

THE FRIGHT AT TRISTOR

A D&D® Adventure exclusively for RPGA® Network GUILD-LEVEL™ Members (2000)

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Table of Contents

Introduction	2	The Farms of Tristor	16
The Living Greyhawk Campaign	2	Investigating the Barn	16
Preparation	2	Return to Tristor	19
Adventure Background	2	The Horde of Tristor	21
What's Really Happening	3	After Sara	22
Adventure Synopsis	3	Tristor, Again	22
Character Hooks	3	The Fright at Tristor	25
The Road to Tristor	4	The Sorceress's Cottage	25
The Heroes Who Came to Dinner	5	The Peace of Tristor	26
The Hamlet of Tristor	6	Concluding the Adventure	27
To Tristor!	7	Creature Appendix	28
Tristor Locations	9	Giant Leech	32

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INTRODUCTION

“Their throats were cut, their innards opened to the world and spread all about them. Our agent in the region cannot guess at the hands behind these fiendish attacks, though he confirms that all live in fear that this demonic villain will soon tire of play with animals, and will start in upon the humble folk of Tristor.”

—Portion of a letter from Field Agent Marim of the Blinding Path to His Worshipful Mercy, Theocrat Ogon Tillit, Supreme Prelate of the Theocracy of the Pale, Coldeven, 591 CY.

The Fright at Tristor is a DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® adventure suitable for four 1st-level player characters. Though it can be used as part of an ongoing game campaign, this adventure is designed as an introduction to the RPGA® Network's exciting new LIVING GREYHAWK™ shared-world campaign. Players and Dungeon Masters interested in the Theocracy of the Pale and the LIVING GREYHAWK campaign are encouraged to consult the LIVING GREYHAWK Gazetteer, though that reference is by no means necessary to play this adventure.

This adventure is playtest-balanced for four 1st-level characters. It also accommodates parties of more than four 1st-level characters, and parties of 2nd and possibly even 3rd level who do not mind an initial bit of easy going. When the player characters achieve sufficient XP to advance to their next level, allow them to advance during the course of the adventure.

THE LIVING GREYHAWK CAMPAIGN

GUILD-LEVEL™ members of the RPGA may play *The Fright at Tristor* as part of the official LIVING GREYHAWK campaign. The final chapter of the adventure includes a response form, to be filled out by the Dungeon Master and sent to RPGA HQ for verification. When played as part of the official campaign, no more than six players may participate in any one playing of the adventure. Once the play results have been recorded, the RPGA will return to the Dungeon Master official magic item and experience certificates, which may be used in play at LIVING GREYHAWK events at conventions and game days.

LIVING GREYHAWK is an international shared-world DUNGEONS & DRAGONS campaign. For the latest character creation rules and information on how you can get involved with the campaign, visit www.livinggreyhawk.com or write to LIVING GREYHAWK, RPGA Network, P.O. Box 707, Renton WA 98057-0707.

PREPARATION

You, the Dungeon Master (DM), should have a copy of the *Player's Handbook* and the *DUNGEON MASTER'S Guide*. A copy of the *Monster Manual* is also useful.

Text that appears in shaded boxes is player information, which you may read aloud or paraphrase to player

characters (PCs) when appropriate. Unshaded boxes contain important information for the DM. Creature and nonplayer character (NPC) statistics are provided with each encounter only in abbreviated form; full creature statistics appear in the *Creature Appendix*, in alphabetical order.

Encounters are rated by Encounter Level (EL), if appropriate. The given EL rating already takes into account all aspects of a particular encounter, including the total number of monsters present and any special tactics or traps. Thus, the DM need not determine the Encounter Level—that work is already done.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The hamlet of Tristor is a small farming community located in the northwestern plains of the Theocracy of Pale, where the steady flow of the Yol River emerges from the sickly mire known as the Troll Fens. Tristor is not far from the Duchy of Tenh, a once-proud nation now little more than a vicious battleground between forces intent upon claiming it as their own. The warring in Tenh, now in its fourth year, has mired Tristor and the surrounding region in a state of poverty.

Compounding this already desperate state of affairs is a band of orc barbarians located deep within the mountains to the east who have taken advantage of the broken spirit of the people and the absence of a notable military (most forces are committed to warring in Tenh) to conduct regular raids upon the towns and villages of the north. Very little is known about the orcs, save that they follow a mysterious leader known as the Watcher, who they venerate with an almost religious fervor. Since the beginning of the raids, less than two months ago, the entire north has been under martial law, at the personal orders of Theocrat Ogon Tillit, Supreme Prelate of the Pale. Anyone caught violating this edict will be found guilty of treason and punished. In the Theocracy of the Pale, birthplace of the Pholtan Inquisition, punishment is no idle threat.

Those who remain to protect the towns of the north are too old, young, or infirm to participate in the wars in Tenh. They do not know what to expect from the orcish horde, and many hope that the Theocrat will redirect proper soldiers from Tenh or the south to help in the defense of the north.

Tristor also faces turmoil of a more personal nature—over the course of the last month, the surrounding area has been plagued by the gruesome mutilations of wildlife and livestock. Local investigators, too frightened to range far from the hamlet for fear of an orcish attack, have failed to turn up meaningful leads. The town's constable has made it known that the person or persons responsible for finding the mutilator will be richly rewarded. The village has become a haven for disreputable bounty hunters and vigilantes, all hoping to solve the mystery. To date, nothing has come of their efforts, and the townsfolk are agitated over the slaughter of their animals, afraid that people will soon be victims themselves.

WHAT'S REALLY HAPPENING

Twenty years ago, a wandering band of Rhennee bargefolk came to Tristor upon the Yol River. The gypsies camped at the edge of town and pawned exotic medicines and poultices to the simple farming folk. Certain bottles of this medicine somehow spoiled, turning from a foul-tasting drink to a deadly poison. Two people died, and a young man was left both blind and paralyzed from the waist down.

The town constable arrested the Rhennee and awaited the arrival of a judge, but the villagers soon stormed Tristor's jail. After a brief scuffle, they ushered the bargefolk outside of town to a small hill, upon which stood a lone oak tree. There, each Rhennee was given a mock trial, found guilty, and lynched.

As proper servants of Pholtus, however, the townsfolk of Tristor were not without mercy. They decided to spare one of the gypsies, a lad of four summers known as Reuven. After forcing the boy to watch the murder of his family, the villagers admonished him to give up his wicked ways and to abandon Tristor forevermore.

The town buried the Rhennee near the oak tree. Within a year, they had put the madness behind them.

The lone Rhennee boy, however, could not let the incident rest. As each year passed, his hatred of the people of Tristor grew like an inescapable malignancy. He wandered the Flanaess for years, gathering funds in exchange for hard work, learning a number of trades all the while.

Reuven learned the ways of the forest in the distant Adri, saw combat in Nyronnd during the Greyhawk Wars, and picked up a host of thievery skills in the decrepit city of Seltaren, in the Duchy of Urnst. To the Sorcerers Nexus of Rel Astra he traded his immortal soul for the ability to channel magic at will. Finally, in the bandit town of Stoink, Reuven spent his savings on a trained circus bear, Tasptaddle, with which he planned to exact his revenge against the cruel people of Tristor. He has been instructing the bear to kill wildlife and farm animals to frighten the Tristor residents, a prelude to a final act of villainy that will make his revenge complete.

ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

On the way to Tristor, the heroes encounter an imperiled farmer and his granddaughter. After rescuing them from a crazed owlbear, the PCs spend the night at their farmstead, where they come under attack by a band of the Watcher's scouts.

Once the group arrives in Tristor, they have a chance to interact with the populace, perhaps learning of the village's dark legacy. During the first evening in town, the party learns of an attack on a neighboring farm, which leads to a series of investigations at farms hit by Reuven and his trained bear. These investigations culminate in the PCs witnessing an attack upon a farmstead, after which the Rhennee and his companion lead them on a chase through the countryside.

Near the Troll Fens, the heroes get a chance to save an innocent girl from another bear, and discover an orcish encampment. Prisoners liberated from the encampment



suggest possible lairs for Reuven. After searching these lairs, the heroes get a chance to face the Rhennee in final combat and put an end to the fright at Tristor.

CHARACTER HOOKS

If you are using this adventure in your own campaign, it may be adapted to any rustic location near a marsh. If the setting you choose is near an existing military conflict that would draw soldiers away from Tristor, so much the better.

In the LIVING GREYHAWK campaign, *The Fright at Tristor* takes place in the northwestern Theocracy of the Pale. If the heroes are not natives, you need to come up with some reason to get them there, or allow the players to come up with the tale of their travels themselves. Some ideas for how to get the party involved in the events of this adventure follow.

A Relative in Need: One of the heroes is related to Shelba Renks, an herbalist who lives in the remote village of Tristor (alter her race and age as appropriate). While traveling through the region looking for adventure, the player character hears about the animal mutilations near the village, and decides to visit the town to ensure Shelba's safety.

A Rumor in Wintershiven: While visiting Wintershiven, the imposing capital of the Theocracy of the Pale, one the heroes overhears tavern talk about the orcish marauders, and about a series of strange animal mutilations in the northern town of Tristor. According to local rumor, Tristor's constable is offering big money to anyone who can help him end these horrifying attacks.

Friend of the Animals: This hook is suitable for rangers, druids, and other nature-loving heroes: At a recent

moot in the Phostwood, rangers, druids, and their allies from the neighboring lands gathered to discuss matters of import to their communities. The gathering was notable for the absence of Sheaves Thunderash, a druid who presides over the community of Tristor, in the northwestern Pale. Coupled with tales of animal mutilations near Tristor, Thunderash's absence sent troubling currents through the circles of leadership in the woods. A hero or heroes are sent from the moot to Tristor, to get to the bottom of the mystery.

Fame and Glory! Few locales in the Flanaess offer as many dangers as the fetid bog known as the Troll Fens. Rumors suggest that the retinue of an ancient Aerdi king can be found deep in the mire, with priceless gold and gems for the taking. Travel to the Pale reveals no suggestions as to the location of the fallen king, but does introduce the heroes to the trouble in Tristor. Though not as lucrative as discovering the trove of a fallen monarch, saving the residents of a terrorized village might be easier, and is as good a chance as any for a hero to make his name.

THE ROAD TO TRISTOR (EL2)

Cool spring winds cut across the northern road in the Theocracy of the Pale. It has been hours since you passed Castle Arndulant, and only a handful of rustic, often abandoned farmsteads suggest that this is inhabited country. As your party rounds a bend in the road, you hear a shrill female scream coming from the direction of a farmstead about a quarter mile away. In the distance, a strange four-legged feathered creature menaces an overturned wagon. An elderly man stands between beast and wagon, attempting to fend the creature off with a pitchfork.

The overturned wagon sits roughly 100 feet from a two-story farmhouse. Behind the farmhouse stands an empty barn. Trunks and boxes are scattered about the road, along with the bodies of two dead horses. The old man does his best against the beast, but deep, bloody wounds to his chest suggest he may not last long. A young woman cowers beneath the wagon, inexpertly holding a dagger in front of her.

Creature: The feathered creature is a starving owlbear. Very old and nearly blind, it attacks by sense of smell. The beast rushes around wildly, hoping to catch prey in its powerful grasp. Though intent upon eating the old man, it turns its attention to another potential meal if attacked in melee by the PCs. The owlbear has not eaten for days and is near death (the statistics below have been modified to account for the creature's condition).

➤ **Owlbear (starving):** hp 47 (currently suffering from 22 points of subdual damage).

NPCs: The old man, Gaeren Aramis, owns both the barn and farmhouse. He was escorting his granddaughter,



Brynn, to Tristor when the owlbear attacked, overturning the wagon in its initial rush.

➤ **Gaeren Aramis:** hp 8 (currently 6).

Gaeren, a human male of 67 years, is a devout follower of Pholtus. Once one of the area's most prosperous crop farmers, arthritis and age forced him from a life behind the plow to a less physically intensive existence, eking out a modest living by raising cattle. Gaeren rarely complains about his knotted hands and sore joints, though his wincing and sharp intakes of breath tell a different story than his cheery, self-confident demeanor.

➤ **Brynn Aramis:** hp 4.

Brynn, a comely young human woman of seventeen, is a refugee from the east, where many farms have fallen to marauding orcs. Her family's farm was destroyed three weeks ago, leaving her the sole survivor of a family of six. She barely escaped with her life, and ventured west, to the protection of her grandfather. She is grateful if rescued, and is not above a little hero worship if one of her rescuers is a particularly good-looking human, elf, or half-elven male.

Development: Assuming one or both of the owlbear victims survive, they invite the heroes to spend the night in the farmhouse. With orcs about, travel is not safe, particularly after dark. If the PCs agree to stay the night, continue to the next section. If they decide to press on, jump ahead to the next chapter: The Hamlet of Tristor.

THE HEROES WHO CAME TO DINNER

If the heroes spend the night in the house of Gaeren Aramis, they find their hosts cheery and pleased for the company. Gaeren sends Brynn to cook up a nice steak dinner for the heroes, explaining that his favorite cow was killed last night, and he does not want the meat to go to waste.

Gaeren is not sure who or what got to his cow, but whatever it was managed to get into a locked barn and utterly savage the poor creature. After seeing the results of the attack, Gaeren is sure that the animal mutilator plaguing the region is some sort of fierce monster. Whatever killed the animals knew and saw what it was doing, as it went straight for the throats. He's sure that the owlbear was not responsible, as it was apparently blind. No tracks can be found in or around the barn, and Gaeren has butchered his cow, destroying any material evidence of the crime.

Gaeren tells the party that he had planned to take Brynn to Tristor to stay with his son Escorel (Brynn's father's brother), the hamlet's miller. Since the wagon was destroyed, however, he's content to wait a few more days, figuring that the worst has already occurred.

Brynn is an excellent cook and prepares a delicious meal. She is very polite, though sad—it is clear that she is having a difficult time with the developments of the past month. She does not like to talk about her family or the orcs who killed them, and she begins to weep when asked about it.

Neither Gaeren nor Brynn know much about Tristor and prefer to keep the dinner conversation focused on the PCs. They are curious about where the heroes are

from, what sort of skills they have, and what they plan to accomplish in their adventuring careers.

After the meal, Brynn cleans the table while Gaeren enjoys a brief smoke from an old pipe. He invites the heroes to sleep in the sitting room, providing some old sleeping pallets to help the PCs feel more at home. Both Gaeren and Brynn keep rooms on the second floor of the old house, and leave the PCs with wishes for good sleep and promises of a grand breakfast in the morning.

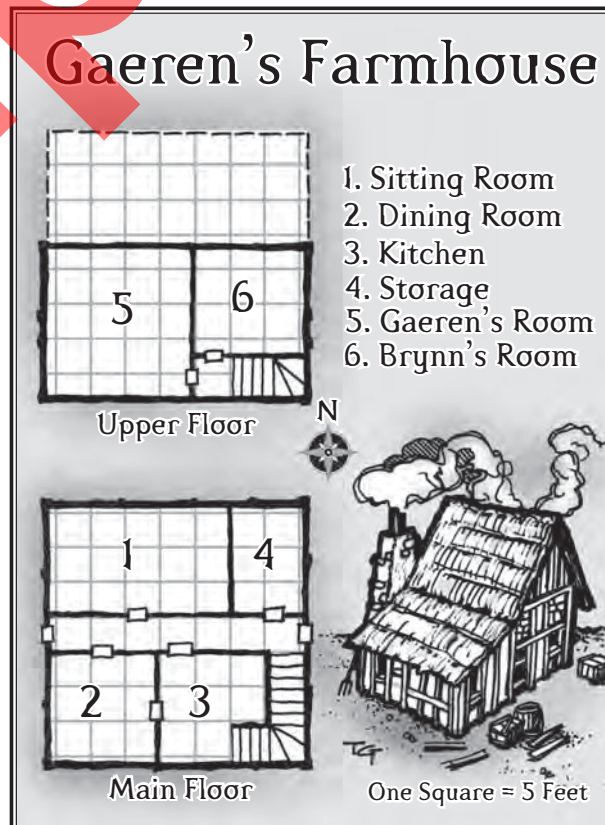
Spending the Night (EL 3)

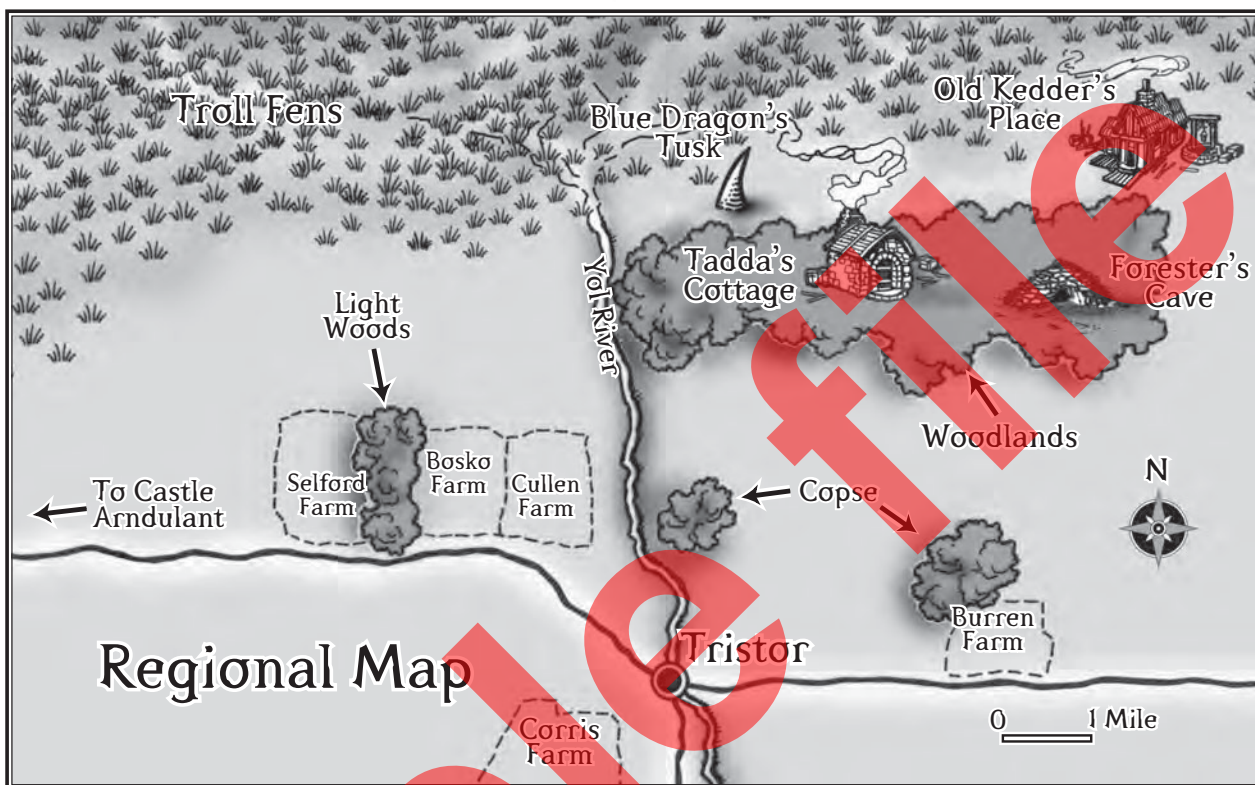
About three hours after midnight, the Aramis farm comes under attack by a band of orcs. If the heroes set a watch during the night, the watching PC(s) may attempt a Spot check (DC 19 if inside, 17 if outside) to notice humanoid shapes or hear movement about 100 feet away from the house, near the site of the battle with the owlbear. Luna and Celene, Oerth's moons, cast fair illumination upon the farmstead.

If no one notices the orcs, or if all the heroes sleep through the night, the villains break into the farmhouse, attempting to frighten the inhabitants by shouting and waving their weapons in the air.

Note that some heroes might spend much of this encounter in their bedclothes. Adjust armor classes accordingly.

Creatures: These orcs, a minor scouting party broken off from an orcish encampment in the Troll Fens, came upon the Aramis farm a few hours after the PCs defeated





the owlbear. They saw signs of a scuffle and a good deal of blood, and figured that any survivors in the house would make for easy pickings. Technically, their raid on Gaeren's house is a violation of orders from the enigmatic Watcher himself, but these orcs are as cruel and greedy as any of their kind, and value exploiting a chance for plunder over orders.

➤ **Orcs** (3): hp 5, 4, 3.

➤ **Orc Sergeant**: hp 16; 7 gp.

➤ **NPCs**: Gaeren and Brynn will not participate in the combat. Brynn is not a warrior, and Gaeren guards the top of the stairs with his pitchfork, awaiting any attacker from his advantageous position.

Tactics: The orcs fight to the death, shouting in Orcish, "We die for the Watcher!" They attempt to keep as many heroes inside the farmhouse as possible. If discovered before they make their way inside, they do anything they can to break away from combat and run for the more controlled interior environment.

Treasure: If the heroes search the bodies after the fight, they find a total of 12 sp, 7 gp, and a map drawn on a crude piece of parchment.

The map has several X's on it, and was drawn by the scouts to alert the Watcher to the locations of nearby towns and villages. Once defeated, the orcs lose all spirit and gladly tell the heroes the purpose of the map. The orcs speak only Orcish, however, which may make communications difficult. If questioned about the animal killings, the orcs claim that their army is not responsible. They tell the heroes that they come from a camp in the Troll Fens, but they will not reveal the camp's location under any circumstances.

Development: The PCs may attempt to track the orcs to determine their point of origin. A relatively simple check (DC 18) reveals tracks leading to the road. Thereafter, Tracking checks are made at DC 28. The orcs traveled a great distance, winding on and off the road, through the countryside more or less at random. Eventually, the heroes will lose the trail, without much to show for it.

Very canny parties may attempt to allow some orcs to survive and flee, with the intention of following them to their lair. Having failed while disobeying orders, however, the orcs live in such fear of the Watcher (whom they have never seen), that they will abandon the Pale altogether, traveling west into the battle-torn lands of Tenh.

After the attack, Gaeren and Brynn declare that they no longer feel safe outside Tristor's walls. They ask the heroes to escort them to Tristor in the morning.

THE HAMLET OF TRISTOR

Under normal circumstances, the hamlet of Tristor is a welcoming if somewhat superstitious and religiously intolerant locale. The recent animal mutilations, coupled with the ever-present fear of orcish invasion and dwindling conviction that the government in Wintershaven will do something to address the problems facing the community, have changed things in Tristor. More than 100 inhabitants of the hamlet have fled for safer lands, leaving only 80 residents to face whatever dangers the future brings. Those who remain are long-time residents,