

# THE BOUGHS



SANDY PUG GAMES

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DUNGEON WORLD

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Thank you.

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# Contents

|                                |    |
|--------------------------------|----|
| Introduction                   | 1  |
| The World of Boughs            | 3  |
| The People of Boughs           | 6  |
| Notable Boughs                 | 11 |
| The Rangers                    | 16 |
| The Beasts Of The Wilds        | 25 |
| Sample Adventure - Peach Trees | 32 |
| Making A Bough                 | 41 |



*“A Ranger is more than just some hobo with a badge and a spear. They’re a noble lot, cast out from the world, bound by blood and honor - they’re the only ones who know the real truth about this world, and probably the only hope we have of surviving it in the long run.*

*There’s shit out there that’ll make your blood turn to ice. You think that Ember Wolf that your uncle saw on a trade run was scary? Rangers keep those things as pets. Out in the world there’s plants that can steal your soul, angry ghosts of lost warriors made of shadows, fire breathing wolves are the least of your worries.*

*Well, so long as we have the Rangers, I guess none of that is yours to worry about. Stay safe up in the trees, friend, don’t venture too far, and if you do, pray to whatever God you call yours that you have a Ranger by your side.”*

## INTRODUCTION

The Vast is humbling and terrifying in equal measure. That first time you step out into the infinite woods and take in just how small you are – it's a moment that's broken people and made heroes. That intense sickness in your stomach, the unshakable mortality that hits you right in your animal brain, every inch of you screaming at how wrong this is, how that horizon goes on a little too far, that darkness a little too dark, and all this god damn green. Eventually it's just a dull reminder that you'll be spending the next 3 days on horseback before you get to where you're going, but it's that first time you'll never forget.

It's not hard to see why most never leave their Bough. The Vast being what it is, most prefer to ignore it; better than going a bit mad when your brain decides it really doesn't fancy comprehending the infinite. Throw in the various nasty beasts that live outside of the trees and the fauna that wants you dead and, well, like I said, easy to see why someone might prefer the Boughs.

Someone reasonable anyway.

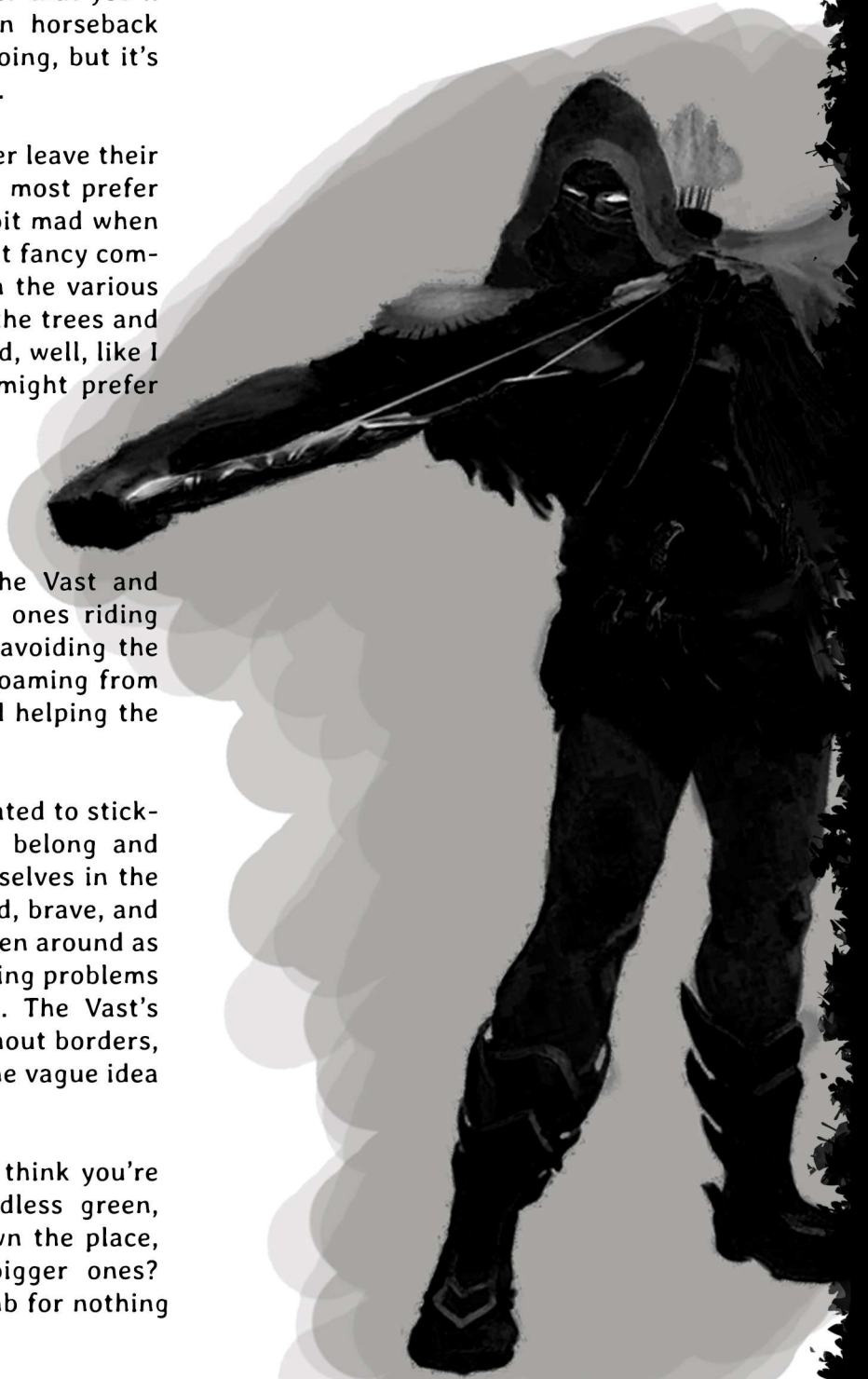
Then there's the other sort I mentioned: the ones that see the Vast and decide, yeah, that's my bit. The ones riding through the bush on horseback, avoiding the Whipgrowths and the Gizzards, roaming from tree to tree, righting wrongs, and helping the needy. At least that's the idea.

The Rangers, a special sort dedicated to sticking their nose where it doesn't belong and making a pain in the ass of themselves in the best possible way. Fearless, feared, brave, and self-righteous as fuck. They've been around as long as anyone can remember, fixing problems and occasionally creating a few. The Vast's very own peacekeeping force without borders, creed, or allegiance except to some vague idea and a pledge.

And that's you, you reckon? You think you're ready to step out into that endless green, saunter into a bough like you own the place, and make problems to solve bigger ones? Were you born to risk life and limb for nothing

more than the chance to make this whole mess a better place, only to be forgotten by all but the wood and bark? Are you willing to stare the end right in the eye, spit into the black gates of death and damn the consequences, so long as it buys you another minute spent saving some unappreciative Yix-fiend from their inevitable end?

Good. Welcome aboard, Ranger.





*“It’s the most incredible thing, being out there. Most of us have lived our entire lives encased in bark, and barely know the sensation of actually being out in the world. The terror is there, sure, but there’s so much more – the sound of wind, the smell of grass, the soft and relentless crunch of the leaf bed. It’s hard to properly describe to someone who’s never stepped foot outside.*”

*It’s dark, the canopy makes sure of that, but there are breaks in the leaves and there are spears of light piercing the world as far as you can see. Not every animal wants you dead, some of them are a joy to watch swing from the branches or stalk through the long grass, but it’s the speed that gets me going.*

*You’ve never ridden a horse, never felt the power of another beast below you, one you tamed or raised from a whelp. It’s the single greatest sensation in the world, cutting through the dense forest so fast your eyes water, Boughs whizzing past you as you cut your trail. The colors blur on the edges of your vision and all that there is is you and your mount, making your way to wherever it is you’re needed.”*

CHAPTER ONE:  
**THE WORLD OF BOUGHS**

## GEOGRAPHY

The great forest of the Vast is infinite, at least as far as anyone can tell. The odd rider or adventurer will get it into their head to finally find a break in the wood and set off, never to be seen or heard from again, just as you might expect. That's not to say the Vast is a homogenous mass of trees stretching in every direction. Well, it's mostly that, but there is some variation. Almost every habitable Bough exists in an immense valley, walled on all sides by a mountain range that's just about as tall as the tallest Boughs, creatively named The Wall.

Beyond The Wall is more forest, more trees, but fewer Boughs and more horrible monsters that want to eat your eyes. The Boughs beyond The Wall are an eclectic mix of pioneers seeking to stake out a new life for themselves and their families, criminal enterprises brewing up Yix batches and the usual motley crew of cults, loners, and warlords all doing whatever dark deeds they're working on that week. As one travels further and further out, the land becomes less fertile, the trees less green, until eventually all that surrounds you is dead, skeletal trees and darkness.

The Valley itself is so big it might as well be endless. A good, fast rider will take a month to cross it from end to end, and a caravan can take almost double that, to say nothing of the ordeal that is crossing The Wall itself. Most people never leave their Bough, fewer still leave the Valley.

The Valley itself is hardly idyllic, with the monsters and plants that want to kill you and all, but it is verdant and rich in resources and fertile soil, with flowing rivers and an abundance of less lethal wildlife. All this means those within the valley are a lucky, privileged few. Not to say they don't have their own problems, but any given Bough tends to have what it needs to thrive, at least in theory.

One thing almost no one lacks for is water. Deep below the ground lies the Firmament. Some call it the Under-Vast or the Great Ocean. It's a massive, flooded cave system, with caverns sprawling over hundreds of miles. Every river flows into it, every lake draws from it and every single Bough in the

valley has its great roots deep in the waters. Some Boughs have access to the Firmament directly, and its citizens fish out there in the pitch black waters and caves. Deadly work, but a good day can bring enough scratch to last a year up top.

The waters are dark, and fewer people visit them than leave the Boughs, so what lives in the deep isn't exactly well known. There's your average fish that you might find in a lake if you were lucky but there's other things down there too. Huge leviathans that prey on the boats, strange multi-limbed gasbags that float above the water's surface that can grow big enough to engulf someone whole, little pockets of flesh and vapor that can steal your body, and the ever present story of The Big One, an oceandwelling predator that chews the roots of the Boughs for sustenance and eats entire boats whole. Every sailor has a story of the time they saw it, every sailor has a friend that they swear lived inside of it for a year, surviving off of clams and crabs. No one's ever proven it's real, but I'm not going down there to check and I don't recommend you do either.

## THE BOUGHS

The Vast is a wood, an enormous forest that stretches on seemingly forever without much in the way of clearings. Within this wood, towering over all else, are the Boughs.

A Bough is a gigantic tree, beyond reckoning. Wide enough at the base that it'd take a Ranger a full hour to circle one, tall enough to pierce the canopy and the clouds above that, they're the largest living things in all of the Vast, and there are thousands of them, all of them hollow, all of them housing an entire society within their protective bark.

Within each Bough is a community of tens of thousands of residents, all working and living within the confines of the tree, most spending their entire lives within the bark, never once braving the Vast. And why would they? Almost every Bough is a self-sustaining archology, with food, water, even light being drawn in from the ground and the leaves, tended to by the people that live within.

Almost every Bough, anyway.

The truth is lots of Boughs go without – maybe the tree is sick, or old, or young, or just sitting on a rough patch of dirt, but the important thing to remember is not every Bough is created equal. The lucky ones may have friendly neighbors who can help or trade for what they need, traveling through the huge branches that bridge some Boughs to one another. Others are less lucky, relying on underhanded tactics, like raids or oppressive governance, propping up the few at the expense of the many. Some are rife with gangs, out of control militia, demonswarms or drug rings, evil mages, and hiveminds.

Long story short, if you thought that the Vast was bad, the Boughs can get just as bad and worse.

### DANGERS, QUESTIONS AND MOVES

Most sections in this book will have one of these little asides to give the GM or the player something cool to use from the above block of text in their games. Consider these as some gentle suggestions for campaigns, sessions, adventures, characters and more.

#### **Dangers**

##### *The Outsiders*

The people that live outside the valley definitely look upon it with envious eyes. Who knows how long until some rogue wizard or ambitious warlord gathers an army and crosses the Wall? Are the disconnected and disparate people of the Valley ready to fight off such a force? What can the Rangers do to stop it?

##### *The Roused Wildlife*

The wildlife is violent, and has been getting worse for as long as anyone can remember. Something's got to be behind this, and whatever it is can't be good for the people that live in this world.

##### *Internal Strife*

The core danger behind any adventure in The Boughs. Something terrible is going on in a community, and it's up to you to fix it.

#### **Yix**

The drug of choice in this world, a powerful concoction made from Bough bark, a little bit of magic and the entrails of a Firmament fish, it's effects include massively enhanced magical powers (for a very short time), euphoria, feelings of "oneness" and occasionally spawning a monster made of oil and nightmares, as well as whatever side effects work for your campaign.

##### *The Waters*

All that ocean, sitting in the dark right below everyone's feet, full of horrible monsters that no one has ever seen before. I'd call that a danger.

#### **Hooks, Questions and Rumors**

How far does the Vast go? What's beyond it? Why is the land beyond The Wall less fertile? The Boughs seem almost designed to sustain life. Why?

They say there's a network of secret tunnels through The Wall that are used by criminals, the Rangers and the powerful.

No one's ever seen the bottom of the Firmament, but something's got to be down there, right? Some say it's the sky, and if you go down you'll fall from above. Some say it's just dirt. Some say it's something alive, and the roots all tangle together into something much much bigger down there.

How come no one has ever seen a Bough sapling?

The sky is only glimpsed by the bravest climbers. They say there's a half dozen moons and two suns. At least some of them do.

Word is that Yix was invented by the Rangers in the first place to empower their mages, and the recipe only got out after a botched job.

The Wall is impossible. There's no way for a mountain range to grow like that organically.

#### **Moves**

- Undo an uneasy peace
- Give one person something everyone wants
- Take away a valuable resource



*“There’s one thing that unites the people of the world, and that’s a general hatred of everyone that doesn’t live inside the Bough they call home. Almost everyone is xenophobic as hell and unwilling to entertain the idea that those outside of their tree are the same decent, hard working, struggling people that they are – and that’s before you get into the part where some of them look like bug monsters.*”

*Aside from that, people are the same wherever you go. Sure the Zel are kind of difficult to speak to, and the Dwarves are far too interested in everything you have to say, the Elves are self-important bastards and the Humans make them look like paragons of modesty, but they all eat, sleep, shit and dream of a better life. They all think their rulers are fools and their family is righteous. They all think they deserve all the good that comes to them, and all the bad is an unimaginable injustice. They fight, they love, they call you a dickhead and slam the door on your face.*

*Sometimes, you’ll be asked how you manage to work with so many different people – well that’s the trick my friend, once you’ve seen one Bough, you’ve seen them all.”*

## CHAPTER TWO: THE PEOPLE OF BOUGHS

## PEOPLE OF THE BOUGHS

The Vast is a diverse world, with a number of intelligent species making their homes in the Boughs. Given the seemingly infinite scale of the Vast, this is by no means an exhaustive list of everything that's out there, the Zel were only 'discovered' living beyond The Wall less than 100 years ago, so don't be surprised if you run into something new out there.

### **Humans**

Good Old Man – founders of the Rangers, settlers of almost half the Valley and kind of a bunch of arseholes. Far as anyone can tell, Humans began somewhere in the center of the Valley and rapidly spread out east, settling some of the most fertile Boughs in the Vast, eventually reaching the wall and abruptly stopping short. Human lore says that they encountered "The World Snake" at the wall that warned them against passing over it and quit their expansion there and then. Debate rages on over if this is a metaphor or if there is some world devouring serpent out there. No one else has ever seen one anyway.

Humans are a fickle and strange lot. Xenophobic, except when they aren't, secretive except when they have something to boast about, and united except for always – most Humans pledge a kind of fealty to "The Confederation of Boughs", a sort of pan-Vast collection of states that, in theory at least, are allies that make choices and decisions together. In reality the last time the Confederation even gathered, less than half of the Human-dominant Boughs showed up, and it sparked a brawl that the Rangers had to step in to clear up. Take from that what you will.

One thing Humans actually do better than almost everyone else is medicine. They're incredible healers, almost every one of them a master of a variety of herbs and techniques to remedy almost any malady. If you're lucky to find yourself injured or sick in a Human-dominant Bough, you'll probably make it, if you can find someone to help. It's little wonder that most think Yix was invented by Humans as a kind of secret community-destroying weapon. They're wrong, probably, but you can see where they get it from.

The rest of the Vast takes a mixed view of Humanity, as you might expect. Given how insular almost every Bough is, no one spends a lot of time worrying about anything not within their own bark, but basically everyone who knows about the Confederation is vaguely concerned that it will one day pull itself together and become the first and only Bough Empire. Humans' reputation for being great healers is much more well known, and almost any Bough will take on some humans if they come knocking for this reason.

### **Dangers**

#### *The Confederation*

If it comes back, it means trouble for everyone. An empire that spans the Valley would be powerful enough to do basically whatever they want, and the nice, quiet, internal strife of the world is suddenly replaced with something much worse. And if even it never comes back, the threat of it might be enough to give some Boughs some ideas about forming their own empire first.

#### *The World Snake*

Something stopped the first Humans from colonizing the lands outside the Valley, and what we've learned seems to suggest it's not just a fear of the unknown. After all, they covered the 1500 or so miles of the Valley without pause. Whatever it is, we'd really rather it not pay us a visit.

### **Questions, Hooks and Rumors**

How are Humans so good at medicine? Do they have some kind of special senses?

If they were the first species, what was around before them?

There's a force behind the Confederation, some invisible hand that wishes to see Humans united. Why? What is their motive?

### **Moves**

- Defy an expectation
- Heal something unhealable – at a price

### Dwarves and Halflings

Next up on the most populous list is our friends the Dwarves and the Halflings, sometimes referred to by terrible people as the Half Races, but never to their faces. They're a curious lot. For a start, we're not very clear on what the difference is between a Halfling and a Dwarf is – they insist it's obvious, and they can tell each other apart with ease, but they're both about 3-4 feet tall, stocky, and hairy, with a love of climbing.

Halflings and Dwarves, like the Zel, come from eggs, but unlike the Zel, a Dwarf or Halfling mother will lay only one or two eggs at a time. Somehow the difference is appreciable to the mother at this point. Able to walk as soon as they hatch, they grow to full maturity in less than a year, before going on to live about 80 years or so. This unique physiology allows the Dwarves and Halflings to very quickly build up their Boughs, doing what would take years for other races in no time at all.

While many animals chew bark and eat the wood of the trees, the Halflings and Dwarves are the only intelligent ones that we know of that do so, often hacking down huge branches of their Boughs, partially for defense and partially for food.

A fiercely xenophobic and insular people, a Dwarven or Halfling Bough is easily spotted by the barricades over the entrance, the warnings to trespassers and the lack of branches reaching over to other nearby Boughs. It's very rare to be allowed into one of their Boughs, and rarer still to feel welcome within their bark. They show some deference to Rangers, as do all races by and large, but take care when you're in there. You never know when you could meet with a little accident.

The rest of the Vast views these folks as industrious, and often feel awe at the technical prowess of a Dwarf or Halfling. Almost any Bough would love to have a couple show up on their doorstep, though obviously that'll never happen – a very, very rare few of their kind have joined the Rangers, and their presence can often open a lot of doors.

### Dangers

#### *Xenophobia*

Every race in the Valley, and in the Vast as a whole, is pretty xenophobic. We all live in walled off trees, we're all evolved these special abilities and quirks that mean we prefer our own company, but the Dwarves and Halflings are another level altogether. They've fought wars over their hatred of other races before, and they're easily technologically capable of wreaking havoc on the rest of us if they ever wanted to.

#### *Technology*

It's one thing to build a neat crane or a barricade, or even some of the heat-power engines the Dwarves and Halflings have come up with, but who knows how far it goes? What the Dwarves and Halflings are building in their fortified Boughs?

#### **Hooks, Questions and Rumors**

Some say the Dwarves and Halflings are the same species, but they lie to us, for some unknown purpose. Others suggest one is the male and one is the female, but they deny both of these ideas.

They have metal in such abundance that if you gathered up every scrap of it every other race uses, you'd only just meet the amount that they control. What do they need it for?

Almost every Dwarf and Halfling Bough has most of the upper level closed off and defended with a small army. What are they doing up there?

#### **Moves**

- Make something incredible
- Break the way things are supposed to be

## Elves

It seems strange to lump the dozen or so sub-species of Elf in one like this, but the rest of the Vast does it, so here we are. Elves are the Vast's diplomats, a friendly folk always happy to lend a hand and work together on whatever it is that they face. This is mainly due to the fact that every subspecies of Elf has its own hivemind, a chunk of their being that is all of them, all at once, tugging each individual to a kind of collective drive. If one Elf needs help with something, they can bet that help will be on the way soon, so long as they're in a friendly Bough of their own kind. The hivemind makes them pretty distrusting of any non-Elf, or any Elf that's not their particular brand of Elf for that matter. The silence they feel from those not connected to the Hive is as disturbing to them as the idea of a constant prattling in the back of your skull is to me, but even so, they're friendly to other races, at least outwardly.

The first thing you're likely to notice is how tall they are. The average Elf towers over most of us at about 7 feet. You'd be forgiven for thinking they seem spindly and weak, but their frame belies an immense physical strength. They say it's just natural, but most people believe some innate magic is at play – maybe the hivemind shares more than just thoughts, maybe the elves' proclivity for magic imbues them with some mystical power, who knows - they're not telling anyway.

Their culture values collective work, community and invention, rivaling the Dwarves and the Halflings for their technical prowess. An Elven Bough is covered in an assortment of cranes, pulleys and other devices for building the vast additions to the bark and branches they construct around the Bough. While most races leave their Bough's exterior relatively untouched, the Elves decorate, paint, enhance, build and modify their bark, often with huge designs venerating their collective accomplishments.

As mentioned, every Elf sub-species has an affinity for magic, producing some of the greatest wizards and sorcerers of the Vast, capable of the most incredible acts of power – tales of Elven magic growing the Wall, vanquishing

entire armies and conjuring Boughs are common. Thankfully for all of us, the hivemind seems to keep these outstandingly powerful Elves dedicated to using the power for good. It's rare to run into one outside of their homes, but by all accounts they seem to be as personable, charismatic and friendly as any other Elf.

## Dangers

### *The Magic*

Some worry about the Elves ability with magic, rumors fly about their ability to unmake the Vast, to tunnel into a new world and suck us all in with them, horror stories of their summoning demons from beyond the world. Its all bunk, but their monopoly on the higher planes of magic power is cause for concern. How could we stop them if they wanted to do something really scary?

### *Infighting*

The largest war the Vast has ever seen was between Elven sub-species, and at the rate they're going, we're due another big one.

## Hooks, Questions and Rumors

What makes the hivemind works and how extensive is it? What kind of range does it have?

The Elves say they have all the secrets of magic figured out, but they're not telling.

There's rumors of a secret Elven Bough somewhere in the Wall, where they research magic and develop their powers as a single species. If we found it, we might be able to figure out everything they know.

## Moves

- Prepare a mighty ritual
- Know something they shouldn't



## Zel

The latest race to join us here in the Valley, the Zel were originally mistaken for yet another horrifying monster of the Vast, which can be forgiven, given their appearance. 5 to 6 foot-tall Wasp-like creatures, complete with mandibles and a brutal looking stinger, many consider the Zel terrifying to behold. Some also consider them beautiful, with their amazing gem-like wings and the striking colors of their shells.

Whatever you think, it's easy to see why first contact was bathed in bloodshed. A small smuggling caravan returning from beyond the Wall encountered a small Zel scouting party and, mistaking them for one of the many deadly beasts that inhabit the Vast, slaughtered them. This would become the standard response to meeting a Zel for almost 100 years until just recently when one of their Boughs was found.

The Zel have been unbelievably forgiving to the rest of the Valley for this treatment. Upon the discovery of the Zel Bough along the Northern ridge of the Wall, most of the Races stopped murdering every Zel they discovered along trade routes and scavenging spaces. The Zel seem happy to leave it at that, at least outwardly. They're still the most closed off of all the Races in the Vast, rarely allowing even the Rangers to enter their Boughs, and those that do make it in often find their Boughs difficult to navigate, given the assumption that everyone within can fly.

Due to our rocky history, we know very little about the Zel. They come from eggs, with their Boughs having huge hatcheries spanning a dozen levels, which are fiercely protected from any and all outsiders. The Zel as a people are a very collectivized group, sharing the resources of their Bough with those that need them the most, but they venerate the individual in their art, a contradiction that doesn't seem obvious to the Zel. They do speak, sort of – the clicking and squeaking noises they make are a kind of verbalization of their pheromone-based language. This means non-Zel often miss out on the nuances of conversation when talking to one, though

Zel are quite able to learn writing and communicate perfectly well that way.

The most curious trait of the Zel is their love of sailing and the Firmament, something almost every other race finds utterly horrifying. Their boats are exquisitely made, their fishing techniques are next to none, and they're somehow able to navigate the pitch black waters. This concerns some Boughs, given that the roots provide a pretty easy point of attack should the Zel ever decide to invade, but since the Zel basically possess a monopoly on the fish trade, there's little anyone can do to stop them cementing their positions within the Valley.

## Dangers

### *The Unknown*

We know next to nothing of the Zel, where they come from, what their "home" looks like, why they moved to the Valley. Too many questions surround them and there's a the risk that they're here for some untoward reasons.

### *Revenge*

Outwardly, the Zel are forgiving, but it's clear to anyone that visits their Boughs or meets one of their caravans that there's something under the surface there. It could be that we're missing the nuance in their statements when they talk about their forgiveness, but as much as the rest of the valley is willing to just forget about it, we're keeping an eye on them.

## Hooks, Questions and Rumors

What happens if/when the first Zel wants to join the Rangers?

Why are the Zel so comfortable in the Firmament? What makes them so good at sailing?

Where are the Zel from? Most races insist they're from the Valley somehow, but the Zel are clearly "new".

The Zel spend more time outside their Bough than any other race. They even openly travel over the Wall. This is very strange.

## Moves

- Attack with overwhelming numbers
- Reveal something unknown, at great cost



*“There’s a Bough out there where they worship dirt. Just dirt. They don’t think its magic, they don’t think it’s imbued with incredible power or sent from a god or anything – they just decided at some point that dirt did a lot of work around here and deserved some props. Who am I to say otherwise?”*

*Not all Boughs are dens of drug lords or Lich-Kings building an unstoppable army of the undead. Some of them are just sort of weird. Those are the fun jobs, in my experience. Nothing like getting word that something terrible has happened, only to show up to a mass beaver invasion, people running in terror as fur balls quietly and calmly make comfy little nests for themselves – or maybe the Bough’s Rock has gone missing, or, my personal favorite job, the Bough has started moving.*

*They won’t tell you about that one at the academy, but riding a Bough off of a cliff has to be the highlight of my career as a Ranger.”*

## CHAPTER THREE: NOTABLE BOUGHS

## NOTABLE BOUGHS

Boughs are diverse, with each one being very different from any other Bough in the Vast. Even within the same species, Bough culture and society will function very differently. Below are a few examples of what you can expect out there, but always remember that the one thing all Boughs have in common is they defy expectations.

### **The Great High Palace Of Life and Plenty**

*Dominant Race:* Human

*Exports:* Foodstuffs, weapons

*Imports:* Metals

*Political Structure:* Liquid Democracy

The Great High Palace is the center of all the maps that the Humans make of the Vast. It's the crowning jewel in their idea of a Confederacy. A massive Bough, and one of the most verdant in all of the Valley, it stands slightly East of the center of the Valley and towers over any tree within a day's ride from its base. The outer bark is the platonic ideal of a Bough. Rough, dark brown bark, strong branches and a perfect canopy of lush green leaves combined with the incredible fields surrounding the tree make for an utterly imposing sight.

One of the few Boughs that openly accepts visitors and immigrants, the people of the High Palace take great pride in showing off their opulence. Most Boughs have a large hollow space in the center that rises right up to the point where the trunk turns to branches, but in High Palace, they've carved their center into an immense elaborate tapestry: a carved story of the struggle of Humanity, battles and political moves, culminating in a massive snake's head descending from the ceiling to devour it all. What this says about Human culture we leave as an exercise to the ranger.

In actual structure, the Bough is similar to most – a base of workshops, storage, and markets on the lower levels built into the wood around the center, before a layer of living quarters, community spaces and grand parks that makes up the vast bulk of the Bough. The community in the Great Palace is relatively loose, without any kind of the separation of neighborhoods you find often in a Bough,

Instead communities tend to form around specific activities, jobs and roles within the Bough rather than physical location. Travel throughout the Bough is relatively unimpeded, with guard checkpoints only around the major thoroughways and crane-lifts.

The lack of any Bough slums is something they take great pride of in the Great Palace, but the inequality is still there. You just need to look for it – sure, the homes might be nice and pretty, but some people in the Great Palace go hungry at night same as anywhere else. You'd be hard pressed to find anyone complaining about it however – to do so would break the illusion of the Great Palace's place in the world.

High above the community levels are the political offices, courts and the occasional church – all the instruments a Bough needs to ensure its wheels remain greased. Of note here are the High Courts, the prison and the Confederation Forum. The High Court is a huge building that juts out of the bark as a turret where the worst criminals of the Confederation are tried and sentenced. Or they would be, if there was a Confederation. The seats of the High Court have remained empty for some time now, but it's still included in tours.

The prison is a fairly simple structure, housed in the center column in the mouth of the snake, prisoners are transported in by a one-use pulley lift system and thrown into one massive communal cell that reportedly holds hundreds. The administration of the Great Palace is not forthcoming on details of their prison, but one assumes the prisoners get food and water and other supplies somehow – that or it's just a hole to toss people in until they die.

Finally the Confederation Forum – the highest room in the entire Bough, and some say the Vast itself. An oversized meeting hall in practice, it has lain empty since the last Confederation meeting ended in a fist fight over some triviality no one really remembers. It's off-limits to tours, but the carvings show a large stage surrounded by row upon row of raised seats, each of which is exquisitely carved with the finest details of that envoys'

Bough's history. The whole Forum is surrounded by massive windows that let in the un-shaded light of the bare sun. Presumably quite a sight under all that dust.

The Great Palace cuts an impressive figure on the surface, but like all Boughs, it has its problems. First and foremost, it's constant warring with any and every neighboring Bough. The reasons they give vary with the war, but the Great Palace has effectively been at war for the past 100 years. Mostly this has been a quiet, cold war, the occasional border skirmish, a raid or two, but more than once a full blown Bough-War has broken out, with both the Palace and whatever Bough they decided was their foe that week dedicating themselves to the utter destruction of each other.

The last time this happened was between the Great Palace and the Dwarf/Halfling Bough of Deeproot. Tensions were high already after Deeproot refused to trade more metal to the Humans, citing a lack of resources for their own projects. The Great Palace responded by blockading all trade routes they could around Deeproot, which forced Deeproot to send armed troops to break the blockade. The escalation continued, until finally both raised an army against the other. Tragedy was only averted through the deft diplomacy and careful work of the Rangers, and the rescue of the Dwarven King Droth.

### Dangers

#### *The Rot*

Despite their attempts to stifle this information, we've gotten evidence that the roots of the Great Palace are infected with the Rot. This is basically a death sentence for the Bough unless they discover a cure no one else has. What happens when the crown jewel of Humanity falls? I don't know, but I'd rather not be around when it happens.

#### *The Confederation*

As with humans in general, the reunification and realization of the Confederation dream presents a clear danger to the peace of the Valley. Worse in the Great Palace, all it would take is one powerful and charismatic leader to leverage the history in the right way at the

right time and we could all be in trouble.

### Hooks, Questions and Rumors

The Great Palace is immense, and the tours they give in no way show even a 10th of the buildings in the political sector. They're hiding something up there.

Whose idea was it to turn the core into an immense statue to the end of the world? Considering the Palace is supposed to be a grand testament to human accomplishment, why is their main artwork a depiction of the end of all things?

The Palace is absolutely surrounded by enemies. Since their closest human ally to the East abandoned their Bough a few years ago, the diplomatic tactic of "threaten everyone and hope no one calls you on it" is running thin.

### Moves

- Offer riches beyond measure
- Start a goddamned War

### Stone-Hold

*Dominant Race:* Zel

*Exports:* Fish

*Imports:* Foodstuffs

*Political Structure:* Dictatorship of the Many

The first place we ever met the Zel on their home ground, Stone-Hold is kind of a disappointing sight when you first come across it. Buried right on the edge of the Valley, its bark curling up around a great cliff face, you might be mistaken for thinking it's a dead Bough. Its leaves are grey, its bark is old, and it's in a pretty bad state.

Look a little closer though, and suddenly you'll notice the workers crawling along the outside of the tree, clearing away stone or shoring up broken branches. You'll see the collector Zel trimming the smaller branches for food and building materials, and maybe you'll catch sight of the huge bulbous growth around the trees midsection, the nursery level, protected by warrior Zel and metal plates.

And that's probably as far as you'll get before the Zel politely ask you to leave. Or tear you apart. Unless you're very lucky, you're not going to be setting foot in a Zel Bough, least of all the first one they've colonized in the Valley. That said, on official business, and early in the discovery of the Zel, they let a few people in to take a look under armed guard.

What we saw was fascinating. A Bough still in the process of being turned it a habitat, and one that's almost entirely unique in the Valley. Upon entering, the first thing you're struck with is the amount of art and décor everywhere. Every spare inch of wood is carved in incredible detail, breathtaking scenes etched in miniature, so fine that it's easy to find yourself lost in them. The Bough itself has a distinctly hive-like feel to it, with hexagonal structures running all around the inner wall.

The base of the Bough is cleared out entirely, accommodating instead a sort of dock, pulleys, winches, and piers tend to a fleet of boats that dangle high above a pitch black pit – precarious for anyone not lucky enough to be born with wings, but the Zel find themselves easily at home tending to their ships, repairing and making them ready for trips deep into the ground, to the Ocean. Surrounding this pit is a ring of fisheries and wood-working facilities, designed to provide quick service to returning ships.

It's at this point you'll notice the lack of steps, lifts or any normal way of egress to the higher levels. The original tours were content with what they saw on the first level, but our agents managed to break off from the main group and discovered a series of tunnels that run all the way up the structure. They guessed that these were some kind of waste disposal or perhaps service tunnels. They were hard to climb, but allowed our people to explore further up the Bough.

The first layer after the docks is a sort of immense community gathering space, an open planned park that runs around the inner wall of the Bough – this seems to be a place where the Zel gather to discuss politics and decide on projects, debate ideas, and so on. The debates clearly become heated, our agent

witnessing two Zel break into a brawl after a presumably passionate debate, each of which had a small crowd which leapt to their defense. Both Zel broke up their battle and appeared to happily return to discussion quickly after.

Higher still brings you to the living quarters, which again are communal. The Zel make their beds out of leaf mulch, cocooning themselves in the green mush to form temporary pods on every surface, ceiling included. These areas again show a Zel desire for open spaces and communal living, but each 'pod' is deeply personalized before the user sleeps, and individual Zel appear to spend a great deal of time making their pod look the nicest among their close neighbors.

Right above these are the hatcheries – our agent was almost caught taking a look here. They're the most heavily guarded part of Bough by far, with guards everywhere and strong metal walls blocking off almost every angle of assault. The hatcheries themselves are vast caves carved deep into the bark. They are full to bursting with the large red eggs of the Zel, tended to by a legion of hatch-nurses and surrounded by beds of leaf-mush. The smell is overpowering and constantly shifting, at one time smelling like flowers or sweet berries and at another of death and shit.

The upper levels of the Bough are a kind of combined storage and distribution center. Quite why this is so high up in the tree is a mystery to us; presumably the Zel find it easier to ascend their Boughs than we do, but still, it's a long way up – regardless, they have massive stock houses of food and supplies, and the logistics to distribute it based on tightly examined and regulated "needs" registered by the living quarters below. Seems to work out okay for them, our agent reports not seeing any kind of destitution on their visit, though it could very well be that we simply have no idea what that looks like to a Zel.

One point of concern was a tunnel our agent discovered before being forced to flee – it appeared to cut out of the tree and into the Wall itself, digging deep into the dark rock that holds the Bough in place. This could be how

the Zel got here in the first place, or it could be a connection to some Zel homebase outside the Valley. Either way, we'd love to get someone in there to see what they're up to.

Stone-Hold has no physically close neighbors, and has the good fortune of being remote enough that the nearest Bough is a day's hard ride away. This means they're not too concerned about invaders, which shows in their relative lack of a militia outside of the hatcheries.

### Dangers

#### *Oceanways*

Almost every Bough relies on its branches to visit its neighbors, should they be lucky enough to have branch-mates. Stone-Hold is connected to every single Bough in the Valley through its Oceanways. As soon as the Valley at large figures this out, they may be less welcoming to the Zel regardless of how many fish they give them.

#### *Vulnerability*

The Zel are new, and they're still seen to some as monsters rather than sentient beings. While they're quite capable of self-defense from the odd raiding party, if anyone had the inclination, this Bough would crumble under a sustained assault.

### Hooks, Questions and Rumors

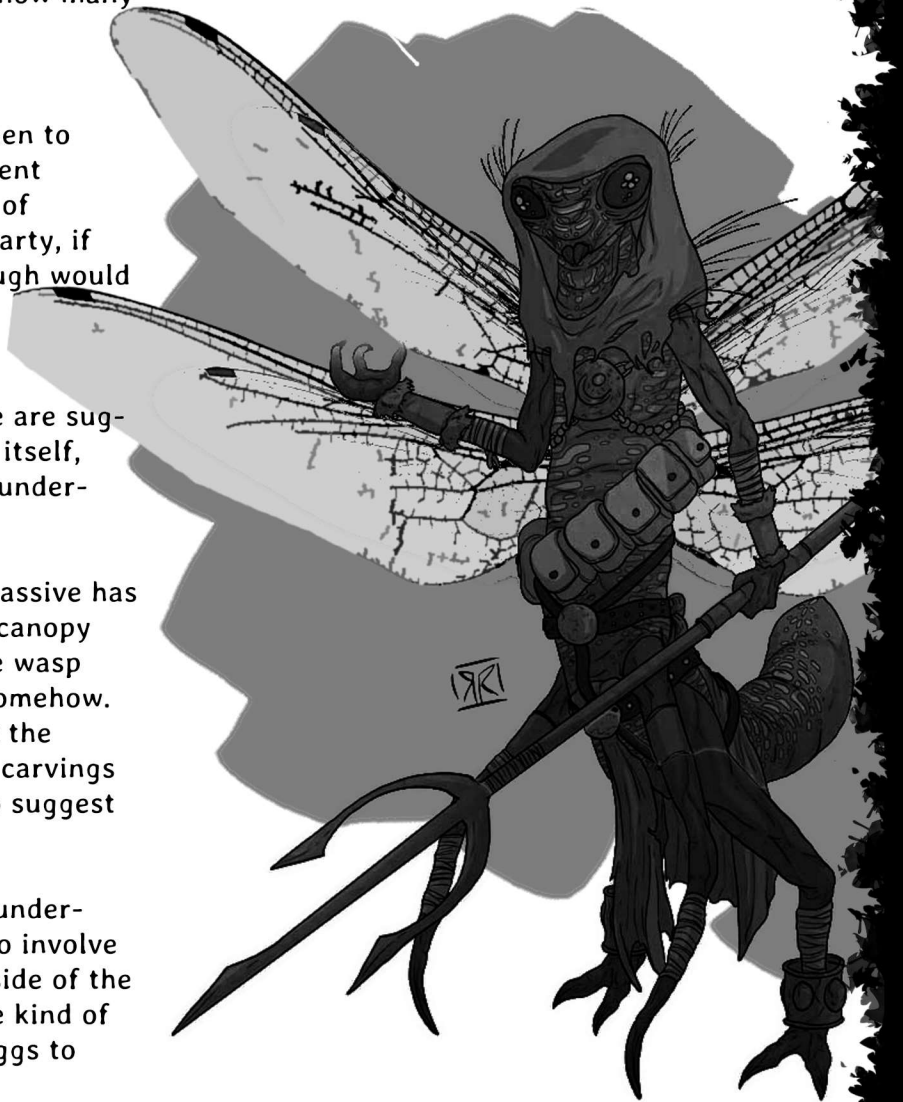
That tunnel leads somewhere. Some are suggesting the Zel come from the Wall itself, living inside of it like some kind of underground Bough.

There are rumors that something massive has been seen perched atop what little canopy that Stone-Hold has, some immense wasp monster feeding off of the Bough somehow. These ideas are mocked openly, but the Rangers have some sketches of the carvings from within the Bough that seem to suggest there may be something to this.

The life cycle of a Zel is as yet not understood – the hatchery also appears to involve magic somehow. Can Zel breed outside of the Bough? Does the magic create some kind of atmosphere required to bring the eggs to fruition?

### Moves

- Get somewhere fast
- Defend to the last Zel





*Before we were anything, we were nothing*

*Before we were together, we were alone*

*Before we were Rangers, we were Boughless*

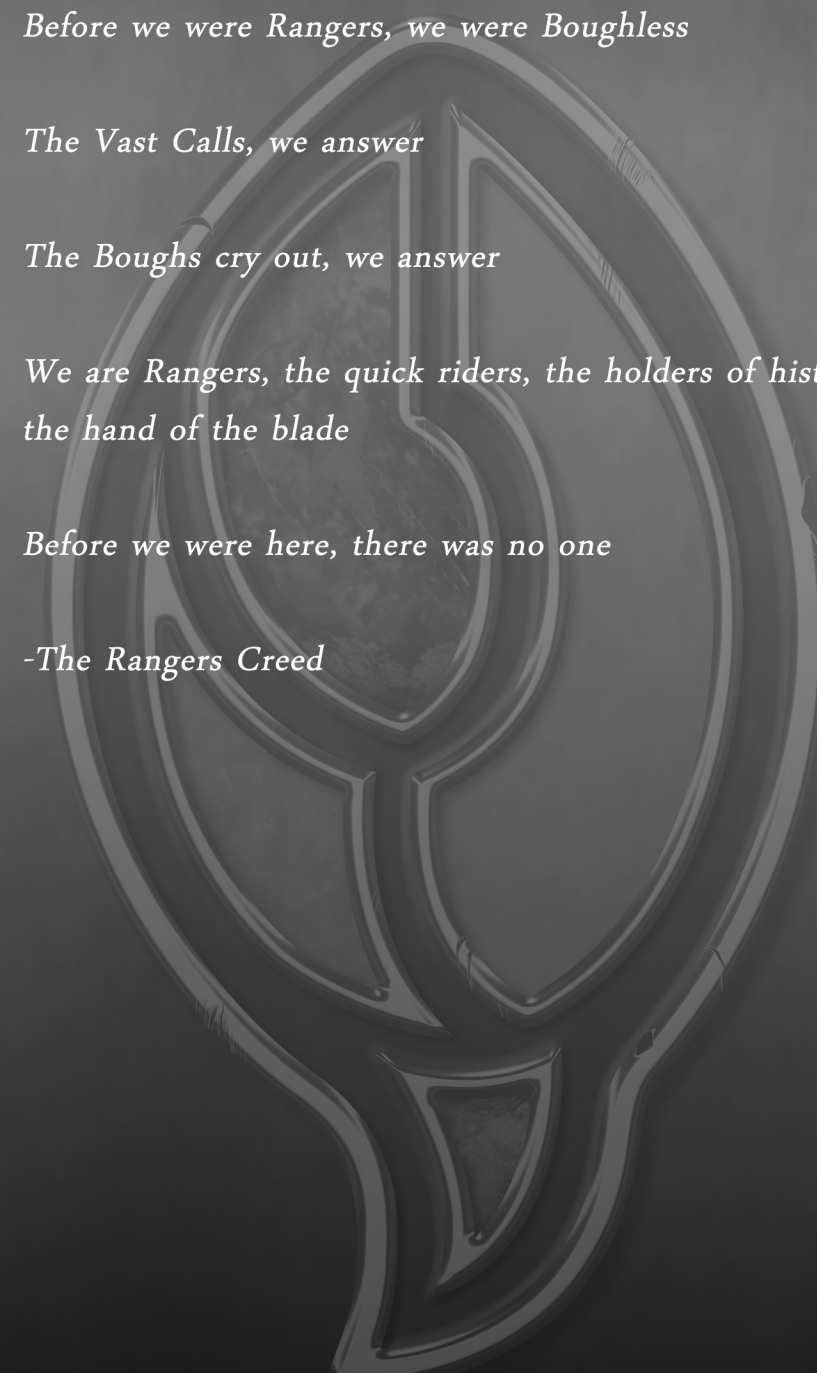
*The Vast Calls, we answer*

*The Boughs cry out, we answer*

*We are Rangers, the quick riders, the holders of history and  
the hand of the blade*

*Before we were here, there was no one*

*-The Rangers Creed*



CHAPTER FOUR:  
**THE RANGERS**

## THE RANGERS

So where do we enter into all of this nonsense? In amongst the warring Boughs, the brutal regimes, the dormant empires, and magical super powers stand us brave few: the Rangers. Somewhere between a police force, judges, private mercenaries, and investigators, ours is an ancient order dedicated to protecting the order of the Valley and the Vast.

We're pretty much the only people keeping an eye on the Vast at large, as best we can. That last part is important – we're understaffed, under equipped and perpetually on the edge of collapse. If you thought the Boughs were a contentious lot, wait till you see the spats we get into. It's not all bad; if you meet another Ranger out there in the Vast, you can expect their support and help whenever possible. Our name carries a lot of weight and can get you out of a lot of scraps (and into just as many). People respect you, fear you, and hate you, sometimes at all once, but mainly they understand you're there to help.

At our core, that's all we are. Here to help. We solve problems, keep the Vast safe and try to leave it a little nicer than we found it. If we can figure out some ancient secrets, defeat a great evil or save some lives while we do it, shit, that'd be nice too.

### **History**

Before we were anything, we were nothing. This is more than just a fancy way to start off the creed; before the Rangers were the Rangers, we were outlaws, vagabonds, criminals and exiles. For a long time, and even now in many Boughs, the punishment for many crimes is to be kicked out into the wilds, branded with a mark, and left for dead. Most people did as they were told and promptly died of hunger, exposure or beasts, but a few managed to cut out a living in the Valley. Some of those managed to band together and slowly, over time, something like a community started to emerge. A cutthroat community of robbers, murderers and bandits, but a community nonetheless.

We bred animals to ride, we learned how to hunt the monsters that had hunted the people of the Vast for centuries. We learned how to

start fires and what to eat out there in the Valley. We learned how to navigate by the rivers and the stars. You could even say we thrived, and as we grew more competent, more exiles sought us out, joined our band, and learned our ways.

Then Treefall happened.

Even the Zel knew about Treefall. It's the one unifying thing that everyone, regardless of Bough or Race, shares and remembers. The day a mountain fell. Barkstone was the platonic ideal of a Bough. Basic, average, normal. An Elf Bough, it had been open to immigration for a while and had even started accepting branded folks into its bark, which is why we were around when it happened. This was before anyone knew what The Rot was, how to look for the signs and how to heal it before it got too bad, before we knew what it could do. The Rot had infected Barkstone's roots, spread through its core and undermined its support slowly over decades until one day, all of a sudden, it gave out and smashed into the ground.

The force of the fall was so great, it was felt in every corner of the Vast. No one really knew what had just happened, least of all the citizens of Barkstone, who'd just had their home fall apart and been cast out into the violent, deadly wild lands of the Valley, where every shadow hides something that wants you dead. It was chaos. Families abandoned each other, people fled the corpse, gangs and political parties tried to seize on the moment to take control of whatever remained of Barkstone's people. Food stores were guarded by armed soldiers, emergency plans were thrown out of the window, and by the end of the first day the Ember Wolves were circling the immense wooden coffin, smelling an easy meal.

The first night is when we arrived.

Most of us had come seeking shelter, making the long journey on the promise of a home Bough, or at least somewhere to stay for a short while. It was a contentious choice, not everyone came along with that initial convoy, many choosing instead the life they'd cut out for themselves out there in the Valley, but

none of that really mattered after we heard the crash.

We were about two days ride when we saw the tree fall down to the ground, heard the smash and crack of bark breaking on the dirt, felt the rumble in the ground shake the world, waking us from our sleep. The convoy's plans were abruptly uprooted and I'm sure some heated words were exchanged. Maybe they debated turning back, maybe someone suggested raiding whatever remained of the Bough, maybe everyone inside would already be dead and we could scavenge the remains. Or, maybe, there were people still alive in there, now alone and exposed in a world none of the understood. In the years that followed a few people would try to claim responsibility, but whoever made the call, we rode like the wind all through the day, covering the distance just as the sun set.

What a sight we must have been for those brave enough to look out from their fallen Bough – A massive cloud of dust silhouetting wild Boughless on horseback, clutching bows and spears at the ready, bearing down on the orange glow of Ember Wolves' teeth.

The wolves were almost inside, having spent most of the evening gnawing on the dead flesh of the tree. We went to work, driving off the mass of wolves, slaying what we could and scaring off the rest – those of us who were mounted chasing the pack into the darkness, those of us on foot dragging the beasts from the wood and cutting them down where we could. When we first burst into the weakened bark, the people of Barkstone fought us in the confusion, mistaking us for raiders. And who could blame them? Marked criminals on horseback armed with spears and bows breaking into their homes, it was a confusing night. It wasn't until the people saw the defensive line we'd set up around the center of the Bough and the bodies of our fallen in the flaming mouths of the wolves that everything started to click.

It was a brutal night of fighting. The wolves were bad, but worse were the gangs. The people needed food, they needed clothes and supplies and those with a little power saw

their chance to claim more. Most of us fell in the intense combat inside the overturned Bough, and it wasn't until the next day when the bulk of our convoy arrived that we finally overcame the traitors and reclaimed the food and supply stocks for the people.

That's when things began to make sense again. We made ourselves useful, guarding the people, teaching them the basics of survival, ensuring everyone got what they needed. Our fastest riders carried messages to the nearest Boughs, begging them to take on these refugees – some were kind, some were not – our best hunters guarded the convoys of ragged homeless Elves in their march to their new homes, and our leaders took on as many recruits as we could, doubling our numbers in a day. We worked as rescue crews, exploring the Rot-infested ruin of the Bough, looking for survivors or vital resources. All of this without orders, without commands or promise of reward. All our records of the time say the same thing... It just felt like the right thing to do.

It took months to get every living person somewhere safe, years til the work of relocation and rescue was truly done, but when the smoke cleared and the dust finally settled, the eyes of the Valley suddenly fell on the half-starved Boughless who had stepped up when no one else had.

Offers flooded in. Boughs wanted us to live with them, to be their personal armies. People argued over what to do with this massive band of trained survivors that had until now been forgotten by everyone. The Confederacy in its burgeoning adolescence wanted us dead, the Elves wanted us to teach them everything we knew, and the Dwarves seemed to mainly want us to stay away from them. No one really bothered to ask what we wanted, but then we hardly knew either. We knew that people couldn't be trusted, most of ours had been cut down by the very same people who were now reaching out to us.

Another kind of message started coming through soon after. Short notes, asking for help. A mother whose daughter had gone hunting in the Firmament, a Bough besieged

by a Rat-Kin, two rival gangs struggling to claim a Bough for themselves. As they came in, people volunteered to help, small parties riding out across the Valley to lend their skills and abilities to help the world, and as word of Treefall started to spread, so did our reputation. People started seeking us out, wanting to join our band and make the world a better place. Suddenly we had a purpose.

We organized, collected our people, and started forming parties, diverse groups of people who were each proficient in surviving the Valley, but with their own unique skills. We began sending these groups far and wide, helping in everything from familial disputes to royal protection. We gave ourselves a name, took our mark and made it our sigil. We accepted gifts of money, equipment, and supplies from those we helped, but never pledged allegiance to any given race or Bough. This fierce dedication to neutrality became our trademark, endearing us to many, infuriating others.

Decades passed, and despite the initial flurry of excitement dying out, we became strong. Small, but strong. 100 years after Treefall, every Bough in the Valley knew of the Rangers, and the sight of one of our parties was one of the most dreaded and most prayed-for events in the Vast.

Our famous neutrality had begun to grate on some. Within our own ranks there were those that felt we'd do better joining up with the Confederacy, or the Elves, or finding our own Bough. From outside, many resented our status and our power, seeing it as illegitimate without a formal leader or Bough. Some saw our acceptance of any and all as a threat to their xenophobic worldview. The Rangers weathered this pressure for a while, but ultimately this led to a schism in our ranks, many seeking the safety of a Bough, or the support of a powerful ally.

For the most part this split was amicable, most people leaving on good terms and with a great respect for their time in our ranks. Some of these were less so – many of the anti-Ranger forces raised by certain races and Boughs have their roots in bitter young Rangers who

came to us seeking glory and riches only to find the thankless work of a Ranger didn't match up to their expectations. None of these aggrieved parties ever went so far as all-out war, preferring instead to work as 'security' for Boughs that for whatever reason didn't want a Ranger poking about the place.

Ultimately these splits are seen as a good thing for the Rangers as a whole. A purifying force, necessitated by the massive influx of new members following the Treefall. It allowed us to become lean and more direct, forced us to embrace our most powerful asset – the ranger party – instead of becoming a massive bureaucratic power in the Valley unto ourselves.

Which brings us to today.

Today the Rangers are still well known, still respected, still feared and hated and revered in equal measure. We're not well funded or well supplied, but we've had worse days. Our direct approach to solving the problems we're called upon doesn't always make us a lot of friends, and we've made enough enemies over the centuries to more than sink a lesser group. Luckily we've also made a few allies, with enough support coming in from those we help to ensure the Rangers are capable of continuing our work throughout the Vast.

There may come a time when the world turns against us, when the Valley decides it doesn't need us around to solve their problems anymore and those that would rather see us gone get their wish. There may come a time when you bite off more than you can chew and find yourself staring up at the green canopy, bleeding out. If that day comes, you can go into the black confident that you're in the good company of every Ranger that rode out before you, looking to save the world, just a little bit.

## Dangers

### *The Schisms*

If one thing could end the Rangers, it's the Schisms. Every now and then we get a little too big to sustain ourselves, and a huge bunch of us leave to greener pastures. So far the core

principles of the group have stayed strong and guided us to continue, but if one group splintered off and started calling itself the Real Rangers but with vastly different ideals? I'm not sure what would happen to us then.

#### *Outside Interference*

People in power hate us, by and large. Sure we have a few allies in high places, and many see supporting us as an obligation they have to follow, but there's no shortage of people in gilded rooms discussing the best way to stop us poking our noses into their business. If they start getting together and putting those discussions into action, we'll have a rough time on our hands. There's already signs we've been infiltrated with spies and who knows what's next.

#### **Hooks, Questions and Rumors**

The archivists of the Rangers keep many secrets that no one else in the world of the Vast are allowed to see – not even other Rangers.

Some suggest that the Rangers are able to survive out in the wilds because they imbibe magic potions or plants that grant them incredible abilities. It's certainly true that Rangers seem to have knowledge of medicine and herbs surpassing even Humans.

The Rangers have tamed horses. No one else had managed to do this before us and every single trade caravan and wagon pulled by horse is down to them. What other creatures have we tamed? What are they used for? Some say they even have Ember-Wolves tamed.

#### **Moves**

- Expose a forgotten pact
- Arrive at the last minute

#### **Mission**

*"Before we were anything, we were nothing  
Before we were together, we were alone  
Before we were Rangers, we were Boughless  
The Vast Calls, we answer  
The Boughs cry out, we answer  
We are Rangers, the quick riders, the holders of  
history and the hand of the blade  
Before we were here, there was no one"*

Our mission is simple – we master the Vast, and we use what we learn to help people. There's a little more to it than that, but that's the core of who we are and what we do. The mastery of the Vast is the part that most people don't hear about – to be a Ranger is to always be trying to learn more about the world that most have fled from. Just as often in your duties you'll be tracking an elusive beast, investigating some strange phenomenon or, if you're especially unlucky, venturing beyond the Wall in search of something new to tame.

Our predecessors started the practice when they first began surviving in their exile. They discovered what was edible, they managed to tame the first of our horses, they set the groundwork for what set us apart from everyone else in the Vast: our knowledge of the world. We know more about this place than the highest Elven mages or the wisest Halfling engineer. It was us that drew the first maps, first set foot outside the wall, and first discovered the Ocean. We have mastered beasts, learned how to slay monsters and accomplished what many thought impossible for thousands of years – survive out in the wilds.

The good news is there's still plenty out there we don't know. The Vast is huge, the forest is endless and there's no shortage of monsters to study, oddities to uncover and mysteries to explore. You'll be expected to report this all back to the Rangers, so our scribes can write it down, and the knowledge can be passed on to the next generation of Rangers. In this way, we build a history of the Vast. Perhaps one day, we'll know all there is to know, but until then, it's on you to add to those pages.

The other half of what we do is the most well-known – we help. Ever since Treefall, the Vast has known that if you have a problem, you can send a message out to the Rangers and they'll come calling. We have a couple of guidelines to ensure we're not helping tyrants or making the world a worse place. We don't answer calls from any Kings or anyone that wasn't elected to rule. If common folk and someone in charge ask us for help at the same time, we side with the common folk until we know otherwise. We don't take part in coups or revolutions. We don't fight in anyone's wars and we don't rob anyone.

That's not to say we've never done any of those things. Once in a blue moon there will be a request from a monarch we just can't ignore, or we might help a revolution in some way other than fighting on the front lines. It's a grey world out there and it's not always easy to stick to the guidelines. Just do your best.

Our goal is to make the Vast a better place. We go where others won't or can't. Unbound by rules or bureaucracy, armed with our legacy and our reputation, we're equal parts judge, police officer, mercenary, and diplomat. You'll be called out to mediate business deals, to slay monsters harrying a Bough, to protect trade wagons, to rescue loved ones and to investigate drug empires. Some people join us thinking the job is all battles and fights and glory, but solving a problem without your blade is ten times better than having to draw steel and should always be your first goal. Escalation only leads to more violence, and sometimes that's what a situation needs, but there's almost always a better way.

There's more Boughs than Rangers, by an order of magnitude, and even if we had enough people, we'd never be able to respond to every request we get. Our best estimates say we are able to attend to 10% of all requests we get. The Vast is a chaotic place, and every Bough has a problem. We can't save them all. This can be hard for a new Ranger to swallow, and you might be wondering what the god damn point of this all is. I don't have an easy answer for you, Ranger. Try to take some solace in those you do save.

That's about it. Go where you're needed, protect the common folk, learn a few things about the world and try to leave it a better place than before you got here. Easy enough, right?

### **Dangers**

#### *Knowledge*

Not everyone in the Vast is comfortable with a bunch of criminals being the holders of all the knowledge of the world, and our archives are a highly prized target among certain folks. There's things in there that would change the Vast forever if they got out. Forgotten deals, lost contracts, unstoppable magics and indescribable inventions.

### **Hooks, Questions and Rumors**

What happens when a Monarch demands aid and doesn't get it? What if they use a civilian-go between?

It's said that the creed is written by the greatest Rangers to ever have lived, and if a Ranger goes above and beyond, leaving a lasting mark on the world, they write a new line in the Creed.

If this is what the Rangers do, what do those groups that split off do? What does their mission look like?

### **Moves**

- Disrupt the Creed
- Hint at something unknown



### Structure

The Rangers have gone through a couple of different forms through the centuries. At first we were a formless mass, dispatching parts of ourselves with no real organization. Everyone did everything and it was a god damned mess. Later we developed a kind of top down organization. We had leaders, distinct sub-divided branches, each with their own unique tasks and goals, all working toward the plan set by the higher ups. This was a bit better than an entirely unstructured shambles, but stifled us, robbed us of one of the greatest things we'd learned from the Vast – adaptability.

Finally we settled on our current way of doing things, a sort of mix of the two approaches.

First off, the Vast is split into sectors, of which there are currently 36. Each of these sectors is patrolled, protected, and monitored by a branch of Rangers, itself made up of several Ranger Leaves, usually around 4 or 5 of them. Each Leaf works as an autonomous group with limited resource-and task-sharing between other Leaves within their sector. As well as those ground teams, each sector has a Ranger party whose entire job is to monitor and direct the other parties within it. We call that team the Fork.

Beyond that we have the Trunk. This is the backbone of the Rangers, a loose collection of academics, archivists, teachers, hunters, tactician, diplomats and others with extensive support skills that, for lack of a better term, lead the Rangers. They make requests to the Forks, send new recruits where they're most needed and spend a lot of time making sure we have a few friends out there in the Vast. While the Forks are the ones that send the requests for help down to each Leaf, bigger tasks, important ones, often come from the Trunk.

The Trunk itself is split into a variety of similar Leaf-Fork-Branch structures, with their 'ground teams' known as Bark, their handlers referred to as the Roots. I don't work there but it seems to have more overlap than the Limbs, with individuals often picking up the

work of whatever needs doing, regardless of their place in the organization.

### Leaves

A Leaf is a party of between 3 and 8 Rangers. They're a collection of Rangers with compatible skills that work within a certain area or on a certain case. Typically these parties will work together for years on a variety of requests and cases, but it's not unknown for Leaves to dissolve and its members to reorganize into other Leaves, other sectors or even into other parts of the organization. Older Leaf members often end up becoming Fork members, mentoring and directing Leaves themselves.

A Leaf usually only works within a single area, but it's quite common for cases to take them outside of that particular area, and their Fork will liaison with the Forks in whichever Sector they have to travel to in order to coordinate resources wherever possible. A single Ranger might end up in more than one Leaf if their skills are in high demand and the tasks of the Leaves don't clash.

Each member of a Leaf has some skill or ability that rounds out their team – though obviously some overlap is inevitable, it's rare that any one Leaf will have several magic experts, for example. Each Ranger is expected to be able to survive in the Vast, ride an animal and be able to hunt, but a Leaf is identified by its specialists. This lets us be confident that any given Leaf can handle what their Fork throws at them.

### Forks

The Fork is a single team of Rangers who coordinate the Leaves in their sector. They're usually a party of around 10 to 15 Rangers, each of which is often an older Ranger who's experienced in the area they're managing. While the Fork is strictly concerned with their geographic area, each member within the Fork will be called upon depending on their own specific skills to coordinate a project or request. As such, Leaves get used to multiple handlers for different sorts of missions.

Each member of the Fork has proven themselves on the ground, but also have shown they have aptitude for the slower work of recon, ground level diplomacy, organization, and resource management.

Forks are also responsible for maintaining some form of headquarters, a physical presence in the area, along with training and recruiting new Rangers. While the Trunk is ultimately responsible for placing these new recruits, it's often the Fork that recommends their assignments. We like this a lot because it fosters loyalty in a Ranger for their Fork, and loyalty is vital when you're working with a 3-4 day delay on orders and mission updates.

Why does this structure work for us? Well for a start it allows us to cover a lot of ground without a lot of oversight or red tape slowing down our operations. It takes a long time to get a message from one end of the Vast to another, and so by splitting it up like this, one Leaf can cover a lot of Boughs without having to juggle complicated bureaucracy. It also helps to build trust between our Rangers and the Boughs they frequent. It enables Forks and Leaves to develop strong working relationships while also letting both groups cut out on their own if they need to. We've also noticed that we get much better intel on an area if a team has worked there for a while – better able to absorb the local atmosphere, I suppose.

Every now and then there's a push to do away with the Trunk entirely, given how loose our organization is, many see its tasks as easily absorbed into the Forks. Recently this has gotten a fair bit of widespread support and has led to a couple of Branches declaring an independence of sorts – they still cooperate with other Branches but refuse to report back to the Trunk. Frankly they seem to get along pretty much alright, though personally it seems to me that the Trunk does a lot of work no one in the Forks wants to get bogged down with, and the way our knowledge base is centralized means that it's a lot more accessible and safe than if all our records were spread out over the Vast. It's bad enough trying to find the antidote to some deadly poison now when we know where that information is kept

imagine how long it'd take to find out just which Fork has the book you need.

### **Notable Branches**

#### *Sector 4 – The Ocean Gliders*

A Branch dedicated to monitoring the Ocean under the Vast. This Branch is more secretive than most, owing to the massive scale they operate on. They're also the least funded and supplied of all of us, for obvious reasons. Their base is somewhere in that inky black ocean, and a better group of Sailors you'll never see. They mainly police pirates, smugglers and raiders, but they've recently been researching some of the larger beasts that make their homes in the cold waters – as well as investigating rumors of some kind of fleet of battleships being built on the far edges of the Valley.

#### *Sector 21 – Calm Wind*

If you ever complain about your work load, look to Calm Wind. These brave bastards are based around the Great Divide, where the 'territory' of all three of the major races begins to intersect near the center of the Valley. Endless diplomacy, raids, arguments, smuggling, inter-Bough wars, and kidnappings is just a taste of what they deal with on top of the usual saving kittens from trees work we do. God bless this crew. Their Fork is the best we have, and somehow directs their Leaves with a surgical grace.

#### *Sector 0 – The Outer Stone*

Our dedicated pathfinders. A hard pack of Rangers with the best survival skills in the entire organization. They spend their time exploring outside of the Wall, charting the barren lands beyond and making maps. They have operated basically since the start of the Rangers and their work is invaluable to understanding this world we're in. Unfortunately they're also massively understaffed for their task, something they make up for by having their Fork also be an active field party.

## Dangers

### *Weaknesses*

This isn't a perfect system, and there's some obvious weaknesses. While the meritocracy model of funneling only experienced and older Rangers to the Trunk means we avoid spies, if even one of them infiltrated the Trunk, we'd be in big trouble. Worse, we share a great deal of information between Branches, so even a Fork getting infiltrated could lead to bad news.

### *Splinter Factions*

The move to eliminate the Trunk has been peaceful so far, but by cutting themselves off from our central collection of information and diplomacy, a weakness has been created, and if a faction of the Rangers decided to exploit that and turn things violent, we might have a civil war on our hands.

### **Hooks, Questions and Rumors**

While publicly the Rangers deny having any leader or head council, some suggest that a shadowy cabal of elders heads up the command structure.

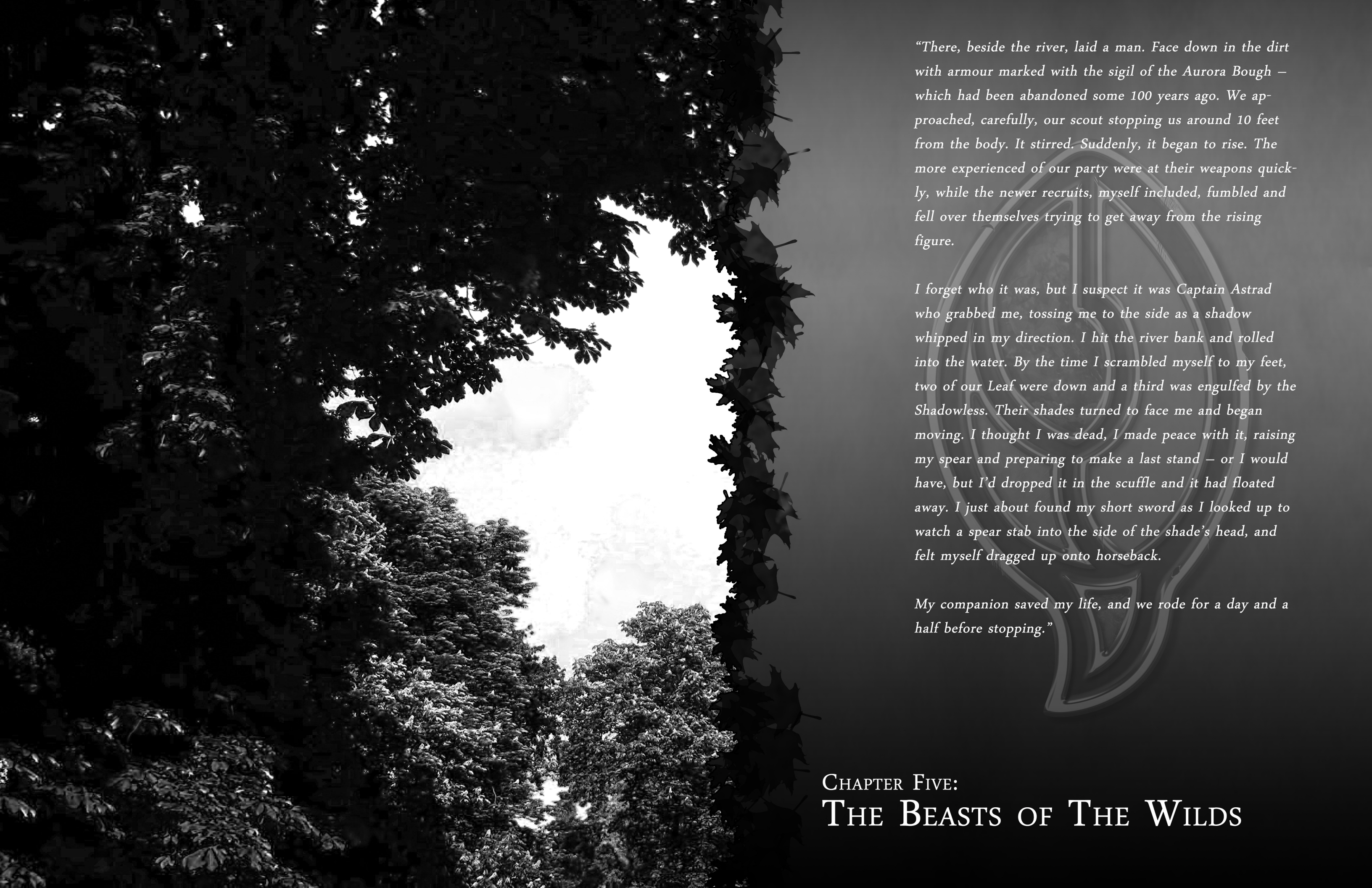
Prominently missing from this is the Spies of the Rangers. Infiltrators and saboteurs. The Black Ops Ranger teams. Who heads them up? How does one become one? Who do they report to?

The Lost Leaves are a rumored collection of Leaves that have fallen off the Branch, so to speak, gone rogue or missing. Given how many Leaves there are and how far away they are from each other, it's not unimaginable to think some just stop calling home...

### **Moves**

- Supply half of what you need
- Provide a place of rest





*“There, beside the river, laid a man. Face down in the dirt with armour marked with the sigil of the Aurora Bough – which had been abandoned some 100 years ago. We approached, carefully, our scout stopping us around 10 feet from the body. It stirred. Suddenly, it began to rise. The more experienced of our party were at their weapons quickly, while the newer recruits, myself included, fumbled and fell over themselves trying to get away from the rising figure.*

*I forget who it was, but I suspect it was Captain Astrad who grabbed me, tossing me to the side as a shadow whipped in my direction. I hit the river bank and rolled into the water. By the time I scrambled myself to my feet, two of our Leaf were down and a third was engulfed by the Shadowless. Their shades turned to face me and began moving. I thought I was dead, I made peace with it, raising my spear and preparing to make a last stand – or I would have, but I’d dropped it in the scuffle and it had floated away. I just about found my short sword as I looked up to watch a spear stab into the side of the shade’s head, and felt myself dragged up onto horseback.*

*My companion saved my life, and we rode for a day and a half before stopping.”*

CHAPTER FIVE:  
**THE BEASTS OF THE WILDS**

## BEASTS OF THE WILDS

Everyone knows the wilds are a deadly place. There's a goddamn good reason that no one ventures outside of the Boughs and why the Rangers exist, and it boils down to the fact that nearly every single thing out there is looking to kill and eat you and everything you care about.

Lucky for you, the Rangers have spent centuries documenting the various monsters of the Vast, the animals and plants and God knows what else that the rest of the Vast has locked themselves away from. Whether or not it'll be of any use is down to you and your Leaf. Study these monsters well, learn their behaviors and their weaknesses and maybe you'll live long enough to tell us something new about them.

### **Ember Wolves**

*6HP – 1 Armor – Damage 1d8+1*

*Group, Organized, Terrifying*

The Vast has wolves: normal, furry, angry, and organized hounds that hunt in packs and can even be tamed. It also has Ember Wolves, which are the same thing except their teeth are made of fire. They feed on cinders and ash, preferring scorched meat over plant matter, but they'll survive on a diet of wood. The flames that lash from their mouths seem almost like limbs, whipping out around their faces and wrapping around prey. Ember Wolves are, obviously, immune to flame and can burn under water for a while before being extinguished. They can reignite their mouths if given a chance to feed before they're slain.

- Set a trap
- Cut off a path
- Consume with Flame

### **Brace**

*12HP – 3 Armor – Damage 1d6*

*Solitary, Large*

When they're young, a Brace isn't much of a threat. They're essentially living rocks, maybe about the size of a small dog when they're born. When they mature, however, they become a problem. Their skin hardens as they age and they grow quickly, becoming boulder sized after less than a year. They use a combination of camouflage and their weight to hunt their prey, rolling down hills to smash whatever poor thing they had their eye on, slowly absorbing it through its stone flesh somehow. Swords and spears are useless against this thing, I recommend a big hammer or just getting out of the way.

- Surprise attack
- Suddenly grow
- Move quicker than expected

### **Drakul**

*8HP – 2 Armor – Damage 1d8*

*Group, Devious, Flying, Large*

If you have the choice, I recommend running from a Drakul. They're not particularly hardy, but they're fast, and clever as hell. They don't look too imposing from afar – they're just large bats really – but their screech is enough to burst eardrums when they swoop, and their feet are powerful enough to lift a Ranger into the air. When I say I recommend running, though, watch where you step, their main hunting tactic is to drive you off a cliff, back you into a corner or into a pack of waiting Ember Wolves. They will use the environment against you if you're not careful.

- Force a mistake
- Use the land
- Take away hearing

**Shade***6HP – 0 Armor – Damage 1d6+1**Tiny, Horde, Cautious, Amorphous*

Shades are fine, really. They're about the least dangerous thing out there in the Vast. They're beings made of pure shadow that feed on other shadows, just a little bit usually. You've probably had a dozen of these little critters feed off of you the last time you went out riding and didn't notice. The problem comes if you come across their warren or threaten the group. Then you're in trouble. The swarm is fast, brutally viscous and will tear your shadow to shreds in seconds if they get the chance, and trust me, you don't want to lose your shadow. If that happens, hope you have a friend nearby that can finish the job before you turn.

- Overwhelm with numbers
- Split
- Fuse to become something bigger

**Shadowless***8HP – 1 Armor – Damage 1d10**Solitary, Mindless, Terrifying*

This is why you don't want to piss off a Shade. Shadowless are what you become if they devour your shadow. It's a slow process, taking about 2 weeks total, but it's incurable as far as we know. First you start to lose the color in your skin, becoming as pale as a sheet within a few hours. Then, slowly, you lose your mind, starting with your ability to speak, then your personality, then everything else. After it's all gone and you're just a shell, you slowly become a shadow yourself, your skin dissolving into a porous darkness. Then you start to feed on others just like Shades, but Shadowless need a lot more shadow to feed themselves than Shades do, often devouring the entirety of their prey's shadow in one feeding.

- Remember a past skill
- Melt away
- Resemble an old friend

**Griff***12HP – 2 Armor – Damage 1d8+2**Large, Magic, Flying, Group*

Griffs are one of the few creatures that make their homes in the Boughs alongside us. Some races and Boughs manage to live side by side with these creatures, others don't. They're almost like if an eagle grew four legs and a long tail, with a large, feathered head, razor sharp beak and a thick coat of fur over its body. They have a varying number of claws on each paw, some have 3, others up to 8. They're familial creatures, protecting their nest and their group to the death. Playful beasts, curious too, it's almost a shame they're meat eaters. I think we could get along well with them if they didn't spend half their time drooling acidic gunk on us from their perches. Careful when you kill one, they tend to cast a death spell that's usually more than enough to wipe out you and your party.

- Cast a spell
- Spit acidic goo
- Call for help

**Pseudo-Bough***Huge, Magic, Intelligent, Solitary*

I'm probably going to catch a lot of shit for including this. No one's seen one of these in real life yet, no one's slain one or gotten any evidence they exist, but almost every race has a couple of folklore stories about these fake Boughs and it seems wise to mention them, just in case. Pseudo-Boughs are a legendary creature, a massive mimic in the form of a Bough. Legends say that it can sit in the same spot for a hundred years, waiting for a society to move in and get comfy before its wood starts to ooze out a sap, which slowly encases its residents and breaks them down into food for the tree.

It's hard to guess at what you'd do if you ran into one of these. We know real Bough sap will melt away with a special mixture of water and fishscales, and we know a real Bough can be killed with fire, Rot or just a good number of axes and some time. If you run into one of these, let us know.

- Move
- Drop saplings
- Unleash the sap

### **Equin**

*8HP – 1 Armor – Damage 1d8*

*Large, Magic, Solitary*

It's hard to imagine that our horses came from this. 12 feet tall, with a massive plume of gas trailing from its head, the Equin is one of the hardest creatures of the Vast. They're not the fastest runners, nor the deadliest fighters, but they don't need much food, don't need much water, can run for hours on end, and that gas plume is enough to deter anything giving chase. They come in a variety of 'flavors', their gas plumes all doing a variety of different effects, all of them bad. Their long gangly legs are a good place to go for if you're trying to take one down. God help you if you manage to run into a few of them, though.

- Run and don't stop
- Exchange loyalty, for a price
- Trample

### **Vexors**

*10HP – 1 Armor – Damage 1d6+1*

*Magic, Group, Intelligent*

Vexors scare the shit out of me. Bipedal, bulky, and with fur covering their chests, they carry a massive shell on their backs made of whatever material they've gathered up over their lives – stones, wood, weapons, bone, whatever. Their eyes are what does it for me. Big yellow reflective orbs with no iris or pupil, just golden spheres glaring out of the dark, looking like they know something we don't. They're inherent magic users, weaving spells without language or implements, seemingly on instinct. If they can speak or do much more than hunt for food in their small gangs, we've not noticed it yet.

- Cast raw magic
- Reveal something unexpected from their shell
- Trample



### **Snappers**

*6HP – 1 Armor – Damage 1d8+2*

*Group, Terrifying, Large*

This is why no one likes going near the water. Snappers are violent, ravenous fish with scales like steel. The female of the species is massive, easily the size of a fishing boat, and can devour one whole given half a chance. They're surrounded by a swarm of males, who are much much smaller, about the size of your hand. These swarms are equally deadly, with razor sharp teeth and a venom that turns your blood heavy, making you sink if bitten. There's not a body of water found without a couple Snapper swarms in them, so be careful when drinking from that river.

- Eat each other for health
- Feeding frenzy
- Leap from the water

### **Burrow-Wights**

*8HP – 0 Armor – Damage 1d8*

*Hoarder, Stealthy, Group*

Pale enough that they're often mistaken for ghosts, Burrow-Wights are found in massive underground warrens, often around solitary or remote Boughs. They're bipeds, with long snout-like faces, hooked claws on their hands and feet, gangly and wrinkled like walnuts all over. They live for Yix. I don't know what they did before the drug was invented, but these things seem to survive off the stuff and their warrens are often packed with piles of stolen Yix bottles. Pretty easy to put down, just look out for their burrowing

- OD on Yix
- Escape underground
- Cause a landslide

**Scaleless**

6HP – 1 Armor – Damage 1d6+2

*Tiny, Cautious, Venomous*

Watch where you step out in the Wilds. It should go without saying, but every single time your foot touches the ground, there's a hundred things out to get you. The Scaleless are just one. These small worm-snake creatures hide just below the ground, sprouting grass-like growths from their backs to cover themselves. Then, when they feel your foot, they bite, delivering a toxin that almost instantly causes paralysis. They'd struggle to kill you quickly, and they're pretty weedy things, but they can keep you frozen forever, or at least as long as it takes you eat you.

- Inject Venom
- Hidden in the Worst Place
- Bring a Friend

**Tank**

12HP – 3 Armor – Damage 1d10

*Solitary, Terrifying, Huge*

Half-Crab, Half bee-hive, if you run into a Tank, and you're alone, and you have no ranged weapons, and your mage is missing, run.

6-8 spindly legs support a massive mushroom-like shell, dotted with thousands of tiny holes. The whole thing is surrounded by a swarm of tiny mites that protect their home by attacking soft, squishy parts of their victims. The Tank itself is quite capable of self-defense - able to rapidly change its form by commanding the hive to build new limbs or armor on the fly. Like lots of beasts, it hates fire, though one of my old comrades insists they saw one engulf fire and start breathing it. I choose not to believe that.

- Grow a new limb
- Collapse into a swarm
- Devour Something

**Howler**

8HP – 1 Armor – Damage 1d8

*Large, Magic, Flying*

A sort of sentient gas cloud, Howlers are named for their distinctive sound when swooping down from on high to attack. They're a faintly purple mist when idle, but can rapidly become more condensed and solid to guard against attacks or to become weapons. Their main tactic is to lay in wait for travelers, be inhaled and eat the poor bastard from the inside.

- Become something solid
- Expand quickly
- Trap something within

**Unspeakable**

*Magic, Intelligent, Solitary*

This is a doozy. So about 50 or so years ago, some Elven mages and some Dwarven engineers got it into their heads to automate spells. They thought they could build some combination of machine and magic that could automatically create and cast magic where it was needed, inventing new spells as it did. This was a failure. Obviously. All they ultimately managed to accomplish was to create a word that we can't say out loud, because it's become sentient.

I don't know what that means. I don't think anyone does, but this word is alive, and capable of thought, planning, scheming, and killing. If you say it, you summon it. It starts in your throat; your vocal chords begin to vibrate unpleasantly, words seem strange in your mouth and you start to have trouble saying anything other than the word. You grow thirsty, very thirsty, and your bones start to ache. Slowly, the word begins to etch itself on your skin, your bones, on your eyes. Eventually the word is all that's left, until it can spread to someone else.

I hate wizards.

- Pass unexpectedly
- Cast a Spell
- Control something

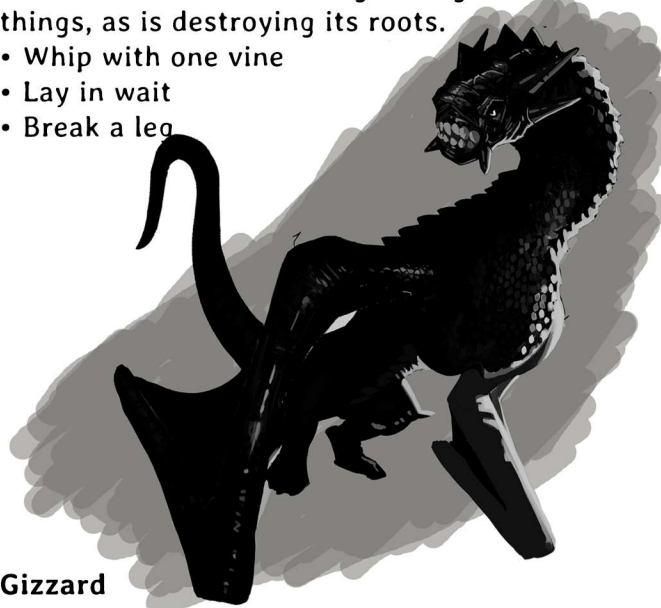
### Whipgrowths

6HP – 0 Armor – Damage 1d8+1

*Solitary, Stealthy, Large*

Whipgrowths are just one of the many plants in the Vast that will kill you as happily as any Ember wolf. They look like a bundle of vines when inactive, laying around or hanging from a branch. When it wakes up or senses life, the bundles quickly form a single vine and up-roots, dragging a large sphere of dirt around with it where it keeps its roots. This vine is fast, can leap and can constrict hard enough to break bones. Fire is good against these things, as is destroying its roots.

- Whip with one vine
- Lay in wait
- Break a leg



### Gizzard

8HP – 1 Armor – Damage 1d8

*Group, Organized, Small*

Gizzards kill more Rangers than basically any other animal out there in the Vast. Partially there're so many of them, but they're also the most underestimated beast in the wild. It's not hard to see why – they're almost cute, roughly the size of a small wolf. They have colorful heads covered in a kind of scaly flesh, with a short beak, a plume of feathers around their neck, and a large, feathery body. They run on two legs, and can take flight for a very short time with their short wings. They have razor sharp claws and their beak can punch through metal if they get a good run up – but the real problem is their hivemind. Something like the elves, they seem to be able to communicate with other Gizzards over many miles, coordinating traps and ambushes without a single sound. If you run into one, kill it, quickly.

- Be Bait
- Take something vital
- Surprise attack after the fight

### Dragons

*Magic, Solitary, Terrifying, Huge, Intelligent*

Another mythical creature. Well, sort of. We know Dragons exist, somewhere. They were a legend like the Pseudo-Bough for a long time until one of the Elf Boughs along the Wall tunneled a little too deep into the rock surface and suddenly had this big winged monster on their hands. Massive, with the ability to cast spells, breathe fire (and ice, and lightning, and who knows what else), it wasn't easy to put this thing down, and by the end what few Elves were left had no Bough to go back to. It took half an army to do it, but what worked was using some bones they found in its hole as arrows. Turns out Dragon skin is resistant to everything but itself.

- Use an unexpected breath attack
- Cast a spell
- Emerge from the rock

### Spiders

6HP – 3 Armor – Damage 1d8

*Devious, Stealthy, Horder, Intelligent*

I hate spiders. They make giant webs up in the canopy and while they start off small, they quickly grow, and grow, and grow. As far as I know, there's no upper limit to how big these things can get. My own Leaf once chased down one the size of a house down the side of a Bough. Their bite is venomous – we have an anti-venom, but hurry, the stuff turns you into stone after about 3 hours.

Between us, there's a theory that these things get smarter as they get bigger, rumors of Spiders setting up shop inside Boughs, bargaining for their lives and developing some kind of mind-control powers have been around since anyone can remember. Be careful around the big ones.

- Weave a web
- Unleash a horde
- Pull on a thread

**Dungeon Dweller***6HP – 0 Armor – Damage 1d4**Magic, Small, Hoarder*

I think we can blame the mages for this one too. A Dungeon Dweller is a small, rat-like creature about the size of a dog. By itself, it's not much of a threat--it could bite you I guess. The main danger comes from its ability to trap you inside their minds. The going theory is that they emit some kind of gas that does this, but it could be a magic spell too – either way, they pull you inside their heads and into some fucked up labyrinth, complete with monsters. Right at the center of the maze is the Dungeon Dweller. If you can figure your way to the center and put a spear in it, you're free. I don't want to know what happens if you can't.

- Reveal a trap
- Show a Minotaur
- Change everything

**The Demonswarm***Horde, Magic, Evil, Intelligent*

Somewhere out past the wall is a cloud of dust and ash, you can see it if you're looking the right way from the right mountain. That's the Demonswarm. It's a massive convoy of rampaging beasts charging across the world. We don't know why they do it, or even how they survive out there, but I recommend not going anywhere near it. Occasionally a Mage will mess up a spell or an inventor will break something important and summon a chunk of the swarm into their Bough. We usually get a letter when that happens.

- Trample everything
- Reveal something unstoppable
- Change direction

**Demon***6HP – 1 Armor – Damage 1d6+2**Group, Magic, Intelligent, Amorphous, Terrifying*

Describing a singular demon is basically impossible. They take a thousand different shapes, each as different as the last. Some are bipeds, with grey skin and eyes like fire, some are dog-like, covered in armor and flags. I saw one that was an ooze, covered in spiders. They're not pleasant to look at. The only unifying thing is that they each have, for lack of a better word, a crown of signs and

sigils hovering around them somewhere. Mages study these runes and say they're some kind of sign of royalty. Each Demon appears intelligent enough to use weapons, tactics and so on, but only a few of them speak, and none of them seem to want to do much more than slaughter. They don't like the dark, strangely enough.

- Ignite
- Promise something at a price
- Change, drastically

**Lich***10HP – 2 Armor – Damage 1d10**Magic, Intelligent, Terrifying*

Sometimes mages go bad, and when they do, this is usually what happens. Liches are the result of a magic ritual popularized by an Elven wizard who joined forces with one of the greatest inventors of the time to find the secret to immortality. They built a machine that essentially strips your flesh from your bones and etches protective runes on the surface. The first problem was they couldn't get the skin back on – the runes destroy it if you try, the second problem was the pain of having your flesh removed makes you insane. Needless to say, Liches are bad news. They're magically powerful, mad, and covered in protective runes. Water seems to ground them for a while, long enough for a quick hammer strike to the skull anyway.

- Cast a spell
- Reveal a monstrous creation
- Remember something from before





*“Peach Trees? Yeah I know the place. Lovely people, they make the best furniture this side of the valley. They used to have a king till a few years ago, and since they outted him they’ve been doing alright. They’ve been acting a little weird recently I suppose, a little too happy, you know? A little too, uh, smiley? I dunno.*”

*Why do you ask?”*



CHAPTER SIX:  
SAMPLE ADVENTURE - PEACH TREES

## PEACH TREES

This is designed to be a short, introductory adventure in the world of Boughs, either to kick off a campaign or as a one shot. It explores a couple of the ideas and themes of Boughs and sets the tone that your average session of The Boughs should take. Feel free to use it as it is, modify it, take parts of it for your own game, or whatever it is you'd like to do with the adventure. The GM should read the whole thing through before running this.

Peach Trees is primarily a Human Bough, and runs under a meritocracy government model. By default, unless otherwise stated, assume the NPCs are human. You can change this up if you want, such as make it a Halfling/Dwarf Bough that's Communist, but just make sure you adjust everything else if you do..

### **Blanks**

Many parts of this sample adventure will have a Blanks section, these are areas and ideas intentionally left to the GM and the Players to create or build on. This is in keeping with the "Make Maps, Leave Gaps" idea powering Dungeon World. Blanks will generally take the form of bullet points, sometimes questions to ask the players, and sometimes details that were intentionally left unexplained.

### **Background**

Here are some details about the Bough itself that a GM should know before running this adventure. This section contains spoilers and is intended only for the GM.

### **The Bough**

Peach Trees is a fairly well-off Bough, near the center of the Valley, with a history of fantastic artisans and merchants. The details of the Boughs politics, its internal make up, and so on is left to the GM.

On the surface, the main thing that's troubling the Bough at the moment is a string of gang crimes by an up and coming family, the Krakokans. These crimes have ranged from theft all the way to brutal beatings, though no one has died yet. Under these circumstances, more guards have been hired and dispatched to patrol the Bough 24/7, citizens are encouraged to stay indoors at night and the Guards-

men have been granted powers to arrest anyone, confiscate items and so on.

Underneath this, the truth is that a massive Spider has made its home in the canopy of the Bough. It's grown so large that its ability to influence people extends deeply into the Bough, and it's been feeding off of a supply of Yix it has the Bough producing, further increasing its mental abilities. The spider is directly controlling the heads of the Bough, and has created the Krakokan crisis to justify martial law, to ensure its supply of Yix increases. The Spider's ultimate goal is unclear, it appears to simply desire more drugs and food to grow more powerful. It's already strong enough that it's able to directly implant ideas and thoughts into the minds of the citizens of the Bough.

### **Romoles**

The Romoles are the family that reached out to the Rangers. They're relatively small, though well known within the Bough itself. Their wooden furniture and fixtures, as well as the small construction projects they've undertaken are of the highest quality, with fine details, artistic flourish and a clear eye for the high tastes of the Bough. They're currently dealing with a takeover attempt by the Legena family.

*Der Romole*, the family's patriarch, was completely free of the Spider's influence until he sent the letter, which caused the Spider to pay special attention to him, and now he's a thrall. He retains his memory, his abilities and so on, but his motives all come from the Spider now. As such, he's part of a conspiracy the Spider has concocted to get rid of the Rangers and further solidify its power over the people of Peach Trees.

*Flash Romole* is the family's firebrand daughter. A bold woman, tall and strong with a massive two handed weapon on her back at all times, she's been fantasizing about joining the Rangers since she was a girl, and is building the funds to leave the Bough soon, though she hasn't told her father, Der, yet. She's not under the Spider's control yet, though she has been handling the Krakokans herself in the streets when she's not at the workshop.

### Krakokans

An old, old crime family that was until the past year or so, completely defunct. They used to run the Bough, were well equipped and well trained. At one point they came very close to actually overthrowing the merchant kings of the Bough, but were brutally attacked and destroyed when they made their play.

On the surface, they're back, muscling in on smaller merchants and beating up rivals, claiming territory. According to the rulers of Peach Trees, they control most of the middle levels of the Bough.

In truth, the Krakokans we see now are merely thugs and low-level criminals united by the Spider's will. They exist as a means to justify a massive increase in Guards throughout the Bough, and more recently, to give the impression that the Romoles are in trouble.

### Legenas

The Legenas are a very large family. Though not quite the rulers of Peach Trees, they're about as close as you can get. They got their start by being the sole metalworking family in the Bough, then leveraged that profit into buying up smaller merchants' businesses. They'd then sell off all the assets of that business and repeat the cycle, constantly making money from their gutting of their rivals.

The Legenas are very much interested in buying the Romoles' business, and have been putting pressure on them to sell, but despite this, they're quite free of the Spider's influence for now, and have barely any role to play in the conspiracy. They didn't hire the Krakokans, nor have they attacked anyone.

*Rex Legenas* is the head of the family. They're a masculine person, but one that rejects the usual ideas of gender roles, preferring neutral pronouns in conversation. Their ability to lead comes from an incredible mind for finances, able to quickly juggle every facet of their business in their head, calculate business plans in an instant, and keep it all straight despite the ever-shifting sea of Bough Economics.

### The Spider

It has no name, no identity, beyond "The Spider". Only one or two people in Peach Trees has ever seen the beast, and they're obviously not telling much about it. It arrived around 5 years ago, and started slowly feeding off of the animals in the canopy. Eventually it stumbled upon a small stash of Yix left by bootleggers in the branches. Upon consuming the inky black fluid, it found itself growing rapidly, and growing smarter even quicker.

Now it's huge, bigger than almost any spider on record. If that wasn't bad enough, the Yix it's constantly imbibing massively bolsters its already potent mental powers, allowing it to seize control of the people of Peach Trees.

Through these efforts, Peach Trees has actually flourished. The coordination brought about by the Spider has increased their trade output: the yields of their farms and their internal production are both almost double that of before the Spider. The Spider has made Peach Trees rich.

All that said, for the most part it's happy to sit in the canopy and allow the engine of people it built to feed it. Only when Der Romole sent his letter did the Spider have to start building a plan to counter the Rangers and, maybe, seize full control of the Bough at last.

The Spider's plan is a complicated one. First it intends to convince the Rangers that the true foe is the Krakokans; this will distract them from their true foe while the Spider begins taking direct control of the most powerful merchant families, using them to produce massive amounts of Yix as well as form an army. Once it gains control of them all (about a day or two after the Rangers arrive), it will begin moving all the citizens of the Bough into holding areas, emptying the streets. Once that's done, it'll send in guards and its new militia to murder the Rangers.

## Scene 1

### *Opening*

The party arrives at Peach Trees. They have received a letter requesting their help in a small business dispute between two noble merchants. Peach Trees is a fairly well-known and prosperous Bough, located near the center of the Valley and has been relatively peaceful for the past few years. The outside of the Bough is well kempt, trimmed and lightly decorated.

There's a small guard house at the entrance to the Bough, the normal sort you'd expect at a Bough of this size, mainly there to stop wild beasts getting inside. The guards are armed with crossbows. A quick show of the letter and their badges will get the party entrance into the Bough without much problem. If a player wants to examine the guards closer, they'll notice that they seem a little weary, a little worn down, but they'll refuse to discuss what's been going on recently, making vague statements about a lot of Whipgrowth attacks recently.

### *Main*

Once inside the tree, the party will be in the main lobby of the Bough – the walls of the tree rise up around them, light pouring in from the vines and leaves lining the inside of the wood. Thousands of people mill around the walkways and corridors that line the inner walls of the Tree, small walkways crisscross the empty space in the center rising all the way up to the canopy, which is high enough to barely make out. The lobby level itself is made up of workshops, small administration buildings and an immense artificial park, full of trees, ponds and merchants peddling food and drink. Think Central Park.

The party knows their first port of call should be the metal workshop of the nobleman that sent the request, located a level above them. Ahead of them, shaded slightly under a tree, is an Elven woman dressed in finery arguing with two larger men. A closer look will show the crossbow the woman is slowly reaching for.

If the players intervene, the two men will quickly walk off, before the players get there.

The woman will thank them, giving her name as Flash Romoles, and explain if pressed that it's a mild dispute between her family, the Romoles, and a new family that has risen in prominence in this Bough called the Krarokans. If players chase and engage the thugs, they can get this info from them too. They're armed with bludgeons but should be an easy fight, they're not getting paid enough to die. The Krarokans are an old crime family in Peach Trees that vanished about a decade ago after a protracted war, before returning last year. The Romoles own most of the woodworking shops in the Bough and have been approached about protection money. Apparently there's a pretty major gang problem in this Bough at the moment.

If the players don't intervene, move on to the next section.

### *Closing*

Once their encounter with Flash is over, players can move on to the metal working shop, or explore the park a little. There's not much more plot to be found here, but plenty of time and opportunity to sprinkle some flavor in. Describe the people as looking a little too happy if you have anyone peer close enough to notice.

### *Blanks*

One of you has dealt with the Romoles before, what are they like?

The guards at the door have a new device to help their work, describe it.

The park has a massive wood and metal statue in the center – this is odd, what does it depict?



## Scene 2

### Opening

As the players move to the workshop, describe the Bough around them. It's a bit messy, more unkempt that you'd expect for a Bough of this size and prestige. There are guards patrolling, again, more than you might expect, but everyone seems pretty happy with the situation. The level the players are on is a workshop district, full of artisans working their trade, building all manner of incredible works. When the party arrives at the workshop they were sent to, they're met by a very short old man wearing an apron. His hair is unkempt and in his hands he's holding a large wooden mallet. He greets them with an enthusiastic smile and introduces himself as Der Romoles, the man that wrote the letter.

Der Romoles will explain the situation in a bit more detail than the letter – the other family is the Legena family, a large merchant family well-known for their excellent products and their brutal corporate takeovers. They have been attempting to buy out the Romoles for a while now but things have become heated and Der believed it was a good time to call in some help. Besides, he's pretty sure the Krarokons are in on the whole thing, and that their push for protection money is a ruse supported by the Legenas to try and force a sale.

Der is happy to answer any questions about the Romoles and their relationship with the Legenas (amicable, until this past few years), as well as anything about the Romoles themselves (famous in the Bough, not so much outside of it. Arrived at the Bough about 100 years ago, his great grandfather brought them. They've been building wooden artisanal furniture and the occasional large scale building project.), though he doesn't know much about Krarokons. If asked about the increased guards and trash, he clams up real quick but with a smile.

At this point, 4 Whipgrowths emerge from windows and the balcony of the workshop. If players are astute and check before or while talking to Der Romoles, they can notice them, camouflaged against the wood and vines.

### Combat

The Whipgrowths instantly go for Der, trying to strangle him to death. The room is cramped and difficult to move in. Make sure to emphasize the tables, chairs, tools and so on everywhere; have the whipgrowths duck and dive under tables. Whipgrowths are easy to kill, so make the room they're in the enemy. The Whipgrowths should always prioritize attacking Der over anything else, but will change target if attacked directly. They will cling really hard to Der's face and neck, making it hard to remove them forcibly without risking Der's life.

Der can't die from the Whipgrowths here, at worst he can pass out, but obviously the players might end up killing him with their "help". If that happens, don't worry about it. Any future scene involving him will have details on how to progress without him.

Should the party start having issues, have Flash show up to help out. Have her break stuff.

### Close

Once combat is done, have Der be really shook up, trembling and clutching his neck, but calm down relatively quickly. He'll blame the Legenas, and give the party the location of the Legena's villa. If Flash is there, she'll also suggest they go talk to the Krarokons, and she has their hide-out location too. If Der is dead, the address for the Legenas is in his ledger, have Flash mention it.

At this point the players can choose their own route. They have 2 main locations ahead of them, and they could potentially suggest going to the Councilors, but whoever is around them should warn them that the councilors don't know they're here, and probably wouldn't take kindly to their presence. Whatever path they don't choose, have Flash head over there alone.

### Blanks

Romoles has a very specific style in his work, describe it.

One of your party is related to one of the families mentioned above. Which one, and how?

### Scene 3

Regardless of where they go, highlight the lack of people everywhere, even the guards have almost all but vanished. If they ask anyone in the streets what's up, no one seems to notice there being a problem.

#### *Location 1: The Legenas Villa*

Located about 30 levels up in the center of the Bough, suspended by a thousand beams of vines and rope, the Villa is an incredible sight. Accessible only by a massive bridge from the inner walls that is guarded at all times by a dozen men.

When the players arrive, have their entry be blocked by the guards. They can get through this a number of ways – combat, their clout as Rangers, they might even use the corpses of some of those Whipgrowths to get in. Either way, talk about the splendor of the bridge, how the vines are wrapped in intense and intricate knots, designs etched into their flesh, the wood under their feet is actually more vines bound tightly into logs, and they're suspended way above the ground.

The Villa itself continues this ostentatious look, all wood, all carved expertly, all dangling from a web of vines in the center of the Bough.

At the second gate, the players are met with another group of guards. They appear displeased with the group being here, and it will take a lot more doing to get past them. If the party struggle, have Rex come down personally. They'll welcome the party into their home, but warn them that any misbehavior will result in them having a long fall followed by a short stop.

Inside the villa makes the outside look a bit run down. Its lined with metal, with every single surface a dedication to how incredible the Legenas family is. Every room is decorated in a different style, and if the players had Rex come to get them, they will explain that each one is dedicated to a company they bought out, or a family they condensed, with their crests as the main focal point of the artwork.

Rex is leading them to their office. When they get there, it's a fairly reserved affair. A single large desk made of a wood that no one recognizes lies in the center of an otherwise sparse room, a single chair behind it. The table is rough, seemingly made from a giant broken branch.

Rex will deny any involvement with anything the players accuse them of. They're also telling the truth and will consent to a magic test. Rex is calm and easy to talk to, happy to answer whatever questions they can.

While talking to them, make sure the players figure out that the Krakokans are not being hired by the Legenas. Rex has no idea who is hiring the Krakokans, though. Have Rex also make some vague allusions to the fact that other families have been acting very strangely recently, doing all kinds of rash and sometimes violent acts, but they have no idea what that's all about.

Sooner or later the players will exhaust what Rex can tell them and leave.

#### *Blanks*

At least one of the rooms has something that one of the characters recognizes. What is it?

What race is Rex?

Rex carries with them a scepter. Why?

#### *Location 2: Krakokan Hideout*

Flash points the team to a maintenance tunnel that runs through the inside of the bark, deep down into the roots of the Bough. The party will have to crawl through the darkness, surrounded by grubs and glowing mealworms. This is a pretty easy place to have some exciting environment stuff happen – have the wood around them creak, maybe give way, separating the party, maybe they have to drop some of their equipment to make it through a tight space – describe it tumbling into the black, shifting waters below, so far they don't even hear the splash. Maybe even a bit of combat against some guard beast the Krakokan's have in the tunnel. It's left to the GM to figure out if this is needed, and what to do exactly.

Once they emerge from the tunnel, the party is precariously balanced on one of the Boughs' enormous roots in the underworld. The ocean laps gently against the dangling roots below, and the dim lights of a small harbor can be seen on a distant root. The ground under the characters is soft and a water line can be seen above the characters if they look around a bit. There's a building just on the edge of the root where they are, but it's hard to see – it's certainly the building Flash told them about though.

There's no light coming from the building, and any noise is drowned out by the ocean below. An approach will reveal that the building is a small cabin, with a very pungent smell emanating from it – a character could identify it as the smell of Yix brewing.

However they approach, the cabin itself is empty, full of barrels of Yix, tons of the stuff, more than any of the players will have ever seen in their lives, and cobwebs, everywhere, thick webbing covering every surface, large pods of spider eggs lay everywhere. Anyone attuned to magic can hear a voice in the distance and the sound of skittering legs.

One of two things can happen here: either the characters will disturb the barrels, and find that inside of them are corpses that will reanimate, attacking them; or if the players don't, someone from outside will hurl a firebomb into the cabin.

#### *Combat 1*

The Yix Zombies are corpses possessed by the Spider and don't fear death. Use normal unarmed soldier stats for them, but have them act wildly, spontaneously, trying to drag the characters down into the ocean. The Yix should react to any and all magic in an interesting and explosive way – have people set off like fireworks, change color, grow extra limbs, change form or some other expression of the Yix's power.

#### *Combat 2*

The people who attack from outside are dressed in standard guards outfits, and are equipped with crossbows and swords. They'll act together, firing volleys of crossbow bolts

then stepping forward to defend their allies who lay down another volley. Exploit the close quarters and deadly drop over the edge.

#### *After Combat*

If the cabin survives, then players can find a shipping label inside that points them to the Councilors office high at the top of the Bough.

#### *Blanks*

This batch of Yix is different than others – why?

This region of the Ocean is known for something terrible, what is it?

#### *Location 3: Councilors Office*

The councilors office is high up at the top of the Bough, and it takes a fair bit of time to scale up there. When the party arrives, they're denied entry. I leave it to the GM to decide if this should be a clerk who tells them they don't have an appointment, a large group of armed guards, or both.

The building itself is utilitarian, basic and sparsely decorated. There are paintings on the walls of the great merchants of the Bough, and the whole place feels like an abandoned law school. The room the party will be led to if they insist on going inside is small, almost like an interrogation room.

If the characters really want to get inside, have a low-level official speak to them, and perhaps give them some of the information from one of the other two locations.

#### *Closing*

After the players return from one of their locations, Der is waiting for them. He looks rough, rougher than when they left, he will seem stressed and very upset. He should explain to the party that Flash still isn't back, and Der hired mercs to go find her, but they've vanished too.

This gives the characters a chance to revisit the area they didn't yet. Use that location as a guide for what happened. Flash was picked up in the Bough, not at her destination, so she won't be found at any of the locations above. Feel free to skip this step if pressed for time.

### *Blanks*

The members of this government all carry a symbol of their trade. What does the clerk carry?

Der's missing a limb, which one?

### **Scene 4**

#### *Opening*

At this point the party is either returning from looking for Flash, or chasing down their next lead – either way, the streets are empty, entirely. It's quiet as death in the Bough except for the far off march of boots and the clack of weapons against the hips of guards and the bark of some inexplicable creature.

The corridor the characters are ambushed in is wide enough that they can maneuver fairly well, with a large balcony/window facing inside the Bough. A shield wall of guards approaches from behind with a bound Flash or Der in tow, while something horrible comes from the front.

The party faces an Ember Wolf, larger than any Ember Wolf they've ever seen, easily 10 feet tall. It's dripping with Yix, which runs over its body like oil, puddles of it pooling around the beast's feet and drooling from its flaming mouth. Its eyes are crazed, and the five men holding its chains are barely able to keep it under control. As soon as the monster sees the Rangers, it breaks free from its bindings and devours one of its handlers in a mess of fire, Yix, and blood. Take the Ember Wolf in the Threats section and scale it up, give it either more damage or more health. Increase its armor by one.

#### *Combat*

The Yixhound is a formidable beast, and quite deep in a Yix-craze. Use standard Ember Wolf abilities and tactics, try to set the players on fire, overwhelm them with fast, rapid attacks, thrashing around with its immense size and spraying Yix everywhere. Press the players into the shield wall behind them, or to the balcony, or even through the Bough bark. Make it a desperate fight, with the Rangers clearly on the back foot. Throughout the fight, show the guards getting more and more nervous, eventually fleeing.

### *Closing*

As the players collect themselves after the battle, Flash or Der will tell them that the guards were saying their orders came right from the high councilor himself. They should stress how dangerous it would be to attack them, but it's clear no one is leaving the Bough alive if something isn't done. Flash/Der can show them the way.

### *Blanks*

The handlers for the Yix hound have very particular armor and clothing – describe it

The hound itself is mutated, how so?

One of the party has seen a Yix-Beast like this before, what was it like?

### **Scene 5**

#### *Opening*

Assuming the players choose to go with Flash/Der and not some more imaginative attack route, they find the Councilors office abandoned, guard stations empty and weapons left on their racks. The building itself appears intact from a distance, and the rope bridge they can use to cross is sturdy as ever. The atmosphere is eerie.

As the players enter the building, any of them that are magical or otherwise attuned to magic energy will start hearing skittering noises, a voice in the far distance, whispers behind them, and so on. The Spider is attempting to spread its influence.

The path to the councilors office is an easy one, no enemies, but every surface is covered in spider webs, eggs, barrels of Yix and the occasional body covered in tiny spiders. Flash/Der will talk about how grotesque this all is as they walk through the long corridors.

#### *Main*

As they enter the councilor's main office, they find it turned into a spiders' den, webbing everywhere. The windows are blacked out by webs, the ground is sticky underfoot and the bodies of guards are strung up all around them. The Councilor himself stands behind his desk, his back to the party. As they approach, he turns, and it becomes clear that he is dead.

The Spider descends from above. It grants them an audience, speaking via the Councilor. It explains the plan, how the Rangers have forced its hand. From its perspective it was happy to let this whole Bough continue as it was before, peacefully, but Der's letter and their presence meant that it had to work faster, take control more overtly. During the talk, Flash/Der starts to show signs of turning, though the Spider struggles to infect the party themselves.

It is feasible that the party could find a path through this situation without resorting to violence. They could strike a deal with the spider to find it a new home, they could offer to help it find a supply of Yix, or they could even suggest the Spider goes back to running the Bough - it does run it exceptionally well. If that fails, and combat is inevitable, begin by having the newly possessed Flash/Der attack the party from behind.

#### *Combat*

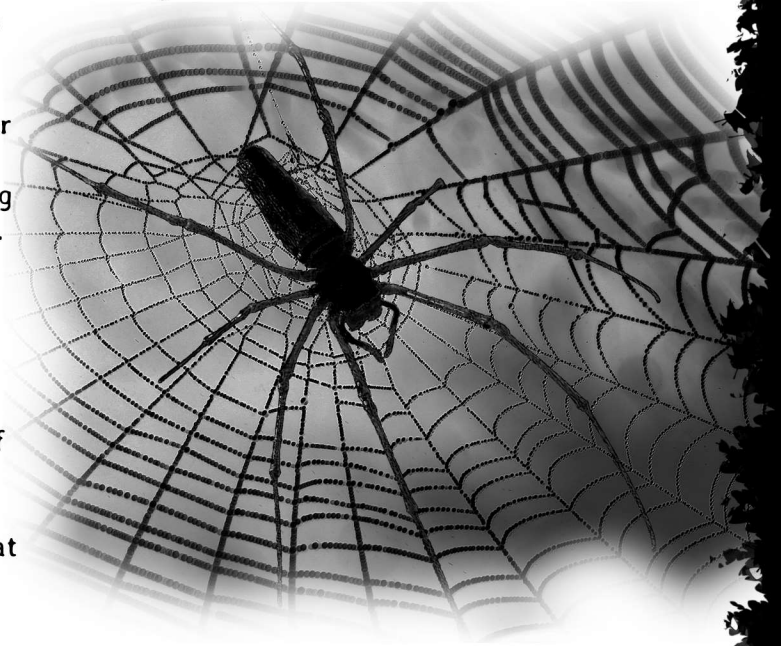
The party has to contend with a multitude of factors in this situation - first of all Flash/Der will be coming at them. They're controlled and lack a lot of their finer combat abilities, but they still make for a good distraction, and besides the players may be averse to simply murdering the mind-controlled comrade.

Secondly the webs around the room are connected to the Spider, and it may use them to pull, trip, drag or otherwise incapacitate the team. Use these to stick their main damage dealers up, forcing the other members to free them by cutting through the webs.

Third is the Spider itself is a massive beast that takes up almost the entire room, and can easily skitter up and down walls of the office and cling to the roof. The Spider is Yix-infused, and can therefore cast some spells, mainly enchanting the webs and summoning spirits to fight for it. The Spider will try and avoid direct combat where possible, but is quite capable of attacking using its legs and fangs. It will try and web up the party members it can get on the ground, wrapping them in a thick web then hanging them from the ceiling.

Eventually, after taking half damage or when its traps and allies are down, it will flee the room, bursting out of the side of the Bough's bark to the wilds outside. The players can pursue, taking the fight outside, using the webbing laying around the room as ropes to abseil from, or by jumping around the branches around the outside of the Tree.

Once the spider is slain, it will make one final attempt to web the party and drag them down to the ground with it.



#### *Closing*

Once the Spider is slain, its influence vanishes from the Bough. The people return from the shelters and the guards return to normal. Allow a day or so to pass, have the party recover in Der's workshop. If the councilor is alive, have them come visit the party and talk to them about the events, thank them for their work and provide them with their reward - a token of favor from Peach Trees, which allows them to ask the Bough for a favor of any kind. You can also give them some money or supplies if it feels right.

If you wish to make this adventure continue into a campaign, you can have the councilor also supply them with the recipe for this particular batch of Yix, which contains Yellow-weed, a rare plant found only in a very particular region of the Wall, where, of course, awaits a Bough of people exporting this plant all over the Valley...



*“Incredible, isn’t it? It’s a Bough seed. Genuine article, I swear, completely legit. I got it from a Halfling Wall-Walker a few summers ago. Traded everything I had for it. You remember that job in Center Valley, when that merchant king gave me the ruby the size of your head? That’s where that ended up. I think I got a pretty good fuckin’ deal.*”

*I can’t believe that this little rock can grow to become a Bough – I’ve got goosebumps even thinking about. I hold in my hand the infinite. All it needs is a bit of water, some sunlight, a tiny sprinkle of magic and time. Then, one day, when you and I are just dust, when everything we are has washed away, it’ll still be here, making a tiny part of this fucked up world safe for some lucky fuckers.”*

CHAPTER SEVEN:  
MAKING A BOUGH

## QUICK BOUGH GUIDE

There may come a time when you have to quickly generate a Bough for your players to explore. When using the guide below, remember it's just suggestions, feel free to discount any rolls and pick the one that looks best to you. You probably shouldn't roll on every table, leave some details to be uncovered through play, or ask your players about it – the only rule is that every Bough should be unique in some way, weird in every way and have a story to tell.

Take a D6 and roll it on each of the charts below to get a general idea of what the Bough you're making looks and feels like.

### Size

1 – *Miniature*, a Bough big enough to house only a dozen or so people. Barely anyone lives in these.

2 – *Tiny*, maybe a couple of hundred people live here, about the size of a small apartment building.

3 – *Small*, a modest town of maybe a thousand people, the size of a city block.

4 – *Average*, your standard Bough, enough room for a couple thousand people, roughly the size of 3 or 4 city blocks.

5 – *Large*, A particularly large tree, enough to house ten thousand residents, and about the width of a major downtown area.

6 – *Huge*, A truly massive Bough, enough room to house up to twenty thousand people. Very rare.

### Location

1 – *Along the Wall*, either at its base or built into the side of its rocky crags. It's rough living out there and only the hardest people make their homes here.

2 – *Beside a River*, a choice location that often means the Bough is prosperous.

3 – *Near the center of the Valley*, this is where most Boughs are, so expect lots of neighbors and inter-Bough conflicts.

4 – *On the outskirts of the Valley*, not too crowded, not too remote, maybe a little harder to get by than if you were near the center but still plenty livable.

5 – *Beyond the Wall*, this way madness lies. Rough living, terrible monsters right outside the door and all manner of unexplained weirdness out in the great grey wastes.

6 – *Remote clearing*, somewhere far from any other Boughs but still within the Valley.

### Goods

What does the Bough trade in?

1 – *Nothing*, this place is self-sufficient or dying, you decide.

2 – *Food*

3 – *Fish*

4 – *Metal*

5 – *Wood*

6 – *Finished goods* – Weapons, Art, Crafts, something specialized that they make better than anywhere else.

### Oddness

Every Bough is a little strange in some way. Some of them are very strange in a big way – make sure this strangeness has effects beyond the superficial, have it inform some aspect of the Bough, its culture or its current problems.

1 – *Armored*, The bark of the Bough is covered in thick metal plates, guards stand at posts erected along the outside of the wood, archers and siege weapons and mages stand at the ready for...something.

2 – *Split*, Through magic, weather or war, a part of the Bough is torn open and faces the outside world.

3 – *Connected*, This Bough neighbors a number of others, and together they decided to connect their homes. Massive bridges, ropes and chains stretch between the immense trees, linking them to one another.

4 – *Roost*, Something makes its home in the Bough's canopy. Something massive.

5 – *Rot*, This Bough is infected with Rot, how far along the infection, and how curable it is, is up to you.

6 – *Abandoned*, No one lives here anymore.

### Government

Some races are more fond of or tend to certain kinds of governance over others, but that doesn't mean you can't have a monarchic Zel Bough, or a collectivist human Bough.

1 – *Meritocracy*, Leadership of the most qualified. This Bough decides its leaders through their brilliance and their accomplishments, be that in War, Politics, Magic or Commerce.

2 – *Democracy*, The people of this Bough vote, in some way, for something. This can take on dozens of different forms but generally involves representatives being elected by the people in some way.

3 – *Collectivism*, This Bough is owned and run by the masses, the political power resting in the hands of large collective groups rather than singular representatives.

4 – *Dictatorship*, One person runs everything, with absolute authority on all things, Monarchies and military warlords fall under this category too.

5 – *Ecclesiastical*, Religion and a central church control whatever form of government exists.

6 – *Anarchy*, This Bough lacks anything like a central government, favoring instead a loose groups of collectives which run and manage their work, living spaces and projects.

## Society

Bough Society should always be unique and as always, make sure this uniqueness is played to the benefit of the story of that Bough.

### Street Level

1 – People here are skittish. Doors close as you pass, guards seem more alert than usual, and no one will catch your eye.

2 – This Bough is a paradise for inventors and/or mages. Experimental workshops are on every corner, new and strange devices are a common sight.

3 – The Bough is split into two or more clans, with deep seated, centuries old rivalries separating them.

4 – Religion is the driving force behind the people of this Bough. Everyone goes to church daily, and can quote scripture at the drop of a hat.

5 – There are guards everywhere, heavily armed too.

6 – The people here do not fear going outside the Bough as most do, exploring the Wilds around their tree, or the ocean under it.

### Government Level

1 – They don't like you here, they distrust the Rangers and make sure you know that.

2 – Something else is controlling the government here, some secret outside force, either through magic or coercion .

3 – You've walked into right into a political revolution. Good luck.

4 – The ruling powers here are new, inexperienced and maybe a little useless.

5 – At some point in time, the rulers of this place made a deal with something far more powerful than them. They think they can handle it. They can't.

6 – There's an occupation going on here. One Bough has conquered another and the streets are full of their forces.

