

The Slaver's Mark

Book I of the Iceriver Valley Trilogy

by Zero Trick Pony

A Dungeons & Dragons 5th Edition Adventure for Level 1-5 characters

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You've only heard whispers and legends of the cold, exotic land of **Iceriver Valley**. They say it's so far to the south that the world turns hot as an oven when you're only halfway there. And is so far beyond the southern deserts that it grows cold again. They say the valley can only be reached by magical means, because there are so many mountains and seas and deserts between here and there that you'd surely die trying to reach the valley by foot, wagon, or ship.

In this story, our adventurers are ripped from their familiar stomping grounds, and whisked away to this far off land. They must escape the clutches of the evil slave masters, forge alliances, gain resources and experience, and go on the offensive to avenge their abduction.

The setting for this adventure is not the Forgotten Realms, this allows the Dungeon Master to create new locations, factions, and creatures.

CONTENT WARNINGS

This story's enemies prominently feature themes of slaves and slavery. The players will **fight against slavery** and ultimately prevail. The slavers are portrayed as evil and cruel; slavery is assuredly vilified in this narrative. Even so, the theme is ubiquitous, and would be difficult to avoid while playing this adventure. Be sure your players are okay with this theme before proceeding.

The example dialog may contain **some profanity**, which the Dungeon Master may choose to omit as desired.

Although **no explicit sexual content** appears in this adventure, some NPCs may occasionally mention **sexual relationships**, including **same-sex relationships**. These are not essential to the story, so the Dungeon Master may omit or amend these as desired.

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How To Use This Guide

Sessions

The overall adventure is divided into Chapters. Each chapter is intended to be approximately one 4-8 hour session or several 2-3 hour sessions. Each Chapter has a **Plot Summary** which outlines one way that the adventure might unfold. Obviously your players may find other ways to achieve their goals, so I have also included a brief **Alternatives** section at the end of each chapter. A **Hook** section describes how you might motivate your players to pursue the activities of the chapter.

Each chapter is paced with a mix of combat and roleplay activities such as NPC interactions or obstacles. These can be skipped or adjusted as desired. When activities are not essential to the overall story I have tried to mark them as **(Optional)**.

Combat Encounters

When possible I have used existing creatures from the 5th Edition D&D books, so you will find few custom statblocks in the adventure. However, I often rename creatures to fit a theme, so you can consider using the adjusted names. When possible I have tried to suggest a menu of alternative enemies, which can be used to adjust the difficulty of combat as desired for your players' level and style. Each chapter introduction includes the intended party composition for which the combat is balanced, e.g. "**four Level 3 player characters**".

Maps

When possible I have provided color tactical maps of the settings where encounters may occur. Grid-aligned maps will have a grid size in their filename, like "-50x30". You can download free full-resolution JPGs for use in Virtual Tabletop Software such as Roll20.net or FoundryVTT. Downloadable URLs look like this:

<http://www.zerotricony.com/iceriver/norwich-tavern-40x30-fullres.jpg>

Scenes

The players may travel to different places such as rooms within a dungeon, or settings within a landscape. Descriptions are provided like this:

- Descriptions of the scene are provided in boxes like these.
- You may read this text verbatim to your players if you like, they'll have no mention of secrets or mechanics.
- Or you can summarize these descriptions in your own words.

If the scene has secrets which the players may not initially know about, those are described in boxes like this:

This scene has a **secret** which the players may learn about.

Characters

For both hostile creatures and friendly NPCs, I have tried to provide the statblock reference, D&D sourcebook and page number, motives, and backstory. You'll see those in a gray box like this:

Tavern Keeper

Commoner; MM p.345

The tavern keeper is a "Commoner" type creature as described in the D&D 5th Edition Monster Manual on page 345. He may have a backstory and motives, described here.

Example Dialog

For NPCs that speak, I have provided some example things they might say. You can read these verbatim, or summarize your own:

Tavern Keeper: Example Dialog

- "Do you want a drink?"
- "You lot look too dirty to stay in my rooms."

Background

These notes are intended to orient the Dungeon Master to the setting. I would encourage you to have your players discover details about the setting naturally as they explore and interact with the world. Stonecrest in particular should seem impassable and intimidating at first, so I suggest not spending much time on the details of Stonecrest until after Book I.

Iceriver Valley

This story is set in a large but isolated river valley in the southern hemisphere, far from the equator. The valley is generally a cold place, with southern reaches particularly snowy and prone to blizzards.



<http://www.zerotrickenpony.com/iceriver/iceriver-valley-map-fullres.jpg>

The center of the valley has the **Iceriver**: a vast, cold, slow-moving river so wide that it is difficult to see the other side in most places. Major cities dot the river's edges, with economies built on fishing and shipping. Passage across the river can be booked on boats and ferries. The valley is bounded on the north and south sides by **impassable mountains**.

The Snowpeak Mountains are tall and impassable; full of snow and ice, crevices and caves. The Sunfire Mountains have green and lush foothills with forests and fields.

The City of Stonecrest

Stonecrest is a huge **walled city** in the south, a hub of extractive farming, mining, and livestock trade. It is situated in the foothills.

Stonecrest's economy runs on **slaves**. A cruel regime of wizards and nobles buy and sell forced laborers for their huge mines and plantations. These slavers are the obvious antagonists of the story.

All slaves the **Slaver's Mark**, a powerful and permanent magical curse that binds each slave to their owner. This is used to enforce obedience, detect escaping slaves, and even kill them. The player characters will awaken with this curse, so their main motivation for Book I is to remove it.

The south plains are mostly low farmland, dominated by the great **slave plantations** that serve Stonecrest. **Slave mining camps** can be found in the foothills and mountains south of the city.

The Fortress of Blackfort

Blackfort is the major settlement to the north. It is a **military stronghold**, commanded by **General Harkast**. He is just and noble, but desperate to supply his King's futile war. Harkast is here in Iceriver to stockpile and transport supplies, armor, and weapons for the distant front line.

Blackfort is the seat of power for the mining and timber operations in the north, which fuel the military. It sits on the coast of a large lake that flows to the Iceriver. The north plains are mostly forest; elm and maple giving way to pine and spruce towards the mountains.

The Free River Cities

Large, proud cities dot the river on both sides, and have little love for either the military in the north or the slavers in the south. They control fishing and river passage, and have significant wealth.

Chapter 1: Abducted

This chapter is written for **four Level 3 Player Characters**. It introduces the players to the setting, and plunges them into an urgent and desperate escape. It includes one battle to add urgency and warm up the game, and foreshadows the complex politics of the slave city of Stonecrest.

PLOT SUMMARY

The adventurers awaken to find themselves disarmed and shackled in a strange bastille, with no memory of how they were brought here. Hungry and exhausted, they are led to a large, crowded trading hall full of refugees, workers, travelers, and slaves. Our heroes have been magically branded with the **Slaver's Mark**, a powerful curse that commits them to a life of servitude. They are to be sold off to local nobles. However, an agent of a local resistance group, **The Thorn**, comes to their aid and attempts to lead them to safety. After a fight with the city guard, the agent leads them through a strange, dangerous city to a safehouse in the slums. They meet the resistance group leader, **The Lady of Thorns**, who explains the circumstances of their abduction. After a rest, The Thorn helps them escape into the countryside in search of a fugitive wizard who is said to be able to free them of their Slaver's Marks.

HOOK

The party is captured in their sleep, and awoken as captives and slaves. They should hope to escape as a pretty natural motivation. The party also starts with none of their gear, so retrieving weapons and items is an obvious urgent priority. If the party is skeptical of the Thorn Agent, or if they seem interested in going along with the Nobles instead, the DM can emphasize the cruelty and menial labor that the nobles propose.

Alternative hooks: The players will want to know how they were captured. When test-playing this module I experimented with plots where the players voluntarily traveled to Iceriver Valley for some reason of their choosing, or they were tricked. These might work for you, but they seemed contrived and frustrating for some of my players. You could still explain their capture as "very powerful magic", to avoid frustration over the players not having had an opportunity to roleplay resisting capture or the Slaver's Mark.

HOLDING CELL

The party awakens alone in a holding cell, together and clothed but without their weapons or adventuring equipment. They are shackled together, and have two points of Exhaustion each.

- You awaken on the floor of a cold, bare cell made of stone bricks.
- The small room's only exit is blocked by a door made of iron bars.
- Your wrists and ankles are shackled with heavy iron cuffs and chains.
- You are each lying on mounds of smelly straw bedding.
- You realize that your weapons, bags, and other gear are all missing. You have your clothes but nothing else.
- You feel hungry and terribly exhausted, and you have no memory of how you got here.

PCs with a passive perception of at least **DC 13** will notice that someone in the party standing in the darkest corner of the cell is faintly glowing with a sickly green aura.

If any of the party perceives the aura, or uses Detect Magic or otherwise investigates auras, they can see that all party members glow with a sickly green aura, a **curse** of some kind.

This curse is the **Slaver's Mark**, which cannot be dispelled or disguised, even with Remove Curse or Greater Restoration. The party later learns that the curse can only be removed by an elaborate ritual which is a closely guarded secret in this land.

After some delay, or if the party makes a lot of noise, a **Slaver Magister** (Mage; CR6, MM p.347) comes to the door. He informs the party that they are now the property of The Great City of Stonecrest, and shall be sold to merchants. He opens the door and leads them out of the cell and down a hall.

Slaver Magisters

Mage; CR6, MM p.347

The magisters are the middlemen of the sprawling Stonecrest slave trade. They are cruel and ruthless. They regard their captives as less than human, worthless other than their sale price. They feel superior to anyone not working in the business of acquiring, selling, trading, and punishing enslaved people. They are reluctant to injure the party only because damaged slaves are worthless.

Slaver Magisters: Example Dialog

- "Ahhh, you're all awake. Finally."
- "I hereby inform you that you are now the property of the Great City of Stonecrest. You bear our mark of servitude, recognized throughout this land as our rightful belongings. Quite simply, you are mine to do with as I please."
- "Come with me. The market is this way."
- "Please do not attempt to remove the Mark, I assure you it is quite permanent."
- "You will now be sold at market; I'm told that many masters are fair and reasonable. Pray you are selected by one of those."
- "Hmm, you are fitter than the usual crop of thieves and beggars. I shall make a note to charge a premium for you."

If the party struggles or fights, the Magister's large escort of **Slave Enforcers** (Black Earth Guard; CR2, PotA p.195) will help subdue them by grappling and dragging them to the Market. Since the party is Exhausted and disarmed, it should not really be possible for the party to win in this situation.

SLAVE MARKET HALL

The party is led down a hallway and into a vast, crowded hall. Slaves are for sale here, and merchants walk amongst them to make their selections.



<http://www.zerotrickenpony.com/iceriver/slavers-hall-30x20-fullres.jpg>

- The Magister leads you into a vast, crowded hall with a vaulted ceiling fifty feet above. Sunlight streams in from large windows high up on the walls.
- You see people of all sorts here in groups, many sitting directly on the bare stone floor.
- Most people are in shackles like you: peasants in tattered clothes, more fit-looking travelers, and even a few formidable-looking adventurer-types wearing leather armor. Some are shackled together in groups, some alone.
- Scattered around the huge hall are a few finely dressed men, walking slowly amongst the shackled peasants. They look appraisingly at each of the groups. Each wealthy-looking man is accompanied by a few guards.
- The far wall of the large market hall is made of iron bars, with an iron gate surrounded by guards and magisters.

Here the party is told to sit and await sale to a **Merchant** or **Noble**. Guards and magisters will not talk to the party. But the players are free to talk to the other captives, or attempt to catch the attention of a buyer. Most captives will not know why they're here or how they were captured. Some may say that they were prisoners in their homelands. None of them are from this place. Some may inform the party about the land of Iceriver Valley and the City of Stonecrest, where they currently are.

Slave-Owning Merchants

Noble; CR½, MM p.348

A smattering of nobles and merchants wander the market, shopping for slaves. Most of these men are bureaucrats who work for someone even more wealthy and powerful. Most are looking for farming laborers, and might be interested in the PCs. Some are looking for mining laborers, the cheaper the better. These will pass over the PCs because they look too expensive. A few merchants may be interested in more capable laborers such as foremen or caravan guards, who are themselves slaves. These NPCs can tell the players more about Iceriver Valley and Stonecrest.

Some merchants are polite, while some are cruel. But all of them are comfortable buying slaves, which makes them bad men.

If the unarmed and exhausted party attacks the merchants, they will be quickly overwhelmed by the guards. This is not uncommon, so the guards will be experienced in containing the players without hurting them much.

One merchant will approach the party and **offer to buy them** for his farming plantation. He can be polite and solicitous, and also dishonest about the difficulty of the work, or their prospects for escape. He can (falsely) claim that after a period of indentured servitude, the party will

earn their freedom. If they refuse, he will shrug and move on. Other merchants will make similar offers, so the party understands this is the only kind of offer available.

Slave-Owning Merchant: Example Dialog

- "You there! Can you swing an axe? How about shoveling and planting?"
- "You look too expensive. I need more expendable peasants for the mines, you'd be a waste of money."
- "Ah yes, you have no idea where you are, do you. You are in Stonecrest, the greatest city south of the River! My lord owns most of the mines and plantations here."
- "I invite you to join my plantation! Fresh air and tending the land. It's a good life!"

If the party agrees to the merchant's offer, he will tell them to wait here for a couple hours. He will come back for them after he has shopped some more.

Once they are alone, PCs with a passive perception of at least **DC 14** can notice that one particular **merchant looks a bit different** from the rest, and is watching the party hawkishly. (Alternatively a **DC12** insight check can reveal this person to the party.) Unlike the others, this merchant is armed, and is dressed in dark clothes which look bulky enough to conceal leather armor. If noticed or approached, this man, **Jardus**, will talk to the party in hushed tones.

Jardus, Thorn Agent

Assassin; CR8, MM p.343

Jardus is an experienced warrior. He serves a covert resistance group active in Stonecrest called **The Thorn**. He has been sent here to scout for the most promising looking captives, and rescue them if possible. After that, they will be asked to assist his organization.

He genuinely hates slavery, since his brother was unjustly taken prisoner and then sold as a mining slave, where he died. The cruel masters of Stonecrest must pay for this atrocity. He is totally loyal to the leader of this group, the **Lady of Thorns**.

The Thorn wishes to liberate the party because they are badly in need of fighters. The PCs seem formidable, and The Thorn hopes for help.

Jardus will reveal himself to be a covert operative of **The Thorn**, a group who resists the slave trade here in Stonecrest. He will offer to buy the party and their gear from the slavers and get them out of here.

Jardus: Example Dialog

- "You must have many questions. I will try to answer, but we don't have much time."
- "A group of us resist the slave trade here in Stonecrest. We are a **Thorn** in its side."
- "I am here to liberate you, but we must act quickly. Come with me to the exit. If asked you will say I have purchased you as caravan guards. That will give me an excuse to ask for your weapons back."
- "I can purchase you with these papers. They are counterfeit, but they should be sufficient to get you past the Magisters."
- "Unfortunately you already bear the **Slaver's Mark**. You'll be caught if you try to move through the city, since all of the City Guard and Slave Enforcers are on the lookout for escaped slaves."
- "The mark can be removed, though only by a very difficult ritual. I don't know how it is done, but my leader will know."
- "You look exhausted. But if we can get to my safehouse in the slums, you can rest there."
- "You will be free, but this is a favor owed. If you help us resist the slavers, we will help return you to your homeland."

Jardus can lead the party to the exit, near the wall of iron bars, and the iron gate. There, he will hand counterfeit papers to a Slave Magister, who writes something in a ledger and then permits Jardus to purchase the party as caravan guards.

Jardus will ask for the party to be unshackled. Then he will ask that their weapons and gear be returned to them. The Magister finds this surprising, but Jardus persuades him that this is because they are expected to do guard duty. "I can handle them," he will say. (Optional: The DM can make the situation more risky by choosing to make this a **DC10** deception check for Jardus. On a failure, the party will not receive their weapons or gear, and will depart unarmed.)

Once unshackled and equipped, Jardus will lead the party out of the gate and down a hall to the exit.

ALLEYS OF STONECREST

Once through the exit, Jardus leads the party quickly out into the city, heading for the **Thorn Safehouse**. However, Jardus's counterfeit papers are quickly discovered, so they don't get far before the alarm is raised. Shouting is heard.

Upon rounding a corner in an alley, a group of four **Stonecrest City Guards** (Thug; CR½, MM p.350) attacks.



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Stonecrest City Guards

Thug; CR½, MM p.350

The guards are intent on killing Jardus, who is a wanted enemy of the City. They intend to recapture the escaped slaves alive, though unconscious and bleeding if necessary. They may be willing to negotiate with the party, but they will not negotiate with Jardus.

With Jardus's help, the party should be able to kill these guards, even with two points of Exhaustion. If the party has no weapons, consider scaling down the encounter to be easier.

Attacking Guards: Example Dialog

- "There they are!"
- "The traitor is with them! Kill the traitor!"
- "You're surrounded, surrender and you won't be harmed."

Once defeated, the party hears more shouting in the distance. More guards are on the way. Jardus urges them to hurry on to the **Low District** of Stonecrest. If they take time to search the guards, they can find common weapons and armor, and a total of **100 gp** on their bodies.

- You are led downhill along sloping alleys, turning so many corners left and right that it is difficult to keep track. You can tell from the distance and the many turns that this is a very large city.
- Jardus stops in front of a simple wooden two storey building. A sign hanging at the front reads, **The Laughing Dog Inn**.
- He leads you around to the side of the inn to an unmarked door.
- Jardus knocks upon this door in a pattern of 3 quick knocks, a pause, then 2 quick knocks, another pause, and 3 slow knocks.
- You hear muffled words from inside, seemingly a question. Jardus replies quietly with a passphrase. The door then opens.

The door opens to Jardus's coded knock and password, and the party is admitted to the **Thorn Safehouse**.

The party can overhear the passphrase with a **DC 16 Perception** check. The question is "**Who goes there?**" The correct response that Jardus speaks is "**I'm here to make things complicated.**"

THORN SAFEHOUSE

Once inside the safehouse, the party meets the leader of this resistance group, **The Lady of Thorns** (Noble; MM p.348). She is largely defenseless, but is surrounded by her loyal entourage of **six Thorn Agents** (Assassin; CR8, MM p.343).

- Inside the safehouse is a dim hallway ending in a narrow staircase. A large armed man is behind the door. He lets you inside without a word.
- You are rushed past many adjoining small rooms to the left and right. You glimpse little except bare walls and the occasional candle.
- You can see into some of the small rooms. Some of them have barrels and crates stacked in the corners. Others have straw piles on the floor and little else.
- You are led quickly up the narrow, rickety stairs and into a small but surprisingly plush sitting room. It is adorned with sofas, chairs, and a large table upon which letters and maps are spread in disarray.
- An elderly woman wearing fine clothes is seated on one of the sofas. She has a stern manner and is conferring with some armed Agents.

Here the party can have more of their questions answered, rest for two days to remove their Exhaustion, and resupply. Then they should make plans to escape the city.

The Lady of Thorns

Noble; MM p.348

The Lady never gives her real name. She is a daughter of one of the most powerful Slaver Noble families. But after witnessing the cruelty and injustice of her father's plantations and mines, she seeks to stop this practice in Stonecrest. Overthrowing the leaders who subjugate the city is her primary aim. She finances her operatives from her family's wealth.

The Lady used to have a man on the inside, a Magister wizard named **Nardan Oakblood** who grew bitter towards the Slavers and sympathetic to the Thorn. He began to use his position to subvert captives, and he knew the ritual to remove the Slaver's Mark. The turncoat Magister would risk doing this for the Lady for a hefty price. However, a few years ago he was discovered, and had to flee the city to save his life.

The Lady hopes that the party will join her cause. She shows them kindness, but this has a price: once they are free of the Slaver's Mark, she will ask the players to join her and go on the offensive against the slaver nobles.

The Lady will explain their situation, and urge them to find a way to remove their Slaver's Marks. The Lady can also spare two **potions of healing** (DMG p.187) for the party.

Lady of Thorns: Example Dialog

- "The slavers buy prisoners or captives from distant lands. There is a bounty for abducting people."
- "As you have seen, it will be nearly impossible for you to move about the city with those Slaver's Marks. The guards all carry magic **Detection Stones** that alert them if unescorted slaves are nearby."
- "The Slaver's Mark can be removed, but it is a difficult and secret ritual. The only person I know who can do it is a fugitive wizard, **Nardan Oakblood**. But he lives far from here, and is difficult to find."
- "One of Oakblood's apprentices, a man named **Drahnek**, was recently seen in **Norwich**, a nearby village. We can help you escape the city. If you find the apprentice, he may lead you to the wizard."
- "You can rest here in the safehouse. For now. An Agent will tend your wounds. Don't show your face in the kitchens or the inn. Food will be brought to you back here. You can take one of the rooms downstairs."

ESCAPING THE CITY

Once rested and resupplied, Jardus will escort the party out of Stonecrest. The party will have to be **stealthy** if they wish to avoid another fight with the guards. They are Marked and **easily spotted** by the guards. They should plan their escape, such as using cover of night, disguises, or back alleys. Stonecrest is a walled city, so there are only a few ways out.

The Sunrise Gate (Optional)

If the party makes a sensible plan to avoid capture, you can let them make a clean escape. Or, you can require that they pass a **DC 13 group Stealth** check to evade the guards. Depending on your session's pacing, you may want to make the stealth check harder to make a fight more likely.



<http://www.zerotrickpony.com/iceriver/stonecrest-sunrise-gate-30x20-fullres.jpg>

If the party is discovered as escaped slaves, they will face a fight as they try to go through the gate. Four **Stonecrest City Guards** (Thug; CR½, MM p.350), plus the **Slave Enforcer** (Black Earth Guard; CR2, PotA p.195) who commands them. These guards will try to subdue the party and kill Jardus again. The guards will be carrying another **100 gp** total on their bodies. The Enforcer will have **100 gp** as well, plus two more **potions of healing** (DMG p.187).

After the fight, they can exit the city and follow the road to Norwich. Jardus won't escort them beyond the walls, but he will give them directions and otherwise be helpful.

REWARDS

The party can accumulate the following rewards from this adventure:

- **1000 XP each** for successfully evading capture and escaping the city.
- **XP** from defeating the guards in one or both battles.
- A total of **300 gp** from looting the guards.
- A total of **4 potions of healing**.
- Common adventuring gear found on dead bodies, such as ropes and rations.

ALTERNATIVES

Ultimately the party needs to learn how to be rid of the Slaver's Mark. But this could happen in other ways:

- If the party doesn't go with Jardus at the Slave Market, then some other merchant could buy them instead. Later, different Thorn Agents can ambush the merchant, kill all the guards, and liberate the party.
- If the party somehow escapes the Slave Market Hall, they can be intercepted by The Thorn later and offered help.
- If the party attacks or betrays Jardus, they will be recaptured by the city guards. Once returned to the Slaver's Market, they'll be purchased by merchants. Later, they can be ambushed and captured by different Thorn agents, who drag them before the Lady of Thorns to answer for their crime. She could punish them by sending them to remove their Slaver's Marks, plus that of other slaves.
- If the party eludes Jardus or escapes into the city, they will be hounded by **Slave Enforcers** and **Stonecrest City Guards**. They will be unable to get far because their Slaver's Marks keep giving them away. Eventually they can be captured, and then recaptured by Thorn Agents.
- If the party is hostile to the Thorn, then you will need to invent a different ally for them that is better suited

to their alignment. For example, a group of smugglers or mobsters who have profit motives might encourage the party to quest to remove their Slaver's Marks, and then return to take up the business.

- To escape the city, the party could scale or fly over the wall instead of exiting via the gate. If a fight is in order, the guards could confront the party below the wall or on its battlements.

Chapter 2: The Lost Apprentice

This chapter is a dungeon crawl with several opportunities for combat, puzzles, and traps. NPC help and comic relief are provided by some juvenile Faerie Dragons, which can be played as whimsical, cryptic, and variably helpful. Combat is balanced for **four Level 3 Player Characters**.

PLOT SUMMARY

The party follows up on their lead to find the fugitive wizard **Nardan Oakblood**. They're instructed to make contact with his **apprentice, Drahnek**, who is currently in the nearby small village of **Norwich**. Upon reaching the village, they learn that the apprentice hasn't been seen in a few days. He is rumored to have gone off into the forest in search of spell components. He had been asking around town about the **local cavern**, which is said to be dangerous. The party can search for the cavern entrance, which they find in a nearby forest.

The party must navigate the cave in search of the lost apprentice, which includes **cliffs, pits, and monsters**. The party can enlist the aid of friendly **Faerie Dragons** which can be found in one part of the cavern. The cave includes a few side-activities, such as the tomb of dwarven adventurers, and placating the cantankerous eldest Faerie Dragon who seeks to manipulate the party.

After the Faerie dragons help the party find either of two secret passageways, the party can reach the final chamber of the cavern. Here, the adventurers must defeat the **spider-like monsters** who captured the apprentice. They then find the body of Drahnek, unconscious but alive in the webbing. The party can revive the apprentice, who gratefully **agrees to help the party**.

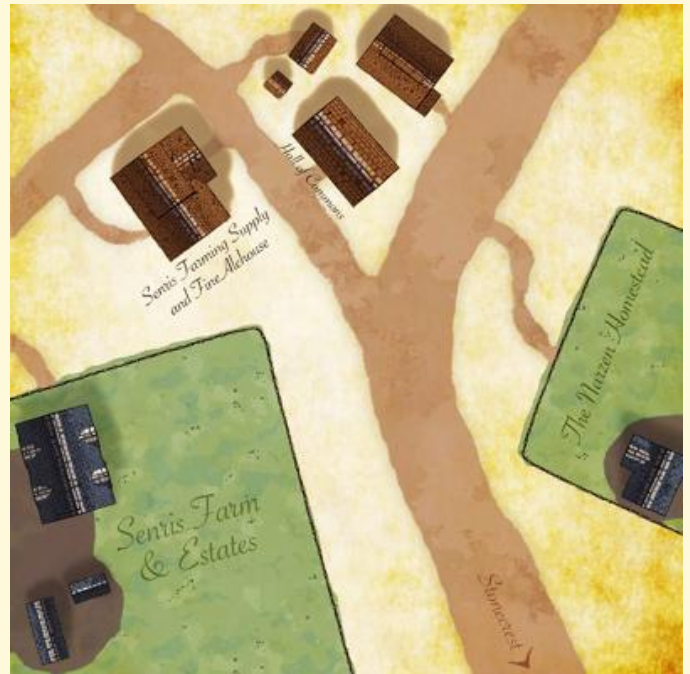
HOOK

The party is looking for **Drahnek**, the apprentice of the fugitive wizard **Nardan Oakblood**. The **Lady of Thorns** suggested the party to meet with him in the village of **Norwich**, which is the closest village from the great slave city of Stonecrest. Villagers and shopkeepers are friendly, and can be asked for the apprentice's whereabouts. They know him well, but report that he went in search of a nearby **cavern** said to be full of enchantments. The cavern entrance can be found in a nearby **forest** to the west.

Alternative hooks: Since this chapter has a simple "rescue the person from the dungeon" structure, it is pretty easy to repackage as a one-shot, or into an existing campaign. Simply change the missing Drahnek character to someone else, and start the quest from any appropriate village or town.

NORWICH

The village is small, just a few farms and shops. The Hall of Commons is just a meeting place for the villagers, currently empty. The only other destination is Senris's Alehouse.



<http://www.zerotriconv.com/iceriver/norwich-town-map-fullres.jpg>

- As you approach the village from the south, you see farms and gardens on either side of the road.
- A few travelers pass along the road; they aren't paying attention to you.
- Most of the buildings you see appear to be houses, though two more mercantile buildings lie ahead.
- A windowed tavern on the left has a sign out front declaring, "SENRISS FINE ALEHOUSE". You see a few villagers coming and going from it. It looks open and welcoming.
- A larger wooden structure on the right appears to be a meeting hall or administrative building of some kind.
- Roads lead out of the village to the north and west.

SENRIS'S ALEHOUSE

Inside the alehouse, the party can find miscellaneous villagers drinking and dining. (All townsfolk in Norwich are **Commoners**; MM p.345). Here the party can buy room and board, and discover the location of Drahnek the apprentice.



<http://www.zerotrickpony.com/iceriver/norwich-tavern-40x30-fullres.jpg>

- The interior of the tavern is simple and slightly shabby.
- Several villagers are seated at the bar and tables, cheerfully talking and drinking.
- As the villagers notice you, there is a lull in their conversation. But they go back to talking after a moment, in more subdued fashion.
- There is a man behind the bar stacking crates in the corner. He is wearing what were once fine clothes, now a bit threadbare.

The innkeeper behind the bar is **Master Senris**, who will sell the party meals and rooms for 1 gp each; a bit overpriced for the quality. Senris also sells a few adventuring supplies such as rations, rope, and torches. There is no other shop in the village.

Master Senris

Commoner; MM p.345

Master Senris owns this tavern. He inherited the building from his father, along with the largest of the nearby farms. Senris's farm is small, nothing like the size of the great slave plantations to the south and west.

Even so, Senris wishes to be a noble, and acts the part. He is stuffy and excessively formal. He treats the simple food and ale he serves as if it were fine and sophisticated. He refers to "his staff" even though he is the only person working in the tavern.

Master Senris: Example Dialog

- "Welcome to the finest alehouse south of the River! What may I have my staff serve you... people."
- "Our rooms are of the highest quality, of course."
- "Why don't you ask Old Farnam there. He loves talking."

At one end of the bar is the town drunk, **Old Farnam**, who can tell the party where the apprentice went. Senris will suggest he talk to them, though they may need to buy him a drink first!

Old Farnam

Commoner; MM p.345

Old Farnam has lived in Norwich all his life. Once a farm hand, he is now too old to labor in the fields. He performs light labor during the day for villagers, and makes it his business to talk to everyone and learn their troubles. He is especially interested in visitors, and eagerly listens to news from Stonecrest to the south or the River to the north.

Farnam **will** notice the party's Slaver's Marks, but he will not mind that they are fugitives. And he'll be too polite to comment on it unless asked.

The apprentice Drahnek often spoke with Old Farnam, buying him ale in exchange for local legends of mysterious happenings. He is looking for leads to discover new magical ingredients and phenomena in this area. When Drahnek heard of an enchanted cavern that might contain spiders, he rushed off in the hopes of finding magical spider silk. He was heedless of the cavern's dangers.

Old Farnam: Example Dialog

- "Why does everyone call me Old Farnam! I'm not that old!"
- "Yes, I know Drahnek! He asked me all kinds of questions about plants and animals, and local legends."
- "Drahnek was very interested in the caverns, wanted to know exactly where they were and rushed off soon after."
- "The caverns are In the center of the forest just to the west. It seems dangerous to go alone, I'm surprised if that's what he did."
- "In the last few years there's been rumors of monsters coming out of there. Big monsters from deep underground. They mostly stay in the caverns. Mostly."
- "He asked all about the monsters from underground. He perked right up when he heard they were spiders."
- "Are you buying the next round?"

FIELDS AND FOREST

The party can follow Farnam's instructions and easily find the forest to the west, about half a day's travel from Norwich. There are no roads going there, but the easy terrain of the farms and fields make for a quick journey.

The forest is not large, and the party can easily find rock formations within it, with a **DC 12 Perception** or **Survival** check. Amongst the rocks is the **west entrance** to the cavern.

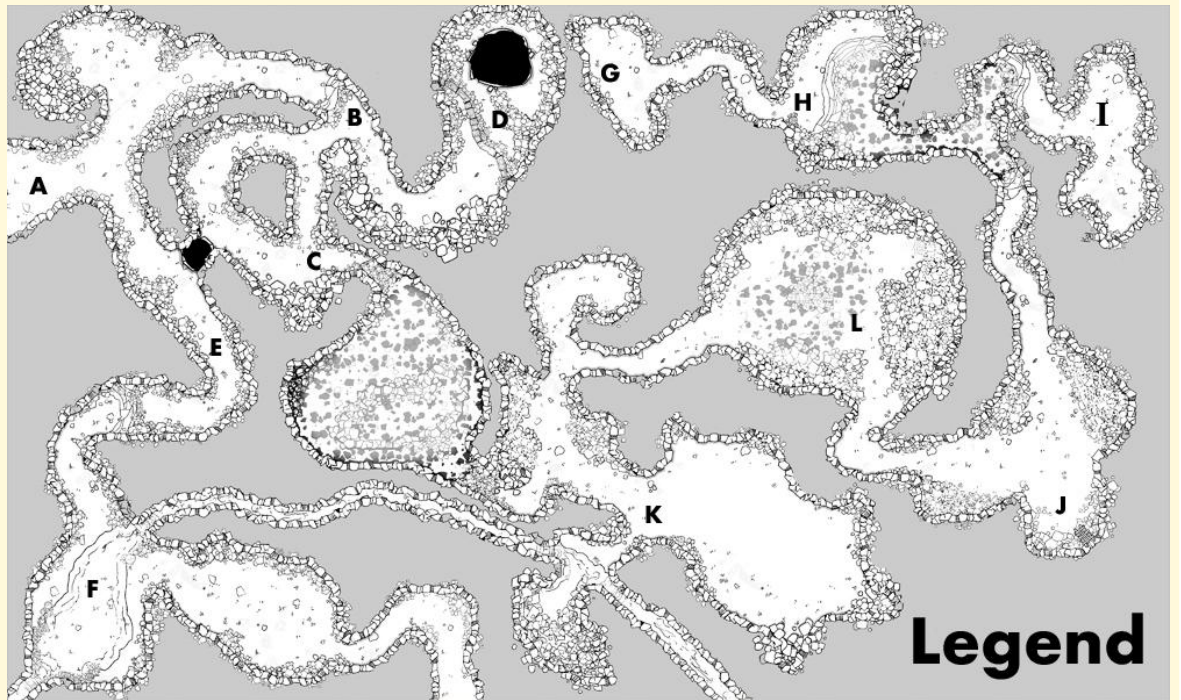
THE CAVERN

The rest of this chapter takes place inside a vast cavern. A free high resolution full color map is available at the URL below, useful for virtual tabletops.

The places inside the cavern are labeled by letter on the legend below.



<http://www.zerotrickpony.com/iceriver/lost-apprentice-cavern-100x60-fullres.jpg>



ENTERING THE CAVERN

Note: The entire cavern is generally **too dangerous for a long rest**. If the party attempts to camp, they'll be attacked by monsters (see below).

A. Main Entrance

The main entrance (**A**) to the cavern is from the west; that is, the upper left corner of the map. The **apprentice's tracks** can be faintly discerned leading away through the north tunnel (**B**). The party can find the tracks with a **DC 13 Survival** check.

- The cavern entrance is low, but opens into a high ceiling as you step inside.
- The cavern smells foul, like must mixed with carrion.
- Tunnels lead away into the darkness to the north and south.
- Stalactites, rocks, and loose shale dot the floor of the cavern. Footing is a bit treacherous.
- The stone walls of the cavern seem naturally hewn, as though from water or wind long ago. These are clearly not mines or artificial earthworks.
- A **cold** breeze blows faintly from the north tunnel, while a **warm** breeze blows faintly from the south tunnel.

Monsters from the Underdark

The cavern has a couple very deep vertical shafts. These effectively bottomless pits extend miles straight down, bridging this world to the **Underdark**. As a result, a few Things Which Don't Belong have crawled up out of the Underdark and are now hungrily at large in the cavern:

- **Troglodytes** (CR¼, MM p.290). A troupe of smelly lizard creatures from the Underdark which cause proximity damage.
- **Swarm of centipedes** (CR½, MM p.338). A nice creepy cave enemy, with swarm tactics being an interesting alternative to the monsters.
- **Swarm of spiders** (CR½, MM p.338). Same as above, but better foreshadows the final spider fight.
- **Piercer** (CR½, MM p.252). Surprise attacks from above by dropping on the party, but very slow speed after the initial attack.
- **Grick** (CR2, MM p.173). A tentacled monster adept at surprise attacks by disguising itself amongst rubble and cave walls.
- **Kaarghaz** (CR2, TftYP p.45). A spellcasting troglodyte, which is a better enemy for a powerful spellcasting party.

This guide recommends **three encounters** with three different groups of monsters: at the Northwest Tunnel cliff, at the West Tunnel cliff, and at the Secret Passage. (A fourth and final encounter in the spider chamber wins the party their objective.) See below.

An antechamber just inside the entrance to the north (**A**) contains five **dead goblins** in tattered clothes. They are carrying crude shovels and pick-axes, but no weapons. A **DC 12 Medicine** or **Survival** check can reveal that one of the recently escaped Underdark monsters killed them. The party learns this by the type of damage found upon them, e.g. "there is a strong stench coming from their wounds" or "the goblins are covered in tiny bite marks".

B. Northwest Tunnel

The tunnel north (**B**) from the entrance (**A**) leads to the top of a **steep cliff** about 20 feet **down**. The tunnel continues below the cliff, with a **side passageway** off to the south (**C**). The party must scale down this cliff if they wish to continue. Flying, Featherfall, rope, or dextrous climbing via Acrobatics or Athletics are all successful tactics.

When the party scales the cliff, **3 swarms of tiny spiders** (CR½, MM p.338) emerge from the side passage and attack. For a more interesting fight, have the spiders appear when only some of the party has gotten down the cliff. This will require them to deal with the cliff (**B**) during combat, or to use it as a tactical advantage.

For higher level parties, use stronger monsters such as a **Grick** (CR2, MM p.173) or a troupe of **Kaarghaz** (CR2, TftYP p.45; they can turn invisible!)

C. Northwest Side Chambers

Through the side passageway from which the monsters attacked, the party can find a sequence of two **bare chambers** (**C**). These can be described as the **nest** of the now-dead monsters, such as a den of smelly Kaarghaz, or a pile of bones left by the spider swarms. **100 gp of treasure** can be found here, in the form of loot upon long-dead corpses.

At the west edge of the first chamber the party can see an opening back into the West Tunnel (**E**), but the entire floor of the opening is missing. A **bottomless pit** about 10 feet wide occupies the entire passage. The party can jump or fly across the pit, but falling into it is death.

A passageway at the back of the second chamber is hopelessly blocked by a cave-in. (The DM may choose to open this passageway if a fast shortcut to the spider chamber is needed.)

D. The Big Pit

After scaling down the cliff, the main passageway appears to end in a chamber containing a large pit (**D**).

- You see that the tunnel ends here, with a small step down into a broad chamber.
- A huge pit occupies most of the room, 25 feet wide and seemingly bottomless. It has smooth walls as far down as you can see.
- Some remnants of wrecked wooden scaffolding are next to the pit, along with huge amounts of tattered rope. These seem to have been used for excavation of the pit.
- You see 4 more dead goblins, also wearing tattered clothes and holding digging gear such as picks and shovels.

The party can examine the pit, the dead goblins, and the scaffolding.

There is also a **magically concealed Secret Passageway** through the wall to the east. The players may find it if they methodically feel every part of the wall, or if they search by magical means. They are expected not to find it, and to regard this as a dead end. They can find help at the Upper Pool if they backtrack to the entrance and explore the West Tunnel. See below.

E. West Tunnel

From the main entrance (**A**), turning right towards the warm breeze will lead the party south into another tunnel (**E**). In the right-hand wall they will see the same small **bottomless pit** with the Northwest Side Chambers just beyond it. The party can attempt to cross the pit and enter the chambers, or they can continue south. (If the party has not yet defeated the monsters here, they can do so when they cross the pit. See Northwest Tunnel (**B**) for further details.)

Continuing south, the tunnel rounds a corner and ends at the base of a **steep cliff**, 20 feet **up**. The party must scale up this cliff if they wish to continue. Flying, rope, or strong climbing via Athletics are examples of successful climbing tactics.

As the party ponders the base of the cliff, they are surprised by a **Grick** (CR2, MM p.173) or similar cave monster with surprise attack ability. After defeating the monster and scaling the cliff, the tunnel continues. The party can see dim light coming from around the corner to the left. This leads to the upper pool (**F**).

UNEXPECTED HELPERS

F. The Upper Pool

At the end of the West Tunnel (**E**), the party can find a deep, clear **underground pool** of water (**F**), sunlit by a gap in the rocks above. The water is safe to drink. Across the pool to the east, there is also an exit from the cavern back into the forest.

- Ahead of you is an underground pool of water, illuminated by a ray of sunlight shining through from a crack in the rocks above.
- Water trickles into the pool from the south, and flows away down a tiny creek at the north end of this chamber.
- The pool is still and clear, with a mirror-like surface.
- Moss and ferns surround the south end of the pool where the water is coming in.
- Across the pool the tunnel continues. You can see daylight coming from that direction.

If the party gazes into the pool, a Minor Illusion causes their reflections in the surface of the water to appear to be wearing **ridiculous accessories** such as fantastical fruit hats, outlandish tieras, and pink feather boas.

Snickering and shushing is heard. If the party calls out, or disturbs the pool, or if enough time passes, four **Yellow Faerie Dragons** (CR1, MM p.133) appear and may speak with the party in Draconic. (Or Common, if needed.)

The Faerie Dragons

The Upper Pool is home to four **Yellow Faerie Dragons** (CR1, MM p.133). They are friendly, irreverent, playful, and bored. They conceal themselves with Invisibility while they play harmless tricks on the party until discovered.

They are happy to be moderately helpful, especially if the party provides them with fruit or sweets, or promises to kill some of the icky monsters. If none of the party speaks Draconic, the DM can decide that one of the Faerie Dragons knows enough Common to communicate. They can warn the party about the cavern's **monsters** and secrets, if asked.

The four juveniles have an older brother elsewhere in the cavern: an unhelpful and cantankerous **Violet Faerie Dragon** (CR2, MM p.133) named **Brian**. Unlike the juveniles, Brian is serious and manipulative. They can mention him if asked.

If the party enquires about their backstory, they can learn that the dragons are from a large underground kingdom far to the east. They came here with their older brother, whose relentless search for a way into the Underdark got him exiled by the King. He has been exploring caves for some years since.

Faerie Dragons: Example Dialog

- "Do you have any candy?"
- "Are you here to kill the monsters?"
- "Do you want to go through the secret passage? I bet you don't know where it is! But we do!"
- "We're called Steven, Doug, Alex, and Maria."
- "We've been here such a long time! Ever since we left the kingdom."
- "The bad things keep killing people. I mean, we had sort of bad things before. But ever since we got the pit, we have REALLY bad things now."
- "Brian made the big stupid pit. Nobody wanted it! But Brian insisted! Now we have a big pit."
- "Brian made goblins dig the pits. Endless goblins, digging, digging for months. Digging a big stupid hole so deep that bad things came out of it."
- "Brian is our older brother. No fun though, he never wants to play. He just wants to make plans and be mad about finding a way down."
- "Do you have any more candy?"

There is also a **tiny water-filled passageway** here, which flows down to the lower pool (**K**). It is too small for any but Tiny creatures to pass through. If the party has a way to traverse it, they can reach the Spider Chamber (**L**) this way instead of through the Secret Passageway (**G**).

Regardless, the party can listen at the tiny passageway entrance. A **DC 15 Perception** check allows the party to hear scuffling sounds of a large creature above the trickling water. (This foreshadows the enemies present in the Spider Chamber.) The party can also learn about those enemies, and the missing apprentice Drahnek, by asking the Faerie Dragons.

G. Secret Passageway

The Faerie Dragons will happily show the party how to get through the wall of the chamber containing the Big Pit (**D**) and into the narrow Secret Passageway (**G**) beyond. The entrance is simply a hole covered by a visual illusion, so it can be discovered by touch or by magic.

The Faerie Dragons will escort the party for the rest of their time in the cavern, though they mostly remain invisible. They may tell the party where to go, or comment on the party's progress. However, the dragons are frightened of enemies, and will flee or become invisible if there is a fight. They won't go first, they won't fight, and they won't warn the party of dangers. They will help confront Brian later, see below.

H. Piercer Ambush

As the party continues through the cavern's tunnels and cliffs, they come upon a pile of yet more dead goblins (**H**).

Unlike the others, these goblins died of **large head wounds**: crushed skulls and gruesome gaping holes in their foreheads. If the party approaches, they are attacked by **Piercers** (CR½, MM p.252), which drop on them from above without warning. The Piercers are weak after their initial attack, since they can take damage on a miss. This is an easy fight but still consumes the party's energy.

Faerie Dragons: Example commentary

- "Those poor dead goblins! They didn't make it too far. Brian is so mean!"
- "Yay you killed the monsters! I knew all along that you could do it."
- "Oh hey you aren't eaten yet! Wow that was awesome! You really killed the heck out of those bug things!"
- "Do you have any more candy?"

I. Tomb of Fire And Ice (Optional)

As an optional diversion, the party can discover a tunnel (**I**) forking off to the north of the secret passage. This tunnel rounds a corner and is blocked by a huge swirling **column of fire**.

The fire is obviously magical, having no apparent source and burning evenly and endlessly. Things that touch or pass through the fire are burned, and additionally encounter an impenetrable barrier of force within the fire.

The fire can be doused or manipulated with Control Flames. However, though the magical fire is extinguished, it is replaced immediately by a **swirling blizzard** of snow and ice. The blizzard is similarly magical and impenetrable. Dousing or controlling the blizzard will cause it to be dispelled but replaced immediately by the fire again.

The party can remove the barrier by **simultaneously** suppressing both ice (control or heat) and fire (extinguish or control). Upon application of any two complementary ice and fire resisting techniques, the barrier will be permanently dispelled.

In the chamber beyond, the party can find two dead Dwarves, embracing each other. They have been dead a very long time, but were once wearing fine clothes.

On their bodies are one dagger each, and a **ring of Cold Resistance** (DMG p.192) and a **ring of Fire Resistance** (DMG p.192).

LOWER CAVERN

J. Exit Ladder

Between the secret passageway (**H**) and the upcoming Spider Chamber (**L**), the party can see daylight coming from above (**J**). A room full of spiderwebs is here, containing a ladder which leads upward out of the cavern into the forest above. The ladder is hard to find from the outside if you don't know what you're looking for, but the party can exit this way later if they like.

Excavated piles of rock are strewn around the ladder outside of the cave. Clearly the goblins moved a lot of rock out of the cave in the process of digging the Big Pit.

K. The Lower Pool

If the party reaches the Lower Pool (**K**) via the tiny passage, or if they travel west beyond the Spider Chamber (**L**), they can find a chamber containing the Lower Pool of underground water where Brian dwells.

Confronting Brian (Optional)

The party can optionally have a mostly harmless encounter with **Brian**, the elder brother of the juvenile Faerie Dragons in the Upper Pool. He can be flying along the passageways leading to the Spider Chamber, or found in the Lower Pool beyond it.

Brian

Violet Faerie Dragon; CR2, MM p.133

Brian wishes to find a viable passageway through to a rumored city of splendor in the Underdark. He successfully used Suggestion to get a bunch of goblins to excavate his pit, miles down. But he is frustrated now because the scaffolding was wrecked by monsters that came out of the pit. He wishes he had more goblins to fend off the monsters, fix the scaffolding, and keep digging deeper. When the party appears, he is angry that they are intruding, but then realizes an opportunity to exploit them. Brian will speak to the party in Common.

Brian will cast **Suggestion** (PHB p.279) on whichever party member he deems the stupidest, or whoever speaks to him first. On success, he Suggests that they go fix the destroyed scaffolding above the pit.

Brian: Example Dialog

- "Oh good, more people wandering into the cave. Totally fine. Just come on through."
- "Hmmm... I wonder, are you as stupid as the others?"
- "I suppose you killed off those smelly lizard men. Well, don't expect me to be happy about it. I'm sure more bad things will come right up from the darkness to replace them. I'll never get to explore the depths at this rate."
- "I would like to **Suggest** that you go fix my rigging, and get back to digging the pit. It's okay, I'll wait."
- "Okay okay! Geez. Iiiii'm sorrrrrrrrry I tried to Suggest you. But listen, it would be a big help if you could get rid of some of these monsters? They're just down that hall there. Can't miss em!"
- "The king would never let us explore the depths. I had to leave the kingdom to have the freedom to get down there. The legends say it's full of treasure."

If the spell succeeds, the other Faerie Dragons will appear and try to bite the enthralled party member, doing 1 damage and ending the spell. They may comment with something like "Brian stop it! We don't need any more pits! Rude! You should say you're sorry!"

Once the spell is undone, Brian will apologize.

L. Spider Chamber

Just west of the ladder (**J**), the party can see that the tunnel walls become choked with spiderwebs. Around a corner lies a large chamber (**L**) containing ten corpse-shaped packages of spider silk, a large amount of webbing, and the **spider-like Underdark creatures** which took Drahnec.

Defeating the Spiders

The missing apprentice, Drahnec, has been captured by one or more **spider-like Underdark creatures**, which the party must fight in the Spider Chamber to liberate the apprentice. Here are some options to compose a boss fight in the spider chamber:

- **Giant Spider** (CR1, MM p.328). A theme-appropriate final fight for lower level characters.
- **Ettercap** (CR2, MM p.131). A more formidable spider-themed enemy for higher level parties.
- **Cave Fisher** (CR3, VGM p.130). An even tougher spider-like monster that uses silk to capture enemies.

The creatures will attack the party on sight, and will attempt to defend the bodies they've gathered. Once defeated, the party can find that one of the ten silk bundles is the unconscious apprentice they're looking for. The rest are dead bodies which can be looted to find a total of **300 gp**, and common adventuring gear such as **daggers, rope, torches, and leather armor**.

The party can revive Drahnek, the captured apprentice, with a **DC 14 Medicine** check, or any healing spell. Once awakened he will be initially disoriented and terrified. The apprentice will come to his senses within a few minutes.

Drahnek

Apprentice Wizard; VGM p.209

The Wizard's apprentice is intelligent and curious, and utterly devoted to his master. But he is naive, and rushes foolishly into danger in the name of gathering knowledge or materials for magical business.

Once recovered, Drahnek will be very grateful, and will happily assist the party. They can leave the cavern and travel back to Norwich without incident.

Drahnek: Example Dialog

- "Is it gone? Is it gone? My goodness it was so fast! I didn't expect them to be so strong! What was I thinking coming in here alone, I should have my head examined. Haha. Anywho! Thanks for saving my skin. It seems I am in your debt."
- "I am Dranek, Wizard In Training Second Class. At your service. And you are?"
- "It would be my pleasure to lead you back to Master Oakblood. I owe you a great debt!"
- "There were local legends of big spiders and I was hoping to find giant spider silk."
- "I gather elements of research interest for Master Oakblood. He is my mentor. I am learning a lot from him, even though I mostly just like... do errands and gather plants and spider webs for spells. Speaking of which!" (Dranek gathers spider silk.)

REWARDS

The party can accumulate the following rewards from this adventure:

- **XP** from killing the various Underdark monsters
- **1000 XP each** for rescuing Drahnek.
- **150 XP each** if the party befriended the faerie dragons.
- Up to **400 gp** found on various dead bodies.
- The **rings of Cold and Fire Resistance** (optional, Tomb of Fire and Ice)
- Common **adventuring gear** found on dead bodies
- **Trophies** from the spiders such as silk, mandibles, and claws.

ALTERNATIVES

Players don't always do what you expect! Here are some alternative scenarios that you may wish to anticipate:

- The players may encounter the Faerie Dragons before they find the Big Pit. In that sequence, you can defer dialog regarding the pit and the Underdark until after the dragons escort the party to that room.
- The players may successfully secret the captured Drahnek away from the Spider Chamber without a fight. This can work but the players should have some clever plan for figuring out which one of the ten bundles is the right one.
- The players may attack the Faerie Dragons, in which case they can simply disappear or flee, and remain undetectable for the remainder of the adventure.
- If the players don't get help from the dragons, you can have them discover the secret passageway by noticing a cold breeze coming from the wall.
- If the players don't learn where Drahnek went, or aren't interested in searching for him, you can have a second apprentice of Oakblood's arrive in Norwich the next day. The second apprentice is looking for Drahnek, and can enlist the party's help to go find him. This can be framed as a test of the party's trustworthiness.

Chapter 3: The Fugitive Wizard

*This chapter emphasizes the inconvenience of the Slaver's Marks even outside of Stonecrest, and shows the players more elements of the setting. The travel and battle sessions can be shortened or skipped if your party is short on time. The essential event is to meet the wizard. Combat is balanced for **four Level 3 Player Characters**.*

PLOT SUMMARY

Grateful for their aid, the apprentice **Drahnek** vows to lead the party to the great river city of **Bexton**. There, he will introduce the party to **Nardan Oakblood**, the fugitive wizard who can likely remove their Slaver's Marks. The party continues their travels, now accompanied by Drahnek. He is intelligent but absent-minded and surprisingly naive.

The party can return to the village for supplies, and then set out along the south road. They pass huge **plantations** and marching groups of slaves accompanying **caravans** of supplies.

While passing through the next village, the party is beset by **mercenaries** who detect their magical Slaver's Marks and attempt to recapture them. The party must travel in secret to avoid further attention. The road turns and follows **The Iceriver**, a vast slow moving river so wide that they can barely see across it.

Upon reaching the river city of Bexton, Drahnek brings them to the wizard. He resides in a magically hidden tower at the city university. The wizard Oakblood tells them that he can help, but the ritual to remove the Slaver's Mark requires four **exotic spellcasting components**. The party has already helped Drahnek obtain the Spider Silk, but now they must gather the **remaining three components** to clear their marks. The wizard will have to make some discreet inquiries to discover how each component can be obtained, and bids the party to wait for him.

HOOK

Drahnek can talk up the fugitive wizard **Nardan Oakblood**, convincing the party that he can definitely help them. And certainly they are owed a debt for saving the wizard's apprentice from certain death in the last adventure. The wizard currently resides in the River City of **Bexton**, in a hidden tower. The party must journey there.

THE ROAD NORTH

Norwich village is the closest place to rest and resupply if they are coming back from the cavern. Drahnek will suggest returning there so that he can collect his belongings. This is also a good place for a **long rest**.

The party can reconvene with **Drahnek** at Senris's Alehouse (see Chapter 2) when they are ready to travel. He will show the party a **map** of the road north to Bexton.



<http://www.zerotricony.com/iceriver/norwich-region-map-fullres.jpg>

- The road to Bexton is well traveled, since it is the main route between the west valley and Stonecrest.
- You'll pass the north part of **Wetloam**, a major slave plantation in this region.
- The village of **Swidcort** has the only inn along the road. It's an even smaller settlement than Norwich.
- After that, the road follows the river north to the rocky peninsula where the river bends.
- **Bexton** is at the center of the bend, situated on wharves and docks out in the **Iceriver**.

As marked slaves, the party must decide **how they plan to travel**: hiding in plain sight amongst the normal road traffic? Or taking to the fields and forests, keeping away from other travelers?

Drahnek will remark that the Slaver's Mark might be noticed along the road, though perhaps not so likely this far out from Stonecrest. Few travelers will be the kind of Slave Enforcers who would notice or check. And if they attempt to stay out of sight, the fields and forests have their own dangers. **The party must choose.**

Regardless of the route, Drahnek will be **constantly distracted** by fascinating trees, rare plants, and other sights as they travel. He will frequently delay the pace of travel if the party lets him.

Drahnek's Travel Advice: Example Dialog

- "Ah yes of course, you bear the Slaver's Mark. Otherwise you would not be so in need of my Master's help! Haha. Silly me. But yes that will make travel a bit of a challenge."
- "The mark may be noticed, though not extremely likely this far out from Stonecrest. It is a gamble."
- "I always travel along the road, I have no experience with furtive skulking through the shrubs and forests! Are you sure it's safe? Aren't there beasts and monsters?"

Passing Scenery (Optional)

As the party travels, they can learn about this land through the passing surroundings. This is not important for the immediate quest, but will foreshadow future adventures in the Iceriver Valley setting.

- As you walk along the road, you pass many kinds of travelers. Some look like peasants, most look like **merchants**. They walk, ride horses, or drive wagons.
- To the left of the road, vast **crop fields** and **orchards** stretch out to the horizon. You've never seen a farm so huge as this. The crops are planted in straight rows, uncannily neat and orderly.
- A large group of **particularly ragged looking peasants** passes by heading south. Despite their tattered clothes, they are marching with surprising precision. A few very well armed soldiers escort them on horseback. These must be **slaves**. The soldiers look like the **Slave Enforcers** you remember from back in Stonecrest.

Despite the risk of being discovered, the passing merchants and slavers will not appear to be checking for Slaver's Marks of random passersby. The party will not be bothered by any travelers. However, when they arrive in Swidcort, a surprise awaits them.

SWIDCORT (OPTION A)

If the party travels along the road, or decides to come in from the backcountry to visit a tavern or inn, then they will pass through the small village of **Swidcort**.



<http://www.zerotrickenony.com/iceriver/swidcort-30x20-fullres.jpg>

- A few buildings loom on the road ahead. You appear to have reached the tiny village of **Swidcort**.
- A **creek** flows through the middle of the town.
- Villagers, travelers of all races, and horses and carts are passing through, standing outside of the buildings.
- The establishments look like a shop, and perhaps a tavern or inn of some sort.

A **DC 14 Insight** check or **Perception** check will reveal that five of the figures look out of place: they're well armed, and they seem to be watching the party. This is a **Mercenary Leader** (Evil Mage; CR1, LMoP p.57) and his henchmen: **four Winged Kobolds** (CR $\frac{1}{4}$, MM p.195) wearing coats hiding their wings.

Mercenary Leader

Evil Mage; CR1, LMoP p.57

A small company of freelance slave hunters has spotted the party. Using magic, they know them to be escaped slaves. They want to knock everyone unconscious and then return them to Stonecrest where they can collect a reward for such people.

The Mercenaries will attack, hoping to abduct the party and turn them in for a reward.

Mercenary Leader: Example Dialog

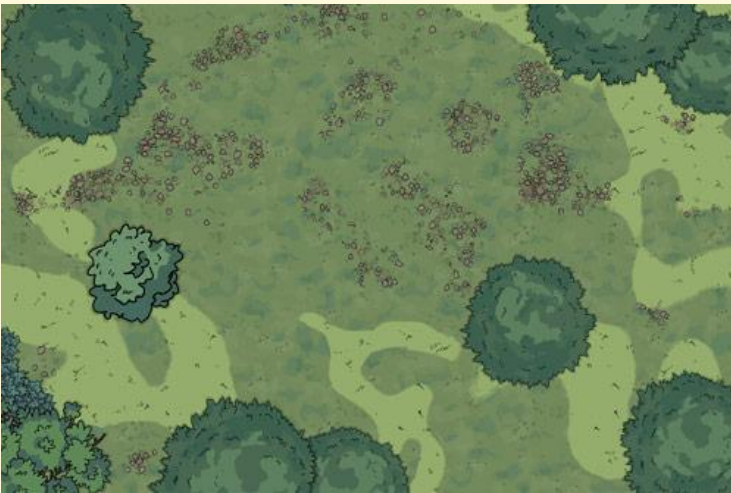
- "Well well! I would not expect to find escaped slaves this far out from Stonecrest. You will fetch a fine price. Don't kill them, just knock them out."

The mercenary leader will be carrying **50 gp**. The winged guards will be carrying **10 gp** each. Once defeated, the party can resupply in peace, or patronize the **tavern** and **inn** that are here in the village. The next day, they can continue north to Bexton without further incident.

BACKCOUNTRY ENCOUNTER (OPTION B)

Alternatively, if the party entirely avoids civilization, they will be safe from detection as escaped slaves. However, they will still be at risk from wildlife. If they avoid both the roads and **Swidcort** (see above), then they will be attacked by a **Dire Wolf** (CR1, MM p.321) and her pack of **three Wolves** (CR¼, MM p.341). You can use any wilderness tactical map for this encounter, such as this one, see below.

(Or, a further variation: if the party traveled along the road for part of the trip, but then avoided Swidcort, they can be attacked in the backcountry by the **Mercenaries** above who spotted them and followed them.)



<http://www.zerotrickenpony.com/iceriver/forest-clearing-30x20-fullres.jpg>

Once the backcountry enemies are defeated, the party can camp in the forest in peace. They can have a **long rest** and then continue their journey without incident. On the second day, the road will near the river's edge and turn north. This is the first time the party will see **the Iceriver**.

- As you come around a corner behind a hill, you can see a huge body of water ahead.
- It is so wide you can barely see the other side of it. It looks like a lake, but the water is moving enough that you can tell that it must be a very large river.

ENTERING BEXTON

The party will arrive in Bexton after a half day's march along the river road. This is a **large city** situated on the **Iceriver**, with many **canals**, docks, wharfs, shipyards, **bridges**, nobles, and merchants. The city is too big for the party to explore every street and building. I've included a caricature map here, with a few suggested districts and points of interest in the legend below.



<http://www.zerotrickenpony.com/iceriver/bexton-map-fullres.jpg>

- As you reach the top of a small hill, you can see many buildings ahead in the distance.
- There are houses and towers of all sorts. It looks like a pretty large city, though not as vast as Stonecrest.
- You also see numerous piers, bridges, and canals interspersed amongst the buildings.
- The whole city seems built on the water, made up almost entirely of wharves and docks and bridges.
- Travelers, peasants, and fishermen are frequent along the road leading into the city.

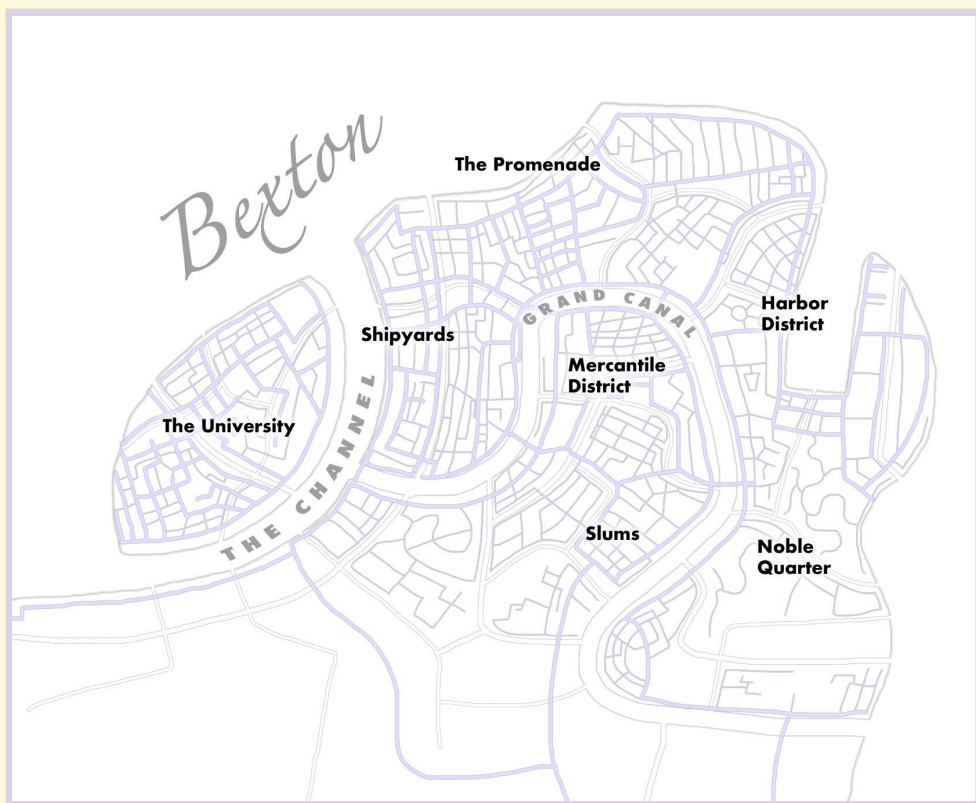
Drahnek will guide the party into the city, assuring them that the people of the Free City of Bexton will not check for their Slaver's Marks. Nobody bothers the party unless provoked. Merchants are polite but business-like.

The party can **travel freely** within the city, and patronize the city's many merchants, taverns, inns, gambling houses, theaters, and guildsmen. This is a **good time to rest**, resupply, or cavort. Bridges across the Grand Canal and lesser canals are numerous and easily passable. City guardsmen protect the bridges at night, but they generally will permit anyone to pass without argument, short of an invading army. See map below.

BEXTON'S DISTRICTS

Here are the general parts of Bexton, which the party can explore as they shop, resupply, and quest.

- The **Grand Canal** winds through the center of the city, generally dividing the merchants and peasants to the south from the city's industry and leisure to the north. Well-guarded bridges connect the city across the Grand Canal. Lesser bridges span the city's many smaller canals.
- **The Promenade** is the leisure district on the waterfront. Gambling houses, taverns, inns, theatres, and brothels line the broad streets. (Tournaments, duels, and prize fights are the star attractions of the gambling houses.) Generally the establishments are finer and more expensive at the east end, and then more seedy and lower class towards the west end.
- The **Harbor District** is the port of the city, full of warehouses, trade houses, and moorings for visiting merchants, nobility, and military ships. There are many ships docked here, arriving and departing frequently.
- The **Noble Quarter** is the finest part of the city, on a small hill and with the several estates and manor houses of the lords of the city.
- **The University of Bexton** is on an island across **The Channel** from the rest of the city. It can only be reached by water taxi, though these are frequent and convenient in peacetime. The university is comparatively uninvolved in the commerce of the rest of the city. It has its own inns, taverns, grocers, and merchants. The University has many colleges, and two **grand libraries** which the players can use, for a fee.
- The **Mercantile District** is across the **Grand Canal** in the center of the city. It is a bustling district of markets, shops, smithies, and tradesmen of all sorts. With a bit of inquiry, exotic artificers and rare apothecaries can be found here, to provide unusual magic items for a fee.
- The **Slums** make up the south end of the Mercantile district. The poorest inns and taverns can be found here, and then many many grouphouses and barracks for the city's peasants. Lodging can be had here for very little gold, but it will be neither clean nor secure.
- The **Shipyards** build watercraft on the Iceriver, including military boats and transport barges. A large number of woodsmiths, blacksmiths, and craftsmen are here, as well as some taverns and inns frequented by the laborers of the shipping industry. Despite the name, they do all kinds of business besides just ship building. Most of the warriors who fight in the games by night are ship laborers here by day.



Further detail on specific merchants, nobles, leaders will be introduced within their relevant future adventures.

THE WIZARD'S TOWER

The party must purchase a water taxi for **3sp each** to take them across the Channel to the University where the Wizard resides. Drahnek will lead them to a **tall tower** near the south end of the island, which passers by seem (magically) not to notice or show interest in.

- You see a tall stone tower, the lone structure amongst some trees at the south end of the island.
- Although there are occasional students and professors strolling in this area, none of them appear to notice the tower.
- It has no windows except at the very top. There is a single huge, heavy wooden door bound in iron.
- A heavy iron knocker in the shape of a gargoyle head is affixed in the center of the door.

Upon knocking on the door, the **gargoyle face will seem to come to life** and address the party. It is unintelligent and can only state commands and relay voices, such as "Who goes there! State your business!"

Drahnek will say "Oh let me in you stupid lump of iron," and **the door will open**. The party can go inside the tower, which is completely bare except for a **winding staircase** that ascends to the top of the tower, ending in a large wooden trapdoor set into the ceiling. Drahnek will knock on the ceiling, and after a moment, a voice inside will bid them enter.

MEETING THE WIZARD

The trapdoor opens upwards into **Oakblood's Study**.



<http://www.zerotrickenov.com/iceriver/oakblood-study-20x15-fullres.jpg>

- You emerge from the trapdoor into a large but cluttered room.
- Bookshelves line every wall, crammed with a variety of tomes, scrolls, and unidentifiable knick-knacks.
- Most of the room is consumed by an enormous desk, with visitor's chairs positioned in front of it.
- A fair-skinned man with fine features sits at the desk, dressed in professorial robes. He looks surprisingly young for a renowned wizard.
- He is reading over a very thick book which is open on the desk. He doesn't look up as you enter.

This powerful spellcaster is **Nardan Oakblood**, the **fugitive wizard**.

Nardan Oakblood

Archmage; CR12, MM p.342

Oakblood was born to a prosperous merchant in Stonecrest. He happily worked as an ambitious young Slave Magister for several years, hoping to gain power and recognition from the Slaver nobility. But he was snubbed due to his youth and lack of noble blood, and became embittered. Nardan began to subvert slaves using his magisterial position, helping **The Thorn** secretly in exchange for gold.

A few years ago, Oakblood was **discovered as a traitor** to the Slavers, and had to flee Stonecrest to save his own life. Now a wanted man, there is a substantial **bounty** upon his head. He hides magically in Bexton, living in fear of discovery. His fugitive status has forced him to be more humble.

The wizard will interact peacefully with the party because Drahnek is there, after he finishes reading. He can offer food, rest, a reward of **50 gp each** for saving Drahnek, and answer their questions. More importantly, he can tell them how their Slaver's Marks can be removed.

QUESTING FOR SPELL COMPONENTS

The next three chapters cover the adventures to fetch the three exotic spell components needed by the ritual to remove the Slaver's Mark. Since the party's request is unusual, the wizard will be **unprepared** to immediately provide the details for two of the three components. He can say that he will need to do some **research and correspondence** while the party fetches the first component. This makes it natural for the quests to happen in order.

Nardan Oakblood: Example Dialog

- "Dranek! You were expected back days ago. Account for yourself!"
- "The... oh my you are Marked! I am so sorry I didn't realize you'd been caught up in all that mess in Stonecrest."
- "Yes, I can remove your Marks, for a fee of course. The ritual is not difficult if you know it. Unfortunately I am fresh out of the three spell components needed, so you will have to gather them first."
- "The first component can be any sort of valued possession -- but there is a catch. It must be a prize won, not crassly bought with gold. You'd have to win such a thing in a tournament."
- "The second component is specially prepared sapphire dust. I know of an artificer that makes it, but he is elusive and difficult. I'll send him a message."
- "The third component is a rare and magical fungus. Its location changes with every season, so I will have to research where it is now. I'll get back to you."
- "I studied the Mark extensively when I served the Magisterium in Stonecrest. I used to apply them, in fact. Removing them is forbidden, and so of course everyone wanted to know how to do it. It was very profitable to learn how."

REWARDS

The party can accumulate the following rewards from this adventure:

- **XP** from killing 5 mercenaries, or 4 forest beasts.
- **500 XP each** for finding the Wizard and learning how to remove the Slaver's Mark.
- Up to **90 gp** found on the mercenaries, if fought.
- **50 gp each** from Oakblood, as a reward for rescuing his apprentice.
- **Trophies** such as teeth and claws found on the forest beasts, if fought.

ALTERNATIVES

Players don't always do what you expect! Here are some alternative scenarios that you may wish to anticipate:

- If the party is captured by the mercenaries, they will be bound with rope and led towards Stonecrest. They can escape their bonds and flee at camp that night.
- If the party chooses not to travel with Drahnek, they will need some other way to locate the Wizard. Since he is magically hidden in the city, they will need to meet some other NPC who can direct them.
- If the party encounters Oakblood without having helped Drahnek, he will have received a letter from the Lady of Thorns requesting his aid. He will be more guarded, and will ask for payment.
- If the party prefers to avoid combat, you can let them get past the forest beasts or the mercenaries with a stealth or intimidation check.
- If you want the party to have a choice in the order of the component quests, then Oakblood can tell them about all three spell components immediately. You'll need to make up a reason why he already knows exactly how to get in touch with the Artificer, and how he already knows where the fungus is growing. For example, the wizard could use sending stones to quickly learn these answers while the party waits.

Chapter 4: A Prize Won Not Bought

In this chapter the players have some freedom to move around the city. Since they are competing in a duel rather than a life-or-death struggle, light-hearted themes such as cavorting, gambling, and shopping are appropriate. Combat is balanced for **four Level 3 Player Characters**.

PLOT SUMMARY

The first needed spell component is a catalyst, called for by cryptic texts: a **valued prize, won of valor**. This item must be won by an act of prowess and skill, and not purchased with gold. The wizard suggests that the adventurers enter themselves into a duel at one of the gambling houses in the river city's waterfront district. The victor usually receives gold, but perhaps the needed item can be negotiated as an alternative prize.

The party can explore the city and find such an establishment: **The Last Chance**, a gambling house operated by a retired Orc warlord, **Azuk**. Certain that the party cannot win against his best **Champion** no matter their numbers, Azuk agrees to wager his **antique rapier** on the fight.

Through persuasion, conversation, or intimidation, the party can optionally learn that the Champion is a **Werebear** who cannot be harmed by ordinary blades. Fighters can choose to obtain silvered weapons from a local smith, which will give them an advantage in the duel.

On the night of the fight, the party is led to an arena where a cheering audience greets **Bjard the Champion**, an arrogant brawler who is the undefeated favorite. The party fights a hard encounter against him. (They will earn fame and favor in the city if they defeat but do not kill him.)

After tending to his wounds, Bjard is boisterous and friendly with the party, and buys them all drinks. Azuk reluctantly surrenders his prized rapier, which the party can deliver to the wizard.

HOOK

If the party wishes to remove their Slaver's Marks, they will need to obtain the right spell components. The fugitive wizard Oakblood will explain that one component of the spell is a **catalyst**, similar to a casting focus. It can be nearly anything that its **owner values**--- an ornament or

favorite weapon, for example. But the method of its procurement is important: it must be **won as a prize**, not purchased.

Nardan Oakblood: Example Dialog

- "The ritual to remove the mark requires an unusual catalyst. We need something of value that you win-- it must be, and I quote, 'a precious prize won of valor and fortitude, not bought with gold or talk.' In Stonecrest there was a tournament I used for this, the prize was usually a lady's jewelry or a warrior's dagger."
- "It's not important specifically what is won, only that it is something prized by its current owner. There are similar games and tournaments here in Bexton. Perhaps you can find one that suits you at one of the gambling houses in the Promenade District."
- "I've never set foot in that part of the city, but perhaps Drahnek could suggest someplace?"

Drahnek is not particularly knowledgeable of gambling or leisure in the city. But he will mention **The Last Chance**, the only gambling house that he's heard of which runs an **open tournament**. (That is, a tournament where anyone is welcome to participate.) Most such establishments tightly control their betting and fighters, so the open fight at The Last Chance is unusual.

THE PROMENADE

The party can get a **water taxi** across the Channel to the **Shipyards** for 3sp each (see Chapter 3).

- At the edge of the Shipyard District you see broad docks jutting out into the river, strewn with lumber and crates.
- Huge wooden buildings perch directly over the water, some containing half-built hulls of great sailing vessels.
- Beyond the docks are storehouses and smithing shops.
- Laborers and tradesmen are all around, carrying materials back and forth amongst the buildings.

Asking for directions can easily lead the party northeast to **The Promenade**, the leisure district at the northern waterfront. If the party arrives **before the afternoon**, the streets will be largely deserted and all the establishments shuttered. Only a few people will be seen, carrying sacks and other groceries to prepare for the evening's business.

Once the taverns open, the streets quickly fill with increasingly rowdy, jostling, laughing townsfolk.

- This area looks like it must be The Promenade, the leisure district on the waterfront.
- You see endless rows of gambling houses, taverns, inns, theatres, and brothels along the broad streets.
- The establishments seem to be finer and more expensive at the far end of the district. Less reputable taverns are here, nearer the Shipyards.

The party can easily ask for directions to **The Last Chance Gambling House**, since it is infamous throughout the city. Or they can find it by walking down the northmost street, looking for its large sign with a **DC 13 Perception** check.

THE LAST CHANCE

If the party arrives during the afternoon or evening, they will find the place to be **busy and crowded**, with drinkers and gamblers loudly conversing at every table.



<http://www.zerotrickenov.com/iceriver/gambling-house-21x14-fullres.jpg>

- Inside the Last Chance are long tables strewn with ale flagons. Gamblers and drinkers crowd the place, talking and yelling drunkenly.
- At one end of the house is a large raised platform with a desk covered in ledgers and small slips of paper.
- A large wooden board adorns the wall behind the desk, which is marked with numbers and names of wagers.
- A huge orc sits behind the desk wearing a green visor, writing in a book and taking bets from the patrons.

Alternatively, The Last Chance will be **shuttered and locked before afternoon** if the party arrives early. One dim lantern light can be seen through the window. Even if the place is closed, the proprietor, **Azuk**, will open the door if they knock repeatedly.

Azuk The Bludgeoner

Orc War Chief; CR4, MM p.246

Despite his name, Azuk is now merely a bookie and bartender. He was an accomplished commander in the Brenian War, but retired from the military after a discouraging defeat. He is now a basically fair if slightly bloodthirsty businessman in Bexton. He is scornful of the contrived show tournaments at other gambling houses, and enjoys letting the people of the city watch "a real fight". His establishment, the Last Chance, became famous for its entertaining and bloody duels with sometimes surprising outcomes.

The party can approach the Orc proprietor, **Azuk**, and ask to join the next tournament. He will be pleased to have new fighters for his patrons to wager on. Since the tournament prize is 500 gp, the party will have to **negotiate** with Azuk for an alternative reward: something of his which is a **prized object**, not gold.

Azuk prefers foreigners and strangers for his tournaments, because they don't know what to expect and will foolishly agree to fight one of his professional warriors. The audience enjoys watching the desperation of foreigners, and they do sometimes win. Since Azuk **does not want to lose** a prized object, he will make the party fight his best: a warrior named **Bjard** who is **secretly a Werebear**. Bjard is a retired soldier and friend of Azuk from the war. Bjard is careful **never to show his shapechanging ability**. Azuk believes that the party is **unlikely to win**, since Werebears are immune to damage from ordinary weapons, and Bjard has **never lost a fight**. Azuk will **not anticipate magic** or silvered weapons.

Azuk will explain the rules and reluctantly agree to put up his **antique rapier** as the tournament prize if they win.

Azuk: Example Dialog

- "So you want to fight, eh? Excellent. The prize is 500 gold."
- "The rules are simple: bring up to 10 men, for all the good it will do you. You'll fight to the knockout. No killing. Otherwise, anything goes."
- "Since you lot don't look like mere farm hands, **you'll fight The Champion**. I can't tell you more since that would spoil the fun, wouldn't it?"
- "You don't want gold? I've never heard that before. But sure, **I'll wager you my antique rapier**. It was with me through the war. If you win, it's yours. Otherwise, the Champion gets the gold as usual."
- "Be at the arena tomorrow night at **sundown**. It's at the end of the wharf. Giant wooden building, can't miss it. Come to the back entrance and my people will put you in the fight."

A **DC 15 Insight** check lets the players notice that Azuk is **calm and confident** about the fight and his prize rapier. He seems certain the Champion will win.

PREPARATIONS

The party has this day and the next to get ready for the fight. If the players discuss the upcoming tournament with Drahnek or Oakblood, they will suggest reconnaissance. They can **purchase supplies**, purchase **weapons**, ask around the Promenade to **gain information** about their foe, or learn other details about past fights. Gamblers within The Last Chance, or proprietors of rival gambling houses, are good NPCs to talk to. The players can also **place wagers on themselves** to make extra money.

Townfolk chatter: Example Dialog

- "Desperate foreign suckers always go for the fights. It's fun to watch them go down!"
- "The Champion? Well Azuk has several fighters, always changing. You never know who Azuk will pick, though he likes to match the enemy so it's a good fight."
- "The toughest fighter is **Bjard**, Azuk's old war buddy. He rarely fights but he never loses. Nothing touches that guy. He doesn't even get tired!"
- "Nah they don't kill anyone, at least not usually. I only watched like two guys die. Maybe three. They've got healing potions in the back. I think."
- "Magic? Oh no nobody fights with magic, that would be a lame fight!"

Evening the Odds (Optional)

You can optionally reward the players' resourcefulness by letting them learn that Bjard is a **Werebear** who can be harmed with **silvered weapons**. Azuk believes that Bjard's true nature is an absolute secret, and this is how he fixes fights. But the owner of a rival gambling establishment, **The Silver Coin**, has deduced the truth.

Hilga Twofoot, Proprietor

Gnome Commoner; CR0, MM p.345

Hilga is the owner of **The Silver Coin**, a rival gaming house that also runs tournaments. Hilga dislikes Azuk, both personally and professionally. She learned that Bjard is a Werebear by paying a spy to follow him into the forest to watch him hunt.

She now seeks an amusing humiliation for Azuk, by arming the party with information which will defeat his champion. (She can offer to loan the party silvered weapons herself, though having them go buy them in the Shipyards makes for more detailed roleplay.)

The players can meet Hilga when they enter The Silver Coin, or Hilga can have her staff follow the players and then invite them to talk.

Hilga Twofoot: Example Dialog

- "Hey. You foreigners. You're the next challenger in Azuk's fight, right?"
- "You should know who you're up against. Azuk is going to use Bjard. He's never been beaten, ever. The bets are only on how long it takes him to beat you."
- "But I know that bastard's secret! Bjard is a Werebear. You'll need **silvered weapons** or you won't even scratch him."
- "I'd love to see Azuk get what's coming to him."
- "I'll even loan you the weapons! Ha!"

FIGHT NIGHT

At **sundown** the following day, the party should go find the **arena** building so the tournament can begin.

- The arena is pretty obvious, as Azuk said it would be.
- A huge wooden building stands tall above the low taverns at the west end of the Promenade.
- Rowdy townfolk are gathered out front in a large mob, waiting to get in to watch the fight.
- An alley along the side of the arena building leads to the back entrance.
- A small unmarked wooden door is staffed by one small, tired looking goblin. He is wearing the same green visor that Azuk wears.

The party can present themselves to the bookie goblin as the night's challengers for the tournament. He leads them into a small dark room with huge double doors at the other end. He tells them to **wait to be introduced**, and leaves.

The arena just beyond the double doors can be heard to be filling up with townfolk: the audience. Eventually the doors open and the bookie goblin's **magically amplified voice** announces the "Foreign Challengers". The **crowd boos** theatrically. The players can now enter the arena.



<https://zerotrickponv.com/iceriver/arena-30x20-fullres.jpg>

The goblin then announces "**The Champion, Bjard!!!!**" and the crowd cheers. A large fighter wearing **plate mail** and wielding a **greataxe** enters at the opposite end of the arena. Combat begins.

Bjard The Champion

Werebear; CR5, MM p.208

Bjard is a veteran warrior and friend of Azuk. He is arrogant and egotistical, but basically honorable and good. He expects to win this fight easily, and knows that the party will be healed back from unconsciousness at the end of the fight. His confidence won't be shaken until either the players score a hit of more than 10 HP with a silvered weapon, or succeed a magical attack that does more than 10 HP of damage.

Bjard has a good life here in the city, and **doesn't want to reveal his Werebear nature** to the crowd. As such, he will not shapeshift until he realizes that he is losing.

Combat Note: Even at lower levels, a large party will get many attacks against Bjard, a single foe with only two attacks per round. So this fight may be significantly easier than the CR rating would otherwise suggest. For a tougher fight, consider making Bjard a **Goliath Werebear** (CR8; IDRotF p.293) instead.

During combat, the raucous audience cheers and throws food. Bjard will **taunt the party** arrogantly at the start of the fight. Azuk and Hilga can both be seen in the audience, if the players look for them. The goblin announcer will cast **Spare the Dying** (PHB p.277) on any combatant who falls unconscious during the fight.

If the party **attacks with magic**, the audience will boo. But the announcer will remind the crowd that there's no rule against magic, and let the fight continue.

When Bjard drops below half health, he will get angry and **shapeshift** into his bear form to continue the fight. (The audience will cheer at this exciting revelation, since most of them bet on Bjard. Azuk will be angry and humiliated, and a few of the audience will boo.)

Once Bjard is knocked unconscious, the party can choose to spare him, heal him, or kill him. The audience will be **stunned that the foreigners won**, and horrified if Bjard is permanently killed. (Though this will not be illegal since it is a tournament.) Most of the crowd will be disappointed because they lost money from betting on the Champion. But **a few of Hilga Twofoot's associates will be happy** because they bet on the foreigners and won gold despite long odds.

AFTERMATH

The party can return to Azuk for their reward. He will be angry but will keep his word, giving the party the **antique rapier** hanging on the wall. If they used silvered weapons, he may demand to know how they learned Bjard's secret. The party can also collect any wagers they placed on themselves, for extra winnings.

If the party later goes to any tavern or gambling house, they will be recognized and generally **treated like celebrities** if they didn't kill Bjard. The audience notwithstanding, a majority of the townsfolk are impressed with the party, and they are now **famous in Bexton**. Admiration, free drinks, and other cavorting ensue.

Bjard can be easily befriended, since he will be impressed with the players' fighting prowess despite the defeat.

REWARDS

The party can accumulate the following rewards from this adventure:

- XP from **defeating Bjard**.
- **1000 XP each** for winning Azuk's rapier.
- **150 XP each** if the players' did any significant reconnaissance to learn Bjard's true nature prior to the fight.
- The **antique rapier** Oakblood requested.
- Any gold they won by betting on themselves.

ALTERNATIVES

This is a bit more "on rails" than a typical adventure, but here are some suggestions:

- The players could go to a different gambling house; you can still set up the fight to be much the same but with different character names.
- The players could throw or lose the fight, though this would be a frustrating outcome. Azuk could let them fight someone else, or win the rapier another way.
- The players could disrupt the fight or attack the audience, which will get them barred from The Last Chance. They could go to another establishment and try again.

Chapter 5: A Special Delivery

This chapter is one of the three spell component fetch quests. They can be done in a different order at the DM's discretion. This chapter introduces a character who will return in Books II and III. Combat is balanced for **four Level 3 Player Characters**; you may want to increase difficulty if your players have leveled up by now.

PLOT SUMMARY

The fugitive Wizard Oakblood informs the party that the next spell component they seek is some exotic **casting dust** made of sapphire and pearl. It may only be obtained from an **elusive artificer** who knows how to make it, with whom the wizard has had uneasy dealings in the past. The party may obtain the needed dust from him, if they are willing to **smuggle a special package** out of the city. They are to rendezvous with the artificer a few days travel away. They will **escort Drahnek** to make the exchange.

The party can pick up the package from a rogue in the slums of Bexton. They're given directions to an alley and a password to speak when approached. They receive the **mysterious package** and are bade good luck by the laughing rogue as he departs.

Unfortunately, the package **attracts unwanted attention** from both animals and humanoids. Drahnek meets them outside of the city, takes the package from them, and confesses that he was afraid it might be problematic.

The party travels beyond the city into the surrounding forest. A **slave encampment** of lumberjacks blocks their path, so Drahnek suggests they go around. However, the lumberjacks' attention is supernaturally attracted by the package, resulting in a confrontation. The following day, the players will be **ambushed** in the forest by beasts, again attracted by the package's mysterious allure. A fight ensues.

Once victorious, Drahnek will lead the party to the rendezvous point and order them to stay out of sight while he goes alone to complete the delivery. The party may learn through persuasion or eavesdropping that the artificer is **Lieutenant Silversword**, a strange looking elf in very fine clothes. He provides the dust in return, and departs. Now relieved of the package, the party can bring the acquired **casting dust** back to the wizard without incident.

HOOK

If the party wishes to remove their Slaver's Marks, they will need to obtain the right spell components for Oakblood. This includes some enchanted **casting dust**--- which he otherwise has no idea how to find or create. It must be obtained from its inventor.

Nardan Oakblood: Example Dialog

- "The next spell component I'll need is fine Casting Dust. It is made magically out of sapphire and pearl."
- "There is only one artificer who can create it, and he is elusive and difficult. He has no workshop or home that I know of, but I can send him a message."
- "Return here at week's end, I hope to hear from him by then."
- "His name is Lieutenant Silversword. I have dealt with him before, he will answer me."

GETTING INSTRUCTIONS

The wizard summons the party back to **Oakblood's Study** (see map in Chapter 3) to learn that Lieutenant Silversword has agreed to provide the necessary casting dust. However, he requires a **clandestine meeting** far outside the city at **Lone Rock**. There, Silversword will provide the dust, in exchange for a **package** which the party must pick up from within the city, and bring to him.

Mission Instructions: Example Dialog

- "The Artificer has agreed to make the casting dust for you. However, as I suspected, there is a catch."
- "He demands an exchange: an item that is currently in the city, which he wants you to pick up and bring along."
- "Drahnek will have to be the one to make the exchange. Silversword doesn't know you but he will recognize my apprentice."
- "I have no idea what this 'item' is. Knowing the Artificer, it will be something illegal."
- "You are to meet his man in the slums, who will give you the package. Go to the **Galloping Goat Tavern** and you will find him wearing a **blue cloak**."
- "You must tell the man '**the sky is full of promise**'. Say exactly those words."
- Once you have the package, meet Drahnek at the **South bridge** and escort him to The Artificer at **Lone Rock**."

STRANGE PACKAGE IN THE SLUMS

Drahnek **will not accompany** the party to pick up the package in the slums. Instead, he will promise to meet the party at the southern bridge out of the city. They can give Drahnek the package there, and then **continue south together** to meet the Artificer at Lone Rock.

Drahnek doesn't like the slums, and wishes to avoid them. He can be honest about this, or make an excuse about how he is busy. More truthfully, the wizard and his apprentice are both aware that the Artificer's **package** will likely be somehow **dangerous or problematic**. If the rendezvous in the slums goes poorly, or if the city guard apprehends them, Drahnek will be happy to avoid involvement. Once the party gets the package out of the city, he will be more comfortable traveling with them.

If the wizard is very friendly towards the party, Drahnek can simply be honest about this concern. This also gives the party an excuse to adventure without an escorting NPC.

The party can get a **water taxi** back to the center of the city for **3sp** each (see Chapter 3). The city is generally passable without risk, so they can ask for directions and find their way to the **slums district**.



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The **Galloping Goat Tavern** can be found fairly easily if asked after; it is located on a dirty side street near the center of the slums.

- You turn down a narrow side street, lined with disordered cobbles crusted in filth.
- Ahead you see a rickety wooden building, with a faded sign hanging out front. A crude goat-like creature is painted on it, with horns and hoofs.
- As you approach, you hear a commotion in the alley. Four armed beggars are surrounding a grim-looking man in a cloak.

When they arrive at the tavern, they will find the man they seek, **Gnavin Cobalt** (Assassin; CR8, MM p.343) in the adjacent alley, surrounded by four hostile **armed beggars** (Bandit; CR½, MM p.343).

Gnavin Cobalt

Assassin; CR8, MM p.343

Gnavin is a mercenary who smuggles and steals for the local merchants and mobsters of Bexton. He is not evil but he has little regard for property. The Artificer employs him frequently, and he is currently smuggling a magic item (see below) out of the city which he obtained from a ship at port. He knows he is to hand this item off to whomever gives him the password.

Gnavin does not want to hurt these beggars; he will be happy to make the delivery and depart without a fight if possible. He was not expecting to be attacked, but also not completely surprised. The Artificer's missions are often more difficult than they appear at first.

The man's cloak is black on the outside, but the players can notice with a **DC 13 Perception check** that when he moves, the inside of his cloak is revealed to be a rich **blue color**. He appears ready to fight the beggars if necessary.

The beggars are **magically attracted** to the package Gnavin is carrying. They don't know why, but they know he has something they want. The players can frighten the beggars away without a fight if they choose, by passing a **DC 13 Intimidation** check. Otherwise, combat ensues. The beggars can fight to the death if you like, or can flee when they realize they are outmatched.

The party can aid Gnavin in the alley against the beggars. Once they are dismissed or dispatched, the party can talk to Gnavin. If they choose to go inside the tavern instead, they will not see anyone matching the rendezvous description. No one inside the tavern will recognize the passphrase if they ask. Gnavin will follow them in a short time later, having been forced to murder the beggars.

Either way, Gnavin will regard the party with suspicion until they speak the **passphrase**: "the sky is full of promise." After that he will simply give them the package and depart. The package is a **small but ornate wooden box**, which Gnavin admonishes them **not to open**. (The box is **locked**.)

Gnavin Cobalt: Example Dialog

- "Thanks for your aid, it would have been a shame to kill those men. Their wits seemed enchanted away."
- "A lot of people have taken an interest in me today. Who are you?" (without the passphrase)
- "Ah good, I've been waiting for you." (with passphrase)
- "Here is the package. No I don't know what it is, I'm well paid not to ask. You must not open it, the client was very clear on that."
- "Good luck carrying that cursed thing. I do not envy your task."

Once the party has the box, they can proceed as instructed through the streets to the southern city bridge. If the players manage to open the locked box, inside they'll find a small, apparently inert crystal orb.

Orb of Magic, Incomplete

Cursed Item, very rare

A small, clear orb apparently made of fine crystal, which is strangely heavy. The orb was made high up in the mountains of a far away nation, by a wizard specializing in the creation of magical items. The orb's purpose is **versatile**; in the hands of a spellcaster of **Level 9 spells**, it can be imbued with one of a variety of powerful abilities. For example it can become an Orb of Kill, of Polymorph, or of Resurrection.

However, this orb has no abilities because it is **unfinished**, and is hungry to be completed. This hunger causes it to magically attract the attention of nearby creatures, even if they cannot see it. The orb has **no such effect** on creatures who **already possess it** or are aware of it prior to coming near it.

Any creature within **50 feet** of the orb must succeed a **DC 15 Wisdom Saving Throw** or become intensely curious about the orb. Such creatures won't know what they seek, but they will be aware of the orb's general location. They will attack the carrier of the orb if necessary to possess it. Creatures which save will still be mildly curious, but will be able to resist acting on this sensation.

This effect persists in weakened form at longer distances. At **100 feet** the effect can be avoided with a **DC 10 Wisdom Saving Throw**. At **300 feet** the effect is avoided with a **DC 6 Wisdom Saving Throw**.

Strange things start happening to the players while the box is in their possession. The DM can choose effects of the orb's curse that befall the players on their way out of the city, such as:

- Passersby may stare at the party, or be noticed (**DC 12 Insight** check) trying not to stare as they pass.
- A flock of birds swoops down on the party. Some of the small birds attempt to make off with the box, though this is unsuccessful.

- Stray dogs in nearby alleys or yards bark at the party as they pass, and give chase.
- Children on the street or in windows along the street stare and point at the party.
- A small crowd of pickpocket children attempts to steal the box from the party. (They can notice this with a **DC 13 Perception** or **Insight** check.)

These encounters should gradually escalate in severity as long as the players have the box.

ENCOUNTER AT THE SOUTH BRIDGE

Drahnek will await the party at the large bridge over the last canal to the south. He will already be across it, on the other side of the canal.



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- The street turns eastward along a large canal.
- Beyond the canal you can see the rolling hills and forests to the south of the city.
- Ahead, a large bridge crosses the canal. Across that bridge is where you are to meet Drahnek.

As the players approach the bridge, some **locals attempt to mug them** from a side alley. At your discretion these can be sad, poorly armed beggars (four Bandits; CR $\frac{1}{8}$, MM p.343), or a more dangerous altercation with more **formidable criminals** (four Thugs; CR $\frac{1}{2}$, MM p.350, or one Bandit Captain; CR2, MM p.344).

This is an opportunity for combat, but if the party notices the muggers, they can beat their Perception with a **Stealth** check and sneak past instead. Or if the party wishes to take the moral high ground, they can avoid a fight with a **DC 15 Intimidation** or **Persuasion** check.

Once dispatched, the party can rendezvous with Drahnek and depart the city. In light of the attention drawn by the package, he will strongly suggest that they **stay off the main roads**.

AVOIDING ATTENTION

Drahnek estimates that it is at least a two day trek south to **Lone Rock**. If they choose to walk along the road despite Drahnek's warning, passersby will stare at them, or possibly **try to take the box**.

After turning onto a smaller road, the party sees no more travelers. However, in the afternoon anyone making a **DC 13 Perception** check (or passive perception) can notice sounds of a **large encampment** about 200 paces ahead of them. Drahnek will caution that with so many people, the box would surely cause a very dangerous situation.

- Some distance ahead of you can be heard the noises of a large encampment.
- You hear horses, cook pans, chopping wood, voices, and the sharp ping of metal tools being used.

With perception or reconnaissance, the players can discover that the encampment ahead is a traveling group of **20 lumberjack slaves** (Commoner; CR0, MM p.345) armed with handaxes. These are escorted by **five Slaver Foremen** (Guard; CR $\frac{1}{8}$, MM p.347) and **two Slave Enforcers** (Black Earth Guard; CR2, PotA p.195). This encounter should be too difficult to win with combat, so the players should avoid or flee.



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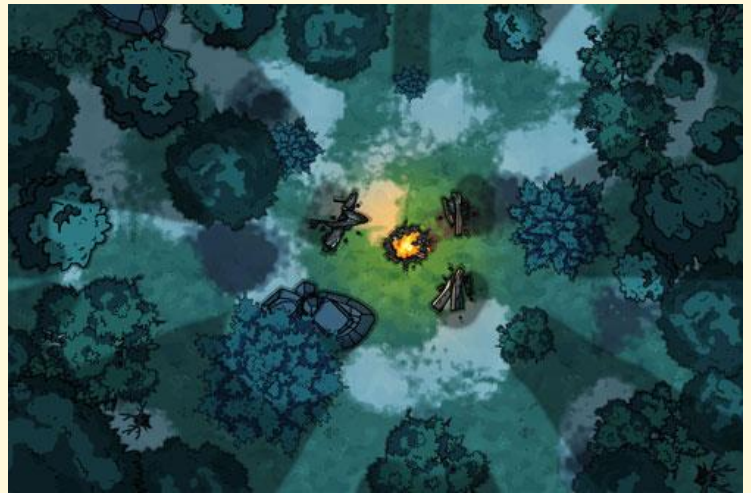
If the players choose to confront the encampment, the Enforcers will notice the party's Slaver's Marks and become hostile unless Drahnek can convince the Enforcer (**DC 16 Persuasion**) that he is the party's master.

The slaves will generally prefer to avoid or flee a fight, except for those who have failed their **Wisdom Saving Throw** against the orb in the box.

Better yet, the party can avoid the camp entirely with a **DC 14 group Stealth** check, sneaking past them through the surrounding forest.

STRAGGLERS AT CAMP

Success or failure, the next time the players attempt a long rest, they will discover that **two Slaves** from the encampment have snuck away and **followed the party**, drawn by the orb in the box. During the night, the Slaves will interrupt the long rest and **attempt to steal the box**. If the rest had a watch rotation, the slaves will be noticed well before they reach camp with a **DC 14 Perception** check.



<https://zerotrickpony.com/iceriver/forest-camp-30x20-fullres.png>

The two slaves are pathetic, armed only with handaxes and no match at all for the party.

Sneaking Slaves: Example Dialog

- "Please, we know you have something good! What is it!"
- "We don't mean harm, but... we must have it!"

They will plead for their lives but also still crave the box. They can be sent away with a **DC 14 Intimidation** check, or captured, or killed in combat. The players can have a successful long rest after they deal with the situation. The

next day they should put distance between them and the Slaver Encampment, or else this will happen again.

CURIOUS BEASTS

The party can complete most of a day's travel along the forest road in peace. However, near the end of the day the party is **ambushed** by an incongruous collection of **beasts** drawn by the orb in the box. The party can avoid being surprised by the beasts if they have a reason to, such as the **Alert** feat or the **Natural Explorer** Ranger class feature.

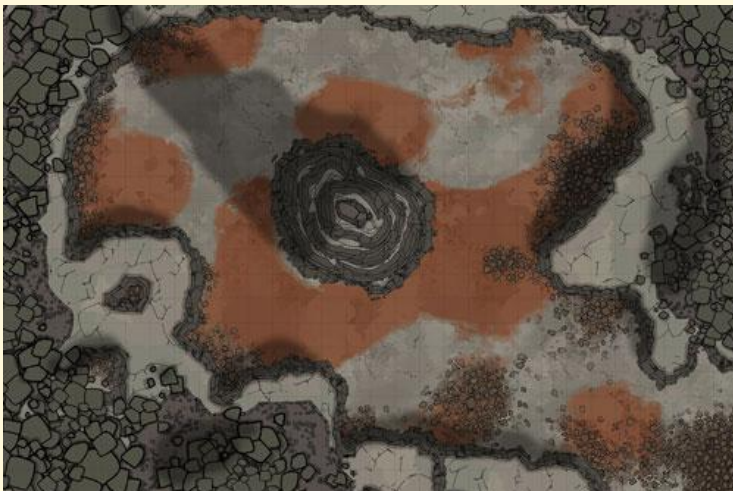


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Three beasts attack at once: a **Cave Bear** (CR2, MM p.334) accompanied by **two Dire Wolves** (CR1, MM p.321). Or, for an easier encounter, consider replacing the more difficult animals with **Black Bears** (CR½, MM p.318).

RENDEZVOUS AT LONE ROCK

Drahnek leads the party off the road towards the meeting place, **Lone Rock**.



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- The forest thins out as you trek away from the road, giving way to low rocky hills. There are no trees or shrubs in this area, just stones and boulders.
- Ahead you can see a tall spire of stone that towers above the rest of the landscape. This must be **Lone Rock**.

Once the party is within 100 paces of the rock, Drahnek will tell the party to wait out of sight while he goes to **make the exchange alone**.

Wait Here: Example Dialog

- "It's best if you wait here. I will be safe, and Lieutenant Silversword is very reclusive. He can be extremely dangerous if he is threatened."
- "I have met Silversword before. I accompanied Master Oakblood to a similar exchange as this one."
- "I don't know what he will do if you are present. He is powerful and erratic."

A **DC 12 Stealth** check will let the party spy on Drahnek from a distance. They will see the Artificer appear and hand over a pouch in exchange for the box.

- A haughty, noble-looking elf steps from behind a rock near Drahnek.
- His skin is pale white, and his hair is so pale gray that it looks silver. He wears an elaborate military uniform.
- A very fine jeweled sabre hangs at his waist, adorned with silver and pearl.
- Drahnek hands the elf the box you've been carrying, and takes a simple leather pouch in exchange. They talk too quietly to hear.

Drahnek makes the exchange without incident. If any party member has line of sight to Silversword, he will **look directly at them and smile** as he departs, using **Greater Invisibility** to avoid being tracked.

Lieutenant Silversword

Adult Silver Dragon; CR16, MM p.117

Silversword **hides his true form** from all humanoids. Instead, he uses his shape changing ability to appear as a High Elf wearing an elaborate military dress uniform.

The Lieutenant is a capable Artificer, having learned to create many ingenious magical contraptions over his centuries of life. He appreciates collaboration with human spellcasters, to craft more elaborate devices. His reclusive reputation gives him cover to avoid maintaining any shop or residence in a human settlement. Instead he deals with humanoids by messages delivered through Familiars or Homunculi constructs.

This NPC will have significantly more detail in a later book.

Drahnek will return to the party with the sapphire dust, looking relieved to have this over with.

Blue Casting Dust

Spell Component, very rare

The Lieutenant has provided Drahnek with a small leather pouch of dust, fashioned of ground up sapphires and pearls. The dust is **magical (Transmutation)** and is properly prepared to channel the energy of a spell. It has no magical purpose of its own, but it makes certain ritual spells possible.

A Glimpse of True Form (Optional)

You can add some foreshadowing about future chapters by adding a small reveal during the return journey. Party members succeeding on a **DC 14 Perception** (check or passive) will briefly glimpse a **large silver dragon flying away** from Lone Rock in the gathering dusk.

This dragon is in fact Lieutenant Silversword in his true form, and hints at future dragon characters. For a less obvious hint, you can tell the players that the dragon was too far away to make out which type; revealing that it was "silver" is a bit of a give-away of "Silversword" otherwise.

Returning to Bexton

The party can now make the journey back to Bexton **without incident**. The slave lumberjack encampment they encountered earlier will be deserted. The players can immediately return the dust to the wizard Oakblood, or they can keep it until they have all the needed components.

REWARDS

The party can accumulate the following rewards from this adventure:

- **XP from killing** the forest beasts, and any humanoids the party killed such as the slaves and thugs.
- **100 XP each** for each encounter caused by the attractive forces of the box in which the players escaped **without killing anyone**.
- **1000 XP each** for delivering the box to Silversword.
- No more than **10 gp total** found on the bodies of dead thugs, slaves, and other assailants. These were poor, desperate people.
- The **Blue Casting Dust**, needed for the Slaver's Mark ritual. It is worth 1000 gp but it would be very difficult to sell. Oakblood and Silversword would both soon discover that the party sold it.

ALTERNATIVES

Players don't always do what you expect! Here are some alternative scenarios that you may wish to anticipate:

- The players may not pick up the package from Gnavin at all. You can get things back on track by having Drahnek do the pickup. The party need only escort him.
- The party may get in over their heads trying to fight the slavers in the encampment. You can have them be captured, thrown into a tent, and then escape later. They'll need to steal the box back.
- The party may refuse to let Drahnek deliver the box to Silversword alone. If so, Silversword will be distrustful of the party, and will not show himself at first. He will use **Greater Invisibility** (PHB p.246) to hide until some kind of apology or explanation is made aloud. Once placated, Silversword will appear and go through with the bargain, but he will be cold and terse. And will depart by disappearing again.

Chapter 6: Elusive Flora

*This chapter takes place in the furthest reaches of the Shadowfell, and is meant to be dark and creepy. Although the spell component quests can be done in any order, this one is a fitting climax to the Slaver's Mark adventure. So I suggest doing it last. Combat is balanced for **four level 3 Player Characters**, and may be adjusted as needed. See below.*

PLOT SUMMARY

The final spell component is a legendary enchanted **fungus** which grows only briefly and in ever-changing locations. Too far away to journey, Oakblood believes he can send the party to its approximate location by portal. From there, they will have to enlist the aid of a **local colleague** to guide them to the fungus's exact location at this time of year. The wizard also provides them with a **special pouch** which can transport the delicate fungus safely.

Upon stepping through the one-way portal, the party finds themselves in a strange gray land of snow and silence. They have been transported to the **Shadowfell**. A small, dilapidated cottage is here, surrounded by a garden of dead brambles which have been shaped into extremely detailed topiary animals.

The cottage contains a single resident, **Brindlebar**, a gloomy, forgetful satyr with tattered clothing. He directs the party to the **center of the forest** which lies beyond the **swamp** and **across the great river**. Brindlebar tells them that they can call for the **Ferryman** to take them across. Brindlebar also offers to send them home when they're done, if they give him one of the found fungi as payment.

The players travel through a snowy, frozen swamp to reach the river. The way is treacherous, and they are attacked by a swarm of shadowy **wasps** made of ice and crystal.

They emerge from the swamp at the edge of a vast, freezing cold river. If the players call for the Ferryman, a **huge skeletal dragon** emerges from the water. It is not hostile, and offers to transport them if they pay the toll. The dragon cares not for gold, but can be **paid with warmth** or heat or light.

Upon reaching the other side of the river, the party finds a dense, silent **forest** of nearly identical black trees all covered in snow. The forest is disorienting, and the party

will get magically lost until they take measures to orient such as marking trees or magically navigating.

The party eventually finds the **clearing** in the center of the forest. The fungi are here, glowing pale purple with their own fey light. When the party touches the first fungus plant, they are attacked by an enraged **Forest Guardian** who must be defeated.

The players can return to Brindlebar the way they came. Upon finding the cottage again, Brindlebar behaves completely differently from before, and is eager for them to drink his supposed **Elixirs of Teleportation**. This is a trap set by a Doppelganger, who is impersonating Brindlebar to trap the party and steal their lives. When they see through this ruse, the real Brindlebar appears and sends them home.

The wizard is pleased with this success, and performs the ritual to remove the party's Slaver's Marks forever.

HOOK

The wizard Oakblood has asked the party to retrieve the third and final spell component to dispel their Slaver's Marks. He tells them that stepping through the portal is the only way he knows to find the enchanted fungus. As soon as they do, they are trapped in the Shadowfell until they find a way home. You can remind the party that the easiest way home is to complete the quest for Brindlebar. The wizard may also cajole the party to proceed, reminding them that the Slaver's Mark cannot be removed any other way. An Insight check could help the party believe that he is being honest.

***Alternative hooks:** Once in the Shadowfell, this chapter is a versatile fetch quest. You can make up other reasons why the party is there, and make up other items to retrieve from the forest.*

THE PORTAL

The party can return to **Oakblood's Study** (see map in Chapter 3) where they find a large portal of swirling energy hovering in a corner.

The portal will take the party to The **Shadowfell** (DMG p.51), a plane of shadow and darkness. The part of the Shadowfell that is reachable from Iceriver Valley is particularly cold, so the party will find **ice** and **snow** and **darkness** there.

It is an opportunity for bravery and excitement if the party **does not know where the portal goes**. But they can choose to step through anyway. If your players have angered Oakblood, then he may know but choose not to inform them. Or if he is a friend and ally, Oakblood may not know exactly where the portal goes either.

Oakblood explains that the enchanted fungi grow in different places from season to season, so he had to use magic to find them. Depending on your party's disposition to the wizard, Oakblood can be forthright but vague, or deceptive, about where exactly the portal goes.

Nardan Oakblood: Example Dialog

- "Unfortunately the fungi is rare and elusive. It grows and withers quickly, changing places from week to week. I had to find it by magic."
- "I've discovered that the final spell component is currently in abundance **near a friend's home**. He is now expecting you, and he has promised to help you find the fungi."
- **[truthful]** - "I know that this portal will take you to your goal, but I must confess I know not where or how."
- **[deceptive]** - "I must send you by portal, it's much too far from here, even by horseback, to get there in time"
- **[deceptive]** - "I'll pop you right into his garden, and then you just knock on the door and that's it. A child could do this, I'm sure it won't take long."

Oakblood also warns the party that the fungi disintegrates quickly as soon as it is picked. To preserve them correctly, Oakblood gives the party a small **Bag of Preservation** in which to store the fungi they harvest.

Bag of Preservation

Wondrous Item, rare

This bag has a drawstring, and appears to be made of soft leather or hide. It has an interior volume of one half cubic foot, matching its exterior volume. The bag's weight is one pound plus the weight of whatever is inside it. Retrieving an item from the bag requires an action.

Items placed in the bag **do not experience the passage of time**. The bag prevents its contents from tarnishing, deteriorating, rotting, burning, oxidizing, freezing, and any other effect which occurs over time. Once removed from the bag, time resumes for the removed item. Any creatures placed in the bag will perceive themselves being removed from it immediately after their entrance, as if no time passed. Creatures cannot think, act, or communicate while inside the bag.

BRINDLEBAR'S COTTAGE

Upon stepping through the portal, the party finds themselves in a cold, dark, snowy forest. Before them is a small, run-down cottage with a garden of brambles woven into lifelike topiaries (animal shapes).



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- You find yourself in a cold, dark forest of dead trees. Snow covers everything. It is silent and still.
- The sky above is dim and gray, like the sun has just set on a cloudy evening.
- You see a tangled garden of dead brambles. The brambles have been shaped into extremely detailed topiaries: horses, lions, and wolves. They seem almost but not quite to move when you look at them.
- Beyond the bramble garden is a small, run-down looking cottage made of shabby planks.

The portal is not present, so there is no apparent way back. If the players wonder at their strange surroundings, you can call for a **DC 13 Arcana** check to realize that the party has been transported to the **Shadowfell**. (Brindlebar and

his cold cottage offer further clues that this is not the material plane; see below.)

Perceptions of **time** and **memory** are confused for all creatures in this part of the Shadowfell. There is no day or night, and the light from the sky is an unchanging dim gray. Unless the party uses magical or mechanical means, they will **not know how many hours** they've been traveling, what **time of day** it is, or how to plan a long rest. They will also have trouble **remembering** specific details of their recent experiences, though they can overcome this with a **DC 13 intelligence** check such as History or Arcana.

If the party knocks on the door of the cottage, they will eventually be greeted after a long delay by Oakblood's supposed colleague, the satyr **Brindlebar**.

Brindlebar

Satyr; CR½ MM p.267

Brindlebar is a gloomy satyr with tattered clothing. His behavior is slow, forgetful, and distracted. Like all creatures who reside in this part of the Shadowfell, he has difficulty remembering anything, or concentrating on tasks and conversations.

Brindlebar was **cursed** and banished to the Shadowfell decades ago after losing a duel of magic. He is **bound** by his curse to serve Oakblood on request, but he is not happy about it. He has promised to send the party back to Oakblood in exchange for one of the fungi... but he will **indirectly betray** the party if he can get away with it. He will not willingly reveal this to the players.

If the party goes inside the cottage, they will see Brindlebar's small, cold quarters.

- The inside of the cottage is cold and bare, with hard wooden furniture.
- A small, white fire is burning in the hearth. You can't feel any heat coming from it.
- Brindlebar offers you tea. The "tea" when you receive it is cold liquid in an ice cold metal mug. It has no taste.

Brindlebar is not hostile since he is bound by his curse to help the party. He may even offer them supplies such as warmer clothing. They should learn about the **river**, the **Ferryman**, and the **forest** to the north.

Brindlebar: Example Dialog

- "Greetings, travelers. You are ... from very far away. How... interesting. Why are you here?"
- "Oh yes, yes of course, the fungi. I must have forgotten already. But yes. I suppose I was expecting you. Please, do come in. Where are my manners."
- "At this time of year you'll find what you seek across the **river** in the **very center of the forest**. The river is far too wide to swim, of course, but the **Ferryman** will take you across."
- "Walk north through the **swamp**, to the river. Once you're at the shore, if you **call his name**, the Ferryman will appear and take you across. For some payment, of course."
- "If you bring me back one of the fungi, I'll send you home. I promised that I would, I think?"
- "You don't want to stay here too long. I forget why."

ICE SWAMP

Traveling north will lead the party into the swamp that Brindlebar mentioned.



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- The icy crunch of the frozen ground gives way to soggy mud, and then frigid puddles which grow gradually deeper as you continue north.
- The water is knee deep in places, and very cold. Some of the patches of ice break when you step on them.
- You feel the cold slice through your boots and chill you.

The swamp is difficult terrain. If the party takes no precautions to keep from falling into the icy swamp water, call for a **DC 13 Dexterity Saving Throw**. PCs who fail are **chilled**, causing them to have disadvantage on attack rolls, Dexterity checks, and Dexterity saving throws until the next short rest. Reasonable precautions can include walking cautiously single file, testing the ground with staves, or using magic to make the footing more secure.

Ice Monsters of the Shadowfell

The party can battle theme-appropriate monsters in the snowy swamp, forest, or river bank:

- **Ice Wasps** (CR½) are Giant Wasps (MM p.329) which can cast the **Ice Knife** spell (XGE p.157) at will in lieu of a sting attack.
- **Snow Cats** (CR1) are Crag Cats (SKT p.240) with white fur. The Forest Guardian can summon these as part of a boss fight in the forest clearing.
- **Ice Toads** (CR1, RoT p.90) can be an appropriate enemy in the swamp or river bank.
- **Awakened Trees** (CR2, MM p.317) can be created by the Forest Guardian, or can appear in the swamp or forest.
- **Snow Golems** (CR3, IDRotF, page 308) are a more dangerous enemy suitable for combat in the swamp or forest, with both ranged and melee attacks.
- **The Forest Guardian** (CR5) is a Frost Druid (IDRotF, p.288) who the party can encounter in the forest when they attempt to harvest the enchanted fungi.

As the party enters a clearing, they hear a distant **metallic humming sound** which grows nearer as they listen. They are soon attacked by **three Ice Wasps** which fly in from the west. (Snow Golems can be a tougher alternative encounter for higher level parties.)

THE RIVER'S EDGE

Eventually the soggy, treacherous footing of the swamp gives way to the stony black shore of a **vast river**.



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- The trees of the swamp begin to thin out ahead.
- The soggy, treacherous footing of the swamp gives way to a beach of black granite stones and boulders.
- Beyond the rocky beach is a vast expanse of cold black water. You can't see the other side. There is a slow current from east to west.

The river is far too wide to swim or fly across. The water of the river is impossibly cold. Creatures that touch it must succeed a **DC 13 Dexterity Saving Throw** to pull back without being **chilled** (see above.)

The Ferryman

Here the party can call the name "**Ferryman**" aloud:

- The black water begins to churn and bubble.
- Two thick black stumps slowly emerge from the water. As they rise, you realize that these are two huge, skeletal wings of black bone.
- The wings belong to a giant skeletal dragon, which soon emerges fully from the water and steps out onto the rocks in front of you.
- The black skeletal dragon's glowing red eyes stare at you impassively. It is massive.

This creature is the Ferryman, who will take them across the river.

The Ferryman

Lawful Good Adult Dracolich; CR17 MM p.84

The Ferryman is a huge skeletal dragon which emerges from the black water of the river. In life, centuries ago, the Ferryman was the Ancient Gold Dragon **Korvek**, a famous and benevolent warrior. He won many battles, and slew an evil Ancient Red Dragon who threatened his people. But the Red Dragon's children had their revenge, and brought down Korvek before he could escape. Not content to merely kill him, the dragons **curled** and **banished** Korvek as a Dracolich here to the Shadowfell.

Korvek's curse prevents him from remembering his true name, or any but the most basic details of his banishment. And he **must perform menial service** for all who ask, in exchange for only token payment. The Ferryman speaks in a **deep, slow baritone voice**.

The Ferryman will carry the party across the river on his back. (He must swim since he cannot fly in this place.) The party must guess what constitutes suitable payment, since he cares not for gold. **Gifts of warmth, light, or flame** will please the Ferryman, as will **songs** or **tales** about those themes.

The Ferryman: Example Dialog

- "Who... calls... for the Ferryman."
- "Of course I can take you across. What... do you present... for payment?"
- "You wish to pay... with Gold. You mean... those tiny shards of cold metal in your pockets. Haha. No... I have no use for any more cold metal."
- "Look around you, travelers. Light and warmth and hope are what is scarce in this place. Can you give something like that to this tired old Ferryman."
- "Travel with care, foreigners. It is easy to get lost in the forest."

The Ferryman's Payment (Optional)

The Ferryman character will become important in future adventures, so you may want to give him more detail now. He can converse with the players at the shore or while swimming, and can tell them what little of his backstory he can remember if they ask.

When the party pays the Ferryman with **flame or warmth**, you can hint at his former glorious past with the following narrative. (This works especially well if the party produces a flame or light source which is near the dragon.)

- The fire burns a warm brilliant orange, and you realize just how colorless everything has been up to now. The warm flame is like nothing else in this cold gray place.
- The great skeletal dragon steps closer to the fire, drawn to its warmth.
- In the flickering firelight, you briefly see the great dragon's skeletal body covered in rich golden scales over rippling flesh and strong muscle.
- As the light plays over his skin, for just a moment you glimpse not a blackened bones, but a golden dragon, strong and proud.
- After a moment, the image fades, and he is a skeleton again.

Crossing The River

Once paid, the Ferryman bids the party to climb onto his back, and he **swims across the river** with them. Mist quickly closes in, and they soon see nothing but water in all directions. They are safe as long as they remain on the dragon's back. The journey takes a few hours, though in the Shadowfell the players have trouble discerning exactly how long that is. This is a good time for a **short rest**.

Eventually the party can see the opposite shore looming in the mist. Another **beach of black granite** rocks and boulders stretches as far as they can see in both directions. Beyond the shore is a thick forest of **identical trees** covered in snow. The Ferryman climbs slowly out of the water and lowers his wings, allowing the players to climb down. He warns them about the confusing nature of the forest, and then submerges back into the water.

THE CONFUSING FOREST

Beyond the beach of the north shore, the forest stretches out in all directions.

- Before you is a thick forest of identical trees. It stretches as far as you can see in both directions down the shore of the river.
- Each tree has black bark, sparse branches, and black pine needles. They're all nearly the same size and height. The identical trees continue north as far as you can see.
- The trees and the floor of the forest are covered in snow.
- Within the forest, you don't hear anything. It is silent and still.

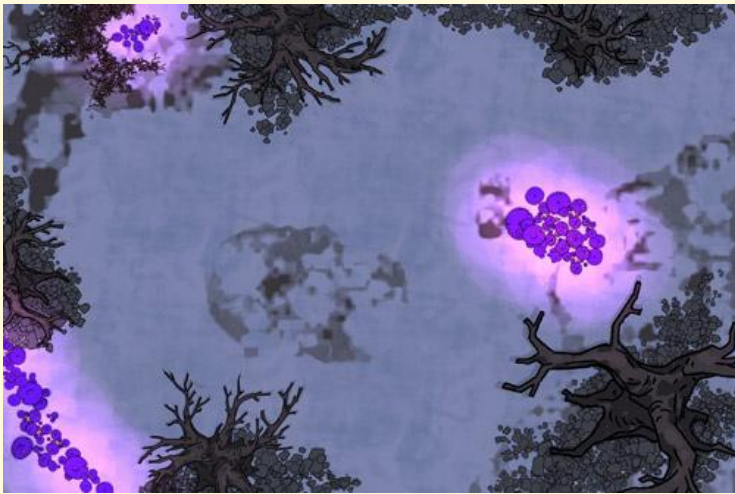
You should hint that the forest is dense and disorienting. The party must have **Natural Explorer** (PHB p.89), or else they must use some means to navigate. They can mark trees, fly above the trees, or recon from their footprints in the snow. A **DC 14 Survival** check can determine the success of the tactic they select. If they don't make any effort to navigate, they will find themselves back at the river after a couple hours of walking.

Even with careful navigation, the dense forest is **magically confusing**. Unless the party uses magical means to navigate, they will **go in a circle** at least once. They may notice this by seeing their own footprints, seeing their prior tree markings, or similar signs that they've been this way before. After this happens, the party can successfully get back on track with a **DC 14 Intelligence** check, survival check, or some means of magical navigation. (I once had a party follow their Unseen Servant to go in a straight line north! Clever!)

Eventually the party can find the **large clearing** in the center of the forest.

THE FOREST CENTER

Once successfully navigating due north for three hours, the party reaches a clearing in the center of the forest.



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- You see a break in the trees ahead, where the forest gives way to a large clearing.
- A few massive old dead trees stand in the clearing, different from those in the surrounding forest.
- A pale purple glow faintly shimmers from a few patches in the clearing. These look like the enchanted fungi you're looking for.

The fungi are here in the clearing. If the party searches the area or otherwise exercises caution, you can call for a **DC 14 Perception** check. Succeeding players will **glimpse a tall, willowy figure** watching them from amongst the trees on the opposite side of the clearing. This figure is the **Forest Guardian** (CR5 Ice Druid; IDRotF p.288). It will disappear after one sighting, and remain neutral towards the party until they take the enchanted fungi.

If the party attempts to touch the fungi, they will **hear a ghostly voice** on the wind, warning them to leave. If they take the fungi anyway, the Forest Guardian will **appear and attack**. (Because of the forewarning, the party is not surprised.) The guardian will summon two **Snow Cats** (CR1 Crag Cats; SKT p.240) which appear in the clearing and attack as well. The Snow Cats can use their **Spell Turning** ability against magical attacks. For a tougher fight for higher level parties, you can add **Awakened Trees** (CR2, MM p.317) to the encounter.

When any ice monster in the Shadowfell dies, its body will vaporize in a cloud of magical dust and blow away in the wind. However, the Forest Guardian will leave behind **two**

Potions of Greater Healing (DMG p.187) and a **Staff of Frost** (DMG p.202) which the party can loot.

Collecting Enchanted Fungi

Once the party defeats these enemies, they can use the wizard's **Bag of Preservation** to collect the fungi. (You can call for a **DC 10 Sleight of Hand** check to make this into a simple challenge.) If the attempting player doesn't use the bag quickly and deftly, the fungi will melt away like snowflakes when touched. But there are plenty of fungi around so the party can eventually fill the bag even if they have to waste a lot of them.

The Return Trip (Optional)

To make a tighter session, you may choose to elide much of the roleplay of the return trip. The party can retrace their steps back through the forest, which will not pose any particular new challenge. The Ferryman will appear again when called, and will remember the party. It will return them to the south shore without need of additional payment.

You can add a simple **stealth challenge** to the return trip through the swamp by saying that the party hears the familiar metallic buzzing sound of the Ice Wasps, but this time in overwhelming numbers--- far too many to fight. The party can hide with a **DC 12 group Stealth** check, or a concealment spell such as *Pass Without Trace*, *Invisibility*, or *Darkness*.

BRINDLEBAR'S IMPOSTER

Once the party navigates back to Brindlebar's cottage, they should expect to complete his bargain: some of the fungi in exchange for him sending them home. But when they arrive, they find that **Brindlebar is behaving strangely**.

The Imposter

Doppelganger; CR3 MM p.82

Brindlebar appears to be at home, but this creature is actually a **Doppelganger**: an evil monster who is mimicking Brindlebar. The Doppelganger uses its mind-reading ability to try to trick the party into drinking a potion which will trap them here.

The real Brindlebar is **hiding nearby** in the swamp. He is bound by his curse not to directly harm the party, so he has **conspired** with the Doppelganger to do it for him. The Doppelganger will take a share of the party's souls as payment.

Because of his mind-reading ability, Doppelganger knows everything the party knows. But will give himself away by **forgetting to ask for the fungi**, and by being **too cheerful, alert, and enthusiastic**.

The Imposter (CR3 Doppelganger; MM p.82) will try to convince the party to **drink potions** sitting on the table inside the cottage. He will say that the potions will send them home if they drink.

The Imposter: Example Dialog

- "My good friends! I am delighted to see you again."
- "Yes of course I remember you! You want to be sent back to your realm. I am happy to be of service!"
- "You can simply drink these Elixirs of Transference, and you shall find yourself home."
- "The fungi? Oh no you keep them. I have no need of them."

The **Identify** spell, or a **DC 14 Arcana** or **Medicine** check will reveal that these potions are likely poisons or curses, and certainly not what he says they are. In fact they are **Potions of Paralysis**.

Potion of Paralysis

Wondrous Item, rare

A nondescript and unappetizing liquid, grayish in color. Any creature that drinks this potion immediately takes **2d4 psychic damage**. They then must make a **DC 13 Constitution Saving Throw**. On a failure, the drinker is **paralyzed** for 1d6+1 hours.

Each round, the drinker can use their action to attempt to resist the effect with another **DC 15 Constitution Saving Throw**. On a success, the creature becomes **only half paralyzed**. For example, if the drinker is currently fully paralyzed then they get use of one arm and one leg. Lingering effects on disadvantage, saves, and criticals are at the DM's discretion.

A subsequent action can be used to further reduce the paralysis **by half again**. After 2 more successful saves, the effect is entirely dispelled.

The Imposter will cling to his lie even after the party becomes suspicious. A **DC 12 Insight** check, or spells such as **Zone of Truth** (PHB p.289) may convince the party of the ruse. If the party attacks, or if they state that they know this person is not the real Brindlebar, the Imposter will give up the ruse and briefly **reveal its true form**: a lizard-like creature with gray skin.

He will fight the party, and will use his next Action to **assume the form of the player** with the lowest AC. Now appearing identical to one of the player's characters, he then will **grapple** that party member. In the tussle, the other players will **lose track of which person is which**. They must then decide which person to attack. The player who has been mimicked may attempt to claim they are genuine, but the Doppelganger will use his mind-reading ability to **simultaneously say and do everything the real**

player does, like a perfect mirror. The party can decide who to attack by random guess, or by magical detection, by Zone of Truth, or other means. Reward creativity here!

Once the Doppelganger escapes or is killed, the real **Brindlebar** will emerge from the swamp and feign ignorance about the Doppelganger. He will be insincerely apologetic, and will lie about his involvement. However, seeing that the ruse failed, Brindlebar will **teleport** the party back to Oakblood's study without further conflict.

BACK TO NORMAL

Without any warning or delay, the party suddenly finds themselves **back in Oakblood's Study**. Oakblood greets them and asks after the fungi. (He will also ask about the party's welfare and offer aid, if he is friendly toward them.) The party should surrender the Bag of Preservation to Oakblood, who will confirm that these fungi are indeed the necessary spell component. If all conditions are met, he will now finally offer to remove the Slaver's Mark for all PCs.

How time has passed (Optional)

Since time passes differently in the plane of shadow, at the DM's discretion Oakblood can tell them that they've **only been gone for 10 minutes**. Or he can say that they've been **gone for a month**, if that fits better with the rest of your campaign. This will affect the party's relationship with NPCs they may have met up to now, such as The Lady of Thorns.

Removing the Slaver's Mark

Oakblood now performs the ritual to dispel the party's Slaver's Mark curse. It takes him one hour and involves careful concentration.

- Using a silvered orb as a casting focus, the wizard performs the ritual you've long awaited. It takes about 60 minutes.
- He concentrates tensely, muttering strange words while gesturing intricately. At the end of the hour, he sighs and looks exhausted.
- You suddenly feel as though a heavy weight has been lifted from your shoulders; one that you didn't realize was there.
- You feel convinced that the mark upon you is finally gone, and you are free.

A Small Betrayal (Optional)

If the wizard dislikes the party, or has become an adversary, there is an optional opportunity here for a cruel twist: spellcasting players can pass a **DC 15 Arcana** check to realize that **Oakblood did not use any of the spell components in the ritual**. He could have removed the mark any time he wanted, but chose to send the party on these dangerous quests purely as payment. Obviously this is a bit of a betrayal, so only add this twist if you plan on making Oakblood an adversary. Otherwise, Oakblood remains an ally in future adventures.

What Now

No longer fugitives, the party can now freely choose their destiny. You can let them do anything, including return home somehow if they wish. However, a natural motivation for the players would be to go on the offensive against the Slavers of Stonecrest: either to topple their unjust enterprise, or simply to get revenge. A set of adventures against the Slavers will be published in **Iceriver Valley Book II: Vengeance**.

REWARDS

The party can accumulate the following rewards from this adventure:

- **XP** from killing the Shadowfell's Ice monsters, the Forest Guardian and her entourage, and the Doppelganger.
- **150 XP** for each player that resisted drinking the Potion of Paralysis.
- **3000 XP each** for finally removing the Slaver's Mark. This is the culmination of many sessions and should cause the party to **level up**.
- The Forest Guardian's loot: two **Potions of Greater Healing**, and the **Staff of Frost**.
- The **Potions of Paralysis**, one per player, if the players retrieve them.

ALTERNATIVES

Players don't always do what you expect! Here are some alternative scenarios that you may wish to anticipate:

- The players may not be willing to step through the portal. If it is motivating, Oakblood can reveal more details about the destination, and can promise them that it's not certain death. He can also warn them that Brindlebar is treacherous, and they should use him but not trust him.
- If the party doesn't interact with Brindlebar, or doesn't get specific directions from him, they will need some other NPC to tell them where to go. Since the river is impossible to miss, you can have the Ferryman appear without being called, and can give them further directions to find the fungi.
- There may be other ways home from the Shadowfell, such as planar portal spells or other characters. If the party does not wish to deal with Brindlebar for the return trip, you will need to invent some other mechanism or NPC that helps them get back to Oakblood.