

Pugmire



Pan's Guide for
New Pioneers

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First off, let me once again state that this is NOT a diary. I have received a little flak from a few less informed people lately, some of whom have decided a daily record of one's actions smacks of the kind of thing performed by perfumed pups who live in castles and the like. Nothing could be further from the truth.

This is a record of my exploits, an account of the adventures and accomplishments of Pan Dachshund. This is the chronicle of that which I have done and achieved, a record from which young pups can read and learn.

Fortunately for the pups, they are getting this information from me, a shining example of how to behave outside the walls of Pugmire.

I don't want to sound dismissive. There are plenty of good dogs in Pugmire. In fact, I got the idea for these journals from one of them, Princess Yosha Pug to be precise.

Yes, I know, it's hard to believe that someone like me could have dealings with the royal family of Pugmire. Man alone knows why they put up with me.

Truth be told, I'm not a huge fan of most of the royal families. Sure, they each have their good members, who, when seen individually, are good dogs. It's when they get together and start legislating lives that things fall apart.

Princess Yosha Pug is one of the good ones. A little naive at times, perhaps, but her heart is in the right place. Plus, I have a deep respect for anyone who is willing to go outside of the walls to pursue a cause, rather than just send someone else after it and hope for the best. She's got the courage of a warrior when she needs it.

As I said, it was her idea that I start keeping these journals. Well, not maybe in so many words, but as I recall the conversation, we were discussing her love of books and knowledge.

"Do you really need to carry all of that with you?" I asked, pointing at her book bag. The worked leather was bulging, the vines distorted and the Pug tail symbol in the center stretched out by the scrolls and books it held. "It's only going to slow you down."

"The information held in these documents is invaluable. It could save our lives."

I sniffed, rather loudly. It was all for show. Books and the information they hold fascinate me, but this isn't the kind of thing a hunter necessarily brags about. It's all well and good to go to the Royal Library and get some background information from Lancaster Pug, the Librarian. However, I might not be seen as quite so fierce if people knew my love of the written word.

I remember being secretly proud of the fact that she didn't ask anyone else to carry her load. There were plenty of bigger dogs in the group who would have been happy to share the burden, but she carried her own.

"All knowledge has the potential to save someone's life," she replied. "Just think of everything that you have been through."

At this point someone may or may not have said something about learning from my mistakes. The conversation devolved from there.

Princess Yosha may not have actually told me to start recording my adventures, but I think that was the gist of the conversation. It's what I took away from it anyway.

So that's what I've been doing. I've got a mess of these little books buried away in various places. Each one records a specific enterprise. I try to present the material as straightforward and unedited as possible. Potential pioneers of any age should be able to find useful information herein!

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Special Thanks

To Andrew Grondin and Anton Adam, for being the best of dogs.

To Alan Gowing for being the short order cook we needed!

Pugmire Backers Beware!

The Pan's Guide video adventure is being animated at the time of this pre-errata release. Do not worry! The videos will all be up after we incorporate all required errata. Thanks for your patience!



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An Introduction to Pan's Guide

From Pugmire to the Monarchies of Mau, and everywhere between, tales emerge of enterprising young dogs seeking thrilling adventure, the lure of mystery, and the glory that accompanies the slaying of a great beast. *Pan's Guide for New Pioneers* may be just what a young pup needs to set them on the right path to renown.

Pugmire is a game of high adventure, mystery, and companionship. In *Pugmire's* world, humankind has long-since disappeared, leaving only the descendants of uplifted creatures to act as the protectors and builders of civilization. Perhaps by poring through the past, retrieving forgotten relics, and harnessing the old masterworks of Man, the dogs of Pugmire can elevate themselves further.

Pan's Guide is a journal, first and foremost, detailing an adventure undertaken by the legendary (and infamous, in equal measure) Pan Dachshund. The roguish Pan ventured into the Fearful Forest

in search of treasure for his kingdom, and answers to mysteries plaguing the land. Pan was unsuccessful in his endeavor, but he returned with his journal, which now passes into the hands of aspiring members of the Royal Pioneers, an organization dedicated to Pugmire's service. Players who take the role of dogs in this game inherit the journal, and embark on a quest of their own. Maybe they will follow Pan's path to even greater successes than the eponymous dachshund.

What does this book contain?

Pan's Guide for New Pioneers is designed to assist roleplayers both new and experienced, and help a Guide in her first time running the *Pugmire* roleplaying game.

Following this introduction is an essay titled "What is Roleplaying?" The essay illuminates the subject of roleplaying games, and how to

PLAY PAN'S GUIDE: AN INTRODUCTION TO PUGMIRE, ON YOUTUBE!



Just search for "Pan's Guide Pugmire Videos" on YouTube, or find video #1 of the series on <http://www.youtube.com/user/theonyxpath> and play along to introduce yourself to the system and world of Pugmire!

participate in them in a reader is new to the hobby, or just wanting some fresh advice on a subject they already know well.

The bulk of *Pan's Guide* is given over to an extensive adventure. The characters in this tale will take a journey ranging from the city of Pugmire to the depths of the Fearful Forest and beyond, placing starting level characters on an odyssey involving combat, mystery, diplomacy, and rescue.

Concluding the adventure are six ready-to-play characters suitable for the campaign in this book, and future adventures of a Guide's own creation. Accompanying them are all the Tricks and Spells the characters can use in this story, in an easy to print-and-play or reference format.

How do I use this book?

The campaign in *Pan's Guide for New Pioneers* is laid out in a distinctive, condensed way, designed specifically for ease of reference. Each new event in the campaign is described in full, allowing the Guide to make a quick read of what's in the vicinity or up ahead, with the following section containing the rules required to resolve any conflicts in the scenario. In the scenario text, the Guide will find text in italics that should be read aloud to the players. Following the rules are pages from Pan's journal that may be read aloud or provided to players, while the final section of each campaign chapter contains art, maps, and flavor text.

Readers will not need to do any flicking back and forth between pages in this book. *Pan's Guide for New Pioneers* wants to put everything on display for each chapter, making a rules check as simple as scanning left to right.

Pan's journal serves as both fiction for someone in need of a good story, and advice to the players' characters, as they possess this journal in-game. Therefore, the Guide has permission to print all journal pages to provide to the players all at once, or one at a time if she deems it more appropriate. Take note that Pan's journey is slightly different to that of the players in this scenario. In some cases, his experiences will offer invaluable advice, in others they may act as red herrings.

How do I play Pan's YouTube Adventure?

Pan's adventure, alluded to in journal entries throughout this book, is an interactive story in its own right, accessible via videos on YouTube in a "choose your own adventure" format.

Just search for "Pan's Guide Pugmire videos" on YouTube or Google, or check out <https://www.youtube.com/user/theonyxpath> to find video #1 in the adventure, and start from there!

Playing through this mini-adventure will prep a group for some of the system and setting in the world of Pugmire, and is recommend for every roleplayer, new or experienced. Give it a go!

Enjoy the Adventure!



What is Roleplaying?

To put it simply, roleplaying is an elaborate game of let's pretend. Each player does their best to act out their character in situations during the game. Some people choose to run their character as extensions of themselves, and that's perfectly fine. Others try to breathe life into a character different from themselves, with challenging desires, motivation, and skills. While that's more difficult than pretending the character is just like you, it can be very rewarding and add to the fun of the game. The best thing about roleplaying is everything is pretend. No one gets struck by an arrow in real life during a game — all the action takes place in the players' minds. Think of it as an interactive story: the Guide tells the players what's happening around their characters, and the players decide what their characters will do.

In a roleplaying game, one participant is the Guide. This person tells a story, also called

an adventure, in which the remaining players participate as their characters. This story can be purchased from a store or over the internet, or it can be an adventure the Guide designed herself. Examples of stories include a quest to recover a lost or stolen item of great value, a mission to gather and report information, escorting important dogs through danger to safety, or slaying an infamous beast. In the *Pugmire* core book, "The Great Cat Conspiracy" acts as a sample story. This book also provides an adventure suitable for approximately three to six hours of play.

Events will occur during the game, representing fun challenges. Simple acts such as opening a door or picking up a sword do not require dice rolls. Other encounters — such as haggling over the price of goods in the market, or shooting an enemy at distance with a bow and arrow — incorporate an element of chance, and do require

dice rolls. Players roll dice to see whether their characters achieve success. The die or dice rolled yield a result that the players compare to a target number the Guide announces. If the player roll meets or exceeds the target number (sometimes known as the difficulty), their character succeeds! If it falls below the number, the attempt fails. Characters with strengths in certain areas may be able to modify their die roll, such as in a case where a shepherd is called upon for her particular wisdom. A high Wisdom means the shepherd — learned sages and philosophers among dogs — may benefit from a +1, +2, +3, or even +4 to a roll requiring her Wisdom. Skills at which characters are particularly competent or well-practiced also convey modifiers to die rolls.

For some challenges, failing isn't terrible. For example, if your character haggles over price in a market — probably using a skill like Persuade, or a trick such as Charming Discourse or Fast Talk — and fails, the character will have to pay full price. A spectacularly bad failure — called a botch (rolling a 1 on a 20-sided die) — may mean the merchant fooled your character into buying something else as well, and again at full price: perhaps it was something the character didn't need, or it might have been a piece of junk not worth the money. Success means the bargaining succeeded, and the character paid less than the original asking price. A spectacular success — called a triumph (rolling a 20 on a 20-sided die) — means the character may pay even less than she would with a simple success, or the merchant may have thrown in something extra for free.

The Guide will likely play the parts of all characters not played by the players. The protagonists will encounter these supporting cast members during the game. The Guide may need to play the role of a shifty bandit, a dog in need of rescue, and even the roles of the monsters.

While being the Guide requires no acting talent, it is helpful if the Guide keeps the same things in mind as the players do about making their characters come alive. Doing so adds more fun to the game. Consider what the grieving mother wants, and how the highwaydog feels about her criminal profession. Even something as simple as the Guide putting on a hat or adopting an accent can add a touch of life to a character.

Remember that rolling dice should act as a feature to improve play with drama, luck, and chance. If the players are having fun and getting into their characters, the story, and the Guide's supporting cast and events, groups should consider leaving the dice rolling only until true moments of tension.

What IS Pugmire?

Pugmire is a game set far in the future of our world. In the past, humans used advanced science to expedite the evolution of certain animals, including the dog ancestors of *Pugmire*. Whether considered evolved or uplifted, they gained comparable intelligence to humans, walked upright on two legs naturally, and used paw-like hands with opposable thumbs to manage more tasks for their human masters.

At some point in the distant past something happened to all the humans. The dogs don't know the cause — war, famine, plague, or something else — but all humans left the planet. All the dogs know for sure is that Man vanished, and some of their amazing relics were left behind.

The dogs and other intelligent animals carried on as best they could. Their current level of culture and technology closely resembles our Earth from the Middle Ages: swords and spears are common weapons; travel overland is by foot, wagon, or on horseback; and for dogs at least, religion focuses on the mysterious humans and their Code of Man, the chief rule of that code being, "Be a Good Dog." Some dogs have a more flexible interpretation of what a "good dog" is than others, so there exists some conflict between dogs.

The remaining human relics are much like magic to the creatures of *Pugmire*. Figuring out how these ancient devices work and what they do is a challenge, and using them wisely is the next great difficulty. Shepherds from the Church of Man and innovative artisans help to decipher these mystical devices and their uses, which can be a source of mystery and wonder for the players and their characters. They can also be sources of amusement when the players realize the great magical oracle their characters need to consult is actually a computer running several familiar types of programs.

Example of Play

Jessa, Katz, and Dawn play characters in a *Pugmire* game run for them by Robert, their Guide. Jessa is playing the part of Trixie Corgi, Katz is playing Grip Pinscher, and Dawn is playing Neenah Corgi. Trixie Corgi is a hunter – a scout and explorer, Grip Pinscher is a guardian – a warrior and guide, and Neenah Corgi is an artisan – a crafter and magician. Robert announced that the group, exploring in the wilderness, discovers something.



Jessa: So, what do we see?

Robert: You see several barrels loaded onto a wagon. The wagon has no animals hitched to pull it – it's just parked in the middle of the road. There appears to be no one else around.



Katz: Grip Pinscher will walk up to the wagon to get a closer look.



Dawn: Neenah Foxhound will follow.



Jessa: Trixie Corgi is going to stay behind to keep a look-out for anything suspicious.

Robert: Okay. As Grip and Neenah get closer to the wagon, they need to make a Wisdom check to spot anything amiss. The difficulty is 13.



Dawn: I roll a 15 for Neenah, adding her proficiency bonus of +2 for having the Notice skill. My total is 17.



Katz: Grip rolls an 11. He doesn't have the Notice skill, so he gets no further bonus.

Robert: Neenah, you hear scratching coming from inside one of the barrels. Neenah's score was high enough that she can tell which barrel it is, too. As the two of you get closer to the wagon, you notice one of the barrels is open at one end, and something is moving around inside.



Dawn: Neenah raises a paw to signal to the others.



Katz: Grip readies his sword and shield.



Jessa: Trixie readies her bow.



Dawn: Neenah prepares the Magic Missile spell for casting.

Robert: All right. As Neenah and Grip get closer to the wagon, a head pops up out of the barrel. It's covered in grayish fur, lots of whiskers, and a narrow, pink nose. A pair of beady, black eyes fix on you, Neenah, and a squeaky voice asks, "Looking for something?" Then, the animal puts two fingers in its mouth, and a piercing whistle sounds. Everyone roll for initiative.





Dawn: Neenah rolls an 8.



Jessa: Trixie got a 14.



Katz: Grip rolls a 19! He's ready for whatever happens next!

Robert: Out of the woods come several creatures in weathered hunting clothes. They are small – smaller than all of you, at least, and they have the same features as the animal in the wagon.



Jessa: Rats!

Robert: Quite right. They are all rats, and the ones pouring from the forest with intimidating shrieks all have weapons drawn. Let's roll initiative dice for them: I have a 6, a 15, a 9, and an 11. Grip Pinscher has the highest score, so he goes first, then he gets to choose who acts next.



Katz: Grip attacks the closest rat to him.

Robert: That would be a scabrous rat with a dagger in either hand, its nose trailing snot as it runs.



Katz: I roll a 12 for Grip. Adding in his proficiency bonus of +2, Grip's score is a 14. Does that hit?

Robert: It does. Scabby is not wearing any armor. Roll your damage.





Katz: Okay, the damage from a longsword is 1d8, plus Grip's Strength modifier. I roll a 4! Grip also has a Strength of 14, which should give him an extra +2 damage, so 6 points, total.

Robert: A sword definitely benefits from extra strength, so you're correct, your bonus applies to damage. Poor Scabby tumbles to the ground bleeding. You can't tell if he's dead or only wounded. You get to choose who acts next!



Katz: I think Neenah should act now.



Dawn: Whew! Neenah holds up her focus, launching her Magic Missile spell at the nearest rat with a ranged weapon – we need to take out their archers so they have to get close to us, where we have an advantage. I don't need to roll to hit with Magic Missile, as it strikes unerringly. I do need to roll damage, though! I want the two glowing bolts to split between two attackers.

Robert: Roll, starting with the damage against the rat wielding a nasty slingshot. Damage for each of the missiles is 1d4+1.



Dawn: I roll a 1 on the first roll. With the +1 that makes 2 stamina points of damage to the rat with the sling. Second roll... a 4. With the +1 that equals 5. So 5 total points of damage to the second target. Trixie can follow my character's turn!

Robert: You take down a rat just preparing to draw a crossbow from his back! So, two rats are down. Jessa, Dawn picked Trixie to go next. A rat with jagged, overly long front teeth glowers at Trixie as he whispers what sounds like the words of a spell. What will she do?



What will Trixie do? Will the band of heroic dogs fight off the rats? Will they discover what was inside the barrels? Was this a trap all along, and was it meant for our heroes, or for someone else? These kinds of events make a journey from point A to point B exciting, dangerous, and rewarding. Perhaps the dogs will discover treasure in the wagon, or clues to a greater danger up ahead. Maybe they'll just rid the land of rat banditry. A game can go many ways, and it's up to the Guide and players to formulate the most fun game.



Some items are dangerous and destructive. There are rumors of animated suits of armor guarding sacred places, and stories of strange devices capable of generating intense temperatures and environmental effects. On the other paw, there are tales of wondrous healing devices, and scrying relics that show visions from the distant past. Learning what relics do and how they work is often worth the risk.

There are numerous strange and unusual creatures in *Pugmire*. Some creatures have undergone mutations, such as giant ants and giant spiders. Spirits of the dead and demons exist, particularly in the lonely places of the world. *Pugmire* can be a pretty dangerous place. Not all encounters are scary or dangerous, however: many can lead to new adventures and new discoveries no dog has ever experienced before — the kind of discoveries that can bring a dog fame and fortune enough to last the rest of her life. Adventure and glory are there for the taking for any dog brave enough to venture into the unknown!

How Do I Get Started?

You'll need to find some people to play the game with you. The person with the most experience playing tabletop roleplaying games should probably act as Guide, though if none of the group is experienced, the person most familiar with the rules should give it a try. Remember: this game is supposed to be fun for everyone. If you can't remember a rule exactly, do what makes the most sense to you, and look up the rule later. It's more important to keep the game moving than to stop the game to spend valuable gaming time looking up rules.

Step One: Find Players

You'll need one person as Guide, and two or more as players. Three to six players and a Guide is probably the sweet spot for gaming group size; the group is small enough that everyone can be heard and get some time in the spotlight, but not so small that the challenges have to be scaled back. Start with friends and family

first, as getting together for a game will be easier to manage. If that doesn't work, consider putting up a note at your local game store or searching forums, such as on <http://www.forum.theonyxpath.com> to find online games. Many game stores have bulletin boards for people looking for players to join a game. Put up a post to advertise that you're looking to join a group or to add another player or two to an existing group. Use an email address as your initial contact point. If you receive more interest than you can handle, don't be afraid to tell that person that your game is full.

Step Two: Find a Venue

If playing at your home isn't a good idea, try playing the game at your local game store — if the store has play space — or possibly even your local public library, a pub function room, or village hall.

Many civic buildings (and a lot of private drinking establishments) make private rooms available for use, but it's important to follow the rules of behavior for the building you use, and you may have to reserve the room in advance. This way you're gaming in a public place with other people around, which is always good when meeting new players.

Step Three: Read the Book

Pugmire is a game with a core concept that's quick and easy to grasp, and rules to govern character powers and limitations. Familiarizing yourself with what's in the book is important. You don't need to memorize every single word — just have a good picture in your head of what things are like when you enter the world of *Pugmire*. You'll need to have a good handle on how the rules work, but don't worry about knowing everything, especially the first time you play. The scenario in this book outlines all the basic rules you need to know.

Step Four: Acquire What You Will Need to Play

Each player will need a pencil, a sheet or two of scratch paper, and their filled-in character

sheet. Players require dice, but they can share until everyone buys their own set. Typically, players will need a set of dice including one each of a 4-sided, 6-sided, 8-sided, 10-sided, 12-sided, and two 20-sided dice. The 20-sided dice — also called "d20" for short — will be used most often, so those are most important. Sometimes players will have superstitions about their dice, such as not wanting other people to use them and "use up all the luck in the dice." Respect other people's wishes about their own property!

Most often, people will play games like *Pugmire* sitting around a table together, but sometimes that isn't possible. There are numerous ways to play even when not everyone is even in the same city; they all require a computer, tablet, or smart phone, and one of any number of different software programs — Skype, Roll20, and Google Groups exist as examples, at time of writing — so people can play together even when separated by thousands of miles. If all else fails, simply type "*Pugmire* RPG online group" into a search engine, and see what happens.

Tabletop roleplaying games can last for hours — it all depends on the complexity of the story. Games can last for years at two to four hours, one night a week. They can also be one-shots, lasting only a few hours and wrapping up the same day. It all depends on what the players and the Guide want to happen. If the players enjoy the game, hopefully a single session will turn into a chronicle — that's when the characters have a series of adventures. They finish one, sort out a few things, then go off on another quest.

What Happens Next?

If you're the Guide, read through the adventure part of this book and prepare for gameplay with your players! If you're a player, please stop reading here: the adventure will soon begin, and reading ahead will spoil the fun and surprises in store!

1. Prologue



Scenario

Summer has just passed in Pugmire, but the days are still long and warm in the realm of good dogs! Alas, they are not merry as they should be... During the spring, in fact, excessive flooding struck the land due to overly abundant winter rains. The Mire – a historic swamp surrounding Pugmire, long drained and dried – burst back into terrible life, the moisture level rising considerably. Thankfully it did not affect the well protecting the kingdom's capital. South of it, however, the overflowing water caused remarkable damage on the west bank of the river, turning acres of farmlands into sloughs, troubling farmers of all breeds.

On visiting the Plastic Quarter of Pugmire, you delve into the commercial heart of the kingdom, pulsing with the hopes and worries of dozens of resident merchants, scores of wandering peddlers, and hundreds of eager customers hailing from as far away as the Monarchies of Mau and other, less-known lands. As the autumn market runs in the souq, the main plaza and the streets converging into it are bright with colorful awnings and diverse stalls. Flags and wreaths of leaves festoon the interior of the Southern Gate, but this display of abundance is not entirely truthful. Many local shops exhibit a thin assortment of good with evidently high prices, and many poor dogs ask for charity from doorways and alleys. As you stroll around, you overhear the crowd and their displeasure at the decrease in crops, and the death of many farm animals.

On a wooden billboard near Southgate, where two bulldogs stand guard, a royal announcement warns the dog population against rat bandits. These nefarious rodents have been taking advantage of the flood to scavenge goods from abandoned farms. Apparently, the emboldened and greedy rats have also been mugging dog travelers and stealing cattle in the lands between the river and the South Road. The sign reads:

WARNING: RAMPAGING RATS

Citizens of Pugmire, fellow goods dogs, and honored guests of this city, an unusual wave of rat banditry has been reported. They are said to be stealing food, mugging travelers, and performing other illicit actions far beyond the flooded land west of the river, where their crimes started not long ago. Please exercise great caution on your purchases, and report any accident or anomaly to the authorities as soon as possible.

Princess Yosha Pug

In the mud beneath the sign, you spot a clothbound journal marked with the sigil of Pan Dachshund.

PLAY PAN'S GUIDE ON YOUTUBE!

Don't forget you can play through Pan's adventure via videos on YouTube in a "choose your own adventure" format. These can act as tips for upcoming events in the story, or as basic guidance on the system for this game.

Just search for "Pan's Guide Pugmire videos" on YouTube or Google, or check out <https://www.youtube.com/user/theonyxpath>



As the characters read the sign, the shorter bulldog guard mutters his disapproval of the rat bandits and her regret for not being assigned to hunting down those impudent scavengers. The other muscle-bound guard grunts that some devious cat must be masterminding the rat attacks, no doubt about that. Then, in a slightly mocking tone, the bulldogs ask the characters if they possess the guts and the ability to help the people of Pugmire. Striking a significant victory against the bandits would certainly earn them the favor of Princess Yosha and maybe even a special reward from her. The bulldogs tell the characters that all they need to do is to go the Pioneer compound

and ask for Pan Dachshund, a friend of Princess Yosha and the main recruiter of intrepid dogs. The guards add that the characters are in for luck, for the Royal Society of Pioneers is actively looking for new recruits, most likely to investigate the rat menace. They are unlikely to find someone who knows better about any tasks and rewards directly offered by Princess Yosha than Pan Dachshund.

Now the characters must only walk a few hundred yards from Southgate to the Pioneers to find about an exciting adventuring opportunity in the service of Pugmire!

Rules

When the characters encounter the bulldog guards in the introduction, the Guide may require a Charisma check to see if they convince the guards to offer them more information.

Checks — and any rolls in *Pugmire*, for that matter — require players to roll a 20-sided die (d20) to obtain a score indicating their success or failure at accomplishing the task. The player then adds their character's appropriate modifier — in this case, the number next to their overall Charisma ability — to the number rolled.

The difficulty to match or beat in this case is 10 — after all, these guards aren't very bright.

Example: Fred Basset is trying to get more information from the guards. He has a Charisma of 15, which gives him a +2 to his Charisma check. He rolls a 9, which normally would fail against a difficulty of 10, but because of his +2 bonus, his modified score is an 11. As the number to meet or beat is 10, he succeeds. The guards will now share more information with Fred.

If a character has an advantage (such as from a trick like Puppy Dog Eyes), their player rolls two d20s (2d20) when attempting any action. The player uses the higher of the two scores. If the character is ever put at a disadvantage by harm-

ful actions or negative environmental effects, the player rolls 2d20, and takes the lower of the two results.

A roll of a 20 on a d20 is called a triumph. Triumphs convey an even greater success than would be expected or required, such as a merchant giving away an item for free rather than accepting a haggled down price. A roll of 1 on a d20 is called a botch. A botch is the worst kind of failure, such as a spear not just clattering against a target's armor, but splintering and breaking in half upon contact. It is up to the Guide to narrate the effects of triumphs and botches.

In terms of the characters' attempt to charm the bulldogs, the additional information gleaned on a successful roll could be directions to the nearby Royal Society of Pioneers' compound, and the fact that they are actively recruiting pioneers.

Simply attempting a roll compels the guards to introduce themselves by name — the short one's name is Ludo, and her muscular companion's name is Risk. Giving small pieces of information as reward for dice rolling is a good way of encouraging experimentation with abilities, tricks, and fortune.

REMEMBER THE FORTUNE BOWL!

The first thing the Guide needs to do is to set up a fortune bowl, and add two points to it. The Guide should add fortune to the bowl whenever the group works as a team, or when players portray their characters well. Tell the players they can choose to intentionally fail a task. Each time they do this, the Guide should add a further fortune point to the bowl. All fortune goes to the bowl.

Whenever a player is in a tight spot, they can ask the rest of the group if they can use a fortune point from the bowl. If the group agrees, the fortune point goes from the bowl to the Guide. The fortunate player rerolls any die, and chooses the higher result from the two rolls.

Following the Pup



I'm not a superstitious dog, but some things make the fur on my neck stand on end. I'm not talking about the Unseen things that bring the bark out of even the stoutest of us. I'm talking about the petty things, seemingly mundane things. These are the things that, when viewed separately, don't seem like much, but when you finally add them together they paint a pretty vivid picture.

I've learned to pay attention to things like this. If you don't, you'll never grow old enough to have gray in your muzzle.

I first spotted the pup near the castle walls. He engaged one of the guards in conversation, something about riches and a rat army. I could tell from the way he dressed that he had no chance of getting in. He wore a stained and mud splattered tunic. He was armed with a short sword and an unstrung bow. From the way his battered leather satchel hung over his shoulder, you could tell it was nearly empty.

This was not the dress of someone hoping to gain a royal audience. Some of us can get away with looking like we just walked through the city gates, but those individuals are rare.

I came across him again in Westwall. I don't usually stroll through the Religious Quarter, but I had been in the city for a few days now and I was starting to feel antsy. Too much time behind the walls makes me long for a reason to get out and get grass beneath my paws again.

He was milling around outside of the Royal Society of Pioneers. He was pacing, but his eyes never left the door. Every once in a while, he would take a few steps towards it, then lose his nerve and go back to pacing.

I leaned against a building and watched him for a while, a smile on my face. I remember the first time I walked into the headquarters for the Royal Pioneers. Of course, I had already made a name for myself by then, not as famous as I am now, but still...

I had just about made up my mind to go over, bring the pup in, and introduce him around when he decided on his own. He turned abruptly and stalked off. I shrugged and, on a whim, followed him.

He headed south, into the souq. This was both the best and worst place to try to tail someone. The hodgepodge way the vendors set up shop means there are few straight paths, making it difficult to keep an eye on someone. However, the merchants' booths do offer great hiding places if the person you're following should turn around to see if she is being followed.

The pup I was shadowing never turned around to check his tail.

We weaved our way through the shopkeepers with their stalls and the dealers with their rugs of exotic merchandise. I waved off offer after offer while the merchants largely ignored my quarry.

2. Introducing Pan Dachshund

Scenario

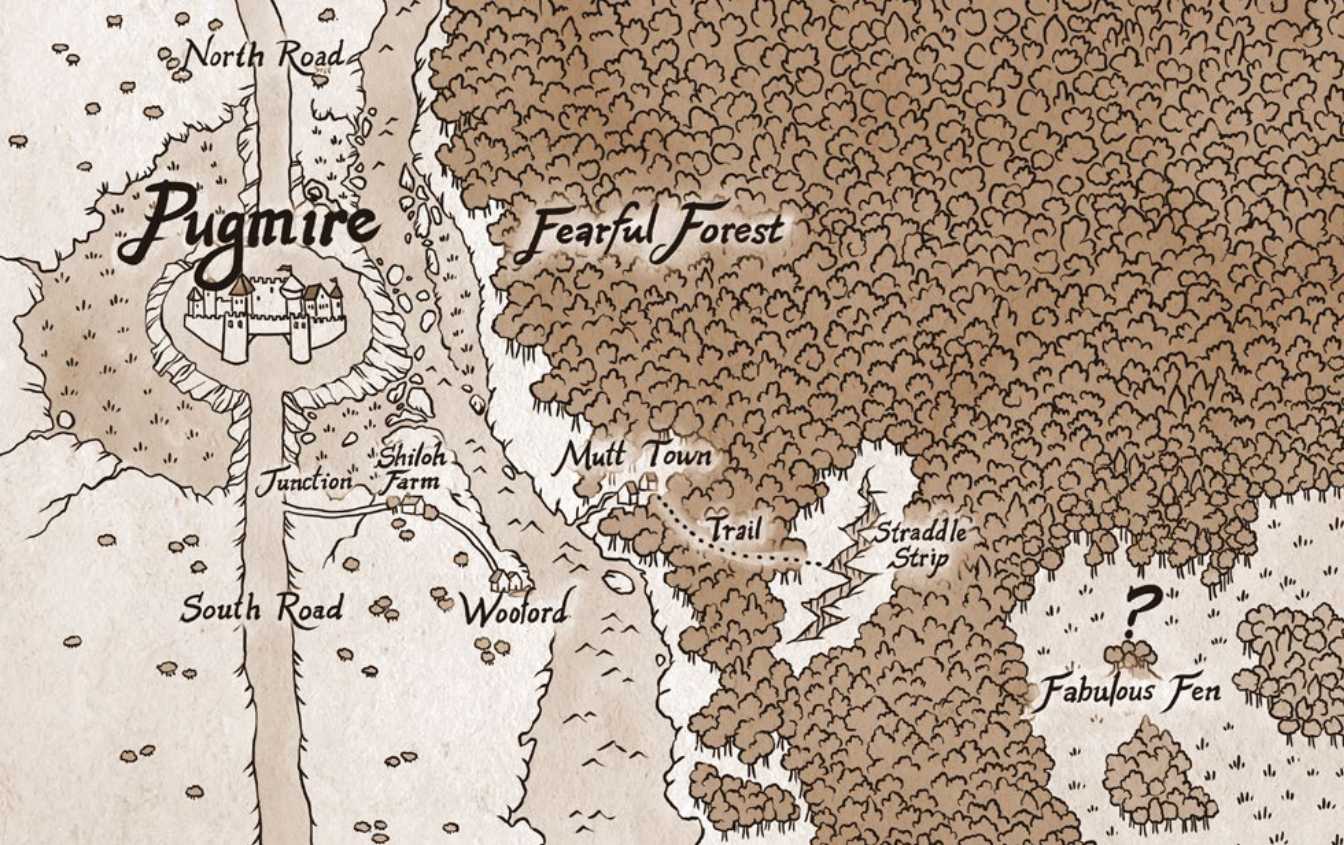
As you walk toward the Pioneers' compound, bays and grunts of a few dogs greet you as they train for melee combat in one of the clustered buildings. Past the entrance, as you walk through the hall leading inside, you see a blacksmith and a warehouse-dog hard at work repairing and storing adventuring gear and supplies. Finally, in the inner courtyard, you see a grizzled dachshund sitting at a small table, upon which rest a well-worn book, a quill, and an inkwell. The dog is sharpening an arrowhead on a whetstone. As he lowers his head to give a good lick to the whetstone, he notices you, stands, folds his arms, and looks at you up and down. "Well, pups, let

me guess. You are here to join the Society, yes? Now tell me, who gave you this idea?"

The characters can answer Pan's question saying that they simply want to join following their own initiative. This answer pleases the dachshund, and he proudly says self-initiative is a very important quality in pioneers.

The characters can also say the guards directed them to the compound. In this case, Pan wrinkles his nose and says the Society does not employ bulldog barkers at the front door. He then asks in turn if the characters know the names of their military advisors.





In this case, knowing the name of one of the guards – Ludo or Risk – elicits Pan’s praise for another excellent quality pioneers possess: inquisitiveness.

Pan is brusque in dealing with would-be recruits, but maintains a friendly attitude. He’s eager to welcome aspiring pioneers. He asks them to sit at the table and writes their names in the Society’s register as members-on-trial. Pan then explains their first task:

Pan puts away arrowhead and whetstone, and looks intently at you. “You came here to help us against the rat bandits, perhaps, but I think they’re a nuisance more than anything else. What really worries me, and Princess Yosha, is another problem. In the past weeks, many young dogs, some of them inexperienced and ill-equipped, went to explore the woods east of Mutt Town, that rough frontier settlement east of the river. They set out to find a legendary site of Man, the Fabulous Fen, and never returned.

“This long-lost place is thought to be where Saint Akbash, a holy dog of yore, found the source of his healing power. The spring flood impoverished many of the dogs, so they went looking for the fen. They were desperate to find treasure to rebuild their farms and pay their debts. Some self-styled followers of Saint Akbash sparked this rush. These so-called

‘holy dogs’ were selling replicas of his divine symbol, saying they would bring good luck in the search for the site. I went to look for this place myself, but I couldn’t locate it. Now, I wonder if you can perform this investigation. I have three objectives for you: find out about the missing dogs, thoroughly map your journey, and discover the Fabulous Fen, or proof of its existence. Achieving any of these feats will stand you in good stead.”

The dachshund is willing to negotiate a monetary reward to get dogs on board.

Pan gives the characters a rough wilderness map he drafted to help them in their journey, and gives them permission to keep his journal, if they attempt to return it. He advises that it contains useful information about their coming journey.

To begin, he says, they will need to walk along a path overlooking the west bank until they reach a suitable spot to cross the river to Mutt Town. Although the area is dangerous due to the rat rampage, they will probably be able to find hospitality in one of the dog farms undamaged by the flood. Pan says to be wary of the followers of Saint Akbash, who have no genuine connection to the Church of Man and might be well conspiring with the rat bandits.

Rules

Now is a good time for the Guide to encourage players to roleplay or talk like their characters. Accents are not required, though some players find them useful to adopt for getting into their characters. Guides might want to gently advise players that by playing their character, rather than themselves, they may encounter fun, unexpected scenes.

In this chapter, the characters meet Pan Dachshund, legendary adventurer. If the characters attempt to haggle reward money from Pan, the Guide can introduce a Charisma check as in the Prologue section. Succeeding at this check means Pan takes a liking to the characters, and will display generosity in his offer.

Fast-Talk, Charming Discourse, and Puppy Dog Eyes convey an advantage. To use these tricks, the players roll 2d20 and take the higher of the two rolls, as noted in the previous chapter.

PAN DACHSHUND

Defense: 13 (crested leather armor)

Stamina Points: 11

Speed: 30/40 feet

Proficiency Bonus: +2

Abilities: Strength: +0 (10), Dexterity: +2 (15), Constitution: +1 (13), Intelligence: +2 (14), Wisdom: +2 (14), Charisma: -1 (8)

Skills: Know Nature, Notice, Survive, Traverse

Attack: Bite (+2 melee, 1d4-1 piercing damage), rapier (+4 melee, 1d8 piercing damage, finesse), longbow (+4 ranged, 1d8 piercing damage)

The Guide should ask if any characters have the Know Religion or Know History skills. If so, the Guide should prompt them to make skill checks to pick up a potentially useful tidbit from Pan's explanation of their mission. All of these skills are based on Intelligence, so any modifier from Intelligence adds to the d20 roll. The difficulty is 10.

If any characters succeed, they may have heard of the Fabulous Fen before in history lessons, or come across Saint Akbash's name in their religious studies. These aren't crucial bits of information, but calling out the possibility for checks helps make players more aware of the kinds of things their characters' skills and abilities do.

WHAT ARE SKILLS?

All characters possess skills on their character sheet. Unlike abilities, characters have skills or they do not. There is no grade of expertise per skill. Instead, if a character is attempting an action and has a skill that might benefit the action, the player rolls her character's proficiency bonus, detailed on her character sheet.

The bonus applies to any rolls involving skills on the player's character sheet. Guides should encourage their players to become familiar with their characters' skills, as they can make or break a challenge.

Pan is included as an emergency aid for the players. He is bound to take an interest in what they do; in fact, he might just follow them to help the group if they get into too much trouble. Try to use him sparingly. The characters and their players should not learn to rely on Pan's intervention regularly. Besides, Pan is a busy dog — he has things to do! However, Pan's journal is very useful: any time players consult the journal before giving up or asking for help, the Guide should consider adding one fortune to the fortune bowl as a reward for using available resources.

TWO SPEEDS?

Some characters have two speeds noted in their stat blocks. In Pan's case, he has Speed: 30/40 feet. On two legs, the character uses the first figure. In one turn, Pan can move 30 feet if he remains upright. If a character drops whatever happens to be in their front paws and falls to all fours, that character can use the second figure for speed. Pan can move 40 feet on all fours.

Some creatures, such as spiders and ants, use all limbs at once, and will only have one figure in their stat blocks. Dogs, rats, cats, and badgers can travel at different speeds depending on the number of legs they're using.

Tavern Talk



I wasn't really surprised when the pup turned into the Hunter's Haven. I was starting to suspect I knew at least a little about what spurred him. The pup stood in the doorway, one paw on the door. I leaned against the wall of the building opposite and took a moment to size him up. Up to that point, I had only glimpses and a general notion of my quarry.

He was a big brute of a mutt whose clothing had seen better days. He wore the homespun clothing of a farmer, or at least someone who didn't spend a lot of time or plastic in town. He'd tucked a blade into his belt, less of a short sword and more of a large carving knife from the look of the handle, and he grasped what first appeared to be an unstrung bow tightly in his fist. But as I looked closer, I could see that the bow wasn't simply unstrung; the top third of it was snapped off.

Despite his size and build, he was barely old enough for his ears to stand on their own. I was already moving toward him when he set his shoulders and pushed into the tavern.

"I've heard that a dog in need can sometimes get a meal on credit?" His voice was thin. Underneath all that mud was a whole lot of youth. The bartender cocked an eyebrow at him.

"What kind of credit?" he asked. "Is there the promise of plastic in the future? If so, how far into the future?"

"Not far. I just need time to get to the Fabulous Fen, but before I can go, I'll need..."

By this time the bartender had turned his back on the would-be adventurer. I strode in behind him and placed my arm over his shoulder.

"No need to worry about credit. The lad's with me."

The barkeep turned back, saw me standing beside the pup, and grunted. It wouldn't do for him to show how impressed he was in front of all the other patrons; it would be bad for business. Still, I could see the admiration in his eyes.

I steered the sputtering pup towards my table. There are no designated areas inside the Haven, at least not official ones. Still, the cats and rats tend to stick to their own when they're there, something we're all grateful for. I've never had to challenge anyone for the spot I like best. When people see me coming, they just get up and move on their own. There was no one at the table at the time, but had there been, they would have gladly surrendered it to me. Or perhaps they would have made room and stayed behind to hear me speak.

It's one of the perks of being that rarity of rarities – an old hunter. Once word gets around that you've taken on the Badger King and wear his teeth as trophies... well, it earns one respect.

I took my place behind the table, my back to a sturdy beam, the wall behind me, and clear sight lines of the door, the bar, and the far corners of the room. I gestured to one of the open chairs.

The mutt stood there, mouth agape.

I gestured again, affirming and insistent. "Well, come on, pup, have a seat. You look as if you've travelled far and need a lick of assistance."

"Thank you for your courtesy," he mumbled, then spent a moment fumbling between his seat and his gear, looking for a way to sit comfortably with the blade in his belt. Finally, he removed it and placed it on the floor next to his broken bow.

"I'm sorry for my rudeness," apologized the earnest pup. "My Aunt taught me better than that. I am Sampson Mutt."

"Pleased to make your acquaintance. I am Pan Dachshund."

Sampson offered a meek smile. "It's a pleasure to meet you, sir."

"Of course it is," I chortled, slapping the table and raising a paw to order a round for us both. "Now, tell me what's brought you so far from home."

3. Approaching the River



Scenario

After setting off from Pugmire in the early hours of a hazy morning, you walk several miles on the South Road, which is empty as per usual after the arrival of so many traveling merchants in the past days. The massive embankment on which the road runs protected it from the flood and shielded large expanses of enclosed paddies west of Pugmire, where industrious rice farmers are even now at work to wrap up the harvest season. Near midday, a freezing wind rises from the north and clouds roll in to darken the sun. A light rain falls as you near the limit of Pugmire's wetlands. There, at the junction with a path leading east, stands a two-horse wagon loaded with household goods. A family of a dozen traveling dogs have stopped for a meal on their way and now busy themselves raising a canopy over their packed goods. The dogs notice you and seem anxious only for a moment before one of them approaches with her paw raised in welcome.

The dog is a middle-aged farmer named Chewstick Poodle, who decided to abandon her damaged farm and move her family to the safety of Pugmire. Chewstick warns the characters of the hostile rats prowling along the river, nimbly treading the mud and swimming in the shallow waters. She heard that some of them, those least savage from the bunch of barely uplifted rodents, tried to find jobs with a notorious rat boss in Mutt Town, but were turned down for their laziness. They resorted to banditry thereafter.

Chewstick knows the most convenient way to the river and Mutt Town. She suggests the dogs take the path branching off the South Road to the east and follow it as it runs on a crest overlooking the flooded farmlands. Staying on high ground, the characters should be able to camp in

safety for the upcoming night. After another day or so of walking along the path, the characters should reach the farm of Blum Shiloh, a brave farmer still holding her ground against the bandit menace, who can provide a safe shelter for the night. After offering her directions and inquiring about the road ahead, Chewstick and her family wave goodbye and move on, following the road from whence the adventurers came.

Your long walk proceeds in mist and drizzle as the path runs along the top of a chain of steep slopes. Beyond the slopes, the swollen river has flooded the squalid west bank, inundating fields, uprooting bushes and trees, and partly collapsing buildings. At last, the rains subside as the shadows of the trees grow longer and the setting orange sun dully sinks beyond the horizon.

The characters need to camp in the open for their first night out. Staying on high grounds, as Chewstick suggested, is the best thing to do. As they rest in the late evening, however, a pack of rat bandits climbs the slopes from the lowlands to attack them.

Ominous rustling sounds and muffled paw steps disturb your well-deserved rest. From the leafy darkness around your camp, you glimpse several pairs of wild, malignant eyes. Then, several rats, dressed in rags and menacing sharpened sticks hasten out from the shadows toward you. Their squeaky voices screech: "Go back whence you came, you wet-dog stinkers. This land is ours now!"

The rats are hungry cowards looking for easy targets. They attack with impromptu, inaccurate projectiles, like rotten fruit, wooden planks from



broken boxes, and the occasional rock. They are, however, too weak and cowardly to put up a serious aggression, and any offensive reaction from

our heroes exhausts the rats in seconds. After chasing the rats away, the characters can finally rest until dawn and a new day of adventure.

Rules

The wet, slippery conditions are not ideal for travel, and these adverse conditions will cause the loss of a stamina point from each character.

Guides should call for a Dexterity check, as characters risk falling in the mud, particularly along the crest trails mentioned in this section. The difficulty to match or beat for this check is 10, and any Dexterity modifier will apply to the roll. Characters are at a disadvantage on this roll, so remember players need to roll 2d20 and keep the lowest result. Characters who succeed keep their footing. Those who fail will be damp and dirty for the rest of the day. The chill from this will wear away one additional Stamina point until the character rests and recovers under cover.

Using occasional hints and suggestions, the Guide can help guide the players along the path to the most useful choices. Chewstick's greeting and cordial conversation should reassure the players of his friendly intent toward their characters.

There are several useful pieces of information to be gleaned from Chewstick Poodle. By now, the players should understand that this is a dangerous mission, and have their characters act appropriately. If the characters act friendly towards Chewstick and his family, obtaining this information requires no rolls. Otherwise, the Guide should call for a Charisma check against a difficulty of 12.

At night, the characters encounter a band of ill-equipped rat bandits who attempt to steal their goods. If the characters did not work out a schedule among themselves to keep watch, let the rats make off with a few relatively unimportant items from the dogs' rucksacks. It's a good lesson to the players that their characters need to pay attention, but it's important to not punish them severely.

The number of rats the characters encounter is two more than the number of characters in the party. So if there are three characters, they should face five hapless rat bandits.

Since this is the first combat in the story, everyone will need to roll for initiative. Every player rolls 1d20, and adds their character's Dexterity modifier to the number rolled. At this time, the Guide also rolls for the non-player characters' initiative. The character with the highest score acts first, then their player chooses the character who acts next, and so on until all parties involved in the combat have either acted or fallen unconscious.

A player or the Guide may choose to interrupt the elected initiative order, either by paying one fortune from the fortune bowl, or in the case of the Guide, by adding one fortune to the bowl. The character who interrupted now acts as if they were next in line to take their turn, and when finished, that character chooses who goes next. Well-timed use of an interrupt can help turn the tide of combat if things are going poorly.

An attack or other action simply requires the acting player to roll 1d20 and add the appropriate modifier on their character sheet to determine the result. Note that the dogs will be rolling against a difficulty of 13 on attacks (the rats have a defense rating of 13 due to their armor and Dexterity modifier). Attempts to intimidate will be against a difficulty of 9 (10 + the rats' Wisdom modifier of -1). One successful blow will drive the rats away.

The Guide should calculate damage from any rat attacks. To do this, check the rats' stats

and look for the attack section. Each weapon or attack type listed will state how much damage the attack deals. The Guide rolls the die type specified, and then deducts the total from the target's stamina points.

Example: Fred Basset and Trixie Beagle battle four rats. Trixie's player rolls the highest initiative with a 16, so she acts first. She attacks one of the rats but fails her roll. She may now do one thing, and at the end of her turn, she will automatically regain reaction to be ready for her next turn. Trixie picks Fred to go next, in the hope that he can incapacitate one of the rats so there are fewer attackers. At this point, the Guide could interrupt by paying one token to the fortune bowl to have one of the rats attack next instead of Fred, but this is optional.

Guides may wish to have the opponents call a truce and offer to leave in exchange for a bribe: money, tools, or weapons.

PATHETIC RAT BANDITS

Defense: 13 (patchwork leather armor)

Stamina Points: 4

Speed: 10/30 feet

Proficiency Bonus: +2

Abilities: Strength: -1 (8), Dexterity: +2 (15), Constitution: +0 (10), Intelligence: -1 (8), Wisdom: -1 (8), Charisma: +0 (10)

Skills: Sneak

Attack: Bite (-1 melee, 1d4-1 piercing damage)

Darkvision: These rats can see without any light at all. Characters using Darkvision in darkness can only see in black and white. They cannot see things they wouldn't be able to see in light, such as invisible characters.

Distracting Attack: After a successful attack, instead of doing damage, the rat can pick her target's rucksack. The rat may take a single one-pawed item the target is not currently holding in his paws.

The rats are poorly armed and any threat will drive them off. If the characters injure any rats, their comrades will carry them to safety as they retreat.

On the Road



"Not here," the cautious pup sighed. "It's not safe. There could be listening ears anywhere."

Another long moment passed. Sampson's muzzle twitched, a crease formed between his eyes. He inhaled, sat up straight, and looked me in the eye. His face was set; he had come to a difficult decision.

"I have reason to believe I can find the Fabulous Fen and the treasures held within. I'll tell you the rest, but only on the road to Wooford. Agree to join me and I'll tell you all."

I glared at him. "Dogs of my station are not used to dealing with ultimatums."

That almost broke him. His eyes softened, but just for a moment. He steeled himself again, then shook his head.

"If you agree to accompany me, then you'll need to know what we'll face. You'll get the whole story on the road. If you don't, I'd just be wasting your time and mine."

I kept my face stoic, but cheered inwardly. This pup had moxie. "I am intrigued. Meet me at the South Gate when the sun has risen."

I made sure Sampson had the plastic to pay for a good night's lodging, then bade him a good night. I left with his promises of paying me back fivefold when we found the Fabulous Fen.

I retired to a room above the tavern. I penned a quick note to my Trustee with the Pioneers, stating I was leaving for Mutt Town. In the morning, I would find someone to carry it to the castle for me.

At dawn, I found Sampson waiting inside the gate. The pup was practically bouncing at the sight of me. Side-by-side, we fell into step and exited the city with the first group of travelers leaving by the South Gate. This included a caravan which, having sold its goods in Pugmire, was returning home.

"We fear to cross the forest alone, hence the dogs we surround ourselves with." Fawzi Chuckwalla strode along the side of the rearmost wagon. His bright vermilion and purple robes matched the riot of colors that made up the covers of the wagons in his train. As soon as the sun had risen above the treeline, he pushed back his hood to bask in its wane light.

"The Fearful Forest has always had some modicum of danger," I observed, making conversation. "What's changed to make you so wary now?"

Fawzi turned his yellow eyes towards me. "We have heard rumors of monsters, monsters the likes of which even the bandits fear to face."

I raised an eyebrow.

"Do not scoff, Pan Dachshund."

"I beg your pardon," I soothed. "I do not question what you have heard, nor do I question the existence of the unexplainable. I have fought and killed many monsters myself."

Fawzi Chuckwalla smiled. "Of this, we have heard. Your name is legendary along the paths we travel. We are well met." He nodded at me, then at Sampson who trailed a few paces behind.

"We would be grateful if you and your young squire would join our convoy. We could pay you well for your time."

"I thank you for the offer, but I fear our paths lie in a different direction."

The lizard ducked his head. "We feared it would be so. Still, we had to ask. Safe travels to you and your companion."

Fawzi picked up his pace, reached up to one of the carts and swung aboard. Sampson trotted up next to me. "Did you find out anything interesting?"

I had told him to hang back so I could converse with the head of the caravan alone. Glad to learn that the pup was a good dog, I obliged him by answering his question. "Just that in addition to the bandits, there are apparently monsters to deal with."

Eager Sampson bobbed his head so vigorously I thought he might knock out his own tooth.

4. The Shilohs

Scenario

The clear weather brings a whiff of fresh-smelling air and a pleasant relief from humidity over the inundated land extending to your left as you walk southwest through the moors. Late in the morning, the river and the dark woodlands beyond become visible. The landscape, however, is desolate, with no settlements in sight for miles. As the afternoon dwindles on, a descent in the trail brings you to the margin of a large morass, which once was an expanse of cultivated land. Farther ahead, beyond a cluster of deserted pens, a grassy knoll rises over its muddy surroundings. At its peak, beside a well-tended orchard of apple trees, stands a neat, white farmhouse. As you make your way towards it, you hear the shout of a pitchfork-wielding, burly dog with a grizzled coat standing at the entrance: "Who goes there?"

The old dog is Big Blum Shiloh. Although her house safely stands on high ground, most of her assets were located near to the river, in flatlands now awash with mud. The recent troubles put a strain on her and her courtesy. Once dialogue eases her suspicion, Big Blum gladly invites the characters into her house.

As twilight falls, you sit indoors at a large table before a roaring fireplace to share a meal with Big Blum Shiloh, her husband Birill, their three daughters, and a few servants. The meagerness of the supper fits the situation of the household, although they strive to make you feel welcome, offering you the best they have. The only available drink besides rainwater is a strong tea, and Big Blum apologizes for not being able to offer beer. At the end of the meal, Birill bumps his wife with an elbow, urging her to talk to you about the family's woes.

Big Blum and her family are in severe distress not only over the flood that decimated their livestock and destroyed their crops, but also over the disappearance of their only son, Little Plum. The young dog's father, Birill, is especially worried about her puppy.

The damage of the flood forced the Shilohs to borrow money from a rat boss named Trimbu. Big Blum asked for just a small sum to buy food, but in the following months, as she was unable to raise adequate revenue, she fell behind with the repayments. She's since been harassed by Trimbu's goons.

One day, Big Blum's only son, a young dog barely come of age, left the house to purchase supplies in Wooford on behalf of his mother. Instead of returning home, however, Little Plum had the supplies delivered to his family by a friendly rat named Puntail, and set out on a dangerous journey to find enough treasure to repay his mother's debt.

Puntail also brought a letter from the young dog to his mother. In the letter, Little Plum said he had acquired an "Akbash talisman," a holy symbol of a dog-sage of old which was said to bring good luck to anyone searching for the Fabulous Fen, the legendary treasure trove in the wilderness east of Mutt Town. Puntail told Big Blum how Little Plum received the talisman from two wandering followers of Akbash.

Big Blum fears the worst for her dear son. Perhaps the characters can help?

As they interact with the Shilohs, the characters might notice that the youngest of Little Plum's sisters, a child named Pistilla, seems eager to talk to them but far too shy to initiate a



conversation. If spoken to kindly, she takes out of her smock a piece of cinnamon she received from Little Plum as a gift. Pistilla says that Little Plum had two of those, and kept one so that he and his sister could find each other following its

strong aroma, in case they lost each other. Pistilla is willing to offer her cinnamon stick as a lucky charm to a good dog expressing confidence in finding her brother.



Rules

The characters encounter Big Blum Shiloh and her family at their farm. They discover the best way to get to Mutt Town, and obtain a contact who can both help them cross the river and provide more information: Puntail the rat. They also find out about the missing Little Plum Shiloh and the charlatan followers of Akbash who conned him into spending his family's scant cash reserves to buy a worthless talisman. Little Plum is on the same mission as the party members, and this gives them something else to keep in mind as they travel.

There is a tiny moral quandary the players might consider: the Shiloh family is in dire straits, with barely enough food to survive and mounting debts to repay to a rat moneylender. For their characters to refuse the family's hospitality would be insulting and rude, but it's also generosity the Shilohs can hardly afford. How can the characters repay the family's kindness? Will they even worry about it? Hunters in the group might be able to bring back some wild game for the family's table, or the characters may decide to "forget" some items that the family might be able to use or sell, such as torches, rope, or a few arrows. Money would be useful to the family to help pay their debts, but the family is much too proud to take cash in exchange for hospitality they gave willingly. The Guide should award fortune if players identify and cleverly navigate this predicament.

Deft players might also discover where Big Blum keeps her valuables and slip a few extra coins into her purse while no one is watching. For this action, the players must make a Dexterity check. If any possess the Sneak skill, they can add the proficiency bonus on to their die roll, along with any Dexterity ability modifier. The difficulty is 12 to slip the money into place without anyone noticing. If the characters fail, someone notices their slipping money into the purse, and the character must leave to avoid suspicion. On a botch, the witness catches the character holding the coin purse, and loudly suspects them of stealing from the family. In this case, the group receives orders to leave the house.

Pistilla is nervous about approaching the group. To determine her intentions, the Guide should ask a character to make a Wisdom check against a difficulty of 13. The Sense Motive skill would assist in this attempt. If approached, Pistilla explains herself and hands over the cinnamon stick. An Intelligence check against a difficulty of 14 tells the characters that cinnamon, as well as being tasty, is a natural deterrent to bugs and may assist in keeping their campsite safe down the road. The skills Know Nature and Survive are good examples of skills players can utilize to modify their roll.



Sampson's Tale



We parted ways with the lizard caravan when we turned took the road to Wooford. I had half expected another entreaty from Fawzi Chuckwalla to join his group, but they simply rode on, not even turning to wave goodbye.

"All right," I said, turning to Sampson. "We've got the road to ourselves now. Tell me about this Fabulous Fen of yours."

Despite being the only dogs visible in any direction, Sampson turned a full 360 degrees before speaking. "They say that rats control all of the crime along the coastal regions. Gambling, money laundering, you name it."

I kept my muzzle tightly shut. I had seen others use outsiders as scapegoats before. I suspected the people furthering these rumors were actually the lowlife dogs committing the crimes the rats were being accused of, but I said nothing.

"There are bandits in the Fearful Forest," Sampson went on so low that I had to lean in further to hear him. "I don't know if they are rats, cats, or bad dogs, but I don't dare use the symbol of Akbash on my own. Anything I removed from the Fabulous Fen would be stripped from me before I reached the edge of the forest."

I agreed with him there. There were horrible stories of the Fearful Forest. I had personally heard tales of gangs of marauders harrying merchant convoys. There was also the ever-present threat of mystic cats performing their necromantic deeds deep in the northern woods.

Still, I gave little credence to rumor and tall tales.

"Tell me more about the Fabulous Fen and how this trinket will allow you to find it. I've heard no dog can discover its location. I've even heard it moves from one place to another to ensure its isolation." More ridiculous nonsense, but I wanted to draw Sampson out. He rose to the bait.

"No, the Fen's location is static, just difficult to find. Almost impossible. Unless you have one of these."

He reached into his pocket and pulled out a stone disk set with an ornamental gem and inscribed with some sort of arrow. I leaned forward and sniffed. It was weird, but inert. I flicked at it, and got no response.

"With this, a traveler of good heart who follows the teachings of Man can cross the wilderness and discover the location of the Fabulous Fen. Once there, well, hopefully there would be enough plastic to rebuild the docks and repair my family's boats.

"At least, that's what the rats say.

"There are two ways to the Fabulous Fen. One, the easier path, involves crossing a river of stone constructed eons ago by Men. That way is guarded by a horrible beast that swoops down and eats any dog who dares attempt to navigate it."

His voice returned to a normal tone as he warmed up to the subject.

"The other, the path of the good dog, lies across a marsh or swamp. You have to prove your worth to find the way, but will be rewarded if you are worthy."

I let all this bounce around in my head as we walked. We passed farms, each looking more ragged than the previous. Some families had salvaged some of their crops. Other fields sat moldering, the plants' root systems sitting in watery mud. A makeshift fence penned in what was probably a small portion of the original livestock. Once bright houses were battered, paint peeling or obscured by dirt and debris.

These were the people who would benefit most from any riches or magic items found in the Fabulous Fen. I could make sure of that.

I nodded to Sampson. He nodded back.

No words were needed.

5. Crooks in Wooford



Scenario

After some hours of wet travel, you catch your first glimpse of Wooford around the bend, as the river, now very close and still impressive with the past rains, hums by in dubious placidity. Ahead of you sits a small village built on sturdy stilts. These props spared most of the buildings from the recent flood. The village moors have been destroyed. Only some of them seem to be under reconstruction, while most of the local boats rest safely on the stilt platforms.

As the characters approach the village, a few dogs busy themselves with their rowboats and nets at the conclusion of their fishing day, and a big timber barge moves slowly away on the misty surface of the river.

After climbing a wood-paved ramp up to the town proper, you emerge in a tiny square. Among huts perched on the stilts and dwindling stairway-like alleys, before a homely tavern, you notice a couple of tall dogs dressed in habits sitting on a low, dry-stone wall. Next to them, planted on the ground, is a standard painted with the frontal image of a benign-looking dog with a ring of light surrounding his head. Before them rests a folding table with a heap of palm-sized wooden disks and a piggy-bank. The two dogs sport friendly smiles and eagerly greet passers-by, who are gathering at the tavern for a late afternoon meal. When someone walks by, they show their standard with an ample gesture and say: "Find real treasure through ancient wisdom! Let Saint Akbash guide you to the Fabulous Fen!"

The two dogs are Bay Catalan and Fos Saluki. The first is an averagely built dog with small eyes and floppy bangs, while the second is tall, pale and skinny, with incredibly long hair. The icon-like painted, haloed dog, as a caption on the

standard states, is Saint Zaval Akbash. Bay and Fos sell replicas of the saint's talisman, supposed to bring luck to anyone searching for the Fabulous Fen. Bay and Fos are also spies and touts for Trimbu, who makes beneficial use of their skills at befriending other dogs.n

The two greet the characters and tell them about Saint Akbash and the legend of the Fabulous Fen, promptly offering them a replica talisman in exchange for some bartered goods. According to the legend, Saint Akbash first traveled to the Straddle Strip, a canyon in the forest, which acts as boundary between the material and the spiritual world. From there, he traveled until he reached his goal, guided by a beacon of light. The talismans are powerless items of superstition, but any spellcaster can recognize some resemblance to true artifacts of Man in their shape, carved out of pinewood.

When the characters question the crooks, they readily acknowledge that they sold one of their talismans to a young, brave dog named Little Plum Shiloh, who likely crossed the river a few weeks before to search for the Fabulous Fen. As they speak to the characters, feigning religious enthusiasm, Bay tends to grin between every single sentence and Fos plays continuously with what sounds like a bag of plastic coins under his habit.

Beside superstitious nonsense, the crooks reluctantly tell the characters the original talisman of Akbash is now the property of none other than Trimbu, whom they call a "rat entrepreneur" in Mutt Town. The characters can obtain this information through buying one of their replicas, or they can extort it with threats. If disgruntled, the crooks prefer to talk their way out of the confrontation, and depart. If pressed, they become hostile quickly, and are ready to fight with their walking



sticks. They can also count on some rogues from the nearby tavern to help them in case of trouble.

At some time during the encounter, Puntail, the good boat-rat from Wooford who delivered

Little Plum's message to his father, appears to support the characters vocally or to lend them a paw in a brawl. The good rat then invites the characters to his home.



Rules

The characters make their way to Wooford, and here they encounter the charlatans selling fake talismans of Saint Akbash. If the characters play along, offering small donations of two or more plastic coins, the two crooks — Bay Catalan and Fos Saluki — will share some information with them, most of which is either simply bogus or dangerously false. If one of the players purchases a fake talisman for ten coins, the two crooks will be downright friendly, and will share everything they know. The hints about the terrain to expect along the route are accurate and will be helpful, even if the characters don't take the two hustlers' advice on how to overcome these natural obstacles. To differentiate between truth and falsehoods, players may make a Wisdom check with a difficulty of 15. A character with the Sense Motive skill can use it to add her proficiency bonus to the roll. On a success, they'll be able to sort the real details from the made-up ones.

Should the characters decide to fight Fos and Bay, they're in for trouble. If the characters outnumber the two scoundrels, or if they get the upper hand quickly in combat, Fos and Bay will call for help, summoning Leeta Weimaraner and a few rats from a nearby tavern. If there are only one or two protagonists involved, Fos and Bay will handle things themselves. Leeta brings one or more rats with her if needed. The total number of opponents should ideally not exceed the number of aspirant pioneers. Leeta uses the same statistics as Bay Catalan, though they are separate characters.

These back-up thugs will join the fight in 1d4+1 rounds after being called. If things go badly for the crooks, Fos and Bay will flee, leaving any remaining colleagues to their fate.

The key detail in this section is that Trimbu the rat boss has the real Talisman of Akbash, and that Trimbu may be found in Mutt Town at the Cheeserake. That the talisman might be for sale is also a key tidbit of information. The characters need this information about the talisman; if they don't sweet talk Fos and Bay, or beat it out of them, one of the two (probably Bay Catalan) will let it slip during the conversation, only to be elbowed in the ribs by Fos Saluki.

BAY CATALAN (AND LEETA WEIMARANER)

Defense: 10

Stamina Points: 6

Speed: 30/40 feet

Proficiency Bonus: +2

Abilities: Strength: +2 (15), Dexterity: +0 (10), Constitution: +2 (14), Intelligence: +1 (13), Wisdom: +1 (12), Charisma: -1 (8)

Skills: Sneak, Survive

Keen Observer: Bay gains an advantage on all Wisdom checks involving hearing, sight, or smell.

Attack: Plain Walking Stick (+4 melee, 1d4+2 bludgeoning)

FOS SALUKI

Defense: 12

Stamina Points: 5

Speed: 35/50 feet

Proficiency Bonus: +2

Abilities: Strength: +0 (10), Dexterity: +2 (15), Constitution: -1 (8), Intelligence: +1 (12), Wisdom: +1 (13), Charisma: +2 (14)

Skills: Bluff, Sneak

Speedy Runner: Fos gets an advantage on all Dexterity checks having to do with running or being involved in a chase. Also, the character's speed is increased to 35 feet (or 50 feet while running on all fours).

Attack: Jeweled Mace (+2 melee, 1d6 bludgeoning)

RAT ALLIES

Defense: 13 (scraps of metal armor)

Stamina Points: 4

Speed: 10/30 feet

Proficiency Bonus: +2

Abilities: Strength: +1 (13), Dexterity: +2 (15), Constitution: +2 (14), Intelligence: -1 (8), Wisdom: +1 (12), Charisma: +0 (10)

Skills: Sneak

Attack: Bite (+1 melee, 1d4 piercing), Crooked Walking Stick (+1 melee, 1d4+1 bludgeoning)

These rats are more courageous than the ones the characters met on the road; they will not run unless two or more comrades are injured or unconscious. These rats will leave the fallen behind in their flight to safety.

River Crossing



One of the benefits of traveling with someone whose family is in the business of river transport is that one does not have to pay for river transport.

We were still a good distance from the docks when a cry rang out.

"Sampson! The prodigal has returned."

A large dog hobbled out to greet us. He was an older, even more ragged version of Sampson. The family resemblance was easy to see, but this dog had led a difficult, dangerous life. The fur had never grown back over an ugly scar on the right side of his neck, and he had a patch over the eye on that side. As he approached, I saw the limp, which he tried to hide.

"Uncle!" Sampson said, running to meet the dog. The two embraced, then turned to me.

"Uncle Winston, this is Pan Dachshund, the great adventurer. Pan, this is my Uncle Winston, the greatest captain on either side of the river."

"Winston Mutt," the grizzled dog said, waving a paw at his nephew. "Please ignore the praise of the pup here. It's a pleasure to meet you, Pan Dachshund." Although he remained turned towards his nephew, his good eye kept straying to the string of badger teeth around my neck.

"Please, call me Pan," I told Winston. "Always a pleasure to meet someone who has heard of me."

We walked towards the docks. The river was higher than I had ever seen it. Some of the smaller, lighter craft bobbed even with docks themselves. It was possible to step directly into them, rather than drop down to reach them. Waves sloshed over the pier.

We wound our way through the crowds and street vendors. I could see a pair of malcontents working the crowd. They seemed to be selling something, trinkets and salvation. I scowled and turned away.

I tried to stay in the middle of the walkway, where it was driest, but two dogs preceding me were used to the water. They strode through it as if it wasn't there, sending up small sprays every time they lifted a paw.

"We need to get over to Mutt Town as soon as we can," Sampson explained. "I know that the river is high, but..."

"If we wait for the river to go down you will be here for weeks. Besides," Winston looked over his shoulder at me, "what kind of river-dogs would we be if we made our esteemed guest wait?"

Recognizing an offer too good to refuse when I hear one, I beamed. It was all the confirmation the grizzled mutt needed.

"Tovor! Stipple!" He roared, delighted. "We've got a fare!"

Two huge dogs appeared from nowhere. One must have had some mastiff in her line, dark brindle arms extending the sleeveless shirt she wore. I couldn't determine the lineage of the other dog. He was just a massive bundle of muscle and fur.

The five of us - Sampson, his uncle, the two brutes, and I - made our way to the end of the dock. Three crafts were moored there under a wooden banner reading, "Eight Paws Water Transport." I cocked a curious eyebrow at the sign.

Before I could ask, Winston proudly spoke up. "Sampson's grandfather, my father, started this business with his brother Eli. When I took over, I didn't see a good reason to change a recognized name."

He handed me an oiled leather bag.

"Place your weapons, provisions, and anything else that needs to stay dry in this. It's bound to be a rough crossing."

I stripped off my goods and stored them in the bag. Winston took it back from me, tying the top with an intricate knot. He folded a flap over the knot, covering the top quarter of the bag, and tied it into place. Then, he lashed the whole thing to the bench of the flat-bottomed boat.

The two big dogs held the craft steady while we all climbed aboard. It pitched in the water as we adjusted ourselves on the plain wooden benches. Then Winston cast off.

6. Friendship and Poison

Scenario

Walking toward the lowest huts of Wooford, barely spared by the flood, you encounter one of the largest Pugmire rat communities. Most of the rodents work as anglers, and the open spaces between their humble dwellings are often draped with moist nets left to dry after long days of fishing. As you approach the huts, you see a bunch of rats working with cord and needle to repair a badly ripped net. They squeak loudly, blaming each other for letting their boat come too close a surfacing rock or some kind of large-mawed river monstrosity. With a broad smile, Puntail brings you to a humble cabin standing on a cluster of bandy stilts: "Welcome to the rat perch, good dogs!"

by a sign of a siren-like creature with the head and forequarters of a cat and the hindquarters ending in fish tail. The place is already crowded, and several waiters are huffing and puffing to fulfill the orders at the tables.

Puntail is a friendly rat willing to offer tea to anyone he thinks is a good dog, for he is always interested in the latest news from outside Wooford. He talks with the characters under the veranda of his cabin. He is also the rat who brought Little Plum's last message to his parents.

Puntail is very worried about Little Plum Shiloh, and regrets not having dissuaded the young dog from his reckless intent to explore the dangerous woods east of Mutt Town. With minimal persuasion, Puntail offers his assistance to find Little Plum and pull him out of any trouble. He also gives the characters any information they might have missed from Bay and Fos. At dusk, Puntail invites the characters to share a meal in the nearby fish grill. The grill's owner, Binko, is Puntail's cousin and a much poorer but honest competitor of Trimbu.

Just after dark, most rats from the local community and some dogs gather under a gazebo where a team of rat chefs roast the best of the day's catch on large coal beds fitted with grills. The establishment is marked with

Puntail waves at his cousin and invites the characters to sit at one of the tables. After a few minutes, a puny-looking mongrel dog named Pirok comes to ask the characters about their preferences among panfish, perch, pickerel, or pike (or anything that swims and begins with a "p"). The characters might notice Pirok was unusually quick to volunteer as their waiter at the table, allegedly because she enjoys serving strangers and anyone who might have an interesting tale to share.

Pirok, who occasionally works at the grill as a hired paw, was pressed into crime by Trimbu and infiltrated his rival's restaurant to cause trouble. Her affiliation makes her an accomplice of Bay and Fos, and if the characters attacked or snubbed the two con artists, the dog is keen to exact revenge for her buddies. She is also eager to gain status in his organization, and might decide to attempt to poison anyone he perceives as a threat to his boss. Pirok's plan, in this case, would be to cook up a story in which she prevented some dog snoopers from Pugmire from creating trouble for Trimbu's business.

Pirok poisons their food as she takes the serving plates from the grill. To this end, she uses a vial of zanabena, an herbal mixture extract that is poisonous to dogs and which carries a slightly bitter aftertaste of eggplant. The dog flees immediately after his attack and leaves the village to avoid apprehension. If the characters sense trouble early and want to question her before she



sneaks away, Pirok's nerves win out and she bolts away in panic. Pirok's cowardice makes her an insignificant foe. The characters can easily overpower her, if they run fast enough.

After dealing with the dog, the characters can retire for the night and prepare for the river crossing with Puntail.



Rules

At the restaurant, players will need to make a Wisdom check for each of their characters to see Pirok the Mutt, hiding in a corner of the kitchen. Any characters possessing the Notice skill may add their proficiency bonus to the die roll. The difficulty to match or beat is 13.

Perhaps they see Pirok stirring the food vigorously, or sneaking shifty, sideways glances toward the dogs, always looking away quickly if they turn to regard her. Each character who succeeds is likely to notice something different. If they discuss what they've seen, it should be simple to realize Pirok is up to no good, and avoid eating. If this happens, be sure to reward the players by adding extra fortune to the bowl. Failure means the character does not notice anything unusual.

Puntail will wonder aloud why Pirok is bringing out their food when she isn't a waiter.

PUNTAIL RAT

Defense: 13 (soft leather armor)

Stamina Points: 6

Speed: 10/30 feet

Proficiency Bonus: +2

Abilities: Strength: +0 (10), Dexterity: +2 (15), Constitution: +2 (14), Intelligence: +1 (13), Wisdom: +1 (12), Charisma: -1 (8)

Skills: Know Nature, Notice, Sneak, Survive

Trap Sense: This rat has an advantage when avoiding traps. Further, he doubles his proficiency bonus on all checks to bypass a lock, trap, or similar device that keeps him from his objective. The device is broken on a success.

Attack: Bite (+2 melee, 1d4-1 piercing damage), dagger (+2 melee, 1d4 piercing damage), sling (+4 ranged 1d4 bludgeoning damage)

If the characters wish to attack Pirok, he will cower and beg for mercy at the first sign of a weapon. He will confess everything, including who hired her and why. Binko, Puntail's cousin, will be horrified at the attempt to poison his guests, and will fire Pirok on the spot.

PIROK THE MUTT

Defense: 14

Stamina Points: 5

Speed: 35/50 feet

Proficiency Bonus: +2

Abilities: Strength: +0 (10), Dexterity: +2 (15), Constitution: +2 (14), Intelligence: +1 (13), Wisdom: -1 (8), Charisma: +1 (12)

Skills: Handle Animal, Know Culture, Sneak

Speedy Runner: Pirok gets an advantage on all Dexterity checks having to do with running or being involved in a chase. Also, the character's speed is increased to 35 feet (or 50 feet while running on all fours).

Unarmored Defense: This dog can defend himself without the need for bulky armor. If the dog is without armor or only using a shield, his defense is 10 + Constitution modifier + Dexterity modifier + shield (if used).

If any characters eat the poisoned food, they will need to make a Constitution check to avoid the worst effects. Players must roll a d20 and add any Constitution modifiers to the result. The difficulty to equal or beat to defeat the poison is 12. Since the goal was not to kill but to sicken patrons, the poison incapacitates characters who fail for an entire day. They will vomit, sweat, and lay in bed feeling terrible.

The zanabena poison will cost them 1d4+1 stamina points, which they will be able to recover normally from rest. Characters who fail the Constitution check acquire the Sickly condition. Having this condition means the character will have disadvantage on all attack rolls and ability checks until they are treated by a shepherd with the Lesser Restoration spell, or after a week of rest.

Those who succeed on the Constitution check will feel unwell, but after losing only 1 stamina point will feel better.

If the characters decide to take Pirok along as a servant, she will keep her mouth shut and work reasonably well for them. If they offer her any sort of reward at the end, she will be indebted, and will ask to stay on as their servant.

If they treat her poorly, Pirok will keep her eyes open while in their employ. She will hope that any information she can gather will serve as payment to Trimbu.

Danger on the River



Tovor and Stipple immediately began to row, pushing the craft upstream in a fight against the current. It seemed simple: we just had to row north to allow for the current, which wanted to sweep us south. Under normal river conditions, we could arrive on the far bank right at Mutt Town. Unfortunately, Wooford was south of Mutt Town. This made sense for barges loaded with trade goods wanting to reach Pugmire, but it made our crossing doubly difficult.

The other four sat at the four corners of the square barge, each paddling with a long oar. They directed me to sit in the center, saying something about evening out the weight. I suspected it was their polite way of permitting me to rest while they worked. Although I suppose by now I'm accustomed to encountering awestruck dogs in my travels, I wasn't going to let them do all the work while I sat there.

"What can I do to help?"

We were nearing the center of the river, and I had to shout to be heard over the rushing waves. I expected some resistance, but Winston just pointed at Sampson.

"Take his spot!" The older dog hollered. "Sampson, drop the tiller and see if you can steer us around this!"

I stumbled over to Sampson's corner. As I did, I looked ahead. The water, which had been a deep blue at the dock, was a churning mix of black rapids with white caps. I took the oar from Sampson. On my first stroke, the river almost snatched it from my paws. I could feel the water trying to have its way with the oar, the boat, all of us.

I put my back and shoulders into it and rowed.

From my position in the back corner, I could see all the other crew members with just a slight diversion of my eyes. I timed my strokes to coordinate with theirs. I suspected I was not moving as much water as they were, especially the two brutes. At least I could keep the craft from spinning in place.

Suddenly, a hole appeared in the water before us. The waves spun in a circular motion. The whirlpool had the front of the barge and was trying to pull us in. For one sickening moment, one side of the boat was in the water, the other hanging over the edge. I rowed, my oar swinging through empty space.

We smashed back into the water. Spray flew over the side, sloshing over everything. I saw Tovor, the long-haired mix, rake her paw through her fur to brush it back from her eyes. Then she took her oar with both paws and rowed for all she was worth.

"Stroke!" Winston hollered. "Row as if your very lives depend on it, lads!"

I did not need anyone to tell me this. I gave it everything I had. My arms and shoulders burned with the effort, but I kept time with the bigger dogs. A quick glance at Sampson showed that he was getting the worst of it. He was totally soaked, alternating between leaning hard on the tiller to push the boat in one direction and using it as an oar to keep us from spinning back.

Those moments seemed like an eternity, but we passed the whirlpool into the relative safe chop of the waves beyond. A few minutes more and the crew brought the sodden boat to rest under a banner like the one on the Wooford bank. We bumped the dock lightly. Stipple jumped up, rope in hand, and secured the vessel. He then offered a hand to each of us as we climbed up. Tovor handed him the baggage while we pushed the water from our clothes, our fur.

7. Dangerous Crossing



Scenario

The sun is still low at the horizon when you board Puntail's flat-bottomed boat to continue your journey eastward. The boat sways gently in the water as the rat ties your baggage securely in the middle and covers it with an oil-soaked cloth. After checking that everything is ready, the rat brings a long steering oar and a few paddles from a nearby shed. He drops the paddles into the boat, stands at the aft, and grabs the steering oar firmly with two paws, waiting for you to take a seat. Then, with a wry smile and self-assured glance at the expanse of water ahead, he deftly swings the oar over his head and plunges it deeply into the water, jamming it in the river bed and giving a powerful stroke to set the boat off shore. He starts singing a squeaky rat maritime shanty.

- Creak-squeak, creak-squeak,
- You old wooden board.
- As long as you don't break,
- We'll be staying aboard.

Mutt Town is slightly upstream in comparison with Wooford. To cut the current diagonally and navigate directly toward the intended destination, Puntail needs the characters at the paddles most of the time, although he manages to keep the boat on shallow, slow-moving waters without difficulty. Near the middle of the swollen river, however, a powerful current suddenly mounts upstream and runs over the boat, making it sway and drift toward deeper, more dangerous waters.

With the rising sun on your right, you feel a chilly breeze rising from the north. Daylight dissipates the morning mist, making the opposite bank of the river clearly visible, and Puntail grins at the sight of your destination. His jolliness lasts just a few seconds, though, for the hum of the river turns into a low roar, and the

rat's eyes grow wide with fear. A sudden tide makes the boat jolt, as the speed of the water increases dramatically due to an unexpected flood current. "On the paddle, quick!" the rat squeaks. "Give your all or we'll be in trouble!"

The characters must help Puntail with their muscles, for the rat is doing all the necessary skilled work at the steering oar. Overcoming the current is no easy task. Getting back to a safe course is going to be a matter of vigor, perseverance, and sheer luck, as raging waters, natural hazards, and even a river monster threaten to capsize Puntail's boat.

When they finally reach the east bank, the characters can travel the course of a tributary stream and reach the bustling frontier settlement of Mutt Town.

After following a tributary up the river for a few miles, your boat glides placidly in the small port of Mutt Town, where a couple of large barges and several smaller boats leave little space for mooring your own. Spared from the floods thanks to its protected position and clever construction, the port is very active due to the local lumber industry, which supplies the urban centers of Pugmire with quality timber and firewood. Puntail deftly maneuvers to dock at the main pier, located at the foot of the terraced slope on which the dwellings rise.

Nobody comes to greet the character at the docks. A patrol of the local militia, made up of diversely equipped, tough-looking mutts, just takes a casual look at their boat before moving forward on their route. Puntail secures the boat and tells the characters they must ascend the slope to find Trimbu's residence. The rat intends to spend the next week in Mutt Town, working as a hired paw to split and stack firewood for



the upcoming winter. He offers to bring the characters back on their return and wishes them good luck.

Asking around if someone has seen Little Plum Shiloh does not produce appreciable results.

Only a rat stevedore resting near the timber barges knows the young dog persuaded a couple of his colleagues to follow him in some kind of adventure in the Fearful Forest.



Rules

Puntail loads up the characters and their gear onto his boat, ties down the equipment securely, and he and the characters shove off toward the far shore. The river is fast-moving and its banks are swollen; recent storms upriver have made the normally quiet water into a series of small but powerful rapids. The river crossing here isn't easy, but the bank on both sides is low and easy to climb, and it's the closest such spot to Mutt Town. Puntail steers the raft, but the characters must help out by doing the rowing. There are four oars in the boat.

Each character rowing must make Strength checks. The difficulty is 15. The party need to achieve three successes between them, and Puntail can contribute if the party is a small one.

Once the group achieve three successes, they clear the rapids and reach the opposite bank.

If any players roll a 20 they achieve a triumph, which counts as two successes towards the overall total. If any players roll a 1, they botch, and can no longer row as they lose an oar or strain a muscle.

Example: Fred and Trixie are rowing on round one. The first round, Fred's player rolls a 17, and Trixie's rolls a 9. One success, so an event will occur. On round two, Fred's player rolls with a 6, and Trixie rolls a 20. Trixie's triumph gives them another two successes, resulting in a total of three.

For each round in which the characters have not achieved three full successes, roll 1d4 and check the table below to see what happens:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 | The boat bounces off a submerged rock. One random character takes 1d4-1 bludgeoning damage. |
| 2 | A giant catfish lunges (with a melee modifier of +3), trying to take a bite out of the boat, an oar, or a character. Each player makes a Dexterity saving throw for their character. The catfish attacks one of the dogs who fails their save, or damages the boat if they all succeed. If the catfish succeeds in its attack, it will deliver 1d6 bludgeoning damage to a character, grab an oar and make off with it, or deal damage to the boat. Characters without oars cannot help row, so one fewer player is able to roll for successes. Likewise, if the boat takes three bites, it will sink and the characters will need to make Constitution checks against a difficulty of 16 (the Traverse skill can modify the roll) to reach the other shore. Failure on an attempt at swimming inflicts 1d4 bludgeoning damage. |
| 3 | The boat narrowly escapes sinking into a whirlpool. All players must make Dexterity saving throws. The difficulty is 15 to avoid being thrown into the water. If they fail their saving throw, they plunge into the water and will end up a mile downstream, coughing, spitting up water, and incurring 1d4 bludgeoning damage at the hands of the river, the rocks, and everything else in the flooded river's water. This would be an ideal time to spend a fortune to re-roll a failed Dexterity saving throw. Swimming requires Constitution checks against a difficulty of 16 (the Traverse skill can modify the roll). |
| 4 | The rudder breaks on a submerged rock. Puntail can no longer steer the boat. The players now need to achieve four rowing successes instead of three to successfully cross the flood-swollen river. This event can only occur once. Subsequent rolls of 4 result in option 2 taking place instead. |

Obligations and Encounters



I was pleased to find that while I looked and felt like a drowned whelp, my weapons and everything else in Winston's bag were bone dry. I pulled out a pouch, reached inside, and pushed a few pieces of plastic into the river master's paw.

Or at least, I tried to.

"No sir, I cannot take payment for the crossing. I know what you intend to do, and it will benefit not just our family, but all families along the river."

I wondered what Sampson had told his uncle.

"I insist. The skill with which you delivered us in safety is to be commended. Your crew deserves much more than I can repay. Please take this paltry sum as a small measure of my gratitude."

Uncle Winston looked away. He brought a paw to his face, possibly to wipe away a tear. I could be very persuasive at times. Hanging around with royals had improved my natural gift of the gab as well.

Winston took the offered plastic, shook my paw, and nodded. Once again, he was the consummate businessdog.

"Man watch over you, Pan Dachshund."

I smiled and replied in kind.

"And you and yours."

As I turned to leave, Winston pulled his nephew aside. I walked a few paces away, to give them privacy, but cocked an ear to hear their conversation. Their voices were low, but I could guess the topic. Winston wanted Sampson to stay, Sampson's eyes were on the road beyond. I heard the phrase "We must all choose our own paths," before I stepped further away.

Winston embraced his nephew and strode away without a backwards glance. It took Sampson a long time to walk over to where I stood.

"Where are we going?" Sampson asked, his voice rising a notch.

"I want to see these rats that you spoke of. It seems like that would be the best place to start."

"You... you want to go into the Cheeserake?"

I chuffed at the name. The sign was a garish thing, colors jumping out at passers-by. I did not have a chance to take another look at it before a barrel-like shadow fell over us.

Standing in the doorway was a huge badger looking us up and down. He was at least twice my height, and cut a menacing figure. I grinned, my fangs showing.

"Shove off," he grunted. "We don't need you lot getting our seats wet."

"Ah good sir, that is precisely why we would like to enter. We need some food and a warm place to dry off."

The badger crossed his arms, using the opportunity to flex his muscles. I wondered if he was the strong but slow type, or the strong and much more troublesome type. "I said, shove off."

I raised myself up to my full height, one hand resting on the hilt of my rapier. "Do you know who I am?"

He stared pointedly at the string of badger teeth around my neck.

"I've a good idea I do." His tone was deeper and foreboding. It sounded like he was gargling ground rocks.

"Then you know I can make it worth your while."

He tensed when I reached into a pouch with my left paw, my right remaining on the rapier. I drew out a pawful of plastic, not bothering to count it. I had to go up on my tiptoes, but I could place it on the shelf created by his folded arms. He glanced down. "Fine, but the drowned mutt stays outside."

"The mutt comes with me," I replied, adding a little more coin. That bag was becoming alarmingly light. Sampson's Fen better be filled with the stuff.

The badger glared at me, then stepped aside.

"Only long enough to dry off. Then scam."

"Thank you, gracious sir." I tried but failed to keep the sarcasm out of my voice.

8. Tough and Sleazy

Scenario

As you walk into Mutt Town, you find its buildings rise along a promenade and a central street, forming a rough T shape. The central street ascends a slope, running from a larger, lower square near the port to a smaller, higher one. The town hall and a chapel of Man dominate the larger square. Along the central street are several shops, where carpenters, blacksmiths, butchers, and tanners are hard at work. The smaller square is also the strongpoint of the settlement's defensive palisade. There, beside an old observation tower and the wooden cabins of the town's lumber workers and militia, is a compound with a pitched roof of red tiles and three ornate chimneys.

The compound in the smaller square of Mutt Town is the Cheeserake, a restaurant, inn, and casino run by Trimbu. The rat boss founded his establishment only a year before, refurbishing a decrepit dog stronghold named Fort Hellhound. The Cheeserake is a major attraction within the otherwise humdrum settlement. The establishment, however, has a strict admission policy toward strangers, and does not welcome the indigent.

Made up of a cluster of buildings built on ancient stone foundations, the Cheeserake is reminiscent of a fortress. The only entrance is clearly marked by a sign painted in red, black, and yellow, which depicts a diabolical dog plunging a big fork into a vat of boiling fondue. A few rat orderlies and a mighty-looking badger bouncer dressed in black chained armor guard the door. As you observe the entrance, an unassuming dog tries to sneak in without attracting too much attention, but the badger immediately takes notice and grabs the

intruder by the scruff of the neck. He brings his boot up into the poor dog's behind, who ends face down in a gutter and slinks away down the street, muttering curses.

The badger bouncer is Barsuc Da Musta, Trimbu's elite bodyguard. Since his master settled into Mutt Town, Barsuc gladly took the role of chief door guard, hoping to extort as many plastic coins as possible from visitors eager to get in and willing to pay for it. He asks insidious and provocative questions to make newcomers uncomfortable and press them into paying a bribe. Barsuc was expelled from Pugmire due to his criminal tendencies, and is particularly suspicious of posh-looking dogs who ought to want anything but to eat and gamble at such a seedy site.

After dealing with Barsuc Da Musta or otherwise entering the compound (slipping into a window or sliding down a coal chute, for example), the characters find themselves in the labyrinthine environment of a former fort dungeon. Although none of Trimbu's employees seem to pay too much attention to them, they are quickly detected and accosted by the establishment's host.

The ground floor of the compound, although well decorated and upholstered, is a maze of narrow corridors and small rooms. Barred windows provide dim illumination, and the smell of cooking food permeates the corridors. As you seek to find your way, you spot two large eyes peering at you from the shadows behind a curtained arcade. The eyes squint in interest and evaluation, then the curtain opens. An agile, white-furred, female cat, dressed in silk and



trinkets, comes forth to meet you. She chuckles artfully. "Meow, good dogs! Are you looking for something? I'm Lazibi, the head waitress to master Trimbu. I can take you to him, if you wish."

Besides her mundane, professional role, Lazibi is a special advisor to Trimbu, endowed with minor magical powers. As she asks for their iden-

ties, suave Lazibi uses her magical Bracelet of Trusting to pry forth information about the characters' true intentions. Lazibi offers to take the characters directly to her boss to prevent further trouble. As she guides the characters, though, she leads them through a narrow corridor populated with rat pickpockets.



Rules

Fighting with Barsuc is a bad idea; he is a tough opponent, though he doesn't fight to the death. Instead, the players should try to talk their way in, convincing him that they are here to eat or gamble, or offer him plastic coins as a bribe, of which he will require more than a few. To talk their way in, they will need to make Charisma checks at difficulty 15, using the Persuade skill if they have it. If they succeed, Barsuc lets them in, but he'll make sure someone keeps an eye on them.

Another option is to slip past Barsuc while he's distracted by making a Dexterity check at a difficulty of 14. The Sneak skill can modify the roll. Failure means Barsuc caught them in the act, and forces them to leave. A botch means Barsuc physically kicks them out of the building, and won't consider letting them in again.

BARSUC DA MUSTA, BADGER BRUTE

Defense: 14 (black chain shirt)

Stamina Points: 20

Speed: 30/40 feet

Proficiency Bonus: +2

Abilities: Strength: +4 (18), Dexterity: +1 (12), Constitution: +4 (18), Intelligence: +1 (12), Wisdom: +0 (11), Charisma: +1 (12)

Skills: Intimidate

Darkvision: This character can see without any light at all. Characters using Darkvision in darkness can only see in black and white. They cannot see things they wouldn't be able to see in light, such as invisible characters.

Attack: Greatclub (+6 melee, 1d8+4 bludgeoning damage)

Vicious: As a bonus action, this badger can move up to his speed toward a hostile creature that he sees. (Bonus actions are just that: a bonus that can be taken under specific circumstances. Every character has one bonus action, but bonus actions are only used for specific abilities that call for them, such as Vicious, in this case.)

The characters find themselves in a large, open room filled with tables where all sorts of gambling games are being played. Lazibi approaches, offering to lead them to Trimbu. She passes through a curtain into a corridor lined with tapestries. The tapestries cover alcoves, disguising the presence of a half-dozen rat pick-pockets who attempt to lift items of value from the characters as they follow Lazibi in a magic-induced daze. Lazibi wears a magical bracelet that causes all within a ten-foot radius

to trust her completely (see Bracelet of Trusting description below). Any attempts to notice the pickpockets with a Wisdom roll (at a difficulty of 15) are done at a disadvantage. The characters are so distracted by Lazibi, it's difficult for them to notice the subtle paws of the rats carefully lifting items from their belts and pockets.

Players who role-play themselves failing to notice items being stolen from them should earn a fortune for the fortune bowl.

Lazibi casually leads the characters along the corridor, looking back over her shoulder periodically to make sure the characters are still following. If a character starts a fight with one of the pickpockets, the rat will immediately dart through a door at the back of the alcove, throwing the bolt to lock it behind them. They will take what goods they've acquired to the counting room, where they evaluate the value of their collection of stolen goods.

If anyone does notice the pickpockets, Lazibi calls off the rest of the thieves with a pre-arranged signal.

LAZIBI, CAT HOSTESS

Defense: 13

Stamina Points: 20

Speed: 40/60 feet

Proficiency Bonus: +2

Abilities: Strength: +2 (14), Dexterity: +3 (16), Constitution: +1 (12), Intelligence: +1 (13), Wisdom: +0 (11), Charisma: +2 (14)

Skills: Persuade, Sneak

Darkvision: Lazibi can see without any light at all. Characters using Darkvision in darkness can only see in black and white. They cannot see things they wouldn't be able to see in light, such as invisible characters.

Items: Bracelet of Trusting

The Bracelet of Trusting convinces all within a ten-foot radius that the wearer can be trusted with even the most sensitive, secret information. The affected characters must make a Wisdom check against a difficulty of 15 to keep from blathering on to the wearer about everything they know. On a success, a character may remain silent, considering what and how much to reveal. On a triumph, the effect of the bracelet breaks for that character. On a botch, the character acquires the Charmed condition for 2d4 days, and is unable to attack or deceive Lazibi. Lazibi gains an advantage on any attempt to charm that individual. Players who role-play this trust well should earn fortune for the bowl.

Welcome to Mutt Town



The Cheeserake was a maze. We threaded our way through crowds, examining doors and hallways as we passed. We ended up in a combination bar and casino. It was a depressing place with poor lighting and no windows to let in sunlight or to allow gamblers to estimate the time of day.

"I would like a pot of ale and two bowls," I told the hostess.

"Will you be joining us for some games? Perhaps a room for the night?"

I felt a tickle between my ears. I shook my head to clear it.

"Perhaps. Let's see how the evening goes."

She led me to the bar. A rat in black slacks, white shirt, and sleeve garters nodded.

"Lazibi?" On the bartender's lips, her name was a question.

"Some ale for my new friend. Two bowls. On the house."

The rat nodded and went off to fetch the ale.

"Thank you," I said. "That's very generous treatment of a stranger."

"Oh, a stranger is only a friend who you haven't met." Her lashes fluttered. My stomach roiled. "Now that we're friends, why don't you tell me your name?"

I normally jump at the chance to introduce myself. Naturally, most people recognize me on sight, but there are still those who do not make the immediate connection. This time, however, I felt that same feeling in my skull, the tickle turning into a maddening itch.

"Just a traveler passing through your fine town."

"Passing through to where?" Lazibi purred.

The itch again. The only way to scratch it was to answer her question.

My skin grew cold and my fur stood on end. I narrowed my eyes and stared at the cat.

Magic. Necromancy.

"Passing through to points beyond," I replied, my voice as cold as the snow.

Her lip curled, one fang exposed. Her eyes narrowed to match mine. The itch turned into a cold spike driven directly into my brain. I braced myself.

She hissed under her breath and spun away just as the rat returned with a pitcher of ale and two earthenware bowls. He stared, dumbfounded, at Lazibi's retreating back and twitching tail.

I took the drinks and tipped him in thanks.

Sampson secured a small spot for us along a shelf running the length of the far wall. Backless stools ran its length. I set the drinks on the scarred wooden surface, pulled out a stool with one paw, and sat, my back to the wall, eyes on the room.

Sampson poured us each a drink. I took it with a murmur of thanks. A ring of dogs occupied the table closest to us. They gambled on the results of dice thrown by a rat dressed like the bartender. There were four dice, rough cubes cut from the bone of some animal.

"What do you think our chances are of finding the Fabulous Fen?" Sampson asked.

"To be honest," I said, my eyes never leaving the gamblers, "I don't know. Many have tried before without success."

"But we have the disk."

A Pomeranian with matted fur made a small wager and won a moderate sum on the result. The rat stole a quick glance at the far end of the room. A rat, fat both in girth and immodest dress, made a circling motion with one finger.

I gulped down my ale. Sampson refilled it without asking.

"There seem to be a lot of those disks for sale on the street. We may have a lot of competition for the prize."

The Pom bet and won again. Another glance, another circular motion.

"So there are no guarantees." Sampson sounded dejected. I stole a quick glance at my companion. He sat hunched over, head bowed. I patted him on the shoulder.

"Fortune favors a bold dog, and I feel like our luck may be turning."

"Someone's luck is definitely turning."

I spun to see the badger from the door stalking towards me. The rat from the throne at the end of the room was pointing at me. "Barsuc!"

"Already on it, boss."

The badger strode over, an unnecessary trio of rat goons flanking him. I stumbled over to the croupier, grabbed his shoulders, pivoted, and tossed him into the oncoming ruffians.

"Let's go!"

9. Rats of Mutt Town



Scenario

Guided by Lazibi, you soon emerge into an expansive basement hall, where amber-colored glass lamps tinge an atmosphere infused with pungent notes of citrus and cloves. Thick carpets with elaborate designs cover the floor, on which several low tables with seating cushions are spaced evenly. A motley crowd of patrons occupy the tables, gambling with cards and dice. A half dozen rat flunkies and maids take care of cleanliness, service, and security. In a corner opposite the entrance, seated on a high chair under a polychrome skylight, a richly dressed, wizened rat with a small snout and very large ears sips wine from a chalice and exchanges comments with two chunky dogs dressed in fur coats and hats.

The important-looking rat is Trimbu. He is talking business with two local timber merchants. Trimbu and his closest associates live off the arduous work of many of their lesser brethren in the establishment above and elsewhere in the kingdom of Pugmire.

Trimbu is already evaluating the protagonists as potential business partners. If questioned about the rat bandits, Trimbu denies any direct involvement with them. Trimbu's statement, in this case, is one of the subjective truths. He feels the savage rats on the west bank of the river are too lowly and disorganized to be worthy of the status of accomplices in his plans. He also says there is no ongoing relationship between him and any crooks selling fake artifacts to dupes, although he once allowed Bay and Fos to make a plaster cast of the Talisman of Akbash in his possession. Dealing skillfully with Trimbu, the characters can persuade the old rat to show them the artifact, and then to form a partnership aimed at finding the Fabulous Fen and recovering its treasures. At any time during the conversation, the rat boss can summon a servant to show the talisman to the characters.

THE TALISMAN OF AKBASH

The real Talisman of Akbash is a disk made of very hard, grey plastic. One of its faces is completely flat, while the other features the triangular relief of an arrowhead pointing at a bead of dull crystal set near the board. The main difference between replica and original is the circular groove inscribing the arrow. Like in the replicas, the groove in the original features a needle and is inscribed with Man-writing. In the original only, the needle spins within the plastic shell, pointing to the magnetic north. With this magnetic compass and homing device, anyone crossing the Straddle Strip can reach the Fabulous Fen with relative ease.

The talisman is an artifact the function of which was to guide the inhabitants of a Man-made haven back home in a remote past. This haven, an underground city, had been built to protect Man for unknown reasons. The talisman receives a magical signal from the haven, but it must be near enough to the hidden sanctuary to detect it. If the characters bring the talisman beyond the Straddle Strip, hold it level, and try to "read" it, the "bead" on it lights up faintly. The light glows more intensely when the arrow on the disk points toward the haven. When held level and aligned with the goal, the Talisman also emits a ping sound, which increases as the user gets nearer.



At Trimbu's command, a hooded rat approaches his seat, holding a valuable wood casket with great deference. The hooded rat opens the lid of the casket and offers it to his master, stooping deeply. Trimbu smirks and puts his paw inside to grab its precious content, a palm-sized, disk-shaped artifact of Man. The rat stands up and raises the artifact over his head, bathing it in the multicolored radiance of the skylight above. "The original talisman of Akbash," he squeaks triumphantly. "And it is mine!"

Despite his ostentatious pride in owning the talisman, Trimbu is willing to lend it to anyone searching for the Fabulous Fen's treasures who

earns his confidence, especially if they are trustworthy dogs hailing from Pugmire, providing he gets something in return. It is, after all, in his best financial interest to see the local economy restored. But any deal with Trimbu will undoubtedly be weighted in his favor. He did not become a criminal boss by practicing charity.

If they make a deal, the rats offer the characters a cheap place to sleep in Trimbu's compound and some provisions for their upcoming trip in the wilderness. If the deal fails, Trimbu's flunkies unceremoniously oust the characters from the Cheeserake's front door, where Barsuc Da Musta sardonically wishes them good luck.

Rules

Trimbu and his associates are eating, drinking, and gambling in a brick-lined basement hall. The hall is large enough to easily accommodate a hundred souls, and there are currently about sixty individuals here, including bodyguards, assistants, hangers-on, and sycophants, most of them visibly armed. At the far end of the hall, Trimbu sits in a large, throne-like chair on a raised platform. The table in front of him is heavily laden with food.

TRIMBU

Defense: 12 (bear hide armor)

Stamina Points: 10

Speed: 10 feet

Proficiency Bonus: +2

Abilities: Strength: +0 (10), Dexterity: +1 (12), Constitution: +2 (14), Intelligence: +3 (16), Wisdom: +1 (13), Charisma: -1 (9)

Skills: Bluff, Intimidate, Know Culture, Notice, Sense Motive

Darkvision: Trimbu can see without any light at all. Characters using Darkvision in darkness can only see in black and white. They cannot see things they wouldn't be able to see in light, such as invisible characters.

Precise Attack: Once per turn, this character can add 1d6 to a melee attack damage roll if he has advantage for any reason, or if an ally of the character is within five feet of the target. This character can also make a Dexterity check (difficulty is 10 + the highest Wisdom modifier of all active opponents) as an action to avoid a target's attention. If successful, he gains an advantage on his next melee attack roll.

Weapons: Dagger (melee +2, 1d4 piercing damage)

Trimbu is only interested in making money; with money comes power and control, so he takes care of the money first, and lets the other things follow as they will. Trimbu carries his authority slyly, like a rat who knows how to get water during a drought.

Trimbu holds the real Talisman of Akbash, and for the right price he will lend it to the characters in exchange for a hefty cut of whatever they find in the Fen. Characters can attempt to negotiate using the Charming Discourse trick or using the Bluff or Persuade skills on a Charisma check against a difficulty of 13 (Trimbu's Wisdom). Not having these skills means the character attempting to negotiate has disadvantage: Trimbu is an old hand at bargaining, and he's very good at it. He will not drop his cut below 40% of the take, regardless of how successful the characters are at bargaining (unless he is Charmed).

If any of the characters had trouble with Barsuc or had any of their possessions stolen by the pickpockets in the curtained corridor outside, and they mention either of these events to Trimbu, he claims he will "see to it that things are fixed."

If, at any point, the characters refer to Big Blum Shiloh's debt, an angry frown overtakes Trimbu's affable expression and he clams up. On a successful Charisma check against a difficulty of 16, he speaks his mind. A Persuade or Intimidate skill may modify the result on the player's die roll. The rat immediately calls Big Blum a shrewd old mutt, who probably keeps a bag of plastic coins in the mattress, cries misery, and exploits the protection of Pugmire to dodge her debts. The characters should understand that pushing this matter is risky, for the cheerful Trimbu angers when his outstanding claims are mentioned. The rat does not admit to sending his boys to solicit payment from the Shilohs, and only says he made an honest offer to buy his debtor's farm for a fair price.

If informed of Little Plum's initiative and the danger he faces in the Fearful Forest, expresses doubt about his debtor's honesty, and mutters that he could well have given that timewasting young dog a job in his restaurant to help with his father's situation.

Into the Fearful Forest



We spent the night at the house of Sampson's father. I woke early, but apparently not as early as the family. I found myself alone in the cottage, the members of the household up and about their business. In the kitchen, I found a covered plate of breakfast, a small bag of dried meat, and a note. The worn, stained paper was weighted down by Sampson's guidance disk. I transcribed the writing from it as follows:

Pan Dachshund,

Thank you for believing in my quest. In my brief time with you I have found you are a good and honorable dog. I also believe I may be a hindrance to you on your quest. I apologize for abandoning you in this way, but I feel I would be more useful here, doing my job with my family, despite my willingness to adventure with you.

Although you have no obligation to continue to pursue the Fabulous Fen, I suspect now that you have its scent, nothing will stop you from reaching it. Towards this end, I have left the artifact I purchased. Please use it in good health.

Man be with you,
Sampson Mutt

A stray tear may have obscured my vision for a moment. After wiping it away, I noted there were directions towards the rumored location of the Fen, including a sketch of the way out of town. I found my pen and journal, removed a page from the back, and wrote my response over a hasty breakfast.

Sampson Mutt,

Thank you for your kind words. I question whether they apply in my case, but you, sir, ARE a good and noble dog. I applaud your devotion to your family. Should there ever come a time when you find yourself willing to join the Pioneers, I would be proud to sponsor you.

I paused here, feeling that there should be more, but not knowing what to say. I finally decided on:

May Man shine on you and your family.
Your friend,
Pan Dachshund

I left the note next to the dish and started away. At the last moment, I turned back and grabbed the disk, more as a way of indicating that I was continuing with the quest than anything else.

I started tramping into the woods with the hope that the fog would burn off quickly. Normally a walk in the woods would have put a spring into my step and made me hold my tail held high. However, talk of marauding rats, monsters, and the grey, muddy landscape itself was enough to make me wary.

The Fearful Forest is foreboding to begin with. A massive wooded area, it is full of twisting paths that can easily lead a good dog astray. It is also rife with bandits, and every pup hears the stories of trees whispering to the unwary, possibly even moving to alter the paths themselves.

I don't know that I believe in talking trees, but I do have a healthy dislike for the necromantic cats and their eldritch acts. I'll take a stand-up fight against a monster over an encounter with a slew of spell-casting cats any day.

I trudged towards the woods, trying to follow Sampson's vague directions. Soon the streets became dirt paths, and the houses more ramshackle with larger, wilder gaps between them. Finally, I passed the last settlement and was truly out in the wilderness. All too soon I began passing the first trees. Small saplings gave way to cypresses, then to the forest itself.

The trees gathered the fog, held it between themselves thick as tangled wool, and blocked any easy line of sight into the area beyond. I sniffed the air, the murk doing little to hide the smell of green growth, leaf rot, and decay.

I smiled, despite myself. The way ahead seemed dismal, but it still felt like returning home to me.

I glanced up at the patchwork sun peeking through the thickening canopy one last time, chose the path that seemed to head in my preferred direction, and stepped into the Fearful Forest.

10. The Mystical Border



Scenario

After leaving Mutt Town, you take a forest trail heading east and winding slightly to south. You leave at the same time as a friendly group of loggers and hunters, who often use the trail, and walk on a well maintained and marked course for a few miles. After leaving your occasional company behind, you carry on the winding way. You pass by a few deforested clearings and several timber deposits before traversing two wooden bridges built across brooks flowing into the river basin. As you walk away from Mutt Town, the traces of civilization fade away until the trail becomes little more than a furrow in

the long grass. By mid-morning, after climbing to the top of a hill, a gap between the trees allows you to glimpse your destination: a canyon extending perpendicular to your direction of travel a few miles ahead.

The characters reach the Straddle Strip after about five hours of marching, when the trail breaks out of the wood and disappears into the vegetation.

Emerging from the woods, you find yourself before a huge rift descending into a range of rocky terrain, stretching as far as the eye



can see to your right and to your left. At its uppermost height, the width of the canyon varies greatly, from very narrow points to huge gaps several dozen meters wide. Below, the terrain sinks into a gloomy abyss, occasionally swept by a howling wind.

Unless the characters want to circumvent the Straddle Strip, which is going to take three days of travel, they must cross the canyon. This can be done only by climbing down and back up, which seems to be the way to go according to the Saint Akbash legend that the crooked rats in Wooford told.

At the bottom of the canyon, which is 30 to 50 feet deep, lie the remains of a broken road of Man. The surfacing parts of the road are now blackened, cracked, and barely recognizable, although the characters can occasionally spot fragments of enameled metal and rocks painted with fading lines of white, yellow, and blue. Where the road still lies underground, the soil is soft and boggy. Here and there, the canyon walls are pierced by ominous-looking holes, a few feet in diameter, which could easily lead to the lair of some beast.

The holes are giant ant tunnels, and are all connected to a subterranean hive. They are impractical to all, to say the least; indeed, only the smallest of dogs might have any real hope to penetrate them. Nevertheless, they present a great danger to anyone lingering for too long within the canyon.

Though the legend of Saint Akbash claims otherwise, there is no ritual method of crossing the canyon base. A lucky character who spends some time searching the ruined road might find a torn piece of attractive red-colored plastic stuck in a layer of sandstone, amounting for several coins' worth of raw plastic.

Once the characters are on the other side of the Straddle Strip, the Talisman of Akbash picks up the signal that can lead our heroes to their destination. Using the compass and reading the direction of the light from two distant points of the Straddle Strip can even allow an artisan dog to make a triangulation and determine their approximate distance to the goal. This calculation reveals a distance of roughly two days of travel on foot.



Rules

If the characters descend to the bottom of the canyon, they will meet the most dangerous foe they've faced so far: Giant Ants. These ants are on patrol foraging for food, and engage in carrying food back to their nest. There are two Giant Ants in this patrol, both workers (drones).

Ants communicate with each other using pheromones, a near instantaneous form of contact that utilizes airborne chemical signals. When one ant engages in a fight, it will immediately give off pheromones calling for help. The second ant will respond to this call for help three combat rounds after the first ant is attacked. If combat goes badly for the characters — and it might; giant ants are tough — the best course of action would be to run away. The ants are busy with their own tasks, and if the attack breaks off or if they are left alone, they will continue with what they were doing.

Any characters captured by the ants will be taken away to their nest.

This is a highly dangerous encounter. It's important for the players to learn that some encounters are better to avoid. The topic of scale is important here, too: one ant is more than a match for one character, even if that character is a tough fighter. If the Guide is running this game for less than three characters, it might be prudent to have the ants ignore the characters altogether — they are already carrying something back to their nest and don't really have the time or interest to investigate the characters. Three characters could probably tackle a single worker ant, but two workers at the same time would be a challenge for a party of five or six characters. Guides should use their best judgement in dealing with this encounter. If the characters insist on fighting, allow them to do so.

Once they see how tough a single Giant Ant is, they will start to work on an escape plan when the second shows up.

If, on the other hand, the characters jump across or use rope to get over a narrow spot in the canyon (successful Wisdom checks at difficulty 13 to find the best place to cross, with Notice skill modifying the die roll result), they will undoubtedly spot the dangerous Giant Ants foraging around the canyon floor. If the Guide feels the ants aren't trying to be secretive, the characters can see them without rolling any dice.

GIANT WORKER (DRONE) ANT

Defense: 12 (chitinous exoskeleton)

Stamina Points: 20

Speed: 30 feet (climb 20 feet)

Proficiency Bonus: +2

Abilities: Strength: +3 (16), Dexterity: +0 (10), Constitution: +2 (15), Intelligence: -5 (1), Wisdom: +1 (13), Charisma: +0 (11)

Skills: Traverse

Darkvision: This ant can see without any light at all. Characters using Darkvision in darkness can only see in black and white. They cannot see things they wouldn't be able to see in light, such as invisible characters.

Attacks: Bite (+3 melee, 2d4+3 piercing)

Grab: To use this ability, a Giant Ant must do damage with its bite attack. A Giant Ant may choose to inflict the Immobility condition at the time it hits with a bite.

Acid Sting: A Giant Ant has a stinger and an acid-producing gland in its abdomen. If it successfully makes an opponent Immobility, it can attempt to sting each round as a +3 melee attack. A hit with the sting attack deals 1d4+3 points of acid damage.

Forest Travels



To say the light was dim inside the Fearful Forest would be to insult darkness. It wasn't the darkness of full night, but the darkness of a barely lit room on the lower levels of a ship. There was illumination, but it was high above and diffuse. The foliage reached across the sky, the trees grasping each other and blanketing the sunlight away. Clammy, dense mist swallowed me whole, obscuring even my own feet. I was tempted to close my eyes and rely on my sense of smell, but I worried that this would not protect me from stray, low-hanging branches.

The last thing I wanted to do was walk muzzle first into a tree limb.

There was nothing for it but to press on.

After an hour of walking, the path split again. I did not see the fork so much as felt it with my feet. My left paw was slightly than my right, and I felt soft loam where there had been hard-packed soil. Straining my eyes, I could just make out a tree directly in my way. Investigating the fork on all fours, I discovered that the path I followed veered off to the left, climbing slightly to disappear behind the old elm before me. To the right, a small, sandy trail slipped into the woods, diving down into the murk. A lesser woodsman would have missed it altogether, even in bright daylight. It was only my years of experience in the wild that revealed it to me.

The left leading path seemed better travelled. I turned to the right. If the Fabulous Fen had been along the established route, it would have already been found by whomever was using the road with such frequency. My goal was someplace hidden and secret. I suspected that the trail to the right would either peter out quickly, or double back to the main walkway.

Either way, it was headed in the general direction I wanted. I might as well follow it for as long as I could.

After only few steps along the new route, I began a precipitous descent. My legs burned as I struggled to make my way, sometimes taking to all fours once more. Fortunately, there were plenty of places where tree roots crossed the path, forming makeshift footholds and keeping the soil from eroding, preventing the way from becoming a treacherous, natural slide.

Each step down brought me further into the clammy, claustrophobic miasma. Even I had a tough time pushing on.

The path bottomed out, widening into a clearing. I couldn't see the path any longer and wondered if this was where it finally gave out. I crept along the edge, staying well inside the tree line. I didn't see anything, but something wasn't right. The fog played with the way sound carried, heightening my anxiety. My own careful footfalls seemed loud. Other sounds, like those of squirrels running up tree trunks and distant birdsong, remained muffled and difficult to pinpoint.

All at once, I stopped, placing one hand against a sturdy oak tree to steady myself. Somewhere, I did not know where, I could hear two dogs locked in conversation.

11. Toward the Beacon

Scenario

The difficult march toward the Fabulous Fen brings you to an area of marshy terrain, as the forest turns slowly to a swamp. You stumble across a pond, and hear some rustling and the sound of something splashing about in the water. This region of humid, pristine wilderness teems with wildlife. Finding a trail or any clue about the direction to take, however, seems a daunting endeavor.

the right direction. One is the trail of Little Plum's party, whose tracks are still fresh on the ground, the other is the genuine Talisman of Akbash. Shortly before midday, when the talisman's ping is already quite loud, a random character picks up a faint but very distinctive aroma of cinnamon. To check out this unusual trail, which seems to run along Little Plum's tracks, our heroes need to deviate slightly from a direct path to the Fabulous Fen.

The characters may wander the bogs aimlessly, unless they possess one of two possible ways to find

Following the smell of the cinnamon, you arrive in a clearing where a bonfire burned within a



circle of stones. Around it remain the traces of an abandoned bush camp: three heaps of leaves used as beds, torn blankets, an upturned pot, some scattered bowls and cups. Signs of a struggle are abundant: heavy paw prints, stomped grass, and an arrow newly planted in the trunk of a tree. Several wet packs and bags, torn open and slashed, slump near the cold, extinguished bonfire. As you look around, you stumble in a cluster of smelly, sticky filaments.

The characters have found the last camp set up by Plum Shiloh and his party before giant spiders attacked and captured them. The arachnids paralyzed and tied their victims with their webs. Among the destroyed bags, the characters can find a backpack left intact by the spiders. The spared backpack belonged to Little Plum, and contains, among other things, a stick of cinnamon like the one the characters may have received by Pistilla Shiloh. The smell of cinnamon repelled the spiders. The tracks left by the spiders as they dragged away their victims are evident, and any dog can easily follow them, though they may struggle to identify what creatures could make such prints. The tracks head in the direction shown by the Talisman of Akbash, and lead directly to the Fabulous Fen.

At sunset, the characters must camp out for the night ahead. In the dead of night, any guarding dog is startled by a sudden light, and any sleeping dog awakens with a fur-raising sense of supernatural terror.

At some distance, in the deep darkness under the trees, a ghostly light floats in the air. The will-o'-the-wisp is no brighter than the pale, sickly moon shining above. The light wavers slightly and its orb grows, its energy flowing through your eyes and into your brain. You hear a soft hum from inside your head. A low, limpid female voice, delicate and chilly as the night breeze, echoes in your mind... "Dogs!"

The apparition lingers for just a few moments, but the eerie situation and the specter's telepathic effect is disturbing indeed. The characters may be shaken, and experience a lingering sense of fear. After the disappearance of the light and voice, silence and darkness envelope the forest once more.

The apparition was Ast-Maat, a wicked creature of the time of Man now haunting the Fabulous Fen. When morning finally arrives, the autumnal chill has intensified, and our heroes need an extra dose of courage to continue.



This uncharted part of the Fearful Forest is roughly the point at which Pan's recorded journey ends. If the characters haven't been mapping their path until this point, a successful Intelligence check against a difficulty of 12 allows the Guide to prompt them to do so, reminding them of their additional objectives.

As they venture further into the forest, a light on the Talisman starts glowing. A "ping" noise issues quietly from the Talisman. At about this same time, characters making a successful Wisdom check against a difficulty of 13 pick up the familiar scent of other dogs, and of the Shiloh family. The Search and Survive skills may contribute to modify any die roll made to accomplish this task. If they succeed, they find the remains of a campsite. Strands of webbing are all around, on the ground and hanging from the trees above. Characters find the adhesive webbing when it clings to their faces, feet, or the backs of their hands. Describe this material as a sudden, mysterious discovery to achieve an alarming effect.

The scattered camp is abandoned: items are damaged by wildlife, the fire burned out long ago, and any some fabric items — bed rolls, shoes, clothing — are soggy from recent rains, and probably moldy to boot. A few items are still salvageable, including a short sword, some arrows in a quiver, and several torches. A successful Wisdom check against a difficulty of 12 (in which the Search or Survive skills will improve the die roll) reveals drag marks in the soil, long and deep enough to be made by the limp bodies of young dogs. This successful check also allows characters to discover oddly-shaped indentations on either side of the drag marks. These tracks were left by the giant spiders themselves. There are at least two. Knowing this should keep the characters on edge for most of the night — and will force each of them to make a Wisdom saving throw against a difficulty of 13. Characters who fail this check acquire the Scared condition until dawn, or until the condition is removed. Scared characters will not willingly stay in the camp area.

The stick of cinnamon found in the remains of camp compels an Intelligence check against a difficulty of 14 (the Know Culture skill will improve the die roll). Success reveals the legendary

CINNAMON AND SPIDERS

Popular folklore in the Kingdom of Pugmire tells of Gustav Doberman, the dog who took on the Coven of Spiders: a terrifying cabal of uplifted arachnids who, these days, live only in legend. The coven enslaved a legion of dogs, grooming them as a perpetual food supply, before Gustav made his way to their Priestess and slew her, freeing his friends and family.

How did Gustav get so close to the well-guarded Priestess? Cinnamon. The spiders dared not approach the intrepid Doberman as around his neck, hanging from his paws, his ears, his jaw, hung smoldering cinnamon sticks. This gas attack disorientated and confused the spiders to such a degree that Gustav was able to walk directly to the Priestess and impale her cold heart.

To this day, all good dogs know a spider hates cinnamon.

deterrent properties cinnamon possesses against insects, including ants and spiders.

Deep in the night, the characters awaken as a chill creeps up each of their spines. Nearby, a ghostly light bobs slowly to and fro. On closer inspection, the characters can see it is a humanoid figure with a glowing head. The characters feel a strange buzzing sensation in their minds, but it passes quickly, and the ghostly figure winks out after only a few minutes, disappearing from view. Characters will again need to make a Wisdom check at a difficulty of 15 after this event or acquire the Scared condition, which lasts until dawn or until the condition is removed. Any characters already Scared that night will not acquire further complications from the second terrifying event.

Between this and concerns about spiders attacking in the night, the characters all sleep badly; none recover any lost stamina points from the previous day's adventuring.

Bandits



"I'm telling you, Bay. We didn't leave anything of any value behind."

The voice was low, gruff, and coming from somewhere to my left. It sounded like the speakers were near the center of the clearing. I was thankful I had listened to my intuition and not walked blindly into an encounter with two unknown dogs in the depths of the woods. There was a chance that they were good dogs, but what would a good dog be doing out in the middle of the Fearful Forest? Anyone with business in the wild that led them far from the trade paths (myself excluded, of course) was bound to be bad news.

I crouched down behind my oak and strained my ears to listen.

"I don't even know if we're in the right place. This stupid fog is impossible. I thought you said it would be gone by midday."

The other dog practically whined these words. I recognized that voice. It took me a few wags, but then I got it. It was one of the shills from Wooford. How had they gotten to the other side of the river?

From my vantage point, I could see nothing but indistinct shapes. There were only two forms that I could make out, both roughly the same size. From the clanking and creaking I surmised that they were wearing some sort of makeshift armor.

Interesting.

The ground was littered with last year's leaves. The recent rains had left them soft and mushy. This muffled any move I made, but it also filled my nose with smell of rot. I couldn't make nose or tail of the two in the clearing. This probably meant my own smell was masked, so I did not complain.

"I don't control the weather, you know –" He continued to speak, but was too distant to hear. The pair continued to snipe at each other, the tones telling the story despite the fact I could not hear the words.

I moved quietly through the underbrush, trying to get a better position.

"Here it is!" The other one moved quickly to his friend's side.

"Nice find, Fos." There was a pause. "They really did a number on them, didn't it?"

"Hopefully they were too quick to worry about trivial things like goods and plastic." I could hear the smile in his voice.

They appeared to be sorting through something on the ground, something which covered a fair amount of space near the center of the clearing. I edged my way through the trees, counting on the fog and the greens of my cloak and tunic to provide adequate camouflage.

"Here, lift up this side of the tent while I dig inside."

There was more noise, the sounds of cloth being pulled apart. Someone was rummaging around in whatever was on the ground.

"I think I found something," Bay exclaimed, his voice pitched even higher in his excitement.

The silence was shattered by a loud snap.

I froze in place, my paw bisecting the only dry branch in the whole area.

"Who's there?" demanded the gruff voice.

I cursed my rotten luck: I was discovered just as their reinforcements arrived. I slung the bow off my back and fired a quick volley of three arrows, one after another, over the two dogs' heads.

12. Saint Akbash's Testimony



Scenario

12a. Your journey takes you to a region of wooded marsh where only the rustle of leaves and the occasional screech of swamp birds break what seems to be the silence of centuries. As you tread an expanse of black, peaty ground, you notice an odd glistening in the shrubbery under a clump of green alder trees. Looking closely, you find a dog-made path paved with mossy, wet flagstones ascending from the fen. The steep path climbs for a few yards, then forks in two directions. The way to the right climbs sharply toward the top of the mound, while the other proceeds on a gentler slope on the left.

climb the scarp and clear some of the vegetation and soil, they discover a multi-colored, variegated plastic dome buried in the ground. The plastic dome covers a cylindrical room extending 20 feet underground (see 13a). The characters can carve a hole in the two-inches-thick plastic shell to crawl through.

12c. A few feet off the path, the stone foundations of an old cottage barely surface from the thick grass carpeting the slope. A pair of partially bare trees overshadow the structure. On the foundation stones, timber has rotten almost beyond recognition, and only the masonry structure of an oven still stands above knee level. A pavement of engraved terracotta tiles is sometimes apparent among tufts of weeds, fallen leaves, scattered roof tiles, and the cruder flooring of run-down animal pens.

Whether they used the Talisman or followed the tracks of Little Plum's captors, the characters reach the place where Zaval Akbash found the source of his miraculous power. After taking the stone-paved path, built by the Saint's followers centuries in the past, they find the Talisman's signal points to the right slope (12b), while the tracks of Little Plum's captors head to the nearby ruins (12c and then 12d).

12b: The steep path ends in a flat lay-by right before a low scarp, which encircles the top of the fen like a jagged, crumbling crown. Rust-colored formations of ferrous ore intersperse the band of bare rock, which make a sharp contrast with the peaty soil. On the lay-by squats a crude stone altar carved with the symbol of an arrowhead pointing up toward a solar disk.

Even a casual search in the ruined cottage allows the characters to pick up a faint but enticing scent of spiced bacon. Following this scent, a magical essence sprinkled by Akbash, the characters can find a sealed vase hidden in a recess under a tile of the pavement. As they search for the vase, however, spiders launch an attack!

The vase contains a rolled papyrus written by Saint Akbash before leaving his retreat and returning to the world.

12d: The path proceeds up to a wall of uneven rock and plunges into a roughly hewn tunnel. This tunnel, still paved with flagstones, descends into an almost completely dark space, from which issues a mildew-scented breeze. No noise comes from the end of the tunnel, where an archway is fitted with a massive, rusty steel door stuck in a completely open position.

The followers of Akbash erected the altar where the talisman's signal was the strongest. The symbol carved on it resembles the design of the top face of the artifact itself. Here the characters notice that, over the scarp behind the altar, the dirt and vegetation conceal an odd, hemispherical bulge in the ground. If the character



Akbash's followers excavated the tunnel with crude tools. At the bottom of the hewn passage, which descends about 10 feet from the base of the scarp outside, is a 15-foot-long tunnel that

once was enclosed in two massive, hatch-like metal doors, now blocked and unusable. The tunnel leads to an underground vestibule (13b).



Rules

The characters must make Wisdom checks against a difficulty of 12 to follow the Talisman's signal. The Survive skill modifies any die roll in this endeavor. Only a botch will send them in the wrong direction, into thick woodland infested with spiders. As they get closer to the Fen, the pinging sound gradually increases in tempo.

With a successful Wisdom roll against a difficulty of 13, the characters will realize the ground behind the altar feels slightly springy. Digging around will uncover a multi-colored plastic dome roughly nine feet in diameter set in hard stone. The plastic is cracked and has several large holes. Characters could exploit these holes as a way in and keep the plastic as coin, but will need rope and a Dexterity roll against a difficulty of 15 to reach the floor of the upper room without injury.

Once thoroughly excavated, the dome will reveal a door beneath it set into the stone wall. Digging out the door takes time, and the Guide should judge whether a surprise spider attack may be prudent. Inside the dome is a small room with a copper cage suspended from the ceiling by wires. On the floor next to the wall is a metal trapdoor, which opens to reveal a metal ladder leading down.

If the characters instead decide to follow the path to the partially collapsed stone cottage, each character must make a Wisdom saving throw. The difficulty is 11. Any characters who fail trip and slip over the loose flagstones. This obstacle causes 1d4-1 bludgeoning damage, causing sprains. It is apparent the flagstones are so higgledy-piggledy due to the sealed clay vase buried poorly beneath. Inside the vase is a papyrus scroll detailing Saint Akbash's life here in the Fabulous Fen. It is a relic of significant value to the Church of Man, whose leaders would pay handsomely for it.

As the characters examine the vase and its contents, one or more large spiders creep up behind them from the nearby cave and attack. The intent of these spiders is to paralyze a victim and

drag it back to the cave. If any characters prevent it from leaving through attacks, the spider drops its intended prey and flees back to the cave. The spiders avoid any characters carrying Pistilla Shiloh's sticks of cinnamon. With a successful Intelligence check against a difficulty of 11, characters carrying cinnamon will realize this is the case.

The party should face one spider for every two dogs in the group.

PARALYSIS SPIDER

Defense: 13 (chitinous exoskeleton)

Stamina Points: 14

Speed: 40 feet (climb 20 feet)

Proficiency Bonus: +2

Abilities: Strength: +2 (14), Dexterity: +1 (13), Constitution: +1 (12), Intelligence: -3 (4), Wisdom: +0 (10), Charisma: -1 (8)

Skills: Balance, Sneak

Speedy Runner: The spider with this trick gets an advantage on all Dexterity checks having to do with running or being involved in a chase. Also, the character's speed is increased to 40 feet.

Attacks: Bite (+2 melee, 1d6+2 piercing damage + venom)

If injured to 4 or fewer stamina points, a spider will retreat into its cave, allowing its victim to escape. When in its safe place, the spider has a defense of 18 and only its front side is vulnerable.

Paralyzing Venom

Any bitten character must make a Constitution saving throw each round, against a difficulty of 14. Each turn the character fails, she loses 2 points of Dexterity. When Dexterity reaches 0, she gains the Paralyzed condition, unable to move, speak, or succeed on any Strength or Dexterity saving throws. Any attacks against a paralyzed dog have an advantage, and if they hit, count as a triumph. The paralysis remains until a few minutes after combat resolves.

After recovering from paralysis, any character who takes damage from a spider bite must make a Constitution saving throw against a difficulty of 16. Failure means the character gains the Sickly condition, putting them at a disadvantage on all ability checks and attack rolls until fully rested.

Campsite



"This way, boys!" I shouted in my loudest, most authoritative voice. "Bandits! Dogs, to me!"

I grabbed the offending branch and winged it into the woods behind me. It struck a tree and knocked free another branch, which let out an impressive crash when it hit the ground.

"Run for it!" Fos shouted. "It's the militia from Mutt Town!"

"What would the militia be doing out in the middle of the woods?"

"Probably looking for the owners of that gear. Why don't you stay and ask them?"

I grinned as the bandits ran off. I didn't spend time congratulating myself over my victory. They would be back as soon as they realized that they were not being pursued by a batch of Mutt Town's finest. I had to make myself scarce.

I sprinted down to the center of the clearing. It took me a minute to identify what I was looking at. It finally dawned on me that the shreds of cloth, scattered pile of wood, and the other couple of items I saw lying about were the remains of a campsite. It must have been a large one, definitely for more than one or two people. I picked up an item or two, gave each a sniff, then dropped it back on the ground.

Bending low, my keen nose inches above the forest floor, I looked for tracks. Something - or a group of somethings - had entered this clearing and dragged away whomever was using it as a campground. A flurry of pawprints encircled a fire pit holding at least one night's worth of ashes. Beyond that, all tracks were obscured by the drag marks.

What was most distressing was that, despite different points of origin, the drag marks all headed into the forest in the same direction.

The direction of the Fabulous Fen, if I had my bearings right.

I took one more moment to explore the tent the original two bandits had been rifling through. There were a few pieces of dried meat wrapped in a scrap of leather. I added this to my pouch. Food might be hard to come by. If I ever met the people who owned these tents, I would gladly repay them, but they weren't using it now.

Sitting in the dirt, not far from where I stood, was one of those disk things that had been for sale back in Mutt Town. So, the campers had been searching for the Fabulous Fen as well. I picked it up and examined it as best I could.

As far as I could tell from my cursory glance, it was identical to the ones from Mutt Town: a smooth disk, the spinning arrow, the crystal or whatever embedded near the edge. I tossed it idly in my paw, thinking, before finally shoving it into one of my many pouches. Worst-case scenario, it was a useless piece of junk that didn't weigh all that much and would not slow me down. Best-case scenario, it might help me find the Fen.

If nothing else, maybe I could use it to barter with the bandits, should they catch up to me.

With that thought, I sprinted off as quickly as I dared. As soon as I was out of the clearing, the way began to rise again. There were no paths cut through the woods here, just the occasional game trail. I ran on, climbing steadily. The run was tiring, but I felt invigorated.

I heard no one following me. My ruse had worked. If anyone did try to sneak up on me, I would have the advantage of the high ground.

Testimony of Saint Akbash

From Akbash, the servant of Man and brother to all good dogs, to those who are beloved in Man and obedient to His Code, mercy unto you, a loving stroke, and nourishment be fulfilled.

I wrote this testimony to make sure that what I smelled, saw, and heard in this most holy place called the Fabulous Fen is not forgotten, should I fail to return to the blessed community of the dawning Church of Man.

It was by Providence that I found my talisman in the Fearful Forest, pursuing my righteous quest to fetch what was left behind. As I walked along the Straddle Strip with my followers, we received a vision, then a beacon of light guided us here.

This place was the seat of a city of Man, and casual digging in the area granted us plenty of scrap metal and plastic. Here, we found a vault still bathed in humane light, and a source of holy elixir.

The vault was also the resting place of Ast-Maat, an angel of Man. Ast-Maat had slept for centuries in the aftermath of the great cataclysm that ended the world of Man, plunging the world into a terrible age of cold and darkness.

The angel was a healer, and had the uncanny power to command the loyalty of Mios, a mysterious cat spirit. In the remote past, she conceived a reincarnation for Man, shaping her thoughts in new bodies that allowed man to delay their disappearance. She also assumed this form, and went to sleep to remain on earth and share with us faithful dogs the essence of her admirable work in the emerging warmer, renewed world.

Ast-Maat became our guide, kindly imparting her knowledge upon us and making us stronger as shepherds. After a while, though, she plunged into a deep melancholy, which urged her to seek the home of Mios, her cat spirit, which allegedly lay in some faraway land. Ast-Maat grew dreamy and apart, as she remembered something in her past that brought her great grief.

Sometimes, to our considerable consternation, she evinced a cold, unsettling anger and reproached us even for our most trivial trespasses. In this distressing situation, we greatly feared that Mios, an ineluctably treacherous cat, had taken control of our angel and turned her against us.

Before we could do anything but worry, Ast-Maat departed, leaving us in sadness.

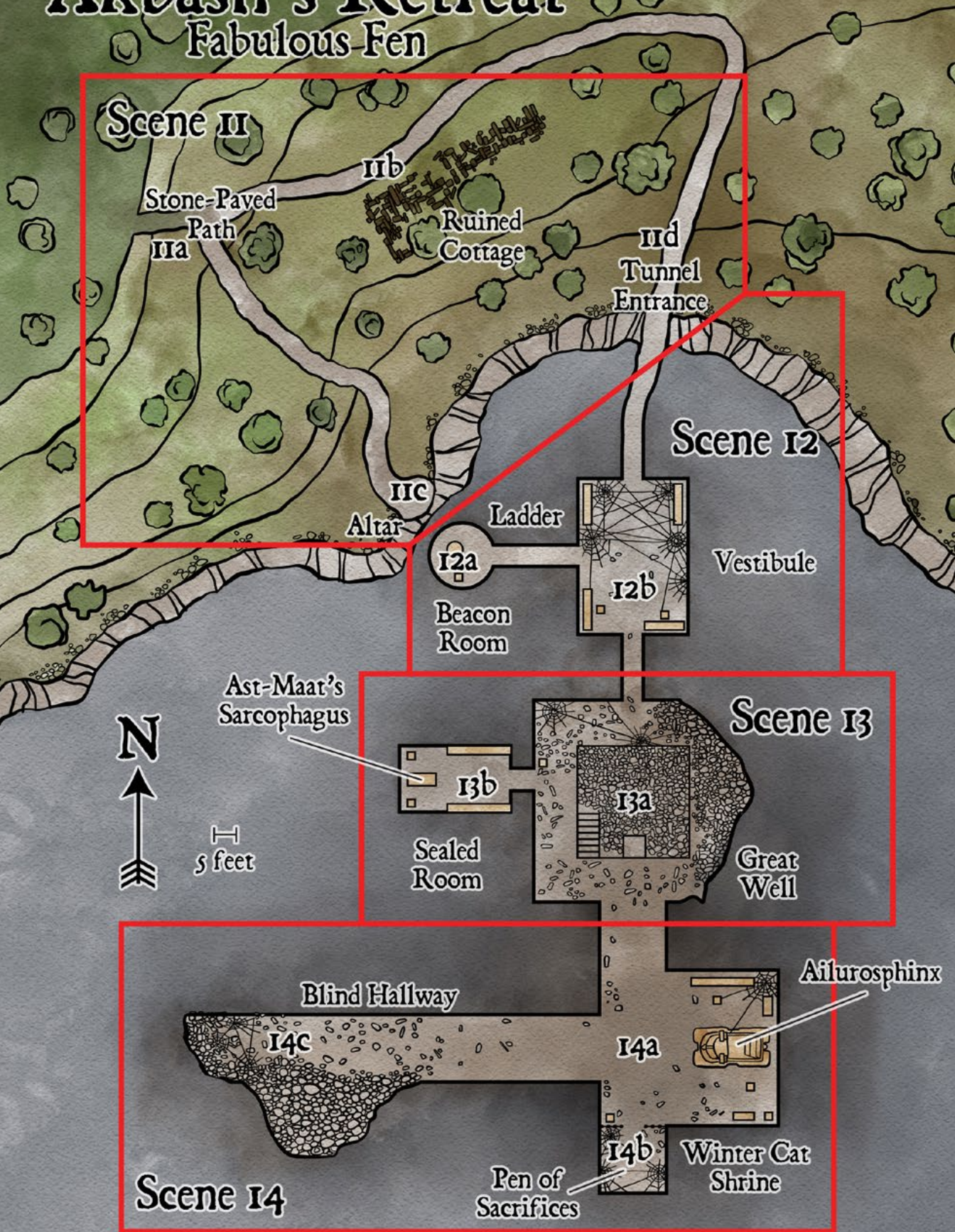
We patiently waited for her to return, but she never did. I wrote this memory when we decided to leave this place as well, to spend our last years among good dogs and to use our healing powers to help in the foundation of the Kingdom of Pugmire.

All this happened as I report it. To the only Man, our Lord and Provider, be health and opulence, our love and devotion, now and always, for ever and ever.

Akbash the Shepherd

Akbash's Retreat

Fabulous Fen



13. Into the Site of Man

Scenario

13a. A iridescent, technicolor, dome-shaped ceiling 15 feet in diameter covers a 20-foot-high cylindrical room akin to a subterranean grain silo. The room is divided vertically by a 15-foot-high mezzanine made of metal grating. In the middle of the curved ceiling space, supported by a slender pylon and by a ring of tie rods, is a marvelous chandelier made of pure copper, only superficially marred with splotches of green corrosion. A ladder connects the mezzanine with the main floor, where a massive metal box, tarnished by age, stands upright against the curved wall. Near the top of the otherwise inert box, a luminous bead pulses slowly and silently with a red light.

The only way the characters can enter this room from outside is by breaking through its plastic, hemispherical ceiling, or by digging out the door fitted in it. The circular room is otherwise connected to a larger, rectangular room (13b) accessible through the tunnel entrance (12d). Two metal, hatch-like doors, now badly rusted and blocked in an open position, once sealed the passage between this room and the rest of the complex.

The only active relic in the room is the source of the Talisman's signal. The metal box emits a pulse synchronized with the Talisman's ping, and the copper chandelier amplifies and broadcasts it in the surrounding region, as a skilled artisan can infer with some reasoning. Beside this function, the red light on the metal box has no other effect. When the characters arrive, the range of the signal only extends to the Straddle Strip because the dome is almost completely covered by a layer of soil and vegetation. Freeing the dome from obstruction to access it without perforation increases the signal's range to Mutt Town. Inflict-

ing heavy damage on the metal box and/or the chandelier effectively stops the signal's broadcast.

13b: The perfectly even floor of this underground chamber is laden with dust and debris. The room, furnished with ancient cupboards, tables, and chairs, is in complete disarray. It looks like pillagers sacked the room in the remote past and unintelligent beasts frequented it for a long time thereafter. A curtain of enormous, interlocking webs draped across the northern part of the room limits visibility and likely poses an obstacle to movement. A passage in the southern wall leads to a subterranean area bathed in dim, natural light.

Once inside the vestibule, the characters will need to light torches to see anything at all. The massive metal doors at both ends of the 15-foot corridor leading into it have completely corroded hinges and can no longer close. Cobwebs festoon the space immediately beyond the inner door.

Two desks and two chairs furnish the south part of the room, and two cupboards the north. The desks are fitted with various Man-era appliances, seemingly smashed and cracked open a long time ago. Likewise, the cupboards contain only ragged remains of ancient clothes, some of them made from very thin, pliable plastic, fitted with metal ornaments.

The webs in the northern part of the room hinder the speed and combat ability of anyone traversing the area. A semi-intelligent giant spider, an eight-legged arachnid monstrosity the size of a dog, guards this area. It lies in ambush near the entrance, ready to jump over intruders as they try to make their way through the webs. Setting the webs on fire can damage the spider and clear the way, although the smoke produced will make the air inside the chamber irrespirable for some time.



If the characters are cautious and arrive here from the beacon room (13a), they can bypass the webbed area, although surprising or avoiding the

spider altogether is extremely difficult. The spider has been influenced by Ast-Maat's telepathy, and implicitly obeys her destructive will.



Rules

Descending the ladder requires a Dexterity check against a difficulty of 12, since the ladder is rusty, the bolts anchoring it to the wall are old, and the masonry is crumbling. Success means the ladder holds; failure means the character slips and falls the remaining distance to the bottom, causing 1d4-1 stamina points of bludgeoning damage. A botch means the ladder pulls free from the wall, crashing to the floor below. Everyone on the ladder when it falls incurs 1d6 points of bludgeoning damage.

A spider crouches in the vestibule above the north doorway, hidden from view from that direction but plainly visible from the center of the room and from the entryway leading back to the beacon room. It will project sticky webbing on any character passing beneath it, before descending to eat.

The desk drawers contain dust as well, and a few pieces of paper in varying sizes. Picking up one or more of the ancient, fragile sheets will cause the paper to crumble into fragments. A box of thin, wooden sticks sits in the central desk drawer, each with a sharp point at one end and a thin metal tube capping the other end, with pinkish dust spilling from the open end of the metal cap. Next to this box is a small plastic object with a metal piece inside, and a clear cap. The cap is full of small, crumbled particles resembling wood shavings. On an Intelligence check against a difficulty of 14, the characters recognize the sticks and clear plastic box as relics of Man.

The cupboards contain ancient clothing: gloves, one-piece yellow jumpsuits including built-in shoes, now stiff and crackling with age, and lightweight, close-fitting garments in gray. On top of a cupboard rest two plastic helmets. Fabric hangs from the lower edge of each, meant

to cover part of the wearer's shoulders, chest, and back. The enclosed helmet is opaque but for a transparent plastic plate set in the face.

Characters may try on any of these items. The fabric of the undergarments will disintegrate as it unfolds. The gloves and jumpsuits will crack and splinter when worn, useless and decrepit. The helmets have survived the ravages of time. Characters can still wear them as originally intended. These, at least, will be interesting relics, useful for further study. While too hot to wear in the summer, they would keep biting flies and mosquitos away from the face effectively and confer a +1 armor bonus to defense.

WEBSPINNER SPIDER

Defense: 13 (chitinous exoskeleton)

Stamina Points: 12

Speed: 30 feet (climb 30 feet)

Proficiency Bonus: +2

Abilities: Strength: +2 (14), Dexterity: +2 (14), Constitution: +1 (12), Intelligence: -3 (4), Wisdom: +0 (10), Charisma: -1 (8)

Skills: Balance, Sneak

Attacks: Bite (+2 melee, 1d4+1 piercing damage + venom)

If injured to 3 or fewer stamina points, a spider retreats to a small shelter built from webbing to recover, allowing its intended victim to escape. When in its safe place, the spider has a defense of 18 and only its front side is vulnerable.

Webbing

If a character becomes tangled in the spider's webbing, she must make either a Strength or a Dexterity saving throw against a difficulty of 15. Failure makes the character incapable of any limb movement. A character may keep trying to break free, though the difficulty increases by 1 on each attempt as the character becomes increasingly entangled.

Reaching the Straddle Strip



The woods were devoid of the shouts and stamping feet of vengeance-seeking bandits: no crashing through the trees, no war cries. Good - I was not being followed. I slowed my pace, still keeping an ear cocked for sounds of pursuit.

I followed a game trail, not a straight or steady path, but one which cut a clear way through the thickets. It continued to climb. The grade wasn't so obvious that you could see it rising, but it was steep enough that you felt it in your legs. I followed the route easily, only having to duck below the occasional tree branch or step over a downed log.

The path branched off a few times. Each time but one, I kept to the one that climbed higher. That time, I let my natural curiosity have the better of me. I followed one of the lower branches for about a half an hour before coming across signs of large insect activity. There were multiple tracks crisscrossing over each other, each with the tell-tale double pincer marks of ants. Sickly trees, their bases stripped of bark to a spot over my head, bordered the area.

I retreated up the path and took the higher fork. The last thing I wanted to do was disturb a nest of ants the size of ponies. Two or three I could handle without a problem, more with luck and surprise on my side. Taking on a whole hill alone? Foolhardy.

I am far too fond of my own coat to attempt something like that.

After more uphill slogging, I finally reached the crest of hill. Once more, the path opened; however, this time it did not spread out to a circular clearing. Instead, the trees gradually thinned out until they stopped altogether. A short distance further, the path ended. In fact, it was not just the path that ended, but the whole side of the forest.

I stood at the top of a rather precipitous drop. I could only assume that this was the Straddle Strip that Sampson had spoken of. I stood for a while, looking down into the gloom. The sun had long since passed its highest point. Its beams were choking among the tree tops on the far side of the gorge. Soon there would be little light in the area. None of the light made it too far into the crevice itself.

I was hesitant to start down when the light would be failing soon. It didn't seem too bad a climb, from what I could see. Still, a turned paw would mean a huge delay, and a broken leg while exploring alone could mean death.

I roamed the edge for quite a while. I had just about decided to risk the climb down and set up camp when the light failed, when I came across a stroke of luck. A huge tree, its base showing the scorch marks of a lightning strike, spanned most of the gap. The tree itself, a giant fir, was devoid of branches for most of its length. The only greenery remaining was at the tip, which rested on the other side of the gorge.

I examined the place where it had split from the roots. Bows of fibrous wood, most thicker than my arm and some thicker than my whole body, connected the trunk to the stump. I hauled myself up onto the tree and bounced a few times. It seemed to be secured by the bits still attached to the trunk.

I sat for a long moment, trying not to think about why this huge tree was in one of the thinner areas of the forest. How long had it spanned the gap? Had it fallen recently, or would age cause it to splinter to dust if too much weight was placed upon it?

There was only one way to find out.

14. The Sealed Chamber



Scenario

14a: This large room, dimly lit by a natural source, underwent a wave of destruction in the distant past. A tremendous impact from outside breached the east wall near the ceiling, opening a sizeable gap to the open sky. The structural collapse filled the eastern part of the room with rubble, and the explosive force blew fragments of rock and metal everywhere else. Opposite the gap, in defiance of the ruin around it, soft, blue light from a wall-mounted lamp bathes a tarnished but intact door on the western wall. The floor sinks into a railing-bordered dry basin, almost filled by sediment and rubble. A flight of stairs descends into the basin and disappears in the damp wreckage. A pale scattering of bones tops the dark and uneven mass.

inside?” Whatever the characters say, in thought or woof, Ast-Maat giggles benevolently and opens the door telekinetically for them, although she does not follow up on any questions.

14b: A soft, turquoise light from the ceiling illuminates this room, steeped in pristine technological artifacts. Several display cases fitted with crystal shutters, most of which are open and empty, fill shelving units lining the walls. The west wall ahead is fitted with a huge, built-in apparatus, which almost fills a vertical surface 15 feet wide and 10 feet high. The apparatus looks inert, except for a central obsidian mirror, which sporadically flashes with a blue light. On the floor before this marvel, lies a white capsule of metal and plastic akin to a sarcophagus.

The basin, now filled by five to ten feet of debris under the edge, was once a stairwell leading to a vast underground complex. It has long been used by spiders as a dumping space for the bones of their prey, and so the bones of many kinds of creatures rest in the pit, dogs included. The door on the west wall, sealed shut and exceptionally resistant to breaking attempts, leads to the vault (14b) mentioned in Akbash’s papyrus. A pulpit stands beside the door, about four feet tall, and presents a horizontal depression on the top, within which the Talisman of Akbash fits perfectly. The characters can use the depression as a lock to open the door with the talisman. When this happens, the characters hear the otherworldly voice of Ast-Maat saying: “You made it to my place, little doggies.”

Without the talisman, the characters are out of luck. After a few frustrated attempts or when they are about to leave, however, they hear Ast-Maat in their mind just the same: “Are you just going to whine, puppies? Or do you want to come

Although most of the shelving units are empty, some contain a few vials of magical healing fluids, the same potions and curative salves for which Saint Akbash was famous. The sarcophagus connects to the wall and is immovable. A dog examining it (especially a shepherd) can infer that the original purpose of the sarcophagus was not to bury the dead, but to protect and heal a living being lying inside it. At some point in the past, however, the apparatus on the wall was progressively (and disturbingly) altered to cater for a mechanical, “dead” body, akin to an animated armor and pertinent to artisan magic. If a living, intelligent being touches the obsidian mirror on the wall, the flashing light takes the form of an unevolved feline body, spinning on a dark background, and the only intelligible text on the top left reads “Mios.” Then, a sequence of magically animated images shows the feline as it is dismembered. A jumbled edit displaying random limbs, a brain, and the spinning feline body appear



before the projection abruptly cuts off. The sequence plays only once, and there is no other way to manipulate the obsidian mirror.

The surviving healing fluids left by Akbash for future visitors of the chamber are an important treasure of the adventure.



Rules

If the players are having trouble realizing the talisman needs to be inserted in the indentation, have them each make an Intelligence check at a difficulty of 10 to receive a hint regarding what to do.

Numerous plastic and glass artifacts lay around the room. Most of the glass pieces have cracked with age, and are useless. Many of the plastic pieces are still intact, if not usable. The characters find strange plastic tubes with plungers fitted to one end and a sharp, metal needle at the other in abundance. They are too small and too clumsy to be useful as weapons, but may fetch a couple of coins each back in Mutt Town or Pugmire itself.

Inside the sealed room, the characters discover an empty sarcophagus of white plastic. Several glass display cases line the walls of this room; most are empty, but two contain a few small jars and bottles. Each container has indecipherable writing on a small label: a shepherd or an artisan studying this label with a successful Intelligence check against a difficulty of 14 could determine that the draught “heals the injured” but nothing more specific than that. The Know Arcana skill modifies the die roll attempting to interpret this writing.

Each of the containers holds a dose of elixir which heals 1d8+3 stamina points for an injured character. Drinking a partial dose has no effect: for the potion to work, a single individual must imbibe the entire contents. There are eleven doses of this elixir in this room.

A squat jar of some nasty smelling goo sits within another display case. With a successful Intelligence check (Know Arcana or Heal skills will assist) against a difficulty of 16, the characters can discern that its contents are a pep salve, which removes all exhaustion, the Sickly condition, and will allow a dog to go on for another round after

losing all stamina points. The jar contains seven doses. Gradient marks on the jar indicate dosage, but nothing on, in, or near the jar explains what the lines represent.

Shepherds or artisans studying the sarcophagus and making a successful Intelligence roll (Know Arcana or Know Religion assist) against a high difficulty of 17 discover the object was meant to house and preserve a living body. A second successful check at difficulty of 12 will reveal the device was reset to accommodate a non-living, mechanical body instead. It is currently empty, although it appears to be emitting power via an unseen transmission.

Glowing and beeping panels in this room spit sparks when handled, dealing 1d4-2 points of lightning damage to anyone manipulating them. These panels have different effects, and the Guide should be creative. Some may alter the lighting, others the temperature, one may even trigger a refrain of classical music through unseen speakers. A security code locks the panel on the sarcophagus, which characters may interfere with on a successful Intelligence roll (Know Arcana modifies the roll) against a difficulty of 17. If successfully deactivated or damaged, a brief, robotic screech fills the air. The characters' actions harm Ast-Maat, preventing her from using her telepathy and mind control tricks for an hour.

Finally, in a translucent, upright case, a spinning hologram depicts Ast-Maat's armored body. A series of glowing buttons protrude from its projector base. If all buttons are depressed, the hologram changes from green to red, and the spirit's immunity to piercing weapons disappears until the hologram automatically reboots an hour later. A successful Intelligence roll against a difficulty of 18 informs the characters that this device is more than a light projector.

Spanning the Gap



"Fortune favors the bold," I said as I stood on the tree. "The Hand of Man protects those who risk all."

I spat, then started walking.

"And shortcuts save time."

This last was not an actual saying. In fact, I was fairly certain my grandfather used to say "Shortcuts add time to any trip," but I pushed the thought out of my head.

The trick to walking over long drops is, of course, to never look down. Unfortunately, I was born a curious pup. My parents said I always had my nose in the air, ever looking for new scents. This trait has grown stronger, not weaker, as I've aged. Now, even with white on my muzzle, I'm still the same curious pup, sniffing the air and looking for innovative ways to get into trouble.

Naturally, I looked down.

Peering down from my tenuous perch, I could see the bottom of the gorge far below. A ribbon of uniform black stone seemed to cut among the rocks. Was this the less favorable route Sampson had spoken of? I looked over either side of the tree, but could see no sign of the monster that was supposed to dwell there.

If that was indeed the "easy path," then somewhere to my right, beyond what I could see, would be the boggy path of the good dog. I crept along the fallen tree trunk, a smile on my face. If good dogs took the difficult path through the swamp and the lazy dog would be set upon by the dreaded Turmack, what happened to the dog who avoided the situation altogether by crossing above the Strip?

There was a loud crack sound behind me. The tree dropped a bit, then resettled.

I had to ask.

The closer I got to the other side, the further towards the treetop I climbed. By now, the trunk had narrowed significantly. It still seemed sturdy, but it was so much thinner. I was forced to walk slowly, one paw in front of the other. I tested each step carefully before shifting my full weight. Soon, my tree bridge dipped lower with each step. Then it bounced underfoot and swayed in a gust of wind.

I reached the tree's top before I reached the far side. The needles that I passed on the sparse branches were brown, an indication of how long the dry wood had lain across the gorge. Each step caused more needles to cascade into the depths below. Dried sap clung to my paws, and the branches snagged at my coat and clothing.

The tree shifted again. I was still a good distance from the other side, but there was no way that I was going to make the entire crossing. I picked a landing zone on the far side that was most of the way up the crevasse and that was devoid of large debris. With a steadying breath, I took two bounding steps and leapt from the trunk. The entire thing twisted to the right underfoot as I jumped over towards the left side.

For a sickening moment, my heart leapt into my throat. Then, I hit the grassy patch I had aimed for and rolled clear until I was face-first in a small bush. My bridge swayed in the slight breeze, but held steady. Quite satisfied with myself, if a little disappointed that no one was there to see my old bones achieve such a feat, I used the bush to lever myself into a standing position. The side of the gorge where I had landed was steep, but not steep enough to keep me from scrambling up to my destination: the other side. I reached the top and looked around. As on the other side of the crevice, there was a clearing, then a few small trees, then the larger trees took over. Several game paths threaded their way into the woods.

One of them would lead me to the Fabulous Fen.

15. The Ailurosphinx



Scenario

15a: A tall, thickset idol of a cat-like being, lying upright and statuesque on its stomach, dominates the eastern part of this chamber. The idol, a stylized feline monster, features stubby limbs folded under its body, a slim, whip-like tail, and a large head with oversized eyes and protruding, rounded ears. The crystal eyes, broken through in places and marred by dreadful, web-shaped cracks, reveal a hollow interior. Against the north wall, to the right of the idol, stands a high, multi-layered shelving unit. On the shelves and the floor around the idol sit several boxes of precious plastic, most of which are opened and upturned. A steel grate with its gate ajar separates the room from a dark recess in the south wall. The west part of the room opens to a 15-foot-wide hallway, from which some natural light seeps in.

This room is an abandoned religious shrine, dominated by an 8-foot-tall, 15-foot-long effigy of the feline demon imagined by Ast-Maat, the Ailurosphinx. The idol is indeed hollow, and a dog brave enough to confront its terrible presence might even crawl inside it through one of its broken eyes. In the cramped interior remain tattered, rusted seats, fitted with pliable plastic straps used to tie sacrificial victims inside the idol's metal shell. An artisan will notice the interior of the idol was meant to be heated up, and a shepherd will remember the frightening myth of a demonic cult that threw sacrificial victims into a metal idol heated with fire.

The plastic containers near the idol, although valuable, are now empty and dispersed. They were probably receptacles for offerings that were pillaged in distant past. The barred area south of the room (15b) was a holding cell for sacrifices, and cultists entered the shrine via the blind hallway.

15b. This old cell, filled with dust and giant webs, is accessible through a half-open, rusted gate. Near the entrance, ancient animals stacked the remains of some leather goods, long since shriveled and dried beyond use. At the edge of the shadows cast by bars and silk filaments alike lies a busted web cocoon the size of a dog. More cocoons, some broken and others intact, wait in darkness in the back of the room.

The spider in the vestibule (13b) keeps its web-wrapped paralyzed victims and monstrous eggs in this area. Inside the four intact cocoons near the south wall are a dead rat, who died of asphyxiation, Little Plum Shiloh, who miraculously survived the spider's poison, starvation, and confinement, and two of Little Plum's companions. Near the dead rat, on a bed of webs covered by a silky blanket, the characters may find four palm-sized spider eggs.

If the protagonists threaten the eggs or free Little Plum Shiloh, who is still half-paralyzed by the arachnid venom, the spider's young, which are hiding in the mass of webs at the end of the blind hallway (15c), form a swarm and rush in to stop them. If the characters defeat the spiders, they can rescue the young dog and his friends. Little Plum is terribly tired and frightened, but one of the remedies found in the sealed chamber can put him, or one of his friends, immediately back on their hind legs to fight, if the characters need extra paws against the enemy.

In the room, partially hidden by a busted cocoon, is an open plastic box and an artifact weapon. Both items were dropped carelessly long ago, and happened by chance to fall next to each other.



LAUBENSTEIN 18

15c. This long hallway ends in a cave in, though a rough, dark gap big enough for a dog to pass through upright leads farther underground. The explosion-ravaged area is filled by rubble and draped with giant webs. The dried husks of oversized flies and the bones of burrowing animals festoon the threads drawn across the gap, ominously dangling in the air current. Several discarded Man-created plastic containers protrude from beneath the heavy rubble.

This area is the lair of smaller spiders, which patient awaiting a victim to crawl into the gap in the wall. The spiders rush to defend their eggs and food, if the characters investigate the barred area near the Ailurosphinx. The plastic containers in this hallway contain packets of flares, which would sell at a high price back in Pugmire.

After exploring the site and rescuing Little Plum, the characters are confronted by their scariest enemy yet, the twisted angel of Man known as Ast-Maat.

Rules

The characters detect a familiar scent in this room: that of the Shilohs. Inside a barred area with an open gate rest imprisoned, web-covered figures. One is a dead rat, desiccated and dry. The others are the missing Little Plum Shiloh and his two travelling companions. They are starving, thirsty, and woozy from spider-venom, but alive.

As the characters approach to free Plum and the other dogs, a swarm of small spiders drop out of the thick webbing on the ceiling of the barred area and attack. Spiders of a similar type hide in the dark gap concluding hallway 15c, and will emerge to attack if any dogs are foolish enough to climb inside their hiding place. Cinnamon is a highly effective repellent, and will immediately drive the swarm into hiding for as long as the spice is in the open in the room.

SPIDER SWARM

Defense: 12 (small size)

Stamina Points: 14

Speed: 40 feet (climb 40 feet)

Proficiency Bonus: +2

Abilities: Strength: +0 (10), Dexterity: +1 (13), Constitution: +1 (12), Intelligence: -3 (4), Wisdom: +0 (10), Charisma: -1 (8)

Skills: Balance, Sneak

Speedy Runner: The spiders with this trick get an advantage on all Dexterity checks having to do with running or being involved in a chase. Also, the swarm's speed is increased to 40 feet.

Attacks: Bite (+0 melee, 1d4-1 piercing damage)

Mass Attack

The spider swarm attacks as a group, collectively dealing damage to the target. Each attack represents dozens of the little stinkers biting simultaneously. Their stats reflect the abilities of the group rather than those of one individual. When the spider swarm has 4 or fewer stamina points remaining, its members retreat into hiding.

Any character taking six or more points of damage from the swarm must make a Constitution check against a difficulty of 12 or acquire the Sickly condition for several hours or until the condition is removed. The condition makes all attack rolls and ability checks take place at a disadvantage.

Plum calls out weakly, directing the characters to a small, dust-covered plastic box on the floor. It is roughly rectangular, made of black plastic, and slightly heavy. Two metal prongs protrude from one end, and its top features a small button. The pup offers to explain how to use it to defeat Ast-Maat if the characters help him escape.

Once freed, Plum advises the characters to use the box against Ast-Maat if she comes back. The players may not know the name mentioned in the Testament of Saint Akbash, but when Plum describes her, they will recognize the strange, glowing entity that frightened them at Plum's abandoned camp. Plum will tell them to touch Ast-Maat with the prongs while holding down the button, and that doing so successfully will disrupt her suit's power supply for a time. He explains that, while he was imprisoned by the spider, Ast-Maat accidentally touched herself with it and she dropped to the floor for nearly an hour before she began to move again. When she fell, she dropped the box, and it has remained on the floor in this room since then.

The plastic box is a relic of Man with only four charges of energy remaining. A successful touch attack using the activated box will use one charge and disrupts Ast-Maat's suit for one hour, forcing her to dissipate. She will still harass the party as a disembodied voice. The attack will first require a Dexterity or Wisdom check against a difficulty of 15 to use it properly. A failed attack with the relic does not use up one of the charges, but a botch does.

If the characters ever use the relic to attack a non-supernatural character — a rat, a dog, or a badger, for example — a success results in the target acquiring the Paralyzed condition, which prevents them from moving, speaking, taking actions of any kind, or reacting. They automatically fail Strength and Dexterity saving throws, and attack rolls against them have an advantage. Any attack that hits counts as a triumph. This condition persists for 3d4 combat rounds.

Nightly Visitor



The day took its toll on me, despite my prime physical physique. As I settled into camp for the night, I placed my weapons within easy reach, rolled my cloak into a makeshift pillow, wrapped myself in my bedroll, and closed my eyes. I was asleep within a few wags.

I woke in the middle of the night. My rapier was in my paw before my eyes were completely open. The fur at the rough of my neck was standing on end. I stared into the darkness, trying to determine what had woken me.

Off to my left, a ghostly voice rent the darkness. It spoke but a single word, but it chilled the marrow in my bones.

“Dog...”

The voice sounded feminine, but cold. I felt that same itch inside my head, only a thousand times stronger.

“Dog... follow.”

Just ahead, in between two trees, was a pale light. It shimmered, green, then yellow, then a cold blue. I found myself moving towards it, my paws betraying me.

“Follow,” the whispery voice intoned again. I watched the light. Was it a thin dog? It moved through the trees, floating rather than stepping. It glided between the branches, not ducking, not making any adjustments for anything on the ground.

I reached for the tree I’d slept under and was astounded to find it was a long way behind me. I had been walking towards the strange light without any realization. I turned and staggered back to my sleeping place. The pressure in my head increased.

My rapier was still on the ground where it had slipped from my insensate paw. I grasped it, stared at it, and tried to focus on it, not the voice compelling me to step away, to follow.

Once again, I found myself away from my kit, my sword gone. I was further along this time, walking blindly. This time, as free will returned to me, I ran, flinging myself towards my bow and arrows only a few inches away. I pulled an arrow from the quiver and, by accident, ran its razor-sharp edge along the pad of my paw.

The pain was cleansing. The fuzziness in my mind slipped away. The voice lowered to a whisper. I concentrated on that thin line of pain, the warm blood spilling on to the ground. I could shut out the voice. I squeezed my eyes shut.

Time passed. I don’t know how much. When I was finally sure that the apparition was gone, I relaxed a little. I pulled a length of cord from my bag and looped it around my arm. The paw had stopped bleeding and had settled in to a dull throb.

I tied myself to one of the tree branches to ensure that I did not follow the lights, should they return.

I slept poorly and awoke stiff and sore from sleeping bound and upright, my back against the tree. Now I itched all over. My paw still throbbed from where I had slit it. Breakfast was a quick thing. Soon, I was on my feet and looking for signs of my encounter.

None of the branches were broken. The leaves and other ground detritus were undisturbed. There were no scents, no track nor trace, nothing to indicate that I had received a visitor the previous night. Had it all been a dream, a hallucination?

I flexed my sore paw. Dream or hallucination, it had been a very convincing one. I chuffed, then walked off in the direction the lights had taken. This path seemed no better or worse than any of the others.

I don’t know how long it took for me to notice the silence. No birds chirped, no small animals scuttled. I had been striding along, deep inside my own head like a rookie pup on his first outing.

Stupid.

I stopped. I stood perfectly still. The fur at my neck was standing on end, my body reacting to the danger that my conscious self had yet to recognize.

To those who read this journal, remember: listen to all your senses. Don’t just trust what you smell, hear, and see. If something feels wrong to you, it probably is. A dog’s sense of preservation is a highly tuned instrument designed to keep one from danger. Listen to that voice that tells you to be scared.

It just might save your life.

Something crashed through the woods, charging towards me.

I wondered if I had listened a little too late.

16. Facing Ast-Maat



Scenario

You marvel at the frightening, fascinating site you have explored, wondering how many other, great things of Man might still lie hidden in the Fabulous Fen. It's then that you hear a female voice in your head. "Bad, bad dogs! You stole the repast of the mighty Ailurosphinx! You spited my Mios!" After a long, resonant moment of absolute silence, a single pulse of greenish light assumes a humanoid shape before your eyes. The mystical figure of Ast-Maat, with her regal headpiece and luminous face, steps into the material world. Elegant Ast-Maat caresses a basket-like box she carries with her left hand, then rises her right hand in a peremptory gesture, her pupil-less eyes flashing with anger and her thirst for vengeance.

tically advanced technology that allowed her to survive in an artificial body.

The process that made Ast-Maat nearly immortal, a subversion of the natural cycle of life and death, took a heavy toll on her mind. The episode that turned her derangement into murderous madness was the demise of Mios, her feline companion, which underwent the same transformation she did, but which but did not survive it. Ast-Maat now keeps the feline's body in a pet carrier she never leaves unattended. Now, the former angel of Man passionately hates all flesh-bodied, living beings. Her guilt-wracked mind has turned her beloved feline Mios turned into a divinized monster hungry for sacrifices, the Ailurosphinx. Occasionally, she will stop attacking to recite some of this history.

The party's intrusion, which prevented the sacrifice of Plum, sealed the fate of our heroes, unless they can best Ast-Maat one way or the other.

Physically, Ast-Maat is an animated armor, but her greatest powers are those of her mind. She can use telepathy offensively, projecting flashes of light, phantom roars, and stunning waves in the minds of her opponents, or invoking the terrifying, hellcat-like shadow of the Ailurosphinx. Ast-Maat attacks produce a supernatural sense of fright, which can accelerate a dog's heartbeat, possibly to the point of stopping it.

Ast-Maat parleys with the characters only to play cat-and-mouse, as her intention is to add them to the pile of sacrifices to the Ailurosphinx. Her telepathic whispers, suave and death-cold, are often cryptic and always disquieting. They may be total nonsense, or they may allude to events happened at the site that were not recorded in Akbash's papyrus. The Guide can keep

The final battle with Ast-Maat happens at any time after the characters find and rescue Little Plum Shiloh, or whenever the Guide deems appropriate, most likely as the characters prepare to leave the site.

Ast-Maat appears as a graceful animated suit of armor with no tail or muzzle, and a full helmet covering her head. She has a completely artificial body, made of metal and plastic, which now contains her organic brain, as well as her mind and memory. After assuming her current form, Ast-Maat's need for mundane nourishment ceased. She began drawing energy from a magical stellar bead set into the armor that comprises her chest. The visor of her helmet is transparent and luminous, and shows only a hazy, expressionless shadow of a face.

Ast-Maat appears to phase in from nothingness, but is using a short-range teleport power, which was part of the survival gear of her magical protective suit. Her limited telepathy and telekinesis are also available to her due to the fantas-



things uncertain and let the players guess what really happened.

The characters can either destroy Ast-Maat or flee, a decision that should not be penalized in any way for she is very powerful and dangerous for inexperienced good dogs. Her physical weak spot is a web-like crack on the visor of her head-piece, which can break easily if hit with a called shot. Also, she is likely to be distracted by an attack that knocks her pet carrier off her hand.

If Ast-Maat is defeated in physical combat, her visor cracks, issuing a puff of chilly mist and the painful, human-like moan of someone made in the image of Man. From the pectoral of Ast-Maat, the characters can remove the stellar bead, which a skilled artisan can turn into a nearly unlimited source of energy for most artifacts of Man. In her pet carrier, the characters find the dead, artificial body of Mios, as it appeared in the obsidian mirror of the sealed chamber.

Rules

As Ast-Maat appears, characters should feel a deep sense of foreboding, and with good reason: not only is she the toughest creature they have ever encountered, she's also ancient, incomprehensible, and unwilling to see reason. They automatically recognize her as the same glowing individual they saw in the forest.

Ast-Maat is a human spirit contained in a highly-advanced piece of technology. As such, she is immune to damage from piercing and slashing attacks, unless the dogs use the device Plum pointed out in the previous chapter. Bludgeoning works normally, but Ast-Maat has more stamina than most dogs. She's tough to defeat using conventional attacks.

If players take Plum's advice and use the black plastic box to stun Ast-Maat, they have succeeded in quelling the spirit – for now. Ast-Maat will recover her full strength after roughly an hour, and will seek vengeance on any living dogs in the area. If the dogs are gone when Ast-Maat recovers, she will put them out of her mind and begin to search for new offerings to the Ailurosphinx.

A DIFFICULT COMBAT

Ast-Maat is a terrifying foe for new pioneers, which is why the adventure provides several methods by which to weaken her, including the sarcophagus control panel, the hologram, and Plum's black box. If the Guide feels generous, she can also make the cat basket at Ast-Maat's side a weak spot. After characters destroy it, Ast-Maat may dissipate forever. Or perhaps, if the Guide feels the dogs need a challenge, harming the basket sends Ast-Maat into a frenzy of violence.

This is the final battle, so Guides should use their best judgement to make it as thrilling as possible!

AST-MAAT

Defense: 16 (armor)

Stamina Points: 36

Speed: 20 feet

Proficiency Bonus: +2

Abilities: Strength: +5 (20), Dexterity: +0 (10), Constitution: +5 (20), Intelligence: +1 (14), Wisdom: -3 (5), Charisma: -3 (4)

Attacks: Slam (+5 melee, 1d6+5 bludgeoning damage)

Darkvision: Ast-Maat can see without any light at all. Characters using Darkvision in darkness can only see in black and white. They cannot see things they wouldn't be able to see in light, such as invisible characters.

Dread: As a single action, Ast-Maat can project a mental image of a character's worst fears into the mind of a single character within 30 feet of her. The target must succeed at a Wisdom saving throw against a difficulty of 12 or drop what they are holding and become scared, moving away from Ast-Maat each turn until either a minute passes, or until Ast-Maat loses sight of the character. Each round the dread infests the character's mind, they lose 1d4 stamina points through psychic damage.

Telepathy: As a full round action, Ast-Maat can tap into the mind of any intelligent being and communicate with them in their language. Most of what she says are mere ravings, though she occasionally seeds in lore from the Age of Man. Her mental presence causes the Sickly condition and erodes 1d4 Intelligence per turn, unless the character succeeds at a Wisdom saving throw against a difficulty of 12. Any eroded Intelligence can only be recovered with a Lesser Restoration (or higher) spell, or by removing the Sickly condition.

Mind Control: Ast-Maat can spend a turn targeting a victim with this power. The victim must make a Wisdom saving throw. If he scores 12 or higher, nothing happens. If he scores less, he gains the Charmed condition, and cannot attack Ast-Maat or target her with harmful abilities or effects. The character will perceive Ast-Maat's words and actions in the most favorable way, but an opposed Charisma check (in which both characters roll Charisma checks and the highest wins) is necessary to convince a dog to do anything he wouldn't ordinarily do. Charmed creatures do not obey suicidal or obviously harmful orders. If Ast-Maat takes any threatening action towards a Charmed dog, the condition ends.

Limited Teleport: Ast-Maat can dissipate over the course of a turn, and reappear elsewhere on the subsequent turn. Ast-Maat's teleportation has a range of 60 feet. Character next to Ast-Maat do not get attacks of opportunity.

Spider Attack



I barely had time to ready myself before the monster was upon me. A spider the size of a pony rushed out of the trees. Its furry limbs churned the earth as it bore down on me. My paws worked in a blur as I shot two arrows into its path. Its armored back deflected the first, but the second found a home in one of the beast's many eyes.

It screamed, its whole body quivering for a moment. I had hurt it.

But I also made it mad. If only I had fire! If only I had some damnable cinnamon! Either one of those would have sent the spider tearing into the distance.

I loosed one more arrow as I retreated. Then I dropped the bow and pulled steel.

The thing was on me in a wag. Its breath was fetid, reeking of old blood. The forelimbs swung about my head, trying to grasp me while its mandibles clicked and rent the air. I parried the blows of its hairy arms, my own arm shaking with effort each time I connected with the thing.

I fainted and thrust, looking for an opening. The skin on its back was nigh impenetrable, tough hide under dense fur. Its arms were similarly shielded, but my blows were doing them damage. My blade sliced through the air, down towards the spider's face. It brought up an arm. The rapier sliced into it, sticking for a moment. I dragged it back, freeing a gout of stinking, dark ichor.

The spider backed off for a moment, more cautious thanks to my assault. We regarded each other, each looking for an opening.

I dodged to its side with the one arrow-blinded eye. It shuffled to track my blade as I spun and thrust in again, landing a blow just below the creature's head. Something popped, a sickening sound like cracking a boiled bone at the joint to find the marrow within. White, foul smelling venom poured forth from its injury.

The spider rose again, spinneret firing silk in all directions. One strand found my leg, and I was trapped for two wags.

Just long enough for the spider to momentarily seize me.

It buried its mandible in my leg. I felt my skin and muscle tear. The pain ignited my limb with a fiery pulse. In horror, I watched as the jaws worked and something in the spider's neck pulsed again and again. With each pulse, more of its white goop squirted into the air.

I brought the point of my blade down, slashing not at the beast, but at the sticky silk holding me trapped. It parted cleanly. Suddenly free, I fell back, scrambling to get out of the way of the gnashing fangs.

I stabbed upward, my blade sliding between the beast's jaws and down its gullet. It didn't like that. I leapt back, away from its gurgling, screeching maw. Then it was gone, bounding into the forest, badly wounded.

I stood to pursue and immediately fell back to the ground. My leg - oh, my leg. Blood flowed freely from my wounds, but my leg bled the worst. But as I examined my injuries, neither wooziness nor nausea overcame me; the injury I dealt the spider moments before its bite seemed to have prevented it from poisoning me.

I grabbed my fallen pack and retrieved my spare tunic. I tore it into strips, binding the leg and staunching the crimson flow. I cast about for something to keep my tourniquet in place, my gaze finally resting on the webbing.

It turns out that the silk of giant spiders is a very useful item to have around. I used it to fasten the bandage to my leg, then to stop the bleeding from the scrapes caused by my crawling around during the fight. It even came in handy when I used a bent branch to create a splint.

I found another sturdy tree limb and created a crutch, using some more of the tunic and a bit of the silk to pad the portion which went under my arm.

There was nothing for it. No matter how badly I wanted to continue, I had sustained too much damage to go on. I had to return to Mutt Town to get professional care. There was always the chance that a little of the venom had entered my system. I was worried, too, about the possibility of the wound becoming gangrenous.

Many a Pioneer has lost a limb to an untreated wound.

Head down, tail between my legs, I started the agonizing trek back the way I had come.

17. Epilogue



Scenario

You did it! You survived an incredible adventure, earned new friends and remarkable treasures, and re-discovered a sacred place where Man trod the earth millennia before your birth. Whatever the final outcome, you surely have become more rugged and experienced dogs, more prepared to face any challenge the future has in store for you.

The characters defeated or evaded Ast-Maat, and their adventure concludes. The return journey to Mutt Town is uneventful, for the disappearance of Ast-Maat seems to have relieved the wilderness of its unseen nocturnal terrors. If the characters did not rescue Little Plum, they still have a big story to tell Pan Dachshund, although their success is not complete.

On the other hand, if the characters achieved their main goal rescuing Little Plum Shiloh, it's time for the Guide to wrap up the story in a nice way.

Once back in Mutt Town, the characters must decide whether to respect their pact with Trimbu or to sneak away without giving the rat boss his dues for lending them the Talisman of Akbash. If asked for his opinion, Little Plum advises the characters to pay Trimbu to avoid his ratty vengeance, if not out of moral integrity. After all, the pup suggests, it would be in character for the boss to exact his dues from his family, or from their neighbors.

The characters must also decide whether to use part of their gains to repay Big Blum Shiloh's debt, and whether to help some destitute dogs west of the river, perhaps paying a tithe to the Church of Man. If the characters rescued Little Plum, achieved a full victory against Ast-Maat, and liberally donate a large part of their hard-

earned treasure to a worthy cause, the Guide may reward them with an immediate level advancement.

After returning across the now-calm river with the help of Puntail and saying goodbye to their rat friend in Wooford, the characters can finally receive some happiness and glory at the Shiloh farm, where rumors of their success have preceded them.

The sun high in the sky when you finally see Shiloh farm in a tepid autumn midday. A small crowd waits for you in the middle of the path. You are greeted not only by the Shilohs, but also by their jubilant and curious neighbors, a few soldiers from Pugmire, and other townsfolk you have never met before. The old Shiloh stands before everyone, her grizzled figure slightly bent forward by anxiety and anticipation. As you approach the crowd and the old dog spies you, she straightens himself up. She leads the crowd in your direction with a broad smile, arms open in welcome. Little Plum seems to shy away, but just for an instant. The sight of his overjoyed parents and sisters spurs him forward, and he trots to meet them all.

Big Blum Shiloh embraces her son long and heartily, as Birill and his sisters cry from joy. All the neighbors shake paws with the young Shiloh and his wayward friends, and many good dogs congratulate the characters for their heroism. Pan Dachshund is also there to congratulate them and award them full membership in the Royal Society of Pioneers. If the Guide feels it is suitable, Princess Yosha Pug herself might also have traveled to the Shiloh farm, after learning of the family's misfortunes and of a brave group of heroes trying to set things straight.



If the characters relieved Big Blum from her debt, the old Shiloh offers them hospitality for a few days and hosts a big barbecue, happily running through her scant supplies. The Shilohs invite all their neighbors and gather a fresh community of good, hopeful dogs. During the party, between dances and munchies, the revelers heap praise and attention upon the characters, and re-

quest over and over for them to recite the tales of their adventure. A few mercantile friends of Big Blum attend, and eagerly appraise any treasure the party liberated from Ast-Maat.

Will our heroes retire now, their first adventure enough for one lifetime? Or maybe they'll tread the perilous and glorious path of pioneers? Man only knows...

Rules

No die rolling should be necessary in the final scene of this adventure. The characters should be free to act however they wish at this point, as they have completed a grand adventure. If they completed the majority of their objectives: rescuing Little Plum, mapping the region, and exploring the Fen, the Guide should consider allowing them to increase their levels using the details in the **Pugmire** core rulebook.

When the characters return to Mutt Town, Puntail Rat dances with joy if he sees Little Plum Shiloh and his friends returned alive. The Shilohs too celebrate Little Plum's return, and will shower the characters with praise and what meager hospitality they can afford to offer. Will the characters consider buying off Big Blum Shiloh's debt with Trimbu?

The characters must decide how to best deal with Trimbu. Surely, officials of the Church of Man would be interested to know how he came to acquire such a potent, fascinating relic of Man as the Talisman of Akbash. The Church would

be interested in exploring this site further, and would need the real Talisman to make that possible. Might the characters act to broker a deal, possibly letting them keep more of their own loot in exchange? Likewise, there is still the question of dividing the loot from this adventure. Trimbu expects his cut, and fair is fair. He loaned them the use of the Talisman, and in the end, it was invaluable to the characters, helping them to collect a number of healing relics they would not have found otherwise. Suffice to say, each of the characters now has stories to tell, a large amount of coins, and full membership in the Royal Society of Pioneers.

The discussion of the secrets in the Fabulous Fen, and the ceremony to welcome them officially as pioneers, should be played or narrated as much as the Guide sees fit.

Congratulations! The players (and their diligent Guide!) will soon be ready to embark on new adventures!

From Eight Legs to Six



The route back was relatively uneventful, but took much longer. I had to stop and rest often, taking care of my injured leg. Despite this, I reached the spot where I had rested the night before. The only prints I saw were my own.

I kept walking.

As the day dragged on into night, I ate on the way, pressing on. The path was relatively even and I recognized more and more landmarks. It was only when it became too dark to see anything at all that I stopped for the night. I rolled myself in my bedroll, as before. Instead of a pillow, I used my cloak to elevate my

injured limb.

Sleep never came fully. My leg throbbed with every heartbeat. I dozed on and off and was back on my paws before the sun had fully risen. I couldn't be sure if the knots in my stomach were the slow onset of spider venom or my own anxiety, but I forced myself to graze on a few nuts and berries that I found along the path.

The sun passed its zenith before I reached the gorge. The tree was still there, an unstable bridge. I tested it as before and it seemed to hold. I decided that I had to force myself to eat before continuing.

I choked down the last of the dry meat, washing it down with water from my canteen. I was about to try and stand when I heard a disturbing chittering below me. A giant ant was making its way up the side of the crevice.

I flattened myself against the fallen tree, peering out from between the dead foliage. Just when I thought the thing hadn't noticed me, it turned. Head held high, antennae twitching, it started up the slope.

It was heading straight for me.

I leapt up onto my bridge, the fallen tree. It lurched and tilted, forcing me to skitter along sideways. As soon as it was stable, I sprinted across as fast as I could. My make-shift crutch had fallen from my grasp, so I dropped to all fours and limped across the tree. Despite the danger, I couldn't help but glance back.

The ant had caught my scent and slipped onto the log behind me. It was moving carefully, but much faster than I. There was no way I would make it to the other side before it reached me. One glance at the snapping pincers told me that it was not worth it to try to flee in my sorry, injured state.

I sat and pulled my bow. My first arrow flew high, but the second caught the ant near the base of its right antenna. Then I was up and moving again. Another glance back revealed that the coast was clear. Before I could slow, the tree I was running on began to sway. Cracks and pops echoed from the end I was moving towards. The tree was going to split off from the trunk from my weight.

That didn't make sense. It had held me the first time I came across. Granted, it shifted a bit, but not enough to threaten its security. Why was it giving way now?

More weight, it was being stressed by more weight.

I dropped to my belly and peered under the trunk. Three ants scuttled their way towards me, moving just as fast upside down as they would have right side up. The nearest ant had closed half the distance to me. The shaft of my arrow stood out from its head like a third antenna.

I bolted for the far end of my bridge to safety.

My leg was on fire by the time I reached it, but I made it across. The fibers holding the tree in place had splintered further. I drew my rapier and, in wild desperation, began to hack at them with its entirely inappropriate blade. They were almost completely severed when the clicking sound of approaching ants reached me. I flung the sword aside and heaved against the sturdy tree. The few remaining bits of wood tore and the log shifted. Another mighty push and the bridge went tumbling down.

The ants screamed as the tree fell, at first straight down, then bouncing along the sides of the ravine.

The Road Home



I walked the rest of the day, through the night, and most of the next day. Along the way, I found a new crutch branch to aid me. My spider bite re-opened while I fled the ants, but the blood ran clear and red. To my intense relief, there appear to be no sign of infection or venom.

When the sounds of the forest started to give way to the sounds of the river's chop, I almost wept. I staggered out of the woods and hauled myself into Mutt Town.

This was not the hero's return I envisioned.

Not knowing where to go, I walked to the docks and straight to Eight Paws Water Transport.

"Hello?"

A moment passed, then a huge dog exited the small building.

Tovor.

"I'm sorry," he started in a voice so low it was almost a growl. "We're not making any more crossings today. The river is too..."

He stopped when he saw me.

"Pan Dachshund," he cried out.

"The one and only," I groaned. Safe at last, my body gave way and I passed into unconsciousness.

I woke in an unfamiliar bed. My injured leg was bound tightly in fresh bandages. My other cuts and scrapes had been tended to as well. I was starving.

"Anyone home?" My voice came out like a bullfrog's croak, and my throat felt as if I had been eating sand.

"Well, hello," replied a gruff voice. "We were beginning to worry."

Sampson's Uncle Winston pushed the door open with his back, and he entered carrying a tray of fruit, bread, and a large pitcher that I hoped contained water. There was also a bowl with steam leaking out from under the cover.

I sat up eagerly. He set the tray across my lap, taking care to avoid the top of the bandaged portion of my leg.

"Start with a bit of water," he said. "Make sure that stays down. Then move on to the broth. You've been out for a long time."

I forced myself not to gulp down the water. The first sips were liquid heaven pouring down my throat.

"How long?"

"Have you been gone or asleep?"

"Asleep."

"Three days."

I shook my head in amazement. Three days lost?

Winston related how Tovor brought me first to a shepherd, then to Winston's house to recuperate. I had vague memories of an antiseptic smell, but the rest was new to me.

Though I was curious about his continued watchfulness over me now, Winston sat with me while I slowly worked my way through everything on the tray before he would relate any more business to me.

"There is something I need to talk to you about."

There it was. "I apologize for intruding on your life this way. I will do everything in my power to repay you."

Winston waved a paw.

"Think nothing of it. I get to tell people that the great Pan Dachshund stayed in my house. What other payment could I need?"

"You can tell them that the great Pan Dachshund is in your debt and considers you a good friend."

The older dog smiled at this, then his face became serious again. He reached into a pocket and pulled out a folded envelope. I recognized the royal sigil at once.

I tore it open and read:



Dearest Pan,

I hope this missive finds you with all speed. My family needs your immediate assistance with a matter of gravest import. Please return to Pugmire at your earliest opportunity.

Yours,

Princess Yosha Pug

I read the note a second time, then crumpled it in my paw. I was out gallivanting around, and then lying insensate while I was needed elsewhere.

"I need to get to Pugmire."

Winston smiled.

"I think that we can arrange that."



Grip Pinscher



History: Grip was born to a martial family, and has enthusiastically clung to that tradition. His family includes several famous military heroes of Pugmire, and they've spared neither expense nor connections to make sure Grip was well-prepared to be the warrior he so obviously wants to be. He attended the best schools and trained under the most skilled combat teachers, and while he is smart, his schooling in other areas of study leaves much to be desired. He spent his summers as a mercenary hired by reputable employers, and learned much about rough-and-ready field combat from these experiences.

Roleplay Tips: Grip enjoys a good fight. Trouble has always found him, ever since he was a pup. He made a careful study of weapons and tactics over the years, and prides himself on being an excellent swordsman. He's always looking to tangle with someone, even if it's only a good-natured wrestling match. Grip is unfortunately a bad loser, and will pester any friend who happens to beat him for a rematch – and he'll keep this up until he finally wins. Even his friends find him overbearing at times.

He has an easy way with members of his regiment – or whatever group he's with – and once he's at ease with his companions, he is good company, joking, singing, and laughing to keep spirits high. Grip is firmly loyal to the chain of command, and respects those in higher authority than himself. Grip doesn't talk about the matter, but he has a deep hatred of cats in general and necromancers in particular. As long as it doesn't interfere in any way with a mission, he will go out of his way to make life difficult for any cats he encounters. Grip has one other personality quirk: he regularly paints or draws his symbol – a line drawing of his helmet – as graffiti on trees, walls, and rocks, to mark his passing.



Description: Mostly black with rust red ears, muzzle, and paws, Grip is handsome and knows it. He wears a prominent scar on his right cheek proudly, and is rarely far from his longsword and chain shirt. His ears are cropped and tail docked in the classic style, though not all dogs approve of such ancient fashion choices. His helmet is always on whenever he is engaged in a mission, except when he sleeps. It is a custom-made and a century-old family heirloom, shaped and worked to look very much like his own head while still

providing good protection for his snout and upright ears.

Personality Traits

Ideal: What is most important to me is vanquishing the undead, spawned by the Monarchies of Mau's necromancers.

Bond: I am inspired by my bond to Fang Pinscher, my family's oldest Matriarch.

Flaw: I love to let people know where I've been by marking my symbol on surfaces.



Pugmire

Name: Grip Pinscher
Calling & Level: Guardian / 1
Breed: Runner
Family: Pinscher
Background: Soldier

STR
STRENGTH

+2

15

DEX
DEXTERITY

+3

16

CON
CONSTITUTION

+1

13

INT
INTELLIGENCE

0

10

WIS
WISDOM

-1

8

CHA
CHARISMA

+1

12

+2

PROFICIENCY BONUS

SAVING THROWS

- ☒ +4 STRENGTH
- ☐ +3 DEXTERITY
- ☐ +1 CONSTITUTION
- ☐ 0 INTELLIGENCE
- ☐ -1 WISDOM
- ☒ +3 CHARISMA

18

DEFENSE

+3

INITIATIVE

30
40

SPEED

STAMINA POINTS

/ 11

CURRENT/MAXIMUM STAMINA POINTS

STAMINA DICE

1d10

TOTAL

DEATH SAVE FAILURE



RUCKSACK AND EQUIPMENT

Longsword (1d8 slashing damage), shield, medium armor (chain shirt), gloves, torches, rations, 50 feet of rope, insignia of rank, a set of fine clothes, a belt pouch containing a few plastic coins, dented old family helmet shaped like a Pinscher head.

ATTACK ROLL DMG TYPE/QUALITY

Longsword 1d8 +2 Slashing

SKILLS

Intimidate

Notice

Survive

Traverse

PERSONALITY TRAITS

Ideal: What is most important to me is...

vanquishing the undead, spawned by the Monarchies of Mau's necromancers.

Bond: I am inspired by my bond to...

Fang Pinscher, my family's oldest Matriarch.

Flaw: No matter what, I just can't...

stop leaving my symbol on surfaces to show others where I've been.

Pugmire

TRICKS

Simple Weapon Aptitude
Martial Weapon Aptitude
Light Armor Aptitude
Medium Armor Aptitude
Heavy Armor Aptitude
Shield Aptitude
Inspiring Word
Rank Has Its Privileges
Speedy Runner

BACKGROUND

Grip was born to a martial family, and has enthusiastically clung to that tradition. His family includes several famous military heroes of Pugmire, and they've spared neither expense nor connections to make sure Grip was well-prepared to be the warrior he so obviously wants to be. He attended the best schools and trained under the most skilled combat teachers, and while he is smart, his schooling in other areas of study leaves much to be desired. He spent his summers as a mercenary hired by reputable employers, and learned much about rough-and-ready field combat from these experiences.

SPELL SLOTS

/
CURRENT/MAXIMUM SPELL SLOTS

SPELLS

CHARACTER SKETCH



Joliet “Neenah” Corgi



History: Joliet has been in trouble since the day she was born. She spent time in jail for theft of artifacts, and has since moved on and changed her name to “Neenah” to stay ahead of the law. Her parents still keep in touch and love their pup, but they don’t have high hopes for their miscreant offspring. She has gone so far as to cultivate contacts in the Monarchies of Mau; the cats are always interested in the items she finds, and have found Neenah useful on more than one occasion. The cats occasionally provide this friendly dog with ancient texts on magic and myth, both of which she voraciously consumes.

Roleplay Tips: Man’s ancient magic fascinates Neenah. Its staggering value to certain individuals impresses her even more. She will not lift an item that will obviously be missed; she’s learned many lessons in her time, and she’s no fool. She will, however, make off with any small relics she can easily pocket without arousing any suspicion. She has the contacts to sell these, and the money she earns helps her find more items legitimately. Neenah has a bad temper and it can frequently get the best of her, but she’s trying to keep it under control. When around the city guard she keeps quiet, and never discusses her own business with anyone she wouldn’t trust with her life – which is very few individuals.



Description: Neenah has a white coat with medium brown and black patches on her back and tail. Her head is brown. She typically wears practical traveling clothes when on the road, and dons her light armor only when she fears she may need it. She seems stand-offish at first, mainly because she's cautious around strangers. She has more than a few secrets to protect, so that caution serves her well.

Personality Traits

Ideal: What is most important to me is forming agreements with other creatures.

Bond: I am inspired by my bond to my family.

Flaw: No matter what, I just can't keep my anger from getting the best of me.



Pugmire

Name: Joliet "Neenah" Corgi
Calling & Level: Artisan / 1
Breed: Herder
Family: Corgi
Background: Criminal

STR
STRENGTH

0

10

DEX
DEXTERITY

+2

14

CON
CONSTITUTION

+1

13

INT
INTELLIGENCE

+2

15

WIS
WISDOM

0

10

CHA
CHARISMA

+1

12

+2

PROFICIENCY BONUS

SAVING THROWS

- ☐ 0 STRENGTH
☐ +2 DEXTERITY
☐ +1 CONSTITUTION
☒ +4 INTELLIGENCE
☐ 0 WISDOM
☒ +3 CHARISMA

13

DEFENSE

+2

INITIATIVE

30

40

SPEED

STAMINA POINTS

/ 7

CURRENT/MAXIMUM STAMINA POINTS

STAMINA DICE

d6

TOTAL

DEATH SAVE FAILURE



RUCKSACK AND EQUIPMENT

Mace (1d6 bludgeoning damage), armor (padded), masterwork artisan focus taken from the skeleton of a strange creature in the Fearful Forest, bottle of ink, ink pen, a few sheets of parchment, small collection of books, a set of common clothes, and a belt pouch containing a few plastic coins.

ATTACK ROLL DMG TYPE/QUALITY

Mace 1d6 +0 Bludgeoning

SKILLS

Bluff

Heal

Know Arcana

Sneak

PERSONALITY TRAITS

Ideal: What is most important to me is... forming agreements with other creatures.

Bond: I am inspired by my bond to... my family.

Flaw: No matter what, I just can't... keep my anger from getting the best of me.

Pugmire

TRICKS

Simple Weapon Aptitude

Light Armor Aptitude

Focus Magic

Friends in Low Places

Keen Observer

BACKGROUND

Joliet has been in trouble since the day she was born. She spent time in jail for theft of artifacts, and has since moved on and changed her name to "Neenah" to stay ahead of the law. Her parents still keep in touch and love their pup, but they don't have high hopes for their miscreant offspring. She has gone so far as to cultivate contacts in the Monarchies of Mau; the cats are always interested in the items she finds, and have found Neenah useful on more than one occasion. The cats occasionally provide this friendly dog with ancient texts on magic and myth, both of which she voraciously consumes.

SPELL SLOTS

/ 3

CURRENT/MAXIMUM SPELL SLOTS

SPELLS

Elemental Ray

Magic Paw

Smell Magic

Floating Disk

Magic Missile

CHARACTER SKETCH



Trixie Corgi



History: Trixie discovered her innate skill at hunting and tracking late in her childhood. Many in the Corgi family turned to raising cattle and military careers, but those paths held no interest for the middle Corgi pup. Her natural affinity developed as she practiced, and soon she could find anything or anyone in the wild – escaped prisoners, wild game, even monsters – as well as the best hunters around. Then one night, something horrible and Unseen, attacked her party of hunters. Details are sketchy, but Trixie was the only one to escape, and she was badly injured. Ever since then she's been plagued by nightmares – some worse than others – and is still terrified of darkened buildings.

Roleplay Tips: Trixie will borrow books from anyone willing to lend them. She reads quickly, and always returns books promptly. Beyond her general thirst for knowledge, Trixie also seeks information to try to identify the creatures that attacked her and her comrades. She reasons that if she can identify them, she can figure out a way to kill them, and will take her revenge for the deaths of so many of her friends.



Description: Trixie is a dark Corgi, predominantly black or chocolate brown, with a white belly, neck, and legs, and light brown flanks and shoulders. She's tall for a Corgi, though still short compared to a large breed. She typically wears a hunting smock and trousers, and her light armor fits comfortably under the smock. Trixie's eyes always sparkle when she's happy or amused, and her good humor means they sparkle often.

Personality Traits

Ideal: What is most important to me is cataloguing wild creatures and their weaknesses.

Bond: My desire to avenge those who succumbed to violent deaths inspires me.

Flaw: No matter what, I just can't get over my fear of demons.



Pugmire

Name: Trixie Corgi
Calling & Level: Hunter / 1
Breed: Pointer
Family: Corgi Cross
Background: Free Dog

STR
STRENGTH

0

10

DEX
DEXTERITY

+2

15

CON
CONSTITUTION

+2

14

INT
INTELLIGENCE

0

10

WIS
WISDOM

+1

12

CHA
CHARISMA

+1

13

+2

PROFICIENCY BONUS

SAVING THROWS

- | | | |
|----------------------------------|----|--------------|
| ☐ | 0 | STRENGTH |
| ☒ | +4 | DEXTERITY |
| ☐ | +2 | CONSTITUTION |
| ☐ | 0 | INTELLIGENCE |
| ☒ | +3 | WISDOM |
| ☐ | +1 | CHARISMA |

13

DEFENSE

+2

INITIATIVE

30

40

SPEED

STAMINA POINTS

/ 12

CURRENT/MAXIMUM STAMINA POINTS

STAMINA DICE

1d10

TOTAL

DEATH SAVE FAILURE



RUCKSACK AND EQUIPMENT

Longbow (1d8 piercing damage), shortsword (1d6 piercing damage, finesse, light), spare ammunition, light armor (leather), torches, rations, hoof from a wild boar, a treasured pencil sketch drawn of her band of hunters shortly before their deaths, a set of common clothes, and a belt pouch containing a few plastic coins.

ATTACK ROLL DMG TYPE/QUALITY

Longbow	1d8	+2	Piercing 150/600
Shortsword	1d6	+0	Piercing

SKILLS

Know Nature

Notice

Search

Survive

PERSONALITY TRAITS

Ideal: What is most important to me is...

cataloguing wild creatures and their weaknesses.

Bond: I am inspired by my bond to...

avenge those who succumbed to violent deaths.

Flaw: No matter what, I just can't...

get over my fear of demons.

Pugmire

TRICKS

Simple Weapon Aptitude

Martial Weapon Aptitude

Light Armor Aptitude

Medium Armor Aptitude

Shield Aptitude

Archery

Respected by Strays

Voracious Learner

BACKGROUND

Trixie discovered her innate skill at hunting and tracking late in her childhood. Many in the Corgi family turned to raising cattle and military careers, but those paths held no interest for the middle Corgi pup. Her natural affinity developed as she practiced, and soon she could find anything or anyone in the wild - escaped prisoners, wild game, even monsters - as well as the best hunters around. Then one night, something horrible and Unseen, attacked her party of hunters. Details are sketchy, but Trixie was the only one to escape, and she was badly injured. Ever since then she's been plagued by nightmares - some worse than others - and is still terrified of darkened buildings.

SPELL SLOTS

/

CURRENT/MAXIMUM SPELL SLOTS

SPELLS

CHARACTER SKETCH



Chopper Bulldog



History: Chopper was trained in the Church's service since childhood. Only recently graduated from acolyte to shepherd, he still has much to learn and knows it. Chopper is eager to continue his education on matters both spiritual and mysterious. He salivates at the thought of a good conundrum.

Chopper's decision to remain with the Church did not impress his down-to-earth family, but they've yet to loudly object to his calling. If he ever threatens the good Bulldog name, they may tug on his leash.

Roleplay Tips: Chopper is a true believer, and while he occasionally finds things that don't blend with his religion, he doesn't let them bother him too much, though he files them away in his journal for later consideration. Chopper is not a dog prone to aggression; he has incredible patience and is very slow to anger. This does not mean that he will not resort to violence if the need arises; it simply takes Chopper longer than most to lose his temper.

Chopper is anxious to make a good impression and bring the Word of Man to the wider world. The few artifacts of Man he's handled intrigue him greatly, cultivating his desire to learn more about these fabulous, magical devices.



BRYAN
SYME

Description: Chopper is brindled with a white head and large, white patches across his legs. He has a barrel chest and big, thick arms, but his legs are spindly-looking by comparison. Chopper is stronger than he looks, but calls on great reserves in times of need. He wears his shepherd's robe proudly, and only resorts to putting on his chainmail and bowl-shaped metal helmet if combat is pending.

Personality Traits

Ideal: What is most important to me is discovering the secrets of the Old Ones.

Bond: I am inspired by my bond to the Church of Man.

Flaw: No matter what, I just can't see anyone come to lasting harm.



Pugmire

Name: Chopper Bulldog
Calling & Level: Shepherd / 1
Breed: Worker
Family: Bulldog
Background: Acolyte

STR
STRENGTH
+1
12

DEX
DEXTERITY
-1
8

CON
CONSTITUTION
+1
13

INT
INTELLIGENCE
+2
15

WIS
WISDOM
+3
16

CHA
CHARISMA
0
10

+2 PROFICIENCY BONUS

SAVING THROWS		
☐	+1	STRENGTH
☐	-1	DEXTERITY
☐	+1	CONSTITUTION
☒	+4	INTELLIGENCE
☒	+5	WISDOM
☐	0	CHARISMA

14	-1	30
DEFENSE	INITIATIVE	SPEED
		40

STAMINA POINTS

/	7
CURRENT/MAXIMUM STAMINA POINTS	

STAMINA DICE

1d6
TOTAL

DEATH SAVE FAILURE

☐	☐	☐
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RUCKSACK AND EQUIPMENT

Mace (1d6 bludgeoning damage), chainmail armor, shield, candles, vestments, rations, symbol of Church of Man, a set of common clothes, a mysterious square sheet of transparent plastic in which an ancient Man map is sealed, and a belt pouch containing a few plastic coins.

ATTACK	ROLL	DMG	TYPE/QUALITY
Mace	1d6	+1	Bludgeoning

SKILLS

Heal

Know Religion

Persuade

Sense Motive

PERSONALITY TRAITS

Ideal: What is most important to me is...
discovering the secrets of the Old Ones.

Bond: I am inspired by my bond to...
the Church of Man.

Flaw: No matter what, I just can't...
see anyone come to lasting harm.

Pugmire

TRICKS

Simple Weapon Aptitude

Light Armor Aptitude

Medium Armor Aptitude

Shield Aptitude

Acolyte of Man

Brute Strength

Prayers to Man

BACKGROUND

Chopper was trained in the Church's service since childhood. Only recently graduated from acolyte to shepherd, he still has much to learn and knows it. Chopper is eager to continue his education on matters both spiritual and mysterious. He salivates at the thought of a good conundrum. Chopper's decision to remain with the Church did not impress his down-to-earth family, but they've yet to loudly object to his calling. If he ever threatens the good Bulldog name, they may tug on his leash.

SPELL SLOTS

/ 3

CURRENT/MAXIMUM SPELL SLOTS

SPELLS

Bless/Bane

Sacred Flame

Spare the Dying

Cure Wounds

Smell Poison and Disease

CHARACTER SKETCH



Pippa Bichon



History: Pippa came from a large litter and a poor family. Her parents and siblings had a hard time keeping everyone fed, but such was the way of the common dog. All members of the family worked to bring in enough plastic coins to keep the roof over their heads. Food is important to Pippa, and meal breaks are almost sacred to her. She doesn't like to share her food unless offered some by others first, and seeing it wasted by someone else is enough to drive her to snap in anger.

Roleplay Tips: Pippa is charming and good looking. She knows this, and makes the most of her charm to open doors and keep the right dogs on her side. She's careful not to abuse those relationships, but she calls on them when she needs to. Pippa is also incredibly curious — if it's something new, she must know about it, and the sooner the better. Pippa is a master of the ambush, and has used this mode of attack very successfully as a ratter. Pippa cares little for abstract concepts like the Code of Man; the Code doesn't keep food on the table, or coins in your purse. Success is all that counts, and Pippa will fight dirty to ensure that she wins.



BRYAN
SYME

Description: Pippa keeps her snow-white fur as clean as possible. She wears light armor any time when engaged in “business,” but otherwise wears a simple tunic with many hidden pockets on the inside of the garment. Pippa’s curly hair needs trimming from time to time, and if she doesn’t keep up with this grooming, her vision becomes impaired by her curly coat. Pippa typically carries a small crossbow when armed, and has a shortsword belted at her side on those occasions.

Personality Traits

Ideal: What is most important to me is keeping the coin coming in.

Bond: I am inspired by my bond to the poor.

Flaw: No matter what, I just can’t resist my insatiable curiosity.



Pugmire

Name: Pippa Bichon
Calling & Level: Ratter / 1
Breed: Fettles
Family: Bichon
Background: Common Folk

STR
STRENGTH

0

10

DEX
DEXTERITY

+1

13

CON
CONSTITUTION

+3

16

INT
INTELLIGENCE

-1

8

WIS
WISDOM

+1

12

CHA
CHARISMA

+2

15

+2

PROFICIENCY BONUS

SAVING THROWS

- | | | |
|----------------------------------|----|--------------|
| ☐ | 0 | STRENGTH |
| ☒ | +3 | DEXTERITY |
| ☒ | +5 | CONSTITUTION |
| ☐ | -1 | INTELLIGENCE |
| ☐ | +1 | WISDOM |
| ☐ | +2 | CHARISMA |

12

DEFENSE

+1

INITIATIVE

30

40

SPEED

STAMINA POINTS

/ 11

CURRENT/MAXIMUM STAMINA POINTS

STAMINA DICE

1d8

TOTAL

DEATH SAVE FAILURE



RUCKSACK AND EQUIPMENT

Shortsword (1d6 piercing damage, finesse, light), small crossbow (1d8 piercing damage), case of crossbow ammunition, light armor (leather), hooded lantern, rations, 50 feet of rope, set of Ratter's tools, a set of common clothes, a lucky knife made from ancient green glass and worn as a pendant, and a belt pouch containing a few plastic coins.

ATTACK ROLL DMG TYPE/QUALITY

Shortsword 1d6 +0 Piercing

Small Crossbow 1d8 +1 Piercing
80/320

SKILLS

Handle Animal

Notice

Sneak

Survive

PERSONALITY TRAITS

Ideal: What is most important to me is...

keeping the coin coming in.

Bond: I am inspired by my bond to...

the poor.

Flaw: No matter what, I just can't...

resist my insatiable curiosity.

Pugmire

TRICKS

Simple Weapon Aptitude

Light Armor Aptitude

Folk Hero

Hardy Constitution

Precise Attack

[illegible]

BACKGROUND

Pippa came from a large litter and a poor family. Her parents and siblings had a hard time keeping everyone fed, but such was the way of the common dog. All members of the family worked to bring in enough plastic coins to keep the roof over their heads. Food is important to Pippa, and meal breaks are almost sacred to her. She doesn't like to share her food unless offered some by others first, and seeing it wasted by someone else is enough to drive her to snap snap in anger.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines, typical of notebook paper. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.

SPELL SLOTS

/

CURRENT/MAXIMUM SPELL SLOTS

SPELLS

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines, typical of notebook paper. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.

CHARACTER SKETCH

This is a blank, cream-colored page with rounded corners. The paper has a slightly textured appearance with some minor discoloration and faint, irregular brown spots, suggesting it is an old or aged piece of paper. There is no text or other markings on the page.



Louise Kuchi



History: The daughter of a well-known merchant family from Pugmire, Louise was not the first pup, nor the second or even the third. As a result, she was unlikely to inherit much of the family business, but found she had an aptitude for fighting. Her family saw this budding talent as inauspicious. Despite their discouragement, Louise worked for some time as a caravan guard protecting the family's goods from bandits, and has distinguished herself on several occasions. Ultimately, she felt her skills were most useful in the wild, where she's honed her talents to a razor's edge. She enjoys not having connections to tie her down, but is happy to hire on as a guard or mercenary to earn some cash to buy what little she needs.

Roleplay Tips: Louise has an aggressive combat style, but she's not above using her family's famous puppy dog eyes to get information, or to secure greater comfort for herself. While she hates seeing those she's grown attached to come to harm, that regret stops when it comes to her enemies.

Except for a few times on the road, Louise has never known want or desperate hunger, but these few brushes with starvation give her some perspective on what's important to her.

Louise is basically an optimist, but also has a pragmatic side that prevents her from getting into too much trouble. She sees the Church of Man as a valuable institution and a good moral compass, but her personal code of ethics is flexible when the need arises.



A fierce combatant and a loyal friend, Louise feels Pugmire is where she wants to settle down when her fighting days are over. She has her eye on a handsome young artisan in Pugmire, and one day she hopes to raise a litter of pups with him — if he'll have her with her reputation as a Stray.

Description: Tall and well-muscled, Louise carries a longbow she purchased with her first payment from caravan guard duties. She must constantly groom herself to keep the gunk from matting the fur around her eyes, but her vision is otherwise keen and her dark eyes are clear. Her coat is a uniform gray, and she tends to keep her hair cut as short as is practical. She wears her shield on her back when it is not in use. Her favor-

ite color is a deep, royal purple, and some of her clothing is made from this color fabric. The color is rarely noticeable unless she's had time to clean her garments. She wears patched clothing, saving her money for things she can't find or make herself.

Personality Traits

Ideal: What is most important to me is being free.

Bond: I am inspired by my bond to my unrequited love.

Flaw: No matter what, I just can't see anyone come to undeserved harm.

Pugmire

Name: Louise Kuchi
Calling & Level: Stray / 1
Breed: Runner
Family: Afghan
Background: Merchant

STR
STRENGTH
+2
14

DEX
DEXTERITY
+2
15

CON
CONSTITUTION
+2
15

INT
INTELLIGENCE
+1
12

WIS
WISDOM
-1
8

CHA
CHARISMA
0
10

+2 PROFICIENCY BONUS

SAVING THROWS		
☒	+4	STRENGTH
☐	+1	DEXTERITY
☒	+4	CONSTITUTION
☐	+1	INTELLIGENCE
☐	-1	WISDOM
☐	+1	CHARISMA

15 DEFENSE	0 INITIATIVE	30 40 SPEED
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STAMINA POINTS

/	15
CURRENT/MAXIMUM STAMINA POINTS	

STAMINA DICE

1d12
TOTAL

DEATH SAVE FAILURE

☐	☐	☐
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RUCKSACK AND EQUIPMENT

Longbow (1d8 piercing damage), shield, gloves, torches, rations, 50 feet of rope, quiver of arrows, a red plastic button taken from the last dog that dared call her as "pariah," a set of patched fine clothes, and a belt pouch containing some plastic coins.

ATTACK	ROLL	DMG	TYPE/QUALITY
Longbow	1d8	+2	Piercing

SKILLS

Bluff

Notice

Sense Motive

Survive

PERSONALITY TRAITS

Ideal: What is most important to me is... being free.

Bond: I am inspired by my bond to... my unrequited love.

Flaw: No matter what, I just can't... see anyone come to undeserved harm.

Pugmire

TRICKS

Simple Weapon Aptitude

Martial Weapon Aptitude

Light Armor Aptitude

Shield Aptitude

Odds and Ends

Speedy Runner

Unarmored Defense

BACKGROUND

The daughter of a well-known merchant family from Pugmire, Louise was not the first pup, nor the second or even the third. As a result, she was unlikely to inherit much of the family business, but found she had an aptitude for fighting. Her family saw this budding talent as inauspicious. Despite their discouragement, Louise worked for some time as a caravan guard protecting the family's goods from bandits, and has distinguished herself on several occasions. Ultimately, she felt her skills were most useful in the wild, where she's honed her talents to a razor's edge. She enjoys not having connections to tie her down, but is happy to hire on as a guard or mercenary to earn some cash to buy what little she needs.

SPELL SLOTS

/

CURRENT/MAXIMUM SPELL SLOTS

SPELLS

CHARACTER SKETCH

Tricks and Spells Appendix

If you are playing Pugmire with only one copy of the core rulebook, this short appendix is here to help. Rather than pass the book back and forth to reference the tricks and spells characters possess, all the ones in this chronicle are provided here, and can be printed multiple times.

Grip Pinscher

Simple Weapon Aptitude

Anyone can use a simple weapon, but dogs with this trick can add their proficiency bonus to attack rolls when using any simple weapon. This includes clubs, daggers, darts, handaxes, javelins, maces, quarterstaves, shortbows, sickles, slings, small crossbows, spears, and unarmed punches, kicks, and bites.

Martial Weapon Aptitude

Using martial weapons requires training and dedication — a dog without this trick always attack with such weapons at a disadvantage. Dogs with this trick, however, can use martial weapons well, and can add their proficiency bonus to attack rolls using them. This includes battleaxes, crossbows, flails, glaives, greatswords, greataxes, halberds, lances, longbows, longswords, rapiers, scimitars, shortswords, tridents, war picks, warhammers, and whips.

Light Armor Aptitude

The dog with this trick can wear light armor effectively, giving her a defense of 11 + her Dexterity modifier. Examples of light armor include padded armor, leather armor, and studded leather armor.

Medium Armor Aptitude

The dog with this trick can wear medium armor effectively, giving her a defense of 13 + her Dexterity modifier. Further, the dog's Dexterity checks (not attack rolls) are at a disadvantage. Ex-

amples of medium armor include hide armor, a chain shirt, scale mail, and half plate mail.

Heavy Armor Aptitude

The dog with this trick can wear heavy armor effectively, giving her a defense of 16 (no Dexterity modifier is added). Further, the dog's two-legged and four-legged speeds are reduced by five feet, and her Dexterity checks (not attack rolls) are at a disadvantage. Examples of heavy armor include ring mail, chain mail, splint mail, and plate mail.

Shield Aptitude

The dog with this trick can use a shield effectively, giving her +2 to her defense. However, she only has one free paw and cannot use weapons or objects with the "two-pawed" quality. Further, the shield offers no benefit against attacks that the user cannot actively defend against (such as attacks from behind or spell effects that go around corners).

Inspiring Word

Using leadership and strength of personality, the guardian encourages allies to keep fighting.

If the ally is within 60 feet and can see or hear the guardian, she can use a bonus action and speak something encouraging, allowing that ally to immediately use a stamina die to regain stamina points or spell slots. This can be used a number of times equal to the guardian's Charisma modifier before the dog needs to sleep.

Rank Has Its Privileges

Whether or not the dog is active in the royal guard, city guard, military, or similar organization, soldiers loyal to that group recognize the dog's authority and rank. The dog can gain access to friendly comrades-in-arms, as well as gather common information and rumors from among the rank and file (not secret military plans, for

example). If the player spends fortune, she can declare that a previously unknown non-player character soldier is an old friend or companion on good terms with the dog.

Speedy Runner

The runner with this trick gets an advantage on all Dexterity checks having to do with running or being involved in a chase. Also, the character's speed is increased to 35 feet (or 50 feet while running on all fours).

Joliet "Neenah" Corgi

Simple Weapon Aptitude

Anyone can use a simple weapon, but dogs with this trick can add their proficiency bonus to attack rolls when using any simple weapon. This includes clubs, daggers, darts, handaxes, javelins, maces, quarterstaves, shortbows, sickles, slings, small crossbows, spears, and unarmed punches, kicks, and bites.

Light Armor Aptitude

The dog with this trick can wear light armor effectively, giving her a defense of 11 + her Dexterity modifier. Examples of light armor include padded armor, leather armor, and studded leather armor.

Focus Magic

The artisan starts with a masterwork focus — a strange, intricate device from the ages of Man that doesn't do anything obvious. By taking this trick, the dog has become spiritually attuned to the focus, and can draw and channel arcane energy through it. In effect, the dog uses the focus to cast spells.

This focus is powered by the artisan's life force and, once attuned, is uniquely tied to the artisan — another dog cannot use it, and another artisan with a similar focus might find that it allows her to create different effects.

Upon taking this trick, the artisan learns three basic spells that can always be used by the focus (Elemental Ray, Mage Paw, and Smell Magic). In addition, the artisan can choose two first-level spells. All references to "spellcasting ability" are references to Intelligence.

Friends in Low Places

The dog has some (generally) reliable and trustworthy contacts amongst criminals. She can get information from such characters, unless the act of passing on information would endanger them. If the player spends fortune, she can declare that a previously unknown non-player character criminal is one of her contacts on good terms with the dog.

Keen Observer

The herder with this trick gains an advantage on all Wisdom checks involving hearing, sight, or smell.

Elemental Ray (Artisan Basic)

Casting Time: 1 action
Duration: Instantaneous

Range: 60 feet

When choosing this spell, an artisan chooses the damage type for the spell: heat, cold, or lightning.

A beam of colored light streaks toward a character within range (red for heat, white for cold, and blue for lightning). Make a ranged spell attack against the target. On a hit, it takes 1d8 damage of the chosen damage type.

Magic Paw (Artisan Basic)

Casting Time: 1 action
Duration: 1 minute

Range: 30 feet

You point your focus at an object and can lift and move the object from a distance with a ghostly paw. You can use your action to control the magic paw. You can use the paw to manipulate an object, open an unlocked door or container, stow or retrieve an item from an open container, or pour the contents out of a vial. You can move the paw up to 30 feet each time you use it.

The paw can't attack, activate masterwork artifacts, or carry heavy objects.

Smell Magic (Artisan Basic)

Casting Time: 1 action
Duration: Concentration, up to 10 minutes

Range: Self

For the duration, you smell the presence of magic, the Unseen, and characters under Unseen influence within 30 feet of you. If you sense mag-

ic in this way, you can use your action to smell a faint odor around any visible character or object in the area that bears magic. This spell cannot be used if the spellcaster is Anosmic.

Floating Disk (Artisan Level 1)

Casting Time: 1 action
Duration: 1 hour

Range: 30 feet

This spell creates a circular, horizontal plane of force, three feet in diameter and one inch thick, that floats three feet above the ground in an unoccupied space of your choice that you can see within range. The disk remains for the duration, and can hold up to the weight of three dogs. If more weight is placed on it, the spell ends, and everything on the disk falls to the ground.

The disk is immobile while you are within 20 feet of it. If you move more than 20 feet away from it, the disk follows you so that it remains within 20 feet of you. It can move across uneven terrain, up or down stairs, slopes, and the like, but it can't cross an elevation change of 10 feet or more. For example, the disk can't move across a 10-foot-deep pit, nor could it leave such a pit if it was created at the bottom.

If you move more than 100 feet from the disk (typically because it can't move around an obstacle to follow you), the spell ends.

Magic Missile (Artisan Level 1)

Casting Time: 1 action
Duration: Instantaneous

Range: 120 feet

Three missiles of magical energy dart forth from your focus and strike their target. Each one deals 1d4 + 1 points of force damage. The missile strikes unerringly, even if the target is in melee combat or has less than total cover or total concealment. Specific parts of a character can't be singled out. Inanimate objects are not damaged by the spell.

You can have the missiles strike a single character or several characters. Each missile can strike only one character. You must designate targets before you roll damage.

Trixie Corgi

Simple Weapon Aptitude

Anyone can use a simple weapon, but dogs with this trick can add their proficiency bonus to attack rolls when using any simple weapon. This includes clubs, daggers, darts, handaxes, javelins, maces, quarterstaves, shortbows, sickles, slings, small crossbows, spears, and unarmed punches, kicks, and bites.

Martial Weapon Aptitude

Using martial weapons requires training and dedication — a dog without this trick always attack with such weapons at a disadvantage. Dogs with this trick, however, can use martial weapons well, and can add their proficiency bonus to attack rolls using them. This includes battleaxes, crossbows, flails, glaives, greatswords, greataxes, halberds, lances, longbows, longswords, rapiers, scimitars, shortswords, tridents, war picks, warhammers, and whips.

Light Armor Aptitude

The dog with this trick can wear light armor effectively, giving her a defense of 11 + her Dexterity modifier. Examples of light armor include padded armor, leather armor, and studded leather armor.

Medium Armor Aptitude

The dog with this trick can wear medium armor effectively, giving her a defense of 13 + her Dexterity modifier. Further, the dog's Dexterity checks (not attack rolls) are at a disadvantage. Examples of medium armor include hide armor, a chain shirt, scale mail, and half plate mail.

Shield Aptitude

The dog with this trick can use a shield effectively, giving her +2 to her defense. However, she only has one free paw and cannot use weapons or objects with the "two-pawed" quality. Further, the shield offers no benefit against attacks that the user cannot actively defend against (such as attacks from behind or spell effects that go around corners).

Archery

Some callings are particularly experienced with ranged weapons, becoming very accurate with them.

Once this trick is taken, the dog gains +2 to all attack rolls with ranged weapons.

Respected by Strays

The dog is well known by strays and other free dogs. If he meets them in his travels, they generally treat him with respect and offer him (and his companions) a night of hospitality, if they don't bring anything dangerous to the camp. If the player spends fortune, he can declare that a previously unknown non-player character stray or free dog is an old friend.

Voracious Learner

The pointer with this trick gains an advantage on Intelligence checks involving something the dog might have read or heard about in the past. It does not apply to situations that are new to the pointer's experience.

Chopper Bulldog

Simple Weapon Aptitude

Anyone can use a simple weapon, but dogs with this trick can add their proficiency bonus to attack rolls when using any simple weapon. This includes clubs, daggers, darts, handaxes, javelins, maces, quarterstaves, shortbows, sickles, slings, small crossbows, spears, and unarmed punches, kicks, and bites.

Light Armor Aptitude

The dog with this trick can wear light armor effectively, giving her a defense of 11 + her Dexterity modifier. Examples of light armor include padded armor, leather armor, and studded leather armor.

Medium Armor Aptitude

The dog with this trick can wear medium armor effectively, giving her a defense of 13 + her Dexterity modifier. Further, the dog's Dexterity checks (not attack rolls) are at a disadvantage. Examples of medium armor include hide armor, a chain shirt, scale mail, and half plate mail.

Shield Aptitude

The dog with this trick can use a shield effectively, giving her +2 to her defense. However, she only has one free paw and cannot use weapons or objects with the "two-pawed" quality. Further, the shield offers no benefit against attacks that the user cannot actively defend against (such as attacks from behind or spell effects that go around corners).

Acolyte of Man

The dog and her companions can receive care and healing at any temple of the Church of Man, if the help isn't dangerous and doesn't cause problems for the shepherds there. The character might have ties to a specific church, and may even have a room there. If the player spends fortune, she can declare that a previously unknown non-player character of the Church of Man is an old friend.

Brute Strength

The worker with this trick gains an advantage on Strength checks involving lifting or pulling something.

Prayers to Man

Shepherds pray to Man, giving them access to incredible feats of magic. These prayers are powered by the shepherd's life force. New prayers are learned either from extensive study within the Church of Man, or through intense meditation and communion with Man.

Upon taking this trick, the shepherd learns three basic spells that can always be used through the shepherd's faith (Bless/Bane, Sacred Flame, and Spare the Dying). In addition, the shepherd can choose two first-level spells. All references to "spellcasting ability" are references to Wisdom.

Bless/Bane (Shepherd Basic)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 30 feet

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

Choose up to three characters you can see within range and one effect: Bless or bane. All targets are affected by the same effect. On the target's next attack, ability, or saving throw roll before the spell ends, the target can roll a d4 and add (Bless) or subtract (Bane) the number rolled to the roll.

Sacred Flame (Shepherd Basic)

Casting Time: 1 action
Duration: Instantaneous

Range: 60 feet

Radiance erupts from a character or object that you can see within range. Characters must succeed on a Constitution saving throw or take 1d8 radiant damage.

In addition, objects hit by the spell shed bright light in a 20-foot radius, which will stay illuminated if the caster concentrates (up to one minute). If you target an object held or worn by a hostile character, that character must succeed on a Dexterity saving throw to avoid the spell.

Spare the Dying (Shepherd Basic)

Casting Time: 1 action
Duration: Instantaneous

Range: Touch

You can touch a living character that has 0 stamina points. The character becomes stable and has 1 stamina point.

Cure Wounds (Shepherd Level 1)

Casting Time: 1 action
Duration: Instantaneous

Range: Touch

When laying your paw upon a living character, you channel positive energy that restores 1d8 stamina points + your spellcasting ability modifier. An additional 1d8 is rolled for every additional spell slot used when casting Cure Wounds. No stamina dice are expended.

Smell Poison and Disease (Shepherd Level 1)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Self

Duration: Concentration, up to 10 minutes

For the duration, you can smell the presence and location of poisons, venomous characters, and diseases within 30 feet of you. You also identify the kind of poison, venomous character, or disease in each case. This spell cannot be used if the spellcaster is Anosmic.

Pippa Bichon

Simple Weapon Aptitude

Anyone can use a simple weapon, but dogs with this trick can add their proficiency bonus to attack rolls when using any simple weapon. This includes clubs, daggers, darts, handaxes, javelins, maces, quarterstaves, shortbows, sickles, slings, small crossbows, spears, and unarmed punches, kicks, and bites.

Light Armor Aptitude

The dog with this trick can wear light armor effectively, giving her a defense of 11 + her Dexterity modifier. Examples of light armor include padded armor, leather armor, and studded leather armor.

Folk Hero

The dog is well known among common folk, and easily fits in with them. He can easily find somewhere to rest or hide among such folk, and they will attempt to shield him from pursuers if their lives aren't threatened. If the player spends fortune, he can declare that a previously unknown non-player character commoner is an old friend or relative on good terms with the dog.

Hardy Constitution

The fettle with this trick can add 1d4 to all Constitution saving throws.

Precise Attack

Most ratters aren't honorable fighters. They know that doing the most damage is all that matters. Once per turn, the ratter can add 1d6 to the damage roll if she has advantage for any reason, or if an ally of the ratter is within five feet of the target.

In addition, the ratter can make a Dexterity check (difficulty is 10 + the highest Wisdom modifier of all active opponents) as an action to hide in the shadows or otherwise avoid a target's attention. If successful, she gains an advantage on her next melee attack roll.

Louise Kuchi

Simple Weapon Aptitude

Anyone can use a simple weapon, but dogs with this trick can add their proficiency bonus to attack rolls when using any simple weapon. This includes clubs, daggers, darts, handaxes, javelins, maces, quarterstaves, shortbows, sickles, slings, small crossbows, spears, and unarmed punches, kicks, and bites.

Martial Weapon Aptitude

Using martial weapons requires training and dedication — a dog without this trick always attack with such weapons at a disadvantage. Dogs with this trick, however, can use martial weapons well, and can add their proficiency bonus to attack rolls using them. This includes battleaxes, crossbows, flails, glaives, greatswords, greataxes, halberds, lances, longbows, longswords, rapiers, scimitars, shortswords, tridents, war picks, warhammers, and whips.

Light Armor Aptitude

The dog with this trick can wear light armor effectively, giving her a defense of 11 + her Dexterity modifier. Examples of light armor include padded armor, leather armor, and studded leather armor.

Shield Aptitude

The dog with this trick can use a shield effectively, giving her +2 to her defense. However, she

only has one free paw and cannot use weapons or objects with the “two-pawed” quality. Further, the shield offers no benefit against attacks that the user cannot actively defend against (such as attacks from behind or spell effects that go around corners).

Odds and Ends

The dog has a penchant for packing just the right thing, and has an advantage when making a Wisdom check to see if he has a particular piece of equipment. If the player spends fortune, he can declare that a previously unknown non-player character is a past customer or merchant on good terms with the dog.

Speedy Runner

The runner with this trick gets an advantage on all Dexterity checks having to do with running or being involved in a chase. Also, the character's speed is increased to 35 feet (or 50 feet while running on all fours).

Unarmored Defense

The stray can defend himself without the need for bulky armor.

Once this trick is taken, and if the stray is without armor or only uses a shield, his defense is 10 + Constitution modifier + Dexterity modifier + shield (if used).

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Pugmire

Pan's Guide for New Pioneers

When a devastating flood hits Pugmire, all manner of bad dogs, opportunistic rats, and manipulative cats take advantage of the kingdom. Good dogs try to turn the tide, but searching the dangerous wilderness for a way to heal the land is no easy task. If only there existed brave dogs to lay down the way for other intrepid pioneers...

It is time for a new group of heroes to set out on a chaotic and risky adventure! Armed with a guide prepared by the daring dog Pan Dachshund, fabulous treasure and great recognition await them. All these pioneers need do is explore the wilds, discover the key to Pugmire's salvation, and return in one piece!

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- Rules laid out and explained for every encounter and challenge in the adventure.
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- Hyperlinks to video footage for those who prefer to follow along in different mediums.

