

ADVANCED ADVENTURES MODULE #27

Bitterroot Briar

by Lang Waters

AN ADVENTURE FOR CHARACTER LEVELS 2-4



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THE BITTERROOT BRIAR

The small village of Ipwich has been plagued by mystery for years. Why do some people, last seen years ago, come stumbling out of the woods looking as young as the day they disappeared, raving mad? Why does the forest itself whisper in the blowing of the trees or the babbling of a brook, beckoning to its center? Local folklore holds that the answers to these questions lie on the other side of an immense wall of thorns in the heart of the forest, the Bitterroot Briar, as do the remains of a good number of would be riddle solvers. What folklore does not reveal directly is that the briar is the site of an ancient battle. A battle, in fact, that continues after centuries.

Stop! The information that follows is for the eyes of the gamemaster only. Knowledge of the contents will only ruin your enjoyment of the game.

Background: 200 years ago the Ironwood was contested ground between the warring kingdoms of Uqbar and Tolq. Uqbar enlisted the druidical order of the Black Oak to establish a presence in the Ironwood and Duke Vuscin offered to guide the druids to a forgotten grove and pools in the heart of the forest. In an act of betrayal by the Duke, the druids were led to the lair of a foul black willow, and over the next several months the druids were reduced in number. Finally they sent a message to a group of rangers sworn to Uqbar, asking for help in investigating the cause. The company's nominal leader, the renowned Brehg, agreed to gather a host and visit the grove. Spies of Tolq alerted the Duke and an ambush of Brehg's men was planned. It is this confrontation between Uqbar's hero and her traitor that echoes in Ironwood to this day.

Soon after Brehg and his company arrived at the grove, the Duke's men, along with men of Tolq, overwhelmed them. Outnumbered, Uqbar's partisans fought heroically. Too late did Taras Greenleaf call up a **wall of thorns** to prevent the Duke's reinforcements from reaching the fray. In the last moments of slaughter Brehg drove his sword into the trunk of the black willow with mighty force, snapping off the hilt. He made a final prayer to the forest god as the axes fell upon him.

Though Brehg couldn't know, his prayer was heard and answered. The spirit of the forest was drawn by the carnage and the threat the war posed to its domain. It took swift and severe action and laid strong enchantments around the vicinity of the ancient grove, slowing time and altering the shapes of the combatants. These enchantments maintained balance in the forest, and provided a test for would be followers. Devout and skilled adventurers may discover the deepest secret of the grove, that the sword wielded by Brehg, the sword **Isiliar**, was sentient and forged to serve the spirit of the forest. It is still conscious and embedded in the roots of the tree, and will transform, under the right conditions and for the right character, into an oracle of the spirit of the forest.

While the war between Tolq and Uqbar ceased in the outside world long ago, battles continue within the pools and grove of the Bitterroot Briar. The survivors of the confrontation now literally claw at each other to escape, while Duke Vuscin believes he has discovered the real means to do so with a bloody ritual. In such an environment all new interlopers within the grove are seized upon quickly. While many seek the briar for rumored treasure, many more seek to escape it.

Notes for the Game Master: The Bitterroot Briar is an adventure for 6-10 characters of levels 2-4. A nature-based character (druid or ranger) will be of help in the module. The adventure involves the PCs travelling to a very magical grove in the middle of a forest; a grove that shrinks the characters down to 1 inch tall and traps them within as time flies (6 months per day) outside the grove. This could have severe consequences on a GM's campaign world and a GM should carefully consider this aspect of the module.

Adventure hooks: Below are a few ways to integrate the module into an ongoing game.

1. Cissela (see below) is luring adventurers to the grove by slowly poisoning a revered matron of Ipwich. The only known cure for her illness is the leaves from a plant which can only be found on the other side of the Bitterroot Briar.
2. Characters hear of a place where treasure and magic items hang from the boughs of trees in a cursed forest grove. They come to investigate.
3. Retrieving a boon from beyond the Bitterroot Briar is a rite of passage for a ranger or fighter player character in whatever order they belong to (or want to belong to). The briar is considered a test, and the character must provide indisputable proof of their adventure—knowledge of a sword known to be lost there ages ago.
4. A druid player character has been charged by their master to learn more about an old mystery—the disappearance of a large number of druids and rangers in the area many years ago.
5. Travelling through the Ironwood forest one of the characters hears the voice of Isiliar (a magic sword) beckoning.

IPWICH

Ipwich is a small sleepy village of loggers and farmers tucked away in the Garvian Mountains. It has a population of 225. Travel to this village is usually uneventful as it lies on a well-traveled trade route. Near the road are an inn, a dry goods store supplying merchant caravans along the trade route, and mill. Other houses are visible through the trees and on nearby hills. Of particular interest is what looks like a single outstandingly tall ash tree on a nearby knoll. This is a shrine to the spirit of the forest, who is much revered by all of the locals.

The player characters may learn a few rumors about the Bitterroot Briar by questioning local townsfolk, especially the barkeep at the inn and any hunters they can locate. Chance encounters on the main road through the village include children playing, townsfolk bringing food to Mother Marit, or one of the notable NPCs.

Borrace the Innkeep: Borrace owns and runs the village inn, The Grunter. He is very round and has graying hair with a full beard. He enjoys his position in the local community as gossip very much and most anything of interest finds its way to his inn. If asked about the briar he will launch into a speech about how many travelers "come through looking for treasure hangin' from the trees, though none of them seem to come back." Other rumors from the rumor table might be heard from Borrace as well.

Urrayne the Druid: A young and earnest man devoted to nature and his community. **Urrayne** (male human, Neutral, 1st-level druid, AC 10; HP 7; S 10, I 11, W 15, D 12, C 10, CH 13; Spells **entangle**, **pass without trace**) is also the keeper of the healing leaves from the briar. These leaves were collected by a successful adventurer from the Briar and given to the townspeople many years ago. What is left is being used to help Mother Marit. When brewed into a tea, the leaves heal 1-4 hit points and remove poison as a **neutralize poison** spell.

If well-disposed to a party, Urrayne will advise the characters to "*listen to the forest.*" He will also lament that one of the blessings of the community is the healing leaves, and they desperately need more. Urrayne may be encountered at the ash tree shrine or in the woods. He won't accompany a party unless well-rewarded. If he adventures, he dons leather armor and arms with a spear and sling.

Mother Marit: Old Mother Marit is the honored matriarch of Ipwich, adopted by the village as everyone's grandmother after all her blood family perished in a tragic fire. She is witty, talkative, and a hypochondriac. It is this latter trait that Cissela has exploited to lure adventurers here as Old Mattie is very superstitious and abhors

magic. She has been bedridden for weeks, but refuses anything but a tea made from leaves provided by Urrayne, water, and dark bread with butter. What she doesn't know is that her self-appointed nurse, Cissela, has been poisoning the tea she brews. Old Mattie has been languishing for long enough that the villagers are taking her seriously now. The characters may find her feverish (75% chance), tended by Cissela or some well-wishing neighbor, mumbling verses of a childhood rhyme (see Appendix A: Lore). Otherwise, she will be coherent, in which case she will offer tidbits from the rumor table but is more given to long digressions about the amusing character of local townfolk. She will end any conversation with a sincere plea for more of the medicinal leaves from the other side of the briar, and genuinely fears for her life. She has nothing to offer but 20 sp and her gratitude.

Cissela the Wererat: Cissela is a short, dark haired woman with large, bulging eyes, short hair, and a long scar on the left side of her neck. She dresses in dark, functional leather, and looks out of place in a rural village like Ipwich. She will walk straight up to the first male PC she sees, touch his chest lightly and introduce herself. "My name is Cissela, but you can call me Sissy," she says as she smiles broadly and winks.

Cissela has lived in Ipwich all her life. A couple years ago an adventuring party on its way to the briar passed through the village. She followed them out of curiosity, attracted to their sinister aura. She was caught watching a dark ritual and given the choice of being an initiate or an offering. Since then, she has been a devout follower of the god of death, and a **wererat** (SZ M; AC 6; MV 120 ft.; HD 3+1; HP 16; #AT 1; Dmg 1-8 (sword); SA: surprise 1-4, lycanthropic bite, 1st-level thief abilities, summon and control giant rats; SD hit only by silver or magic; AL LE).

After her "conversion" she accompanied her newfound friends into the Briar and watched each of them die. She would have died too, in the coils of Duke Vuscin, if not for some fast and shrewd talking. The Duke and Cissela have formed a mutually beneficial relationship wherein Cissela leads victims to the Duke and Cissela gets to keep the possessions. She will not hesitate to use all of the guile and charm that she possesses to earn the trust of the characters so that she can lead them directly to Vuscin or his cronies. If all goes as planned Cissela will pave the way for the Duke on the outside as well by saving money and establishing a house in anticipation of his escape. Cissela is careful never to be in the briar for very long.

MAP OF IPWICH AND SURROUNDS

ONE INCH EQUALS 5 MILES



Cissela currently resides with Mother Marit, across the way from the hanging boar sign of The Grunter inn. Mother Marit intends to leave her house to Cissela after she dies, and has informed every one of her intent. Cissela has hidden the treasures she receives from Vuscin in a chest in corner of the basement, behind several very old chairs covered with a thick, dusty tarp. In the locked, trapped (poison needle) chest is: 56 gp, 156 sp, 12 gold necklaces (5x50 gp, 7x100 gp), 23 silver bracelets (3x10 gp, 4x25 gp, 12x50 gp, 4x75 gp), and 52 gems (34x10 gp, 10x 50 gp, 5x100 gp). When coin becomes too plentiful, Cissela purchases small gems and inexpensive jewelry from the passing merchants to keep her stash small and portable.

Duke Vuscin the Black: Duke Vuscin, also known as Vuscin the Black, was a traitor to Uqbar and the bane of the hero Brehg. He lairs in Isiliar's hollow inside the Bitterroot Briar. The Duke is interested in sacrificial victims for performing the dread rite of the god of death (see Appendix A: Lore) in order to escape the Briar. The Duke and Cissela would betray each other if the circumstances called for it, but there has been no need and their current bond is solid. Vuscin is smart enough to attack only one character at a time if he can. Otherwise, if encountered, he will monitor the party and pretend to just be a snake. Cissela will work with him to lead characters astray.

Duke Vuscin as a **spell-casting giant snake** (SZ L; AC 6; MV 90 ft.; HD 5; HP 24; #AT 2 (bite, constrict); Dmg 1-4, 2-8; SA: constriction, spells (**read magic, charm person, darkness, burning hands**); AL LE) when compared to diminutive characters.

BEGINNING THE ADVENTURE

When the characters enter Ipwich they draw the curious looks of several adults walking about and a small gaggle of children that come running and skipping from between two cottages and an inn with the sign of a boar (The Grunter). The children circle the group as together they sing a child's rhyme:

*Old Man Troll
Whither will I go?
Over the briar
And cross the water
To win treasure for my beau!*

*(Then one child sings out)
There I met the faeries
Bent to do me harm.
I sang to them of olden days
To better to stay their charm.
Huckleberry fairy can't catch me!
I've turned into a bumblebee!*

With that the small singer charges, buzzing, at the other children that run laughing from him, and they disappear between the cottages on the far side of the way.

This simple rhyme is a scrap of oral history in the village. The rhyme was put together by a bard generations ago to regale local children with the story of a successful return from the Bitterroot Briar. Attentive players may inquire about a briar or other details of the rhyme from villagers, with most responses confirming the existence of the briar, and some revealing other rumors. A particularly merry character might join the children at play. If this happens, more verses will be heard that reveal clues about the environment on the other side of the briar (see Appendix A: Lore).

What the characters choose to do next is up to them. The GM should role-play the natives and provide information about the bitterroot briar to the characters when appropriate. The rumors below should provide some guidance.

1. "Aye, the wee folk, they're malicious here. Don't trust a fey creature in these parts, it'll only lead to harm!" **T**
2. Looking around to make sure no one else hears, "I've heard the trees talk, I have!" **T**

3. "The Briar's been there as long as anybody remembers. My granddaddy used to say that it was a druid created it, years ago to protect something. Not sure what that might be though." **T**
4. "The other side o' the briar?! Nobody wants to go there; a witch makes her home there." **F**
5. "Aye, ye can see it from a certain bluff I know, but no amount of walkin' will git ye there. You don't find the briar, it has a way of finding you..." **T**
6. "The witch changes people into animals....she changed me into a newt!" **F**
7. "Strangest of all, once or twice every few years or so somebody will come stumblin' out o' the woods claiming to have lived as a little creature. Nobody talks about it much 'cause if it comes from one man, it's just crazy talk, but if it comes from several men, then it's something you don't want attracted to ya..." **T**
8. "Two ancient kingdoms fought in these woods a long ago." **T**
9. "Well if you've talked to Urrayne you must know about the healing leaves. He saved my son with those, and they only come from the briar." **T**
10. "There's a beast loose in the woods, half bear, half bird. It has a great beak and feathers along its arms. Two children have been lost to the animal in the last three years." **T**

THE IRONWOODS

The Ironwoods surround the small village of Ipwich: only a mile-wide swath along the larger river banks has been logged clear of trees, cutting the Ironwoods into several smaller sections. During exploration of the forest random encounters should be checked for twice a day. Even though the grove can be seen at a distance from several different vantage points, and in fact, it seems as if there are multiple locations for the grove, it is not possible to find it without one of three things happening:

1. One of the characters is guided there by the voice of Isiliar (see below).
2. One of the characters commits an act of wanton violence against the forest e.g. killing a game animal for sport not food. If this happens the party will encounter the grove in whatever direction they are headed within 10 minutes.
3. An encounter with Leafmuntos the pixie leads them to the grove and briar.

Barring one of these events it is **impossible** to locate the grove.

The Voice of Isiliar: Isiliar is the sentient sword once wielded by the hero Brehg. The sword was forged by a follower of the spirit of the forest. Isiliar can communicate telepathically but since its injury in the grove it is unsure of its identity and confused. It does realize that it is trapped, and attempts to communicate with beings that might help it. The voice of Isiliar can be heard by ears actively focused on the natural sounds of the forest, particularly the wind in the trees or the water in the streams. Any character in the Ironwood that states that he is listening to either the wind or water and is undisturbed for more than ten minutes may hear Isiliar's imprecations. Listening for Isiliar is calculated at base 50% chance +10% per level for druids or rangers.

Isiliar's communication is vague and consists of one or two word statements. There is a strong urging to "come" followed by directions like "this way" and encouragement "yes, yes." Questioning Isiliar is not very helpful as it is unsure of its own nature since it was broken. Replies range from "help!" to repeating "what am I?" over and over or "dark" and "the tree!" Characters following the voice of Isiliar arrive on the west bank of the southern outflow of the stream that runs through the Briar.

Random Encounter Table A - The Ironwoods

A roll of 1-2 on d6 indicates an encounter, check twice daily and if an encounter is indicated roll d12 and consult the table below. Encounters with an asterisk (*) cannot be used more than once.

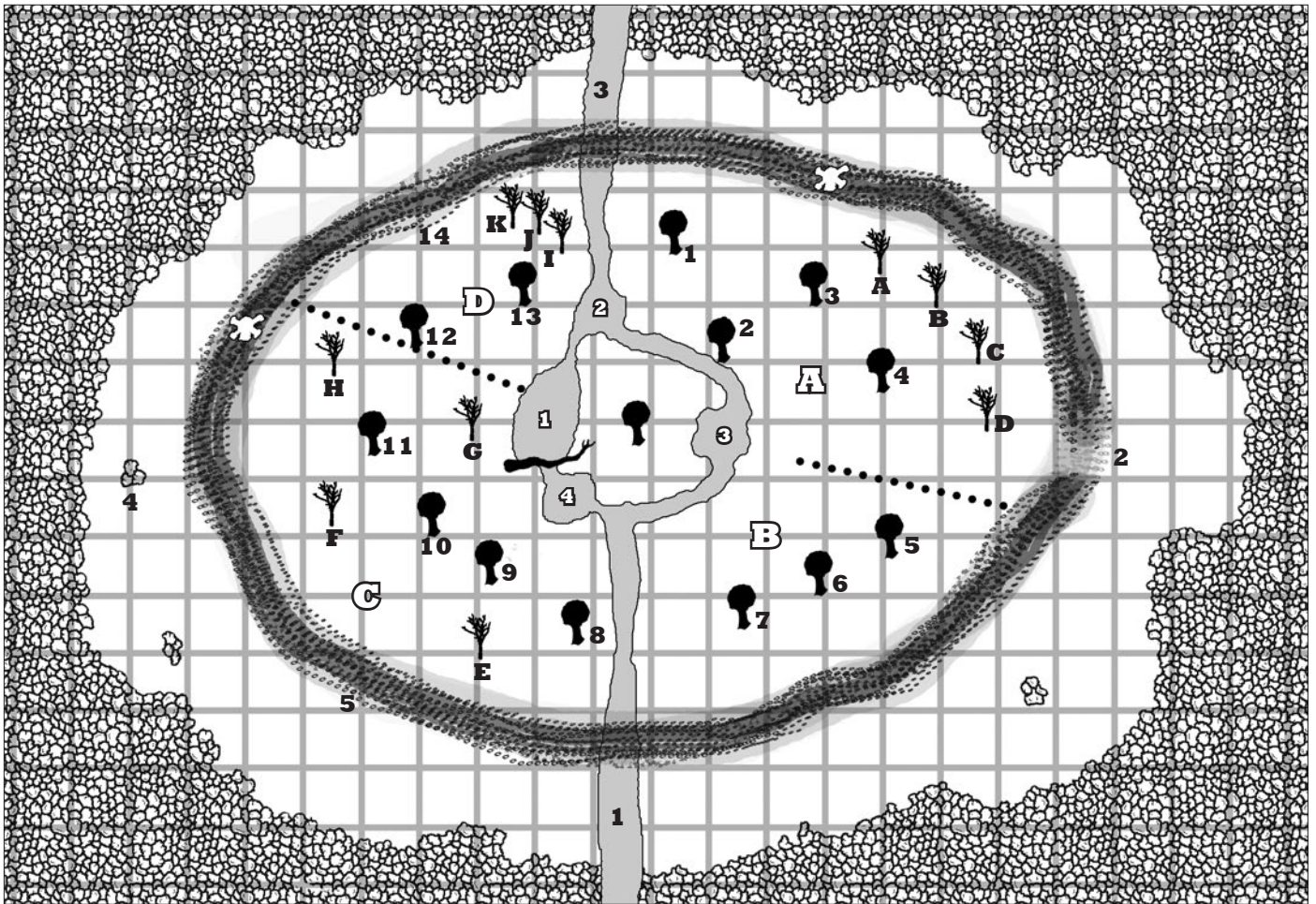
1. **Scarlet the Faerie Dragon:** This fey creature makes her home in the grove and travels freely between it and the outside world. This creature is the companion of Leafmuntos and takes a great deal of delight in bewildering travelers. It will use all of its spells to this end. It will not lead characters to the briar. See The Grove AREA 8 for statistics on Scarlet the Faerie Dragon.
2. **Leafmuntos the Pixie:** Leafmuntos also calls the grove home and travels freely between it and the outside world. He delights in leading people he finds in the woods astray, to the briar if possible, by confusing and taunting them. If the characters follow his laughter and endure his teasing the PCs will find themselves facing the briar in 3 turns. If they choose to ignore the pixie his pranks will become more mischievous—throwing small stones, dropping pine cones on their heads, anything to get their attention without hurting them, but eventually he'll desist if he gets no response. See The Grove AREA 2 for statistics on Leafmuntos.
3. **The Hilt of Isiliar*:** The hilt of a sword is discovered by a keen eyed character. The blade has been snapped off clean at the hilt, but it is clear that it was a treasured possession as the pommel and hand guard show expert workmanship. The hand guard is carved in the shape of a great oak leaf. The hilt is worth 200 gp.
4. **Boar:** This irritated **boar** (SZ M; AC 7; MV 150 ft.; HD 3+3; HP 15; #AT 1; Dmg 3-12; AL N) will hold its ground if it is threatened and charge if it is attacked. If the characters remain still it will move away quickly after a few moments.
5. **Owl Bear*:** This **owlbear** (SZ L; AC 5; MV 120 ft.; HD 5+2; HP 17; #AT 3; Dmg 1-6, 1-6, 2-12; SA hug; AL N) is old and has taken to scavenging and preying upon much smaller creatures than it did in its prime. It flees if it loses half its hit points.
6. **Akin*:** **Akin** (male human 1st-level fighter; SZ M; AC 6 (ring & shield); MV 90 ft.; HD 1; HP 7; #AT 1; Dmg 1-8 (sword); AL NG) is a hapless adventurer that escaped from Cissela and the Duke, and he is still reeling from his time spent in the grove as a crayfish. With slow movements and much re-assurance the party may get him to speak, though he is very confused. He answers only in non-sequiters about living in a stream. If Cissela is with the party he will charge her in a rage, shouting "Witch!" Akin will not go back to the briar under any circumstances.
- 7-8. An unfortunate hunter, now a **yellow musk zombie** (SZ M; AC 8; MV 120 ft.; HD 2; HP 9; #AT 1; Dmg 1-6 (spear); AL NE).
9. **Local Hunters:** These **3 hunters** (SZ M; AC 8; MV 120 ft.; HD 1; HP 4, 5, 7; #AT 1; Dmg 1-6 (bow), 1-6 spear; AL LN), are ostensibly looking for the owlbear, but are somewhat afraid that they'll find it. They freely offer information from the rumor table if questioned. There are three groups of hunters, each encountered separately.
10. **Reynard the Bard:** Reynard is a wanderer and a drunk. If specifically asked for a local tune he will sing a song about Brehg that mentions Brehg's sword Isiliar as well as his disappearance in the Ironwoods trying help the order of the Black Oak. He loves to talk and sing about adventure but won't actually participate in one, saying his adventuring days are over. He will viscosly defend himself if attacked, offering no quarter.

Reynard, male human 2nd-level bard (5th-level fighter, 7th-level thief): (SZ M; AC 2; MV 120 ft.; HD 5/7/1; HP 36; #AT 1; Dmg 1-8+1; SA charm, spells (animal friendship, speak with animals), 7th-level thief abilities; AL NG). Possessions: Lute, **bracers of defense AC 2, longsword +2, potion of healing**, and 25 gp.

11. **Elves*:** The party stumbles into an elven ambush, finding themselves surrounded by a group of **6 elves** (SZ M; AC 5; MV 120 ft.; HD 1+2; HP 4, 5 (x2), 6, 7, 8; #AT 1; Dmg 1-6 (bow), 1-8 (sword); SA +1 to hit; SD elven resistances; AL CG) with bows drawn. Their leader addresses the party, "What is your business in these woods?" If their reaction to the PCs is hostile they will disappear into the woods and harry the party with arrows until the player characters leave the forest, make it to the Briar, or are killed.
12. **Urrayne the Druid.** See Notable NPCs.

THE BITTERROOT BRIAR

EACH SQUARE EQUALS 10 FEET



THE BITTERROOT BRIAR

The briar is ten feet high and encircles the grove. An open, grassy area with a few scattered trees separates the forest from the briar. It always appears to be early morning in the grassy area with dew on the grass and a very light mist hanging low to the ground.

This briar is an artifact created by the spirit of the forest based upon of the **wall of thorns** spell cast by Taras Greenleaf during the conflict between the Druids of Uqbar and the soldiers of Tolq. The thorn bushes have thrived tremendously in this enchanted environment and have collected several uglier forms of plant life from the surrounding forest. It is at this point in its existence old, dense, and formidable.

From the ground, no matter how often the characters spot the briar from tree or hill tops they will not discover the briar until one of the three entry ways to the briar is satisfied. In all other cases they will either lose sight of the briar or appear to have strayed.

The briar itself is roughly 15 feet high and 10 feet thick, generally circular, and is made up of the most densely tangled, thick-vined, large-thorned bramble any character has seen.

There are two enchantments upon the bitterroot briar. The first is an enchantment upon the grassy area between the briar and the woods as well as in the grove. This enchantment slows time; for every day spent here, 6 months pass on the outside.

The second enchantment is placed upon those who enter grove: a trapping and shrinking enchantment. The round after a living creature enters the grove it shrinks down to 1 inch in size and finds itself unable to exit the grove by any means, excepting

shapeshifting magic. Creatures that shapeshift can walk to the edge of the briar, shapeshift, and beat a hasty retreat. Creatures native to the forest (pixies, faerie dragons, owls, etc.) are affected by the shrinking, but are not trapped—able to come and go as desired. Non-living creatures (such as the mudmen) are immune to both the shrinking and trapping effects. For more information on being small, see The Grove.

Because of this second enchantment, there is no way out of the grove for most visitors, but there is random 1% chance per year that a trapped creature is freed from the enchantment. Such creatures find themselves outside of the briar in the Ironwoods, temporarily confused and bewildered. This confusion lasts for 12 months unless a save vs. magic is made. In such case, the confusion lasts for 1-4 weeks. After the confusion is over, the person does not remember what happened.

Around the briar, there is a cumulative 10% chance per turn of encountering **Jakys the Troll** (SZ L; AC 4; MV 120 ft.; HD 6+6; HP 32; #AT 3; Dmg 5-8, 5-8, 2-12; SD regeneration; AL CE). Jakys has a make-shift den in AREA 4. He is an ancient troll, and looks it. He would just as soon not take on a group of PCs if possible. When encountered he threatens the PCs with the most vile possibilities he can think of, but ends it all by inquiring about any food they might have. If no one tries to negotiate, he will shriek and charge the party, hoping to get a few of his opponents to back into the stream if near the south exit—he is well aware of its effects. He will then engage remaining characters and hope to catch any that have shrunk afterwards. He will jump into the north stream if set afire, but not the south stream. Jakys is aware of all the enchantments in the bitterroot briar.

There are three main ways to penetrate the briar.

The Streams: Characters may try to submerge themselves in the stream and so pass under the briar and into the grove and pools. At the south exit of the stream from the briar characters are subject to the shrinking enchantment of the grove immediately. The stream is not enchanted at the north entrance of the stream into the briar.

Muscle Through: Attempting to move through the briar incurs 1-2 hp damage per foot. Slow work with edged weapons can create a safe passage 1 foot deep per turn of work without incurring damage. Normal fire cannot harm the thorns. The bramble magically grows back quickly, and will completely have reclosed any gap opened within 24 hours.

Fight Through The Thin Spot: The briar is naturally less dense in AREA 2, allowing characters to create a safe passage 5 foot deep per turn.

OUTSIDE THE BRIAR

Yellow Musk Creepers: There are two places on the briar proper (indicated by a white skull and crossbones sign) where 2 **yellow musk creepers** (SZ L; AC 7; MV 0 ft.; HD 3; HP 8, 19; #AT 6 (western), 10 (eastern); Dmg see description; AL N) have taken root. At the western yellow musk creeper the characters also find a **yellow musk zombie** entwined in the briars. The zombie is too entangled in the briars to escape, but it makes a terrible thrashing if anything that looks remotely like prey comes within its view.

1. THE SOUTH STREAM EXIT: Flowing out of the briar is a stream ten feet wide, with low rocky banks and shallow water three to five feet deep. Short green grass and tiny purple flowers grow on either side. The briar extends across the water and hangs low.

Any PC touching the water of the stream here must make a save against spells or shrink immediately to 1 inch tall as if they had entered the grove. Characters that shrink will be disoriented momentarily. Armored characters will find themselves suddenly submerged in water and sinking. Unarmored characters will find themselves in what seems to be a large and swift river.

Characters that are drowning will find themselves staring into the huge, beautiful, and quite liquid face of **Elatha**, the water spirit of the Bitterroot Briar stream. She will offer to save the character and bestow **water breathing** (lasting 20 days) in exchange for a favor (a few day's service in her underwater garden). If characters agree to this they automatically receive the benefits of Elatha's water breathing spell. She will treat PCs cordially as long as they are non-aggressive.

If the characters attack Elatha, she is treated as a special kind of **water weird** (SZ L; AC 4; MV 120 ft.; HD 3+3; HP 13; #AT 0; Dmg drowning; SD see description; AL CG).

2. THE THIN SPOT: The briar here is less dense than elsewhere, but a young **bloodthorn** (SZ M; AC 4/3; MV 0 ft.; HD 5; HP 17; #AT 5; Dmg 25% of total hp; AL N) has recently taken root in the middle of the briar here, feeding on small mammals passing through. It's always interested in larger prey, of course. A nature-oriented character has a 2 in 6 chance of seeing the young bloodthorn before entering the range of its tendrils; all others have a 1 in 6.

3. THE NORTH ENTRY OF THE STREAM: Disappearing into the briar is a stream about seven feet across and two to three feet deep. The briar hangs low over the water here. This is probably the easiest entry point. The enchantment of the stream is absent here and will not affect characters until they are within the confines of the briar on the other side.

4. THE LAIR OF JAKYS THE TROLL: More than likely, Jakys will not be encountered in his lair. This is a hovel constructed of hides stitched and stretched between fallen trees. There is a nauseating reek as characters approach. Inside on a tree stump table are the bones of a tiny human, separated but in anatomically correct order. Suspended from the hide roof in the far corner is a wooden cage about six inches high and twelve inches long.

Jakys has buried the collected treasure from his victims in a chest outside of his hovel, under one of the fallen trees. It is not well-concealed and consists of 523 gp, 311 sp, a **potion of healing**, and a **potion of speed**.

5. SKELETON: Woven into the outside of the briar is an old human skeleton in rotted clothes, suspended in the branches of the briar. Long ago Jakys hung the sinewy remains of one of his victims here and the vines have grown over it, supporting it after everything but the bones have rotted away.

An old spider web covers both eye sockets, but there is no associated spider. The web is a magic item which, if placed over the eyes, acts as a **True Seeing** spell. It is fragile, and any rough handling will destroy it, and even with the gentlest handling, it can only be put on and taken off 5 times before it crumbles away.

THE GROVE

The grove is a strange and beautiful site. Eleven small oak trees, each about 25 feet high, encircle an area roughly 80 feet across. Dividing the grove in half is a stream. In the very center of the grove the stream runs to either side around a small island. Dominating the island is an ancient looking willow tree. The willow looks strangely cloven in its trunk with a thick, large branch that is completely blackened and misshapen protruding to one side. The grove inclines slightly to the north such that several small pools have formed in the stream where the flow is obstructed. The largest of these pools lies just north of a fallen oak tree that forms a natural bridge between the shore and the island. Sunlight penetrates across most of the grove and colorful wildflowers cover the grassy open spaces.

There are several dead and horribly twisted trees interspersed amongst the live oaks. It appears that objects are suspended from at least some of these branches, both among the dead and live trees. With the exception of the dead trees, the grove is idyllic

A great deal of conflict lies beneath the surface of this idyllic scene as the ancient war between Uqbar and Tolq continues in a different form. Partisans of each side struggle with each other in animal or insect form, all seeking desperately for a way out.

The grove is divided into four quadrants A, B, C and D, on the map. When characters enter any of these the primary residents have a 20% base chance +10% /cumulative per turn of being encountered.

- A. Leafmuntos the pixie
- B. Ban the Korred
- C. Scarlet the Faerie Dragon
- D. General Hesper and the Bees

On Being Small: Being 1 inch tall (1/72 normal-sized) makes moving about slow business: a character normally moving 120 ft. takes 6 rounds to move 10 feet when small, a character normally moving 90 ft. takes 8 rounds, and a character normally moving 60 ft. takes 12 rounds. A GM should adjust weapon ranges accordingly.

Normal Per Round	Small Per Round
120 ft.	1.67 ft.
90 ft.	1.25 ft.
60 ft.	0.83 ft.

Unless specifically noted, all objects in the grove are full-sized, but they become small-sized if a diminutive player-character grabs them. If a diminutive character drops or releases an object (ie. no longer in the character's possession) the object slowly grows to full-sized over a period of 12-24 hours.

The Dead Trees. The dead trees with objects suspended from their branches or embedded in their trunks are former residents of the grove that committed suicide. The objects contain the souls of the dead and have a 25% chance of turning into smoky figures if taken outside the grove. This releases the soul trapped within, freeing it to proceed on its normal journey.

Ordinary oak trees are indicated in each quadrant with numbers while dead trees are indicated by letters.

Random Encounter Table B – The Grove

A roll of 1-2 on d6 indicates an encounter. Encounters with an asterisk (*) cannot be used more than once. Check every 3 turns.

1. **Giant Centipede:** (SZ S; AC 9; MV 150 ft.; HD 1/4; HP 1; #AT 1; Dmg Special; SA Poison save at +4; AL N)
2. **Giant Ants from the Fallen Oak (4):** (SZ S; AC 3; MV 180 ft.; HD 3; HP 8, 11, 13, 20; #AT 1; Dmg 2-8; SA poison sting 2-12 or 1-4 if save vs. poison successful; AL LE). This gang of **4 soldier giant ants** is out looking for food and captives. They are obedient to their queen, who is trying to locate a victim so that she can perform the sacrificial rite. Attacks are to subdue unless hard pressed. Captives are taken to AREA 7 in the Fallen Oak.
3. **Snake in the Grass*: Duke Vuscin the Black** (see Notable NPCs), on the prowl for sacrificial victims.
4. **Bombardier Beetle:** (SZ M; AC 4; MV 90 ft.; HD 2+2; HP 14; #AT 1; Dmg 2-12; SA acid cloud; AL N).
5. **Giant Mantis:** (SZ L; AC 3; MV 60 ft. flying 120 ft.; HD 10; HP 54; #AT 1; Dmg 2-12 or 3-12; SA surprise 75%; AL N). This mantis will attack anything in the grove except Duke Vuscin—a prior conflict with a burning hands spell accounting for such behavior.
6. **Net Throwing Spider:** This long-legged **giant spider** (SZ L; AC 4; MV 90 ft. 120 ft. in web; HD 4+4; HP 21; #AT 1; Dmg 2-8; SA paralysis poison, surprise 1-5 in 6; AL CE)lies hidden, suspended from the tall grass, waiting for food to pass by underneath. It is limited to one attack where it will drop precipitously upon its victim and cast the net that it has spun and holds with its legs. If successful it immediately pulls its entangled and helpless victim into the high grass. If unsuccessful on its first attempt it will retreat as fast as possible.
7. **Scarlet the Faerie Dragon*:** See AREA 8 The Grove for statistics.
8. **Giant Frogs.** These three former soldiers are now living life as **3 giant frogs** (SZ M; AC 7; MV 30 ft., swimming 90 ft.; HD 3; HP 10, 14, 17; ATK: 1; Dmg 2-8; SA swallow whole on a natural 20; AL LE). They are loyal to Vuscin.
9. **Bee Patrol (4):** See The Grove AREA12 for statistics.
10. **Giant Owl:** See The Grove AREA 7 for statistics.



QUADRANT A

1. **ORDINARY TREE:** A broken and very rusted sword shard, with hilt, can be seen in the grass at the foot of this tree. Looking up PCs can barely discern a large metal shape in the topmost branches which is a shield embossed with a golden bee. Remember, the sword shard and the shield are full-sized items, but they shrink if a diminutive PC grabs ahold of them.
2. **LEAFMUNTOS THE PIXIE:** Looking closely a character may make out what looks like a small tree house, high up in the branches. Getting to the house is no easy task as **Leafmuntos** (SZ S; AC 5; MV 60 ft., flying 120 ft.; HD 1-4 hp; HP 3; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon; SA see description, SD see description; AL N) will defend his home vigorously. First he will throw nuts and then resort to his magic arrows if the characters keep trying to ascend the tree.
3. **ORDINARY TREE:** This tree has a thick, leafy vine encircling the trunk about four feet off the ground. There is a knot tied in the vine, and in the center of the knot is a wooden flute. The flute detects as magic, but it is of the most prosaic sort—it attracts the attention of birds when played (the owl from AREA 6 may fly overhead if someone plays it). The birds don't obey the player, nor do they come in large numbers, it just seems that birds enjoy the music.
 - A. **DEAD TREE:** Six dark green gems are embedded in the trunk 10 feet up. The gems are worth 200 gp each and must be dug out.
 - B. **DEAD TREE:** This tree has already been looted.
 - C. **DEAD TREE:** An artificial eye made of marble is embedded in one of the crooks in this tree. It cannot be seen from the ground. The eye, if implanted, allows the user to charm person once per day.
 - D. **DEAD TREE:** Small chest with 300 sp and 4 gems worth 200 gp each in the roots, barely visible.

QUADRANT B

Ban the Korred (SZ S; AC 5; MV 90 ft.; HD 6+1; HP 3; #AT 1; Dmg 1-6 +4; SA hurl boulders (2-8), SD laugh, spells; AL CN) lives in the Ironwood, but spends most of his time in the grove. Upon sighting the PCs Ban will break out in a broad smile, lean back and laugh, then approach them with a combination of graceful leaps, kicks, and spins. He will end by grasping the first PC that he reaches by the hips and exclaiming loudly that everyone must join him for a dance on the island, said dance to take place at dusk.

The dance is a spectacular event within the grove, so popular that a ring has been trod into the ground in front of the willow tree. The dance takes place once a week, and is attended by most of the denizens of the grove, even those that despise one another. Anyone interrupting the dance is immediately subject to the Korred's dance power.

Ban is not very helpful, and given mostly to laughing and dancing. If pressed he may become annoyed, and any flagrant abuse of any inhabitant of the grove will draw his attention and likely a boulder. Once he is angered he isn't rational and can't be negotiated with.

5. **ORDINARY TREE:** There is nothing of interest about this tree.
6. **OWL NEST:** This nest has three baby giant owls that will be defended fiercely by the **mother giant owl** (SZ M; AC 6; MV 30 ft., 180 ft. flying; HD 4; HP 17; #AT 3; Dmg 2-8, 2-8, 2-5; SA surprise 1 in 5; AL N) if the nest is approached.
7. **GORTHOL THE SPIDER:** This oak tree has a large spider web between two of the branches that overhang the stream.

Several mouse size victims appear to be suspended along the bottom of the web, but apart from this the tree is ordinary.

The web is the construct of Gorthol, a **giant spider** (SZ L; AC 4; MV 30 ft. 120 ft. in web; HD 4+4; HP 21; #AT 1; Dmg 2-8; SA poison; AL CE). Gorthol loved being a soldier in Tolq's army since he got to fight and kill. He is the only inhabitant of the grove to not only embrace his fate, but to enjoy it. He has the body of a spider, but his head is a mix of human and spider. It gives him great delight to talk to his victims as he sucks out their innards. There are a number of items in his large web: several very small, desiccated corpses; a dragonfly; a small stick; a tiny, cylindrical, white scroll case containing a **scroll of dispel magic**; **sword +2**; **wand of lightning** (2 charges)

The scroll and wand are in the possession of a human desiccated corpse while the sword is on another small corpse, this one an elf.

QUADRANT C

The Tree Bridge: An oak tree has fallen across the stream in this quadrant, creating a natural bridge to the island. The roots of the tree are exposed and reveal two holes large enough for small characters to enter. The tree is 3 feet in diameter. There is a pool on the north side where the flow has been obstructed.

Walking across the top of the tree may attract the attention of the owl or Scarlet. If the characters enter either of the holes, see The Fallen Oak for more information.

8. **SCARLET THE FAERIE DRAGON:** Scarlet may be seen cavorting in the pools as she loves to dive and swim, her insect-like wings acting as fins. She lairs in a hole in this tree about ten feet up. She is friendly with Leafmuntos and often co-operates to prank interlopers. She is fond of casting an illusion on the bee hive in AREA 12, making it appear as a small chest that the tree has somehow grown around. If the party molests the trunk in any way the bees will defend the hive. While characters are distracted by the bees Scarlet will help herself to the honey. Like Leafmuntos, Scarlet will make contact if this pranking is handled good-naturedly. At first she will badger the party members for sweet treats. If the party has any sweets it can offer Scarlet will be grateful and provide a helpful hint for a current problem. Otherwise she will eventually leave the party alone when she becomes bored.

Scarlet, female young adult faerie dragon: (SZ S; AC 5; MV 60 ft., 240 ft. flying; HD 7-8 hp; HP 7; #AT 1; Dmg 1-2; SA breath weapon, spells; SD invisibility; MR 48%; AL CG)

Scarlet casts as an 8th-level magic user. She has the following spells ready:

First: **dancing lights, sleep, unseen servant, ventriloquism**

Second: **audible glamer, forget, magic mouth**

Third: **phantasmal force, suggestion, water breathing**

Fourth: **fumble, polymorph self**



9-11. **ORDINARY TREES:** These trees have nothing unusual about them.

A. **DEAD TREE:** Six dark green gems are embedded in the trunk 10 feet up. The gems are worth 200 gp each and must be dug out.

E. **DEAD TREE:** High up in the branches of this dead oak is a silver headband that increases the wearer's Intelligence by 1 point (max 18).

F. **DEAD TREE:** An empty **iron flask** lies in the tangled roots of this dead tree, about a foot below the surface.

G. **DEAD TREE:** A **sword +1** dangles from some vines in the mid-branches of this suicide.

H. **DEAD TREE:** This tree has already been looted.

QUADRANT D

12. **CAPTAIN HESPER AND HIS COMPANY:** Unless Scarlet has cast her illusion to look as if the tree trunk has grown around a small chest, an active giant beehive is easily visible growing around the base of this tree.

The small hive is the abode of a company of Uqbar soldiers now all living as bees. Lead by **Captain Hesper** (SZ M; AC 5; MV 120 ft., 300 ft. flying; HD 5; HP 31; #AT 1; Dmg 1-4; SA poison, can sting multiple times; AL LG), the company is comprised of **5 other men/giant bees** (SZ M; AC 5; MV 120 ft., 300 ft. flying; HD 4+2; HP 14, 15, 21, 22, 26; #AT 1; Dmg 1-4; SA poison, can sting multiple times; AL LG). This group is unwilling to perform the rite necessary to escape the grove. Consequently they have done their best to accept their fate and see themselves as protectors of other creatures in the grove. They are goal oriented, well organized and will absolutely not tolerate intrusion in their home, or sympathy with: crayfish (cowards), ants (an evil empire), spiders (traitors), frogs (opportunists) etc.

Harm done to most other plant or animal life will draw their attention. Friendship with any fey creature is perceived as highly suspicious behavior. Hesper's strengths include loyalty and fearlessness, and faults include intolerance and stubbornness. Hesper's company patrols the grove and lives with **10 normal giant bees** (SZ M; AC 6; MV 90 ft., 300 ft. flying; HD 3+1; HP 6, 8, 9 (x3), 11 (x2), 12, 16, 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1-3; SA poison, can sting only once; AL N). If the hive is approached PCs will be buzzed by the giant bees and their buzzy voices can be heard saying, "Advance no further or suffer the consequences!"

Normal giant bees that die during combat are magically refreshed in the hive after 1-4 days unless the entire hive is destroyed. Destroying the hive produces enough food for 100 days for one man and 3 doses of royal jelly (acts like a **potion of extra healing** and **cures disease**).

13. **ORDINARY TREE:** There is nothing of interest about this tree.

14. **THE HEALING SHRUB:** At 11 o'clock, near the Briar, is a small shrub whose leaves are an efficacious healer. Characters that have seen the healing leaves in Urayne's care or 3rd-level (or higher) druids will recognize the plant. It takes 10 leaves to brew a healing tea, and up to 150 leaves can be harvested without harming the plant. Druids will know instinctively when they have reached the limit. The tea will heal 1-4 hit points as well as act as a **neutralize poison** spell. The plant can be harvested once every 4 years.

I. **DEAD TREE:** Dangling between two small branches of this tree is a metal tube containing a **cure serious wounds scroll**.

J. DEAD TREE. In the center split of this tree is a small teak box. Within is a beautiful ebony and ivory chess set worth 1,250 gp.

K. DEAD TREE. This tree has already been looted.

THE POOLS

Four small pools have formed in the stream where the flow is obstructed. The largest of these pools lies just north of a fallen oak tree that forms a natural bridge between the shore and the island. If the characters enter the water (more than likely via a gift of water breathing from Elatha) there is a chance for random encounters in the pools as well as in the parts of the stream connecting the pools.

Random Encounter Table C - The Pools

A roll of 1-2 on d6 indicates an encounter, check 4 times per day.

1. **Giant Frogs** (4): Roger Longshanks leads a group of three other **giant frogs** (SZ M; AC 7; MV 30 ft., swimming 90 ft.; HD 3; HP 12, 15, 18, 20; ATK: 1; Dmg 2-8; SA swallow whole on a natural 20; AL LN), all of whom are cursed adventurers or soldiers. They know the words of the rite and they have paid lip service to Vuscin, though they have made a pact to co-operate in the capture and sacrifice of (ideally) an evil creature in order that one of them may escape. They hope to trade out senior members and collect junior members for help—"It's the only way, and it's even fair. Surely you see that". Good negotiation determines whether the frogs become friend or foe.
2. **Giant Crayfish** (4): Richard the Red leads this group of **3 giant crayfish** (SZ L; AC 4; MV 60 ft., swimming 120 ft.; HD 4+4; HP 16, 17, 22, 31; ATK: 2; Dmg 2-12, 2-12; SA swallow whole on a natural 20; AL LN), is similar in many respects to the frogs in terms of history of members and plans to cooperate to escape. Richard the Red attempts to lead the characters to a "way out" at Isilair's Hollow. Richard and Roger despise each other, and each may raid the other if they see that they have captives. Good negotiation determines whether the crayfish become friend or foe.
3. **Giant Catfish**: A great old **giant catfish** (SZ L; AC 7; MV 180 ft. swimming; HD 10; HP 71; ATK: 1; Dmg 3-12; SA swallow whole, poison; AL N) swims with impunity through the pools. All the other water creatures, except the snapping turtle and Elatha, flee before it.
- 4-5. **Poisonous Bubbles**: Some methane filled bubbles burble up from the creek or pool bed. Characters may avoid the bubbles with a successful save vs. breath weapon. Those who fail must save vs poison or become nauseated for 1-4 turns -1 turn per Constitution bonus.
6. **Scarlet the Faerie Dragon**: Scarlet is cavorting underwater. See The Grove AREA 8 for more details.

1. **POOL OF THE MUDMEN**: The broken and eroding magical staff of Taras Greenleaf under the fallen oak has created **3 mud men** that inhabit this pool. As non-living creatures, the mud men are unaffected by the shrinking effect of the grove and are full-sized. The mud men ignore the diminutive characters and everything else in the grove because nothing is large enough to attract their wrath, but there is a 10% cumulative chance per round that the mud men will try to shake the characters off of them with violent shivers if the characters walk along the muddy bottom of their pool.

This will seem to be an earthquake, with the ground roiling beneath the character's feet and heaving them up into the current. If the "earthquake" happens, debris of all sorts is thrown up into the current along with the characters—including several diminutive corpses. If characters mention they are looking closely at what's thrown up by the shaking mud men, they will see three objects that have just broke loose from a diminutive corpse of a magic user: a **dagger of venom**, a **potion of extra healing**, and a **necklace of missiles** (containing 2 5HD, and 2 3HD missiles).

Because of this "earthquake" there is a 40% chance (-1% per point of Dexterity) that characters find themselves carried away by the current, skipping and rolling across the bottom. If characters declare they are swimming to the surface they suffer only 1-2 points of damage when they hit the fallen oak downstream. They may then try to climb to the top, where the owl may take notice. If characters make no comment on what they are doing they (75% of the time) plunge under the fallen oak, suffer 1-6 hit points of damage, and emerge in AREA 4, Elatha's Grotto, or (25% of the time) the characters suffer no damage and instead emerge in AREA 11 of The Fallen Oak.

2. **SNAPPING TURTLE**: A large pile of rocks appears to have a small open cave with a very long earthworm emerging from the darkness, writhing slowly. The earthworm is the tongue of a **giant alligator snapping turtle** (SZ L; AC 0/5; MV 30 ft., swimming 20 ft.; HD 10; HP 66; ATK: 1; Dmg 6-24; SA surprise 1-4 in 6; AL N). The turtle may pursue wounded prey, but moves slowly.
3. **WATER SPIDERS**: Looking up from underwater where the stems of lilies look woven together it appears that there are four white, cottony cocoons of some kind. These are the lairs of **4 giant water spiders** (SZ M; AC 5; MV 90 ft. 120 ft. in web; HD 3+3; HP 12, 15, 18, 26; #AT 1; Dmg 1-4; SA paralysis poison; AL N). These spiders pull air from the surface into underwater "bells" from which they hunt insects and small fish. Each bell has enough air for one character for one hour. The bones of more than one tiny adventurer are woven into a couple of the bells. One of these is a halfling. Next to the halfling (and unseen unless the web is cut and the bell disrupted) is a fine looking **short sword +2, giant slayer**. The spiders will be encountered in their lair 60% of the time, +5% per round thereafter.
4. **ELATHA'S GROTTO**: This is a marvelous underwater site—the streambed is paved with small flat stones fitted tightly together. It is obvious that small hands have done a lot of work here. The stones encircle various aquatic plants, and mark out paths, shape themselves into benches, and lead into alcoves. A forest of water lily stems undulate slowly in the current and extend far to the surface, ending in broad floating leaves. Dappled light dances about and there is a general feeling of warm serenity

There is a 50% chance that Elatha is in her lair when PCs arrive. As a non-living creature, she is not affected by the shrinking effect of The Grove. She enjoys her little garden and willingly aids any who promise to work on it for her.

If the characters attack Elatha, she is treated as a special kind of **water weird** (SZ L; AC 4; MV 120 ft.; HD 3+3; HP 13; #AT 0; Dmg drowning; SD see description; AL CG).

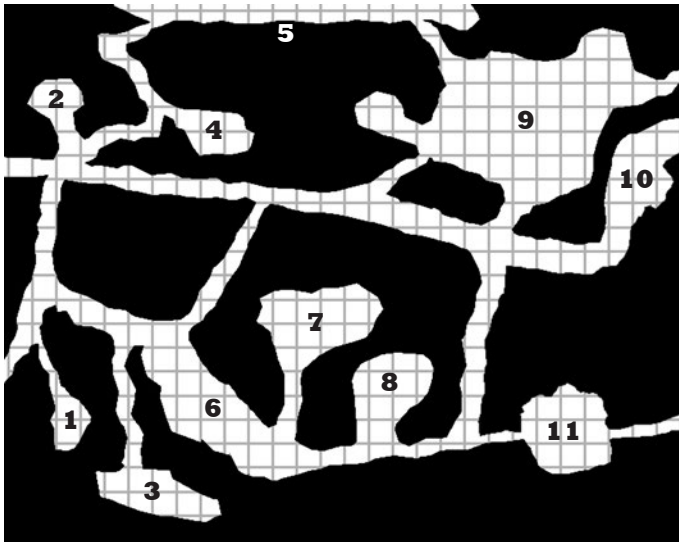
THE FALLEN OAK

This oak was cast down by the Black Willow, crushing Taras the druid and a giant he was fighting. It now forms a natural bridge between the Grove and the Island. Characters crossing on the top of the tree have a 30% chance to attract the attention of the mother giant owl. Characters may choose to enter one of the two holes in the roots and cross through the tunnels in the tree. The tunnels are unlit, round, and 8 feet in diameter (in relation to the diminutive characters).

The Fallen Oak is now inhabited by a giant ant colony. The colony consists of one queen, 25 workers, and 8 soldiers (four are on patrol in the grove). The ants are all former soldiers of Tolq though they no longer recognize Vuscin as their leader and compete with him for captives for The Rite. Abantha the queen commands total loyalty from the rest of the colony. The ants have orders to capture victims alive and will attack to subdue for as long as possible. Any PCs captured will be brought before the queen for inspection and then held in area #7. They will be held here for as long as it

THE FALLEN OAK

EACH SQUARE EQUALS 10 FEET FOR DIMINUTIVE CHARACTERS



takes for Abantha to send a scout to the hollow and make sure that Vuscin isn't there before they set out as a group, the workers carrying Abantha.

For every turn spent in the tunnels there is a 50% chance of encountering one of the 10 roaming worker ants or 4 roaming soldiers.

After ten rounds of combat one worker or soldier will arrive per round until all 14 roaming ants are accounted for.

Ants will not follow PCs into AREAS 5, 10 or 11.

Below are the statistics for the soldiers and workers found in the colony. The GM should assign individual ants to the various locations as indicated.

Soldier Ants (4): (SZ S: AC 3; MV 180 ft.; HD 3; #AT 1; Dmg 2-8; SA poison sting 2-12 or 1-4 if save vs. poison successful; AL LE)

Worker Ants (25): (SZ S: AC 3; MV 180 ft.; HD 2; #AT 1; Dmg 1-6; AL N)

1. FEEDING CHAMBER: In this chamber, **4 worker giant ants** are feeding on the remains of a giant beetle. In the corner, under some wooden debris, are the scattered remains of a human picked clean. 10gp are spread about the corpse.
2. GUARD CHAMBER: A soldier giant ant is always in this room.
3. EXPANSION CHAMBER: *4 worker giant ants* dig in this room, expanding it for future use.
4. SECONDARY LAVAE AND EGG CHAMBER: **4 worker giant ants** are always in this chamber, tending to the larvae and eggs. If combat occurs in this chamber, a soldier or another work may arrive in 4 combat rounds instead of ten as is common throughout the rest of the nest.
5. STAFF OF THE WOODLANDS: This is a very long chamber where the sound of rushing water is loud. A pool covers the entire floor and water pours into the room in a great, long curtain along the length of the northern wall.

Prodding with a pole will reveal a ledge along the right hand side that is covered only by about a foot of water. There is a 10 foot width of relatively calm water that covers the ledge and most of the pool, and then troubled water where the stream pours over the staff and into the pool. If PCs dive into the pool they have a chance (25% -1% per point of Strength) to be swept into Elatha's Grotto.

This is the bottom of the Fallen Oak, where Taras' staff of the woodlands has lain broken for nearly a year (grove time). The staff cannot be salvaged and it will disintegrate if moved. As it disintegrates, it releases the last of its magic into the surrounding waters. Characters must save vs. spells—those who fail gain a randomly determined druid spell usable once per week from the below table:

1d6	Spell
1	pass without trace
2	barkskin
3	tree
4	animal friendship
5	speak with animals
6	wall of thorns

6. PRIMARY LAVAE AND EGG CHAMBER: **4 worker giant ants** are always in this chamber, tending to the larvae and eggs. If combat occurs in this chamber, a soldier or another work may arrive in 4 combat rounds instead of ten as is common throughout the rest of the nest.
7. PRISONER CHAMBER: Any PCs captured will be guarded here by at least **2 soldier giant ants** and **3 worker giant ants** while all of the soldiers gather to conduct themselves to Isiliar's Hollow.
8. PUPAE CHAMBER: There are 8 ant pupae in this room. Each are one quarter the size of the adults and entirely helpless. Each has one hit point.
9. THE QUEEN'S CHAMBER: **Abantha** (SZ L: AC 3; MV 0 ft.; HD 10; HP 52; #AT 0; Dmg 0; AL LE) will always be attended by **1 soldier giant ant** and **4 worker giant ants**. She will hiss and command her workers to "Sieze them!" If things go badly for her, she will attempt to negotiate a truce.
10. FOOD STORAGE CHAMBER. This room contains a large pile of seeds and organic matter mounded in the center.
11. GIANT'S SKULL CHAMBER. The tunnel is cut in half horizontally from the floor where the tunnel opens up into the chamber by something dull white, such that to enter the chamber a character must squeeze through the opening above it. Characters that ask about the white obstruction will notice, after brushing some dirt off the top, several huge teeth. It is the jawbone of the giant that Taras was fighting when the oak came down upon their heads. Peering through the opening reveals a wide, placid pool in a dome shaped room (the inside of the giant's skull). The ceiling is obscured without poking a head through the opening, but something glitters in the shallow pool beyond.

In the pool are an ivory cylinder containing a scroll of remove curse and a potion of extra healing. The glittering at the bottom of the pool is a huge (i.e. normal sized) ring. This is a **ring of feather falling**.

THE ISLAND

The Island has a single, huge tree that dominates it, its branches spreading out and forming a canopy. This tree is a black willow that has been slowly dying since being wounded by Brehg. The willow has made allies of some of the darker inhabitants, promising escape from the grove in return for sacrifices. The willow has observed Isiliar's reaction whenever the tree is feeding. It has been difficult with a wound to get enough to eat, especially since the grove is off the beaten path. Consequently the willow has reverted to a more treeish state. The willow cannot move from its spot due to the wound inflicted by Isiliar.

At the bottom of the willow by the dancing ring, is an opening six inches high and about three inches wide. It is through this opening that entrance is gained to Isiliar's hollow.

Isiliar's hollow/Vuscin's lair. At the base of the tree, on the south side, is a hollow in the tree. The hollow is about 30 inches high and 45 inches in circumference inside. Most of the wall looks slick red with blue veins. Crossing the room at a 25 degree angle from the darkness above and piercing the low part of the interior northern side of the tree is a thin, gleaming metal column—Isiliar. The area around Isiliar is black. It does not take a druid to see that the presence of the sword is harmful to the tree.

This hollow is also the lair of Vuscin, who knows the Rite of the Reaper (see Lore) and is eager to make a sacrifice. Vuscin is safe in the hollow until blood is spilled on the floor. There is always a 33% chance that Vuscin is here, and if he is, he lays coiled about Isiliar. If he and Cissela have been in communication this is where they will plan an ambush. With advance warning that the characters are approaching he will cast darkness about himself, attempt to capture someone and draw blood (not kill), and conduct the rite. If following the PCs, once they are inside the hollow, Vuscin will enter, cast his darkness spell, attack, and then begin the rite.

If the Rite of The Reaper is begun (blood spilled on the floor and The Reaper invoked at least once) the willow will close the entrance to the hollow in one round and begin to fill the hollow with acid at 1 foot per round (relative to diminutive character size). This acid does 1hp damage per round of contact. Vuscin will coil about Isiliar as high up as possible, hoping for the best and chanting The Reaper's name.

If the hollow has 6 feet (relative to diminutive character size) of acid in it, and the invocation of The Reaper has been repeated at least five times, Isiliar will react blindly to the threat of an energized enemy (the tree) and the invocation of the diety against whom it was forged to do battle. The reaction is threefold— it casts a dispel magic and teleport spell on anything touching it, and a polymorph other spell on all individuals not in direct contact with it. Anything touching Isiliar finds itself teleported outside the hollow, and will have resumed their prior size and form. Anything not touching Isiliar is teleported somewhere in the briar and polymorphed according to their alignment:

lawful evil/giant ant
lawful good/giant bee
neutral (any)/giant frog or giant crayfish
chaotic evil/giant spider
chaotic good/giant mantis

If anyone in the group has been in contact with Isiliar the voice is stronger and more urgent here than ever before, asking "Who am I?" If the PCs have not harmed any neutral or good aligned beings (except in self-defense) since entering the Iron Woods, and if any two of the following additional conditions are met inside the Hollow, a wondrous transformation takes place.

PCs can clearly and correctly answer Isiliar's question, "Who am I?"
PCs gained at least two separate allies within the grove.
PCs invoke a good diety within the hollow at least three times in succession whether in repudiation of the invocation of The Reaper or by themselves.
PCs possess the hilt of Isiliar.

If these conditions are met, the entire tree starts shaking violently and the hollow begins to slowly close while an irresistible gust of wind picks up the characters and drops them outside the tree. A leafy, thorny vine bursts from the dead wood of the tree and encircles it, while what look like dark red roses begin to bloom all about it. The image of the beautiful willow is briefly replaced by a black and cruelly twisted tree that seems to struggle as if alive, only to be replaced again with an ancient and healthy oak.

At this point all PCs under any enchantment are released from that enchantment. This applies to all neutral and good aligned inhabitants of the grove as well. Evil others, like Vuscin, are permanently trapped in their current form, quickly losing any memories of their prior lives.

Finally, if there are any nature-based characters in the party, they are addressed telepathically: "You have restored me to myself, and more. My spirit has been released from the blade and I am once again a living, growing being. I owe you a debt of gratitude. Once every three moons you may ask me a question which I may answer truthfully "yea" or "nay". Praying before me you will receive instruction, as you have proven yourself a worthy disciple destined for great deeds in His service. Takes these remains from the many before you and use them wisely."

The ancient oak's roots push up the below buried items: 2,154 gp, 751 sp, 3,238 cp, several sets of clothes in various states of decay (one of two robes present is a **robe of blending**), a number of weapons (including a **dagger +2** and a **mace +1**), 10 pearls with a total value 3,000 gp, one **pearl of the sirines**, and 10 gems worth 1,400 gp.

THUS ENDS THE BITTERROOT BRIAR!

APPENDIX A: LORE

The verses of Over the Briar:

Refrain before each new verse:

(Huckle Berry Fairy/King Crawdaddy/Spinning Wider Spider/Foul Old Owl/Queen Anny Ant)
*Whither will I go?
Over the briar
And cross the water
To win treasure for my beau*

Followed by a verse:

*There I met the faeries
Bent to do me harm
I sang to them of olden days
To better stay their charm
Huckle Berry Faeries
can't catch me!
I've turned into (King Crawdaddy/ Queen Anny Ant etc.)*

*There I met a wise old owl
High up in her tree
I gave her something for her nest
And she answered questions three
Foul Old Owl
can't catch me!
I've turned into I've turned into (King Crawdaddy/ Queen Anny Ant etc.)*

*There I met Sir Crawdad
With sharp and bony jaw
We wrestled in the sucking mud
I was sorely pressed with claw
King Crawdaddy
can't catch me!
I've turned into I've turned into (Spinning Wider Spider/ Queen Anny Ant etc.)*

*There I met the soldiers
They pulled and bit my pants
I flicked my long sword here and there
And slew the Queen of Ants
Queen Anny Ant
can't catch me!
I've turned into I've turned into (King Crawdaddy/ Foul Old Owl etc.)*

After each verse the child chases after the other kids with appropriate antics and sound effects. As soon as someone has been tagged they all start the rhyme according to whatever creature the tagger was, and after the refrain whoever was tagged chooses a new verse.

The Rite of The Reaper: The Rite of The Reaper consists of drawing blood from a living being, splashing its blood on the floor of the hollow, touching Isiliar, and chanting the name "The Reaper" repeatedly. This energizes the black willow and agitates Isiliar. Isiliar casts several spells indiscriminately in defense.

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Bitterroot Briar

The small village of Ipswich has been plagued by mystery for years. Why do some people, last seen decades ago, come stumbling out of the woods looking as young as the day they disappeared, raving mad? Why does the forest itself whisper in the blowing of the trees or the babbling of a brook, beckoning to its center? Local folklore holds that the answers to these questions lie on the other side of an immense wall of thorns in the heart of the forest, the Bitterroot Briar, as do the remains of a good number of would be riddle solvers.

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