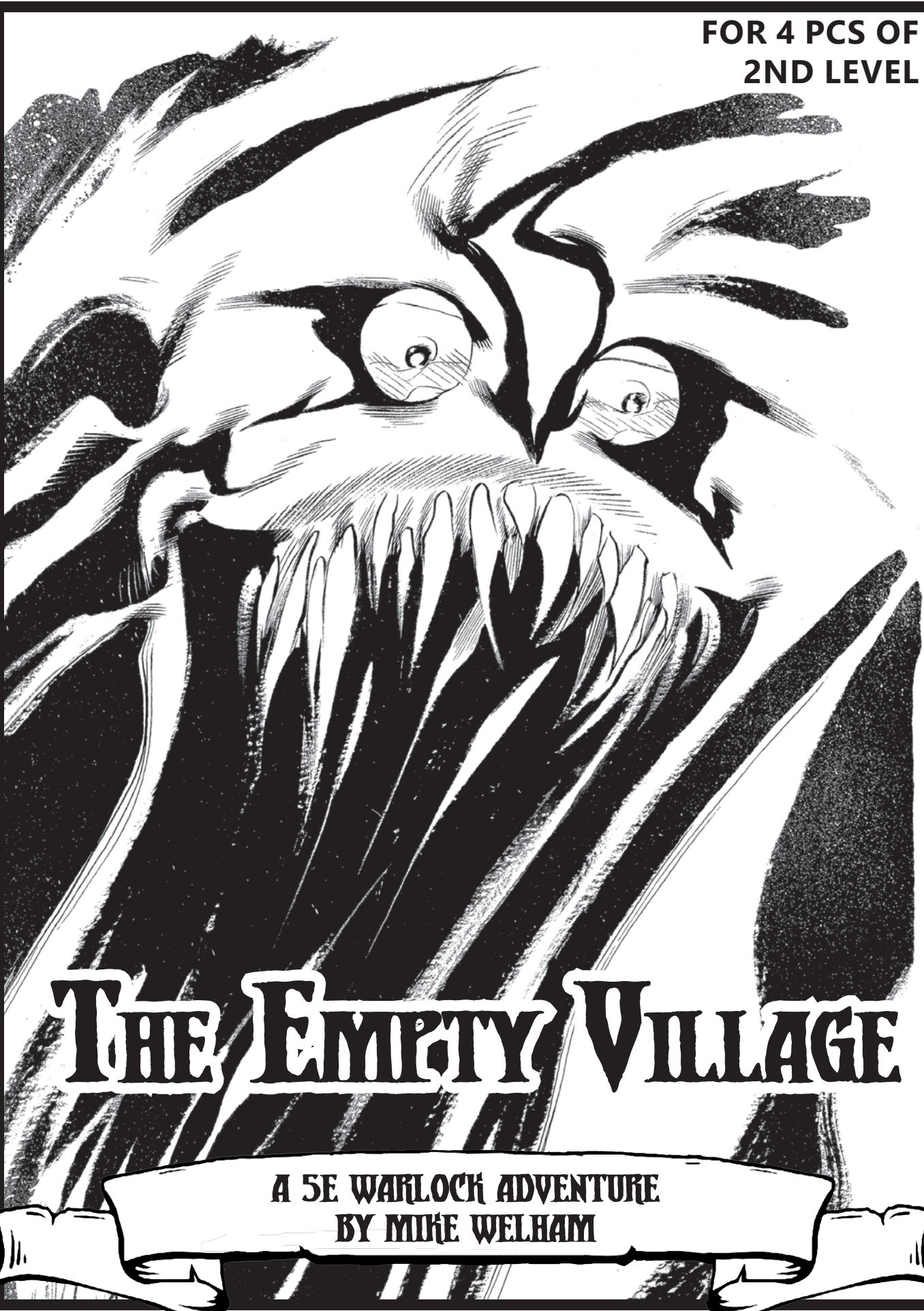




FOR 4 PCS OF
2ND LEVEL

THE EMPTY VILLAGE

A 5E WARLOCK ADVENTURE
BY MIKE WELHAM

THE EMPTY VILLAGE

Adventure Background

For centuries, the cheshirians have stalked prey on Midgard from a seldom-traveled section of the Shadow Realm they call the “Forlorn Roads.” Their peculiar magic allows them to reach from the Shadow Realm into Midgard and drag their victims onto the Forlorn Roads. These lost and bewildered creatures then become easy prey for the cheshirians. Fortunately, the Forlorn Roads is tied to the Northlands, preventing the cheshirians from hunting far across Midgard. It was during one of these hunts that the cheshirian, Ariaira, witnessed a group of adventurers rescuing a comrade she had transported to the Forlorn Roads. Seeing the group’s heroism and bonds with one another awoke a desire for companionship in Ariaira—a desire foreign to the solitary cheshirians—and she began to comprehend the loneliness of her existence. While contemplating her new desires, she decided the best way to obtain friends was to do something brave to help people—just like the adventurers she saw.

Such an opportunity arose, at least in her mind, when she stumbled upon a death cult intending to bring about the end of existence by calling forth a powerful, fiery

demon lord to flood the world by destroying the ice in the Northlands. Knowing she couldn’t stop the catastrophe, she decided the best thing she could do was move potential victims to her territory in the Forlorn Roads where they could avoid disaster.

Her first target was Fjellgard, a remote human village in Trollheim. Her efforts proved disastrous, as nearly everyone she pulled into her realm became fearful or aggressive. Her attempts to calm people by describing the apocalyptic future awaiting them only made the situation worse. Fearful of the cheshirian, some of the people attacked Ariaira, while many others fled. Confused, she retreated, leaving the villagers scattered throughout the cave system she called home. To make matters worse, Kettek, another cheshirian who had been hiding unnoticed nearby, grew jealous of Ariaira hoarding all the “prey” for herself. He brought in a host of monsters to join him in hunting the people of Fjellgard without Ariaira’s knowledge after she ran from the villagers.

Adventure Hooks

A courier acting on behalf of Uffi Toothless tasks the PCs with checking on the village of Fjellgard. The jarl expected a

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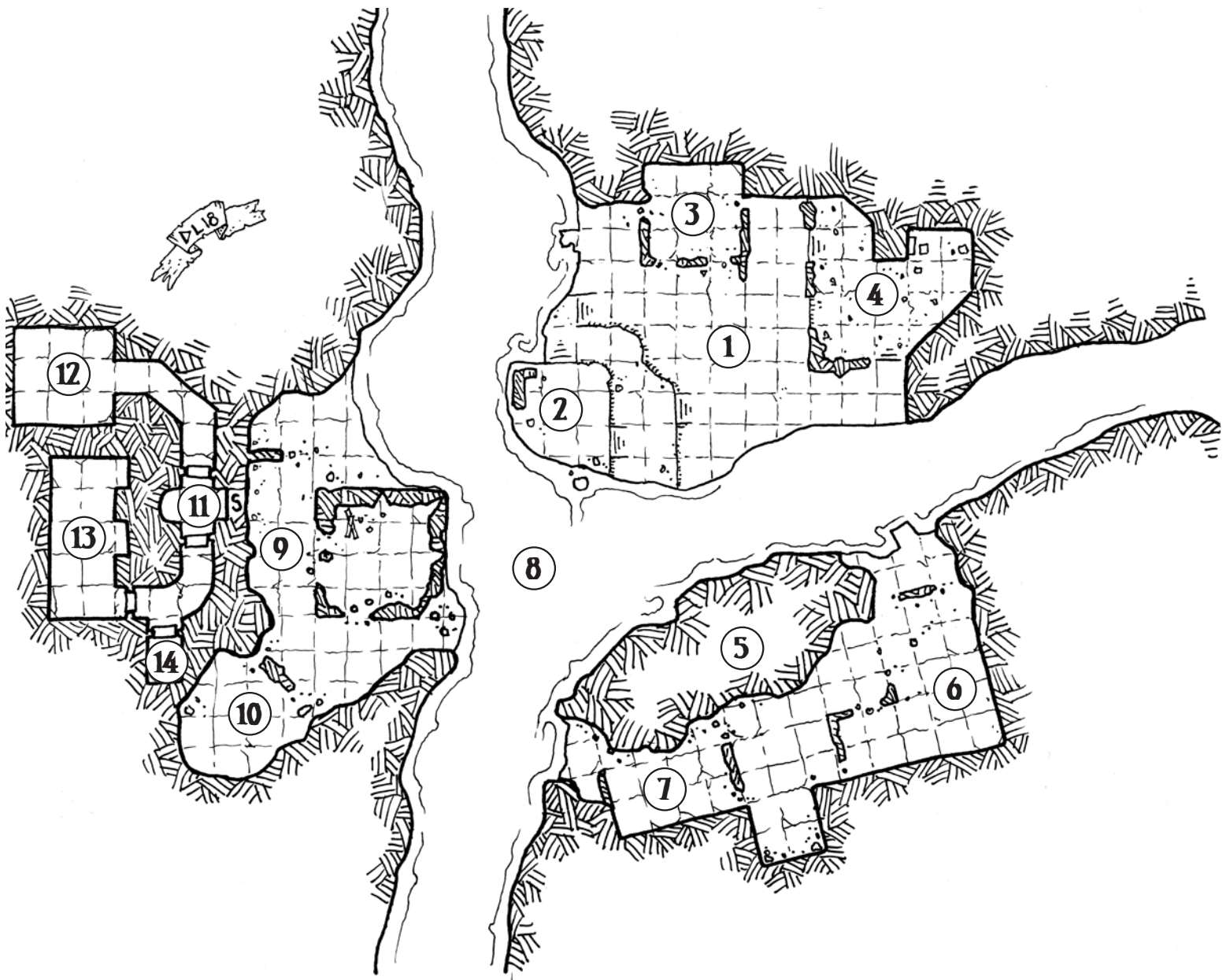
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dispatch from the village two days ago and has not received it. The courier offers 100 gp for the PCs to discover the reason for the delayed dispatch and deal with any troubles the village might be experiencing that are causing the delay. Alternatively, the PCs may travel to Fjellgard to meet with a sage in the village who has information the PCs need. Finally, the PCs simply could be looking for the nearest place for shelter in the unforgiving North.

Half-Eaten Food, Still Warm

Ariaira planned the village's forced evacuation carefully. She selected a couple of young children to whisk away first. After speaking with the children to convince them of the game they were playing, she picked up enough of their voices to mimic them. She pretended to be the children to lure other villagers to a small clearing north of Fjellgard, where she had found a way to temporarily thin the divide between Midgard and her lair in the Forlorn Roads. By some quirk of the magic that allowed her to create the portal, any creature that passed through the portal was stuck in the Forlorn Roads unless it used the same portal to leave the realm. Within days, the missing villagers became a lure in and of itself for the other villagers, quickly depopulating Fjellgard. Proud of her accomplishments, she was utterly unprepared to handle the villagers' reaction to her good deed.

When the PCs approach Fjellgard, they spy familiar sights and smell familiar scents belonging to a thriving village. Smoke from various fires rises above the buildings, dogs give chase to one another just outside the village, the aroma of a freshly-cooked communal meal wafts gently by as the wind shifts. A successful DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check notices that there are no sounds other than those made by animals coming from the village. There is no metal-on-metal sound from a smith, no sawing or hammering of wood, and, most eerily, no conversation or shouting of children.

As the PCs pass into the village proper, they see no inhabitants. It looks as though everyone in the village left in the middle of their meal. The relative heat of the food and the state of the cookfires, indicate the villagers left scant minutes before the PCs arrived. PCs who investigate notice no signs of struggle and no bloodshed. The weapons in the village rest in scabbards, on walls, or are propped up against chairs, showing a lack of violence. The villagers' homes reveal no obvious attempts to flee the village. Necessities for travel, such as warm clothing and blankets, remain where they should be. Likewise, the PCs find personal treasures like gems and family jewelry in many homes. Unscrupulous PCs can gather various items worth a total of 50 gp from the homes.

A successful DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Survival) check notices a large amount of recent tracks leading out of the village to a clearing north of Fjellgard. As the PCs approach the clearing, a successful DC 12 Wisdom

(Perception) check hears faint cries for help originating from the clearing. These cries come from an invisible and out of phase Ariaira, who has taken notice of the PCs. Since she is using voices unfamiliar to the PCs, they have disadvantage on their Wisdom (Insight) checks to determine the voices are fake. Each PC that enters the clearing is magically transported to Ariaira's redoubt (see Meeting Ariaira and Area 5 below).

The Forlorn Roads

The Forlorn Roads are in a perpetuate twilight like the rest of the Shadow Realm. Colors are muted, light doesn't seem to penetrate the darkness as easily, and the entire realm is dimly lit by some unseen source. Ariaira's lair is within a small cavern on the Forlorn Roads and, unless otherwise stated, is in complete darkness.

Meeting Ariaira

Ariaira approaches the PCs when they arrive in Area 5. Knowing the PCs aren't from the village, she hurriedly explains that she needs their help to calm the villagers. She states she is only trying to save them. If questioned about what she is saving them from, she mentions something big is coming and proclaims, "when the beacon is lit on top of the world, ice will fall, and floods and fire will consume the world." Ariaira assumes a dire warning will impress the severity of the situation on the PCs and get them to act on her behalf.

A successful DC 12 Charisma (Deception or Persuasion) check assures Ariaira that the PCs are friendly, convincing her to reveal more information about her recent actions. She tells them about her attempt to become a hero, and she explains that she "rescued" the villagers because she overheard the death cult's plans, as described in the Adventure Background. She expresses shame at failing at her first attempt to save people and hopes the PCs can help her convince the villagers to hear her out. She understands if the villagers want to return to Fjellgard and agrees to let them return if the PCs can help her talk to them first. If the PCs insist on compensation for their assistance, she offers all she has in return for their help (see Area 5). She insists on staying in Area 5 as the link between the worlds is fragile and difficult to maintain at a distance. If she is to return the villagers to Fjellgard, she will need to stay in Area 5 to protect the link. If asked, she sketches out her lair in the dirt for the PCs (excluding Areas 11 through 14, of which she has no knowledge).

If the PCs attack Ariaira, she uses Out of Phase and flees, returning regularly to make furtive attempts to convince them of her sincerity.

1. HUNTING PARTY

Despite the cheshirians' general dislike of other fey, Kettek found it expedient to involve three **fraughashar** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 206) in his hunt for the villagers. Kettek knew he wouldn't be able to hunt all of the villagers at one time, and the fraughashar were easy to persuade into joining him in his sadistic scheme. The arrival of the PCs alleviates the fraughashars' growing boredom. While they prefer to dispatch intruders themselves, they have no problem goading the PCs into Area 3 where they know Kettek's hunting "hounds" rest.

2. BROKEN STATUE

A single **beli** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 35) awaits atop this terraced section of the caverns amid debris from an unidentifiable, tentacled statue. Allied to the fraughashar and curious about the spoils promised to them by Kettek, the beli invisibly followed the group to this realm, where it remains unseen as it observes the fraughashar in Area 1. It only attacks when creatures other than its allies climb up to this area or if the PCs slay two of the fraughashar in Area 1.

3. HUNTER'S KENNEL

A pair of **darkmantles**, Kettek's trained hunting companions, rest on the ceiling of this chamber above the headless bodies of four villagers. The two have been instructed to stay in this chamber until called by Kettek for another hunt, but they attack any creature that enters the room or disturbs the bodies of their latest meals.

4. CONSERVATORY OF THE DEAD

Kettek and his companions killed dozens of Fjellgard's villagers in the initial assault. The bodies that weren't immediately consumed were piled here for later consumption. Unbeknownst to Kettek, one of his companions had violet fungus spores on its clothing. The spores quickly took hold in the bodies and now four full-grown **violet fungus** inhabit the room, steadily consuming the corpses.

5. ARIAIRA'S REDOUBT

Ariaira keeps a modest room tucked into a hollowed-out rock abutting the new stream. The only entrance and exit is to the north, and it sits higher in the wall above the water line. A successful DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check is required to reach the entrance if the water level in Area 8 is below 5 feet. A slight shimmer in the air in the center of the hidden chamber is the only indicator of this room's magical connection to Midgard.

TREASURE

Ariaira keeps items she obtained from her hunts in a small recess in the room, but her growing desire to be heroic and save people fills her with guilt when she looks at them. She is happy to part with them if the PCs are willing to help her. The recess holds a variety of rings, necklaces, and gems totaling 150 gp.

6. DEN OF SPIES

Two **spies** in service to the Queen of Night and Magic hide in this room. They occasionally scout the remainder of the lair to give the shadow fey in Area 7 updates on Kettek and his followers.

7. PORTAL-SEEKERS

The Queen of Night and Magic, aware of the cheshirians' magical talents, sent four **shadow fey** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 171) to investigate after she noticed a long-lasting cheshirian portal on the Forlorn Roads. These shadow fey haven't seen Ariaira yet, but they know they are close to finding the location of the portal. The Queen instructed them to destroy the source of the portal quietly and return without anyone the wiser to maintain peaceful relations with the cheshirians. Kettek's presence has kept the shadow fey in hiding as they work to destroy the portal without being discovered. They see the PCs as an opportunity to achieve their goal without being directly involved.

If the PCs are open to conversation, the shadow fey offer them 50 gp to kill Kettek and destroy the portal. They promise an emissary of the Queen of Night and Magic will pay them on the Midgard side of the portal if it is successfully destroyed. They can't help the PCs directly since their mission is a covert one, but they can let the PCs know that Kettek exists and that he has scattered allies throughout the lair. Like Ariaira, they are unaware of Areas 11 through 14 and can't advise the PCs on those locations.

8. THE COLD STREAM

After figuring out how to create the link to Midgard from her lair in the Forlorn Roads, Ariaira used her magic to divert a stream into her lair so the villagers could have a fresh supply of water. Since she had never used her powers to do something as grand as diverting part of a creek before, her initial attempt flooded the caverns. After letting the water level subside, she renewed her efforts. Her unstable magic causes the stream to vary in depth by two to five feet throughout the day. When the stream is lower, it is difficult terrain. When it is higher, a successful DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check is required to stay afloat. A creature with a swimming speed automatically succeeds on this check.

9. PROWLING THE RUINS

Three **snowcats** (*Creature Codex*, p. 346), more of Kettek's hunting pets, prowl this area, which is dimly lit by torchlight that is leaking through the blockade built by Fjellgard's villagers in Area 10. The blockade frustrates the snowcats, and they dislike the stream cutting off the rest of the lair. They are hungry and perk up at the arrival of the PCs. If they hear commotion from the stream, they hide within the ruined building, where they wait to launch an ambush.

10. LAST STAND OF FJELLGARD

Fifteen villagers (use **commoner** statistics for the five of them that are old enough and well enough to fight) banded together in this easily defensible section of the lair. Under the leadership of a **guard** named Jakob, they grabbed what material they could while avoiding the monsters stalking them and erected a makeshift barrier. They attempted to leave as few gaps as possible to avoid being targeted by arrows, so their field of view is limited. The villagers are distrustful of everything they hear, believing it to be more lies from the cheshirians. A successful DC 14 Charisma (Persuasion) check convinces the villagers that the PCs mean them no harm. It requires a successful DC 12 Strength (Athletics) check to breach the barrier. If the PCs attempt to breach the barrier without the villagers' permission, the villagers attack as soon as they have an opening.

11. KETTEK'S LOBBY

The entrance to a hidden section of Ariaira's lair escaped her notice when she first settled in the area. Kettek, who intentionally sought a secret place from which he could observe Ariaira, quickly found the door to this area and made himself at home in the confines beyond. A successful DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check finds the almost invisible seams marking the door. The door is unlocked, but it is trapped with a Shard Sphere trap.

Shard Sphere Trap. When a creature opens the door, a rusted iron sphere falls to the ground and explodes in a shower of metal shards. Each creature within 15 feet of the door must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 11 (2d10) piercing damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Prevention. A successful DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) check locates a lead wire from the door connected to a group of wires holding the sphere in place overhead. A successful DC 12 Dexterity check using thieves' tools disables the lead wire harmlessly. A character without thieves' tools can attempt this check with disadvantage using any edged weapon or edged tool. On a failed check, the trap triggers.

12. SAVED FOR LATER

Eight villagers (use **commoner** statistics) are locked in this room. If they hear the PCs attempting to break into the room, they try to gain the PCs' attention. They are afraid of Kettek and welcome any attempt at rescue. Unfortunately, they do not have the tools to disable the lock and have spent their time formulating plans to rush the cheshirian when he comes for them. If the PCs free the villagers before confronting Kettek, six of the villagers rush to Area 10 to rejoin their families while two stay with the PCs to seek vengeance against the cheshirian.

Locked Door. The door leading into this chamber is locked. A successful DC 15 Dexterity check using thieves' tools picks the lock. Kettek in Area 13 possesses the key to this lock.

13. KETTEK'S DOMICILE

The **cheshirian**, Kettek, resides here, devising a plan to capture the remaining villagers in Area 10. When the PCs arrive, he attempts to deceive them into believing Ariaira is a monster hiding behind pleasantries. He claims she was the one who brought all the creatures to terrorize and kill the villagers. He further tries to convince the PCs he is working to rescue the villagers. To bolster this ruse, he makes a show of magnanimously offering to return the villagers to their home. He falsely explains that he has captured the villagers in Area 12 to help him convince the larger group in Area 10 to allow him to teleport them all back home at one time—an easier feat than teleporting them individually. No matter how the situation plays out, he uses his Out of Phase action and leaves only his smiling mouth visible as he talks. Kettek has a *constant dagger* (see below) and uses it in place of one of his claw attacks. The chamber holds a comfortable mattress, which the cheshirian stole from another village, but is otherwise sparse.

14. ILL-GOTTEN GAINS

Kettek stores a smattering of items taken from his victims here. The cheshirian expects no one to make it this far, so the treasure is unguarded and in plain sight. This chamber houses a *potion of healing* and a collection of coins, gems, and jewels worth a total of 250 gp.

Concluding the Adventure

If Ariaira survives and the PCs help her explain her motives to the villagers, she becomes an ally of the PCs. She doesn't join them on adventures, but she keeps an eye on the PCs while they are in the Northlands. She might come to their aid in a time of need or pull them onto the Forlorn Roads just in

time to save them from a bad situation. Before they leave, she asks the PCs to teach her how to be heroic, and she works to improve the lot of others through her peculiar magic—starting with helping the villagers of Fjellgard.

If Ariaira does not end the adventure on good terms with the PCs, she reverts to her old hunting habits after the PCs escape through her portal with the villagers. She works to undermine the PCs while they are in the Northlands, subjecting them to inconvenient or dangerous practical jokes.

If Kettek survives, he seeks revenge on the PCs. If he survives and Ariaira was rejected by the PCs, he sways her to his side, and they hunt the PCs together. He actively targets friends and relatives of the PCs, advertising his involvement in their accidents or deaths.

If the PCs promised to slay Kettek and destroy the portal for the shadow fey in Area 7 (Ariaira permanently disables the portal after the villagers are returned to Fjellgard, if the PCs help her talk to them), the Queen of Night and Magic sends an emissary with the promised 50 gp to the PCs. She makes note of their assistance and may seek out the PCs in the future.

If the PCs rescue the villagers, the people of Fjellgard offer a 50 gp worth of jewelry and general supplies as a reward. They host a feast in the PCs' honor and commemorate the event annually. The PCs can broker a peace between Ariaira, if she survives, and Fjellgard, and she promises to watch over the village—without stealing them away to the Forlorn Roads.

After the villagers return to Fjellgard and recover the dispatcher, the jarl's courier pays the PCs the promised 100 gp.

Cheshirian

This bipedal creature's broad, disarming smile counters its misshapen appearance.

The cheshirian is a carnivorous fey creature with the unique ability to hop back and forth between the Material Plane and a seldom-traveled section of the Shadow Realm known as the Forlorn Roads. The Forlorn Roads are tied to the Northlands and the cheshirians rarely travel beyond the Northlands for fear of losing their connection to their realm. Their peculiar magic allows them to snatch unsuspecting prey from one realm and deposit it into the other. When a cheshirian is out of phase in either realm, it often displays its disembodied smile to unnerve its disoriented prey. All cheshirians have palindromic names.

CHESHIRIAN

Small fey, chaotic neutral

Armor Class 14

Hit Points 66 (12d6 + 24)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Cha +5

Skills Deception +7, Stealth +6, Survival +2

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Common, Sylvan

Challenge 3 (700 XP)



Claim Territory (1/Day). The cheshirian spends 1 hour out of phase attuning itself to a section of the Forlorn Roads up to 1 square mile in size. This section becomes its territory until it dies or it designates another area as its territory. It also attunes itself to a similarly-sized swath of land on the Material Plane in the Northlands as part of this process. More than one cheshirian can claim the same territory, though this overlap often ends with one of the cheshirians slain by the other or moving on to a different area.

Out of Phase. As a bonus action, the cheshirian can magically exist on the Material Plane and the Forlorn Roads simultaneously. While it is out of phase in this way, it is invisible in both realms (though it can choose for its mouth and teeth to remain visible), and it has resistance to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical attacks. A creature that the cheshirian hits with its claw attack while out of phase has resistance to the cheshirian's claw damage. As a bonus action on a subsequent turn, the cheshirian can choose to fully manifest on the Material Plane or the Forlorn Roads.

Sound Mimicry. The cheshirian can mimic humanoid voices. A creature that hears the voices can tell they are imitations with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The cheshirian makes two claw attacks.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) slashing damage. If the target is a Medium or smaller creature, it is grappled (escape DC 11). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained, and the cheshirian can't use its claw on another target.

Drag to the Forlorn Roads. The cheshirian teleports itself to its claimed territory in the Forlorn Roads, its claimed territory in the Northlands, or to an area of the Forlorn Roads with which it is familiar. If it is grappling a creature, the grappled creature must make a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw (a creature can willingly fail this saving throw). On a failure, the grappled creature teleports with the cheshirian to the chosen location. A creature that is in the Forlorn Roads and not native to the Shadow Realm can attempt a new Wisdom saving throw at the end of each hour, reappearing in the space it left (or in the nearest unoccupied space if that space is occupied) on a success. A creature can choose to fail this saving throw. If a creature fails this saving throw each hour for 48 hours, it is permanently stuck in the Forlorn Roads and must find a different way out. A fey creature or a creature native to the Shadow Realm can choose to permanently remain in the Forlorn Roads or not at the end of the first hour.

CONSTANT DAGGER

Weapon (dagger), rare

You gain a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon.

When you roll a 20 on an attack roll made with this weapon, the target loses its resistance to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage until the start of your next turn. If it has immunity to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage, its immunity instead becomes resistance to such damage until the start of your next turn. If the creature doesn't have resistance or immunity to such damage, you roll your damage dice three times, instead of twice.

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