



A Pathbinder Adventure Anthology bor 1th-10th Levels

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Tales of the Old Margreve

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The spells in the "New Margreve Spells" section and the monster statistics in the Bestiary section are open content. All other material – including descriptions, proper names, characters, story elements, designer's notes, geographical and setting material, flavor text, and society information – is product identity.

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•••• Old Margreve Gazetteer ••••

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Fiction.	. 4
Old Margreve Gazetteer	. 6
The Old Margreve.	. 7
Margreve Sites, Inhabitants, and Adventure Hooks	
Magic in the Margreve	20
New Margreve Spells	. 22
New Margreve Incantations	23
Margreve Bestiary	24
Ala	. 24
Child of the Briar	. 25
Deer Centaur (Alseid)	. 26
Green Hussar	. 27
Leshy	. 28
Myling	. 29
Rusalka	. 30
SAP DEMON	. 31
Suturefly	. 32
VILA	. 33
Zmey	. 34
Zmey Headling	. 35
Hollow	36
Adventure Background	36
Adventure Summary	. 36
Levoça: A Troubled Village	. 36
Before Today	. 38
Day 1: The Wolves	40
Day 2: The Hollow Man Comes Knocking	. 41
Day 3 & Beyond	. 43
The Singing Tree	. 43
The Honey Queen	45
Adventure Background	45
Adventure Summary	. 45
Adventure Hook	45
Introduction	. 45
Part 1: In the Forest	. 46
Part 2: Among the Effildawnan	. 47
Part 3: In the Honey Cave	. 48
Concluding the Adventure	. 53
Challenge of the Fang	54
Adventure Background	54
Adventure Summary	. 54
Adventure Hooks	. 54
Part 1: Once Upon a Time in the Fog	54
Part 2: The Paths of Gamayun	. 57
Part 3: The Belly of the Beast	60
Concluding the Adventure	62

1. 100

(CABLE

The Griffon Hatchling Heist	63
Adventure Background	. 63
Adventure Summary	. 63
Adventure Hooks	. 63
Introduction	. 63
Part 1: To the Tower	. 64
Part 2: Stealthily through the Still tower	. 65
Part 3: Hatchlings!	. 70
Part 4: Escape from the Still Tower	. 71
Concluding the Adventure	
Gall of the Spider Crone	72
Adventure Background	. 72
Adventure Summary	. 72
Adventure Hooks	. 72
Part 1: The Pregnant Woman Upstairs	
Part 2: Into the Woods	. 75
Part 3: Mavra's House	. 78
Part 4: Back at the Inn	. 80
Concluding the Adventure	. 82
Blood and Thorns	
Adventure Background	. 83
Adventure Summary	
Adventure Hooks	
Introduction	
Part 1: The Handfasting	
Part 2: A Thorny Problem	
Part 3: Kingdom of the Briar	
Concluding the Adventure	. 93
Grandmother's Fire	
Adventure Background	
Adventure Summary	
Adventure Hooks	
Part 1: Proper Hunted	
Part 2: Into the Bush	
Part 3: The Heart of the Matter	
Concluding the Adventure	
8	102
Adventure Background	
Adventure Summary	
Adventure Hooks	
Introduction	
Part 1: A Troubled Village	
Part 2: Hidden Agendas	
Part 3: Into the Heart	
Part 4: The Zmeytrap	
Concluding the Adventure	. 110

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For Mikhail Gave the Moonlit King Fis First Taste of Good Forest Beer

RCELAS THE BARD'S NOTE: The lands in and around the Old Margreve Forest are alive with tales both light and dark. One scarcely begins a conversation with a Margrevian when they will say, "This reminds me of a story that my grandmother once told..." And then you are on a journey through a landscape peopled by mighty warriors, tragic lovers, unspeakable horrors, and a seemingly endless array of fools who offended the forest and met terrible ends.

When the cooking-fires are burning low or when beer is set before them, the woodcutters of the Old Margreve tell tales of the greatest of their number: Mikhail the Woodcutter, also known as Mikhail of the Margreve or Mikhail of the Forest. A mighty figure who could fell 100 trees with a sweep of his axe, Mikhail went mad when his family was taken from him and carved the Great Northern Road out of the forest in his desperate and doomed attempt to find them. His fate is not clear: some say his quest took him into the Heart of the Forest, where he lives still. Others say his body lies in a secret tomb somewhere along the road, along with his magic axe.

One day when Mikhail the Woodcutter was coming home after a hard day's work in the forest, he heard the sound of merry-making deep in the woods and smelled the fine smell of meat on the spit. As I said, it was the end of the day, and Mikhail had a powerful hunger and thirst on him. His stomach growled like a dragon, and his mouth watered as he thought of the good food that lay beyond the trees. "I will go see who it is," he said to himself, "and maybe they will share their meat and drink in exchange for a good tale or service." And so he went.

Soon he came to a clearing, and what did he find but the Moonlit King and his court resting after a day's hunting in the Old Margreve. The king and his courtiers lay on silken pillows beneath a canopy of midnight blue and drank fine wine from silver goblets, while deer and boar roasted over magical fires on spits turned by the king's slaves.

As Mikhail stood wondering what he ought to alo (for he knew tales of poor mortals who crossed the Moonlit King's path and regretted it), the king's courtiers saw him. "This human has stumbled on us unawares," they said to each other. "Let us call him over, and we will have some sport with him." And so they did. Mikhail went when they called, but he said to himself, "I will keep my wits about me."

When Mikhail stood before the king and his courtiers, the courtiers laughed at his simple clothes and the dirt on his hands and the mud on his boots. They said to him, "Come, man, and rest your weary body on one of our fine pillows."

But Mikhail said, "Ah, generous lords! I cannot rest upon your fine pillows, for as you see, I am covered in filth and would spoil them."

The courtiers laughed and said, "You are wise to refuse, for if you had rested on one of our pillows you would have fallen into a deep sleep and never awoken." (The Moonlit King said nothing because he was a king and Mikhail was only a woodcutter.)

Then the courtiers offered Mikhail a plate saying, "Come, man, and sate your hunger with our fine food."

But Mikhail said, "Ah, most excellent of lords! I cannot accept your kind offer, for you see, as a poor woodcutter, I live on naught but stale bread and illcooked mutton, and your food would be much too fine for me."

The courtiers laughed and said, "You are wise to refuse, for if you had tasted our food you would have become our slave, and we would have carried you back to Shadow to serve us for 100 years." (The Moonlit King said nothing, because he was a king and Mikhail was only a woodcutter.)

Then the courtiers offered Mikhail a silver goblet brimming with wine saying, "Come, man, and slake your thirst with our fine wine." And full of mischief they said, "But perhaps you will tell us that you have no stomach for strong drink."

This, Mikhail could not abide. He took the goblet offered him, drank it to the dregs, and gave it back

to the courtiers. In a voice all innocence he said to them, "Ah, greatest of lords! Thank you for that most refreshing drink. Truth, it is as mild as the milk given by my village's best goat."

The courtiers were astonished at this and called for stronger wine. When Mikhail drank it he said, "Ah! This reminds me of water dipped from the clear brook next to my house."

The courtiers were again astonished and called for the strongest wine they had. When Mikhail drank it he said, "Ah! My lords, this draught reminds me of when, as a boy, I would beg my parents for a taste of strong drink, and they gave me fruit-juice saying, "This is strong wine.""

At this the Moonlit King could not remain silent. "Sir!" he said. "You have drunk three goblets full of our strongest wine and call it milk, water, and fruitjuice. How can this be?"

Mikhail said to him, "Oh king, I am born of the Old Margreve, where men drink good, strong forest beer. It nourishes us when we are weaned from our mothers' breasts, and it is the last thing to pass our lips before we close our eyes for the final sleep. For taste and potency, I tell you that it surpasses all other drinks in the world."

The king said, "Let us taste this good forest beer, and if it is not as you say, we shall drag you into Shadow where our hunting-dogs will bite and tear your flesh for all eternity, yet you shall not die."

The king bade his servant to fetch some good forest beer. This he did at once, returning in the blink of an eye with seven great kegs. He tapped the first of these, and soon, the king and his courtiers and Mikhail all held great tankards of good forest beer. When the brew passed their lips, the king and his courtiers looked at each other in amazement and said, "We have drunk at the hearths and tables of thousands of worlds, from the abodes of the gods to the devils' own inn; and we have never tasted ought as fine as the beer of the Old Margreve!"

And so the king and his courtiers and Mikhail made merry throughout the night, singing and joking and dicing and dancing, and when the seven kegs were empty, they cried for seven more. So lively were they that no creature of the forest got a wink of sleep that night. Even Baba Yaga at last put her head out of her hut and shouted for peace. In the hour before daybreak, the king called for an end to their revels. Before the king and his company returned to Shadow, he said to Mikhail, "With my own hand I give you this axe. It is called Woman's Scorn, for there is nothing so sharp in all the world. With it, you can cleave anything that stands before you, whether 'tis wood, flesh or stone, as if you cleft the air." Then he blew his hunting-horn, and he and his courtiers and their horses, slaves, and servants, were gone.

That is how Mikhail the Woodcutter gave the Moonlit King his first taste of good forest beer. And once a year since that day, when the Moonlit King comes a-hunting in the Old Margreve, he always stops at the inn where they serve the best beer, and drinks his fill of that fine brew.

And that inn is my inn, and devils take the man who calls me a liar!

-Wade Rockett





nce upon a time, we feared the deep dark forest. Back in those early gaming days, the woods bristled with unknown creatures, fantastic new perils, and unfamiliar magic. Mysterious lights haunted the hollows. The shadows of unnamed creatures fell upon us. And nobody knew the singular weakness of the strange figures that stepped from the oaks. Back then, the forest was a scary, wild place. A dark frontier hiding darker secrets. A dungeon without walls. For us, it was a wonderful time of innocence and discovery and adventure. A time to kiss the ring of ignorance for the novelty it bestowed.

But then, something terrible and inevitable happened. One by one, we learned all of the creatures' names, cataloged the Achilles' heel of every foe, prepared the most effective spells and protections, and armed ourselves with cold iron and silver arrows. We strode into the woods, confident in our tried-and-true strategies and assured by a CR system that promised nothing more than we could handle. A few days later, we emerged with a few scratches and yet another *ring of protection*. The novelty and the risks were fading... and so was the thrill, lost somewhere in an overgrown lot of metagame knowledge, bluster, and expectation. *Tales of the Old Margreve* rekindles our excitement in the forest. This gazetteer and adventure anthology revisits and reinvigorates the deep dark woods, breathing a new sense of wonder into the most classic fantasy environment of all. We and the patrons who helped design this book hope it has the same effect on your players.

In *Tales of the Old Margreve*, your heroes trek past crumbled griffon towers, over stiles and shepherds' fields, to where the lonely road vanishes under the dark canopy of the Old Margreve Forest. Deep in its misty hollows, new creatures and strange superstitions inspired by Eastern European folklore come to life in all of their Old World glory. Here, the rusalka's song rises over the crackle of a midnight fire. Here, those who ignore the Old Ways are never seen again.

Under the boughs of the Margreve, your heroes face the wiles and claws of Old World creatures, ply the power of folk magic, and earn a place in fireside tales. The rewards are new... and so are the risks.

Welcome to our campsite at the edge of the Old Margreve. Beyond our fire lies a great wall of trees and, beyond that, a vast unexplored wilderness the size of Ireland. Heft your pack, light your torch, and muster your courage. It is time to head inside. •••• Old Margreve Gazetteer •••

The Old Margreve

The bills rise wild, and there are valleys with deep woods that no axe has ever cut. There are dark, narrow glens where the trees slope fantastically, and where thin brooklets trickle without ever having caught the glint of sunlight.

... The old folk have gone away, and foreigners do not like to live there... The place is not good for imagination, and does not bring restful dreams at night."

-H.P. Lovecraft, "The Colour Out of Space"

The Old Margreve Forest is an ancient place, already old when most of the gods were young. In time immemorial, it cradled the great spirits of nature, and its loam felt the footfalls of the old ones. As millennia passed, its roots swallowed rivers, its canopy stole the sun from vast tracts of land, and its groves crested mountains that have since weathered to hills.

In all that time, the Margreve has changed little. Time seems to transpire around it, lapping at its edges like the sea around an island. Though kingdoms rise and fall beyond its borders, the Margreve remains a world apart—a place where memories and old magic linger in the rings of trees and where new ideas never quite take root.

MOOD AND MYSTERY

Very little is known about the Margreve's interior. There is simply something wrong with the place, something that unsettles the nerves, plays upon fears, and discourages exploration. Too many stories of danger exit the wood and too many travelers do not. The few pathfinders who dare the Margreve's deep trails return with strange scars, stranger stories, and too few prizes to warrant either.

From the outside, the Margreve looks like any Old World forest. In some places, dark, tangled, and foreboding. In other places, sun dappled and open, like an evergreen palace of towering tree pillars, ivy carpet, and wind-rustled canopy. But there is something more to it. Something hiding behind the wind and the leaves and the trees. Something living and vigilant. A presence that none who stand dwarfed amongst the trees can deny.

The Margreve is a numinous place. It evokes feelings that sages deconstruct into three terms. *Mysterium tremendum* unsettles the nerves of interlopers, evoking fear and trembling, especially in first time visitors. *Mysterium fascinans* conjures awe and intimidation as the interloper delves deeper. And nearest the Heart of the Forest, *mysterium deus* evokes an unsettling feeling of being in proximity to a supernatural or divine "other."

Most describe this faceless "other" as a dark, sinister presence, but perhaps, they are simply not in touch with the natural order of this ancient place. Deep-woods druids cast the Margreve in a brighter, if not wilder, light, describing the supernatural presence as beautiful, terrible, and bestial. They talk of "Margreve" as if it were a living creature with a personality and will of its own. Men of the cloth reject the idea that the forest is alive but acknowledge that some Great Presence lives therein. Worshippers of Porevit and Yarila claim to hear the whispers of a withdrawn aspect of their Green Gods. Others sense older gods, inimical to man and dwarf, brooding in the forest's vastness and waiting for the age of man to pass. Perhaps they are all right. Even Baba Yaga confesses, "The Margreve came before such recent inventions as gods and spells and names and language."

MARGREVE ATTITUDE

The Margreve's starting attitude is indifferent toward those born in the Margreve and unfriendly otherwise. It is easier to fall from the Margreve's good graces than to rise in them.

The following are examples of conditions that lower the Margreve's attitude toward you by one notch. The Margreve never forgets these conditions. If a condition is met more than once, its effect does not stack.

- You have instigated a forest fire in the Margreve.
- You have a living or dead blood relative toward whom the Margreve has a worse attitude.

The following are examples of conditions that raise the Margreve's attitude one notch. The Margreve's attitude never rises above friendly. If the condition changes, you lose the corresponding attitude rise.

- You are actively pursuing the druid class.
- You feed the Margreve with spell energy daily (see *feed the forest* in the **MAGIC IN THE MARGREVE** section).
- You are of the animal, fey, or plant type.

THE LIFE OF THE MARGREVE

The Margreve is 3/4 location and 1/4 magical beast. Its personality, will, and mindset are ancient, bordering on alien. It enjoys perceptions and powers beyond understanding—and often beyond the notice—of those who dare to enter its bounds. It nourishes itself. It defends itself. And it remembers those who have challenged it in the past. It is in many ways like any other creature, with the notable exception that it is the size of a country.

The Margreve employs subtle but effective tactics to expel or kill interlopers. To a virtually timeless forest like the Margreve, these actions occur with rapid response times. To a target creature with a lifespan of only 1 or 2 centuries, however, the Margreve's actions seem patient and calculating.

SENSES: The Margreve feels. Keenly. It enjoys forest-wide tremorsense, keen enough to pinpoint the location of any creature and identify it by species. Some say the forest recognizes individuals by their unique footfalls, but this rumor is inaccurate; it spawns from the accurate observation that deep woods inhabitants sometimes "step" like other creatures to disguise their species from the ever vigilant trees. Inhabitants worry that the forest "feels" their voices, so secrets are often spoken in whispers while rapping loudly on a tree.

The Margreve can indeed recognize individuals: not by their footfalls but by the blood they spill. The first time an individual bleeds upon the forest floor, the Margreve knows him or her. It tracks individuals with tremorsense and catalogues their acts under the signature of blood until they leave the forest. When an individual re-enters and bleeds again, the forest "remembers" the blood and connects current activity to the catalogues of the past.

Often the Margreve connects newcomers to blood-relatives who spilled their blood in the past, perhaps many generations or even centuries before if the bloodline runs pure. Newcomers whose ancestors held strong positive relationships with the forest may feel welcomed by the woods, if only in some small, mysterious way. Those whose ancestors performed dark deeds in the Margreve's borders feel a great threatening presence all around them. In many ways, the rumor that the Margreve punishes men for the sins of their fathers is correct.

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.... Tales of the Old Margreve

The Margreve's recognition of creatures by their blood may be why so many thorns grow along its outskirts. And it may be one reason why the Margreve abhors bloodless constructs and exsanguinated undead.

MEMORY: What the Margreve consumes, it remembers. In addition to recognizing and remembering creatures by the blood they spill, the Margreve absorbs many of the memories and much of the knowledge of those who expire beneath its canopy. To something as old and alien as the Margreve, this knowledge is rarely valuable on an individual level, but it helps to classify the attitude and refine the archetype of the individual's species.

Some say that the Margreve is ravenous for blood and knowledge. Dig up a creature newly buried in its soil, and become a believer. Roots thick and thin snake through every vein in its body. Someone just 2 days in the ground must be chopped from the very trees in order to be removed.

ATTITUDE: The forest dreams of ancient times, of the behaviors of long-dead creatures and pre-civilized forest dwellers, just as people dream of idealized crops, forests, or orchards. What the fledgling races of men and elves call progress, the Margreve considers pale shadows, intolerable deviations into the madness of civilization, and corruptions of the green and ancient state of life. As a consequence, the Margreve considers correct those behaviors of old, and incorrect behaviors must be pruned like limb and blossom.

Interlopers who exhibit incorrect behavior take their lives in their hands when they step into the woods. Like any NPC, the Margreve has an attitude toward each inhabitant and interloper based on the forest's memories of their actions and their adherence to the Old Ways. Newcomers to the Margreve inherit the attitude of their closest bloodrelative, perhaps a distant forebear, who bled on the forest floor.

MOVEMENT: Like all intelligent creatures, the Margreve has learned that the element of surprise provides a great tactical advantage. The forest tends to act when creatures are not looking. Since the forest cannot see, it uses its keen tremorsense to determine when target creatures are still and their heartbeats slow. This typically occurs when creatures are sleeping, but it is not uncommon for a relaxed (or drunken) person on watch to hear or notice movement while sitting quietly at a campfire.

The Margreve may move paths, add forks, or redirect game trails at will. Explorers who wake in the Margreve may feel disoriented, as if their camp rotated during the night. Trails that should lead deeper, now lead home. Landmarks cannot be trusted. A compass is the explorer's only friend. The best advice comes from a handful of successful trappers and furriers. "Don't make any appointments," they say, "A path may take 3 days or it may take a fortnight. It just depends." Superstitious parties pass by large ancient trees on the same side, lest they risk separation. Folk say that night comes early to the

Folk say that night comes early to the Margreve. This is true not only because of the forest's canopy but because the Margreve can thicken (or thin) it at will. During the day, the Margreve filters the sun's rays, blocking most before they reach the forest floor and creating an acre of dim light centered on targets whose species suffer in such conditions. Vampires and undead travelers experience the opposite effect, as the canopy opens above them and subjects them to the full glare of the sun. During the night, the Margreve typically hides the moon and stars, making navigation by celestial bodies impossible and the prospect of getting lost dangerously likely. The exception is for lycanthropes, whose wildness the Margreve favors and for whom the Margreve never withholds the moon.

One of the Margreve's most insidious defenses is to starve interlopers. It moves its roots to redirect streams underground and withhold fresh water. It shakes its branches to spook game and withhold fresh food. An old Margreve saying, "Deer and rabbits dance around the starving man," has been depicted in wood whittled by emaciated men and found near their bones.

VOICE: In addition to the challenges of disorientation and starvation, an interloper must come to grips with the forest's haunting sounds and voices. The Margreve possesses the power to listen to vibrations and repeat them anywhere within its borders. It does not understand languages or the meaning of sounds to those who hear them, but it often experiments with the repetition of sounds, and it has catalogued the reactions species have to them. The Margreve may repeat the roar of a mountain lion or the wail of a banshee to scare interlopers into perilous terrain or the domain of a territorial creature. The forest cannot reproduce convincing sounds from memory, so it replays them live. In the Heart of the Forest, the Margreve squeezes the "Briarbound Maiden" whenever it needs to throw her sympathetic screams as a lure. And it has learned that whispered conversations or the branch-whipping sounds of a storm 400 miles away have a disconcerting effect on creatures standing alone amidst still branches.

These strange, disconnected sounds have prompted many rumors amongst neighboring folk. Some falsely believe that the Margreve has the power to teleport creatures within its borders. They say this explains why dreadful creatures can be anywhere (can't you hear one now?!) and why people get lost inside. Most folk simply believe that the Margreve is haunted. It is, but forest crones know that these carried echoes are not true evidence. In fact, some listen to the leaves to gather imprecise information about distant areas of the woods. Baba Yaga and her sisters have even mastered a type of clairaudience by stepping into trees or burying themselves next to roots that vibrate with carried sounds.

The Margreve also mutters to itself in a language of rustling leaves and clattering twigs. *Commune with nature* or *comprehend languages* can tap into one of a hundred, alien, forest "conversations" with itself. Few have the patience to tune into a contextless fragment that may take the Margreve a month to utter completely.

THE POWER OF THE MARGREVE

AURA OF RUST: Iron and iron alloys rust quickly in the Margreve. Though the effect does not destroy thick blades overnight, the sharpening and replacement cost of rusted axes and saw mill blades make

> large scale logging unprofitable. A dagger becomes broken in 1 day and destroyed in 2; a light metal-hafted weapon becomes broken in 5 days and destroyed in 10. *Mending* and *make mhole* effectively repair rusted objects. Noncasters arm themselves with bottles of deer tallow, linseed oil, and other costly oils to prevent rusting of weapons and armor. Ferrous creatures, including any with exposed steel parts, take 3d6 rusting damage/ week spent in the Margreve.

> > **AURA OF WILDNESS:** A mild aura of wildness permeates the Margreve. Bardic tales counsel travelers to abandon or kill

•••• Old Margreve Gazetteer ••••

animal companions that grow aggressive under the Margreve's canopy. In one famous song, a ranger's cat transforms into a smilodon and spears him with its saber-teeth. In another, a snake transforms into a chthonic creature with horned plates and gliding membranes. Though exaggerated and romanticized, these songs communicate the core truth that, in time, tamed beasts regress to feral states. And occasionally, devolved creatures do emerge from the forest.

The Margreve's aura of wildness also affects intelligent creatures. Lycanthropes and individuals with the wild shape class feature must struggle to assume humanoid form. Even natural lycanthropes must use force of will to bend their shape to humanoid.

Some claim that eating of the Margreve's bounty introduces a mote of wildness to the soul. Though this rumor is ultimately unsubstantiated, rare foods procured from the woods continue to sell as aphrodisiacs in the city.

AWAKEN AND CONTROL: The Margreve's ability to move trees, roots, and branches is a very minor and temporary version of its full power to awaken and control Margreve-born flora and fauna. No one knows the limit of this power, but bards sing of a great Margreve expansion, when "the lands east of the Cloudwalls fell to an army of treants to rival the legions of angels." In modern times, the Margreve has limited itself to awakening animals, spawning green hussars, and creating

GLOBAL MARGREVE POWERS AT A GLANCE

For the purposes of its spell-like abilities and effects, assume the Margreve is a 20th-level caster with a 30 Charisma. All related save DCs are Charisma-based (10 + spell level + Charisma modifier).

MANIPULATION

- ANIMATE OBJECTS (SP) At will; forestwide. As the spell, except the target must be a dead Margreve-born animal, and the effect ends if the target leaves the forest.
- ANIMATE PLANTS (SP) At will; forestwide. As the spell, except the target must be a Margreve-born plant and the effect ends if the target leaves the forest. Typically used to redirect or remove paths, add forks, thicken or thin canopy, move branches, and channel or relocate water by moving roots.
- AURA OF RUST (EX) Constant; forestwide. Non-magical ferrous metal objects take 1 damage/day; this ability ignores hardness. Objects gain the broken condition once losing half their hp.

Mending and make whole effectively repair rusted objects. Bottles of deer tallow, linseed oil, and other special oils prevent rusting. Each bottle costs 5 sp and holds 5 applications. Each application treats an item no bigger than a weapon or shield for 1 day. Armor requires 2 applications. Ferrous creatures take 3d6 rusting damage/week.

- AURA OF WILDNESS (EX) Constant; forestwide. Domesticated creatures must save 1/day or become untamed as the snap the leash Margreve spell. Lycanthropes receive only 1 Constitution check/day to assume humanoid form. Natural lycanthropes must roll as afflicted lycanthropes to assume humanoid form. Individuals with the wild shape class feature make a Constitution check as an afflicted lycanthrope to change to humanoid form.
- AWAKEN (SP) 1/day/square mile. As the spell, except the target must be a Margreve-born plant or animal, and the target serves the forest indefinitely.
- CHARM MONSTER (SP) At will; forestwide. As the spell, except the target must be a Margreve-born plant or animal—including familiars and vermin—and the

permanent protectors like treants and leshy. All serve the forest and many act as pure extensions of the forest's mysterious will.

Some creatures, however, the Margreve does not awaken but merely controls for a time. Stories abound of biting ants invading bed rolls, poisonous grubs spoiling food, and wasps swarming on weapon hafts.

Mortal magic also pales before the Margreve's power to awaken and control. Familiars drawn from the Margreve serve the caster... when the caster's instructions do not contradict the forest's will.

The Margreve's power to awaken and control animals, vermin, and plants also transcends death. A dead animal, even one already cooked, animates if the Margreve so chooses. Though rare, it has occurred enough times to prompt forest dwellers to ritually bless their food. They have a saying: "Thank the Margreve for your breakfast, for the forest let you catch it. Thank the Margreve for your supper, lest it rise up and flee."

The Margreve can rejuvenate, warp, or rot dead wood in its borders. Targeted wood need not have originated in the Margreve. Woes betide the archer whose arrow shafts bend, the defender whose shield rots, and the fighter who weapon haft blossoms with flower and thorn.

REINCARNATE: The Margreve's power over death also allows it to spontaneously reincarnate fauna, sometimes in the bodies of dead humanoids. Disturbing stories of "the ferals" describe ordinary folk

charmed target understands the forest's desire.

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GHOST SOUND (Ex) At will; forestwide. As the spell, except that the sound is real and not illusory. The sound may include speech, and the sound must be a sound currently being produced somewhere else in the forest.

REINCARNATE (SP) 1/day/square mile. As the spell, except the target must be a Margreve-born animal, and the new body may either be newly formed as per the spell or a body of a whole creature that is less than 1 hour deceased. If the target is non-intelligent, the Margreve may awaken it post reincarnation.

- SIPHON MAGIC (EX) Constant; forestwide. (See the MAGIC IN THE MARGREVE section for details.)
- WARP WOOD (SP) At will; forestwide. As the spell, except the target wood must be dead, and the ability includes rotting wood and rejuvenating rotted wood.

MEMORY

The Margreve remembers individuals and catalogues their deeds. It can connect individuals to the deeds of blood-relatives and millennia-old ancestors.

ABSORB KNOWLEDGE (SP) Constant; forestwide. The Margreve absorbs and remembers the knowledge possessed by those who die on the forest floor.

Treat the Margreve's knowledge of a particular fact as if it had cast *speak with dead* on the corpse and the corpse received the normal *speak with dead* Will save.

SENSES

Using bloodsense and tremorsense, the Margreve tracks individuals until they leave the forest. When an individual returns, the Margreve must recognize it again by its blood. Until then, the forest knows only its species.

- **BLOODSENSE (EX)** Constant; forestwide. The Margreve can identify individuals by their blood, when spilled.
- **TREMORSENSE (Ex)** Constant; forestwide. In addition to the normal functions of tremorsense, the Margreve can also identify an individual's species.



.... Tales of the Old Margreve

who wandered into the Margreve as people and reemerged with the disposition of a rabid animal. In truth, these unfortunates perished in the wood, and while their souls have passed on, their risen bodies now host the awakened soul of a badger, owl, or wolf.

SIPHONING MAGIC: Sun, rain, and soil provide the basics for any forest to thrive. The Margreve takes more. It siphons magic from every spell cast within its borders. This siphoning effect evidences itself in small ways, depending on the spell. For example, when the

Margreve feeds upon a fraction of the magic of a *cure light wounds* spell, the grass around the wounded becomes lush and vibrant. Such "spell marks" last for days and, to those who have learned to read them, reveal a great deal about the nature and power of spells cast and the events that may have transpired.

The Margreve desires casters to cast more spells so that it can siphon more spell energy. Ironically, the siphoning encourages them to do so because that first *cure light wounds* or *ice storm* was not as effective as usual, and the caster may be obliged to repeat the casting or cast something else.

Once a spell is cast, the Margreve recognizes that the caster "has food" and capitalizes on the opportunity to extract more spells to siphon. By manipulating trails and carrying sounds, the Margreve may route dangerous creatures toward spellcasters in the hopes that more siphonable magic arises as the caster defends, attacks, and heals.

Ignorant members of Zobeck's Arcane Collegium argue that the Margreve hates spellcasters and clearly tries to kill them. In fact, the Margreve has no interest in killing a spellcaster, as the act would result in less siphoning. This is why the Margreve routes less powerful creatures toward the caster first. It routes more powerful species only when the lesser creatures prove utterly ineffective as spell prompters. On the other hand, if a routed creature spills a great deal of a caster's blood, the Margreve frequently chases the predator away to prevent the caster from dying. Near-dead wizards have staggered from the Margreve with stories of bees covering their foes' faces or tree branches crushing the wild boar that nearly gored them to death. Some have found profound meaning in such events and begun pursuing druidic vocations.

It is natural to imagine the Margreve routing challenging creatures toward the PCs. But sometimes, the creatures it routes toward a spellcaster *are* the PCs.

The Margreve's relatively few permanent inhabitants provide a base amount of magic for the Margreve to feed upon. The magic is woven into daily rituals, blessings, curses, sacrifices, and children's rhymes. These cantrip level spells hold little magic, but they are an integral part of every inhabitant's daily life, repeated at meals, before and after rest, and during many common tasks. The magic is so slight and provided so regularly that the Margreve does not send challenge creatures against inhabitants in order to prompt more magic to siphon. In fact, the forest protects inhabitants precisely because they feed it habitually. The Margreve feeds upon their magic like a whale on krill.

Baba Yaga suspects that the Margreve hides "batteries" of siphoned spell energy somewhere in the Heart of the Wood. She has yet to locate one. If one exists, it may hold devastating spell potential, aggregate magic siphoned across a country-sized area over a period of centuries.

CUSTOMIZING THE MARGREVE EXPERIENCE

The degree to which the Margreve uses its powers to intervene against change, interlopers, and acts against the Old Ways depends on the mood you want to elicit. A less aggressive Margreve tends to evoke a more mysterious forest, filled with occasionally justified superstitions, unexplained disappearances, strange creatures, ghost stories, and

aphoristic tales. Fear derives from the unknown, and it is never quite clear whether the Margreve or its inhabitants are responsible for the effects that the PCs experience. The Margreve reacts subtly and sporadically. One cannot test cause and effect. One cannot trust senses. Perhaps darkness has fallen preternaturally early or perhaps it is just later than one thinks. Perhaps the trail always bent toward the deer centaur graveyard yesterday. Perhaps not. With a less aggressive Margreve, the setting is one of ominous foreboding, as much about mystery as about fear.

Lower aggression could result from relatively slow responses to stimuli. Or the incredibly vast forest might simply not always address concerns as small as humanoid trespassers. With this option, the powers of the Margreve are something like an immune system, designed to deal with such trivial invaders without requiring conscious will or much energy. This does not imply that the Margreve does not have a consciousness but simply that the powers detailed above pale in comparison with the true powers of the Margreve, should it ever deign to turn its eye and attention to a grievous assault on its body.

To elicit feelings of a major power at play, ratchet up the Margreve's aggressiveness. Outsiders are never welcome and rarely tolerated. Hostile leshy patrol the borders, discourage encroachment by untaming livestock in adjacent fields, and thwart casual exploration by thickening underbrush with vines and brambles. The forest responds to undeterred interlopers quickly and consistently. Stepping into the Margreve demands the same care taken in a dungeon. The forest moves from backdrop to active participant, warping and rusting outsiders' weapons at critical moments, routing challenging creatures toward spellcasters frequently, and twisting trails toward peril without fail.

Elevated aggression might be temporary or permanent. If long lasting, inhabitants and outsiders can, through experience, predict the Margreve's reaction to their actions, and through trial and error, learn a great deal about how the Margreve works. Fear and mystery diminish as PCs begin thinking of the Margreve as a foe with predictable reactions. Predictions naturally spawn clever tactics and spells to thwart those reactions. Obsidian blades sidestep warping and rust. Levitating casters fool the forest's tremorsense, and spells catch their blood to hide their identity. Until the Margreve turns its full attention and power against the brash invaders, an appropriately equipped party, armed with spells to deceive the Margreve, might enjoy as much success as one which learns and observes the Old Ways.

Whichever level of aggression you choose, factor in the Margreve's attitude toward each PC. This allows the PCs some control over their environment, and through their actions, the opportunity to temper (or inflame) the Margreve's aggression toward each of them. •••• Old Margreve Gazetteer ••••

Margreve Sites, Inhabitants, and Adventure Rooks

RECENT HISTORY

For centuries, shadow fey ruled the Margreve. They allied with the human of House Stross while that family ruled Zobeck. The Black Prince of the Shadow Fey allowed the Stross nobles (and only the nobles) to hunt in the forest and construct a castle in the Western Margreve. But 80 years ago, that all changed when Zobeck's Great Revolt brought death to House Stross. The shadow fey and human alliance fizzled, and the castle, renamed Shadowcrag, fell into disuse. The Margreve still retains a certain hushed atmosphere of wild decay and noble privilege. But once again, it has grown opaque to outsiders.

GEOGRAPHY

The Margreve is a sprawling, trackless forest of 32,000 square miles. Mountains, hills, rivers, and swamps corral and snake through a vast wilderness of old growth and dense underbrush. The River Argent forms the Margreve's winding southern border and separates the forest from the Free City of Zobeck and the Ironcrag Cantons to Zobeck's west. The Dwarven Cantons and Grisal Marches lie to the Margreve's west. In the north, low mountains separate the Margreve from the undead kingdoms of Morgau and Doresh. In ancient times, the Cloudwall Mountains formed the Margreve's eastern border, but the trees have since crested the mountains' spine and the southern Black Hills extension. A full 1/3 of the forest (over 10,000 square miles) now lies east of the Cloudwalls, flowing down toward the open steppe of centaur territory.

West of the Cloudwalls, the Great Northern Road divides the other 2/3 of the Margreve fairly evenly. This wagon-wide road travels north from Zobeck to Castle Valach and is the only trail known to proceed from one side of the Margreve to the other. Thousands of square miles of dangerous and unexplored wilderness flank the road.

THE GREAT NORTHERN ROAD

"Ol' Mikhail, a family man, took the Old Margreve's trees. So the Old Margreve took his family and brought him to his knees. Ol' Mikhail, a vengeful man, embraced his ax and pain. As it had his heart, he vowed to cut the Margreve in twain."

—The Legend of the Great Northern Road The Great Northern Road stretches over 200 miles from Zobeck to Castle Valach, on its way to the city of Bratislor in the north. Though only a wagon-width wide in most places, the forest seems unable to totally reclaim it. For reasons lost to time, the road remains a scar cut down the Margreve's face. High overhead, the branches of flanking trees reach for each other, turning the road into a long tunnel with a tall gothic arch. Some sun reaches the road's travelers, but night falls early even in high summer.

Due to boggy, rocky, and overgrown stretches, travelers frequently take a fortnight to traverse the road's 200-mile length on foot. Riders typically take 8–10 days if they pull no wagons. Coaching inns, spaced 1–3 days apart, offer travelers a respite from beasts and weather.

Though snow and cold challenge winter travelers, the road's condition suffers most from meltwaters, spring rain, and mud. Coaching inns are either closed or not prepared to cater to travelers during this time. Merchants willing to risk the Great Northern Road before the annual road opening festival in Zobeck can expect tough going, both in terms of terrain and hungry creatures emerging from the deeper hollows.

ROAD TRAVELERS AND SECURITY: The northern road is the only passable route to the rich cities of the Red Queen and the undead princes of Morgau and Doresh. As the second source of wealth for the city of Zobeck—the first being the River Argent—the Great Northern Road sees its share of travelers.

Dwarf muleteers, Kariv gypsies, and Zobeck traders keep the path from growing over. It falls to the traveler to clear trees that storms some preternaturally harsh—throw across the road. Creeks to water men and beasts abound, but superstitious travelers burden themselves with water drawn from without. Boggy sections of the road take a cart or two each year, and rocky sections cripple wheels, hooves, and ankles. It is not an easy road, certainly, but there are no dwarven tolls or the risk of centaur banditry on it either.

Small caravans of Kariv trundle along the road more frequently than any merchants dare. Four or five wagons, painted with wards and sigils, bring a trickle of goods and what pass for luxuries. Somehow, more wagons arrive in Zobeck than a traveler passes while heading in the other direction. Some claim that the Kariv have entered a costly bargain with the shadow fey, allowing the gypsies to travel a parallel shadow trail. Others say Kariv witches make their most valuable wagons invisible to conceal them from bandits. Either could be true for folk as canny and ambitious as the Kariv. Their odd ways and suspected allies engender distrust, and they frequently come to the attention of law enforcement.

The Order of the Griffon Riders in the city of Zobeck takes responsibility for security along the road. They often hire auxiliaries and irregulars for clearing out nests of bandits. Merchant houses also pool funds to buy additional security for the First Muletrain of the season.

GRIFFON TOWERS AND COACHING INNS: Many years ago, the House Stross constructed 12 Griffon Towers to defend their fortunes. Eight of them were spaced evenly along the Great Northern Road to guard its full length. Four more were constructed in the woods to guard hunting lodges, mines, or powerful wellsprings of magic. Most people assume that the towers got their name from the griffon blazons carved in their walls, but that is merely the mark of the Stross border guards.

The towers themselves have a much closer connection to griffons, as their stables, roosts, and shelters. House Stross built the towers for its griffon riders, an elite company of couriers and shock cavalry. The parsimonious council of the Free City has done away with that tradition in recent years.

Now the Margreve griffons run wild. A top predator along the forest road, they pose a constant threat to caravans and mule trains. The griffons come in both black and speckled varieties, and knowing the difference can prove critical. The black griffons are more aggressive and very fond of horseflesh; some claim they are faerie steeds. The speckled ones are shy, tamable, and may serve as animal companions to suitable heroes.

With the disbanding of the griffon riders, the abandoned Griffon Towers fell into disrepair. In spring, feral griffons nested in them, and in summer and fall, travelers took shelter behind their thick stone walls. The Free City Council saw the opportunity to make coin and sold the heavily reinforced strongholds to enterprising businessmen who turned them into Coaching Inns. These combination hostels, stables, and resupply centers double as trading forts for wagons meeting mid road.

Though these Coaching Inns inherit stalwart defenses from their Griffon Tower days, the Margreve remains a dangerous place to live and work. The inns change hands frequently. At any given time, there is a 10% chance that an inn that bustled with trade wagons last season



now sits empty, has new "owners", or is occupied by a nightmare creature from the Old World.

THE RUINED GRIFFON TOWER: Between Ol' Mikhail's Inn and the Witch's Teat Inn lies the burnt out ruins of an inn whose name no one recalls and whose walls no one dares rebuild. It sits in a logistically awkward spot for those who fear the sounds that escape it during the night, for it rests midway between the other two inns, precisely where travelers and their beasts of burden require rest.

THE EVE OF THE FOREST COACHING INN: This inn marks the midpoint of the Great Northern Road and sees the most activity as wagons meet from both directions to trade and share news. It is the only inn to offer messenger pigeons, whose tiny papers often read, "Halfway there, goods still safe." Compared to the other Coaching Inns, the Eye of the Forest is quite civilized. Defended by a full-time retinue of experienced military men and managed by Zobeck natives, the inn seems out of place, even mocking of the backward wilderness that surrounds it. Years ago, the owner discovered a tangled clearing just off the road where the forest had reclaimed a burned-down cottage. In the midst of the charred and tumbled-down ruin, there stood a large brick oven. The oven now sits in the Eye of the Forest's common room. The owner keeps the oven's cast iron door slightly ajar, and many a traveling child has creaked it open with curiosity. Inside lies a sweet reward and a blackened skeleton, the remains of a human female, hunched and shrunken with age.

THE SHADOW SISTER INN: The Kariv tell a campfire tale that has caused many travelers to press their tired horses past the Forest King Inn at the road's northern end. The inn's half-gnoll owner claims the racist Kariv invented the tale to sink his business, but the Kariv swear the tale is true. "Step from the Forest King Inn at midnight," the gypsies say, "and squint your eyes at the moon-kissed mists of the Eastern Margreve. Do you see the Shadow Sister Inn standing in the trees? Do you see the mist pour from its chimney? Do you see the shadow man squinting back at you?"

FOREST FEATURES

While travelling the Great Northern Road can be risky business, only fools and heroes branch off into the wilderness. Besides the Margreve's negative attitude toward outsiders and besides the unnatural creatures that lurk in the underbrush, natural hazards and tough terrain abound. Crevices and bogs cradle skeletons of the hapless. Razor thorns slice skin and leather. Rocky outcroppings hide dire bear and dire boar dens. Carnivorous plants lie in wait, and poisonous pollens mist into the wild.

Poor weather and limited visibility exacerbate the treacherousness.



••• Old Margreve Gazetteer ••••

Rain triggers suffocating mudslides. Snow buries landmarks. Lightning storms strike armor-clad travelers, and blizzards block passes, cripple sight, and freeze limbs.

Those who survive the Margreve's dangers return with incredible tales and bragging rights. They speak of Mountain Trees that grow upon each other, merging acre-wide groves into a single tree of mythic proportions and unbelievable heights. They speak of titanic caverns where strange creatures have built cities between colossal roots that dangle from the ceiling. And they speak of old places, alive with ancient memories that whisper and plead.

INTERLOPERS AND INHABITANTS: The intolerable taint of neighboring lands hems the Margreve in on all sides, occasionally bleeding into the forest in the form of woodcutters, interlopers, and villages. The Margreve slowly and silently swallows most. Lumberjacks and traveling companions seem to wander off and disappear. Ghost towns of palsied cottages lie abandoned and overgrown in the forest fringes. Few survive to testify to the Margreve's methods. Most interlopers simply get lost and never return to civilization. Others become servants of the wood, new creatures with loved-ones' faces standing at their relatives' windows.

Despite the dangers and intolerance of the Margreve, a few scattered permanent settlements do exist. The mysterious peoples of these backwater villages live within a complex tradition of symbiosis with the forest. They respect the forest's power, honor the covenants of their forebears, and observe what people now call "The Old Ways." Few outsiders have ever seen such inhabitants, for they rarely leave the woods. But gypsies and rangers carry disturbing stories back to campfires and public houses. Children who hear such tales grow into men who shudder at the sight of a lonely cottage amongst the trees.

In over 30,000 square miles of forest, only four human villages are known to exist. Most of their insular inhabitants live their lives without ever venturing beyond the shade of the forest's clinging boughs. One or two elected individuals, commonly sinners and defilers of the Old Ways, conduct the village's infrequent business with outsiders as a life sentence. It is a great honor to have no ancestor with this duty.

These elected villagers emerge from the woods at coaching inns to trade for salt and other rare commodities. They fear the outside world, consider it tainted, and treat its people as contagious. Pineys, as they're called, rarely make eye contact, for they believe that doing so invites disease. Some are chosen specifically because they are blind. Some are blinded as part of the punishment that saddled them with the duty to begin with. All wear protective trinkets and charms, produced by a cottage industry of village crones. Superstition overflows into their mannerisms as they appease guardian and nature spirits with habitual gestures and facial expressions.

Few outsiders have ever seen a piney in person, for the forest folk come and go as quickly as possible, often in the middle of the night when fewer tainted civilized folk are about. Some coaching inn owners describe pineys as "disturbing to view" with oversized eyes and ears. They say that pineys stare at your heart and never blink. They say that pineys' large eyes and uncomfortable mannerisms stem from living deep within the dark forest for generations, or possibly from interbreeding with fey or darker powers. Gypsies retell stories of the discovery of piney skeletons with strangely twisted limbs that no human should have. Perhaps they are just poor, inbred souls slowly degenerating in form and function. Or perhaps something sinister does transpire in those hidden villages.

THE OLD WAYS

To outsiders, a piney's life is a mysterious one, filled with strange sayings, regimented rituals, and daily traditions that seem superstitious and backward. If a person wants to live in the Margreve or even wander it safely, he or she must learn how to feed the forest with rhyme and ritual. Only this is not how the inhabitants know it. Their rhymes and rituals are merely "the Old Ways," passed down from generation to generation. To Margrevians, the Old Ways have spiritual connotations, habitually observed and rarely shared with outsiders. PCs who endeavor to learn the Old Ways quickly find themselves participating in the mood and traditions of the forest.

Inhabitants uphold countless superstitions and traditions, representative of the Old Ways. Many vary wildly from place to place, but here are just a few with forestwide adherents:

- Margrevians open the eyes of their dead, lest the deceased wander lost and angry through the wood, unable to find their way to the afterlife.
- Sinners confess their transgressions by cutting themselves and dripping their blood upon the thirsty forest floor. Evil men heal themselves before a single drop falls.
- A bloodless man cannot pass to the afterlife. Consequently, the dead are never buried, lest the roots exsanguinate them before the souls can reach heaven.
- One of the greatest punishments is to be buried—dead or alive. Revenants of the buried haunt the Margreve. Every dawn, they return to their graves, and the root wicker cage that was once their circulatory system.
- Any man-made structure built without sacrificing blood to the forest shakes itself down upon its owner.
- In a year's time, treants grow from those dead who have commended themselves to the forest with sap, seed, and ritual.
- There are places in the forest that give or take youth, but only the unborn and the dead can find them.
- Margrevians extinguish torches before midnight. This is related to a far older tradition: Margrevians do not permit white moths to gather, lest a mora (witch) hide in their number.
- If you count butterflies one less than your group's number, one of you will die.
- An evil creature is born every time a "civilized" man enters the woods.
- Margreve beasts must never leave the forest as tamed companions of outsiders, lest the beasts become infatuated with "civilization" and become half-men, abominations that outsiders call lycanthropes.
- If you nail the skin or hair of a sick person to a tree, the tree will absorb part of the disease and lend its strength to healing the illness.
- Ancestors store wisdom in the trees, but only descendents of their bloodline can tap it by clawing into the tree ring present in the ancestor's day.
- Every year, Margrevian kin, friends, and lovers celebrate the upcoming spring by giving each other blood-dyed pieces of thread. Each wears it until a tree signifying their relationship blossoms, whereupon the bearer drapes the thread upon the blossoming branch. It is an ill omen if the tree never flowers. Terrible feuds have blossomed from trees that do not.
- Every plant has a theme, a power, and a purpose. Flowers tend to be the beguilers, and that is perhaps why outsiders are so fond of

••• Tales of the Old Margreve ••••

them. True power lies in leaf, stem, and root.

Salt is incapable of holding magic, and makes an excellent ward against magical creatures, enchantments, and curses. Margrevians who hear rumors of salt-encrusted springs are like gold-diggers hearing of a new vein. Salt is one of the few reasons that Margrevians meet merchants along the Great Northern Road.

WESTERN MARGREVE

The Western Margreve represents the 1/3 of the forest that lies west of the Great Northern Road. Here, old growth trees and dense underbrush predominate. Line of sight is limited to 1d4+2x10 ft. The primary canopy is unnaturally thick and the floor perpetually dim to dark. The occasional white birch rises bloodless among its chestnut, beech, and walnut neighbors.

The terrain is fairly flat, with the exception of the perch of Castle Shadowcrag in the center and the rise of the Dwarven Cantons in the west. Numerous streams meander down from these higher grounds and stagnate in small lakes that dot this side of the forest. In many areas, the multi-tiered understory and dense underbrush make the forest impassable except by cance. Forget-me-nots surround a number of ponds and, for those intimate with sorcery and the Old Ways, allow *scrying*, and even *teleportation*, to sister locations beside other ponds.

The Western Margreve is the oldest section of the forest, and the least inhabited. No known human settlements exist. But less than a day's journey into the fringes of the forest, evidence of numerous failed settlements hide amongst the trees. Tumble-down structures slowly weather into the past, and vines choke lone statues and stalwart stone arches. The Western Margreve is defiantly wild and actively resists habitation. Here, villages fail and individuals struggle to survive.

The head of the School of Star and Shadow Magic at Zobeck's Arcane Collegium claims that shadow magic threads through the trees of the Western Margreve. He points to the magic woven at Castle Shadowcrag, the shadow fey that still emerge, and the midnight echoes of baying shadow mastiffs. He discourages anyone from entering the Western Margreve without first learning fundamental shadow spells and undertaking lessons he teaches at the Collegium. Lesson One: Never discount Margreve superstitions, especially those about shadows and death. When a Margrevian says, "Never sleep against a tree's west side, lest its morning shadow swallow you," best take heed.

BRIARBLACK HILL: A field of baby's breath surrounds a hill covered in jet black buds and briars. Few have ever seen the place, but legends say that a mighty battle once took place in the sky above it. A dozen ala, wicked spirits of lightning and pain, brought down an elder zmey, a multi-headed black dragon of lust and dominance. The massive zmey crashed to the ground. Thanks to happenstance and a magical wellspring on the site, the dragon's corpse never completely decayed. In time, soil covered it, forming Briarblack Hill.

Adventure Hook—A magical wellspring with powers of rejuvenation does indeed flow beneath Briarblack Hill, but it is not quite the fountain of youth that the PCs seek. Wait... did the hill just move?

CASTLE SHADOWCRAG: Perched on a hill, and commanding a panoramic view of the Western Margreve, lie the ruins of Castle Shadowcrag. The dwarves of Clan Grimbold stayed at the castle for a spell. And certain unnamed wizards and cultists visited them from time to time, to purchase things best not discussed. Likewise, fighters seeking weapons forged of starmetal or pure shadow often made their way to the Grimbold dwarves, paying steep prices for weapons and armor not available anywhere else. Adventure Hook—The dark magic infused into weapons, armor, and wondrous items created at Castle Shadowcrag is fading, and the wizards, cultists, and fighters of old are drawn en mass to Shadowcrag to renew them. In fact, the fading magic is all the ploy of Strossshadow fey half-breed ghosts who extort the gathered magic items' owners into forwarding the ghosts' plot to take revenge against Zobeck, the city that was once theirs.

GENEZEK KRAJ RUIN: Little remains of the temples of Genezek Kraj, except for legends of relics and an archipelago of ruined stone arches rising from a sea of underbrush. Hedge witch Vara's flock of 30 wereravens roost on the arches and in treetop hovels whose entrances face the sky. This "roost" is also home to soul crows and several varieties of lesser blackbirds and ravens.

Adventure Hook—A forest crone rewards the PCs with a map that leads them toward the fabled relics of Genezek Kraj. It directs them to the grove of arches, up the trees, through the wereravens' lofty hovels, down through hollow trunks, and into ancient temples' buried chambers. Perhaps the PCs can defeat the traps and guardians that the "forest crone" Vara could not. She and her flock wait topside in ambush.

LEPERFLOWER TRAIL: A "leper" colony of intelligent undead fled Morgau and have taken to the hollows and branches of the northern Margreve. Their contagious positive energy illness weakens them, and its very existence threatens the unlife of their imperial ghoul and vampire knight masters.

Adventure Hook—A secret proxy of the vampire knights, posing as a rich Zobeck philanthropist, seeks living heroes to pursue and destroy the "lepers" and their disease. He claims the disease creates more undead. Brilliant flowers and lush undergrowth trail the undead lepers as they flee from the heroes, deeper into the woods. Heroes who bring an intelligent undead specimen back for study spur a war between Zobeck—which may just have discovered a new weapon against undead—and a southern undead city in Morgau, which threatens to block all trade on the Great Northern Road if Zobeck does not destroy the specimen immediately.

MINER'S LAMENT: In the Western Margreve, *rods of metal and mineral detection* and similar magics all point to Miner's Lament, a dry gulch nestled along the southwest edge of the forest. The gulch's crimson stone holds a veritable treasure trove of raw ores. Embedded bronze nuggets glow at sunset, and new rain exposes pockets of uncut opal and veins of gold. The first dwarf excavators wrung their hands, eager to lay claim to the bounty that lay at their feet. But the moment their first pick struck, the walls of the gulch hemorrhaged a great red torrent of clay, mud, and magic that buried all. Some say the gulch turns greed, blood, and bones into the same precious metals used to lure the next victims.

In truth, the gulch is the Western Margreve's cesspool, where the forest channels the dregs of siphoned magic. The forest is incapable of burning siphoned magic completely, and spells with certain descriptors—such as force and law—result in trace amounts of magical "ash." As this ash migrates to Miner's Lament, precious metals absorb some of it, containing it as they too are swept toward the gulch. Few have ever taken such "treasures" from Miner's Lament.

Adventure Hook—The Western Margreve's cesspool reaches deep into the earth, and its concentration has begun to affect creatures above and below ground. Corrupted earth elementals and creatures that can only be described as walking spells make their way toward Zobeck's outlying farms. The Margreve parts trees and foliage to let the creatures pass. It is more than happy to watch its magical refuse walk itself out.

UNDEAD AND THE NORTHERN SWAMPS: Zombies and other undead

•••• Old Margreve Gazetteer •••

prowl the northwestern edge of the Margreve, but individual undead do not typically venture in too deeply. Every century or so, a horde of Lord Fandorin's zombies and ghouls presses south toward the Dwarven Cantons, but the forest and the dwarves have always repulsed them in the end. Swaths of both army's bones and shields stick out of the forest's detritus.

Adventure Hook—When the Black Canton dwarf skirmishers make one of their periodic preemptive raids against zombies amassing at the forest's edge, they realize too late that 3/4 of the undead are propped up, inanimate corpses. The real undead army surprises them from behind, and the surviving dwarves now trundle in slave wagons toward Morgau. The canton seeks a tiger team, fleet of foot, to catch up with the shuffling undead, infiltrate their overwhelming numbers, and release their brethren. The dwarves also seek rangers to hunt down vampire spies who return from the Northwestern Margreve to report just how vulnerable the dwarves truly are.

CENTRAL MARGREVE

The Central Margreve represents the 1/3 of the forest that lies east of the Great Northern Road and west of the Cloudwalls. The underbrush is less twisted and dense than in the Western Margreve, the canopy is not as thick, and the forest floor is not as dark. Line of sight is limited to 1d8+4x10 ft. Pine, spruce, cedar, and other coniferous trees and shrubs predominate the north and fill the valleys between the fingers of the Cloudwalls. Needles, pine cones, and ferns carpet the forest floor. In the south, deciduous trees dominate, dropping their colored leaves and seeds upon a floor thick with detritus, creeping ivy, and night blooming flowers.

A contagious wildness permeates the Central Margreve, and the place smells of cedar and musk. Dire beasts and rabid animals are common. In general, the forest seems more alive than the oppressively dark Western Margreve. In the Central Margreve, spider crones spin tales and proffer poisons, rusalki drown men in their arms, and leshy erase trails and imperil interlopers. Old World magic throbs with power. The uncontainable spells of Baba Yaga and her sisters hide in the hollows and chase each other through the trees.

ARMIGER WOOD: In the crook of Grandfather's Tears lies a stretch of forest where rusty armor girdles the trees, as if a regiment of warriors had been transformed to gnarled wood or saplings had sprouted within suits of discarded plate. Forest goblins sometimes run through here beating on the tarnished breastplates like drums, a sure sign that they are whipping themselves up to cause major trouble. Despite years of this abuse and layers of rust, the armor shows no sign of falling apart.

Adventure Hook—Whistlehollow Village, south of the Armiger Wood, recently experienced a mini-Enlightenment, a vision of life not predicated on superstitions. They expelled their old puritanical leadership in favor of the New Ways. The exiled leaders are returning to take revenge. They are not alone. As the vengeful druids of old once did, the exiles have animated the Armiger trees, creating armored treants: +3 armor bonus to AC, a level of barbarian, and a distinctly un-treelike bloodlust. The PCs are in Whistlehollow to advise the locals on escaping the dark ages and to deliver a steam golem to take over the most difficult chores.

CRADLE GROVE: The hearty maple trees in this grove feature giant burls at their bases. A natural depression on the top gives each burl a basin shape, and the formations collect rain water as it runs down the tree. Villagers from nearby Ulchik Village ladle out the water and pour it over newborns in a forest baptism ceremony. Babes dedicated to the forest are left overnight in the burl cradles, defended only by the great trees. On full moon nights, as many as seven babies might be found lying in Cradle Grove.

Adventure Hook—A party of powerful do-gooders "rescued" three babes from Cradle Grove, committed them to an orphanage in Zobeck, and disappeared on some promising new adventure. Terrible tragedies erupt around the children. People die. The PCs must discover where the "Unlucky Ones" came from and ultimately take them back safely to Ulchik Village. The orphanage is anxious to see the babes go, especially the one with the white pupils.

DARKBUD MARSH: A sacred species of lily-of-the-valley grows in a marsh beside the River Argent. When this flower, like a chain of tiny white bells, is picked, it does not die. Instead, its buds blacken and wither when touched by sin, disloyalty, and deception. Margrevians respect this flower that sees into the heart, but outsiders have no such compunction. Some courtiers and rich merchants have begun sewing it into their cuffs as an ostentatious display of their purity and honesty. Of course, they have the coin to replace the rare flower when it blackens. Forest folk worry that the outsiders will harvest the darkbud to extinction, a troubling fact in light of their belief that the flowers absorb the evil proclivities of the forest, and as the flowers' numbers dwindle, the dark side of the forest slowly wakes.

Adventure Hook—Spent and blackened darkbuds smell of rotting meat and quickly draw rats, dogs, and other carnivores. Creatures that eat the discarded buds see the black hearts of those who divested their sin into the flowers. All over Zobeck, such animals are turning on their masters. It is as if the animals are seeing their deceptive, perfidious owners and companions for the first time.

FIVE WAGON OAK: The largest oak south of the Pine Bogs once grew on the southern edge of the Central Margreve. But an enterprising family of retired loggers chopped it down, cleared the surrounding land, and built an entire farming community out of its wood. The community is gone now. All that remains on the overgrown site is a forlorn windmill, covered in vines and moss. The creaking of the mill can still be heard in the dead of night, but the millfan has not turned in a century. Those who hear it slowly lose their minds. Messengers following the Argent's southern bank toward Zobeck have drowned themselves to escape its terrible creak.

Adventure Hook—Too many messengers from the East never show in Zobeck as expected. The latest carried crucial documents. The Free City suspects bandits or dangerous creatures. They send the PCs to investigate and neutralize the threat. The heroes discover a thriving farm at Five Wagon Oak. None of it is real. Except for the old windmill. Inside it, the hollow shells of the expected messengers house rats. The PCs reclaim documents. Too many documents. Documents they never should have seen.

THE FOGROLLS: Along the southern edge of the Margreve, hot water bubbles up from the swampy ground. Mud fields, deeper than a man is tall, swallow the hapless. The hot water heats the air, and convection carries it toward the River Argent. Throughout winter, a dense fog bank forms over the icy water and rolls over the surrounding land, cloaking fields and hanging in the forest for miles. Even at high noon, visibility is limited to a few hand spans.

Adventure Hook—While travelling along the River Argent in late fall, the PCs and a group of Kariv gypsies wake to a bitterly cold morning lost in fog. Fog shadows haunt the Fogrolls, calling to worried Kariv parents in the muted voices of their lost children. Unlike regular shadows, fog shadows are dark grey, have a soft three-dimensional quality, and feed on fear like will-o'-wisps.

•••• Tales of the Old Margreve ••••

GRANDEATHER'S TEARS: In the center of the Central Margreve, cedar water flows out of the Pine Bogs. Further northeast, fresh water trickles down the Cloudwalls, gathers at Splitoaks Crossing, and creates a fast moving river that meets the slower Pine Bog's tributary at Three Sister's Lake. The lake overflows into an artery called Grandfather's Tears, which crescents to the east, emerges from the Central Margreve near Levoča Village, and joins the River Argent heading south.

Whereas the Western Margreve uses Miner's Lament as a cesspool for the dregs of siphoned magic that the forest cannot completely burn, the Central Margreve washes its magical ash away. Strange and terrible things, dead and alive, float out of the forest in Grandfather's Tears. Over the millennia, trace magic has accumulated on the riverbed and infused the river water like salt. At night, the rocky riverbed glows with a faint blue luminescence. Dead organic material rots quickly when submerged. Wooden boats and oars decay quickly, making river travel nigh impossible.

Aquatic wildlife have adapted to life spent breathing and swimming in the tainted water. Because the river removes protective layers of dead skin and scales before new skin grows underneath and wounds have the chance to heal, many species have developed fast healing 1 to compensate. Those with higher fast healing survive and breed themselves to the top of the food chain. Overactive fast healing plagues the larger species with gigantism, growths, and vestigial limbs. Fish, eel, and frogs grow patches of horn plate instead of skin or scales, and many appear as devolved as the horseshoe crabs that skim the river bottom. Forest creatures that habitually eat them or slake their thirsts on Grandfather's Tears appear equally changed.

Adventure Hook—Tin-bottom boats and living vessels, like the canoes grown at Riverbend Village in the Eastern Margreve, are the only watercraft capable of surviving the rot, fighting the current, and carrying the PCs up Grandfather's Tears. Getting to Riverbend, 100 miles into the Margreve, is the hard part.

MOONDRAWN CAVES: A magical wellspring captures all whose face it reflects, including the moon. It carries moonlight to the deepest depths of a network of caves in the far north of the Margreve. Far below the surface world, were-troglobites of incredible variety cavort in the echoing caverns with terrifying hybrid forms: were-salamanders with atrophied eyes and slimy skin lacking any pigment; were-crayfish with 4-ft.-long antennae and multi-jointed arms; and were-flatworms with transparent bodies and oversized saucer mouths lined with razor teeth.

Adventure Hook—A middle-aged woman hires the PCs to recover her father, a renowned explorer who refuses to retire. Clues point toward a magical wellspring that her father (mistakenly) believed to be the fountain of youth. The PCs find the old man deep in Moondrawn Caves... with his new family.

THE PERCHES: Tall trees ring an unremarkable clearing 50 miles north of the Fogrolls and twice as far from the Great Northern Road. High overhead, their branches mingle in the wind. Deer-centaurs believe that the true-of-heart experience omens here. However, unless such petitioners know they are in a sacred place, they may walk on, oblivious to the signs that the trees cast as dappled light upon the forest floor. Deer-centaur now avoid "Spiritsign," their old name for this site. Now they call it "the Perches" on account of the feral griffons that nest in the trees.

Adventure Hook—Shadow fey have decimated the deer-centaur tribes and killed the Alseid Princes. Weakened by their losses and fractured over leadership, the deer-centaur seek the name of the leader destined to galvanize them to triumph over the shadow fey. They seek a brave party to kill the griffons at the Perches or temporarily distract them from the site so the deer centaur can consult the signs there. The signs implicate the very same party as champions against the shadow fey.

TWILIGHT FORK: Drawnbow Trail heads northeast from the banks of the River Argent and terminates at Twilight Fork. By day or night, Twilight Fork looks like an ordinary branching of a forest trail. But not so at twilight when ghostly fog and an ominous liminal quality settles upon the site. They say that a traveler, torn over a life and death decision, can take *both* paths at such times. One path leads half his soul to the reaper. The other path infuses the other half of his soul with the power to overcome whatever problem led him here. The desperate and the indecisive come to Twilight Fork, but only tattered half-souls leave.

Adventure Hook—Two men hire the PCs to capture and return a woman who has fled into the forest. She is spouse to both men. When the first husband returned after his wife long presumed him dead, she became torn over her old and new husbands and fled toward Twilight Fork. If the PCs do not catch her in time, she returns with half a soul. Moreover, the fork ensures that one of the husbands dies. Catching the woman is not easy, for she is a talented rogue and wizard. Margreve traps that do not ensnare her may instead spring upon the PCs.

ULCHIK VILLAGE: Isolated from the civilized world by the Cloudwalls and thousands of square miles of dangerous wilderness, Ulchik Village is one of the most remote human settlements in this area of the world. It is also one of the strangest. The villagers worship Pyotr, a withdrawn treeaspect of the Green Gods, Porevit and Yarila. The village adults live the silent, enduring lives of trees, without clothing or shelter, and very often in tree shape. The village children feed and water their betters. It is a difficult task for the children, hobbling along with twisted necks, clubfeet, and degenerate limbs that centuries of inbreeding have begotten.

Adventure Hook—A magical blight has struck Ulchik Village and the villager's petrified half-tree bodies are bobbing down Grandfather's Tears. Without outside help, the village will perish. When the priestess of the Temple of Porevit asks the PCs to intervene, she explains that as the last remaining worshippers of the tree-aspect Pyotr, the Ulchik villagers are crucial to the god's survival.

EASTERN MARGREVE

The Eastern Margreve represents the 1/3 of the forest that lies east of the Cloudwalls. The youngest section of wood, its trees are merely millennia old. Conifers dominate the higher elevations and fade into deciduous varieties as the land falls toward the Rothenian Plain and the open steppe of centaur territory. There is a grand openness to the Eastern Margreve, like walking through a palace of pillars. Fewer trees reach for the sky, but their leaves are legion and form a canopy just as thick as in the Central Margreve. In most locations, the underbrush is not dense enough to halve movement and not remarkable enough to use as landmarks. A monotony of trees stretches in every direction, making the forest especially trackless and easy to get lost in (-4 penalty to associated Survival checks). Line of sight is 1d10+8x10 ft.

A handful of small lakes hide in the woods, but they are few, far between, and difficult to find. Interlopers who lack survival skills and who do not carry in their own water frequently die of thirst (-5 penalty to Survival checks associated with locating potable water and game). Because of relatively little fresh water, fewer wild animals make their homes in the Eastern Margreve. Many of these drink the tainted water of Grandfather's Tears and appear both dire and devolved, with aggressive personalities, cancerous fast healing, tumors, spines, and patches of horn and shell plating.

Trees survive by tapping the water table, but the fauna food-andwater chain is broken. Aberrations, undead, and otherwise unnatural

••• Old Margreve Gazetteer •••

creatures roam the Eastern woods and further insure its inhospitable reputation. But even these are uncommon, and one is as likely to die of thirst, hunger, or exposure as one is to perish in the claws of a wandering monster.

Compared to the dark, overgrown feel of the Western Margreve and the wild, Old Magic feel of the Central Margreve, the Eastern Margreve feels vacant and dream-like. There are thousands of acres

of utter silence, where no birds sing and nothing moves but the wind through the leaves. At night, the conspicuous absence of chirping insects and hooting owls becomes especially disconcerting. Only the hypnotic rustle of branches dances in the wind high above. Were it not for night falling and lifting, time might lose meaning for a party camping under these boughs.

Indeed, legends say some travelers enter the Eastern Margreve young and emerge old, and some enter old and emerge at a different time altogether. The basis for these tales is unclear. Perhaps the windblown branches hold the power to entrance and sustain. Perhaps explorers stumble upon cursed wellsprings in their search for water. Or perhaps the veil to the Astral Plane thins here, and unbidden dreams carry men to its timeless expanse. This last would also explain the numerous sightings of ghosts, for spirits of loved ones pass through the Astral Plane on their way to the afterlife.

BRAIDWOOD VILLAGE: Every year, more centaurs abandon the isolationist ideals of their ancestors and gravitate toward cosmopolitan trade centers. Not so at Braidwood Village where tradition and the Old Ways thrive. Legendary hunters and warriors, the Braidwood centaurs dominate the southeastern Margreve. They frequently challenge nearby alseid (deer centaur) tribes over hunting grounds and water sources and defend their territory from Rothenian Plainsrunner centaurs looking for wood and game. Every structure at Braidwood Village is grown, not constructed. With purposeful inosculation, pruning, and braiding, the centaurs shape living trees into homes and art. Complex living sculptures of ancestors locked in battle with their enemies decorate the grounds.

Adventure Hook—A covey of mora (Margreve moth witches) from the Hag's Tooth Hills has teased the centaur warriors out of Braidwood Village before surrounding it in an impenetrable ring of whirling leaves and hair. Inside the ring, the PCs and a pathetic cadre of young, old, and infirm centaurs fight for their lives against mora and the wood-braid statues they animate. If the mora capture the centaur elder for whom they came, they coax desired knowledge out of him through torture similar to espalier, in which his limbs are split lengthwise, grafted, and bent in a twisted mockery of Braidwood homebuilding.

CAVES OF SORROW: High in the Cloudwall Mountains, a shallow cave forms what looks like an eye and tear from below. A sect of Kariv gypsies travel across the Rothenian Plain, dare the forest, and climb the mountain to practice an incredible form of ancestor worship in the cave. They sacrifice to a local forest god, who rewards them with one-on-one discussions with their departed loved ones. For worthier sacrifices, the godling allows intimate relations with their departed spouses. It has been this way for generations. A Kariv woman is always pregnant.

Adventure Hook—To solve a mystery, the PCs need to speak with a departed soul, but they have no corpse upon which to cast *speak with dead*. The Kariv tell the PCs of the Caves of Sorrow and the powers of the godling there. The PCs might prepare sacrifices, meet the godling, and walk away satisfied. Or they might realize that the godling is merely a kyton sorcerer using its abilities to don the faces of the departed and keep the sacrifices coming. The revelation explains all of the stillborn

Kariv babes, strangled by their own umbilical cords.

DJURDJA FALLS: What little water falls on the Eastern side of the Cloudwalls gathers at Djurdja Falls. Here, it plunges into the 400-ft.-wide mouth of an upturned cave, where it disappears

into darkness, 1,000 ft. deep. Strange plants dangle 100-ft.-long tendrils over the lip to gather water and nutrients from the waterfall's mist. Small herbivores with mist-collecting dorsal plates, like those of a stegosaurus, wander the cold mists around the hole and down the mountain side. Carnivores have adapted to retain water and extract it from blood. *Adventure Hook*—The PCs lead an expedition up the Cloudwalls, over the cave lip at Djurdja Falls, and down into darkness. A 1,000-ft. drop leads to whitewater torrents, mile long belly crawls, and vast caverns. What alien aberrations or prehistoric beasts lurk below the mountain or fight for dominance in this isolated ecology? Can the PCs escape after Baba Yaga's

that the PCs have arrived to explore or that the PCs inadvertently rouse? Lost HEART'S COPSE: Miles and miles of unoccupied forest surround a busy 30 acres. Here, the ghosts of bent-back men search the underbrush for lost items, missing loved ones, and the souls of their departed mates. They say that the forest leads all here who refuse to move on after loss. Any living creature that enters this area experiences temporary life-blindness. Any living creature that enters this area experiences temporary life-blindness. The creature sees only other creatures with life-blindness normally, all others appear incorporeal with muted voices. Unlike looking at the Material Plane from the Ethereal Plane, inanimate objects and dead creatures appear normal.

sisters seal the cave mouth? Are the witches trying to bury the same power

Adventure Hook—After stumbling into Lost Heart's Copse, a weeping ghost picking through the underbrush asks the PCs to help him find his wife. The mission takes the life-blind PCs to Zobeck whose bustling streets now seem like lonely cobblestones through a quiet, clockwork ghost town. To locate the ghost's wife, the PCs must solve the mystery of her abduction and murder. The crime is old. Clues haunt places that no longer exist. There are no NPCs to help our heroes.

SALT SPRINGS: In the center of the Eastern Margreve, toxic, saltchoked water bubbles up through crusty sores between the rocks. As more water oozes up and cools, the salt precipitates from the suspension, accumulating around the vent and forming roughly man-sized pillars of salt over time. Few know of the site where the "salt men" stand amongst the trees. A brave kobold family risks making their way here to collect the salt men, bartering them within the forest and selling them beyond the wood to alchemists who claim the salt men have special properties.

Adventure Hook—A wealthy Zobeck merchant learns of the salt springs' existence and sends the PCs to find it, claim it, and build a stockade around it. On their way, the PCs encounter a family of kobolds carrying coffins through the predawn forest. Inside each coffin is a salt man they are hiding from possible bandits. A dead rat, Tales of the Old Margreve

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HEART OF THE FOREST POWERS AT A GLANCE

In addition to the global Margreve powers, each fully-formed Heart enjoys the following unique powers:

- **DRAWN CURTAIN (Ex)** Constant; heart-wide. Divination (scrying) spells cannot perceive anything within the Heart and those within the Heart are immune to *detect thoughts* with respect to those without. Conjuration (teleportation) spells either fizzle (75%) or land the caster outside the Margreve (25%) at a location nearest the caster's current position
- **HUNGRY HEART (EX)** Constant; heart-wide. Magical effects have a 5% chance/round to be suppressed (siphoned) entirely as if entering an *antimagic field*, except that it has no effect on incorporeal undead nor any Margreve powers.

QUENCH (SP) At will; heart-wide; as the spell.

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added to each coffin for smell, completes the deception. The kobolds attempt to thwart the PCs mission in every way possible. They have already trapped the site of their wealth source and have no intention of sharing their wealth or letting a stockade stand.

SLEEPWALKERS' HILL: In the northeastern corner of the Margreve, atop a single forested hill, aerial plants drape over the branches like Spanish moss and drop their puffy pollen like snowflakes from the canopy. Once a year, Margreve pixies collect the pollen and grind it into the dust that imbues their arrows with the power of sleep, charm, and memory loss. The pixies seem to be the only creatures who can remember the hill at all, which is quite remarkable. How can one forget the menagerie of individuals—beasts and humanoids alike—that wander here without yesterdays?

Adventure Hook—Creatures too powerful for the pixies to handle are devouring the aerial plants whose pollen the pixies value for their own defense. The pixies seek something to vanquish the plant eaters. Something unaffected by the mind-affecting nature of the place. Perhaps a construct. Perhaps something not quite dead. Meanwhile, as the pollen snowfall dwindles, elves and beasts snap out of their trances. Some walk out of the forest centuries after they first came to Sleepwalkers Hill. They could be the PCs.

HEARTS OF THE FOREST

The Western and Central sections of the Margreve each feature a geographical region known as a Heart of the Forest. In each heart, vast concentrations of magical power, siphoned and stored over millennia, pulse through the landscape, adding shadow powers to the Western Heart, and feral powers to the Central Heart.

The Eastern Heart has not yet formed, but it is on the cusp. Once formed, it will feature a concentration of dream powers.

The power held in the Hearts of the Forest exceeds that of major artifacts. Like a major artifact, a singular method for destroying a heart may exist, but no mortal knows it, and carrying out the deed is nigh impossible. Fire, blight, natural disasters, and the magic of mortals pale before these great seats of the Margreve's power. Even the terrible magic of the world's great sorcerers cannot destroy a Heart, any more than a man can kill a lake with a sword thrust.

Despite the meager threat individuals present, the Margreve tolerates few interlopers in its hearts. Only those well versed in the Old Ways have any chance of surviving the forest's often aggressive response to their presence.

WESTERN HEART

The Western Heart has tap roots older than the modern gods. Like a tangle of world snakes, these massive roots braid, branch, and bore deep into the earth.

The Western Heart harnesses the bulk of its power from the Shadow Plane. The heart's taproots pierce the plane of shadow and grip its tattered edges. As they grow into the shadow fabric, they draw the plane closer and suckle on its negative energy. The Material Plane slides under the Shadow Plane, and every century or so, pent up planar friction dissipates in a planar "earthquake" that releases incredible energy into roots poised to collect it.

The proximity and influence of the Shadow Plane ripples through the Western Margreve and gathers in the Western Heart. The shadows of trees and beasts are disproportionately long, even at noon. Sometimes they move with slight independence or detach entirely, a dreaded condition of the "shadow cursed" and many undead here.

Plant life flourishes in the dim light. In many places, it grows with such density that it reduces travel to machete swings and 5-ft. steps. Ivy spirals up abandoned spider webs, filling in the gaps, and forming great leafy sheets between the trees. The wind puffs the sheets one way then the next, and walking through this Heart of the Forest is like hacking one's way through the gills of a breathing fish.

In places, the Western Heart's tap roots grip spheres of individuals frozen by *imprisonment* spells. A dozen buried archmages and hierophant druids and twice as many angels and demons bleed their renewable spell energy up through the tree roots. When energy abounds, the process reverses, and the heart stores energy in bodies that convulse under the strain of containing such power.

Ashen GLADES: Legend claims that Perun, god of lightning and war, threw a pair of lightning bolts across the Western Heart of the Margreve, scarring the face of the landscape with wide swathes of charred wood. To this day, nothing grows in these ashen glades. Blackened logs cover the forest floor, and the jagged edges of snapped trunks poke between them like a spiked pit of trees. Dozens of ala—black-whirlwind hags born of claw and lightning—nest in the charred tree trunks and herald preternatural storms that rage over the forest. The Margreve tolerates the ala because the ala do not tolerate interlopers, especially humanoids. The hags kill or eject any who enter the Western Heart.

Adventure Hook—The priests of Perun believe that the survival of Zobeck depends on a fragment of one of Perun's lightning bolts still sparking below the Ashen Glades. The temple hires the PCs to retrieve the relic. Divination reveals that ala hate dragons more than they hate humanoids and that a zmey, an epic-level multi-headed black dragon, suffers *imprisonment* somewhere under the Western Heart. Freeing the beast may be the PCs' only chance to distract the powerful ala from the site. It may also be the biggest mistake of their lives. But if they don't do it, the "helpful" priests of Perun will.

THE CRUMBLING TOMB: Forgotten, covered in lichen, and gripped by ivy, the Crumbling Tomb rests in the eternal darkness of the canopy. Behind its mithral bar doors lies a mummified sage, guarded by a pair of sorcerous assassin vines. A unicorn is the only recurring visitor. Shadow fey legends say that when the time comes, the corpse will gain unlife and take sides in a pivotal conflict in the Old Margreve. At dawn, shadow ivy pulls the Crumbling Tomb underground, leaving a small chip of stone at the site. At dusk the •••• Old Margreve Gazetteer •••

Crumbling Tomb emerges in another Western Heart location. Some say that the tomb is searching for something.

Adventure Hook—The PCs require critical information that only the unicorn possesses. To meet the unicorn, the PCs must locate the Crumbling Tomb after dusk and get there before it disappears at dawn. When the unicorn does not show the first night, the PCs must either abandon their mission or remain inside the tomb and *shadow walk* with it to its next location. On the *shadow walk* between dawn and dusk, the PCs experience an adventure on the tattered edge of the Shadow Plane and learn the terrible truth about the tomb's unicorn visitor.

CENTRAL HEART

The Central Heart of the Forest is a place of unbridled wildness. Trails disappear behind trailblazers. Structures shake themselves down. Poisons are more deadly, diseases more virulent. Travelers devolve to beasts, and beasts devolve to creatures best left unnamed.

The forest uses its abilities, particularly *warp wood* and *animate plants*, more frequently in the Central Heart. Its auras of rust and wildness pulse with extra potency.

Baba Yaga frequently calls the Central Heart home. The daring may find her living house wandering somewhere between Baba's Wend and the Mistwallows. Even with all of her powers, Baba Yaga can but nudge the wild heart of the wood toward her ends, and only then at great cost. Its deeply rooted power cannot be harnessed although she and others fight over the knowledge of how to nudge it and the wisdom of doing so.

PALEWOOD: In a white birch copse no larger than a town market, a limestone outcrop rises nearly as high as the treetops. Riddled with warren-like holes, the crag is home to a burgeoning cadre of tiny wicker effigies. When a forest resident commits a sin, he or she weaves an effigy, divests the sin into it, sacrifices a month of life energy, and stakes the newly animated wicker man on the forest floor for the wild beasts to ravage. Sometimes the sin-eating effigies escape their ignominious fate. Why they gather at the crag at Palewood is a mystery that most forest folk believe is best left unsolved.

Adventure Hook—The sin-eater effigies at Palewood Crag possess memory and guilt for sins they never committed. Many of them have become the epitome of the sins from which they are woven. The wrathful boil with hatred for their creators. The envious want to change places with their creators. The proud demand their due, and the greedy want their creators' very souls. Soon, they will organize. Soon, they will march.

DEAD DRUIDS' RUN: A fast-running river thunders through the north end of the Central Heart of the Forest. Where the rapids are roughest, no trees or underbrush encroach near the river's bank for 100 ft. Instead, an elliptical-patterned bank lies open to the sky. Rising from the whitewater, five jagged, roughly humanoid-shaped rocks burst toward the sky. The folk of nearby Ulchik Village say the rocks were once druids that one of Baba Yaga's children encased in stone, presumably as punishment for some treacherous deed they suffered upon her—or attempted to. The nature of this deed remains long-forgotten. If one concentrates on drowning out the cacophony of the whitewater, a chorus of screams can be heard emanating from the rocks.

Adventure Hook—The forces of darkness have leaked a rumor: ancient druids, petrified by a great witch, shall each grant a *wish* to anyone who frees them from the rock. It is, of course, a lie. A witch did petrify the druids, but at the druids' self-sacrificing request. For under the feet of each rock figure, an elder vampire lies buried in the river bed. Stakes shatter against the chests of these legendary

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WESTERN HEART POWERS AT A GLANCE

In addition to its other Heart of the Forest powers, the Western Heart has the following unique abilities:

- AURA OF DESECRATION (EX) Constant; heart-wide. As the spell desecrate, except affects shadow creatures as well as undead.
- **EARLY GRAVE (SP)** Constant; heart-wide. Those who fall prone or lie down (such as to sleep) are subject to a 5-ft.-square *black tentacles* effect, except with erupting vines instead of rubbery tentacles. The vines draw dying creatures into the earth at the rate of 1 ft./round.
- **FONT OF BLOOD (SU)** Constant; heart-wide. A vampiric effect turns all wounds acquired in the forest into bleeding ones, as if the wound were delivered by a *wounding weapon*.
- **RELUCTANT RETURN (SU)** Constant; heart-wide. When bringing back the dead, the soul in question believes that a CE caster is targeting him.

SHADES (SP) 1/day/square mile; as the spell.

- SHADOW HEART (SU) Constant; heart-wide. A "shadow heart" pumps the blood of any creature reincarnated. The creature gains a 1st-level spell from the illusion (shadow) school as a spell-like ability (1/day) but cannot touch a loved one without dealing strength damage as a shadow.
- STRANGER AT THE DOOR (SU) Constant; heart-wide. Shadow mastiffs lurk in conjured mage's magnificent mansions. Shadows await the caster who climbs into a rope trick's extradimensional space. Portable holes, bags of holding, and handy haversacks overflow with shadow spider swarms or worse.

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creatures. Sunlight warps around their foul bodies. Running water blackens where they step. Only the sacrifice of the druids holds the unnatural creatures down, and only a good (foolish) creature can free the druids from their timeless duty in the stone. A thousand years ago, a gold plaque at Dead Druids' Run warned good creatures against such an action. But for its gold, the plaque was stolen, fought over, and lost. Presently, a vampire knight in Morgau fingers the plaque and grins, hoping his rumor bears fruit.

EASTERN HEART

Though the Margreve crested the Cloudwalls and spilled upon the Rothenian Plain centuries ago, a new Eastern Heart of the Forest has not yet formed. The mountains have slowed the necessary transfer of power... until now. The Eastern Heart finally stands on the cusp of formation. And this fact has Baba Yaga worried.

There is a prophecy that begins with "An Eastern Heart shall be born" and ends with "And the great witch shall die." Baba Yaga believes that the verse refers to her, and she has gone to incredible lengths to slow the Heart's formation. Though a true power, Baba Yaga cannot prevent the Heart from being born altogether. She has however enacted a plan to buy herself time.

With the help of her sorcerous daughters and at great expense to her health and sanity, Baba Yaga has chipped off shards of the condensing "soul" of the Eastern Heart, effectively shattering what would have been a full heart into 37 pieces. Each chipped shard flew off and coupled with the soul of a living creature. Baba Yaga does not know which individuals bear the soul fragments nor in what small or grievous way the shard affects them. But she is happy, because until those creatures die, the disjointed heart cannot fully form.

In time, Baba Yaga plans to locate the "forest-hearted" individuals

.... Tales of the Old Margreve ...

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CENTRAL HEART POWERS AT A GLANCE

In addition to its other Heart of the Forest powers, the Central Heart has the following unique abilities:

- AUGMENTED AURA OF RUST (EX) Constant; forestwide. As the aura of rust ability, except twice as much damage.
- AUGMENTED AURA OF WILDNESS (EX) Constant; forestwide. As the aura of wildness ability, except with a +4 modifier to save DC.
- LYCANTHROPE NEEDLES (SU) At will; heart-wide. The Margreve transmits the curse of lycanthropy through the needles of its conifers. Every 10 rounds a creature spends moving through dense terrain, it risks brushing past a lycanthrope needle and contracting the curse (Fortitude DC 15 avoids). The Margreve chooses the base animal.
- Social Decay (Su) At will; heart-wide. The forest haunts the dreams of sleeping creatures, slowly shifting them to a state of paranoia against their companions: TYPE insanity; SAVE Will DC 17; ONSET 2d6 days; EFFECT –4 penalty on Will saves and Charisma-based skill checks; cannot receive benefit from or attempt the aid another action; cannot willingly accept aid (including healing) from another creature (Will DC 17 negates).
- **UNENDING RAGE (Ex)** Constant; heart-wide. Individuals utilizing the rage class feature rage for the maximum duration possible (Will DC 20 negates).
- VIRULENCE (Ex) Constant; heart-wide. All successful saves related to negating or healing natural diseases and poisons must be confirmed with a second save.
- WILD (EX) At will; heart-wide. *Beast shapes, tree shapes*, and *wild shapes* are chosen by the Margreve and include dire and devolved forms. The Margreve chooses the duration. A Will save (DC 28) ends the new shape. Failing by 5 or less results in a partial reshaping, similar to a lycanthrope's hybrid form. Saves may be retried daily.

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and offer them attractive ways to extend their lives. She may assign a daughter or minion to act as their guardian angel, lingering in the background and protecting them from time to time. If a forest-hearted insists on putting itself in danger, however, Baby Yaga instructs the guardian angel to abduct and imprison it.

Meanwhile, Baba Yaga's arch rival, an ancient zmey dragon, seeks the same individuals to kill them and hasten the prophecy. Even if the zmey is unsuccessful, Baba Yaga has the harder job, for some of the forest-hearted presently stand on the opposite sides of a battlefield, some are prey animals, and some are adventurers who frequently wander close to their own deaths.

The forest-hearted live their lives, oblivious to the power and potential connected to their soul. In some, sorcerous powers develop, flashing out during moments of emotional turmoil. Should one of these individuals die in some distant land, a Heart Tree forms over the corpse, and the saplings of a new forest rise quickly around them. Right now, the next Margreve may be walking out of the forest as a man.



Magic in the Margreve

The Margreve siphons a fraction of every spell's power, visibly channeling the energy through leaf and root, and feeding on the siphoned power. In time, some of the siphoned power collects in the remote recesses of the forest, blossoming up in rare buds and dark hollows. Intrepid casters can compensate for siphoned spell power by taking advantage of these metamagic material components and metamagic locations. In fact, adventures often spawn from the search for such mystic items and places.

SIPHON MAGIC

Like any living thing, the Margreve wants to thrive and grow. But unlike a normal forest, the Margreve requires more than just sun, rain, and soil. The Margreve hungers for magic energy, which it acquires by feeding on the magic of every spell cast within its borders.

The Margreve's power to siphon magic is an extraordinary ability that affects only spells and spell-like abilities. Other powers and permanent magical items are not affected.

The Margreve siphons spell energy equivalent to 1 CL. That is, all spell effects receive a -1 modifier to CL. If this would reduce the spell's duration to 0, use the minimum spell duration instead. If the spell has no effects based on CL, the exact siphon effect is left to the GM's discretion.

The dissipation of siphoned energy into the forest frequently manifests visually. The exact effect depends on the spell's school. For an unlisted school (or even a listed one), the GM may create (or tweak) the visual effect, down to the individual spell if so desired.

For some schools, casters suffer more than just a loss of power from the siphon. During the siphoning process, eldritch Margreve energy comingles with a cast spell's energy, noticeably twisting the spell's normal effect. Unlisted schools have no such side effects.

ABJURATION

VISUAL EFFECT: Wisps of abjuration magic curl around the target, fall to the ground, and strengthen grass and undergrowth with protective force. For 1 round/spell level and in a 1 ft/spell level radius, trodden grasses spring back and retain no footprints (as pass without trace), underbrush slides past the bite of a machete, and evocation magic leaves no mark on the spot, unless a caster targets the spot directly. SIDE EFFECT: None.

CONJURATION (HEALING)

VISUAL EFFECT: Low-level cure spells cause grass to grow lush, weeds to sprout, and buds to open in a circle centered on the target. Days after the blood has soaked into the forest floor, a perspicacious adventurer can still detect the site of a battle by the lush circles that dot the landscape. More powerful spells create wider circles or cause more pronounced growth. For example, raise dead causes a young tree to sprout beneath the corpse so that the target awakens in its boughs.

SIDE EFFECT: Low-level spells like *cure light wounds* leave tiny galls and patches of bark on the target for 1 day/spell level. High-level spells, like *heal* and *raise dead*, have profound (but harmless) effects on the target's physiology, practically covering the target in wet bark and knotted roots. Adventurers who survive the forest often emerge as "tree men," covered with the tell-tale signs of curative magic.

•••• Old Margreve Gazetteer ••••

CONJURATION (SUMMONING)

VISUAL EFFECT: A transparent image of the creature(s) summoned screams out of the caster's face and melts widemouthed into the ground.

SIDE EFFECT: The Margreve chooses the creatures summoned through conjuration (summoning) spells. However, casters can ensure their own choice by including a material component—tooth, claw, or other body part (not hair)—from the desired species. During the siphoning process, the Margreve's aura of wildness intertwines with the spell's energy, giving summoned creatures a 10% chance to gain the confused condition during their first round to act.

CONJURATION (TELEPORTATION)

VISUAL EFFECT: A loop of silver cord drifts out of the target, like the middle of a fishing line taken by the tide. Its direction and relative loop length provide some indication as to how far off target the spell will be.

SIDE EFFECT: Ancient stone circles, sacred groves, siphoned "spell batteries," and ley lines tug and distort the teleportation path to the caster's desired destination. For *teleport* and *teleport object*, subtract 25 and add the caster's level to rolls on the spells' familiarity/target table. If the Margreve is friendly toward the caster, add 10. If unfriendly, subtract 10. If hostile, subtract 20. For *greater teleport*, treat the caster as "very familiar" and roll on the familiarity/target table normally.

DIVINATION

VISUAL EFFECT: Vines and underbrush withdraw or creep toward the caster depending on the woe or weal of the divination respectively.

SIDE EFFECT: Two or more divination spells cast simultaneously in the Margreve have a 10% chance of crossing wires, providing all parties with inaccurate (and sometimes wildly inappropriate and interesting) information.

DIVINATION (SCRYING)

VISUAL EFFECT: None.

SIDE EFFECT: The Margreve may pull a scrying spell's invisible sensor toward a target of the forest's attention or, in rare cases, reveal something that is not really there. During the spell's duration, the sensor's connection with the forest sometimes inclines the caster to refer to himself in the first person plural.

EVOCATION

VISUAL EFFECT: Depending on the spell descriptor, frost covers the ground (cold), fire singes grass blades (fire), light glows and fades into the trees (light), the canopy closes to treasure the darkness (darkness), leaves kick up at the caster's feet (air), sparks arc between the caster's legs or nearby trees (electricity), etc.

SIDE EFFECT: None.

ILLUSION (FIGMENT)

VISUAL EFFECT: None.

SIDE EFFECT: Figments created in the Old Margreve have minor details added, as if the forest were trying to fit them in somehow. Moss grows on illusionary trees, brambles curl around illusory walls, and chirping birdsong accompanies ghost sounds. The DC to disbelieve such spells is increased by 1, but sometimes the figment acts in an unexpected way, as if it were more than mere illusion; like the silent image of a forest goblin that gives its caster a mocking bow when dismissed.

METAMAGIC COMPONENTS

Though there are no known ways to cancel the Margreve's siphon effect, casters can offset the power loss by collecting metamagic material components that hide in the nooks and crannies of the forest. Each component represents a tiny repository of Margreve-siphoned power, which casters can tap when preparing or casting their spells. Treat these rare components as consumable metamagic feats. Some function for all spells, spells of a certain school or descriptor, or individual spells only. Low-level adventures often spawn from the search for components such as these:

- Grip the thorny limb of a dead briar child until you bleed in order to extend an entangle spell (Extend Spell).
- Crush a lily that has succumbed to hoarfrost in order to cast a spell with the "cold" descriptor as a swift action (Quicken Spell).
- Unbraid the knotted tresses of a rusalka to empower a spell of the enchantment school (Empower Spell).
- Persuade an Ala to breathe into a pouch or sack, and release it later to widen any spell (Widen Spell).

METAMAGIC LOCATIONS

In addition to metamagic components, the Margreve features remote locations whose magical wellsprings and alignment with ley lines increase spell power as metamagic feats. The creatures that inhabit these places are well equipped to take advantage of the magic boost. Some standard creatures have even adapted and specialized to take maximum advantage of effects such as these:

- Standing beneath the thundering, icy waters of Kariv's Tears Falls in the Eastern Margreve causes any healing spell cast to be automatically empowered (Empower Spell).
- Illusion (shadow) spells cast within 100 ft. of the Crumbling Tomb in the Western Margreve are heightened (Heighten Spell).
- Conjuration (summoning) spells cast at Twilight Fork in the Central Margreve are extended (Extend Spell).

Non-Caster Casters

Every intelligent creature born in the Margreve and raised in the Old Ways treasures an intimate magical connection with the forest. Even those who have no talent for the magical arts cradle a tiny spark of Margrevian magic in their soul. This spark allows them to cast a single 0-level spell (1/day, cantrip or orison).

The spell is always the same for an individual, and the material components, gestures, or rhyme necessary to cast the spell are unique to the individual. The spell represents both the character's relationship with the forest and the expenditure of cantrip magic that feeds the forest. Through this magic, one Margrevian may have a knack for keeping blades sharp, another for locating game, and another for predicting storms or the arrival of foreigners.

At the GM's discretion, non-caster outsiders can also learn a 0-level spell after living with an insider for 1 month. Sometimes the spell learned is the same spell that the insider knows, replete with the same gestures and verbal components. But most times, the Margreve selects its own spell for the outsider, according to his or her character.

.... Tales of the Old Margreve

New Margreve Spells

Feed the Forest

School evocation; Level druid 1–9 CASTING TIME 1 round COMPONENTS V, S, DF RANGE personal TARGET you DURATION 1 hour/level of the spell (D)

SAVING THROW Will negates (harmless); SPELL RESISTANCE yes (harmless)

This spell may be prepared in any slot of 1st–9th level. When cast in the Margreve, it feeds a constant trickle of magical energy into the forest. For the duration of the spell, you can cast spells of the same level or lower without the forest sending challenge creatures to coax you into casting more magic for the Margreve to siphon. The forest remains aware of you and may interdict or attack you for other reasons.

Feed the forest spells appear on a druid's list the first time they prepare spells within the Margreve. At the GM's discretion, rangers and witches with a similar tie to ancient powers of nature may also receive these spells.

Porevit's Mantle

SCHOOL transmutation; **LEVEL** druid 1, ranger 1 **CASTING TIME** 1 standard action

Components V, S, M

RANGE touch

TARGETS one creature/level

DURATION 1 hour/level (D)

SAVING THROW Will negates (harmless); SPELL RESISTANCE yes (harmless)

You take on the physical characteristics of the terrain around you. Grass and tiny mushrooms sprout in your hair, moss beards your chin, and your flesh takes on the mottled hue of leaf green and bark brown. This grants a +3 circumstance bonus to Stealth checks in the appropriate terrain.

SNAP THE LEASH

SCHOOL enchantment [mind-affecting]; LEVEL druid 2, sorcerer/wizard 2, witch 2
CASTING TIME 1 standard action
COMPONENTS V, S, M (used leash or similar object)
RANGE close (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)
TARGET one living creature of Intelligence 2 or less
DURATION instantaneous
SAVING THROW Will negates; SPELL RESISTANCE yes
You remove the shackles of domestication from a creature's

mind, causing it to entirely forget being broken or trained. Mounts refuse to be ridden and other animals forget any tricks learned and obedience taught. Memories are not affected, so creatures may remain drawn to those who have treated them kindly and aggressive towards those who have harmed them. The animal can be domesticated again, but the trainer must start from scratch.

This spell is only partly effective against animal companions, familiars, and paladin mounts. Although the spell removes any tricks they know, the bond between animal and master is otherwise unaffected.

Spy My Shadow

SCHOOL transmutation; LEVEL sorcerer/wizard 2, witch 2 CASTING TIME 1 standard action COMPONENTS V RANGE personal TARGET you DURATION 1 min./level SAVING THROW none (harmless); SPELL RESISTANCE yes

(harmless)

You whisper a fey rhyme to your shadow, bringing it to life as a tenebrous spy that can slip under doors, between shutters, and through the narrowest of cracks. You may stretch your shadow up to 10 times your height, and move it as you wish although it remains two-dimensional and cannot interact with physical objects.

You may spy through your shadow's eyes and ears as if they were your own, but magically enhanced senses do not work through this spell. Utilize the Stealth skill normally if trying to keep your shadow's presence a secret: it gains a +4 bonus to Stealth checks in dim lighting but a -4 penalty in brightly lit areas.

Enemies who see your shadow can make attacks against it using your touch AC although your shadow is incorporeal. Damage or effects done to your shadow affect you as though you had been hit by the attack.

STEP LIKE ME

SCHOOL transmutation; LEVEL sorcerer/wizard 1, witch 1 COMPONENTS V, S, M (personal item, blood, hair, footprint, or other connection to target) CASTING TIME 1 standard action RANGE close (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels) TARGET one creature DURATION 1 day (D) SAVING THROW Fortitude negates; SPELL RESISTANCE yes You steal the footsteps of a target creature within one size category of yourself. For the duration of the spell, you leave the tracks of the target while they leave tracks as if they were you. In addition, creatures capable of identifying creatures using

tremorsense mistake you for a creature of the subject's species.

YARILA'S BOUNTY

SCHOOL conjuration; LEVEL druid 4, ranger 4 COMPONENTS V, S CASTING TIME 1 standard action TARGET one creature touched

DURATION 10 min./level (D)

SAVING THROW Will negates; SPELL RESISTANCE yes

The sun's life-giving energy heals and sustains your body. For the duration, you gain fast healing 1 whenever you are bathed in direct sunlight; 30 min. or more of exposure also provides a day's normal nourishment and removes the fatigued and exhausted conditions.

Limited exposure to sunlight—such as dim light—reduces the spell's healing to 1/minute. Normal or magical darkness suppresses the spell's effect entirely.

Undead are especially vulnerable to this spell. If a targeted undead fails its Will save, it gains the shaken condition and suffers damage instead of healing while in sunlight.

•••• Old Margreve Gazetteer •••

New Margreve Incancacions

OLDWOOD RITE

SCHOOL evocation; EFFECTIVE LEVEL 6th SKILL CHECKS Knowledge (arcana) DC 20, 2 successes; Knowledge (local or religion) DC 20, 2 successes; Knowledge (nature) DC 20, 2 successes COMPONENTS V, S, M *Material Components*—fresh earth from the

Old Margreve; sacred herbs; a few drops of the caster's and target's blood, dripped onto the forest floor

CASTING TIME 60 min.

RANGE touch

TARGET one creature touched

DURATION 1 day SAVING THROW Will negates

(harmless); **SPELL RESISTANCE** yes (harmless)

The Oldwood Rite incantation can only be invoked within the Old Margreve, but variations exist for other numinous locales. You call on the Margreve's spirit to accept you as part of the forest. This does not prevent the Margreve's spell siphon or nullify the forest's senses, but the Margreve generally ignores you and treats you as a trusted visitor rather than as an interloper: assume one positive step in the Margreve's attitude toward you.

In addition to this benefit, you can sacrifice a spell or spell-like ability during the casting to gain the benefit of *feed the forest* for the level of spell sacrificed.

FAILURE: Failing 2 consecutive knowledge checks, the forest sucks hungrily at the caster's life energy, who gains 1 temporary negative level.

STORIES THAT WOLVES TELL

SCHOOL transmutation; EFFECTIVE LEVEL 6th

SKILL CHECK Knowledge (arcana) DC 20; Knowledge (local) DC 20; Knowledge (nature) DC 20

$\textbf{Components} \ V\!\!, S\!\!, M$

Material Components—a pouch woven from fresh wolfsbane stems; a flint knife that has been shaped without the touch of iron; a living wolf you sacrifice during the casting

CASTING TIME 30 minutes

DURATION 1 day or 3 days

SAVING THROW none

Slit a wolf's throat with a flint knife and you can steal its voice, trapping it in a wolfsbane pouch. Spit into the bag and you gain the power to speak in the wolf's voice for the day. There are stories in the howling of wolves and you can listen in on them, hearing tales of hunts and prey and strange things seen. You can also add your own voice to the chorus if you dare, singing songs and spinning tales that soon spread around the forest.

This incantation enables you to speak and understand the language of wolves and worgs. Looking for information

or spreading stories via the howling of wolves requires a Diplomacy check and a Bluff check to fool them into thinking you really are a wolf.

The effect lasts for 1 day or until the bag is destroyed. If done on the first night of the full moon, the effect lasts for 3 days.

BACKLASH: If the wolves learn that you are using a stolen voice, they become hostile and hunt you down.

FAILURE: Failing 2 consecutive skill checks results in the wolf's voice replacing your own for the duration, leaving you unable to speak except in growls and howls.

WISDOM OF THE OLD WAYS SCHOOL varies; EFFECTIVE LEVEL 0

Skill CHECK Knowledge (local) DC 20, 1 success

Components V, M

Material Component—varies, usually a natural object freshly taken from the forest or a simple crafted item like a corn doll or hazel wand (typical cost is 1 gp or less) **CASTING TIME** 10 minutes

RANGE varies

TARGET varies

DURATION varies

SAVING THROW Will negates; SPELL RESISTANCE yes You invoke an ancient Margreve tradition and the forest responds.

These rules cover various different incantations equivalent to 0-level spells. Below is a small sample of rituals, each treated as a separate incantation. They become increasingly unreliable if invoked beyond the Old Margreve:

- Break a rival's arrow and wrap its head in fox sinews: its owner's next three ranged attacks are at a -1 penalty.
- Draw a nettle across your palm and dedicate the pain to an enemy: unluck plagues their day (see *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Core Rulebook* for curses).
- Known as a "widow's taper," a candle made from the wax of Margrevian bees helps guide a lost love one home: grants them *know direction*, except it indicates the target's home.
- Place an alraune root in a bowl of milk beneath their sickbed: the target gains a +1 circumstance bonus to their next Fortitude check against disease.
- Swear to do a deed while touching a living tree to gain a vila's blessing: +1 bonus to next physical check.

BACKLASH: Using this incantation leaves you feeling uneasy and uncommunicative, like a reclusive forest animal: you suffer 1 ability damage to Int, Wis, or Cha (chosen randomly).

FAILURE: The effect reverses, either affecting you instead of the target or having the opposite effect to the one intended.



AIRGIRE

rarely seen beyond its borders. The unlucky few who encounter the Margreve's native creatures rarely live to tell the tale. But tales abound nonetheless. Wild and terrible tales to frighten travelers and threaten disobedient children.

To maintain mystery and heighten fear, withhold the creatures' names from your players for as long as possible. Instead, describe the creatures by the sound they make or the smell that precedes them. Your players will soon develop their own evocative names for these beasts as they recall key characteristics to describe the creatures to locals. Margreve folk tend not to name fell creatures, for they say that names bequeath power. When inhabitants must pronounce a monster at all, they use informal references like "the howlers," "the Mistwallow maidens," or "the shuddering boys."

Many of the creatures in this bestiary bear their real world names. Many have Eastern European roots. The ala, leshy, rusalka, vila, and zmey enjoy rich histories as spirits and demons in Slavic mythology. Research into their fascinating stories may not only reveal other Slavic beasts to bring to your game but also inspire variants based on the many, often conflicting, aspects each one possesses.

Ala

With an outrageously wide mouth of razor-sharp teeth and smoky black rags for clothes, the crazed crone leaps into the air in a black whirlwind of claws and lightning.

Ala are born from galls that grow on the trunks of treants. While in this parasitic pocket, an ala sickens the treant and devours its life force. When the treant dies, the ala takes the treant's soul as its own before erupting in a black whirlwind of claws and lightning.

Ala appear as wild hags with windblown hair and clothes of smoky black rags. Their true form is that of a whirlwind, which can always be seen by šestaci (or men with 6 digits on each hand). An ala cannot enter a house without it shaking in protest.

Arriving in new areas on the cusp of hail or lightning storms, ala take up residence in the hollows of trees that were struck by lightning. Ala are most active when thunder rocks the forest.

These huge-mouthed creatures have voracious appetites, and though their "livestock" typically consists of rabid owls, wolves, and badgers, they favor the taste of innocents above all else. Some unsavory tribes beg an ala's favor with gifts of captives.

In battle, ala twist into black whirlwinds that sweep foes from their feet, battering them with claw, tooth, and electricity. When not in whirlwind form, ala tear at their foes with claws and a poisonous bite, or they throw wicked lightning bolts and hailstorms upon their enemies from a distance. Woes betide the hapless hero who confronts an ala while a storm rages overhead, for such storms energize the ala and enable it to call more powerful bolts. Because ala wield lightning with such mastery, some sages associate them with Perun, the God of Lightning.

The only thing ala hate more than sentient humanoids are dragons. Newborn ala and dragon children are rumored to fall into trances during storms when they fight each other in the clouds.

ALA

XP 4,800 CE Medium monstrous humanoid INIT +3; SENSES darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +14

AURA frightful presence (30 ft., DC 14)

AUKA Ingitial presence (so it., DC 14) DEFENSE AC 21, touch 16, flat-footed 18 (+3 deflection, +3 Dex, +5 natural) HP 95 (10d10+40) FORT +7, REF +10, WILL +10 IMMUNE electricity OFFENSE SPEED 30 ft., fly 30 ft. (perfect) MELEE bite +15 (1d6+5 plus poison), 2 claws +15 (1d4+5) SPECIAL ATTACKS whirlwind (3/day, 10–30 ft. high, 5 ft. wide at base, 1/2 wide as tall at peak, 2d8+5 damage plus Perun's kiss, DC 17) SPELL-LIKE ABILITIES (CL 10th) 1/day—*ice storm* (DC 13), *lightning bolt* (DC 12) (or if stormy

conditions, call lightning storm (DC 14)

STATISTICS

• Tales of the Old Margreve ••••

STR 20, DEX 16, CON 18, INT 10, WIS 16, CHA 8 BASE ATK +10; CMB +15; CMD 26

FEATS Alertness, Diehard, Endurance, Flyby Attack, Great Fortitude

SKILLS Climb +13, Fly +24, Intimidate +10, Perception +14, Sense Motive +5, Stealth +18, Survival +13; RACIAL MODIFIERS +4 Fly, +4 Stealth

LANGUAGES Common, Draconic

ECOLOGY

CR 8

ENVIRONMENT hills, mountains, and forests

ORGANIZATION solitary or storm (3-5)

TREASURE normal

SPECIAL ABILITIES

PERUN'S KISS (SU) Jagged bolts of lightning flash inside the ala's whirlwind, dealing 2d6 electricity damage plus an additional 1d6 electricity damage per ala in whirlwind form within 50 ft.

Poison (Ex) Ala poison—injury (bite); save Fort DC 17 (Constitutionbased); frequency 1/round for 6 rounds; effect sickened, sickened creatures are nauseated; cure 1 save.

The poison infuses the ala's flesh, so creatures making bite attacks against an ala must also save after each successful attack.

.... Margreve Bestiary

Cr

CHILD OF THE BRIAN

The ligneous figure's eyes gleam like polished walnuts, and the sly smile seems oddly placed on the tiny body covered in spikes and thorns. The creature's waist is no thicker than your clenched fist, its sinuous arms no wider than your finger but thice the length of its body.

Children of the briar are a frequent nuisance to fey and mortal alike. They grow in the Margreve's many briar patches but sometimes spawn when a sorcerer or magical creature's blood is spilled on the forest floor. Despite their size, they gather in great numbers, cultivating the Old Margreve's thorny thickets into veritable fortresses. Wise men flee when they hear their clicking language in the underbrush, for the children have a taste for blood and all the capricious wickedness of spiteful children.

From their lairs, the children of the briar creep far and wide to spy on the forest's inhabitants, sometimes using spiders, monstrous centipedes, or giant dragonflies as mounts. They converse with travelers bearing interesting news, but their words are thorned with gleeful malice, jealous bile, and lies. They are not above murder. They bargain what they learn for trinkets, favors, and drops of spilled blood.

The fey have long used the children of the briar as spies and informants, and the power of the Otherworld now courses through their veins, allowing them to work simple magical tricks and slip between the mortal and faerie realms with relative ease.

A caster of 3rd level or higher can gain a child of the briar as a familiar using the Improved Familiar feat.

CHILD OF THE BRIAR

XP 400

ENVIRONMENT temperate forest

ORGANIZATION solitary, gang (2–8), or nest (9–24) TREASURE standard (usually small items)

SPECIAL ABILITIES

ECOLOGY

BRIAR MAGIC (SP) A child of the briar can cast any cantrip from the sorcerer/wizard spell list. The save DCs are Charisma-based.

- **ENTANGLE (EX)** As a standard action, two or more children of the briar in the same square can produce an effect identical to an *entangle* spell in the 5-ft. square they occupy (DC 10 + number of children of the briar in the square). Briar children are immune to this ability, but other entangle effects affect them normally.
- **FEY BLOOD (EX)** Children of the briar count as both plant and fey for any effect related to type.
- **SPITDART TONGUE (Ex)** Every child of the briar can shoot a wooden spike from its mouth every other round. Treat this as a Tiny dart (1 damage, base range 20 ft.).
- **THORNY GRAPPLE (EX)** A child of the briar's long thorny limbs enable it to grapple creatures up to 2 size categories larger than itself. It adds its Dexterity modifier instead of Strength modifier to any damage inflicted while grappling.

NE Tiny plant INIT +3; SENSES low-light vision; Perception +7 DEFENSE AC 17, touch 15, flat-footed 14 (+3 Dex, +2 natural, +2 size) HP 9 (2d8) FORT +3, REF +3, WILL +0 DEFENSIVE ABILITIES plant traits; DR 5/cold iron WEAKNESSES vulnerable to fire OFFENSE SPEED 20 ft., climb 10 ft. MELEE 2 claws +6 (1d2-2 plus grab) SPACE 2-1/2 ft.; REACH 5 ft. SPECIAL ATTACKS spitdart tongue, thorny grapple SPELL-LIKE ABILITIES (CL 2nd) 3/day—briar magic (DC 12) 1/day—entangle (DC 13) STATISTICS STR 6, DEX 17, CON 11, INT 13, WIS 10, Сна 14 BASE ATK +1; CMB +2 (+6 grapple); CMD 10 FEATS Weapon Finesse SKILLS Bluff +4, Climb +8, Perception +7, Stealth +14 (+20 in forest); RACIAL MODIFIERS +8 Climb, +2 Perception, +6 Stealth while in forest LANGUAGE Briarclick (spoken only), Common, Sylvan SQ fey blood

.... Tales of the Old Margreve

DEER CENCAUR (ALSEJO)

This creature has the slender upper body of an elf and the lower body of a deer.

Alseid are the graceful woodland cousins to centaurs. Because they are rarely seen far from the wooded glades they call home, they are sometimes called "grove nymphs," despite being more closely related to elves than nymphs.

Alseid see the forest as an individual and a friend. They are suspicious of outsiders who do not share this view. Lost travelers who demonstrate deep respect for the forest may spot a distant alseid's white tail and chase after it as it bounces toward a road that leads out of the forest. Disrespectful strangers may follow the same tail to their doom.

Male alseid have antlers growing from their foreheads. Antlers grow very slowly, branching every 10 years for the first century of life. Further points only develop with the blessings of the forest. No 14 point imperial alseid are known to exist, but many tribes are governed by princes with 13 points. Because antlers signify status, alseid never use them in combat. Cutting an alseid's antlers is one of the direst punishments an alseid can receive. Elf rangers have reported a lone alseid exile, wandering the Margreve, its antlers sawn off near the scalp.

Alseid have a deep connection with the Old World magic of the Margreve. Their leaders favor the druid and ranger classes.

ALSEID

Alseid Characters

Alseid are defined by their class levels—they do not possess racial HD. Alseid have the following racial traits.

+2 DEXTERITY, +2 WISDOM, -2 INTELLIGENCE: Alseid are nimble and wise, but rely more on instinct than logic.

MEDIUM: Alseid are Medium creatures and have no bonuses or penalties due to their size.

QUADRUPED: Alseid receive a +4 bonus to their CMD to resist trip attacks.

FAST: Alseid are fast for their size and have a base speed of 40 ft. **DARKVISION**: Alseid can see in the dark up to 60 ft.

ALSEID MAGIC: Alseid add +1 to the DC of any saving throws against Old World spells that they cast while in the forest.

WOODFRIEND: See above.

SKILLED: Alseid receive a +2 racial bonus on Perception and Stealth skill checks.

WEAPON FAMILIARITY Alseid are proficient with all spears and shortbows (including composite shortbows).

LANGUAGES: Alseid begin play speaking Common and Elven. Alseid with high Intelligence scores can choose from the following: Briarclick (the language of Children of the Briar), Gnoll, Gnome, Goblin, and Sylvan.



XP 200 Alseid ranger 1 **CN Medium monstrous humanoid** INIT +3; SENSES darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +9 DEFENSE AC 16, touch 13, flat-footed 13 (+3 armor, +3 Dex) HP 6 (1d10+1) FORT +1, REF +5, WILL +5 OFFENSE SPEED 40 ft. MELEE longspear +2 (1d8+1/x3) RANGED composite shortbow +4 (1d6+1/x3) SPECIAL ATTACKS favored enemy (magical beast +2) STATISTICS STR 13, DEX 17, CON 12, INT 8, WIS 16, CHA 8 BASE ATK +1; CMB +2; CMD 15 (19 vs. trip) FEATS Point-Blank Shot SKILLS Heal +7, Knowledge (nature) +3, Perception +9, Stealth +9, Survival +7; RACIAL MODIFIERS +2 Perception, +2 Stealth LANGUAGES Common, Elven SQ track, woodfriend, wild empathy +0 ECOLOGY **ENVIRONMENT** any forest ORGANIZATION solitary, pair, band (3–6), or tribe (7–20 plus 3 hunters of 3rd level and 1 leader of 6th level) TREASURE NPC gear (composite shortbow [+1 Str] with 20 arrows, longspear, studded leather, other treasure) SPECIAL ABILITIES WOODFRIEND (SU) When in a forest, alseid leave no tracks and

automatically discern true north.

••••Margreve Bestiary ••••

OREEN HUSSAR

A figure of living wood in the shape of horse and rider regards you with knothole eyes above a beard of moss. It wears a bark cuirass and holds a gnarled lance in one hand. A leafy bow rests beside its saddle.

Green hussars sprout like galls from the oldest Margreve trees whenever the forest needs them. Although they resemble cavalrymen, both horse and rider is a single creature of living wood. They are hunters, instruments of the forest's wrath-relentless and pitiless. Their senses are formidable since the forest constantly whispers where to track their prey. Green hussars do not speak but on occasion let out a sepulchral groan, like the creaking of an ancient tree. In combat, they rush through the forest in waves, leaf-fletched barbs flying before them, before moving in for the kill. They fight to the death.

The forest sometimes sends green hussars forth as a strange kind of tithe collector. They take food, drink, and sometimes rare woods and spices-coins or silver are not usually accepted. They can be appeased for rather little, but failing to understand or meet their silent demands means a murderous pursuit.

When not on a hunt for men or tithe, a green hussar stands still as a statue, often planting itself in a sacred place as a guardian. Fey and other forest inhabitants often bring gifts, adding flowers, owl feathers, and strands of spider's web to the splay of twigs that rises from its back like a hussar's wing.

When slain, a green hussar shrivels into a fungus-infested stump, its top resembling the face of its slayer. These stumps can be found throughout the forest. Locals sometimes bury tokens of their enemies in them, watering the offering with blood, tears, and cries for vengeance in the hope that the Margreve sends a green hussar to see justice done.

GREEN HUSSAR

CR 3 XP 800 N Large plant INIT +2; SENSES blindsense 60 ft., low-light vision; Perception +2 DEFENSE AC 15, touch 11, flat-footed 13 (+4 natural, +2 Dex, -1 size) HP 30 (4d8+12) FORT +7, REF +3, WILL +3 DEFENSIVE ABILITIES plant traits; DR 5/slashing WEAKNESSES vulnerable to fire OFFENSE SPEED 50 ft. MELEE mwk lance +6 (1d8+3/x3), 2 hooves +0 (1d6+1) RANGED mwk shortbow +5 (1d6/x3) SPACE 10 ft.; REACH 5 ft. **SPECIAL ATTACKS** flowering lance (+3 bleed), trample (1d6+4, DC 15) STATISTICS STR 17, DEX 14, CON 16, INT 8, WIS 14, CHA 10 BASE ATK +3; CMB +7; CMD 19 (23 vs. trip) FEATS Deadly Aim, Run SKILLS Perception +2 (+10 in forest), Stealth +3 (+7 in forest), Survival +4 (+8 tracking in forest); RACIAL MODIFIERS +8 Perception while in forest, +4 Stealth while in forest, +4 Survival when tracking in forest

LANGUAGE understands Sylvan

SQ livewood weaponry, undersized weapons, woodland stride

ECOLOGY

ENVIRONMENT temperate forest

ORGANIZATION solitary, pair, or band (2-5)

TREASURE none

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- FLOWERING LANCE (EX) The first wounding strike each day from a hussar's lance causes the tip to break off and root itself in the target, inflicting damage equal to the hussar's Strength modifier each round as it grows and sprouts crimson flowers. The lance functions normally without a tip, regenerating after 1 day if in a hussar's possession.
- LIVEWOOD WEAPONRY (SU) A green hussar can transform a piece of living wood into a lance, shortbow, or bundle of arrows as a free action. In their hands these are masterwork while, in all others' hands, they count as improvised weapons.

UNDERSIZED WEAPONS (EX) Although green hussars are Large, they use weapons as Medium humanoids.

WOODLAND STRIDE (Ex) This ability functions as the druid class feature of the same name.

• Tales of the Old Margreve ••••



1411

This strange man wears loose scraps of clothing and appears to be covered in bark and root-like growths. The hair and beard that frame his piercing green eyes writhe like living vines.

Generally solitary, leshy can often be found tending to plants and animals in groves around the edge of the Margreve. Leshy have little patience for interlopers and often kill, abduct, or frighten off trailblazers and guides.

Leshy prefer trickery over combat, particularly enjoying misguiding and kidnapping interlopers through use of their mimicry. If challenged, they use their change size ability to scare intruders away but never hesitate to fight to the death in service to the forest if necessary. Leshy hate metal, especially the axes they associate with logging, and they go out of their way to steal metal items and lead those who use them astray.

With careful courting and appropriate gifts, it is possible to gain a leshy's capricious assistance. This can be risky, however, since leshy have a fey-like love of mischief. Still, there are tales of times where a leshy's help has been essential to a group traversing the Margreve.

LESHY

CR 4 XP 1.200 CN Medium monstrous humanoid **INIT** +1; **SENSES** darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +10 DEFENSE AC 17, touch 11, flat-footed 16 (+1 Dex, +6 natural) HP 42 (5d10+15) FORT +5 REF +5 WILL +6 OFFENSE SPEED 30 ft. **MELEE** club +8 (1d6+3) SPELL-LIKE ABILITIES (CL 5th) Constant-pass without trace, speak with animals 1/day—command plants (DC 17), create water, entangle (DC 14), hideous laughter (DC 15), plant growth, shillelagh **STATISTICS** STR 16 DEX 12 CON 14 INT 14 WIS 15 CHA 16 BASE ATK +5; CMB +8; CMD 19 **FEATS** Great Fortitude, Power Attack, Toughness SKILLS Bluff +8 (+12 when mimicking), Handle Animal +8, Knowledge (nature) +7, Perception +10, Stealth +9, Survival +10; RACIAL MODIFIERS +4 Bluff while mimicking LANGUAGES Common, Elven, Sylvan; speak with animals (as the spell) SQ change size, mimicry, wild empathy +8 ECOLOGY ENVIRONMENT temperate forests **ORGANIZATION** solitary **TREASURE** standard (club and other treasure) SPECIAL ABILITIES CHANGE SIZE (SU) As a standard action, a leshy can appear to change its size; becoming as tall as a massive oak (Gargantuan) or as short as a blade of grass (Diminutive). The change is entirely illusory, so the leshy's statistics do not change, though it gains a bonus or penalty to Stealth equivalent to its apparent

size category. Anyone physically interacting with the leshy can

disbelieve the size change (Will DC 15; Charisma-based).

- MIMICRY (SU) A leshy can mimic the calls and voices of any creature it has heard (such as the roar of a lion, the song of a sparrow, or voice of a PC). To use this ability, the leshy makes a Bluff check with a +4 racial bonus; listeners who succeed on an opposed Sense Motive check realize that something is mimicking the sound. If the listener is familiar with the individual the leshy is imitating, the listener gains a +4 bonus to oppose this check.
- WILD EMPATHY (SU) This works like the druid's wild empathy class feature, except the leshy receives a +5 racial bonus. Leshy with druid or ranger levels add this racial modifier to their wild empathy checks.
- Leshy are the self-proclaimed protectors of the Margreve outskirts. With their plant growth ability, they sabotage cultivated land, wipe out trails, and create weed walls and thickets to keep civilization at bay. Using command plants, they transplant assassin vines and other plant creatures to discourage new settlements. Some have wrangled rabid animals to the same purpose.



0/144

•••Margreve Bestiary••••

Myling

A small person in ragged clothing dashes toward you with open arms. There is a slight bluish tint to its flesh, and its eyes are a dull white.

Mylings are the souls of the unburied, those who die in the forest as a result of abandonment or exposure. The enraged soul finds no peace until its body is properly interred. A myling seeks a creature to carry it to its final resting place.

Mylings tend to be solitary. They haunt the place they died and the vicinity surrounding the dwellings of their killers. In a tragedy that leads to the death of multiples, the resultant mylings "hunt" as a pack.

Mylings shadow lone wanderers at night and jump onto their backs, demanding to be carried to their chosen burial grounds; myling packs, however, are more courageous and attack larger groups. Wrapping its arms and legs around its target, a myling holds on to its victim with great tenacity, constantly begging, threatening, and biting until its mount agrees to take it to its final resting place. If the victim proves unable or unwilling to carry the creature there, the myling bites its victim to death in a rage.

The myling's body grows heavier as it approaches its chosen burial spot. It sinks into the earth and takes its "mount" with it to an early grave, buried alive. Freshly churned earth is a sure sign that a myling has claimed the person responsible for abandoning it when it was alive.

Mylings maintain a trace of the personality they had when they were alive. Some are coy and charming, others sullen, some sadistic. Though they appear much as they did in life, mylings hide their faces and sing innocent rhymes as they approach their targets, for the creatures know that their dead eyes and cold blue skin give them away.

Myling XP 600 CE Small undead INIT +6; SENSES darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +7 DEFENSE AC 15, touch 13, flat-footed 13 (+2 Dex, +2 natural, +1 size) HP 19 (3d8+6) FORT +3, REF+3, WILL +4 DEFENSIVE ABILITIES undead traits; DR 5/iron OFFENSE SPEED 30 ft. MELEE bite +5 (1d4 plus attach) SPECIAL ATTACKS attach, buried alive STATISTICS STR 10, DEX 15, CON -, INT 10, WIS 12, CHA 14 BASE ATK +2; CMB +1 (+9 grapple when attached); **CMD** 13 FEATS Improved Initiative, Weapon Finesse SKILLS Acrobatics +5, Climb +6, Diplomacy +5, Perception +7 LANGUAGES Common

ECOLOGY

ENVIRONMENT forest

ORGANIZATION solitary, pair, pack (3–6) TREASURE none

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- ATTACH (EX) When a myling hits with a bite attack, it latches onto the target, effectively grappling its victim. A myling has a +8 racial bonus to maintain its grapple on a foe. It can deliver a bite automatically each round it successfully maintains the grapple.
- **BURIED ALIVE (EX)** Once on its chosen burial grounds, a myling grows heavier and sinks into the earth. Any creature with a myling attached sink with it (Reflex DC 12 to avoid). The DC increases by +2 for each additional myling attached to the victim. A myling and its victim sink in 1d6 rounds; the victim may attempt a new save each round, but the DC increases by 1 each time. On a successful save, the victim breaks free from the myling's grasp, but still needs to break free from the ground if it spent any time sinking. Victims that become fully submerged begin to suffocate (see *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Core Rulebook*). Treat the churned earth as quicksand (see *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Core Rulebook*).

••• Tales of the Old Margreve •••

Rusalka

A beautiful woman, her skin almost transparent, sits upon a willow branch. She is barefoot, and her hair and clothing are wet, as if she has just returned from a swim. She smiles seductively and motions for you to approach.

When a woman drowns in the Margreve, her dripping body may rise again as a rusalka. Some claim the drowning must be a suicide resultant from an unmarried pregnancy or from jilted love. Others say that the water must be "unclean"—tainted with murder or possessed of some evil spirit.

Rusalki dwell in the water where they died but often step out at night. Some climb a nearby tree, dangle their feet, and sing alluring songs. Others sit on the bank or a dock, coyly combing their wet tresses and awaiting prey. Rusalki mesmerize and seduce with song and dance (assisted by their formidable spell-like abilities) to lure victims into their arms. Once embraced, victims begin drowning as if held underwater.

A rusalka is charming and sadistic, perhaps claiming to be a lonely and love-lost tree spirit. While she giggles and flirts, she may part the water of a lake, using *control water*, and coax her beguiled "lover" toward the center to be rewarded with a passionate kiss as the waters rush back.

Those who resist a rusalka's charms hear the roaring of a raging river in the distance as her frail hands slam them to the ground with supernatural strength.

Rusalki tend to be solitary. They do not share "lovers" and may fight over the most prized victims. On nights when the moon is full, rusalki leave their watery homes and join in dance circles at the water's edge, singing all night long. Mothers forbid their children to swim when the moon is full, lest a rusalka drag them to the bottom.

RU	SALKA CR 6
XP 2	,400
CE N	ledium undead
INIT	+5; SENSES darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +15
DEF	ENSE
AC 1	8, touch 11, flat-footed 17 (+1 Dex, +7 natural)
нр 7	6 (8d8+40)
Fort	- +7, Ref +3, Will +8
DEFE	NSIVE ABILITIES undead traits
WEA	KNESSES vulnerable to fire, withered tresses
OFFI	ENSE
SPEE	D 30 ft., swim 40 ft.
Meli	EE 2 slams +12 (1d4+5 plus grab)
SPEC	IAL ATTACKS drowning embrace
SPEL	I-LIKE ABILITIES (CL 8th)
Cons	tant—detect thoughts (DC 17), tongues
At	will—charm monster (DC 19), control water, create water,
	suggestion (DC 18), water walk
1/	day— <i>dominate person</i> (DC 20)
STAT	ISTICS
STR 2	20, Dex 13, Con —, Int 13, Wis 15, Cha 20
BASE	Атк +6; СМВ +11 (+15 grapple); СМD 22
FEAT	s Alertness, Improved Initiative, Power Attack, Weapon
F	ocus (slam)
SKILL	s Bluff +8, Diplomacy +10, Knowledge (local) +6, Perception

+15, Perform (sing) +13, Sense Motive +15, Swim +13; RACIAL

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MODIFIERS +8 Swim
LANGUAGES Common
ECOLOGY
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ENVIRONMENT forest

ORGANIZATION solitary or circle (2-4)

TREASURE normal

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **DROWNING EMBRACE (SU)** A rusalka feeds by consuming the life essence of the victims that she lures into a passionate embrace or grabs in combat. A victim begins drowning immediately (see *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Core Rulebook*) as if already having held its breath for a number of rounds equal to twice its Constitution score. While embraced, the victim also suffers 2d6 negative energy damage/round. If a victim breaks free, it stops drowning.
- **GRAB (Ex)** A rusalka's grab attack works against creatures of Medium size or smaller. A grabbed victim is immediately subject to her drowning embrace ability.
- WITHERED TRESSES (Su) Completely drying the (attached) hair of a rusalka by keeping it out of water for 24 consecutive hours utterly destroys her, causing her body to turn to desiccated swamp weeds and crumble.



••• Margreve Bestiary ••••

Sap Demon

Oozing from an ax wound to a stout maple's trunk, a small figure of milky amber fluid forms on the forest floor. Vaguely humanoid in appearance, this languid ooze half walks and half flows forward, implacably following the axe wielder's path to certain revenge.

Sap demons are intelligent oozes that hunt down those that inflicted the tree wounds from which they bled. Though typically small in size, the larger the sap source is, the larger the resulting creature can be. Over the course of a few hours, these milky amber creatures pool into a shape that vaguely resembles their tree's attacker (for instance a hat may be incorporated into its overall shape).

Sap demons pummel their prey with pseudopod fists, but when possible, they especially enjoy claiming the weapon that wounded their tree and wielding it to deliver a final blow.

To gain speed, maneuverability, and protection, a sap demon may possess another creature by pinning it and oozing down its throat. Once inside, the sap demon dominates its host and causes it to bleed as its tree bled. Since the sap demon takes no damage when its host is wounded, it performs reckless acts. It upholds no scruples. It may wander into town for fisticuffs and mayhem, or it may bed a local woman who later gives birth to a forest changeling.

SAP DEMON CR 3 XP 800 CE Small ooze INIT +2; SENSES blindsight 60 ft.; Perception +2 DEFENSE AC 9, touch 9, flat-footed 9 (-2 Dex, +1 size) HP 27 (5d8+5); fast healing 5 **FORT** +2, **REF** -1, **WILL** +3 DEFENSIVE ABILITIES OOZE traits; DR 5/slashing WEAKNESSES winter's kiss OFFENSE SPEED 20 ft., climb 20 ft. MELEE 2 slams +7 (1d4+2 plus grab) SPECIAL ATTACKS soul sap STATISTICS STR 14, DEX 6, CON 12, INT 12, WIS 14, CHA 10 BASE ATK +3; CMB +4 (+10 grapple); CMD 14 (16 vs. grapple) FEATS Defensive Combat Training, Improved Grapple^B, Improved Initiative, Weapon Focus (slam) SKILLS Climb +15, Escape Artist +10, Stealth +11, Survival +9; RACIAL MODIFIERS +8 Climb, +12 Escape Artist, +4 Stealth, +2 Survival LANGUAGE none (but see soul sap ability) SQ amorphous, summer's step ECOLOGY **ENVIRONMENT** temperate forest ORGANIZATION solitary, pair, or band (3-6) TREASURE none SPECIAL ABILITIES AMORPHOUS (EX) A sap demon squeezes as though 2 size categories smaller. GRAB (Ex) Effective against opponents up to 1 size category larger than the sap demon.

Soul SAP (Su) A sap demon may slide down the throat of a sleeping, helpless, or pinned living creature that is within 1 size category of itself. Once inside, the sap demon takes control of its host. Treat the effect as *dominate monster* and as if the sap demon speaks the creature's language. While dominated, the host gains blindsight 60 ft., Diehard, Vital Strike, and barbarian's rage. The host's ears drip blood (1 damage/hour). No damage inflicted upon its host harms the sap demon. If the host dies or remains unconscious for 1 minute as the result of nonlethal damage, the sap demon exits.

- SUMMER'S STEP (Ex) Fire damage affects a sap demon (or host) like a *haste* spell for 1 minute.
- WINTER'S KISS (Ex) Freezing temperatures affect a sap demon (or host) like a *slow* spell. In addition, the host loses the use of its legs and falls prone (speed 5 ft.). The host's bleeding slows to 1 damage/3 hours (Fort DC 15 negates). The host retains control, losing blindsight, Diehard, Vital Strike, and rage.



••• Tales of the Old Margreve ••••

SUCUREFLY

They darting creatures look like dragonflies except with three pairs of gossamer wings, a jagged splinter-wood body, and flashes of bright colors running down their sides.

Margreve folk rarely speak when sutureflies dart through the trees, for these creatures listen for lies and sew any offender's mouth, nose, and eyes shut. Some say the Old Wood hides nothing but liars, and that is why the Margreve is shrouded in silence. Others say that the forest uses sutureflies to smother those who break its covenants and silence those who would reveal its secrets. Folk of the Outer Margreve release sutureflies from wooden coffers brought to forest trials to encourage witnesses to tell the truth. In the Heart of the Wood, one of Baba Yaga's daughters polices her "flock" of stolen children with sutureflies.

Adventurers evidence a suturefly's handiwork more often than they glimpse one directly. Bodies with sewn mouths and noses lie dead in the underbrush, mysterious children whose mouths are ringed with black puncture marks observe intruders from afar, and ascetic dryads step from trees, their eyes sewn shut against the evils of civilization.

Numerous suturefly varieties exist. Some have been bred to attack based on verbal triggers other than lies. Black-banded sutureflies, for instance, detect curses and religious blasphemies. In the Mistwallows of the deep Margreve, a green and gold variety attack briar folk, hags, and any others who allow magic to escape their lips.

Sutureflies dart, hover, and strafe with near perfect maneuverability. The common varieties are 6 inches long, but deep woods rangers claim to have discovered detached, 5-ft.-long wings, crushed in the forest detritus. by a permanent *discern lies* spell (Will DC 15; CL 5th; Wisdombased with +5 racial bonus).

SEW (Su) If a suturefly hits with a touch attack, it sews its opponent's mouth, nose, or eye closed. With supernatural speed, the suturefly repeatedly pierces the victim's face, each time threading a loop of the victim's own skin through the previous hole. These skin loops blacken, shrink, and draw the orifice closed. It takes a full round action and a sharp blade to sever the loops and reopen the orifice. Intense pain and 2 damage accompany the procedure (Heal DC 15 for half). A victim whose mouth and nose have been sewn shut immediately begins suffocating. Victims 5 or more size categories larger than the suturefly are unaffected by its sew ability.

TACTICS

BEFORE COMBAT Sutureflies dart from hiding to gain surprise. **DURING COMBAT** Once it has sewn a mouth closed, it targets the

same victim's nose, unless threatened by another opponent. **MORALE** A suturefly attacks until it has sewn all of its opponents' mouths and noses closed. It pursues fleeing opponents for 1 final attack round.

XP 200 N Fine vermin	
INIT +4; SENSES darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +1	St. Contraction of the second s
DEFENSE AC 22, touch 22, flat-footed 18 (+8 size, +4 Dex)	
HP 4 (1d8)	
FORT +2, REF +4, WILL +1	
IMMUNE mind-affecting effects	
OFFENSE	
SPEED fly 40 ft. (good)	
MELEE touch +12 (sew)	
SPACE 1/2 ft.; REACH 0 ft.	
STATISTICS	
STR 1, DEX 19, CON 10, INT -, WIS 12, CHA 4	
BASE АТК +0; СМВ -4; СМО 1	
FEATS Weapon Finesse ^B	
SKILLS Fly +16, Perception +1, Stealth +20	RET
SQ detect blasphemy	
ECOLOGY	
ENVIRONMENT Margreve Forest	
ORGANIZATION solitary, wing (2–4), or quiver (5–10)	
TREASURE none	-
SPECIAL ABILITIES	
DETECT BLASPHEMY (SU) The most common variety o	of suturefly

••••Margreve Bestiary ••••



This beautiful, slim woman is mounted on a deer. Her hair is the color of spring grass; her skin is polished wood and her eyes are gray like a coming storm.

The vila is a close relative of the dryad. Like their cousins, they serve as protectors of the Margreve. Where dryads beguile to accomplish their goals, the more savage vila coerce. They demand oaths from interlopers and enforce them fiercely. Vila delight in testing the generosity and forgiveness of travelers and tormenting the uncharitable and cruel with bad weather and misfortune. Particularly obnoxious adventurers might suffer from bad luck for many weeks due to a troop of vila quietly dancing around their camp each night.

The vila are often seen in the company of wolves or deer. In combat they are frequently encountered mounted on fleet-footed deer. Vila who take class levels favor druid and ranger.

VILA

CR 5

XP 1,600 LN Medium fey (shapechanger) INIT +5 (+9); SENSES low-light vision; Perception +18 DEFENSE AC 21, touch 16, flat-footed 15 (+2 armor, +5 Dex, +1 dodge, +3 natural) HP 40 (9d6+9) FORT +4, REF +11, WILL +8 DR 5/cold iron WEAKNESSES forest dependent OFFENSE SPEED 30 ft. **RANGED** mwk composite shortbow +11 (1d6+1/x3) SPECIAL ATTACKS fascinate (at will), smite oathbreaker (3/ day; +5d6) SPELL-LIKE ABILITIES (CL 9th) Constant-speak with animals 1/week-control weather STATISTICS STR 12, DEX 20, CON 13, INT 11, WIS 14, CHA 16 BASE ATK +4; CMB +5; CMD 20 FEATS Deadly Aim^B, Dodge, Mounted Archery, Mounted Combat, Pointblank Shot, Precise Shot, Weapon Focus (shortbow)^B Skills Fly +17, Knowledge (nature) +17, Perception +18, Perform (dance) +14, Perform (sing) +14, Ride +23, Stealth +21, Survival +15; RACIAL MODIFIERS +4 Knowledge (nature), +4 Perception, +6 Perform (dance), +6 Perform (sing), +6 Ride (class skill), +4 Stealth, +4 Survival LANGUAGES Common, Sylvan; speak with animals (as the spell) SQ change shape (falcon, wolf; beastshape II), dance of the luckless, forest meld, wild empathy +9 ECOLOGY **ENVIRONMENT** any forest ORGANIZATION solitary, pair, or troop (3-12) TREASURE standard (leather armor and masterwork

composite shortbow [+1 Str] with 20 arrows)

SPECIAL ABILITIES

DANCE OF THE LUCKLESS (SU) Vila who dance for 1 hour (usable 1/ night) create a fairy ring of small gray mushrooms. The ring lasts 7 days and has a 50 ft. diameter/dancing vila. Non-vila who fall asleep in the ring suffer a -2 luck penalty to skill checks and attack rolls for 24 hours.

- **FASCINATE (SU)** A singing vila fascinates as if she were a 9th-level bard (Will DC 17; Charisma-based).
- **FOREST DEPENDENT (SU)** A vila is mystically bonded to a single forest and never willingly leaves it. Each hour spent outside its borders, she suffers 1 Constitution damage (Fortitude DC 15 negates). While within her forest, she receives a +4 bonus to initiative checks.
- **FOREST MELD (SU)** A vila can meld for as long as she wishes with any tree in her forest (similar to how the *meld into stone* spell functions).
- SMITE OATHBREAKER (Su) As a full-round action 3/day, using any weapon, a vila can smite any opponent within 60 ft. who swore an oath in her forest and broke it. If she hits, she adds 5d6 to her damage. If she misses, the smite is not used.
- WILD EMPATHY (SU) As the druid's wild empathy class feature but with a +6 racial bonus to the check. Vila with wild empathy as a class feature add this racial modifier to their wild empathy checks.

••• Tales of the Old Margreve ••••



Crashing through the forest, this three-headed dragon stands upright, its tail thrashing from side to side as it walks. A vicious mouth lined with ivory teeth graces each head and green scales gleam in the fleeting sunlight piercing the ancient canopy.

Hunting beneath the dark canopy of the forest, lurking just beneath the surface of still lakes, and guarding gaping cave mouths concealing great treasure and mystery, the zmey serves two functions often tuned to one—vicious terror and nature's protector. Single-mindedly destructive, the zmey keeps the heart of the forest free from interlopers. Some rumor the Margreve's heart controls the actions of this beast, yet the zmey indeed has its own desires and inclinations.

The churning rage boiling in the heart of the zmey finds cooling only in the company of a pure maiden. Though vulgar and fearsome, zmey lust after maidens and go to elaborate—and often confused lengths to court these women. Most often, this courtship results in kidnapping. Hushed folktales claim the beasts are able to mate with these maidens. The women rarely survive the 12-month pregnancy and childbirth. The spawn of this pairing, called a zmajeviti, is usually male. Thankfully girls born of this union are extremely rare since they carry a lustful darkness in their soul.

A rare beast indeed, zmey avoid their own kind, leaving competition in favor of more isolated hunting grounds. The rare times two zmey fight for a disputed part of the forest, a trail of destruction leads like a blistered scar to the victor.

Zmey eat any organic matter available to them, but they favor mammals as meals. The more difficult the hunt, the better, for zmey feel that intellect flavors the meat.

Dappled black and green scales cover this enormous beast. The three necks towering above the creature's body are long and powerful, each ending with an identical menacing head, each flanked with membranous, spiny frills. A forked tongue flickers across long pale teeth and six pairs of eyes burn red with rage. A pair of leathery wings stretch from the zmey's back, trailing down to a long tail accented with peaked crests. A zmey often stands upright and measures 25 ft. from snout to tail. The beast weighs over 9,000 lb.

ZMEY

CR 14

XP 38,400

CE Huge dragon

INIT +1; SENSES blindsight 60 ft., darkvision 90 ft., low-light vision, scent; Perception +23

DEFENSE

AC 29, touch 9, flat-footed 28 (+1 Dex, +20 natural, -2 size) HP 216 (16d12+112); regeneration 5

FORT +17, REF +11, WILL +16

IMMUNE paralysis, sleep; RESIST cold 10, fire 20

OFFENSE

SPEED 50 ft., fly 50 ft. (clumsy), swim 50 ft.

MELEE 3 bites +24 (2d6+10/19–20), 2 claws +24 (1d8+10), tail +22 (2d6+5)

SPACE 15 ft.; REACH 15 ft. (20 ft. with bite)

SPECIAL ATTACKS breath weapon (50-ft. cone, DC 25, 10d10 fire, special), trample (2d6+15, DC 28)

STATISTICS

STR 31, **DEX** 13, **CON** 25, **INT** 16, **WIS** 22, **CHA** 19 **BASE ATK** +16; **CMB** +28; **CMD** 39

FEATS Awesome Blow, Critical Focus, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Critical (bite), Multiattack, Power Attack, Sickening Critical, Vital Strike

SKILLS Bluff +17, Climb +25, Diplomacy +17, Fly +2, Intimidate +23, Knowledge (geography) +20, Knowledge (nature) +20, Perception +23, Sense Motive +22, Stealth +12, Survival +22, Swim +23

LANGUAGES Common, Draconic, Elven, Sylvan

SQ lake leap, multiheaded, spawn headling

ECOLOGY

ENVIRONMENT forest

ORGANIZATION solitary

TREASURE standard

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **BREATH WEAPON (SU)** As a standard action, a zmey may breathe a 50-ft. cone of fire from each of its three heads, splitting 10d10 total fire damage between the heads in any proportion the zmey chooses: for example 4d10 fire damage from head 1, 6d10 fire damage from head 2, and none from head 3. One roll determines the recharge time for the entire creature, allowing its use every 1d4 rounds. A zmey can choose to not harm plants or plant creatures.
- LAKE LEAP (SU) Though not aquatic, a zmey spends much of its time lurking in lakes, ponds, and pools scattered throughout the Margreve. When submerged in a natural pool of water of any size, it can, as a standard action, transport itself to another similar body of water within 5,000 ft. This ability does not function within or between rivers, streams, or other rapidly flowing bodies of water.
- MULTIHEADED (EX) A zmey can be killed by severing all of its heads or slaying its body. Any attack that is not an attempt to sever a head affects the body, including area attacks or attacks that cause piercing or bludgeoning damage. To sever a head, an opponent must make a sunder attempt with a slashing weapon targeting a head. A head is considered a separate weapon with hardness 0 and hp equal to double the zmey's HD. To sever a head, an opponent must inflict enough damage to reduce the head to 0 hp. Severing a head deals damage to the zmey's body equal to double the zmey's HD that can't be regenerated until the head regrows.

REGENERATION (Ex) This regeneration applies only to damage inflicted on the zmey's body; it doesn't apply to damage to its heads. Regeneration stops functioning when all heads are severed. It takes 24 hours for a zmey to regrow a functional head.

SPAWN HEADLING (SU) A zmey's severed head grows into a zmey headling 2d6 rounds after separation. Smearing at least a pound of salt on the severed head's stump and burning the bleeding neck for 10 damage prevents this transformation.



.... Margreve Bestiary

CR 8

Zmey Readling

When severed from a parent zmey, a zmey headling possesses a voracious appetite, seeking to feed as soon as possible. This inevitably leads to one of two outcomes—either the headling attacks those who severed it or it attacks its parent, whichever appears closer to death. Headlings begin their existence with cloudy memories from their parent zmey.

Growing headlings feed destructive urges, crashing through the forest, slaying fauna and scorching flora to sate the insatiable hunger that fuels their growth. Many stories focusing on the bestial nature of the zmey are actually reports of rogue headlings.

A headling grows into a full grown zmey after two lunar cycles after separation from the parent zmey. During those months, the headling begins its transformation with little aside from aggression in its heart. It may rampage through the forest or behave in a dreamlike manner, enrapt with some personal mission.

(GMs wishing to represent a zmey headling through different stages of its growth should use the young and advanced simple templates.)

Zmey Headling XP 4,800

CE Medium dragon

INIT +5; SENSES darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision, scent; Perception +17

DEFENSE

AC 21, touch 11, flat-footed 20 (+1 Dex, +10 natural) HP 105 (10d12+40); fast healing 5

FORT +11, REF +8, WILL +11

IMMUNE paralysis, sleep; RESIST cold 10, fire 10

OFFENSE

SPEED 40 ft., swim 40 ft.

MELEE bite +17 (2d6+7/19–20), 2 claws +17 (1d4+7), tail +15 (1d6+3)

SPACE 5 ft.; REACH 5 ft. (10 ft. with bite)

SPECIAL ATTACKS breath weapon (50-ft. cone, DC 19, 8d8 fire) STATISTICS

STR 25, DEX 13, CON 18, INT 14, WIS 18, CHA 17

ВАSE АТК +10; СМВ +17; СМD 28

- FEATS Improved Critical (bite), Improved Initiative, Multiattack, Power Attack, Vital Strike
- SKILLS Bluff +10, Climb +18, Diplomacy +10, Intimidate +16, Knowledge (geography) +9, Knowledge (nature) +9, Perception +17, Sense Motive +15, Stealth +14, Survival +17, Swim +26
 LANGUAGES Common, Draconic, Sylvan




• Tales of the Old Margreve ••••

By Richard Pett

The one sure way to tell if the baby-eating Margreve Witch is at band is to watch your milk—if it curdles suddenly, then she is near. If so, never answer a knocking on your door at midnight, for it is sure to be her Hollow Man come to collect your head!

—old wives' tale of Margreve

Adventure Background

I once served the Margreve Witch, as her guardian and protector, but one day, I heard singing and staggered through the forest to serve a new mistress. I have no words for what I felt, nor a mouth to form them if I had, but I know what I have to do: I must serve the ancient tree that is dying—will die—unless I help her.

The forest stirs, and soon things that should have remained dead beneath the rust carpet of fallen pine needles will awaken once more. She is merely the first.

She whispers to me, this Singing Tree, and the heads I bring give her a voice. With that voice she can talk once more, calling her legs to chase you, hands to throttle you, and teeth to bite you.

I am the Hollow Man, and soon, the harvest begins...

"Hollow" is a fantasy forest adventure suitable for PCs of 1st level.

Adventure Summary

Nargreve Forest. The adventure set on the edges of Margreve Forest. The adventure takes place around Levoča—a thorp plagued by a wood golem called the Hollow Man, made of trees and spit and babies' tears. It collects heads for its mistress the Singing Tree, a magical tree that awakens the minds and anger of animals.

The adventure commences with the PCs arrival at Levoča where things are amiss: a bull has killed its owner, a young girl has disappeared, and on the very night of the PCs arrival, a pack of wolves menace the village.

Soon a culprit is found—the Hollow Man—who begins knocking on doors at midnight with its scythe—eager to collect heads for the Singing Tree. The Hollow Man effectively besieges Levoča, and the locals resolve to kill him.

Even if the Hollow Man and its wards are dealt with, the animals remain angry because the Singing Tree continues to call in the dark. The PCs must locate the tree and destroy it, facing a dense forest alive with angry creatures before a final confrontation with the vile Singing Tree herself.

STARTING THE ADVENTURE

The PCs need only to arrive at the thorp of Levoča for the events within this adventure to occur. Perhaps Levoča is simply a stop on another journey, the first steps in exploring the ancient forest of Margreve, or maybe the PCs are visiting someone they know in the village.

The adventure begins with the PCs approaching the village late one afternoon, just as the sun begins to doze behind the pines.

A WORD OF WARNING

The Hollow Man, a wood golem with slightly modified abilities, is still a CR 5 creature that would, under normal circumstances, easily wipe out a party of 1st-level adventurers, even with the help of the villagers. The intention of this adventure is to create a seemingly unassailable foe, forcing the PCs and villagers to work together to overcome it using brains as well as brawn. Do not use the Hollow Man as an excuse to kill the party but, instead, as a precursor to other foes that lie within the forest. The Hollow Man is, in essence, interested simply in harvesting heads for the Singing Tree and does not sully the Harvester scythe with un-chosen blood.

Running an adventure such as this can provide an interesting change of pace, making PCs think twice about boldly entering the Margreve Forest assuming that they can deal with whatever lies within its forlorn depths.

Levoça: A Troubled Village

As PCs approach the village, read or paraphrase the following description:

The muddy byway you are on winds its way through the forest and, eventually, reaches a damp clearing where the sun struggles to reach the ground through a canopy of forlorn trees. About 30 moldering, thatched cottages lurk in this clearing. Local children chase pigs and sheep in play, but they all rush toward you. They take your hands and lead you into the dark village, the clearing around which is watched by hundreds of unsettling scarecrows made from bones and branches wound together.

Levoča is a troubled village; the normally sleepy thorp has been plagued by unexpected events in the last few days.

LEVOČA

THORP conventional (church-led farming community); **AL** N **GP LIMIT** 40 gp; **ASSETS** 740 gp

DEMOGRAPHICS	
POPULATION 75	
TYPE isolated (100% human)	
AUTHORITY FIGURES	
Decruse Action (made human supert 1)	

BROTHER ARKADI (male human expert 1)

Levoča is a small community that subsists on farming—primarily livestock—and hunting. Ostensibly, power is based by default with Brother Arkadi, a follower of Porevit and Yarila; in truth, however, the brother is little more than a weak-willed old man.



.... Bollow

Houses are made of wattle and daub (hardness 5, hp 10) and have thatched roofs built around a central stone chimney. Doors are simple (Break DC 13) and held shut by a latch. Each house has 2–5 windows with shutters (Break DC 13) and a single room.

ALLIES: While the PCs can overcome events in and around the village themselves, things may be easier with help. A torch-wielding mob is more likely to drive the Hollow Man into a fiery grave, and any extra muscle is always useful for low-level PCs.

The locals begin with an indifferent attitude toward the PCs, but they are treated as a single entity in terms of resolving any Diplomacy checks. A total of three local men are willing to help the PCs at the start of the adventure; this rises to 6 if the local's attitude rises to friendly and 12 if they become helpful. Should, for any reason, the local's attitude become unfriendly at any time, the PCs receive no help.

As events move on, the following modifiers should be added to any attempt to get the local's help through Diplomacy:

TABLE 1-1: DIPLOMACY MODIFIERS

For being caught digging up Yurt's body	-8
For each villager killed (whether by PCs hands or not)	-2
For each wolf killed by a PC	+1
For helping to drive off the wolves	+2
For rallying the locals into firing at wolves, not shadows	+4
For returning Karda's body and destroying the swarm	+4
For telling Drash of the connection between the bull's	+4
madness and the forest	

Although the PCs can count upon the support of at least some of the locals—who gladly help in any reasonable way—when things start to get scary, they easily lose morale and run away (Will DC 10 if the locals are helpful, DC 13 if friendly, and DC 16 if indifferent). For each villager unconscious or dying in any dangerous encounter, the DC increases by 1. If 5 or more villagers are unconscious or dying in any given encounter, those remaining must make an immediate morale check. Villagers asked to directly fight must make morale checks 1/ round; otherwise, they make checks 1/encounter.

EVENTS: This adventure is run as a series of events linked by the Hollow Man and the Singing Tree. Events occur on a daily basis to keep an element of menace. Events beyond day 6 are not included but should follow the pattern of the previous days.

WILDLIFE: The sudden madness of animals, caused by the Singing Tree, is a backdrop to events in "Hollow." Use animals to provide hints to the PCs that all is not well, and expand upon the listed events as you wish. For example, the village is full of domestic animals, and while some have made their save against the Singing Trees effects, some have not—or they may fail at various points in the adventure. You can have some fun with unexpected nips from dogs and scratches from cats, but keep these things in the background, it could soon become tiresome to your players if every goat they pass butts them or every bird that flies over pecks them.

Familiars and animal companions are special since they are summoned animals. In each case, summoned animals become enraged by the Singing Tree's song and attack random targets nearby (including the summoner) as though confused (Will DC 15). In the case of familiars and animal companions, the saving throw should be made at midnight each day (using their own or their masters' Will save, whichever is greater), and those that fail flee into the woods unable and unwilling to attack their masters yet wishing to do so. Such animals revert to their basic type and flee randomly into the forest, returning the next night if they save or, otherwise, remaining wild. Assume that such companions

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TALES OF THE OLD MARGREVE ADVENTURES

While all adventures in this eight-adventure anthology share the dark-forest, Old World theme, each adventure stands alone. They may be played individually or linked together into a campaign, levels 1–10.

None of the adventures in the anthology takes into account the powers of the Margreve as described in the gazetteer. GMs wishing to transplant these adventures to a standard forest setting may do so without modifying the adventures. GMs playing these adventures in the Margreve are encouraged to layer the Margreve's powers into each adventure with the desired level of Margreve aggression in mind.

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come to no harm while wild and that, if they make their save or the Singing Tree is silenced, they return and behave as normal.

All animals are aware of the singing but merely that it is all around; they cannot identify exact locations but know it comes from the forest.

	ARD LEVOČA LOCAL CR 1/3
XP 65	
Human d	commoner 1
N Mediu	m humanoid
INIT +2; \$	Senses Perception +2
DEFENS	E
AC 12, to	ouch 12, flat-footed 10 (+2 Dex)
нр 7 (1d	6+4)
FORT +1,	REF +2, WILL -1
OFFENS	E
SPEED 30) ft.
Melee	torch –3 (1d3+1 plus 1 fire) or pitchfork +1 (1d6)
RANGED	shortbow +2 (1d6/x3)
SPACE 5 1	ft.; REACH 5 ft.
TACTICS	
DURING	COMBAT The locals hate fighting and try to gain strength
from	numbers.
Morale	The morale of locals in dangerous situations is described in
the A	ALLIES section, above.
STATISTI	CS
STR 12, D	Dex 15, Con 12, Int 11, Wis 8, Cha 10
BASE ATH	x +0; CMB +1; CMD 13
FEATS Ski	ill Focus (Perception), Toughness
SKILLS Cr	aft (stonemason) +4, Intimidate +1, Perception +2,
Profe	ession (farmer) +3
	GES Common
LANGUAG	

The collapsed remains of an old limekiln weather here.

Just less than a century ago, the locals planned to use limestone quarried nearby to make quicklime, which has numerous purposes. The kiln fell into disuse over a series of three bad summers and now sits here slowly collapsing.

The lime kiln is a 5-ft.-wide shaft, some 20 ft. deep; an exposed chimney top embedded in the hillside links to a funnel-shaped burning area 10 ft. across at the base, which is loaded with fuel through an 18-inch-wide crawl hole.

••• Tales of the Old Margreve ••••

The kiln may be repaired (Craft [masonry] DC 10, requires two successful checks): one attempt/person/day is allowed, and if a check fails, the day's work is lost. A further day's work is required to fill the kiln with fuel and fire it for 8 hours.

Characters falling into a burning kiln suffer 3d6 fire damage/round and begin to suffocate. The only escape is through the crawl hole (Climb DC 10 or Escape Artist DC 15).

(The Climb check can be made more difficult by smoothing the chimney lining (Craft [masonry] DC 15), which again requires 1 day that is lost if the check is failed. The Escape Artist check can be increased to 20 in a similar fashion.)

2. THE WITCH-PIT

A pair of mangy-looking ducks calls this perfectly circular pond home. A curious timber stake rises from its center, and a trio of rusted manacles dangle from its top.

The Witch Pit, leftover from the ancient times, was once used to burn witches. It has not been used for many years and has slowly filled with water and muck. The ironwood stake shows signs of severe burning (Perception DC 15).

If the water is removed—an act that takes 5 workers at least 3 full days—the 15-ft.-deep, 10-ft.-wide pit is revealed in all its glory, complete with more rusting manacles and vague stone markings on its smooth walls.

A further day's work would place enough fuel in the pit to let it burn for 8 hours. Characters falling into the burning pit suffer 3d6 fire damage/round and begin to suffocate (Climb DC 15 escapes).

3. THE WOOD WARDS

The edges of the village are thick with strange figures staring outward, scarecrows of sack and stick. Each has been carefully fashioned to appear angry and wakeful.

There are nearly 100 wood wards on the edge of the village. Traditionally, one is placed each year just as winter arrives to keep away evil spirits. They are significant to the locals who would look upon their destruction—even in light of the Hollow Man animating them—as sacrilege.

4. The Chapel to Porevit and Yarila, the Green Gods

A fresh grave stands in the lonely graveyard beside this small simple chapel, whose roof is sagging dangerously.

This small simple chapel with a cornucopian altar is used by Brother Arkadi to conduct religious ceremonies. The fresh grave is that of Olay Yurt.

BROTHER ARKADI, the senile clergyman (NG male human expert 1) is very, very old; his sight is almost gone, and his hearing is practically non-existent. He stays in Levoča to give the odd service, to marry and bury people, and to bless festivals. That Arkadi is the de-facto elder of the village is not in doubt; however, he has become so senile that in effect there is no leader.

5. ANNA'S PLACE

This large farmstead has an attached barn, complete with iron weathervane.

Anna's place is roomy, and the widow allows travelers to stay in her barn for a very modest fee—and providing they behave. Anna may even cook for travelers if they can change her indifferent attitude to friendly although this mother of three has a difficult time making her food stretch far.

The barn itself is 20 ft. square with a large rickety simple door (Break DC 13). The hayloft is 10 ft. above the floor and filled with hay in autumn, a supply that depletes to nothing by the following spring.

6. KARL'S PLACE

This small farmstead has a huge amount of timber drying in an open outhouse, next to which is a large sturdy storage shed.

Karl, dour and age-weary, fires charcoal once a fortnight by building a large timber mound; the wood is covered with soil and turf before firing. This process takes Karl about 2 days, and the resulting charcoal is sold.

Karl has enough charcoal and timber to fill both the lime kiln and the Witch Pit once (or one of them twice), but he does not give it up readily unless he becomes friendly with the PCs or someone offers him the right price (around 25 gp).

7. OLAF YURT'S HOUSE

This small croft has a pair of walled fields at the rear.

Yurt was killed 3 days ago by his bull. Yurt's son, who lives in a house on the other side of the thorp, spends the first few days of this adventure removing his father's belongings and trying to decide what to do about the bull.

8. Kostya's Farmstead: The First Victim (Day 2)

9. BAČA'S FARM: THE SECOND VICTIM (DAY 3)

10. Koreň's Croft: The Third Victim (Day 4)

11. CHROBÁK'S PLACE: THE FOURTH VICTIM (DAY 5)

Each of these 4 locations, areas 8–11, is a standard farmstead as detailed above.

Before Today

Unbeknownst to the locals, the Singing Tree's cries have already begun their unsettling effect upon local animals with the events listed below.

THE ANGRY BULL (CR 2)

Olay Yurt was a good man in his late forties. He had achieved something of a reputation as the village comedian and always had a tall tale to tell or a yarn to spin. Yurt lived alone in his house (area 7) since the death of his beloved wife during childbirth 22 years ago.

Yurt bred cows and calves to eat and sell, and his bull was his pride and joy. It had sired over 40 calves and made Yurt a good living and a sizeable belly.

All that changed 3 days ago.

Yurt was tending the beloved bull, preparing for a new batch of cows he expected to buy soon, when the bull attacked him. It's unclear what





.... Tales of the Old Margreve

happened that day exactly, but the entire village was alerted to Yurt's yelling. It took the villagers almost an hour to get to Yurt's body, so fierce was the bull, and by that time the animal had mangled the body.

They buried Yurt yesterday—his grave can be seen outside the chapel. Yurt's son Drash initially tried to kill the bull but was driven back; he is now busy emptying his beloved father's house, intending to burn it when he has done. At that time, Drash also intends to walk into the field and slaughter the bull with a hunting spear. It takes Drash 3 days to empty his father's house.

Drash is in no state to talk, and all interaction checks such as Diplomacy are made with a -2 penalty. The locals unhappily relate what they know, but any talk of digging up Yurt and casting *speak with the dead* is looked upon with horror. Using Diplomacy, the PCs learn Drash's story and that the bull has never attacked anyone before indeed, occasional brave lads rode its back.

CREATURE: The bull is in the field at the back of Yurt's house. The field is 50 ft. square and edged with stout stone walls 5 ft. high. If subjected to a *speak with animals* spell, the bull is decidedly aggressive, and the only information the PCs learn is that it keeps hearing a maddening singing from the forest. It recalls nothing of the attack. Handle Animal attempts made against the bull receive a +10 DC modifier. PCs may notice (Handle Animal or Perception DC 20) that every few minutes the bull suddenly looks up and bellows (because of the Singing Tree). It is not unusual for bulls to become aggressive during spring, but at other times, such behavior is unusual (Knowledge [nature] DC 10).

If Drash attempts to kill the bull, play out the combat. If the PCs point out that it may be something in the forest that has driven the bull mad, Drash agrees to wait until the PCs find out what that may be.

BUILL XP 600

Variant herd animal, auroch (see Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary)

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DEVELOPMENT: The bull attacks anyone entering the field. It continues to attack until reduced to 5 hp, when it flees.

THE MISSING GIRL (CR 3)

Karda, 6 years old, often goes into the forest in search of truffles with her beloved pig. Her parents never minded since she rarely came back empty handed, and truffles, being a delicacy, fetch high prices. And Karda was a clever little girl who never strayed from the edges of the forest.

Yesterday evening, however, she didn't return, and as PCs arrive in town, her mother Jarka is in the woods searching for her while her father farms.

Karda actually strayed a little farther than usual into the forest this time, following the pig on the trail of truffles. Unfortunately, by this time, even her beloved pig was succumbing to the maddening noise of the Singing Tree and fled. Karda gave chase and stumbled beneath a tree where a bechive hangs (see map). The bees, also angered by the singing, stung the poor girl to death.

The PCs can follow Karda's tracks (Survival DC 10); remember, apply a +1 DC modifier for each day that has passed.

CREATURES: Karda's body lies at the foot of a large beech tree. Characters can see that she has been stung to death (Heal DC 10 or Perception DC 15); remember, apply a +1 DC modifier/10 ft. from the child's body. Characters notice the beehive (Perception DC 15), which hangs 15 ft. up in the branches.

BEE SWARM XP 800

Variant wasp swarm (see Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary) HP 31

DEVELOPMENT: The swarm is fierce, and it attacks anyone who comes within 20 ft. of the tree. The swarm is not easily deterred and attacks until reduced to 0 hp, at which point it dissipates. The bees do not give chase beyond 30 ft. from their tree.

Characters realize that bees normally do not swarm and attack unless provoked (Knowledge [nature] DC 10).

If PCs do not intervene, Jarka finds her daughter's body on day 3 and is also killed by the swarm.

Day 1: The Wolves

Allow the PCs to explore the village, remembering that it is early evening when they arrive. As the evening wears on, wolf howls are heard near the village, and as midnight approaches, a pack of wolves nears. The villagers light torches and arm themselves with shortbows, standing watch with the wood wards.

Use this encounter to show how disorganized and scared the villagers are: there are 24 in all, divided into 12 groups. The villagers are a greater danger to themselves than to the wolves, firing arrows hastily into the dark, dashing out into each other's line of fire, and accidentally setting fire to crofts.

At some stage in this encounter, if necessary, have Anna plead with the PCs to help the locals.

This encounter gives you a chance to introduce the villagers as a mob using torches and driving opponents away (see **DESTROYING THE HOLLOW MAN** section for more information). At some stage in combat, have a group of 12 locals rush a wolf, driving it back and demoralizing it until it flees.

VILLAGERS (12)

CR 2

XP 135 EACH Standard Levoča local HP 7 each

WOLVES (6)

XP 400 EACH

HP 13 each (see Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary)

DEVELOPMENT: The wolves are angered by the Singing Tree and behave with uncharacteristic aggression. They stalk 50 ft. from the village (Stealth +6). At intervals of 1d6 rounds, 2–3 of them surge in to attack, withdrawing the round after. If three of the wolves are slain, the rest flee.

The villagers jump at their own shadows, fire shots at random noises, and dash around foolishly. They are armed with shortbows, and each round, several of them (1d4+1) fire into the woods at imaginary wolves. If a villager sees a wolf (Perception opposed by wolf's Stealth), he or she has a chance to hit it; otherwise, arrows are wasted in fear, shooting at shadows. At the GM's option, fumbled attacks may hit other villagers or the PCs. If they run out of arrows, they flee indoors.

PCs can calm the villagers enough to only fire arrows when they see wolves (Bluff, Diplomacy, or Intimidate DC 15).



CR 3

CR 1/3

CR 1

···· Follow ····

Day 2: The Kollow Man Comes Knocking

Guided by its scythe—*Harvester*—and on a mission for the Singing Tree, the Hollow Man comes knocking at midnight, tonight and for 12 nights hereafter. The Hollow Man enters the village via the Hollow Way, accompanied by a wood ward, and proceeds directly to its victim's house. Tonight, it takes Kostya's head (area 8). Unless the PCs intervene, the Hollow Man enters, knocks Kostya's wife aside, and lops off the old farmer's head in a single swing. On this first occasion, the Hollow Man then points at each of its intended next four victims with its scythe and makes a single knock on its weapon.

When the Hollow Man enters the village, read or paraphrase the following:

A crooked thing lurches into view; a creature made of moldering briar, bone white parched branches, and polyporeinfested tree trunks. It grips a cruelly bent scythe in one hand, the weapon hung with the corpses of countless animals, some of which seem to still twitch. The creature has no eyes, but it seems to be looking for someone, and as it raises its formless head of aged wood, an idiot moan drones from it as it stares slowly around.

THE HOLLOW MAN

XP 1,600

Variant wood golem (see *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary*) **HP** 64

MELEE 2 slams +12 (2d6+4) or *Harvester* +13 (2d4+5/x4); SPECIAL ATTACKS animate wood ward; SQ trackless step (as druid), woodland stride (as druid)

ANIMATE WOOD WARD (SP) The Hollow Man is able to animate 1 wood ward/day within 60 ft. The wood ward follows simple visual instructions from the Hollow Man.

Note This creature's CR has been reduced to reflect its change in abilities.

DEVELOPMENT: The Hollow Man knocks three times on the door of its intended victim with *Harvester* before entering the building by any means. Assume that once the Hollow Man enters a house, unless a PC intervenes, it takes 3 rounds for it to sever its chosen head and gather it up. Once it collects a head, it moves back toward the Singing Tree as quickly as possible. The Hollow Man is interested only in harvesting a head for the Singing Tree and returning with it as swiftly as possible.

If attacked, the Hollow Man lashes out with a single slam attack, not wishing to sully its *Harvester* (see below) with impure blood. Only if the Hollow Man becomes frightened does it lash out with its scythe.

If the Hollow Man finds its intended target's house empty, it uses *Harvester's* abilities to first teleport to its chosen victim and then return to the village to show the results of its work before returning to the Singing Tree. It never returns to the Singing Tree empty handed and only uses *Harvester's* extra abilities to chase down fleeing victims. It staggers through the forest toward you; an animated tangle of broken branches, twigs, and animal bones held by wire, rot, and anger. Its head is a moldering, eyeless sack ending in a flaccid sheep jaw, and its hands and spastic legs are bent branches that it uses to move along the ground like an injured spider.

CR 1

WOOD WARD

XP 400

N Medium construct INIT +0; SENSES darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Perception +1 DEFENSE

AC 12, touch 12, flat-footed 10; (+2 Dex) HP 31 (2d10+20)

FORT +0, REF +2, WILL +1

DEFENSIVE ABILITIES construct traits; IMMUNE magic

WEAKNESSES vulnerable to fire

OFFENSE

SPEED 30 ft.

Melee 2 slams +2 (1d4) Special Attacks horror gaze

STATISTICS

STR 11, DEX 14, CON —, INT —, WIS 12, CHA 10

Ваѕе Атк +2; СМВ +2; СМD 14

ECOLOGY

ORGANIZATION solitary or gang (2-4)

TREASURE none

CR 5

SPECIAL ABILITIES

HORROR GAZE (SU) Shaken, 30 ft., Will DC 12 (Charisma-based, includes +2 profane bonus) negates. A wood ward's horror gaze does not affect the same target more than 1/day.

DEVELOPMENT: The Hollow Man directs the ward to protect it, either by standing guard outside the door if its victim's croft or by directly intervening against any attackers in combat. The wood ward attacks until destroyed. It remains animated for 8 hours.

HARVESTER (THE HOLLOW MAN'S SCYTHE) AURA faint divination; CL 12th SLOT none; PRICE —; WEIGHT 10 lb.

DESCRIPTION

This +1 scythe is made of ancient wood, bleached and smoothed by time, and it is actually a part of the Singing Tree itself. Harvester is draped with the remains of ancient corn dolls and mummified rodents: some fresh, some quite ancient (Perception DC 10).
The fresh kills come from the Hollow Man's approach to the village and offer a valuable clue to reaching the singing tree.

The scythe directs the Hollow Man to the Singing Tree's chosen victims as though the wielder had cast the *find the path* spell (CL 12th). The wielder can cast *tree stride* (2/day, CL 12th).

- Any wooden construct wielding the weapon returns to full hp at midnight.
- Upon the death of the Singing Tree, *Harvester* reverts to a +1 *scythe*, losing all other powers.

CONSTRUCTION

REQUIREMENTS Craft Magic Arms and Armor; unique to the Singing Tree; **Cost** —



.... Tales of the Old Margreve

A HOLLOW TALE

Knock, knock, knock; The Hollow Man calls. Swing, swing, swing! His greedy scythe falls!

Chop, chop, chop; He takes another head. Burn, burn, burn! The Hollow Man is dead!

The Margreve Forest has been haunted by hollow men for centuries. Some, like this one, are animated servants of the Margreve Witch herself, others have been gouged from trees, and at least one was made with naughty children.

In each case, the Hollow Man has a weakness—a vulnerability to fire—and the PCs can exploit this.

The curious rhyme above is well known to the locals from their childhoods, and any adult or child is able to give the rhyme word for word. The locals know that villagers used to burn an effigy of a hollow man at a special festival although this festival is no longer held. Characters may already know the rhyme and that it in fact celebrates the way such golems were killed by warriors in centuries past (Knowledge [local] DC 20).

DESTROYING THE HOLLOW MAN

The Hollow Man is a considerable foe, and one that could easily destroy a party of low-level adventurers. However, there are two key factors in dealing with it that the PCs may learn:

- 1. The Hollow Man is interested only in its intended victims. It has no interest in any kind of combat save securing a head each night for the Singing Tree.
- 2. The Hollow Man is vulnerable to fire. There are two locations in the village at which the PCs can deliver considerable damage to the Hollow Man with little personal risk—assuming they can lure it there: the lime kiln (area 1) and the Witch Pit (area 2).

There is enough flammable material at Karl's to fill both the kiln and the pit, each burning for 8 hours, and there is enough other timber in the village for a second attempt at one location. Using less timber or charcoal lowers the time and temperature (adjust the damage accordingly), but a minimum of 4 hours of flammable material is needed to get both locations burning efficiently.

However, the Hollow Man is not about to conveniently step into a burning pit and must be lured or driven there. A successful bull rush can push a target, but the Hollow Man's high CMD (25) makes this approach unlikely to succeed. Portable burning objects, such as carts, may be used; these objects enable PCs to combine their CMB values (up to 2 PCs for every 5-ft. square in size): such CMB checks are made with a +4 bonus if the object is burning although those pushing risk catching on fire themselves, and such objects only burn for 10 rounds. In this way, objects can be used to perform 1 maneuver/2 rounds; each maneuver is a standard action that provokes an attack of opportunity. The PCs could attempt to lure the Hollow Man onto a disguised or magically hidden pit, judge the success of each such case upon its merits.

The PCs may also attempt to lure the Hollow Man into a house and torch it. A burning house burns for 1 hour, and anyone trapped within takes 1d6 damage/round and risks catching fire.

A less risky method is to use the locals to help: a crowd of torchwielding locals may be able to help drive the Hollow Man to its doom. The PCs can be made aware of this option in several ways: by having the locals use torches to drive away wolves on day 1, by having the Hollow Man back away from fire, or by having an NPC suggest it.

If the Hollow Man is demoralized (see *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Core Rulebook*) by someone using Intimidate and wielding fire, the character can make an additional check on subsequent rounds that they still carry the flame to frighten the Hollow Man. In this way, it can be driven in a particular direction. This second check follows the same rules as demoralizing checks that succeed by 5 or more. On the following round, a further check may be made and so on. If a check fails, the Hollow Man can act normally.

Since it has a vulnerability to fire, all attempts to demoralize the Hollow Man with fire are made with a +2 bonus. Additionally, a character gains a +1 bonus to Intimidate checks against the Hollow Man for every 3 characters within 20 ft. who also wield fire

REACHING THE SINGING TREE ALONG THE HOLLOW WAY

Although it leaves no tracks, the Hollow Man has to pass through a lonely and remote part of the forest and is beset by creatures maddened by the Singing Tree itself.

The PCs may first hear about the Hollow Man's way into the village when Mother Molvor comes to Levoča from her house—Dead-Nettle Cottage, which lies about a mile north of the village—early on day 3. Mother Molvor saw the Hollow Man pass her cottage the night before on its way to the village and was worried. The locals are likely to alert the PCs to this event if they do not notice her themselves. There is no trail between Dead-Nettle Cottage and the village: Mother Molvor has no need to visit the village that often and the Hollow Man has not left any tracks. However, PCs accompanying the old lady back to her cottage may find some clues.

Mother Molvor happily points out where she saw the Hollow Man pass her cottage and the thick forest she saw it emerge from in the twilight. PCs soon come upon the freshly mangled corpse of a magpie (Perception DC 10).

The magpie is one of the many animals that have become enraged in the forest of late and that attack the Hollow Man as it moves through the forest. So common are these attacks, they offer a trail back to the Singing Tree.

The Hollow Man uses the same route each night; this path is not direct but consistent. Each night it is attacked by animals, and as the days build, the carcasses are easier to find. The Hollow Man occasionally takes the effort to hang the dead creature from nails on its scythe or from the branches of trees. It doesn't know why it does this. Assume that all such attacks on the Hollow Man by animals do no damage.

Though the carcasses present a trail, it is much slower than normal to track since it is so fragmented. PCs can move at 1/8 their speed (Perception DC 25), 1/12 their speed (Perception DC 20), or 1/16 their speed (Perception DC 15). (For more details about overland movement see the *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Core Rulebook*.) Apply a -2 DC modifier for each day after day 3 because the number of animal carcasses increases.

The Singing Tree is 6 miles away, and characters may encounter angry animals themselves.

42



Day 3 & Beyond

Day 3, A Fleeing Victim: At dawn, Bača (area 9) and his family leave the village, packing their belongings into a handcart and vowing never to return. About 2 hours later, Mother Molvor arrives in the village to check that everyone is safe.

Unless they have already heard the tale, the PCs should hear local children singing the Hollow Man nursery rhyme: a well-known traditional tale that has been sung by children in these parts for centuries.

The Hollow Man returns tonight for its second victim, Bača, but finding him gone, the golem seemingly leaves the village. However, the Hollow Man actually utilizes Harvester's special abilities to catch up with the man and his family, beheads the farmer, and returns to the village to parade the head—almost gratuitously around Levoča.

Day 4, A Cry for Help: If the Hollow Man is still alive, the terrified locals organize a meeting where angry words are exchanged. Allow the PCs to take part in this meeting and suggest ideas to a large captive audience.

Regardless of the PCs intervention, the locals decide to send for help. They instruct Kahr—the fastest runner in the village—to go to Zobeck and beg for help from Lord Mayor Gluck. If the PCs provide a horse, Kahr rides. On his journey, Kahr is attacked and killed by a pack of wolves. (If the PCs are with Kahr, use the wolf pack detailed in the Day 1: The Wolves section to play out this encounter and consequences.)

That night, Koreň's croft (area 10) is attacked by the Hollow Man. Koreň is a widow, but her eldest son Torb is beheaded unless someone stops the Hollow Man.

Day 5, The Returning Messenger: The Hollow Man returns tonight and enters Chrobák's Place (area 11). The farmer puts up a fight but is beheaded.

Day 6, The Hollow Man Comes Knocking on the PC's Door: Tonight is the turn of the PCs—remember the Hollow Man takes the youngest mature male's head!

Beyond Day 6: If the adventure goes beyond day 6, start to assign random victims. Once the 13th victim is taken, the Singing Tree's quest is completed. (For more details, see The Singing Tree section of this adventure.)"

The Singing Tree

Her voice is hoarse now, for the head she sings with is frail. Soon, she knows, she'll become as silent as the other trees of the forest unless she can find new heads to sing through and learn to walk again as she did in ages past.

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.... Tales of the Old Margreve

The Singing Tree is an awakened tree whose voice was once heard across the entire forest, but centuries ago, the Margreve Witch cast her into a deep sleep from which she thought she would never awaken. Now, however, something else stirs in the deep of the forest: its own call stirring up many creatures from beneath fallen leaves, awakening many things that should not be awake.

The animals were the first to answer the Singing Tree, but they could not help her, and her singing and weeping drove them to madness. Many still walk in the woods near her. It was not long, however, before one came to her who could help—the Hollow Man. Now at last she has hands to chop with and legs to do her fetching and carrying. She told her new servant to gather a head each night for 12 days, and once 13 heads adorn her thorny boughs, she becomes a treant with a dark soul once more.

THE WOODS ABOUT THE SINGING TREE (CR 3)

The forest here is classified as medium (see *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Core Rulebook*). It requires a Survival check to avoid getting lost (DC 16).

This area has many animals driven mad by the tree's singing, and they attack anyone that comes near.

TABLE 1-2: RANDOM ENCOUNTERS (1 PER 4 HOURS)

D20 ROLL	ENCOUNTER ¹	CR
1-10	No encounter	_
11-12	Snake, venomous	CR 1
13-14	Spider, giant	CR 1
15-16	Spider swarm	CR 1
17–18	Wolf	CR 1
19–20	Boar	CR 2

(1) See Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary.

CREATURES: The Singing Tree lies 4 miles from the village, but the Hollow Man staggers on a route 6 miles in length. The Singing Tree stands in a clearing blighted by decay, covered in fungus. The air here is thick with flies and buzzing things, even in winter, and the ground crawls with insects.

Here is the pitiful wreckage of a once magnificent tree. Now, the plant is riddled with polypores and sick fungal growths; its thorny boughs hang wasted, swaying in the wind; its once great girth withered to little more than a black, lightningtortured canker swollen by disease. Human heads leer from this monstrosity, the meeting point of plant and flesh a riot of lesions and puss.

THE SINGING TREE (ANIMATED OBJECT VARIANT) CR 3

XP 800

NE Large construct (plant)

INIT +0; SENSES darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Perception +8

DEFENSE

AC 13, touch 9, flat-footed 13 (+4 natural, -1 size) HP 52 (4d10+30)

FORT +1, REF +1, WILL +4

DEFENSIVE ABILITIES construct traits; **IMMUNE** magic **WEAKNESSES** thirteen heads, vulnerable to fire

OFFENSE

SPEED 10 ft.

MELEE 2 slams +6 (1d6+2 plus grab)

SPECIAL ATTACKS additional attack, constrict (1d6+2), sing, weep TACTICS

- **DURING COMBAT** If the Hollow Man still lives, it sleeps in the boughs of the Singing Tree by day. As soon as she spots intruders, the Singing Tree instructs it to attack. If the Hollow Man is not alive, the Singing Tree immediately weeps, calling a giant centipede to her aid; she then sings. She tries not to enter combat unless at least one attacker is confused, preferring to call animals to her aid.
- **MORALE** If reduced to 10 hp, the Singing Tree offers the PCs a dark secret if they let her go. The details of this secret are left to the GM, but it should be something of great use in future adventures in the forest (perhaps some knowledge of the Margreve's powers). The secret is her only bargaining power, and once she has lost it, she flees. If cornered, she fights to the end.

STATISTICS

STR 14, DEX 10, CON —, INT 14, WIS 12, CHA 14 BASE ATK +4; CMB +7; CMD 17 FEATS Ability Focus (sing), Iron Will

SKILLS Knowledge (nature) +4, Perception +8, Sense Motive +8 SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **SING (SP)** The Singing Tree can sing 1/round. This has the effect of a *lesser confusion* spell (DC 16; CL 4th). Animals within a 10-mile radius suffer the effects of a *confusion* spell but need only make 1 save/day (CL 12th).
- **THIRTEEN HEADS (SU)** Without any heads, the Singing Tree cannot sing or weep.

The tree begins the adventure with a single mummified head and adds another for each successful mission the Hollow Man carries out. Instead of targeting the creature, characters can target the heads: each head has AC 16 (+4 natural, +2 size) and has 5 hp. Damage to the heads does not come off the Singing Tree's hp total.

WEEP (SP) The singing tree can weep 1/1d3 rounds. The weeping acts as a *summon nature's ally I* spell (CL 4th).

DEVELOPMENT: Should the Singing Tree gain 13 heads, she becomes a treant once more. She terrorizes the nearby villages, and her singing continues to drive animals insane. How the adventure progresses beyond this point is up to the GM, but perhaps some way can be found to kill her.

TREASURE: Upon her death, the Singing Tree turns bone white, resembling an ashen-faced woman of great beauty, clasping a bright red apple. The apple radiates strong enchantment magic. Anyone biting the apple receives a permanent +1 Charisma bonus; however, once a single bite is taken, the apple withers and rots to dust.

Beneath the roots of the tree are the remains of older victims (Perception DC 20 or DC 10 if deliberately digging): their possessions are delicate from the passage of time but show strange filigree, almost disturbing fey imagery. The objects are a silver mirror with an ebony handle (75 gp), a *potion of neutralize poison* in a green glass jar with a silver stopper (worth 10 gp), a bone hairbrush with dire boar bristles (30 gp), 34 pp, an elaborate ring fashioned of walnut depicting dancing fey (a *ring of the ram* [5 charges]), and a masterwork chain shirt.



By Jonathan McAnulty

Young Lyla, purple flowers braided in her auburn hair, gazed into the cave mouth. The smell of honey wafted pleasantly out from the dark interior. The bees buzzed invitingly around her. She was not afraid. She liked the bees, and they liked her. She always treated them respectfully, just as she had been taught, and in return, they ensured no harm ever came to her. Such were the ways of the Margreve. With a playful smile, she stepped into the cave. The bees followed.

"The Honey Queen" is a fantasy forest adventure suitable for PCs of 2nd or 3rd level.

Adventure Background

rare purple flower, the effildawnan, blooms within the Old Margreve. Herbalists prize the flower's sleep-inducing properties and use it to create teas, poultices, and medicines. A colony of bees in the Old Margreve also makes use of the flower's pollen, creating a magical honey, which they sell to the forest fey. This hive, a curious blend of honey bees and giant bees, inhabits a cave near a glade along the southern border of the Old Margreve. A succession of awakened queen bees rules the hive, and these queens are responsible for the honey's creation. The PCs are hired to journey into the forest and confront the bees.

The honey possesses two very special qualities. It prevents aging in those that eat it. However, this youth comes at a steep cost, for the taste of the honey sends a soul into an ageless sleep. Only one hive of bees makes this potent honey.

In addition to the queen, a second intelligence dwells within the hive. A young girl named Lyla, some 50 years ago, befriended the bees and tasted their honey. Her slumbering form, perpetually young, lies within the hive. Over the years, her mind has found a way to wander free of her sleeping body, entering into the simple minds of the honey bees.

Adventure Summary

In "The Honey Queen," PCs are tasked with journeying into the Old Margreve and confronting the Honey Queen. With little to go on, they encounter a trio of potential helpers, the last of which can guide them toward the Queen's Glade, a meadow frequented by bees. From there, the PCs follow the bees to their home. Effildawnan fills the area around the glade, and the fragrance of the flowers induces dream-like hallucinations, forcing PCs to question reality.

At the entrance to the honey bees' home, the PCs must get past the old bear that guards the entrance. They then meet a large face made of bees, which asks them their business and identifies herself as Lyla. Whether by guile or force, the PCs must enter the bee's home, a series of tunnels in the forest floor. Within the massive hive are several traps and guardians. As the PCs finally reach the door of the queen's chambers,

they again meet Lyla, who seeks to prevent them from entering and disturbing "mother." Overcoming this swarm of bees, the PCs enter and confront the Honey Queen, an awakened queen bee. They also discover a girl in an enchanted sleep, cared for by the bees. The PCs now have the chance to bring the Honey Queen to task and rescue the girl.

Adventure Rook

Terelsa Garlook is a go-between, an agent capable of hiring the right people for any sort of job: domestic, dangerous, mundane, or odd. While she avoids strictly illegal commissions, she sometimes works for less than savory characters who often wish, for obvious reasons, to remain anonymous. She also does occasional work for the city government. A friend of an acquaintance (or relative) put Elsa onto the PCs, and now, she has hunted them up with a job offer:

"I have been told you lot aren't completely unfamiliar with a certain element of danger and might even be able to find your way through the woods at night without getting completely lost and eaten. There's a certain rare purple flower currently blooming in the Margreve, and I have a client interested in it. That is, they, the client, are interested in the honey that it is rumored might be made from this flower's pollen. The stories say it's like a little bit of youth and that interests my client, who would be willing to pay guite handsomely for a container of the stuff. The thing is, the sellers of this honey won't do business with my client, so we want you to convince this seller to part with some. We'll give you something with which to buy the honey and pay you for making the journey and the acquisition."

Terelsa initially offers 500 gp for a vial of the honey, but if pressed, she is willing to go up to 1,800 gp although she does not give in too quickly. Assuming the PCs accept the job, Terelsa supplies the following bits

of information, the sum of what she has been told:

- The purple effildawnan blooms near the southern border of the Margreve, well away from the Old Road.
- Some claim the forest fey have access to the honey, knowing both where and how to acquire it.
- The honey in question possesses a slight purple cast to it and radiates magic.

To "pay" for the honey, Terelsa supplies the PCs with a ring of *protection* +2, which they are supposed to trade for the honey although they can use it until the time comes to part with it.

Introduction

Spring has come to the Old Margreve. The trees, young and ancient alike, are in leaf and all the world is green. Unfortunately for the PCs,



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BOONS AND BANES

The exact nature of the boon or bane given by Elsee should be chosen based on how difficult or easy the GM desires the rest of the adventure to be, coupled with the level of the party. The following ideas are just some suggestions.

POSSIBLE BOONS

Forest Boon—The party gains a +2 luck bonus on d20 rolls for 1 week.

Gift of the Bear—The PCs gain a +2 luck bonus to Strength for 1 week.

Gift of the Cat—The PCs walk softly, gaining a +2 luck bonus to Stealth for 1 week.

POSSIBLE BANES

Forest Bane—The party suffers a –2 penalty on d20 rolls for 1 week.

Gift of Flies—Small insects buzz around the PCs for 1 week, imparting a -2 penalty to Perception checks.

Gift of Stench—The PCs emit an unnatural stench for 1 week, imparting a -2 penalty to Stealth checks.

while there are many stories of the effildawnan and many tall tales concerning the powers of the honey that is made from it—most of them dealing with the subject of eternal youth and beauty—few in Zobeck know how to find the flower. Those that know tend to keep quiet about it, for the flowers bring a good price. If the PCs inquire, they learn to search around the southern edges of the Margreve, west of the Old Road.

Part 1: In the Forest

Each GM should determine how long PCs adventure in the Old Margreve as they search for the magical honey, but it is suggested that over the course of 1–3 days, the PCs have the following three encounters designed both to give a fairy-tale quality to the adventure and to spur the action forward.

THE CRONE

Ahead, you hear soft singing. Parting the branches, you spy an elderly woman in a simple dress and wrapped in a shawl. She is seated upon a stump. "Greetings children," she says, "Have you anything for a poor, old woman to eat?"

The woman is Baba Migori, or Grandmother Migori. A powerful druid and very familiar with the forest, she often tests travelers as to their worthiness. Uninterested in fighting, she quickly disappears with the wind if attacked. (She actually turns into an air elemental and flies away through the trees). Her interest in the PCs is straightforward. Having been informed of the PCs quest, she also wants them to rescue Lyla, thinking it is time the child woke from her sleep.

DEVELOPMENT: If the PCs cheerfully share some food with her, she thanks them and says the following:

"Thank you kindly. One good deed deserves another. I know your journey and your business. I advise you to head west, searching for the Queen's Glade. Remember to always treat royalty with respect, but sometimes, even the noblest need to be corrected. Still, the sword is not the answer to all problems, and the bees open their homes to those that know the name of Lyla."

If questioned about Lyla, she eagerly volunteers that there is a young girl, "imprisoned" by the Honey Queen of that name. Baba Migori tries to extract an oath from the PCs that they will rescue the child. After extracting such a promise, she vanishes.

If the PCs share their food but are rude and hostile, Baba Migori merely tells them to continue west. If the PCs threaten her or are rude, she leaves without helping them at all.

The Mother (CR 2)

Continuing your journey through the thick woods, you come suddenly into a more open area with a lush carpet of grass instead of the underbrush you've been fighting so hard all day. The area is dominated by a singularly large tree, its trunk possibly 15 ft. in width. A woman stands at its base gazing up. "Don't move! Stay still!" she calls up, worry in her voice.

CREATURES: A family of werebears lives in a small cottage just north of this clearing. The woman, Elsee Barkcot, is the mother of that family and her youngest son, Obiah, is the child who has climbed unadvisedly high in the tree. This wouldn't be so much of a problem except that a giant spider lairs in the tree and has crawled onto the trunk between the boy and the ground.

GIANT SPIDERCR 1XP 400HP 16 (see Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary)

CHALLENGE: The child, 9 years old, has climbed so high, he fears to come down. Likewise, his mother is afraid to climb up after him, having an irrational fear of spiders. The boy clutches the tree 80 ft. above the ground (Climb DC 15): the boy weighs 85 lb. The mother pleads with the PCs to help. The giant spider has cover because of all the branches between it and the ground. PCs who rescue the child should be rewarded for overcoming a CR 2 encounter (XP 600).

DEVELOPMENT: If the PCs can successfully and safely bring the child down, his mother gives them a boon. If they refuse to help or bring harm to the boy, she gives them a bane. The nature and mechanics of these boons or banes are left to the GM.

THE MAIDEN (CR 3)

From nearby comes a frantic cry for help. You hear the sound of something large crashing through the spring growth and another cry for help. It sounds like the cry of a young woman.

CREATURES: The sound is that of an ogre chasing a young, female alseid named Frauleene. The deer centaur has an injured leg and can only just keep ahead of the savage brute that wants to torment and consume her.

FRAULEENECR 1/4XP 100Female alseid expert 1 (see MARGREVE BESTIARY, page 24)HP 5SKILLS Knowledge (nature) +6, Survival +7



.... The Koney Queen....

OGRECR 3XP 800HP 30(see Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary)

DEVELOPMENT: As Frauleene, an herbalist, gathered plants in the forest, she was caught off-guard by the ogre. Assuming the PCs rescue her from the ogre, she responds with sincere gratitude. More importantly, she knows where to find Queen's Glade and can lead the PCs in that direction. She has no interest in venturing among blooming effildawnan and does not accompany the PCs all the way to the glade, but she can share the following information:

- Blooming effildawnan induces hallucinations and should not be taken lightly.
- There are those in the Margreve who trade with the Honey Queen for her magical honey.
- Once in Queen's Glade, the PCs should follow the giant bees back to their home.

Part 2: Among the Effildawnan

Frauleene leaves the PCs as soon as she sees one of the purple effildawnan flowers, but she tells them the meadow they seek is only 1 mile further west.

THE SCENT OF THE FLOWERS

Effildawnan grows as a vine on the sides of trees. As the PCs near Queen's Glade, they see more and more of the purple flowers, some growing so thickly as to threaten the health of their hosts. Simultaneously, the scent of the flowers increases in intensity. Buzzing around the flowers, hundreds and thousands of honey bees busily gather the pollen. In theory, one could follow these smaller bees to their home (Survival DC 35).

DEVELOPMENT: Few harvest the effildawnan flower, for in addition to its rarity, the pollen of the flower induces dreamlike hallucinations. As the PCs near the glade, they begin to hallucinate (Fortitude DC 15 negates). However, even a successful save does not prevent characters from feeling as if they are walking in a dream-like state. Each PC failing their save sees something different. It is feasible that a hallucinating PC might go from one dream vision into a second or even a third before the glade is reached. The exact ramifications of each vision are left to the GM and the players. GMs may choose what each hallucinating PC sees or roll 1d20 and consult the following chart for each affected PC:

- 1. A giant bee buzzes among the flowers, singing a cheerful tavern tune.
- 2. Goblins peek around the trees and laugh at the PC.
- 3. The PC is sure he or she isn't wearing any pants.
- 4. Cold red rain begins falling through the green leaves.
- 5. The trees are walking alongside the PCs.
- 6. The shadow of a large, multiheaded flying creature circles above the PCs as if it were shadowing them.
- A large stone starts following the PCs, only moving when it is not being watched.
- 8. A warm, moist feeling spreads through the PC's pants suggestive of a weak bladder.
- 9. Bats in the daytime! Hundreds of bats all flying from the heart of the forest to the north.
- 10. The PC hears the distressed calls of a loved one, constantly

just out of sight.

- 11. The smell of something cooking fills the air. Someone close-by is baking something very tasty.
- 12. One of the PC's companions develops a bestial nature, slowly growing fur, fangs and a tail.
- The ground grows sticky. Golden, gooey honey is oozing out of the very soil making walking difficult.
- 14. A veritable storm of pollen swirls heavily through the air, a white cloud reducing visibility.
- 15. The ground starts sloping steeply up or down, requiring one to climb in order to advance.
- The purple flower blooms begin getting larger and more menacing as the PC feels himself shrinking.
- 17. There's a grinning cat sitting on the branch of a tree, watching the PCs.
- Little plant men dance around the feet of the party, waving thorn-like spears
- Spiders crawl from the leaves, the tree trunks, and out from under the rocks. You can't walk without crunching them underfoot.
- The PC's hands feel like they are shrinking and his or her ears feel like they are growing.

PCs who experience these hallucinations can otherwise act normally, and the visions will stop 2d6 minutes after entering Queen's Glade, leaving the flowers behind. Though you do not have to mention it, the PCs might remember that the flowers are valuable (Knowledge [local] DC 12). The fresh flowers sell for 10 gp/lb. For every hour spent among the flowers, unaffected PCs have to make a new Fortitude save, to make sure they don't start hallucinating as well.

THE BOAR IN THE STREAM (CR 3)

While the PCs are still among the effildawnan, only 1/4 mile from Queen's Glade, they meet a very real danger; one they might confuse at first for a hallucination.

CREATURE: A large, wild boar has wandered among the flowers and is now confused and disoriented. Once it spots the PCs, it rushes to attack, eager to vent its frustrations. The boar has been seeing things for the last 2 days and any attempt to calm it suffers a -6 penalty.

TERRAIN: The area is heavily wooded with effildawnan vines growing thick on all the trees. The land slopes gently down to a 10-ft.-wide stream. The water is 3 ft. deep at its deepest spot.



•• Tales of the Old Margreve •••

ADVANCED BOAR

CR 3

XP 800

нр 22 (see Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary)

THE DRONING OF THE BEES

Queen's Glade is a meadow in the Old Margreve nearly 1/2 mile in diameter. In the spring, flowers and bees fill the entire glade. PCs who enter Queen's Glade while under the influence of the effildawnan become panicked by the over-powering droning of the bees (Will DC 12). Panicked characters flee back to the safety of the effildawnan vines.

THE GIRL IN THE GLADE

When the PCs first enter Queen's Glade, those not under the influence of the effildawnan spot what appears to be a child dancing near the northern edge of the glade (Perception DC 13). It is Lyla (see area 2). Should the PCs approach her (Perception +9), they discover that the image of the girl is actually a swarm of flying honey bees moving as one. As soon as Lyla is aware of any onlookers, however, she disappears, returning home. If the PCs manage to watch her long enough, as the sun begins to set, they see her head north through the woods, back home.

TRACKING A BEE

There are several giant bees in the glade, in addition to the smaller bees, and they will not bother the PCs in any fashion unless attacked first. They are more easily followed northward to their home (Survival DC 12).

Dart 3: In the Koney Cave

Following the giant bees home, the PCs come to the base of a great tree. Two roots of this ancient oak form a door frame, beyond which is a cave. The earthen cave has few stone walls, but the great roots of the surrounding trees and walls of thick wax provide the necessary stability to keep the roof from collapsing. Unfortunately for those who might plan on smoking the bees to sleep, the air always blows out of the cave's mouth, never in. Except where noted, the tunnels within are 9 ft. in height, and once past the initial chamber, the walls, ceiling, and floor are all coated in 6 inches of wax (hardness 1, 15 hp/5 ft.). There are numerous honey lamps within the cave on both the walls and the floors (but none on the ceilings except where noted in the text). The Honey Queen has placed these for the benefit of visiting fey, for reasons of aesthetics, and for disguising certain traps. These lamps cannot be removed from their locations without destroying the lamp. The fragrant smell of honey and the constant buzzing of tens of thousands of bees fill the whole complex.

Two types of bees live within the honey cave. The first, diminutive honey bees, buzz constantly to and fro. Though a few might land on the PCs, these bees are not aggressive unless the Honey Queen instructs them to be. Giant bees also lair within (see area 3). These giant bees are, except for their size, identical to the smaller honey bees in both habits and temperament. Despite their generally passive nature, the Honey Queen has set several of them as guards, and these bees fight to the death. Still, the GM should have a few of these large bees zip noisily by the adventurers as a reminder that this is an active working hive.

HONEY LAMP

AURA faint transmutation; CL 4th SLOT -; PRICE 6,000 gp; WEIGHT 1/2 lb.

DESCRIPTION Honey lamps, made from glowing honey encased in bee's wax, shed light as a lamp. Often found in the shape of a globe, the honey can also be sealed into stone or wood recesses. If the wax (hardness 0; hp 4) is broken or smashed, the honey crystallizes in 7 days and ceases to glow. Eating the honey while it is still glowing grants you darkvision (30 ft.) for 1 week and 1 day.

CONSTRUCTION

REQUIREMENTS Craft Wondrous Item, continual flame, darkvision (spell or ability); Cost 3,000 gp

1. THE GUARDIAN (CR 4)

The roots of an ancient tree frame the entrance of this earthen cave. The sweet smell of honey wafts out on the gentle cool breeze emanating from the large hole. It appears that there is a dark chamber just past the entranceway, but farther in, it is clear that there is light.

CREATURE: An old grizzly bear, grown fat on honey and easy living, lairs within the entrance of the honey cave. Well trained, the bear knows to allow anyone who mentions the name of Lyla to pass further within. Those who don't mention Lyla are forcefully barred entry. The bear attacks if provoked.

CR 4

OLD GRIZZLY BEAR

XP 1.200 HP 42 (see Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary) AC 15; REF +4, WILL +3; DEX 11, WIS 14, CHA 8

TREASURE: In the back of the lair, among a pile of dried bones, is a wand of calm animals (29 charges) (Perception DC 16).

2. THE FACE OF LYLA (CR 1)

The scent of honey grows stronger as the dirt floor of the bear's den gives way to a slick waxen floor. The walls and ceiling are likewise coated with a thick layer of golden wax, all illuminated by the warm flickering glow of lights embedded in the floor. The tunnel opens into a large circular room. Lights, like those in the floor, are embedded in the walls so the whole room has a golden glow. Numerous bees buzz busily through the air. Along the walls are benches of stone covered in the ubiquitous bee's wax.

This is where guests of the hive, those seeking to do business with the Honey Queen, are expected to wait. As the PCs enter the room and get their bearings, tiny bees begin coalescing together in the center of the chamber, forming a buzzing swarm. Within 2 rounds, the swarm shapes itself into the face of a young girl with curly locks.

CREATURE: It's not every day you see a gigantic, three dimensional bust of a girl formed from a swarm of bees, and GMs should play up the uniqueness of it and make sure the PCs understand what they are seeing. After a round of shaping itself, the face speaks. The voice is that of a girl, modulated through the filter of a thousand bees. Named Lyla, she serves as the Honey Queen's adopted daughter and spokesperson. If the PCs hurt or killed the guardian bear, she knows it and severely berates them for their rudeness before asking them their business. If the PCs ask concerning her identity, she becomes recalcitrant, giving them only her name. If they mention their desire



for the magical honey, she responds, "Magic is for fey. Not for you!" She does not agree to sell them the honey under any circumstances. Only if the PCs attack does she retaliate, unleashing herself upon them as a swarm of bees. If the PCs do not attack but persist in going further into the hive, she says only, "Turn back before it is too late, I warn you," before dissipating.

Lyla (Unique Honey Bee Swarm)

CR 1

XP 400

CN Diminutive vermin (swarm) INIT +1; SENSES darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +9

DEFENSE

AC 15, touch 15, flat-footed 14 (+1 Dex, +4 size)

HP 13 (3d8)

FORT +3, **REF** +2, **WILL** -1

DEFENSIVE ABILITIES swarm traits **IMMUNE** mind-affecting effects, weapon damage

WEAKNESSES possessed by Lyla, stinger, swarm traits

OFFENSE

SPEED 5 ft., fly 40 ft. (perfect) MELEE swarm (1d6 plus poison)

SPACE 5 ft. or 10 ft.; REACH 0 ft.

SPECIAL ATTACKS distraction (DC 11)

STATISTICS

STR 1, DEX 12, CON 10, INT 14, WIS 7, CHA 16

BASE ATK +2; CMB -; CMD -

Skills Fly +12, Perception+9, Perform (dance) +9, Stealth +7; RACIAL MODIFIERS +8 Perception

FEATS Skill Focus (Perform [dance]), Skill Focus (Stealth) LANGUAGES Common, Elven, Sylvan **SPECIAL ABILITIES**

POISON (Ex) Honey Bee Venom—injury; save Fort DC 11 (Constitution-based); frequency 1/round for 4 rounds; effect 1 Con damage; cure 1 save.

- POSSESSED BY LYLA (SU) This swarm of bees is a manifestation of Lyla, a 12-year-old girl who has been asleep for 50 years. It can shape itself to match the self-image of Lyla, sometimes appearing in the image of a dancing girl, sometimes as a swords-woman, sometimes as a large, talking head. When it does this, the swarm occupies only 5 ft. of space, as a Medium creature. If Lyla attacks, the silhouette image explodes into a typical swarm of angry, stinging bees. Lyla can use the droning of the bees to communicate, producing an unearthly, chilling feminine voice. A swarm of bees possessed by the personality of Lyla is subject to mind-affecting effects as follows: the swarm is allowed a saving throw against a bard's fascinate ability, and all other mind-affecting effects, charms, compulsions, morale effects, patterns, and phantasms-if the saving throw fails, the swarm is dispersed as Lyla loses influence over the swarm
- STINGER (Ex) Honey bees frequently lose their stingers when they attack and subsequently die. For every point of damage inflicted by the swarm, it loses an identical amount of hp.

3. A FLOOR OF HONEY CR 4

Just beyond the conference room-10 ft.-the floor of the tunnel is trapped, and a pair of giant bees are under orders to attack any non-bees.



TRAP: The wax floor of the tunnel is rigged to break when stepped on, trapping the feet of trespassers in a glue-like honey.

HONEYFOOT TRAP

CR 1

CR 1

TYPE mechanical; **PERCEPTION** DC 20; **DISABLE DEVICE** DC 20 **TRIGGER** location; **RESET** none

EFFECT 2-ft.-deep pit (entangled as tanglefoot bag); Reflex DC 15 avoids; multiple targets (all targets in a 5-ft.-by-10-ft. area)

CREATURES: Two giant bees wait on the wall, just beyond the trapped square. They swiftly attack as soon as the PCs enter the square containing the trap. They have no regard for their lives and fight to the death. They do not coordinate their attack and simply go straight for the intruder in the lead.

GIANT BEES (2)

XP 400

N Medium vermin

INIT +2; SENSES darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +5

DEFENSE

AC 14, touch 12, flat-footed 12 (+2 Dex, +2 natural) HP 13 (3d8) FORT +3, REF +3, WILL +2

IMMUNE mind-affecting effects

WEAKNESS stinger

OFFENSE

SPEED 20 ft., climb 10 ft., fly 80 ft. (good) MELEE stinger +2 (1d4 plus poison)

STATISTICS

Str 11, Dex 14, Con 11, Int —, Wis 12, Cha 9 Base Атк +2; CMB +2; CMD 14

SKILLS Fly +6, Perception +5, Survival +1; RACIAL MODIFIERS +4 Perception, +4 Survival to determine direction

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Poison (Ex) Giant Bee Venom—injury; save Fort DC 11

(Constitution-based); *frequency* 1/round for 6 rounds; *effect* 1 Con damage; *cure* 1 save.

STINGER (EX) When a giant bee successfully stings another creature, there is a 50% chance that the stinger remains in the target, killing the bee on the following round. Removing a stinger requires a full round of action, and the wound cannot be healed magically until the stinger is removed. As long as the stinger remains embedded in a victim, new poison is injected each round.

4. HONEY BEE HIVES

Honeycombs line a recess in the wall which is crawling with tiny honey bees. Golden honey drips thickly from the honeycomb onto the floor.

Many such hives fill the tunnels, each with their own queen and workers. While the bees do not attack en masse, they sting anyone reaching for the honey or attempting to break off the honeycomb without proper attire, such as gloves. Anyone stung is affected by poison just as if attacked by a swarm.

POISON (Ex) Honey Bee Venom—injury; save Fort DC 11 (Constitution-based); frequency 1/round for 4 rounds; effect 1 Con damage; cure 1 save.



.... The Koney Queen

5. A THIN FLOOR AND A SHORT FALL (CR 4+)

This hallway has been trapped to prevent intruders from reaching the more important hives of the giant bee colony.

TRAP: The wax floor is constructed in such a way as to break when someone reaches the designated area. Old giant bee stingers line the floor at the bottom of the pit, embedded in wax. The pit is further disguised by the fact that there is a honey lamp embedded in the wax of the floor.

STINGER TRAP

CR 2

CR 1

CR 1/2

TYPE mechanical; PERCEPTION DC 22; DISABLE DEVICE DC 20 TRIGGER location: RESET none

EFFECT 10-ft.-deep pit (1d6 falling damage); embedded stingers (atk +10 melee, 1d4 stingers/target for 1d4+2 damage each); Reflex DC 20 avoids; multiple targets (all targets in a 5-ft.-by-10-ft. area)

CREATURES: Just beyond the trapped hallway, in a small earthen tunnel, lives a fat mite by the name of Duxt. Duxt receives room and board from the Honey Queen in exchange for a few light duties, one of which is the guarding of this area. Duxt bursts out of his den, uttering a series of blustery threats, 2 rounds after the PCs encounter the pit trap. He is accompanied by a lone giant bee, which he directs to attack any intruder not in the pit. Duxt prefers lightly armored intruders as primary targets. On the third round of combat, a second giant bee attacks from the rear. A third arrives on the sixth round of combat. If the combat finishes before the reinforcements arrive, these other giant bees do not attack but instead harmlessly fly by, oblivious to the threat to their hive.

GIANT BEES (1-3)

XP 400 EACH

HP 13 each (see area 3)

DUXT

XP 200

Advanced mite (see Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary) **HP** 5

RANGED short bow +4 (1d4/x3); COMBAT GEAR brooch of shielding (91 charges)

DEVELOPMENT: Duxt knows the location of the Honey Queen and the next trap, and if captured alive, he can be easily made to talk. Duxt himself gets across the traps by riding on a giant bee.

TREASURE: Besides his brooch of shielding, which he wears, Duxt keeps a pouch in his lair containing three emeralds, each worth 200 gp.

6. GIANT BEE CELLS (CR 1–4)

Set into recesses in the wax-covered walls are giant honeycombs, each easily 2 ft. wide and dripping with golden honey. In more than one of them, giant white maggoty things squirm.

There are several of these areas, each one basically identical save for the number of giant bees encountered at each location.

CREATURES: At any given time, each section of giant honeycomb contains 1d3 giant honey bees, each busily at work. These giant bees ignore the PCs unless attacked or unless the PCs in any way touch one of the larval giant bees. If the PCs do either of these things, the giant bees swiftly attack, fighting to the death to protect the young.

GIANT BEES (1-3)

XP 400 EACH

HP 13 each (see area 3)

7. THE YOUNG QUEEN (CR 3+)

This chamber, set within the polished hollow of an ancient tree, can only be reached by climbing the tunnel leading up to it (Climb DC 20). The room is 20 ft. high and the ledge, upon which the newly laid eggs are first kept, is 15 ft. from the rounded floor. Unlike the halls and chambers below, it has no lighting. Only read the following if the PCs possess a light source:

The golden brown walls of this egg-shaped chamber are fashioned from well polished wood. A high ledge encircles the room, and in several places, leathery looking eggs rest atop it.

CREATURES: Two giant bees occupy this chamber, and they attack anyone who climbs to the ledge. They also attack if either they or the eggs are threatened. Otherwise, they ignore intruders. One of the bees is a young queen who serves as the current egg layer for the giant bee hive. The other is a worker who periodically carries eggs to various honeycombs below.

TERRAIN: Because of its egg-like shape, anyone moving more than 5 ft. from the lip of the tunnel entrance must compensate (Balance or Climb DC 10). Those failing this check tumble back down into the tunnel (Reflex DC 10 avoids) before falling 20 ft. to the floor below (2d6 falling damage).

GIANT BEE	CR 1
XP 400	
HP 13 (see area 3)	

YOUNG GIANT QUEEN BEE

XP 600 Advanced giant bee (see area 3) **HP** 19

DEVELOPMENT: Traditionally, when a Honey Queen dies, her gift of intellect transfers magically to a young queen, such as the one in this chamber. Thus, there is always a Honey Queen to oversee the hive. If the PCs kill this young queen and subsequently kill the current Honey Queen, the line of queens is broken and the magical honey ceases to be produced until a new queen matures. Of course, if the PCs destroy all the bees in the hive, they also destroy any possibility of a new Honey Queen. Doing so severely angers many important Margrevians who appreciate the goods produced by this hive.

8. A Thin Floor and a Long Fall (CR 1)

This hallway has been trapped in order to prevent intruders from reaching the chambers of the Honey Queen.

TRAP: The wax floor is constructed in such a way as to break when someone reaches the designated area. The fall is quite severe, intentionally so, and the soft earthen walls of the pit make getting out hard (Climb DC 30 or 25 in the corners of the pit).



CR 2

CR 1

.... Tales of the Old Margreve

Pit Trap

CR 1

CR 1

TYPE mechanical; **PERCEPTION** DC 22; **DISABLE DEVICE** DC 20 **TRIGGER** location; **RESET** none

EFFECT 20-ft.-deep pit (2d6 falling damage); Reflex DC 20 avoids; multiple targets (all targets in a 10-ft. square)

DEVELOPMENT: If the PCs fall into the pit, Lyla meets them here, rather than at area 9, choosing to fight them while they are trapped.

9. Lyla the Sword Woman (CR 1)

Honey bees begin swarming in front of you. As they buzz and fly, they form an image in the air of a shapely woman, dressed in armor of some sort. The three-dimensional silhouette, formed of buzzing gold and black bodies, seems to be holding a sword albeit one made entirely of flying bees. When it speaks, though the image is that of a woman, the voice is the voice of the girl you heard in the outer chamber. Even as distorted as it is by the buzzing that produces it, the voice is recognizable as the same. "Silly people! My mother must not be disturbed. What do you want?"

Lyla, though willing to talk for a short time, cannot be persuaded to allow the PCs to pass. As they have made it this far, she perceives them to be enemies and thieves. Eventually, she attacks, and though she continues a playful banter, her attack is quite earnest.

CREATURES: The stats for Lyla in this encounter are identical to those from area 2, regardless of any damage done there. This is essentially a new swarm of bees she is using.

Lyla

XP 400 HP 13 (see area 2)

10. The Honey Queen's Chambers (CR 5)

The Honey Queen spends almost all of her time within these chambers, experimenting and crafting.

When the PCs make their way through the entrance hallway (see terrain below) read or paraphrase the following:

The root-filled tunnel opens into a vast, magnificent golden chamber. Lit by a dozen golden globes, each attached to the plethora of wax covered roots that have been laced together to form the roof approximately 15 ft. from the slick, waxy floor.

Four more lights have been placed around a wax-covered bed of stone on the south side of the room. A young girl, her features vaguely familiar to you, lies upon it, apparently asleep while small honeybees crawl across her face.

CREATURE: The Honey Queen is the title of a dynasty of awakened queen bees. How these creatures first came to self awareness remains a mystery, but when one Honey Queen dies, another always rises to take her place. Within the Old Margreve, the Honey Queens maintain a brisk business selling honeys (both magical and nonmagical) to the fey of the forest. The bees trade nonmagical honeys for glassware, wooden tools, and occasional repairs to the hive tunnels. They trade magical honeys for fairy magic, often scrolls or small temporary magical favors, which in turn allow the Honey Queen to continue manufacturing her magical honey. When the PCs enter, the Honey Queen, who is approximately as tall as a horse, exits from the tunnel leading into her laboratory and promptly demands they state their business.

TERRAIN: The chambers of the Honey Queen make good use of roots and the Honey Queen's ability to bypass these roots. A multitude of roots fill the hall and Medium or larger creatures must move through them at 1/4 speed, unless they possess woodland stride or an equivalent power. One other option is hacking through the roots, removing them as an obstacle (hardness 5; 20 hp/5-ft. square).

The hall leading to area 10b, the queen's laboratory, is identical in nature to the entry-hall.

The ceiling of the main chamber rises to a height of 25 ft. and is likewise filled with a multitude of roots although the queen keeps them woven together in such a way as to create a subterranean bower, 10 ft. deep, in which she both rests and stores her treasures. Her woodland stride allows her to easily enter this room-within–a-room.

THE HONEY QUEEN CR 5
XP 2,400
Female advanced awakened giant bee sorcerer 4
LN Large magical beast (augmented vermin)
INIT +2; SENSES darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +5
DEFENSE
AC 21, touch 13, flat-footed 17 (+4 armor, +3 Dex, +1 dodge, +4
natural, -1 size)
нр 59 (5d10+4d6+18)
FORT +7, REF +8, WILL +9
OFFENSE
SPEED 20 ft., climb 10 ft., fly 80 ft. (good)
Melee stinger +9 (1d6+2 plus poison)
Space 10 ft.; Reacн 5 ft.
SPECIAL ATTACKS command bees
SORCERER SPELL-LIKE ABILITIES (CL 4th; concentration +8)
6/day—laughing touch
SPELLS KNOWN (CL 4th; concentration +8)
2nd (4/day)— <i>continual flame</i>
1st (7/day)—charm person (DC 15), entangle (DC 15), mage
armor, sleep (DC 15)
0 (at will)—acid splash, daze (DC 14), detect magic, mage hand,
prestidigitation
BLOODLINE fey
TACTICS
BEFORE COMBAT Before combat, the Honey Queen casts <i>mage armor</i> .
DURING COMBAT The queen's primary tactic is to avoid melee if
possible, using entangle, sleep, and charm. If possible, she
directs any giant bees in her vicinity to attack spellcasters and
archers first. When her spells are exhausted, she begins to make
use of Flyby Attack, targeting spellcasters and archers first.
Repare The survey survey days on first if we have dots 40 has an loss

MORALE The queen surrenders or flees if reduced to 10 hp or less.

STATISTICS

STR 15, DEX 16, CON 15, INT 16, WIS 16, CHA 18 ВАSE ATK +7; CMB +9; CMD 22

- FEATS Brew Potion, Craft Wondrous Item, Dodge, Eschew Materials, Flyby Attack, Weapon Focus (sting)
- SKILLS Fly +18, Knowledge (nature) +15, Perception +19, Spellcraft +15, Use Magic Device +16, Survival +3; RACIAL MODIFIERS +4 Perception, +4 Survival to determine direction



.... The Koney Queen...

LANGUAGES Common, Sylvan

SQ bloodline arcana, imbue honey, woodland stride **COMBAT GEAR** honey of cure moderate wounds

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **COMMAND BEES (SU)** As a free action, the Honey Queen can command any number of bees or giant bees, telepathically giving them simple orders. Bees so dominated must be in the queen's sight, but bees continue to follow her orders once they are out of her sight until the commands are carried out. Awakened or otherwise intelligent bees receive a saving throw against this power (Will DC 18; Charisma-based).
- **IMBUE HONEY (SU)** The Honey Queen can imbue a dose of honey with magical effects, as either potions or wondrous items. She is also capable of crafting *ageless honey* using honey made from effildawnan pollen.

Poison (Ex) Honey Queen Venom—injury; save Fort DC 16 (Constitution-based); frequency 1/round for 6 rounds; effect 1 Con damage; cure 1 save.

DEVELOPMENT: This final confrontation, the showdown with the Honey Queen can go a number of ways depending on the PCs and how they present themselves to the queen. The Honey Queen is not overly concerned about her slain bees, for their lives are cheap to her, and they are easily replaced. Rudeness, however, angers her and overt aggression brings retaliation. Though the queen begins with a hostile attitude, the fact that the PCs have made it this far intrigues her, and if the PCs use Diplomacy to bring her attitude up to friendly, she relents and sells them the honey they seek. If the PCs attack, she naturally defends herself. If the PCs try to force their way into the laboratory or remove Lyla from her bed, she likewise becomes aggressive. In short, though the queen is not naturally violent, neither is she possessed of a generous spirit.

If combat ensues, the Honey Queen surrenders when reduced to 10 hp. In surrendering, she is agreeable to two concessions: the PCs may purchase her honey (a *ring of protection* +2 or any item of similar value is accepted as payment), and they may remove Lyla. She does not, however, quickly forgive them for either.

PCs who use Diplomacy to solve the problem should be awarded as if they defeated the queen in combat.

TREASURE: In the root-woven upper chamber are four magical scrolls containing the following spells: *cure light wounds, invisibility, mage armor,* and *magic fang.* These are scrolls the Honey Queen plans on using to imbue honeys, but in a pinch, she can attempt to use them for combat. To find the scrolls, the PCs need to hack their way into the queen's bower and find them (Perception DC 16).

10A. THE SLEEPING LYLA

The child sleeping on the wax covered bed of stone is Lyla. PCs may try any number of ways to break the enchantment she lies under. If removed from the care of the bees, she wakes naturally within 1 week, as the spell wears off. Otherwise, the antidote in the next chamber can break the enchantment and the queen might be made to disclose this information.

10b. THE QUEEN'S LABORATORY

Unlike the rest of the complex, the walls of this smaller side room are cut stone and the ceiling is of worked timber. Oversized counters line the walls, all covered with vials, bottles, jars, burners, candles, and chalks.

> This laboratory contains all the necessary equipments, powders, and expensive ingredients needed to manufacture a multitude of magical creations. The Honey Queen uses it to craft her magical honeys.

TREASURE: Besides the many expensive ingredients in this room, two wax vials containing *ageless honey* sit besides another vial which contains a black-tinged honey (an immediate antidote for *ageless honey*). A fourth vial holds a magical honey which operates identically to a *cure moderate wounds* potion. The queen carries a vial similar to this one on a belt around her waist, but the curative honey in this room has been made to fill an order from an important Margrevian. A *honey lamp*, resting

in a bowl, illuminates the room. If the PCs impress the queen with Diplomacy, she gifts them this lamp (see page 48).

AGELESS HONEY

AURA strong enchantment; CL — SLOT —; PRICE —; WEIGHT 1/2 lb.

DESCRIPTION

WRoll

Crafted only by the Honey Queens of the Old Margreve from honeys made from the pollen of the effildawnan flower, a small spoonful of this purple-tinged honey causes you to fall into a deep sleep for 1 month (Fort DC 20 reduces effect to 1 day). During this time, you are subject to neither aging nor hunger.

CONSTRUCTION

REQUIREMENTS imbue honey ability; unique to Honey Queens; COST —

Concluding the Adventure

Concluding "The Honey Queen," regardless of the results, presents opportunities for further adventures.

If the PCs deliver the honey to Terelsa, she is good for their payment. Good-aligned PCs might well worry about who wanted the honey and whether they are aware of its sleep-inducing qualities.

Lyla, if rescued, presents her own difficulties. Her family, woodsmen from the borders of the Margreve, is dead or gone, and none remain to care for her. She awakens disoriented, remembering only the events of her slumber as a dream. Within a month, she begins manifesting sorcerous abilities.

As noted earlier, PCs who manage to completely wipe out the giant bee hive make themselves no friends by doing so. The forest is a tough place, and a bit of larceny or maiden rescuing is one thing. However, destroying part of the forest's makeup brings only anger and disapproval (as hinted at by Baba Migori). If the old Honey Queen still lives, she most certainly holds a grudge, and besides redoubling her defenses, she keeps her antennae up for opportunities to get back at her attackers.





By Dan Voyce

"Have no fear my child. Just wear the cloak and carry the offerings and all will be well. The Margreve will guide you. I know we said never to wander alone, but this is different. It's just another ritual, like the dolls at harvest time."

"Or spring, when we sacrifice the lambs? Father, why are you crying?"

"... I'm just so proud of you. Now run along girl, we mustn't keep the forest waiting."

"Challenge of the Fang" is a grim fairy tale for PCs of 4th level. Depending on their actions, parties may earn more or less treasure than average.

Adventure Background

ome stories never die. They demand to be told again and again. They weave themselves into reality, age-old rituals with age-old power. Mortals, of course, forget such things. Even long-lived elves forget, in time. But the Old Margreve remembers, and now, the time has come for one such ancient tale to play out yet again.

The "Challenge of the Fang" is a battle between wolf and man—between the tooth and claw of nature, and the fire and steel of civilization—for the Margreve's blessing. Chosen by omens, an innocent is sent into the forest, sought by both sides: one trying to devour her, the other to save her. Whoever wins earns the forest's favor for three generations.

This time, a young girl named Czerwonya wears the venerable red cloak that marks a sacred offering. While she was being sent into the forest by a tearful father, deep in the Margreve, the title *Would-Be-King of Wolves* was given to the smartest and toughest of the lupine horde; he set off to hunt her down. The third part of the ritual triad is the hunter, wielder of axe and fire, who must slay the wolf to ensure that it is civilization that gains the forest's boon. Fate chooses a PC to fulfil this role.

Adventure Summary

A panicked horse carries a dead man into the party's midst, wolves pursuing close behind. Brave PCs can claim the woodsman's magical hatchet, *Wolf Killer*. At the nearest refuge, Czerwonya's father pleads for help, and fellow travelers turn out to be shapeshifters in service to the Would-Be-King of Wolves.

Heading into the deep woods, PCs are tested in their knowledge of the old ways. Besting these challenges earns help and grudging respect from local fey. Failure means an encounter with the mora, moths whose touch brings lethal apathy and deadly dreams.

Their final destination is the tree house of a forest crone, nestled in the canopy of a meandering treant. The lupine champion has devoured the witch, visibly writhing in its swollen belly. The outcome of this battle decides not just the fate of Czerwonya but who gains the Margreve's blessing: wolf or man.

Adventure hooks

Fate chooses the party to represent the forces of civilization in the challenge of the fang, and this decision is enforced by the Old Margreve. PC druids, witches, or sorcerers with the fey bloodline who prepare spells in the forest during the adventure gain an ambiguous but strong impression that the forest has a task for them. The Margreve also lures them in with twisting trails and misdirection, sending PCs to the Paths of Gamayun whether they wish to go or not.

Recalcitrant players can be hooked in several ways. Local druids and wise-women can communicate the forest's will; stressing both the honor of being chosen, the danger should wolves succeed, and the sure death of an innocent girl. If greed can sway them, Czerwonya's father also offers a magical reward.

Part 1: Once Upon a Time in the Fog

The adventure begins as PCs travel the Great Northern Road, clouds descending from the nearby mountains to become fog. Their ultimate destination is immaterial, for fate will interrupt the journey. GMs can stage this adventure wherever they wish along the road.

FIGHT IN THE FOG (CR 5)

The PCs are near the end of a day's travel. The sun is descending behind the tree line, and a thickening fog muffles the sounds of the forest, leaving a strange sense of disconnection, as if the party were one step removed from the normal world.

A distant sound grows louder by the moment; the clatter of galloping hooves is coming from behind the group (Perception DC 10):

A wild-eyed horse bursts out of the fog, blood flying from its wounded flanks. Its fur-swathed rider sways in the saddle, gleaming hatchet in his hand.

PC mounts and animals begin to panic (Handle Animal or Ride DC 20 to control animal; DC 10 for battle-trained creatures). The horse runs straight into their midst, rider bouncing and swaying but not actually making any attack. Any blow sends him tumbling to the ground, but he was dead long before the blow was swung.

Both horse and master have been mauled, but the rider seems to have died of old age rather than his wounds. He's swathed in wolf furs, his saddle and tack look ancient. Clasped in his death grip is a silver hatchet.

•••• Challenge of the Fang ••••

WOLF KILLER

AURA faint enchantment; CL 11th

PRICE 2,758 gp; WEIGHT 3 lb.

DESCRIPTION

- This ancient silver hatchet was cast by the first woodsman to face the challenge of the fang. One side of the blade is engraved with a stylized snarling wolf's face, the other with a young child's visage.
- This is *Wolf Killer*, a +1 silver throwing axe. Anyone touching it feels a tingle of magic and the inexplicable sense that there's a price involved in owning it. During the challenge of the fang, the wielder is the subject of a *geas*—urging the character to head into the deep woods and face the Would-Be-King of Wolves—and is plagued by dreams and visions: fearsome wolves pursuing a red cloaked girl, and apparitions of *Wolf Killer's* many previous wielders.

Give the PCs a round or two to react, and then, read or paraphrase the following:

Low shapes prowl around you, hazy silhouettes in the fog. From the mist a gravelly voice demands "That prey is ours. Leave it and be gone, and we may spare you."

CREATURES: Four awakened wolves lurk in the fog, using scent to detect the PCs. They're proud and belligerent if the party tries to talk, demanding the surrender of horse, man, and axe. Although able to converse in common, these wolves know nothing of the civilized world. They call the axe "*Wolf Killer*" and humanoids "furless" or "two-legs." If asked who sent them, they say only, "one who would be king."

TERRAIN: Fog obscures all sight beyond 5 ft., and adjacent creatures have concealment.

AWAKENED WOLVES (4)

XP 600 EACH

CR 1

HP 26 each (see *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary* and *Core Rulebook*)

DEVELOPMENT: The wolves prowl the fog, lunging out of the fog before retreating, only to attack again from a different direction. They make off with *Wolf Killer* if possible. The last wolf standing flees.

The fog continues to thicken and twilight soon gives way to impenetrable darkness. The PCs hear sounds of movement in the underbrush to either side of the road, but investigations find nothing but fresh wolf tracks shadowing their trail. A strong feeling of being watched settles upon their shoulders, never leaving until the adventure is complete. It's not just wolves watching, however, but the Margreve itself.

REFUGE AND REVELATION (CR 6)

The nearest refuge is a roadside coaching inn:

Flickering hearth flames send light and shadow dancing across the room. A soot-stained charcoal burner nurses an empty flagon by the fire, looking up at you with tearful eyes. Nearby, a shriveled crone tells the fortune of an awed young man while a dwarf peddler sharpens knives on a mechanical grinding wheel. Another corner is filled with road-stained pilgrims, intent on a card game while a pair of barber-surgeons, gaily dressed and overloud, lean on the bar and court the attentions of a flustered serving girl. The barber-surgeons, Janusz and Marek, are loud and drunk but otherwise harmless. The dwarf is Baldernek Gunnacksen, traveling mainly for some respite from his large and disputatious family. The young man having his fortune told is Pavel Gruszka, on his way to be married in a nearby village (see "Blood and Thorns" adventure).

Fellow Travelers

CR 1/3

CR 6

Human commoner 1 HP 4 (see Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Core Rulebook) SKILLS Profession (varies) +4

DEVELOPMENT: The main gossip is the ill-omened weather and how wolves seem to be growing bolder and more cunning of late. Previous deeds by the party may also be mentioned.

The Soothsayer

Mother Babushka is a woman so tiny and wrinkled that she looks like a gnome, almost buried beneath a cloak of owl-feathers and layers of patterned cloth. Patches of moss and wood-like nubs mark her olive skin, sure sign of someone who has drunk deep of the Margreve's power. She calls to anyone passing by:

"A coin for your future, traveler? I know much that is spoken of in the gossip of crows, the howls of wolves, and the whispering of leaves."

If *Wolf Killer* is on show, Babushka watches its bearer with an odd look in her eyes. She'll wistfully admit to knowing its previous bearer long ago, having worn the red cloak herself once upon a time. She knows that the challenge of the fang involves a battle with the Would-Be-King of Wolves and tests in a sacred place called the Paths of Gamayun but not exactly what they'll involve.

Mother Babushka

NG Small human sorcerer 7 HP 24

BLOODLINE fey; **SKILLS** Profession (soothsayer) +11 (See Would-Be-King of Wolves, page 61, for Mother Babushka's spells.)

DEVELOPMENT: If anyone asks to have their fortune told, she has them drip candle wax into a bowl of cold water, examining the shapes that form:

"I see choice, catechism, and consequences. You'll pass through places that were old before iron was born, and iron will avail you little there. Knowledge of the old ways is better than sword or shield. I'll also say this: Not all that's devoured is dead and gone, and when offered a choice, the brave may earn a great reward by saying boldly, 'all'."

THE DESPERATE FATHER

The tearful charcoal burner is Hodel Köhler, drowning his sorrows in cheap liquor. Nervously wringing his hands, he soon approaches the party then bursts into tears, begging for help. He claims that his daughter has become lost in the forest, and no one dares go look for her. His emotions are genuine, but he's hiding something (Sense Motive DC 20). If PCs press him on this, he proves to be poor at hiding the truth (Bluff -1).

The truth is that his daughter Czerwonya was chosen to take part in



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.... Tales of the Old Margreve

the challenge of the fang, and he felt he had no choice but to submit to the forest's will and hope that civilization's chosen champion could save her. Treat this as "revealing an important secret" if PCs try to tease it out of him with Diplomacy. Hodel starts indifferent to the party, becoming friendly if he sees *Wolf Killer* or if they assure him they'll save his child.

Characters may recognize Hodel's story (Knowledge [history or local] or Perform [oratory] DC 18). It's similar to many ancient stories from different locales, but the root always seems to be some kind of contest between wolf and man, with the life of an innocent caught in the middle.

If PCs show him *Wolf Killer*, Hodel's face lights up with hope. He begs its bearer to slay the Would-Be-King of Wolves. If PCs ask where Czerwonya might be, he tells them to head into the forest. "The Margreve will guide you," he assures.

TREASURE: Hodel promises eternal gratitude if they save his daughter, but he can provide little in the way of a cash incentive. As grateful gift or necessary bribe however, he'll also offer a small tin box that's warm to the touch. Inside is a golden feather, which flickers with a flame that never burns out:

"Long ago, I saw the firebird and tried to catch it, but all I managed to grab was this. Please take it with you as a light for the dark places and a token of my love for little Czerwonya."

FIREBIRD FEATHER

AURA faint transmutation; CL 3rd PRICE 2,250 gp; WEIGHT —

DESCRIPTION

A firebird feather burns with *continual flame* and grants *endure elements* (cold only) to whoever carries it. Druids can use it in place of their usual divine focus, and presenting it causes vampires to recoil, as if they had been confronted by a holy symbol.

In exchange for the feather, Hodel asks that the PCs stand beneath one of the nearby trees with him and swear to save his daughter. No magic binds their oath, but there'll be consequences later if they break it.

Wolves in Sheep's Clothing (CR 6)

The pilgrims wear green woolen cloaks and the holy symbol of the Green Gods. They're an uncouth-looking bunch, but who's at their best after a long journey? Their occasional unfriendly glances suggest that they are sizing the party up (Sense Motive DC 20).

They rebuff attempts at conversation or requests to join them, seemingly obsessed with a deck of tarocchi fortune-telling cards that their leader is dealing. Again and again, he casts readings for his companions, and a handful of cards keep cropping up each time. If a PC gets a good look at these repeating cards, they'll see something strangely familiar in them... each represents one of the PCs, and there's a look to the face, piece of equipment, or other sign that the card depicts them. The dog-eared cards are uncanny but non-magical.

These men are vargamors—woodsmen who worship the power of the wolf and use enchanted oils to take on lupine characteristics. Repeated use of *worg salve* has left them all with traits similar to those of werewolves: moon-shaped birthmarks on their palms, elongated index fingers, snaggletooth grins, eyes that reflect the moonlight, and brows that meet in the middle. Their leader Boleslav is a genuine werewolf and also a šestaci—a wicked man with six fingers on each hand who can see the true form of ala and serves their evil whims.

BROTHER BOLESLAV CR 2 XP 600

Male werewolf (hybrid form) (see *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary*) HP 21

CR 1/2

COMBAT GEAR worg salve (2)

VARGAMOR (9)

XP 200

Male human barbarian 1 NE Medium humanoid

INIT +2; SENSES Perception +4

DEFENSE

AC 12, touch 10, flat-footed 10 (+2 armor, +2 Dex, -2 rage)

нр 13 (1d12+7)

FORT +6, REF +2, WILL +2

OFFENSE

SPEED 40 ft.

MELEE handaxe +5 (1d6+4)

SPECIAL ATTACKS rage (6 rounds/day)

TACTICS

BEFORE COMBAT The vargamors apply 2 applications of *worg salve*, gaining low-light vision and a bite attack.

DURING COMBAT They rage and attack with frenzied howling.

MORALE If Boleslav is dead, any wounded, non-raging vargamors are easily persuaded to flee (Intimidate DC 11).

BASE STATISTICS AC 14, touch 12, flat-footed 12; HP 11; FORT +4, WILL +0; MELEE +3 handaxe (1d6+2); STR 15, CON 15

ENHANCED STATISTICS (using 2 applications of *worg salve*) **SENSES** low-light vision; **MELEE** handaxe +5 (1d6+4), -1 bite (1d6+2)

STATISTICS STR 19, DEX 14, CON 19, INT 10, WIS 11, CHA 8 BASE ATK +1; CMB +2; CMD 13 FEATS Skill Focus (Survival), Toughness

SKILLS Bluff –1, Intimidate +3, Perception +4, Stealth +3, Survival +4 LANGUAGES Common

SQ wild empathy -1 (wolves and dire wolves only)

COMBAT GEAR worg salve; OTHER GEAR handaxe, leather armor

DEVELOPMENT: Boleslav and the vargamors prefer to attack when they can ambush the party—such as while they're asleep—or as soon as their cover is blown.

The travelers—Baldernek, Hodel, and the barber-surgeons—assist PCs as best they can but are terrified of the curse of lycanthropy and overmatched by the vargamors' ferocity. Mother Babushka mysteriously disappears during the fight.

Boleslav flees in wolf form, if the battle appears lost.

From this point onward, lupine adversaries shadow the party's every move. If they stray from the path, the Margreve sets wolves, worgs, werewolves, and vargamors on them. All try to make a name for themselves by killing the PCs or stealing *Wolf Killer*.

TREASURE: In addition to *worg salve*, Boleslav carries an amulet of lightning-struck stone in the shape of an ala and dragonhide armor made from zmey headling (480 gp).



.... Challenge of the Fang

WORG SALVE

AURA faint transmutation; CL 5th

Рпісе 750 gp; Weight —

DESCRIPTION

Brewed by hags and lycanthropes, this oil grants you lupine features. Each pot contains enough for three applications; one application rubbed onto the appropriate area grants one of the following: low-light vision, scent, speed 50 ft., or a secondary attack (bite) for 5 minutes. Use all three applications at once to transform into a wolf, as the *beast shape I* spell. Excessive use of worg salve may result in the target becoming a werewolf.

CONSTRUCTION

REQUIREMENTS Brew Potion, beast shape I; COST 375 gp

Part 2: The Paths of Gamayun

Whether or not they're searching for the missing girl, once they leave sight of civilization the party is engulfed in the Margreve's numinous power. The forest leads them ever deeper; paths shift, compasses veer, noises lure them on and dangerous creatures block the way home. They're drawn inexorably into the deep woods.

Soon, trees tower overhead like living buttresses in a titanic hall, halfformed floral faces hover at the edge of vision, and the laughter of unseen fey mixes with the almost-words of whispering leaves. Fireflies brighten in the gloom, for only occasional shafts of light break through the canopy, and large seeds drift inexplicably in the breezeless air. The atmosphere feels heavy with an unnerving sense of anticipation, and PCs should have no doubt that they're walking in an ancient and powerful place:

Before you is a living arch formed from a pair of intertwining trees. Flanking it are gnarled wooden statues of horsemen, almost swallowed by weeds. Vines curl around their wooden lances, and tiny flowers poke through their beards of moss. Beyond the arch, thick briars and brambles flank a narrow path.

FEATURES: The statues are green hussars who planted themselves here long ago and have never yet had cause to move. Only if attacked or if the PCs try to burn the bramble maze do they animate. Anyone examining them closely notices tiny ribbons, twisted leaves, and other offerings in their wings. Adding a token marks a PC as respectful and faithful to the forest's power, which is noted by the fey that wait further in.

GREEN HUSSAR (2)

HP 30 (see MARGREVE BESTIARY, page 27)

TRAVELING THE PATHS

The Paths of Gamayun are a labyrinth with no physical solution; it forms and shifts by the Margreve's will, and the only way to leave is by facing its challenges or forcing a way out through the thick, tall briars flanking the trail (treat as a *wall of thorns* spell). The path forks many times during their journey, but if the party splits up, they find themselves meeting again at the next challenge.

Time is of the essence in reaching Czerwonya before the Would-Be-King of Wolves, and PCs can speed their journey by making skill checks to reveal the best path to take through the maze. Intersperse these checks with the major and minor encounters listed below:

- *Knowledge (local) (DC 13)*—Identify local trail marks that show the correct path.
- Perception (DC 17)—See a strand of red cloth caught on a thorn.
- *Sense Motive (opposed)*—Determine whether a child of the briar's directions are lies.
- *Survival (DC 15)*—Spot wolf tracks or a child's footprints in the mud.

The following minor encounters can be used to add extra detail to the PCs journey:

- **BRIARS AND LIARS.** Children of the briar lurk in the underbrush, clawing at anyone who tries to leave the path. They can be tempted out to talk by promises of gossip, gifts, or an acorn cup of blood.
- **CRUMBLING CADAVERS.** Dusty grey corpses crouch in the underbrush, some huddled in fear and others curled up as if merely sleeping. They're the remains of those who failed the tests and became victims of the mora. Touching a corpse makes it to crumble to dust.
- LAUGHING LITTLE MAN. A pixie follows the PCs, taunting and hindering them. It's all good fun though, and PCs who can laugh at themselves earn his respect. Those who attack suffer ill-fortune and minor inconveniences throughout their time in the forest.
- **POLYMORPHING POOL.** A pool of water reflects not the viewer's appearance but the animal which best reflects their personality. Drinking from the pool changes the PC into an animal for a time, as per *beast shape II*.
- SAP DIPLOMACY. A globule of sap, actually a sap demon, dangles over the path, oozing from a wounded branch. A face in the ooze converses with the party and tries to get them to stand beneath it as it falls.
- SQUIRRELS WITH RED EYES. The path turns suddenly into a shadowy clearing. Oaks tower overhead so thick they block out all light. Eyes flash in what dim light remains, as red-furred creatures—large, large indeed—scatter over the giant acorns littering the floor.
- **WOLFISH WILES.** A silver-tongued worg shadows the party's progress from beyond the wall of briars. It tries to convince them to abandon their quest so wolves can take their rightful place as masters of the forest. It offers *worg salve*, lycanthropy, and the friendship of its kind as a bribe.

FAILING THE TESTS: THE MORA (CR 5)

Some say the mora is a swarm awoken by the Margreve, others that its moths are possessed by the spirits of witches and shadow fey, who gather to drink the dreams and souls of travelers. If PCs fail all the tests, refuse to try them, force their way out of the maze or otherwise anger the forest, it sends the mora to punish them.

THE MORA

CR 3

N Diminutive magic beast (swarm)

INIT +4; SENSES darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Perception +15 DEFENSE

AC 18, touch 18, flat-footed 14 (+4 Dex, +4 natural) HP 38 (7d8+7)

FORT +6, REF +8, WILL +3

DEFENSIVE ABILITIES sanctuary (DC 15), swarm traits; **IMMUNE** weapon damage

WEAKNESS swarm traits

ALL AND ALL AN

CR 5

••• Tales of the Old Margreve ••••

OFFENSE

SPEED 5 ft., fly 40 ft. (good)
MELEE swarm (1d3 Cha damage and fatigue)
SPACE 10 ft.; REACH 0 ft.
SPECIAL ATTACKS deadly dreams, fatigue (DC 15)

SPELL-LIKE ABILITIES (CL 7th; concentration +5)

3/day—lullaby (DC 12), sleep (DC 13)

TACTICS

BEFORE COMBAT The mora flit stealthily above their foes' heads. **DURING COMBAT** The mora uses *lullaby*, picking foes off one by one. **MORALE** If reduced to 0 hp, the individual moths scatter in a

thousand directions

STR 1, DEX 18, CON 12, INT 12, WIS 13, CHA 14

BASE ATK +5; CMB -; CMD -

FEATS Flyby Attack, Hover, Skill Focus (Stealth), Wingover SKILLS Fly +24, Perception +15, Stealth +26; RACIAL MODIFIERS

+8 Perception

SPECIAL ABILITIES

DEADLY DREAMS (EX) Unconscious or sleeping victims suffer Constitution damage rather than Charisma from the mora's swarm attack.

FATIGUE (SU) Living creatures that take damage from the mora become fatigued (Fortitude DC 15 negates). Enemies already fatigued become exhausted; those already exhausted fall unconscious.

SANCTUARY (SU) Apathy afflicts all who try to harm the mora. Treat this as a *sanctuary* spell. A successful Will save (DC 15) means the creature is immune this effect for 24 hours.

DEVELOPMENT: If the PCs defeat the mora, they may go on their way or return to the paths and try again.

THE TEST OF KNOWLEDGE (CR 6)

The PCs' knowledge and respect of the old ways is tested as their path crosses a river:

There's a break in the canopy as you find a river running across your path. Dark, muddy water swirls and bubbles around a ford of mossy stepping stones.

The party may well be suspicious of such a tranquil scene but no immediate danger presents itself. If anyone examines the stones, there is something not quite right about some of them (Perception DC 20).

CREATURES: Only some of the stepping stones are real—three are really the moss and mud covered heads of bagienniks lurking just below the surface. A fourth creature circles in the muddy water in case anyone tries swimming: Monstrous humanoids burst from the water, their long-limbs caked with mud and fish bones. "Defilers!" one shouts. "How dare you tread in her sacred place? We demand tribute for this affront!" "Tribute!" its companions echo in ever-louder shouts, "TRIBUTE!"

TERRAIN: The river is 25 ft. wide and looks no challenge to a decent swimmer. Hopping across using the stones is also possible (Acrobatics DC 15, but see below).

BAGIENNIK (4)	CR 2
XP 600	
CN Large monstrous humanoid (aquatic)	
INIT -1; SENSES darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +4	
DEFENSE	
AC 13, touch 8, flat-footed 13 (-1 Dex, +5 natural, -1 size)	
HP 17 (3d10+6)	
FORT +5, REF +0, WILL +3	
DEFENSIVE ABILITIES ferocity; RESIST Cold 5	
OFFENSE	
SPEED 40 ft.	

MELEE 2 slams +7 (1d6+4 plus grab) SPACE 10 ft.; REACH 10 ft. SPECIAL ATTACKS snort

TACTICS

BEFORE COMBAT The bagienniks hide in the water. **DURING COMBAT** They initially grab enemies and hurl them back onto the bank. If wounded below half its hp, a bagiennik becomes enraged and fights to kill. **MORALE** Bagienniks get angrier and more determined as combat continues. If the last remaining has more than half its hp remaining, it flees. Otherwise, all the bagienniks fight to the death

STATISTICS

STR 18, DEX 8, CON 14, INT 7, WIS 10, CHA 8 BASE ATK +3; CMB +8 (+12 to grapple); CMD 17 FEATS Intimidating Prowess, Power Attack SKILLS Climb +8, Intimidate +7, Perception +4, Stealth +1, Swim +18; RACIAL MODIFIERS +8 swim

LANGUAGES Common, Sylvan SQ amphibious

SPECIAL ABILITIES

SNORT (Ex) A bagiennik can snort scalding oil from its nostrils, 1/hour. Treat this as alchemist's fire. Bagienniks are immune to their own oil and the oil of other bagienniks.

DEVELOPMENT: Bagienniks look like lean, web-toed ogres with wrinkled skin and a bulbous snout located between their beady eyes. They are brutish, degenerate creatures related to banniks (bathhouse spirits). Unlike their more civilized cousins, bagienniks live like brigands in the wild, robbing and sometimes devouring travelers. Their anger is like an avalanche of falling stones: it starts small but rapidly grows in size.

Bagienniks serve an obscure but proud divinity known as Lada, Queen of the Underwater

Lawns, who may be an aspect of the Green Gods or just a powerful fey or rusalka (Knowledge [local or religion] DC 22).

Demands they be gone or questions like "whose sacred place is this?" only insult and enrage the bagienniks. A polite and respectful response, apologizing for trespassing and requesting passage appeases them, as can a prayer in Lada's honor (Diplomacy or Knowledge [religion] DC 15, increase the DC if the bagienniks are especially annoyed). The PCs must also make an offering: an animal sacrifice, a gift fit for a noble lady, or meat and beer for the bagienniks.

Killing the bagienniks fails this test. If the PCs negotiate their way past, award them half the XP value of the encounter.

THE TEST OF RESOLVE (CR 0 OR 7)

Shortly after their ordeal at the river (or whenever the party is feeling tired and looking for a place to rest), their resolve is tested by a pair of distracting vila:

A break in the bramble wall reveals a clearing where two shapely feminine forms await. They have skin like polished mahogany but hair and eyes as green as emeralds. They nod as you approach—charming smiles blunted by something haughty in their storm cloud eyes.

CREATURES: These two are Iwona (meaning "yew tree") and Jagoda ("berry"). Iwona is the eldest, calmer and shrewder. Jagoda is more vivacious but quicker to wrath. They are friendly, if somewhat aloof, but show a little more respect to druids and rangers. They invite the party to rest a moment, becoming angry if they try to depart in disrespectful haste. They *fascinate* (DC 17) reluctant PCs.

TERRAIN: The glade behind them looks like the perfect campsite although PCs who examine the ground can find countless wolf tracks. It contains a green pavilion tent, beside which is an archery butt and a stone altar overflowing with cakes, ribbons, fresh fruits, and flowers. These are traditional offerings to the vila (Knowledge [local or religion] DC 15).

VILA (2) CR 5 XP 1,600 EACH HP 40 each (see MARGREVE BESTIARY, page 33)

DEVELOPMENT: The vila suggest a meal, then a friendly archery competition, and various other diversions (including hints of a possible romantic liaison) to deflect the PCs from their aim.

They also have a short test: they demand to administer a single slap to each character, to remind them of the seriousness of their quest and the seriousness of oaths. This inflicts 1d3+1 nonlethal damage, but they also use their smite ability—adding 5d6 normal damage if the target has ever broken an oath sworn in the forest. Anyone affected is scorned and reviled by both vila. The party fail this test if they refuse the vilas' challenge, allow themselves to be overly delayed, or if more than one character proves to be an oath-breaker.

TREASURE: Each vila carries 3 *sand arrows* in addition to their normal equipment, which they use to confound violent PCs and offer as a prize to anyone who can beat them at archery.

THE TEST OF TALENT (CR 0, 4, OR 8)

The maze ends at a circular clearing. Here sits their final challenge, a fearsome ala named Stuhac, sitting cross-legged on a flat rock surrounded by goblin bones. She's haughty, scornful, and thoroughly enjoying herself. As

the party arrives she's cracking open a femur and sucking out the marrow:

"Greetings would-be champions of axe and flame. I am the final ordeal of the Paths of Gamayun. I offer you three challenges: a test of skill, a test of strength, and a test of wits—choose now or the game is over, and I'll feast on more than bones!"

CREATURES: Stuhac sits alone in the clearing but countless eyes peer out from the underbrush: fey, wolves, and others come to observe the final test.

STUHAC

XP 4,800 Ala (see MARGREVE BESTIARY, page 24) HP 97

DEVELOPMENT: Stuhac responds angrily if the PCs recall Mother Babushka's advice and demand to try all three tests, but she acquiesces grudgingly if they insist. She also reacts poorly to threats, violence, or attempts to avoid her challenges:

"Foolish mortals! I am the storm's wrath and the fury of winter sky. The hill has not yet been cleft to drive the shaft from which the iron to kill me will be mined. Know your place and do not anger me with this foolishness!"

THE RULES: Anyone caught cheating gets a blast of Stuhac's *call lightning*, but she only declares the challenge forfeit if she tires of their antics. To her, "cheating" and "boring" are interchangeable. She's especially amused by PC tricks that backfire.

THE TEST OF SKILL: A party member must play a balalaika that's crawling with wasps: this requires three Disable Device checks (DC 20) to avoid disturbing the wasps, alternating with three Perform (string instruments) (DC 15) checks to play a decent tune. Failing one Disable Device check subjects the PC to the swarm's distraction ability and means the character automatically blows the next Perform check. Additional failures mean the swarm attacks for 1 round. Stuhac heckles the PC throughout, but if successful with at least one Perform check, she's satisfied. If they pass all six checks, both Stuhac and the watching fey are impressed.

WASP SWARM XP 800

HP 31 (see Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary)

TEST OF STRENGTH: At first glance, this seems pretty straightforward: out-wrestle the "dwarf" Zapasník (he is indeed quite short for a leshy). Stuhac says that the contest is to the best of three pins and involves "clinch fighting, hurling, slamming, pinning, gouging—torn cartilage and popping joints!" If anyone complains that this sounds too dangerous, she politely suggests that perhaps a local milkmaid could be persuaded to fight for them, or would they prefer to just shut up and climb into her jaws?

ZAPASNÍK XP 1,200

Leshy (see Margreve Bestiary, page 28) HP 42 **CR 3**

CR 8

AURA frightful presence (DC 15); MELEE unarmed +8 (1d3+3); CMB +8; CMD 19



.... Tales of the Old Margreve

DEVELOPMENT: Characters who disbelieve the leshy's illusory size grapple as normal, but if they're fooled add +4 (the bonus for Gargantuan size) to Zapasnik's CMB and CMD.

TEST OF WITS: Stuhac produces a gul bara board of lacquered green and black wood and invites one of the PCs to defeat her in a game.

Play involves an opposed Intelligence check. For every 2 points that one contestant beats the other, one of the winner's pieces is removed. The first player to remove all 12 of their pieces is the winner.

A Sleight of Hand check (DC 10) adds 2 to the check result, but this is opposed by the opponent's Perception. Spells like *prestidigitation*, *suggestion*, and *silent image* might also be used to grant an advantage. Stuhac herself has little skill at the game but is using an enchanted board:

STUHAC'S ENCHANTED GAMEBOARD

AURA faint enchantment; CL 3rd PRICE 1,800 gp; WEIGHT 2 lb.

DESCRIPTION

This gul bara (backgammon) set is enchanted to assist its owner: dice roll favorably and pieces shift position, giving you a +4 bonus to opposed Intelligence checks to beat an opponent. A Perception check (DC 25) is required to detect this cheating. In addition, every time someone removes one of their 12 game pieces during the natural course of a game, the other player feels a stab of pain and loses 1 hp.

The set's beneficial magic ceases to function for you if you lose a game played on the board.

CONSTRUCTION

REQUIREMENTS Create Wondrous Item, prestidigitation; COST 900 gp

DEVELOPMENT: If the PC wins, Stuhac angrily hurls the board into the trees. PCs can retrieve and claim it for themselves, but doing this in front of Stuhac leaves her even more annoyed.

Victorious PCs are permitted to depart unmolested. If they beat all three of Stuhac's challenges, however, she's forced to grant them a boon: either a *matrushka doll* (see *Tales of the Old Margreve: A KoboldQuarterly.com Compilation*), the return of *Wolf-Killer* (if it was stolen earlier), or a favor to be asked for later. If PCs take the latter option, she gleefully twists any request like a malevolent genie.

If the PCs fail all three tests (or just won't play), Stuhac magnanimously offers to let them go unmolested if someone volunteers to be eaten. If they refuse, she calls down hail and lightning, toying with them for a round or two. The lightning causes a conflagration to spring up, which she fans towards the party, forcing them to flee (see *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Core Ralebook* for rules on forest fires).

Part 3: The Belly of the Beast

One way or another, the party leaves the Paths of Gamayun, and the trail leads back into the forest proper. Allow them time to rest after their trials before they come across a small dell where Czerwonya spent the night.

A GATHERING OF DOLLS

The remains of an improvised camp sit in a small dell, the fire pit properly ringed with stones and ashes scattered. The underbrush is filled with small wooden dolls, paint faded and peeling, that ring the camp as if watching over it. Several small bootprints, a strand of red wool, and an impression where a small body curled up in the mossy earth mark the site (Survival DC 13). The dolls are non-magical, but there's no sign of how they got there. They serve as proxy sacrifices, left on altars and set adrift in streams by superstitious villagers throughout the region (Knowledge [local or religion] DC 15).

Ringing the camp are the tracks of a large wolf. It circled the clearing several times, then ran off ahead of the girl.

Just beyond the camp are a series of odd, uneven depressions in the underbrush about 3 ft. in diameter and almost as deep. These are treant tracks (Knowledge [nature] DC 18). Czerwonya's footprints follow them for a while before suddenly vanishing, but the tracks continue on. Maybe she hitched a ride?

GRANDMA'S HOUSE (CR 0 OR 8)

Czerwonya's destination is the tree house of Mother Babushka, the ancient crone who may have read their fortune back at the inn. Her hut is nestled in the leafy canopy of a meandering treant named Raudnun, who resembles a witchwood tree:

A tree lopes through the forest; its upper half is a wide spray of green leaves and crimson berries, its trunk- legs wrapped in mistletoe vines. Surmounting its canopy is a rickety-looking hut. Crows flap around it, agitated and cawing loudly. Amid their shrieking, you hear what seems like words: "Axe! Axe! Wolf! Wolf! Cloak! Cloak!"

CREATURES: Raudnun is a slow-witted treant that doesn't speak Common. He ignores the party unless they use fire or start hammering pitons into him. Annoying Raudnun earns an irritated swat, which should be enough to discourage bad behavior.

TERRAIN: Babuskha's hut is 30 ft. off the ground (Climb DC 15). Anyone falling while climbing receives a +2 bonus to grab a branch.

CR 8

RAUDNUN

XP 4,800 Treant (see *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary*) **HP** 114

If the party manages to communicate, he'll eventually confirm that the old witch who lives in his branches has had a couple of recent visitors: a little human and a big wolf. Characters who speak with the crows find them in a jubilant mood, expecting a good feast one way or the other.

THE BIG BAD WOLF (CR 6)

The situation in Babushka's hut depends on the PCs speed in getting here and their successes in the Paths of Gamayun.

SWIFT AND SUCCESSFUL PARTIES reach Raudnun only a few minutes after Czerwonya. The Would-Be-King of Wolves has devoured Mother Babushka and is conversing with the girl in her guise, trying to gain Czerwonya's confidence. Snatches of conversation can be heard above, such as "my, what big eyes you have..." (Perception DC 20).

AVERAGE PARTIES arrive as the wolf throws off its disguise and leaps at Czerwonya. The PCs have only a few rounds to get into the hut before he catches and kills her.

LATE AND UNSUCCESSFUL PARTIES arrive just after the wolf has killed Czerwonya. Ritual complete, the new King of Wolves is jovial. He banters with them disguised as an abnormally fat Babushka. He'll try





to lure *Wolf Killer's* bearer up alone if he can, but he is content with gloating if they pierce his disguise (an *alter self* spell). His main aim is to escape and consolidate his power. Any fight becomes a chase as he races through the forest in search of reinforcements.

CREATURES: Czerwonya, Mother Babushka (swallowed), the Would-Be-King of Wolves.

TERRAIN: Babushka's hut is full of clutter: crude tables, discarded clothes, potted plants, scattered bric-a-brac. Cabinets balance precariously; their shelves overflow with jams and preserves, ceramic vials, and ancient scrolls. Countless herbs dangle from the roof. The hut counts as difficult terrain and characters moving at greater than their base speed in a round risk falling over (Acrobatics DC 10).

Several branches outside the hut are wide enough to walk on (Acrobatics DC 7). The Would-Be-King of Wolves retreats onto them if PCs try to corral him inside the hut.

Babushka's cauldron is actually *Inushka's Pot*, boiling away happily despite no fire beneath it. Throwing its boiling proto-potions on someone inflicts 3d4 fire damage plus 1 splash damage to all creatures within 5 ft. If the PCs somehow get the wolf to speaking scornfully about its contents, *Inushka's Pot* immediately animates and attacks him.

Czerwonya Köhler

XP 100

CR 1/4

NG Small human commoner 1 HP 4; AC 12

NOTE: Czerwonya's red cloak is non-magical but marks her as a sacred sacrifice. For the duration of the challenge, the Margreve protects her with an effect similar to a *sanctuary* spell (DC 16).

Mother Babushka (devoured) XP 2,400

NG Small human sorcerer 7 HP 24 (currently 15 hp); **BLOODLINE** fey

(See the Would-Be-King of Wolves for Mother Babushka's spells, if released.)

A bear-sized wolf rears back on its hind legs, eyes agleam with malice and hunger. Its jaws open wider than any normal wolf, revealing a bright red tongue and gore-stained fangs. There's a screaming face and clawing hands visible beneath the skin of its swollen belly, as if it had devoured someone who is struggling to escape.

CR 7

THE WOULD-BE-KING OF WOLVES

XP 3,200

NE Large magical beast

INIT +3; SENSES low-light vision, scent; Perception +8

DEFENSE

AC 19, touch 13, flat-footed 16 (+3 Dex, +1 dodge, +6 natural, -1 size)

HP 80 (9d10+27)

FORT +9, REF +6, WILL +6

DR 5/silver

OFFENSE

SPEED 50 ft.

MELEE bite +13 (1d8+4 plus trip)

SPECIAL ATTACKS consume magic, swallow whole (AC 14, 8 hp)



•• Tales of the Old Margreve •••

SPELLS KNOWN (CL 8th; concentration +6)

4th (3/day)-shout (DC 16)

3rd (5/day)—blink, deep slumber (DC 17), suggestion (DC 17)

2nd (7/day)—alter self, glitterdust (DC 14), hideous laughter (DC 16), scare (DC 14)

- 1st (7/day)—charm person (DC 13), entangle (DC 13), grease (DC 13), hold portal, reduce person (DC 13), sleep (DC 15)
- 0 (at will)—dancing lights, daze, detect magic, mage hand, mending, prestidigitation, read magic, touch of fatigue (DC 12)

TACTICS

- **BEFORE COMBAT** The Would-Be-King of Wolves threatens "to huff and puff and blow this house down" (*shout*).
- **DURING COMBAT** The Would-Be-King of Wolves prefers to stay at range and use stolen magic to harass the PCs. When this is gone, he'll vomit up Babushka and try to swallow any nearby Small creature with magical abilities.

MORALE Once Czerwonya is dead, his aim is escape.

STATISTICS

STR 19, DEX 17, CON 16, INT 12, WIS 12, CHA 15 BASE ATK +9; CMB +14; CMD 27

 FEATS Combat Casting, Deceitful, Dodge, Iron Will, Mobility
 SKILLS Acrobatics +9, Bluff +10, Climb +10 Disguise +4, Perception +8, Stealth +11, Survival +6 (+10 scent tracking); RACIAL
 MODIFIERS +4 Survival when tracking by scent

LANGUAGES Common, Sylvan

SQ woodland stride

SPECIAL ABILITIES

CONSUME MAGIC (EX) The Would-Be-King of Wolves can absorb the magic of a swallowed opponent. He can use the spells or spell-like abilities of a victim, as if he was the swallowed creature; the swallowed creature, however, cannot cast spells or use spell-like abilities.

INUSHKA'S POT

XP 600

Small animated object (see Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary) HP 21

CR 2

DEVELOPMENT: The Would-Be-King of Wolves begins the fight having swallowed Mother Babushka and cannot use swallow whole again until his belly is empty. Cutting Babushka free requires a sunder maneuver and deals 8 damage.

Among the herbs dangling from the ceiling is a sprig of fresh wolfsbane. Presenting this at the Would-Be-King of Wolves forces him to recoil, much like thrusting a holy symbol at a vampire. After one round of recoiling however, he can act normally against the wielder (Will DC 20).

If she is rescued from the wolf's belly, Mother Babushka profusely thanks the PCs and recovers enough to assist in 1d3 rounds. If they are in serious need of help, Raudnun can be spurred to assist them (Diplomacy DC 19).

After the fight, Babushka offers to teach the party *Stories That Wolves Tell*, an incantation to better keep an eye on the Margreve's lupine inhabitants. If Czerwonya still lives, she offers *Inushka's Pot* or a similarly priced item as an additional reward. At the GM's discretion, she can become an ally and teacher to the party, allowing them to learn more of the forest's ancient lore.

Babushka smiles coyly if the PCs ask how the wolf was able to devour her whole and steal her magic or what events she knew of in advance, admitting only that "We all had our parts to play."

Concluding the Adventure

If PCs save Czerwonya and kill the Would-Be-King of Wolves, then the wolves must bow before mankind for three generations. They become wary of civilization. Attacks on livestock lessen and most wolves live in fear of man—especially the PCs.

If both Czerwonya and the Would-Be-King die, the situation is a stalemate. The Margreve's wolves eventually learn of the party's involvement and some try to prove themselves by hunting the PCs down. The boundaries between the worlds of wolf and man remain uncertain, with lives lost on both sides as the borders are tested.

If Czerwonya dies and the Would-Be-King escapes, the Margreve judges wolves superior to men. United by their new king, wolf packs are soon a menace; prowling fearlessly up to village, campsite, and coaching inn alike. Livestock is plundered, lone travelers waylaid and devoured. Wolves become the most common animal awakened to do the forest's bidding, and tales of werewolves and wolf worship soon begin to spread. Killing the Wolf King does little to stem the tide wolves run victorious and proud until the next challenge of the fang.



By Michael Furlanetto

In which the adventurers learn that the challenge of parenthood is even more fearsome than bloodthirsty monsters and dusty ruins...

"The Griffon Hatchling Heist" is a forest-based fantasy adventure suitable for PCs of 5th level. Although it contains several opportunities for combat, it emphasizes planning, stealth, and creative problem solving.

Adventure Background

enturies ago, House Stross, rulers of Zobeck, built a dozen griffon towers under the boughs of the Margreve. Each of these towers housed a unit of elite griffon cavalry. Eight guarded the Great Northern Road while others stood watch over hunting grounds, mines, and other important locales. The Still Tower falls in the last category, built over a magical oddity—a location which enhances divination spells. Under the guise of a quiet forest retreat, the nobleman who ordered its construction hoped both to use this effect to his advantage and study its origin.

Not long thereafter, House Stross fell, and the Griffon Towers fell into disuse and disrepair. As the most isolated of the lot, the Still Tower housed only the descendents of its black griffon inhabitants. These griffons, the largest and most aggressive in the forest, are led by Lesharrkk, whose voracious appetite for horseflesh is matched only by her self-regard.

The Still Tower was attacked 10 days ago. A group of brigands led by a cyclops and a sorcerer struck during a thunderstorm. Their first blow used a purloined scroll—and some luck—to *polymorph* Lesharrkk into a less threatening form. With their greatest opposition neutralized, the bandits were able to kill the other adult griffons and capture a clutch of valuable eggs. The sorcerer and part of the gang has left the tower to sell their loot while the cyclops, three ogres, and a host of bugbears remain to guard the clutch.

Lesharrkk, who escaped the massacre in her new form, finds the adventurers and asks them to rescue her eggs.

Adventure Summary

The PCs are approached by a talking housecat who claims (truly) to be Lesharrkk, the proud pride-mother of the oldest and most ferocious pack of black griffons in the Margreve Forest. Her tower was attacked by brigands—her pride mates are dead, her eggs are held hostage, and she has been transformed. She asks the PCs to retrieve her eggs before they hatch; in return, she offers her gratitude and all the treasure left by the previous masters of the Still Tower.

The party makes its way up a narrow forest track to a hidden back-entrance to the tower. Overcoming an ancient carnivorous tree, a claustrophobic swim up an underground stream, and the dusty caryatid columns guarding an ancient library, the PCs sneak through the tower under the noses of the band of brigands. Atop the tower, they fight the cyclops leader of the bandits to retrieve the griffon eggs.

Of course, the eggs hatch as soon as the party takes possession of them. The PCs must escape the surrounding bandits while guarding their hungry cargo, all the while ensuring that the hatchlings do not start to believe that one of the PCs is their mother. Success wins the party a powerful ally, a long-forgotten magical secret, and a potential future base of operations. Failure probably leads to a slow roast on a cyclops' spit.

Adventure Rooks

The Griffon Hatchling Heist occurs during springtime in the Margreve Forest, when griffon eggs hatch and the seasonal rains turn the roads and paths to mud. The PCs should be near or in the Margreve when the adventure begins. They can get involved in one (or more) of the following ways:

- If the PCs have built a reputation as competent problemsolvers, Lesharrkk may have heard of their exploits from other forest denizens. Alternately, an ally of the party from a previous adventure may have recommended them to the griffon.
- If the PCs have been struggling with a recurring villain, then make that villain either the leader of the brigands or the buyer for the griffon eggs. In this case, the PCs may be hunting for Lesharrkk after hearing rumors of their foil's exploits.
- If the PCs have done some service for the forest, then perhaps the Margreve itself guides Lesharrkk to them. If your campaign is emphasizing the other-worldly and magical aspects of the Margreve, this hook would reinforce that theme.
- Finally, Lesharrkk might happen randomly upon the PCs on the Great Northern Road. This hook works best if this adventure is the first taste the PCs have of the Margreve.

Introduction

The adventure begins as the PCs come across a cat fighting with a raven:

A snarling cat leaps out at a low-flying raven. "Perun's bolts!" spits the cat as the bird flies away. Turning to look at you, the cat bares its teeth in what seems to be an attempt at a friendly smile.

CREATURE: The cat is a polymorphed black griffon. She has retained her mental statistics and her ability to read and write.

TRANSFORMED LESHARRKK XP 1,200

Variant cat (augmented griffon) (see Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary)

CR 1/4

SENSES darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Perception +8; INT 9, WIS 17, CHA 12; LANGUAGES Common



•••• Tales of the Old Margreve ••••

DEVELOPMENT: A Knowledge (local) check (DC 20) identifies Lesharrkk's natural form. Driven by the desire to reclaim her eggs, Lesharrkk will not engage in combat in her current form. Once returned to her normal form, treat Lesharrkk as a griffon with the advanced simple template (see *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary*).

Lesharrkk is desperate for help, and given her time constraints, the PCs are her only remaining option. If they do not agree to help, she will try to convince them again later. Perhaps she finds an ally to speak on her behalf, maybe she writes her plea in the campsite dirt—be inventive, but do not force the party's hand. Under no circumstances will Lesharrkk engage in combat; if attacked, she departs to find a way to reverse her transformation. Once restored, she—and all the griffons of the Margreve—harry the PCs at every opportunity.

At the same time, remember that Lesharrkk is a proud, powerful, angry creature. Although she needs the help of the PCs, she will not beg, prostrate herself, or sacrifice her dignity any more than absolutely necessary.

If the PCs agree to talk with her, Lesharrkk will recount the events of the bandit attack from the background. One of her pride mates flew her away from the tower before he succumbed to the missile fire of the bugbears. After the attack, Lesharrkk stayed to observe the comings and goings of the criminal band, learning that the middling sorcerer who leads the brigands is planning to sell the griffon eggs for a princely sum and that the tower would be lightly guarded while he escorted the buyer to the eggs. Eventually, since she could not carry her eggs to safety in her new form, she left to seek help.

While the PCs recover her eggs, she plans to visit a little-known Margreve locale and enact an incantation to reverse her condition. Never having performed it before, she worries that it will take too much time, preventing her from rescuing the eggs.

If the PCs agree to help, Lesharrkk gives them some information to help in their quest:

Just north of the Eye of the Forest Inn is a hunting track heading west between two mossy stumps. Follow it, always choosing the right-hand fork, until you reach a clear pond under a bluff. There the trail ends, but a guardian of some sort waits by the pond. Take care! The tower will be on top of the bluff to your left. You can swim into the cellar of the tower through the pool—head upstream until you find air again. Most of the brigands camp outside the tower, so behind its thick walls, you should be able to make your way up right under the noses of the filthy swine who slaughtered my kin. My clutch of eggs await atop the tower—those criminals are too mercenary to risk moving them and losing their reward. You have no more than a week before they hatch, and the rest of the bandits will return soon, so please hurry. I will meet you with the eggs at the two stumps which begin the trail.

My hatchlings will treat whomever they see first as their mother. So if you tarry and they hatch before I reach you, disguise yourselves, distract them, something—neither of us wishes you to foster a griffon.

Part 1: To the Tower

The Still Tower lies approximately 30 miles west of the Eye of the Forest Inn on the Great Northern Road. Lesharrkk directs the party to a hunting trail which leads to the hidden entrance to the tower. Parties should cover that distance in 2–3 days.

Feel free to provide appropriate random encounters for the party during the first day or two, but avoid doing so on the day they reach the tower to avoid depleting their resources unnecessarily.

Rain begins to fall late the first day. Just a drizzle at first, during their journey it strengthens steadily. By the time the PCs reach the bloodtree, they should be tired of slogging through mud in the driving rain. The hard rain continues until the PCs enter the tower; during this time, visibility is halved and Perception checks suffer a -4 penalty. Later, the rain softens to a misty drizzle, reducing visibility by half but having no further effect on Perception checks.

BLOODTREE SPRING (CR 6)

The Stross builders of the Still Tower recognized that the underground spring which fed their well emerged aboveground not far from the tower. To protect against foes who might take advantage of this vulnerability, they planted a grove of bloodtrees around the pool. Over time, all but one of these bloodtrees perished; the one which remains waits at the end of the hunting track the PCs travel:

The track finally reaches its end. On your left is a 50-ft.-high, bracken-covered bluff. Just visible through the driving rain, 60 ft. ahead, is the small pool. The forest thins somewhat around the pool with only a few waterside trees shading a small field of wildflowers and knee-high grasses.

See below for the bloodtree's likely actions. Once it springs its ambush, read the following:

The smell of newly-turned earth surrounds you as thin woody strands burst from the ground, grasping for your legs.

CREATURES: A single bloodtree waits in ambush on the bank of the pond. Its trunk is 10 ft. from the path on the side opposite the bluff.

TERRAIN: Everywhere except the path and the pool is difficult terrain. The pool is 5 ft. deep in hard granite (see below for more details on water flow and escape from the pool). The bluff is 50 ft. high and covered in thick brush. The profusion of handholds makes climbing relatively easy although slow (Climb DC 10, successful checks only allow 1/5 base speed).

These stubby trees bear green-bladed leaves and nondescript brown bark. On their boughs grow bright red, apple-like fruit, releasing a sweet-smelling scent.

Bloodtree	CR (
XP 2,400	
N Huge plant	
INIT +7; SENSES tremorsense 60 ft.; Perception +16	
Defense	
AC 21, touch 11, flat-footed 18 (+3 Dex, +10 natural, -2 size)	
HP 112 (9d8+72)	
Fort +14, Ref +6, WILL +3	
DEFENSIVE ABILITIES plant traits; RESIST acid 5, fire 5	
OFFENSE	
SPEED 0 ft.	
MELEE 4 slams +11 (grab)	
RANGED siphorb fruit +9 (1d4+1 acid)	
Space 15 ft.; Reach 20 ft.	
SPECIAL ATTACKS constrict (1d6+5)	



•• The Griffon Katchling Keist ••

TACTICS

BEFORE COMBAT The bloodtree waits until as many PCs as possible are within reach of its root tendrils. It retaliates immediately if attacked before springing its ambush.

DURING COMBAT The bloodtree engages all foes at once.

MORALE The bloodtree fights until all of its root tendrils are destroyed.

STATISTICS

STR 20, **DEX** 16, **CON** 26, **INT** -, **WIS** 9, **CHA** 10

BASE ATK +6; CMB +15; CMD 28 (cannot be tripped)

FEATS Combat Reflexes, Improved Grapple, Improved Initiative, Skill Focus (Perception), Skill Focus (Stealth)

SKILLS Perception +16, Stealth +13 (roots); RACIAL MODIFIERS +5 Stealth

SQ root tendrils

ECOLOGY

ENVIRONMENT temperate forests

ORGANIZATION solitary

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **ROOT TENDRILS (EX)** The roots of the bloodtree lie well hidden up to 20 ft. away from the base of the tree. Each round, the tree can direct up to 4 roots to attack although only one root can attack a single target per round. Once a creature is dead, these roots pull the creature underground within 1 minute, at which time smaller roots siphon the blood, organs, and flesh for the tree's nutrition over the next week. The bloodtree possesses a total of six root tendrils. Each root tendril can take 15 damage before being destroyed; this damage applies to the bloodtree. Destroyed tendrils regenerate within 1 month.
- SIPHORB FRUIT (EX) The bloodtree produces 4d6 ripe fistsized fruit per year. These can be hurled by the tree for 1d4+1 acid damage although it never uses these attacks on grappled foes. The acid loses its potency 2 rounds after the fruit is picked.

TREASURE: Siphorbs can be harvested from the bloodtree: the 15 present can be sold within the Margreve Forest for 20 gp each (for a total of 300 gp). There is a leather sack half-buried in a patch of recently-turned soil (Perception DC 10). The sack—which contains 45 pp, 490 gp, and 398 sp—marks the resting place of a bugbear rogue killed by the bloodtree after fleeing from the companions he just robbed. Time and rain have rendered his trail down the bluff almost impossible to follow (Survival DC 35); if the PCs succeed, the trail leads to the main bugbear encampment.

Up the Stream

The pond is fed by an underground spring. This channel, 5-7 ft. wide, flows from the depths to the well room of the Still Tower (see room A1) and then to the bloodtree's pond. A 60-ft. swim against the frigid stream's current reaches the well room. This corresponds to 3-4 rounds of swimming (Swim DC 15). (Recall that a successful Swim check allows a character to swim 1/2 speed as a full-round action and that, because the stream is underground, characters must hold their breath.)

The pond is too far away from the brigands and too shielded acoustically by the Still Tower itself for the bandits to notice the PCs unless they employ particularly flashy tactics.

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THE STILL TOWER AND MAGIC

The Still Tower sits on a particularly powerful wellspring of divination magic. All spells of the divination school cast within 100 ft. of the center of the upper floors of the tower behave as if they were prepared with either the Extend Spell or Enlarge Spell feat (but not both), as the caster desires at the time of casting. The usual penalty—use of a higher-level spell slot—does not apply. Casters must know of this effect in order to take advantage of it. This knowledge can be gained from the texts inside the tower or with a Spellcraft check (DC 30) when a divination spell is cast. (A successful check allows the caster to extend or enlarge the spell being cast at the time.) Very few know of this secret wellspring—the powers of the Margreve probably know, as may some surviving Stross scions or retainers. Lesharrkk knows that the tower was built for some sort of arcane study, but she does not understand the details.

Divination magic cast within the tower does not attract the attention of the Margreve magic siphon, even if the caster is not aware of the Still Tower's boon.

Part 2: Stealthily through the Still Cower

Long abandoned by all but the griffons, the Still Tower now hosts a vicious group of bandits:

A thin square tower rises sharply above the top of the bluff. Its ground floor connects to several wooden buildings while its top seems open to the elements although the crenellations make it difficult to see clearly from the ground. Windows open into the main floor and two upper levels of the tower. The sides are scarred with soot and scorch marks from recent magic. A noisome camp lies in the lee of the tower opposite the bluff.

The Still Tower has some common architectural features. All ceilings are 9 ft. high. The exterior walls of the main tower are reinforced masonry (Break DC 45, hardness 8, 180 hp, Climb DC 20), while the interior walls are superior masonry (Break DC 35, hardness 8, 90 hp, Climb DC 25). The stables and barracks have wooden walls (Break DC 20, hardness 5, 60 hp, Climb DC 21). All doors are strong wooden ones (hardness 5, 20 hp); none can lock.

The most straightforward way for the PCs to complete this adventure is for them to sneak into the well room. From there they can proceed up the secret rooms (A2, B7, C2, D1, and E2) to the roof, where they can retrieve the eggs. If the PCs come up with an alternate plan, though, let them try it. Remember, the eggs will hatch no more than a week after the meeting with Lesharrkk, so slow sniping at the bandits may not be fast enough. The balance of the brigand band do not return until after the week is up, so they are not detailed below.

The bandit camp is the most important feature outside the Still Tower. It sits 10 ft. east of B1 and B2.

The Bandit Camp (CR 10)

A large camp lies in the lee of the tower opposite the bluff. At least 60 dark-furred creatures must live amidst the squalor.

CREATURES: There are 29 bugbears at the tower although the camp

.... Tales of the Old Margreve

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THE BRIGAND BAND OBSERVATION

Your goal as a GM for this section should be to make the PCs nervous. They are not powerful enough to handle the entire brigand band at once, so stealth should be their goal. (For alternative PC strategies, see the main text.) Keep them on their toes by making—or seeming to make—Perception checks for the brigands every time they enter a new room, every time they enter combat, every time an hour passes... essentially, every time the action or the tension flags. Think of this section as a horror movie, and insert a wandering guard every time a strange noise or cat jumping out of a closet would be appropriate.

To aid you in that task, the entries for all the rooms in the tower contain notes detailing the changes to the DC of the Perception checks made by the brigands, which brigand will make them, and how long they will take to respond. Although the PCs likely do not realize it, the bandits are bored and inattentive, so reasonable precautions by the party almost certainly lead to success. Feel free to decide the results of the Perception checks without rolling. For instance, a party which is really embracing the spirit of stealthy exploration should not be punished by a freakishly lucky die roll by the GM.

Most of the brigands, including the cyclops and ogres, are awake from late afternoon until near dawn. At other times, add another 5 to the DCs of their Perception checks. Some bugbears are on the opposite schedule, so the tower is always guarded.

CREATURE	PERCEPTION	PERCEPTION
A CONTRACTOR	(INCLUDING INATTENTION)	(INCLUDING SLEEP)
Bugbear	+3	-2
Cyclops	+6	+1
Ogre	-3	-8
LIKELY CIRCUN	ISTANCE	PERCEPTION DC
Hear combat		-10
Hear a conver	sation	0
Hear a creatu	re walking	10
	0	

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holds accommodations for twice as many. (Half the group is escorting the sorcerer to the buyer.) The remaining bugbears, bored, spend most of their time wrestling and boasting.

BUGBEARS (29)

XP 600 EACH

HP 17 each (see Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary)

PERCEPTION +3 (-5 inattention); RANGED longbow +1 (1d8); GEAR leather armor, light wooden shield, morningstar, longbow (20 arrows)

DEVELOPMENT: If combat arises, the bugbears swarm any foe, attempting to overwhelm them with superior numbers. Note that the bugbears are well-supplied with ranged weapons—a consequence of their preparations for combat with flying opponents—so they do not hesitate to use ranged attacks. Once half of the bugbears are dead, the survivors flee when reduced to 5 hp.

The ogres and the cyclops will look to see the source of any commotion involving the bugbears in 1d4 rounds.

TREASURE: The bugbears have a total of 3,000 gp worth of coins,

gems, and jewelry.

NOTE: The CR of this encounter has been decreased to account for the relative ineffectiveness of large numbers of low-level foes.

LEVEL A: THE CELLAR

This level contains both the well-room for the tower and the secret library of the tower's master.

A1: THE WELL ROOM

The western wall of this 30-ft.-by-30-ft. chamber contains a pool of water surrounded by a low stone wall. The broken ladles, smashed kegs, and rotted pails imply this room once served as a well chamber. The southeastern corner used to contain a wooden staircase leading upward, but years of decay have left the timbers in a splintered pile on the floor. Ruined kitchen supplies and rotted sacks of grain complete the décor.

DEVELOPMENT: The closed door and distance give a +11 modifier to the DC of Perception checks made by the bandits. One of the bugbears in the camp has the greatest chance to hear the PCs. If it hears anything, it will open the door and peer in 1d4+4 rounds later. Unless the PCs are visible from the top of the ruined stairs or have a light source in the room, the bugbear will then depart. If not, he must contend with a 20-ft. drop from the door to the ruined stairs. The secret door provides an alternate exit (Perception DC 25).

A2: THE SECRET LIBRARY (CR 6)

This 20-ft.-by-25-ft. room was once a library, but the smashed bookcases and torn tomes now form a pool of refuse on the floor. A metal ladder leads upward in the northeast corner. Around it stand two men sculpted from marble. Their unmoving eyes stare past the massive stone flails held motionless in front of their shirtless chests.

CREATURES: Two caryatid columns guard the room and attack anyone who enters, except those who wear the badge of the Griffon Riders.

TERRAIN: The refuse on the floor makes this entire chamber difficult terrain. This, and the need for silence, increases the difficulty of this encounter to CR 6.

CARYATID COLUMNS (2)

CR 3

XP 800 EACH

CR 2

HP 36 each (see *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bonus Bestiary*) MELEE mwk flail +8 (1d8+6); GEAR masterwork flail

DEVELOPMENT: In combat, one caryatid column uses its flail to trip foes, despite the attacks of opportunity this provokes, while the other attempts to kill those who are downed. Neither attempt to disarm, instead using their shatter weapons ability. The only noise made by either column during combat is the crash of their weapons against their opponents. The caryatid columns fight as long as any enemies remain in the room.

The remoteness of this echoing chamber gives a +16 modifier to the DCs of Perception checks made by the bugbear bandits. If one hears anything, it will open the door to the well-room (A1) and peer in 1d4+4 rounds later.

The ladder leads upward to room B7.



•••• The Griffon Katchling Keist ••••

TREASURE: Three old tomes can be pieced together with 2 hours of patient work. Two of the tomes concern the nature of divination magic and could be sold for 400 gp. The third explains the magical effect on which the Still Tower was built. Give any PCs who read it the information found in **THE STILL TOWER AND MAGIC** sidebar (see page 65). The chamber would make a secure place to rest and recover spells.

LEVEL B: THE MAIN FLOOR

This level contained the main floor of the tower, including the great hall, barracks, kitchen, and stables.

B1: THE STABLE STOREROOM

The stalls and the pegs, the pails and the tack of a stable still fill this room although the large doors have been knocked down into timber. No horses remain, but the central aisle is filled with torn bridles, ruined bits, and shredded, bloodstained saddles. The wooden walls are stained and worm-eaten but appear to be stable.

DEVELOPMENT: The broken door, thin walls, and distance give a +6 modifier to the DC of Perception checks made by the bugbear bandits. One of the bugbears in the camp has the greatest chance to hear the PCs. If he hears anything, he will investigate in 1d4+2 rounds.

The horse gear is all that remains of the griffons' favorite foodstuff; the corpses were dumped to the bloodtree's domain below.

B2: THE BARRACKS

This wooden-walled 20-ft.-by-30-ft. room must have been a barracks, for it contains two rows of broken beds and shattered wooden chests. Now it appears to house a variety of rodents and insects.

DEVELOPMENT: The thin walls and distance give a +4 modifier to the DC of Perception checks made by the bugbear bandits. One of the bugbears in the camp has the greatest chance to hear the PCs. If it hears anything, it will investigate in 1d4+2 rounds.

The Stross guards and griffon riders slept here while serving at the Still Tower. None of its current inhabitants pose any danger to the PCs.

TREASURE: This only item of value in this room is a Griffon Rider badge (see A2).

B3: THE MAIN HALL

This large stone room is now empty with even the windows missing their shutters and panes. The ashes of long-cold campfires smear the floor. The main double doors exit to the east while other closed doors pierce the south and west walls. A large fireplace fills the northeast corner, surrounded by windows on the north and east walls.

DEVELOPMENT: The closed door and distance give a +7 modifier to the DC of Perception checks made by the bugbear bandits. One of the bugbears in the camp has the greatest chance to hear the PCs. If it hears anything, it will investigate 1d4+3 rounds later. The doors lead to B2, B3, and the stairs to A1 (moving clockwise from the south).

B4: THE KITCHENS

This rectangular stone-walled room was once a kitchen. Large cooking fireplaces fill the west wall, just beyond the doorway

to the north. Discarded implements litter the floor, and dusty debris covers the cobwebbed tables and counters. A single window pierces the south wall.

DEVELOPMENT: The closed door and distance give a +14 modifier to the DC of Perception checks made by the bugbear bandits. One of the bugbears in the camp has the greatest chance to hear the PCs. If it hears anything, it will investigate 1d4+4 rounds later. The doors lead to B3 and B5.

B5: The Pantry

This mostly rectangular room contains a variety of tattered sacks and broken, overturned barrels. Windows in the west wall overlook the high bluff while doors in the east and south walls lead to other rooms. A fireplace graces the northern wall, and a rusty metal ladder on the eastern wall climbs through the ceiling.

DEVELOPMENT: The closed doors and distance give a +21 modifier to the DC of Perception checks made by the bugbear bandits. One of the bugbears in the camp has the greatest chance to hear the PCs. If it hears anything, it will investigate 1d4+5 rounds later. The doors lead to B4 and B6. The ladder leads upward to C1.

This room was once a dining room for the servants and a pantry.

B6: THE SERVANTS' QUARTERS

Spiders and rats have replaced the former inhabitants of these windowless sleeping quarters. The furniture seems betterpreserved here than elsewhere in the tower although it is still stained and sagging. A fireplace fills much of the north wall.

DEVELOPMENT: The closed door and distance give a +27 modifier to the DC of Perception checks made by the bugbear bandits. One of the bugbears in the camp has the greatest chance to hear the PCs. If it hears anything, it will investigate 1d4+6 rounds later. The door leads to B5.

TREASURE: This room contains nothing of value. However, the chamber would make a relatively secure place to rest and recover spells.

B7: THE SECRET BEDROOM

This L-shaped room must have served two functions. The northwestern leg contains a dresser, bed, and basin, clearly marking it as a bedchamber. The southern leg contains tools, tables, and broken glass implements. A sturdy metal ladder drops through the floor and rises through the ceiling. No windows allow light into this chamber although a small fireplace on the southwestern wall must have provided some illumination.

DEVELOPMENT: The walls and distance give a +21 modifier to the DC of Perception checks made by the bugbear bandits. One of the bugbears in the camp has the greatest chance to hear the PCs. If it hears anything, it will search the rest of the main level. The ladder leads down to A2 and up through C2 to D1. Note that there is no entrance to B7 from the rest of the main level.

Once, this chamber served as a bedroom and workshop for the Stross noble who commanded the tower. When he fled, he took everything of value with him.



.... Tales of the Old Margreve

LEVEL C: THE TREATY ROOM

This level contains a secluded meeting room for the Stross.

C1: THE TREATY ROOM

Two window frames pierce three of the walls of this 25-ft.square room. A metal ladder passes through the floor by the south wall, and a staircase rises along the western wall. The rotting frame of a large table fills the center of the room, surrounded by collapsed chairs, moldy upholstery, and the moth-eaten remains of tapestries. Spider webs fill a fireplace in the northeastern corner.

DEVELOPMENT: The ladder leads down into B5. The stairs lead upward through D2 to E1. The open staircase gives the ogres in E1 a +2 modifier to the DC of Perception checks while the open windows give the bugbears outside a +8 modifier to the DC of Perception checks. One ogre investigates any disturbance in this area after 1d3 rounds while the bugbears take 1d4+6 rounds to appear. The windows look out over the roof of the lower level (at roughly the same level) on the north, east, and south.

C2: LADDERWAY

The metal ladder continues upward from B7 to D1.

DEVELOPMENT: The thick stone walls give a +12 modifier to the DC of Perception checks by the ogres in E1 above. Any noise will cause one of them to explore C1 in 1d3 rounds, increasing their chances to hear further noises in this area.

LEVEL D: THE SCRYING ROOM

This level contains a secret room used by the Stross for powerful divinations.

D1: THE SCRYING ROOM

Time has been kinder to this windowless room than to the rest of the tower. In the northeast corner, a ladder rises through the floor and continues through the ceiling. Antique chairs, several small tables, stained papers, and a variety of cracked crystals, broken mirrors, and tarnished metal are strewn around the room.

DEVELOPMENT: The ladder leads down through C2 into B7 and up into E2. The ladder upward to E2 is rusted through (Perception DC 30). The first creature to climb the ladder causes it to break, leading to 1d6 falling damage (Acrobatics DC 20 avoids). The ogres in E1 may hear the sound of rending metal (Perception DC 6). (This DC includes the buffer of the stone ceiling, which provides a +11 modifier to the DC of Perception checks.) One ogre will go to C1 to investigate any disturbance in this area after 1d3 rounds.

TREASURE: None of the contents of the room are in good enough condition to retain any value. The papers are cryptic notes without any modern relevance (although they provide a good opportunity to foreshadow future adventures). A small pewter key lies among the detritus (Perception DC 20); this fits the chest in room E2. The chamber would make a secure place to rest and recover spells.

D2: STAIRWAY

The staircase continues upward from C1 to E1.

LEVEL E: SUPPLIES AND SECRETS

This level contained a storeroom for the Griffon Riders and a secret treasury for the Stross.

E1: THE SUPPLY ROOM (CR 6)

This square room connects to stairs leading both upward and downward. Windows on the south and east walls look out over the roof of the main level 20 ft. below. The bulk of the room contains pegs, lockers, chests, and tables, reminding you of nothing so much as an army quartermaster's tent. All the original contents are now gone. Instead, a campfire smolders on the wooden floor while a haunch of rotting meat sits against one wall. Three bedrolls attest to the presence of more recent occupants.

CREATURES: Every corner of the forest has its ogres. Sometimes they get evicted by something bigger or fall out of favor with a hag. Once upon a time, three of them, a little more motivated than the average ogre, all fell together at the same time. Perhaps they were all inordinately full from the caravan that they assaulted, or perhaps it was the strong drink they also found. After the feasting, though, they stayed together. Very few people dare bother them. They happen to be for hire for a fairly cheap price, simply because they just love slaughtering and eating humanoids. Now they work as personal bodyguards for Zyzhashcha the cyclops. They have claimed this room as their own and attack any who enter—seeking both sport and food.

ATVARS, DETLAVS, AND STALDZIS: THE BAD TRIO OF OGRES (3) CR 3 XP 800 EACH

HP 30 each (see *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary*) **PERCEPTION** –3 (–5 inattention)

DEVELOPMENT: The ogres while away the time until the hatchling buyer returns and they are paid. They throw knucklebones and gnaw their way through the last black griffon corpse.

In combat, Atvars and Staldzis concentrate their attacks on the same foe while Detlavs attacks whomever attacked him last. The ogres flee if reduced to 5 hp, passing down through the tower to avoid their cyclops master. They avoid the bugbears and flee the encampment entirely.

Zyzhashcha the cyclops has a +3 modifier to the DC of any Perception checks she makes to hear activity in this chamber. Accustomed to the toddler-like squabbling between the ogres, she will not investigate any noises which last less than 2d3 rounds, no matter what they contain. The bugbears are more prone to investigate, but the distance gives them a +11 modifier to the DC of any Perception checks they make. If successful, they investigate 1d4+8 rounds later.

One staircase leads downward through D2 to C1 while the other leads upward to F. This room once contained supplies for the Griffon Riders, but it has been stripped of any valuables.

TREASURE: Apart from their equipment, the spendthrift ogres have only 25 sp between them.

E2: THE TREASURY

A thick layer of dust covers every horizontal surface of this windowless rectangular room. Although your arrival has stirred the still air, kicking up some dust, clearly no one else has passed this way for many years. In the east, a ladder rises from the floor while, to the west, another metal ladder rises to a





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•••• Tales of the Old Margreve ••••

trapdoor in the ceiling. A small wooden chest sits under its own layer of dust in the center of the room.

DEVELOPMENT: The ogre trio has a +11 modifier to the DC of any Perception checks they make to hear activity in this chamber while Zyzhashcha the cyclops has a +12 modifier to the DC of any Perception checks she makes. Both assume that any noises come from the other for 2d3 rounds. The bugbears are more prone to investigate, but the distance and walls give them a +19 modifier to the DC of any Perception checks they make. If successful, they investigate rooms E1 and F 1d4+8 rounds later.

One ladder leads downward to D1 (see D1 for details on its hidden structural weakness). The other rises to the secret trapdoor to F although the trapdoor is clearly visible from below. This room was once the hidden treasury of the Stross lord, complete with hidden escape route to a griffon mount.

The staircase continues upward from C1 to E1.

TREASURE: The chest is locked with a straightforward lock (Disable Device DC 20). The key to the lock can be found in D1. The chest contains an imperial topaz and gold necklace (125 gp) and a full jar of *restorative ointment*.

LEVEL F: THE GRIFFON ROOSTS (CR 6)

This level is the nesting area for the black griffon tribe:

A short battlement surrounds the top of the tower. On the south and west, the wall extends up to a 10-ft.-high ceiling, but the north and east side of this enclosure are open to the elements. In the southeast corner a staircase descends beneath the roof while in the northeast three stone roosts rise up to heights of 3, 6, and 9 ft. The entire area is covered with feathers, fur, and bits of discarded food. In the southwestern corner is a large nest containing four enormous eggs.

CREATURES: One of the leaders of the bandits lives here, guarding the hard-earned treasure.

TERRAIN: The roosts and the roof provide high ground. The battlements are 4 ft. high; any bull rushes over the battlements would lead to a fall of 30–40 ft. The complicated terrain and fragile eggs make this a CR 6 encounter. Remember to assess damage to the eggs from any area attacks which include their square—use the AC and saving throws given below.

Zyzhashcha, Cyclops Leader

CR 5

XP 1,600

HP 65 (see Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary) PERCEPTION +6 (-5 inattention); COMBAT GEAR dust of illusion

DEVELOPMENT: Zyzhashcha spends most of her time sleeping, eating, or throwing rocks at passing birds. She is not aware of the secret trapdoor.

In combat, Zyzhashcha attempts to defeat any foes herself, not calling for aid from the other brigands. She uses her flash of insight as soon as possible. Although she is careful not to damage the griffon eggs, in the heat of battle, she does not think to hold them hostage against the PCs. She does not forgo attacks in order to use her *dust of illusion* in combat. Zyzhashcha fights to the death.

The ogres have a +3 modifier to the DC of any Perception checks they make to hear activity here. They will not investigate any noises which last less than 2d4 rounds, no matter what they contain. The bugbears have learned not to disturb their leader, so they will only investigate if a corpse lands amidst their campsite.

The staircase leads downward to E1. The hidden trapdoor requires a Perception check (DC 30) to find from this side; it leads to E2.

Part 3: hatchlings!

After 1 round of combat, PCs may notice the eggs hatching (Perception DC 15, or DC 5 after combat):

The four blue-speckled eggs, each the size of a sheep's head, lean against one another. Suddenly, the nearest one starts to shake. A thin crack appears at its peak. The other three eggs then shake and crack too.

Give the PCs 6 rounds to prepare, and then, any hatchlings who survive the battle hatch 1/round thereafter:

The egg fully cracks, and out pokes the head of a small bird, its feathers plastered to its scalp. As it emerges from the shards of the eggshell, you see that its legs are covered in matted fur and its back bears two spindly wings.

CREATURES: Black griffon hatchlings are about the size of a housecat.

BLACK GRIFFON HATCHLINGS (4) CR 1/4 XP 100 EACH

Variant cat (see *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary*) **HP** 3 each

SPEED 5 ft.; SKILLS Perception +1 (includes –4 penalty for being newly hatched), Sense Motive +1

DEVELOPMENT: Griffon hatchlings sleep for most of the first few days of their life, awakening every 5 hours for 20 minutes or so. When awake, they are noisy—reduce the DC of any Perception checks made to notice them by 5. Each time they awake, they want to eat; as carnivores, meat, eggs, and milk are the only things which sate their hunger. If not fed, they get louder (reduce Perception check DCs by 10) before returning to sleep. If the PCs and hatchlings remain in the Still Tower, be sure to check to see if the bandits hear the new additions to the party.

Each time the hatchlings awake they seek their mother. The PCs may avoid this fate by preventing the young griffons from perceiving any humanoids during a given awakening (by placing them in a sack, for instance) or by succeeding on one Bluff check per hatchling per awakening (opposed by the hatchling's Sense Motive). Track the number of times the PCs failed to disguise themselves from the hatchlings.

Remember that the hatchlings recognize their mother by sight, sound, and smell; disguises which cover only one sense should give a -5 penalty to Bluff checks, while those which cover all three would give a +5 bonus. A complete lack of disguise gives a -10 penalty to Bluff checks.

In general, encourage creativity here, and use the hatchlings for dramatic effect. Let the PCs use scent transfer from the roosts or from discarded feathers. Interpret spell effects generously—PCs should be



••• The Griffon Katchling Keist ••••

able to cast *sleep* on the quaking eggs, for instance, to buy themselves some time. Likewise, magical communication with the hatchlings could reverse the effects of a single failure per hatchling. Make sure that the hatchlings awaken at the most inopportune times, and play up the tension of possible imprinting. Most likely your PCs do not wish to become foster mothers to a griffon!

Treat the hatchlings as housecats to assess their weight, size, need for air, etc. Note that the tossing-in-a-sack method makes it difficult to feed the hatchlings or provide them with enough air to breathe.

Finally, if the PCs are stuck, Knowledge (nature) checks (DC 11) provide a way for you to give them suggestions.

Part 4: Escape from the Still Cower

All that remains for the PCs is to escape with the hatchlings. They have a number of options. Although the young griffons will not survive an unprotected trip down the underground stream, parties who think to protect them in insulated, air-filled containers might leave successfully

the way they came. At the other extreme, parties could fly magically away from the rooftop itself, trusting on speed or magical protections to avoid the bugbears' attacks.

Whatever the plan, ensure that the PCs have at least one challenge (of roughly CR 6) on their way out. The ogre trio is provided as a default—they can investigate the rooftop just before the PCs escape down the secret trapdoor with the hatchlings, or they could stand in the way of an escape out a back window over the bluff. If the PCs fly away, a wyvern (see *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary*) summoned by the magic siphon of the Margreve would fit (see **MAGIC IN THE MARGREVE** section, page 20). If the players come up with a particularly clever way to extract the hatchlings, consider providing an easier encounter without reducing the experience award from CR 6.

(Note that the default ogre trio has almost no treasure, so other options will not shortchange the PCs in terms of treasure.)

Concluding the Adventure

Lesharrkk's ritual was faster than she expected, so she meets the PCs 1-day's travel up the trail from the Still Tower.

Depending on her attitude to the PCs, Lesharrkk could make a valuable ally in later adventures. She could serve as a scout, a source of information, a safe hideout, or even transportation for the PCs. Perhaps she will share the secret incantation and location she used to break the enchantment upon herself.

Her reaction to the PCs depends on how successful they were. Award 3 points/hatchling returned alive. Give 1 point if the PCs offer Lesharrkk food (2 if they offer horseflesh). Deduct 1 point for each meal a hatchling missed. Deduct 1 point for each time a hatchling began to imprint upon a PC. Use the following table to judge the results:

SCORE	LESHARRKK'S FINAL ATTITUDE	Оитсоме
12–14	Helpful	Lesharrkk helps the PCs as much as possible.
8–11	Friendly	Lesharrkk does a favor for the PCs or helps them in minor ways for a year.
5-7	Indifferent	Lesharrkk does a favor for the PCs.
3–4	Unfriendly	Lesharrkk orders the griffons of the Margreve to leave the PCs alone for a year.
2 or less	Hostile	After raising her young, Lesharrkk
		becomes the PCs' enemy.

Allow the PCs to gain the benefits of lower-level rewards at higher levels. Tailor each level of reward to your campaign—some GMs may allow a friendly Lesharrkk to provide griffon mounts for the PCs while others would allow the PCs to move into the Still Tower. A helpful pride-mother should be a powerful although difficult reward to obtain.

FUTURE ADVENTURES: The Still Tower itself might spark future adventures. PCs might return there to cast important divinations, or they might seek to harness its power more fully.

Also, the other half of the bandit troop remains at large. If it was led by a recurring enemy of the PCs, the events of this adventure provide even stronger grounds for enmity. Even if it represented a new foe, the survivors might seek revenge.


By Tim Connors

The Spider Crone donned her ivy crown of prophecy, and her face paled. The crown never lied. Today, she would die.

"Gall of the Spider Crone" is a wilderness fantasy adventure suitable for PCs of 6th level. It uses fast campaign progression, and is therefore generous with treasure.

Adventure Background

ariv gypsies sing the "Rhyme of the Spider Crones" to their children and to guests gathered at their campfires. It recounts the life of Jędza Nansa and her vila sisters who traded their legendary beauty for arcane power, hags' faces, and the company of spiders. It is a true story.

Jędza Nansa lives amongst the monstrous spiders of the Margreve, where she traffics in potions and poisons, divinations, and enchanted ropes and nets. Many trade their most precious possessions for her legendary services.

Earlier today, Jędza prophesied that she would die. To sidestep her fate, she melded with a willow tree, hoping to escape any harm that might befall her. Unbeknownst to her, the tree bore a powerful parasite in a gall high in its branches. The willow expelled her, and horror flooded her face as she discovered a massive gall now growing upon her own belly. She took her knife to it. She focused her magic upon it. Both failed.

Something began to twitch inside the parasitic pocket. Something began to claw her from the inside. She doubled over, sickened and dazed. Jędza stumbled through the woods toward her sister's house, but she quickly collapsed.

A common woodcutter named Sandor found Jędza unconscious. He had braved the deep Margreve to offer Jędza his life in exchange for a potion that would cure the terminally ill babe wrapped onto his back. Now he carried Jędza too.

A thunderstorm brewed as Sandor carried woman and child toward the Great Northern Road. Lightning flashed. Rain and sweat slid down his face. A Kariv band, securing their wind-blown wagons against a Coaching Inn, spotted Sandor as he stepped from the trees.

Presently, the Kariv tend to Jędza in an upper room of the Witch's Teat Coaching Inn. With healing potions, they have revived Jędza. She has promised the Kariv her treasured *ivy crown of prophecy*, arachnid escorts... anything they want, if they will just remove the gall that is killing her. The greedy and opportunistic Kariv have agreed, but they are not faring well. One of them takes a hot knife to the crone's belly. Four others brave the storm-wracked woods to collect a magic jug from Jędza's sister's house at Jędza's request. Meanwhile, the storm grows ever more violent as something struggles to be born from the "Gall of the Spider Crone."

Adventure Summary

A preternatural storm drives the PCs into the Witch's Teat Coaching Inn. Inside, screams of pain echo from an upper room, and a gypsy midwife dashes downstairs with water and blood-soaked rags. She begs the PCs for healing potions but suspiciously denies the PCs access to the "pregnant woman" upstairs until it is nearly too late.

The PCs discover that the pregnant woman is actually the gall-bellied Spider Crone. Something squirms inside her parasitic pocket. The crone kicks the incompetent Kariv surgeon aside and begs the PCs to cut the gall off her.

Attempts to excise the gall fail. Jedza tells the PCs that if they can retrieve her sister's magic jug in time, she may be able to capture the unborn creature before it devours her soul. In exchange, she promises the PCs everything she previously promised to the Kariv, which vexes the gypsies.

The PCs rush into the wild night, armed with a crude map and the crone's struggling homunculus, which acts as an unwilling key to her sister's domain. En route, shambling mounds and shocker lizards, energized by the lightning storm, challenge the PCs' timed progress.

Jędza's sister's "house" is the abdomen of a giant, rickety spiderconstruct. It hangs from a chasm-spanning spider web. Defeating the trap that protects the jug requires eight hands. But the PCs will never make it back in time anyway... unless they puppet the spider-silk control ropes of the home and ride it back to the Coaching Inn.

While the PCs are away, the Kariv continue reckless excise attempts in order to "earn" Jędza's reward. Unless the PCs get back in time, the gall creature devours Jędza's soul and wields incredible power when it finally erupts in a black whirlwind of claws and lightning.

Adventure Rooks

A preternatural storm rages above the Margreve. Lightning flashes, wind howls, and trees crash across the Great Northern Road. Through the darkness and slanted rain, the PCs spot the *everburning torch* of the Witch's Teat Coaching Inn. Whether the PCs have business at the Coaching Inn or are traveling the Great Northern Road on some other errand, the adventure begins as they enter the inn.

Part 1: The Pregnant Woman Upstairs

Thousands of square miles of forest surround the Witch's Teat coaching inn. The closest city, Zobeck, lies 100 miles south along the Great Northern Road.

The inn was once a griffon tower, built by the House Stross for its griffon riders, an elite company of couriers and shock cavalry. When the parsimonious council of the Free City abandoned the tradition in recent years, a crippled Kariv gypsy named Vassily purchased the tower, and the fortified structure began its second life as a coaching inn.



THE WITCH'S TEAT COACHING INN

Outside the coaching inn, an *everburning torch* struggles against the night, and a wooden placard bearing the words "Witch's Teat" clacks in the wind against the inn's stone walls. Gypsy wagons are secured against the inn's flank (Perception DC 10).

When the PCs enter the inn, read or paraphrase the following:

As you enter the coaching inn, wind and rain race inside past you. Half a dozen candles snuff out in the common room, and gruff voices call from the shadows to shut the door.

A maid with striking features latches the door against the howling wind. Two more girls relight the candles, and one by one, the faces of men, arranged at tables throughout the common room, catch the light. All are dressed in the garb of gypsies. All stare at you with anxious or dour faces. On every table, even the unoccupied ones, a gleaming knife stands on end, pointing toward the sky.

An older woman wearing a babushka descends a staircase and rushes passed you with blood-soaked rags. Screams of pain echo from an upper room.

The maid who closed the door is Mishenka, the daughter of the inn's owner, a crippled old Kariv man named Vassily. Vassily stands, revealing his wicker leg. He welcomes the PCs unconvincingly and motions for Mishenka to usher them to an empty table near the fire and tend to their requests. Vassily sits and rejoins a troubled conversation with Adrik, the patriarch of the Kariv band staying at the inn.

Screams of pain echo at intervals from the upper room. Tanya, the babushka midwife and mother of Adrik, carries rag after rag down the stairs, where she wrings copious blood into the fire at the PCs' feet. If questioned, the superstitious woman says that blood-wringing is a Kariv custom, and she attempts to redirect the conversation by begging the PCs for healing potions for "her daughter" in labor upstairs. If the PCs refuse, Tanya offers to pay up to twice the typical rate. If the PCs ask her daughter's name or offer to attend to the girl personally, Tanya stammers and makes a suspicious getaway up the stairs.

Let the players drive the pace of this scene. As the anxious but tightlipped Kariv pretend that all is well, build tension and suspicion with:

- Increasingly frequent screams (and curses) from upstairs
- Everyone quickly resetting the tables' upturned knives when a massive thunder clap topples them. If asked, the gypsies claim that the knives protect against evil storm spirits.
- Periodic reappearances of Tanya, silently wringing her blood rags and whispering ever more dire news into Adrik's ear.
- Vassily and Adrik's whispered but heated conversation. Vassily wants Adrik to murder "her" (Jędza) before "it" (the gall creature) is born. Adrik refuses, because if she dies, he will never learn the hidden locations of the promised treasures.

- •••• Tales of the Old Margreve •••
- A hot-headed young Kariv who draws his sword and makes for the stairs to "End this." Adrik and two others intervene, and Kariv dissent blossoms.
- A baby (Sandor's unnamed daughter) starts crying upstairs, but the screams of pain continue.

If the PCs still do not attempt to ascend the stairs, Adrik approaches them directly. Either way, he decides that the PCs may be his only avenue to saving Jędza and securing her promised riches. Perhaps they can keep the crone alive long enough for his brother and three nephews to return with Jędza's sister's magic jug. Before leading the PCs upstairs, he gravely warns them not to judge by appearances.

THE GALL AND PLEA

Stone stairs spiral up into the inn's second story, where a gossamer curtain separates a landing from a dark bedchamber. In the center of the room, an ugly old woman lies on a featherbed soaked in blood. A Kariv man stands beside her with a bloody knife in his hand. Behind him, a shaking gypsy woman cups her mouth with one hand and tries to hold the room's only lantern over the man's shoulder so that he can see. The ugly old woman in the bed is not pregnant. A massive gall grows upon her belly, like a burl upon a tree. The surgeon lowers his knife against the gall, and the crone screams, curses, and kicks him aside. Something big squirms inside the gall. The ugly old woman looks at you beseechingly. "Please," she pleads. "For the love of Perun. Help me!"

In the corner, a woodcutter feeds goat's milk to a baby.

The creature inside Jędza claws away 3 hp/hour; she has only 11 hp left, so unless provided with magical healing, she has only 4 hours to live. Once reduced to negative hp, she cannot be stabilized and magical healing has no effect. The Kariv have depleted all healing at their disposal. All attempts (by anyone) to excise the gall are ineffective and deal Jędza 1 damage/ round of surgery. If moved or carried, she suffers 1 damage/round.

A closed coffer on a side table contains the Kariv's captive suturefly. Indispensable at business meetings, its triple pair of wings buzz loudly whenever someone within 30 ft. lies. Jędza has answered the Kariv's questions truthfully and honors the PCs with truth also. If the suturefly buzzes because someone lies (such as the surgeon claiming he needs no help), the Kariv explain its purpose.

If the PCs consider harming the crone, give her the chance to warn them (truthfully) of the dire consequences of her death. She says that the gall creature is immune to any harm inflicted on its host and that, if she dies, the creature will doom her immortal soul by claiming it as its own. Moreover, it will erupt more powerful than she ever was—powerful enough to slaughter everyone at the inn. PCs may recall corroborating tales of gallborn creatures devouring treants' souls (Knowledge [nature] DC 25). Sandor the woodcutter gravely adds that if the crone dies, she cannot brew the potion to save his child. The rare king's sleep poison that courses through the babe's veins already killed its mother (DC 19 to cure with *neutralize poison*).

Whether the PCs consider harming the crone or not, she promises them everything she previously promised to the Kariv: namely her *iny crown of prophecy* hidden somewhere in the forest. This offer vexes Adrik, who has risked his band's safety for a prize he can no longer win. He adroitly suggests that the PCs merely heal Jędza (for "a lesser but still generous reward") to give time for his brother and three nephews to return with the magic jug that the crone will use to contain

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ROLEPLAYING NITCA

Despite its profound ugliness, Nitca is a vain little creature, fastidious about keeping up its appearance. It frequently licks and primps itself like a cat. It hosts a beloved pair of spiders on its back as pets, where they scurry and weave repairs to Nitca's imperfect wings. Nitca is particularly fond of the egg-laden female. If any harm comes to Nitca or the PCs place Nitca in an extradimensional space for more than 10 minutes, Nitca's spider pets die, and Nitca become Hostile. Nitca cannot speak, so it mimes and exaggerates its expressions.

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the gall creature. Jędza retorts that the four men are already dead. She asks pale-faced Tanya to open the shuttered window, whereupon Jędza's homunculus spider-climbs over the sill, into the room, and across the wall. The goblin-faced homunculus has four arms and four legs and holds the other end of its broken leash in its maw. The Kariv men took the homunculus with them as a key to access Jędza's sister's domain. It reports telepathically to Jędza that shocker lizards killed the four men.

While Tanya grieves for her son and his kids, Jędza begs the PCs to succeed where the Kariv men failed. If they retrieve her sister's magic jug in time, she may be able to save her soul and maybe even save Sandor's child.

If the PCs agree to collect the jug, Jędza asks them to swear an oath on the child's head that they will succeed. Jędza draws a crude map to her sister Mavra's house, featuring four major landmarks: the inn, west to a clearing, northwest to a deer-centaur graveyard, and north along a ravine to Mavra's house, with each location 3/4 miles from the previous. Jędza also explains that the PCs will require the presence of Nitca, her homunculus, who Mavra knows and trusts. Nitca will not willingly travel more than 1 mile from Jędza, so it must be forced. Jędza calls for Vassily's wicker leg to be used as a cage (hardness 3, 5 hp), and Vassily fears refusal. If instead the PCs decide to stuff Nitca in an extradimensional space, like a *bag of bolding*, Nitca reluctantly enters under Jędza's demanding gaze, but the homunculus becomes unfriendly and bites whoever sticks their hand in to retrieve it later.

If the PCs attack Jędza, Sandor and the Kariv defend her against the PCs. Jędza swears revenge and defends herself as best possible until she dies, and the ala bursts from her corpse (see "The Ala Erupts" in Part Four).

JĘDZA NANSA CR &	B
XP 4,800	
Female vila (modified) druid 4	
CN Medium fey (shapechanger)	
INIT +5 (+9 in forests); SENSES low-light vision, tremorsense 30 ft.;	
Perception +18	
DEFENSE	
AC 19, touch 16, flat-footed 13 (+5 Dex, +1 dodge, +3 natural)	
HP 62 (currently 11 hp) (9d6+4d8+13)	
FORT +8, REF +12, WILL +12; +4 vs. fey and plant-targeted effects	
DEFENSIVE ABILITIES resist nature's lure; DR 5/cold iron	
WEAKNESSES forest dependent	
OFFENSE	-
SPEED 30 ft.	

MELEE claw +8 (1d4+1 plus poison)

.... Gall of the Spider Crone ...

RANGED +1 human-bane composite shortbow +14/+9 (1d6+1/x3) plus poison)

SPECIAL ATTACKS poison, smite oathbreaker (3/day, +5d6)

DRUID SPELLS PREPARED (CL 4th; concentration +6)

2nd-fog cloud, hold vermin^D (DC 14), summon swarm (spiders only), vermin messenger

1st—calm vermin^D (DC 13), entangle (DC 13), longstrider, magic fang (DC 13), produce flame

0 (at will)—detect magic, detect poison, flare (DC 12), guidance (D) Domain spell; DOMAIN Vermin

SPELL-LIKE ABILITIES (CL 9th; concentration +12)

Constant—speak with vermin

1/day—augury, rope trick, whispering wind

1/week—legend lore

STATISTICS

STR 12, DEX 20, CON 13, INT 11, WIS 15, CHA 16

BASE ATK +7; CMB +8; CMD 24

- FEATS Brew Potion, Deadly Aim^B, Dodge, Mobility, Mounted Archery, Mounted Combat, Natural Spell, Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot, Weapon Focus (shortbow)^B
- SKILLS Bluff +15, Climb +8, Knowledge (arcana) +30, Knowledge (nature) +22, Perception +18, Perform (dance) +9, Perform (sing) +10, Sense Motive +17, Stealth +24, Survival +22; Racial Modifiers +14 Knowledge (arcana), +4 Knowledge (nature), +4 Perception, +6 Perform (dance), +6 Perform (sing), +6 Ride, +4 Stealth, +4 Survival

LANGUAGES Common, Sylvan; speak with vermin

- SQ change shape (fire beetle, giant spider, vermin shape I, *beast shape II*), forest meld, nature bond (Vermin domain; spells affect vermin instead of animals), nature sense, trackless step, wild empathy +13 (includes +6 racial bonus), woodland stride
- GEAR +1 human-bane composite shortbow (stolen) with 20 poisoned arrows, dagger of venom (lost), spider song collar (silk collar that functions as pipes of the sewers, except it calls spider swarms with successful Perform [sing] check)

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- FOREST DEPENDENT (SU) Each hour spent outside the Margreve, Jedza suffers 1 Constitution damage (Fortitude DC 15). In the Margreve, she receives a +4 bonus to initiative checks.
- FOREST MELD (SU) A vila can meld indefinitely with any Margreve tree, similar to how meld into stone functions.
- POISON (Ex) Old Crone—injury; save Fort DC 17 (Constitutionbased), frequency 1/round for 4 rounds, effect 1d6 Dex, cure 2 consecutive saves.
- **SMITE OATHBREAKER (SU)** As a full-round action 3/day, using any weapon, Jędza can smite any opponent within 60 ft. who swore an oath in the Margreve and broke it. If she hits, she adds 5d6 to her damage. If she misses, the smite is not used.

NITCA

XP 400

Homunculus (see Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary) **HP** 11

SPELL-LIKE ABILITIES constant—spider climb

TREASURE: One of the Kariv has taken Jedza's +1 human-bane composite shortbow and quiver of 20 poisoned arrows for "safekeeping" while the surgery takes place.

Dart 2: Into the Woods

As the PCs leave the inn, fist-sized spiders converge on the building (Perception DC 20). The harmless spiders brave the storm to be near Jędza on her death bed.

WEATHER, MOVEMENT, AND GETTING LOST: The thunderstorm rages. Poor visibility and a trackless forest reduce all movement to 1/4 normal. (For example, a PC with Speed 30 ft. walks 3/4 of a mile in 1 hour.) The Kariv and shocker lizards are 3/4 mile (1 hour) away. Mavra's house is an additional 1-1/2 miles (2 hours) away. At this speed, the round trip will take 6 hours. Unless the PCs heal Jedza before they depart, she dies-and Nitca goes insane-after 4 hours.

The downpour reduces visibility to 1/4 normal. Gusts of wind impose a -8 penalty on Perception checks, a -4 penalty on ranged weapon attacks, and a -2 penalty on Fly checks. Tiny creatures (like Nitca) must succeed on a Fly check (DC 20) to fly at all. The wind automatically extinguishes unprotected flames, like torches. Protected flames dance wildly.

Randomly, approximately every hour, when not in combat, check if:

- Protected flames extinguish (50% chance).
- The PCs' leader gets them lost (Survival DC 20) (see Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Core Rulebook for consequences and remedies).

The Dead Kariv (CR 7)

Unless the PCs instruct Nitca to lead them around this area, the homunculus (or Jędza's map) leads the PCs directly to the Kariv and shocker lizards, 3/4 miles west of the inn. The homunculus understands Common but cannot speak, so it waves its arms wildly as the party nears this area:

A wide clearing lies open to the rolling thunderclouds. The downpour has turned the forest floor into an impromptu bog. Tufts of grass form islands that rise from shin-high water. A short distance ahead, a man dressed in gypsy clothes lies facedown, his arms above his head, clinging to the grass.

The man is Adrik's nephew, Driskaw. He twitches, alive but dying at -3 hp. If roused, Driskaw wants to try to save his father and brothers and return to the inn. He is a non-combatant and does not join the party.

Driskaw's father Rurik and two brothers lie dead in the same clearing, drug 30 ft. apart by hungry shocker lizards. In the darkness and downpour, the PCs may only notice them one at a time.

CREATURES: As the PCs approach the third man-Rurik, who wears a blue cloak-the man rises 8 ft. into the air upon a tangled mass of vines and roots. A shambling mound attempts to carry him away from the three shocker lizards that were nibbling at him. As with the other bodies, the PCs cannot tell if the man is unconscious or dead without "rescuing" him.

TERRAIN: Treat the 80-ft.-diameter clearing as a shallow bog: it costs 2 squares of movement to move into and increases the DC of Acrobatics checks by 2.

SHAMBLING MOUND

XP 2,400

HP 67 (see Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary)

SHOCKER LIZARD (3)

XP 600 EACH

CR 6

HP 19 each (see Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary)



CR 1

0/100

.... Tales of the Old Margreve

DEVELOPMENT: In combat, the shocker lizards arc lethal shocks to target PCs and the shambling mound, which is immune to them. The shocker lizards flee if only one lizard still lives, but the shambling mound fights to the death, trying to abduct and devour a humanoid corpse.

TREASURE: Woefully ill-equipped for their task, the Kariv have little of value, except for four *potions of cure light wounds* (one per man) and Rurik's' *blue willow cloak.* If the PCs recover all the bodies, Driskaw gives them the cloak and all potions in excess of healing his own wounds.

BLUE WILLOW CLOAK

AURA faint illusion; CL 3rd

SLOT shoulder; **PRICE** 2,400 gp; **WEIGHT** 1 lb.

DESCRIPTION

This cloak of fey silk is light and entirely waterproof. When worn and activated in the rain, it grants *invisibility* (1/day) to the wearer. The effect lasts for as long as it rains or 1 hour, whichever is shorter.

CONSTRUCTION

REQUIREMENTS Craft Wondrous Item, invisibility; Cost 1,200 gp

NITCA GOES BERSERK

Once the PCs are 1 mile from the inn, Nitca goes berserk, trying everything in its power to get back within range of Jędza. It becomes uncooperative, and its attitude sours 1 level, from indifferent to unfriendly. If caged, it gnashes its teeth, spits, claws, and bites the bars (ineffectively if in Vassily's wicker leg). If Nitca escapes somehow, it returns to Jędza who scolds it and sends it back toward the PCs. It waits for the PCs exactly 1 mile from Jędza but resists any attempt the PCs make to capture it again.

THE DEER-CENTAUR GRAVEYARD (CR 6)

The map leads the PCs another 3/4 miles northwest of the clearing to the overgrown acreage of the deer centaur graveyard:

Massive antler racks protrude from the sopping ground and catch weeds that the storm has uprooted and blown away. The sound of rushing water issues from the northwest.

From out of the darkness ride three, vine-covered, deercentaur skeletons. Each gallops forward in a series of imperfect, jarring motions.

CREATURES: Three puppet vines have taken residence in the protective rib cages of deer-centaur skeletons. Each vine's tendrils corkscrew around the limbs of its skeletal host, acting as muscle on bone. The main body of each plant writhes in a tangled mass inside the belly of its skeletal steed. Assume each is 30–60 ft. distant from the PCs (in a random direction) and is preceded by a 30-ft-radius of animated weeds.

PUPPET VINE (3)

XP 800 EACH

Variant assassin vine (see Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary) HP 30

AC 18, touch 9, flat-footed 18 (+9 natural, -1 size); SPEED 30 ft.

THE RAVINE

The graveyard slopes toward a ravine along the graveyard's northwest edge. The 15-ft.-wide ravine carries a torrent of 8-ft.-deep floodwater north at 60 ft./round. A PC who enters it must make a Swim check (DC 20) every round to avoid going under and being swept away (see

Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Core Rulebook). Fording the ravine requires three Swim checks (DC 20) in a row.

As the ravine heads north, it gradually widens and deepens, forming a steep-walled chasm that runs like a scar toward Mavra's home. Over the 3/4-mile course between the graveyard and Mavra's house, the chasm widens to 40 ft. wide, its sidewalls grow to 40 ft. tall above the water, and the water reaches 15 ft. deep. After Mavra's house, the chasm narrows, its walls shrink, and the water shallows again at the same rate, returning the chasm to a 15-ft-wide ravine with 8-ft-deep water in another 3/4 miles.

Climbing the walls requires a Climb check (DC 20). The branches of massive trees meet 70 ft. above the ravine.

THE DEER-CENTAUR EXILE (CR 4)

After following the ravine for 1/4 mile northwest from the graveyard, the PCs discover the following:

The ravine is slowly widening and deepening as it proceeds northwest. Less than a mile from the deer-centaur graveyard, the ravine has widened to 20 ft. across, and its sidewalls tower 10 ft. over the water that rushes through it. Just ahead, a large, partially submerged web spans the chasm. The web has caught a great deal of debris, including some sizeable logs. A half cocooned deer centaur struggles at the water line to free itself from the sticky webs and swim against the current, but the rushing water repeatedly drives it back into the web. Near the top of the web, a human-sized spider slowly crawls toward its escaping prey. The deer centaur screams a blood-curdling cry for help.

CREATURES: Flawn is a young, bastard deer-centaur and an exile. His tribe sawed off his antlers and banished him after the tribe's matriarch revealed that Flawn leaves human tracks, and is therefore no woodfriend. The truth is that Jędza told the matriarch that one day Flawn's antlers will grow fourteen points, a prediction that threatens the matriarch's own son's rise to Imperial Alseid, so the matriarch cursed Flawn with the false prints. Flawn does not know the truth. He seeks Jędza to explain and atone for the curse of his tracks. If he is in fact an abomination, he plans to kill himself at the deer-centaur graveyard.

Flawn desperately attempts to free himself from the web but nears exhaustion. He is 10 ft. below and 10 ft. beyond the ravine's lip.

The weight of the logs threaten to breach the web (hp 3, DR 5–), and the spider tests the web's integrity with each baby step toward Flawn (10 ft. below the spider).

PCs realize (Perception DC 20) that one of the logs next to Flawn is moving its stunted branches of its own accord. This "log" is in fact an insect-like creature. It looks like a rotted log covered in shelf mushrooms and galls. It has a few stunted branches for legs, and its mouth is a hollow at one end. It shares Flawn's predicament and his desperation.

FLAWN, DEER CENTAUR

XP 200

CR 1/2

CR 1

Alseid (see MARGREVE BESTIARY, page 26) HP 12

GIANT SPIDER XP 400 HP 16 (see Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary)



CR 3

•••• Gall of the Spider Crone ••••

LOG BUG XP 800

CR 3

Variant ankheg (see Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary) HP 28

DEVELOPMENT: Unless the PCs intervene, the spider reaches Flawn in 2 rounds and proceeds to bite him.

In combat, the spider throws webs at attacking PCs. Meanwhile, in desperation and panic, the log bug grapples, bites, and spits at anyone who tries to help Flawn escape.

If the PCs attack the web, the spider abandons it, but continues to fight to the death. The log bug, once free of the ravine, burrows into the Margreve floor and flees.

If rescued, Flawn becomes a lifelong friend of the PCs. He tells them his situation, says he could not find Jędza, and asks to borrow a dagger, which he says he will take to the graveyard and kill himself. To prevent his suicide, the PCs must lend a sympathetic ear and make a heartfelt counter argument (Diplomacy DC 20). A promise to help Flawn solve the mystery of his newfound human tracks provides a +4 circumstance bonus. At the GM's discretion, Flawn may join the party now or plan to rejoin them at a later date. If raised to CR 6 with class levels, Flawn may also replace a PC who dies.

THE WEATHER CLEARS

After the PCs follow the ravine toward Mavra's house another 1/4 mile, the weather abruptly changes. The 2-mile-radius thunderstorm centers on the ala in Jędza's gall. When the PCs trek beyond this radius, the thunderstorm and its torrential downpour cease as if passing through a curtain.

The PCs still have another 1/4 mile to go, but there is no wind, no lightning, and no rain. Though darkness still cloaks the forest and the terrain remains difficult, speed improves from 1/4 to 1/2 normal speed.

TINY COFFINS (CR 8)

Just before Mavra's house comes into view (around a bend), read the following:

The ravine has widened and deepened further, becoming a 40-ft.-wide, 40-ft.-deep chasm. On the side opposite the deer-centaur graveyard, a dozen child-sized coffins are piled haphazardly on the ground.

CREATURES: Somewhere far upstream, the folk of an unnamed Margreve village divest their sins into tiny wicker effigies and float them away in tiny coffins. The sacrificial ritual transfers months of the sinner's life into the newly animated effigies, and the wicker men bang and scrape inside their coffins as young girls place them in the stream and weep over their loss. Mavra has taken to plucking the coffins from the water, freeing the sin-eater effigies, and using them as companions and guardians. The effigies do not attack Mavra, Nitca, or common animals. However, they spring from hiding to surround and attack the PCs. Read the following when this happens:

All around you, cat-sized wicker men spring from behind rocks, emerge from thickets, and drop from tree branches. These menacing creatures look like man-made effigies of sticks bundled in twine and thorns. Of the dozen in sight, some have flailing seed-pod dreadlocks, and others leap forward with rocks rattling in their wicker cage bellies. If Flawn is with the party, he warns the PCs not to let the sineaters bite them. He grapples an attacking sin-eater, closes his own eyes, and says, "Child of the Margreve, child of man, I take back your name," whereupon the sin eater dies peacefully. PCs may perform the same maneuver. An adherent of the Old Ways, Flawn believes that this is the appropriate way to dispose of a rogue sin eater. If disposed in this way and then worn and set alight, a sin-eater effigy grants the effects of *virtue*, *guidance*, *resistance*, and *owl's wisdom* for the 1/2 hour that it smolders away. Flawn strings those he has killed around himself and insists on burying those killed in other ways under heavy rocks.

CR 1

SIN-EATER EFFIGY (12)

XP 400

NE Tiny construct

INIT +2; SENSES darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Perception +3

DEFENSE AC 14, touch 14, flat-footed 12 (+2 Dex, +2 size)

HP 11 (2d10)

FORT +0, REF +2, WILL -2

DEFENSIVE ABILITIES construct traits

OFFENSE SPEED 20 ft.

MELEE 1 bite +6 (1d4–1 plus sin soak) SPACE 2-1/2 ft.; REACH 0 ft.

STATISTICS

STR 8, DEX 15, CON —, INT 10, WIS 7, CHA 12 BASE ATK +2; CMB –1; CMD 11 FEATS Weapon Finesse

SKILLS Perception +3, Stealth +12

LANGUAGES Common (cannot speak)

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- SIN SOAK (Su) Sin Soak Curse—injury; save Will DC 14 (Charismabased, +2 racial bonus); frequency 1/round, effect bestow curse for 1 hour.
- If the victim fails the Will save, the sin eater divests its sin-based life force into the victim and dies, and the victim gains immunity to subsequent sin soak curse for 1 hour. The curse's effect only affects its victim during combat. Each combat turn, the victim has a 50% chance to act normally; otherwise, the victim acts according to the sin infused into that effigy (choose or roll randomly, once per affliction):
 - Despair—Take –2 penalty on attack rolls, saving throws, ability checks, skill checks, and weapon damage rolls.
 - *Envy*—Claw at face of visible humanoid with highest Charisma: claw BAB –5 (1d4 + 1/2 bonus)
 - *Gluttony*—Make a Constitution check (DC 10, +1 for each previous check) or take 1d6 nonlethal damage and become fatigued from starvation. A full meal recovers all non-lethal damage.
 - *Greed*—Attempt a disarm maneuver to steal the ostensibly most valuable item the target possesses.
 - *Pride*—Become stunned while contemplating an epiphany about how great you have become.
 - *Sloth*—Take no action and becomes flat-footed.
 - Wrath—Bite an enemy with animal fury: bite BAB –5 (1d4 + 1/2 Strength modifier).
- At the GM's option, these curses may also exhibit flavorful but nonmechanical effects during non-combat periods.



.... Tales of the Old Margreve

Part 3: Mavra's Rouse

THE HANGING HOUSE

Just around a bend, Mavra's house comes into view:

A single taut thread spans the 40-ft.-wide chasm. Hanging upside down like a bat from the center of the thread is a ramshackle wooden spider. Its 15-ft.-long legs hook over the thread, while its wagon-sized abdomen dangles 15 ft. above the rushing water below. Most of the spider's innards, including some cabinets, ropes, and tacked on furniture are visible. Other areas are concealed by the tattered molt of a giant spider, which the wooden house has slipped a few of its own legs into, like fingers into a ruined glove.

Mavra is not at home and does not appear in this adventure. She typically leaves her home dangling here for safekeeping. The thread functions as a *rope* of *climbing*. Mavra has purposely encumbered the house so that the rope is just strong enough to support a lightly-encumbered Medium-sized creature (which Mavra is) in addition to the 1-1/2-ton house. More weight causes the thread to snap and the house to plummet into the 15-ft-deep torrent below. The house permits intruders, and getting inside is as simple as slipping from the outside to the inside of its wood frame body.

Common ways to get to the house include:

- Tightrope walking the slightly sloped thread and climbing down into the house the 20 ft. from the chasm lip to the center of the thread (Acrobatics DC 22, moving at 1/2 speed).
- Use hands and feet to inch along under the thread the 20 ft. (Climb DC 7, moving at 1/4 speed). Dangling and traversing with only hands increase the DC to 20.
- Making a running long jump (Acrobatics DC 20) from the chasm lip to the house and grabbing hold of the house (Reflex DC 18). If either fail, the PC falls into the torrent and is swept downstream. If both succeed, the PC latches onto the house, the thread snaps, and both he and house crash into the torrent (see **THE HOUSE DROPS** section, below).
- Flying to the house without incident.

MAVRA'S HOUSE

XP 3,200

N Huge construct

INIT -2; SENSES darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Perception -5 DEFENSE

AC 15, touch 6, flat-footed 17 (-2 Dex, +9 natural, -2 size) HP 79 (7d10+40) FORT +2, REF +0, WILL +2

DEFENSIVE ABILITIES construct traits, hardness 5

OFFENSE

SPEED 80 ft. (see gear below), climb 20 ft. MELEE 2 slams +13 (1d6+8) SPACE 15 ft.; REACH 15 ft. SPELL-LIKE ABILITIES (CL 4th)

Constant—spider climb

STATISTICS

STR 26, DEX 6, CON —, INT —, WIS 1, CHA 1 BASE ATK +7; CMB +17; CMD 25 SQ Jędza dependent (house dies if Jędza dies) GEAR horseshoes of speed (variant, functions on eight-legged constructs and raises the house's speed from 50 ft. to 80 ft.)

AD HOC XP AWARD: Give the PCs 1,600 XP for their efforts if they get into the house.

THE HOUSE DROPS: If the house drops into the water, neither it nor anyone in or on it takes falling damage. The house immediately animates in a flailing panic to escape the water and the chasm. Any PC inside the house risks drowning (Swim DC 25). Any PC swimming within 15 ft. of the house suffers a -5 penalty to Swim checks as the house's eight legs blindly flail. Clinging to the house's abdomen or legs requires a Climb check (DC 20) each round. Perching safely atop the house's body requires a single Climb check (DC 25).

RESCUING THE HOUSE: The house's 15-ft. legs scrape the ravine bottom, slowing its downstream movement to 50 ft./round. PCs not clinging to the house are swept downstream at 60 ft./round. It will be 1/4 mile (26 rounds) before the water shallows to 10 ft. deep and the house gains the purchase it needs to clamber out of the ravine of its own accord. Though helping the 1-1/2-ton house escape sooner is difficult at best, let the players play out their actions. Failing a Perception check (DC 10), PCs falsely hear a waterfall in the distance.

Once the house escapes the chasm, it spider climbs a massive elm and remains in the branches, 50 ft. above the ground (Climb DC 15).

INSIDE THE HOUSE (CR 5)

Whether up in a tree or resting on the ground, the house sits perfectly still and rests on solid footing:

Moss, spittle, and ichor seem to hold the rickety spider house's wooden pieces together. The monstrous spider molt into which the house has slipped itself covers a few of the legs and forms a makeshift roof over the bentwood-ribbed abdomen. Inside rests the bare bones of what could otherwise be a wagon. Two wide, flat chests form the floor, a cabinet is fastened to the frame with webs, and a second cabinet door opens the back of the spider house's head. A sticky net swings like a hammock, and eight silk ropes pass down through a metal ring above it.

Up to four Medium creatures can cram into the spider house. **CHESTS:** If the house fell into the water, the two floor chests are smashed open and empty. Otherwise, they contain:

Chest 1—Utensils, dried apples, salt, a jug of sweet sap, and cocooned and *gentle reposed* meat.

Chest 2—Clothes, fasteners, baskets, empty bottles, common tools, and a *treebleed bucket* (see below).

CABINETS: Both cabinets are unlocked but secured with *arcane lock* (Disable Device DC 20):

Cabinet 1—Knives, eight *sand arrows* (see below), various material components, five *potions of cure moderate wounds*, three *potions of endure elements*, and a *potion of delay poison*.

Cabinet 2—This wooden cabinet acts as the head of the spider house and is a wondrous item called a *bungry chest* (see below).

HAMMOCK AND ROPES: Each rope controls one of the spider house's legs, but someone must sit in the hammock for them to function (see Riding the House section, below).

TREASURE: Mavra's hammock is a masterwork net. Concealed inside the *hungry chest* are three 2-ft.-tall clay jugs, each shaped and painted like a grotesque head, replete with nose spout and ear handles. Each bears



CR 7



a different comical expression, registers a different magic aura, may or may not be stoppered, and contains something different:

- EXPRESSION holding back a sneeze; AURA moderate necromancy; currently stoppered. If unstoppered, a living ochre jelly (CR 5; HP 63; see *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary*) bursts out and lands upon every creature within 5 ft. At the GM's discretion, a homunculus of one of Mavra's rivals escapes its ooze prison, memorizes the PCs' faces, and attempts to flee to its master, leading to consequences beyond the scope of this adventure. This jug also contains 10 amber gems worth 525 gp each (5,250 gp total).
- EXPRESSION surprise; AURA —; currently unstoppered; empty.
- **EXPRESSION** cheeks ballooning with air; **AURA** moderate necromancy; currently stoppered; empty. Only this jug is a *soul jug* (see below)—the magic jug that Jędza wants the PCs to retrieve.

HUNGRY CHEST

AURA moderate conjuration; **CL** 9th **SLOT** —; **PRICE** 2,500 gp; **WEIGHT** 15 lb.

DESCRIPTION

- This chest (8 ft. cube) appears to be a wooden spider head from the outside. It functions as a *bag of holding (type I)* with a twist. When opened, it appears to be a normal empty chest, regardless of the actual contents.
- When an inanimate object passes over the threshold into the space, it is sucked in with great force. If you let go, the object disappears

inside. You can retain his hold on the object (Strength DC 20). On a failure, you must make a Reflex save (DC 20) to avoid being sucked in with the object, suffocating after 10 minutes.

- When an empty hand reaches inside, the silhouettes of concealed contents—items and gasping, sucked-in creatures—become vaguely visible. The more empty hands reaching inside, the more real all contents become. A full eight hands are required to withdraw an item. A sucked-in creature counts his own hands as amongst the eight necessary to escape.
- This item is a fundamental component of the spider house. If the house is destroyed, so is the *hungry chest*. Mavra assumes the form of a spider to extract items.

CONSTRUCTION

REQUIREMENTS Craft Wondrous Item, secret chest; Cost 1,250 gp

SAND ARROW

AURA faint evocation; CL 5th

SLOT —; **PRICE** 144 gp; **WEIGHT** 1/10 lb.

DESCRIPTION

The shaft of this +1 arrow is made of tightly packed white sand that discorporates into a blast of grit when it strikes a target. On a successful hit, the sand catches in the fittings and joints of metal armor, doubling the armor check penalty and arcane spell failure chance, and imposing a -10 ft. penalty to speed until the armor can be cleaned. Additionally, creatures hit by a sand arrow are blinded for 1d4 rounds (Fortitude DC 13).

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•••• Tales of the Old Margreve ••••

CONSTRUCTION

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REQUIREMENTS Craft Magic Arms and Armor, blindness, gust of wind; Cost 72 gp

Soul jug

AURA moderate necromancy; CL 9th

SLOT —; **PRICE** 16,200 gp; **WEIGHT** 5 lb.

DESCRIPTION

If you unstopper the jug, your soul enters it; this functions as the *magic jar* spell with a 9-hour duration and the jug acting as the gem. Unlike the *magic jar* spell, the jug must remain unstoppered for you to move your soul to a nearby body, back to the jug, or back to your own body. Once stoppered, treat the jug as "out of range." Possessing a target is a standard action (Will DC 19 negates). Only one soul may be in the jug at one time. If a soul is in the jug when the duration ends, the jug shatters.

Weakness—Margreve dependent. If this jug is taken out of the

Margreve, it shatters.

CONSTRUCTION

REQUIREMENTS Craft Wondrous Item, magic jar; COST 8,100 gp

TREEBLEED BUCKET

AURA faint universal; CL 3rd

SLOT —; **PRICE** 1,000 gp; **WEIGHT** 1 lb.

DESCRIPTION

This combination tap and sap bucket slowly draws magical elixirs from trees. The potion remains viable for 24 hours and its effect depends on the tree species as follows: oak (*know direction*), rowan (*purify food and drink*), willow (*hide from animals*), and holly (*good berry*). It has 50 charges. Tapping a living treant destroys the *treebleed bucket* or yields potions of greater magics at the GM's discretion.

CONSTRUCTION

REQUIREMENTS Brew Potion, Craft Wondrous Item; **COST** 500 gp

PLEA ON THE WIND

Before the PCs leave the house, Jędza sends a *whispering wind* message to it. Assume everyone in the house hears the whisper-soft message, even if the house has moved locations. The message is: "Hurry, I beg you! You will not make it back in time on foot. Drive the house! Nitca knows how. Take the trees. Hurry!"

The Kariv have continued desperate surgical procedures in the PCs' absence. Thanks to their meddling, Jędza now has only 6 hp (1-1/2 hours to live), regardless of whether the PCs healed her before departing. However, the PCs can ride the spider house back to the inn in 1 hour. But first they must learn how to control it.

If Nitca hears the *whispering wind* message, it temporarily acts Helpful to the PCs. Nitca jumps into the hammock, thus activating the control ropes. The ugly homunculus bounces excitedly, pointing to the ropes and anxiously miming directions. If Nitca did not hear the message, the PCs will have to convince the homunculus that the message truly came (Diplomacy DC 15).

RIDING THE HOUSE

Any weight upon the hammock activates the ropes. Pulling a control rope requires so little energy that Mavra can pull each one by tying them around her individual fingers. Each rope controls a leg, but the spider house only moves with coordinated manipulation of the ropes. The rope handlers must be inside the house, which fits up to four Medium creatures. Others, like Nitca and Flawn, can ride by clinging to the side or top.

To drive the spider house, the rope handlers take turns making Dexterity checks (DC 6); they may not take 10, and no one may aid them. The group must achieve 10 successes before 3 failures (about a 37% chance if all handlers have +0 Dex bonus). If there are less than four handlers, each roll takes a -2 penalty for each handler less than four. If Nitca heard the *whispering wind* message or believes it occurred, the handlers receive a +1 to their rolls, as Nitca mimes which ropes to pull and when.

The GM is encouraged to add descriptive flavor to the roll results. Every time a handler succeeds on his roll, the house steps forward, turns appropriately, or gains momentum. Every time a handler fails his roll, the house bucks wildly. Nitca waves and points in orchestration of the handlers, and depending on their success, its goblin face bears an expression of glee or disgust.

After three failures, the house makes a dead stop, flips upside down, or rears wildly (at the GM's discretion). The result is the same: all riders may tumble out (Reflex DC 15), which may have serious consequences if the house is high in a tree (the house doesn't fall because it has *spider climb*). In addition, the group suffers a 10 minute loss and must begin rolling all over again.

After ten successes, the party drives the house as desired, controlling its movement—and its slam attacks!—completely, so long as the same handlers continue to man the ropes. If up in a tree, they safely descend.

A RIVAL DROPS IN (CR 5)

As the PCs approach the inn, read the following:

A giant lizard, the size of a horse, climbs over the inn, gobbling up fist-sized spiders. It rushes down the side and hisses in anger. A brightly colored frill flares around its head and shakes like a rattle.

The lizard claims the arachnid feast and attacks any who attempt to enter the inn.

If the PCs are driving the spider house, they may pull its strings to fight the lizard. Assume that everyone inside the spider house gains improved cover (+8 AC, +4 Reflex saves, +10 Stealth) until it is destroyed.

GIANT FRILLED LIZARD XP 1,600

CR 5

HP 59 (see Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary)

Part 4: Back at the Inn

WHILE THE PCs WERE GONE: Though Adrik, the Kariv leader, would never admit it, he has been helping Jędza out of greed not kindness. He risked his family members' lives staying at the inn to keep Jędza alive, and his brother and nephews died trying to save the ugly crone. And after all this, it will be the PCs who receive the reward that Jędza previously promised him. The situation vexed him to action during the PCs' absence.

In a desperate attempt to win Jędza's reward before the PCs returned, Adrik personally continued surgical attempts with ever increasing aggressiveness and at great peril to Jędza. Just before Jędza fell unconscious, she begged Adrik to stop. Her blood has soaked through the second floor, and drips upon the PCs' table by the •••• Gall of the Spider Crone •••

common room fire. Only Adrik and his mother Tanya remain. All others are hiding in the woods 1 mile from the inn.

JeDZA'S STATUS: If the PCs arrive in time, assume that Adrik's surgical foibles have reduced JedZa to -3 hp (unconscious). All stabilization and magical healing attempts fail. The ala is born when JedZa dies in 10 rounds.

If the PCs do not get back to the inn in time, assume that they arrive just as Jędza dies, Nitca goes insane, and the ala erupts (see The Ala Erupts section, below).

WHAT THE KARIV DO: If Jędza is still alive, Adrik asks the PCs to hand Tanya the jug. If the PCs ask why, Adrik (forgetting the suturefly in the coffer by the bedside) lies, saying that Tanya knows how to use the jug. The lie-detecting suturefly vibrates its wings loudly. In truth, Adrik wants his family, not the PCs, to save Jędza.

If Tanya gets the jug, she casts *identify* on the jug, examines it for 3 rounds, and makes a Spellcraft check (DC 24; *identify* and Spellcraft give her a +17 bonus). If successful, she realizes all properties of the jug, including that it is impossible to suck the unborn gall creature into the *soul jug* and that Jędza's hand must be manipulated to unstopper the jug in order for her soul to transfer to the jug. Tanya starts to tell the PCs these details, but despicable Adrik interrupts, asking the PCs to promise to share Jędza's reward first.

WHAT THE PCs MIGHT DO:

- If the PCs attempt to heal Jędza to consciousness, they fail.
- If the PCs flee or kill Jędza, she dies and the ala erupts.



- If anyone unstoppers the jug, that character falls to the floor, apparently lifeless, and his or her soul enters the jug. Any attempt to possess Jędza succeeds.
- If a PC manipulates Jędza's hand to unstopper the jug, her soul transfers to it.

WHAT JEDZA DOES: If transferred to the jug, Jedza attempts to exact revenge on the perfidious Kariv by making an immediate attempt to possess a PC (Will DC 19 negates). Consider this a readied action that occurs before the jug can be restoppered. A possessed PC's soul transfers to the jug, and the character may take no actions (just like the *magic jar* spell).

Jędza's soul replaces the PC's Intelligence, Wisdom, Charisma, level, class, base attack bonus, base save bonuses, alignment, and mental abilities, including spells and spell-like abilities, with her own. The PC's body retains its Strength, Dexterity, Constitution, hp, natural abilities, and automatic abilities. Jędza cannot activate the PC's extraordinary or supernatural abilities. Consider giving the possessed PC's player the "new stats" to play the Spider Crone. Tell the player (privately) that Jędza wants to lose the jug's stopper so that she cannot be trapped in or out of the jug and that Jędza wants to stab Adrik in the face. He swore an oath to help her, but performed reckless surgery and risked her soul for greed. Tanya was complicit. Jędza can use her smite oathbreaker ability against them both.

After Jedza deals with Adrik and Tanya, she asks the other PCs if they want her to relinquish her host's body and return her soul to the jug or if they want her to fight the gall creature using the PC's body. Either way, she attempts to extract a heartfelt promise from the PCs to raise her from the dead when it is all over.

THE ALA ERUPTS (CR 8, 9, OR 10)

As soon as Jędza's body dies, the ala erupts. If the PCs are not present, the ala kills Adrik and Tanya. If it perceives the PCs nearby, it attacks them. Otherwise, it hunts them down after finding and killing the rest of the Kariv, Vassily, his daughter, and Sandor. Miraculously, Sandor's baby survives and becomes the PCs' charge. Perhaps she is gifted and destined to become a hero one day.

If the PCs are present, read the following:

A tremendous thunderclap rocks the Margreve. Lightning spears the night, strikes the inn, and splits nearby trees with crackling fire. Wind sucks the shutters from the building, and a gale snuffs all natural lighting inside. In the deeper darkness, electricity dances across the cracked surface of the Spider Crone's gall. It bursts open. From inside rises a black whirlwind of claws and lightning.

The ala claims the soul that currently occupies Jędza's body. Mortal magic cannot recover this soul, even after the ala dies.

If the ala claimed Jędza's soul, it is born as a CR 10 creature (XP 9,600), and it:

- Gains the advanced creature template: +26 hp, +2 on all rolls (including damage rolls) and special ability DCs, +4 to AC and CMD.
- Gains the giant creature template: +26 hp, +2 to all rolls based on Str or Con, size increases to Large, -1 penalty on all rolls based on Dex.

If the ala claimed anyone else's soul, it is born as CR 9 creature (XP 6,400) and gains only the advanced creature template.

•• Tales of the Old Margreve ••••

If the ala did not claim a soul because Jedza's body was soulless, the ala is born soulless as a CR 8 creature (XP 4,800), takes damage from channel energy as if undead, and cannot be possessed via the soul jug.

Ala

CR 8, 9, or 10

CR 3

XP 4,800, 6,400, OR 9,600 HP 97, 123, or 149 (see MARGREVE BESTIARY, page 24)

DEVELOPMENT: For the first 5 rounds, the ala attacks in whirlwind form. On round 3, it uses call lightning storm. On round 5, it uses its ice storm spell-like ability. On round 6, it transforms into its cackling, wide-mouthed, razor-toothed hag form, and thereafter, it attacks with its poisonous bite and slams. It retakes whirlwind form if it wants to move through an opponent's space, perhaps to escape being flanked.

Adrik, Kariv Leader XP 600 Male human rogue 1/fighter 3 CN Medium humanoid (human) INIT +2; SENSES Perception -1 DEFENSE AC 13, touch 12, flat-footed 11 (+1 armor, +2 Dex) HP 27 (1d8+3d10+3) FORT +3, REF +5, WILL +0; +1 Will saves vs. fear **DEFENSIVE ABILITIES** trapfinding OFFENSE SPEED 30 ft. Melee mwk rapier +6 (1d6+1/18-20) SPECIAL ATTACKS sneak attack +1d6 STATISTICS STR 12, DEX 14, CON 10, INT 13, WIS 9, CHA 8 **BASE ATK +3; CMB +4; CMD** 16 FEATS Combat Expertise, Combat Reflexes, Improved Feint, Quick

Draw, Weapon Finesse SKILLS Acrobatics +6, Appraise +1, Bluff +6, Climb +5, Craft +1, Diplomacy -1, Disguise -1, Escape Artist +2, Heal -1, Intimidate

+6, Perception -1, Perform -1, Ride +6, Sense Motive +5, Sleight of Hand +8, Stealth +7, Survival +3, Swim +5, Use Magic Device +3

LANGUAGES Common, Elven

SQ armor training, bravery

COMBAT GEAR oil of magic weapon; OTHER GEAR belt pouch (4 gp), padded armor, peasant's outfit

Tanya, Kariv Matriarch

XP 800

Female human sorcerer 4 CN Medium humanoid (human)

INIT +1; SENSES Perception +2

DEFENSE

AC 12, touch 11, flat-footed 11 (+1 Dex, +1 deflection) HP 13 (4d6-4)

FORT +0, REF +2, WILL +6

OFFENSE

SPEED 30 ft.

MELEE mwk silver dagger +1 (1d4-3/19-20)

BLOODLINE SPELL-LIKE ABILITIES (CL 4th; concentration +8) 7/day-touch of destiny

SORCERER SPELLS KNOWN (CL 4th; concentration +8):

2nd (4/day)—detect thoughts (DC 17)

- 1st (7/day)—alarm, color spray (DC 15), comprehend languages, identify
- 0 (at will)—arcane mark, detect magic, detect poison, mending (DC 14), prestidigitation (DC 14), read magic

BLOODLINE destined

STATISTICS

STR 7, DEX 13, CON 9, INT 13, WIS 14, CHA 19

BASE ATK +2; **CMB** +0; **CMD** 11

FEATS Combat Casting, Craft Wondrous Item, Eschew Materials, Simple Weapon Proficiency, Spell Focus (divination)

SKILLS Acrobatics +1, Appraise +6, Bluff +4, Climb -2, Craft +1, Diplomacy +4, Disguise +4, Escape Artist +1, Heal +2, Intimidate +4, Knowledge (arcana) +6, Knowledge (local) +3, Perception +2, Perform +4, Profession (soothsayer) +6, Ride +2, Sense Motive +4, Sleight of Hand +3, Spellcraft +7, Stealth +1, Survival +4, Swim -2

LANGUAGES Common, Elven

SQ bloodline arcana, fated

COMBAT GEAR scroll of scorching ray, scroll of touch of idiocy; OTHER GEAR belt pouch (2 gp), bracers of armor +1, elixir of love, elixir of truth (2), unguent of timelessness (2)

Concluding the Adventure

The Spider Crone's body dies when the ala is born. If her soul was in the body at the time, her soul is destroyed also. She cannot be raised or resurrected by mortal magic.

If, however, the PCs removed the Spider Crone from her body in time, they save her immortal soul. She remains "alive" in the soul jug (or in a possessed PC) until the jug's magic jar effect ends in 9 hours. At that time, she dies. But in this case, her soul is free and willing to be raised from the dead.

If the PCs raise or reincarnate her, she thanks them and rewards them with the promised ivy crown of prophecy. She brews a potion, which saves Sandor's baby, and Sandor names the babe after the most heroic PC.

At the GM's option, Mavra, Jędza's sister, may be good or evil. If good, she forgives the PCs for breaking into her house and raises Jędza back to life if the PCs do not. If evil, she plots to punish the PCs for breaking into her house; she claims Jędza's territory if the PCs do not raise Jedza; and she begins abducting children from groups traveling the Great Northern Road. Reclaiming the children and killing Mavra may become a new mission for the PCs. Whether good or evil, Mavra does not let the PCs leave the Margreve with her house.

If the PCs do not kill the ala, it rages through the forest, heralding a series of preternatural lightning and hail storms. Eventually, it threatens Zobeck farmlands, and the Free City seeks PCs to track it to a massive tree hollow where it broods, flashes, and thunders.

IVY CROWN OF PROPHECY
AURA moderate divination; CL 7th
SLOT head; PRICE 10,080 gp; WEIGHT 1/2 lb.
DESCRIPTION
On command (1/day), this ivy filigreed crown grants you the effects
of a divination spell.

CONSTRUCTION

REQUIREMENTS Craft Wondrous Item, divination; COST 5,040 gp



CR 3



"No one dares command us now, my brethren. The dominion of mortals and fey and shroud-eating corpses is over. The forest is with us. The Kingdom of the Briar shall come at last!"

"Blood and Thorns" is a tale of bloody revolution and would-be kings, for PCs of 7th level. Its climax is set in the deep woods near the Grisal Marches, but initial scenes can take place anywhere. It uses fast progression and treasure.

Adventure Background

or years, the children of the briar have traded favors, secrets, and droplets of blood. A nuisance more than a menace, they are quickly ignored when their spying stops being useful. Things are changing, however. An adventurous child of the briar named Catchweed, who long served the wiles of the shadow fey, has decided that enough is enough. It's time his people rise up and become a power in the Old Margreve—the match of any hag, nymph, or scáthsidhe.

Assembling an alliance of sap demons, shambling mounds, shadows, and children of the briar, he ambushed a hunting party of vampires from the Grisal Marches, immobilizing them with living stakes of mandrake root. Their necromantic blood proved a potent catalyst for his growing power.

Under Catchweed's command, briars and brambles are spreading throughout the forest and infesting the flesh of fey and beast alike. Wise enough not to threaten the Margreve itself, he instead challenges other forest dwellers for dominion. His crusade has a simple philosophy: plants have the strongest ties to the Old Margreve, so all other creatures should bow before them.

If Catchweed isn't stopped, a new power will arise in the forest, fuelled by the blood of vampires and stolen fey spells: a spiteful Kingdom of the Briar to clash with the court of the shadow fey, the shroud-eaters of Walkers Wood, and Zobeck's dominion over the Great Northern Road.

Adventure Summary

The adventure begins at a wedding, when briar-tangled boars interrupt the proceedings on a pain maddened rampage. In the aftermath, PCs hear many similar tales. Investigations uncover rumors of a "King of Thorns" but an ancient Margreve ritual hides him. Only spider crone Jędza Padak has the means to find the king, but to get her help, PCs have to climb high into a maze of webs.

By bargaining or force, the party gains Padak's aid: a strand of phase spider silk they can follow to the villain's lair. To stop the King of Thorns, they'll need to sneak past his forces and into his Palace of Briars, where the moribund source of Catchweed's power is revealed.

Adventure hooks

While PCs have danger thrust upon them in the opening scene, they're at their leisure to investigate (or not) afterwards. Things only get worse as time goes on, and sooner or later, they'll have to either stop the King of Thorns or bow to his power.

If they need a nudge to get involved, use existing friends and allies to spur them on. Innkeepers and village elders promise to scrounge every penny they can, and NPCs, such as Mother Babushka and the Honey Queen, add their voices to the call for help, offering unique rituals, spells, and magic items by way of payment.

Getting help from the authorities is easier said than done. Citybased merchants are concerned only for the sanctity of their trade route, and while Zobeck's griffon riders are responsible for the area's security, they've learned the hard way not to get involved in matters beyond the road. Persuading either party that the King of Thorns' threat is credible (Diplomacy DC 30) merely spurs them to hire expendable irregulars (like the PCs) to sort things out.

Unsurprisingly, no one suggests approaching the vampire lords of Morgau and Doresh for aid.

Introduction

The PCs are guests at a wedding feast in the open air at the forest's edge, amidst trees hung with lanterns and bright cloth pennants. The rituals are over: The happy couple has tasted sacred salt, stood back to back and gazed at each other in bronze mirrors, and each guest has tied a ribbon around their clasped hands as they stood, palms against an ancient tree, and swore the marriage oath. Now they're bound together as closely as Porevit and Yarila.

The ceremonies are over and the party has truly begun. Friends and relatives tuck into a feast on long tables. Ale, wine, and wedding mead flow copiously. A handful of minstrels beat drums, pluck the balalaika and sing.

Did the PCs bring a gift?

GETTING THE PARTY INVOLVED: As 7th-level characters, PCs are big fish in the very small pond of local villages. Elders seek their advice, children come to gawp, and lusty local lads and lasses try to catch their eye. Perhaps the party is invited purely because of their celebrity status? Maybe they're related to the bridal party or they saved one of them during a previous adventure. Even complete strangers are welcome, as tradition dictates that anyone arriving during a feast must be offered hospitality.

As a holy hero favored by the gods, a PC cleric or paladin might well be asked to officiate the ceremony. Arcane spellcasters will be politely badgered to provide magical entertainment and any bard worthy of the name should be chomping at the bit to show off. Rogues can find ample opportunity to charm potential patrons (or victims) while martial types might well be invited to a hunt by the groom's family, to catch the pesky local dire boar that's destined to serve as the banquet's centerpiece.

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.... Tales of the Old Margreve

Part 1: The Kandfasting

This is a social event, not a dungeon, so the party shouldn't be equipped for combat. None of the guests are wearing armor, and the only weapons on scene are a few daggers and staves. As famous adventurers, etiquette allows PCs to carry a sword (its elegant and a mark of class) or a famous weapon like *Wolf Killer*, but going armed and armored without good reason is considered the mark of a dangerous lunatic. If PCs are suitably disarmed (including swapping their combat spells for flashy entertainment) then the GM should award the party as if it was 1 CR higher than written.

FEAST INTERRUPTED (CR 7)

Like everyone else, the PCs are invited to cut meat from the wedding boar, a mighty daeodon (or dire boar) braised in honey. As one of them comes back for a second or third helping however...

A horrible choking and moaning disturbs the festivities, accompanied by the sudden screams of guests. The sacred feast boar—skinless, cooked, and carved down to its ribs—is twisting and groaning on the spit as if alive.

The spasms of the carcass are disgusting but harmless, a warning from the Margreve of what's to come.

CREATURES: As the meat starts to groan, a living boar with briars erupting from its flesh bursts into the glade. Two more charge into the clearing in round two, three more on round three.

WILD BOAR (6)

CR 2

XP 600 EACH

HP 18 each (see Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary)

DEVELOPMENT: The boars overturn tables, send mead-barrels rolling, and trample gifts, guests, and food alike. They charge the nearest group each round and are easily distracted. The boars fight to the death.

If all boars are defeated, the wedding party profusely thanks the PCs (assuming they helped) before beating a hasty retreat with whatever remains of the food and drink. In the aftermath, PCs hear many similar tales of maddened forest beasts and the unnatural abundance of brambles and briars. As powerful adventurers, the peasants naturally look to them for answers.

Below are some of the stories to be heard; several of the creatures mentioned below have been charmed by Catchweed's *cap of thorns*:

- An elderly druid was recently found dead, tangled in a bramble patch that should have submitted to his woodland stride.
- A trio of dryads haunts a nearby campsite. Driven mad by itchy thorns growing out of their flesh, they try to lure passing travelers into their spiny embrace.
- Grandmother Bear has lived peacefully near the village for decades, protecting locals from danger and accepting offerings to the forest. Now she batters down fences, shatters cabin walls, and slaughters livestock without reason (treat as an awakened dire bear).
- The wood wards of Levoča (see "Hollow") recently came to life, battling with a mass of thorny assassin vines that are besieging the village.
- A unicorn lies dying in a thorn bush-eyes bulging, tongue

- lolling, flanks slashed to ribbons by thorny vines wrapped around it. If the party tries to free it or claim its horn, the vines are revealed as a thorny shambling mound.
- Children of the briar have been disappearing. Many local nests are empty and those that remain are much more belligerent.

Part 2: A Thorny Problem

It's obvious that something wicked is brewing in the forest's depths, but to discover exactly what, PCs will need good knowledge of the forest's secrets or answers from someone similarly skilled. If they wander the Margreve for clues, use the stories detailed above to create encounters for them.

LORE (DIPLOMACY OR KNOWLEDGE [LOCAL]):

DC 15—Maybe the children of the briar know something. They're made of thorns and always up to something.

DC 20—Someone or something calling itself the King of Thorns is rumored to dwell in the deep woods.

DC 22—The king's servants are plants and creatures infested with thorny briars. They hate all humanoids.

DC 25—The king's said to live in a briar palace somewhere near Walker's Wood. Powerful magic hides its location.

The party may seek advice from wise NPCs they've met in earlier adventurers. They can confirm that something major is afoot that the Margreve's spirit seems to be either ignoring or supporting. They can also point PCs' in the direction of the children of the briar, both as a good source of information and another type of briar-related trouble.

QUESTIONING THE KING OF THORNS' SERVANTS

Learning about the King of Thorns is tough: almost every child of the briar in the Old Margreve supports him, and all charmed minions are convinced his cause is just:

"The King of Thorns promises that we shall rule this forest. Dryad, nymph, and vila will serve us; man and alseid, wolf and hag, will bow to us. The Kingdom of the Briar is coming."

Catchweed's servants begin any conversation hostile and typical DC modifiers are as follows: +5 (basic facts), +10 (Catchweed's plans for a plant kingdom), +15 (the Spider Crone's involvement). Intimidation or magic can help loosen their tongues, and if PCs break the charm on those controlled by the *cap of thorns*, most creatures shift their attitude to friendly or helpful.

FINDING THE PALACE OF BRIARS

Regardless of the method used, no one is able to reveal the King of Thorns' location or lead PCs to his lair. The knowledge melts from their minds when they try to speak it, and if PCs try to find it themselves, paths shift and magic twists to keep both Catchweed and his palace hidden, sending all non-plant creatures in endless circles.

Scrying on Catchweed or the Briar Palace automatically fails, as do all divinations and similar magic directly targeted at them. Indirect or cunningly-worded divinations may reveal that the forest is actively hiding him, and that a spider crone is somehow involved. A sample divination is provided below:



0/144

•••• Blood and Thorns ••••

Thorn King nestles in a green enclasp, Seekers find nothing but a thorny rasp. His lair cannot be known or shown, Thanks to the wisdom of a spider crone.

NEST DIPLOMACY (CR 6)

If PCs investigate the children of the briar, they'll find their normal haunts abandoned, inhabitants run off to join the king of thorns' army. They can eventually locate an active nest however, and locals will advise them to capture a suturefly or two for the meeting, to ensure the honesty of any information.

The briar child nest is a mass of spiky brambles, filling a dell about 100 ft. in diameter. Entrances for Tiny creatures dot the circumference, and there's similar-sized paths running through its centre. The nest provides concealment and improved cover. The surrounding terrain is heavy undergrowth, filled with thorny plants.

Six children of the briar live here, one of whom is from the Briar Palace; he's red-tinged and considerably larger and meaner than his companions. The defenders stay within the nest and snipe at PCs with their magic and spitdart tongues. *Bloodroot* (see *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Core Rulebook*) grows throughout the nest and the children dab their tongues with it before spitting.

Advanced Child of the Briar XP 600

 HP 13 (see MARGREVE BESTIARY, page 24; see Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary for advanced template)
 COMBAT GEAR feather tokens (tree, whip)

Child of the Briar (5)

ХР 400 ЕАСН

HP 9 each (see MARGREVE BESTIARY, page 24)

DEVELOPMENT: They're in no mood to cooperate unless captured. PCs who do not locate all the nest's entrances (Survival DC 21) find their foes slipping away once they no longer have the advantage.

TREASURE: Breaking open the nest reveals the children's treasure: trinkets (worth 300 gp in total), a coppery-tasting *potion of bull's strength* made from vampire blood and four carved bark *scrolls* bound into a crude book, holding seasonal druidic magic (*plant growth, daylight, diminish plants, and sleet storm*).

Optional Encounter: Wrath of the Briar (CR 7)

If the King of Thorns learns of the party's involvement, he dispatches warriors to intercept them. A briar army begins combing the forest. Shadows move ahead of them like hounds chasing a scent, and everyone they encounter is interrogated for news.

ARMY OF THE BRIAR (2) CR 5

XP 1,600

NE Tiny plant (swarm)

INIT +3; SENSES low-light vision; Perception +14

DEFENSE

AC 16, touch 13, flat-footed 13 (+3 Dex, +3 natural) HP 31 (7d8) **FORT** +7, **REF** +7, **WILL** +2

DEFENSIVE ABILITIES plant traits, swarm traits; IMMUNE weapon damage

WEAKNESS swarm traits

OFFENSE

SPEED 30 ft.; climb 20 ft. MELEE swarm (2d6 plus entangle)

SPACE 5 ft.; REACH 0 ft.

SPECIAL ATTACKS entangle

SPELL-LIKE ABILITIES (CL 4th; concentration +8)

3/day—*briar magic* (DC 10) 1/day—empowered *entangle* (DC 11)

TACTICS

BEFORE COMBAT They try to catch PCs in a pincer movement.

DURING COMBAT They sweep over enemies, clawing until

opponents are entangled and biting frenziedly.

MORALE The swarms break up if reduced to 0 hp.

STATISTICS		
STR 6, DEX 17	, CON 11, INT 13	, Wis 10, Cha 14

ВАSE АТК +5; **СМВ** —, **СМD** —

FEATS Empower Spell-Like Ability (entangle), Great Fortitude, Lightning Reflexes, Skill Focus (Intimidate),

SKILLS Climb +10, intimidate +10, Perception +14, Stealth +25 (+31 in forest); RACIAL MODIFIERS +8 Climb, +2 Perception, +6 Stealth in forest

LANGUAGES Briarclick (spoken only), Common, Sylvan

SQ fey blood

CR 2

CR 1

SPECIAL ABILITIES

BRIAR MAGIC (SP) The army of the briar can cast any of the following spells 1/round as a spell-like ability: *dancing lights, daze, ghost sound, light, prestidigitation*.

ENTANGLING (EX) Creatures damaged by the army of the briar become entangled (Ref DC 13 negates; Constitution-based).

FEY BLOOD (Su) The army of the briar counts as both plant and fey for effects related to type.

SISTER OF SPIDERS

Wherever PCs left the spider hut in "Gall of the Spider Crone," it's gone when they return. Anyone can tell them how to find it, however; "Just head into the deep woods until you see the spiders." Enliven their journey by adding encounters with alseid refugees fleeing the King of Thorns' influence, or briar-infested treants and leshy who proselytize against the evils of civilization and the salvation to be found in the Kingdom of the Briar.

PCs eventually reach a section of the deep woods that's shrouded by webbing. Bundles of cocooned prey dangle overhead which get larger as the PCs move deeper: animals at first, then the shriveled corpses of forest goblins, alseid, and unwary woodsmen.

CREATURES: Ettercaps roam the forest floor, harvesting silk and poison from local spider swarms: they're bent double carrying huge bundles of raw silk and half-filled glass vials dangle around their necks. If questioned about the spider crone's whereabouts, they point upward, adding in broken common that PCs should climb the webbing.

ETTERCAP

XP 800

CR 3

HP 30 (see Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary)

.... Tales of the Old Margreve

DEVELOPMENT: Several of the larger webstrands are thick enough to be walked on, spiraling upward into a mass of webs. PCs continuing at ground level soon find the webbing impassible and the way blocked by a multitude of spider swarms, ettercaps, and monstrous spiders.

AND THE BLADE WENT SNICKER-SNACK! (CR 8)

The webs around you are crowded with spiders both massive and miniscule. Strands thick enough to walk on spiral high into the canopy, passing between pulsating grey egg sacks, entangled victims, and globular buildings made from spittle and silk. Eightfold eyes watch you from a veritable city of spiders.

High above, you can make out a giant arachnid silhouette. The Spider Crone's hut perhaps? Or just a spider of colossal proportions? **CREATURES:** There are spiders everywhere but only a few are immediate dangers. Three giant spiders help Snickersnack block the way to the hut. They throw webs at PCs who try to bypass the fight.

TERRAIN: Traversing the webs requires Acrobatics or Climb checks (DC 8); these checks are also required if creatures are hit in combat while on a web strand.

Webstrands (hardness 0; 14 hp) criscross the area both horizontally and vertically, the nearest being typically 1d3+5 ft. away. Falling results in a plunge of 1d6x10 ft. into webbing, which inflicts 1d3 nonlethal damage per 10 ft. fallen. Flying PCs risk becoming entangled each round (Fly DC 18).

CR 1

GIANT SPIDER (3)

ХР 400 ЕАСН

HP 16 each (see Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary)

DEVELOPMENT: Other giant spiders merely watch, clicking their mandibles as if commenting excitedly on the battle. If a character drops something valuable, however, a swarm quickly binds it in webs and drags it away. This also applies to PCs lying helpless or unconscious for more than 2 rounds.

SNICKERSNACK CR 6 XP 2,400 LG Medium construct INIT +5; SENSES darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Perception +12 DEFENSE AC 20, touch 16, flat-footed 14 (+5 Dex, +1 dodge, +3 natural, +1 shield) HP 64 (8d10) FORT +2, REF +7, WILL +4 **IMMUNE** construct traits OFFENSE SPEED 30 ft., climb 20 ft. MELEE half-sword of the Margreve Knights +15 (1d8+3/17–20) or half-sword of the Margreve Knights +13 (1d8+3/17-20), 3 rapier +13 (1d6+1), whip +13 (1d3+1) SPACE 5 ft.; REACH 10 ft.

TACTICS

DURING COMBAT Snickersnack prefers to leap from strand to strand, dueling one opponent at a time. If pressed, it uses the *half-sword of the Margreve Knights* to sever the web beneath an enemy's feet.

MORALE If reduced to 10 hp, Snickersnack surrenders and escorts PCs to the spider crone.

STATISTICS

 $\mathbf{Str}\ 13, \mathbf{Dex}\ 20, \mathbf{Con}\ -, \mathbf{Int}\ 10, \mathbf{Wis}\ 14\ \mathbf{Cha}\ 10$

Ваѕе Атк +8; СМВ +9; СМD 24

FEATS Dodge, Mobility, Multiweapon Combat, Weapon Finesse

SKILLS Acrobatics +17 Climb +11, Perception +12, Stealth +5 (+9 in webs); **RACIAL MODIFIERS** +4 Acrobatics,

+8 Climb, +4 Perception, +4 Stealth in webs

LANGUAGES understands Common; *speak with vermin* (spiders only)

•••• Blood and Thorns ••••

GEAR buckler, half-sword of the Margreve Knights, 3 rapiers, whip SPECIAL ABILITIES

WEB-WALKER (EX) Snickersnack moves normally on any web strand thick enough to hold its weight and doesn't need to make an Acrobatics check to balance on them.

Snickersnack looks like a suit of plate armor made from giant spider carapaces, wearing a bright green cape and tricorn hat. Unlike most constructs, it's fully intelligent and firmly good-aligned. Roleplay Snickersnack as if it was a paladin and honorable swashbuckler. Although it can't speak beyond rattles and clicks, Snickersnack's gestures are expressive enough: cap doffing, cloak swishing, and mocking bows should leave the PCs in no doubt that facing a flamboyant duelist.

HALF-SWORD OF THE MARGREVE KNIGHTS

AURA strong transmutation; CL 13th

PRICE 50,507 gp; **WEIGHT** 4 lb.

DESCRIPTION

The story of the ill-fated Margreve Knights, adventurers who perished in the heart of the woods, is little remembered except in the name of this strange sword. To all appearances, it's only half of a sword, cut lengthwise along the edge of the blade, but it functions as a +2 keen adamantine longsword that's light enough to be used with Weapon Finesse. Legend says, the second half of the sword is lost in the forest, and if rejoined, they'll form a special vorpal blade.

CONSTRUCTION

REQUIREMENTS Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *finger of death, keen edge*; **Cost** 25,253 gp

THE CRONE AND THE STRAND (CR 8)

Once Snickersnack is subdued or destroyed, nothing else impedes the party's journey (see "Gall of the Spider Crone" for details on the Spider Crone's hut):

An old woman sings wordlessly as she weaves on a living loom—a man-sized spider with silk twisted into a cat's cradle around its legs. The crone has bark-brown skin and wispy white hair, toothless mouth showing just a hint of mandible as she smiles. Her round, neck-less head and pronounced hump combine with thin gangly limbs and overlong fingers to give the disturbing impression of an arachnid in not quite perfect human guise.

If PCs badly damaged or robbed her hut in the previous adventure, add:

"What's this?" she exclaims. "Brigands and murderers and vandals, I'd guess. Out to once more pillage a poor old lady's hovel are you?"

The crone immediately asks for a promise not to hurt her. If they break this oath, PCs become vulnerable to her *smite* power.

CREATURES: Jędza Padak claims to be Jędza Nansa's sister. Her mood depends on how "Gall of the Spider Crone" concluded: mournful if her sister is dead, wistful if she was reincarnated as an ettercap, happy if Nansa was raised or resurrected.

Jędza Padak, Spider Crone

XP 4,800

HP 62 (identical to Jędza Nansa; see "Gall of the Spider Crone," page 74)

CR 8

Jędza Padak presents an innocent demeanor, offering nettletea and making small-talk as if visiting her was the most normal thing in the world. Slyness and menace always seems to lurk just beneath the surface, however. She's happy to answer PC questions, but never let them forget this is an amoral creature of great power:

"I didn't hide the King of Thorns, but I taught him how to ask the Margreve for sanctuary, and the forest has given it to him. Poor little thing. Such a nice boy when he was young, but time and scorn have made him as cold and angry as a winter storm. He only wants to do right by his people, though. Get them respect, safety, and a kingdom of their own. Is that really so wrong?"

DEVELOPMENT: The Margreve hides Catchweed from Jędza Padak, just like everyone else. However, she does have a means of finding him.

The question she puts to PCs is why she should help. Why undo the King of Thorns' plans? She doesn't care who claims rulership of the Old Margreve and the forest certainly doesn't. Humans, dwarves, and kobolds all engage in war and conquest, why shouldn't the children of the briar? Perhaps people are being hurt, but that's true everywhere—especially in vampire-haunted Doresh. Why doesn't the party go help them instead?

If the PCs have a good response to these questions, Jędza Padak will aid them. This isn't a matter of Diplomacy checks, just good roleplaying; she's interested in their opinions, not their ability to present them. If they spared Snickersnack, then he'll support the party with rattles and clicks if they bring up the suffering that Catchweed's campaign is causing.

If she remains unconvinced, Padak's prepared to sell them the *ghost thread*. Something in barter of at least equal value, rising to twice or three times that much if the PCs destroyed Snickersnack, argued poorly, or thoroughly looted her hut in the previous adventure. Oaths of future service can make up part of this bargain, but she'll also demand something tangible.

If they use force, she surrenders when reduced to 15 hp or less, giving up the thread and marking the party for later vengeance. Unless PCs gain her oath to let them depart in safely, a horde of spiders pursue them as soon as they leave her hut.

TREASURE: Any treasure left behind last time is still here, plus a conspicuous new addition—a red lacquered *adamantine breastplate* marked with the heraldry of Lord Fandorin of Grisal. It is broken with a stake-sized hole over the wearer's heart. Catchweed traded this item to Jędza Padak in exchange for information on potential threats to his plans... including the PCs.

GHOST THREAD

AURA moderate conjuration; CL 15th SLOT —; PRICE 5,250 gp; WEIGHT 1 lb.

DESCRIPTION

Created by phase spiders, the majority of this miles-long strand



•••• Tales of the Old Margreve ••••

of enchanted silk resides on the ethereal plane. Only a few inches at either end exist permanently in the material world, but these can be used as normal. Creatures can follow the strand to its destination by running their hand along the thread, which phases into the material plane beneath their grasp. If dropped or severed (harness 0, 1 hp), the thread disappears back into the ethereal plane in 2d6 rounds.

Currently, one end of the *ghost thread* is wrapped around a bent nail in the hut's wall while the other is tied to the palace of briars. If a PC keeps careful grip of the strand at all times, they can follow it to Catchweed's lair.

CONSTRUCTION

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REQUIREMENTS Craft Wondrous Item, secret chest; Cost 2,625 gp

Part 3: Kingdom of the Briar

By carefully following the *ghost thread*, PCs can defeat the Margreve's shifting trails and attempts at misdirection. It leads them north, near Walker's Wood. The King of Thorns' domain is eerily silent—air stale and undergrowth thick with briars. Animals seem to be completely absent.

UTBURD'S HENGE (CR VARIES)

A break in the canopy allows sunlight to bathe this clearing. Moss girds a rough circle of rectangular stones. Blue flowers abound: chicory, cornflower, and harebell. The scattered bones of children lay concealed in long grass.

Characters may have heard of this place, Utburd's Henge (Knowledge [local] DC 20): a check result of 25 or more reveals that *utburd* is an ancient word meaning "that which is taken outside" probably referring to the practice of abandoning unwanted children. Despite this, the place seems wholesome and mercifully free of choking undergrowth.

CREATURES: Mylings haunt this glade. They approach peacefully at first with wide doe-eyes and mournful grey countenances, whispering their plea in an archaic dialect.

MYLING (1 PER PC)

XP 600 EACH

HP 19 each (see MARGREVE BESTIARY, page 29)

DEVELOPMENT: The mylings' chosen burial grounds are the barrows surrounding Catchweed's palace. If the party agrees to carry them home, they'll provide some useful information on the King of Thorns and his army.

GREEN GUARDIANS (CR 6)

The King of Thorns' first line of defense is a scattering of enchanted mandrake roots: Tiny humanoid-like plants that shriek if anyone passes near.

CREATURES: The area is patrolled by a unique creature that resembles a mass of thorny vines. Should an enchanted mandrake root shriek, it hunts them down within 2d6 rounds, bursting out of the earth in a frenzy of flailing tentacles. The briar beast retreats deep below ground if reduced below 20 hp.

TERRAIN: This area has massive trees and heavy undergrowth (see *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Core Rulebook*).

TRAP: Mandrake roots are living plants with AC 5 and 4 hp. It screams when a non-plant creature of Tiny or greater size comes within 20 ft. It can be disarmed by sealing its lips with an iron pin.

ENCHANTED MANDRAKE ROOT

TYPE magic; PERCEPTION DC 18; DISABLE DEVICE 15 TRIGGER alarm; RESET automatic EFFECT spell effect (*alarm*)

EFFECT (if destroyed or uprooted) spell effect (*shout*, 30 ft. cone, deafened for 2d6 rounds, 5d6 sonic damage, DC 16 negates deafness and halves damage)

BRIAR BEAST

XP 6,400

Variant giant squid (see *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary*) HP 102

N Huge plant; **SENSES** low-light vision, tremorsense 60 ft.; **SPEED** burrow 60 ft.

DEVELOPMENT: Once PCs have encountered their first mandrake root, they can pick their way safely through the others (Perception DC 18). Failing a check means they stumble onto another root, attracting the briar beast or one of the sample encounters below, if it's already been defeated.

THE THORN KING'S ARMY

Catchweed uses a cluster of ancient barrows as his base of operations. Every tomb has been broken open: ancient chieftains animated as yellow musk creeper zombies, unwanted bronze regalia discarded beside empty biers. Carvings on the walls depict a people who never knew iron and revered the forest's power.

Shadows slip between clusters of children of the briar and decrepitlooking zombies. Shambling mounds wander aimlessly, snuffling for scraps. Sap demons toy with possessed travelers and briar men foray out, returning periodically with captives who are taken into the palace of briars and never seen again.

SAMPLE ENCOUNTERS (CR 5):

- 1 advanced child of the briar, drilling a unit of 5 musk creeper zombies
- 3 advanced children of the briar, strutting proudly
- 2 briar men, returning to camp with a captured forest goblin
- 2 roving shadows

• 2 sap demons, laughing and joking as they toy with their hosts

To get into the briar palace, PCs will need to sneak past this ragtag army. They have several options:

Bluff—Claiming to be a human possessed by a sap demon is an opposed Bluff check with a +5 bonus if the target is disguised appropriately (see Disguise below). Bluff can also be used to distract NPCs or allay suspicions if the PCs are spotted.

Disguise—Making a character look like they're possessed by a sap demon is a minor detail (+5 check modifier).

Stealth—Patches of heavy undergrowth provide 30% concealment and a +5 circumstance bonus on Stealth checks. Unless the alarm has



CR 2

CR 9

CR 6



been raised, assume all enemies take 10 on their Perception checks and are distracted (-5 modifier).

Perception (with -5 modifier for being distracted):

- Musk Creeper Zombie –5
- Child of the Briar +2
- Sap Demon +2
- Shadow +3
- Briar Man +5

VIOLENCE: The party may resort to a surgical strike if Bluff and Stealth fails them. If combat finishes within 1 round, allow PCs to make a Stealth check with a -10 penalty (modified by any cover they can get to) to hide before anyone glances in their direction.

RAISING THE ALARM: The camp goes on alert if humanoid intrusion is detected. Shadows patrol the outskirts in pairs while hunting parties spread out to look for the PCs (select from the sample encounters above). Briar Men also replace the zombies at location BP1.

PCs that flee the scene may trigger a shrieking mandrake root, giving away their position and attracting the briar beast.

THE PALACE OF BRIARS

At the heart of the tumuli sits a dome of stygian briars. The wood looks dead and brittle but still an effective barrier. Finger-length thorns protrude in all directions, like a regiment of tiny spears. **FEATURES:** The black briars are native to the Shadow Realms (Knowledge [planes] DC 24). Treat the dome as a non-magical *wall of thorns* (see *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Core Rulebook*) that exists in both the Material and Ethereal Planes. Passageways are unlit unless noted otherwise. The whole palace is filled with a rhythmic clickety-clack as hundreds of children of the briar chant in unison.

TERRAIN: The floor is carpeted with thorns, but characters can move safely if they stay at normal walking speed. Trip or bull rush attempts gain a +1 bonus due to the uncertain footing, and running or charging risks falling (Acrobatics DC 10) and taking 1d4 damage. Children of the Briar ignore these penalties.

BP1. DOOR OF THORNS (CR 4)

A mass of taut vines form a thorny mesh door (hardness 5, hp 30, Break DC 23), held together by a tangle of interlocked spines (Disable Device DC 25). They're enchanted to respond to commands of the King of Thorns or his briar men (Use Magical Device DC 25).

CREATURES: Two musk creeper zombies guard the doorway, wearing the ragged raiment of ancient lords. If the alarm is raised, they are replaced by briar men (see location BP2 for statistics).

TERRAIN: The dome overhangs the doorway, allowing PCs to hide there.

TRAP: Breaking the door open or inflicting more than 10 damage on it activates the flailing thorns trap.

•• Tales of the Old Margreve ••••

FLAILING THORNS

CR 4

TYPE mechanical; PERCEPTION DC 16; DISABLE DEVICE DC 25 TRIGGER proximity; RESET manual

EFFECT atk +15 (3d6 piercing damage and target is pinned, Ref DC 20 halves damage and avoids pin); thorns (3 damage/round that target is pinned)

NOTE: Pinned characters are trapped up to their elbows in a mass of thorns. They can be freed by grappling (CMD 25) or by someone else making a Disable Device check (DC 25).

YELLOW MUSK ZOMBIE (2)

CR 1/2

XP 200 EACH

HP 12 each (see Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary)

BP2. Exsanguinarium (EL varies)

Blood drips slowly from bodies tangled in the thorny ceiling. Hundreds of children of the briar crouch here, swaying and clicking as one. Occasionally, one of them stretches up to catch a falling droplet in their mouth. A larger briar man strides around the chamber, applying a scourge to the back of anyone who strays out of time with the chorus.

This room is used to harvest vampire blood to create briar men and is part of the ritual that appeases the Margreve and hides the Palace of Briars.

CREATURES: There are 300 children of the briar in this chamber, but none notice the PCs unless they draw attention to themselves. If they engage the briar man in combat, there's a 50% chance each round that one of the larger children notices and joins the fight. If area effect spells hit the chanting mob, they may well wake from their trance-adding an army of the briar (see page 85) to the fight.

FEATURES: The emaciated humanoids tangled in the ceiling are vampire spawn, immobilized by hawthorn roots piercing their chests. They remain fractionally aware-eyes wide in pain and terror, fanged mouths open in silent screams.

The chanting is a variant on the Oldwood Rite incantation (Spellcraft DC 20) (see MAGIC IN THE MARGREVE section, page 23), feeding the forest with power and requesting sanctuary and concealment from prying eyes. If PCs destroy the chanters in both exsanguinariums, the magic hiding Catchweed and the briar palace comes to an end.

ADVANCED CHILD OF THE BRIAR

CR 2

HP 13 (see Maargreve Bestiary, page 24; see Pathfinder Roleplaying *Game Bestiary* for advanced template)

BRIAR MAN **CR 3**

XP 800

XP 600

NE Medium undead

INIT +3; SENSES darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Perception +9

DEFENSE

AC 16, touch 13, flat-footed 13 (+3 Dex, +3 natural) HP 29(4d8+11); fast healing 2 FORT +3, REF +6, WILL +4

DEFENSIVE ABILITIES channel resistance +2, undead traits; DR 5/ silver; RESIST cold 10, electricity 10

WEAKNESSES vampire weaknesses, vulnerable to fire

OFFENSE SPEED 30 ft.

SPEED 30 ft., climb 20 ft.			
MELEE 2 claws +6 (1d4+3 plus grab)			

SPACE 5 ft.; REACH 10 ft.

SPECIAL ATTACKS constrict (1d4+3 plus blood drain), dominate (DC 16), spitdart tongue, thorny grapple

SPELL-LIKE ABILITIES (CL 4th; concentration +6)

3/day—briar magic (DC 12)

1/day—entangle (DC 13)

TACTICS

DURING COMBAT The briar man moves to constrict as quickly as possible.

MORALE Briar men flee if reduced to 10 hp or of attacked by fire or undead-affecting magic.

STATISTICS

STR 16, DEX 16, CON —, INT 11, WIS 11, CHA 14 BASE ATK +3; CMB +12 (+16 grappling); CMD 20 FEATS Lightning Reflexes, Toughness SKILLS intimidate +9, Climb +18, Perception +9, Stealth +10 (+16 in forest)

RACIAL MODIFIERS +8 climb, +2 perception, +6 stealth in forest LANGUAGES Briarclick (spoken only), Common, Sylvan SQ fey blood, shadowless, spider climb, vampire likeness **GEAR** cold-iron scourge (treat as whip)

SPECIAL ABILITIES

BRIAR MAGIC (SP) Briar men can cast any of the following spells (3/ day) as a spell-like ability: dancing lights, daze, ghost sound, light, prestidigitation.

- FEY BLOOD (Ex) Although undead, briar men also count as fey for effects related to type.
- **SPITDART TONGUE (Ex)** Briar men can spit a wooden spike from their mouths every other round. Treat this as a dart (1d2 damage, range 20 ft.).
- VAMPIRE LIKENESS (SU) Briar men have the weaknesses and special abilities of vampires (see Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary) with the following exceptions: briar men can dominate both humanoids and plants; daylight does not destroy them, but negates their fast healing and makes them fatigued; they have no coffins, cannot assume gaseous form, and are destroyed if reduced to 0 hp.

DEVELOPMENT: If freed, the vampire spawn don't remember much. They're newly spawned and most can't clearly recall being created (they were abducted by the King of Thorns' minions and spawned by Valanora). They don't understand their fate, and if it's made clear to them, some will beg for death. Ravenous hunger soon drives them to attack the PCs.

CR 4

STARVING VAMPIRE SPAWN (4)

XP 800 EACH

HP 26 (currently 1 hp) each (see Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary)

DEVELOPMENT: Starving vampire spawn make a Will save each round (DC 15) or attack. They attack frenziedly, desperate for blood.





Once a source of blood presents itself, they fight to the death. Having no coffin, spawn reduced to 0 hp perish after lingering in mist form for 2 hours.

BP3. SANGUINE ALCHEMY

The chamber is filled with red-stained alchemical equipment. Desiccated bats hang from the ceiling. The foul scent of decaying blood hangs heavy in the air.

Here, the King of Thorns experiments in harnessing the power of vampire blood. Amidst the test tubes are a dissected child of the briar and small pots holding cuttings of basidirond, yellow musk creeper, and assassin vine—all regularly fed with blood.

CREATURES: Karayan is a greater shadow with a talent for poisons and alchemy. Longtime companion to the King of Thorns, he works to perfect new recipes and in return is allowed to feed on captured creatures before they're transformed into vampires. PCs likely catch him working on his latest batch of potions using a pair of *tenebrous gloves*.

KARAYAN, GREATER SHADOW

XP 4,800

HP 58 (see Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary)

INT 16; SKILLS Craft (alchemy) +15, Fly +15, Knowledge (arcana) +15,

Knowledge (local) +12, Knowledge (nature) +12, Knowledge (religion) +15, Perception +13, Stealth +20 (dim light +24, bright light +16)

GEAR tenebrous gloves

TREASURE: There are potions of *bull's strength, cat's grace, darkvision, gaseous form,* and *spider climb* here, but being brewed from vampire blood, they may have unforeseen side-effects at the GM's discretion.

TENEBROUS GLOVES

AURA faint illusion (shadow); CL 9th SLOT hand; PRICE 6,000 gp; WEIGHT —

DESCRIPTION

Created to allow shadows to interact with the material world, these gloves allow an incorporeal creature to handle physical objects as if by *mage hand*. Material creatures treat them a *ghost touch weapons*, but without any attack bonus.

CONSTRUCTION

CR 8

REQUIREMENTS Craft Wondrous Item, mage hand, shadow walk; COST 3,000 gp

DEVELOPMENT: Karayan parleys in a murmuring voice that undulates in and out of audibility. He can tell PCs much of what

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•••• Tales of the Old Margreve ••••

occurs in the Briar Palace but does not directly betray his oldest (and only) friend, the King of Thorns. His aim in any negotiation is to escape unharmed and keep his gloves.

TP4. HALL OF TRIBUTE

Surely every gift, bribe, and token ever offered to a child of the briar is in this room. Coins, jewelry, knickknacks, and curiosities... and hundreds of tiny acorn cups, each holding a blood-red pellet.

CREATURE: Woven into the ceiling is a sleeping briar man. If the alarm is raised he awakes and drops down on unauthorized visitors. Characters can avoid waking him with a Stealth check (DC 14).

TRAPS: This room warded by a flailing thorns trap (see Door of Thorns, area BP1, page 89). An enchanted mandrake root is planted just inside the room (see page 88).

BRIAR MAN, CR 4

XP 800

HP 29 (see page 90)

TREASURE: The room contains 1,350 gp in baubles and curios. Among them are a *living stake* and several mementos from Catchweed's adventures in the shadow fey courts: *elixirs of love* and *vision*, a *swan boat feather token*, a *hand of the mage*, and a *necklace of strangulation*.

LIVING STAKE

AURA faint necromancy; CL 5th

SLOT —; PRICE 750 gp; WEIGHT 1 lb.

DESCRIPTION

Created from mandrake root, the living stake longs to taste the heart's blood of vampires. A successful melee attack attaches it to a vampire's chest. Roots force their way into the creature's heart, negating fast healing and preventing gaseous form. If the target is reduced to 0 hp, it is immobilized as if it had been staked. The stake can be pulled out (Strength DC 20), provoking an attack of opportunity; this destroys the magic item. The stake has no effect on targets other than vampires.

CONSTRUCTION

REQUIREMENTS Craft Wondrous Item, halt undead; COST 375 gp

DEVELOPMENT: Each acorn cup contains a pellet of solidified blood, labeled with the name of its donor. If the pellet is consumed, any save the target makes against an effect of the imbiber's suffers a -2 penalty for 24 hours.

If PCs have previously given a cupful of blood to a child of the briar, their tribute is here among the acorn cups. The King of Thorns will consume a PC's pellet as soon as he identifies them.

TP5. THORN KING'S SANCTUM

The walls of this room are adorned with umbral tapestries and statuettes of delicate silver filigree. Opposite the entrance is a pair of wooden thrones. The leftmost is occupied by a severe young woman in scarlet robes. Briars seem to be growing all around her, pinning her to the chair.

In the centre of this room is a miniature forest, a tiny model of the whole Margreve.

CREATURES: Sitting on the throne is Dame Valanora, captured during a hunting expedition in the forest and now Catchweed's unwilling ally. She's immobilized by a *living stake* pushed through her heart. If freed she forms a temporary alliance with the party.

FEATURES: The miniature forest is a living replica of the Old Margreve, produced in exacting detail. PCs can easily identify various locations like Utburd's Henge, the Spider City, Levoča, and the Honey Queen's cave. Only the Margreve's heart lacks detail. Anyone making a prolonged examination of the miniature will feel the telltale tingle of magic and see additional details appearing: it allows a user to *scry* (1/day) somewhere in the forest, as a 7th-level druid.

TRAP: This room warded by a flailing thorns trap (see Door of Thorns, area BP1, page 89).

The King of Thorns is also in this room.

XP 3,200	
NE Large undead (augmented plant)	
INIT +5; SENSES darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Perception +:	17
DEFENSE	
AC 23, touch 14, flat-footed 18 (+5 Dex, +9 natural, -1 size)	
HP 75 (10d8+30); fast healing 5	
Fort +6, Ref +10, Will +8	
DEFENSIVE ABILITIES channel resistance +4, undead traits; DR 1	.0/
magic and silver; RESIST cold 10, electricity 10	
WEAKNESSES vampire weaknesses, vulnerable to fire	
OFFENSE	
SPEED 40 ft.; climb 20 ft.	
MELEE 2 claws +11 (1d6+4 plus grab)	
SPACE 10 ft.; REACH 15 ft.	
SPECIAL ATTACKS blood drain, constrict (1d6+4 plus blood	
drain), create spawn, dominate (DC 17), spitdart tongu	e,
thorny grapple	
SPELL-LIKE ABILITIES (CL 10th; concentration +8)	
3/day—briar magic (DC 13)	
1/day— <i>entangle</i> (DC 14)	
SPELLS KNOWN (CL 10th; concentration +8)	
4th (1/day)—shadow conjuration, speak with plants	
3rd (4/day)—crushing despair (DC 17), dispel magic,	
displacement, major image (DC 16)	
2nd (5/day)—blur, darkness, enthrall (DC 16), mirror image,	
pyrotechnics	
1st (6/day)—cause fear (DC 14), charm person (DC 15), hide	ous
laughter (DC 15), minor image (DC 14), ventriloquism	
0 (at will)—detect magic, lullaby (DC 14), mage hand, messo	ige,
read magic, resistance	
TACTICS	-
BEFORE COMBAT Catchweed stalks the PCs. Speaking via	
ventriloquism, he claims that his plans are in the Margreve	's
best interests. He tries to use charm person on PCs and we	ake

best interests. He tries to use *charm person* on PCs and weaken their resolve with *crushing despair*. He prepares for combat by casting *displacement*, *mirror image*, and *blur*.

- **DURING COMBAT** he uses *pyrotechnics* to disperse PC fires and tries to pick them off one by one.
- **MORALE** If reduced below 35 hp, Catchweed casts *darkness* and flees through the briar walls in mist form to regain his strength before gathering allies and attacking again.



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STATISTICS

STR 18, DEX 20, CON -, INT 15, WIS 13, CHA 17

BASE ATK +7; CMB +12 (+16 grappling); CMD 27

FEATS Combat Casting, Eschew Components, Lightning Reflexes, Silent Spell, Spell Focus (enchantment)

SKILLS Bluff +16, Climb +17, Diplomacy +6, Intimidate +10, Perception +17, Spellcraft +7, Stealth +17 (+23 in forest), Use Magic Device +8; RACIAL MODIFIERS +8 Bluff, +8 climb, +8 perception, +8 sense motive, +8 stealth (+14 in forest)

LANGUAGES Aklo, Briarclick (spoken only), Common, Sylvan

SQ fey blood, gaseous form, misdirection, shadowless, spider climb, vampire likeness

COMBAT GEAR cap of thorns

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **BRIAR MAGIC (SP)** Catchweed can cast any of the following spells as a spell-like ability (3/day): *daze, dancing lights, ghost sound, light, prestidigitation.*
- **FEY BLOOD (EX)** Although undead, the King of Thorns also counts as fey for effects related to type.
- MISDIRECTION (SU) Unless the PCs have disrupted both incantations (location BP2), Catchweed is under the effects of a *misdirection* spell and the *Oldwood Rite* incantation (see MAGIC IN THE MARGREVE section, page 20).
- **SCÁTHSIDHE SECRETS (SU)** Catchweed casts spells as a 10th-level bard but has no other bardic abilities.
- **SPITDART TONGUE (Ex)** Catchweed can spit a wooden spike from his mouth every 2 rounds. Treat this as a dart (1d2 damage, base range 20 ft.).
- VAMPIRE LIKENESS (SU) Catchweed has the weaknesses and special abilities of a vampire (see *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary*) with the following exceptions: Catchweed can *dominate* both humanoids and plants; and daylight does not destroy him, but negates his fast healing and makes him fatigued.
- Unlike briar men, Catchweed can assume gaseous form, and he does have a coffin. His coffin is a large gall buried beneath the miniature forest in location TP5.

DAME VALANORA

XP 6.400

CR 9

Female human vampire sorcerer 8 (see Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary)

HP 102 (currently 1 hp)

TREASURE: Lining the walls are mementos from the Shadow Realms (total value 800 gp). Some of these objects are silver and can be wielded against vampires as improvised weapons.

CAP OF THORNS

AURA strong enchantment; CL 7th SLOT head; PRICE 35,000 gp; WEIGHT 1/2 lb.

DESCRIPTION

Donning this thorny wooden circlet causes it to meld with your scalp. It can be removed only upon your death or by a *remove curse*. The cap suckles at your blood, causing 2d4 damage. After this initial feeding, however, the thorns feed only 1/day for 1d4 damage.

You can sacrifice 1 hp/HD you possess to cast a special

entangle made of thorny vines. Entangled creatures must make a Will save (DC 14 + your Cha modifier) each round they take damage from the thorns, or be affected by a *charm monster* spell. The victim will then be free from the cap's entangle but carry thorny vines melded into their flesh. The target is allowed a fresh Will save every week, with a cumulative +1 to the DC per week they've been effected (maximum of +4), as the thorns become more deeply rooted. The thorns fall from the target's body if they make a successful Will save, and they can also be dispelled by magic that affects curses.

CONSTRUCTION

REQUIREMENTS Craft Wondrous Item, charm monster, entangle, fey blood; Cost 17,500 gp

Concluding the Adventure

Unless stopped, Catchweed forges a new kingdom that soon clashes with the other powers of the forest. He eventually perfects creating spawn, and a new breed of vampire briar men become the enforcers of his regime. Battles with shadow fey and ghost knights from the Grisal Marches keep his power in check, but for the foreseeable future, the northern Margreve is a much more dangerous place.

If Catchweed is defeated, his army soon falls to squabbling and disbands. Briars cease to spread unnaturally, and those bearing the king's mark recover from their enchanted servitude. Children of the briar creep back into their nests with another grudge to add to their long list of grievances, but their behavior is otherwise soon back to normal.





By Ben McFarland

No fires burn throughout the Old Margreve and fey trickery is afoot! Will you journey deep into the Heart of the woods to lift the terrible curse before the cold bite of winter kills countless innocents?

"Grandmother's Fire" is a wilderness adventure suitable for PCs of 8th or 9th level.

Adventure Background

Ince, there was a werewolf named Dmitri who loved a village girl named Elena. Knowing Elena's family would never accept his curse, Dmitri met Elena as a woodcutter and concealed his true nature. They fell in love, continuing to meet secretly in the woods until Dmitri could "find the right moment" to talk to Elena's family.

A jealous vodyanoi watched their trysts from the river and coveted the beautiful girl. After learning the werewolf's secret, the creature kidnapped Elena and turned her into its rusalka wife.

Despite the werewolf's pleas, the vodyanoi refused to release the girl's spirit.

Desperate to free his beloved from vodyanoi slavery, the werewolf sought advice from a Kariv oracle who claimed only Grandmother's fire could manage the task. With the conviction of true love, Dmitri stole Baba Yaga's skull of embers. However, while racing back to dry Elena's shawl, Dmitri was captured by ghouls, and the skull was lost to the vodyanoi.

A furious Baba Yaga cursed the whole of the Margreve for the theftso long as she has no cinders in her hearth, no fire burns within the forest and the people suffer the cold until they return what was stolen.

Into all of this come the adventurers...

Adventure Summarv

While crossing the Margreve, the adventurers encounter ghoulish Ghost Knights of Doresh hunting peasants. During the ensuing battle, it's discovered that fire spells only generate cold or acid effects. Afterward, the rescued serfs fearfully explain that they seek Baba Yaga to ask why fires no longer burn. They beg for the characters' escort.

At her walking hut, Baba Yaga declares a thief stole the fire from her stove. The Margreve will know only the cold of her hearth and the bile of her anger until the embers return. If they accept, she grants the magical sight to follow the thief's trail with a warning of dire consequences for failure.

Tracking the culprit leads to the edge of the Margreve's Heart. Werewolves tear apart well-armored corpses while unconscious captives, including the thief, hang in cages. The werewolves attack any characters attempting to claim Dmitri. Upon waking, Dmitri explains his actions and explains if the party helps him recover the skull, they may claim the cinders.

On the way to the vodyanoi's sacred pool in the Heart of the Margreve, the rusalka Elena begs them to turn back. Made to realize her folly, however, she aids them in defeating the vodyanoi. While

Dmitri steals the shawl, the vodyanoi fights bitterly at its pool, summoning boiling gevsers and steaming elementals to slav the party. Its death frees Elena and allows the skull's return.

Adventure hooks

The characters begin this adventure during any trip through the Old Margreve although the story has its greatest urgency when set in late fall, as the lack of fire means the impending winter will be quite deadly to the many forest communities. This hook relies upon the adventurers' good nature and willingness to help a group of scared commoners.

Other motivations might include:

- The party may know the werewolf but be unaware of his true nature. He asks for their aid with a task.
- The party may know the drowned girl. Her family asks the group to recover her body and attend her funeral pyre.

Part 1: Proper Runted

As the story begins, the characters are traveling along the road in the Old Margreve on a crisp, late autumn day...

COURSING PEASANTS (CR 10)

The autumn air is crisp, with a hint of approaching frost and the Old Margreve is calm as your group makes its way along the Tinker's Trail. Suddenly, the quiet is broken as a group of people burst from the foliage ahead. Oblivious to you, they look back with panic evident in their faces. Faint, hollowsounding barks echo through the woods, as if hounds pursued them, and are quickly joined by the muted thunder of hooves.

Allow Perception checks to spot the arrival of the Ghost Knights:

CREATURES: These are a contingent of Ghost Knights of Doresh, ghoulish warriors of that princedom. They often hunt the forest's occupants for sport.

TERRAIN: This portion of the Old Margreve is mostly old-growth, with a tall canopy and some scattered brush. Otherwise, the sky is visible only in slivers and fragments through the branches. Flight is possible to an altitude of 20 ft. before becoming entangled. Areas of brush or trees are difficult terrain. Areas of evergreen trees provide cover and concealment. Illumination is normal during the day and limited to what the characters possess at night. The peasants carry a flickering sunrod shedding dim illumination if this encounter occurs at night. The weather is slightly overcast and cool. Characters sleeping outdoors awaken to a frost.

During this adventure, no fire burns. Alchemist's fire and oil do nothing but soak the target. Spells or items inflicting fire damage instead cause either cold or acid damage. This effect is immediately apparent to the caster or wielder and no amount of experimenting allows fires to burn during the adventure. Characters with already burning objects find the flames

•••• Grandmother's Fire ••••

extinguished, and the items burst back into flame upon leaving the forest. (Reasons for this are explained in **THE DANCING HUT** section, below.)

PERCEPTION CHECKS:

DC 12-Characters see knights approaching.

DC 15—Some of the horses appear translucent. And there are flying, skeletal dogs!

DC 17—Characters notice the knights' livery (Knowledge [local]). *DC 22*—There's something unusual about the knights (Knowledge [religion] notices their ghoulish nature).

KNOWLEDGE (LOCAL) CHECKS:

DC 13—Those are Ghost Knights of Doresh!

DC 17—Knights with that sort of armament are usually undead.

DC 21—Those are Honest Brothers (full knights) from the Walker's Wood Commandery of Dame Orkov

KNOWLEDGE (RELIGION) CHECKS:

DC 17—Some of those horses appear to be ghostly mounts, bound to their riders. They are a lesser form of ghost.

DC 19—Those knights appear to be ghouls, with a pack of lich hounds! **IF THE KNIGHTS ARE SPOTTED:**

A group of mounted warriors pauses, visible through the foliage. Some of their mounts shimmer and waver, as if insubstantial, and several skeletal creatures lope past them, feet floating over the ground as they run toward the peasants.

The characters may wish to act. If so, roll for initiative, but first read the following:

The flying skeletal hounds yip and bark turning in your direction. Somehow, the creatures appear to have sensed your group and the whole party has turned in your direction. They may not see you yet, but they certainly will and in short order.

The lich hounds' lifesense ability detects the presence of the characters as stronger life forces, and their orders dictate they should chase the strongest humanoids they sense. The lich hounds turn to pursue the characters, and the Ghost Knights follow suit. Unless the party acts first and takes steps to magically conceal their locations, the hunting party discovers them and attacks.

GHOST KNIGHT OF DORESH (4)

CR4

XP 1,200
Male ghoul fighter 3
LE Medium undead
INIT +3; SENSES darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +3
Defense
AC 21, touch 13, flat-footed 18 (+6 armor, +3 Dex, +2 natural)
HP 35 (2d8+4 plus 3d10+6)
FORT +5, REF +4, WILL +7; +1 vs. fear effects
DEFENSIVE ABILITIES channel resistance +2, undead traits

OFFENSE SPEED 30 ft.

MELEE bite +8 (1d6+3 plus disease and paralysis) and 2 claws +3 (1d6+3 plus paralysis) or battleaxe +8 (1d8+3/x3) and bite +3 (1d6+1 plus disease and paralysis) or lance +8 (1d8+3/x3) and bite +3 (1d6+1 plus disease and paralysis)

SPECIAL ATTACKS paralysis (1d4+1 rounds, DC 14, elves are immune to this effect)



TACTICS

DURING COMBAT The Ghost Knights charge, lances leveled. They shift to battleaxe and bite if unhorsed, trying to return to their mount when possible. They target spellcasters first, but immediately shift their focus to any cleric who channels positive energy, even dismounting to better utilize their paralytic attacks. MORALE The Ghost Knights fight until only one remains, at which

time the lone remaining knight attempts to flee into the forest. STATISTICS

STR 17, DEX 17, CON —, INT 13, WIS 16, CHA 14

ВАSE АТК +5; СМВ +8 (+10 for Bull Rush); СМD +21

FEATS Improved Bull Rush, Mounted Combat, Power Attack, Trample, Weapon Finesse

SKILLS Acrobatics +2, Climb +5, Perception +8, Ride +6, Stealth +5, Swim +2; includes armor check penalties

LANGUAGES Common, Darakhul

SQ armor training 1

TREASURE npc gear (battleaxe, breastplate, heavy steel shield, lance)

SPECIAL ABILITIES

DISEASE (Su) Ghoul Fever—injury; save Fort DC 14 (Charismabased); onset 1 day; frequency 1 day; effect 1d3 Con and 1d3 Dex damage; cure 2 consecutive saves.

CR 3

GHOSTLY MOUNT (2)

XP 800

N Large undead (incorporeal) INIT +2; SENSES darkvision 60 ft., scent; Perception +14

DEFENSE

AC 12, touch 12, flat-footed 10 (+1 deflection, +2 Dex, -1 size) HP 11 (2d8+2)



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... Tales of the Old Margreve

FORT +3, REF +5, WILL +1

DEFENSIVE ABILITIES channel resistance +4, incorporeal, rejuvenation, undead traits

OFFENSE

SPEED fly 50 ft. (perfect)

MELEE corrupting touch +0 (3d6, Fort DC 11)

SPACE 10 ft.; REACH 5 ft.

TACTICS

DURING COMBAT Ghostly mounts attack with their corrupting touch as directed by their rider.

MORALE Ghostly mounts fight until destroyed or until their rider is slain.

STR -, DEX 14, CON -, INT 2, WIS 13, CHA 11

BASE ATK +1; CMB +2; CMD 13 (17 vs. trip)

FEATS Endurance, Run^B

SKILLS Perception +14, Stealth +10; RACIAL MODIFIERS +8 Perception, +8 Stealth

SQ undying service

SPECIAL ABILITIES

CORRUPTING TOUCH (SU) As a ghost's corrupting touch ability (see *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary*).

- **REJUVENATION (SU)** As a ghost's rejuvenation ability (see *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary*).
- **UNDYING SERVICE (SU)** A ghostly mount can support its rider as if it were corporeal. It continues to do so even if it passes through another corporeal creature.

HORSES (2)

CR 1

CR 4

XP 400 EACH

HP 15 (see Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary)

TRAITS Combat trained and corpsehardened (see CORPSEHARDENED TRAIT sidebar)

LICH HOUND (2)

XP 1,200 EACH

NE Small undead

INIT +3; SENSES lifesense 200 ft., low-light vision; Perception +3

DEFENSE

AC 18, touch 18, flat-footed 15 (+3 Dex, +4 deflection, +1 size) HP 42 (5d8+20)

FORT +5, REF +4, WILL +4

DEFENSIVE ABILITIES undead traits

OFFENSE

SPEED 30 ft., fly 50 ft.

MELEE bite +7 melee (1d12 plus trip)

SPACE 5 ft.; REACH 5 ft.

SPECIAL ATTACKS gut rip

SPELL-LIKE ABILITIES (CL 5th; concentration +9)

3/day—ethereal jaunt

TACTICS

DURING COMBAT Using their lifesense ability, the lich hounds turn and hunt the characters, howling and then attempting to trip them to better use their gut rip attack.

MORALE Lich hounds hunt until destroyed.

STATISTICS

STR 10, DEX 17, CON —, INT 6, WIS 10, CHA 18 BASE ATK +3; CMB +2 (+6 for trip); CMD 15 (19 vs. trip) FEATS Alertness, Skill Focus (Survival), Weapon Finesse

SKILLS Fly +8, Perception +6, Sense Motive +2, Stealth +7, Survival +9 LANGUAGE understands Darakhul

EANGOAGE UNderstands Daraki

SQ ethereal jaunt

SPECIAL ABILITIES

GUT RIP (EX) A lich hound can, as a swift action that does not provoke attacks of opportunity, tear into any adjacent prone creature for 2d12 damage, ripping its intestines out from the inside. Combined with the *deathwatch* aspect of its lifesense ability, gut rip allows lich hounds to perform a coup de grace action as a swift action rather than as a standard action.

- HowL (Ex) The eerie howl of lich hounds in pursuit of their prey often shakes the morale of living creatures that can hear the noise.
 Those creatures are shaken for 5 rounds (Will DC 16; Charismabased; sonic). Creatures that successfully save against this effect cannot be affected by that lich hound's howl for 24 hours.
- **LIFESENSE (SU)** A lich hound notices and locates living creatures within 200 ft., just as if it possessed the blindsight ability. It also automatically senses the strength of a creature's life force, as if it had cast *deathwatch*.

DEVELOPMENT: With the Knights slain or driven off, the peasants approach the characters:

A group of rough and dirty peasants emerge from behind a large, moss-covered stone. All men, the fear of their recent flight still colors their faces, and boldest amongst them approaches you. His beard still has a twig in it as he speaks.

"Mighty lords, we owe you our lives. Still, we must beg such powerful heroes as you for another favor. No fire burns in the forest, and we don't know why. The Kariv oracle we consulted clutched her head, crying out when she tried to read the innards of her divining crab. She made a warding sign and told us to seek out old Baba Yaga, that only Grandmother could say why we must live in the dark and cold. The Fell Crone is potent and we are men with families. Please. Winter is coming, and without fire, the snows will kill our children. Will you go to her hut and ask mercy on our behalf? Or perhaps learn what angers her so? Please! Nothing more, we swear it!"

The peasants have little to offer but do know the way to Baba Yaga's hut. They performed an incantation to divine its location from the forest. They do not personally know this incantation and cannot share it.

If the characters decline, their adventure has one chance to continue. Allow them to continue, but allow no fire effects within the Margreve until they return the cinders to Baba Yaga. She eats these peasants when they visit her. On the first night they camp, the forest is unnaturally cold. Unless they sleep in an extradimensional space, characters and mounts must make Fortitude saves each hour (DC 15, +1 per previous check) or take 1d6 nonlethal damage. Any bonuses from Survival apply normally. If the characters decide to backtrack, they may follow the peasants' trail and find Baba Yaga's home.

THE DANCING HUT

The peasants lead the characters into the Margreve, following game trails and woodcutters' footpaths for 2 hours before approaching a clearing. Within the meadow is a small wooden hut surrounded by a cast iron fence. On each picket, save two, sits a bare skull. A tiny spark flickers in each eye socket.

The hut always seems to face away from the adventurers, no matter



how they circle it. To enter, one must say, "Turn your back to the forest, your front to me" (Knowledge [arcane, history, or local] DC 25); after a few attempts at finding the entrance to the hut, peasants speak up, as one remembers the phrase:

The hut stands up on an enormous pair of chicken legs. In a few unceremonious steps, it turns and settles back down again without any sign of ever having moved.

When the party approaches the gate, it swings open untouched. The hut shudders like a bird settling into a nest as the group crosses the threshold. The peasants beg to remain outside, offering to watch mounts and animal companions. They fear Baba Yaga, swearing any oath the characters desire to avoid entering.

The front door swings open without a touch. Inside, a goldeneyed cat strolls across the threshold. "Fools," it mutters. "Come in, quick, before she rages again."

The cat eyes any animal companions, telling the characters to leave their pets outside.

Those entering the hut find it is larger inside than outside. Random objects float about; disembodied hands use knives to cut slivers of meat and sweep the floor with a silver birch broom. An old woman leans over a cylindrical basin, holding an enormous pestle while staring into the waters within the basin. Several lanterns illuminate the structure.

"Pfaw," spits the crone, slapping the surface of the water with her dark nails before turning to face you. Her face twists with anger, her iron teeth evident in her scowl. She stands slightly hunched but her eyes hold a terrible cunning ferocity. She leers at you with a butcher's appraising glance. "What brings you to Grandmother? It is not easy to find my home," the Fell Crone gestures for you to come closer. "Speak! Before I grow angry and add your skulls to my fence..." Accentuating the comment, invisible hands slam the door shut behind you.

Baba Yaga doesn't attack the characters inside her hut, but she threatens violence more than once. Any attack against her here by the characters simply fails to inflict damage although she comments she "Will remember your little tantrum for another day." Baba Yaga answers the following questions:

- WHY WON'T FIRE BURN? "A thief took the fire from my stove in a skull from my fence. And so I cursed the Margreve."
- WHEN WILL YOU LIFT THE CURSE? "When the fire and the skull carrying it are returned. Until then, the Margreve will know only the cold of my hearth and the bile of my anger."
- Do you know who stole your HEARTH CINDERS? "A fool of a boy named Dmitri, who claimed he had a question. Oh, I'll not forget his face."
- Why don't you reclaim them yourself? "Because I've another task to tend to elsewhen. And as long as I suffer, the Margreve suffers. Suffering tends to motivate people like you."
- WHAT WILL YOU GIVE US IF WE RECOVER THE EMBERS? "I'll not eat you this day or the day you return my fire."
- Can you give us anything to help recover the embers? "Heb. Since you're willing, yes. Until the sun rises, you can see the thief's footsteps through the Margreve. This is my aid to you."
- As the party leaves:



"Do not fail me in this," her trailing voice is the crush of dead leaves and gravel. "I'll not forget you."

Time flows a little differently within Baba Yaga's hut. The conversation with her might take a blink of an eye or several hours. Depending on the role desired for terrain and illumination, adjust the passage of time spent conversing with the Fell Crone. Even the location seems slightly different, as if the hut moved while they were inside, but the fence is in the same relative position. The peasants are gone when the characters exit the hut, but any mounts remain, secure and unmolested. Speaking to the animals indicates they did not notice that the hut moved, but things definitely appear different.

Baba Yaga's gift of magical sight lasts until the sun rises tomorrow and makes the thief's steps appear as faintly glowing footprints. Keeping to the trail isn't difficult, but takes several hours due to the terrain. At standard movement rates, they arrive at the next area in 3 hours.

Part 2: Into the Bush

Read the following as the characters travel from Baba Yaga's hut into a dark and foreboding portion the Margreve:

The trees crowd in closer as you follow the thief's route through the forest. Thick trunks of birch and pine crowd out most of the low brush, leaving you to thread your way between grasping branches and melancholy ferns. Few sounds echo through the shadows, and the air hangs heavy with the smell of peat.

As the group approaches, allow Perception checks to detect the sounds and smells coming from the nearby clearing when the group is 50 ft. from it. The characters can make these checks at 100 ft. away by increasing DCs by 7, but no details above DC 15 can be detected without magical assistance.

•• Tales of the Old Margreve ••••

PERCEPTION CHECK:

DC 10—Characterer notes that something is happening up ahead in the clearing, near a mound.

- DC 15—Character can see men stacking logs in a pile.
- *DC 20*—Those aren't men, those are werewolves!
- DC 25—Those aren't logs, they're corpses!

Two in the Bush (CR 10)

If the party takes precautions to approach stealthily, make Perception checks for the werewolves (+8 Perception, -1 penalty/10 ft. from the clearing). Success indicates the werewolves know the party approaches, possibly knowing how many. Otherwise, the werewolves detect the party 30 ft. from the clearing.

If the werewolves detect the party:

The figures stop stacking whatever they were piling in the clearing. There is a pause, and then, a chorus of long, deep wolf howls breaks the silence of the forest, followed by the muted fluttering of several birds taking flight.

CREATURES: The werewolves recently defeated the junior Ghost Knights guarding this encampment and proceed with the dismembering and destroying of the ghoulish corpses before freeing the prisoners although it may seem they're preparing to eat the prisoners. They suspect more Ghost Knights approach the meadow and ready an action to rage, anticipating battle. They do so as soon as the party engages or becomes visible.

Groups that do not immediately engage the werewolves in combat may attempt to negotiate a peaceful encounter:

DIPLOMACY CHECKS:

DC 34—The werewolves do not believe the party and remain hostile. If the party does not immediately depart, begin combat.

DC 39—The werewolves remain unfriendly and aggressive but do not immediately attack. They discuss the situation and only initiate combat if the party suggests they surrender Dmitri. Permit another check and reduce DCs by 5.

DC 44—The werewolves are indifferent but become hostile should the party suggest they surrender Dmitri. In this case, allow another check to calm relations. The characters may recover the situation if they make another Diplomacy check (DC 30).

If the party fails to make the werewolves friendly, the lycanthropes demand the party leave immediately. Failure to do so initiates combat.

If the werewolves become friendly, they allow Dmitri to talk with the party on the condition the characters peace-tie their weapons and stow any symbols or spell component pouches. The werewolves never leave hybrid form. (Proceed to the **CONFESSIONS OF A WEREWOLF** section, below.)

TERRAIN: The forest is thick here, and areas outside the clearing are difficult terrain. The sky is blocked out by branches and leaves. Flight is possible to an altitude of 15 ft. before becoming entangled. Areas outside the meadow provide cover and concealment. Illumination is dim during the day and limited to what the characters possess at night. Weather is slightly overcast and cool.

THE CAGES: Six dwarves and Dmitri are imprisoned within the 200-lb. cages. Each cage holds an unconscious creature suspended from a 10-ft.high segmented pole which is anchored by two cables to nearby trees. These cables or the pole can be sundered (AC 5; hardness 10; 15 hp), causing the cage to swing down and either away from the sundered cable, or towards the sundered pole. The swinging cage attacks any creature in a 15-ft. cone from either its remaining anchor point or toward the trees: **SWINGING CAGE** (+8 touch attack, 4d6 damage and knocked prone).

RAGING MARGREVE	Werewolf (Hybrid Form) (4) CR 6

XP 2,400

Human natural werewolf barbarian 6

CE Medium humanoid (human, shapechanger)

INIT +6; SENSES low-light vision, scent; Perception +8

<u>DEFENSE</u>

AC 21, touch 10, flat-footed 19 (+7 armor, +2 Dex, +4 natural, -2 rage)

HP 69 (6d12+30)

FORT +11, REF +5, WILL +7

DEFENSIVE ABILITIES improved uncanny dodge, trap sense +2, uncanny dodge; **DR** 10/silver

OFFENSE

SPEED 40 ft. (30 ft. in armor); no escape

MELEE bite +12 (1d8+3 plus trip and curse of lycanthropy) and battleaxe +13/+8 (1d8+10/x3)

RANGED light crossbow +8 (1d8/19–20)

SPECIAL ATTACKS rage powers (augmented animal fury, knockback, renewed vigor)

TACTICS

DURING COMBAT The werewolves fight with tooth and axe, trying to keep foes prone whenever possible.

MORALE They fight until destroyed, they are unwilling to surrender Dmitri to another captor.

BASE STATISTICS AC 23, touch 12, flat-footed 21; HP 57; FORT +9, WILL +5; MELEE bite +10 (1d8+2 plus trip and curse of lycanthropy) and battleaxe +11/+6 (1d8+7/x3); STR 20, CON 17

STATISTICS

STR 24, DEX 15, CON 21, INT 8, WIS 14, CHA 8

ВАЅЕ АТК +6; **СМВ** +13; **СМD** 23

FEATS Power Attack, Improved Initiative, Improved Natural Attack (bite), Weapon Focus (bite)

- **SKILLS** Climb +8, Intimidate +8, Perception +8 Languages Common
- **TREASURE** NPC gear (battleaxe, +1 chainmail, cloak of resistance +1, light crossbow with 20 bolts)
- **SQ** change shape (human, hybrid, and wolf; *polymorph*), lycanthropic empathy (wolves and dire wolves)

SPECIAL ABILITIES

AUGMENTED ANIMAL FURY (Ex) While raging, the barbarian can use its bite attack as part of a full attack at its full base attack bonus –2. Also, the barbarian can make a bite attack as part of the action to maintain or escape from a grapple, before the grapple check. If the attack hits, the barbarian's grapple checks made against the target this round receive a +2 bonus.

DEVELOPMENT: With the werewolves defeated, the cages can be lowered and the occupants freed. Dmitri awakens 1 hour after being freed unless the characters take steps to wake him sooner (Heal DC 20 or any magical healing). The dwarves are reavers from the Black Canton of Grisal in the Ironcrags and quite grateful for their liberation before departing—promising a reward should the characters visit. They don't know Dmitri; he was captured after their incapacitation. Obviously upset after being freed from his captivity, Dmitri does not fight the characters, willingly explaining what happened. •••• Grandmother's Fire ••••

CONFESSIONS OF A WEREWOLF

If the party incapacitated the werewolves, Dmitri asks for mercy on their behalf, stating they didn't capture him. If they are dead, he says nothing but remains visibly upset. He explains his situation:

Dmitri sits up, a hearty young man with a full beard. After taking a drink, he begins speaking, looking at each of you. "Yes. I stole Baba Yaga's fire. I had to. A cruel and jealous vodyanoi drowned my Elena, and now it wants to keep her as its rusalka bride. I couldn't let her spend forever like that, and I sought out the Kariv. Their oracle said if I could dry Elena's shawl, I would free her from the fey," he swallows back tears. "The oracle claimed the only thing that could do that was Grandmother's fire." He gives a bitter laugh, "I can be a charming fellow. I found the dancing hut and spoke with one of her daughters in the woods nearby. I convinced her that I could help her finish her chores for naught but a cup of tea." Shaking his head, Dmitri continues. "We worked until afternoon. Then I suggested to her daughter to collect the firewood, and I would prepare the kettle. After helping all day, she trusted me." Sniffing, his voice is full of disgust. "Once she was gone, I took a skull from fence and filled it with the cinders from the hearth. Like a rabbit, I bolted from there. I swear the skulls screamed 'thief!' as I left. But I no longer have the skull."

Sense Motive checks indicate his sincerity. If asked where the skull is now, he continues:

"As I made my way to the vodyanoi's pool, the Ghost Knights began hunting me. They chased me across the river where the vodyanoi was waiting." Dmitri barks a short, angry laugh, "It churned the river to an angry froth and tripped me as I balanced on a fallen tree. It snatched up the skull while I dangled over the rapids." He chokes back a sob, "The miserable river spirit fled and the ghouls caught me as I scrambled back to my feet. They poisoned me and stuffed me in that cage before hunting further." Dmitri looks up, his eyes tearful, "And then I awoke to you."

Sense Motive checks indicate his sincerity. If asked about the werewolves, he states that they look familiar but he doesn't know them. A Sense Motive check (DC 25) indicates he is lying. If pressed, he says they are fellow villagers, but he didn't want to slander their reputation. A Sense Motive check (DC 30) indicates this is true, but he still holds something back. Dmitri is also a natural werewolf but remains in human form. It is best to keep this secret until the Crossing the River section.

DEVELOPMENT: His story told, Dmitri explains he is willing to help the characters recover the skull, leading them to the vodyanoi's pool, if they will agree to him drying Elena's shawl before returning the fire to Baba Yaga. Travel to the vodyanoi's pool takes an hour on foot.

CROSSING THE RIVER

Halfway to the vodyanoi's pool, the characters come to a river crossing. Standing on a large fallen tree serving as the bridge is a soaked young woman with a bluish tinge to her complexion. This is Elena, the rusalka.

ELLENA XP 2,400

Rusalka (see Margreve Bestiary, page 30) HP 76 DEVELOPMENT: Elena does not fight the characters.

Dmitri immediately recognizes her and begs the characters not to attack. As they approach, he goes to embrace her, but Elena motions for him to stay on the river's edge:

"Wait, my love!" she calls. "Do not do this. I chose this fate to free you from your blood curse," Elena gives him a mournful look. She turns to you, "The vodyanoi claimed he was doomed to be a werewolf. I offered to become its wife if the spirit altered his fate. It agreed." She begins crying. "Once I drowned, it sent word to the Ghost Knights, claiming death frees everyone."

A painful sob escapes from Dmitri. "Oh Elena," his voice breaks, "I was born a werewolf." He looks to your group. "It was my pack brothers you fought in the clearing. I can't be 'freed.""

Her eyes shining, Elena looks at you with a vengeful mien. "The vodyanoi tricked us, but I'll have my revenge." She walks to the far side of the river and touches a large toadstool, its cap filling with water like a bowl. "Anoint your boots with this dew and then wash your faces with just a splash. Until the sun sets tomorrow, you will be able to walk upon the vodyanoi's pool and breathe its waters like air. If you do this, you can kill the cursed fey and free me." She looks back at Dmitri and you, "Will you do this for me? For us?"

Dmitri nods in agreement, asking the characters to participate in this act of righteous vengeance. He apologizes for concealing his true nature before but claims he needed help in freeing Elena. Hasn't he lost enough already?

Doing as Elena instructs grants the characters *water breathing* and *waterwalking* as per the spells until sunset the following day. Dmitri states he will steal the skull while the party engages the fey so does not wash his boots.

DEVELOPMENT: After she's secured the characters' assistance, Elena walks into the river, melting away with the current as the group departs. Travel from this point to the vodyanoi's pool takes another 1/2 hour.

Part 3: The heart of the Matter

Their march takes the characters into the Heart of the Margreve. Trees towering far overhead, this part of the forest is preternaturally quiet and the air so heavy with magic it makes the hair on the back of the characters' necks stand on end.

The spirit of the Margreve watches these events unfold with hungry interest. Any creature willing to suffer damage equal to its HD in sacrifice to the forest gains a +2 bonus to on its next attack and a bonus to damage equal to what it suffered: for example, a 10 HD creature can take 10 damage for a +2 bonus to its next attack and +10 damage on the attack. The vodyanoi knows of this power before combat starts; characters sense it in whispers and mutterings on the wind after they've been wounded here.

The Vodyanoi's Pool (CR 11)

CR 6

As the group approaches the vodyanoi's pool, Dmitri reveals his plan to the characters:

"The vodyanoi certainly knows we're coming. If you go to the edge of its pool and challenge it, the creature's pride will draw it



out to face you. While you fight it, I'll dive into the water and steal the skull from its lair with Elena's help. Don't worry, you have my word—I won't try to flee with the skull. All I want is to free Elena."

Sense Motive checks confirm Dmitri's sincerity. With the plan confirmed, he slinks into the underbrush, shifting into wolf form.

CREATURES: The vodyanoi lairs at this pool, gloating over the rusalka it tricked into becoming its wife. When the characters arrive, it rises up out of the water:

A frog-like man climbs from the water and stands on its surface as if it were solid. His skin is grey-blue, and his beard is a tangle of reeds and stick. His voice is cruel and grating as he addresses you, a light mist of steam rising from his form.

"Trespassers! You have no business in the Heart of the Forest and no right to challenge me. The boy was a clumsy fool and the girl made a bargain with me. I'll not let her go."

The vodyanoi is not interested in discussion. It intends on destroying the characters to prove its superiority. Its link to the power within the skull grants it the spell-like ability to cast *scorching ray* (1/day) and its boiling geyser ability. It has also permitted him to summon up two fire-infused water elementals to help defend his pool. They rise out of the waters on their initiative to attack characters.

As combat begins, Dmitri runs and dives into the pool, changing into his human form mid-dive.

TERRAIN: The forest is fairly open, and areas outside the pool are normal terrain. The sky is visible above through branches and leaves. Flight is possible to an altitude of 65 ft. before becoming entangled. Areas of branches or roots at either end of the fallen tree provide cover and concealment. Illumination is normal during the day and limited to what the characters possess at night. Weather is slightly overcast and cool.

ļ	CINDER-FUELED VODYANOI CR 7
	XP 3,200
	NE Medium fey (water)
	INIT +6; SENSES low-light vision; Perception +18
•	DEFENSE
	AC 20, touch 13, flat-footed 17 (+2 Dex, +1 dodge, +7 natural)
	HP 84 (13d6+39)
	FORT +9, REF +10, WILL +10
	DR 10/cold iron
	OFFENSE
	SPEED 30 ft., swim 30 ft.
	MELEE slam +8 (1d4+2)
	RANGED scorching ray +8 touch (4d6/ray, 3 rays)
:	SPECIAL ATTACKS boiling geyser, breath weapon (60-ft. line of steam
	DC 18, 3d6 fire and blind 1d6 rounds), water mastery
:	SPELL-LIKE ABILITIES (CL 13th; concentration +15)
	At will—water breathing
	1/day—scorching ray
	TACTICS
	DURING COMBAT The vodyanoi tries to blind and knock enemies
	prone so the elementals can further pummel them.
	MORALE The vodyanoi fights to the death.
	STATISTICS
	STR 14, DEX 15, CON 16, INT 14, WIS 14, CHA 12
	BASE ATK +6; CMB +8; CMD 28
ļ	FEATS Ability Focus (boiling geyser), Deceitful, Defensive Combat
	Training, Dodge, Great Fortitude, Improved Initiative, Wind Stance
	SKILLS Bluff +17, Diplomacy +15, Disguise +7, Knowledge (local) +18
	Knowledge (nature) +18, Perception +18, Sense Motive +16,
	Stealth +15, Swim +20, Use Magic Device +14; RACIAL MODIFIER
	+4 Swim

COMBAT GEAR Baba Yaga's cinderskull



•••• Grandmother's Fire ••••

CR 8

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- BOILING GEYSER (SU) The vodyanoi can create a geyser (2/day) of boiling water in a 10-foot square. Living creatures within the area take 6d6 fire damage and are knocked prone (Reflex DC 18 halves damage, still standing; Intelligence-based).
- WATER MASTERY (Ex) The vodyanoi gains a +1 bonus on attack and damage rolls if both it and its opponent are touching water. If the opponent or the vodyanoi is touching the ground, the vodyanoi takes a -4 penalty on attack and damage rolls.

FIRE-INFUSED HUGE WATER ELEMENTAL

XP 4,800

Variant huge water elemental (see Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary)

HP 95

N Huge outsider (elemental, extraplanar, fire, water); MELEE 2 slams +15 (2d6+7 plus burn); SPECIAL ATTACKS burn (2d6, DC 17), breath weapon (30-ft. cone of steam, DC 19, 5d6 fire), drench, vortex (DC 22), water mastery

DEVELOPMENT: The elementals try to kill the characters by any means possible. They open with breath weapons and resort to slams.

BABA YAGA'S CINDERSKULL

AURA moderate evocation; CL 13th

SLOT —; PRICE —; WEIGHT 5 lb.

DESCRIPTION

Warm to the touch, this white, dry skull emanates an orange glow from its eye sockets equivalent to dim illumination in a 30-ft. radius. The wielder enjoys the constant effect of an endure elements spell and either the spell-like ability to cast scorching ray (1/day) or the powers of the Fire domain, regardless of class. (CL equal to wielder's HD).

CONSTRUCTION

REQUIREMENTS Craft Wondrous Item, creator must be Baba Yaga; COST -

DEAD MAN TALKING

When the vodyanoi is defeated, Dmitri emerges from the depths of the pool with the steaming skull, and Elena rises from the waters shortly afterwards, bearing her shawl:

Dmitri transforms into his hybrid form as he turns the skull's bronze gaze upon Elena's shawl, causing steam to dissipate into the air as it dries. Elena looks at you, smiling as he does so.

"We cannot thank you enough. Know that you will find Grandmother's hut at the river crossing where we met. You can return her fire to her there." She begins to fade out of sight and reaches up to Dmitri's face. "Come with me, my love." He scoops up her lithe frame in his arms, and the two embrace. Water washes over them, pouring from Elena and engulfing the werewolf. The skull falls into the shallow edge of the pool, small wisps curling up from it.

The couple melts into the waters of the pool, dissolving into nothing while leaving Dmitri's vacant pelt floating on the surface. Their mingling voices speak from the empty air, "And now we will be together forever. Please accept this cloak as a token of our gratitude." Sapphire hued roses begin to sprout

and blossom around the skull, their cerulean blooms opening in moments. "And take these roses. Brew a tea from their petals and you'll be certain to gain Baba Yaga's favor. Again, thank you for your kindness..." With a ripple of wind across the water, their voices fade-leaving only the gifts and the sounds of the forest.

While it looks like a cloak fashioned from a wolf skin, it is a magic item-a Margreve fur.

MARGREVE FUR: DMITRI'S FOX CAPE

AURA faint transmutation; CL 7th

SLOT shoulders; PRICE 20,000 gp; WEIGHT 3 lb.

DESCRIPTION

- Many tales tell of those who gain the powers of Margreve's animals by wearing their fur. Made into cloaks or capes and properly enchanted, these furs bestow abilities upon the owner as follows:
- Fox Cape—Wearer gains a +2 to Reflex saves, +4 competence bonus to Diplomacy, and +8 competence bonus to Bluff.

DEVELOPMENT: The four blue roses blooming around the skull allow for a single pot of tea to be brewed. This tea has special value to Baba Yaga.

Concluding the Adventure

With the vodyanoi slain, Elena's shawl dried, and Dmitri dead, there is nothing left to do but return the skull to Baba Yaga.

But the characters may not want to.

Nothing forces the group to return the skull. However, groups choosing to keep the skull earn Baba Yaga's ire; she may send her three knights or Koschei the Deathless to recover the cinders. Failing to return the skull means the region suffers a long and miserable winter without fire. Countless villages freeze to death in the season's icy grip, and the Ghost Knights spread their influence deeper into the forest. As the characters depart:

Standing right where Elena claimed it would be, Baba Yaga's hut overlooks the stream where you met the rusalka. A wisp of smoke curls from the chimney, and both the door and the cast iron gate stand open. All along the fence, the skulls twinkle with a sinister gleam.

If they return the skull, Baba Yaga cackles gleefully, lifting her curse from the Margreve. She welcomes them inside and covetously takes the skull, talking softly to it as she cracks it open like an egg to pour the embers back into her hearth. She thanks them for their service, telling them they may leave with their lives.

If the characters bring the tea brewed from the blue roses which bloomed at the edge of the vodyanoi's pool, the Fell Crone offers them a boon for their honesty-they may seek out her hut at some point in the future and safely ask her a single question, which she promises to answer truthfully.

With this, she dismisses them and hums a tune as she begins cooking something. After the characters depart the hut, a backward glance shows the hut silently disappearing into the foliage on great chicken legs, and the fence gone.





By Steven Robert

The zmey's eyes locked on the lovely Kariv maiden—the creature's sinuous necks circling the girl. It stood, mesmerized by lust until arrows rained down from the Kariv hidden in the branches above. Uncontrollable rage welled up inside, and its three heads reared back and spat a tremendous gout of fire.

But even as the flames left its mouth, they disintegrated into puffs of smoke. The beast's eyes widened as the great oak above him stirred. Only then did the zmey recognize its mistake.

"The Lustful Dragon" is a forest adventure suitable for PCs of 10th level.

Adventure Background

he Margreve's zmey inspire fear and terror far and wide, but they have a strange weakness: overpowering lust for pure human maidens strong in the Old Ways.

Bards tell these tales only in hushed whispers. Legends say that the tattoos marking such women cannot be erased, even by death, for the dragonmark's magic preserves the girl from harm until her fate is met. Once a zmey finally reaches her, the beast's seed festers within her womb, tearing her asunder after a brutal 12-month pregnancy. The resulting child—a zmajeviti—harbors the dragon's evil and a desperate anger toward kinfolk. Horror and desperation follow the child.

Many years ago, a Kariv named Avigna manifested the mark. Her desperate father and uncles reasoned that only the center of all power, the Heart of the Margreve, could save her. They discovered an intricate incantation to sacrifice a zmey in return for Avigna's freedom. Magically enflaming the zmey's lust, the Kariv ambushed it—and when the zmey angrily torched not only the Kariv but also the Heart's ancient trees, the awakened forest extinguished the beast's fiery breath and threw its own power behind the Kariv. Soon the zmey's salted corpse lay at the towering trees' feet, freeing the girl from her curse. Avigna escaped, but when her beloved refused to believe the curse broken, she drowned herself in the Rushfens.

Days ago, one of the Margreve's elder zmey, Manje, awoke from a decades-long slumber. His lustful eyes sparkled, and his sharp ears heard the forest whisper of the lovely dragonmarked girl Vidanya. The dragon now chases her, thundering toward Levoča.

Only Baba Ludva, one of the Margreve's notorious Spider Crones, foresaw Manje's fixation. She spirited Vidanya away before the zmey could find her. However, Vidanya's respite is only temporary, for now the Crone plans to trade the girl to further her own dangerous plans.

Adventure Summary

The zmey arrives at Levoča while the PCs sleep, devastating the town in its desperate search for Vidanya. The PCs fight a group of headlings and emerge just in time to hear the dragon's ultimatum: turn over Vidanya or Levoča burns. After it departs, Levoča's leaders beg the PCs' succor in saving the girl. They must first find a suspicious Kariv seer and convince her to teach them a ritual to trap the zmey and remove Vidanya's dragonmark. They must then retrieve the girl from Baba Ludva through bargain or force.

The PCs next journey to the Margreve's Heart, gathering the necessary components for the *Zmeytrap* incantation and focusing the forest's energy into the incantation. The zmey, mad with lust, arrives, and clever PCs turn the forest against it. But, once awoken, the Heart's ire turns upon the PCs.

Adventure hooks

The adventure assumes only that the PCs spend a night in Levoča. Ties to the town and its residents—such as any generated in the adventure "Hollow"—will strengthen the hook. If they have completed that adventure, the Festival of the Hollow Man may lure them back.

Introduction

The adventure opens after Levoča's Festival of the Hollow Man, which commemorates the defeat of a deadly golem that plagued Levoča in days past (recently, if the PCs completed "Hollow," or long ago if not). That night, Manje begins his hunt for Vidanya.

That hight, Manje begins his hunt for vidanya.

Part 1: A Troubled Village

This section takes place in Levoča (see the adventure "Hollow" for more details, page 36).

HEADLING HELL (CR 10)

This initial encounter assumes that the PCs spend the night in one of Levoča's barns—possibly Anna's—which function as the town's guest quarters.

Read or paraphrase the following to begin the adventure, taking into account any precautions the PCs take before sleeping:

Levoča huddles fearfully at the edge of the Margreve, but this evening it hosts a rare celebration. The villagers re-enact the defeat of the legendary Hollow Man with burning effigies, dancing, and drinking long into the night. Then, with a sense of exhausted satisfaction, the town fades into peaceful torpor. Suddenly, a crash and an enormous shriek shatter the silence. Moments later, two gouts of fire explode through the barn's walls.

CREATURES: Manje begins his assault by leveling Vidanya's house, but of more immediate danger to the PCs are two zmey headlings. These creatures are all that remain of another zmey who suffered a grisly death at Manje's fury as punishment for also pursuing Vidanya. After tearing the headlings from his rival, Manje chased them into Levoča, where the ravenous beasts smell the PCs.



•••• The Lustful Dragon ••••

Unless the PCs have posted a guard or have magical defenses, the shricks outside awaken them just as the headlings attack.

TERRAIN: The wattle and daub barn walls (hardness 5, 10 hp) burn relatively slowly. Assume that the wall segments adjacent to each headling's initial position catch fire on the first round of combat. Each segment takes 1d6 fire damage/round. Once a segment has been reduced to 5 hp, the fire spreads to all adjacent segments.

Bales of extremely flammable dry hay fill the hayloft, 10 ft. above the ground, and part of the ground floor. Any hay adjacent to a burning wall segment has a 25% chance each round to catch fire. When that occurs, the straw burns in one round, inflicting 2d6 fire damage to creatures in that square (Reflex DC 15 for half damage and to avoid catching fire).

Heat and smoke also pose dangers; once 50% of the building's exterior catches fire, treat the interior of the building as if it were a forest fire (see *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Core Rulebook*).

Zmey Headlings (2)

CR 8

ХР 4,800 ЕАСН

HP 105 each (see MARGREVE BESTIARY, page 35)

DEVELOPMENT: The headlings breathe fire on the building, hoping to set it ablaze. One enters through a window, and one through the ceiling. Intensely hungry, each headling focuses its attacks on one (preferably unprepared) character. They attempt to pin PCs inside the building and use their breath weapons liberally. The headlings fight to the death.

Outside, shrieks and thundering crashes continue throughout the battle. Once the PCs defeat the headlings or exit the barn, continue immediately with the next encounter.

FIRES OF NIGHT (CR 10)

Chaos fills Levoča. Roaring infernos consume several buildings, and bleeding bodies litter the ground where, only hours ago, dancing lightened hearts. Most of the residents huddle in the Witch Pit, a circular depression about 20 ft. deep. Above them, two dragons—one enormous and the other even bigger—fly lazy circles around the pit, lit eerily by the flames below.

The larger dragon's three long, solid necks end in spine-frilled heads, and dappled green and black scales cover its immense bulk. Presently, one head booms, "You hide the dragonmark from me, fools? The girl belongs to me—return her or suffer my wrath!"

With that, another head torches a huge oak adjacent to the pit, and the vast creature soars to the north. The smaller dragon continues to circle, eyeing the trapped villagers hungrily.

The roaring fires create dim illumination throughout the village. **CREATURES:** The zmey Manje flies into the Margreve at full speed. If the PCs pursue, it focuses on escape but pauses to swat interlopers away. After 3 rounds, it spots a pond and uses *lake leap* to escape.

A more immediate danger is the remaining headling, who has already grown significantly larger than its siblings. If left unmolested, this headling pushes the burning oak into the Witch-Pit (assume that the villagers have cleared it out for the festival, if the PCs did not before) and feasts on the 30 villagers trapped inside.

GIANT ADVANCED ZMEY HEADLING

XP 9,600

HP 145 (see MARGREVE BESTIARY, page 35; see Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary for templates) **DEVELOPMENT:** If the PCs approach, the headling breathes flame and charges, eager for more food.

The headling flees if reduced below 30 hp. It pauses only to push the burning tree into the Witch Pit (Strength DC 20).

LEVOČA'S APPEAL

After the villagers eventually extinguish the fires, Anna (or someone else with whom they have good relations) approaches the PCs:

Dreadful silence fills the village, its exhausted residents staring blankly. After a time, Anna approaches, her face composed but her dress blanketed in soot.

"The evil eye has locked its gaze on us again. The great zmey has marked our girl Vidanya, strong in the Old Ways, as its doomed lover. The zmey will destroy her, one way or another, and its seed—a zmajeviti—will destroy us.

"And yet, perhaps it grows even worse. Baba Ludva, the eldest of the Spider Crones, arrived in Levoča 3 days ago. Her pinched and sour face spewed honeyed words of wisdom and compassion, and she huddled closely with our young women. The next morning, she had vanished—and Vidanya with her. Surely she found the dragonmark and holds the girl hostage, and Levoča will suffer as a result.

"We turn to you in desperation, for our village can bear no more calamities. Please, save Vidanya—and us—from this fate. We can offer little, but we cling to hope, for as terrible as it seems, the zmey can be defeated. Folktales speak of Kariv magic that saved one of their girls from the mark. Seek their wisdom, we beseech you. And please, hurry."

Anna can relate any of the information in the first two paragraphs of the **ADVENTURE BACKGROUND** section although her folktale sources often exaggerate the zmey's power. She does her best to impress upon the PCs the great dangers of engaging the zmey and urges them to seek the Kariv. The residents of Levoča are otherwise quite hostile to the Kariv (Sense Motive DC 15).

She knows that one of the Kariv's greatest seers, Mama Cana, has camped for the season at the ruins of Whistlehollow village, a day's travel upriver. She can also provide general directions to Baba Ludva's demesne in the Hag's Tooth Hills, although none know precisely how to find her burrow.

Part 2: Ridden Agendas

The PCs now must find the crone—and hence Vidanya—and learn the Kariv's secret. The order in which they perform these tasks does not matter, but the Kariv are closer to Levoča.

Although Manje will not return to Levoča for several days, his threats should put the PCs under time pressure. If they dally, tales of the enraged dragon torching nearby villages in his search for Vidanya reach their ears.

THE SHRIVE'S STORY (CR 11)

When the PCs arrive in Whistlehollow, read the following:

Whistlehollow once occupied one of the most beautiful of the Margreve's dells, but now, its ruined hovels lie buried under fallen trees and collapsed rock walls jutting awkwardly through the day's misty rain. Now the Margreve is reclaiming its territory,



CR 10

.... Tales of the Old Margreve

the village abandoned decades ago for unknown reasons. A small circle of bright wagons huddle together in the ruined town's center. Four armed men and women recline under one of the wagon's rough awnings—two scan their surroundings while the others talk softly. Candlelight streams out of one wagon.

CREATURES: "Mama" Cana, a hermaphrodite Kariv shrive (LN human expert 12; hp 84; Diplomacy +17, Knowledge [arcana] +16, Knowledge [history] +22, Knowledge [nature] +22, Perception +21, Profession [soothsayer] +22, Sense Motive +27), has retreated here to escape the less welcoming "civilized" settlements. The middleaged "woman" long ago forsook her clan and sought her own way within the forest. In an ironic twist, many Kariv youths now steal away from their own clans in order to join Cana's independent band.

Cana has a deep respect for the Margreve and assiduously avoids its ire and attention. As such, she forswears magic of all forms—aside from krinomancy, at least. Instead, her soothsaying appears to be entirely non-magical yet still remarkably insightful. Any PCs who use magic in her presence worsen her attitude by one step. She wears a simple but brightly-colored wrap with long, gray hair framing her penetrating black eyes.

Cana was born with the profound insight of krinomancy. She can discern with absolute accuracy any lie told to her or written in her presence by someone whose blood she has tasted within the previous year, as if she were under a constant *discern lies* effect. The amount of blood required is minimal, but she cannot ingest it with any other substance and must be able to taste it for the ability to have effect. Cana is also incapable of lying although she may refrain from speaking or tell only part of the truth.

Cana flees if combat breaks out while her companions cover her escape. The youths flank and sneak attack where possible, fleeing once Cana is safe.

KARIV YOUTHS (4)

CR 3

XP 800 EACH

N male and female human rogue 1/fighter 3 HP 59 each (use statistics for Adrik, see page 82)

DEVELOPMENT: Vanic, one of the youths, warily greets the PCs and suspiciously demands their business. He will only fetch Cana from the wagon if the PCs shift his attitude from unfriendly to friendly or if they provide a good reason to see her. Levoča's plight satisfies him although the Karivs' faces sour at the name.

The meeting with Cana proceeds in four stages. The ceremonial first stage includes blessings and prayers to Cana's patrons, the Green Gods. PCs who comport themselves especially well (Knowledge [nobility or religion] DC 25) gain the party a +2 bonus on subsequent Diplomacy checks. Immediately after, Cana volunteers to read the PCs' fortunes and tells each one to venture into the surrounding forest and find a fallen branch that "calls to them."

Cana thrice strikes the bough sharply against a sapling, whispering softly, "The blood, the heart, the soul." Each strike snaps off a single leaf from the sapling, which flutters into her waiting hand.

Cana examines the leaves for a few seconds, presents them to the PC with a small knife, and asks the PC to spatter some blood onto the leaves. She then delicately tastes the blood and enters a brief trancelike state. PCs who refuse the reading receive quizzical looks from the Kariv

and worsen Cana's attitude (initially Indifferent) by one step.

The second stage consists largely of small talk. Here the PCs can use Diplomacy to improve Cana's attitude as normal.

In the third stage, Cana carefully probes the PCs' story. Her skill at truth-seeking forces PCs who attempt to hold back information to make a Bluff check (opposed by Cana's Sense Motive) in order to avoid having to either lie or reveal the information. Any lie she detects (either through krinomancy or Sense Motive) immediately worsens Cana's attitude by one step (Sense Motive DC 25 to note her reaction) although she does not explicitly acknowledge her insight or pursue any hidden information.

She also asks why she should help them. A quest to save Levoča worsens her attitude by one step because its residents are so hostile to the Kariv. Defeating the zmey neither improves nor worsens her attitude, for she regards it as part of the Margreve. However, saving the innocent girl Vidanya makes Cana much more sympathetic, improving her attitude by one step.

In exchange, Cana tells them the information about the Kariv contained in the **ADVENTURE BACKGROUND** section. She also explains that, once dragonmarked, a woman remains so for life—and simply killing the zmey will only trigger the inevitable pursuit by another. The Kariv incantation, and its zmey sacrifice, offer the only route to remove the mark permanently.

Finally, in the fourth stage, Cana reveals the results of her readings. She turns to each PC and refers elliptically to a shameful secret, action, or thought in their past, preferably something that occurred in or near the Margreve. She says little about the event itself but implies it's important. PCs who admit culpability in the event—even if not detailing it—earn the group one boon. Those who deny the truth worsen her attitude by one step while those who remain silent have no effect. When appropriate, Cana's reading should offer hints toward atonement or overcoming the PC's inner demons.

After this step, assuming that she is at least indifferent, Cana explains the *Zmeytrap* incantation (see Part 4, except she does not describe the backlash) and provides directions to the Legion Oak. For each boon they have earned, she adds some advice: the PCs can choose to either substitute one of Cana's skills for their own on a single skill check while performing the incantation, or they can add a +2 bonus to any one of their skill checks. She also recommends tricking the zmey into breathing fire on the Legion Oak and then battling from its branches, which will provide assistance.

Moreover, Cana tells the PCs where to find the necessary foci in the Heart's Rushfens: Avigna the Dragonmarked's scorned heart, a blackvine oak just outside the fens, and the Salt Spring.

If the PCs lack a means to reach the Heart quickly, Cana suggests beseeching Baba Ludva for help.

If Cana is at least friendly, she also explains the incantation's backlash. If she is helpful, she teaches them a short chant that reduces the forest's anger by one level (see **PART 4: THE ZMEYTRAP**).

STORY AWARD: If the PCs make Cana friendly or helpful, award them 9,600 XP. Also, award them 1,200 XP for each boon they earn from Cana.

THE CRONE'S BAIT (CR 12)

PCs most likely seek the Spider Crone to find Vidanya, but they may also need a way to reach the Heart quickly.

Once the PCs arrive in the Hag's Tooth Hills, they find her burrow in 8 hours (Perception DC 20); reduce this time by 1 hour for every 3 by which the check exceeds 20, minimum 1 hour:



•••• The Lustful Dragon ••••

The Hag's Tooth Hills' rocky outcroppings lie amongst the more barren corners of the Margreve with gnarled pines worming their way into the moss-covered stones' joints. Lizards bask in the relative abundance of sunlight while spider webs overflow from the larger crevices.

The path meanders among the pines and suddenly opens into a small clearing. A crude lean-to of branches lashed together by fine silken strands nestles between two outcroppings. Inside it, a girl matching Vidanya's description pale, strikingly beautiful, long blonde hair—sits like a child on the ground, intently sewing patches into a bright quilt. A large iron pot gurgles and steams next to her.

The structure is only visible within 60 ft.

Baba Ludva has cursed Vidanya (see below); the girl ignores the PCs while continuing to sew patches onto the quilt. Next to her sits an *ogre's pot* (see *Tales of the Old Margreve: A KoboldQuarterly.com Compilation*).

TERRAIN: The lean-to (a 5-ft.-square structure) stands at the corner of two vertical stone walls (each 20 ft. across and 10 ft. tall). Other outcroppings produce a rough circle 60 ft. across. The entrance to Baba Ludva's burrow, a 5-ft.-wide trap door rigged to open and shut by pulling the spider webs below (a swift action), lies adjacent to the structure. Its shaft descends vertically 30 ft. and opens into a 40–ft.-diameter, web-filled chamber (treat as a *web* spell) with a crude bed and a functioning—though filthy—magical workshop. A warren of web-filled tunnels surrounds the chamber.

Baba Ludva has also used her Silken Dance power to spread webs in a 50-ft. circle around her burrow (Perception DC 35).

CREATURES: Like her sisters, Baba Ludva long ago traded her vila powers and beauty for a darker end. Becoming something akin to a night hag, Ludva gained power over others' dreams; however, she lost her own as she developed an unexpected kinship with dreamless spiders. The crone ultimately seeks to enter the forest's numinous dreams and claim them for her own.

Ludva appears to be an emaciated, gray-skinned old woman with torn gray hair and pools of blackness instead of eyes. Clothes that touch her body immediately disintegrate into rags.

The crone's web of vermin spies noticed Manje stirring, and she spirited Vidanya away from Levoča, intending to offer her to the zmey in return for help in her plan. As a precaution, she tapped the Margreve's magic to trap Vidanya's soul in her *heartstone*.

This left the girl in a permanent dream, rendering her nearly mindless but pliable to the crone's every whim (curing this requires Baba Ludva's death or a *remove curse* against DC 19). She is unconcerned with her bait sitting in the open since the zmey's lust cannot be sated without the girl's soul. Note that the soulless Vidanya is also immune to scrying.

The crone's minions, a group of phase spiders, hide in the surrounding outcroppings (Stealth +7). They turn ethereal as soon as they spot the PCs, and one reports to Ludva. One spider grapples Vidanya and carries her inside the burrow.

BABA LUDVA, THE SPIDER CRONE

XP 9,600

Female variant advanced night hag

CN Medium outsider (evil, extraplanar)

INIT +10; SENSES darkvision 60 ft., tremorsense 30 ft.; Perception +20

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A THIRD CRONE AND OTHER EASTER EGGS

This adventure uses a third Spider Crone; PCs may have already encountered two of her sisters. If they had particularly memorable encounters with either of them, consider replacing this Spider Crone with her more familiar sister—although this will require some thought as to her (nefarious) machinations or at least allow their dealings to influence Ludva's attitude.

In fact, as the final adventure in this anthology, "The Lustful Dragon" presents a good opportunity to revisit many of the PCs' old friends and enemies. Here are some more possibilities:

- The Honey Queen—The queen's honey is a necessary component for the Zmeytrap incantation.
- Challenge of the Fang—If the PCs won the challenge, reduce the forest's anger by one in the final encounter. Otherwise, increase it by one.
- The Griffon Hatchling Heist—Lesharkk may assist the PCs in traveling quickly around the Margreve.
- Gall of the Spider Crone—The PCs' dealings with the other Kariv may influence Mama Cana.
- Grandmother's Fire—The Zmeytrap incantation requires a match lit with Baba Yaga's cinderskull.

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DEFENSE

AC 29, touch 16, flat-footed 23 (+6 Dex, +13 natural) HP 108 (8d10+64)

Fort +16, Ref +10, Will +13

DR 10/cold iron and magic; IMMUNE charm, cold, fear, fire, sleep; SR 24

WEAKNESSES forest-dependent

OFFENSE

SPEED 30 ft.; dream stride

MELEE 2 claws +15 (1d4+7), bite +15 (2d6+7 plus disease) SPECIAL ATTACKS dirge of doom, dream haunting, silken dance SPELL-LIKE ABILITIES (CL 8th; concentration +13)

- Constant—detect chaos, detect evil, detect good, detect law, detect magic
- At will—deep slumber (DC 18), invisibility, magic missile, ray of enfeeblement (DC 16)

At will (with heartstone)-etherealness, soul bind

3/day—bestow curse (DC 19)

TACTICS

BEFORE COMBAT Baba Ludva casts *invisibility* as soon as possible. **DURING COMBAT** Once her silken dance web grapples the PCs, Baba Ludva leaves the burrow ethereally and positions herself behind them. She asks their business, using the web, *deep slumber*, and the *ogre's pot* to immobilize PCs in order to buy time. If that fails, she uses *etherealness* to maneuver to attack spellcasters.

MORALE The crone escapes into the burrow *ethereally* if reduced to fewer than 30 hp.

STATISTICS

STR 25, DEX 23, CON 26, INT 22, WIS 20, CHA 21 BASE ATK +8; CMB +15; CMD 31

FEATS Alertness, Combat Casting, Deceitful, Mounted Combat

SKILLS Bluff +20, Diplomacy +13, Disguise +20, Intimidate +18, Knowledge (arcana) +16, Knowledge (planes) +19, Perception

+20, Ride +17, Sense Motive +20, Spellcraft +19 LANGUAGES Abyssal, Celestial, Common, Infernal

CR 10

.... Tales of the Old Margreve

SQ change shape (giant spider, *beast shape III*), heartstone, speak with vermin (9 rounds/day), wild empathy +11 (spiders only, no matter type; includes +6 racial bonus)

SPECIAL ABILITIES

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- DIRGE OF DOOM (SU) Baba Ludva can use this bardic ability for 25 rounds/day.
- **DISEASE (SU)** Demon Fever—injury; save Fort DC 22 (Constitutionbased); onset immediate; frequency 1/day; effect 1d6 Con damage (target must save a 2nd time or 1 point of this is instead drain); cure 2 consecutive saves.
- **DREAM HAUNTING (SU)** See night hag ability in *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary*.
- **DREAM STRIDE (SP)** While asleep, Baba Ludva can transport her body anywhere within the Margreve, at a rate of 60 miles/ hour. She may take up to nine willing sleeping subjects with her, although all automatically suffer the effects of her dream haunting for that night.
- **FOREST DEPENDENT (SU)** Baba Ludva is mystically bonded to the Margreve and never willingly leave it. Each hour spent outside its borders, she suffers 1 Constitution damage (Fortitude DC 15 negates). While within it, she receives a +4 bonus to initiative checks. (This bonus is included in the statistics block above.)
- **HEARTSTONE (SU)** See night hag ability in *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary*.
- SILKEN DANCE (SU) Baba Ludva can dance for 1 hour/night to create a 50-ft.-radius ring of nearly invisible spider strands (Perception DC 35). The first time a hostile creature enters the web, the strands animate as per the *black tentacles* spell (CL 9, filling the entire area).

TRAPDOOR PHASE SPIDERS (4)

CR 6

XP 2,400 EACH

Advanced phase spiders (see *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary*) HP 75 each

VIDANYA	CR 1/2
XP 200	
Standard Levoča local (see page 37)	
HP 8; regeneration 5; CHA 18	

SPECIAL ABILITIES

DRAGONMARKED (SU) Three faint dragonhead tattoos on her stomach mark Vidanya as destined to bear a zmajeviti. Zmey pursue her inexorably until she conceives, but until she gives birth, their innate magic also provides her with regeneration 5.

OLD WAYS (Su) The Old Ways run strong in Vidanya, allowing her to use the *Wisdom of the Old Ways* incantation (3/day, see pg. 23) without skill check or backlash.

DEVELOPMENT: Baba Ludva regards Vidanya as a useful tool, but she will happily listen to the PCs.

The crone begins as unfriendly toward the PCs but can be influenced by Diplomacy. In exchange for Vidanya's soul, she initially demands a soul to place inside her *heartstone*, and she refuses to negotiate unless the PCs improve her attitude to at least indifferent. In that case, she settles for oaths to bring her sap from the Margreve's dreaming Heart (see **PART 4**), for which she provides a *treebleed bucket* (see p. 80). She warns the PCs that tapping the tree will anger it, so they should wait to do so until they are ready to leave. If the PCs defeat Baba Ludva, she retreats into the burrow and uses Bluff to convince the PCs she can kill Vidanya while her soul is trapped. She still attempts to drive a hard bargain although she will ultimately trade the girl for her life.

The PCs may also seek passage to the Heart via the crone's *dream stride*. She provides this service if the PCs agree to retrieve the dreaming sap; otherwise, she demands another soul.

Finally, so long as she allies with the PCs, the crone also gives them her two *salted webs*.

TREASURE: Vidanya has just finished a *quilted bridge*. Next to her is an *ogre's pot*. The magical laboratory inside the burrow contains a *treebleed bucket* (p. 80) and two *salted webs*. Ludva's *heartstone* opal is worth 1,800 gp (The *ogre's pot*, *quilted bridge*, and *salted web* magic items can be found in *Tales of the Old Margreve: A KoboldQuarterly.com Compilation*).

STORY AWARD: If the PCs rescue Vidanya without violence, award them XP as if they had defeated the crone in combat.

Part 3: Into the Reart

The PCs' quest to retrieve the incantation components now takes them to the Eastern Heart of the Margreve. The following encounters can be completed in any order; however, if the PCs travel magically through the Margreve (on their own or through Baba Ludva's *dream stride*), the forest's power and Avigna's madness divert them to the rusalka's lair, regardless of their intended destination.

THE WOMAN SCORNED (CR 11)

The overwhelming stench of the Rushfens—cloying algae, swamp gases, and decay—blankets the earth as completely as the 2-ft.-layer of thick, muddy water beneath. Above, the great trees of the Margreve's Heart grasp each other from the isolated low hummocks on which they perch.

Buried in the gurgling muck lie a myriad of tree boughs and husks. Sometimes these cordon off a deep pool as still as the winter sky; sometimes they form channels through which water hurtles as if down a mountainside. The treacherous footing of this ever-changing landscape stretches for miles.

The Rushfens are very difficult terrain, reducing land speeds to only 1 mile/hour. This increases to 2 miles/hour if the PCs have a *quilted bridge* or similar magic to bypass obstacles.

Cana's directions (or the Margreve's magic) lead the PCs to the rusalka Avigna's lair, which lies 6 miles inside the fens. She rests inside a particularly large and brackish pool, nearly 30 ft. across and just as deep. The muddy water provides total concealment after only 5 ft., but allow PCs Perception checks (DC 25) to trace an underwater creature's movements by the water's ripples and waves. The surrounding swamp consists mostly of shallow bog (difficult terrain, increasing the DC of Acrobatics and Stealth checks by 2), with a couple channels of rapids (4 ft. deep). Medium PCs crossing the channels may be knocked prone (Strength DC 20); small creatures must swim.

CREATURE: Many years ago, the Kariv girl Avigna manifested the dragonmark (see **ADVENTURE BACKGROUND**). Although her kinsmen freed the girl, her beloved denounced Avigna as cursed nonetheless, and the distraught girl eventually threw herself into the Rushfens. Days later she rose as a rusalka. Now mad, she desires the zmey's love again. If she discovers Vidanya's mark, she focuses all of her attention on the girl.



••• The Lustful Dragon ••••

Avigna the Dragonmarked

CR 11

Near the edge of the Rushfens, the PCs find the following:

THE ANCIENT VINE (CR 12)

Rusalka sorcerer 8 (p. see Margreve Bestiary, page 30) CE Medium undead

INIT +5; SENSES darkvision 60 ft., Perception +23

DEFENSE

XP 12,800

AC 21, touch 14, flat-footed 17 (+3 Dex, +1 dodge, +7 natural) HP 216 (8d8+72 plus 8d6+80)

FORT +13, **Ref** +7, **Will** +15

RESIST cold 10; IMMUNE undead traits

WEAKNESSES vulnerable to fire, withered tresses

OFFENSE

SPEED 30 ft., swim 50 ft.

MELEE 2 slams +16 (2d6+5 plus grab)

SPECIAL ATTACKS drowning embrace

RACIAL SPELL-LIKE ABILITIES (CL 8th; concentration +16) Constant—*detect thoughts* (DC 19), *tongues*

At will—charm monster (DC 21), control water, create water, suggestion (DC 22), water walk

1/day-dominate person (DC 24)

SORCERER SPELL-LIKE ABILITIES (CL 8th; concentration +17) 12/day—*elemental ray*

SORCERER SPELLS KNOWN (CL 8th; concentration +17)

4th (5)—*confusion* (DC 23)

- 3rd (7)—deep slumber (DC 22), fireball (DC 21, cold damage), protection from energy
- 2nd (8)—glitterdust, hideous laughter (DC 21), mirror image, scorching ray (cold damage)
- 1st (9)—burning hands (DC 19, cold damage), mage armor, magic missile, obscuring mist, shocking grasp (cold damage), true strike

0 (at will)—dancing lights, daze (DC 19), detect magic, ghost sound (DC 18), message, ray of frost, read magic, resistance **BLOODLINE** elemental (water)

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TACTICS

- **BEFORE COMBAT** Avigna remains hidden deep within her pool, scouts with *detect thoughts*, and casts *mage armor*, *mirror image*, and *protection from energy*. She then attempts to *dominate* an obvious fighter and turn him against his comrades.
- **DURING COMBAT** Avigna uses her ranged spells to harass the PCs while inside her pool. She remains underwater if possible, trying to lure enemies (and especially Vidanya) into the pool.

MORALE Secretly desiring a final rest, Avigna fights until destroyed.

STATISTICS

STR 21, DEX 17, CON -, INT 13, WIS 17, CHA 28

ВАSE АТК +10; СМВ +15; СМD 23

FEATS Ability Focus (*dominate person, suggestion*), Alertness, Dodge, Empower Spell, Improved Initiative, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (slam), Spell Focus (enchantment)

Skills Bluff +20, Diplomacy +17, Knowledge (local) +6, Perception +23, Perform (Sing) +17, Sense Motive +16, Spellcraft +12, Swim +14

Languages Aquan, Common

SQ bloodline arcana

Gear headband of alluring charisma +2

DEVELOPMENT: If the PCs defeat Avigna, her body crumbles, leaving a soft leather pouch where her heart was. This is a *scorn pouch* and a focus for the *Zmeytrap* incantation (see *Tales of the Old Margreve: A KoboldQuarterly.com Compilation*). A dense copse of dead trees lies ahead of you. Some have fallen, leaning at odd angles, while inky black, leafless vines choke others.

This deep in the forest, the dead trees permit one of the few clear views of the sky, and the undergrowth runs wild here. These lesser plants and the thicket of trees obscure the grove's center from view.

Light undergrowth fills all squares in the 80–ft.-wide copse (costing 2 squares of movement, providing concealment, and adding 2 to the DC of Acrobatics and Stealth checks). Any creature more than 20 ft. away also has total cover and total concealment.

CREATURE: A dangerous vine aberration destroyed these trees and now inhabits an oak at the grove's center. This blackvine oak strikes quickly to crush any life. Note that it ignores cover and concealment within the copse because its sensory vines extend throughout the area.

CR 12

CR 11

BLACKVINE OAK

XP 19,200

Variant roper (see *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary*) **HP** 138

DEVELOPMENT: The creature strikes with its tentacles as soon as all its prey is within range. If any prove difficult, it uses a vine attack to collapse a dead tree onto the PCs. This requires a successful ranged touch attack (against AC 2) and a DC 20 Strength check. It inflicts 4d6 damage (Reflex DC 15 for half).

The PCs can extract the vine's heart from its host tree with 1 hour of work with a slashing weapon or tool.

SALT OF THE EARTH (CR 11)

Inside—and under—the Eastern Heart lies a great salt dome. The mineral reaches the surface at the Salt Spring, which feeds the Rushfens at their southern tip and attracts both the forest's residents and alchemists:

A strange spring bubbles cloudy water through a crusty oozing sore in the rock. The air smells sharp and tangy, and the trees here huddle close to the ground, blanketed in a thick brown moss. The water trickles slowly northward in a series of stagnant pools layered on salt-encrusted stones.

The spring fills a single 5-ft. square; the surrounding terrain is relatively clear.

CREATURE: The Margreve's strange energy recently animated a dangerous guardian here, and it attacks any creature gathering salt from the spring. The creature glides out of the salt dome, emerging as an enormous humanoid.

SALT ELEMENTAL

XP 12,800

Variant elder earth elemental (see *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary*) HP 168

MELEE 2 slams +26 (2d10+12/19–20 plus bleed); SPECIAL ATTACKS bleed (1d6)



••• Tales of the Old Margreve ••••

DEVELOPMENT: The elemental focuses its attacks on creatures that attempt to gather salt. It will not pursue those who retreat. By scraping the nearby deposits, PCs can gather 1 lb. of salt/2 hours.

Part 4: The Zmeytrap

Cana's directions send the PCs deep into the Margreve's Eastern Heart, where they set the *Zmeytrap* incantation under its greatest tree: the Legion Oak.

Zmeytrap

SCHOOL enchantment (compulsion) [mind-affecting]; EFFECTIVE LEVEL 8th

Skill CHECK Knowledge (nature) DC 27, 3 successes;

Knowledge (arcana) DC 27, 3 successes; Bluff or Sense Motive DC 27, 2 successes

CASTING TIME 2 hours; see text

Components V, S, F

Extra Casters-minimum of 4 casters

Foci—a dragonmarked girl; a creeping vine of surpassing age; the heart of a woman scorned (literally or figuratively); 1 lb. of salt (optional)

RANGE Old Margreve Forest

TARGET one zmey

DURATION see text

SAVING THROW see text; SPELL RESISTANCE no

The Zmeytrap incantation focuses a zmey's lust to an unquenchable obsession for a dragonmarked girl. The casters must build a ritual circle around the Legion Oak, the greatest tree in the Margreve, within which the girl (and no others) must remain. The incantation draws out some of the Margreve's spirit to compel the zmey to race directly toward the victim. The compulsion takes hold after 2 hours, but at least one caster must continue the ritual until the zmey can see the victim.

The zmey must succeed on a Will save (DC 18 + caster's Cha modifier) to pass through the ritual circle; the DC increases by 10 if the caster scribes the circle in salt. The zmey may attempt this save 1/round as part of a move action.

Until it touches the victim, the zmey may take no actions other than movement unless provoked by an attack or other hostile action. It may respond to such a threat but must do so without cunning or rational thought. For example, it may use its breath weapon but cannot choose to leave plants unaffected, it ignores disadvantageous terrain, and it cannot make Perception checks if the DC exceeds 10. However, the zmey receives a Will save (DC as above) to end the incantation each round it is attacked.

If the zmey is slain in the Heart, the dragonmark disappears from the girl. Otherwise it remains.

BACKLASH: The *Zmeytrap* incantation wakens the angry Margreve from its torpor (see below for details).

FAILURE: The compulsion to find its victim remains, but the zmey can use its full mental faculties.

THE LUSTFUL HEART (CR 14)

The shadowed stillness of the Margreve's Heart intensifies toward its center, where a monumental oak, encrusted with dozens of cancerous galls and burls, rises at least 200 ft. above and spreads its writhing branches—many thicker than stout oaks—even farther horizontally, creeping up and down, left and right along the ground.

A 2-ft.-thick layer of leaves and fallen branches blankets the ground below, making the terrain treacherous. Dry and dead saplings dot the ground, their lives crushed by the thick canopy above.

While the PCs perform the *Zmeytrap* incantation, keep track of the number of failed skill checks, as they have consequences in the next encounter. Each time the PCs fail a check, the oak's trunk groans, the galls creak, and the fallen leaves crackle (Perception DC 20).

CREATURE: After 6 hours, Manje finally approaches from the east. Unless attacked, he double moves toward Vidanya, squeezing through the branches where necessary.

TERRAIN: The Legion Oak's branches snake up, down, and around. The map shows only the lowest layer of branches thick enough to walk on (on average, 5 ft. aboveground). Before the zmey awakens the Heart (see below), moving through the tree's space requires the usual skill checks. But once it wakes, the tree assists PCs, and they can move at full speed with no penalty. For simplicity, assume that a creature can locate a branch leading upward (1d6–1)x5 ft. away from their current location. Such branches always lead directly toward or away from the trunk, and they rise 1d10x5 ft. before becoming too thin to support creatures.

The lower branches are all solid enough that moving between them requires squeezing for Large creatures. Leaves densely pack the upper layers of branches, providing concealment to creatures 20 ft. away. Larger branches may provide cover.

The dead leaves and branches covering the ground makes it difficult terrain for Medium or smaller creatures and adds a +2 modifier to the DC of Acrobatics and Stealth checks.

Creatures larger than Medium cannot fly under the tree unless they have the Hover feat.

While they await Manje's arrival, the PCs can clear this terrain or set traps in any reasonable way. Clearing leaves and branches from a 5-ft. square takes 15 minutes of work. With 2 hours of work, PCs can also use the fallen logs and dead saplings to create barricades, deadfall traps (Reflex DC equals 10 + 1/2 PC's skill bonus; deals 5d6 damage), an unstable log trap (trip maneuver, CMB equals PC's skill bonus), or any other reasonable contraption they can imagine (using Craft (trapmaking), Knowledge (engineering), or Survival).

CR 14

<u>Manje</u> XP 38,400

Zmey (see MARGREVE BESTIARY, page 34) HP 216

DEVELOPMENT: While subject to the *Zmeytrap*, Manje uses suboptimal tactics. It pays no regard to terrain or traps (even if he must squeeze) so long as it ends each turn closer to Vidanya. Once attacked, it immediately breathes fire (see below). Until it throws off the *Zmeytrap* incantation, it must use a move action each turn to approach Vidanya (or pass the circle). Once it saves, it focuses all of his attacks on a single PC, preferably a caster. Even without the *Zmeytrap* incantation, Manje's obsession with Vidanya makes it fight to the death.

Once Manje uses its breath weapon, the forest wakens immediately and snuffs out the flame, cutting the damage in half. Manje's breath





weapon then becomes useless for the remainder of the battle—this allows it an immediate save to escape the *Zmeytrap* incantation.

Moreover, the tree itself turns its anger on Manje. Any time Manje begins its turn adjacent to a large branch, the tree attempts to grapple the beast (CMB +26, CMD 35). If successful, the zmey cannot move that turn, but it can escape by hitting the branch (AC 2, hardness 5) for at least 15 damage.

Branches also subtly guide PCs standing on them, providing a +2 deflection bonus to AC, a +1 luck bonus to attack rolls, a +1 bonus to CL, and fast movement.

TREASURE: A wanderer, Manje carries its hoard in a *tree bag* (treat as a *type II bag of holding*, except the bag opens into a hollow tree deep in the Margreve) looped around a talon. It contains 2,500 gp, 2,650 sp, three emeralds (250 gp each), a *golden bair rope* (a variant *rope of climbing* that coils into a single golden hair), a *ring of animal friendship*, a *goblin shield* (same as a *lion's shield*), a *Margreve spear* (similar to a *trident of warning*, except that it detects forest predators), and a *figurine of wondrows power (bronze griffon)*.

THE HEART AWAKENS (CR VARIES)

As the zmey thunders to the ground, its necks thrashing violently but impotently, the forest itself breathes deeply. The Legion Oak's black galls unfold into wooden cavalry while the rustling leaves above begin an angry whisper, animating into creatures of babbling leafy mouths. Rhythmic tremors like colossal footsteps shake the ground, and around you, the soil separates as smooth, rock-hard tree trunks wielding branches as sharp as swords rise slowly from below.

The Margreve awakens.

The angry Margreve slowly but steadily animates its minions in order to drive the PCs away: harnessing the forest's power has consequences, especially if done crudely. If they leave immediately, PCs can avoid most of the danger. If they stay—perhaps to extract the Heart's sap for Baba Ludva—the danger increases.

The Heart's anger determines how rapidly the danger builds. It begins at an anger level of 2. Each failed skill check during the incantation increases this by 1.

Tapping the Heart with the *treebleed bucket* takes 3 rounds and also increases the anger level by 1. If the PCs used it before the battle with the zmey, increase the anger level by 2 instead.

Cana's chant decreases the anger level by 1.

CREATURES: The round after the zmey dies, a treant appears at the north edge of the map and six green Hussars emerge from the tree's galls.

Each of the groupings below is equivalent to one CR 8 encounter; during the first wave of attackers, one such set appears per anger level, at the rate of 1 additional group /3 rounds.

CR 3

CR 3

GREEN HUSSARS (6) XP 800 each

HP 30 each (see MARGREVE BESTIARY, page 27)

Petrified Treants (6) XP 800 each

Variant caryatid column (see *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bonus Bestiary*) HP 36 each





TREANT

CR 8

CR 3

....110....

XP 4,800 HP 114 (see Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary)

WHISPERING DEMONS (6)

XP 800 EACH

Variant allip (see Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bonus Bestiary) HP 30 each

DEVELOPMENT: The treant pursues the PCs deliberately, animating trees to funnel them away from the Legion Oak. The hussars use their mobility to isolate spellcasters. The petrified treants form a battle line, focusing their attacks on melee combatants. The whispering demons focus their attacks on flying PCs and pursue any who flee.

If the PCs move at least 400 ft. from the ritual circle and continue steadily away, the Heart sends no more foes after the first wave. If, however, the PCs remain, more and more creatures animate, regardless of the forest's anger level. Throughout the first wave, emphasize the approach of the Margreve's forces and impress upon the players their precarious situation.

Continue to throw CR 10 encounters at the PCs until they realize that they cannot calm the Heart's ire. The purpose of this sequence is not to kill the PCs but to demonstrate to them the danger and power of the Margreve's Heart and to teach them that using it carries inevitable, and ultimately deadly, risks. Large groups of low CR creatures are unlikely to cause harm quickly, so they are the safest foes to use.

If the PCs agreed to retrieve the Heart's sap for the Spider Crone, she shadows them ethereally throughout their battle. If they break their oath, she materializes and demands they fulfill it, attacking them if they refuse. The Heart's minions ignore her, since it does not regard her as an enemy.

Concluding the Adventure

If the PCs defeat Manje, save Vidanya, and escape the Heart, they can return to Levoča without major incident. The grateful townsfolk, grimy from rebuilding, hail them as heroes but have little to offer as a reward.

If Manje lives, he claims Vidanya and punishes Levoča for the PCs' insolence. They may have another opportunity to confront him during his assault.

If the PCs deliver the Heart's sap to Baba Ludva, she regards them as allies for bringing her mysterious plans one step closer to fruition.

Regardless, the PCs have likely angered the Margreve, and they would be wise to make amends quickly.

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