

CIRCLE OF WOLVES

An adventure by Michael Prescott

THE SITUATION

Morton village has a werewolf problem, and neither prayer nor pitchfork has solved it.

Tracks (booted, barefoot and paw) are easily followed, leading through the forest up the river Mor to an ancient mound, an old holy place nestled in the shadow of a rocky escarpment.

The mound has a long history, which will soon claw its way into the present.

THE OLD MOUND

A cross-shaped mound, 30' high in the center, built from the rock of the escarpment, now covered in hardy grasses.

On the mound, sounds fall dead, with only the loudest noises carrying further than 60'.

THE STONE CIRCLE

The stones stand 15' tall, and are hewn from the native rock. Many are etched with thoughtless graffiti.

For spellcasters who have been purified by the pool, peaceful magic has double its normal effect.

QUARRY POOL

Knee-deep and crystal clear, the quarry pool effervesces with tiny bubbles. Acrid vapors play across the surface, and the bottom is pale, bare rock. There are no fish.

Metal objects immersed in the water will emerge bright and shining. It has a sour taste; those who drink it are doubly affected by magic cast from within the stone circle that day.

MORTON WOOD

The wood north of Morton stretches for many miles, and is dense with maple, ash and oak trees.

It is busy with the sounds of wildlife. Animal tracks, fruiting trees and berry-laden bushes abound.

ENCOUNTERS IN THE WOODS

Roll d10 every d4+2 hours spent in the area:

1. A wolf-marked villager, lost, confused, and full of venison
2. The spirit of the wolf
3. The werewolf (at night only)
4. The hermit Wyrting
5. A Morton search party (2d6)
6. Members of the Circle (d4+3)
7. Black bear
8. The ghost of Troy Ulfssen
9. A stripped animal carcass
10. Deer (d4)

POOL OF GEFEHOIT

A ceremonial pool predating the stone circle. Cracked, it will not hold water long, but any who fill it (even slightly) and bathe are blessed, and cannot be transformed by the Leádstæf until the next time they eat a meal.

The hermit bathes here regularly, and his oft-repaired bucket sits in long grass nearby, as does his cyldwort-filled pipe. Perhaps he bathes now.

WATERFALL

This is the source of the Mor, which gives Morton its name. It flows underground above the escarpment and emerges here.

The mound-builders threw their sacrifices into it, and bone and skull fragments remain within the swirling pool at its base.

Half buried in pebbles: a tiny silver gauntlet containing a gnome-sized skeletal hand, and two golden rings.

DRY CAVE

A crack in the escarpment, a packed earthen floor shows frequent use. It runs 25' into the escarpment; within it hang hundreds of sprigs of dried cyldwort, one fresh. If consumed, effects vary by person and last d4 hours. Roll d6 + doses taken and apply all effects up to the result:

1. ringing in the ears
2. shivers, chattering teeth
3. painful cramps
4. incapacitating dizziness
5. life-threatening hypothermia
6. cold insight from the stars (d2 times only)

LAIR OF THE HERMIT

Inside: a cook fire, latrine pit and a filthy bedroll, all unwisely close. Wrapped in the roll is a Vinteralf dagger of mithril silver.

A subtle magic draws small forest creatures here; their bones litter the forest outside.

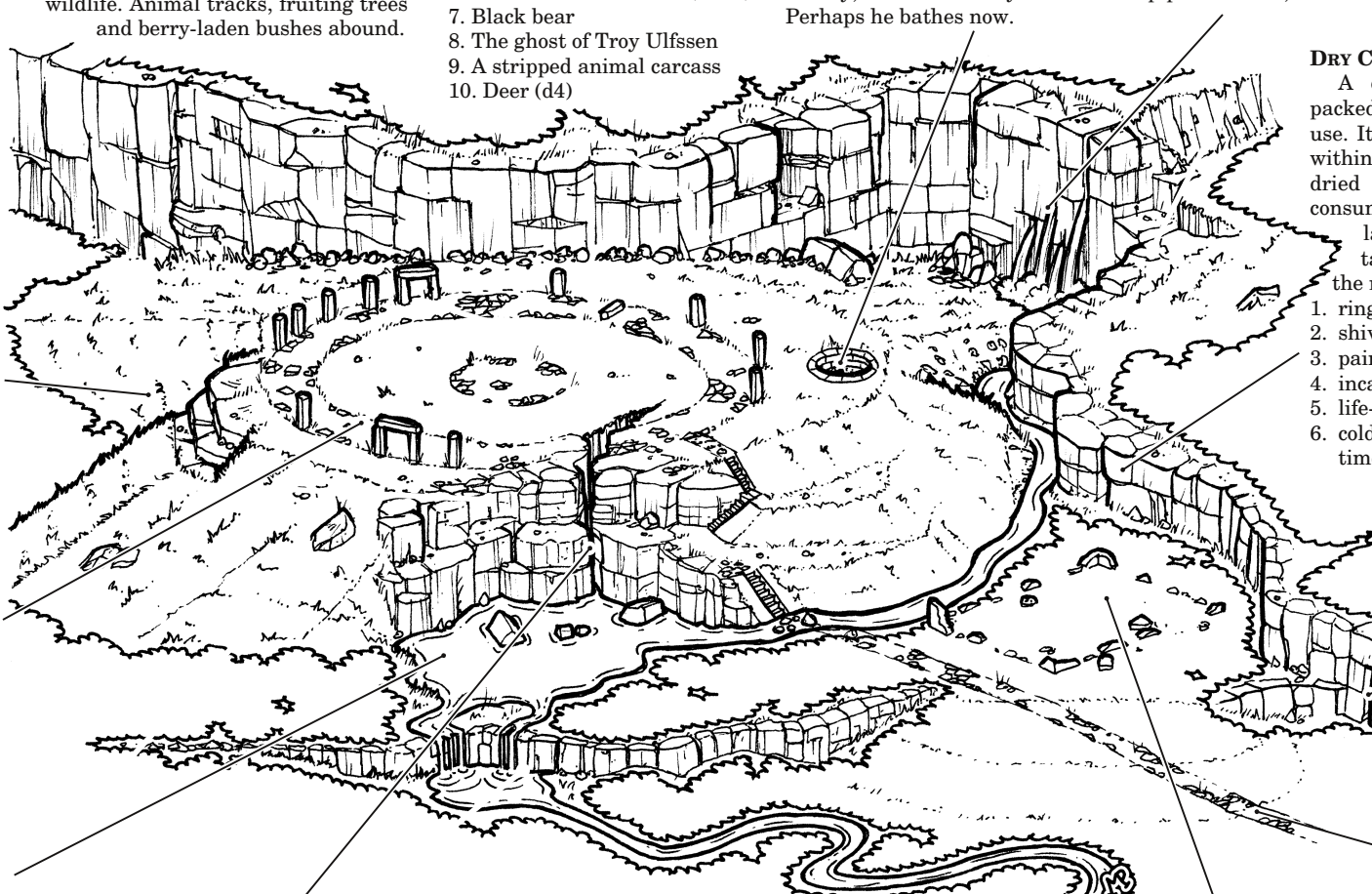
ANCIENT ROAD

Scattered cobbles run four leagues due east until finally being swallowed by the forest. Thrice blessed, one cannot meet enemies while walking upon it.

GARDEN IN THE RUINS

Remnants of a cottage create a sheltered space. Erected by a wizard now long dead, who came centuries before the Vinteralf to study the mound, circle and pool.

The hermit grew cyldwort here until the Circle of Morton began using it as a regular campsite. The hermit fumes, but dares not confront them alone.



THE BLAZING FISSURE

A great crack splits the mound, pulsing with foul vapors and a ruddy glow. The fissure is 30' deep and 4' wide, and the bottom runs with molten lava.

Water from the quarry pool splashes in over a blackened lip, spitting up angry goutts of steam.

The first part of the fissure is open to the air, but it runs a further 50' into the mound, ending in a small, lava-floored chamber.

Careful exploration will reveal sufficient hand-

and foot-holds to climb inside, along the fissure wall. It ends 50' inside the mound in a narrow lava-floored chamber, 20' x 7'.

On a ledge is a Vinteralf warrior, dead and long reduced to a statue of ash that collapses at the slightest touch. She wears scale mail, a silver buckle and a mithril-silver bastard sword.

Floating on the lava are the six **Embrenu Sætung**. Five gleam brightly in the red light.

THE WEREWOLF

A restless spirit wanders the lands around the mound; it is the soul of anguish and hunger unfulfilled.

It roams at night, looking for a victim: it can possess anyone that bears its mark, transforming them instantly into a snow-white wolf of fantastic size and ferocity.

It will attack savagely, gorging itself on meat if it has the chance, fleeing into the woods if outmatched - ideally with a stolen limb to gnaw.

The first touch of sunlight restores the victim to their natural form. Usually, they remember nothing. If pressed, some may recall being crushed into a tiny space while enduring intense heat.

Unless treated by powerful magic, bites heal to a purplish scar: a wolfmark.

DIE, TO RISE AGAIN

If the wolf is killed, the spirit is expelled from the victim, who resumes their original form. Half the damage is passed onto the victim, which may prove fatal if they are not as hardy as the wolf.

The spirit may not possess again for d6 hours.

If the killing blow is dealt by a **silver weapon**, however, the spirit is slain permanently. The victim resumes their natural form, but with the full damage the wolf suffered.

Immersion in lava will also slay the inhabiting spirit.

SPIRIT OF HUNGER

The werewolf is no common lycanthrope, but Hyngran, scourge of the frozen starlands. Nine generations ago, Hyngran and five of his kin, the Leádstæf, were ensnared by Vinteralf starpriests and imprisoned in silver ingots.

Brought here at great cost, they were entombed beneath the mound where the heat of the lava would render them powerless.

Warm climes limit Hyngran's power, but in the far north he is practically a demigod. Only his kin keep him here, for he cannot move the Embrenu Sætung himself, and will not leave without the others.

THE CIRCLE OF MORTON

Three years ago, Troy Ulfssen, the miller of Morton, led three families in a revival of

the old ways of worship. Leading them out to the stone circle in the forest, they joined in prayer each month under the full moon's light.

Their questing prayers didn't find the old spirits of the earth, but Hyngran, ever restless. With a vision, Hyngran convinced Troy to enter the narrow cave.

This he did, and died falling into the lava, but not before upsetting Hyngran's prison, one of the Embrenu Sætung. This was two years ago.

Members of the circle, like everyone in Morton, bear the mark of Hyngran.

The Circle believes that the coming of the wolf is a test of their faith. They return to the mound regularly.

They are serious but good-natured, and seek converts.

TROY ULFSSSEN, WITLESS HERALD

Unaware that he is a ghost, Troy wanders the Morton wood preaching devotion to the old ones. Hyngran has addled his mind with visions, and Troy unwittingly seeks to lure others into disturbing the Embrenu.

THE EMBRENU SÆTUNG

In the narrow chamber beneath the mound, floating on the surface of the lava, are five platinum bowls, engraved with mazes.

Each contains an ingot of shimmering, molten silver, into which one of the great spirits of the Leádstæf has been bound.

A sixth bowl - which once held Hyngran - floats off to one side. Disturbed by Troy, contact with the cavern wall has let it cool and its contents have solidified.

If the silver in the other bowls is spilled or solidifies, the spirit trapped inside is freed.

The bowls are incredibly hot and will burn the unprotected: this counts as a mark for the purposes of transformation.

Finally, drinking the molten silver will cause the spirit to be permanently bound to the drinker's body. This will surely kill the drinker, destroying the spirit along with them. If the imbiber somehow survives, they are permanently possessed by the spirit.

THE LEÁDSTÆF

The kin of Hyngran are as follows, from least to greatest:

- * Brégnés, the spirit of terror
- * Angnes, the spirit of fear
- * Cwealm, the spirit of pain and torment

* Egesa, the spirit of dread and horror

* Inwitsorh, the spirit of sorrow brought on by malice

Like Hyngran, the Leádstæf are intangible and invisible, detectable only by the most sensitive. Unable to withstand the heat of the narrow cave, they leave immediately.

Each is the herald of the next: if the Leádstæf choose, they can leave a mark usable by the next.

Those possessed by Brégnés and Angnes take on wolf form, like the victims of Hyngran. Cwealm manifests as an arctic fox, the flesh flayed from its skull.

Egesa appears as a white-furred bat of fearsome visage and 12' wingspan.

Inwitsorh manifests as a polar bear, white-furred and three-headed.

THE WILL OF DEVILS

The Leádstæf wish to depart for the north as soon as possible, but will not leave their kin behind if any remain imprisoned.

Until all six are released, they will harass anyone in the area, attempting to draw attention to the fissure.

THE HERMIT

Wyrting the mad has lived on the mound since he was a young boy. He is the latest inheritor of a secret tradition, for he is the guardian of the Embrenu Sætung.

Chosen by the mound itself, he knows all its ways. He knows of Hyngran's hunger and the folly of the Circle of Morton.

He rags are filthy and his hair plastered with animal fat, but his skin and hands are scrubbed clean from his daily baths in the pool.

The old powers of mound speak to him, and he serves them faithfully. Though he has no idea why, he dutifully maintains the cache of cyldwort in the dry cave.

Like everyone here, he bears the wolfmark (a bite on his left forearm).

THE FROST WOMEN

The starpriests knew the day would come when the Leádstæf would escape, and prophecied its exact hour. A year ago, a party of their bravest warriors set forth on a quest. Their task: to prevent the spirits returning north by any means.

On their way south, they have been beset by every imaginable calamity. Several are

injured, and they grieve the loss of their leader, their starpriest, their doctor, their two archers, and their finest swordmaster.

Used to arctic extremes, they are sick with the unbearable heat, which robs them of their vitality and causes frightening hallucinations.

THE SURVIVORS

Bregna bears a two-handed vorpul blade and wears starsteel plated chain.

Zau wields dual maces of paralysis and is clad in white, hydra-skin armor.

Syareen, the translator, fights with a scarab of extortion - a mithril, animate wasp.

Piobaan, the scout and pathfinder, wears a cloak of invisibility and wields a sling staff.

Nurmin, their confessor-acolyte, is starblind but sees three heartbeats into the future. She fights unarmed, and alarmingly well.

They know all the ways to kill the Leádstæf. When they arrive, they will immediately seek out Wyrting, the hermit, to obtain cyldwort, the only thing that will allow them to operate unhindered.

Thereafter, they will do everything in their power to:

- * magically trap the fissure entrance
- * slay any escaped Leádstæf
- * kill anyone marked by the Leádstæf, even Wyrting

They have made unthinkable sacrifices on their journey, and are all five bound together by the memory of it. They expect to die here, and are determined to make their lives count.

