

Lights and Grays

August 10, 2022



After the initial encounter, the party may talk to [Yllbella](#), a [druid](#) that lives at the nearby forest to get both the information and a possible alliance to deal with the problem. The journey, however, is not a simple stroll in the woods, as conspirators that don't want the alliance to occur try to prevent it.

Section Summary

Yllbella, the druid, lives in a purposefully hidden grove in the forest. Guarded and reclusive, the path to her hut (or hideout, however one prefers to interpret the way she lives), is known only to a select few, including [Ashur Ivaako](#), who tells the party how to find her once he determines that they're trustworthy. He takes the party aside and whispers:

"Head west in the woods, and pay attention on the fireflies. She'll know you're there looking for her, and she'll use the fireflies to guide you to her"

Unfortunately, as this information is bound to be passed at the *Brawler's Caldron*, Francis, the former captain of the burg and secret leader of the criminals, monitors their movements. He sees Yllbella as a possible threat to his dominance. She's

always lurking around, only found when she pleases, while moving unhindered. Uncertain of the amount of information she possesses on his operation, Francis sees an opportunity to finally locate her hideout to “take measures if need be”. He sends his best team to follow the adventurers to the spot and oversee their movements.

The Scouts' Mission

The team of villains have specific instructions to locate the hut and decide whether to interfere based on the itinerary of the party. If they locate the druid and move towards town, they are to assume the adventurers have recruited her and are finally going to enter the castle to “fulfill their intended purpose.” In that case, the scouts are to wait for them to leave and then sack and destroy her home, since there's be no use for her afterwards.

If the party finds her and moves elsewhere, the scouts are to follow. Francis suspects a second entrance to the underground levels of the castle through the woods, which would be valuable information. On discovering an entrance, the scouts are to map it and return. If the adventurers enter this newfound location, one of the scouts remains there to observe and report to Francis.

Francis also wonders about the supposed curse, interested in verifying both the veracity of the rumor and how it may affect the pillage of the castle and maintenance of the power established there.

The scouts are to remain unseen and to avoid combat unless their presence may somehow expose their leader and organization, in which case they are to eliminate all present.

The Scouts: The Gray Brothers

The Scouts are a group of three identical triplets dressed in hooded grey leather clothing. During a heist gone wrong, they suffered serious injuries from an explosion, and since then, they possess unique characteristics. They use their identical appearance to misguide those trying to tell them apart, resulting in no one knowing their names. They can be distinguished only by their scars and have all adapted to the loss of one of their primary senses.

- [Eyes](#)
- [Ears](#)
- [Face](#)

Note: As the Gray Brothers follow the trail left by the party, not the group itself, the GM should only run Wisdom (Perception) checks if the party is, for some reason, searching actively for someone following them. The brothers not only actively try not to be perceived, but they are also skilled in doing so. They do not intend to engage the party in combat yet, only when they're back in town, and the party has fulfilled their usefulness.

The Singing Forest

The Singing Forest is known as such for the high concentration of insects, that create a constant and oscillating humming sound. The deeper into the forest one goes, the louder the sound becomes, and the vegetation becomes denser, which keep most people from venturing too deep.

Yllbella makes her home in the eastern part of the forest, close to the burg, beside a dried water fountain.

The hut is actually a very big tree that literally embraced

Yllbella's presence and has molded its roots into a home for her. She lives there and is gravely concerned with the drying up of the water fountain and the fact that the biomes are restless. The forest itself, as a living organism, seems afraid of something or someone, but Yllbella is not wise and powerful enough to understand its worries, which is why she's seeking help.



The Stone Gate

At some point while traveling through the woods heading west, read or paraphrase:

As you walk carefully through the tangle of roots that cover the ground, half obscured by the fallen foliage, the humming of the forest grows to a Fortissimo and a sudden stop. As the sound slowly restarts, small points of light start to glow, as a pulsating heart. Fireflies start flying in a small group in concentric circles, then in a line, as if forming an arrow-like pathway that moves forward through the trees, their buzzing wings producing a sound distinct from the ambient forest music.

The fireflies are being guided by the forest itself. The humming of the insects seems to guide them with cadence.

A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) or Wisdom (Nature) check reveals that the roots and branches are moving, as if hiding the path taken by the adventurers.

Note: Unbeknownst to them, the forest is in fact trying to protect them from the Gray Brothers.

After two hours of walking in zigzag through the forest, assuming they've followed the fireflies, read or paraphrase:

After two hours of following the fireflies, the pathway they take you through leads to a beaten path. Further on, the path narrows to a passage with two huge boulders in each side, as if nature itself had formed a gate there. As the glowing insects proceed normally forward, the growling of beasts adds a new bass line to the music of the forest.

Leaving the shadows ostensibly, five [dire wolves](#) reveal themselves upon the boulders, as feral guardians, with fresh blood dripping from their bare teeth.


Meanwhile, the fireflies continue forward, disregarding the beasts above.

The wolves are intimidating but do not attack the party, even though they look like they will. They are aware of the presence of the Gray Brothers and are lying in ambush for them. If the adventurers simply continue forward, the beasts only look menacingly and growl but do not attack.



If the party attacks or pose as a threat, the animals attack. The fireflies, however, continue forward towards Yllbella's hut, unless there is combat or a very loud noise, in which case the humming of the forest becomes silent, and the fireflies stop, resuming their way after peace is restored.

The Druid

After the adventurers pass through the stone gate, they soon  find Yllbella.

The interaction between them is at the DM's discretion, in order to steer the party one direction or the other, taking into consideration her traits and personality.

Read or paraphrase:

Gradually, the vegetation starts to wane as the forest opens up to you. The space between the trees gives you room to breathe and move, and the whole environment seems to lighten as the fireflies spread upwards as the humming of the insects stops completely. Over a small hill reveals a small house in the trunk of a tree, as if the tree had grown in that shape, without the interference of metal tools.

A hooded shape waves her hand, Yllbella signaling them up as birds and squirrels gather around her acting cute, as if she found a way to weaponize fluffiness.

“Welcome heroes! Come, take a seat with me at the fireplace and warm our bellies and hearts with some food. I have waited long for someone brave that would help me bring rest to the Singing Forest.”

Yllbella talks about the strange occurrences in the forest, such as monsters wandering around, the drying up of the fountain that is beside her hut and the strange dreams that she's having, which she states are manifestations of the will of the Singing Forest, the way the forest “talks to her”.

She is convinced that the source of this evil comes from under the castle, but she knows of a tunnel in the forest from which evil creatures are emanating, and she believes it goes into the castle. She proposes going there to investigate. She is kind and is equally concerned about the criminals there and can easily agree to follow that route of investigation as well.

If over an hour passes without the party leaving Yllbella's home, a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals muffled sounds in the distance. A successful DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check clarifies that it's the sound of the wolves

dying. The Gray Brothers stumbled upon them and quickly finished them.

Possible Outcomes

- The party decides to go towards the burg and investigate the criminals, in which case they'll have a violent welcoming committee on arrival.
 - The adventurers decide to investigate the source of the curse through the outside, in which case they are going to enter the main dungeon through route 2 (see the dungeon map)
 - The group goes with Yllbella straight to the castle doors to investigate the location in a direct approach, in which case, Francis walks with them to the door, and no criminals attack.
 - The party somehow discovers that that the Gray Brothers are following them and confront them, which causes the Gray Brothers to flee the scene in order to avoid confrontation and stick to their plans.
 - The group manages to catch up with the Gray Brothers, triggering combat, in which case Face and Eyes stay to fight, while Ears goes back to warn Francis, who in turn arranges a violent welcoming committee for them once they show up back in town.
 - The adventurers somehow conclude that Francis is the leader of the criminals, after collecting evidence upon defeating the brothers in combat.
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The People's Plea

August 10, 2022



The party arrives in the burg in order to help solve the mysterious disappearance of the lord. The residents have a small informal council that gathers from time to time at the *Brawler's Cauldron*. They are good folk that have the best interest of the town at heart and wish for the expulsion of the embedded criminals.

The criminals care little for the "council". They have no power to enforce their deliberations and have no force to collide against them, therefore representing no threat. The fact that the owner of the tavern is a member also plays a big role on the lenience they show, for he is a well-respected former adventurer that, even in his old age, commands respect.

A group of strangers entering the town, however, could certainly affect the frail balance of powers that reside there.

As they enter the palisade, read or paraphrase:

Whatever they call it, "Gutter Town" is the name screamed by the pungent odor as soon as you enter the limits, as if the walls were containing the carrion from spreading outwards. The stink, mixed with the visible decay of what erstwhile was an architectural marvel is offensive in itself. The inhabitants can't really be told apart easily, since everyone is half covered in filth. Watching eyes full of sorrow and malice

follow your movements inquisitively as you take your path to what seems to be the only building visible that's not a ruin. "The Brawler's Cauldron," says the sign. A tavern, ironically, is the only building forgiven by whatever curse was set upon the place, or maybe it was the only source of alcohol around, and that's why the miscreants spared it from destruction.

Your escort takes you through a dark alleyway beside the tavern and knocks a code on a window while continuing to walk. A door up ahead opens, and the escort signals you to enter. A wide corridor leads to the inside of a small and well-kept shop that is organized as a lab, the door and windows boarded up from inside. A half-elf wearing glasses is tidying up the place, apparently embarrassed by the tiefling woman's teasing. A table at the center is there with the exact number of seats needed, and the fey man carefully places test-tubes and bottles in the shelves, flustered while she tickles him with her tail. As they notice you, he opens his arms in a courteous invitation for you to take your place at the table while the tiefling seems a little startled and assumes a serious façade.

"Welcome my friends, please, let's talk! My name is [Ashur Ivaako](#), your host, and this is my dear friend [Bell](#)! Please, take a seat!"

Ashur offers to provide the party with all the information at his disposal, as well as sell them at a discounted price whatever items he may have that can help them on their journey. His father, a former adventurer, has recently gone to the castle to try and solve things by himself and has not yet returned, which leaves Ashur extremely anxious. Bell, a dear friend of his, has volunteered herself to go with the party as soon as she heard that help was coming, in order to set her friend at ease. If the party make inquiries about possible approaches that are more discreet to go about it or move around town, given the fact that the city is inhabited by cutthroats and evildoers, read or

paraphrase:

The leader of the people's council, Francis, the eldest in the room, raises his hand emphatically and the room subdues in deep and respectful silence. He stands up straight with surprising vigor and examines everyone in the room slowly. His civilian clothes are decorated with medals and sigils of his prime, when he has the city's captain. His receding hairline frames the wrinkled forehead of a man full of sorrow and concern as he declares with a solemn voice:

With all due respect, friends, I don't mean to be ungrateful for the priceless services you so valiantly came here to offer, but the shadows are not the area in which you want to operate in this city. The shadows, corners, and gutters here are taken, overflowing with countless bottom-feeders, dangerous people that have no herald, no identification, no face, and no respect for life. One can't tell them apart from the innocent residents, and their silent blades can come from anywhere. What you want here is to solve the disappearance of the lord, enter that castle, and march right on its heart, a direct approach, brute force, straight to the point, foot-on-the-door-punch-on-the-face kind of heroism, not a reproduction of the underhanded methods of the scum we already have here. With a brief bow of the head, he sits silently, with an expression of half-embarrassment for failing his people, depleted of the vigor he just displayed.

At the end of his speech, any character that is suspicious of him can attempt a Wisdom (Insight) check with the following discoveries:

- **DC 15.** Francis seems to voluntarily choose when to display his vigor and when to appear frail
- **DC 20.** Francis has an agenda of his own that he's not sharing and is trying to influence the acts of the party,

dressing up his wishes as heroism to manipulate the party.

Note for the GM only

In truth, Francis is the leader of the organized crime in town. He intends to use the party as cannon fodder to further his interests inside the castle. He has no true intention of ridding the town of criminals, but instead, solidifying his control.

Among the information in the town, Ashur highlights three things that he believes to be important:

- He believes there's some sort of curse or dark magic at play. [Yllbella](#), a [Druid](#) that lives in the surrounding forest, has come to him asking for help. She describes it as if some unnatural corruption is taking over the forest from underneath, and according to her, the source seems to irradiate from beneath the castle.
- The criminals organized in town extorting the residents have a hidden leader. No one knows the leader's identity, but they are obviously organized in a hierarchical structure, although one can only identify lieutenants giving orders. Whoever it is has privileged information and is always interfering with the solution of the issue. Ashur's father had a suspicion but never shared. "Too serious to make claims without solid evidence," he used to say. Ashur warns the party to expect trouble from the thugs at any moment.
- Lord Zuulpa Thall had a daughter that had an accident that left her needing a wheelchair a few years before his disappearance. The elders say that the event deeply scarred him, and his personality gradually changed to a taciturn and dark demeanor. Right after the accident, he spent fortunes turning the city into a more accessible

place, so that she could be more comfortable, but both vanished suddenly.

Possible Outcomes

- The party decides to go with Yllbella to gather more information on the dark/cursed aspect that might be present in order to be more prepared and maybe recruit her help.
- The adventurers decide to investigate/confront the criminals, looking for the leader that might have more information on the disappearance of the Lord.
- The group goes straight to the castle doors to investigate the location in a direct approach, **in which case, Francis will walk with them to the door, and no criminals will attack.**

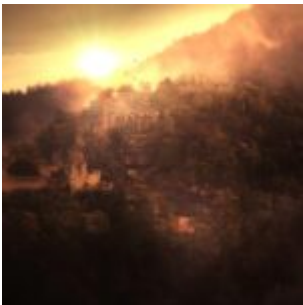
Optional encounter – The Criminal Deterrence

When the party decides what approach to take towards the issue and leave the *Brawler's Cauldron*, they are likely to have a group of criminals waiting for them outside. Their attack depends on the behavior of their leader, Francis. Francis wants to remain in power, while remaining in secret. His façade of a respectful upstanding citizen is precisely what allows him to be on both sides of the struggle and have intel on his enemies. The party will be ambushed if they confront Francis on his lies or express the intention of directly investigating the criminals instead of going towards the castle. If the party chooses any approach other than going right away towards the castle, Francis “goes home”. That signals the criminals to attack and dissuade

our heroes off the investigation. In that case, the party is attacked by five [thugs](#) that have nothing other than death and violence to deliver.

The Insider

August 10, 2022



Content Trigger Warnings

This adventure includes betrayal, death, violence, and an injury that results in permanent disability.

Something stinks in Gutter Town!

A missing noble has led to the fall of a town and its surrounding area into the hands of criminals. Can you find the solution and restore order?

This adventure is designed for 3–4 characters, levels 5–7.

Background

Lord Zuulpa Thall was once a noble of great renown with a notoriously brilliant mind. Cherished by all, the lord was in charge of the administration of southern part of the kingdom, a position of great prestige that brought admiration upon him, as well as envy. The reasons why the beloved man has become an outcast whose name invokes fear in the hearts of all is covered in mystery. Rumors say that he lost his edge when his only daughter perished in a tragic accident, but only one thing is certain—the southern lands are unruly and chaotic, and the lord has not been seen for a decade, while everything dies around his manor as if a curse has fallen upon it.

When the lack of control and leadership became an insurmountable problem, the surrounding lords started to send their own people to investigate the absent lord and determine the reason for his lack of governance. All that went to the lord's castle have returned in a box, discovered as mutilated corpses, or didn't return at all. The surrounding lords started annexing some of the land, partly taking advantage, partly having no choice but to rule over the land in order to resolve the problems brought by the absence of leadership.

The burg that surrounds the castle, however, remains unconquered in absolute chaos where the strong oppress the weak. A group of residents, led by an elderly former captain, have taken the destiny of the town in their own hands and are looking to hire a group of capable adventurers to enter the castle and find out what happened with their liege lord and resolve this tension once and for all.

It would be true to say that some of the lords that now control areas once controlled by Lord Thall had some economic advantages in the appropriation of lands under the excuse of keeping the

king's peace and protecting the people, but they are unanimously willing to give back the lands once the rightful owner appears again. As the king himself has not decreed otherwise, maybe for all the friendship that was between them, no one is authorized to take the burg by force in order to investigate the whereabouts of the missing lord or to reestablish order. Given the circumstances, a small criminal group has taken the town, and the people that refuse to abandon it are at their mercy, creating a safe haven for all varieties of backstabbers, cutthroats, and wanted criminals, since invading the burg would be an act against the king himself. In theory, Lord Thall is still the warden of the South and represents the king and his royal will, despite the ways his castle or lands are being used by others without his supervision.

The once beautiful burg, both the castle and the small town contained within its walls, are now a clear image of decadence. The front of the burg has strong walls and a thick gate. Around it, the natural protection of cliffs that surround it, so steep that only spiders could climb, or wings could reach. Around the triangular shaped piece of land, a canyon offers perfect protection from all other directions, and at the far end sits the lonely castle.


All are interested and involved in a collective effort to solve the dire situation in the most decisive yet discreet way possible. The Southern Lords, the king, the people, all want a resolution for the dilemma, either by finding a corpse, a man struggling with the effects of trauma, or even final evidence of his disappearance, anything that would assemble evidence enough for another lord to be named in his stead and the disbanding of the criminals that plague the region. Individually and collectively, the lords plot a way to send people in and unfold this mystery to bring order to the South.

Adventure Hooks

- The king himself is bothered by the lack of solution on the matter and has sent an envoy, with the royal sigil, looking for a specialized group that will solve the issue without causing turmoil amongst the noble houses. There is animosity and suspicion that the Lords are not solving the matter for the advantages that they may gain.
- The Southern Lords of the region gathered in a joint effort to rid the region of criminals and put an end to the dissatisfaction of their king. They are hiring willing capable people to solve the matter unofficially to get the criminals with their guard down and avoid further shame on the noble houses.
- The Circle of Druids is highly concerned by the spread of maleficent corruption in the region and decay of the forests and are looking for “city dwellers” that could further investigate its origin, since its source comes from inside the city walls.

Where are we?

Chasm Town

The burg was founded by the Thall family over a century ago  by a military genius-made-lord.

Strategically placed in the edge of a canyon at its highest peak so it would funnel possible hostiles and make them come from a single direction, maintaining the high ground as advantage, and controlling the situation. Strong and tall palisades at the town's limits, built over irregular terrain that gets higher and higher in layers, would also compel invading forces to fight always at a disadvantage.

The castle itself is right on the edge of the final and highest point, overseeing the town and beyond its walls.

A shadow of its former glory, all is decrepit and forsaken. Ivy has taken the stones of the castle; the windows, either broken or sealed shut from the inside; the pieces of the tapestry hanging on the walls and the flag that were not taken by time, all torn and filthy. The town is a huge gutter with open air sewage, plagued by rats, half burned buildings, and a single well that is surrounded by thugs at all times, holding the resource at ransom.

The only building in town that is partially maintained is the *Brawler's Cauldron*, a family business that is partly a tavern, the only one left, and partly a store that used to sell books, alchemical pastes and the like, that is now boarded up from inside. The former store section of the building seems to suffer constant vandalism, different from the rest of the building.

Stat Blocks

- [Belmaia](#)
- [Ashur Ivaako](#)
- [Yllbella](#)
- [Eyes](#)
- [Ears](#)
- [Face](#)
- [Thug](#)
- [Dire Wolf](#)
- [Wolf](#)
- [Eagle](#)

Encounters

1. The People's Plea
2. [Lights and Grays](#)
3. [Pawns of Francis](#)

Maps

- [Chasm Town](#)
- The Brawler's Cauldron