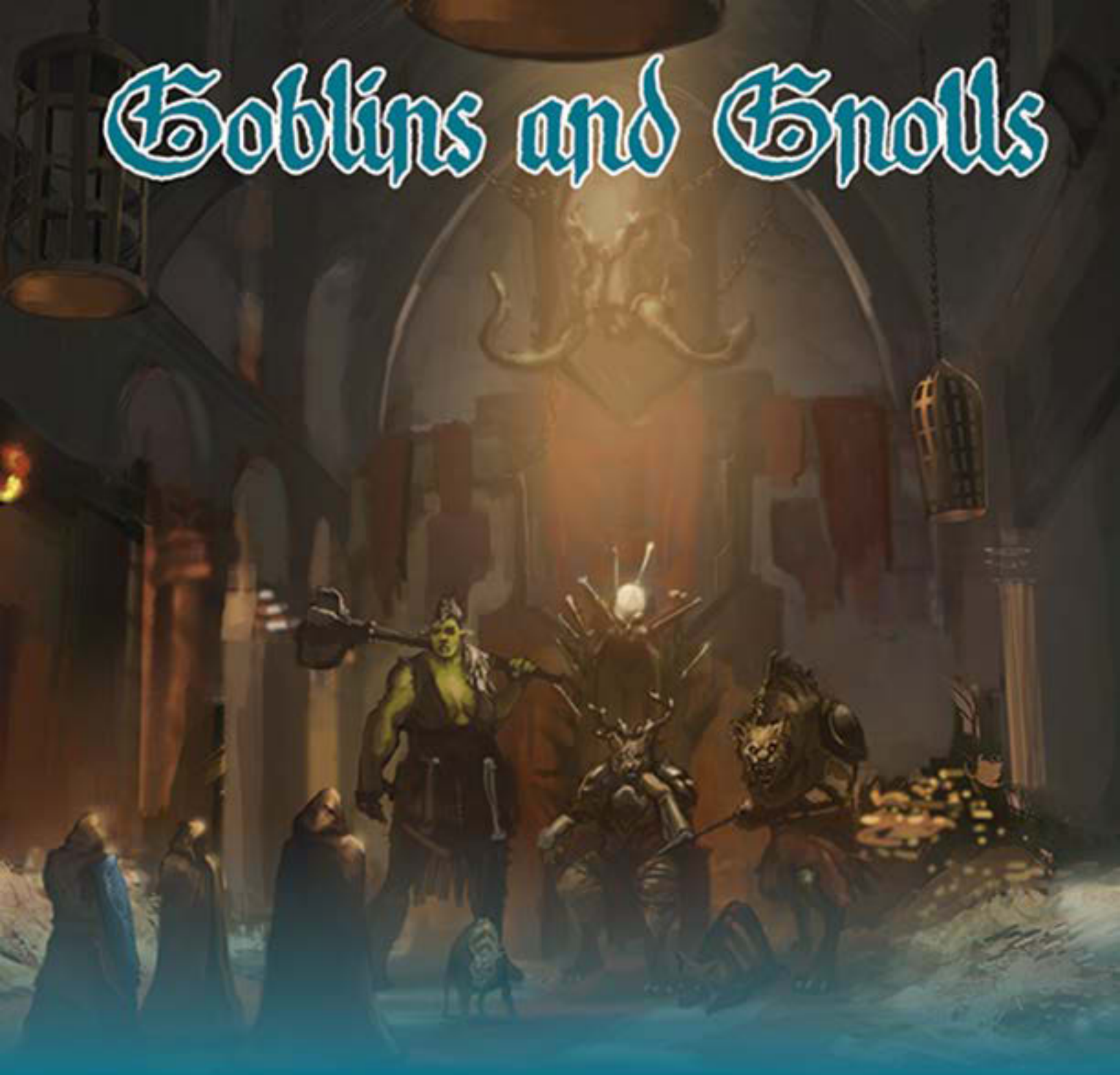


Goblins and Gnolls



By James M. Ward
and Kenneth Spencer



FROG GOD
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Goblins and Gnolls

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Death in the Painted Canyons

Kenneth Spencer

Introduction

The party of at least four PCs of level 5 should include a mix of abilities, especially PCs with investigative and survival skills. It would be helpful, but not necessary, if at least one PC has some knowledge of the Painted Canyons, or at least some experience with desert survival. If your party lacks investigative skills, there are clues as to the criminal conspiracy in the gnom encampment, or you can just drop that aspect of the adventure and run it as a stand-up fight. Parties lacking survival skills or desert experience can hire a guide at Salt Springs for 3 silver shekels (gp) a day. There is a hidden secret behind all the events of this adventure; a great deal of combat can be expected, and those attempting this adventure should be prepared for a vicious battle before resolving the plot. Individually, the combats in this adventure are not that challenging, but the cumulative effect of so many battles – or if the PCs allow the gnolls

to organize themselves – may prove more challenging to the players than it might initially appear.

The adventure takes place in a hilly, arid region called the Caliphate, but can be set in any campaign world. A well-defined caravan route dotted with caravanserai, small walled oasis communities that provide safe locales for the caravans to rest and resupply, crosses this region. Each caravanserai is almost an independent fiefdom, their isolation resulting in the local rulers possessing great leeway in the exercise of their authority.

If using this adventure in the **Lost Lands** campaign setting by **Frog God Games**, the Satrapy of Salt Springs and the great ergs flanking the Painted Canyons lie in the western extent of the great Ashurian Desert. The pasha of Salt Springs answers to the Caliph of the Ammuyad Caliphate in the northwestern extent of the continent of Libynos.

GM Note

You can give the adventure a more exotic feel by referring to the monetary currency by the local names. In the Caliphate, a silver shekel (a



heavy silver coin) is the equivalent to a standard gold piece (1gp), while a gold daric (1pp), a silver drachma (1sp), and a copper obol (1cp) round out the currency equivalencies. PCs can exchange their normal currency prior to the adventure at this rate, or if it is easier you can simply ignore the Caliphate designations and use the standard currencies (given in parentheses throughout the adventure).

Adventure Background

Caravans passing from the caravanserai at Salt Springs through the Painted Canyons and on towards the oasis town of Beni-Hadith are being attacked by a band of gnolls. These gnolls have been particularly lucky, always seeming to strike the caravans that are the least guarded and where the most valuable items are being carried. The Satrap of Salt Springs has offered a bounty for the destruction of these gnolls but is unaware that treachery from within actually lurks behind the attacks.

Adventure Summary

All is not as it seems, as the gnolls are in the employ of Hiram Parth, a corrupt merchant in Salt Springs. Parth has been supplying them with information concerning the caravans and then fencing the goods through his criminal contacts in the distant city of Bhutan. As the adventurers poke around they alert Parth, and he will warn the gnolls. To solve the mystery, the heroes must not only face the gnolls, but also uncover the traitor in Salt Springs. But all know that only death awaits in the Painted Canyons.

The Satrap's Request

The PCs are traveling through an area not far from Salt Springs when they notice that placed in the markets are several official announcements calling for adventurers and mercenaries to come to the aid of the Satrap of Salt Springs. Alternately, the PCs can hear about the job through idle gossip in taverns or from a crier hired by the pasha's agents to spread the word.

Adventurers and Mercenaries Wanted!

By His Wisdom, Pasha Hari Abubakkar,
The Satrap of the Salt Springs Caravanserai

To Rid His Wisdom of a Plague of Gnolls that, in their
Perfidy, have troubled His Wisdom,
Especially The Most Villainous Leaders of this Savage
Band, Red Mane and Talking Dog.

Success will be Greatly Rewarded:
5 Silver Shekels per Pair of Gnoll's Ears
200 Silver Shekels Each for Red Mane and Talking Dog

An Additional Reward and His Wisdom's Eternal
Gratitude and Respect
For Disposing of this Issue Once and for All.

The PCs can find out more by asking around. His Wisdom, Pasha Hari Abubakkar, has a reputation for being an honest, if somewhat harsh, man. Caravans passing through his territory can expect to receive decent treatment. Criminals, on the other hand, can expect the maximum punishment allowed by law, if not more. In the past, wandering swordsmen and such riff-raff have received little assistance from His Wisdom, and more than a little official harassment. That he is openly requesting the aid of such folk is a sign that he has grown desperate, a situation that an enterprising party can work to their advantage.

It should take the PCs no more than a day or two to reach Salt Springs. The trip is uneventful.

The Satrapy of Salt Springs

The caravanserai at Salt Springs is a sprawling walled compound encompassing the springs themselves, as well as stables, markets, inns, and the Satrap's Palace. Salt Springs sits at the edge of a large erg, a region of open sandy desert. Its location is the sole reason for its existence, and the entire population is engaged in providing services — both legal and otherwise — to the many caravans traveling through the region. Daily, a string of camels and more exotic draft animals trundles into the maw of Salt Springs. The journey from distant lands is long and arduous, and so most merchants work one stage of the Great Caravan Road. In Salt Springs they can rest, resupply, and exchange goods brought from one end of the Great Road for goods from another. The pasha collects a tax on every transaction, and forwards a portion of it to the caliph far to the west. The next treasure caravan is due to depart in a few months, and worries over the gnoll raids are what have prompted His Wisdom to stoop to hire adventurers.

Most of the structure is fully roofed, thus limiting entrance to a few choice, and well guarded, doors. Slaves are routinely tasked with shoveling away dunes that have piled up against the caravanserai's walls and gates. The structure itself is built from limestone quarried from the Painted Canyons and artfully arranged in bands of color. The roof is also of stone, though centuries of torches and lanterns have stained the vivid colors a dull black. Navigating the caravanserai is difficult, and a local guide is highly suggested, less one become lost in the maze of covered streets and markets. Lanterns light the merchant and market areas, as well as some of the residential neighborhoods, but beyond these a wanderer should bring his or her own light source.

Salt Springs is divided into six quarters based on the type of people who live there or the tasks they perform.

1. The Pasha's Palace

The central quarter is the Pasha's Palace, a network of rooms and corridors decorated in a restrained opulence and heavily guarded. These areas are well lit at great expense by glass jars containing *continual lights*. The pasha is wealthy enough to maintain a small garden at the center of the palace so that he and his favorites may enjoy natural light, water fountains, and green vegetation.

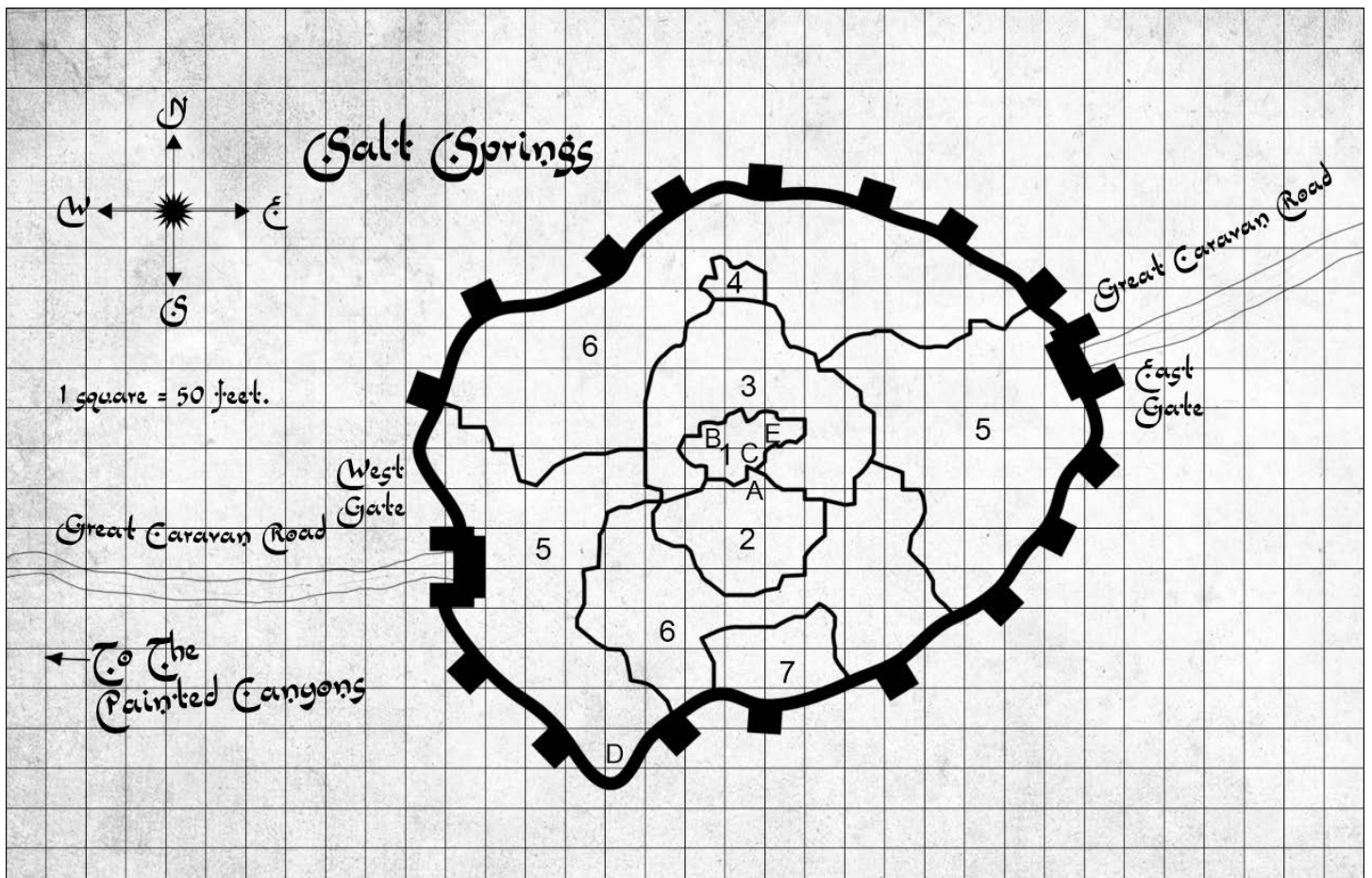
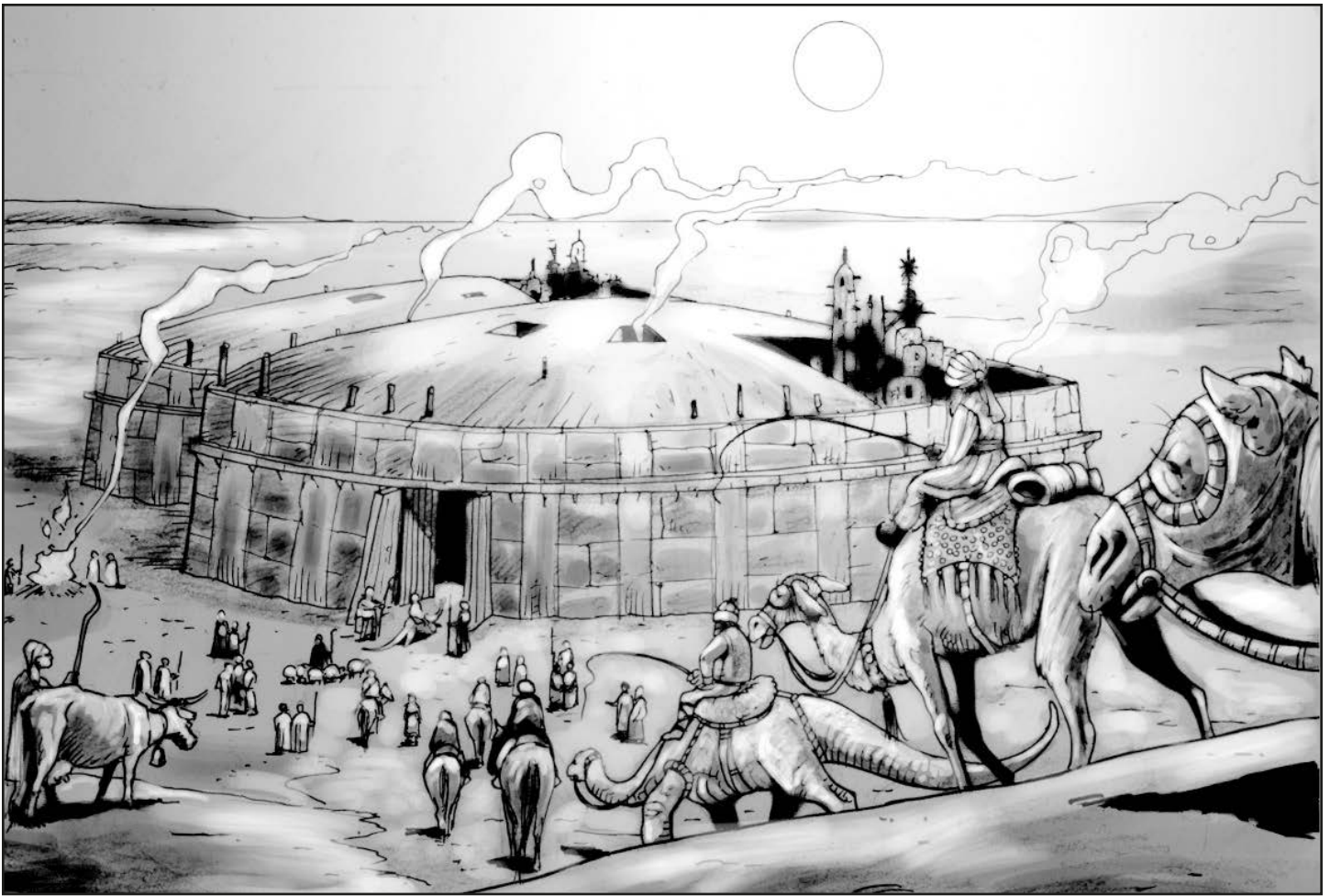
2. Merchant's Quarter

Close to the palace, but also adjacent to the Central Souk, is the Merchant Quarter. In addition to the resident merchants, traveling merchants can find high-class accommodations here. The area is lit by lanterns and well tended by a cadre of slaves (owned by the pasha and rented to the merchants). Guards regularly patrol here, and a guard station sits in the middle of the quarter. It is here that the infamous bitter springs of the caravanserai flow (**Area A**), closely controlled by the merchant's consortium and only open for public use during certain hours of the day.

3. Central Souk

The Central Souk is the largest of several open markets within the walls and roof of the caravanserai. Goods of all kinds change hands here, mostly in bulk. A few vendors work the edges selling food and water, but the souk is largely given over to the larger merchants. Other souks throughout Salt Springs are dedicated to various types of goods, such as preserved food, bulk water, livestock, clothes, and manufactured goods.

GOBLINS AND GNOLLS



4. Dwarven Souk

The Dwarven Souk is home to the small Stoneholme clan of dwarves from the near-fabled Northlands who operate a large smithy and are willing to repair or manufacture metal goods, weapons, and armor.

5. Caravaneers' Quarters

At the East Gate and West Gate are twin Caravaneers' Quarters designed to serve the caravans directly. Here there are stables, inns, taverns, brothels, wine shops, and gambling dens. All these businesses, even those of ill repute, are legal in Salt Springs, provided that they pay their taxes to the pasha. Large beasts cannot navigate the deeper corridors of the caravanserai, and so must remain in the stable areas. Smaller animals are permitted further within the caravanserai, provided the owner is willing to put forth a deposit against any damages they might cause (and defecating outside a privy is considered damage). This amount varies based on the nature of the creature, though a minimum of 3 drachmas (sp) will be levied. These quarters are lit by torches or lanterns and only loosely patrolled.

6. Laborers' Quarters

Backing onto the Caravaneers' Quarters and forming a narrow band from gate to gate is the Laborers' Quarter. This is the home to the free men and women who load and unload the caravans, shuttle goods from one gate to the other, and perform most of the day-to-day work of the caravanserai. This area is rarely patrolled and is lit only by what means the locals can afford, which means very little and only when necessary.

7. Slave Quarter

Adjacent to the Laborers' Quarter, but only connected to it by two narrow, guarded corridors at the east and west ends, is the small Slave Quarter. Slaves are used for the least pleasant tasks in Salt Springs, such as cleaning out privies and hauling the muck to the roof to be dried for use as low cost fuel or fertilizer. Below the Slave Quarter is a large natural cavern that has been expanded, and is used to grow certain varieties of edible mushroom and raise stunted, blind cows (both originally brought at great expense from the Dwarven Holds to the north).

Most districts of Salt Springs are safe; the pasha makes sure travelers and merchants can pass though unmolested. However, there are no laws or rulership so draconian as to completely stamp out crime, and smuggling as well as con games and the occasional robbery do occur. The areas around the Caravaneers' Quarter, the Laborer's Quarter, and Slave Quarters are the most notorious.

Meeting the Satrap

The PCs are asked their business when they approach the gates, and if they reply that they are here to answer the Satrap's call for adventurers, they are escorted to a set of rooms inside the gates where they may rest and recover from their journey. Although treated with respect, they are not able to wander the caravanserai without an escort. After some time, they are brought to the palace for an audience with His Wisdom, Pasha Hari Abubakkar.

The audience room is small, but well decorated with rich tapestries and ornaments of gold. The floor is covered with a detailed mosaic map of the satrapy, including the Great Caravan Road through the Painted Canyons. As His Wisdom explains matters to the party, he leaves his throne and walks around the tile, pointing out areas as he mentions them.

"I am an open and honest man, so I will tell you what is in my mind and heart. I find your kind abhorrent; your unbound and vagabond lifestyle mocks all that is good and orderly in society, and you are little more than bandits, renegades, and cutthroats. However, I find myself in need of your sort of scum, and so you can expect fair and equitable treatment from me. During your stay in my satrapy, you will receive food and lodgings equal to the task I am placing before you, and not equal to your station — that is, you will be treated far better than you deserve.

"Caravans traveling from here to the oasis at Beni-Hadith must pass through a region 100 miles in length known as the Painted Canyons. As they travel through that blasted and desolate land, they are often being attacked by a band of unclean beastmen — gnolls. These brutes, less than savages in my view, have so far eluded my soldiers and managed to escape back into the maze of canyons from which they spring forth.

"The gnolls are lead by an infamous savage named Red Mane, a beast of great size and cunning. A pagan shaman called Talking Dog assists him in his depredations. We have reason to believe that these base creatures enslave captives taken in these raids, and that some have even been sacrificed to their dark gods.

"The attacks have been well planned, and seem to strike at the caravans when they are at their most vulnerable. Furthermore, the most valuable cargoes are targeted with too much regularity to be a mere coincidence. Red Mane has managed to even sniff out hidden cargoes and carry these off. How such lowly and barely intelligent creatures — who all know are not much more than animals — have managed this is beyond me. You have no doubt seen the posts I have had placed throughout the region and are thus aware of the rewards I am offering. That will be your total reward for this enterprise, as I wish to have any goods taken by the gnolls returned to their rightful owners or, if such cannot be found, I will gift their value to worthy causes.

"If you have any needs that must be addressed, please feel free to bring them to Hiram Parth, a respected merchant of this caravanserai and my wisest advisor. You may now leave my presence until you can return in triumph and glory. May the gods be with you!"

The pasha's starting attitude towards the party is indifferent, although this may change in the course of the conversation if the adventurers either impress him or lower themselves in his (already low) esteem.

If the PCs impress the pasha, he will be more respectful and provide them with better accommodations. If they are disrespectful or appear inept, he will become quite unfriendly and signal an end to the already chilly reception. In this case the party can expect a minimum of assistance; they are merely servants tasked with an unpleasant chore, after all. The

party is then escorted back to their quarters and told that Hiram Parth will be available to meet with them the next morning.

If the pasha's attitude remains basically unchanged as a result of the interview, the PCs will be quartered in the servants' quarters of his palace (**Area B**) and given a fine meal to fortify them before their coming endeavors. They may come and go from these quarters as they please for up to 1 week before the pasha grows impatient and his attitude changes back to indifferent. If the pasha is impressed by them, that night the PCs are given lavish guest chambers in the palace (**Area C**) and are treated to fine food and wine, as well as, entertainment provided by a minstrel and several dancing girls. They are given free run of the palace (including passwords to the dungeon) and the caravanserai. They will remain in favor for 2 weeks, after which point the pasha might rethink his general impression if the party seems not to be worth his high regard. If the party bungled the interview, they will be barracked in unused bunks in the guardhouse of the Pasha's Dungeon (**Area F2**) but given the password to come and go freely. Finally, if the adventurers managed to appear simultaneously incompetent and rude, the party is on its own and must find and pay for its own lodgings out in the caravanserai while in Salt Springs. If they have not left the caravanserai within a week of accepting their audience, the pasha grows impatient, and there is a 30% chance each day that one of them will be arrested by the pasha's secret police and thrown in the dungeons for 1d4 days for some minor violation, e.g. vagrancy, loitering, etc. (see "Complications in Salt Springs").

The House of Parth (Area D)

The morning following their audience with the pasha, the PCs are again escorted through the caravanserai, this time to the house of Salt Spring's most prosperous merchant, Hiram Parth. Parth lives in a modest home built on the inside of the caravanserai's outer wall (**Area D**). The outside lacks adornment of any type, but once inside, the party is struck by the sheer opulence of the dwelling. Golden threaded tapestries hang on the walls, the furnishings are made of exotic hardwoods, every possible ornament is made from gold or silver, and the cushions upon which Hiram and his guests sit are covered with silk. Servants abound, and during their interview, the PCs each have their own personal attendant to fill their drinks, bring them food, and stand ready with bowls of water with which to clean their fingers. After being led into Parth's opulent dining salon and being seated upon silk cushions around a low table, their jewel-bedecked host arrives. He is fat and jowly, wearing fine silks, silken slippers, and a bright green turban ornamented with strings of tiny pearls. Once all the PCs have seated themselves and been attended to by their assigned servants, Parth seats himself and addresses them.

"Greetings to you, O brave souls, I am pleased beyond words that His Wisdom has chosen such bold and heroic figures such as yourselves to rid us of these bothersome pests. Please, sit and break your fast with me, I wish to hear tales of your many exploits."

The PCs may ask Hiram for anything they may need, within reason (100 shekels or less per individual), and will receive it. The party may very well wish to question the fat merchant about the gnolls, the Painted Canyons, or other issues (see sidebar below).

GM Note

If the PCs question Hiram Parth, he freely provides the information in normal font below if the right questions are asked. He chooses not to disclose the information in italics, since it is not in his interest to do so. How (and if) the party gets this additional information depends on how you choose to play the encounter, but if they simply accept the briefing at face value, they will get none of it. If the party contains a PC with



high Charisma, Parth's reaction to that will likely bring out a bit more information, and if the party questions him actively, they will not only receive more information but will also realize that Parth is definitely avoiding certain details. Even if the party does not get all the information from Parth, but they ask around with the suspicion that they didn't hear the whole story, they are likely to get more of the italicized information from other sources in the caravanserai.

If the PCs attempt to use magic or force to coerce Hiram Parth, he calls for his guards — **3 eunuchs** armed with scimitars — who arrive in 1 round and attempt to take the PCs captive. They will resort to deadly force if Hiram is threatened or one of them is killed. Captured PCs are turned over to the pasha on charges of "assault upon a person of station," sentenced to 10 days in the dungeons, and garner consequences as explained under "Complications in Salt Springs." Killing any of the eunuchs does not produce additional charges against the PCs. Killing Parth results in a death sentence unless they are able to prove his guilt (see "Rewards and Further Adventures").

Eunuch Guard (3): AC 13; HP 90 (9d8+27); Spd 30ft; **Melee** scimitar x3 (+6, 1d6+4 slashing); **Str** +4, **Dex** +1, **Con** +3, **Int** -1, **Wis** +1, **Cha** +0; **Skills** Intimidate +2; **AL** LN; **CR** 3; **XP** 700.

What Parth Knows

- The attacks have been at random locations along the Great Caravan Road through the Painted Canyons *but always at the most opportune places and upon specific pack camels carrying the most valuable goods.*
- The gnolls are little more than filthy beasts, attacking like savage animals *but appear to show a shrewd grasp of military strategy, relying on different and varied tactics in their ambushes.*
- The gnolls are of the Two Bloody Spears tribe that has dwelt in the depths of the Painted Canyons for hundreds of year, *however they have only become this aggressive and coordinated since the coming of the chief*

DEATH IN THE PAINTED CANYONS

Red Mane and his shaman Talking Dog.

- His Wisdom has dispatched men to track the gnolls and, though the gnolls apparently make no effort to hide their trail, the men have returned empty handed or not at all. *The gnolls apparently plant traps and false trails for pursuers and take prisoner those that fall into their hands.*

- None of the goods taken from the caravans has reappeared in the markets of Salt Springs *but there are other markets available farther afield such as the distant city of Bhutan beyond the Painted Canyons at the west-ern end of the Caravan Road.*

- The settlement of Beni-Hadith is small and could be easily avoided by anyone seeking to circumvent it in order to reach the markets of Bhutan, *but if the gnolls were doing so they would need some sort of merchant contacts within that city in order to sell their ill-gotten goods.*

In addition to their audience with Hiram Parth, at some point the PCs may wish to break into his home and search it for clues if they become suspicious of his involvement. He stays out late at his warehouses most nights, so it would be a simple matter to try and gain entry after the servants have left for the day and before he has returned. He has a personal contingent of **12 guards** who are always posted at the gates to his manor, but these could be avoided with proper planning. Picking a lock will be necessary to gain entry through a locked window or side door.

Guard (12): AC 16; HP 11 (2d8+2); Spd 30ft; Melee scimitar (+3, 1d6+1 slashing); Str +1, Dex +1, Con +1, Int +0, Wis +0, Cha +0; Skills Perception +2; AL LN; CR 1/8; XP 25

Once inside Parth's house, the PCs may search his personal quarters. A search turns up several bottles that are marked as a cheap vintage of wine (certainly out of place here) but if uncorked they are revealed to hold a colorless oil with a peculiar odor. Searching papers may uncover a list of names among his personal papers that includes both merchants of distant Bhutan among their number and a number of notable smugglers and bandits (use a check for secret doors to see if these papers are identified during the search). No explanation is given for the presence of these names, and they do not comprise incriminating evidence in of themselves, but a rogue PC will recognize them to be members of the notorious thieves' guild known as the Zuma Qulldishi. It is also possible that a non-thief will recognize the connection to the thieves' guild, although this is unlikely unless the PC would have some reason to have learned this, either through shady connections or asking around in the caravanserai about criminal activities.

Unless the party has in some way manipulated Parth's schedule, there is roughly a 40% chance that Parth and his eunuch guards will return to the house during the first hour of the search, increasing cumulatively by 20% with each hour of searching. If the PCs do not keep a lookout, then Parth takes note of their entry due to several small telltale signs that are prepared throughout his house and attempts to ambush them as they leave. In this case Parth and the eunuchs will fight to the death to prevent anything the PCs have discovered from leaving the house. If the party is warned by a lookout and escapes, Parth will know that someone has been in the house, but is actually unlikely to suspect that it was the party.

Hiram Parth: AC 14; HP 136 (16d8+64); Spd 30ft; Melee scimitar x2 (+6, 1d6+3 slashing), dagger (+6, 1d4+3 piercing); Str +1, Dex +3, Con +4, Int +1, Wis +1, Cha +3; Skills Deception +6, Insight +4, Perception +6; AL NE; CR 5; XP 1800.

Equipment: *potion of healing.*

Further Trouble with Hiram Parth

After their meeting with Hiram Parth, the PCs are free to travel about Salt Springs at their leisure. If Hiram suspects the PCs are competent, or if they are getting close to discovering his crimes, he will first approach them under the pretense that he does not wish for His Wisdom's reputation to be sullied by consorting with hired mercenaries and offer up to 10,000 silver drachmas (sp) to just forget the whole thing and leave town. If they refuse the money, or if they seem too trustworthy, Hiram then hires some itinerant ne'er-do-wells from the Laborers' Quarter to kill them.

The **8 thugs** lack finesse, and will simply kick in the door of the party's quarters one night in an attempt to slaughter them before they are armed and armored (even if they are staying in the palace servants' quarters, which have an exterior entrance). If slain or captured, the assassins still have the 200 silver drachmas on them that they were paid with. They will not rat out Hiram (for fear of reprisal) unless put under torture, a process that will require 1d3 days and that the pasha will attend to with relish if his attitude is generally friendly toward the PCs. If Hiram's involvement is uncovered, he will claim it was done to protect the honor of his satrap; he will be given a stern rebuke and placed under house arrest for 30 days by a slightly bemused pasha.

If the party leaves town before the "assassins" get their chance, or is staying in the palace guest quarters, these curs will simply take Hiram's money and leave town in the opposite direction — you just can't hire good scum these days.

Thug (8): AC 11; HP 32 (5d8+10); Spd 30ft; Melee scimitar x2 (+4, 1d6+2 slashing); Ranged heavy crossbow (+2, 100ft/400ft, 1d10 piercing); Str +2, Dex +0, Con +2, Int +0, Wis +0, Cha +0; Skills Intimidation +2; Traits pack tactics; AL CN; CR 1/2; XP 100.

The Investigation

The PCs can use whatever means they deem necessary to find the clues that lead to Hiram Parth and his scheme. Several options exist, and enterprising parties will no doubt invent their own. They can follow a caravan and hope it is attacked, talk to locals and witnesses, press Hiram for more information, or simply go to the site of the latest attack and attempt to follow the tracks back to the gnoll's encampment. If they decide to follow a caravan or investigate the site of the latest attack, go to "The Ambush at the Ford", in The Painted Canyons chapter. If the PCs decide to return to Hiram Parth's residence to gain more information, see "The House of Parth" above.

Talking to locals and witnesses requires a good deal of legwork for the party. Hiram Parth has been instructed to aid the party in their investigation, and he will search for any witnesses or survivors of previous raids. Sadly, he finds none (or at least that is what he tells the party), and will explain that other than the resident merchants (who rarely leave) most of the population is rather transitory, and it seems that all witnesses have moved on. If they investigate on their own, the PCs will face a certain level of reluctance by the residents of Salt Springs.

A better avenue would be to work the Caravaneers' and Laborers' quarters. It will take 1d4 hours of asking around to find a witness to one of the gnoll attacks, and no more than three witnesses can be located (caravan workers spend their time on the caravans, not remaining in the caravanserai itself for very long at a time, so there are not many available to find).

If the party questions one of the witnesses, 1d3 of the following information can be gleaned from each:

- The gnolls used differing tactics each attack, sometimes swooping out of a side canyon, other times causing a rock fall to separate the caravan into easily picked off pieces.

- The gnolls are lead by a large and particularly ferocious packmaster called Red Mane. He wields a magical flaming great axe in battle.

- Talking Dog, the shaman of the Two Bloody Spears tribe, is a potent spellcaster, and his acolytes aren't unskilled either.

- Most of the attacks took place at the far end of the Caravan Road, nearer to Beni-Hadith than Salt Springs.

- The gnolls seemed to single out certain camels, usually ones with more valuable loads — even if those loads have been disguised or there are decoy camels included in the caravan.

- One caravan scout allegedly was able to follow the gnolls back to their encampment and escape back to Salt Springs. His name is Hurgash, but he is currently imprisoned in the Pasha's Dungeon for murdering a man in a bar fight and faces execution soon.

Complications in Salt Springs

Salt Springs is in an isolated and barren region, and so nearly all raw materials and manufactured items need to be imported at great expense. Adding to this are the pasha's high taxes and tariffs on all goods that pass through the caravanserai, as well as, all transactions that occur within its walls. This means that all legal purchases and services are increased by 150% over the list price. Goods and services can be found for less if the buyer is willing to turn to the black market. If the party is native to this area, any PC can make a connection with the black market and buy goods for regular prices, with only a 5% chance of being caught. Assuming, however, that the PCs are strangers to the area, making a purchase on the black market requires a successful saving throw to avoid being caught. Rogue PCs make the saving throw with a +4 bonus. If the party takes particularly good precautions, or is particularly obvious about what they are doing, assign appropriate bonuses or penalties to the saving throw roll.

Failing the save results in the PC being caught by the pasha's secret police, tried, and imprisoned until he can pay a fine of 300% of the list price of whatever he was trying to buy (See **The Pasha's Dungeon** below).

PCs who are arrested find that the pasha is unhappy that the adventurers he has hired proceeded to break his laws. He will not meet with them, but if they obtained a favorable reaction during their initial interview, the pasha will allow them to pay the fine out of their reward, though in this case an additional 200% will be levied for "court fees". If any PC that has been arrested has not met with the pasha yet, he is out of luck and must pay the fine. Furthermore, the pasha's initial attitude with him is extremely unfriendly.

In addition, losing the pasha's favor, run-ins with Hiram Parth, attempts to break into Parth's house, heavy handed tactics during the investigation, or any number of other acts undesirable to the pasha can land the PCs in

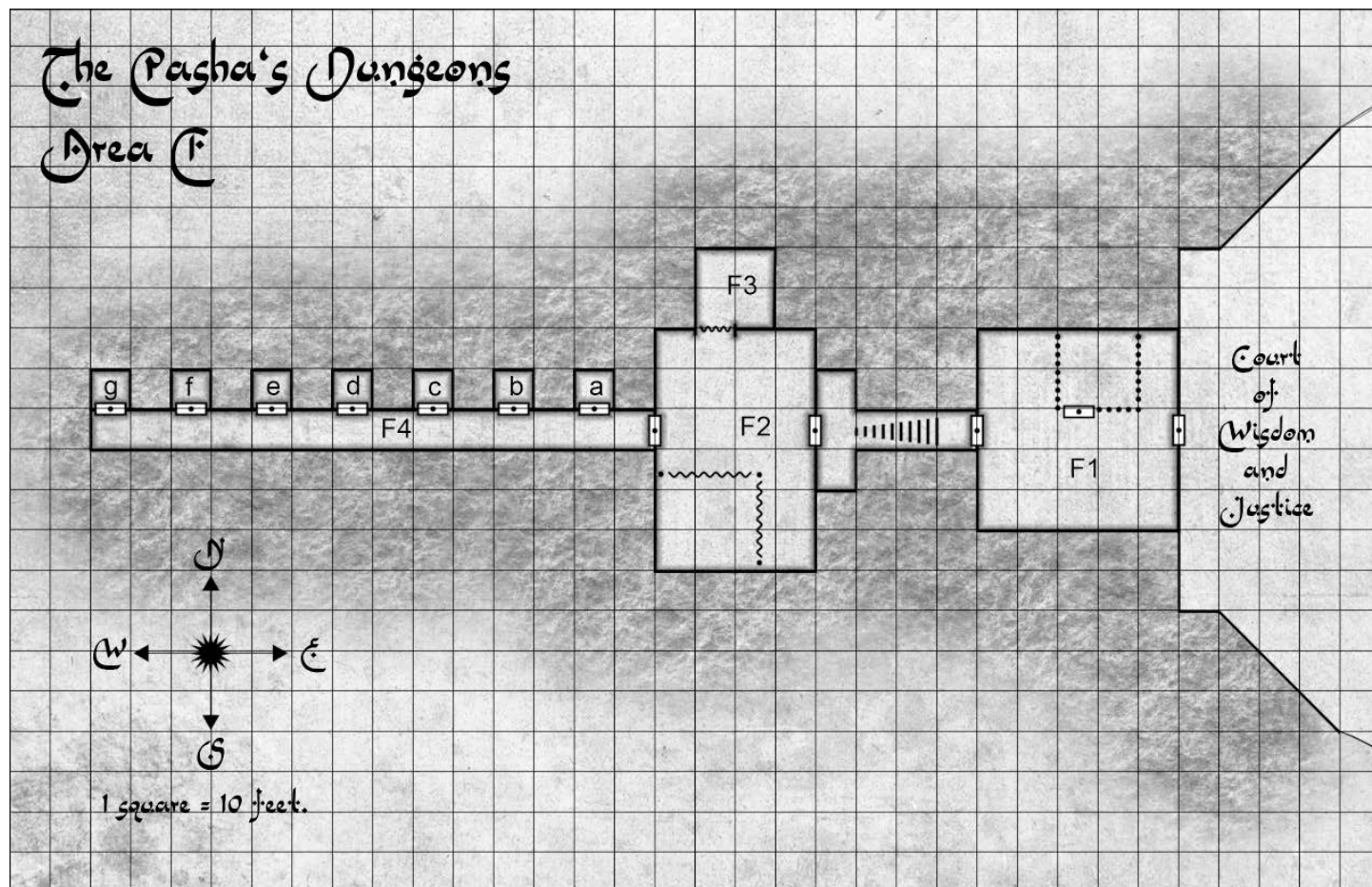
hot water with the caravanserai's soldiers or its secret police and result in arrest and imprisonment. In addition, attempts to reach and/or rescue the caravan scout Hurgash might lead the PCs to the Pasha's Dungeon on their own.

The Pasha's Dungeon (Area F)

It is a very poor idea to try to break out of the Pasha's Dungeon, but PCs being what they are, someone will no doubt attempt this approach if so incarcerated. The Pasha's Dungeon is built beneath the caravanserai and is constructed from the same stone as the rest of Salt Springs. The dungeon lies beneath the palace proper and can be reached through the Court of Wisdom and Justice (Area E), which is full of guards and court officials during the day but has a single **guard** (see "Guards" below) making rounds at night every few minutes. In addition, it has many large (locked) windows that could be forced open.

There is but the one entrance to the dungeon, and it is heavily guarded. Any attempt, successful or not, to free prisoners from the dungeons results in the guilty parties being branded as outlaws in the Satrapy of Salt Springs. This means the PCs are not able to collect any reward should they decide to strike against the gnolls on their own. Of course this also means that they would be able to keep any treasure acquired. As word of these misdeeds spreads, legal authorities throughout the Caliphate will be alerted about the criminals. A wise move on the part of the party at this point would be to flee the region, at least until things die down. The Northlands are nice this time of year, and a sojourn in that far-off lawless land is no doubt in order.

Ceilings are 10ft high, and light is provided by heavy stone globes that have been impregnated with *continual flame* spells. Doors are of stout oak reinforced with bands of iron. The guard captain carries the keys.



Area F1: Entrance

Beyond the reinforced door it lies a room for receiving prisoners, complete with a holding cell and a table at which the guard captain can fill out the necessary paperwork on any prisoners entering or leaving the dungeon. The far door leads to a set of stairs. These steps go down deeper into the dungeon. *Continual flame* globes mounted on the walls light the room and the stairs. Locked in a drawer in the table (the guard captain has the key) is a list of four passwords. One of them is the daily password for the dungeon, but there is no indication of which is correct.

Creatures: There are **2 guards** and a **sergeant of the guard** on duty at all times. The two guards stand ready at the far door. There is a 30% chance each half hour that another pair of guards may come in to transport a prisoner to or from the dungeon.

Captain of the Guard: AC 15; HP 65 (10d8+20); Spd 30ft; **Melee** scimitar x2 (+5, 1d6+3 slashing), dagger (+5, 1d4+3 piercing); **SA** multiattack, parry (reaction, +2 AC vs. 1 melee); **Str** +2, **Dex** +3, **Con** +2, **Int** +2, **Wis** +0, **Cha** +2; **Skills** Athletics +4, Perception +2; **AL** LN; **CR** 2; **XP** 450.

Guard (2): AC 16; HP 11 (2d8+2); Spd 30ft; **Melee** spear (+3, 1d6+1 piercing); **Str** +1, **Dex** +1, **Con** +1, **Int** +0, **Wis** +0, **Cha** +0; **Skills** Perception +2; **AL** LN; **CR** 1/8; **XP** 25

Area F2: Guardhouse

At the bottom of the stairs is another door and another **2 guards** (see **Area F1** for stats). They do not allow anyone to enter or leave unless the daily password is given, and they shout an alarm if it is not.

Beyond this door is the main guardroom, a combination bunk and ready room for the guards. The room is a spacious and features three exits: a reinforced door that leads to the cells, another reinforced door that leads up to the entrance, and a doorway blocked by a curtain of beads that leads to the adjacent slave quarters. A curtained-off bunk area fills one corner. A small round table with four chairs sits in the middle of the room, and normally has either a meal or a quirkat game spread out upon it. Two small braziers of coal are in the room, one in the bunk area and one near the table. Spare clothes, suits of half-plate, heavy crossbows, and halberds line the walls (as do crude drawings of an adult nature), along with any equipment and belongings taken from the prisoners in **Area F2**.

Creatures: A total of **8 guards** (see **Area F1** for stats) can be found in the guardhouse at any time, half sleeping in the bunk area and the other half loafing until needed. Additionally, there is a 30% chance per half hour that an additional 2 guards come through escorting a prisoner to or from the dungeon.

Area F3: Slave Quarters

Creatures: This small room is the home of the **3 slave women (commoners)** who clean the dungeon and cook the meals for the guards. They are violently unattractive women, long ago broken in body and spirit by the hopelessness of their life and the drudgery of their tasks. The three share one dirty pile of rags as a bed and own nothing more than their raggedy clothes.

Area F4: Cells

A long corridor stretches into the darkness. The heavy stone globes of *continual light* would normally illuminate this area, but it is the custom of



the guards to throw heavy cloths over them when leaving the room. When entering from the guardhouse, the right hand wall is broken into seven cramped cells. Each cell is closed by a locked iron gate. The cells contain little save for prisoners, a bed of straw, and a necessities bucket.

Creatures: Six of the cells are full, and any PCs will be stuffed into the last cell (Cell G). Cell A contains Hirus Burningwrath, a local dwarfish merchant (LN **commoner**) who was convicted of falsifying weights; he will be beheaded in the morning. Nasim Ba, a known and convicted smuggler (CN **bandit**), languishes in Cell B; he will also be executed in the morning. Cell C is currently the home of Sara bint Hamza (LN **commoner**), who has been convicted of teaching slaves to read; she is sentenced to 30 days in the dungeon. As the PCs pass Cell D, Hurgash the Mighty calls to them to free him from false imprisonment on trumped up charges. Though he really did beat a man to death in a tavern brawl, Hurgash acted in self-defense, but his victim was a citizen, and so the caravan scout loses his head in the morning. Estevan Cordoba strums his lute in Cell E, serving 30 days for public performance without a license, while his traveling companion, Chani Morning Star awaits 50 lashes in Cell F for interfering with the satrap's soldiers when she intervened in Estevan's arrest. She is gagged and manacled to prevent her from casting spells.

Hurgash the Mighty, Fighter: AC 10; HP 13 (2d10+2); Spd 30ft; **Melee** unarmed (+2, 1 bludgeoning); **Str** +1, **Dex** +0, **Con** +1, **Int** +0, **Wis** +0, **Cha** +0; **Skills** Athletics +3; **Traits** action surge, fighting style (dueling), second wind (1d10+2); **AL** U; **CR** 1/8; **XP** 25.

Estevan Cordoba, Rogue: AC 10; HP 9 (2d8); Spd 30ft; **Melee** unarmed (+2, 1 bludgeoning); **Str** +0, **Dex** +1, **Con** +0, **Int** +0, **Wis** +0, **Cha** +1; **Skills** Perception +2, Performance +5, Sleight of Hand +5, Stealth +3; **Traits** cunning action, sneak attack +1d6; **AL** CN; **CR** 1/8; **XP** 25.

Chani Morningstar, Cleric: AC 10; HP 9 (2d8); Spd 30ft; **Melee** unarmed (+2, 1 bludgeoning); **SA** channel energy (preserve life, turn undead), spells (Wis+3, DC 11); **Str** +0, **Dex** +0, **Con** +0, **Int** +0, **Wis** +1, **Cha** +0; **Skills** Religion +2; **AL** LN; **CR** 1/2; **XP** 100.

Spells (slots): 0 (at will)—*guidance, light, resistance*;
1st (3)—*bless, command, cure wounds, detect magic, protection from evil and good*.

Development: Obviously Hurgash may be of interest to the party, and if they mention a desire to find the Two Bloody Spears gnom encampment, he quickly promises to guide them there if freed. He can be used as an NPC to join the party or can replace a PC casualty if you wish. Nasim Ba will also make this promise but is lying and attempts to flee at his first chance. Hirus Burningwrath likewise knows something of the Two Bloody Spears because a number of his clansmen were captured by them a few years back. If given his freedom, he offers this tidbit, "My cousin, Havrak's a vengeful dwarf and a master stoneworker. If he's still alive, don't be surprised if he's fixed up some nasty trick in order to have his vengeance on his captors. Bring him or any of our kin home to the Dwarven Souk, and you'll be well rewarded." Estevan and Chani don't know anything of value, but can serve as henchmen if needed out of gratitude if given their freedom.

The Painted Canyons

The Painted Canyons are a stretch of badlands that lie two days' journey outside of Salt Springs. They are a maze of canyons, colorful sandstone bluffs, and limestone escarpments, mostly devoid of water and forage save for a thin strip of green along the Havari River. This relatively verdant strip is the route that caravans take from Salt Springs to the oasis town of Beni-Hadith. The caravans have been seemingly nowhere, strike, and are gone almost as quickly as they appeared.

Navigating the Painted Canyons is difficult, as the badlands are riven with blind canyons, side passages, rock jumbles, and sheer bluff walls. Finding water and food, especially forage for horses, is not easy, though those who are familiar with desert environments should fare nicely.

Thirst and starvation are not the only dangers in the canyons. The locals say that everything in the Painted Canyons either bites or stings, and this includes the native plant life. Movement through the canyons is difficult due to the rugged terrain, so that a caravan only makes about 15 miles a day and usually requires a week or more to pass through the dreaded region. From the edge of the canyons, it is less than a day to reach Beni-Hadith. Parties should roll daily on the random encounter table below while they are within the Painted Canyons. Encounters may be direct or indirect, at the GM's whim, as the canyons cut line of sight to tens of feet within them, but someone on a bluff can see for miles. Encounters marked with an asterisk do not occur as long as the PCs follow the main trail along the Havari River and should be treated as no encounter. The Attack Site encounter can *only* be encountered along the Caravan Road and is otherwise treated as no encounter.

Random Encounters in the Painted Canyons

3d10	Encounter
3–6	No encounter
7–9	Band of Gnolls
10–11	High Desert Nomads
12–14	Giant Horned Toad
15–16	Pack of Coyotes
17–18	Sun Worshipers
19–21	Giant Scorpion
22	Ogres
23–25	Smoke on the Horizon
26	Hidden Spring*
27	Dead Bodies*
28	Ant Colony*
29	Attack Site
30	Escaped Slave

No encounter

Nothing unusual occurs that day.

Band of Gnolls

Three gnolls, their **3 mates** and **5 cubs** are out hunting. If they spot the party, or if the party attacks and any gnolls escape, they return to The Gods' Needles and warn Red Mane. Any captured gnolls can be coerced into giving away information about the band and its encampment in exchange for their freedom.

Gnoll (3): AC 15; HP 22 (5d8); Spd 30ft; **Melee** bite (+4, 1d4+2 piercing), spear (+4, 1d6+2 piercing); **Ranged** longbow (+3, 150ft/600ft, 1d8+1 piercing); **Str** +2, **Dex** +1, **Con** +0, **Int** –2, **Wis** +0, **Cha** –2; **Senses** darkvision 60ft; **Traits** rampage; **AL** CE; **CR** 1/2; **XP** 100.

Gnoll Female (3): AC 15; HP 22 (5d8); Spd 30ft; **Melee** bite (+4, 1d4+1 piercing), spear (+4, 1d6+1 piercing); **Ranged** longbow (+4, 150ft/600ft, 1d8+2 piercing); **Str** +1, **Dex** +2, **Con** +0, **Int** –2, **Wis** +0, **Cha** –2; **Senses** darkvision 60ft; **Traits** rampage; **AL** CE; **CR** 1/2; **XP** 100.

Gnoll Cub (5): AC 13; HP 9 (2d8); Spd 30ft; **Melee** bite (+2, 1d4 piercing), spear (+2, 1d6 piercing); **Ranged** shortbow (+3, 80ft/320ft, 1d6+1 piercing); **Str** +0, **Dex** +1, **Con** +0, **Int** –2, **Wis** +0, **Cha** –2; **Senses** darkvision 60ft; **Traits** rampage; **AL** CE; **CR** 1/8; **XP** 25.

DEATH IN THE PAINTED CANYONS

High Desert Nomads

A group of ten camel-mounted nomads and their sheep, the nomads are knowledgeable about the territory and gladly offer to guide the party through the Painted Canyons. If the party hires a nomad as a guide, he expects to be paid 5 silver drachmas (sp) a day, and leads the PCs away from danger and to sources of food, fodder, and water. For an additional 20 silver shekels (gp) he will take them to The Gods' Needles (Area H). If the party is in a sad state, the nomads may rescue them and take them back to their camp to recover if you choose.

Nomad (10): AC 16; HP 11 (2d8+2); **Spd** 30ft; **Melee** longsword (+3, 1d8+1 slashing); **Str** +1, **Dex** +1, **Con** +1, **Int** +0, **Wis** +0, **Cha** +0; **Skills** Perception +2; **AL** LN; **CR** 1/8; **XP** 25

Giant Horned Toad

A deadly giant lizard is out hunting, and has caught the party's scent. It follows the PCs and attacks if they are otherwise engaged or begin to look weak.

Toad, Giant Horned: AC 15; HP 93 (11d8+44); **Spd** 30ft; **Melee** bite (+6, 2d8+4 piercing); **Ranged** acid blood (recharge 6, +3, 50ft, 6d6 acid); **Str** +4, **Dex** +1, **Con** +4, **Int** -4, **Wis** -1, **Cha** -2; **AL** U; **CR** 3; **XP** 700. (**Monster Appendix**)

Pack of Coyotes

These large coyotes (resembling very small, hunched wolves) follow the party, staying out of sight as best they can, hoping someone will eventually drop something tasty or, better yet, die of thirst. In the meantime, they shadow the party, which could cause a rising of paranoia amongst intrepid adventurers. The coyote moon songs at night are lovely, if that's any consolation.

Coyote (10): AC 12; HP 3 (1d6); **Spd** 40ft; **Melee** bite (+1, 1d4-1 piercing); **Str** -1, **Dex** +2, **Con** +0, **Int** -4, **Wis** +1, **Cha** -2; **Skills** Perception +3; **Senses** keen hearing and smell; **Traits** pack tactics; **AL** U; **CR** 0; **XP** 100.

Sun Worshipers

These 3 giant lizards have recently finished eating a stray camel and are now sunning themselves on a large rock. They hiss at any who approach them, but are currently too lazy and well fed to bother attacking except in self-defense.

Lizard, Giant (3): AC 12; HP 19 (3d10+9); **Spd** 30ft, climb 30ft; **Melee** bite (+4, 1d8+2 piercing); **Str** +2, **Dex** +1, **Con** +1, **Int** -4, **Wis** +0, **Cha** -3; **Senses** darkvision 30ft; **AL** U; **CR** 1/4; **XP** 25.

Giant Scorpion

This monster lies in wait along the party's route, hidden under sands or in a cave alongside the trail. When the PCs are close, the giant scorpion springs out, attempts to grab something meaty, and then scuttles off to enjoy its meal.

Scorpion, Giant: AC 15; HP 52 (7d10+14); **Spd** 40ft; **Melee** claw x2 (+4, 1d8+2 bludgeoning), sting (+4, 1d10+2 piercing plus 4d10 poison [DC 12 Con half]); **SA** multiattack; **Str** +2, **Dex** +1, **Con** +2, **Int** -5, **Wis** -1, **Cha** -4; **Senses** blindsight 60ft; **AL** U; **CR** 3; **XP** 700.

Ogres

Two ogres have been lost in the Painted Canyons for some time, and are getting tired of a diet of cactus fruit and giant lizard. As soon as they spot the party, they charge in and fight to the death.

Ogre (2): AC 11; HP 59 (7d10+21); **Spd** 40ft; **Melee** greatclub (+6, 10ft, 2d8+4 bludgeoning); **Ranged** javelin (+6, 30ft/120ft, 2d6+4 piercing); **Str** +4, **Dex** -1, **Con** +3, **Int** -3, **Wis** -2, **Cha** -2; **Senses** darkvision 60ft; **AL** CE; **CR** 2; **XP** 450.

Smoke on the Horizon

The party spots several pillars of smoke on the horizon. If they follow them, they find the gnoll encampment. Use the notes for following the gnoll's tracks under "Attack Site" below.

Hidden Spring

The party comes across a spring of fresh water hidden in a side draw.

Dead Bodies

The party comes across the bodies of three dwarves, long dead in the desert sun, their flesh picked clean. There are signs of violence, and the bodies have been looted. These are members of Hirus Burningwrath's clan that have been missing for over a year.

Ant Colony

This canyon is riddled with huge mounds of a giant ant colony; the party must either backtrack or risk causing the ants to swarm. The area of the colonies covers 100ft of the canyon. Each round that one or more PCs are in this area, there is a 1 in 6 chance (per PC) that swarms of ants will emerge to defend the colony. If combat is taking place over the top of the colony, an additional swarm will emerge in each combat round.

A swarm is made up of 2 giant warrior ants and 5 giant worker ants, and multiple swarms may emerge. If the party retreats, the ants will not pursue them more than approximately 200ft before returning.

Ant, Giant Warrior (2): AC 15; HP 13 (3d6+3); **Spd** 30ft; **Melee** bite (+4, 1d6+2 piercing plus 1d6 poison); **Str** +2, **Dex** +1, **Con** +1, **Int** -4, **Wis** -3, **Cha** -4; **AL** U; **CR** 1/4; **XP** 50.

Ant, Giant Worker (5): AC 15; HP 9 (2d6+2); **Spd** 30ft; **Melee** bite (+4, 1d6+2 piercing); **Str** +2, **Dex** +1, **Con** +1, **Int** -4, **Wis** -3, **Cha** -4; **AL** U; **CR** 1/8; **XP** 25.

Attack Site

This is one of the sites where the gnolls have previously ambushed a caravan and can be encountered multiple times. The sites show a level of organization normally unheard of amongst the more savage humanoids. Several different tactics have been used, such as wild ambushes from the side canyons, dropping rock falls to break the caravan up into pieces, and some signs point to lookouts and archers being posted on the cavern walls.

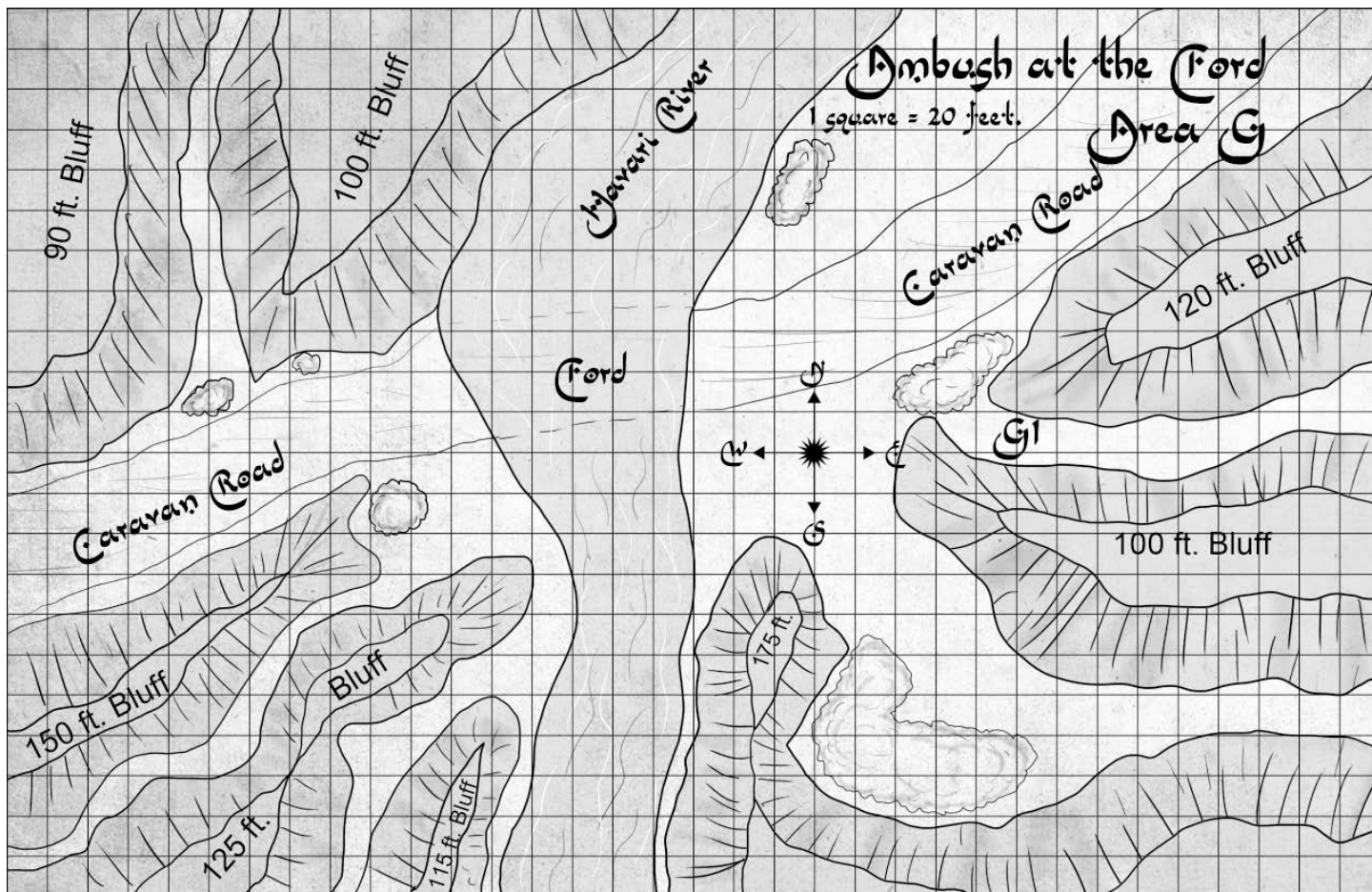
Searching the sites of the latest attacks does yield some clues. Gnoll tracks (if the party searches for tracks, treat this as a secret door check), as well as those of several hyenas, camels, and assorted humanoids lead off into the Painted Canyons, eventually reaching the gnoll encampment (Area H).

Escaped Slave

One of the slaves in Area H-6 or H-7 of the Gnoll Encampment has escaped. He or she is almost dead from thirst and exposure but, if rescued, can lead the party back to Red Mane's encampment; however, he will not assist in battle or risk recapture.

Ambush at the Ford (Area G)

If the PCs decide to follow a caravan and look for an attack, there will be one leaving in 1d3+1 days. This caravan, led by Samir ibn Faoud, consists of 36 camels, 30 guards (human guards), 40 drovers (commoners), and 12 camp followers (commoners). It is carrying the usual assortment of silks and bundles of tea, plus a collection of rare and exotic feathers from the fabled flying lizards of Tynnos



Island valued at 3,000 gold darics (pp). The feathers are hidden on one particular camel whose non-descript nature fails to hint at the small fortune riding on its back. PCs that wander through the caravan looking for anything out of place or unusual will detect a strange smell on the camel (recognizable as the oil from Parth's house if the PCs managed to locate it). Hiram Parth personally sees off every caravan in his official capacity as His Wisdom's personal advisor. His attention to detail is legendary, and he goes so far as to check the straps on random loads, inspect the camels and other beasts of burden, and direct the guards as to their duties.

As the party travels with Samir's caravan, they have a tense, but fairly uneventful journey thorough the twisting passages of the Painted Canyons (roll for encounters normally but subtract 5 from the die result due to the 30 armed guards that accompany the column). Side canyons open off of the main canyon that the Havari River passes through. The vibrantly colored bluffs rise up on either side, casting at least half of the canyon in shadow. Natural rock falls line both banks of the river, creating numerous opportunities for ambushers to take cover. The Great Caravan Road stays to the southern bank of the river, crossing at the only good ford near the far western end of the canyons (**Area G**). There is a 50% chance each day that Samir points out a place where the gnolls have ambushed caravans (see "Attack Site" above), and the party may investigate these if they wish. However, the caravan is not waiting for them, and will press on even if the adventurers are left many miles behind. If the PCs become separated, roll for encounters normally.

As the caravan approaches the ford, everybody is tense in anticipation of the threat. At the ford the caravan can easily be caught with half on one side of the Havari, and half on the other. Guards are posted on both banks as side canyons open up to the east and west. The party needs to decide how they are arranging themselves for the crossing, and it would not be unreasonable to split the party into teams in order to watch both sides. Samir will wait with a party of mounted guards on the far side of the river, figuring that since the last time the gnolls attacked at the ford they attacked the part of the caravan waiting to cross, and will likely vary their tactics somewhat.

Creatures: When the caravan is about halfway across, one of Red Mane's pack lords leads his warriors in a howling charge out of the side canyon (previously screened by seemingly impassable thorny brush) at **Area G1**. They are targeting the marked camel with their scent ability but will grab other camels that are nearby, striking down any who get in their way. The grizzled pack lord is obvious in directing his raiders, pointing out a specific camel and barking orders. While the warriors are busy with this, Talking Dog leads his acolytes in rounding up prisoners for eventual sacrifice, with a special eye towards attractive females, as these seem to please the packmaster the best (unless Talking Dog and both of his acolytes are slain, assume that they make off with 1d4+4 captives from among the camel drovers and camp followers). The attacking force that the PCs must contend with consist of **Talking Dog**, **2 gnoll acolytes**, a **gnoll pack lord**, **2 elite gnoll warriors**, **8 gnolls**, **2 hyenas**, and a **giant hyena**. Do not subtract or add any of these forces to the Gnoll Encampment (**Area H**) other than Talking Dog himself. Other attackers are present, but assume that they are occupied by the caravan guards fighting under the direction of Samir. In total, 1d10+10 guards and drovers are slain. Samir will not pursue any stolen property, hurrying instead towards Beni-Hadith and its relative safety. See "The Gnolls" sidebar below for gnoll stat blocks and the "Talking Dog" sidebar for more information regarding the mad shaman.

Development: The whole thing will be done with as much speed as possible and, unless thwarted, the raiders will be back up and into the canyons within 6 rounds. There Red Mane awaits with a reserve force that hampers pursuit by his use of tactics he picked up while serving as a mercenary, one of which is to cover his retreat. As soon as the ambushers and the loot are clear (and possibly Talking Dog and the prisoners if there is time) Red Mane will trigger a rock fall that seals off the canyon behind them causing a delay of several hours unless the PCs have the means to fly over or otherwise bypass the obstacle quickly. Red Mane's reserve force never openly engages the PCs and unless the PCs scout by air, will never be seen by them as they make their way back to the encampment by hidden routes.

The Two Bloody Spears

The Two Bloody Spears gnoll tribe has lived in the Painted Canyons for generations. For many years their depredations were minor, the occasional raid of a small caravan or harassing the high desert nomads who wandered the region. All this changed when a young gnoll warrior called Red Mane returned from a long journey to the north. There he had served as a mercenary for less-than-finicky humans and dwarves, learning a great deal about how the world outside of the Canyons functions. He also made contacts with a large criminal organization in the city of Bhutan, the Zuma Qulldishi.

Mostly the Zuma engage in smuggling operations and robbery, though they have been known to occasionally commit highway banditry or take on contracts for murder. Through his contacts Red Mane managed to make an arrangement whereby his tribe would raid the caravans passing through the Painted Canyons and the Zuma collect the loot, and return every few months with goods for the gnolls. This has made the Two Bloody Spears tribe prosperous and Red Mane's rule stable.

The tribe is well armed and armored and this wealth has allowed the tribe to conquer the other gnolls in the area and drive off other savage humanoids. The Two Bloody Spears tribe is now poised to become the dominant force in the Painted Canyons.

The Gnoll Encampment (Area H)

The encampment of the Two Bloody Spears tribe lies deep in the canyons, and is a 50-mile journey from the Caravan Road. Finding the encampment requires either tracking the gnolls after a raid, or a bit of luck.

Red Mane has chosen a defensible and difficult to locate part of the Painted Canyons to be his base of operations. The encampment sits on two large pillars of rock called The Gods' Needles and an adjacent bluff in a small and out of the way box canyon. The Needles are hard limestone pillars that rise 200ft above the canyon floor, surrounded on three sides by the softer sandstone canyon walls. Unlike the brightly colored sandstone that comprises most of the Painted Canyons, the Needles are a flat whitish grey in color.

There are two ways to get onto The Gods' Needles, from the canyon below or from the surrounding bluffs. The top of each Needle connects at two points to one of the surrounding bluffs via shoddy rope bridges that are treacherous to cross. The bridges connecting the Needles to each other and to the bluff lack hand lines and are not of the highest quality. Anyone fighting or moving faster than a walk on the bridges risks falling off. A DC 8 Dex save is required each round to keep one's feet, and any failure results in the PC prone and hanging off the bridge. A second saving throw allows anyone hanging off a bridge to pull themselves back up, but failure of this check by 5 or more will result in a plummet to the canyon floor below (20d6 bludgeoning damage).

The Needles themselves may be scaled with a DC 12 Str (Athletics) check; the first climber can let down rope for others to follow (but this method does provide total concealment to the climbers from any gnoll guards above). The top of the Needles themselves are strewn with rubble and sliced with small fissures.

The gnolls have built huts and structures within in their encampment out of a mixture of construction types. Smaller structures are constructed from the semi-fossilized rib bones of gargantuan animals excavated from the canyon walls in the vicinity of The Gods' Needles. These are lashed together at the top and covered with cured hides. At the apex of the rib bones is an adjustable flap that allows smoke to escape (it gets cold at night in the high desert, and thus every evening a fire is lit). Larger structures are composed of adobe with flat roofs braced by wooden beams, long-dried in the desert sun, and occasionally reinforced by more of the mysterious megafauna bones. Doorways are slightly shorter than a gnoll, about 6ft in height, and are covered by a hide drape. The interior of the typical dwelling contains a pallet of dirty furs for each gnoll or captive living there, a central stone fire circle, the weapons and armor of any

gnolls currently in the huts, assorted food stuffs, several water gourds, 1d4 shrunken heads of various humanoids and gnolls and other items unique to each hut listed in the descriptions below.

The Gnolls

The gnolls (and slaves) of the Two Bloody Spears tribe are as follows:

Red Mane, Gnoll Packmaster: AC 16; HP 74 (10d8+30); Spd 30ft; **Melee** bite (+6, 1d6+4 piercing) or greataxe x2 (+6, 1d12+4 slashing plus 2d6 fire); **Ranged** javelin x2 (+6, 20ft/60ft, 1d6+4 piercing); **SA** incite rampage (recharge 5–6, 30ft), multiattack (weapon x2, incite rampage); **Str** +4, **Dex** +1, **Con** +3, **Int** –1, **Wis** +1, **Cha** –2; **Senses** darkvision 60ft; **Traits** rampage; **AL** CE; **CR** 3; **XP** 700.

Equipment: chain shirt, *flaming greataxe* (treat as *flametongue*), 4 javelins

Treasure: pouch with 27 gold darics (pp) and 2 shrunken heads filled with gold dust worth 35 silver shekels (gp) each. Red Mane's *belt of scalps* acts as a *ring of protection*, although it is a grisly object, a belt bearing 13 human scalps.

Talking Dog, Gnoll Shaman: AC 15; HP 40 (9d8); Spd 30ft; **Melee** bite (+4, 1d4+2 piercing) or blood spear (+4, 1d6+2 piercing plus wounding); **Ranged** javelin (+4, 20ft/60ft, 1d6+1 piercing); **SA** spells (Wis +3, DC 11) **Str** +2, **Dex** +1, **Con** +0, **Int** –2, **Wis** +1, **Cha** –2; **Senses** darkvision 60ft; **Traits** rampage; **AL** CE; **CR** 1; **XP** 200.

Spells (slots): 0 (at will)—*light*, *mending*; 1st (3)—*cure wounds*, *inflict wounds*, 2nd (2)—*hold person*, *silence*.

Treasure: silver holy symbol set with lizard teeth (worth 35 silver shekels), pouch with 18 gold darics (pp), 35 silver shekels (gp) and a 3 shrunken humanoid heads stuffed with gold dust (35 silver shekels each). Talking Dog's blood spear acts as a *sword of wounding*.

Gnoll Acolyte: AC 15; HP 22 (5d8); Spd 30ft; **Melee** bite (+4, 1d4+2 piercing), scimitar (+4, 1d6+2 slashing); **Ranged** javelin (+4, 20ft/60ft, 1d6+1 piercing); **SA** spells (Wis+3, DC 11); **Str** +2, **Dex** +1, **Con** +0, **Int** –2, **Wis** +1, **Cha** –2; **Senses** darkvision 60ft; **Traits** rampage; **AL** CE; **CR** 1/2; **XP** 100.

Spells: 1st (2)—*cure wounds*.

Gnoll Pack Lord: AC 15; HP 49 (9d8+9); Spd 30ft; **Melee** bite (+5, 1d4+3 piercing) or glaive x2 (+5, 10ft, 1d10+3 slashing); **Ranged** longbow x2 (+4, 150ft/600ft, 1d8+2 piercing); **SA** incite rampage (recharge 5–6, 30ft), multiattack (weapon x2, incite rampage); **Str** +3, **Dex** +2, **Con** +1, **Int** –1, **Wis** +0, **Cha** –1; **Senses** darkvision 60ft; **Traits** rampage; **AL** CE; **CR** 2; **XP** 450.

Elite Gnoll Warrior: AC 15; HP 35 (5d8); Spd 30ft; **Melee** bite (+5, 1d4+3 piercing), scimitar (+5, 1d6+3 slashing); **Ranged** longbow (+3, 150ft/600ft, 1d8+1 piercing); **Str** +3, **Dex** +1, **Con** +0, **Int** –2, **Wis** +0, **Cha** –2; **Senses** darkvision 60ft; **Traits** rampage; **AL** CE; **CR** 1/2; **XP** 100.

Gnoll: AC 15; HP 22 (5d8); Spd 30ft; **Melee** bite (+4, 1d4+2 piercing), spear (+4, 1d6+2 piercing); **Ranged** longbow (+3, 150ft/600ft, 1d8+1 piercing); **Str** +2, **Dex** +1, **Con** +0, **Int** –2, **Wis** +0, **Cha** –2; **Senses** darkvision 60ft; **Traits** rampage; **AL** CE; **CR** 1/2; **XP** 100.

Gnoll Female: AC 15; HP 22 (5d8); Spd 30ft; **Melee** bite (+4, 1d4+1 piercing), spear (+4, 1d6+1 piercing); **Ranged** longbow (+4, 150ft/600ft, 1d8+2 piercing); **Str** +1, **Dex** +2, **Con** +0, **Int** –2, **Wis** +0, **Cha** –2; **Senses** darkvision 60ft; **Traits** rampage; **AL** CE; **CR** 1/2; **XP** 100.



Gnoll Cub: AC 13; HP 9 (2d8); Spd 30ft; **Melee** bite (+2, 1d4 piercing), spear (+2, 1d6 piercing); **Ranged** shortbow (+3, 80ft/320ft, 1d6+1 piercing); **Str** +0, **Dex** +1, **Con** +0, **Int** -2, **Wis** +0, **Cha** -2; **Senses** darkvision 60ft; **Traits** rampage; **AL** CE; **CR** 1/8; **XP** 25.

Hyena: AC 11; HP 5 (1d10+1); Spd 50ft; **Melee** bite (+2, 1d6 piercing); **Str** +0, **Dex** +1, **Con** +1, **Int** -4, **Wis** +1, **Cha** -3; **Traits** pack tactics; **AL** U; **CR** 0; **XP** 10.

Hyena, Giant: AC 12; HP 45 (6d10+12); Spd 50ft; **Melee** bite (+5, 2d6+3 piercing); **Str** +3, **Dex** +2, **Con** +2, **Int** -4, **Wis** +1, **Cha** -2; **Traits** rampage; **AL** U; **CR** 1; **XP** 200.

Commoners: These are noncombatants. Refer to rulebook for stats.

Encampment Key

Area H1: Guard Post

At each of these locations, a hyena skull has been mounted upon a short pole. During the day, **3 gnolls** and a **hyena** are tasked with keeping watch here for intruders or escaping slaves. At night, **5 gnolls** and a **hyena** man each of these positions but, as there have never been any intruders and the slaves are locked away before sunset, they are not terribly vigilant, spending most of their time gambling and dozing, and have tactical disadvantage on Wis (Perception) checks. There is a 25% chance at any given time that one of the elite warriors is on duty or checking on the guards (in which case they will be very alert).

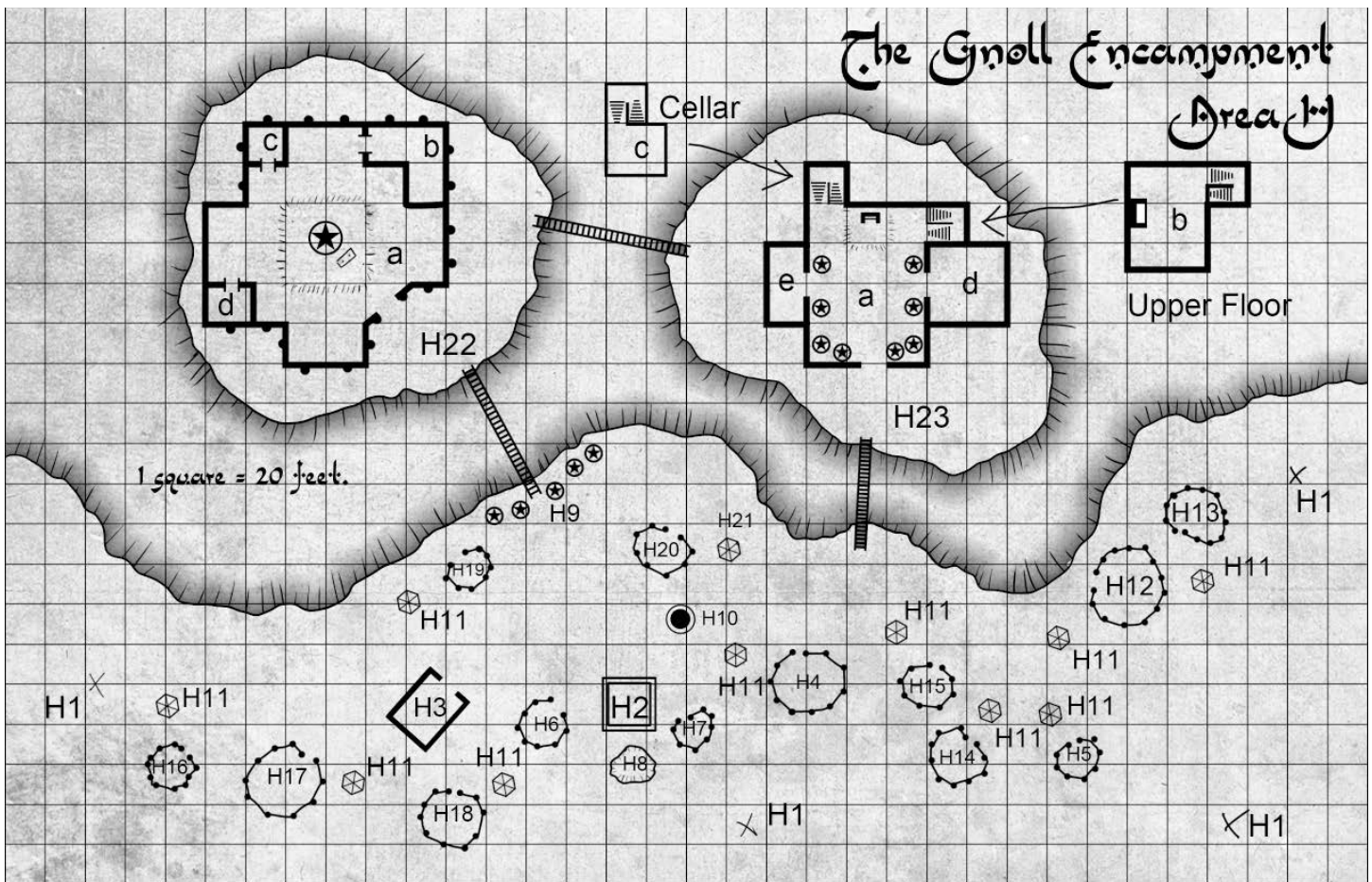
Area H2: Slave Grounds

This area is where the slaves taken by Red Mane's band in their raids are worked each day. Every day there are clothes to be mended, weapons and armor to be cleaned, and other small tasks the gnolls don't wish to perform. There are currently 10 captives (see Areas H6 and H7) being held — all the previous slaves have been sold, eaten, or sacrificed to Alquemadak. A 3ft high wall of poorly dressed, dry-fitted stone surrounds the area. The ground is littered with waste, as the slaves are worked to death and allowed to clean their area only in their "free" time. Whenever slaves are present, **3 female gnolls** keep watch over the area.

Area H3: Storehouse

This large structure is the main storehouse for the goods taken from the caravans and destined to be passed on to smugglers. One of the bachelor **elite gnoll warriors** and his **hyena** are always on guard outside this building.

Every month, a caravan of smugglers sneaks into the valley below to collect their ill-gotten goods and pay Red Mane his share. The smugglers are not due for two weeks, and they do not factor into the adventure. However, one of Talking Dog's acolytes is a clever fellow and has learned how to read. In order to keep from being cheated, Red Mane has ordered the young priest to keep a written record of every item passed on to the smugglers and how much in goods was returned in payment. The bright fellow has gone one step further, and included a list of the names of the people his masters deal with. The inventories and list are written in a very poor form of the Common tongue, but are legible. Anyone who has found the list of names in Hiram Parth's house (see **Area D**) recognizes these as the same individuals that Parth has been dealing with.



The building is packed with crates, boxes, and bales of trade goods: silks, tea, exotic furs, imported foodstuffs, and bars of gold are all stacked inside. In one corner is a small portable writing table. Opening the table reveals a stack of papers (the manifest mentioned above), several quills, a jar of ink, a penknife, blotting paper, and an abacus. The goods (should the party just make off with them and not return them to the Satrap) are worth 45,000 silver shekels (gp) in total, though some items are of dubious nature (a few bags of exotic drugs and illegal alchemical ingredients). It would require an entire caravan to move all of these goods, though 10,000 shekels' worth could be transported in as few as four backpacks if the more valuable goods are picked out.

Area H4: Young Bloods' Lodge

This hide hut serves as the home of **12 gnolls**. These gnolls are the youngest and thus lowest warriors in the band and have yet to earn enough of a reputation to have their own dwelling. Half of the warriors are present here at any given time, usually sleeping, and the rest are on duty at the guard posts. There are also 1d4 **hyenas** here at any given time.

Area H5: Old Pack Lord's Hut

A **gnoll packlord** lives in this hut with his pet **giant hyena**. Once he was in command of the band, but was defeated and cast aside by Red Mane during that packmaster's rise to power. Now, it is his job to watch the slaves and make sure the younger warriors keep to their tasks. He is more than a little peeved that he has been placed in a position he sees as beneath him. Inside there is a dirty fur pallet, the pack lord's spare armor and weapons (a battleaxe, heavy wooden shield, and scale mail), several wineskins (mostly empty), and scattered foodstuffs. Most night he picks out a female slave or two to serve him, and is often drunk and passed out by midnight.

Areas H6–H7: Slave Huts

These two small huts are the living quarters for the most useful slaves kept by Red Mane's band (the others having been sold or killed). The slaves are poorly fed, receive a minimum of water rations, and are beaten on a daily basis. Their living quarters are strewn with trash and debris, as they are worked much too hard to be concerned with sanitation or appearances. They are a sullen and oppressed lot, but will fight with utter frenzy if given the chance to turn the tables on their captors. There are **4 female commoners** in H6 and **6 male commoners** in H7 (one is the dwarf Havrak Dwellingdeep). All the rest are normal human caravaneers or desert nomads taken in various raids (1d6hp each).

Development: If Havrak Dwellingdeep is questioned, he will advise the PCs of the trap he built in **Area H23b**. If he is safely returned to the Dwarven Souk of Salt Springs, the PCs will be rewarded with 100 gold darics (pp).

Area H8: Midden Pit

This 12ft deep pit is used as a rubbish dump by the slaves. It provides a potential hiding place, as the gnolls don't bother to search it unless a slave is missing.

Area H9: Votive Statues

These crudely carved wooden statues of the various aspects of Alquemedak the Hyena God stand 8ft tall and are decorated with thin, beaten sheets of gold (250 shekels worth apiece). From right to left the statues depict: the Master of Fortune, an aspect to which the gnolls pray to bring them fat and soft targets to plunder; the Taker of Slaves, who stands with both hands clutching manacles, ready to add another victim to the Hyena God's collection of slaves; the Lord of Carrion, who is crouching in offal, a twisted grin on its face; the Giver of Plentitude in Exchange for

Sacrifice, its hands holding a bloodstained bowl before it in which small animals and objects are smashed to gain the Hyena God's favor; and finally the Smasher of Skulls, standing tall and strong with its arms crossed, each hand holding a war club. Each of these may be identified by questioning a gnoll prisoner. The gnolls pray to the Smasher of Skulls before each raid, and destroying this totem causes a considerable reduction in morale for any gnoll that witnesses its destruction.

Area H10: Well

Dwarven slaves were worked to death to dig this well 100ft down into the highest aquifer. The current batch of slaves spends a good deal of their time raising water from the well and carrying it to the cisterns and gnoll dwellings. If the party is looking for further adventures, the well no doubt connects with a host of caverns below.

Area H11: Storage Huts

These small huts are only 5ft high and are constructed in the same manner as the common dwellings. Each is claimed by a particular **gnoll** who has a 25% chance of looking through its contents at any given time of the day or night. They are filled with foodstuff, looted amphorae mostly filled with water — though there is a 45% chance of finding one filled with expensive wine worth 25 shekels (gp) — tools, clothes, and other assorted household items. Most of the goods are of little value, though looted trade goods worth 1d10+5 silver shekels (gp) can be found.

Area H12: Veteran's Hut

This hut is the sleeping place for **5 elite gnoll warriors** and **8 female gnolls**. **Five cubs** occupy two of the pallets. Each veteran likewise has his own pet **hyena**. As high-ranking warriors of the band, these veterans are not required to stand watch at night, and can be found here late in the evening and until morning. The females and cubs stay nearby during the day, and retreat to their hut as night falls. Hidden in the pallets is 35 shekels (gp) in assorted coinage.

Area H13: Empty Hut

This dwelling is normally occupied by 6 elite gnoll warriors, their mates, and 3 cubs. However, they are currently out hunting in the mesas to the north of the Needles, and have taken any items of value with them.

Area H14: Warriors' Lodge

This hut is inhabited by **8 gnolls**. Living with them are **10 female gnolls**, **6 gnoll cubs**, and **4 hyenas**. Half the warriors are here at any given time, the others on watch. One pallet has a silver penny whistle worth 20 silver drachmas (sp) hidden in it.

Area H15: Bachelors' Hut

This hut is the home to **3 gnolls** and their **3 hyenas**. These three are all bachelors and the hut looks like it, with items and food debris strewn about. They do not stand watch but are instead tasked with guarding the storehouse (**Area H3**), where one is always on guard with his hyena. Among the pallets are 4 silver shekels (gp), 45 silver drachmas (sp), and 56 copper obols (cp).

Area H16: Feuding Hut

A hut occupied by **4 gnolls** and their families (**3 gnoll females**, **2 gnoll cubs**, and **2 hyenas**); there is a pallet for a fifth, but he was killed



in a recent caravan raid, and the four remaining gnolls have been busy feuding over his belongings. These four stand opposite watches, two from dawn to midday, the others from dusk to midnight. The belongings in contention consist of a shrunken head filled with gold dust worth 35 silver shekels (gp), and a small collection of coinage worth a total of 22 silver shekels (gp).

Area H17: The Brothers

Although a large hut and thus usually occupied by a gnoll veterans with families, this hut is the living space of **6 gnolls**, all brothers, and their **3 hyenas**. They have learned to combine their meager resources. The brothers all stand night watch at various parts of the encampment, and thus are found here sleeping during the day. Unlike most of the bachelor huts, this one is somewhat clean and organized. Among the pallets are: 3 silver shekels (gp), 15 silver drachmas (sp), and 6 copper obols (cp).

Area H18: The Dying Gnoll

A large hut occupied by an elite gnoll warrior (no longer capable of combat) and his sons (**5 gnolls**). The older gnoll was severely wounded in the last raid, and is barely hanging onto life. In consideration of his decades of service, Red Mane has allowed the old warrior to take his time dying in relative peace. The old gnoll's sons, on the other hand, have been busy standing day watches and trying their best to outperform each other, all in the hopes of being granted their father's possessions after he dies (assuming they haven't already stolen the best parts). Along with the warriors are a total of **8 female gnolls**, **7 gnoll cubs**, and **3 hyenas**, representing their various families. The veteran's treasures consist of 5 gold dust-filled shrunken heads worth 35 shekels (gp) each and assorted stolen trade goods worth a total of 100 silver shekels (gp).

Area H19: Rite of Passage

Four **gnoll females** and their 4 **hyenas** occupy this small hut. They are in seclusion while they await their rite of passage. Two **shaman acolytes** guard the entrance to this hut day and night, changing the guard every six hours. Each female wears crude jewelry made of semi-precious stones worth 5 silver drachmas (sp) each.

Area H20: Swinging Gnolls

This small dwelling was once the home of 4 gnolls. These warriors were charged with guarding the storehouse, but were caught pilfering from it and brutally executed by Red Mane. In his anger, they were flayed alive in their corpses left to hang in the hut until they rot. The smell is obvious to anyone within 10ft of the hut.

Area H21: Looted Storage

This storage hut belonged to the executed gnolls in **Area H20**. As a result, it has been thoroughly looted. The interior is empty, save for discarded sacks and boxes.

Area H22: Temple of the Hyena God

Standing upon the western Needle is a massive construction of adobe bricks. The same giant ribs used elsewhere in the camp are incorporated here as decorative ornamentation and load-bearing supports. The exterior surfaces of the building have been etched with crude totemistic images of death, destruction, and fire.

Area H22a: Worship Hall

The peak of this adobe structure rises 30ft above the ground, and has a 10ft diameter circular opening at the top to allow light in and smoke out. The air reeks of offal and blood, and fat red candles give off the sent of frying meat. In the center of the temple is a large statue of Alquemedak carved from gleaming obsidian. The statue depicts the Hyena God, a gnoll-like demonic figure, standing upright, its hands raised towards the heavens, and the shattered remains of its victims at its feet. The god's hands and face are covered in dried blood, and its elongated, tooth-filled maw is open in a howl of triumph. The statue is 15ft tall and stands on a dais of more of the gigantic bones.

Before the statue sits a 6ft by 6ft by 3ft slab of basalt. Chains to hold sacrificial victims are attached at the four corners of the slab. The altar is covered in dried blood, as is the floor and dais around it. Surrounding the altar and the statue is a circle of twenty 3ft high red candles made from the tallow of humanoids. Each candle is inscribed with Chaos runes and punctuated by humanoid teeth pressed into the tallow.

Creatures: During the day 3 **gnoll acolytes**, accompanied by a **giant hyena**, tend the sacred candles and stand ready to perform any services required of them.

Area H22b: Shaman's Chamber

Here **Talking Dog** and his pet **giant hyena** (if they survived the Ambush at the Ford) lives and works, unless he is performing ceremonies in the temple, or serving as Red Mane's advisor. Two **gnoll acolyte shamans** accompany Talking Dog wherever he goes. Of all the gnoll dwellings, this one is the dirtiest. Talking Dog refuses to be bothered with cleaning, and rarely considers the filth here important enough to order a slave to see to it. There is a small bed of furs opposite the entrance, and next to the bed is a locked, ironbound wooden chest. Inside the chest are a *potion of invisibility*, a *ring of animal influence*, 15 gold darics (pp), 440 silver shekels (gp), and 76 silver drachmas (sp). A wooden table and chair rests against one wall, but the shaman rarely uses it as anything other than a scratching post or acolyte beater.

Talking Dog

"The Great God Alquemedak commands that I offer your soul and flesh to him. His will cannot be denied!"

Description: Talking Dog is old — at least for a gnoll — and his pelt has grown gray. He walks with a slight hunch and a limp but is still a fearsome warrior who can command the powers of his demonic god.

Personality: Mad, mad, mad, mad.

Background: Talking Dog felt the power of the Hyena God at an early age and, while still a cub, ran off into the desert to seek the voices that called to him. He found them, and returned to his band to murder and sacrifice all to the glory of Alquemedak. Since then, he has served a variety of packmasters, killing those who don't obey his religious laws, and brining up from the ranks those who will. Red Mane obeys and may live for now, at least as long as Alquemedak commands it.

Area H22c: Acolytes' Hall

This chamber serves as the living quarters of Talking Dog's acolytes. There is little in this room save for eight filthy fur pallets — the acolytes know better than to leave anything valuable unattended. Most of the time the room stands empty, as Talking Dog keeps his minions busy. At night 1d4+1 **gnoll acolytes** can be found here, sleeping off the day's labors.

Area H22d: Larder

This dark room is used as a larder by Talking Dog and his acolytes. Inside are a private cistern and various foodstuffs — all rotten and scum covered as befits worshippers of Alquemedak.

Area H23: Packmaster's Palace

Smaller only than the Temple of the Hyena god, this multi-level adobe structure serves as the palace of Red Mane, Packmaster of the Two Bloody Spears tribe.

Area H23a: Throne Hall

The floor is covered with the dirty pelts of various deadly predators, all hunted down and slain by Red Mane himself. A 50ft long strip of expensive (and now ruined) purple silk leads from the entrance to the base of a dais. Upon this pediment sits Red Mane's throne of bones. The bones are the remains of his greatest foes, intricately woven to provide a fitting seat for the packmaster. The dais itself stretches 20ft from the back wall, and is made from the carved shoulder blades and hipbones of some massive beast excavated from the canyon walls below. Along the walls stand eight carved wooden statues, each the likeness of one of the band's former packmasters, three of whom are Red Mane's ancestors. Each statue is crudely painted in an effort to make it more realistic. The walls of the throne room are painted in rather gruesome detail with scenes from Red Mane's life, from his cubhood, through his years among northmen mercenaries, his rise to power among the gnolls alongside Talking Dog, and his cunning in striking a deal with a human merchant (if the party looks closely at the painting they will recognize a resemblance between the pictured merchant and Hiram Parth). Behind the throne is a large unlocked ironbound chest that contains the shrunken and preserved heads of every gnoll who has dared to challenge Red Mane for leadership of the band — 17 in all, each stuffed with gold dust worth 35 silver shekels (gp). Unless a council has been called, this chamber is empty.

Area H23b: Packmaster's Bedchamber

As befits the leader of a prosperous band of gnolls, only the finest decorations and accouterments serve the packmaster's needs. Against one wall is a feather mattress and carved wooden bed complete with silk

canopy looted from a caravan. Sadly, gnolls are hard on their furnishings, and the bed has been cut and rent in multiple places. An actual fireplace, built by dwarven slaves, complete with a brick chimney provides heat and light throughout the day and night. A jumble of wood sits next to the fireplace, and is refilled daily by slaves.

Opposite the fireplace is an upright harpsichord, again looted from a caravan. Red Mane does not know how to play it, but is always on the lookout for a slave who can. Currently, that slave is an elven woman named **Elisa Stardream (commoner)**. Elisa is Red Mane's favorite, and along with his 3 mates (**female gnolls**) and 2 slave concubines (**commoners**), can usually be found here with **Red Mane** and is his trained **giant hyena**. Nearby is a table and chair, at which Red Mane takes his meals (the women must sit on the floor and watch). Nailed to the underside of the table is a small wooden box that contains Red Mane's greatest treasure, a ruby and gold gorget-style necklace worth 3000 silver shekels (gp).

Traps: The fireplace was built by dwarven slaves now all dead save for Havrak Dwellingdeep (see **Area H7**). The whole thing is rigged to collapse when the proper stone is depressed (AC 15 to be struck from across the room by a ranged attack). Hidden beneath the wood pile is a waterskin filled with lamp oil as part of the trap planned by the now all but dead dwarves. When the trap is triggered, the hearth and chimney collapse into the 10ft by 10ft area directly in front of them, dealing bludgeoning and fire damage to anyone occupying those squares. This in turn spreads the burning contents of the fireplace onto the wood pile. In the next round the oil-filled skin explodes dealing fire damage to anyone still in the room for 3 rounds and requiring an additional saving throw to avoid catching on fire. A DC 18 Wis (Perception) check will reveal the trap.

Red Mane

"I will enjoy your death, almost as much as I will enjoy eating your flesh afterwards."

Description: Red Mane is a big, scarred gnoll of unknown age — at least twenty-three summers. His namesake hair is kept long and wild, as wild as the rampant rage in his eyes.

Personality: Red Mane is cruel, callous, demanding, and fearless.

Background: Once, many summers ago, Red Mane served in a mixed group of mercenaries that fought in the wars of the softer races. There he learned how to lead men in a civilized way, as well as how to seek out the dark underbelly of city life. Red Mane used this knowledge, and the support of the prophet Talking Dog, to cement his hold over the Two Bloody Spears band of gnolls. Now, he tries to balance his instincts with his learning and raise his people up to become a major force in the region. Luckily for the other races, he lacks the intelligence to do this, and instead merely mimics the military discipline and tactics he saw as a mercenary.

Area H23c: Treasury

Inside this subterranean chamber is Red Mane's personal treasure hoard of 150 gold darics (pp) 1280 silver shekels (gp), 3,450 silver drachmas (sp), 9080 copper obols (cp), and three diamonds worth 500 silver shekels (gp) each.

Area H23d: Bodyguard Barracks

This is the home of Red Mane's personal bodyguard, a troop of **7 elite gnoll warriors** and their **3 hyenas**. These gnolls are the finest in the band and absolutely loyal to Red Mane — at least as long as he is strong enough to discourage one of them taking over the band. None of them are married, but they do have their pick of available females, and all have their eyes on the young gnoll females awaiting their rite of passage and eventual mating in **Area H19**. Searching the nooks and crannies of this room reveals a **+1 dagger**, 56 silver drachmas (sp), 45 copper obols (cp), and three shrunken heads filled with gold dust worth 35 shekels (gp) each.

Area H23e: Packmaster's Larder

This foul-smelling chamber is used as a larder by Red Mane, his personal bodyguard, and favored warriors. Inside are a private cistern, various foodstuffs (including haunches of smoked human, elf, and dwarf

meat), and thirteen casks of rare Monrovia Fire Wine worth 55 silver shekels (gp) each stolen from a caravan. Drinking at least one glass forces the imbiber to make a DC 12 Con save or become drunk (poisoned). The PC can make another save for every hour that passes, with a cumulative +1 bonus on the saves.

Rewards and Further Adventures

Assuming the party is successful, His Wisdom will be more than generous. Payment will be prompt and in full, with additional rewards for exemplary behavior. If the entire gnoll band is wiped out or driven off, he will give each hero a +1 enchanted weapon or armor appropriate to their class and profession, plus gives the party an additional 2,000 gold darics (pp). If they managed to uncover Parth's conspiracy, they will receive the above rewards, plus an extra bonus of one fifth of the value of Parth's property (His Wisdom comes into possession of it after the trial and execution of the traitor). This sum will total 5,000 gold darics (pp), but the party will have to wait at least three months for the property to be auctioned and sold. If they choose not to wait, the Pasha will happily hold it for them until their return. All rewards are, of course, subject to the taxation of the satrapy at the rate of 33%.

As long as the PCs have not made fools of themselves and have managed to eliminate the gnolls, they will be welcome at Salt Springs anytime for as long as they want to stay, and given the best accommodations and treatment available. If the PCs have become fugitives from the law of Salt Springs, they can clear their names and collect the above reward by proving that Hiram Parth was in league with the Two Bloody Spears (probably by recovering the gnolls' loot manifest together with the evidence from Parth's own residence). If the PCs do not clear their name, then they receive no rewards and remain on the run from the pasha's men.

If they manage to defeat the gnolls, but fail to uncover Parth's treachery, His Wisdom will not be very happy with them when the attacks resume. He will issue an arrest warrant for the party, and should they ever find themselves in his satrapy again, they had best be disguised and using assumed names. If they are arrested (and assuming that they don't do anything stupid such as resisting arrest) they will be taken to Salt Springs and placed in the dungeon for three days. Once they have had a chance to cool their heels a bit, the guards come and escort the PCs to the edge of the satrapy, returning to them any weapons or other items they carried (minus a small amount of coin and jewelry that was 'lost'). There the guards inform them that they are no longer welcome in the Satrapy of Salt Springs, and to return is to discover that failure is punishable by death. Additionally, His Wisdom will have sent messages to neighboring rulers and to the Court of the Grand Caliph describing the PCs and their perfidious ways. The party can expect complications should they get into trouble in any nearby domain.

Our heroes adventures need not end here, however, and the Painted Canyons as well as the Satrapy of Salt Springs would be a suitable place to explore and profit from. The Painted Canyons are no doubt filled with other interesting places to explore and loot (where did the strange gigantic bones used by the gnolls come from, and are there more of those creatures still living somewhere in the fathomless depths of the canyons?). The destruction of the Two Bloody Spears tribe has left a power vacuum in the Painted Canyons, one that any number of would be warlords might be happy to fill. Further, rumors abound that somewhere in the Painted Canyons is the Lost City of Omlach-Tur, a cliff-dwelling ruin and once-capital of a long dead empire.

Having a permanent base is and being the only adventurers the Pasha Abubakkar will allow to operate in his area is a great boon to such endeavors. Seeing the success of paying bounties for the gnolls, His Wisdom may desire to see other foul creatures hunted down in the Painted Canyons. Finally, the PCs could follow the leads learned from Parth and the gnolls and travel to far off Bhutan and root out the Zuma Qulldishi.

Deep in the Vale

By James M. Ward

This adventure is for beginning characters, with a bias toward fighters. Player characters should start *Deep in the Vale* at 1st level with zero experience points. As they complete each encounter, give them the experience points they earned immediately instead of waiting until the adventure is over. Ideally, characters should gain a level or two (and the hit points and other benefits those levels add) before the characters wrap up the adventure.

All of the player characters should have been raised in the Vale. The pleasant valley is a peaceful place where few problems bother the inhabitants. Twenty to thirty years ago, there were wars against orcs and goblins; oldsters of the village still tell stories about those times. But now, life is easy for the people of the Vale—or it was. That is about to change.

This adventure is not about acquiring gold and magical treasure. *Deep in the Vale* presents many situations where fighting is the characters' best option, but there are many others where characters will be smart to do some roleplaying before resorting to their weapons. At all times, reinforce the idea that the characters' decisions are affecting the story and that what they do is affecting the lives of people in the Vale.

Events of *Deep in the Vale* should be spread across many days or even weeks. The villains of this adventure aren't launching an all-out offensive against the Vale; they are raiding, seizing opportunities, and acting on impulse rather than following some master plan.

Give players time to think about and discuss the situation between encounters and to make plans for how they should meet the threat. Since days may be passing between encounters, you don't need to put time pressure on players. Keep the game moving, but don't push players to make rapid decisions or rash judgments unless the immediate situation calls for it. Between encounters, let players enjoy the usually idyllic life of the Vale. The blacksmith is going to make horseshoes, shields, weapons, and tools. Hunters are going to track deer in the woods to the north. The rhythms of life should continue in the Vale, no matter what problems come to the villagers.

At the end of all of these encounters, the Baron over this territory could summon the characters to his castle (in the nearest large town, about 20 miles away) to receive a reward and to be offered a new quest dealing with a problem the Baron is having in another part of his barony.

Introduction

In any game for beginners, the Game Master needs to help new players learn how to roleplay and how to react to the descriptions the GM provides. *Deep in the Vale* includes many battle encounters, but characters shouldn't just be dropped into a situation and told to roll initiative. Arrange things so the players' and characters' decisions can lead them into situations where fighting is the best (or only) option. Nonplayer characters (the villagers of the Vale) are your best tools in this regard. Their advice, news, requests for help, or screams in the distance can motivate characters into doing all sorts of things.

If you're a new Game Master, you should know the Fifth Edition combat rules and experience rules. You don't need to be an expert, but if nothing else, you should be intimately familiar with the rulebook's table of contents and index so you can find answers quickly as questions come up during play.

The player characters are all 1st-level adventurers from the Vale,

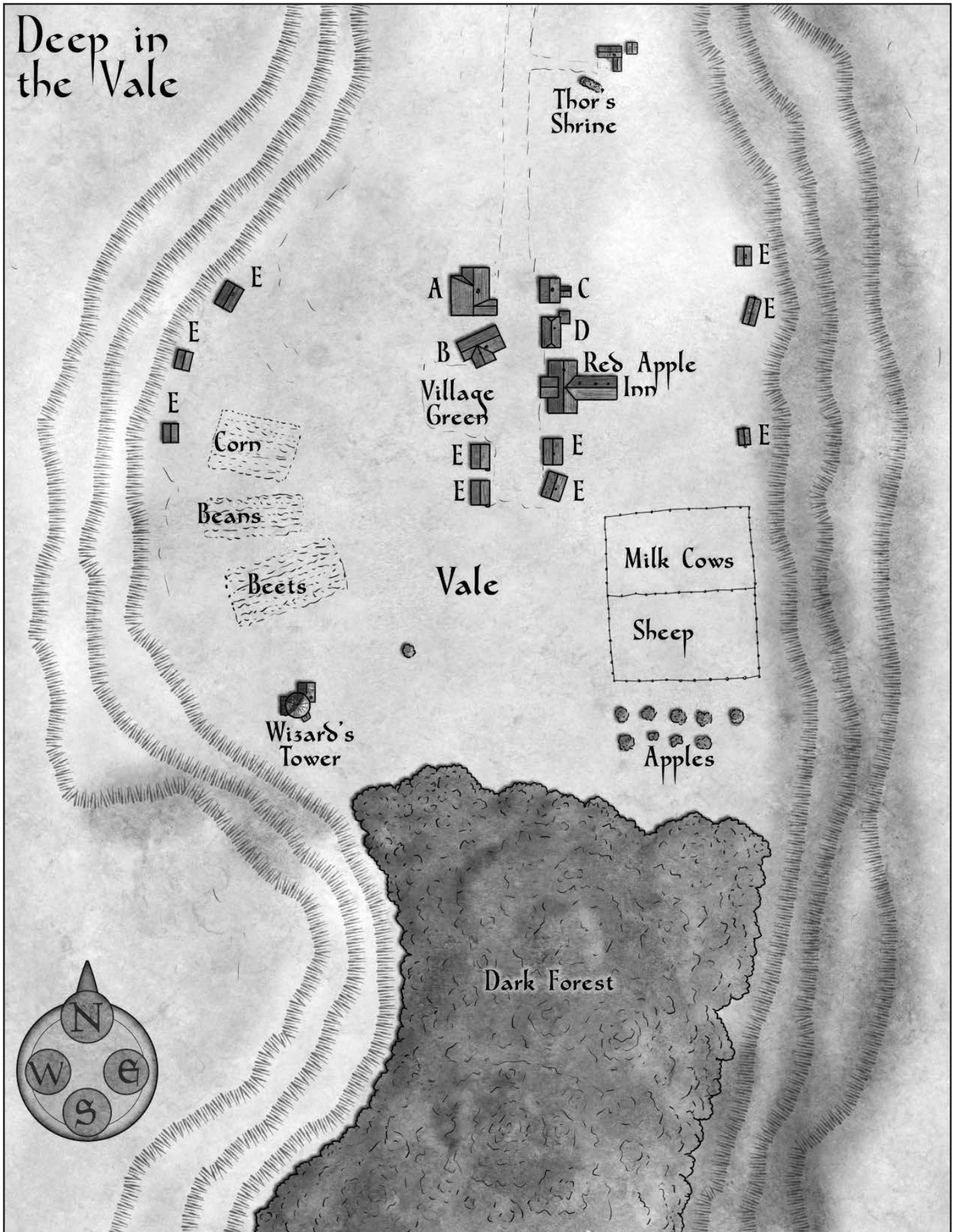
and *Deep in the Vale* is their first adventure. The Vale is a humble place where military and adventuring gear is rare. There are no suits of armor or war horses for sale in the local area. If characters want that material, they must wait until they have a chance to visit a bigger city, which is many miles away. The equipment that can be purchased in the Vale must be what could be found in the farms, homes, and shops of simple folk. Things like daggers, pots and pans, unusual leather items, and other uncommon goods might be bought from Keuffel, the tinker who peddles his wares throughout the Vale in an oxcart. A handful of tradesmen in the village make backpacks, fur cloaks, lanterns, and similar goods. These can be bought at the market in the village square. The blacksmith player character can make shields and simple weapons, but martial weapons and metal armor are beyond his or her skill. The leather worker can make leather and hide armor, but nothing more complex. Those two characters working together could make studded leather armor.

It's reasonable for characters to already have the types of things that village blacksmiths make and that farmers or humble tradesmen use regularly. Each of the player characters should have a job in the village. Players can choose jobs or you can assign them however you like, but be logical. The character with the highest Strength score, for example, is a good candidate to be the blacksmith, while the character with the highest Intelligence might be the village's only scribe (or be apprenticed to a scribe). A cleric would tend the shrine to Thor at the entrance to the Vale.

Be sure everyone has a job. Players and characters don't need to love their jobs (not everyone does!). Suggested jobs include dairy farmer, orchard farmer, shepherd, innkeeper, leatherworker, wood carver, hunter (or poacher), and healer's apprentice. A character's job doesn't need to be identical with or even related to the character's class; there's nothing wrong with someone playing a rope maker who aspires to become a great sorcerer or a farmer who tells tales, sings, and practices playing a hand-me-down lute in the evening. All characters should be in their late teens or the equivalent age for their race. All of them are successful at their jobs, even if it's not the job of their dreams.

The central figure in the adventure is the blacksmith. This character should be a fighter or a similar class. He or she has a greatclub that the character's father carved from a piece of oak that was struck by lightning. Every other character starts with a backpack and a quarterstaff or a club. An arcane spellcaster has a dagger and 2d4 darts. Anyone can have a sling. Their backpacks contain things like a mirror, flint and steel, a canteen, a small tin pot, a wooden plate and a gourd cup, an oiled tarp to serve as a ground cloth or small lean-to, a heavy cloak, a change of clothes, a few bandages, and a skin of wine.

As the Game Master, one of your tasks is to describe people, places, and things so well that they come alive in the minds of your players. If players enjoy themselves, they come back for more, and everyone around the table has more fun. One of the most important things you can do as a GM is maintaining a sense of excitement. Keep the action moving and don't punish characters unduly; try to always leave a means of escape for characters who get into trouble. We don't encourage babying players or letting characters survive when they do foolish things that ought to get them killed. With new players in their first few sessions, however, it's best to give their characters every opportunity to survive—if only because a player who's rolling up a new character isn't actively participating in the adventure. If your players have more experience with fantasy roleplaying games, then there's less reason to pull your punches.



DEEP IN THE VALE

The Vale

The Vale is a prosperous place. Everyone works and enjoys life in the peaceful valley.

All the player characters know exactly what is useful in any given cabin and have no problems asking to borrow these items. As the GM, you might suggest they ask to borrow some of this equipment to fight the Vale's battles.

A. Amber's Cabin

Amber is eighteen years old and the true beauty of the Vale. She has always had a liking for the blacksmith of the Vale. Everyone figured she would marry him when she turned eighteen. Her log cabin is the largest in the Vale. This vintner's cabin has six large rooms and a loft above. She and her father live there. Her father grows grapes on the hillside at the eastern edge of the Vale. His red and white wines age in barrels in the root cellar of the cabin.

Amber can, of course, be changed to any race or gender that best suits the romantic interests of the blacksmith, who isn't necessarily human or male.

Amber spins wool from her sheep to make warm clothing and blankets. She is skilled with a sling, using iron sling bullets the blacksmith made for her. She is a useful nonplayer character (NPC). She is perfect for giving suggestions that move the adventure along. She is also going to be the focus of a quest during the adventure.

Her father, Hector, was in the King's army twenty years ago. He has a halberd and a dented breastplate that he wears when there's time to gear up for battle. He is an old man now, however, and wouldn't be much use in a real combat situation.

(Amber and Hector [Commoners]: AC 10, 4 hp; +2 to hit, 1d4 bludgeoning or slashing damage)

B. Farmer's Cabin

This farmer grows corn, beets, and beans in three large fields. He can be a player character or a nonplayer character run by the Game Master (GM). If he's an NPC, his name is Flinn. His home is a large, four-room log cabin. Behind it is a corral for a pair of plow horses. His root cellar is the largest in the Vale; he uses it to store crops he doesn't sell in the large town twenty miles away. The farmer has a big wagon for hauling produce to town. Above the mantle in his cabin are two short swords. These were weapons used by the farmer's two grandfathers in the Great War thirty years ago. The weapons are a tad rusty but could be made battle-ready with a little cleaning and sharpening.

(Flinn [Commoner]: AC 10, 4 hp; +2 to hit, 1d4 bludgeoning or slashing damage)

C. Sheep Herder's Cabin

While Amber helps turn the sheep's wool into yarn, the sheep herder tends the sheep and moves them around the hillsides to munch on grass. He can be a player character or a nonplayer character run by the GM. If he's an NPC, his name is Samwel. His cabin has two large rooms and an adjoining shed where he stores the wool after the shearing. Samwel has four sheep-herding dogs that obey his commands and might actually be useful in a fight. There are 100 sheep that spend the nights in a large, fenced pasture east of the cabin. Every morning the sheep are taken to a different section of the gently sloping hills and allowed to crop the grasses in those areas.

(Samwel [Commoner]: AC 10, 4 hp; +2 to hit, 1d4 bludgeoning or slashing damage)

(Boxer, King, Malek, and Predo [Mastiffs]: AC 12, 5 hp; +3 to hit, 1d6 + 1 piercing damage and the target must make a successful DC 11 Str saving throw to avoid being knocked prone [bite]; has tactical advantage on Wis (Perception) checks relying on hearing or scent)

D. Dairy Farmer's Cabin

The dairy farmer's cabin is large with two rooms and an adjoining milk barn. His name is Drixell, and other workers in the Vale help him milk thirty cows. He then gets more help making butter and cheese. Drixell keeps sixty cows in a large, penned pasture. A group of five teenagers take batches of cows out each day to let them graze around the north end of the Vale. All of these boys carry slings and river stones, with which they are quite accurate. In a battle in the Vale, they could stand along a ridge and hurl sling stones down at an enemy. They would never stand and fight in melee.

(Drixell [Commoner]: AC 10, 4 hp; +2 to hit, 1d4 bludgeoning or slashing damage)

(Herd Boys [Commoners]: AC 10, 4 hp; +2 to hit, range 30 ft./120 ft., 1d4 bludgeoning damage)

E. Worker's Cabin

Each of these cabins has two rooms and a loft above. These are the workers of the Vale, who do whatever jobs are needed. Each family has two or three children of all ages. In times of danger, the children hide in the root cellars of the cabins while the mother and father stay above to protect the cabin. The common weapon of all workers is a quarterstaff. The people are adept at using these weapons, as there are village practices every Thor's Day on the village green.

All of these workers keep beehives. Honey from the Vale is famous for reported healthy properties. Besides its food value, the honey is cooked into mead and sold. When Flinn goes into town on his wagon, he always brings several bottles, jars, and small casks of honey and mead to sell for the workers.

(Workers [Commoners]: AC 10, 4 hp; +2 to hit, 1d4 bludgeoning damage)

Red Apple Inn

The Red Apple Inn is a large, two-story building. The upper story has six bedrooms and a bath chamber. The lower floor has a large meeting room with a bar, a large kitchen with pantry, and a large bed chamber for the innkeeper and his wife. The inn is famous for apple ale as well as meat pies. The five children of the innkeeper and his wife help run the inn. There is a small stable at the side of the inn and a fenced paddock behind. At any given time, the innkeeper has four good horses for sale.

Lunchtime at the inn is when people get together and talk about the events of the day. Everyone in the Vale comes to eat there at lunch time.

It's a little-known fact that the innkeeper (Immett) and his wife (Kathla) are expert shots with light crossbows. They have also taught their sons and daughters this skill. The entire family is capable of sitting on the roof of the inn and launching bolts into an advancing enemy.

(Immett, Kathla, and five children [Commoners]: AC 10, 4 hp; +2 to hit, range 80 ft./320 ft., 1d8 piercing damage)

Village Green

The village green is the social center of the Vale. Every Thor's Day is weapon's practice, where adults use quarterstaves and children practice

with slings. At the end of the week, if the weather is pleasant, music is played on the green. When there is danger in the area, everyone comes to the green to band together and plan how they will protect their homes, farms, and businesses.

Thor's Shrine and Blacksmithy

The shrine has stood at the entrance to the Vale for as long as anyone can remember. Maintaining the shrine has customarily been the job of the Vale's blacksmith. Once a day, the stones of the shrine are wiped down with raw wool. Mistletoe is spread evenly on the marble arch. If the hammer bell isn't ringing because there's no wind, the caretaker chimes the bell a few times a day.

The blacksmith shop with its anvil and furnace are in a large, one-room cabin behind the shrine. The smith should be a player character, preferably the strongest character in the group. In one of the encounters, the blacksmith will be gifted by the gods with the ability to make battle hammers quickly. He also can make stout shields.

Wizard's Tower

The tower is the home of Agamemnus St.-Cyr, a human wizard who's now over 300 years old and looks it. For most of those years, Agamemnus has secretly and not-so-secretly protected the land around his tower. He isn't as capable anymore as he was a hundred years ago. There's still plenty of power in the old spell tosser, but he relies more and more on magic items he's created.

Despite his great age, Agamemnus is still a little over 6 feet tall, but he looks much shorter because he's so bent by age. He uses a staff with an eagle's head atop it (pick one character and have the eagle head wink at him or her, but only when no one else is looking; even Agamemnus won't believe it). When the wizard gets angry, however, the eyes of the eagle glow with a pale blue light. The wizard dresses in black silk robes and wears two ruby rings. A faintly glowing medallion of a scarab beetle hangs on his chest, and a green glass dagger hangs at his hip.

This wizard and his tower can be very useful to you. Agamemnus will pay a good price for anything magical the characters acquire and want to sell, including any of the goblin shamans' totem staffs. He can also cast many spells that are beyond the power of the PCs. He can neutralize poison, restore characters who've been polymorphed or petrified, and he'll even sell a few useful potions, provided he likes the buyer. Whenever the characters encounter a magical or mystical problem that's beyond them, they can get help from Agamemnus—provided they offer him something in return (he's kind-hearted but not running a charity). The best way to pay him is to give the wizard his pick of the treasure and any magic items the characters acquire. This also helps to keep the game balanced.

If there is a spellcaster in the group, Agamemnus might find a way to reward the young mage with a magic item that's useful to protect the people of the Vale. His tower is a ramshackle construction of stone and timber that looks as if it's held together as much by ivy as by mortar and nails, and it might tip over at any moment. The appearance is misleading, of course, since that's the way of wizards; the tower is perfectly sound. Its inside layout is confusing, however; there are no straight walls, no main corridor or central staircase, and every room seems to be at a different level from every other room. If characters ever follow Agamemnus from room to room (that being the only way to navigate this maze without getting lost), they'll eventually find themselves back where they started, although they'd swear they went up a lot more steps than they went down.

(Agamemnus [6th-level wizard]: AC 12, 23 hp; +5 to hit, 1d4 + 2 piercing damage [dagger]; +6 to hit with spell attacks, save DC 14; prepares the following spells: [at will] *fire bolt*, *mage hand*, *mending*, *prestidigitation*; [x4] *detect magic*, *mage armor*, *magic missile*, *shield*; [x3] *misty step*, *suggestion*; [x3] *counterspell*, *fireball*, *fly*)

A Run Around the Valley

The adventure begins with the player characters all gathering for their customary, once-a-week foot race around the valley. They've been doing this every Thor's Day morning since they became teenagers. This encounter provides a chance for the characters to prove their courage and to gain some valuable status—and armor.

Formatting Note: Wherever you encounter text framed the way the next passage is, it's meant to be read aloud to players.

You live and work in the Vale. Each of you has been on your own for several years; you have your own homes and make a good living. The Vale has been good to you, and you like the land and the people who live in this area. You have a group of friends that you like to tip a few ales with at the local inn. As teenagers, you all dreamed about being brave heroes like those in the legends the old folk tell at the inn.

Today is Thor's day, and you and your friends are up before dawn. Thor's day falls in the middle of every week. You're gathered with weapons in hand at the shrine of Thor, at the top of a hill near the village. You wait for the sun to peak over a ridge to the east. To the west, behind you, are the Vale and your homes.

As the blacksmith, you are the strongest person in the group. As the son [or daughter] of a blacksmith, you have been shaping metal for most of the seventeen years of your life. Among your friends you see farmers, herders, and simple tradesfolk. You get together for this run every Thor's Day. Your friends all want to beat you in this race, but none of them have been able to do that in the last five years.

As dawn's light comes over the hill, you shout "Go!" Heading north, you all enjoy the feel of your muscles working. The first part of the run is five miles to the ridges on the west side of the valley. Before the race is over, you'll have jogged around the valley three times as fast as you can. From the ridgetops, you can look down at all the farms and cabins in the Vale.

In minutes, you and your friends run past the corn, bean, and beet fields along the western side of the valley. One of your companions rushes past, and you laugh. Everyone can see that he has pushed ahead way too early.

As the group jogs past the black tower in the southwest end of the valley, every one gives that mass of magical stone a wide margin. A wizard lives in that tower. As children, you dared each other to slap the door of the tower and run away. That stopped when Devon slapped the door and turned to stone until the following sunrise.

The south end of the valley is filled by the dark forest. Even hunters avoid that place. Instead, you jog east past the huge apple orchard. The red apples are large and thick on the trees. Stomachs grumble at the thought of the apple pies that will soon be baking in cabins all across the Vale.

The reason for bringing weapons on this run becomes clear as the howls of wolves and bleats of sheep hit your ears. Everyone races forward to see four large wolves tearing apart several dead sheep. The beasts aren't paying any attention to your group.

The group is running for exercise when they have come across wolves that are feasting on sheep in a pasture. The wolves are hungry, so they won't be scared away easily. They ignore the player characters unless they're attacked; then the wolves fight to keep the carcasses of the sheep they're eating. Characters can get a surprise round if they rush straight into the fight without hesitating. There is one wolf per player character.

Wolf pelts are valued as cloaks in the Vale, because they're warm and they show that the wearer had the courage to fight a wolf. A leather worker can fashion any number of wolf pelts into heavy cloaks in two weeks.



Such a cloak is equivalent to leather armor. (Characters who can't wear leather armor can still wear the cloak as a status symbol, but they won't receive the +1 AC benefit from it.)

(Wolf: AC 13, 11 hp; +4 to hit, 2d4 + 2 piercing damage and the target must make a successful DC 11 Str saving throw or be knocked prone [bite]; a wolf has tactical advantage on attack rolls if at least one active ally is adjacent to the target)

The Shrine's Warning

Clerics put the shrine to Thor at the top of the rise hundreds of years ago. The shrine is a white marble arch with mistletoe growing over the sides and top. There is a small bell in the shape of a hammer hanging from the top of the arch. A white marble bench is below the arch. People can rest on the bench and enjoy the view down into the Vale. The creators of the shrine hoped the gods would look favorably on the valley and give the people their blessing.

As the blacksmith, you've come to the shrine to look for the tinker and his cart. He's been expected for several days. On your own time, in the last week, you started making shields, and you wonder whether the tinker could try and sell some of them for you. As you neared the shrine, you sent up a prayer to Thor, the deity of combat and strength—and the shrine started glowing! On the shrine's bench appeared a large warhammer. You can't help but wonder what sort of message this is. You have never seen anything like this before.

This is an experience with no explanation. Thor knows that the Vale will soon be under attack by several different forces, so he's giving the blacksmith a high quality warhammer. The glow vanishes from the shrine when the hammer is picked up. The weapon glows dully when within 100 feet of any type of monster, but the character won't know this until a monster approaches. From now on, the blacksmith can make similar warhammers, but they won't glow.

As the GM, you need to create a sense of danger that wasn't present before in the Vale. As the characters work at their various jobs, they get a sense they are being watched. Every once in a while, the hackles on the backs of their necks rise for no apparent reason.

The villagers begin gossiping about crops being stolen in the night. Farm animals are killed and parts of them are carried away toward the Dark Forest. Fall comes a bit early, and all the crops are ready for picking.

Dark clouds come out of the south. The clouds blot out the sun and make things very dark in the Vale. Thunder and lightning fill the sky day and night. The goblin shaman has called the clouds, to make things easier for the light-hating goblins when they raid the Vale. If there is a cleric in the player group, that person knows the dark clouds are an evil sending.

Introduce the charming daughter, Amber, of the wine maker. Amber is romantically interested in the blacksmith. When she hears the blacksmith describe the warhammer and the glowing shrine, she insists on being taken there. When she urges the blacksmith to sit with her on the bench, she begins glowing, too. This scares the wits out of her and she rushes home. This is a foreshadowing of her being kidnapped in a later encounter.

Zombies Smashing in the Door

In the middle of the night, there is a pounding on the door of the blacksmith's cabin. If the blacksmith makes a successful DC 10 Wis (Perception) check,

GOBLINS AND GNOLLS

he notices that his warhammer is glowing before he hears the knocking at the door. Outside are two zombies bent on killing whoever is inside the cabin. Depending on how the blacksmith responds and the zombies' luck, the zombies might be easy to destroy, or they might prove very tough. If things are looking grim for the blacksmith, another character can arrive to help, having heard the sound of fighting from down in the Vale.

(Zombie: AC 8, 22 hp; +3 to hit, 1d6 + 1 bludgeoning damage [slam]; when an attack reduces a zombie to 0 hp, the zombie makes a Con saving throw with DC = 5 + damage from attack; if successful, zombie has 1 hp)

After the battle, tell the blacksmith that he can hear the sounds of more zombies attacking other houses in the night. There are six more zombies attacking other cabins. Thor's hammer glows in the darkness as the wielder of the hammer comes within 100 feet of the monsters, but it displays no other magical properties.

The zombies were sent by the goblin shaman. Creating the zombies was a lot of effort for the shaman, and he must rest for several weeks afterward. There will be no more attacks during that time.

The Tinker's Demise

On another Thor's day, you're all waiting at the top of the rise for the dawn to start your race. All anyone in the Vale can talk about is the zombie attack two nights ago. No one could find a trail, to learn where the zombies came from. As the sun rises, in the distance you can all see the wagon of Keuffel the tinker on the King's Road, but the wagon isn't moving. The horse is dead, and a body is sprawled on the ground.

Assuming characters go to investigate, continue reading.

The horse and the tinker were killed by dozens of orcish arrows. The tinker's head is stuck on a pole near the wagon. Unrecognizable runes are carved on the blood-drenched pole, and raven claws are tied to it with leather strings. Goods from the wagon are strewn all around the area.

Orc arrows are over three feet long and are painted in the colors of a specific orc tribe. They are fletched with raven feathers and tipped with obsidian arrow heads. There hasn't been an orc raid in this area for years. The people of the Vale must be warned.

There are many fun roleplaying situations around this discovery. Once characters begin spreading the word, the entire population of the Vale meets on the village green. Use the people of the Vale to present options for the player characters to consider.

Do the player characters pack up everything and take the wagon and the body down into the Vale? There are many useful items in the wagon; do they plunder the wagon, since Keuffel doesn't need any of his goods anymore? These materials include, but are not limited to: throwing daggers, axes, lanterns, oil for the lanterns, holy symbols, trail food, and kitchen items like cups, plates, and cutlery. There are enough items to supply all the player characters with useful equipment.

There is much debate over telling the wizard of the tower this news. Some believe he should be summoned immediately, others that he shouldn't be bothered yet in case this is an isolated incident. Is there a need to set up a night watch? Should someone travel 20 miles to the Baron's castle for help? What is the significance of that strange pole the orcs left behind? No one knows what the people should do, but after the PCs' successful fight against those wolves, they continually look to the player characters for advice.

No one can find any unusual tracks around the wagon, but none of the villagers are willing to search very far from the presumed safety of the Vale. If anyone is going to conduct a wider sweep for signs of the orcs, it will need to be the characters.

Danger at the Heart of the Forest

All the villagers talk about the murder of the tinker. Suddenly, everyone is convinced the Dark Forest is crawling with orcs, and someone must go in there to scout the area and find out what's happening. As the village folk talk and the innkeeper serves up apple cider, suddenly the door opens and a stranger walks in—an elf warrior in a tightly-wrapped cloak of dire wolf fur.

This is Saradus, an elf scout and a nonplayer character for you to control. He is useful to stir action in the adventure and help the player characters survive. You should think about how you want to roleplay this character. Think of a movie character you like who is aggressive and quick-witted, and make Saradus like that character. The elf's quest is to find a very special wolf. He's hunted this creature for years. When he describes the beast, Saradus gets a faraway look on his face. His description makes the wolf sound very dangerous: it's a huge wolf with white fur, icy blue eyes, and breath so cold it can freeze the blood in your veins (a winter wolf, though Saradus never calls it that). Sounding very sad, Saradus explains that the wolf killed his younger brother. When characters go into the forest, they see many wolves. Whether they glimpse this one is up to you, but it's not wise to let them catch it; a winter wolf is far too tough for beginning characters (or Saradus) to fight.

After hearing about recent troubles in the Vale, Saradus suggests setting traps all along the edge of the Dark Forest. He'll make suggestions, but the characters should be the ones driving the decisions about what type of traps would be best against orcs. The player characters should lead the way in any endeavor like this.

(Saradus [Elf Scout]: AC 13, 16 hp; +4 to hit x2, 1d6 + 2 piercing damage [shortsword] or +4 to hit, range 150 ft./600 ft., 1d8 + 2 piercing damage [longbow]; Saradus has tactical advantage on Wis [Perception] checks based on vision or hearing)

When characters near the Dark Forest, read the following text.

Chills go down your spine as you near the Dark Forest. This is a place of frightful legends for you. All your life, your family and friends have filled you with stories about the dangers of the forest. Even Saradus seems nervous, and no one is talking. Then everyone hears twigs snapping and brush being pushed aside. Not thirty yards inside the woods, you see the shapes of four goblins approaching. They don't seem to have noticed you yet, since you were standing still. They appear armored and geared for war. The elf signals the group with a question: attack the goblins, or duck out of sight and see what they do?

If characters attack immediately, they surprise the goblins. If characters try to hide, they must make Dex (Stealth) checks. Compare their results to the goblins' passive Perception scores of 9; anyone whose Stealth check is 8 or lower is seen by the goblins, and if these goblins see a potential victim, they attack. If no fight breaks out, the goblins proceed quietly up the valley and try to steal a pair of sheep.

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(Goblin: AC 15, 7 hp; +4 to hit, 1d6 + 2 damage [scimitar] or +4 to hit, range 80 ft./320 ft., 1d2 + 2 piercing damage [shortbow]; can disengage or hide as a bonus action on its turn)

After the goblins are dealt with, Saradus is all for pushing into the Dark Forest to see where they came from. He suspects a raiding party, or possibly an entire tribe, has set up camp in the forest.

If Characters Trail the Goblins

Once in the forest, Saradus finds plenty of goblin tracks. He can lead the group to the goblin camp easily. The tracks lead to a well-hidden cave opening on the side of a hill. Characters can watch the cave from a dense thicket that gives excellent cover; there's no chance they'll be spotted if they keep quiet.

At any one time, you can count about twenty goblins outside the cave, maintaining a large fire with wood dragged from the forest. Goblins continually enter and exit the cave, too, and there's no way to tell how many are inside. Several goblin shamans are with the group, each of them holding a pole just like the one that was left near Keuffel's wagon (minus the tinker's head, of course). Keuffel and his horse were killed by orc arrows; does that pole mean the goblins and orcs are working together?

The shamans seem to be building some sort of altar of heaped stones. Prayers are spoken to each stone, and as it's added to the pile, it glows briefly with an ugly green light. When a goblin brings a live rabbit or squirrel out of the forest, one of the shamans splits it open and splashes its blood onto the stones. Once it's bled out, the carcass is thrown into the fire. The shamans seem especially pleased by the way the smoke from the fire is curling and drifting low over the forest.

It would be foolish for the characters to attack an organized group of over twenty goblins. If players don't realize that, Saradus absolutely refuses to take part. As long as they don't do anything foolish, characters can watch the cave for as long as they like before slipping away again.

If Characters Don't Trail the Goblins

If characters choose not to follow the goblins, Saradus leads them in another direction. Hours later, they discover a big orc tower under construction. They can find a safe, secure place to watch from.

At least twenty orcs are working around the tower, and they're being supervised by a pair of orcs that are even bigger, uglier, and crueler than the rest. The tower is built mostly of logs, but the base is stone, and it's clearly a powerful defense. Several goblin shamans are here, too, casting spells and splashing animal blood onto the walls of the tower.

The tower is near a low cliff with a waterfall plunging into a large pool. The orcs are quarrying stones from the cliff and cutting trees in the forest.

Back in the Village

Back at the village, everyone who hears this news is certain the goblins and/or orcs pose an immediate danger to the Vale. Saradus suspects the goblins are preparing to make an important sacrifice—probably the type they perform before launching a major raid. The orcs obviously are building a secure base from which to launch raids, hoping to lure people of the Vale into making suicidal attacks against the tower.

After this exploit, the people of the village look to the player characters as leaders. Talk continues long into the night about how best to defend the Vale if bands of monsters come. This is a perfect roleplaying opportunity. NPC villagers ask difficult questions of the player characters, such as:

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1. How many goblins can the village expect to beat in a fight?
2. What sorts of spells can a goblin shaman cast?
3. When will these creatures attack?
4. Should the village send someone to the Baron to ask for help?
5. What type of battle plan are the goblins or orcs likely to use?

If player characters can't answer these questions, that isn't a problem. It's best if they're honest with the townsfolk about what they don't know; being caught making things up will undermine their credibility.

In any event, the orcs and goblins aren't yet ready to launch their attack. Many days will go by before that happens.

inside so that a group of villagers could get into the middle of the webs with a chance of achieving surprise. The elf knows that giant spiders (assuming that's what created these webs) track victims by sensing vibrations in their webs. If the webs are moving everywhere, the spiders won't know which way to look. After some debate, the villagers are willing to move ahead with this plan, if the characters agree to form the team that goes into the orchard.

There are three large spiders in the webbing. Characters see dead sheep as they make their way into the webbing, but the spiders are easy to surprise because of the shaking webs. The spiders are on the ground in shallow holes, with hundreds of webbing strands going into the holes.

(Giant Wolf Spider: AC 13, 11 hp; +3 to hit, 1d6 + 1 piercing damage plus 2d6 poison damage [bite]; DC 11 Con saving throw for half poison damage; creatures poisoned to 0 hp are paralyzed for 1 hour)

A Spider in the Apples

In the morning there is a stirring of the villagers. A large section of the apple orchard is covered in thick webs. The webs are so dense that it's impossible to see past them into the webbed section of the orchard. A 3-foot-wide section of webs extends from the orchard to the sheep pens. A quick count of the sheep reveals five are missing.

The villagers are terrified and hysterical. Amber is especially upset about the missing sheep, and she hopes the characters can figure something out.

Saradus suggests the easiest thing to do would be to burn the webs and kill whatever comes out to escape the fire. Most of the townspeople object, however, since they depend on the apples for food and cider.

Saradus then makes another suggestion, if necessary. If everyone pokes at the sides of the webbing with long poles, it could distract whatever is

Talk to the Wizard

After the spider attack, most villagers think the wizard of the tower should be called on to help defend the Vale. The oldest villagers remember the wizard helping the last time orcs attacked from the Dark Forest, and they believe he'll help again.

Naturally, they want you to talk to the wizard and ask for his help. There is some danger in this, since the last time the wizard made his presence known, it was to turn a prank-playing child to stone for 24 hours.

Saradus wants nothing to do with a possibly crazy human wizard, so



he refuses to go with the PCs to the tower. Instead, he says he'll wait for them at the inn.

Agamemnus is aware of the wolves, giant spiders, and goblins coming into the valley. He's not aware of Keuffel's death and will be saddened to hear that news; they sometimes played chess together. The wizard protests that he's too old to venture into the Dark Forest anymore, even with the characters for protection, but he does want to do his part for the defense of the Vale. Instead, he offers the group five potions, free of charge: *2 potions of healing*, *1 potion of invisibility*, *1 potion of frost giant strength*, and *1 potion of neutralizing poison*.

As the characters prepare to depart, Agamemnus tells them, "If you get your enemies to follow you to the Vale, I can still shoot *fireballs* at them," and he holds up a withered, scorched wand of ash. If there's a spellcaster in the group, the wizard gives that character a wand of *sleep* spells with five charges; when all five are used, the wand is depleted.

When the player characters report back to the inn, Saradus is amused at their account of the wizard. He suggests that if the wizard will fight only if the monsters come near his tower, maybe the villagers should erect a fence to force infiltrating monsters close to the tower. Surprisingly, quite a few townsfolk think this is a great idea, and they resolve to get to work building the fence in the morning. They should be able to finish it in about a week. Whether it will actually work as they hope, or if the orcs and goblins will just go over it, remains to be seen.

Wolves in the Night

In the middle of the night, when the full moon is at its highest, the night fills with the howls of wolves. Moments later, the cows and sheep begin moaning and shrieking in fear and pain. It sounds as if dozens of wolves are attacking the Vale!

Saradus leads one group of villagers to fight off the wolves attacking the cows and sheep. PCs can go with Saradus or strike out on their own; wolves are racing everywhere through the Vale and even attacking cabins in an effort to get at the families inside. During the course of the battle, characters notice that the fur on the backs of many of the wolves is singed; these wolves were driven into the Vale from the Dark Forest by goblins and orcs hitting them with lit torches. If none characters come to that conclusion on their own, Saradus suggests it after the battle. The wolves generally favor killing livestock over people, because it's safer and easier, but there's plenty of peril to go around.

The exact number of wolves in this attack doesn't matter. Characters should face several wolf attacks. The first can be easy, the second a bit harder, and the third should be desperate; you don't need to kill anyone, but if one or more characters drop to 0 hit points in the last battle and need to make a few death saving throws, they'll know they were in a fight for their lives.

During one of the fights, a winter wolf appears in the distance, almost as if it's surveying the damage being done by the other wolves. The beast watches for a short time, then turns and lopes away. It moves generally in the direction of Amber's home from wherever the characters saw it, but don't make that connection for them; just tell them it's moving north, or west, or whatever direction is appropriate. If Saradus sees it, he gives chase, but he'll lose the beast quickly when clouds cover the moon.

This is all a diversion. The real reason for the wolf attack is to create a distraction while a team of goblins kidnaps Amber. Her father (Hector) is killed in the attack, and a goblin totem is left at the door of their cabin. There's no sign of Amber.

(Wolf: AC 13, 11 hp; +4 to hit, 2d4 + 2 piercing damage and the target must make a successful DC 11 Str saving throw or be knocked prone [bite]; a wolf has tactical advantage on attack rolls if at least one active ally is adjacent to the target)

Amber is Kidnapped

Many wolves were killed, and the surviving beasts have retreated from the Vale. Wounded cows, sheep, and people are bandaged. Dead livestock is butchered, and the smokehouses are filled with fresh meat.

Suddenly, a cry of anguish splits the night. Neighbors have discovered Hector slain in his home! The door is smashed in, and it looks like a desperate battle was fought inside. The old man is dressed in his dented breastplate and his halberd lies at his side; it looks like he gave as good as he got, but that wasn't enough. A goblin totem like the one left at Keuffel's wagon is driven into the ground next to the front door. Worst of all, Amber can't be found, dead or alive.

The kidnapping has the villagers in an uproar. The goblins who took Amber away hid their trail expertly by riding wolves; their paw prints blend in with the hundreds of others throughout the Vale.

Amber is clever, however; she dropped one of the large amber stones from her necklace at the forest edge to show where the goblins entered, and characters will spot it if they search along the treeline. She dropped nine more stones along the game trail the goblins followed back to their cave.

Goblins of the Dark Forest

Assuming characters follow the trail left by Amber, read the text below. You'll need to adjust a few words if they wait for daylight before entering the forest, or if the characters never visited the goblins' cave before now.

You follow quietly behind Saradus as the elf moves through the darkness. It quickly becomes clear that this trail leads to the goblin's cave. Saradus leads you to a dense thicket where you can see what's going on before making a plan of attack.

A large fire is burning outside the cave. The forest has been cut back and a large stockpile of wood is nearby; teams of young goblins are using it to continually feed the fire.

The cave is a strange sight. Above it, the goblins have heaped up a high mound of boulders. There may be goblin sentries on that mound; it's hard to tell in the darkness. Goblins are entering and exiting the cave constantly. Those coming out are carrying food to crude tables near the cave entrance, almost as if they're preparing for a banquet.

Flames from the fire illuminate a second mound of stones in the cleared space in front of the cave. These stones are splashed with dried blood and ringed with more of those goblin totems. Amber lies top the stones, tied with leather ropes. Four goblin shamans are chanting around the mound, and a sickening, green mist is gathering in the air above it. A hideous face is slowly taking form in the mist.

Having gotten a good look, Saradus motions for everyone to back away to a safe distance, where you can make a plan without danger of being heard.

The group needs a plan of action to save Amber. There is a need for haste, because the characters don't know when the magic of the goblin shamans will reach its peak. If players don't come up with these ideas, Saradus can suggest them. Possibilities include the following; use these as guidelines to react to whatever the players come up with.

1. Topple the Fire: The huge fire is tall enough that it could be toppled

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over, and flaming logs would roll everywhere through the clearing. In the confusion, someone could rescue Amber from atop the mound of stones. Characters with bows or spells can increase the chaos by firing into the goblins from the forest.

This is an excellent plan. The goblins will be thrown into complete confusion, giving the characters 1d4 + 3 rounds in which they can run through the area without meeting any resistance from the goblins. At least one shaman at the altar will keep his wits about him and fight back when someone tries to rescue Amber, but the plan should succeed if characters don't waste time.

Up to 40 howling goblins chase the characters through the forest, occasionally getting close enough to throw a javelin or shoot a shortbow. They'll chase characters right into the village, unless PCs think to run past Agamemnus's tower; the wizard easily drives the goblins off with *fireballs* from his wand.

With their plans completely foiled and their confidence in the shamans shaken, the goblins pack up and leave the Vale that night. If characters go back to the cave and destroy the altar, the Vale will have no trouble with goblins for many years. If they leave the altar intact, goblins will become a regular nuisance in the area, stealing livestock and occasionally burning crops.

2. Topple the Boulders Above the Cave: Two goblins are guarding the boulders above the cave. If they aren't killed silently, dozens of goblins come scrambling up the cliff, shrieking and howling for blood. Once the guards are dealt with, the stones can be toppled with a successful DC 15 Str (Athletics) check, or automatically by multiple characters whose Strength bonuses add up to 6 or more. The tumbling stones almost block off the cave entrance. This is a great diversion; many goblins are crushed by the rocks, and the rest assume that the rockfall was an accident, not an attack, since the sentries didn't sound an alarm. All of the goblins except the shamans outside the cave start digging furiously at the heap to clear the cave mouth. Sneaking into the camp is easy, because no one is paying attention to the forest. Two shamans are still standing guard over Amber, however, and they must be dealt with before she can be rescued.

As before, up to 40 goblins chase the characters through the forest all the way back to the village, unless they're stopped by Agamemnus.

With their plans completely foiled and their confidence in the shamans shaken, the goblins pack up and leave the Vale that night. If characters go back to the cave and destroy the altar, the Vale will have no trouble with goblins for many years. If they leave the altar intact, goblins will become a regular nuisance in the area, stealing livestock and occasionally burning crops.

3. Attract the Goblins' Attention and Lead Them to the Wizard's Tower: It doesn't take much to get the goblins to chase the characters. All someone needs to do is launch a spell from the treeline, or just stand up and holler an insult. Unless someone goes back ahead of the pack to warn Agamemnus about what's coming, however, 1d10 + 10 goblins get past the tower before the wizard can react; they chase the characters right into the village and attack whoever they meet. If Agamemnus is warned, his *fireballs* and the villagers' traps slaughter many goblins and force the rest to retreat quickly.

Most of the goblins at the cave join in this chase. One goblin shaman remains to watch Amber and keep the ritual going. Once the goblins have left their camp, it would be easy for one or two characters to rescue Amber.

The goblins pack up and leave within a day, and they stay away for many years if the altar is destroyed.

4. Charge the Goblin Shamans: This approach is unlikely to work. There are 60 adult goblins and four shamans in and around the cave, and they all join in if a fight breaks out. After a few rounds, it should be clear that a frontal attack was a bad idea. Saradus suggests retreating into the forest if no one else does. Dozens of goblins pursue. Amber probably will be killed while the characters are running away. Such is the price of failure. If you are feeling generous, you might let the failure of this plan naturally morph into plan 3, but 1d10 + 10 goblins will still get past the tower and into the village.

(**Goblin:** AC 15, 7 hp; +4 to hit, 1d6 + 2 damage [scimitar] or +4 to hit, range 80 ft./320 ft., 1d2 + 2 piercing damage [shortbow]; can disengage or hide as a bonus action on its turn)

(**Goblin Shaman:** AC 17, 21 hp; +4 to hit, 1d4 + 2

bludgeoning damage [totem staff]; spellcasting +4 to hit, save DC 12; prepares the following spells: [at will] *acid splash*, *poison spray*, *shocking grasp*; [x2] *ray of sickness*, *witch bolt*)

Orcs of the Dark Forest

Orc Scouts

A quiet week has passed since "the night of wolves and goblins." But this morning, two cattle herders found two dead orcs in a pit trap at the edge of the forest. They were killed by the sharpened stakes at the bottom of the pit. They were well-armed with shortbows, arrows, bronze shortswords of surprisingly good construction, and bronze breastplates and helmets. Each of them also had 11 silver coins. Common consensus in the village is that they were scouts for a bigger attack that's undoubtedly coming.

Orc Band

It's been nine days since the two orcs fell into the pit trap. Nine quiet days. But tonight, you're awakened by pounding on your door. The person pounding is one of the workers who's been standing night watch along the forest. He informs you that another orc is caught in one of the traps, and three others are trying to rescue it. The guards want to attack them, but they're afraid to do so without the characters in the lead. These orcs are much bigger than goblins!

There's a full moon, so treat this fight as if it's happening in dim light. The trapped orc is just being lifted out of the pit as characters arrive. After two orcs are killed, the other two try to run away. The forest is pitch dark; be sure players understand that before deciding whether to follow.

These orcs are well armed with greataxes and armored with hide armor. They definitely aren't hunters; they were ready for battle.

(**Orc:** AC 13, 15 hp; +5 to hit, 1d12 + 3 slashing damage [greataxe] or +5 to hit, range 30 ft./120 ft., 1d6 + 3 piercing damage [javelin]; can use a bonus action to move 30 ft. toward an enemy in sight)

Unexpected Aid

A few days after your fight against the orcs, an unexpected visitor rides a wagon into the village. The Baron heard of the troubles in the Vale and sent Sergeant Rollins to investigate. Rollins arrives with a wagonload of weapons and armor. There are twelve halberds, twelve steel breast plates, ten crossbows, and two hundred crossbow bolts. This equipment is a gift from the Baron to the people of the Vale, to aid their defense. Sergeant Rollins was ordered to stay and train the people of the Vale how to use their new weapons and armor.

Rollins explains that the Baron is sorry he can't send more soldiers, but there's also trouble brewing with giants along the far border of the barony. The army is defending that territory.

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Player characters can use some of this equipment, if they need it. Between Saradus, Agamemnus, and Rollins, the characters have three valuable NPC allies. When roleplaying the crusty old sergeant, think of a no-nonsense, never-say-die person you know or that you've seen in a movie and use that person's mannerisms and accent. The sergeant is a veteran of many wars and an excellent leader, but he's not a patient man and he expects the people of the valley to work hard readying their defenses against the orcs.

(Sergeant Rollins [Knight]): AC 18, 30 hp; +5 to hit x2, 2d6 + 3 slashing damage [greatsword]; 1/round as a reaction, Rollins can increase his AC by 2 against a single melee attack; has tactical advantage on saving throws against fear; 1/round Rollins can grant an ally within 30 ft. a bonus of 1d4 on an attack roll or saving throw)

People of the Vale Must Choose

The people of the Vale are gathered at the inn. Their discussion deals with what to do about the orcs. Everyone is certain bands of orcs are massing to attack the Vale. The defenses along the edge of the Dark Forest are as strong as the people of the Vale can make them. Sergeant Rollins is explaining that this situation demands a decision, and only the people of the Vale can make it: they have limited resources, and they must concentrate them on either offense or defense. If they split their effort, they only increase the odds of failure.

Concentrating on defense protects the village and the Vale against damaging orc raids. It also lets the villagers fight from behind fortifications that will protect them and magnify their power. On the negative side, it lets the orcs pick the time and place to attack and guarantees that the village will wind up fighting the entire orc force all at once.

Concentrating on offense lets the villagers pick the time and place to attack and forces the orcs to react. If the attack is launched correctly, the villagers could catch a small portion of the orcs and destroy them, then catch another small portion and destroy them, and they'd never need to face a large force of orcs at one time. On the negative side, taking the offense leaves the Vale exposed to orc raids that will almost certainly cause significant damage and more than a few deaths. If the spoiling attack is launched at the wrong time or place, it could end with the whole attacking force being wiped out and the Vale left defenseless against the orcs.

Rollins ends his speech by saying, "I've only been in your Vale for a short time, but I see why you love this place. If I wasn't the Baron's lieutenant, I'd want to live in a place like this. I admire you folks.

"But I wasn't sent here to be your friend. I'm a warrior who's seen many battles, and I'm here to give you the best advice I can. If you were professional soldiers, I'd say 'take the fight to the orcs and stick it to 'em'. But you're farmers and herders with halberds you barely know how to use. Don't get me wrong—you've learned a lot about fighting over the past few days—but that doesn't make you soldiers. In this situation, I'd say build up your defenses and aim to crush the orcs in one big battle.

"But this is your home, and it's your decision. I'm just here to advise."

Sergeant Rollins's assessment of the situation is correct, but his assessment of the village militia is lower than they deserve. Rollins has served with professional warriors for so long that he has an ingrained pessimism about part-time militias. After Rollins's speech, many people in the inn look to the player characters to see their response. This is a perfect time to encourage someone to give a rousing speech to build up the people's spirit and help them make their decision.

The people of the Vale respect Sergeant Rollins, but ultimately they'll be swayed by the player characters' opinions. Don't allow the players to turn this decision over to an NPC. Whatever the PCs decide is best, the villagers back them up. If they decide to take the offense, see "Attacking the Tower." If they choose to go on the defensive, see "Defending the Vale."

Attacking the Tower

When the decision is made to attack the orcs, read the following aloud. Adjust the text appropriately if characters haven't seen the orc camp before.

The people of the Vale agree with you that, despite the risks, the best plan is to surprise the orcs by attacking. First, someone must scout the orcs' camp and see what preparations they've made. Your group is the obvious candidate for this mission.

At dawn the next day, you move out. As you travel through the Dark Forest, Saradus points out signs that small groups of orcs have been moving through these woods regularly, probably to spy on the Vale from the forest's edge.

By noon, you reach the southern edge of the forest, where you can see the orcs' camp. They are building a tower of stone and timber near a waterfall that plunges into a large pool. The lowest level of the tower is completed, with stone walls and one very large door, but the upper levels aren't finished. The orcs are quarrying stone from the cliff, and they've built a wooden crane atop the cliff to help move the stones. It appears that one wall of the tower might have suffered damage in an accident—maybe a stone fell from a crane—but it's hard to be sure, since orc construction is a bit sloppy to begin with.

This being mid-day, only a few orc sentries can be seen: one is atop the cliff, and one is atop the tower. The other orcs must be resting inside the partially-built tower, out of the sunlight that they hate so much.

If anyone wonders about the "very large door," explain that it's 10 feet high and 6 feet wide. Orcs are more massive than humans, but they don't need doors nearly that tall or wide.

Characters who try to examine the damaged stonework of the tower (from the safety of the treeline) can make DC 15 Int (Investigation) checks. Dwarfs add twice their proficiency bonus to the check because of their stonemasonry ability. Characters who make successful checks realize that the damaged wall could be toppled into the tower if it was hit with a ram. The falling stones would kill or injure many of the orcs, and the rest could be cut down as they rush out through the tower's one door. If no one makes a successful check and no players come up with that idea on their own, Saradus can suggest it.

Another option is to wait until the orcs come out at nightfall and split into smaller work parties. Then characters could try to isolate those smaller parties and attack them individually.

Or, characters could go back to the village with the information they've gained and come back with reinforcements.

What the characters can't know unless they wait for nightfall, when the orcs come out of the tower, is that there are 20 orcs in the camp. Characters also don't know that the orcs are led by an ogre; that's why the door had to be made so large.

Toppling the Wall: A makeshift ram is easy to get from the forest. Any large, sturdy log will do. Every time the wall is rammed, let one of the players roll 1d20 and add the combined Strength modifiers and Athletics bonuses of all the characters wielding the ram. The wall collapses if the result is 16 or higher. Collapsing stones kill 1d6 + 4 orcs inside the tower. It takes the survivors 1d4 rounds to figure out what happened and get themselves sorted out in the tower. Then they come charging out the door at the rate of 2d4 orcs per round, angry and ready to fight. The ogre is the last one out. It took 3d6 damage from the falling stones.

For obvious reasons, it would be a good idea to kill the two sentries before attacking with the ram. The sentry atop the cliff can see the sentry

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on the tower, but the tower sentry hardly ever checks the cliff top.

Attacking Work Parties: When the orcs are working at night, they divide into four groups. The first group consists of six orcs cutting stone from the cliff face; the second group is eight orcs on the tower, doing construction; the third group is four orcs atop the cliff, operating the crane; and the fourth group is one sentry atop the cliff, one at the base of the tower, and the ogre, who paces around the camp aimlessly and occasionally bawls at the orcs to work harder.

Orcs on the tower can get down and reach the quarry area in eight rounds. Orcs in the quarry area can reach the tower in six rounds, or they can climb up to the cliff top and the crane in eight rounds. Orcs at the crane can climb down to the quarry area in four rounds. Characters who watch the orcs working for a while can estimate these times pretty closely by making a successful DC 12 Int check.

The tower would be difficult to attack directly; characters would need to get to the second level to fight the orcs, either by going inside and climbing the stairs or by climbing one of the two ladders.

The quarry area is a poor target for the first attack because reinforcements coming from the tower and the cliff top will arrive at about the same time, giving them a chance to overwhelm the characters.

Attacking the crane first is a better option; it has the smallest number of defenders, and reinforcements will be strung out, giving the characters a chance to defeat them piecemeal as they arrive. The weakness of this plan is that it doesn't take advantage of the orcs' morale rule (below) by killing the ogre first. The ogre will reach the cliff top the round after the orcs from the quarry get there.

Orcs' Morale: No matter how the fight begins, the orcs will be surprised and dismayed that the villagers are attacking them in their own base before their tower is finished. At the end of every round when at least one orc or the ogre is killed, count the number of surviving orcs. Add 5 if the ogre is still alive. Then roll 2d10; if the result is higher than the number of surviving orcs, they turn tail and run for their lives. If the result is equal to or less than the number of surviving orcs, they keep fighting. The ogre fights to the death regardless of what the orcs do. Once the orcs retreat, they aren't seen again at this base or in the Vale for many years.

(Orc: AC 13, 15 hp; +5 to hit, 1d12 + 3 slashing damage [greataxe] or +5 to hit, range 30 ft./120 ft., 1d6 + 3 piercing damage [javelin]; can use a bonus action to move 30 ft. toward an enemy in sight)

(Ogre: AC 11, 59 hp; +6 to hit, 2d8 + 4 bludgeoning damage [greatclub] or +6 to hit, range 30 ft./120 ft., 2d6 + 4 piercing damage [javelin])

Villagers in the Fight: If characters bring villagers along as reinforcements to help in this fight, you have two options. First, you can use the villagers' stats and conduct the fight with the full rules. In this case, it's best to divide the villagers into squads, put a PC in charge of each one, and let the player commanding that squad roll attacks and damage for those NPCs and keep track of their hit points as if they were his or her characters. Players might suggest this on their own, since it's fun to handle a big battle this way. It makes the fight take quite a bit longer, however. The villagers' stats are listed below, under "Defending the Vale."

A quicker option is to handle the villagers with a simplified system that relies only on attack rolls. Ignore the attacker's bonuses; this system is only concerned with the unmodified number showing on the die. A villager attacking an unwounded orc kills the orc if the attack roll is 16 or higher. If the orc is already wounded by a PC, it's killed with an attack roll of 10 or higher. An orc kills a halberdier with an attack roll of 13 or higher, and kills a crossbowman with an attack roll of 10 or higher.

In any case, villagers won't fight the ogre; it's too frightening.

Defending the Vale

By this time, there are deadly traps 50 yards thick at the edge of the Dark Forest: a long trench lined with sharpened stakes, tangles of tree branches and thorny vines to slow down the orcs where they can be picked off with crossbows and *fireballs*, and covered pits for them to fall into. A stout wall of stones and logs that defenders can fight behind runs from the east ridge to near Agamemnus's tower; the wizard insists he can take care of any monsters coming near his home. Ten yards into the forest is a thick line of leaves, twigs, and dry wood. When orcs approach, this can be set aflame with fire arrows.

Assuming the orcs attack at night (they usually do), the light should blind them temporarily, and when they cross the fire lane, their dark silhouettes against the flames will make them easy targets for crossbows.

Sergeant Rollins has drilled the people of the Vale to assemble quickly at the village green when a guard rings a gong there. According to his plan, defenders with slings move to the eastern ridge and the apple orchard; those with halberds and breastplates line the center of the wall, where the attack is expected to be heaviest; and those with crossbows line up behind the halberdiers, ready to launch bolts between them. Because of their experience, player characters and Saradus are free to roam the battle as a "flying column" to reinforce wherever there's trouble.

All that's left to do is for someone to go talk to Agamemnus and make sure he knows the plan. As usual, that task is given to the player characters.

(Slinger [Commoner]: AC 10, 4 hp; +2 to hit, range 30 ft./120 ft., 1d4 bludgeoning damage [sling])

(Crossbow [Guard]: AC 13, 11 hp; +3 to hit, range 80 ft./320 ft., 1d8 + 1 piercing damage [light crossbow] or +3 to hit, 1d4 + 1 piercing damage [dagger])

(Halberdier [Guard]: AC 16, 11 hp; +3 to hit, reach 10 ft., 1d10 + 1 slashing damage [halberd])

Talk with the Wizard

The old wizard comes to his tower door looking extremely angry. Before you can even say hello, he starts shouting.

"I see no reason to help this Vale. No orcs can get into my tower. Why should I help the people of this valley? What have they done for me?"

The situation with the wizard is meant to be a roleplaying challenge. Players must use their best roleplaying skills to persuade Agamemnus to help in the coming fight.

Agamemnus isn't really mad at the villagers. He has a terrible toothache, and it's making him angry at the whole world. A character who makes a successful DC 12 Wis (Insight) or Wis (Medicine) check recognizes what the problem is. Otherwise, they'll need to rely on their wits.

It doesn't take much to win the wizard's help. If someone can ease his toothache, he changes his position immediately. One of the *healing* potions Agamemnus gave the characters earlier will do the trick, as will any curative or restorative spell of 1st level or higher. Otherwise, just some friendly conversation, a cup of lukewarm tea, a few reminders of how long the wizard has lived in the Vale and how much everyone here respects him, and how desperate the situation is, will bring him around.

Attack in the Night

The growls in the night testify to that the orcs are moving in. The clang of the warning gong brings everyone to their position along the wall well before the orcs reach the edge of the forest.

When he hears twigs snapping, Saradus launches a fire arrow into the line of tinder. Within moments, flames are leaping to the sky, and the howls of orcs signal their surprise. The flames don't stop, them, though; the hulking shapes of orcs lurch through the flames, and the sound of twanging crossbows indicates they're excellent targets. Traps and obstacles are taking a toll as well. To escape them, a handful of orcs shift their line of approach too far to the west, and they pay with their lives when the first *fireball* sizzles down from the tower and explodes among them.

The battle is on!

DEEP IN THE VALE

In this battle, you're only concerned with what the player characters do. Assume the villagers take care of themselves.

Let the characters fight a few orcs along the wall; orcs are pretty tough, so don't throw too many of them against the characters at once. Describe the shouts, growls, and clanging sounds coming from left and right in the battle.

When players have the feeling that they're winning, describe the massive shape of the ogre suddenly leaping through the flames and charging toward the wall. It crashes through the defenses, scattering halberdiers and crossbowmen left and right. The orcs redouble their attacks, and the villagers are wavering. Unless the ogre is stopped quickly, the villagers are likely to panic and run. Sergeant Rollins is somewhere else out of the characters' sight, and the ogre is too far from the tower for Agamemnus to attack it with a spell. Only the characters are capable of fighting this ogre.

The orcs' and ogre's stats are given above, under "Attacking the Tower."

When the ogre dies, a howl of alarm spreads up and down the line of battling orcs. With their champion dead, the rest aren't willing to press a losing battle. They flee back into the forest and quickly disappear in the darkness.

A cheer goes up from the people of the Vale. The player characters are hailed as heroes and treated to a great welcome at the inn. Agamemnus comes out of his tower for the first time in decades—a hush falls over the room when he hobbles unannounced into the common room of the inn, and then the people break into cheers all over again. He rewards each of the characters with 250 gp and a potion or scroll of your choice; pick things you know the characters can use.

A few days after Sergeant Rollins rides back to the Baron's castle, a messenger arrives from the Baron. He wants the characters to join him at his castle, to be honored again with a feast—and to be offered a new mission. It seems there's a village in another part of the barony that needs help fighting off monsters, and Sergeant Rollins assured the Baron these characters were the right people for the job.

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