

GRENWALD'S GREMLINS

by

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Grenwald's Gremlins is an AD&D 2nd Edition adventure designed for 6-8 player characters of levels 3-5 (about 28 total levels). As the prime motivation behind this plot is the rescuing of a good aligned ferryman and the destruction of a small group of malevolent new monsters, evil and possibly even neutral PCs are generally inappropriate. Ideally, the party will be well balanced and consist of at least a couple of strong fighters.

This module may be set around a wide lake in the midst of any temperate, heavily forested mountainous region of the DM's campaign world which has known human and demihuman settlements located nearby. Due to its short nature and narrow scope, the DM should experience little difficulty in incorporating this adventure into his or her own world and find it useful to spice up an otherwise boring period of overland travel.

To begin, the PCs should be seeking information concerning, for example, the condition of the road ahead or possible nearby ruins. They should lack the means (swimming, *flying*, etc) to cross any large body of water on their own. Additionally, the DM should be thoroughly familiar with the new monster type (the gremlin), which forms the impetus for this module.

For the Player Characters

Read or paraphrase the following to the players:

In recent weeks, you have completed a long, arduous trek across part of a high mountain range and are now leisurely traveling along a narrow trail through the thickly forested valley below. Seeking information concerning a future objective, you met a lone dwarf in the last village who enthusiastically directed you to a ferryman named Grenwald who operates a service over a lake only a few miles east of the settlement. Encouraged, you set out early this morning, breathing in the clean, crisp mountain air and admiring the spectacular local natural scenery.

Now, as you feel you must be close to your destination, the air slowly becomes mistier and cooler - even the most warmly dressed among your party begins to shiver. Finally, the fog-enshrouded surface of the lake comes into view beyond a small clearing. All is ominously still and silent as you move toward this forlorn place.

Assuming the PCs advance, proceed to the "Waiting" section.

For the Dungeon Master

Naturally, there is far more to this situation than first appears. Originally, Grenwald the ferryman was an heroic ranger who campaigned tirelessly with a troop of local mountain dwarves to rid the surrounding forest (the same one containing the PCs at the moment) of a large group of cyclopskin who had been harassing travelers for some time. Gradually, the ranks of their party dwindled as more and more of the courageous warriors were killed in combat. The crusaders were finally put to an end when a cyclopskin ambush defeated all except Grenwald, who was left for dead. Fortunately, a nearby band of unusually gregarious killmoulis discovered the hapless human and nursed him back to health as far as they were able - a process taking several months.

Meanwhile, the king of the mountain dwarves, anxious to rid himself of the cyclopskin menace once and for all and to avenge his friend Grenwald, sent a large party of his finest soldiers to drive all cyclopskin from the area.

They managed to succeed and since then, preoccupied with their own internal political struggles, the dwarves have retreated into their mountain fastness - today very rarely seen by outsiders.

By this time, Grenwald had reached the stage of maximum recovery. Unfortunately, his few permanent injuries would forever prohibit him from resuming the fighting profession on a full time basis. Realising this, Grenwald settled down in his cabin beside a mountain lake and began to study an old set of books he had looted from a cyclopskin lair years ago but had never got around to reading. These musty tomes covered the theories and concepts behind the understanding and casting of wizard spells, even including a few first-level incantations for practice. Eventually, the ranger decided to change profession and subsequently acquired the shaky skills of a beginner mage. To Grenwald's dismay, his magical abilities, due to the use of an unconventional method of tutelage, were inaccurate, thereby ensuring his spells would either fail or produce an undesirable effect about one third of the time. In order to hire a tutor to teach him the finer points of spell casting and, as his money supply had dwindled considerably, Grenwald decided to go into business for himself as a ferryman.

After the expenditure of all his remaining coins and after taking many slow, painful and laborious weeks chopping down trees and constructing jetties, Grenwald was ready to commence operations. Assisted by the same band of killmoulis who helped him earlier (and occasionally by other friendly forest inhabitants) the mage saved many a grateful passenger a long walk around the lake, a journey which many had grumbled about in the past. Although the service was only moderately used, the money and companionship it provided proved well worth Grenwald's while. As a result, he quickly began to gather funds and became well versed in the lore of the surrounding lands, thanks to the travellers' tales.

All went fairly well until Grenwald attempted to cast the *find familiar* spell. He only wanted a fox, ferret or the like to prowl the surrounds, looking out for easy game animals and dangerous monsters. Instead, however, the spell worked disastrously. A deafening explosion rocked the mage's cabin as four diminutive creatures (gremlins) suddenly appeared from a billowing yellowish cloud and subsequently raced around the room, smashing or throwing everything in sight with glee amid cackles of malevolent laughter. After a while, they turned on Grenwald's killmoulis who, being essentially nervous creatures at heart, generally fainted right away before being promptly bound and gagged by the invading gremlins. Grenwald himself put up a great struggle but eventually met the same fate as his little companions. With all opposition out of the way, the gremlins then set about their task at hand.

Due to their requirement of feeding off gremlin provoked negative emotions in other beings, the gremlin terrors set about devising yet another of their usual intricate schemes by first examining their human prisoner's possessions where they found out about his past and current actions. Finally, the gremlins realised that it would be advantageous to their perverted cause to seek out some cyclopskin and introduce them to their old foe, Grenwald. While attempting to do just that a few hours later, they met up with an exploratory party of cyclopskin whose task it was to see if the forest had quietened down enough to resettle in their former homeland. At first, the cyclopskin threatened to eat the gremlins immediately, but the gremlins faked a pleading and snivelling routine so well that a bargain was struck. The gremlins would keep their lives in return for the cyclopskin being led to Grenwald and being protected from intruders while the leader of the group journeyed to fetch the others and return with them to exact communal revenge upon the former ranger and once again settle in the area. The remaining cyclopskin, under the strictest instructions from their leader, set up camp a short distance from Grenwald's hut and are now remaining in their clearing, guarding their captives - Grenwald and his killmoulis - waiting for their fellows to return.

The gremlins, however, have absolutely no intention of keeping their end of the bargain. They intend to operate the ferry service themselves, charging very high fares and pestering the passengers until they come across a party of powerful looking adventurers such as the PCs. After harassments, the gremlins mean to inform these

people of the plight of their "poor human acquaintance" in the hope that they are noble enough to rescue the human and destroy the cyclopskin. While the battle is raging, the gremlins will inform the cyclopskin (whom they swore earlier to protect) that they have been tricked and will meet their doom at the hands of the adventurers. In the extra heated combat that is bound to ensue, the gremlins will join in and attack both sides - all the while feeding off the strong waves of hatred that will assuredly emanate from their enemies. After receiving the "meal" of a lifetime, the gremlins will make their escape to further satisfy themselves on other areas, reproducing and spreading their "fun" all over yet another unsuspecting world.

This is the complex web of intrigue in which the PCs find themselves embroiled when participating in this adventure. Hopefully, they will guarantee its successful completion by rescuing Grenwald, defeating the advance cyclopskin party to discourage their incursions into the forest and, above all, ensure the annoying, malevolent gremlin race does not gain a foothold in their world through the successful fruition of their scheming, devious designs.

Waiting

Read or paraphrase the following to the players:

You have arrived on the shoreline of a mountain lake of indeterminate size whose surface is largely obscured by a heavy covering of fog. To the north of the clearing, the trail you have been following disappears into the midst of the woods, apparently overgrown and falling into ruin. South lies only impenetrable forest. Apparently, all who travel this way are compelled to make good use of the ferry service – the accessories of which now may be seen before you. A forty-foot long jetty looms over the waters above a tiny, stinking swamp. At the foot of the jetty, a stout wooden sign boldly states in Common:

Ring bell for ferry

Charge: 1 gp per person
2 gp per mount

Grenwald, manager

The bell indicated by the sign lies at the end of the jetty, dangling from an overhead metal pole. Its clapper displays a rope for ringing. You see and hear nothing unusual nearby.

To start this adventure moving, someone will have to ring the bell forcefully to attract the attention of the gremlins on the other side of the lake who will arrive with the ferry roughly half an hour later. Meanwhile, the PCs are free to explore the clearing if they wish, quite probably feeling relaxed and oblivious to the dangers that lie ahead.

Close inspection of the woods to the north and south will soon reveal their truly impenetrable nature. Even the trail that formerly led to the north and around the lake is now well covered with thorny, poisonous plants and weeds and is likely the home of various snakes and spiders. If a PC feels the need to proceed in these directions, he or she will suffer scratches, bruises and abrasions at the rate of one hit point per round and stands a 50% chance of attracting a wandering monster from the DM's own temperate forest encounter tables (note that this is the only possible case for random encounters to occur within this adventure).

The sign displaying the ferry fares is just that, as mundane and as unattractive as the bell that appears to show the beginnings of rust on its crude metallic framework. Occasionally, the jetty swings slightly and its boards creak, but this is misleading as it is of overall sturdy, safe construction. In actuality, the only real danger here lies in the swamp, six feet beneath this structure.

Concealed amidst the clumps of reeds and waist high mud and slush, lie a voracious tribe of muckdwellers who wait in anticipation of their next warm blooded meal. PCs may end up down there through choice or by stepping too close to the embankment on either side of the jetty. If any PC strays within one yard of this area, roll 1d8. On a roll of 1-3, nothing happens, however, if a 4-8 is rolled, a loose clump of muddy earth comes loose beneath the PC's feet and forces that character to make a dexterity check or plummet into the swamp below (no damage). Almost immediately, 12 muckdwellers rush in and attack, first squirting water into the eyes of their opponent(s) (save vs. wands negates with successful water blinded victims losing their attack that round as well as any dexterity bonuses and are +2 to be hit for the duration of combat) and then attempting to make a kill. Additionally, unless the PC(s) have the ability of *free action* or similar magics, they will suffer a -2 to hit due to the presence of waist high slush that severely hampers fighting ability. None of these hindrances apply to the muckdwellers, however.

Searching the immediate area afterwards will prove a waste of time and effort as this collection of monsters has accumulated no treasure which has not since disintegrated or sunk deeper into the lake. With the help of the others, the PCs in the swamp should have little difficulty climbing back up onto the jetty or the embankment if they desire to take the same risks as before.

Muckdwellers (12): Int Average; AL LE; AC 6; MV 3 Sw 12; HD ½ hp 4(x3), 3(x2), 2(x5), 1(x2); THACO 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1-2; SA water jet (10' range); MR nil; SZ T; ML 10; XP 15 each; MC.

At any time before the ferry arrives or when many or all the PCs are in the swamp in need of rescuing, have the following gnome appear from the forest trail to the west, render any assistance needed, and introduce himself as follows:

“Greetings fellow travellers, I am Gnosh Shortbeard, a bookseller from the village, journeying this wonderful morning to the abode of my sickly granduncle across the lake. I am pleased to have run into such fine company as yourselves and will, if you permit, gladly make your acquaintance.”

Gnosh is young, richly dressed, and wears a shortsword at his side. The gnome is actually as friendly and sincere as he appears and is overjoyed to have run into strangers in these parts as he, like his close friend Grenwald, always enjoys hearing news from the outside world. Suspicious spellcasters will read nothing negative about this cheerful fellow who will, if sufficiently provoked, respond to any attacks with equivalent force. If the PCs are sociable, they will soon become engaged in much lighthearted conversation, as the gnome tends to become very talkative when excited. Note that he knows nothing of the information the PCs seek from Grenwald and has no intention of joining the party at any stage.

Gnosh Shortbeard: AL LG; AC 7; MV 6; F2; hp 10; THACO 19; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon type; S 11; D 17; C 14; I 13; W 9; Ch 15; ML 12; shortsword, dagger concealed in left boot, purse containing 9 gp, 27 sp.

The Ferry

At some point during the conversation, the ferry appears, slowly gliding out of the mists:

All talk abruptly comes to an end as a large vessel, presumably the long waited ferry, appears from the fog. It is fairly wide with a length you estimate at being between sixty and seventy feet and holds a naked mast that towers over the boat, looking very out of place. Strangely, the crew resemble little of either humans or known friendly forest creatures, being tiny, repulsive beings with excessively sharp features - four in number - who are now rowing toward the jetty with incredible ease. After docking, one of the mysterious beings jumps up onto the jetty and motions to your party to board the vessel.

These beings are gremlins who, at least for the moment, put on a pleasant face and attempt to refrain from acting with less than the utmost courtesy. Presumably, these creatures will be totally unknown to the PCs, thereby forcing them to be on their guard despite the gremlins' apparently friendly overtures. Spell casting to divine the truth, if it doesn't fail outright due to their high magic resistance, will reveal that the gremlins do indeed intend to convey the party to the other side of the lake and have no immediate hostile intentions.

Gremlin telepathic communication, once established, will inform the PCs that the gremlins claim to be members of a unique, peaceful woodland race which rarely makes contact with anyone but Grenwald who, they say, is temporarily indisposed on the other side of the lake. At the ferryman's request, as he often enlists the aid of willing forest creatures, they volunteered to help out today - a story Gnosh can readily confirm as being characteristic of the mage. For now, it is vital that the PCs accept the gremlins' supposedly harmless intentions and do not harm them in any way. If necessary, have Gnosh greatly exaggerate Grenwald's magical offensive capabilities and how quickly they would be used upon the PCs should they interfere with his business.

The ferry itself is a knarr, a wide, oval shaped vessel with a single deck and fitted with two pairs of oars - one gremlin on one pair and one on each other oar. A lone gremlin sits at the stern, operating the tiller. Near both the stem and the stern lie small, raised sections that serve as the only seats. Although it may be crowded, there is sufficient room to accommodate, in addition to the crew, up to nine passengers and their mounts (no larger than horse sized). Under the current weather conditions, the journey to the other side of the lake should take no longer than around four turns.

Gremlins (4): Int very; AL CE; AC 5; MV 14 Sw 7; HD 1, hp 3(x1), 2(x3); THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1-4; SA spells; SD spells, regeneration; MR 50%; SZ T; ML 12; XP 650 each; new monster.

Initially, the only serious problem that arises is the gremlins' barely suppressed sense of mischief that clearly manifests itself when the ferry fares are discussed. The gremlins surprisingly demand a charge of five times the listed fee in advance. This "insignificant modification", they relate, is again on Grenwald's directives as he is trying to expand his business into nearby bodies of water to help even larger numbers of weary travellers. Gullible Gnosh pressures the PCs to accept this revised charge as he has absolutely no wish to refuse the kindly ferryman or his assistants. The PCs, through shrewd bargaining, will only be able to reduce the fare by one gold piece each - any less and the gremlins flatly refuse to move. If the PCs comply, the gremlins state that they will accept goods, gems and magical items of equivalent value if necessary. Any determined, violent actions toward the gremlins will cause them to back down to the regular charge as the gremlins have gone to such great pains to trap the PCs to see their scheme fail right at the beginning.

After all problems are rectified, the ferry soon gets under way. For the first ten minutes or so, the gremlins remain curiously sullen and silent, replying to any questions posed by the PCs in vague, general terms only. However, it is towards the end of this seemingly innocent period that the "fun" really begins for the gremlins as they inflict two or three of the following annoyances on the PCs:

Vexing voices: One gremlin out of sight from the others (probably the tiller operator) selects the two most probable characters who, from its own observations, would likely begin an argument or fight at the least provocation. Casting a *ventriloquism* spell in their direction when the pair are not in face-to-face contact, the gremlin perfectly imitates the voice of one who threatens or angers the other most effectively in a series of scathing comments. All who fail to save vs. spells at -2 do not recognise the ruse and treat the “speaking” character appropriately. Denials made by the supposed offender or by those who made their saves mean little to the provoked (such is the power of the gremlin’s spell) unless such enraging comments are totally out of character for the PC concerned (40% chance). If successful once and no one is yet suspicious, the mischievous gremlin attempts its little trick a few more times before it becomes bored and gives up.

Gremlin overboard! When it believes it is not being directly observed, one gremlin at a single oar throws a heavy coil of rope into the lake so that it makes a loud splash and hastily turns *invisible*. Following this, the other gremlins, in mock alarm, telepathically shriek that it must have fainted and fallen overboard due to the after effects of a recent illness and make vain attempts toward a rescue - with or without the PCs’ assistance. Swimming and diving into the lake to find the gremlin should be out of the question for both parties as the gremlins falsely claim to be incapable of doing this and a quick dip of an exposed hand into the ice cold waters of the lake should inform the PCs of the folly of such actions (if they don’t take the hint, swimmers take 1 hp cold damage per round of total body exposure to the water and risk drowning if heavily encumbered). Apparently, the missing gremlin is gone for good.

Taking advantage of its diversion, the elusive gremlin swiftly and silently proceeds to utilise its pick pockets skill at 50% efficiency on the unsuspecting PCs. Types of items stolen will always be less than palm sized and not likely to be noticed missing immediately. If the thief is somehow discovered, it will maintain its cover and swim to the nearest bank, not appearing again until the final scene.

This incident is but yet another means by which tensions may rise on the ferry. If, amidst all the arguments and confusion, the gremlins are accused, they will willingly turn out their clothing for examination (revealing no stolen items) and, particularly if their thieving companion is discovered, use their charismatic abilities to the utmost, again by blaming its actions on a recent illness, promising full restitution upon landfall.

Chilling cantrips: All remaining gremlins on the ferry imperceptibly concentrate their *cantrip* abilities to produce an array of magical special effects orchestrated to frighten the PCs and increase their entertainment. Each of the following will cause no direct harm to the PCs and will last for at least two rounds each: (1) Nearby, the water churns and bubbles over a four foot radius and reddish, glowing "eyes" which appear to belong to an immense, shadowy beast glare at the party. (2) Each PC experiences an unexplained momentary shiver down his or her spine. (3) Alarming howls, grunts and snarls are heard faintly in the distance, sounding very similar to the most terrifying monsters the PCs have fought in the past.

For each of the three annoying events listed above, each gremlin receives a bonus of one hit point to be added to its current total. But, for them, the best enjoyment is yet to come...

After some or all of the above pranks are pulled, tensions will probably be running high with some PCs ready to, perhaps, vent their feelings of frustration on the now not so innocent gremlins. When this occurs, or when all or most of the pranks have been tried, read this passage to the players:

All of a sudden, a change seems to sweep over the mysterious rowers. They cease their work and stand at the stem of the ferry, glaring at you with exceptionally malicious expressions. All former pretence of a friendly nature has vanished as the largest creature begins to telepathically sneer:

“You know, we didn’t tell you what really happened to that wretched, crusading coward, Grenwald, did we? Yes, you start - you are indeed interested. Well, the last time I saw our poor human acquaintance, he was trussed up in the hands of a nice, friendly bunch of cyclopskin. Personally, I don’t think they’ll do anything rash to him – perhaps only slice him up into bite-sized portions for their supper! Just try to save him if you dare; only your pathetic bunch of misfits barely appears to be able to rescue a fly from a spider’s web! In fact, I think you’re all washed up!”

With these final words, before any PC could even hope to stop them, the gremlins turn *invisible* and hurriedly swim to shore, appearing again later in this adventure. At this moment, the mists part to reveal, at last, the PCs destination, merely twenty yards away. Unknown to them, a deadly surprise awaits their landing.

Before making their initial journey across the lake to meet the PCs earlier that morning, the gremlins encountered and bargained with a predatory water weird which was desperate to drain a large quantity of life forces as it had not fed adequately for some time. If it would not bother them, the gremlins stated, they would provide a boatload of life within the hour. The deal accepted, the water weird has been impatiently waiting ever since for its promised victims.

Without warning, only seconds before everyone is ready to disembark, the water weird's sleek, serpentine form lashes out of the placid waters and scores an automatic hit on Gnosh the gnome, dragging his futile, struggling and thrashing form below. There, in spite of all attempts to save him, the weird drowns the gnome within seconds, releasing his limp, lifeless body to sink to the bottom. The merciful DM should resist any compulsion to stop this horrifying event as it has been designed to illustrate the true treacherous, malicious nature of the PCs' gremlin foes (whose involvement in this incident may be deduced from their final remark). Hopefully incensed by the gnome's meaningless demise, the PCs should be more determined than ever to put an end to the gremlins and their diabolical designs. If you really must play out this attack as a normal melee, the water weird has a particular (but incomprehensible) interest in slaying the gnome before any other life form.

Once finished with the gnome, the water weird attacks again in a terrifying frenzy, attempting to slay as many characters and mounts as possible. Throughout the fighting, the incessant, high-pitched laughter of the gremlins mocks the PCs, resounding through the trees like the wind. If any mounts on the ferry are not trained for combat and successfully calmed by a PC with suitable animal handling abilities, they will panic, rocking the ferry so that it stands a 60% chance of being overturned.

Should this occur, the water weird may make one free attack on a selected opponent, the others, while remaining in the waist high water, suffering a -2 penalty on all attack rolls. If the ferry remains upright but is still shaking, combatants fight with a -1 penalty due to the unsteadiness of their environment. The water weird fights until reduced to one hit point, such is its hunger, when it attempts to flee. Once driven away or while reforming, surviving PCs and mounts may clamber ashore.

Water weird: Int Very; AL CE; AC 4; MV 12; HD 3+3, hp 21; THACO 15; #AT 0; Dmg 0; SA drowning on failure to save vs. paralysis; SD sharp weapons inflict only 1 hp damage, fire based attacks cause half damage; MR immune to most spells save *purify water* which kills it; SZ L; ML 15; XP 420; MC.

Grenwald's Hut

Once everyone is ashore and begins to survey the scene, read this passage:

Looking about, you observe a similar set of surroundings to the other side of the lake from where you have travelled. A 30' long jetty stands over the lake near a small wooden sign that displays the ferry fares. North and south, you are flanked by more thick, overgrown forest and a narrow trail winds its way east.

Above all, an old logger's hut, likely belonging to Grenwald, is the place that most intrigues your party. Standing a few paces south of the jetty at the edges of the forest, this small building has a sloped roof, two visible windows, an open front door, and smoke that curls from the chimney. Perhaps someone is at home – were those creatures on the ferry telling the truth?

By now, the PCs will presumably be experiencing deep feelings of confusion and anger from the recent series of puzzling events. If the PCs express no interest in entering the hut, the DM should remind them that the answers they seek might be located within. Extra incentives are provided, of course, in the form of the smoke and open door.

Elsewhere within the clearing, the only significant feature is concealed evidence of the trail hacked through the forest when the cyclopskin were transporting their captives to their temporary prison north of the hut. The beginning of this crude trail may be discovered only if the PCs carefully search this area for at least five man turns (half this time if a ranger is with the party). Following the trail will lead to Grenwald and his cyclopskin captors. Proceed to "The Clearing" section.

PCs entering the hut via a window (closed, but easy to pry open) rather than the front door may soon regret their decision. Earlier, the gremlins placed a handful of five huge centipedes on each of the four windowsills to provide great discomfort to those PCs who suspect some sort of trap at the front door. These loathsome, writhing arthropods each have an 80% chance to make contact with any PC who crawls through the windows. Being well camouflaged, they may be seen and avoided only if the windowsills are studied for longer than two rounds before entering. As the gremlins are *invisible* and watching nearby, each gains one hit point per two PCs stung.

Huge centipedes (20): Int non; AL N; AC9; MV 21; HD 1 hp each; THACO 20; #AT 1; Dmg nil; SA poison (immobilisation for 1-6 hours); MR nil; SZ T; ML 7; XP 35 each; MC.

PCs using the more conventional entrance view the following:

1. Living room

The thick, oaken front door swings open to reveal a cramped, unoccupied room in a state of great disarray. A multitude of papers, scrolls and tomes of all sizes lie strewn all over the floor. Sets of cupboards that once may have flanked the fireplace that contains a still smouldering fire, lie overturned, hiding their contents. Two massive, old iron sea chests lie untouched along the north and east walls as does a sturdy table surrounded by three chairs which is positioned in front of a window along the eastern wall. Another door, similar to the one you have just passed through, only closed, leads north.

This mess, of course, was created by the gremlins in order to develop their current plot for feeding after they were summoned into the world of the PCs through the fireplace. Currently, these monsters are hiding near the clearing containing Grenwald and his captors, waiting quite impatiently for the PCs to arrive. As a result, they

will not directly interfere with PC actions while in the hut. However, as usual, they have left a "surprise" to mark their passing. Worming their way through the goldmine of delicious paper and parchment, are a collection of 35 bookworms who have, within only a few hours, ruined much of Grenwald's prized manuscripts. For every book or scroll examined by the PCs, there is a 55% chance of it being 10-60% destroyed by the worms and a 5% chance to actually contain 1-4 of these creatures who flee instantly if attacked. At the DM's option, if a leather or cloth container is placed on the floor while in this room, it may attract a number of the bookworms who then proceed to digest some of the unfortunate PC(s) possessions.

Bookworms (35): Int non; AL N; AC 2; MV 12, Br 3; HD ¼ hp 2 each; THACO 20; #AT 0; Dmg 0; SA -7 to opponent's surprise rolls; SD camouflage; MR nil; SZ T; ML 4; XP 15 each; MC.

If the PCs nevertheless spend a turn sorting through the mess, they will find enough undamaged portions of a diary assembled by Grenwald to reveal most of the background information from the "For the Dungeon Master" section up until the fateful day when the bungling mage attempted the *find familiar* spell. Here, the procedure followed to enact the incantation is recorded step by step until the handwriting suddenly stops for no apparent reason. That is when the gremlins appeared and, although the PCs have no way of knowing this for sure, the connection may be made between the spell and some sort of sinister, destructive occurrence. No direct evidence of such a spell - the required brass brazier, for example - remains within the hut, having been removed by the gremlins.

Other texts which may be pieced together after much careful searching reveal fragmentary reports on: local legends and lore which are so hopelessly vague and misleading that any information on this topic sought by the PCs must still be obtained from Grenwald; the society and behavioural patterns of cyclopskin and the names and descriptions of the mage's forest creature helpers - a list from which the gremlins are noticeably absent. Altogether, the texts should serve to inform the PCs of the unknown, strange nature of the gremlins, Grenwald's commendable life, and the strong possibility of the nearby presence of vengeful cyclopskin.

The table and chairs are unspectacular and the fireplace displays no unusual marks. If the PCs are able to lift the fallen cupboards, which each take a combined strength of 25 to lift, their contents will be revealed as merely normal cups, cutlery and others forms of tableware. The sea chests, locked, are only poorly so (+15% on lock opening chances) and contain coarse woollen clothing and delicious preserved foodstuffs for four single meals. Nothing else of interest lies within this room.

2. Bedroom

The door to this room is locked, although, due to its flimsy construction, it may be battered down after taking 20 hp damage.

This tiny room contains a bed along the northern wall between a highly visible trapdoor and another iron sea chest. On either side of the door, rows of empty shelves are placed with no apparent purpose. Two windows allow strong rays of sunlight to bathe the room warmly. After a while, you begin to realise that a faint, putrid smell pervades throughout this room, originating from underneath the bed.

When the gremlins came upon this room, they ransacked the shelves and dumped their contents of books and scrolls in the living room. Everything else was left alone, being too uninteresting or too difficult to open. To these evildoers, the best use for this room was as a prison for a particularly troublesome killmoulis which fought the gremlins valiantly but unsuccessfully until its capture when it was locked in this room for days, without any

clean air or nourishment. Unable to escape, its body now lies in a pitifully huddled ball underneath the bed - a gruesome discovery for any PC who attempts to reveal the source of the room's stench.

Behind the bed, within the normally locked sea chest, lies a formidable arsenal of weapons (all non-magical) which Grenwald, to his regret, cannot use fully these days if he wishes to progress rapidly in his new profession of wizardry. Included within the chest are: one battleaxe, two composite short bows each with a complement of 20 flight arrows, four daggers, one longsword and two shortwords. Although there is certainly nothing preventing the PCs from taking some or all of these weapons, they will be required to justify their actions to Grenwald, should they meet him later, who will recognise his arms as such and not think too highly of pure and simple thievery.

Of greatest interest in this room is the wooden trapdoor that may be opened either by picking its complicated lock (-20% on thief's open locks chances) or through the application of 50 hp damage concentrated all on the same spot. However, if the lock picking fails or the PCs use any other means to batter down the trapdoor, an unusual trap is activated automatically. Unless all within a two-foot radius make a successful save vs. dragon breath, a large quantity of non-poisonous, bright orange plant juice squirts in all directions and stains all skin, clothing and armor it contacts. Such markings last for 2-5 weeks unless removed sooner by magic. Meanwhile, the victim(s) will have to go to great lengths to cover themselves should they wish to remain inconspicuous in any public place. Grenwald developed this trap to be able to trace any thief who would dare to steal his most treasured possessions with relative ease. PCs in this predicament will again have to answer to Grenwald for their seemingly dishonest actions.

Located within the eight cubic foot space beneath the trapdoor lie: a black, silken drawstring pouch containing three dazzling rubies worth 550 gp each, 63 pp, 39 gp and 2 sp; four *potions of extra-healing* and, interestingly, an old, partially faded parchment map of the immediate area. This map, if the PCs have not yet discovered the crude trail leading north into the forest outside and need information concerning the possible whereabouts of Grenwald, will prove invaluable as it reveals a clearing only a mile north of the hut. The apparent significance of that place - the gremlins implied the ferryman was being held not very far away and it would make a perfect hiding spot - should lead the PCs in the right direction. If the PCs really need help in this regard, the map may be placed wherever the DM desires.

Upon the commencement of the PCs' journey, refer to "The Clearing" section.

The Clearing

Read or paraphrase the following to the players:

After plodding single file along the short forest trail which was probably made by whoever came before you and hacking away the odd overhanging branch, you hear brutish voices just ahead. Cautiously parting the brush, you reveal a pitiful sight. Within a completely enclosed clearing, approximately sixty feet in diameter, lie a group of four primitive fur clad humanoids, each with only one eye. Currently, they are lazily, but apparently in a celebratory mood, lounging around a low burning fire pit surrounded by piles of whitened bones, eating cooked slabs of meat and joking in their own sharp tongue. Occasionally, one of these beings throws a new bone at a lone tree at the north of the clearing - a place that really captures your party's attention.

A badly battered human dressed in rags, presumably Grenwald, stands slumped, tied securely to the tree, grunting incomprehensible gibberish at irregular intervals. To his right, strung from a branch six feet above the ground, is a bulging, moving leather sack of indeterminate contents.

Neither group appears to suspect your presence.

The only way into and out of the clearing is the trail the PCs are on, the surrounding forest being much too dense for an approach to be made in any other direction. If the PCs hurry, they will gain automatic surprise as the cyclopskin, believing themselves falsely as being protected by the gremlins, are far from vigilant and are growing bored from waiting for their leader and their fellows to return. No such advantage will be incurred, however, if the PCs (DM's judgement) either procrastinate or make any loud noises.

As the PCs advance into the clearing, the cyclopskin eventually come to their senses and begin their defence, attacking in berserk rage due to the gremlins unexpected betrayal - applying a +2 bonus to all attack rolls while suffering -2 on their armor classes. No cyclopskin holds missile weapons (all lost on recent hunting expeditions), instead using their spiked clubs (one is +1) or a blazing log from the firepit - each for 2-8 (+4) hp damage. The only tactics used are the annihilation of the intruders and the retention of their human captive at any cost.

Cyclopskin (4): Int average; AL C(E); AC 3; MV 12; HD 5, hp 35, 30, 28, 25; THACO 15; #AT 1; Dmg 2-8 (+4 for strength); MR nil; SZ L; ML 19; XP 270 (x3), 420 (x1); MC. Each wears a pouch containing 3d6 sp and 1d10 cp.

To make matters worse, after the first combat round, the elusive gremlins appear in the midst of the fray and attack both parties, thereby infuriating an already heated situation with their usual tactics.

Throughout this particular battle - the climax of the exceptionally emotive situation created by the gremlins - the evil little beings "feed" at twice the normal rate gaining (1 hp / 5 rounds). As the gremlins have no desire to end up as sword fodder (their prediction of the ultimate fate of the duped thick headed cyclopskin), they will remain only until maximum hit points (8) are reached or when reduced to one hit point, upon which they will turn *invisible* and flee the area permanently to spread their unique form of chaos elsewhere.

When the rescue of Grenwald is attempted, the PCs will encounter the final gremlin surprise left behind by these creatures who, to their regret, realised that they might not be around to watch. Through an intricate collection of ropes, both Grenwald and his killmoulis (the contents of the leather sack) are tied together. If either is significantly moved, the branch from which the killmoulis hang will come crashing down - its main body and accompanying stems and leaves doing 2d6 points of damage to all within a 60 degree arc 10 feet wide around the captives. Victims (only the PCs) are allowed dexterity checks for half damage that are made with a +3 penalty if any of the captives are grabbed just before the fall. This trap may be detected only if the PC concerned specifically states that he or she is examining the upper sections of the tree for at least a round and disarmed normally afterwards.

Grenwald is currently malnourished and delirious, so for now will be of no help to the PCs. His statistics are as stated in the "Grenwald" Appendix with the modifications of a total lack of spells and a current hit point total of 13. Assuming they survive the rescue attempt, the killmoulis' statistics are:

Killmoulis (3): Int average; AL N (CG); AC 6; MV 15; HD ½, hp 2(x3), 1; THACO 20; #AT 0; Dmg 0; MR 20%; SZ T; ML 12; XP 7 each; MC.

Before concluding the adventure, Grenwald and any surviving killmoulis will need to be carried back to the hut and, over a period of two full days, nursed back to reasonable health. Only then will Grenwald prove to be of any help to the PCs. When this point is reached, proceed to "Concluding the Adventure".

Concluding the Adventure

Assuming Grenwald survives and recovers, he thanks the PCs profusely for their efforts and gladly fills them in on the events that led up to his capture. He has no knowledge as to the origin of the creatures the PCs first encountered on the ferry (which he calls "gremlins") and fervently hopes that the PCs have destroyed them as he believes they have no place in this world. Then, free of charge, Grenwald imparts the vital information the PCs were seeking originally - anything that will considerably assist the characters in their nearby travels.

Further rewards depend upon the PCs' earlier actions in relation to Grenwald's possessions, particularly if someone is prominently marked as a result of the trapdoor trap. If the guilty party justifies his or her actions convincingly (DM's judgement) and/or displayed great courage in the rescue attempt, all will be forgiven if all unused items are returned. Otherwise, no further help to the offender(s) will be given and adequate restitution will still have to be made. To the "good" PCs, the mage hands out a reward of 100 gp (or equivalent) per character plus an additional 550 gp ruby if a wizard within the party promises to stay an extra week and teach him the finer points of spell casting. Then, the PCs may be on their way.

Further adventures using this scenario include several possibilities for the enterprising DM. Grenwald may mention to the PCs that many friendly forest inhabitants seem to have been scared away lately by the presence of a great evil that he believes to be the presence of cyclopskin which are massing close by for an attack to reclaim their former domain. The truth of the matter depends upon the fate of the cyclopskin leader who journeyed to fetch the clans. Did he manage to return to his companions or not? If so, the humans of the forest villages will likely have a battle of BATTLESYSTEM proportions on their hands in which the PCs may play major roles as leaders as a horde of over 200 enraged cyclopskin invade the area.

Also, what of the gremlins? If any escaped and survived the following months, they slowly begin to multiply and populate even the farthest reaches of their new world. While they retain no animosity toward the PCs, they will welcome the chance to meet them again, should the party be called upon by some unfortunate to rid them of their old adversaries. Perhaps, as with so many adventures, this seemingly happy ending is really only the beginning....

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APPENDICES

GREMLIN

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Any
FREQUENCY:	Very rare
ORGANIZATION:	Band
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Day
DIET:	Special
INTELLIGENCE:	Very (11-12)
TREASURE:	See below
ALIGNMENT:	Chaotic evil

NO. APPEARING:	4-12
ARMOR CLASS:	5
MOVEMENT:	14, Sw 7
HIT DICE:	1
THACO:	19
NO. OF ATTACKS:	1 bite
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	1-4
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	See below
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	See below
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	50%
SIZE:	T (1 ½ tall)
MORALE:	Steady (11-12)
XP VALUE:	650

Created on the insane whim of a mischievous evil power, gremlins are diminutive, malevolent creatures that delight in tormenting and harassing humans and humanoids to satisfy their strange form of sustenance.

Typically, gremlins appear as a curious hybrid of gnomish, impish and goblinish stock, although far more bizarre variants are known to exist throughout the multiverse. They stand around 1 ½- 2' high and possess short, stubby legs, a mouse-like tail, a broad chest and an ugly, grinning inhuman face filled with long rows of gleaming, razor sharp teeth. Skin colour is a sickening brownish green, showing wherever clumps of grey fur are missing. Dress involves everything from garish court jester type outfits to drab peasant garb, depending on the needs of the occasion.

In addition to their own spoken language, gremlins may communicate with any intelligent being through a special form telepathy that imparts like abilities on the communicant. During such contact, the gremlins, if they so desire, may behave as if they possessed a charisma of 18 - enlisting allies and influencing the minds of their opponents to further their devious schemes.

Combat: Being highly magical, enchanted creatures, gremlins often amaze unsuspecting, larger opponents with their powers. They each have 18 strength, perfect 120' range infravision, are able to swim, and may use the *invisibility*, *cantrip*, *feather fall* and *ventriloquism* (which allows the gremlins to project any voice they have

heard in the past) spells at will. Also, gremlins possess the average abilities of a 5th-level thief in the skills of move silently, climb walls and pick pockets only.

In most cases, gremlins avoid direct combat, preferring to wreak their mischief from a safe distance. However, when choosing or being forced into this option, they will fight with expert efficiency under the loose direction of their leader using an array of colourful tactics which are likely to include: ensuring confusion and collisions among opponents by turning *invisible* at the most opportune moment; using spells to cause attacks to fumble; separating the enemy through *ventriloquism* diversions, and throwing any potentially dangerous object within reach.

Habitat/Society: Gremlin society revolves around a highly independent, loose band that may vary in size from four to twelve of these loathsome creatures. The cleverest is proclaimed leader and theoretically has the final say in all matters. Although some of its charges may occasionally act on their own accord, they will never do anything to harm the band to which they are entirely loyal. When and if they decide to settle down in an area, it will be in a crudely constructed burrow, never very far from a centre of population. Any treasure found in these places has always been stolen, being small in quantity and selected for its occasional use in pranks only.

The sole purpose of gremlins, which unfaillingly occupies most of their waking hours, is to plan and spread acts of chaos and confusion to the intelligent creatures they encounter, both as a form of sustenance (see the Ecology section below) and an activity with which they take a perverse delight. To this end, gremlins have become experts in scheming, deception and trickery in all forms. Unlike similar pranks pulled by good creatures such as pixies and faerie dragons, gremlin tricks are usually potentially lethal and more complicated in nature, often being planned days beforehand. As such, gremlins are particularly untrustworthy creatures that may turn upon supposed allies at any time.

Ecology: Created especially for this purpose, gremlins have an unusual method of feeding which, by committing unpleasant deeds and subsequently viewing the emotions of hatred, anger and confusion created, they are satisfied as if they had just consumed an extremely nourishing meal of fine quality food and drink. If this mischief is not performed to a significant degree at least three times per day, gremlins begin to lose hit points at the rate of one every five hours until they do what they must. Conversely, for every ten rounds of effective prank viewing, gremlins gain one hit point to a maximum of eight.

Gremlins are of one sex only and reproduce via a magical ritual known to each band on the night of the summer solstice when each creature precisely duplicates itself. Always in good health, they live to an average age of 350 years. More information on these unusual beings is unknown as, upon death, gremlins inexplicably vanish, taking with them all of their possessions.

GRENWALD

AL NG (lawful tendencies); AC 6; MV 9; R6/M1; hp 39; THACO 20(15); #AT 1; Dmg by weapon or spell type (+4 vs. cyclopskin due to ranger bonus); S 15; D 15; C 14; I 17; W 15; Ch 14; ML 18; dagger, *ring of protection* +3; spells: one per day with 33% chance of failure from: *burning hands*, *find familiar*, *light*, and *push*.

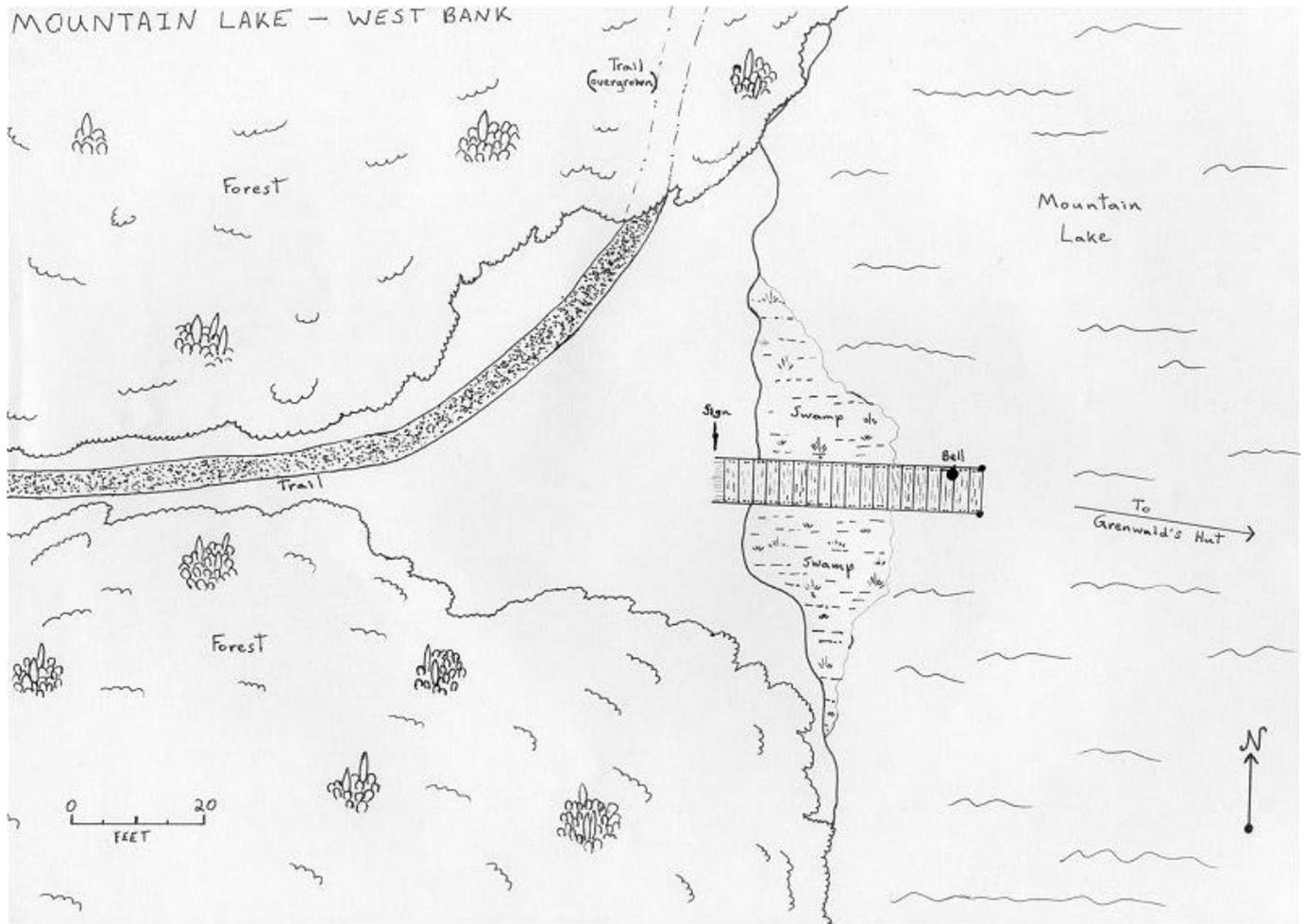
Grenwald is a human ferryman who runs a service on a mountain lake deep within a sparsely inhabited forest. Formerly a crusading ranger of considerable power, he changed profession to that of a mage after a cyclopskin ambush left him half dead. Now, he stands stooped at 5'9" and appears to be somewhere in his late forties, having unkempt shoulder length greying hair and piercing green eyes. Despite being in constant pain from several permanent injuries, Grenwald is generally tolerant, cheerful and extroverted. He delights in the many conversations he makes with his passengers – many regulars being his dearest friends. As a helpful side effect of these conversations, the ferryman has become a virtual repertoire of local rumours and lore. All these qualities make Grenwald one of the forest's most respected and protected inhabitants.

Grenwald is a highly principled man whose outlook on life bares some similarities to that of a paladin's. As such, he is still prepared to champion the cause of good (especially against cyclopskin) should the need ever arise. In combat, Grenwald fights with his dagger and spells, resorting to his former ranger abilities only in desperate circumstances. If Grenwald is slain, the mage's killer(s) will have made enemies of all good creatures for miles around.

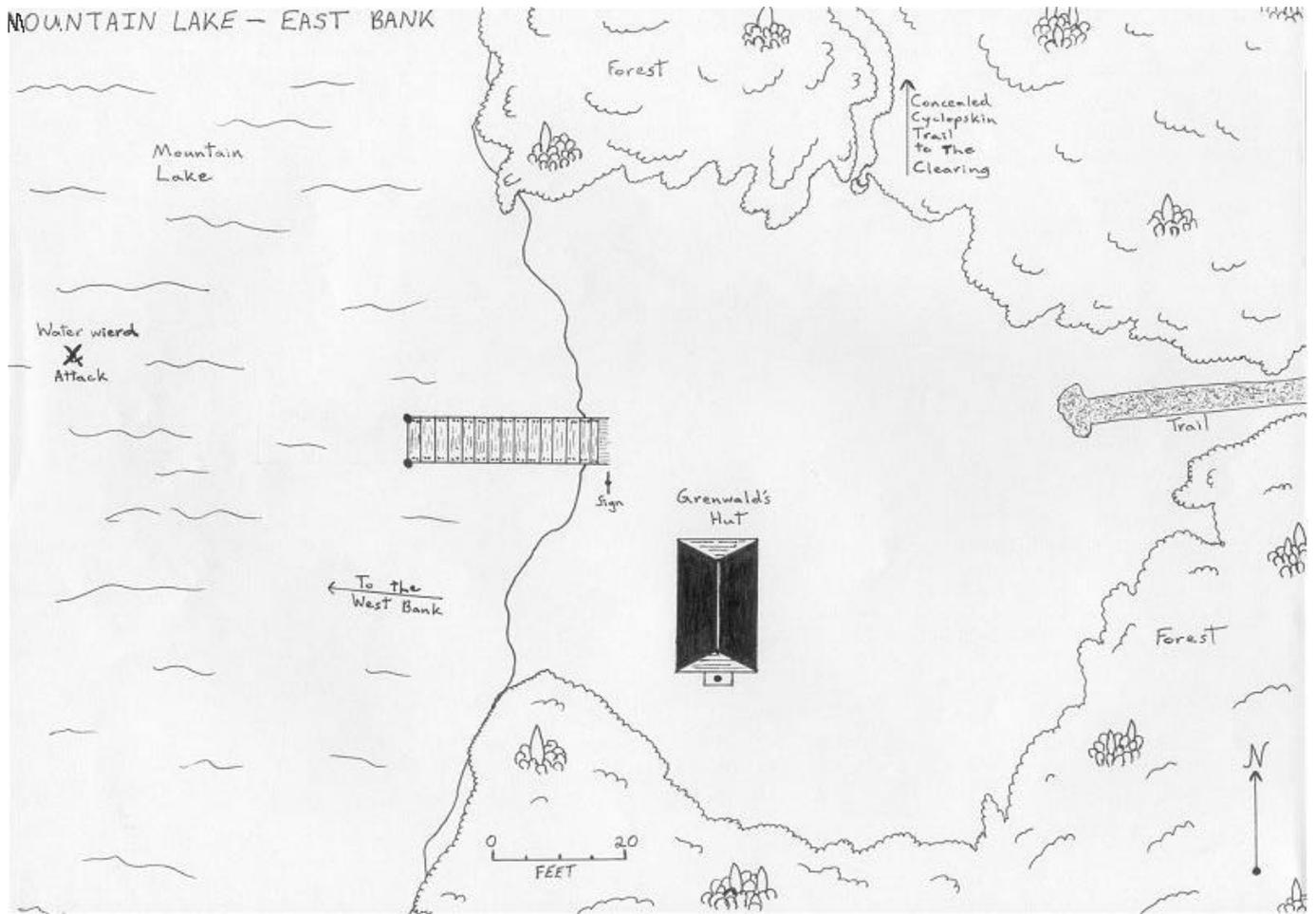
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MAPS

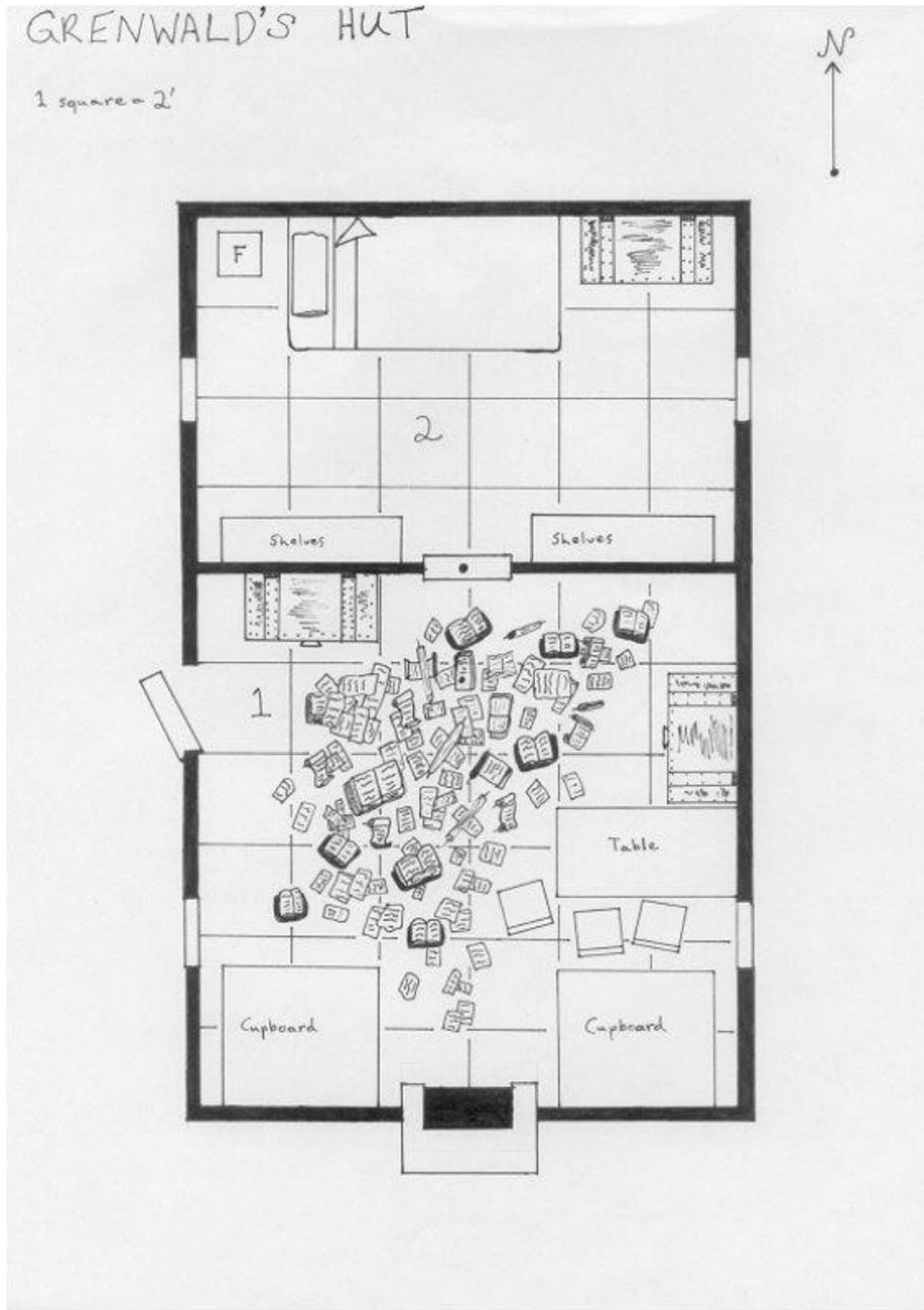
Mountain Lake – West Bank:



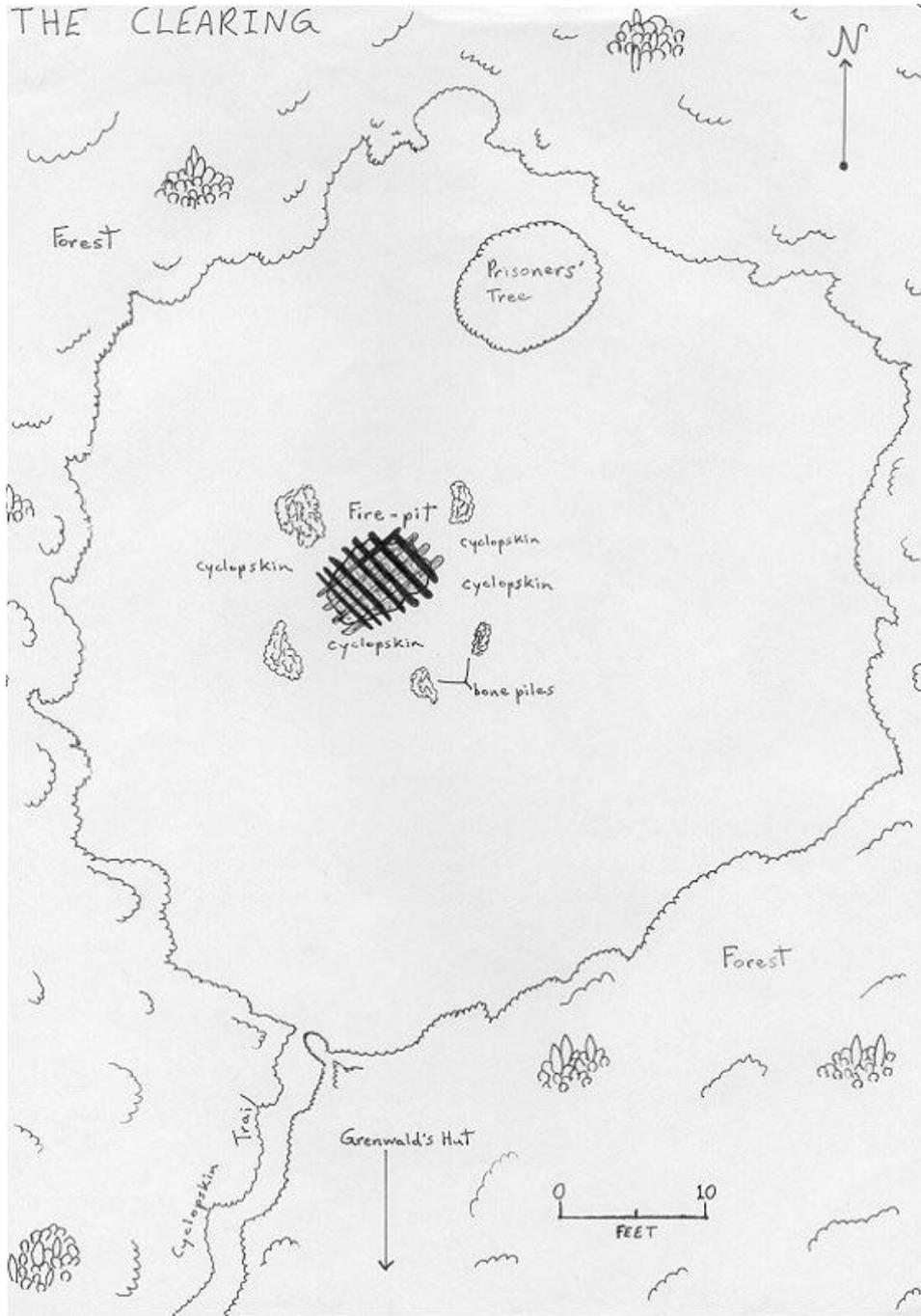
Mountain Lake – East Bank:



Grenwald's Hut:



The Clearing:



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