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VILLAGE BACKDROP: TRICKLETREK



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VILLAGE BACKDROP: TRICKLETREK

Months ago a mysterious asteroid crashed into the waters of nearby Swishswirl Cove and in the days afterwards a strange sickness spread across the glades to the north, poisoning its inhabitants and causing a supernatural illness in the gnomes. Now an unnatural blight, a ghastly illness that drains the local gnomes of their vibrant colouration, leaving a sickly, otherworldly colour in its wake, has taken hold in the gnomish settlement of Trickletrek.

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TRICKLETREK AT A GLANCE

Surrounded by human towns and villages, the gnomish settlement of Trickletrek has gone by many names throughout its history, as gnomes take particular joy in a good-spirited pun or a particularly clever name. Currently named for the service it provides to travellers, things have quickly gone from bad to worse for the resident of Trickletrek. Local legends claim the gnomes of Trickletrek have dwelled in the forest they call the Great Greens since before the region's human tribes united into the kingdoms that exist today. By far the most successful gnomish settlement in the area, the gnomes of Trickletrek were until recently constructing new neighbourhoods and a bridge of dwarven design.

All this changed when a mysterious asteroid crashed into the waters of the Swishswirl Cove. In the following months, a strange sickness spread across the glades to the north, poisoning its inhabitants and causing an unnatural blight in the gnomes dwelling in Trickletrek. The village is now in a state of emergency. The ghastly illness drains the gnomes of their vibrant colouration, leaving a sickly, otherworldly colour in its wake.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Ruler Helga Hedgeman

Government Autocracy

Population 70 (43 gnomes, 24 humans, 8 halflings, 1 dwarf, 1 half-elf)

Alignments N

Languages Common, Gnome

Corruption +0; **Crime** +0; **Economy** -3 **Law** -4; **Lore** +1 **Society** -10

Qualities Rumormongering citizens, strategic location

Danger +20; **Disadvantages** Cursed, hunted

NOTABLE FOLK

Most of the population are nothing more than hardworking peasants. A few, however, are of interest to adventurers:

Cezar Valeborn (location 2; NG male half-elf bard [archaeologist] 5) A lover of forgotten lore and avid studier of paranormal events, Cezar has relocated to Trickletrek from a nearby city.

Dapperfield Daisylocks (location 10; NE male colour-blighted gnome bard [animal speaker] 4) Trickletrek's local orchardist, Dapperfield was ostracized when he showed signs of illness.

Gabber Gygarian (location 9; N male gnome bard 2) Eccentric storyteller and town greeter Gabber is named for his obsession with small talk and local happenings.

Gladius Gnarlbeard (location 6; CE colour-blighted bodak) A renowned dwarven architect, Gladius Gnarlbeard went missing several days after the asteroid crashed into Swishswirl Cove.

Gunter Greatgreen (location 8; NE male colour-blighted gnome druid [blight druid] 8) The caretaker of the Great Greens vanished not long after the asteroid struck Swishswirl Cove.

Helga Hedgeman (location 1; LN female human ranger [urban ranger] 5) The mayor of Trickletrek, Helga has held this position uncontested for 14 years because of gnomish disdain for the monotony of leadership.

Kevinnen Jamear (location 2; N male halfling rogue 3) Kevinnen is a Swirlside investor who purchased the local inn after its owner perished from colour degradation.

NOTABLE LOCATIONS

Most of the village comprises peasant homes. A few locations, however, are of interest to adventurers:

1. **Trickletrek Town House:** This building is generally empty as the Trickletrek gnomes hold a strong disdain for politics.
2. **Jamear's Market:** Gnomes from all over the Great Greens come here to barter and trade tales and baubles.
3. **The Trickletrek:** The path from Trickletrek down to the shores of the Great Trickle is infamously perilous. Most gnomes make their living acting as guides up and down this path.
4. **Insaneta Crossit:** Designed to make the trek across the Great Trickle easier, this incomplete bridge was never finished because of its architect's disappearance.
5. **Swishswirl Cove:** Named for its gentle whirlpool, some gnomes correlate the asteroid that struck the cove to the happenings in Trickletrek.
6. **Swirlside Construction Site:** Intended for new homes to house Trickletrek's growing populace, construction on Swirlside stopped after its architect vanished.
7. **The Rotting Wood:** The northernmost groves of the Great Green reek of a sickness that drains away a person's colour.
8. **Gunter Greatgreen's Grove:** This beloved grove has become quarantined as the bleaching sickness spreads southbound from the Rotting Wood.
9. **Gabber the Greeter's Abode:** Located on the outskirts of Trickletrek, Gabber's cottage is a rest stop for visitors.
10. **The Bleached Ranch:** Located south of the main village, the gnomes of Trickletrek began avoiding the Dapperfield Ranch when the colour started to drain from its owner's complexion.

MARKETPLACE

Resources & Industry Fruit, guide services, lumber, venison

Base Value 550 gp; **Purchase Limit** 2,500 gp; **Spellcasting** 3rd; **Minor Items** 2d4; **Medium Items** 1d4; **Major Items** -

When the PCs arrive in Trickletrek, the following items are for sale:

- **Potions & Oils** *barkskin, charm animal, cure moderate wounds, speak with animals*

VILLAGE LORE

A PC making a Knowledge (geography) or Knowledge (local) check may know some information about the village. A successful check reveals all the information revealed by a lesser check.

DC 10: Named for the great river that lies west of the village, the gnomes of Trickletrik primarily make their living guiding travellers down the jagged canyon surrounding the Great Trickle.

DC 15: Headed by Gladius Gnarlbeard, a second settlement appropriately sized for “big folk” was slated for constructed near Swishswirl Cove, but construction has ceased. Mayor Hedgeman seeks to eventually unite the two settlements into a single town.

DC 20: The nomenclature for the Great Greens and its surrounding regions was chosen by Gunter Greatgreen, a local druid selected to be the region’s warden by the local archdruid.

VILLAGERS

Appearance The residents of Trickletrik prefer vibrant, natural colours in their garb such as vivid greens, pale pinks and blues and rich browns. Person hygiene is emphasized and knickknacks such as small charms are celebrated as symbols of individuality.

Dress The villagers prefer simple garments with cool, vibrant colours. Fancy embroideries and coat-of-arms are popular among the residents, although such garb seldom impedes its wearer’s ability to perform outdoor labour.

Nomenclature Nomenclature is fickle and mercurial.

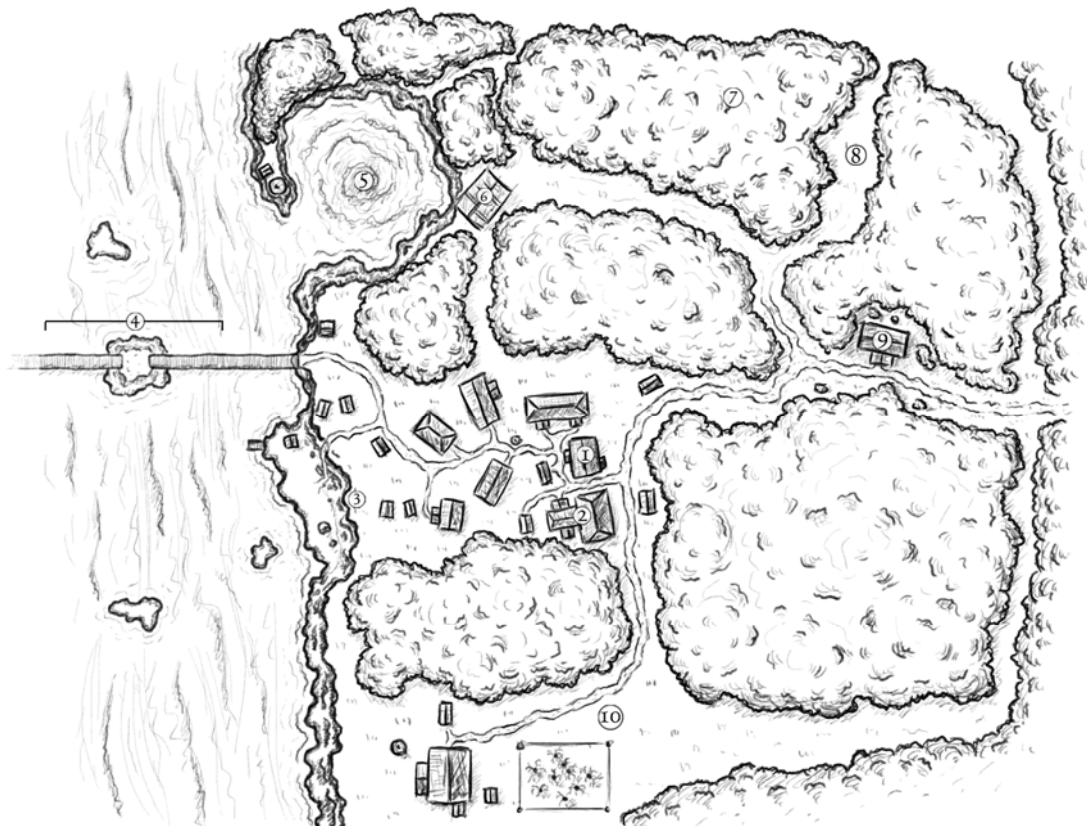
Gnomes are prone to altering their given and family names on personal whim, resulting in few naming trends and a town genealogy that is neigh impossible to fathom.

WHISPERS & RUMOURS

A PC can use Diplomacy to gather information about the village and its surroundings. This takes 1d4 hours and requires a DC 10 check. A character exceeding this check gains one additional rumour for each 5 points by which he exceeded DC 10. Use the table below to determine which rumour(s) the PC learns.

D6	RUMOUR
1*	Gunter Greatgreen is inflicting an otherworldly sickness upon the people of Trickletrik for encroaching too far upon the ancient forests of the Great Greens.
2	Cezar Valeborn has taken a fancy for Trickletrik’s mayor.
3*	Gladius Gnarlbeard met a gruesome death in the Great Greens and now haunts his incomplete bridge.
4*	The illness infecting Trickletrik is a direct result of the mayor’s ungnomely leadership practices.
5	Gabber the Greeter wards off illness by drinking a strange tonic he found while wandering in the woods.
6	The Swirlside asteroid impact might be related to the strange illness spreading throughout the Great Greens.

*False rumour



NOTABLE LOCATIONS

1: TRICKLETREK TOWN HOUSE

The most prominent building in Trickle trek is the town hall, by virtue of it being designed by humans. Although gnomes are the majority race of Trickle trek, humans and halflings almost unanimously run the village's government as most gnomes have little interest in the monotony of politics. As a result, Mayor Helga Hedgeman (LN female human ranger [urban ranger] 5) has held her position without opposition for nearly 15 years. However, Helga often complains about the difficulty in getting the gnomes to make any legitimate political decisions, leaving her burdened with numerous concerns, especially the spread of a mysterious sickness that is plaguing Swirlside and driving the gnomes into all-out hysteria.

2: JAMEAR'S MARKET

One of the first investors in Swirlside, Kevinnen Jamear (N male halfling rogue 3) is as opportunistic as they come and as sharp as a tack. But when Gladius Gnarlbeard went missing, Kevinnen wisely decided to channel his assets out of Swirlside and into purchasing the Trickle trek Lodge, the village inn, after its previous owner succumbed to a mysterious illness. Although originally sized for gnomes, Jamear set about making his new inn as accommodating as possible to travellers and residents alike and he even sells knickknacks in the inn's common room. Jamear desperately wants a return on the gold he spent on Swirlside and as the only living investor, he has much to gain if wandering adventurers were to save Trickle trek from destruction.

3: THE TRICKLETREK

Although called other names by other races, gnomes have always called the river west of Trickle trek the Great Trickle. Cutting deep through the land, the river lies at the bottom of a deep canyon that is impassable for miles around save for the Trickle trek; a winding path that is only slightly less treacherous than the surrounding cliffs. The gnomes of the Great Greens took to guiding travellers down the path, across the river and back up again for coin and named their village after the trail. Although available to the public, few travellers are foolish enough to try to traverse the Trickle trek without an experienced guide. Those who do seldom live to regret it.

4: INSANETA CROSSIT

As the village of Trickle trek expanded, it was only natural for its inhabitants to seek new, exciting ways for travellers and townsfolk alike to cross the Great Trickle. When the dwarven architect Gladius Gnarlbeard (now CE colour-blighted bodak) was contracted to build Swirlside, he lamented the difficulty presented in getting supplies to his worksite across the Great

Trickle. For a nominal fee, Gladius agreed to build his masterpiece, a bridge of peerless architecture he named the Germainta Crossing after his darling wife. When Gnarlbeard disappeared, construction stopped as rumours spread that he and his workers now haunted the bridge as undead monstrosities.

Not long after Gnarlbeard's disappearance, a group of travellers attempted to cross Germainta's Crossing. According to witnesses, they had made it half way across when the bridge dumped the entire entourage into the Great Trickle before lurching back into position. There were no survivors. Gladius's widow is said to visit the bridge each evening in hopes of encountering her husband's ghost, but even she is reluctant to actually step onto the bridge itself.

5: SWISHSWIRL COVE

Because of its natural, gentle whirlpool Swishswirl Cove has always been a place of natural wonder to the gnomes of Trickle trek, so much so that plans were made to construct a new neighbourhood off the cove's southern shores. Gunter Greatgreen (NE male colour-blighted gnome druid [blight druid] 8) adamantly opposed construction from the day Gladius Gnarlbeard began working until the day a mysterious asteroid crashed into the centre of the cove's whirlpool, causing the waters to become as volatile as a bubbling cauldron. Since then, strange happenings have plagued Trickle trek, from disappearances to a mysterious sickness that rapidly drains the colouration from living folk. Cezar Valeborn (NG male half-elf bard [archaeologist] 5), a travelling occultologist, has theorized that an impact as large as the one the people of Trickle trek described likely tore a hole in the riverbed, draining large volumes of water into an unknown subterranean cavern. Unknown to the people of Trickle trek, the asteroid harboured a terrible entity; a colour out of space that feeds upon the people of the Great Greens from beneath their feet.

6: SWIRLSIDE CONSTRUCTION SITE

Although Trickle trek has a sizable human population the village was never designed for "big folk" and as a result many streets and businesses are simply too small for Trickle trek's larger inhabitants. Helga Hedgeman, Trickle trek's human mayor, recently decided to expand Trickle trek in order to accommodate people of all sizes. After contracting Gladius Gnarlbeard to design the new settlement and lead construction, the settlement of Swirlside was born. (Or would have been born, if not for Gnarlbeard's disappearance in the days following the asteroid impact in Swishswirl Cove.)

7: THE ROTTING WOOD

The area of the Green Greats now called the Rotting Wood did not exist until the asteroid crashed into Swishswirl Cove. Within days, the forest to the east of the cove began to wither and die as its animal and fey guardians became bleached and pale, gaining an otherworldly tint. Most of the guides who have investigated the Rotting Wood never returned; those who have claim the area is littered with the ashen remains of infected creatures and haunted by those who still suffer from the illness. Extremely agitated by their sickness, the denizens of the Rotting Wood curiously refuse to attack anything infected by the otherworldly taint; even infamously territorial animals refrain from striking at one another, perhaps recognizing each other's illness as a sign of allegiance.

In the weeks following the asteroid's impact, the taint has crept further southward. Some claim the wood's protector, Gunter Greatgreen, prowls the forest at night as agitated as any of the other infected creatures that call the Rotting Wood home.

8: GUNTER GREATGREEN'S GROVE

Before the asteroid struck Swishswirl Cove, Gunter Greatgreen (NE male colour-blighted gnome druid [blight druid] 8) was a highly respected resident of Trickleterek, and by far its oldest citizen. A powerful druid who was tasked to watch over the Great Greens, Gunter took the forest's name for his own and spent the next 75 years of his life preserving the balance between civilization and the natural world in the area. Vocally opposed to the construction of Swirlside, some of Trickleterek's residents were relieved when Gunter mysteriously stopped protesting its construction after the asteroid crashed into Swirlside Cove. Not long after the druid's disappearance a sickening blight began spreading throughout the Great Green that corrupted man, beast and tree alike, bleaching them of their colour and warping their minds.

Although some claim the bleaching sickness that has overtaken Trickleterek was imparted upon the village by Gunter, Mayor Hedgeman, who knew Gunter best of anyone, resolutely states the druid loved his forest home too much to taint it with whatever is plaguing the Great Green. In fact, the truth is far worse. Having followed the asteroid that impacted Swishswirl in order to observe its effects, a gathering of extraterrestrial mi-go ambushed Gunter and claimed his magical grove as their own. Through horrid experimentation and mutation, Gunter has been reduced to a near-mindless pawn of the mi-gos' machinations; as the sun falls each evening, the shambling wreckage that is Gunter Greatgreen wanders from his grove, to spread a colouring ring of blight throughout the wood.

9: GABBER THE GREETER'S ABODE

Although all gnomes are eccentric, even the residents of Trickleterek admit that Gabber the Greeter (N male gnome bard 2) is an acquired taste, hence the location of his cottage on the eastern outskirts of the Great Green. Although employed as the forest's greeter and director towards Trickleterek, Gabber's maniac obsession with befriending everyone he meets often inspires travellers to hurry along towards Trickleterek than befriend the lonely greeter. Willing to spin any story and tell any lie necessary to bring others around, Gabber's isolation is (accidentally) self-inflicted. Sharp as a tack and persistent as mould, Gabber has continued to live in relative health and happiness for two centuries.

When the sickness started to spread throughout the Great Greens, the people of Trickleterek conveniently forgot to check on Gabber, whose close proximity to the taint and stubborn refusal to relocate made many assume it was only a matter of time before he succumbed to the sickness. Some folks who stayed in contact with Gabber claim he found a magic tonic that cleans away the taint when applied, but thus far Gabber has neither confirmed nor denied these claims. In truth, the crafty gnome discovered a mi-go encampment while visiting his friend, Gunter Greatgreen, and stole some of their otherworldly medicine for his own protection.

10: THE BLEACHED RANCH

The Daisylock Ranch has been in Dapperfield's (NE male colour-blighted bard [animal speaker] 4) family for several generations; an impressive feat by gnomish standards. Claiming to have kept his colours by constantly inventing new ways to grow and serve the berries his family has traditionally harvested, Dapperfield was beloved throughout Trickleterek both as a orchardist as well as for his pitch-perfect songs, all of which centre around the joys surrounding his harvest. That is, until the colourless illness swept across Trickleterek. Dapperfield was among the first to show signs of the illness; his blueberry beard was quickly bleached by the strange sickness, tinted with what some might call an otherworldly taint. As Dapperfield's symptoms worsened, the gnomes of Trickleterek quickly quarantined all produce from the Dapperfield Ranch, now called the Bleached Ranch by the village's few children. No one has seen Dapperfield or the workers he employs for nearly a month, although plumes of sickening smoke waft over the ranch every night as the sun dips beneath the horizon.

LIFE IN TRICKLETREK

Business has virtually ceased in Trickle Trek because of rampant illness and the strange happenings plaguing the village.

TRADE & INDUSTRY

Most gnomes in Trickle Trek are self-employed as guides or practice crafts such as weaving or leatherworking. Other residents are more likely to work as orchardists, construction workers or hunters. With the residents of the Great Green succumbing to a deadly contagion, however, most industry has ground to a halt.

LAW & ORDER

Although the gnomes of Trickle Trek care very little for politics, they understand the importance of village laws, although merry mischief abounded in Trickle Trek. In the wake of illness and hysteria, however, life has become a paranoid monotony for all of Trickle Trek's residents as gnome and big folk alike quickly succumb to desperation and depression.

EVENTS

While the PCs are in the village, one or more of the below events may occur. Choose or determine randomly:

COLOUR-BLIGHTED VILLAGER CR 1/3 (XP 135)

This gnome seems almost completely drained of colour – its hair, eyes and skin are all of a dull grey hue.

Colour-blighted gnome commoner 1

N Small humanoid (gnome)

Init +0; **Senses** low-light vision; Perception +1, Sense Motive -1

Speed 20 ft.; **ACP** 0; Acrobatics +0 (-4 jumping), Climb +5, Swim +5

AC 11, touch 11, flat-footed 11; **CMD** 9; +4 vs. giant-type foes (+1 size)

Fort +2, **Ref** +0, **Will** -1; +2 vs. illusions

hp 6 (1 HD)

Space 5 ft.; **Base Atk** +0; **CMB** -1

Melee dagger +1 (1d3/19-20)

Atk Options +1 attack vs. reptilian or goblinoid foes, +1 attack and damage vs. creatures not colour-blighted

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 1; concentration +1)

1/day—*dancing lights*, *ghost sound* (DC 10), *prestidigitation*, *speak with animals*

Abilities Str 11, Dex 11, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 8, Cha 10

SQ weapon familiarity

Feats Skill Focus (guide or hunter)

Skills as above plus Profession (guide or hunter) +8

Languages Common, Gnome, Sylvan

Gear as above plus belt pouch, 2d4 cp, peasant's outfit

D6 EVENT

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 | The PCs watch a resident transform into a colour-blighted villager before their eyes. |
| 2 | A crowd of hysteric gnomes swarms the Trickle Trek Town House, blaming the strange illness on the village's mayor. |
| 3 | Kevinnen Jamear offers the PCs free room and board in order to try to sweet talk them into helping the village. |
| 4 | Germaina Gnarlbeard decides to visit Insaneta Crossit at dusk to wait for her husband's ghost. |
| 5 | At nightfall, several mi-go raid Trickle Trek, attempting to collect sickened villagers as specimens for study. |
| 6 | The PCs watch plumes of odd-coloured smoke rise from the Bleached Ranch at dusk. |

GUNTER GREATGREEN

CR 7 (XP 3,200)

Colour-blighted middle aged gnome druid (blight druid) 8

N Small humanoid (gnome)

Init +1; **Senses** low-light vision; Perception +13, Sense Motive +10

Speed 20 ft.; woodland stride; **ACP** 0; Acrobatics +1 (-3 jumping), Climb +4, Fly +11, Swim +4

AC 14, touch 13, flat-footed 13; **CMD** 15; +4 vs. giant-type foes (+1 armour [*bracers of armour* +1] +1 deflection [*ring of protection* +1], +1 Dex, +1 size)

Fort +9, **Ref** +3, **Will** +9; +2 vs. illusions

hp 68 (8 HD)

Space 5 ft.; miasma (DC 20); **Base Atk** +6; **CMB** +5

Melee +1 sickle +7/+2 (1d4) or

Melee Touch bleeding touch (7/day) +6 (1d6 bleed; 4 rds.)

Druid Spells Prepared (CL 8; concentration +12)

4th—*death ward*, *lesser age resistance*, *touch of slime* (DC 19)

3rd—*animate dead*, *ash storm*, *contagion* (DC 18), *fungus infestation* (DC 18), *poison* (DC 18)

2nd—*barkskin*, *feast of ashes* (DC 17), *pernicious poison* (DC 17), *wilderness soldiers*

1st—*cause fear* (DC 16), *death knell*, *frostbite* (DC 15), *obscuring mist* (2), *pass without trace*, *produce flame*

0—*detect poison*, *guidance*, *resistance*, *spark*

Atk Options +1 attack vs. reptilian or goblinoid foes, +1 attack and damage vs. creatures not colour-blighted

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 8; concentration +12)

1/day—*dancing lights*, *ghost sound* (DC 12), *prestidigitation*, *speak with animals*

Special Actions wild shape (3/day)

Combat Gear *wand of touch of slime* (43 chgs.)

Abilities Str 9, Dex 12, Con 16, Int 14, Wis 18, Cha 14

SQ vermin empathy (+10 [+6]), weapon familiarity

Feats Ability Focus (miasma), Natural Spell, Spell Focus (necromancy), Toughness, Weapon Finesse

Skills as above plus Knowledge (nature) +13 and Survival +11

Languages Common, Draconic, Druidic, Dwarven, Gnome, Sylvan

Gear as above plus spell component pouch, belt pouch, 12 gp, cleric's vestments

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