

# the northlands series: the long night of winter

NLS4: Oath of the Predator by James M. Spahn







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# The Long Hight of Winter ILS4: Wath of the Predator

By James M. Spahn



Oath of the Predator is a Pathfinder Roleplaying Game adventure for the Northlands Saga setting and is the Fourth adventure in The Long Night of Winter adventure anthology. Like the other adventures in the anthology, Oath of the Predator is intended to be dropped into a Northlands Saga campaign by the GOD at any time or place that is convenient. It is not tied to any particular location other than taking place amid a dense, primal forest. It is designed for a party of characters of levels 6-8.

# The Northlands Series: The Long Night of Winter



"Gather round, lads and lasses, and draw close to the hearth fire. Let the glowing coals warm your hands and a horn of mead warm your heart while the old men tell tales and sing songs of days long gone. Each winter the storms howl down from the Far North and bury our fields and halls in a thick blanket of white. They bring nights cold enough to shatter a man's bones or freeze an aurochs' blood in its veins, and all men huddle close to their fires in the darkness and wonder if this is finally the Fimbulwinter that will bring about the great battle of Ragnarök. Some say these harsh winters are the work of demons of the Ginnungagap sent to break the will of men in preparation for the coming End Days. Others say they are the gift of the Æsir to mold men and hone their strength as the fire tempers good steel in anticipation of those dark times.

"Me? This old skald thinks it is a time to gather close to comrades and loved ones and tell stories and lies, to swap boasts and jests, and to celebrate that the All—Father has given us one more night for the heartsblood to run hot. The morrow's dawn is never promised us, and there are things other than the cold that stalk the long night of winter and can kill a strong man just as surely. So tilt the flagon to fill an old man's drinking horn once again, for talk can be dry work, and lean in close to listen. I have a tale to tell you ..."

The *Northlands Series* (*NLS*) are standalone adventures set in the Northlands that allow the GM to drop a one-shot game into that setting or as a short interlude into *The Northlands Saga Adventure Path* with minimal effort. They are not tied to a particular locale within the Northlands, though they may require a certain general type of terrain (e.g. mountains, forest, etc.), and they are not tied to a specific chronology. They can be played in any order, and all or none of them can be used as the GM sees fit. They are presented from the standpoint of a fireside tale being told by an old skald to pass the long hours of a winter night, allowing the GM to use them as short breaks from normal campaign play with different PCs and without any long-term consequences, or they can be inserted into a normal campaign. The idea is to provide the GM with the maximum flexibility for their use with a minimum of fuss.

So take them. Use them. Make them your own. The winter night is cold, and there are many hours to pass before the dawn  $\dots$ 

# Oath of the Predator

**Oath of the Predator** is a short Pathfinder Roleplaying Game adventure for character levels 6–8. It takes place in a remote forested area where a hero was lost a generation ago and a tiny logging town built in his honor continues to eke out an existence on the very edge of the deep woods.

# Adventure Background

Thorvald the Wanderer has been dead for a generation, though in his time he came out of the wild places of the world to bring protection and justice to those who lived on the edge of untamed lands. As his reputation grew, he drew the service of several loyal retainers, none more loyal than Ivar the Stout. Ivar became his closest friend and loyal shieldbearer. Together they drove back the fell things of the deep forests, including a great many predators who had been corrupted into sceadugenga otherworldly shadow walkers of the night — by some terrible malady whose source went undiscovered by Thorvald and Ivar for decades. These twisted sceadugenga of all types seemed to crawl from the shadows of the dark wood with a taste for the flesh of Northlander, Alfar, and Dvergar alike — any beings they could get hold of it seemed. They were keen and cunning beyond the intelligence of normal animals. Finally, Thorvald took a company of men loyal to him into the heart of the deep woods and swore that he would destroy the source of this terrible evil or die trying. Deep in the heart of the forest, Thorvald's company found a great black oak that was both living and dead. It was untouched by the seasons, yet cast a terrible shadow over all other living things in the deep woods. From its roots bubbled a great spring of murky water that offered no life but only festered and polluted the soil.

No skalds' tales recall what happened in the deep woods, save that Thorvald was slain. Only Ivar and a handful of survivors emerged from that terrible place, paying their respects to their fallen leader before scattering to the four corners of the world. Only Ivar remained behind. Proclaiming the land clean, Ivar planted his great spear in the ground and founded the village of Thorvald's Gift on the edge of the deep woods. With his great strength he helped establish the logging trade that would be the cornerstone of this village. All who came to the Gift found fortune and prosperity.

But darkness has risen again from the deep woods, and an ill wind blows in the village of Thorvald's Gift. Jarl Ivar, now old and gray, though still hail and strong by all accounts, has gone missing — vanished under the light of the full moon. Huscarls and woodsmen who venture into the forest are disappearing, and strange, predatory sounds — the snarls of beasts and other inhuman creatures —are heard drawing closer to the village. Ivar's badly injured son and chief huscarl, Bóthvarr, has put out a call for aid. He offers payment and gratitude to any who can discover the fate of his father and set Thorvald's Gift at peace once more.

The truth is far more terrible than Bóthvarr knows: His father, Ivar, is a monstrous lycanthrope — a were-vlkodlak who can take the form of a great, grizzled bear-like beast capable of unimaginable destruction. Ivar's condition has long been a point of shame for him and, unknown to his son, the accursed lycanthrope took up service with Thorvald years earlier in hopes of somehow finding a cure for his affliction. When Thorvald and Ivar discovered the terrible Black Oak that was corrupting the deep woods, its evil took hold of Ivar and he slew his boon companion. Fearing that he had finally given in completely to the great evil within himself, Ivar swore an oath to any god that would listen that night that the blood of his battle-brother would cleanse the deep woods until the full moons vanished from the sky. Ivar knew his oath was fulfilled, but knew not which god had accepted his promise.

Much to his woe, it was the trickster god Loptr who heard the cries of the werebeast, and a few weeks ago the full moons of both the Pale Sister and the Dark Sister were eclipsed in the night sky. After tearing through his own hall and nearly killing his son, Ivar fled into the deep woods where he now remains. But in the shedding of innocent blood, he has disturbed the spirit of his murdered friend, and with it, corruption has returned to the deep woods. Only by setting right the sins of Ivar can peace return to Thorvald's Gift.

# Adventure Summary

The PCs arrive in Thorvald's Gift to find the town beset by bestial predators that attack in the dark of night. In the first attack, the local jarl was dragged away into the forest by the beast and has not been seen since. Working on behalf of the jarl's son, the PCs trace the abnormal beasts into the deepest parts of the forest where they find the vile, unnatural Black Oak, a great tree corrupting the heart of the forest. Ascending within its hollow trunk, they discover many secrets of that fateful trip years ago when the hero Thorvald the Wanderer fell, and learn that it was at the hands of his most-trusted comrade, the missing jarl Ivar the Stout. Only by destroying a dark idol at the heart of the tree and laying the vengeful soul of Thorvald to rest do the PCs have the chance to release Ivar from his own curse and finally bring justice for his betrayal decades ago.

# Beginning the Adventure

The PCs can be drawn to the tragedy of Thorvald's Gift in several ways. A ranger or druid might know the legends surrounding Thorvald and travel to Thorvald's Gift to pay homage to the lost hero — only to stumble upon the troubles currently plaguing the village. For a more direct draw to Thorvald's Gift, rangers, druids, or others attuned to the cycles of the natural world might feel the dark energy suddenly flowing from the deep woods and travel there on their own to investigate. Another option could be that the party receives word from Bóthvarr seeking their aid. He is still recovering from the wounds he received during the attack by the terrible beast that he believes took his father. Whatever draws the player characters to Thorvald's Gift, they find it in dire straits and in desperate need of help.

# Part One: Thorvald's Gift

Thorvald's Gift is barely a village, and more a collection of households clustered around the modest hall of Jarl Ivar the Stout under the very eaves of the deep woods. The hall serves as the home of the jarl and also the local gathering place and drinking hall. In good weather, locals gather under a large pavilion outside the hall to drink to one another's health and the prosperity of the local timber trade. Other than the jarl's hall, the largest building in the village is a shop that sells saws, axes and other tools necessary for logging. This small settlement has seen prosperity following Jarl Ivar for more than 20 years before the "attack" and his subsequent disappearance.

#### THORVALD'S GIFT

N hamlet

Corruption -2; Crime -3; Economy -6; Law -5; Lore +0;

Society –6 Qualities insular

Disadvantages hunted

Danger +15

**Government** autocracy

#### THE NORTHLANDS SERIES: THE LONG NIGHT OF WINTER

**Population** 53 (humans [Northlanders]) **Notable NPCs** 

**Ivar the Stout, Jarl of Thorvald's Gift** (CN male afflicted were-vlkodlak human fighter 9)

**Bóthvarr, Chief Huscarl** (N male human fighter [huscarl\*] 6)

Thrasi, Lumber Overseer (N male human ranger 4) \*See The Northlands Saga Complete 51

Base Value 160 gp; Purchase Limit 1,000 gp

# A. The Village of Thorvald's Gift

When the PCs first approach the village, read the following.

The rutted road cuts a thin path through a thick, almost oppressive woodland that reluctantly opens up to a large clearing that appears to be little more than a loggers' camp. A broad stream flows through the clearing next to the lumberyard set on its banks with a flotilla of logs being prepared to float downstream. A few large carts for dragging logs rest nearby. A single longhouse showing significant recent damage stands in the center of the settlement with a large pavilion tent erected just outside. Within this pavilion can be seen a long bar and large tables that serve as a watering hole for the loggers who work the nearby yard. Small log cabins are clustered around these structures as if huddling for safety away from the dark depths of the surrounding forest eaves. A burly Northlander with a thick red beard and a prominent scar on his cheek approaches, a heavy logging axe in one meaty hand.

The man approaching is a huscarl named **Thrasi** who oversees the lumberyard. He greets the PCs in a brusque, almost rude manner. He has little time to explain the situation to them. If they successfully move his unfriendly attitude to friendly through Diplomacy or tell him they received word that Thorvald's Gift was seeking aid for an evil plaguing the village, he softens somewhat and directs them to Jarl Ivar's hall (area **A1**). If his attitude remains unfriendly or indifferent, he brushes them off with an admonishment to not disturb his work or that of the other loggers and provides no further information. In either case, a successful DC 18 Sense Motive is able to discern that he's not unsympathetic to the village's plight — quite the contrary. He just doesn't trust strangers and is worried that the PCs will bring more troubles down on an already troubled village. If the PCs wish to locate Thrasi later, he can usually be found in the lumberyard (area **A3**) or his house (**A6a**).

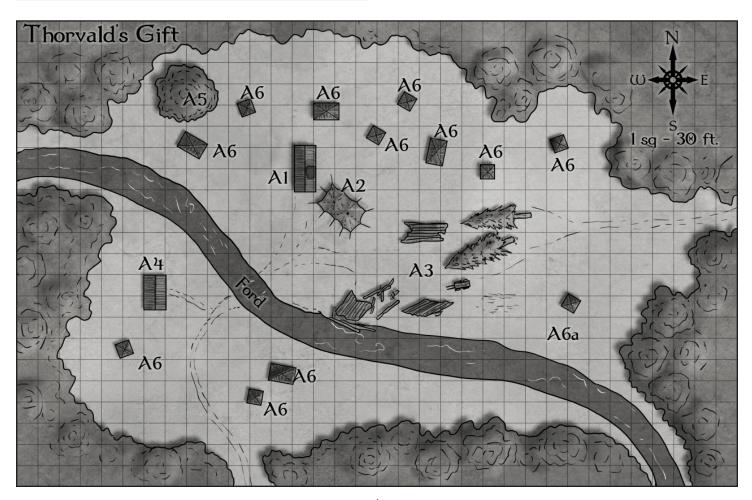
# THRASI CR 3 XP 800

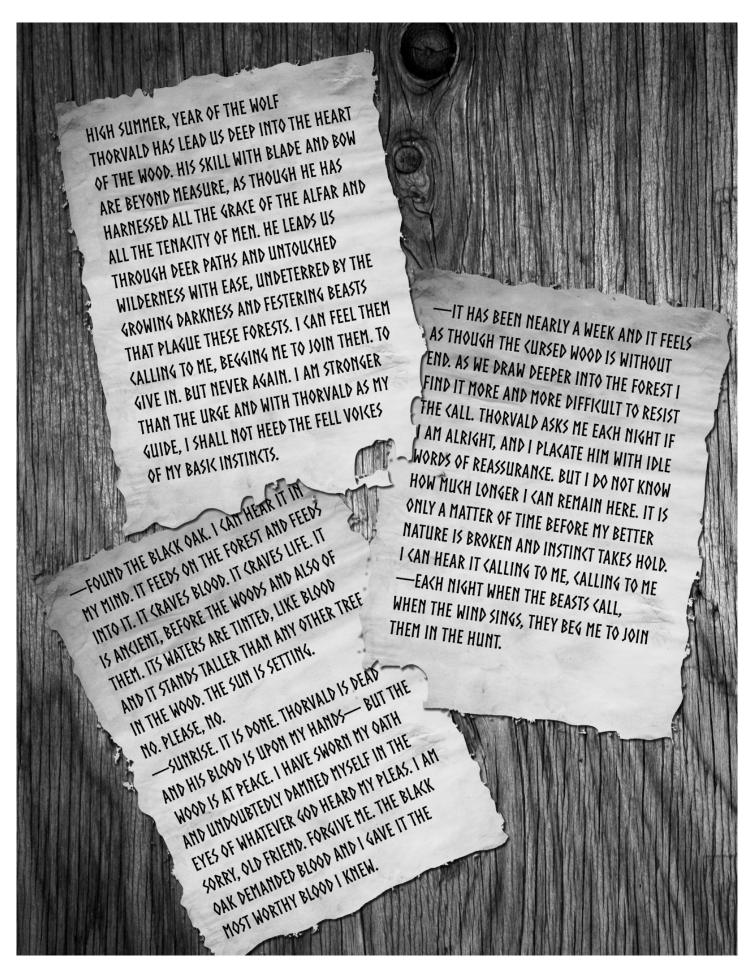
**hp** 30 (Pathfinder Roleplaying Game GameMastery Guide "Trapper"\*)

\*Replace masterwork battleaxe and masterwork buckler with masterwork greataxe

# Ar. Jarl Ivar's Hall

Clearly the hall of a person of importance in this small settlement, it is nevertheless rather small and unassuming as most longhouses go. Added to this humble appearance is the fact that its thatch roof and parts of its log and earthen walls have been nearly torn to splinters. Heavy tarps secured by nails cover the gaping holes. A heavy oak door marks the entrance to this damaged hall and stands open, revealing flickering firelight within.





#### THE NORTHLANDS SERIES: THE LONG NIGHT OF WINTER

The home of Jarl Ivar, his son Bóthvarr, and a pair of elderly household thralls is as simple as a longhouse can be, with a modest hall and small hearth for cooking and warmth in the colder months, and two small bedrooms and an attached dairy for making goat cheese adjoining it. The main hall once held a pair of tables with benches but is wrecked, with blood spatters on the floor and walls where a terrible fight recently occurred. Likewise, one of the bedrooms — the one belonging to Jarl Ivar — has had its wooden door torn from its hinges. The bed within is destroyed and soaked in old blood. The door to the other bedroom is closed and bolted from within (hardness 5, hp 15, Break DC 23).

A single young **huscarl** stands guard in the main hall, but gestures toward the closed door and lets them pass if they come in peace and are clearly not sceadugenga. **Bóthvarr** (N male human fighter [huscarl\*] 6; hp 45, currently 7) is resting in the second bedroom but comes to the door leaning on a stout cudgel if the PCs knock. He is a young man in the prime of his life with wild hair the color of amber and a short-cropped beard. Heavy bandages soaked with fresh blood bind his left leg as he hobbles forth. He offers a pained smile as he offers them the hospitality of his father's ruined hall and dismisses Mitvald the huscarl so he can talk with the PCs in private.

\*See *The Northlands Saga Complete*, page 51 for details of the huscarl archetype.

#### HUSCARL CR 1 XP 400

**hp** 16 (Pathfinder Roleplaying Game GameMastery Guide "Caravan Guard"\*)

\*Replace banded mail, buckler, lance, kukri, and heavy crossbow with chainmail, light wooden shield, handaxe, and shortbow.

**Development:** Bóthvarr explains that more than a week ago a terrible beast tore the very wall from this hall, killed the house thralls, and mauled his father before dragging him off into the deep woods. Bóthvarr awoke and tried to battle the beast but could not overcome its fury, nearly losing his left leg in the attempt. Four of the jarl's huscarls pursued the beast into the forest but have not been seen since. Since then, beasts have been seen prowling the edge of the woods near the village, and a few of the locals were attacked when leaving the lumberyard for their homes in the late hours of the night. In spite of his wounds, the town looks to him for leadership as the jarl's son and chief huscarl.

Bóthvarr relates to the PCs his father's adventures with Thorvald (the first two paragraphs under **Adventure Background** above). He says his father never spoke much of what transpired in the shadows of the deep woods that day, but Bóthvarr believes these attacks are somehow related to the old stories. He is desperate for aid and fears that these attacks will only get worse as the nights pass. All the attacks have been in the evening, and the locals all get a sense that the deep woods has somehow grown fouler — nothing overt, just a sense of ill omen and the sounds of sceadugenga in the night. The beast that attacked his father and the few locals seems to be acting randomly, though Bóthvarr and the two thralls are the only victims who were not carried off into the deep woods. Thus far, including the original rampage in the jarl's hall, there have been three such attacks.

In return for their aid, Bóthvarr is willing to pay the party a portion of his father's own treasures which he gained in his days of high adventure with Thorvald the Wanderer. Beyond that, he has little to offer, but he makes every attempt to play to their better nature and mind's-worth as Northlander heroes.

Once his offer is accepted, Bóthvarr asks the PCs to retrieve a long wooden footlocker bound in iron from under his bed. It is fairly heavy, and when they bring it to him, he tells them to open it and take whatever they like. Inside it they find Ivar's old adventuring kit and a small nest egg of valuables that include gold and silver arm-rings, torcs, and hacksilver (see "Treasure" below). A DC 19 Perception check locates a previously undiscovered false bottom in the chest that hides a small traveler's journal. Bóthvarr is as surprised as the PCs at its discovery. See the adjacent **player handout** for relevant entries from the journal.

If the PCs ask to see Bóthvarr's wounds, he tells them not to concern themselves with his minor injuries. However, if they press the matter, he

# Thorvald's Gift Rumor Table

While in Thorvald's Gift, the PCs have multiple opportunities to obtain rumors about current events through contact with the locals. Anytime the PCs are successful in obtaining information from a local as described in the description, roll 1d12 and consult the table below to determine what rumor they hear. Unless otherwise noted, each interaction with a local yields only one rumor. A rumor can be heard more than once, but if the PCs are unlucky and keep hearing the same rumor over again feel free to reroll or choose another rumor as necessary.

1d12	Rumor
1	There is an evil tree at the heart of the wood that is the lair of a powerful wight returned from the grave for his vengeance. (Partially true)
2	Ivar's story about his past adventures with Thorvald are lies. There were other survivors on that last fateful journey, and I have heard it said that they tell things differently about what occurred in the deep woods. (Partially true)
3	Merada brews a special drink that could fell even one of the Jötnar with one swig. (False)
4	If you sleep under the full moon at the shrine of the Vanir, when you awake you'll be in the land of the sceadugenga. (False)
5	A great linnorm that lives deep in the forest is the source of the evils that trouble Thorvald's Gift. (False)
6	Bóthvarr and Merada are having a secret love affair. (False)
7	The overseer of the lumberyard is stealing from the jarl. (False)
8	Thorvald's spirit still lingers in the deep woods where he fell. (True)
9	An evil god of the Ginnvaettir has cursed the deep woods. (Partially true)
10	The noises of beasts heard at night are the wights of loggers who died felling trees. (False)
11	Bóthvarr made a deal with the beasts of the woodland to murder his father. (False)
12	Ivar murdered his wife soon after Bóthvarr was born. (False)

reveals them. Other than minor bruises and cuts, the wounds are clearly those of someone who has been attacked by a large predatory beast, with claw marks raking his side and several obviously cracked ribs. His left leg has been badly mauled by the toothed maw of said beast, and he is lucky to not have lost it. The two thralls were both buried behind the hall, and if dug up, show the same kind of mauling wounds. The superstitious Northlanders will be aghast at risking the wrath of the wights by disturbing their graves, and thereafter the PCs receive a –4 penalty on all skill checks and ability checks involving Charisma when dealing with the folk of Thorvald's Gift.

**Treasure:** The total value of the gold and silver in Ivar's chest is 2,900 hs plus 2 amethysts (150 hs each). In addition, there are a *potion of cure serious wounds*, *potion of cure light wounds*, *potion of heroism*, +2 *chain shirt*, +3 *handaxe*, and +1 *dagger*.

# A2. The White Hart

This open-sided tent has been set up outside the jarl's damaged hall to offer more room and protection from sun and rain. The canvas roof of the tent is painted with the simple but distinct image of a white stag. Beneath its canopy are half-adozen long wooden tables flanked by benches. These surround a round wooden bar upon which are set large casks of bitters, port, and ale. Wooden tankards and horn steins cover one side of the bar, and a large roasting pit ringed with stones serves as a cook fire beyond its boundaries. Near this fire pit, an oven of stacked stone has been built. Smoke rises from its tall chimney, and the smell of baking bread is mouthwatering.

A matronly woman with formerly fiery hair — now more ashes than flame — is filling mugs and calling names. She occasionally wanders out to the fire to pull roasted meat from long skewers and sets them on wooden trenchers. In spite of her age, she is still spry and moves with strength and purpose. The handful of somber patrons who sit at the tables or linger at the bar take their food and drinks from her, leaving hacksilver for her to collect.

The owner of The White Hart as the locals have come to call the summer pavilion is Merada Whitehair, the widow of a once-prominent shipbuilder of Halfstead. She came to Thorvald's Gift soon after its founding when her husband was killed in a construction accident. She was put in charge of Jarl Ivar's kitchens and was eventually able to create this pavilion to better serve food and drink to the hard-working locals in the warmer months. She is tough, no-nonsense, and is not afraid to settle disputes with a cudgel. She's firm, fair, and enjoys a good conversation with any patron who spends time in her establishment. During the day, the White Hart isn't very busy, with only 1d4 loggers. During the evenings, it springs to life with 4d6 loggers present for food and drink in spite of the recent troubles. The villagers are gruff and reserved, but open up for anyone who succeeds on a DC 15 Diplomacy check. Buying them a drink or a meal provides a +2 bonus to this check. No check is necessary to obtain information from Merada. If the PCs inquire with Merada or any of the patrons about the recent troubles, consult Thorvald's Gift Rumor Table. Talking to Merada yields two rumors rather than just one.

#### MERADA WHITEHAIR XP 800

**hp** 23 (Pathfinder Roleplaying Game GameMastery Guide "Barkeep"\*)

\*Replace masterwork heavy crossbow, +1 human bane bolt, and sap with +1 merciful club and frying pan (treat as improvised weapon).

LOGGER CR 2
XP 600
hp 26 (See Area A6)

# A3. Lumberyard

Felled trees cut at various lengths rest here in piles. Men work with axes and saws trimming, stripping, and sectioning trees in preparation for transport downstream.

The lumberyard is the heart of Thorvald's Gift. During the day, 2d8+4 loggers can be found here working the timber. They are gruff and more concerned with their work than dealing with curious travelers. If the PCs ask about the recent troubles in Thorvald's Gift, they are directed to speak with Bóthvarr (area A1) or Merada (area A2). Characters who become violent or aggressive find themselves facing several angry Northlanders armed with wood axes.

LOGGER XP 600 hp 26 (See Area A6)

## A4. Shop

Other than the jarl's hall, this is the largest building in Thorvald's Gift. A simple cottage, it has large, hide-covered windows set into its front face, flanking a heavy wooden door standing open. A sign hangs over the door with the simple image of various hand tools burnt into the wood. A thatched roof protects it from the elements, and through the open doorway you can see all manner of wares associated with the lumber trade sitting on display on shelves and tables.

CR 2

Torfi the Shrewd owns and operates the general store, and lives here with his wife Geirhildr. He also keeps a trained guard dog on a leash behind his establishment during the day, though the beast sleeps inside at night. He keeps a well-stocked shop that contains all manner of supplies needed to manage the lumberyard and maintain a household. This includes axes, saws, rope, knives, hooks and other tools of the trade and many assorted mundane household goods. He does not keep a large stock of weapons beyond those used by hunters, such as shortbows, spears, and arrows. He does not stock martial weapons or heavy armor. If the PCs seek some particular mundane item not mentioned above, there is a flat 65% chance he has it. A ladder leads to a small loft bedroom above the main floor. Torfi keeps his earnings hidden in a large sack that is under his large straw mattress (DC 17 Perception check to locate). The sack contains his savings of 327 hs.

# TORFI and GEIRHILDR CR 1 XP 400

**hp** 13 (Pathfinder Roleplaying Game GameMastery Guide "Shopkeep")

GUARD DOG CR 1 XP 400

hp 13 (Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary "Dog, Riding")

**Development:** If questioned about current events, Torfi has little interest in the beasts that have been attacking Thorvald's Gift, save for as it pertains to the protection of his wife and his business. However, he will play up the threat if he thinks he can make a few extra sales to gullible would-be heroes.

## As. Shrine to the Vanir

This large tree casts a shadow over many of the surrounding cottages. A hollow has been cut into its base, and the heartwood beneath is carved to depict the image of a man with a beard of leaves and a woman holding a bow. Small alcoves cut into the wood can be used for small candles or to leave offerings.

This small shrine is the closest thing that Thorvald's Gift has to a godshouse. It is a simple shrine devoted to the Vanir gods of nature — primarily Freyja and Freyr. There is no full-time godi to tend to the small shrine, though locals occasionally come here to offer up a small prayer or gift. Lately, villagers have begun leaving a garland of flowers in a plea for protection from the predators of the deep woods. Druids or divine spellcasters dedicated to one of the Vanir who spend an hour in prayerful vigil at this shrine can prepare one additional 1st-level spell for the day. The locals are unaware of this shrine's secret blessing, but a divine spellcaster can realize its significance with a DC 15 Knowledge (religion) check. If PCs take the offerings left by the villagers or the shrine

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CR3

is otherwise despoiled, the perpetrator receives the effects of a *bane* spell for 24 hours (no save).

# A6. Loggers' Homes

About a dozen small cabins are scattered about the village of Thorvald's Gift. They are simple thatch-roofed affairs, with stone chimneys. Goodwives can be seen bustling about, tending to small gardens or washing clothes on the nearby riverbanks. A few children are present, gathered in a small group to play with a large mongrel dog.

The residents found here during the day are primarily the wives and children of the loggers who work the forest. They have little interest in strangers, whom they fear are likely to bring more trouble down on Thorvald's Gift. Most adults who are approached are likely to ask the player characters to go on about their business and leave them be. The children, on the other hand, are quite curious, though their information is likely to be embellished and full of fanciful tales. Use **Thorvald's Gift Rumor Table** for any news obtained from these locals, though feel free to expand upon them in fanciful ways to reflect the children's imaginations. The **mongrel dog** who plays with the children is a surprisingly stout mutt who follows any PC who feeds it, serving loyally as long as it is shown kindness.

After nightfall, the **loggers** begin to return to their homes. They are generally taciturn and tightlipped toward strangers, though a DC 20 Diplomacy check turns their attitude to friendly. If the PCs mention they are working on behalf of young Bóthvarr, they receive a +4 bonus to this check. If a logger is made friendly, refer to **Thorvald's Gift Rumor Table** for information that can be gleaned from the encounter.

MONGREL DOG CR 1 XP 400

**hp** 13 (Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary "Dog, Riding")

LOGGER CR 2 XP 600

Male or female expert 4 N Medium humanoid (human)

Init +0; Perception +8

AC 13, touch 10, flat-footed 13 (+3 armor)

**hp** 26 (4d8+8)

Fort +3; Ref +1; Will +5

Speed 30 ft.

**Melee** greataxe +5 (1d12+3/x3) or dagger +5 (1d4+2/19–20) **Ranged** longbow +3 (1d8/x3)

Str 14, Dex 10, Con 15, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 10 Base Atk +3; CMB +5; CMD 15

**Feats** Diehard<sup>B</sup>, Endurance, Martial Weapon Proficiency (greataxe)

**Skills** Craft (carpentry) +7, Climb +11, Knowledge (engineering) +7, Knowledge (local) +7, Perception +8, Profession (logger) +8, Survival +8, Swim +9

Languages Nørsk

**Gear** masterwork, studded leather armor, greataxe, dagger, climber's kit, pouch with 5d10 hs

#### A6a Thrasi's House

This cottage, much like the others, is the home of the foreman Thrasi (see area A above). It is empty when he is gone, with no wife or children to occupy it. Searching within its cluttered and unkempt interior (DC 19 Perception) can locate his personal stash of 167 hs.

# Night Watch (CR 7)

As a means of ending the predation, the PCs are likely to take guard duty in or around the village and perhaps even set a trap. Regardless of the preparations that they make, shortly after the sun sets the sounds of vicious wild beasts begin to be heard intermittently under the eaves of the surrounding trees and steadily grow closer to the settlement. Whether the PCs choose to plunge into the forest to confront the creatures, wait for them to emerge, or set up some sort of trap, their efforts are soon rewarded as a number of large wolves attack. They are unprepared for the presence of the PCs, and it is possible that they are surprised by the party and put at a considerable disadvantage from the outset. Feel free to allow the party's plans to come off without a hitch for this encounter, as it is meant to be revelatory as opposed to a serious challenge. If the PCs choose to set off into the woods immediately rather than guard the village, then this encounter occurs during their first night of travel.

The attack consists of **5 worgs** and a **werewolf** in wolf form (and largely indistinguishable from the worgs themselves). Though normally intelligent beasts, these creatures fight with a savage fury with little regard for tactics and refuse to surrender.

WORGS (5) CR 2 XP 600

hp 26 (Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary "Worg")

WEREWOLF CR 2 XP 600

**hp** 21 (Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary "Lycanthrope, Werewolf")

**Note:** This is an afflicted werewolf rather than a natural one, so its bite does not transmit the curse of lycanthropy to its victims, though PCs need not know that immediately.

**Development:** The werewolf remains in wolf form until he falls in battle, at which point he transforms back into the form of one of the human villagers, a logger named Fenrir who disappeared in one of the attacks a week ago and has been presumed dead. If the PCs attempt to communicate with him, then with his dying breaths he mumbles, "The corrupted heart ... at the Black Oak," before expiring. If his death does not allow such an opportunity, then it is one of the worgs who utters this cryptic statement before it dies (the worgs speak Nørsk and Giant).

If the party does not take the hint to investigate the heart of the wood from this encounter, then attacks continue nightly (consult the **Deep Woods Encounter Table** below). There are no more lycanthropic villagers involved, but the participants of each attack is far more savage and bestial than a normal member of its species might otherwise be, once again pointing to something that is inherently wrong occurring deep in the forest.

# Part Two: Deep Trouble in the Deep Woods

After the PCs have the opportunity to speak with Bóthvarr, Merada, and others to learn of the recent troubles in Thorvald's Gift, they should concern themselves with protecting the villagers from the nightly attacks, perhaps with a sojourn into the ominous depths of the forest where it seems the troubles may have started. After the events of **Night Watch** above, such a journey should seem inevitable.

No known tracks cut through the forest, and it is little explored beyond its eaves where the loggers ply their trade. If the PCs recovered Ivar's journal from area A1, then they can piece together a course leading to the strange black oak at the heart of the forest from his writings. Otherwise, simply by traveling through the forest and always walking in the direction that the trees seem to grow taller and darker, the undergrowth thicker will more or less guide the PCs in the right direction as well. This latter information is well known among the loggers of Thorvald's

Gift and is used as local wisdom in order to *not* accidentally stumble into the deep woods. Any local who is asked readily provides this bit of guidance.

There is no map of the forest depths themselves; instead, the journey is presented as taking a certain length of time that is punctuated by escalating random encounters before the PCs reach the source of the darkness at its center: the Black Oak. It ordinarily takes 5 days of travel for the party to walk to the Black Oak (mounted travel or flight are not options due to the thickness of the forest). If the PCs have Ivar's journal, then they are able to set a more direct course, reducing the time of travel to 4 days. Along the way, they will encounter many dangers of the woodlands. Play up the oppressive nature of the deep woods and the sense that the player characters are being watched and even hunted.

The forest is dense, trackless and difficult to traverse. Little direct sunlight reaches the woodland floor through its thick canopy, and travel is slow. Overland travel is at one-half speed, and unless otherwise noted, each encounter occurs in light undergrowth with a 25% chance of being in heavy undergrowth (see "Wilderness" in Chapter 13 of the *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Core Rulebook*). Each day of travel requires a DC 15 Survival check to remain on course. A failed check means that the PCs have gotten turned around and must spend much of the day backtracking, adding 1 day to the length of time needed to reach the Black Oak.

Each day of travel after the first (see **The Return of Ivar** below) brings the chance of a random encounter. This begins as a base 50% chance the first night. Each cumulative day of travel increases this chance by 5%. Each night spent camped in the woods increases this chance by 10%. If the PCs opt to light a campfire at night, the chance increases by 20% rather than 10%. However, if a night encounter occurs and the PCs do not have a campfire or other light source, then they will be fighting in total darkness unless they have low-light vision or darkvision. So they must deal with certain risks either way.

Once an encounter occurs, the base chance resets to 50% and increases cumulatively again as described above. A check for encounters should be rolled once during the day after the first day and once during each night, starting with the first night. If an encounter is called for, roll 1d10 and consult the **Deep Woods Encounter Table** below.

#### Deep Woods Encounter Table

d10	Encounter	Average CR	
1	1d3 giant skunks	5	
2	1d4+3 archer bushes	6	
3	Hangman tree	7	
4	3d4 worgs	7	
5	1d4+2 assassin vines	8	
6	Lightning treant	8	
7	4d4 troblins	8	
8	Ivar the Stout	9	
9–10	1d2 beasts of chaos	varies (see below)	

#### ARCHER BUSHES (1d4+3) XP 600

CR 2

The Tome of Horrors Complete 36

N Small plant

Init +0; Senses tremorsense 60 ft.; Perception +0

AC 14, touch 11, flat-footed 14 (+3 natural, +1 size)

**hp** 21 (3d8+9)

Fort +6; Ref +1; Will +1 Immune plant traits

Speed 10 ft.

Ranged thorns +4 (1d8)

Str 11, Dex 10, Con 16, Int 2, Wis 11, Cha 9
Base Atk +2; CMB +1; CMD 11 (can't be tripped)

Feats Skill Focus (Stealth), Weapon Focus (thorns) Skills Stealth +13

**Thorns (Ex)** An archer bush can loose a cluster of needlesharp thorns at a single target within 20 feet as a standard action. An opponent hit by the thorns takes 1d8 points of piercing damage. Further, the target takes a –1 circumstance penalty on attack rolls, saves, and checks until the thorns are removed (full-round action to remove the thorns).

#### ASSASSIN VINES (1d4+2) XP 800

CR3

**hp** 30 (Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary "Assassin Vine")

**Beasts of Chaos:** When this result comes up on the random encounter table, roll 1d4 and consult the following tables to determine the type of animal that has been warped by the influence of the Black Oak. Stats for these beasts of chaos are at the end of this section.

#### Beasts of Chaos

d4	Beast of Chaos Types	CR
1	Wolf	3
2	Dire boar	6
3	Grizzly bear	6
4	Smilodon	7

#### **GIANT SKUNKS (1d3)**

CR3

XP 800

hp 27 (Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary 3 "Skunk, Giant")

#### **HANGMAN TREE**

CR 7

XP 3.200

**hp** 84 (Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary 2 "Hangman Tree")

# LIGHTNING TREANT

CR8

XP 4,800

The Tome of Horrors Complete 607

NE Huae plant

Init +3; Senses low-light vision; Perception +3

AC 22, touch 7, flat-footed 22 (-1 Dex, +15 natural, -2 size)

**hp** 138 (12d8+84); fast healing 10

Fort +15; Ref +3; Will +7

Defensive Abilities electric healing; DR 10/slashing; Immune

electricity, plant traits; Resist fire 10

Speed 40 ft.

**Melee** 2 slam +16 (2d8+9)

Space 15 ft.; Reach 15 ft.

Special Attacks double damage against objects

**Druid Spell-like Abilities** (CL 12th):

At will—enlarge, faerie fire, greater magic fang (self only) 3/day—call lightning storm (DC 18), lightning bolt (DC 16),

protection from energy

1/day—chain lightning (DC 19)

Str 28, Dex 9, Con 24, Int 11, Wis 17, Cha 11

Base Atk +9; CMB +20; CMD 29

**Feats** Cleave, Greater Sunder, Improved Initiative, Improved Sunder, Power Attack, Skill Focus (Survival)

**Skills** Knowledge (nature) +4, Stealth -2 (+14 in forests),

Survival +7; Racial Modifiers +16 Stealth in forests

Languages Aklo

Double Damage Against Objects (Ex) A lightning treant

# Troblin Mutations

Each troblin has the potential to possess 1d2 random mutations brought about by its bizarre regeneration. Roll on the table below for each mutation.

d20	Mutation	
1–2	Dual forearm; claw damage increased by one die type (claw damage 1d6+3) and it gains the benefits of wielding a twohanded weapon with that arm.	
3–4	Dual foreleg; +2 racial bonus to Acrobatics checks, +2 racial bonus on CMD to resist being bull rushed or tripped when standing on solid ground.	
5–6	Massive scarring; natural armor bonus increases by +1.	
7	Multiple muscles; +2 Strength.	
8	Shortened tendons; +2 Dexterity.	
9	Redundant vital organs; +2 Constitution.	
10	Third leg; +4 racial bonus to Acrobatics checks, +4 racial bonus on CMD to resist being bull rushed or tripped when standing on solid ground, +10 to Speed.	
11	Two arms on one side; gains an additional claw attack when making a full attack and gains the benefits of wielding a two-handed weapon with that arm.	
12	Two heads; Gains Superior Two-Weapon Fighting ability (see below) and a +2 racial bonus on Perception checks.	
13–20	No mutation.	

**Superior Two-Weapon Fighting (Ex)** Troblins with two heads automatically gain this ability. Because each of its two heads controls an arm, a troblin does not take a penalty on attack or damage rolls for attacking with two weapons.



that makes a full attack against an object or structure deals double damage.

**Electric Healing (Ex)** Electricity damage heals a lightning treant 1 point of damage for every 3 points it would otherwise deal. If the amount would cause the lightning treant to exceed its full normal hit points, it gains any excess as temporary hit points — these temporary hit points last for 2 hours.

#### TROBLINS (4d4) XP 600

CR 2

The Tome of Horrors Complete 609 CE Medium humanoid (goblinoid)

Init +1; Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +2

AC 13, touch 11, flat-footed 12 (+1 Dex, +2 natural) hp 22 (3d8+6 plus 3); regeneration 2 (acid or fire) Fort +5; Ref +4; Will +1

Speed 30 ft.

**Melee** greatclub +5 (1d10+4), bite +0 (1d6+1) or 2 claws +5 (1d4+3), bite +5 (1d6+3)

Str 16, Dex 12, Con 15, Int 8, Wis 11, Cha 7
Base Atk +2; CMB +5; CMD 16
Feats Great Fortitude, Toughness
Skills Perception +2, Stealth +5
Languages Giant
SQ mutation
Gear greatclub

**Mutation (Ex)** The regenerative ability of a troblin does not function as well as those of its trollish parent. Sometimes when an injured troblin regenerates, its body warps in an inexplicable fashion. A severed arm may regrow as two arms, or a scar may grow to cover the troblin's entire body in thick skin. Further, if a troblin suffers a critical hit in melee, it has a 25% chance of gaining a mutation once it is fully healed. See the sidebar for random mutations.

#### WORGS (3d4) XP 600

CR 2

hp 26 (Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary "Worg")

### Beasts of Chaos

# DIRE BOAR BEAST OF CHAOS XP 2,400

CR 6

Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary "Boar, Dire'; The Tome of Horrors Complete 702

CN Large magical beast (augmented animal)

Init +4; Senses darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision, scent;

Perception +20

Aura frightful presence (30 ft., DC 13)

AC 19, touch 9, flat-footed 19 (+10 natural, -1 size)

**hp** 47 (5d10+15 plus 5) **Fort** +7; **Ref** +4; **Will** +2

**Immune** confusion, fear, hold animal, hold monster, slow,

haste; **SR** 17

Speed 40 ft.

Melee gore +9 (2d6+10) Space/Reach 10 ft./5 ft. Special Attacks rage

Str 25, Dex 10, Con 17, Int 2, Wis 13, Cha 12 Base Atk +3; CMB +11; CMD 21 (25 vs. trip)

Feats Improved Initiative, Skill Focus (Perception), Toughness Skills Perception +20; Racial Modifiers +20 Perception

Rage (Ex) In the presence of bright light (a daylight spell,

continual flame, but not actual sunlight), a beast of chaos flies into a berserk rage, attacking until either it or its opponent is dead. It gains +4 Strength and -4 AC while enraged. It cannot end its rage voluntarily. If the source of light is removed, the creature's rage ends 1d4 rounds later. The beast is fatigued (-2 to Strength and Dexterity) for the remainder of the encounter.

GRIZZLY BEAR BEAST OF CHAOS CR 6
XP 2,400

Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary "Bear, Grizzly"; The Tome of Horrors Complete 702

CN Large magical beast (augmented animal)

Init +1; Senses darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision, scent;
Perception +14

Aura frightful presence (30 ft., DC 12)

**AC** 20, touch 10, flat-footed 19 (+1 Dex, +10 natural, -1 size) **hp** 47 (5d10+20)

Fort +8; Ref +5; Will +2

**Immune** confusion, fear, hold animal, hold monster, slow,

haste; SR 17

Speed 40 ft.

Melee 2 claws +7 (1d6+5 plus grab), bite +7 (1d6+5)

Space/Reach 10 ft./5 ft. Special Attacks rage

Str 23, Dex 13, Con 19, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 10

Base Atk +3; CMB +10 (+14 grapple); CMD 21 (25 vs. trip)

Feats Endurance, Run, Skill Focus (Survival)

**Skills** Perception +14, Survival +5, Swim +15; **Racial Modifiers** +8 Perception, +4 Swim

Rage (Ex) In the presence of bright light (a daylight spell, continual flame, but not actual sunlight), a beast of chaos flies into a berserk rage, attacking until either it or its opponent is dead. It gains +4 Strength and –4 AC while enraged. It cannot end its rage voluntarily. If the source of light is removed, the creature's rage ends 1d4 rounds later. The beast is fatigued (–2 to Strength and Dexterity) for the remainder of the encounter.

#### SMILODON BEAST OF CHAOS CR 7 XP 3.200

The Tome of Horrors Complete 692, 702

CN Medium magical beast (augmented animal)

**Init** +2; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; **Perception** +17

Aura frightful presence (30 ft., DC 13)

**AC** 19, touch 12, flat-footed 17 (+2 Dex, +7 natural) **hp** 57 (6d10+24)

Fort +9; Ref +7; Will +3

**Immune** confusion, fear, hold animal, hold monster, slow, haste; **SR** 18

Speed 40 ft.

**Melee** bite +11 (1d8+7 plus grab plus bleed), 2 claws +11 (1d4+7 plus grab)

**Special Attacks** bleed (1d3), pounce, rage, rake (2 claws +10, 1d4+6)

Str 25, Dex 15, Con 19, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 10
Base Atk +4; CMB +11 (+15 grapple); CMD 23 (27 vs. trip)
Feats Power Attack, Run, Skill Focus (Perception)
Skills Acrobatics +10 (+14 jump), Perception +17, Stealth +11 (+15 in heavy undergrowth or tall grass), Swim +11;
Racial Modifiers +4 Acrobatics, +4 Stealth (+8 in heavy

undergrowth or tall grass), +8 Perception

Rage (Ex) In the presence of bright light (a daylight spell, continual flame, but not actual sunlight), a beast of chaos flies into a berserk rage, attacking until either it or its opponent is dead. It gains +4 Strength and -4 AC while enraged. It cannot end its rage voluntarily. If the source of light is removed, the creature's rage ends 1d4 rounds later. The beast is fatigued (-2 to Strength and Dexterity) for the remainder of the encounter.

# WOLF BEAST OF CHAOS XP 800

CR3

Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary "Wolf"; The Tome of Horrors Complete 702

CN Medium magical beast (augmented animal)

Init +2; Senses darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision, scent;

Perception +16

**Aura** frightful presence (30 ft., DC 11)

AC 18, touch 12, flat-footed 16 (+2 Dex, +6 natural)

**hp** 15 (2d10+4)

Fort +5; Ref +5; Will +1

**Immune** confusion, fear, hold animal, hold monster, slow,

haste; SR 14

Speed 50 ft.

Melee bite +3 (1d6+2 plus trip)

**Special Attacks** rage

Str 15, Dex 15, Con 15, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 10

Base Atk +1; CMB +3; CMD 15 (19 vs. trip)

Feats Skill Focus (Perception)

**Skills** Perception +16, Stealth +6, Survival +1 (+5 tracking by scent); **Racial Modifiers** +4 Survival when tracking by scent, +8 Perception

Rage (Ex) In the presence of bright light (a daylight spell, continual flame, but not actual sunlight), a beast of chaos flies into a berserk rage, attacking until either it or its opponent is dead. It gains +4 Strength and -4 AC while enraged. It cannot end its rage voluntarily. If the source of light is removed, the creature's rage ends 1d4 rounds later. The beast is fatigued (-2 to Strength and Dexterity) for the remainder of the encounter.

# The Return of Ivar (CR 9)

The first day of the party's travel in the deep woods brings them face to face with the man they are seeking. **Ivar the Stout**, as the powerful werebeast that he has become, stalks the woods and comes across the party's trail.

# IVAR THE STOUT (VLKODLAK FORM, RAGING) CR 9 XP 6,400

Male old afflicted were-vlkodlak human fighter 9 (The Northlands Saga Complete 78, Advanced Bestiary 205) CE Large monstrous humanoid (human, sceadugengan, shapechanger)

**Init** +6; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision, scent; **Perception** +13

**AC** 18, touch 11, flat-footed 15 (+1 deflection, +2 Dex, +1 dodge, +7 natural, -2 raging, -1 size)

**hp** 117 (9d10+54 plus 9)

Fort +12; Ref +5; Will +6 (+8 vs. fear)

**Defensive Abilities** bravery +2; **DR** 5/good and silver; **SR** 15

Speed 40 ft.

### NORTHLANDS SAGA: THE LONG NIGHT OF WINTER

Melee bite +17 (2d6+8), 2 claws +16 (1d8+8)

Space 10 ft.; Reach 10 ft.

**Special Attacks** rage 24 rounds/day, rage powers (powerful blow +3, quick reflexes, terrifying howl DC 19, unexpected strike), weapon training (axes +2, natural +1)

Str 24, Dex 14, Con 23, Int 8, Wis 12, Cha 12 Base Atk +9; CMB +17; CMD 31

**Feats** Blind-Fight, Cleave<sup>B</sup>, Dodge<sup>B</sup>, Improved Initiative, Power Attack<sup>B</sup>, Skill Focus (Stealth), Step Up, Vital Strike, Weapon Focus (bite)<sup>B</sup>, Weapon Focus (greataxe)<sup>B</sup>, Weapon Specialization (greataxe)<sup>B</sup>

Skills Perception +13, Stealth +13

Languages Nørsk

**SQ** armor training 2, change shape (human, hybrid, vlkodlak; *polymorph*), lycanthropic empathy (vlkodlaks), monstrous blood

**Gear (melded into body while in vlkodlak form)** +1 chain shirt, ring of protection +1, belt of mighty constitution +2

**Monstrous Blood (Ex)** In all forms, Ivar is considered both a humanoid and a monstrous humanoid for purposes of spells and effects that affect a specific monster type.

**Rage (Ex)** Vlkodlak can rage as a barbarian whose class level is equal to its Hit Dice. It gains powerful blow and terrifying howl as rage powers. Additional rage powers can be gained if the vlkodlak increases in Hit Dice.

**Tactics:** Ivar follows the party's trail and attempts to catch them by surprise (Stealth opposed to their Perception). He remains in his bear-like vlkodlak form throughout the battle, so it is unlikely that the PCs realize who he is during this encounter.

**Development:** Ivar attacks and fights for 1d4 rounds or until he loses a quarter of his hit points. He then flees back into the woods, though a ranger PC could attempt to track him and bring him to bay. If the PCs actually manage to slay Ivar in this encounter, after 1 round his body sinks into the ground where it is claimed by the forest and can no longer be found. This act regenerates him — the oath he swore to Loptr will not allow him to end his suffering until the Black Oak has been destroyed and Thorvald's spirit laid to rest. He regains full hit points and emerges from the forest floor again in some random location near where he fell at moonrise of the next night, allowing him to continue to plague the PCs.

# B. The Black Oak Grove (CR 7)

The great canopy of the deep woods opens, only to be consumed by an even greater shadow. Amid a pool of festering, putrid water there rises a gnarled oak of unimaginable size. Its long branches are covered with gray, dead leaves that somehow seem to block out even more light than the other oppressive vegetation of this accursed forest as they droop in the mist-laden air of this clearing. Its thick roots plunge into the pool, burying themselves deep in the sleeping earth — it is vast, unyielding and vile. If ever there was a heart of corruption in the forest depths, it is this infernal oak.

The terrible Black Oak is, in fact, the source of evil in the deep woods. Its mere presence has a corrupting influence. Characters who are good and noble (of lawful or good alignment) will find themselves uncomfortable and downtrodden in its presence, suffering a –1 penalty on all saving throws as long as they remain within sight of the tree. In addition, the tree weakens the effects of healing magic, drawing the positive energy from such spells as they are cast. All curative spells that restore hit points are only 50% as effective as normal. Inflict spells (such as *inflict light wounds*) meanwhile deal 150% normal damage as if a recipient of the Empower Spell feat.

In addition to the dark pact made by Ivar long ago, the tree's blight over

the land is further enhanced by the presence of several former adventuring compatriots of Thorvald, now bound to the Black Oak under the same curse. They are corrupted and monstrous, fed and groomed by its all-pervasive evil.

The waters in which the Black Oak takes root are also corrupted. Anyone foolish enough to drink of this fell brew finds that it does not quench thirst. In fact, it causes greater thirst and weakness in the drinker as if he has gone for days without water or sustenance. Each time a drink is taken, the individual must make a DC 15 Fortitude save or suffer 1 point of Constitution drain. Furthermore, those who disturb the water or drink from it awaken the lingering undead spirit of Velana, Thorvald's former lover and adventuring companion. She is now bound to the pool of the Black Oak as a **graveborne** fen witch with gray, sloughing leathery skin over a skeletal frame, webbed hands and feet, fiery red points of light in hollow eye sockets, and a single nostril in the center of her face, all shrouded in the tatters of a rotten robe.

VELANA XP 3,200 CR 7

Female advanced graveborne fen witch (The Tome of Horrors 278; The Ossuarite "Graveborne" template) CE Medium undead

Init +7; Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +13 Aura horrific appearance (60 ft., DC 17, 1d8 Str)

**AC** 20, touch 13, flat-footed 17 (+3 Dex, +7 natural) **hp** 51 (6d10+18)

Fort +7; Ref +8; Will +9

**Defensive Abilities** channel resistance +2; **DR** 5/bludgeoning; **Immune** undead traits; **Resist** cold 10; **SR** 17

Speed 30 ft.

**Melee** 2 claws +11 (1d4+5)

**Special Attacks** death speak (DC 17), mind probe (Will DC 17)

Str 21, Dex 17, Con 17, Int 18, Wis 18, Cha 19 Base Atk +6; CMB +11; CMD 24

**Feats** Alertness, Blind-Fight, Great Fortitude, Improved Initiative<sup>B</sup>

**Skills** Climb +14, Disguise +13, Intimidate +13, Knowledge (religion) +13, Perception +13, Stealth +12, Survival +13, Swim +14

**Languages** Aklo, Nørsk; telepathy 100 ft. **SQ** hag, swamp stride

**Death Speak (Su):** A fen witch who knows an individual's true name can speak that name as a swift action. If the individual hears the fen witch speak its name, that creature must succeed on a DC 17 Will save or perish. If the save succeeds, that creature cannot be affected again by the same fen witch's death speak for 24 hours. Note that the fen witch does not need to speak a language the creature understands in order to affect it; she only needs to speak its true name. Other fen witches or creatures who hear the target's true name cannot use this ability; it only functions for the fen witch after she has used her mind probe ability on the target. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Whether the fen witch's death speak ability is successful or not, the target's name remains fresh in her mind for 24 hours. After that, she must use her mind probe ability again to retrieve a creature's true name.

**Hag (Ex)** A fen witch counts as a hag for the purpose of joining a hag's coven.

Horrific Appearance (Su) The sight of a fen witch is so revolting that anyone within 60 feet (other than another fen witch or hag) who sets eyes upon one must succeed on a DC 17 Fortitude save or instantly be weakened, taking 1d8 points of Strength damage. Creatures that are affected by this power or that successfully save against it cannot be affected again by the same fen witch's horrific appearance for 24 hours. This is a mind-affecting effect. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Mind Probe (Su) As a full-round action, a fen witch can peer into the mind of a living creature within 60 feet in an attempt to extract the creature's true name. The target can resist the mental trespassing by succeeding on a DC 17 Will save. If the save fails, the fen witch has learned the creature's true name and can use her death speak ability. Creatures with an Intelligence score of 2 or less and creatures with no Intelligence score are immune to this ability. Psionic creatures can use defense modes or other psionic abilities to counter this probe. A creature that successfully saves cannot be affected again by the same fen witch's mind probe for one day. The save DC is Wisdom-based.

Swamp Stride (Ex) A fen witch can move through any sort of natural difficult terrain at its normal speed while within a swamp. Magically altered terrain affects a fen witch normally.

**Tactics:** Velana does not attack right away, preferring instead to remain hidden in the mists shrouding the surrounding trees with total concealment. When the PCs enter the clearing, read the following:

Gentle laughter echoes through the misty clearing, but quickly turns predatory. "Come for Thorvald, have you? You'll not have him. He belonged first to me, then to the tree. None shall pass between the roots to claim him while the blood of the vine still flows. ... Who are you, and why do you seek Thorvald?"

While the PCs search for the source of the voice (opposed Perception and Stealth checks with a +4 Stealth bonus due to the mist), the fen witch uses her mind probe ability to try to learn the true names of some of the PCs or confirm any names that the PCs gave her if they responded to her questions. Once she is discovered, she unleashes her horrific appearance and attempts to use death speak against any PCs whose names she knows. Velana fights until reduced to 0 hp, at which point the roots of the tree

reach forth and drag her under screaming as the tree reclaims its prize.

**Development:** Observant PCs may have noticed that Velana made mention of passing "between the roots." This is the key to entering the hollow of the Black Oak, which can be done only by actually wading into the waist-deep pool among the roots. A PC need only feel about in the murky waters near the roots (DC 12 Perception check) to discover a hollow that leads them into the depths below (area **B1**). Of course, characters may be reluctant to do so given the dangers of the water, but if they are careful not to swallow the water and have dealt with Velana, they can find a short, muddy, and water-filled tunnel that leads under the pool and up into the hollow at the base of the tree.

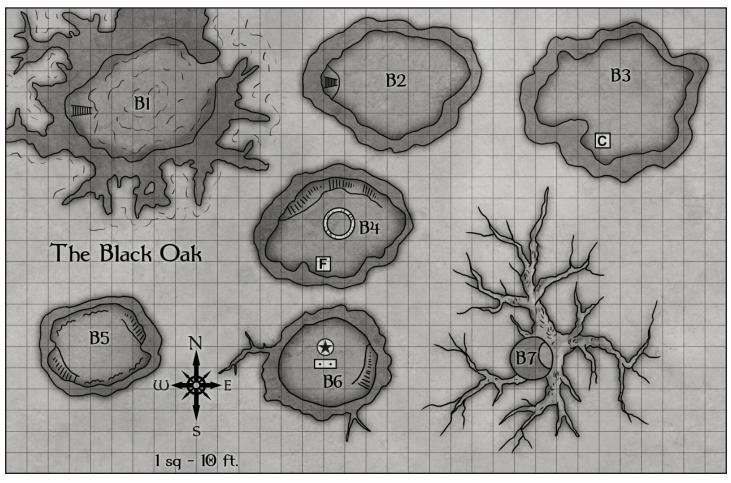
**Treasure:** A few remnants of Velana's days as a thief still linger in the putrid waters, though they are difficult to find. Searching through the waters is time consuming and allows a single DC 27 Perception check per searcher per hour to discover a small waterlogged and rotten bag containing a +2 dagger and 2 rubies worth 300 hs each.

# Inside the Black Oak

The Black Oak is alive (such as it is), but its heartwood is corrupted and in many places has completely rotted away, creating huge hollows in its interior. There hollows are so large as to be cavernous. Its interior is humid and oppressive, with no internal light. The walls are wood, though it is far too wet to burn, even with magical fire. In truth, it is protected by evil magic that prevents its destruction unless the great altar at its uppermost reaches is destroyed. The only hope is that would-be heroes ascend from its nested roots and destroy the black heart at its apex.

# Br. The Roots (CR 7)

The murky waters surrounding the great tree are pooled here in a large cavern of roots and thick, brown mud fed by



a constant trickle from the water above. This hidden pool is chest deep, and the mud sucks at your feet as you struggle toward what passes for a shore, where the tangle of winding roots has formed what could serve as a crude ladder to ascend into the dark interior of the tree itself.

The mud here is thick and deep, equal to a deep bog (see "Environment" in Chapter 13 of the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Core Rulebook). A strangle weed dwells at the bottom of this pool and attempts to coil around the first PC to cross toward the root ladder. Moreover, this pool is the final resting place of one of Thorvald's companions. This druid's bones have long since sunk into the deep muck, but his elemental companion remains and now guards his bones as the **Keeper of the Pool**. It sees anyone attempting to cross the pool as desecrating its master's grave and immediately attacks, though it has been slumbering for long years and will not awake to attack until 1 round after the strangle weed does so. The Keeper and the strangle weed ignore each other, but tend to complement each other quite well in battle as they gang up on victims rendered nearly helpless in the mud. The strangle weed will not leave the pool, but the Keeper pursues until destroyed.

#### **STRANGLE WEED XP 800**

CR4

The Tome of Horrors Complete 574

N Large plant (aquatic)

Init +2; Senses blindsight 30 ft., low-light vision; Perception +8

AC 18, touch 11, flat-footed 16 (+2 Dex, +7 natural, -1 size)

**hp** 38 (4d8+20)

Fort +9; Ref +3; Will +4

Defensive Abilities camouflage; Immune plant traits; Resist

Speed swim 5 ft.

Melee slam +9 (1d6+9 plus grab)

Space 10 ft.; Reach 20 ft.

Special Attacks constrict (1d6+9), fronds (5)

Str 22, Dex 14, Con 20, Int 2, Wis 16, Cha 10

Base Atk +3; CMB +10 (+14 grapple); CMD 22 (can't be

Feats Power Attack, Weapon Focus (slam) Skills Perception +8, Stealth +3, Swim +17

Camouflage (Ex) Since a strangle weed looks like normal seaweed when at rest, it takes a DC 20 Perception check to notice it before it attacks. Anyone with ranks in Survival or Knowledge (nature) can use one of those skills instead of Perception to notice the plant.

Fronds (Ex) Strangle weed attacks with fronds that can extend up to 20 feet from its central mass. Each strangle weed has 3–12 fronds. A strangle weed attacks with these fronds as a slam attack; although it can make only one attack per round, if it grapples a foe it is not denied its Dexterity bonus against non-grappled foes and can still make attacks of opportunity if it has any free fronds. Once a foe is grappled, the strangle weed can attempt to latch on 1-4 additional fronds each round as a standard action by means of a separate grapple check. Additional fronds attached to a foe do not do increased damage, but they do add a cumulative +2 bonus to the strangle weed's CMB on subsequent grapple checks against that foe. To free itself, the foe must succeed on a grapple check against every frond grappling it.

#### **KEEPER OF THE POOL** XP 3,200

CR 7

hp 95 (Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary 2 "Elemental, Mud, Huge")

# New Magic Item

Aura moderate transmutation; CL 7th **Slot**—; **Price** 142,210 gp; **Weight** 2 lb.

AL N; Senses 30 ft., darkvision

Int 12, Wis 10, Cha 14, Ego 14

Language telepathy, speech (Common, Halfling, Nørsk, Thieves' Cant)

#### **DESCRIPTION**

Recovered during a raid in the Southlands long ago, Flicker is an intelligent +2 speed short sword containing the personality of a halfling thief of Bard's Gate. It adapted to life in the Northlands, and even learned Nørsk before being lost in the Black Oak. It is able to cast blink and invisibility 1/day each. Its purpose is to defeat the rivals of the Gray Deacons thieves' guild (see Bard's Gate by Necromancer **Games**), but is unaware that the guild is no longer extant. As a result, it sees any rogue who does not identify himself with the Gray Deacons as a rival and makes use of its special purpose power to give its wielder a +2 luck bonus on attacks, saves, and checks against that foe. If Flicker is told of the destruction of the Gray Deacons, it goes into a deep depression and loses its special purpose power. At the GM's discretion, it can associate itself with another organization to renew its special purpose.

#### **CONSTRUCTION**

Requirements Craft Magic Arms and Armor, haste; **Cost** 71,260 gp

**Treasure:** Anyone taking the time to dig in the muck at the bottom of the pool for at least 15 minutes (DC 19 Perception check) can locate the deceased druid's mortal remains - or at least the few stained bones and teeth that make up what is left of them. Pulling out the remains exposes what's left of his gear lying beneath him (DC 23 Perception check to notice these in the murky water). The remains consist of a rotten knapsack and a short sword in an equally rotten scabbard. The blade is the intelligent short sword Flicker (see sidebox), while the knapsack still holds a potion of water breathing, 502 hs, 2 pearls (75 hs each), and an emerald (300 hs).

# B2. Sleeping Squirrels (CR 8)

This large chamber is framed by both a floor and ceiling of thickly interwoven roots and leaves. It is dark, musty and moist. A low rustling in the darkness seems to be coming from the shadowed vines far above your head. A pungent odor lingers in the room.

This level is home to 2 mutated squirrel swarms who slip in and out of the tree through tiny knotholes and glide with their rudimentary winglike membranes that extend between their hind legs and forelegs. They are particularly aggressive and are awakened the first time any loud noise is made in the chamber. They swarm the chamber, attacking en masse, hoping to devour their targets' brains with the tiny tentacles that extend from their open maws. Once the swarms have been dealt with, the PCs have to find their own way to continue their ascent in the tree, as the root ladder ends here. This can be anything from flying to cutting footholds in the inner walls of the tree, to using hooks to pull down the ceiling of tangled branches. The tangle is too dense for anything larger than Tiny size to pass through, though it can be cut with a determined effort (2-ft. thick, hardness 5, hp 90, Break DC 32, Resist fire 10).

be lost or destroyed.

CR 6

MUTATED SQUIRREL SWARMS (2) XP 2,400

Sword of Air 326 N Tiny animal (swarm)

Init +8; Senses low-light vision; Perception +11

**AC** 19, touch 17, flat-footed 14 (+4 Dex, +1 dodge, +2 natural, +2 size)

**hp** 50 (10d8+10) **Fort** +6; **Ref** +13; **Will** +8 **Immune** swarm traits

**Weaknesses** swarm traits

**Speed** 20 ft., climb 20 ft., fly 40 ft. (poor)

Melee swarm (2d6 plus 1 Int) Space 10 ft.; Reach 0 ft.

Special Attacks distraction (DC 16), extract brain

Str 5, Dex 18, Con 13, Int 2, Wis 13, Cha 10

Base Atk +7; CMB —; CMD —

**Feats** Great Fortitude, Improved Initiative, Lightning Reflexes, Skill Focus (Perception), Weapon Finesse

**Skills** Acrobatics +8 (+16 jumping), Climb +12, Fly +9, Perception +11, Stealth +18 (+23 in trees); **Racial Modifiers** +8

Acrobatics when jumping, +5 Stealth in trees

**Extract Brain (Ex)** The mutated squirrels use their tentacles to attempt to drill into the skulls of their victims and extract their brains as they swarm over them. This deals 1 point of Intelligence damage each time they deal swarm damage to a creature. Any creature within the swarm that has a condition that causes it to lose its Dexterity bonus (if any) or lose an action (such as nauseated from the effects of distraction) takes 1d4 Intelligence damage instead. A helpless creature takes 2d6 Intelligence damage per round. If a creature is reduced to 0 Intelligence by the extract brain attack, the creature is killed and its brain consumed by the swarm.

**Development:** Unless the PCs are particularly quiet or ingenious in dealing with the squirrel swarms, they are likely to alert the spiders on the level above to their presence. Cutting through the tangle of branches certainly does so. If such is the case, the spiders are waiting in ambush for their arrival, though they do not descend from their webs to engage the player characters.

# B<sub>3</sub>. Ravenous Spiders (CR 7)

There is a palpable sense of danger in this chamber. Movement through the area is hindered by thick, sticky webbing that coats the walls and floor in sheets. Countless pairs of red eyes suddenly flash to life in the heart this massive nest of enormous spiders.

A colony of **8 giant spiders** resides in this nest. They immediately attack, eager for a new meal beyond the squirrels upon which they are accustomed to feeding. If they were aware of the party's presence, then they attack with surprise in the first round after PCs begin to ascend into the room and attempt to entangle as many PCs as possible with their webs. More than one spider focuses its attacks on a PC until that individual is entangled. After the spiders are defeated, anyone clearing the webbing near the top of the chamber finds a ceiling of solid heartwood. Set near one edge is a small manmade trapdoor that provides access above and has obviously not been opened in many years (it is stuck and requires a DC 18 Strength check to force it open).

GIANT SPIDERS (8) XP 400 CR 1

hp 16 (Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary "Spider, Giant")

**Treasure:** If the party manages to defeat the spiders without burning their webs, they can discover the remains of past victims encased within them. These desiccated, skeletal husks include not only forest animals but loggers and travelers that have gone missing over the years. One corpse wears 2 gold arm-rings (250 hs each), and clutches a wash-leather in one hand. Within the pouch are 22 hs, a small jade statuette of a Dvergar (500 hs), and a sapphire (650 hs). A different corpse still wears a dusty *cloak of resistance* +2. If the webs are burned, the arm-rings and statuette can still be recovered with a DC 25 Perception check, but the other items will

# B4. The Wailing Heart (CR varies)

A surprising sense of serenity pervades this chamber. A solid stairwell carved from the chamber's walls wraps around the room and up into the darkness above. The floor of polished heartwood is blackening around the edges as if slowly giving way to the corruption that infects the great tree, though this corruption does not reach the center. A circle of graceful luminous sigils has been inscribed into the wood. Within the confines of this circle, you see that the floor is pristine and the wood still fresh and vibrant. More shocking is the beautiful Alfar maiden who stands within the circle. She is clearly a Nûklander, her glossy black hair is vibrant and lush, and her deep brown eyes are dimmed with sadness. She gasps in surprise upon seeing you and reaches a hand tentatively in your direction. A shock of green energy lances from the runes at the extended hand, and she cries out in pain, quickly drawing it back.

This Nûk woman is **Elk-Running**, another druid who was a member of Thorvald's company that came to the tree. She was exploring its interior when she sensed a coming darkness as Ivar slew his friend and swore his oath of evil. She quickly wove a powerful enchantment in the form of a unique protective circle to protect herself, but the magic from an ancient scroll she had found in the Far North

was more powerful than she knew, and she has been imprisoned within it ever since. She has lingered here for decades, her life-force extended by her own imprisoning magic.

ELK-RUNNING CR 6 XP 2,400

**hp** 47 (Pathfinder Roleplaying Game NPC Codex "Island Defender"\*)

**Languages** Draconic, Druidic, Giant, Nørsk, Nûklander, Svlvan

\*Elk-Running is a Nûklander, so replace the Elven Magic racial trait with the Silent Hunter racial trait and the Elven Immunities racial trait with the Elemental Resistance (cold) racial trait as described in the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Advanced Race Guide.

**Development:** Elk-Running is pleased to see the PCs and is willing to tell them what she knows if they will help release her. She sensed the evil of Ivar's actions and knew that he betrayed and murdered Thorvald before making some powerful oath, but she does not know any details beyond that. She says that she always found something odd about Ivar, as if the primal violence of nature was somehow contained within his body. But Thorvald's trust in him was sufficient for her, and she had never pursued the matter further — much to her regret. She tells the PCs that she cannot undo her own enchantment, but if they will free her she will aid them in their quest to destroy the corrupting influence of the Black Oak.

Elk-Running has tried to cast *dispel magic* on the circle, but it never seems to be strong enough. If any living thing attempts to cross the plane of the circle, it immediately takes 3d6 points of nonlethal damage and is pushed back out the way it came in (no save). The truth of the matter is that two successful castings of *dispel magic/break enchantment* or some combination thereof against a DC 18 must be done simultaneously to

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break the circle's power. Elk-Running can provide one of the castings, but will have to rely on the PCs to perform the other if they are able.

Unfortunately, Elk-Running has been exposed to the powerful corruption of the Black Oak for many long years, and its effects have been held at bay only by the magic of the circle. If the PCs are successful in breaking the circle's enchantment, the years of dark magic it has contained suddenly floods in upon the Nûk woman, and she falls to the ground, writhing in pain as evil energy visibly devours her. If quick-thinking PCs immediately begin to channel positive energy at Elk-Running to preserve her from the negative effects of the tree's corruption, they can save her if they give her the equivalent of 20 hp of healing with the channeled energy within 3 rounds. Otherwise, at the end of the third round she is fully consumed by the long-denied dark forces of the tree, leaving only her equipment and empty clothing behind. Worse than even this fate, Elk-Running rises in 1d6 rounds as a **groaning spirit** and pursues the PCs for vengeance until destroyed.

#### **GROANING SPIRIT** XP 3,200

CR7

The Tome of Horrors Complete 357 CE Medium undead (incorporeal)

Init +7; Senses darkvision 60 ft., lifesense; Perception +20 Aura fear (30 ft., DC 19), unnatural aura (30 ft.)

AC 17, touch 17, flat-footed 14 (+4 deflection, +3 Dex) **hp** 85 (10d8+40)

Fort +7; Ref +6; Will +10

**Defensive Abilities** channel resistance +4, incorporeal;

Immune cold, electricity, undead traits; SR 20

Weaknesses vulnerability to dispel evil

**Spd** fly 30 ft. (perfect)

Melee incorporeal touch +11 (1d8 plus chill touch)

**Special Attacks** keening

Str —, Dex 17, Con —, Int 16, Wis 16, Cha 18

Base Atk +7; CMB +7; CMD 24

Feats Ability Focus (keening), Alertness, Blind-Fight, Improved Initiative, Weapon Focus (incorporeal touch)

**Skills** Bluff +14, Fly +24, Intimidate +17, Knowledge (religion) +16, Perception +20, Sense Motive +20, Stealth +16

Languages Giant, Nørsk, Nûklander, Sylvan

Chill Touch (Su) Damage caused by the groaning spirit's touch attack is considered negative energy and sends a chilling cold through an opponent's body. Any creature touched must succeed on a DC 19 Fortitude save or suffer 1 point of Strength drain. Groaning spirits are the bane of other undead, and any undead they touch (except other groaning spirits) must succeed on a DC 19 Will save or flee in fear for 2d6 rounds. The save DCs are Charisma-based. Keening (Su) Once per day, at night only, a groaning spirit

can release a death wail audible to a range of 1 mile. All creatures within 30 feet that hear this must make a successful DC 21 Will save or be affected as per the wail of the banshee spell. Those that make their save still take 3d6+7 points of damage. The save DC is Charisma-based and includes a +2 bonus from the groaning spirit's Ability Focus

Lifesense (Su) A groaning spirit can sense all living creatures up to 5 miles away.

Vulnerability to Dispel Evil (Ex) If a dispel evil spell (the second effect requiring a touch attack) is used against a groaning spirit, the creature must succeed on a Will save (DC 15 + caster's relevant ability score modifier) or be destroyed immediately.

If the PCs decide to wait until after they have destroyed the evil of the Black Oak before freeing Elk-Running, they find that the task is much easier. Once the idol at area B6 is destroyed, the circle collapses and Elk-Running is free to seek out the PCs on her own. If freed from the circle and she survives, Elk-Running joins the PCs and aids them against the Black Oak to the best of her ability. Whether she is willing to remain after and continue as a member of the party is up the GM.

Ad Hoc Xp Award: If Elk-Running is freed by the PCs and survives it, award the PCs 4,800 XP for their efforts.

## B<sub>5</sub>. Last of the Old Guard (CR 8)

The stairs wind upward into a room that offers a vision of horror entombed in nature. The blackened vines that have frequently served as what passes for arras in this terrible oak clutch the corpses of long-slain armored warriors now rotted to rust and bone. Their faces are twisted in terrible grimaces, and weapons are still clutched in skeletal hands. Another winding stair of carven oak rises out of the tangled vines of the floor into the darkness above.

These poor souls are the last wretches who died in the service of Thorvald's ill-fated quest into the deep woods. The life-sapping energy of the Black Oak. combined with Ivar's oath, have bent them to the service of the evil power whose temple lies at the farthest height of the tree. If the PCs set foot upon the far stairwell ascending into the tree above, the vines of the room immediately spring to life as an entangle spell (caster level 12th, DC 17). At the same time, a chorus of rasping voices fills the room, appearing to emanate from the corpses, and call out, "Do you swear as Thorvald's Betrayer did? Do you offer your promise?" The voices give no more explanation than this. If the PCs do not all answer in the affirmative within 3 rounds, or if they refuse, the undead tear free from the walls and attack as 5 cairn wights. If they do answer in the affirmative, then each PC is given the opportunity to shift his alignment to evil. If they do not take the opportunity to do so, then the wights react as if a negative answer was given; any PC that chooses the alignment shift (or who is already evil) is thereafter ignored by the wights and the entangling vines and allowed to proceed unimpeded.

These wights are the last comrades of Thorvald who are "protecting him" even in their state of corrupted undeath. They are armed with the weapons they once wielded in life, and one of them is even wearing a ring of spell turning, which it activates on its first action. These creatures fight until destroyed and are unaffected by the entangle effects of the vines. Once all five have been dealt with, the vines return to their quiescent state.

#### **CAIRN WIGHTS (5)** XP 1,200

CR4

Male advanced wight (Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary "Wight")

LE Medium undead

Init +3; Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +13

AC 21, touch 12, flat-footed 19 (+3 armor, +2 Dex, +6 natural)

hp 34 (4d8+16)

Fort +5; Ref +4; Will +7

**Immune** undead traits

Weaknesses resurrection vulnerability

#### Speed 20 ft.

Melee slam +6 (1d4+3 plus energy drain) or each one possesses one of the following attacks:

- +2 longsword +8 (1d8+5/19-20 plus energy drain) or mwk longsword +7 (1d8+3/19-20 plus energy drain) or
- +1 returning spear +7 (1d8+5/x3 plus energy drain) or
- +3 heavy mace +9 (1d8+6 plus energy drain) or
- +1 adamantine short sword +7 (1d6+4/19-20 plus energy drain)

**Ranged** one has the following ranged attack:

+1 returning spear +7 (1d8+4/x3 plus energy drain) Special Attacks create spawn, energy drain (1 level, DC 16)

Str 16, Dex 16, Con —, Int 15, Wis 17, Cha 19

Base Atk +3; CMB +6; CMD 19

Feats Blind-Fight, Skill Focus (Perception)

Skills Climb +0, Intimidate +11, Knowledge (arcane) +9, Knowledge (religion) +9, Perception +13, Stealth +8; Racial

Modifiers +8 Stealth

Languages Giant, Infernal, Nørsk

Gear chainmail (has broken condition), each is armed with one of the following weapons: +2 longsword, masterwork longsword, +1 returning spear, +3 heavy mace, +1 adamantine short sword; one also wears a ring of spell turning

### B6. Guardian of the Black Oak (CR 10)

You ascend the stairs and come to a room unlike any you have seen thus far, a chamber of rich, polished black oak. To your surprise, daylight actually streams through an opening high above at the top of the tree, sending a bright shaft onto a large wooden altar that is carved as one contiguous piece from the floor itself. This shrine is covered in foul carven runes smeared with blood and powdered bone. An idol of terrible magnificence carved from polished black wood sits upon it, and behind the altar stands a colossus of the same construction. A voice booms across the chamber.

"Ivar could not come himself, I see! He sent lackeys mere sellswords?" You realize the voice is coming from a figure clad in shadow who is looking down from the opening above. His features are hard to distinguish, little more than a silhouette against the light.

"Thorvald will not be betraved again. I will not be twicedamned! I now serve forces greater than that oath-breaker knows. See for yourself the terrors that my new master has given me. From the deep woods, his power shall spread until all the natural world is bent to his will and under my command. Rise, Heart of the Black Oak, and lay waste to my foes!"

At the shadowy figure's command, the colossus of wood lumbers to life and attacks the party. It is a black oak golem powered by the will of the vile tree from which it was made and exists only to destroy the enemies of the Black Oak. It is simpleminded, concentrating on the first person to damage it until that target is slain before moving on to a new opponent. The black oak golem fights until destroyed, though clever PCs might be able to exploit its weakness (see "Development" below). The figure above disappears from sight as soon as the golem attacks.

#### **BLACK OAK GOLEM** XP 9,600

**CR 10** 

hp 101 (see Appendix)

**Development:** The black oak golem is intrinsically tied to the dark idol upon the altar. If a PC appears to be threatening to damage the idol (the golem is unintelligent, so even a PC that is within the threat range of the idol could be considered to be threatening it), the golem immediately switches its attacks to that individual until it is no longer threatened. If the idol is actually damaged by someone, the golem attacks that individual until he is dead or someone else damages the idol, causing it to change its attacks to that target. See the sidebox for details of attacking the idol.

In addition to destroying the black oak golem, if the dark idol is destroyed, the heart of the Black Oak itself is killed and begins a process of withering that starts at the altar and extends outward through the entire tree. After 5 rounds, cracks and rot are noticeable in the wood of the tree, and its leaves begin to fall off. After 5d6 rounds, sections of the tree's trunk and branches begin to collapse and fall away. None of these directly affect the PCs, though they clearly see that the tree is crumbling and becoming unstable. After this point, the instability of the tree causes the DC of any Acrobatics or Climb checks to increase by 2, and running or charging are impossible while inside the tree. After another 5d6 rounds, the entire tree collapses in a thunderous roar of splintered wood. Anyone

# Damaging the Dark Idol

The dark idol is composed of the living wood of the Black Oak and is permanently attached to its wooden altar. The dark idol is immune to nonmagical attacks, has hardness 5, and 50 hit points. Furthermore, it has a 50% chance to resist the effects of any spell cast against it. In addition to its passive qualities, the dark idol has an active defense as well. Anyone who makes a melee attack against the idol (whether successful or not) must make a DC 18 Fortitude save or take 1 negative level. Each time the idol inflicts a negative level on someone, it mends 5 point of damage that it has suffered. It cannot mend damage to more hit points than its maximum.

still inside the tree or within 100 feet when this occurs takes 10d6 damage from the falling debris and crushing force of the massive tree.

Treasure: Anyone taking the time to search the altar can locate a hidden compartment (DC 20 Perception check). It is protected by a circle of death trap if the compartment is opened without first disarming it. Within are stored some of the treasures of Thorvald and his old adventuring companions. These include a bag holding 1,520 hs, a potion of cure moderate wounds (CL 6), a potion of levitate, a suit of +1 chainmail, 20 +2 arrows, a +2 light wooden shield, a stone of good luck, and a wand of magic missiles (CL 9: 8 charges).

# **CIRCLE OF DEATH TRAP**

CR7

XP 3,200

Type magical; Perception DC 25; Disable Device DC 20

Trigger magic (alarm); Reset none

Effect spell effect (circle of death, slays 15d4 HD of living creatures, lowest-HD creatures affected first [creatures of 9 or more HD unaffected], DC 20 Fort negates); multiple targets (living creatures in a 40-ft. burst)

# B7. Lower Canopy (CR 9)

The warmth of the sun greets you as you step out into the great canopy of the Black Oak. Branches reach in all directions, most large and strong enough to support your weight. Thick leaves prevent you from seeing clearly beyond a few feet, though many are smeared with fresh drips of blood and the branches in the area show many bloody footprints. However, even as you watch, these bloody patches are absorbed into the dark bark of the tree.

Maniacal laughter can be heard from among the concealing foliage. "Come for me, will you? Think you I am but another pawn of this darkling sprout? Even were you to fell the Black Oak itself would I remain and rule from the forest depths!"

When Ivar betrayed and murdered his friend and mentor in the name of dark powers, he cut the hero's throat and drained his blood into the pool at the roots of the Black Oak. From this morass of blood and vile mud. Thorvald's spirit rose again as a vengeful blood wight. He now climbs among the branches of the tree shouting his barely remembered rage and sense of injustice to the silent forest, though there is little of Thorvald left in the creature. His massive oozing form leaves fresh bloody footprints drippings throughout the foliage, but the leaves and bark of the tree absorb this vital fluid after only a few seconds so he cannot be tracked in this way.

The omnipresent foliage provides concealment to anyone among these branches at a distance of greater than 10 feet and total concealment at a distance greater than 50 feet. The branches twist and run about in all directions, but no one can move more than 5 feet in any given direction without having to make an Acrobatics check to jump to another branch. The DC of the check is determined by how many squares beyond the first 5 feet the individual wants to leap. There is no room for a running start, so

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the DCs are always double the distance of the jump. A jumper can move only in a straight line on a leap and can make only one leap per move action. On a failed jump check, the leaper must make a DC 15 Reflex save to catch smaller branches and foliage beneath to prevent a long fall. He must then spend his next move action to climb up to the point that he was trying to leap to. On a failed save, the leaper falls 1d6 x 10 feet and can then make another DC 15 Reflex save to catch another branch (though he will have to climb the full distance to reach where he first came from with a Climb DC of 15). After falling a total 100 ft. + 1d6 x 5 ft., an individual has reached the pool at the base of the tree. Successful bull rush attempts allow these same Reflex saves to avoid falling.

# THORVALD THE BETRAYED XP 6,400

CR 9

Male blood wight (The Tome of Horrors Complete 641) N Large undead

Init +6; Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +20

**AC** 21, touch 11, flat-footed 19 (+2 Dex, +10 natural, -1 size) **hp** 90 (12d8+36); fast healing 5

Fort +7; Ref +6; Will +9

**Defensive Abilities** channel resistance +5; **DR** 10/bludgeoning and magic; **Immune** undead traits; **Resist** fire 10

Speed 40 ft.

Melee 2 claws +14 (1d8+5 plus grab plus 1 bleed)

**Ranged** +1 longbow +11/+6 (2d6+1/x3)

Space 10 ft.; Reach 10 ft.

Str 21, Dex 15, Con —, Int 13, Wis 13, Cha 16 Base Atk +9; CMB +15 (+19 grapple); CMD 27

Feats Alertness, Improved Initiative, Point-Blank Shot, Power

Attack, Rapid Shot, Weapon Focus (claws)

**Skills** Acrobatics +10 (+19 jumping), Climb +20, Escape Artist +18, Perception +20, Sense Motive +3, Stealth +16, Survival

+11; Racial Modifiers +8 Escape Artist

**Languages** Nørsk

**Gear** +1 longbow, efficient quiver with 50 arrows, cloak of elvenkind, boots of striding and springing

**Engulf (Ex):** A blood wight can try to wrap a Medium or smaller creature in its body as a standard action. The blood wight attempts a grapple check that does not provoke an attack of opportunity. If it wins the grapple check, it establishes a hold and claws its opponent with a +4 bonus on the attack roll.

Attacks that hit an engulfing blood wight deal half their damage to the monster and half to the trapped victim.

An engulfed victim must holds its breath as long as it remains trapped or begin to drown.

A trapped victim can break free with a successful grapple check. A Large blood wight's body can engulf 1 Medium, 2 Small, 4 Tiny, 16 Diminutive, or 32 Fine or smaller opponents.

**Tactics:** Thorvald makes use of his boots and camouflaging cloak to move among the branches and snipe vulnerable PCs, especially spellcasters and archers. He does this at around a range of 40 feet or so to keep the target in sight, but he attempts Stealth checks and moves between his sniping attacks to keep his opponents guessing. If a single opponent manages to close in on Thorvald's position, he attempts to engulf that individual and drown him before his companions can reach him to give aid.

**Development:** If the idol at area **B6** is destroyed or Thorvald travels more than 100 yards from the Black Oak, he loses his fast healing, channel resistance, and DR as the dark power fueling his existence begins to fade.

# Part Three: Returning to Thorvald's Gift

If the idol of the Black Oak was destroyed and Thorvald was slain, the PCs have no monstrous random encounters on their return journey. Instead, they see harts and hinds, birds and beasts — natural creatures who belong in a verdant forest. It seems as though corruption is already fading from the deep woods. If the Black Oak still stands and Thorvald still lives, however, the forest plagues them with random encounters as described in Part 2.

# Contrition (CR 9)

If the Black Oak is destroyed, the party has one specific set encounter the day after they leave the Black Oak behind.

The burly, aged man standing before you is wearing the tattered, bloodstained remains of what were once workman's clothing. He clutches a logger's axe and his black hair is streaked with gray and silver. His pale blue eyes are weary and filled with guilt. He looks to you and your companions with almost pleading eyes.

"There is one corruption that yet lingers in the forest. There is one remnant of that evil oath which fouled these lands. I am Ivar, and I would ask on behalf of Thorvald's Gift that you carry out one last act of heroism."

Ivar explains all that has transpired in the past, from his dark oath, his true nature and the corruption of the deep woods. He leaves nothing out (see the last 2 paragraphs of the Adventure Background). At the end of his story, he asks that the PCs release him from his curse by taking his life so that there is no lingering taint on the forest. This is an opportunity for roleplaying and discussion of what is the right choice to make between the player characters. In the end, if they refuse, Ivar transforms into his hybrid form and attacks the party in an effort to force their hand. Once he is slain, he thanks the party and dies in peace. In his pocket is a strip of bark carved in Runic by his own hand admitting to his condition and the wrongdoings — a final confession to unburden his soul of guilt.

# IVAR THE STOUT (HUMAN FORM)

CR 9

Male old afflicted were-vlkodlak human fighter 9 (The Northlands Saga Complete 78, Advanced Bestiary 205) CN Medium humanoid (human, sceadugengan, shapechanaer)

Init +6; Senses low-light vision, scent; Perception +13

**AC** 19, touch 14, flat-footed 16 (+5 armor, +1 deflection, +2 Dex, +1 dodge)

**hp** 90 (9d10+27 plus 9)

Fort +9; Ref +5; Will +4 (+6 vs. fear)
Defensive Abilities bravery +2

Speed 30 ft.

Melee +1 giant-bane greataxe +17/+12 (1d12+11/x3) Special Attacks weapon training (axes +2, natural +1)

Str 18, Dex 14, Con 17, Int 8, Wis 12, Cha 12 Base Atk +9; CMB +13; CMD 27

**Feats** Blind-Fight, Cleave<sup>B</sup>, Dodge<sup>B</sup>, Improved Initiative, Power Attack<sup>B</sup>, Skill Focus (Stealth), Step Up, Vital Strike,

Weapon Focus (bite)<sup>B</sup>, Weapon Focus (greataxe)<sup>B</sup>, Weapon Specialization (greataxe)<sup>B</sup>

Skills Perception +13, Stealth +17

#### Languages Nørsk

**SQ** armor training 2, change shape (human, hybrid, vlkodlak; *polymorph*), lycanthropic empathy (vlkodlaks), monstrous blood

**Gear** +1 chain shirt, ring of protection +1, +1 giant-bane greataxe, belt of mighty constitution +2

**Monstrous Blood (Ex)** In all forms, Ivar is considered both a humanoid and a monstrous humanoid for purposes of spells and effects that affect a specific monster type.

#### IVAR THE STOUT (HYBRID FORM, RAGING) XP 6.400

CR 9

Male old afflicted were-vlkodlak old human fighter 9 (The Northlands Saga Complete 78, Advanced Bestiary 205) CE Large humanoid (human, sceadugengan, shapechanger)

Init +6; Senses darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision, scent; Perception +13

**AC** 18, touch 11, flat-footed 15 (+1 deflection, +2 Dex, +1 dodge, +7 natural, -2 raging, -1 size)

**hp** 117 (9d10+54 plus 9)

Fort +12; Ref +5; Will +6 (+8 vs. fear)

Defensive Abilities bravery +2; DR 5/good and silver; SR 15

Speed 30 ft.

**Melee** +1 giant-bane greataxe +17/+12 (1d12+15/x3) or bite +17 (2d6+8), 2 claws +16 (1d8+8)

Space 10 ft.; Reach 10 ft.

**Special Attacks** rage 24 rounds/day, rage powers (powerful blow +3, quick reflexes, terrifying howl DC 19, unexpected strike), weapon training (axes +2, natural +1)

Str 24, Dex 14, Con 23, Int 8, Wis 12, Cha 12

Base Atk +9; CMB +17; CMD 31

**Feats** Blind-Fight, Cleave<sup>B</sup>, Dodge<sup>B</sup>, Improved Initiative, Power Attack<sup>B</sup>, Skill Focus (Stealth), Step Up, Vital Strike, Weapon Focus (bite)<sup>B</sup>, Weapon Focus (greataxe)<sup>B</sup>,

Weapon Specialization (greataxe)<sup>B</sup> **Skills** Perception +13, Stealth +13

Languages Nørsk

**SQ** armor training 2, change shape (human, hybrid, vlkodlak; polymorph), lycanthropic empathy (vlkodlaks), monstrous blood **Gear** +1 chain shirt, ring of protection +1, Medium +1 giant-bane greataxe, belt of mighty constitution +2

**Monstrous Blood (Ex)** In all forms, Ivar is considered both a humanoid and a monstrous humanoid for purposes of spells and effects that affect a specific monster type.

Rage (Ex) Vlkodlak can rage as a barbarian whose class level is equal to its Hit Dice. It gains powerful blow and terrifying howl as rage powers. Additional rage powers can be gained if the vlkodlak increases in Hit Dice.

Concluding the Adventure

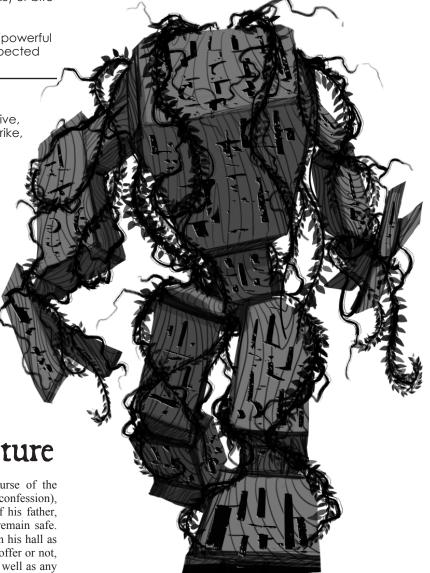
After hearing the news of Thorvald's fell spirit, the curse of the maligned god, and the ultimate fate of his father (including his confession), Bóthvarr is of a mixed heart. He is saddened at the loss of his father, but recognizes that it was the only way for the village to remain safe. He assumes the position of jarl and invites the PCs to stay in his hall as his honored huscarls. Regardless of whether they accept his offer or not, he also allows them to keep his father's adventuring gear as well as any treasures they may have recovered in their adventure.

Each PC receives a reward of 2,500 XP for destroying the Black Oak and slaying Thorvald. This is in addition to any experience points they earned during the adventure itself. In addition, if the players roleplayed the final encounter with Ivar well and in a true Northlander manner, the GM can award an additional 500 XP in reward.

In the event that the characters did not defeat Thorvald and lay Ivar to rest, the village suffers a terrible tragedy. Ivar's attacks become bolder, and he begins dragging villagers out of their homes at night accompanied by packs of the fell creatures of the forest. Eventually, the few remaining survivors flee their homes to find a new life elsewhere, and the darkness of the deep woods grows, the forest becoming a blight upon the land for generations to come and a constant reminder of the failure of heroes.

# Appendix: New Monster Golem, Black Oak

This construct stands nearly 9 feet tall and is a lumbering hulk of vaguely humanoid shape, though without any discernable head. Its arms swing wide above bowed legs, and nearly reach the ground as it plods forward. It appears to be carved from a single massive piece of black, coarsely grained wood that is pocked with knots and festooned with many splits and splinters. Yet despite its seemingly fragile composition, it moves with a solid, indomitable will that belies any apparent weakness.



### NORTHLANDS SAGA: THE LONG NIGHT OF WINTER

BLACK OAK GOLEM XP 9,600 CR 10

N Large construct

Init +0; Senses darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Perception +0 Aura corrupting aura (10 ft., DC 16)

AC 24, touch 9, flat-footed 24 (+15 natural, -1 size)

**hp** 101 (13d10+30); fast healing 2

Fort +4; Ref +4; Will +4

**Defensive Abilities** rejuvenation; **DR** 15/magic and slashing; **Immune** bludgeoning weapons, construct traits, fire magic **Weaknesses** treebound

Speed 20 ft. (can't run)

Melee 2 slams +19 (2d8+7 plus withering)

Space 10 ft.; Reach 10 ft.

Str 25, Dex 11, Con —, Int —, Wis 11, Cha 1

Base Atk +13; CMB +21; CMD 31

**Environment** forest (with Black Oak) **Organization** solitary **Treasure** none

Corrupting Aura (Su) A black oak golem is surrounded by an aura of corruption spawned by the foul influence of the Black Oak itself. Any living creature within 10 feet takes 1d6 points of nonlethal damage per round and must make a DC 16 Fortitude save or be sickened. A new save is required each round a creature is within the aura to avoid the sickening effect. In addition, any living creature within the aura attempting to cast a divine spell must succeed at a concentration check (DC 15 + double the level of the spell) or lose the spell. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Immunity to Magic (Ex) A black oak golem is immune to any spell or spell-like ability that allows spell resistance. In addition, certain spells and effects function differently against the creature, as noted below.

A warp wood spell slows a black oak golem (as the slow spell) for 3 rounds, with no saving throw.

A repel wood spell affects a black oak golem, but it is

allowed a Fortitude save each round to try to resist its effects.

**Rejuvenation (Su)** As long as the Black Oak lives, the black oak golem cannot be permanently destroyed. If reduced to 0 hit points, the golem crumbles to splinters, but the Black Oak grows a new burl somewhere on its trunk that splits open 1d3 days later to release a new black oak golem at full hit points.

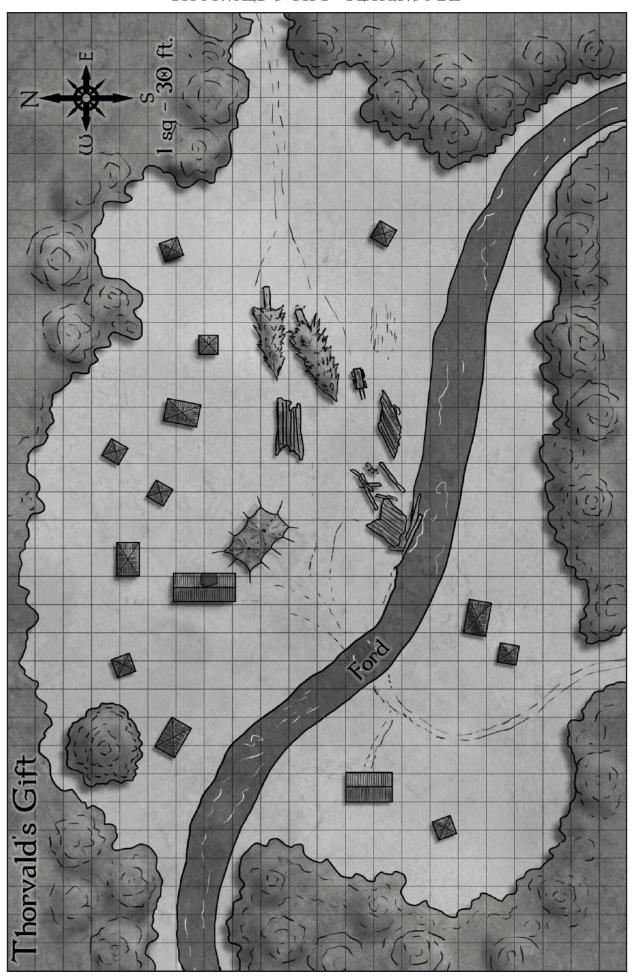
**Treebound (Su)** A black oak golem is inextricably bound to the Black Oak. If the Black Oak is killed by destroying the idol at its heart, a black oak golem immediately loses its immunity to magic, immunity to fire, damage reduction, fast healing, rejuvenation, corrupting aura, and withering abilities. In addition, the golem gains the shaken condition for 1d4 rounds as it adjusts to the loss of its vital force. **Withering (Su)** When a black oak golem makes a successful slam attack against a living creature, the dark splinters that embed themselves in the wound carry the taint of the Black Oak and require the target to make a DC 16 Fortitude save or take 1d2 points of Strength damage as the creature's muscles wither and vitality is sapped by the corruption of the tree.

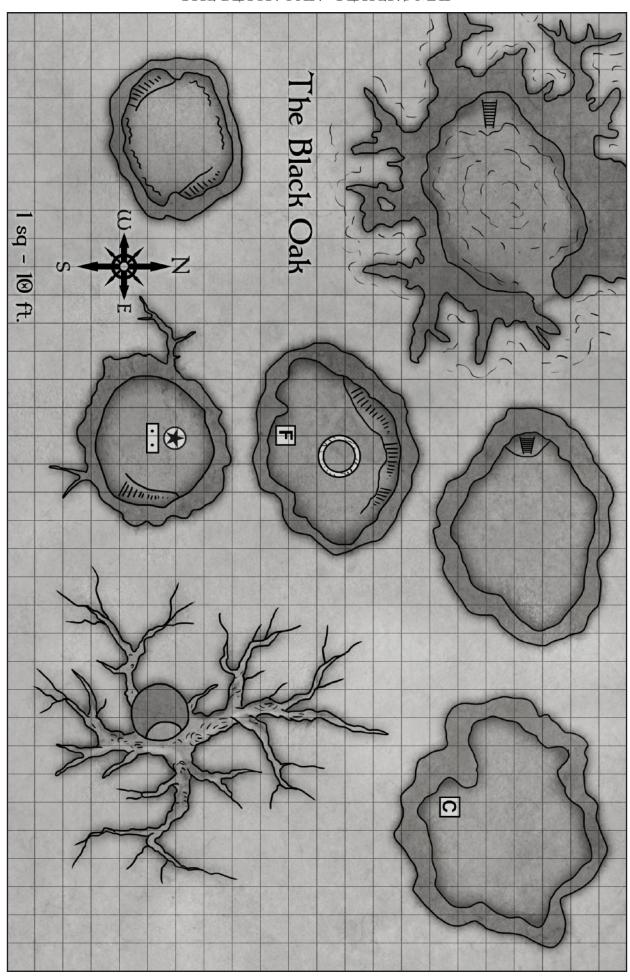
A black oak golem is grown in a burl that grows on the trunk of the Black Oak and serves as the special guardian of the shrine at the heart of the great tree. It is a solid piece of black wood that is unusually grainy and splintered, yet resilient and nearly indestructible while powered by the malevolence of the creator tree. The Black Oak can create only one black oak golem guardian at a time, though as long as the Black Oak lives, if the golem is destroyed the tree can spawn a new one.

A black golem's first priority is always to defend the idol at the heart of the Black Oak. Because it is unintelligent, this propensity can be used against it as it constantly redirects its attacks to whoever damaged the idol most recently, potentially allowing attackers to keep it off balance as it moves back and forth between multiple opponents. If the idol is destroyed, the Black Oak begins to die, and many of the golem's most-potent defenses are lost, weakening it considerably.

#### Construction

A black oak golem is constructed of a single piece of wood weighing 3,000 pounds. It is specially grown by the Black Oak itself from its own substance and cannot be created by other means.





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# the northlands series: the Long night of uinter

# NLS4: Oath of the Predator

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