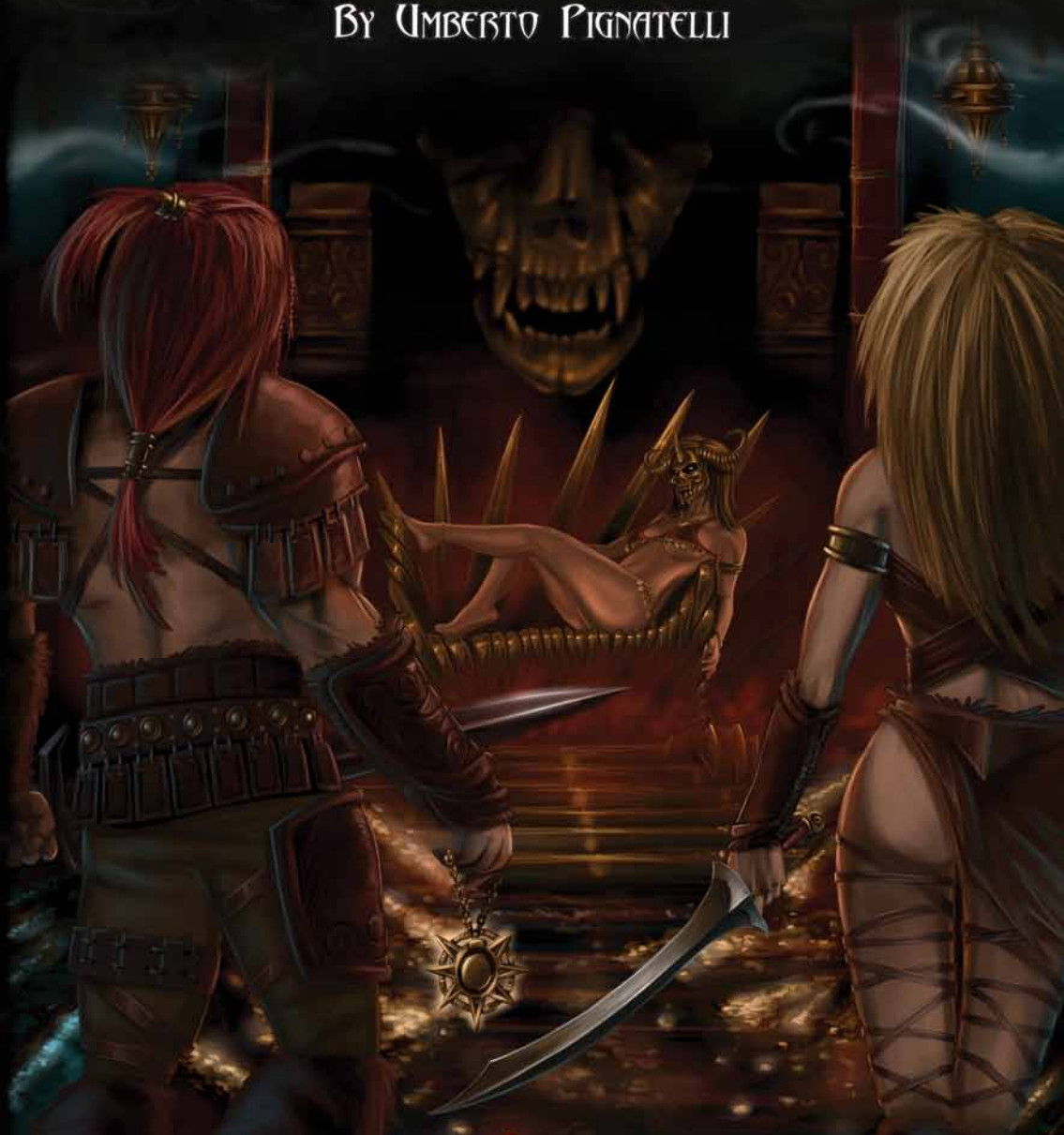


THE AMULET OF DOGSKULL

By UMBERTO PIGNATELLI



BEASTS & BARBARIANS
Golden Edition
UMBERTO PIGNATELLI

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A Sword and Sorcery Savage Worlds adventure for a party of four Veteran characters

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But there is no honor among thieves, and this crime will lead the heroes on a restless hunt beyond the Godaxe River, only to discover that something ancient and evil lurks behind a door that no one should open!

The dangers of the savage North, betrayals and chases await the heroes in the fifth installment of the Beasts & Barbarians adventure series!

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BEASTS BARBARIANS

A Sword and Sorcery Savage Worlds setting

BY UMBERTO PIGNATELLI

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INTRODUCTION

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Welcome to *The Amulet of Dogskull*, the fifth adventure for the *Beasts & Barbarians* Savage Worlds setting.

To play this scenario, you need a copy of the Savage Worlds core rules and *Beasts & Barbarians Golden Edition*. You'll also find *Jalizar*, *City of Thieves* useful, but it isn't essential.

This scenario is for a party of four Veteran heroes, with some experience (40-45 Experience Points is the optimal level), but it can easily be modified, by following the instructions in the Golden Edition, for parties of different sizes and experience.

You can play it with your own characters, download free pre-generated heroes where you found this product, or customize the

archetypes found in the *Archetypes of the Dominions and Jalizar* free supplement.

If you don't have gaming terrain, you will also find it useful to have some gaming stones and several copies of Burst Templates handy to represent specific terrain features in fights.

Text in italics is intended to be read aloud or paraphrased by the Game Master to the players.

Now, if you intend to play this scenario, stop here: the following sections are reserved for the Game Master.

Otherwise, if you plan to run this adventure, go on, and prepare to venture into the Lands of the Dread Sea!

CHARACTER REQUIREMENTS

This scenario asks the heroes to do a series of different things: break in and steal (Climbing and Lockpicking, Stealth), survive in rough water (Swimming), and then track down enemies in a savage environment (Survival and Tracking). Plus, the customary sword and sorcery dose of fights (any combat skills).

In addition, as the main threat of the adventure is of a supernatural nature, a character with some experience in the occult will be useful; a character with some social skills can also help solve a couple of tense situations.

Although all the skills above are useful, none is essential to play the scenario.

THE HOOK

The heroes are temporarily in Fort Miscenium, one of the forts on the Godaxe River, in the Borderlands, fully detailed in the scenario.

Maybe they are off-duty mercenaries or simply passersby. They can know each other from past adventures, or can be total strangers recruited separately by Andreas. The important thing is that they are broke and in serious need of money. This should not be difficult, if you are using the *After the Adventure* and *Savings* rules of *Beasts & Barbarians*.

BACKGROUND FOR THE GAME MASTER

Four hundred years ago, a dangerous sorcerer of Cairnlander origin, known only as Dogskull, ravaged Northeim.

It is said she had the blood of the Ancestors tainting her veins and this was the source of her power.

Dogskull had a pack of hideous creatures under her control, a kind of hounds, vicious and evil as herself. They were called Howlers, for the terrible sound produced from their inhuman throats. However many of these beasts the Northlander warriors killed, other ones appeared, as if given birth by a devilish mother.

In truth, Dogskull's Howlers were the offspring of a sorcerous relic the witch found in a remote tomb in the north: a magical cauldron, capable of enslaving the souls of human beings to create terrible monsters, which even if killed, can be summoned again the night after.

Dogskull ruthlessly used the people of her own clan, the Tomb Hounds, to create the first Howlers, and added new beasts to the pack by sacrificing captured enemies.

Blades and courage could not win against the sorceress, but cunning and magic could. A wandering priest of Hulian and a Northlander smith secretly joined their forces and forged a gold amulet, sun-shaped because the sun is the symbol of Hulian, Smith of Words, and defeater of all demons.

These types of amulets, even if not magical like this one, are fairly common in Northlander art, and are called Smagas.

They waited for a moonless night, when Dogskull and her beasts were forced to rest, and stealthily made their way to the entrance of the Cairn where the sorceress lived. Then they closed the door of the tomb and sealed it using the magic of the amulet.

Dogskull suddenly woke up, and feeling the power nearby, unleashed the pack on the doors of her Cairn. But no pull, push or bite could open the tomb's gate, nor any spell known to Dogskull. Only one thing could open that door: the Smaga.

Then the priest and the smith sat in front of the gate, waiting. First Dogskull threatened, then pleaded, and finally begged her jailers to release her, but they didn't.

In the end, no more sounds were heard from within the Cairn. Had the witch died of hunger and thirst, or had she been devoured by her own pack?

Nobody knows the answer.

The priest and the smith left the tomb, and went their separate ways. Stories diverge at this point: someone say that the priest kept the Smaga, others the smith, but soon its whereabouts were lost in the mists of time. The only certain fact is that Dogskull's tomb contains an impressive treasure, the fruit of her plundering, but nobody has ever dared to look for it. Apart from the risk, it is a futile task, because without the amulet, the Cairn of the Hounds, as it is called, cannot be opened.

Over the centuries the story of Dogskull was almost forgotten, surviving only in the songs of bards. But today the amulet has appeared again, leading to a series of events...

NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE: FLASHBACK

This scenario lends itself very well to being played as a flashback. In this case, start the adventure with a bang, playing the Chase described in the Run for Your Life Scene (Part 3, page 39), till the heroes enter the gate of the stead and meet Vesna and Maddoc. At this point, tell the heroes: "A week ago, when this story started, you never imagined it would have ended like this..." and run the story from the beginning, up to the combat with the Howlers. After that fight, return to the Survivors of Vestvan Stead scene.

*This way of playing the scenario is suggested only for experienced players and groups who are interested in a more narrative game. For rules on running flashback scenarios, check **Beasts & Barbarians Golden Edition** page 130 (In the *Thick of Things* adventure generator entry).*

PART I: A ONE NIGHT JOB

THE EYES OF A LADY...

The adventure starts at Fort Miscenium, the biggest and strongest of the line of forts on the Godaxe River, the natural barrier between Northeim and the Borderlands. Fort Miscenium has grown over the years from a simple fortification to a town, even if a town surrounded by tall, sturdy walls. The Fort is built on the southern bank of the river, and is the start of the Northern Trail, a road crossing the Northlands and the Cairnlands, eventually reaching Valkheim.

It is a very dangerous path, used only by the boldest, or most desperate, merchants. The Trail starts on the northern side of the river; a ferry and some barges are used to bring people across.

More details on Fort Miscenium are given in Appendix I: Fort Miscenium (see page 80).

The heroes are at the fort for some reason: maybe they are mercenaries looking for work, or they are simply passersby. The only important thing is that they are penniless, as always, and in need of some money.

You have all been at Fort Miscenium for a while now. You had hoped to get a job as guardsmen for some rich merchant trying his luck on the Northern Trail, but nobody seems to be going that way right

now. The other option would be to enlist with the soldiers of the Fort, but you've had your share of military life for now. So, your purse is getting thinner every day, while you became fatter and more bored.

One morning, while you are wandering in the town surrounding the real Fort, you see a group of soldiers crossing the main street. They are important people, because the crowds of citizens are stretching their necks to see them.

You, like the others, look at the scene: among the foot soldiers there are a couple of riders. On a black stallion rides an armored man, a rough looking soldier in his fifties, with many scars and an eyepatch. Near him, on a white mare, there is a blonde girl, of clear Northland origin.

"Commander Ascanius, ruler of the Fort, and his lovely wife enjoying a ride in the city." A voice near you comments.

You turn to see the person talking: the man speaking is pleasant-looking and well-dressed, with a moustach and a well-groomed beard. He looks like a merchant, probably a Faberterran, but not the fat type, trembling in sight of bandits: he has a sword at his hip, and isn't for show.

"Lady Gwynned is very pretty, and quite a bit younger than her husband."

He continues "It is no mystery why Commander Ascanius loves her deeply, and showers her with gifts. Look at the quantity of gold she wears!"

You have heard of the wife of the fort commander: Gwynedd is the daughter of Kronn, a powerful Northlander chief, and this marriage has a strong political importance in creating a new peace in the north. As the newcomer says, she wears an impressive amount of bracelets, rings, earrings, and a marvelous sun-shaped pendant, which seems to be made of gold.

"Nice girl, and even nicer jewels. A man, even a small group of men, could live well on them for a long time, if they are bold enough to take the chance."

"And you look like that type of men." He adds with a sidelong glance.

This is an open proposition, and if the heroes are interested (and they should be, if they want to go on with the adventure), they can discuss the details in a nearby tavern.

There, over a horn of Northland mead, Andreas spills the rest of the beans.

"I am a merchant, specializing in jewels. I have a customer, south in Faberterra, a noble, who will pay a large sum for the Smaga, the sun-amulet on the commander's wife's neck. I offered her a generous sum for it, but she refused. I know that she always wears her jewels, except at night. So I am looking for someone bold enough to sneak into her bedchamber and steal it. I offer one thousand Moons for the job, which is a fair price. It is a dangerous job, but a very lucrative one. In addition, you could use the occasion to steal all the woman's other jewels, which are also worth a

tidy sum. I will buy them at an honest price. But it must be done tonight, because my customer in Faberterra is getting impatient, and I need to close the deal."

If the heroes accept, Andreas tells them to meet him at the Syranthian Watermill on the docks tonight (see Appendix I). They'll bring the amulet; he will bring the money. Simple and easy.

While the party is leaving the tavern they are allowed a Notice (-4) roll. With a success they spot a person looking at them: he is another stranger, probably a desert nomad, far from home, totally dressed in black. But before they can do anything the man disappears into the crowd. He is Hazir, Andreas' partner, and he is watching the heroes to check they don't go directly to Commander Ascanius to betray the merchant.

...ARE WORTH MORE THAN ANY JEWEL

INFORMATION GATHERING

The heroes don't have much time to assess the situation, so they should quickly gather some intelligence on Lady Gwynned and her powerful husband and do the job tonight. Andreas tells the adventurers that the couple live somewhere in the Inner Fort, but this is basically all that he knows.

If they want further info they must snoop around the fort, looking for an off-duty servant, maid or soldier to befriend and talk to. In this case they are allowed one Streetwise or Persuasion roll per two hours of work (with a bonus ranging from +1 to +4 depending on their approach, role-play, the quantity of booze and tips): what they learn depends on the success of the rolls.

Every entry includes the previous information, with the exclusion of the Critical Failure. For example, if the characters score a raise, they also gather the knowledge of the failure and success entries.

Critical Failure. The person concerned is made suspicious by the character's behavior and goes away, potentially alerting the Fort's soldiers.

Failure. Lady Gwynedd is quite ill-tempered and she rules her husband with an iron fist.

Success. Lady Gwynedd and her husband live on the upper floor of the northwestern tower of the Inner Fort.

Raise. They stay on the upper floor, where they keep no guards, because they are very jealous of their privacy.

Two Raises. The lady always keeps the windows of their private rooms open, because she loves cold, as all Northlanders do. His husband lets her, but being sensitive to cold he wants braziers kept alight everywhere in their tower. They consume a lot of charcoal, a whole cart each week (see further details below).

BREAKING IN

Given the information above, there are basically two ways to sneak in the Inner Fort, and in particular in the northwestern tower, where the couple sleeps.

CLIMBING UP THE WALL

The heroes can simply walk outside the Inner Fort, up to the base of the walls, and scale them to reach the window of the Third Floor (see below). The wall is steep, but very thick ivy grows on it, making a

climb possible. Three Climbing rolls are necessary to reach the top, respectively at (0, -2 and -2), but a hero can decide to stop earlier (at the First Floor after one roll, and at the Second Floor after two), and take his chances with the windows of the current floor (see below). In the case of success, the hero climbs up to the floor immediately above, with a failure he simply doesn't manage to advance; only with a critical failure does he fall down.

In addition, during each round of climbing, each adventurer must draw a card from the Action Deck: on a Club, the ivy breaks under the weight of the hero, and he must make an immediate Strength roll to avoid falling down. Heroes with the Brawny Edge, the Obese Hindrance or who are Encumbered break the ivy with any card higher than four (plus Club as others).

Each floor is approximately 10 feet tall, so falling causes 1d6+1 damage per floor.

Note that if the heroes have a rope only the first character must climb up using the rules above. Once he reaches the Third Floor, he can tie the rope at the window, and the other adventurers can climb up with a simple unmodified Climbing roll.

THE CHARCOAL CART

As the party can discover during the Information Gathering process above, each week a cart of charcoal is brought to the northwestern tower of the Inner Fort, and, of course, the next delivery is scheduled for late this afternoon. The cart arrives from outside the town, from the house of Dirty Jorrall, the local charcoal burner, a lumberjack as placid as the oxen dragging his cart. The cart is let inside by the guards without being inspected and Dirty Jorrall unloads the contents directly into the cellar of the

tower (see Basement, below). The heroes have several ways to use the Charcoal Cart to sneak inside the Inner Fort. The most straightforward one consists of waiting for Jorrall outside the town, knocking him out (he isn't a great fighter), and substituting one of their number for him. With Jorrall's dirty clothes, a face blackened with charcoal and a hood, a simple Persuasion test is enough to pass the guards' inspection. At this point up to four characters can be hiding among the charcoal. But this means that the character driving the cart must go back out of the Fort after unloading the cargo (and his comrades). Otherwise the characters can wait for Jorrall to enter the town and then, with a Stealth roll, jump on the back of the cart behind him, and dig a hideout in the charcoal. Finally they can

address him directly, and with a Persuasion roll (+2 if a pretty girl is involved) and 50 Moons they can buy a ride in the charcoal.

(M) Dirty Jorrall (1): Use Commoner stats. See page 70.

INNER FORT

The Inner Fort isn't the focus of the scenario, so only a brief description of it is given, but it can be useful to know the layout if the heroes seriously mess up the attempted theft. It is a square stone and mortar building, with four towers, one per corner and several internal buildings.

Barracks. The place where the off-duty soldiers sleep and eat. There are three



barracks in various buildings of the Fort. During the day, 2d6 Soldiers can be found in each Barrack, double the number by night.

Courtyard. The central square of the Fort, also used as a practice field. The main well of the Fort is also here. During the day 3d6 Soldiers are usually found here, during night time only 1d4-1 (minimum 1).

Gate. This is guarded night and day by a patrol of four guards.

Walls. On the battlements during daytime there is always a guard patrolling. During the night there are two, plus another one walking around the external perimeter of the Fort twice per hour. He takes five minutes to complete one circuit of the perimeter.

Stables. This hosts the Fort's mounts and beasts of burden. During daytime there are always four stable hands and farriers at work. During nighttime one of them sleeps here in an empty box.

(M) Stable Hands and Farriers (1-4): Use Commoner stats. Farriers have Strength d8. See page 70.

Warehouses. These locked buildings (Lockpicking roll to get inside) store provisions, weapons, and other assorted goods necessary for military activities. There are two of them, usually watched over by a very bored (-2 to Notice rolls) guard.

(M) Fort Soldiers (variable number as described above): See page 72.

THE NORTHWEST TOWER

This large, squat tower is the main building of the Inner Fort. The main access is

via a door on the ground floor, but there is also a hatch which allows the charcoal to be unloaded directly into the cellar. A stairway allows access to all the floors of the tower. On the tabletop, each floor is 20" by 20".

BASEMENT

This contains a **cellar** where charcoal is stored in a large pile, and a second **cellar** full of food and wine. A stairwell leads to the ground floor. It isn't much frequented: during the daytime, draw a card from the Action Deck when the heroes enter the Basement: if a Club is drawn, it means that a servant it is there, busy with some errand. During nighttime there is nobody there.

(M) Servant (1): Use Commoner stats. See page 70.

GROUND FLOOR

It is composed of three rooms: an **entrance** allowing access to the tower from the courtyard, the **kitchen** and the **servant's quarters**. A stairway allows access to the Basement and the Second Floor. There are always a couple of guards in front of the entrance, plus six servants (a cook, a butler and another four assorted servants) divided between the kitchens and the servants' quarters. At night the servants are all in their quarters, sleeping, while during the day they are on the various floors of the tower, busy with their tasks.

Windows: There are no windows on this floor, which is basically at ground level, only small arrow slits.

(M) Servant (6): Use Commoner stats. See page 70.

(M) Commander's Guards (2): Use Fort Soldier stats, replacing armor with iron heavy armor (+3) and adding spear to gear. See page 72.

FIRST FLOOR

This floor has the **main hall** of the tower, with a large fireplace, a table and a decorated seat, and a **dining room**. During daytime it is usual to find Lady Gwynedd there with her two handmaids, Emma and Gilean, playing the harp and doing similar things. During the night there are a couple of guards there, dining on the leftovers from their lord's table. They are usually quite drunk (-2 to Notice rolls). In the room there is always Draco, the Commander's old, almost blind hunting dog, hoping to get a bone or a scrap of food.

Windows: The windows on this floor are protected by metal grates (Toughness: 8), which can be forced open with a Strength (-4) roll.

(M) Draco (1): See page 71.

(M) Fort Soldiers (2): See page 72.

SECOND FLOOR

This floor contains the **rooms of Emma and Gilean**, the handmaids of Lady Gwynedd, and a **guard room** used by the soldiers guarding the Commander and his wife (on the upper floor). During the day this floor is almost deserted, while during at night the guards are busy playing dice, and Emma is sleeping in her bed, while Gilean, who is having an illicit affair with Hiram, one of the guard officers, is usually very busy with her lover.

Windows: The windows of this floor are protected by wooden blinds, which are

kept closed by night. They can be broken (Toughness: 7) or pried open with a Lockpicking (-2) roll.

(M) Fort Soldiers (6): See page 72.

(M) Emma and Gilean (2): Use the Commoner Stats, adding the Attractive Edge. See page 70.

(M) Hiram the Officer (1): Use Fort's Soldier stats, raising Fighting by one die step and adding the Command Edge. See page 72 and 70.

THE ALARM

***Before the Theft.** Usually Beasts and Barbarians scenarios handle raising alarms in intrusion missions using Alarm Tokens (see the Moonless Night Over Grimdell Heroic Tale or Beasts and Barbarians #4: Shadows over Ekul). In this case, a successful theft being necessary to the beginning of the plot, the Game Master should let the heroes reach the bedchamber of Lady Gwynedd without alerting the guards, unless the players make some blatant error. In this case, they should be given the chance to escape from the Fort and to try the theft again the night after (with much dismay from Andreas).*

***After the Theft.** Once the heroes have the Smaga in their hands, the GM can handle raising the alarm more strictly: if the heroes do something that causes noise in the bedchamber (or the occupants cry out), the guards from the second floor storm in after 1d4+1 rounds. After 2d6 rounds, the general alarm is given, alerting the entire Fort. At this point the heroes should be well away from the Fort, running away through the dark alleys of the town, heading to the Syranthian Watermill.*

THIRD FLOOR

This floor is home to the Commander and his wife. It is composed of a **bedchamber** connected to a **dressing room** (with a large pool where the Lady takes her daily bath) and the **Commander's study**. If the heroes come climbing the wall, they arrive in the dressing room, if they arrive from the stairs, there is a door leading to the sleeping room and another leading to the study. During the day this floor is usually deserted, the occupants being in other parts of the fort busy with their duties. During the night they are in the sleeping room, where there are a number of braziers alight. When the heroes enter this, go on with the next scene.

Windows: The windows of this floor are always open, because the Lady enjoys the cold and have no grates.

ON THE NECK OF A LADY

The scene below supposes that the heroes reach the Commander's bedchamber in the dead of the night, without having raised any alarm (see above). Change it according to the situation of your party.

Finally you made it! You are in the Commander's bedchamber. It is clearly a nobles' room, but it is furnished with a barbaric taste: furs and weapons hang on the walls rather than tapestries and precious paintings, and hunting trophies are scattered all around. The noble couple are in their bed, under a bearskin. Judging from their snoring, they should be fast asleep.

You look around with professional eye, and you see what you are looking for: a jewel-box atop a cabinet. It has been carelessly left half open and it is full of jewels!

The heroes can move around the room with relative ease. On the floor there are furs, muffling the noise of their steps. The jewel box contains all the Lady's trinkets (worth around a thousand Moons), but one thing is missing: the sun-shaped amulet, the Smaga!

When the heroes look around for it, read the following part.

You frantically look around for the amulet. It must be somewhere, when you spot it: Lady Gwynned, who has the remarkable habit of sleeping naked, turns over in her sleep, and you can see it, shimmering, between her breasts!

If the heroes want the amulet, they must snatch it from the lady's neck. This can be done in many ways.

If the heroes prefer a subtle approach, they can delicately remove it by making first a Stealth roll to gently force the lady to move, then an Agility (-4) or Lockpicking (-2) to pry open the clasp of the golden chain keeping the amulet in place. If they do this, they can quietly leave the room and reach their employer at the Syranthian Watermill; go to the next scene.

If they fail one of the rolls, they manage to steal the Smaga, but the girl wakes up and screams, awakening her husband and giving the Alarm (see sidebar) throughout the entire Tower. At this point the situation becomes difficult: unless restrained in some way, Commander Ascanius jumps out of the bed, grabs the sword lying near him and engages the heroes, naked as he is, while he shouts to alert the guards.

The sleeping room is a square 10" by 10" with a door on the north door, leading to the stairs, and another one on the east

door. A window is placed on the south wall. The couple's bed, 3" by 2", is placed in the middle of the western wall.

(WC) Commander Ascanius (1): See page 70.

(WC) Lady Gwynned (1): Use Commoner Stats, adding the Attractive and Noble Edges, plus the Bloodthirsty Hindrance. See page 70.

TERRAIN AND PROPS

- **Braziers:** There are up to three braziers scattered about the room, with hot coals inside. They can be rolled over on the fur covered floor to create a fire filling a Small Burst Template (spot fire intensity: 1d10 damage) and to create a diversion to cover an escape.

- **Furniture:** The room contains assorted furniture (a cabinet, an armoire, and a dresser). They have Toughness: 7 and grant Light Cover.

- **Trophies and Hanging Weapons:** As described in the narrative text, on the walls of the room there are several trophies and weapons. If the heroes are interested in grabbing something in the heat of the fight, they are allowed a Notice roll. If they score a success they spot a Str+d6 weapon, a shield or a suitable prop for a Trick (with a bonus of +2). With one or more raises, they find a Str+d8 weapon or a prop for a trick with +2 bonus in a Small Burst Template.

GETTING OUT OF THE FORT

Once the heroes have the Smaga, they should escape from the Fort; staying and fighting is a losing tactic - in few moments all the Fort's soldiers will be alert. Even if they wake Commander Ascanius, they have the chance to create a diversion

HEROES' JOURNAL: SMAGAS

Smagas, or clan amulets, are very important for Northlanders. Even if for the barbarians of the north the important thing is the man who wields the sword, not his father's name, they have their roots, and Smaga testify to it: these amulets, usually made of gold, are passed from father to son (or rarely to daughter) to symbolize the continuation of a clan and to perpetuate the bloodline. Some Smagas are older than the Iron Empire. A Northlander with a Smaga always wears it with pride.

This particular Smaga, forged by a Northlander smith with the help of a wandering priest of Hulian, is a remarkable piece, sun-shaped because the fiery star is the symbol of Hulian, Smith of Words, and inscribed with the profile of a running hound, because it was made to entrap Dogskull and her hellish pack.

It grants the user the Champion Edge, but its power remains dormant till the first time a Demon is met.

(using the braziers or a proper Trick) to reach the adjacent dressing room, lock or barricade the door behind them, throw a rope from the window and climb down (with an Agility or Climbing (+2) roll).

If the party has no rope, they can improvise one by cutting and tying the curtains of the room and the tapestries hanging from the walls. To do this they must make an Agility roll, summing up successes and raises. When they have three or more the improvised rope is ready (-2 to Agility or Climbing rolls). Multiple heroes can work on the rope in the same round. At this point they can run away.

ROUGH WATERS

The heroes should run directly to the rendezvous point, while the whole town is brusquely awoken by the Fort's soldiers ransacking it to find the thieves.

When the heroes reach the Syranthian Watermill (see Appendix I), read the following.

The watermill is one of the oldest buildings of Fort Miscenium. Built directly on the riverside and inside the city's walls, this massive, water-powered structure was constructed during the height of the Empire by Syranthian engineers for an Emperor who dreamed of transforming the Borderlands into the granary of the northern empire. Today it continues to work but very little grain is milled. It is more a curio than a workplace.

When the heroes arrive at the mill the small door is only ajar. Andreas waits for the heroes on the upper floor of the mill, impatiently walking over the planks. The text below supposes the heroes stole the Smaga but alerted the guards, change it accordingly to match the actual situation.

"Good, you made it. I heard the ruckus and I was sure you were caught. Do you have the amulet?"

When the heroes hand it over, the merchant smiles widely and throws a bag to the party. The bag is weighty and apparently filled with money, but any character accurately inspecting it discovers that only the coins on the surface are golden Moons, below there are little pieces of stone.

"Finally the Key is in my hands! With this the treasure of Dogskull will be mine!" Andreas gloats.

If the heroes ask more Andreas continues:

"This amulet is much more a simple jewel. What a pity that guards discovered the theft. Now we need a diversion, I am right Hazir?"

You turn to see on a black dressed man, probably a southerner, on the opposite side of the room. The stranger silently nods and pushes a lever nearby.

Suddenly the floor opens under your feet and you fall several yards, landing in water!

Andreas's smiling face appears over you.

"You are in the mill's water conduit." He shouts to overcome the sound of the mill "I'll open the water gate, resulting in... an interesting moment for you. When the guards will find your smashed corpses they'll think the jewels are on the bottom of the river and won't look for them anymore. And now, if you'll excuse me, I have an appointment with a treasure... on the other side of the border!"

The ceiling over your head closes with a slam.

In the same moment the water gate opens and you are dragged into the mill's innards by the force of the water!

This scene is handled with a variation of the Chase rules. Unlike normal chases, in this case the party isn't trying to follow someone, but must resist the terrible force of the water.

The Chase lasts for seven rounds. During each of the first four of them the heroes face a particular danger (see below), then from the fifth on, they must somehow

avoid ending up in the mill's wheel, or be smashed into a bloody pulp! Ignore the Complication and Range rules, but handle Action Cards for the Grabbing Each Other rule below.

Grabbing Each Other: Heroes acting on cards with the same number are very close, and can grab each other. In this case, from then on, they can decide to act on a single card and make a cooperative roll for the rest of the Chase. This is true until one of the heroes rolls 1 on the skill die, regardless of the Wild Die, which breaks their hold. No more than two characters can grab each other.

Raises and Critical Failures: Characters rolling a raise have the chance to take a breath for a moment, recovering a level of Fatigue, or, if they aren't Fatigued they gain +2 to the next Chase roll. On the other hand, if a character rolls a critical failure, the water sucks him in, so he must immediately face the effects of the next round, and is considered "a round ahead" in the Chase. This also means they have to resist an additional round in the Waterfall over the mill wheel below.

Round 1 – Water Flush! The heroes are subjected to a sudden influx of water, when Andreas opens the gate. Each character must make a Strength (-2) or Swimming roll, or suffer a level of Fatigue.

Round 2 – Low-Ceilinged Conduit. The characters are dragged through a very narrow conduit with a low ceiling, so they have no way to keep their heads out of the water. The best thing to do is hold their breath! They must make a Vigor (-2) or Swimming roll, or suffer a level of Fatigue.

Round 3 – Whirlpool. The low-ceilinged conduit ends in a small round room, with

a hole in the bottom where the water exits. This causes a terrible whirlpool, into which the heroes are dragged. Characters must make a Spirit or Swimming (-2) roll or be Shaken. They can recover from being Shaken normally at the beginning of the next round. For the purposes of Chase rolls, a Shaken character suffers a -2 penalty.

Round 4 – Metal Bars. After the whirlpool, the water conduit is larger and taller there, but ends in a grate of metal bars, to catch river debris before it can go into the millwheel and block it. This means that the adventurers are beaten against the bars with terrible force! Any character must make a Strength (-2) or Swimming roll or suffer 2d6 damage.

Round 5-7 – Over The Millwheel. The metal bars are on the verge of a waterfall, below which there is the wheel, rolling! The bars that beat the heroes above are now their best friends, because they keep them from a terrible death! The heroes begin by clinging to the bars with both hands. Then, each round, they must make a Strength (-2) roll. With a failure they lose their grip with one hand, with a critical failure, both hands. A character who isn't clinging on any more falls down, suffering 2d8 damage in the first round in the mill, 3d8 in the second round, and then, if he survives, he passes over the wheel and faints (he is Exhausted).

With a success, a character manages to stay as he is, while with a raise he can clasp a bar with one hand, if he is holding with a single hand, or if he is already clinging with two hands he can find a more stable position, which temporarily protects him from the water's force (he doesn't need to roll on Strength anymore).

Blocking the Wheel. A character in a stable position (see above) can try to block the wheel below in some manner. This requires first a Smarts (-4) or Repair (-2) roll to quickly examine the wheel mechanism, and, if they are successful, they identify a gear where, by placing a medium sized item inside (at least as big and sturdy as a short sword), the mechanism can be stopped. This requires an Agility (-4) or Throwing (-2) roll from the awkward position where the character is (+2 if he scored a raise in the examination roll above). With a success, the item blocks the wheel (preventing damage to any heroes stuck in it). The item used is destroyed, unless made of steel or something of comparable hardness. A hero blocking the wheel should be awarded a Bennie. At the end of the seventh round, the wheel suddenly stops.

A trapdoor opens from the ceiling and you see the face of a bearded officer and several soldiers. "You below, don't try anything."

The heroes are all Exhausted from the terrible experience in the water and they cannot do anything.

"Drag them out," grumbles the officer.

"As you command, Captain Vasko," a soldier answers.

At this point, exhausted, they are saved by the Fort's soldiers, who recognized them as the thieves.

Once you are dry, the commander of the patrol, Captain Vasko, tells you: "You are lucky, a little boy saw you entering the mill. Otherwise now you'd be dead. Not that the fate awaiting you is much better." He shrugs.

Chained and bound, the heroes are brought back to the Fort.

The little boy in truth saw nobody: he was paid a coin by Andreas to report to the guards where the heroes are. The scoundrel wanted their corpses to be found, so the hunt for the thieves would cease, but he didn't foresee the heroes surviving the watermill.

PART 2: RAVINGS AND RAT BONES

IMPERIAL JUSTICE AND WOMANLY RAGE

Commander Ascanius isn't a pleasant person on his best day; imagine what he's like after he and his wife were robbed in their own bedchamber.

Gwynedd, the pretty little wife, is with her husband when you are dragged in front of him, bound and chained, and she is even more ferocious than the husband: under the studied courtesy of a princess there is the soul of a true barbarian woman.

Captain Vasko gives her the bag of jewels (if the heroes haven't lost it in the water), and she immediately searches in it, throwing rings and bracelets carelessly aside, frantically looking for the one thing that is missing.

"Sons of a mangy dog, where is the Smaga, the sun shaped amulet?" she shouts.

The heroes can tell the woman whatever they want: she doesn't believe them. She is convinced the heroes hid the Smaga somewhere, because it isn't in the bag with the other jewels. Andreas never visited her to propose buying the jewel, so this fact cannot be used to exonerate the heroes. In few moments she is raging.

Eyes flashing like steel, little Gwynned turns to a guard and surprises him, grabbing his sword.

Her puzzled husband is forced to grab her, before she slashes you!

"Let me cut away their puny manhoods, and I am sure they'll spit out where they hid my Smaga!" the little devil growls.

Captain Vasko and the other guards look around, embarrassed and puzzled by the ferocity of their lady.

Depending on the mood of your group, you can roleplay the scene further, with Lady Gwynned threatening to do worse things to the heroes moment by moment, while her husband and the guards try to sooth her.

In the end the Commander, as the highest authority in the city, condemns the heroes:

"According to Imperial law, a thief caught in the act has one hand severed. But since you have stolen both from me AND from my wife, you shall have both hands severed. The sentence will be carried out tomorrow at first light. Throw them in the Beetle Cell, so they'll have a whole day to meditate on their fate!"

It is a harsh sentence, but it doesn't satisfy everybody.

"Husband, do whatever you want with this rabble, but find the amulet. It belonged to my father, his father and so on for countless generations. Otherwise I'll go back to my family, and you'll face the wrath of my father Kronn and my entire clan!"

With offended majesty, Gwynedd leaves the room. The heroes aren't the only ones in big trouble for the disappearance of the amulet.

BEETLES AND RAVINGS

The heroes are thrown in jail, stripped of all their belongings. They are probably Fatigued or Exhausted, so the best thing they can do in the short term is fall asleep (a Vigor roll to stay awake). When they wake up the Fatigue, caused mainly from their dire experience in the water, has worn off and they can look around.

It is dusk, even if they cannot tell.

The Beetle Cell is the worst part of the dungeon below the Fort. It is a dark, damp and smelly room. From the many small fissures in the walls comes the sound of hundreds of tiny insects. You aren't the only inhabitants of the cell. In a corner sits a man, an old geezer with waist-long hair and beard, so mingled that you can't tell where one ends and the other begins. He turns toward you and from his eyes, which are totally white, you understand he is blind.

"Ohhh..." he says with raspy voice "Old White-Eyes has guests finally! Are you enjoying the hospitality of Commander Ascanius, too?"

White-Eyes is an old Northlander wanderer and has many disgusting habits, such as catching beetles with lightning-fast hands and munching them as tasty snacks.

He owes his name to the cataracts which make him completely blind, but this hasn't prevented him from wandering across all the northern Dominions over the last forty years.

White-Eyes has a gift; he is a seer. In his blindness he can see glimpses of the future and the past. Over the years this has brought him more problems than benefits, because he cannot keep his mouth closed.

Some months ago, he shouted in the plaza of Fort Miscenium that he saw Commander Ascanius crawling like a snake. The same day the Commander fell from his horse and broke a leg. He didn't understand what had really happened, and ordered the "witch" to be imprisoned.

Note that White-Eyes, like all true prophets, doesn't know the meaning of his own words: sometimes he isn't even aware of pronouncing them.

"Let me see... you are the fooled thieves of the Key, the fishes who got drunk with water. You are the unaware hand of destiny which will close the Door That Must Not Be Opened. Ah... interesting. I wonder what it means..."

White-Eyes is a chatty fellow and sees something special in the heroes. Being a long-time wanderer of the north he knows a lot of old interesting stories, among them the story of Dogskull (see sidebar).

The old Northlander is important for the plot because he can set the players on the

WHAT ABOUT DOGSKULL?

Characters will probably brooding about the last words Andreas told them, when he was sure that they were going to die: he spoke of "a Key", "a treasure", and "Dogskull". The first two words, in particular, are very interesting. The legend of Dogskull is widely told in the north, so there is some chance the adventurers know of it. Northlander heroes are allowed a Common Knowledge roll, while other characters must roll on Knowledge (Legends and Lore). The entries below give information according to the degree of success of the roll. They are inclusive, so for example a character scoring a raise also knows the information in the success entry.

If no hero scores at least a success, White-Eyes, who knows a lot of legends, explains to them the Success level information.

Failure. *Sorry, the hero has never heard of Dogskull.*

Success. *Dogskull is a legendary Cairnlander marauder who amassed a treasure hoard from her robberies, which was never found.*

Raise. *Dogskull was a Cairnlander sorceress, leading a legion of monsters which ravaged Northheim centuries ago. Stories say that a Northlander smith and a priest of Hulian, by joining forces, managed to defeat her.*

Two Raises. *Dogskull could not be defeated, because she was immortal. The smith and the priest trapped her in her own Cairn, sealing it with a special key, a sun-shaped amulet!*

right track, hinting to them that tracking down Andreas and his partner, as well as being a good way to get revenge, could also be a good way to become rich.

At one point White-Eyes has a vision. He starts by telling the heroes something of their past, a fact that nobody knows (the GM should prepare a cryptic phrase or two about the past adventures of the heroes), thus demonstrating his powers.

Then he tells them three important prophecies, even if they seem to be only craziness.

Prophecy 1. *"Piles of gold await you beyond the long-closed door. Choose what you will, but choose wisely!"*

Prophecy 2. *"A hunt awaits you, with black and white hounds. Fear the white ones, but you can trust the black one, for he is a faithful dog!"*

Prophecy 3. *"Remember that the pot can cook everything, but not the sun!"*

The information above will be useful later, but the heroes have more urgent matters: next morning their hands have a meeting with the executioner's axe.

The door of the cell is too sturdy to be bashed and the lock good enough to thwart any lockpicking attempt.

But White-Eyes has the solution for this too.

"You won't stay there long: the way lies under the white mole's throne."

The meaning of this little riddle is simple: the escape route is under White-Eyes' own butt. There is no chamber pot in the cell, but

no trace of waste either. White-Eyes found an old manhole on the floor and sat over it, using it as a toilet. If he is moved, the manhole is revealed. It is *very* disgusting, but it is large enough for a man to squeeze inside; however, first it must be opened.

The metal bars are rusty and they can be broken with some effort (a Strength (-2) roll, which can be cooperative). If the heroes fail they can retry, but they suffer a level of Fatigue. Once the way is open, the heroes can climb down the narrow passage – luckily, it is well lubricated.

Heroes must make an Agility roll to pass through it; in case of failure they suffer Bumps and Bruises. Characters with the Obese Hindrance or Brawny Edge roll at -2, while Small heroes have no need to roll at all.

White-Eyes wishes them good luck: he isn't interested in escaping; he is fine in this place. His blind stare follows the heroes when they disappear into the dark conduit.

UNDER THE FORT

The conduit ends abruptly and you fall down through darkness for a couple of yards. Luckily you land in murky water and mud, so you are unhurt. Around you there is total darkness, but your eyes are accustomed to it after so much time in the Beetle Cell, and you see something. You are in an underground channel, ankle deep in water. Nearby there is a pile of rubbish of unknown origin. There is a trickle of water; probably you are in a sewer built under the town, and you are almost certain it flows into the Godaxe River: you only have to follow the water, and you'll be free.

GM TIP: WHITE-EYES

Unlike the many charlatans and agitators roaming the Dominions, White-Eyes is a true prophet. Normally he is only a drunk, blind beggar, but when the prophecy possesses him, he becomes another person. White-Eyes wanders, alone, across all the North, and for some reason, he manages to survive everything, as if a god really does protect him.

White-Eyes is an excellent plot device for the Game Master: he can be used to lead the players on all sorts of adventures...

Actually, the situation isn't that simple: the channel the heroes are in is more complex than it seems, with dead ends, blockages and so on. Navigating it is done using an abstract system. During each exploration round the heroes are entitled to a cooperative Smarts (-2) roll. For each success and raise, they get an Advancement Token. In case of a critical failure, instead, they lose a Token. Whenever they gather ten or more Tokens, they have almost exited the tunnels, and you can run the next scene. In addition, during each navigation round, draw a card from the Action Deck, and run the mini-scene described below. The GM should assign a bonus (from +1 to +2) to the navigation roll for particularly clever ideas (like marking the walls to avoid looping back). Characters with the Watch Your Back! Edge roll at +2.

Weapons and Light. The heroes enter the tunnels unarmed and without any light sources. Because they are accustomed to the low light, they are considered to be in Darkness instead of Pitch Darkness. As for weapons, the heroes can look around, and try to find a piece of wood, a stone or a rusty metal bar. This requires a Notice

(-4), Survival (-2) or Repair roll. In the case of success, they find a Small Improvised Weapon (Str+d4), while with a raise they find a Medium Improvised Weapon (Str+d6). On a raise or better they can decide to have a balanced version of a smaller weapon: so with one raise they could find a standard (non-improvised) Str+d4 weapon (counts as a club), and with two raises a standard Str+d6 weapon (counts as a mace).

Managing Redraws. If the party draws the same card more than once, consider only the color. If it is black, the heroes got somewhat disoriented (maybe the conduits look all the same), and their next advancement roll suffers -2. If it is red, the party finds a useful hint (like a strong water flow or smell fresh air coming from some direction) and gain +2 to their next Advancement roll.

Deuce – Bottomless Mud. The characters enter a round shaped room, 6" in radius, filled with disgusting mud, in which they sink up to their knees. There is another exit on the opposite side of the room. If the heroes go back they don't receive any Advancement Tokens for this exploration round. If they cross it, when they are in the middle, they discover they are sinking down very quickly: they are in a sort of quicksand! The heroes automatically sink down by one third of their height each round; when they are completely submerged they suffer the effects of Drowning (see Savage Worlds core rules). They can make a Strength (-2) roll each round to stay afloat: with a success they don't sink any deeper this round, with a raise or better they even manage to emerge by a third. But staying afloat is only a temporary remedy; to get out the characters must leave the mud. They can move 1" per round if they manage to make a Strength

roll, plus 1" per raise. Those characters caught in the mud can be helped by characters outside it, if they have a rope, a long staff or any way to hook the trapped heroes: this is a cooperative roll made with +2 by all participants.

Three – Water Rats. The party is walking in a corridor 4" wide and 12" long (black card) or in a room 8" by 8" (red card) waist deep in water, and with detritus floating around. Unbeknownst to them, they are being followed by a pack of dangerous creatures similar to water rats, called Gray Coypus. These beasts, excellent swimmers, stealthily surround and attack them! The whole area, apart from a small safe zone 3" by 1" placed by the Game Master, is considered Difficult Ground. Any hero without at least d6 in Swimming suffers -2 to both Parry and Fighting while in the water.

(M) Gray Coypus (2 per hero): See page 72.

Four – Flooded Passage. The current corridor is gradually submerged in water. If the heroes want to go on, they must dive, and swim underwater for a while, till they re-emerge on the other side. This requires a Swimming roll and a Vigor roll. If the hero fails either one, he suffers a level of Fatigue (which wears off after two miniscenes) and the group cannot gain any Advancement Tokens in the current round. If all the party manages to pass through the flooded passage, the group gains an additional Advancement Token.

Five – Torch. With a Notice (-1) roll, a character finds an old, dry, torch in a niche. Having no flint and steel, he can light it only with a Survival roll (generating sparks by rubbing two stones together). The torch lasts for two hours (four exploration rounds).

Sizz – Hidden Pit. The party is walking in a dry passage, littered with dirt and garbage. It is quite narrow and so the heroes must walk in single file. The first hero must make a Notice (-2) roll, with a success he spots a hole in the ground, concealed in the rubbish; otherwise he must draw a card from the Action Deck. Unless the card is a face card, the unfortunate character falls down a pit, suffering 2d6 damage. If the card drawn is a face card, he luckily avoids the pit and the same check must be made by the next character in line. Continue till someone falls down or the whole party passes unharmed beyond the pit. At the bottom of the pit there is a heavy metal bar. It counts as a mace (Str+d6, AP 1 vs rigid armor).

Seven – Vines from a Hole. The heroes arrive in a tall room where, five yards above the ground, there is a hole, leading to an elevated passage. The only way to reach the hole is by climbing up a very strong vine, growing in the cavity, and dropping down into a mass of tendrils. Although the vine looks quite pale and strange, it is harmless (as a Survival (-1) or Lotusmastery roll can reveal). If the heroes climb up (Climbing roll) and enter the elevated passage they gain an additional Advancement Token. In addition, if they have a sharp object, they can cut some vines to create an improvised rope (see Wreckage below for uses).

Eight – Jump Over the Water. The heroes are in an elevated passage, which is abruptly interrupted by a deep chasm, several yards deep, with dark waters flowing furiously at the bottom. If the heroes want to pass, they must jump to the other side. The chasm is six yards wide (3" on the battlefield), so the heroes can make a Strength roll to pass over it with a running jump. In case of failure they slip on the

edge, and any character ready on the other side can grab them with an Agility (-2) roll. If they aren't grabbed by anyone, or if they get a critical failure on the jumping roll, they fall down suffering 3d6 damage (a successful Swimming roll halves this). If the heroes go back or don't manage to jump over the water, they don't receive any Advancement Tokens this exploration round.

Nine – Wreckage. In a flooded room full of debris, there is a capsized, broken barge. If a character is so curious as to put a hand under it to search the wreckage, he is bitten by a rat (2d4 damage). If the party prefers to right the barge (group Strength roll), the rat, disturbed, escapes – and the party finds an old rope wedged under the seat. A rope can be very useful just as it is (especially if the party stumbles into the Bottomless Mud above), otherwise it can be cut into pieces and used to make better improvised weapons, for example a sharp rock can be tied to a stick to build a rough axe (a third of the rope and a Smarts or Repair (+2) roll increases the size of an Improvised Weapon by one step).

Ten – Floating Barrel. The heroes spot a floating barrel in the water. If they investigate it, they find it contains some scraps of old salted pork. In addition the barrel can be broken to pieces with a Strength or Repair (+1) roll to create up to two Medium Improvised Weapons.

Jack – Don't Touch the Dead Cow. The heroes find themselves in a passage where water becomes higher step after step. The cause is soon found: a big mass is blocking the channel, causing deep water and forbidding the adventurers to go on this way. If they go back, they don't gain any Advancement Tokens this exploration round. If the party decides to investigate, they

discover that the mass is a dead cow, with a pitchfork stuck in it (counts as a spear which breaks on a 1 on the Fighting Die). The beast was disposed of in this manner because it was the victim of a serious parasitic attack: flesh-eating beetles. If the characters touch it in any way, a swarm of little monsters comes out from every one of the poor beast's orifices to attack the heroes! A Fear Check is required due to the gory nature of the scene. If the heroes manage to destroy the beetles, they can go on along the tunnel.

(WC) Swarm of Flesh-Eating Beetles (1): See page 78.

Queen – Black Cat. While the heroes are wandering in a passage, they hear something scuttling nearby. If they investigate they corner a big, black, stray cat, which hisses with anger. If the characters ignore the beast nothing happens. Any hero trying to attack or to shoo the cat must make a Spirit roll; in case of failure he acquires the Bad Luck Hindrance till the end of the session. If the characters try to befriend the cat, they are allowed a Reaction roll. Charisma doesn't modify the roll, but +2 is added for any of the following factors: having the Sorcery Arcane Background, having the Beast Friend Edge, offering some scraps of food. If the reaction is Friendly, the cat purrs and the befriended hero receives the Luck Edge till the end of the session. If it is Helpful, in addition to the Friendly effect, the cat glances at the hero and moves in a direction, clearly wishing to be followed. If the party follows it they are led towards the exit for a while, before the cat gets bored and wanders off: they receive an additional Advancement Token. Black cats are sorcerous creatures and should be treated with respect (this is info that any character can discover with a Knowledge (Arcana) roll).

King – Death Flowers. In a vaguely warm passage, the heroes see a large cushion of moss, dotted with small, pretty flowers. With a Lotusmastery (+2) roll, they can be recognized as the dreaded Ivory Lotus. A Lotusmaster character can gather enough of them with a skill roll to recover one Lotus Supply Token (see the sidebar Stripped Characters). These plants are very dangerous, because they can emit a cloud of lethal pollen. Any character moving carelessly near them (within a foot) must draw a card from the Action Deck: if a black card is dealt, the plants produce a Medium Burst Template of lethal spores, causing 2d8 damage on the first round of exposure, 2d6 on the second and 2d4 on the third. A Vigor (-2) roll halves the damage. The pollen attack is automatically triggered if an adventurer touches the flowers or if a Lotusmaster rolls 1 on the skill die while trying to gather components.

Ace – Naked Skeleton. The heroes spot in a side passage a small, dry room, with a skeleton laying in it. The skeleton is prone, and seems he was walking toward the dark end of the room. He still has a sword in his grasp, a metal helm on his head and a dagger near his foot. All the items shimmer strangely in the darkness, and, even stranger, the skeleton seems to be totally naked! In truth the skeleton is the victim of a particularly nasty creature, called Jungle Ambusher, which now is hidden on the ceiling, ready to fall (attacking with the Drop) onto the first warm blooded creature so careless as to enter the room. The Jungle Ambusher's digestive acids can corrode the majority of living tissues (flesh, leather and cloth included), but cannot consume bone. On metal they have unsuspected effects, altering their chemical (alchemical) nature. The iron sword is so hard that it now deals +1 damage and is

considered steel-hard. The bronze dagger's blade instead, now emanates a faint glow (reducing the light penalties by 1 within 3"). Finally the helm grants +4 Armor to the head.

(WC) Jungle Ambusher (1): See page 74.

Joker – Double Encounter! Draw two other cards and combine the encounters. At the end of the encounter, the party automatically gains an additional Advancement Token.

THE RIVER ASSASSIN

Finally, you smell fresh air! The exit cannot be far away. You find yourselves in a large underground passage, ending in a reed-infested opening. Outside you can see the faint light of the stars: No jewels ever looked so beautiful. You advance toward the exit, splashing around in the water, when suddenly you see something: a white, human skull on the ground, covered by mud. And bones, all around, broken as if by incredible strength. Someone or something must have brought them there. And then from beyond a pillar it emerges: an enormous coypu, big as a horse and with fangs as long as swords! It drools copiously while it darts toward you, blocking the exit. If you want to leave this place alive, you must fight for your life!

Any hero staying in Fort Miscenium for at least a week is allowed a Common Knowledge roll. With a success he remembers having heard about mysterious disappearances of boatmen and washerwomen. Everyone thought this was due to bandits, but this creature is the real culprit: during dusk and dawn it leaves the conduits and hunts for human prey near the riverbanks. This knowledge helps the hero in rational-

izing the facts, giving him +2 to the Fear check caused by the creature.

The battlefield is a shallow water area of irregular size: a rough rectangle 12" by 8", with the long side on the north-south axis. There is an entrance on the north side, from where the heroes came in. Place the heroes within 6" of it. The exit, 2" wide, is placed on the opposite side. The monster is concealed behind a pillar (see below) and is On Hold. It attacks recklessly as soon as possible.

After killing the monster, the heroes can taste freedom again.

(WC) River Assassin (1): See page 78.

TERRAIN AND PROPS

- **Shallow Waters:** The characters are knee-deep in water, so the whole area (except the Pile of Debris below) is considered Difficult Ground. The River Assassin isn't affected by this rule.

- **Pillars:** There are eight pillars holding the ceiling up, in two rows of four, placed at even distances on the north-south axis. They are 1" by 1" on the battlefield, have Toughness 10 and grant Light Cover.

- **Pile of Debris:** More or less in the center of the room there is a large pile of debris, driftwood and other assorted stuff that the creature, guided by some ancestral instinct, has amassed to sleep on. It counts as normal ground. In addition, as it is littered with all sorts of things, a character can automatically find a Small Improvised Weapon (a stone or a piece of wood) in it, simply by spending an action looking for one.

- **The Sharp Pole:** In the middle of the Pile of Debris there is seven foot long piece of



GM TIP: STRIPPED HEROES

During this adventure, the heroes lose the greater part of their equipment. This is a classic trope of the Swords and Sorcery genre. The exact moment when this happens is left to the Game Master: it can be during the Rough Waters scene (fragile items break and others are dragged away in the river by the force of water) or after being captured by the guards, in which case their stuff is sequestered by Commander Ascanius. At the GM's discretion, some objects can be kept: rings, amulets and any concealed items.

This event should not hinder the capabilities of the characters heavily, with two noticeable exceptions, described below.

Lotusmasters. *These characters need a Lotus bag to be effective. During the adventure there is no way to find another one, but a Lotusmaster can gradually create his own. This is handled in an abstract way through Lotus Supply Tokens, which can be gained in various ways during the adventure. When a Lotusmaster has three Tokens he has reconstructed his Lotus Bag and can use his powers without penalty.*

<i>Lotus Supply Tokens</i>	<i>Effects</i>
0	No Lotusmastery possible.
1	-2 To Lotusmastery rolls. Power Points reduced to 50%
2	-1 To Lotusmastery rolls. Power Points reduced to 75%
3	Full power, Lotus Bag restored.

Relics. *If a hero has a relic of some type (for example per the Fallen Noble Edge) probably the player will be angered by losing it. Depending on how it was lost (in the river's waters or sequestered by the Commander) it can reappear somewhere along the river (in the hands of a powerful NPC) or be stashed in the Commander's treasure, its retrieval leading to an interesting adventure...*

wood, probably a small tree, broken and with a sharp point. Two heroes (or a very strong one) can pick it up. It is considered a very large Improvised Weapon (Str+d12, reach 4, 2 hands, -2 to attack rolls, -2 Parry, AP 4). If two heroes are picking it together, sum up the die steps of their Strength score to count damage (so if it is picked up by two characters with Strength d8, the sum of dice steps is d12+1, ending in a total damage of 2d12+1), and they make a cooperative attack roll. Alternatively a strong hero can wrestle the beast onto it, causing impaling damage (for character's Strength+d12), simply by winning a Grapple for two rounds in a row.

THE LAST TANKARD INN

When the heroes leave the River Assassin's den, they emerge among the weeds on the Godaxe River's southern bank. They are near the docks area of Fort Misceum and it is a couple of hours before dawn.

If they want to follow Andreas' tracks, they must go north, and this means crossing the river. No bridge exists over the Godaxe River (it would be very long, and there is always the risk it could be used by the barbarians to invade the south), but there is a ferry boat service on the northern shore

of the river, with an inn attached, the Last Tankard Inn (see Appendix I). This is the beginning of the Northern Trail and a natural resting place for merchants before facing the threat of the wilderness.

Obviously the party cannot wait for the ferry, but there are various ways to cross the river: they can swim to the other side (it is quite wide but calm, so a single Swimming roll is needed; in case of failure the adventurer arrives on the other side, but he is Fatigued) or they can sneak to the port and “borrow” one of the many fisherman’s boats left unguarded. In this case a simple Stealth roll is required; in case of failure, a fisherman spots the party and tries to stop them, but he is a fairly weak threat for any who have survived the River Assassin (use the Commoner’s stats). Otherwise, with a Repair or Survival roll, the party can improvise a small raft solid enough to cross to the other side.

Whenever the heroes arrive on the other side of the Godaxe River, read them the following:

When you leave the cold water of the river, you are in the North, officially out of reach of the long arm of Commander Ascanius. But you know that borders and rivers won’t stop him, or his wife, when they discover your escape. Despite the early hour, you aren’t the first one crossing the river this morning. In front of you there is the Last Tankard Inn, so called because it is the last place where a man can drink a civilized beverage on the Northern Trail.

A carriage full of goods, with oxen yoked, is ready for travel, as are four (or whatever number is equal to the party size) horses, saddled and packed. Probably they belong to a merchant and his guards, who

are now inside the building enjoying their last drink before hitting the road.

The heroes have had some strokes of very bad luck lately and are almost totally unequipped now. If they jump into the saddle, they can gallop away before the merchant and the guards are even aware their mounts and stuff were stolen. The carriage is yoked with oxen which are too slow to be used in a pursuit (but also too slow to be used to escape).

Before stealing the mounts, the adventurers can enter the tavern and ask Tazzar the innkeeper if he has seen Andreas and Hazir (who are easily recognizable) in the last few days. The answer is a positive one; the two swindlers took to the road, headed northwards, the night before. They have almost two days’ head start.

The inn is almost deserted now; the only customers are the merchant Taricos of Faberterra and his four (or as many as the party) guards, enjoying an early meal before starting their journey. If a hero is really impudent, before going out and stealing their horses he can sit at the table with the merchant and share his meal and chat a bit. In this case he should be rewarded with a Bennie.

Assumed that the heroes steal the horses, read the following part.

You jump into the saddle and spur the beasts. An angry merchant and his puzzled guards storm out of the inn.

“You can’t do this!” He shouts “We haven’t even started the trip!”

But you are already away, in a cloud of dust. The hunt begins.

(M) Merchant Taricos (1): Use Commoner Stats, add the Connections (Merchants) Edge. See page 70.

(M) Merchant's Guards (1 per hero): Use Fort Soldier Stats. See page 72.

later, on the party's tracks. The heroes will meet them later...

(M) Captain Vasko (1): See page 69.

(M) Fort Veterans (4 per hero): See page 72.

ILL-GOTTEN GAINS

On the horses the heroes stole, there are the following things:

1. One melee weapon per hero
2. One ranged weapon (with ammo) per every two heroes
3. One medium shield
4. One suit of light leather armor (+1) per every two heroes
5. One bronze medium corselet (+2, torso only)
6. Enough cooking implements for a Lotus Supply Token
7. Provisions for one week per hero.

The exact nature of the items is left to the GM, to suit the party's needs.

MEANWHILE, AT FORT MISCENIUM

Not much time passes before the characters' escape is discovered. A little before dawn, the jailers go to their cell and find only White Eyes. The madman simply says the heroes escaped through the waste passage. Great is the rage of Commander Ascanius. He summons Captain Vasko, the same man who captured them before, and orders him to track down the fugitives. In few hours the horse theft at the ferry tavern is discovered, and the heroes are identified. Captain Vasko and a detachment of Fort Veterans are in the saddle few hours

ON THE ROAD

You are free, on the road again and on the trail of enemies and a great treasure! Could life be any better than this? After some miles, when you are sure you aren't being pursued, you slow the horses to a walk. You are in the savage north now; meadows and heaths surround you but you know it will be only temporary, soon they will be replaced by woods and then by thick evergreen forests. You are riding on the Northern Trail now, nothing more than a faint scratch on the untouched skin of the wild land around you.

Following Tracks. Following the tracks of Andreas and Hazir isn't difficult. The trail is muddy, and not much frequented recently. In the last two days, only the two swindlers left the fort for the North and they didn't do anything in particular to conceal their path. The first time a hero rolls a raise on a Tracking roll, he discovers that one of the two cheaters' horses (Hazir's one) is missing a nail in a horse-shoe, making it very recognizable (+2 to any subsequent Tracking roll).

Restocking Lotus. Being now in the wilderness, a Lotusmaster character has the chance to restock (or better, rebuild) his bag of tricks. The meadows first, and later the heaths, are a rich environment, and as it's now the height of summer, there are plenty of opportunities. A Lotusmaster can make a single Lotusmastery roll per

day to check if he managed to gather some Lotus. The key factor is the time he spends: the minimum is one hour (-2 to the roll), reduce the penalty by one per extra two hours used. Using lots of time can also bring a bonus, but not greater than +2. In the case of a success or better, the Lotusmaster finds the equivalent of one Lotus Supply Token, plus one if he scored a raise. With two raises he also finds a dose of Mistletoe Lotus (see Book of Lore page 92).

During the journey the heroes have several encounters, listed below. As a rule of thumb, the party should have an encounter per day.

LONESOME HUNTER

You ride for the whole day, always on the Northern Trail. Gradually the meadows peter out, and you find yourselves in a shady wood. It is a savage and harsh place, full of life: you spot deer and fawns far away from the road, and you even have a brief glimpse of a wolverine, watching you with obsidian eyes before disappearing among the trees. It would be a marvelous place to hunt, if you didn't have more interesting prey to pursue already.

The heroes travel all day before camping for the night. While they are cooking some food, a voice is heard from nearby. This belongs to a bearded individual, dressed in civilized garments but with a noticeable bear fur cloak. The man is Swithwulf, a lonesome Borderlands fur hunter who loves to cross the border to seek the best quarry. He is interested in trading some salt (there is some in the heroes' backpacks) for fresh meat or a couple of furs, and to talk a bit of course.

Swithwulf is a chatty fellow, and by speaking with him the heroes can recover the following information. It is a pure role-play encounter, so no roll is required. They are organized in a single discourse, detached in four blocks, but the GM should feel free to reword it.

1. *"I have a wife and a scrap of land in the Borderlands, but a couple of times a year I cross the river and go hunting in the North. The furs you can get here have no equal. It is a dangerous business, you know, because Northlanders consider all this land their exclusive property and do very nasty things if they catch you. But well, a tribe of barbarians cannot be worse than hearing my old woman's babbling for the whole season, can it?"*
2. *"I spotted two riders, camped a day from here, last night. I think they were merchants, because one of them looked like a stranger, all dressed in black. I didn't visit their camp because I had a bad feeling about them. They left the main trail at the Hooked Rock to take the path to the Brac Mountains."*
3. *"They are fools, or have some particular business in that direction. The Brac Mountains are a dangerous place: it is the territory of Brac the Giant and his clan. They rob and murder trespassers. If they are lucky enough to avoid them, the path ends in the Vale of Pines, where there is only the stead of the Vestvan family, a small clan of Northlanders. Peaceful people, but they aren't rich and won't gain a merchant enough profit to justify a trip like this."*
4. *"If you decide to follow the same path, stay alert: this morning I*

heard a strange belling in the forest, and I found tracks too... weird ones. Northlanders say that the Horned Lord dwells around here, but I have never seen him. (see sidebar)"

Swithwulf accepts any offer to share the meal and fire of the group and will even help them with guards' duty, but at dawn he is off into the woods again, without saying goodbye. He is just that type of fellow.

THE HORNED LORD

Early in the morning the heroes are back in the saddle again. They ride through the woods without incident till midday.

You have arrived at the place Swithwulf told you about: that crooked, strange stone must be the Hooked Rock, and there a side path begins, leaving the Northern Trail.

The Hooked Rock is considered holy by Nandals, so it is covered in strange carvings. Looking at the ground (a Tracking roll is required if the party hasn't spoken with Swithwulf) it is clear that two horsemen passed there yesterday and took the side path.

The journey continues through an even thicker wood all day. At night time the heroes camp in the thick of the woods, because no clearing can be found. In the dead of the night a terrible belling is heard. It is stronger than the trumpets of ten legions together and full of incredible frustration and loneliness.

The belling is heard three times, each time closer. Then the party hears the cracks of trees broken like toothpicks, and they see the creature making the noise.

HEROES' JOURNAL: THE HORNED LORD

The Horned Lord is a legend of this part of Northeim. Heroes can know something about the legend with a Knowledge (Legends and Lore) (-2) roll, or with a simple Common Knowledge roll if they are of Northlander origin. Depending on their degree of success, they discover the following information. As the Horned Lord is a legend, all degrees of success contain some truth, but always intermingled with falsehoods. They are inclusive, so a character scoring a raise also knows the information in the success entry.

Swithwulf knows the information relative to the Success entry.

Failure. *Horned who?*

Success. *The Horned Lord is a giant, from the Troll Mountains. He is so called for the helm he wears. He has a pack of moose under his command and they trample everything he wants when he sounds his horn.*

Raise. *The Horned Lord is a giant moose, escaped from the stable of the Lord of Thunder, who uses him as mount. He is the biggest in all Northeim, even bigger than the fabled elephants of the south. He is so big because he lives on human meat.*

Two Raises. *The Horned Lord is a giant moose, the last of his kind. He is a very old being, wandering alone in the North since he lost his mate. Stories say that a lady of pure mind can soothe his sufferings.*

Nothing in past adventures has prepared you for this sight. The creature slowly emerging from the trees is a moose, but as big as an elephant and much scarier. Its fur is old and withered, almost white in several places, and the horns on its head... well, they are large as city gates, and covered by festoons of velvet and pieces of wood. But the worst thing is the voice of the beast, which resonates with pain, hunger and loneliness.

The first thing the heroes must do when seeing the Horned Lord is a Fear check, because the beast is really frightening.

Soothing the Horned Lord. The Horned Lord isn't automatically hostile, but is attracted to the party, especially if a woman

or a young hero is present. He is a strange creature, with a supernatural empathy and can actually project his own loneliness. If the heroes stand still and don't attack him, the Horned Lord approaches one of them: a woman or a character with the Young Hindrance. If both are present he goes to the one with the highest Spirit.

The chosen heroine can actually feel the great loneliness of the beast. If the player says her character actually tries to comfort the beast, this triggers a Dramatic Task, based on Spirit (-2). Heroines with the Pacifism Hindrance or the Healer Edge receive a +2 bonus (these stack). After five rounds, sum up the total number of successes and raises scored by the heroine and check the result below.



SUCCESSSES	EFFECTS
0	The heroine is totally unempathic. The Horned Lord attacks wildly!
1-2	The Horned Lord's feelings overwhelms the heroine's mind! She must immediately make a Fear check (-4). In this manner she partially absorbs the anguish of the beast, which goes away.
3	The Horned Lord is soothed. He emits a last, heart-breaking bellow, and then he goes away.
4	The heroine actually feels the pain of the beast, who allows her to caress his massive head. Then he stares at her, into her very soul, and goes away. The heroine gains a Bennie.
5	The heroine has a sudden vision of the history of the beast (see creature description) and of his pain. The Horned Lord sits down near the character and stays there for a while. When he goes away the heroine is a different person: she gains a Bennie and her Spirit is raised by one dice step for the rest of the adventure.

If no woman or young hero is present, the Horned Lord wanders in the camp for a while: draw three Cards from the Action Deck, for each face card drawn a Party Gear Bundle is destroyed (see below).

Attacking the Horned Lord. Attacking the Horned Lord unleashes his terrible violence. It is very unlikely that the heroes can defeat him, on the other hand he can do real damage to them. In addition he is a cursed creature, so killing him will have consequences (see creature description).

Luckily, the creature isn't a real killer and if he is dealt a Joker he loses interest and goes away. The battleground is a 12" by 12" square, dotted with trees (see below), and with the party's gear scattered around (see below). The battle ends when the heroes escape or the monster goes away.

(WC) The Horned Lord (1): See page 73.

TERRAIN AND PROPS

- **Trees:** The battleground is full of trees: at least ten small ones (1" by 1" on the tabletop, Toughness 8) and a number equal to the party size of large ones (2" by 2", Toughness 11, Heavy Armor). The small ones suffer damage when the Horned Lord passes over them, while the others are too sturdy and suffer no damage. If things get ugly, the heroes can decide to climb up a large tree to escape the Horned Lord's rage (Climbing (+2) roll required).

- **Party Gear Bundles:** The heroes unloaded the horses for the night, so their stuff is scattered all around. Place four Gear Bundles (1" by 1" tokens) on the battlefield, near the heroes. They represent stuff like food, blankets, frying pans and so on. They have Toughness 7 and can easily be destroyed by a trampling giant moose. At the end of the battle, count how many Bundles remain: if there are two or less, they lost the best part of their provisions, forcing them to use the Hunger rules (see *Savage Worlds* core rules).

FOLLOWED!

Today you leave the forest, as the path climbs up steeply. In few hours you are in the Brac Mountains, as Swithwulf called them. The air is crisp even if it is summer.

The journey continues without problems for all the day.

During the night, the heroes find a good place to stop and rest: a hot spring, where they can even have a bath. While they are resting, from their elevated position, they are allowed a Notice roll. With a success, they spot a fire, down in the valley, on the path they climbed up during the day. There is someone following them.

The next day, the path continues climbing up. There are a lot of hairpin bends, so

if the party pays attention, they can spot who is behind them in the road: even from this distance they recognize the armor of Fort Miscenium's soldiers. They are Captain Vasko and his men, on the trail of the party, to bring them back to Commander Ascanius and his bloodthirsty wife.

The heroes should get rid of the pursuers: they are only a couple of hours behind them. Direct confrontation isn't viable, as the soldiers are too numerous, but various ways can be found to slow them down or seriously damage them. A couple are described below, but creative players can come up with other ideas.

Creating a Rockslide. With a Survival roll, the heroes can find a suitable place where the road passes below precariously



placed rocks. With a cooperative Strength roll they can create a rockslide large enough to block the road. If they feel very nasty, they can wait for the soldiers to arrive and bury them under the rocks.

In this case, they automatically kill 1d4-1 soldiers per success and raise scored.

The Wooden Bridge. Even if the party doesn't find a suitable place for a rockslide, or think to try it, in the afternoon the adventurers are offered a perfect chance to slow down pursuers: the path leads them across a rope bridge over a chasm. The adventurers can decide to simply cut the ropes after crossing, or, if they want to do more damage, they can sabotage the ropes so they break when someone passes over the bridge. In this case they manage to kill 1d4 soldiers. If they are very nasty, they can hide near the bridge and wait for Captain Vasko and his men to arrive and cross, jumping out to cut the ropes only when the soldiers are in the middle. The Captain isn't a fool, and don't risk all his men. First he sends a couple of men to the other side of the bridge to secure the area, and then he crosses with the rest of the troops. He also prepares archers, to be safe. If combat arises, treat the bridge as being 2" wide and 24" long. The two ropes keeping it in place are sturdy, but only have Toughness 5.

Whatever the heroes do, Captain Vasko is determined, and won't quit the hunt. He'll find an alternative route to pass through the mountains and will re-appear later (see Scene 43). If he is in earshot when the party blocks him he shouts.

"Hear me, thieves! You can do whatever you want, but I'll find you, or my name isn't Vasko Blackbound!"

BRAC THE GIANT

At midday, you finally start descending. While you are crossing a narrow canyon, on foot and leading your horses by the reins, an enormous man, almost twelve feet tall, dressed in furs and carrying a club as big as a tree stump, comes out from behind a rock. He isn't alone: other smaller fellows, dirty and dressed in the same barbaric manner, appear behind him. In the same moment you hear the sound of feet at your back. You turn, only to see other barbarians behind you.

You are surrounded.

The enormous individual is Brac, the Mountain Giant, a large but not very smart fellow.

"Puny men passed two days ago," he growls, beating the club on the ground to mark his words. "Give me everything or I kill you," I said them. They spoke smoothly and gave Brac and his brothers water skin full of bloody stuff. Brac drank. Brac felt ill. Puny men escaped. Now Brac angry! Now Brac kills first then takes everything!"

His savage brothers cheer at this phrase beating their primitive weapons on their shields.

Soft Tongues and Rough Minds. The heroes have some slim chances to parley with Brac and his band to avoid a confrontation, but they must talk fast and on the right topics. In gaming terms, this can be handled with simple role-play or with the Social Conflict rules, pitting the heroes' Persuasion against Brac's Smarts (d4). The modifiers below apply to the characters' rolls:

SOCIAL CONFLICT MODIFIER	PROPOSAL
-4	Giving Brac an alcoholic beverage.
-4	Giving no gift to Brac
+2	Proposing a one-to-one duel with Brac (in this case the maximum result achievable in the Social Conflict is the duel)
+2	Giving Brac substantial gifts (i.e. two horses)
+2	Telling Brac that a group of rich people is coming after them (this causes Brac to ambush Captain Vasko and his men: the Captain loses 1d6 men)

If the heroes win with three or four successes, Brac doesn't let them pass for free, but offers them the chance to have a *single* hero duel with him. In case of victory (he laughs) the characters will be allowed to pass (see duel below). If they win with five successes or more Brac lets them pass unharmed (much to the dismay of his brothers).

Otherwise the heroes must fight the monster and his band to the death. The battleground is the narrow canyon where the party is trapped. It is 6" wide and 18" long on the north-south axis, with exits on the short ends. Place the heroes and their mounts in the middle of it. Brac and half his Brothers are placed within 6" of the northern exit, while the other half is placed within 3" of the southern exit.

Brac's Brothers are placed in the cover of rocks and their tactics consist of peppering the heroes with shots from ranged weapons (to avoid being caught in Brac's sweeps).

When Brac dies, his Brothers must make a group Spirit (-2) roll; if they fail, they flee. This applies only if a duel isn't in progress (see The Duel below).

The battle ends when the party defeats Brac and his band or they manage somehow to leave the battlefield by the northern exit.

(WC) Brac the Giant (1): See page 69.

(M) Brac's Brother (2 per hero +2): See page 69.

TERRAIN AND RULES

• **Rocks:** The canyon is full of stones (some of them placed by Brac's band). Each of them is 1" by 1" on the tabletop, grants Medium Cover and is considered Difficult ground. Place four of them within 6" of the northern exit and four within 6" of the southern border, placing Brac's Brothers in their cover. The other four can be placed wherever you want.

• **The Duel:** If Brac agrees to a man-to-man duel it is staged in the middle of the battleground, with no hero closer than 6" to the fighters. If Brac dies his band must immediately make a group Spirit (-2) roll. With a failure they flee, with a success they stay but let the heroes pass; only with a raise do they wildly attack the party, deciding to avenge their big relative.

PART 3: IN THE VALE

THE HOWLERS

In the afternoon the mountain path slopes steeply down, and you can see the Vale of Pines below you. It seems a peaceful place, all evergreen woods, dotted with clearings, and ends in a series of rolling hills in the north. A plume of smoke comes from the solitary settlement you see from your elevated position: a fortified stead, surrounded by a tall palisade, in a large meadow in the middle of the vale. If Swithwulf told you the truth, it must be Vestvan Stead.

You still need some hours to complete the descent from the mountains, and when you arrive in the vale the long dusk of northern summer is beginning, giving you elongated shadows. The path you followed in the mountains continues there, crossing the Vale, leading northward, into the hills.

The Vale is a peaceful place, the trail winds between the tall evergreens, and their scent is strong and good, but there is something dark in the air, and it isn't only dusk falling. Any character with the Danger Sense or Woodsman Edge is allowed a Notice roll, in case of success they point out that no animal sounds can be heard anywhere around; even the owls, usually awake at this hour of the day, are silent. If at least one hero notices this, the party can skip the surprise check below.

The trail you are riding on is muddy and you can clearly see the signs of a couple of

horses. After a while a side track, nothing more than a pathway, appears on the main trail. The tracks look confused there: probably the horsemen stopped to decide what direction to take.

Ask the heroes for a Tracking roll (+2 if they already discovered Hazir's horse has a missing nail). With a success they are sure the two swindlers took the side pathway, with a failure this is only the most likely hypothesis.

While the heroes are deciding what to do, the horses suddenly get nervous. The heroes must make a Surprise roll (unless someone was alerted before), then go on with the following scene.

You are still kneeling on the ground, examining the tracks, when you hear the first howl. It isn't from a wolf or a dog. It is much more frightening, freezing your blood. And it is near. You raise your head just in time to see a pack of big shapes emerge from the shady evergreens to attack you!

The battleground is an 18" by 18" heavily forested area, divided in two equal halves by an 18" by 4" path on the north-south axis (the main path). At 8" from south there is a crossroad with a side trail, a 4" wide trail leading westward. The entire area, apart from the paths, is considered Difficult ground.

The heroes and their mounts begin in the junction or in the immediate vicinity. The Howlers begin in the forest, in a rough circle at least 6" away from the heroes. During the first round, half of the beasts howl, while the others attack. From the second round on, all the pack rushes into melee.

(M) Howlers (1 per hero +2): See page 74.

TERRAIN AND PROPS

- **Woods Dwellers:** The Howlers aren't hindered by the forest, which isn't Difficult Ground for them. It grants them Light Cover.

- **Horses Go Mad!** Horses are frightened by the Howlers! In the first round of combat they must make a Spirit roll or be Panicked (as per the standard *Savage Worlds* rules) and escape westward on the side trail. The same roll is required if they are attacked. If currently being ridden, the rider can try a Riding (-2) roll to control a Panicked mount.

RUN FOR YOUR LIFE!

The last monster has just fallen under your sword, when you hear more howls, and they are very near! Darkness has already fallen, and among the trees you can see dozens of these foul beasts, their golden eyes shimmering in the night. Suddenly a howl stronger than the other ones is heard and you spot a massive half-human half-dog creature running crouched among the four legged monsters. He wields a crude spear in his claws and raises it towards you. As if awaiting his orders the monsters rush toward you. Their hunt begins, and you are their prey!

The monsters are simply too numerous to be fought, the only option the heroes have is jumping into the saddle and running away as fast as they can!

This is a Chase, of standard duration (5 rounds). The heroes use Riding as their Chase skill, while the Howlers use Agility. There are four groups of beasts, composed of five monsters each. The fourth group also includes the Pack Leader. The Pack Leader never attacks directly (and cannot be attacked), but his group receives +1 to all attack rolls.

Every group rolls and receives Action Cards independently.

In this Chase the heroes use the normal Attack Range table while the monsters use the table on the following page. If the card drawn is red, the monsters attack the heroes, if it is black, they attack their mounts. As they are on the run, Gang Up bonuses don't apply.

Protecting the Mounts: Heroes are armed and in the saddle, so they can protect their own mounts. By choosing the Defend option, they give +2 Parry to their horses; choosing the Full Defense option they roll Fighting (without the +2 because they are "running") and can use the result in place of the horse's Parry.

Being Unhorsed: Heroes unhorsed are in dire danger. Starting from the next round they don't receive Action Cards anymore, and are surrounded by a group of Howlers (normal combat happens). A friend can decide to go back and pick up an unhorsed comrade. The altruist hero receives no Action Card in the current round, the unhorsed friend suffers 1d4 free attacks from the Howlers, but at the end of round they are both in the saddle again. They suffer -2

to Chase rolls now due to the extra weight, but the altruist hero is awarded a Bennie.

Howler's Range Table

CARD VALUE	RANGE
2-6	No attack possible
7-8	Half the group of beasts of attack with -4.
9-10	Half the group of beasts attack at -2.
J-Q	A single beast attacks without any modifier.
K-A	Two beasts attack without any modifier
Joker	The whole group of beasts attacks without any modifier!

Ignore the standard Complication rules, instead every round a particular event happens.

Round 1 – On the Path. The heroes are riding on the path westward. The passage is tight, so no character, monsters included, can receive more than two Action Cards.

Round 2 – Tree Over the Ditch. There is a large ditch dividing the wood in two, and the heroes are going directly into it! Luckily there is a large trunk that can be used as a bridge. Heroes crossing the bridge receive +2 to their Chase roll, but cannot receive more than two Action Cards. Alternatively a character can decide to force his horse to actually *jump* over the ditch! He suffers -2 to the Chase roll, but if he scores a success or more, he receives an additional Action Card; in case of failure both the rider and the mount suffer 2d6 damage. The Howlers aren't affected by this event.

Round 3 – Keep Your Head Down! The chase brings the heroes into a forested area with little underbrush, so horses can



be spurred to their maximum speed! The riders must keep their heads down, because low branches can be deadly. The heroes' Chase rolls receive +4 this round, but they must reveal all the Action Cards they discard: each Club discarded means that a low branch is in their way, this requires an Agility roll to avoid. With a failure they are Shaken by the blow, with a critical failure they are unhorsed and suffer 2d8 damage.

Round 4 – Intelligent Tactics. The heroes are going down a steep hill, and they don't see monsters behind them anymore. The reason is simple: the creatures took a shortcut and now are waiting for them down the hill! This is a very intelligent tactic, not an animal one. The Howlers use Smarts as their Chase skill this round, while the heroes roll against Notice.

Round 5 – The Archer. The heroes are in a large meadow now, in the middle of it there is safety, a fortified stead! The Howlers redouble their efforts to catch the heroes before they are out of reach. The monsters receive +1 to Chase rolls, but whenever someone (heroes or monsters alike) acts on a Heart card someone on the palisade's battlements shoots an arrow with deadly precision at a Howler (Shooting d10, Wild Dice, Damage: 2d6, medium range).

At the end of the fifth round, the heroes reach the Stead: a wooden gate opens, the heroes are let inside and the door slams behind them. They are safe, for now.

(M) Howlers (20): See page 74.

(WC) Pack Leader (1): See page 77.

THE SURVIVORS OF VESTVAN STEAD

Just in time! The gate slams behind you, and you can hear the Howlers growl and bite it, in anger. Then they yelp in pain when the archers on the battlements punish them with arrows.

"They are going away," a voice says.

You turn back and you see that the archers of the stead are a sole individual: a Northlander woman in her thirties, with the tired face of someone who hasn't slept much in the last few days. Despite her gown and braided hair, she wields the bow with deadly competence.

"Maddoc" the woman says "Take their horses to the stable."

Maddoc, a scrawny kid not older than twelve summers, is the one that opened and closed the gate. He looks at you, your armor and weapons, with wide eyes.

"Hurry up, boy!" his mother spurs him, "I need you on the battlement while I cook something for supper for your brothers."

You turn and see several other kids, aged between two and six years, staring at you from the doorstep.

"Go inside and sit somewhere," the woman says. "This will be a long night."

The whole family of Vestvan Stead consists of six persons: Vesna, the courageous woman keeping the Howlers at bay with her bow, her oldest son Maddoc and four other kids (Cronn – two years, Badila – four, Russ and Astrid – six).

After Maddoc stables the horses, Vesna comes inside. She throws some wild tubers and a piece of bacon in a pot, then cuts large chunks of stone-hard goat cheese and offers them to the party with honey and black bread. Then, while the heroes eat, she tells them what is happening there.

"The Vale has always been a peaceful place, but two days ago a couple of strangers arrived at the stead.

A nice fellow and a grim, black-dressed one. The nice one, Andreas, did the talking. He asked a lot of questions about the hills around. In particular he got very excited when my husband, Russ, told him of the Hound Hill. It is a strange place, during nighttime the wind always howls like a pack of ferocious dogs.

It is scary, and my parents always told me to stay away from it, but the strangers offered Russ a bag of gold if he could lead them there. Naturally that big fool accepted, and the three of them went into the hills.

They haven't come back yet. Instead, the evening after their departure the Howlers, these monstrous beasts, appeared and attacked the stead. We are safe only because Maddoc was quick enough to close the gate and I am good with the bow. During daytime they hide somewhere, but at dusk they return. We are trapped in the stead, and I fear for the life of my husband."

This is what happened: Russ, Andreas and Hazir found the Cairn of Dogskull, and opened it using the Smaga, unleashing the evil inside.

If the party wants to find the two swindlers, recover the amulet, pillage the Cairn

and seal it again, they have to go into the hills too. They need only find someone who can guide them there. Vesna cannot abandon the stead and the kids.

"I know where the Hound Hill is, I can take you there," Maddoc is at the door, listening to you.

"You cannot!" his mother shouts "You are only twelve!"

"If Dad is in that place, and these strangers can do something to save him, I'll go."

Maddoc is only a boy but he is a Northlander, and he is brave. He wants to help save his father, and there is nothing that his mother can say or do to dissuade him. This is an excellent moment for the players to do some role-playing to convince Vesna that the only way to stop what is happening in the vale requires her son.

The Northlander woman is protective as a she-wolf with her cubs, and doesn't trust strangers (after all, the whole situation happened because her husband helped strangers) but in the end she growls:

"We'll speak of this tomorrow morning, if we manage to survive this night."

NIGHT AT THE STEAD

The heroes cannot leave the stead now: it is simply too dangerous. The Howlers' pack has surrounded the place and going out is a suicide. They must wait till morning.

Luckily, the night is starry and clear, so you can see the whole meadow, up to the borders of the wood.

The Howlers aren't stupid: they fear Vesna's bow, so they remain among the

trees, out of range, staring at you with golden eyes full of hunger.

You cannot count them, but they are numerous, very numerous, and howl their rage at the sky.

At one point their massive humanoid leader comes out from the shadows, and orders silence. He looks toward the farm with a strange, man-like stare and chants a verse of melancholy and rage strangely mixed together.

The beasts shut up, as if waiting for something, and then it happens: the bodies of the Howlers Vesna killed to help you, which are lying in the grass, suddenly start smoking and are engulfed in flames, like chestnuts thrown in a fire.

When the fires end, only some charred bones testify to the existence of these misshapen creatures.

"I killed more than a dozen of them" Vesna says "And it always happens that way: after a while they burn. And their number doesn't seem to dwindle."

The heroes are safe at the stead for now: the place is too well protected for the Howlers to assault it for now, but Dogskull is still recovering her powers so she is content to keep the inhabitants pinned inside.

This is the last chance for the heroes to have a good night of sleep (they can share guard duty with Vesna and Maddoc): the rest and the good food are enough to let them recover all Fatigue they might have suffered during the adventure.

Vesna is also quite good at treating wounds (Healing d8) and can patch up the damage

the heroes suffered in the battle and chase with the Howlers (when they arrive at the stead they are still in the Golden Hour).

Finally dawn comes.

STRANGE BEDFELLOWS

Early in the morning, the Howlers seem to have disappeared. Maddoc and Vesna say this is normal: during daytime they hide somewhere, probably fearing sunlight. Now it is time to pack and prepare to leave, led by Maddoc, for the Hound Hill. But before the heroes goes off for their mission, another surprise awaits them.

A group of horsemen, battered and covered in mud, arrives at the stead at a gallop. You recognize them: they are Captain Vasko and his men. They have survived to all the obstacles you piled in front of them, and this very morning they have arrived at the Vale.

They haven't been attacked by Howlers, yet, so they don't know what the real danger is.

Captain Vasko, whom you recognize from the black hound painted on his shield, evaluates the stead's palisade from a distance, and then decides to parley. "We know you are in there! Come out and I swear you will be brought back to the Fort unharmed. Force me to attack that place... and things will be bad for you, I assure you. You cannot escape!"

Now the party has various options. Captain Vasko's presence can be positive: if they can persuade him that there is a common, bigger threat in the valley, they can gain the help of his soldiers.

So the principal tactics the heroes can try are the following:

Making a Pact with Captain Vasko. There is a bigger problem than the heroes in the Vale: the Howlers. They were probably aroused by Andreas and Hazir, the people stealing the Smaga. Joining their forces, they can go to the Hills together (and maybe Captain Vasko can leave someone to protect the stead), recover that damned jewel and end the story. The captain can be persuaded, but first he must be convinced of the existence of the monsters. There aren't any in sight, but the various burned bones scattered around are a good indication that something happened there. Note that the Captain isn't a fool and requires a sign of goodwill from the heroes: he asks them to exit from the stead and parley outside. If the heroes do this, he is convinced and grudgingly accepts a pact with the party, but only to recover the Smaga. He leaves up to four men to protect the stead, if the heroes ask him (and this altruistic behavior should be rewarded by giving a Bennie to the player proposing it).

Resist and let the Howlers do the Dirty Work. If the heroes refuse to parley or to surrender, Captain Vasko waits for nightfall to assault the stead. He uses incendiary arrows to set light to the pressed hay roof of the farm. He wants to drive the people out of the house, and then capture them in the meadows. He deploys his best bowmen (a third of his troops) in Heavy Cover at maximum bow range (48") and starts shooting burning projectiles. The chance to have the Stead set on fire is handled in an abstract way. For every arrow that hits (Shooting rolls with no modifier: target's size compensates range), roll a d6, with a 4-6 a small fire starts.

At the beginning of the round, roll a d6 for each alit fire: with 1-3 the fire remains the same size, with 4-6 it grows by one size (from Small to Medium, from Medium to Large). At the end of the round the house suffers one Fire Damage Token per fire per size (so a Small fire causes one Token, a Medium two and a Large three).

If at any point the stead has twenty or more Fire Tokens the structure is considered burning and must be abandoned.

Heroes can try to extinguish fires. With a skill roll, for each success and raise, they can reduce a fire by one size. Fires reduced to less than Small are extinguished. If the heroes roll 1 on the skill die, regardless of the Wild Die, they suffer 1d10 damage. The skill roll necessary to extinguish the fire is determined, for each fire, by drawing a card from the Action Deck and checking the table below. Heroes can decide to make cooperative rolls.

Fire Extinguishing Table

CARD SUIT	SKILL	NARRATIVE EXAMPLE
Clubs	Agility	Extinguishing fires with a blanket or similar
Diamonds	Climbing	Climbing on the roof and kicking down the burning parts
Hearts	Strength	Cutting away burning structures with an axe.
Spades	Vigor	Take water from the well constantly

The rain of fire arrows lasts for five rounds, then the whole pack of Howlers emerges from the wood, led by the Pack Leader. They assault Captain Vasko and his men from the rear, killing everyone.

The heroes will be on their own in their attempt to defeat Dogskull.

(M) Howlers (40): See page 74.

(WC) Pack Leader (1): See page 77.

(M) Fort Veterans (All survivors): See page 72.

(WC) Captain Vasko (1): See page 69.

Escape. The heroes can try to sneak out of the stead, fooling Captain Vasko and his men. Behind the stead, the grass grows very tall and is excellent for passing unnoticed. The heroes first need an Agility roll to climb down the palisade, and then they must make three group Stealth (-1) rolls. If they score at least two successes, they pass unnoticed, otherwise Vasko's sentinels spot the heroes and a Chase (standard length) is played in the woods, till Maddoc brings the heroes to a small cavern where they can stay for a while till the soldiers go away.

If the characters create a diversion (i.e. sending their horses at the gallop, with dummies in the saddle, through the main gate) they receive a bonus from +1 to +4 to the Stealth rolls.

Surrender. This isn't a very heroic option. If the heroes surrender, Vasko respects the pact, and has them tied but unharmed. The heroes are brought back to Fort Miscentium. Three nights from today Dogskull finally leaves the Cairn, assaults and de-

GM'S TIP: THE AMBUSH OPTION

The events in the Strange Bedfellows scene make sense only if Captain Vasko actually has enough men (at least double the party size) under his command. If he doesn't have at least this numerical advantage, he opts for another tactic. He puts sentinels around the stead to spy on the heroes and then sets an ambush for them before they reach the hills, resulting in another fun scene. The Captain tries, if possible, to capture the heroes alive, and this can lead to another occasion for the party to parley with him...

stroys the Vestvan Stead and a dark shadow reappears in the Northlands...

Important Note. The heroes might trust Captain Vasko because he is a cadet noble, and his family emblem, a black dog's head, is painted on his shield, very visibly. White-Eyes' second prophecy was: "A hunt awaits you, with black and white hounds. Fear the white ones, but you can trust the black one, for he is a faithful dog!", and this refers to the good captain. The first hero remembering this fact receives a Bennie, but only after the group makes a pact with Vasko.

A BLEAT IN THE HILLS

The heroes (and hopefully Captain Vasko with some soldiers) led by Maddoc, marches towards the hills, in the northern part of the Vale. Given the harshness of the ground, horses are only an impediment and should be left at the stead. It is a misty day, with poor visibility. First they have to cross a wooded area, than the real hills begin.

After half an hour of walking, the heroes hear a sound coming from nearby. It is the bleating of a goat.

"It's Bertha!" Maddoc says, excitedly. "My goat! When the Howlers attacked we didn't manage to get the herd inside the stead and they ran away. We must find her!"

The boy is impulsive, and cannot be persuaded to ignore the sound. He simply runs in the direction of the bleating. The heroes have no other choice than following him.

The bleat leads you to the base of a small rocky hill. It is the scene of a massacre: dead goats are everywhere, lying in pools of blood. They seem to have been killed by a beast, which was content to smash the carcasses, without eating them.

"Our goats!" Maddoc sobs. "Our herd! Why do such a thing? Bertha! Bertha! Where are you?"

Bertha, the sole survivor, is bleeding from a leg wound, but she is alive, and bleating, at the base of a large rock. Maddoc runs to help her, and the poor beast licks his hand.

Let the heroes make a Notice roll. In the case of success they note the danger looming over the boy.

With terror you see the big humanoid Howler you have seen leading the pack, on the top of a rock over Maddoc and Bertha. He has the spear in his hand, and he is ready to throw it at the heedless boy!

The heroes have no time to act, the monster is going to throw, they can only cry out a warning to Maddoc.

The monster, distracted by your shout, misses his target, and the spear sticks in the soft ground near Maddoc. The boy, surprised, raises the eyes, but it is too late: the Pack Leader jumps down and grabs him! Now he is running down the hill, with his small victim in his claws!

The boy is brave, but the monster is far stronger, so he has no chance to break free. The heroes must stop him before he kills Maddoc!

This is a standard Chase, staged among the woods and the first of the hills. It uses Agility as the Chase skill. Each round of the chase a specific event happens, as described below. Complications apply only to the heroes, the Pack Leader is unaffected. On the other hand, the Pack Leader isn't interested in attacking, so when he gets a Jack or Queen he receives +1 to the next Chase roll and attacks against him in the current round suffer -1. Double the modifiers if he is dealt a King or Joker.

For this Chase, if the heroes are with Captain Vasko and his men, divide the Veteran Soldiers by the number of the Wild Cards in the party and "attach" each group to a Wild Card.

Round 1 – Among the Brambles. The monster runs down a slope, full of brambles and other thorny plants. Heroes can decide to take a -2 to their Chase rolls (before rolling) to avoid the thorns, otherwise after the Chase roll they must make a Vigor roll to avoid Bumps and Bruises.

Round 2 – Dry Creek. At the base of the slope there is a dry creek. The beast tries to confound his pursuers by hiding behind the rocks. This round the Pack Leader uses Stealth as his Chase skill, while the party uses Notice.

Round 3 – Tall Weeds. The monster's mad charge passes across a field of tall weeds. Any ranged attack suffers an additional -2.

Round 4 – Over the Chasm! The monster arrives in front of a large ravine, dividing a hill in two parts. With reckless abandon he jumps over it! This round the Chase roll is made using Strength (-2), success meaning that the heroes jump over the ravine. If they fail the roll, in addition to the normal effects they miss the jump! The heroes are allowed an Agility roll to cling on the edge of the ravine (they can regain solid ground in the next round with a Strength (-4) roll, which can be cooperative). If they fail the Agility roll they fall, suffering 2d6 damage.

Round 5 – Rocks! This is the only chase round during which the Pack Leader attacks. He climbs up a rocky slope, and when at the top, he rolls boulders down behind him, with the intention of smashing the heroes! During this round, Climbing is the Chase skill. In addition to the normal effects of the Chase roll, for each success and raise the monster can make an opposed Agility roll against a pursuer of his choice (the pursuer receives +1 to the roll if he has the Dodge Edge, +2 with the Improved version). If the monster wins, his opponent is hit by a stone boulder (2d8 damage). The Pack Leader doesn't suffer multi-action penalties for multiple boulders.

The Chase ends when the monster enters a dead end: a woody depression filled with old, skeletal plants.

(WC) Pack Leader (1): See page 77.

BROWN FINGERS OF DEATH

This creature must be gifted with supernatural stamina, because he dragged you relentlessly through the hills. But now his escape is over. Like a wolf chased by hunters, he enters a wooded depression filled with old, skeletal plants. It is a strange place; you can see ancient carvings on the brown bark of the dead trees.

"Careful now," Captain Vasko says. "A cornered beast is the most dangerous one."

Characters wanting to examine the carvings on the trees more closely can make a Knowledge (Arcana) roll or a Common Knowledge roll if they are of Cairnlander origin. With a success or better they recognize the signs engraved on the plants as an ancient curse written in the language of the Ancestors. The meaning, more or less, is "Sons of the autumn, brown fingers of the dead, rest in peace till the sap of life touches your bark-like skin."

These phrases identify the place as Cairnlander holy ground.

There is a narrow path among the dead trees, and it ends in a clearing, with no possible exit, because a thick wall of dead plants blocks any escape attempt. At the far end of the clearing, like a king among his subjects, stands a huge, charred oak, covered in white carvings like an old Ivory Savannah shaman.

The Pack Leader is stuck in the middle of the clearing, his black eyes fixed on the terrorized ones of the boy in his claws. Froth drops from his open jaws, a few inches from Maddoc's throat.

Let the heroes make a Smarts (-4) roll. With a success they understand that the monster seems to be fighting to *not* bite the young Northlander, but the arrival of the heroes interrupts his inner struggle. He throws the boy aside and assaults the party!

The battleground is the clearing, a circle 12" in diameter. Reading it like a clock face, place the 2" wide entrance to the clearing at six o'clock, with the heroes and their allies entering through that "corridor". The Pack Leader is placed within 2" of twelve o'clock (almost under the branches of the charred oak), and Maddoc is positioned within 1" of him, Shaken and prone. The ground beyond the clearing is so crowded with trees that it is impassable.

The Pack Leader attacks the party with reckless abandon (Wild Attack). The important thing is that sooner or later the monster or the heroes will be wounded or shaken by a wounding effect. When this happens, read the following.

The blood spilled by the mighty blow traces a line in the air, and drops like rain on the bark of the dead trees. You hear a sort of thrill stirring the dead branches and for a moment you have the impression of hundreds of low voices whispering in an ancient, forgotten language. The runes carved on the plants start weeping a thick nauseous substance, and, like a nest of snakes, the branches take life and try to claw at you with dead, brown fingers!

But this isn't the worst of it. You hear a loud crack and the big, majestic oak twists and breaks, revealing an enormous, fanged mouth in the trunk, from which emerges a greenish, pulsating, shimmering...

The heroes and their allies must make a Fear check when this second part of the battle starts. If the character read and understood the runes on the trees at the beginning of the path, they are somewhat prepared, and roll with +2.

Place the Old Charred Oak at twelve o'clock (given its size you can use a Small Burst Template to represent it) and place the Animated Trees evenly all around the perimeter of the clearing. If possible, place two of them near the entrance, so that they can crawl into it, virtually sealing the clearing. The goal of the ensorcelled plants is clear: destroy and eat any living being, Pack Leader included.

The humanoid monster isn't an ally of the party, but, if he is not attacked by the characters, he prefers to fight the animated plants. From the third round the Old Oak tries to grab Maddoc and to bring him to his "mouth" (see monster description). Before the ensorcelled plant can devour the boy, the Pack Leader saves him, throwing himself in the plant's grasp, hopefully giving the heroes enough time to win the battle by exploiting the plants' weaknesses. This "dramatic" action by the Pack Leader is considered a use of the Fanaticism setting rule.

The battle ends when the Old Charred Oak is destroyed, thus breaking the magic animating the other plants. At this point go on with the next scene, Father.

(WC) Pack Leader (1): See page 77.

(WC) Maddoc (1): See page 75.

(WC) Old Oak (1): See page 75.

(M) Animated Plants (1 per hero plus 1 per 2 extra Ally): See page 68.

TERRAIN AND PROPS

• **Runes of Sorcery:** The trees are engraved with ancient sorceries, trapping evil spirits inside. A sorcerer character can read the runes on a tree aloud, trying to break the enchantment. This is an opposed roll between the mage's Sorcery and the plant's Spirit. If the sorcerer wins, the Animated Plant is Shaken, with a raise it suffers a Wound. Each attempt costs the wizard 1 Power Point. Trying this tactic against the Old Oak is possible, but the hero suffers -4 to his roll. Any character with the Knowledge (Arcana) skill is entitled to a roll the first time he sees the plants to become aware of this option.

• **Stone Altar:** In the middle of the clearing there is an old, moss covered stone, a yard tall. It is an old altar, used in ancient times to offer sacrifices to the spirits inhabiting the ensorcelled plants. It is as large as a Small Burst Template, and any hero standing on it can benefit of its protection (he is granted the Champion Edge). This power can be detected with the *detect/conceal* *arcana* Power.

• **They Come from the Wood!** Anytime a Joker is dealt to any character, a new Animated Plant pops out! Roll a d12 and place it at that "o'clock", 2" from the clearing's border, toward the wood's interior. The new plant cannot act till the next round.

"FATHER!"

When the Old Oak is destroyed, read the following part.

The plants were animated by the Old Oak's heart: destroying it turns them back to normal, dead branches.

HERO'S JOURNAL: ENSORCELLED WOOD

The wood of the Old Oak is surely magical, and can be used to craft a Sorcerer's Staff (see page 99), but the character can decide whether to roll on Repair or Knowledge (Arcana). If the character scores a raise, the staff has an additional gift: it grants the wielder +1 to any opposed roll to resist the powers of the undead.

Once the battle is over, a strange transformation comes over the body of the Pack Leader. Its shape changes, becoming that of a Northlander man in his thirties with a stripe of white hair.

"Father!" Maddoc cries.

Yes, the Pack Leader was Russ, who was turned into a monster for some unknown reason, and by an as-yet unknown enemy. Now you understand the monster's reluctance to attack the stead and to kill his own son: somewhere his true soul continued to fight, and now he has found his freedom.

Maddoc cries for a while, then silently starts gathering wood to build a pyre for his father using the dead plants. If a character helps him without hurrying him on, he should receive a Bennie, because certain things must be done.

After his father burns, Maddoc guides the heroes to the Cairn of the Hound, where the evil infesting these lands lurks. He might be young, but he has the heart of a Northlander, and now he has another reason to want the evil in the Cairn stopped.

PART 4: THE CAIRN OF THE HOUND

DOGS ON THE DOORSTEP

"This is the Hill of the Hound," Maddoc says.

The Cairn of the Hound looks like an ordinary hill, not much different from the many others around. You wonder how such evil originates from such a common-looking place.

"There is a sort of trail leading to the basis of the hill," the young Northlander says, "Which ends in a stone wall, with strange carvings. I always thought it was weird."

Maddoc leads the party to the base of the hill.

The situation now is very different: the "stone wall" Maddoc spoke of is in reality a massive stone gate, which lies open, like the mouth of a monstrous mastiff, revealing a passage to the dark bowels of the hill.

The gate was sealed with the magic of the Smaga, but Andreas and his comrades broke it, to enter the Cairn and plunder it.

There is no other access, so the heroes must enter from here. Inside is a stone corridor with a strong, canine smell, mixed with the scents of wet earth and worse things.

Dogskull isn't a fool: leaving the gate of the Cairn unguarded last time cost her

centuries of imprisonment, so now she has placed plenty of guards.

You reach a large room in the depths of the hill. It must be the inner courtyard of the Cairn because you see several other buildings around that must be stables, warehouses and smithies. The whole place is full of Howlers, the full pack probably, which is snoring and sleeping, in a deep but agitated sleep. They are everywhere, but in particular they are gathered around the massive stone gate on the opposite side of the room, which is decorated with carvings of running dogs. It must be the door of the inner Cairn, where the source of the evil lies.

As it's daytime, the Howlers are immersed in a deep sleep, this being a limitation of their powers.

There are a hundred Howlers in the courtyard, so, even if the party is in the company of a strong force of Fort Veterans, they should avoid a direct confrontation; instead they should move quietly among the beasts, without awakening them.

This is a slightly modified Dramatic Task. Each hero, each Wild Card ally and each group of four Extras must make a Stealth roll per round (Extras make group rolls). Successes and raises don't matter, but failures do: each time a roll fails the players receive an Alert Token, three Tokens with a Critical Failure. Each group draws an

Action Card to determinate order of play as usual, but also to determine the difficulty of the Stealth roll, depending on the card's color, as described below.

CARD TYPE	STEALTH ROLL MODIFIER
Black	-2
Red	0
Red Joker	+2, immediately discard an Alert Token
Black Joker	-2, immediately acquire an Alert Token

Events are triggered according to how many Alert Tokens the party accumulates.

TOKENS	EVENT
1	One of the Howlers growls in its sleep, but nothing serious happens.
2-3	The Howlers are very nervous now, and likely to wake up; all further Stealth rolls suffer -1.
4-5	A single Howler wakes up and must be dispatched quickly! For each round combat lasts, the party automatically receives one Alert Token.
6-10	A group of Howlers (number equal to the heroes) wakes up! For each round of combat, the party automatically receives two Alert Tokens.
11+	The whole pack wakes up and the heroes must fight their way through! See Battle with the Hounds sidebar.

If at the end of fourth round the heroes have less than 11 Alarm Tokens, and there aren't any Howlers awake, they manage to cross the courtyard without awakening the pack, open the gate and enter the inner Cairn undisturbed, otherwise a big battle starts (see box on next page).

Contested Gate. If the heroes arrive at the gate while there are Howlers awake, opening it requires an Agility (-2) roll, and closing it a Strength (-2) roll. Both rolls can be cooperative, but any failure causes the hero to suffer a free attack from a Howler (which has The Drop on a critical failure).

(M) Howlers (100): See page 74.

IN THE WOLF'S DEN

You bar the door behind you, and now you are in the inner Cairn. The air is musty, and smells like a tomb. Long festoons of webs hang from the ceiling, and an occasional cold gust of air freezes the hair on your neck. The place seems devoid of any life, but you have the strong sensation of being watched by extremely malevolent eyes. A dark corridor leads deep inside the underground palace.

The heroes are now inside the palace of Dogskull. It was the ancestral home of the Cairnlander clan of the Tomb Hounds, before the ambitious witch sacrificed them to the unholy cauldron to transform them into the first members of her pack of Howlers.

The palace is large and labyrinthine, made with corridors going up and down and natural caverns blending with Ancestor-made halls. No detailed map is given for the location, instead several encounters

BATTLE WITH THE HOUNDS

In the dire event that the pack is awakened, the heroes must fight for their lives! The monsters are simply too numerous to fight, so the heroes have a chance to survive only if in the company of Captain Vasko and his veterans.

The Hounds have a clear advantage, and have 10 battle Tokens and Knowledge (Battle) d6 (with a Wild Die).

The heroes receive one battle Token per two Wild Cards in the party (excluding Mad-doc), plus another one per three Fort Veterans on their side, up to a maximum of 8. So, a group of five heroes, Captain Vasko, and nine Fort Veterans has 6 Wild Cards (3 Battle Tokens) plus 9 Fort Veterans (3 Battle Tokens), total 6 Battle Tokens.

If no hero has the Knowledge (Battle) skill, remember that Captain Vasko has d6.

Gaining Ground. *The heroes are at a grave disadvantage: their main hope of survival is in reaching the gate of the inner Cairn and barring it behind them. The distance from the door depends on how many rounds of Stealth they have managed: for each round less than four, they have a section of space to cross. If they win a Mass Battle round, for each success and raise, instead of causing their enemies to lose a token, they can decide that **all the party** (Allies included) advances by a section of ground, till they reach the gate, which at this point is contested (see above). The heroes can also decide to go on alone, leaving their comrades to their fate; in this case the Character Battle Result (see SWD page 92), instead of giving a bonus to the Battle roll of the Commander, allows them to advance a section of space per success and raise.*

Assigning Casualties. *Apart from individual damage, for each Battle Token the heroes lose, remove two Fort Veterans. When all the fort veterans are removed, each Battle Token causes one Wound to Captain Vasko (up to three, at the fourth one he goes down, killed by the Howlers). Further Battle Tokens lost are ignored. If the heroes manage to bring all the party (Allies included) beyond the gate of the inner Cairn, the normal token recovery rules apply (tokens are recovered with 4–6 on d6, each recovered token gives back two Fort Veterans).*

and areas are described, each of them connected to other locations, through a series of passages and corridors, as in old choose-your-adventure game books. The GM is free to delete some encounters, or add others, to make the exploration of the palace longer (and harder) or shorter and easier.

The corridor where the heroes start leads to the Hall of the Bewitched Well (1).

1 – HALL OF THE BEWITCHED WELL

You are in a large shady hall, surrounded by tall pillars, sculpted to resemble vaguely humanoid beings. In the middle of the room there is a rough stone well. A massive wooden door stands to the south, on the opposite side of the room, while stairs eastwards go deep into the bowels

of the Cairn. Finally a narrow passage, probably a natural one, goes westwards.

The statues represent men with long, clawed hands, and canine heads. With a Notice roll, the heads are recognized as simple ceremonial helms, while with a Knowledge (Arcana) the humanoids are recognized as Ancestors.

The well is actually a pool of black, murky water. It is very full, the water level is less than a hand's breadth from the stone rim, but it seems only a yard deep. If someone looks in the well, he sees something shimmering below the water! The exact identity of the item is left to the Game Master, but it is a Precious Treasure for the hero (see sidebar on page 62). If two or more characters are looking in the pool at the same moment, they must make an opposed Spirit roll, only the adventurer losing the roll sees the treasure inside.

At this point if the hero has the Greedy Hindrance he must make a Spirit (-4) roll otherwise he automatically decides to put his arm in the water to grab the treasure. Non-Greedy heroes can decide freely what to do, whether trying to pick up the item or not. If someone sticks an arm (or an object) in the water, a mysterious force grabs the imprudent character and tries to drag him into the pool! This is an opposed Strength roll, which can be cooperative, against the Strength d12+2 of the malevolent Spirit of the Pool (it is a Wild Card). If the victim loses, she inhales water and suffers a level of Fatigue, as per the Drowning rules. Multiple levels of Fatigue lead to Incapacitation and, after half Vigor rounds without air, death. If the victim wins the roll with a success she is still caught in the water, but she manages to breathe and suffers no Fatigue this round; with a raise, she is free.

The Spirit of the Pool can be spotted with the *detect arcana* Power, and can be exorcized with the *banish* Power (Spirit d8). Once the party is aware of the danger of the pool, its real contents are revealed: lots of human bones and skulls, under the black water.

Connections: Mossy stairs down to Empty Tomb (2), Narrow natural corridor to Haunted Kennels (3).

2 – EMPTY TOMB

You enter a square empty room, with old beds and niches in the walls, devoid of any living being. A stone sarcophagus, open and empty, stands in a shady alcove.

This room was a communal living room of the Cairnlanders, where they lived with their dead Ancestors. Dogskull, in her search for bodies and souls to satiate the hunger of the Cauldron, sacrificed all of them. Now the room is empty but with a Notice (-4) roll a character can find, abandoned in a corner, a little purse with some pieces of bone inside. It is a personal amulet, an item no Cairnlander will abandon willingly. The amulet grants a one-use Bennie to whoever finds and keeps it (two if he is a Cairnlander). This Bennie, if not spent, is conserved between sessions.

Connections: Mossy stairs up to Hall of the Bewitched Well (1).

3 – HAUNTED KENNELS

You are in a stone corridor, with three doors on each side, each of them blocked by old rusty grates. On a metal hook on the wall hang several old muzzles, and a dog's barding lays abandoned in a corner. There is a definite old canine scent in this place.

The Tomb Hounds always had a strong relationship with dogs: they bred and trained big mastiffs both for hunting and war, following the teachings of their Ancestors. These noble beasts were kept in the kennels, small rooms protected by the grates. The grates are rusted shut, so a Strength (-2) roll is required to open them. The kennels are apparently empty,

When Dogskull took power, she tried to use the mastiffs for the Cauldron, but fidelity being the beasts' main trait, she failed. For this reason she had all the dogs of the clan slaughtered and their bones thrown in the Ossuary (10). The restless souls of the butchered dogs now haunt the kennels. When the heroes are half-way into the corridor, or enter one of the kennels, suddenly the rusty gate opens, driven by an invisible force, and terrible, mind-shaking howls are heard! Each hero must make a Spirit (-2) roll. In case of failure he is Shaken. An adventurer who is already Shaken must still make a Fear Check.

The spirits of the dogs are too many, and too angry, to be banished or fought in any manner. The only chance the heroes have consists of running away from this place: each round the characters can make an Agility roll (-2 for a Shaken hero, the Fleet Footed Edge grants +2), for each success and raise they get an Escape Token. Whenever they have three Escape Tokens they are safe, at one end of the corridor.

The dogs' spirits are put to rest after the heroes defeat the Monster of the Ossuary (see below).

Connections: Narrow natural corridor to Hall of the Bewitched Well (1), stone corridor to Dogs Over a Bone (4).

4 – DOGS OVER A BONE

While you are advancing in a stone corridor you hear enraged growls and the sounds of a fight just around a corner.

If the heroes peer cautiously around the corner (Stealth roll) they see a peculiar scene: two big Howlers are furiously fighting among themselves. The reason for the fight is strange, carved bone. If the heroes give the monsters the time to end their dispute, the bigger Howler wins, forcing the smaller one to retreat into a corner. Then the winner picks up his prize and disappears south (he is headed to the Treasure Room, see next scene), while the loser stays there to lick his wounds. If the heroes aren't cautious enough (they move carelessly or fail the Stealth roll) the monsters became suddenly aware of them and, temporarily forgetting their dispute, assault the heroes!

Once they have defeated their opponents the heroes can examine the bone. It is a foot-long femur, engraved with runes and sculpted in an irregular way. Any Cairnlander character recognizes it immediately: it is an Ancestor key, a device the forefathers of the Tomb Hounds used to protect the most important places of the Cairns. The same information is available with a successful Knowledge (Legends and Lore) (-2) roll. This key in particular opens the sealed door in the Ossuary (see below).

(M) Howlers (2): See page 74.

Connections: Stone Corridor to Haunted Kennels (3), Passage to Pits of Blood (5).

5 – PITS OF BLOOD

You arrive in an underground amphitheater, surrounded by a series of steps. At

the top of the steps there is a platform, on which lie three big, old drums. The sand of the flooring is smeared with red, and you have no doubt what this place is: it is an arena.

Here, many people were brutally slaughtered, because the Cairnlanders delighted in having their prisoners killed in gruesome ways. In particular, they used the Ancestors' Drums to force the prisoners to fight each other to the death. These ancient relics, full of foul magic, were played by the Drummer, the shaman of the tribe (see Prison of the Drummer below), but so numerous are the deaths they have caused that now they can play themselves. Whenever the heroes enter the arena (a circle 12" in radius, surrounded by a 6" wide ring of steps, each step is 1" wide and counts as Difficult ground), the drums start drumming! This counts as the *puppet* Power cast with Sorcery d10 and a Wild Die, affecting everyone in the arena. The duration of the Power is a single round, but it is recast at the beginning of each round, until the drums are destroyed (see below). The trapping of the Power is that every affected being draws his best melee weapon and attacks the nearest person! Plugging one's ears or the Hard of Hearing Hindrance grants +2 to the opposed roll to resist the Power.

The drums, the source of the evil enchantment, have Toughness 5. Each drum destroyed reduces the Sorcery die type of the enchantment by one step, and when the last drum is broken it explodes in a burst of bone shards and shrieks, causing 2d6 damage to everyone in a Large Burst Template (an Agility roll is allowed to evade the attack).

Connections: Passage to Dogs Over a Bone (4), Corridor to Great Hall (6).

6 – GREAT HALL

You are in a magnificent dining hall. A fireplace large enough to cook a whole cow stands in the middle of the room and a U-shaped table, laden with cups and plates, occupies the greater part of the room. Everything is covered in dust, and the food on the table is reduced to black, desiccated things. There is a tall seat, the armrests decorated with dogs' skulls, in the middle of the table.

In this dining hall the warriors of the clan gathered to eat, feast and boast. In this very hall Dogskull put her magical Cauldron on the fireplace and used it to snatch away the souls of her fellows, who never managed to finish the banquet. The tableware is mostly made of clay, but with a Notice roll the heroes can find, in the place setting for the tall seat, golden cups and plates. They are of Imperial manufacture, surely the fruit of some raid beyond the border, and are worth a tidy 300 Moons.

Connections: Gate to Hall of the Bewitched Well (1), Passage for Collapsing Ceiling (7), Corridor to Stone Bridge over the Chasm (9).

7 – COLLAPSING CEILING

You are cautiously walking along a stone corridor, surrounded by tall, half crumbled columns. When you are almost in the middle of it, pieces of debris start falling from the ceiling. This place doesn't seem very stable... Suddenly you hear a rumble, and in a moment stones and boulders are raining down!

The heroes have only once chance to save their skins: run, as fast as they can, to the end of the corridor, where there is a wooden door, and hopefully, safety! The scene is

handled as a Chase of standard (5 rounds) duration. It is based on Agility and has a little tweak: as there is no pursuer, the only danger the heroes have to face are falling boulders. For this reason ignore Complications and the attack range table; instead, every round check the Action Card (if the heroes got any) against the table below and apply the danger they face. If the heroes manage to survive for five rounds they reach the door (leading to the Armory), but now the passage back is sealed and they must find another way out.

ACTION CARD	EFFECT
No Card Dealt	<i>Column collapses!</i> You must jump over it, with a Strength (-2) roll, or suffer 3d6 damage.
2-3	<i>Large Boulder falls!</i> Agility (-2) roll or suffer 2d8 damage.
4-6	<i>Loud Crash!</i> Spirit roll or be Panicked for the rest of the Chase (-1 to all rolls).
7-8	<i>Rain of Debris!</i> Agility roll or suffer 2d4 damage.
9-10	<i>Cloud of Dust!</i> Vigor roll or -1 to all rolls in the next Chase round due to coughing.
J-A	No danger in this round.
Joker	No danger in this round, +2 to the next Chase roll

Connections: Wooden Door to Armory (8), Passage for the Great Hall (6 – only before collapsing).

8 – ARMORY

This room is covered in dust and long festoons of spiderwebs. Hanging from the walls and piled on stone slabs there are old weapons, in the typical Cairnlander style. A forge, unlit for centuries, occupies the far end of the room. In a corner you see a hulking suit of bone armor, covered in spikes, which surely belonged to a giant of a man. Apart from the door you came in by you see no other exit from this place.

The armory is an interesting place for adventurers to search. The forge cannot be lit, but the assorted tools can be used for Repair rolls with +2. Most of them are quite cumbersome to transport, but a character can collect enough assorted items to create an Armorer Kit.

The greater part of the weapons and armor are too old and rusty to be used (Cairnlander metal is usually plundered from Ancestor's tombs) but with half an hour of inspection the following items can be found: a couple of bone tipped scythed double spears, a horn bow (normal stats), enough arrows to replenish the heroes' quivers, a sack of six brainstones, two slings and a stone-headed maul.

The armor is bone and bronze reinforced heavy armor (+3, reinforced) but it is so big that can be used only by a Brawny hero.

All the new items are described in the Appendix II, see page 83.

The real problem for the heroes is finding an exit from this place. Luckily there is a secret door, with a passage leading to the Stone Bridge (see below). It is concealed behind the wall near the forge, and it opens by pushing down the torch hanging on the wall nearby. It requires a Notice (-4) roll to be found, with +2 for the Thief

and/or Treasure Hunter Edge, which can be cooperative. Even if they fail the roll, the party finds the passage after 1d4 hours of exhausting search (Vigor roll to avoid being Fatigued).

Connections: Secret passage to Stone Bridge Over the Chasm (9).

9 – STONE BRIDGE OVER THE CHASM

You are in a large natural cavern, broken in two by a large, very deep chasm. The ceiling is so high that you cannot see it in the darkness; you only spot the shapes of large stalactites. The only way to pass over the chasm is by crossing a narrow stone bridge. It looks treacherous and the skull-shaped heads of the pilasters do nothing to ameliorate this sensation.

The stone bridge is solid, but a little slippery from moisture and mosses. It isn't a great problem if the heroes walk carefully (and secure themselves with ropes), the real threats are the guardians of the bridge: a flock of Tomb Vampires, carnivorous giant bats which lie hidden among the stalactites, ready to ambush trespassers. The bridge is 18" long and 1" wide, so the heroes must walk in single file. When they are half-way across, the flying assassins dive down from the ceiling and attack them! Since the fight is in an awkward situation, anytime a hero rolls 1 on the skill die on an Agility-related roll, regardless of the Wild Die, or is wounded, he must make an Agility roll. In the case of failure he falls down from the bridge, but manages to cling on to the edge. Only with a critical failure does he fall into the chasm, suffering 3d6 damage. A clinging hero can regain solid ground with a Strength (-4)

roll. As the Vampires are flying monsters, they are immune to this rule.

Once on the other side of the bridge, the heroes can go deeper into the Cairn, taking a corridor in front of them, a passage to the east, or climbing down a stairway to the west.

(M) Tomb Vampire (2 per hero): See page 79.

Connections: Corridor to Great Hall (6), secret passage to Armory (8), passage east to the Ossuary (10), stairs west to the Mead Cellar (12), corridor to the Corridor of Tapestries (13).

10 – OSSUARY

You are in a square room, surrounded by columns. The greatest part of the room is occupied by a large pool, three yards deep, filled with a thick layer of bones of various types. In the middle of the Ossuary there is a short pedestal, on which stands the biggest and weirdest skull you have ever seen: big as a horse's head, it could belong to a dog, apart from the four saber-like teeth protruding from the mouth. The whole thing is carved and decorated with thin insets of gold and silver, making it a remarkable piece of jewelry. Stone stairs lead down from the room's ground level to the bottom of the Ossuary.

The Ossuary is the place where the clan used to throw the unused bones of their enemies, or of those Ancestors so old and destroyed that they could not be recognized. A secret door in the bottom of the pit is the only entrance to the *sancta sanctorum* of the Drummer, the shaman of the clan, and the only person Dogskull ever feared. After his death, the witch sealed the entrance to



his room and set a supernatural guardian to watch over the entrance.

The Ossuary Guardian manifests itself whenever the heroes go down into the pit: the bones start clattering and some of them, as if driven by an invisible force, climb up the pedestal, connecting to the engraved skull! In two rounds the Ossuary Guardian is created and attacks the heroes savagely. In the Ossuary it can use the Feed on Bones Special Ability without limit, so the heroes have to detach the head, and bash it or throw it outside the pit (Throwing or Strength (-2) roll), where it is powerless and can be smashed easily (see creature's stats on page 76).

The pit is a square 12" by 12", with a 1" by 2" stair going down. The bottom is so littered with bones that it counts as Difficult ground. Once the Guardian is defeated, the pit can be explored freely. With a simple Notice roll, the silhouette of a door can be spotted in the south wall. It has no door handle and is totally flat, apart from a weirdly-shaped keyhole. If the heroes have found the Ancestor key (see Dogs Over a Bone above) that item fits perfectly in the hole and the door opens silently, otherwise they have to use Lockpicking (-4 to the roll) or bash it down (Strength (-4).

(M) Ossuary Guardian (1): See page 76.

Connections: Passage to the Stone Bridge Over the Chasm (9), secret door to the Prison of the Drummer (11).

11 – PRISON OF THE DRUMMER

You pass the secret door and cautiously walk along a narrow corridor, till you reach a small hall, reeking of ancient

sorcery. On the northern side of the room, there is an entire wall covered by shelves, full of ancient scrolls. An embellished lectern stands nearby, with an open scroll on it. But the most noticeable thing is this: in an alcove at the far end of the room, a man is sitting, half asleep, on a seat. Tall and muscular, when you enter the room he raises his bald head, sharp-featured like a bird of prey, and stares at you with black eyes.

"Visitors..." he whispers in a feeble but educated voice "After so much time... I beg your pardon if I don't stand up."

Only now you see that the hands of the man are nailed to the armrests with two sharp bone daggers!

This place was the den, now become the prison, of the Drummer, the shaman of the clan. Fearing him, Dogskull seduced and betrayed him. The evil witch wisely decided to not kill him: a dead Cairnlander mage can be more dangerous than a live one, because he could return as a vengeful Ancestor. Instead she stabbed him with two ensorcelled daggers: the blades block the Drummer's power (and smashed his hands, preventing him from drumming, the source of his powers), but have also stopped him dying for all this time. The Drummer has been kept here for several centuries, and will do anything to take his vengeance on Dogskull. If the heroes tell him they came to destroy Dogskull, he makes a proposal.

"Hear my words, and act wisely: remove the blades trapping me, and then, before I exhale my last breath, stab my heart with them! Then you'll have a weapon capable of destroying Dogskull!"

If the heroes accept, this is what happens: when they remove the daggers, the Drummer suddenly starts to age; in the space of a couple of breaths he is a man of middle age, then a greybeard and finally an agonized ancient man. The heroes must be quick, and stab him in the heart with the two daggers at the same time! It requires a combination of two Fighting or Spirit rolls (to stay cool), with a multi-action penalty, to be executed successfully in the same round. If either one fails, the attempt must be redone from scratch. The characters have three rounds in which to succeed. If they are successful, the Drummer is shaken by a thrill, and the hero wielding the daggers feels a wave of heat in the blades, as if they were alive. Then with a smile on his face, he whispers for the last time:

"When you meet Dogskull, tell her that the Drummer sends her a gift."

Then he dies.

The Drummers' daggers. These weapons are now possessed by the soul of the Drummer. They are magical, and can damage monsters with certain immunities (count them as made of steel for this purpose). In addition, when in presence of Dogskull, if the user says "the Drummer sends you a gift" while wielding them, his hands act by themselves and throw the blade at the witch! This counts as the bolt Power, cast with Sorcery d12+2, with a Wild Die, and causing 3d6 damage. The two daggers can be thrown in the same round without any multi-action penalty. After one use (regardless of whether they hit or not), the blades shatter.

The Library. The greater part of the scrolls, including the one on the lectern, have suffered the effects of time and neglect, but

one very important tome survives. It can be found with a Notice (-2) roll, +1 per every thirty minutes of search (up to +4). It is a scroll conserved in a bronze case, written on human skin! It is simply called the Red Book of the Ancestors, and it is considered a Tome of Forbidden Secrets (see *Beasts & Barbarians Golden Edition*, page 118). It is written in Cairnlander runes, so characters not knowing this language suffer a further -4 to the Smarts roll to understand it. It contains the following Powers: *darksight* (invisible rune drawn with saliva on eyelids), *summon ally* (low-pitched howl calling a Tomb Vampire).

Connections: Secret door to the Ossuary (10).

12 – MEAD CELLAR

You are in a dark cellar, a sort of long corridor, surrounded by enormous barrels. The smell of old, seasoned spirits is very strong, but there is a subtle note of corruption under it. On the opposite side of the cellar you spot a tall wooden door.

Cainlanders love alcohol, and despite not being able to grow grapes in their fields, they make excellent mead using wild honey, mushrooms and other weird components, some of them quite exotic and disgusting.

A dry-throated adventurer can decide to quench his thirst with some of this stuff. Whenever he opens a barrel, the Game Master secretly draws a card from the Action deck and checks the entries below. Each barrel contains enough liquor for 50 cups, but the spirit loses its strength a week after the barrel is opened.

Clubs – Poisoned Mead. Something went wrong in the distillation of this mead. Al-

though it seems good, half an hour after drinking it, the drinker feels sick, and he must make a Vigor (-2) roll or suffer a level of Fatigue, which wears off after 2d4 hours. Multiple cups drunk require multiple rolls, with an additional -1 (for example, two doses requires two Vigor (-3) rolls).

Diamonds – Golden Mead. This brown, dense mead goes down the throat like molten metal. Any character drinking it gains the Nerves of Steel Edge for two hours. A double cup drunk grants Improved Nerves of Steel, further doses are dangerous and require a Vigor (-2) roll; failing means the character loses the Edges and feels so miserable as to suffer -2 to all Spirit rolls for 1d4 hours.

Hearts – Mead of Courage. Any character drinking this strong, rich liquor feels particularly good. For two hours he receives +1 to all Spirit rolls and +2 to Fear Checks. Multiple doses grant no additional benefits, instead they cause a Vigor (-2) roll. In the case of failure the drinker suffers from the Overconfident Hindrance for the next 1d4 hours.

Spades – Mead of Heads. When the heroes open this barrel, they must make a Notice (-4) roll. In the case of failure they see nothing unusual, and drink the strangely-flavored liquor. Only after drinking the first cup does the character discover the disgusting truth: in the mead float the severed heads of enemies, giving the drink its peculiar taste. Any non-Cairnlander character who drank must make an immediate Spirit (-2) roll or be Nauseated for the next hour. Characters successful at the Notice roll luckily spot the macabre trophies before drinking.

Black Joker – Black Mushroom Mead. This greenish, odorous mead is flavored with special mushrooms found only in the darkest woods. It is also called the Mead of Sorcerers. Any character drinking it immediately recovers 10 Power Points. It is a very strong liquor, so a Vigor (-4) roll is required after the first dose, in case of failure the hero throws up, gaining a level of Fatigue (and recovering no Power Points).

Red Joker – Blood Lotus Mead. A brilliant red mead made with the flowers of the Blood Lotus. It is very sweet, almost nauseating, but any hero drinking it automatically recovers a Wound and gains +1 Toughness for a day. Further doses in the same day have no effect.

Managing redraws: if the party opens multiple barrels and redraws the same suit, they find normal, non-descript mead. Only with face cards do they find another barrel of “special” mead.

Connections: Corridor to Stone Bridge Over the Chasm (9).

13 – CORRIDOR OF TAPESTRIES

You are in a long corridor, lined with old tapestries, from which faces of people long dead stare at you down the centuries.

The tapestries on these walls briefly recount the story of the Tomb Hounds clan, until their fall at the hands of Dogskull. The last tapestries were woven by Dogskull herself using magic. A brief description of several tapestries is given below

First Tapestry. A depiction of a large pack of white, savage dogs, or hounds.

GM's Tip: PRECIOUS TREASURES

Different things are important for different types of characters. Here follow some examples of precious-looking items which can stimulate the greed of heroes. The Game Master should custom tailor the items for the hero: so for a mighty barbarian a silver encrusted battle axe is ok, while for a gladiator a black, beast-shaped helm could be.

Some general ideas are given below.

Warrior-types. Big, jewel-encrusted weapons; shimmering armor and helms.

Wizard-types. Sorcerous looking staves; ancient glowing tomes.

Rogues-types. Slender, bejeweled weapons; golden rings and necklaces.

Learned men. Old curios (a particularly rare statue, book or painting).

Commoners. Money and assorted jewels.

The precious treasures, even if they look magical, aren't. They are only precious and have an average value of four times the basic cost (minimum 300 Moons, maximum 1500 Moons).

Second Tapestry. A group of Cairnlander warriors, walking in the woods, led by a tall man with a dog-shaped helm and long claws. Probably it is an Ancestor, guiding the future Tomb Hounds.

Third Tapestry. The Cairnlander warriors and the pack of hounds, together. The hounds are sniffing the warriors, while the Ancestor raises his hands over them in a blessing gesture.

Fourth Tapestry. The Cairnlander warriors and the hounds run together in battle, against the Northlanders.

Fifth Tapestry. The main hall of the clan, where the Cairnlander warriors feast and eat, with dogs at their feet.

Sixth Tapestry. A pale woman of extreme beauty, in front of a bubbling cauldron, from which a terrible smoke emanates. The smoke engulfs both the pack of hounds and the Cairnlander warriors.

Seventh Tapestry. A pack of Howlers, led in battle by the pale woman above!

Connections: Stone Bridge Over the Chasm (9), Treasure Hall (see next scene).

THE TREASURE HALL

You arrive in a large room, dimly illuminated by torches and with deep arches and alcoves. The place is literally filled with precious stuff: jewels, ancient weapons, coffers full of coins and gold lie scattered around! You have never seen so many riches and your eyes wander over all this loot greedily. In particular you note...

The powers of Dogskull's Cauldron exploit the greed of people. A person with no greed is almost immune to its lure. But almost everyone, loot-hungry adventurers being no exception, is greedy. The last part of the adventure is focused on the heroes winning out over their own greed. But to do so, the Game Master must show the players something designed to tickle their interest! The Precious Treasures sidebar gives some tips on how to create some tempting treasures for the various members of the party. The GM should plan them in advance and use them to complete the narrative above. Afterwards, conclude with the following:

Atop a mound of gold and jewels, carelessly abandoned on a silver encrusted strongbox, lies the cause of all your troubles: the sun-shaped amulet, the Smaga!

Then a soft, purring voice is heard, coming from the other side of the room.

Stretched out on a couch like a cat, there is one of the most beautiful women you have ever seen: dressed in a scanty outfit that leaves little to the imagination, she is of very pale complexion, and with black, almost hypnotic eyes. Her face is tattooed with white signs, so that it resembles a slightly disgusting, but at the same time very attractive, skull.

There is no doubt, you have found her: this is Dogskull!

In front of the woman lies a big golden cauldron, with dog-like feet. The whole thing is engraved with the shapes of dogs and hounds, with precious gems for eyes, giving the impression they are alive.

"Come, my guests, come!" Dogskull purrs, in a morbid voice.

"Have you come to take my treasure? Or to join my ranks?" She adds with mocking tone. "Please, enjoy the generosity of Dogskull, tell me which of the marvels in this room you want, and it is yours!"

The GM must ask the players what their heroes desire most in the room. They can nominate anything present (Dogskull included, for lusty characters).

Unless the heroes nominate Dogskull herself or the Smaga, Dogskull listens to their words then answers.

"That is a nice trinket, but are you sure you wouldn't prefer something else?"

At this point any hero wanting a piece of treasure discovers he wants something else more: the Cauldron, because the relic is exploiting his greed!

"The cauldron?" Dogskull laughs "Of course you want the cauldron! Everybody wants the cauldron! And the cauldron it shall be!"

At this point the heroes, even if they don't want to, slowly start moving toward the cauldron, from which now comes a hellish light! Each character must make a Spirit (-2) roll. Heroes with the Greedy Hindrance roll suffer an additional -2, check the results below.

Raise. The hero resisted the lure of the Cauldron, and only moved a couple of steps.

Success. The hero moved halfway to the Cauldron. He is Shaken and starts the fight 6" from the Cauldron.

Failure. The hero is very near to the Cauldron and partially exposed to its hellish light. He suffers a level of Fatigue which expires after two rounds of fighting. He begins the combat 3" from the cauldron.

Critical Failure. The hero is staring into the Cauldron and fully exposed to the hellish light, which is melting his flesh! He suffers 2d8 damage (armor doesn't protect) and begins the fight within 1" from the Cauldron. If he is Incapacitated by the damage, he throws himself in the cauldron, dying, and becoming a new Howler!

There are two other things that the heroes can want: Dogskull herself or the Smaga.

KISSING DOGSKULL

If a hero says he wants Dogskull, the woman is pleased, and she asks him to come near and kiss her. Any hero kissing Dogskull automatically falls under the *puppet* spell (no roll is necessary, but Dogskull must pay the Power Points) and begins the combat within 1" from Dogskull.

ASKING FOR THE SMAGA

A hero can decide to ask for the Smaga. If no hero does, Maddoc will, and this causes the witch to shout, angrily:

"The amulet? Why do you want the amulet? Nobody wants the amulet! Guards! Seize him!"

At this point, two shapes come out from the shadows behind the couch: they are human-dog hybrids, similar to the Pack Leader, one black and the other white, armed with ancient Cairnlander weapons, and they rush toward you!

The heroes had better run toward the Smaga, while the battle starts!

THE CAULDRON AND THE AMULET

The battleground is the treasure hall, a room 18" by 12", with the long side on the north-south axis. There is a large door, 3" wide, on the southern side, where the heroes came in. On the northern side, there is a large alcove, 6" by 3", where Dogskull's Guards start.

On the eastern and western sides there are other six smaller alcoves, three per side, each 4" by 4" and overflowing with piles of treasures (see below).

All the niches are in the Darkness light condition.

Dogskull is lying on a couch (she is considered prone), 2" from the northern niche, while her Cauldon (see below) is 4" south of her.

The Smaga is placed on the center of the treasure pile of the middle alcove of the west wall.

The heroes are placed by default within 6" of the door, but if they surrendered to Dogskull's seduction they must be positioned as per the previous scene.

Deal Action Cards to all the participants, plus one for the Cauldon, to see when its spawning ability triggers.

The bad guys' tactics are these: the Guards try to intercept the character with the Smaga in any way they can, and in as a secondary priority, try to protect the Cauldon and Dogskull. The witch tries to use area Powers to slow down the heroes, so that the Cauldon can summon enough Howlers to overpower the party.

White Eyes' Words. This is a very difficult fight if the players use a traditional approach, but there is a way to win it easily: throwing the Smaga in the Cauldon destroys it. The heroes received a useful hint from White-Eyes' third prophecy. The blind man in fact told them that "the pot can cook everything, but not the sun!" The Smaga is sun-shaped and the Cauldon is effectively a pot. If a player remembers this by himself, he should be rewarded with a Bennie, otherwise the Game Master can ask the players at the beginning of each odd-numbered round to make a Smarts (-4) roll; on a success they suddenly remember White Eyes' words (but not his

meaning, the players must work that out for themselves). Each subsequent roll reduces the penalty by one.

The destruction of the Cauldron causes the end of Dogskull, the Howlers and even of Dogskull's guards. When this happens, go to the End.

(M) Dogskull the Witch (1): See page 70.

(M) Dogskull's Guards (2): See page 71.

(M) Howlers (varies): See page 74.

CARD	HOWLERS
Clubs	1
Diamonds	2
Hearts	3
Spades	4
Black Joker	Draw another card and double the number of Howlers!
Red Joker	Bigger Specimen! It has Strength and Vigor both raised by one die step, and the Command Edge.

TERRAIN AND PROPS

• **The Cauldron:** Nobody knows the true origin of this large engraved cauldron, big enough to cook an entire cow. It is made of yellow metal, which looks like gold, but on closer inspection isn't. The cauldron is a demonic artifact, with its own consciousness, and exploits the greed of people. It agreed to serve Dogskull, but in truth even the witch is its slave. When the Cauldron activates (as now) it is very dangerous to stay nearby. Any character within 1" of it suffers 2d8 damage (armor doesn't protect). If the victim is Incapacitated, she falls into the Cauldron, becoming another slave soul.

In addition, during its action, the Cauldron spawns Howlers: the beasts literally jump out from the cauldron (it costs them 3 Pace) and can act immediately. The first round, four Howlers are spawned automatically, from the second round on, it depends on the draw of a card, as in the table below.

The Cauldron has Toughness 11 (3) and three Wounds, but it is automatically destroyed if the Smaga is thrown inside it.

It can be represented on the battlefield by a Small Burst Template.

• **The Smaga:** This ancient sun-shaped amulet is an object of power, fully described on page 15. In this scene it is important because it can be thrown into the Cauldron, destroying it. The first time a character grabs it, he receives a Bennie. The Smaga can be thrown with the Throwing skill (range 3/6/12), if the character is only aiming at an area (like the Cauldron), he receives a bonus of +2. In the case of failure, the amulet scatters 1d6" in a random direction. Heroes can try to "pass" the amulet, in this case the thrower must roll on Throwing (with range penalties) and the receiver on Agility to grab it.

• **Treasure Piles:** Each pile of treasure is made of enough gold to make a man rich for a life, but in combat they are more a hindrance than anything else. Each pile can be represented by a Medium Burst Template and is Difficult Ground. Searching it (a Notice roll is required), a character can find a useful prop for a Trick with +2 bonus, or, if a raise is scored, he can find a melee weapon up to Str+d8. No roll is necessary if the character has seen a particular weapon as Precious Treasure (see sidebar on page 62), in this case it is only necessary to roll a d6 to randomly select in which pile the Precious Treasure is.

GM's Tip: THE TREASURE OF THE CAIRN

The heroes have now a huge treasure, and they have surely earned it. Applying the normal After the Adventure rules, the party can spend all of it, but even living like a classic Sword and Sorcery adventurer, there is enough wealth here to keep a man constantly drunk for years (if his liver is strong enough to handle it). So, if the Game Master decides to find alternative ways to handle the treasure, here are some suggestions and considerations.

Transportation. *Carrying away all this stuff requires at least one horse per 5000 Moons of plunder. Consider that the treasure is made largely of jewels, precious objects and similar things, the coins are only a minority. A man on foot can carry up to his full encumbrance level of gold, consider that 1 lbs = 30 Moons in this case.*

Curse. *If the Game Master wants to get rid of the treasure in a spectacular way, he can state that a curse lingers over it and that 2d6 days after being moved away from the Cairn, it turns to dust. In the meantime the heroes could have spent part of it, putting them in an interesting situation...*

Surrounded by Vultures. *Carrying off the treasure may be easy, but keeping it is a problem. Whenever word of the enormous wealth the heroes found spreads, bandits, power hungry nobles, even the Alchemists of the not-so-far-off Gis could be interested.*

Change of Pace/Fulfill a Goal. *The treasure of the Cairn is an excellent way to alter the pace and feel of the campaign. If the heroes were wandering scoundrels, now they can become more important players in the Dominions: with the loot they can arm a ship and recruit a crew, create a mercenary band, found a temple, or even buy a title somewhere and become nobles. There is always some penniless count somewhere with a decent-looking daughter to marry. The same money can be used to fulfill a long-time goal of a hero: reconquer his realm, take a vengeance on a powerful enemy, clean up his colorful past. The possibilities are endless...*

THE END

The following text supposes the heroes throw the Smaga in the Cauldron, feel free to reword it as necessary to fit the events of your game.

The sun-shaped amulet flies through the air like a living thing, and lands directly in the Cauldron.

You hear a shout of terror from Dogskull a moment before it is drowned out by a mighty explosion. The Cauldron explodes in hundreds of howling shards. It the

place where the malign artifact stood now only the Smaga lies, intact as if nothing had happened.

"The sun won over the darkness," Captain Vasko whispers, and makes the sign of Hulian.

In that very moment you hear a hiss, and see the howlers, rolling on the ground, smoking as if burning from inside. In few moments only ashes remain of these hideous abominations.

But this isn't all: in a corner of the room, Dogskull stands up on unsteady legs.

"Mine! It must be mine!" She staggers toward the amulet, trying to take it.

But step after step you see her perfect body age with an uncanny speed. When the old crone manages to touch the amulet, she is already a withered corpse.

"Consumed by her own greed," Maddoc says, recovering the amulet.

This isn't the last effect of the Cauldron's destruction. If the two guards of Dogskull are still alive, they fall down, and their bodies experience an incredible transformation: in few moments they become Andreas and his comrade Hazir, the swindlers who caused all this trouble.

They are only unconscious, so they can be revived, tied and sent back with Vasko to face the justice of Commander Ascanius. If questioned they reveal that they opened the door of the Cairn, and to have fallen under the thrall of Dogskull and her treasure. They don't remember anything else.

Now the heroes have a very big treasure on their hands (see sidebar): the treasure hall contains assorted plunder worth 60,000 Moons, so they could give a couple of coffers to Captain Vasko for his help and to

repay Lady Gwynned for the distress they have caused her.

Both the good Captain and Maddoc want to seal the Cairn entrance with rocks so that nobody can enter it (and anything bad still lurking in the dark halls cannot escape).

Captain Vasko and his surviving men mount their horses to return to the Fort.

"If I were you, I'd stay away from Fort Miscenium for a while. Lady Gwynnedd is a bloodthirsty little barbarian, I am not sure this gold will satisfy her!"

"But, if you decide to ignore my suggestion and come back to the Fort, pay me a visit at the barracks, and I'll offer you a tankard or two," he adds with a smirk.

Then he spurs his horse, and leaves at the gallop.

CREATURES AND NPCs



ANDREAS

This soft-tongued man has been many things in his life: a mercenary in the Independent Cities, a ruffian in Syranthia and a professional kidnapper in Faberterra. He was forced to leave the Imperial capital hastily after his last criminal enterprise went badly awry. He and his friend Hazir heard the story of the Amulet of Dogskull from a Syranthian Sage they robbed and murdered on a mountain path in the Borderlands. The poor man had recognized the Smaga as the amulet around the neck of Lady Gwynedd, the wife of the Commander of Fort Miscenium. The two bandits decided to test the story...

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d8

Skills: Climbing d6, Fighting d8, Healing d6, Notice d8, Persuasion d10, Riding d6, Shooting d8, Stealth d6, Throwing d6.

Charisma: +2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 7(1)

Hindrances: Greedy.

Edges: Block, Charismatic, Frenzy, Low-life, Luck.

Gear: Iron curved long sword (Str+d8), bronze dagger (Str+4, Range: 3/6/12), light leather armor (+1), war sling (Str+d6, Range: 8/16/32), merchant clothing.

ANIMATED PLANT

A normal plant, in which ancient Cairnlander shamans trapped evil spirits. Now, if moistened by blood, it wakes, becoming a horrible abomination

Attributes: Agility d4, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d8, Vigor d6

Skills: Fighting d8.

Pace: 2; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 9(1)

Special Abilities

• **Armor +1:** Thick bark.

• **Clawed Branches:** Str +d4, Reach 3. Animated Plants have very long branches they can use to grab and kill prey. They have a lot of tiny branches, which count as two Fighting attacks made without any multi-action penalty.

• **Demonic Construct:** Animated Plants are immune to poison or disease, and ignore Wound modifiers and called shots (apart from those linked to their weaknesses and to branches). They receive +2 to Toughness and to Spirit rolls to recover from Shaken. They are considered Demons.

• **Forest Crawler:** Animated Plants can move, but very slowly. They cannot run, but can move without penalty in heavily forested areas, including impassable ground.

• **Size +1:** Much bigger than a man.

• **Weakness (Fire):** Despite being possessed by a demon, an Animated Plant is made of dry wood so it burns easily: it suffers +4 damage from fire attacks and is considered a very flammable target.

• **Weakness (Old Oak Sap Heart):** Destroying the heart of the Old Oak, breaks the sorcery animating the plants, and the Animated Plants turn back to normal deadwood.

BRAC'S BROTHER

A tribesman of a primitive Northeim mountain clan, probably with some Nandal blood in his veins. He is dirty, hungry and superstitious: a deadly combination. He fears and respects his chief, the giant Brac.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4, Spirit d6, Strength d8, Vigor d6

Skills: Climbing d6, Fighting d6, Intimidation d6, Notice d6, Shooting d6, Stealth d6, Throwing d6.

Charisma: 0; **Pace:** 5; **Parry:** 5/6; **Toughness:** 6(1)

Hindrances: All Thumbs, Clueless, Fear of Magic.

Edges: Brute.

Gear: Stone battle axe (Str+d8) or war club (Str+d8) or stone tipped spear (Str+d6, 2 hands, Reach: 1, +1 Parry), skin-covered small shield (+1 Parry), sling (Str+d4, range: 4/8/16).



BRAC THE GIANT

Brac is a Northlander from a primitive clan of the Brac mountains. His father was already dead when he was born, and his mother died bearing him, so as tradition dictates, he was left exposed on the Warm Stone (see the Book of Lore) for three days and nights. Not only did he survive and become accepted by the tribe, but at six he was tall as a woman, at eight tall as a grown man, and at fourteen he was a true giant. Brac isn't smart, he doesn't need to be; but he is strong and cruel.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4, Spirit d6, Strength d12+2, Vigor d8

Skills: Climbing d6, Fighting d8, Intimidation d8, Notice d4, Stealth d4, Throwing d6.

Charisma: -2; **Pace:** 7; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 10(1)

Hindrances: All Thumbs, Clueless, Ugly.

Edges: Brute, Command (Brothers only), Sweep.

Gear: Crude club (Str+d8, Reach 2), furs (+1).

Special Abilities

• **Dirty Kicker:** Str+d4, Reach 2. Brac soon understood that his legs are as long as normal men are tall and can use them in fights to his advantage. He can make a free kick attack per round, without any multi-action penalty, which counts as a Shield Bash (SWD, page 75). He cannot use the kick and Sweep Edge in the same round.

• **Size +3:** Brac is twelve feet tall, as sturdy as a young tree (and almost as smart).



CAPTAIN VASKO

Captain Alder Vasko the Blackhound is the second son of a minor noble of the Borderlands, Lord Blackhound. Having no chance to inherit his father's manor, he joined the Fort soldiers, distinguishing himself by his skill and courage. He has a no-nonsense attitude his men respect.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d10, Healing d4, Intimidation d6, Knowledge (Battle) d6, Notice d6, Persuasion d6, Riding d6, Shooting 8, Throwing 8.

Charisma: +1; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 8/7; **Toughness:** 8(2)

Edges: Armor Use, Combat Reflexes, Command, Dodge, Fallen Noble (Blackhound shield), Nerves of Steel.

Hindrances: Heroic, Loyal.

Gear: Iron long sword (Str+d8), medium bronze armor (+2), bronze heavy helm (+3, head only), white shield with black hound emblem (+1 Parry, +2 Toughness vs ranged attacks), bow (damage: 2d6, range: 12/24/48, ROF: 1).

Special Abilities

• **Blackhound Shield:** Vasko left his family to find his fortune at the Fort, but he did it with his father's blessing. He proudly uses his family shield, emblazoned with the black hound emblem. The shield, so long as it is wielded by a member of the Vasko family, grants him the Nerves of Steel Edge and +1 to any Soak rolls. If Captain Vasko doesn't survive the adventure, taking the shield back to his family will be well-rewarded.



COMMANDER ASCANIUS

Commander Ascanius is a legend among the men of the Borderlands' forts. Of pure Borderland blood, he enlisted in the fort mercenaries, like many others, to earn a scrap of land as the Price of Blood. He quickly rose through the ranks, becoming Commander of a Fort at twenty-eight. Unlike other Fort commanders, who opted for a passive defense of the border, he was always ready to take the initiative, taking the war to the Northlanders on the other side of the Godaxe River. This made him many enemies, but also earned him the respect of the northern barbarians, who respect his courage. Seven years ago the Count of Felantium gave him command of Fort Miscenium, the most important strongpoint on the border. Ascanius recently married Gwynned, daughter of Kronn, an important Northlander clan chief, thus ensuring a fragile peace with the Northland clans near Fort Miscenium.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d10

Skills: Fighting d10, Knowledge (Battle) d10, Notice d8, Persuasion d6, Riding d8, Shooting d8, Throwing d6.

Charisma: +3; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 8; **Toughness:** 9(2)

Hindrances: One Eye.

Edges: Charismatic, Command, Leader of Men, Noble.

Gear: Iron long sword (Str+d8), iron dagger (Str+4, Range: 3/6/12), medium leather and bronze armor (+2), bronze helm (+2, head only), medium shield (+1 Parry, +2 Toughness vs ranged attacks), horse.

COMMONER

A common person. You can tweak the stats to represent a specific individual.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Fighting d4, Knowledge (specific trade) d6, Notice d4.

Charisma: +0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 5

Gear: Improvised weapon (Str+d4, -1 to Fighting rolls and Parry).



DOGSKULL THE WITCH

This beautiful woman is a four-century-old witch, who terrorized the whole North before being trapped in her own Cairn by a spell. She owes her name to the skull-like tattoos on her head, a common practice among the Cairnlander clans. A fairly weak sorceress, great part of her powers depends from the magical Cauldron she found somewhere in the far North. She had no hesitation in sacrificing her own people and her mentor, the shaman Drummer, to her dreams of power.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d10, Spirit d10, Strength d4, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d8, Intimidation d8, Knowledge (Arcana) d10, Notice d8, Persuasion d10, Sorcery d10, Stealth d8.

Charisma: +4; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 6

Edges: Arcane Background (Sorcery), Bikini Heroine, New Power (x2), Power Points (x4), Temptress (9 Power Points), Very Attractive.

Hindrances: Greedy, Vengeful.

Powers [30 PP]: *armor* (symbols of protection shimmering on her bikini), *barrier* (obnoxious fumes from the Cauldron form a fiery wall), *bolt* (ghastly wisps fly from the Cauldron to the targets), *boost/lower trait* (fumes from the cauldron), *fear* (howls come out of the cauldron), *stun* (acrid smoke from the Cauldron).

Gear: Bikini made of human bones (+0, see Notes on page 84), black cloak.

Special Abilities

- **Sharp Black Nails:** Str+d4. Retractable, require an action to be extended.
- **Slave of the Cauldron:** If the Cauldron is destroyed, Dogskull quickly ages and then dies.

DOGSKULL'S GUARDS

These large, furry humanoids have dog-like heads and are absolutely faithful to Dogskull. In truth they are Andreas (the white-furred one) and Hazir (the black-furred one), transformed and subjugated by the Cauldron's magic.

Dogskull's Guards are Henchmen.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d10, Vigor d8

Skills: Climbing d6, Fighting d10, Intimidation d8, Notice d6, Stealth d8.

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 8/7; **Toughness:** Andreas: 8 (1)/ Hazir: 9(2)

Gear (Andreas): Bone Cairnlander longsword (Str+d8), light half armor (+1), small shield (+1 Parry).

Gear (Hazir): Cairnlander bone tipped spear (Str+d6, +1 Parry, Reach 1, 2 hands), medium bone armor (+2).

Special Abilities

Claws: Str+d4.

Frenzy: Dogskull's Guards are ferocious creatures and can make two attacks per round, without any multi-action penalty.

Howl: The howl of this creature is terrorizing. It counts as Intimidation test of will affecting everybody in 2 x Spirit die type inches of the Guard.

Size +1: The Guards are bigger than a man.

DRACO

An old hunting dog, the favorite of Commander Ascanios, a survivor of many hunts and military campaigns. This has earned him the right to stay in the hall of the tower to sleep, and occasionally to grab a good mouthful of food or a juicy bone.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6 (A), Spirit d8, Strength d4, Vigor d6

Skills: Fighting d4, Notice d8, Tracking d10.

Pace: 5; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 4

Special Abilities

- **Almost Blind:** Draco is almost blind, suffering -4 to any sight based Notice roll. On the other hand his sense of smell is excellent, granting him +2 to any Notice and Tracking rolls based on smell.
- **Bite:** Str+1.
- **Old Dog:** Draco is very old and feeble, but still a good dog. His Vigor and Strength are reduced as is his Pace.
- **Sleeps with One Eye Open:** Like all old dogs, Draco slumbers through the day, but

always with his ears and nose open. He is always considered an active sentinel.

• **Size -1:** Draco is quite small.

FORT SOLDIER

Borderlands Fort soldiers are usually quite tough, because they have to serve a number of years to obtain a scrap of land, according to the Price of Blood law (see *Beasts and Barbarians Golden Edition*, page 37). These ones are a little softer, because the life at Fort Miscenium is easier than in other places, but still valuable men.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Fighting d6, Intimidation d6, Riding d6, Shooting 6, Throwing 6, Notice d4.

Charisma: +0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 6/5; **Toughness:** 7(2)

Edges: -.

Hindrances: Loyal.

Gear: Bronze long sword (Str+d8), medium leather and bronze armor (+2), bronze helm (+2, head only), medium shield (+1 Parry, +2 Toughness vs ranged attacks), bow (damage: 2d6, range: 12/24/48).

Special Abilities

• **Sergeant:** One Fort Soldier in every ten is a hardened veteran who has achieved the rank of sergeant. His Smarts is one die step higher and he has the Command Edge.

FORT VETERAN

This soldier is a grizzled veteran of Fort Miscenium, seasoned in many battles. Scarred and dressed in furs, a cloak and battered armor, he looks more barbaric than his regular counterparts, but he is reliable and loyal.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d8, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d8, Intimidation d6, Riding d6, Shooting 6, Throwing 6, Notice d6.

Charisma: +0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 7/6; **Toughness:** 8(2)

Edges: Combat Reflexes.

Hindrances: Loyal.

Gear: Bronze long sword or battle axe (Str+d8), medium leather and bronze armor (+2), bronze helm (+2, head only), fur cloak, medium shield (+1 Parry, +2 Toughness vs ranged attacks), bow (damage: 2d6, range: 12/24/48).

Special Abilities

• **Bowman:** One Fort Veteran in every three is an expert archer, with Shooting d8 and the Trained Thrower Edge.

• **Tracker:** One Fort Veteran in every ten is an expert ranger and tracker, skilled in the ways of the North. He has Tracking and Survival d8, plus the Woodsman Edge.

GRAY COYPU

Coypu are beaver-like aquatic mammals, common on the Godaxe River. They are usually quite peaceful, but the gray variant, which migrated centuries ago from the swamps of Tricarnia, is very different: skinny, with a raspy tail and a short bone crest protruding from the spine, it is a ferocious hunter, and, quite often carries rabies. They are particularly fond of underground, water-flooded environments like sewers, where they prosper.

They are very smart, for animals, and adopt pack tactics.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6(A), Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Fighting d6, Stealth d8, Swimming d10.

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 4

Special Abilities

• **Aquatic:** Gray Coypus are natural swimmers and move with the same swiftness both in and out of water.

• **Bite:** Str+d4.

• **Low Light Vision:** This beast is accustomed to living in darkness. It ignores penalties for Dim and Dark light.

• **Size -1:** Gray Coypus are between the size of a cat and a dog.

• **Stuck In!** Gray Coypus have long, frontal fangs, like those of beavers, and use them to stab prey savagely. Whenever a Gray Coypu hits a target with a raise, the fangs become stuck, automatically causing Str+d4 damage per round to the enemy until he frees himself, by winning an opposed Strength roll (the Coypu rolls with +2).



HAZIR

This tanned, black dressed man comes from far away land, the Red Desert. He and Andreas met many years ago, when serving as mercenaries in the Independent Cities, and since then they have been inseparable. Of the criminal duo, Hazir is surely the strong arm, while Andreas is the silver tongue: in fact you hardly ever hear more than a couple of words from the somber nomad, but he is more than ready to let his extremely sharp battle axe do the talking when the situation gets ugly.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d10, Vigor d10

Skills: Climbing d6, Fighting d10, Healing d6, Notice d6, Riding d8, Shooting d8, Survival d6, Stealth d8, Throwing d6.

Charisma: +0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 9(2)

Hindrances: Loyal (Andreas).

Edges: Improved Frenzy, One Hand and Half, Nerves of Steel, Trademark Weapon (boarding axe).

Gear: Razor-sharp iron boarding axe (Str+d8, AP 1), bone Kullah – Red Desert nomad dagger (Str+4+1, Range: 3/6/12), medium reinforced armor (+2), bow (Damage: 2d6, Range: 12/24/48), black clothing.



HORNED LORD

The Horned Lord is an enormous moose. Probably he and his mate both drank rain-water from the Warm Stone (see Book of Lore), causing a growth mutation, or maybe he is a Gara Onaga (see page 102). The Horned Lord is very old: the female died dozens of years ago and now the Horned Lord is alone, restlessly wandering in the north looking for a new companion that he'll never find. Northlanders consider him a sort of demigod and won't touch him.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6 (A), Spirit d12, Strength d12+3, Vigor d10

Skills: Fighting d6, Notice d6.

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 15(2)

Special abilities:

• **Armor +2:** The Horned Lord's patched fur is thicker than any leather.

• **Cursed Being:** The Horned Lord is a creature touched by the gods and his fate isn't for mortals. A hero killing the Horned Lord must make a Spirit roll (-4 if he is a Northlander) or he receives the Bad Luck Hindrance till he atones for his misdeed in some way (GM's decision).

• **Fearful:** Seeing the Horned Lord is impressive, he causes a Fear check.

• **Large:** Attackers have +2 to attack rolls against the Horned Lord due to his size.

• **Size +6:** The Horned Lord weighs 5,000 pounds and is twelve feet tall at the withers.

• **Trample:** Str+9. The Horned Lord can trample opponents simply by moving over them. The beast must run to use this at-

tack. Targets in the path of the Horned Lord must make an Agility roll opposed by the beast's Fighting roll or be trampled (Str+Size damage, d12+9).

•**Weakness (Emotions):** The Horned Lord is gifted with tremendous empathy. He suffers -2 to resist any emotion based Power, but, if he successfully resists one he becomes ferocious (as per the Berserk Edge).

•**Wretched Soul:** The Horned Lord's soul is filled with sorrow and his very presence has the capacity to amplify emotions. Any Power with an emotion based trapping, if cast in his presence has double range and duration.

HOWLER

A dog-like creature, but big as a pony. Its face is a nightmare of teeth and drool, but the golden eyes look extraordinarily human. Howlers are so called for the blood-freezing sound their inhuman throats produce. They are minions created from imprisoned souls by the sorcerous Cauldron of Dogskull. A great many of them were warriors of the Tomb Hounds, the clan of Dogskull, and their fur has markings similar to the ritual paintings of the clan.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d8, Intimidation d8, Notice d8, Stealth d6, Tracking d8.

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 7 (1)

Special Abilities

•**Armor +1:** Thick hide.

•**Bite:** Str+d6. Howlers have dagger-sharp teeth.

•**Fleet Footed:** Howlers are fast runners; they roll d8 instead of d6 when running.

•**Go to the Throat:** When a Howler hits with a raise on its Fighting roll, it hits the least armored spot on its target.

•**Howl:** The howl of this beast is terrorizing. It counts as an Intimidation test of will affecting everybody in 2 x Spirit die typeinches of the Howler. If multiple Howlers use this ability in the same action, they make a single cooperative roll.

•**Slave of the Cauldron:** When a Howler is killed its soul is trapped again in the Cauldron, this causes its body to burst into hellish flames very quickly, within 1d4 hours after death, leaving only charred bones behind. Likewise, if the Cauldron is destroyed, the Howlers automatically die, and this time their souls are freed forever.



JUNGLE AMBUSER

This beast, usually found in the jungles of the southern Dominions, somehow found its way into the channels under Fort Miskenium and found quite a comfortable environment. It looks like a large, round-shaped manta, with a series of suckers on its back and a carpet of microscopic needle-like tendrils on the other side. The preferred tactic of this skilled hunter consists of climbing up onto the ceiling (or up tall trees in the jungle) and dropping on its prey. Once it has enveloped its victim, the needle-like tendrils emit a powerful digestive juice which can kill almost any living creature. Even if the ambush fails, the Jungle Ambusher can be a great threat when on the ground, because its flat body is equipped with eight long tentacles, allowing it some mobility.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4 (A), Spirit d8, Strength d10, Vigor d6

Skills: Fighting d6, Stealth 10.

Pace: 3; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 8

Special Abilities

•**Crawler:** Jungle Ambushers have no proper legs, so they move at only half Pace and suffer -1 to Parry.

• **Drop Attack:** The favorite attack technique of the Ambusher consists of dropping on enemies from on high. Heroes under it are automatically hit and suffer the effects of Envelopment (see above) unless they make a successful Agility roll. The roll is at -4 unless the victim wins an opposed roll of their Notice vs. the monster's Stealth to spot it before it is too late.

• **Envelopment:** Creatures enveloped by the Ambusher are exposed to the terrible acid juices of the beast, which deal 2d6 damage per round until the victim manages to free himself from the monster (opposed Strength roll, the Ambusher rolls with +4), and clean himself in some manner (for example, diving into water). When there are enveloped victims, any 1 rolled on attacks against the Ambusher hit the victim instead (as per the Innocent Bystander rule). This applies both to ranged and melee attacks.

• **Multi-Tentacled Horror:** These creatures' bodies are equipped with tentacles, which they can use to move on the ground, or to fight. They can make up to four tentacle attacks per round, each dealing Str+d4 and with Reach 2. Victims hit with a raise are dragged under the beast and are considered Enveloped. Subtract one attack for each victim currently enveloped by the Ambusher.

• **Size +3:** Jungle Ambushers are of variable size. This specimen is big enough to cover a Medium Burst Template.

• **Weakness (Head):** The octopus-like head of the Ambusher is the only weak point of the creature. Positioned approximately in the center of the body, it can be hit with a Called Shot (-4). If it is hit, the Ambusher only has Toughness 4 and suffers +4 damages from impaling attacks.



MADDOC

Maddoc, son of Russ and Vesna, is a young Northlander boy of twelve. He has spent his whole life in the Vale of Pines, and now he is growing up he often thinks about the world outside. Maddoc is young, but he is brave and tough.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d4, Vigor d6

Skills: Climbing d6, Fighting d4, Notice d6, Survival d4, Stealth d4, Throwing d8.

Charisma: +0; Pace: 8; Parry: 4; Toughness: 5

Hindrances: Loyal, Stubborn, Young.

Edges: Brave, Fleet Footed.

Gear: Small knife (Str+d4, Improvised weapon), barbaric clothes.



OLD OAK

An age-old oak, in which ancient Cairnlander shamans trapped an angry (and hungry) spirit. It was dormant, but with the liberation of Dogskull it has partially emerged from its slumber, and now a single drop of blood is enough to awaken it.

Attributes: Agility d4, Smarts d6, Spirit d10, Strength d10, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d8.

Pace: -; Parry: 6; Toughness: 18 (4)

Special Abilities

• **Armor +4:** Thick bark.

• **Branches:** Str+d4. Reach 4. The Old Oak has four very long claw-like branches that it can use to attack (normal damage) or to grab an opponent (Grappling) and bring them to its mouth (see mouth below). Each branch attacks independently without any multi-action penalty. Branches can be targeted with a Called Shot (-2). They have Toughness 8 and a single Wound is enough to cut them away.

•**Demonic Construct:** The Old Oak is immune to poison and disease, and ignores Wound modifiers and called shots (apart from those linked to its weakness and to branches). It receives +2 to Toughness and to Spirit rolls to recover from Shaken. It is considered a Demon.

•**Mouth:** Str+d10. AP 4. The mouth of the Old Oak is a nightmare of teeth. Luckily, it is located on the trunk, and this means that the monster cannot use it freely. First it must grab a victim with a branch (during which no damage is inflicted). Only at this point can it crunch the tasty snack. When the mouth is empty it

can use the following Powers, with 20 Power Points, using Spirit as its arcane skill: *fear* (terrible shriek), *burst* (vomit black ichor), *stun* (whirlwind of dead leaves comes out of the mouth).

•**Size +6:** The Old Oak is big and imposing.

•**Weakness (Fire):** Despite being possessed by a demon, the Old Oak is made of dry wood so it burns easily: it suffers +4 damage from fire attacks and is considered a very flammable target.

•**Weakness (Glowing Sap Heart):** Within the mouth there is a pulsating green heart, the size of a human head. If this is

destroyed, the spirit within the oak is sent back to its dark realm, and all the plants of the Cairnlander Wood turn back to normal deadwood. It can be hit with a Called Shot (-4).

It has Toughness 5 and three Wounds. The Sap Heart can be targeted with ranged weapons, and by weapons with Reach 1 or more, without any problems, but shorter weapons require the attacker to actually enter the mouth (suffering a mouth attack as above).



OSSUARY GUARDIAN

This creature, born of the enchantments of Dogskull, has a long serpentine body made of bones, ending in the engraved head of some archaic canine being. Attached under the head there are a series

of long “tentacles” (actually, bone spines) ending in lethal sharp points, that the creature uses to attack.

It is a Right Hand.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d10, Vigor d6

Skills: Fighting d8, Intimidation d8.

Pace: 5; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 9

Special Abilities

•**Fear:** Seeing the Ossuary Guardian for the first time causes a Fear Check.

•**Feed on Bones:** If the Ossuary Guardian suffers a Wound (or is Incapacitated) while in the Ossuary, at the beginning of every round it is allowed a Spirit roll. In case of success it recovers the wound and can act normally. This ability works only while the skull is intact and in the Ossuary.

•**Hardy:** The Ossuary Guardian isn't wounded by a second Shaken result.

•**Size +2:** It is a serpentine being, seven yards long.

•**Tentacles of Bone:** The Ossuary Guardian has four tentacles ending in sharp points (Str+d4, Reach 4). It can do make to four attacks with them, without any multi-action penalty, but given its particular body construction, no one opponent can be attacked more than twice in a round.

•**Undead:** The Ossuary Guardian receives +2 to Toughness and to rolls to recover from Shaken. It is immune to poisons and disease, and ignores Wound modifiers.

•**Weakness (Skull):** The Guardian's power originates from its bewitched skull. A Called Shot (-4) is necessary to hit it and a successful blow is enough to detach it from the body and make it scatter 1d4" in a random direction (given the tall walls of the pit, it cannot finish the turn outside the Ossuary if this happens). While in the Ossuary the head has Toughness

10, outside the Ossuary it drops to 5. Shattering the skull causes the monster to be destroyed forever, while only detaching it from the body causes the old body to collapse, although a new one can be created in the next round thanks to the Feed on Bones ability.



PACK LEADER

This hulking humanoid is covered in white fur and has a nightmarish dog-like head. Feared and respected by the rest of the Howler pack, he leads them in battle with ferocity. In truth he is poor Russ, husband of Vesna, transformed into this twisted abomination by the magic of Dogskull's Cauldron. Despite everything, Russ' soul continues to live somewhere in this monstrous body and will do anything to prevent harm to his family and loved ones. Unlike the Howlers, when the Pack Leader is killed, Russ' soul is freed and doesn't return to the Cauldron.

Attributes: Agility d10, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d10, Vigor d10

Skills: Climbing d8, Fighting d10, Intimidation d10, Notice d8, Stealth d8.

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 8/7; **Toughness:** 9 (1)

Gear: Cairnlander bone tipped spear (Str+d6, +1 Parry, Reach 1, 2 hands), loin-cloth.

Special Abilities

•**Armor +1:** Thick fur.

•**Claws:** Str+d4.

•**Frenzy:** The Pack Leader is a ferocious creature and can make two attacks per round, without suffering a multi-action penalty.

•**Hardy:** Lesser wounds don't matter to this mighty beast. If the creature is Shaken a second Shaken effect doesn't cause a Wound.

•**Howl:** The howl of this creature is terrifying. It counts as an Intimidation test

of will affecting everybody in Spirit x2 inches.

• **Pack Leader:** The Pack Leader is respected by the other Howlers. He has the Command and Command Presence Edges, but only toward Howlers.

• **Size +1:** The Pack Leader is bigger than a man.



RIVER ASSASSIN

This specimen of Gray Coypu, for some unknown reason, has grown without any limits. Now it is as big as a horse, but much more dangerous. It has a double series of fangs, claws long as daggers, and a short bone crest on its back, thick as man's fist. It is omnivorous but in recent times has developed a taste for human meat.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4 (A), Spirit d6, Strength d12+1, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d8, Intimidation d8, Notice d6.

Pace: 7; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 11 (2)

Special Abilities

• **Armor +2:** Rubbery hide and layers of fat.

• **Claws:** Str+d4.

• **Curved Fangs:** Str+d6. AP 2.

• **Improved Frenzy:** The River Assassin can make two attacks per round, one with claws and the other with fangs, without any penalty.

• **Low Light Vision:** This beast is accustomed to life in darkness. It ignores penalties for Dim and Dark light.

• **Primeval Horror:** The sight of the River Assassin triggers some ancestral flight instinct in the human mind. Seeing it causes a Fear check.

• **Size +3:** The River assassin is ten feet long and weighs 500 pounds.

SWARM OF FLESH-EATING BEETLES

These hand-sized beetles, also called Death's Head Beetles for the peculiar white shape on their carapaces, are one of the major causes of cattle death in the North. Usually they live in tombs and old Cairns, and since these structures are quite common even in Norheim, it sometimes happens that beasts are brought to graze on them. The larvae of the beetles are then ingested, and in few weeks develop internally, devouring the poor host from the inside. If disturbed they are very aggressive, attacking even human beings.

Swarms are treated as one creature. They cover an area equal to a large Burst Template and attack everyone within it every round. When a Swarm is wounded, its size decreases to a Medium Burst Template on the first hit, and a Small one on the third (see the Split Special Ability for smaller Swarms). A further hit disperses it.

• **Attributes:** Agility d10, Smarts d4 (A), Spirit d12, Strength d8, Vigor d10

• **Skills:** Notice d6.

• **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 7

Special Abilities

• **Bite:** The beetles are ravening beasts, hitting automatically with their tiny fangs causing 2d4 damage to everyone in the template. The damage is applied to the least armored location (victims in completely sealed suits are immune).

• **Split:** This swarm is clever enough to split into two smaller flocks (Small Burst Templates) should its foes split up. The Toughness of the smaller flocks is lowered by -2 (to 7 each) and their Agility is lowered by a die step.

• **Swarm:** Parry +2; since the flock includes dozens of creatures, cutting and piercing

weapons only deal half damage. Area-effect weapons work normally.

TOMB VAMPIRE

A giant bat, as big as a large dog and with a wingspan of eight feet. It is a blood-sucker (hence the long teeth) typical of the Cairns, its favored technique being to kill prey with its razor sharp talons before feeding on the dead body.

It is considered a Novice creature for the purposes of the *summon ally* Power.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6 (A), Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Fighting d8, Notice d6, Stealth d6.

Pace: 4; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 5

Special Abilities

•**Bloodsucker:** A Tomb Vampire has powerful canines. If it rolls a raise on a Fighting attack, it embeds these teeth in the victim's neck and starts sucking! The victim suffers Str+d8 damage (armor doesn't protect) until he breaks free by winning an opposed Strength roll (the Vampire rolls with +2).

•**Fly:** A Tomb Vampire flies with Pace 6 and Climb 1, it cannot run.

•**Talons:** Str+d4.

practicing. This is fortunate, because only her skill at archery saved her family from the Howlers' rage.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Climbing d4, Fighting d4, Healing d8, Notice d8, Shooting d10, Stealth d4, Survival d6.

Charisma: +0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 5

Hindrances: Loyal.

Edges: Marksman.

Gear: Father's bow (Damage: 2d6, Range: 12/24/48), bronze knife (Str+d4), Northlander gown.

Special Abilities

•**Lioness and Cubs:** Vesna is a peaceful soul, but she is ready to do whatever it takes to save her sons and husband. When her family is directly threatened, she receives +2 to any Spirit roll.



VESNA

Vesna, wife of Russ, is a Northlander woman in her thirties. She has lost part of her youthful slenderness after bearing five sons, but she has kept her copper red hair and a certain mature beauty. Vesna was the heir of Vestvan Stead, but Russ, her husband, married her for love, not for her possessions. Vesna's father was very proud of his daughter, in particular of her skill with the bow: years ago, young Vesna killed a bear thirty paces away with an arrow and from that day she has never quit

APPENDIX I – PLACES OF INTEREST

FORT MISCENIUM

Government: Governorship (ruled by a military commander in name of the Count of Felantium)

Ruler: Commander Ascanius

Population: 3000

Military Forces: 150 Borderland Soldiers (80 Medium Infantry, 30 Medium Cavalry, 30 Rangers, 10 Artillerists)

Religion: Divine Couple, a Northeim minority still worship the Lord of Thunder

Imports: Salt and luxuries.

Exports: Timber, smoked fish, Northeim furs.

General Description: Fort Miscenium was the first fortification built by the Empire on the Godaxe River in days of yore. Over the years, thanks to its favorable position, a town was built around the fort, with a new set of walls. The Godaxe River is quite large and deep in this region, and this makes Fort Miscenium a good port for the ships and barges sailing up and down the river.

Fort Miscenium supports a strong garrison of Borderland Soldiers, ruled by a Commander, who in theory has control over the other forts of the line, even if his

real power extends only as far as his cavalrymen can reach in few days' hard riding.

The Fort suffered its last direct attack twenty-eight years ago (2482 AF), during the Winter of Wolves, when the river froze and a large horde of Northeim ravagers came down to seize it and swarm south into the Borderlands.

Luckily the defenses held, if barely, and the barbarians were repelled.

In the last few years the area around Fort Miscenium has enjoyed relative peace: Commander Ascanius has adopted the tactic of assaulting the Northlander clans beyond the river before they can become a real threat, and this has gained him the reputation of a tough warrior, respected even by his enemies.

A year ago he married Gwynedd, daughter of Kronn, a powerful Northeim clan lord, establishing a fragile peace on both sides of the River.

The Northern Trail. Fort Miscenium marks the beginning of the Northern Trail, a trade route crossing Northeim, the Cairnlands and even Valkheim, all overland. It is a dangerous but very profitable path. For this reason, Northeim is a good place for mercenaries and caravan guards looking for employment. If you are using the Merchants of Jalizar rules (see *Jalizar*,



City of Thieves, page 92) and the heroes are trading goods on both sides of the line, if they score a success or better on the Streetwise roll they draw an additional card from the Action Deck.

IMPORTANT LOCATIONS

Here follows a brief list of the most important locations of Fort Miscenium.

Battlements and Walls. The fortifications around the town are made of solid stone, unlike the normal Godaxe River forts. In

particular, the sections facing the river are very sturdy and are defended by a number of catapults and ballistae, kept in good shape by the Fort's artillerists. During the assault of the Winter of Wolves, it was only thanks to these defenses that the Fort resisted. The docks are the only part of the Town not protected by the walls.

Borgan's Smithy. Borgan is a Northlander refugee who left his clan a dozen years ago for unknown reasons. He lost an arm in battle, but the remaining one is enough to make him a very good smith, his craftsmanship highly prized by mercenaries and

soldiers alike. He has a number of apprentices, and likes bullying them.

Docks. The docks of Fort Miscenium are large enough to host five ships of medium size at the same time, plus a number of fishing boats. A ferry allows travelers to cross the river and reach the Last Tankard Inn (see below).

Fur Market. The central plaza of the Fort, it is the traditional place where hunters sell the precious furs from the other side of the river to the merchants of the south, but you can find almost any type of goods there.

Inner Fort. The original nucleus of the settlement, this is a sturdy square fortification, built using the structure typical of Imperial encampments. Now surrounded by the town, it serves as a barracks, a prison, and the residence of the Fort Commander.

Last Tankard Inn. This inn and caravanserai is built on the northern side of the river, and represents the real start (or end) of the Northern Trail. It is also the last (or first) place where you can wet your throat before facing the savage North, and almost every traveler quaffs a good one before hitting the road, because there is a superstition that if you drink at the Last Tankard, you'll come back alive to drink there again. This is a belief that Tazzar, the

innkeeper, is more than happy to encourage. Passage across the river is made by a regular ferry service or hiring a local fisherman. In times of war with the Northlander clans, the Last Tankard Inn has been razed and burned a number of times, but it is always rebuilt, because it is a very profitable place.

Ramona's House. The last bawdy house before the Northern Trail and the savage lands, it is run by Ramona, a soft, dark-skinned woman of matronly appearance, who, despite her appearance, is more than capable of dealing with drunkards and other troublemakers.

Syranthian Watermill. At the height of the Empire, one of the Emperors, Domestian III the Farmer, dreamed of making the Borderlands the granary of the northern part of the Empire. Large farms were constructed, which today don't exist anymore, and he ordered the construction of a great mill, which would have served the entire region. Sages came from far-away Syranthia to build it, creating a marvel of hydraulics and engineering. Today the Watermill isn't used anymore, but it is enclosed in the city walls and is considered a sort of symbol of the town. The millwheel still turns and the clockwork mechanism rumbles, but nobody really knows how to use it.

APPENDIX 2 – ARMORY OF THE NORTH

The North is a savage place, and its dwellers are fierce, if brutish, warriors. This appendix introduces some new weapons and items typical of the North. They are Rare outside Norheim and the Cairnlands.

MELEE WEAPONS TABLE

TYPE	DAMAGE	WEIGHT	COST	NOTES
BLADES				
Moon Sickle	Str+d4	2	400	See Notes
POLEARMS				
Scythed Double Spear	Str+d8	4	300	Reach 1, 2 hands, +1 Parry, counts as two separate weapons for multi-attack purposes

AMMUNITION TABLE

AMMO	WEIGHT	COST	NOTES
Brainstones	1/3	Special	See Notes

ARMOR TABLE

TYPE	ARMOR	WEIGHT	COST	NOTES
Human Bone Armor	-1	-10%	+25%	See Notes, Cairnlander only, Rare.

MUNDANE ITEMS TABLE

ITEM	WEIGHT	COST	NOTES
War Horn	4	300	See Notes
SPECIAL			
Smithy	-	900/100	See Notes

ITEMS DESCRIPTIONS

Brainstones. Also known as “tathlums” these sling bullets are irregular earthenware globes cooked in bone fires. Brainstones are cursed weapons, because they are made by mixing together clay and the brains of fallen enemies. These items aren’t sold: they are made by the warrior using them, or, in rare cases, found in some treasure stash. Despite coming from the Cairnlands, they are fairly well known in Northeim too. To make a Brainstone the warrior must mix clay and the brains of a powerful enemy (he must be a Henchman, Right Hand or Wild Card) and cook it over a fire till it becomes a hard stone (usually a full night of cooking is required). Then he must make a Spirit roll (-2 for a Northeim character). In case of failure the Brainstones created are simple sling stones. In case of success he obtains a real Brainstone (three with a raise). Any enemy hit by a Brainstone must make a Spirit (-2) roll before suffering any damage or he is Shaken. Such is the power of the Brainstone. After the first use the cursed item shatters. The materials for making Brainstones, apart from the brain, are 5 Moons’ worth of clay and other supplies, but this cost can be ignored with a successful Survival roll. Usually Brainstones are fired from slings, but it isn’t uncommon to throw them by hand, like normal stones (Damage: Str+d4, Range: 3/6/12, ROF: 1). Only Northlanders and Cairnlanders know how to make Brainstones.

Human Bone Armor. Only the Cairnlanders are so barbarous as to use the bones of other persons to craft armor. Any type of armor can be made of human bones (even if, for heavier types of armors, they are mixed with metal or other materials). Human bone, despite what one might think, is fairly weak, so human bone

armor protects one point of armor less than standard armor of the same type (so light human bone armor grants +0 Armor, medium +1 and heavy +2). On the plus side, human bone armor is very spooky, and grants +2 to any Intimidation rolls toward other humanoids. In addition, for sorcerers, it has another use: any time the spellcaster uses a Power with a trapping related to death or the undead, he inflicts +1 damage and receives +2 to opposed rolls. On the bad side, suffering, vengeful spirits live in these bones, and they are ready to take their vengeance on the user. Any time the sorcerer rolls a critical failure on a Sorcery roll while wearing this armor he cannot spend a Bennie to reroll it, as per the Critical Failures Setting Rule (see SWD page 94). Light Human Bone Armor (+0) allows using the Loincloth Hero/Bikini Heroine Edge.

Moon Sickle. Wise Men of the North know something that other Lotusmasters, even the Alchemists of Gis, don’t know or have decided to ignore: plants, Lotus included, hate metals, in particular bronze and iron, so when harvested with such an implement they lose a good part of their power. So, many Lotusmasters use special blades made of bone or of pure metals, silver and gold, which are consecrated through long rituals on nights of the full moon and smeared with exotic Lotus powders. These blades, called Moon Sickles, can harvest the Lotus without damaging it, thus granting the alchemist better components. In game terms, a Lotusmaster with such a tool gains +1 Power Point/Rank (to a maximum of +5 at Legendary). Moon Sickles must be kept pure: if they touch blood, human or animal alike, they lose their power. This prevents the use of such an implement in combat.

Black Moon Sickle. There are rumours that a Moon Sickle can be transformed into a tool of corruption, used by Lotusmasters with nefarious interests, by the following ritual: a normal Moon Sickle must be taken, and then it must be used to carve out the heart of a human being. The organ must be then squeezed over the blade, tainting it forever. At this point the Lotusmaster must make a Spirit (-4) roll. In case of failure the sickle becomes useless, with a success or more it loses the powers of a Moon Sickle but becomes a Black Moon Sickle, which grants +1 to any Lotusmastery roll on the *poison* Power, or +2 if the Sickle itself is used to inject the poison. Black Moon Sickles aren't sold: they are found in ancient Cairns or must be created by a black-hearted Lotusmaster.

A character can benefit from the effects of only one sickle at a time.

Scythed Double Spear. The origins of this weapon are probably among the Ancestors, the forefathers of the Cairnlanders, because the best exemplars of this weapon are found in age-old Cairns. The weapon consists of a wooden or bone (rarely metal) shaft ending in two scythed blades, one on each end. The double spear is used with a staff-fighting technique, more than a classical spear approach, and can strike with both ends. For this reason it counts as two separate Str+d8 weapons and the user can make a main hand and an off-hand attack as per the standard rules. Unlike staves, even while making two attacks the user receives +1 Parry. They are typical of the Cairnlands. The cost listed in the table refers to a bone weapon. Multiply the cost accordingly to the Golden Edition guidelines for a metal version.

Smithy. A fully equipped smithy, including forge, anvil, tools and everything you need

to forge metal items. Without a Smithy you cannot craft weapons greater than Str+d4 or armor heavier than Light (+1). The first cost refers to buying it, while the second is the cost to rent it for ten days.

War Horn. Northlanders are masters of crafting war horns. Carved from the horns and bones of animals, they are used in battle to direct and encourage friends and to scare enemies. Tradition demands that a man should kill the beast from which the horn is made himself, and then craft it with his own hands, but this isn't absolutely necessary.

In game terms, the horn is a very useful tool, and can be used for three different purposes. All of them require the exclusive attention of the character, so no other action is possible in the same round (but the hero can move with his normal pace).

First, it can be used to enhance the efficacy of orders. The horn blower must make a Vigor roll: for each success and raise he increases his Command Radius, or the Command Radius of a friendly commander within 3" of him, by 50%. The effect lasts until the horn blower is dealt a Joker or a Deuce from the Action Deck.

Second, the horn can be used to encourage disheartened allies. The horn blower must make a Spirit (-2) roll. Until his next action, any friend in Command Radius receives +1 to Spirit rolls.

Third, the horn can be used to make Tests of Will at a distance. Before making the Test of Will, make a Strength roll (this doesn't count as an action). If the blower scores a success, the Test of Will affects any enemy target (friends are immune) in a Medium Burst Template centered on the blower; with a raise, the template is Large.

BOOK OF LORE: NORTHEIM

This section expands the background information about Northeim found in *Beasts & Barbarians Golden Edition*. The greater part of it is for the Game Master, but various pieces of information can be shared with players, especially those playing characters of Northlander origin.

GEOGRAPHY

AN UNCHARTED LAND

Imperials usually define Northeim as all the lands beyond the Godaxe River, as far as the Cairnlands in the north-east and Caledland to the west. An impenetrable land, it is for the most part unexplored and uncharted. Valleys, ravines, deep woods and thunderous rivers are all part of this wild landscape, as are tall mountains and dangerous, shadow-infested hills. This also means that the size of the Northlands as depicted on maps isn't accurate at all: probably they are far larger than depicted on Justinus' sketches.

TRACES OF CIVILIZATION...

It is true that a man could walk for weeks in the Northeim forests without meeting another human being. But it is also true that Northlander villages and steads, and

even some still-inhabited Cairns dot the land, if you know how to find them. With the exception of the Northern Trail (see current adventure), there aren't any real roads in the Northlands, and people usually follows trails and passages used by animals or follows natural features, as rivers' beds.

This doesn't mean that in the past civilized races didn't try to subjugate the savage North: Imperials did, and Tricarnians too. All over the country, especially near the borders, ancient forts, towers and even stretches of Imperial road can be found, but they are almost all abandoned and overgrown by plants, or became the dens of marauders or even worse things.

"The North doesn't forgive," is the common saying, and any civilized traveler willing to walk in these savage lands should keep it well in mind.

...AND FOOTPRINTS OF GIANTS

Northeim is also called the Land of Giants; this refers to the fact that the dwellers are one of the biggest and physically mightiest races of the Dominions. In truth, the origin of this name is subtler: in the remote era when the Dread Star fell, the dusts flowing north found a natural barrier in the Troll Mountains and recoiled, precipitating in the Northlands. So

monsters and hideous, mutated creatures are more common in this land. The Syranthian sages say that this is probably the origin of the Nandals, being men corrupted by the Dread Star dust, and also this explains the presence of many giant-sized creatures in the North, like the peaceful moose, the brown bear and the Northern wolves (see Fauna below) as well as many other monstrous beings living hidden in unpopulated valleys or under the rocks of tree-shaded rivers.

PLACES OF INTEREST

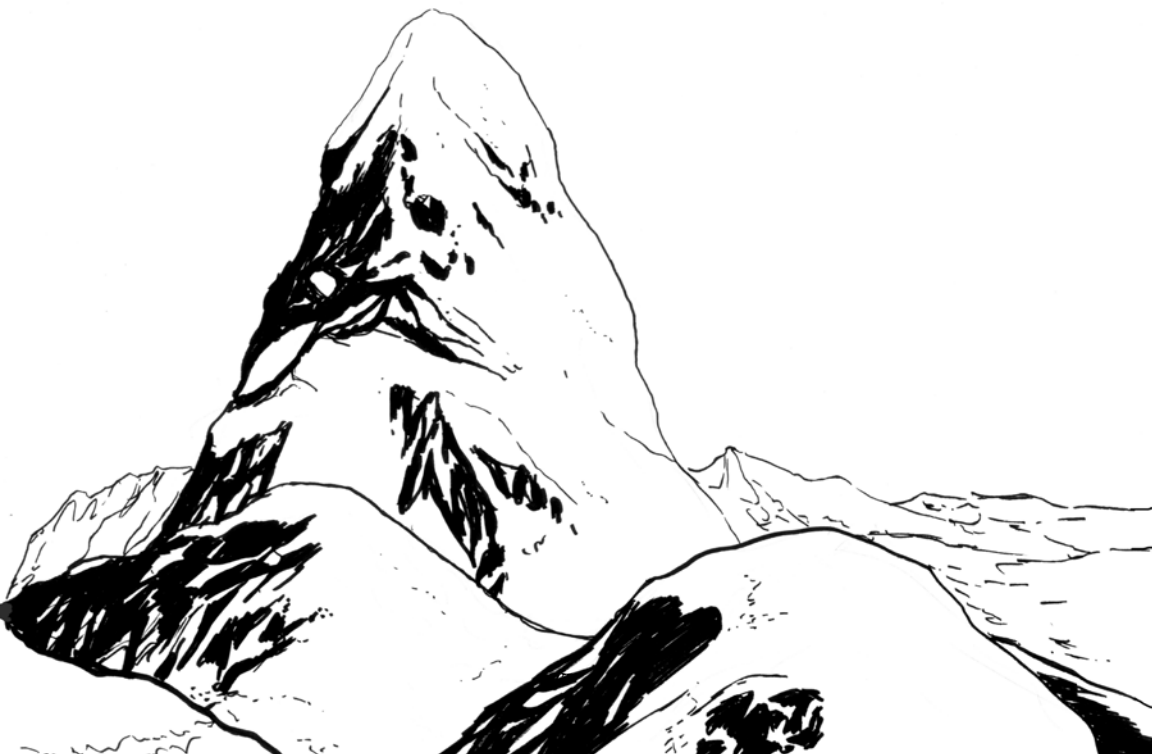
As explained above, Northeim is very large and uncharted, so an exhaustive description of all the geographical areas and regions is impossible. Instead, the focus is on several well defined areas, well-known from travelers' tales, that could be useful to stage adventures. The Game Master is encouraged to add other places as he sees fit.

AXE LANDS

"The axe's edge is always sharp," is a common saying among the Borderlands soldiers watching the Forts, meaning that the border area between the Borderlands and Northeim is always a very dangerous and tense region.

In the past, the region was quite heavily populated, and there are remains of both Imperial and Northeim settlements, but, given the bloodshed by both sides they are now only empty shells. The barbarian clans retreated north, and only come down periodically to try to break the Forts' line and swarm down into the southern countries.

Geographically, this area is very variegated, from the dense woods of the west, to the grassy plains of the east and the tall cliffs of central Northeim; the only common feature is the Godaxe River, flowing through the whole region. Quite large, even if not as big as the Elephants' River, it



THE WARM STONE

The existence of the Warm Stone is debated by drunken warriors in the long winter nights, but very few are the men who can say they have seen it with their own eyes.

Somewhere in the Brac Mountains there is a large flat, piece of stone, which is permanently tepid. The stone glows faintly by night. Stories say that it is a chunk of the original Dread Star, and that it has great powers. It is considered holy by the barbarians of the Brac Mountains, who have a harsh tradition: when an unwanted child is born (or found), they place it on the Warm Stone and leave it exposed for three days and nights. If after this time the infant isn't eaten by wild beasts and doesn't die from his privations, he is taken back and raised by the whole clan. Many of the babies strong and lucky enough to survive their night on the stone develop strange features, called Gifts of the Stone: the commonest one is growing bigger and bigger, becoming a true giant, but there are others not so good, like extremely virulent illnesses appearing later in life. The Brac Clan is obsessively protective of the Warm Stone and keeps its exact location secret. Any non-clan member found near the Stone is automatically killed.

The mutating powers of the Stone aren't only limited to babies exposed to it, but are also passed down to beasts and plants: over the stone, in fact, there is a small spring, whose water falls directly onto the stone, and runs off in a small creek. Beasts drinking it (but not people) develop strange features like the babies exposed on the Stone.

The Warm Stone in the Game: To add the effects of the Warm Stone to a creature you can simply add the Monstrous Ability Size +2, or alternatively draw a card from the Action Deck and apply the results of the Abominable Creatures of the Lotus Table (see *Beasts & Barbarians Golden Edition*, page 173).

is navigable for much of its course. Despite it being fed by many tributaries, mostly seasonal creeks which make it tumultuous and strong in spring, the main source of the river is located on a remote peak in the heart of the western Troll Mountains. There is a story about the source of the river, saying that it comes out from the open gates of a mountain fortress, built ages before men walked the earth. This fabulous place is called the Palace of the Lord of Thunder, because stories say that whoever goes there will be unerringly struck down by lightning. There must be some element of truth in these legends, because none of the various expeditions and bold heroes who dared climb that mountain ever came back.

BRAC MOUNTAINS

The Brac Mountains are the nearest mountain range to the Godaxe River. Situated more or less in the center of the Northeim, they are savage and quite barren, but luckily not very high. Justinus of Syranthia, when visiting these mountains, said they are old and worn, probably dating to before the fall of the Dread Star. Very few plants grow on the Bracs: brambles, some very tough evergreens, and the Rose of Calland, a small highly perfumed flower which Northeim girls use to perfume their bodies before their wedding night. The Bracs owe their name to the famous Brac son of Brac, a legendary Northeim warrior. Stories say that he was seven yards tall, that he could kill a Troll by punching it in the head, and that he rode to battle in a chariot pulled by twenty goats. The last is surely an exaggeration, but it is true that the Brac Mountains and their surroundings are a place of giant beings, probably because of the effects of the Warm Stone (see sidebar on page 88).



Today Brac's clan still exists, but has fallen into a state of almost total barbarism due to the effects of their impure blood, mixed with that of the Nandals and tainted by the Warm Stone.

MOUNTAIN OF FIRE

The Mountain of Fire is one of the most distinctive features of Northeim. An active volcano, it stands among the snow-covered peaks, and the puffs of black smoke coming out from its top can be seen from dozens of miles away. The Mountain of Fire often doesn't erupt for years, but in its innards there is an ever-burning fire, the hottest and most terrible of the known Dominions. This is the reason why, many years ago, a surviving branch of the cult of Hulian built the so-called Monastery of Hammer on it. Smiths and warriors, after some years of war these reclusive priests are now a power in the region, and many are the Northeimer clans that seek their counsel and send their most skilled youths to be taught the art of metalworking. The priests are willing to share at least the basics of their knowledge, but there are stories of a secret forge built right inside the volcano, where the Sons of Hulian are trying to create steel, as they did in the past! The access to this *sanctum sanctorum* is forbidden to any non-member of the cult, but even without this secret knowledge, a smith trained in the Monastery is highly prized and automatically considered a noble by his clan.

But the Mountain of Fire didn't always belong to the Monastery: the mountains nearby are the ancestral home of many Nandal clans, and, in their veneration of fire, they consider the volcano Nag, which in their guttural tongue means, Father of Fire, the holiest of their holy places. Periodically they try to assault the Monastery

to wipe out the invaders, and in recent years only the joint efforts of the priests of Hulian and their allied Northlander clans have managed to drive back the brutish hordes.

FOREST OF WHISPERS

In the middle of Northeim there is a vast forested area, called the Forest of Whispers, as thick and dark as the southern jungles. It is populated mainly by deciduous plants; this is strange, because the commonest trees in Northeim are conifers. But this isn't the strangest thing about the Forest of Whispers: sages say that this wood was originally part of the Caledlands (so explaining the different types of plants), and within its borders strange things happen. People hear voices and sounds that seem to come from nowhere, and more than one person has been lost under the shady trees, to be never seen again.

For example, there is the story of the Forty Seventh Phalanx, also called the Obsidian Army because it was entirely composed of dark skinned volunteers from Kyros, which entered the Forest to capture Gonnar the Bald and his band of Northlander warriors, and never came back out. This event dates back to 2199 AF, during the height of the Empire, but the story still circulates today. Some of the few travelers daring enough to cross the Forest report hearing the sounds of military horns, and sightings of strange black-skinned figures, dressed in ancient armor, briefly appearing during the night.

The greater part of the Northlander clans living near the Forest believe that inside its borders dwell the Gara Onaga, a race of woodland spirits, which enjoy tricking and beguiling men so foolish as to

cross their borders. Northlanders crossing the wood usually make sacrifices to appease them, because their power is strong enough to doom a man or a woman forever. Old wives love to tell the story of Wynna the Blonde, a shepherdess who incautiously entered the wood to find a lost lamb, and who, on returning to her village, was stoned to death by her own mother, because her hair had turned completely black and her face was now so ugly that she was taken for a monster.

This should be enough for any wise man to stay well away from the Forest, and in fact it is, apart from a single group: Lotusmasters. On the moss-covered branches of these trees grow strange, exotic types of Lotus found only in the north, and this sometimes lures practitioners of the Art or their envoys inside to gather such treasures. As can be easily imagined, very few of them come back.

SKULLBROKEN HILLS

Far to the north-east there is a range of strange, rocky hills: they are called the Skullbroken Hills, because of the thin layer of whitish lichen covering them. Very few living beings roam among the thorny bushes and the sparse, stiff, grass, but they aren't the main threat in this place: the real danger consists of the dark, desiccated things coming out from inside the hills during the night, because many of those hills are in fact ancient Cairns.

There are also rumours of a clan of Cairnlander cannibals dwelling in these hills. They are called Heartrippers, because they kill people to cut out and eat their hearts, but there have been no confirmed sightings of them: only the bodies of their unfortunate victims are found, thrown away, on the borders of the hills.

Usually the Skullbroken Hills are wind-swept, but sometimes a sudden, thick fog comes out of nowhere, that can extend its tendrils far away from the hills. A Jalizaran merchant who saw this said that it is even thicker and smellier than the fog in the City of Thieves, but old Northlanders hearing these words usually stay silent, because they know the true nature of this fog: it is smoke coming out of the chimneys of some Cairn, where the creatures living inside burn unmentionable things.

There is an ancient paved road crossing the Hills, of unknown origin, called the Safe Way, dotted with old piles of skulls and bones, which can take you straight to the Cairnlands. Stories say that if a man stays upon it, no power of the tombs can touch him, but the evils lurking in the hills are sly enough to lure people off the road, so the majority of the merchants directed to the Cairnlands prefer to stay on the Northern Trail, preferring to travel a longer route than risk their lives on the Safe Way.

BEASTS AND PLANTS

FLORA

The savage North is full of plants of many types. The most common trees are evergreens, in particular conifers, but in several areas the woods are mixed with deciduous trees, the commonest ones being oaks, chestnuts and maples. In the hearts of ancient woods can also be found very old trees, called Old Giants, or Trees of the Thunder Lord. They look like deciduous plants, but are enormous, some of them as big as houses, with large leaves and smooth, almost silver bark, but they are always covered in leaves, even in the depths of winter. The sap of these plants is

HERO'S JOURNAL: LOTUS OF THE NORTH

Mistletoe Lotus. *This parasitic plant grows on the taller branches of trees. To find it, a Lotusmastery (-2) roll is required (another -2 if the Lotusmaster isn't originally from Northeim). For each success and raise, a dose of Mistletoe Lotus is found. Then the hard part begins. Someone must climb up the tree and cut it off. Draw a card from the Action Deck: if it is a face card, two Climbing rolls are required to reach the Lotus, if it is a number, only one roll is necessary. Then consider the color: if it is black rolls are made at -2. In the case of failure, the would-be gatherer suffers 2d6 damage from falling. If a Joker is dealt, the Lotus is in a very dangerous place, add another Climbing roll and a further -2 to all the rolls, but double the number of doses. Mistletoe Lotus is highly sought-after because it has strong curative powers: a dose counts as Refined Lotus and, if used for a healing or boost/lower trait (any physical trait) it grants +2 to the roll. Mistletoe Lotus is Rare and usually sold at 200 Moons/dose.*

as red and thick as blood, and it is said that it can cure any illness. During the height of the Empire, the priests of Hulian had them cut down and burned, because they were sacred to another god.

Mushrooms are also abundant in the northern woods. Some of them, like the thick and tasty Brawny Pig, are commonly eaten, while others, such as the Black Mushroom, are very rare and highly sought-after by magicians, because they have wonderful effects on their powers. Among the poisonous ones, the small, greenish, King's Dagger is one of the most common, but the most important thing any mushroom seeker must pay attention

to are the Circles of Mushrooms: mushrooms of many types appear in large rings. Northlanders think that they are inhabited by evil Gara Onaga, which can rob a man of his soul.

Wild berries are also quite common: straw berries and blue berries are abundant in spring and summer, big and sweet as a maiden's kiss. And the girls, in particular, look around the river banks because there can be found the legendary Shalanna's Berry, a particular white berry: the juice of this fruit, if smeared on lips, can make whoever you kiss fall in love with you.

Outside the woods, among the hills and in the grasslands, grow several herbs, most of them short-lived due to the intense cold of winter. The Purple Crocus, for example, is excellent to flavor food, while the little white flower called the Gara Bell, can be dangerous: stories say that they mark the places where the Gara Onaga dwell.

Lotus also exists in several varieties, the most famous one being the Mistletoe Lotus, usually growing on the branches of oaks (see sidebar).

Northlanders aren't great farmers, but they harvest wild wheat and plant some domestic strains, as well as cabbages and wild potatoes. In addition they tend small orchards of apples, preserved for the winter and used for brewing cider. During the cold winter they eat turnips, leeks and chestnuts gathered in autumn.

FAUNA

The North is wild, and full of savage beasts. A fact that the Sages of Syranthia noticed in their trip north is the generally bigger sizes animals reach in Northeim.

Deer, stags, even rabbits are somewhat larger than their southerner counterparts. Northlanders usually shrug at this affirmation and say that the Lord of Thunder makes them bigger because the north is the land of the strong ones. In truth, the explanation can probably be found in the Dread Star dust (see above).

Among the beasts typical of such countries, the Northern Wolves are probably the most feared: these canines aren't just bigger here than anywhere else in the Dominions, but they are also smarter and with a thicker coat.

Tomb Hounds, instead, are a totally different species: similar to Jackals, these beasts were probably introduced into the North by the Cairnlanders' Ancestors. After the disappearance of that mysterious empire, some clans of tomb dwellers continued to tame them, but for the most part they became wild, infesting the Cairns and hills of their former masters. Their grayish fur is shorter than that of wolves, and they are somewhat smaller, but they are very fast and if they smell blood they became absolutely enraged.

In the forests, you must keep an eye out for the Black Bear or Northern Bear. This fellow is almost as big as his cousins in the Caledlands, but far more ferocious. An enraged Northern Bear can easily tear down a tree with the strength of his paws, and in hot summers, when sometimes there are outbreaks of rabies among the animals, you must watch out for ones with frothing mouths, because, driven mad by the malady, they will attack anything in sight.

Bears can be dangerous, but they are only beasts. You should be really frightened when you find regular long scratches on the bark of trees, in two sets of three, because this

means that the fearful Bone Eater is nearby. Bone Eaters are similar to bipedal bears, but they are smaller (usually from ten to twelve feet tall), with pale fur, round black eyes, and a triangular face. They have long retractable claws and are vicious hunters, gifted with an almost human-like cunning. They are so-called because after killing a victim they immediately break open the bones and eat the marrow, burying the carcass somewhere as a food supply. They eat almost anything, but are especially fond of human meat. A single Bone Eater can easily take down an entire stead: first, it ambushes the family's hunters; then, it waits for rescue parties to come looking for the missing relatives and finally, when only women and infants remain in the stead, it storms inside to feast upon them. Stories say the Bone Eaters were once humans, who resorted to cannibalism during very hard winters, and for this sin they were cursed by gods; but this is an unconfirmed legend.

The rivers of the North are also full of life: beavers and coypu, trout and other river fish abound, but the most common is the Black Salmon, so called for the dark color of its scales, which can grow up to three yards long, and whose flesh is tasty and appreciated in all the northern Dominions. Salmon stay in the Drowned King Sea in winter, and only in summer do they go up the Godaxe River and other creeks, driven by some ancestral instinct.

The last type of beast to which travelers should pay heed in the north, surprisingly, is snakes. In the depths of the woods lives the extremely rare, but dangerous, Brachan, a brown-scaled constrictor up to twelve yards long, usually active only in summer.

In winter or in very cold places such as in glaciers you must fear the presence of the

White Hunter, an enormous, furry snake, with hypnotic eyes which it uses to paralyze its victims to kill them with greater ease. The many legends of dragons in Northeim probably derive from this abomination.

POPULATION

Northeim is inhabited by a mixed population of Northlanders and a minority of Cairnlanders, but, given the complexity of the latter culture, it is left aside for a future supplement, keeping the focus of this Book of Lore on the real owners of the land.

PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Northlanders are very big, almost as tall as the Ivory Savannah tribesmen, but far bulkier and stronger. They have a fair complexion and hair of various colors: black and brown are the commonest, but redheads aren't uncommon, while in the northernmost clans blonde is also present.

As explained in the core rulebook, Northlanders dress in furs and roughly-woven wool. Northlander men usually dress in a loincloth, a pair of trousers or a simple tunic, even in winter. They think that real men must face the adversity of the climate, not hide themselves in

layers of clothes as the decadent southerners do. Some of them, nevertheless, smear themselves with animal fat.

Despite this disdain for clothing, they are vain, and like jewelry, usually bracers and necklaces. Among the more civilized tribes the clan cloak, made with squares of wool of different colors, is also quite common.

Women tend to be more modest than their male counterparts: they wear long gowns, and, after marriage, they keep their hair braided. Only among the most savage clans are the women dressed in rough fur bikinis.



WAY OF LIFE: THE LAW OF THE STRONG

Northlanders are quite primitive: they farm, have little orchards and small herds, but for the most part they are hunters and gatherers. Normally gender roles are very clearly defined: men hunt and herd, while women gather and tend the fields.

But this is only a part of their lives: any Northlander worthy of the name is a warrior, and their worst fear is dying in their own beds, so they leave their women alone, often for extended periods of time, and go to war.

“War” for a man of the North has many facets: it mean fighting and raiding against rival tribes, a pillaging expedition south into the Borderlands, or serving as a mercenary in a civilized realm for a while, to earn gold and enjoy wine and soft-skinned women.

The moral basis of this behavior is the Law of the Strong: for a Northlander, it is only natural that the strong prevail over the weak, as happens in the animal kingdom. For this reason they see no dishonor in attacking a man to rob him of his life, his valuables or his woman. This is a point that no civilized man could ever understand, and is the basis of their barbarism.

This doesn't mean that Northlanders are ruthless assassins: they can be invaluable friends, have a strong sense of honor and generally keep their word.

SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Families and blood relationships are very important for Northlanders: they are a patriarchal and patrilinear society, meaning that power is in the hands of men,

and bloodlines are based on the father. A group of families sharing the same male ancestor (usually so old as to be mythical) are called a “clan”, which is nothing more than a very loose and extended family.

As said above, Northlanders are hunter-gatherers with primitive agriculture, meaning that their economy cannot sustain large communities. So, the two basic settlements of their race are steads and villages.

Steads are farms, inhabited by an extended family, and usually self-sustaining. Many of them are surrounded by a palisade or other means of defense, with the fields and orchards lying outside. Steads can be of various sizes: from small huts where a man, his wife and his son live, to structures as big as small castles hosting a patriarch, several sons, nephews and their relatives. They are ruled by the oldest able-bodied man, who behaves exactly like a king in his own holding.

When a stead reaches critical mass, another one is founded nearby, keeping its blood relationships with the previous one: in this way, a clan can take control over a whole region.

Villages are quite rare, and they are usually built near rivers or on the few existing roads: they are inhabited by the many families composing a clan. Protected by a palisade, they are usually ruled by a clan chief, who is chosen by the other male members of the community. Several ways to make this choice exist: heredity (very rare), trial by combat, being chosen by a group of elders or priests, or simply popular acclamation.

This is true in times of peace. When a war or a feud of some type erupts (a very com-

mon occurrence), war chiefs lead the clans or families in battle. The war chief need not be the same person who rules the clan in times of peace (although this can happen): Northlanders are too practical to ignore the fact that the skills of peace aren't the same as those of war.

ECONOMY

The Northlands have a self-sustaining society, based mainly on barter, both of goods and favors. A complex system of social conventions discourages lazy people, who are quickly recognized and ostracized.

Money, in the form of physical currency, isn't much used in the North, even if ore and other precious things (especially jewels) are used for barter. When the first merchants visited Northeim, they were delighted at the fact that Northlanders saw no value in coins, even those they pillaged in the south, and this led to a series of legendary swindles.

Northlanders going south of the border as mercenaries quickly learn the value of money in these lands, but they are reluctant to import their concept into their own society: while a Northlander warrior can use Moons in Faberterra to buy booze and favors from courtesans, when he comes back home he will likely pierce them to make a necklace for his wife or melt them to form a goblet, a much more useful thing.

Slavery isn't practiced on a large scale in Northeim, for a practical reason: in a place where life is so harsh, another mouth to feed is a luxury very few can afford. Nevertheless, some clans keep slaves (especially women) obtained in clan feuds or carried off in raids south of the border.

FEMALE ROLES

Northlander society is very male-centered, but this doesn't mean that women are totally subjugated by their fathers, brothers and husbands. Due to the nature of their warring society, Northlander women spend a lot of time alone, because their men are off somewhere battling each other or south of the border working as mercenaries.

This means that they must be independent, and must be able to hunt and to defend themselves. The saying goes that it is easier to win the favors of a she-bear than



a fierce Northlander woman, and it is true. Usually women don't go into battle, but there are few exceptions (see Spear Widows below), and they are surprisingly good at defending their homes.

Women, except those in the smaller families, are organized in the Circle of Women, a collective gathering of all the adult females of the clan, ruled by the oldest one. The Circle discusses the matters of the clan privately; no man can join these gatherings. By deciding on a common approach, and through subtle influence on the males, a Circle led by a smart woman can direct the decisions of the clan.

In truth the Circle has one real power, the Right of Banishing. The oldest woman on the clan, speaking on behalf of the Circle, can Banish any man, even the most powerful warrior or war chief, resulting in complete ostracism by all females: no woman, relatives and slaves included, will sleep with him, cook for him, tend his fields or house, sew his clothes or do anything for him. For women, a Banished man doesn't exist anymore.

This is a terrible curse even the boldest warrior fears; luckily it is seldom invoked.

SKALDS, WISE MEN AND SMITHS

Northlanders can be a violent and physical people, but they appreciate wisdom and skill, when they find it.

Since they are an illiterate population, knowledge is passed to new generations via an oral tradition: legends, stories, songs and ballads are told around the fire on cold winter nights, and they are the basis of Northlander culture.

Telling a story or singing a song isn't a thing every man can do: you need a good voice, acting skills and an excellent memory. The role of professional story-teller is fulfilled by the Skald, a sort of wandering poet and bard, who earns a living in this manner. But a Skald isn't only a man recounting forever the deeds of the past, he also creates new songs, ballads and stories about current events, sometimes embellishing reality. The dream of any Skald is creating a ballad so famous that it will be sung forever, granting him a kind of immortality. Skalds of the past did this, for example Sijourn and the Ballad of the White Horse, Braddoc and the Story of the Hammerhorn Warrior, or Gunnar and the famous Cycle of Winter Stories.

Skalds aren't only men of words; some of them are also men of the sword. Swordsman Skalds can inflame the souls of their comrades before a battle, or cover an opponent in so much ridicule that he is obliged to draw his blade or be shamed forever.

Apart from ballads and stories, there is other knowledge that can be handed down, more prosaic but still important: for example laws, clan lineages, traditions, and even practical things like the art of healing, the uses of the Lotus, or simply knowing when to plant crops. All this knowledge is retained by the Wise Men, men (and rarely women) who keep it alive, thanks to their highly-trained memories. As their tradition is oral, every Wise Man in his maturity trains a pupil, to pass on his knowledge. This is an exhausting role, because the young one must spend endless days repeating and memorizing laws, rules, treaties and many other things, incessantly whispered in their ears by the old lips of their masters. Even the Sages of the Library of Syranthia respect the wis-

SKALDS, WISE MEN AND SMITHS AS PLAYER CHARACTERS

All these concepts can make for an interesting alternative Northlander hero. Here follow some suggestions on how to create such a character.

Skald. *A Skald needs a high Charisma bonus, all the social abilities he can get and probably a good Knowledge (Legends and Lore) skill. If you have access to Jalizar, City of Thieves, the Poet Edge is a must.*

Wise Man. *A Wise Man needs a high Smarts, as many Knowledge skills as he can, and the Scholar Edge. He can also take the Sage Edge ignoring the Literate prerequisite.*

Smith. *Smiths need a high Repair above all, and should take the Smith Edge (see below). A Smith trained in the Monastery should also take the Noble Edge and in addition he receives +2 to any Repair roll while working on metal.*

dom of the Northlander Wise Men, and occasionally envoys of the Library pass long periods side by side with old Wise Men, writing down their knowledge for the Library's archives before death erases it forever.

But above even Skalds and Wise Men, Northlanders respect smiths. A good smith is a resource for the entire community: he can produce tools and implements, and above all he can forge weapons and armor, granting his clan an edge over their enemies. The best smiths are trained in the Monastery of the Hammer, but others discover amazing things through experimentation and hard work. For a Northlander smith, the hammer sings on

the anvil, and every item he makes contains a little piece (or maybe even a large piece) of his own soul. For this reason, Northlander weapons and armor tend to be unique, differing depending on the smith who made them.

WAR

Northlanders love war. For a warrior of the North, dying on the battlefield is the best of the ends a man could aspire to. Northlanders are strong, bold and indomitable, and this reflects in their style of warfare. The typical army of northmen is a disorganized horde of individual fighters, gathered around their heroes and war chiefs.

They lack any distinction between melee and ranged troops, or between infantry and cavalry (Northlanders know how to ride, but they fight on foot). They don't know or respect any battle formations, and, even worse, they don't obey orders very well: often a war chief is obliged to beat a little sense into his men, knocking a couple of them down, and even then, he can be sure that in the heat of battle every man will fight on his own. This is often a problem when barbarians join the civilized armies of the south as mercenaries; in this case they are used as irregular shock troops or are trained and disciplined through long, exhausting drills, a thing that any Northlander man hates.

That said, Northlanders are among the best warriors of the age: they compensate for their lack of tactics with sheer force and savagery. In particular, berserkers are often found among them, warriors who go mad in the heat of battle. For some of them this is a natural state, while others go berserk using secret Lotus concoctions.

The equipment of a Northlander warrior varies a lot: they usually wear light or medium armor, made of leather, furs and plaques of metal, and use a round wooden shield and a conical helm for additional protection. But many of them prefer to go into battle bare-chested, covered only in war paint. Among weapons they prefer battle axes, one- and two-handed, as well as large-bladed, double-edged swords, both single- and two-handed. Spears and javelins are also widely used: a common tactic, when a group of warriors is running to clash with their opponents, is to throw javelins and then go up close and personal. Bows are also widely used, but apart from the initial part of a battle, they soon become useless, as the two armies intermingle. Bows are also used to hunt, to defend positions (like steads and villages) and by women. Another typical battle implement of the Northlanders is the war horn. Made with the horns of different animals, each horn has a unique sound and personality, and can be used to encourage men, taunt enemies and to give directions to warriors on the battlefield.

CEREMONIAL BURIALS

Northlanders venerate the memories of their forefathers with stories, songs and legends of their deeds, not by paying respect to rotten shells.

For this reason the body of a dead Northlander is usually burned on a pyre, with his best weapons, armors and clothing, and the ashes scattered. Depending on the region and the importance of the deceased, his horse, dog and wife may follow him onto the pyre, after being ritually killed by his best friends. Luckily, this is a custom which is dying out.

SMITH (PROFESSIONAL EDGE)

Prerequisites: *Novice, Smarts d6+, Strength d6+, Repair d8+, Vigor d6+*

The character trained for a long time at the forge, and now he is well versed in the art of the hammer and the anvil. He receives +2 to any roll to repair weapons and armor.

In addition, this Edge has two other uses.

In the After the Adventure phase, the Smith can make a Repair (-2) roll. He obtains one Sharpened Token plus one per success and raise. The smith can keep them for himself or share them with his companions. Each Token, before the adventure starts, must be spent on a weapon or on a piece of armor: if spent on a weapon, the item receives +1 damage till the end of the scenario, if it is spent on armor, it grants a single free Soak roll. In narrative terms, the weapons or armor are sharpened, balanced, reinforced or put into top-notch shape in some way.

The smith needs only an Armorer Kit to use the Edge in this manner, but if he has access to a Smithy he rolls with a +2.

Second, the Smith, provided he has access to a Smithy, can create normal weapons and armor with a Repair roll, spending only 25% of the base cost. He can do this both in the After the Adventure phase and during the game. If he is trying to create a Rare Item or something not belonging to his culture, he rolls with -2 (penalties stack).

There is a practical motivation for cremation: in the past, Northlanders used to bury their relatives in underground tombs or leave the bodies exposed so that nature could consume them, but given the proximity to the Cairnlands and their Ancestors, sometimes this caused weird effects on the corpses and there are legends of dead

warriors of the past coming back from the lands of the dead to haunt their families.

Today, the tombs of Northlander kings or lords can still be found, but they are always very old.

TRIALS OF MANHOOD

The men of the North are a harsh people. Nobody is truly considered a man till he passes the Trial of Manhood. The exact nature of this trial varies, but usually the young boy must accomplish one of the following things: hunt down a dangerous prey, kill a declared enemy of the clan or do some other noticeable deed.

It is the boy who decides when it is time for his Trial; nobody will force him to do it, but if he doesn't, he will be considered a child forever. He leaves his village or stead, alone or with a friend, taking with him only his weapons. He can only come back when the deed is done, bringing with him proof of his feat: the corpse of a powerful prey, the weapons (or the head!) of a dreaded enemy, or some other tangible sign of this enterprise. When he does, the other members of the clan cheer him, and he becomes a real man and integral part of the tribe. If he fails, he continues to be considered a child, but often failure means death.

This is how life is when you follow the Law of the Strong.

Trials of Manhood can be exciting scenarios (see page 103).

For women the situation is a little different: a girl becomes a woman, and can join the Circle (see page 97), when she has her first Moon Blood. No particular task is expected from her, apart from marrying a man and bearing strong children. But nothing pre-

vents a woman from leaving her village and attempting the same deeds as a boy. In this case she'll acquire great respect, but probably she will have difficulties finding a husband because very few men want to marry a so fierce and independent a woman.

RELIGION

The Men of the North aren't religious in the traditional way: they don't have temples or even priests. Their holy places are natural ones, like ancient stones, trees, springs or even particular mountains. The closest things to temples are the small shrines dotting the wilderness where people leave offerings.

Offerings are also made on special occasions: during battles (it is the custom to offer the souls of fallen enemies to the Lord of Thunder), before marriages or when asking for specific favors (more game in the woods, having a child and so on). The peculiar fact is that the relationship with the deities is always on a personal basis, without the intermediation of a priest. As a member of a very independent people, no Northlander will ever allow another man to speak on his behalf, even to the gods. This has always made it impossible for other cults, such as the Divine Couple, to convert the barbarians to more civilized beliefs.

THE LORD OF THUNDER

The main deity of the North is the Lord of Thunder. An aloof and distant god, the Lord of Thunder gives a man strength and vigor when he is born, and then leaves him alone. He is a hard god for a hard people. His holy places are usually natural features (mainly trees and stones), struck by lightning. He is also the god of truth: any

person swearing an oath near a holy place to the Lord of Thunder must respect it: if he breaks it, he will be struck by lightning, sooner or later.

The Lord of Thunder lives in a magnificent palace, surrounded by the souls of dead heroes. The Halls of Thunder, as they are called, are a place of eternal feasting and combat, where heroes prove their skill in terrible duels, but then they rise up, alive, even after suffering terrible wounds, and come back to the feast. Warriors think that an honorable and heroic death allows them to enter these Halls. On the exact location of these Halls, stories differ: some say they are in the sky, beyond the clouds, while others think that they physically exist, and are located in the Palace of the Lord of Thunder, situated at the source of the Axe River (see above). But the same legend says that no living man can enter this Palace and come back to the lands of mortals.

The last important fact about the Lord of Thunder is his name. The Lord has a personal name, but it is secret and whispered only by the oldest and wisest sages. It must be never pronounced, because names have the power to bind their owners, and nobody could try to bind a god without being annihilated.

This fact has in the past caught the attention of the priests of Hulian, because using names like this is usually a way to bind demons, and if it is true it can alter the theology of the whole world in unpredictable ways ...

MANANNAN

Manannan is a minor deity; other cultures might say she is only a demigoddess, but she is very important for the Northlanders. Manannan was a mortal woman, the

daughter a king of the past. Her father, husband, brothers and sons, her entire family was treacherously murdered by a rival clan during a banquet. Only Manannan survived by chance, hiding in the flue of the firepit. Her existence destroyed in a single night, she came out, blackened by soot, the only touch of color in her face being the tracks of her tears.

But Manannan never wept again: instead she grabbed her father's spear, tracked down the killers of her clan and killed them, one by one. The last, a treacherous Cairnlander called Wormtooth, wounded her mortally, but the girl managed to kill him before dying.

After death Manannan entered the Hall of the Thunder Lord, and became his adoptive daughter. Now she holds her stepfather's spear, and is the goddess of vengeance, a feeling well known to the Northlanders.

Manannan hears the pleas of whoever is seeking vengeance, but especially of women: a woman who suffered a great loss by murderous hands sometimes abandons her family, unbraids her hair and paints the Signs of Vengeance on her face, becoming a Widow of the Spear, consecrating her life to the goddess in exchange for vengeance.

A restless huntress, a Widow knows no mercy and often manages to avenge her dead, or die in the attempt. After the blood debt is paid, a Widow can very rarely return to her previous life: some of them commit suicide to join their loved ones, others became ruthless killers, and a few travel south and join the Amazons of Ascaia.

A Widow of the Spear can be an interesting concept for a female Northlander player character (see sidebar).

PLAYING A WIDOW OF THE SPEAR

Only female characters can be Widows of the Spear. In her background, a Widow must have some task of vengeance to accomplish, usually to avenge the death of a relative.

The heroine must replace one of her Hindrances with Vow (accomplish her vendetta), and in addition, she receives the Death Wish Hindrance. Manannan guides the hands of a Widow, so she can take the Trademark Weapon Edge (usually with a spear, bow or sword or other weapon belonging to a murdered relative as a focus), ignoring all the prerequisites.

*A Widow of the Spear can prepare and use on herself a particular body paint (see the **Beasts & Barbarians Body Paints** freebie), called the Mark of the Widow. It is made exactly like other body paints, but it grants +1 to one of the following Traits: Fighting, Shooting, Throwing, Agility, Strength or Vigor. Choose two Traits with a raise.*

After accomplishing her vow, the Widow loses the Death Wish Hindrance and cannot use the Mark of the Widow any more.

GARA ONAGA

This expression means more or less “Hidden People” in the Northland tongue, and refers to a plethora of supernatural beings living in the wilderness, side by side with mortals, but usually cleverly concealed. They are the spirits of the trees, the small creatures pollinating the apple trees in spring or the marvelous, greenish maidens living in ancient pools deep in the forests. Not all the Gara Onaga are real: some of them are only personifications of phenomena the primitive minds of barbarians cannot explain, while others, instead, are ancient monsters and abominations.

The Gara Onaga are curious, playful, mischievous and in certain cases even dangerous and cruel, like the ones dwelling in the Forest of Whispers (see above). The Northlanders accept their existence and pay respect to them in various ways: from cups of honey and milk left out of the doorstep, to the sacrifice of the last-born child of the season to particularly evil ones.

Every Gara Onaga is different. Here follows some examples.

The dreaded **Redbringer** appears as a normal human, apart from a single feature: he always wears a brilliant red garment. It can be a cloak, a scarf or some other item. The Redbringer visits steads and villages and he is usually warmly received because he introduces himself as a wandering Skald. During the night, through his stories and his mesmeric power he obtains what he wants: bloodshed, preferably between relatives. A single Redbringer can rekindle the old hatreds of a family (or a clan) and make them murder each other. It isn't always an immediate process: after the visit of a Redbringer, months can pass before the feelings he stirred up explode in an outburst of violence. There are only two defenses against Redbringers: they cannot enter a house unless invited, and cannot tolerate salt. A pinch of it burns them like fire, and a fistful of it can easily kill them.

Oak Guardians are small, stout humanoids, with a bark-like skin and a mane of herbs and leaves as hair. Oak Guardians are shy, and appear only by night. They are spirits of the plants, especially oaks, and they carefully tend them, cleaning the roots, cutting away the dead branches and so on. If a man has the good luck to see a Guardian while attending to these tasks, and if he manages to speak with it without

making it flee, can offer it a mouthful of wine. In exchange the Oak Guardian gives him an acorn. It is magical, and whoever eats it needs no food for a year, a month and a day.

But there is also a dark aspect to the legend of the Oak Guardians: if you meet them on a night of the full moon you should escape as fast as you can, because then they are in a frenzy of bloodlust; if they manage to catch you, they'll cut your throat and nurture their beloved oaks with your blood.



Yangari are deer-like creatures, very pale and elusive, and they only live in the deepest forests. If a man manages to kill a

Yangari and to eat its raw heart, he will suddenly know the answer to any one question he desires. The problem is that if a hunter starts chasing a Yangari, the strange powers of the beast forbid him to quit: he will continue until he catches it or he falls down exhausted. At this point the Yangari comes back, and with his raspy tongue licks the mouth of the helpless hunter, sucking away his breath and killing him.

TRIAL OF MANHOOD ADVENTURES

Manhood Trials can be excellent “flashback” adventures, which you can play when part of the gaming group is missing, and they are good for expanding and revealing the past of a Northlander hero. In addition, Trials of Manhood can have an impact on the present, justifying a particular event (see Consequences below).

Here follow some guidelines on creating them.

PREPARATION

A Trial of Manhood always happens in the past of the hero (so use all the flashback rules, see *Beasts & Barbarians Golden Edition*, page 130). The character is still in his youth, so he must be returned to Novice Rank and 0 XP. Optionally, if you want to make it harder, you can also assign the Young Hindrance to the hero (reduce his stats accordingly).

MOTIVATION

Why did the character decide to attempt the Trial? The simplest, commonest answer is because he wanted to be considered an adult, but there can be other options: for example, no man can marry or join a military expedition before passing the Trial of Manhood and so becoming a true man. A good motivation can make the adventure more personal.

ENVIRONMENT

Today the character might be a great hero living in a palace, but where did he grow up? In an isolated stead deep in the mountains? In a troublesome village near the border? In caverns among very primitive people? What was his family like?

In this adventure you basically investigate the past of the character, and this could reveal interesting facts.

NATURE OF THE TRIAL

A Trial is made to show the prowess of a man, so it must be a difficult (but not impossible) task. The most typical ones for warrior-like characters consist of hunting down particularly dangerous game, killing the enemies of the tribe or some other act of courage and skill: for example, climb a mountain nobody has ever climbed, find a very rare herb or discover the fate of a long-missing fellow tribesman. Whatever you choose, the nature of the Trial should show the strengths (and the weaknesses) of the young man. It is always a “quest” for something, but it is also a process of self-discovery.

AIID

During a Trial, the young man (or woman, in rare cases) is only allowed the minimum

equipment. Depending on the harshness of his clan, this can mean a couple of weapons and his armor, or even going naked into the wilderness. Another important factor is the aid the character can get during his quest: one of the supporting roles in a Trial of Manhood is the Mentor (see below), usually a PC or NPC who can give substantial help in the task.

NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

Trials of Manhood are very archetypal, so the basic narrative structure of these adventures is usually the following:

1. **Leaving Home.** In which the hero abandons the place and life he knows (with regret or other feelings).
2. **Travel.** Travel can be physical, as well as metaphorical; it is a time when the character encounters the diversities of life. It includes a series of minor or major incidents, each of them part of his growth process.
3. **Discovery.** In which the character acquires knowledge of something important.
4. **Trial.** Where the object of the trial is finally found and the skills of the questing hero are proven.
5. **Outcome and Return.** Not all trials end with a victory, sometimes even a defeat can be considered growth, while at other times victories have a bitter taste: in both cases surviving the trial is usually enough to be considered grown up. At this point the hero comes back to his home, to receive the approval of his peers.
6. Optionally, there are also **Consequences**, which are the effects of a trial in the future, affecting the current timeframe of the campaign.

INVOLVING ALL THE PLAYERS

The best way to play a Trial of Manhood Trial is as a one-to-one scenario, with a single player and Game Master. But given that such an adventure can be used as a filler when part of the group is missing, there are several ways in which the other players can be involved.

The best way consists of giving them other characters to run for this scenario only, as the “supporting cast”. In particular, the questing hero can meet a **Companion** or a **Mentor** in the course of the adventure.

A Companion is a character which, for a reason or another, willingly joins the questing hero in his trial. He could be a close friend, a person met by chance on the road or even a rival, forced by events to make a temporary truce with the questing hero. Companions should be characters of comparable strength to the questing hero (so Novice heroes with 0 XP).

Mentors instead are helpful characters the questing hero will meet in the first part of the adventure: examples could be the lonely mountain man who saves him from certain death, or the old sage living in the oak grove. Mentors usually guide and look over the questing hero, so they should be more powerful and experienced than him (typically Seasoned characters).

Note that neither Companions nor Mentors are necessarily trustworthy: some of them can have hidden agendas or even betray the questing hero.

The important thing to remember for the Game Master is that all the players must be involved and entertained, but in this scenario the focus is on the questing hero.

REWARDS

Apart adding substantially to the personal story of a character, all the players should be rewarded in some manner after a Trial of Manhood adventure, both the questing hero and the “supporting cast”. Both the questing hero and the regular characters of the other players get XPs (even if their temporary characters died in the flashback scenario), in addition every player who played a “supporting cast” role receives a special one-shot Bennie, called the Trial of Manhood Bennie, which can be conserved between sessions (but disappears after use).

Finally, the GM can decide to allow the “supporting cast” characters to re-appear again in the course of the campaign, as alternative characters.

EXAMPLE OF A MANHOOD TRIAL ADVENTURE: THE HUNT FOR GREYCLOAK

In the current adventure, the party is in the Northlands, and is captured by a strange Gara Onaga, the Queen of Leaves, a sad creature in mourning because she was abandoned by her human lover. The session ends with a climax, the party being imprisoned in a cell dug into a giant tree.

The next week, half of the players are missing; only Shangor's player and one other are present at the gaming table. So, the Game Master decides to play a flashback, telling how the Northlander barbarian became a man.

Many years ago, it was summer, and all the able-bodied men of Shangor's village were south making war; only the women,

the elders and the boys, Shangor included, were in the village, which was terrorized by an enormous wolf, Greycloak, which had killed half of their herd. So Shangor and his friend Torr decided to prove themselves men by tracking it down and killing it.

For this adventure, the second player is given Torr, Shangor's friend, to play. He is a Novice, Young hero.

The two boys sneak away from home by night, with a mouthful of food and basic weapons: Shangor has grabbed his father's sword, and Torr, his uncle's bow, and they go into the woods, tracking the beast. The day after, they meet Caius Merikos, a wandering smooth-tongued merchant who gets them drunk. When the boys wake up the next day, heads aching, they find themselves stripped of all belongings, including the weapons of their relatives. The heroes continue to wander through the forest (maybe looking for the treacherous merchant), when they encounter the Forest Girl, a playful Gara Onaga who gives them jewels and tries to keep them forever in the woods with her feminine wiles.

The two boys escape her enthrallment, they hear her lonely cry, and stumble on Caius Merikos' cart, the horse butchered by the wolf. Caius himself is fighting for his life against the beast. The two boys intervene, kill the wolf and save the merchant, who, coveting the jewels the two boys wear, tries to kill them. Torr dies and Shangor kills the merchant in revenge. Then he skins the wolf, burns his friend using the merchant's cart as a pyre, with the jewels of the Forest Girl upon him, and comes home to the village. Now he is a man, and he has learned two sad truths: civilized men must not be trusted, and nothing is worth as much as a true friend.

Both Shangor and Torr's player main character receive XP.

Consequences: *the Forest Girl the two boys met in the past is the Queen of Leaves who has captured the heroes! Gara Onaga don't age as humans do, so she hasn't recognized Shangor as the boy who escaped from her enthrallment many years ago. Shangor (and the whole party) can exploit this useful information in the adventure, giving a new twist to the plot.*