

HIDE AND ZEKE: AN INTRODUCTORY ADVENTURE FOR RUNEBEARER

INTRODUCTION

Hide and Zeke is an adventure for beginning Runebearer players and GMs. In this adventure, the PCs will investigate the disappearance of a group of children and explore an abandoned house. PCs should have skill levels of 8-12 in a mix of skills. Tracking is an extremely useful skill in this adventure, and concealment, investigate, and a high perception score are helpful as well.

THE HISTORY OF RUNDAM

Up until 100 years ago, Rundam was isolated from Bostonia; its inhabitants paid homage to no Baron, and they worshipped pagan gods. Woodsmen serving Lord Rigentropp made contact with the village and used it as a base to support new logging camps. Through contact with the loggers, and priests, the Rundamites were integrated into Bostonian society, and became subjects of Lord Rigentropp.

As the logging trade prospered, so did Rundam. The Lord built a road, connecting the once isolated village to the rest of Bostonia. Merchants started to make regular visits and construction started on a sawmill.

Rundam's decline started in y771, Black Rains brought sickness to the region. Soon after, a group of white ratlings attacked several of the camps, and then raided Rundam, burning much of the village. The destruction bankrupted the nobles who managed the logging operation, and forced the remaining camps to close. Rundam returned to being an isolated backwater.

RUNDAM TODAY

Today, Rundam is still recovering from the events of 33 years ago. Rundam is a farming community with about 300 inhabitants. It is surrounded by acres of rich hillside fields and pastures, and several lush hardwood forests. Loggers have slowly made their way back to the region; a few nearby camps purchase provisions here, and use the road to transport wood to the larger towns to the south.

HIDE AND ZEKE

In Rundam, children are considered adults when they are in their early teens. Every few years as needed, Rundam welcomes its grown children into the community with a huge feast, and a blessing from the local Ilpader. The feast is followed by a ceremony in which the new adults hike through the woods, and as a test of their teamwork and courage, sleep the night at a "haunted" house.

HOW THE PCs GET INVOLVED

The start of this adventure presumes that PCs are passing through Rundam on the eve of its Coming of Age ceremony.

At that point, events will transpire that will involve the PCs in the search for some missing children. However, getting them to Rundam is the job of the GM. Some possible explanations are below:

- PCs could be guards at one of the nearby logging camps. One day, they are granted some R&R and trek to Rundam for supplies. They happen to arrive on the day of the Coming of Age feast, and are invited to join the villagers.
- PCs could be traveling to, or from, another adventure. Any remote location in northern Bostonia could be in Rundam's general vicinity.
- If one of the PCs is an herbalist, or alchemist, he could be in this region looking for a rare herb, or reagent. Rundam could be a planned stop, or the group could get lost during a trek through the hills.
- In a new campaign, one or more of the PCs could be young, disenchanted villagers from Rundam looking for a life of adventure elsewhere. The events of this adventure could be the spark that sets them traveling.
- PCs who are bounty hunters could be searching for a band of slavers that are rumored to operate in this area. The GM could use the slavers in this adventure to provide details to the bounty hunter PC.
- Priests or priestesses could have been assigned to travel to Rundam and watch and document their ceremonies.

THE ADVENTURE

THE FEAST AND THE MORNING AFTER

While traveling through the wilderness of northern Bostonia, you and your companions stop at the village of Rundam on the eve of its spring festival. Though you had heard that the people of this village were simple and insular, this evening they invite you to their table, and break bread with you.

Your hosts are eager for news, and stories of adventure. In return, you treated to a night of wine, and song. The festivities lasted late into the night. However, your long journey tired you, and you retired to your rooms long before your hosts.

The next morning, you wake with a heavy head, and the taste of the local brew coating the back of your throat. You had planned to get a late start, perhaps chat a bit with your hosts at breakfast. However, as you make your way across your room, and throw open the shutters, something tells you that you missed breakfast.

The sun shines high in the air; it is almost noontime. Below you, in the village square, dozens of villagers have gathered. The crowd shouts, and hollers. Many of the men wave fists, pitchforks, and hefty sticks. A couple of the women are crying.

It seems an angry mob has gathered outside your window.

The PCs might think that the villagers have turned on them, but that is not the case. What has happened is that after the PCs went to bed last night, the villagers performed their Coming of Age ceremony. Six village children received a blessing, and marched into the woods to camp at a nearby "haunted" house.

The children are late returning, and the villagers started to organize search parties. However, rumors of wolves, and ghosts have stirred them into a panic. When the PCs see the scene, it is chaos with various families are arguing - some wanting to wait another hour, some wanting to form a mob to storm the abandoned house, and still others warning of the house's history.

If PCs observe for a moment, they will be able to hear snippets of the argument, and possibly (Conversation DL 7, Perception DL 12) catch some basic information; some children are missing, and a house, and perhaps wolves (or a ghost) are involved.

QUESTIONING THE MOB

PCs that go down to the mob to investigate will have a tough time insinuating themselves into the discussion. People are yelling, arguing, sharpening their pitchforks, or weeping. PCs could use any of several skills to gain the attention of one of the villagers (all at a DL of 7):

- Conversation to wait for the perfect lull in a heated discussion to start asking questions.
- Persuasion to convince one of the upset mothers that the PCs are here to help.
- Orate to shout down the crowd and convince them to deal with the crisis in a calm fashion.

Of course, once the PCs have the villagers' attention, they will ask questions about the situation. The GM should answer those questions based on the information provided elsewhere in this adventure. However, some suggested topics, and their answers are listed here.

Topic	Answer
What is wrong?	<u>Concerned Mother</u> : The ceremony has gone terribly wrong. Our children have gone missing. <u>Old Timer</u> : I'd say wolves got 'em by now. <u>Angry Family Member</u> : Shut up, old man.
Wolves	<u>Trapper</u> : Yes didn't you hear them, howling and barking like mad? But then, you were out cold. Sure was a miserable night for the ceremony. <u>Other Villager</u> : Those weren't wolves howling. Those howls were unnatural.
Ceremony	<u>Calm Villager</u> : Every year, the children who are old enough to work the lord's land go out into the woods and camp the night by old Zeke's house. One or two of them go in and bring out a souvenir - just an old candlestick, or the leg from a chair. Next morning, they all return. <u>Excited Villager</u> : But now it's midday and they are still gone. Something terrible has happened. Maybe old Zeke has them!
Zeke's House	<u>Villager</u> : It's to the north of here, up Bald Hill. There is a trail through the woods leading right to it, but it might be overgrown. No one goes up there, but for this ceremony. It is a creepy place.
Creepy Place	<u>Villager</u> : It is a huge house, but no one has lived there since old Zeke was han... died there. Some folks say the place is haunted by Zeke's ghost.

Topic	Answer
Zeke's Ghost, or Hanging	<p><u>Old Timer:</u> Ezekiel Crow was a rich recluse; lived here about twenty years ago. He was into a whole slew of badness from what I hear. Some say he was a warlock, and Ilpader Mantram hanged him for it.</p> <p>Anyway, there's always some story or another about how old Zeke is coming back to take revenge on this village for hanging him.</p>
Unnatural Beast	<p><u>Trapper:</u> I used to keep traps up by Crow's old house. I don't any more. See, one night, I was checking a couple of my traps. It got late, and the sun was setting, but I thought, "Why bother coming back up here tomorrow?"</p> <p>So, I was searching around the house, maybe thirty yards away, when I heard a noise in the bushes. I looked up and there was this huge thing - half man, half rat. Its eyes were glowing, and it was dragging these long steely claws on the ground. It spotted me, and I held my axe up, hoping it would keep its distance. It just threw its head back and laughed, belching fire high into the air.</p> <p>I ran like the Deceiver himself was at my back. Never been close to that place since.</p>
Ilpader Mantram	<p><u>Old Timer:</u> He was a character. Spent more time asking questions, and buried in his books than actually preaching. He was the one that started the fuss with Zeke - asked a bunch of us about him; went up there a few times to talk with Zeke.</p> <p>One day, he summons a bunch of us to the church, shows us a bunch of drawings, and started talking about how Zeke had made a deal with an evil spirit. He had this necklace he took from Zeke's house, some kind of unholy symbol.</p> <p>The Ilpader led us to Zeke's house, and we confronted him. He denied everything. We kept him there, and searched his place. We found a book that none of us could read. Mantram said it was a book of rituals, proof of Zeke's sorcerous ways.</p> <p>So we hanged him.</p>
Where is Ilpader Mantram now?	<p><u>Old Timer:</u> Oh, he is long gone, left soon after that mess with Zeke. Probably off to find another warlock. Ilpader Garland is here now. Maybe he can tell you more about it.</p>

EBENEZER CROW

When the conversation begins to lag, or it looks like the PCs are done with their questioning:

Suddenly, a gravely cackle interrupts your conversation. You turn to see an old man dressed in a formal jacket, and breeches. Though once fine, his clothes are as withered as his skin. He tugs at the tuft of wiry, gray hairs on his chin, and lets out another laugh, which quickly turns to coughs.

Once the old man recovers, he addresses the villagers, "Ha! You miserable lot, look at you. Aren't you wishing you hadn't hanged Ezekiel now? He did nothing to you, left you alone, and you ignorant fools hanged him for it."

More coughs then, "But he's back now isn't he. You know it is true. You can feel the pricking on the back of your neck, and the chill in your bones. You murdered him, and left his body for the roaches. But now, he's found a way to return. Ha! Now he'll make you all pay."

The crowd breaks into chaos as some people begin to pray for salvation, while others try to shout the intruder down. One woman faints, while two hotheaded villagers start walking toward the ancient man with blood in their eyes.

Give the PCs a chance to silence Ebenezer Crow, and calm the angry villagers. To convince the hotheaded villagers to leave Eb alone, PCs will have to interpose themselves, and make a skill check (Persuasion or Fast Talk DL 10). Otherwise, they will have to physically restrain the men.

In a few moments (or if the PCs do nothing, or are having trouble gaining control of the situation), the village priest, Ilpader Garland arrives.

A young man in priestly robes pushes his way through the crowd. As they see the priest, the mood of the villagers changes immediately; the blood in their hearts is replaced with shame. The mob goes quiet, and the Ilpader speaks.

"Eb Crow, you get back home now. None of these people have harmed you, and only the grayest of them knows anything about Zeke. Children have gone missing, and we need to find them. If you're not going to help with that task, then you need to go home."

QUESTIONING EBENEZER CROW

Astute players might think to question Ebenezer Crow about his brother.

Ebenezer lives in a tiny house a couple hundred yards from the rest of the village. It is clear that Ebenezer is a capable and independent man. The yard around his house is cluttered with various tools, and from the looks of it, old Eb is building traps, skinning animals, curing meat, and chopping firewood.

You knock on the door, and can hear muttering, and shuffling from within.

Eb Crow is a bitter, old man who hates the village of Rundam for what they did to his brother. He will open his door, and talk to PCs, if for no other reason than to make it clear that he will not help them. It is very unlikely that he will volunteer any information.

PCs might remind Ebenezer that the victims of this incident had nothing to do with the fate of Ezekiel. If they bring up this argument, allow them a skill test (Persuasion DL 17) to get Eb to talk. In addition, can be bribed with goods amounting to 50p or more (Bribery DL 10 or DL 8 if the GM is particularly impressed with the bribe).

Topic	Answer
Ezekiel	Ezekiel was my brother. We were thick, he and I. Traveled all over this blasted place; made a fortune and lost it just as quick. Yeah, those were the days.
Fortune	Oh, is that what this is about? (scowls) Well, I suppose I can brag a bit about it; it's all gone anyways. About 20 years ago, Zeke and I made a killing smuggling whiskey and rum.
Smuggling, Whiskey, or Rum	Oh yeah, we ran whiskey back when Lord Gadsden was in power here. He owned a huge brewery in Jherod and made it illegal to buy anything else. Well, the stuff was too expensive, and tasted like pigswill. Zeke and I distilled our own whiskey, strong and sweet, and sold it to every inn and alehouse within 50 miles. (Lost in remembrance) Yes, we made quite a pair of thieves, Zeke and I. We would make the stuff in his basement, sneak it out the tunnel, make haste to the coast, or south toward Jherod.
Tunnel	There is a tunnel leads straight from the Zeke's basement north to the road. We could smuggle our goods even when the Lord's guard was camped in Rundam.
Rundam	A bunch of cowards, and yokels. Let the Deceiver have them. Ha! Let Zeke's ghost have them.
Ghost	I think my brother found a way to come back from the grave. Just before that priest hung him, he told me that if anything happened to him, he would find a way to see justice done - even if it meant digging himself out of his grave.
Grave	Ezekiel wasn't buried in the churchyard. He was hanged for practicing magic, and so he was buried out in the woods, behind his house.

Topic	Answer
Magic	I don't know. Zeke was always talking about power and spirits. Mostly made it up, I reckon. Still, toward the end, his talk got stranger and stranger.
Where is Grave?	Behind his house. I can tell you where to look. Gives directions that require a skill test (Navigate DL 5) to follow.
Hanged	Mantram charged up to the house with a bunch of villagers, roused Ezekiel out of bed, and hanged him. They almost torched the house, but Mantram wanted to search it for evidence. Of course, there was nothing there.

THE VILLAGE PRIEST

Once Ebenezer Crow is dealt with, Ilpader Garland calms the crowd, and convinces them to wait while he sorts out the matter. He proceeds to talk quietly with several of the villagers. When he is done with them, he walks over to your group and takes you aside.

"I know several men will go charging up to that abandoned house. I also know that these people have some strong superstitions, and firmly believe that Zeke's ghost has something to do with the missing children. I am afraid that someone will do something foolish, and hurt himself, or someone else."

"I need someone with a cooler head, and experience in dangerous circumstances. If the stories you spun last night have any truth to them, you fit that description perfectly. Now, I can't offer you much, but whatever I can spare is yours. Will you please lead the search party?"

Father Garland is worried about his village. Several children are missing, and though the Father does not believe in Zeke's ghost, he wants to be certain. He sees the PCs as experienced warriors, and hopes they can deal with whatever threat exists, as well as keep his people from trouble.

The PCs might want to ask the Ilpader a few questions. Some suggested answers are listed below.

Topic	Answer
Zeke, or Witchcraft	Well, it was a long time ago - before my time actually. But yes, Ezekiel Crow was hanged by Ilpader Mantram on charges of witchcraft. From all I have read, the charges were flimsy - nothing more than a couple trinkets, and a book no one could decipher. Ezekiel claimed he found them years ago, but Mantram was looking for witches.

Topic	Answer
Where is Ilpader Mantram	I don't know. He left long before I arrived at this parish. I heard rumors of another of his "investigations" in a small parish in the western part of James Barony.
Investigations	From what I understand, Ilpader Mantram is a self-proclaimed witch-hunter, and spends more time searching for devils than he does saving souls.
Ceremony	I don't understand it, or approve of it, but these people have held it for many years with no mishaps. There have not been any children of age for quite some time, so last year was the first I actually saw of it. I can't tell you much more than you already know.
Wolves	There are wolves in the region, but they mostly stay far from Rundam. I heard the wolves last night as well, but I could not tell how close they were to the village, or the house.
Zeke's Ghost	I am not concerned about a ghost, as much as I am concerned about a group of frightened, hotheaded, young villagers tromping about through those woods.
Unnatural Beast	I have never seen of such a thing, nor have I heard about it outside of the local alehouse. It is more likely that the children have gotten themselves lost, or are playing a cruel joke on us.
Payment	Yes, I understand you will want to be paid for your services. As I said, I don't have much. I will gather the church funds, and take a collection from the families outside. We might be able to scrape together 200-300 coins. I hope that is enough for you.

THE REAL STORY (GM EYES ONLY)

Everything is as it seems in the village of Rundam. No one knows the fate of the children, and no one here has anything to do with their disappearance. Everyone is eager to help in any way they can.

The children did travel to Zeke's house for their initiation rite. They made camp, and then attempted to enter the house to find a suitable trophy. Unfortunately for them, a group of slavers passed through Rundam a year ago posing as traders. Talking to the locals, they caught wind of the strange initiation rite.

Seeing the chance for easy money, the slavers returned to the site a week before the ceremony, and set several traps for the unwary children. Those that entered the house were caught in the traps. Those that remained outside were ambushed by

the slavers and their dogs (the howling and barking heard in the village).

Once the children were subdued, the slavers took a secret tunnel they found in Zeke's basement that led to a road. Their plan was to follow the road to the coast, and their ship. Once they board their ship, they will sail to the cobrat lands; in some kingdoms, human children fetch a small fortune.

However, their plan went awry when their wagon broke down in the darkness. They did not fix the wagon at night for fear of search parties seeing their lights. So, they waited until morning, fixed the wagon and continued down the road. The PCs are hours behind, but can still catch up if they figure out what has happened.

OPTIONAL ADDITION TO THE PLOT

Even stranger is the fact that the slavers were waylaid along the road early this morning. A group of white ratlings had been scouting this area for months, searching for a powerful ancient site. Just yesterday they found the site, but realized that they require a blood sacrifice to enter.

They headed toward Rundam with an eye for stealing one or two humans from their fields. On their way, they happened to run into the slavers carrying a wagon full of sacrifices. Impatient, the ratlings stopped the slavers and "convinced" them to give up their booty. The ratling group and the ancient site they are trying to explore will be published in the second part of this adventure.

SETTING OFF

As you prepare to leave, the priest speaks to the villagers. When he finishes, a group of six young men wielding crude weapons approach you. "Outsiders, the Father has told us you have agreed to search for the missing children," he motions to his group. "We are coming to help you."

Let the PCs decide what to do with the six villagers. A skill check (Tactics DL 10) will indicate that these men have never seen life or death combat. If the group allows them to help, then refer to the following stats:

VILLAGERS			
Physical	10	Initiative	0
Swiftness	10	Attack	8
Mental	10	Damage	1d6+1d4
Perception	10	Defense	9/8/6
Move	6	Armor	0
		Hit Points	28

Skills

Kn: Local Area	12
Craft: Farming	11
Climb	10
Swim	9
Stealth	5

The villagers will follow the PCs' instructions, and try to be of use, but are unskilled and will probably end up getting in the way. In fact, there is a good chance that one or more of the villagers that accompany the PCs will be hurt.

If the PCs do not want the villagers to travel with them, they will have to convince either the men to stay (Persuade DL 12), or persuade Ilpader Garland to talk them into remaining behind (Persuade DL 9). Otherwise, the young men will insist on going to the house, and will tag along, even if unwanted.

GETTING TO THE HOUSE

Just before you start your journey, the villagers tell you it is about a two-hour walk to the house. They instruct you to head north through the fields, and through the gentle hills to the north of Rundam. After about three miles, you will crest a hill, and see the woods in which Zeke lived. The townspeople tell you that if you search at the edge of the forest, you will find the trail that leads to the house.

The trip to Ezekiel Crow's house takes about 2 hours, and is uneventful. If your players are interested in the lay of the surrounding land, you may want to draw a rough sketch of the territory, being careful to leave out the secret tunnel from Zeke's house, and the ancient site shown. Refer to the map in Figure 1 for details.

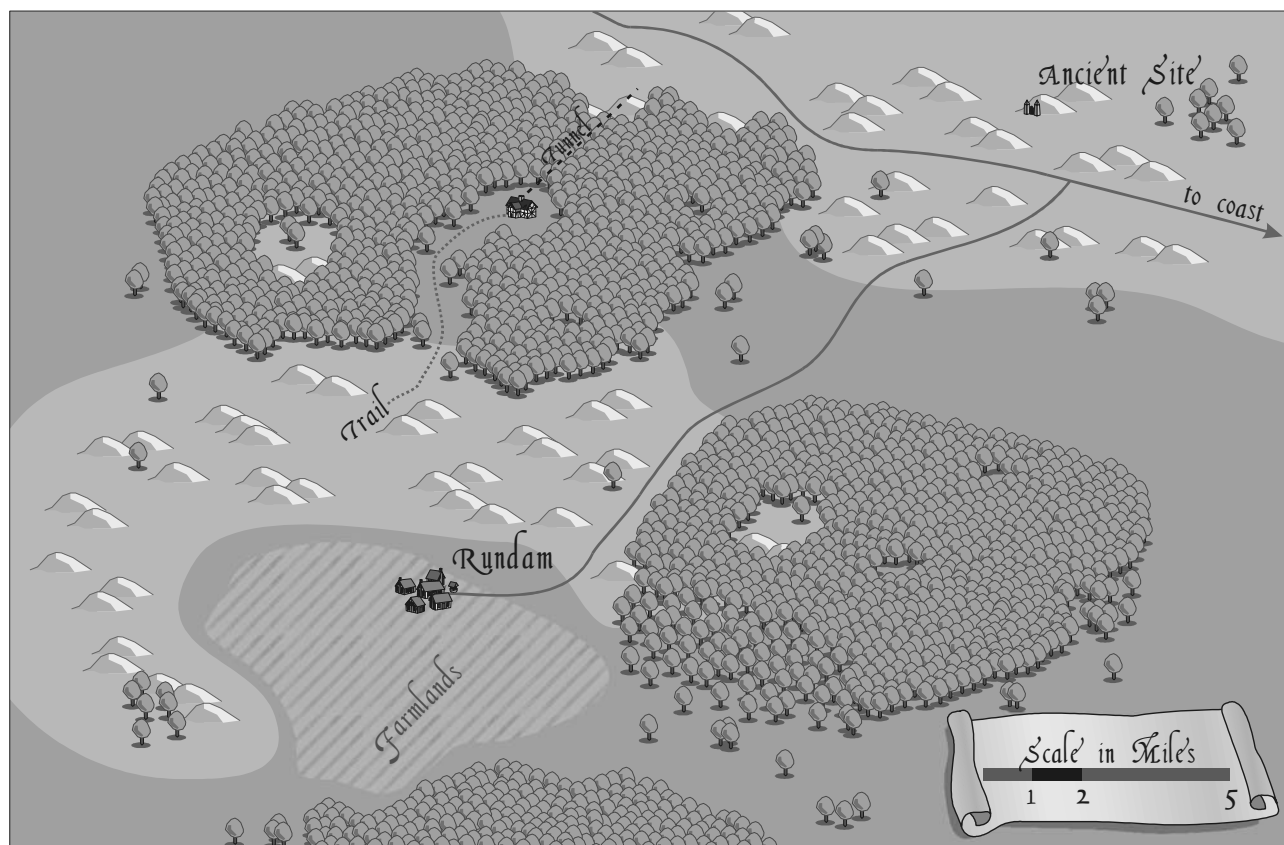


Figure 1 -- Rundam and Surrounding Area (GM's Map)

If the PCs brought help from the village, they will have no trouble finding the trail that leads to Zeke's. However, if they are alone, a skill check (Navigate DL 6) is required to locate the trail. Since finding the trail is critical to the adventure, allow the PCs to roll as many times as is necessary. However, each search takes another hour and puts the characters behind their quarry.

Once they are on the trail, the group has a chance to gain some information as to the fate of the children. Allow them to

make skill checks to find clues under the following conditions:

1. Any PC with the tracking skill who indicates they are tracking, or searching for signs of the missing children can make a skill check (Tracking DL 11) to determine that the children did pass this way recently, but so did a group of 3-8 men. Even a failed check will indicate that the children came this way.

- Any PC with the detect traps skill can make a skill check (Detect Traps DL 8 if they are walking in the woods; DL 13 if on the road) to find a peculiar mechanism. The trap consists of several logs set to fall onto the road, and partially block the path. The deadfall is still set. The trap is sprung manually by a lever in the woods, just beside the road.
- There is a 50% chance that one of the guard dogs left in the basement of the house will start barking while the PCs approach the house. An attribute check (Perception DL 12) is required to hear the noise. Note: If the PCs are in the house, or close to it when the dogs bark, they will automatically hear it.

OUTSIDE OF ZEKE'S HOUSE

You travel for nearly an hour on the overgrown trail leading to Zeke's house. The trail seems to stretch endlessly, and takes you up a steep incline. The going is tough, but the urgency of your quest spurs you onward. Finally, with sweat covering your skin, and your hearts beating heavily, you see the house of Ezekiel Crow.

This two-story house stands like a ghost in the forest. You can easily see the evidence of its former glory. Majestic columns flank the front porch, and the trim on the windows and doors is carved with depictions of winding, fruited vines. Now, real vines cover the walls, and creep through broken windows, and fallen shutters. Thick tree limbs smack against the roof, knocking large holes in the slate. Nature is reclaiming this place.

The obvious entrance to the house is to step onto the porch and go through the front door. However, astute characters might want to search around the house before entering. Those that do will notice many broken windows on the first floor, all of which offer easy access to the inside.

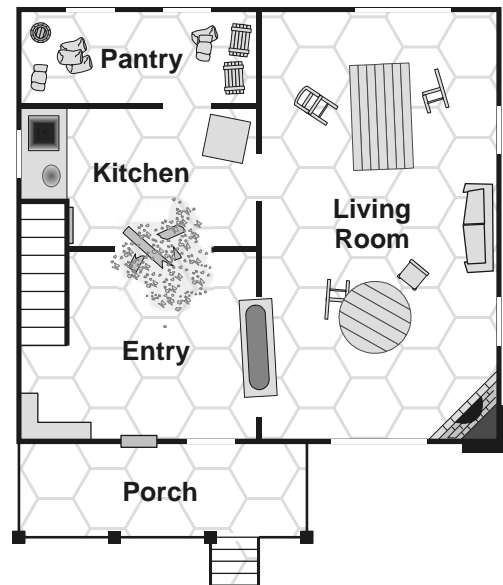
More interesting is the pit that there is a pit dug in the back yard. It is obviously fresh, but it would take a skill check (Tracking DL 12) to determine that the pit had been covered, and then subsequently fallen into by one or more people. Also, whoever fell into the pit was then dragged in the direction of the house.

Characters that search in the woods behind the house will eventually find Ezekiel Crow's grave. It is easy to spot, because even in the thick woods, nothing grows in this spot. The plants are either dried and brown, or curled away from this place. The gravesite is marked with a small pile of round stones, but it is obvious that no body is buried here. The grave has collapsed, or been uncovered, and whatever corpse was here, has long since been taken.

INSIDE OF ZEKE'S HOUSE

What follows is a room-by-room description of the house and its contents. Please note that any loud noises in the house will alert the dogs in the basement. They will likely bark, and growl, and wait by the door to attack anyone who enters the basement.

GROUND FLOOR



PORCH

A set of rickety steps leads to a wooden porch. The porch was once painted, but the color has flaked off into tiny red chips that stick to your boots and pant legs. The wood has rotted through in several places, and the entire structure groans with every step. The front door is here, as is the shattered remains of a glass window.

Unless characters are careful crossing the porch, there is a 1 in 6 chance of a board giving way under a random character, doing 2d4 points of damage to the his leg.

If the PCs note the red paint flakes, give them a +2 to future tracking tests in the house. The slavers came this way, and tracked red dust through the house.

PORCH - WINDOW

The porch window is about four feet wide, by three feet high. The glass is shattered, and colorful shards litter the porch. A moth-eaten, and tattered curtain hangs over this window.

Any character can easily climb through the window to gain access to the entryway. The curtain is worthless.

PORCH - FRONT DOOR

The front door is a sturdy-looking wooden door. It is covered in the same red paint as the rest of the porch. However, unlike the porch, the paint on the door is intact. A simple brass handle opens the latch.

The door is not locked, or stuck. It will groan and squeak, but open easily.

ENTRY

Dust rises into the air as you enter this room, forming swirling clouds in the rays of sunlight streaming in through the windows. As soon as you take a breath, you are assailed by a musty, moldy odor that turns your stomach. A small bench is built into the southwest corner of the wall.

There are two wooden archways leading from this room as well as a set of stairs, and a broken window, similar to the one leading to the porch.

The eastern archway is large, and partially blocked by a knee-high planter, but you can still see a large room beyond. The northern archway has collapsed, and debris blocks your progress in that direction.

A skill check (Tracking DL 10) allows a PC to spot the red dust leading from the front door to the living room (east).

ENTRY - PLANTER

This planter is nearly two feet high, and made of irregular stones. This basin is the source of the stench in the room. It contains dirt, and dead plants that have rotted to dust, and mold over the years. A white and violet mold covers the basin.

Though the mold is harmless, if disturbed, it will form a foul smelling, and choking cloud. A skill test (Herbalism DL 8) can be used to collect some of the mold without forming a cloud. Another herbalism check can be used to identify this specimen.

ASPERGILLUS VIOLARIUM

Climate:	Wet; Dark; Temperate or Warm
Season:	Any
Knowledge DL:	10
Discovery DL:	16
Bunch:	1d3
Purchase:	5p

Aspergillus Violarium is found in dark, wet places, growing on dead plant material. A colony of this mold is white, with deep purple streaks, and splotches. The white portion of the mold is useless. However, the purple portion can be used as a recipe for alchemical dyes. In addition, if the mold is dried and then cooked into a

powder, it gives anyone who consumes it an affinity (as per the advantage) to woodlands for 1d4 hours.

ENTRY - BENCH

This is a three feet high, wooden bench with cabinets underneath. The doors to the cabinets have ornate brass handles.

The handles to the cabinets might be worth 40p if sold. A skill check (Trading DL 12) will allow a character to successfully appraise the handles. If PCs open the cabinet, they find old leather boots, and a folded clock. Both are usable, but neither of them is special.

ENTRY - DEBRIS

This archway has collapsed, and with it a large portion of the ceiling. A large pile of rubble blocks your way.

It would not be hard to climb over the rubble (Climbing DL 6), or to clear it away (Strength 12). Clearing the rubble takes 10-30 minutes (you can base this time on their strength roll, or roll 1d3x10).

KITCHEN

This room looks as though it was once a fully functional kitchen. A waist high shelf and cabinet dominates the west wall. Inset into the top of the shelf are a coal pit, and a washbasin. There is a large wooden table in the northwest corner. In addition, there are archways to the north, and east, and a door on the west wall.

Remember that there are guard dogs in the basement, and those dogs might have been alerted by loud noises in the house. If the dogs are alerted, they will be right behind the basement door, growling and barking. If PCs listen at the basement door, remember to take into account the status of the dogs.

KITCHEN - TABLE

This is a large, wooden table built for function as opposed to style. Tarnished and rusted utensils are scattered about the table along with one or two wooden ones. In addition, four dried, animal skins are here.

Unfortunately, the animal skins are tattered, and worthless. If the characters search, they might find a few tarnished, but usable metal utensils, but at most these would bring a total of 5p.

KITCHEN - COAL PIT

This is a basin, about two feet by two feet, and eighteen inches deep. It is filled with charcoal, ash, bones, and a few bits of charred animal flesh. A metal skewer and spit are here as well.

If the PCs search through the coal pit, a skill test (Perception DL 14 or Conceal DL 9) will find the carbonized remains of a human finger still wearing an intact silver ring. The ring is not magical, but will fetch about 50p if sold to a jeweler (Trading DL 7 to appraise).

KITCHEN - WASH BASIN

This is a metal basin, similar in size to the coal pit. Two wooden buckets sit inside.

KITCHEN - CABINET

As you open the doors to the cabinet, three huge centipedes scurry out and attack.

Unless the players exhibited care in opening the cabinet, the centipedes will gain a free surprise round in which they attack. Also note that if you want a tougher battle, or you have a lot of PCs, you may want to increase the number of centipedes. However, use care when you toughen this encounter. This is not the main fight, and you don't want to injure your PCs so that they cannot continue.

GIANT CENTIPEDE

Physical	5	Initiative	+4
Swiftness	25	Attack	7
Mental	-5	Damage	2d4
Perception	5	Defense	13/11/9
Move	7	Armor	2,2,2,0,2
		Hit Points	18

Special Abilities

Many Legs: Leg wounds do not affect this creature.

No Mind: This creature is so dumb, that it has immunity to spells based on illusion or fear. In general, most spells affecting the mind of the creature, or spells requiring an INT save will not affect this creature. The GM is the final arbiter as to whether a given mind-based spell will affect this creature.

Poison: The bite of the giant centipede injects a mild poison. The victim must make a TOU test vs. DL 8. If they fail, they lose 1d3 hit points and 1 point of STR. If they succeed in the test, they take 1 hit point of extra damage, but suffer no other effects.

Spider Walk: Like most insects, the giant centipede can walk on walls and ceilings.

(After the battle) Once you dispatch the centipedes, you resume your search of the cabinet. Inside you find a spilled bag of rotted grain, three glass bottles whose contents have long since evaporated, a small woven basket, and two large jars filled with a milky-white liquid.

The jars are filled with Flesh Eater potion. Each jar contains enough potion to fully consume a human-sized amount of flesh.

FLESH EATER

Commonality:	Rare
Complexity:	15
Time to Make:	3 Days
Total Cost:	155p
Ingredients:	Strong Acid, Lead, Quicksilver
Processes:	Cooling, Infusion, Melting
Equipment:	Icebox, Infuser, Oven

This potion is a specialized acid that melts flesh. Living flesh produces chemicals that negate the effect. Splashing this potion on someone causes 2d4 points of damage. Drinking this potion causes 2d8 points of damage to the drinker.

The real use of this potion is to destroy dead tissue, leaving no trace of the original matter. The potion will fully dissolve any dead tissue it comes into contact with. This can be used to skeletonize a carcass, clean bloodstains or even dispose of a dead body.

It takes a bucket full of this stuff to completely eat a dead human-sized body. A vial full will clean bloodstains or eat away a smaller creature.

A vial of this potion will do 3d8 damage to undead creatures with bodies (like skeletons and zombies).

PANTRY

This room is crowded with barrels, boxes, and sacks. Most of these are overturned, or broken, spilling their contents. The floor is covered in a nauseating mix of rotting grain, mold, and rat droppings - about an inch deep.

There is nothing of value here.

LIVING ROOM

This is a spacious room, well lit by a number of windows. Two large tables, and several upturned chairs dominate the middle of the room. The southeast corner of the room houses a brick fireplace, and a couple of feet away along the east wall sits a dusty couch.

The only exits from this room are two archways to the west, and several windows along the north and east walls.

Aside from what is contained in the descriptions of the individual features, there is little in this room.

LIVING ROOM - FIREPLACE

A brick fireplace is built into the wall here. It is a large fireplace that could obviously heat the entire room, and then some. Several charred logs and a pile of ashes sit in the fireplace. At about shoulder height is a wooden shelf that holds several figurines.

A successful skill test (Tracking DL 10) will indicate that someone had a fire going no less than twelve hours ago.

The figurines on the mantle are made of ceramic, and are well crafted and painted. One of the figures depicts a huge talak warrior mounted on a bladed chariot with flaming wheels. The warrior is yelling a fierce battle cry and hurling a metal spear. Two more figures are obviously meant to be human commoners, scrambling away from this raider with looks of horror on their faces. The fourth figurine has been shattered, and crushed to dust, but a close inspection finds a tiny metal spear in the remains.

If sold, the figure of the talak will bring 150p to a scholar, or an artist. The commoner figures will bring 30p each. However, the figures are minor artifacts, but it will take a spell, or a skill test (Artifacts DL 14) to notice something strange about them.

FIGURES OF THE HUNT

Analyze DL:	14
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Figures of the Hunt always depict a dangerous predator. Similar to Ivory Figurines, these magic items summon the creature they depict when they are thrown to the ground, and a command word is spoken. The summoned creature remains for the duration of a single battle, and then returns to figurine form.

The main figure is never found far from another set of figures crafted in the form of prey. Usually 1-6 of these figures are found with the predator figure. Each time the creature is summoned to battle, one of the prey figures is destroyed. Once the prey is depleted, the predator figure loses any magical abilities it had.

Each time this item is used, the predator will demand a blood sacrifice from the character that performed the

summoning. This sacrifice must come from the summoner, and will cost them 2d6 hit points.

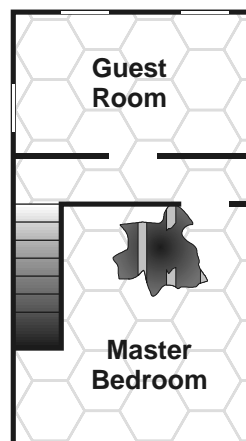
LIVING ROOM - TABLES & CHAIRS

The middle of the living room is cluttered with large dining tables and several overturned chairs. In addition, the remains of a recent meal -- complete with utensils and plates lies scattered on the floor.

The place looks like the scene of a fight, and if anyone asks, tell him or her this. A quick search will find a pewter candelabra (15p), and three candles (1p each) among the debris.

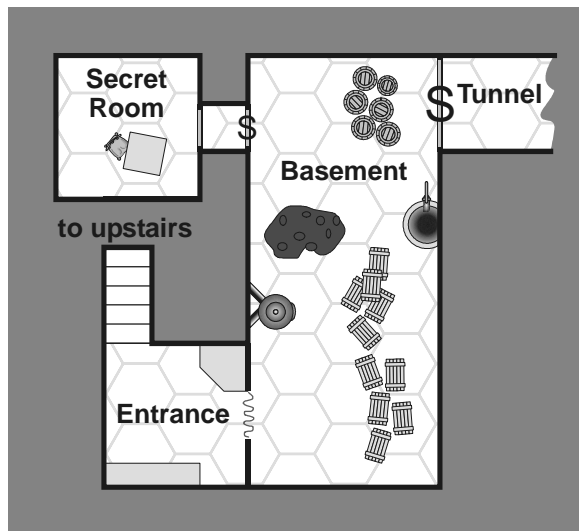
In addition, a cheap tin necklace with a symbol of Aestra is lying here. If any of the villages accompanies the PCs to the house, they will recognize it as belonging to Jenni, a girl from the village who was taking part in the ceremony.

UPSTAIRS



The upstairs of Zeke's house has a small landing, and two small bedrooms. I am leaving the exact descriptions and contents of these rooms up to the GM for the time being. A later version of this document will have upstairs room descriptions.

BASEMENT†



STAIRS AND ENTRYWAY

Remember that it is likely that there will be a pair of agitated dogs here waiting for the PCs. In the event that the dogs are still in the basement, the PCs will encounter them there. In either case, please adjust your descriptions accordingly. Also, take note that PCs will need a light source to be able to see anything in the basement.

GUARD DOGS

Physical	13	Initiative	+1
Swiftness	13	Attack	12
Mental	5	Damage	2d6
Perception	13	Defense	13/12/11/10/9/6
Move	7	Armor	1
		Hit Points	28

Special Abilities

Smell and Hearing: Dogs have a 23 perception with respect to hearing and smell checks.

You head down a creaky wooden staircase. The air is damp, heavy with must, and the smell of animals. You notice that the stairs are rotted from the wet conditions, and each step you take knocks a tiny bit of the wood away.

At the bottom of the stairs is a small room containing a bookshelf along the south wall, and a writing desk and chair stuck in the northeast corner. The only exits from this place are the stairs leading to the kitchen, and a curtained arch to the east.

Zeke used this room as an office when he was a smuggler. However, there are no papers, or books here. When the zealous Ilpader Mantram searched this room for evidence against Ezekiel, he took every last item. Both the desk, and bookshelf are empty.

BASEMENT†

You enter a huge room with a dirt floor, and walls made of irregular stones. A well, an old, rusted pump, and number of crates, sit along the east wall. Many of the crates are opened, or rotted through. In addition, there are several rows of barrels stacked in the northeast corner of the room. Along the west wall is a stout coal furnace, and a waist-high pile of coal.

Of course, it is possible (though not too likely) that the dogs are here when the PCs enter. If they are, they will be sniffing, and scratching at the northern corner of the west wall when they notice the characters. They will then rush to the attack.

There is a secret panel on the west wall. It takes a skill check (Concealment DL 16) to notice a slight seam in the rocks. The panel will open if the correct stone is pressed. If any of the PCs starts pressing random stones in hopes of opening the door, they will find it soon enough.

BASEMENT† - CRATES

The majority of these crates are open, and their contents are scattered along the floor. Dozens of random metal parts, pipes, basins, and flasks can be found. There are also several sacks of grains, and powders lying here. Finally, a few of the boxes are closed and intact.

Most of this garbage is the remnants of Zeke's still. Many of the metal parts are damaged, but some useful salvage is here. A skill check (Alchemy DL 10) will allow a PC to find 100p worth of goods. Without a skill check, no more than 50p will be salvaged.

The closed boxes contain tools - shovels, rope, nets, pullies, and pickaxes. An astute PC might realize that these items could be used to dig a pit, or set a trap similar to the one on the trail. All of this equipment is new.

BASEMENT† - WELL AND PUMP

This crumbling well, and rusted pump used to provide water for the house. It is obvious that this device has not been used in a long time.

The pump is broken. A close inspection (Perception DL 15) turns up scratch marks, and even traces of oil on the pump, as though someone attempted to fix it unsuccessfully.

BASEMENT† - COAL FURNACE

This is an iron furnace with pipes leading out through the ceiling. An old dusty shovel rests against the stove, and coal dust covers everything. A large pile of coal is on the floor here as well.

There is nothing of interest here.

BASEMENT† - BARRELS

A dozen barrels rest here, a few feet from the northeast corner. They sit on end, and are lined up in three neat rows. You can smell alcohol here.

Eleven of these barrels contain the remains of the Crow Brothers' moonshine. The slavers left a couple of their number behind to restack the barrels as they made their escape. The final barrel is the switch that activates the secret door to the east. This barrel is stuck to the floor here, and cannot be lifted. It can be rotated, and if someone gives it a quarter turn, and then presses down on it, the door will open to provide access to the tunnel.

A close inspection of the floor (Tracking DL 6) will show cart tracks that lead to the door.

The moonshine did not age well. Each barrel can bring 5p if sold.

BASEMENT† - SECRET ROOM

As you open the door, the air seems to chill. A simple wooden table and chair sit in the middle of this room. A pile of metal debris and glass lies on the table, and the surrounding floor. On the north wall is a 2' x 2' panel slightly ajar.

Sitting in the southwest corner of the room is a skeleton dressed in tattered fineries. As you enter, the skeleton leaps to its feet, and its skull rolls back and forth on its shoulders, held by only the thinnest strand of dried ligament. It moves its jaw as though trying to speak, and waves its arms at you. Its hands have been severed, leaving two jagged stumps of bone.

This skeleton is the remains of old Ezekiel Crow. Zeke was in fact, a warlock of moderate knowledge. He made a pact with a nearby evil spirit and was granted magical powers. When Zeke was hanged, the spirit raised him as a skeleton; it had hoped to use Zeke's magic to free it from its prison.

So, about a year after his hanging, Ezekiel Crow clawed his way out of his shallow grave. Confused and disoriented, Zeke followed the voices in his head and headed for his basement and his magic books. Ezekiel reached his house, made his way to the basement, and found the secret door that led to his magical study. Unfortunately, his yearlong interment had affected his memory, and he forgot the trap he had set for curious intruders. As he reached into the nook that held his arcane books, a blade slashed down and severed both of his hands.

Without hands, the undead Zeke found himself unable to work the latch to his study, and unable to cast spells. For years, he has waited for some unfortunate to open the door and set him free.

EZEKIEL CROW

Physical	15	Initiative	-1
Swiftness	8	Attack	12
Mental	20	Damage	2d8
Perception	10	Defense	12/11/10
Move	5	Armor	0
		Hit Points	30

Special Abilities

No Flesh: Slashing and thrusting weapons do 1/2 damage. Arrows and thrown piercing weapons do nothing. Axes, maces and hammers do full damage.

Undead: Ezekiel takes no penalty for wounds sustained, as he feels no pain. In addition, he does not have to roll for unconsciousness. His SPI score of 20 is their resistance to being turned by a priest. Zeke also take damage from water blessed by Stratus. Such water does 2d6 damage for each vial poured on him.

Spellcaster: Ezekiel could cast spells, but has lost his hands. Zeke has the skills artifacts, and rune knowledge at level 16.

The only interesting feature in this room is the secret nook. Characters inspecting the nook will see a sharp steel blade has fallen across the opening. Dried blood covers the blade and the nearby wall. If the blade is pried up, make a strength check (DL 14) to determine success.

Inside the nook is a silver key in the shape of a rat-headed woman wearing a flowing gown. In addition, there is a leather-bound book.

The key opens the doors to the nearby ancient site that is the home of the "Rat Queen." (Note: This site will be detailed in a future adventure). The book contains notes on several common runes. Anyone studying it for a month will get a +1 to his or her rune knowledge skill. In addition, the book contains the ritual spells familiar and suppress magic, as well as a map leading to the home of the Rat Queen.

BASEMENT† - TUNNEL

Zeke's secret tunnel is a long, damp tunnel with a floor made of flagstones laid together haphazardly. It is well constructed, and wide enough to fit a wagon through. The structure is supported by wooden beams swollen from the continuous drops of water that seep through the ceiling. As you walk, you sense the tunnel sloping down.

The tunnel extends nearly two miles underground, finally emerging on a wooded hillside. A narrow trail winds down the hill and deposits the PCs on a road leading east and west. The slavers took the road east toward the coast. A skill check

(Tracking DL 8) shows the path of the slavers, and the fact that the PCs are at least six hours behind them.

PURSING THE SLAVERS

At this point, the PCs should have a good idea of what happened to the children. The obvious solution is to follow the slavers' path, catch up with them, and somehow free the children.

After a couple of hours on the road, the players will come to the scene of a campsite.

THE SLAVERS' CAMP

You have been walking for at least two hours with no sign of your quarry. However, upon rounding a bend in the road, you come across the still smoking remnants of a campfire. Nearby, lies a small pile of wood chips, and shavings, along with a few larger worked pieces that look as though they snapped.

The slavers were here just an hour before. They set up camp when one of their wagon wheels broke. The wood is left over from the slavers' repair efforts, and any PC searching the area has a chance (Perception DL 10) to find a broken short sword blade, and a hammer that was carelessly left behind. A skill check (Craft: Carpentry, Craft: Teamster, Wagon Driver, etc. DL 6) will indicate that the slavers were likely mending a broken wheel, or axle.

A character searching the area for clues (Tracking DL 10) will note that there were probably a dozen or more people camped here, and that there was a scuffle at the site. In fact, a couple sets of tracks lead into the nearby brush.

If characters follow these tracks, they will wander into the hills for about twenty minutes. Then allow them skill checks (Perception DL 6) to hear someone moving about behind some rocks. When they investigate, they will find a scared, young woman hiding here.

THE ESCAPEE

Behind the stones lies a young, filthy, brown haired woman, her hands still bound behind her back. The scraps of twine on the ground here indicate that she has spent some time trying to break her bonds. As you approach, she backs away regarding you with fear.

The girl's name is Emma, and she is exhausted, and quite scared. If the PCs have villagers with them, she quickly recognizes her rescuers, and her fear quickly turns to relief. If the PCs are alone, the girl will take them for bandits, or ruffians (she does not remember the characters from last night's party), and make a feeble attempt at escape.

PCs can talk to Emma and make a skill test (Persuasion DL 8) to convince her of their noble intentions. In any case, she is too tired to flee, and once the PCs release her hands, she will understand that they mean her no harm.

Once Emma is freed, she will ask for food, and help the PCs in any way she can. She has no fighting skills, but is a competent medic (skill level 10), and knows a great deal about the capture of her friends, and the disposition of the slavers.

Topic	Answer
Capture	<p>Well, we made it to Zeke's house quickly enough, and took an hour or so to make camp for the night. We camped a little ways away from the house, since we thought we heard an animal or something from it.</p> <p>Anyway, a few of us decided to head into the house to get our trophy. My brother had mentioned seeing some statuettes in one of the rooms when he went, but he didn't get any of them. I wanted to take one of those, so I went.</p> <p>When we entered the house, we were attacked by a group of men. It was dark, and they surprised us. Before I could run, I was entangled in a net. I heard dogs, and screams from outside, one of the kids was yelling about having fallen into a pit. Then, one of the men hit me over the head, and I fell unconscious.</p> <p>When I woke, all of us were in a wagon, bound and covered with a heavy tarp. I couldn't see anything. We were in that wagon for hours.</p>
Escape	<p>The wagon slammed into a rock or something; there was a huge thud. And then we stopped. The men were grumbling, and they unloaded us off the wagon. We were on the road back there, and I could see that one of the wheels had broken.</p> <p>While we were unloaded, a couple of the boys tried to escape, and there was a commotion. While the guards were dealing with the others, I snuck away, and hid in the hills.</p>
Slavers, How many?	<p>There are only six of them, but they are all armed with swords, and nets.</p>
Where are they?	<p>It hasn't been more than two hours since we stopped to fix the wagon.</p>
Dogs	<p>I heard some dogs growling when the men attacked us, but there were none when we stopped. One of the boys said that they left them behind because they went crazy in the basement of the house. I was knocked out, so I did not see.</p>

THE SLAVERS

Gaylen Peck and his band are a rough bunch of thugs. They work for the notorious slaver, Captain Hallus Lorender. Lorender makes runs up and down the coast from the borakki lands, to the southern cobrat city-states. The cobrat buy borakki slaves for cheap labor, and humans as servants, or for sport.

Gaylen's group has a wagon full of human children, and is trying to get them to the coast, where Lorender's ship awaits. If he succeeds in getting to the coast, the PCs have probably lost the adventure, as the ship's crew will come to the assistance of Peck, and will probably overwhelm the adventurers.

However, the PCs will catch Peck well before he is in sight of the coast. There are a total of six slavers. One of Peck's men drives the slow ox cart. The rest of them are scattered around it. They are alert, but after encountering no pursuit for hours, they are not specifically looking for trouble.

What happens now is up to the PCs. They face six armed men who are probably trained combatants. PCs might be tired, and might be injured from previous encounters. To make matters worse, there are several innocents in the hands of the villains. This is a very dangerous encounter for both the characters, and the children they are supposed to save.

SLAVER

Physical	10	Initiative	0
Swiftness	10	Attack	10
Mental	10	Damage	1d8+1d6
Perception	10	Defense	10/9/7/6
Move	6	Armor	2,0,2,2,2
		Hit Points	28

All of the slavers are armed with short swords and nets

GAYLEN PECK

Physical	13	Initiative	+1
Swiftness	13	Attack	13
Mental	15	Damage	1d8+1d6
Perception	15	Defense	13/10/9/7
Move	7	Armor	2,0,2,2,2
		Hit Points	35

Gaylen Peck is aArmed with a short sword and net.