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WHISPERS OF THE DARK MOTHER

1 of 6

BY ROBERT GRESHAM



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SEEDS OF EVIL

WHISPERS OF THE DARK MOTHER PART ONE

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ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

For centuries before the heroes Gran and Brynn settled the continent of Brynnndell, the region was populated by barbaric humanoids that followed ancient, foul gods. Across the land these savage cultists erected repugnant totems and crude obelisks as offerings to their malignant deities. For years they practiced their unspeakable rites in defiled glades and caverns, until civilization came to the continent. Once the country became settled, the more depraved cults were wiped out, and their shrines destroyed. The new rulers brought with them new gods to guide the people.

But deep in the fungus blighted forest surrounding the foothills of quartz-peaked Bright Mountain, one of the old temples remained active. Fearing they would be destroyed like the other cults to the Old Ones, the members of The Ebon Dawn retreated into their mountain stronghold and strengthened their defenses. They summoned guardians from beyond, setting them loose upon the valley, while they wove spells that would make them immortal. They succeeded, but in horrific ways they weren't prepared for. Weakened while they adapted to their new forms, the cult was discovered and defeated, the wounded survivors sealed in their mountain temple. Powerful prisoners, the remaining members of the Ebon Dawn resigned themselves to their apparent fate.

Until one night, the half-orc witch, Heskos Vell, succeeded in contacting them.

Through dreams, the imprisoned leaders of the Ebon Dawn taught Heskos the religion of Shub-Niggurath. His new dark patron supplied him with the power he'd always dreamed of. Soon completely insane, Heskos pledged his life to the Dark Mother. He prayed nightly and through unspeakable nightmares, was given the task to free the Ebon Dawn leaders from Bright Mountain.

Through research, both mundane and supernatural, Heskos discovered that the incantations used to bind the entrance to the Temple of Shub-Niggurath, were inscribed in a magical tome called, *The Lamentations of the Fungus Men*; a heretical work by insane druids living near the Shadowlands desert.

During his quest to procure the book, several unwholesome allies flocked to Heskos's side. The first was the madman Corvun Baerg, a devotee of the Black Goat, who would do anything to gain power and concubines. The second was his new familiar, Black Tom, a more powerful conduit of Shub-Niggurath's power.

Over time others joined them. Soon Heskos found himself the nominal leader of a new sect of the Ebon Dawn. Using a terrible spell to remove and then animate his flesh, Heskos claimed the moniker, *The Skinless One*, leading the cult's rituals while still searching for the keys to release his deathless masters.

The witch recently learned that the eccentric apothecary

and collector, Lady Canterville, living in the town of Brighton, possesses a fragment of the *Lamentations of the Fungus Men*, and has instructed a half-orc, Kemon Haveran, to retrieve it.

Meanwhile, Lady Canterville has put out the word that she seeks brave souls for a difficult task. The curious old woman has a known interest in aggressive flora and wants a handful of seeds from the dangerous plant life inhabiting the valley.

ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

The players arrive in Brighton and hear about Lady Canterville's job offer. Soon after they learn that a group of merchants from the capital were slaughtered a week ago north of town, and that a local boy has gone missing in the same area. Talking with Lady Canterville reveals that she is after a half-dozen weedwhip seeds for the creation of a special anti-toxin. After accepting the job, the players travel north through the forest, encountering a band of starving vor-gremlins. After dealing with the capricious sprites, the party continues on, discovering a tunnel short cut under a fungus shrouded hill. Traveling through the tunnel leads to an encounter with a cave fisher, while traveling around it adds hours to the expedition. Upon reaching the weedwhip grove, the party faces the hostile creatures until they collect enough seeds.

During their journey back to town they find the missing boy from town, seriously injured in a hazardous patch of xtabay flowers. After rescuing the boy, the group encounters an ogre bent on eating them.

Arriving back in Brighton, they find Lady Canterville under attack by thieving sorcerers. The party defends the noblewoman but discovers one of the burglars, a half-orc, has already absconded with a book from her collection; a fragment of *The Lamentations of the Fungus Men*. Lady Canterville rewards them for the seeds, but implores them to track down the book before the evil spells within can be used.

ADVANCEMENT TRACK

The players begin this adventure at first level. They should reach second level before they return to Lady Canterville. Feel free to add any encounters from the random encounter chart found in the *Bright Mountain Valley Regional Sourcebook*, or any monster found in a forest environment, so that the pc's gain the needed xp to advance in level before returning to town.



CHAPTER ONE: THE ARRIVAL

The adventure begins once the players arrive in Brighton. As they enter a town crier climbs atop a wooden crate and announces the day's news.

The monotony of rolling grasslands and sparse forest breaks up ahead as the town of Brighton comes into view. Farms with various fruits and vegetables create a quilt of colors embracing the town. The fishing boat covered Taalmaara River cuts the town in two, while the Lord Mayor's castle sits atop a hill overlooking the settlement like a watchful guardian.

The scent of cooked food drifts from the various food carts lining the cobblestoned, King's Road, their merchants shouting the day's deals as you pass.

At an intersection ahead, a young boy climbs onto a wooden crate and blows into a horn. The sound causes many to turn towards him.

"Hear ye, hear ye, The Lady Celeste Canterville is still in need of brave heroes for a dangerous task. Interested parties should apply directly to the Canterville Estates before sundown.

The Lord Mayor also reminds all that due to the

to the harvest's bounty, free fruit is still available at the castle. Thank you."

The boy hops down, scoops up the crate, and scrambles up the road toward the next intersection where he delivers his message again.

The pc's are now free to do as they please. A couple of likely options follow.

Food Carts: The various carts sell chicken pies, salted pork, and sausages with cheese. The food is decent and inexpensive, making the carts a daily destination for many laborers in the area. They are operated by Nikoli Custus, Rafael Marlin, and Garrick Longbeard. Nikoli and Rafael are friendly, but the dwarf Garrick is very competitive and will try to undercut the others to make a sale. They overhear a lot of town gossip, becoming excellent sources for rumors and other information, though Garrick finds discussing the personal affairs of others rude. If asked about taverns or inns, the merchants will direct the party to the Horse Brass Pub, or The Laughing Dragon.

Lady Canterville: The aging socialite and collector lives in her estate just outside of town. She has the largest collection of books in Brighton; the wizard Alhoon often

spends hours at a time pouring over tomes in her library.

Free Apples? Let's get in on that! If the characters decide to go for free apples, they travel up the hill that leads to the Lord Mayor's manor. At the castle, they are met by the scribe Antonius, who cheerfully doles out a 3lb. canvas bag of over ripened apples to each person who asks for one. There are only a few seeking free fruit when the PC's arrive. One woman is there petitioning to see the Lord Mayor and Antonius dutifully sets an appointment for her. A DC 15 perception check reveals that the woman is seeking compensation for livestock slaughtered by wild animals.

Taverns/Inns: Five taverns and inns stand out from among the others in town, though ale, mead, and a local brandy made from cinnamon and apples are served at most food establishments.

The Laughing Dragon: This dinner theater ran by half-elf siblings puts on nightly plays for patrons, many the original works of the owners. Rooms can be expensive, 5 gp, to 7gp for included meals.

The Horse Brass: Run by the affable Clive Bechlynn, this rowdy tavern is packed at nearly all hours. Craft beers from throughout the West are served by some of Brighton's most sociable barmaids and bartenders. Information relating to town labor, trustworthy merchants, even illegal monster fighting can be found in this popular dive.

*Note: because the regulars tend to get drunk rather quickly at the Horse Brass, information often flows too freely here. PC's receive a +1 bonus to diplomacy checks while dealing with fellow patrons after spending at least 1 hour at the tavern.

Ogre's Belly: This quant tavern caters mostly a non-human and non-dwarf crowd. The owner, Zuchar, is a menacing looking but gentle half-orc who brews his honey nut ale on site. The Belly as it's commonly called, serves a popular breaded sausage, fried crispy in bacon fat and served with mustard. The rooms are cheap, only 5 sp a night, but humans who come to the belly can expect a cold reception.

The Burning Candle: Madam Ignala and her ifrit companion Faegrin run this card house and brothel near the warehouse district of town. Most pleasures can be found in this den of vice, but Madam Ignala draws the line at violence and other unmentionable acts of depravity. Faegrin has a reputation for being unusually lucky at dice and cards, but that doesn't stop players from lining up. Many members of the Bhestos and Vallaara family along with several shopkeepers in the area have been petitioning the Lord Mayor to shutter the place, so far unsuccessfully.

Leopus' Roadhouse: Located just outside of town, this seedy inn is frequented by vagabonds, criminals, and other dregs of Brighton's society. The owner, Leopus, claims to be a former adventurer forced into retirement after being mauled by hellhounds. Leopus will rent rooms to anyone at a fee of 3 gp a night. It's a rare day when a brawl doesn't break out at this rough establishment.

TABLE: TAVERN GOSSIP

To receive one of the following pieces of town gossip a PC must make a successful Diplomacy check DC 12. Then roll 1d10 and the PC receives the corresponding number. Some rumors, marked with either *, **, or † are received automatically at the indicated tavern/inn.

1. "Merchants traveling from Griffonport to Bryndell were found slaughtered to the man, their bodies arranged in a strange pattern."
2. "Be careful wandering through Ogre's Alley, that street is haunted."
3. "Sheriff Tate hates small-folk, going out of his way to harass halflings."†
4. "I saw the Jade Fox once, beautiful and graceful like an elf, but covered in green fur, with the head and tail of a fox!"
5. "A group of half-orcs have been seen around town lately. I hear they were thrown of Zuchar's for being too rowdy."
6. "I just had a baby boy! Drinks on me. I tell ya, I was so scared, I hallucinated that the midwife delivering him turned into an ogre."
7. "That rake Ariston the perfumer had an affair with Kaarlo Merin's wife, and that's why he killed himself in Ogre's Alley." **
8. "I hear that the wizard Alhoon buys korred braids. You can usually find them by the stone shrines out in the forest after the faeries dance."
9. "Harrin Frost's not a crook like those brothers working down at the general store. Only three-gold-trade-in for a longsword? Crooks I tell ya." *
10. "They're fighting deranged owlbeats against each other after hours at the farmer's guild-longhouse. Two gold can get you into a fight, but bring more, because they bet deep over there." *

† Ogre's Belly, * Horse Brass Pub, ** The Burning Candle.

Follow up questions require a second Diplomacy check at DC 10 with a 50% chance that this information comes from a different patron, requiring additional time to gather.

Whispers of the Dark Mother

PART ONE



About the dead merchants:

"The Beast of Bright Mountain Valley got them. They were found southeast of town near Lady Canterville's estate. The Beast's never come so close to town before."

"The bodies, what was left of them, were buried last week in the cemetery."

"The pattern? No clue. Alhoon the wizard was with the men that went to take care of the corpses, and he didn't understand it either; they say."

About Ogre's Alley:

"Every once and a while they find a be-headed body in that alley; Stay clear of it."

"Kaarlo Merin was the last one found dead in the alley. That was about a year ago."

About Sheriff Tate:

"He's been leaning on the Leafy Tonic, owned by the newlyweds Frobe and Caramanera. He's been fining them for every minor infraction possible. Meanwhile, Gubbo the

butcher has rats the size of dogs!"

"Tate's a fair man, probably the most honest man in town."

About the Jade Fox:

"A notorious burglar, Sheriff Tate's been after him or her for almost a decade. Only steals high value treasures from rich nobles so, good for the Fox, I say!"

"The Jade fox isn't some hybrid beast; she's a woman in skin tight leather armor with a whip that looks like a tail, and special goggles that resemble fox ears. She can use that whip on me any day."

About Half-Orcs:

"Not may live in town. There's Zuchar, one of the midwives, and then the hermit Kreos, but his house is north of Brighton, in the forest."

"I hear ol' Zuchar had to throw a couple out of his place a couple weeks back. Unsavory, the lot of 'em, you ask me."

About Ogres:

"Those foul monsters should be eradicated. Death to ogres!" Other patrons repeat the shout in deafening unison.

About Ariston the perfumer:

"That man is a lady charmer, I tell you what. It's those perfumes of his, women can't resist them. I hear he makes them from the centipedes that infest the sewers. Either way, my wife loves his scents, but I have to buy them, I won't let her go near that philanderer."

"I hear his bestselling perfumes are crafted from the scent glands of giant centipedes and he raises the creatures in the basement of his shop. True or not; he pays good gold for 'pede glands."

About Kaarlo Merin:

"He was a good lad. Incompetent though. Lost his job the same way he caught his wife in bed with that scoundrel Ariston. Went to Ogre's Alley and took his life. What a shame."

"Kaarlo was killed by the ghost of Ogres's Alley. Stay away from that place!"

About Alhoon the Wizard:

Alhoon lives in the rookery tower and provides spell casting service for the town at the charge of the Lord Mayor. He often spends his time with the pigeons on the tower roof or at the library at Lady Canterville estate."

"Alhoon buys all sorts of weird stuff. Be careful around them stone shrines, if there's any korred dancing within the circle, they'll attack you if you disturb them."

About The general store:

"Ostog who runs the place is from Kladio. He's stubborn as heck and hates magic. He rents out a space to two brothers: Jovaal and Haarn. They argue about every little thing: especially the price they'll pay for goods. Save yourself the headache friend and do your business with Harin Frost."

About the illegal monster fights:

"Forget I mentioned it. In fact, piss off; I've got nothing more to say."

"Go to the farmer's guild longhouse after hours on Moonday. They change the password weekly though, I think it's, 'Honey pot. Be careful, the beasts sometimes get loose and attack the crowd. Of course, there's an over under on that happening, so I wonder if it's intentional..."

Guilds:

If the PC's ask around about an adventurer's or traveler's guild, they are directed to the Temple of Balanced Coin, whom often hire for dangerous tasks, the town sheriff Byron Tate, or

to Leopus's Roadhouse. The temple only has guard jobs available, while the Sheriff and Leopus will inform the party that the Lady Canterville has been soliciting for brave heroes to complete a dangerous task.

THE CANTERVILLE ESTATES

Once the party decides to inquire about the dangerous task Lady Canterville is hiring for, they find her manor easily just outside of town. When they arrive at the estates, read or paraphrase the following:

A high-steeped, three story manor looms before you. Long windows on the first and second floors display stained glass designs of various flowers in bloom. Short hedges flank a winding path of polished stone leading from the outer gates to the front oak doors. Thick scarlet rose bushes line the outer walls while bright green ivy coats the sides to the roof. As you approach you see a fist sized bird land on the roses, and the flowers respond. Their petals curl over and snap down on the bird like hungry jaws. The bird shrieks and struggles, alerting the other roses to prey. They stretch toward the bird, biting down on its exposed back. Within moments it goes still as the roses drain the fluids from its body.

The front door swings inward and an old human with bone white hair ringing the back of his otherwise bald head, stands before you. His expression is blank but his red-rimmed eyes look tired.

"Welcome to the home of Lady Celeste Canterville. I am Emilio, her lady's loyal servant. I assume you've come about the job?"

After the PC's introduce themselves and confirm they've come seeking employment, Emilio leads them through the manor's foyer to a wide oak staircase leading to the second floor. At the top, he directs them to a sitting room already occupied by a young half elf, and informs them that Lady Canterville will be with them shortly while he prepares some tea and biscuits.

The half elf, a young woman named Kara, is a chronicler

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who's been waiting for adventurer's to arrive. She wants to write a famous song about heroes that will be sung in taverns throughout the country. She carries a beautiful lute that she's learned to play quite adequately.

As soon as Emilio departs to make refreshments, Kara introduces herself to the group. She is a good natured, though humorously simple woman who's never been farther than a day away from town.

Kara

CG Half-elf bard 1

Medium humanoid (elf, human)

Init +2; **Senses** low-light vision; Perception +5

DEFENSE

AC 15, touch 12, flat-footed 13 (+3 armor, +2 Dex)

hp 9 (1d8+1)

Fort +1, **Ref** +4, **Will** +1; 2 vs. enchantments

Immune sleep

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee *copper* rapier* +2 (1d6/18-20)

Ranged *shortbow* +2 (1d6/x3)

Special Attacks Bardic performance

7 rounds/day (countersong, distraction, fascinate, inspire courage +1)

Bard Spells Known (CL 1st; concentration +4)

1st (2/day)-*grease*,

hideous laughter (DC 14)

0 (At will)-*dancing lights*,

ghost sound (DC 13), *message*,

prestidigitation

TACTICS

During Combat Kara buffs her comrades with inspire courage, but uses grease to escape if things go badly.

STATISTICS

Str 10, **Dex** 14, **Con** 12, **Int** 13, **Wis** 8, **Cha** 17

Base Atk +0; **CMB** +0; **CMD** +12

Feats Skill Focus (perform [strings]), Weapon Finesse

Skills Bluff +7, Diplomacy +7, Perception +5, Perform (strings) +12, Sense Motive +3, Sleight of Hand +6, Stealth +5, Use Magic Device +7

Languages Common, Elven

SQ bardic knowledge +1, elf blood

Combat Gear potions of cure light wounds (2), alchemist's fire, sunrod, tanglefoot bag, thunderstone; **Other Gear** studded leather, copper* rapier, shortbow with 20 arrows, masterwork lute, 13 gp

*copper weapons have the fragile quality, and break on an attack roll of natural 1.

Kara asks to join the group on their adventure into the forest. She asks for no payment, just the opportunity to chronicle their journey. If they refuse, she secretly follows the party, revealing herself after the encounter with the starving vor-gremlins. Along the trip, she constantly strums her lute while trying out potential song lyrics. When she finds ones she likes, she stops to write them down in a scroll she keeps in a case on her belt. If half of the party dies in combat, Kara uses grease to escape, fleeing back to Brighton.

After about ten minutes, Emilio returns with the tea and biscuits. After serving the food, he leaves, and Lady Canterville enters the room. When she does, read or paraphrase the following.



An elderly woman in an expensive gown walks in and takes a seat across from you.

Her face is weathered from long days beneath the sun, and her wrinkled hands are calloused from hard work. She smiles and clears her throat but is suddenly seized by a coughing fit. Emilio pours her a glass of water which she accepts, taking a sip and placing it next to her on an end table.

"Forgive me, welcome," she says after a moment. "I am Lady Celeste Canterville, thank you for coming. As you may have heard in town, I am looking for brave souls for a dangerous task. You lot certainly look the part."

Emilio produces a scroll, unfurls it and places it before you. It is a small map of the region.

"About three days north of Brighton, within the forest, are groves of gate willows. These hazardous trees shed petals that can be used to

empower summoning spells. I am in need of these petals, and some weed whip seeds, to create a special anti-toxin that will help cure many diseases. Because the petals and seeds are quite hard to procure, I am willing to pay 300 gold for three usable specimens from each.

This map shows the basic trail toward the gate willow grove and the weedwhip patches-though it is several years old and may be inaccurate in places because of its age."

About Gate-Willows

"They look like shimmering willow trees, roughly 9 feet tall. Its hanging branches glisten with arcane energy. Its tangerine colored catkins contain the magic I wish to cultivate. If destroyed, the tree and all but one catkin shrivels to dust. The tree can summon forest creatures to protect it."

A DC 15 Knowledge Nature check is enough to know that gate willows are often used as homes by dryads, and that the tree can, as a full round action, release a petal that summons 1d3 creatures from the summon monster II list.

About Weedwhips:

"They can be hard to notice because their large petals look like any ordinary flowers. And, like I said before, they have long whip like vines that can strike the flesh from your bones at a distance. And they're poisonous. In my youth I was able to collect the seeds easier, but now, not so much."

A DC 15 Knowledge Nature check is enough to also know these above facts. Success by 5 or more also reveals that the whips of the plant are languid, and don't make attacks of opportunity, and that attacking it with slashing weapons exposes the attacker to its poison.

About the dead merchants/Beast of Bright Mountain Valley:

"Grisly business that was. Those poor men. The Beast has never attacked so close to town before. To be honest, it's one of the reasons I seek the whipvine seeds; added security."

"They were laid down in a strange pattern; the flesh from only their torso's removed. Alhoon, the town wizard, sketched the scene for his records."

After the party accepts the job, Emilio shows them out.

Outside a woman is waiting. If the party went for free apples at the Lord Mayor's castle, they recognize her from before; she was petitioning Antonius for a meeting with Mayor Goodwater. Either way, when she sees the party exit Lady Canterville's estate, she approaches them. Her face is full of fear and anxiety. When she reaches them, read the following.

"Please help, I beg you, can you help me? My name is Shala. My cows were all slaughtered at my farmstead and while I was here in town petitioning for their replacement, my son has gone missing. I think he has been taken by the Beast! If you are traveling north for the noblewoman, will you search for my son along your way?"

About your dead livestock:

"This morning I found all six of my milkcows slaughtered. They were disemboweled, and their entrails draped around the exterior of my house like festival decorations. It has to be the Beast. Animals would have devoured my cows, not strung them around to scare us."

About your son:

"Faven is a good lad, almost ten years old. I should have brought him with me when I came to town, but I was afraid to leave the farm unattended after the cows were killed; now Faven is gone."

About searching for Faven:

"For the past month we've been hearing strange, maddening howls coming from the north. I'm sure they belong to the Beast. Please, if you head that way, please, search for Faven and bring him home to me."

If the party agrees to search for Faven, Shala gives them a wood carving of a knight to show him so he'll know they've been sent by her. She can offer no money as she's now in serious financial trouble from losing her cows. Losing Faven on top of that might destroy her.

It is almost evening when the party returns to Brighton. The PC's may wish to secure lodging if they haven't already or they may decide to set out into the forest right away. If



they want to purchase any additional supplies, they are able to at the general store. All mundane items below 50 gp are available, though potions of cure light wounds sell for 10% less than the listed price.

CHAPTER TWO: INTO THE WOODS

As the party makes their way through the forest north of Brighton, they risk running afoul of its dangerous denizens. During the day there is a 20% chance they encounter a wandering monster, and during the night this roll is made twice. Consult the following table, or insert any creature of appropriate CR that is native to forests or temperate hills.

Each square is 12 miles square and due to the heavy vegetation takes a full 48 hours to fully explore. The forest is overgrown and quite dense so the Game Master should be familiar with the rules for becoming lost. The ground is uneven in many places and is very hard.

PCs must make a DC 12 Survival check to construct a comfortable enough camp. Failure indicates that the PC did not sleep well and is fatigued until she can get proper rest.

Forest Square Unless otherwise indicated by a keyed entry on the map, each forest square has the following features:

Flora- Oak and firs are the predominant tree types, with the local hybrid, the Gran Oak (a mix of valley and blue oak) being the most common. The trees can be home to many hostile creatures, especially decapus' and snakes. Wildflowers grow throughout, along with wide-bladed, dark-green grass. The nutrient rich soil of the valley forest is almost black. The land is bumpy but the overgrowth provides relief from the sun during bright, hot days.

Fauna- Squirrels, rabbits, deer, and snakes are common in the forest as are owl bears, giant eagles, and mountain lions. The Drenhawk, a local red-bodied bird with bright, blue-and-yellow plums sprouting from its crown, fills the forest air with its signature song.

Hill Square Unless otherwise indicated by a keyed entry on the map, each hill square has the following features:

Flora- The grassy hills of the valley are blanketed in various wildflowers, and small fir trees that only reach 6 feet tall. Many of the hills are in fact burial cairns left over from the barbarians who once ruled the region.

Fauna- In addition to the rabbits and squirrels common

in the forest, the hills are home to field mice, stray cats, and goats. Owls break the quiet of night with their constant hoots.

Random Encounters in Bright Mountain Valley

Not an all-inclusive list but a sampling of some of the dangerous wildlife living within the valley.

D20	Creature	percentile
1	Huge Earth Elemental	01%-05%
2	Wyrmling Green Dragon	06%-10%
3	Giant Scorpion	11%-15%
4	Decapus	16%-20%
5	Dire Wolf	21%-25%
6	Assassin Vine	26%-30%
7	4 x Yellow Musk Creeper	31%-35%
8	3 x Werewolf	36%-40%
9	4 x Giant Wasp	41%-45%
10	5 x Spider Swarm	46%-50%
11	Ogre	51%-55%
12	Centipede Swarm	56%-60%
13	Large Earth Elemental	61%-65%
14	Gate Willow	66%-70%
15	2 x Korred	71%-75%
16	Unicorn	76%-80%
17	3 x Whipvine	81%-85%
18	Chupacabra	86%-90%
19	Ivy Sprite	91%-95%
20	Treant	96%-00%

Exploring the Valley

A. THE TOWN OF BRIGHTON.

Landmark-visual. The town of Brighton is automatically discovered upon exploring this square. The PC's start their quest here.

Surrounding the town in this square are various manor homes, the town dump, farms, and a couple of taverns that act outside of the town's immediate authority.

FIRST NIGHT (CR 3)

During the first night PC's make camp after setting out, they are ambushed by a pack of hungry vor-gremlins. These small, fire-breathing goblins can be driven off with a gift of food.

(4) Vor-gremlin CR ½

XP 200

Vor-gremlin warrior 1

NE Small humanoid (goblinoid)

Init +6; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; **Perception** -1

DEFENSE

AC 16, touch 13, flat-footed 14 (+2 armor, +2 Dex, +1 shield, +1 size)

hp 6 (1d10+1)

Fort +3, **Ref** +2, **Will** -1

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee *short sword* +2 (1d4/19-20)

Ranged *short bow* +4 (1d4/x3)

Special Attacks: Breath (1d6 fire, 10' cone; 1d6 rounds)

STATISTICS

Str 11, **Dex** 15, **Con** 12, **Int** 10, **Wis** 9, **Cha** 6

Base Atk +1; **CMB** +0; **CMD** 12

Feats Improved Initiative

Skills Ride +10, Stealth +10, Swim +4; **Racial Modifiers** +4 Ride, +4 Stealth

Languages Goblin

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Breath (Sp): As a full attack action, vor-gremlins can breathe fire once every 1d6 rounds in a ten-foot cone. To use this ability, the Vor-gremlin inhales oxygen which becomes a type of gas, and causes a membrane to inflate at the back of its skull. When it has filled with enough oxygen, the vor-gremlin can expel it as flame. If this membrane is punctured by a piercing weapon, the contained flames erupt from the sac, dealing 1d6 points of fire damage to all targets, including the vor-gremlin, in a 10 foot radius.

Floating (Sp): while their skull membrane is inflated with gas, a Vor-gremlin can float as per the spell feather fall. This ability lasts as long as the Vor-gremlin can hold its breath (rounds = double constitution score). Once they land or must take breath, they expel the gas as flame.

TACTICS

Four vor-gremlins hide in the surrounding trees awaiting nightfall. Once it is dark, preferably when the campfire is extinguished, the four gremlins float down breathing fire into the air, or at a sentry if one is present, once they land. A DC 5 perception check is

WHISPERS OF THE DARK MOTHER

PART ONE

required for a character to hear the expelled flames and wake up. After landing they attempt to steal packs or left out food. They are starving so don't use stealth as they would normally, noisily rummaging through the camp. The perception check to hear the gremlins while they search for food and wake up is DC 5.

If the gremlins are given food, they will run off without further combat, otherwise they fight as long as it takes to procure something to eat and escape. If reduced to half of its hit point total, a gremlin will abandon combat, and flee into the woods.

B. CAVE TUNNEL. Landmark-hidden; Perception DC 15. When the party discovers this cave, read or paraphrase the following.

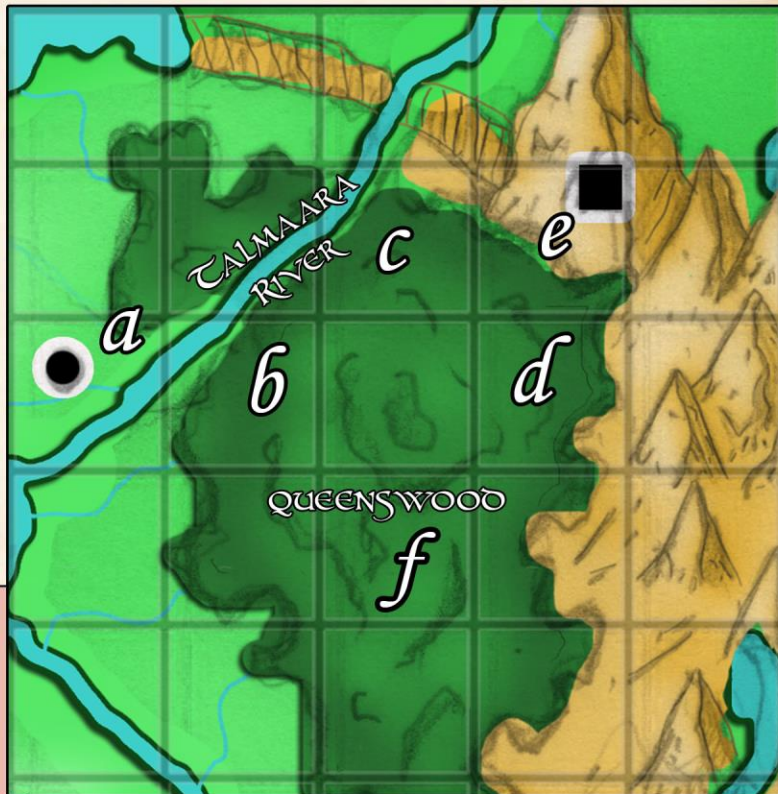
"A high cliff rises to meet you in the distance. To continue traveling north, you will need to travel around the rock and earth wall, or climb 80 feet up its precarious surface. Getting closer you see an opening in the wall. A dark tunnel leads inside, possibly even through the rocky wall. A small leather boot, a gnome's or a human child's, rests on the dirt floor a few yards into the tunnel."

A knowledge geography check, DC 12, confirms that unless it veers off in an odd angle, or descends into the earth, the tunnel likely cuts through the hill. A path around the rocky cliff could add hours to the day's travel.

The PC's can also attempt to climb the wall. Several roots that breach the wall face are rotted through and pull easily out when grasped. This increases the difficulty to climb the wall by +2 making the total difficulty of the climb DC 15. Sharp saplings litter the ground like tiny spears, inflicting an additional 2 points of piercing damage to anyone who falls on them from a distance of 20 feet or higher.

B.1 ENTRANCE.

When the PC's enter the tunnel, read or paraphrase the following.



The low ceiling of this tunnel opening is slick with moisture and water drips sporadically hitting the soggy earthen floor with tiny, echoing taps. The air is cool, but carries a damp, musty scent. A couple of yards into the passage, the ceiling raises to a height of fifty feet. Stalactites, like hungry teeth, bear down on you from above. The walls are rocky and uneven. A small boot, well-worn and mostly dry, lies on the ground. Ahead, the tunnel continues into darkness.

The boot belongs to Favan, son of a local cowherd named Shala.

B.2 CAMP.

The rocky walls become rougher in this chamber, with outcroppings of various sizes climbing towards the ceiling. A few of the ledges are wide enough to stand on or be used for cover. The largest sheltering the remains of a

a camp beneath it. Wood within its fire pit, only half burned. Two packs lie further ahead as the tunnel continues through the cave.

A DC 12 survival check reveals that the firewood within the pit is only a day's old and is still usable for at least a nights worth of heat and light.

The two packs toward the far end of the cave are 10 feet apart. One is larger, the other made for a child or small humanoid. Within the large pack the party finds the following; a bedroll, flint and steel, iron pot, mess kit, rope, torches (10), trail rations (5 days), and a waterskin filled with foul smelling, potent alcohol. The rations are flattened, dried squirrels. A knowledge local or knowledge nature, DC 12, reveals these are standard trail rations for orcs and half-orcs in this region. In the smaller pack is a bedroll, an empty belt pouch, a clay mug, a dagger, two fishhooks, flint and steel, a sewing needle, signal whistle, 50 feet of string, 50 feet of thread, a waterskin, a week's worth of trail rations (some bread, nuts, and cheese), and a whetstone. A wooden figure, identical to the one given to the PC's by Shala, is wrapped in a small cloth inside the clay mug.

The alcohol is orc brewed. Non orcs drinking it must make a DC 15 Fort save or be sickened for 1d6 minutes.

Immune mind-affecting effects

OFFENSE

Speed 20 ft., climb 20 ft.

Melee 2 claws +5 (1d4+3)

Ranged filament +3 (drag)

Special Attacks pull (filament, 10 feet)

STATISTICS

Str 17, **Dex** 12, **Con** 17, **Int** —, **Wis** 10, **Cha** 4

Base Atk +2; **CMB** +5 (+9 with pull); **CMD** 16 (28 vs. trip)

Skills Climb +11

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Filament (Ex): A cave fisher can fire a thin filament of sticky silk as a standard action. This touch attack has a range of 60 feet and no range increment. A creature struck by a cave fisher's filament becomes attached to the sticky

B.3 FISHER ATTACK. (CR 2)

The tunnel thins out ahead, curving and sloping upward. The wall's rocky exterior is accompanied by small cracks.

On one up the upper ledges is another tunnel that winds around the ceiling of this chamber. This crawl space is the lair of a cave fisher. The crab-like insect waits for the party to pass under it before launching a filament strand toward whomever is the least armored, as it is not fond of cracking through 'shells' for its food. This tunnel opening can be spotted with a DC 13 Perception check.

Cave Fisher

CR 2 XP 600

N Medium vermin

Init +1; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +0

DEFENSE

AC 15, touch 11, flat-footed 14 (+1 Dex, +4 natural)

hp 22 (3d8+9)

Fort +6, **Ref** +2, **Will** +1



thread. As a standard action, a creature can rip the filament free with a DC 20 Strength check. A caught creature can also attempt to escape a filament by making a DC 25 Escape Artist check. A filament is AC 14 (touch 12), has 5 hit points, and has DR 15/slashing. An application of liquid with high alcohol content (or a dose of universal solvent) dissolves the adhesive and releases the creature caught by the filament. A cave fisher can have only one filament active at a time.

Pull (Ex): A cave fisher has a +4 racial bonus on CMB checks made using its pull special attack.

TACTICS: The cave fisher waits until the group is leaving its range before it attacks. It targets the least armored foe. If it successfully catches one of the PC's, it drags the character up while backing away on the ledge, into its tunnel. The ledge and the small opening into its lair provide it with (+2 cover). If it reels a pc all the way to the top, it focuses its attacks on that character until it or its target is dead. If it kills a pc, it drags it into the tunnel towards its lair to devour.

B.4 FISHER'S LAIR.

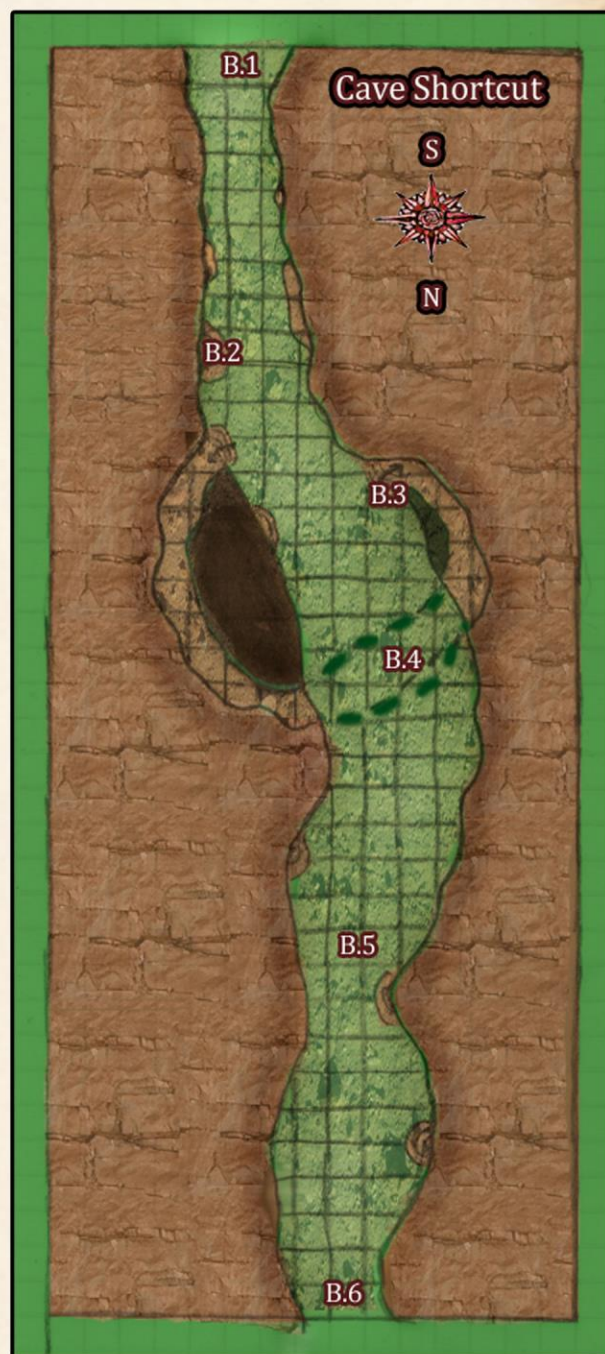
The crawlspace opens to a small chamber above the central tunnel. Broken twigs, bones, and piles of fern leaves have been fashioned into a sort of nest. Clear fluid coats the branches, reflecting in the light.

In the insect's lair are the bones of an adult humanoid. A DC 12 heal check reveals the owner to be a half-orc. In the debris of the creature's nest is a masterwork, copper kukri. This was Graok, a henchman of Kemon Haveran. He was the culprit behind the massacre of Shala's cows. He abducted Favan as the boy foolishly set out alone to seek justice for the lost livestock. Seeing him as a potential sacrifice to his patron, the Dark Mother, he brought the boy to the cave seeking shelter. His plan failed when he was captured and eaten by the cave fisher. Favan fled at the sight of the crab-like insect, leaving behind his pack, and losing a boot.

B.5. CENTIPEDE NEST (CR 2)

Ahead the grass and mud floor of the cave becomes dry and sandy, and no moisture drips from the ceiling.

This dry area of the cave is the home to three giant centipedes. As soon as the sandy floor is disturbed, they burrow out and attack, hungry for prey. The insects



hatched together and have learned to focus their attentions on a single target. They fight to the death.

A Survival check (DC 12) is adequate to safely dissect and remove the creature's scent glands for craft use, while a DC 15 check is required to extract their poison.

Centipede, Giant

CR 1/2 XP 200

N Medium vermin

Init +2; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +4

DEFENSE

AC 14, touch 12, flat-footed 12 (+2 Dex, +2 natural)

hp 5 (1d8+1)

Fort +3, **Ref** +2, **Will** +0

Immune mind-affecting effects

OFFENSE

Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft.

Melee bite +2 (1d6–1 plus poison)

Special Attacks poison

STATISTICS

Str 9, **Dex** 15, **Con** 12, **Int** —, **Wis** 10, **Cha** 2

Base Atk +0; **CMB** –1; **CMD** 11 (can't be tripped)

Feats Weapon FinesseB

Skills Climb +10, Perception +4, Stealth +10; Racial Modifiers +4 Perception, +8 Stealth

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Poison (Ex): Bite—injury; save Fort DC 13; frequency 1/round for 6 rounds; effect 1d3 Dex damage; cure 1 save. The save DC is Constitution-based and includes a +2 racial bonus.

B.6. EXIT

Once the PC's exit the tunnel they find themselves on the other side of the cliff and can continue north on their journey.

C. WHIPVINE FIELDS. Landmark: visual.

The woods begin to thin out in this hex opening into a grassy field. Weedwhips and other monsters grow and live randomly throughout this area. Due to the numerous hazardous plants, the monster population is thinner here. Random encounter percentages are halved while traveling through the hex.

After the party encounters the first weedwhip, they must seek out others to collect the seeds required for Lady Canterville. Once per hour of searching, there is a 70% chance of finding another weedwhip, with a roll of 01%-10% resulting in two of the plants encountered at the same area. Further complicating matters, not all weedwhips carry seeds. There is a 1-in-4 chance that the plant defeated has no seeds.

Roll 1d4 with a result of 1 failing to turn up a seed.

When the party reaches the hex, read or paraphrase the following.

The forest breaks ahead, and rolling grasslands spread out before you. Tiny white flowers grow in patches and the air buzzes with the sounds of bees. Other plants and flowers dot the landscape. Far away in the distance, the quartz covered peaks of Bright Mountain glitter in the sun (moon)light.

Have the pc's make DC 15 perception checks. Success indicates that the character notices that a bush up ahead is not a normal plant. Characters that possess ranks in Knowledge (nature) or Survival can use either of those skills instead of perception to notice the weedwhip. If they successfully notice the plant, read the following, or the weedwhip gets a surprise round to attack once a pc is in range.

On a mound in the glade, a pungent, man-sized plant with three spiky tendrils sways softly in the cool breeze.

This is the first of many weedwhips the party will have to defeat before they have gathered enough seeds. It remains dug in until a pc is within its range and then it attacks.

Weedwhip

CR 2 XP 600

N Medium plant

Init +7; **Senses** blindsight 30 ft., low-light vision; Perception +1

Aura stench (DC 12, 1 minute)

DEFENSE

AC 14, touch 13, flat-footed 11 (+3 Dex, +1 natural)

hp 16 (3d8+3)

Fort +4, **Ref** +4, **Will** +2

Defensive Abilities dig in, poisonous; Immune plant traits

Weaknesses languid whips

OFFENSE

Speed 10 ft.

Melee 3 tentacles +5 (1d4 plus poison)

Space 5 ft.; **Reach** 15 ft.

Special Attacks poison

STATISTICS

Str 10, **Dex** 17, **Con** 12, **Int** —, **Wis** 13, **Cha** 5

Base Atk +2; **CMB** +2; **CMD** 15 (27 vs. trip)

Feats Improved Initiative B, Weapon Finesse B
SQ camouflage

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Camouflage (Ex): Since a weedwhip looks like a normal plant when at rest, a successful DC 15 Perception check is required to notice it before it attacks for the first time. Anyone with ranks in Survival or Knowledge (nature) can use either of those skills instead of Perception to notice the plant.

Dig In (Ex): A weedwhip can bury its central bulb in earth or sand as a move action, granting it partial cover against all attacks, but preventing it from moving. It can extract itself from the ground as a move action.

Languid Whips (Ex): A weedwhip's tentacles don't threaten any squares, and doesn't make attacks of opportunity.

Poison (Ex): Tentacle—contact; save Fort DC 12; frequency 1/round for 6 rounds; effect nauseated 1 round; cure 2 consecutive saves. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Poisonous (Ex): Any creature that attacks a weedwhip with a natural piercing or slashing weapon is exposed to its poison.

TACTICS: The weedwhip begins combat with a full-attack using its three tendrils, focusing on multiple targets. It's trying to poison as many enemies as possible. Once it receives damage, the plant switches to attacking one target. If reduced to a third of its hp, the weedwhip uses its dig in ability to avoid being destroyed.

This first weedwhip automatically drops a usable seed.

SQUARE D. XTABAY COPSE CR 2

Landmark-visual. A wide patch of red flowers blanket the hills in this hex. A successful knowledge nature check (DC 12), reveals that mixed in with these flowers are dangerous xtabay plants. The pollen from these blood-red flowers can induce a pain-resistant sleep allowing them to sup on the sleeper's blood.

When the party travels through this hex, read the following.

The hills before you are blanketed with bright, crimson-colored flowers. Their strong aroma, similar to lavender and honey, drifts along the wind. A young human boy lays motionless among the scarlet blossoms.

The missing boy Favan, is asleep, a victim of the xtabay pollen. His robust constitution has kept him alive while the flowers around him feast on his blood. He currently has a Con score of 4 from exsanguination.

XTABAY

CR 1/2 XP 200

N Small plant

Init +1; **Senses** low-light vision, tremorsense 30 ft.; Perception +1

DEFENSE

AC 12, touch 12, flat-footed 10 (+1 Dex, +1 size)

hp 8 (1d8+4)

Fort +6, **Ref** +1, **Will** +1

Immune acid, plant traits

OFFENSE

Speed 5 ft.

Melee 2 stings +0 (1d3–1 plus 1d2 acid)

Special Attacks devour, soporific pollen

STATISTICS

Str 8, **Dex** 13, **Con** 19, **Int** —, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 11

Base Atk +0; **CMB** –2; **CMD** 9 (can't be tripped)

ECOLOGY

Environment any land

Organization solitary, pair, copse (3–5), or garden (6–12)

Treasure none

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Devour (Ex): While a creature is under the effects of a xtabay's soporific pollen, the plant may, as a full-round action, occupy the same square as the sleeping creature and slowly sap the life from it. Every round the xtabay uses this ability, the affected creature must make a DC 14 Fortitude save or take 1d2 Con damage. This feeding is curiously painless, and normally isn't enough to waken a foe put to sleep by the plant. Each round this feeding continues, the sleeping victim can attempt a new DC 14 Will save to awaken. This save DC is Constitution-based.

Soporific Pollen (Ex): As a standard action, a xtabay can release sleep-inducing pollen into the air around it. Each creature within a 10-ft.-radius burst centered on the xtabay must make a DC 14 Will save or fall asleep for 1d3 minutes. A creature that succeeds on the Fortitude save cannot be affected by the same xtabay's soporific pollen for 24 hours. A creature put to sleep by this pollen can be awakened by vigorously shaking the sleeper (a standard action) or by damaging it. This is a mind-affecting sleep effect. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Tactics: The active xtabays turn their attention toward the PC's as soon as they enter range. They attempt to subdue them with their soporific pollen. If that fails they defend themselves in melee.

Development: Favan is happy to see the PC's, even more so when they reveal the wooden carving from his mother. He is weakened from the xtabays and needs assistance walking. He can recount to them his kidnapping by the half-orc (Graok didn't share his plans with Favan, instead saying he was 'bringing him to his master'. Once home, Favan's mother showers him and the PC's with affection. They may not have earned gold from retuning Favan, but they have earned a life-long ally in Shayla. In future installments of the Whispers of the Dark Mother Quest Path, she proves to be a valuable asset to the party. For returning Favan, award the PC's xp as if they had overcome a CR 3 encounter.

E. BRIGHT MOUNTAIN. Landmark-visual and hidden. Far to the east, on the border of the country, lays the quartz-peaked Bright Mountain. The surrounding forested hills are fungus-blighted and filled with tribes of depraved ogres. The area is also the rumored home of "The Beast of Bright Mountain Valley", a demonic creature that has haunted the region for centuries. While this location does not feature in this scenario, it does later during the Adventure Path, during the sixth installment: Beasts of Bright Mountain.

F. GATE WILLOW GROVE CR 3.
Landmark: Hidden. A DC 15 Perception check discovers the gate willow. When the players approach within 60' of the tree, read or paraphrase the following.

Ahead of you stands a gate willow tree upon a blanket of lavender-colored flowers. It stands roughly 9 feet tall, it's hanging branches and swaying catkins crackle with arcane energy.

If any of the characters possess magical items (such as potions, scrolls, or extracts) the gate willow is alerted to the possible danger. Read or paraphrase the following. If the characters do not possess magical auras of any kind, but approach within 30 feet without taking any stealthy precautions, they also alert the tree.

The tree starts, its drooping branches whirling in an erratic fashion. A catkin erupts, spilling an apple sized petal onto the flowers at its base. As it hits, the petal pops with a burst of arcane energy.

The gate willow's petal summons a creature to defend it. In this case the creature that arrives is an akata: a blue-skinned lion with twin tentacle tails, and dozens more, wormy tentacles where its mane should be. Normally a creature summoned by a gate willow petal remains for only 6 rounds before vanishing and leaving a pile of leaves where it once stood, but an akata has a 10% chance of remaining on this plane.

Gate Willow, see appendix.

Akata

N Medium aberration

Init +6; **Senses** darkvision 120 ft., scent; Perception +1

DEFENSE

AC 13, touch 12, flat-footed 11 (+2 Dex, +1 natural)

hp 15 (2d8+6)

Fort +3, **Ref** +2, **Will** +4

Defensive Abilities no breath; **Immune** cold, disease, poison; **Resist** fire 30

Weaknesses deaf, vulnerable to salt water

OFFENSE

Speed 40 ft., climb 20 ft.

Melee bite +2 (1d6+1 plus void bite), 2 tentacles -3 (1d3)

STATISTICS

Str 12, **Dex** 15, **Con** 16, **Int** 3, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 11

Base Atk +1; **CMB** +2; **CMD** 14 (18 vs. trip)

Feats Improved Initiative

Skills Acrobatics +6 (+10 jump), Climb +9, Stealth +10;

Racial Modifiers +4 Stealth

SQ hibernation

ECOLOGY

Environment any

Organization solitary, pair, or pack (3-30)

Treasure standard

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Deaf (Ex): Akatas cannot hear. They are immune to spells and effects that rely on hearing to function, but they also cannot make Perception checks to listen.

Hibernation (Ex): Akatas can enter a state of hibernation for an indefinite period of time when food is scarce. When an akata wishes to enter hibernation, it seeks out a den and surrounds itself in a layer of fibrous material excreted from its mouth—these fibers quickly

harden into a dense, almost metallic cocoon. While hibernating, an akata does not need to drink or eat. The cocoon has hardness 10 and 60 hit points, and is immune to fire and bludgeoning (including falling) damage. As long as the cocoon remains intact, the akata within remains unharmed. The akata remains in a state of hibernation until it senses another living creature within 10 feet or is exposed to extreme heat, at which point it claws its way to freedom in 1d4 minutes as its cocoon degrades to fragments of strange metal.

Salt Water Vulnerability (Ex) Salt water acts as an extremely strong acid to akatas. A splash of salt water deals 1d6 points of damage to an akata, and full immersion in salt water deals 4d6 points of damage per round.

Void Bite (Ex): Akatas hold hundreds of invisibly small larval young within their mouths, spreading these parasitic creatures to hosts through their bite. Only humanoids make suitable hosts for akata young—all other creature types are immune to this parasitic infection. The disease itself is known as void death.

Disease (Ex) Void Death: Bite—injury; save Fort DC 12; onset 1 hour; frequency 1/day; effect 1d2 Dex and 1d2 Con damage; an infected creature who dies rises as a void zombie 2d4 hours later (see below); cure 2 consecutive saves.

Void Zombie (CR +1)

A humanoid killed by void death becomes a void zombie. A void zombie is a fast zombie that gains a secondary "tongue" attack (actually the larval akata's feeding tendril), dealing 1d6 points of damage. A void zombie also gains the following special attack.

Blood Drain (Ex) If a void zombie hits a living creature with its tongue attack, it drains blood, dealing 2 points of Strength damage before the tongue detaches.

TACTICS: The akata charges the least armored foe and attempts to bite, and infect that character with its terrible disease. It fights as long

as it is summoned. If the akata remains past the summoned time, it immediately flees the area, looking for an easier food source.

OGRE BATTLE (CR 3)

Sometime during their trip home, regardless of the squares traveled through, the characters will encounter Orab, a stupid and sadistic ogre on the hunt for man-flesh. Orab is a coward and not particularly smart. He isn't ready for a real fight. If he encounters armed resistance he must make a DC 12 Will save or be shaken for the duration of the encounter. If reduced to 10 hp or less, he flees.



Orab the Ogre

CR 3 XP 400

CE Large humanoid (giant)

Init -1; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision;

Perception +5

DEFENSE

AC 17, touch 8, flat-footed 17 (+4 armor, -1 Dex, +5 natural, -1 size)

hp 30 (4d8+12)

Fort +6, **Ref** +0, **Will** +3

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft. (40 ft. base)

Melee *greatclub* +7 (2d8+7)

Ranged *javelin* +1 (1d8+5)

Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.

STATISTICS

Str 21, **Dex** 8, **Con** 15, **Int** 6, **Wis** 10, **Cha** 7

Base Atk +3; **CMB** +9; **CMD** 18

Feats Iron Will, Toughness

Skills Climb +7, **Perception** +5

Languages Giant

Gear in addition to his combat gear, Orab has 9 gp, and a Large-sized gold ring worth 50 gp.

Before the characters return to Lady Canterville, they should have reached second level. If they still haven't reached this mark, have them encounter monsters along the trip home until they do.

CHAPTER THREE: LIBRARY MAYHEM

When the characters arrive back at Lady Cantervilles estate they immediately notice something is amiss. Read or paraphrase the following when the party is within 60 feet of the entrance to the manor.

The entrance to Lady Cantervilles estate hangs open like a rotting wound. Emilio, her manservant, lays face down in the threshold. Blood has pooled around him and pours down the front steps toward the cobblestone path leading to the home.

While the PC's were away a group of cultists led by the one-eyed half-orc, Kemon Haveran, have invaded Lady Canterville's Estate. They've been sent by Corvun Baerg to seize her copy of *The Lamentations of the Fungus Men*. When they arrived at the manor, Emilio assumed tragically that the group was another band of adventurers seeking employment.



G. 1. ENTRANCE.

Once the characters reach the doorway to the manor, or check on Emilio, read or paraphrase the following.

Sticky crimson fluid seeps from a gash in Emilio's throat while his lifeless eyes stare down in shock. His body is still warm.

The sound of breaking glass cuts the air, emanating from the library on the second floor.

Emilio is dead and beyond saving.

It takes the party 1 full round to reach the library on the second floor. Players must make a DC 5 acrobatics check or slip in Emilio's blood puddle. Characters that slip take no damage but are covered in blood and must make a DC 12 Will save or be sickened for 1d4 rounds.

G. 2 LIBRARY (CR 4)

When the PC's reach this room they find that the door has been barricaded from the other side. They must break down the door to get in.

Strong wooden door

Hardness 5 hp 20 **Break** DC 25 (barred on opening side by furniture)

Once the characters have breached the library, read or paraphrase the following.

The library is in chaos. Bookshelves have been overturned, their numerous, multi-colored tomes spilled across the floor. The lounge chairs and end-tables have been shoved to the side of the room in a heap. A bruised and bloody Lady Canterville has been backed into the far corner of the room by three, cloaked men. A fourth man crouches behind the furniture pile. The center window to the room has been smashed outward.

The window to this room was broken after Kemon snatched the Lamentations of the Fungus Men. He then cast feather fall and leapt out. The others have remained behind to cover his escape.

The cultists inside the room cast spells against whoever enters. One casts feather fall and leaps out the window. The cultist behind the furniture pile casts color spray at incoming targets, while the two near Lady Canterville fire magic missiles at the first PC through the door.

Shub-Niggurath Cultist CR 1

XP 400

Human Sorcerer 1

LN Medium humanoid (human)

Init +2; **Senses** Perception +2

DEFENSE

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

hp 11 (2d6+2)

Fort +3, **Ref** +2, **Will** +4

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee mwk kukri +2 (1d4)

Ranged dart +3 (1d4)

Sorcerer Spells Known (CL 2nd; **concentration** +5)

1st (5/day)—color spray (DC 14), magic missile (x3), feather fall

0- (at will)—daze (DC 13), detect magic, ray of frost, read magic

Bloodline arcane

STATISTICS

Str 10, **Dex** 14, **Con** 13, **Int** 12, **Wis** 8, **Cha** 17

Base Atk +1; **CMB** +1; **CMD** 13

Feats Alertness, Combat Casting, Eschew Materials, Iron Will

Skills Bluff +7, Intimidate +8, Knowledge (local) +5, Perception +2, Sense Motive +1, Spellcraft +6

Languages Common, Aklo

SQ arcane bond (familiar [rat]), bloodline arcana (+1 DC for metamagic spells that increase spell level)

Combat Gear potion of cure light wounds, scrolls of disguise self (2), scrolls of shield (2), wand of sleep (11 charges), alchemist's

fire (2);

Other Gear

darts (5),

mwk kukri,

33 gp



TACTICS:

The cultists have been tasked with ensuring Hemon escapes and fight to the death. As an added precaution, the cultist jumping out the window using feather fall is a diversion to buy extra time for Kemon. When he lands, he runs in the opposite direction of their hideout (see The Chase, below). The one behind cover switches to magic missile after casing color spray, targeting the pc previously struck by missiles. Once in melee, he relies on his masterwork kukri. The two cultist's by Lady Canterville launch missiles at any clerics or perceived healers in the group. Once in melee, they switch to their masterwork kukris.

If any of the cultists are captured, they refuse to speak, fearing the retribution of Corvun Baerg or The Skinless One. At the first opportunity, they repeatedly bash their heads against the floor or wall of their confinement area until they are dead.

THE CHASE (CR 2)

If a PC decides to leap from the window and give chase to the escaping cultist, run the following encounter. If no pc pursues the cultist before the fifth round of combat, he escapes. Note that Kemon has already had a couple of rounds to escape himself, and isn't noticed fleeing by any pc's.

Note; the library is on the second floor of the estate. Leaping the 15 feet to the ground requires an Acrobatics Skill check (DC 10) to avoid taking 2d6 falling damage.

Once a pc lands outside, read or paraphrase the following.

Sixty feet ahead of you a red cloak flaps in the wind as its wearer flees at top speed. A pile of recently cut wood blocks your path, as do several of the carnivorous roses that surround the estate.

The chase is on! To run this encounter, draw 10, 2" x 3" rectangles one after the other on your battlemat, or use index cards (doing this before the game session will save you valuable time). Label the rectangles 1-10. Write the correlating obstacle information on each rectangle. Place the cultist on rectangle number 3, PC's begin on rectangle 1.

This chase assumes that each rectangle is roughly 30 feet apart. For each 10 feet below 30 feet base speed a PC

possesses imposes a -2 penalty to checks to overcome obstacles presented on a rectangle. For each 10 feet increase in speed beyond 30 feet a +2 bonus is bestowed. The cultist has a base speed of 30 feet.

Because the cultist initiated the chase, he goes first. He attempts to move and shoot magic missiles at pursuers each round until he is caught or escapes. This allows him to attempt to move to the next card.

It takes a move action to move through a single rectangle (card). When a character exits from a card, he must choose one of that card's two obstacles to face as a standard action before moving to the next card. Success means the character moves to the next card, while failure means the character must face the obstacle again on the next round. Instead of exiting a card, a character can choose to take another action not directly related to navigating the chase's course, such as casting a spell or drawing a weapon.

A character who wants to attempt to move three cards during his turn can do so by taking a full-round action. That character must overcome both obstacles on the card he is leaving. In this case, if a character fails either obstacle check by 5 or less, he only moves one card forward and his turn ends. If a character fails either obstacle check by more than 5, he cannot move at all that turn. A character unfortunate enough to fail two obstacle checks in a turn becomes mired in his current square (he might have fallen from a ledge, gotten a foot stuck amid roots, or got caught in a stampede, for example). A character that is mired must spend another full-round action becoming un-mired and effectively loses his next turn in the chase. In some cases, becoming mired might impart additional penalties (such as falling damage).

A character can also choose to make a ranged attack or cast a spell during his turn in a chase. If the action is a full-round action, he can't move at all. Use the number of cards and their established distances to determine ranges as necessary. The terrain where the chase takes place might provide the target partial or even full cover or concealment, as you wish. A character can only choose to make melee attacks against targets that are on the same card.

CARD OBSTACLES

1. Carnivorous Roses- *Leap Over:* acrobatics DC 10;
Sneak Past: stealth DC 15

2. Tangled Vines- *Avoid:* acrobatics DC 10;
Slip Through: escape artist DC 15

3.Nothing.

4.Dense Trees- *Up and Over:* climb DC 15;
Squeeze Past: escape artist DC 10

5.Nothing.

6.Wet, Mossy Rocks- *Nimble Run Across:* acrobatics 15;
Spot the Dry Stones: perception 20

7.Busy Farm- *Sneak Around Barn:* stealth DC 15;
Notice Shortcut Through Hay Stacks: perception DC 20

8.Nothing.

9.Tall Fence- *Climb it:* climb DC 10;
Gap in the fence: perception DC 20

10. FINISH LINE

If the PC's manage to catch the fleeing cultist, he puts up a fight, using his masterwork kukri when cornered. His secondary task is to delay the intruders while Hemon makes his escape. Pleased that he has succeeded, the cultist screams expletives at the party and praises the coming of the Dark Mother. He fights to the death.

CONCLUSION:

Once the cultists have been dealt with, a severely hurt Lady Canterville motions for the PC's to speak with her. Her wounds are mortal and there is no time for the proper healing spells required. Once the PC's are gathered by her side, read or paraphrase the following.

Lady Canterville trembles as she holds a bruised and bloodied hand to the seeping wound on her chest. Her face has become cold and grey as a stone.

"The book...the half-orc with one eye stole it," she says, crimson foaming at the corners of her mouth. "The Lamentations of the Fungus Men...it's evil. The spells within...give the power to summon the dark young of the Black Goat...to become as they are! It has to be recovered. Please...get it back before...it's too late."

Lady Canterville's eyelids flutter and then close. Her labored, shallow breathing ceases. She is dead.

Lady Canterville's heart gave out during the attack, suffering too much internal damage, so she is beyond saving. If the PC's summon the authorities, Sheriff Byron

arrives within the hour along with two, white-and-black robed clerics from the Church of Eternal Slumber. Tate takes the PC's statements while the clerics cast speak with dead on Lady Canterville. They report that Lady Canterville was the victim of a *bestow curse* causing her wounds to be unhealable, and that a half-orc led the burglars. Upon hearing the news, Tate thanks the PC's for dispatching the burglars. He also asks if they would come to the Sheriff's station first thing in the morning, if they are interested in going after the mysterious half-orc.

If the PC's don't summon the authorities, Kara (if she still lives) steals away from the group and informs the sheriff herself. In this case, Tate waits until the next morning and has guards go retrieve the PC's for questioning. After hearing about the events at the estate, Tate offers deputy positions to the PC's if they wish to hunt down the one-eyed, half-orc.

The speak with dead spell revealed nothing about the book that was stolen, so Tate is ignorant of this fact. It did however reveal that the PC's were employed by Lady Canterville, and that a sack of gold found in the estate is their pay. This sack contains the money promised for the retrieval of the weedwhip seeds. Tate, an honest man, gives the characters the gold when they come to the sheriff's station in the morning.

The adventure continues in: **Whispers of the Dark Mother part 2: The Tower of Hidden Doors**, available at www.waywardrogues.com, paizo.com, and www.Rpgnow.com.



JS



WHISPERS OF THE DARK MOTHER

The foul agents of Shub-Niggurath are active in the country of Brynnfell, and it is up to a group of brave heroes to thwart them.

PART ONE: SEEDS OF EVIL. CHARACTER LEVELS 1-2

The characters arrive in the town of Brighton and accept a job securing weedwhip and gate willow seeds for a local noble woman. They also agree to search for a missing boy in the same area. Along the way they run into a group of starving gremlins and an ornery ogre. Returning with the seeds and the boy, the party encounters cultists of Shub-Niggurath attacking their employer. After defeating the evil sorcerers, the PC's discover that their leader, a one-eyed half orc, has stolen a rare book full of evil spells, the Lamentations of the Fungus Men. They are tasked by the town sheriff to track down the half-orc and return the book.

PART TWO: THE TOWER OF HIDDEN DOORS CHARACTER LEVELS 2-3

After canvassing the town of Brighton for clues, the party is directed to a rowdy tavern where the cultists have rented a room. After searching their quarters and defeating their guardians, the PC's travel to a ruined tower west of town. There they confront the one-eyed half orc and his werewolf companions, only to discover that an ancient, undead horror has long called the tower its home. After clearing the tower of its foul inhabitants, the PC's find documents that link the cult activities to the son of a prominent Brighton noble.

PART THREE: DESPICABLE DEEDS CHARACTER LEVELS 3-4

The PC's investigations lead them to the manor of Martin Bhestos, son of Gaavan, a prominent member of the Lord Mayor's Advice Council. They become trapped in the manor while Martin's assassins and other un-wholesome allies attempt to kill them while Martin escapes. As they make their way through the manor, they

WHISPERS OF THE DARK MOTHER

PART ONE

discover a series of strange paintings that enlighten them to a portion of the cult's plan, and learn that Martin works for a man from the capital named Corvun Baerg, who may have found another copy of the Lamentations of the Fungus Men.

who has just transformed Corvun into one of his favored satyrs. Once they deal with an evolved Corvun, they must face off against the sanity shredding Skinless One and his awakened Hidden Masters.

PART FOUR: BELLY OF ROT.

CHARACTER LEVELS 4-5

Traveling to the capital, the PC's track down Corvun Baerg and learn that he is the lieutenant to the cult leader, A witch named Hexos Vell, also called the Skinless One. Using the book, Corvun plans to perform a ritual that will turn him into one of Shub Niggurath's favored satyrs. Making their way through an underground forest, the PC's find a blighted grove full of corrupted dryads, and a temple dedicated to the Dark Mother. As they clear the temple they learn that Corvun Baerg has escaped, and that the cult plans to open a sealed vault containing the sect's deathless masters, located somewhere in Bright Mountain.

PART FIVE: CALL TO WAR

CHARACTER LEVELS 5-6

The party returns to Brighton, just as an army of ogres attacks the town. Using the defenses provided, they must fend off the giants until reinforcements from the capital arrive. Once the ogres are driven off, the party chases their retreating leaders into the foothills of Bright Mountain, discovering that the decadent tribe also reveres the Black Goat of the Woods, Shub-Niggurath! The party dispatches the remaining ogres, discovering that their assault on the town was a preemptive strike to soften them up for the coming of the deathless masters. A secret tunnel leads toward their sealed prison.

PART SIX: BEASTS OF BRIGHT MOUNTAIN

CHARACTER LEVELS 6-7

Following the secret tunnel, the party faces off against The Beast of Bright Mountain Valley, a legendary predator that has haunted the region for years. The PC's learn that the beast is a guardian of the deathless masters, before defeating it. Arriving at the foot of Bright Mountains central formation, the party discovers that the vault has been breached. Making their way through the trapped temple, they come upon a vast ritual chamber filled with acolytes and the leader of the cult, Hexos Vell,



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THE GREY MAIDEN

Alignment: Lawful Neutral

Domains: Darkness, Death, Earth, Law, Protection, Repose

Subdomains: Night, Psychopomp, Soil

Symbol: A crystal owl

Garb: white/black/gray robes
(guardians/dust-wardens/protectors)

Favored Weapon: flail

Worship and Holidays: Priests of the Gray Maiden lead communal worship in stone shrines and temples built with crypts or standing adjacent to graveyards. In Bryndell and nearby countries, the goddess's two great festivals take place on the equinoxes.

Typical worshippers: grave-diggers, farmers, virgins, harlots, vampire-killers, adventurers, native Brynnyns

Center of worship: Bryndell

Description: This ancient power goes by many names among the nations of Celmae: Queen of the Underworld, Veiled Guide, Night Flower, and Keeper of the Last Gate. In Bryndell, greatest center of her worship, men call her the Grey Maiden. Brynnish art shows her as a slender damsel wearing somber robes and carrying a crystal candlestick, attended by translucent owls and faceless shades. Few paintings show the flame of her candle; stories tell that only the dead can see the taper's true light, as the goddess leads them into the next world.

(In Bryndell the Ashen King goes by the name Hell-Candle, because he can take the form of a phantom carrying a false light that leads souls into undeath).

The Grey Maiden rules a gloomy, dusty country that lies close to Celmae, just on the other side of death. She leads departed souls to their appointed places in the afterlife. Though she remains indifferent to the petty lusts and vain hopes of mortals, the goddess sometimes intervenes on Celmae to aid champions of Law. She accepts sacrifices for help against the undead and disease, and the regeneration of the soil in spring. She regards Amaura and the Ashen King as her rivals, and the Dark Mother as a terrible enemy. As keeper of the dead, she seldom grants permission for the departed to return to the mortal plane, and takes affront at attempts to trespass in her sphere through resurrection or the creation of undead.

The Church: The Church of Eternal Slumber dominates Bryndell as the state cult, with a monopoly over funerals, the right to claim death-tithes, partial legal immunity for its high priests, and numerous other perks and privileges from its close association with the crown. Over the centuries, the Church has absorbed the lesser cults of local heroes. It discourages the foreign worship of



Amaura and warns people of the Hell Candle's corrupting lure, but reserves its greatest hatred for the cultists of the Dark Mother--whom it burns at the stake.

The Supreme Protector oversees the whole church in Bryndell from his seat in the capital. He advises the king. Beneath him rank the protectors, who oversee districts called fields, centered on the temples. Minor clerics called guardians serve under the protectors or travel the lands on commission from their superiors. Celibate warrior zealots called dust-wardens enforce the will of the Protectors and hunt the undead, working outside the ordinary jurisdictional boundaries, and answering to the Supreme Protector and his agents.

In addition to its clergy, the Church employs lay scribes and clerks who keep detailed genealogical and funerary records, and oversee the laws pertaining to the cult of the Grey Maiden. Brute squads led by bailiffs assist the scribes in collecting death-tithes and other fees. The recorders also document outbreaks of pestilence, because they believe disease can taint the soul as well as the flesh. Church necrologists find support for this doctrine in the ailments spread by undead corpse-eaters, blood-drinkers, and the embalmed servants of the Hell Candle.

Because fornication and adultery can bring impurity and sickness into the home and pollute the womb, the priests preach against these things. But few priests turn away harlots who so often seek the Grey Maiden's protection from the pox or the nocturnal dangers of their profession.

Outside Bryndell, smaller cults serve the goddess. Some of these sects resemble the Church of Eternal Slumber because they look to it as a model or they sprang from it when Brynnens immigrated to new lands, but others practice local customs the Brynnish clerics would find quaint, strange, or even blasphemous.

Temples and Shrines: A temple of the Gray Maiden stands in every major Brynnish settlement, with an attached burial ground or crypt. The Os Domus (House of Bones) in the City of Bryndell, serves as the center of the Church of Eternal Slumber. Travelers and backwoods folk of the kingdom pour libations at cairns, crossroads, cave mouths, heroes' tombs, and on old battlefields.

In countries beyond Bryndell's borders, the places holy to the Gray Maiden vary as much as the sects that serve her, but most show a connection with the deity's aspects of death and earth: grottoes, tombs, earthwork pyramids, etc.

A Priest's Role: Priests of the Grey Maiden prepare spells at dusk.

Leaving a corpse unburied insults the goddess. A priest must at least sprinkle soil on the dead body and recite a prayer.

A priest may be asked to investigate apparent murders. Priests may be called on to bless newborns in the rite of bone-dust. The priest smears powdered animal bones across the face of the infant, reciting incantations that dedicate the child to the Grey Maiden's keeping.

Priests do not officiate at marriages, expect for the Brynnish royalty, but they do perform sacrifices on behalf of betrothed virgins. The maidens purchase doves and offer them to the priest before their wedding nights.

Brynnens follow the custom of pouring wine into freshly turned earth after plowing, recovery from illness, and any battle or duel. If a priest happens to be anywhere nearby, people will seek him out and ask him to perform the libation ritual.

Priests must sacrifice a cow, sheep, or other large animal at the new moon. They bury the entrails as the portion set aside for their goddess, but may keep the rest, sharing the meat with worshippers.

Militant clerics carry flails, weapons that symbolize both the chains on the gates of death and the tools farmers use for winnowing chaff. These arms serve well for crushing skeletal monsters.

Adventurers: In Bryndell, folk say that death rides with the daring. Brynnish adventurers wise enough to heed this warning pay homage to the Grey Maiden, and the most-far-travelled have spread the Brynnish cult to distant countries.

The Grey Maiden receives many offerings from rangers who hunt the undead, grim paladins, monks, Lawful assassins, fighting-men, white necromancers, and dungeon explorers.

Holy Texts: No single holy canon exists. Priests from Bryndell study the multivolume lifework of the sage, Bartimus, the Compendium of Funerary Rites and Other Death Customs. Brynnish worshippers seek inspiration in *The Descent of Gran*, an epic poem about the latter career, death, and afterlife of Bryndell's first king.

Holidays: Shroudtide, observed on the autumnal equinox, honors the approach of death and winter, and commemorates all the dead not named at lesser holidays. Tilth Eve, held on the vernal equinox, thanks the goddess for withdrawing wintry death the soil and for sparing babies. In Bryndell, the death-dates of Gran, Brynn, and other heroes fill the lunar calendar. Militant Brynnish clerics of the Grey Maiden condemn Amaura's 'Festival of Life' as an affront to the Grey Maiden because it clashes with Tilth Eve.



GATE-WILLOW

A shimmering willow tree with stands roughly 9 feet tall. It's hanging branches and swaying catkins glisten with arcane energy.

Gate-Willow CR 3

XP 800

N Large Plant

Init -1; **Senses** Perception +1

DEFENSE

AC 13, touch 8, flat-footed 13 (-1 dex, +5 natural, -1 Size)

hp 23 (3d8+9)

Fort +5, **Ref** +0, **Will** +2

Defensive Abilities DR 5/slashing

Immune plant traits

OFFENSE

Speed 0 ft.

Space 10ft., **Reach** 0 ft.

Special Attacks Summoning pedals

STATISTICS

Str 11, **Dex** 9, **Con** 16, **Int** —, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 7

Base Atk +1; **CMB** +2; **CMD** 12 (can't be tripped)

ECOLOGY

Environment warm forests

Organization solitary

Treasure standard (1 summoning petal)

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Detect magic (Sp) the gate willow is especially cautious when in the presence of magic. It constantly scans for magic, and when it detects its use, will shed a summoning petal to protect itself.

Summoning petals (Sp) Each gate willow comes with 1d4 summoning petals budding on it at any given time. As a full-round action, the gate-willow may shed a single summoning petal and bring 1d3 creatures from the summon monster II list. Akatas and elk most often answer a gate willow's summons. The creatures exist for 6 rounds, before fading into a pile of leaves and twigs. If an akata was summoned, there is a 10% chance the beast remains, becoming free-willed. The gate-willow regrows the summoning pedals in 2d4 rounds once expended. On death, a single summoning petal remains, and can be activated like an elemental gem that summons 1d3 giant spiders.

Rumored to be trees of especially powerful dryads, these willows crackle with arcane energy. Each of their drooping branches sway against invisible currents of magic radiating from the world around it. Evolved from intense arcane mutation, these trees use simple

summoning spells to defend themselves from predators, and to spread fertilized seeds. Some sages believe the first gate willows appeared following the cataclysm known as the Shattering.

Gate-Willows stand nearly 9 feet tall, and weigh roughly 600 pounds.



Whispers of the Dark Mother

PLAYERS GUIDE

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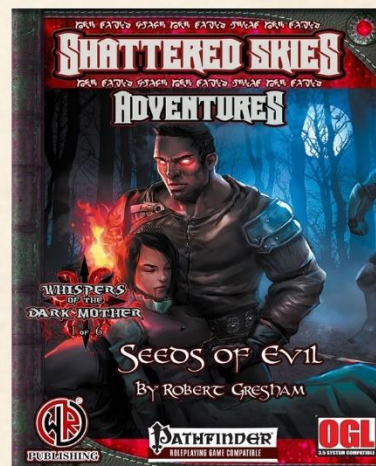
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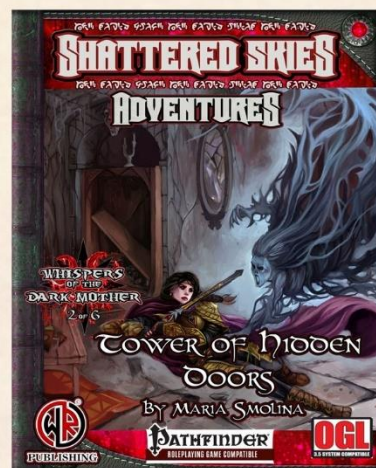
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