

# Maximum<sup>1e</sup>HP

The old school zine for a new school world



Issue #003

The Wilderness

# Maximum<sup>1e</sup>HP

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## CREDITS

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A special thanks goes out to all the people who submitted potential content for this issue and all those who offered support.

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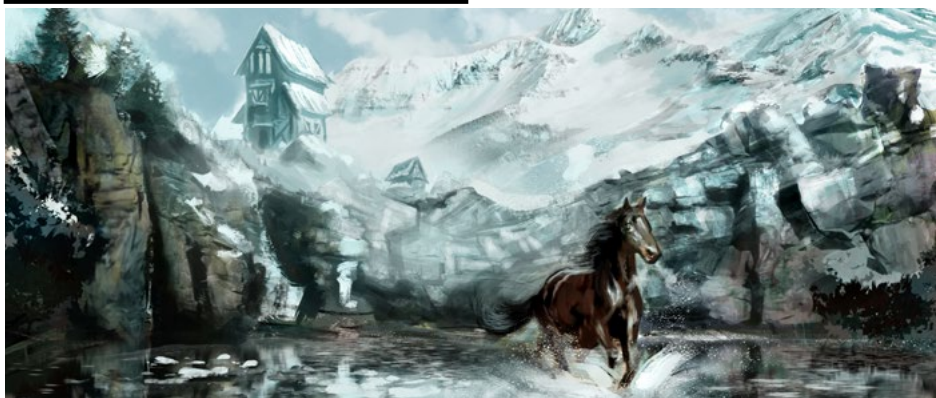
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# INTRODUCTION

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Welcome to issue #003 – The Wilderness issue of Maximum HP, The old school 'zine for a new school world. In this issue we delve into the wild forests of the world. The deep green places, the fey and the hidden secrets kept by nature, and the unnatural that invade it. The game might have the word dungeons in it, but the game doesn't end there.

At Fail Squad Games, we offer rousing content for your tabletop roleplaying games, never hard and fast rules. What follows in this and upcoming issues of Maximum HP are articles, notes, tips, tricks, traps, treasures and other pieces that have come to mind for your 1E gaming table organized by theme with each issue. To keep the 'zines fresh and exciting, we have liberated ourselves from a production deadline to allow us to channel maximum creativity into each issue. Content will be nurtured, selected from submissions, not rushed, and chosen as inspiration strikes or from where we see a need at our own tables.

The majority of this 'zine is intended for GMs, but players may also find much of the content interesting and, hopefully, inspiring.

It is suggested that players not read the adventure sections if their GM intends to run an adventure from the 'zine.

Our intent is to share the Fail Squad Games style and that of our readers with other gamers of earlier editions to enrich their gaming experience. The 'zine format will present small, easy to digest articles firmly rooted in the spirit of the older edition games and magazines. Although the content may be informal, we want the physical product and presentation to be the best we can deliver for just a few bucks.

Note on stats: In Maximum HP we refer to a blend of 1E, 2E, and OSRIC books and references for stat blocks, spells, and balance. Some variance may occur, but none of these will significantly affect gameplay. Refer to your favorite manual of monsters, handbook for players, or guide for GMs for exact numbers relating to your specific preferred system. You may also notice THACO entries in stat blocks. THACO (To Hit AC 0) emerged between 1E and 2E. We use it here to conserve space, feel free to refer to any charts or system information that works best for you.

# THE GREAT OUTDOORS

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*Tim Kask*

Standing on the primitive dock you have just been delivered to by some very sketchy locals, you turn and see the immense jungle from which this tiny clearing has been hacked. Proceeding into the green gloom on the well-used trail, you soon find yourself dwarfed by the enormous extent of the jungle: its height, its width, its impenetrability.

The enormous trees loom overhead, festooned and girded with all manner of vines and creepers, filtering the light to a hazy green. Strange sounds are heard all around. The canopy barely contains a cacophony of birdcalls, some familiar and some not. The birds flutter and flit about overhead; the myriad flowers swarm with butterflies of every hue.

Proceeding along the path some distance, you come to a swiftly flowing river spanned by a spidery contraption made of rope and sticks.

In the scant three preceding paragraphs, there are hidden at least a half-dozen ways to challenge, i.e., kill, a party. Snakes, both venomous and squeezing, abound. The canopy can house all manner of dangers,

from malignant birds to stirges to aggressive hummingbirds. The vines could be snakes as well, waiting to drop. There could lurk aggressive primates. The river could be home to crocs and hippos. The ground level can be home to anything from forest elephants to forest rhinos to large felines.

I hope you might begin to see my point. None of the preceding hazards have anything magical or fantastic about them. If you begin to add in just fantastic flora, the dangers multiply exponentially.

From the very earliest games, the great outdoors has been sadly neglected by many a DM. It is my belief that outdoor adventuring is sadly unappreciated and underutilized.

Neither the treasure nor the bad guy is always underground. To get to that subterranean trove of riches, you must traverse the outdoors and face those perils and trials inherent to cross-country traveling. All the adventures I have written, whether self-published or professionally, have had varying degrees of outdoor peril.

I don't need three-eyed papins to kill you; how about a nice-sized grizzly bear? Or a 14-foot alligator? Or a rhino with a bad disposition? Nature is a cruel mother.



Outdoor adventuring should test the players' skills to the limit, watching where they walk for snakes, venomous bugs, and the like, keeping an eye peeled overhead for anything that might drop, or worse, leap on the party. Their heads should be on swivels for any threats at ground level.

Resting overnight can be anything but restful. When I have a party pulling an "overnighter", I require that they settle on watches and who is on which. I consider "overnight" to have 9 hours, and magic-users to require six uninterrupted to fully recharge, so it usually falls out as three shifts of three hours. When stuff happens that "wakes the wizard", I don't allow full re-spell, just a proportion.

Darkness in the jungle brings out a whole new class of threat.

Gary Gygax thought the outdoor part of adventuring to be at least as much fun as exploring ruins and delving. He knew dungeon crawling would have a greater appeal and so gave lip service to rules for outdoors beyond distance and effect conversions. He did take one extraordinary step to address that when it was determined that the constraints of budget and book size would force both the Weapons Damage charts and more on the outdoors to Greyhawk; he told

people to go out and buy another company's game.

Gary told players/DMs to go out and buy *Outdoor Survival*, a boardgame published by Avalon Hill. He encouraged the fledgling DMs to adapt it as best they could/understood for the outdoor part of their campaigns. What he did was inadvertently create the prototype DM Screen. All of us early DMs that bought it ended up setting it on its side, and voila, the Screen was born. Now we had a way to hide the maps (and roll dice in secret, thereby raising the PCs' anxiety levels).

Think of all the biomes in which an adventure can be set, excluding the jungle already exemplified: arid/sandy/desert; grassy, vast plains; hardwood or coniferous forests; swamps and moors; frigid climates; mountains; treacherous river crossings; and that is not every type of terrain you might set your adventures in.

For a DM, getting there should be half the fun, to mangle an old cliché. A certain balance must be maintained; it would not bode well for the PCs should they arrive at ground zero for the adventure already beat to pieces. However, it can be quite fun if the "getting there" part of the adventure offers little "minor" encounters or even

a detour with a nice payoff for the group. Here the possibilities are limited only by the DM's imagination. DMs should be cognizant of potential "side trips" mentioned by the party as well as where the PCs' interests lie.

The PCs need to fill in their world; all those blank areas between encounters have to be filled in to give the campaign context.

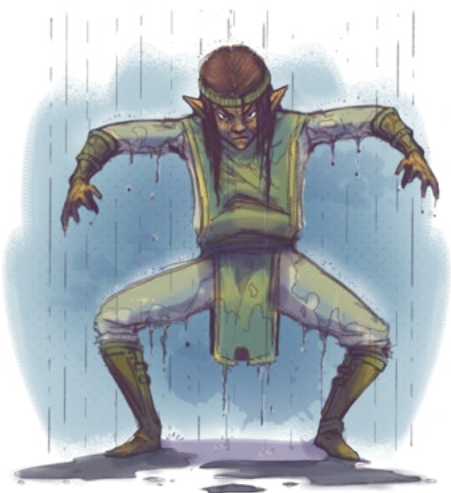
As an example, I will use my *Snakeriders of the Aradondo*. The adventurers are literally dropped off on a beach/delta of the river. They know that the ruins they seek are somewhere up the river. They usually construct a raft and make their way upriver against a slow current. Some have elected to hoof it. They face giant frogs, really big caimans, oversized snakes, carnivorous apes (some of which are trained and directed), strangler vines, and unfriendly flowers.

All of the preceding completely neglects the most encompassing of all outdoor factors, the weather. It would be unreasonable to think that all outdoor adventuring takes place on sunny days in moderate temperatures. Rain is bad for archery, visibility, fire-based anything, and footing/traction. Snow screws up visibility and footing. Wind and hail are self-explanatory. Extreme cold makes metal brittle

and hinders physical activity. I once wrote an adventure where the party had to go *through* a glacier using round tunnels bored through the ice. They spent a great deal of time slipping and falling until they figured out a way to traverse winding, melting ice tunnels. Then, all the markings they tried to make to show where they had been kept melting.

PCs outdoors are most vulnerable after the sun goes down. Predators come out to prey. Sleeping outdoors in unknown territory should be cause for extreme caution on the part of the PCs. All sorts of inimical stuff can happen at night.

The possibilities are endless for facing challenges in the great outdoors. Not all experience points need be won underground.



## ENCOUNTERS IN THE WILD

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GMs may require rapid-fire encounters set in the wilds to challenge traveling players. These encounters can breathe life into a world and make adventurers think twice about wandering through the wilderness. They can also be used to drop clues, springboard adventures, or inspire entire campaigns.

### GRUNTAKER'S HATE

*Hill Giant (1), Cave bear (1)*

Gruntaker makes his home outside the city where he monitors the local trade route closely. He vigilantly monitors the road, hoping to capture and sacrifice “nasty” magic-users to the goddess of the forest. He nurses an insatiable hatred of magic, its use, and its existence. In the eyes of Gruntaker, it is everything terrible and wrong with the natural world and it opposes the true order of all things.

If a party appears weak enough to not be a serious threat and travels with an obvious magic-user, he will block their passage. His favorite location to employ this tactic is an old stone bridge where he demands a toll. Asking for a toll to pass is the simplest ruse, but the best concocted

by the dull-witted giant. He hopes to distract the “heroes” with talk and argument long enough for Buldabok, his best friend and cave bear, to attack from the rear where he has observed wizards frequently hide.

In his sacrifices and ceremonies, Gruntaker has gained the ability to



cast entangle as a druid once per day. He sees this as proof that his work is blessed by his goddess.

Should a traveling party have no magic or obvious magic-users and be accompanied by a druid, Gruntaker is very happy to accommodate the travelers by welcoming them to stay and rest at his forest glen under his protection. He speaks very frankly and bluntly about his hatred for magic and is unapologetic about sacrificing the lives of magic-users.

**Gruntaker, Hill Giant** (Int. 5–7 Low intelligence; AL NE; AC 4; MV 12; HD 8+2; hp 46; THAC0 9; #AT 1; Dmg 1–6 or by weapon (2–16 +4); SA Hurl rocks (2d8); SZ L; ML Elite (13–14); XP 1,952)

**Buldabok, Cave Bear** (Int. 2–4 Semi-intelligent; AL N; AC 6; MV 12; HD 6+6; hp 31; THAC0 13; #AT 3; Dmg 1–8/1–8/1–12; SA Hug (2d8); will fight with negative hp; SZ H; ML Average (8–10); XP 723)

Two miles off the road, Gruntaker makes his home in a cave near a peaceful clearing with his friend Buldabok. He lives a surprisingly wholesome life where he cultivates vegetables, raises chickens, and shares his existence with the natural world around him.

Carefully arranged and hidden in their cave, the pair of friends

have 1,200 sp, 473 gp, a roll of finely made chain cloth for making chain armor (300 gp value), and a bolt of silk fabric (500 gp value). Arranged around the forest clearing is a coop for 18 chickens, a fenced garden growing an assortment of vegetables, a grove of 12 apple trees, and a large stone altar caked in dark dried blood and burnt blast streaks. This is where Gruntaker sacrifices magic-users and their “wicked” items.

## TOR AND FENT

### *Minotaurs (2)*

Tor and Fent are brothers on the run. They revolted against a ruling minotaur and left their labyrinth home only to discover they would be hunted ruthlessly by humans as well as their own clan. They have made a temporary home amidst a dense forest with extremely thick scrub oak and bramble undergrowth. Near the center, they cleared the tangling brush enough to make a comfortable camp where they can regroup and plan.

At a quarter-mile distance from the camp, a small string of smoke can be seen rising from the forest. A large pit trap containing a broken cart and a disemboweled mule is discovered nearby. The pit contains what is presumably the contents of the trading cart: 5 sacks of cracked





corn, bits and pieces of horse barding, and 6 broken and battered shields. Large hoof prints circle the top of the pit.

Movement through the undergrowth is disorienting and slow. Direction sense is required to not lose orientation, and all movement is at 50% of normal. The brothers have no problem muscling through the growth and never become confused.

Moving silently through the undergrowth is nearly impossible. A thief attempting to move silently may attempt to do so with a -44% penalty or no penalty if they slow to a movement of 2" or less.

At the camp, the brothers hold captive two travelers who are strung up to dangle just above the ground near a makeshift canvas tent. A

third, they have butchered, and the remnants are slowly roasting over a low fire. The minotaurs are visibly salivating while watching the "meat" cook. Tor, the larger of the two, is wearing bronze plate armor and carries an oversized two-handed scimitar.

In the minotaur's tent among sparse blankets and makeshift sleeping space, a hidden wanted poster of the brothers shows a reward of 1,000 gp if captured alive and 500 gp for their heads in the nearest large town. They also have a chest containing 4 gems (200 gp value each) and 400 gp.

**Tor and Fent, Minotaurs** (Int. 8–10 average intelligence; AL CE; AC 6 (1 Tor); MV 12; HD 6+3; hp 34, 42; THAC0 13; #AT 2; Dmg 2–8/2–8 or 1–4/by weapon type (2d6+2 s/m, 3d6+2 great scimitar); SA Grapple, charge (4–16); SD +2 bonus on surprise rolls, fearless, immune to maze spells; SZ L; ML Elite (13); XP 1,400 (Fent), 1,500 (Tor))

## THE BLINDING GLADE

*Nymphs (3), Wild animals (Many)*

A group of nymphs gathered in the forest to press back evil, discuss the situation regarding humans, and heal the local forest of its monstrous

blight.

## A mile from the glade

A pure stream winds its way deep into the forest. Everything the stream touches springs to lush, verdant life. Fish thrive and play under the banks; birds swirl and dance above; deer, rabbits, and all manner of wildlife are eager to partake in the pristine water or its bounty in some way.

## Half-mile from the glade

Approaching the glade, adventurers notice many animals in an exceptionally calm and peaceful state following the stream. They ignore their natural instincts while traveling toward the glade. Predators and prey travel side by side, even nuzzling and grooming occasionally along their journey.

## Quarter-mile from the glade

A sense of peace and tranquility envelopes all non-evil creatures who fail a save vs. magic within a quarter-mile of the glade. Those affected are not able to attack or harm any of the natural creatures gathering or traveling toward the glade. Evil and unnatural creatures failing the saving throw find the forest, stream, and creatures terribly revolting and are compelled to leave. Pressing evil creatures forward causes them to suffer blinding headaches, a sense of their

own doom, then utter disgust before paralyzing fear seizes their every thought. Evil beings who make their saving throw are likely to become enraged and become the focus of all creatures traveling to the glade. They will defend the glade with their lives against evil intruders. Any druid or ranger character can “feel” they are approaching hallowed ground of some sort at this distance.

## At the glade

The forest falls away and the stream plunges forty feet over a waterfall into a pristine forest glade of incredible beauty. Flowers and trees bloom in a wave of wonderful smells with fat bees busily visiting each bursting bloom. Crisp, cool mists swirl from the falling water that drops into an azure pool surrounded by an impossibly lush forest. A chorus of birds sings and swirls in the air, and every sort of wild creature is represented playing and reveling in the glistening verdant sanctuary.

Approaching the stream reveals three humanoid beings swimming playfully near the edge of the pool. As they emerge from the water, it is clear the bathers are incredibly beautiful by all standards and radiate an aura of natural magic and light. They are so beautiful, in fact, that all beholding them must make a saving throw vs. spell or

be rendered completely blind. One creature is male, one female, and one is neither and both at once.

Characters may approach the nymphs if they have a Charisma of 10 or more. Those of lesser Charisma are either blocked by the fauna or ignored completely by the nymphs. When the nymphs speak, they sing hauntingly in unison. They are appreciative of sincere offers to serve the forest. Many intrusions in the forest concern the creatures, and they have several potential quests to offer wandering heroes.

- “Ugly” bugbears are defiling the forest and hunting pixies deep in the forest. They hide in underground caverns to the west; their exact location is hidden from the nymphs.
- A sacred “Tree of Souls” would help to protect the glade and many of the creatures in the forest. The nymphs ask the heroes to travel to another distant forest and return a seed to the glade while they use their magic to preserve the forest until the new tree can be grown.
- A nearby kingdom is pressing into the forest and cutting the trees to mill and build. These trees are connected to the forest and the nymphs. The local lord isn’t willing to just give up the resources at his doorstep that his people need.

- A wizard discovered the nymph gathering and has put a bounty on their return to his tower. A less moral group of heroes have been dispatched to capture the creatures. They must be stopped or misdirected until the nymphs can leave the forest.

- A treant has become poisoned. It is turning the forest dark and wicked. The heroes are asked to take a large portion (ten gallons or more) of the water from the nymph’s pool to soothe and cure the creature.

**Nymph** (Int. 15–16 Exceptionally intelligent; AL N; AC 9; MV 12; HD 3; hp 18, 16, 15; THAC0 17; #AT 0; Dmg Nil; SA spells as 7th-level druid, dimension door once a day; SD if looking at nymph save vs. spell or blinded, if looking at nude nymph save vs. spell or die; SZ M; ML Unsteady (7); XP 1,400)

Over the years the nymphs have gathered many gems and jewels, mostly gifts from unrequited lovesick beings. They offer these as reward if heroes seek it. They keep these treasures carefully hidden under a stack of rocks at the bottom of the pool.

## Treasure

*Elixir of Madness*, *Oil of Slipperiness*, 300 platinum pieces, Jasper (30 gp), Lapis Lazuli (10 gp), Alexandrite (100 gp), Moonstone

(50 gp) x2, Amethyst (100 gp), Obsidian (10 gp), Aquamarine (500 gp), Oriental Amethyst (500 gp), Azurite (10 gp) x3, Oriental Topaz (1,000 gp), Black Opal (1,000 gp), Purple Pearl (500 gp) x3, Bloodstone (50 gp), Rhodochrosite (10 gp) x2, Blue Quartz (10 gp), Spinel (100 gp), Carnelian (50 gp), Turquoise (10 gp), Chalcedony (50 gp) x4, Zircon (70 gp), Garnet (500 gp) x2.

## THE TRAVELING TREE

Traveling trees were created by the first elves of the world who wielded nearly godlike magic. A very few of these small trees remain in the world and are maintained to connect the realms of the elves and their fae kin. Each tree supports numerous spheres that transport travelers to destinations shown within. The traveling trees are usually found growing in protected and secret wilderness places. Those interested in keeping the trees secret often enchant the surrounding area as they pass through with various types of warding magic to keep hapless wanderers away.

Traveling trees vary in height from five to fifteen feet and can be of any variety that suits the environment or represents the destinations it holds. Typically, the spheres show the destination in which one will appear when transporting through.



The spheres are small, no more than 5” across, and require a traveler to touch the sphere to be taken to the desired location. Touching the device or sphere at the end location brings one to the tree that acts as a connecting point.

Traveling trees are, as one might imagine, popular meeting and gathering places among those who have access to them. Many human faerie tales tell of mysterious elven or pixie tea parties late at night in the forests. These gatherings are frequently the result of travelers congregating near a traveling tree.

## MAGIC ITEMS

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### CROWN OF THE BOURGEOIS KING

*(Michael Stewart)*

The coronet appears as a golden bejeweled crown from a distance. Upon closer inspection, the circlet’s true material is revealed. In truth, it is made of thin wood and painted gold, with the interior being plain and obviously wooden.

When worn, the crown acts as a cursed item, forcing the wearer to make a saving throw against magic. The victim becomes convinced they are the emperor of all lands they are aware of. Furthermore, anyone

beholding the wearer of the crown under its full effects must also make a saving throw against magic, and if failed, they, too, fall victim to the crown, believing the wearer is their liege. This effect lasts while the crown’s wearer remains in line of sight. Its effects wear off to viewers within 1d4 rounds after escaping the sight of their ‘monarch’. However, if they see the crown wearer again, they must make another saving throw with effects as described above.

Should the wearer of the crown make their saving throw upon placing the crown on their head, there is no effect to the wearer or those viewing them, and it may be removed at will. Putting the crown back on requires another saving throw with effects as noted.

Once its power overwhelms the wearer, the crown cannot be removed unless a remove curse spell is cast upon it. The crown detects as magic but is not an evil item.

### SWORD OF THE FEY

*(Michael Stewart)*

The hilt of this weapon appears as a normal broadsword. The blade, however, is made of faint gray smoke, giving it a translucent appearance when drawn. The weapon strikes ethereal targets as a



+3 weapon and does normal damage to the victim. It may be used against non-ethereal targets as well, but in such cases, the blade only does 1d3 points of damage and acts as a +1 broadsword.

When used against non-ethereal targets, the Sword of the Fey ignores all armor. Thus, all non-ethereal targets are effectively Armor Class 10 (Dexterity adjustments still apply).

Its final ability is against illusions. The wielder of the sword gains a +3 bonus to disbelieve illusions. In order to gain that bonus, the wielder of the blade must first successfully strike the illusion with the blade. This may be difficult depending on the illusion in question, but the sword's bearer must have at least a chance (i.e., a natural 20) to hit the illusion no matter how invulnerable it may appear.

## CREATURES

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### THE SEALGAYR ANAM [SĒL-GĀR Ā-NŪM]

*(Chris Clark)*

This non-corporeal creature is made from negative material energy. It resembles a legless skeleton wearing robes and a hood with a skeletal face and bony, grasping

hands. They are sentient energy creatures with no tangible form, although they present as floating phantasms as previously mentioned. The exact process by which these creatures come into existence is unknown, but it is thought to be a byproduct of failed demonic magic. As these creatures represent a demonic failure of that magic, all are exiled from the nether planes upon creation and are forced into the realm of the living. As failure is at the core of their being, they are hateful, sorrowful, and eternally seek solitude. Any Sealgayr Anam encountered by a player character, therefore, is nearing starvation.



The Sealgayr Anam is a creature that lives with a terrible curse: that which it hates most it must pursue for sustenance. This horrific magical spirit detests sentient life and feeds from its essence, the soul. It is known to haunt the darkest portion of large forests where it avoids contact with living souls, although it must on occasion consume these very souls to survive. It creates within its victims a feeling of isolation and hopelessness, eventually causing these hapless targets to yearn for a release from life. When this mental state of despair approaches, the Sealgayr Anam grants its victims a dreamless sleep before sucking forth their very souls.

The Sealgayr Anam detests light, and sunlight hinders the ability of this creature to sense its prey and see in whatever fashion it senses its surroundings. For this reason, the Sealgayr Anam prefers to hunt on dreary days with significant cloud cover, during storms when the light of the sun is significantly reduced, at night, and always within forests that have thick, sun-blocking canopies. This horrid creature prefers twilight and the hours of night the most but must have conscious victims in order to bring forth feelings of despair and hopelessness in those it targets. As such, it seeks awake and conscious victims and is most

often encountered during dusk or on overcast days.

Although affected by holy and arcane magic as though they were undead of equivalent level, Sealgayr Anam are demonic spirits. They may only be attacked by enchanted weaponry; standard weaponry appears to pass right through them without resistance. Unlike undead, they take full damage from cold-based attacks, but are immune to mind control of any kind. Sealgayr Anam defeated in combat dissolve into vapor and disappear.

The Sealgayr Anam has many means at its disposal for weakening the resolve (and therefore the will to live) of its intended victim. All its abilities are intended to frighten and deject the unwary traveler, and all attack the will of the target.

## Auditory and Visual Hallucinations at Will

First, the Sealgayr Anam does its best to separate party members from one another. It does this by placing both auditory and visual illusions directly into the mind of its quarry. As such, the auditory or visual illusions are unique to a given character, rather than the group, thus eliciting ribald and mocking statements, as well as impacting the team spirit of the entire party. Auditory illusions often include cries for help, commands to cease

progress (“Halt!”), or threatening noises of a less than verbal nature (growls in the underbrush, the sound of giant leathery bat wings, etc.). These illusions are often used to cleverly guide victims to trailside hazards such as poisonous plants, rock falls, and quicksand. This unique form of attack renders the Sealgayr Anam incapable of creating illusions that may be seen or heard by more than one person at a time.

## Forest Labyrinth

Once the prey of the Sealgayr Anam has become suitably frightened by illusion and the hazards of the trail, the Sealgayr Anam employs its second attack, the Forest Labyrinth. This horrific ability projects a virtual maze into the mind of the target, causing them to lose all sense of direction. All trees look alike, landmarks seem to disappear, and all paths lead back to their starting points for those who fail to avoid this mental attack. Even highly skilled woodsmen (or forest dwellers) suddenly become confused, and there seems to be no escape from the continuing illusions sent by the Sealgayr Anam.

When the victim becomes suitably hopeless, the Sealgayr Anam employs its final ability, a double-strength sleep enchantment that causes all who fall under its spell to fall into a deep and

dreamless slumber. Victims losing consciousness due to this magical ability may only be awakened by contact violent enough to cause 2 or more points of damage. While asleep, the Sealgayr Anam drains 1d6 points of health from the victim each round until the victim is either rescued or expires. Corpses left behind by the Sealgayr Anam are withered, dried husks.

If at any time the Sealgayr Anam is called out by name (“it’s a Sealgayr Anam!”), the creature becomes immediately visible to all, and its illusions are automatically dispelled. If attacked, it will defend itself with its two disease-ridden claws.

**FREQUENCY:** Very rare

**NO. APPEARING:** 1

**ARMOR CLASS:** 0 (when invisible)/3 (but immune to standard weaponry)

**MOVE:** 18”

**HIT DICE:** 8

**% IN LAIR:** 0%

**TREASURE TYPE:** none

**NO. OF ATTACKS:** 2 or innate ability

**DAMAGE/ATTACK:** 1d6 + disease

**SPECIAL ATTACKS:** Auditory and visual illusion at will to a single target, Forest Labyrinth to a single target, Disease that causes boils and fatigue (and 1d6 per hour)

**SPECIAL DEFENSES:** Immune to standard weapon, invisible until

evoked (called out)

**MAGIC RESISTANCE:** 30%; All saves at +2

**INTELLIGENCE:** Average

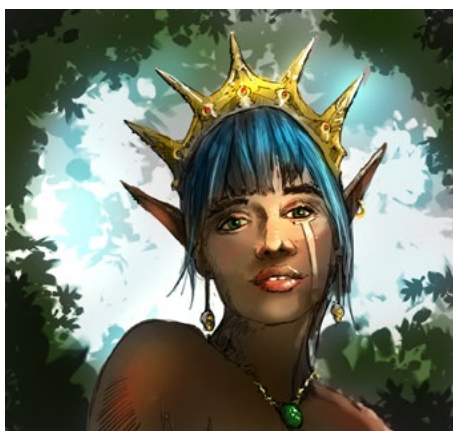
**ALIGNMENT:** Chaotic Evil

**SIZE:** M

**PSIONIC ABILITY:** none

## WILDERNESS NPCs

### AELOWYN FAEWYNE



Of all the royalty in the elven realm, Aelwyn Faewyne is perhaps the most difficult to predict and the most open to the world of humans. She is the youngest princess of the Faewyne bloodline and prone to a wanderlust that comes with an insatiable curiosity for the short lives and affairs of humans.

She aided travelers in peril so many times that she became a piece of local folklore known as the Traveler's Protector. Caravans and tradesmen purposefully camp near the forests where she has been encountered in the hope of witnessing her miracles, and some even hope to capture her heart.

It is said that in times of need or danger, human travelers hear her angelic singing voice echo through the forest before she appears. She

Name <u>Aelwyn Faewyne</u>		Race <u>Elf</u>		Class <u>Cleric</u>		Level <u>5</u>		Align <u>CG</u>																
General character appearance & notes																								
See description																								
STR	11	Hit	Race HP	Def	Min	Max	Para/Poison	Petri/Poly	R,S,W	Breath	Spell	XP												
DEX	16	+1		+1	-2		9	12	13	15	14													
CON	9			65	70		AC	HP		Move														
INT	11						-2	22																
WIS	17	+3		2,2,1	0																			
CHR	15	7		+3	+3																			
Weapon										Adj	Spd	Range	Damage	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
Bolas											8	6, 12, 18	1d3 /1d2	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Quarterstaff +1											4		1d6+1	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Equipment / treasure / notes																								
Spells - 1st: Bless, Command, Cure Lt. Wounds x2, Detect Evil 2nd: Aid, Barkskin, Chant, Find Traps, Hold Person 3rd: Continual Light, Dispel Magic																								

is known to give hearty adventurers quests to return pieces of human history to her for study. She additionally may send heroes on quests to unexpectedly aid their fellow humans and reveal the best nature of themselves.

## THE FOREST ORACLE

The Forest Oracle, usually appearing as a huge owlbear, is the mortal representation of Artio (Bear Goddess of Celtic mythos). Other worshippers see her as Medeina, companion to Silvanus, as a sister to Gaia, or many other wilderness godlike beings. Devout religious followers receive clerical and druidic spells, which is evidence to her connection of the realms of the gods. As she is a demigoddess, she grants spells only up to 5th level to her clerics and druids as per a particular book addressing demigods and deities.

The Forest Oracle may, on rare occasion, visit and bless altars arranged to her or other gods of nature when it suits her. When an area is blessed by the oracle, it truly becomes a neutral ground. No creatures within 50' of the altar are inclined to attack or initiate aggression without a saving throw. Such sites are frequently sought by travelers as safe havens to rest or heal.





The Forest Oracle, when agreeing to present herself to devout followers, dispenses wisdom, insight, protection, and advice. She concerns herself mostly with matters of the natural world but will advise those she feels have served her well on many topics.

She may innately summon 1d4 owlbear companions once per day, cast entangle 3 times per day, and charm person or mammal twice per day. She casts spells as a 12th level druid at half the standard casting time. For game purposes, she is considered to possess a 21 Wisdom and enjoys all the immunities and benefits attached to such a score.

The Forest Oracle can “feel” potential future outcomes as a result of various courses of action. Her answers are sometimes cryptic, sometimes direct, dependent on the events she considers, the phrasing of the question or situation, and the nature of those involved.

When the Forest Oracle dies on the Prime Material Plane, she does not permanently die. She returns to the Primeval Forested Plane to rest and heal. She may send other servants to represent her during these times of rest and healing. Owlbears are her favored representation, but she may send any true neutral entity from her home plane.

**FREQUENCY:** Unique

**NO. APPEARING:** 1

**ARMOR CLASS:** -2

**MOVE:** 18”, Climb 6”

**HIT DICE:** 13 (70 HP)

**% IN LAIR:** 0%

**TREASURE TYPE:** none

**NO. OF ATTACKS:** 3 (Claw, Claw, Bite) + innate abilities

**DAMAGE/ATTACK:** 2d6+2, 2d6+2, 2d10+2

**SPECIAL ATTACKS:** Innate abilities (see description), Cast as 12th level druid, surprise 50% of the time in wilderness

**SPECIAL DEFENSES:** Immune to spells not affecting beings with 21 WIS, +1 or better weapon to hit, Slight future vision (50% immunity to attempts to deceive her before making usual saves or checks)

**MAGIC RESISTANCE:** 15%

**INTELLIGENCE:** Very

**ALIGNMENT:** Neutral

**SIZE:** L

**CLERIC/DRUID:** 12th

**FIGHTER:** 8th

S: 19 I: 18 W: 21 D:16 C:19 CH: 17

## GROGMOTH

Despite being reared amongst the cruel and wretched, Grogmoth never subscribed to the ogrish dogmas of his kin. Wickedness was woven into the very being of his tribe, something never true for Grogmoth who realized at a young age he could not abide evil simply for the



sake of evil. His disobedience to the chieftain's malicious demands often brought the leader's rage as well as physical reprimands from others in the tribe. During one such reprimand, Grogmoth's left arm was nearly torn from his body. The injury eventually healed, but never fully or properly. As the wound slowly recovered, Grogmoth's anger with his tribe stewed. Eventually, he was sold as a servant to a visiting ogre magi. While serving in his new master's hollowed redwood laboratory, he discovered a natural aptitude for learning and mage craft, but always kept his ability secret.

When he felt his knowledge was sufficient, Grogmoth quietly slipped away from the decaying tree, never to return. After months of hiding and cultivating self-confidence,

Grogmoth cast his first spell—find familiar—and a clever corvid came to him. Carmella grew to adapt to her new partner's needs, but retains a good measure of greed when it comes to shiny objects and has a bit of a malicious streak. The two are forever bound to one another, and though they bicker and complain, they never separate for long.

Carmella introduced Grogmoth to the Forest Oracle where he was given wise counsel and a secluded cavernous haven to complete his study and refine his magical nature. With the aid of Carmella and the Oracle, Grogmoth shed the remnants of his wicked beginnings and anger toward his tribe to become a follower and servant of the Oracle and her forests. He is a full ogre magi, but not in appearance or temperament.

He speaks many languages: Gnome, Troll, Elf, Goblin, Ogrish, Kobold, Orc, and Common, all in a slow deliberate manner to announce around his prominent tusks. Grogmoth is rather superstitious, with some beliefs being valid practices of the Oracle and others simply "feelings" about various charms and practices. Though he prefers to use spells in combat, Grogmoth is an able fighter despite his wounded arm which renders him unable to wield a shield. His race and appearance have blocked

him from the proper schools of wizardry, but he is eager to talk with spell casters and trade for books, scrolls, and information to feed his insatiable desire for new knowledge.

**Grogmoth, Ogre Mage** (Int. Exceptional (16); AL N; AC 4; MV 9, Fl 15(B); HD 5+2; hp 30; THAC0 15; #AT 1; Dmg 1–12; SA Magic spells; SZ L; ML Elite (13–14); XP 750)

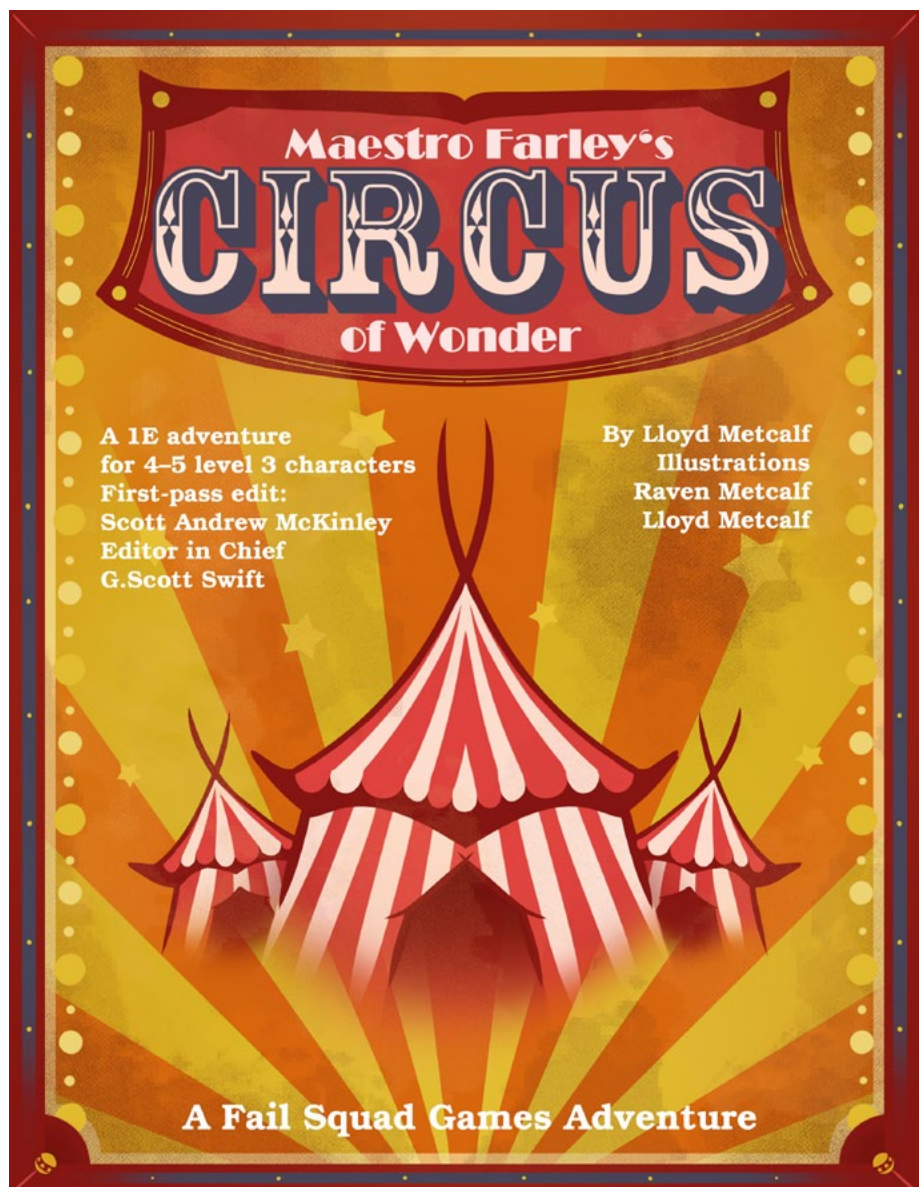
As an ogre mage, Grogmoth can fly (up to 12 turns), become invisible, cause darkness 10' radius, and polymorph to bipedal form from 4'–12' tall. (\*Note: Human, elf, dwarf, and hobbit forms confound Grogmoth. He hasn't interacted enough with those races to convincingly morph into their forms. There is usually something quite wrong when he tries, e.g., missing ears, legs too long or short, head far too small.) Grogmoth also regenerates 1 hp per round when in battle. Once per day he can do the following: charm person, sleep, assume gaseous form, create ray of cold (8d8).

Grogmoth may act as a liaison between mortals and the Forest Oracle, dispense quests, hire adventurers to perform quests in the wilds, or retrieve knowledge from human settlements. After spending a full week with 2–4 humans or other races, he will be able to polymorph into a convincing likeness of one. All of his polymorphed forms suffer the pain and troubles of his injured arm.

**Carmella, Giant Raven** (Int. 5; AL N; AC 7; MV 3, Fl 48(D); HD 4; hp 17; THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1–8; SD Familiar to Grogmoth; SZ M; ML Elite (13); XP 420)



# MAESTRO FARLEY'S CIRCUS OF WONDER



## USING THIS ADVENTURE

The following adventure is a preview of a short adventure that has been in the works for some time but remains unreleased in its complete form.

This adventure is intended to be a standalone side quest or short adventure for you to have in your arsenal when larger campaigns need a respite. Some players may decide to go one way when all your plans lie in the opposite direction. This is such a time to have FSG Side Quests handy.

This adventure begins in a town or civilized area but is focused on a wilderness area on the road. It is completely sensible to come across the unusual brigands on the road without ever entering or beginning in town. If this is the case, begin at “**What Did We Just Encounter?**”

Boxed text is intended to be read aloud to players and aid you, the GM, in setting the scene and descriptions. Feel free to alter or ignore these descriptions to suit your personal gaming style. Some of the encounter descriptions may be included here but are only intended as a tool for GMs who need it.

**Standard monsters** are found in **bold typeface**. *Magic items* and *spells* are *italicized*. New monsters or items defined herein will also have an asterisk reference to the Appendix: New Magic & Monsters (e.g. **monster\*** or *magic item\**).

This adventure can take place in any town of average size with a smaller township nearby with a connecting road able to support hobgoblin brigands.

## SYNOPSIS

Desperate brigands prey on merchants and those traveling the roads through the wilds to Tunstead, disrupting honest trade and placing little to no value on civilized life. Knuckle Bones, a brutal hobgoblin that captains a band of goblins, despite his cunning, has only obtained moderate success as a highwayman, until recently. His band scored big when they raided a traveling sideshow—Maestro Farley’s Circus of Wonders. The band, now assuming to be in possession of some of the fanciest clothes ever created for mankind, is using the unusual items and supplies from the circus to create deceptive encounters with travelers.

Recently, Knuckle Bones and his tribe charmed, captured, and polymorphed the local alderwoman’s fiancé who, as a



result of their magic, is now in the form of an ogre. They've also managed to control the circus' tiger and hold captive a few of the more interesting performers.

Knuckle Bones has used his newfound success to entice more hobgoblins to join his dandy band of highwaymen. What the heroes won't know, until maybe it's too late, is there are far fewer hobgoblins than it would appear. Knuckle Bones has been growing his tribe by using a powerful [wand of enhanced polymorph\\*](#) on his captives!

Can the heroes solve the mystery on the road? Free the captives? Rescue Reginald, the alderwoman's fiancé? Make the trade route safe for decent folk once again? Save the shape-shifted creatures before the curse becomes permanent?

## ALDERWOMAN'S QUEST



Adelina Corinth sent out requests for mercenaries recently and received very few responses.

As the characters pass the town offices or approach Tunstead, the herald is spreading the word that Alderwoman Corinth is offering gold for the services of sellswords. Any responding are quickly ushered into the town council offices and presented to the alderwoman herself.

The council offices have been decorated with streamers, muslin, and banners in gay colors. Wilting flowers line the entry hallway. It appears a wedding was recently performed but not cleaned up.

Alderwoman Corinth is a tall, red-haired woman who hasn't slept properly in days. She quickly describes her beloved Reginald, her fiancé from the township to the south. You gather that he is an olive-skinned, dark-haired gentleman of polite society. This description is gleaned from the alderwoman's rambling talk of love, swooning, and fret of harm. He was due to arrive four days ago with all his belongings for their wedding.

"I've gathered 200 gold for you to simply travel south along the road to Tunstead and find Reginald, then escort him safely here. The dolts he hired from Tunstead likely fell short in their duties. He always travels wearing his wide-brimmed hat. For his family, it's a hat of honor that signifies his noble status. I felt it was a mistake to travel with such a target on his head, but the family insisted."

what. But they aren't making any sense. They don't look sober to me."

## Actual Events

Using some *dust of disappearance*, a goblin rogue slipped onto the wagon and laced the drinking water with a hallucinogen used by the carnival mystic to make her more elite clientele "receptive" to her prognostications. The brigands then followed the wagon until it was certain everyone had drunk from the cask.

## THROUGH THE GATES

As the alderwoman finishes her introduction, or even during it, the doors to the council house burst open, and the herald rushes in.

"Madam Alderwoman, you might want to come to the gates. The tailor merchants from the South were, well, I think they were robbed... or something. Ma'am, it's the same road Reginald would come by."

At the front gates, three merchants are bloodied, bruised, and stripped. The gate guards are making them comfortable in the barracks while the page is sent to the temple for the cleric.

The guard captain says, "I don't know if they're delusional from hunger or

The goblin rogue, thinking himself dressed in noble clothing, stopped the wagon as a distraction. Hobgoblins in white-powdered wigs and mounted on camels charged in while the tiger handler released the cat on the guardsmen. The guards went down harder than expected,



and the tradesmen staggered out of the fray and into a ravine. The hobgoblins had what they needed and felt no need to pursue the presumably dead or unconscious merchants.

## Reported Events

“We were making the trip as usual. We hired a couple of Tunstead guards since the road has been more dangerous than usual and we had a lot invested in this shipment. We were transporting tailored clothes and wigs for the nobles. We were all feeling a bit ill, perhaps from some bad food on the road. We were stopped by a demonic looking little clown—a wicked, cackling, child-size, red-nosed demon with a bloody spear. The guards drew bows on the thing. Gangling horses on stilts ridden by wigged lawyers with walrus tusks swooped in from behind.

“A great striped cat that flowed like water felled our guards, and we were swarmed by the most gayly painted but ugly brigands you could imagine. It was all just strange, liquid, and confusing. We woke up at the bottom of a ravine, our wagon, horses, shipment, everything we owned, gone!”

## A MISSION MORE URGENT

Alderwoman Corinth boosts her offer to 400 gp with the strange story from the merchants.

“I’m more worried than ever about Reginald. I’m not sure if these merchants are drugged, delusional, or charmed, but if you can make the road to Tunstead safe while finding my love, you’ll have my gratitude and that of the entire town.” She raises a handkerchief to her watery eyes and softly cries, “Oh, Reginald.”

## Note on Polymorphed Creatures

This adventure has several polymorphed creatures. Detection of the creatures should be allowed by way of a *detect magic* spell or some other expendable resource available to the party. Some scrolls of *detect magic* are placed throughout the adventure as a hint as to their usefulness.

The goblin regulars and native hobgoblins don’t find the addition of new members suspicious. They assume they’ve defected from other tribes when they heard of the success of the Knuckle Bones Tribe. The polymorphed creatures suffer from an unusual forgetfulness

side effect of the wand. While polymorphed, they don't recall who they were before the transformation. Perhaps they retain minor abilities or skills, flashes of quick disjointed memories, but nothing identifying their past.

The *wand of enhanced polymorph* should be destroyed or depleted in any battle between Knucklebones and the characters or cease functioning a few days after the events of this adventure unless you are prepared to allow level 3 characters such a powerful item.

Polymorphed creatures (unless otherwise stated) have 1d6+1 days before their polymorphed state becomes permanent.

## WHAT DID WE JUST ENCOUNTER?

Goblins (7), Hobgoblins (3), Hobgoblin camel mount (1)

On the road to Tunstead, the characters have the following unusual encounter with brigands at least a day's travel from town. The enemies include seven **goblins**, three **hobgoblins**, and one **camel-mounted hobgoblin\*** riding a **barded camel\***

As you round a bend, three small bipedal creatures run into the road 20 yards ahead. They can only be described as diminutive, nightmarish clowns. Each is wearing brightly colored, garish clothes. Their faces are smeared with white, green, and red makeup. Two carry a bamboo tube, and the third wields an exceptionally large hammer made of some sort of fabric. Upon closer inspection, you realize the creatures are goblins.

The trio of goblins come to an abrupt halt in the middle of the road and stumble into one another. The hammer-wielding one hits one of its partners, and the great hammer "squeaks" on contact. The victim retaliates by compressing half of his bamboo tube into the other half and squirting a stream of liquid at the hammerer.

It is the brigands' intent to distract travelers, douse them with oil by surprise, and threaten them into surrender with burning crossbow bolts. If the characters listened carefully to the tailors' story of their robbery, they may be prepared for this tactic. All brigands wield regular weapons in addition to a light crossbow. The hidden

members are initially 100 feet into the woods away from the ambush point. Five out of the seven goblins have squirt tubes containing a flask's worth of oil. The trio in the road continue their antics, attempting to distract the travelers while their cohorts move in to surround travelers and block escape. The goblins are careful to only cover the travelers and not their goods in oil. The hammer-wielder has a half flask of oil on him as a result of the distraction.

All the goblins and hobgoblins are wearing either circus performer clothes or clothes of nobility and social status; few of the clothes fit properly. Some are wearing wigs, and many have tried to apply makeup and face powder. All the goblins and hobgoblins believe their new attire reflects an air of wealth and power to humans.

One hobgoblin emerges wielding a lance while riding a camel draped in brightly colored canvas. He demands surrender as soon as he appears. The rider carries 50 sp, 20 gp, and 1 *scroll of detect magic*.

**Note:** If there are more than six characters, including men-at-arms and henchmen, feel free to increase the number of foes to nine **goblins** and four **hobgoblins**.

## THE HOBGOBLIN SIDESHOW

The trail of the initial goblin and hobgoblin raiding party can be followed with little difficulty by a character practiced in such things, requiring only a successful Wisdom or standard tracking check. The most direct trail is through a half-mile of forest, but a more accessible path exists by following an abandoned road to a dead-end, overgrown field. The road to the





encampment is a five-mile round-about journey through the woods and comes with the risk (2 in 6 chance) of another small hobgoblin and goblin bandit attack (1d6 of each).

In the clearing of what used to be a field, many brightly colored tents are haphazardly arranged and bustling with activity (see map).

These encounters are meant to be approached with tactical planning and strategy. Characters should be encouraged to find their own way to explore the camp without charging straight into open fighting, which attracts most of the camp all at once. Typical strategies involve sneaking through at night, operating in disguise, charming and manipulating hobgoblins, or taking

on the areas independently. Every adventuring party is unique, and there are limitless solutions to this sandbox scenario.

A regular patrol of one **hobgoblin** and 2d4 **goblins** walks the perimeter of the encampment every 3 turns. They raise an alarm (summoning 2d4 **hobgoblins**) and call for the hobgoblin **animal handler\*** (Area 4) or the **ogre** (Area 3) at any sign of trouble. Few things change among the following areas during a day or night approach.

## 1. The Road Guards

Hobgoblins (2), Goblins (4)

Two hobgoblins in high-wire acrobat tights and four goblin archers with bright scarves sit around a small campfire roasting a rabbit and a small

## ENCAMPMENT MAP



boar on a spit. The meat is nearing completion, and most of the attention is on the food.

These are supposed to be the rotating and patrolling guards for the camp, but they are consumed by watching the food. Sneaking or moving near these tents is at a 10% bonus, and the creatures' infravision is useless from staring into the fire.

The two hobgoblins here are polymorphed circus performers. One is a trapeze artist known as [Olga Svigny\\*](#) (12 hours remaining), and the other is [The Amazing Mubarak\\*](#), who is a human pincushion and sword swallowing act. Olga has a *wand of illusions*. She isn't very imaginative with its use but can summon a very convincing illusion of an additional ten hobgoblin guards charging in to protect the camp. She may (10% chance if attacked) expend extra charges from the wand to cast a more convincing illusion and bring forth a frightful clown dressed in red and white stripes wielding a pair of deadly scimitars with masterful skill.

For roleplaying purposes, the goblins are quite jealous of the hobgoblins' "aristocrat clothes and magic" and wish they had access to the tailor supply wagon (Area 2). The hobgoblins are aware of the goblinoid envy and take every opportunity to gloat in their

finery or bribe them with pieces of clothing. They are beginning to believe their own lie that they are diplomats to the human empire.

## 2. Knuckle Bones

Hobgoblins (4), Knucklebones (Leader)

One **hobgoblin** in the tents is a polymorphed performer: [Morovia Borislav\\*](#), the bearded lady of the jungle. Her act was as a tumbling elephant rider and curiosity. The circus has been lacking an elephant for many years, and she substitutes large Clydesdale horses in her act.

Morovia has two *scrolls of detect magic* in her tent. She doesn't understand what they are since being transformed; she only knows to keep the magic items secret.

In this area, three camels and two large horses are tethered to a set of posts. Two cargo wagons are opposite a sizable vardo occupied by the hobgoblin leader [Knuckle Bones\\*](#). Two tents nearby house



five **hobgoblins**, three of which are currently present.

Knuckle Bones is a tremendous and imposing hobgoblin leader. He dominates his tribe with fear and intimidation, but those under his command are some of the most successful hobgoblins around.

His magic [\*wand of enhanced polymorph\\*\*](#) has grown his command rapidly. Very soon, all the transformed creatures will be permanently altered.

**Note** – The vardo contains an extremely well-secured secret panel behind the forward axle containing a *scroll of dispel magic*. It should not be discoverable, or nearly impossible so, for anyone without the help of [\*\*Madame Mushka\\*\*\*](#) (Area 5).

Knucklebones is no fool. He knows the clothes from the circus are for performers and clowns; he also knows that those looted from the tailors' shipment are for fops and nobles. What is real is the morale of his tribe when they wear them. The goblins and hobgoblins have become so convinced that the clothes represent some sort of station among humans that they accept them in lieu of gold.

In combat, Knucklebones begins by targeting the strongest looking armored character (or who appears to be a melee fighter) with his *wand*

*of enhanced polymorph*, attempting to turn his target into a harmless, fluffy, white rabbit. He then savagely slashes at the remaining foes with his longsword. If he feels his life is in danger, he uses his *dust of disappearance* on himself in an attempt to escape.

Knucklebones seeks a stronghold nearby, hoping to establish his tribe. Currently, he is a rogue leader with only the followers he has gathered here.

The wagons contain:

- 300 ft. of cable and rope for trapeze and high wire acts
- 200 ft. of other rope
- Large 20' x 20' safety net
- Chest full of clown costumes and makeup (locked)
- Hardware (nails, hammers, line crimpers, tent stakes, flint, handaxe, small pulley)
- Four 50 lb. sacks of wheat, two 50 lb. sacks of oats
- Twelve bales of hay
- Two square shovels, one spade, three rakes, two hoes
- Six large sealed crates with upper-class tailored clothes on the cutting-edge of fashion (value 50 gp per crate)

### 3. Big Top

Goblins (6), Hobgoblins (4), Ogre (1)

One of the **hobgoblins** here is a polymorphed performer. He is **Bruno Gustav**, a half-elf who was quite popular, very handsome, and known for performing remarkable trick shots with bow and arrow, sling, and crossbow.

This large tent was originally intended to house the main entertainment of the traveling sideshow, but now it houses the communal activities of the tribe and “Ruggo” the **ogre**.

Crude tables and logs for chairs are lined up on one side of the tent. Six **goblins** and four **hobgoblins** rotate in and out, picking over scant remnants of clothes, ropes, and dried trail rations. On the opposing side of the tent, an ogre snores loudly. If the characters search the area, a large-brimmed hat is found on a chest among some noble clothes, 100 sp, 150 gp, an exquisitely crafted loveseat (30 gp value), and a hand-carved chifferobe (100 gp value).

The ogre is the alderwoman’s Reginald who has been first *charmed*, then *polymorphed* by Knuckle Bones to protect and serve the tribe. His presence is a great source of morale and fear for the goblins and hobgoblins. Ruggo has 48 hours to have *dispel magic*,

*remove curse*, or *polymorph* cast on him to change him back to his original form before permanently becoming an ogre. He doesn’t know why, but Ruggo insists on wearing or carrying his large-brimmed hat when he leaves the tent, even though in his current form the hat is a very poor fit.

Regular members of the tribe are not aware that Ruggo is a polymorphed human. Only Knuckle Bones (Area 2) and the captives (Area 5) are aware of Reginald’s predicament. Ruggo is barely aware that he might not be a typical ogre. He doesn’t recall much before joining Knuckle Bones and being his “friend”. He does suspect he was in love once a long time ago and may vaguely recollect planning a trip to a city or town.

### 4. The Sideshow

Tiger (1), Hobgoblins (2), Animal handler (1)

Here, three cage wagons form a semicircle. One contains a griffin, one a harpy, and the third is empty. Its presumed resident, a large **tiger**, lies in front of the three wagons calmly licking its front paws. Two **hobgoblins** are talking to an elaborately dressed hobgoblin **animal handler** nearby outside a red tent. The handler wears striped pants and an elaborate red and gold jacket and carries a long whip.

The cage bearing the griffin is a

polymorphed dog. The polymorph was done by someone who had only ever seen a griffin from afar, or from stories. The resulting creature is a poor representation of what an actual griffin is. The animal is nearing starvation and has been neglected by the goblins and hobgoblins out of fear. The harpy is a turkey with a permanent intricate illusion cast on it.

The all-too-real tiger is controlled with *potions of animal friendship*. Once charmed, the animal was fed several horses and treated well enough to be content in serving its hobgoblin master.

The master is a polymorphed human animal handler named [The Magnificent Madlow\\*](#). Somehow, he recalled his affinity for the animals, and Knucklebones was satisfied enough with the transformation and service to the tribe. Madlow has a *scroll of detect magic* but doesn't recall how or why he came to have it.

For roleplaying purposes, the hobgoblins are afraid of the tiger. They do, however, want the tiger and its master to take a turn at patrol and camp security. The animal handler has one dose of *dust of disappearance* which can be used on himself and the tiger. Madlow suspects something is wrong in the camp and is rather frustrated at his

inability to recall anything before arriving at camp.

## 5. Captives

Goblins (8), Hobgoblins (3)

This large, round tent has the surviving performers held in an animal cage. The tent is guarded by eight **goblins** and three **hobgoblins**.

The following captives remain:

- [Madame Mushka\\*](#), fortune teller. She is known to use mind-altering drugs to impress or swindle clientele. She was up late the night of the raid when a huge hobgoblin charged in and clubbed her. She woke up in the cage. If allowed to examine Knuckle Bones' vardo, she recalls a very-well-hidden panel that contains a scroll of dispel magic. She has a 10% chance of recognizing any polymorphed performers.
- [The Amazing Aldo\\*](#) has a magic act and is an illusionist. He is certain that some of the hobgoblins are transformed performers. He is sure that Ruggo is. He has a 33% chance of recognizing any polymorphed performers.
- [Elsy Ethereal\\*](#) is a remarkably beautiful and agile acrobat. She was practicing late the night of the raid. The tent was swarmed by goblins and her family



dragged away. She recalls one huge hobgoblin was looking for magic items. She has a 10% chance of recognizing any polymorphed performers (20% chance for acrobats).

- The captives are struggling with consciousness from being denied food and water. Whenever they beg for provisions from their captors, they are denied longer. What food and drink they do receive is after the goblins have had their fill when tasked with delivering it to the cage. All captives are weak but will aid the heroes in releasing their fellow surviving performers.

The captives are struggling with consciousness from being denied

## PLAYER'S MAP



food and water. Whenever they beg for provisions from their captors, they are denied longer. What food and drink they do receive is after the goblins have had their fill when tasked with delivering it to the cage. All captives are weak but will aid the heroes in releasing their fellow surviving performers.

## LOOSE ENDS

### The Perfect Ending

(20% bonus XP):

All surviving polymorphed performers are saved, Alderwoman Corinth provides any remaining *dispel magic* required, Reginald completes his journey to his bride, the performers perform at the ceremony, and the heroes are guests of honor.

## A Lukewarm Ending

(Normal XP):

Less than half the polymorphed performers are saved and Reginald returned. The circus goes out of business, forcing the survivors into a rough life on the streets.

## Well, the Road is Safe

(-10% XP penalty):

Fewer than two performers are saved, and Reginald is lost, but the Knuckle Bones Tribe is no more and remains are returned to loved ones.

## If You Can't Beat 'em, Join 'em

Characters are captured and turned into bugbears that serve the Knuckle Bones Tribe. They become hunted by a stream of pseudo-military units from the nearby human settlements and must defend the camp at all costs by carrying out guerrilla warfare tactics.

## MAESTRO FARLEY'S APPENDIX

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### Wand of Enhanced Polymorph

This wand has 4 charges. While holding it, you can use an action to expend 1 of its charges to cast a variation of the *polymorph other* spell. It functions as the regular

*polymorph other* spell, except that it does not require concentration, and after a maximum of one week (1d6+1 days), its effects become irreversible except by means of a *wish* spell or other extremely powerful magic.

The wand regains 1d3 expended charges every third day at dawn. If you expend the wand's last charge, the wand crumbles into ashes and is destroyed.

### Wand of Illusions

This wand has 9 charges. Activating the wand causes two of its charges to cast an *illusion* spell that creates a detailed illusion with visual and auditory elements. Expending a single charge creates either a visual or auditory illusion (*Audible Glamour*).

Upon expending all charges, the wand dissolves into mist and is destroyed.

### Barded Camel

Camel, Medium (Int. 1 Animal intelligence; AL N; AC 7 (4–Barded); MV 18; HD 2+2; hp 15; THAC0 19; #AT 2 (Kick or bite); Dmg 1–6; SZ L; ML Unsteady (5–7); XP 65

### Bruno Gustav (Hobgoblin / Half-elf)

While polymorphed, as standard hobgoblin. If restored, a neutral good half-elf scout (Thief) level 3.

STR 8, INT 10, WIS 11, DEX 17, CON 9 CHR 16, AC 5, HP 15. Long Sword, Dagger, Leather armor

## Camel-mounted Hobgoblin

Camel, Medium (Int. 1 Animal intelligence; AL N; AC 7 (4 – Barded); MV 18; HD 2+2; hp 15; THAC0 19; #AT 2 (Kick or bite); Dmg 1–6; SZ L; ML Unsteady (5–7); XP 65

Hobgoblin, Rider (Int. 8–10 Average (human) intelligence; AL LE; AC 5; MV 9; HD 1d1+8; hp 12; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon (Long Spear 1d8, or Broadsword); SZ M; ML Steady (11–12); XP 35)

Charge. If the camel-mounted goblin moves at least 20 feet straight toward a target and then hits it with a Spear attack on the same turn, the target takes an extra 1d8 piercing damage on that attack. If the target is bipedal, it must succeed on a saving throw vs. paralyzation or be knocked prone.

## Elsy Ethereal

Chaotic good Human level 1 performer/dancer. STR 9, INT 11, WIS 9, DEX 15, CON 12 CHR 17, AC 8, HP 6. Dagger, darts (6)

## Knuckle Bones (Hobgoblin)

Hobgoblin Warrior Chief (Int. 8 Average intelligence; AL LE; AC

4; MV 9; HD 6+1; hp 24; THAC0 13; #AT 1; Dmg 2d4+4 broadsword +1 (or by weapon +3); SZ M; ML Steady (11–12); XP 800)

Knuckle Bones possesses the wand of *enhanced polymorph* and *dust of disappearance* and may use either of them as needed.

## Madam Mushka

Level 0 Human with INT 15, AC 9, Thaco 20

## Moravia Borislav (Hobgoblin)

While polymorphed, as a standard hobgoblin. If restored, a neutral good lvl 0 human with a Dexterity score of 14, a Charisma score of 6, and an Animal Handling and Acrobatics ability (Non-Weapon Proficiency if used).

## Olga Svigny (Hobgoblin)

While polymorphed, as a standard hobgoblin with a *wand of illusions*. If restored, as a lawful neutral Human lvl 1 Fighter STR 12, INT 10, WIS 9, DEX 15, CON 14 CHR 10, AC 7, HP 7. Short Sword, Dagger, Leather armor

## Reginald (Ruggo the Ogre)

While polymorphed, as ogre. Ogre (Int. 5–7 Low intelligence; AL CE; AC 5; MV 9; HD 4+1; hp 23; THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1-10 (or by weapon +6); SA +2 dmg; SZ L; ML Steady (11–12); XP 270)

If restored, as a lawful good lvl 0

human noble with no weapons or armor.

## The Amazing Aldo

(Illusionist) level 2. STR 11, INT 16, WIS 9, DEX 16, CON 9 CHR 13, AC 7, HP 5. Quarterstaff, 2 first-level illusionist spells

## The Amazing Mubarak (Hobgoblin)

While polymorphed, as standard hobgoblin. If restored, Chaotic good lvl 2 human fighter. STR 16, INT 11, WIS 12, DEX 15, CON 11 CHR 8, AC 8, HP 12. Scimitar, Shortbow. Mubarak's familiarity with scimitars is such that any slashing weapon used against him suffers a damage penalty of -2.

## The Magnificent Madlow (Hobgoblin Animal Handler)

While polymorphed, as a standard hobgoblin with two *potions of animal friendship*.

If restored, Level 0 human animal handler with WIS 15.



# THE SUBLIME FONT

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Scott McKinley

(Suitable for a party of 4th–6th level characters)

**Worker Goblin Note:** This adventure was intended to be used in a popular setting that is not public IP. So, we've changed some names to protect the innocent. In the realm of Bigby, Melf, and others residing in the world of "Elderhawk" is where this was intended to be played but may be used in any setting.

## THE MYTH

Deep in the heart of the Farvale Forest, a tiny and little-traveled arm of the vast Gnarleywood, there lies a natural spring known as the Sublime Font. It was once a tranquil place, a source of pure water for sylvan creatures for miles around and a focus of druidic and Fey magic. Now, however, although Farvale is located at a temperate latitude, the Font remains frozen, regardless of the season.

Adventurers who have stumbled upon the Font report having felt a chill breeze, even in the depth of summer, long before they laid eyes upon the mystical fountain. When they finally pushed aside the dense



undergrowth and peered between the ancient hornwood trees—their smooth, black bark coated with an unnatural hoarfrost—those brave souls beheld a clearing, perhaps a stone’s throw wide, almost entirely filled with a heavy, frosty mist, as if the great mother goddess Gaia had breathed out a great cloud of warm breath on a freezing midwinter’s day and had it coalesce in midair. A few intrepid souls who have entered the glade and swum through the icy vapor say there is a fountain plume in the middle, taller than a man, coming from a crack in the earth. Around its frozen, intricate, crystalline form are arrayed a ring of “supplicants”—humans, elves,

dwarves, halflings, and more—all frozen and staring at the fountain. Meanwhile, gentle waves of frosty gas perpetually exude from this motionless geyser, though it never seems to melt or grow smaller.

Although these reports have been few and far between, sages seem to corroborate them. However, there is apparently only one person who has actually touched the Sublime Font and lived to tell about it, a dwarf from the Coron Hills named Thorvus Frostbeard. Stories of Thorvus’ experience and the consequences wrought upon him are as varied as creatures in the woods themselves, but most agree that from that day forward Thorvus had



a white frost coating his long beard that would not dissipate even in front of the most blazing inn hearth nor during the longest day of sweaty work at a hot forge.

## THE WHOLE STORY (DM ONLY)

Three score years ago in a dark corner of the Elemental Plane of Water, a particularly powerful ice elemental named Izkil rebelled against Hydra, Elemental Princess of Water. She cast him out, banished him to the Prime Material Plane for a thousand years, and sent a powerful servant, an elder water weird, to keep an eye on the traitor. Izkil found himself on Artera and did everything he could to thwart and annoy his chaperone for years, leading him from one body of water to another. Finally, the weird's patience ran out in the middle of the Farvale Forest during a particularly harsh winter, and it attempted to use its elemental absorption ability on Izkil. The result was a fusion of their natures and the birth of a unique para-elemental being, an ice weird. The ice weird no longer has any desire to return to its plane of origin, but it hates all life on the Prime Material and has been expanding its chilling effect

to a greater and greater portion of the Farvale. Over the last decade, several hunters, loggers, and adventurers have stumbled upon its home in the Sublime Font. Except for Thorvus, it has frozen each of them, draining their life essence and growing ever stronger. The ice weird is, however, bound to the spring wherein it was born, able to leave only for short periods and then still only able to roam within the area of forest it has transformed. Its presence has attracted other cold-loving creatures not often found in the Farvale: winter wolves, ice mephits, and the like. The ground within the glade is hard-frozen and slippery, and you may wish to make characters roll Dexterity checks or make saving throws during combat to keep their footing.

## Adventure Hooks

1. A local noble, a middle-aged woman known as Baroness Tarre, has put out a call for adventurers to get to the bottom of some strange, unseasonable weather in her family's forest. She didn't originally put much stock in peasant rumors, but her head huntsman, a skilled ranger named Rook, recently disappeared during a routine boar hunt. She suspects dark

magic and offers a reward of 1,000 gp. Rook can be found among the frozen victims in the Sublime Font glade and, at your discretion, revived once the weird is defeated.

2. A nereid or other fairy creature beguiles the party into investigating a foul spirit that has taken over one of its favorite and most revered sites, the Sublime Font.

3. The local archdruid, a withered, white-haired man named Vinglas, seeks out the PCs' assistance. He was ready to cede his title to his protégé Dary, foregoing the normal ritual combat. Two weeks ago, he sent Dary to complete a simple ritual of ascension at the Sublime Font, but Dary never returned. Vinglas has led his circle for more than a decade, and it's possible none in the order have visited the Font during that time. Dary can be found among the frozen victims in the Sublime Font glade and, at your discretion, revived once the weird is defeated.

4. The party meets Thorvus Frostbeard at an inn near Dyvers and hears his tale of the Sublime Font. He is convinced that he could defeat the evil in the glade (and finally defrost his

blasted beard!) with the help of powerful allies such as the player characters, or perhaps, the ice weird still exerts some control over Thorvus and uses him to lure new victims to the glade.

5. An adventuring party which becomes lost in the woods may simply stumble upon the Font.

### Hex-Crawl Note

The DM may wish to have the characters engage in an extended wilderness search before locating the Sublime Font, in which case standard temperate forest encounter tables should be used until near the Font glade.

**Ice Weird** (Int. 13–14 Very; AL CE; AC 3; MV 12; HD 8+4; THAC0 13; #AT 3 (2 claws + 1 asphyxiate); Dmg 1d6+1, 1d6+1 /Special; SD (See below) SZ L; ML Steady (11–12); MR 20%; XP 1,282)

**Special Attack:** The ice weird sublimates part of its body into magically subzero mist and attempts to force a single creature to breathe it. Those who fail a saving throw versus paralyzation are frozen solid, while those who succeed take 2–8 points of damage. Only killing the ice weird will allow a creature to be unfrozen, and healing or restorative magic is still needed.

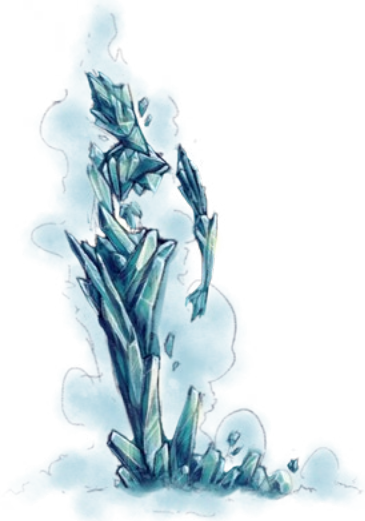
**Surprise:** When initially hiding

in its frozen fountain form, the ice weird has a 4 in 6 chance of surprising characters.

**Special Defense:** Ignores 2 points of damage from each piercing attack. Immune to nonmagical weapons. Takes half damage from nonmagical fire. Takes full damage from magical fire, but fire-based spells and spell-effects below 4th level have a 75% chance of not functioning in its glade. Regenerates 3 hit points per round while in its glade.

**Gaseous Form:** The ice weird may assume frozen mist form for up to three rounds once per day, during which time it is immune to physical attack. A *purify water* spell will do 3d8 damage to an ice weird.

The ice weird appears as a 9' tall humanoid made of jagged ice or as a cloud of mist.



## Treasure

Some of the frozen “supplicants” cannot be revived. They carry a total of 710 gp and an assortment of magical treasure including a *cube of frost resistance*, *potion of plant control*, *gauntlets of dexterity*, *longbow +1*, and *bracers of defense AC 5* (as well as anything else you deem appropriate to find on forest-goers). Nonmagical gear is largely ruined. Depending on the adventure hook used, the baroness, fey quest-giver, or archdruid may provide additional reward for restoring the forest and Font.

## THOUGHTS FROM THE BACK ROOM

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*Lloyd Metcalf*

For me personally as a GM, some of the biggest challenges in gaming outdoors come from tactical positioning and encounters in the wild. We forget that in dungeons and contained settings it’s common to have a map handy, but the outdoor parts of our adventures are frequently a series of vague monster stats and random chance.

“Where are trees? Who is facing the campfire? Where am I in relation to the stream? Where is that clearing?”

All common questions from players. I started keeping some cutout tree

trunks, rocks, and various generic outdoor battle map representational items in a zip bag. Terrain seems to be more important in wilderness encounters than anywhere else, or maybe it is simply because I had prepared for it the least.

Many outdoor encounters, battle or not, improve dramatically when the GM can represent opponent location, local trees, potential cover, and other elements encountered. The general map for traveling outdoors can be a simple trailing map (points connected by lines), but when the encounter begins, laying down trees, rocks, thickets, and markers seems to truly spark creative roleplaying in my players.

## Personal Experience

Adding things from personal experience can also add great depth to outdoor encounters. If you have ever been camping, thick black fly or mosquito populations can really be a complete distraction from EVERY activity. Are there ticks? Leeches? Harmless snakes? If the players are running low on food, can they catch a fish? If fishing is your hobby, it can be interesting to add a little flavor to what it's like to coax a brown trout into biting. Of course, too much of your hobby's minute details here can derail the game, but a search for bait and tools can add a wonderful anchor to the realistic feel of your game.

Spending some time outdoors, hiking trails, walking through undergrowth, noticing the damp, cool feel of moss on tree bark, all can add new descriptive power to your wilderness encounters. It exists in fantasy medieval times as clearly as it does in the park. If you don't have access to being in the wilderness, reading outdoor books can be great fuel for adventures outside the dungeon. ***"Lost on a Mountain in Maine"*** by Donn Fendler is an entire nonfictional adventure of a young lad lost on Mt. Katahdin. He recounts many scenarios of survival in the environment and how mundane things become lingering challenges for the hero (himself as a boy). It's a light read but loaded with challenges adventurers might face hiking over mountains and through wild places to get to their dungeon adventure.

Wilderness encounters don't need to be just ogres, giants, or orcs. This issue provides many of those things, but when you add in challenges like bitter cold rain, swarms of biting mosquitoes, or slogging through swamp water with sodden feet, these encounters with dangerous adversaries can become more memorable than the most complex dungeon trap ever considered.



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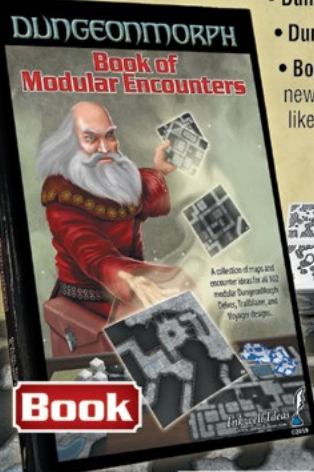
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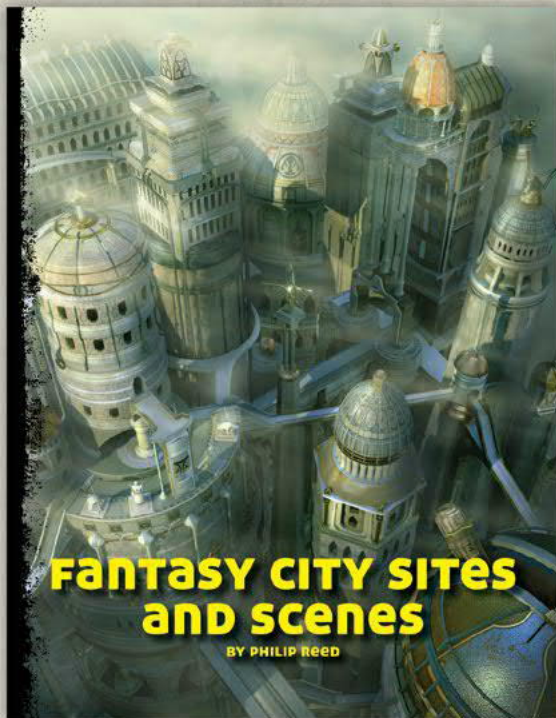
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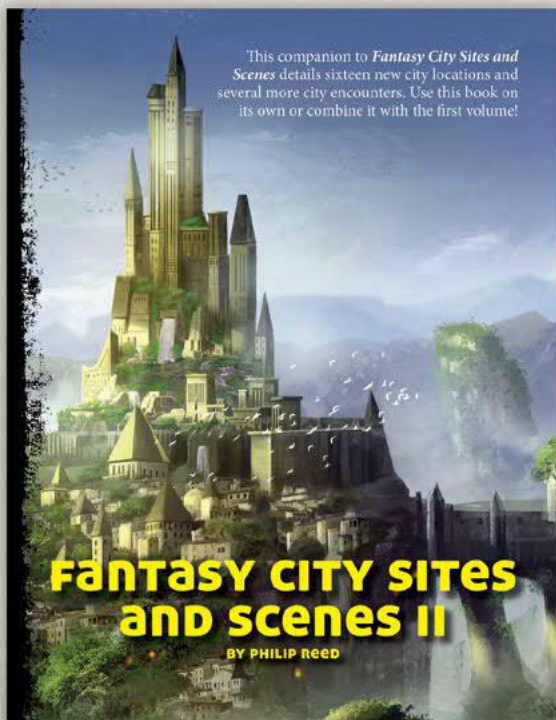
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