



## GIFT OF THE GNARLED ONE

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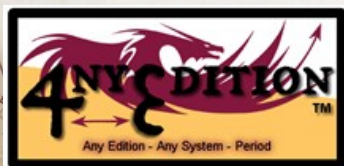
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Desperate herdsmen call upon the old gods of their ancestors only to realize it could cost them their livelihood.

*Gift of the Gnarled One* is a short adventure for four to five player characters. Although designed for the *Feudal Lords Campaign*™, this adventure is suitable for any medieval fantasy setting.

## ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

War between two powerful feudal lords rages in the south and though winter approaches, both armies prepare to carry onward during the cold, brutal season. Soldiers move further north to raid and pillage for supplies. Several weeks ago, raiders began harassing the northern hills surrounding Lubri village.

Frightened and isolated, the elders gathered together to seek a resolution. After much deliberation, the desperate herdsmen sought out the Gnarled One, an ancient and twisted oak legend to command the power of the old gods. After elders recited the archaic ritual scrolls of their ancestors, the Gnarled One heard their plea and awoke from its deep slumber. The age-old oak blessed the strongest of the youths, a goat herder named Hugh, and transformed the lad into a bear.

Crazed and confused, the bear lashed out in anger before fleeing into the hills. Several days afterward, the beast drove the soldiers from the surrounding area. At first the villagers seemed pleased, despite the shock of their unwitting sacrifice. In their wisdom, the elders comforted the loved ones of Hugh hoping that his transformation would end once the raiders routed.

Unfortunate for Hugh and the rest of the tribe, his new form is permanent. Furthermore, the beast threatens the goat herds that sustain Lubri. The herdsmen, ill-equipped to subdue their kin, now seek out adventurers to aid in their plight.

## ADVENTURE SECRETS

The elders are unaware of the true nature of the gift bestowed by the Gnarled One. Hugh is a **werebear**. Unable to yet harness his new power, the lad is enraged and frightened. Furthermore, unbeknownst to the tribe, one of the surviving soldiers is also accursed with lycanthropy. Therefore, two such beasts roam the countryside.

## QUESTS

This adventure assumes characters travel northward, exploring the mountainous regions in search of fame and glory. However, the following quests can further draw in adventurers for a more personal connection.

**CLEARING NORTH ROAD** Accused of not maintaining the roads in his lands, Sir Allen of Lerwick beseeches adventurers to investigate and remove debris along the old north road. Raiders fell several trees to block the path and waylay merchant cara-





vans. The noble further informs adventurers that successful negotiation with the villagers of Lubri may convince the goat herders to assist in clearing the road.

**MERCHANTS OF CASEUM** The cheesemongers of the Casuem Merchant Guild, who depend on the northern herdsmen for goat cheese, fear raiders may threaten Lubri and other villages. The traders seek adventurers to investigate and assist the herdsmen to drive any pillagers from the land.

## THE VILLAGE OF LUBRI

The journey to Lubri takes four days along a well-known route. While adventurers encounter no danger during their trek, snow and cold weather dampens spirits and hampers travel. Once adventurers reach Lubri, the villagers are at first cautious, though soon warm to their company should they pose no threat. If a priest is within the adventuring group, the elders are fearful that their transgressions will be viewed as heretical. Though, all are penitent and will eventually seek out the cleric for absolution.

**IMPORTANT CHARACTERS** Adventurers may interact with one or more of the following personalities within Lubri.

- **Drest:** He is the voice of the elders. The man is nearly forty, though looks older. Drest has long, tangled blonde hair with sharp, sunken features and piercing eyes. His dress is simple and suited for the cold climate.
- **Branwen:** She is a young lass with pale, white skin and long blonde hair. Branwen is betrothed to Hugh. She is quiet and sad.
- **Lyall:** She is the mother of Hugh. Lyall is in her mid-thirties with striking, handsome features. Her graying, blonde hair is up and most days, covered in a wimple. She fears she lost her only son and aids Drest in convincing the elders to reach out to the adventurers for help.

**REWARD** The villagers of Lubri, as well as neighboring herdsmen, gathered nearly 200 gp worth of trade goods for the subdual and return of the bear.

- **Riding Horse:** The horse belonged to the leader of the pillaging soldiers (**Area 9**). It has bit and bridle, saddle, and two saddlebags filled with feed.
- **Silk Cloth:** Branwen offers this 1 square yard of silk as a reward (25 gp). The young lass scrimped to purchase this from a passing cloth merchant in hopes to embroider her wedding dress.
- **Chest:** The villagers present a chest filled with 2,400 cp.
- **Goat Herd:** The elders also give 38 of

the finest mountain goats in the village (2 gp each).

Drest understands that the adventurers might scoff if offered such goods, therefore he emphasizes the value. He hopes adventurers assume the villagers will reward them in gold rather than trade goods. If the adventurers persist in collecting an advance, Drest presents them with the riding horse and silk.

### THE VILLAGE OF LUBRI

Lubri is a hamlet situated in the foothills below a great mountain range. Most houses are circular stone structures with thatched roofs or timber framed, wattle and daub homes.

Mountain goats thrive in these high altitudes and eat the tall, winter grass. The livestock allow the herdsmen to sell goat milk and goat cheese to merchants while providing meat during lean, cold months.

Although the villagers of Lubri share similar customs and traditional beliefs of those further south, many often mistake their simple dress of furs and skins with that of wildmen and druidic pagans.

## HUNTING THE BEAST

Drest, at the behest of the elders and much to his dislike, does not relate the full truth about the fate of Hugh. Instead, Drest admits to evoking the old gods and weaves a tale that the Gnarled One awakened a large bear from hibernation to aid against the soldiers. Drest further describes the event and claims the beast struck Hugh and carried the poor lad off into the wooded hills.

The elders do not want adventurers to kill or maim the bear for fear it will further anger the old gods. Rather than dispatch the beast, the elders prefer adventurers to drive it away from the lands or subdue the creature and return it to Lubri. The villagers will then undertake a journey to release the beast further in the mountains and well beyond their grazing fields.

**TRACKING THE BEAR** Drest organizes several groups to search the surrounding lands, widening into the northeast. Unbeknownst to the villagers, both **werebears** lair within the grove of Gnarled One.

After traveling for a 1d4+1 hours, adventurers discover large bear tracks in the deep snow. Those proficient in tracking soon discovers the location of the grove within 2d6 hours.

## GROVE OF THE GNARLED ONE

Both beasts nestle among the tall stretch of winter grass surrounded by trees and brush. Once adventurers reach the grove, read or paraphrase the following:

*The thick, tangled brush within the grove thrives, climbing to a height of a man. Several trails of crushed grass snake*

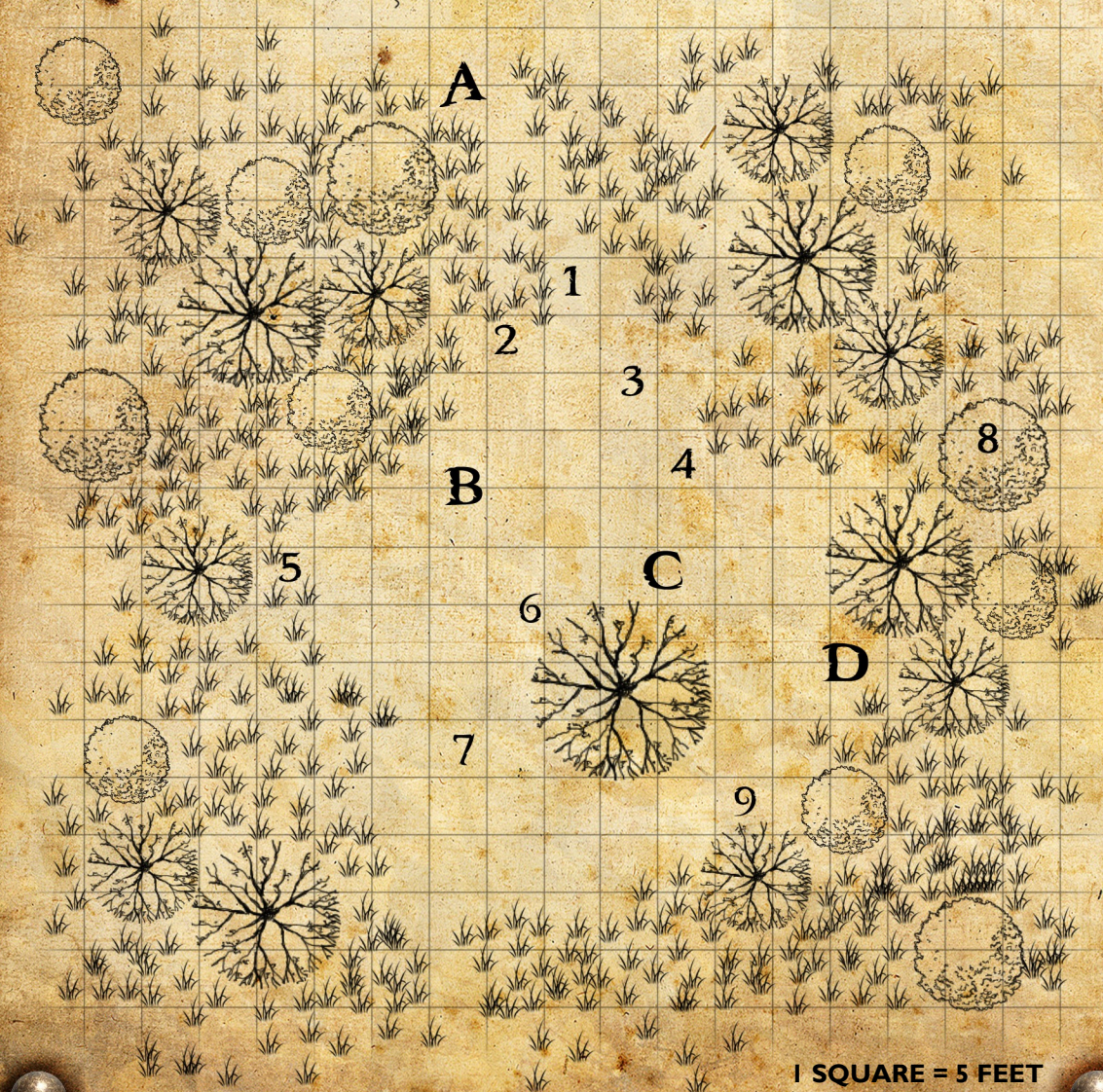






Lubri Hamlet

## The Grove of the Gnarled One



1 SQUARE = 5 FEET



throughout the sward where the beast forged paths with its enormous girth. A venue of vultures take to flight from the tall grass as low a growl rumbles upon the winter wind.

**GENERAL FEATURES** If the adventurers are fortunate, the sun still hangs high in the sky.

- **Light:** If it is still daylight, the grove is bathed in bright light. Otherwise, a nearly full moon provides dim light.
- **Foliage:** Movement through the brush of tall grass and thorny vines is difficult. Although, both **werebears** remain unhindered by the growth.
- **Trees:** The trees can provide cover and are not difficult to climb. Climbing the trees can provide a momentary advantage allowing adventurers to spot both bears within brush. Should adventurers take refuge within the trees, the beasts can climb with great ease or shake them from the tree with an opposed Strength check.

**A** Adventurers following the tracks of the bear enter the grove from the north. The trail leads into the tall brush only to dissipate among a plethora of tracks. As adventurers move further into the sward, the second **werebear** approaches from behind attempting to ambush stragglers.

**B** Remains of many of the victims lie scattered among the grove and tall grass. The numbered areas on the map indicate the location of the bodies.

**1-4** The remains of soldiers and several goats litter the ground. The skeletons lie beneath heaps of torn armor and clothes, shredded shields, and broken boar spears. Closer examination reveals the marrow of larger bones sucked clean and several sharp breaks as if hued with a heavy weapon.

**5** These are the remains of a mercenary guide under the employ of the soldiers. His rib cage and skull crushed beneath the weight of the bear. Aside from a broken short-bow and a rusting iron sword, a belt pouch holds a moss agate (10 gp) and a smoky quartz (9 gp).

**6** Tattered hide armor covers the skeletal remains of a warrior. While claws and bite marks riddle the bones, closer investigation reveals the soldier fell from the strike of a great axe. Clutched within bony fingers, rests an unbroken spear. Spread about the area is 5 ep and 10 cp.



**7** This unfortunate wretch lived through the initial attack and attempted to crawl from the sward. His former comrade-in-arms, now transformed into a beast, feasted upon his remains. A mace and pouch holding a pearl (10 gp) is all that is salvageable from the remnants.

**8** Observant and perceptive adventurers take notice of a broken corpse tangled in the high branches of a tree. The carcass hangs head downward, though most of its torso is mangled. Little remains and approaching the tree draws the attention of the **werebear** located in **Area D**.

**9** As with the warrior found in **Area 7**, this soldier fled to the sound of the rushing river located southward. He hoped the rapids would carry him fast from the beast. Although, a collapsed lung led to his downfall. With his last breath, he covered himself with his shield (*Treasure*). Scattered among the tall grass are 5 ep and 10 cp.

**C** The great, twisted oak is the Gnarled One, an ancient remnant of a bygone age. The villagers of Lubri believe it is a rare vestige of the old gods. Whether the age-old oak answered the villagers plea or the decrepit ritual scrolls of their ancestors still held a last glimmer of magic that led to the transformation is for the Game Master to decide. Though, those that choose to strike or otherwise harm the tree do suffer a minor curse. They are surprised



during their next encounter and enemies gain an **advantage** (+2 bonus) to attack rolls during the first round of combat.

**D** This is where both **werebears** rest, though only one is present when adventurers explore this area. The tall winter grass and thick brush covers the beast giving an **advantage** (+2 bonus) to hide. Both beasts attempt to ambush adventurers once drawn deeper into the grove. When one of the lycanthropes attack, the other tramples through the brush and joins the fray.

**TREASURE** The shield located in **Area 9** is magical. Though simple in appearance, the round wooden shield is a *shield +1*. The dark wood is fashioned from eldritch trees and bears the heraldry of one of the warring feudal lords. Any attempt to paint over or scrape off the markings proves futile as they reappear after a long rest.

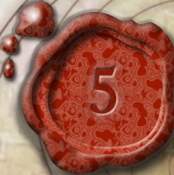
## SCALING THE ENCOUNTER

*Any Edition™* products are rules light that focus on story and adventure elements rather than hard statistics. This allows Game Masters to change the adventure with minimal need for conversion. The following suggestions will aid in finding the right fit for your adventuring group.

**3RD EDITION** This is an easy encounter for four to five 7th level adventures; an average encounter for 6th level characters; and challenging for a 5th level group.

**4TH EDITION** Use the **wereboar** statistics to represent **werebears**. This is an easy encounter for a group of four or five 6th level adventurers. To increase the difficulty to a standard encounter, add two additional **wereboars**.

**5TH EDITION** This is a deadly encounter for a group of four to five 6th level adventurers; remove one **werebear** to create a hard encounter. This is also a hard encounter for a 7th level group; a medium encounter for 8th level and 9th level characters; and an easy to medium encounter for 10th level adventurers.





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