

THE WHISPER VALE



ADVENTURE PRIMER

BY

ZACH GLAZAR & JOHN HAMMERLE

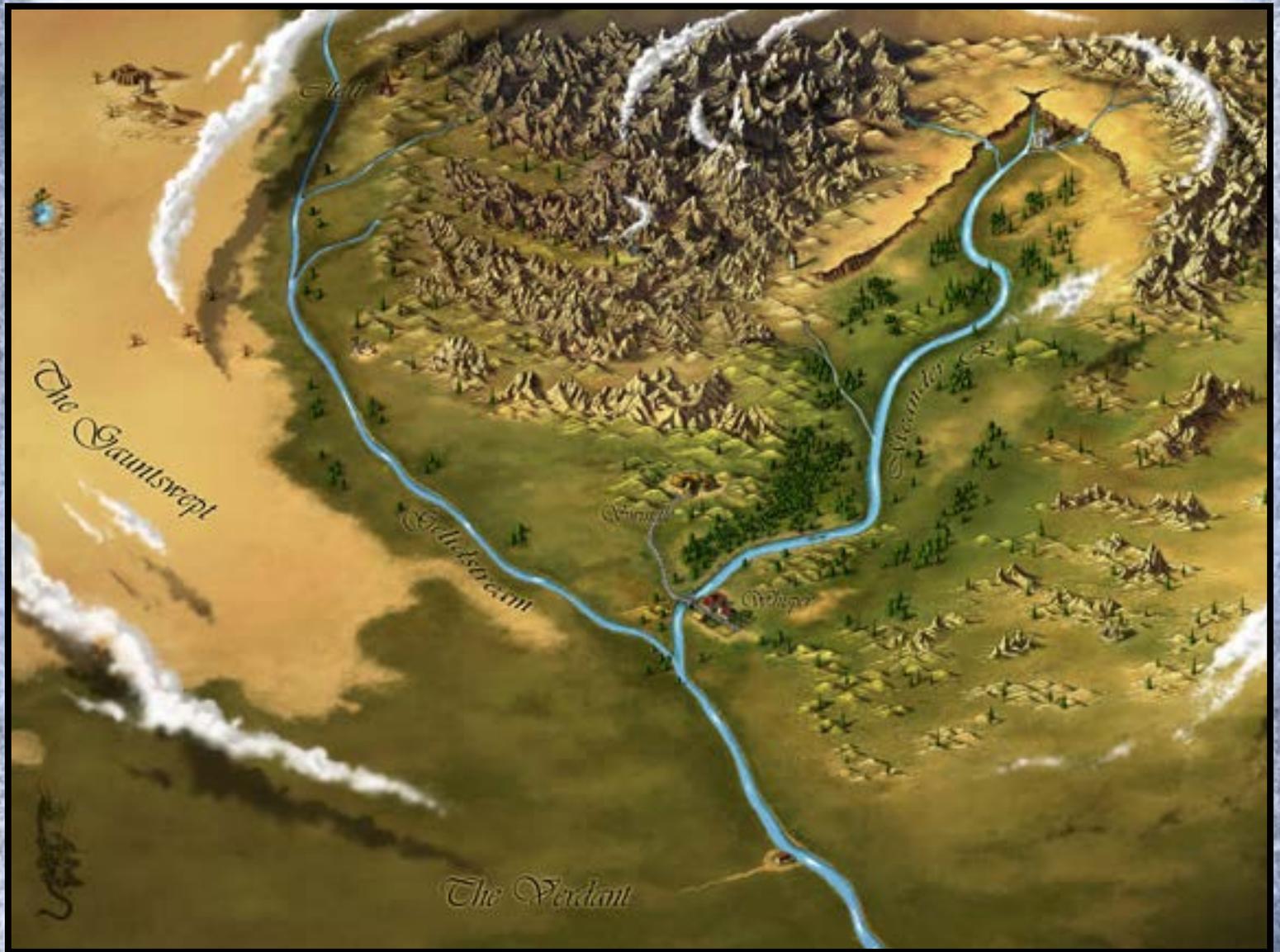
Excerpts from The Whisper Vale Regional Setting Guide

High quality adventures, maps, miniatures and more items designed for the discerning role-playing game enthusiast are available at-

www.lessergnome.com/store

Lesser
Gnome

O, THE PLACES YOU WILL GO ...



WELCOME TO WHISPER

The Vale is an isolated valley on the northern periphery of civilization. This region had been tied economically and culturally to a succession of titular aristocrats, arrogant despots, and feckless bureaucrats far to the south. Centuries of foppish reign ended abruptly from a horrific onslaught of disease. Antiquated notions of de jure birthright have kept the Vale from fading off the map. Cartographers, not rulers, ultimately define empires.

The Whisper Vale's isolation was abrupt. A pestilence spread quickly through its villages and hamlets, leaving misery and death in its wake. The plague's harsh judgment was swift and indiscriminate.

When kingdoms find themselves under duress, civilization presses on as best it can. Empires are seldom supplanted by peaceful communes. Turmoil and suffering become the hallmarks of such eras. Trapped by geography and distance, the Whisper Vale paid dearly. As populations dwindled, kingdoms and empires turned inward to recover and protect their power. Cut off, the Vale's survivors persisted and rebuilt.

In the South, the Whisper Vale now exists only as faded ink on aged maps. Manor houses, walled trading outposts, and large homesteads form sad ruins. Armed caravans occasionally traverse the rutted trade road, which winds along the Gelidstream's west bank. This road connects the town of Bounty, south of the Vale, to the northern town of Cleft, a dwarven stronghold. Only the boldest southern merchants attempt this route. Hence, their infrequent visits to the Vale are met with raucous merrymaking.

Residents of the Vale are focused on their routines, ambivalent to the outside world. By day, they till crops of food for their tables and grain for their taverns. The power that keeps excess in check yields a wedding ring by night.

THE RIVER

A large river, the Gelidstream, flows south from its source the dying glaciers far to the north. Its deep, cold waters flow through a narrow channel, skirting the mountains near Cleft. Downstream, the Gelidstream is joined by the Meander, where it widens and slows its pace. Crossing the Gelidstream above the confluence is unsafe. Sheer cliffs and strong currents combine to form a natural barrier to the north and west of the Whisper Vale. The gentle slopes on the western bank of the river lead to cold, desolate grasslands known as the Gauntswept.

The river system boasts one surviving bridge. It is located at a crossroads, near the village of Whisper. The sporadic caravans cross the Gelidstream further north via an ancient ferry. A road winds down from the mines of Cleft to the ferry's landing. The ferry remains functional despite its age. Cleft's dwarven woodwrights maintain the ferry, which is the town's sole link to the wider world.

THE WHISPER VALE

The Meander River is born at the convergence of two cirque headwalls at the valley's peak. Its source consists of two short waterways. The mellifluous Springborn issues from the cleft where the Vale's headwalls collide. Its twin, the Fjäll, roars over the scarp of the eastern headwall before tumbling violently down to the valley floor and merging with the Springborn. The ruins of a monastery are cradled by the two waterways just north of where they converge to form the Meander. From here, the Meander winds steadily southward through a long, fertile vale. The nutrient-rich Ahlma seeps from the mountains to the west and feeds the Meander some leagues downstream, nourishing the Vale's rich farmland.

Wide flatlands spread from the Meander's banks to distant mountain ranges, which hem the Vale in from the east and west. These flat expanses are spotted with green woods and lush orchard groves. Small conifers prosper in the mountains' foothills, rising in height and grandeur as they ascend the steepening lands beyond.

Stewardship of the wild is showing its effects. Healthy forests with wide canopies and tall grasses are grazed upon by an abundance of wildlife. Predators cull the weakest of these. Even the fey have returned.

'THE WALL'

Tall, forbidding mountains rise majestically along the length of the Whisper Vale, breaking through the tree line to reveal barren crags of stone. These ranges are known as 'the wall'. Each has a steep versant, making them virtually impassible. Foothills slope upward from the Meander to each inhospitable 'wall'. Vagabond marauders wander the foothills as conflict or hunger drives them from the vast, cold wastes in the east.

THE TAINT

Cracks in 'the wall' bleed down through the mountains' arms into the foothills. A shadow prowls deep in the foothills, where tainted sylvan bowers hide. Knotty pines and poisonous plants fill dark hollows. Insects plague slender swathes of land behind the wholesome facade of the foothills. A fissure near the town of Whisper heaves an ominous sigh at the edge of hearing, hinting at a deep, lurking fear. It is the dark breath of tartarean depths, from the very bowels of the world. These deeps have powerful roots in local folklore. Legend tells of dark waters of unplumbed depths at the world's soul. The fissure's regular exhalations trigger a primordial dread.

THE GAUNTSWEPT

The frigid grasslands and biting cold of the tundra form The Gauntswept. It is home to vast herds and their predators. Savage bears and packs of aggressive Gauntswept Scavengers - reptilian creatures the size of great dogs - roam the countryside. The herds lazily migrate from north to south every winter and return again in the spring. Following the migration across the Gauntswept's vast expanse are tribes of inhuman savages. These roving bands are outcasts of every description. When not on the hunt, they are engaged in bloody raids against each other.

Life amongst the nomadic humanoid tribes is brutal and short - it is an existence marked by conflict. This is the essence of their culture. Periodically, they set up impromptu markets to trade in slaves, weapons, and women. Strong leadership in the past had led to loose confederations. These hordes lasted as long as their leaders lived.

The endless grasslands of the Gauntswept also host ogres, trolls, and lawless marauders. Individuals and small bands rove recklessly - these monstrous entities are very strong and wicked. This is necessary to their survival, as they compete with the more populous barbaric tribes.

Ancient tales tell of places untrodden, where monsters dwell. There are wild rumors of outlandish civilizations, which have endured.

Near the glacial wall that forms the Gauntswept's northern boundary loom the great fortresses of the frost giants. Long ago,



EMPYREAN REACH

Atop the tallest western peak, beyond the tree line, lie the crumbling remains of a mysterious tower. Covered in lichen and weathered by centuries of unrelenting winds, this crumbling tower is marred by time. The structure resembles a giant hand with its fingers stretching toward the heavens.

Seers and sages of any race, even the seemingly immortal elves, only mutter furtively when they are asked about the Reach. Tales vary. Some tell of a Master of Elementals, who once dwelt within its walls. Others refer to a Demonic Summoner who stood atop the highest ramparts. He is said to have mocked forgotten gods from this perch through the enslavement and torment of their mortal children.

The Empyrean Reach continues to keep its secrets, as even those fortunate enough to return are lost. Loremasters, conjurers, and treasure-seekers have, at various times, made bold expeditions to The Reach. Survivors of such trips occasionally wander back to civilization, bearing strange artifacts and tales. These hardy souls return transformed by a madness.

There is an unlocked doorway at the entrance leading past a shimmering curtain of light into the mountain's roots. Beyond that point, no two memories have ever been reconciled.

The power of the great kingdoms to the south has waned. Without the vast resources of wealthy patrons expeditions have declined. Thus, the mysteries of The Reach remain elusive.

Atop its peak, The Reach points ever skyward.

passed portentously through the ages in oral tradition. Now, only minstrels sing of such things. Although they do not know it, their rhymes ring true.

THE VERDANT

Boundless expanses of grasslands sweep south from the Gauntswept. The lush lands forming The Verdant present a natural barrier, stretching deep into uncharted lands to the south and west. A perpetual horizon meets the sky above. An oppressive ocean of blue presses down upon the endless veldt, where even the grass seems to bend under its weight. One could travel days through this land and never slake his thirst. This is The Verdant's perilous secret. Hardy souls have been swallowed by the grass, perchance to be discovered years after. Only their bleached bones remain, in stark relief against the greenery in which they are entombed.

The Verdant is deceptive and deadly.



their icy strongholds witnessed the site of a climactic battle. The giants faced a powerful army from the south - led by a fiendish sorcerer.

The sorcerer king and his army succeeded in part - wresting a powerful artifact from the clutches of the frost giants. However, his forces decimated, the sorcerer fled south, disappearing with the artifact. The best conjectures point to a ghostly vanguard that protects its powerful undead king.

The Gauntswept hides a society of lizard-folk within icy marshes. Whether by evolution or animistic magic, these reptilian beings have adapted to the cold. The icy folk can be fierce adversaries when threatened. It is not in their nature to be cruel. The icy folk are insular and tend to be suspicious of outsiders. Their remote chilly swamp, both distant and inhospitable, assures seclusion.

Organized expeditions have not penetrated the Gauntswept for many generations of men, leading to fantastical reports. Most believe they are merely stories told to frighten children. However, not all fables are mired in myth. A measure of truth inevitably emerges from the most preposterous tales. Dread demons and deadly dragons are not merely the figments of a frightened child's imagination. Such powers indeed exist, their truths

WHISPER

*Farewell happy fields, where joy forever dwells:
hail, horrors!*

-John Milton, Paradise Lost

Whisper is rustic. It consists of nineteen farmsteads, a busy inn, an empty temple, and a smattering of small shops. Talk at the Archmug - the tavern/town hall - revolves around weather, harvests, and (most importantly) the quality of ale. Arguments in the town are rare and usually drunken; brawls are rarer still and always drunken.

Most of Whisper's residents are content. Any unrest ceases at finger pointing over the use of common grazing lands. Wealthier families have viewed the use of such land as shrewd and prudent, while others have interpreted it as freeloading. Such disputes have always been settled amicably over mugs of ale.

The inn - not the temple - is the spiritual center of Whisper. The innkeeper makes particularly good ale. It is bartered within Whisper and sold at mercenary prices beyond. This renowned brew is a source of great pride - and income - to Whisper. His ale has earned the cordial innkeeper affection and respect. His brooding brewer rides the coattails of this success.

Whisper's famed penchant for draining the barrel encourages the brewer to siphon a little ale from each batch, which he smuggles out. This 'shadowy' export has become the backbone of Whisper's flourishing trade. Citizens also sell excess grains (usually mouldy) to the hamlet of Swindle and meat and feed to the town of Cleft. These goods often ride on the same cart that moves Whisper's ale.

Another of Whisper's exports is happily given, if not gladly received. A number of wives from Whisper have formed a zealous temperance society, with feckless support from the town's priest. This dedicated group of harridans spends its days sewing modest patterns for the poor and handwriting numerous pamphlets for those in need. Through this travelling ministry, Whisper's citizens have found a way to send all exports on a single cart, known as 'the wagon'. The pious women are gently set atop meticulously thatched grains topped with a luxurious featherbed - the only one of its kind in Whisper. The air becomes tense with anticipation as the zealous temperance society settles in. The helpful onlookers are confident, however, in their gallant effort to ensure a safe, comfortable, and quiet ride for the barrels of ale concealed neatly beneath the whole affair. Nevertheless, there is a collective sigh of relief as the women finally settle. The village priest and his flock see the ladies off on their weekly rounds with the bulging wagon before returning inside the inn to minister.

The wagon is a relic from the past, left in Whisper by a group of monks fleeing from a monastery to the north. It broke down in



Whisper and the monks, loathe to wait for repairs, had pressed onward, out of the Whisper Vale.

The order of monastic scholars had fled from the Meanderbrook Monastery. At its height, the monastery had been renowned for its wine. It was abruptly abandoned during the time of the plague and never reclaimed. The monastery is remembered fondly, with frequent lamentations over the loss of its excellent wine. The great library full of scholars who strived to spread their faith through reverential religious evangelism with incessant calls for moral, selfless living have been easily forgotten.

Rumors and theories abound regarding the monastery. Remnants of great wealth and magical artifacts are conversation standards. Being a little too far away and a lot too dangerous keeps idle speculation idle. As there is no excuse for cowardice that is not coupled with an equally ridiculous imaginary danger, the residents of Whisper loudly proclaim the monastery's ruins to be haunted.

Whisper's culture of geniality has been upset by mysterious events. Herds have been culled at night, crops have been rudely trampled, small fires have sprung up in prized turnip gardens, and heirlooms have disappeared. Folks scratched their heads at first, then confronted with the hard work of investigation, picked the lazy road and simply assigned blame. Without a semblance of law, neighbors fell to blaming neighbors on the quick road to righteous justice. Drinking, arguing, and finger-pointing replaced drinking and toasting. Thus was paradise lost. This shredding of the social contract has diminished the potency of Whisper's alehouse arbitration.

CLEFT

There is no fatigue so wearisome as that which comes from lack of work

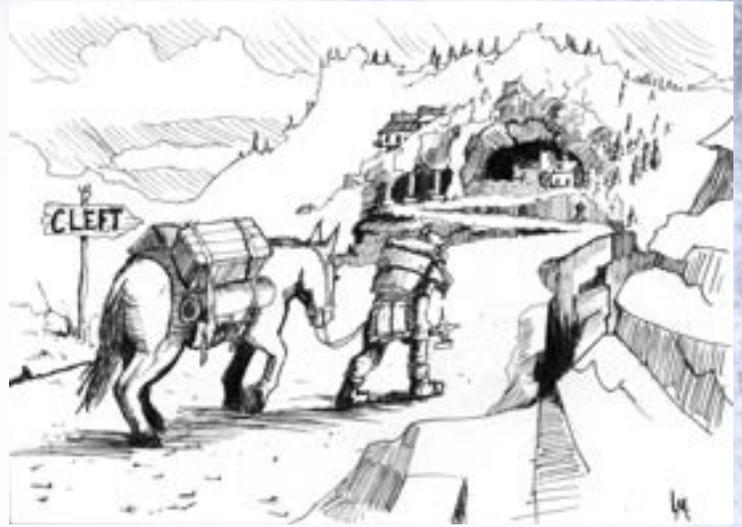
-Benjamin Franklin

Generations of hard work have cemented Cleft's sterling reputation as a town of stoic northern folk. By all appearances, this tradition continues in earnest. Cleft's Taskmaster spends most of his time in a tall tower which looks out upon the town. A symphony of hammers, bellows, and furnaces rises musically to the Taskmaster's chamber on the top floor, and spreads out over the valley in enduring welcome to visitors.

At the center of Cleft's industry is the famed Guildworks, which has produced finely crafted - even magical - weapons, armor, and gizmos. For years the artisans of the Guildworks toiled at their furnaces, building a surplus of items... A surplus the current generation inventories and maintains carefully.

Once the northernmost in a chain of mines that supplied iron and other metals to their rulers in the south; the mountain town of Cleft is an independent enterprise. Steadfast dwarves, along with a smattering of human journeyman and tinker gnomes, compose its population.

Within Cleft's protective outer walls, the mountain forms a natural overhang which provides shelter and hides its secrets. Skillfully crafted switchbacks wind down from the town's gated entrance. Beyond the gate, the road passes a narrow fissure that whistles with a blast of cold air four times daily. Cleft's topography provided a reprieve from the great pestilence, hence the town's patriarchal and artisan traditions have remained largely intact. Cleft's venerable Taskmaster hails from a long line of chiefs.



The dwarves have always made weapons. Their surplus grew in step with their ego. As the dwarves see it, their prized creations belong only in deserving hands. They have been known to make rare exceptions for a few members of Whisper's make-shift militia. The dwarves' handiwork is known to be the finest in the northern world.

Or so it would seem... Those hardworking days are over. Those who have assumed the mantle of responsibility realized that reputation has far more value than work ethic. If Cleft's sons spent as much time working the forge as they did finding clever methods for convincing the Taskmaster they were working, the town of Cleft would be truly worthy of its reputation. At first, the young generation at the Guildworks had difficulty reconciling their quiescent outlook with time-honored tradition. Inevitably, they found a loophole. The old saying, 'a day's work never ends...' was updated to include, 'when it never begins'. Equipped with their new mantra, a machine was devised.

Deep in the Guildwork's main workshop, its young members assembled an ingenious device. This pinnacle of modern engineering has one purpose: To make noise. In true Cleft form, hammers ring, bellows sing, and dark, thick smoke belches endlessly from the Guildwork's chimneys. Cleft's Taskmaster's heart fills with joy as he rises every morning to see workers streaming in and out of the Guildworks. Assured of his legacy, he keeps to his chambers, where he is attended diligently. From his tall perch, his elderly eyes fail to note the clues which mask Cleft's mighty ruse. Great trains of wheelbarrows pass through the Guildwork's doors daily, carrying provisions that could easily be mistaken for a midsummer feast.

Fine creations crafted and hoarded by the sweat and sacrifice of their forebears pay for the current generation's largess. Their stockpile dwindling, the Guildworks carefully inventories and scrutinizes their trade. Even so, no one seems inclined to leave the large, comfortable, and most luxurious break room in the Vale. Periodically, someone gets booted into the machine room to stoke the deceptive furnaces.





SWINDLE

A man is usually more careful of his money than of his principles.

--Oliver Wendell Holmes

Sheltered near the foothills of the Vale is the smutty hamlet of Swindle. Its crude denizens spend their time plotting to enrich themselves. The concept of honesty is as foreign to their large ears as the virtue of charity.

As a rule goblins are shunned for their pension for lawlessness. Alone, they pose a threat to no one. They become more brazen as their numbers swell. Short, vulgar, and notoriously ungovernable, they can be menacing. They lack culture, and their ambition is limited. The decent folk of the Whisper Vale have come to accept these neighbors near the mountains.

An isolated tribe had settled in an abandoned town just north of Whisper. What the disreputable inhabitants call their amalgamation of filthy hovels is unknown. They use their own language amongst themselves. To everyone else in the Whisper Vale it is known as 'Swindle'.

This once quaint town was abandoned during the pestilence. Its farmers and tradesmen fled, leaving a clean and orderly village with its renowned central garden. Seizing the opportunity, Swindle's new citizenry fell upon this idyllic setting, dragging an artisan sundial (pilfered from a nearby ruin) behind them. 'No one conquers who does not fight' apparently does not apply to these guys.

Weeks of wanton looting and creative vandalism ensued. The town in ruins, it began to feel like home. Appreciating their handiwork, the tribe stayed on. The town grew filthier; the goblins, content, grew lethargic and fat.

Bullied out of Swindle proper, a smallish goblin made a momentous discovery. He fell to looting a watermill next to a small stream on the outskirts of town, where he stumbled onto a still. Being a 'clever' goblin, he accidentally fired up the still by swip-

ing an especially shiny cap. Treasure poured from the still, creating an economic niche for the tribe. He became an instant hero in Swindle.

The result, Rotgut, heralded a new, insidious assault on the Vale. Never aged, poorly distilled, and highly potent, Swindle's pungent export is less tasty and more effective than Whisper's finest. In time, with the help of an indentured group of pollinating pixies, the goblins added floral extracts and other herbal ingredients that gave it a distinctive taste and, to anyone who imbibed, a pleasant hallucinogenic effect.

With the birth of Rotgut, Swindle's place in the Vale was assured. The goblins took to trading their sordid creation for various necessities. With goods in hand (and booze in barrels) they began to host the region's seasonal market. Shady deals, heated arguments, and cheated customers are its hallmarks. It is a good time for all. Held quarterly, the market's rowdy, boisterous atmosphere attracts the stout folk of Cleft. A few lucky husbands sneak out of Whisper on 'business'. Whisper's wives hate it, their menfolk love it, and the goblins profit by it.

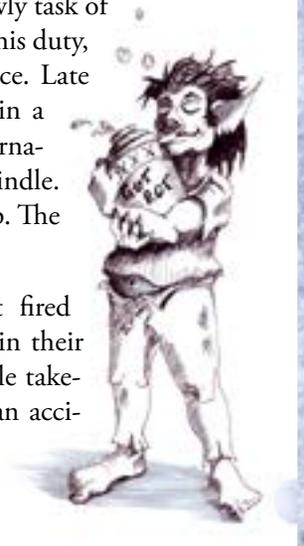
Word of Swindle's success has reached other goblins. One of the more organized tribes traced the Swindle goblins' path. Upon learning that Swindle's clan had picked something up in some ruins, they resolved to follow this path to riches. This ambitious tribe, the L'uort, crisscrossed the Vale before running in to some ruins. They were unaware that these were the very same ruins - the Meanderbrook Monastery - from which the Swindle clan had appropriated their prized sundial. Thrilled at their success, the L'uort looted their way through the ruins. Inevitably, they discovered a still - it's a monastery, after all - behind a king's ransom in casks of liquor. It dawned upon the L'uort chief that mastery of markets is more complex than simply combing through dangerous places.

The L'uort press to wrest Swindle's monopoly on gut-wrenching liquor with the aid of a disgruntled Swindle goblin. This miserable creature was demoted to the lowly task of minding the pixies. Unhappy with this duty, the Adjutant plotted petty vengeance. Late one night, he stuffed a few pixies in a sack and set out to establish an alternative swill to strike at the heart of Swindle. A pair of L'uort scouts picked him up. The L'uort gained the missing piece.

With restless abandon, the L'uort fired up their new machine and reveled in their genius. As they prepared their hostile takeover of the bottom-shelf segment, an accident changed everything.

The L'uort have grown.

The goblins at the ruins have uncovered a thing beyond their understanding. They are about to find out that they cannot flee from a warning they did not heed.



PERCH

is disorganized, cold, and damp. Known for its proximity to Swindle's garbage heap, no one likes to talk about Perch.

The hapless pixies are trapped. Complicit in their confinement, these malcontents waste their days sullenly. They fixate on the past, when they lived innocently in a loose collection of woodland dwellings. A druid had charged them with the protection of an enchanted fountain. It was inevitable that their curiosity would lead the pixies to partake of the charmed waters. Their thirst slaked, the pixies soon realized their mistake. For with each draught, the fountain's allure turned to sweet torment.

Hubris and betrayal proved the pixies' undoing. An insolent youth was spurned by another. As he drifted, he encountered a kindred soul. The two brought out the worst in each other. After gaining the young pixie's trust, his erstwhile friend - a black-hearted gnome - subdued and enslaved the spurned youth. Tricked, the pixie was bound to the whims of his new master. His master's first order was to steal the pixies' enchanted fountain.

Returning to the fountain's glade, they found the place changed. Their charge had disappeared, replaced with a note. Brief and pointed, it read, "Vengeance is mine." The clan swore a solemn oath to wrest their fountain from the clutches of the note's author. Their first order of business was to banish the spurned youth. A battle was planned in haste and bravely fought. Alas for the pixies, their druid forsook them. The black-hearted gnome taunted and mocked as he routed his enemy.

Their fate was sealed. The cruel gnome behind the affair had already traded the pixies' fountain to Swindle for a song and a drink.

Now the Pixie's toil in Swindle. In return for mindless pollinating and plant care, Swindle's goblins allot them measured sips from their fountain. The pixies of Perch are still better off than the insolent youth who ruined their way of life. The gnome rewarded his new familiar with a list of tasks. He is sullenly bound to his masters every whim.

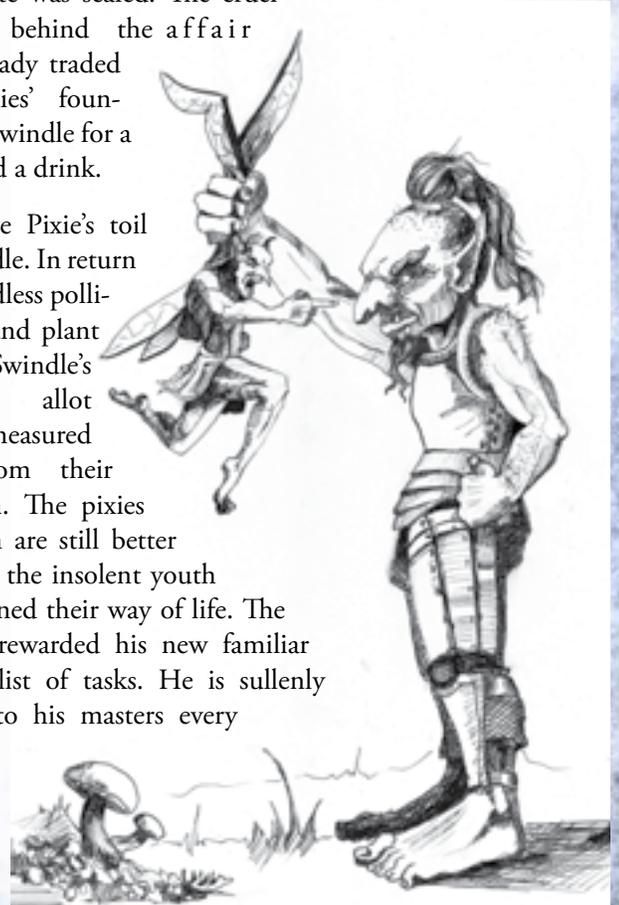
Now, since by my own recklessness

I have ruined my people,

I feel shame....

-Homer, The Illiad

Lush vines drip from a sheer cliff overlooking Swindle. A small, shallow hollow conceals a secret that would scandalize polite society. This is where Swindle's indentured servants, the pixies, come to roost. They live a hardscrabble life as pollinators for Swindle's rotgut liquor. Swindle has managed to hide the fact that their pitiful pixies are the secret, critical component of the goblins' commercial success. The pixies' hollow



O, THE PEOPLE YOU WILL MEET

THE APOTHECARY

Herbs, incense, and natural remedies can be purchased here. Unless seeking components or ingredients, most travelers find little of interest here, save a salve that the apothecary concocts from local river plants. When applied, it will heal minor wounds instantly, but can only be used once per day. Her recipe is a closely-guarded secret. Therefore, only a handful of doses are available. Given time and money, the proprietress can make more.

NORAH APOTHECARY

The quiet and reclusive Norah is a minor mystery in Whisper. She does not share their religion or participate in their festivals. She is not unfriendly; she merely has limited interest in social niceties. Unmarried and uninterested in becoming that way, she spends her days either in her store, or wandering the Vale collecting useful flora. She refuses to have any dealings with the residents of Swindle and never attends its faire. Norah is friendly with Atina, the secretive mistress of the grove.

WHEAT'S END

The miller and his son operate Whisper's mill to grind local grain for baking and barter. Business has been downright bad lately as the families struggle with poor harvests and suspicious activities. The friendly miller will feel inclined to help in any manner available to him just to bring the town (and his business) back to normal. He has one adventurous son, Runem, who often has good reason to make himself scarce from some of the town's other inhabitants, as his eye for other men's women is renowned and (not surprisingly) unpopular.

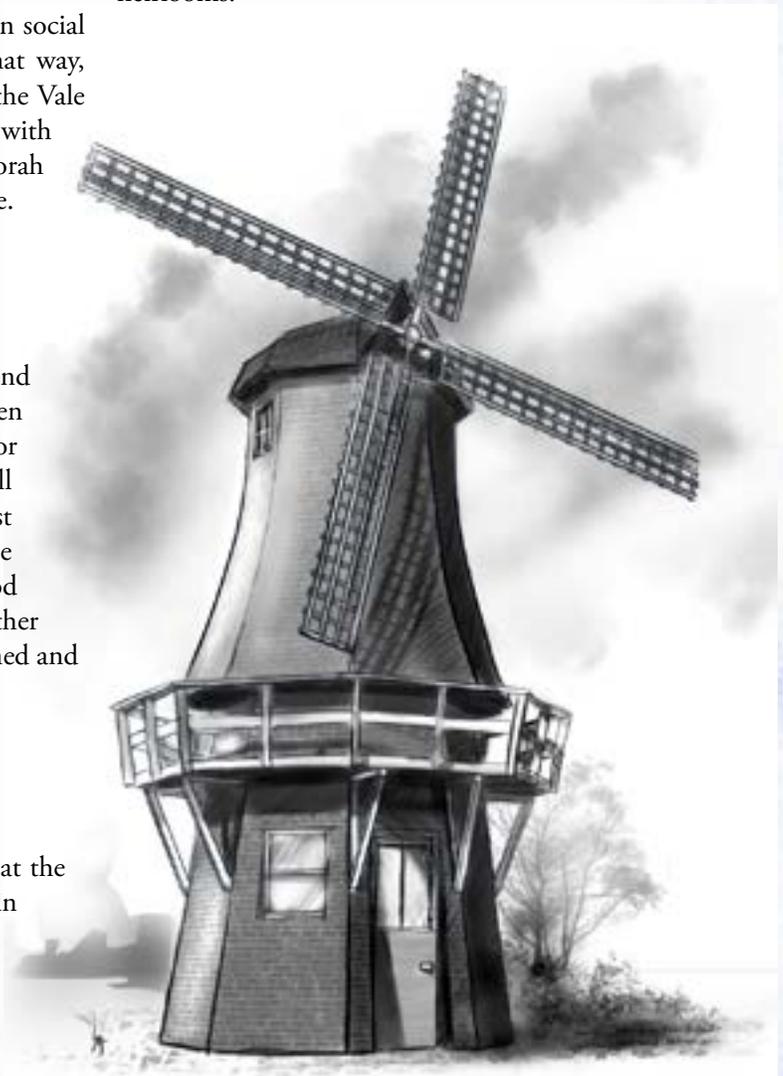
NIGEL MILSTON MILLER

Nigel is Whisper's hardworking miller. He is a regular at the inn. He is agreeable and never argumentative - due in part to his being functionally deaf. He does little negotiation without his ears, aka his son, present. His love for both the village and his son is readily apparent.

RUNEM MILSTON MILLER'S SON

Runem is Whisper's second most renowned paramour. He is the miller's muscular son. With the decline of his father's health, Runem has assumed responsibility for the mill's daily activities. He is an avid hunter and tracker who is secretly involved with one of the maidens of the prosperous Furrow family. He also dallies with the young wife of a local farmer. His fear of getting caught in this web of duplicity leads to many long days at the mill and even longer hunting expeditions. If asked, Runem would be willing, with adequate compensation, to join the players on a reasonable expedition. Less savory characters may choose to retain his aid by threatening to expose his liaisons. He is a capable warrior with solid skills as a woodsman. He has an enchanted sword and #Secret1080

a suit of fine chain mail armor. Both items are precious family heirlooms.



THE FORGE

The blacksmith shop in Whisper specializes in pitchforks - it makes a lot of these. The blacksmith can repair most iron and steel goods as the need arises. He is reliable. In a pinch, the blacksmith can make weapons and some lighter varieties of armor.

THOM TINKER BLACKSMITH

Thom is the local blacksmith. Apart from pitchforks, his work revolves around plows, harnesses, and horseshoes. Thom was originally apprenticed to a renowned armorer from the mining town of Cleft. His mentor retreated to the Guildworks of Cleft, leaving Thom to his own devices. He is familiar enough with shields and armor to make repairs. While he cannot ascertain the exact properties of enchanted items, Thom knows good craftsmanship when he sees it. As happy behind an anvil as an ale mug, he frequently pops into the inn both during and after work. Often those needing his services quickly fret about this - preferring the sound of ringing hammers to ringing laughter.

THE COBBLER'S WEAVE

This store sells quality merchandise crafted by a talented couple. The Cobbler's Weave sells cloth, clothing, and shoes. The old couple are well-to-do. They own many high quality clothes and tapestries, many of their own creation.

KATHRYN SEAMLY MASTER SEAMSTRESS

Kathryn's work consists of making and repairing clothes for the locals. She is loathe to part with her finer creations. Kathryn takes great pride in being the best dressed woman and the mistress of the most finely decorated home in the Vale. Aloof but friendly, she adores her hardworking husband, notwithstanding his embarrassing wardrobe.

PERCY SEAMLY COBBLER

Oblivious to fashion, Percy is the quintessential utilitarian. This is good for the village as a whole since fancy shoes make for poor harvest footwear. Hardworking, friendly, and sociable, Percy is no stranger to the inn. He is also self-appointed Grand Marshal of the boozy festivals in Swindle.

THE CHEMIST'S SHOP

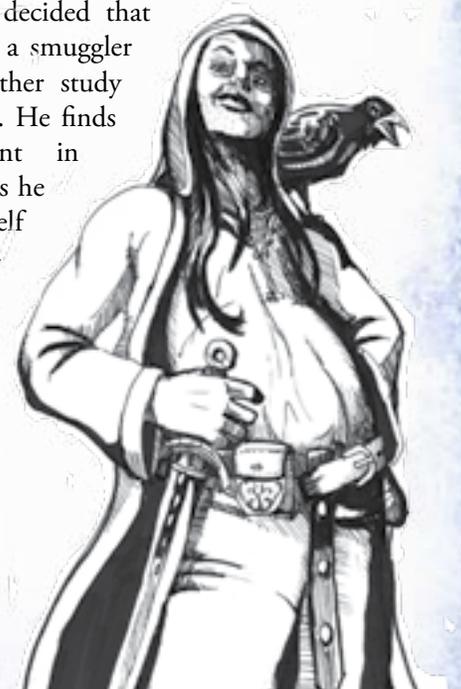
The town's alchemist, Kurtiss, deals in small powders and minor chemicals such as fertilizers and dyes. He is often in the shop at irregular hours, and even then, he shutsters the windows to avoid a rude awakening. Kurtiss can provide other alchemist wares and products, if necessary.

KURTISS DRAZ'UK ALCHEMIST

Kurtiss leads a double life. He is part-time alchemist and full-time hedonist. As a lazy merchant, Kurtiss can rarely be bothered to tend to his own store. It is not laziness, but the black market that keeps his store shuttered. He plies a healthy trade in unhealthy potions between Whisper and Swindle. No one in any of the towns admits to wanting his services but many would panic should he retire.

Kurtiss is good-natured and generous to a fault. He is best known to the community for his work with the brewer in improving the town's signature export. His chief innovation is faster acting yeast. But Kurtiss' principal contribution has been to serve as a reliable test subject for new brews. He takes copious notes regarding different brews and their relationship to stages of sobriety. It is obvious that Kurtiss has had more than a few too many samples.

He has long since decided that the romantic life of a smuggler is preferable to further study in the chemical arts. He finds 'spiritual' fulfillment in some of the products he 'alchemizes' for himself - and another hedonist whose identity would surprise no one.



THOPAS

GNOME SORCERER

Thopas' origin is shrouded in mystery. No one in the Whisper Vale can recall the time before he took up residence in his untidy hut. He never speaks of his past outside bitter muted mutterings. This is just as well, as everyone knows better than to ask him about it. Any answers he deigns to give are peppered with falsehoods and a rotating array of facts that change regularly.

There are a small number of other gnomes loosely scattered throughout the region. These creatures mind their own business and work as honest tinkers and miners. However, from the mines of Cleft to the meeting of the rivers, when folks talk about 'the gnome' there is never any confusion as to which gnome they are talking about. Apart from his physique and some of his innate mannerisms Thopas has none of the qualities associated with other gnomes. He lives in a forest but hates it; he can talk to burrowing mammals - they wisely avoid him - and his taste in companions of the fairer sex is unusual in its focus and surprising in its success.

Petty viciousness blended with minor criminality and a dash of the self-satisfaction he derives from bizarre cruelty weave the fabric of Thopas' nature. He is known to have influenced - at one time or another - all of the less savory individuals in the Whisper Vale. Over the years these mentorships have existed solely to fill a void - unprincipled entertainment. On the rare occasion a protégé benefits from their relationship it is purely accidental. Although not explicitly evil, he does what he does for his own reasons, to the benefit of no one but himself.

Normally such a narcissistic and cruel gnome would quickly find himself on the wrong side of an angry pitchfork-wielding mob. For complicated reasons he is simply shunned by the majority of the residents of the three villages. At times Thopas has been sought out by unwary or unprincipled people looking to further their malevolent plans.

For amusement, Thopas has been known to temporarily befriend others - usually the petty or vicious-tempered social outcasts. Such friendships are usually short, and for Thopas, full of glee-filled opportunities for indecency and mischief.

Despite his nasty demeanor Thopas is a useful and, oddly enough, entertaining companion. When asked for wisdom or advice, he is certain to listen. Often, those who seek advice must endure a barrage of rants on unrelated matters - before he deigns to share his 'wisdom'. He delights in opportunities to put his expertise to use - especially when it involves necromancy, divination, or illusion. Thopas' most important knowledge, which he only shares in dark hints, is gleaned from his favorite hobbies - extispicy and uromancy. These divination schools are the reason that small animals of every description flee. Purely amusement and distraction, he relishes any roles that employ secret plots and

deceptive machinations. His love of mischief has allowed him to be the invisible hand that has dissolved marriages, planned betrayals, and furthered many dark purposes.

Most citizens of the Vale tolerate him as a crazed miscreant whose habits, while loathsome, are mostly harmless. He often teeters on the brink of sanity while delighting in sowing maliciousness. His only real companion is his ill-mannered equal, a pixie familiar named Sartern, whom he treats appallingly. Their relationship is complex, to say the least, but what cannot be said is that they do not deserve one another.

Thopas' hut is strewn with small bones, straw, papers, and other detritus. In one corner hangs a small cage, also made of bone, where his miserable familiar sleeps on a little perch. Thopas frequently writes and mutters to himself about another "lesser" gnome, at which point he becomes hysterical and wildly paces about his hut. Thopas is capable of limitless vulgarities which, being who he is, has turned out useful on many occasions.

Pressed to combat, Thopas uses powerful and insulting illusions to subdue his dazzled foe. Victorious, he enjoys a rare treat - he makes them beg for their lives, extracting ridiculous promises and a victor's trophy. He is more apt to select a cherished wedding band than a mountain of gems. He has little use for riches.

The twice-outcast goblin and the innkeeper's dishonest son are his ilk. He spies on the townsfolk through his pixie familiar who flits about the towns regularly.

He is aware of the current state of affairs at the monastery. He fears something is amiss, if only because his pixie sighted that busy-body druid and her smelly bear chasing a small band of scouts. She only takes action when great danger threatens the natural order - Thopas knows this first-hand.



