafty fighter.</i>
Bow of horn	4	10	12	poison	<i>A small but powerful bow made of wood, horn and metal, it is hard to bend by an archer lacking the terrifying strength of the long arms of Orcs.</i>
Broad-bladed sword	5	10	14	poison	<i>This wicked short sword forged by Orcs is primarily a stabbing weapon, created to viciously strike unprotected areas.</i>
Broad-headed spear	5	10	12	Pierce	<i>A short spear wielded with one hand mainly as a thrusting weapon, but used also to slash with sweeping swings. It is not balanced and thus cannot be shot from a distance.</i>
Jagged knife	3		14	-	-
Heavy scimitar (2h)	7	10	14	break shield	<i>A larger scimitar meant to be borne with two hands, it is a brutal, heavy blade, meant to literally hack enemies to pieces.</i>
Orc-axe	5		16	Break shield	<i>Cruel weapons of differing size and shape, the axes wielded by Orcs are used one-handed to savagely hack at armoured enemies and to cleave through their shields.</i>
Spear	4	9	12	Pierce	-

Called Shot Effects:

WEAPON TYPE	SUCCESSFUL CALLED SHOT
Break shield	The target's shield has been smashed.
Poison	The target has been Poisoned.*
Disarm	The target drops his weapon.
Pierce	The attack results in a Piercing blow, regardless of the Feat die.

**Orc-poison:* a poisoned character becomes partially blind after a number of rounds equal to his Body or Heart rating, whichever is higher, in addition to suffering from the normal effects of being Poisoned (see Chapter Four of the Adventurer's Book). A blinded character in combat must assume a defensive stance and suffers a modifier of +6 to the TN of all actions. The effects of Orc-poison wear off after one full day.

GREAT ORCS

'...he was a great Orc with a huge iron-clad head, and yet agile and strong.'

Great Orcs are a powerful breed of Orc often encountered as leaders and chieftains of their weaker-blooded relatives. Legends hint at the possibility that they descend from servant spirits that once took an Orcish shape to serve the Dark Power's purposes. King Golfimbul, the Great Goblin, Azog and his son Bolg were Great Orcs.

Great Orc:

ATTRIBUTE LEVEL	
7	
ENDURANCE	HATE
48	8
PARRY	ARMOUR
5 +2 (shield)	4d
SKILLS	
Personality, 3	Survival, 2
Movement, 2	Custom, 2
Perception, 3	Vocation, 3
WEAPON SKILLS	
Heavy scimitar (2h)	3
Broad-headed spear	3
Orc-axe	2
SPECIAL ABILITIES	
Horrible Strength	Hideous Toughness
Commanding voice	Great size



MORDOR-ORCS

"The Orcs in the service of Barad-dûr use the sign of the Red Eye."

Several different breeds of Orc comprise the growing armies in the service of Mordor, from the small but deft Snaga to the large black Uruk. Broad, with crooked legs and long arms, Mordor-Orcs differ greatly in size and capabilities but are all cruel and cunning, often directly subject to the will of their Dark Lord. In the years following the Battle of Five Armies, Orcs bearing the Red Eye have started once again to issue from Mordor, agents spreading the taint of the Shadow and bearing orders for all malevolent creatures with hate for the Free Peoples.

Snaga Tracker:

A smaller breed gifted with wide, snuffling nostrils, able to catch the scent of enemies from a distance, even after a prolonged period of time has passed. Trackers are a weak and lazy lot, but quick and clever.

ATTRIBUTE LEVEL	
2	
ENDURANCE	HATE
8	2
PARRY	ARMOUR
3	2d
SKILLS	
Personality, 2	Survival, 2
Movement, 2	Custom, 1
Perception, 3	Vocation, 1
WEAPON SKILLS	
Bow of horn	2
Jagged knife	2
SPECIAL ABILITIES	
Hate Sunlight	Snake-like speed

Black Uruk:

Large and evil Orcs of great strength, picked from among the fiercest to act as lieutenants, bodyguards or chosen warriors, sent to reinforce a colony of lesser Orcs.

ATTRIBUTE LEVEL	
5	
ENDURANCE	HATE
20	4
PARRY	ARMOUR
5 + 2 (shield)	2d
SKILLS	
Personality, 3	Survival, 2
Movement, 3	Custom, 1
Perception, 3	Vocation, 2
WEAPON SKILLS	
Broad-bladed sword	2
Broad-headed spear	2
SPECIAL ABILITIES	
Horrible Strength	

Messenger of Lugbúrz:

An emissary of the Shadow, a Messenger of Lugbúrz is always on an errand for his Master, be it to spy upon Men, Elves or Dwarves, or to rouse all creatures with evil intent in an area.

ATTRIBUTE LEVEL	
4	
ENDURANCE	HATE
18	5
PARRY	ARMOUR
4	2d
SKILLS	
Personality, 3	Survival, 2
Movement, 2	Custom, 2
Perception, 3	Vocation, 3
WEAPON SKILLS	
Heavy scimitar (2h)	2
Jagged knife	3
SPECIAL ABILITIES	
Hate Sunlight	Snake-like speed
Commanding Voice	

ORCS OF THE MISTY MOUNTAINS

... near the Gladden Fields he was waylaid by the Orcs of the Mountains, and almost all his folk were slain.

Among the most numerous of the malicious creatures serving the Shadow, the Orcs of the Misty Mountains are used to living and making war in the deep places beneath the earth, where their sight is keener than any other Orc. When they are encountered in their mines, they are savage fighters and reckless in assault, but they leave the dark under the mountains only when marching to war or to avenge their fallen kind, as they suffer badly the light of the sun.

The Orcs of the Misty Mountains are a wild and independent lot, bent on their own purposes and aims when the Shadow's influence is weak, but ready to obey

the will of their Master when directly subject to it. The smallest among them are often referred to as goblins.

Orcs of Goblin-town

The Orcs and Goblins of Goblin-town hate Dwarves, and will attack a Company that includes Dwarves with blind fury:

Add Hatred (Dwarves).

Orcs of Mount Gram

The Orcs of Mount Gram fiercely hate all Hobbits, and will relentlessly attack a company including any:

Add Hatred (Hobbits).

Orc-Chieftain:

Only the most wicked and cruel of Orcs live long enough to become chieftains and lead their tribe or warband to battle. An Orc-chieftain is easy to recognise, as it is usually the largest in a group, wielding the meanest weapons and donning superior armour. Often, tell-tale scars or mutilations mark a chieftain's long service under the Shadow.



ATTRIBUTE LEVEL	
5	
ENDURANCE	HATE
20	5
PARRY	ARMOUR
4 +3 (great shield)	3d
SKILLS	
Personality, 3	<u>Survival, 2</u>
<u>Movement, 3</u>	Custom, 1
Perception, 2	<u>Vocation, 2</u>
WEAPON SKILLS	
Orc-axe	3
<u>Spear</u>	2
SPECIAL ABILITIES	
Hate Sunlight	Horrible Strength
Snake-like speed	Commanding voice

Goblin Archer:

A Goblin Archer is an Orc chosen for his keen eyes. His ability to see in the dark, coupled with a steady hand, lets him shoot arrows with precision by night or day.

ATTRIBUTE LEVEL	
2	
ENDURANCE	HATE
8	1
PARRY	ARMOUR
2	2d
SKILLS	
Personality, 1	Survival, 2
<u>Movement, 3</u>	Custom, 1
Perception, 2	Vocation, 1
WEAPON SKILLS	
<u>Bow of horn</u>	2
Jagged knife	1
SPECIAL ABILITIES	
Hate Sunlight	Denizen of the Dark
Craven	

Orc Soldier:

Often armed with characteristic bent swords, Orc Soldiers are a loud, undisciplined lot. Only a forceful chieftain with a cruel whip and a sharp blade can keep them in line...

ATTRIBUTE LEVEL	
3	
ENDURANCE	HATE
12	1
PARRY	ARMOUR
3 +1 (buckler)	3d
SKILLS	
Personality, 2	<u>Survival, 2</u>
Movement, 2	Custom, 1
Perception, 3	Vocation, 1
WEAPON SKILLS	
Bent sword	2
Spear	2
SPECIAL ABILITIES	
Hate Sunlight	Craven

Orc Guard:

The strongest and boldest Orcs are equipped with the toughest armour they can find or put together, and are placed to keep watch on an area wielding a sword and sturdy shield.

ATTRIBUTE LEVEL	
4	
ENDURANCE	HATE
16	3
PARRY	ARMOUR
4 +2 (shield)	<u>2d</u>
SKILLS	
Personality, 2	Survival, 2
Movement, 3	<u>Custom, 2</u>
<u>Perception, 3</u>	Vocation, 1
WEAPON SKILLS	
Spear	3
Bent sword	2
SPECIAL ABILITIES	
Hate Sunlight	Hideous Toughness



- spiders - of mirkwood

These foul things belong to a very ancient race, almost as ancient as Darkness itself. Evil, intelligent creatures in spider-form, they weave hideous webs whose black threads hang across the trees of Mirkwood, waiting for any living being to be hopelessly trapped in them. The dense cobwebs seem to snare light itself, plunging their surroundings into perpetual night and earning the forest its name.

For almost two thousand years, the Spiders of Mirkwood have spied upon all who dared approach the forest, watching and waiting. They have plagued the Woodmen living along the western eaves of the wood and the Elves of Thranduil's Palace with furtive assaults and ceaseless warfare. Unlike Orcs, they are not direct servants of the Shadow, but their own machinations often find them in league with it.

COMMON WEAPONS

The Spiders of Mirkwood's poison is their most formidable threat:

Spider Weapons:

WEAPON TYPE	DAMAGE	EDGE	INJURY	CALLED SHOT	NOTES
Ensnare*	-	-	-	-	<i>The creature uses its thread to capture its target, using the Seize Victim power</i>
Sting	Attribute Level	10	14	Poison	<i>Unlike the natural breeds of spiders, these creatures inject their poison using a sting.</i>

*If the *Ensnare* roll is successful and produces a great or extraordinary success, the spider immediately attacks its victim using its sting.

Called Shot Effects:

WEAPON TYPE	SUCCESSFUL CALLED SHOT
Poison	The target has been Poisoned.*

**Spider-poison*: a poisoned character is paralysed and falls to the ground after a number of rounds equal to his Body or Heart rating, whichever is higher, in addition to suffering from the normal effects of being Poisoned (see Chapter Four of the Adventurer's Book). The effects of Spider-poison wear off after one full day.



ATTERCOPS

...there were spiders huge and horrible sitting in the branches above him.

Many-eyed and many-legged, Attercops are giant spiders reaching up to the size of boars. They are crafty predators who attack unwary victims, first tying them up with their spider-thread and then poisoning them. While a single Attercop does not pose a significant threat to any but a less-experienced adventurer, a roused spider-colony can be a challenge even for a veteran company of heroes.

Attercop:

ATTRIBUTE LEVEL	
3	
ENDURANCE	HATE
12	2
PARRY	ARMOUR
4	2d
SKILLS	
Personality, 1	Survival, 1
Movement, 3	Custom, 1
Perception, 1	Vocation, 1
WEAPON SKILLS	
Ensnare	2
Sting	2
SPECIAL ABILITIES	
Great Leap	Seize Victim



GREAT SPIDERS

...he noticed a place of dense black shadow ahead of him, black even for that forest, like a patch of midnight that had never been cleared away.

Great Spiders display their dreadful heritage much more prominently than the lesser Attercops. They are gigantic in size, sometimes as big as horses or greater, but their soft, flexible bodies enable them to hide in surprisingly narrow passages. While they can always be described as monstrous spider creatures, their features often differ from one individual to another: the number and appearance of their legs and eyes may vary, for instance – some are supported by long and thin stalks, others move about on strong and hairy limbs ending in claw-like appendages, some spy from the dark with clustered eyes, and others follow their prey with bulbous, many-windowed eyes. Regardless of the details, Great Spiders are always a terrifying sight.

Great Spider:

ATTRIBUTE LEVEL	
4	
ENDURANCE	HATE
36	3
PARRY	ARMOUR
5	3d
SKILLS	
Personality, 3	Survival, 2
<u>Movement</u> , 3	Custom, 2
<u>Perception</u> , 2	Vocation, 1
WEAPON SKILLS	
<u>Ensnare</u>	3
<u>Sting</u>	2
SPECIAL ABILITIES	
Denizen of the Dark	Seize Victim
Strike Fear (TN 16)	Dreadful Spells*

**Holding spell*: a hero who fails the Corruption check due to Dreadful spells cannot attack a Great Spider for a number of rounds equal to 10 minus his Wisdom rating.



- trolls -

Trolls are one of the evil races created by the Great Enemy in the Elder Days. They were bred to fight in many bitter wars, and were created strong and powerful, yet slow-witted and dull, and appear monstrous and misshapen, as if left unfinished by their cruel maker. It is not known whether they were generated in many forms, or if they evolved since their first appearance, but by the end of the Third Age several different breeds of trolls can be encountered.

COMMON WEAPONS

The following weapons are those most commonly employed by most trolls.

Troll Weapons:

WEAPON TYPE	DAMAGE	EDGE	INJURY	CALLED SHOT	NOTES
Bite	5		14	-	<i>Trolls have fearsome fangs, sometimes so large that they protrude from their mouths.</i>
Club	6	10	14	-	<i>A Troll club can be anything, from a stout branch ripped from a tree, to a body part torn from a fallen enemy.</i>
Crush	Attribute level		12	-	<i>Weaponless Trolls use their weight and strength to pound relentlessly upon their enemies.</i>
Heavy hammer	8		16	Break shield	<i>Trolls clutch this huge, brutal weapon with a single hand.</i>

Called Shot Effects:

WEAPON TYPE	SUCCESSFUL CALLED SHOT
Break shield	The shield carried by the target has been smashed.

CAVE-TROLLS

A huge arm and shoulder, with a dark skin of greenish scales, was thrust through the widening gap.

Cave-Trolls were created to fight and hunt deep under the earth. Barely more intelligent than wild beasts, they have dark skin with a greenish hue, covered with tight, robust scales. While not necessarily inferior in size to other breeds of Trolls, they appear shorter as they are extremely hunched and often advance on all fours walking on their knuckles.

Nobody knows if Cave-Trolls can endure the light of the sun, as they never leave their hunting grounds under mountains, hills and fells.

Cave-Troll:

ATTRIBUTE LEVEL	
7	
ENDURANCE	HATE
76	8
PARRY	ARMOUR
5	3d
SKILLS	
Personality, 2	Survival, 2
Movement, 2	Custom, 0
Perception, 1	Vocation, 0
WEAPON SKILLS	
Bite	3
Crush	1
SPECIAL ABILITIES	
Great Size	Hideous Toughness
Savage Assault	Thick Hide



HILL-TROLLS

Taller and broader than Men they were, and they were clad only in close-fitting mesh of horny scales, or maybe that was their hideous hide...

Hill-Trolls are probably the most common breed of this cruel race, as they prowl desolate areas from the Coldfells in the north to Gorgoroth in the south. They are wild and beastly in battle, prone to bellowing and roaring to intimidate their enemies, but can be disciplined to use simple weapons and armour.

Hill-Troll:

ATTRIBUTE LEVEL	
7	
ENDURANCE	HATE
84	7
PARRY	ARMOUR
5 (+1)	3d
SKILLS	
Personality, 3	Survival, 2
Movement, 2	Custom, 0
Perception, 2	Vocation, 2
WEAPON SKILLS	
Heavy hammer	3
Crush	2
SPECIAL ABILITIES	
Great Size	Hideous Toughness
Strike Fear	



Hill-Troll Chief:

A Troll-chief is a larger, meaner and more intelligent Hill-Troll, a formidable opponent even for the most valorous (or reckless) heroes.

ATTRIBUTE LEVEL	
8	
ENDURANCE	HATE
90	10
PARRY	ARMOUR
6 (+1)	4d
SKILLS	
Personality, 3	Survival, 2
Movement, 2	Custom, 1
Perception, 2	Vocation, 3
WEAPON SKILLS	
Heavy hammer	4
Bite	2
SPECIAL ABILITIES	
Great Size	Hideous Toughness
Horrible Strength	No Quarter



MOUNTAIN-TROLLS

Great beasts drew it, Orcs surrounded it, and behind walked mountain-trolls to wield it.

Mountain-Trolls are the largest of all Troll-races, often twelve feet or more in height. Immensely strong and dangerous, luckily they are rarely encountered, and are dull-witted and slow.

Mountain-Troll:

ATTRIBUTE LEVEL	
9	
ENDURANCE	HATE
96	9
PARRY	ARMOUR
7	4d
SKILLS	
Personality, 4	Survival, 3
Movement, 2	Custom, 1
Perception, 2	Vocation, 2
WEAPON SKILLS	
Crush	4
SPECIAL ABILITIES	
Great Size	Hideous Toughness
Horrible Strength	Thing of Terror

STONE-TROLLS

...there were three fair-sized trolls at hand in a nasty mood, quite likely to try toasted dwarf, or even pony, for a change...

Stone-Trolls are solitary predators, living in small groups in filthy caves strewn with the remains of unwary travellers. They seem to be more intelligent than other Troll types, maybe thanks to their habit of prowling in the proximity of populated areas. Their appearance, while always frightful, is made less monstrous by their tendency to wear simple clothes, cook their food and use tools like drinking jugs and barrels. A very ancient breed, Stone-Trolls owe their name to the fact that they turn to stone if exposed to the light of the Sun.

Stone-Troll:

ATTRIBUTE LEVEL	
6	
ENDURANCE	HATE
72	5
PARRY	ARMOUR
5	3d
SKILLS	
Personality, 2	Survival, 1
Movement, 2	<u>Custom, 1</u>
Perception, 1	Vocation, 1
WEAPON SKILLS	
Club	3
<u>Crush</u>	1
SPECIAL ABILITIES	
Great Size	Horrible Strength
Hatred (Dwarves)	

- WOLVES of the WILD -

By the time of Bilbo's adventures, Wolves, Wargs and Werewolves could be encountered at night in the eastern vales close to the Misty Mountains, where they prowl in search of prey. The Wargs and Orcs of the Mountains often help one another in their raids against the Woodmen, gathering food for the Wolves and slaves to work for the Orcs.

COMMON WEAPONS

Wolves attack their enemies using the following form of attacks:

Wolvish Weapons:

WEAPON TYPE	DAMAGE	EDGE	INJURY	CALLED SHOT	NOTES
Bite	Attribute level	10	14	Pierce	<i>Wolves possess powerful jaws filled with sharp fangs.</i>
Rend	Attribute level		14	-	<i>When an enemy is most vulnerable, Wolves rend their bodies using their hideous claws.</i>

Called Shot Effects:

WEAPON TYPE	SUCCESSFUL CALLED SHOT
Pierce	The attack results in a Piercing blow, regardless of the outcome of the Feat die.

WARGS

"How the wind howls!" he cried. "It is howling with wolf-voices. The Wargs have come west of the Mountains!"

Wargs are a particularly evil breed of wolves living over the Edge of the Wild, displaying wicked cunning and malicious intent. They communicate using a dreadful language, foul to the ears of listeners not sharing their love for cruel and hateful deeds. Wargs generally look like lean and powerfully-built grey wolves, with eyes shining in the dark, but their size and appearance vary according to age and experience.

Wild Wolf:

The average Warg, a Wild Wolf is slightly larger than an ordinary Wolf, and much more vicious. It can be encountered in packs, but also as a solitary hunter or scout, ready to howl and alert other Wargs and evil creatures for miles around. Orcs learn how to ride upon Wild Wolves like men do on horses.

ATTRIBUTE LEVEL	
3	
ENDURANCE	HATE
12	1
PARRY	ARMOUR
5	2d
SKILLS	
Personality, 1	Survival, 2
Movement, 3	Custom, 0
Perception, 2	Vocation, 0
WEAPON SKILLS	
Bite	2
SPECIAL ABILITIES	
Fear of Fire	Great Leap
Seize Victim	

Wolf Leader:

Greater in stature, cruelty and cunning than ordinary Wargs, a Wolf leader is called upon by its lesser kin to deal with serious threats, like bands of travelling adventurers trespassing into Warg territory. A Wolf leader is never encountered alone, but always surrounded by a pack of Wild Wolves.

ATTRIBUTE LEVEL	
5	
ENDURANCE	HATE
16	3
PARRY	ARMOUR
6	3d
SKILLS	
Personality, 2	Survival, 3
Movement, 3	Custom, 1
Perception, 2	Vocation, 1
WEAPON SKILLS	
Bite	3
Rend	1
SPECIAL ABILITIES	
Fear of Fire	Strike Fear
Savage Assault	



WEREWOLVES

"Listen, Hound of Sauron!" he cried. "Gandalf is here. Fly, if you value your foul skin! I will shrivel you from tail to snout, if you come within this ring."

It is suspected by the most learned among the Wise that the cruellest packs of Wargs might be led by the foulest of creatures: trusted servants of the Dark Lord returned from the Ancient World to serve him once again. Devouring spirits trapped in wolf-form, they hate the very soil they walk upon, and desire only to defile and ruin in an attempt to quench the dreadful hunger that consumes their mortal bodies.

The Werewolf of Mirkwood:

The Werewolf of Mirkwood is a monstrous wolf-like creature. Greater than any Wolf or Warg, its body has been twisted by the terrible power that has possessed it for uncounted centuries. This dreadful beast has made its lair under the mountains of the Wild Wood, a complex of caves it leaves only to temporarily satisfy its thirst.

ATTRIBUTE LEVEL	
8	
ENDURANCE	HATE
68	12
PARRY	ARMOUR
9	4d
SKILLS	
Personality, 2	Survival, 3
Movement, 3	Custom, 1
Perception, 3	Vocation, 3
WEAPON SKILLS	
Bite	4
Rend	1
SPECIAL ABILITIES	
Thing of Terror (TN 16)	Savage Assault
Denizen of the Dark	Great Size
Great Leap	

Hound of Sauron:

Chosen for its ferocity and malicious intelligence, a Hound of Sauron is a minion of the Dark Lord, a servant sent on a precise errand, be it the gathering of forces for a coming war, the hunt for a specific individual, or spying on an area. Hidden behind the shape of an ordinary Warg, a Hound of Sauron conceals much greater powers.

ATTRIBUTE LEVEL	
6	
ENDURANCE	HATE
20	5
PARRY	ARMOUR
6	3d
SKILLS	
Personality, 3	Survival, 2
Movement, 3	Custom, 1
Perception, 3	Vocation, 3
WEAPON SKILLS	
Bite	3
Rend	1
SPECIAL ABILITIES	
Strike Fear	Hideous Toughness
Savage Assault	



- vampires -

In the Elder Days, the Dark Lord counted among his servants a number of mysterious bat-like creatures, sometimes said to possess the power to change shape. A race of vampire-bats endures to this day: when roused, they fly in huge swarms, heralding the coming of an Orc-host by forming a dark cloud above its ranks. But a darker menace lurks among the heights of the Mountains of Mirkwood and in forgotten pits under Dol Guldur, a brooding presence that accompanied the Shadow when it first descended upon Greenwood the Great...

COMMON WEAPONS

Vampires attack using a formidable array of natural weaponry.

Vampiric Weapons:

WEAPON TYPE	DAMAGE	EDGE	INJURY	CALLED SHOT	NOTES
Bite	Attribute level		16	Pierce	<i>The fangs of a vampire penetrate deeply when the creature fastens on its victim.</i>
Rake	Attribute level		14	-	<i>Vampires may use their wings to strike with talons as hard as iron.</i>

Called Shot Effects:

WEAPON TYPE	SUCCESSFUL CALLED SHOT
Pierce	The attack results in a Piercing blow, regardless of the outcome of the Feat die.



GREAT BATS

...the great bats ... fastened vampire-like on the stricken.

Unusually large bats, whose taste for blood often leads them to follow when Orcs and Wargs go on raids or to war.

Great Bat:

ATTRIBUTE LEVEL	
3	
ENDURANCE	HATE
10	2
PARRY	ARMOUR
5	2d
SKILLS	
Personality, 1	Survival, 3
Movement, 3	Custom, 0
Perception, 3	Vocation, 0
WEAPON SKILLS	
Bite	2
SPECIAL ABILITIES	
Hate Sunlight	Denizen of the Dark
Seize Victim	Fell Speed
Bewilder	

SECRET SHADOWS

Taking the form of great misshapen bats, these servants of Sauron fly on their great fingered wings to carry his dark tidings or to spy upon the land, or join a swarm of Great Bats when war or hunt has provided them with prey. These Vampires belong to an astute and patient breed, always aware of the will of their Master and ready to do his bidding. Ages ago they were able to disguise their foul appearance and appear as beautiful women. Today, they may appear as such only briefly, to confound their opponents.

Secret Shadow:

ATTRIBUTE LEVEL	
5	
ENDURANCE	HATE
35	6
PARRY	ARMOUR
7	3d
SKILLS	
Personality, 2	Survival, 3
Movement, 3	Custom, 2
Perception, 3	Vocation, 2
WEAPON SKILLS	
Bite	3
Rake	2
SPECIAL ABILITIES	
Hate Sunlight	Denizen of the Dark
Snake-like Speed	Fell Speed
Savage Assault	Bewilder



- Part 4: The Campaign -







the - setting -

... suddenly his hand met what felt like a tiny ring of cold metal lying on the floor of the tunnel.

Several important events occur in the year 2941 that usher Wilderland into a new age: the death of Smaug, the Battle of Five Armies, the restoration of the Kingdom under the Mountain and of Dale, and the discovery of the Ruling Ring by Bilbo Baggins. The decade following these momentous events sees the Free Peoples savour an unexpected respite: men gather under the banners of ambitious kings and chieftains, raising their heads to look beyond their old and restrictive borders for the first time in a long while, and adventurers dare once again to follow forgotten roads in search of renown.

From a gaming perspective, this is a very suitable time to set up a new campaign in Wilderland. It is a period that is well known to readers, but its chronology is missing the detail of later times, allowing for all sorts of adventures. The One Ring 'officially' starts in the year 2946. By this time, the heroes have adjusted to the new *status quo* and have five years of active adventuring in front of them before the year 2951 offers the Loremaster the opportunity to close the first part of a campaign with a bang as the Shadow returns to Mirkwood. This rude awakening shatters the peaceful optimism of recent years, a dramatic event that proves particularly effective if the early years have been spent playing simpler adventures.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter contains the background material needed to start playing a game set at the end of the Third Age. The information is supposed to be used more as a toolkit rather than as a rigid script – the last thing it should do

is limit the creativity of the Loremaster and his players. By introducing the locations, personalities and events presented here, Loremasters and players will be able to set up a great number of Adventuring and Fellowship phases that will be both entertaining and faithful to the source material.

The aim of the material found in this chapter is to establish the foundations of an ongoing series of adventures based initially around a focused location (for example, the cities of Esgaroth and Dale) and eventually ranging across Wilderland, an area full of opportunities for exploration and excitement. The period of relative peace offers the Loremaster a chance to present adventures rich with wonder and discovery, set in a simpler narrative style, well-suited to the mood of the tale narrated in *The Hobbit*.

THE TALE OF YEARS

The chronologies found in this volume record events from the past and provide an outline of things yet to come. Most entries are drawn directly from the available sources; others have been developed for the game, striving to attain a certain level of internal consistency. The result is a timeline composed of events great and small, giving a historical context to the deeds of the heroes. Combining the happenings described here with their own adventures will help the players achieve a deep level of participation in the setting. Moreover, the presented events serve as plot elements that may be developed into complete adventures.

WILDERLAND

Wilderland is a wide region. Leagues and leagues of unexplored terrain lay in front of heroes in search of adventure, and well-known and beloved locales await players eager to discover them once again from a new personal perspective. The detailed journey rules further enhance the experience that comes from simply travelling across the region.

IMPORTANT PERSONALITIES

Many important characters are referred to in this chapter, and most of them may be introduced freely into the lives of player-heroes. These canonical personalities embody the true spirit of the setting, and should always be included as an active part of the game. For many players, making the acquaintance of some of the characters of the books is the main reason to play a game set in Middle-earth.

USING THE SOURCES

The background material found in this chapter has been written to be as complete as possible, but of course the best reference material is Tolkien's books themselves. A Loremaster in need of inspiration or a player looking for the most faithful description of a place can simply crack their books open and look for the relevant chapters – although spirited discussions of the 'correct' interpretation of a particular passage should be kept for after the game!

As far as the first core set of *The One Ring* is concerned, *The Hobbit* is the book to keep handy, but several pages in *The Lord of the Rings* concern themselves with what happened before Frodo's time. However, this doesn't mean that every time that a character encounters someone or visits a place the Loremaster should search through hundreds of pages for the tiniest bit of reference material.

ASSEMBLING A COMPANY

The composition of the group of characters is very important, as no other gaming element has a comparable influence on the type of campaign that will take shape during play. Assembling the right group of adventurers is therefore a step that should be considered with the greatest care. To facilitate this decision, this chapter offers a standard solution, one that should easily accommodate the choices made by the players during character creation:

The default campaign starts in 2946, on the occasion of the first Gathering of Five Armies, a celebration held in Esgaroth for the first time, five years after the eponymous battle.

Newly-created heroes may be adventurers that have been attracted to Lake-town by the clamour surrounding the event. They may have ended up there on their own, or they might have accompanied an official emissary. If the Loremaster wants the campaign to feature characters as personalities of importance, the adventurers might even be those emissaries themselves! Whatever the details, the Gathering of Five Armies provides a quick and easily customisable option.

THE TALE OF YEARS

Three timelines have been included in this section: the first (*Old Lore*) presents facts mainly concerning the ancient history of relevant areas of Middle-earth and the folks inhabiting it; the second (*Recent Past*) offers information that is considered common knowledge to most starting adventurers; the third chronology (*Gathering Shadows*) outlines current and possible future developments that can be witnessed or affected by the heroes themselves.

OLD LORE

"Long ago in my grandfather Thrór's time our family was driven out of the far North..."

The information presented in most entries below may be revealed to a character belonging to the folk most concerned with the information and possessing the Old lore Trait, or succeeding in a **Lore** roll. Entries in *italics* are reserved for the Loremaster's eyes, as they relate facts known only to a few (if anyone at all).



Year 1050

About this time, a shadow takes shape in Greenwood the Great. The forest is darkened and Orcs and Spiders begin to spread from the Naked Hill in the south. The Silvan Elves confine themselves to the northernmost regions of the forest, and Men begin to call it Mirkwood. The earliest tales of the Hobbits relating to their Wandering Days seem to indicate that they once came from these areas.

Year 1800

The Dwarves of the line of Durin delve too deep under the Misty Mountains and awaken an ancient evil. After millennia of prosperity, the vast halls of Khazad-dûm, Wonder of the Northern world, are abandoned the following year, its inhabitants driven out by fear and death.

Year 1999

Thráin I, King of Durin's folk and distant ancestor of Thorin Oakenshield, comes to the Lonely Mountain and founds a dwarf-kingdom. There, the Dwarves discover their most prized treasure, the Arkenstone, known also as the Heart of the Mountain.

Year 2063

In the past centuries, the increase in power of the Necromancer of Dol Guldur has been responsible for the slow but steady diminishing of the inhabitants of the vales of the Great River. In the year 2063, the wizard Gandalf finally enters the fortress to investigate the matter (songs and legends of the Woodmen have him led through Mirkwood by the young son of a hunter).

The evil power dwelling in Dol Guldur retreats when faced by Gandalf's challenge and flies to the East. The wizard returns from the pits of the fortress carrying a treasure, and gives it to the Woodmen for safekeeping (see Woodmen-town at page 105). It begins the period known to the Wise as the Watchful Peace, a truce that will last for four hundred years.

The shadow over Mirkwood weakens and many folks that were forced to leave return to their lands: the Woodmen multiply and prosper in the following years, establishing settlements both east and west of the Great River.

Year 2210

Thorin I, son of Thráin, removes the royal house of Durin's folk from Erebor to abide in the Grey Mountains.



He carries the Arkenstone with him, as part of the royal treasure.

Year 2460

After four centuries of hiding, the Dark Lord secretly returns to Dol Guldur. His strength is increased, and his dark thoughts are felt by all malevolent creatures. The Ring heeds the call.

Mirkwood darkens once again as evil things are called back and creep into the forest. In the following decades, many people choose to leave the region and go south.

Year 2463

At the request of the Lady Galadriel, a White Council of the Wise and Powerful is formed to unite the forces of the West against the Shadow. Saruman the White, who has long studied the Enemy and his servants, is chosen to lead it. The Elvenking of Northern Mirkwood is invited to join, but refuses.

It is around this year that Déagol, a Stoor Hobbit, finds the One Ring while swimming in the Gladden River. It does not remain in his property for long, as his friend Sméagol murders him to get it for himself. In the following years Sméagol is estranged from his people, and eventually seeks refuge under the Misty Mountains.

Year 2480

Answering commands issued from their master in Dol Guldur, the Orcs begin to spread in the dark places beneath the Misty Mountains. From Mount Gundabad in the north to Moria in the south they secretly strengthen every stronghold, barring all the passes into the lands west of the mountains.

To respond to the increasing threat from the mountains, the Woodmen of the western river vales raise their burg at Mountain Hall, building upon the foundations of an older fortification.



Year 2510

Following a great battle, Eorl the Young, lord of the Horse-folk of the north, leads his people from the upper vales of the river Anduin to live as free Men in the plains of Calenardhon, far in the distant south. He becomes the first King of the Mark of the Riders.

Year 2570

Late in the reign of Náin II, a plague of Dragons begins to afflict the Dwarven mansions in the Grey Mountains. The Dwarves face a long and terrible war.

Year 2589

The Dragons of the northern waste spread south to prey on the Dwarves. King Dáin I and his second son Frór are slain by a Cold-drake while barring the gates to their halls.

Year 2590

Thrór, the eldest son of Dáin I and heir to the kingship, restores the royal house to its ancient seat in Erebor. The Arkenstone is brought back to its place in the Great Hall



of Thráin, and with it returns a great part of Durin's folk. They mine and tunnel the roots of the Mountain, enlarging the subterranean kingdom building huge halls and greater workshops. Another group of Dwarves is led eastward by his brother Grór, the third son of Dáin: under his rule they eventually settle in the Iron Hills.

About this time, several clans of Northmen living along the River Running move north to be closer to the Lonely Mountain. They befriend the Dwarven colony of Erebor, attracted by the opportunities offered by the prospering trade with the Iron Hills. The city of Dale prospers, and the following hundred years see it become the capital of a strong kingdom extending far and wide to the East and South.

Year 2740

Dismayed by the increasing forces of both Dwarves and Men of the North, many Orcs resort to raiding the regions west of the Misty Mountains. This threat comes mainly from their stronghold of Mount Gram.

Year 2747

At the Battle of Greenfields, Hobbits of the Shire face and defeat an Orc-band from Mount Gram. Their king,

the Orc Golfimbul, is killed by Bandobras Took, better known as the "Bullroarer".

Year 2758

About this time, the wild folks of the East move against their enemies. In the North, the armies of Dale muster under the banner of King Bladorthin, but between the end of 2758 and the first months of 2759, stiff, relentless winds hit the North, covering the lands with snow and ice. The Long Winter has come, and King Bladorthin dies before he sees the end of it. He is succeeded by his young son Girion, who drives his enemies back to the eastern frontiers of the realm.

In five months, the Long Winter causes great suffering and inflicts grievous losses on many peoples. Gandalf the Grey himself intervenes, coming to the aid of the Shire-folk.

Year 2770

One night, Smaug the Dragon descends on the Lonely Mountain spouting flames. The Dwarves are caught by surprise and Erebor is sacked, its inhabitants slain. Warriors from Dale are destroyed too, and Girion their lord is killed. Thrór, the King under the Mountain,



escapes the slaughter by secret means with his son Thráin. They are joined in exile by Thorin, the young son of Thráin. The Dragon claims the underground halls of Erebor as his lair, and its treasure becomes his hoard. From the Mountain, Smaug starts preying upon the neighbouring lands, killing people and livestock and reducing the surrounding area to a wasteland. Some time later, Dale becomes deserted and slowly crumbles to ruins.

Year 2790

Thrór, Dwarven King in exile, is captured and slain in Moria by the Great Orc Azog. Preparing a war of vengeance, his son Thráin calls for a great muster of Dwarves.

Year 2793

The Dwarves of Durin's Folk, strengthened by great forces sent from the Houses of the other Fathers of the Dwarves, begin a long and cruel war against the Orcs of the Misty Mountains.

Year 2799

The final battle of the War of the Dwarves and Orcs is fought before the East-gate of Moria. The Dwarves are victorious, and a very young Dáin Ironfoot distinguishes himself by killing Azog singlehandedly. But victory has a bitter taste: the war has greatly reduced the number of Orcs still dwelling in the mountains, but at the cost of a frightful number of lives.

After the battle, the various Houses part ways without attempting to reclaim Moria, and the Dwarves are dispersed again to the four winds: Dáin Ironfoot returns to the Iron Hills. Thráin and his son Thorin wander westwards, to eventually settle in the Blue Mountains to the northwest.

Year 2841

A lust for gold slowly takes possession of Thráin. He resolves to return to Erebor and convinces Balin and Dwalin and a few others to leave the Blue Mountains with him. Their wanderings bring them again beyond

the Misty Mountains, until on a dark night Thráin disappears in Mirkwood.

Year 2850

After almost eight hundred years, Gandalf the Grey once again enters Dol Guldur in secrecy. Inside the evil fortress, he finds his darkest fears to be true: the dreaded Necromancer is indeed the dark lord Sauron. Before fleeing the black stronghold, the wizard encounters the missing Heir of Durin: a dying Thráin entrusts him with a map and a key and then dies.

Year 2851

The White Council meets in Rivendell to confer about Gandalf the Grey's discoveries in Dol Guldur. He urges a move against the dark lord, proposing an attack on his fortress. Saruman opposes Gandalf's advice, asserting that the Council is not yet ready and that for the moment Dol Guldur should not be molested for fear of worse repercussions (at this time, Saruman has already discovered that the One Ring was lost in the Gladden Fields, and does not want any interference in his attempts to find it).

Year 2890

Bilbo Baggins of Bag End is born in the Shire, son of Bungo Baggins and Belladonna Took.

Year 2900

Despite the danger of these lands, many bold men and women make their way back into the vales of the Great River from the South. They are welcomed by Radagast the Brown to 'live in amongst the more pleasant woods in the valleys and along the river-shores'.

Year 2911

An extremely fierce and long cold season begins in November. Remembered as the Fell Winter, its frozen grip doesn't release the regions of the North from snow and ice for five months. Rivers and lakes are frozen over, and white wolves descend from the frozen wastes of the far North.



When the frigid winds finally relent in March of the following year, rivers overflow with the melting of the snow and many lands are flooded as a result. It is about this time that the Long Marshes spread extensively, extending from the Old Forest road to the Forest River.

Year 2931

Aragorn, son of Arathorn, is born on May 1st. He is the direct descendant of Isildur, the last High King of the Men of the West. Two years later, his father is killed while riding against the Orcs of Mount Gram with the sons of Elrond Halfelven. His mother Gilraen takes Aragorn to Rivendell, where he is received by Elrond as foster-son. He is given the name Estel (Hope) and his lineage concealed.

RECENT PAST

...there came one day to Bilbo's door the great Wizard, Gandalf the Grey, and thirteen Dwarves with him...

The following entries report the relevant events that have occurred in the past five years. Entries not in *italics* are to be considered common knowledge for any character coming from the North, as this great news has spread far and wide in Wilderland.

Year 2941

The wizard Gandalf, Thorin Oakenshield and thirteen Dwarven companions visit Bilbo the Hobbit in the Shire: they set upon a quest to recover the treasure of Durin's Folk and free the North from the threat of the Dragon of Erebor.

Gandalf temporarily abandons the expedition to persuade the White Council to strike decisively against Dol Guldur: this time, Saruman approves and the council sets upon the difficult task. But Sauron yet again anticipates the moves of his enemies and retreats from his fastness: the Dark Power leaves Mirkwood.

A series of unlikely events lead to the death of Smaug and to the destruction of Lake-town. Dáin of the Iron Hills becomes King of the restored Kingdom under the Mountain, while Dwarves, Men and Elves collaborate in rebuilding new cities in Dale and upon the Long Lake.

Year 2942

Bilbo returns to his peaceful life in the Shire. He carries the One Ring with him, not suspecting its true nature. News of the great events that have come to pass spread across the land as he travels home.

The Dark Lord returns to Mordor. He is received by his most powerful servants, the nine Ringwraiths, who prepared for his return in their stronghold of Minas Morgul.

Year 2943

The Master of Lake-town falls victim of the dragon-sickness and leaves, carrying with him most of the gold given to him by Bard for the help of the Lake-people. Initially helped by some companions, he is then abandoned and dies of starvation in the Waste.

Year 2944

The creature Gollum leaves his lair under the Mountains and begins his search for the thief of the Ring. Some time later, he enters Mirkwood, to eventually reach Esgaroth and even the streets of Dale. For a while he is watched closely by the Wood-elves.

Years 2944-2945

Bard completes the reconstruction of Dale and is crowned King. A new Lake-town is completed on the Long Lake and trade resumes up and down the Running River. Beorn establishes his rule as a great chief at the head of his new followers, soon to be known as the Beornings.

GATHERING SHADOWS

One autumn evening some years afterwards, Bilbo was sitting in his study writing his memoirs...

The following entries describe events concerning Wilderland from year 2945 to 2951. Here no entries are given in *italics*, as all featured events are available for the Loremaster to use in any ways he sees fit. For example, each entry could be expanded to constitute the main plot of an Adventuring phase, or narrated to players as part of the Year's End segment of a Fellowship phase, or simply employed as a descriptive background element. Some information won't be revealed to players at all, but kept secret until the day it will become known (if it will be discovered at all).

There are no major events recorded in the sources for the first four years, and so a handful of simple ones have been devised for the game (mainly to facilitate the introduction of a new group of heroes). Without earth-shattering occurrences, new characters have plenty of room to develop their adventuring careers before more important occurrences start affecting their lives: in year 2951, the first seeds of the War of the Ring are planted, and a new era for Middle-earth begins.

Year 2946

The Gathering of Five Armies

In the last days of November, on the fifth anniversary of the eponymous battle, a great feast celebrating the victory at the Battle of Five Armies is held in Dale for the first time. People from all neighbouring lands are expected to participate in the revels, as the feast has been arranged to coincide with local celebrations held for the end of the harvest season and the beginning of the colder months of the year.

The celebrations are a great occasion to put together a group of new heroes.

The Council of the North

During the first Gathering, envoys from Lake-town, the Woodland Realm and the Kingdom under the Mountain meet in the presence of King Bard to debate matters concerning Wilderland.

The player-heroes may be present as representatives of their own folk, and maybe even meet each other at the Gathering.





Year 2947

Gollum seeks the One Ring

About this time, Gollum abandons the trail of Bilbo over the Misty Mountains and turns back. He hides in Mirkwood, slowly making his way to the South. His presence fills the forest with dreadful rumours, and among the Woodmen a tale starts to spread, telling of a blood-drinking ghost preying upon the unwary.

Heroes journeying through Mirkwood or spending a fellowship phase in proximity to the forest might see a glimpse of Gollum.



Year 2948

The Grey Pilgrim

Fearing a possible estrangement between the Folks of the North, Gandalf the Grey visits the courts of Elves, Men and Dwarves. He is considering the possibility of inviting one of their rulers to become a member of the White Council. The choice will be offered either to King Dáin, the Elvenking, King Bard or Beorn. Gandalf will consider his choices, and then present his candidate to the head of the council, the wizard Saruman.

If the heroes are in a position to be considered as counsellors, Gandalf listens to their advice.

Year 2949

Gandalf and Balin visit Bilbo

Gandalf and Balin journey to the Shire to visit Bilbo Baggins. They arrive at Bag End on one autumn evening. They spend some time together, talking of their adventuring times and about how things are going in Wilderland.

Balin doesn't hide his disquiet from his good friend, and tries to convince Bilbo to join him in a new adventure. Bilbo is reluctant, and in the end declines the invitation.

If a hero hails from the Shire, he might actually witness the episode.

Year 2951

Sauron Declares in Mordor

After nine years of preparations, Sauron unveils his presence in the black land of Mordor. He is ready to spread his power far and wide, and begins to rebuild his Dark Tower. His will is bent on gathering a vast army in the black land, and his summons are answered by all sorts of wicked creatures. Gollum is among them, and his path slowly turns in the direction of Mordor.

At this time, characters with at least a permanent Shadow point or a Shadow rating of 3 or more may experience nightmares, mostly visions of the black land, the raising of the Dark Tower, or the Flaming Eye.

The Nazgûl enter Dol Guldur

As his first act of war, Sauron sends the Nazgûl to reclaim his stronghold in southern Mirkwood. Their arrival triggers once again the Darkening of Mirkwood. Rumours of a new Shadow in the South start to be whispered by many folks in the North. Orcs and Goblins are found bearing the symbol of a lidless Eye.

The Return of Arwen

Arwen, daughter of Elrond, returns to Rivendell to visit her father after a long stay in Lórien.

The Departure of Aragorn

On the day of his coming of age (May 1st) Aragorn learns about his true name and heritage from Elrond, his foster-father. From his hands he receives two heirlooms of his House: the shards of the sword Narsil and the ring of Barahir. The next day, Aragorn encounters Arwen for the first time and falls in love with her. Upon learning of her true nature and heritage, Aragorn leaves Rivendell to go into the wild.

WILDERLAND

...what I have heard seems to me for the most part old wives' tales, such as we tell to our children. All that lies north of Rohan is now to us so far away that fancy can wander freely there.

The player's map of Wilderland shows the regions found to the east of the Misty Mountains, as far as the river Redwater. It's an area measuring approximately 600 miles across from West to East and 500 miles from North to South. Most of it is occupied by the forest of Mirkwood, and the peoples inhabiting it claim the lands around it or very close to it, if not inside it.

This section contains several entries detailing various features shown on the Loremaster's map. The cities of Dale and Esgaroth are described in greater detail, as they are likely to be chosen as the base of operation for a newly-formed company of adventurers.

THE LANDS ABOUT THE MOUNTAIN

Some of the most powerful realms of the Northlands can be found in the vicinity of the isolated peak known as the Lonely Mountain.

Dale

Dale is a city of Men built on the western bank of the Running River. It rises in a valley between the southern arms of the Lonely Mountain, where the river turns around the town making a wide loop before resuming its southward course. Its foundations were first laid by Northmen almost four hundred years ago.

For two centuries, the city enjoyed a close alliance with the Dwarves of the Kingdom under the Mountain and grew rich and prosperous, extending its power to the east over the lands between the Running River and Redwater. Many kings passed down their crown to their heirs, until the city was destroyed when Smaug descended on the Dwarf-kingdom. Dale remained a deserted ruin for the best part of two centuries, its power a dream remembered only in sad songs sung in Lake-town and in smaller settlements scattered along the Running River.

Dale was reclaimed in the year 2941 by Bard, a descendant of its former lords and slayer of the Dragon, when news of his great deed attracted many Men from the west and south. With the re-founding of the Kingdom under the Mountain the city is returning to its former splendour as the products of skilled Dwarven hands issues again from the Front Gate of Erebor to be sold in the markets of Dale, along with the wares made by local craftsmen and the foreign goods brought upstream by boats coming from Lake-town.

The last four years have seen the completion of most of the restoration works, including crenelated walls and bell towers, but great labours are undertaken every month as trading blooms and wealth increases. Dwarf stonemasons are seen working everywhere, as they supervise the building of new fountains and pools and the raising of new bridges stretching across the waterways.



Dwarf craftsmen busy themselves with the paving of the streets using stones of different colours (from which the streets take their names). The countryside to the south and west of the Mountain is once again home to vast farmlands providing food for the city population and, especially, for the Dwarf colony under Erebor. Farmers are enlarging their fields every year, getting nearer and nearer to the great forest of Mirkwood and the northernmost extensions of the Long Marshes.

Royal Palace

The residence of King Bard is a stone palace built by Dwarven masons directed by King Dáin himself. From

the outside it is an imposing sight, with its marble pillars and commemorative fountain representing the Fall of Smaug. Inside, the palace looks like a Dwarven underground hall, with its small deep windows and glass lamps hanging from the distant ceiling. The two great openings at the side of the great front gate are oriented to receive the light of the sun as soon as it rises over the easternmost Mountain arm.

The throne of King Bard sits upon a dais and is a gift from the Elvenking: made of carven wood, its knotted engravings tell the story of the shooting of the Black Arrow. Here, King Bard holds his court; he receives



envoys and important traders from the south and east and dispenses justice upon his vassals and followers when required or asked.

Toy-market

Open every first Monday and Thursday each month in the city marketplace, the toy-market of Dale is a colourful and noisy centre of activity attracting merchants from Wilderland and beyond. Here, Dwarf master artisans compete to sell the product of their craft, beautiful toys made of wood and metal with near-magical properties: life-like singing birds, Dwarven masks that laugh when a string is pulled, and smoking-pipes that produce soap-bubbles are just some examples of the wide offering to be found at the market.

The best-selling item since the reopening of the market is certainly the Dalian musical cracker, finely embossed with entwining dragons, that when pulled apart makes a sharp noise and reveals a small but perfectly functioning musical instrument inside. A separate area is dedicated to the dangerous art of making fireworks; here, interested parties can buy squibs, crackers, backarappers, sparklers, torches, dwarf-candles, elf-fountains, goblin-barkers and thunder-claps.

Merchants Quarter

This is the fastest-growing area of the city, already occupying a sizeable part of the town and with several large buildings used to store the wares destined to be shipped to Lake-town. It rises close to the main opening to the south of the city, the Traders Gate, leading to the landings and quays along the river where the goods are loaded onto the boats going downstream, and to the Merchants Way, the southbound road to Esgaroth.

Ravensgate District

Along the north-western bend of the river, closest to the Mountain, stand many large houses, the homes of loyal followers who were richly rewarded by Bard the Bowman for their part in the Battle of Five Armies,

and of those merchants and artisans who have grown wealthy through trade. The district is bordered by a long street lined with narrow houses and paved with white cobblestones, the White Lane, where most of the craftsmen workshops of the town are found.

Royal Barracks

The best fighters among the followers of King Bard come regularly to the Royal Barracks to train the youth of the city and help restore the fame of the warriors of Dale. The black-liveried Royal Archers practice here every day, looking for the next occasion to match their skill against the members of the Bowmen's Guild of Esgaroth.

Erebor

The Lonely Mountain has been known as the lair of Smaug the Dragon for almost two centuries. Today, Erebor is again the seat of the King under the Mountain and the most prosperous colony of Durin's Folk. It is an isolated peak, rising to the east of Mirkwood and south of its greater neighbours, the Grey Mountains. The Mountain is tall enough to be covered in snow until Spring is underway, and extends over a wide area. Its slopes separate in six great spurs, long steep-sided ridges that fall towards the plains to the south and west, and in the direction of the Waste and its tumbled lands to the north and east.

The waters of the River Running spring from the roots of the Mountain, where the two southernmost spurs of the peak meet in a great cliff-wall. Here, the stream flows swiftly out of the Front Gate of the Dwarven stronghold and then winds a wide loop over the valley of Dale, before finally turning away from the Mountain on its road to the Long Lake.

Since the death of the Dragon, the followers of King Dáin have been busy cleansing all the passages of their underground kingdom, to free them from the stench of the worm that permeated every corner. Then, they started delving ever deeper, to carve halls and streets under the



earth befitting a rich and powerful kingdom. In just a handful of years they have restored all the upper levels of their stronghold, and reopened many lower passages and tunnels that the Dragon blocked to defend his hoard.

The Front Gate

The main entrance to the Kingdom under the Mountain is a tall arch opening on the south face of Erebor. Splintered and blackened in many places at the time of the Dragon, several sections of the arch have been replaced, along with those stones paving the way leading into the Mountain that were rubbed smooth by the passing of the great monster.

The materials used to restore the Front Gate have all been supplied in an unusual way: right after his

crowning, King Dáin ordered that every Dwarf leaving the Kingdom under the Mountain on business should return within a year bringing marble suitable for building, as a tribute to their newfound realm. Dáin himself gave his contribution, supplying a large block of red porphyry brought from his home in the Iron hills that was cut and placed as the gate's new lintel. Now that the order of the King has been lifted, entering the Front Gate bringing a small piece of marble as a gift is considered a token of respect.

The Great Chamber of Thrór

A visitor who enters the Front Gate to reach for Erebor's hall of feasting and of council must follow the narrow channel that contains the boiling waters of the Running River. Recovered from its ruin and silence, the great hall is more magnificent than ever before, and its high roof



echoes once again with song, cheer, and the speeches of the King under the Mountain. King Dáin's seat dominates the hall, set against the great golden cup of Thrór, a huge two-handed chalice, hammered and carven with birds and flowers with bejeweled eyes and petals.

The Great Hall of Thráin

Down many long stairs and echoing passages, and more long stairs and sloping corridors, a vast chamber is found. Here, for two centuries Smaug the Dragon has lain on his bed of gold, among the remains of many slain Dwarves. But before that time, this chamber was the Great Hall of Thráin, a place of feasting and celebration, where the Arkenstone, the Heart of the Mountain, was kept safe. Today, the gold has been moved elsewhere and the hall has been cleansed, but it will take many long years for it to be considered fully wholesome again: for too long the Dragon has brooded here over his treasure, sleeping his dark dreams. King Dáin comes here from time to time, on his way to the tomb of Thorin Oakenshield.

Balin and several of the dwarves that took part in the quest that finally freed Erebor seem to have chosen the hall as their meeting place when they must discuss something privately—“A dark place for dark business,” as they like to say.

Lake-town

Since the great days of old, when a powerful realm of Northmen stretched far from the Lonely Mountain, there has been a city upon the Long Lake. Grown out of a small community born along its western shore, the village of Esgaroth became a trading port when families of merchants decided to move there from Dale. They built warehouses, and great residences to live in and closely follow the coming and going of their goods. For many years thereafter the boats of the Lake-men were seen going up and down the river, their holds filled with gold and their decks crowded with warriors in armour,

ready to bring war to distant lands. When Smaug descended on Erebor almost two hundred years ago, the town of Esgaroth was miraculously spared. Dale wasn't so fortunate, and those inhabitants who were able to escape its ruin with their lives were forced to seek asylum among the Lake-men. But in time, even the town along the shore had to be abandoned for fear of the Dragon, and the Lake-men built new dwellings directly on the surface of the Long Lake itself, in the hope that its deep, cold waters might keep them safe from the fire. Lake-town was born, and it endured under the shadow of the Mountain until the night Smaug fell upon it, and it disappeared in a cloud of steam and sparks.

Today, a great wooden bridge runs out from the western shore to reach the city of Esgaroth, built anew a few miles to the north of the spot where the bones of Smaug rest undisturbed. Larger than before, the new home of the Lake-people is also constructed upon stilts made of huge forest trees driven into the bottom of the lake, and its buildings, quays and streets bustle with the activities of a folk enjoying a greater level of prosperity than ever before.

Skilful Elves from the kingdom of Thranduil have helped in the reconstruction, and their cunning art is visible in the many arches that bend as gracefully as tree boughs across the wider streets, and in the delicate frets that grace several house facades.

To this day Esgaroth remains a free city, governed by a Master elected from among the old and wise. He conducts the affairs of his office from a Great House in the main Market-place, on behalf of the people of Lake-town and advised by an assembly of councillors. His duty is to safeguard and preserve the peace and riches of the city, administering its trades and policies. In recent years Esgaroth has started to suffer from the proximity of the city of Dale: fearing for the independence of Lake-town, the Master of Esgaroth is tightening his trading and political relations with the Woodland Realm.



The Wood-elves have always been welcome in Lake-town, and much sought-after help arrived from them when the city was destroyed by Smaug. Elves have never stopped being an everyday sight for the Lake-men, both along the quays and in the houses of the most fashionable and influential merchant families.

Market-place

In the tradition of the previous lake-town, the market-place is actually a wide square gap between the buildings where the surface of the lake is directly accessible by long wooden quays with many steps and ladders. The area is surrounded by the tall piles on which are built inns, taverns and several large warehouses. In this area, many Raft-elves and more exotic merchants coming from lands to the south and east can be encountered.

Town-hall

The new Lake-town differs from the previous one mainly due to the magnificence of its Great House. Raised away from the Market-place (as tradition would have had it) it is removed from the nearby buildings by a stout palisade and is accessed through a portal that can be blocked by an iron gate when needed. Here the Master of Esgaroth meets the city councillors to discuss the town's policies

on river-tolls, cargoes and gold. A flight of steps to the back of the hall reaches down to the surface of the lake, where the Master's great gilded boat is always ready to carry him about his business.

Bowmen's Guild-hall

One of the better known sights in Esgaroth is the large fortification rising to the right of the long bridge connecting the city to the mainland. This square building houses the Bowmen's Guild of the city of Esgaroth. Composed of free men, in time of war and danger they gather in companies and come to the support of the city guards. In time of peace, they enjoy the company of their peers and spend their free time at the guild-hall testing their skill with archery challenges and drinking an ale they brew themselves.

THE LAND OF THE BEORNINGS

The borders of the land falling under Beorn's rule are defined by how far his followers are willing to go to pursue their enemies. To this day, this includes territories around both sides of the Great River near the Carrock. Since the day that Beorn decided to become a leader of men, his followers have come to live close



to his house, building homesteads and small fortified settlements along the edge of Mirkwood, from the Old Forest Road up to the Forest Gate.

Beorn's House

Beyond a belt of ancient oaks and a very tall thorn-hedge, the House of Beorn encloses a wide area including gardens, wooden barns, stables and sheds, and a great house not very different from a traditional Northmen hall (see the box about the *Northmen Great House* below); rows of bell-shaped bee-hives show that Beorn's eating habits haven't changed since Bilbo's visit (even if it is plain that he doesn't enforce them on his followers, who live mostly by hunting). It is here that Beorn can be found most of the times (at least during the day), holding council with the older and mightier among his followers, receiving foreigners and guests or baking his famous cakes.

The Carrock

The Carrock is a great hill of stone breaking the current of the river in the upper reaches of Anduin, to the north of the Old Ford. An ancient flight of steps starting from a small cave at the foot of the hill leads to a flat space on top. A stony ford joins the Carrock to the eastern shore of the Great River, but not to its western shore.

High Pass

A pass going over the Misty Mountains, connecting Wilderland to the western lands. The High Pass is known to most people as it is often a preferred route to the Redhorn Gate and the pass going over the mountains at the source of the Gladden River. Watching over the pass to free it from the threat of Goblins is one of the duties that Beorn requires from his folk, an obligation that the Beornings are glad to fulfill.

Old Ford

The Old Ford is the point where the Old Forest Road crosses the Great River. Once, a great stone bridge stood here, and the ruins of its foundations can still be seen

in the drier season when the river is shallower. The ford is watched constantly by the Beornings, who also meet here to trade with other folks (mainly the Woodmen).

THE LAND OF THE WOODMEN

The valleys along both sides of the Great River and the western eaves of Mirkwood are the home of the Woodmen. Numerous, brave and well-armed, they populate a land that is constantly imperilled by many threats.

The Woodmen of Wilderland are not united under a crown, but are divided into several Houses, as they call a group of clans or families who dwell together in the same great hall under a common token of kinship.

Every house is ruled by its council of Elders, a circle of the old and wise. In times of need, the Elders from all houses meet at a folk-moot, a great gathering where the most important decisions concerning the Woodmen at large are taken. There are four main Houses of Woodmen in Wilderland: the House of Mountain Hall, the House of Woodland Hall, the House of Woodmen-town and the House of Rhosgobel.





Northmen Great House

A great house's main feature is usually a long pillared hall with three aisles, tables, benches and three central wide hearths, the side aisles complete with raised platforms to house sleeping cots and personal wares. Openings on the ceiling let out the smoke produced by the fire-places. Two doors open on the shortest sides, usually placed to face north and south. At one end of the hall, usually near the north door, is a dais with a table placed across its width; the greatest of the hearths is usually placed in front of this table. This is the place where celebrations and feasts are held, and where songs are sung and tidings are heard, or where the Elders of the folk meet to hear each other's council. Woven cloths or painted shields with images of ancient tales or family devices hang from pillar to pillar, with the most magnificent ones placed around the dais. Woodcarvings grace the doorposts, and the base and capitals of each pillar, with animal frets and other decorations.

Mountain Hall

This is the main settlement of the Woodmen on the west side of the Great River. It is hidden in a narrow valley east of the Misty Mountains, where a turbulent stream runs amid steep walls of rock and around grassy knolls and pine-covered hills. The village itself is located where the river loops around an area of grassland set against the stony shoulder of the mountains. It is not protected by a stockade or hedge, as the watercourse has been widened and deepened, making the village accessible only by a dirt road cut along the stream where it passes the nearest to the rock face.

Many villagers work in mines dug into the mountains to the west, searching in the recesses of the earth for metals prized by all inhabitants of the vales of the Great River: copper, tin and iron. It is a dangerous trade, as many creatures lurk in the dark under the mountains, waiting patiently for the unwary.



The Burg

From the village, a flight of stairs reaches up to the burg, a stone tower built centuries ago by the Northmen who first discovered this remote dale. A watch is set upon it by night and day, ready to blast the great Horn of Warning in case Orcs or other foes would try to approach the village stealthily. The horn is one of the treasures of Mountain Hall, as it was carved out of the tusk of a Cold-drake of the North by craftsmen of old, and wrought with many devices, the burg amidst them all.

Rhosgobel

Rhosgobel is the name of the place where the abode of Radagast is found, on the southwestern edge of Mirkwood just one hundred miles north of the naked hill where Dol Guldur rises. Its name ("Brown hay") comes from the high thorn-hedge that separates the area from the nearby forest. The Brown Wizard has been living here since before the Northmen came to the vales of Anduin. His presence has been greatly beneficial to the Woodmen, and over time a small village has sprung up; here the Woodmen dwell under one roof, the long House of the folk, as is their custom.

The Great Hall

This great building has its back to the wood and its face to the Great River, with two doors opening to the north and south. Radagast comes here often, although he usually prefers to reside in his own house some distance to the south of the great hall, a small cottage with a thatched roof inhabited by all sorts of birds.

Woodland Hall

Woodland Hall lies fifty miles to the south of the Old Forest Road, in a wide clearing cut in the forest by generations of axe-wielding Woodmen. It is the largest community of Men to be encountered within the borders of the wild wood, a village protected by a very tall hedge and a stout stockade, raised beside a river flowing south from the Mountains of Mirkwood.

Woodmen of all ages search for fish among the eddies of the Dusky River with bow, spear, net or line, as its

waters are still considered wholesome this far from the foulest depths of the forest. They also wash the gravel of its shallows looking for gold, brought here by the waters of the river from the roots of the mountains to the north. The great house of Woodland Hall is a very large building, built on a hillock whose sides have laboriously been made sheer on all sides but one, increasing its defensibility.

The Great Hall

Among the great houses of the woodland folk this is probably the most magnificent. Generations of carpenters spent long hours with knife and gouge in hand to carve life-like images of beasts, warriors and women into the tough wood of the trees of Mirkwood. Every door and window-post, every pillar, rafter and beam tells a different tale, sometimes harkening back to times now forgotten, when the Woodmen lived in different lands. Such craft has never been equalled again, leaving the Woodmen of today to wonder at the cunning of their forefathers.

Woodmen-town

Woodmen-town lies forty miles to the south of Woodland Hall. It is a smaller settlement, lying in a clearing among the trees where the forest stream heads west, turning before the wood rises into low hills beyond its eastern shore. Several homesteads cluster around an ancient great house, built by a hero of the Woodmen when the Shadow was first banished from Mirkwood. With a history going back for more than nine hundred years, the House of Woodmen-town reunites the most prominent families of the Woodmen (even if Woodland Hall is the largest dwelling of their folk). Its council of Elders is given precedence in all folk-moots, and many war-leaders have been chosen among its warriors and chieftains.

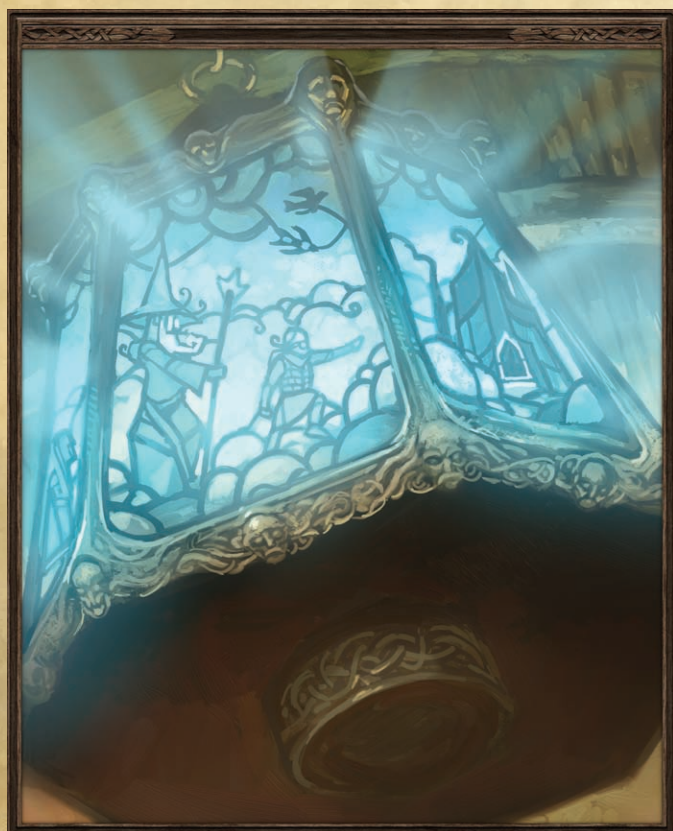
Woodmen-town suffered greatly from the threat of the Shadow and, when noisome mists and vapours started to issue once again from Dol Guldur four centuries ago, many Woodmen left the village.



It is only thanks to the actions of the wizard Radagast that Woodmen-town wasn't completely deserted. Today, many Woodmen are returning, as the darkness recedes from the western borders of the forest and birds and animals return to enliven the oak and beech woods with their cries.

The Hall of Balthi

This great house takes his name from a legendary hero of the folk. Under its roof the Woodmen keep their greatest treasure, a wondrous lamp burning with an everlasting blue light, the product of a craft so ancient it comes from a time before the reckoning of Men. It is held aloft by chains fastened to a beam of the roof. The lamp is encased in a fair and clear blue glass like a sapphire, wrought by craftsmen of the folk with figures in gold showing a young warrior, not much more than a boy, leading through the woods an elderly figure holding a staff, and advancing together towards a dark fortress on a hill. The Woodmen attribute the lamp with prodigious healing powers, and the great house is considered a hallowed place by all Houses of the Woodmen.



MIRKWOOD

Described by many as "the greatest of the forests of the Northern world", Mirkwood is a sea of woodland measuring more than 400 miles from north to south and 200 miles from east to west, at the point where the Old Forest Road crosses its width. It extends across the very middle of Wilderland, and its presence has shaped the history of the region for centuries. Nobody knows exactly what lies within its borders, as no one has thoroughly explored it.

The days when the Elvenking enforced his rule over all of Greenwood the Great are long gone, and the wild wood has reclaimed its hundreds of streams and shadowy vales, its clearings, bogs, hills and mountains. The creatures that inhabit it have become "queer and savage", as Beorn once put it, like the ever-present black squirrels, the thousands of black moths that crowd around any traveller carrying a source of light, and the hundreds of black butterflies that fly above the tree-tops. Many darker things have descended from the mountains that rise in the middle of the forest and have issued out of the pits of Dol Guldur, to breed and multiply in the dim shadows.

Fortunately for all who live near its edge, the forest has grown less dark since the Necromancer was driven from his stronghold in the south of Mirkwood, and some think that it will soon be possible to open the Old Forest Road to traffic once again.

Heart of Mirkwood

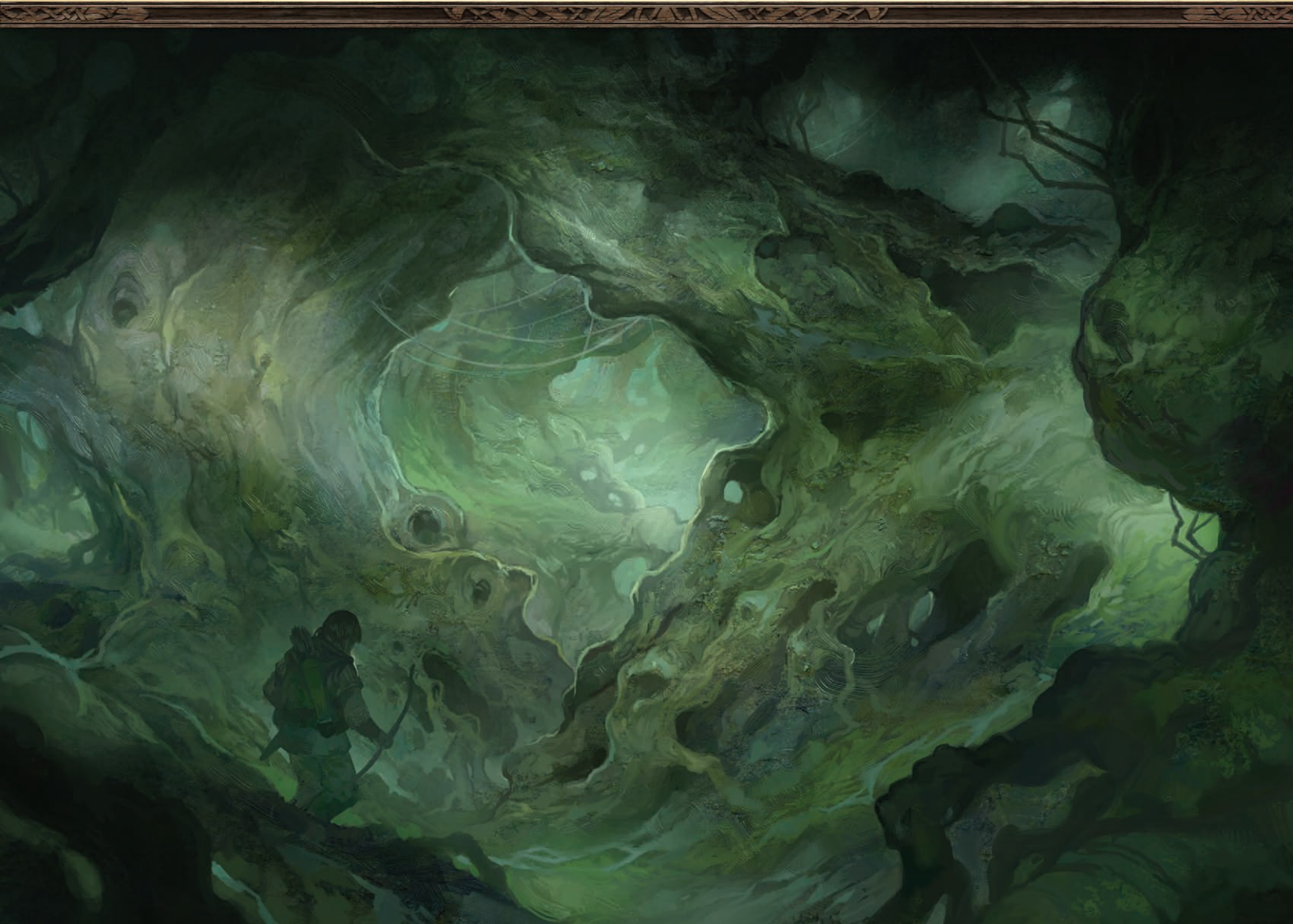
Trackless and unconquered by the light, the Heart of Mirkwood is the rotten core of the forest. Here the trees have huge, gnarled trunks, their twisted branches are heavy with strands upon strands of ivy and their roots are so tangled that in some places it is impossible to set foot upon the open ground. Many creatures have made their lair in this region, the darkest part of the forest, and most spiders seem to emerge from its remote corners. Nothing that goes on two legs is welcome here, and not even the boldest of Orcs dares to enter.

Northern Mirkwood

This region borders with the Woodland Realm, where the Forest River cuts the northernmost portion of Mirkwood neatly in half. Despite its proximity to the realm of Thranduil, this area is very dark, and dense cobwebs stretch from tree to tree; the clear sign of the presence of Spiders. For a while now, the only viable way across Mirkwood is found here, where the Forest Gate gives entrance to the Elf-path. This is a trail made by the Silvan Elves, and it is protected by the Elvenking's magic from being overgrown or blocked by cobwebs. Near its eastern end, a small forest river interrupts the path with dark, swift waters said to carry an enchantment capable of making anyone who drinks from it drowsy and forgetful.

Mountains of Mirkwood

The Mountains of Mirkwood were once known by the Elves as the Dark Mountains because of the colour of their slopes, covered by dense forests of dark fir. With the passing of the centuries the name assumed a different interpretation, as the Dark Lord's most hideous creatures began to haunt the range. It is from cold caves under these mountains that the great bats that participated in the Battle of Five Armies came from, and many returned there to mend their wounds and brood upon their defeat. From a spring among these mountains the Enchanted Stream flows to meet the Forest River to the north, as do several other brooks and creeks that lose themselves in winding courses among the trees of Mirkwood or in the Long Marshes to the east.





Southern Mirkwood

Southern Mirkwood was the land of the Necromancer. His dark tower sits upon a hill surrounded by a forest of dark firs. From its gate issue dozens of paths and trails that spread like a web across the region, the roads once used by his many servants, spies and soldiers. Today, the vast fortress of Dol Guldur is empty and silent, but the presence of its former master echoes still in its many dark halls and chambers. His malevolent will weighs upon the region like a curse, and his influence is felt by anyone who tries to approach it, and by those creatures that still lurk in the area, waiting.

The Narrows of the Forest

Approximately 140 miles south of the Old Forest Road, the width of the forest narrows until it measures less than 100 miles across. This tapering 'waist' was created centuries ago by the work of a powerful folk of Northmen that once lived in the lands to the west of the wild wood. The large indentation along the western border of Mirkwood is all that is left of their realm. They cleared it by felling many trees for the building of their homes and to make space for their pastures.

Several paths made by the Silvan Elves used to cross the entire width of the Narrows of the Forest, and other folks made use of them when the Elvenking forsook these lands. Today, many Woodmen know where these tracks start but nobody knows whether they lead anywhere or simply disappear where the forest is darker. Stories tell of how these paths are haunted by Woodwights, restless ghosts of Northmen who died as slaves when an enemy folk took their land, centuries ago.

Western Mirkwood

The wide portion of the forest that extends to the west of the Mountains of Mirkwood is as dark and dreary as most of the wild wood. Here, the Old Forest Road used to enter Mirkwood, approximately thirty miles east of the Old Ford. Also known as the 'Dwarf-road', the Old Forest Road used to run across the forest for over 200 miles, to emerge where it was interrupted by the Running River. At the time of the journey of Bilbo, the road was said to

be used by Goblins and overgrown by the vegetation. Five years later, the situation might have improved as the Orcs have been severely diminished at the Battle of Five Armies, and the road might soon be opened again.

Woodland Realm

The area of Mirkwood to the north of the Forest River is claimed by the Elvenking as his own domain. In another age of the world, the Elvenking sat at court on the hill of Amon Lanc, where today stands the dreaded fortress of Dol Guldur. But the day came when the King left his realm to bring war upon the Enemy at the head of a powerful host, and never returned. His mourning son took his place on the throne, and retreated north with his people. When, centuries, later the forest darkened and Orcs and spiders spread under its shadows, the Elvenking withdrew again, finding sanctuary in a stronghold under the earth, not far from the eastern side of Mirkwood.

Today his subjects dwell in wooded valleys of ancient oaks and beeches, along the river that runs out of the Grey Mountains to the north and flows into the Long Marshes to the east. Here, they live in houses and huts built upon the surface of the forest and high up on the branches of the trees.

The Halls of the Elvenking

Protected by magic and by great doors of stone, the underground fortress of the Wood-elves is a palace and treasury for their King, a refuge for their folk and a prison for their enemies. The Halls are built into a system of caves underneath a great hill, and host many comfortable chambers and passages, including the royal residence of King Thranduil. A subterranean watercourse flows under the hill where the wine cellars of the palace are located, along with the deep dungeons reserved for those who must be kept prisoner at the orders of the King.

OTHER LANDS

Ancient rhymes remember that to the south of Wilderland lay realms with sunny vineyards, stone cities and lofty monarchs. Today most of these lands are known simply as names given to exotic goods, sold by adventurous merchants whose tales are difficult to tell apart from what they make up to sell their wares. To the north stretch the Grey Mountains where the Dwarves long delved, and the Withered Heath, the ancient breeding ground of Dragons. Beyond them lie the frozen wastes, enshrouded in cold mists and dark legends.

To the west extend the Misty Mountains, a range of forbidding peaks riddled by Goblin tunnels and mines, running for almost 800 miles from the far North to the South. To the east lay endless plains where wild folk dwell and multiply, until the day a new king or chieftain will once again harness their hatred and bring them to war against the west.

- campaign - outlines

It appeared that Gandalf had been to a great council of the white wizards, masters of lore and good magic; and that they had at last driven the Necromancer from his dark hold in the south of Mirkwood.

When the Loremaster considers the elements that will be part of the tale of the last Great Years of the age that his players will experience, he should probably make up his mind about the kind of stories he is going to tell, which places his players are going to visit and what they will try to achieve with their deeds. All these potential questions may be used to draw a *campaign outline*, a framework that will help the players and the Loremaster to turn the group's gaming sessions into a consistent overarching narrative.

CAMPAIGN STRUCTURE

A campaign outline is structured as a combination of elements. These basic components may be discussed by the Loremaster and his players to create a campaign in tune with everybody's tastes, or can be chosen by the Loremaster alone to better achieve surprise or add a veil of mystery and wonder to the game.

CAMPAIGN GOAL

What is the goal of the campaign? How its development is going to affect Middle-earth and its history? The objective of a campaign traces the potential changes that the gameplay is likely to force upon the world, hinting at what is going to happen and what the players can do about it.

LOCATION

Where is most of the action going to take place? Wilderland is a wide region, including forbidding mountain ranges, secret vales, remote villages and deep forests. Are the heroes going to travel extensively, never staying in the same place for long, or will they choose a location as their main base of operations and give their services to its ruler?

FOCUS

There are many reasons why an individual might search for adventure, and it is likely that every hero has his own. But how would the Loremaster or his players reply to the question: 'What is your game all about?' Is it fighting the Enemy? Is it about exploring? Or is it politics? War? Horror? Every good story combines many of these themes, but a truly effective campaign outline should consider its underlying *leitmotif*, a recurrent subject matter that gives the game a distinctive 'background flavour'. The Loremaster may refer to the focus of the campaign when he is looking for a source of inspiration, and players find it easier to determine their own goals when the narrative is more thematically consistent.



COMPANY

Does the campaign outline offer a particular reason why the heroes have gotten together to pursue a common goal? Maybe they are all outcasts, individual shunned by their community. Or are they champions, elected to fight the darkness on behalf of their folks? Or are they secret saviours, bound to fight the Shadow without the comfort of public recognition?

LOREMASTER CHARACTERS

Who will side with the characters in their struggle? And who will oppose them? The cast of Loremaster characters is extremely important, as its composition more than anything else will provide a campaign outline with a ring of authenticity and distinctiveness. As far as allies are concerned, the sources contain an extensive supply of memorable individuals to be used as recurring characters, and this book presents several among them and interprets them in gaming terms. But every good

story needs a villain, and a campaign outline should devote at least a few lines to one or more characters or creatures that might be featured as the company's most prominent adversary.

- the DARKENING of - MIRKWOOD

*Under the boughs of Mirkwood there was
deadly strife of Elves and Men and fell
beasts.*

In the year 2951, Sauron sent the Ringwraiths to reclaim his dark hold of Dol Guldur in yet another chapter in the struggle between darkness and light for control of Mirkwood. In the following decades, Sauron succeeded in making Dol Guldur the starting point for large-scale



attacks against Lórien and the Woodland Realm. Even though the Free Peoples were ultimately victorious, many lost their lives and Wilderland at large suffered greatly.

The *Darkening of Mirkwood* campaign outline places the heroes in the middle of that coming war, alongside those who fight the shadow that threatens to engulf the forest and subjugate all those who live near and inside it. Can the heroes change what has been written? Will they succeed in weakening the power in Dol Guldur and protecting the folks that live in the forest? Or will they fail and worsen their fate?

THE DARKENING OF MIRKWOOD STRUCTURE

The following information is given to the Loremaster as a starting point, a set of narrative foundations to be used, tweaked and expanded by the playing group once play begins. Most of what is contained in this chapter is the product of speculation and can be used as is, altered or ignored as the Loremaster sees fit to better conform to his own views and to better tailor the setting around his players' choices.

CAMPAIGN GOAL

Wilderland changes dramatically in the years that separate the tale told in *The Hobbit* and what is recounted in *The Lord of the Rings*. For example, the Woodmen are described in *The Hobbit* as being "many... brave and well-armed" and inhabiting several farmsteads and villages in the woods, along the Great River or at the foot of the Misty Mountains, but are barely given a mention in *The Lord of the Rings*.

While this could be attributed to several reasons, a feasible explanation is that they were gravely diminished as a people by the rise of the dark power dwelling in Dol Guldur. Radagast himself, a worthy wizard belonging to the same order of Saruman the Wise and Gandalf, plays a very small part in the War of

the Ring and by the end of the year 3018 he is nowhere to be found when scouts from Rivendell come to search for him at his 'old home' at Rhosgobel.

So, what happened exactly? Could the history of Wilderland have gone otherwise? This campaign outline lets a gaming group try to provide an answer to both questions: the Loremaster and his players will face the growth of the Shadow over Mirkwood and the efforts of their heroes can prove the key that will prevent the Dark Lord from succeeding. What will come to pass before the beginning of the War of the Ring is going to be determined by their struggle.

LOCATION

This outline is mainly centred on the Land of the Woodmen, with a focus on their settlements to the east of the Great River. In many ways, this location provides the ideal setting for a campaign as the source material leaves a lot of room for modification and expansion, allowing ambitious players a large amount of freedom.

The information about the area presented in this volume can be used to create a campaign with a Man-centric, almost historical feel to it, with Elves and Dwarves (and Hobbits) used to enhance the wonder of the setting with their otherworldly quality, either introduced by the Loremaster or by the characters. The resulting mood can be compared to that of the first chapters of *The Hobbit* or *The Lord of the Rings*, where the Shire provides a strangely familiar, almost ordinary setting, made unusual and wondrous by the introduction of 'outlandish folks' like Dwarves, Elves or 'wandering conjurers'.

FOCUS

The focus of the campaign is the changes and upheavals that the war will bring to Wilderland: whatever the outcome of the conflict, the actions of the heroes will affect the fate of the land and shape its history. There are several subjects that can be explored in a campaign centred around war, and all of them fit very well the



game's overarching theme — the Twilight of the Third age — from the meaning of heroism in Tolkien's writing (sacrifice for the benefit of others), to that of loss and the wear of the world (things pass and are forgotten, either in victory or defeat).

COMPANY

A company of adventurers involved in the war for Mirkwood can be composed of a diverse range of characters, as having a common Enemy makes for a very strong bond. What will make a difference is the way that the companions choose to participate in the conflict. For example, they might openly join the Woodmen in their fight for survival against Dol Guldur, possibly with the ambition of one day becoming leaders of a folk without kings; or they might choose Radagast the Brown as their guide, and act as his agents and emissaries; or they might never choose a side, and simply follow their call to adventure, often facing situations that will see them take part in the larger conflict anyway.

LOREMASTER CHARACTERS

As far as potential allies are concerned, the main Loremaster characters for this outline are Beorn and Radagast, two of the most mysterious figures created by Tolkien. The Loremaster and his players have a chance to solve some of the riddles regarding them that the sources didn't provide an answer to, like for example what was the nature of Beorn's enchantment, or when or how did he die, or why Radagast wasn't ultimately involved in person in the war against Sauron.

BEORN

Others say that he is a man descended from the first men who lived before Smaug or the other dragons came into this part of the world, and before the goblins came into the hills out of the North... At any rate he is under no enchantment but his own.

Beorn started to establish his position as a great chief after the Battle of Five Armies, when he began uniting

many men under his rule. Nobody knows why he did so, and nobody seems able to divine his plans for the future: Beorn seems content today as a leader of a folk as he seemed once to enjoy his previous isolation. His followers obey his loose rules out of respect for their leader, and a council of elder chieftains comes to his house regularly to interpret his will and let it be known to the rest of the population.

Beorn maintains good relations with both Gandalf the Grey and Radagast the Brown, and the two wizards have been seen arriving at the house of Beorn together on occasions.

Beorn appears as a huge man of indeterminate age with a thick black beard and hair. Powerfully built with strong arms and muscular legs, he speaks with a growling voice when angered and laughs a great rolling laugh when amused.

Encountering Beorn

One thing that didn't change since his solitary days is that Beorn still doesn't like Dwarves and 'beggars' — his contemptuous name for all travellers — and rarely invites foreigners into his house. This distrust has been passed to the Beornings at large, and as a consequence nobody can enter their lands without being questioned or even threatened (they make an exception for the Woodmen, as they are not seen as foreigners in these areas).

Requests to see Beorn are usually immediately turned down by whoever met the applicants, unless they are persuaded of the importance of the matter with clear evidence. And even if the heroes succeed in getting to meet Beorn, it won't be easy to get anything out of him: the shape-shifter rarely concerns himself with the dealings of other folks, so he won't be interested in things that do not directly involve either his lands or his followers. He treats events of any magnitude that happen in other regions as vague rumours, and will quickly become uninterested in what the adventurers have to say about that, unless the heroes go to great lengths to involve him.

Beorn as a Patron

As explained above, Beorn is little concerned with the affairs of adventurers, and may take into consideration the possibility of entrusting the company with a task only if he has a pressing need and he thinks that the heroes are more suited to the endeavour than his most trusted men.

A mission from Beorn will most likely be a very dangerous business, involving hunting or directly facing some dire threat menacing the lands of the Beornings. For example, The companions may find themselves be asked to pursue a band of raiding Orcs and Wargs into the mountains from whence they came, or track down a solitary Troll that is terrorising an area; when such an occasion arises, Beorn is likely to have the company rely on its own devices, as if the mission was a test of sorts. Beorn can be made a patron of the company if the heroes met him during an adventuring phase and only if at least one character in the group possesses a rating of Valour 3 or more, or at least a companion is a Beorning or Woodman with a Standing score of at least 1. A company with Beorn as a patron may meet him when spending a Fellowship phase in his house or in a nearby location.

The Enchantment of Beorn

The origins of Beorn are mysterious at best. The few things we know about his past seem to suggest that the shape-shifter once used to live somewhere in the mountains or that he descended from a folk that used to live there, and that someone or something forced him to leave, or forbids him from returning. Moreover, when Bilbo first meets him he seems to be living under some sort of obligation forcing upon him his solitary life, maybe even his peculiar diet of cream and honey. Whether this obligation is a curse, an enchantment or even a self-imposed stricture tied to a vow or oath, the details remain unclear.

What is certain is that the day that Beorn took part in the Battle of Five Armies his 'enchantment' seems to have been somewhat altered: Beorn interrupted his secluded life, apparently retaining his shape-shifting powers.

While Beorn and his secrets should remain at least partly hidden in the obscurity that Tolkien wrapped around them, the playing groups might be tempted to find a few answers, possibly letting the Loremaster develop the following information into intriguing plot hooks.

- The fact that Beorn doesn't eat animals, either domestic or wild, seems to point to a sort of *geas*, a magical obligation that was possibly laid upon him at birth or that he imposed on himself at a later date. As often happens in myth, this stricture might even be the key to his shape-shifting ability. Today, Beorn is teaching some of his secrets to his followers, and if his powers are indeed due to such a *geas*, then the process might involve the imposition of rules similar to the ones he himself follows: Beornings may have to abstain from eating animal meat for at least one week every month to enjoy the benefits of their Virtues, or the requirement imposed by Beorn, that all Beornings should attend the festivities held at Yule-tide at his house, might involve the renewal of vows.
- The old solitary life of Beorn may have had something to do with Bolg, the Orc overlord of Mount Gundabad, as the Battle of Five Armies seems to be the episode that released Beorn from this obligation. This detail hints at a sort of old feud between Bolg or his father Azog, and Beorn himself or some of his ancestors who lived in the mountains. If the story of Beorn was one of revenge, then was the extinction of Azog's bloodline a sufficient compensation for the wrong he presumably suffered? Is the feud really finished, or will a new Lord of Gundabad rise and come to look for Beorn or his kin? How will Beorn die — as he isn't active at the time of the War of the Ring?
- In the years following the creation of his new folk, Beorn will establish a progeny fathering at least a son — Grimbeorn. As Grimbeorn is called 'the old' by the beginning of the War of the Ring, he should be born at least before the year 2970. It is said that the men of his line had the power of taking bear's shape



— does this require Beorn to lay his geas upon his son, maybe during a ceremony held in a sacred vale in the Misty Mountains, where the Great Bears of the mountains used to live? Must Beorn lose his own power to pass it over to his son? If the companions succeed in becoming friends with the old shape-shifter they might be called to help him in these private proceedings.

Beorn the Skinchanger

If the Loremaster requires Beorn to appear to help a company of heroes involved in a difficult fight he may use the stats provided below. A powerful and dangerous *deus-ex-machina* device, Beorn should be employed only if the players have done something to actually prompt his intervention. The characteristics of Beorn in bear shape have been formatted in a similar fashion to the creatures contained in the Adversary chapter.

Beorn the Skinchanger (in bear shape):

When Beorn appears at a battle scene he always arrives already in bear shape (he is never seen shape-shifting). He always fights relentlessly, assuming a forward stance for the entire episode.

ATTRIBUTE LEVEL

9

ENDURANCE	HOPE	PARRY	ARMOUR
99	12	12	4d

SKILLS

Personality	5	Survival	3
Movement	4	Custom	0
Perception	3	Vocation	3

WEAPON SKILLS

Maul	4		
Damage: 9	Edge: 10	Injury: 16	Called shot: The shield carried by the target has been smashed.

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Giant-size	Beorn is neither knocked out nor killed when reduced to zero Endurance or if wounded once. When at zero Endurance or when wounded once he keeps fighting until wounded twice, or reduced to zero Endurance AND wounded.
Toughness	Reduce Beorn's Hope point score by one to reduce the Endurance loss caused by an enemy's attack by 9 points (Beorn's Attribute Level).
Terrible Strength	Following a successful attack, reduce Beorn's Hope point score by one to increase the target's Endurance loss by 9 points.
Great Wrath	Reduce Beorn's Hope point score by one to make a Personality roll versus a difficulty equal to 10 plus the highest Attribute level among all foes. On a successful roll the enemy loses a number of Hate points: one point on a success, plus one point for every 7 icon rolled. The Loremaster assigns the Hate point loss to the creatures opposing Beorn in any way he sees fit.

RADAGAST

"...perhaps you have heard of my good cousin Radagast, who lives near the Southern borders of Mirkwood?"

Radagast the Brown is a wizard. He abides in a small wood of ancient oaks in Rhosgobel, close to the southwestern eaves of Mirkwood, where many Woodmen have come to stay near him. Once content to spend his time in quiet conversation with birds and animals (whose diverse languages he seems to be able to speak fluently) Radagast had an active part in the White Council's preparations to attack Dol Guldur, and since that time he has shown an increased interest in the matters of the people living in the area.

Like his peers Saruman the White and Gandalf the Grey, Radagast has always appeared to the eyes of mortals like a vigorous old man who doesn't seem to wither and grow weaker with the passing of the years. He wears a tall, wide-brimmed hat and brown cloak over clothes of earthen colours, and sports a long, wild-looking reddish beard slowly turning grey, and long, unkempt hair of the same hue. He usually paces his stride with his long Oaken staff.

Encountering Radagast

Radagast can be encountered in his house at Rhosgobel at any time. He seems to rarely leave his small cottage, apart from short walks into the forest to the east. Despite his solitary life, Radagast seems to be well informed about events happening in the land of the Woodmen at any time, sometimes betraying knowledge of things befalling in more distant places in Wilderland. While never really rude, his years of isolation (or his friendship with Beorn...) seem to have made his conversation come across as brusque or abrupt, as if he was unused to the common laws of courtesy recognised by Men, Dwarves and Elves.

Strangers wanting to meet Radagast and asking the local Woodmen for directions are led all the way to his house, reached by a pathway of white stones starting close to the Great Hall of Rhosgobel. Visitors trying to reach the house of the wizard alone seem to lose their way easily and find themselves back in front of the Great Hall after walking aimlessly for some time. During the warm months of the year, any visitor might be forced to wait for a while, together with the many Woodmen coming to see the wizard and seek his help.

Radagast as a Patron

Seventy years before his appearance during the War of the Ring, the Brown Wizard is the perfect replacement for Gandalf as the figure of a wise and enigmatic counsellor. Radagast's own goals and achievements have been left indefinite at best by Tolkien, leaving ample room for creative speculation. Companions choosing Radagast as a patron might do so more to seek his support, rather than because they expect him to offer something to accomplish. Radagast possesses an extensive knowledge of herbs of any kind, and healers who follow his advice are able to find the most expeditious remedy for any type of ailment. Moreover, his animal friends may deliver messages or warnings across Wilderland in a very short time. If Radagast needs the help of a company of heroes that chose him as their patron, then he can find them quickly through his animal friends if they are to be found anywhere in Wilderland. The animal messenger will carry the wizard's message, or bid the heroes to go and find Radagast.

For some reasons, Radagast does not travel much. He seems to have limited his area of interest to the places immediately surrounding Rhosgobel. One of the reasons might be that his own capability as a wizard would be reduced if he was outside the borders of Wilderland. A mission from the brown wizard will most likely involve Dol Guldur, the primary concern of Radagast the Brown for many decades.



Radagast can be chosen as a patron if the companions met him during an adventuring phase and only if at least one character in the group possesses a rating of Wisdom 3 or more, or if at least one companion is a Beorning or a Woodman with a Standing score of 1 or more. A company with Radagast as a patron may meet him when spending a Fellowship phase in Rhosgobel.

The Magic of Radagast

The wizardry of Radagast seems to be connected to the animal and plant life populating Middle-earth. He is learned in the lore of herbs and beasts, and seems to have a special friendship with birds. He is also said to be “a master of shapes and changes of hue”, an ability possibly enabling him to accomplish different things: from assuming the form of an animal himself (like a bird, a terrestrial beast, or even a fish) to altering the form or colour of someone or something else.

A company of adventurers enjoying the friendship of Radagast might be magically hidden from the eyes of all wicked creatures as they advance on a mission undertaken with the favour of the wizard, or they might find it singularly easy to fish from the forest's rivers, or particularly refreshing to rest under the boughs of its trees.

ADDITIONAL SETTING MATERIAL

The following entries provide additional historical details that the Loremaster can use to flesh out the cultures featured in the campaign. Much of the information has been created purposefully for the game, using different historical and literary sources.

The Necromancer

A war between light and darkness has been fought for almost two thousand years under the eaves of the forest of Wilderland. It started when a shadow first took shape in Greenwood the Great in the year 1050 of the Third Age.

Later known as the Necromancer, for centuries he was allowed to slowly increase in power, until Gandalf the Grey challenged him and forced him to retreat. This gave the forest and its inhabitants a respite, and many folks were able to prosper and multiply.

Four hundred years later, the Necromancer returned to his black fortress, his stature increased, and darkness crept once again under the trees of Mirkwood. But this time he faced a stronger opposition: a White Council of the Wise and Powerful was formed at the request of Lady Galadriel and a watch was kept on the Hill of Sorcery.

For almost five centuries the black sorcerer bided his time, spreading his malevolence from his stronghold in the forest, slowly tainting animals and plants alike, and stirring wicked spirits. He extended his corrupting influence over almost the entirety of the forest, with the exception of the Woodland Realm beyond the Mountains of Mirkwood, and the Land of the Woodmen to the west. While he expected nothing less from the Elves, he was surprised by the endurance demonstrated by mere mortal Men.

The Lamp of Balthi

Legends and songs of the Woodmen remember the name of Balthi (“the Bold”), the young son of a Mirkwood hunter. Centuries ago, the boy led the Grey Wizard through the forest to the hill of Dol Guldur.

When Gandalf emerged from its pits, he entrusted the boy with an object wrapped in a cloth, ordering him to fly as enemies were approaching. The young boy obeyed and ran away at once, but later the same day he unfolded the cloth to reveal a lamp shining with a cold and clear blue flame.

He immediately covered the lamp, but the little light that escaped from the folds betrayed him and he was spotted by an Orc tracker who let loose an arrow. Balthi was hit, but succeeded in distancing his pursuers despite his

wound, as he wisely chose to remain under the cover of Mirkwood, where his enemies expected him to leave the wild wood by the shortest route. Several days later the exhausted boy reached a clearing in a valley by the Dusky River. He was led there by the joyful singing of River-maidens, and finally fell asleep expecting never to wake again. He woke several days later instead, fully healed of his wounds and weariness.

When he finally rejoined his kin, he returned with them to the same clearing and built a great hall to live in and to protect the treasure he received from the Grey Wizard.

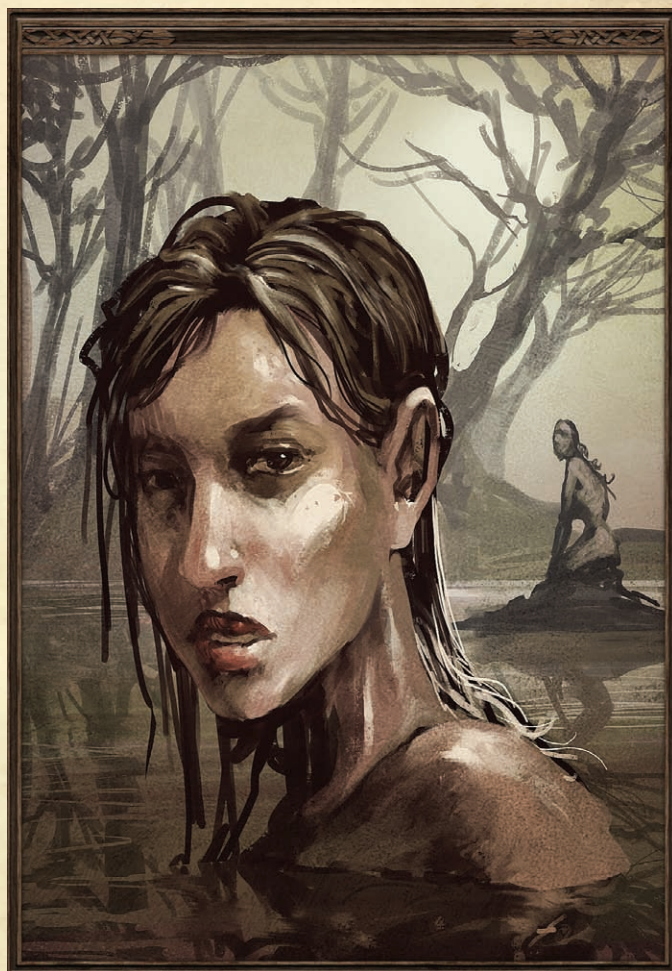
For four hundred years Woodmen-town prospered, as the forest slowly healed from the hurt caused by the Necromancer. The wizard Radagast became a trusted friend of the Woodmen and they learned much from him and his ways. When the Necromancer returned to the forest the Woodmen were troubled, but they were able to endure: they had become a strong folk with powerful allies by that time, with the means and weapons to counter the aggression of the Shadow.

The River-maidens

Twenty miles to the east of Rhosgobel, in the midst of Mirkwood, there is a deep and windless lake. It is called the Black Tarn, but by the year 2946 nobody remembers why as its cold waters are a glassy green and the sun seems to shine fully upon it all year long. The Woodmen come here to fish the silver trout that can be seen swimming under its surface in the morning and evening. Radagast the Brown can often be encountered here, wandering around the woods around the lake.

The lake is home to the River-maidens, three fair creatures in female form that at times can be seen swimming just below the surface of the Dusky River's waters. Amidst its eddies they play, singing songs and sometimes helping, sometimes playing tricks upon the Woodmen that come to the river or to the lake to fish. They understand the

speech of beasts and birds, and may assume the shape of the silvery trout that live in the river.



The Werewolf of Mirkwood

When Sauron reclaimed the fortress of Dol Guldur in the year 2460, all malevolent creatures perceived his presence and newfound power. In its lair under the Mountains of Mirkwood, an ancient monster awakened from its age-old slumber: it was no less than an Evil of the Ancient World, a servitor spirit embodied in the form of a great ravenous Wolf. It emerged from its dark den, and started prowling the depths of the forest.

In the following years, the Werewolf killed many Elves in its hunting, until the Elvenking withdrew the borders of his realm further to the north. As soon as he was roused, the Werewolf of Mirkwood was aware of the light of



the lamp hanging in the great Hall of Balthi. Unable to locate it precisely, it perceived it as a maddeningly painful presence, as its flame burns with a light coming from a hateful past. (The characteristics of the Werewolf of Mirkwood can be found in the Adversaries chapter at page 64).

SUPPLEMENTARY CHRONOLOGY

The following chronology is composed mainly of events created for the Darkening of Mirkwood campaign outline. The Loremaster is free to alter it in any way he sees fit. Several entries summarise what has been presented previously for ease of reference.

Year 2063

Gandalf enters Dol Guldur. During his exploration he finds an ancient Elven lamp glowing with an inner light. The Necromancer flees. The wizard entrusts the young Balthi with the keeping of the lamp. Balthi founds Woodman-town. The shadow loosens its grip on Mirkwood: many areas of the forest become safe to live in and, the River-maidens grow less wild and start having friendly contacts with the Woodmen.

Year 2460

The Necromancer returns to Mirkwood. A new darkening of the forest begins. The Werewolf of Mirkwood awakens. In the following years, Thranduil the Elvenking withdraws the borders of his kingdom further to the north.

Year 2463

The first meeting of the White Council is held in Rivendell. Radagast talks of the darkening of Mirkwood. The council decides not to intervene for the moment, deeming the Necromancer to be a lesser manifestation of evil, maybe a Ringwraith.

Gandalf the Grey reveals to the brown wizard how he came upon the lamp of Balthi. From a later talk with

Saruman the White concerning the arts of the Ancient World, Radagast is persuaded that the light of the lamp has the power to keep at bay the darkness issuing from Dol Guldur.

Year 2850

For centuries, the Necromancer has been left free to work his sorcery from the dark hill of Dol Guldur. He has been able to spread his influence all over Mirkwood, but contrary to his plans he has failed so far in scaring the Woodmen away from the forest.

Prompted by Elrond's concerns and his own, Gandalf returns to Dol Guldur. He discovers that the Necromancer is indeed Sauron, who is secretly gathering all the Rings and is actively looking for the One. Having left the dark hold with this terrible knowledge, the Grey Wizard travels extensively, to prepare for a confrontation against the Dark Lord.

The following year Gandalf urges the White Council to take action, but he is opposed by Saruman the White, who deems such a direct action to be unnecessary, as he believes that Sauron has been greatly diminished by the loss of the One Ring.

Year 2900

Despite the danger of these lands, many bold men and women make their way back into the vales of the Great River from the South. They are welcomed by Radagast to 'live in among the more pleasant woods in the valleys and along the river-shores'. Some of them have been persuaded to leave their lands and move north by Saruman the White, who is working with the Brown wizard in an attempt to strengthen the communities living around the Gladden Fields; others have heard about Beorn and the watch he keeps over the lands to the north of the Old Ford.

Year 2941

The White Council finally decides to put forth its strength and makes preparations for an attack on Dol Guldur. Sauron anticipates the aggression and leaves his dark hold. Mirkwood is made partly wholesome again.

Year 2946

At the council held during the Gathering of Five Armies, the Woodmen are represented by an envoy chosen during a folk-moot of all Houses of the Woodmen (this role could be fulfilled by a player-hero). From the vales of the Great River he brings comforting news of the enduring peace, of hunters exploring Mirkwood and of the Misty Mountains almost free from the threat of Wargs and Goblins.

Year 2951

In the first months of the year, three Ringwraiths arrive in Mirkwood. One enters Dol Guldur and starts haunting the place to terrorise any living being that might come near it. The other two roam the surrounding area to stir all wicked things still inhabiting the woods.

By the end of the year the Southern Mirkwood region becomes again a Dark Land, as more and more evil creatures enter the forest.

Year 2952

A Ringwraith leaves Dol Guldur and goes north, to reach the lair of the Werewolf of Mirkwood. Here the slave of the Ring reveals to the beast that the source of its torment is the flame of a lamp burning with a light born in the Uttermost West, and that the lamp is in possession of the Woodmen. The Werewolf goes south to hunt for the lamp, leaving a trail of destruction in its wake.

In the meantime, another Nazgûl lures one of the River-maidens away from the Black Tarn, and traps her in a pool in Dol Guldur. Her mischievous side is turned to wickedness.

In the following years, the Woodmen dwelling in and near Rhosgobel witness the green waters of the Black Tarn slowly turn dark. Soon only misshapen black trouts seem to swim in it and folks begin to avoid it. Tales circulate about the songs of River-maidens luring travellers to a watery death in the lake. Many Woodmen are confused, as other witnesses keep relating stories about fair River-maidens helping out fishermen in their trade along the river shores.

FURTHER ADVENTURES

(Bilbo)...he had no close friends, until some of his younger cousins began to grow up. The eldest of these, and Bilbo's favourite, was young Frodo Baggins.

There are several ways that a hero's adventures might come to an end. Adventurers can die fighting against the servants of the Dark Lord, or their will can finally break under the burden of the Shadow. But there is another possibility: a hero can retire from adventuring willingly; to peacefully return to his own land and spend his remaining years amongst his loved ones.

But the struggle against the Shadow knows no respite, and when a hero leaves the game another one must rise to take his place. It could be a sister or a brother, a close or distant cousin, or a son or daughter eager to follow in the footsteps of an adventurous parent. It could even be someone not related by blood to the previous player-hero at all, but simply an individual who was inspired by the adventurer's deeds.

ADVENTURING CAREER

Living the life of an adventurer is a hard endeavour for members of any culture. Dwarves and Elves may be long-lived in comparison to Hobbits and especially Men, but their capability to deal with the harsh struggle against the Shadow isn't really superior to that of the other races.



In fact, it is rare for a hero who survives the many threats he encounters to remain active for more than two decades; most can only bear this exhausting way of life for a maximum of 15 to 20 years before they return home to their families and to the many duties that are expected of such a remarkable member of the community.

Retirement

The suggested pace for a *The One Ring* campaign sees the Loremaster and his players take part in four to six sessions of play for every year of game time. This translates roughly to an average yearly rate of 13 Experience points for every character, enough to see them rise to excellence in about 15 years. If a hero has gotten this far with his body and spirit intact, he should consider himself very lucky and seriously think about retiring voluntarily from active adventuring.

By choosing to retire, a hero ensures he has the chance to pass along as much of his experience as he can to whoever is going to take his place, before a well-aimed sword stroke finally ends his career, or sorrow and regret nest too deeply into his soul (see Heroic Heritage below, and Heritage Modifiers in particular).

Heroic Heritage

When a hero dies, succumbs to the Shadow or retires from adventuring, his player must create a new character to take his place. When this happens, the new adventurer starts the game with a number of additional Experience points, representing the knowledge and experience the previous character was able to pass on to his heir.

This bonus is shown on the Heroic Heritage table below, and is based on the total number of Experience points that a hero accumulated up to the moment of his demise or retirement, and is modified by the precise nature of the hero's departure from active adventuring.

Heroic Heritage:

EXPERIENCE POINT TOTAL	EXPERIENCE BONUS
10-19	2
20-39	4
40-59	6
60-99	8
100-159	10
160-249	12
250+	14

The circumstances in which the hero left the game modifies the amount of Experience inherited by the hero's successor:

- When a hero dies or succumbs to the Shadow, the number of Experience points passed along to his heir is reduced by the number of permanent Shadow points they have. When a hero retires willingly, the heroic heritage bonus is applied without modifiers.

Astrith has been adventuring for many years and has gained much renown as a ruthless opponent of the Shadow. Recently the weight of all she has experienced has begun to take its toll. She has been awarded a total of 112 Experience points but has gained four permanent Shadow points. Her player decides that Astrith retires to her home in Dale and passes her quest to her younger brother Erling. This means that Erling will have an additional 10 Experience points to spend before he sets out on the road. If Astrith's player had chosen to continue the game with Astrith, and she had died or succumbed to the Shadow, Erling would only have inherited six Experience points in the first case and five in the latter.

HEROISM

"I do not love the bright sword for its sharpness, nor the arrow for its swiftness, nor the warrior for his glory. I love only that which they defend."

What distinguishes a hero from a common individual? Superior valour? Greater wisdom? Fearlessness and prowess in battle? Generosity and nobility of spirit? Several aspects of heroism are explored and exemplified in both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. Tolkien doesn't portray his heroes as warriors who "love war and valour as things good in themselves", but more as generous souls who are willing to sacrifice themselves for the benefit of others.

Heroic Death

In *The One Ring*, adventurers face mortal threats and may die. If this unfortunate moment arrives, the Loremaster and his players should consider the circumstances of the adventurer's demise, and decide if the situation fits Tolkien's ideas of a truly heroic death: not the result of recklessness or the idle pursuit of renown or honour, but the sacrifice of an individual striving to protect or save others.

When a hero dies a proper heroic death, the Loremaster should reward the character by treating it as if the hero retired willingly - and thus shouldn't reduce his Heroic Heritage bonus by the hero's permanent Shadow rating, as the adventurer cleansed the memory of his flaws by sacrificing himself for the benefit of others.







- Part 5: Introductory Adventure -





the - marsh-bell -

The marshes and bogs had spread wider and wider on either side. Paths had vanished, and many a rider and wanderer too, if they had tried to find the lost ways across.

- **When:** The company may undertake this adventure at any time, but it is better suited as an introductory episode for a new company, set in early spring 2946.
- **Where:** Esgaroth or Dale, or anywhere close to the Long Marshes.
- **What:** Two Dwarven messengers left the Lonely Mountain several days ago on an errand. They now seem to have disappeared in the Long Marshes. The Kingdom under the Mountain is astir, and the news quickly reaches Dale and Esgaroth.

The Marsh-dwellers are an ancient breed of shadow creatures; deadly and terrible, their name even appears in old rhymes told to scare Hobbit children in the distant Shire (but the real meaning of the rhyme has long been forgotten). They still haunt the Long Marshes, and have recently captured Balin and his travelling companion.

- **Why:** There are several reasons why the companions should feel compelled to find out what happened to the two unfortunate Dwarves. First, a chance to participate in a rescue is exactly the sort of opportunity to make a name for themselves that young adventurers are looking for. Second, Glóin, a very important Dwarf, is offering a reward and will certainly be very grateful if the companions come to his aid. Third, if there are any Dwarves in the company, they will probably feel that it is their duty to do what they can to help one of their own kind.

- **Who:** As the heroes will discover during the adventure, one of the emissaries is no less than Balin, one of the twelve Dwarves that undertook the Quest for Erebor. He was accompanied by his cousin Óin.

ADVENTURING PHASE

The adventure is presented in three parts, based on the locations and events providing the focus for the story. The Loremaster will find it easy to determine when a session should be set up as an episode and when it would be wiser to switch to narrative time instead.

PART ONE - WHERE NOISOME WATERS POUR

The main aim of the first part is to entrust the company with a mission, but it also serves as a simple introduction to the setting and to several game mechanics. At the end of this part, the players should have gained a greater understanding of the mood of the game, made the acquaintance of a famous character, and probably gained a few Advancement points.

PART TWO - A LONG AND WEARY WAY

The second part of the scenario starts when the company decides to follow the steps of Balin and Óin. This section introduces the rules for journeys, and lets the characters have a first look at the Long Marshes area.

PART THREE - BESIDE THE ROTTING RIVER

The final part of the adventure should see the company face the challenge posed by the Marsh-dwellers. An enfeebled breed of creatures, they should pose a challenge only to the weariest of heroes, unless the adventurers are unwary enough to fall into their various traps.

PART ONE - WHERE NOISOME WATERS POUR

If this is the players' first game, the first session can be conveniently set at Esgaroth. Lake-town is a free city, where adventurers hailing from different places come in search of opportunities to make their name. In addition to Northmen of all extractions, Elves and Dwarves are a common sight, as both the Woodland Realm and the Kingdom under the Mountain have interests in the city. Even Hobbits may come to Lake-town without raising too much of a commotion, as strange sights are becoming the norm, with merchants from the south and east bringing their wares into town with increasing regularity.

The following information is revealed to any Dwarven adventurer who makes conversation with a local, but it can otherwise be gathered without the need for a dice roll by any character actively looking for news about the two missing Dwarves in Dale or Esgaroth. If none of the adventurers are looking for news, they can get the same information by picking up rumours and succeeding in a roll of **Riddle**.

Hraf son of Hrabín, a Raven of the Mountain, has brought to Erebor some sinister tidings: two Dwarven messengers who left the Lonely Mountain on an errand are nowhere to be found. The Kingdom under the Mountain is astir, and Glóin the Dwarf himself has spread word that whoever provides news of the missing Dwarves will be richly rewarded.

Tip for new Loremasters

Your players might want to look around before they follow this lead. When you are preparing for the adventure, take a moment to think about the places they could visit and people they could encounter. Take a look at the information on Esgaroth found on page 101 of this book.

ENCOUNTERING GLÓIN

If the adventurers are interested in meeting the famous Dwarf and try to get officially involved in the search for Balin and Oin, their wishes are easily fulfilled: Glóin currently resides in Lake-town in a rich mansion close to the town-hall. He stays there for several weeks every year, acting as an envoy in Esgaroth for the King under the Mountain.

This meeting can be presented by the Loremaster following the structure for Encounters introduced in Chapter Five of the Adventurer's Book: an **Introduction** stage followed by a quick **Interaction** should see if the player-heroes are fit to be sent on an official mission or not.

Set Tolerance

Glóin, a veteran of many battles, prizes Valour over Wisdom, so the basic Tolerance rating for the encounter is equal to the highest Valour rating among the companions. Unfortunately, he holds a grudge towards Silvan Elves, as he was imprisoned by the Elvenking along with his companions during the Quest for Erebor.

- Glóin is prejudiced against Elves, which reduces the basic Tolerance rating for the Encounter by one if there are Elves in the company. Additionally, he will refuse to deal directly with an elf spokesman.

Luckily for the group, Glóin is eager to see his cousin and brother recovered as soon as possible, so the Tolerance rating of the Encounter receives a bonus of +1. Finally, if any companion is a Dwarf with a Standing rating the Loremaster should remember to take this into account.



Introduction

Glóin welcomes the company to his hall. As he emerges from his private quarters, he wipes ink from his fingers with barely contained impatience (his duties in Esgaroth keep him busy with a lot of paperwork). In 2946 Glóin is 163 years old, an accomplished veteran who likes to consider that his adventuring days aren't over yet. He usually wears rich white clothes, or clothes of different colours with white trimming, matching the hue of the two points of his forked beard. Glóin is very courteous and fair-spoken under most circumstances, but today he is urgently looking for men of action, and grows quickly impatient with individuals trying to enter his graces with cunning words; as a consequence, the player-heroes will be lucky if they opt for designating a spokesman to state their intentions clearly:

- If the company chooses a spokesman to introduce the group, the difficulty of the action (roll of **Awe** or **Courtesy**) is set at the standard TN 14;

- If the players opt for individual rolls (most likely using **Courtesy**) they will face a *hard* difficulty of TN 16, as Glóin waits impatiently for them to introduce themselves.

Interaction

During the interaction stage, Glóin briefs the company with the additional details regarding the missing Dwarves, drawing on a piece of parchment a sketch of the route that the messengers opted to follow:

"My cousin Balin son of Fundin has left the Lonely Mountain with a companion. He was meant to personally deliver a letter, a formal invitation from King Dáin Ironfoot to the Lord of the Eagles for the coming Gathering of Five Armies, an important meeting to be held at the beginning of Summer. He planned to go south along the Running River, to investigate the conditions of the Old Forest Road and possibly traverse it, now that the threat of Goblins has been greatly reduced."

Map 1 (page 140) shows the route that Balin and his companion Óin were supposed to follow. Unless Glóin is dealing directly with an Elf spokesman, he then adds the following:

"I don't know what happened, but unfortunately the possibilities are many in these days of doubt... if the perils of Wilderland were not enough, there are always the suspicious dwellers of the Woodland Realm to consider. They are sworn enemies of the Shadow, but unfortunately they don't love Dwarves and watch their land jealously. I hope my concerns are ill-placed, but I wouldn't be surprised if Balin had found himself again a guest of the Elvenking's celebrated hospitality..."

The players can make other rolls on request. **Insight** or **Riddle** are appropriate skills, and yield the following results:

- **Insight:** a successful roll reveals that Glóin is trying to hide his profound concern. A great or

extraordinary success uncovers that the Dwarf is worried because it was his older brother Óin that chose to accompany Balin on his errand.

- **Riddle:** a successful roll lets a listener gather from half-spoken hints that Glóin first suspected that something was wrong because he experienced an episode of foresight. A great or extraordinary success reveals that the foresight concerned a sinister fate that might have befallen Óin.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The following information can be revealed, fully or in part, to players as the outcome of their encounter with Glóin or as the result of investigating different leads.

Of Ravens and Dwarves

A Dwarf hero possessing the **Raven of the Mountain** virtue might think about seeking advice from his feathered friends: Hraf son of Hrabín is a friend of Glóin. Hraf was called a few days after Balin's departure, because Glóin had a most vivid and disturbing dream: Óin was drowning in dark waters. Hraf immediately left the Mountain and followed the route that Balin and Óin intended to follow, but could not find them anywhere. It was as if they had been swallowed by the marshes.

Note about Glóin's Dream

The dream applies well to the situation at hand, but this foresight episode is in fact related to things that won't transpire for many years: according to the sources, Óin will drown 48 years later in 2994, during Balin's ill-fated attempt to recover Khazad-dûm, as he explores the West gate of Moria and stumbles upon the tentacled Watcher in the Water. While this is something the players might never discover, the vision gives the players a reason to be wary of any pool of water encountered during the adventure...

Glóin's Reward

Glóin intends to offer a princely reward to whoever returns Balin and Óin to the Lonely Mountain, but does not quantify the prize: he is not looking for mercenaries,

but for adventurers motivated by more than just money.

- If the two missing Dwarves are brought back alive to Lake-town, every surviving adventurer will be awarded with silver and gold amounting to 5 points of Treasure.

ADVENTURE AWAITS

If the company went to see Glóin to offer their help, he soon evaluates their proposition and makes his decision based on what the players said and their characters did during the encounter:

If the heroes won Glóin's trust, they are officially tasked with the rescue of the two missing Dwarves and receive a map of the lands to the south of Esgaroth (Map 1). As the journey by river is the only safe alternative to cross the Long Marshes, Glóin also provides the adventurers with papers permitting them to borrow boats from the Lake-men.

If the heroes gathered information about the missing Dwarves without consulting Glóin, the Loremaster will have to adjust the adventure somewhat.

If the players met the Dwarf but failed at the Encounter, or if they played their characters inconsistently during the investigation, or made their own lives difficult in some way, the Loremaster should arrange events to make sure that the players feel that even their bad or unfortunate choices have consequences.

Example: Adventurers are a curious lot by definition, but nosy strangers aren't necessarily welcome... if the heroes wander across Lake-town asking questions, their inquisitiveness might be noticed: the new Master of the town orders that their reasons to be in the city be known, and sends six guards led by a captain to find out. Barring a hostile confrontation, the group will have to convince the captain of their good intentions, or spend some days in jail...



Tip for new Loremasters

Your players might make a mess of the meeting with Glóin, or even bypass him completely. If this happens, you can either continue your game in the direction that the players are taking it, or provide more of an incentive for them to join in the search, possibly finding a link to the backstory of one or more characters. Perhaps Balin is rumoured to know the whereabouts of a treasured family heirloom belonging to one of the characters, or perhaps he possesses information that the company needs. Consider what would give any or all of the characters a personal stake in finding the missing Dwarves. While the renown to be gained from the performance of good deeds should be reward enough for heroes of Middle-earth, sometimes players need an extra nudge...

PART TWO - A LONG AND WEARY WAY

Considering the information the company has likely gathered so far and the nature of the mission, the adventurers should sooner or later embark on a journey south to find the missing Dwarves. The Loremaster may present this part of the adventure using the standard rules for journeys. The part opens with a preliminary stage of planning, followed by the standard journey resolution phase.

THE JOURNEY SOUTH

If the companions decide to follow Glóin's intended route they will enter the Long Marshes, trying to reach the point where the Old Forest Road exits Mirkwood and encounters the Running River. It is a long and treacherous trek to cover on foot, as it goes across swamps and bogs for approximately eighty miles. Going the distance on a boat should be much safer, as the river waters run hurriedly south.

- Based on the journey rules, the travelling distance on foot from Esgaroth to where the Old Forest Road leaves the eastern borders of Mirkwood requires eight days of march and two Fatigue tests from each player.
- If the company will be travelling on boats downriver, it will take them four days, and require one Fatigue test from each player.
- If the Loremaster wants to make his players' lives a little bit harder, he may account for the fact that the area is a Shadow land, and requiring that the difficulty for all rolls be set to TN 16 (*hard*).

Planning the Route

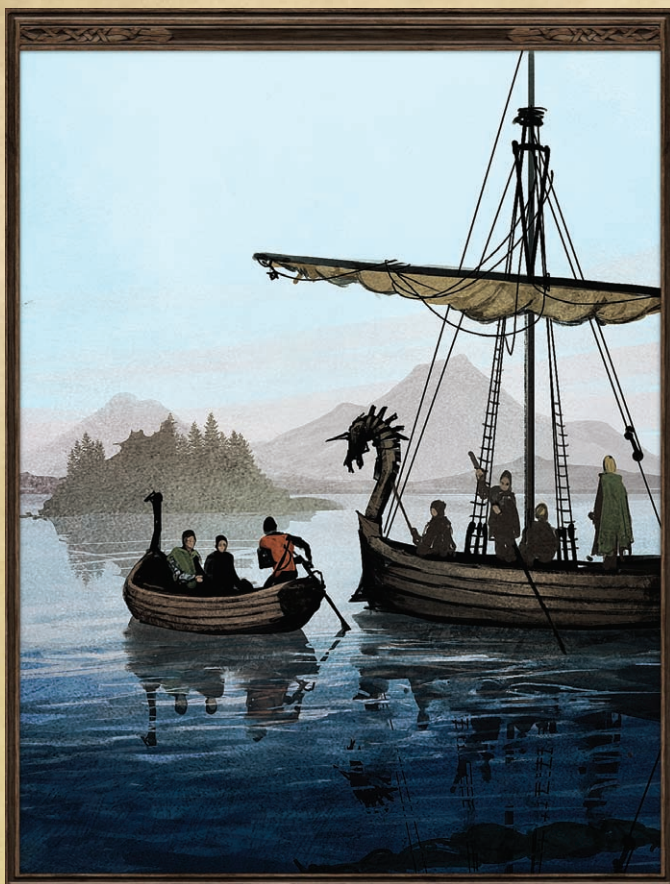
Armed with this information, the players might want to reduce their risk by studying their chosen route: as stated, on page 154 of the Adventurer's Book, all players may attempt a **Lore** roll to study the route and modify the characteristics of the Journey based on their knowledge of the area. As a consequence of their planning the Journey might take less than expected, or make for safer or less tiresome progress.

Finding Boats

The adventurers may obtain one or more boats in Esgaroth, by showing the Lake-men the papers given to them by Glóin, or by paying for their use if they can afford to do so (according to their Standard of living).

- The boats that are available in Lake-town are wooden, round-bottomed skiffs allowing for two, four or eight rear-facing oarsmen, led by a coxwain coordinating their efforts and steering the boat with a side rudder. Typically, lake-town skiffs sport bird-headed prows, with swans being the traditional choice. In recent years, dragon-prowed skiffs have become popular with the more daring young Lake-men.

A player-hero may manoeuvre a skiff using his **Athletics** skill (and may benefit from possessing the **Boating** Trait).



As far as the standard rules for Journeys are concerned, this is a duty that should be entrusted to the guide of the company.

Fatigue Tests Resolution

When the planning stage is over, the players decide how the company travels south, and the Loremaster then narrates what they see and experience along the way.

- When the Loremaster considers it appropriate, he asks his players to resolve the Fatigue tests required by the Journey rules and records their outcome, to later apply any penalties, or any Hazard sequence triggered by badly failed rolls. If the gameplay follows the adventure as it is presented here, the Loremaster should probably apply the effects of failed Fatigue rolls right before the third part of the adventure starts.

Page 35 contains descriptions of several potentially dangerous episodes to be used if one or more Hazard sequences have been triggered: the Loremaster should pick the ones he considers to be most appropriate to the character's current circumstances.

Exploring Middle-earth

The following paragraphs describe the itinerary that the company is likely to follow when retracing the road taken by the two missing Dwarves, and present a number of events set to challenge the group of players. The text assumes that the player-heroes choose to go boating along the Running River.

FROM ESGAROTH TO THE STAIR OF GIRION

It takes a day to cover the fifteen miles that separate Lake-town from the southern end of the lake, close to where its waters pour out over high waterfalls (their loud roar can be heard slowly increasing in volume as the adventurers get nearer to the falls). Travellers going south usually disembark on the western shore of the lake, where several wooden piers jut out from the shingles. There, a number of huts huddle close to the lake and fires can be seen twinkling in the dark at night. These are the homes of the Lake-men that sometimes serve as porters for the Stair of Girion.

- The Stair of Girion is a paved portage trackway, built long ago by the Lake-men with the help of Dwarven masons, allowing for the swift transport of boats and their contents from the lake down to where the Running River resumes its course beyond the falls (or up to the lake from the river, for boats coming from the south). Entire boats can be loaded on wheeled carts, that are then pulled along grooves dug into the paved trackway.

The Stair of Girion hasn't seen a lot of traffic in the past few centuries. Not even the death of Smaug has provided the chance to put it to much use, as only well-armed and courageous merchants (a rare breed...) dare to approach the lake directly by boat. Fearing to enter the darkest parts of the Long Marshes, they prefer to



unload their wares ninety miles south of the lake, where the Running River enters Mirkwood and the marshes, and then continue their journey overland along the eastern borders of Mirkwood (see Map 1).

The Lake-men Huts

If they arrive at the Stair at the end of the first day of their journey, the adventurers will probably load their light boat (or boats) on the trackway to proceed south the next morning. This will probably force the adventurers to camp close to the lake shore, or ask for seats around a fire with the lake-men.

The porters are young and simple men; they are easily excited by the sight of adventurers daring to go south on a boat, and might jump at the chance of hearing a good story or a song of the old days. If the adventurers are gracious enough to mingle with the Lake-men and to indulge in their thirst for adventurous tales, the young porters have a way to reward the heroes for their kindness:

- If any companion makes a roll using any *Custom* skill to entertain the Lake-men, they introduce the company to an ancient-looking individual, old Nerulf: the decrepit Northman is hardly intelligible when he speaks, but when told that the companions are heading south he repeats over and over again what seems some words of warning or rhyme of lore he learned when he was a child: "If you go south in the marshes take heed: tread lightly and fear the gallows-weed..."

INTO THE LONG MARSHES

Beyond the Stair of Girion, the company will be rowing south in the Long Marshes, an area considered to this day to be mostly unexplored and dangerous, shunned even by the most curious of lake-men and raft-elves. The terrain along the river vale is flat and fenny, and a dense fog often rises in the morning, making it almost impossible to follow a path on land. Boating on the river makes for a steady progress, even if the stream becomes tortuous and sometimes wanders among a

hundred winding courses. The river waters are faster in spring than in other periods of the year, as the ice melts in the distant mountains.

Entering Mirkwood

Approximately 25 miles south from the lake, the river enters the eastern eaves of Mirkwood. The shadowy canopy of the wood seems to silence the sounds of nature, from the buzzing of insects to the chirping of birds.

- The part of the Long Marshes that is inside Mirkwood qualifies as a blighted place. As the region is a Shadow land, all companions must pass a Corruption test every day or gain a Shadow point. The Loremaster should emphasise the oppressive, depressing nature of the place, that makes them question why they set out on their mission.

Navigating the Marshes

The Loremaster may refer to the following guidelines as he looks for ways to bring to life the perils of travelling through unfamiliar territory.

- As the company enters the marshes, boating becomes more difficult, as dangling branches and submerged roots make for unexpected obstacles: the character steering the boat (the *guide*) is required to make an **Athletics** test every day. Failure to pass a test results in all companions losing 3 Endurance points, as they must enter the cold waters of the marshes to free their boat from where it gets stuck in mud, or in a tangle of dead boughs.
- Any hero acting as *look-out* for the company should be allowed two **Awareness** rolls every day. A great success is required to notice that the company is being followed, while an extraordinary success identifies the pursuers as a group of Wood Elves (see *By Order of the Elvenking* below).
- All heroes acting as scouts can be allowed two rolls every day, using **Explore** or **Search**, to look for signs of the passage of Balin. Exploring the

marshes is handled as a *prolonged action* (see page 22) requiring four successful rolls to be completed. When four rolls have been made successfully, the companions are considered to be following a path that will eventually lead them to Balin's last encampment (see Balin's Camp below).

BY ORDERS OF THE ELVENKING

The companions stop being alone as soon as they enter Mirkwood: a group of four Wood Elves is quietly following them. They tread silently along the western riverbank, on hidden paths that only they know and see, sometimes leaving the ground to continue their progress from tree to tree. They are following orders issued by the Elvenking, who sent them to watch the area where the eastern borders of his realm meet the Long Marshes.

If the Elves are discovered (by a look-out man noticing them, for example) they can be approached. Otherwise, they keep following the company with the intention of discovering more about their errand (see below).

Encountering Galion

The group of Elves is led by Galion, a former cupbearer (butler) of the King consigned to patrol duty for drunkenness since the famous escape of a group of

Dwarves from the royal halls. His presence complicates communications a bit, as he doesn't like strangers and despises Dwarves (and Hobbits!) as he blames them for his current situation.

- Galion is impressed more by Valour than Wisdom. He is prejudiced against Dwarves and Hobbits (-1 to Tolerance for every Dwarf or Hobbit adventurer).

The information contained in the following paragraph can be used by the Loremaster to run an encounter between two conflicting sides: the Elves that want to discover what the adventurers are up to, and the company looking for Balin.

What the Elves Know

Galion wants to discover what the recent traffic on the river is due to. A few days ago, they were keeping an eye on Balin and Óin, as the two emissaries were heading south on a small boat. The Elves followed them for many miles, until one night the two Dwarves simply disappeared from their encampment. Galion thinks that they might have discovered that they were being followed and chose to sneak away quietly: he didn't inquire further and returned, as these parts of the marshes are too close to the Mountains of Mirkwood for him to tarry for too long.





- If the encounter proceeds well, the Elves might be persuaded to lead the company to where Balin made camp before disappearing (see Balin's Camp below). The players might need more than a few good rolls, as Galion wants information in exchange for information.
- If the companions fail enough rolls to exceed the Tolerance rating set for the encounter, it is possible that Galion has been made suspicious by the behaviour of the heroes. Maybe they mentioned that they are looking for Balin, one of the Dwarves that Galion considers responsible for his current misfortune? Whatever the reason, if the Loremaster considers that the encounter has ended on a sour note, the Wood Elves leave the company for good and disappear into the forest without offering their help.

BALIN'S CAMP

The company will discover where Balin made his last camp if they are led there by Galion, or if they were following the right leads (they completed the prolonged action needed to explore the marshes): it is a patch of dry land rising to the west of the river course, a few miles north of where a stream descends from the Mountains of Mirkwood to join the River Running (the Rotting River, a brook of dark and muddy waters, mostly avoided by the Elves as it exudes a putrescent reek even in the coldest months of the year). It will probably take most of the second day of travel in the marshes for them to get there, just in time to have a look around before darkness falls.

- If the companions have a look around and succeed in a Search roll, they find traces of the days-old encampment. A great success indicates that the two Dwarves set up the camp but didn't sleep there, while an extraordinary result discovers a box tucked in a rotten stump and protected by *spells of secrecy*, cut hastily but efficaciously on the bark of the tree (if the searching character is a Dwarf, it only takes a normal success to find the spell-protected box).

The box is a small ivory jewel case, with intricately carved images of regal-looking birds: the Great Eagles of the Misty Mountains. The box contains a written and illuminated parchment, King Dáin's letter to the King of the Eagles. The letter is rolled and wound about by a fine necklace of twisted gold wire, holding a magnificent precious stone of a snowy colour the size of a small fist: when the box is first opened, any surrounding light is caught and multiplied by the jewel's countless facets, making the box shine as if it contained an inner light. It is a lordly gift, intended to pass from one king to another.

- As the stone comes from the hoard of Smaug, the Dragon's wickedness still lingers upon it: when they first lay their eyes on it, all heroes must pass a Corruption test or gain a Shadow point, as a fierce desire is kindled in their hearts.

When the site of Balin's camp has been searched, it is time to consider what to do next. If the company arrived here at the end of the second day, the adventurers will most likely have to stop for the night before they can proceed further.

THE STONE-TROLL

The Loremaster may use this encounter as a nasty Hazard episode, or if he feels the need to raise the danger level of the adventure. The encounter takes place necessarily at night, as the Stone-Troll sleeps during the day.

Many years ago a large Stone-Troll descended from his lair in the foothills of the Mountains of Mirkwood to dwell in the Long Marshes. His wit has been dulled by years of solitude, and he has lost any ability to speak in a comprehensible fashion (but his hunger has grown accordingly). He has taken to lying in wait close to a stinking pool of stagnant water, crouching under the surface among the reeds.

At night, the pool is lit up by a prodigious number of ghostly wisps of flame, or corpse candles, which seem to attract animals or other sorts of food for the Troll.

These flickering lights might be noticed by the companions as they set up for the night, or by a hero keeping watch over the camp. If the stinking pool is approached, the Stone-Troll emerges from his hiding place and attacks.

- The combat encounter should be set up as an ambush against the companions (see page 42) and thus require a roll from all heroes to avoid being surprised. If any hero is surprised by the Troll, in addition to the normal consequences of being surprised he must pass a Fear test or find himself unable to invoke an Attribute bonus for as long as the character faces the monster.

Stone-Troll:

ATTRIBUTE LEVEL			
6			
ENDURANCE	HATE	PARRY	ARMOUR
60*	3*	5	3d
SKILLS			
Personality	2	Survival	1
Movement	2	Custom	1
Perception	1	Vocation	1
WEAPON SKILLS			
Club	3		
Crush	1		
SPECIAL ABILITIES			
Great Size*	Horrible Strength	Hatred (Dwarves)	

Stone-Troll Weapons:

WEAPON TYPE	DAMAGE	EDGE	INJURY	CALLED SHOT	NOTES
Club	6	10	14	-	<i>A Troll club can be anything, from a stout branch ripped from a tree, to a body part torn from a fallen enemy.</i>
Crush	Attribute level		12	-	<i>Weaponless trolls use their weight and strength to pound relentlessly upon their enemies.</i>

*The Troll has been weakened by his meagre hunts (his Endurance and Hate ratings are slightly less than normal for a member of this fell race) but a Stone-Troll remains a formidable opponent. The Loremaster may further reduce his effectiveness by considering him to be already wounded.

If they defeat the Troll, the companions will discover and possibly inspect his previous injury: a cut inflicted by an axe (was it Balin's?).



PART THREE - BESIDE THE ROTTING RIVER

The third and final part of the adventure starts when the adventurers finally get near the lair of the Marsh-dwellers, where the river meets the Old Forest Road (probably on the fourth day since they left Esgaroth). Here a town of Men once thrived, a waystation for travelling Dwarves coming from or going to the Iron Hills and merchants from the South and East. When the power of the northern Kings waned, the town was abandoned, until the marshes and the forest swallowed its ruins, together with any trace of its existence.

THE WOOD OF HANGING TREES

Beyond the Rotting River, the water course breaks against tangles of hoary willow-trees standing close together and shutting out the light of day even at its brightest. Their drooping branches trail into the water, and their moulding roots sink deep into the grey slime: the river disappears in a vast fen without wind or tide.

- At this point of the adventure, the heroes will be actively trying to find Balin and Óin. The Loremaster should ask the players how they intend to proceed. If they intend to comb the area, the adventurers will probably be forced to leave their boat (or boats) and advance knee-deep in the water (for some, waist-high...).

Scouting the marsh beyond the Rotting River can be translated into another *prolonged action* requiring at least a total of six successful rolls. Heroes acting as scouts may choose from Explore or Search. For every two successful rolls, the Loremaster may pick one of the following clues and reveal it to his players as the result of their search:

- *A wrecked boat.* The searching adventurers find the small boat used by Balin and Óin. It has sunk under the marshy waters, but is visible from the surface as the water is just a few feet deep. It looks damaged,

as if something slashed at it with fangs or claws. There are no signs of the two missing Dwarves.

- *Ancient bones.* Several stretches of the marsh are strewn with bones of differing ages. The remains belong to animals and men (victims of the Marsh-dwellers).
- *Ruins.* The last vestiges of the ancient town jut out from the slime and the mud, like stubbed fingers and broken teeth. Lonely pillars, small marble arches, and wet walls with grinning gargoyles stare at the unexpected visitors.

When the adventurers accumulate a total of six successful rolls, they will have found their way to the dark pool (see The Marsh-bell, below). In the meantime, two main menaces lurk in this rotting wood, posing a challenge that introduces the climax of the story.

Gallows-weed

A sinister tree-hanging plant, gallows-weed can prove dangerous to adventurers exploring the marshes or sleeping in the open. It coils itself around a victim's neck like a snake, and then pulls up to strangle him. All companions actively searching for the missing Dwarves may be attacked by the dangerous plant, as their actions are exposing them to the threat as they pass under drooping branches. More than one adventurer may be attacked at approximately the same time (gallows-weed are a one-shot threat, as once attacked, the adventurers aren't likely to get surprised again).

- The chosen victims are allowed to make an **Awareness** test, as the plant slithers around their neck to attack. On a failure, they are seized and pulled from the ground, toward the tree branch from which the weed is hanging.

The character immediately loses a number of Endurance points equal to half his Fatigue score. If the character doesn't pass out, he may free himself by succeeding in a roll of **Athletics**; on a failed roll he loses another three points of Endurance and must try again.



- Another companion may try to cut free the victim of a gallows-weed. All attacks hit automatically, but the character rolls the dice anyway to determine the quality of the success: the victim is freed on a great or extraordinary success (ignore Endurance losses).

Nerulf's Warning

If a player remembers the rhyme of lore recited by the old lake-man as the company explores the Wood of Hanging Trees and explicitly mentions that the companions are looking for 'gallows-weed', then they may be allowed a roll of Search to spot plants that may fit the description.

- On a successful roll the companions are able to stay clear of the hanging plants and are not subjected to their attacks.

Gore-crows

A breed of crows twisted by long years spent in the shadow of the Mountains of Mirkwood, Gore-crows are servitors of the Marsh-dwellers. They look like small-sized ravens with a greenish sheen to their feathers.

- When they explore the woods, any look-out and huntsman in the company is allowed a **Hunting** roll to notice their presence. The Gore-crows stand motionless, as if sleeping, on the highest willow-tree branches.

These gloomy birds act as alarms for their underground overlords, and they start croaking when intruders get too close to their lair (see The Marsh-bell below). Gore-crows are roused from their apparent slumber only when they spot shiny things, like jewels or other precious items.

- If the players make the mistake of exposing the stone of Dáin in the open, the Gore crows immediately try to steal it. They silently glide one after the other, making a sweeping attempt at snatching the necklace in their beaks or claws. If the company hasn't noticed the Gore-crows yet, then the thieving birds succeed automatically and

fly away with their prize. Otherwise, the character holding the necklace avoids the attack by succeeding in an **Awareness** test.

Heroes trying to shoot down a Gore-crow in flight using a bow may make a roll using their weapon skill against a *severe* difficulty (TN 18). If the roll is successful, the bird drops anything it was trying to steal and then flies away — on a great or extraordinary success, the bird is skewered through by the arrow and is killed. Gore-crows are too small and quick to be hit with a thrown spear.

THE MARSH-BELL

Sooner or later the adventurers find their way to a deep pool of dark water. Here the ruins are more prominent, as if this was the place where the main buildings of the sunken town once rose. The remains of a great marble arch can be seen on the distant shore, still holding a massive wooden gate, the other walls of the building now crumbled into the mud. On the treetops around the pool the Gore-crows croak, signalling the presence of the trespassers.

After a while, all companions start to hear the slow and soft ringing of a bell: it seems distant and remote, as if coming from under the ground:

- All heroes who hear the bell must make a Wisdom test. If a hero fails the test, he gains a Shadow point and enters the pool, walking towards its centre as if in a daze. If the Shadow point makes a character Miserable (or the hero was Miserable already), he is completely transfixed and disappears under the dark waters before other companions may stop him (as if he keeps behaving normally until the very last moment).

A companion may stop a dazed adventurer by tackling him, making a roll of Athletics against a TN equal to 10 plus the target's Body score.

All companions who failed the Wisdom test and were not prevented from entering the pool wake up some time



later, completely soaked and lying at the top of some crumbling steps leading from a water-logged tunnel into a stony chamber.

- Characters who failed the roll and got transfixed are here too, trapped in a sorcerous sleep from which there is no natural waking. They can be roused by calling them back with a successful roll of **Song** (something that might occur to a hero succeeding in a Lore test, if nobody proposes it before).

Heroes who resisted the call of the bell and enter the cold waters voluntarily discover that an underwater opening leads to the same underground chamber. This chamber is part of the complex of mouldy cellars of a once-proud palace of Men.

Players might well be wary of entering the pool. Rolls of **Explore** or **Search** reveal that the Dwarves' tracks lead to the pool and do not leave it.

THE LAIR OF THE MARSH-DWELLERS

Map 2 on page 140 shows the disposition of the cellars below the ruins. There lurk the Marsh-dwellers, a horrible race of treasure-hoarding humanoid monsters. They are responsible for the disappearance of Balin and

Óin, but have been robbed of their prey by the cunning of the two Dwarves, who were able to shut themselves in an empty room. They will try to get even by not letting the adventurers return to the surface with their lives...

The underground complex reeks of dying and rotting things. It is dark, dank and cold, its stone floor invariably covered by a film of stagnant water. The Loremaster can use the locations described below to set the stage for the conclusive episode of this adventure.

1. Flooded Chamber

This is the room where the victims of the Marsh-bell go in their sleep-like daze. It can be reached by waking heroes by entering the pool, and then just walking or swimming underwater for a few yards to an opening on the pool side. The opening leads to a short passage that emerges in the half-flooded chamber. The room is completely devoid of any features, barring wet stone walls and a dark doorway leading to the main cellar.

2. Main Cellar

This is a vast vaulted chamber, presenting six arched openings, three on the right side and three on the left (leading to several smaller cellars). The farthest doorway on the right side is larger, its arch decorated with stones of many colours (leading to the wine cellar).



In the wall opposite the opening to the flooded cellar, there is a narrow vertical chimney, leading to the surface (a faint breeze can be felt if someone sticks his head into the chimney); inside the chimney hangs a bell rope, that if pulled rings a dull-sounding bell (attracting Marsh-dwellers, see page 138). The floor inside the confined space of the chimney is littered with gore crow feathers and bird deposits.

- If the Gore-crows succeeded in stealing the stone of Dáin, it can be found here, hidden among the dirt.

3. The Cells

The four passages that exit the main cellar lead to several cells, once used to store goods and wines, and today serving as the Marsh-dwellers' resting places. Most cells appear as no more than wet, dirty holes, filled with waste and food scrapes.

Any adventurer entering these passages and forced to fight will be considered to be in cramped quarters. Additionally, ranged weapons cannot be used here.

4. Wine Cellar

The decorated archway that opens in the main cellar leads to a short flight of marble steps descending into the darkness. At the end of it, a reinforced door defaced by claw marks is found. Beyond the door is the wine cellar, a wide room with a low ceiling resting on short, stocky pillars.

- Balin and Óin found refuge here when they were trapped by the Marsh-bell. If the adventurers arrive here, the two Dwarves open the door (it was closed from the inside) and thank their saviours with what strength is left in their body: they haven't had any food or water since the day they arrived here.

When freed, the two Dwarves will insist upon leaving. In their present condition, they are not of any help to the company and will have to be protected if a fight breaks out.

5. Treasure Chamber

The first doorway to the left of the flooded chamber leads to a tight and twisting passage that suddenly opens into a wider semicircular room. Here, a great wooden gate is set into the stone wall. The foul stench that permeates every inch of the underground complex here is almost overpowering. The gate is not locked, and the great wooden door can be pulled open with some effort, its hinges creaking noisily. Beyond the gate is a great natural cave, the treasure chamber of the Marsh-dwellers: on the irregular floor sits a huge heap of polished gold coins and other shining objects, like silver table knives, cups and dishes, lamps and candlesticks. A warm, shivering glow seems to radiate from the hoard of the Marsh-dwellers, as if the gold had been enchanted by the long brooding of the greedy creatures.

- All heroes entering the chamber must pass a Corruption check or be captivated by the sight of the hoard: if a hero fails the roll he falls to his knees, dazed by the sight of the silver and gold.

All companions failing the roll are considered to be surprised when the Marsh-dwellers attack (see below).

The Marsh-dwellers Approach

Some moments later, the gold brilliance that permeates the chamber seems to multiply as a hundred tiny mirrors start to flicker in the darkness: the eyes of a horde of Marsh-dwellers slowly creeping towards the adventurers from all directions. If the heroes do not retreat immediately beyond the gate (possibly trying to shut it behind them) they must fight against the approaching horde.

- Companions standing their ground against the Marsh-dwellers are immediately outnumbered three to one, with their backs against the gateway. Whenever a creature is felled by a hero, another one takes its place. A companion dazed by the hoard is surprised by the attack (see page 48).

If the heroes succeed in killing at least a dozen of Marsh-dwellers without suffering grave consequences,



the creatures seem to pause momentarily in their onslaught, leaving the companions some time to reflect — but in a handful of moments, the shining eyes in the dark multiply, as the creatures tighten their ranks for a crushing assault.

- If the companions do not take this last chance to flee (maybe to grab some of the gold lying on the floor...) they will be relentlessly attacked by the Marsh-dwellers that now will stop only when all the companions are dead (from now on, the heroes may only leave the fight by attempting to Escape Combat — see page 163 of the Adventurer's Book).

The Loremaster can warn the players that there seem to be too many creatures for them to have any reasonable chance of defeating all of them in combat. If that doesn't work, remind them that they are on a rescue mission and getting the Dwarves out should be their priority.

The Gold of the Marsh-dwellers

There probably isn't any time for the companions to grab a meaningful share of the hoard of the Marsh-dwellers, but if the players come up with an interesting plot to get hold of some of the gold, the Loremaster might allow them to take away the equivalent of a point or two of Treasure each.

THE MARSH-DWELLERS

The underground cellars are the realm of the Marsh-dwellers. Here they try to lure their victims, to then kill and feed upon them. Every valuable is then stripped from their bodies and brought to the Treasure chamber. They appear as shambling humanoid creatures with clammy pale flesh, like that of a corpse left to rot in the water. They move slowly and quietly, leaving behind wet footprints with their bare feet. A fell light in their small eyes suggests a wicked vitality and intent.

At least six Marsh-dwellers prowl the various cellars at all times, but another dozen or so emerges from the

Treasure chamber if the bell is rung (see the entry for the area 2, the Main Cellar, on page 136). If the adventurers find the Treasure chamber and are foolish enough to attack the innumerable monsters, the Loremaster may stage their final and stupidly heroic last stand. If the adventurers prove to be of a wiser sort, they will attempt to save the Dwarves and themselves and find a way out.



COMMON WEAPONS

The Marsh-dwellers attack by biting their victims, or try to injure them with their unclean claws.

Marsh-dwellers' Weapons:

WEAPON TYPE	DAMAGE	EDGE	INJURY	CALLED SHOT	NOTES
Bite	4		12	-	<i>A Marsh-dweller's bite is weak in comparison to that of other malevolent creatures, but its hunger makes it a dangerous opponent nonetheless.</i>
Claws	5		16	-	<i>The claws of a Marsh-dweller are hard and almost razor-sharp. Luckily, the creatures are often too slow and clumsy to use them to good effect.</i>

Marsh-dweller:

ATTRIBUTE LEVEL			
4			
ENDURANCE	HATE	PARRY	ARMOUR
10	2	4	3d
SKILLS			
Personality	2	Survival	2
Movement	1	<u>Custom</u>	1
Perception	1	Vocation	0
WEAPON SKILLS			
Bite	2		
<u>Claws</u>	1		
SPECIAL ABILITIES			
Hate Sunlight	Foul Reek		

AFTERMATH

If Balin and Óin have been rescued from their fate, the company will probably head north to return to Esgaroth, unless the gameplay has led to unexpected developments. The return trip may be summarised by the Loremaster or narrated in detail.

When they finally find their way to Esgaroth with the two Dwarves, the adventurers will be received triumphantly. Glóin will meet them aboard the great gilded boat of the Master of the town as they make their way across the lake, ready to award them with their prize.

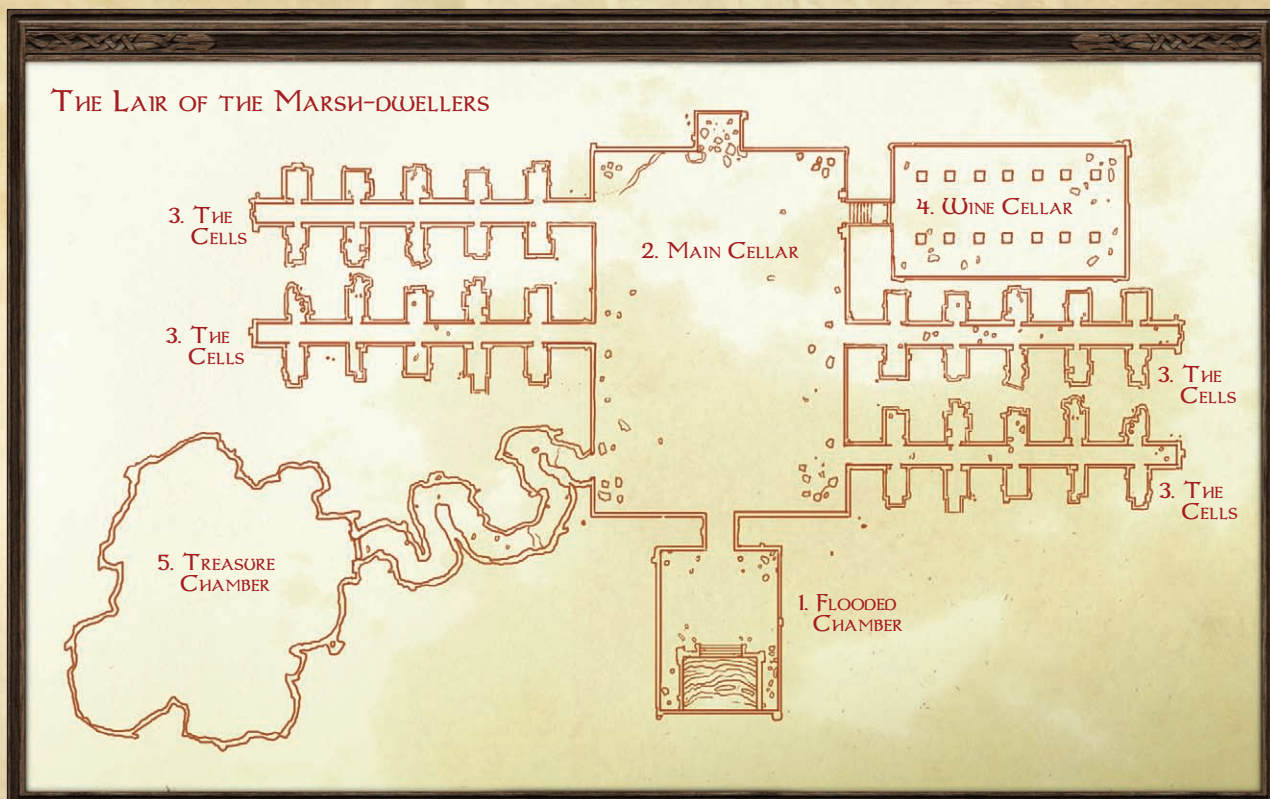
- It will take the company eight days and two Fatigue tests to return to Lake-town, as the heroes will be rowing upriver this time.



Map 1



Map 2





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- the one ring - playtesters

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