



# Spirit Shield

**A mystical presence has captured a noble's spirit, ensnaring it within a shield. The act must be undone, even if it means inciting a war.**

## 5E

A unique module for  
Dungeons & Dragons



### **SPECIAL NOTE TO READERS – PLEASE READ!**

“Spirit Shield” is written for the clients of Heroes B&B to enjoy as part of their ultimate gaming experience with us. Heroes B&B is a Twin Cities-based company that caters to gaming groups who wish to heighten their role-playing sessions. If you’re planning on spending a day or weekend with us as part of our special gaming experience, then **STOP right here!** We don’t want to spoil your fun by giving away all the plot twists that even Loki would find nerve-wracking.

If that’s not the case, then enjoy this adventure module that provides equal doses of role-play and combat, not to mention some unique gaming moments.

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For monsters, we’ve either created them from common creature templates or make recommendations from one of our favorite 5<sup>th</sup> Edition publishers, Kobold Press.

All images/visuals were used from creative commons sites; we would like to thank these generous and talented artists for their work!

A final and potentially most important note: A big thank you to the groups and individuals throughout Minnesota and Wisconsin who game with us and encourage us to continue designing these unique D&D adventures. We can’t wait to enjoy this adventure with you and your group!



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## **ABOUT THE ADVENTURE**

Valkyries, female warriors of the Norse god Odin, have become bound to a warrior-king named Ulf Roar, meaning 'famed wolf' in the Northlands tongue. In one of Roar's most famous battles, he and his Valkyries were victorious against a much larger army, one with a myriad of nobles. Included in this group of royalty was a fighter of prominence, the elder sister of the future king of Southpool.

In this battle, now several years past, the noble woman was slain. Rather than her soul passing to the afterlife, the Valkyries acted. With incredible and rare magical ability, they converted the woman's soul into a powerful artifact, a shield of legend. This shield was gifted to the warrior-king Ulf Roar.

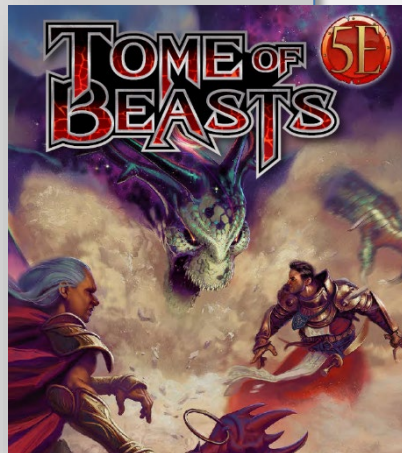
The woman's spirit has not given up, however. She is harrassing the Southpool king, her brother, awakening him nightly and inducing a terror-induced anxiety. All in the hopes of having her soul released from the shield. In reaction, the king has asked his advisors to find a suitable group of adventurers that isn't smart enough to understand the certainty of death in attempting to capture the legendary shield. So the king's advisors have stayed away from traditional heroes (the realm's knights) and looked elsewhere, specifically the dungeons. There they came upon the shadiest of characters that happen to have shown surprising success in their thievery and other, unmentionable deeds. This group? The Player-Characters.

To draw out the warrior-king and his Valkyries to battle, the Player-Characters must convince the neighboring provinces through word or deed to go to war with the Northlands king. Once in that war, the Player-Characters must then capture a Valkyrie and convince it to release the noble's spirit.

### *A memorable creature from our friends at Kobold Press*

*Heroes B&B would like to credit Kobold Press for its terrific lore of the Valkyries, which led in part to the creation of this module. Check out the Valkyries and*

*and other great 5th Edition creatures in Kobold Press' Tome of Beasts here:  
<https://koboldpress.com/kpstore/product/tome-of-beasts-for-5th-edition/>*



## **ADVENTURE OVERVIEW**

Here are notes on the module:

- It is intended to take at least 12-15 hours to complete;
- It has been written to accommodate all Player-Character (PC) levels in 5<sup>th</sup> Edition Dungeons and Dragons. GMs will need to change creatures and conditions based on player levels;
- In some cases we have provided monster recommendations as well as where to find them in different 5<sup>th</sup> Edition publications.
- Locations are loosely described in most parts of this module as Heroes B&B gamers play 5<sup>th</sup> Edition D&D with a multimedia package of high-detailed maps and sound systems.



## ADVENTURE BACKGROUND & HISTORY

Ulf Roar is a Northlands warrior of immense size and fame. His hulking, 7-foot frame and penchant for collecting fellow warriors and even shaman to his side has led him from obscurity as a simple blacksmith's child to a renowned warrior-king. His name, known as "Famed Wolf" in his Northlands tongue, is spoken in reverence among the many tribes he leads in the North and in utter fear by the kingdoms of the South.

His fame is so endearing that the gods themselves have taken note. While unsubstantiated, it is a common belief that Ulf Roar was once gifted the presence of angelic creatures, known as Valkryie. These winged creatures fly about the battlefield invisible, aiding Ulf Roar and his allies with their god-given magical abilities and spells.

It is on one of these occasions, when the Valkryie and Ulf Roar were involved in a battle, that in time led to the involvement of the Player-Characters.

On this occasion, Ulf Roar and his band of Northmen were facing a much larger army, one boasting not only forces from the South but the

glorious, much-heralded heroes leading those armies. The Southlanders, however, had no idea that Ulf Roar and his forces were aided by angelic creatures. In fact they were taken unaware when unthinkable instances began happening on the battlefield. First, Southland warriors began complaining of their weapons becoming infinitely heavy. Then, to the



Southlanders' utter surprise, fallen Northland warriors began rising, somehow miraculously healed from their battlefield wounds. At this time, Southlander warriors and mages began hearing voices (without seeing the sources of this speech) and the sound of unseen wings flapping around them. This was the last straw for most. Most Southlanders fled the

battlefield, fearing evil influences they could not see, much less fight.

One Southlander that did not flee the battlefield was Annabel Bythesea (pronounced Bittersee), a two-handed fighter of such skill that she bested a dozen Northland fighters that day before Ulf Roar landed a killing blow. In doing so, Roar yelled in such triumph that the Valkyries took notice. One of the angelic creatures used her god-given gift to capture the slain woman's soul and transfer it into a shield, giving the metal shield legendary powers. Ulf Roar, beholding this incredible magical feat, immediately picked up the shield and ran toward the remaining Southlanders, beginning the final and brutal assault on his demoralized foes. The triumph was complete in mere minutes and thus contributed to Ulf Roar's standing among the gods.

But there was one soul involved in the battle that day that would not rest; one soul that would fester with hatred and the promise of revenge .... Annabel Bythesea.

On the night after the battle was decided, at midnight, as Ulf Roar and his Northlanders were celebrating, far to the south a man was suddenly awoke.

Almer Bythesea, at the time, was the younger brother of Annabel and the eldest son of the king of Southpool, a province in the South. Almer was awoke at midnight to a sudden chilling sensation that not only alerted him to a foreign presence but caused him to scramble out of bed in fear. The chilling sensation gradually formed into the ghostly presence of his sister, Annabel. The ghost spoke of what occurred on the battlefield and how her soul was wrongly transformed into a magical instrument now wielded by their enemy, Ulf Roar. Annabel would not stand for this and pleaded for her brother to take revenge and free her from this unlawful imprisonment.

Almer, utterly frightened, could only nod his head in agreement.

That was two years old.

In the time since, Almer the elder prince became the ruler of the rich province of Southpool. And as his kingdom prospered, so did Almer's influence, largely through his association with the region's church. Almer even created an annual "Cleansing Day," one where criminals of questionable morality and shameful decision-making were ceremoniously handed over to executioners.

And not one time during that two-year reign of peace and prosperity did Almer consider his promise to his slain sister, Annabel.

Until two nights ago, when the ghost of Annabel returned. In fury. The ghost scared the king out of his bed and made him repeat his promise.

That frightening event has now happened on consecutive nights, forcing King Almer to act on his promise. His solution - Almer called for an immediate "Cleansing Day" and hence gave some reknown criminals (the Player-Characters) a choice – be given to the executioner or somehow free his sister from the shield of Ulf Roar.

Being infinitely more wise than brave, King Almer has even come up with a plan to aid the criminals, which of course does not include himself getting anywhere close to Ulf Roar.

In the time since the battle in the North, Almer and his Southpool Kingdom has discovered information that would aid the king's scheming:

- \* Ulf Roar is indeed surrounded by angelic creatures, but only when he is on the battlefield;

- \* These angelic creatures, the Valkyrie, have the power to create incredible magical items but also have the ability to undue such magic, ie,

allow the souls tied to magical items to be freed;

\* Ulf Roar is rarely on the battlefield anymore, having little interest in small skirmishes. It is only a massive and prominent battle between realms that will cause him to unloose his rage and angelic creatures upon the enemy.

Armed with this knowledge, King Almer knows he must draw Ulf Roar back onto the battlefield, where the criminals (the PCs) could then somehow pry the shield away from the warrior-king. Or, the PCs could capture one of the angelic creatures and force it to dispel its magic, and free Almer's sister from the shield.

There is just one problem with King Almer's plans – he doesn't want to risk his army and well-being to such a dangerous brute as Ulf Roar. And the only other realm in the South large enough to field an army that would have any chance of defeating Ulf Roar's forces is that of Southpool's neighbor, Totby. But that kingdom is led by a ruler even more cowardly than Almer himself – King Emory Patrick Drake the III. Almer's spies, however, have recently brought him intriguing news. Old Drake, definitely long in the tooth now, has a unwielding passion for his youngest child, a daughter, just now coming of age. Princess Hedwig Drake, the youngest of Drake's numerous children, is rumored to be quite beautiful. So beautiful, in fact, that Almer believes if the girl was kidnapped – and that kidnap tied to the king-warrior Ulf Roar – that the old Totby king, Emory Drake, could be compelled to start a war against the Northlanders. And thus allow the criminals, the players, the opportunity to free his sister from the warrior-king's shield.

Then, and only then, will King Almer be allowed to once again sleep in peace. And then, and only then, will the Player-Characters be allowed to keep their heads.

## **FOR MULTIPLE ADVENTURES**

"Spirit Shield" is designed to provide an adventure for up to three tables of Player-Characters at one time. Each of the tables would be tasked to incite war in three different provinces:

### **\* TOTBY**

This is the kingdom of Emory Patrick Drake. His daughter, renowned for being Drake's fairest daughter, will have to be kidnapped and evidence left to deceive the king that Ulf Roar and his allies were behind this evil act.

### **\* FIMM BOER**

This province was once under the control of a populous halfling nation of farmers. But that was decades ago as Ulf Roar and his warriors made this long stretch of rich soil and hills one of their first conquests. Once captured, the land was given a new name, "Fimm Boer," meaning five farms in Norse, for there are five large community farms in this area. But a few among the Norse know the real meaning behind the name – it took the Norse five days to conquer this territory, four and a half of those days were spent traveling there.

To incite war, the Player-Characters will have to find a means to rally the halflings, to give them cause to find their courage and take up arms against the Northmen that remain there.

### **\* WUTHERING WASTES**

This far-reaching desert is home to a number of nomadic gnome packs. The packs rarely interact with the region's provinces as they constantly war with each other. However, if somehow controlled, the packs offer a sizeable army to threaten the Northmen.

The Player-Characters will be directed to find a gnoll chieftain, a female named Uggi FilthTongue. This gnoll, a rare female chieftain, is said to be wiser than most of her kind, and incredibly dangerous.

FilthTongue will hatch a plan – the different gnoll tribes must be convinced that their religious leader, the demon lord Yeenoghu, wants a statue built of his likeness, one so large it towers above the sands of the Wuthering Wastes. The creation of such a statue will unite the gnoll tribes for they will have to find slave labor as the thought of physical labor is abhorrent to the gnolls. Where could they find

such a populous that could provide the sheer numbers of slaves - not to mention strong enough ones! – but in the North?

But first, the Player-Characters must convince the gnolls the demon lord Yeenoghu wants such a monument. To do so, they must appear as spirits in upcoming gnoll celebrations, baring the trophies of their ancestors.

### **GM NOTE: THE POWER OF THE ANGELIC CREATURES**

The Valkyries, as described in Kobold Press' Tome of Beasts, are powerful creatures and this adventure was created with the thought that more than one of these creatures would surround Ulf Roar on the battlefield.

Knowing how powerful these creatures are, here are some GM hints in how to handle the creatures at lower or mid-tier levels.

\* There is no known number of valkyries that aid Ulf Roar. The warrior-king himself has not even told his fiercest allies, concerned that he

may upset one of his gods, Odin, who he believes has sent these creatures to him. So whether the PCs face one, two or three Valkyries is something the GM could decide;

\* If GMs use more than one Valkyrie, they could consider giving legendary powers to just one of the creatures, a leader of the creatures;

\* If there is more than one Valkyrie, the PCs may not have to deal with all of them at one time as one or two could be sent to other parts of the battlefield on Ulf Roar's orders.

### **GM NOTE: THE MALICE OF ANNABEL BRUNDISH**

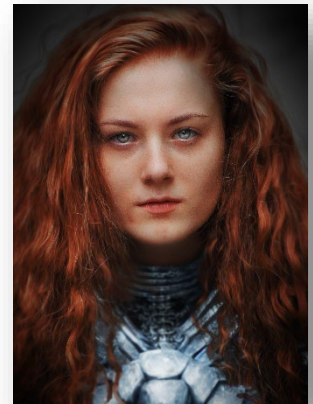
The spirit of Annabel Bythesea lives on in the shield of Ulf Roar. And even though Annabel's spirit will not communicate with the warrior-king Ulf Roar – who it feverishly hates - it will reach out to those who come near it.

Annabel's spirit is like a Helm of Telepathy in that it can Detect Thoughts from those within 30 feet of it. If it Detect Thoughts that it agrees with – ie, that are working against Ulf Roar – it will reach out to that Player-Character.

In doing so, it will promise aid in defeating the angels that protect Ulf Roar if the player-character will link minds with Annabel's spirit. The spirit has a "See Invisibility" effect that it

will share once the player-character agrees to link minds, and thus allow the Player-Character to see the invisible Valkyries.

The spirit, however, has two purposes in creating this link. Other than aiding the Player-Character against the angels (the Valkyries), it more importantly wishes to kill Ulf Roar. If the Player-



Annabel Bythesea

Character does something other than attack Ulf Roar on its turn, Annabel's spirit will attempt to force the Player-Character to attack the warrior-king through whatever means possible. This will happen before a Player-Character attempts an Action or Bonus action. The player should roll a contested Wisdom save vs. the spirit (+4 to check) to determine if Annabel or the Player-Character dictates what happens on the player's turn. A separate Wisdom save, an

Action, is needed to try to separate a Player-Character's mind from the spirit's. (DC will depend on player level.) Or the Player-Character can simply move 30 feet away from the shield, but it must first pass the save as Annabel's spirit will continue to try to force the Player-Character to attack the warrior-king.

The connection with Annabel's spirit is broken if the Player-Character is rendered unconscious.

## **GM NOTE: PLAYER-CHARACTER CRIMINAL BACKGROUNDS**

In preparation for this adventure, players can create a criminal background, with their crimes being more on the morally questionable side vs. the more traditionally violent crimes.

Or, players can use one of the criminal backgrounds listed below. These backgrounds are associated with nicknames, which give the characters advantage with Charisma checks with common folk but at disadvantage with noble NPCs. These backgrounds also provide Proficiency in skills that PCs may not have with their classes or backgrounds.

### **BACKGROUNDS:**

#### **1 – “Reaper”**

This player dug up fresh graves looking for jewelry and other valuables. The tactic worked well for years before an abnormally large female half-orc noticed this person was wearing her departed mother's favorite ruby necklace. The half-orc immediately clubbed the player, deposited their unconscious body to authorities and of course, swiftly returned the ruby necklace to her dear, dead mother at the gravesite. The PC managed to escape authorities only to be recaptured the following night digging up the half-orc woman's grave again in hopes of recapturing the ruby necklace.

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Skill Proficiency: Investigation

#### **2 – “Bird-Brain”**

This player stole a beloved pet from a high-ranking noble family and then tried blackmailing these individuals. To accomplish this, the player sent messages to the family by carrier pigeon and asked them to send diamonds back using this same pigeon. Authorities, however, then released the bird and tracked it back to the player's location, where they were promptly arrested.

\*\*\*

Skill Proficiency: Nature

#### **3 – “Penny-wise”**

A renowned thief, this player sneaked aboard a noble's wagon, pocketed a trove of gold and silver coins, then sealed themselves into a crate that was in the back of a wagon. This crate was scheduled to be dropped off at a marketplace, where the thief would then easily get away. But when the wagon arrived at the marketplace, handlers accidentally dropped the crate, causing it to smash open, revealing the player. The player, weighed down by gold and silver coins in their pocket, was easily captured.



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Skill Proficiency: Stealth or Sleight of Hand

#### 4 \_ "Lucky"

An incredibly skilled thief with incredibly bad luck, the player pulled off a home robbery worth thousands of gold in jewelry. After successfully dodging countless guards and traps, the person woke up the next day and went to a shop to sell off the jewelry, only to discover the store owner was the one they stole from. The player was then arrested, with a look of shock still on their face.

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Skill Proficiency: Stealth or Sleight of Hand

#### 5 \_ "Cheat-o"

This player stole handfuls of antique jewelry from several houses during a crime spree. On the last home, however, the person saw an orange-colored food - a favorite snack - that was evidently too good to pass up. During the ensuing snack feast, the person was interrupted and had to flee. When the person was later

found and questioned, authorities discovered orange-colored food residue still stuck in their teeth.

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Skill Proficiency: Stealth or Sleight of Hand

#### 6 \_ "Scratcher"

This player was kicked out of school at a young age for scratching a chalkboard with their unnaturally long fingernails. This rare talent was then brought to the streets, where the PC would follow nobles walking around the village, scratching at a hand-held chalkboard, only leaving the noble's side after receiving a "tip." This ingenious plan worked until the PC encountered a half-ogre guard accompanying a noble. Irritated by the scratching, the half-ogre promptly took a swing at the PC, knocking them out cold. The person lay on a village street unconscious for hours before being arrested for littering.

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Skill Proficiency: Performance (a hand-held Chalk Board is equipped!)

## **ADVENTURE OUTLINE**

### **Part One – Cleansing Day**

**BOTH TIERS:** The Player-Characters – infamous, petty criminals for the most part – are dragged before the king. He has called for an unexpected “Cleansing Day,” where commoners of the realm with questionable morals, petty crimes and/or a combination of both are put to death. The Player-Characters are given a choice – the executioners’ rusty blade or a quest given by none other than King Almer Bythesea himself.

Activity: RP

### **Part Two – Inciting War**

**HIGH TIER:** The PCs must kidnap the youngest daughter of the king of Totby, a neighboring Southlands province, and plant evidence that the kidnapping is the act of the Northlands warrior-king Ulf Roar, thus inciting war between the two countries. What the PCs will get, however, is another surprise – the princess has eloped with a noble’s son, who has rather unique plans for the new couple.

Activity: RP/Combat

**LOW TIER:** The players must convince another neighboring nation, one of Halfling farmers, to rise up and revolt against the Northland warriors that conquered them years ago.



Ulf Roar’s legendary shield that has a trapped noble’s spirit inside.

### **Part Three – The battle**

**HIGH TIER:** The players must use a crane upon a mountain’s crossroads – a popular merchant route - to gain access to where the warrior-king Ulf Roar is. Once they reach the mountaintop, the players battle the king and his commanders and try to find a way to capture the shield and a Valkyrie.

Activity: Combat

**LOW TIER:** The players take a sharply sloped pathway around the mountain in hopes of getting access to the mountaintop. Along the way they get entangled a Hag coven.

Activity: Combat

### **Part Four – The Valkyries**

**BOTH TIERS:** Always seeking battle, the Valkyries will tell the players they will only free the woman warrior’s spirit from the king’s shield if the players agree to journey with them to the lair of a legendary creature that even Northerners won’t get near. A creature of shadow and death!

Activity: RP/Combat

### **Part Five – The Wuthering Wastes**

**BOTH TIERS:** This is the site of the finale where the players will venture into a desert temple and take on the creature of shadow and death.

Activity: RP/Combat

## PART ONE: THIEVIN' SEASON

With rusty chains wrapped around your wrists and ankles, an old, holey potato sack covering your head and a seriously demonic itch on the tip of your nose, this here, you surmise, is the real stuff.

This here is bad luck.

No, you correct yourself, this here isn't bad luck. It's uncommonly bad luck. Not just slip on an ice patch and break your elbow right after cleanly pickin' a noble's purse bad luck. Nope!

This is uncommon bad luck.

The type your thievin' mother warned you about. The type your rogue of a father used to cast finger symbols at.

And there ain't a thing you can do about it.

Oh you can curse the king of this here realm, Southpool, all you want. But it ain't going to help.

Although the king is, for whatever it's worth, clearly the reason for your uncommon bad luck. You see, it's the middle of summer. It's thievin' season. It's when the nobles stay out late and drink too much and become easy pickens.

The thievin' season is a bee-you-to-full (beautiful) thing and thank the gods, about the only thing a good, honest thief can count on.

Until this year.

Until, actually, last night, one night after your luck ran out. That of course was when you were



apprehended out on the streets and dragged down here into the castle's dungeons. And that ain't exactly newsworthy as it has happens from time to time.

Nope. The real bad luck stuff – unbeknownst to you – was happening in the .... King's bed.

Well, now, before we get to that we should review a bit o' recent history, something that all good, highly intell'er'gent thieves know and that's the "Day of Cleansing."

The king, one Almer Bythesea (pronounced Bitter-sea), came

to the throne young and penniless. And so he found religion, not of course to praise the gods but to share in the churches' deep pockets. Pockets that wouldn't be fully bulging until a new \*cough\* holy holiday was created. Thus the king founded a "Cleansing Day," when Almer Bythesea would rid good Southpool of whatever unfortunate rogues found themselves in the dungeons on the first day of spring by beheading them. These beheadings, so King Almer proclaimed, cleansed the realm of its sins.

And so, all intell'er'gent thieves, like yourselves, well, they minded their manners and prying fingers in the days leading up to spring and so avoided the Cleansing Day beheadings.

Until now.

One night ago, the very night after you were apprehended, King Almer for some unknown and ungodly reason announced a second Cleansing Day this year – right here in the midst of thievin’ season!

Which is why you stand in the middle of the dungeons, with chains around your wrists and ankles and a holey potato sack on your head. You are to be cleansed ... of your head and the community of its sins.

And what’s worse, that demonic itch on the end of your nose is getting worse!

But then you hear it ... a voice, from behind you.

“Not ‘im!” the voice shouts out. A voice that you don’t recognize.

“Nor that one. Definitely not that one. Umm, probably not that one. Oh, for heaven’s sakes, not that one ...”

You don’t hear anything else as at this moment, you are dragged off, actually thrown over some ungodly strong brute’s shoulder like a sack of potatoes – strangely ironic due to what’s covering your head! You’re then carried somewhere before being thrown down on the ground like a sack of ...

Even before you can finish that thought, the holey sack is ripped off your head and what you see is quite astonishing.

It’s the source of your uncommonly bad luck. And it’s looking right at you. Staring, actually.

“Really?” says a fat, short man with a crown atop his head, his dark eyes fixated on you.

“That box of rocks is going to cure my night-time terrors?”

“King Bythesea, I assure you,” says another man, skinnier and taller than the other, and clearly the voice you first heard. “There’s more to this one than meets the eye, although likely not the senses. Good god man, have you taken a bath in the past month?”

The skinny, tall man with prying blue eyes and dressed impeccably well seemingly answers his own question as he looks at you (the Player-Character).

“Oh forgive me for not introducing myself ...”

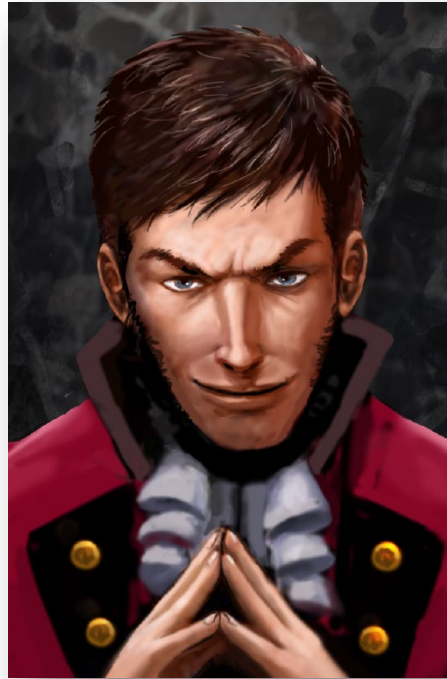
But of course you know who he is, and indeed every rogue in Southpool does as well. He has sent more fair, honest-to-goodness rogues to be beheaded than any other soul in the kingdom. He’s

none other than Percy Payne, the king’s right-hand man. The one who commands his king’s executioners.

He’s a bloody nightmare, right here, right in front of you.

“The name’s Percy, although most call me Payne.”

Percy winks at you and then proceeds.



Percy Payne of Southpool

READER NOTE: Heroes B&B has permission from Inkwel Ideas to use their art. This art of Percy Payne is part of Inkwel Ideas’ “NPC Decks,” which can be found at <https://inkwellideas.com/>



"You, my good man," he says, "have the chance and honor to aid our most humble and devout king."

"Get on with it, Payne!" the king shouts. "Tell 'em what keeps me up at nights, that scares me out of me own bed like some wee-bitty toddler!"

"Certainly your highness," Payne replies, "if you would just allow me to ..."

"Nonsense!" the king retorts, "I want action Payne, not words. Listen here ..." as the king turns to the Player-Character, "you pathetic soul, you have three nights. Ya hear?"

"Three nights! At the end of that third night, if the deed's not done, why I'll cleanse every one of you and every one of your family members. Do ya hear me by god!"

The king stomps his foot on the dungeon floor and then leaves the room in a huff.

At this point the sound of rattling chains and mumbled curse words can be heard as a larger contingent of chained prisoners – treated like the other, blinded by potato sacks on their heads and in chains – are brought into the room.

At the same time, a young servant rushes to Payne's side and presents him with a list of the just-arrived criminals as well as a list of their crimes. Payne begins reading these off and as he does, one by one, the holey potato bags are ripped off the prisoners' heads. (The chains remain, however).

"A distinguished lot if there ever was one," Payne says, chuckling.

"Well lets get to it then, shall we? After all, it is a day of heroism or head loss for you scoundrels! Ha-ha, what excitement!

"Now, let's start at the beginning, shall we ..."

Payne will speak of the following:

\* Nearly a decade ago a force arose in the North, an upstart warband of Vikings led by an uncouth brute named Ulf. The brute threatened to cut off valuable trade routes in the mountains to the north without some ungodly compensation by the likes of our grand province Southpool, the blokes to the east, Totby, and of course the halfling nation of farmers to the far east. Well, the valiant heroes of the Southlands wouldn't stand for such a thing and so we gathered our heroes and went to war. One of those heroes was of course the King's elder sister, the most renowned warrior of the province, Annabel Bythesea (pronounced Bittersee). Annabel had slain giants, drakes and all manner of opposition and thus led our forces onto the battlefield that day!;

Payne's voice cracks as he continues...

\* It was not to be, however. Through some wizardry, some black, foul magic, the Vikings and their leader Ulf came out victorious. Worse yet, the King's brave and beautiful sister Annabel was lost! Lost!

\* Well, it was a sad, shameful day in our history that we had hoped to put behind us. To never forgot, of course. Dear, dear Annabel. But to put behind us ... to prosper in the face of defeat. Well as you know, your own Southpool, under the skilled and humble devotion of our King, has prospered and that ugly day of war was thought to be, indeed, in our past. But that changed just a few nights ago. For the spirit of Annabel - as spirited as the woman herself! – aroused the king from his bed and told him that the evil Vikings possess her spirit – indeed her spirit is trapped inside a shield. A shield that is in the Viking Ulf's possession. Well, our most valiant and courageous King could never stand for such a thing. So you, you distinguished lot, well you must find a way to obtain this shield and to release Annabel's spirit. Give the great warrior her deserved rest. Do this for your

humble and devout King and he will reward you, wipe your sins of the past clean.

Or we'll prepare the executioners' axes and cleanse your heads straight from their necks. What say you?"

Payne goes on once the PCs agree to the quest with the following:

"Most wise of you. Now let's get to the details. Ha! I've come up with a name for you – Percy's Mercy ... I even surprise myself sometimes. Anyhooo, the details ..

"First, know this, Ulf, actually now known as Ulf Roar, which means "Famed Wolf" in Norse – such rubbish! – is rarely seen on the battlefield except of course for the most prominent of battles. That, my Percy's Mercy, is what we, well you, will cause. A most feverish battle with multiple provinces! Yes! Not Southpool of course. We don't like those nasty things anymore. But our neighbors Totby, yes. We can convince Totby to strike up arms against Ulf. You see, we Southpoolers may not care for blood and battle but spy work, oh that we're quite familiar with. And we know for certain the Totby king, Emory Patrick Drake, the old boar, is endeared to his youngest daughter. And if something would happen to that daughter, something that could be blamed on Ulf and his minions. A kidnapping, perhaps? Well, that would certainly start a war!

"But we would need at least one other province at war as well, to make it prominent in Ulf's eyes. Ah! The halflings. Yes. You'll remember those poor little souls lost their province to the

brutes up North some years ago? Perhaps if the little halfers were roused to take up arms. There's so many of the little buggers! Yes, yes. That would do... if we could just figure out how to inflame them, a call to arms for their freedom!

"Well, I'm sure you'll figure out a way .... "

"Remember, Percy's Mercy, you have a total of three nights, including tonight, to bring the factions to war. Once the war begins, you are to aid one of those provinces with your one and only objective being to find Ulf's shield that Annabel's spirit is held in and release the poor woman. Do this and you shall be rewarded. Fail to do this and you and your friends and families' lives are shortlived.

"And should you get caught, we will of course deny your existence or any connection with our grand kingdom. And of course then execute your family and friends.

"Tally ho now!"

**GM NOTE 1:** Once this parts ends, the two groups go their separate ways, one to Totby and one to Fimm Boer. Each group will be given some gold, horses enough for the party, 1d6+1 healing potions and several packs filled with various adventuring gear.

**GM NOTE 2:** Percy Payne will mention that the Southpool Spy Network has been hard at work, trying to uncover the location of Ulf Roar and a rumor involving dark magic. Once these rumors are tracked down, Percy will ensure the words reach the PCs through Southpool's spy network.

## **PART TWO/HIGH TIER: Totby**

The lightly wooded lands of Totby are bordered by Southpool and its numerous small lakes to the west. To the north is a massive mountain range that acts as the beginning of Vinna Jord, the conquered lands home to Ulf Roar and his Northerners.

Due to the constant land bickering with Southpool and the “evil” hordes of Northerners, Totby has a substantial army. What it doesn’t have is a leader who wants to use that army. King Emory Patrick Drake the III is well past his prime, not that courage or ambition were ever something the scrawny noble had to begin with. Drake is perfectly content to keep his borders safe and see his trio of daughters wed. It is his youngest, Princess Hedwig, that has caught his eye. Hedwig, the king believes, is an angel of spirit and mind and one to be guarded over like a precious and oversized gem. Which is why the Princess has a squadron of guards and hounds around her room inside the castle walls.

It is this contingent that the Player-Characters will have to deal with when they arrive in Totby with the job to kidnap Princess Hedwig and leave evidence to indicate Ulf Roar was involved in this act.

To accomplish the latter, the Player-Characters have been given the following:

1) approximately a half-dozen blonde wigs – long strands of straight, blonde hair that are so long they could blind a gnome or halfling. With the wigs on, it is believed the Player-Characters will look like Viking raiders;



2) a papyrus filled with Norse words so they can sound like Ulf and his army. Have the Player-Characters do an Intelligence check to remember these – make it at disadvantage and extremely challenging. If the players fail the check, they’ll remember how to say a couple of Norse words but won’t remember what they mean. Here are the words they’ll remember: Vaenn (beautiful); Vaeger (honor, glory); Noktan (naked); Kogur-sveinn (baby). (GM note: The Totby guards fully understand Norse so they should be puzzled in how the “Norse” Player-Characters use the language.)

3) A half-dozen silver arm bands with symbols of Odin. The Player-Characters can either wear these or leave them behind. They were taken off dead soldiers from Ulf Roar’s army. They have no magical qualities and are shaped like a thin horseshoe.

**INSIDE THE TOTBY CASTLE**, the Player-Characters will see the contingent of guards and their hounds. The players were able to enter the castle as the Southpool king paid a merchant to secretly transport them inside. The merchant also provided the location of the Princess’ room, located furthest away from the castle’s entrance but also in a fairly quiet area. Here is where the players will see the guards and their hounds.

The players have two choices \_

1) they can try to overwhelm the guards and their hounds and hope they don’t call more guards to this area. There are dozens of guards at the castle but fewer in the late night hours. One guard of the half dozen on duty always

carries a horn.

2) they can try to trick the guards or sneak into the princess' room. This will not be as difficult as it may seem.

The guards are part of a cover-up that has allowed Princess Hedwig to elope one night ago with a minor noble named Corbyn Lloyd the IV. Corbin paid the guards an outrageous sum of gold to look the other way.

If the Player-Characters spend time listening to the guards before they attack them, here's some of the conversation they'll hear ...

Guard 1: "What are you going to do with your share?"

Guard 2 - "Shhhhh! Be quiet man – are you going to announce it to the whole castle? Gawd, King Drake's going to be furious when he hears. Furious!"

Guard 1 - "Yes, yes, whatever. I'm getting that sweet little jeweled dagger down at the smithy ... together with that gold-encrusted sheath, it will be a sight to see!"

Guard 2 – "Oh sure, announce it to the world that you're suddenly loaded with gold. That's incredibly smart! Old King Drake won't figure out a thing!"

As a result of these conversations, the guard's Passive Perceptions should be pretty low. Even if/when the hounds growl, the guards will try to silence them because they certainly don't want any attention called to them that evening.

**ONCE THE PLAYERS GET INSIDE THE PRINCESS' ROOM,** they'll get a surprise. At a desk with "her" back toward the door is one Murray Walsh, a slim man with a 5 o'clock shadow on his oval face.

Murray is acting as Princess Hedwig's "double" as the princess couldn't trust her servants (beholden of course to King Drake). So she paid Murray to dress up like her – he in fact has one of her red flowery dresses on, a black-colored wig with big curls, and even a little make-up on.

(Murray was bored and always wondered what make-up would feel like).

When a Player-Character enters the room, the following will happen ...

\* Murray will keep his back turned toward the player(s) as long as possible. He is sitting in front of a mirror so he can see behind him. As soon as he sees the player enter, he will immediately raise his hands and draw the wig's big curls toward his face, hoping the curls will cover his 5 o'clock shadow (his short beard stubble). He will then begin to gently pat the curls as if he's trying to keep the wig in place.

\* Murray will speak as little as possible, but if needed, will try to sound like the Princess, using "big words" to sound intelligent and noble. Words/expressions to use: "Oh, my elflock is disgraceful ..." (Meaning: his hair is tangled up); "I'm not trying to be hugger-mugger, but why are you here?" .... (Meaning: I'm not trying to be secretive ...)

At some point, have the Player-Characters do Perception checks. Here's what they could find on high checks ...

\* Depending on where they are in the room and if the "princess" is still sitting, they could notice the "princess" is wearing rather old, shoddy black boots;

\* The "Princess" has rather strong color combinations of eye-liner on and some of it is drawn in crooked lines;

\* The beard stubble growth on the Princess' face, which is partly masked by the curly wig.

When confronted with possible violence, the "princess," Murray Walsh, will quickly give in and relate the following:

\* The Princess has eloped with a rather good ole friend of his - a "high" noble, Lord Corbyn Lloyd the IV;

\* The two left yesterday evening for the perfect getaway, the old Davies Castle. The castle is a



half day's ride away, in the thick of a forest. "It's the perfect hideout – nobody ever goes there!"

Murray will ensure the players that he – or the other guards! - won't tell anybody at the Totby castle about this situation – certainly not the king himself. If the players convince him they'll stay silent as well about the missing princess, he'll mutter something about "gosh, I guess have to keep this dress on a bit longer then ..."

Murray also will relate information about what the noble Corbin Lloyd – the Princess' boyfriend - looks like. He will describe Corbin as a good-looking man with long dark hair, a slight build and who has had the unfortunate luck in recent weeks to develop a skin issue. "The poor man's skin is as dry as a tumbleweed."

Murray will add that when the princess is found missing, he will tell the good King that a warband of riders from the North, Vikings, were seen riding toward Davie's Castle. He doubts her disappearance will be uncovered until later this night when the King comes to see his daughter.

#### **SPY NETWORK UPDATE**

On the road to Davies Castle, the players will be intercepted by a trio of Southpool agents (the spy network). The three are half-elves and they have news of vast importance. This news is delivered to the players in word, not by message for the information is too value. Here's the information:

-A secret about Ulf Roar has been leaked out of the warrior-king's empire. The secret is this: For years now, the warrior-king has been blessed by his gods, who years ago sent him two flying female warriors referred to as Valkyries. These warriors are often invisible and carry powerful magic. It is well known within Ulf Roar's nation that these Valkyries wielded the magic that turned an ordinary shield into one of legend, using the soul of a woman warrior to do so. Thus the Percy's Mercy group must not only

find and take Ulf's legendary shield but also one of the Valkyries as well and hope the angelic creatures will undo or dispel their magic.

#### **OLD DAVIES CASTLE**

This deserted castle is a half day's travel from Totby castle, further east from Southpool, and located in the heart of an old, undeveloped forest.

When the Player-Characters reach this castle, it is an overcast day with a light breeze that barely sways the tree branches. Besides the sound of nature, it is quiet here.

The castle is located in the center of the forest, surrounded by a moat. There is one way to easily reach the castle – two logs span the moat on the west side of the castle. The two logs are sturdy and heavy but are cut precisely to move slightly when a person walks upon them. There are two clear fishing lines wrapped around one of the logs (Passive Perception DC 20 to spot the fishing lines). The lines each hold two, small bells – these are positioned under the logs and not visible – that clatter when a person walks upon the logs. The sound is easily heard across the entire deserted castle.

From or near the moat log bridge, one can see inside the deserted castle. There is no movement and no sign of activity. If the Player-Characters call out, the noble Corbin will respond on their second or third attempt. Corbin was busy ensuring all was prepared for their arrival.

Lord Corbin Lloyd is a romantic at heart. After falling in love with the Princess, he spent days searching the forest for a hideout for them to live in. And that's how he came upon the old Davies castle, which once housed a competitor to the Drake family for the crown of Totby. The Davies family, however, was ruined by its own internal squabbles and decades ago, were erased from the kingdom. Drake's family even

spread rumors of vampires that lived within the ruined castle so it has remained vacant for decades. Or so most thought, including Corbin himself.

The young Corbin made the mistake of investigating the ruins and was promptly captured by a Yuan-ti cult. Corbin was held there for some days before he was convinced the cult could provide both he, the princess and any number of Totby residents a life free from the constraints of human society and all its sin and guilt.

As the Player-Characters arrive, the princess has been shepherded – rather rudely! – to an underground tunnel network under the castle and begun her time with the “blessed emissaries of the serpeant gods.”

Corbin will see the Player-Characters as more opportunities to turn Totby kingdom into a “more civilized society” that doesn’t rely on the “horribly unfair” class system of the Totby castle, where nobles are treated in one way and the rest of civilization quite a different and horrible way! (Lord Corbin, by the way, has no idea what the “horrible way” is as he was raised in an extremely rich household).

Corbin will bring the Player-Characters to a large room in the ruined castle, one that has an adjoining room with a door separating the two. Within this room is a large hearth – mostly destroyed – as well as two bedrolls, a couple of old chairs and an opened chest showing what appears to be female clothing. The chest is well-made, with quality metal fastenings and lacquered wood. The clothing all appears to be neatly folded inside the chest. There is no evidence of wrongdoing in the room (ie, showing the Princess was kidnapped or harmed. She was dragged down to the underground tunnel network after she went into the adjoining room.) The room appears somewhat picked up, as if someone has stacked stonework

that once fell from the walls along the back of the room, up against the wall.

Corbin will welcome the Player-Characters to the castle and tell them about his and the princess’ desire – their “long-hoped-for plans” – to rebuild this castle, live here and create a new Totby community. One where all will be welcomed, no matter their station in life. Poor or rich, young or old, halfling or human. All are most welcomed!

When asked, Corbin will say the princess has gone into the adjoining room to prepare their next meal. Corbin himself can’t go inside the room for he is preparing to leave. One of his Totby friends was due to arrive some time ago and he’s afraid he might have got lost in the forest. Corbin will act as if he’s in a hurry to leave, as he would much prefer to be gone by the time the Player-Characters go into the adjoining room.

While speaking with the Player-Characters, Corbin will occasionally itch his arms and the back of his neck. It won’t be difficult for Players to see flakes of skin come off as he itches, much like when one peels from a bad sunburn. Corbin has the Yuan-ti Shed Skin trait, allowing him as a Bonus action once per day to free himself from a grapple or restraint. He might have to use that if things go bad. At the first sign of violence or if the Player-Characters act aggressive, Corbin will use the stacked stonework to climb up the wall and then leap over the side of it, into the moat. The water inside the moat is fairly murky and if a player dives into it after him, Corbin will be hard to track. He’ll eventually try to reach the other side of the moat and escape into the forest.

The adjoining room – not viewable by the players as they arrive due to the closed but not locked door – has two stone golems inside. One golem is positioned right across the doorway, appearing like a statue. It has ruby gems as eyes

that stare straight toward whatever person opens the door. The two gems possess two spells (Suggestion) that activate when somebody opens the door. If the player fails the save(s), they'll be directed to move into the room and close and lock the door.

If the player succeeds the two Wisdom saves, a second stone golem – positioned behind the door as it opens into the room - has been directed to grab whoever walks in and restrain them as the first golem animates and closes the door. A human Cultist lies hidden inside the small room, behind an old wooden shelf. Once a Player-Character is grabbed, the cultist will rush out and prick the player with a slender dagger that has poison on it. The poison will not harm the player, although the dagger does 1d4 damage. The player has to make two saves vs.

the poison – 1) the first save either stuns (on a successful save) or renders it unconscious for d4 rounds; and 2) the second save – at the end of the player's d4 rounds – is to shed the stun/unconscious condition. This second save can be repeated at the end of each turn.

The stunned or unconscious player will be carried down to the underground tunnel network to become part of the Cult.

Underground is a set of caverns that contain cultists and the leaders of the Yuan-ti.

## **PART TWO/LOW TIER: Halflings, Fimm Boer**

Fimm Boer is a farmer's paradise, a province that is divided by a river that snakes ever southwards. The Norse call this river "Sigr," meaning victory, as they used the river to bring their numerous warrior-filled ships to the region to overtake the halfling nation.

The area's lands are lightly forested or in most cases, farmlands surrounded by populous villages. The region does have one significant landmark, the Mounds of Dother (pronounced doe-ther), in Norse meaning of the Mounds of Death. This mounds, which border the river, are covered by black rock and dark-colored shale.



Coming from Southpool, which is west of this area, the Player-Characters will come upon one of these populous villages properly called Forra Boer (meaning First Farm in Norse).

Forra Boer is a small village, very different from the sprawling Southpool region the player-characters come from. In Forra Boer, there are more barns than buildings, more farm animals than farmers and even more chickens than folk on the gravel roads.

As the Player-Characters arrive in the village, a few elements will become clear, including:

- \* There is no hint of the fact that

the halflings once ruled over these lands. Everything is built to Norse standards (heights) and all names in the village – including the

village itself – has Norse names. The only thing that speaks of the halfling’s culture is their actual names. Even so, they often use the Norse tongue in their own language.

Examples:

- a fierce or aggressive person is “atall”;
- a crop in the farmlands is an “akr”;
- a girl is a “maer.”

\* There are few Northmen around. The few guards that are seen around the farms are largely avoided by the halflings, who look down at their hairy feet when a Norse guard(s) nears.

\* The halflings appear in good spirits despite their situation. They do not appear physically abused but do show signs of serious fatigue, as they apparently work feverishly to fill Ulf Roar’s annual harvest demands.

It is likely the Player-Characters will see and talk first with the many halfling children running around Forra Boer, including Merric Goodbottle, a know-it-all youngster. Merric will likely point the Player-Characters to one of the community’s leaders, Ruby Sarsaparilla.

Sarsaparilla, a female halfling, is a matchmaker among the Boers. A matchmaker not of young couples for marriage but of farmers and their fields. It is commonplace knowledge among the Boers that a farmer’s field is no better than the number of Red Wrigglers, a type of red-colored worm, found in that field. The Wrigglers break up the Boers’ hard, compact soil, allowing crops to thrive there. These worms are so sought after and so cherished that it is common for Boers to walk their fields by the dozens, planting their feet delicately into the soil to discover burrowing Red Wrigglers. These worms are then picked, collected and stored until after the field has been planted, where they are then placed back in the soil to aid the growing process.

The matchmaking process, performed by a cherished community leader (Ruby), involves inspecting a Boer’s feet and equally their ability

to find these cherished worms in the soil as they work their feet in and out of the dirt.

When approached, Ruby will peer upon the Player-Characters curiously but still welcome them into her field of sunflowers. The field is well-planted and appears ready to be harvested as the sunflowers are nearly 8 feet tall, not to mention planted in neat rows that are so thick with leaves and stalks that one cannot see across the field.

Ruby will welcome a Player-Character into the field, believing they are there to participate in the matchmaking. By tradition, this is a private affair, with Ruby and the Player-Character walking far enough into the field as not to be seen.

Ruby will ask the Player-Character to “go ahead and take it off so we can see what’s-what.”

Ruby is pointedly looking at the player-character’s shoes/boots when she says this but the other players not standing closeby will not see this.

**(GM NOTE:** Provide an Out of Character explanation. I.e, Ruby the halfling is motioning to your feet and is asking you to take your boot off. When you reply in character, do NOT say BOOT or FEET or anything of that nature. )

As Ruby makes her way through the matchmaking process of evaluating the player’s feet and their pursuit of Red Wrigglers, some of her comments on the player’s feet could be ...

“Well, now, I must say, the length is really fine. I mean what else can one ask for?”

“Could you twist it about for me a bit there ... Oh, very kind, very kind ...”

“That’s quite sufficient. Now I must say, it’s, it’s, well, how does one say this politely ... it’s quite bald. There’s not a single hair ...



“Well that’s quite shocking. How else, sir, are you supposed to really, well, dig in and feel about, ya know.”

“Now, of course, we’ve reached the final stage. The determination of depth ...”

Ruby will have no interest in hearing anything negative about the Norse or “raising a fuss” about the past. She is, however, a proud halfling that can be persuaded to say something if the Player-Characters raise the issues of how the Norse culture dominates the halfling’s.

Ruby will tell the PCs that if they wish to hear of the halfling’s culture, they should listen to Master Wellby Goodbottle’s storytelling.

Other halflings the players could come upon in the farm village:

\* **Osster Proudstep**, “counter” of the crop in Forra Boer. Osster, a rather round halfling, counts the crop toward the quota the Norse require of the halflings. He views the current situation with the Norsemen as just “pickles” – it’s all fine. No bandits to worry about these days when they were constantly a problem in the “old days.”

\* **Winys Swiftberry**, female halfling farmer of an apple crop that hasn’t produced at all. Now she’s under pressure – her crop is due and she doesn’t have enough blossoms that will turn into fruit. She needs magical help or she swears she’ll curse anybody who doesn’t help! The Swiftberry curse! It’ll shrivel you up like an apple left in the sun too long, and “your juices will flow fast from all parts of your body!”

### SPY NETWORK UPDATE

On the road to the fields, the players will be intercepted by a trio of Southpool agents (the spy network). The three are half-elves and they have news of vast importance. This new is delivered to the players in word, not a message

for the information is too value. Here’s the information:

-A secret about Ulf Roar has been leaked out of the warrior-king’s empire. The secret is this: Years ago, the warrior-king was blessed by his gods, who sent him two flying female warriors referred to as Valkyries. These warriors are often invisible and carry powerful magic. It is well known within Ulf Roar’s nation that these Valkyries wielded the magic that turned an ordinary shield into one of legend, using the soul of a woman warrior to do so.

Meaning, not only must the players somehow steal Ulf’s shield away, they must also find and kidnap a Valkyrie and convince it do undo its magic.

### OLD WELLBY’S SONGS

Wellby Goodbottle, the grandfather of Merric, can be found in the fields, an elderly halfling who sings songs and tells stories for the farmers to listen to as they tend their field. With him are sisters Kithbrix and Xankis. Both play mandolins.

When Goodbottle is found, he will welcome the Player-Characters with courtesy and invite them to relax in the field and listen to one of his tales. He will then recite the following as he softly plays an ukulele ...

Once there was a couple who tended a most amazin’ pumpkin. It grew ten times as fast as every other squash. Their neighbors couldn’t believe it. They kept saying, “Gosh what a squash!” But after a few weeks and awash with a growin’ squash, the farmers’ noisy neighbors told them it was time - to pick it! Their neighbors said that there enormous squash was takin’ up too much space in that their little field. But the couple wouldn’t have it! So the pumpkin grew until it became as large as a house and roomy as a barn. Then, by gosh, those lucky farmers, well, they lived in that there posh squash for years, at least until they

tired of hearing their neighbors call out,  
“Orange you glad you didn’t pick it?”

Goodbottle is hesitant to speak of the Norse for he had family members die decades ago in the short battle against the Northlanders. He is, however, of a mixed mind about the Northlanders’ presence and reminders of his grandson Merric growing up in this environment could trigger him to open up to the Player-Characters. If he does, he will do so in song, as to not to raise suspicion if the Northlanders are watching. (Goodbottle always feels like he’s being watching!) Here’s the song:

“There once was a small, dark-haired gent, who sailed the river,  
He did so with ease, but did carry a quiver,  
Afraid he was not, even if he was frail,  
For he had a hidden den, amongst the black shale,  
There he carefully wrote, a most secret journal,  
crafted mostly by candlelight, for he was nocturnal,  
Secrets of halfings he did record, deeds and songs to make us all calmer,  
orrrr ...  
remind us all of our true blessed honor.”

At that, the halfling bard will rise from the field and begin packing his bag to leave. As he does so, he’ll whisper, “Look at the farmers now and don’t ask me a thing for I shall be leaving and I won’t be followed by the likes of you ....”

Then he’ll whisper the following ...  
“Seek out the black shale along the river bend. Within lies the hideout of Otbert Riverhopper and his blessed book of our halfling history. Recover it and bring it back, in secret, to me. It will rekindle our halfling courage and honor as quick as a wink, I tell ya!”

By guidance from the farmers (who have of course overheard the bard’s songs and whispers), Ruby the matchmaker or even Merric, the Player-Characters will learn the

bend in the river has been named by the Norse as the Mounds of Dother (pronounced doe-ther), in Norse meaning of the Mounds of Death. This area, which borders the river, is characterized by its black rock and shale. Not one halfling alive knows what’s in Otbert’s secret den or has been there, fearing they would be followed by the Norse and the location revealed. Any of the above halfings, however, do know of a couple of boats that are along the riverside that can be used by the players and would not catch the Norse’s attention. (The Norse control the entire stretch of river so there is little concern there.)

By boat, the bend referred to in the song is a few hours travel south of the farmlands, as the boat goes with the current. As the Player-Characters arrive at this location, they’ll notice why the Norse refer to it as the Mounds of Death for seemingly everything here is black, from the massive stones that cling to the hillsides to the darkened shale on the ground. Grass nor shrubs can be found here although there are groups of blackened saplings in different locations. More than a bit scared of ill omens, the Northmen have left this area alone.

The den of Otbert Riverhopper is not easily found, as it will take an active Perception check of 20 to uncover it. (GM note: When the den is found, the day’s last rays of sunlight will be showing as dusk draws near.)

The opening of this secret den is behind a set of blackened saplings and covered partially by withered vines that descend from a mound or hill. At first glance, Otbert’s secret location appears to be an animal’s den as the opening is barely big enough for a halfling to enter, not to mention a medium-sized humanoid. The den’s opening is, however, slightly widened as the shale and dirt surrounding it have fallen away.

Unless the withered vines are dealt with, there is little light within the den. But likely enough

light to show what appears to have been a wolf's den, a tight space that only a few people can enter at a time. Within this space is a coiled rope with one end tied to a piton. This rope lies next to another hole in the ground, equally as small as the first. A dim light from below shows what appears to be a underground structure, surprisingly quite large and complete with stonework, stairs and even large gaping holes in the floor.

This apparently is Otbert Riverhopper's secret den and somewhere within is the book that will bring courage back to the halflings and perhaps have them rebel against the Northmen.

The rope by the hole is old and dusty but in surprisingly good shape and Player-Characters, one-by-one, can begin descending down the 50-foot rope to the underground structure.

\*\*\*\*The players will enter the cavern a short time before sunset \*\*\*

Once the first Player-Character enters the room, a series of events will begin happening ....

1 \_ A Fane Spirit (Tome of Beasts 2, pg. 141) will appear. As the sun's lights are still overhead, the spirit will look like a normal, elderly male halfling. This is Otto Wanderfoot, known as Priest Otto. Otto's clothes appear quite old, ragged even, and his hair is long, mostly silver with dark specks, but reasonably kept. Otto was left by Otbert, a favorite cousin, to watch over his possessions, including the prized book. Otto, however, has a horrible memory (he can't recall where the book was placed) that is all made the worse because of frequent distractions. (the sprites mentioned below) Once the party goes into initiative, Otto's daylight appearance will fade away as the sun dips below the horizon. Otto will only attack creatures that call him (it) undead or act as if it's undead.

2 \_ There are at least a dozen Cadaver Sprites (Tome of Beasts 2, pg. 55) moving around this underground area, but only on the ground. They are invisible and their soft voices barely can be heard above the sound of dirt and shale falling from different sections of the ceiling. If heard (Perception DC 20), the sprites say ... "Darkness brings the cold truth." "He's like us, he just doesn't know it. Not yet." "The old one is living proof that looks can deceive." "The only life around here lies motionless."

The sprites have a strange bond with Otto and the Seer, and will attack any creature that attacks them.

**PRISONERS** \_ The players will discover there are two prisoners in cells in this underground structure. The prisoners cannot be seen due to the metal doors that are closed and locked. (Otto has the keys) In this first cell is a Deathspeaker (Tome of Beasts 2, pg. 82) named **Skarde the Seer**. Skarde has a male, raspy voice – an ancient one. "Come, speak, sit and listen."

Skarde will say the halflings locked him up decades ago for a hateful truth – he told them their futures, that they would be slaves to the Northmen, and in return they locked him up. "Ungrateful lot!" Skarde will say he can help the PCs find the book, not because he knows but he can find the truth within the priest's mind. "It is one of my talents as a seer, assuming of course that I can see the priest."

If let out, Skarde will insist on talking with at least a couple of the Player-Characters, asking about their lives and what has happened over the past few years in the southern provinces. (If the players talk to him for more than a minute, they will be under his "Deathspeak" ability.)

The other prisoner is \_ depending on the tier of the party \_ a ghoul who hungers for flesh (Tome of Beasts 2, pg. 321). Or a Crimson Mist

(Creature Codex, pg. 67), depending on the party.

The book the party seeks – Otbert’s book – can be found on Otto’s body. It is a small book, which would fit neatly in a halfling’s palm, and

has dozens of pages recording the history of the Fimm Boer halflings. Some of these deeds are common, everyday happenings while other speak of courageous tales of their ancestors against deadly creatures two and three times their size.

## **SOUTHPOOL SPY NETWORK: Part 2**

The players will remain in their respective provinces overnight resting and ensuring their previous day deeds incited the excitement that they hoped. Indeed the next morning gossip quickly finds them that both the Totby king and a group of Fimm Boer Halflings are set upon war, raising armies and preparing to meet the Northerners. There is even – fueled by the Southpool spy network – correspondence between the two provinces of a brewing alliance. These rumors grow in persistence throughout the day until a spy within the Southpool network finds the players and delivers them a message from Percy Payne.

The message is delivered in person, in a quiet place and in a whisper. The message is this:

- \* As expected both provinces are amassing armies, both of which will be marching before dawn tomorrow;
- \* Southpool’s spy network has found Ulf Roar and his forces. They are within the mountains separating the various kingdoms. As they had threatened long ago, they are building towers to control the trade to the north and in fact have already shut down several prominent trade routes over the mountains;
- \* The players are to volunteer in the provinces’ respective armies. They will be given wagons

and horses so they can appear as merchants to the Northmen;

\* There are just two mountain routes left open. One is a main crossroads. The band of Percy Mercy’s that went to Totby will follow this route with the Totby army close behind. Near the top of this route, at the crossroads, the Northmen have built cranes that deliver goods to the mountaintop, where they are building their towers. Use the cranes to get to the mountaintop without being seen. There they will find Ulf and more importantly, the shield. Kill or leave Ulf alive, it doesn’t matter. Find the shield and remove the woman’s spirit from the shield.

\* The other route on the mountain is one recently discovered, previously unknown. It has never been used by merchants like the crossroads. But it snakes around the mountains and eventually ... the Southpool agents believe ... ends up at the mountain top. The party that went to the halflings will use this pathway to get to the top of the mountain and help the others find the shield and remove the spirit from it.

\* Once the shield and a Valkyrie is secured, the players must find a portal the Southpool spy network has created. This portal will take the players to a secure spot where the shield’s magic can be undone.



### **PART THREE: Battle with Ulf Roar**

The battle with Ulf Roar and his clan will occur in multiple locations on one mountain, which is part of a range of high-altitude mountains that exist between the southern provinces and Ulf Roar's northern kingdom.

The mountain range is called Jotunn Havre (pronounced Joe-ton Ha-var), meaning Giant Haven in the Norse tongue. The tallest peaks of this mountain range are covered in snow year-around but this won't be where the encounter occurs.

Information that Southpool spies have recently uncovered – and conveyed to the Player-Characters – is Ulf Roar is building a fortress on one of the mountains on this range. The mountain where the encounters will happen is several thousand feet high and the location of the major merchant roads that lead over this mountain range.

Where the encounters on this mountain will occur depend on the number of players.

Important notes for the mountain encounters:

\* **Weather** - Rainfall is a consistent factor. Wind strength will vary but there are strong gusts. These environmental factors will make climbing more challenging and could impact range weapons.

\* **Crane** - The Northlanders have built a crane at the top of the mountain. The crane has a platform that can be lowered 80 feet down to the crossroads area. The platform can support



the weight of 2 medium-sized creatures or 3 small-sized creatures. It can be lowered without using an action – assuming someone is at the top of the mountain using it - but raising it does require an action.

\* **Traders** – Historically trading caravans have crossed these mountains. Nearly all of these caravans originate from the Southlands and include multiple wagons of goods. In recent weeks, the Northlanders have slowed some of these caravans as they've started using the roadway to try to secretly carry shipments for the

new fortress. Now only one main road remains open for merchants. However, Southpool spies have found a narrow pathway off this main road that winds up and around the mountain.

\* **Allies:** If the Player-Characters are able to lure Totby or the other provinces into this battle, the allies would come into play in the Crossroads area of the mountain. The allies' main forces, however, would come after the players reach the top level, where Ulf Roar and his commander and shaman are. The players must use the crane or scale the cliff walls to reach the top of the mountain.

Here's how these encounters will occur, depending on the tier of the table:

#### **HIGHER-TIER TABLE**

##### **CROSSROADS**

This is the route used by traders to traverse the mountain. This will eventually be where the

main battle between the forces happen. However, as this battle is happening, the players will be at the top fighting Ulf Roar and his commanders while trying to trap a Valkyrie.

### **MOUNTAIN TOP**

This is the route used by traders to traverse the mountain. It is also where Ulf Roar and his commanders are, as well as slave labor. The portals for the players also can be found here.

### **LOWER-TIER TABLE**

#### **BEND ONE AND BEND TWO**

The players will encounter situations on two sheer pathways on the mountain side.

#### **HAGS DEN**

The players could be transported to a Hag's den as part of this adventure. If not, they arrive at the mountain top.

### **MOUNTAIN TOP**

See above. The lower-tier players must reach the portal. There will be skirmishes here as they arrive, including with Giants and Ulf Roar's forces.

### **IN MORE DETAIL**

#### **CROSSROADS**

This is the route used by traders to traverse the mountain. The players could be disguised as merchants as they have access to a wagon and horses. The players will be traveling ahead of the main Totby and halfling armies, which will be traveling behind, also mainly disguised.

As the players reach the crossroads, they'll notice that the crossroads' traffic has essentially halted. A number of Hill Giants are "directing traffic," stopping and examining each wagon and then taking a "toll." (The Giants may refer to it as "wax? No, sacks? No ... tax! Yes, tax!") The Giants have been instructed to "trade" merchants rock (from the mountain) for any

lumber the merchants carry. One of the rocks contains a creature that had fallen from the sky and had not been noticed. (This is a form of a Beholder)

As the players look on, they'll see Giants remove lumber and place it on a platform, which has rope fixed to it. This platform is then lifted up the side of the mountain, some 80 feet above the crossroads to a plateau. There are several piles of lumber resting on the roadside.

If the players look to the mountaintop, it's likely they'll see the outline of a fortress or tower as well as potentially some activity there. This is where Ulf Roar and his commanders are, according to the Southpool spy reports.

(GM Reminder: The crane platform can support the weight of 2 medium-sized creatures or 3 small-sized creatures. It can be lowered without using an action – assuming someone is at the top of the mountain using it - but raising it does require an action.)

### **MOUNTAIN-TOP**

Operating the crane is an Ogre named "Erk." Erk is irked! The wheel that operates the crane has become irksome to maneuver as it appears severely rusted and corroded. Plus, the crane's rope is too large for the spindle so it constantly falls around the ogre's feet. So when the crane is lowered, the ogre's ankle and lower leg become entrapped in the rope and now he has major rope-burn around his ankles and knees! Erk is irked!

Also on the mountaintop are a number of giants that are essentially slave labor, moving stone off the main part of the mountain, allowing for the continuing construction of the fortress.

Ulf Roar is here along with two of his commanders that rarely leave his side, his warrior-champion, Torsten the Barbarian, and his chief shaman, Svend. The shaman's war wyvern, complete with thick metal armor, also

lies near. When battle breaks out, Svend will mount the wyvern and cast spells from the sky.

Of course the Valkyries are near as well.

GM Note: Remember that when the battle begins, the players will have to deal with “the malice of Annabel Brundish,” the noble spirit in the shield (See pg. 4).

### **LOWER-TIER TABLE**

These players take a separate route up the mountain, leaving the main pathway at the base of the mountain and working their way up a sloping pathway that stretches around the mountain. About halfway up the mountain path, the players will come upon this first incident.

### **BEND ONE**

Zilla Wormchewer is a snow hag that recently has had more than her share of fights with her sister, an Annis Hag named Olga Toestealer. Fed up, Zilla has moved out, leaving the cavern (situated high in the mountains) in hopes of finding a quieter cave.

Zilla: “Who needs the constant chirpings of an old crow – did you sweep out the cavern? Did you gather the berries? Did you harvest the goblin’s toenails? I mean, how can one be so bothersome? Live and let live I say.”

As the Player-Characters arrive to this area, there is fog clinging to the mountains. The most Perceptive of the players will hear a woman’s voice call out, “Nooooooooo! ...” and then a commotion of some sorts ahead of them. What’s ahead is not seen due to the curving mountain path.

What the player(s) will see as they come around the bend up ahead on the pathway is an overturned cart, along with upturned barrels and chests. Some of these barrels have landed

on the pathway fairly close to the players, others, they’ll discover, were lost as they fell off the mountainside.

The player(s) will then see a woman running down the pathway, coming from the opposite side. The woman is Zilla and if seen far away will appear to have a long, fur-lined cloak on. The cloak has a head covering, which partly covers Zilla’s light-colored (silver) hair. The woman carries a bulky pack on her back and a bent, wooden staff in her right hand. (Zilla has an illusion that covers many of her more scary hag features, like her claws and blue-colored skin.)

“Oh that’s, that’s not good,” Zilla will say as she’s first sees the overturned cart. “Oh boy, oh boy. This is bad. This is really, really bad ...”

Give Perception checks as creatures could be heard flying overhead. The fog conceals them as they are more than 60 feet away but the creatures’ wings can be heard with a strong Perception check. These are two Perytons.

Zilla will hear the flying creatures then rush to the shadows of the mountain path and warn a player-character(s) - if seen - to do so as well.

“Those are her scouts and trust me, you don’t want to be around when my sister gets here and finds out,” Zilla will say of the Perytons. “She’ll be so, so angry ....”

Zilla will say she planned her get-away from the cave for some time and just today borrowed a number of her sister’s favorite items. These items were packed quickly into the barrels.

Unfortunately for Zilla, her sister’s planned day-long trip was for some unknown reason cut short and Zilla had to leave a bit quicker than expected. In her haste, Zilla’s cart slipped out of her grasp and nearly toppled off the mountainside.

If the players help Zilla, she’ll tell them ...

\* Seek out the circles if they see her sister

coming for her. These are summoning circles that she created long ago to protect herself. She is willing to provide a series of words and hand gestures that will summon an elemental spirit from the circles. They are a series of these circles found farther up the pathway;

\* Don't get near her sister – she'll crush you!  
Zilla will say her sister is bigger than a grizzly bear and just as mean!

After the Perytons aren't heard, Zilla will see the pathway – part of it is missing - and act surprised, "That wasn't there before!" She'll then tell the player(s) she has a "fix" for that but she'll have to cast a spell. The spell is "ice wall" and it will provide a perfect stepping stone to get her to safety.

**GM Note 1:** The place near the pathway hole – if investigated – has a sharp, clean cut to it as it was magically created. The player could perform a Perception or Investigation check to see the clean cut and a Survival check to discover its significance – that the break-off area is not natural.

**GM Note 2:** Zilla was warned by Ulf Roar's army of the possibility of adventurers coming this way. She and her sister are attempting to trick the players into stepping into the "magical circle" found on the next bend and thus be taken into the hags' den.

**GM Note 3 – Long Jump Mechanic Reminder:**  
If you have a 10-foot start, you can jump up to the number of your Strength ability score. If you don't have the 10-foot running leap, you can jump half the distance.

#### **THE HAG BARRELS:**

Roll 1d4 to identify what's in the hag barrels that fell off the wagon:

**Roll of 1** \_ Goblin body parts. These are small and green-colored. Hands, feet and elbows; lots of elbows! There are teeth marks on all of them, especially the elbows.

**2** \_ Magic item – a Hag's Claw.

**3** \_ A burst of bright green light explodes out from the barrel, going in a 20-foot cube. (This is like a Fairie Fire spell) Dexterity save for players near the explosion. (DC14) Unlike the spell, the duration of this spell is 1 day. (Remove curse will remove it as well as Dispel Magic)

**4** \_ A rat (actually an Imp that has shapechanged) named Kyip. The "rat" will say it was a goblin fearful of being eaten and jumped in front of a spell. It says it belongs to neither of the two sisters. It's hoping to get the player(s) to step into the magical circle and go into the hag's den.

#### **BEND TWO**

This second mountain bend features an area that has stones fashioned in a circle. This is the magical circle Zilla spoke of earlier. (GM Note: If players examine it for magical purposes, it has conjuration magic emanating from it.)

Olga Toestealer is using Disguise Self and appears as a slender, dark-haired woman in the prime of her life. She does not wear a cloak but a dress of soft leather that appears patchwork, light in some areas, darker in other areas. (She frequently fingers this leather dress) She has a number of purple-colored flowers enwrapped in her long, dark hair. The flowers appear to be similar to the ones the players have seen growing along the cracks and crevices of the mountain pathway.

Olga will appear at the opposite side of the pathway and appear surprised at the sight of the player(s). She will immediately turn back, toward where she came from, motion with her hand and in Giant say, "Stay back." This is to two ice trolls that cannot be seen by the players due to the bend of the pathway.

Olga will relate the following:

\* She will ask the player(s) if they have seen another woman on the pathway? This woman sometimes refers to her (Olga) as her sister but

they are not related. More importantly, the woman stole from her and then tried to flee earlier today. This after Olga provided the woman a safe place to rest and heal after she had been attacked by Northmen. (She will name Ulf Roar if needed) This all relates of course to Zilla and none of it is true.

\* Olga will tell the player(s) she has summoned several friends of hers to help find the woman. She doesn't believe she'll be able to survive the winter without the supplies that were stolen from her.

"I am a kind, honest soul who is being taken advantage of."

If asked of the circle in stones, Olga will say she can only guess, as she didn't place it there. But she would guess it's a summoning circle.

If the players say they haven't seen Zilla, Olga will press them and say there's only way the woman could have gone. "Are you protecting her?" she'll ask and then send her friends, the Ice Trolls, to investigate.

If a fight breaks out, Olga will change form, try to grapple one of the players and step into the magical circle.

If a player or Olga steps into the magic circle, they will disappear and teleport back to the Hags' den.

## HAGS' DEN

This is a cavern deep within the mountain. Even so, wind has managed to carve a way into the mountain and whips around furiously. (Ranged attacks are at disadvantage if more than 10 feet away).

A group of small Fey, Redcaps, await and immediately attack the players upon sight. Zilla Wormchewer, the snow hag, will wait long enough for the Fey to get enough blood to moisten their red caps with and then step into the room.

The hag will collect blood from the Fey's redcaps – the players' blood – and then demand the following: The players must find the Northerner's shaman, the one that sticks close to Ulf Roar and is called Svend. They must collect his blood and samples of his hair and then leave the shaman alive. (This way the hags can control him.) The blood and hair are to be brought to the hags.

Or the hags will use the players' blood to control them and do what activities they have planned for the shaman. The hags won't say what they plan to do with the shaman. Nor will they return the players' blood.

## **PART FOUR: The Valkyries**

Two fiery Valkyries, Helgak and Svipul, were sent by Odin to watch over the Viking warrior-King Ulf Roar. The two have been with Ulf Roar for more than a decade. Savage and blood-thirsty to begin with, the Valkyries' time with the Vikings has not sated their desire for conflict or bloodshed. The two have now turned on each other, threatening to kill one another as both believe the other has fallen in love with the mortal king.

It was Helgak who showed signs of this love first, taking a rare step in taking a young woman warrior's soul and ensnaring it into a shield. This shield is now wielded by Ulf Roar, who values it tremendously.

This led to instant jealousy from Svipul (pronounce Svee-pol), who has since been known to drag bleeding victims to Ulf and allow the King the last triumph stroke of killing the nearly helpless mortal.

This has infuriated Helgak who has seen Ulf Roar spend more of his time lately with the other Valkyrie.

This anger and jealousy will spill out as the two are captured on the battlefield and then drug into a portal, which was placed there for the Player-Characters to use. The portal takes the Players-Characters and the Valkyries into an unknown cavern within the mountain. The cavern appears natural, with unfinished earthen walls are around. There is a pool in the center of the cavern, fed by a natural spring. But otherwise the cavern is empty and does not appear to have an easy-to-find entrance or exit.



The portal remains open for the Player-Characters and Valkyries to return to the battlefield.

"You," the dark-haired Helgak will say to her sister Valkyrie, even if she is covered by a net or grappled and restrained by the Player-Characters "are like some pitiful, flea-ridden tomcat who drags a dying mouse to his owner, hoping to please him. You are disgraceful, you old, toothless tomcat!"

Any such outburst will be answered by the fair-haired Svipul, who will nearly spit in anger, "Say that on the battlefield, you ragged, blind crow! I will gut you. Gut you! I will take my sword and split you from ....

"You are too slow, you love-struck, witless fool!" Helgak will answer back.

"It wasn't me that turned that woman warrior into a play thing for Ulf, was it Helgak?" Svipul will shoot back. "Where were you on the battlefield today? Hiding as usual. I was searching Helgak. I'm going to take my dagger and blind you first, very slowly tear your ...."

Svipul will shout out, "Let me free and we will see who shall blind who, you old crow! I will show Odin who the fiercest warrior here is!"

Key parts about this scene:

\* The Valkyries have no desire to let Annabel free from the shield, especially Helgak, who sees it as her best way to convince Ulf Roar to return her affection for him.



\* The Valkyries have no fear of death, believing Odin will raise them before the next sunrise. (They are immune to being frightened).

\* Eventually the Player-Characters will learn there is no threat that will convince them to undue the magic ... but is there a temptation. A lust for blood. Valkyries have a desire to fight something that no mortal could stand up to, something even Ulf Roar wouldn't dare challenge – a creature of shadow and death. A creature with terror in its eyes and death in its hands.

"That is," Svipul will say, "if Helgak can leave her mortal love alone for a few hours; she's such a lovestruck, flea-ridden tomcat."

"I'll leave Ulf to raise my blade and I'll get the killing blow, prove myself to be the better of any warrior! Of any Valkyrie!"

The Valkyries will agree to this trade – undoing the shield's magic in return for a chance at this battle – but they must be allowed to fight the creature of shadow and death alongside the Player-Characters.

The Player-Characters are instructed to meet the Valkyries the following day, at a mountainside further north.

## **PART FIVE: Wastelands Temple**

The Valkyries will arrive at the ruins in the northern parts of the Wuthering Wastes before the players. The ruins stretch some distance – close to a half mile - as it once housed a now-lost civilization.

Unknown to the players, the Valkyries have lured a band of Bugbears to the temple in hopes of \_ at least temporarily \_ quenching their blood thirst. The bugbears, however, only number a couple of dozen so the Valkyries also lured a warband of gnolls here as well. The gnolls will arrive second and only after the players begin battling the bugbears. The Valkyries will insist the lower-tier group move into the temple (there is a



secret opening on the second level of the structure) to begin searching for the creature of shadow and death. One Valykrie will go with each tier-level party.

### **HIGHER-TIER**

This party can draw the bugbears and their mounts away from the temple. This battle will last only a round or two before the warband of gnolls arrives from the opposite direction. The gnolls will go after players and bugbears alike and after a short time, will be more than happy to devour the remaining bugbears and allow the players to move into the temple without giving chase.

### **LOWER-TIER**

This group can attempt to stealth onto the second level of the temple – which is built into

the desert's rock formations – and slip past the few bugbears and/or giants that remain.

**INSIDE THE TEMPLE**, here's what they find ...

The ages-old rock that makes up the walls of this massive temple has an infinite number of minute holes, created by the constant, destructive wind. And yet, the remnants of light that poke through these holes are almost instantly extinguished inside the temple. As a result, dim light barely stretches more a few inches into the temple. Even so, it is possible to see the slightest of movements on the rock floor. These movements appear like shifting sand. Gray-skinned humanoids also move about, some carrying and consuming bloody limbs. The air carries a constant stream of gusting winds and undistinguishable whispers.

Once the players get to the temple floor, they will see a pile of what appears to be burnt sand that moves chaotically along the ground, often in different and random directions. It is possible the gusts of winds coming from the holes within the temple walls are moving this burnt sand, or perhaps something else?

Within the temple the player group will come upon a group of ghouls. Some of these ghouls have feasted on a few of the bugbears that found their way inside. The ghouls will resist the players before ultimately one of them approaches the players. Seeing the power the

players yield, the ghoul will attempt to broker a deal with them:

- \* They will tell the players where to find the creature of shadow and darkness – which they would like dealt with anyhow – if they remove another obstacle. The creature of shadow and darkness and the obstacle can not be dealt with by one party, no matter their strength.

- \* If the players balk, the ghoul Khuruq will provide them an antidote to a disease they may picked up in the original fight against the ghouls.

More about the ghouls:

- \* The ghoul who comes to interact with the players is a “servant of the emperor.” His name is Khuruq – (pronounced Ku-rook).

- \* The ghouls believe they are the children of a incredibly powerful ghoul-dragon (his name has been lost to history although the ghouls won't say this);

- \* Their “ever wise and powerful” emperor has waged war on the strongest of their enemies, dark-skinned elves and even demons. These enemies have managed to infiltrate this long-held temple of theirs and now control a prominent room within the temple.

Ultimately, the higher-tier players will face the creature of shadow and death while the lower-tier players will fight a demon of darkness.



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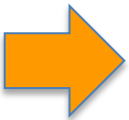
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