

Landu the Eloquent's

HANDBOOK OF HORRORS™

Book One: The Forests of Rith Barradu

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The Forests of Rith Barradu

This module describes the exploration and possibly reclamation of Rith Barradu, the ancient elven forest nation. It is designed for a well-balanced party of 5-8 first to third levels. If you plan to use The Forests of Rith Barradu for characters significantly more powerful than this they should either travel in a smaller group or you should adjust the encounters accordingly.

The Fall of Rith Barradu

In the far Eastern reaches of the continent Aradus, across the icy Wastes of Galtung, past the festering sore the humans of Port Hiron call their city stands a great and forbidding forest: Rith Barradu. Long ago, the Bards tell us, a noble elven nation thrived under the sheltering branches of this mighty forest. In their love and pride they wrought an awesome city of shining towers and strong walls to be their capitol, and called it Rith Barradu, the City in the Trees. Word of this mighty citadel spread to distant lands, and the forest-nation was ever afterward known by the name of its capitol.

The wealth and splendor of the forest kingdom was a wonder of the world. Elven sages traveled from far away to consult the Oracle of the Redwoods, held without peer as a source of magic and wisdom to those who proved worthy. Wisdom of a different sort was to be gained at the great Priest's Circle, where elven priests held solemn ceremony. In peace and harmony the ages passed.

Alas, even among the elves happiness could not last forever. It came to pass that some great evil shattered the power of the benevolent elves. Beasts strong and fell appeared in the darkest reaches of the wood. Orcs and gorn waxed strong and butchered the elves, burning the forest. The shining waters of the land ran red.

So few escaped this great evil that those outside Rith Barradu heard only a rumour of its fall. Many believed that the greatest part of the elves and their compatriots were fled deep into the forest. Some songs say that somewhere in the hidden glades of the haunted woodlands the great city of Rith Barradu still stands, a haven to the tattered remnants of the nation. Despite all efforts, none have managed to prove the right of the story.

The condition of the lands surrounding the Forest of Rith Barradu belie the tales. The foul beasts of Rith Barradu have spread beyond the borders of the land, and prey upon those few hardy (or foolish) enough to abide nigh. Many times over the centuries brave souls have ventured into the woods, but only a handful have ever returned. Rith Barradu is now a dark, haunted forest which echoes of fallen majesty.

The Quest for Rith Barradu: The Setting

The story begins in Port Hiron. This city can be either a stopover from the group's previous adventure or the starting point for your campaign. Port Hiron is a wild, wide-open town with essentially no law save that of the jungle. It is frequented by Pescanna nomads from the Wastes of Galtung, miners from the Iron Mountains, farmers and ranchers from the surrounding plains, and all manner of seamen. Although not as important as Dukarton to the south, Port Hiron sees its share of traffic.

Port Hiron straddles the Slag river, so named for the slag heaps around the smelters at its source. A wide fertile plain separates the teeming city from the sinister forest; most of the food consumed in Port Hiron is grown here. Almost any commodity or service imaginable can be bought somewhere in Port Hiron (for a price). It is often best not to inquire too closely as to the origins of goods.

To the west of Port Hiron stretches the Forest. Most of the locals avoid the Forest, even the local militia contenting themselves to patrol only the edges. Periodically bands of orcs and goran raid the villages closest to the eaves of the Forest. Since only such vermin are known to inhabit the coastal regions of the area, no shipping routes even pass within sight of the ruined elven ports along the shore.

The Forest of Rith Barradu stretches between the coast of the great Western Ocean and a series of mountain ranges collectively known as the Wall of Rith Barradu. The mountains cause abundant rain to fall on the Forest, and the warm winds from the sea moderate the climate in the winter. The result is a beautiful land of flowing water and towering trees, rising toward the mountains 50-100 miles inland.

The three ranges directly bordering Rith Barradu differ markedly in character. The northernmost are known as the Cloudytops; seldom are they seen without a cloudy wreath drawn about their peaks. They are sheer and jagged, with many steep valleys and hidden lakes.

The Ice Mountains stretch from the middle of Rith Barradu almost due north. They are higher than the Cloudytops, and many have glaciers nesting on their upper slopes. Their permanently snowy peaks can be seen for many miles.

Not nearly as lofty as their northern neighbors, the Iron mountains are a treasure trove of mineral wealth. The elves of Rith Barradu are said to have been the first to work mines in the Iron Mountains, but today only the thriving men and dwarves of Hardrock and other mining towns in the southern end of the range bring metals and minerals into Port Hiron.

North of Port Hiron, on the leeward side of the mountains, stretches the arid, icy Wastes of Galtung. Deprived of warmth by the upward thrust of the mountains, the Wastes are fit only for a nomadic existence by tribes of hunters who survive on the herds of bison and caribou who roam the plains.

The Quest of Rith Barradu: Introduction

Once you have established your group of adventurers in Port Hiron, it is time to introduce them to their guide into the trackless forest. The city is abuzz with rumors of a strange, stern elf who seeks aid in entering the horrid forest. Every innkeeper and tavern owner has been paid to point likely-looking prospects to the Purple Myvern, and notices have been posted in many of the city's shops. Even the town crier is announcing the interest of one "Gaudern Greycloak" in "seeking stalwart companions to brave the perils of the Haunted Forest."

If your group chooses to ignore this multi-media blitz, you still have one final option. Gaudern is prowling the bars, taverns, and inns of the seaport searching for adventurers in person. By whatever means you choose, Gaudern Greycloak will eventually search out your fledgling group.

Gaudern is a tall, stern young elf with black hair and green eyes. He bears himself with military precision, and speaks with courtesy to all he meets. These traits cause both suspicion and derision in the wily inhabitants of Port Hiron. If the characters question anyone about Gaudern they will be told that he arrived on a ship from Dukarton two weeks ago and has been interviewing potential employees since. He seems to be well provided, and is known to have repulsed several attempted robberies since his arrival.

Unknown to the locals, Gaudern is more than the normal seeker after adventure. He is descended in direct line from a princess of Rith Barradu who escaped the onslaught of evil and fled to Dukarton. He made his fortune fighting orcs in the Dukarian Guard. Gaudern is determined to learn the truth about his lost people.

The Purple Myvern is in the section of town which caters to sailors. It has a rowdy reputation, but wayfarers staying under its roof know that they will awaken alive and with all their possessions. The owner is an awesomely strong old dwarven fighter named Anfas who enforces his inn's sanctity with a battered old warhammer when necessary. He knows of Gaudern and will usher the characters over to his table with a terse comment of approval for the "damnfool elf". Said elf will quickly order lunch for all, it being near noon.

Gaudern will appraise the band of adventurers, attempting to make sure that they understand the dangers they may face. He

will ask only that anyone who agrees to come along defend him and all others he brings along, and offers an equal share in any spoils taken. If this does not seem to entice able adventurers, he will reluctantly confess that he has information about the lands and cities of Rith Barradu gleaned from old records. If any mention of salaries is made he will be evasive and try to change the subject; he doesn't feel he has enough to offer anyone competent a decent wage.

If any members of the party are thieves or specifically ask about the possibility, they may (25%) notice that two of the tavern's patrons are paying more attention to the conversation than their own drinks. If confronted in the Purple Myvern they will flee, not wishing to tangle with either the doughty elven warrior or the tavern keeper. If followed, they will quickly spot the character(s) and attempt to shake them. Both are 3rd level thieves with shortswords set to watch Gaudern. If any shadows are particularly persistent they will be led into an ambush.

Thieves' ambush: 4 low level fighters in leather with maces and 2 low level thieves with clubs. The ambushers will attempt to drive off the players, and will flee as soon as the two thieves from the bar make good their escape.

If no one notices the observers in the bar, the party should witness Gaudern being set upon by the two thieves from the bar and their ambush. In the unlikely event they don't rush to his aid, Anfas will scathingly suggest they take up a career in accounting and rush forth to save his customer, and the unhappy party will find that they have just lost a job opportunity unless they talk fast.

Undoubtedly your group are made of the stuff of heroes, and after driving off the band of ruffians will be invited to meet Gaudern the next morning at the west gate of the city. If asked, the elven warrior will provide up to 1500 Gold pieces (total) for provisioning; making it clear that this is an advance against any treasure found. There is just enough time remaining that afternoon to make any preparations and purchases necessary.

The Quest: Leaving Port Hiron

The next morning dawns bright and clear. The 40 mile journey across rolling farmlands will pass uneventfully, although any character with woodsman or ranger training may notice that someone seems to be following. If this fact is brought to Gaudern's attention, he will assume that additional adventurers were recruited by Anfas and insist on riding back to meet them. Otherwise the skulkers will wait to attack after the quest camps for the night on the eaves of the forest.

Ailgus the bold: mid level fighter in chain & shield with

longsword

8 highwaymen: low level fighters in leather & shield with shortswords

4 thieves: 1st level thieves with clubs and slings

This formidable band represents the local Thieves Guild's attempt to cut themselves in on the action. Ailgus will concentrate on Gaudern, while the rest of the troop distribute themselves roughly evenly on his companions. The four slingers will snipe from cover. The attack will break off rapidly if the adventurers put up a spirited defence; and the ruffians will scurry away to lick their wounds and find easier prey.

Gaudern, although not seriously challenged by his opponents, will make a point of appearing in trouble as a test of his party's loyalty. If they respond appropriately, he will reward them by showing them his map and revealing his heritage. Although his map shows only the city and the Priest's Circle, he is confident that Rith Barradu can be found.

The Quest: Traveling in the Forest

The next day our stalwart band will enter the forbidding Forest of Rith Barradu. Scattered copses of trees will soon join together, and as the day progresses the true forest of towering trees will be entered. The shadowing effects of the looming giants keep undergrowth to a minimum except near the clearings. Horseback travel is no real problem under the forest canopy since the first layer of growth generally starts 30-50 feet above the ground. Once well into this trackless expanse there will be constant danger.

One of the biggest problems travelers will face is navigation. Only major terrain features are stable, even some of the large rivers and lake may be affected by a wet or dry spell. With care and attention to the sun (or a compass, if you so allow) Gaudern hopes to keep heading more or less west until he finds the Coldwater River. Following this flow to Coldwater Lake, the plan is then to bear north and find what Gaudern believes to be the Silver river which so many elven songs speak of. He will freely admit the limits of his overland navigation and gratefully concede this chore to any comrade who demonstrates a familiarity with forest navigation. The elven warrior is quite willing to try any other theory of the whereabouts of Rith Barradu, as he seriously expects the search to take several years.

Any readily visible trail indicates the presence of sentient beings; forest creature's track are barely discernable to those unlearned in the lore of woodcraft. The unwary will soon learn that a trail which is easy to follow often leads to disaster in the form of a hungry monster's lair. This condition is far from unique to the Forest of Rith Barradu

and any character with woodland skills or background will avoid the larger trails. Travel through the Forest is accomplished at a rate of about 20 miles per day with rational packing, while those willing to risk the larger trails might be able to make 30 miles on a good day.

The local wildlife present a somewhat less urgent but potentially more dangerous problem. The forest teems with life, much of which is essentially harmless. Birds, small mammals, and insects will be a constant presence. If they suddenly fall silent; it is usually the sign of some major disturbance such as the approach of an angry cave giant.

In addition to the more normal sorts of creatures, the Forest has its more unusual denizens. Travellers will soon learn to be wary of Gelgoids in the deep glades and vinelings on swampy ground. The truly woodwise may discover the secret of the Sylvania lichens, whose colors can warn of approaching evil. Gaudern is aware that such a plant exists, but he mistakenly believes it to be some type of flowering plant.

The Quest: Areas of Interest

Based on the sketchy information he has available, Gaudern knows that the site of Rith Barradu is on a lake at the junction of two rivers. His study of the accounts of survivors of earlier forays leads him to believe that Rith Barradu is further north and west than most other scholars have placed it. Since he (and consequently the players) actually know nothing of the true location of Rith Barradu, their chosen path may vary a great deal, to say nothing of the chances of getting lost. The following areas of interest may be reached in almost any order; they are listed in order from east to west as much as possible.

The Goran Heartland

Between the Blue and Coldwater Rivers lives the bulk of the Goran and Orc population of the forest. This region was once one of the most beautiful provinces of Rith Barradu but today it is marred by the constant warring of Goran and Orc tribal factions. Large tracts of forest have been maliciously burned off, and the resultant erosion has turned the northern part of this region into twisted badlands. The Blue River has turned a muddy, rusty color as a result.

The largest portion of the Forest remains intact, for even Orcs find some virtue under the spreading boughs of the trees. They find the cool, damp darkness on the forest floor quite pleasant. The ample cover favors the hit-and-run sniping that Orcs are so well known for.

Most of the stable population of the Goran Heartland is found in the shattered ruins of three elven cities. As one might imagine, the inhabitants just LOVE visitors (for dinner or

sacrifices, that is). Humans might conceivably pass into one of these strongholds of evil since there are men in the area who have some commerce with the humanoids.

The society of the area is brutally simple: the strong rule. Dynasties last only as long as the swordarm of the eldest male. The dominant forces in the region are the Goran shamans, the Cynrhonin, and the Shunned Ones. Both have a disturbing tendency to sacrifice "lesser beings" to appease their gods or aid in whatever magical ritual they are currently engaged in. The warriors fear and respect these evil priests and sorcerers and strive to please them, partly to avoid being stabbed, burned, flayed, torn asunder, drowned in their own blood, or any of the many other charming forms of sacrifice.

Oddly enough, this very brutality makes the area easier to penetrate. Casual slayings are commonplace, so a small force riding through will be molested only if they attract the attention of the priests or war chieftains. One must simply hope to ride the fine line between being so weak as to become prey and so strong as to constitute a threat.

Some farming is done in the cleared areas, but most of the essentials are gleaned from the Forest or raids into the farmlands around Port Hiron. The lush fertility of this injured paradise once supported many times the current population. The current inhabitants are often lucky to make ends meet.

Nag Carock

The Goran magical abilities make them more powerful than their Orc cousins, so of course they took the best dwellings for themselves. Nag Carock sits atop a spur of the Ice Mountains with the Blue River curling past far below. Once a lovely airy city, it now looms blackly over the surrounding countryside. The Goran delight in burning had denuded the Forest for miles in every direction. The resulting erosion has made much of the Blue River valley a wasteland.

The Forbidden City

One only of the ancient elven cities remains largely intact. What power has preserved it none can now say, but the evil creatures of the area know all too well that some power resides within the walls.

The Oracle of the Redwoods

Deep in the heart of the Forest of Rith Barradu lies a sacred grove of redwood trees, enormous trees which surround a beautiful, isolated glen. In this glen sits an oracle, his origins unknown and perhaps unknowable. The Oracle is capable of answering almost any question concerning the use of white

magic or the Forest, but dispenses his answers and wisdom only to those he deems worthy.

The goran and cyrhornin have long sought the location of the Oracle, but due to the diligence of its' guardians they have so far failed.

In addition to the Oracle the following forces will always be present in the immediate vicinity of the Sacred Grove:

3 Guardians of the Sacred Grove: mid to high level Elven Archers with magical abilities. They will be armed with +2 Longbows, +1 Arrows, and +3 Short Swords.

12 mid level Elven Archers of the Brotherhood, armed with longbows and short swords. They will wear green enameled chainmail and camouflaged tunics, cloaks, gloves, and hoods.

12 riding Elks

The Eye of the Oracle: the most powerful guardian of the Sacred Grove. The Eye is a glowing ball of light similar in appearance to a will-o-wisp or lunagar. It always travels alone, seeking those who have strayed too close to the grove or who have attracted the interest of the Oracle. If the intruders are evil, the Eye leads them astray, usually into some trap or ambush set by the Guardians of the Sacred Grove. If the intruders are good the Eye either leads them away from the strongholds of evil or, if the Oracle believes that they are worthy, directs them to the Oracle. The Eye moves quickly, and is always careful to stay just out of arrow range.

Note: This provides an outline of a basic adventure. The rest is up to you, the gamemaster. Descriptions of some appropriate monsters and creatures follow and are also available on disk. The main characters: the player characters and Gaudern Greycloak are left to your imagination...

THE MONSTERS, CREATURES, AND ENCOUNTER TABLES GIVEN IN THIS BOOK MAY BE USED WITH THE SCENARIO GIVEN ABOVE OR MAY BE INTEGRATED INTO YOUR OWN CAMPAIGNS. FEEL FREE TO ADD TO THE ENCOUNTER TABLES OR TO USE ANY OF THESE BEASTS IN YOUR OWN WORLD. HAVE FUN!

- THE CREATURES OF THE DARK SIDE -

Arwenangau (Leapers)

The Arwenangau (pronounced AR-WHEN-ONG-GOW) are the ambushers of the great forest. These small humanoid creatures stand less than two feet tall when erect but possess remarkable camouflage. They cling to the high branches of the forest's trees, waiting for weak targets to wander along on the ground below. When they are still and clinging to trees, the Arwenangau look exactly like burls on the wood.

When they attack, the Arwenangau leap from the trees in great numbers (often as many as twenty). Some scramble for packs, weapons, pouches or other items of treasure, while others throw themselves at the necks and faces of characters, biting with their razor-sharp teeth or spitting acid for one to four points of damage. When they are satisfied with their hoard or when battle starts going against them, Arwenangau let out piercing howls and scramble up the surrounding trees at incredible speeds.

Cave Giant

Solitary, ill-tempered, and strong, these twelve foot humanoids dwell in the mossy caves that dot the Forests of Rith Barradu. They will only trouble those who invade their territories, but they deal with such intruders sharply, attacking without seeming provocation. Cave Giants attack by pounding the ground with their enormous fists, causing all within thirty feet to lose their footing and fall. They then charge and pound hapless trespassers to a pulp as they are scrambling to get up.

The Cave Giant's skin coloring resembles a mossy lichen-covered boulder. When resting or motionless, the Cave Giant has excellent camouflage.

Cynrhonin

The Cynrhonin (pronounced SIN-RHO-NIN) are among the most terrifying creatures of the darkened Forest of Rith Barradu. Cynrhonin possess the ability to change their shape to any humanoid form, and will often appear as elves or men to gain a party's favor. The Cynrhonin have mastered the languages of the men and elves of the Forests of Rith Barradu, and are thus convincing mimics. In natural form, Cynrhonin are enormous white grubs, some ten feet long from head to tail and four feet in diameter.

Cynrhonin are able to use the weapons of their assumed forms with reasonable proficiency, but their most feared form of attack is their powerful magic of decay. Cynrhonin are able to wither plants, causing trees to collapse and branches to fall. They are able to cause ten years of aging to humans or forty years to elves with a single spell. They can cause swords to rust, armor to rot, shields to age to brittleness. Finally, Cynrhonin are able to leech the very vitality of opponents at a rate of up to four points per combat turn, using this leeched damage to heal themselves.

Fungoi

Lichen-like in appearance, Fungoi are actually sentient creatures which leap from their resting places on trees to any heat-producing object which passes by them (such as a living creature). Upon attaching themselves to a creature, Fungoi excrete a substance which causes the victim to run off into the woods at full speed for one hour. Characters may try to resist this affect. Meanwhile, if not burned out by the application of fire (with the resulting damage to the character) the Fungoi burrow themselves inside the victim, and curl around the brain stem. There they sit, allowing the character to regain consciousness and return to his companions. When the opportunity presents itself (such as when the character's companions are asleep), the Fungoi seizes control of its host, spawning a duplicate of itself which the host spits onto a companion.

A Fungoi which has made its way fully inside a character can only be killed by healing magic which cures disease. If not killed, the Fungoi wanders around inside its host for up to ten years before it reproduces and kills its host.

Wandering at various points in the Forests of Rith Barradu are humans and elves who have been taken over by Fungoi. To all appearances, they will seem perfectly normal characters and may even join an adventuring party. Only when the party is asleep, or when only one member has sight of the Fungoi-infested character, will the Fungoi strike. A host can usually spit a Fungoi less than five feet, but if it misses, the Fungoi can launch itself from the ground to the intended victim. A host can contain up to three Fungoi duplicates, and will flee if the victim kills all three.

Gelgoid (Leaf Leeches)

Deep in the heart of the forest, where the trees grow thickest above the heads of wanderers, dwell the Gelgoid leeches. Identical in appearance to leaves, the Gelgoid wait patiently in the branches of the tallest trees until they sense vibrations on the forest floor below. Then they drop in large groups, attaching themselves to victims and draining blood for three combat turns until sated. The Gelgoid vary in color as the seasons change, making them extremely hard to detect, and are able to control their flight down from the treetops to home in on heat sources below. Gelgoid are very susceptible to fire.



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Goran

The scent of carrion follows these dark green skinned humanoids as they carry on their barbaric rituals of destruction in the depths of the woods. Goran generally travel in packs of not less six, with a dozen or more typically roaming the woods together. Despite their diminutive stature (the average Goran stands less than four feet tall but weighs fully 140 pounds), the Goran are fierce fighters, and will always pursue and fight opponents as long as even a single Goran is able to draw breath.

The most feared attack of the Goran, however, is not their fighting ability but their powerful skill in the black arts of magic. Every party of ten or more Goran will have at least one black magician, a master of the magics of fire and disease. The Goran seem to act with no purpose but the wanton destruction of the forests, a task they carry out with a vengeance. Many a grove of blackened and withered trees stands witness to the power of Goran magic, and many an elf has, in times gone by, fallen to the curse of Goran fire.

In battle, the Goran go to any length to hide and protect their spell casters. Their tactics range from surrounding Goran shamans with a living shield of fighters to arm-waving and babbling tactics by fighters to distract opponents from true spell-casting shaman. Goran make frequent use of light crossbows to keep opponents from approaching shaman and their guards.

If possible, Goran will not kill opponents, but will drag

them off, presumably to be used in fire rituals of sacrifice. It is thought that somewhere, in the vast wood surrounding Rith Barradu, the Goran have a city or a base from which they launch their foul operations. Sadly, such a base has never been found.

Grue

First appearing on the dark roads skirting the edges of the Forest of Rith Barradu, the Grue - as the folk tales call them - stalk the cold and lampless corners of the wood at night. These horrid creatures travel only at night, assuming gaseous form to fly unseen through fog and mist. In gaseous form, a Grue is impervious to physical attack, and can only be harmed by magic which attacks the mind. The gibbering yell of the Grue, its only attack usable in gaseous form, paralyzes all who fail to resist it with fright. In order to otherwise attack, the Grue must assume physical form, drawing mass out of the fog which surrounds it.

Even in physical form, the Grue remains invisible until it attacks a victim. Fully a dozen feet tall when rearing, these horrid serpentine creatures can attack their victims in three ways:

- * By raking the victim with both enormous claws and biting with its gaping jaws
- * By staring at the victim with its bloody central eye, causing the victim to flee in terror
- * By screaming with a gibbering yell, causing all who hear the sound and cannot resist the magic to freeze with fright

If the Grue is battled to near the point of death, it will try to turn itself back into fog, a process which takes two combat turns.

The only known weakness of the Grue is its heavy breathing, which can be heard in any of its forms at distances of up to eighty feet.

Heartwood Mole

A creature surely conjured from the very soul of evil, the Heartwood Mole lives a life of unabashed malice. These small creatures, not more than six inches in length, thrive on the heartwood of the great trees of the forest, sucking the very life of the oldest of trees and filling the trees with lust, hatred, and malice toward all living things. The Heartwood Mole floats effortlessly through the treetops, supported by a constantly full belly of helium gas. When it finds a tree strong in the life and magic of the forest, it attaches itself like a mosquito to the upper branches of the tree, and begins to eat away at the heartwood.

Months later, its hideous task complete, the mole enters the tree and takes control of it. The power of the mole allows the tree to move slowly, to coil its roots about enemies, to strike wanderers with its branches or cover them in blackened leaves. The tree gradually turns black, but retains its vitality for years, until finally the mole splits into two and leaves the shattered stump of the tree in search of two new victims.

When flying or when attached to a tree, the mole is susceptible to attack with ranged weapons and/or magic. If attacked, the mole will remove itself from its tree victim and turn on its attackers, shooting acid from its proboscis for a distance of up to 50 feet. Once inside a tree, the mole attacks with the limbs of the tree, but is still susceptible to magical attack.

Lunagar (Moon Slaves)

Only appearing on nights when the moon is full, Lunagar appear as small balls of light, hovering in groups of five or more, looking for living victims. When they find likely victims, they begin to dance around in the air in a swirling pattern of colors. All who watch for three or more combat turns and fail to resist the magic of the dance are held motionless, transfixed by the spinning colors. After one hour, the bodies of those who watch are turned to stone and their minds are taken by the Lunagar deep into the heart of the woods. It is said that when the night of the full moon has passed, the Lunagar return to the moon for one month, taking with them minds of their victims. Killing a Lunagar releases the mind.

Mutants

The product of some foul magic, mutants are small (3' tall) humanoid creatures who live in the branches of trees and shower unwelcome visitors with rocks. They live in large groups and rarely leave their trees until they have killed their victims.

Nebish

The Nebish are a race of forest low-life, the pack rats and petty thieves of the sylvan lands. Three feet tall and mottled green in skin tone, the Nebish make their lives preying on the weak, and will run at the first sign of bloodshed. Most often, the Nebish will try to steal items from a party of adventurers when they are asleep, or when their vigilance momentarily slips. Their high speed and silent movement allow them success in many of their follow-and-strike missions. They appear in large numbers (usually 20 or more) and will often run into a camp screaming and waving their hands while one of their number slips off quietly with valued items. They have no loyalty whatsoever to each other and will often sacrifice several of their number to make off with some alluring item of treasure.

Screamers

Among the most feared beasts of the cursed wood, Screamers literally feed upon the fears of living creatures. Appearing only on the coldest and dampest of nights, Screamers can be heard at great distances shrieking with blood-curdling sharpness. Invisible until they attack, the wispy flying Screamers will try to paralyse their victims with their shriek of terror before attacking. When a victim is frozen with fright, the Screamer descends to feed, wrapping its wispy tendrils about the victim and feeding on his fears, until the victim goes insane. The victim of a Screamer's attack is quickly drained of strength and goes insane after five combat turns. Screamers are susceptible to all forms of attack.



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Shunned Ones

When the Forests of Rith Barradu were peaceful and pure, and when the age of men was young, a clan of humans settled about the glens of the outer forest. For years, they lived in peace with the elves of Rith Barradu, and as generations passed, they became masters of the magic arts of healing.

But as time passed, some of their number grew bold and began to experiment with the magics they had so carefully crafted for generations. As the forces of evil and decay crept into the once-proud forest, some of these humans struck deals with the Goran and Cynrhonin, betraying their fellow tribesmen for powerful magics of decay and destruction.

Their newfound powers changed the Shunned Ones, causing their skin to rot and their bodies to wither. Plagues of unnatural causes swept their villages, killing most and leaving only the febrile and withered. Their healing powers fading rapidly to the corrupting forces of the Goran magic, they wrapped their failing bodies in rags and leaves, and began to wander the forests, spreading disease and seeking revenge for their misfortune on all living creatures.

The Shunned Ones often travel alone, and will never be found outside their lairs in groups larger than four. Their appearance is that of mummified men, wrapped in rags and limping painfully. They attack with their powerful magics which cause wounds, curses, and disease. Their curses can cause paralysis, fear, and reduction of combat abilities. Their diseases vary from fevers which cause fainting once per day to a rotting disease which causes the victim to gradually lose extremities and is fatal if not cured in one to four months. The sight of a Shunned One causes paralysis for one round.



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Vapor Wolves

The great hunters of the darkest sections of the forest, the Vapor Wolves prey upon those foolish enough to enter their domain. Vapor Wolves first appear as gentle wisps of grey mist, moving skillfully about the trees. But as they approach their prey, their rapacious howls give away their true intent.

Traveling in packs of ten or more, Vapor Wolves always begin by circling their victims, growling and yelping while they size up their opponents' strength. If the wolves believe an encounter will go in their favor (or if they are hungry), they will land and assume the forms of enormous grey wolves, surrounding their prey and leaping to the attack. When a Vapor Wolf is killed, he explodes, delivering 1-6 points of damage to all within 5'. If half their number are killed without comparable losses to the enemy, the wolves will retreat, returning to vapor form in one turn and flying quickly away.



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Vinelings

Vinelings so closely resemble the twisted vines that cover the forest floor that they are virtually undetectable to untrained eyes. Vinelings, however, are a far cry from their natural brethren. They live mainly in swampy areas, where the floor of the forest is soft. Upon sensing vibrations in the forest around them, Vinelings will quickly coil themselves around the legs of intruders, digging thorns into their victims' flesh and pulling them down into the forest floor. Unless the victim quickly frees himself, more Vinelings will join the fray, and the

victim will sink quickly to a choking end.

Wolf Spiders

These hairy spiders, some ten feet in length, roam the forests in search of live food. Able to leap 20 feet in a single jump, these solitary spiders often hide temporarily behind boulders and in caves, waiting for victims to stumble close enough for a fatal leap. They attack with their razor-sharp mandibles which contain a potent venom causing sleep in one to four rounds. Their exoskeletons are extremely hard, making them hard to injure and they are remarkably fast for their size.

Wood Spirits

These ghosts of human and elven heroes have returned to the forest to take revenge for their hideous fates at the hands of evil. Unfortunately, they can no longer discriminate between those of good heart and those of evil intent, and attack indiscriminantly. If a party contains elves, a Wood Spirit (they are always solitary) is only 25% likely to attack, and will likely hover just out of arrow range and watch the party for hours. Otherwise, they are 80% likely to attack.

Wood Spirits attack with swords and bows of cold, weapons doing double their normal damage because of their intense, bone-chilling properties. They are unaffected by sharp or edged weapons unless tipped with silver, and even blunt weapons do only half damage. Wood Spirits are often impressed with displays of forest love and will break off attacks on any creature which can convince the Spirit that its motives are pure.

The Brotherhood

These secret order elves are the defenders of the Forests of Rith Barradu from the encroachments of the Goran and Cynrhonnin. Their total number is unknown, but no more than a dozen have ever been seen together. Their tactics are hit-and-run, their method: stealth. Skilled with long bow and short sword, and often riding on the backs of elk, these renegade elves have taken upon themselves the task of harrying the Goran and Cynrhonnin in their pursuit of Rith Barradu and the Sacred Grove. They will aid good creatures in their battles with Goran, but will remain hidden in the forest until the last possible moment.

Centaur

Few remain of the once-proud centaurs, who used to gallop about the Forest with joy and abandon. Half man and half horse, the centaurs now travel alone, trying to find a safe haven from the fires of the Goran.

Eye of the Oracle

Deep in the heart of the Forest of Rith Barradu, it is said, lies a sacred grove of redwood trees, enormous trees which surround a beautiful, isolated glen. In this glen, the elders say, sits an oracle. In the forgotten days when elves reigned happily throughout the wood, the Oracle of the Redwoods proved a source of magic and wisdom to all elves who proved worthy. After the butchery of the elves, the location of the grove itself was lost and many a party of Goran and Cynrhonnin has been lost in the search of this last stronghold of elven times.

The Eye of the Oracle is a ball of light similar in appearance to a will-o-wisp or Lunagar. The Eye always travels alone, seeking those who have strayed too close to the grove or who have attracted the interest of the Oracle. If the intruders are evil, the Eye leads them off on a false path, usually into some trap or ambush set by the Guardians of the Sacred Grove. If the intruders are good the Eye either leads them away from the strongholds of evil or, if the Oracle believes that they are worthy, directs them to the Oracle. The Eye moves quickly, and always stays just out of arrow range.

The Eye has only a single attack - a spell of fear directed against a single opponent each combat turn. This spell causes the opponent to run at top speed in a random direction for two hours becoming totally lost in the process.

Fairy

These small winged creatures are the protectors of the trees and the sworn enemies of the Heartwood Moles. Their number has severely diminished since the heyday of the Forests of Rith Barradu, but a solitary fairy can still be spotted tending and healing the great trees of the dying forest. Fairies speak elven and will aid those of good heart who penetrate the heart of the forest. Fairies are able to cure minor wounds, to cure diseases, and to cause confusion in evil creatures.

Forest Elves

Light green skinned and slight of build, the Forest Elves of Rith Barradu once roamed the forest in great numbers, but the Goran and Cynrhonnin have reduced them to huddled families dwelling isolated in the tops of trees. The forest elves have become somewhat xenophobic, and avoid all encounters where possible. Many believe that their city of Rith Barradu still stands deep within the forest.

Giant Condor

Most of the Giant Condor have left, having flown to distant lands with the coming of the Goran. But every so often a solitary bird can be seen spreading his thirty foot wingspan far above the treetops and watching the goings on in the forest below. Giant Condor have been known to attack Cynrhonnin in the aid of elves and other forest creatures, but always fly off soon after, despite their known mastery of the languages of men and elves.

Guardians of the Sacred Grove

The Guardians of the Sacred Grove are reputed to number nine, but always travel alone. Their sacred purpose is to guard the Sacred Grove containing the Oracle of the Redwoods from all intruders not guided there by the Eye of the Oracle. Selected by the Oracle itself from among the strongest and stealthiest of elves, the Guardians are champions of the sword and long bow and are masters of a rare form of plant magic. Their skill in magic allows them to shape wood with their hands, harden wood to the strength of steel, animate plants and trees, and step into trees to effectively disappear.



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King Redwood

Once the tallest of the Redwoods of the Sacred Grove, King Redwood has taken to wandering the forests, stamping out those creatures who harm trees. Hundreds of feet tall, King Redwood took to walking about the forest over the extreme objections of the Guardians of the Sacred Grove and of the Oracle. His extreme boredom at the prospect of waiting around the grove for the approach of evil motivated him to begin his wanderings, wanderings made possible by his complete ignorance of the fact that redwood trees can't walk.

King Redwood moves noisily throughout the woods and confronts most intruders testily, threatening them with enormous branches. If convinced of a parties good intent, he can be quite talkative and is quite knowledgable about the Forest. Having promised the Guardians not to reveal the location of the Sacred

Grove, he will grow angry if anyone asks him about it, but he will gladly discourse at length on other topics.

Satyr

The messengers of the elves, the satyr are fleet-footed creatures with the torso and head of men but the legs of a goat. Satyr are found primarily near reputed locations of the city of Rith Barradu and warn elves about approaching enemies. They are also in touch with the Brotherhood.

The Seekers

A party of men and elves from the Cold Lands in the North, the Seekers are in the Forest on some unknown mission. I believe that they are seeking the Oracle for some reason. Their names are Reskor, Partu, Barak, and Callisandra.

Sylvani

The Sylvani are a race of mossy lichens with the ability to detect the presence of evil and danger. Normally, Sylvani are green in color. When creatures of good are near at hand, they turn a gentle blue. However, when creatures of evil approach within a quarter mile, the Sylvani turn a deep red and chirp gently. Those who know the woods well often camp near Sylvani patches.

Mood Sprite

Mood Sprites are tiny (six inches tall) flying creatures of pure heart and trusting, jolly manner. Killed in large number by the Goran, they still live deep in the heart of the Forest, where they hope to trade gifts of healing herbs for magic and gold.

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...in terror and sadness, the elves fled to the depths of the forest, never again to cross the paths of men. Some say their great city of Rith Barradu stands even now amidst the tufted trees of the now-darkened forest, a haven to the tattered remnant of their race. Some say simply that the elves of Rith Barradu are no more.

The foul beasts of Rith Barradu's forests, it is said, have now spread beyond the borders of the land and they have begun to appear in many worlds, working their evil. There was a time many years ago when my travels took me to the cursed woods. What follows is the record of what I saw...

FROM THE INTRODUCTION

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