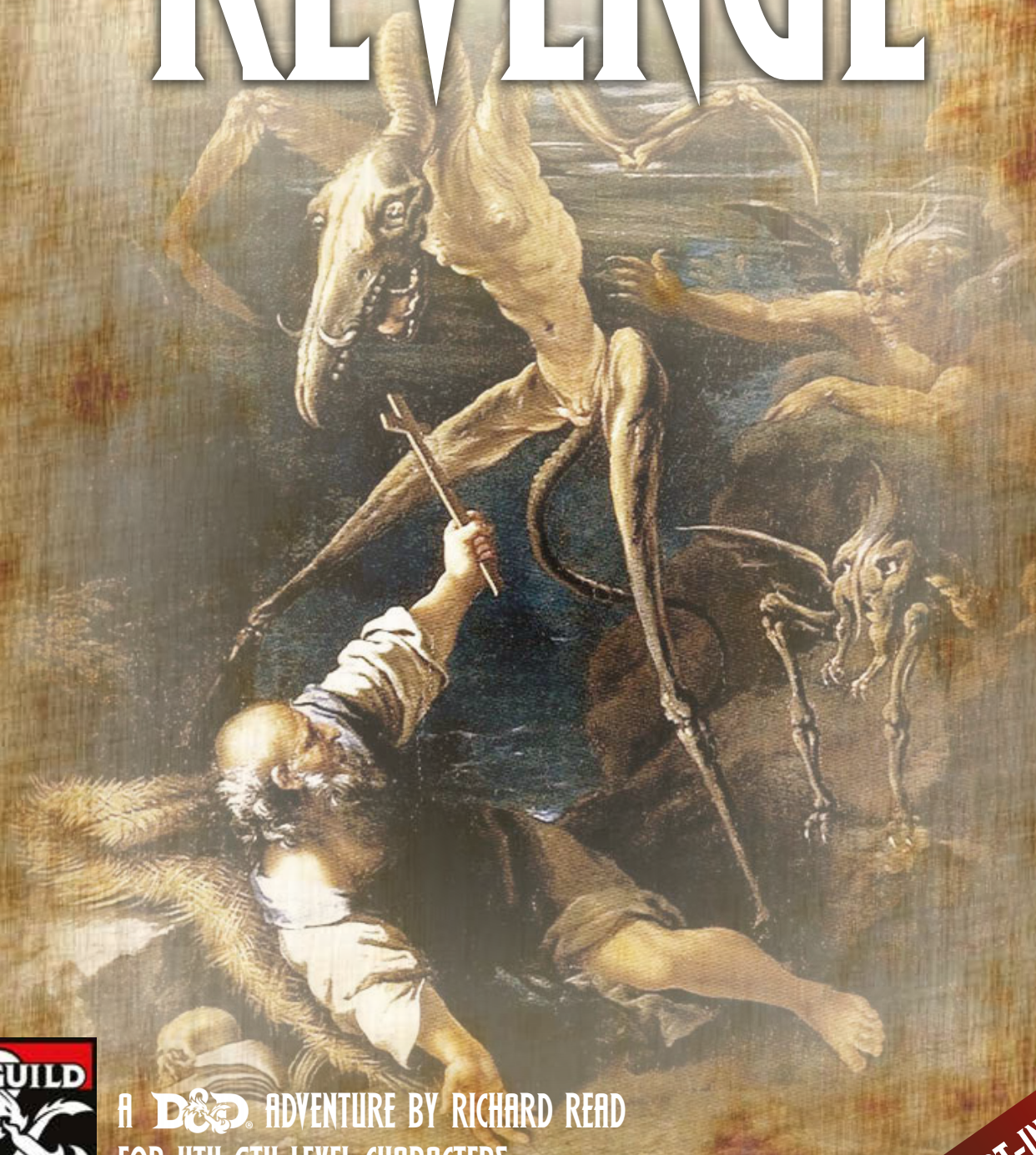


AUNT LOBELIA'S REVENGE



A **D&D** ADVENTURE BY RICHARD READ
FOR 4TH-6TH LEVEL CHARACTERS

LGBT-INCLUSIVE!



*For Dave, Peter, and Robert
Also for John and Peter*

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AUNT LOBELIA'S REVENGE

The following information is intended for the dungeon master, or DM.

If you want to participate in this campaign as a player, don't spoil the fun: stop reading now!

INTRODUCTION

This one-off adventure is designed for fourth-, fifth-, or sixth-level characters. You can run it in-between major campaigns, use it as a side quest, or change some of the details to make it pertinent to your main storyline. You might also use it to introduce new players to the game.

The gist of the story is simple:

- The players arrive in a small town, where they encounter an old friend—a bloodthirsty, sword-slashing mercenary who recently assumed a new identity, and by a complete fluke, became the town's mayor.
- The friend's wife goes missing under very suspicious circumstances, and the players are asked to find her.

The campaign has a mix of combat, exploration, and social interaction, so it should offer something for every kind of player. But of course, take all the liberties you like to adapt it to your group's preferred style.

A FEW IMPORTANT NOTES

- I provide details about the major NPCs and creatures that players may encounter—for example, I explain how they'll react in certain situations. However, you won't find a full list of the monsters' stats, nor are there detailed explanations of magical items or spells. For simplicity's sake, I refer you instead to the appropriate page of the *Dungeon Master's Guide* (abbreviated to DMG) the *Monster Manual* (MM), or the *Player's Handbook* (PH). Page numbers refer to the fifth-edition books.
- Throughout the adventure, you'll find bits of text that have been offset, italicized, and placed against a gray background. This is what characters see when they enter a given area. You can read the text aloud to players as-is, or you can paraphrase it if you prefer.
- If you've led players through a town setting before, you know that things can be very unpredictable—far

less predictable than when a group is creeping from Point A to Point B in a dungeon maze, anyway. I've provided descriptions of important locations and non-player characters (NPCs) that your players may encounter in Briswold. However, it's up to you, the dungeon master, to embody those characters and make them respond appropriately, according to their motivations. As is often the case when you're DMing, you'll have to improvise from bulletpoints, not use a fully fleshed-out script.

- To help you in your role as storyteller, I've included a short list of random NPC names and businesses that you can use when players veer in unexpected directions as they're exploring the town of Briswold. You'll find that list on page eight, after the descriptions of major NPCs.
- One last thing: this adventure is LGBT-inclusive. You're welcome to change anything in this campaign to suit your tastes, but I'd love it if you left that element intact.

LOBELIA'S THIRST FOR REVENGE

Aunt Lobelia didn't intend to destroy the town of Briswold. It just happened.

Don't get me wrong: Lobelia has always been evil. She delights in slaughtering humans, dwarves, elves, and orcs by the dozen.

But like most hags, Lobelia is also deeply selfish. She understands that those very same humans, dwarves, elves, and orcs create the sparkly things she holds dear. Kill them all, and there'd be no one left to weave the silk, mine the jewels, or blow the glass baubles that adorn the walls of her lair. And so, there's a method to her murder.

Or at least there was. But Briswold crossed a line. If Lobelia gets her way, the town will be no more.

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Three centuries ago, Aunt Lobelia came to this corner of the world as part of a coven called the Mistresses of the Marsh. She and two other hags settled in a cave to the west of Briswold, about a mile beyond the banks of the Troutrun River, on the edge of a mist-covered swamp.

When the Mistresses arrived, Briswold didn't even have a name. It was just a trading outpost for trappers, a couple of shacks in the wilderness. The hags had free rein to waylay merchants, adventurers, and common folk traveling the nearby roads or floating down the Troutrun. As they did, they amassed a mountain of coin, jewelry, and other trinkets—even a few slaves. But they made sure to leave Briswold itself alone. Without it, there'd be fewer travelers in the area and thus, less loot.

Over the last 100 years, Briswold has grown, and so has fear of the Mistresses. (Though obviously, no one calls them by that name. The Mistresses are the only ones who know it, and no one who's encountered them has lived long enough to tell others.) Early on, parents in Briswold frightened their children with stories of evil marsh-witches, but everyone assumed those were just fairy tales meant to keep young ones on the straight and narrow. As the children grew into adults, and as disappearances and other strange events continued to plague the region beyond the river, the stories became something more. Calls for action grew louder.

Twenty years ago, the town council finally decided to act. On a fine fall morning, Mayor Durnish himself and a dozen hired adventurers strode out of the gates, hoisting their shiny swords to the cheering crowds and promising to make the countryside safe. For three days, they searched the marsh, finding little more than fox paths through the underbrush, but on the fourth day, they discovered the Mistresses' cave.

Quietly inching past mounds of skeletons—the unfortunate victims of the hags' labors—Durnish and his team made their way into the lair, which glittered with the Mistresses' ill-gotten gewgaws. There, the party surprised the hags as they feasted on the remains of a poor spice merchant who'd made the mistake of traveling the river alone. In the blink of a basilisk's eye, one of the

mercenaries fired three bolts from her crossbow, leaving the hag called Vellix dead on the ground. A second hag, Lady Crane, vanquished several of Durnish's do-gooders with her sharp claws and fearsome death glare, but she soon fell, too.

In the end, only Durnish and Aunt Lobelia were left alive. Both were battered and bruised, but Lobelia wasn't as helpless as she let on. When the mayor stumbled toward her to deal a death blow, Lobelia unleashed a powerful spell that sent him into a deep, deep sleep.

For a day and a night, Lobelia pondered what to do with Durnish. She could have slaughtered him then and there, of course, but Lobelia was crueler than that. As she stood over the fire, boiling and pickling the

remains of Vellix, Crane, and the 12 dead adventurers, she concocted a devious plan to undo the man who lay softly snoring on the floor of her cave. She took a lock of Durnish's hair, a bit of his flesh, and a vial of his blood, sealed them in a small clay pot, said a few magic words, and swallowed the pot with a snaggletoothed grin.

A short time later, Durnish awoke to a grim sight: Aunt Lobelia was gone, as were the bodies of his 12 companions and the two dead hags. All he could see were 14 severed heads, which had been arranged in a circle around him. Their eyes were sewn open, as though they watched him while he slept. Durnish himself had been stripped naked and was badly scarred. Far worse, he was paralyzed with dread of the magic Lobelia may have wrought.

Hours passed. Eventually cold, hunger, and thirst compelled Durnish to stand. He walked to the edge of the circle, uncertain what fate might befall him when he stepped beyond the gruesome border. He kicked Vellix's head with his foot and watched it roll to the side, knocking Crane's head to the ground as it did.

Durnish held his breath, waiting for the worst. When he could stand it no longer, he took another deep breath and held it again. Minutes slowly ticked by.

Nothing happened.



Somewhere in the distance, Lobelia laughed at how superstitious humans can be.

Briswold mourned.

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As Durnish stepped safely beyond the circle's edge, he exhaled with relief, but something in the back of his mind made him worry that he'd gotten off too easily. He was right to be suspicious.

The mayor found his gear along with that of his companions lying in the far recesses of the cave. Other than that, the lair had been entirely emptied out: none of the chests or vials or skeletons that he'd seen before the battle remained.

Still wary, Durnish put on his armor and did the only thing he could do: he lifted the head of Vellix in his left hand, took Crane in his right, and walked back to Briswold. The townsfolk hailed him as a hero.

Attacks in the marshes immediately abated. They didn't stop entirely, but they became infrequent enough that the townspeople slept soundly again.

But on the next full moon, just a few arrow-shots from her former lair, Lobelia gave birth to a beautiful, babbling, baby girl. It pained her to look at any creature so pink and pretty, but she knew it would bring her great pleasure in the years to come. And so, she waited. Lobelia didn't mind having time to kill.

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Two decades after Durnish awoke in Lobelia's cave—twenty years to the very day—a traveling soothsayer appeared in Briswold, promising to predict the future for a few copper coins. The mayor's wife, Nedra, was among the many men and women who visited the mystic, happily handing over her money in exchange for a small cup of tea. Like the others, she drank it in one gulp (it was considered bad luck to linger over it), and the fortune teller read the leaves. Nedra glowed with joy as the old woman promised her happiness to the end of her days.

Of course, Nedra's tea was poisoned. By the time she lay cold and dead, Lobelia and her stack of clattering teacups had disappeared into the marshes again.

The following spring—a year before your brave adventurers stumble into Briswold to play their part in this story—Lobelia and another hag, Black Willow, were training Lobelia's daughter to seduce Mayor Durnish. Just as they finished packing the last of Astrid's bags, a crow flew into the cave, announcing that the mayor had died—not by Astrid's hand as Lobelia had intended, but from a broken heart.



The hags were disappointed but not dissuaded. Lobelia had destroyed Durnish by destroying his wife, and for that, she was happy. But Lobelia meant to do more—much more. She'd been far too lenient with Briswold, allowing it to interfere with her marauding and her pleasure. Enough was enough: the town had to go.

Astrid arrived in Briswold the following day, calling herself Thalia. In no time at all, she seduced Durnish's successor, Mayor Esmerelda. The day they were married was cloudless and crisp, and the wedding bells could be heard for miles in every direction. Lobelia and Black Willow stood in the mouth of their cave and listened, quietly cackling.

Slowly, Astrid began spreading plague throughout the town, using poison that Lobelia had concocted. She was careful in her work, killing just enough people to cause concern, but not enough to inspire widespread panic. In the streets, many folks spoke of leaving, and Astrid planned to slaughter anyone foolish enough to remain. The hags would then burn Briswold to the ground, and the coven could celebrate a job well done.

But all didn't go as planned. With Astrid gone, Lobelia and Black Willow fought constantly, and there was no third hag to settle their arguments. As a full moon rose over the marshes, the two came to blows, and just as Lobelia was about to unleash a deadly rain of fire on her friend-turned-foe, Black Willow rushed to the far corner of the cave and dove into a pool of water that led all the way to the river. The coven was no more.

Lobelia's angry screams sent bats reeling, and a few fish

froze where they swam. She disguised herself as a raven, flew to Briswold, and told Astrid the awful news. Astrid screamed as her mother had done, took the form of a jet black ibis, then the two flew away into the night.

Now, Astrid and Lobelia wait. They've called to sisters far and wide, begging one of them to join their coven. A sea hag called Forsythia has sent word that she's on her way, but in the meantime, the townspeople of Briswold have turned their eyes to the swamp, searching for the mayor's missing bride. If they find Astrid and Lobelia before Forsythia arrives, it may be the death of Lobelia's dream.

If not, it'll be the death of Briswold.

NPCS: THE CITIZENS OF BRISWOLD

Mayor Esmerelda Godwin/Marta Glump (female, human, 40ish)— Not so long ago, Marta Glump was a loutish, unmannered, sword-slinging mercenary. Due to an unusual series of events (see "Dinner with the Mayor" below), she was forced to flee from a job and assume the identity of a wizard named Esmerelda Godwin. She may be rough around the edges, but she's good at heart, and she truly loves her wife, Thalia (aka Astrid).

Thalia/Astrid (appears to be female, half-elven, 25ish)— Esmerelda/Marta will tell the group that Thalia came to town as a wandering scholar, though if asked, she can't recall where Thalia might've been headed at the time. Thalia is in reality a green hag (MM pg. 177) and is a crucial part of Aunt Lobelia's plan to destroy Briswold.

Claude Hopper, the butler (male, dwarven, 300ish)— Claude isn't the dwarf he once was. His clothing could use a good wash, he's blind in one eye, and he forgets about half of what he hears. He's devoted to Briswold, though, having served the mayors of the town for nearly 200 years.

Grace, Hope, and Charity Blurm (female, human, 30ish)— Three sisters from a farm just outside the town walls. They're triplets, in fact. None are formally educated, but they do their jobs well enough. Charity is especially shrewd and may have suspicions about Thalia's origins. She knows nothing for certain, but she did hear strange whispers coming from one of the guest bedrooms late one night. (What she overheard was a conversation between Thalia and Black Willow.)

Sturm and Drang (male, half-orc, 40ish)— Brothers who serve as bumbling guardsmen at the mayor's house. Not bad in a fight, but they have very little common sense.

Gilead Ackers (male, human, 50ish)— Gilead is the head of the town watch and very diligent in his job.

Old Coop (male, human, 60ish) — Former bard and owner of the Muddy Bottom Tavern. He lost a hand in battle years ago, and he's out of practice as a bard, so he won't be willing to accompany the party. However, he might be persuaded to tell the party about Thalia's occasional visits to the tavern—if the party gets him drunk and promises not to tell the mayor what he's said.

Saul (male, halfling, 120ish)— Devoted fisherman and drunk who has quite a tall tale to tell about the night that Thalia went missing.

Athena Falton (female, halfling, 80ish) — Innkeeper of The River Bed, an inn near the shore of the Troutrun River. She's used to dealing with working folk, but she's well educated and can easily hold her own in an intelligent conversation. She's always a little amused when people assume she's as simple as some of her customers.

Barb (male, halfling, 80ish) — Athena's servant at The River Bed. He's shy and self-conscious about his stutter, but he's observant and smart.

Volga (female, dwarf, 150ish) — Adventure supply merchant, owner of Diana's Quiver. She talks a good game, and she's got a reasonably good supply of basic weapons and armor. (She's a dwarf after all, and she knows quality workmanship when she sees it.) However, an Insight check of 18 or higher will reveal that she's never actually gone on an expedition herself.

Calamine (male, human, 50ish) — Priest at the shrine of Eldath. A very kind man who has a soft spot for underdogs, the poor, and the underprivileged. He was born blind and wears a blue blindfold at all times, but he manages to get around well enough using his staff.

Anais (female, human, 30ish) — Oracle at the shrine of Eldath. Anais is a kind woman, and her heart is in the right place, but she isn't a very good oracle. A decade ago, Calamine found her starving and near death on a

roadside not far from Briswold and immediately took her in. Anais has stayed on at the temple as a way of thanking Calamine, and she's tried to commune with Eldath, but she hasn't had much success—until recently, that is.

Urg (male, half-orc, 40ish) — Fine goods merchant, owner of Riverside Finery. Urg has worked hard to overcome his rough, hardscrabble upbringing. (His mother and father were both nomadic barbarians belonging to the Tribe of the War Claw.) Urg left home once he gained adulthood at 14 and apprenticed with a variety of merchants to learn the trade. After arriving in Briswold two decades ago, he met Carn, who owned Riverside Finery. Eventually they wed, and when she died after a short illness, Urg became the sole proprietor.

Pepper (female, human, 10ish) — Street urchin. If befriended, Pepper might tell the party that she occasionally saw Thalia wandering the banks of the river alone, very late at night. Once, she even saw Thalia crouch on the docks and speak to the water.

Snout (agendered, human, 30ish) — Beggar. Snout has found something on the street: a near-empty bottle of poison. It's the same poison that Thalia has used to kill the residents of Briswold. One drop remains in the bottle. As with the poison in Thalia's bedroom (see pg. 11), it smells like a Potion of Healing. If someone is foolish enough to drink it, they'll need to make a Constitution saving throw of 12 or higher. On a fail, the person has disadvantage on Strength and Dexterity checks and saving throws for three days. If they roll a natural one, they might take 1d12 damage (your call). Snout found the bottle in the garbage outside the mayor's house one night.

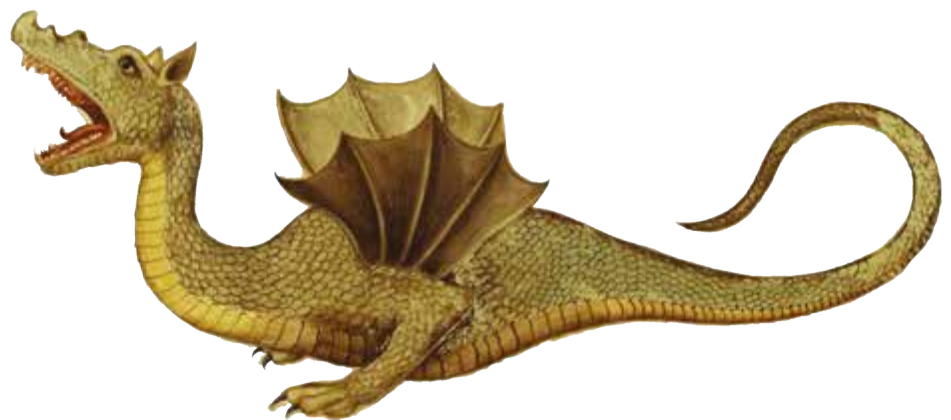
EXTRA NPC + BUSINESS NAMES

PEOPLE

Alphonse
Blaise
Corian
Dalric
Kell
Marthon
Ruth
Symca

PLACES

Bernard's Apothecary and Herbal Goods
Balgur's Bargain Goods
Coco's House of Cocoa
Devil's Playground
Kalvo's Outpost
Lady Luck Tavern
The Last Stop
Merkel's Apparel
John the Smith
Abernathy's Toy & Game Emporium



CHAPTER 1: A CURIOUS ARRIVAL

The adventurers arrive in Briswold, a town of 500-or-so residents nestled against the Troutrun River. Shortly afterward, they see a two-horse carriage being driven along one of the larger streets. Its curtains are fully closed.

The carriage is small, meant to hold just one or two people. It's fairly simple, too—much less ornate than carriages you've seen racing along the grand avenues of larger cities. Still, everyone in the street stops and bows as it moves by. Clearly, they know who's riding inside.

Suddenly, the driver of the carriage brings his two horses to a stop. A few moments later, a gloved hand emerges from the curtain at the side of the carriage, holding a note. The driver hops down from his perch, takes the note, listens at the curtain for a moment, then walks over and hands the note to you. There's a loud knock from inside the carriage. The driver climbs back to his seat, takes the reins, and continues down the street, out of sight. The crowd eyes you with a mix of emotions—suspicion? jealousy? curiosity?—then continue on their way.

Assuming that the players open the note, this is what it says:

"You are hereby summoned to dine at the home of Mayor Godwin this evening at eight o'clock. Casual attire."

Anyone on the street can point the party to Mayor Godwin's house, a large-ish (but not too large) home that sits in the center of town. Generally speaking, townsfolk refer to the mayor simply as "Mayor Godwin", but if asked, they'll reveal that the mayor's given name is Esmerelda.

CHAPTER 2: DINNER WITH THE MAYOR

When the party arrives at Mayor Godwin's house, they're greeted at the door by Claude Hopper, the mayor's butler. Hopper shows the party to the small but nicely appointed dining room. Oil paintings of previous mayors line the walls—male and female, mostly human, but with a few dwarves and half-elves sprinkled about.

There's a table set for the party, with one additional seat at the head of the table—presumably for the mayor. The mayor, however, doesn't appear during dinner. All four courses (beet soup, pickle salad, mushroom souffle,

and wine-poached pears for dessert) are served by three servants (Grace, Hope, and Charity Blurm). When the dessert plates are cleared and Claude pours after-dinner drinks, a distant bell chimes, and the servants immediately depart.

After they've gone, a wooden panel slides aside, revealing a small, hidden door. Out steps a woman in a beautiful brocade robe, which is open to reveal well-polished leather armor. This must be Mayor Godwin.

However, **at least one person in the party already knows this woman**—not as Mayor Esmerelda Godwin, but as a crass, bloodthirsty adventurer named Marta Glump. (**Pick a player at random, or depending on your players' backstories, it's possible that several knew Marta, once upon a time.**) The last time the players saw her was about three years ago, when she sailed off to work as a guard for a wealthy client.

Marta carries her own plate of food, sits down at the table after greeting everyone warmly, and starts bringing the party up to speed as she eats.

"So, last I saw you, I was heading out to serve Lord Alwin. He was one of them paranoids—you know, always thinking that somebody was out to get him? He got it in his head that he was being hunted by vampires, and that's when he hired me.

"I thought it was the dumbest thing I ever heard, but... well, as it turns out, there were a few vampires. So, long story short, Lord Alwin got bit, and we had to kill him.

"After that, Lady Alwin wasn't so happy with me, and I can't say as I blame her. She was the highest ranking priestess in town, so she had to drive the stake into her husband's heart, the poor thing. She wanted me executed for negligence, but luckily, I bribed a footman, got out of the castle, and ran until I got here.

"Obviously, I couldn't tell no one who I was, seeing as how Alwin was known far and wide in these parts, and news about his death was all the talk at the time. So, I put on airs and said I was a great wizard called Esmerelda Godwin. Unfortunately, they wanted me to prove myself by killing a couple of trolls that were bothering the townsfolk.

"So, there I was at the edge of town in the middle the

night during a raging thunderstorm, with these two mean, ugly trolls barrelling toward me. I couldn't even move, I was scared outta my pants! Then, all of a sudden, there was a huge flash of light and a the loudest clap of thunder you ever heard, and when I could see again, there were the trolls: burnt to a crisp, not twenty feet from where I stood.

"Everybody loved me after that. When Mayor Durnish kicked the bucket last year, the townsfolk chose me to take his place. And now, here I am, living the dream!"

Afterward, Marta and the party swap stories. She wants to know everything that the group have been up to lately and what they're doing in this part of the world. (Having the players talk about their mission and recount their activities to date might seem tedious, but it can be a good way to get them thinking about their goals and behavior. **It firms up the story, basically.**)

When there's a lull in the conversation, Marta explains that the group is welcome to stay in Briswold for as long as they like. However, she has a problem that she'd like their help in resolving. As it turns out, Marta's wife has gone missing:

"I know I never seemed like the marrying type, but then I met someone—a traveling scholar who was passing through town on her way to...well, I forget where she was heading. Blonde and buxom—pretty as an apple in summer, she was. Her name was Thalia. I fell for her like a dead hill giant off a cliff.

"We got hitched a few months back, and everything's been pretty good since then—or well, it had been. Over the winter, we received reports that some folks in town had succumbed to swamp fever—about ten in all. I checked their bodies myself, and if it were fever, it weren't no fever I ever seen. With all the blood they vomited up and the black welts on their bodies, I think they was poisoned.

"Then, four weeks ago, things got really bad: I woke to the sound of Thalia screaming. I ran down the hall to her bedchamber—I know, it's weird sleeping apart like that, but Thalia's old-fashioned that way—and she was gone. Vanished. Window open, curtains blowing in the breeze, no signs of struggle or anything.

"The guards have searched for her high and low, but nothing's turned up. I've promised the townsfolk that I'm

working up a big ol' complicated spell to find Thalia and protect Briswold from plague, but I can't keep up that lie much longer. I ain't got no one to talk to about this because everyone thinks I'm some great wizard. You've got to help me out of this. Find Thalia, figure out what kind of disease has been killing people, and I'll give you anything I can."

If the party inquires about the separate bedrooms, Marta explains that in this part of the world, many couples maintain separate beds. It's an old custom, stemming from the days when food was scarce, and the population had to be kept low to prevent starvation. It doesn't make much sense in Marta and Thalia's case, but then, traditions aren't known for being sensible.

If the party agrees to find Thalia and the cause of the plague, they'll receive **a letter of credit for rooms at The River Bed inn**. There *are* two guest rooms at the mayor's house, but Thalia was in the process of renovating them when she disappeared. She'd planned to use them for her studies, making one a library and the other a workshop. The renovations have continued in her absence, though at a slightly slower pace since Thalia isn't standing over the carpenters all day long, goading them to do more. Still, they're nowhere near ready to receive guests.

The party will also receive **a second letter stating that they're Mayor Godwin's trusted emissaries**, and that they've come to help find Thalia and guard Briswold from the ravages of plague. Though Briswold makes much of its living from trading with outsiders, the townsfolk can be suspicious of strangers—especially given everything that's taken place over the past month. This letter will help put merchants, barkeepers, and others at ease.

After seeing the letter, the townsfolk will tend to trust the party unless otherwise noted or unless they behave badly. **However, the people only know the mayor as Godwin. Calling her "Esmerelda"—much less "Marta"—will probably arouse suspicion and make folks less cooperative.**

CHAPTER 3: EXPLORING BRISWOLD



1. MAYOR'S HOUSE

Characters: Esmerelda Godwin/Marta Glump (mayor); Claude Hopper (butler); Grace, Hope, and Charity Blurm (servants); Sturm and Drang (house guards)

Obstacles: False bottom in Thalia's wardrobe

Treasure: Thalia's unusual perfume; 2 recipe cards taped into a book on herbalism; a bolt of green fabric; an empty vial of poison that smells like a Potion of Healing

Other findings: None

Neither the butler (Claude), the three servants (Grace, Hope, and Charity), nor the mayor's personal guards (Sturm, Drang) noticed anything out of the ordinary on the night of Thalia's disappearance—until they heard her scream, that is.

Claude, the servants, and the guards agree that the evening she disappeared was pretty typical: the mayor and Thalia dined together, argued about something trivial (in this case, the cost of renovating the two guest rooms), then retired to the mayor's bedroom for an hour or so. Afterward, Thalia went to her own room to sleep.

All six confirm that, as the mayor said, there were no signs of struggle in Thalia's room. They've left everything just as they found it that night.

THALIA'S BEDROOM

Like all the rooms in the mayor's house, this one is decorated simply. The wooden ceiling, walls, and floors are unadorned, except for a large burgundy rug covering much of the floor. Matching burgundy curtains flutter in the open window across from the door. A large bed is positioned beside the window, with a small table next to it. A wardrobe stands on left wall, and a vanity table and mirror sit to the right. You see a small tray of cosmetics atop the vanity table, and a small bookshelf attached to the wall nearby.

Thalia's bedroom contains little more than clothing and other common accouterments. Apart from her wedding ring, Thalia wasn't much for jewelry, so there's nothing valuable to loot, other than **some perfume in a bottle made of light blue glass** sitting on her vanity. Sniffed from the bottle, the perfume reeks of brackish, dirty water. On the skin, though, it's intoxicating, and it smells a little different on everyone who wears it.

The perfume offers a +1 on Charisma checks for a full day and can be applied 20 times before the bottle is empty. Whoever escorts the party through the house—whether it's the mayor, Claude, the servants, or the guards—will try to prevent the group from stealing the bottle, but if the party manages to take it, **it's worth around 100gp.**

The bookshelf contains 12 tomes on healing and herbalism. All are common and fairly basic—the kind of thing that magic-users have seen many, many times over. If the party could sneak them out of the room, they'd only be worth about 5gp in total.

However, in one of the books—*Tara's Tome of Rustic Remedies*—there are **two recipe cards** glued inside the back cover. They can be found with an Investigation roll of 10 or higher. Both recipes are written in Abyssal. If the party can read them, one is **a recipe for Potion of Greater Healing (DMG pg. 187)**, while the other is unknown to the party. A Medicine check of 18 or higher will suggest that it's **a recipe for a Potion of Poison (DMG pg. 188).**

On the bedside table, there's another book—it's a popular novel called *The Clan of the Owlbear* by Octavian Thrumsinger that Thalia may have been reading. (There's no bookmark.)

The party will likely search under the rug for trap doors, but there's nothing to be found. However, **hidden beneath a false bottom in Thalia's wardrobe is a bolt of silky green fabric and an empty vial.** (Players will need an Investigation roll of 18 or higher to find the latch for the false bottom.) Upon close inspection, a character will see that the fabric has gotten wet and the color has run in some places. Also, there are small bits of algae and twigs stuck to it.

The players have no way of knowing this now, but the fabric was purchased by Thalia three months ago and

subsequently enchanted by Aunt Lobelia. **If it's cut and sewn into a garment, the wearer receives advantage on Persuasion checks.** (Note: the benefits only accrue if the garment is visible and significant. Turning it into a handkerchief wouldn't have much effect—though it could perhaps be fashioned into a more effective scarf.)

If the players sell the fabric without knowing about the enchantment, **it'll only fetch about 5gp.** With the enchantment explained, **the fabric is worth 250gp to the right buyer**—though no place in Briswold will pay that much for it.

There's less than a drop of liquid left in the vial, but a Medicine check of 14 or higher will suggest that it once held a healing concoction. (In fact, it was a Potion of Poison, which smells identical to a Potion of Healing.)

GUEST BEDROOMS

The guest bedrooms being renovated are on the second floor, across the hall from Esmerelda and Thalia's rooms.

These two rooms are located on the opposite side of the hallway from Esmerelda and Thalia's bedchambers. The furniture has been removed from both rooms, and new shelving has been installed in one of them. Where there was once a solid wooden wall between the two bedrooms, a door has been installed to connect them.

Thalia told everyone that she needed more space for her studies and planned to use these rooms for that purpose. (Neither she nor Esmerelda ever hosted visitors, so the loss of two guest rooms wasn't a big deal.) She'd sent for her books and her supplies, intending to make one room a library (the one with shelves) and the other a workroom. No one can seem to recall what, exactly, Thalia studied, though the books in her bedroom would suggest that she was an herbalist of some kind.

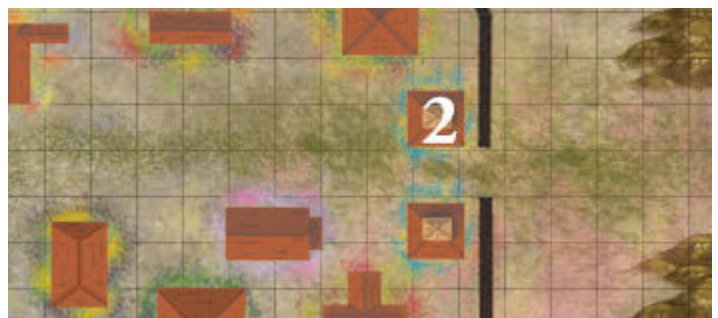
The furniture for these rooms is being stored elsewhere in Briswold. Depending on when the party visits, the shutters may be open (during the day) or locked tight (at night). No matter when they visit, though, anyone inspecting the room will notice that the floors are wet. The servants have tried to dry out the room, but to no avail. They insist that the water has come from carpenters leaving the shutters open overnight, or perhaps from leaks in the roof, but an investigation roll of 18 or higher shows that there are no leaks at all. (In truth, the water is due to frequent visits from Black

Willow, a sea hag. Though she hasn't visited Briswold since the night that the coven disbanded and Thalia disappeared, the servants can't seem to dry out the water left in her wake.)

If all had gone as planned, this is where Thalia would've concocted the poison she needed to spread plague across Briswold. (The poisoning she's done so far came from concoctions that Lobelia gave her, which she's used up.) Since she's never had a chance to use this workspace, there's nothing to see here.

ELSEWHERE IN THE HOUSE

Other than the above, there's nothing else of interest in the mayor's house.



2. TOWN WATCH

Characters: Gilead Ackers (head of the town watch); 2 NPC guards in any tower at any one time

Obstacles: None

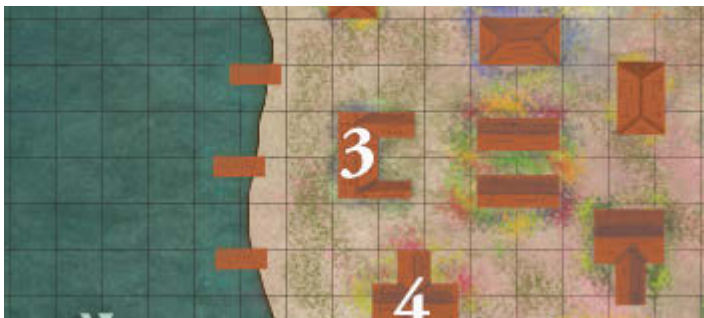
Treasure: None

Other findings: Gilead will give the players a map of the town and surrounding area. He can also provide a few basic weapons if asked: 2 shortswords, 2 longswords, 1 bow, and 1 quiver of 20 arrows.

The town watch consists of 24 guards. With the search for Thalia, the rank and file are growing angry about the long hours and lack of a pay raise, but their leader, Gilead Ackers, is doing his best to keep morale high.

Gilead is a friendly man and devoted to the mayor. He appreciates any help the party can provide, and he'll draw them a rough map of Briswold and the surrounding wilderness. (Make it as rough as you like.) However, he can't spare anyone to accompany the party.

Gilead does have a small cache of weapons that aren't being used: two shortswords, two longswords, one bow, and one quiver of 20 arrows. If asked, he'll loan these out, but he asks that they be returned.



3. MUDDY BOTTOM TAVERN

Characters: Old Coop (owner), Saul (fisherman), three NPC patrons

Obstacles: None

Treasure: None

Other findings: Old Coop's memory of Thalia's song; Saul's fishing tale

The tavern's owner, **Old Coop**, is a lifelong resident of Briswold. He loves his hometown and the new mayor, but something about Thalia made him uncomfortable (though he never told anyone that).

If the party buys Coop a beer or two, he might be persuaded to discuss Thalia's occasional visits to the Muddy Bottom, where she sang some very mysterious ditties that he'd never heard before. (That's a little unusual, seeing as how Old Coop was trained as a bard.) He remembers a snippet of a song that went like this:

*My wife is a handsome old lass,
She's lusty and busty and crass.
But my mother wishes
The wife swam with the fishes,
And what she wishes comes true, alas!*

Sitting at the far end of the bar is a very drunk fisherman named Saul, who'll talk in exchange for a drink. He swears that the night Thalia disappeared, he caught a fish so big it nearly broke his boat. It was over five feet long with giant eyes—the moon was bright that night, and he it saw plain as day.

Ultimately, the fish got away. (The "fish" was actually Black Willow, Lobelia's fellow hag, but there's no way for the party to know this.) Saul thinks the fish must've bitten through the net and swum off. After telling his story, Saul passes out in his ale.



4. THE RIVER BED

Characters: Athena Falton (owner); Barb (servant); 3 NPC guests

Obstacles: None

Treasure: None

Other findings: If asked about the night of Thalia's disappearance, Athena remembers only that the cats acted oddly. If the party builds trust with Barb, he'll confess that he was mistreated by Thalia.

When she sees the letter from Mayor Godwin, Athena, will happily give the party up to three rooms. (That's as many as she has available at the moment.) Meals are included with the stay.

Neither Athena nor Barb remember anything from the night of Thalia's disappearance, though Athena does recall that the cats in storage room were restless all evening long. The storage room isn't noteworthy—just a small, 10' by 10' room with shelves of wheat, beer, dried meats, spare linens, and other items typical for an inn. However, it does have a door that leads out onto the dock. Athena's five cats make their beds on a small pile of hay in one of the corners. (They were upset on the night of Thalia's disappearance because of Black Willow, who escaped into the river after her fight with Lobelia and lurked along the docks for a time.)

Barb is shy because of his stutter, but he's approachable and very intelligent. If the party gains his trust, he'll admit that Thalia was rude to him on several occasions and made fun of his speech impairment. He's never told anyone this, though, because he loves the mayor so much.



5. DIANA'S QUIVER

Characters: Volga (owner); 2 NPC customers

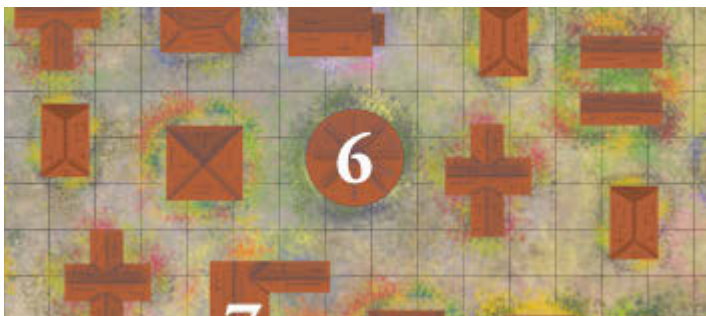
Obstacles: None

Treasure: None

Other findings: If asked, Volga complains that someone has been stealing her herbs.

Players can purchase basic weapons, armor, and other equipment here, including some spell components. Volga is a born haggler, and she prices her wares about 20% higher than average just so she can wheel and deal with customers. (If players haggle well, she'll drop that mark-up and accept average prices—but not a copper less.)

Neither Volga nor her customers remember seeing anything unusual before Thalia disappeared, though Volga admits that someone had been pilfering her herbs. (The pilferer was Thalia, who used them to create her poisons. No one's stolen herbs from the shop since the night she disappeared.) On a Nature roll of 18 or higher, a player might deduce that the stolen herbs could be used to create a poison of some kind.



6. SHRINE OF ELDATH

Characters: Calamine (priest); Anais (oracle); 2 NPC priests

Obstacles: None

Treasure: None

Other findings: Eldath's grotto (soaking is equivalent to receiving a *Lesser Restoration* spell); odd sayings from Anais

Calamine is a kind man—a true priest of Eldath, the goddess of serenity and healing. If the players make a donation to the shrine, he'll allow them to soak in a pool located in a sacred grotto beneath the shrine. The pool is filled with water from the Troutrun River and has been blessed by Eldath herself. **Bathing in the pool has the same effect as receiving a *Lesser Restoration* spell (PH pg. 255).**

Anais the oracle speaks once per day, but Calamine says she's never been exactly accurate in her predictions. They've gotten worse over the past month, as Anais has told fortune-seekers things like "The worg is at the window", "Aunt Lobelia is preparing dinner", "Forsythia bends toward Briswold", and so on. Frankly, her reputation is diminishing day by day.

Anais has never had a strong relationship with Eldath, though she's been trying to commune with her for years. Unbeknownst to her, though, Eldath is finally responding, and Anais' predictions, while sometimes hard to decipher, grow more accurate by the day.



7. RIVERSIDE FINERY

Characters: Urg

Obstacles: None

Treasure: None

Other findings: Urg remembers the fabric that Thalia bought from him, though it was in pristine condition at the time.

Riverside Finery offers a magnificent array of robes, tunics, and other clothing, and it's all of exquisite quality. Urg also sells fabric from throughout the region: cotton, linen, silk, and brocade. He's a little snobbish—mostly because he's trying to hide his barbaric upbringing.

If the party shows Urg the bolt of green fabric discovered beneath the false bottom of Thalia's wardrobe, he'll recognize it at once. He remembers selling it to Thalia

about three months ago, but it was in much better condition then—no color runs, no twigs or algae. He'll buy it back, but only for 1gp.



8. OVERGROWN TRAIL

Characters: None

Obstacles: Difficult terrain; 25% chance of a random forest encounter during the day; 50% chance of encountering a worg at night

Treasure: None, though magic users might come across special herbs, if they roll Nature checks of 15 or higher

Other findings: A Survival check of 18 or higher will reveal wolf-like tracks traversing the path; possibility of encountering allies

This trail runs roughly east-west, starting at the banks of the river, winding through the marsh, and rising suddenly at the edge of the swamp as the land becomes rocky again. Shortly thereafter, it makes a sharp turn to the north, passes Lobelia's lair and disappears into the dense forest beyond. The hags and worgs are the only creatures that use it regularly, so it's heavily overgrown, requiring a Survival check of 12 to locate.

Even after the players find the trail, the going is tough: consider it Difficult Terrain, so movement speeds are cut in half. It also puts players at a disadvantage on Stealth rolls. Should they pass the entrance to the lair and go further north, the party's speed is halved again, making it 25% of normal.

Without the Difficult Terrain, it would take players half a day to walk from the riverbank to Lobelia's lair. As it is, however, it takes a full day, unless the party has magical means to speed their travel or a ranger with swampland as a Favored Terrain.

Along the path, Lobelia has planted some herbs that she uses in her magic. Players who roll Nature checks of 15 or higher have a good chance of spotting clusters

of valerian, wolfsbane, pennyroyal, rue, and of course, lobelia.

Players making Survival checks of 18 or higher will detect wolf-like tracks down the center of the muddy path. These are from the worgs that live in area #11. If the players travel **at night**, there's a **50% chance that they'll encounter one of the adult worgs** along the way. If the players travel **during the day**, there's a **25% chance of a random forest encounter** (see DMG pg. 302-303).

If you think that your players need help to battle Lobelia and Thalia/Astrid (and possibly Forsythia), consider having them encounter another group of adventurers along the trail. Perhaps the members of that party are experienced hunters and fighters. Then again, maybe they're a bunch of untrained newbies who just want to find Thalia and become heroes, but are more likely to get in the way.



9. ENTRANCE TO LOBELIA'S LAIR

Characters: None

Obstacles: 4 vine blights

Treasure: 50gp and a waterlogged diary beneath skeletons hidden in the undergrowth

Other findings: Remains of weapons near the skeletons

The entrance to the cave is about 20 feet wide, but it's so obscured by vines—including **four vine blights** (MM pg. 32)—that the path through the undergrowth is only about five feet across. Spotting the entrance isn't hard, provided players make Survival checks of eight or higher. **The vine blights will attack immediately after the last player has passed through the entrance into the cave.**

If the party stops to investigate the cave entrance (either before or after combat with the vine blights), they'll discover a carpet of bones beneath the vegetation. Most are from wild animals, though shreds of clothing still cling to two human skeletons. Judging from the

rusted axe and rotting bow nearby, they might've been adventurers, or perhaps just hunters. There's no telling exactly how long ago they died, but it's probably been several years.

Sitting in a frayed sack beneath the skeletons, there's a pile of **50gp** and a **waterlogged diary that's nearly impossible to read**. (If the players spend time with the diary, they might be able to make out a few words here and there, like "Briswold", "disappeared", "trail", and so on—the implication being that these adventurers tried to end Lobelia's reign some time ago.) Other than that, there's nothing of value here.



10. WHEN CAVES ATTACK

Characters: None

Obstacles: 3 piercers and/or 1 roper

Treasure: +1 Ring of Protection, Staff of Withering, 3 silver daggers, 1 silver music box filled with semiprecious stones, and 2 potions of healing.

Other findings: Worg tracks

This lightless, musty cavern is barren except for a few piles of broken rock that has shorn away from the walls over the centuries. The ceiling is high, though, so the cave doesn't feel cramped.

The smell of musk permeates the air, suggesting that wild animals have used this cave as a lair in the recent past, though you can't see any sign of them now.

A Survival roll of 12 will allow the players to locate piles of animal dung (from the worgs in area #11). If the roll is 15 or higher, they'll also find a faint path of wolf-like prints running throughout the cavern.

There are two potential combat scenarios, depending on how much you want to challenge your players:

AVERAGE COMBAT OPTION: If the players follow the worg tracks through the cave, they'll avoid

the **three piercers** (MM pg. 252) dangling from the ceiling 50 feet above. (The piercers will be hard to spot unless players have Darkvision and roll an 18 or higher Investigation check while looking at the ceiling to find them.) If the players don't find or follow the tracks, the piercers will attack simultaneously, each doing 5d6 damage on a successful hit. They're not intelligent and attack randomly. **The piercers possess no treasure.**

ADVANCED COMBAT OPTION: If your party is very strong, **substitute one roper** (MM pg. 261) **for the three piercers**—or include all four enemies. As with the scenario above, following the worg tracks will allow the players to avoid the roper, which is disguised as a pile of rubble near the wall. However, if the players find themselves fleeing the worgs in area #11, things could get interesting.

The roper sits on the bodies of its prey, and those bodies still possess a fair bit of loot. Steel and iron items have been dissolved by the roper's digestive fluids, but players can find **three silver daggers** (100gp each), **one silver music box** (40gp) **filled with semiprecious stones** (400gp), and **two regular Potions of Healing** (DMG pg. 187). You can decide whether the music box is still functional—and if it is, how far its tune carries....

Next to a pile of rubble along the southern wall, a collection of bones are strewn about the cave. Strips of green, silky fabric litter the area, and clumps of long, blonde hair still cling to a female human skull. The carcass has been picked clean.

If the party takes time to investigate, they'll see one of the skeleton's leg bones trapped beneath the nearby rubble. The leg is draped in remnants of a fine silk robe, and nearby, there's a oaken quarterstaff topped by an intricately carved hand. This is a **Staff of Withering** (DMG pg. 205).

On an Investigation roll of 16 or higher, the players will find a ruby ring in a platinum band on the floor near one of the severed arms. It's a **+1 Ring of Protection** (DMG pg. 191).

The party may think that the woman was Thalia, but in fact, she was just another adventurer out to kill Lobelia—specifically, a traveling wizard who'd heard of trouble in these parts and meant to resolve the matter

herself. Unfortunately, she encountered the worgs first and attacked them with a *Thunderwave* spell, which was so loud, it caused rocks to tumble from the walls and ceiling, pinning her to the ground. The worgs ate her alive. This happened about six months ago.



11. WORG DEN

Characters: None

Obstacles: 3 worgs (2 adults, 1 cub)

Treasure: 1 Bag of Holding containing a marked set of cards and a rigged pair of dice

Other findings: The cub can be trained

If the players announced that they were making their way through area #10 stealthily—and if everyone in the party rolled a 12 or higher on Stealth, *and* if the party didn't get attacked by the piercers/roper—you can simply explain that the musk in this small cave is overpowering and that two wolf-like creatures are slumbering in a bed of twigs, bones, and faded fabric near the western wall. (The cub is hidden from view by its parents.)

More likely than not, however, that didn't happen, so this is what the party experiences:

The stench in this small cave is overpowering—it's the same musk you smelled before, but magnified. And now, you see why: in the center of the room, snarling in your direction and hungrily licking their lips, are two massive, wolf-like beasts, guarding what looks to be one of their offspring. It doesn't take an experienced ranger to know that this is their den, and you've walked right into it.

The **two worgs** (MM pg. 341) will fight to the death to protect their young cub. They'll choose their victims based on size, starting with the smallest player first, even though that may not be the weakest player of the party.

If the adult worgs are killed, the pup will whimper and cling to their corpses, but he will not attack. If the party

feels so inclined, they can try raising the cub—and in fact, he's trainable to a point. However, instinct tells worgs to attack, kill, and devour weaker creatures. If the worg's belly is kept full, that's not a problem, but if it starts to get hungry...well, complications could arise.

The worg's bed is made from remnants of previous adventurers, including the wizard who died in area #10. (Scraps of her silk robe are among the newest, least dingy material in the bedding.) There's little treasure here, though the players can find **one Bag of Holding** (DMG pg. 153), which contains **one deck of marked playing cards and one pair of rigged dice**. What players might do with such shady playthings is up to them.



12. THE TROPHY ROOM

Characters: None

Obstacles: Brutal double trap triggered by glyphs

Treasure: None of interest

Other findings: Shattered mirrors, shrunk heads

The large cavern just to the south of areas #9 and #10 is fairly featureless—a typical cave with a few bats flitting about near the ceiling. But as players enter the high, narrow tunnel to the southwest, things take a grisly turn:

Along the floor of this slim, soaring, east-west cavern sit two rows of skulls. You can immediately see that the skulls come from humans, dwarves, elves, orcs, and many other creatures, including beasts of the forest. Their long-dead, lifeless eye sockets face one another from about ten feet apart, creating an orderly, macabre path through the cave. Shards of mirror have been attached to the walls, casting gruesome reflections of the skulls in every direction. No matter where you turn your gaze, the mirrors provide a kaleidoscopic view of death and decay.

This is the hags' trophy room—though unlike a conventional trophy room, this one contains no treasure to speak of. It's more of a warning, something to inspire fear and horror.

Just in case the skulls and mirrors aren't enough to deter visitors, however, Lobelia has installed a brutal trap. Etched onto the cave walls, about halfway down the passage, are **four small glyphs**, two on each side. One pair of the glyphs sits a foot off the ground, and the other two are about three feet above the ground.

The glyphs can only be spotted with an Investigation roll of 18 or higher, and it will take an Arcana check of 18 or higher to understand that the glyphs trigger a trap—though the precise nature of that trap will remain unclear.

If the trap is triggered—either by an adventurer walking past the glyphs or by a wary player tossing something like a stick or stone down the room—two things happen:

1. First, a net falls from the ceiling. (The ceiling is about 60 feet high and the net is well camouflaged, but in theory, it could be spotted by someone with Darkvision who's specifically looking up and who rolls an Investigation check of 20 or higher.) Any character in the passageway must make a Dexterity saving throw of 14 or higher, or else they'll be knocked prone and pinned beneath the net. Because the net is weighted, it will take two full turns for a player to get out of it.

2. Second, poison gas will spew from 10 of the skulls' mouths. Any character in the passageway must make a Constitution saving throw of 14 or higher or suffer 1d8 poison damage and be knocked unconscious for 1d4 turns.

There's only one way to bypass the trap, and that's to fly or leap over it. The glyphs detect movement a foot above and below where they're inscribed, so crawling under wouldn't help—unless someone has the ability to tunnel through earth. To pass without triggering the trap, someone would need to leap, swing, or fly over the glyphs, about four feet in the air.

Ordinarily, the hags would come running when they've heard the trap go off. However, they can scry on this cave using one of the skulls on the floor. In this case, they'll see the strength of the party and adopt other tactics.



13. LOBELIA'S OUTER CHAMBER

Characters: None

Obstacles: 2 bone naga

Treasure: 1 jeweled Dagger of Venom, 1 magical lamp (Lathander's Blessing)

Other findings: None

As you enter this oddly shaped chamber, you're confronted by another ghastly sight. Towering above you, brushing the ceiling 50 feet above, is a massive pile of bones of all shapes and sizes. The pile takes up most of the cavern, spreading nearly to the walls. Even in the gloom, the bones are so clean and white, they practically shimmer.

If the party creeps along the walls and doesn't touch the pile of bones, they can pass through this cavern without incident (no Dexterity check required). However, if just one person touches one bone, **two bone nagas** (MM pg. 233) spring to life and attack, targeting the weakest players first.

Aunt Lobelia acquired the bone nagas from some Yuan-Ti who used to live in the nearby swamp. Maybe she bought them, maybe she took them—it was so long ago, she's forgotten the details. All she knows for certain is that in life, one was a guardian naga, the other was a spirit naga, so their spells are slightly different. They will respond first with magical attacks, then move to physical attacks:

Bone naga #1 (guardian)

Attack 1: *Bestow curse* (PH pg. 218)

Attack 2: *Hold person* (PH pg. 251)

Attack 3: *Command* (PH pg. 223)

Attack 4: Bite

Bone naga #2 (spirit)

Attack 1: *Lightning bolt* (PH pg. 255)

Attack 2: *Hold person* (PH pg. 251)

Attack 3: *Sleep* (PH pg. 276)

Attack 4: *Ray of Frost* (PH pg. 271)

After round #4, be creative—let the bone nagas bite, cast deceptive spells, or whatever the situation calls for. They're intelligent creatures, so treat them as such.

If and when both nagas are killed, players can search the large bone pile. Hidden along the edges are **one jeweled Dagger of Venom (DMG pg. 161)** and **Lathander's Blessing, a magical lamp that casts true sunlight.**

Lathander's Blessing can be used for lighting, just as a normal lantern. However, it can also be used as a weapon to harm and blind other creatures. Pointing the lamp at any creature, lifting the lamp's shade, and invoking the name of Lathander has the same effect as using a *Sunbeam* spell (PH pg. 279). Lathander's Blessing can be used an unlimited number of times for lighting and twice a day for attacks.



14. LOBELIA'S INNER CHAMBER

Characters: None, though if the hags are in disguise, they'll present themselves as captives

Obstacles: 1 sahuagin priestess (Glosh); 2 green hags (Aunt Lobelia and Astrid), and potentially 1 sea hag (Forsythia). Note that if Forsythia is present, all hags have heightened abilities.

Treasure: Semi-precious stones worth 2,000gp, an amulet of water breathing, 3 vials of poison, 1 platinum ring with a ruby stone, love letters from Esmerelda/Marta, and a hag eye. If Forsythia is here, there's also a Heartstone and a Soul Bag.

Other findings: None

At last, we find the **green hags known as Aunt Lobelia and Astrid/Thalia (MM pg. 177)**, attended by their servant, **a sahuagin priestess named Glosh (MM pg. 264)**. If the party needs a greater challenge, assume that the **sea hag Forsythia (MM pg. 179)** has arrived to create a coven. Note that **when hags are in a coven, they fight at a higher level**. Specifics are explained the MM pg. 176-179.

IF THE HAGS ARE AWARE OF THE PARTY:

Chances are very good that the hags have heard the party coming. If the trap in area #12 was triggered, or if the party fought the bone nagas in area #13, the hags were immediately alerted. They've disguised themselves as disheveled maidens and locked themselves in a large iron cage near the center of the cavern. (The cage is, indeed, locked, but all the hags have keys, and there's a trapdoor in the cage's roof, too. They can escape the cage through the door or the roof in one action.) They've ordered the sahuagin priestess, Glosh, to hide at the southern end of the cavern, in the pool that leads to the marsh. Glosh is floating in dark water about ten feet below the surface.

In this situation, you can read the following description. Note that if Forsythia is here, there are three women in the cage, not two:

Torches illuminate this oddly shaped cavern, which reeks of refuse and decay. There's a small fire near the center of the room, and a couple of crates nearby, but what really draws your attention the large, iron cage beside the fire.

In the cage, two (or three) women are slumped, quiet and forlorn. One of them immediately sees you and taps the other(s), making gestures for you to approach quickly and quietly. The women wear tattered dresses—the remains of what might've been fine clothing. From the overpowering stench in the cavern, you would guess that they've been living in their own filth for some time.

The disguised hags will beg the party to release them from the cage, saying that they were brought here and held captive by Mayor Godwin. Astrid will claim to be Thalia, while Lobelia will claim to be her twin, Serena, who'd been taken by city guards as she entered Briswold to look for her sister a couple of weeks ago. If Forsythia is here, she will say that she's a traveling dressmaker called Evangeline. They explain that they have no idea what Mayor Godwin is up to, but they think she is possessed by a demon. They're all very good liars, so players would need an Insight check of 19 or higher to sense that any of them are lying.

The cage isn't difficult for the players to unlock. There's a key atop one of the crates, and anyone with Thieves' Tools can pick the lock with a Dexterity check of 10 or higher.

Once they're free, the hags will thank the adventurers profusely. However, they'll be in no rush to leave the cavern, inviting the party to sit beside the fire with them and eat from the food in the crates. **If the party becomes suspicious, or if the adventurers let their guard down, the hags will attack.** Glosh will wait two or three combat rounds to attack, giving the hags time to wear down the adventurers.

IF THE HAGS ARE UNAWARE OF THE PARTY:

If the party has quietly traversed the trophy room (without triggering the trap) and the outer chamber (without causing the nags to attack), neither the hags nor the sahuagin priestess will hear the party coming. They'll be too engrossed in making plans to destroy Briswold. In that case, you can read this description. Note that if Forsythia is here, there are three women by the fire, not two:

Torches illuminate this oddly shaped cavern, which reeks of refuse and decay. There's a small fire near the center of the room and a couple of crates nearby, as well as a large, iron cage beside the fire. The cage appears to be empty.

Huddled beside the fire are two (or three) wretched-looking women, speaking in voices too low to be properly heard. Nearby stands a terrifying creature, with gills, a crest of spikes atop its head, and a face like a sea monster. Neither the women nor the odd creature seem to have noticed you...yet.

Caught without their disguises, the hags will immediately attack once they detect the party.

COMBAT STRATEGY

If there are only two hags—Lobelia and Astrid—they will rely heavily on **Vicious Mockery** (PH pg. 285), forcing players to make Wisdom saves vs. a DC 12 or take 2d4 damage. When players get within melee range, the hags will begin using their claws for 2d8+4 damage.

If there are three hags, they will use **Hold Person** (PH pg. 251), **Lightning Bolt** (PH pg. 255), **Phantasmal Killer** (PH pg. 265), **Polymorph** (PH pg. 266), and **Eyebite** (PH pg. 238) to carry out ranged attacks. (Note that in a coven, hags share spell slots for these spells and that they have to remain within 30 feet of one another to use Shared Spellcasting, as explained in MM pg. 176). The hags will use melee attacks once the players move closer.

Glosh will use **Hold Person** (PH pg. 251), **Guiding Bolt** (PH pg. 248), and **Spiritual Weapon** (PH pg. 278) until the party gets within melee range. At that point, she'll attack with her bite and claws—though she can still use magic if she likes.

As the battle rages on, Forsythia will use **Death Glare** (MM pg. 179) as her attack action. When Astrid or Lobelia drop below 10hp, they'll cast **Invisible Passage** (MM pg. 177) and attempt to escape—either by running through areas #13, #12, and #9, or by plunging into the pool at the southern end of the cavern and swimming into the marsh. If Forsythia drops below 10hp, she'll use her **Heartstone** (MM pg. 179) to turn ethereal and escape. Glosh will fight to the death.

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The hags would prefer to take the party alive rather than kill them. **If the characters are captured, the hags will imprison most of them and send one member of the party back to Briswold with an ultimatum.** If the character can convince the citizens of Briswold to abandon the town and move far away, the hags will release the rest of the party unharmed. If not, or if the character who's playing the messenger attempts any deceitful acts—for example, returning to the cave with a large number of mercenaries—the hags will slaughter the party and everyone in Briswold.

On the other hand, if the players are victorious, they'll find the following loot:

IN THE CRATES: Food, spell components, a small, intricately carved wooden chest containing **semi-precious stones (mostly jade, sapphire, and opal) worth 2,000gp**, an **Amulet of Water Breathing** (can be used once per day, with effects like a **Potion of Water Breathing**, DMG pg. 188), and **three Potions of Poison** (DMG pg. 188).

ON LOBELIA: Nothing

ON THALIA: **One platinum ring with a massive ruby (her wedding ring) worth 500gp**, and **three love letters from Esmerelda/Marta**, with locks of hair attached to each. There's no telling what she might've meant to do with the letters and hair, but magic users will know that it was nothing good.

ON FORSYTHIA (if she's there): **Two small bags**, one of blue silk, the other made of something like aged leather. The silk bag contains a gleaming black **Heartstone** (MM pg. 179). The leather bag—which is actually made from human skin—is a **Soul Bag** (MM pg. 179) **containing the soul of a powerful orc warlord**. If the party is crafty, perhaps they can negotiate a bargain with the soul—so long as they can figure out how to communicate with it.

ON THE SAHUAGIN PRIESTESS: A small, red velvet bag containing a **hag eye** (MM pg. 176) **on a silver chain**. The hag eye can't be used by the party, but it would be valuable to collectors.

CHAPTER 5: A FINAL REVELATION

When the party returns to Briswold and tells Esmerelda/Marta of Thalia/Astrid's true nature, she's noticeably distraught. And yet, she admits that in the back of her mind, she always felt that something was "off" with her wife. Though she was very happy with Thalia, their relationship evolved so quickly, so easily, that Esmerelda/Marta didn't entirely trust it.

After a long sigh, Esmerelda/Marta thanks the party for uncovering the truth, and she orders the guards to ring the summoning bell, bringing all of Briswold to the town commons in front of the mayor's house. She asks the party to join her on the steps of her home, where she makes the following speech to the crowd:

"Today, this group of brave adventurers did something that no others have ever done—not even the late Mayor Durnish. They have endured trials and tribulations to rid the swamps of danger and make this countryside safe again for all to wander.

"They have also solved the mystery of my beloved Thalia's disappearance. I'm shocked to report that Thalia was actually a hag in disguise who had been plotting with her vile kin to destroy Briswold and all who live here. Thanks to these hardy fighters, that plot has been foiled, and the hags themselves have been done in."

Marta pauses for a moment and looks at all of you before continuing.

"If Briswold is to recover from this heinous act, if we are to grow and prosper, we must do so together. The only way

to do that is to work with our neighbors, to trust them as much as we trust our own families. And there can be no trust when people live behind masks and lies."

The crowd grows quieter, hanging on Marta's every word.

"Thalia was not the only one living among us, disguised as something she's not. I am not what I seem, either. I am not a wizard named Esmerelda Godwin. I am, in fact, nothing more than a rough, common mercenary, who was, until recently, doing jobs for hire, just as these proud folk have done.

"My name is Marta Glump, and I have been happier in Briswold than I have ever been in my life. I would like to remain among you, if you'll have me after such deceit. However, I understand that you didn't choose Marta Glump to lead you, you chose Esmerelda Godwin. We shall have a new election for mayor in the coming days."

The crowd is still—so still you can hear shop signs creak in the breeze and the Trountrun River gurgle along its banks less than a bowshot away. Within moments, someone shouts, "I nominate Marta Glump for mayor of Briswold, now and for all time!" After a brief pause, the shout is quickly echoed: "Now and for all time!" Soon, everyone in the square is cheering, and Marta is holding back tears as she looks out upon hundreds of people who clearly love her for who she is, not for something as trivial as a name.

It quickly becomes clear that the residents of Briswold adore Marta—and if the party asks around, they'll learn that rumors of her true identity have been circulating for some time, so while her revelation was dramatic, it wasn't much of a surprise to anyone. (As for Marta being linked to Lord Alwin's death...well, the people of Briswold didn't care much for "Uppity Alwin" anyway. Half of them would've done him in themselves if they'd had the chance.)

Before the party goes, Marta gives them **1,000gp** from the city treasury, **new mounts** (if they need them), and promises that they'll always have a place to stay in Briswold, so long as she's alive.

Marta will also ask the party if they found Thalia's wedding ring. If the players give it to her, she'll hold it to her heart for a moment, then return it to them. Marta carries enough painful memories of Thalia's deceit; she'd buckle under the added weight of the ring.

