WARLOCK

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Fey Courts

WARLOCK

TABLE OF CONTENTS

"**Owls, Roses, and Thorns: Lost Courts of the Elves**" by Wolfgang Baur 2
"**Recollections of the River Court**" by Jon Sawatsky 6
"**River Court Rogue's Gallery**" by Shawn Merwin 14
"**Guardians of the Trifles**" by Troy E. Taylor 18
"**Variant Undine**" by Shawn Merwin 24

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OWLS, ROSES, AND THORNS: LOST COURTS OF THE ELVES

By Wolfgang Baur

Elvish courts have always been strange places—to mortals anyway. They are somewhat like royal courts among humans, but because of elvish and fey longevity, the fey courts are far more dominated by single figures and for much longer periods, and these factors invariably leave their mark across centuries, setting down quirks, customs, traditions, and arcane and court law. Each founder's interests often become enshrined in the magic, architecture, fashions, and even speech of the courts, most having their own preferred courtly dialect: the Strigian Elvish dialect of the Court of Owls used loan words from Druidish scriptures and ritual while the Rosy Elvish dialect of the Rose Court was known for complex speech and obligatory rhyme, especially in forms of address.

The members of a fey court consist of vassals, servants, and family of elvish nobles, invariably major royalty such as dukes, princesses, kings and queens, emperors and imperatrixes—in a few cases, without the title but with all the influence. Each court revolves around its founders as the moon chases the sun. The most balanced tend to be founded married couples but sometimes by single rulers of great influence or charm.

Here are three courts from the list of the famous courts of the Valeran Empire at its height. There were more than two dozen courts known over the imperial years, and many others still remain active in the Summer Lands and in hidden places on the branches of Yggdrasil, aloft in airy realms, or in other hidden places of Midgard far from the Seven Cities and Dornig.

COURT OF OWLS (ARBONESSE)

For a long time, the Court of Owls was the primary site of elvish pilgrimage for druids and followers of the old ways as well as worshippers of the forested, shadowed branches of the elvish pantheon: Holda, Yarila and Porevit, and Sarastra. Its founder was the archdruid Illem Quinor, a pious and stern elf who founded the Circle of Owls and whose adherents served the elvish empire throughout their territories as shapeshifting, keen-eyed scouts and (sometimes) saboteurs. While most visitors to the Court of Owls were pilgrims and priests, hidden among those masses were always a few spies bringing their reports to the Roost, the small but ornately gilded chamber where the archdruid listened, pondered, and sent further missives to the emperor or imperatrix on matters that directly concerned the pantheon or the empire.

When the elves retreated to the Summer Lands and the empire faded away, the library of the Court of Owls was burned to the ground. Most histories say the fire was ordered by Quinor himself, for its libraries contained far too many secrets best kept away from grasping dwarves and humans. Others claim that a vindictive gnomish

servant, bitter at the command to depart and unwilling to leave human and elfmarked friends behind, set the blaze. Many volumes are said to have been carried off during the fire by gnomes and other servants, and a few were found later by scavengers surprised to note their pages were inviolate—legible and whole—despite a thick coating of ash on their covers. These "lost books of Quinor" are highly sought after as they remain one of the very few exemplars of elvish magic available to non-elves. Most are believed to have wound up in Bemmea or Maillon, though at least one necromantic volume is said to have been carried off by nightgaunts winging their way to the Scarlet Citadel. These books can all be authenticated by the presence of the Archdruid's Seal, an inked design of an owl, holly leaves and branches, together with elvish runes spelling out "Eternally Watchful," with the whole rendered as an arcane mark that resists erasure and tampering (in a few cases, a lead imprint of the seal attached by a ribbon—these are older but also less secure methods of authenticating a lost book of Quinor).

What truly remains of the Court of Owls is a matter of some discussion. A few druids and pilgrims still visit in the summer months and refer to themselves as the New Court of Owls, but this is draping themselves in lost glories. Structurally, the fine wooden buildings are all fallen into decay, the stone foundations remain true but overgrown with moss and even cavelight moss, and some dark and hungry spirit inhabits the court's groves and streams. Many visitors return missing a horse, ox, or dog, and a few complain that "lustful, beguiling music" can be heard from the famous court's stream.

This stream is the Noctuan Water, a fresh, babbling bit of a stream, rarely more than a foot deep in most places, which still runs from a hillside and then crosses mid-air over the fetid moat to the outer courtyards. In some places, the Noctuan Water is lifted by arcane means to flow into the kitchens and halls; in other places, it is cleansed by elemental magic. At its final stop, it flows into a large, still pool in the main courtyard, still lined with reeds and lilies, before disappearing underground. An undine or water spirit may still live in a cavern below.

COURT OF ROSES (ARBONESSE)

The Court of Roses was devoted to the young and the poor among the elves. It was a place of learning, courtship, carousing, famed for its poetry and its Silver Shrine of Baccolon as well as the Great Hall of the Crimson Queen Othaniel. She was both the wealthiest patroness of elvish arts and learning and (so whispers maintained) the most ruthless keeper of the empire's records, genealogies, and arcane bloodlines—the foundation on which titles, peerage, inheritances, and fiefdoms rose and fell.

Queen Othaniel's public patronage of Baccolon was largely a boisterous, popular way to hide her devotion to Sarastra and her teaching of young elvish wizards, sorcerers, and other arcanists about high magic, shadow and illuminated rituals, and rites that strengthened ley lines, that built new shadow roads, and that even moved ley lines miles across the empire to thwart enemies or reward the emperor's chosen. Her titles ran as Her Sanguine and Ethereal Majesty, Othaniel Qivaressa, the Red Queen of Baccolon, Countess of the Lower Arbonesse, Baroness of Steinhafen, Mistress of the Arcane Roads, and Keeper of the Key of Seven Stars, Beloved of the Poets and Immortal in Song.

The Rose Court is now a place of ghosts, as well as dusty arcane workshops filled with animated oozes burning with cold light, and a few other horrors such as clockwork poets, animated undead cats with particularly fluffy and luminous fur, and rats of unseemly intelligence. Its famous stained-glass windows were all removed and conjured

away during the Retreat: tall vacant windows and at least two enormous round ones remain as the frames where enormous glass once filled the air with light and pleasing shadows. Smaller, stained-glass windows were said to have remained but have all been looted as well; a few have been set into new temples and taverns as far afield as Reywald and Salzbach.

Somewhere within its ruins are likely some arcane treasures, and (if some of the human histories are true) somewhere beneath the court should be the Crimson Queen's dungeons and workshops. Several "true and authentic" maps of these workshops exist, though the two best known disagree with one another on such simple matters as where the entrance to the chambers is; most agree these maps are all dated long after the Retreat. Banshees, phantoms, and occasionally pilgrims of Sarastra's darker traditions can be found in the buildings, though most of these are purely nocturnal visitors, so the merely curious are advised to visit by daylight when the ruins are at their best and the odds of a violent attack by undead or alchemical horrors are minimal.

One item of especial interest can still be found quite easily: the talking roses of the court still grow wild and rambling in what was once the famous Prickling Maze where young elves played and older, perhaps inebriated elves sought to question the foliage in pursuit of green wisdom or amusing anecdotes. The talking roses speak the Rosy dialect of Elvish and may be the last to do so; they are widely versed in weather lore, botany, and the distinct cries of any bird or animal inhabiting the ruins, but they are also quite melancholy still at having no sparkling courtiers to speak with. A few wilder legends claim that old blood rituals once turned the white roses red and summoned forth a dark goddess from the woods or that void pipes can still be heard in the Prickling Maze at dawn and dusk. Gardeners who have attempted to take a cutting or transplant from among the talking roses have, thus far, been prevented by children of the briar and other floral guardians. But such a bloom would surely bring a smile to the face of any of the elves who remember the Rose Court at its height.

GRIFFON COURT (MARGREVE)

By elvish noble standards, the Griffon Court was a backwater of little consequence: a summer camp to learn griffon riding, to hunt deer in the Margreve, to ponder a few of the mysteries of the deep forest, and perhaps to dally with the shadow fey if they showed themselves at all. The territory is surrounded by marshy woodlands and thickets of thorn and briar so ancient that they require axes to clear—most visitors come by ley roads or on griffon wing if they come at all.

And there are still reasons to visit. For the elvish armies, the Griffon Court was an important breeding and nesting ground for two-headed eagles, hippogriffs, wyverns, and griffons, as well as (at one time) for occasional fey drakes or moon drakes given as gifts among the nobles. It was also a crucial training grounds for knights and captains, not the glamorous nobles but the well-trained leaders who made sure that elvish armies could handle any rebellion and expand their rule over patient centuries. So it was a martial court from the beginning, but it also retained pride in its messenger services, flying couriers and making deliveries by air from Thorn to Gennecka and to Liadmura and Velersh.

And despite the retreat of the elves, it is still at least somewhat inhabited. Four elves, twenty elfmarked, and a scattering of gnomes and halflings keep the place in running order and maintain a stable of six to ten trained Margreve griffons at all times for the use

of the imperatrix on her rounds and hunts. Since her health has declined, these choice beasts are more often given to her various favorites at court, but they are still trained at the hunting lodge that was once home to several hundred of the empire's brightest knights, young squires of the martial orders, and a famed school of rangers and archers.

Rumor has it that some elements of the Griffon Court's armor, weapons, and training methods remain available to worthy elves and elf-blooded humans, but on the whole, the court is not welcoming place. Built on a stony crag above much of the forest canopy and with three large clearings to handle training, flying, and a modest orchard and viticulture, it more resembles a woodland village than one of the esteemed homes of the elvish legions of old. Tunnels, armories, and barracks of the old Flying Fifth Legion (also called the Griffon Guard) are said to have been sealed off and are largely inaccessible to visitors. Only the court's commander, the Griffon Knight-Commander Alluvar of Rothenheim, Marshall of the Margreve and at least honorary general of the 5th legion, is believed to know the command words and to hold the arcane keys to the tunnels of the Flying Fifth. His wife Xendra, his son Ollivary (or more correctly, Alluvar the Younger), and his squire, young Fillibera of Liadmura, round out the garrison.

RECOLLECTIONS OF THE RIVER COURT

by Jon Sawatsky

Yes, it's true! I have travelled far up the rivers that flow through the Arbonesse—all the way to the River Court. There I was taken on a tour of the place before being seated for dinner with the king himself, that secret keeper, Ulorian the First! Here, sit, I will recall my time there for you so that you might decide if such a trip is in your interest..

—Nenmaas Goodloaf (halfling of House Aunun)

The River Court is the last foothold of the elves in Midgard. Tucked away in the great forest of Arbonesse, the court's population comprises a few elves, many elfmarked, halflings, and a growing number of aquatic humanoids of various types. It is this last contingent of the court that makes it unique among the kingdoms of Midgard, for nowhere else are the waterborne fey so welcome as in King Ulorian's Court.

The farms around Ulorian's castle are simple affairs and serve as home to most of the court's halflings as well as a number of elfmarked. The fields are well irrigated, and it's common for small aquatic fey to travel up the canals and make their homes in their banks—even assisting with the harvest when time.

Darker things also dwell in the court. Creatures whose natural abilities lie in the domain of subterfuge and spying. King Ulorian welcomes these creatures as subjects, and it's through them that he maintains advantage over his enemies and allies alike.

THE FIVE SPIRES OF THE RIVER COURT

The spires of the court are simply stunning. They are surprisingly hard to see from the nearby forest, a fact I must attribute to the magic of the place. Though why his majesty would wish to hide these splendors is beyond me! Alabaster white with golden trim, they rise like majestic fingers pointing to the stars. Each is built upon some important edifice, and I'm told there are chambers at the tops—though no one would tell me what is kept there…

A Note on Architecture

The River Court is built both within the river Neurabon and on its saturated banks. The castle, with its towers and water gates, is built in the middle of the river, and a thick foam builds at the base of its walls where the swift water meets the stone. Entrance to the castle is made either through a gate facing upstream or via a heavily guarded walkway from shore.

The spires of the River Court are built near the castle. All of the spires, save for the Spire of Baccho, can be reached by water—even the library in the Spire of Memory is partially submerged.

The interiors of the buildings of the River Court are designed to offer comfort to those aquatic fey who live there. Many chambers are partially submerged, and their walls drip with cool condensation. Despite being lavishly decorated with polished river stones, gilded archways, and beautiful hanging water plants (that bloom eternally in the presence of King Ulorian), the buildings of the River Court are cold and wet and uncomfortable to those not suited to the water.

Spire of Currents

The Spire of Currents is built upon the elves' primary woodworking workshop. Though the crafters produce mundane goods such as furniture and tableware, the workshop is chiefly known for its production of river barges. The crafters are led by Uynitia Boughbender, an elfmarked woman whose arms were maimed in battle and replaced with magical wooden facsimiles that move at her command.

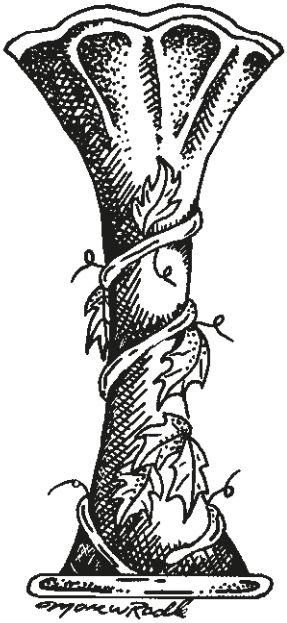
The workshop at the base of the spire opens onto the river where old and damaged barges are delivered and new ones set afloat. Despite the labor transpiring in the workshop, a meditative silence is all that can be heard, though occasionally songs or laughter drift from the gate.

The spire is accessible via the workshop, but its doors are locked and warded against simple magic. Only Uynitia has the key to the spire, which she keeps on a silver chain around her neck at all times. The spire reaches three hundred feet into the air and has a single windowless staircase that rises from the workshop to its peak.

The topmost chamber of the spire is a small room painted in gold. It has a round window that faces south and is framed in rough-cut pieces of wood from the forest. In the center of the room is the broken prow of the first riverboat built by the Court. Broken and splintered, the boat yet contains powerful elvish magic. Several simple pillows sit on the floor around the prow, and those who sit there are filled with visions depicting elvish wood crafting techniques. To be invited to sit with the broken prow is a high honor.

Spire of Memory

The River Court's principal library is built near the castle and is commonly referred to as the Spire of Memory. It consists of three main chambers connected by short, highly decorated corridors. The chambers are well lit by beautiful and magical stained-glass windows whose animated scenes depict the history of the court. The library is managed by three elven scholars (Nilia, Sarion, and Fenn) who oversee a small staff of elfmarked and halfling workers.



The library has representatives who travel throughout Midgard searching for books to add to the spire's impressive collection. These representatives are mostly elfmarked scholars accompanied by well-paid mercenaries. The scholars of the River Court are often found combing through old ruins in pursuit of lost knowledge.

The three chambers of the spire are heavily guarded, and access to the stairs leading to its top is restricted to the three head librarians. A spiraling staircase leads from one of the library's chambers to the top of the spire. The spire rises two hundred feet, and the walls along this staircase are covered in elvish writing: poems, ballads, expressions—all written in the same steady silver script.

The topmost chamber of the Spire of Memories contains a simple bookshelf filled with the rarest and most magical tomes kept by the River Court. Only those who have earned the favor of the court may hope to open these rarest of books.

Spire of Unity

Though the River Court's population is small (estimated around 3,800), it's surprisingly varied. Elves, elfmarked, halflings, and all manner of fey (especially aquatic) all live together peacefully. Though the court's reputation suggests it is the home of exiles and outsiders, those who dwell within its limits are far from hermits living lives of solitude. The Spire of Unity consists of a grand feast hall. Half the hall is submerged in the cold water of the river while the other half sits on sturdy stone. A wooden common table runs through the hall—one end dips into the water. Chairs made from curved driftwood line the tables.

For those subjects of the court who prefer their meals cooked, as opposed to raw and fresh from the river, a stone stove sits at the dry end of the hall. It is said that the bones from fish cooked on the stove regrow their flesh when cast in the river, so it is common to see piles of such bones in the watery portion of the hall after a large feast.

Spire of Baccho

This spire is built upon a large wine-storage vault dug deep under the riverbank's wet, clay-filled soil. The vault has two dimly lit chambers connected by a short corridor and tasting room. Ornately carved wooden storage racks form aisles and line the walls of both chambers. One chamber is for wines that have aged up to sixty years while the other chamber is reserved for vintages bottled as far back as two hundred years. The entrance to the wine vault is heavily guarded due to the large amount of enchanted wine stored inside.

The spire is accessed via a spiraling staircase built atop the entrance to the vault. It rises for a hundred feet above the ground and is topped by a small chamber magically locked and warded. Inside the top chamber, which is windowless and kept cool by permanent spells, is a glass display case containing a few grapes from the very first harvest by the elves of the River Court. The grapes are said to be blessed by Baccho and possess powerful magic.

Spire of Charun

This tallest spire in the River Court is the Spire of Charun. It sits upon the temple of Charun, a large boat-shaped building made from dressed stone and finely carved wood. The temple resembles a river barge with its primary entrance in the aft section and the altar placed near the prow. Wooden benches, carved with depictions of the Boatman ushering the elves to and from the heavens, form rows along the length of the main chamber. Windows, shaped like ornate lanterns, line the walls allowing muted light into the space.

The spire is accessed behind the altar via a spiraling staircase lit with sacred lanterns. It rises two hundred feet above the temple

to a worshipping space reserved for special ceremonies. Few have been allowed to enter the top of the spire, and those who have do not speak of it. Rumors that it contains a portal capable of accessing every plane of existence are unsubstantiated.

THE ALABASTER GATES

It was on my tour of the castle proper that I was allowed to see the twin gates said to offer direct passage to Elfheim itself! Though the gates appeared only to lead to the other side of the room when I spied them. Still, I could sense the magic in those snow-white frames as I was hurried on.

Last of the true elfroads in Midgard, the Alabaster Gates of the River Court allow accepted travelers to step from the middle world to the luminous land of the elves: Elfheim. The King of the River Court alone has the ability to activate the gates, which sit in well-guarded buildings inside the castle's courtyard. Though the mode through which the gates are activated is a well-kept secret, many scholars suspect the king's crown is the key; its observed properties suggest that the crown exists in both Midgard and Elfheim at the same time and that its magic is the source of some of the king's more powerful abilities.

The gates themselves are made from purest white stone interwoven with pale wood set to give the appearance of water flowing upward from the ground. The gates are fifteen feet tall and ten feet wide, and emit a constant warmth—like stone heated in the sun.

THE WINERIES OF THE RIVER COURT

Of all the secrets revealed to me in my time in the River Court, it was the wineries that stroked my sense of wonder the most. Though I must admit, there is also something inexplicably dreadful about those strange groves whose ebon grapes grow on vines that strangle the trees.

The Neurabon river winds through the Arbonesse, feeding streams, lakes, and ponds along the way. The land along its banks is rich and fertile, and the members of the River Court have taken great advantage of this fact. The variety of grape grown under the dense canopy requires little sunlight; a trait which defies the natural world and is a product of the king's magic. The vines of these plump grapes, whose midnight flesh is sweet and overwhelming, grow around the trees and shrubs of the forest; they wind tightly around their hosts, making deep impressions in the bark.

The grapes are harvested by halflings who climb here and there to collect the grapes. These workers pride themselves in the careful manner with which they pluck the grapes—rarely is one piece of fruit wasted.

The wine is produced in two sturdy stone and wood buildings built near the groves. As with all the structures of the River Court, the buildings are accessible by both land and water. Inside, the grapes are crushed and stomped by mischievous water spirits and small aquatic fey who dance and sing old songs together, washing themselves in the river when their appendages becomes too stained.

The River Court produces two wines. The one, which they export to Dornig and beyond, is strong and sweet and best drunk with a hearty meal. The other, which is bottled and stored in racks deep underneath the Neurabon, is enchanted with the king's magic and is reserved for members of the court.

THE THEATRE OF DROWNED STARS

My eyes widened when I was escorted to the edge of a great whirlpool near the castle. The water of the Neurabon swirled and frothed, and I admit to terror as it was suggested I simply throw myself into the vortex. Not wanting to appear rude and

with uncertainty over the cleanliness of my drawers afterward, I leapt into the whirlpool. Against my expectations, I emerged in a stone and clay chamber under the river. The walls of the place were lit with beautiful glowing blooms, and I was led then into the Theatre of Drowned Stars where I had a delightful night.

Below the castle and accessed by a magical whirlpool on the banks of the river is the River Court's amphitheater. Named for the magical blooms that illuminate the walls and ceiling of the theater, the Theater of Drowned Stars hosts weekly performances by a rotating cast of poets, actors, singers, and orators.

The theater is built in the round and is oval shaped. Stone benches form rows around the central stage, which is made from enchanted clay. There is never a need for sets to be built for the theater's performances as the clay can be molded, carved, and magically commanded to change its shape.

The principal master of ceremonies for these performances is a **boloti** (*Tome of Beasts*) named Prince Suss who travels on a magical wave of water that occasionally topples. Prince Suss is an impressive speaker and charming host who loves to cast *fog cloud* before making an appearance.

CELEBRITIES OF THE COURT

Enetha Senbloom, High Priest of Charun. Enetha (N elf female, 8th-level Storm Domain Cleric) is a tall, pale woman whose robe is made of undulating river plants. The cowl of her robe is made entirely of shaped, black water, which shadows her face and lends a trickling quality to her speech. The high priest spends most of her time in the Spire of Charun where she gives sermons and counsels the court's membership. She travels the Neurabon on a riverboat made from the bones of those enemies of the court who drowned.

Gibbers Crane, Master of the Pluckers. Master Crane (NG halfling male **scout**), or "Gibbers" to those who know him, is a severe and hard-working halfling who leads the Pluckers—a union of halfling laborers responsible for harvesting the grapes from the wineries of the River Court. Gibbers wears patched overalls and a floppy, wide-brimmed hat decorated with a single crane feather. His hands are permanently stained a dark purple color from a lifetime of plucking the magical grapes.

Halliath Moro, Marshal of the Knights of the Deluge. Marshal Moro (LE elf male **knight**) is the leader of the River Court's small unit of elite king's guards, the Knights of the Deluge. He is rarely more than twenty feet from the king and, thanks to Ulorian's magic, has not slept is over seventy years. Moro is a devastating opponent whose armor is made entirely from hardened hydra scales. His helm is made from the skull of a particularly large hydra that he slew single-handedly when it threatened the spires. He wields a sentient glaive named *Torrent* with the power to control water and summon elemental guardians.

DINNER WITH KING ULORIAN

Though the feasting hall of the River Court is a cold and watery place where the walls themselves are made from the Neurabon and the guests are half-submerged, it is still a wondrous and oddly inviting place. Those glowing blooms which appear so often to light the dark places of the court lend a soft and admittedly maudlin ambience. The strange little spirits carrying plates of fish and cold soups are as filled with charm as they are razor-sharp teeth.

Being Seated. Guests are brought into the feasting hall under the river's muddy banks through a dripping tunnel whose entrance is guarded by several water elementals. Before being seated at the king's long, stone

table, guests who require it are targeted by spells to keep them dry despite being partially submerged in the cold water of the Neurabon.

Welcome. After taking their seat at the table, all the guests are welcomed by the River Court's most famous orator, Prince Suss, who retells the founding of the court before enumerating the many victories of King Ulorian.

First Wine. Each guest is served wine from the River Court's reserves. This magical drink allows all creatures to speak and understand the Aquan tongue.

The King is Seated. King Ulorian is announced and arrives to sit at the head of the table. The king prefers simple robes that drape and flow. The water that he passes through rises and forms small decorative shapes—the king's wake is a reminder of his immense power and connection with the river in which he has built his castle.

Second Wine and Tales. The guests are served a second glass of enchanted wine that allows them to breathe underwater for the duration of the dinner. At the king's request, Prince Suss recounts the stories of the court.

Dinner. Dinner, consisting mostly of steamed fish and root vegetables, is served first to the king and then to each guest. The servants at the meal are small water sprites who cart the plates to and from the table with a gentle rippling sound.

Cases and Accolades. After dinner, and provided King Ulorian is in the mood, guests may both plead their case for the king to intervene in some matter and praise the king for his actions and hospitality. The king rarely speaks during this part of dinner, reserving his judgement for later. Sometimes, if an accolade is exceptionally well articulated, the king may offer his favor in the form of a valuable curio or a promise to act.

The King Departs. When he decides dinner is over, the king rises and leaves. Occasionally, the king stops to acknowledge a guest whose company he has particularly enjoyed. Most of the time, the king simply exits, flanked by several guards.

The Guests Depart. The guests are ushered from the feasting hall. With the effects of the wine activated, the guests often end the evening with a swim in the shallows of the river. Each guest is given a smooth river stone with the sigil of the king engraved on one side. The stone is magical and can be squeezed to produce a half-gallon of drinkable water each day.

KNIGHTS OF THE DELUGE

Led by Marshal Moro, the Knights of the Deluge are a small unit of elite guards dedicated with protecting King Ulorian. The knights wear enchanted chainmail whose interlocking chains appear to flow like waves across their chests. The glaive is the official weapon of the knights who defend the court from the wild things of the Arbonesse and enact the will of their king in Midgard. Some of these knights have trained in elemental magic and can wield it to assure their victory in combat. These rare warriors call themselves Extinguishers.

KNIGHT OF THE DELUGE

Medium humanoid (elf), lawful neutral
Armor Class 16 (chainmail)
Hit Points 71 (13d8+13)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)	15 (+2)

Saving Throws Con +3
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10
Languages Aquan, Elvish

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Blessing of the Neurabon. The knight gains a swim speed equal to its speed and can breathe air or water whenever it is in the River Neurabon.

Actions

Multiattack. The knight makes two glaive attacks.

Glaive. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +5 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d10 + 3) slashing damage.

Surge (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). The knight is carried forward by a magical wave of water. It moves its speed in a straight line toward one target and makes a glaive attack, doing an additional 3 (1d6) force damage for every five feet it moves using this ability. Creatures struck by this attack are knocked prone.

EXTINGUISHER

Medium humanoid (elf), lawful neutral

Armor Class 16 (chainmail)

Hit Points 130 (20d8+40)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	15 (+2)

Saving Throws Con +4

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12
Languages Aquan, Elvish
Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Blessing of the Neurabon. The Extinguisher gains a swim speed equal to its speed and can breathe air or water whenever it is in the River Neurabon.

Innate Spellcasting. The Extinguisher's spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 15). The extinguisher can innately cast the following spells, requiring only verbal components.

At will: *chill touch, light, ray of frost*
2/day each: *fog cloud, thunderwave*
1/day: *misty step*

Actions

Multiattack. The extinguisher makes three glaive attacks.

Glaive. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d10 + 3) slashing damage.

Surge (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). The Extinguisher is carried forward by a magical wave of water. It moves its speed in a straight line toward one target and makes a glaive attack, doing an additional 4 (1d8) force damage for every five feet it moves using this ability. Creatures struck by this attack are knocked prone.

MAGICAL WINES OF THE RIVER COURT

Kept in cool, dark underground chambers below the Neurabon river, the wine reserved for magical enchantment is aged at least twenty years before being removed. The brackish cellars, filled with racks of dark wine, are kept clean by a variety of snail loyal to King Ulorian.

Wine of the Court

Wondrous item (wine), common

The white glass of this bottle of sweet, dark red wine is made from the sand found along the banks of the Neurabon river. It contains enough for six servings and bears the sigil of Ulorian the First, King of the River Court. A creature who drinks a serving of this wine may speak and understand Aquan for 1 hour. Creatures who drink more than one serving within 24 hours must make a successful DC 12 Constitution saving throw or become incapacitated for 1d4 hours.

Wine of the River

Wondrous item (wine), uncommon

Kept in ebon-colored bottles, this sweet, aged wine tastes of citrus and a delicate flower that grows only on at the edge of the Neurabon river. The bottle contains four servings and is embossed with the oar-shaped symbol of Charun. A creature who drinks a serving of this wine may breathe both air and water for 1 hour. Additionally, the imbiber is filled with knowledge about the Arbonesse forest and gains advantage on Intelligence (history) checks about the forest for 1 hour. Creatures who drink more than one serving within 24 hours must make a successful DC 14 Constitution saving throw or become incapacitated for 1d4 hours.

RIVER COURT ROGUE'S GALLERY

by Shawn Merwin

The fey lords and ladies, known for their capricious natures, lurk like dangerous spiders at the center of their otherworldly webs. Perhaps none are as impulsive and deadly as the River King, master of the streams, rivers, ponds, and lakes that link the mortal world to the fey realm.

The River King, also known as Ulorian or His Rippling Majesty, resides in his castle, which holds the Great Rippling Hall. The River Court is composed of the River King's servants, spies, retainers, and other servants, all of whom gain and lose power as frequently as the rising and lowering of the tides.

Documented here are three of the River King's most trusted and long-serving courtiers and servants. How long they remain in Ulorian's favor remains to be seen, but while they have his trust, they are some of the most powerful beings in the River Court. The goals and motivations of each likely put them into contact with the mortal world, and thus they are potential threats (or maybe even incidental allies) of adventurers.

(For more information about the River King and his court, check out Wrath of the River King, an adventure by Wolfgang Baur and Robert Fairbanks.)

GRUMMLUMP, THE TOLL COLLECTOR

The River King rules over the waterways that act as passages along the Shadow Road, the mysterious thoroughfares that connect the mortal world and the fey lands. As such, he expects tribute from those using his rivers, streams, and lakes for their travels. His representative in acquiring such tributes is Grummlump, known in the River Court as the Toll Collector.

Grummlump in a man-sized, sentient humanoid frog at home as much on land as he is on water. His deep, croaking voice carries over the waves, shouting orders to his crew and warnings to river travelers in commanding tones. His wit is as sharp as his scimitar, but he rarely engages in small talk. His leather armor is stained with the blood of those who cross him.

Grummlump oversees dozens of crews that patrol the waterways, each charged with boarding boats, inspecting goods, and levying taxes and tolls as they see fit. Grummlump spends time with each of these crews, making sure each collects enough while not overly burdening those they intercept and forcing them to employ other means of travel. His long-standing position in such a capricious court speaks to his negotiation skills and work ethic.

A typical crew under Grummlump's guidance consists of a lieutenant and a number of fey or amphibious sailors loyal to the River King: shadow fey, elves, merfolk, and the like. If such a crew is encountered with Grummlump leading them, they fight to do the death, for they know what fate awaits if they flee while serving their master.

GRUMMLUMP

Medium fey, neutral evil

Armor Class 16 (studded leather)

Hit Points 79 (12d8 + 24)

Speed 30 ft., swim 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+0)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)

Skills Deception +6, Intimidation +6, Perception +5, Persuasion +6, Sleight of Hand +7, Stealth +7

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15
Languages Common, Sylvan
Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Amphibious. Grummlump can breathe air and water.

Speak with Amphibians. Grummlump can communicate with amphibious creatures.

Lightning Leap. As a bonus action, Grummlump can move up to his speed. This movement does not provoke opportunity attacks. If he lands next to a creature, Grummlump can make a scimitar attack as part of the bonus action.

Actions

Multiattack. Grummlump makes two scimitar or shortbow attacks.

Scimitar. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage.

Shortbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack*: +7 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage.

Tongue Lash. Grummlump's tongue lashes out and grabs an object within 20 feet that can be held in two hands, like a weapon, shield, wand, or other similar item. If the object is unattended, he automatically takes possession of it. If it is attended or wielded, the target must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw to retain possession.

ZIZZBAZZ, LADY PESK

Every fey court needs a network of spies, and the River Court is no exception. One of the most unique tools in the River King's spy arsenal is Zizzbazz, known by friends and foes alike as "Lady Pesk."

Zizzbazz appears to most as a gnome-sized woman with a complex array of multibladed wings growing from her back. Her limbs and head are strangely elongated and thin, even for a fey folk. She speaks quickly and in halting, staccato phrases, making it difficult to understand her. Her short sword is designed to look like one of her many wings.

Zizzbazz's role in the River Court is that of spy and scout. Eagles guard the River Palace from a distance, watching the grounds around the palace, but Zizzbazz is the one charged with investigating intruders around the waters controlled by the River King. Her natural grace and strong wings make her a difficult target to pin down. Those who try to strike her in combat often find their missiles and blades striking allies instead as she flits in and out of their reach.

ZIZZBAZZ

Small fey, neutral
Armor Class 14
Hit Points 72 (16d6 + 16)
Speed 30 ft., fly 50 (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	18 (+4)	13 (+1)	11 (+0)	17 (+3)	13 (+1)

Skills Perception +6, Stealth +7, Survival +6
Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities poisoned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 16
Languages Common, Sylvan
Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Cunning. As a bonus action, Zizzbazz can dash, disengage, or hide on each of her turns in combat.

Flyby. Zizzbazz doesn't provoke an opportunity attack when she flies out of an enemy's reach.

Sneak Attack (1/Turn). Zizzbazz deals an extra 17 (5d6) damage when she hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of Zizzbazz that isn't incapacitated and Zizzbazz doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

Actions

Short Sword. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage.

Shortbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack*: +7 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage.

Reactions

Rapid Shift. When a melee or ranged weapon attack misses Zizzbazz, she can redirect that attack against a new target within 5 feet of her. The original attacker rerolls the attack against the new target.

UZIT, THE CRUSHING VENGEANCE

Like the relentless, pounding power of flowing water, the River King's need for vengeance is unyielding. If a creature earns the ire of His Rippling Majesty in a very public and embarrassing manner, the River King does not forgive and does not forget. He turns to Uzit, the Crushing Vengeance.

Uzit has fine facial features, like a typical fey, but is the size of an ogre and has the bulging muscles of a pile of round river stone. Even the most jaded courtiers at the River Palace stand in awe of her raw power as the River King often amuses himself by arranging wrestling matches with four normal-sized foes against Uzit.

But it is when Uzit is on a mission that she becomes truly terrifying. She passes along the Shadow Roads, her stone-like form grinding slowly but inevitably toward her target. She does not sleep, eat, drink, or pause until she finds her query. Then she takes great pleasure is crushing the life from them, hearing their bones crack, and seeing her king's revenge enacted in the most gruesome manner possible.

When not on a mission of vengeance, Uzit is pleasant company. She enjoys a good story and an entertaining song as much as the next courtier, dressing in the latest fashions at the court.

UZIT

Large fey, neutral evil

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 133 (14d10 + 60)

Speed 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	8 (−1)	20 (+5)	8 (−1)	12 (+1)	8 (−1)

Skills Athletics +9

Damage Resistances piercing and slashing damage from nonmagical attacks

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, paralyzed, petrified

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages Common, Sylvan

Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

Disguise. While Uzit remains motionless, she is indistinguishable from a pile of rocks.

Actions

Multiattack. Uzit makes two slam attacks.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (2d8 + 5) bludgeoning damage, and the target is grappled. While a target is grappled in this way, it is restrained (DC 17 to escape). Uzit can grapple two Large-sized or smaller targets in this manner but loses one slam attack per grappled creature.

Crush. *Melee Weapon Attack*: one or two grappled targets. Uzit can crush each target that is has grappled. The target takes 23 (4d8 + 5) bludgeoning damage.

GUARDIANS OF THE TRIFLES

by Troy E. Taylor

In this 10th-level adventure, the player characters embark on an exploration of the Arbonesse, the last bastion of the elves. They find themselves enmeshed in the intrigues of the River Court, sending them off to the realm of the Wild Hunt on a quest for a magic item desired by no less a personage than his Implacable Majesty, Ulorian the First.

This adventure features many creatures from *Tome of Beasts* (TOB).

PC HOOKS

There are many ways to hook an adventurer, but here's a couple possible reasons to visit the Arbonesse:

- The Old Cities of the Arbonesse were abandoned and overtaken by wilderness, but it's a good bet magic items and treasures were left behind.
- The PCs' desire to visit the River Court where exiled elves and their allies reside.

PART 1: TRESPASSING INTO THE ARBONESSE

The PCs have traveled through the forest for several days when they come upon this scene, which can be read aloud to the players:

"There is a break in the forest, a stretch of chest-high grasses, dotted with bluebells and white breeches. All is still and tranquil. At the far end of the break, you see the White Hart! The great antlered deer of Arbonesse legend stands regally in the light of day. The creature is majestic and takes your breath away.

"There is a rustling and a flock of birds erupts from the tree line. The White Hart's head swivels toward the sound. Breaking through is a hunting party of shadow elves."

The hunting party includes an **enchantress** (TOB) who is in the process of casting *hold monster* at the White Hart. A **forest hunter** (TOB) leads the hunting party and has his longbow nocked but is waiting on the release of the spell. The other four archers are also shadow elf **scouts**.

Read aloud:

"The enchantress's spell is cast but has no effect. The White Hart bounds away, heading straight at the adventurers. The shadow elves unleash their first volley, but none find their mark."

The PCs may take any actions they desire. The White Hart will race past the PCs with a supernatural speed and agility. This brings the PCs into a direct confrontation with the shadow elf hunters who attack them without provocation.

Should combat ensue, it is interrupted before its conclusion by the piercing sound of a hunting horn. On all sides, a large patrol numbering twenty or more guardian elves

appear. All wear a patch depicting the sun and river crest of the River Court. Captain Elynwyd, an **elvish veteran archer** (TOB), leads them. Against such odds, the shadow elves put down their arms and surrender.

The enchantress introduces herself to Elynwyd. "I am Cavatina, and we are emissaries of the Black Prince. We beg mercy of the Lord of Exiles, for we were unable to stop these outsiders!"

Elynwyd then addresses the PCs. "You have done a great service in fighting these poachers. Please accompany us back to the River Court, so we can present you to Lord Ulorian."

If the PCs balk at the request, the captain will insist.

If the PCs go their own way, the GM may consider these options:

- Bring in an even larger patrol and force the PCs to comply.
- Skip the next encounter and have the PCs discover the glade in Part 3.
- Possibly, the PCs will join forces with the shadow elves. In this case, the shadow elves serve as "guides" to the glade.

PART 2: COURT OF THE RIVER KING

The PCs arrive at River Court. Read this to the players:

"The company arrives at the city of white stone citadels erected along the Neurabon River. The city is a bustling, vibrant trading hub. The city has a cheerful buzz about it with merchants hawking goods to exuberant shoppers while lively, chime-filled music fills the air. A swan boat of no discernable propulsion ferries the company to the island palace, which features towers of water, pearl, and ice. The company pauses in the courtyard to mingle with courtiers. Then it is permitted to enter the lesser court, a hall with an elegant driftwood decor. Ulorian, in a cloak of shimmering, flowing water, is in the midst of receiving petitions from his vassals. The courtiers are colorfully garbed. In addition to elf and elfmarked attendants, there are many wondrous fey creatures. After a herald's introduction, Elynwyd presents the company."

If the GM has the adventure *Wrath of the River King*, it contains a map of Ulorian's palace. The map is not necessary, however.

The persons at court have their own objectives:

- Cavatina was caught red-handed attempting to poach the White Hart in an effort to please the Black Prince. To avoid the headman's axe, Cavatina grovels and begs Ulorian's forgiveness. She makes any pledge he requires.
- Ulorian is the **River King** (TOB). He has little interest in this episode except he has no wish to antagonize the Black Prince until he has decided whether to ally the River Court with his ascendant power. He is inclined to mercy to salvage relations. His other concern is more pressing: Gaining the upper hand on the Lord of the Hunt. Ulorian wants to exert some leverage over him—tweak his pride or test his power.
- Elynwyd is aware of Ulorian's dilemma and would use the PCs (and possibly the enchantress Cavatina, if the GM is inclined to boost the party) to infiltrate the Lord of the Hunt's realm so that Ulorian retains deniability if anything goes wrong.

While in Elynwyd's custody—in the courtyard and again in Ulorian's presence—PCs should have the opportunity to discern the mood and overriding concerns of those assembled. As needed, the GM can call for DC 10 ability checks of Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma for the PCs to gain this information. Above all, successful checks should reveal Ulorian's concerns with both the Lord of the Hunt and the Black Prince.

The GM should encourage interaction between the PCs and Ulorian. If the PCs hope to persuade Ulorian or any of his courtiers on a point, make opposed ability checks.

Ulorian makes two declarations as the audience ends:

- **To Cavatina**. "We should deal with you much more harshly. But we wish to foster good relations between our kingdom and the domain of the shadow fey, and your trespasses did no actual harm. Return to the Black Prince with the understanding that we of the River Court do not take kindly to unannounced 'hunting expeditions,' even when the hunters are of close kinship. Arranged in advance, you will find us receptive hosts, though we limit our sport to game that is in abundance. Understand our resolve. Until we escort you from our borders, you will be our guests but under the watchful eyes of our beloved captain Elynwyd. We invite you to stay and witness as we exercise our good judgement in this other matter."
- **To the PCs**. "We are gravely concerned by your intrusion from outside our sheltering forest. Are no borders sacred in your sight? Do you follow your own whims rather than good sense? Are you like those for whom nature is simply a resource to be exploited? But perhaps the inclinations of trespassers such as yourselves can be employed to a more fruitful outcome. Elynwyd would employ you, but we are not so sure it is within our writ to command subjects of another prince. Suffice to say, we would take it kindly if you would perform a small task. I would dine on sunflower seeds from the sacred glade. They are a delicacy we find to our liking. Elynwyd will show the way. Accomplish this task and earn our loyalty."

PART 3: SACRED GLADE

The PCs come upon the sacred glade. The PCs' objective is to gain a chain of orichalcum then dive into the whirlpool and be transported to the lands of the Wild Hunt.

As they arrive, read this description:

"The glade is the very picture of sylvan serenity. The air is filled with sweet fragrance of wildflowers. A bubbling brook tumbles over a stairstep waterfall and flows into the pond. The surrounding trees cover half the glade in shade. Three elves in diaphanous woodland attire, accompanied by a small fey creature with butterfly-like wings, are stringing together dandelions and using magic to transform them into a golden chain. They are giggling as they work. A trio of fluttering pixies are plucking seeds from a wild stand of sunflowers near the shore. The pixies zip about, playing tag before depositing the seeds in a sachet. At the center of the pool, four water nymphs are swimming with synchronized precision, a clockwise whirlpool developing in their wake. Four winged sprites with bows and wearing dour expressions flit about the glade's perimeter, keeping watch. All the fey creatures have expressions of expectation."

The creature helping fashion the orichalcum chain is a **dau** (TOB) named Seriathe. The aquatic nymphs are fey akin to **merfolk**.

The "guide" for this encounter—either Elynwyd, Cavatina, or Seriathe—explains the situation if Ulorian's intimations at court are not understood. There is more to this than collecting sunflower seeds.

"We do not know what trials await you," the guide says, indicating the vortex in the pool, "except you will transported to the realm of the Lord of the Hunt. Seek out the doila, which is elvish for 'fate speaker.' The doila knows your true destiny. You will recognize it as a catfolk creature wearing stoles embroidered with arcane symbols.

But the doila must be coerced or compelled. Bind the dolia in these orichalcum chains, and it will do your bidding. Even so, beware. When it prophesies, two utterances will be true and one will be false."

Seriathe then speaks. "You may have of me one boon. If it is in my power, I will grant it." The dau has some spellcasting and an extensive knowledge of the intrigues of the River Court but is a stickler for etiquette. The dau will respond only if the PCs are polite. A DC 10 Charisma (Persuasion) check is required.

The guide then says: "Pixies, cast some seeds upon the waters, and if they are carried to the 'other side,' our guests can be on their way!"

The PCs need to swim out to and dive into the vortex. It is a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check to swim against the magical current and enter the vortex. It transports them to the realm of the Wild Hunt.

PART 4: FATESPINNING DOILA

The PCs emerge on the "other side" in the center of a pond. The glade is nearly identical to the one they left, except it is night. There is an ominous, oppressive feeling. A swarm of fireflies moves across the pond and into the surrounding trees but momentarily illuminates a footpath through the green. A hare darts out and hops down the footpath.

The dark forest footpath leads several hundred yards to the lair of the doila. It is an ancient ruin of stonework. There is an obelisk carved with arcane symbols. The doila looks like a medium-sized catfolk of black fur wearing stoles embroidered with arcane symbols.

The doila is an ancient entity known as a **nichny** (TOB). It is up to the GM to decide if the doila will willingly answer three questions about their past, present, or future or if it must first be captured with the orichalcum chain. Either way, the creature and the chains disappear once its third answer is given.

There are five "Guardians of Trifles" in the immediate area. These are fey creatures tasked with protecting a magical item. The GM selects or randomly determines which of two genuine trials the doila will reference. There is also one false trial that has a monster intended to be the PCs' doom.

Here are the five. The quoted response is how the doila describes it. The changing tense depends on whether the prophecy answers a question about the past, present, or future—keeping in mind that the PCs' perception of time is distorted in fey realms.

- A covey of hags guards a *mirror of life trapping*: "The drapery is removed. I see six, a reflection, three pair? Avert your eyes, lest the visage be too painful to behold. Your prison was/is/will be made of glass and silver. Your doom was/is/will be ugliness and despair."
- Malphas duelists guard an *oathbow*: "Woe be unto you. Did you/are you/will you heed(ing) the storm crow's warning? What do the duelists care for the twig and the twine? They carry flashing blades."
- A weeping treant wears a *ring of shooting stars* upon a fingerlike branch guarded by a selang companion: "Two they are, made alike and unlike by the same twisted devotion. One revels in the distortion but cannot abide to hold the void; the other weeps, a ringbearer without hands. Compassion was/is/will be misplaced here."
- A brood of kikimora guard a spell scroll of *prismatic spray* in an abandoned wizard's hut: "Hateful bird. Hateful woman. Hateful bird-woman, clutching a rainbow. From hidey-hole diminutive, it fouled/fouls/will foul the whole."
- A duskthorn dryad and its vine troll skeleton guard a *staff of the woodlands*

in its grove: "A grove of wood, dark and twisted, save one. There is allure in bark, leaf and branch, much to fear from a heart of thorns. They commanded/commands/will command bones to walk."

The false trial is a swarm of wolf spirits that chase the unworthy into the cave lair of a savager.

- Supposedly they guard their lord's *scimitar of speed*, but in truth, it is an empty scabbard: "*A blade of speed and precision, was/is/will be intended for the master of the Wild Hunt. Trusted canines show the way. Do not disturb the bear's peaceful slumber.*"

PART 5: GUARDIANS OF THE TRIFLES

Each of the trials is detailed here. In the land of the Wild Hunt, game trails are the norm, foot and cart paths rarer. The circumstances of how the PCs crossed over and the magical nature of their quests allows "shortcuts" through the realm, short journeys to the trial sites. Not all the guardians will fight to the death; they will yield or flee if it appears their lives are in jeopardy.

The Way Back. The players still hold onto a magical connection to the sacred glade. Diving into the pond on this side will transport the PCs back to where the aquatic fey are maintaining the vortex.

Old Hunting Lodge

A coven of hags resides in this two-story, former hunting lodge. The first is a *mirror hag* (TOB), Sister Amie, who sits in a rocking chair clutching a lap blanket and greeting visitors in the main room. Sister Amie invites visitors to gaze into her mirror. Covered by a drapery, the mirror of life trapping hangs over the fireplace. The other two are **green hags**. Sister Belle comes from the upstairs wearing a sleeping gown and possessing a bad attitude. Sister Christine comes in from a side door from the kitchen carrying a ladle, insisting visitors taste her foul-smelling concoction.

Pine Tree Encampment

A **malphas** (TOB) mercenary captain erected a campaign tent and his company of three **ravenfolk warriors** (TOB) are gathered around a campfire beneath a stand of sheltering pine trees. They are wary warriors. Their charge is to keep safe their master's *oathbow*, which is on a stand in the tent.

Wildfire Ruin

A clump of twisted, charred trees is the remnant of a wildfire. Sitting in the crook of one of the trees is a **selang** (TOB), singing an off-key rendition of a song of battle, pain, and bloodshed, ready to switch to its Alien Piping ability. The selang's tree is a **weeping treant** (TOB), and it wears a *ring of shooting stars*.

Abandoned Wizard's Hut

From tiny hidey-holes, three **kikimora** (TOB) infest this former wizard's hut. The kikimora are accidental guardians. When the hut's former occupant hastily fled, she left behind a case with a scroll of *prismatic spray* in a desk.

Duskthorn Grove

The grove of thorny trees is tightly packed, any movement in this area requires a DC 10 Dexterity save to avoid taking 1d10 piercing damage. The *staff of the woodlands* is camouflaged to look like one of the trees. A **duskthorn dryad** (TOB), Lanie, can command a **vine troll skeleton** (TOB) to defend the staff.

False Trial

The game trail turns into a series of sharp turns and grows narrower from surrounding dark woods. A *swarm of wolf spirits* (TOB) begins a howling pursuit

of the PCs, herding them down the path toward the lair of the **savager** (TOB). An empty scabbard is all they find.

PART 6: A THEFT DISCOVERED

The PCs return to court. Ulorian receives the PCs. "We sent you for sunflower seeds. Hardly a taxing endeavor. We dined without you. What took you so long?"

If the PCs present their trifle, Ulorian accepts it gladly. "Well, this most definitely is not sunflower seeds but a suitable substitute."

Once the prize is delivered, the **Lord of the Hunt** (TOB) storms in. If the GM believes the fey lord is too powerful, substitute his **dullahan** (TOB) servant.

The Lord of the Hunt's voice resonates. "There are thieves in this fish-loving, soggy court! My honor demands justice!"

Ulorian looks to the PCs. "You didn't steal this trifle from the realm of the Wild Hunt, did you? Tsk, tsk. What does my lord's honor require?"

"Trial by combat!" the Lord of the Hunt cries.

"So be it," says Ulorian.

Unless the PCs can find a noncombative resolution, the Lord of the Hunt will engage them. The River King will not let the combat turn lethal. Once someone appears in true jeopardy (such as two failed death saves), the River King will intercede, using his personal authority to command the fighting to cease. His Grasping Whirlpool ability can restrain the aggressors. Clerics provide healing.

The combat satisfies Ulorian's desire to test his peer. The PCs gain a powerful ally in Ulorian, the third-ranking fey lord. The PCs are now free to explore the Arbonesse with Ulorian's blessing.

VARIANT UNDINE

by Shawn Merwin

The beautiful, destructive nature of water is represented by a tremendous variety of water creatures in Midgard. Some capture the tranquil elegance of a placid pond. Others encapsulate the terrible destruction of the hurricane. Somewhere between those two extremes are the undines, the fey manifestation of water in the form of waves, currents, and ripples.

Daughters of Nethus. Undines are considered the daughters of the chained god Nethus, Master of the Waves. While they may have originated in his demesne, the undines have spread far and wide, some moving from the oceans into the seas, to the bays, to the lakes, and finally to the ponds and rivers of Midgard. The further the undines travel from the oceans into less volatile waters, the weaker and more placid they become.

The Undinal Hierarchy. The most powerful of the undines are the ocean and sea undines whose personalities and powers are as forceful as the waves and who threaten even large sailing vessels. They jealously guard their homes at the bottom of the largest seas and oceans, treating most mortals who sail or swim above them as intruders. Such powerful undines are a force to be reckoned with.

The bay or lake undines are both smaller in stature and weaker in destructive power. They still use force to protect their underwater homes, but they are more likely to live harmoniously with nearby mortals. Lake undines, for example, have been known to rescue drowning children or animals that wander into the water from nearby settlements. Of course, when the mood strikes, they are equally likely to sell those rescued children to a fey lord or lady.

The weakest and most timid of the undines are the pond and river varieties. They keep to themselves, interacting with the mortal population only if forced by more powerful creatures that they might serve. They are likely to hide from passing strangers, relying on their guardians for protection.

Undine Lairs. Undine lairs are fully submerged, ranging from wide-open expanses on the ocean floor to small riverside caves. Most undines use water creatures as guards or pets: from vicious sharks for the ocean undines down to giant crayfish for the smaller river or pond undines. Undines favor precious gems such as diamonds and pearls as their wealth.

When are not patrolling their homes and tending their pets, they love to make art, especially music and sculpture. Undine songs, unlike the deadly ones of their siren cousins, are said to soothe the soul and leave the listener refreshed. Undine sculpture, created by the power of eroding water, is rarely spotted by mortal eyes but is said to be of surpassing beauty.

IN RIVERS AND PONDS

The least of the undines, those of rivers and ponds, rarely grow more than three feet tall. Their forms are draped in flowing sheets of water that act as clothing. They sport blue-green hair that ranges from short and mossy to long and stringy, like ropy seaweed.

These undines often rely on the local wildlife to protect them when creatures of the mortal realm threaten them and their lairs. Giant crabs and crayfish are their main protectors although sometimes river- or lake-dwelling mammals might also serve the undines. Beavers or muskrats often make their homes near a friendly undine.

Where these undines live, the natural world seems to flourish. Part of it is the magical nature of the fey creatures, but it also results from their active stewardship of the land.

RIVER/POND UNDINE

Small fey, chaotic neutral
Armor Class 13
Hit Points 27 (8d6 + 6)
Speed 20 ft., swim 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)

Skills Nature +3, Perception +4, Persuasion +5, Stealth +5
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14
Languages Common, Aquan, Sylvan
Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Amphibious. An undine can breathe air and water.

Actions

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) bludgeoning damage.

Chill Spray. The undine sprays a 10-foot cone of frigid water. Each creature in the cone must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw, taking 7 (2d6) cold damage on a failed save, or half as much on a successful one.

Soothing Song. The undine target one living creature she can see within 30 feet of her. That creature must make a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or become incapacitated. The creature can attempt a saving throw at the end of each of its turns to remove the effect.

IN BAYS AND LAKES

Undines of lakes and bays are more powerful than their pond-dwelling sisters, growing to five feet or more. And in temperament, they are much more fickle and volatile. Their expressive faces run the range from calm contemplation to twisted anger, sometimes at a moment's notice.

Undines of bays and lakes have grown used to their mortal neighbors, and some even make deals of trade or protection with locals. It is not unusual for an undine living in a lake near a farmstead to trade with the farming families. Raiding parties trying to get to a settlement by boat can run afoul of undines who agreed to guard the settlement's water route.

Undines of the lake or bay might call upon larger water creatures to protect them: dolphins, alligators, and the like. They are fiercely protective of their homes, rarely allowing a land-dwelling mortal to get near it. The few who have seen undine lairs and lived to tell the tale speak of it as if it's a dream: beautiful sculptures, mournful aquatic songs, and hollows of glittering gems.

BAY/LAKE UNDINE

Medium fey, chaotic neutral
Armor Class 14 (natural armor)
Hit Points 78 (12d8 + 24)
Speed 30 ft., swim 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)

Skills Athletics +6, Perception +5, Stealth +5
Damage Resistances cold, fire
Condition Immunities petrified, prone

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Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15
Languages Common, Aquan, Sylvan
Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Amphibious. An undine can breathe air and water.

Innate Spellcasting. The undine's innate spellcasting ability is Intelligence. It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no components.

At will: *friends, resistance*
3/day each: *acid arrow, blur, misty step*
1/day each: *hypnotic pattern*

Actions

Multiattack. The undine makes two slam attacks or two water plume attacks.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage.

Water Plume. *Ranged Weapon Attack*: +7 to hit, range 120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d10 + 3) bludgeoning damage. The target must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

IN OCEANS AND SEAS

The largest and most powerful undines in Midgard are those of the oceans and seas, carrying the power of the crashing waves within them—a threat to entire vessels. When they appear above the surface, they stand eight feet tall with rippling muscles under watery skin, and their features resemble beautiful women clothed in patches of seaweed.

These undines are quick to anger. The mere presence of mortals in the waters around their homes drives them into a rage that is hard to quell. Without quick talking and persuasive reasoning, they are quick to smash vessels. Very few mortal sailors have encountered undine and lived to tell.

Rumors speak that these powerful undines are gathering forces and preparing to attack the Oracle of Kammae where their sire Nethas has been chained as a prisoner for decades. Only priestess Qorette Mardefon of Nethus knows for sure if this is true or not.

OCEAN/SEA UNDINES

Large fey, chaotic neutral
Armor Class 16 (natural armor)
Hit Points 136 (16d10 + 48)
Speed 20 ft., swim 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)

Skills Athletics +7, Perception +5
Damage Immunities acid, cold, fire
Condition Immunities charmed, paralyzed, petrified, prone
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 15
Languages Common, Aquan, Sylvan
Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

Amphibious. An undine can breathe air and water.

Innate Spellcasting. The undine's innate spellcasting ability is Intelligence. It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no components.

At will: *create/destroy water, fog cloud, thunderwave*
3/day each: *call lightning, enthrall, shatter*
1/day: *cone of cold, conjure elemental, mislead*

Actions

Multiattack. The undine makes three slam attacks.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage.

Acid Geyser (Recharge 5-6). The undine sprays a 30-foot cone of corrosive water. Each creature in the cone must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, taking 35 (10d6) acid damage on a failed save and being pushed 20 feet. On a successful saving throw, a target takes half damage and is not pushed.

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