



# In the Realm of the Elm King



by Jerimy Grafenstein

*In the Realm of the Elm King* is an adventure for four to six player characters of first and second level, though suggestions to modify it for higher level characters are given. A thief and cleric may prove especially valuable to the completion of the adventure, but creative players should be able to complete the adventure without either class.

## Background

Ten years ago, Helena Bomar, a venerable woman originally from Kalamar, stumbled onto a baby bugbear tied in a filthy rag and left for dead in the briars and thistles of the wooded Legasa Peaks. Helena took the creature home with the intent of raising the 'boy.' On her next trip into the village of Has, she bragged about giving birth to a strapping young boy named Bomari, but the villagers (who considered her merely simple-minded) ignored her claims. She soon returned to her lonely farm, leaving the locals with a humorous tale. If only that was the end of it...

Over the next few weeks, the old woman returned to the village and proceeded to commission a variety of strange items from the blacksmith and carpenter. First was a large cage of iron and oak, along with several sets of chains, shackles and locks, plus farm implements and a large wagon. Rumors soon flew all over the village, but even the local lads who tried (and failed) to peek into the old woman's house never learned what she was doing.

Then, as quickly as it started, it was over. Helena stopped coming into the village, and several of her orders were constructed but never delivered (or paid for!) Most folk assumed the old woman had passed on, but the rumors of her death eventually proved false and the locals were left to wonder what happened. When eventually asked (as an aside to demands of payment), the old woman simply said her child was gone, and that was that.

What they didn't know was that Helena had been keeping the bugbear shackled and caged for months, feeding and caring for the beast as best as she could. As the creature quickly grew, she eventually realized that she could not control him. In fact, she suspected he would kill and eat her the first chance he got. Saddened, she returned the beast to the woods where, luckily, he was too excited about his newfound freedom to think about killing her as he ran east, deeper into the woods.

Helena returned home to her lonely life (having been banished from Has as a debtor), but never forgot her lost 'child.' Likewise, the bugbear never forgot the woman. While he harbored no weak human emotions like love, he felt some gratitude (though he never admitted it aloud) and thus left her unharmed.

In time, Bomari the bugbear rose to renown among the humanoids of the area, whom he subjugated through strength of arms. When a cowering kobold referred to Bomari as his 'king,' the moniker stuck, and the bugbear became known as "*the King of the Woods.*" Later, when several of his minions were

captured by the local humans, they confessed of their allegiance to "*a great king*" in the woods. Lacking a better title, the locals deemed the creature "*the Elm King.*"

A few brave folk attempted to root the Elm King out of the forest, but the bugbear proved too elusive for them. With each passing day, the stories of the Elm King spread, causing an influx of nacent mercenaries hopeful of founding their reputation on the Elm King's capture. None were successful.

As time passed, the Elm King faded into legend and many refused to believe he ever existed. Some thought it was a humanoid hoax intended to inspire fear, while others assumed the language barrier between men and monsters had caused a simple misunderstanding. Others thought the villagefolk invented the rumor in order to bring a small measure of fame and increased revenue to their village.

The humanoids continued to occupy the woods, their presence keeping the occasional tale of the Elm King alive (mostly told over drinks or to scare small children into staying out of the woods), but few believed the beast truly existed.

How wrong they were...

Some months ago, the Elm King took a mate. He hopes she will produce a litter so his legacy can live on, but she refuses to submit to his attentions - unless he first brings her an infant or small child to consume. Thus, Bomari began to visit nearby farms and villages in search of these treats. The disappearances soon raised alarms, and belief in the Elm King is returning although many of the superstitious locals fear to discuss the topic aloud.

## Quick-Start Introduction

GameMasters wishing to jump right into the adventure should read or paraphrase the following text to the players:

Entering the village of Has, you note the simple streamers, ribbons and painted gourds hanging from homes and shopfronts, and other obvious festival decorations, though there is a distinct lack of festivity.

The atmosphere seems muted. Vendors relax in the shade of thatched canopies, beneath which they display their wares. Some call to you, hoping to draw your attention to whatever goods they sell, but most seem content to let you come to them. You see no dancing and hear no song, and people grouped in twos and threes only mutter as you pass, their sad, deadened or suspicious eyes staring back at you.

## Adventure Introduction

The locals normally hold the Festival of Planting this time each year, when they rest and celebrate the work of seeding before the rains and summer heat give life to the crops, and

before the logging season.

The characters haven't missed the festival, but there is little to celebrate. Three weeks ago, two small children disappeared from their homes during the night. Both families and large parties of searchers roamed the hills with little luck, and dispatches for aid were sent to the earl, but with no response. Still, life must go on, so the locals prepared for the festival - and then another child went missing.

Borovar Varano, the father of the last missing child, set out for Frandor's Keep (only about 40 miles away as the crow flies) in desperate hope of enlisting military aid. Unfortunately, he tried to save time by traveling the shorter route up the river along a little-used wilderness trail, and an irate black bear ensured he never arrived at the Keep.

Learning of the kidnappings could take place almost as soon as the characters enter Has, or later on after they've explored a bit. Feel free to let the characters roam around the village of Has and use it as their base of operations over the course of the adventure.

## The Village of Has

Located on the eastern edge of the Kron'd Heights, within the realm of the city-state of P'Bapar, sits the village of Has [hãz]. Has is comprised mostly of small square one-story heavy timber buildings with thatched or shingled roofs. Merchants and vendors generally sell their wares in the open air in front of their homes, underneath extended porches to provide protection from the elements. Visitors to Has find a small village with homes and farms spread among the hills. At first glance it appears the population is actually half of the estimated 720 because of the dispersal of its residents.

The people here are hearty and resilient, persevering through the harsh elements and carving out their meager existence. Most make their living hunting, farming or logging. Onions, carrots and potatoes are the most common crops while rabbits, elk and deer are the most hunted animals. Outsiders are distrusted and viewed with skepticism.

Animal trophies are prevalent in the village and skins hang from the sides of many homes. Fresh meat is readily available and one of the few things that has withstood the rampant inflation of trade goods. Customers lucky enough to find items they want to buy can expect to pay double the list price for goods, with the sole exceptions being meat or fur clothing.

Several named locations are listed below, though you should feel free to add any other minor businesses and NPCs that seems appropriate or needed in the circumstances.

### The Pit

The pit is a large open-air depression covered by a thatched hexagonal roof supported by heavy timbers. Log steps lead downward forming seats that ring a six-sided center. During gatherings or times of emergency the locals gather here to

### Adventure Hooks

Although the adventure takes place in the wilderness on the furthest reaches of Baparan civilization, there are several opportunities to introduce the players to the area.

The village of Vew can serve as a starting point if the PCs have completed the adventure *White Horns, Ivory Palette* there. They may hear news of the missing children while at Green Griffyn Inn and decide to investigate. Vew is only about 50 miles away from Has by road (just under a day on horseback or 2½ days on foot). See the free downloadable adventure *White Palette, Ivory Horns* at [www.kenzerco.com](http://www.kenzerco.com) for more information on Vew.

Frandor's Keep may be a military outpost holding a lonely vigil high in the rocky hinterlands, but nevertheless remains an excellent location for PCs to start from. Characters can travel 100 miles along the borderland road from Frandor's Keep via Vew and Sabden to Has (2 days on horseback or five days on foot). Alternatively, the PCs can take the Old Has Road, which cuts the distance down to 40 miles. However, the PCs may not realize that the trail is considered impeded terrain, and thus slows travel to two days on horseback or four days on foot. Furthermore, PCs traveling this route should face at least one random encounter per day (see the *Frandor's Keep* supplement for appropriate encounters or use the wilderness encounters included in this book).

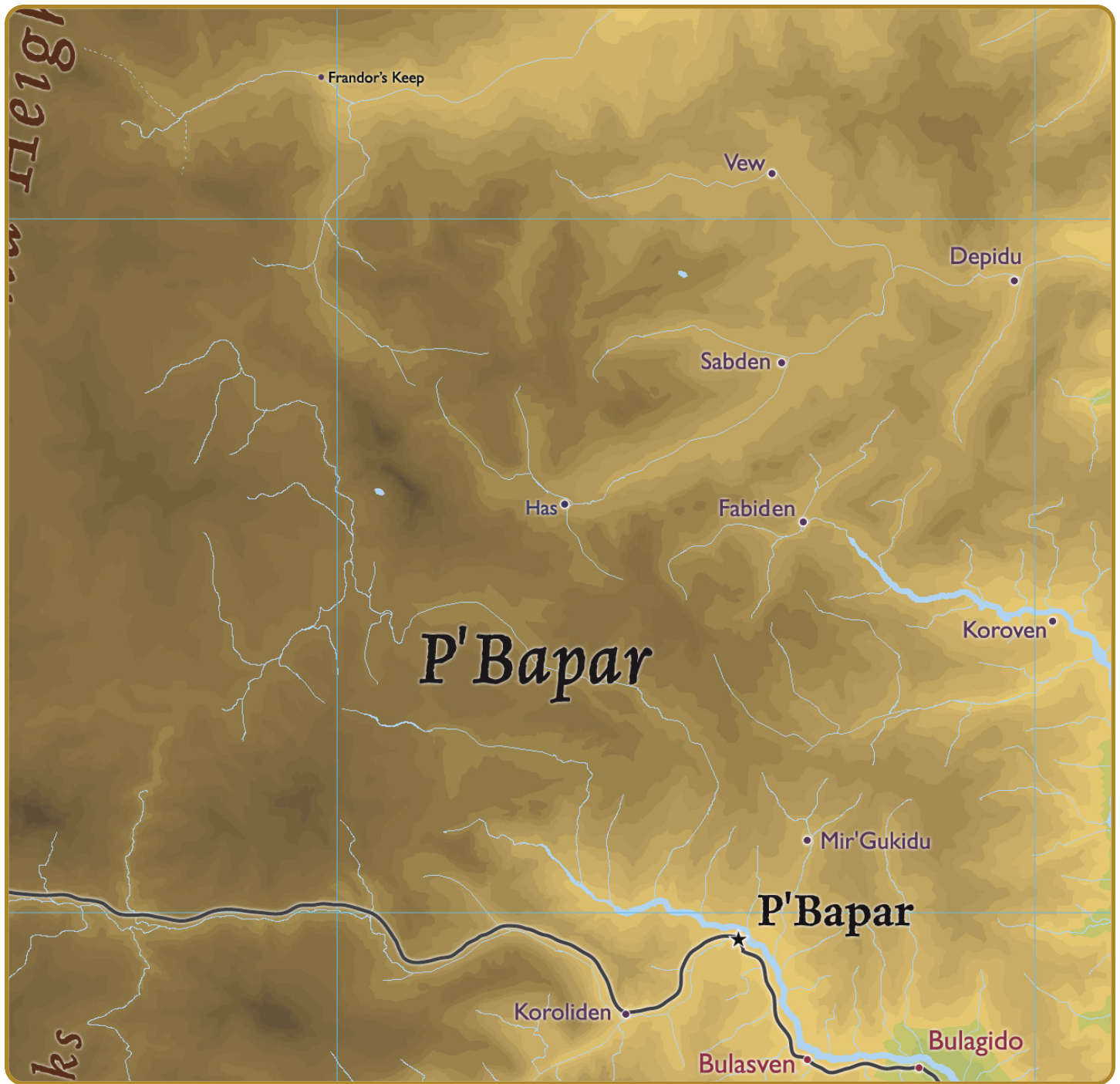
Alternatively, create your own hooks or use any of the following sample ideas to introduce the player characters to the adventure:

- ▶ The discovery of a corpse (Borovar Varano the weaver) in the wilderness near Frandor's Keep, and his letter that begged for Lord Reyifor's aid in recovering (or avenging) stolen children from Has, has inspired the PCs (or gotten them hired) to travel to Has and solve the mystery.
- ▶ As mentioned earlier, Has celebrates an annual Festival of Planting - a traditional time of relaxing and drinking after a long spring of seeding the ground. The festival is a time of relaxation before the logging season begins. It would be logical to assume that local merchants would travel to Has, in order to make a little coin off the revelry and loosened purses the festival could provide. The PCs might be hired on as caravan guards to escort the merchant to Has.
- ▶ The PCs overhear a (no doubt exaggerated) story of the Elm King from a Baparan merchant, loudly telling it over drinks in a tavern. Asking for more information, the PCs learn only that the tale originated in the village of Has. If they want to learn more, they'll have to go there.

speak. The space is also used for communal purposes including duels, disputes and elections.

### The Wolf Den

This is Has' sole inn and tavern, where the locals enjoy drinks or the occasional meal. The taproom of this two-story build-



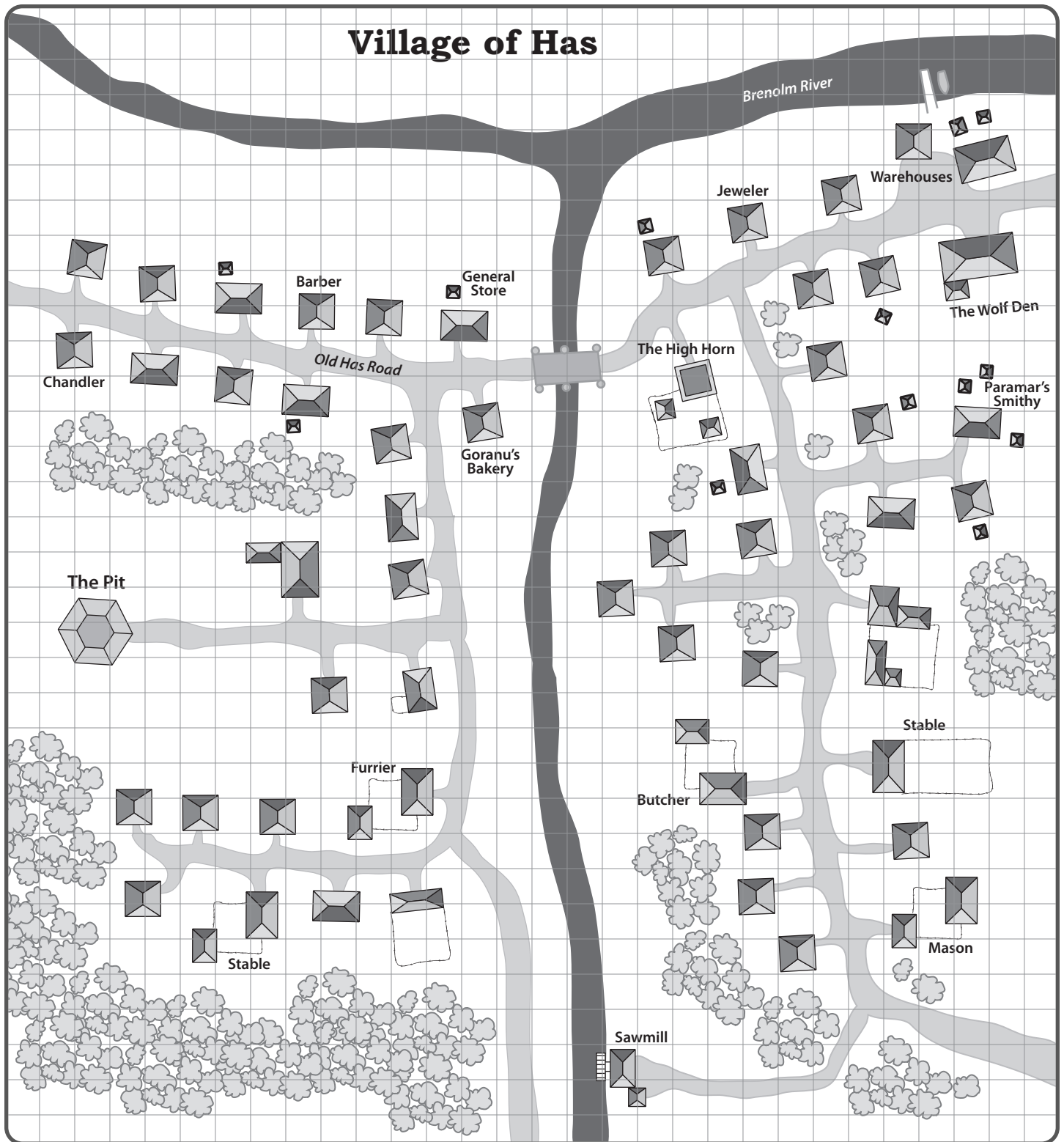
ing is cluttered with tables scattered haphazardly throughout the room. A stone fireplace is opposite the bar, which runs the length of one side. Upstairs are four private rooms for rent, and one larger common room with floor space for up to a dozen people. The larger common room also includes a fireplace.

The Wolf Den offers the following:

- ▶ Mug of beer or ale: 1 cp
- ▶ Meals, per day (whatever is being made, usually roasted meat and vegetables or a stew of sorts): 3 cp
- ▶ Private room: 1 sp/night or 5 sp/week
- ▶ Common room space: 3 cp/night or 15 cp/week

**Mavar Foseter:** Mavar is the proprietor of the Wolf Den. This middle-aged, gray-haired, overweight human has a heavy frame that has only increased in size over the years. His personality is gruff, and he makes sure everyone who drinks in his inn knows who's in charge. He frequently eyes the taproom, eager to put an end to any trouble. Characters can get on his good side by acknowledging the difficulties of his job, praising the Wolf Den, and so on. Mavar seems to know everything going on in the village, and if he likes the PCs he can serve as a good source of information.

**Cho:** Deji wife of Mavar. She is now in her early forties and, like her husband, short and stout. She tends the kitchen.



**Vela:** Vela is the raven-haired 24-year-old daughter of Mavar and Cho. She is a sultry and mouthy serving girl who is aggressive on a good day. She takes no lip from anyone, and her constant scowl makes her seem less attractive than she really is.

**Nelata Bilamo:** This 19-year-old human female serves drinks in the inn. She is red-haired, attractive and shy, and a favorite among the males in the village.

**Fogan Vektor:** This young man cleans the inn and keeps the rooms neat. He lives in the attic and mostly comes out late at night. He doesn't talk much and prefers the quiet night to the bustling day.

**Nolan "Brassbottom" Bodari:** Nolan is a halfling drifter who has fallen on hard times. Abandoned by his former employers (for whom he was working as a torchbearer), Nolan has been struggling to make ends meet while he gathers up his courage to move on. Nolan was wounded in a battle and, not wanting

to wait on him to recover, his employers left him in Has. Nolan is not particularly brave and the thought of walking alone to a new settlement scares him to death. Currently, he relaxes in the Wolf Den, watching as the coins in his purse dwindle, hoping something or someone will come along soon. Nolan offers his services to the characters at the first opportunity. He charges two copper pieces a day for his services, plus food and lodging.

- ▶ A successful opposed Diplomacy, Intimidation or Seduction check vs. Nolan's Resist Persuasion check influences him to drop his rates to 1 cp/day.

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**Mavar Foseter:** N Baparan human male; HP 24, Init +3, Def +2, DR 0, ToP 7 /5; language (Brandobian 43, Merchant's Tongue 55, Baparan 66), listening 44, resist persuasion 27; Quirk foul-mouthed, Flaw prematurely gray

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**Cho:** N Deji human female; HP 22, Init +2, Def +1, DR 0, ToP 6 /5; cooking/baking 56, language (Deji 72, Merchant's Tongue 23), resist persuasion 23; Quirk nosy

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**Vela Foseter:** N Baparan human female; HP 21, Init +1, Def +0, DR 0, ToP 6 /5; language (Baparan 68, Deji 29, Merchant's Tongue 40), resist persuasion 33; Quirk quick-tempered, Flaw allergies (pollen)

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**Nelata Bilamo:** N Baparan human female; HP 22, Init +2, Def +1, DR 0, ToP 6 /5; cooking/baking 23, first aid 13, language (Baparan) 67, resist persuasion 40; Quirk shy (see Frandor's Keep)

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**Fogan Vektor:** N Baparan human male; HP 23, Init +3, Defense +0, DR 0, ToP 6 /6; language (Baparan) 70; laborer; Flaw pocking

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**Nolan "Brassbottom" Bodari:** N halfling male; HP 17, Init +2, Defense +4, DR 0, ToP 5 /5; language (Baparan 67, Merchant's Tongue 48), listening 27, resist persuasion 32, tracking 44; Quirk absent-minded, flaw myopia

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## Paramar's Smithy

Paramar Dafon is the village's blacksmith as well as its leader. His shop is where he takes care of general metalwork and blacksmithing. Paramar is 39 years old, has broad shoulders and a barrel chest, a tangle of red brown hair on his head and a thick beard to match.

Despite his rugged tradesman appearance, he possesses a keen intellect and a lifetime of hard wrought experience living on the frontier. Paramar can answer any general questions the PCs have about the disappearances. He also knows the folk-tale of the Elm King, though he does not believe it and will not volunteer this knowledge unless directly questioned on the subject.

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**Paramar Dafon:** N Baparan human male; HP 25, Init +2, Def +2, DR 0, ToP 7 /7; administration 37, blacksmithing/ metalworking 48, language (Hobgoblin 23, Merchant's Tongue 37, Baparan 72), resist persuasion 48; Quirk fear of heights, Flaw pocking

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## Goranu's Bakery

Goranu Remela runs a bakery specializing in thick, filling rye bread. While many of the locals patronize her shop, she has only lived in the village for a few years, and still isn't entirely trusted as a member of the community.

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**Goranu Remela:** N Baparan human female; HP 22, Init +3, Def +2, DR 0, ToP 6 /5; cooking/baking 67, language (Merchant's Tongue 50, Baparan 70), salesmanship 33; Quirk claustrophobic (see Frandor's Keep)

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See also *A Bump in the Dark* adventure opportunity, below.

## The High Horn

By far the tallest structure in Has, the High Horn is a square three-story building, each floor roughly 20 feet wide, comprised of stone and timber. It once served as a garrison for Baparan soldiers until the influx of treasure hunters during the Great Exploratory Boom so wiped out the local humanoids that the garrison was abandoned. It is now owned by the Varanos, the oldest family in the village and the most prosperous merchants in the village. The art of clothwork has been their business for generations.

The ground floor includes a tailor's and weaver's with a wooden-roofed, fenced in yard out back serving as the rented workshops for the local carpenter and cooper. The second floor contains a hatmaker's, mercer's, and used clothing shop. The third floor contains storage and several cots for use when the Varanos find it easier to go upstairs and collapse into a cot rather than walk home and go to bed.

The latest child to be kidnapped, Ela Varano, is the child of Melana and Borovar the weavers. It is Borovar's corpse that lies in the wilderness between Has and Frandor's Keep (see the sidebar on page 2).

Should the PCs get on Paramar's bad side, they can appeal to the Varanos for aid. As some of the best known people in the village, they have their fingers in many pies, and can provide any information that Paramar can. They are also the ones providing Paramar with any reward money.

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**Sular Varano (tailor):** N Baparan human male; HP 24, Init +3, Def +2, DR 0, ToP 7 /5; administration 31, language (Merchant's Tongue 55, Baparan 71), salesmanship 77; Quirk quick-tempered

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**Melana Varano (weaver):** N Baparan human female; HP 22, Init +2, Def +1, DR 0, ToP 7 /5; language (Baparan 65, Merchant's Tongue 23), salesmanship 30; Quirk nosy, Flaw tone deaf

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**Feledar Varano (mercer):** N Baparan human male; HP 21, Init +2, Def +0, DR 0, ToP 6 /5; language (Baparan 68, Merchant's Tongue 40), salesmanship 28; Quirk glutton

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**Balon Varano (hatmaker):** N Baparan human male; HP 22, Init +3, Def +0, DR 0, ToP 6 /5; language (Baparan) 67, salesmanship 24; Quirk nosy, Flaw allergies (animal dander)

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**Loran Varano (used clothing merchant):** N Baparan human male; HP 22, Init +1, Def +1, DR 0, ToP 6 /5; language (Baparan) 67, salesmanship 32; Quirk greedy, Flaw pocking

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**Maloran Lotis (carpenter):** N Baparan human female; HP 23, Init +1, Def +0, DR 0, ToP 6 /6; carpentry/woodworking 57, language (Baparan) 67; Quirk foul-mouthed, Flaw facial scar

**Takar Mokira (cooper):** N Baparan human male; HP 22, Init +1, Def +1, DR 0, ToP 6 /5, language (Baparan) 71; Quirk miserly, Flaw flatulence

**Apprentices/Assistants (3-12):** N Baparan humans; HP 21, Init +3, Def +0, DR 0, ToP 6 /5, language (Baparan) 68

## Other Locations

Due to its isolation in the hills, Has has few other businesses, though you may assume the following: four warehouses, two stables, a furrier, plus a barber, chandler, butcher, general store and a mason.

## Part One: Arrival

Upon arriving in Has, it should soon be obvious that something is amiss.

▶ Utilizing a successful Current Affairs check (Easy) enlightens characters to the current situation, revealing that a young girl by the name of Ela Varano was whisked away two nights ago.

Most of the locals put the blame on vague humanoid threats, and several of the men claim to have taken up arms and scoured the area searching for the kidnappers. In truth, most of the men are too frightened to venture deep into the woods and spend most of their time along the road to Sabden, questioning the few travelers and looking for too-obvious clues like a child's footprints or clothing.

▶ Once the characters learn of the abduction, they can continue to question the villagefolk or attempt a second Current Affairs skills check (Average, this time). If successful, they learn that Ela Varano was not the first child taken; two young boys named Vanam and Baka disappeared weeks prior.

The easiest way for the characters to become involved in the adventure is to offer their aid in the search to find Ela, or be asked by one of the locals (perhaps the Varano family) to do so. While the people of Has are leery of strangers, they still need all the help they can get if they want to find the children. Search efforts have been ongoing and many have already given up hope.

The characters soon learn that the search effort focuses on the surrounding hills. If they wish to help they are pointed to the west. Few of the search parties have gone too far from the village, partly because they become discouraged when they can't find any clues and partly because they fear becoming victims of the local goblins and kobolds (not that they admit the latter), but all the villagefolk agree that an armed group of 'experienced mercenaries' (*i.e.*, the PCs) might have better luck.

## A Bump in the Dark

**Encounter:** 4 big spiders (50 EPs each)

**Potential Yield:** Dagger +1

**Potential Story Awards:** Eliminating this threat to Has (50 EP)

This encounter takes place in Goranu's Bakery, one of the oldest buildings in the village. You can introduce this encounter at any time while the PCs are in the village, either by having Goranu approach them on the street or letting her ask for help if they enter her shop.

Goranu is a 'new' resident in Has, having moved here only a couple of years ago. Some of the villagefolk have been spreading nasty rumors that she is to blame for the kidnappings, cooking the children and selling them in her meat pies. This may steer the PCs onto a false trail.

Ever since her arrival, she has been hearing scuffling sounds in her cellar. At first she merely assumed it to be rats - until last night, when her dog went missing. She is afraid to venture into the cellar and asks the characters to investigate it for her. She has little to offer in the way of a reward, but she says that her father left her a finely crafted dagger, and if they solve the problem she will give it to them. The weapon is a **Dagger +1**.

**The Cellar.** The cellar can be entered through a set of angled doors on the outside of the bakery. The doors has been broken for months, which allowed several giant spiders to take up residence in the cellar. They are the cause of the scuffling sounds and the reason her dog went missing. The creatures occasionally come out at night and search for food.

When the characters open the cellar doors, read or paraphrase the following text:

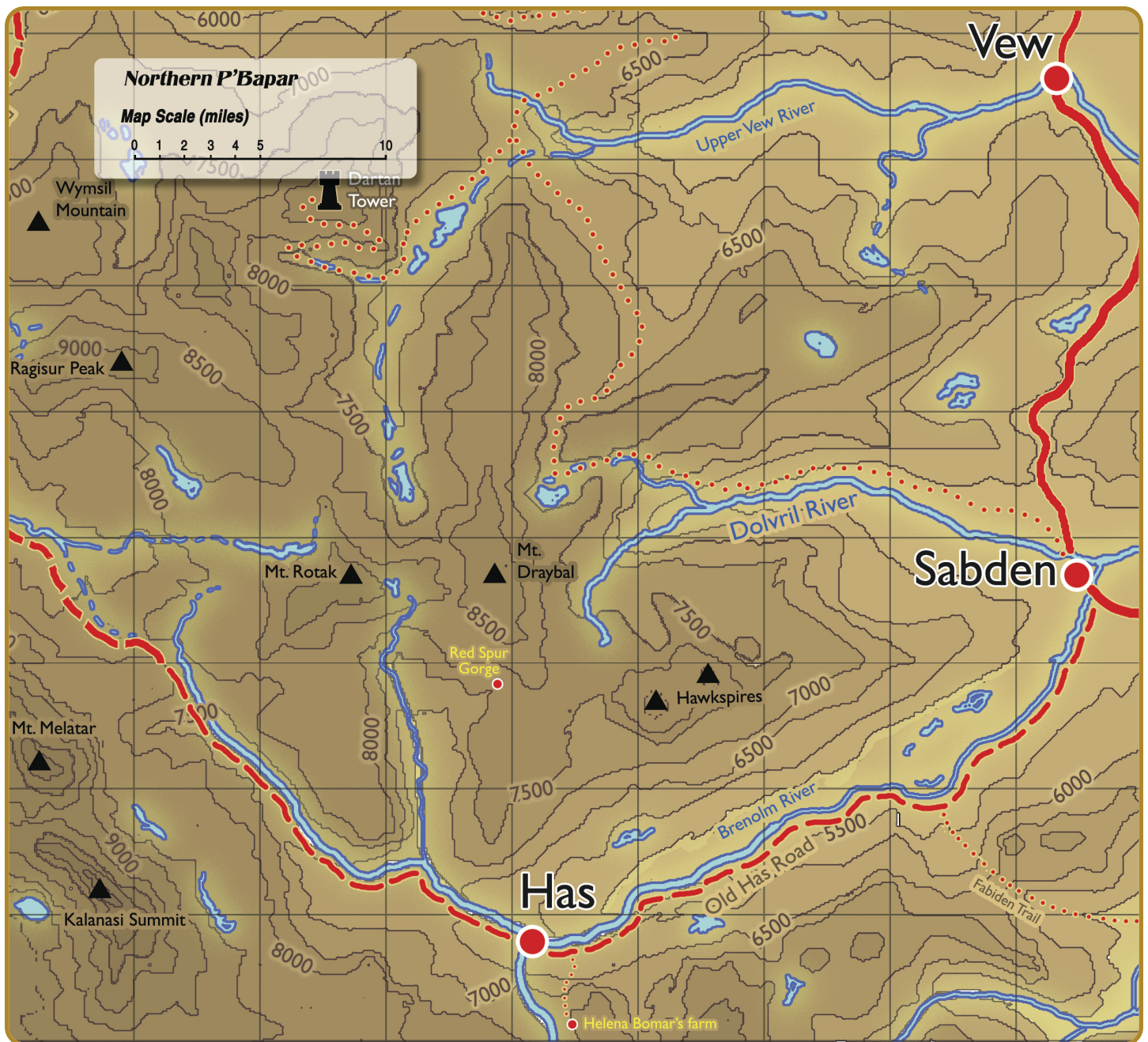
You tug open the wooden doors and see a dusty, cobwebbed set of stairs descending a short distance to a dirt floor. What you can see of the dark, rough-hewn cellar appears empty, save for some small, dusty wooden kegs stacked in one corner.

Two spiders make their home in the dark ceiling corners, while two others lurk inside the old, empty kegs. The cellar is the same size as the building (20' x 20') with a 7 foot high ceiling.

*A battlemap for this encounter is provided at the end of this book.*

**Big Spiders (4):** HP 6 each; Init -4; Spd 10; Rch 2' (short); Atk -2; Dmg 0; SA VF 5 poison; Def +4; DR 2; ToP n/a, Size T; Move 5 ft./sec; EPV 50 each; Notable Skill: hiding 40

**Not the End.** The PCs may wrongly assume that the spiders are the cause of the missing children, and parade the spiders' corpses through the village. In this case, the villagefolk praise the PCs highly (as in the *Conclusion*), though they are saddened that the children have apparently been consumed - bones and all. With their guard down, another child disappears that very



night while the PCs bask in the glow of adoration. The PCs must now suffer the indignity of the villagefolk's slurs and shaming, but may be able to trace the Elm King back to his lair.

- ▶ A successful Tracking skill check (Average) made outside the missing child's open window allows the PCs to start tracking. Determine additional checks as needed (e.g., once every quarter-mile) as the players proceed along the 12 mile journey to the Red Spur Gorge (detailed later in this adventure).

## Wilderness Encounters

This section includes six unique encounters for you to throw at your players. The *When a Body Meets a Body* encounter works best if you use it the first day the PCs explore the woods, though it need not be their very first encounter.

At some point the characters should return to Has, either to seek more information about things discovered in the wilderness, to lick their wounds or to see if anyone else found a clue to the missing children. Once back in the village, proceed to *Part Two: Revelations* (though you may continue to exploit any unused wilderness encounters later).

### 1. Search Party

- Potential Encounter:** 5 armed villagefolk (67 EP each)
- Potential Yield:** leather armor, short swords

The characters encounter a group of armed men from Has searching for the girl. This group, composed of experienced brawlers at The Pit, decided on their own to investigate this area and thus stumble across the characters.



If the PCs spent several hours in the village prior to becoming involved in the search, at least one of the fighting men recognizes them. After conversing with the PCs, they head in another direction to continue the search. They will not accompany the PCs, rightly claiming that two groups can search a larger area than one.

If, however, the characters set out immediately to aid in the search, none of the men recognize them. They are naturally suspicious, demanding to know who the PCs are and what they're doing in the woods.

- ▶ A character with a successful Diplomacy check (Average) can persuade the group that the PCs are there to help with the search. On a failed check, the villagefolk demand that the PCs return with them to the village so they can confirm their story. If the PCs refuse, and the villagefolk outnumber them by two to one, the villagefolk attack, though they allow the PCs to surrender.

If the fighting men win the battle or the PCs surrender, the entire group returns to Has where the characters are presented to Paramar the village leader. Unless the PCs act suspiciously or aggressively, Paramar believes their story and apologizes for the search party's aggressiveness. As noted earlier, he can answer any general questions about the disappearances and he knows the story of the Elm King, though he does not believe it and won't volunteer it as information.

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**Fighting Men:** N Baparan human male fighters 1; HP 28; Init +2; Spd 7 (6 jab); Rch 2'; Atk +2; Dmg 2d6p+1; Def +1; DR 2; ToP 8/6  
Notable Skills: language (Baparan 70), resist persuasion 23  
Equipment: leather armor, short sword, 1d10 cp

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## 2. Giant Centipedes

**Encounter:** 6 giant centipedes (14 EPs each)

A character steps over a fallen tree, grouping of rocks or loose leaves and disturbs a nest of the creatures. The centipedes roll a d8 for Initiative, as they are aware of the characters approaching.

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**Giant Centipedes (6):** HP 3 ea; Init -1; Spd 5; Rch 1' (short); Atk 0; Dmg none; VF 5 poison; Def +1; DR 0; ToP n/a, Size T; Move 5 ft./sec

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## 3. Kobold Raiding Party

**Encounter:** 8 kobolds (17 EPs each)

**Potential Story Award:** Preventing some innocent farmer being killed and thereby creating a new crisis in Has (25 EPs)

While these kobolds are not brave enough to attack a human settlement *en masse* in a daylight assault, they have no qualms about dispatching some clueless travelers in the woods.

- ▶ If a player succeeds at a Tracking skill check (Easy), he detects a trail of disturbed leaves and other foliage, plus any other attributes based on the character's skill mastery. If the

character also determines the age of the tracks (1d4+1 minutes; Average mastery or better required), he is not surprised when encountering the kobolds. The same applies to any other PCs he mentions the age of the tracks to.

If the characters follow the trail, they soon encounter the kobolds standing in a small, roughly circular clearing about 50 feet in diameter. The kobolds are discussing (in their native language) a nighttime raid on an isolated Has cabin to take place in a few days (1d4+1 or as desired). Several kobolds remain on guard.

- ▶ A PC who makes a successful Hiding or Sneaking check (Average) may approach as close as the trees on the very edge of the clearing without being noticed. Moving any closer attracts the kobolds' attention.

If the players attack from the edge of the clearing with ranged weapons or spells, the kobolds retreat until they feel safely out of range. Otherwise, they rush into melee.

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**Kobolds (8):** HP 15 ea; Init 3; Spd 6; Rch 0'; Atk +2; Dmg 2d4p-3 (dagger); Def +4; DR 2; ToP 6/4; Size S; Move 5 ft./sec.

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## 4. Giant Ticks

**Encounter:** 2 giant ticks (67 EP each)

Early summer is prime season for ticks, and that includes the giant variety as well. Sensing fresh blood, two giant ticks spring from the trees or grass and attack.

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**Giant Ticks (2):** HP 28 ea; Init 3; Spd 16; Rch 1' (short); Atk +5; Dmg 2d4p (plus subsequent d4p blood drain every 10 seconds attached); Def 0; DR 4; ToP n/a; Size S; Move 5 ft./sec.

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## 5. When a Body Meets a Body

**Potential Yield:** 1 mess kit, 1 whetstone, 1 wineskin, 1 flint and steel, 1 piece of chalk, 1 woolen blanket, 1 dagger, 2 sp, 7 cp and a grubby, stained piece of crumpled parchment.

**Potential Story Award:** Confirming with relative certainty that the Elm King is real by translating the letter (or having it translated): 100 EP

Through sheer luck, the characters eventually stumble upon the deteriorating corpse of a goblin scout - once an emissary and scout for the goblin leader operating near Frandor's Keep (see the *Mine of the Goblin King* adventure opportunity in that supplement). Having heard rumors that a being called the Elm King had several bands of humanoids paying him tribute, the goblin 'king' sent a few well-equipped scouts into the area in order to learn more about the Elm King's power and what territory he claims.

One of the goblin scouts carried a false message of friendship to the Elm King in case they were discovered in his lands, although the goblin leader sees him only as a future threat to

the expansion of the goblin ‘kingdom.’

While searching the area, however, the evil goblins were unfortunate enough to harrass a rather large black bear. During the subsequent fight, this particular goblin stumbled over the edge of the rocky rise and fell to his death. He has been dead for two weeks and most of his exposed flesh has been picked clean by carrion feeders.

When you want to introduce this encounter, read or paraphrase the following text.

- ▶ You may also want to require an Observation check (Easy) for the characters.

Among the tall pines and scant undergrowth you spot a glint of light on metal some distance away. Cautiously, you approach a rocky area where the trees thin and the ground sharply descends down a rugged, rocky hill. At the top of the slope you discover the remnants of a sword, the top half sheared off. As you are investigating it, your attention is drawn down the hill. Fifty feet below you, perched on a rocky shelf, you see what appears to be the body of a small human or similar creature.

To make matters worse, the ridgeline extends for a distance in either direction. Unless the characters want to spend an hour walking down the ridgeline, then another hour to get back, only to be faced with a 30 foot climb, they’ll need to climb down the cliff.

- ▶ A successful Climbing/Rappelling check (Average without rope, or Easy with rope) is required to reach the body. Don’t forget that the character needs to succeed at a second check to climb back up!

If the characters search the body, they discover that the goblin corpse still has a pack slung across its right shoulder. A small shield is strapped to its left arm and an empty short sword scabbard is attached to its belt. Its clothing and bags are bloody and a quick inspection indicates that its head is crushed. Its right leg is situated at an awkward angle and appears to have been broken as well.

Inside the bag is a mess kit, whetstone, wineskin, flint and steel, chalk, woolen blanket, a dagger, 2 sp, 7 cp and a grubby, stained piece of crumpled parchment.

- ▶ The text on the parchment is written in a coarse dialect of Hobgoblin, and requires a successful Literacy (Hobgoblin) check (Average) to decipher.

Secretly read or paraphrase the following text to the player(s) whose character can read the letter. Roughly translated, it reads thus:

Great King of Trees,

Long time my kingdom seeks friends against humans and when your stories reach us we seek you out. We share enemies now and want to talk more about this. Head scout can do more talking of my words to you.

King of Goblins

More than likely this letter will mean little to characters that have not already encountered the goblin ‘king’ in *Frاندor’s Keep*.

- ▶ Characters may attempt a Current Affairs check (Difficult) at this time. Success indicates that the character remembers a folktale of a mysterious man or creature called the Elm King. Rumor had it that he led a rag tag band of humanoids and for some time was considered a threat in the area. All attempts to destroy the Elm King failed and he faded from memory as quickly as he came to power.

Asking around in Has reveals that Paramar knows a little bit of the Hobgoblin tongue.

## 6. Lost in the Woods

**Potential Yield:** First Aid provider

The characters encounter Talus Somar, a middle-aged Baparan herbalist from Sabden who became lost in the woods. Talus claims to have been heading to Has to attend the Festival of Planting when he left the trail to catalog some plants and became lost in the woods. In truth, Talus was chased off the road by “a vile monster too terrible to even describe” (a large rat) and since lost his way.

After stumbling upon the characters, he nervously approaches them, hoping for assistance. Talus is deathly afraid to die alone in the woods and attempts to attach himself to the characters hoping they can lead him to Has. If the characters explain they are searching for missing children, Talus offers his assistance, not because he is concerned for the child but because he doesn’t wish to be left alone.

If the party is in need of healing, Talus can provide First Aid.

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**Talus Somar:** N Baparan human male; HP 22; Init +2; Def +0; DR 0; ToP 7 /5; botany 60, first aid 51, language (Merchant’s Tongue 32, Baparan 73); Quirk animal phobia (rodents)

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## PART TWO: Revelations

Asking the locals about the Elm King draws a slightly nervous response from superstitious locals, or an angry one from others (touchy about the fact that they didn’t pursue this line of inquiry out of fear for their own safety). Anyone asked immediately demands to know why the characters are interested in the Elm King. Word spreads quickly through the village and Paramar is notified of the characters’ inquiries. If the charac-

ters have not previously met the large blacksmith, he introduces himself and asks the meaning of their questions.

If presented with the goblin letter (see the *When a Body Meets a Body* adventure opportunity), Paramar can translate it for the PCs, if they have not done so already. Most likely the characters have several questions and Paramar does his best to answer them, though he expresses his disbelief of the old folktale. Paramar refuses to share information with any characters in Dishonor and asks that they leave his presence during this time.

**Below are some of the most common questions the characters may ask along with Paramar's responses:**

**Q:** Who is the 'King of Goblins?' mentioned in the letter?

**A:** "I know of no 'goblin king,' but there are many goblins in the surrounding wilderness. If there is such a creature, perhaps some bounty hunters residing in the area around Frandor's Keep would know more."

**Q:** Who, or what, is the Elm King/King of Trees?

**A:** "The Elm King? It is a folktale, nothing more. Still, I suppose I may tell you the story. There is not much to it. Simply put, several years ago, a mountain man was said to have rallied the humanoids together into a fearsome war band. This is the man who came to be known as the Elm King. For some time, the people of Has and even those in Sabden to the northwest believed an attack was imminent, yet it never came.

*Neither the few brave young local men nor the lone treasure hunters who braved the wilderness in hopes of killing or capturing the Elm King were successful in even catching sight of him. Their only battles were with the local kobolds in the woods.*

*Naturally, as the imagined danger grew more distant, the whispers and rumors began to die away and the forays into the woods ceased. No one ever bore witness to this 'Elm King' and I have never seen or heard of any proof that he ever actually existed."*

**Q:** Is there anyone else who would know more about the Elm King?

**A:** "Perhaps. A few people whispered that an old witch who dwelt nearby was actually the mother of the man. Some say she has intimate knowledge of the story and may in fact be its inventor."

**Q:** Can you tell us more about this old witch?

**A:** "I believe her name was Helena. Helena... Bomar, perhaps. She was a strange woman who hailed from another land and came here many years ago. I suppose it may have been as much as ten years ago that she claimed to have born a son named Bomari. She was always bragging about his strength and handsome good looks, but one day she said nothing more about him. When the local youths, in their high spirits, asked her why she stopped bragging on her precious son, she simply said he was gone.

*The timing of the disappearance of her child and the rise of the Elm King led many to believe that they were in fact one and the*

*same. Perhaps whoever kidnapped the children had something to do with the disappearance of her son, though ten years seems to me a long time to wait between victims."*

**Q:** Where can we find the old witch Helena?

**A:** "She used to come into the village to trade a few times but I haven't seen her, or heard of anyone who has, in a long time. She may be dead now. The villagefolk here fear the old woman's magic still lingers in her house and will not approach for fear of being cursed. Still, if you must go, walk along the old southern hunting trail for about three miles and you should see her cabin on a ridge."

**Q:** Did the search parties find any new clues to any of the missing children?

**A:** "No, we are running out of hope. The parents of the last child taken along with some of the other villagefolk, including myself and the parents of the other children, are willing to offer a reward to whomever finds any of them. I cannot promise much but whatever we can afford - some coins, some food and some equipment you may find helpful - is yours. Mavar, the owner of the Wolf Den, told me that he can offer free room and board there while you search."

**Q:** We encountered kobolds in the woods. Could this have something to do with the Elm King?

**A:** "The stories say that kobolds served the Elm King, but that is all I know. More than likely their appearance was a coincidence, but if you think they are somehow involved then I suggest you start your search there."

You may have Paramar answer any other questions the characters may have, within the limits of what an average village man would know or believe.

## The Witch on the Hill

**Potential Yield:** Puzzle Box (100 or 120 sp)

**Potential Story Awards:**

- ▶ Solving the puzzle box (80 EPs)
- ▶ Learning of Bomari's location (100 EPs)

At some point the characters should seek out Helena Bomar to investigate the claims about the possibility her son is either the Elm King or his disappearance is connected to the recent loss of the children in the village. Her home is located several hours walk from the village on an old hunting trail that most of the men now avoid.

The old lady has a reputation in the area of being not only a witch but also a supernatural being. She has lived in the same house for decades and most assume her life has been extended by the use of dark magic, but in fact she is merely descended from a line of long-lived ancestors.

Helena lives on a small farm now long overgrown; her plot of land is thick with rotted crops from the year before. Helena usually makes enough effort to plant her crops in the spring

but rarely harvests her land. Instead she plucks the vegetables she needs when they are ripe and leaves the rest to rot. Her home is a simple square one-story cabin comprised of heavy timbers.

Now nearly 90 years of age, Helena is a conniving and utterly evil old woman, delighting in the misery of others. As the years have worn on the woman has become somewhat insane. She fears nothing and views the arrival of the characters as a chance to take care of long overdue tasks she is unable to finish (on account of her age and lack of motor skills).

As the characters arrive at Helena's farm, read or paraphrase the following text.

The rugged hunting trail winds up and over the rocky terrain, through tall pines and knotted oaks before it splits. One portion of the trail continues on into the hills but the other path, overgrown with weeds and roots, winds down into a small valley. From your vantage point on the hill you can see a small home sitting on a ridge in the woods some distance away. You set off through the trees and eventually emerge at a large clearing surrounded by the forest.

The trail ends at the bottom of the overgrown hill, seemingly overcome with rotting vegetation. Weeds and twisted vines dominate one side of the hill, overgrown with neglect, but what draws your attention are the dozens - perhaps hundreds - of rotten pumpkins covering the ground. Flies and maggots buzz noisily around the gourds, and the stink nearly makes you retch.

At the top of the hill sits a squat wooden cabin comprised of logs with a thatched roof. A trickle of smoke wafts from the fieldstone chimney suggesting that someone is alive and well inside.

Helena is not expecting the characters and may not hear them when they arrive. She is inside relaxing and unless they make a considerable amount of noise or knock on the door, she is oblivious to their arrival.

► Make an appropriate Listening check for Helena.

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**Helena Bomar:** NE Kalamaran human female; HP 15; Init +11; Def -4; DR 0; ToP 5/2; arcane lore 12, botany 16, listening 13, resist persuasion 30, language (Baparan 58, Kalamaran 74); 0 EPs

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The old woman has little interest in visitors and demands to know what they want. If a PC mentions the name Bomari it instantly draws her attention and she welcomes them inside her home to speak about her son. It has been years since she has seen her 'boy' and she revels in the small chance to brag about him. Helena is very aware that the local kobolds follow her 'son' and she is in fact quite proud of the fact.

While the kobolds of the forests avoid the village, they had

in years past scouted the old woman's farm with the intent to raid it. The presence of the large bugbear (even when it was a child) was enough to deter them. When Bomari was set free and rose to prominence among the humanoids of the forest, the kobolds who began to worship him sought out Helena to give praise to the woman who raised their king. It has been many years since she was visited by the kobolds, but she learned of their dedication to the creature and more importantly where he made his lair. Of course, she won't willingly share this information with anyone who means her boy harm. Helena may be slightly insane, but she knows how the people of Has would treat her boy if they discovered his location.

Upon arriving at the house and meeting Helena, read the following to the players.

The old woman that answers the door seems ancient. Her face is covered by thin leathery skin cracked and wrinkled from years of age. Sunken brown eyes peer out at you and her broken yellow teeth reek of rot. Gnarled fingers hold the door open wide, allowing the breeze to blow her wispy white hair around as she peers out from the cabin door.

Pungent odors linger in the air and the one-room building is cluttered to the point of making movement inside difficult. Through the wide open door, you can see two large tables dominating the space, both covered with various clay pots and jars. A metal cooking pot hangs in the fireplace and a small cot rests against the far left wall. Rags, blankets, and clothing rest in fetid piles in several places and small insects and rats scurry over every available surface. There is so little room you are forced to stand in the doorway or outside while you talk to the old witch.

After a moment of inspection the old woman cackles a bitter laugh and speaks in a raspy voice.

*"What is it you want? No potions today!"*

When the characters first arrive, Helena treats them as trespassers. After inquiring about Bomari, she warms to them to some extent. Once it becomes clear that the characters are seeking Bomari, the old witch demands to know why they want to find him. Helena may be old but she is crafty enough to know that the characters need her more than she needs them. Still, she can be persuaded to tell them what they need to know.

Helena knows nothing of the abductions and, if asked what happened to her son or if the boy was abducted, she cackles and simply says that "he left" giving no further explanation. Asking where the boy is now only elicits laughter and responses such as "You'd like to know, eh?" or "I cannot tell you". There are only two ways to successfully learn the location of Bomari's lair.

After talking to the old woman the characters should get the

impression she considers herself somewhat of an herbalist and potion-maker. In fact, she is terrible at both. While in her younger years she studied magic, but has since long forgotten how to perform the arcane arts. This doesn't prevent her from experimenting with potion-making, however. When Bomari was an infant she was convinced she could successfully sway the bugbear's attitude with the right potion, forcing the beast to be loyal to her. It was one of these errant concoctions that actually made Bomari sterile and unable to produce children.

Still, the old woman feels as if she is an accomplished potion-maker. Recently, she's been experimenting with the idea of extending her fading life with a potion. Since most of her creations are devised by herself, the likelihood of her succeeding is minimal at best. Still, in order for her to attempt this task she must find a freshly deceased human corpse. At her age she doesn't possess the means to accomplish this task, but if the characters agree to provide her with a human corpse no more than four days old, she tells them the location of her son.

Of course, acquiring a body could prove difficult. The residents of Has routinely cremate their dead or, in more rare cases, bury them in a stone cairn. Bringing this request to Paramar does not elicit a positive response and he adamantly refuses to give the woman what she asks. If, for some reason, the characters discuss this with Paramar then steal away with a corpse, Paramar assumes they are the body snatchers. He will be furious with them, banish them from the village and refuse to render any aid to the group.

The second (and more likely) way for the characters to discover the location of her son is to solve the woman's puzzle box. Helena is hesitant to suggest this method, preferring the corpse, but if pressed for any other way she reluctantly mentions the 'impossible' puzzle box.

Nearly a century ago, Helena fled her native home of Bet Kalamar (the capital of the Kalamaran empire) after stealing a precious puzzle box from the noble woman whom she served as a nanny. Fearing for her life, she fled to P'Bapar, hoping the contents of the box would ensure she was wealthy enough to retire. Helena believed that the noble woman's most precious item was contained within the box - a fragile jewel that she could sell for countless amounts of gold. Unfortunately, when attempting to open the box to sell the contents she discovered something terrible in the process. The puzzle was infuriatingly complex, and she has been unable to solve the mechanism to get at the contents inside. She fears breaking the box open would destroy whatever valuables are inside. If somehow the characters can open the box for her and finally reveal the treasure inside, she reluctantly tells them the location of her son.

Helena is slightly mad, and intimidation or threats of violence only strengthen her resolve. She cannot be swayed in this manner. Worse, any character that attacks the woman is in for a shock. In her advanced age, the woman has neither the inclination nor the ability to defend herself. If she is killed, the characters can still locate the Red Spur Rock (detailed further

on), but the task become far more difficult requiring sheer luck or the process of elimination.

**GM's Note:** Helena is not entirely in her right mind. Having lived much longer than she ever thought the old woman is a bit insane. As such, she **never** refers to Bomari as a creature or bugbear but always a boy or a man. If anyone ever were to insinuate that he was anything but a human she flies into a rage.

## The Puzzle Box

*A visual image of the puzzle box is included at the end of this book as a Player Aid.*

Forged from iron, the puzzle box has a rich maple veneer carved with images of woodland scenes on each of its four sides. The box is 11 inches long, 5 inches wide, and 3 inches thick. It appears to be a solid mass of wood but in fact it can be opened.

On the top of the box are four rows of wooden buttons. Each row contains ten buttons painted in alternating colors of green and red, the color long faded and dull but still discernible. Helena has no idea how the box works other than that the right combination of buttons must be pushed in order for the box to open. What she doesn't know is that the box itself contains the clues to open it.

In its most simple form, the colors of the buttons stand for wood and iron (green and red respectively). Two buttons must be pushed in each row to open the box. It matters not which row you start nor which order the buttons are pushed in. The box is oriented so that the front face provides clues to the bottom row, the left side the second row up, the back face the top row and the right side the third row up.

### The Clues.

The front face of the box provides the clues to the bottom row. Careful observation of the box shows ten small woodland creatures foraging for food. Squirrels, chipmunks, and rabbits carry off acorns or nibble on grass. The eighth squirrel, however, is not carrying a nut but instead hoists a steel coin. This means that the eighth (green) and ninth (red) button must be pushed (in that order).

The left side of the box provides clues to the third row from the top. This face contains a large oak tree that has dropped leaves onto the ground. A young girl is raking the leaves together. The iron rake touches the third leaf indicating that the third (red) button must be pushed in first then the fourth (green).

The right side indicates which buttons need to be pushed on the third row up. Here, men drive a large bear with a spear. There are five men with spears. The first man on the left wears metal armor and carries a shield, appearing to be the leader. He represents the first (red) button. Above, five stars look down on the scene, the one to the farthest right being larger than the rest indicating the green button to be pushed.

The rear face of the box corresponds to the top row of the box. On it, nine satyrs dance and sing at a large fire. The fire is in the sixth (red) spot and one satyr drinks from a horn refusing to dance in the ninth (green) spot.

- ▶ A character inspecting any face may make a Riddling check (Easy) in order to discover the clues on that face.

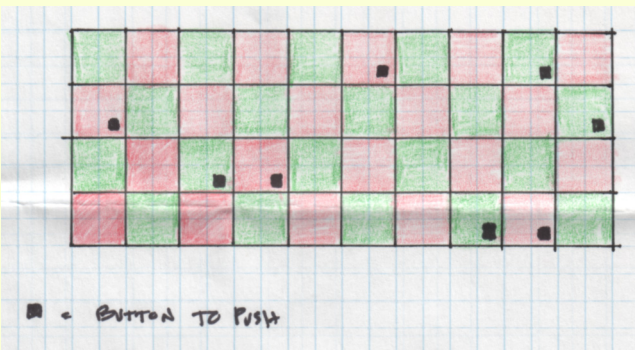
In summary, the buttons to be pushed (from top to bottom) are as follows.

**Row 1 (top):** 6th (red) and 9th (green)

**Row 2:** 1st (red) and 10th (green)

**Row 3:** 3rd (red) and 4th (green)

**Row 4 (bottom):** 8th (green) and 9th (red)



It is possible that the characters are simply too befuddled to solve the box, or that they dismissed Riddling as a worthless skill to take. If this is the case, you may opt to give them a hint (bearing in mind that your rep as a staunch GM is now compromised!) Characters still unable to solve the puzzle will actually spark some latent creativity in Helena's head and she finally makes the connection instead. In that case, she quickly tries to get the players to go away so she can open the box herself, even going so far as to tell them where to find Bomari.

Once the box is opened, Helena attempts to snatch it away as quickly as possible (though given her advanced age and arthritis this adverb must be taken in context). She gives the characters what they want and tries to get them away so she can finally see what's inside. Anyone who prevents Helena from taking the box angers the old woman and she refuses to reveal the location of her son until she has the box in her hand. Attempting to open the box angers her even more (and sets off the small trap inside).

The trap releases vinegar from a small vial, destroying the contents inside.

- ▶ This trap can be detected in advance with a successful Identify Trap check and disarmed with a successful Disarm Trap.

Anyone lucky enough to actually get inside the box may be disappointed to discover a folded letter written in High

Kalamaran. This is a letter of adoration from a former lover of the noblewoman Helena used to serve. She feared the letter would be discovered by her husband and hid it in the box.

- ▶ The letter requires a character with at least Advanced mastery of the Literacy (Kalamaran) skill to read it. A character with Average mastery can pick out many of the words and get the general gist.

While the letter is worthless, the box would fetch a sum of 10 or more gold pieces to the right buyer in a large city. Such an item would generate interest and word would eventually filter to Kalamar (though it would take some time). Even so many years later, the noblewoman and/or members of her family might still be around.

## The Red Spur

Once the characters deliver a fresh corpse or decipher the puzzle box, Helena tells them where her son resides. Helena doesn't elaborate on this information or how she knows it. Her biggest concern is to remove the characters from her home once she has what she wants.

The old woman looks at you grudgingly and says

*"To the north of Has is a once sacred place. A bloody red spur or stone marks it. There you will find my boy. The men in the town should know it well. They can help you find it.*

*Shoo, shoo! I've told you what you want to know now go."*

## PART THREE: Against the Elm King

Upon returning to Has, the characters should possess a clear direction as to where they need to go in order to investigate claims about the Elm King and see if there is a link between him and the abductions. Paramar is interested to hear what they have discovered and the characters need to find out more about the "Red Spur."

Paramar can tell the characters that the Red Spur is a large protrusion of rock that juts up at an eighty-degree angle nearly a hundred feet into the air, some miles to the north. Long ago, the early settlers of the region thought the place sacred, but few go there now. The area around the spur is rugged terrain riddled with gullies and small rocky gorges and valleys. Worse, kobolds run free in the area and despite efforts to drive them out they keep returning. Paramar has never been to the Red Spur, but he knows the history of it and how to get there.

Paramar admits that the area would be an ideal hiding place for this Elm King, if he existed. He also thinks that it would be extremely dangerous to venture into. Most of the people of Has avoid that area because of the kobold activity. If the characters are brave enough to venture into the region to search for

the children, Paramar is willing to lend them what aid he can.

He has two **Minor Healing Potions** he gives to the group if they show an interest into exploring the Red Spur. Anyone who takes the potions becomes Honor bound to accept the task of searching the gorge (whether he knows it or not). Taking the potions but not searching the gorge should negatively impact the character's personal honor reward for this adventure.

If asked about the area, Paramar can tell the characters the following.

Paramar rubs his chin as he ponders aloud.

*"The Red Spur is a pinnacle of stone that rises high into the air. As I recall its tale, early settlers considered the site sacred and gifts to the Great Huntress were often brought to it. Weddings and ceremonies of importance were also performed there.*

*As the years wore on people spent less time in the woods, settling in towns nearby. While some still considered the site to be a holy place, few others traveled there. Then, decades ago, kobolds and other monstrous beings took up residence in the area and trips to the spur stopped altogether.*

*To find the spur you must travel north up the river valley for perhaps a dozen miles or so. Simply keep your eyes open and you should spot it easily."*

Paramar cannot lend any more aid to the characters in their journey, and encourages the characters to leave immediately. Some characters may ask for aid from the villagefolk, to which Paramar replies.

*"I cannot spare any more men to search that area. Most of the villagefolk are not fighting men, and sending them to the gorge could be suicide. As well, I am not convinced this Elm King exists or that he has anything to do with the abductions. I support your search of the area but I will not send my own men in there to be slaughtered by kobolds or worse."*

Paramar makes no apologies for this. Outsiders are less valuable to him and the characters have so far done little to prove they have the best interests of the village at heart. Still, he is willing to support them with the potions and reward them if the children are recovered. After speaking with Paramar, the characters should make for the Red Spur gorge and seek out the Elm King.

## To the Gorge

The gorge is only about 10 miles due north of Has, but over steep hills and through dense undergrowth. Thus, walking to

the Red Spur takes about a day and a half, while riding on horse or pony gets the PCs there no faster.

Towards the end of the trip, travelers who head towards the spur can see the large spire of reddish rock through the trees and should be able to navigate their way there with little effort. While traveling towards the gorge, you should roll random encounters every two hours on the table below. Each encounter only happens once. If rolled a second time, re-roll.

## Random Wilderness Encounters

### 1) Kobold Patrol

**Encounter:** 6 kobolds (17 EPs each)

A kobold patrol stumbles across the characters. The creatures boldly attack until half of their number are slain. After that they retreat... far less boldly.

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**Kobolds (6):** HP 15 ea; Init 3; Spd 6; Rch 0'; Atk +2; Dmg 2d4p-3; Def +8; DR 2; ToP 6 /4; Size S; Move 5 ft./sec.; Equipment shoddy dagger and small wicker shield

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### 2) Bear Corpse

**Potential Story Award:** Discovering kobold trail (50 EP)

The characters discover the carcass of a black bear.

A band of eight kobolds encountered the beast already grievously wounded from a fight with another bear upon whose territory it had encroached. They killed, gutted, and skinned it for food leaving whatever they could not carry away to rot.

▶ There is nothing of value here, but any character making an average difficulty Tracking check learns about the presence of the kobolds - in particular, which direction they went in. This reduces by two hours the characters journey to the spur as they have a clear trail to follow for some time, after which the trail is lost.

### 3) Wolves

**Encounter:** 2 wolves (84 EPs each)

The characters encounter 2 wolves. These beasts are starving, and desperate enough to attack the party.

---

**Wolves (2):** HP 30 ea; Init -2; Spd 10; Rch short; Atk +3; Dmg 2d4p+2; Def +3; DR 2; ToP 12 /10; Size M; Move 20 ft./sec.

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### 4) Striges

**Encounter:** 2 strix (67 EPs each)

A pair of strix spots the characters and attempts to make lunch of them.

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**Striges (2):** HP 15 ea; Init -1; Spd 10; Rch short; Atk +7; Dmg 1d3p + blood sucking (1d4p/10 sec); Def +1; DR 0; ToP 10 /5; Size T; Move 20 ft./sec. (flying), 1 ft./sec. (ground)

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## 5) Kobold Foragers

Characters encounter 4 kobolds foraging for berries and roots. These creatures have little desire to fight because they are somewhat unprepared. They attempt to flee upon seeing humans, but defend themselves if attacked.

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**Kobolds (4):** HP 15 ea; Init 3; Spd 6; Rch 0'; Atk +2; Dmg 2d4p-3; Def +2; DR 2; ToP 6 /4; Size S; Move 5 ft./sec.; Equipment shoddy dagger, wicker basket

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## 6) Black Bear

**Encounter:** black bear (417 EPs)

**Potential Story Award:** avoiding the bear (20 EP)

The PCs spot a large black bear some distance off. The creature seems to be searching for food. It has little desire to engage the players. Unless approached and provoked, the bear leaves them alone. A bear will be a difficult challenge for a party of inexperienced characters, and those stupid enough to attack it probably won't make the same mistake again with the new characters they roll up.

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**Black Bear:** HP 51; Init -1; Spd 4; Rch short; Atk +8; Dmg 2d6p+4; Def -1; DR 9; ToP 20 /11; Size L; Move 20 ft./sec.; EPV 417

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## Red Spur Gorge

After a day of travel through the rough terrain, the characters spy a rocky rise of red stone some distance off through the trees. After locating the spire, it's a simple enough matter to find the spur sitting on a large ridge of stone. The gorge, an open air split canyon, runs to the base of it. Generally speaking, the gorge is at least 20 feet above the character's heads. The ground rises as it approaches the spire.

The spur at the top of the gorge is the old sacred site. It is a wide, open area in front before a small cave slices under the spire of rock. Small tunnels (too large for a Medium creature to access without crawling) crisscross through the canyon, with the larger cave at the top serving as Bomari's lair.

The kobolds live in the small caves that twist in and out of the gorge, and aren't expecting any sort of attack on their lair. Traversing through the gorge, however, draws their attention - and it is virtually impossible to sneak through the gorge without the kobolds finding out. Anyone who is dumb enough to attempt such an endeavor is spotted at some point and attacked.

The kobolds have never been threatened in their lair and the presence of the bugbear has been enough of a deterrent (in their eyes) to prevent any sort of attack. As a result, they have little in the way of defenses or strategy to defend their lair. Once combat breaks out, the kobolds dart in and out of the tunnels, causing confusion. This allows them to cycle in fresh bodies and harass the characters.

It's important to keep track of the number of kobolds the characters kill during their assault(s) on the lair. Once the kobolds are reduced to less than eight of their number, they stay in the tunnels watching the characters but not engaging them. (It may be that the PCs are forced to retreat from the gorge and lick their wounds, returning at a later date. In that eventuality, the kobolds do their best to set up some sort of defenses or traps in case the characters return.)

Under no circumstances do the kobolds pursue the characters past the 'shrine' (Area 6) unless Bomari fares extremely poorly in the first few rounds of combat. They consider the rock spire (Area 7) to be a sacred location and know that it is generally a bad idea to disturb the Elm King. Bomari harbors little affection for the kobolds, and getting too close to the bugbear could mean instant death for them. Regardless of what the characters do, the kobolds are more afraid of Bomari than they ever will be of the party.

## The Kobolds

All in all, 24 kobolds make their home in the gorge. It would be fairly easy to simply overwhelm the characters with sheer numbers, but you should resist this unless actually want a quick end to the adventure. Not all the kobolds are present in the canyon at all times, of course; some are out foraging for food, raiding or simply exploring the woods.

After the PCs first battle with the kobolds (wherever that may be), the kobolds dart into the small tunnels waiting to spring out and ambush the characters as they move through the gorge. Each area should be treated as a potential combat encounter, and it's up to you to determine when and where the kobolds spring forth from the tunnels to attack.

Note that kobold wooden spears are merely sharpened sticks 7½ feet long that are only functional for one battle. Kobold wicker shields are also worthless after one use in battle; unused shields are worth 5 cp each to a typical arms dealer.

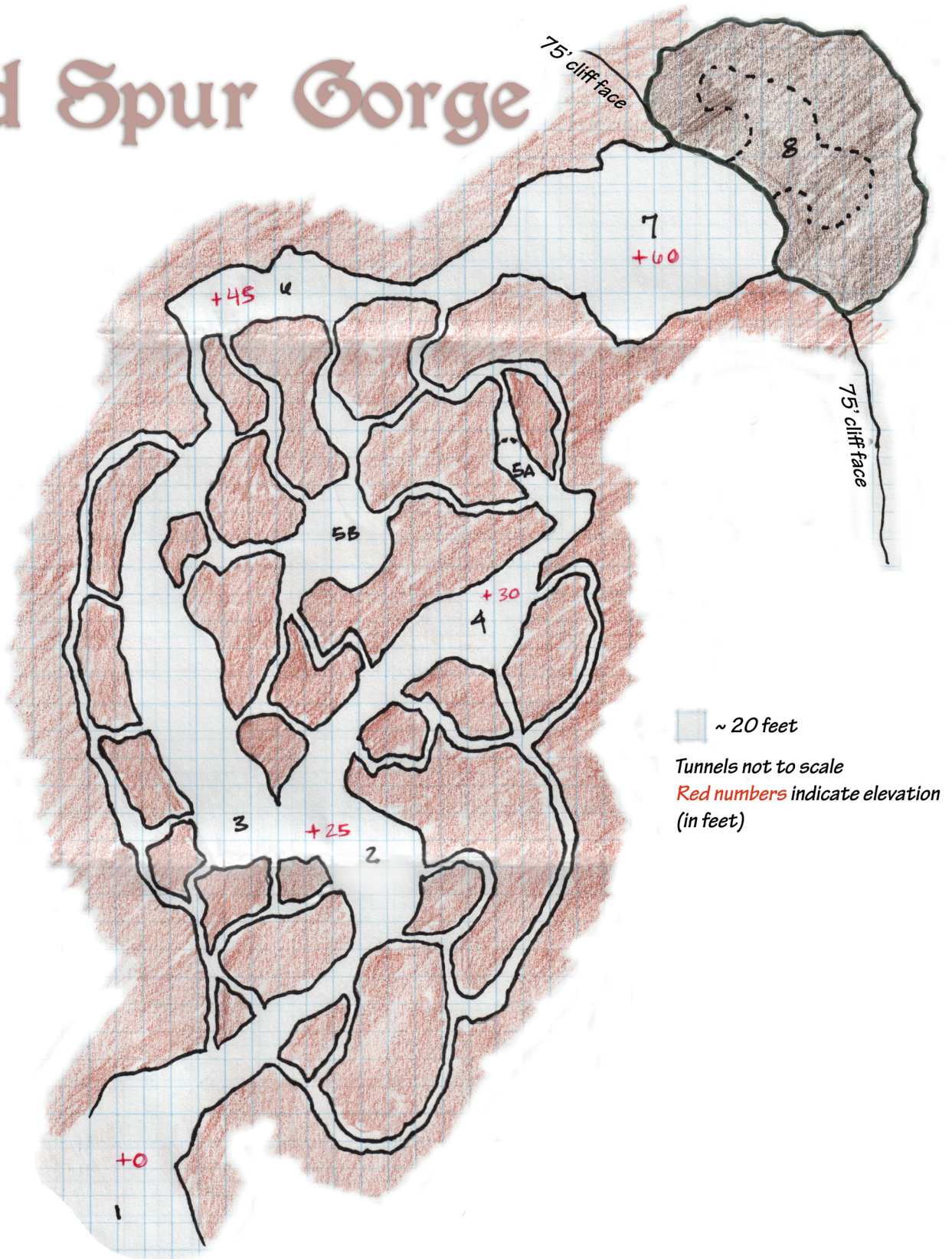
▶ Characters with the Appraisal: Armor & Weaponry skill know that kobold items and weapons are poorly constructed and have little or no resale value.

## The Bugbears

Bomari is a typical bugbear, despite his strange first few years of life when he lived under Helena's care. He has grown accustomed to the kobolds but he still loathes the little creatures, taking every opportunity to smash those that annoy him most. The little canines fear him but still continue to serve him.



# Red Spur Gorge



Bomari has a particular hate for his human name. Anyone taunting him with it drives the creature into a rage (as per the Journeyman mage spell Enrage). This effect only takes place once per combat.

When Bomari was young, Helena tried to come up with some form of potion to make the bugbear serve her. While her attempt to placate the creature failed, she did manage to make him sterile, a fact he is unaware of. Because of this, Bomari has been unable to produce children.

The female bugbear, on the other hand, is quite fertile, but demands fresh human child flesh before allowing Bomari to mate with her. After his last failed attempt to impregnate her, his mate left the spire to contemplate the relationship.

## Area Descriptions

### 1) Entrance

The woods thin as you approach a ridge comprised of red sandstone. Before you the ground rises sharply upwards but a cleft in the rock breaks open beyond which a tall spire of crooked rock shoots upwards into the air.

The canyon is not guarded, at least not initially. Forcing the characters to retreat allows the kobolds time to set up some proper defenses at a later date, but upon their first visit to the canyon the kobolds are unaware. No guards are posted at the canyon opening.

▶ Characters may make Listening skill checks and, if successful, hear scuffling and occasional high-pitched yapping or squabbling deeper in the canyon.

### 2) Living Quarters

**Encounter:** 5 kobolds with daggers (17 EPs each), 4 kobolds with spears (17 EPs each)

Littered with refuse and reeking of rancid meat you presume this area is the general living quarters for the creatures of the canyon. The canyon widens a bit here.

This is the general living area for the kobolds. Remnants from meals such as small animal bones and tufts of fur are scattered over the area. The kobolds use the open ground here to wrestle and fight among each other as well as relax and eat.

Nine kobolds are in this area the first time the characters enter here. Unless they have been overly noisy, the creatures are somewhat taken aback (surprised) by the PCs.

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Kobolds (with daggers): HP 15 ea; Init 3; Spd 6 (4 jab); Rch 0'; Atk +2; Dmg 2d4p-3; Def +8; DR 2; ToP 6 /4; Size S; Move 5 ft./sec.; Equipment: dagger and small shield

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Kobolds (with spears): HP 15 ea; Init 3; Spd 12 (8 jab); Rch 6 1/2'; Atk +2; Dmg 2d6p-3; Def +4; DR 2; ToP 6 /4; Size S; Move 5 ft./sec.; Equipment: spear

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### 3) Fire Pit

**Potential Yield:** 5 clay urns (3 cp ea), 1 keg (15 gal; 6 cp)

The open canyon in this area contains a large depression that serves as a fire pit. A metal frame has been erected over a large area of black soot-covered stone, indicating this where the kobolds cook any meat not fresh enough to be eaten raw.

Off to one side, several stacks of firewood are lined up against the rust-colored stone walls along with a large wooden keg and several clay urns.

Most of the food preparation takes place here, with what meat the kobolds don't eat being offered up to the Elm King as a tribute. The keg contains ale long gone bad (though the kobolds don't seem to mind). The clay urns contain dirty water.

### 4) Skinning Area

The walls of this wide area are covered with drying skins, with several crude work areas set up where animals are skinned and cleaned. The area stinks of a coppery tang and the ground is stained with dried blood. Crude iron implements lie on the floor, carelessly discarded after their last use.

The kobolds drag their kills back here to skin and clean them.

### 5A) Kobold Waste

**Encounter:** 4 kobolds with daggers (17 EPs each), 4 kobolds with spears (17 EPs each)

The canyon dead-ends here into several small tunnels. From the smell it appears this area is used as a disposal for the kobold's trash and waste. Small piles of feces and puddles of urine are scattered among the other litter here. The smell is terrible!

There should be little of interest to the characters here. The kobolds don't mind rummaging through this area or darting into these tunnels to escape. The first time the characters come down this tunnel the kobolds attempt to ambush them here, hoping to trap and kill the characters.

Four of the kobolds wield daggers and shields, while the other four remain behind them and use spears to attack as a second rank.

Kobolds (first rank): HP 15 ea; Init 3; Spd 6 (4 jab); Rch 0'; Atk +2; Dmg 2d4p-3; Def +8; DR 2; ToP 6 /4; Size S; Move 5 ft./sec.; Equipment: dagger and small shield

Kobolds (second rank): HP 15 ea; Init 3; Spd 12 (8 jab); Rch 6 1/2'; Atk +2; Dmg 2d6p-3; Def +4; DR 2; ToP 6 /4; Size S; Move 5 ft./sec.; Equipment: spear

## 5B) Sleeping Quarters

**Potential Yield:** 9 trade coins, kobold trophies

Small tunnels open up into a larger area covered with piles of animal fur and rags that serve as beds for the creatures. The ceiling here is only five feet in height.

The kobolds sleep and store what little valuables they have here. Searching this area reveals one of the following items for every minute searched (each item is unique).



- A small rabbit skin pouch containing 3 trade coins
- A small pouch of black bear fur containing 4 trade coins
- Two trade coins under a pile of fur
- A small leather pouch with two rabbit feet
- A black bear paw
- A small leather pouch with 2 bear incisor teeth

## 6) The 'Shrine'

The canyon turns and widens here, giving you a grisly display. Animal heads sit atop pikes around small shrines and offerings on the ground, many of them containing rotting food or meat. The area seems to resemble a shrine to someone - or something.

The small shrines are offerings to the Elm King. Bomari ignores most of these, except when hungry. The kobolds consider this area the limit of their territory and will go no closer to the spire while Bomari lives.

## 7) Rock Spire

**Encounter:** Bomari the bugbear (unarmored; 100 EPs)

**Potential Yield:** human-made large shield, silver earring (5 sp)

**Potential Story Award:** Besting the legendary Elm King in combat (200 EP)

The ground levels out here as you reach the top of the ridge and the base of the Red Spire. Before you, the spire of rock rises crookedly into the air. The rest of the wide, open area here is covered with loose rocks and debris. Kobold corpses and skeletons lie in several places and give the area the appearance of a war zone. Those bodies with flesh on them are covered with bloated flies and maggots.

At the base of the spire, a large crack shoots downward. At its thirty-foot zenith the crack is only a few inches wide, but by the time it reaches the ground it opens to 15 feet in width. Beyond the crack you see only darkness.

▶ Allow the players to make a Listening check at this point. If they succeed, they hear a shuffling sound, as if of a large creature moving.

Give them a mere second to determine their actions, then continue:

Suddenly, a form begins to emerge from the darkness. To your horror it is no kobold or man, but a heavily muscled creature nearly eight feet in height. Its massive shoulders are covered with thick dark fur and its nose contains a prominent ridge reminiscent of a bear. A wooden shield is strapped to its left arm, and in its right hand it carries a deadly-looking morning star.

The creature snarls at you menacingly before bashing the morning star against its shield, seemingly in challenge. With a roar, it attacks!

Bomari attacks any obvious fighters first, ignoring other classes unless the character deals a significant amount of damage to him or taunts him by using his name. It may be that the characters failed to make the connection that Bomari is actually this bugbear. That's fine and may stay a mystery for the time being.

If Bomari suffers a significant amount of damage early on in the fight, and it is obvious the characters will win with ease, feel free to have several kobolds rush to his aid. If the battle turns, Bomari has no problem crushing the annoying kobolds if they get in his way.

Once Bomari is defeated, the kobolds leave the characters alone, no matter how many of them are left\*. They greatly fear the characters that killed their king.

Bomari wears a large silver earring in his left ear (5 sp) and used a large human-made shield.

\* unless rallied by Bomari's mate *Kshigti* (see "Honey, I'm Home!")

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**Bomari (bugbear):** HP 48; Init -1; Spd 10; Rch 4'; Atk +7; Dmg 2d6p+6; Def +6; DR 2; ToP 19 /8; Size L; Move 10 ft./sec.;

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Equipment: morning star and large shield

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**GM's Note:** Because Bomari is not expecting an attack, he chooses not to wear his hot and uncomfortable body armor (thus his Damage Reduction is reduced to 2 and his EP value to 100). If you're running this adventure for higher level (or tougher) characters, use the full DR 6 and 175 EP value.

## 8) Bomari's Lair

**Potential Yield:** medium shield, ringmail, longsword, copper basin, 3 bottles of wine, household knick-knacks, short sword +1, mage scroll, potion of sleep, 15 sp, 135 cp, 43 trade coins

Inside the cleft in the base of the spire is a large cave. One side of the cave is covered by a mess of furs and rags, forming a large bed of sorts. Hanging on rough sections of the walls are several skulls, many of them obviously human or demi-human. A broken shield sits next to another that appear to be intact.

Below the shields on the floor is a pile of weapons, some obviously broken and rusted, while others may be in good condition.

To the left, the cave opens into another area filled with refuse, rubble, feces and garbage.

This is Bomari's lair. The skulls are trophies he collected while being a general menace to the region. Hidden below the piles of rags and worthless furs is Bomari's treasure, taken from homes he raided or people he killed. Bomari took not only what he prefers to use but even items he had no need for, merely to have them as trophies.

Searching the cave reveals the following treasure:

- a large sack containing 135 cp
- an upside-down dwarf skull holding 15 sp
- suit of Human-sized Ringmail
- a medium shield (human made)
- a broken large shield (human made) *worthless*
- 1 longsword (human made)
- 1 great sword (human made) *rusty, pitted and worthless*
- 43 trade coins (loose)
- tarnished copper basin (4 sp) containing potable water
- 3 bottles of wine (1 sp each)
- large sack containing a linen tablecloth (2 sp), a carved and painted miniature wooden troll (5 sp) and 3 decorative wooden bowls (2 sp each)
- Short Sword +1**
- Mage Scroll** containing *Feat of Strength* (apprentice), *Translate* (1st level), *Magic Projectile* (2nd level)
- Potion of Sleep**

The area to the left serves as a garbage pile and bathroom for Bomari and his mate. A general search of this area turns up some unfortunate information: small blankets, child-sized human clothing and even a wicker bassinet should provide enough clues that the kidnapped children are no longer alive. Anyone carefully searching the area (by sorting through some refuse) finds several small bones and skulls obviously belonging to human children. Sadly, the characters are too late to save them.

▶ A successful *Monster Lore* skill check could tell the players that bugbears often sneak into villages and steal infants in order to feed their mates so the females enter into heat.

## 9) [optional] Honey, I'm Home!

**Encounter:** Kshigti the bugbear (175 EPs)

**Potential Yield:** silver chain (36 sp), silver rings (9 sp)

**Potential Story Awards:**

- ▶ Killing Kshigti (thereby preventing her from eventually repopulating the area with bugbears): 175 EP or...
- ▶ Driving off Kshigti (thus transferring this problem to someone other than the residents of Has): 80 EPs

*Use of this encounter is left to the GameMaster's discretion. It should not be used if the players have performed adequately and are in a weakened state after defeating Bomari. However, if that encounter proved anticlimactic or if the PCs are truly annoying you by camping in Bomari's lair for days in order to restore every last hit point before daring to venture through the wilderness and return to Has with the grim news of the childrens' fates, you may consider having Bomari's mate (Kshigti) return to reconcile with him.*

Some time after the players enter Red Spur Gorge, the Elm King's mate Kshigti will return with the hope that Bomari has captured additional children for her to feast on. If forewarned of trouble – such as by seeing kobold corpses littering the gorge – she will be on her guard and employ her considerable Sneaking skill (50) to ambush a lone sentry or otherwise take the invaders at a disadvantage.

Kshigti will seek revenge if she learns Bomari has been slain but not at the cost of her own life. As such, she will not simply wade into the middle of a group of armored humans trying to take as many as she can with her. Rather, she will engage in hit and run attacks for as long as she is permitted to do so. Any surviving kobolds (from the initial pool of 24) will be employed as scouts or sacrificial diversions in these attacks.

If decisively engaged and severely mauled in the process, she will do her best to disengage and flee never to return.

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**Kshigti (bugbear):** HP 43; Init -1; Spd 10; Rch 4'; Atk +7; Dmg 2d6p+6; Def 0; DR 6; ToP 18 /8; Size L; Move 10 ft./sec.;

Equipment: crude morning star

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If slain and searched, she wears a silver necklace (36 sp) as a bracelet along with 3 gaudy silver rings (each worth 3 sp).

## Conclusion

**Potential Yield:** 40 sp

**Potential Story Awards:**

- ▶ Solving the legend of the Elm King and demonstrably proving to the resident of Has that the threat has been eliminated (500 EP). *This entails revealing its relation to Helena and physical evidence of the dead bugbear such as its decapitated head.*
  - ▶ or as above but without physical evidence or tying up all the loose ends (250 EP)
- ▶ Solving the mystery of the missing children (300 EP). *This mandates physical evidence (the babies' clothing and bassinet and returning the childrens' remains for proper burial).*
  - ▶ or as above but without physical evidence (100 EP).

Returning to Has, the characters should deliver the sad news about the children. Once they reveal that the Elm King is actually a bugbear, the locals (perhaps Paramar even states it aloud) believe that it was the cause of the missing children these past few months. Paramar is thankful for the help the characters provided, and rewards them with free lodging for while they rest and heal any wounds plus 40 silver pieces to be split amongst the group.

Any character that remains in Has too long and takes unfair advantage of Paramar's hospitality may be risking their personal honor. Any character that stays more than two additional weeks after recovering from his wounds but fails to pay for lodging is considered a leech and one of the worst kinds of treasure hunters. GMs should take these actions into account when computing honor awards (specifically the award for personal honor).

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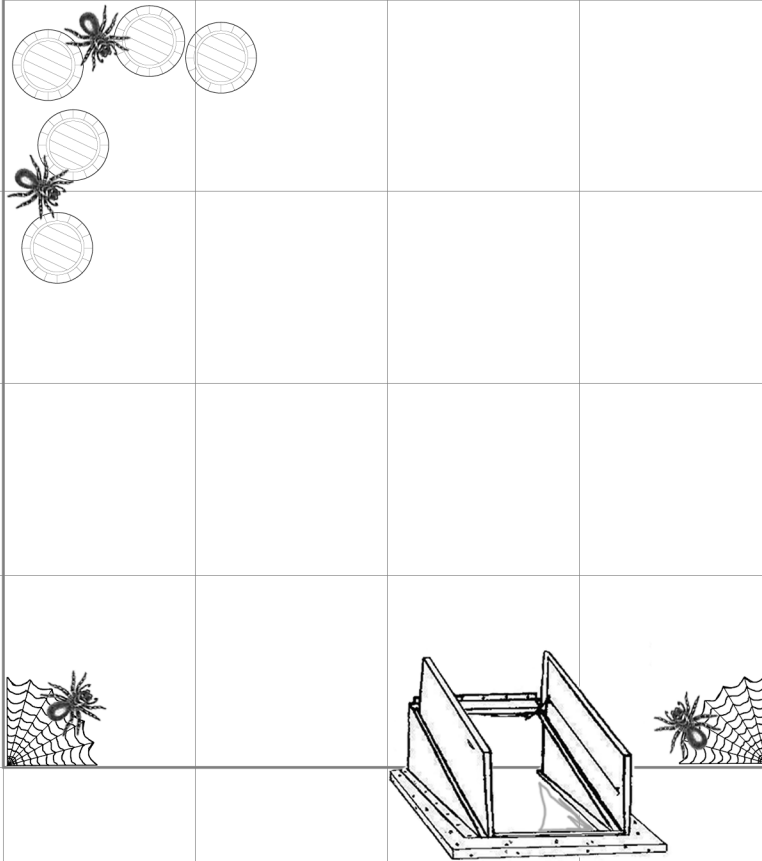
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# A Bump in the Dark: Battlemat





## Player Aid: Helana's Puzzle Box