

THE LAST OWLBEAR



An Extinction-Ending Adventure
for 5th Edition



THE LAST OWLBEAR

An Extinction-Ending Adventure
for 5th Edition



Table of Contents

| | |
|-----------------------------------------|-----------|
| Introduction | 5 |
| Adventure Background | 5 |
| Overview | 5 |
| Running this Adventure | 6 |
| Abbreviated Stat Blocks | 6 |
| Key Characters | 7 |
| Plot Hooks | 10 |
| | |
| Chapter 1: The Caravan | 11 |
| Caravan Encounters | 11 |
| Dizzying Downpour | 11 |
| Completely Inedible! | 11 |
| Gnoll Creek Bridge | 12 |
| The Sending Wolf | 13 |
| All that Glitters and Croaks | 14 |
| Sycamore's Request | 16 |
| Bonfire Night | 18 |
| Bannermore's Tent | 18 |
| Bonfire | 19 |
| Cage Wagon | 19 |
| Distant Campfire | 20 |
| Calling it a Night | 20 |
| | |
| Chapter 2: The Hunt | 21 |
| Preparing for the Hunt | 21 |
| The Hunt | 22 |
| Stage 1: The Pursuit! | 22 |
| Stage 2: The Bait! | 25 |
| Stage 3: The Snare! | 26 |
| After the Hunt | 27 |
| | |
| Chapter 3: Dangerous Cargo | 28 |
| Pay Dirt | 28 |
| Caravan Encounters | 29 |
| Doogie-Two Heads | 29 |
| That Damn Bridge! | 30 |
| Throwing a Mephit | 31 |
| The Ankheg Fields | 32 |
| The Alchemist's Tower | 34 |
| On Approach to the Tower | 34 |
| Tower Clearing | 34 |
| After the Battle | 36 |
| | |
| Chapter 4: The Experiment | 37 |
| Monstrous Merger | 37 |
| Mimic Mayhem | 39 |
| Carbon Copy | 41 |
| Further Adventures | 44 |

Credits

Lead Designer Michael Holik

Additional Design Lucas Zellers, Benjamin Ghita

Graphic Design and Layout Michael Holik

Cover Illustration Agustín Marceillac

Interior Illustrations Lucas Ferreira CM,
Martin Kirby-Jackson

This work includes material taken from the System Reference Document 5.1 ("SRD 5.1") by Wizards of the Coast LLC and available at <https://dnd.wizards.com/resources/systems-reference-document>. The SRD 5.1 is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode>.

Made in China

Copyright Mage Hand Press, Scintilla Studio, 2023

Introduction

Amber hues of evening streak through a canopy of old oaks, illuminating a narrow game trail. A traveler walks down this new shortcut through the Mosswood, which could shave hours off their journey if the path hadn't contorted into spirals. Undeterred, they press forward, gambling that their path's end would be fortuitous after all.

The snap of a branch reverberates through the woods. The traveler halts and trains their ears, grasping for the hilt of a dagger on their thigh. Then, a footfall echoes through the air, deep and padded, a great paw stomping the earth. The traveler tenses. Their eyes wheel around to find the source, but find only those towering oaks in all directions.

"Grarr... grarrooo!" shatters the silence, a bellowing screech that thumps in the chest.

The traveler is already sprinting, dagger dropped limply upon the path. A few of those heavy footfalls give chase, and then fall still. Still running, already out of breath, tears well in the traveler's eyes.

An owlbear! Nobody has seen one in fifty years. Terror and wonderment seize them in equal measure. This might be the last one in the world.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The owlbear looms large over culture. It is depicted on family crests, appears in children's storybooks, and even moonlights as a siegeball team mascot; but in truth, nobody has seen an owlbear in decades.

Hunting owlbears for sport has been a favorite hobby of nobles and a rite of passage for budding adventurers for centuries. As populations declined, the challenge shifted from killing to tracking owlbears, fostering a cottage industry of owlbear trackers that would hunt any specimen within a hundred miles. Hunters still tell tall tales of besting the creature, but anyone young enough to hunt the beast has certainly never been alive to see one in the wilds.

The expansion of humanoid settlements sealed the owlbear's fate. Clear-cutting forests to make way for farmland has become common practice, decimating owlbear habitats within a few decades. Moreover, the increased use of evocation and conjuration magic also caused widespread

contamination by theruphane gas, a magical byproduct that reeks of ammonia and nitre. This gas collects in the bodies of large beasts and monstrosities, such as owlbears, and slowly poisons them.

Twenty days ago, however, the alchemist Priya Saran received a detailed written account of an owlbear sighting in the remote Mosswood forest and scrambled together a caravan to capture and transport the beast. Her plan, as near as anyone can decipher, involves using a giant owl, a regular bear, and several vats of alchemical reagents to make the owlbear a suitable enough mate to continue the species. Failing that, she shall preserve the owlbear specimen for future generations of sages.

OVERVIEW

The Last Owlbear is an adventure for characters of 5th to 6th level.

It begins in *Chapter 1: The Caravan*, in which the party accompanies a northbound caravan toward the remote Mosswood and confronts a variety of roadside encounters along the way. At the edge of the Mosswood, the caravan holds a bonfire night to rest and prepare for *Chapter 2: The Hunt*. The characters are enlisted for the multi-stage plan to capture the owlbear. This leads them deep into the giant-spider-infested Mosswood, on a chase back through the forest, and finally to a trapped clearing where they might battle and cage the beast.

Chapter 3: Dangerous Cargo sees the characters retracing their steps on a southbound trek, but now transporting the 1,500-pound owlbear and enduring ambushes from the ruthless Bramblethorn Company, a band of adventurers that wants the owlbear dead. At the foot of the alchemist's tower, the characters confront Bramblethorn one final time to save the alchemist and the owlbear's future.

Finally, in *Chapter 4: The Experiment*, the characters assist the alchemist in a series of wildly unconventional alchemical experiments in an attempt to replicate a suitable mate to the last owlbear and perpetuate the species.

RUNNING THIS ADVENTURE

To run this adventure, you need a copy of the System Reference Document (SRD) or the 5th Edition core rules.

Text that appears in a box like this is meant to be read aloud or paraphrased for the players when their characters first arrive at a location or trigger a specific circumstance, as described in the text.

Important information, such as ability checks, saving throws, and attack rolls, are listed in **bold** as a cue that dice will be rolled by you or the players. Other game mechanics such as when the characters roll initiative, are awarded gold pieces (gp), or take a short or long rest, are also listed in **bold**. Important nonplayer characters and monsters are similarly listed in a **red bold**.

If a phrase appears in *italics*, it refers to the name of a spell, a magic item, or a section within this adventure. This book contains no additional spells or magic items, so all spells and magic items referenced can be found in the 5th Edition core rules or SRD.

ABBREVIATED STAT BLOCKS

This adventure contains statistics for all creatures that the characters are intended to battle. Instead of including full monster statistics in a dedicated appendix, abbreviated stat blocks for monsters and important nonplayer characters are presented directly in the adventure. These stat blocks are much shorter than normal and omit the most infrequently-used information found in stat blocks.

The following explanation uses a young red dragon as reference to explain which information is included and which types of shorthand are employed.

YOUNG RED DRAGON (Large Dragon, LE) CR 10

HP 178 AC 18 Speed 40 (80 fly)

Str +6 Dex +0 Con +5 Int +2 Wis +0 Cha +4

Saving Throws Dex +4, Con +9, Wis +4, Cha +8

Immunities fire

Senses blindsight 30 ft.

Multiattack. Bite, 2 Claws

Bite. *Melee (Reach):* **+10** to hit, **17 (2d10 + 6)** pierc. + 3 (1d6) fire.

Claw. *Melee:* **+10** to hit, **13 (2d6 + 6)** slash.

Fire Breath (Recharge 5–6). 30-foot cone: **DC 17**

Dex save. *Failure:* **56 (16d6)** fire. *Success:* Half.

TITLE LINE

The title line includes the monster's Name, Alignment, Size, Type, and Challenge Rating. Alignment is abbreviated (LE means Lawful Evil, for example) and is omitted entirely when a monster is unaligned. The monster's Challenge Rating (CR) omits the number of experience points it awards, as this adventure uses milestone leveling.

HP, AC, SPEED

The three boxes below this list the monster's Hit Points (HP), Armor Class (AC), and Speed. It omits the monster's Hit Dice calculation, its source of armor class, and most information about its speed. The Speed box contains the monster's walking speed and whether it can burrow, climb, fly, or swim. In this case, the dragon can move at 40 feet and fly at 80 feet, so its speed is listed as 40 (80 fly).

ABILITY SCORES

The six values listed are the monster's Ability Score Modifiers, which are used for its ability checks and saving throws unless otherwise noted. Its actual Ability Scores are omitted, as few effects reference a creature's ability scores directly. In this case, the dragon has 21 in Constitution, but only the modifier of +5 is listed.

TRAITS

Below the Ability Score Modifiers, each of the monster's notable Special Traits are listed. The Special Traits section omits most senses and languages, in addition to most traits that won't have a significant impact on combat. For example, this adventure omits whenever a monster has the Keen Hearing and Smell feature. Special abilities use "adv" for "advantage" and "disadv" for "disadvantage."

ACTIONS

Finally, the monster's Actions are listed, usually consisting of its attacks and Multiattack, if the monster attacks more than once on its turn. An attack lists whether it is a Melee, Ranged, or Spell attack in *italics* with range in parentheses, when applicable. It then lists the attack bonus in bold, followed by the attack's damage in bold, and an abbreviation of the damage type (usually bludgeoning, piercing, or slashing; listed as buldg., pierc., or slash.) Conditions, such as grappled and frightened, are listed in bold when applicable.

If a monster's ability happens as a bonus action or reaction or if it recharges once used, this is detailed in parentheses.

CAN'T WE FIX IT WITH MAGIC?

Spells that raise the long dead, such as true resurrection, seem like a ready-made solution for an extinction crisis. However, extinction has a kind of magnetism that is impossible to avoid. Even if one were to resurrect a few owlbears, the same forces that drove to the brink of extinction would do so again. We call such members a "dead clade walking." They might survive for a while, but they can never recover to their previous numbers and avoid the pull of extinction. In the real world, for example, the passenger pigeon relied on huge chestnut and oak forests; without those forests, resurrected passenger pigeons are still doomed to extinction.

It's hard to convey the magnitude of these extinction forces, so fantasy settings need an additional wrinkle in order to parallel the real world: when a species or race goes extinct, the souls of the dead are forever cut off from the mortal plane. Extinct creatures can't be resurrected, consulted, or even magically cloned. Extinction sends reverberations through magic itself, enraging the gods and diminishing the world by degrees. With each extinction, the colors grow a little dimmer.

Because there is no magic that can remedy exploitation and overkill, this small change to the nature of resurrection allows a fantasy world to mimic the perils and consequences of extinction in the real world. Slowing the extinction crisis is a challenge that demands compassion, advocacy, education, and hard work. It should be no different in your campaign.

KEY CHARACTERS

The following characters feature prominently in this adventure.

PRIYA SARAN (SHE/HER)

Priya Saran is perhaps the most accomplished human alchemist of her generation. Through experimentation and innovation, she has mastered the fundamental elements of the universe more handily than any wizard, even as those self-same wizards mock her expertise. This is but one example of a long standing feud between alchemy and wizardry, each claiming to be the more fundamental arcane discipline, one leveraging a scientific approach to the elements, and the other a sweeping curriculum of magical technique. As such, Priya has faced ridicule and sabotage from wizardly rivals for decades. Little by little, her hard-won discoveries have entered magical canon, much to the chagrin of spellcasting purists.

Ever distractable, Priya's research interests extend to biology, ecology, mathematics, and sociology. Her most recent fixation has been that of the recently-extinct owlbear: did a wizard construct such a beast, or was it born of natural selection? Or perhaps supernatural selection? Thus began a decade of owlbear research culminating in the recent reports of one living specimen, perhaps the very last owlbear, dwelling in the remote Mosswood.

MELVILLE BANNERMORE, (HE/HIM)

Melville Bannermore is an intrepid caravan master by trade, but prefers the term "land sailor," and styles his leadership after great sea captains and their long ocean voyages. Indeed, no corner of the world is too remote or perilous for Bannermore, as long as it can be reached by wagon.

After decades of crisscrossing the continents, Bannermore has gone gray, as humans often do, but has grown no less adventurous. His run-ins with



Melville
Bannermore

magic too spectacular or strange to explain has imparted a superstitious streak, sometimes founded on the patterns of monsters and the hazards of the road, and sometimes on broadly fostering luck. It is this luck to which Bannermore credits his many years of exploring, not his ironclad leadership or dauntless personality, though the latter two are at least partially responsible.

For decades, Bannermore's most prolific client has been none other than the alchemist Priya Saran. When rare, exotic ingredients are needed or a fragile and priceless distillation set must be transported undamaged, Bannermore is the man for the job. However, her next sprawling expedition, one to capture a live owlbear, is the most dangerous yet, and will test every ounce of Bannermore's experience.

SOFIA FONTAN (SHE/HER)

None of Melville Bannermore's expeditions would even set off, much less succeed, were it not for the diligent planning of his protégé and second-in-command, Sofia Fontan. In the naval tradition, Sofia has assumed the title of quartermaster and refers to her boss as "Captain Bannermore," and her responsibilities mirror this role neatly. She takes inventory, plans rations, oversees the crew's wellbeing, estimates when the caravan must stop to restock, sees to it that the wagons and beasts of burden are in good repair and health, and directly oversees short term hires. Unsurprisingly, she is fastidiously organized.

Captain Bannermore feels much like a father to Sofia, and has left the caravan company to her in his will, in the likely case that he dies on the road. Introverted and task-oriented by nature, Sofia rarely bares her soul, but after a glass of wine she might tell lengthy tales of her and her captain's adventures, and shares a similarly daughterly sentiment in return.



ZELKOV NETH (THEY/THEM)

A raven-haired wood elf carrying entirely too many knives, the tracker Zelkov Neth (who prefers to go by just “Neth”) was hired by Bannermore to help the caravan track the last owlbear to its nest. Unbeknownst to Bannermore and the others in the caravan, Neth is something of a disreputable tracker, having been kicked out of ranger enclaves and adventuring companies for petty theft, picking fights, and negligence that left others dead. They are loyal to coin if nothing else, and so might be invaluable in capturing the last owlbear—as long as nobody makes them a better offer.

GORMUN GRAVELSPICE (HE/HIM)

With a larger crew than usual for the expedition to the Mosswood, Sofia Fontan was forced to hire a dedicated cook. Even more unfortunately, Gormun Gravelspice was the only one available. On paper, Gormun is perhaps overqualified for such a task: decades of experience cooking for an entire clan of mountain dwarves, following a legacy of Gravelspice cooks doing the same for centuries. However, as the caravan is soon to learn, dwarven cooking is at best unpalatable to non-dwarves, and at worst inedible. Caravan members can expect a few pebbles in every dish.

BRAMBLETHORN COMPANY

As opposed to altruistic or heroic deeds, the Bramblethorn Adventuring Company is known for slaying monsters—dragons, behirs, and even low-ranking angels—and charging steep fees for the service. They take their murderous efficacy as a mark of pride, as they endeavor to become the most well-known band of adventurers in the land.

Braugili the Barbarian (*she/her*). The terse and fearsome bugbear known as Braugili is a collector of sorts. In her cottage, she collects axes of all shapes and sizes, each sharpened to a razor’s edge. Mounted on the walls next to them are the skulls and heads of every type of monster she has bested. The catalog of heads is overwhelming, but it is critically missing the head of an owlbear. Doubtless, Braugili’s barbarian rage is fueled by this collector’s obsession and an almost primal need to separate heads from bodies.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Braugili has also become a proficient chef, as she often butchers, seasons, smokes, and eats most of the meat she kills.

“Keen-Eyed” Käthe Fittkau (*they/them*). “Keen-Eyed” Käthe’s moniker is well-deserved. A tiefling born to humans, Käthe was never allowed to participate in the family fletching business, but

the proximity to the craft of bows and arrows left its mark early. When the family required deft hands and precise aim to demonstrate the quality of their products, Käthe was the obvious choice. The life of traveling to sell arrows was eventually abandoned for a life of doing trick shots in a circus, which was in turn abandoned for a life of adventuring. At every turn, Käthe’s keen eyes, light fingers, and silver tongue paid dividends.

Indeed, Käthe was chiefly responsible for founding Bramblethorn Company, via connecting the wizard Erasmus Bax to the wealthy financier, Scrimshander. To this day, Scrimshander is the company’s most valuable client, and his most recent assignment demands one thing: the pelt of the last owlbear.

Delaney Pasma (*she/her*). Dour Delaney Pasma bears the pallid complexion and grim temperament of a corpse, speaking always in a near monotone. Though a cleric by profession, Delaney has never sworn allegiance to a single god, preferring instead to offer devotion to a collection of gods: those associated with night, death, secrets, and darkness. The sable clothing and black hair, therefore, is likely a way to venerate this odd pantheon, rather than a fashion statement.

Nearly a month ago, Delaney received a vision from one of her dark gods: that of an owlbear’s heart bleeding gold. To Delaney, this could mean only one thing: a divine quest to drive the owlbear to extinction as an offering to the gods of death.

Erasmus Bax (*he/him*). Erasmus Bax thinks of himself as a human wizarding prodigy, mastering his first cantrip at the age of five and commanding *fireball* by eleven. Naturally, he graduated top of his class at his wizarding tower, a fact which he never fails to mention. At barely nineteen years old, Erasmus Bax is one of the youngest adventuring wizards, and has made a name for himself with incendiary comments and even more incendiary spells. Specifically, Erasmus has fallen into the age-old feud between alchemists and wizards over which is the more fundamental of the two disciplines. More seasoned and well-reasoned spellcasters usually decide that both fields are complementary parts of the same whole, and that both have their use cases, but Erasmus has been a firebrand against alchemy, and despises potions of any kind.

When word reached Erasmus Bax that Priya Saran, the most eminent alchemist of our time, has endeavored to save the owlbear from extinction, Erasmus vowed to ensure the opposite, almost entirely out of spite.

PLOT HOOKS

Each character might have their own reason to join the expedition. They might have been recruited separately or together, and they might not be acquainted at the onset of the adventure. Roll on the following table, pick from the plot hooks from below, or invent your own reasons why each character has joined the expedition.

d10 Plot Hook

- | | |
|-----|--------------------------------|
| 1–2 | A Miraculous Sight |
| 3–4 | Hired Help |
| 5–6 | Eccentric Ally |
| 7–8 | Green and Gold |
| 9–0 | Masterwork of the Monster Sage |

A MIRACULOUS SIGHT

Twenty days ago, you were traveling through the edge of the Mosswood and saw something incredible: an enormous nest constructed on the ground between a trio of boulders made from tree limbs and great patches of dried moss. Feathers strewn about the nest and dozens of footprints in the soft earth confirmed your suspicions: you've found an owlbear nest! Nobody has seen an owlbear in decades, at least, not a living one.

You send a message to the only person you suspect might be able to help: the alchemist Priya Saran, whose tower is 400 miles south. You linger at the nest for a few hours and set off to the alchemist's tower, meeting and joining the northbound expedition on your travels.

CONTENT WARNING

Encounters in this adventure feature giant spiders, the threat of drowning, and some scenes of body horror. The GM can omit or modify these sections without impacting the overall story.

Additionally, this adventure grapples with issues related to extinction, climate change, and ecological disaster, which might result in eco-anxiety in players. *The Last Owlbear* is designed to let GMs and players constructively engage with climate issues, develop emotional resilience to these topics, and find catharsis by exploring collective action.

HIRED HELP

Mercenaries don't ask many questions about their work, but you had some concerns about this job. A caravaner, Melville Bannermore, has been recruiting muscle on a hush-hush basis to move some dangerous cargo. Usually, this kind of work is for unskilled laborers, not cutthroats and soldiers for hire, but Bannermore has been handing out nets and catchpoles to anyone who signs. Needless to say, this caught your attention. You signed up once you learned that the cargo was an enormous cage for an enormous monster.

ECCENTRIC ALLY

Despite your best efforts, you and the alchemist Priya Saran have been friends for years. Priya has an inscrutable sense of humor, an annoying laugh, and perpetually carries the odor of noxious alchemical reagents, but she has a kind heart and an unfaltering moral compass. When she suddenly drew up plans for an expedition to the Mosswood and ordered two dozen builders to start constructing an animal enclosure next to her tower, you knew she had a good reason. And when she asked you to join the expedition, you could hardly refuse. Whatever Priya has become obsessed with, it is almost certainly important, and you owe it to her to help in any way you can.

GREEN AND GOLD

The owlbear crest has flown over your household for as long as anyone can remember. Its symbol has adorned banners in wartime, tapestries in peacetime, and the wax seals of every document that entitled your family to its wealth, land, and prestige.

At your grandfather's deathbed, he bid that you seek out and see an owlbear with your own eyes. He muttered something about the "right to rule" and "his damned mistakes" before making you swear to find one. When he breathed his last, the owlbear head mounted over the fireplace stared down at you, unblinking, and you knew you had no other choice.

MASTERWORK OF THE MONSTER SAGE

Painting and sketching wildlife has been your passion for years, the more magical and fantastical the better. Though you have sketched a nymph standing at a Fey Bridge and painted the scales of a green dragon from life, you've never seen an owlbear. Nobody has in decades; the sketches and paintings are stiff and artificial, as if the artists were using clay for reference. You've resolved to see one for yourself and create a masterwork, immortalizing the owlbear in art for generations to come.

Chapter 1: The Caravan

The adventure begins in a northbound caravan rolling over bumpy roads. The characters have joined the caravan on an expedition to capture the last owlbear in existence, recently sighted in the Mosswood, an ancient forest sixteen days' travel north of the nearest trade settlement. For their participation in this expedition, each character has been promised **500 gp** upon delivery. The journey has been underway for five days and has been relatively uneventful so far.

If you'd like to transport this caravan and its destination to any other setting, feel free to do so, as long as the forest remains ancient and mysterious, and the core conceit—that owlbears have been driven to the very edge of extinction—is respected.

CARAVAN ENCOUNTERS

On the northbound journey to the Mosswood, the characters find bumpy roads but few hazards. Choose or roll for at least three encounters on the Northbound Caravan Encounters table—at least one should be *The Sending Wolf*, *All that Glitters and Croaks*, or *Sycamore's Request*, as these are longer, more involved encounters.

Character Introductions. If the characters haven't introduced themselves before joining the caravan, you can use the *Completely Inedible!*, *Dizzying Downpour*, or *Gnoll Creek Bridge* encounters as an opportunity to get them acquainted with each other while on the road. You can also use these encounters later to spice up the northbound journey, even once the characters are introduced.

Northbound Caravan Encounters

d6 Encounter

- 1 Dizzying Downpour
- 2 Completely Inedible!
- 3 Gnoll Creek Bridge
- 4 The Sending Wolf
- 5 All that Glitters and Croaks
- 6 Sycamore's Request

DIZZYING DOWNPOUR

A sudden squall overtakes the caravan, forcing the characters to dive into a cave for shelter. Read or paraphrase the following:

The gray storm clouds that have been tailing your caravan all morning fulfill their promise early, dumping their ominous cargo in a heavy spring storm. Rain drives hard into your eyes and soaks the ground until forward progress becomes impossible. You all take shelter in a nearby cave. You spot a nearby cave and dive in to take shelter and wait out the downpour.

With the characters gathered in a cave and the rainfall outside carrying on indefinitely, they have little else to do but build a fire using a small amount of dry firewood and mingle.

If the characters don't already know each other, have them introduce themselves, describe what they look like, and explain why they have joined the northward expedition to capture the last owlbear.

If the characters have already been introduced, each player can opt to tell a story from their character's past to other players at the table. Other players can respond with a story from their pasts. Each character who participates gains **Inspiration**.

The rain finally lets up after each character has shared some information about themselves.

COMPLETELY INEDIBLE!

The characters literally can't stomach the food prepared by the caravan's terrible dwarven chef. Read or paraphrase the following:

For days, the dwarven cook's meals have gotten worse and worse. You couldn't take more than a bite of the "stew" he brewed up today—it had literal rocks in it! Other folks in the caravan are doubled over from hunger or from the stomach pains of eating it. This cracks it: you'll have to fend for yourselves.

The dwarven chef, **Gormun Gravelspice**, due to limited rations, has resorted to some old clan recipes that are practically inedible to non-dwarves.



If a character chooses to choke down the “pumice stew,” a **DC 17 Constitution saving throw** is necessary to prevent the poisoned condition, which lasts until after the character’s next encounter. The other characters resolve to cook a meal of their own, using whatever they can find, hunt, or gather.

Ask each player how they participate in finding ingredients or otherwise preparing the meal. If the characters don’t already know each other, have them introduce themselves and describe how they use their adventuring skills to help prepare the meal. Any course of action requires a successful ability check. Typical checks include:

- » A **DC 14 Wisdom (Survival) check** tracks and hunts a rabbit or squirrel.
- » A **DC 14 Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Survival) check** gathers berries or wild root vegetables.
- » A **DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) check** digs through the caravan’s stores of food and finds some stale but edible rations.
- » A **DC 14 Charisma check** assembles the ingredients into a palatable meal. A character with proficiency in chef’s utensils has proficiency on this check.

If the characters succeed on three ability checks to prepare the meal, they assemble a palatable stew. Each character that helped prepare and eat the meal gains **Inspiration**.

GNOLL CREEK BRIDGE

An unassuming bridge turns into a deathtrap for the caravan. Read or paraphrase the following:

The miles have started to blend together as you trek northward through abandoned farmsteads and remote villages. That’s probably why you didn’t look twice at the rickety bridge over Gnoll Creek. The lead wagon swept through easily enough, but the bridge let out an unsettling groan upon receiving the final wagon, the one mounted with a towering, ten-foot tall iron cage. Suddenly, you hear a board snap and watch the cage wagon list to one side! The bridge is collapsing!

The characters are the only members of the expedition on the bridge as the cage wagon starts to fall through the timbers, threatening a 20-foot plunge into the waters below. **Roll initiative.**

Pushing the wagon forward requires a **DC 14 group Strength (Athletics) check**. Characters that wish to participate in the check must take the Ready action to push simultaneously on initiative count 0. If a character can help in another way, such as by casting the *mending* cantrip on a board or assisting the horses pulling the wagon, they grant advantage to another character making the check.

The wagon continues to snap the bridge’s boards as it rolls forward, and makes it across after **three successful DC 14 group Strength (Athletics) checks**. Three failures cause the bridge itself to collapse and splash into Gnoll Creek. Recovering the wagon from such a fate takes all day and imposes a level of exhaustion on each character that lasts until after their next encounter.

THE SENDING WOLF

The road descends to lower ground as it approaches a thick swamp. Read or paraphrase the following:

The northbound route to the Mosswood leads the caravan into the depths of a sickly-smelling swamp, where hanging moss and dense trees muffle the sounds of your travel into an eerie silence.

"It floods like this every year," Neth grumbles, "We should have missed it, but the rainy season came a few weeks early."

The road peeks only a few inches above the stagnant water, and sinks into mud every quarter mile. As you work to free the cage wagon from another muddy patch, you realize the road up ahead is swallowed in a field of creeping fungi and choking vines.

The usual routes through this part of the forest are washed out. No matter which route the characters take through the swamp's center, the wagons will make very slow progress and move 20 feet each round.

As the caravan sets out into the swamp, characters with a **passive Perception score of 11 or higher** spot a white wolf trudging through the brackish water a hundred feet in front of the caravan. Unbeknownst to the party, the wolf is an **okuri-ōkami**, a guiding spirit that is indistinguishable from a normal wolf. A **DC 13 Wisdom (Insight) check** realizes that the wolf has carefully matched the caravan's sluggish pace. The wolf departs if it is attacked, approached, or shooed. Unless someone has attempted to harm it, the wolf returns and resumes walking in front of the caravan. **Melville Bannermore**, the caravan master, is superstitious by nature and advises the party to leave it alone; **Neth**, the caravan's tracker and guide, suggests that someone take a potshot with an arrow.

SHRIEKER (Medium Plant) CR 0

HP 13 AC 5 Speed 0

Str -5 Dex -5 Con +0 Int -5 Wis -4 Cha -5

Condition Immunities blinded, deafened, frightened
Senses blindsight 30 ft. (blind beyond this radius)

Shriek (Reaction). The shrieker emits a loud shriek when a creature comes within 30 ft., and continues to shriek for 1d4 rounds.

After about an hour of travel in the swamp, the caravan encounters a shrieker. Read or paraphrase the following:

An ear-piercing screech erupts from just above the muddy waterline ahead of the caravan, and an instant later, a splashing, thundering mass of wood and vines charges toward the caravan from the east.

Roll initiative. The **shrieker** is making enough noise to attract a **shambling mound** from its den nearly 200 feet to the east of the caravan. Create a **countdown timer** visible to the players and **set it to 3**. This represents the number of rounds until the shambling mound reaches the caravan. A **DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Survival) check** recalls the mound is blind beyond a 60-foot radius. If a shrieker is making noise or the shambling mound has taken damage since the end of its turn, the shambling mound uses its turn to Dash toward the caravan and the **timer decreases by 1**. Otherwise, the mound is too far away from the caravan to perceive it and hides beneath the mud on its turn. When the **timer reaches 0**, the mound is 60 feet away from the caravan and is capable of perceiving the characters without the aid of a shrieker, allowing it to fight in earnest.

SHAMBLING MOUND (Large Plant) CR 5

HP 136 AC 15 Speed 20 (swim)

Str +4 Dex -1 Con +3 Int -3 Wis +0 Cha -3

Resistances cold, fire
Immunities lightning
Condition Immunities blinded, deafened, exhaustion
Senses blindsight 60 ft. (blind beyond this radius)
Lightning Absorption. Instead of taking lightning damage, the mound regains hit points equal to the lightning damage dealt.

Multiattack. 2 Slams.

Slam. Melee: +7 to hit, **13 (2d8 + 4)** bludge. If both Slams hit a target, target is **Grappled** (escape **DC 14**) and the mound uses Engulf.

Engulf. A grappled target becomes **Blinded**, **Restrained**, and unable to breathe. **DC 14 Con save** at the start of the mound's turns. **Failure: 13 (2d8 + 4)** bludge. Can only Engulf one target.



On a character's turn, they can use their action to attempt to lead the caravan further into the swamp (away from the shambling mound) with a **DC 17 Wisdom (Survival) check**. If a character directs the caravan to follow the white wolf, this check has advantage. On a failure, the character alerts another hidden **shrieker**, which rolls initiative and uses its Shriek to alert the shambling mound. On a successful check, the caravan proceeds 20 feet further into the swamp.

After a total of three successful checks, or when the characters defeat the shambling mound, the caravan reaches the road on the far side of the swamp and escapes the field of shriekers. The wolf vanishes by the time the caravan leaves the swamp.

Once the caravan is safe, Melville Bannermore lights his pipe and opines about the strange wolf the party encountered in the swamp. Perhaps the wolf was actually a guiding spirit, an **okuri-ōkami**? It was able to traverse the swamp undetected, so it might have laid a path for the caravan to follow.

ALL THAT GLITTERS AND CROAKS

As the caravan travels through a field of tall grass, a character with a **passive Perception score of 13 or higher** (or an NPC traveling with the caravan, such as **Neth**) spots something glimmering in the grass. Read or paraphrase the following:

A golden twinkle catches your eye in the tall, swaying grass. On a lark you step a few feet off the road and reach down to find a human finger made of solid gold discarded in the dirt.

The golden finger is worth at least **10 gp**, potentially more if it is an art item of some sort, but its providence impossible to discern. A **DC 11 Wisdom (Medicine) check** determines that the finger is anatomically accurate, down to the broken bone and roughly-severed flesh at the end of the appendage. Furthermore, a **DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check** reveals that the finger was simply left here, not buried, and only for a few days.

A **DC 11 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation) check** reveals a few gold flakes leading away—the beginning of a trail! Before the party can set off in pursuit, **Melville Bannermore**, the caravan master, exclaims that the finger is likely caused by a **midas toad**, and offers the party and caravan a reward of **1,500 gp** to track it down and capture it alive. A **DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) check** recalls that a midas toad is a rare golden amphibian with the ability to transmute anything it touches into gold, which it then consumes.

Neth, the caravan's resident tracker, attends the party and grants advantage on Wisdom (Survival) checks made to track the midas toad. A **DC 13 group Wisdom (Survival) check** follows the trail of gold flecks for about a mile through the field and to the edge of a pond. Upon arriving at the pond, a **DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation) check** spots a golden leg worth **200 gp** covered in scum at the bottom of the pond, confirming that the toad is nearby.

Searching the pond's edge for the toad requires a **DC 18 Wisdom (Survival) check** (Neth doesn't grant advantage on this check). If a character fails this check, they accidentally touch the midas toad while overturning its stone and must make a **DC 12 Constitution saving throw**, as per the golden toad's Midas Touch trait. On a success, the character safely spots the toad. **Roll initiative.**

MIDAS TOAD (Small Elemental) CR 3

HP 77 **AC** 15 **Speed** 20 (burrow)

Str +3 **Dex** +1 **Con** +2 **Int** -4 **Wis** +1 **Cha** -4

Condition Immunities blinded, deafened, frightened
Midas Touch. A creature that touches the toad: **DC 12 Con save.** *Failure:* Target is **Restrained** and begins turning into gold. It repeats the save at the end of its next turn. *Second Failure:* Target is **Petrified** in gold.

Bite. *Melee:* **+5** to hit, **7 (1d8 + 3)** pierc. + **5 (1d10)** poison, and the target is subjected to Midas Touch.

The midas toad may attempt to flee once it is aware of the characters. A **DC 16 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check** (made at disadvantage if a character has harmed the golden toad) offers the toad 1 gp. On a success, the toad will move up to its speed to eat the coin on its turn, potentially falling into a trap.

If the characters kill the toad or it escapes into the woods, proceed to Fool's Gold. If they knock it out or capture it, proceed to *Toad in Tow*.

Fool's Gold

When the party returns to the caravan, Melville curses in frustration at the wasted time, and starts the caravan moving again. Until the characters finally arrive at the Mosswood, Melville takes every opportunity to grumble about the literal tons of gold that they might be enjoying if they had captured the toad alive.

Toad in Tow

The party has successfully captured a golden toad, and will soon have a near-infinite supply of gold at their fingertips! When they return to the caravan, read or paraphrase the following:

With the toad in tow, Bannermore exclaims in delight and dances clumsily at the money that they're sure to make. Hoisting the wooden cage with the toad, the caravan master tosses you a heavy bag of gold coins and freezes with a pained expression. A golden sheen spreads from his fingers, where the toad has brushed against him, freezing him entirely in gold within a few moments.

Caravan members rush to grab the statue as it lists to one side, but the cage slips free of its golden grip, breaking as it hits the ground, allowing the toad to escape.

Bannermore tossed the promised **1,500 gp** to the party before being unceremoniously transmuted into gold. Shortly thereafter, **Sofia Fontan**, the caravan's quartermaster, takes charge of the expedition. Rather than continuing northward, however, she announces that the first order of business is to reverse Bannermore's golden petrification, even if it means doubling back to Priya the alchemist. A **DC 13 Intelligence (Arcana or Nature) check** understands that only a *greater restoration* spell, or similar magic can reverse such transmutation magic.

A **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation) check** discovers the following among Bannermore's effects:

- » A *potion of lesser restoration*
- » Bannermore's travel diary

Rummaging through Bannermore's travel diary of the area discovers mention of a hot spring that had healed the pain in his joints, along with a rough map of where it could be found. Furthermore, an entry from the last northward expedition details Bannermore's encounter with a hermit (potentially "magical folk" as the diary calls it) whom the caravan master befriended.

The party can reverse Bannermore's golden petrification (and the petrification of any other characters similarly transmuted) in a number of ways, and might use any of the following methods:

Restorative Hot Spring

If the characters opt to try using the hot springs, a successful **DC 14 Wisdom (Survival) check** follows the roughly-sketched route in Bannermore's travel diary. The hot spring is guarded by a **plesiosaurus** hiding in the water, and will attack creatures who attempt to use it. Submerging Bannermore's body into the hot spring grants the benefits of *greater restoration*, but splashing the water on him isn't enough.

PLESIOSAURUS (Large Beast) CR 2

HP 68 AC 13 Speed 20 (40 swim)

Str +4 Dex +2 Con +3 Int -4 Wis +1 Cha -3

Bite. *Melee (Reach)*: +6 to hit, 14 (3d6 + 4) pierc.

Finding the Hermit

Attempting to locate the hermit mentioned in Bannermore's travel diary is no mean feat, but a **DC 14 Intelligence check** traces the preceding entries in the diary and reconstructs his route. Following this route brings the characters to a modest hut at the foot of a mountain, occupied by a septuagenarian halfling named **Erma** (*she/her*), who is secretly a **couatl** in disguise.

The hermit understands the characters' intentions and Bannermore's predicament (and indeed, even knows what the characters are thinking moments before they speak). However, the hermit demands at least one of the characters performs a small deed for them before reversing Bannermore's petrification: bringing a bundle of flowers and herbs to a shrine at the peak of the mountain, a grueling one-day trek. Doing so requires three consecutive **DC 13 Strength (Athletics) checks**. Failing a check results in a fall down the mountain path, dealing 3d6 bludgeoning damage. Alternatively, a character attempting the trek can simply toss the bundle of flowers into a ravine and lie about reaching the summit.

The delivery to the shrine is intended as a simple test of conviction and good intentions. If a character completes the delivery, or fails and is honest about such failure, the disguised couatl casts *greater restoration* on Bannermore and any other petrified characters.

DOCTORING UP A POTION

Though the characters don't have a *potion of greater restoration*, a **DC 14 Intelligence (Arcana or herbalism kit) check** realizes that, with the right ingredients, it may be possible to strengthen the *potion of lesser restoration* from Bannermore's pack. Specifically, the party will require the roots of a *wyin tree*, a rare plant known to grow where fairies dwell.

Searching out the tree with a **DC 15 group Wisdom (Survival) or Intelligence (Nature) check** brings the party to the edge of a Fey Bridge, at which a **dödó** (see the *Book of Extinction* for statistics), a **satyr**, an **awakened mouse**, and an **awakened rabbit** are having a tea party. The **dödó** invites the party to join them, and begins to jabber on about local Feywild politics. A **DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check** convinces someone from the tea party to direct the party to a nearby *wyin tree* from which to harvest the roots.

BACKTRACK TO PRIYA

The simplest method to reverse Bannermore's petrification is to reverse the caravan and return to the alchemist Priya Saran, who can brew a potion of greater restoration in around 24 hours. The alchemist is mortified at the loss of time, however, and laments that the owlbear might move on before the caravan reaches the Mosswood! If the party opts to travel back to Priya's tower, present an additional Caravan Encounter on their return trip north. Furthermore, consult the Off to a Late Start sidebar during *Chapter 2: The Hunt*.

SYCAMORE'S REQUEST

As the caravan sleeps, one of the characters is visited by a strange vision of a green woman. Pick a character that would be sympathetic to the plight of a forest spirit and read or paraphrase the following:

After a long day of travel, you unfurl your bedroll and fall asleep in your small tent. A sound like wind through the trees awakens you.

Perhaps you're half-asleep, or perhaps you're in the throes of a vivid dream. An enchanting woman with green skin sits at your side, brushing her hands through your hair and humming a quiet, unplaceable melody. When the strangeness of your midnight visitor dawns upon you, you open your mouth to speak, and she silences you with a shush. You dutifully quiet.

"Find me," the green woman whispers. And you suddenly know she is westward. You awaken in your bed with no sign of the woman, but her unplaceable melody echoes in your ears.

Unless the character is immune to being charmed, they were magically charmed overnight by a visiting **dryad** who requested the character travel westward to visit her. The character isn't aware of being charmed, but is instead quietly obsessed with the green woman and the idea to travel westward to meet her. This obsession lasts for 24 hours.

A **DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) check** determines that, if the vision was real, it might have been a visiting fey spirit. However, it's not clear if the vision was anything more than a dream. The other party members don't need to attend the charmed character, but it would be wiser to travel in a group.

To temporarily leave the caravan and travel westward, the characters need to sway **Melville Bannermore**, the caravan master, with a **DC 13 Wisdom (Deception or Persuasion) check**. Unbeknownst to the party, Bannermore is a superstitious type and believes he was visited by a fey creature in his youth. If the characters disclose the real reason they wish to temporarily leave the caravan, they have advantage on this check. Bannermore consults his map and decides that the caravan will proceed north without the party, as long as they catch up by tomorrow morning. The characters can also slip away from the caravan with a **DC 13 group Dexterity (Stealth) check**, but folks will eventually realize they've abandoned their posts as caravan guards. The caravan was trekking through farmland and open plains when the

character was visited, so detouring off the road and finding it again isn't a challenging feat.

Vague magical effects direct the party to the dryad's tree. After the party starts traveling in a westerly direction for two hours, the charmed character can make a **DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check** to hear a bluebird singing a familiar, unplaceable melody. The bird perches on a nearby shrub and flutters a few feet at a time to ensure the party follows. If the party fails to notice the bird or follow it, an unusual breeze catches a number of leaves, causing them to flutter in the desired direction.

Eventually, the party arrives at an abandoned farmstead presided over by a gnarled sycamore tree. Read or paraphrase the following:

At the center of a distended field, the husk of a farmhouse stands next to a wide, gnarled sycamore tree. The house is missing its door and windows. The grass around it has died. As if on cue, a light rain begins to drizzle on the scene.

The 20-foot square farmhouse has been abandoned for nearly a year, as a **gorgon** has taken up residence within it. The metal bull creature started to rust, and sought out a place devoid of rain for its lair. After petrifying and devouring the residents of this house, the gorgon found such a haven.

As the characters approach the house, a **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check** spots an odd, sinister clue next to the path: a statue of a cat with an arched back and puffed tail, frozen in a hiss. A further **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation) check** discovers hoof prints that a character with proficiency in Animal Handling will recognize as belonging to a bull.

A **DC 14 group Dexterity (Stealth) check** approaches the farmhouse without the gorgon hearing. If alerted, the gorgon charges out from the farmhouse, surprising the party, and unleashes its Petrifying Breath. If the characters approach quietly, they instead surprise the gorgon. While outside the farmhouse, the gorgon has disadvantage on Dexterity saving throws, as its rusted metal skin scrapes together when wet.

GORGON (Large Monstrosity) CR 5

HP 114

AC 19

Speed 40

Str +5 Dex +0 Con +4 Int -4 Wis +1 Cha -2

Condition Immunities petrified

Trampling Charge. If the gorgon moves 20 ft. and hits with a Gore attack, **DC 16 Str. Failure:** knocked Prone, then extra Hooves attack against the target.

Gore. Melee: +8 to hit, 18 (2d12 + 5) pierc.

Hooves. Melee: +8 to hit, 16 (2d10 + 5) bludg.

Petrifying Breath (Recharge 5–6). 30-foot cone: **DC 13 Con save. Failure: Restrained** and begins turning into stone. It repeats the save at the end of its next turn. **Second Failure: Petrified.**

When the characters defeat the gorgon, read or paraphrase the following:

As the metal monstrosity falls, the sun pierces the clouds and the rainfall ceases. The sycamore tree that towered over the small farmhouse unfurls as if a tension were released, causing it to stand up straight and fill its boughs with leaves. Suddenly, in a split in the sycamore's trunk, you spy the face of the green skinned woman from your dream, now cloaked in the unearthly beauty of a dryad. She smiles and fades into her tree.

If any characters were petrified by the gorgon, the dryad casts *greater restoration* to free them. Inside the farmhouse, a **DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation) check** finds the shattered remains of at least three petrified people and **120 gp**. Additionally, one of the statue remnants bears a *ring of protection*, which evidently did little to dissuade the gorgon's petrification.

Lastly, a **DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation) check** discovers a *staff of healing* lodged in the branches of the sycamore tree. Unlike other staves, this staff can be attuned by any creature, and has a number of charges equal to the character level of the attuned creature (minimum 1).

BONFIRE NIGHT

The caravan reaches the edge of the Mosswood just before sundown and it's decided that the expedition should rest for the evening before continuing onward. Melville Bannermore, the caravan master, wisely concludes that there will be no more downtime until the captured owlbear is safely transported to the alchemist, and so encourages the caravan to rest. Read or paraphrase the following:

The edge of the Mosswood, a towering wall of green, is in sight by dusk. Instead of continuing onward, the caravan breaks for the night and lights a mighty bonfire at the center of the encampment. The few travelers that brought mead or wine crack open their bottles, as this will be the last real moment of respite until the journey's end. Once the expedition's quarry is captured, the southward return trip will be nonstop.

The wagons form a rough approximation of a circle with a scattering of tents, horses, and bedrolls. As the dwarven chef produces a fiddle and plays a merry tune, the camp evokes the warmth of a tavern of rowdy outdoorsmen before a hunt.

The party has the night off before the owlbear hunt begins. They can freely explore the camp, meet any remaining members of the expedition and let off some steam. The camp is divided into the following locations:

- » **Bannermore's Tent.** The caravan master, Melville Bannermore, has a double-sized tent. Its front flap is open, and it is lit from within by a cool, magical light.
- » **Bonfire.** The caravan drivers have erected a tall bonfire in the center of the camp, with a five-foot plume of fire illuminating much of the space.
- » **Cage Wagon.** Some of the hunters and guides are roughhousing near the enormous cage wagon brought by the expedition.
- » **Distant Campfire.** Quite apart from your expedition, you spy a small campfire built on a hill no more than half of a mile away.

After the characters have explored each of these areas, they can return to their tents for the night. Proceed to *Chapter 2: The Hunt*.

BANNERMORE'S TENT

The caravan master, **Melville Bannermore**, is enjoying a quiet evening in his tent before the hunt begins. Read or paraphrase the following:

As you stick your head in Bannermore's tent, you find the caravan master sitting cross-legged arranging tarot-like cards in front of him. With a kindly nod, he invites you in.

Inside the caravan master's tent, Bannermore is running a card game called *Ballad of Suits* for anyone that would like to play. This game is played with a special deck of illustrated cards. In it, each player is dealt one illustrated card from each suit and must use the illustrations to construct a story told in 1 minute.

A player rolls a d12 for each column on the following table and uses the results as elements of a story. If the story is good enough, the player receives **Inspiration**.

| d12 | Wands | Cups | Swords | Symbols |
|-----|---------------|--------------|------------|--------------|
| 1 | Princess | Conflict | Key | Castle |
| 2 | Merchant | Love | Cauldron | Forest |
| 3 | Thief | Celebration | Crown | Graveyard |
| 4 | Priest | Wealth | Quill | Waste |
| 5 | Shepherd | Charity | Dagger | Cave |
| 6 | Warrior | Greed | Flame | Crossroads |
| 7 | Beggar | Imprisonment | Marionette | Dungeon |
| 8 | Wizard | Journey | Chain | Hell |
| 9 | Tax Collector | Ceremony | Book | Tavern |
| 10 | Hermit | War | Wand | At Sea |
| 11 | Dragon | Despair | Mirror | Bridge |
| 12 | King | Death | Skull | Strange Land |

BONFIRE

At the center of the encampment a mighty bonfire rages, casting a flickering light over the circle of tents and wagons. When the characters arrive here, read or paraphrase the following:

An oversized bonfire at the center of the encampment disgorges a plume of fire, lighting much of the space, but warming only a select radius; closer and the firelight burns the little hairs on your arms, further and the cool night air dominates. At precisely that middle point, a table of gear and provisions have been arranged in the flickering half light. The caravan's quartermaster, Sofia Fontan, counts each item meticulously against the expedition's manifest.

The quartermaster, **Sofia Fontan**, has arranged provisions and gear for the upcoming hunt in organized piles around the bonfire. However, due to a few caravan guards missing the departure window, she has excess equipment, which she is happy to sell, as noted on the following table:

| Item | Cost | Weight |
|----------------------|--------|---------|
| Blowgun Needles (50) | 1 gp | 1 lb. |
| Hunting Trap | 5 gp | 25 lb. |
| Explorer's Pack | 10 gp | 59 lb. |
| Grappling Hook | 2 gp | 4 lb. |
| Muzzle | 10 gp | 6 lb. |
| Net | 1 gp | 3 lb. |
| Piton | 5 cp | 1/4 lb. |
| Poison, basic (vial) | 100 gp | — |
| Shovel | 2 gp | 5 lb. |

An explorer's pack contains a backpack, a bedroll, a mess kit, a tinderbox, 10 torches, 10 days of rations, a waterskin, and 50 feet of hempen rope.

CAGE WAGON

One of the people traveling with the caravan is trying to find a way to pass the time while also honing their hunting skills. Read or paraphrase the following:

At the edge of the encampment stands the cage wagon, which, as its moniker suggests, is fitted with a 10-foot-tall iron cage to house the expedition's owlbear quarry. Nearby, you spy some of the hunters and trackers rushing about in the darkness, throwing things at each other and falling roughly to the ground when hit.

Neth, the caravan's expert wayfinder and guide to the Mosswood, hangs off the bars of the cage, swinging no fewer than four sets of bolas in their hands. Raising an eyebrow, Neth says, "Bolas tag. You in?"

Zelkov Neth, the resident Mosswood tracker, packed an excessive number of bolas for the expedition and has started playing "bolas tag" for small amounts of gold with the other caravaneers.

If a character is interested in playing bolas tag, they ante **25 gp** and gain 3 sets of bolas. A bolas is a simple ranged weapon with the Thrown (range 20/60) property. A creature hit by a bolas falls prone and is out of the round. A creature can only throw one bolas on its turn, even if it could normally attack more than once. Each competitor in a game of bolas (two or more), **rolls initiative**. Neth joins the game with two other hunters; each has 14 AC and makes their attack and initiative rolls with a +5 bonus.

The game progresses until only one competitor is left standing or every competitor has run out of bolases. In the latter case, standing competitors play follow-up rounds to determine a winner. The winner gains all of the anted gold and receives **Inspiration**. If Neth loses, they collect their bolas and stomp off back to their tent for the night.

DISTANT CAMPFIRE

Any character with a **passive Perception score of 12 or higher** notices a small bonfire flickering on a hill about half of a mile away. If the party decides to hike over to the bonfire, read or paraphrase the following:

You detect the aroma of grilling meat as you approach the distant campfire. Sure enough, an odd-matched quartet of gruff adventuring types sit astride an open fire cooking a freshly-hunted boar. Wordlessly, an imposing bugbear bearing a greataxe at her side gestures for you to sit and join them.

Bramblethorn Company is a small party of adventurers also traveling north into the Mosswood tomorrow. Sensing a kinship with the party, they invite the characters to share in their roast boar (before Braugili the Bugbear eats half of it).

If asked, any member of Bramblethorn will report that they have been hired to map the forest (an alibi close enough to their true purpose—to hunt the last owlbear—to pass *zone of truth*). However, a **DC 17 Wisdom (Insight) check** indicates that Bramblethorn might not be telling the whole story. Furthermore, Bramblethorn refuses to join the caravan's northbound journey, as their route takes them in a more westerly direction.

Attacking Bramblethorn. Bramblethorn Company is a group of appropriately paranoid veteran adventurers. If the characters attack any member of Bramblethorn, **Erasmus** instantly activates two prepared magical traps: the first is a harmless wave of force that pushes each creature other than members of Bramblethorn Company back 15 feet, and the second is a *tiny hut* spell centered on the bonfire, safely encapsulating Bramblethorn in a protective dome of force. Bramblethorn rests in this dome until morning and teleports away, if necessary.

The party can speak to the four members of Bramblethorn together or separately.

BRAUGILI THE BUGBEAR

The bugbear barbarian, **Braugili**, maintains a furled brow and rarely talks to those outside of Bramblethorn Company. She maintains that solemnity as she tends to the food at the fire, rotating it, seasoning it, and habitually cutting portions off for her fellow company members. As the characters are accustomed to Gormun Gravelspice's dwarven cooking, this meal seems heavenly. A **DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check** convinces Braugili to share a potion of the meal, granting 2d6 temporary hit points when the character next finishes a long rest.

DOUR DELANEY

The half-elf cleric, **Delaney Pasma**, bears a grim expression at all times and speaks in a monotone voice. Despite this, they appear to be a cleric of some repute, adorned with multiple holy symbols of different faiths. Delaney will happily discuss the finer points of comparative religion with any character that has proficiency in the Religion skill.

Furthermore, Delaney is happy to offer her services as a spellcaster for a modest price. She will cast any of the following spells for the characters for 25 gp each: *create or destroy water*, *cure wounds*, *identify*, *lesser restoration*, and *sending*.

ERASMUS THE GREEN

Having already drunk a few glasses of wine, the young-looking human wizard **Erasmus Bax**, corners an arcane spellcaster or character with proficiency in the Arcana skill and lectures them at length about the important distinctions between arcana and alchemy—and how alchemy is plainly a con man's craft, as opposed to true magic. Nodding and agreeing with Erasmus's take on alchemy allows a character to escape after only ten minutes, but making even one counterpoint dooms a character to an hour of boring conversation, during which time he parades out a series of arcane focuses and crystals as proof of arana's so-called superiority.

KEEN-EYED KÄTHE

The amiable tiefling archer, **Käthe Fittkau**, keeps the conversation on other characters, asking them penetrating questions about why they have chosen to pursue a life of adventuring, what they truly want from this lifestyle, and what they surmise as their greatest flaws. A character with a **passive Perception score of 14 or higher** detects that Käthe is analytically sizing them up with their questioning, while avoiding any personal questions.

After speaking to Käthe, any character with a **passive Perception score of 10 or lower** notices upon returning to their caravan's bonfire that they are missing **3d6 gp** from their possession.

CALLING IT A NIGHT

When the characters have finished exploring the various parts of the camp, they can bed down for the night and prepare for *Chapter 2: The Hunt*.

Chapter 2: The Hunt

The caravan has proceeded into the Mosswood, an old growth forest of towering oaks. Read or paraphrase the following:

The cool, verdant canopy of the Mosswood stretches overhead and gnarled oaks encircle you like an army of moss-cloaked giants. Though men rarely venture into these woods, you aren't met by a lonely silence: instead, the woods emanate a low cacophony of buzzing insects, croaking frogs, chirping birds, and snarling predators. Somewhere in the far distance of this noise, you might hear a growling hoot of an owlbear.

A **DC 12 Wisdom (Survival) check** notices faint tracks that resemble those of a large bear's, but with protruding claws. However, a **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check** also notices a reflective line streaking through the canopy above. Perhaps a large spider dwells here as well?

PREPARING FOR THE HUNT

The caravan soon finds a clearing and sets up a temporary camp. Read or paraphrase the following:

As the lead wagon arrives in a large clearing, Bannermore issues a hand gesture and the caravan springs into action. Every member busies themselves with specific duties, as per a plan devised by Priya the alchemist herself. Meanwhile, Bannermore and Fontan erect a small tent to oversee the sprawl of work.

The party has no specific directions for how to assist in preparations for the hunt. If asked, **Melville Bannermore** indicates that the party's role is for the hunt itself, but they're welcome to help everyone prepare. The characters can assist in any of the following areas:

- » **Neth**, the tracker, has laid out a trio of incomplete maps, and attempts to extrapolate the actual shape of the Mosswood and how it might be explored. A **DC 15 Intelligence or Wisdom (Survival) check** helps construct a working map with very few gaps. Assisting with the maps affects *Stage 1: The Pursuit!*
- » **Sofia Fontan**, the quartermaster, opens a satchel with an array of animal call whistles, ranging from ducks, to deer, to bears. Because nobody has heard an owlbear's call in decades, constructing a convincing call using a combination of others is a daunting task. A **DC 18 Intelligence (Nature) or Charisma (Performance) check** combines an impression of an owl with a bear call to achieve a close approximation of an owlbear's call. Assisting with the call affects *Stage 1: The Pursuit!*
- » The cook, **Gormun Gravelspice**, is brewing something truly foul: his attempt at a musk to conceal a hunter's scent from the owlbear. It soon becomes clear that Gravelspice has no sense of smell. A **DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Medicine) check** brews up a modestly successful musk. Creating and applying a musk affects *Stage 2: The Bait!*
- » A group of diggers is excavating a 10-foot-deep, 15-foot diameter pit trap, large enough to contain the cage wagon. The digging is complicated by a tangle of thick roots just beneath the soil's surface. A **DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check** helps chop the roots with an ax and finish digging the hole. Assisting with the digging affects *Stage 3: The Snare!*
- » Once the open cage wagon is lowered into the hole, a convincing false top must be constructed over it, a task which proves challenging due to the hole's size. A **DC 15 Charisma (Deception) or Wisdom (Survival) check** helps camouflage the cover with leaves, branches, and soil, though it still sags somewhat. Assisting with the hole affects *Stage 3: The Snare!*

THE HUNT

Once the preparations for the hunt are complete, Bannermore calls the party over and explains the three-stage plan for the hunt:

Stage 1: The Pursuit! The party accompanies **Neth** the tracker to find the owlbear's nest without alerting it.

Stage 2: The Bait! Once the nest is found, the characters will lead the owlbear back to the clearing. To this end, the characters are given sackfuls of bait to encourage the owlbear to follow.

Stage 3: The Snare! At the clearing, all the party has to do is lure the owlbear into the oversized pit trap where the cage is buried. Then, they need only close the top of the cage.

Once the characters are ready to begin, proceed to *Stage 1: The Pursuit!*

STAGE 1: THE PURSUIT!

With a makeshift map and collection of animal calls, **Neth** and the characters set off into the Mosswood in search of the owlbear. Read or paraphrase the following:

Leaves crunch underfoot as you push deeper into the Mosswood. Wide, gnarled oak trees stand at irregular intervals, without so much as a break in the canopy in sight. As the name implies, mats of thick green moss cloak the landscape, enshrouding an otherwise rocky landscape of boulders, stones, and sudden crevices.



OFF TO A LATE START

If the caravan was significantly delayed in reaching the Mosswood, such as if it doubled back to Priya's tower during the *All That Glitters and Croaks* encounter, you can choose to impose disadvantage on 5 separate ability checks that players make during the hunt. These various difficulties arise from their tardiness, as the owlbear has had time to move its nest, recent rains have caused more mud, and the characters have already tired of their travel. Count down these disadvantage rolls in view of the players.

Because the Mosswood hasn't been mapped or fully explored, Neth relies on a collection of partial maps to begin tracking the owlbear. A **DC 16 Wisdom (Survival) check** uses the maps to avoid deep ravines that snake through the Mosswood on the way to the northern section of the forest where the owlbear was previously spotted. This is a **DC 12** check if the characters previously helped Neth assemble a more complete map.

On failed check, the party's expedition is halted by a steep ravine in the forest, which requires a successful **DC 13 Strength (Athletics) check** to cross using an impromptu rope swing. Failing this causes a character to plummet down into the *Ettercap Ravine*. Otherwise, the characters reach the northern section of the forest and are *On the Trail*.

ON THE TRAIL

Neth and the party are closing in on the owlbear! A **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception or Survival) check** finds several owlbear tracks snaking down a game trail. Because they overlap in both directions, it's clear that the owlbear frequents this path regularly. Some investigation reveals that one end of the trail leads toward the base of a lengthy ravine, while the other snakes toward higher ground. A **DC 17 Intelligence (Nature) check** assumes that the owlbear would have built its nest on higher ground. A failed check, by contrast, reckons that the owlbear built its nest in the ravine, similar to how many bears settle in caves. However, if the characters have already visited an *Ettercap Ravine*, they know that these areas are infested with giant spiders, and that the owlbear nest will be at higher ground.

Proceed to either the *Ettercap Ravine* or *Owlbear Nest* accordingly.

ETTERCAP RAVINE

Lengthy ravines such as this one snake beneath the canopy of the Mosswood, threatening to swallow unwary travelers whole. If the characters fall into one of these ravines or travel into one for several minutes, read or paraphrase the following:

A shallow creek plunges into this crack in the earth, which darkens to blackness after a dozen feet. Venturing forward, the ravine tightens on both sides and you sink deeper into the creek, eventually standing up to your knees in brisk water. Finally, you spot a white filament high above you. Dozens of them, glistening from the only light filtering between the cliffs. Something else dwells up there, silently slinking in the dark.

After proceeding into the ravine, it narrows down to a 10-foot wide gap between the cliffs and the shallow creek becomes difficult terrain. Any character with a **passive Perception score of 13 or higher** spots owlbear feathers wedged in the rocks. However, a character with a **passive Perception score of 17 or higher** also notices the near-silent web-walking of an **ettercap** and **four giant spiders** hiding above the party, ready to drop upon them.



ETTERCAP (Large Monstrosity, NE) CR 2

HP 44 AC 13 Speed 30 (climb)

Str+2 Dex +2 Con +1 Int -2 Wis +1 Cha -1

Spider Climb. Climb anywhere without ability checks.

Multiattack. 1 Bite, 1 Claws.

Bite. *Melee:* +4 to hit, 6 (1d8 + 2) slash + 4 (1d8) poison, and DC 11 Con save. *Failure:* Poisoned for 1 minute and can repeat the save at the end of each of its turns.

Claws. *Melee:* +4 to hit, 6 (1d8 + 2) pierc.

Web (Recharge 5-6). *Ranged (30/60):* +4 to hit.

Hit: **Restrained.** To escape, DC 11 Str check as an action. Web has AC 10, HP 5.

Roll initiative. If the characters fail to spot the ettercap, it and the spiders descend and surprise the party. The giant spiders and ettercap attempt to use their Web actions to restrain as many characters as possible during the first round of combat.

GIANT SPIDER (Large Beast) CR 1

HP 26 AC 14 Speed 30 (climb)

Str+2 Dex +3 Con +1 Int -4 Wis +0 Cha -3

Senses blindsight 10 ft.

Spider Climb. Climb anywhere without ability checks.

Bite. *Melee:* +5 to hit, 7 (1d8 + 3) pierc. and DC 11 Con save. *Failure:* 9 (2d8) poison. *Success:* Half.

Web (Recharge 5-6). *Ranged (30/60):* +5 to hit. *Hit:* **Restrained.** To escape, DC 12 Str check as an action. Web has AC 10, HP 5.

After defeating the spiders and ettercap, the characters can find dozens of bulbous, white egg sacks deeper in the ravine. These are laid at the water's edge near a widening of the creek, and many of them are missing large chunks, as if something has chewed on them. With a **DC 12 Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Survival) check**, a savvy character can harvest 3d6 giant spider eggs to use as bait in *Stage 2: The Bait!*

OWLBEAR NEST

Following the owlbear tracks up a game trail to higher ground, the characters find the owlbear's nest! Read or paraphrase the following:

Shorn tree limbs and logs have been arranged into a mound with a depression at its center. Inside, a boulder of gray feathers and fur heaves with each breath. The last owlbear: it's breathtaking. Even from this distance, the owlbear's size carries a natural magnificence, a mix of beauty and danger commanded only by an apex predator.

It doesn't yet notice you. For now, the owlbear appears serene, as much a part of the landscape as the moss or oaks.

The owlbear isn't initially aware of **Neth** and the characters. Its level of awareness—and antagonism—is reflected in the **Threat DC**, which **starts at 12**. The party's actions over the rest of the hunt can increase or decrease this DC. Track this DC in view of the players.

The party's goal is to lead the owlbear away from its nest and toward a pit trap in a faraway clearing. To this end, they can use a variety of tactics, including imitating mating calls, laying out bait, and outright antagonizing the owlbear. A selection of possible approaches are detailed below.

Furthermore, random impediments, as detailed on the Owlbear Complications table, might hinder the party. After each successful check to lead the owlbear away from its nest, roll on the Owlbear Complications table or pick one of the results.

Approach the Nest. The owlbear is fiercely protective of its nest, a fact which will become apparent if a character approaches it. A **DC 19 Dexterity (Stealth) check** reaches the side of the nest and sees within it without attracting the owlbear's ire. On a failure, **increase the Threat DC by 3**.

Bait. A character can lay out bait for the owlbear with a **DC 16 Dexterity (Stealth) or Wisdom (Survival) check**. This is a **DC 12** check if the characters previously harvested giant spider eggs from the *Ettercap Ravine*. A failure **increases the Threat DC by 1** and a success lures the owlbear closer to the trapped clearing.

Mating Calls. Using an existing animal call whistle and a **DC 16 Charisma (Performance) check**, a character can emulate an owlbear mating call. This is a **DC 12** check if the characters practiced the owlbear mating call with Sofia. A failure **increases the Threat DC by 1** and a success attracts the owlbear closer to the trapped clearing.

Flushing it Out. Using smoke, loud noises, or another tactic to scare the owlbear away from its nest requires a **DC 15 Charisma (Intimidation) check**. A failure **increases the Threat DC by 2**, whereas a success **increases the Threat DC by 1** while successfully moving it toward the trapped clearing.

Poking the Owlbear. Outright attacking or antagonizing the owlbear—directly or indirectly—causes it to fly into a rage and chase down the nearest character. **Increase the Threat DC by 2** and proceed directly to *Stage 2: The Bait!*

Owlbear Complications

d6 Complication

- 1 Neth loses their footing and lands roughly. A **DC 15 Dexterity (Stealth) check** assists Neth to their feet before the owlbear takes notice. On a failure, **increase the Threat DC by 1**.
- 2 Lured by the scent of bait, a deer casually walks into the owlbear's line of sight. A **DC 13 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check** quietly scares the deer away. On a failure, the owlbear takes notice and pounces on the unsuspecting deer. **Increase the Threat DC by 1** as it is motivated to protect its latest meal.
- 3 The owlbear starts walking directly toward where the party is hidden. A **DC 13 group Dexterity (Stealth) check** silently repositions the party. On a failure, **increase the Threat DC by 1**.
- 4 The owlbear simply loses interest in the bait. A **DC 13 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check** places bait near enough to catch the owlbear's attention. On a failure, **increase the Threat DC by 1** as it notices the bait tumble toward it.
- 5 The wind suddenly shifts direction, potentially alerting the owlbear to the party's location. A **DC 13 Wisdom (Survival) check** swiftly moves downwind or disguises the party's scent. On a failure, **increase the Threat DC by 1**.
- 6 One of the characters stumbles into a beehive! A **DC 15 Constitution check** endures stings that deal 1d4 piercing damage without making a sound. On a failure, **increase the Threat DC by 1** as the owlbear notices a yelp of pain.

After three successes to lure the owlbear, or **after the Threat DC increases to 15**, proceed to *Stage 2: The Bait!*

STAGE 2: THE BAIT!

The second stage of the hunt begins after the characters provoke the owlbear (intentionally or unintentionally), or after they have lured it down a forested hill and out of sight from its nest. The methodical process of luring the owlbear to the trapped clearing quickly breaks down into a panicked chase through the woods as the characters attempt to reach the caravan with their lives.

Read or paraphrase the following **only** if the characters have made three successful checks to lure the owlbear:

When the owlbear is at last following the trail of bait with some consistency, Neth creeps from their underbrush hiding place, draws a loaded blowgun, and fires a single dart with a quiet *thoomp*. As the dart embeds in the owlbear's side, its eyes snap wide in rage, forming perfect circles, and acquire Neth in an instant.



Next, read or paraphrase the following, regardless of how the characters arrived at this stage:

With an ear-piercing screech, the owlbear breaks into a four-legged sprint of thundering footfalls directly toward Neth. The hunter turns to run entirely too late and the owlbear dives atop them like a ton of bricks. A rumbling growl emanates from the shaggy beast as it paws the soil, readying itself to run you down as well.

Neth is unconscious, but the owlbear turns its attention to the remainder of the party, initiating a chase. If the players prefer to fight the owlbear, remind them that, unless they first lure the owlbear to the trapped clearing, it will escape before they can defeat it.

To participate in the chase, the characters must make a series of group ability checks against the owlbear's **Threat DC** and play through a chase in four phases. If at least half the group succeeds a group check, the whole group succeeds. If the characters fail a group ability check, they suffer the consequences listed in the phases below. Let characters substitute making a check by employing clever tactics, and be liberal when awarding advantage for particularly canny solutions.

If the characters helped Gormun Gravelspice brew up a musk to conceal their scent from the owlbear, each player gains a special instance of **Inspiration** which they can use to reroll an ability check. This Inspiration lasts only until the end of the chase.

PHASE 1: TANGLED THICKET

As the owlbear barrels toward the party, the characters meet a dense thicket of briars and vines. Each character contributes to the group ability check by making a **Constitution check** to force through the underbrush or an **Intelligence (Nature) check** to find a game trail or another natural bypass to the wall of thorny brush.

If the group ability check is a failure, the character with the lowest personal result takes 2d8 slashing damage as the owlbear rakes them with its claws.

PHASE 2: MUD!

The owlbear closes in, its claws slashing the air with each bound, just as the party meets a level pool of mud that swallows them to their waists. Each character contributes to the group ability check by making a **Strength (Athletics) check** to trudge through the mud or a **Dexterity (Acrobatics) check** to bound across patches of solid ground.

If the group ability check is a failure, the character with the lowest personal result takes 2d10 bludgeoning damage as the owlbear stomps them into the mud. They don't participate in the next stage of the chase.

PHASE 3: WEBBED RAVINE

Just as the characters gain ground on the owlbear, the path drops away in front of them as they meet another of the Mosswood's ravines. This one is infested by a colony of giant spiders and ettercaps, whose silken webs extend out of the mouth of the ravine and into the trees above. Each character contributes to the group ability check by making a **Strength check** to leap over the ravine through the strands of webbing, or by attempting to destroy a section of webbing with a melee weapon attack. The webbing has AC 10, 10 HP, vulnerability to slashing damage, and immunity to psychic and poison damage. Successfully destroying a section of webbing counts as a success (a result of 20), whereas missing an attack or failing to reduce a section to 0 hit points counts as a failure (a result of 5).

If the group ability check is a failure, the character with the lowest personal result plunges into the ravine and is entangled in a mass of webbing. They don't participate in the next stage of the chase.

PHASE 4: ROCKY GROUND

The clearing is in sight! The only thing separating the characters and the well hidden pit trap is a straightaway path of loose stones. Each character contributes to the group ability check by making a **Dexterity (Acrobatics) check** to avoid slipping along the path or a **Wisdom (Perception) check** to find an alternate route.

If the group ability check is a failure, the character with the lowest personal result takes 1d10 + 5 slashing damage as the owlbear hits them with a Beak attack.

ENDING THE CHASE

As the characters reach the trapped clearing, proceed to *Stage 3: The Snare!*

STAGE 3: THE SNARE!

The final stage of the hunt couldn't be simpler, at least on paper. The caravaneers have excavated and disguised a pit trap large enough to contain the entire cage wagon. All the characters must do is trick the owlbear into falling into the hole, and then close the top hatch of the cage before it escapes. Failing that, they could simply defeat it in battle and render it unconscious with a careful final blow.

Read or paraphrase the following:

Breathless and smelling of soil, you dash into the caravan's carefully-prepared clearing. Unbeknownst to the rampaging owlbear mere feet behind you, a large and carefully hidden pit trap awaits it in the center of this clearing, and a fence has been erected around the clearing's perimeter, camouflaged among the trees and foliage.

The clearing is a roughly 80-foot diameter circle, and the pit trap is a 10-foot-deep, 15-foot diameter hole at the clearing's center. As the characters enter, a wooden gate drops from the treeline, barring escape back down the path.

GREAT GRAY OWLBEAR (Large Monstrosity) CR 5

HP 114 AC 15 Speed 40

Str +5 Dex +2 Con +4 Int -4 Wis +2 Cha -2

Multiattack. Piercing Screech if available, then 1 Beak, 1 Claws.

Beak. *Melee:* +8 to hit, **10 (1d10 + 5)** pierc.

Claws. *Melee:* +8 to hit, **14 (2d8 + 5)** slash.

Piercing Screech (Recharge 5–6). Each creature within 20 ft.: **DC 15 Con save.** *Failure:* **18 (4d8)** thunder and **Deafened** and **Frightened** for 1 minute. Target repeats save at the end of each of its turns. *Success:* Half and not deafened or frightened.

Roll initiative. Any character within 30 feet of the owlbear can use an action to attempt a **DC 15 Charisma (Performance) or Wisdom (Animal Handling) check**, goading the owlbear into approaching and attacking on its turn, if doing so doesn't provoke opportunity attacks. This may position the owlbear close to the prepared pit, but it will only fall into it if a character succeeds on a **DC 17 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check** as an action. If the characters helped camouflage the cover of the pit trap, this is a **DC 14**.

ACCIDENTALLY KILLING THE OWLBEAR

The remainder of the adventure relies on the owlbear's survival, so you might want to intervene if a lethal attack, such as a ranged attack or a damage-dealing spell, reduces the owlbear to 0 hit points. You could cause the owlbear to begin make death saving throws, and require a **DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine) or Intelligence (Nature) check** to be stabilized.

However, it is also appropriate to end the adventure with such an accidental death. This story is intrinsically about the fragility of nature and the importance of conservation efforts. If the characters fail in this respect, they might earn a despicable reputation for their actions—villains for all time, who mercilessly slayed the last owlbear.

If the owlbear falls in the hole, a **DC 21 Strength (Athletics) check** closes the hatch on the cage within the hole, trapping the owlbear there. If the characters helped excavate the hole, this is a **DC 18**. (Note that the Help action can remedy the high DC.) If the hatch isn't closed, the owlbear leaps out of the cage and can't be tricked or goaded into the hole again. The only recourse is to battle the owlbear and knock it unconscious.

The characters should be careful not to damage the owlbear with ranged attacks or spells when it is near death, as it can only be rendered unconscious if a melee attack reduces it to 0 hit points. A **DC 15 Wisdom (Animal Handling, Medicine, or Perception) check** ascertains whether the owlbear has more than half of its hit points, less than half of its hit points, less than a quarter of its hit points, or less than 10 hit points.

When the characters defeat the owlbear or capture it in the pit trap, proceed to *After the Hunt*.

AFTER THE HUNT

Though the hunt didn't go exactly as planned, the last owlbear has been safely caught. Read or paraphrase the following:

An arrangement of pulleys, ropes, pack animals, and above all, brute strength, works to slowly inch the cage wagon out of the pit and back onto its wheeled platform. The owlbear within stomps, hoots, screeches, and roars—noises which reverberate in your chest.

Gormun Gravelspice is apparently also an expert in the dwarven art of moving stones, so the process of recovering the wagon and moving the owlbear is prolonged, but exceedingly safe. Meanwhile, the rest of the caravan disassembles the work of the clearing; when the caravan leaves, it will be as if it never arrived.

The caravan is ecstatic at a successful hunt, all except Neth, who stumbles back to camp, bruised and battered, and spends the evening sulking. While the caravan is packed back up and the clearing is being restored, the party can take a **short rest**.

Finally, while Sofia Fontan oversees the caravan's loading, **Melville Bannermore** pulls the characters aside for one additional task: someone must escort him to the owlbear's nest. The alchemist, Priya Saran, needs as many notes as possible on the owlbear's natural habitat, so it can be replicated in captivity. Only one character needs to volunteer for the task, but Bannermore might specifically ask the character with the highest Intelligence score to escort him.

No ability checks are required to retrace the party's steps back to the owlbear's nest. When Bannermore and the character or characters arrive back at the rest, read or paraphrase the following:

The evening sun casts streaks of gold through the Mosswood, whose oaks carve out pillars of shadow across the landscape. The owlbear's nest, a colossal construction of tree limbs and logs arranged in a great dish, takes on amber hues at this evening hour. As Bannermore takes notes on the nest's dimensions and structure, your eyes fall upon something astonishing: among a mat of shed feathers and leaves lies a smooth, white oval over a foot across. An owlbear egg!

The characters that first lay eyes on the owlbear egg gain **Inspiration**. Bannermore is gobsmacked, and after taking a few moments to recover, carefully retrieves the egg, wraps it in a bedroll, and gently carries it back to the caravan. There, Sofia improvises a surprisingly effective incubator in the back of the supply wagon and ensures that at least one caravan member keeps guard over it. The party can take a **long rest** and proceed to *Chapter 3: Dangerous Cargo*.

Chapter 3: Dangerous Cargo

Advance all player characters to 6th level

The caravan begins its southbound journey, the mother owlbear and egg in tow, back to the tower of alchemist Priya Saran. Though the plan is to retrace the caravan's route and avoid many of the previous obstacles, such as the swamp-flooded section of road, the characters will meet a new obstruction in the form of the murderous Bramblethorn Company, who seeks to kill the mother owlbear.

PAY DIRT

At the onset of the caravan's southbound journey, a set of familiar faces, the adventurers of Bramblethorn Company, meets the characters outside of the Mosswood and issues an attractive offer. Read or paraphrase the following:

With the cool morning air, the caravan sets off southward in high spirits, all except the owlbear which gnaws at the cage wagon's bars and swipes at anyone who draws too near. The creature is wild with malice, but settles somewhat once fed, which must be done regularly.

An hour after the caravan sets out, the lead wagon approaches a familiar set of four figures on the road: Bramblethorn Company, who stand at ease alongside a sizable treasure chest, blocking the road. Grumbling, Bannermore orders the caravan to halt, and steps out alongside you to approach the adventurers.

The four members of **Bramblethorn Company**—**Braugili** the bugbear barbarian, **Käthe Fittkau** the tiefling archer, **Delaney Pasma** the half-elf cleric, and **Erasmus Bax** the human wizard—greet the caravan with businesslike repose, and issue a proposal: they are willing to pay the entire contents of the treasure chest for the owlbear. This purportedly includes **30,000 gp**, a *flame tongue greatsword*, a *robe of scintillating colors*, a *necklace of fireballs*, and a *staff of fire*. Bramblethorn keeps their distance and refuses to let the party inspect the treasure more closely until they unhook the cage wagon from the caravan.

If asked, Bramblethorn Company has only sinister motives for the owlbear: Braugili intends to mount the owlbear's head on her wall, Käthe is being paid handsomely to bring the pelt back to the company financier, Delaney is motivated by her devotion to a deity of death, and Erasmus merely seeks to spite the alchemist Priya Saran.

The entire assemblage is a trap: the treasure chest is a magic item enchanted to create an illusion of treasure and a remote illusion of the adventuring party (as per the *project image* spell). A **DC 16 Wisdom (Insight) check** detects a note of deception in the proposal, and a *detect magic* spell reveals that the treasure chest and adventurers radiate illusion magic. Furthermore, a **DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) check** made specifically to examine the adventurers or the treasure discerns their illusory nature.

The only item in the entire treasure chest that is real is the *necklace of fireballs*, which is rigged as a trap. When the chest is opened, the necklace chain is pulled, dropping all four beads into the chest and casting *fireball* as a 6th-level spell. Each character within a 20-foot radius of the chest must succeed on a **DC 15 Dexterity saving throw**, taking 11d6 fire damage on a failed save, or half as much on a successful one. A character that discerns the illusion can disable the trap with a **DC 14 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check** to retrieve the *necklace of fireballs*. The magic enchanting the treasure chest is fleeting and dissipates after 8 hours.

Bramblethorn Company magically observes the interaction from afar (a distance of two miles away), hoping that the *fireball* trap will kill the party and caravan leader outright. When the trap fails to do so, they revert to a plan of ambushing the characters on the road.

CARAVAN ENCOUNTERS

Challenges abound on the southbound trek to the alchemist's tower. Not only must the characters defend their cargo from a company of rival adventurers, their cargo itself is an irate 1,500-pound predator. Choose or roll for at least two encounters on the Southbound Caravan Encounters table, then proceed to *The Alchemist's Tower*.

Southbound Caravan Encounters

d4 Encounter

- 1 Doogie-Two Heads
- 2 That Damn Bridge!
- 3 Throwing a Mephit
- 4 The Ankheg Fields

DOOGIE-TWO HEADS

The caravan meets a hastily-constructed barricade on the road, visible from a half-mile away, manned by a small crew of bugbear sentinels. Recent rain has made the ground too soft for the wagons to bypass the main road, so the only reasonable way forward is to dispatch the bugbears or negotiate with them. If the characters approach the barricade, read or paraphrase the following:

As you reach the ramshackle barricade, a bugbear knocks twice on a log—a signal. In response, the earth rumbles as a lumbering, two-headed giant rises from where it laid concealed behind the barricade. The giant leans forward and bellows, “Oy, I’m Doogie Two-Heads, and you’re gonna give me the owl-thing!”

The barricade is staffed by **four bugbears** and **Doogie Two-Heads** (*he/him*), an ettin. The bugbears are mercenaries working for Bramblethorn Company, tasked with controlling Doogie and extorting or killing the party to gain the mother owlbear. However, Doogie Two-Heads is ostensibly in charge of their operation, due mostly to his size.

Even by ettin standards, Doogie Two-Heads is a remarkably dim-witted creature. He insists on being called by his full name, but also insists that the left head is named “Doogie” and the right is named

“Two-Heads.” He becomes violently angry whenever someone gets this mixed up. Furthermore, the heads rarely agree on anything, including what they’ve been tasked to do. “Doogie” believes his job is to smash some wagons, whereas “Two-Heads” was told to grab the owlbear. Furthermore, a **DC 14 Wisdom (Insight) or Intelligence (Investigation) check** uncovers that the ettin is being paid only with a new club, since his current club is infested with termites.

A **DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check** convinces “Doogie” (but not “Two-Heads”), to stand down if the characters promise to pay them with two giant clubs, instead of one (or any similar payment). Alternatively, a **DC 21 Charisma (Deception) check** can turn the heads against one another, for example, convincing “Doogie” that “Two-Heads” is getting paid better than him. These tactics successfully distract the ettin and remove him from the conflict, but cause the bugbears to attack.

BUGBEAR (Medium Humanoid [Bugbear], LE) CR 1

HP 27 AC 16 Speed 30

Str +2 Dex +2 Con +1 Int -1 Wis +0 Cha -1

Morningstar. Melee: +4 to hit, 11 (2d8 + 2) pierc.

Javelin. Melee or Ranged (30/120): +4 to hit, 9 (2d6 + 2) pierc.

DOOGIE-TWO HEADS (Large Giant, CE) CR 4

HP 85 AC 12 Speed 40

Str +5 Dex -1 Con +3 Int -3 Wis +0 Cha -1

Two Heads. Adv. on saves against being blinded, charmed, deafened, frightened, stunned, and knocked unconscious.

Multiattack. 2 Clubs.

Club. Melee: +7 to hit, 14 (2d8 + 5) bludg.

Once the bugbears are defeated, a **DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation) check** finds their payment from Bramblethorn Company, **1,000 gp**, as well as a letter from **Braugili** the barbarian detailing the caravan's route and cargo.



THAT DAMN BRIDGE!

If the characters have previously completed the Gnoll Creek Bridge encounter on the northbound trek, they encounter the same bridge in an even worse state of repair on their return trip. Read or paraphrase the following:

The snapped boards and heavy rains have taken its toll on the rickety bridge spanning Gnoll Creek: its center has buckled entirely, plunging into the creek and leaving a deep slump in what remains of the bridge. If the crossing was perilous before, now it's a deathtrap.

The cage wagon strained the bridge to its breaking points on the caravan's last crossing; now, the wagon is nearly a ton heavier, and the bridge is missing a 5-foot span. However, the characters are resourceful, and more importantly, have no choice other than to somehow cross the creek.

The bridge stands 20 feet above Gnoll Creek.

For the purposes of this encounter, moving the caravan's people and cargo across the gap in the bridge is trivial. The only challenging task is somehow transporting the cage wagon, which weighs 4,000 pounds. The characters might do so in a number of ways, including any of the following methods. Call for an ability check for any solution the characters attempt. Pushing the wagon across the remaining bridge requires a **DC 20 Strength check**; each successful check **decreases the DC by 2**.

Replacing the Span. Chopping down a nearby tree or cannibalizing the base of another wagon, the characters can create a flimsy replacement for the missing span of the bridge. A **DC 14 Strength check** fashions the raw or scavenged lumber into serviceable parts.

Reinforcing the Bridge. Some improvised materials, liberal use of the *mending* cantrip, and some cleverness might be able to fortify the remaining

parts of the bridge. A **DC 14 Intelligence check** identifies which sections most need reinforcement before the wagons can attempt to cross.

Magical Help. Creative use of magic can help reinforce the bridge, lighten the load of the cage wagon, or assist other characters. For example, the *levitate* spell can't lift the cage wagon, but perhaps it might reduce its overall weight. Or perhaps the *web* spell can add some needed stabilizing tension to the bridge. Award particularly clever use of spells with **Inspiration** and count the spell as a successful ability check.

Brute Strength. Some raw muscle might be required to prevent the columns of the bridge or the improvised span from buckling. A **DC 17 Strength check** applies enough force to prevent total collapse of the structure.

Last Second Effort. If any other ability check to move the wagon fails, a **DC 14 Constitution check** to push or pull the wagon can give the wagon enough momentum to cross a moment before the bridge collapses.

FAILING TO CROSS

If the crossing turns disastrous, the plunge into the water damages the cage wagon and injures the mother owlbear, but miraculously doesn't drown the creature. Recovering the wagon from such a fate takes all day and imposes a level of exhaustion on each character that lasts until after their next encounter. A **DC 12 Wisdom (Medicine) check** identifies the owlbear as having a broken leg which can't be healed until arriving at the alchemist's tower.

SUCCESSFUL CROSSING

A few minutes after the cage wagon crosses Gnoll Creek, the bridge fully collapses and is swept downriver. Bannermore and the others breathe a sigh of relief, as the caravan proceeds southward.

THROWING A MEPHIT

Bramblethorn Company's resident mage, Erasmus Bax, has left a magical obstacle for the caravan. Read or paraphrase the following:

As the caravan proceeds through a copse of trees, you meet a wall of fog that grows unexpectedly dense. Soon, the front of the caravan is concealed from the back, and the trees press in on the road on either side. You get the impression of eyes staring at you from the fog as things grow eerily quiet.

The area of the fog is lightly obscured. A **DC 14 Intelligence (Arcana or Nature) check** discerns that the fog is wholly unnatural, and a *detect magic* spell discerns that the entire forest bears the aura of illusion magic. Meanwhile, a **DC 17 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation) check** spots eyes in the mist—something is watching the caravan from the treeline!

Six steam mephits attack the caravan from all sides, surprising the characters if no one spotted the eyes in the mist. **Roll initiative.**

STEAM MEPHIT (Small Elemental, NE) CR 1/4

HP 21 AC 10 Speed 30 (fly)

Str -3 Dex +0 Con +1 Int +0 Wis +0 Cha +1

Immunities fire, poison

Condition Immunities poison

Blurred. Disadv. on attacks against the mephit

Death Burst. When the mephit dies, 5-foot-radius sphere, centered on itself: **DC 10 Dex save.**
Failure: **4 (1d8)** fire.

Claws. *Melee:* **+2** to hit, **2 (1d4)** slash. **+ 2 (1d4)** fire.

Steam Breath (Recharge 6). 15-foot cone: **DC 10 Dex save.** *Failure:* **4 (1d8)** fire. *Success:* Half.

On initiative count 20, a number of **steam mephits** join the combat, bringing the total number of mephits back to six. New mephits are produced endlessly, a fact which becomes evident (without an ability check) after two rounds of combat. Therefore, the only means of escape is to track down the source of new mephits or race out of the forest, a half-mile distance, ten rounds of combat if the caravan moves at full speed.

A **DC 11 Wisdom (Perception) check** discerns that the new mephits all originate from the same direction. Proceeding 30 feet through the treeline in that direction brings the characters to the edge of a 60-foot-diameter pond, whose surface emits constant wisps of mist. The pond is nonmagical except for a **lesser water elemental** that dwells within it and attacks when the characters draw near. This elemental is the source of the mephits, as well as the *mirage arcane* spell which created the fog and trees.

LESSER WATER ELEMENTAL

(Medium Elemental, N) CR 3

HP 45 AC 14 Speed 30 (swim)

Str +3 Dex +1 Con +3 Int -3 Wis +0 Cha -1

Resistances acid; nonmagical bludg., pierc., slash.

Immunities poison

Condition Immunities exhaustion, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained, unconscious

Freeze. Cold damage reduces the elemental's speed by 20 ft. until the end of its turn.

Multiattack. 2 Slams.

Slam. *Melee:* **+5** to hit, **7 (1d8 + 3)** bludg.

Wave (Recharge 6). 10-ft. radius sphere, centered on the elemental: **DC 13 Dex save.** *Failure:* **11 (2d10)** bludg. *Success:* Half.

When the elemental is defeated, the mephits die without activating Death Burst. Also, the *mirage arcane* spell affecting the area ends, revealing that the caravan is in a nondescript field nearly a mile from the road. A **DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check** spots a glimmer from within the pond: a sapphire worth **400 gp** etched with delicate arcane symbols. Any character who was forced to listen to the wizard Erasmus Bax lecture about the supposed inferiority of alchemy will recognize the crystal as one that hung from Erasmus's necklace.

THE ANKHEG FIELDS

Melville Bannermore, the caravan master, decides to route the caravan through a swathe of farmland overrun by ankhegs in order to throw off Bramblethorn Company. Read or paraphrase the following:

Acid-pocked plowshares and wagons with sheared-through axles litter acres of farmland ruined by burrows and 10-foot tall anthills. Abandoned farmhouses and leaning windmills show tell-tale signs of abandonment—an entire ghost county of farms.

“Not enough owlbears around to keep the ankhegs down,” Neth says, shaking their head.

“Spoken like someone who’s never had an ankheg fry,” Gormun smirks, shouldering his massive ladle. “Those grubs can feed a clan for a week”

A **DC 13 Intelligence (History or Nature) check** recalls a time before the proliferation of ankhegs. Owlbears fed on ankheg grubs, restricting the population to rocky highlands. Without owlbears, however, ankheg hives have invaded the countryside and driven away entire villages of hardworking farmers.

Charting a path for the caravan without aggravating the ankhegs waiting just beneath their anthills is no mean feat. To represent the ire of the local ankhegs, track an **Ankheg Threat Level** in view of the players. This counter **starts at 2** and increases if the caravan provokes the ankheg hives.

To traverse the ankheg fields, the characters must progress through two encounters on the Ankheg Fields Encounters table. Characters can also choose to attempt any of the encounters on the Optional Ankheg Fields Encounters table.

Ankheg Fields Encounters

d4 Encounter

- 1 Keeping an eye on turf and stone, characters can mark out the best route for the caravan with a **DC 15 group Wisdom (Survival) or Intelligence (Nature) check**. On a success, the wagon progresses for a while on solid ground. On a failure, **increase the Ankheg Threat Level by 1**.
- 2 The lead wagon sinks through the soft earth over an ankheg tunnel! A successful **DC 15 group Strength (Athletics) check** pulls the wagon back onto solid ground. On a failure, **increase the Ankheg Threat Level by 1**.
- 3 The owlbear catches a scent of ankheg grubs from beneath a nearby anthill and begins stomping around in its cage. A successful **DC 15 group Wisdom (Animal Handling) check** calms down the owlbear before it alerts the ankheg hives. On a failure, **increase the Ankheg Threat Level by 1**.
- 4 The tell-tale, silvery fin of a bulette cuts through the sod at a distance from the party, though the creature seems uninterested in tackling the caravan. A **DC 15 group Wisdom (Insight) or Intelligence (Nature) check** avoids bulette’s path and, consequently, the ankhegs it is hunting. On a failure, **increase the Ankheg Threat Level by 2**.



ANKHEG (Large Monstrosity) CR 2

HP 39

AC 14

Speed 30 (burrow)

Str +3 Dex +0 Con +1 Int -5 Wis +1 Cha -2

Senses tremorsense 60 ft.**Bite.** *Melee:* +5 to hit, **10 (2d6 + 3)** slash. + **3 (1d6)** acid and **Grappled** (escape **DC 13**). Can only grapple one target.**Acid Spray (Recharge 6).** While not grappling, 30-foot line: **DC 13 Dex save.** *Failure:* **10 (3d6)** acid. *Success:* Half.**Optional Ankheg Fields Encounters****d3 Encounter**

- Neth** reasons that the abandoned farmhouses might contain valuables left behind as ankhegs took over the area. With a successful **DC 14 group Dexterity (Stealth) check**, the characters can creep in and out of enough farmhouses to find a +1 martial weapon of the GM's choice without alerting the ankhegs. On a failure, **increase the Ankheg Threat Level by 1**.
- Gormun Gravelspice** is intent on making his clan's secret recipe. A successful **DC 14 group Intelligence (Investigation) check** raids anthills for ankheg grubs, each the size of a cucumber. During the party's next short or long rest, Gormun cooks up a pungent dish called *ankheg goulash*, granting each character who eats it 3d6 temporary hit points. On a failure, **increase the Ankheg Threat Level by 1**.
- The lingering odor of ankheg acid gives **Sofia Fontan** an idea to ward them off. A **DC 14 group Intelligence (Nature or cook's utensils) check** brews up a concoction of rotting fruit that resembles the ankheg's warning pheromone; **decrease the Ankheg Threat Level by 1**. On a failure, **increase the Ankheg Threat Level by 1**.

LEAVING THE ANKHEG FIELDS

As the party leaves the ankheg fields, read or paraphrase the following:

The heavy rumbling of disturbed earth reaches a crescendo as the tunneling ankhegs finally converge on the caravan. Gormun's heavy ladle swings in a wide arc as he shouts "Let 'em come! We'll make soup of the lot of 'em!"

Roll initiative. A number of **ankhegs equal to the Ankheg Threat Level** (up to a maximum of 6) burst out of the ground, each within 5 feet of a character, and attack. The owlbear makes a Claws attack at any ankheg that comes within 5 feet of its cage (see *Chapter 2: The Hunt* for the owlbear's statistics). When the characters defeat the ankheg ambush, the caravan escapes the ankheg fields without further incident.



THE ALCHEMIST'S TOWER

At the end of the caravan's southbound journey with the owlbear, the characters reach their destination: the tower of the alchemist Priya Saran. However, unbeknownst to the characters, Bramblethorn Company has already reached the tower and captured the alchemist, locking down the tower and preparing for one final ambush.

ON APPROACH TO THE TOWER

As Priya's tower comes into sight, the characters spot a winged, mottled creature descending to meet them. Read or paraphrase the following:

A flutter of asynchronous wingbeats meets your ears as a strange creature wearing an oversized satchel descends from the treeline. The homunculus tips its head and approaches cautiously as the caravan slows to a halt.

Melville Bannermore recognizes the **homunculus** as **Bangle**, Priya's personal familiar. The familiar drops its satchel at the party's feet before urgently miming that they should take it. Inside, the satchel contains four *potions of climbing*, two *potions of greater healing*, and a *potion of speed*. A **DC 14 Wisdom (Insight) check** intuits that something is deeply amiss if Priya is having her familiar deliver satchels of potions to the caravan. The homunculus perches on the shoulder of the tallest character as the caravan proceeds toward the tower.

TOWER CLEARING

Priya's tower is 30 by 40 feet at its base. It stands 40 feet tall at the center of a clearing 120 feet in diameter. Unbeknownst to the party, the tower's entrances are sealed via *arcane lock*. The clearing contains a 80-foot diameter lumber enclosure for the owlbear, already filled with piles of hay, a small magical stream, and an artificial cave. A lone scarecrow wearing an acid-burned flour sack stands along the path to the tower, 60 feet from the tower's door. As the characters approach, read or paraphrase the following:

A translucent mouth glimmers into existence on the scarecrow and declares, in the voice of Erasmus the Green, "It's about time you showed up! Frankly, we hoped you'd have the dignity to die on the roadside, but now that we've reunited, I'll propose a simple exchange: surrender the owlbear or the alchemist dies."

Atop the tower, you can make out the wizard Erasmus Bax alongside a figure tied with rope: the alchemist Priya Saran perched on the ledge.

Via a *magic mouth* spell, the wizard **Erasmus Bax** has issued an ultimatum on behalf of Bramblethorn Company: surrender the owlbear, or **Priya Saran** dies. A character with a **passive Perception score of 12 or higher** also spots "Keen-Eyed" **Käthe Fittkau** taking aim with a longbow from a balcony 20 feet up the tower. A character with a **passive Perception score of 14 or higher** also notices **Braugili** the barbarian and **Delaney Pasma** the cleric hiding behind of the tower.

Depending on how the party attempts to confront Bramblethorn Company, proceed to *Negotiating with Erasmus*, *Saving Priya*, or *Battling Bramblethorn*.



NEGOTIATING WITH ERASMUS

Because Erasmus is atop the tower, any attempt to negotiate with him involves approaching the tower and shouting. Erasmus, a pompous and imperious wizard, prefers arguing from this literal position of power and exudes smug superiority during the entire encounter. Furthermore, Erasmus has very little patience for theatrics or prattle—if a character attempts to rescue Priya, attack any member of Bramblethorn Company, or does anything unexpected, Erasmus simply shoves Priya over the ledge (proceed to *Saving Priya*).

Erasmus *counterspells* any spell cast upon him, and any *feather fall* spell cast on Priya.

Play Along. A **DC 13 Charisma (Deception) check** pretends to acquiesce to Bramblethorn's demands. Pleased with a successful plan, Erasmus issues a series of instructions: the party is to dock the cage wagon with the enclosure and release the beast inside. Then, they are to retreat one mile down the road, and the alchemist will walk to them. Erasmus intends to slay the owlbear, collect its head and pelt, and escape before the party returns to the tower. A further **DC 17 Charisma (Persuasion) check** convinces Erasmus to release the alchemist early, casting *feather fall* before shoving her from the tower.

Ask for Payment. A **DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) check** simply demands payment for the exchange. Braugili the barbarian emerges from around the tower to toss a rough hewn sack to the party containing the promised amount for the expedition—**500 gp** for each character.

Intimidation. No amount of intimidation will sway Erasmus, as he has the clear upper hand and the high ground.

Distraction. A **DC 15 Charisma (Performance) check** distracts Bramblethorn with some kind of eye-catching activity. This allows a character to take one action before Erasmus can react and shove Priya from the tower.

SAVING PRIYA

If a character attempts to rescue Priya, attack any member of Bramblethorn Company, or simply fails to comply with Erasmus's demands, the wizard shoves Priya from the top of the tower.

Roll initiative. As Priya falls during the first round of combat, each character gets a turn to attempt to rescue her from falling. Safely catching the alchemist requires a successful **DC 13 Strength (Athletics) check**. Even on a success, the alchemist is knocked out from the fall and the catching character takes 4d6 bludgeoning damage.

Players can attempt any other method to rescue her, but any attempt should involve at least one successful attack roll or ability check (against a **DC 15**). For example, a character might employ a creative use of a spell, such as *gaseous form* or *web* to soften the landing. Because the target is moving, however, a **DC 15 check using the character's spellcasting ability** might be needed to cast the spell correctly.

If the characters fail to intercept the alchemist or soften the landing by the end of the round, the fall kills her. However, if you prefer, **Bangle** the homunculus can fly in at the last possible second to perform a potion-based rescue. Read or paraphrase the following:

As the alchemist plummets helplessly to the foot of the tower, a winged blur darts in a curved path toward her, colliding an instant before impact. You recognize the form of Priya's homunculus, Bangle, and that its hind legs cling to a potion bottle as it flies. Instead of the dull thud of impact, you hear the clash of a shattering bottle. The alchemist and familiar vanish instantly upon impact, safely dematerializing to the Ethereal Plane as an *oil of ethereality* splatters upon both of them. It would seem that Priya had a backup plan!

Once splashed with the *oil of ethereality*, Priya and Bangle are safely concealed on the Ethereal Plane for 1 hour, after which they reappear.

Whether the alchemist lives or dies, Bramblethorn Company recognizes that their only bargaining chip is off the table and strikes! Proceed to *Battling Bramblethorn*.

BATTLING BRAMBLETHORN

If **Bramblethorn Company** is attacked, or Priya is killed or rescued, the members of Bramblethorn spring into action and attack the party. **Roll initiative.** Use the initiative order from *Saving Priya* if the characters have previously rolled.

Braugili the barbarian and **Delaney Pasma** the cleric rush the characters from around the tower, "Keen-Eyed" **Käthe Fittkau** takes shots from the balcony 20 feet up the tower, and **Erasmus Bax** performs magical attacks from the top of the 40-foot tall tower. If the **great gray owlbear** is released at any time during the battle, accidentally or intentionally, a **DC 14 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check** convinces it to fight alongside the party against Bramblethorn Company. The owlbear uses its statistics from *Chapter 2: The Hunt*. Furthermore, if the owlbear dies, see the *Accidentally Killing the Owlbear* sidebar in Chapter 2.

BRAUGILI (Medium Humanoid [Bugbear], NE) CR 3

HP 44 AC 15 Speed 40

Str +3 Dex +2 Con +3 Int -1 Wis +1 Cha +0

Resistances nonmagical bludg., pierc., slash.

Multiattack. 2 attacks.

Greataxe. *Melee:* +5 to hit, 9 (1d12 + 3) slash.

Handaxe. *Ranged (20/60):* +5 to hit, 6 (1d6 + 3) slash.

KÄTHE FITTKAU

(Medium Humanoid [Tiefling], CE) CR 2

HP 60 AC 15 Speed 30

Str -1 Dex +4 Con +1 Int +0 Wis +2 Cha +3

Resistances fire

Shortbow. *Ranged (150/600):* +8 to hit, 9 (1d6 + 6) pierc. and the target's speed is halved until the end of its turn.

Shortsword. *Melee:* +6 to hit, 7 (1d6 + 4) pierc.

DELANEY PASMA

(Medium Humanoid [Half-Elf], LE) CR 2

HP 60 AC 15 Speed 30

Str +2 Dex -1 Con +2 Int -1 Wis +3 Cha +1

Scourge. *Melee:* +4 to hit, 7 (1d10 + 2) slash.

Profane Spark. One creature within 60 ft.: **DC 13**

Wis save. *Failure:* 9 (2d8) necrotic.

Curse of the Dark God (Bonus Action, 1/Day).

One target within 60 ft.: **DC 13 Wis save.**

Failure: Disadvantage on attack rolls and saving throws, and can repeat the save at the end of each of its turns.

Healing Light (Bonus Action, 1/Day). One creature within 60 ft. regains **18 (4d8)** hit points.

ERASMUS BAX

(Medium Humanoid [Human], NE) CR 2

HP 45 AC 15 Speed 30

Str -1 Dex +2 Con +0 Int +4 Wis +1 Cha -1

Counterspell (Reaction, 2/Day). Nullify the casting of a spell within 60 ft.

Force Missile. *Ranged (120):* +6 to hit, 7 (3d4) force.

Brimstone Blast. 15-ft.-cube, centered on a point within 60 ft.: **DC 14 Dex save.** *Failure:* 11 (2d10) fire. *Success:* Half.

BANNERMORE'S SACRIFICE

Though the rest of the caravan members rush for the edge of the clearing when combat breaks out, Bannermore stands his ground. If a killing blow would impact Priya, the owlbear, or one of the characters, Bannermore dives in the way of the attack, nobly sacrificing himself for the owlbear's future. The long-adventuring Bannermore can't later be returned to life, as he has already explored every part of this world, and is ready to explore the afterlife.

If two or more members of Bramblethorn have been killed or Erasmus has fewer than 15 hit points remaining, Erasmus activates a magic item to cast *teleport* and escape, abandoning his allies. All other members of Bramblethorn Company fight to the death. When Bramblethorn Company is defeated, proceed to *After the Battle*.

AFTER THE BATTLE

Once Bramblethorn Company is defeated and Priya Saran and her tower are liberated, the *arcane locks* on the tower disengage and the expedition can finally come to a close.

Bramblethorn was carrying the following:

- » Braugili: A *bag of holding* containing the caravan's payment: **500 gp** for each character.
- » Käthe Fittkau: A set of *bracers of archery*.
- » Delaney Pasma: A *+1 shield*.
- » Erasmus: A *pearl of power*, which he drops even if he teleports away from combat.

Additionally, the characters can keep any excess potions delivered to them by Bangle.

If Priya was injured or transported to the Ethereal Plane, she is healed or returned to the Material Plane shortly after the battle's conclusion. If she died during the battle, the adventure ends in defeat and the owlbear is doomed to extinction, unless the party can later restore her to life.

Once Priya is conscious, the owlbear is introduced to its new enclosure and the rest of the caravan is paid for the expedition. Finally, Priya intends to ask the party for one additional favor: to assist her with her owlbear cloning experiment. Proceed to *Chapter 4: The Experiment*; otherwise, see *Further Adventures*.

Chapter 4: The Experiment

In this chapter, the characters assist **Priya Saran** conduct a number of unorthodox alchemical experiments in an attempt to save the owlbear.

To safeguard the species, Priya will need to create a population of some 50 to 100 owlbears, a number large enough to prevent inbreeding and to shape the owlbears' forest habitat to their needs. However, creating even one copy of the captured owlbear is no mean feat, so Priya intends to try a few experimental methods, each a proof of concept for future attempts.

In the aftermath of the battle with Bramblethorn, read or paraphrase the following:

Priya holds the sturdy bars of the owlbear's freshly-constructed enclosure. Her eyes glisten as she watches the creature pace back and forth with heavy strides.

"She's more beautiful than I imagined," she says, lost in thought. "And she's already been through so much..."

Turning to the party, she adds, "The experiments aren't going to be easy. I could use lab partners with cool heads on their shoulders. What do you say, want to see this thing through to the end?"

If the characters agree to help, Priya offers to increase their payout by **150 gp** each—a bonus she ominously refers to as "hazard pay."

Priya is adamant that her brand of alchemy is very different from the arcane magic practiced by wizards like Ersamus Bax. Even characters with considerable skill in magic might feel out of their depth performing alchemical experiments in a laboratory. As such, participating in these experiments is as much a test of quick thinking and reaction times as it is one of careful preparation.

MONSTROUS MERGER

Priya's first plan is to combine a **giant owl** and a **cave bear** into a new owlbear. If owlbears were indeed created by a powerful wizard in ages past, this experiment may readily bear fruit. As characters walk through Priya's workshop to the adjacent enclosures, read or paraphrase the following:

Rune-etched glass apparatuses on hooks line the walls of Priya's workshop, each labeled in her narrow, illegible script. Vats of dubious-looking chemicals taller than Priya herself dot the room amid a network of tubes and hoses trailing outward like nerves from a brain stem.

As you exit the workshop into freshly-built enclosures behind the tower, you see a row of three large, glass pods, each bristling with crystals, tubes, and metallic antennae. Each is empty, but a giant owl and a sleepy-looking cave bear wait in adjacent enclosures.

"Another caravan brought these in a day or two before you got back. They should give us the raw materials we need," Priya says as she pulls on a heavy leather apron and goggles with comically thick lenses. "Let's make an owlbear!"

This complex experiment plays out in four stages as the characters must succeed on group ability checks to prevent terrible mutations from taking hold on the resulting **bearowl chimera**. (Unbeknownst to the alchemist and the party, the experiment will always result in a terrible abomination, but if conducted poorly, it will yield a significantly more hideous and deadly creature.)

LOADING THE PODS

Priya directs the characters to maneuver the giant owl and cave bear into the left and right “chimera pods.” A **DC 17 group Wisdom (Animal Handling) check** guides the beasts into the pods without incident. On a failure, however, the beasts are uncooperative and, while the party is distracted, a spider creeps into one of the pods; **add the “Web” action to the bearowl chimera’s statistics.**

CHIMERIC CALIBRATION

The pods are covered in a variety of magical implements: crystals, rods, antennae, and wires. Priya begins issuing a series of complex instructions as to which wires to connect and which components should be aligned. A **DC 17 group Intelligence (Arcana) check** follows these instructions to the letter. On a failure, however, some of the wires are disconnected or some components are misaligned; **add the “Eight Legs” trait to the bearowl chimera’s statistics.**

DIALING IN GASSES

As the pods flare to life, Priya directs the characters to adjust the valves and hoses connected to the pods to ensure the right mix of reagents reach the beasts. A **DC 17 group Wisdom (Survival) or Intelligence (Nature) check** provides an uninterrupted flow of reagents from the nearby bubbling vats and burning censures. On a failure, the gas becomes too thick or poorly balanced; **add the “Acid Spit” action to the bearowl chimera’s statistics.**

GONE HAYWIRE!

Suddenly, one of the pod’s antennae fractures under the strain, spewing arcs of lightning in all directions! Make a **DC 17 group Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check** to leap onto the cage and reattach the antenna. On a success, the lightning stills as the rod clicks back into place. On a failure, the experiment is overcharged; **add the “Two Heads” trait to the bearowl chimera’s statistics.**

ENDING THE EXPERIMENT

The pods emulate a deep whirring noise as the experiment draws to a close. Read or paraphrase the following:

The pods fill with smoke and coruscating bands of lightning. With a flash and a pop like the cork being pulled out of a bottle, the center pod opens and a hooting, growling amalgam of fur and feathers spills out. It’s a far cry from the sleek apex predator your caravan brought back from Mosswood forest, but it is—in fact—equal parts bear and owl. The body parts, however, have been arranged haphazardly and with terrible asymmetry. In the split second of confusion before the raging monstrosity attacks, Priya mutters, “Well, it *technically* worked...”

Roll initiative as the **bearowl chimera** attacks. Note that its statistics includes actions and traits which the creature might or might not have, depending on the experiment’s success. Such traits and actions are labeled as “Mutation” traits.

BEAROWL CHIMERA (Huge Monstrosity) CR 6

HP 105 AC 15 Speed 45

Str +5 Dex +3 Con +4 Int -4 Wis +1 Cha -2

Resistances nonmagical bludg., pierc., slash.

Eight Legs (Mutation). Adv. on Claw attacks.

Two Heads (Mutation). Adv. on saves against being blinded, charmed, deafened, frightened, stunned, and knocked unconscious.

Multiattack. 2 attacks.

Bite. *Melee:* +8 to hit, **18 (2d12 + 5)** pierc.

Claw. *Melee:* +8 to hit, **16 (2d10 + 5)** slash.

Web (Mutation, Recharge 5–6). *Ranged (30/60):* +6 to hit. *Hit:* **Restrained.** To escape, **DC 15 Str check** as an action. Web has AC 10, HP 5.

Acid Spray (Mutation, Recharge 5–6). 30-foot cone: **DC 15 Dex save.** *Failure:* **27 (5d10)** acid. *Success:* Half.

The bearowl chimera fights to the death. When it is defeated, its corpse begins to separate into a variety of component parts. Priya takes notes on the ordeal and then offers each character that took damage a *potion of greater healing*.



MIMIC MAYHEM

As the chimera-style merger experiment failed in spectacular fashion, Priya turns to her second plan: forcing a mimic to permanently assume the shape of an owlbear. Read or paraphrase the following:

Unfazed by the disintegrating bearowl corpse, Priya leads the party back into the tower and down a winding set of stairs to the basement. She munches on a handful of shelled walnuts, passing every other bite to her homunculus, Bangle, perched happily on her shoulder. “We may have better luck with a mimic—it has more flexible donor material,” she says. “Bangle here’s seventy percent mimic!”

She opens the door to a storage room full of chests, barrels, and other eminently mimic-able furnishings. Her brow furrows as she scans the cluttered basement and Bangle thoughtfully scratches her chin. “I could have sworn I had one around here somewhere...”

Before the experiment can begin, the characters must find the **mimic** hiding in Priya’s basement. A **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check** notices the footprints of a rat ending suspiciously in front of what looks like a brass-bound chest. Once the mimic is identified, it can be incapacitated with an **improvised weapon attack against an AC 12** using a syringe provided by Priya. The mimic can then be moved to an enclosure upstairs without incident.

If the check or attack to find or incapacitate the mimic fails, the **mimic** attacks! The mimic will attempt to Hide and polymorph into a new object whenever possible. After the mimic is reduced to half its hit points or fewer, it retreats upstairs into its enclosure. Once the mimic is within its enclosure, the experiment can begin in earnest.

This experiment consists of multiple doses of alchemical substances, as follows.

MIMIC (Medium Monstrosity, Shapechanger, N) CR 2

HP 58

AC 12

Speed 15

Str +3 Dex +1 Con +2 Int -3 Wis +1 Cha -1

Skills Stealth +5

Immunities acid

Condition Immunities prone

False Appearance. While motionless, the mimic is indistinguishable from an object.

Grappler. The mimic has adv. on attacks against grappled creatures.

Adhesive. Any creature that touches the mimic is **Grappled** (escape **DC 13**). Checks to escape grapple have disadv.

Pseudopod. *Melee:* +5 to hit, **7 (1d8 + 3)** bludg. and the target is subject to Adhesive.

Bite. *Melee:* +5 to hit, **7 (1d8 + 3)** pierc. + **4 (1d8)** acid.

Shapechanger. The mimic polymorphs into an object.

MIMIC MAGNIFICATION

In comparison to the great gray owlbear in the neighboring enclosure, the mimic seems pitifully small. Administering a *potion of growth* of a specific dilution will bring the creature up to size.

Priya has three relevant potions stocked in her laboratory:

- » 1 × *potion of growth* which **increases a creature's height by 7 feet**
- » 4 × *diluted potions of growth* which each **increase a creature's height by 5 feet**
- » 3 × *diluted potions of diminution* which each **decrease a creature's height by 3 feet**

These magical effects on a creature's height are cumulative. For example, if a creature drinks a *diluted potion of growth* and a *diluted potion of diminution*, its height increases by only 2 feet. The characters must determine which combination of potions will **increase the mimic's height by 8 feet**, such that the mimic is the same height as the great gray owlbear.

Solution. The correct solution is to mix one *potion of growth*, two *diluted potions of growth*, and three *diluted potions of diminution*. Mathematically, this is $1 \times (7) + 2 \times (5) + 3 \times (-3)$. The order in which potions are mixed has no effect on the solution.

TRANSMUTATION COCKTAIL

Despite the mimic matching the owlbear in size, it fails to match it in strength or nimbleness, and outright refuses to assume the form of another living thing. Priya, therefore, plans to remedy all these problems at once with a cocktail of powerful potions.

Bangle wheels out a shop cart with a collection of potions and mixing flasks. Each of the three potions is a single color:

- » A *potion of strength* is **Cyan**
- » A *philter of love* is **Magenta**
- » A *potion of speed* is **Yellow**

The correct potion to administer to the mimic will be **Blue-Green** (equal parts **Blue** and **Green**).

Mixing equal amounts of potions yields the colors described in the table that follows:

| | Potion of Strength | Potion of Love | Potion of Speed |
|--------------------|--------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Potion of Strength | Cyan | Blue | Green |
| Potion of Love | Blue | Magenta | Red |
| Potion of Speed | Green | Red | Yellow |

Priya's tower stores as many potions as necessary for players to discover which mixtures yield which colors. As a final hint, you can show them the color wheel on this page, which demonstrates the relationship between CMY colors.

Solution. The correct solution is to mix a *potion of strength* with a *philter of love* to make a **Blue** potion, then to mix a *potion of strength* with a *potion of speed* to make a **Green** potion, then to mix the blue and green potions for the correct **Blue-Green** magical cocktail.

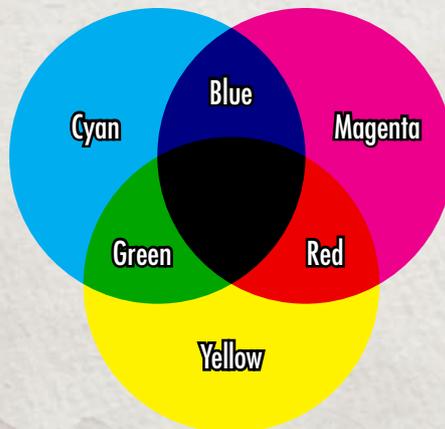
Alternatively, if one or more of your players are colorblind, allow them to make a **DC 13 Wisdom or Intelligence check** to discern a part of the above puzzle. Two successful such checks are sufficient to create the correct magical cocktail.

ONLY SKIN DEEP

Once the cocktail of potions has been applied to the mimic, it transforms into the spitting image of an owlbear. Read or paraphrase the following:

As the transformed mimic gets shakily to its feet, Priya lowers her *x-ray goggles* and adjusts a dial on the side, the lenses turning opaque with white light. "Rust and rime," she curses, "It's still jelly all the way through—no bones except its teeth." She rips the goggles off and tosses them to Bangle, who flits irritably nearby. "The solution might be more arcane than I thought."

The mimic may look like an owlbear, but its beady amber eyes and too-long purple tongue reveal its true nature: it is still a mimic—just an exceptionally large one. With this failed experiment, Priya swiftly turns to her last-ditch effort: duplicating the owlbear's egg instead.





CARBON COPY

Priya's final plan is to use the unexpected boon of a viable owlbear egg in a modified version of the *clone* spell. If the players can successfully implement this plan, it will produce a viable owlbear. Read or paraphrase the following:

"Magic has a mind of its own," Priya says with a smile. "But it turns out, it's kind of an idiot. We can run a *clone* spell on this sample, and with a few minor misdirections we can bypass all that messy business about a soul."

A **DC 12 Intelligence (Arcana) check** recalls that a *clone* spell grows an inert duplicate of a living creature, which receives the creature's soul in the event of its death. Priya's modified version uses giant owl eggs and a sample of flesh from the captive owlbear to gestate an owlbear hatchling. She calls the plan a "bait and switch" for the spell. Instead of growing a duplicate of the owlbear in a jar, they grow one in an egg, and hopefully produce a healthy owlbear cub when it hatches.

This plan is the most ambitious of those attempted so far, and takes place in three steps: obtaining a sample of owlbear flesh, casting the *clone* spell using the sample, and magically swapping the clone from its jar into an egg, in the hopes that it will hatch naturally.

OWLBEAR BIOPSY

The *clone* spell requires 1 cubic inch of flesh from the owlbear, which needs to be safely and surgically removed. As Priya prepares for the later stages of the experiment, the characters must anesthetize the owlbear using one of the sleeping potions (technically poisons) Priya has in her laboratory. At her direction, the characters find three similarly-labeled sleeping poisons:

Drow Poison. An **Intelligence (alchemist's supplies) check** understands the following about this potion:

- » **DC 12:** Typically, this poison is made only by drow using ingredients found deep underground.
- » **DC 14:** This is an injury poison, meaning it is applied to weapons that deal piercing or slashing damage and affects creatures through the blood.
- » **DC 16:** This potion is less potent than others, and usually fails to render a creature unconscious. It lasts for only an hour.

Essence of Ether. An **Intelligence (alchemist's supplies) check** understands the following about this potion:

- » **DC 12:** This noxious, clear liquid is usually an alchemical solvent or a byproduct of other alchemical processes. It is notoriously flammable.
- » **DC 14:** This is an inhaled poison, meaning that it is released into the air and affects creatures within a 5-foot cube, dissipating immediately thereafter.
- » **DC 16:** This poison is more effective than others and lasts for a full 8 hours.

Oil of Taggit. An **Intelligence (alchemist's supplies) check** understands the following about this potion:

- » **DC 12:** Distilled from the rare *taggit root*, this poison has the consistency of syrup and smells coppery, like blood.
- » **DC 14:** This is a contact poison, meaning it can be smeared or splashed on a creature to affect it.
- » **DC 16:** This poison is less effective than others but longer lasting, rendering a creature unconscious for up to 24 hours.

Any check that beats a **DC 18** recalls that creatures rendered unconscious by any of these poisons are awakened when injured. Therefore, the characters will need to perform the biopsy swiftly and be ready to run!

GREAT GRAY OWLBEAR (Large Monstrosity) CR 5

HP 114

AC 15

Speed 40

Str+5 Dex+2 Con+4 Int-4 Wis+2 Cha-2

Multiattack. Piercing Screech if available, then 1 Beak, 1 Claws.

Beak. *Melee:* +8 to hit, 10 (1d10 + 5) pierc.

Claws. *Melee:* +8 to hit, 14 (2d8 + 5) slash.

Piercing Screech (Recharge 5–6). Each creature within 20 ft.: **DC 15 Con save.** *Failure:* 18 (4d8) thunder and **Deafened** and **Frightened** for 1 minute. Target repeats save at the end of each of its turns. *Success:* Half and not deafened or frightened.

When the party enters the owlbear enclosure, **roll initiative.** The party must attempt to render the **great gray owlbear** unconscious using any combination of the poisons described above. To render a target unconscious, it must fail a **Constitution saving throw** (the owlbear has a +4 **bonus**): *drow poison* is **DC 8**, *essence of ether* is **DC 15**, and *oil of taggit* is **DC 13**. Using a poison incorrectly, such as having the owlbear ingest *drow poison*, is ineffective. Reference the SRD for the full text of these poisons.

Whenever a character fails to render the owlbear unconscious (either because the owlbear succeeds its saving throw, or because a poison was used incorrectly), the owlbear swipes at the nearest character using its claws: a *melee* attack roll with a +8 bonus, dealing 14 (2d8 + 5) slashing damage on a hit. Once the owlbear falls unconscious, a **DC 13 Wisdom (Medicine) check** as an action successfully performs a biopsy and extracts a sample of the owlbear's flesh. Whether this check succeeds or fails, the owlbear immediately awakens and attacks the nearest creature!

CRYSTAL CATALYST

When the characters escape the owlbear's enclosure with a sample, read or paraphrase the following:

Priya meets you in the center of the workshop, cradling a two-foot tall crystal jar in her hands. The briny scent of seawater emerges as she removes the shimmering crystal lid. "We can start the cloning process in this," she says in a voice taut with repressed worry. "It's sort of my retirement plan, but if we do this right, I should be able to use this vessel again later."

Priya leaves the crystal vessel with the party and begins work on duplicating the owlbear's egg. The alchemical apparatus in Priya's workshop can recreate the effects of the *clone* spell, but it still requires a reservoir of magical energy to begin. To charge the apparatus, the characters expend spell slots with a combined level of 8 or more. A **DC 15 check using a spellcaster's spellcasting ability** can also create enough magical energy to charge one level of the apparatus; however, a failure imposes one level of exhaustion. (If there are no spellcasters in the party, allow characters to use their choice of Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma for spellcasting ability checks.)

Once the apparatus has absorbed enough magical energy, characters can place the sample obtained from the owlbear into the vessel and seal it. In a flurry of sparks, the apparatus surges with energy into the vessel, replicating the *clone* spell. Within the vessel, the characters can see that the sample of flesh has transmuted into a pale, featherless owlbear cub in the early stages of development.



HOT SWAP

In this section, players need to transfer the cub from the vessel to a fabricated owlbear egg, where it can begin to develop normally. Read or paraphrase the following:

A row of owlbear eggs on Priya's workbench, each mottled brown and the size of a cantaloupe, shows the trial and error she has already undertaken to test this step. The leftmost few eggs are shattered to tiny pieces, but eggs further to the right show less and less damage until the last egg, which is pristine and seemingly untouched. Occasionally this gradient is interrupted by more bizarre mishaps, including one invisible egg and one transmuted completely to gold.

"These eggs are duplicates," Priya explains, dusting powdered calcium off her hands, "and still empty, I'm afraid. We just need to swap the clone into one of them."

A **DC 13 Intelligence (Arcana) check** recognizes the *fabricate* spell in hastily-scrawled diagrams on a chalkboard nearby Priya's workbench. The spell creates an assembled, nonmagical object from raw materials. Piles of broken chicken, geese, and duck eggshells evidently represent the raw materials.

The final stage of the experiment requires "hot-swapping" the owlbear clone from its crystal vessel into a waiting egg. A **DC 14 group Intelligence (Arcana) or Dexterity (thieves' tools or tinker's tools) check** scribes a pair of miniature *teleportation circles* into the ash wood of Priya's worktable. On a failure, the target egg explodes, and the party can try again with a new egg. On a success, read or paraphrase the following:

Priya touches a yew wand to the *teleportation circles* and the sulfur between them burns away with a puff of acrid smoke. Light flashes from Priya's *x-ray goggles* as she examines the interior of the crystal vessel and the steaming owlbear egg. After a long moment of silence, she pulls the goggles off and smiles. "Congratulations, adventurers—we made an owlbear!"

Where once there was one owlbear egg, there are now two, the first monumental step toward saving the owlbear species.



CONCLUSION

The adventure ends as both eggs are returned to the mother owlbear's enclosure. Read or paraphrase the following:

Sated by a meal of bearowl chimera meat and still blurry from the anesthesia, the mother owlbear makes no protest as the eggs are returned to her enclosure. The rumbles of her sleeping almost obscure the tiny, porcelain crack of eggshell. The owlbear's original egg is hatching in your hands. With a defiant screech, a hatchling owlbear thrusts its beak through the shell and breathes free air for the first time.

The new hatchling needs a name, which Priya asks the party, or a character that has had an important connection with the owlbear or the egg, to choose.

Once the owlbear hatchling is placed in the enclosure, Priya pays each character the agreed hazard pay of **150 gp** each, and the party can continue with their various adventures.

Over the next month or so, Priya repeats the cloning ritual until the clutch of owlbear hatchlings has grown to nearly two dozen. Each iteration refines the process, coming closer and closer to perfect reliability. If the characters continue to help at the alchemist's tower, they notice their own influence on the alchemy causes some of the hatchlings to take after them in small ways. This might mean feathers the color of a character's hair, unusual flecks of color in their eyes, or being born a little smaller or larger than normal.

Word begins to spread of the new clutch of owlbears, and Priya begins to plan for her next step: establishing a new population in the Mosswood forest.

FURTHER ADVENTURES

The Last Owlbear is written as a guided experience that allows the players to save the owlbear species. What happens once the adventure is over is up to the group. By the end, the characters have an armful of magic items, a taste for adventure, and the open road in front of them. They could become dungeon-delvers, bandits, or saviors of a dozen more endangered monsters.

This section contains the seeds for future adventures and how to develop the party's relationships with some of the colorful characters they first met in this adventure.

THE LAST VAMPIRE

When word of the party's heroic achievements regarding the last owlbear spread, the characters receive a cryptic message and an upfront payment from Countess Carmilla Von Bernhardt, a reclusive noble living in a manor among the Wyrnteeth mountain range. The invitation is urgent but its reasons are vague.

Little do the characters know that their host, the gracious countess, is not only a **vampire**, but the last vampire in the world. Centuries of vampire hunters have taken their toll on the bloodsucker population, and they now converge on the baron's manor. Will the party save another monster from extinction, as they have before, or is the countess and her ilk better off dead?

THE RUSTORM

Evocation spells such as *fireball* leave behind a noxious magical byproduct known as theruphane. Not only does this pollutant collect in the bodies of large animals, from owlbears to elks, and eventually poison them, it has also been affecting the atmosphere.

A week ago, a cloud of theruphane gathered into a magical thunderstorm that has begun to sweep across the continent, constantly gaining strength. This therustorm has battered the countryside with planeshifting cyclones and random "spell strikes"—lightning imbued with magical fire, frost, or force. If something isn't done soon, this climate catastrophe will soon spiral out of control. Can the characters penetrate into the eye of this storm and combat the living spells at its center, or will the balance of magic forever shift away from mortalkind?

A BETTER MOUSETRAP

All mimics are worrisome creatures, but the owlbear-shaped mimic resulting from Priya's alchemical experiment is even more off-putting than its furniture-shaped brethren. And it's evolving. The "Monster Mimic" has begun replicating other monstrous creatures, such as bulettes and rust monsters, and even begun to imitate their magical abilities, such as a dragon's breath weapon. When the Monster Mimic escapes within Priya's tower, can the party communicate with the burgeoning shapeshifter, or will it devour and replace them one-by-one?

DRAGONFALL

Following the defeat of Bramblethorn Company, Erasmus the Green has feverishly plotted revenge on Priya and the nascent population of owlbears. To this end, he has enlisted an unlikely ally: the tracker, Neth, who helps Erasmus slip into Priya's tower by night and steal every owlbear egg and hatchling from the premises.

Rumor is, the traitorous tracker and wicked wizard plan to auction off the entire set of eggs and hatchlings at Dragonfall, a lawless desert city built amongst the bones of an ancient dragon. Infiltrating the auction means evading the bands of cutthroat assassins that run Dragonfall, impersonating a group of merchants, and absconding with an entire hatchery halfway across the continent. If the characters are discovered, however, they'll surely be thrown into the Blood Pits, an arena in which contestants battle for fame, glory, and freedom.

THE LAND SHIP

Following the shipment of the last owlbear, Melville Bannermore has decided to retire, leaving his caravan business to the ever-capable Sofia Fontan. However, his business entails one final prize that must be recovered from the deserts outside Dragonfall: the Land Ship, *Quadrivium*, a roving base of operations that can ship vast quantities of goods overland. Moreover, the Land Ship, just as its oceanborne counterparts, is equipped with a broadside of cannons, suitable for deterring even the mightiest of dragons.

Sofia enlists the characters on the mission to reclaim the *Quadrivium*, offering the ship itself to the characters in exchange for the cargo therein. Can the party brave the depths of the desert and best the warren of kobolds and the wicked lamia dwelling in the ship?