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# INTRODUCTION



ANY STORIES ARE TOLD about the Whisperwoods: The trees speak to each other, they say. Mysterious shadows follow people through the thicket.

Sometimes small creatures whisper to a traveler.

All those stories have one thing in common: They always mention Stoneham, a small village in the middle of the Whisperwoods.

The village is already a few centuries old, but the Forest is a lot older than human history can recount. Old magic dwells inside the forest, its origins long forgotten by its inhabitants throughout the eons. Many intuit the dwelling magic. There are many scary tales about the forest and its inhabitants too, but no one knows anything specific.

One particularly dark secret of this forest is guarded by a Hag and a small circle of fey. What was entrapped in the Heart of the Woods, must remain sealed and hidden. Even if the unsuspecting inhabitants of the forest must be sacrificed for it.

This includes the people of Stoneham. Every fourteen years they hold a Sacrificial Rite, where a cursed child is burned on a pyre on the last night of October to calm the forest.

## INFORMATION FOR PLAYERS

The adventure is designed for four to six characters of levels 6-8. It works best with four characters of level 8 or six characters of level 6.

The adventure plays in a dark high-fantasy forest setting. The people believe in the power of the forest. There are many mysterious creatures and monsters, and the forest is filled with magic phenomena.

The priest Brythan has issued a call for adventurers to protect the village of Stonham from the evil machinations and curses of a witch.

## ATTENTION

The adventure has a rather serious, dark, and dramatic tone. It contains religious to fanatic rites and some bizarre views of the inhabitants of the forest. Other sensible topics are child sacrifice, torture, compulsive acts, human experimentation, intrigue, and lies. Please use your common sense and watch the reactions of your players. When in doubt, turn down the effects and be less explicit in your descriptions.

## ABSTRACT

**Background.** Eliade lives in the village for many generations. She assumed many different identities during the decades. Currently, she lives as the widowed Rosalie Noldrem in the village and helps the hunter with his work.

When she was young, she settled in the forest with a coven that consisted of Euphenia and her sister Esmae beside her. But Euphenia did not want to share the forest with humans. Thus, a rift between the Hags has been developing for decades. Eliade preferred peaceful coexistence with the humans and Esmae sided with her sister, who perceived the humans as a threat.

Eliade tried to oppose Euphenia but wasn't strong enough. Therefore she desperately searched for the Sanctum of the Forest. Hags didn't have access to it, but she still managed to reach a covenant with the fey.

By using the power of the forest, Euphenia and Esmae were sealed in the Heart of the Woods, where the lair of the coven was located. To maintain the seal, it had to be strengthened by a Sacrificial Rite every 14 years. For this purpose, Eliade lived among the humans as one of them. She cursed women to bear and give birth to cursed children. Those children had to live alone in a hut near the village until they were finally sacrificed.

**Current Events.** The sacrificial rite is close. But the forest is acting weird. Weirder than usual. Meanwhile, the village is haunted by horrible curses. The village's priest is looking for experienced adventurers to deal with the matter. He suspects there is a witch in the village who is responsible for the curses.

But in actual fact, the priest is a disciple of the sealed Hag Euphenia. As her puppet, he is tasked to expose the green Hag Eliade and make sure that the Sacrificial Rite can not be performed. Unfortunately, he can't interfere with the rite directly, because it is a long tradition in Stoneham.

Meanwhile, Eliade tries to maintain her cover, mitigate the curses of the sealed Hag that haunt the village, and keep Euphenia trapped inside the seal.



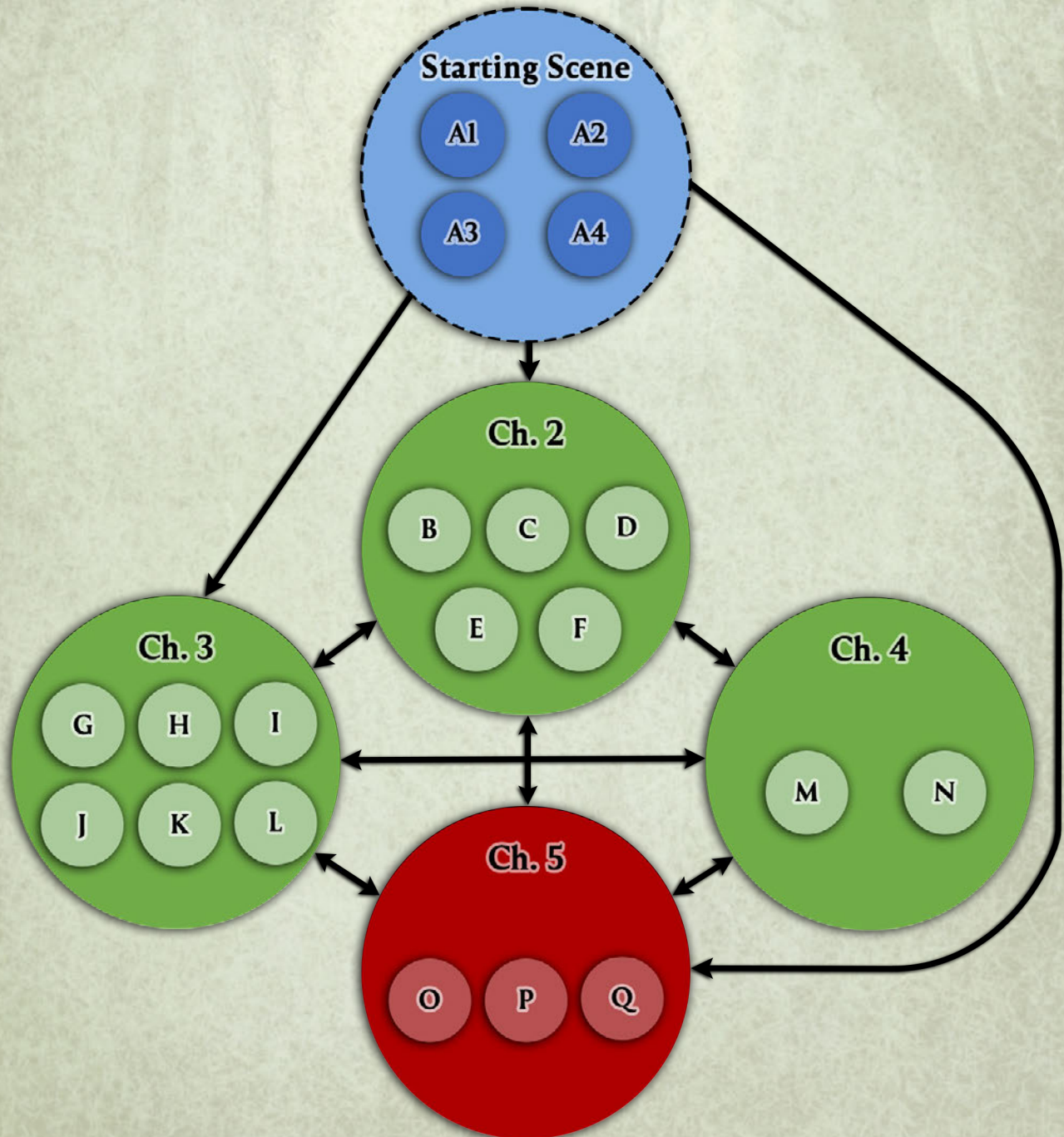
# SCENE OVERVIEW

Here you get an overview of the structure of the adventure and a table of how the scenes (A, B, ...) are connected. The adventure doesn't follow a linear chapter structure. If you don't like the scenes or you are interested in other things in the adventure, just use the **Informations** and **Twists** from the scenes inside the chapter or the random tables for your own ideas.

Within this PDF there are a lot of links between the scenes, information, and NPC's. Use this to jump within the document without annoying

scrolling. Use this to freely run your individual adventure.

- It is recommended to use [A. \(p. 11\)](#) as the starting scene.
- Each green scene contains at least 2-3 hints about another green scene in the adventure.
- Each green scene is connected to all others (indicated by the arrows), and you can switch between them as needed during the game.
- The goal is to use the green scenes to get to the red scene.





# FACTIONS AND RELATIONSHIPS IN THE ADVENTURE

The adventure *The Secret of the Whisperwoods. The Curse of Stoneham* is a character-driven adventure. The focus is on the characters and NPC's, their actions & goals, and the resulting consequences. This offers the possibility to make decisions more freely, but at the same time requires a different form of background information. For this purpose, there is a brief overview of the existing factions, their goals, as well as a network of relationships to clarify the interrelationships of the individual NPCs at a glance.

## IMPORTANT FACTIONS IN THE ADVENTURE

The adventure features four major factions, with only the first three actually being game-bearing, which is not to say that the villagers of Stoneham cannot be given that role:

- 1. The Hag Eliade
- 2. The Hag Euphenia
- 3. The Fey in the Forest
- 4. The villagers of Stoneham

Basically, you have to consider the characters as a fifth independent faction, who can change the balance between the factions as plot drivers.

### 1. THE HAG ELIADE

**Description.** Eliade, as one of the central NPC's, possesses all the important information for the success of the adventure. She is the mastermind behind the Sacrificial Rite and is interested in keeping Euphenia trapped in her seal. For this, she takes advantage of the fairies.

**Goal.** Maintaining the status quo so she can continue to secretly divert magical energy during the Sacrificial Rite.

### 2. THE HAG EUPHENIA

**Description.** Euphenia is the central antagonist in the adventure and wants to take revenge on the fairies and Eliade for imprisoning her in her lair. She wants to enslave the people in the forest and keep them as livestock.

**Goal.** Break her seal and claim the entire forest for herself.

### 3. THE FEY IN THE FOREST

**Description.** The fairies of the forest want to get rid of Euphenia but have neither the courage nor the means to do so. Therefore, they reluctantly help Eliade to at least keep Euphenia captive.

They also dislike the Sacrificial Rite, but they have no other choice.

**Goal.** Get rid of the Hag Euphenia and protect the Cursed Child.

### 4. THE VILLAGERS OF STONEHAM

**Description.** The villagers are the uninformed but gullible participants in the Sacrificial Rite. The factions 1. to 3. carry out their power struggles secretly on the back of the devout community of Stoneham.

**Goal.** They want to continue their simple life carefree, without disturbances and overcome the curse in their village.

## IMPORTANT RELATIONSHIPS IN THE ADVENTURE

The relationship network shows the most important NPCs from this adventure. The overview is supplemented by short statements about how the respective NPCs relate to each other. How to use the network of relationships:

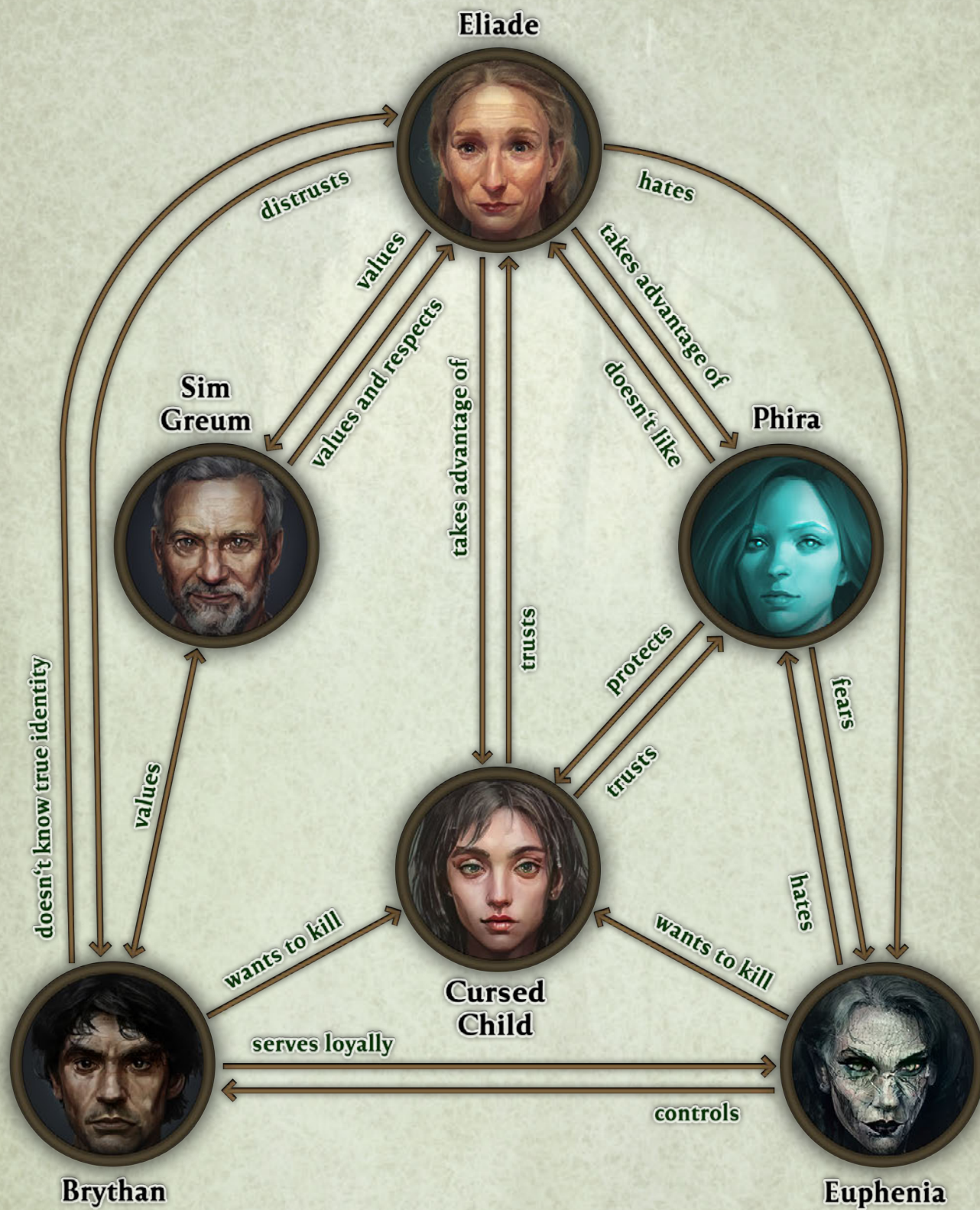
- The arrows between the NPC's indicate who is related to whom.
- If there is no arrow leading from one NPC to another, there is no relationship from that NPC to the other.
- The text above the arrows defines what the relationship between the NPC's is.
- Who the text comes from is determined by the direction of the arrow. The person from whom the arrow starts is at the beginning of the sentence. The person where the arrowhead ends is at the end of the sentence (example: **Phira** fears **Euphenia**.).

The faction affiliations were deliberately omitted, because there are no rigid affiliations for every NPC.

The network of relationships is an orientation for the basic interaction between the NPC's. On the other hand, these relationships can change due to the actions of the player characters.









Introduction	<p>CHAPTER 1: WHISPERWOODS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Brythan's call for help</li> <li>- rumors about the Whisperwoods</li> <li>- whisper encounter</li> <li>- starting Scene</li> </ul>
Confusion	<p>CHAPTER 2: STONEHAM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Curse</li> <li>- Brythan's quest</li> <li>- the Sacrificial Rite</li> <li>- rumors in the village</li> <li>- Phira's story</li> <li>- Eliade's story</li> </ul>
Setting and Pursuing Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- confront Brythan</li> <li>- confront Eliade</li> <li>- confront Phira</li> <li>- fight the curse</li> <li>- save the child</li> </ul>
	<p>CHAPTER 3: FAIRY GROVE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- contrast between happy fairy world and corruption</li> <li>- stories of the remaining fey</li> <li>- the corrupted treant</li> </ul>
	<p>CHAPTER 4: BLOCKSBERG</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ritual site and hidden glyphs</li> <li>- depressing normality of the sacrifice</li> <li>- background knowledge vs. conviction of the villagers</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Eliade's lair in contrast to her friendly attitude in the village</li> <li>- Eliade's secondary objective</li> </ul>
Climax	<p>CHAPTER 5: HEART OF THE WOODS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Euphenia's corruption</li> <li>- horror elements inside the lair</li> <li>- the heart</li> <li>- battle with Euphenia</li> </ul>
Resolution	<p>EPILOGUE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- consequences of the actions taken</li> <li>- tying up loose ends</li> <li>- prospect on the long term implications</li> </ul>

## TENSION ARC

This tension arc is meant to give you an idea of how the adventure is built and how you could run it. It is not a strict order of events and should not entice you into railroading (rigid, linear sequence of events). You don't have to check off all bullet points in a section. If you managed to create the right mood for a phase or your players just decide differently you may and should skip bullet points.

The introduction phase should be used to make the players curious and to hint that there is more to find than just Brythan's quest. It should also be used to show the dark atmosphere and the dangers of the Whisperwoods. Take your time the set the mood for the adventure.

During the confusion phase, the players get entangled in the schemes between [Brythan \(p. 23\)](#), [Eliade \(p. 25\)](#) and [Phira \(p. 25\)](#). If the players are too easily swayed by either side, you could use one of the provided twists to shake the confidence about their assessment of the situation. The players should be confused and need to work for a consistent picture of the situation.

During the next phase, the players should overcome their confusion. They are meant to define goals and pursue them. Here they can achieve some partial success and maybe new goals emerge along the way. Overall they should have the feeling that they are working towards a solution.

The climax of the adventure is the confrontation with Euphenia. Most players will probably look for a fight here, but conceding that the Sacrificial Rite is the lesser evil and showing them a dramatic Sacrificial Rite would be a proper climax for the adventure. There are also possible [alternate playstyles \(p. 55\)](#) if the players side with Euphenia. Some thought experiments about that are outlined in the epilogue.

During the resolution phase, the players can tie up [loose ends \(p. 54\)](#), if they so choose. There should be some retrospect on what decisions were made, how things played out, and what consequences that entails. After finishing the game you could also give them a prospect of how things continue after the players depart for a proper conclusion.



# CHAPTER 1: THE WHISPERWOODS



**T**HE WHISPERWOODS are an old and densely grown forest. It originally got its name because of the little Pixies, Fey Spirits, and Dryads who whispered hints to lost travelers to guide them out of the woods. Inside the forest, travelers were always enveloped in a feeling of warmth and comfort.

Still, the forest isn't harmless, especially if the intruders ignored the whispers of the fey: The undergrowth gets thicker and thicker the deeper you get into it, and before you know it, you can never find your way out.

Deep inside the forest, there is a secret Fairy Grove. The sanctum of the grove is connected to a passage into the Feywild and it permanently permeates the forest with fey magic. But the sanctum was corrupted and it weakens more and

more, which causes the forest to turn darker.

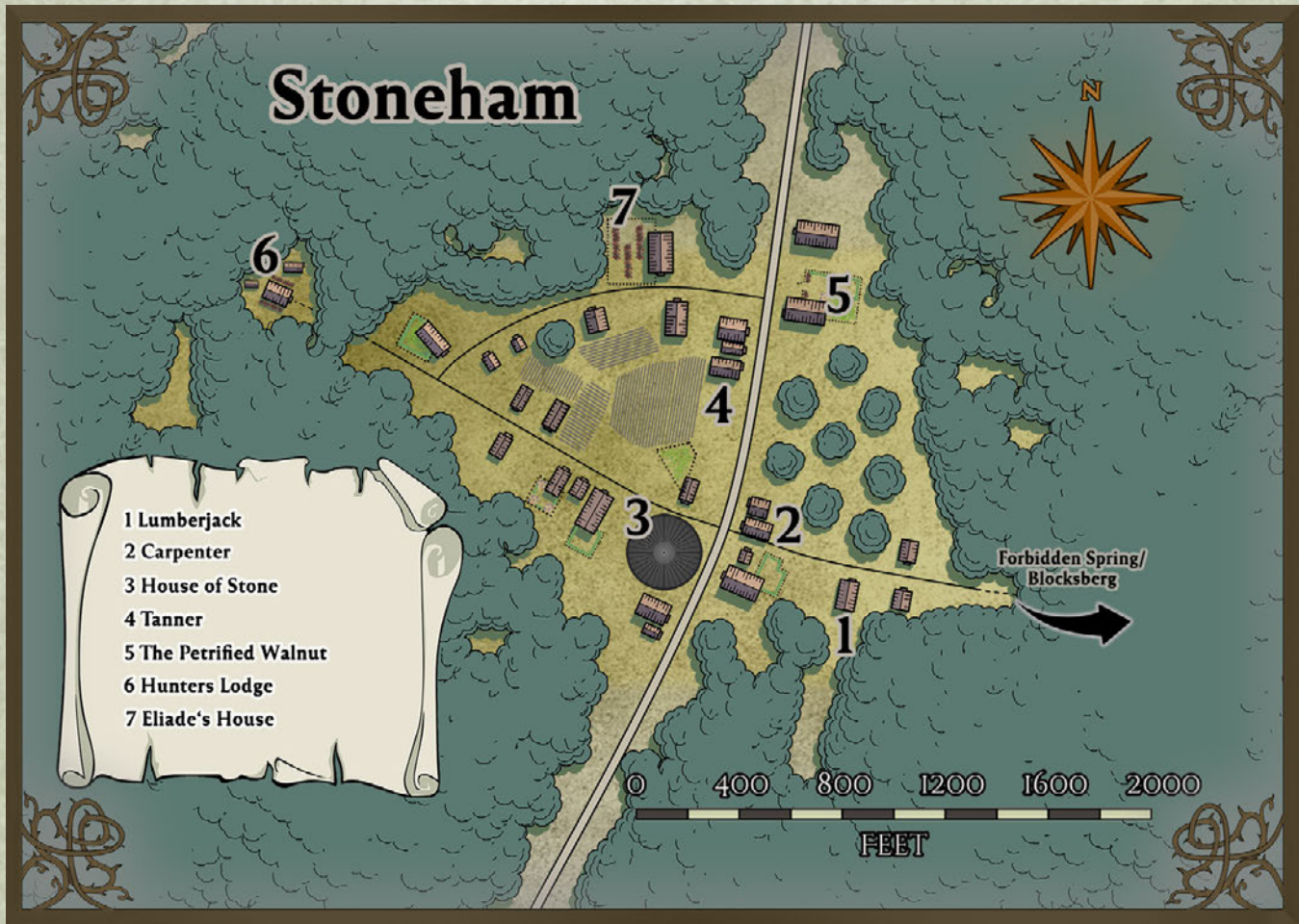
Over time, the forest has changed. Its trees seem to grow unnaturally tall and fast, creating the oppressive feeling to be surrounded by giants looking down grimly, waiting for you to make a wrong move.

By now the whispering confuses the travelers, frightens them, but all paths just lead the confused deeper into the forest. Instead of the little fey one now meets weird creatures. Disguised as trees, mushrooms, or other harmless things they make those who go astray vanish forever.

They drag the often half-dead travelers to Euphenia (p. 52) to the Heart of the Woods so she can feed on them.



## CHAPTER 2: STONEHAM



**S**TONEHAM was founded during the last major war. Refugees from all countries retreated deep into the woods and prayed that their pursuers wouldn't find them. The forest whispered hints to the poor farmers and craftsmen again and again and led them to a glade big enough to settle there. A lush meadow with lots of herbs and fertile soil. The forest also provided plenty of game for the hunters.

Over time, a well was dug and fields were planted for the cultivation of oats and potatoes. There are many small vegetable gardens. Otherwise, people live from hunting.

A little further off in the forest, there is a second glade. On this glade is a spring with a small island in the middle which has a huge rock towering on it. The villagers viewed the spring as a sacred place of the forest and forbid entering it.

Every 14 years, on the last day of October, the Cursed Child is burned on the nearby Blocksberg (p. 36) as a sacrifice for the forest. Shortly after the next Cursed Child is born and the cycle repeats. As soon as its powers awaken it gets sent to the spring and has to live in isolation until the next Sacrificial Rite.

### THE LEGEND OF STONEHAM

The rock shook and shone in a searing light that was visible all the way to the village. A voice came from deep within the forest and called the villagers to the rock at the spring. A hut had appeared there and the voice spoke to them: "On the sick child is a curse that will infect the forest." One of the children cried out, suddenly a mark was glowing on its forehead and vines burst out of the ground and flailed around. The voice spoke again: "But don't be afraid. The child can be cleansed, the curse fought, and the forest saved. If you wish to save his soul, offer it to the forest. Leave it here, burn the curse out of it in due time, and see the grateful soul healed by the forest."



## NEW CREATURES AND MAGICAL ITEMS

The monsters, NPC's, and magical items introduced in this chapter are detailed here.



### PROFILE

**Background.** Brythan has always been a very religious man, but very curious and close to nature too. One day he wandered through the Whipserwoods, got enthralled by the whispers of the Hag Euphenia, and got abducted to the center of the forest. After a few weeks of imprisonment, he lost faith in his god. He was a broken man and joined Euphenia. She listened to him. His prayers to her were heard. He became her mouthpiece and seven years ago the new priest of Stoneham (p. 17).

**Goals.** Satisfy his new “goddess” to get her attention.

**Personality.** friendly, cooperative, close to nature, devious and cunning

**Peculiarity.** He wears his holy symbol hidden (*Amulet of Allegiance* (p. 59)).

**Fears.** Not getting attention from his “goddess” anymore. Fear of failure.

## BRYTHAN GROFF

*Medium humanoid (Human), lawful evil*

**Armor Class** 13 (chain shirt)

**Hit Points** 32 (5d8 + 10)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)

**Skills** Deception +8, Medicine +7, Persuasion +3, Religion +4

**Senses** passive Perception 13

**Languages** Common, Dwarvish

**Challenge** 3 (700 XP)

**Aura of Corruption.** Brythan Groff uses an Action to eat a corrupted mushroom and emits a dark and frightening aura for 10 minutes in a radius of 30 ft. If his acolytes are within the range of the aura, they get +2 to all attack rolls.

**Hag's Blessing.** The Hag's disciple can use an action to transform into a raven (3/day) and stay in that form for 1 hour. Use the stat block of a raven **Raven** (MM, p. 335). If the hitpoints of the raven are reduced to 0, the Brythan turns back into his original form.

**Hag's Eminence.** As a bonus action, Brythan Groff can use a spell slot to add 10 (3d6) necrotic damage to his melee attacks. This effect lasts until the end of his next turn. If Brythan Groff uses a spell slot of 2nd level or higher, increases by 1d6 for each spell level higher than 1st.

**Spellcasting.** Brythan Groff is a 5th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks). He has the following cleric spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *Sacred Flame*, *Light*, *Thaumaturgy*

1st level (4 slots): *Sanctuary*, *Guiding Bolt*, *Cure Wounds*

2nd level (3 slots): *Lesser Restoration*, *Spiritual Weapon*

3rd level (2 slots): *Dispel Magic*, *Remove Curse*, *Spirit Guardians*

### ACTIONS

**Mace.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.  
*Hit:* 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage.

