

FRIEND OF THE CHILDREN

*When children are playing alone on the green,
In comes the playmate that never was seen.
When children are happy and lonely and good,
The Friend of the Children comes out of the wood.*
—Robert Louis Stevenson, "The Unseen Playmate"

INTRODUCTION

The village of Medvedka Vas sits at the edge of the wilderness, where the waters that flow from the Padli Mountains meet the headwaters of the Bela Gozd River. Logging camps located throughout the area bring their timber here to float them to the towns and cities downstream. It is also a center for fur trade, especially the pelts of bears, which are plentiful in the area. It is a small, sleepy, ride-through village of no note—except for one detail. The children of Medvedka Vas do not age.

BACKGROUND

Roughly five years ago, the children of Medvedka Vas stopped aging. No one can provide an exact date or point to an event when it began. The children were not all affected at the same time, and it took parents months or years before they realized their children were no longer growing. Some believe the children were cursed because their parents—many of them loggers—upset a forest spirit. Others believe it is punishment for rejecting the old gods and worshipping foreign deities brought by traders. Many regional healers and clerics have tried to cure the children, some sincere and some charlatans. None have succeeded.

What nobody knows, and what the characters must discover, is that the answer lies within Bear



A WOIN DARK FANTASY ADVENTURE FOR GRADE 8 PCs

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Plateau—a plateau rising above the forest, not far from the village. Superstitious villagers claim that the forest atop the plateau was sacred to their ancestors, who followed the Old Religion, and remains protected by forest spirits.

This superstition is compelling, but false. Several human generations ago, the caves under Bear Plateau were the home of Kasvin Bearclaw, a reclusive gnomish archdruid. He was a close friend to the sprites and pixies of the forest, who frequently visited him. He sincerely loved human children for their imagination and their adventurous spirits, and he would protect them from harm whenever any wandered into the wild forest.

Despite his simple, druidic lifestyle, Kasvin was still a gnome at heart and loved to tinker. He and his fey friends frequently snuck into homes with children to fix broken toys or improve upon plain ones. Although he never revealed himself to the people of the village, child or adult, legends soon spread of the mysterious “Friend of the Children.”

As the wars and settlements of man steadily encroached on these forests, most of the sprites and pixies that used to inhabit them left to find new homes in other, greener lands. One pixie, however, stayed. Eglantina, the last pixie of Bear Plateau, remained with Kasvin.

Decades passed, and as Kasvin felt his end drawing near, he began to write down all he learned. In the winter years of his life, he spent most of his time locked away in his workroom, using potions to prolong his time in this world just long enough to finish his last treatise. Eglantina sorely missed their adventures in the woods and in the village, but she still enjoyed their evenings together. They spoke of old adventures over cups of herbal tea or sip their tea in silence, letting the sounds of the forest and caves speak for them.

Only after completing his magnum opus did Kasvin allow himself to pass away. He died peacefully, but Eglantina could not accept her lifelong companion’s death. Using the Sap of Life, a natural ichor Kasvin used in his life-preserving potions, she worked to preserve her friend’s body and continued, as usual, to chat one-sidedly and

sip tea across the table. Her strange solitude gave her many long decades to think about the forest’s—and Kasvin’s—slow, lingering death. Her thoughts turned towards humans, the loggers and the warriors and the hunters; the killers of all living things. She grew to despise them, but could not bring herself to hate the children that Kasvin loved so deeply.

By her own twisted logic, Eglantina decided she needed to protect the children from the curse of aging. Using the Sap of Life, she created a potent poison that halted the physical process of aging for 30 years. She envenomed her arrows, shouldered her bow, and flew to Medvedka Vas...

ADVENTURE HOOKS

- ▶ The desperate villagers of Medvedka Vas pool their remaining resources and offer a hefty reward to anyone who can lift the curse from their children. Word of this bounty travels from town to town through word of mouth.
- ▶ One of the families of the village is a distant relative of a party member and sends a message begging for help.
- ▶ The party is hired by a wizard who is conducting experiments into ways to extend life and is eager to gain samples of the children’s blood as well as any information regarding spells or artifacts that may be the cause of this anomaly.

SYNOPSIS

When the characters arrive in Medvedka Vas, they learn that something is preventing the children of this small village from physically aging, although they seem to be developing mentally. In order to effectively conduct their investigations, the party must seek the approval of Lord Pavletic, who may ask them to prove their sincerity and abilities by first performing another service for him. Their investigations eventually lead them to Bear Plateau, where they must overcome the dangers of the cavern and confront Eglantina at Kasvin Bearclaw’s final resting place.

RUNNING THE ADVENTURE

The adventure poses a mystery, and the players must both determine the cause of the children not aging and cure the children. Discovering the cause is independent from discovering and effectuating the cure. The party might defeat Eglantina at Bear Claw Cavern and still not know how to cure the children. Alternatively, they could deduce the cure, but if they have not defeated Eglantina, she'll re-enchant the children soon after the party cures them.

It is nearly impossible to encounter Eglantina outside Bear Claw Cavern. She avoids putting herself in danger and is patient enough to win a war of attrition. If she has to, she'll wait until the party leaves town and then start re-enchanting the children. If the party successfully cures the children, collects the reward, and leaves the village without defeating her, Eglantina will re-enchant the children and Lord Pavletic will put a bounty on the "charlatans" who conned the children's poor, desperate families.

MEDVEDKA VAS GEOGRAPHY

The village of Medvedka Vas lies on the southern banks of the mighty Bela Gozd River. Quaint shops and family-operated lumber mills dot the banks of the river, and a dirt road leads further inland to Lord Ivan Pavletic's manor. Many hunters and loggers travel north of the river to work their trade in the mighty forest surrounding Bear Plateau. The other small hills around the village are bald, cut clean over decades of logging.

CONDUCTING INVESTIGATIONS

Interviewing Villagers

When interviewing unnamed villagers (shopkeepers, dock workers, etc.) use the following rumor table. Sasha Kalin's tavern patrons, as well as named villagers such as Lord Pavletic and the children's parents, know specific information beyond what is provided here.

Village Rumors

2d6 Rumor

- | | |
|-------|---|
| 2-3 | Forest spirits, upset at the logging, are behind the children not aging. (Close to the truth, but unfounded.) |
| 4 | A while back, a traveling warlock stopped at Kalin's Tavern. A group of drunk loggers mistook her for a prostitute and accosted her. In revenge, she cursed the town. (False. No such event has occurred in Sasha Kalin's establishment, nor would she allow it.) |
| 5 | Many of the children refer to the "Friend of the Children" looking out for them. Supposedly this was an old folk tale, remembered only by the oldest townsfolk. (Partially true.) |
| 6 | It is said that Lord Pavletic made a deal with some forest spirits at Bear Plateau and that is the real reason he forbids logging and hunting there. (False. Pavletic doesn't want to provoke the Giant Owl there. Learning of it might lead the village's headstrong hunters to seek it.) |
| 7 | Giant owls are known to inhabit the woods nearby. (True.) |
| 8 | Surely some political rival of Lord Pavletic has hired powerful wizards to cast dark magic on the town in hopes of taking control of his manor. (False. Speaking with Pavletic about this prompts him to reveal the old superstition of magic surrounding Bear Plateau.) |
| 9-10 | Lord Pavletic is furious about a poacher who has been hunting in his woods. This poacher is the source of the curse, as he murdered the Great Bear Spirit that protects these woods and sold its head for gold in a foreign city. (Partially true, see "Lord Pavletic's Manor," below. There is a poacher, but there is no Great Bear Spirit.) |
| 11-12 | Before the children stopped aging, Lord Pavletic led the village to abandon the village's old gods (see "Uller's Wayshrine," below) in favor of a more "civilized" pantheon. Now the old gods have cursed the children to punish the village. (Partially true. Pavletic wants to modernize his small village, and leading his people to abandon their old gods was one of his first ideas. The rest is entirely false.) |

EXAMINING THE CHILDREN

Characters who inspect one of the afflicted children may attempt a *Difficult* [16] INT check. On a success, he or she discovers a very small scar, seemingly from a bug bite. Every child has such a mark in a location that is typically not covered by clothes, like forearms or the neck. Given how common scars and bug bites are on village children, and the overall lack of medical knowledge among the villagers, this has gone unnoticed.

USING MAGIC IN THE INVESTIGATIONS

Detect magic spells and abilities reveal an aura of infusion magic around the affected. Spells or abilities which detect, prevent, or cure poison or illness have no effect. While the effects are undesirable, the substance is a magical potion—not a poison or disease.

CURING THE CHILDREN

The children's condition is due to Eglantina shooting small slivers soaked in a powerful potion into the children, causing them to not age for thirty years. Killing Eglantina does not end the enchantment, but it will prevent her from re-enchanting any cured children.

Dispelling the magic on an affected child automatically ends the effects on a successful *Difficult* [16] MAG check, and requires 10 MP. If the dispel is successful, the target child begins aging again normally, but he or she will not instantly grow to what his or her age should be.

There is no nonmagical cure, other than waiting thirty years for the potion to wear off. If there is nobody in the party who can cast the spells necessary, they must arrange for an appropriate spell caster to visit the village.

MINOR NPC STATS

Unless stated otherwise, the villagers have **peasant** statistics.

LOCATION 1: MEDVEDKA VAS

Medvedka Vas is a small village of around 150 people. Many of the young men spend most of their time living in logging camps away from the village. A smaller number of villagers earn a livelihood as hunters and fur traders, spending much of their time away from the village. The remainder are farmers. Six buildings near the docks serve as the center of commerce for the village.

VILLAGE DOCKS

Most travelers arrive at and depart from the village from here.

The docks are busy with travelers arriving and departing, and you can hear the sounds of a saw cutting wood from a lumber mill a bit up the river. At the head of the bridge that spans the river hangs the bloodied, dog-mauled corpse of a man below a sign displaying the single word "POACHER." The nearest building to you is a large hall with the sign "Kalin Tavern" painted on the side facing the docks, which is where most of the recent arrivals are heading.

NPCs here are busy loading or unloading their boats and are in no mood to talk. If the party forces a conversation, use the encounter table for "Kalin Tavern," but the NPC suggests meeting at the tavern after they complete their business on the docks.

KALIN TAVERN

Most of the space of this large building next to the docks is used for the dining hall, which is bustling with patrons, mostly boatmen, lumber merchants, fur traders, and local farmers. There is a bar off to the side and a door leading to the kitchen behind it. The second floor has a large common sleeping area with bunk beds that can sleep up to 40 people. There are only six private rooms.

The tavern is owned by Sasha Kalin, a tough, childless widow, who prefers to sit in the corner with friends and acquaintances. Her staff—all human commoners who can share information from Rumor Table, above—includes the bartender, Elvino Mauc, a brash, heavysset man in his thirties who lives in the bar and a few cooks and bar maids who work in shifts.

On a normal day, 2 to 25 patrons are inside when the tavern is open (dawn to midnight). Roll three times on the table below whenever the party enters to determine who is at the tavern. Unless stated otherwise, patrons can share a rumor

from the Village Rumors table in addition to any specific information they can share.

HAPPY EXPEDITIONS

Owned and operated by Pudd, a dour and jaded halfling, Happy Expeditions sells items needed by hunters, loggers, and boatmen. He also carries domestic items of use to local farmers. He has no children and does not share an opinion on what is causing the village's children to not age. If pressed to guess, he sourly remarks that children "were never meant to grow any bigger."

TAILOR

This abandoned store front was once the place of business for the village's tailor, Octavij Cebela. He was a human and a widower with a beloved young daughter. Not long after the curse began, Octavij claimed that the old legend of the Friend of the Children was real and was about an evil gnome sorcerer who sought control over the village's children for unspeakable ends. As the years wore on, Oktavij became increasingly unraveled

Random Tavern Patrons

1d6	Encounter	Information
1	2d6 loggers	All forests in the area are part of Lord Pavletic's manor. None may hunt or fell a tree without a license from him.
2	1d6+1 foresters	They are employed by Lord Pavletic to deter poachers and illegal logging. If asked about the ban on hunting and logging near Bear Plateau, they nervously claim it is to ensure a safe place for bears to den and raise cubs to keep the population healthy. If pressed, they recommend speaking to Pavletic in person—specifically about "the owl."
3	A hunter	There is a family of a cave bears in a cave system accessible on the northwest side of Bear Plateau. She's been fruitlessly trying to convince Lord Pavletic to allow him to kill one as a trophy.
4	A fur trader	Travels the river buying furs to sell in larger cities. If the party mentions the cave bears, she'll offer 10 gc per pelt, 2 gc per paw, and 20 gc per gall bladder, but warns against speaking to anyone else about their deal.
5	2d6 boatmen	None are local and all are skeptical of the rumors about the village's unaging children.
6	2d6 local farm hands	Young, unmarried men out on the town. They'll share that no farmstead's children have escaped the curse, no one older than 12 was affected, and they worry that they will not get Pavletic's permission to move to another farmstead far away from this cursed town.
*	Lord Ivan Pavletic	Lord Pavletic enjoys spending time at the tavern and often meets with his serfs, the local merchants, and visitors to the town to hear their requests and address their concerns. See the section on "Lord Pavletic's Manor," below.

*Use this encounter when all the other encounters have been used.

until he killed his daughter and himself. Any local can relate the story. If the party investigates the now-empty building, they find it emptied of all items, but there remains a grisly message above a written in old, dried blood on the wall above the mantle. It reads: *The Friend of the Children is No Friend At All.*

WELL-HEELED

The town cobbler, a female gnome named Pala, focuses on plain, practical, and durable boots for farmers and huntsmen. Her husband and daughter died of the gasping cough. Her daughter had the curse and was not aging, but that didn't stop her from getting sick and dying. If asked about the tailor, she'll relate Octavij's story (see "Tailor," above). She'll also discuss how he once accosted her, raving that the curse was the fault of "her kind" and demanding her to remove the "gnomish curse" from his daughter. She had to hire some local men to keep guard for several days, until Octavij's grizzly end.

LUMBER DOCKS

This is where barges prepare sawn and unsawn lumber for transportation down the river. A local merchant named Sreko Ravnik manages the docks. His children were already grown when the curse began and have not yet had any children of their own. He believes that those who claim it is a curse from forest spirits are superstitious idiots, and he remains optimistic even in these dark times. He shares any one rumor from the Rumor Table, so long as it does not involve forest spirits.

LUMBER MILL

The mill is run by Gregor Robert Broz, his sons, and four hired hands. He also has a daughter who is physically aged 9. She played a lot in the woods and he believes this to be a prank by some forest spirit. Gregor still lets his daughter play in the woods in the hopes that the spirit will make her normal again.

ULLER'S WAYSHRINE

The shrine is a red herring. It only relates to the story in that it indicates the people of this area used to practice an older nature-based form of worship. Some villagers blame the curse on the fact that the people have turned their backs on and offended the old gods. The names of the gods may be replaced by those more appropriate to your campaign world.

At the crossroads out of town, there is a weathered stone wayshrine. It depicts a large hairy man standing with fur wrapped around his waist and cape, but no shirt, pants or shoes. Stone icicles hang from his beard, and his fierce eyes stare into the distance. A phrase in Common is painted at the base of the shrine, reading *enter the modern world and forget the gods of old.*

A *Challenging* [13] LOG check allows a character to identify this statue as a shrine to Uller, a local god of hunting and winter. The statue is weathered and ancient, clearly many centuries old. The runes are, however, newer and seem to be carved over an earlier set of runes or letters. It is impossible to determine what the earlier runes where.

LOCATION 2: MANOR AND FARMSTEADS

Unless otherwise stated, all NPCs on the farmsteads have **peasant** statistics and can share rumors from the Rumor Table. They distrust the party and not cooperate with the investigation without a letter from Lord Pavletic. The farmsteads are large and, in addition to the named NPCs, house 2d6 farmhands and 1d6 servants who can share rumors from the Rumor Table.

LORD PAVLETIC'S MANOR

Lord Pavletic's home is the village's only stone structure. Its fortifications are simple but effective, consisting of a stone wall surrounding the outside

and the housing structures abutting the wall inside, leaving a large courtyard in the middle. Lord Pavletic (a **knight**) lives in the manor with his wife Virgilija and their three unaging children: Anton (male, 15, but physically 10), Nevij (male, 13, but physically 8) and Federika (female, 8, but physically 3). Five servants clean and prepare food for the family. Lord Pavletic employs no guards, but he can call on his rangers to exact justice or to provide protection, if he feels he needs it.

Lord Pavletic is generally liked by most of his subjects. He is fair, the village is prosperous, and the serfs have no difficulty in making their payments or providing their required labor. However, he strictly enforces his rights over all game on his lands—more out of superstition and fear than greed. Peasants guilty of poaching are sewn into a deerskin, hunted down by Pavletic's hounds, and their mauled bodies hung near the docks.

He is tired of charlatans taking advantage of the village's troubles and is not initially inclined to help the party. He provides a letter giving the party permission to search the farmsteads, to travel to Bear Plateau, and to hunt only if the party provides some service to him. Some possible services include:

1. Tracking down a poacher known to hunt without a license in his forests and bring him to Lord Pavletic, dead or alive. If the party was offered money by the fur trader in Kalin's Tavern for cave bear pelts before the party had a license to hunt, and if the party informs Lord Pavletic of this fact, he'll have the fur trader punished as a poacher, and considers his request fulfilled. Otherwise, the party can attempt to track down the poacher in the forest (Location 3, below).
2. Put on an archery contest with his rangers for the villagers' entertainment.

If the party fulfills the requested service, in addition to providing them a license to hunt and travel to Bear Plateau, he also shares that there are old stories of Bear Plateau being a sacred area

to followers of the Old Religion. Although no druids have been seen in the area for generations, he initially feared that logging or hunting activity near the area caused some spirit to curse the village. But even after years of allowing no hunting or logging there, the curse has not been lifted. Therefore, the party may travel there and conduct their investigation in whatever manner they deem appropriate. However, he would prefer that the party does not disturb the giant owl that roosts in the forest atop the plateau. He understands it is both powerful and intelligent, and it has done no harm to any of his subjects.

DOBRIC FARMSTEAD

The Dobric family has farmed this land for generations. Rusmir Dobric, the head of the household, is bitter that he never had a son. He is suspicious of his farmhands and protective of his older daughter. He believes the village is cursed and keeps his granddaughter locked up in a room so that she does not "infect" the land.

1. Rusmir Dobric (male, 53): head of the household. He is cranky and distrustful and chases the party off his land unless they have a letter from Lord Pavletic.
2. Radenka (female, 47): Rusmir's dowdy, reticent wife. She believes the curse is due to the desecration of Uller's Wayshrine.
3. Vita (female, 25): daughter of Rusmir and Radenka. A young widow whose husband died of the gasping cough. She is furious that Rusmir keeps her daughter locked away.
4. Samija (female, 10, but physically 5): daughter of Vita. Rusmir keeps her locked in her room because he fears her curse will affect the world beyond. She blames a "stinging butterfly from the forest" for her condition and reveals her "sting mark" where Eglantina shot her, but cannot describe it much beyond that.

ZALEZNIK FARMSTEAD

When Zeno Zaleznik realized what was happening to the village's children, he thought he could get around it by having children outside of marriage—thinking that whomever was behind the curse would have no interest in bastard children. He coerced his milkmaid to bear a child to him and his wife to go along with it. When that didn't work, he hired a young girl from another village as a nanny and did the same with her. This led to a dispute with the other family, and Lord Pavletic had to intervene and agree to help marry the young woman and pay a handsome dowry to the family.

1. Zeno Zaleznik (male, 49): head of the household. He is uncommonly charismatic, and is the undisputed master of the household, despite his selfish nature. He welcomes the party, but urges them to speak with Lord Pavletic if they have not already done so.
2. Rasta Zaleznik (female, 32): wife of Zeno; stout but timid. Her husband forbids her from speaking to strangers, and she fears him too much to disobey. She avoids publicly speaking with the party.
3. Damjanca Bugarinovic (female, 22): nanny and mother to Zemir. Pleads with the party to find a cure. She's been breastfeeding for years, and is desperate to escape the family, but fearful of losing her son. She is overjoyed that armed warriors have arrived to enact a daring rescue—especially if Zeno is tragically killed in the process.
4. Rozinka Ljubenko (female, 27): milkmaid and mother to Sintja. She loves Zeno and Rasta, but is jealous of Damjanca.
5. Radmil (male, 12, but physically 7): son of Zeno and Rasta, twin of Ago. Claims to have heard whispering in the forest, past the lumber mill, on the Bear Plateau side.
6. Ago (male, 12, but physically 7): son of Zeno and Rasta, twin of Radmil. Claims to have seen someone small “like a butterfly” watching him when he was playing with the bears.

If asked about bears, he says that they never harm children.

7. Rama (male, 9, but physically 4): son of Zeno and Rasta. Angry that he never got to see the bears.
8. Emilijana (female, 6, but physically 1): daughter of Zeno and Rasta. Vocabulary of a six-year-old but has great difficulty pronouncing words. Remembers nothing that might account for her condition.
9. Sintja (female, almost 3 years, but physically 9 months): daughter of Zeno and Rozinka. She is incapable of normal speech. Still must eat baby food.
10. Zemir (male, 2 years, but physically 4 months): son of Zeno and Damjanca. Still nurses from his mother.

PODREPSEK FARMSTEAD

Adnen grew up here and bought the rights to this farm after the prior tenant got permission to move away.

1. Adnen Podrepsek (male, 46): head of household. He is suspicious, but cooperates with the investigation if the party presents a letter from Lord Pavletic.
2. Robin (female, 36): wife of Adnen. A gracious host and eager to speak with people from outside the village.
3. “Old Grammy” Neda Podrepsek (female, 82): mother to Adnen. She lost most of her sight and much of her hearing, but is still able to get around on her own and still has her wits about her. She is judgmental and uncomfortably bigoted, but happy to talk about herself and enjoys an audience. She recalls and can retell the old legend of the Friend of the Children with the help of little Helena.
4. Helena (female, 12, but physically 7): daughter of Adnen and Robin. She knows the Friend of the Children story and loves to sing about it. She has never seen the Friend, but wants to meet him and is happy that she will live forever and never have to grow up and marry a boy.

CIZEK FARMSTEAD

The Cizeks are unable to bear children, but have adopted many. The Bajzek family fled in the night two years ago, abandoning their “burdensome” children, but the kindhearted Cizeks swore to look after them. Lord Pavletic has given them legal custody of the children.

If questioned, most of the girls admit to having played in the woods. Sana reports that the Friend of the Children is not so friendly, explaining that the Friend shot her with an arrow. The other children laugh at her and say it was just a thorn. “It *was not!*” Sana retorts. If asked, the other children say that there are lots of brambles and thorny plants and that it is hard to walk through the woods without tearing your dresses, cutting your leg and getting poked all over.

1. Radoljub Cizek (male, 48): head of household.
2. Myrvete Cizek (female, 40): wife of Radoljub
3. Adopted daughters: Marija (13, but physically 8); Melina (12, but physically 7); Azemina (14, but physically 9); Sana (11, but physically 7).

SIROL FARMSTEAD

The Sirols came from a nearby town and bought rights to this land after the prior family fled the village. The Sirol’s children were already teenagers when they moved here and so they have no children affected by the curse. They are not worried about the curse and are grateful that it gave them the opportunity obtain rights to this farmstead. They intend for their sons to leave the village after they marry and raise their children outside of the village, only to return when the children are grown. Because they grew up in a larger town, they feel that they are more sophisticated than the locals.

1. Uzeir Sirol (male, 49): head of household, a gregarious braggart who welcomes the party, eager to hear about their travels and share his own (embellished) stories.
2. Zita Sirol (female, 44): wife of Uzeir. She is vain and a gossip. She can share many details of the other farming families.
3. Uzeir and Zita have three sons—Dzelal (24),

Mart (21), and Mirt (19), all of whom are bored of the farm life and eager for any excuse to leave the village.

LOCATION 3: WOODS AND LOGGING ROADS

Should the party follow up on leads discovered in town and head toward Bear Plateau (or attempt to track down the poacher for Lord Pavletic) there is a 1-in-6 chance of an encounter every 2 hours during the day and a 1-in-6 chance of an encounter during the night. If you roll an encounter, roll on the following table:

Woods Encounters

2d6 Encounter

- | | |
|-----|---|
| 2–5 | A woodland animal runs across your path (a wolf, deer, elk, or boar) |
| 6 | A territorial grizzly bear with her cub. She defends her child, but does not attack human children. |
| 7 | A territorial boar with her piglets. She defends her children, but does not attack human children. |
| 8 | A poacher (veteran) pretending to be a ranger working for Lord Pavletic. If found out and threatened, he’ll lead them to Bear Claw Cavern in exchange for the party not turning him in. |
| 9 | Six of Pavletic’s rangers (veterans). If the characters are found with game animals but no license, they arrest the party and take them to Lord Pavletic. |
| 10 | A giant owl pellet containing the fur and bones of a wild boar. |
| 11 | A poacher’s stash containing bear traps and a rough map of the plateau with an “X” marking the location of Bear Claw Cavern). Re-roll if already found. |
| 12 | A pack of 2d6 wolves . They follow the party from a distance, looking for an opportunity to attack a straggler, a weaker-looking party member, or a horse if the party ties it up and leaves it. |

If the party is trying to track down the poacher (encounter 8) in response to a request by Lord Pavletic, a *Difficult [16]* INT check is needed to pick up the trail.

LOCATION 4: BEAR PLATEAU

A high plateau rises from the forest. The rocky cliff edge has little vegetation but the top is forested. The sheer cliff face surrounding the plateau is 200 feet high. Scaling the plateau is a quick extended task and requires each character to succeed on three *Routine [10]* STR checks. Three failed checks results in the character falling 3d6 x 10 feet straight down. An ally may make a *Challenging [13]* AGI check to catch their falling companion.

THE WISE WATCHER

If the party successfully scales the cliffs and reaches the top of the plateau, read the following:

The top of Bear Plateau is covered in trees so tall and thick they block the sun. The scent of pine and cedar is almost overwhelming, and there are no footprints or other signs of humanoid presence.

Characters who look around find large, dark-brown, pellets of organic matter littering the forest floor. If they break the pellet apart, they discover it is made up of fur, hair, bones, and other indigestible bits of local fauna (mountain goat, bear, wolf, small mammals, deer, etc.). One of the pellets contains the remains of an adult human, 5 gc, climbing tools, and a metal tube with a poacher's map showing the area, including an icon of a huge white tree in the center of the plateau and a red X beside it.

These pellets are made by a giant owl (use **giant eagle** stats) who nests in an exceptionally large white pine at the center of the plateau. Characters near the white pine who make a *Difficult [16]* INT check or higher notice something large and grayish-brown high up in the tree. A *Routine [10]* LOG check confirms that it is a giant owl. If a party member touches the

tree, the owl attacks unless the characters can convince it that they mean it and the forest no harm. Should the party kill the owl, three giant owls flock to the village the following evening and begin destroying houses and indiscriminately attacking any villagers they find outside.

At the base of the tree is a dark hole that leads inside the plateau itself. The tunnel is nearly 10 feet in diameter and slopes gently downwards, twisting as it goes. It spirals for 200 feet before reaching Area 1 of Bear Claw Cavern (Location 5, below). If the party attempts to escape the owl, it pursues them until they reach Area 1, after which it retreats to the top of its tree.

LOCATION 5: BEAR CLAW CAVERN

1. BEAR CAVE

Three **grizzly bears**—a mother and her two almost-grown cubs—den here. They attack anyone over 10 years old. Unless the party passes a group *Strenuous [21]* AGI check, the mother detects the party's approach and charge up the tunnel towards the entrance at them (potentially trapping them between a furious owl and a hungry bear). After the first round of combat, the cubs join the fight.

2. DRUIDIC ALTAR

This branch of the tunnel ends in a small, moist alcove. On the opposite side of the room, a thick tree root wraps around a hanging stalactite, with one knot forming into what looks like the shape of a sleeping face. Before this is an altar, upon which are affixed a number of idols.

Many of the idols depict Uller—or another appropriately ancient god—but there are dozens of unrecognizable icons of spirits and demigods from across the region. The room looks as if it were an altar for a single druid or small group. It

has not been used in a long time.

The “face” in the root is that of an ancient, partially-petrified treant named White Pine. The treant is old and can no longer sense the world through its trunk or boughs, only its roots. The forest guardian was once Kasvin’s friend, and has helplessly observed Eglantina’s descent into madness. If the party treats the idols with respect, it speaks, offering to tell Kasvin’s story and reveal the truth about the Friend of the Children.

3. FUNGAL GARDEN

You enter a large cavern lit by the soft blue bioluminescence of the fungi that cover the floor and walls. Some fungi are as fine as blades of grass, while others grow taller than humans and wider than a bear.

A *Challenging* [13] LOG check indicates that it is highly unlikely that these fungi would have all grown together here naturally. For every ten feet that the characters move in this cave, roll 1d6 and consult the following table:

1. *Harmless fungi*, edible
2. *Medicinal fungi*, heals 1 HEALTH
3. *Gas spore*, emits gas 5d6 melee attack for 3d6 poison damage
4. *Shrieking plant*, attracts remaining cave bears and carnivorous plant, and alerts Eglantina
5. *Violet fungus*, touches with 5d5 melee attack for 2d6 death damage
6. *Plague fungi*, releases bursts of spores 5d6 melee or contract flesh rot

Characters may inspect a 5-foot square by making a *Routine* [10] INT check. On a success, roll 1d6 and consult the table. The character becomes aware of the fungus inhabiting the square, but does not disturb it.

4. CAVE POOL

This cave bends to the right and slopes into a pool of water. Bones litter the floor, including the carcasses of bears, wolves, and two adult humans. A

Routine [10] INT check reveals their skin and flesh has been seared away by acid. The pool of water is fed by an underground spring.

A **carnivorous plant** inhabits this cave, preying on unwitting creatures that come here to get water. It avoids attacking the party *en masse*, but attempts to follow them and attack any party member that breaks off from the rest of the group or straggles behind. Anyone who drinks or becomes immersed in the water in this room receives a 6d6 melee attack or contracts moor plague.

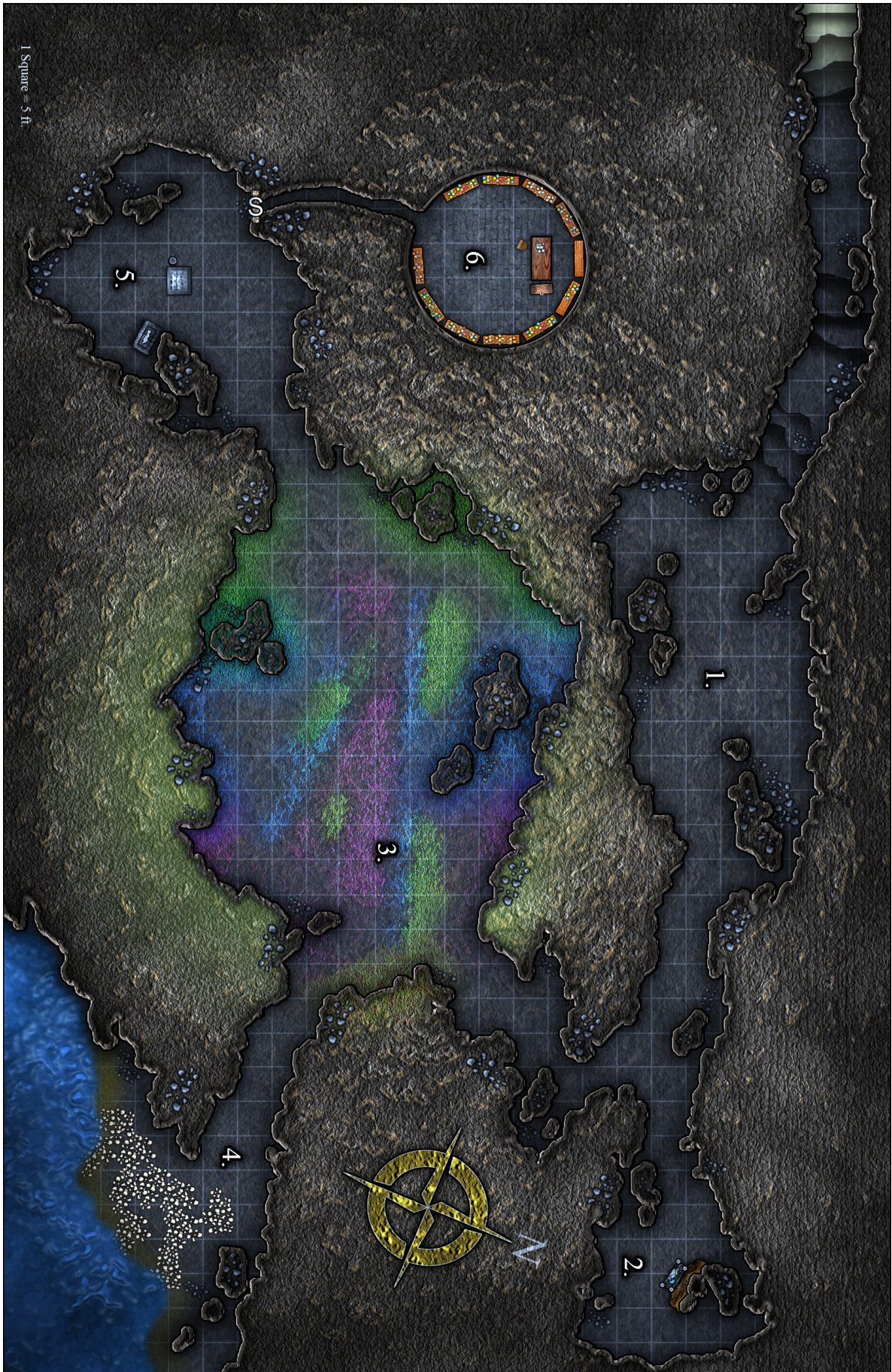
The following can be found in the debris: a citrine gemstone worth 50 gc, a rusted dagger, a rusted sword, a rusted shield, moldy leather armor, and 38 gc scattered about.

5. KASVIN’S FINAL RESTING PLACE

In the northwest of this small chamber, you see what looks like a stone bed below a number of root-entwined stalactites, dripping a milky liquid onto a small figure lying on the bed. There is a tattered tapestry in the northwest corner of the room, and a set of stone table and chairs are located in the center of the room.

If the party investigates the figure on the stone bed, they find that it is a very old gnome. He is dead, but remarkably well preserved. The liquid dripping from the stalactites coats him like a thin film. As for the furniture, one chair and half the table are covered in a layer of dust. The other chair and the edge of the table near it are clean and dust free.

Secret Door. The tapestry is old and faded, but it depicts Kasvin sitting atop a tree stump cheerfully reading a storybook to several gathered human children. Many small animals, including bear cubs, piglets, and wolf cubs sit peacefully at his feet. Hidden behind the tapestry is a gnome-sized tunnel to Area 6.



If Eglantina was alerted by the fungi, she lurks sourly among the sap-covered vines (*Demanding* [21] INT to spot). If not, she is in Area 6, and does not notice the characters unless they make noise.

If she is not spotted, Eglantina begins shooting arrows at the party members and casting spells to put them to sleep and confuse them. After expending all her spells, she hides in the shadows and addresses the remaining characters. Eglantina has typical **pixie** stats and abilities. She is an old, power-ful, and experienced pixie, and uses the vines to provide total cover, making her difficult to locate and hit.

A voice calls out from the dark, coming from different directions and heights and bounces around the cave walls making it impossible to determine exactly where is coming from. It is a high-pitched feminine voice ranting about the evils committed by adults: war, destruction of the forests, and the loss of childhood innocence. She ends her tirade by madly screeching: "It is *your* fault! I have to be big ... you must all be destroyed. I have to be big!"

Eglantina draws upon the power of Kasvin's last gift to her, and transforms into a **werebear**, lacking its damage immunities. If she is brought to 0 HEALTH in her transformed state, she changes back to her true, now dead form, with *Kasvin's great bear* trinket laying near her corpse. If made unconscious, she also reverts to pixie form, but if she took more damage while in werebear form than her maximum HEALTH as a pixie, she dies as soon as she reverts.

Kasvin's Great Bear

Wondrous item, rare

An exceptionally detailed miniature of a humanoid bear, about the size of a human thumbnail, carved into brown and yellow petrified wood. On the bottom is a maker's mark of a bear claw. An extraordinary example of gnomish workmanship,

the pendant was created by Kasvin Bearclaw to lend to those who protected the forest in times of great need. Anyone who holds the trinket tightly and states, "I have to be big," takes the form of a **werebear** with all its statistics and abilities, except for damage immunities. The transformation lasts for 1 hour unless it is voluntarily ended as a bonus action, dispelled (10 MP; *Demanding* [21] MAG) or the trinket is destroyed. While the trinket can be used at any time, it requires an hour's exposure to a full moon before it can be used again.

Sap of Life

The milky substance dripping from the root-covered stalactites onto Kasvin's corpse is a rare substance known as the Sap of Life. Through some mixture of tree sap, underground water, and the magic that seems to permeate Bear Plateau, it acquires powerful healing and regenerative properties. In its natural state, the Sap of Life can be applied topically or ingested. When the liquid is rubbed on skin, it slows aging and helps re-move wrinkles. When ingested, the person must make a *Challenging* [13] END check. A failure causes vomiting for one minute. On a success, the sap removed any Tiredness conditions, diseases, or poisons. The Sap of Life can be used as an ingredient in cosmetics and medicines, and fetches a good price from alchemists and apothecaries.

6. KASVIN'S WORKSHOP

The door to the hidden workshop is gnome-sized, but the room inside is spacious. It contains an alchemist's workbench, a writing desk, and a rack to stretch skins for making parchment. The walls are covered with floor-to-roof shelves of jars with various ingredients; glass flasks, tubes, and other alchemist tools; various wood-working tools; and book-making tools.

Most of the herbs are no longer fresh, but there is sufficient equipment to put together a healer's kit, an herbalist's kit, alchemist's supplies, calligrapher's supplies, leatherworker's tools, painter's

supplies, woodcarver's tools, and a poisoner's kit. A party member must have the appropriate proficiency in order to know what items are needed to put together the proper kit or set of tools.

On the writing desk is Kasvin's Treatise and a note to Eglantina, thanking her for her many decades of friendship, bequeathing *Kasvin's great bear* to her, and requesting that she seek out a worthy person to lead to his book, so that all he learned in life is passed on. He also urges her to travel and find others of her kind to keep her company.

Kasvin's Treatise

The inside jacket reads: You hold the final work of Kasvin Bearclaw—a simple gnome who found

harmony in nature. I bestow my last treatise to all those who seek that life of tranquility. The book is an extremely high-quality, vellum tome with wood covers wrapped in leather with metal bands and clasps. There is no title, just a detailed moon-phase mandala impressed into the leather on both front and back covers and a separate moon-phase pattern on the spine. The book's dedication reads: To the children. May we see the world through their eyes. It is an exhaustive treatise on the philosophy and practices of Moon Circle druids, written in a mix of memoir, poetic verse, exposition, and didacticism. There are also highly detailed and skilled illustrations of animals, plants, fey beings, astronomical charts, and other topics of druidic interest.

Sage Knowledge. A non-druid character who reads this book is instantly imbued with all the magical power Kasvin poured into his magnum opus. This character gains the *secret of plants* and the *secret of animals*. The book's magic fades after the ability is imparted for the first time, but it remains a valuable tome, and is worth 1,000 gc to collectors or other druids.

Potion of Stunted Growth

A small, nearly empty vial of cloudy white liquid is set on the alchemist's workbench. If held to the light, it sparkles with internal light. A tiny quiver of Tiny-size arrows is set on the bench near the vial. There is enough potion to provide an efficacious coating to 4 darts or pixie-sized arrows. If an arrow or dart that has had the potion applied to it pierces the skin of a creature, it has the following effects, based on the size of the creature the arrow or dart hits:



Potion of Stunted Growth Effects

Creature Size	Effect
Tiny	The affected creature, if not killed by damage from the dart/arrow, will not physically age for 45 years.
Small	The affected creature will not physically age for 30 years.
Medium	The affected creature will not physically age for 15 years.
Large	The affected creature will not physically age for 5 years.
Enormous	No effect

Any character who possesses a vial of the *potion of stunted growth* may make a *Difficult* [16] LOG check once every 24 hours. On a success, they learn how to create an antidote for the poison using the Sap of Life as a reagent. Creating enough potion to cure all the children of Medvedka Vas takes three days of work.

CONCLUSION

Each farmstead is able to reward the party with 2 gc per child cured, and most parents apologize that they cannot give their children's saviors more. Zeno Zaleznik feigns poverty, but asks an attractive character if they would accept his son or daughter's hand in marriage as a reward, "once the kid grows up a bit."

After curing the children and collecting their reward, the party has the option of telling Lord Pavletic about the Sap of Life in Bear Claw cavern. If they don't tell him, the party has less than 48 hours to gather as much sap as they can before he sends his rangers to survey the cavern. If the party instead informs him and explains the substance's value, he rewards the party by granting them one request, if it is within his power. (He is unable to fulfil a request with a cost greater than 1,000 gc.)

With gold, the Sap of Life, and a few other trinkets in hand, the adventurers are free to depart Medvedka Vas for new horizons. Adventure awaits!

WEREBEAR

A lycanthrope has two sets of statistics. The first is its normal statistics in humanoid form; the second is its animal statistics in beast form. In this adventure, Eglantina switches between **pixie** and **grizzly bear** forms, a process which takes two actions.

When in bear form, use the regular grizzly bear statistics with the following alterations.

- A werebear can only be harmed by silver weapons (Eglantina lacks this ability).
- Those who receive a critical hit from the werebear's claw attack contract lycanthropy.
- A dose of belladonna (wolfsbane) taken within one hour of contracting lycanthropy negates the condition if correctly prepared with a *Demanding* [21] LOG check. Only one such attempt can be made.
- If slain, the creature reverts back to its natural (pixie) form.

LYCANTHROPY

Lycanthropy is a disease which is contracted from a bite or other injury caused by a lycanthrope.

The victim forms an END countdown pool and follows the normal disease process.

Transmission Scratch or bite

Pool END

Interval Daily

Difficulty *Strenuous* [21]

Effect Permanent lycanthrope

Once the lycanthropy becomes permanent, the victim involuntarily changes form at the next full moon and every full moon thereafter. He or she becomes aggressive when in that form. A lycanthrope career exists for those who try to gain control over their affliction, but that is beyond the scope of this adventure.