THE TALE OF THE SPHINX

by Paige Leitman

Creature: *Gynosphinx* | **Levels:** 6 - *10*

ADVENTURE FLOWCHART



SYNOPSIS

Alephandrielat, a gynosphinx, doesn't kill people who try to raid the tomb she guards. Instead, she uses her lair powers over time to de-age opponents to babies, and then raises them "right" so they live upright lives. Sometimes nature beats out nurture. One of the sphinx's charges has left seeking revenge. The heroes can ask around with the local fey and townsfolk to learn more. She has rejoined a former adventuring partner and they are up to no good. The characters will have to decide how to resolve this family drama.

ADVENTURE HOOK

The Tale of the Sphinx is for 6th-10th level characters. The adventure starts with the characters in transit from one location to another. They should be in a relatively wild area with a few small villages nearby.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The sphinx protects Porfindel's tomb. Flynnad came to the tomb sixteen years ago to try to rob it. Alephandrielat couldn't dissuade her peacefully, so she de-aged Flynnad and tried to raise her to be a better person. Flynnad ran away and teamed up with a necromancer who wants to steal Porfindel's bones in order to use her ghost as a military advisor.

This adventure references creatures that aren't found in the *Monster Manual*; their stats can be found in the books listed below:

- Archer, *Volo's Guide to Monsters*
- Drow House Captain, *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes*
- Korred, *Volo's Guide to Monsters*
- Master Thief, *Volo's Guide to Monsters*
- Necromancer, *Volo's Guide to Monsters*
- Quickling, *Volo's Guide to Monsters*

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

- **Alephandrielat (AL-eff-ann-dree-el-at)** – Or "Alepha" (Ell-EFF-uh) for short. The sphinx who voluntarily guards Lady Porfindel's tomb. She's bold, commanding, and has a sly sense of humor. She loves her "kids" and does her best to raise them right. She has golden fur on her leonine body, and gold, silver, and white wings. She wears an elaborate gold torc set with lapis lazuli and other jewels. Her eyes shine with a cerulean light.
- **Lady Emillian Porfindel (Uh-MEE-lee-an POR-fin-del)** – a venerated tactician who died peacefully about sixty years ago. Her ghost is calm, patient, and three moves ahead of everyone else. She cares deeply about Alephandrielat and the "kids" and enjoys raising a second family. She looks like a pale apparition of an elderly woman with long braided hair, dark skin, and very good posture.
- **Flynnad (FLIN-add)** – a human tomb-robber that Alephandrielat turned into a 2 year old child. She's 18 now and has broken Alepha's "brainwashing." She left Porfindel's tomb to take revenge on the sphinx. She has freckles, blue eyes, sandy brown hair, and the scars of a lifelong warrior.
- **Ghemar (GEH-mar)** – a half-elven necromancer and Flynnad's former and current compatriot. She has coppery skin, green eyes, and red-brown hair.
- **Ardella (Ar-DELL-uh)** – a gnome boy with curls, freckles, and green eyes. He's ten and his magical abilities are just starting to flicker to life.
- **Benwick (BEN-wick)** – a skinny 15 year old human boy with greasy, long, dark hair and a penchant for sarcasm. He's very sneaky, and an excellent hunter.
- **Stollos (STALL-owes)** – a hulking goliath boy with dark gray skin and vine-like markings. He thinks before he talks or acts and enjoys working with his hands. He's 23 and about ready to leave home to apprentice with a carpenter in town.
- **Peleen (PELL-een)** – a handsome, good-hearted, triton innkeeper in Sweetwater Branch. He's been here forever and knows all the gossip. He has silver-blue skin and purple hair.
- **Tiranuil (TEER-uh-nool)** – a wood elf ranger in Sweetwater Branch. He knows the local fey and is willing to consult for a fee. He's older and has white streaks in his auburn hair.
- **Greyanna (Grey-AH-nah)** – a human woman in her mid-fifties, Flynnad's cousin, and a priestess of Eldath in Sweetwater Branch. She is a pacifist and will heal anyone who needs her help.
- **Carilindë (Kar-UH-lend-UH)** – a wood elf smith in Sweetwater Branch. She's not the trusting sort and she keeps grudges, but she's good to her word and speaks her mind. She's got strong arms and likes to show them off. Her red-brown hair is tied up in a ponytail, and her brownish skin has small burns from sparks all over it.

CHAPTER 1 – THE ONE THAT GOT AWAY

SCENE 1.1: OUT HUNTING

Area Information

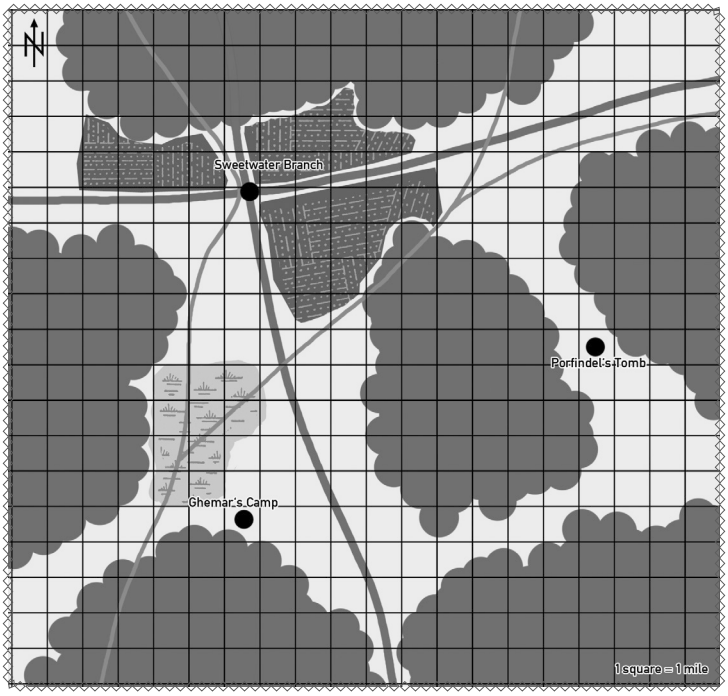
This is a small forest clearing near a major road through the area. It's late fall, so the grass is brown and many trees are bare, though the area is mostly full of evergreen trees. A cold, rainy drizzle falls from overcast skies. Though technically brightly lit, the fog and drizzle limit vision to 100 feet.

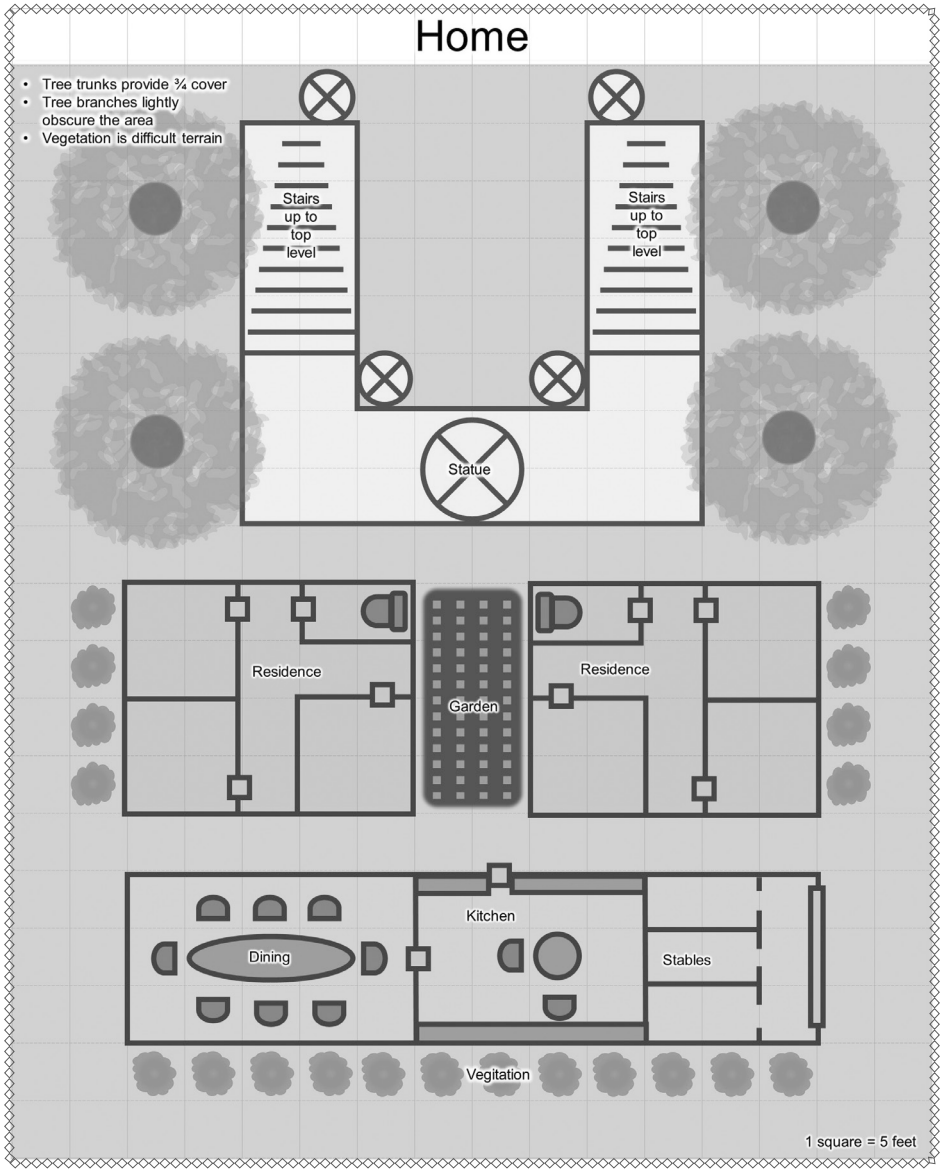
Creatures/NPCs

Alepha has been looking for Flynnad and she's wet, tired, and concerned. She's searching on foot because the evergreen trees block her sightline to the ground. Alepha wants to recruit the characters to help her find Flynnad and find out who took her. She suggests going home to get Lady Porfindel's advice, but the characters are welcome to start tracking the kid now. She searched the north side of the road and was starting on the south side. She believes Flynnad must be within ten miles of here.

She tells Flynnad's story; as an adult, she came to rob Lady Porfindel's tomb sixteen years ago. Flynnad could not be dissuaded so Alepha used her magic to alter the effects of time so that Flynnad became two years old. Alepha and the ghost in the tomb, Lady Porfindel, have been raising Flynnad since. Their goal is to turn her into a good person. Flynnad has been moody lately ("You know, teenagers,") and Alepha is

MAP 0


Sweetwater Branch
Porfindel's Tomb
Ghemar's Camp
1 square = 1 mile


Home
Tree trunks provide ¾ cover
Tree branches lightly obscure the area
Vegetation is difficult terrain
Stairs up to top level
Stairs up to top level
Statue
Residence
Garden
Residence
Kitchen
Dining
Stables
Vegitation
1 square = 5 feet

convinced Flynnad went out for a long walk to get away from the "family" and someone took her.

DEVELOPMENT

Alepha suggests going back home to talk to Lady Porfindel because she always has good advice (*Scene 1.2*). The characters are welcome to search for Flynnad on their own (*Scene 2.1*) or go to the small town nearby to ask after her (*Scene 2.2*).

SCENE 1.2: HOME

Area Information

An imposing monument in red and white marble memorializes a woman with a particularly calculating look on her face. Religious iconography shows the Red Knight advising Tyr, Lord of Battles. A cozy set of small wooden buildings houses "the kids" (Ardella, Flynnad, Benwick, and Stollos, all former grave robbers), and the sphinx.

Creatures/NPCs

Lady Porfindel is concerned about Flynnad. She's supervising Ardella, Benwick, and Stollos in getting dinner ready and teaching them reading, writing, and school lessons as they do.

Alepha wants Porfindel's advice on how to find Flynnad and wants the characters to help her search. The family all have bits of useful information about Flynnad:

- **Alepha** – Her magic that de-ages people causes their brains to revert to their childish state. Memories of one's life prior to that point are lost in the transition or are fuzzy and half-remembered. That's what gives Alepha and Porfindel the ability to raise good people without whatever traumatic past caused them to turn bad.
- **Ardella** – Flynnad was angry, particularly at Alepha. If the characters are going to look in the forest nearby, they should leave a saucer of milk out for the fey. He heard Flynnad mention them and they're very friendly.
- **Benwick** – He's seen a group of about ten heavily-armed people camped to the west. They were also packing up camp and leaving, so he's not sure where they are now.
- **Stollos** – He heard Flynnad grumbling about going back to Sweetwater Branch, a little town nearby that was where Flynnad originally grew up.
- **Porfindel** – In the kindest way possible, she says that she is concerned that Flynnad might have remembered some of her old life and might be looking for revenge. She suggests that looking for Flynnad in the forest or in Sweetwater Branch are the best options.

DEVELOPMENT

The characters might choose to search the forest (*Scene 2.1*), check for Flynnad in Sweetwater Branch (*Scene 2.2*), or look for the camp of well-armed people (*Scene 3.1*).

CHAPTER 2 – FINDING FLYNNAD

SCENE 2.1: FEY FRIENDS

Area Information

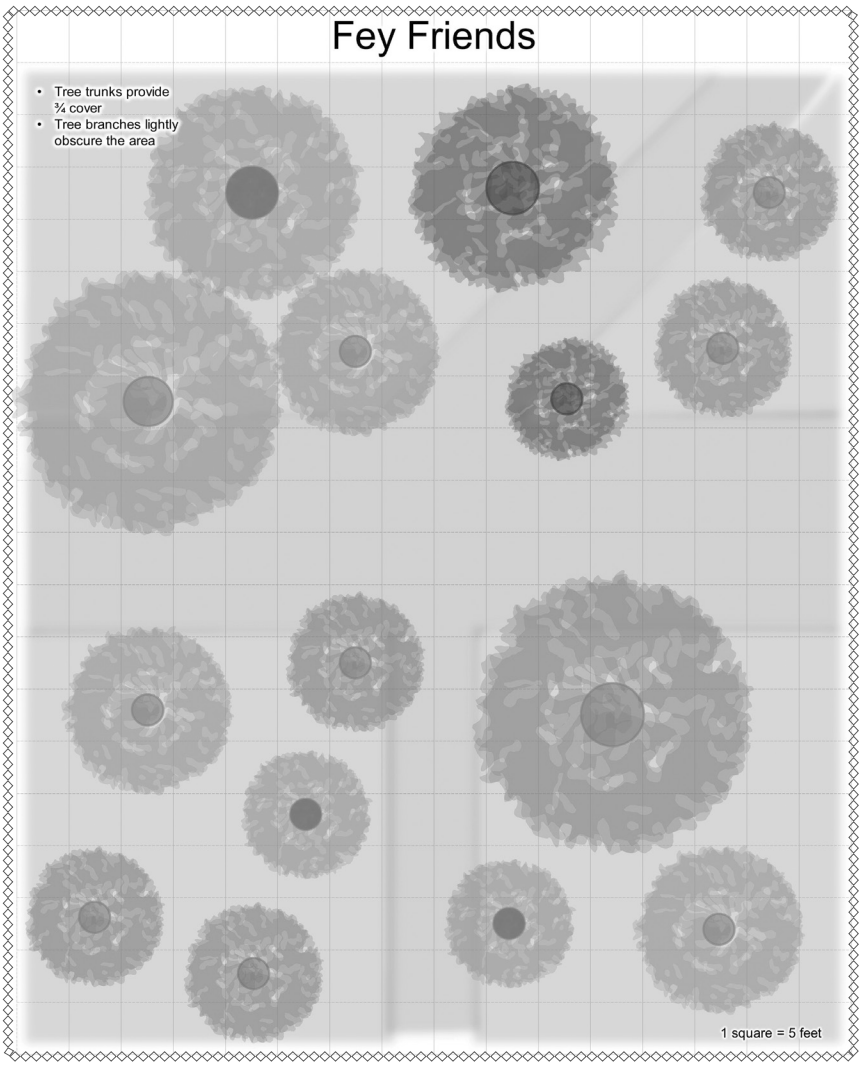
The forest here is densely covered with evergreen trees. Cold rain mixed with some sleet makes the day miserable. The rain and sleet limit vision to 50 feet.

Creatures/NPCs

If the characters set out a saucer of milk, a group of **sprites** will show up in 15 minutes. If they add cookies or sweets, the sprites will show up in 5 minutes and the characters will have advantage on all Charisma checks with them. Unfortunately, any offering draws the attention of darker fey. A group of **quicklings, redcaps**, and/or **korred** show up after 20 minutes. The sprites leave when the dark fey arrive and return when they are gone.

The sprites want all of the milk and sweets they can beg out of the characters. The dark fey want warm mortal blood for their redcaps.

The sprites know Flynnad by description. She killed a sprite with a slingshot months ago, so they don't go anywhere near her. They are heart-seers that can sense whether a creature is good or evil and they know for a fact that this kid is evil. They steer clear of evil characters as well. The characters can, with advanced culinary bribery, get the sprites to rouse up the bright fey in the area to help them.



If the characters manage to talk the dark fey out of a fight or keep one alive for questioning, the dark fey say they knew Flynnad. A DC 13 Intelligence (Arcana, Nature, or History) check or a DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check will suggest the dark fey can be bribed with blood, raw meat, or sufficient gold. She used to steal sheep from some of the farmers and bring them to the fey. Flynnad was trying to get them to fight Alepha, but the fey refused because they didn't think they would survive. Both groups of fey know that there is a sizeable encampment of people a few miles to the south west near the swamp, and can tell the characters how to get there.

Level adjustment:

- 3 level 6 characters: 2 redcaps and 3 quicklings
- 5 level 8 characters: 1 korred and 3 redcaps
- 7 level 10 characters: 3 korreds and 3 redcaps

Development

The characters can go on to Sweetwater Branch (*Scene 2.2*) or to the camp (*Scene 3.1*).

Scene 2.2: Sweetwater Branch

Area Information

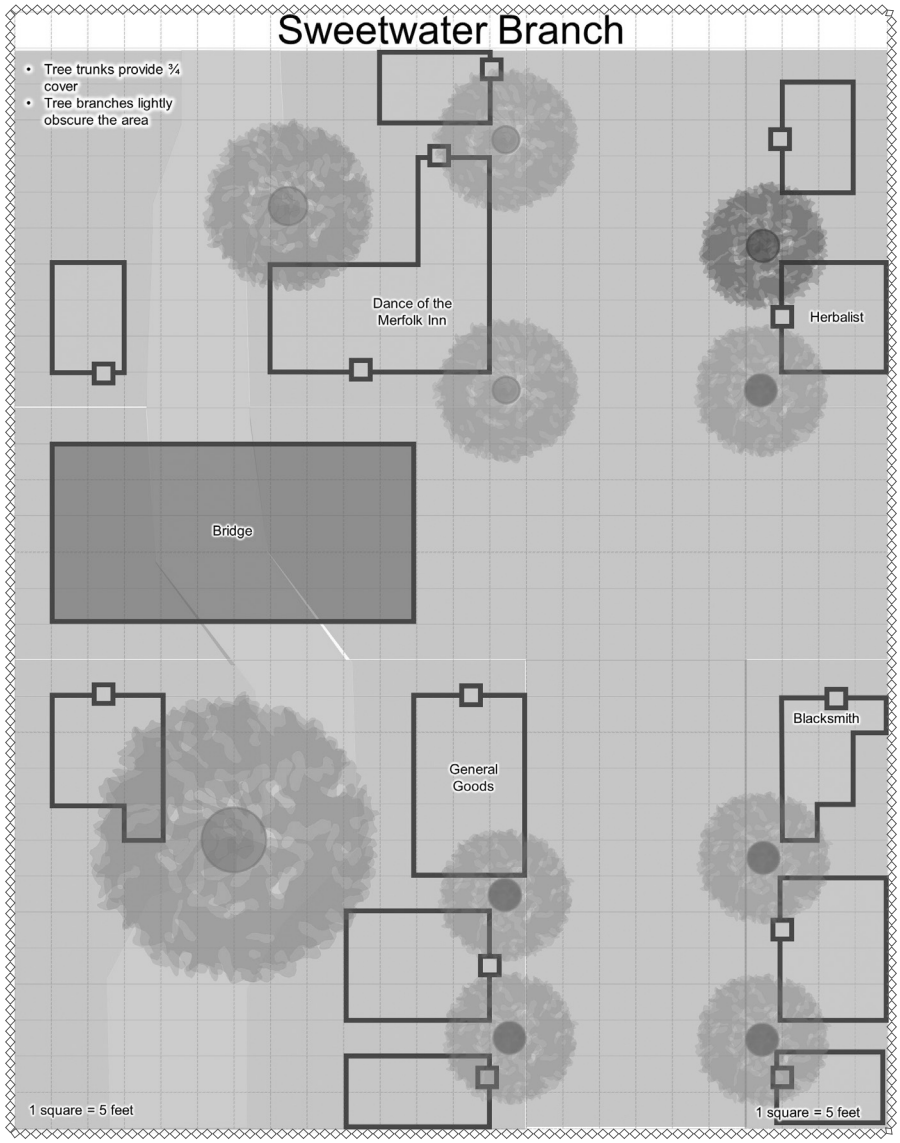
This crossroads stop has about ten homes of local farmers, foresters, and townsfolk and an open-air shrine to Eldath (or any other deity of forests and peace). A blacksmith, an herbalist, a purveyor of general goods, and The Dance of the Merfolk inn take up the four corners of the crossroads. A large creek (Sweetwater Branch) flows through the hamlet. The town is a tiny stop along a secondary road.

Creatures/NPCs

There are perhaps a dozen townsfolk around during daylight hours. At night, all buildings other than the inn are closed.

The townsfolk want no trouble. Greyanna wants the characters to save Flynnad from both the sphinx and Ghemar. Here's what the townsfolk have to say about Flynnad:

- Peleen knew Flynnad from "way back then." She was a competent fighter who was working with a half-elf wizard named Ghemar. The pair were out for gold and glory and bragging about exploring dungeons and slaying monsters like any other adventurers. Flynnad's cousin Greyanna tends the town shrine.
- Tiranuil knows that Ghemar is a half wood-elf wizard with a mean streak and a thirst for power. She's been in the area lately, hiring mercenaries. Tiranuil declined her offer. He can tell the characters where her camp is for 50 gp. That fee is waived if the characters express a wish to stop Ghemar. He also knew Flynnad as a young braggart back in the day, but one with a quick sword-arm and a penchant for violence.
- Greyanna is angry that the sphinx took Flynnad's choice, agency, and memory and calls the sphinx a



- monster. She cast *greater restoration* (from a scroll) to return Flynnad to her late thirties. Flynnad deserves to be able to decide her own fate; the sphinx has no right to control her. Flynnad stormed off talking about revenge. Greyanna wants the characters to talk Flynnad out of revenge.
- Carilindë remembers making Flynnad's first shield for her a couple of decades ago. She was as wild as any other young adventurer. Flynnad's group of adventurers were having a hard time making money. Her elderly parents passed away in poverty after the bank took their home due to unpaid debts. Flynnad was trying hard to find anything to help her family, including dangerous enterprises like robbing Porfindel's tomb.

DEVELOPMENT

The characters can go on to look for Flynnad in the forest (*Scene 2.1*) if they haven't already or to the camp (*Scene 3.1*).

CHAPTER 3 – MY OLD LIFE

SCENE 3.1: THE GUARDS

Area Information

The forest here is densely covered with evergreen trees. Cold rain is pouring harder. Wisdom (Perception) checks for things that are more than 30 feet away are made with disadvantage due to the rain. The sun is setting, and the forest is dimly lit. Rain limits vision to 30 feet.

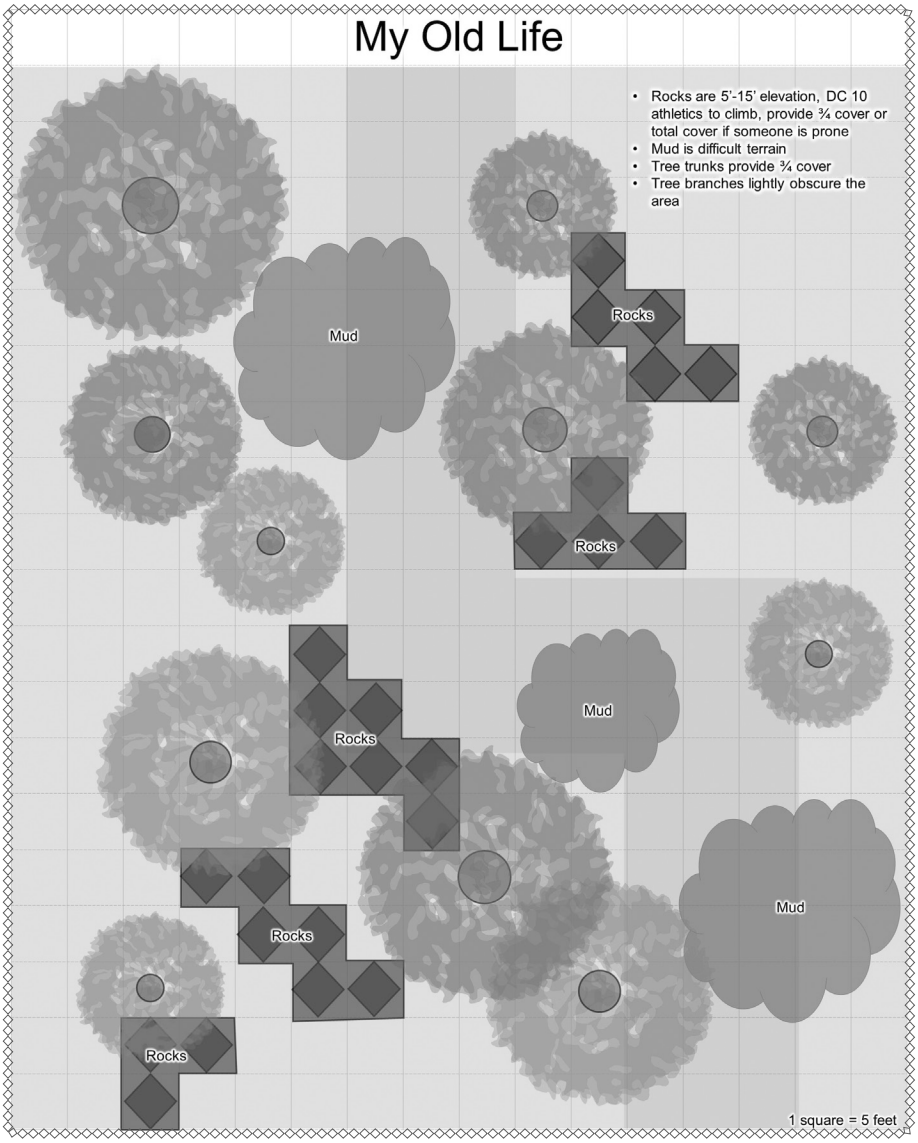
Creatures/NPCs

A half dozen or so guards (**archers**, **veterans**, **spies**, **master thieves**, and/or an **assassin**) patrol the outside of the camp, alert and wary. Their objectives are to tell passerby to get lost, and if they refuse to leave, to subdue them and bring them to Ghemar for questioning.

They know someone named Flynnad is back, is an old friend of Ghemar's, and is in Ghemar's tent right now planning something big. Whatever they're planning is secret because the guards have been sent to keep a watch on the perimeter where they can't overhear.

This is a very hard fight. However, the characters can make things easier in several ways:

- If the characters assure the sprites that they are working for the good of the entire forest, and supply them with some delicious people food, the sprites can harass the guards and lead them off into the woods for hours.
- If the characters were cordial with the dark fey, the redcaps are delighted to hunt these guards down and silently murder them in a gruesome fashion one by one.



- The characters can patiently stalk the guards individually and take them out silently in groups of one or two. Tiranuil can be hired (for 200 gp) to help do this. (He has the same stats and abilities as a master thief for weaker parties, an assassin for average parties, or a **drow house captain** with wood elf racial features for strong parties.)
- Roleplaying some sort of massive distraction. Lady Porfindel is happy to help them plan it. Alepha is happy to help them execute it. The townsfolk and the fey are also willing co-conspirators. Outright bribery works as well; these guards are hired mercenaries and demand significant coin (DM's discretion as to what is significant) from the heroes.

Level adjustment:

- 3 level 6 characters: 1 **archer**, 1 **veteran**, and 4 **spies**
- 5 level 8 characters: 3 **archers** and 4 **veterans**
- 7 level 10 characters: 1 **assassin** and 6 **master thieves**

Development

Once the guards are dealt with, the characters can face off against Ghemar and/or Flynnad (*Scene 3.2*).

Scene 3.2: The Necromancer

Area Information

The forest here is densely covered with evergreen trees. Cold rain is pouring harder. Wisdom (Perception) checks for things that are more than 30 feet away are made with disadvantage due to the pouring rain. The sun has almost set, and the forest is dimly lit. Rain limits vision to 30 feet.

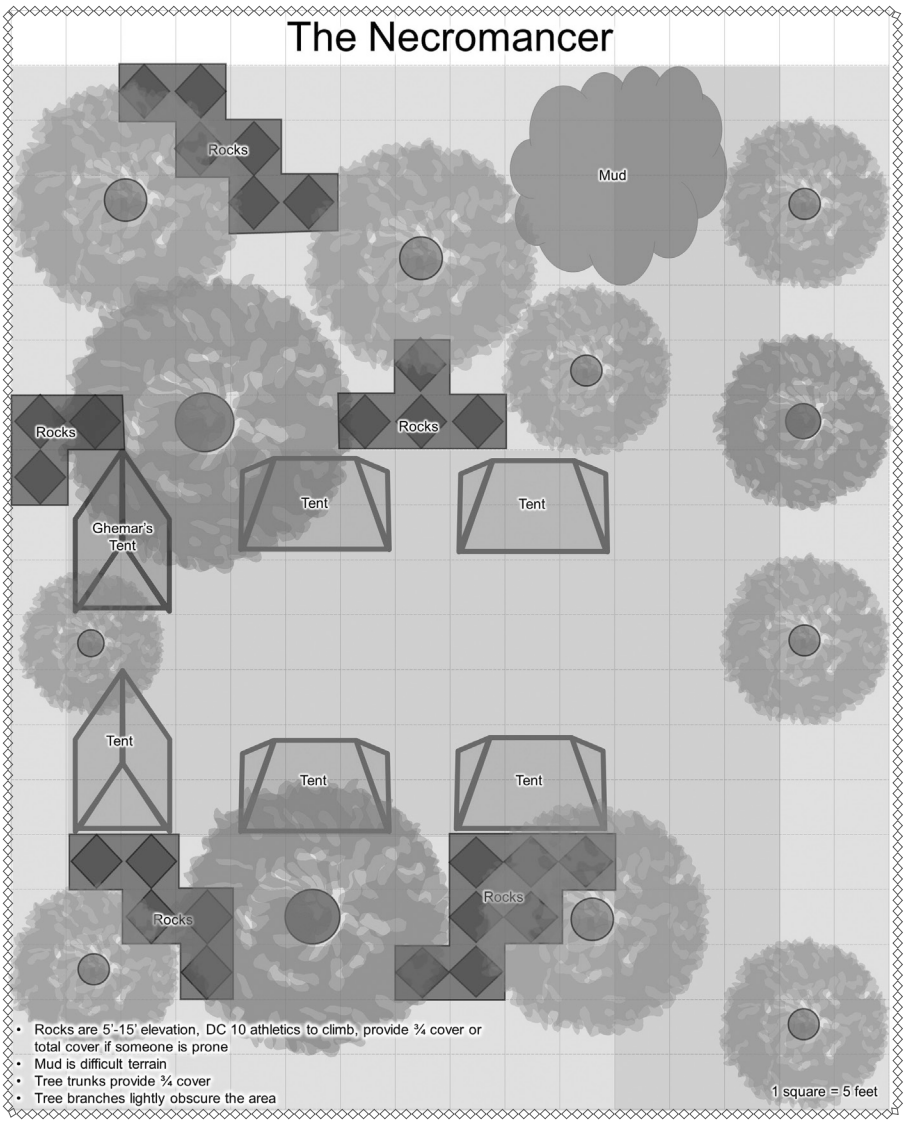
Creatures/NPCs

Flynnad and Ghemar are in Ghemar's tent discussing plans to attack Porfindel's tomb and steal Lady Porfindel's bones.

Flynnad wants revenge on Alepha for trying to brainwash her, but doesn't want the other kids hurt ("wasn't their fault that they fell in the same trap I did.") She doesn't care what happens to Lady Porfindel.

Ghemar is a necromancer and has rites and rituals that will bring Lady Porfindel under her control and bind Porfindel to serve as Ghemar's military advisor. Ghemar doesn't care about the sphinx or the kids.

Flynnad tries to explain to the characters how she has been wronged and get them to agree to go hunt Alepha with or without her. Ghemar offers to give the characters 200 gp worth of jewelry if they will slay the sphinx. If they refuse, she agrees to give them a *periapt of proof against poison* to sweeten the deal. If the characters still refuse, but indicate they won't interfere, Ghemar and Flynnad let them go. If Ghemar and Flynnad notice their sentries have been hurt, killed, or driven off, they attack.



Level adjustment:

- 3 level 6 characters: 1 veteran (Flynnad) and 1 **mage** (Ghemar)
- 5 level 8 characters: 1 gladiator (Flynnad) and 1 **necromancer** (Ghemar)
- 7 level 10 characters: 1 **warlord** (Flynnad), 1 necromancer (Ghemar), and 1 **minotaur skeleton**

If the fight is too easy, the undead that Ghemar has buried nearby rise up to assist her:

- 3 level 6 characters: 1 or 2 **skeletons** per round.
- 5 level 8 characters: 1 or 2 **ghasts** per round.
- 7 level 10 characters: 1 or 2 **minotaur skeletons** per round.

Development

The characters have an important choice to make here. Do they:

- Subdue Flynnad and take her back to Alepha? If they do, do the heroes suggest that Alepha de-age Flynnad again?
- Kill Flynnad?
- Let Flynnad go free?
- Join Flynnad to hunt down Alepha?

Conclusion: The Choice

Afterwards, Alepha and Lady Porfindel desperately want to know what happened and why it happened. They want to engage in a deep discussion about free will and the power of nature versus nurture. If Flynnad is killed or left free they are deeply saddened.

Rewards

If the characters bring Flynnad back alive Lady Porfindel gives them each a small book of military history that's she's written posthumously. The characters can sell it for 500 gp. If they choose to keep it, they roll Intelligence (History) checks about military history with advantage if they take 10 minutes to look for the answer in the book.

Author's Notes

Thank you, beloved husband, first and always. Thanks also to the women and nonbinary folks who are learning to play *D&D* right now. I'm SO happy you're here!

About the Author

Paige started playing *D&D* in 1982-ish and has been a DM and player her whole life. She runs conventions (mostly in Atlanta, Georgia) and writes adventures with her husband. Her other hobbies include travel, goats, progressive politics, and making the online *D&D* community a nice place for good people.