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VILLAGE BACKDROP:
WELLSWOOD





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VILLAGE BACKDROP: WELLSWOOD

A busy, prosperous village, Wellswood is justly famed for the warm welcome travellers find in the village's taverns and inns and for its most striking feature: Lake Thraren—a subterranean lake lying deep below the village's foundations. The villagers catch the exotic fish swarming in its deep, cold waters and on its shore stand the fortress home of the dwarf clan of Erdikr. Here long before humans colonised the land above, these secretive dwarves serve Lord Issakainen, maintaining the village's many wells, but let none enter their lightless home.

All is not peaceful in Wellswood, however. Merchants and villagers alike grumble at the slowly increasing burden of taxes levied by the greedy Lord Issakainen while others have begun to wonder exactly what clan Erdikr are up to deep below the earth.

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SYSTEM NEUTRAL EDITION

Welcome to this Raging Swan Press System Neutral Edition Village Backdrop. Herein you'll find evocative, inspiring text designed to help you—the busy GM—run better, quicker and easier games.

This book is compatible with most fantasy roleplaying games. It's impossible to create a truly system neutral book, though, and some generic game terms—wizard, fighter, human, elf and so on—lurk within. These generic terms are easily modified to the GM's system of choice.

One special note about the NPCs in this supplement. While some are wizards, fighters, clerics and so on, others are simply normal folk. Because different game systems handle normal folk differently we've made no attempt to note their "class" leaving them simply as "female human" and so on.

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WELLSWOOD AT A GLANCE

A busy, bustling place Wellswood stands near the juncture of two trade routes. Here, travellers and traders shake the mud of the road from their feet and Lord Issakainen grows fat on the taxes and tolls he levies on both traveller and villager alike. And although Wellswood is famed for the warm welcome travellers find in its taprooms and businesses the village is well known for another reason entirely.

For Wellswood is aptly named, indeed. Many wells—both natural and dwarf-made—dot the village. Far below lies Lake Thraren, a large subterranean lake navigable in parts and fished for the many exotic fish swimming therein. A small clan of dwarves—the Erdikr—dwells upon the lake's ebon shores. Nominal servants, or at least allies, of Lord Issakainen they permit few outsiders to visit their lightless home.

Wellswood is not the peaceful place it first appears. Lord Issakainen grows greedy and taxes have been rising steadily of late. Merchants grumble at the increased costs while recently some villagers have begun to wonder exactly what the Erdikr are up to in their ebon hold.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Ruler Ilmari Issakainen

Government Overlord

Population 192 (139 humans, 37 dwarves, 15 halflings, 1 half-elf)

Alignments LN, NG

Languages Common, Dwarven, Halfling

Resources & Industry Fishing, hospitality/lodgings, travellers' services

NOTABLE FOLK

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

Aelliah Issakainen (location 1; NG female middle-aged half-elf bard 5) Beloved by the villagers, Aelliah does much to temper her husband's dour, greedy demeanour.

Antal Silverleaf (location 8; N male old halfling cleric 4 [Behron]) Named for his silver hair, Antal maintains the Traveller's Rest. Too old to travel far now, he is a popular fellow.

Azthur Erdukr (location 10; LG female dwarf fighter 5) Often seen about the village, checking well walls and the like, Azthur is suspicious of strangers and their questions.

Elimia Takala (location 6; NG female human) Owner of the Boot and Wheel, Elimia is a congenial host; she has a strong regular trade, which infuriates Jani Lieno.

Ilmari Issakainen (location 1; LN male old human fighter 2/wizard 3) Lord of the village, and a powerful (but dour) man, Ilmari has grown wealthy through clever management of Wellswood's location and unique resource.

Jani Leino (location 2; N male human) Landlord of the Footsore Wanderer, Jani greatly desires to buy the Boot & Wheel; his advances have been rebuffed repeatedly.

NOTABLE LOCATIONS

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

1. **Castle Issakainen:** Castle Issakainen's lofty battlements overlook the trading routes that meet just north of the village.
2. **The Footsore Wanderer:** Occupying a walled compound, the Footsore Wanderer has ample accommodations for all but the largest caravans.
3. **Toll Booth:** From these watchtowers Lord Issakainen levies tolls on all travellers entering Wellswood.
4. **Wheels & Wagons:** Run by two brothers, this large business can repair almost any mode of transport.
5. **Tuomi's Outfitters:** This meticulously organised shop has everything a traveller should need to reach his destination.
6. **The Boot & Wheel:** This small inn does a roaring trade; its guests are welcome to pitch their tents within the inn's grounds or to hire one of its many small lodges.
7. **The Angry Badger:** A local's watering hole, the Angry Badger serves cheap, plentiful drinks and basic, but filling, food. Additional entertainments are always available upstairs (and occasionally downstairs).
8. **Travellers' Rest:** This rambling shrine dedicated to Behron, the god of travellers, is open to all. Travellers low on funds can sleep in the shrine for free.
9. **Lake Thraren:** Lord Issakainen tightly controls access to Lake Thraren and tithes those fishing its ebon waters. Therein swim several rare and exotic types of fish found nowhere else.
10. **Don Galir:** Home of the Erdikr clan, this small dwarven hold lies under Wellswood; non-dwarves are rarely admitted and what goes on therein is a matter of speculation among Wellswood's populace.

DON GALIR'S HIDDEN HISTORY

Don Galir is much older than Wellswood. Founded by survivors fleeing a great battle fought against rampaging orcs long ago, the dwarves settling here did so by accident. They discovered Lake Thraren—named for the ancient dwarven heroine who led them here and who disappeared exploring its furthest reaches—and built Don Galir as an ultimate redoubt against renewed orcish aggression. Although the battle took place centuries ago, the dwarves' work continues unabated. When the humans founded Wellswood, the dwarves knew they could not remain hidden and so forged an agreement with the first lord Issakainen. They agreed to maintain the various wells and the lord's burgeoning fortress in return for being left alone to live as they please.

VILLAGE LORE

A PC may know something about Coldwater, its history and surrounds. Determine how knowledgeable the PCs are and then impart some (or all) of the information below:

- Named for its many wells, Wellswood stands above a huge subterranean lake rich in exotic fish.
- The local lord—Ilmari Issakainen—controls access to the lake by selling fishing licenses to his serfs; he levies half their catch in payment.
- A small clan of dwarves—the Erdikr—dwell in the village; they have served the Issakainens for centuries and maintain the various wells and important buildings in the village.

VILLAGERS

Appearance Fishermen are pale of skin, but otherwise appear like other villagers—dark haired and generally fit and healthy. Gray and light brown eyes predominate. Dwarves are heavily bearded and normally wear leather clothes of dark hues.

Dress Villagers wear loose, ill-fitting woollen or leather clothes suited to their trade.

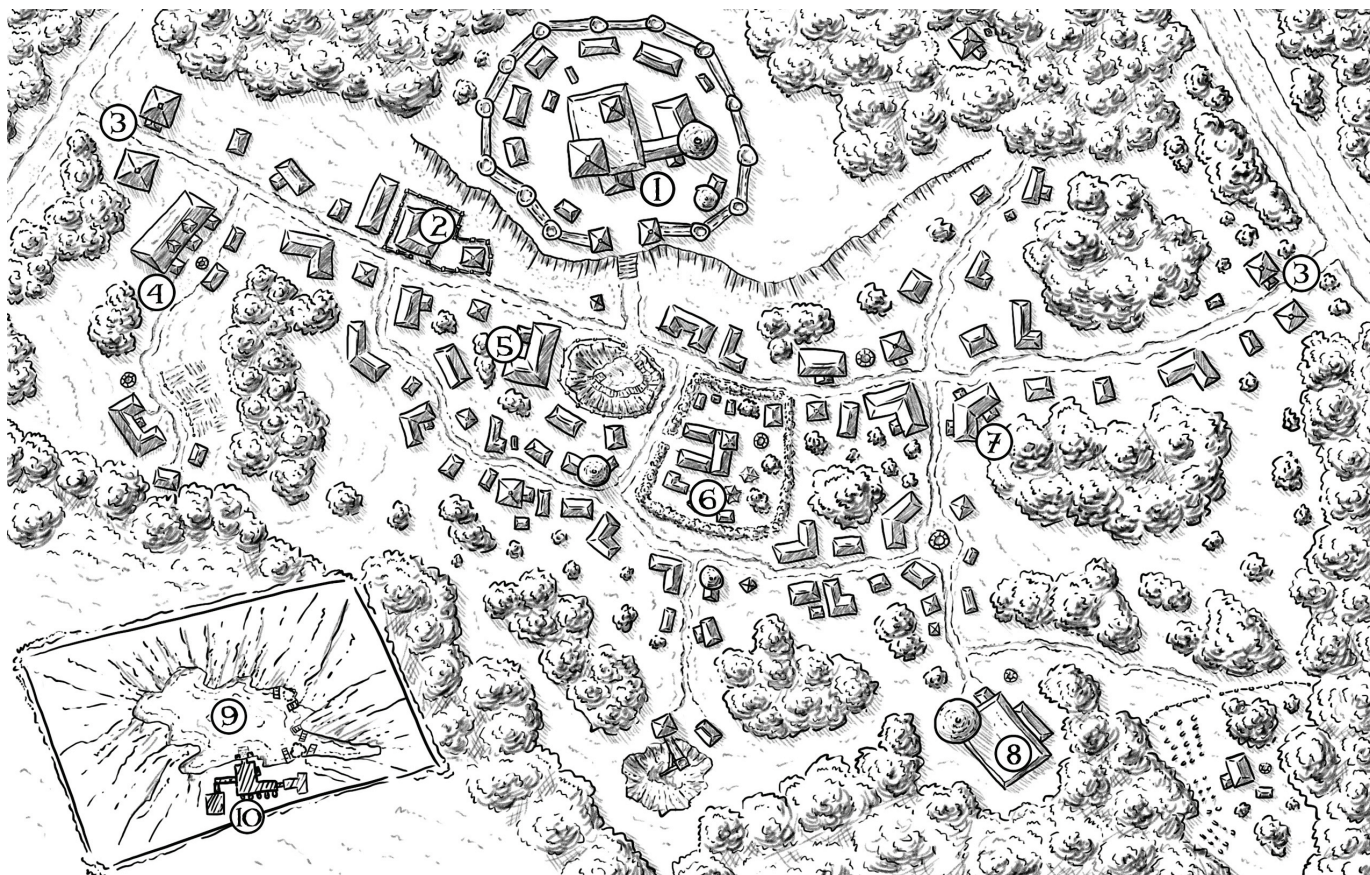
Nomenclature *male* Armas, Hannu, Kaarlo, Veli, Vesa; *female* Aila, Asta, Irina, Pia, Satu; *family* Rantanen, Siano, Tuomi, Varala.

WHISPERS & RUMOURS

While in Wellswood a PC may hear one or more rumours. The PC can learn this information in a number of ways: perhaps by overhearing two locals gossiping, chatting with regulars over a few drinks at the local tavern and so on. Use the table below, to determine which rumours the PC learns.

D6	RUMOUR
1*	Something terrible dwells in Lake Thraren; occasionally it takes one of the fishermen.
2*	Cracks have appeared around some of the wells—a collapse is imminent! The whole village is doomed!
3	Those dwarves are up to something. Their digging is going to cause a collapse—half the village will probably fall into Lake Thraren.
4	Lord Issakainen has grown wealthy from his control of Lake Thraren, and he grows increasingly paranoid someone is planning to steal his riches.
5	Jani Leino wants to buy the Boot and Wheel; he dreams of controlling all the village's various inns so he can increase prices and get very rich.
6	The Angry Badger has a secret cellar which hosts monthly animal fights—hence the name. The fights are to the death, and attract a hard-core following.

*False rumour



NOTABLE LOCATIONS

1: CASTLE ISSAKAINEN

Castle Issakainen's lofty battlements loom over the village as a constant reminder of her lord's power. Somewhat of a work in progress, the castle has seen several major phases of building and expansion and is thus a hodgepodge of architectural styles.

Here dwells Ilamri Issakainen (LN male old human fighter 2/wizard 3) and his half-elven wife Aelliah Issakainen (NG female middle-aged half-elf bard 5). Ilmari is dour, somewhat joyless and becoming obsessed with the collection of wealth whereas Aelliah is joyful and much beloved by the populace. Consequently, she does much to try and mollify the growing discontent against her husband's increasing greed.

Ilamri maintains a force of 67 men-at-arms (LN human fighter 1) to secure the village and a squadron of 18 elite cavalry (LN human fighter 2) to patrol the surrounding roads in groups of six for a half-day in both directions.

2: THE FOOTSORE WANDERER

This extensive walled compound offers excellent security for visiting merchants and its grounds can accommodate all but the largest caravans. Jani Leino (N male human) is the landlord here. He greatly desires to buy the Boot & Wheel (location 6) to dominate Wellswood's economy. Thus far, Elimia Takala, owner of the Boot & Wheel, has rebuffed his advances.

- **Food & Drink** meal (rabbit in mushroom sauce, chicken with buttered parsnip or similar) 3 sp, ale 4 cp, wine (pitcher) 2 sp.
- **Accommodation** A standard room costs 5 sp a night.



3: TOLL BOOTH

A toll booth stands at both ends of the village; all travellers (but not villagers) using the main road must pay a toll. Four men-at-arms (LN human fighter 1) garrison the booths day and night, but the night watch is far less vigilant than their daytime brethren. Collected tolls are transported to the castle at dusk. The tolls are:

- **Per Traveller:** 1 cp
- **Per Wagon:** 1 gp
- **Per Horse:** 1 sp
- The tolls are cumulative. So, for example, a traveller riding a horse would pay 1 sp and 1 cp, while two men on a wagon pulled by one horse would pay 1 gp, 2 sp and 2 cp.

It's a relatively trivial matter for travellers on foot to avoid paying these tolls (if they know about them) by cutting through the surrounding woods. However, those caught doing so must pay a fine of double the normal toll.

4: WHEELS & WAGONS

Run by two brothers, this large business can repair almost any mode of transport. Comprising a large workshop—a converted barn big enough to accommodate a wagon—and a stables with attached smithy this is a busy place.

Ylermi (NG male human fighter 1) is a talented smith while his brother, Jaska (NG male human), is a skilled carpenter. This is a family business, and both men's wives (Elina and Pia [both N female human]) and their children help out around the place. Pia is a skilled healer and tends any sick or lame animals for 1 sp a day.

BEHRON

N god of Travel

Epithets: The Farwanderer

Symbol: The open road running to the horizon.

Favoured Weapon: Light mace

Raiment: Plain brown robes

Teachings: Only by wandering do we find ourselves. Those that settle down deny the boundless beauty and wonder of the world.

Holy Texts: The faithful obsessively make and gather maps and write journals of their journals. These are stored in the sect's various roadside shrines and often contain amazing tales of far-off lands and places. Some contain details of legendary places and are sought out by adventurers keen to learn more about such locales.

5: TUOMI'S OUTFITTERS

This meticulously organised shop has everything a traveller should need to reach his destination.

Run by Fruen Tuomi (N female old half-orc sorcerer 2), a retired adventurer, the shop is well stocked and tended. Fruen is manic about order and cleanliness and her business reflects her twin passions. Beyond that held in her shop, she has yet more stock in a cavernous cellar that has a forgotten well allowing direct access to Lake Thraren. Sometimes at night, she fishes and drinks here for hours while reflecting on her adventures and slain companions. The following day she emerges tired, hung-over and dishevelled which has led to rumours of her conducting strange rituals away from prying eyes swirling among the populace.

6: THE BOOT & WHEEL

This small inn does a roaring trade; its guests are welcome to pitch their tents within the inn's grounds or to hire one of its many small lodges.

- **Food & Drink** meal (mixed greens stew, baked parsnips and onions or chicken soup with bread) 1 sp, ale 4 cp, wine (pitcher) 1 sp.
- **Accommodation** Travellers can pitch their tent in the inn's grounds for 1 sp a night. Additionally, a dozen lodges are available for 2 sp a night.

The Boot & Wheel offers no accommodation in the main building. Rather, many small lodges dot the surrounding area. All owned by Elimia Takala (NG female human) they are available for nightly hire and sleep a maximum of six individuals (comfortably). Thick hedges surround the whole affair, and keep travellers' animals from wandering away. Elimia is a gregarious host, but she does not like her rival, Jani Leino (location 2). The slow increase in taxes of late also concerns her; she worries they'll adversely affect trade, and therefore her own business.

7: THE ANGRY BADGER

A local's watering hole, the Angry Badger serves cheap, plentiful drinks and basic, but filling, food. Additional entertainments are always available upstairs (and occasionally downstairs).

- **Food & Drink** meal (typically fish soup with bread, spiced fish with parsnip and onion or parsnip broth with thick chunks of bread) 1 sp, ale 4 cp, wine (pitcher) 1 sp.
- **Accommodation** The Angry Badger has no accommodation available, and travellers are not allowed to stay overnight in the common room.

A large common room dominates the ground floor, and several ladies await the pleasure of visiting guests, who they entertain on the upper floor.

Several cellars lie beneath the tavern; one comprises a series of storerooms and contains nothing out of the ordinary. The other, accessed by a hidden stair, is the venue for month animal fights. Raucous and well attended by locals and specially invited travellers these affairs are loud and bloody.

8: TRAVELLER'S REST

This rambling shrine dedicated to the god of travellers is open to all. Travellers low on funds can sleep in the shrine for free. Antal Silverleaf (N male old halfling cleric 4 [Behron]) watches over the shrine and its visitors. Old age and arthritis have ended his wandering days, but he yet serves his lord by tending to the needs of those visiting this place. Antal is happy in Wellswood, but yet dreams of one last grand journey.

- **Accommodation** Travellers can sleep at the shrine for free, although the accommodation is nothing more than a hard stone floor in a draughty hall. While sleeping here is free, Antal often suggests those doing so might want to help with the shrine's maintenance and upkeep.

9: LAKE THRAREN

Lake Thraren's waters are deep and dark and are home to several exotic fish species found nowhere else in Ashlar. Consequently, Lord Issakainen tightly controls access to Lake Thraren and tithes those fishing its waters. Fish caught here are quickly sold to visiting merchants who in turn sell them to the great and the good of the realm.

The only known access to Lake Thraren from the surface is via the many wells throughout the village. Some are no bigger than a normal well, while others are large enough to have steps leading down to floating pontoons at which the villagers' fishing boats are moored. As part of the agreement between Lord Issakainen and the villagers he provides several magical everlasting torches for the fishermen to use; however, these must be returned every night to the castle.

10: DON GALIR

Home of the Erdikr clan, this small dwarven hold lies under Wellswood; non-dwarves are rarely admitted. Don Galir overlooks Lake Thraren's dark waters. Occasionally, the dwarves are seen sculling about on the lake in one of several boats they keep moored behind their fortress's great stone doors. What they search for, or where they go, on these expeditions is a matter of much speculation among the villagers. The dwarves, however, are a taciturn lot at the best of times and keep their own council.

LIFE IN WELLSWOOD

On the surface, Wellswood is a peaceful village, but building tensions lurk beneath the surface—anger at the rising tax burden placed on its visitors and locals being the primary cause. While the populace are not close to rebellion or protest, before long local business will be forced to raise their prices (again). Some also wonder exactly what the secretive dwarves of clan Erdikr are up to in their subterranean home.

TRADE & INDUSTRY

Life in Wellswood mainly revolves around servicing the needs of the many travellers passing through the village. Other villagers fish Lake Thraren in search of the many exotic and rare fish swimming gliding through its lightless depths.

LAW & ORDER

Lord Issakainen maintains a sizable force of men-at-arms at his castle backed up by an elite force of cavalry. The cavalry rove up and down the road for a half-day's ride in both directions to keep travellers safe; consequently, bandits rarely lurk in Wellswood's environs.

Lord Issakainen tolerates no disturbance to anything that generates his revenue and troublemakers are dealt with harshly.

EVENTS

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

D6	EVENT
1	A large caravan arrives in the village and heads toward the Boot & Wheel; as it does so several locals (employees of the Footsore Traveller) try to dissuade them—instead offering discounted rates to the caravan master.
2	Several near-penniless drifters are sleeping at the Traveller's Rest. The next morning, an argument develops when one traveller accuses another of robbing him. They come to blows and are both arrested.
3	Fruen Toumi (location 5) is widely assumed to be up to something. She is often tired and haggard in the mornings, and some think she's a witch trafficking with dark powers. The PCs are advised to never enter her cellar.
4	The wheel of a wagon passing through the village breaks; the main road is blocked for an hour while the wagon is dragged up to Wheels & Wagons.
5	A villager runs through street calling frantically for help—it seems someone has fallen into one of the wells!
6	Azthur Erdukr is seen examining several of the wells and shaking his head. Rumours sweep through the village that some of the wells are unstable and could collapse at any time.



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