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INSIDE
THIS ISSUE:
HEXCRAWLING
IN DOLMENWOOD!
HAGS ADDLE!
MORE MONSTERS
OF THE WOOD!
& THE DRUNE





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Wormskin — *Issue Five*

This fifth installment in the periodic chronicles of Dolmenwood reveals something of the history, nature, powers, and schemes of one of the forest's primary factions: the sorcerers known as the Drune. Regarding themselves as the true masters of the wood, but operating always outside of the transitory political structures of men, adventurers who meddle with the delicate power balance of Dolmenwood are sure to encounter the Drune, before long.

This wintry feast of an issue continues with referee's guidelines and procedures for running hex-crawl style adventure sessions within Dolmenwood. To that end, detailed descriptions of a further cluster of seven hexes within the region known as "Hag's Addle" are furnished. The comings-and-goings of the titular Hag are then elaborated in lavish detail, allowing the referee to easily work her into an adventure set in the region.

Finally, four Dolmenwood-specific monsters are presented, including traditional "monster stat block" details on the Drune and one of their most commonly employed servants.

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THE WATCHERS OF THE WOOD



Herein is the lore pertaining to that sinister cabal of sorcerers who covet the arcane secrets of Dolmenwood above all else. Common folk refer to them as “the watchers of the wood”, for the name they call themselves — the Drune¹ — is said to be accursed.

The information in this article, save for the last section, “Rumours”, is not common knowledge. It should thus be guarded by the referee and only revealed according to the players’ explorations in Dolmenwood.

I. Origins

The Drune folk are a remnant of an antique realm said to lie somewhere in the distant north during that questionable age when the hidden powers still stalked the world in raiments of flesh and blood. Among their people, they were a caste of seers and fortune-tellers.

Regarded as a “folk apart” by the mundane farmers and officials they trucked with, the Drunemen were accepted at arms-length due to their connection with the weird forces that lurk above and below. They lived modestly in chapter-houses where many brothers would sleep and eat and practice their monkery.

In sooth, they were religious ascetics of a sort, worshipping nothing and no one but seeking after that which they would one day worship, seeking knowledge of that nameless god that was their true father. So they had been told by the lesser spirits they communed with, and they had no reason to doubt them. They took no wives and maintained their numbers through active recruitment in the form of bribes and kidnappings. Women were at this time thought to be a distraction from the Drune mission and so were generally avoided except during certain lunar phases that indicated a time of carnal acts.

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¹ The word “Drune” (with a capital D) refers to the cabal as a whole. Individual members are referred to, in singular and plural, as “a drune” or “some drunes”.



Their code was secrecy, their mantra “Seek, Know, Keep”. The Drune collected knowledge like night-moths at work in a field of moon-mazed fronds, slurping up every bit of nectar that presented itself. Occult matters were of special concern, given the direction of their researches. No man who acquired and shared in their knowledge could leave with it and keep his life. This was understood by all.

II. Migration

The histories vary concerning the cause of the Drune's migrations and do not tell of how they came to be separate from that northern folk that birthed them. What is known is that the small group who came to Dolmenwood many centuries ago had deviated vastly from the gospel of its forefathers. These Drune came with women and sons and daughters. No longer seeking after the Hidden One and his vaunted wisdom, these Drune were bent on power and possession and the means to command the world around them. All their will was set to climb the black ladder of godhead and return to the world as its rightful aristocracy. Their knowledge had grown from the arts of crystal-watching and shadow-talking into a formidable edifice of sorcery capable of calling up the most recalcitrant of demon lords.

In Dolmenwood, the Drune had found a most opportune confluence of earth energies. It is said that in much of the world ley lines have withered to mere trickles of occult power, but in Dolmenwood the flow veritably crackles, giving rise to new lines and attracting all manner of spirits and fey oddities. Here was a great welling of strength to lend to the Drune's ambitions, and upon discovery they knew they must husband it and make it their own.

III. Establishment in Dolmenwood

At the time of the Drune's arrival, Dolmenwood was largely free of mankind's influence. Aside from a few isolated hermits, no men had ventured into the place's depths. This would change with the nascent growth of the river trade that brought many southrons into the region several hundred years later. Until then, the Drune operated undisturbed, but not alone.

A fairy lord called the Cold Prince had laid claim over the Wood well before the Drune's coming. Beings from Fairy had passed back and forth from Wood to Otherworld since time immemorial, and none could recall a period that preceded their lord's rule. Over the ages, as is the way with most fey creatures, the Prince grew indolent and lax with his power. In his pride and utter self-assurance, the elf lord (and by decree, his court) chose to ignore the curious sorcerers. As it came to pass, this hasty decision would eventually lead — many centuries later — to the Cold Prince's ejection from Dolmenwood.

The Drune and their families came to settle the high hills surrounding a vast loch fed by subterranean springs, and they named it *Droun* according to the old spelling of their name. There they built a great lodging of wood and smooth stones called up from the earth. This place is their cult's spiritual centre, and while Drune may now be found scattered throughout the Wood, all Drune-folk must return here to conduct business with their masters and, eventually, to die and have their bones secreted within the sorcerers' hallowed ossuary.

IV. Tenets

The Drune of Dolmenwood believe themselves to be the true inheritors of the Drune legacy. Other offshoots of the Old Drune, such as the dreadful Hieromancers of the Unholy City and the equally abominable Saffirmen, regard themselves in a similar light. Thus, every faction sees the others as apostates and heretics and no historian can say with any certainty which group is in the right. All of them share a number of key ideas that one might call the Drune Heritage:

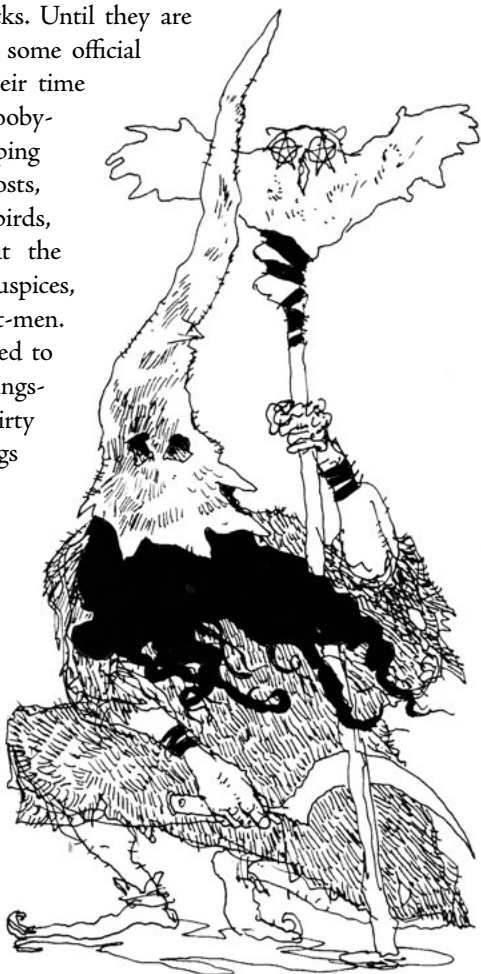
- ✦ Knowledge is sacred and more valuable than a man's life.
- ✦ The obtainment of knowledge is its own justification.
- ✦ Knowledge must be hoarded like kings hoard gold; dissemination is impoverishment.
- ✦ A drune's life has limited significance individually; he is but a hair on the vast body of all Druneness which lurches forward across the aeons to transcendence.

The various factions descended from the Old Drune may be differentiated by their outlook and ultimate goals. The Drune-folk who came to Dolmenwood desire nothing less than true godhead and pursue this goal ruthlessly. Their members share certain static values:

- ✦ Make no arrangements with the aristocracy of Fairy or their subordinates.
- ✦ All men are as peasants to the Drune and may be called upon to serve.
- ✦ No spirit may hold the Drune in obligation; no bargain may be struck that would require Drune indenture.
- ✦ The bones of all Drune must be collected and interred within the Ossuary. Further, the bones must be etched with a summation of the individual's deeds and the true names of his forebears.

V. Lifestyle

One may only become a drune by being born the son of a drune and every drune is born into a station within Drune society. Members of the *aegis* — the Drune high council — dwell with their families in the Lodge and occupy much of their time coordinating various projects and conflicts and handing down policy. Other drunes consider them bureaucrats, necessary yet at times terrible. The *audrunes* watch over the Stones and mind the Leys. The remainder are known as *cottagers* and make their dwellings throughout the Wood. Cottagers maintain households wherein all property is under the management of the drune-wife and her daughters, who are known as *braithmaids*. The males of the household own nothing but the clothes on their backs. Until they are called upon by the *aegis* to perform some official duty, they will spend the bulk of their time scavenging ruins for lost grimoires, booby-trapping their surroundings, sleeping in crypts and dream-talking to ghosts, capturing fey pests, dissecting birds, brewing virulent poisons to sell at the Night Market, recording omens and auspices, and tracking the movements of goat-men. Moonlit meetings are sometimes called to mete out justice or discuss recent goings-on. On such occasions, as many as thirty drunes may appear, though gatherings of less than a dozen are more likely.



VI. Occult Powers

As ascetic students of arcane lore who worship no god, the Drune may be broadly classified as a sub-type of *magic-user*. Seekers and hoarders, they have absorbed magickal procedures from outside sources: they are known to be masters of some number of dweomers which are common to other stripes of magic-user. Additionally, through means unknown², they control a smattering of magic which is normally commanded only by those who devote their lives to prostration before idols and petty gods. *Finger of death* is one such spell — greatly favoured by the Drune and feared by their enemies. However, their isolation from the “mainstream” of wizardly discourse, since millennia, has led them down a somewhat different path of occult discovery.

The primary power of the Drune lies in the following areas of occult study:

- ✦ The harnessing and manipulation of earth energies. The Drune have painstakingly mapped the many greater and lesser ley lines of Dolmenwood, guiding their placement of standing stones to amplify and direct geomantic force.
- ✦ Astral travel via the greater ley lines. A sub-order known as the Audrune are the designated masters of the leys and know the secrets of travel along them, both to other locations in the wood and to otherworldly realms beyond.
- ✦ The shaping of flame and of darkness. These two energies have long been friends of the Drune. It is said that all Drune may see in utter blackness and that they may summon flickering green flames to their service, at will.
- ✦ The use of sacrifice, binding, imprisonment, and enslavement as a means of amplifying or even creating arcane force. Kidnap by the Drune is feared as a fate worse than death by the common folk of Dolmenwood.
- ✦ The command and transmutation of wood and plants. Having dwelt exclusively in the forest for many centuries, it is natural that their studies have led them to dominate their environment. The Drune possess the secrets of golem-working in wood, wicker, and bramble.

The magic of the Drune, including spell lists and their unique dweomers, will be discussed in greater detail in the future.

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2 Those who inquire into the private business of the Drune are few and far between. Those whose prying does not cost them their souls are even fewer in number. This handful of semi-reputable sages whisper of ancient pacts between the Drune and various unscrupulous proto-deities as the source of their seemingly divine-inspired powers.

VII. Relationships with Other Factions

Though they have, at times in the past, formed alliances with various other powers within Dolmenwood, these were always temporary and typically ended with betrayal. The Drune are not known to be trustworthy. The current state of their relationship with others in the forest is as follows.

- ♦ **Elf Lords:** Generally, the Drune have no truck with fairies, regarding them with suspicion and disdain. They will, on occasion, engage in trade with more neutral, business-like fairies (e.g. scrabies) who are able to supply them with various occult items, but avoid all interaction with the elf lords of the wood.
- ♦ **The Cold Prince** (see *Wormskin* issue three): The Drune and their mastery of the ley lines of Dolmenwood were instrumental in the imprisonment of the forest's former lord. They still guard the summerstones which ward his dominion in Fairy and secretly fear his return and wrath, via some betrayal or machination. The Drune have tried on several occasions to infiltrate the Prince's embassy (which, by uncircumventable ancient decree, remains in Dolmenwood, hidden behind the Falls of Naon, hex 0504), hoping to capture its fey powers. All attempts failed, ending with the capture and imprisonment or death of drunes.
- ♦ **The Duchy of Brackenwold and the Barony of the High Wold:** The Drune regard all other human inhabitants of the region as fools to be manipulated as required. There exists an ancient truce between the Drune and the Duchy of Brackenwold, but the most recent dukes have begun to turn a blind eye to any persecution of the Drune.
- ♦ **The Church of the One True God:** Are likewise regarded as fools. According to Drunic lore, their God has no actual presence in either the physical or the astral realms and is thus of no interest as a target of the Drune's god-binding magic. The Church seeks to eradicate the Drune from Dolmenwood, viewing them as a force of great evil and mistakenly believing them to be priests of forbidden gods.
- ♦ **Goatmen:** Are bloodsworn enemies of the Drune, with whom they are engaged in a long and bloody war of attrition. Open conflict is a rare occurrence, but is a gruesome affair. The Goatmen and the Drune were once, long ago, allies. The Goatmen's betrayal adds to the vehemence of their animosity, and the brutality of their conflict.

- ♦ **Atanuwe, King of the Wood:** The Drune hate and wish to depose the Nag-Lord. They lust after his arcane potency and plot to harness it by ritually enslaving him.
- ♦ **Ygraine the Sorceress:** The Drune mistrust the Sorceress, but still view her as a potential ally, especially in their machinations against Atanuwe. (Of course, once she has served her purpose, they will have no qualms about betraying her.)
- ♦ **Witches:** Ancient pacts deter the Drune from interfering with the activities of witches. Likewise Witchkind gives Drune men a wide berth while actively seeking to subvert and enlist young braithmaids into their covens. This is a practice reluctantly tolerated by the aegis. Collaborations between the Drune and the Witches are naturally somewhat rare, but not unheard of. Some make the disputed claim that the witches aided in the building of the Ring of Chell.
- ♦ **Adventurers:** The Drune mistrust bands of wandering ne'er-do-wells, but will at times deal with them. Adventurers who have performed the Drune some favour may be rewarded (with gold or precious stones — *never* with magic, which the Drune hoard absolutely). It is not unheard of for a group to establish an ongoing working relationship with the cabal, though such adventurers will never be privy to the reason behind the quests on which they are sent. The Drune do not look kindly upon rogues who attempt to seduce their daughters.

VIII. Schemes and Goals

The various operations and projects of the Drune are not well understood by outsiders. Viewed from afar, their activities seem bizarre and even preposterous to others. Those with insight recognize that there is purpose behind the Drune's seemingly random appearances and odd inquiries into the doings of domesticated animals, the number of children born over the past winter, or the amount of rain collected after last night's storm. They are omnipresent in the Wood, yet they are shrouded in mystery and regarded with no small amount of apprehension.

In sooth, the Drune busy themselves with the aggregation and maintenance of occult power. They have a multipronged approach to these tasks with various members assigned to the following schemes:

- ✦ Restore contact with the entity Gheillough which dwelt in Lake Longmere, before the coming of the Nag-Lord tainted the waters there. The Drune, of old, profited greatly from their dealings with the power in the waters and seek to reawaken it.
- ✦ Tend to the Ring of Chell to prevent the Cold Prince's return.
- ✦ Rebind those stones that have been lost or become otherwise inaccessible.
- ✦ Track the emergence of new Ley Lines.
- ✦ Entrap Atanuwe and subjugate him.
- ✦ Discover the sanctums of weak and hidden gods and likewise compel them into service.

IX. Rumours

While the common folk of the wood seldom discuss the Drune freely, fearing their attention, the following rumours may be gleaned, should player characters inquire about the nature and doings of the Drune.

1. Though they keep forest spirits as wives, the Drune are not born like other men. They grow in the deep woods, inside ancient oak trees whose hearts have been gouged out by lightning or fungi. *[False.]*
2. The Drune-sign, which may be found carved onto rocks or trees in parts of the wood which they frequent, is that of an owl in flight, with pentagram eyes. *[True.]*
3. The Drune keep their faces concealed by hoods as their gaze brings death, even to their own kind. *[False.]*
4. The centre of the Drune's learning and activity in Dolmenwood is their secret lodge, believed to be located within the Witching Ring. *[True.]*
5. There is a secret farm in a cavern under Dolmenwood where the Drune raise the offspring of abducted maidens for meat. *[False.]*
6. The Drune enslave those who wander too close to their lands. *[True.]*
7. The Drune have betrayed their alliance with the Dukes of Brackenwold and now serve the Nag-Lord. *[False.]*
8. Drune babes born during the winter months are few in number; their blood is used to anoint the Summerstones each year. *[True.]*
9. Naughty children who stray too close to a drune cottage will be transformed into kindling and will burn in a drune's hearth. *[False.]*
10. Under the advisement of his court wizard, the Duke of Brackenwold has secreted the bones of a drune man and made the Drune aware of this. The sorcerers would fain recover the remains, but the Duke uses them as leverage. *[True.]*
11. The Drune will pay a man's weight in gold if he can swim across the Longmere. *[False.]*
12. Each drune wears a golden torc under his robes that is his mark of office. *[True.]*



HEX-CRAWLING IN DOLMENWOOD



The Dolmenwood campaign setting is presented, in part, as a hex-crawl in the traditional mould. A series of adventures may be run by starting the player characters off in one of the hexes on the campaign map (perhaps one of the villages) and then allowing them to move where they will, exploring one hex after the other, guided by their whims or by various rumours they may have heard. Many hexes have obvious features which are indicated on the referee's map — rivers, marshes, islands, roads, etc. Additional details of the hexes are being progressively revealed in *Wormskin*.

The standard rules of the game provide guidelines as to how one may run a campaign focussed on wilderness exploration, but the exact procedure is rather scantily described and lacking in flavour. This article thus presents some alternative guidelines for running exploratory adventures within Dolmenwood. The aim is to furnish a more specific and detailed procedure which the referee may follow in order to adjudicate what the player characters encounter on their journeys and to provide flavourful, incidental details to reinforce the atmosphere of the setting.

Note that, while these guidelines are perfectly usable in their current form, they will be expanded upon in future issues of *Wormskin*. At the very least, generator tables or articles providing greater depth in the following areas will be featured:

- + Camping in Dolmenwood.
- + Hunting, fishing, and foraging.
- + Location generators. (Tables for generating *Lesser Stones* can be found in issue four.)
- + Expanded mishap and hazard charts.
- + Dolmenwood-specific encounter tables. (These will include all of the creatures presented in the *Monsters of the Wood* articles in *Wormskin*.)

In the meantime, the referee is encouraged to use the charts and procedures presented in this article as a stimulus for imagining his or her own events, encounters, and locations.

Hex Crawl Procedure

Each adventuring day is divided into three *phases*, of approximately eight hours each. In each phase, the following procedure is followed:

1. **Choose action:** the party decides what to do.
2. **Random events:** the referee rolls for an unexpected happening.
3. **Resolve:** the random event and the selected action are resolved.

Actions

The party may engage in one of the following standard actions, in a single phase of an adventuring day:

1. **Travel:** passing through a hex and into an adjacent one. On roads marked on the map, the party travel through two hexes (three if mounted). Off-road, one hex is traversed. There is also a 2-in-6 chance, when travelling off-road, of getting lost. This is increased to 3-in-6 in hexes classified as difficult terrain. An experienced woodsman¹ decreases the chance of getting lost by 1-in-6.
2. **Explore:** looking for interesting features within a hex². There is a 4-in-6 chance of discovering the main location in the hex description³. Difficult terrain reduces this to 3-in-6. An experienced woodsman increases the chance by 1-in-6.
3. **Retrace Steps:** looking for something which was previously encountered in a hex. The basic chance is 5-in-6 or 4-in-6 in difficult terrain. An experienced woodsman, tracker, or navigator increases the chance by 1-in-6.
4. **Interact:** staying at one location for some time (e.g. exploring a dungeon, town, monster's lair, etc).
5. **Camp:** resting and/or sleeping.
6. **Forage:** hunt, fish, or forage for food. There is a basic 2-in-6 chance of success. An experienced hunter, angler, or woodsman increases the chance by 1-in-6. If successful, food sufficient for 3d6 meals has been acquired.

Visibility

Poor visibility reduces the chances of finding things and increases the chances of getting lost, as follows: mist 1-in-6, fog 2-in-6, darkness 3-in-6.

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¹ This includes ranger or druid types.

² The event roll may *also* indicate the discovery of a location. If this happens, two locations are discovered in this phase: the main hex location plus a random location.

³ Note that the chance of finding locations while exploring is kept deliberately high, for the benefit of game pacing.

Random Events

The referee rolls 1d12 and consults the table appropriate to the party's action. Note that, if the party is *interacting* with a location that has its own random event table, then that should be used instead.

On the Road

1. Uneventful
2. Uneventful
3. Weather change
4. Weather change
5. Mishap
6. Spoor
7. Spoor
8. Encounter
9. Encounter
10. Encounter
11. Encounter
12. Location

Travelling along a major road marked on the campaign map.

Off-Road

1. Uneventful
2. Uneventful
3. Weather change
4. Weather change
5. Mishap
6. Spoor
7. Encounter
8. Encounter
9. Encounter
10. Location
11. Location
12. Location

Travelling, exploring, retracing steps, or foraging in the woods.

Difficult Terrain

1. Uneventful
2. Uneventful
3. Weather change
4. Weather change
5. Mishap
6. Mishap
7. Mishap
8. Spoor
9. Encounter
10. Encounter
11. Location
12. Location

Travelling, exploring, retracing steps, or foraging in a hex of difficult terrain.

Camping

1. Uneventful
2. Uneventful
3. Uneventful
4. Uneventful
5. Uneventful
6. Uneventful
7. Weather change
8. Weather change
9. Spoor
10. Spoor
11. Encounter
12. Encounter

Locations

The main location from the hex description may be discovered or the referee may roll for a minor site of interest:

- | | |
|-----------------|--------------------|
| 1. Lesser stone | 5. Strange waters |
| 2. Strange tree | 6. Monument |
| 3. Tomb | 7. Mysterious ruin |
| 4. Shrine | 8. Portal |

Weather

Summer

1. Hot, clear
2. Sweltering
3. Overcast, muggy
4. Stormy, thunder
5. Gentle rain
6. Baking, dry
7. Low cloud, mist
8. Warm wind

Autumn

1. Balmy, clement
2. Frosty, chill
3. Rolling fog
4. Bracing wind
5. Cloudy, misty
6. Driving rain
7. Brooding clouds
8. Drizzle, damp

Winter

1. Clear, cold
2. Frigid, icy
3. Light snow
4. Snow storm
5. Frigid mist
6. Freezing rain
7. Bitter, silent
8. Relentless wind

Spring

1. Clement, cheery
2. Brisk, clear
3. Windy, cloudy
4. Warm, fresh
5. Pouring rain
6. Chilly, damp
7. Gloomy
8. Chill mist

Encounters

Roll on the encounter tables appropriate to the party's location and activity and the time of day. Roll to see whether the creature is in its lair or abroad.

Spoors

Roll on the encounter tables, but only a sign of the rolled creature is detected: tracks, cries, droppings, markings, etc.

Mishaps

When a mishap event occurs, the referee should determine whether it is a vehicle (wagon, cart, etc), mount, or person that gets into trouble. This may be determined randomly or by caprice. The precise individual affected is then decided, by whatever means the referee should choose.

Personal Mishaps

1. Trip and sprain ankle. Movement rate reduced by one quarter, DEX reduced by one. Magical healing or a night's rest cures.
2. Lose an item.
3. Harried by biting insects or leeches. Lose 1 hit point (cannot be fatal).
4. Fall into a bog or stream. Dampness and chills cause -1 to hit until warmed up (requires an hour's rest, except in hot weather).
5. Strap or buckle breaks. Armour loses 1 point of AC until repaired. (Alternatively, backpack strap breaks.)
6. Tangled in thorny plants. Clothing torn.
7. Rations fouled (mouldy, turned to mush, infested with bugs, etc). 1d6 rations are now inedible.
8. Take a fall. In normal terrain, suffer 1d6 damage (save versus paralysis or make a climbing check for half). In difficult terrain, the damage increases to 1d12.

Wagon Mishaps

1. Item falls off.
2. Wheel breaks. A wagon can travel at half speed with one wheel missing but cannot move with more than one damaged.
3. Stuck in mud or a ditch. Takes 1d6 turns to extract.
4. Person falls off or is hit by wagon. Lose 1 hit point (cannot be fatal).

Mount Mishaps

1. Bolts. The party may have to chase the beast to retrieve it.
2. Sprains a leg. Speed reduced by one quarter until cured by magic or 1d3 days' rest.
3. Spooked and jittery by unknown cause. Throws rider (1d3 damage).
4. Ailment. Speed reduced by half until treated.



HAG'S ADDLE



The stretch of land along the banks of the river Hameth as it trickles sluggishly out of Lake Longmere is known as Hag's Addle. In the minds of the common folk of Dolmenwood, this region of treacherous marshland, mazy pathways, and twisted thorn trees is to be shunned at all costs, for herein wanders the hag. Many tales speak of her evil magic: how she may lure men to her lair and transform them into wolves; how she may kidnap infants and mince their flesh into her pies; how she may lay curses of barrenness and sorrow upon any woman who meets her gaze. If the naturally desolate atmosphere of the place was not enough to deter wanderers, such tales ensure that none of sound mind venture here.

Those of a more rational bent, who may question the veracity of the superstitions of simple folk, claim that kidnappings, cursings, or murders in the area in recent times can, in truth, rarely be associated with the hag. Some even doubt that she still lives.

It is also of note that the earliest folk tales concerning this region actually speak of it as a beautiful realm of water-meadows and part of the dominion of the fairy Queen of Blackbirds. In fact, all of these stories have some truth, as will be elucidated.

The Tale of the Hag

As spoken of in older myths, the banks of the upper Hameth were once the property of the Queen of Blackbirds, a powerful fairy who held dominion in parts of southern Dolmenwood, in addition to her kingdom in Fairy. In legend, the queen was aloof and ignorant to the concerns of mortal men and women (as is the case with most of her kind), but for the most part benign. She was said to hold great balls and banquets upon barges in the river and to give rich reward to the man who could catch the most beautiful nightingale alive upon midsummer's eve.

Over time, the queen's interest in this small dominion in the mortal world waned and her attentions were drawn elsewhere. It was then that her younger sister, a fairy princess of whom no tales of men speak, began oh-so slowly to jealously claim the water-meadows for her own. This sister, a dabbler in dark magic, delighted in observing the ravages of time on the mortal world: decay, disease, and death. Under her influence, the beauty of the meadows was submerged under the sludge and stale waters of the bog. It was at this time that the legend of an evil witch or hag in the marsh began.

But not for long did this dark fairy princess have her way. After a half-dozen centuries of absence, the fairy queen chanced to return to the Hameth and discovered all that her sister had wrought. The princess was captured and brought before her elder sister, who did not look at all kindly on her deeds. "If thou lovest decay and decrepitude above all, then such shall be thy own fate," she decreed, banishing her wayward sibling to the cruelest fate of fairy-kind: exile from the undying realm, to dwell forever in the mortal world where all things wane and pass.

The queen abandoned the defiled bogland that she had once ruled and assigned her sister the task of warding the door that leads from that region into her kingdom in Fairy, always to dwell on the threshold that she may not pass¹. Further curses and fairy geases were laid upon the princess, causing her power to diminish as her immortal body ages and withers.

This is the origin of the bitter, accursed being known to men as the hag of the swamp. Her lair and comings-and-goings are described in more detail, later.

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1 The Queen could, of course, have ordered that the door simply be closed forever. Leaving it open and binding her sister to it as guardian was part of her punishment.

0807 - Catcher's Bay and The Fiddler in the Dark

*Characters exploring the shores of this hex have a 2-in-6 chance of attracting the attention of 1d6 **boggins** (see *Monsters of the Wood*). (The chance is reduced to 1-in-6 during daylight hours on sunny days). This is in addition to the normal chance of a random encounter.*

This stretch of lake, where Longmere begins to narrow and seep into the marshes of Hag's Addle, is renowned among local fisherfolk, for two reasons. Firstly, it is famed as the singular location in which Longmere Squid (colloquially known as "maids o' the lake")¹ lurk and may be caught. Secondly, it is feared as a favoured prowling spot of the water monsters known as **boggins**.

The Fiddler in the Dark

The northern shore is said to be haunted by a witch who enchants men with haunting dirges played on an ivory fiddle. These tales refer, of course, to the presence of the Atacorn Farthigny, whose cottage lies not far from the shore. (See *The Atacorn's Retreat*, in *Wormskin* issue four, for a full rundown on this location.)

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¹ These thigh-sized, pink, translucent squids are a Dolmenwood delicacy, with a twist: according to folklore, feasting beneath the moon on Longmere squid fried in garlic butter is a sure way to summon the attentions of a witch, who will visit in the dead of night. Young women may desire to summon a witch in order to join their sisterhood, whereas men may desire their company for other reasons (most witches are said to be eternally youthful and of rather loose morals). (The name "maids o' the lake" derives, apparently, from the squids' uncanny similarity to the nude bodies of shapely maidens, as they flit close to the surface under moonlight. Most agree, though, that this may be attributed to the fanciful imaginings of sleep-deprived fishermen.)



Catcher's Bay

Along the southern shore can be found a wide, boggy beach called Catcher's Bay, frequented by the special breed of angler who dares ply his trade under the enchanted eaves of Dolmenwood.

Some 300 yards into the lake, a submerged manse of domes and twisted spires serves as the lair of twenty **boggins** and a like number of human slaves. The manse was once the home of a great sorcerer, known in legends as Hysanth the Amphibious, who created the race of boggins as servants for his ore mines beneath the lake. The wizard is long dead, but his servants have multiplied and spread throughout Dolmenwood, now enslaving humans in a hateful mockery of their own origins. In addition to a great hoard (5,000gp) of rare ores of zinc and marsh-copper — both valued by alchemists and magic-users — some remnants of Hysanth's magic remain partially intact among the weed-choked lair: a derelict subaquatic vehicle, a pearl necklace of *water breathing*, a crystal ball.

0808 - The House of Merridwyn Scymes

The vivimancer¹ Merridwyn Scymes lives an isolated existence, dominated by his research into matters of breeding, mutation, and ancestry. His homely — but of-late somewhat dilapidated — cottage lies beside a stream in a small dell in an area of pleasant, cheery woodland.

Until several months ago, the wizard lived alone with his wife. He now lives alone, following a gruesome magical accident involving the casting of a faulty (cursed?) scroll of the spell *divide body*. The wizard's body was indeed divided, but not in the intended way and with permanent duration. Merridwyn now exists in a gruesome and sorry state in which his body is separated into three entities, each with independent existence: his skeleton and skin both roam freely, while the mass of his nerves, muscles, blood vessels, internal organs and brain cling together to form the third entity.

The visceral mass is in constant agony due to lacking the protection of the skin and spends most of its time submerged in a bath of warm salt water, tended by the ministrations of the skeleton. The skin, on the other hand, has run amok and haunts the woods around the house with murderous intent. Merridwyn's wife was the skin's first victim. Her corpse now lies in their bed, having been indefinitely preserved by a casting of the spell ward against decay.

Merridwyn was in the process of researching a new spell, *divide ancestry* (a variant on *divide body*). The notes and experimental paraphernalia for this spell can be found in his laboratory and could be completed by a magic-user with 1d6 weeks' further research. As it stands, the spell is functional but dangerous — the subject must save versus death or perish during the procedure. Merridwyn was working on contract from Lord Barrathwaite of Lankshorn (hex 0710), who is aware that the wizard has experienced “delays” in his research, though not what the true problem is. The lord continues to support him with deliveries of food and supplies.

A *chime of incontinence* hangs in Merridwyn's laboratory. His spell book, which is hidden behind a false panel in the lab, contains the following spells, in addition to those he has memorized (see below): *clone plant or animal*, *decay*, *face absorption*, *vats of creation*. Several trinkets and minor magic items are also concealed in the vivimancer's bedroom.

¹ Vivimancers are magic-users who specialise in the arcane manipulation of life and biological tissue, warping natural processes to their own ends. See *The Complete Vivimancer*, from **Necrotic Gnome Productions**, for full details of the vivimancer class and the many new spells available to it. Scymes' spells are presented in a separate PDF, for those who do not have the aforementioned book.

Viscera: HD 2, AC 9, Att Spells, MI 8, Mv 60' (20'), AI N, XP 38. The brain of Merridwyn Scymes has the following spells memorized: *sleep*, *meld flesh*, *transparency*, *web*, *cannibalize*.

Skeleton: HD 2, AC 8, Att 1 x 1d4 (scratching) or by weapon, MI 8, Mv 120' (40'), AI L, XP 29. The skeleton suffers half damage from slashing or piercing attacks.

Skin: HD 2, AC 9, Att 1 x 1d4 (strangulation), MI 9, Mv 120' (40'), AI C, XP 29. When the skin successfully attacks in melee, it wraps itself around the victim, causing a -4 penalty to AC and attack rolls. Attacking the skin when it is wrapped around someone has a 50% chance of damaging the victim instead.

Divide Ancestry

Level: 4

Range: Touch

Duration: Instant

Casting Time: 7 days

Cost: 1,500gp (drugs)

Cast upon a creature which is the offspring of parents of two different humanoid races (e.g. a half-elf, half-goat, half-goblin, etc), this unusual procedure causes the subject's body to split permanently into two halves: one pure-blooded being of each parent race. For example, applying the procedure to a half-goat would produce a pure-breed human and a pure-breed goatman.

The resulting beings are fully independent and begin their divided existence with identical memories and mental faculties, though the former diverge immediately — there is no telepathic bond between them. Any abilities related to one side of the ancestry are possessed only by the corresponding being.

During the procedure, the subject must be kept under the influence of specially balanced, deeply soporific drugs to the value of 1,500gp.

Chime of Incontinence

A hexagonal gong of black ceramic (mixed with catoblepas dung), six inches in diameter. The chime may be sounded thrice per day to magical effect: all within 30' must save versus paralysis or void their bowels. (In battle, this is rather distracting, causing victims to lose their action in the following round and suffer a -1 penalty to attacks and AC, until the mess has been cleaned up.)

0907 - Bafflestone and Environs

If a random encounter occurs in this hex, roll 1d6. On a 1 to 3, an encounter with the wandering slaves of Bafflestone takes place. On a 4 to 6, roll on the standard encounter tables.

The heart of this region is permeated by the presence of the nodal called Bafflestone that rests at the crossing of the Lines of Ywyr and Lamm. Once under the stewardship of the Drune, Bafflestone now stands without a guardian. It is actively shunned by all sentient beings and only those trapped within its psychic grip are found near it.

The stone itself is an irregular, blocky prism of deepest red carnelian with a smoke-like vein of unknown black crystal residing at its core. About eight feet tall and almost three feet wide, it stands on an oblong and ornately hewn block of blue granite that adds another two feet to its overall height. Close examination of Bafflestone's surface will reveal the minute and intricate primary carvings of the Ancients¹ as well as cruder secondary/marginal runes of obvious Drunic origin.

Bafflestone was irrevocably warped by the arrival of the Nag-Lord in Dolmenwood. Beneath the weight of Old Shub's smothering psychic miasma, the stone's inner magical structure erupted with a grievous and invisible wound that bled into the dreams of the Wood's inhabitants for a long, dark time. The Drune — being self-appointed stewards of all the standing stones in Dolmenwood — attempted to clot Bafflestone's wound and put an end to its leaking nightmares. They failed miserably at this task, effectively amplifying Bafflestone's unnatural radiance.

Any who stand within a mile of its location will perceive Bafflestone's psychic malaise and must save vs spells. Failure indicates that the character is sympathetic to the stone's deep malignity. Sympathy manifests as follows:

- ♦ Inability to sleep.
- ♦ Unwillingness to leave the stone's presence (must be physically forced to go beyond Bafflestone's reach, a roughly one-mile radius extending from the site of the stone in all directions).
- ♦ Unwillingness to eat or drink, despite feelings of hunger and thirst.

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¹ The Ancients were a mysterious race that predate mankind's arrival in Dolmenwood. The folk of Fairy do not speak of them, and it is believed that they were responsible for raising many of the Wood's monoliths.

Unless sympathetics are dragged, pulled, or otherwise coerced away from the stone, they will wither and die, remaining on this plane as morose and disconsolate **undead wanderers** who are compelled to patrol the environs of Bafflestone without rest. These desiccated corpses will seek to drag outsiders to the site of the stone in order to test their wills against the monument's eldritch presence. Close proximity (within 10 feet) to the stone requires a second save vs spells to resist its pull (-3 modifier to roll). Capture by undead sympathetics will attract others who will lend their leathery muscles to the tasks of grappling and dragging. Those who prove to be immune to the stone's effect are immediately devoured by their captors.

Goat-men have been known to bring potential converts to Bafflestone's undead congregation, holding their prisoners in chains at the edge of the stone's psychic reach until the wanderers arrive to collect them.

Undead Wanderers: HD 2, AC 8, Att 1 x 1d6 (clawing) or by weapon (1-in-4 carry a longsword or shortbow), MI 10, Mv 120' (40'), AI N, XP 20.

0908 - The Hag's Lair

(Difficult Terrain)

If a random encounter occurs in this hex at night, there is a 2-in-6 chance that the Hag is encountered.

The southern stretch of the River Hameth flows wide at this place and seeps into Dolmenwood via a maze of streams, rivulets, and marshy pools. The land here is a confusing tangle of marshy waterways, peat bogs, swampland, mudholes, and mired moors. Safe passage is best found by boat, although enough dry pathways exist to make travel by land possible yet uncomfortable.

Many a traveller has gotten lost trying to find their way through the convoluted passageways. Yet those who venture into the deeps of the marsh may come across an eerie sight: a round, wooden hut, thatched with reeds, hovering ten feet above the surface of the gnat-plagued mire. This is the home of the **Hag**, rumoured to conceal a door to the Fairy Realm. Even one who has encountered the hut before has no improved chance of discovering it again when retracing their steps (see *Hex-Crawling in Dolmenwood*): the hut is mobile and may be located anywhere in the southern half of this hex. Wherever the hut is found, the Hag cannot be more than an hour's walk away (and vice versa) — the two are magically bound together.

The Hag and her hut are described in detail, later in this issue.



0909 - The Time Hole

In the boggy woods in the north of this hex, the norms of reality are warped by the supernaturally potent presence of a monolith of ancient origins. The monolith is a 10' cube of black stone covered in writings in a miniscule, scrawling script. The stone has sunk deep into the mud of the bog, but this does not dim its influence. At close range (within 50 yards) the monolith emanates an intense time-warping field, causing all creatures to reverse age at a rate of one year of lifespan per turn of "real" time. Plants and trees grow backwards in this area, giant trunks emerging from the mould of the bog and crashing upwards into the sky, only to dwindle to saplings over the span of a day and then vanish into pollen. Animals and birds undergo similar reversed life cycles. This effect occurs throughout the hex, though its rate diminishes with distance from the monolith.

Those who know of the monolith's existence may make use of its time-reversing capacity in order to extend their lifespans. Only the most cunning may use this effectively, as there are long-term side-effects of time-reversal which are not immediately obvious. Ygraine the sorceress (hex 1802) knows the secret of youth-renewal via the monolith's power.

The monolith has one further curious property — touching its surface and speaking the name of a historical personage has a 50% chance of causing that person to be summoned out of time. The effects this may have on the timeline may be catastrophic.

1007 - The Tower of Frost

A slender, partially collapsed tower stands in a glade of twisted beech trees, encased in a scintillating rime which seemingly holds the ruin in place. The tower is the recently adopted home of the **Lady Frost-Dust-Shadow**, an elf¹ who has quested through many obscure realms in the Otherworld to reach Dolmenwood. She is a trusted servant of the Cold Prince, sent here via perilous, long-forgotten ways in order to uncover the means by which her liege's kingdom is under sorcerous exile. The Lady appears as a young woman, tall and slender, clad in white, with eyes of cold blue and hair of silver. She speaks High Elfish, Sylvan, and Woldish (the latter with a noble foreign accent) and will attempt to charm any mortals whom she encounters, seeking information on the stones of the Witching Ring (see *Wormskin* issue three). To those who cannot be charmed, she pretends to be a magic-user — named Lady Mistraine — from a distant realm, interested in studying the ley lines of the wood.

When the tower is first discovered, there is a cadre of 5 **flammbraggyrds** (see *Monsters of the Wood*) in the bushes nearby, scoping it out. They are in the pay of the Audrune Aethogrym (the guardian of Golokstone, hex 0910), who has sensed the presence of the Lady in this area and wishes to know of her doings (the flammbraggyrds are to spy on and/or kidnap her).

The tower has three floors:

1. Double doors of elegantly carved white willow wood lead into a wide hall where the Lady's servants — **four young men** of Dolmenwood, charmed into her service — make their rude dwelling. They do not know their mistress' true nature or name. During the day, 1d4 of the men are abroad, carrying out their mistress' command.
2. Ruins, a large hole in the wall through which wind whips. The stairway to the upper level is blocked by hunks of ice. These are illusory, but hold up against tactile inspection.
3. The **Lady Frost-Dust-Shadow** occupies the upper floor, whose windows are occluded by sheets of ice. At night, when her servants are present, she sometimes (50%) makes her way, invisible, into the forest. The contents of the room are minimal: a slab of ice decked with white furs; books, in High Elfish, recounting the history of the Cold Prince's dominion in Dolmenwood and the events around its exile; a small coffer with 100pp and sixteen frosty quartz crystals (50gp each); several sets of clothing (white silk dresses, wolf-fur cloaks).

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¹ The elves of Dolmenwood are denizens of the fairy Otherworld, for the most part only venturing into the mortal world upon specific quests (be it on behalf of a fairy lord or on a personal whim). Some few elves may take up more permanent residence in the forest, for reasons of their own.

Charmed Men: HD 1, AC 7 (leather + shield), Att 1 x 1d6 (shortsword), Ml 9, Mv 120' (40'), Al L, XP 10. Each man carries a pouch of 2d20 platinum coins.

Lady Frost-Dust-Shadow: HD 6 (22 hp), AC 5 (charms), Att 1 x 1d6+2 + frost (staff) or runes, Ml 10, Mv 120' (40'), Al N, XP 1,070. The Lady may activate the following elf-runes (granted to her by her liege) thrice per day: *charm person, hold person, gust of wind, wall of vapour*; and the following once per day: *charm monster, ice storm, invisibility*. Her willow staff is of +2 enchantment and freezes one hit by it for 1d6 turns (save versus paralysis to avoid). (The staff's freezing ability is only effective in the hands of frost-elves.) She wears a mithril amulet of spell reflection (effective against a total of seven levels of spells). As an elf, weapons of silver or cold iron inflict +1 damage against the Lady.

1008 – The Nemeton

(Difficult Terrain)

Opposite the Hag's Addle, not far from the eastern banks of the Hameth, an old path runs north and east to a murky dell. This is the site of the Nemeton: a grove of collapsing willow trees, flooded by several inches of water and encircling a dais of lichen-chewed stone flags. At the centre stands a white marble podium (4' tall) stylized with carvings of fruiting vines, and on this podium rests a simple stonework bowl. The water inside it is crystal clear and good to drink, and it can never be exhausted. Those who know the ancient words of command can use this bowl to summon rains, even violent storms, and direct them to hang over a given hex located within the Wood or adjacent to its borders. The Drune monitor this area regularly and may put in an appearance if they see the bowl being utilized. They will be inclined to kill anyone who has obtained knowledge of the command words. It should be noted that the bowl, the podium, even the flagstones are magically rooted in place. Attempting to remove them will guarantee interference from the Drune. The origins of the Nemeton are unknown and predate the arrival of men in the Wood.



THE HAG OF THE MARSH



The Hag is known to mortals by various names: Black Allis, Shub's Nanna¹, Old Crust-Breath, Mother Swithenby, and many others. Her *true* name, however, was removed from her memory by her sister, the Queen of Blackbirds, to serve as an extra layer of protection between the two realms. Although she does not remember her name, the Hag will recognize it if it is discovered. She would then be subject to the demands of the true name's wielder.

The Hag of Hag's Addle: HD 11 (57 hp), AC 3, Att 1 × 1d6+2 (enchanted walking stick) or spells, Ml 9, Mv 90' (30'), Al C(E), XP 3,600. The Hag can use the following spells, once per day each: *bestow curse*, *charm person*, *allure*, *entangle*, *dispel magic*, *fly*, *fear*, *polymorph others*, *cloudkill*. She is immune to the effects of 1st level spells. In addition to her walking stick, the Hag may carry one of several other magic items (see the Outward Appearance table; the items are described later). Only her walking stick and willow switch are useful in combat. As a fairy, the Hag is susceptible to attacks with iron or silver weapons, suffering an additional point of damage per attack.

Appearance

The Hag wanders the marsh in many guises; some say she is an ugly old woman, some a beautiful, dark-complexioned maiden. No two travellers' reports are ever the same. These outward appearances are illusory. *Detect magic* does not indicate anything unusual about the Hag (this itself is an illusion, as she is a powerful fairy and magic flows through her veins). Even spells such as *detect illusion* and *true seeing* have a 50% chance of failure.

When the PCs first encounter the Hag, roll 6d12 on the table on the following page to determine her basic appearance and mannerisms.

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¹ Utterly falsely. Shub's Nanna is a different being entirely: a goat-crone who dwells in hex 0911 and serves the Nag-Lord.

	Appears to Be	Appearance	Clothing	Attitude	Speech	Carrying
1	4-year-old girl	Ambiently glowing	Ballroom gown	Angry	Accented	Empty basket
2	400-year-old woman	Arthritic	Buckskin	Annoyed	Cloying	Empty sack
3	Ancient satyress	Curious	Dried fishskins	Bouyant	Echoey	<i>Frogskin Pouch of Casting Stones</i>
4	Animated human corpse	Disheveled	Fine-spun linens	Business-like	Elvish	Handful of moss
5	Decrepit old woman	Eager	Golden armour	Calculating	Familiar	<i>Marsh Lantern</i>
6	Dessicated half-elf	Ecstatic	Homespun shift	Demanding	Gnomish	Map of the marsh
7	Elderly woman	Exhausted	Nude	Distracted	Mute	<i>Rowanwood Crown</i>
8	Pregnant woman	Lost	Ragged woolens	Engraged	Overly formal	Sack of fungus (see <i>Wormskin</i> issue one)
9	Matronly woman	Nervous	Royal robes	Flippant	Pleading	Two dead kittens
10	Mushroom-covered ghoul	Predatory	Treebark	Mischievous	Seductive	<i>Oak Staff</i>
11	Rotted dryad	Refreshed	Wedding dress	Misleading	Slang-filled	Net of eels
12	Young maiden (between 12-16)	Sleepy	Woven leaves	Pouty	Whigny	<i>Willow Switch</i>

(The items marked in italics are described later, in *The Hag's Magical Items*. The Hag is always carrying her Walking Stick.)

The Hag's true form is that of a crone, bent and decrepit beyond human comprehension, with eyes as large as saucers and a great, warty nose. The only way to see her true appearance is to be invited into her hut (see *Hag Haggling*, later). Once her form is rightfully revealed, her illusory guises no longer fool those who have seen her.

Character

The Hag serves as a Watcher Between Worlds, charged by the Queen of Blackbirds to eternally guard one of the most vexing passageways into Fairy. The nature of this task, as well as its unending duration, have made the Hag hateful and depraved.

During the day, she is compelled to keep watch within the hut, where the passage exists. At night, when the doorway is locked, she prowls the marshlands. Although she has no need for sleep, she may not stray more than an hour's journey from the hut.

In her nightly wanderings, the Hag engages primarily in two activities. Firstly, she collects marsh herbs for use in her magic. Secondly, she seeks out mortals to enslave or consume (she particularly values children). Only someone who can quickly engage her in conversation (see *Hag Hagging* for some ideas on topics of interest to her) will avoid this fate.

Supernatural Abilities

In addition to the previously mentioned spells known by the Hag, she possesses several other powers which she may choose to bestow upon someone whom she has invited into her hut (this, of course, requires some favour in return — see *Hag Hagging*, later). It is for this reason that she is sometimes sought out by adventurers in the region. Her powers are as follows:

- ✦ The Hag may see into the distant past and future — in many worlds — by casting marsh herbs into her brazier. The resulting smokes induce a hallucinogenic stupor, lasting for 1d6 hours, in all within the hut (no save). Among the screechings and wailings of the Hag, the prophecy can be perceived. There is a 10% chance of all who witness the prophecy being driven insane (roll per individual).
- ✦ The Hag can cure any disease and lift any curse. This requires that the subject remain in her hut for 1d12 days. This in itself may carry other risks.
- ✦ The Hag can bestow great beauty or vigour (effective CHA or CON increased by 3 points, to a maximum of 18) upon a mortal, lasting for 1d6 years (though the Hag claims the boon to be eternal). The price is a full night of passion with the Hag.
- ✦ The Hag can recall the deceased to life (effectively the clerical spell *resurrection*, though the magic also functions even if no part of the body remains). There is a great price to this magic, however: someone who truly loves the one to be returned must forfeit their own life and their immortal soul. (Raising of the one thus sacrificed is impossible.)

The Hag's Hut

Although called “The Hag’s Hut” by all unfortunate enough to set eyes upon it, the hut does not belong to the Hag; the Hag is but the current resident in a chain of occupants stretching back into the mists of time. The hut existed aeons before the Hag appeared in the Dolmenwood and it will exist as long as the gods deign.

The Hut’s Exterior

A round, windowless wooden hut thatched with reeds, approximately 15 feet in diameter, with a single doorway. At night, when the Hag is not at home, it floats ten feet above the marshland. It can wander of its own accord, slowly levitating from one location to the next with wildlife fleeing before it. (Any non-submerged living creature which the hut passes over is reduced to a boneless mass of quivering flesh.) However, the hut often remains stationary over algae-covered swamp waters or deep mudmire pits.

There are two ways to gain entrance to the hut and each leads to a different place (for the hut exists in two places simultaneously), as follows:

1. The door to the hut is guarded by fiendish magical wards and locks beyond understanding. A magic-user who manages to break these bonds will find their efforts rewarded with entrance to nothing more than an utterly empty wooden hut. This is the interior of the hut in the mortal world.
2. One who gains an invitation from the Hag may enter into the hut’s second coexistence: a small gateway dimension between Dolmenwood and the realm of Fairy. It is here that the Hag truly dwells and where the door to the kingdom of the Queen of Blackbirds is located. This aspect of the hut is described further, on the following page.

The Hut on the Border of Fairy

Nothing made of iron can pass over the threshold into this aspect of the hut; iron will clatter to the ground as if blocked by an invisible wall. Inside, no illusion exists and most magic fails. The only magicks that work in this pocket dimension are those abilities innate to natives of Fairy (this includes the Hag) or items that were enchanted in Fairy. Other magical items forever lose their charms, if brought inside the hut. Sentient weapons collapse in a scream of rust.

Inside, the hut is gloomy and smoky, but generally unremarkable. It contains the mundane items of a hedge witch's life: bundles of herbs and root vegetables, jars of spices, candles, cooking pots and utensils, a large cauldron, a stone mortar and pestle, bedding, etc., all have their place. A small stone hearth and chimney occupy one side. **Five large black cats** (actually Grimalkin — see *Wormskin* issue one — charmed to remain forever in chester) lurk in the rafters, eyeing guests greedily. They will pounce on troublemakers.

Charmed Grimalkin: HD 3, AC 6, Att 1 × 1d6 (claws or bite), Ml 9, Mv 120' (40'), Al C, XP 65. Anyone damaged by one of the Hag's Grimalkin must save versus spells or be afflicted with the nightly urge to drown themselves in the bog (WIS check per night to avoid).

Points of Interest

1. The **cauldron** is likely to contain a bubbling stew of “bog meats” (including human body parts).
2. Many of the **jars** and **candles**, upon close inspection, bear distorted human faces, melded into the ceramic or wax. These are victims of the Hag whom she has charmed and transmuted into household objects.
3. A brass doorknob protrudes directly from the middle of the **fire in the hearth**. Turning the knob a three-quarter turn and yanking upwards opens a passageway to Fairy. Although a visitor enters by jumping down into the passage, they arrive as if walking through a normal door. The door swings shut immediately upon a visitor's entrance. There is no going back through this fairy door¹. During daylight hours, the door is unlocked and anyone (except the Hag) may enter, though the Hag is compelled to prevent it. At night, the door is impenetrably locked.

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¹ Exiting the kingdom of the Queen of Blackbirds is a tale for another day. The Hag supposedly knows all the possible paths that lead back to the hut (though her knowledge is many centuries outdated).



Hag Haggling

It is difficult, though not impossible, to gain the Hag's favour. Following are some of the ways in which she may be appeased. The lucky person may then gain an invitation to the Hag's hut or some other favour.

- ✦ The simplest way to gain invitation to the Hag's hut is to be a stout-hearted virgin and to ask nicely. She is compelled to cooperate.
- ✦ The Hag has a soft-spot for cats and is inclined to chat with grimalkin.
- ✦ Proffer a delicacy unobtainable in the Dolmenwood. For example, the Hag is extremely fond of pickled fish from Walthamthorp, a land many leagues distant.
- ✦ Return an item the Hag lost, especially if the item was stolen.
- ✦ Bring the Hag fresh cuttings or rootstock of herbs or plants that do not grow in this area of the Dolmenwood. The Hag cultivates the marshlands with various medicinal plants and seeks to expand her plantings.
- ✦ Tell the Hag she is beautiful and mean it. She can tell if someone is lying.
- ✦ Offer to do the Hag's bidding. This is dangerous and may result in a near impossible task (such as fetching the sigh of a mother's pride), as the Hag is clever. However, she is duty bound to abide by the terms she sets should the foolish adventurer succeed.
- ✦ Bring her cats or kittens, alive or recently dead. If the animals are alive, she will feed them from her cauldron and then release them. (Such cats develop a livid sentence within a week.) If the animals are dead, she will feed them to her grimalkin. If the adventurers killed the animals, they will not receive an invitation.

The Entertaining of Guests

A person who has been invited into the hut may be party to one of the following activities:

- ✦ **Dinner:** A soup or stew, served from the cauldron.
- ✦ **Conversation:** The Hag is an expert on marsh herbs and is knowledgeable of fairy history (though reluctant to discuss the latter).
- ✦ **Magic:** Those who have paid the appropriate price may be subject to magical workings (see *Supernatural Abilities*).
- ✦ **Rest:** Occasionally, the Hag may allow an individual to sleep the night in her hut. Those of youthful complexion may find themselves subject to her lusts.

Note that, unless bound by some meaningful contract, it is possible that the Hag will change her mind about inviting mortals into her abode and decide to enslave them instead.

Adventure Hooks

The following seeds may be expanded by the referee into longer scenarios involving the hag of the marsh.

- ♦ The vivimancer Merridwyn Scymes' visceral mass (hex 0808) has entered into an uneasy pact with the Hag, who provides him balms, salves, and herbal bath additives to ease his suffering. He has charged the adventurers to find the Hag to procure an urgently needed medicinal. (The referee may decide what the wizard gives the Hag in return for the medicines.)
- ♦ The party meets a grimalkin who warns them that the Hag is in a foul temper because one of her most precious items is missing and she strongly desires its return. Later, the Hag's **marsh lantern** can be seen bobbing and weaving through the marsh reeds. Upon inspection, the lantern is caught in the harness of a wayward mule.
- ♦ A party of five fishermen pole flat-bottomed boats across the swamp. They have bundles of fresh herbs and creels of fresh-caught fish. They report they glimpsed the Hag's hut hovering over marshland half a league away but hurried away lest they meet the witch herself.
- ♦ A dead feral cat is nailed to a tree. A hand-lettered sign nailed above the cat reads "YOU NEXXT HAGG"; the sign is written in charcoal on birch bark. Every twenty feet for a hundred feet, another cat in a varied state of decomposition is nailed to a tree with a similar sign ("YOU DED HAGG", "YOU DIE NEXXT", etc.). At the base of the last tree, a large splatter of dried blood stains the undergrowth. A box of charcoal pencils and a roll of birch bark are stashed in a rotting log nearby. The Hag might be interested in these items.
- ♦ A moss dwarf agrees to arrange a meeting with the Hag for a steep price: the party must rescue his cousins from their servitude to Farthigny, the Fiddler in the Dark (see *Wormskin* issue 4). (The referee should decide how this dwarf has entered into the Hag's favour.)
- ♦ A local noble's spouse disappeared in the marsh and was last seen (by a guide or servant) in the vicinity of the Hag's hut. A reward notice for their rescue is put out. The unlucky person has been transformed into a candle and now rests upon a shelf in the Hag's hut.

Rumours About the Hag (d12)

The following rumours relating to the Hag and her doings have been spread by fisherman, frog giggers, and bog cutters.

1. Emissaries of Lord Malbleat (hex 0709) are negotiating magical favours with the Hag, whereby a marsh demon will be chained into the goat-lord's ring. *(Partially true. The deal actually revolves around an infernal pact whereby he will be granted dominion over the lands around the village of Dreg.)*
2. The Hag is lonely and seeks news of the outside world; she often approaches lone fish trappers to trade poultices for gossip. *(False. The Hag is far from talkative.)*
3. Pack animals that lose their way in Hag's Addle are often found as boneless masses of rotting flesh. *(True.)*
4. Samish Boulfroth, an old frog gigger from Dreg, caught a mere glimpse of the Hag's true form and was struck blind. *(False. He actually cavorted with swamp nymphs.)*
5. The Hag's hut roams the marshes alone at night, striding about on two giant bird legs. *(Partially true. The hut moves, but not upon legs.)*
6. The Hag supplies bodies for the flesh wizard's experiments. *(False.)*
7. Several children lost in the marshes and later found report they were pointed to a path by "a kind old grandmother". *(True. But this is not the Hag.)*
8. Grimalkin refuse to speak of their dealings with the Hag. *(True. Some grimalkin have made bargains with the Hag. They do not discuss this with strangers.)*
9. During the most recent waning crescent moon, the Hag was seen outside the flesh wizard's cottage, severely beating him with her **willow switch**. *(False.)*
10. At night, the Hag amuses herself by hurling balls of coloured lightning at owls and bats. *(False.)*
11. To gain an audience with the Hag, one simply has to ask. This worked for at least one young hunter who lost his way in the marsh. *(Partially true. This approach will not work for everyone.)*
12. The Hag guards a secret doorway to a fairy kingdom. *(True.)*



The Hag's Magical Items

The Hag's magical items were all originally crafted in Fairy, so remain enchanted when she takes them inside her hut. She always carries the walking stick on her person and may be encountered with other items as described in the outward appearance table (see page 29).

Oak Staff

This hearty oaken quarterstaff is made of living wood from Fairy. Once per day, it may be touched to the ground and will thus provide the one who carries it with a full day's worth of physical sustenance.

Rowanwood Crown

Made of fresh limbs stripped from a rowan sapling of the Dolmenwood, this crown extends a fairy's ability to see demons, devils, and traces of black magicks when worn on her brow. The Hag wears it when dealing with members of Lord Malbleat's retinue (see *Rumours*).

continued overleaf

Willow Switch

A whip-thin, long branch of green willow, this is the Hag's favoured weapon when away from the hut on dangerous business. It does only 1d3 damage per lash, but the Hag can rapidly flutter and thrash the branch, making eight attacks per round. (An elf or human with DEX of 16 or greater could learn this feat, in time.)

Frogskin Pouch of Casting Stones

Made of the vocal sac of a male bullfrog, this pure white frogskin pouch holds a set of polished river stones etched with fey symbols. The Hag sometimes makes a great show of "consulting the stones" when trying to determine whether to free, enslave, or eat a human being in her capture. The stones are worthless when used in this manner. She actually uses the stones to communicate with the marsh-demon Ygromolg, with whom she has an alliance. She casts them into a small pan of water over the smoldering ashes of a hardwood fire and the stones arrange themselves to relay the messages. (This is a common fairy method of communication.)

Marsh Lantern

The Hag's marsh lantern is a normal brass lantern filled with hundreds of fireflies. The owner may capture fireflies each evening at dusk. If fireflies are not in season, the owner may command three will-o'-the-wisps (minor non-corporeal demi-fey which haunt the marshes) to serve as the light source in exchange for a single drop of their own blood.

Walking Stick

This stout blackthorn limb serves as the Hag's walking stick. The shank of the stick is highly polished dark brown with red highlights and the handle is a knob of naturally yellowed wood. Etched into the copper ferrule (the part which touches the ground) is a secret symbol believed by fairies to bring extra luck when conducting business with men. The walking stick can be used as a powerful shillelagh (+2 to hit and damage).





MONSTERS OF THE WOOD



Boggin

HD: 6+4

AC: 5

Attacks: 2 × 1d4 (groping hands) or 1 × 1d12 (muck rake)

Move: 120' (40') (swimming or walking)

Morale: 8

Number Appearing: 1-6: abroad (1d6),
7-8: lair (2d6)

Alignment: C

Intelligence: Murky

Size: L (10' tall)

XP: 980

Possessions: Muck rake

Hoard: C/XX (eerie), valuable earths
and ores (d10 × 100gp)

Originating in Lake Longmere but now spread throughout the pools, lakes, and mires of Dolmenwood, these amphibious monstrosities ply the water's edge in search of warm-blooded sentients to drag down to their lair. Their limbs are frog-like and a huge matting of pondweed grows from their heads, concealing their faces. Upon death, the flesh of a boggin dissolves into sludge — their true appearance, beneath the matting of hair/weed, is a matter of some conjecture. Boggins have a rudimentary understanding of Woldish, but among themselves speak in loon-like gibbers.

Special Abilities

Marsh grab: Anyone hit by both of a boggin's grasping hands in the same round is dragged beneath its reeking mane of weed and may subsequently not act except in an attempt to escape. This requires a save versus paralysis each round. In the meantime, the boggin will attempt to drag the victim to its underwater lair. Land-dwellers captured by boggins have a 2-in-6 chance (per individual) of being kept as slaves and put to work in the boggins' sludge mines. The other 4-in-6 victims are simply dismembered and consumed.

Amphibious vomit: The putrid, green vomit of a boggin, when caked around the mouth and nose of a humanoid, grants the ability to breathe underwater. A boggin produces enough of the substance to apply to two humanoids per day. In this manner, they keep air-breathing creatures alive as slaves.

Traits

1. Dead tree branches sticking antler-like from the head.
2. Weed-hair full of squirming worms and tadpoles.
3. Female with rows of pendulous teets.
4. Long, lumpy tail, ending in a great tuft of pondweed.
5. Stench causes retching in humanoids within 20'. Save versus poison or suffer -2 to attacks. (XP value increases to 1,280.)
6. Adorned with necklaces of human bones.

Encounters

1. Boggins emerging from a pool to chase 1d3 fleeing slaves: naked humans, covered in pondweed, with green sludge caked around their mouths.
2. Boggins lurking in a muddy pool, only the tops of their heads protruding. A drune perches in an overhanging willow tree and promises payment (apparently in the form of human slaves) in return for six barrels of "husk sludge".
3. A group of fishermen sit around a fire, drinking and singing merrily. They are unaware of the boggin making its way quietly through a bed of reeds and about to pounce on them.
4. A lone boggin dragging itself from a muddy pool which is dried up or frozen, moaning plaintively. The beast will not live long out of water.

Lairs

1. An ancient well shaft, now submerged in a pond. The monsters keep a single slave, tied up in weeds at the bottom of the well: an old woman who is forced to spend her days blindly tunneling.
2. An underwater dome of baked mud and woven branches which is only visible from the surface by the bubbles which rise from it. Within the dome, the boggins have established colonies of rare fish and mollusc breeds, which are tended to by a dozen swimming slaves. The boggins themselves are servants of a supra-intelligent octopus which lairs in a cave below.
3. A maze of subaquatic caves and tunnels, mined into the bedrock of a lake. Human slaves support a highly organised business of rare earth extraction, tied to a network of unscrupulous traders on the surface.
4. A single, large cavern in the side of a pool. The boggins here live a peaceful existence, preying only on fish, led by the soothing wisdom of a moon-like orb which speaks to them of philosophy and the stars.

Brambling

HD: 2+2

AC: 6

Attacks: 2 × 1d6 (bramble claws)

Move: 120' (40')

Morale: 9

Number Appearing: 1d6 abroad (no lair)

Alignment: N

Intelligence: Rudimentary cunning

Size: M (5' tall)

XP: 50

Possessions: None

Hoard: None

Thickets of thorny wood and curling bramble, animated into humanoid form by Drune magic. A wicked green fire flickers in their vaguely formed eye sockets. Bramblings are called up from the forest and used by the Drune as temporary servants, guards, or spies. At its heart, each bears a scroll of parchment, inscribed with occult runes.

Special Abilities

Blend into woods: Bramblings can move with great stealth in woodlands, surprising on a 4-in-6 chance.

Entangle: If both claw attacks hit, the victim is entangled in brambles and takes 1d8 automatic damage per round, until freed (this requires killing the brambling).

Damage resistance: Piercing or bludgeoning weapons only inflict half damage.

Weaknesses

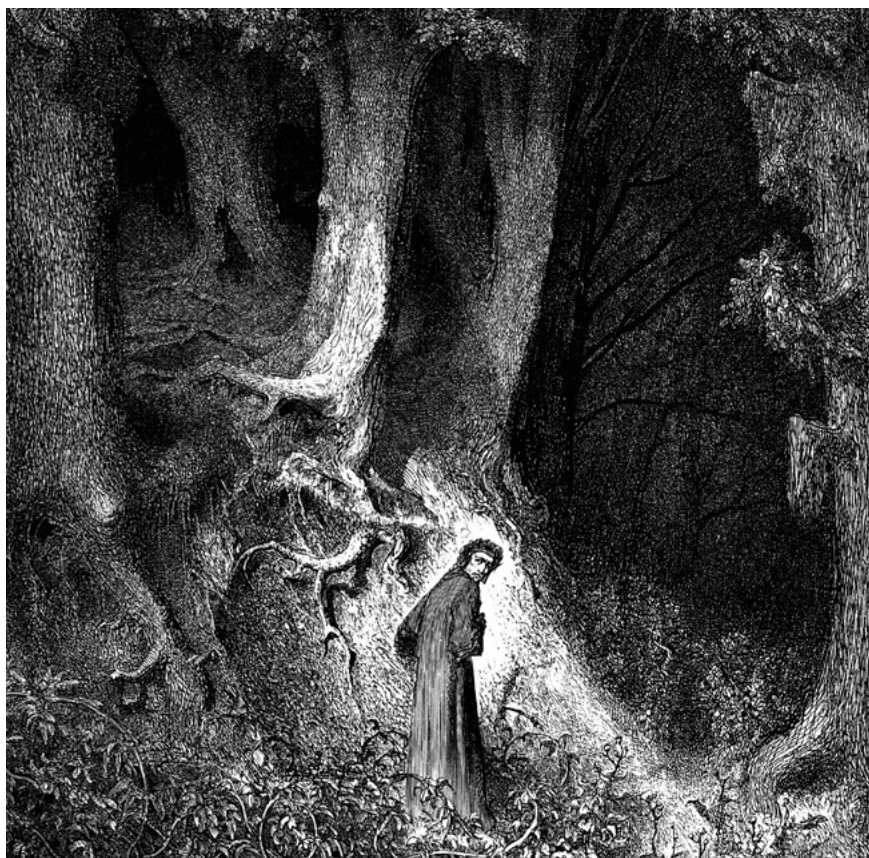
Flammable: Bramblings suffer double damage from fire.

Traits

1. Crown of thorns.
2. Intermingled with pretty wildflowers.
3. Partly formed from a thick, charred, stump.
4. Holly beard.
5. Bird's nest in chest cavity; may contain a clutch of eggs.
6. "Face" covered with bright yellow fungus.

Encounters

1. Creeping through the branches of a large tree overhanging a brook. The bramblings have been tasked to spy on the actions of a group of fairy nobles who are currently camped beside the stream.
2. Concealed in the tangled undergrowth around a glade wherein a wicker man has been erected. If passersby dare to tamper with the device, the bramblings will attack.
3. Conjured to life by a drune to carry a prisoner — a wretched, semi-conscious knight — to a standing stone (choose the closest nodal).
4. Clumsily carrying stones and clods of earth to cover over a shallow pit in the woods. Inside the hole is the body of an emaciated unicorn, ritualistically bound in silver-threaded rope and strewn with sprigs of thyme.



Drune

HD: 5

AC: 6 (hexes)

Attacks: 1 × 1d12 (staff of greenflame) or spells

Move: 120' (40")

Morale: 9

Number Appearing: 1-6: abroad (1), 7: abroad (1d6), 8: lair (1)

Alignment: N (E)

Intelligence: Penetrating

Size: M

XP: 500

Possessions: Trinkets (occult), U/VI (occult), golden torc (150gp)

Hoard: C/XX (occult), N/IX (occult), O/VII (occult)

Moody, cloaked members of the occult brotherhood whose avaricious hand creeps across Dolmenwood, grasping arcane power wherever it can be found. All drunes are male and all clad themselves in thick woollen cloaks as black as night, when abroad. Whether encountered by happenstance or deliberately sought out, they are defensive and wily and seek only to manipulate others to their own ends.

Special Abilities

Sorcery: Your typical drune has the following spells memorized: *sleep*, *charm person*, *finger of death*, *hold person*.

Traits

1. Bears a pentagram sigil upon his breast.
2. Necklace of owl skulls.
3. Crown of antlers.
4. Wears a featureless clay mask.
5. Grizzled plaits cascading from his hood.
6. Skin covered with occult markings (tattoos? paint?)

Encounters

1. In command of 2d4 lackeys — normal men or women under a mind-bondage spell, an odd, snarling expression on their faces and a malicious glint in their eyes. The lackeys are dragging a ten-foot high, humanoid, wicker cage upon a cart.
2. Summoning 2d4 bramblings from the undergrowth to protect a rune-covered stone in the centre of a glade. The stone bears encoded directions to a newly discovered ley line.

3. Sitting upon a boulder, apparently deep in contemplation. A flock of ravens spiral around the seated drune. Their cawing seems vaguely coherent, as if words are concealed within the cacophony.
4. In battle with a knight and 2d4 men-at-arms in the service of the duke. The drune has been charged with kidnapping locals for use in dark rituals and is attempting to flee arrest.

Lairs

1. A thatched cottage beside a brook in a pastoral glade. The drune lives here with his wife and daughter and spends his days mapping the many hundreds of rune-carved, granite skulls littered throughout the surrounding woods, attempting to decode some arcane pattern in their arrangement.
2. A tumbledown shack beside a flint cliff. The front room is home to the drune's eleven children — five daughters and six sons — who often play in the woods nearby. These woods are guarded by miniature clay statues baked by the drune's wife, which watch with leery eyes for intruders and warn of their arrival. The drune himself is charged with recording the movements of the moon and planets¹. To this end, he has a hidden lookout tower atop the cliff and keeps many charts, maps, and horoscopes.
3. An amateurishly renovated ruin in which a lone drune makes his dwelling. Close by is a monolith of fathomless obsidian which has the power to imprison the body and soul of one who gazes into its depths. The drune knows the secret of releasing those trapped and uses the stone to experiment with the effects of prolonged extra-dimensional stasis upon the human psyche.
4. A somewhat dilapidated cottage in a glade surrounded by great rookeries. A waterfall nearby plunges into a rocky pool. The drune who lives here — an old man, bent with age and partially blind — sits at the top of the fall, mourning the recent death of his wife. His sorrow is mingled with the relief of accepting his own nearing death and with a bitterness against his brothers, the Drune. This old man now wonders if he has spent his life aright, though he knows no other path. In this state, he may rashly reveal secrets of his brotherhood to strangers, before regretting also this and casting himself to his doom on the rocks of the pool below.

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¹ The Drune have some evidence that major magical workings on earth are mirrored by the heavens as slight fluctuations in the paths of the planets or the cycle of the moon. If the full knowledge of this sympathy could be deciphered, it would grant great power.

Flammbraggyrd

HD: 3+4

AC: 3

Attacks: 1 × 1d8+2 (white-hot fire tools)
or 2 × 1d3+heat (fists)

Move: 120' (40')

Morale: 10

Number Appearing: 1-6: abroad (1d6+1),
7-8: in bivouac (2d4+1)

Alignment: C(N)

Intelligence: Gusto beats subtlety

Size: M (5'-6' tall)

XP: 100

Possessions: Flagons; cast-iron playing cards briquette dice; tasty ashes, soots, and smuts.

Hoard: Usually none (10% chance of a cast-iron chest with K/XII)

Part zeal, part showy ironwork hearth, the blazing Flammbraggyrds are spirits created on occasion when a weary fighting man dies asleep in front of a fireplace. Sometimes, these soldiers were top professionals, but just as often they were the gouty, drunken, or slothful. When a man attains Flammbraggyrd status his energy becomes limitless and barely restrained. He will wander, undisciplined and furious at being cheated into a new existence, until the unmistakable scent of braggyrd-ash (a fine powder substance emitted on the breath of Flammbraggyrd) draws him to his kin. In battle they wield pokers, tongs, fire shovels, and bellows, heated to an eye-splintering white. Though fearsome, Flammbraggyrds can be genial in a bellowing manner and, as well as enjoying hot mead and beer, make a mean cup of tea.

Due to their affinity with iron (see below), Flammbraggyrds will often be employed or magically enslaved by those wishing to assassinate or capture certain fey personages. If employed, prices vary wildly from troupe to troupe. Though they hit hard, it is worth noting that, due to their blustery, rambunctious nature, they are often unpredictable and inept at identifying the fairy in question.

(While they are created from expired humans, Flammbraggyrds are a compressed embodiment of soldierly fervour. They are thus not undead and cannot be turned.)

Special Abilities

Heat Metals: Anyone struck by a Flammbraggyrd's bare hand must save vs spells or find any metal about their person become unbearably hot over the course of 1d3 rounds. At the referee's discretion, this can range from minor burns, in the case of jewellery, buckles et al, to lethality, in the case of those wearing chain or plate mail.

Iron Resolve: Flammbraggyrd are always considered to be wielding iron and inflict double damage against fairies.

Weaknesses

Extinguishable: A Flammbraggyrd cannot survive long without its burning hearth. The raging heat inherent in these beings means the fire may only be extinguished by magical means (normal water instantly evaporates, doing no harm), but if this occurs, the Flammbraggyrd has a 4-in-6 chance of dying per round.

Traits

1. Irritatingly focussed on the minutiae of greaves.
2. Takes genial backslapping way too far.
3. Iron hard-head, glistening ginger moustaches.
4. Keen tactician, but fails to conclude plans.
5. Febrile, snappy. Inexpertly tries to juxtapose attitudes of choler and joy.
6. Dashing boots and a hat of iron curlicues.

Encounters

1. Playing a bizarre combination of drinking game and close order parade manoeuvres.
2. Marching up and down a trail leading to the nearest hamlet, spitting sparks and loudly explaining to passersby the upcoming fate of the fairy-duke dwelling in the house yonder. The actual denizen — a terrified lorimer — has literally no idea what they are talking about.
3. A series of scorched clearings have tactical diagrams burnt into the ground. Following these reveals a group of brawling Flammbraggyrds getting nowhere fast in their mission.
4. Hiding in a nearby cave while an Obscurant Mope (see sidebar) wafts around expounding half-baked pacifist platitudes.

Groups of Flammbraggyrds sometimes attract the attention of depressing smoke spirits known as Obscurant Mopes. These beings seem to take pleasure in dismally pointing out the cruel barbarity inherent to soldiering, putting a downer on any Flammbraggyrd mission. Flammbraggyrds thus beleaguered do their best to hide away or to insult and berate the Mope in an effort to disperse it.

Obscurant Mope: HD 5, AC 8, Att: 1 × 1d4+1 (envelop 30'×30' area) + 50% chance of snuffing out light sources, Def: only harmed by magic or high winds, MI 9, Mv 60'(20'), AI L, XP 500.





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