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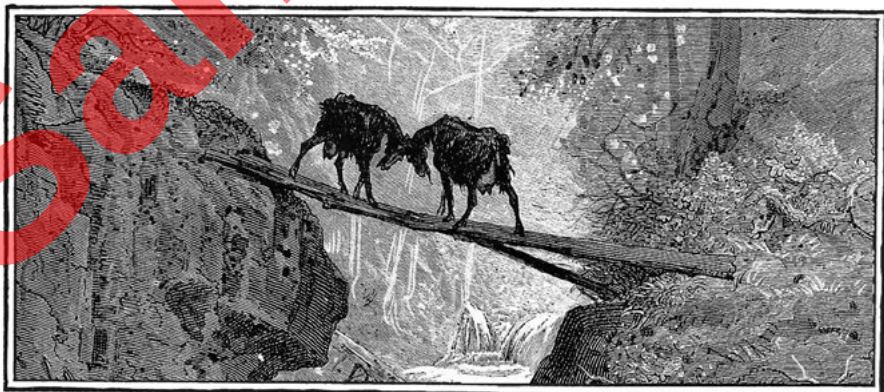




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Wormskin – Issue Five

This fifth installment in the periodic chronicles of Dolmenwood reveals something of the history, nature, powers, and schemes of one of the forest's primary factions: the sorcerers known as the Drune. Regarding themselves as the true masters of the wood, but operating always outside of the transitory political structures of men, adventurers who meddle with the delicate power balance of Dolmenwood are sure to encounter the Drune, before long.

This wintry feast of an issue continues with referee's guidelines and procedures for running hex-crawl style adventure sessions within Dolmenwood. To that end, detailed descriptions of a further cluster of seven hexes within the region known as "Hag's Addle" are furnished. The comings-and-goings of the titular Hag are then elaborated in lavish detail, allowing the referee to easily work her into an adventure set in the region.

Finally, four Dolmenwood-specific monsters are presented, including traditional "monster stat block" details on the Drune and one of their most commonly employed servants.

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THE WATCHERS OF THE WOOD



Herein is the lore pertaining to that sinister cabal of sorcerers who covet the arcane secrets of Dolmenwood above all else. Common folk refer to them as “the watchers of the wood”, for the name they call themselves — the Drune¹ — is said to be accursed.

The information in this article, save for the last section, “Rumours”, is not common knowledge. It should thus be guarded by the referee and only revealed according to the players’ explorations in Dolmenwood.

I. Origins

The Drune folk are a remnant of an antique realm said to lie somewhere in the distant north during that questionable age when the hidden powers still stalked the world in raiments of flesh and blood. Among their people, they were a caste of seers and fortune-tellers.

Regarded as a “folk apart” by the mundane farmers and officials they trucked with, the Drunemen were accepted at arms-length due to their connection with the weird forces that lurk above and below. They lived modestly in chapter-houses where many brothers would sleep and eat and practice their monkery.

In sooth, they were religious ascetics of a sort, worshipping nothing and no one but seeking after that which they would one day worship, seeking knowledge of that nameless god that was their true father. So they had been told by the lesser spirits they communed with, and they had no reason to doubt them. They took no wives and maintained their numbers through active recruitment in the form of bribes and kidnappings. Women were at this time thought to be a distraction from the Drune mission and so were generally avoided except during certain lunar phases that indicated a time of carnal acts.

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¹ The word “Drune” (with a capital D) refers to the cabal as a whole. Individual members are referred to, in singular and plural, as “a drune” or “some drunes”.



Their code was secrecy, their mantra "Seek, Know, Keep". The Drune collected knowledge like night-moths at work in a field of moon-mazed fronds, slurping up every bit of nectar that presented itself. Occult matters were of special concern, given the direction of their researches. No man who acquired and shared in their knowledge could leave with it and keep his life. This was understood by all.

II. Migration

The histories vary concerning the cause of the Drune's migrations and do not tell of how they came to be separate from that northern folk that birthed them. What is known is that the small group who came to Dolmenwood many centuries ago had deviated vastly from the gospel of its forefathers. These Drune came with women and sons and daughters. No longer seeking after the Hidden One and his vaunted wisdom, these Drune were bent on power and possession and the means to command the world around them. All their will was set to climb the black ladder of godhead and return to the world as its rightful aristocracy. Their knowledge had grown from the arts of crystal-watching and shadow-talking into a formidable edifice of sorcery capable of calling up the most recalcitrant of demon lords.

In Dolmenwood, the Drune had found a most opportune confluence of earth energies. It is said that in much of the world ley lines have withered to mere trickles of occult power, but in Dolmenwood the flow veritably crackles, giving rise to new lines and attracting all manner of spirits and fey oddities. Here was a great welling of strength to lend to the Drune's ambitions, and upon discovery they knew they must husband it and make it their own.

III. Establishment in Dolmenwood

At the time of the Drune's arrival, Dolmenwood was largely free of mankind's influence. Aside from a few isolated hermits, no men had ventured into the place's depths. This would change with the nascent growth of the river trade that brought many southrons into the region several hundred years later. Until then, the Drune operated undisturbed, but not alone.

A fairy lord called the Cold Prince had laid claim over the Wood well before the Drune's coming. Beings from Fairy had passed back and forth from Wood to Otherworld since time immemorial, and none could recall a period that preceded their lord's rule. Over the ages, as is the way with most fey creatures, the Prince grew indolent and lax with his power. In his pride and utter self-assurance, the elf lord (and by decree, his court) chose to ignore the curious sorcerers. As it came to pass, this hasty decision would eventually lead — many centuries later — to the Cold Prince's ejection from Dolmenwood.