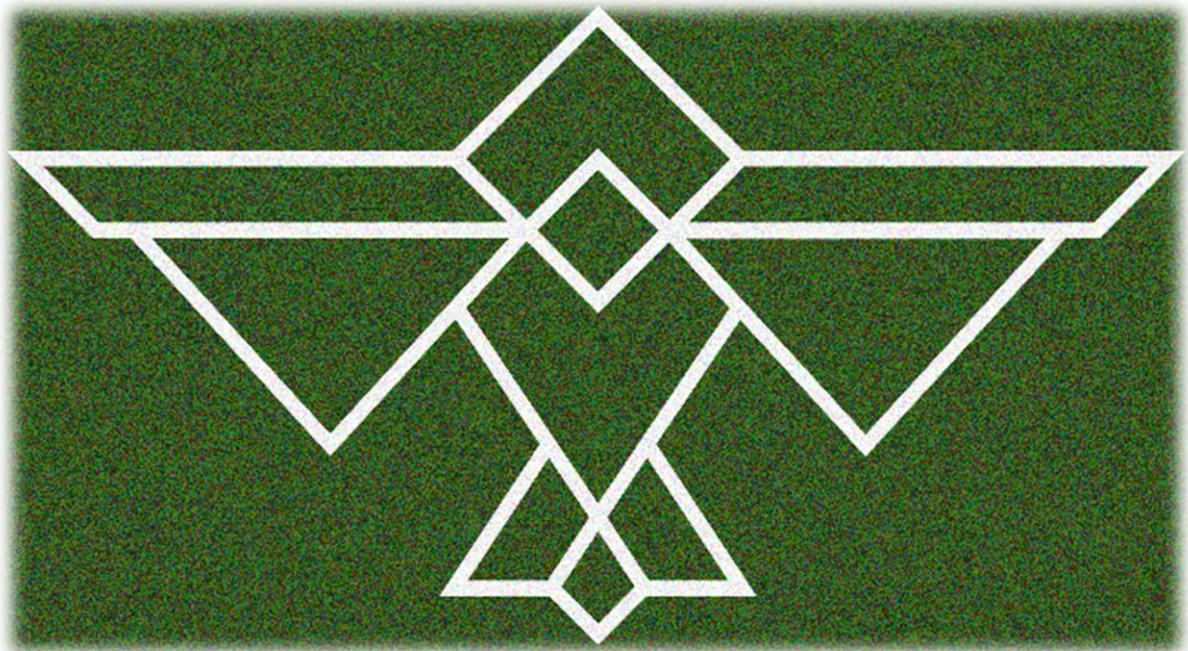

DRAGON WARRIORS



Legacy of Borek



Legacy of Borek, A Dragon Warriors Adventure

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Introduction

The PCs are staying at Lord Aldred's castle to recuperate after the events of Shadow on the Mist. Simon, the party's disciple of the True Faith has returned to Jib's Hollow with some church knights with silvered shields to purge the town of mandicors, leaving Sir Gregor, Aelfric, and Walburgis to the comfort of Lord Aldred's hospitality.

However, Walburgis's corruption (her shadow has been replaced by that of a nine-legged spider due to her high level of Taint) was spotted in the town by one of the True-Faith priests, Father Oswald, to whom she went to speak about her adventures. She also brazenly wore her headgear carved with symbols of the Lord of the Void (an obscure representation of the Devil, to be sure, but this was noticed by Sister Mearna), plus the report from Notker of Walburgis's use of magic has forced the Baron's hand – as useful as the party has been to him, he has to act. He had been reticent to act before now because there is prestige in having access to magical resources at court and the Mistress is too capricious to be a reliable servant.

Now under pressure from the bishop, however, following Mearna's and Oswald's reports, the baron now

needs to be seen to be acting to root out blasphemy from his domain.

Unknown to the baron, one of the baron's advisers is a fay changeling and his whispers have bought the PCs until morning before being arrested. Messengers were sent to each character's chambers in the night to warn them of the baron's intention to arrest Sir Gregor's retinue (although Sir Gregor, by virtue of his status and actions, is currently not implicated in Walburgis's blasphemy).

The changeling was expecting them to return the favour and save the Grey Folk's children in Hazelmead, but the PCs instead decided to return to Walburgis's home village. This was an ideal opportunity to develop a story arc that had been building with Walburgis's character over the past couple of game years – ostensibly a priestess of the True Faith, she has wrestled with the temptations of blasphemy and the convenience of avoiding the teachings of her faith. Was she ready to embrace a new path?

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About this Adventure

This adventure was written very specifically for my adventuring party. Walburgis, an air elementress, had been wrestling with her faith for the past couple of years and had become cursed by the nine-legged spider-avatar of the Lord of the Void (from *Mountain of the Gods*). As such, this adventure may need some polishing to introduce a narrative and motivation to keep your own players engaged. Minerva, one of the key NPCs, is Walburgis's sister and Aurelia, daughter of the North Wind, Lady of the Skies, and Mother of Birds was a fitting new deity for Walburgis to whom to devote herself (should she wish to) – Walburgis having demonstrated on repeated occasions her love for avians – having befriended, tamed, and trained a raven, saved a goose from slaughter, and other small incidents in which her love for birds drove her actions.

Adapting the Adventure

If the PCs have no emotional ties to their faith or their villagers, this adventure could simply be a rescue mission and all the background lore on the deities and location little more

than a textured background to the events that will unfold once the PCs arrive.

The final scene with Sir Beorn relies on Sir Beorn still being alive in your campaign and hunting the PCs to bring them to justice for some crime or other (in my campaign, Sir Beorn, whilst odious and indifferent, was not treacherous). But if the PCs have not committed a crime in your campaign, this could be a good segue into an adventure in which they have been framed and must prove their innocence.

All the other usual guidance applies when adapting one of my adventures to a canon Dragon Warriors campaign – I have shaped the Dragon Warriors rules and professions into the style of game I prefer to play, with additional skills, combat options, alternative spells, and other rules that may not fit comfortably alongside another Dragon Warriors GM's rules. With this adventure particularly, difficulty factors for primary ability score tests and stealth (for example) are included that have not been calibrated for the canon rules and will need changing by the GM playing with those rules.

The Warnings

Whilst staying at Lord Aldred's castle, each of the characters was visited in the night by a messenger warning them of their impending arrest (only 3 PCs are in the castle).

Walburgis

It is late, night has long since fallen and you are preparing for bed by the light of a single candle illuminating your room. There is a gentle knock on your door¹.

If asked to identify himself, a man's voice, soft and low, just says, "I am a messenger, m'lady, with a message of some urgency and privacy."

Opening the door, the corridor is in darkness and a gentleman stands before you wearing a long robe of thick dark wool. A thin strip of fur adorns the collar indicating an expensive garment. Between the dark shoulder-length hair laced with grey and the lines of his features laid bare by the light of your candle, you estimate the man to be in his early forties, or thereabouts.

"Apologies for the lateness of the hour, m'lady, but this cannot wait until morning and your bravery deserves at least the warning I can provide. The baron is displeased with the brazen disrespect you have shown the True Faith." At this, his eyes flick momentarily to the bronze headband you're wearing before continuing, "I have bought you until first light before the baron will arrest you and you may find the guard on the west exit to be, how shall I put this, less than diligent in his duties for the next half an hour. I, for one, care neither way for the symbols of gods nor devils – I care only that one's actions are true to one's convictions, but mine are not the sensibilities that govern this castle." He pauses for a second and looks like he might be about to say something, then seems to change his mind. "Goodnight, m'lady, and fare well." With that, he nods his head, turns, and strides silently down the corridor before being engulfed by the darkness.

¹ Note about doors on the inside of the castle. There are no locks on the internal doors of Aldred's castle, except on the most private areas. Most doors are held closed with a simple latch that can be lifted.

However, sleeping quarters and other private rooms can be "locked" by sliding a bar across the top of the latch on the inside, which prevents the latch lifting the mechanism from the outside.

Aelfric

You are glad of the private chambers you have been provided by the baron, as it has given you an opportunity to study the scrolls you retrieved from the Twilight Realm relatively undisturbed. However, as always when you become engrossed in your studies, you have not noticed the candle burning down to a stub. Minutes before the flickering flame might be entirely out of fuel, you are disturbed in your studies by a knock at your door.

In the dark corridor outside stands a red-haired gentleman with strikingly angular and symmetrical features, "Please excuse this interruption to your reading," he looks past you at the desk, covered in parchments, although it does cross your mind that he knew what you were doing even before opening the door.

He continues, "We are rarely blessed with such fortune to have a scholar with your knowledge grace our castle and it may have pleased me greatly to discuss that which each of us knows about our respective scholarly domains, but I fear that such a conversation may no longer take place due to the indiscretions of your companion."

He is speaking quietly and quickly and, as he mentions your companion, glances down the corridor into the absolute darkness beyond your feeble candle's light. His tone changes slightly and he speaks more loudly, "You look tired. Perhaps a stroll in the night air will refresh you." You sense that he is speaking for the benefit of someone else before continuing, in a much lower voice, "And if you need to be alone with your thoughts, the courtyard near the west gate is usually quite quiet at this time of night."

Before you have a chance to respond, the striking gentleman glances left and right quickly, then hurries into the darkness.

Sir Gregor

Like a good knight, you embraced sleep soon after retiring to your room – you said your prayers and quickly drifted off into a dreamless sleep from which you are rudely awoken by a loud knocking. Through the cracks in the wood, you can see the night is still dark behind the shutters. A child's voice calls through the door to your room, "Sir knight, make haste, the baron requests an urgent audience with you."

Opening the door, you are surprised to see not a child but a grown man. Young – late teens, perhaps twenty – with a prominent scar that runs across his forehead and down the left side of his face that makes you wonder to its cause. As you open the door, the man speaks quickly, with a high voice that you had earlier mistaken for a child's. "With apologies for disturbing your sleep, the baron has asked for discretion due to the sensitive nature of the topic he wishes to discuss with you. Please dress quickly and meet him in the courtyard by the west gate." The boy/man seems nervous and is speaking quickly, avoiding eye contact, and wringing his hands. "The sky will grey with the first light of dawn soon and the baron does not wish for this meeting to be seen. Please hurry." With that, the boy/man turns and almost flees down the corridor, to be swallowed by the night-darkness cloaking the castle.

Fleeing the Castle?

Typical of any adventuring party, the PCs did not heed the warnings. Walburgis wanted to retrieve something from her horse before leaving – the stables being situated in the main courtyard (and the most heavily guarded area of the castle). Whilst she was turned away from the

courtyard by guards ("under orders not to allow anyone to leave"), she was therefore seen attempting to leave the castle.

Aelfric remained holed up in his room until morning and was forced to make a more daring escape that required much overt and witnessed use of sorcery.

Sir Gregor did attend the courtyard but, because the messenger lied about the baron wanting to meet there and because the other PCs were not there, he returned to his room. As far as the baron and his men knew, Sir Gregor had not been summoned by the baron, nor was he seen during the night, so he was able to act almost as normal the next day.

Walburgis did manage to escape in the night and Aelfric managed to escape the next morning (although at the cost of his secret). Sir Gregor remained in town to try to find out what might have triggered the arrests.

Sir Gregor was once again visited by the messenger, this time in the form of a young noble lady with hypnotically green eyes and a long blue robe. She followed Sir Gregor through town until he was alone before warning him of the threat to his companions and alluding to a place of safety in the mountains.

On the Run

A short scene of cat-and-mouse followed, which split the party and resulted in a couple of skirmishes with guards that were combing the nearby foothills for the fugitives.



Encounter in the Canyon

Eventually, the PCs found safe shelter in a secluded canyon, where they rested for the night.

At twilight, as the skies are greying towards night, a child, perhaps only 7 or 8 years old just seems to appear – walking from behind a twisted rock formation, fresh and clean like he'd just washed, wearing gaudy orange clothes, full of smiles, and sporting a mop of blond hair that seems tossed by a wind you cannot feel. "I'm glad you are together. We have some children that have lost their way and you have secrets that have spilled into the world and need stoppering back in the dark places whence they sprang. As one good deed deserves another, you should look in Hazelmead for my children."

After delivering the message, the boy just walks off into the encroaching night, leaving you as stunned as when he first appeared.

Predictably ignoring any attempt to corral the PCs towards my planned adventure, the PCs decided they needed a safe place to rest, re-equip, and heal before travelling to Hazelmead – given their proximity to Walburgis's remote home village, Ashenshale, the PCs set off for that village at first light.

The Village of Ashenshale

Ashenshale² is a remote mountain village nestled within a wide valley. Steep south-facing mountain slopes protect it from northerly winds and provide rich feeding grounds for sheep, which you can see dotted across the mountainside as you crest the last ridge on your way to the village. A broad, shallow lake is fed by two streams: one from the northeast and one from the northwest, before draining into another stream that leaves to the west. A shore of black gravel encloses the lake before giving away

to long grasses and orchards of apple, plum, and pear trees, amongst which pigs root for food.

Walburgis, you know that few fish inhabit the lake but eels spawn there in abundance and you are looking forward to one of your favourite meals that always reminds you of home – boiled eel in plum sauce.

The village population is small, under 100, but it is largely self-sufficient as its remoteness and lack of roads make any kind of trading difficult. Iron is traded only in small amounts – what



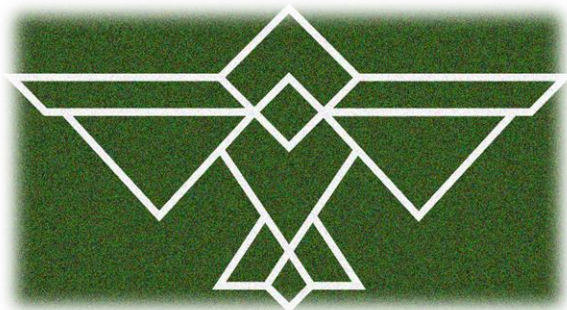
² I read the following section verbatim to my players, both to set the scene and to remind them of some

past events. Not all of this text will be relevant outside of my campaign.

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can be carried by donkey or in a small handcart – with a neighbouring village, Red Lane, about 3 hours trek to the northeast.

Along the north-western slopes, a large stylised bird has been carved out of the turf that can be seen from the south-eastern path as you enter the village – it must be over 100' wide from wing-tip to wing-tip. It supposedly guards the village and, despite being a pagan totem, Walburgis, you were never able to release your people from this superstition and they continue to tend the totem to ensure the undergrowth does not cover up the stone they toiled so hard to reveal all those centuries – maybe millennia – ago. It is perhaps this failure that led you to abandon your position as this village's priestess of the True Faith nearly four years ago and retire to the cloistered nunnery to be amongst people that could help you understand your faith and the role you were to play in the True God's great plan.



Walburgis, you have only returned here once before, last year, after the distressing trials in the tomb of King Vallandar. Your people welcomed

you back with open arms and sought to hear of your journeys and tales. You stayed a few months and, whilst your heart was warmed by being surrounded by family and friends, you could not help but feel something drawing you away and you returned to your companions and the employ of the baron.

And now you return again, a fugitive, wanted for the crime of blasphemy with two stalwart companions that have chosen to stand with you. Tears start to well and you are not sure if this surge of tears is genuine joy to see your home again or whether it is just the relief that it offers some respite from the harrowing ordeals of the past few days.

Visitors to Ashenshale are few and your silhouettes against the eastern ridge have begun to draw attention. As you approach closer, you can see Conayn, the Headman, starting towards you and your heart is lifted again – Conayn practically raised you as his daughter since your parents died of disease when you were only little. And Minerva, recognisable from the veil she wears continuously since being left hideously scarred by the same disease that claimed your parents, is running along the path towards you, arms open and calling your name. You cannot hold back the tears any longer and you rush forward to greet her.

Catching Up

Conayn will invite the PCs to join him for a lunch of eel coddle³ and plum pudding. He will try to keep the mood light so as not to burden the PCs with the village's plight so soon after arriving. However, Minerva will be unable to hold back.

Between Conayn, Millicent (Conayn's wife), and Minerva, the following story will spill out.

A few days ago, four fighting men – mercenaries, perhaps – came to the village and rounded up half a dozen of the strongest men in the village and led them away into the hills. Carwen, the Blacksmith, tried to resist and was slain⁴. Artos, the village's finest hunter was away in the mountains when the mercenaries came so escaped the draft.

When he returned and learned of what happened, he went back into the mountains to track the group. He followed their trail to an old mine about two miles from here. However, Artos was detected and was injured whilst making his escape. Despite his injuries, he made it back to the village and was able to give a brief report of what he had seen, even sketching a rough map before his poisoned wound engulfed him in delirium. We had prayed for aide

and the next morning, you appear over the ridge – our daughter of the sky⁵, returned in our hour of need!

Visiting Artos

The PCs may choose to visit Artos and will see him lying in a bed, eyes open but oblivious to proceedings around him.

His injury is severe – less so for the injury itself, but more so for the poison slowly spreading through his body – black lines trace the veins leading away from the wound in his thigh. Minerva has been tending the poisoned wound but laments that it continues to spread slowly – in only a few more days, she fears, it will reach his heart and kill him. Perhaps the villains that created the poison also have an antidote?

If they try to speak to Artos, he fades in and out of consciousness and what he says is gibberish. Minerva explains that he was not this delusional when he first returned to the village, but the poison seems to be invading his mind as well as his blood. Before he was this way, Artos spoke of four armed men and someone that seemed to be their commander – he carried no weapons, but the armed men deferred to him. The people of the village are being treated cruelly – bound, whipped, and forced to work the old mine. “This is a dark time for

³ Perhaps a little too close to the edge of palatable for many, but delicious to those who grew up with it.

⁴ Willuf, Carwen's apprentice, now tends the forge.

⁵ A reference to Walburgis's air elemental powers, which are known to the villagers.

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our village," Minerva finishes quietly, and heavy with sadness. She places an affectionate hand on Artos's shoulder as she speaks; his body

seems to shudder in response, and he gasps for another breath of air. You get the sense that Minerva cares more for Artos than just as his nurse.



Cast of Characters

The Mercenaries

There are five mercenary guards, led by an earth elementer, Caliban. Two of the mercenaries are armed with crossbows and are wearing hardened leather armour, with the other two wielding maces and wearing light chain.

The fifth soldier is Caliban's bodyguard, a second-rank armsman with heavy chain armour and a Morningstar.

Crossbowmen (2)		(Reflexes 11)
Attack:	13	Magical Attack: N/A
Defence:	3	Magical Defence: 3
Stealth:	3	
Perception:	11	Vision: Normal
Evasion:	3	Health Points: 1d6+9
Movement:	30	(60)
Weapons/Attacks:	Crossbow (1d10+1, 4) or Shortsword (d8, 3)	
Armour/Defences:	Hardened Leather (AF2)	
Rank Equivalence:	1	
<u>Notes</u>		
+1 Attack with Crossbow from Combat Mastery (Crossbow) at rank 1.		
In melee, Dynamic Melee allows guards to add +1 to Attack or Defence each combat round.		

Guards (2)		(Reflexes 10)
Attack:	13	Magical Attack: N/A
Defence:	3	Magical Defence: 3
Stealth:	3	
Perception:	11	Vision: Normal
Evasion:	3	Health Points: 1d6+9
Movement:	30	(60)
Weapons/Attacks:	Mace (d8, 4)	
Armour/Defences:	Light Chain (AF3)	
Rank Equivalence:	1	
<u>Notes</u>		
+1 Attack with Mace from Combat Mastery (Mace) at rank 1.		
In melee, Dynamic Melee allows guards to add +1 to Attack or Defence each combat round.		

Bodyguard		(Reflexes 12)
Attack:	14	Magical Attack: N/A
Defence:	4	Magical Defence: 4
Stealth:	4	
Perception:	12	Vision: Normal
Evasion:	3	Health Points: 1d6+10
Movement:	30	(60)
Weapons/Attacks:	Morningstar (d10, 4)	
Armour/Defences:	Heavy Chain (AF4)	
Rank Equivalence:	2	
<u>Notes</u>		
+1 Attack with Morningstar from Combat Mastery (Morningstar) at rank 1.		
Profile includes +1 Defence from Combat Mastery (Heavy Chain) at rank 1.		
In melee, Dynamic Melee allows guards to add +1 to Attack or Defence each combat round.		

Caliban		(Reflexes 14)	
Attack:	14	Magical Attack:	19
Defence:	6	Magical Defence:	9
Stealth:	5		
Perception:	13	Vision:	Normal
Evasion:	1	Health Points:	1d6+6
Movement:	30 (60)		
Weapons/Attacks:	Stone sword +1 (d8+1, 5)		
Armour/Defences:	Hardened Leather (AF3)		
Rank Equivalence:	4		
<u>Notes</u>			
+1 AF from Earth Elemental Resistance. Has the spellcasting abilities of a fourth-rank earth elementer (including raw essences).			
Profile includes the +1 Attack and Defence from magic sword			

The Villagers

Included here a handful of villagers that the party interacted with as part of this adventure – people they took with them to the camp or otherwise. None are key to the adventure but are included here in case you would like to use them in your own playthrough of this adventure.

Conayn and Millicent



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The Taken

Six villagers were taken by the mercenaries: Leopold, Forthwind, Robin, Barder, Bryce, and Boren⁶. The longer the PCs take to launch a (successful) rescue attempt, the more of these villagers will not return alive.

Each of these men are strong and healthy (or, at least, they were before being taken) but, should it come to it, are not combat-trained so will only fight as unranked humans in the event they are required to do so.

Walburgis and Minerva's adopted parents. Conayn is the headman of the village and well respected. Millicent is secretly less well-liked, as she can come across as haughty and superior but she is well-meaning (if a little patronising).

⁶ In a small village of under 100 inhabitants, there are probably only around 20-or-so households. To lose

the blacksmith and six other men is a significant loss to the village.

Artos



Young and accomplished, Artos is swift, strong, and keen-eyed, and his bow and spear have more than once kept the villagers fed during winter. Artos will spend the bulk of the adventure in a toxin-induced delirium or unconscious but any villager the party ask about him will only speak praise for his bravery and unhesitating attempt to rescue those taken from the village.

Langliva



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Langliva is barely 16 years old, the only child born of old parents, Boris (72) and Helena (55). Boris was a prized hunter in his day (although senile now) and used to regale Langliva with stories of his adventures in the mountains. Langliva devoured these stories and is now consumed by a wanderlust that her position in the village has been unable to fulfil.

Needing to secure an heir for their orchard, Boris and Helena promised Langliva to Norman, a vintner that makes cider (and a very rough brandy), but their marriage is loveless and uninspiring, and caring for her infirm parents weighs heavily on Langliva, so when the offer to go adventuring with the PCs came along, she jumped at it!

Minerva

Minerva is Walburgis's younger sister, struck with a disfiguring disease that has left her hideously scarred and she now wears a veil at all times, even in the privacy of her home. Minerva is the village's midwife and herbalist. However, despite her medical skills, she does not know how to arrest the poison slowly draining the life from Artos.

Oskell



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Oskell is an experienced hunter and knows this region of the mountains well. He is of a similar age to Walburgis and always had a “bit of thing” for her growing up but would never presume to make a move – Walburgis holds a privileged position within the village, both as the adopted daughter of the headman and as True Faith Chosen of the Sky. He knows her calling will take her on paths that he can't follow but his feelings for her will mean that he will care for her safety over anyone else's on this adventure.

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On the Road

There is an animal trail that winds over the north ridge and along the far slope towards the plateau where the old mine is. This is the route marked out on Artos's rough map and likely the one the PCs will attempt. However, the mercenaries have trapped this route and fortified the approach to the plateau from this path.

Movement

Movement on the trail is slow-going and characters can only walk safely at half movement speed along the trail. To move normally, test Reflexes against a difficulty of 12, with a -4 penalty to jog, and a -8 penalty to run. Failure indicates the character trips and falls and must test Reflexes again but this time against a difficulty of 16 to avoid falling. If this second test is failed, the character falls/slides 3d10 feet before being able to arrest their fall and must climb back up (or be rescued by their friends). Any falling damage is halved.

Traps!

The road to the kidnapper's camp is boobytrapped. If the characters are hustling along the trail, they are unlikely to notice the traps.

Three traps are suggested here, but the GM is free to litter the path with as many traps of whatever difficulty as will challenge the PCs. As a general rule, all traps are difficult to spot (Stealth 8) but note bonuses to Perception for daylight (+5) that should mean that even a low-rank lead character might spot one or two of these. Having spotted or triggered the first trap, the characters may be alert to more, which provides a further +2 to Perception.

Be sure to track marching order and distance between the characters so you can adjudicate who is caught in each of these traps.

Trap 1: Falling Rocks

There is a cord across the path, hidden amongst ivy growing across the animal track. If tripped (i.e., the lead character did not notice the cord), rocks will tumble down the mountainside towards the group. All characters up to 30' behind the lead character (including the lead

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character) must test Evasion against Speed 14. Failure to dodge the rocks causes 1d6+2 damage, reduced by AF (minimum 1 HP damage).

Any character that fails to avoid the rocks must also test Reflexes against a difficulty of 12, applying a penalty equal to the amount by which they failed their Evasion test. If this fails, they are knocked 3d10 feet down the side of the mountain. Any falling damage from this fall is halved, representing half falling and half sliding down the mountainside.

Trap 2: Crumbling Path

At the narrowest point of a particularly treacherous section of trail, where the mountainside is at its steepest, the path has been deliberately eroded and will crumble beneath the feet of the first person to try to cross it.

Because of the difficulty of spotting how the path has been dug out of the side of the mountain, the stealth of this trap is 10.

If the lead character fails to notice the weakened section of path and climb around it (easy enough to do once it has been detected), they must test Reflexes against a difficulty of 19, falling 10' for each point by which the Reflexes test is failed.

This trap only affects the lead character.

Trap 3: Sweeping Rope

If the lead character triggers the third and final trap, it will cause two heavy boulders to fall down the mountainside – one in front of the characters and one behind (about 15' between them). A rope has been tied to the two boulders, so any characters standing between the two boulders as they bounce down the mountainside may have their legs swept from under them.

Additionally, the boulders themselves may hit someone.

The lead character, and anyone up to 15' behind the lead character, must test Evasion against Speed 16, else be swept off the mountainside and fall 10d10 feet (the distance is different for each character). Each character should test Reflexes and reduce their fall by 2' for each point of the result (remember to use Reflexes adjusted for armour).

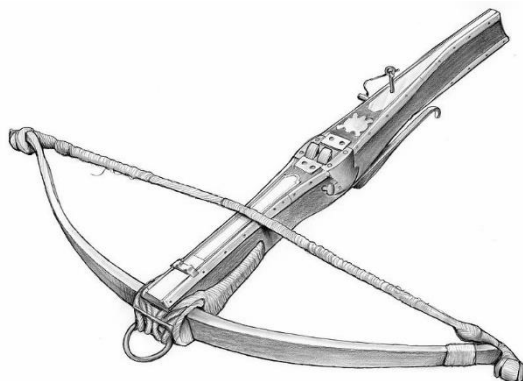
If there is a character standing exactly 20' behind the lead character, they may be struck by the large boulder. This character should test Evasion against Speed 15 to avoid being hit by this boulder. If they fail, they are bowled over the edge of the path with the same game effects as if they had been tripped by the rope.

Snipers!

Finally past the traps, two crossbowmen will be keeping watch on a rocky shelf slightly below and ahead, about 200' away from the bend in the path that will put them in sight of anyone following the trail.

They will release a few shots but, if the PCs attempt to get to them, they will scramble up the ledge and head back to the safety of the camp. At this range, they are unlikely to hit (and are only carrying 6 bolts each) but they will likely cause the characters to pause and give the camp more time to prepare their defences (and herd the workers into the tunnels).

Note that if the PCs approach at night, the snipers will have returned to the camp – although approaching at night will also make the traps much harder to spot.



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RETREAT!

Between the traps and snipers, the PCs decided at this point to retreat to the village and consider their next move.

Back at the village, the PCs spoke to Oskell, another hunter. Oskell suggested an approach that would take them upstream through the steep, fast-flowing stream at the north-western end of the valley.

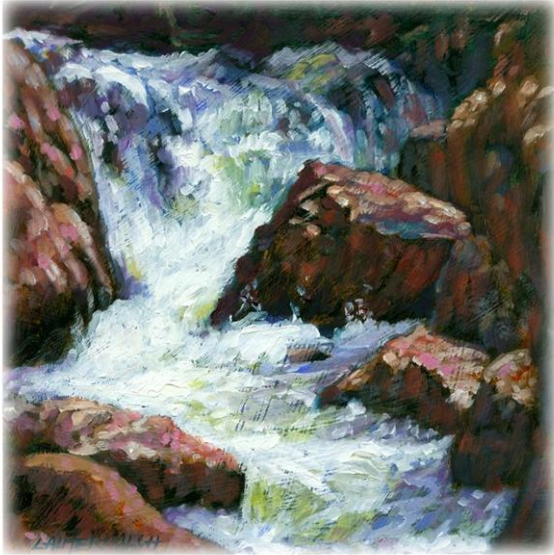
Oskell cautions against this, however, as the current is strong, the sides of the gulley are sheer, and the rocks beneath the water are uneven and slippery. In parts the river will be chest-deep, too.

Wading upstream would take the characters to a split in the rockface that should be just wide enough to squeeze through. On the other side of the crevice is the plateau.

The PCs chose to attempt this route rather than try a frontal assault again. They prepared to set out in the morning.

The PCs also decided to take some extra help from the village – Halouyn, a strong farmer that evaded the original draft and Langliva, a teenage apple-picker with whom Walburgis felt a kinship (but has no experience of the mountains outside the village and no useful skills).

Alternative Route



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In the morning, the PCs, Oskell, Halouyn, and Langliva, lightly equipped with what they felt they may need for their ascent, met at the mouth of the northwestern river to make a second attempt at rescuing the abducted villagers.

Navigating the River

Movement upstream is slow and perilous. Movement is halved and it is not possible to run or jog. The characters will need to be single file.

Note that losing one's footing may cause the character to be bashed against rocks – be mindful of the impact on any delicate items in the character's pack, including clay lamps, vials, and so on. At the very least, if their packs end up

underwater, everything will become wet (books and scrolls, torches, etc.).

Obstacles in the River

As with the mountain path, the river is not without its dangers. And, whenever the GM feels the tension or danger is easing off, he should call for the characters to test Strength to continue moving forwards (difficulty 14), success or failure on which will adjust the character's next Reflexes test to remain sure-footed (difficulty 15). Failure to remain sure-footed will result in being swept downstream a short way and bashed against rocks for 1 HP damage. Having been swept a little downstream, the test must be repeated, with the same consequence for failure.

Obstacle 1: Log

A large branch from a tree must have broken off and fallen into the water because it is speeding towards the group, carried by the fast current. The characters really have 2 choices – attempt to brace themselves against the impact of the log or try to dodge out of the way.

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Brace for Impact!

The character sets themselves, as best they can, to withstand the impact of the log as it barrels and spins down the river. The character will be struck by the log as a (1d8+1, 1d6) weapon. Whether it defeats the character's armour or not, still roll the d6 (as if for damage), as this indicates the strength with which it struck the character. The log has a Strength of 10, plus the result of the 1d6 damage die.

The character bracing against the strike may add 2 to their Strength for the purposes of resisting being knocked back by the log. The character must then test Reflexes against a difficulty of 15, modified by however much they succeeded (or failed) their opposed Strength test with the log.

For every point by which the Reflexes test is failed, the character is washed 10' down river before recovering their footing, taking half the damage they would have taken had they fallen that far as they are bashed against rocks. Damage may be reduced by their AF (if any) but not below 1 HP damage (in addition to any damage caused by the log).

Example

Sir Balin has a Strength of 12 and a Reflexes of 14, modified to 11 because of his armour. Bracing himself, he has an effective Strength of 14 against the log. The log hits Sir Balin but it did not penetrate his armour. However, the GM still rolls damage and gets a 5, meaning the log has an effective Strength of 15. Sir Balin and the log each test Strength. Sir Balin scores 16 and the log score 18, meaning Sir Balin has a -2 penalty to Reflexes to avoid being knocked back by the log. With an effective Reflexes now of only 9, Sir Balin needs a 6 to retain his footing on the slipper rocks on which he is standing...

Dodge!

The other option is to try to jump out of the way of the log. Its movement is erratic, so requires the character to test Intelligence against a difficulty of 16 to anticipate the log's movement, success or failure of which will modify their Evasion against the log's Speed of 14 by the amount the character succeeded or failed the Intelligence test.

If the dodge fails, they are struck as if they had attempted to brace for the impact, but they do not get the bracing bonus to Strength, plus the Reflexes test to remain standing is at a difficulty of 16, not 15.

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Example

Aelfric has an Intelligence of 13 and Evasion of 2. Scoring a total of 17 on his Intelligence test, beating the difficulty of the test by 1, Aelfric gets a +1 bonus to his Evasion for the purpose of evading the log. But disaster! Aelfric only scores a total of 8 for his Evasion attempt, failing to avoid the log by 6, thereby suffering a -6 penalty to Reflexes for the purposes of the test to avoid being swept away. Is this the last the party will see of Aelfric?

must test Strength against a difficulty of 15 or be pushed back. Anyone failing this test must then test Reflexes against a difficulty of 15 or be swept off their feet. For every point by which this test is failed, they take 1 HP damage from being bashed against the rocks.

Anyone swept backwards, whether they lose their footing or not, must make the attempt again before being able to proceed.

Party members that have retained their footing can support other character struggling with this by holding ropes tied to the character, etc. Creativity should be rewarded with bonuses of +2 to +4 to the Strength tests, at the GM's discretion.

Obstacle 2: Rapids

A stretch of fast water is making progress harder going. Everyone



The Split

As Oskell mentioned, the river eventually rushes past a large deep split in the rock, slightly above the level of the river. It is narrow, dark, and the cramped conditions mean the characters can only walk one abreast – Oskell will refuse to go first. The passage through the split slopes steeply upwards and ends in fallen rocks. These rocks could be moved but Oskell warns that the rockfall could indicate the roof is weak and could collapse.

Midway through the split, the lead character will see (or feel) that the wall to the right falls away and another passage slopes steeply downward into the heart of the mountain. Just on the edge of the lamp light (assuming they still have a lamp or torch after wading up the river) the lead character thinks a step might have been carved, or it could just be a natural ledge. It is difficult to tell without getting closer...

Oskell will have no knowledge of this passage – Oskell will hypothesise that the same movement in the mountain that caused the rockfall ahead also opened up this second passage.

Clearing the Rockfall

The PCs could ignore the passage altogether and just head to the plateau by clearing the rockfall.

Not knowing what is on the other side, they may decide to be stealthy and come up with creative ways to be discreet. They may even worry about the strength of the ceiling and seek to reinforce the roof first.

Whatever their preparations, the ceiling will not collapse, nor will the mercenaries be waiting for them on the other side – they are far enough away from the mercenaries' camp for them not to have heard the excavations and is shielded from sight by a copse of white willow trees ("white" referring to the species of willow tree, not the colour of the leaves or bark).

Anyone with plant lore skill will know the willow is a soft wood and not suitable for creating wooden supports for mine tunnels, for example (but is great for whittling).

Clearing the rubble will be straightforward enough, and larger blocks can be rolled down the split to

empty into the river below. It is hard work and will take about an hour and the eventual break of light will be a welcome sight to the sweat-soaked muscle-sore adventurers that have laboured to clear the exit.

The Passage

Further inspection reveals that the side passage looks like it might have been worked a little – not enough to make it smooth, just enough to make it less rough and a little less tight. The steep slope is littered with light rubble and the end of the slope does indeed end in a worked step from which the passage levels off, leading only a short way before ending in a metal panel, about 2' wide and 5' high, engraved with the symbol of Borek.

The Door

It is not immediately evident that this is a doorway – there is no visible handle and no visible hinges. Should the PCs be able to detect magic, the panel will register as such.

The door is made from pewter⁷, although that will not be obvious in the light – it will just look like a dull metal, like iron or lead – or possibly lightly tarnished silver. The lack of rust may be a clue that it is not iron.

⁷ In this instance, the pewter alloy is made from tin, lead (instead of antimony), and small amounts of copper and silver. This amount of pewter would be

Mundane attempts to open the door will fail and, as a magically locked door, a sorcerer's *Portal* spell will likewise be unsuccessful. With sufficient time, the surrounding stone could be hacked away with a pick, or they could use the "front" entrance the mercenaries are able to open.

The proper way to open the door is with an *Animate Earth* spell. By making the door openable only with an elemental earth spell, the Giants saw to it that Aurelia could not be free by any of her air elementer followers. If the PCs recover Caliban's notes, they will indicate that this spell is required to open these doors.

When we played this the party sorcerer wanted to use a *Ritual of Identification* on the door, which I allowed. Once complete, I allowed the sorcerer to attempt to open the door using his *Portal* spell boosted with 2 MP. He needed to test Psychic Talent against a difficulty of 15 to succeed. I also read to him the following:

Ritual of Identification

Your long hours in this cramped hallway attuning yourself to the energies radiating from the door finally pay off. The corridor melts away in front of you as you receive your vision.

worth a considerable amount of money, should the characters be thinking along those lines.

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You see the corridor being chiselled away and the large metal door being fixed in place, but what is odd about this vision of industry is the striking features of the men performing the work. They are short, maybe little more than 4' tall. Strong arms wield strange tools in three-fingered hands but what is the most striking is their features – angular features; hard, almost chitinous skin; and bulging black eyes. The overall impression is insectoid but nothing you have read nor seen comes close to the vision of these creatures.

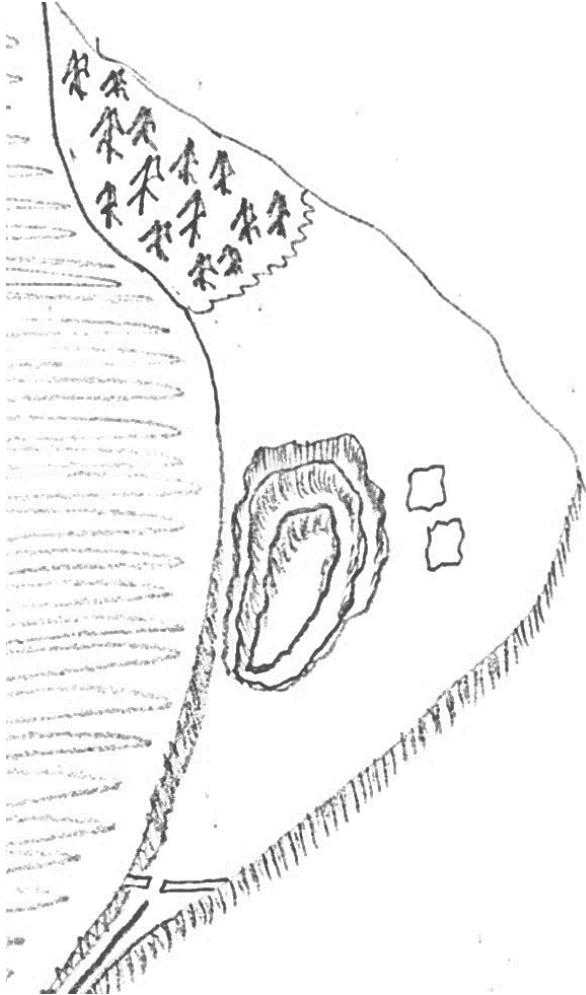
Once the metal panel is in place, another one of these creatures scuttles into the tunnel and fixes you for a moment with those large black unblinking eyes and, for some reason, you feel very exposed, even though you know this is just a vision and you cannot really be seen. The creature takes a hesitant step in your direction but then seems to change his mind and continues down the passageway to the door.

What you observe is the creature performing a magical ritual. It's not a ritual you recognise and it certainly isn't sorcerous, but you start to understand elements of it. Once the creature is finished, he scuttles off down the passageway, pausing only momentarily to fix you with another stare and a sort-of smile before disappearing out of sight.

The vision fades and you return to your surroundings.



The Plateau



The plateau is no more than about 400' north to south and the open pit mine no more than 100' across at its widest point. The northern third of the plateau is given to a copse of white willow and the rest of the plateau is mostly short thick grasses and low shrubs (little cover). The pit itself has three tiers, each 20' deep (the floor of the pit being 60' deep).

The two buildings to the east of the pit are the old ruined storehouse and an equally derelict forge. The

crossbowmen have cases of quarrels stashed here and are where they sleep. The other mercenaries, when not on patrol, sleep in tents at the bottom of the pit.

Daytime

During the day, the two crossbowmen keep watch from the rock shelf just outside the plateau to the south, one guard mans the south wall, and the other guard patrols around the plateau. Caliban and his bodyguard oversee the excavations at the base of the mine.

Night-Time

At night, the crossbowmen sleep one each in the ruined buildings, one mercenary is on guard while the other two sleep. Caliban does not take a watch, leaving that to his mercenaries.

When running this adventure, Walburgis had accidentally seriously injured Langliva, causing a dislocated shoulder. Once the party had cleared the exit from the passage and made camp in the woods, they reset Langliva's shoulder, but her scream alerted the guards of the PCs' presence, so they were more prepared for their night-time assault than they might otherwise have been.

To make any combat encounter less challenging, if the PCs have previously set off any of the traps along the trail, two of the mercenaries may be away from camp resetting these. These mercenaries could return to the camp at whatever point would be most dramatic to the narrative!

In my game, Caliban and his bodyguard collapsed the tunnel as soon as the PCs were detected making their move, leaving only three mercenaries for them to deal with, at the cost of four of the villagers' lives (lost in the cave in).

In terms of tactics, if the mercenaries are not aware of the PCs before they attack, Caliban's first priority will be to get to the tunnel with his bodyguard and use *Animate Earth* to collapse the tunnel if he feels at all threatened by the approaching PCs.

The two crossbowmen will target the PCs from cover (focusing on PCs closest to the mine) and the other soldiers will prioritise protecting Caliban, then the crossbowmen.

This will likely be a hard toe-to-toe fight, especially if the characters were injured by the traps or obstacles on their way here. The best strategy to defeating them would be to use stealth and surprise – perhaps even attempting to separate the guards by creating a distraction in the

wooded part of the plateau for one of the guards to investigate.

The Mine and the Tunnel

Tin is rare⁸, so tin mines, even in inaccessible locations like this, could have been economically attractive – even if that meant carrying the smelted tin by hand.

At its lowest level, and heading into the mountainside, a tunnel has been dug and the exposed stone looks fresher than the stone on the sides of the open pit.

Torches have been set into the ground and a small camp has been set up at the bottom of the open pit, with strong ladders set up at each tier to allow easy traversal between each tier. Where each ladder is, torches have been set up so that the ladders are clearly lit, even at night.

If attacking at night or with warning, the PCs will find the villagers manacled to the walls inside the tunnel, malnourished and exhausted. Deeper into the tunnel, Caliban may just be seen before barking a primordial command to the elements and bringing the roof of the tunnel crashing down...

⁸ Third in value only to silver and gold, but it is not used as pennies as it is too valuable to use for such

low-value currency and its similarity in colour to silver could create confusion.

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Within the camp are lots of mundane supplies: rope, oil, lamps, torches, picks, shovels, foodstuffs, etc. In Caliban's tent are some notes (assuming he did not have time to take them with him). There is also some alchemical equipment and more notes (again, assuming Caliban did not have time to take them with him) about the poison that he has been making for the mercenaries' weapons. There is a jar of incomplete poison here that, from the notes, could be used as a base to make into an antidote.

Otherwise, the PCs will find a case of crossbow bolts (80 bolts remaining) in the forge, any equipment they were carrying (armour, weapons, etc.), about 100 florins worth of cash, and a large jar of poison.

Brewing an Antidote

There are enough ingredients and equipment here to brew an antidote to the poison. To do so requires specialist knowledge that, if the PCs do not have, Minerva will (assuming she is free to do so, see the final scene).

An Alchemy (Intelligence) test against a difficulty of 16 will identify the recipe for the antidote and a Herbalism (Intelligence) test against a difficulty of 17 will enable the character to brew the antidote. If the character has access to

Caliban's notes, these will add 2 to both tests.

Each test will take several hours and use up all the ingredients available – the PCs only get one chance at this.

The Villagers

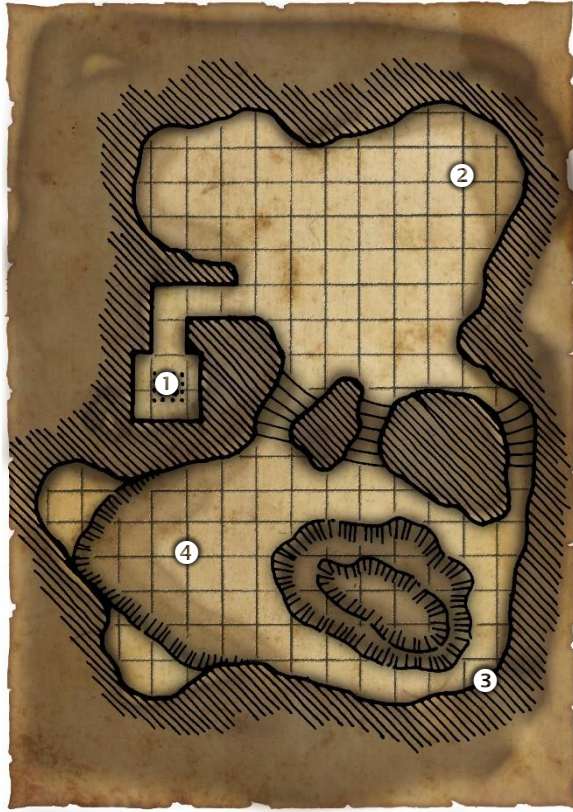
If Caliban destroys the tunnel, four of the villagers will be trapped by the rocks. Unless the rocks are cleared immediately, all four of the villagers will die. Even if rescued in time, only one or two will survive their wounds. In any case, any survivors will be difficult to transport back to the village – broken legs and other injuries will make them cumbersome to move.

If the PCs manage to get to the villagers before Caliban can collapse the tunnel (difficult, but maybe not impossible), they may even be able to save the other two villagers from being killed in the caves beyond.

In terms of the return journey, the mercenaries will have reset one of the traps along the animal trail for each day that passes since the traps were triggered. Otherwise, unless the GM feels a random encounter is required, the journey home will be uneventful.

The adventure could end here – with a funeral for the departed and perhaps a wedding between Artos and Minerva!

Aurelia's Prison



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Before leaving the valley, however, assuming the PCs figure out how to enter it, the PCs may first explore the prison, either through the tunnel Caliban and his mercenaries are using the villagers to dig or the pewter door in the split. Here, they will likely encounter the daughter of the North Wind, Aurelia. Although whether they do this at the same time as Caliban depends on how soon after Caliban collapses the

tunnel that the PCs think to follow (either by clearing the rocks or entering the caves via the other door that leads directly into the antechamber).

The prison has not been created by the giants – as is obvious from the cramped passages and low ceiling – but by their mountainfolk slaves, the now all-but-extinct dwarves⁹.

1. The Antechamber

The antechamber is a skilfully hewn square room.

The pewter door opens directly into the antechamber containing a wealth of broken and rotting trappings of worship – primitive windchimes, rotting garments with the sleeves shaped and embroidered to look like bird wings when the arms are outstretched, broken candles, etc. The most interesting artefact is a stuffed and mounted golden eagle upon a podium. Many of the feathers have dropped to the floor around the base of the plinth and much of the eagle's body is tatty, with burst stitches and caked in mould. Should anyone think to check, the body of the eagle and, to a lesser degree, the feathers, will

⁹ These were the black-skinned, bulbous-eyed, three-fingered underground-dwelling “creatures” from the identification ritual. No gratuitously bearded, comically grumpy, beer-swilling short people with

Scottish accents in my campaign! “Dwarves” are the true children of the mountain and are as alien to Man as the Fae.

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register as magical. Carved deeply into the podium is the symbol of Borek.

Whilst the room is bedecked with the trappings of worship, this is no temple. The dwarves sealed the trappings in this place to deprive her followers of them, not to honour Aurelia with them.

2. Aurelia's Throne Room

Aurelia's throne is on a raised platform in the far side of the large cavern into which the antechamber opens (top right on the map). This whole cave area is more natural-looking: stalactites and stalagmites litter the ceiling and floor, and the walls are of seemingly natural unworked stone. Steps have been carved between vast pillars of rock in the south wall of the cave and a short flight of steps the whole width of the cave leads up to Aurelia's throne.

Upon entering the throne room, the cavern will flood with stark electric-blue light that will momentarily blind characters not expecting it.

What happens next depends on whether the PCs discover Aurelia on their own or whether Caliban has made it to the throne room at about the same time as them.

In my game, the PCs dallied too long after Caliban collapsed his tunnel such that the encounter between Caliban and Aurelia had already happened. However, if the PCs enter shortly after the tunnel collapses, they

will arrive in the cavern at about the same time as Caliban (see Caliban and Aurelia, below).

3. Caliban's Tunnel

Caliban's tunnel from the pit mine leads into the cave system to the bottom right, opening into the tight passage between the cave wall and the tower of rock that dominates the lower area of the cave.

4. The Lower Cave

The lower cave contains little of interest. If the PCs did not follow the mercenaries immediately, they will find the first dead mercenary not far from the tunnel mouth, crushed by some falling rocks. Another villager will be found lying face down on the central set of steps leading up to the throne room, a terrible wound in his back that passes all the way through his chest. The final villager will be found in the lower area in the bottom left of the map, alongside the body of Caliban, whose body seems traced with painful burns. The villager's wounds seem consistent with the stone-bladed sword in Caliban's lifeless hands.

If the PCs think to investigate Caliban's burns, they will see they trace out the symbol of Borek across his torso (the "body" of the bird across his front and the wings wrapping around his sides where the tips meet at his spine).

Caliban and Aurelia

Some of this may become obvious to the PCs if they obtain Caliban's journal, capture Caliban to interrogate him, or hear his encounter with Aurelia play out.

Caliban is searching for the "Weapon of Ouros" – thinking it to be a powerful elemental weapon aligned to the earth (he recognises "Ouros" as an incarnation of the mountain). However, he has mistranslated "Enemy" as "Weapon" and has stumbled upon Aurelia's prison instead.

Encountering Aurelia will discombobulate Caliban, who will at first be confused, then frustrated, and finally angry – threatening Aurelia to relinquish the Weapon of Ouros, to which Aurelia will not take kindly. Aurelia will summon one of her servants, the Storm Eagle, to torment Caliban in the caves. Eventually, he will be cornered by the eagle in the lower cave and forced to suffer its burning embrace until death releases him from his pain.

Walburgis and Aurelia

Aurelia has been imprisoned here for centuries, if not millennia, but her demeanour betrays no impatience. New visitors will interest her, and she will attempt to get the PCs (or NPCs if the mercenaries are with them) to release her by proving their worth to her and sacrificing someone of faith to her (which is how the magical seals holding her can be broken).

Walburgis, being pledged to three powers¹⁰, will particularly interest Aurelia and, if Walburgis is present, Aurelia will address her in preference to anyone else.

"You are an interesting one – a daughter of three fathers. Can you not choose?" The question is intoned sardonically, almost mockingly, as if the choice should be obvious.

This question might confuse Walburgis, who may ask for more clarity.

"The Void, the Light, and the Sky all fight for your allegiance." She will say, exasperatedly before continuing, "You have to choose."

If Walburgis chooses anything except the Sky, Aurelia will seem disappointed. The bronze amulet¹¹ that Walburgis wears will choose this

¹⁰ A vested priestess of the True Faith, her crown presents her as a mistress of the Void, and she practices her elemental faith in a manner sometimes at odds with the accepted True Faith doctrine.

¹¹ Taken from the Mountain of the Gods – one of the elemental treasures in the chamber beneath the shrine. It is aligned to the element of air, which Aurelia can control enough to forbid Walburgis access to its power.

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moment to fall to the floor and shatter.

If Walburgis chooses the Sky, Aurelia will ask Walburgis to forswear her other callings. "Do you forswear the Void?" Aurelia asks keenly. If Walburgis does, the bronze headband gets very hot (2 HP damage and causing a burn around her head) before slipping off and falling loudly to the floor (but not breaking – it is too powerful an artefact to be destroyed so easily).

"Do you forswear the Light?" Aurelia seems almost to be holding her breath in anticipation of Walburgis's answer. If Walburgis does, she will gain the Faithless¹² ability.

Finally, Aurelia will ask Walburgis to pledge herself to her, "And will you pledge yourself to me, Daughter of the North Wind, Queen of the Skies, and Mother of Birds?"

If Walburgis says yes...

"Then demonstrate your devotion to me, sacrifice your fellow who still follows the Light." Aurelia indicates towards Sir Gregor¹³.

If she does, Aurelia will command Walburgis to soak her amulet in the blood of the sacrifice and bring it to her.

If Walburgis does all of this, Aurelia will bless the bronze amulet, changing the glyph inscribed upon its surface to that of what the PCs probably still believe is Borek, and Walburgis will become a Rank 1 Disciple to Aurelia (for which the blessed amulet is now Walburgis's holy symbol).

Upon appointing a new disciple, the stuffed eagle in the antechamber will gloriously return to life and full health and follow Walburgis as a faithful companion (similar to a sorcerer's familiar).

Depending on how far Walburgis goes with this, she may fall short of sacrificing Sir Gregor. However, Aurelia will not give up so easily, haunting Walburgis, tormenting her dreams, and tempting her with power and freedom in exchange for her devotion. And, despite being trapped, she is still a powerful divine entity whose powers can reach a little in the air around this mountain to command the air and the birds to wreak havoc amongst those for whom Walburgis may still care¹⁴.

¹² Faithlessness leaves a character more vulnerable to supernatural and magical influences, reflected in a -3 to Magical Defence until an act of true devotion can restore faith in something.

¹³ Sir Gregor is a Knight of the (True Faith) Church.

¹⁴ As a minimum, one of the villagers to whom Walburgis has become attached should suffer some kind of misadventure at Aurelia's hand.

Caliban's Notes

Caliban's notes may shed some light on this place, although some of his facts and translations are wrong, so they may just end up adding to the PCs' confusion!

The notes are written in a mix of Bacchile and Elleslandic – the gist of them is that the ancient Selentines noted this place as home to the “Children of Ouros”. The reference, which is likely lost on the PCs without specialist knowledge, is to the giants and dwarves that used to live here, of course, not Aurelia, although anyone unfamiliar with Ouros and Ouronos may confuse the reference to Ouros to mean Ouronos and think

the reference means a child of the skies (assuming the PCs recognise either name).

The notes further suggest a great weapon of Ouros is buried here, although this is a mis-translation – it should refer to a great enemy, not weapon. At this point in the notes, the symbol of Borek (or, rather, Boros) is drawn. The enemy of Ouros, of course, is Aurelia, who would strive to see the mountains cast from the skies.

Additional pages also detail both the recipe for the poison and its antidote.

The only other interesting thing about the notes is an elemental incantation calling to the Spirits of Earth, which would unlock the doors to Aurelia's prison. Any elementer would recognise it but it could only be cast by an Earth Elementer – it is the *Animate Earth* spell.



What happened Next?

The next section of the adventure was very campaign-focused and is included here more as a narrative to inform one way in which the adventure could end rather than as a series of adventuring scenes suitable for play.

Walburgis and the party attempted to find the missing villagers' bodies in the caves, having sent Oskell, Halouyn, and the injured Langliva back to Ashenshale with the antidote to the poison infecting Artos's wound. Aurelia, spurned by Walburgis's refusal to slaughter Sir Gregor toyed with the party, randomly extinguishing their lights, leaving them disorientated within the caves, and tempting Walburgis with the promise of release with the simple act of plunging her dagger into Sir Gregor's back. Eventually, the party found Leopold's body but were too frustrated with the tricks Aurelia was playing with them to be able to get his body out, so his soul remains trapped within the mountain, unable to rest.

The party then returned to the village, but on their approach, Aelfric (or, more accurately, his familiar) spotted

soldiers amongst the settlement wearing the livery of the baron!

Remaining hidden atop the ridge, the party counted four footmen and Sir Beorn, seemingly using Conayn and Millicent's longhouse as their base. Suspecting that Sir Beorn is there looking for Walburgis, the party retreated to the plateau to plan their next move.

Using Aelfric's familiar to get a message to Minerva, Walburgis wrote, "Minerva. Does antidote work? What does Sir Beorn want? Give details. In hiding. Villagers dead. Is Oskell back? Love W" (I gave the player a limit of 20 words to write on the small scrap of paper).

Whilst waiting for a reply, Aelfric used a *Ritual of Identification* on the stone sword recovered from Caliban's body.

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The vision you receive is of a great warrior wielding the stone sword against a succession of strange creatures - chimerae combining many fantastic creatures into a single body; each more fantastic than the last. Nothing seems unusual (except the unique creatures the great warrior is fighting) until your perspective changes and you realise that the warrior is a giant, not a normal-sized human at all.

The backdrop against which the warrior was fighting these strange creatures was of a mountain vista.

It was a succession of disjointed scenes that didn't seem to tell a coherent story and the warrior was human-seeming (except for his size), very muscular, and a highly proficient fighter.

The sword is just a +1 sword in the hands of any but a child of the mountain (giant, dwarf, etc.). The enchantment is of elemental craft, not sorcerous. In the hands of the mountainfolk or an earth elementer of at least 8th rank, the sword is much more powerful (details at the GM's discretion). The sword, being made from stone, counts as 2 items for the purposes of encumbrance.

There was no response to Walburgis's message, so Aelfric's familiar also scouted as best it could, but Minerva could not be seen at Artos's bedside nor visiting her favourite tree, the implication being that Minerva is either imprisoned somewhere... or dead...

The PCs at this point, had little choice but to return to Ashenshale in person to investigate whatever Sir Beorn was doing there.

Returning to Ashenshale

When the PCs eventually do return to Ashenshale, what will they find?

At nearly the same time as Oskell returned with the poultice, Sir Beorn and four of the baron's soldiers arrived at the village. Oskell went straight to Artos's hut, where Minerva administered the cure to Artos. Sir Beorn and his men sought out Conayn and Millicent, effectively placing them under house arrest until they tell him what he wants to know about Walburgis. When Minerva went to check in with Conayn later in the day, she, too, was arrested.

Sir Beorn is hoping that Walburgis will return to her home village. So far, none of the villagers have told Sir Beorn or his men that Walburgis is nearby. It is likely that Sir Beorn will lose patience waiting for Walburgis here and leave soon to look for her elsewhere. However, he will want to leave a message for Walburgis and will execute Conayn before he leaves.

¹⁵ Artos will survive but will have some meaningful impairment that will be a burden to him, Minerva, and the village. The players should determine the nature of this impairment together but it should be

Oskell is now tending to Artos as best he can and praying for Walburgis's return¹⁵.

The soldiers have done a house-by-house search for Walburgis and are currently watching the tracks leading out of the village. Halouyn attempted to make for the mountain trail to return and warn Walburgis, but he was killed by one of the soldiers when he refused to stop. Halouyn's body is hanging from a makeshift gibbet off one of the lakeside barns (facing into the village) as a stark reminder to villagers that they must obey Sir Beorn and his men.

Langilva was not so fortunate enough to even make it back to the village, having fallen to her death after being startled by an eagle swooping at her¹⁶.

If the PCs scout the village before returning, they will see four armed men patrolling the village, all wearing the baron's livery, and Halouyn's corpse hanging from a gibbet near

more significant than, for example, mere scarring (which he will have). Perhaps he is now an imbecile?

¹⁶ Part of Aurelia's revenge on Walburgis for rejecting her. Walburgis should not expect this to be the last Aurelia's petty acts against her.

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the lake. If they spot Sir Beorn, they will remember that he is the baron's steward and showed little sympathy for the plight of the villagers of Norham. The PCs would have no reason to suspect that Sir Beorn would be any more lenient to Ashenshale – if they are to convince him to spare Ashenshale and Walburgis, they will have to do something other than appeal to his better nature.

Once the PCs had scouted Ashenshale and spotted Sir Beorn, I started a three-day timer before Sir Beorn would grow bored and move on (possibly to Red Lane).

If the PCs return to Ashenshale after Sir Beorn has left, Minerva will address Walburgis, sobbing.

“Oh Wally, it was terrible. They killed him! They killed him! And it was all your fault!” At this point, her emotions bubble over into anger, as if Minerva is just realising that the reason whoever it is that is dead is Walburgis's fault. “We protected you and now Conayn is dead!” Minerva is no longer crying. Instead, her eyes harden as she continues. “Never return! You abandoned us before and now you return with the wrath of the baron at your heels. Your crimes cost Halouyn and Conayn their lives and I bet you were planning to abandon us again anyway – so just leave now.” Minerva is shouting, her grief exploding from her in a cavalcade of vitriol directed at Walburgis. Each of her words stabs you in your heart because you feel them to be true.

Without giving any of you time to respond, she turns back into the longhouse, slams the door and you hear the bar being slid into place to prevent you following her. You hear Minerva's heavy sobs coming from within.

Remember that Minerva has witnessed or heard of the death of Langliva, Halouyn, Conayn, and the six abducted villagers, and Artos, for whom she holds a deep affection, may never fully recover – this is a dark day for her and the village, and it is a simple leap for her to focus her rage and unresolved resentments on Walburgis.

How Did it End?

Walburgis was torn between staying to help rebuild her village's fortunes and support Minerva and leaving with the party to Hazelmead (the quest the fay child had set them to clear their name). In the end, Walburgis left but gave her remaining worldly wealth to the villagers, although that did little to rebuild her reputation with them – having now abandoned them for a second time and, this time, in the face of such tragedy, too – so many dead in such a short period.

Unbeknownst to Walburgis, Minerva was later approached in her dreams by Aurelia and Minerva was not so restrained as her sister, sacrificing a True Faith pilgrim in the name of Aurelia to become Aurelia's first disciple in a long time. Aurelia, now free, may herself feature in a future adventure, but that is a tale for another time.

On their journey out of the mountains, they were unable to find shelter as a storm moved in, but they were offered sanctuary from the storm in a kindly hermit's stone cottage, built into a bowl-like formation in the mountain. The stranger introduced himself only as "John" and took great interest in the character's stories (and some of their items, too). Within the hut, set against the mountainside,

was a door, part-concealed by shelves and through which John warned the party not to go. John was hospitable and well-meaning, helpful, and generous with his hospitality – a refreshing change from the party's recent encounters.

The weather continues to worsen throughout the morning, and you are eventually forced to take shelter in a nook. You eat a few morsels of lunch whilst waiting for the worst of the winds abate. As you pack up, you hear a voice, "I have better shelter than that nook, and better food too, if you want to join me."

Peering out of the nook, you see an elderly man, perhaps late 50s or early 60s, walking with the aid of a staff and dressed in many layers of ragged cloth. Despite his age and the high winds that are whipping at his ragged clothes and long hair, he walks slowly but with surety across the rough terrain. "You have picked a poor day to travel, it seems. The skies are unforgiving and they have saved their worst for the afternoon – we should hurry to somewhere safer." His voice is distorted by the winds howling around you, but his smile seems warm and you see no trace of malice in his eyes. As far as you can tell, he is unarmed.

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Agreeing eagerly to the promise of better shelter, he leads you not 200 yards back to a trail you had missed on your way to the nook – perhaps while sheltering your eyes from the dust thrown up by the wind, you completely missed it. Following this trail a short way, it seems to end at a long low pile of loose rocks but what is actually a low wall, behind which is a sheltered hollow. A rickety looking stone cottage has been erected against the mountain wall on the far side of the hollow.

“They said my mind was sick, my words were poison, and my rituals forbidden. But I have made my peace with the past and appreciate the isolation. Doesn't mean some new company every now and again isn't appreciated,” he finishes with a warm smile and a slight chuckle.

If asked about the partially concealed door, he will simply respond that “The door keeps out the nightmares; it must never be opened.” He will claim he has never opened the door and will be otherwise evasive about what it on the other side or how he knows, with such comments as “I can see more clearly now my sight is fading” and suchlike. The PCs may notice at this point that one of John's eyes is cloudy.

Those following this campaign will note that John's stewardship of the door is similar to the First Knight of Enoch's guardianship of the Realm of

Nephilim (see *Mountain of the Gods*). John, too, is a seed for a future path the campaign may take.

The party spent the night with John, although awoke to find John already up and pottering about the cottage.

John is already up and pottering about his cottage. Through the gaps in the shutters, you can see grey skies, but it seems dry, at least.

You have slept really well – you feel more rested than you have in a while, despite the thin bedroll and the hard floor. Perhaps the combination of relief from having left the trials of Ashenshale and Aurelia behind, perhaps from the cosy comfort of this cottage, or the caring hospitality of the charming John have all conspired to relax you and make you feel ready to take on whatever challenges may face you next.

The smell of burnt porridge mixed with some unspeakable mashed vegetables brings you round to full wakefulness. Whatever John's charms, his cooking is not one of them.

“Good morning! It is a fine day, is it not? You have slept long into the morning, but you looked so peaceful that I could not bring myself to disturb you. I hope my pottering has not brought you from your slumber early. There is plenty of food, if you are hungry.”

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The jovial sparkle in his good eye, the easy smile on his face, and the whimsical lilt in his voice combine to cajole you out of bed, even though you feel so relaxed and comfortable that you feel like you could stay here forever.

From here, the party left the mountains and arrived at the muddy northern shore of Steeple's Lake without mishap.

The *Beast of Black Ruin* beckons in the village of Hazelmead!



Appendix A: The Pantheon

The powers at work in this adventure belong to the ancient Selentine pantheon, the details of which have been lost or corrupted over time, so only someone with the Theology (Selentine Polytheism) skill would know any of this in detail. However, the PCs may pick up enough references to want to research further and learn more. This section provides some additional details that may be weeks or months of game-time coming to the players. Or, perhaps, other GMs would like to use these powers within their own games and are looking for a little more information.



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Boros and Aurelia

Boros, the North Wind, spread with the Selentine Empire to Ellesland and, whilst in these lands, birthed a daughter: a golden eagle, Aurelia, who was worshipped by the people of Ashenshale. However, the Giants, who had previously been the recipients of the villagers' tributes, grew jealous of Aurelia and imprisoned her within this cave. Centuries passed and, with the coming of the Dragons, the Selentines withdrew, taking their gods with them. The Dragons destroyed the Giants' civilisation, which degenerated into tribes of primitive savages that now terrorise remote mountain regions.

The villagers of Ashenshale (wrongly) revere the carved eagle on their mountain as a symbol of Borek (their name for Boros) but is actually the avatar of his daughter, Aurelia. The villagers believe that the first-born daughter of Borek founded the village, although their mythology

speaks of her as a mortal woman, not as an elemental demigod.

Superstition has it that Borek flies around the mountains in eagle form to guide those lost amongst the mountains' many confusing trails back to safety.

Ouros and Ouronos

Ouros and Ouronos are twin Titans of the Mountains and the Sky, respectively. Air and Earth, diametrically opposite, rarely meet (in a philosophical/theological sense, at least), but amongst the mountain peaks, such rules are more flexible.

Titans?

Titans do not have an equivalent representation in the True Faith (unlike the Elements) but were considered by the ancient Selentines as predecessors to their pantheon, coexisting with the gods in a sometimes-uneasy truce (there are many Selentine stories of conflict between the gods and the titans).

That echoes of ancient Titans still resonate in the remote mountain valleys of Ellesland should come as no surprise to one who has travelled far and seen much of the Lands of Legend – even dead gods may not yet realise they have died and continue to spin their webs and play their games in the wild places yet to be brought under the heel of a new creed.