the Faerie Ring

Along the Twisting Way

Dangerous Game

A 3rd-Level Adventure

NEZ OXVI

by Stephen Rowe

5E

The Faerie Ring

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Tremendous Thanks to the support of our 315 Kickstarter backers for making this all possible. You're wonderful.

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Dangerous Game

BACKGROUND

A tribe of fir bolg believes they've found a possible cure for the Morrigan's curse, which transforms pregnant fir bolg into hounds by the time they give birth. The women might call upon the power of the Wild Hunt to trade lives for lives fairly taken, or they may seek a loophole whispered by a mysterious oracle. The huntresses must stalk, with wit and weapon, mortals armed with the same. Should they triumph, the tribe believes they might master the pending transition. However, in so doing, they risk death with no child to show for the sacrifice. This theory remains untested until a group of wayward settlers wanders into their territory.

Soon the hunt begins.

Dangerous Game is a stand-alone adventure for the world's oldest fantasy roleplaying game for 4–5 player characters of 3rd level. The PCs become the prey to sympathetic predators while powerful fey forces move in the background. Can they turn the tables on their pursuers, or are their lives forfeit to the Wild Hunt?

Derrick Ardoon is the second son of nobility, a father, and a widower. His wife Mala was the third daughter of a fish merchant with no title. The marriage was not approved by Ardoon's powerful family, to say the least.

Mala died during childbirth, delivering a healthy girl that she named Margery with her last breath. Derrick spent years attempting to leverage every piece of gold and scrap of influence at his disposal to resurrect Mala, but his family quietly thwarted him at every step. Derrick's father eventually delivered an ultimatum—marry someone suitable or move beyond the family's sphere of influence. Given the option between betraying the memory of Mala and political exile, he chose the latter.

Derrick spent years more preparing for the founding of a new settlement in an uncharted wilderness. He scouted the perfect location, assembled a hardy group of colonists, gathered supplies, and contracted guides to help the settlers. He hopes that the new home might be a fresh start and longs for a chance to create a society Mala would be proud of.

The hopeful settlers do not realize the vast wilds are claimed by a dwindling group of the cursed fir bolg. The Cloch Briste (Broken Stone) tribe believes they have discovered a path toward conquering the

Morrigan's curse. By risking their lives in a fair but deadly contest, they can invoke the Wild Hunt to master the beast within. Unwilling to kill others of the tribe, this potential solution has gone untested. The coming of the settlers provides an opportunity that can only be providence.

Getting the PCs Involved: The PCs are trained woodsmen, survivalists, or adventurers working with Derrick Ardoon to defend his new community while training the settlers to survive. Individual motivations will vary, so consider placing one or more of the PCs' relatives among the settlers and others being well paid for their services. The PCs are each offered 200 gp pay for the lengthy trek and keeping guard while a settlement is established.

Summary: The PCs guard and guide a caravan of settlers seeking to start a new community. They must protect and train the inexperienced but eager people while venturing ever deeper into an ancient forest. When approached by a seemingly peaceful tribe of fir bolg, the PCs learn of the fey's terrible curse and their desperate hope for a solution. If the PCs agree to terms, they find themselves hunted by a pair of relentless pregnant warriors. The PCs must find a way to win out over superior foes but even in victory might become pawns in the schemes of mysterious forces.

CHAPTER 1: INTO THE WILDS

The PCs lead the settlers deep into the unspoiled wilderness to a location scouted for the proposed community. With no trails, limited supplies, and winter in the future, they must begin training the ignorant people to survive. The caravan, with 52 persons and 22 pack horses in tow, has been on the move for a month prior to the adventure's start when the wilderness is entered in earnest. Roughly a month of travel remains ahead, assuming nothing goes awry. The wilderness is dense forest terrain.

EXAMPLE SETTLERS

The following are a number of example NPCs for the caravan of colonists. The GM is encouraged to create additional individuals or to tie NPC backgrounds to the PCs (especially their bonds) in order to increase emotional investment in the group's safety.

Derrick Ardoon (LG male human **noble**): The handsome, dark-haired noble has abandoned his family by blood and now sees every settler as his people by choice. He desperately hopes the burgeoning settlement is a success but not for selfish reasons. He wishes only to build a better world for his daughter. Derrick knows that his skills are more suited to royal courts and possesses a deep humility uncommon to the aristocracy.

Margery Ardoon (LG young female human **commoner**): Derrick's only child is an independent, headstrong girl of 9. Her daring personality, fire-red hair, and stark green eyes sometimes remind him too much of her mother. Margery is no spoiled noble's daughter and shows a maturity beyond her years. Mistreatment by her cousins has prepared her well for the harsh realities of life, but she worries for her loving father.

Beckan Uld (NG male dwarf **commoner**): Beckan is a short scrawny dwarf smith with not much of a beard to speak of. However, he cares little for such meaningless frivolities. The Ulds have long served the Ardoons as smiths and crafters, giving the family uncommon prestige. Beckan sees most of his relations as greed-filled opportunists willing to sell independence and respect for gold. He thinks most Ardoons are the worst sort of nobles, using money to buy what should be earned with sweat and tears. Derrick is the sole exception, and Beckan has come to see him as a sort of brother-in-exile. He allowed himself to be talked into this fool's errand but is beginning to have second thoughts as difficulties mount.

Pela Fournis (CG female human **bandit**): The slight and quick Pela has broken her nose in a half-dozen scrapes. The rebellious trickster grew up on the meanest streets, stealing to survive. Possessing a dangerously gallant streak led her to double-crossing the wrong criminals. A shameless hoarder, Pela knows next to nothing about surviving in the wild but casually assumes it can't be *that* hard.

SETTLERS' SURVIVAL

The hopeful colonists are ill-prepared for surviving in the wilderness or establishing a settlement from scratch. While traveling, the PCs have numerous opportunities to both aid and instruct. While this might require skill checks, conducting these lessons as roleplaying encounters is more rewarding and immersive. The PCs may also wish to train the settlers to be better combatants with a Charisma (Persuasion) check or construct weaponry with Intelligence checks using artisan's tools. Success on at least three out of five DC 12 checks, using the skill or tool in question, imparts useful training to three members of the caravan over 5 days of practice. A trained character isn't more effective individually in this short a time but can reliably use the Help action to help others at the task after training. Such characters will also become able to practice on their own to gain proficiency in the future if the party encounters them again after the end of the adventure.

While the caravan theoretically has sufficient supplies (food and water) to last everyone for a few months without rationing, eventually it is going to run low. Derrick Ardoon humbly requests that the PCs work to supplement the stores while helping the colonists learn to forage. The caravan moves slowly enough that the PCs can safely forage without slowing it down. Whenever a PC succeeds at a least a DC 12 Wisdom (Survival) check to forage, they instruct a member of the caravan on how to forage. This grants a cumulative +1 bonus on future foraging checks from helpful settlers assisting for the purposes of determining how much food is gathered.

Most settlers are **commoners**.

Story Award: The PCs should receive 25 XP for each settler taught how to forage, fight, or craft, and 200 XP for each roleplaying encounter.

ENCOUNTERS

The untouched forest is home to many strange monsters and bothersome fey. It is also the territory to fir bolg and cŵn annwn struggling to retain their sense of self.

Each encounter might test 3rd-level characters to their limits and should take place about a week apart.

Tiny Saboteurs: Two **chittering creepers** (*The Faerie Ring: Along the Twisting Way Campaign Guide*) leading four sprites become incensed at the temerity of mortals seeking to civilize the wilderness. They sneak into the caravan's camp in the dead of night to ruin food and water, kill or drive off the pack animals, and destroy valuable equipment. The hit-and-run saboteurs flee conflict, hoping to wear down the numerically superior foe. The group continues nightly raids until at least four of the attackers are defeated.

CHITTERING CREEPER

Small fey (mandragora, sentinel), neutral

Armor Class 13
Hit Points 66 (12d6 + 24)
Speed 30 ft., climb 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	6 (–2)	10 (+0)	6 (–2)

Damage Vulnerabilities fire
Damage Immunities poison, psychic
Condition Immunities blinded, deafened, exhaustion
Skills Stealth +5
Senses blindsight 60 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 10
Languages —
Challenge 1 (200 XP)

False Appearance. While the chittering creeper remains motionless, it is indistinguishable from normal foliage.

Rejuvenation. A destroyed chittering creeper regrows a new body in 1d10 days unless it is completely burnt to ash with fire.

Susurrus. Any creature other than a chittering creeper that starts its turn within 20 feet of the chittering creeper must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or be deafened until the start of the creature's next turn. If a creature's saving throw is successful, the creature is immune to the susurration of all chittering creepers for 1 hour.

ACTIONS

Shed Tendrils. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 10 ft., one grappled creature. *Hit:* 8 (2d6 + 1) bludgeoning damage and 7 (2d6) poison damage. The grapple ends, but the target remains restrained as the ensnaring tendrils rip free, spurting toxic sap, and entangle it. The restrained condition lasts until the target succeeds on a DC 13 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check as an action. The chittering creeper instantly grows new tendrils to replace the lost ones.

Tendrils. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (2d6 + 1) piercing damage and 7 (2d6) slashing damage. If the target is a creature, it is grappled (escape DC 13). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained, and the chittering creeper can't use tendrils on another target but can use Shed Tendrils.

SPRITE

Tiny fey, neutral good

Armor Class 15 (leather armor)
Hit Points 2 (1d4)
Speed 10 ft., fly 40 ft.

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

Skills Perception +3, Stealth +8
Senses passive Perception 13
Languages Common, Elvish, Sylvan
Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

ACTIONS

Longsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 1 slashing damage.

Shortbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 40/160 ft., one target. *Hit:* 1 piercing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned for 1 minute. If

its saving throw result is 5 or lower, the poisoned target falls unconscious for the same duration, or until it takes damage or another creature takes an action to shake it awake.

Heart Sight. The sprite touches a creature and magically knows the creature's current emotional state. If the target fails a DC 10 Charisma saving throw, the sprite also knows the creature's alignment. Celestials, fiends, and undead automatically fail the saving throw.

Invisibility. The sprite magically turns invisible until it attacks or casts a spell, or until its concentration ends (as if concentrating on a spell). Any equipment the sprite wears or carries is invisible with it.

Angry Trees: A pair of awakened trees sees the humanoids and their fires as a growing threat to be picked off before it gets worse and begins stalking the slow-moving caravan. Picking off the stragglers or anyone who ventures too far from camp, the settlers find only broken, half-crushed bodies. It might be hard to catch the subtle stealthy killers without laying a clever trap or ambush.

AWAKENED TREE

Huge plant, unaligned

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)
Hit Points 59 (7d12 + 14)
Speed 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	6 (–2)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	7 (–2)

Damage Vulnerabilities fire
Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing
Senses passive Perception 10
Languages one language known by its creator
Challenge 2 (450 XP)

False Appearance. While the tree remains motionless, it is indistinguishable from a normal tree.

ACTIONS

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (3d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage.

Hounds of Annwn: The Morrigan has seen signs of some event of significance to her plans involving mortals in the region, though not enough to target individuals. She sends a pack of one cù sìth (hounds of the sídhe) per PC to wipe out the mortals and thwart destiny. As is so often the case in matters of fey sovereigns, this impulsive action sets the wheels of fate in motion. Whispers warn there is something moving in the trees just before they attack, preventing PCs who are near her from being surprised. These cù sìth are relatively newly transformed and have not yet awakened to the full might that awaits them, but they were the only group near enough when the Morrigan sensed something was afoot.

NASCENT CÙ SÌTH

Large fey (sídhe), chaotic evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)
Hit Points 34 (4d10 + 12)
Speed 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	18 (+4)	17 (+3)	8 (–1)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Str +5, Cha +4
Skills Acrobatics +6, Nature +1, Perception +3
Damage Resistances bludgeoning, slashing, and piercing from nonmagical attacks
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13
Languages understands Common and Sylvan but can't speak
Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Keen Hearing and Smell. The cù sìth has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing or smell.

Morrigan's Cursed Conduit (1/Day). As an action, the cù sìth can channel a fraction of the Morrigan's power, giving it the benefit of a *fire shield* spell. The cù sìth chooses whether the effect is a warm

shield or a cold shield. The cù sìth takes half as much damage as the shield deals.

Predator's Presence. A creature that begins its turn within 5 feet of a cù sìth must make a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw. If it fails, it must choose "fight" or "flight." If it chooses "fight," attacks against it have advantage for the next 1 minute. If it chooses "flight," it gains the frightened condition for the next 1 minute. At the end of each of the affected creature's turns, it can make a new saving throw, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Once a creature makes this saving throw, successful or not, it is immune to that cù sìth's Predator's Aura until the next dawn.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d8 + 3) piercing damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 13 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

CHAPTER 2: GUESTS OF HONOR

The settlers' encroachment on their territory does not go unnoticed by the Cloch Briste (Broken Stone) tribe of fir bolg. They follow after with stealthy hunters tracking and studying.

FIR BOLG'S ENTREATY

Thwarting an organized attack by the cù sìth shows the mortals have the enmity of the Morrigan. Kes and her hunters decide the weight of destiny surrounds the settler's arrival.

The fir bolg approach carefully over the course of days, wishing to earn trust. They start by leaving offerings of food in the form of slain elks and the foraged plenty of the forest. They follow this by hunting down and slaying any of the foes from Chapter 1, such as the awakened trees, chittering creepers, or cù sìth (but not the sprites) that escaped death. The corpses slain by strange arrows are left as offerings.

Eventually, Kes and Ulgar act as ambassadors. The hunters wait unarmed in the PCs' path, hands up in a show of peace.

Kes (LN female fir bolg ranger 6): As one of the eldest surviving fir bolg women, Kes desperately wishes to break the Morrigan's curse and give birth to a child without sacrificing her identity, so she can raise that child. The graying fir bolg is on the cusp of old age but stronger and faster than most younger fir bolg. She is certainly a damn sight smarter—with keen eyes and a sharp tongue. Kes is the current leader of the Broken Stone tribe and holds firmly to ideals of duty and honor. She hates the notion of killing innocents (even in a fair fight) but believes she must for the sake of her people's future and the building of her own family with Ulgar.

Ulgar (CN male fir bolg ranger 6): Ulgar is Kes's much younger mate. He couldn't fathom asking Kes to sacrifice herself, even though he too has a deep longing to be a parent of a child they created together and the freedom to be intimate without fear. However, he is willing to help her fight for a way to see their shared dreams realized, however difficult it might be. He thinks there must be some other way.

Intelligence (Nature): With a successful DC 11 check, the PCs can recognize both as fir bolg—fey nomad warriors who keep to the wilderness. With a DC 13 check, they PCs know something of the Wild Hunt, a spirit of nature's violence said to bless and empower the fir bolg. With a DC 15 check, the PCs have even heard of the Morrigan's curse, which permanently changes any pregnant fir bolg into a hound by the time of birthing.

Development: Kes and Ulgar do everything they can to placate Derrick Ardoon and the PCs. They give oaths of hospitality and offer sanctuary and an opportunity for peaceful contact. Derrick is cautious but willing, considering the alternative is potentially a conflict they can ill afford.

Story Award: The PCs receive 200 XP for making peaceful contact with the fir bolg.

CAMP OF THE BROKEN STONE

The camp of the nomadic fir bolg is in a small clearing with hammocks set within the surrounding trees. Only

a few impermanent tent-like structures exist—crafted from wood and animal skins—surrounding a great fire with smaller cooking fires on the periphery. Also along the edges are a dozen odd-seeming leashed hounds the size of ponies. The dogs awaken to bark or growl at the settler's approach, spooking the horses.

The fir bolg are all aware of the settler's coming and the potential they represent. The grim folk are terse but inviting, quickly calming the feyhounds. The three dozen members of the tribe care for the settlers' pack animals, feed all with their best fare, help them to make camp, and invite the mortals to take the comfortable seats by the fires. The fir bolg are not a talkative people, and questions are politely deflected or answered briefly. Derrick and the other settlers engage the PCs in whispered conversations to get their impressions and opinions on the situation.

Wisdom (Insight): With a DC 13 check (or a DC 15 check using Perception instead), the PCs can note the fir bolg appear tense and are behaving uncharacteristically kind, beyond the expectations of hospitality.

Wisdom (Medicine): With a DC 12 check (or a DC 14 check using Perception instead), the PCs can see that the average age of the tribe is late middle age with fewer women and almost no children present. None are pregnant.

As nightfall descends, Kes whistles for attention and asks that the tribe and her honored guests gather around the main fire. Read or paraphrase her following speech.

"Listen close, for I share the secrets of the Wild Hunt.

"At the heart of nature is violence. The dance of predator and prey is brutal and unforgiving. Every life ends, and most with fear and pain. Weakness precedes death. The Wild Hunt embodies this harsh truth. It is the spirit of nature that civilization can never tame. Your society only builds walls of separation and destroys until boundaries become respected. Our Wild Hunt, this force, being, and embodiment . . . can only be beaten into submission or . . . placated with sacrifice.

"We are the fir bolg. Our greatest champions battled the Wild Hunt and won. We became the Hunt's chosen and wrought terrible destruction. In time, another champion arose and nearly destroyed us. These are the cycles, and the way of nature. The greatest predator is eventually a stronger beast's prey.

"The sixth tribe, the Túatha Dé Danann, could not accept this. They turned to blood magic and a dark goddess called the Morrigan. We fought her growing power but failed, and in our weakness, she cursed us with slow extinction. We can give birth only once and become hounds forever after. The transformed fight a losing battle against darkness, becoming pawns of the Morrigan. They are the hounds that attacked you.

"Being born with a womb offers half of us a chance to continue our kind, but only in a dwindling, doomed way and at the ultimate cost of ourselves. It is not a price many can bear to pay or bear to place on our mates.

"Yet new hope stirs. We have learned that the first to fall to the curse has conquered it. She can shift between hound and woman without succumbing to the Morrigan's influence. She claims through the power of the Wild Hunt, we might achieve the same. However, sovereigns give nothing without sacrifice.

"'A shared land breeds a shared fate.' We will share the land we have stalked willingly with you newcomers."

Several younger fir bolg murmur uncomfortably, questioning the wisdom of sharing and the worthiness of the newcomers. Kes quiets them with a harsh glare before continuing.

"We can't just say you are welcome. You must prove your worthiness for the Wild Hunt to acknowledge your claim to be our peers. We must hunt and be hunted by other hunters, risking everything in the process. We must prove ourselves and you to be true peers with equally shed blood and entwine our fates with yours. A fight with lethal weapons, with nothing held back except a basic mercy to a downed foe, will draw the Wild Hunt's power and allow us to split and weaken the curse, sharing it with those who would share our land. You who dare help us would also have a fragment of the curse, giving you some of the power of a beast and some of its uncontrolled nature. Both of us would be beyond the Morrigan's reach, but whoever relented first would have the worse of the pair.

"Killing one of our own for this is pointless, for our

territory and our curse are already shared among us. However, the sacrifice must willingly submit to the trial, or we become monsters in another way. In exchange for bearing a part of our curse and risking lives equal to our own, I make you this oath: should you offer up your own for the hunt, this tribe shall protect and guide your people, no matter the outcome, until we no longer roam this world."

Kes stoically answers any questions posed, offering additional details.

- As the most eager in the tribe to conceive together and the mightiest hunters as a pair, Kes and Ulgar would be the hunters.
- All involved could take no food, water, or steed, but may be armed with any weapon at their disposal.
- The hunted must be willing and cannot be coerced to take part in the ritual. They must stand a fair chance of victory.
- The ritual hunt only ends with victory by predator or prey, and they must use full lethal force until at least half of the participants on one side are unconscious, dying, or dead and any conscious survivors don't demand it continue. The Wild Hunt cannot be stirred by half-hearted displays of token blood. The fir bolg agree with great solemn sadness that they are willing to risk death but promise to stabilize surviving foes once either side has clearly won.
- The tribe fiercely promises to protect and provide for the settlers to the last, regardless of the hunt's outcome. The land will be their shared hunting territory indefinitely.
- The newcomers gain a head start (approximately 8 hours).
- If the settlers refuse, they may leave the camp in peace, but from that moment onward, the fir bolg shall never regard them as allies.
- The effect of the curse on the newcomers is impossible to predict with certainty, but it might resemble lycanthropy if the PCs lose. If the PCs win, it will at the least give them a burst of animalistic strength and cursory lupine features. Once weakened this way, the curse will be possible to remove with magic, though only completing the trial and seeing the results will determine exactly what means can lift it.

Development: If the visitors hesitate, especially if they worry about accidentally dying or killing, Kes produces two *spell scrolls of reincarnate* and vows that they will be used to revive anyone slain on the Wild Hunt's behalf in the name of this noble cause. If the fight concludes with fewer than two deaths total, any remaining scrolls will go to the PCs as thanks for their assistance.

Otherwise, the fir bolg remain silent with the weight of their desperation and guilt driving them to such a request. The fir bolg plight touches a deep chord with Derrick Ardoon, who might volunteer himself if it was not for his daughter. He implores the PCs, reminding them that they are the only ones among the colonists who stand a chance of survival. However, none can make such a weighty decision for them. The fir bolg stop short of threats or intimidation, but Ulgar might approach PCs privately with heartfelt pleas.

Story Award: The PCs receive 400 additional XP for agreeing to the fir bolg's offered deal.

CHAPTER 3: HUNTER AND HUNTED

The PCs can set off from the camp at any point they wish. The hunt begins 8 hours after the PCs leave.

Influence of the Morrigan: The Morrigan does not know if this ritual is destined to succeed or fail, but she has no intention of the fir bolg finding out either way. She cannot intercede directly. Otherwise, she would sweep into the forest and murder the fir bolg tribe to the last. Instead, she can only stack the deck against them. She does this by sending a hard and driving storm the night after the PCs depart the camp.

Wisdom (Survival): With a successful DC 10 check, a PC predicts that the weather should be clear for the foreseeable future. A DC 15 check predicts a hard rain lasting until dawn (starting just after midnight) with fog the morning after until it clears before noon. A DC 20 or higher check, which can also be attempted

using Intelligence (Arcana), allows PCs to note signs of unnatural winds and ill omens pointing toward some primal force manipulating the weather.

Spirit of the Hunt: The PCs and the fir bolg invoke the Wild Hunt by taking part in the ritual of predator and prey. The Hunt rewards cleverness, strength, and bravery while punishing ignorance, weakness, and cowardice. With the magic of the Hunt taking hold, the PCs eventually find evasion impossible and conflict inevitable. Likewise, the PCs become supported should they respect the game they play and turn the tables on their pursuers.

A successful DC 13 Intelligence (Nature) check (or a DC 15 check using Survival instead) whenever a twist of coincidence occurs allows the PC to recognize it as unnatural. A DC 15 check allows the PC to recall tales of the hunt and the favoring of violence over escape.

Foraging: The hunt rewards those that fend for themselves and punishes those who don't or can't. A PC using the Survival skill to forage for food and water easily finds enough to eat and drink, but attempts to gain a surplus seem thwarted by horrendous luck or strange circumstance. The Wisdom (Survival) check to get along in the wild is DC 10, and the PC foraging moves at a normal speed. However, the PC cannot provide food or water for others no matter how high their check.

Hiding: PCs using the forest to hide in order to set up an ambush find that the trees shield them from sight and the background noises of the forest rise at just the right moments. This grants a +5 bonus on Stealth checks in addition to finding undergrowth that lightly obscures them. However, PCs attempting to hide in order to evade pursuit find the forest stilling, breakable twigs underfoot, and coincidental clearings making evasion far from easy. In this case, PCs have disadvantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks.

Tracking: Pursuit is inevitable and inescapable. Between the tracking skill of the fir bolg rangers and the influence of the Wild Hunt, the PCs can only stall

TABLE 1: WILD HUNT TIME MODIFIERS

Action	Description	Time Modifier (Hours)
Move at fast pace	Each hour of moving at a fast pace adds time to pursuit (this is cumulative).	+1
Using a faster speed	If the PCs are moving at a speed above 30 feet (this is cumulative, once for every 10 feet faster than 30 the speed is, once per day).	+2
Forced March	Walking for more than 8 hours in a day adds time to pursuit (maximum once per day).	+1 per additional hour walked
Trackless Step	Each PC with the trackless step ability adds time to pursuit (this is a cumulative one-time bonus).	+4
Natural Explorer	Each PC with this feature that has chosen forest as the favored terrain adds time to pursuit (this is a cumulative one-time bonus).	+4
Hiding Trail	The PCs work to hide their tracks with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check (one-time bonus).	+4
Magic	The PCs use magic to trick or foil pursuit (one-time bonus per different spell).	+8
Double Back	The PCs create a false trail by doubling back, sending the fir bolg down a dead end (one-time bonus).	+4
Storm	If the PCs delay the fir bolg until the Morrigan's storm hits, it adds additional time (one-time bonus).	+12

BUILDING TENSION

The fir bolg's pursuit should keep the PCs in a state of tense expectation. It is important to maintain this right up until a final climactic confrontation. The exact timeline until an attack occurs should remain mysterious to the players but can be represented by more abstract warnings. With successful Wisdom (Perception) checks, PCs might hear distant breaking branches growing nearer. PCs doubling back in attempts to lose pursuit might make Wisdom (Survival) checks to note how quickly and easily the fir bolg follow after. These worries should compound when no clever strategy, magical ruse, or stealthy trick proves capable of foiling pursuit for long. Be careful not to overdo these sorts of anxiety-driving events. Instead, employ them as a subtle tool to keep the players on track with a nagging sense of dwindling time.

pursuit for a time. The GM should use the following table to determine how long the pursuit takes with the minimum time being 8 hours after the hunt begins (16 hours after the PCs depart). PC actions can add time to the hunt. This is not an exhaustive list, and PCs should be rewarded for clever ideas (see **Table 1: Wild Hunt Time Modifiers**).

PURSUIT (CR 9)

The fir bolg hunters are desperate and deadly. They pursue the PCs with single-minded focus, resting only when they must, knowing their quest is girded by the Wild Hunt's power. Tracking the PCs down is only a matter of time, and they represent a dire threat quite capable of killing an entire party. Use the generic forest map to represent any combat encounter in a location the PCs do not choose.

Creatures: Kes and Ulgar hunt the PCs. As a pair, they represent a threat that should outmatch the PCs in a fair fight on open ground. At the least, the PCs face stiff odds.

KES AND ULGAR

Medium fey (fir bolg [fomorian]), chaotic neutral (Ulgar) or lawful neutral (Kes)

Armor Class 15 (studded leather)
Hit Points 38 (7d8 + 7)
Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	16 (+3)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	8 (–1)

Saving Throws Str +6, Dex +5
Skills Animal Handling +3, Nature +2, Perception +3, Survival +3
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13
Languages Common, Sylvan
Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Keen Hearing and Smell. The fir bolg has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing or smell.

Mark Prey. When the fir bolg hits a creature with an attack, they can choose to mark it as prey until they mark another creature as prey. They always know the direction to their prey, as long as it is within 30 feet, and have advantage on Wisdom (Survival) checks made to track it.

Multiattack Defense. When the fir bolg is hit by an attack, it gains a +4 bonus to AC against all subsequent attacks made by that creature for the rest of the turn.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The fir bolg makes either two melee attacks or two ranged attacks.

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage.

Longbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage.

Development: While both Kes and Ulgar are conflicted, it is not enough to stay their hands. Each does their utmost to reduce each PC to 0 hit points before moving on to the next until at least half the PCs are down and any remaining surrender.

Story Award: The PCs gain 600 additional XP if they defeat Kes and Ulgar but spare their lives.

AMBUSH

The PCs' best path for victory is to lure the fir bolg into an ambush. This allows the PCs to choose which one of the maps the fight takes place on, based on a combination of successful Wisdom (Survival) checks and time spent scouting the wilderness for the best location. Success is cumulative with the DC 19 check making all maps available.

The PCs can use the aid another rules to work together to scout the area for an ambush location. They can retry this check every 24 hours. They do not have sufficient time to take a 20 on this check. Each PC can choose his or her most advantageous location on the map prior to the ambush and the direction the fir bolg approach from. If the PCs do not scout the area or are surprised, use the generic forest map, and the PCs do not get to control the fir bolg's approach.

TABLE 2: MAP LOCATIONS

Wisdom (Survival) DC	Time Required to Scout (hours)	Map Location Available
None	n/a	Map 1: Generic Forest
DC 13	8	Map 2: Short Ledge
DC 16	16	Map 3: Canopy Clearing
DC 19	24	Map 4: Narrow Valley

TRAPS AND TRICKS

The PCs can make use of simple traps for ambush or to delay pursuit. The Wild Hunt supports such efforts, and the PCs might realize as much with a successful DC 11 Intelligence (Nature) check or DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check. The following traps do not require gold or special abilities, only ability checks and valuable time. A trap can be placed anywhere on a map available to the PCs (see above).

Traps can also be used as a delaying tactic against the rangers, though each trap type is effective only once in this way, adding the modifier shown to the fir bolg's pursuit time. Creating traps requires a successful Wisdom (Survival) check or Dexterity check using carpenter's, mason's, or woodcarver's tools (as appropriate to the trap) with the DC shown. Each PC beyond the first assisting on constructing a trap reduces the time required to construct it by 1 hour (to a minimum of 1 hour).

TABLE 3: TRAP CONSTRUCTION OPTIONS

Trap	Ability Check	Time Required (hours)	Time Modifier (hours)
Snare	DC 12	1	+1
Simple Pit	DC 14	1	+2
Camouflaged Pit	DC 16	1	+2
Spiked Simple Pit	DC 18	2	+3
Camouflaged Spiked Pit	DC 20	4	+6
Falling Tree	DC 22	6	+9

TRAPS

The PCs might think to construct other traps not covered in this section, and the GM is encouraged to reward creative thinking. Assign any idea an appropriate ability check DC and time using the following traps as a guideline.

Story Award: The PCs receive 10 XP for every hour they delay the hunters.

SNARE TRAPS

Mechanical trap

This trap can be noticed with a successful DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check and can be pulled aside or triggered harmlessly once noticed.

The trap constricts around a limb or other part of the triggering creature's body (successful DC 15 Dexterity saving throw negates). The creature is restrained. The restrained creature can escape with a successful DC 10 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check as an action. The trap has AC 13 and 2 hit points and has

immunity to bludgeoning, poison, and psychic damage. The trap can hold up to a Medium creature.

PIT TRAPS

Mechanical trap

Simple Pit. A simple pit trap is 10 feet deep and functions as described in the SRD.

Camouflaged Pit. This pit functions as a hidden pit trap in the SRD and is 10 feet deep.

Spiked Pit. This 10-foot-deep pit functions as described in the SRD. It is also a simple pit, is 10 feet deep, and is not poisoned.

Camouflaged Spiked Pit. This 10-foot-deep pit functions as described in the SRD. It is also a hidden pit, is 10 feet deep, and is not poisoned.

FALLING TREE TRAPS

Mechanical trap

This trap uses natural materials like vines or wedged branches to precariously balance a dead tree trunk above a spot where it can't be seen on approach, such as in the branches of a larger tree.

A trip vine 3 inches off the ground stretches between two pieces supporting the dead tree. The DC to spot the drab vine amidst the foliage is 15. A successful DC 15 Dexterity check using thieves' tools disables trip vine harmlessly. A character without thieves' tools can attempt this check with disadvantage. On a failed check, the trap triggers.

Anyone who inspects the trees or supporting materials can easily tell the inspected object is merely wedged in place and liable to fall. A character not intentionally inspecting the trees above must succeed on a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check to spot it. As an action, a character can pull the trip vine, causing the trap to trigger.

When the trap is triggered, the dead tree falls. Any creature in the 10-foot-square underneath the falling tree must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage and 11 (2d10) piercing damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a successful one. Once the trap is triggered, the area containing the dead tree is filled with broken wood and is difficult terrain.

SPELLS

Magic can aid the PCs in erecting traps. A *floating disk* spell reduces the construction time of a falling tree or rock trap by 2 hours. An *unseen servant* can reduce the construction time of any trap by 1 hour (to a minimum 1 hour). Other spells might create traps or reduce the time to construct traps at GM discretion.

FLEEING

Rather than setting up a single ambush point for one fight, the PCs might try to fight the fir bolg using hit and run tactics. This allows less time to prepare any single location for attack but has the added advantage of not hanging all of their hopes on one fight. To fight Kes and Ulgar in this manner, the PCs can either make use of the ambush locations described previously (using them in any order) or simply attack the fir bolg whenever opportunity presents itself. However, the primary difficulty then becomes fleeing the fight. The PCs may inadvertently use these rules during any of the previous encounter setups if forced to flee. The following rules take effect once the PCs have withdrawn from combat and begin retreating. Due to the cover of the trees, PCs can end the combat by getting all members heavily obscured by foliage and succeeding on a group Dexterity (Stealth) check contested by the hunters' group Wisdom (Perception) check.

Otherwise, escaping an encounter with the fir bolg requires both moving quickly and forcing the hunters to fail on a Wisdom (Survival) check to track the PCs. The check to track the PCs is base DC 15. If the PCs split up, the fir bolg follow the most obvious trail with the most people to its conclusion.

Unless the PCs move at a speed of 20 feet or less before factoring in terrain, the fir bolg must accept disadvantage on their check to move at a normal speed while tracking. Visibility during the night or during the Morrigan's storm add to the difficulty (+2 DC for each). Each PC with the Natural Explorer feature adds a cumulative +2 to the check's DC. However, the fir bolg's tracking is aided by the magic of the Wild Hunt

SPLITTING THE PARTY

The PCs might be tempted to split up in order to accomplish more at once in smaller groups. This is a risky tactic. When the fir bolg's pursuit is over, they find one of the groups of PCs, and the fey's victory is all but certain. It is only a matter of time before the remaining PCs are hunted down and killed as well. The *augury* spell or similar magic might indicate whether the proposed action is a good or bad idea within the unknown time frame.

and can't be completely thwarted by mortal magic.

The PCs can attempt to hide their trail by succeeding at a DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) group check. Characters proficient in Stealth can make a Dexterity (Stealth) check instead as part of this group check. A successful check or a *pass without trace* spell adds +5 to the DC of the fir bolg's Wisdom (Survival) check.

Development: With a successful Wisdom (Survival) check, the fir bolg manage to track the PCs down and start combat again. On a failed check, the PCs manage to evade direct pursuit. The fir bolg eventually find them again but are 1 hour behind for every point by which they fail the check. The PCs can then increase this time through actions detailed earlier in this chapter.

CONCLUSION

The PCs may refuse to take part in the ritual of the Wild Hunt. The fir bolg understand and bear no overt enmity. The settlers are allowed to freely leave but face terrible danger establishing a colony without the fey's aid. Worse, some fir bolg come to resent them, and it might be only a matter of time before violent elements take control within the tribe and more aggressive fey decide that driving these settlers out in favor of others is the only way to weaken the curse.

If the PCs take the deal, the fir bolg are true to their word, regardless of the outcome. The nomads establish a community with the mortals, teaching them the ways of the forest. If the PCs killed Kes and Ulgar during the hunt and there were not enough *spell scrolls of reincarnate* to go around, tensions strain over time and eventually might become violent without careful diplomacy. If Kes survives, she becomes capable of changing form between hound and fir bolg by mastering the darkness within. This changes the nature of the fir bolg but ties their fate to murder if any PCs died and definitely alters their culture as the terms of the ritual require sharing space with the new settlers.

As long as the PCs participate with earnest lethal force but spare at least one hunter's life, this forges a deep and strange connection between the PCs, the Wild Hunt, and the Morrigan. The weight of the magic transfers partially to the PCs. The full repercussions of the curse and what quests might be required to find a cure could fuel an entire campaign. Of course, the PCs also earn the direct rage of a foiled fey sovereign. The consequences of this are likely to be dire and long lasting. The GM is encouraged to choose a form for the curse that is most fitting for the campaign in the long run, but ideas are offered here.

If the PCs lose but survive, they might gain the werewolf lycanthropy curse as if bitten by a werewolf and failed on the initial saving throw.

If the PCs win, they might gain the following curse with no saving throw to avoid gaining it:

WILD HUNT'S GIFT

Curse

Whenever the target is damaged, it must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or animalistic power surges through it. The target gains a +2 bonus to damage with weapon attacks for 10 minutes and grows visible fangs, claw, and tufts of fur but takes a –2 penalty on Wisdom saving throws; the target also gains claw natural weapons with base damage 1d4 slashing for that time. Each claw is a simple weapon with the light and finesse properties.

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Map 1: Generic Forest

Map 2: Short Ledge

Map 4: Narrow Valley

Map 3: Canopy Clearing