

DOLMENWOOD

Welcome to Dolmenwood



Gavin Norman

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Version 2.1



Writing: Gavin Norman. **Editing:** Gavin Norman. **Layout:** Gavin Norman. **Visual design:** Vasili Kaliman, Gavin Norman. **Art:** Pauliina Hannuniemi, Aaron Howdle, Chris Huth, Tom Kilian, Emma Lazauski, Kyle Patterson, Rachel Quinlan. **Dolmenwood player's map:** Jonathan Newell, coloured by Zach Kallas. **Dolmenwood logo:** Tim Hastings.

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The Journey Begins

A wanderer's first steps into the tricksome and beguiling Dolmenwood.

This book is a gateway to adventure in the fantastic realm of Dolmenwood—a swathe of tangled woods, fungus-encrusted glades, and foetid marsh on the wild borders of civilisation. Within Dolmenwood, the magical and otherworldly are always close at hand. Standing stones loom in glades hallowed by pagan cults of yesteryear. Ley lines pulse beneath the earth, their potent arcane energy tapped by greedy sorcerers. Doorways to the perilous realm of Fairy allow transit between worlds, for those charmed or blessed by the lords of Elfland.

Travellers of adventurous spirit are drawn to Dolmenwood, for the place is rife with intrigue, secrets, and magic. Heroes may gain renown by striking against the encroaching forces of the wicked Nag-Lord, who lurks in the corrupted northern woods. Explorers may unearth treasure hordes and lost relics of the Church in forgotten crypts and hidden lairs. Wanderers may discover a cornucopia of weird, magical herbs and fungi in the untrod depths of the woods. Students of magic may unravel the secrets of the standing stones and ley lines, in defiance of the sinister Drune cult that wards them.

Step then, bold or foolhardy adventurer, into the hoary forest realm of Dolmenwood and beware, for little here is as it seems!

The Kingdoms of Fairy

Dolmenwood sits at a place where the boundary between the mortal world of everyday folk and the immortal realm of Fairy grows thin. It is thus that fairies of all stripes, both wicked and benign, haunt the deeps of Dolmenwood. Some even venture into the towns of mortals and mix with common folk. Though mortals now claim dominion over Dolmenwood, mighty fairy lords held sway here in ancient times and—some would say—remain the true masters of the realm.

Villages, Inns, and Homely Hearths

A thread of rustic civilisation runs through the heart of Dolmenwood, with villages and inns dotting the roads that wind through the Wood. The people of the forest are a quaint and superstitious lot, but welcoming of outsiders and keen to share folktales and rumours at the fireside over a mug of ale and a pipe.

The Tangled Wilds

When one steps beyond the roads and tracks that connect the settlements within the forest's bounds, the trees and brambles of Dolmenwood draw in close. Moss, lichen, and weird fungi proliferate in the dank undergrowth. Stretches of treacherous marsh lurk concealed in the lowlands, waiting for unwary travellers to stumble to their doom.

Monsters, Beasts, and Restless Spirits

The time-honoured exhortation “do not stray from the path!” refers not only to the dangers of becoming lost in the dark and befuddling wilds of Dolmenwood. Fell beasts, tricksome fairies, restless spirits of the long deceased, great and terrible wyrms, and weird fungal monstrosities also lie in wait, eager to lay hands on foolhardy mortals who wander into their clutches. Those who step from the well-worn path must truly be wary.

Standing Stones

Scattered in every obscure corner of Dolmenwood are standing stones of all shapes and sizes—lonely, moss-covered obelisks, altars traced with runes long illegible, glades ringed with mighty dolmens. It is said that these stones were erected by the cults of gods now long forgotten, for use in their heathen rites. It is unwise to tamper with these stones or set foot within their glades, for the sinister Drune claim them as their own and do not suffer trespassers.

Fungi and Strange Herbs

The otherworldly energies that permeate Dolmenwood promote the growth of all manner of strange fungi and herbs in the undergrowth. Many have magical powers of use to adventurers, and many can be sold for profit. Foraging for rare specimens can prove a lucrative business.



THE DOLMENWOOD PLAYER'S BOOK

This document is an excerpt from the *Dolmenwood Player's Book*—the complete player's guide to campaigns set in Dolmenwood. In addition to the introductory material in this document, the following topics are elucidated in the *Dolmenwood Player's Book*.

Sentient Folk

An introduction to the five most common sentient races in Dolmenwood, including the languages they speak.

Character Classes

Eight new classes of adventurer recommended for use in Dolmenwood campaigns plus to guidelines for using standard *Old-School Essentials* classes in Dolmenwood.

Elf (Dolmenwood variant): Ageless denizens of Fairy who have crossed over into the mortal world for reasons that they seldom reveal.

Friar: Wandering monastics who spread the gospel of the One True God.

Grimalkin: Mercurial feline shapeshifters, native to the Fairy realm.

Hunter: Adventurers who are at home in the wilds of the forest, hunting for food or trophies. Expert trackers, stalkers, and killers.

Knight (Dolmenwood variant): Warriors who serve one of the noble houses of Dolmenwood, doing their bidding and upholding their honour.

Minstrel: Musicians and poets drawn to a life of wandering and adventure.

Moss dwarf: Stocky demihumans who dwell in the dank reaches of the Wood. As moss dwarfs age, their flesh becomes overrun with plants, moulds, and fungi.

Woodgrue: Bat-faced goblins, renowned for their love of music, revelry, and arson.

Separate Race and Class

Rules for creating characters by selecting race and class separately, for those who prefer this method.

Magic

New magical abilities—*knacks*, *runes*, and *glamours*—possessed by several character classes and races.

Expanded Equipment

A greatly expanded selection of equipment—including a miscellany of herbs, pipeleaves, and spirituous beverages.

Appendices

A miscellany of background information, rules, and procedures to add flavour to campaigns set in Dolmenwood.

REQUIRED BOOKS

Dolmenwood is written for use with the *Old-School Essentials* game system. The Classic Fantasy and Advanced Fantasy flavours work equally well.

OTHER DOLMENWOOD BOOKS

The Dolmenwood Campaign Book: An exhaustive tome detailing the secrets and lore of Dolmenwood, for referees who wish to run campaigns in the setting.

The Dolmenwood Monster Book: A menagerie of weird beasts, fickle fairies, and strange spirits that inhabit the wild places of the Wood.

Dolmenwood adventure scenarios: A series of adventures set in Dolmenwood is also available, presented in an easy-to-use format, perfect for the time-pressed referee.



Inspirational Media

The Charwoman's Shadow—Lord Dunsany

The Fellowship of the Ring (Book 1)—J.R.R. Tolkien

Goblin Market—Christina Rossetti

Gormenghast—Mervyn Peake

The Green Knight—David Lowery

Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell—Susanna Clarke

Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell—BBC series

The King of Elfland's Daughter—Lord Dunsany

Krabat—Ottfried Preußler

Labyrinth—Jim Henson

The Ladies of Grace Adieu—Susanna Clarke

Legend—Ridley Scott

Lud-in-the-Mist—Hope Mirrlees

Lyonesse trilogy—Jack Vance

Mio My Son—Astrid Lindgren

Over the Garden Wall—Patrick McHale

Princess Mononoke—Hayao Miyazaki

Smith of Wootton Major—J.R.R. Tolkien

Spirited Away—Hayao Miyazaki

Stardust—Neil Gaiman

Twin Peaks—Mark Frost and David Lynch

The White People—Arthur Machen

The Wicker Man—Robin Hardy

Folk and Factions

An overview of the folk of Dolmenwood and the factions that vie for control.

SENTIENT FOLK

Elves, Grimalkin, and Woodgrues

Among the myriad races of Fairy, a small number have a trustworthy enough reputation that they may sometimes be found openly in the company of humans: elves, otherworldly and beautiful, the little cat-folk known as grimalkins, and bat-faced woodgrues are the most commonly encountered fairies.

It is uncommon for such folk to permanently set up home in a village or town among mortals, but the sight of them—an elf perusing the wares of a pedlar, a grimalkin dancing a jig upon a tavern table, or a woodgrue blowing smoke rings from a long pipe—is not so unusual as to raise too many eyebrows.

Moss Dwarfs and Goatfolk

Humans are not the only mortal race to call Dolmenwood home. The dank, fungal-infested lowlands of the eastern woods are home to a shy and stunted race called moss dwarfs, part mortal flesh and part plant or fungus. The reaches of south-western Dolmenwood are goat country, inhabited since ancient times by goatfolk, divided into two castes, distinguished by the length of their horns—the aristocratic longhorns and the commoner shorthorns.

Other Sentient Beings

If one ventures off the beaten track in Dolmenwood, creatures of many other kinds may be encountered. Goblin tricksters peddle fairy fruits and other questionable wares; scrabies emerge from their network of tunnels, eager to trade; even a bird, animal, or fish may surprise travellers by greeting them from the wayside, spinning a riddle, or cursing their trespass.

BASTIONS OF CIVILISATION

The Dukes of Brackenwold—Lords of the Realm of Dolmenwood

Ruling from the (supposedly) impregnable Castle Brackenwold on the south-eastern verge of the forest, the Dukes of Brackenwold trace their line back to the earliest settlers in the region. All mortal folk within the Wood—from the humblest beggar to the highest lord—pay fealty to the duke and the whole forest is his property.

The Church of the One True God—Pious Ally of the Duchy

The Duchy of Brackenwold sanctions the monotheistic religion of the Church, which is widely spread throughout Dolmenwood and beyond. Indeed, the Bishop of Brackenwold is said to hold equal sway over Dolmenwood to the duke himself. The Church's presence in Dolmenwood is, in modern times, somewhat diminished. Many shrines and chapels that once saw regular worship have fallen into ruin and been reclaimed by the forest. Some within the Church—in particular, the Bishop of Brackenwold—wish to rediscover and re-sanctify the lost shrines.

Longhorn Nobility—Ancient Rulers of the High Wold

Three noble houses of longhorns—aristocratic goatfolk—rule over the High Wold region of south-western Dolmenwood, where goatfolk live alongside humans. Where once the longhorn nobles ruled supreme, the High Wold is now subsumed within the Duchy of Brackenwold and the longhorns swear fealty to the duke.





MASTERS OF THE ARCANE

Drune—Masters of the Standing Stones

A cabal of sorcerers who roam the Wood, cloaked in black. They claim the magical energies of Dolmenwood as their own and are self-appointed masters of the standing stones. What gods they worship is a matter of conjecture, for they guard their secrets with their lives. In the eyes of the Church they are heathens to be eradicated, for it is said they deal in devil worship and human sacrifice. Kidnap by the Drune is among the greatest fears of the simple folk of Dolmenwood, who fear to speak the name “Drune”, believing it to be accursed. Instead, they refer to the cult by euphemistic titles such as “the Hooded Men” or “the Watchers of the Wood”.

Witches—Worshippers of Ancient Gods

Mortal women who worship ancient pagan deities in the forbidden depths of Dolmenwood. Their aims are obscure, but it is known that they gather beneath the moon to conduct their heathen worship and to work magic. In folklore, witches are variously portrayed as depraved practitioners of human sacrifice, lustful seductresses (for they are said to be eternally young), and ministers of potent cures and charms.

Ygraine the Sorceress—Mysterious Lady of the North

A reclusive figure and ruler of the village of Meagre’s Reach, Ygraine dwells in a many-tiered manse overlooking a black lake. It is rumoured that her sprawling home is haunted by fairy folk. Her guests are infrequent but well-coiffed, so the people of the Reach say. The sorceress herself no longer makes public appearances, though it is said that she is a woman of patrician beauty, refined in all aspects and wealthy beyond measure.

OTHERWORLDLY FORCES

The Cold Prince—Banished Fairy Lord of Winter

Where now mortals reign, great elf nobles once held court. The entirety of Dolmenwood was once the domain of a fairy lord known as the Cold Prince. According to legend, he ruled the Wood from a castle of ice on a high cliff overlooking the frozen waters of Lake Longmere (for winter ruled eternal in Dolmenwood while the Cold Prince had dominion).

When humans began to settle the wild glades of Dolmenwood, a great war between fairy and mortal ensued, wracking the forest. After years of combat, mortals prevailed and the Cold Prince was banished to his domain in Fairy. Fearful tales of the Cold Prince’s return to Dolmenwood and his icy wrath weave a common thread through the folklore of those who dwell within the bounds of his erstwhile domain.

The Nag-Lord—Depraved Unicorn God

A wicked, trickster figure of local folklore, said to keep unholy court in the twisted northern woods, where his armies of corrupted goatfolk and other creatures of chaos lair. The Nag-Lord is known by many names: common epithets are “the King of the Wood” and “Old Shub”. In folktales, the Nag-Lord is depicted as being part man, part unicorn, with nine legs (nine being regarded as an especially accursed number).



Dolmenwood Gazetteer

The most commonly traversed or spoken of regions of the Wood.

CASTLE BRACKENWOLD

The seat of the Duchy of Brackenwold and ancestral home to the nobility of the line, Castle Brackenwold perches upon a high hill with a great town stretched at its feet. Alongside the mighty garrison maintained by the duke is a great cathedral, making this fortress-town also the centre of the Church's power in the region.

DREG AND SHANTYWOOD ISLE

A rough port-town and fishing village on the marshy banks of the River Hameth. Dreg has a seedy reputation as a haunt for thieves, charlatans, and rascals of all stripes, made only worse by its proximity to the lawless Shantywood Isle, a notorious port of ill-repute. Aside from its profusion of taverns and gambling dens, Dreg is known for its fine sausages, made from the flesh of the swine kept in the bogs to the north of the village.

FORT VULGAR

A crude keep overlooking a port at the northern end of Lake Longmere. Fort Vulgar is ruled by Sir Osric the Gaunt, a vassal of the Duke of Brackenwold who is responsible for the taxation of all traffic via the port.

HAG'S ADDLE

A region of mazy swampland around the banks of the River Hameth. The place is shunned not only due to the natural hazards of the marsh, but also because of the hag who haunts its sodden expanse. It is said that she has the power to see into the past and future and to raise the dead, but that the price she demands in return is perilous.

HIGH-HANKLE

The second largest town in Dolmenwood (after Castle Brackenwold), High-Hankle is the ancient capital of the High Wold region. Its reputation is one of revelry, carousing, and debauchery of all kinds. At its centre stands the imposing Castle Perigonne, home of the Baron Hogwarsh.



THE HIGH WOLD

A barony encompassing the south-western corner of Dolmenwood. The High Wold is noted for the ancient line of aristocratic goatfolk who rule in tandem with the human lords of the region. The barony has become wild of late under the lax rule of Baron Hogwarsh: highwaymen ply the roads and charlatans peddle questionable wares.

LAKE LONGMERE

The great lake Longmere, at the centre of Dolmenwood, is twelve miles broad at its widest point. No ships ply its waters, and anglers who frequent its shores speak fearfully of lake monsters.

LANKSHORN

The northernmost settlement in the High Wold, the market town of Lankshorn lies within a bowshot of the forest's border. Ruled by the goatfolk aristocracy, Lankshorn is said to have an odd cultural mélange, as the traditions of the civilised south meld with the quaint, superstitious ways of Dolmenwood.

MULCHGROVE

The central region of the Wood is a dank lowland riddled with fungal forests, treacherous bogs, and twisted willow-woods. The region is little traversed save by sentient fungal monstrosities and the moss dwarfs who are native to the place, loving fungi and moulds and all that is dank.

PRIGWORT

Situated in the centre of Dolmenwood, the market town of Prigwort is the largest settlement beneath the eaves of the forest. Famed for its breweries and distilleries, Prigwort is ruled by a council known as the Brewmasters. Fine Prigwort spirits are to be found on the tables of connoisseurs far and wide.

THE RUINED ABBEY OF ST CLEWYD

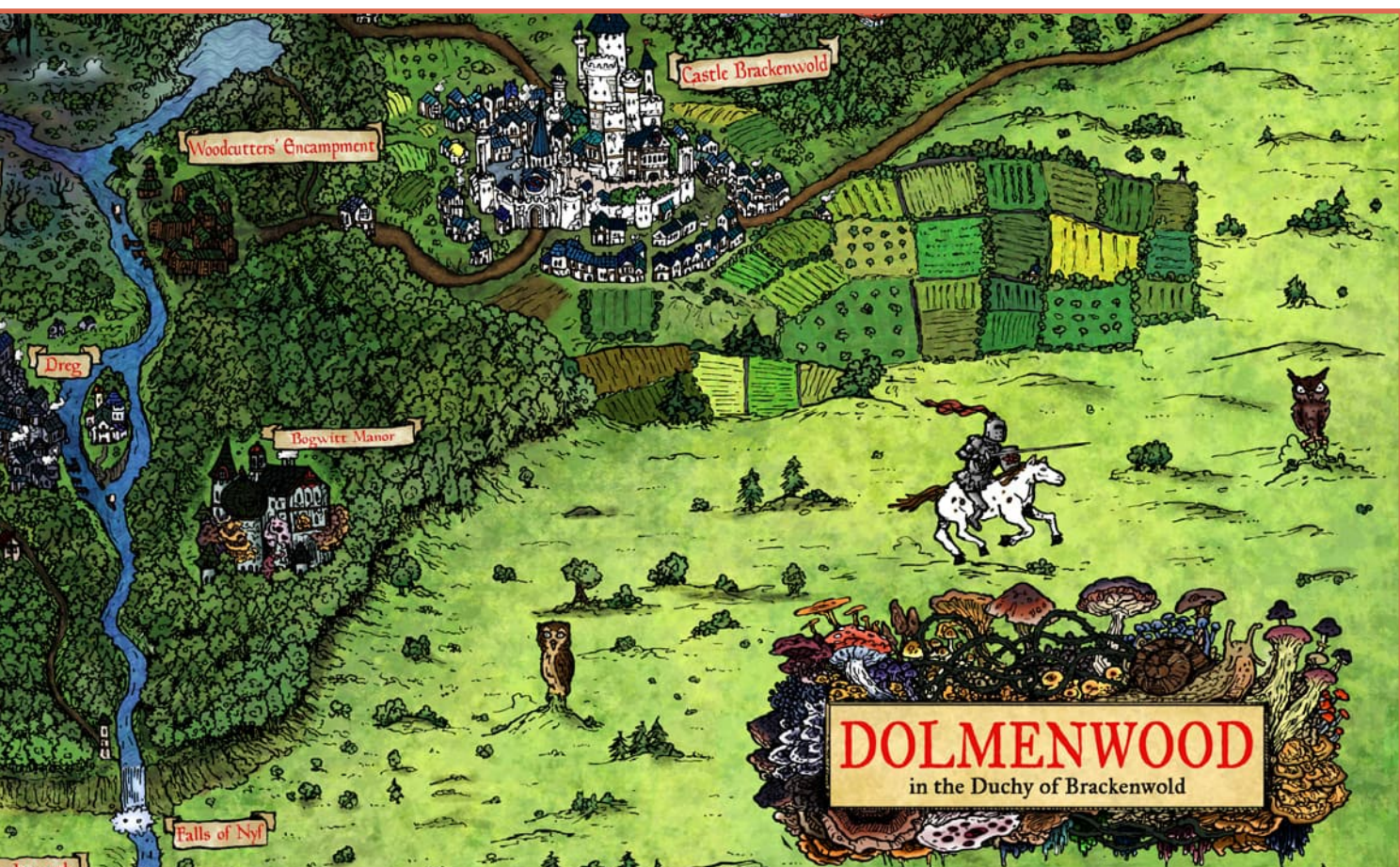
East of Lake Longmere, in the depths of Dolmenwood, a great monastery was founded, of old. The abbey now lies in ruins, following a nocturnal assault of unknown provenance, a century past.

THE WITCHING RING

Those who wander far in the western reaches of Dolmenwood speak of a vast ring of frost-rimed stones, erected by the ancients for purpose now unknown. The folk of Dolmenwood name them the "summerstones" and the great ring which they demarcate the "witching ring".

THE WOODCUTTERS' ENCAMPMENT

Once a mere woodcutters' camp, the village is now a thriving trade community. The locals practice unusual arts of woodcraft and are said to have no fear of the Drune.



Rumour and Folktale

Tales which may be heard on the lips of minstrels and common folk.

ANCIENT MAGIC OF LAKE LONGMERE

Known colloquially as “the Heart of the Wood”, the great lake Longmere is said to be the seat of an ancient magic in Dolmenwood, guarded by the witches. On moonlit nights, witches fly over the lake and commune with water spirits, who whisper secrets that others wish to hide.

BE WARY OF THE OWLS

The common folk of the Wood fear owls of all kinds, for they are regarded as an omen of death. Many a folk tale speaks of mortals who were driven mad by the gaze of an owl or disappeared after encountering one of the birds by surprise. It is perhaps no coincidence that the chosen symbol of the Drune—found carved into rocks and trees wherever they gather—is an owl in flight.

DEWIDORT OF SMERNE

The phantom of this notorious highwayman has haunted the roads of the Wood since the village of his origin—situated in the wild moors north of Dolmenwood—was submerged in the black ooze of the ever-expanding bog. The secret location of his treasure hoard is a topic of great interest to adventurers, rogues, and the law alike.

FAIRIES IN PRIGWORT

The jaded entourage of the evil fairy Prince Mallowheart is said to visit the town of Prigwort at night for secret congress with its council, the Brewmasters. What dealings they have with the fairy Prince is unknown.

GOAT-LORD RIVALRIES

The half-brother goat-lords Ramius and Malbleat are bitter rivals, scheming to undermine each other’s reputation and influence. Word in Lankshorn is that both lords are amassing troops in secret and that their animosity will soon erupt into open war. The Lankshorners fear that their town may be the stage upon which the two goat armies clash.

MASTER BLADESMITH IN LANKSHORN

The finest bladesmith in Dolmenwood makes his home in Lankshorn. In addition to normal swords of exquisite make, he sells weapons of pure iron, which is harmful to fairies of all kinds.

RELIQS IN THE RUINED ABBEY

It is rumoured that the Church has endeavoured on several occasions to re-sanctify the ruined abbey of St Clewyd, but to no avail, for the place is said to be haunted. The riches of the former abbey are believed to still lie untouched in its crypts.

RISE OF THE TALKING BEASTS

The population of sapient beasts in Dolmenwood is growing, especially in the northern valley now known as the “Valley of Wise Beasts”. It is feared that some unknown force is rallying the talking beasts, preparing to overrun the forest and wrest town and bower from their rightful human owners.

SINISTER FOGS IN WINTER

Sometimes in the deeps of winter, clouds of thick, sinister fog rise from the earth in Dolmenwood. Ghosts, phantoms, and ghouls roam with the fogs, ensuring that only the desperate venture out of doors. These fogs—lasting for several days—are known as *Vagues*.

SPIES OF THE COLD PRINCE

There are reports of frost-clad fairies upon the roads of Dolmenwood—undoubtedly servants of the Cold Prince. It is claimed that these frigid elves will trade icy jewels and fairy silver in exchange for information about what goes on in the deep woods.

THE DEAD IN DOLMENWOOD

A curious property of Dolmenwood is that the souls of those who die there are believed to retain their connection to the corpse indefinitely. This is known, in scriptural terms, as “mortalism” and is a phenomenon of some dispute within the Church. It is only through the careful ministrations of the order of Saint Signis the Silent (also known as the Lichwards) that the dead are put to rest.



THE DREAM THIEF

Folk in Castle Brackenwold speak of recent nights of restless sleep in which they dream only of drifting upon a vast body of purple water. This portends the machinations of the fairy lord known as The Duke Who Cherishes Dreams. It is said that he steals the dreams of mortals and—with the aid of the sorceress Ygraine—plots to drag Dolmenwood into his somnambulant domain.

THE DRUNES' VENGEANCE

Red-eyed ravens and ghostly owls have been spied congregating around graveyards. This is an omen that the wrath of the Drune is turning toward the Church, in reprisal for the recent attacks on the brotherhood by the witch-hunters of the order of St Faxis.

THE DUKES' SINISTER PACT

In ancient times, the Dukes of Brackenwold made pact with the secret gods of the Wood, being granted rulership over all of Dolmenwood for forty-four generations, in exchange for their souls after death. This time span has almost expired and it is surmised that ruin will soon befall the Duke and his family.

THE HAG'S EYE

Those who venture into the stinking marshes north of the village of Dreg speak in fearful tones of the Hag, an ancient and terrible sorceress who haunts the region. According to legend, bold Sir Hankley skewered her left eye upon his lance and cast the horrid organ into the bog. The Hag promptly devoured the impudent and ill-fated knight, but searches to this day for her lost eye. She would be greatly indebted to one who could locate it.

THE NAG-LORD MOVES SOUTH

Wicked goatfolk in the employ of the Nag-Lord have been sighted in the vicinity of the ruined abbey of St Clewyd of late, far to the south of their master's dominion. The folk of Prigwort mutter fearfully of war. Word has it that the duke's forces are massing in the town in anticipation of an attack.

THE WIZARD OF PRIGWORT

A wizard by the name of Droobe makes his home within the town of Prigwort. It is said that he is amenable to visitors seeking his arcane knowledge and is willing to place or lift curses for a fee. It is believed that his magic is responsible for the otherworldly quality of the spirits brewed in Prigwort.

TREASURES OF HOARBLIGHT KEEP

Anglers and hunters who ply the western shores of Lake Longmere speak of Hoarblight Keep: a pale white keep atop the cliffs. This is the accursed palace of the fairy Cold Prince, lain in ruins for many centuries, shrouded with fearsome wards and bans to protect the earthly hoard of the Cold Prince which still lies untouched in its catacombs.

TREASURES OF THE BIG CHOOK

Fishers' tales abound with accounts of the lake monster Big Chook which haunts the waters of Lake Longmere and metes out horrific death to all who encounter it. The beast is said to slumber in a crystal cavern deep in the lake, where it guards a hoard of fabulous treasures, including the long lost mirror of the Queen of the Witches—a magical doorway to the realm of the witches' dark gods.

WEIRD FUNGI IN MULCHGROVE

A profusion of valuable fungi, some of which are magical, can be found in Mulchgrove. Wizards and herbalists will pay good money for rare specimens.



DOLMENWOOD

Want More Dolmenwood?

The complete Dolmenwood setting is coming soon, as a 3 book set packed with fairy tale magic and eerie folk horror.

Book 1: The Dolmenwood Player's Book: A complete player's guide to Dolmenwood, including an easy-to-digest setting intro, new classes and races, new equipment, and reams of random tables and rules to bring a fairy tale flavour to life in your games.

Book 2: The Dolmenwood Campaign Book: The essential referee's guide to running campaigns in Dolmenwood, including full info on history, secrets, and factions, plus detailed write-ups 12 settlements and 200 pages of fantastic locations throughout the Wood.

Book 3: The Dolmenwood Monster Book: The companion to the Campaign Book, this tome details a host of weird fairy tale inspired monsters that lurk in Dolmenwood.

Coming to Kickstarter early 2023! Sign up for our newsletter at necroticgnome.com to be notified on launch.



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