

OF VARSKS AND WINTER WITCHES

AN ADVENTURER'S GUILD™ SCENARIO SET IN THE HEARTLESS WASTES
OF THE BIRTHRIGHT® CAMPAIGN WORLD

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INTRODUCTION

Of Varsks and Winter Witches is a stand-alone AD&D® adventure and source-pack provided by the RPGA® for use with the BIRTHRIGHT® campaign setting. It was conceived and structured in such a fashion that Dungeon Masters should be able to run this adventure in a period of roughly four hours.

Familiarity with the basic BIRTHRIGHT boxed set is needed in order to properly use the included pregenerated player characters, (the blood abilities are unique to that setting), and the BIRTHRIGHT supplement "Tribes of the Heartless Wastes" provides details on the territories on the realms of Vosgaard. The information therein can help the Dungeon Master to greatly enhance the flavor of this adventure with additional background material and details. Further, a color map including the domain of Velenoye where this adventure takes place, is featured in that product.

THE ROLE OF WEATHER IN OF VARSKS AND WINTER WITCHES

An ever-present feature of the Vosgaard region is the cold. Temperatures average between 20-50 degrees (Fahrenheit) weather, even in the spring. For the duration of this adventure, the temperature hovers around 30 degrees during the day, dropping to about 20 at night. About two feet of soft snow is on the ground everywhere, and is not likely to thaw for a few months yet.

The weather of Vosgaard is also extremely volatile. It can shift from crystal clear one day to blizzard conditions by the time the sun rises the next day. In order to quickly and easily simulate these weather shifts, the Dungeon Master should roll a d20 at the beginning of each day of the adventure and compare the result to the result in Table One to determine the current weather.

When outdoors in inclement weather, characters must adjust abilities and statistics accordingly using the modifiers Table Two below.

The weather penalties affect all types of creatures not native to arctic and sub-arctic lands, including humans, elves, orogs, goblins, and other humanoids, while creatures such as polar bears, ice giants, and varsk are not be penalized.

All penalties assume that the characters are wearing average

Table 1: Random Weather

Roll	Result
1-5	Clear
6-8	Sleet/freezing rain
9-13	Light snow
14-17	Heavy snow
18-20	Blizzard

protective gear and warm clothing appropriate to the conditions. Magical protections, spells, and unusual preparations may negate some or all of the above (for example, a character riding a varsk is not affected movement penalties, but is still subject to ability score penalties, and so forth.). Characters who somehow find themselves wearing soaking wet clothing, or are for some reason left unprotected from the elements, suffer 1d4 points of damage per hour of exposure if the weather is in the 1-8 range on Table One; or 2d4 per hour if the weather is in the 9-20 range.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION: VOSGAARD

The region of Cerilia known as Vosgaard is a harsh and frozen land. Located on the continent's northern reaches, the region is blanketed by snow and ice most of the year.

The human inhabitants of these lands, the Vos, are a grim and hardy people. They prize strength, brutality, and perseverance above all else. Even a divine bloodline does not garner one immediate respect-one must prove their worth in battle, and the rulers of this frigid landscape usually got their title by fighting for it,

Table 2: Weather Effects

Precipitation	Str	Dex	Con	MV	THAC0	Sight	Spells?
Blizzard	-2	-3	-1	-50%	-2	-90%	S
Heavy Snow	-1	-2	-1	-20%	-1	-50%	M
Light Snow	—	-1	—	—	-1	-20%	—
Sleet	-1	-2	—	-20%	-2	-20%	—
Clear	----- no effect -----						

Str, Dex, Con: These modifiers apply to proficiency checks and saving throws based on these ability scores for as long as the weather lasts. As soon as the conditions change, the modifiers change to reflect the new conditions.

MV: Blowing snow slows characters' movement. The movement penalties listed affect how far a person can travel in a day, and even how far they can move in combat.

THAC0: Swinging a weapon accurately in bad weather conditions can be difficult at best; add these penalties to a character's THAC0 ratings. For characters using missile weapons, first consider the sight penalties to determine if a shot is possible, then add the THAC0 penalty.

Sight: Apply this penalty to how far a character can see, whether day or night.

Spells?: Casting certain spells may be difficult under adverse weather conditions. Spells that have long casting times, require sensitive material components (including liquids), or intricate somatic components may be difficult to cast. M = moderate effect on spellcasting (the DM may require a successful DEX roll to cast a spell). S = severe effect on

not by birth. As a culture, they prize warriors and priests, shun rogues, and despise all wielders of wizardly magic. Tattoos and ritual scarring are common for Vos of all classes, and they wear their scars proudly.

Given the “gift” of war by Azrai, the dead god of shadow, the Vos are more than happy to strike out at nearby peoples, or at other tribes of their own kind if there is no external threat to align them. Their two gods—Kriesha, goddess of winter and monsters, and Belinik, god of battle, feuds, and fear—exemplify the forces that drive and shape the Vos people. In fact, most temples is Vosgaard are joint affairs between the priesthoods of both of these faiths, although it is normal for one priesthood to dominate the other in a particular realm.

With battles against each other and the harsh environment they live in being the main focus of their existence, the Vos as a people have had little energy to devote to cultural advancement, and so exist as the most primitive human culture in Cerilia. They lack the technology to make long bows or crossbows, and steel weapons are not a common commodity. Further, they have never developed a true written language, relying instead on the *selevyek*, a series of pictographs. While primitive, this form of graphic communication is nonetheless able to convey a great amount of information.

In fact, the *selevyek* is the root of a type of priestly magic unique to the Vos—spell tattoos. A spell tattoo, when properly created and enchanted, allows a character (usually a warrior) to carry the magic of a particular priest spell. When the character decides to use the spell, he may activate the tattooed spell and use it as if here the priest who originally cast the spell. The tattoo has a chance of being ruined when the magic is evoked, but if it survives, it can be re-enchanted with the same spell it held before. (Whenever a character evokes a spell tattoo, there is a XX chance per level of the spell that the tattoo is ruined.)

Vos priests jealously guard the secret of spell tattoo creation. Generally speaking, only priests of Kriesha and Belinik know how to create them.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION: VELENOYE

Velenoye is a land nearly devoid of vegetation and wildlife. Formerly green with forests, it has been left almost barren by years of conflict between the Sword Rust Tribes, the neighboring orog nation, and Firosk Slecktra, a powerful wizard that lives hidden in a nearby domain. Only of a quarter of its land shows any signs of stability, and its history of rulers has been a tapestry of brutality.

The current tsara (“lord” or “chief,” equivalent to a king) is Fiala Ruszca, but the most powerful and

influential person in the domain is the Winter Witch Lida Marnorin, the priestess of Kriesha in Velenoye’s Temple of Might. Tsara Fiala takes her orders from the Winter Witch as if she were a vassal of the priestess instead of the reverse.

Lida has served in her position for 20 years, outlasting five tsars and tsaras. During this time, she has brought Kriesha to the forefront of Vos faith at the expense of followers of Belinik, and she continues to build the strength of her church by, in part, ensuring that few outside influences take hold in Velenoye. One of her main tactics to achieve this has been forbid all trade with neighboring realms.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION: THE ADVENTURE

Viktor Kesskin is a burly Vos who owns the largest herd of varsk in Velenoye. Most of his herd was stolen from neighboring realms by raiders in his employ, but now he seeks to improve his breeding stock through simpler and more above-board means. Unfortunately, the Winter Witch’s ban on trade prevents him from doing so. Thus, he has taken desperate measures to add to his herd.

Hearing rumors of dissent in the higher ranks of the orog nation of the Sword Rust Tribes, Viktor secretly made contact with an influential orog. Korzor, lieutenant to the regent of the Sword Rust Tribes, sought to establish a slave trade with the Surzek goblins of Lutkhovsky, but it was forbidden by Tolzimkur, his regent, due to a recent goblin slave uprising that resulted in many slaves escaping to Lutkhovsky. Korzor is presently engaged in schemes to undermine Tolzimkur’s rule, and Viktor is going to contribute 2,000 gp to Korzor’s “war chest” in exchange for six varsk of the finest quality.

Neither Korzor nor Viktor wish to have their activities discovered, as both would be placed in grave danger from their respective national leaders. Therefore, the varsk transfer will take place through intermediaries beyond the borders of both their countries, in the Surzek goblin-dominated region of southwestern Lutkhovsky.

To further reduce the chance of the exchange coming to the attention of the Winter Witch, Viktor has recruited a small group people with no local political connections to pick up the varsk and bring them back to him—the player characters.

BEGINNING THE ADVENTURE: MEETING VIKTOR

The characters have answered a request by Viktor Kesskin to meet him at his varsk ranch, some two miles east of Velensk, Velenoye’s capitol city. The ranch covers well over a square mile, and is the home for

about two hundred fifty of the large furred reptiles. When the party arrives, they are escorted into Viktor's cramped office, which is heated by a fireplace that burns varsk dung. The large man dominates the room, almost seeming to loom over everyone in there. Servants bring food and ale for all characters and then withdraw, leaving the player characters alone with Viktor.

With everyone seated, Viktor begins to speak. His deep voice resonates in the small room, making it seem to boom even though he is speaking in a normal tone of voice. "As my missive stated, I am in need of skilled, reliable couriers. Mutual friends recommended you to me, and they staked their honor on your abilities to deal honestly with employers. I am willing to give you five gold for your troubles thus far and for your silence should you choose not to accept the task for which I wish to hire you. Is this acceptable to you?"

If the player characters want to know who recommended them, the Dungeon Master should provide an NPC they know and trust. Viktor puts a pouch with enough gold to pay the characters, and doesn't seem to be insulted if they decide to count it. He then asks if they are willing to enter his employ as his couriers. If the answer is "no," Viktor bids them farewell, and the Dungeon Master should proceed to "Enter the Temple of Might." If the party agrees to work for him, he says:

"You are to be my representatives in the closing deal involving the purchase of six varsk. As you may know, I own the largest herd of varsk in Velenoye, but I need new breeding stock. Since Winter Witch Lida forbids any dealings with our neighbors, I find myself needing to resort to unorthodox methods to add bloodlines to my herd.

"I am paying you to meet with a group of orogs in the Orlenskyy Mountains, just over the border in Lutkhovsky. This is a convenient place to acquire the animals due to political reasons—I've already mentioned the complications with our own dear Winter Witch, but the deal is complicated further by the fact that the trade is being made with the stubborn orogs of the Sword Rust Tribes, with which our land is at war.

From behind his desk, he pulls a small strongbox, a bronze dagger, and a scroll. "This locked strongbox contains the payment for the orogs. The dagger is a token that will prove to the orogs that you represent me. The map will guide you to the meeting location. The orogs are only going to wait at the location for two days, so you must get there and make the exchange within seven days. If you leave tomorrow or

the next day, you will get there in plenty of time to take the animals.

"I will pay you each 100 gold in advance, and 100 gold each for every varsk that you bring back to me alive. They are supposed to bring six. Do not be stupid and try to bring local varsk; almost all of the beasts of Velenoye come from my stocks, and they are no help in expanding my bloodlines."

Viktor will tolerate some haggling on the part of the characters, but he will not go above 150 gp for each varsk returned, nor is he willing to up the advance he is giving the party. If the player characters get too greedy or pushy, allow whoever seems to be their main spokesperson a Charisma check. If the check fails, Viktor angrily says that he cannot do business with them and asks them to leave. If the check succeeds (or if the player characters begin to back off from their demands, Viktor explains that he is offering them as fair a deal as he can afford; the varsk he purchasing are not coming cheap. If the deal goes sour because the player characters are too greedy or pushy, the adventure continues with "Enter the Temple of Might."

Assuming any haggling comes to a pleasant resolution, Viktor opens the scroll, which contains a simple map. It shows a path to the mountains (they should head almost due north until they reach the base of the mountains) and several notable landmarks along a little-used trail. It's approximately 25 miles to the base of the mountains, and another 5 miles into the mountains beyond that before the rendezvous point. Viktor explains that if the good weather holds, it will take two days to reach that point, and about a day and a half back if the varsk are ridden. The orogs will arrive around midday of the fourth day after the party meets with Viktor (day 4 of the adventure, counting the day of the meeting with Viktor as day 1) and will leave the morning of day 7. He further explains that the bronze dagger (the blade of which has a selevyek pictograph meaning "bargain" engraved upon it) must be given to the orogs before any other actions are taken. If it isn't presented first, the creatures may not deal fairly with the party, Viktor warns. The strongbox is locked, but Viktor opens it if the party asks him to. Inside are an assortment of gems with a total value of 2,050 gp, slightly more than the bargain calls for. Viktor does not give the player characters a key to the strongbox, assuring them that the orogs do not require one—and neither do they. (Both of which are true.)

Viktor answers whatever additional questions the party may have to the best of his ability. He doesn't expect they will encounter any difficulties beyond some bad weather. He cannot provide them with any additional equipment, but suggests some merchants who will give them fair prices in the town, but requests that the party not use his name, as he doesn't want to draw the attention of the Winter Witch's servants. He also

recommends that the party undertakes the journey to the mountains on foot. Although he would be willing to sell them some varsk to ride (for 100 gold each, and then buy them back for the same price when the party returns), he warns that maneuvering one varsk while mounted on another is a difficult, if not impossible task; varsk don't simply follow along like horses do.

If the characters go to Velensk to get additional equipment, the Dungeon Master should turn to "In Velensk." If they choose to get underway immediately, either on foot or on varsk, the Dungeon Master should turn to the scene titled "Enter the Temple of Might."

IN VELENSK

Velensk is one of the oldest cities in all of Vosgaard—and it looks its age. This is a squalid city where people are crammed tightly together within weather-beaten walls. The air is thick with the stench of unwashed bodies and furs, beasts of burden, and burning animal dung. The streets are packed with merchants and animals during the day, and traffic is slow while tempers are high. Few people, even warriors, brave the night streets alone.

The trip to Velensk should be uneventful for the party, unless they conduct themselves otherwise. If all the party does is go to the recommended merchants to secure supplies, nothing happens. (The merchant is a fairly gruff individual who doesn't have time or patience for haggling, but sells equipment to the player characters at the prices listed in the *Player's Handbook*. Dungeon Masters need to keep the cultural level of the Vosgaard people in mind, however. Many types of equipment aren't available in Velensk, or anywhere else in the Heartless Wastes.)

Whether the characters linger in Velensk, or being their journey immediately, the adventure continues with "Enter the Temple of Might."

ENTER THE TEMPLE OF MIGHT

Unfortunately for Viktor, his plan to trade outside of Velensk is known to the Temple of Might. Once they depart Velensk, they are approached by a party of seven people. One bears a symbol of a white hand on the breastplate of her banded mail—Kriesha's symbol. The others all appear to be warriors of the temple. The newcomers stop about thirty feet away from the party, and assemble to let the priestess speak. The woman is tall, with jet-black hair, fair skin, and a white fur cloak that blows freely in the chill wind.

If the party has agreed to work for Viktor, she says the following:

"I am Petra Verkalik, priestess of Kriesha. We know that you have spoken to Viktor Kesskin about trading outside of Velenoye. This has been forbidden by

priestess Lida Marnorin. I stand here as a representative of the Temple of Might, and we wish you to proceed with this trade. When you return with the animals, you will turn them over to the Temple, not to Kesskin. He will be punished for his treasonous activities. In exchange for your cooperation in this, you will not be held responsible and will not be charged."

If the party has refused to work for Viktor, she says this:

"I am Petra Verkalik, priestess of Kriesha. We know that you have spoken to Viktor Kesskin about trading outside of Velenoye. We wish you to agree to his offer; we wish to acquire evidence as to his treasonous plans. Make the trade as he expects, but when you return, give the animals over to the Temple, not to Kesskin. We will allow you to keep the advance payment he has arranged for you."

If the group agrees to turn the animals over to the Temple, Petra and her bodyguards return at the end of the adventure, expecting to complete the exchange. They wait until the party leaves the area, either toward to the rendezvous location (if they agreed to Victor's deal) or back to Victor's ranch (if they refused earlier).

If the party refuses to comply with the priestess' demands, she will warn them that refusing to comply with a direct order of the Temple is grounds for arrest, imprisonment, and possible execution. She will state again the Temple's offer, and remind them how generous the temple is being. If they still refuse, Petra orders her guards to attack.

Petra Verkalik, hf, Pr6: AC 4 (banded mail); MV 6; hp 34; THAC0 18; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon (mace or short bow); SA spell casting, *wand of magic missiles* (22), *chill touch* 1/day, *wall of ice* or *ice storm* 1/day; SD spell, +1 to saves vs. cold; SZ M; ML Champion (15); Int High (14); AL LE; XP 975.

Spells Memorized: 1st—*create water*, *cure light wounds* x2, *endure cold/endure heat*, *sanctuary*; 2nd—*charm person or mammal* x2, *obscurement*, *spiritual hammer*, *withdraw*; 3rd—*continual darkness*, *prayer*; Bloodline: Anduiras, tainted, 8; Blood Abilities: none

Guards (6), hm, F2: AC 5 (chain mail); MV 9; hp 20, 17, 16, 15, 13, 11; THAC0 18; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon (mace); SA nil; SD nil; SZ M; ML Champion (15); Int Average; AL LE; XP 35

While Petra's warriors immediately interpose themselves between the priestess and the party, she takes a step back and casts spells well out of combat. Petra leads with her *prayer* spell. She has already cast *endure cold/endure heat* upon herself, which will

protect her from the first 10 points of non-normal heat or cold she might suffer. She then uses *create water* over one of the party members, drenching them, and *charm person or mammal* on any party member who gets past her warriors, or otherwise tries to attack her (she directs the person to protect her from any other attacks). If she can continue to attack at a range, she uses *spiritual hammer*, her wand, or her bow, but will fight hand-to-hand with her mace if she must. If wounded below half her hit points, she casts *withdraw*, binds her wounds, and uses her cure spells on herself. If still pressed, she casts *continual darkness* or *obscurement* in and attempts to escape, using the wand as a long-range attack to deter pursuit, if necessary.

If the party manages to kill her, she curses them with her dying breath, calling the anger of the goddess of winter upon them. Any results rolled on the weather table should be changed to the next worse category for the duration of the adventure. The weather begins to worsen almost immediately.

Each of the guards carries 2d4 gp. Petra carries 37 gp, 21 sp, and 18 cp, and wears a silver bracelet with a silver wolf's head on it worth 300 gp.

TRAVELING TO THE MOUNTAINS

The flatland of Velenoye is dominated by subsistence farms and potato growers. No unusual encounters take place here, as the populace is used to well-armed folk traveling about. If the weather is extremely poor, the party will be able to find a farmer with enough room in his barn to provide shelter for them at night for only 1 gp each.

THE PRIEST OF BELINIK

If it seems that the playing time might run longer than six hours, do not include this encounter in tournament play.

Also staying at the farmer's house is Mikhail Urtomon, a priest of Belinik in semi-exile. Mikhail disagreed strongly with some of the leaders of the Temple of Might—priestesses of Kriesha, to be exact. They cast him from the Temple, and so he now wanders about Vosgaard, serving Belinik how he can. Mikhail is ashamed at how the priestesses of Kriesha have gained power in Velenoye at the expense of the priests of Belinik, and meddles in the affairs of the Winter Witches however he can.

Mikhail is a nondescript man about to enter his thirties. His chain mail is battered, and all of his equipment is well-worn, although his holy symbol—a steel medallion with two crossed axes engraved on it—still gleams brightly, like the morning sun on an army expecting a battle.

Mikhail Urtomon, hm, Pr6 Belinik: AC 5 (chain mail); MV 9; hp 33; THAC0 18; #AT 3/2; Dmg by

weapon (long sword) +1; SA spells, +1 to hit with long sword; SD spells, protection from extreme cold weather; SZ M; ML Elite (13); Int Very (11); AL NE; XP 975.

Spells Memorized: 1st—command, cure light wounds x2, endure cold/endure heat, hold person; 2nd—*silence*, *wyvern watch*; 3rd—*spell tattoo*, *summon insects*; Magical items: *boots of the north*, *potion of diminution*.

He will be quite chatty, and glad to talk of the great battles he has witnessed and participated in. If any mention of the priestesses of Kriesha are made, he scowls and spits, calling them “thieves and meddlers.” If asked about his venomous attitude, he mentions that he has had a falling out with his temple due to the priestesses, and likes to interfere in their schemes.

If told of Petra's involvement in their mission, he nods knowingly and says, “Yes, that's typical of them.” If told that they refused her offer, fought, and managed to kill her, the bitter priest laughs and complements them on their victory. If the relations with the group have been positive up to this point, he offers to give one of the characters of Vos descent a spell tattoo—either of one of his cure spells, or of hold person. If they accept, he will make preparations for the spell and tattooing (he only has enough of the magical ink to make one tattoo).

If told that Petra managed to escape, Mikhail will still offer a Vos character a spell tattoo, but will offer his *silence 15' radius* spell instead. (“The priestesses of Kriesha don't like losing, and they don't give up easily; you will see her again, and will need the help.”)

If the party is generally rude or indifferent to him, Mikhail retreats to another corner of the barn, cast *wyvern watch*, and go to sleep. If attacked, he'll use his *potion of diminution* to escape—he realizes that he can't fight off the entire party.

AT THE FOOT OF THE MOUNTAINS

According to the map, the landmark is a tall cairn of red stones. Using the sketch of it on their map and traveling west along the mountains' base, the landmark is easy enough to find, and marks the beginning of an old trail leading northwest into the mountains. The soft snow on the mountains rests upon hard-packed snow that's also about two feet deep; this hard snow is not likely to be breached unless the party makes a concerted effort to do so.

There are no encounters that happen here.

ON THE MOUNTAIN TRAIL

The next landmark on the map is about three miles later. It is a large stone, almost spherical, buried about a third

of the way in the ground. Its exposed height is taller than a large man's head. It appears to be a natural stone, rather than being carved to this shape. The trail turns northeastward around the stone. A few hundred feet away from the stone is a pack of skuhlzecki, crawling about under the snow. Sensing the vibrations of the party, they'll burrow through the snow, surround the party, and attack.

Skuhlzecki (6): AC 5; MV 1 Br 9; HD: 2+2; hp 12, 11, 9, 7, 7; THACO 19; #AT 1; Dmg 2d4 (bite); SA superheated blood; SD resistant to cold, attack from under the snow; SZ S (2' long); ML Average (8); Int Animal (1); AL N; XP 175 each

A skuhlzecki (hot-headed ice borer) is a small segmented worm with a hard bony plate on its head. This plate is just above a concentration of blood vessels, which cause the plate to grow very hot (causing 1d4 damage to any that touch it), allowing it to melt its way through snow and permafrost. They will surround two to three party members (depending on how far apart they are spaced) and quickly wriggle through the hard snow, turning it to slush and causing the characters in that area to fall into something much like quicksand unless a saving throw vs. petrification is made. The skuhlzecki will then attack any characters so trapped with a +4 to their chance of surprise. Since they attack from within the miasma of slush, shields are virtually useless against them, and are not counted in the target's AC. Furthermore, their concealment in the snow means that they are effectively invisible and characters attack them with -4 penalties (magical methods of seeing invisible creatures will not negate this, although something like x-ray vision will. Slashing and stabbing weapons do normal damage, but bludgeoning weapons only do half damage, as the slush weapons the weapons' blows. If an ice borer has fed on someone for more than 3 points of damage, a blood sac in its body (possible some sort of food storage organ) swells up, and if the creature is killed, the blood sac explodes for 2d4 points of burning damage to all within a 5' radius (a saving throw vs. paralyzation means the character avoids the damage). A skuhlzecki brought to the surface is AC 10 and will cease all attacks, spending one round to flip over and the next to use its hot head to bury itself in the snow.

The skuhlzecki have no treasure.

THE MEETING-POINT

The landmark for the meeting is a great tree which has been burned and chopped to death. Still majestic in its charred gloom, the tree was once a source manifestations for Firosk Sleektra, but was negated by the actions of the great shaman of the Sword Rust Tribes, Oneg Skuhlzek.

If the orogs have arrived before the party, they will make camp in front of the great tree. If the party arrives first, they will try to make the trade, move a ways away to camp, and leave the next night. There are a total of six orogs and six varsks in the camp.

Orogs (6): AC 3 (banded mail); MV 9; HD 3; hp 18, 16, 13, 12, 11, 9; THACO 17; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon +2; SA nil; SD nil; SZ M (6 1/2' tall); ML Elite (10-14); Int Average (10-11); AL NE; XP 120

Varsks (6): AC 6; MV 15; HD 5+5; hp 35, 33, 33, 31, 30, 29, 28, 27; THACO 15; #AT 1; Dmg 1d8; SD suffers only half-damage from cold-based attacks; SZ L; ML High (12); XP (270)

Orogs are a subterranean race of miners and warriors that inhabit Cerilia's mountain ranges. Taller than humans, they have short, stocky legs, thick, barrel-chested torsos, long, powerful arms, and a somewhat apish face with a short, snubbed muzzle and flat nostrils, with hairless skin ranging from leathery gray to black. Orogs are nauseated and blinded by sunlight, and even overcast days give them a -1 on attack rolls and saving throws (fortunately, most days in Vosgaard are at least overcast, and very few days are ever sunny for more than a few hours). Each of these is carrying a steel sword or steel-bladed battle axe, and proudly displays decorations of brown cloth with a curved black claw on it.

Korzor has told these orogs to turn over six varsks to whoever presents them with a bronze dagger with a certain symbol on it (Viktor's token) and a strong box. They're too concerned about being caught (by their own people or by goblins) and so they do not plan to try and cheat whoever comes for the trade. Two of the orogs speak Vos, and so the two groups may communicate.

However, some of the local Surzek goblins have become aware of the orogs' and humans' intrusion into their lands, and have sent a band of goblin warriors to attack. This warband is being led by Kullak, a fabled war-chief among the Surzek goblins.

Goblins (12): AC 7 (leather + shield); MV 6; HD 1-1; hp 7, 7, 7, 6, 5, 4, 4, 3, 3, 2, 2, 1; THACO 20; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon (short sword or hand axe); SA nil; SD nil; SZ S (4'); ML Average (10); Int Low (8); AL LE; XP 35

Elite goblins (7): as above except AC 5 (scale + shield); HD 1+1; hp 6, 6, 6, 6, 5, 5, 4; THACO 19; SZ M (6'); XP 65

Kullak (Blooded Goblin): as above except AC 4 (banded mail); HD 3+1; hp 20; THACO 17; #AT 2; by weapon (long sword) + 1/d4 + special (claw); SA blood ability; SZ L (7'); ML Elite (13); Int Average (10); XP

175; Bloodline: Azrai, minor, 11; Blood ability: death touch

The rank-and-file goblins each have 3d6 silver, while the elite goblins each carry 3d6+2 silver. Kullak carries 6d10 silver.

Kullak is a large female goblin that fights with a long sword in one hand and also with her other hand—a large metal claw. As successful hit with the claw causes d4 hit points of damage and invokes her death touch blood ability. The victim must save vs. death magic, with a successful save meaning no additional effect is incurred. A failed save means the victim is infected with a strange magical poison. Their body feels warm and comfortable, regardless of the outside temperature, and suffers no cold-related penalties to their abilities or attacks. However, every 6 hours the character loses d4 points of Constitution. When their Con drops to 0, they spontaneously combust, leaving nothing but a charred skeleton after a round (all items carried by the character must save vs. magical fire or be destroyed; all within 1' of the character take 3d4 points of fire damage). Kullak will approach from a side that allows her to attack one of the humans in the party.

The orogs will gleefully leap into battle, although if combat seems to be going well for them, they will attack to subdue their foes (pulling their punches so the goblins merely go unconscious, rather than dying)—goblins brought back to the orog city will be enslaved. The orogs will not attack the PCs unless the PCs initiate hostility against the orogs. The varsk will not attack unless they are attacked.

After the battle, the orogs will drag away the bodies of any goblins they killed and claim their items, leaving the rest for the PCs (unless the surviving orogs are in better shape than the surviving goblins, in which case the orogs will try to take more than their share of the loot).

LEAVING THE MOUNTAINS

As long as the party does not attack the orogs, the humanoids will pack up on time, leave the varsk, and return to their own land. The party can choose to return at any time once the exchange has been made—the orogs aren't interested in being social and won't care if the party leaves right away.

The varsk-mounted party has a 1-in-6 chance of being attacked by more skuhlzecki on the way back through the mountains. The encounter plays exactly like the first one with the hot-headed ice borers, except that they'll center on one varsk and its rider. The varsk will be able to attack the creatures biting it, but will be at a -4 penalty to hit (as if it were using a blunt weapon).

PETRA RETURNS

If the party agreed to the deal with Petra, they will see her group approach when they get within a few miles of the varsk ranch. After cautious greetings are exchanged, she tells the adventurers to dismount from the varsk, at which point she and her guards walk over to claim them.

“Excellent work. We have been suspicious of Kesskin for quite some time, we only lacked proof. You have helped us this day; your names will be remembered favorably in any future dealings. I suggest that you make yourselves scarce now; Kesskin is likely to have friends, and you would not want your name associated with his arrest should they try to help him.”

If the party chooses to renege on their deal with the priestess, she will warn them that the consequences of their actions will be most dire. Should they insist on returning the animals to Viktor, Petra and her guards will attack.

If the party and Petra's group fought, and she managed to escape, she will be waiting with a group of 10 guards and 2 lieutenants, and will shout to them the following:

“Do not be foolish. We only seek to punish the lawbreaker Kesskin. I am willing to ignore your affront to my person; if you turn over the varsk now, you will be allowed to leave. Are your own deaths and the enmity of the greatest temple in all of Vosgaard worth some petty coin from an animal breeder? I think not.”

If the player characters comply, she lets them leave. She and the temple will not forget, however; the party has made an enemy with a cold-cruel heart and a very long reach.

If the player characters refuse, Petra's group attacks. The game statistics for the regular guards are the same as the guards in her first group.

Guard lieutenants (2), F4: AC 5 (chain mail); MV 9; hp 25, 22; THAC0 16; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon (mace) +1; SA nil; SD nil; SZ M; ML Champion (15); Int Average; AL LE; XP 120.

Petra uses her priestly ability to cast an *ice storm* upon the party (she is aware that this will damage the varsk, but she only needs one needs is one to survive) before her guards attack. She will then cast prayer, and will make sure to cast *charm person* or *mammal* on whoever she perceives as the greatest threat.

Any player characters that aren't killed outright by the combat will be arrested, imprisoned, and executed.

Their adventures may continue someday, but for the purposes of this scenario, they are considered at an end.

RETURNING TO VIKTOR

As the party approaches the ranch house, several varsks in the nearby pens come forward to sniff at the new arrivals, their large tongues dangling out menacingly. The gate to one pen has been left wide open; it is large enough to hold about ten varsks, and the feed bin appears to contain varsk feed. Any noise outside attracts the attention of Viktor, who has been inside the house, conducting business as usual. He opens the door long enough to identify the party, point at the open pen, and close the door again.

After the varsks have been penned, Viktor comes out to examine them. After giving each of the animals a cursory look, he will nod appreciatively and motion for the player characters to follow him back inside.

"It seems that the orogs have not chosen to cheat me. The animals are all healthy, and none appear to be any relation to my herd. It will take some time for me to determine the good traits of these new animals, but the very existence of new bloodlines in my herd will benefit me greatly.

"I hope you had little difficulty in making the trade?"

Viktor is mildly curious about the skuhlzecki and goblin attacks, but states that both are expected complications when traveling through the mountains. He does mention that should he opt to do business in this fashion again, he will want to warn his prospective hires about what they might encounter.

Should he be told of the Temple of Might's awareness of his activities, he will become quite alarmed, although the news of Petra's death will mollify him somewhat. He will want to finish his business with the party as soon as possible; he will gladly pay them the agreed-to amount and usher them out, cautioning them about talking about his involvement in their trip and the nature of their agreement.

If asked, he is willing to sell them each a varsk at a reduced price (150 gp instead of the typical 250 gp), although if he has been told about Petra's involvement, he asks that they return singly so as to not attract attention to him.

Here Ends *Of Varsks and Winter Witches*

RODYL POSTOK

4th-level Male Vos Warrior

STR 17 +1/+1

DEX 9

CON 15

INT 12

WIS 16

CHA 11

HP: 34

AL: N

Height: 5'7"

Weight: 175

Eyes: Gray

Hair: Black, with a full beard

Bloodline: Vorynn, great, 22

Blood Abilities:

minor—Bloodmark (hair is white on left side of head)

major—Heightened Ability (Wisdom)

Weapon Proficiencies: Long sword, dagger, hand axe, short bow, war spear

Languages Spoken: Vos, Orog (pidgin)

Non-weapon Proficiencies: Survival (Arctic), hunting, bowyer/fletcher, varsk riding, animal handling

Magical Items: +1 dagger, *potion of extra-healing*

Armor Worn: Chain mail

Money: 75 gp, 120 sp, 2 50 gp gems

Background: Rodyl was born and raised in western Velenoye, spending his childhood hunting with his father, whom he loved and respected above all else. However, during the spring of his 14th birthday, his father was injured on one of their hunting expeditions, and then the pair was trapped by a freak snow storm. Young Rodyl did what he could to save his sire, but his father froze to death despite his best efforts.

Since that day, Rodyl has borne no goodwill toward the priestesses of Kriesha. He has devoted himself to thwarting their plans quietly at every opportunity, without drawing attention to himself. Traveling the domain and normally making a living as a huntsman, he has also acted as a guide through the Orlenaskyy mountains, including more than one stint as a scout for a Velenoye war party planning on attacking the Sword Rust Tribes.

Appearance and Personality: Gruff and quiet most of the time, he respects those who brave the cold wilderness. Of average height and build, Rodyl's most striking feature is his bloodmark—all of the hair on the left side of his head (including his thick beard) is as white as snow. In the midst of battle, with his fair skin flushed and his two-color hair bristling about, he looks like something stolen from the Shadow World.

Viewpoints on other player characters: Rodyl thinks Nelka is a brave and worthy fighter, although he isn't sure how trust-worthy she is—her wide swings between stealthy kills and near-bezerk rages concerns him. Further, she wears a spell tattoo, a gift from a priest of Belinik—or so she claims. He thinks Torok is a trust-worthy companion, despite the fact that the unearthly blood of elves flows in his veins. Ivan could be a brave warrior, but as things stand, Rodyl is very careful about turning his back on him—priests of Erik have a reputation for turning on companions seemingly on a whim and he does not wish to fall victim to such whim. Lenora is the kind of woman Rodyl envisions himself marrying someday—a strong, self-reliant warrior who will be able to protect their many children while Rodyl hunts for their food. However, he recognizes that she is not wife material—she is *too* self-reliant and overly proud—but hopes that by being her friend that he will cause her to warm to him. Finally, Rodyl trusts Gregor with his life, without any hesitations or reservations. He is truly a warrior's warrior, if a little arrogant at times.

NELKA VERKAIK

4th-level Female Vos Warrior

STR 14

DEX 9

CON 12

INT 12

WIS 12

CHA 10

HP: 25

AL: CN

Height: 5'10"

Weight: 140

Eyes: Black

Hair: Dark brown

Bloodline: Basaia, tainted, 22

Blood Abilities:

minor—Alertness

major—Divine Wrath

Weapon Proficiencies: Battle axe, long sword, dagger, sling, garrote

Languages Spoken: Vos

Non-weapon Proficiencies: blind-fighting, endurance, gaming, leatherworking, rope use

Spell Tattoo: *Endure cold* as an 8th-level spellcaster

Magical Items: +1 shield, *potion of gaseous form*

Armor Worn: Studded leather, +1 shield

Money: 3 100 gp gems

Background: Nelka's father was the commander of a fort on the northern end of Velenoye. When she was twelve years old, Surzek goblins attacked and overrun the fort, and both her parents were killed. The pain at seeing her family destroyed caused Nelka's Divine Wrath blood ability to manifest for the first time, and she picked up a fallen weapon and attacked with all the fury her bloodline could muster. Since that time, she has studied combat with a zeal that would impress a Belinik priest (and it is a Belinik priest who gave her spell tattoo—a prominent shape on the side of her neck), and has been a member of more than one mercenary company.

Appearance and Personality: Nelka is a tall, thin woman, plain of face, with cold, cruel eyes like black diamonds. Her attitude and posture are almost reptilian—clinical, inhuman, and disinterested. She speaks only in short phrases. While Nelka most often prefers to attack by stealth, she has also been known to charge at foes uttering savage war cries that would chill the heart of a banshee.

Viewpoints on other player characters: Nelka finds Rodyl to be an interesting companion, and recently has found herself entertaining romantic thoughts about him that she isn't quite sure how to deal with. Torok has been a friend ever since they both served with the same mercenary company, and she trusts him implicitly—he has saved her life once, and she has saved his as well. When Ivan first met up with them, she wasn't sure of what to make of him—she'd never met a priest of Erik before. While they have been traveling together, she has decided the young druid can be trusted. Lenora is a bit too forceful in her independence for Nelka's tastes. Nelka knows all about the need to keep men at an arms-length, having been orphaned at a young age, but she thinks Lenora is entirely too militant in the way she goes about it. Finally, Nelka thinks Gregor is without question the very image of the ideal Vos warrior—in fact, he is too perfect! Sooner or later, he's going to show his true colors, and until then, Nelka will watch him like a hawk so that she can catch him in whatever cowardly or treacherous act he will commit.

TOROK VILYALMIN

3rd-level Male Half-Elf (Vos) Ranger

STR 13

DEX 15

CON 14

INT 14

WIS 15

CHA 13

HP: 20

AL: CG

Height: 5'9"

Weight: 160

Eyes: Ice-blue

Hair: Blond

Bloodline: None

Ranger Abilities:

Hide in Shadows: 25% (without cloak)

Move Silently: 27%

Weapon Proficiencies: Long sword, dagger, longbow, dart

Languages Spoken: Vos, Sidhelien (elvish)

Non-weapon Proficiencies: Herbalism, running, animal handling, riding (horse), riding (varsk)

Species Enemy: Goblins

Magical Items: +1 longbow, cloak of elvenkind

Armor Worn: Studded leather

Money: 21 gp, 6 sp, 1 25 gp gem

Background: Both of Torok's parents are half-elf druids (followers of Erik), which live in one of the forests of the realm of the Manticore. When he reached adulthood, he chose to see more of Vosgaard, and has been traveling ever since that time. His eventual goal is set foot in every Vos province, even the much-feared Ice Marches, Mistmoor, and Battle-Fens. He teaches his knowledge of herbs to any who ask, and is always willing to help with an intractable animal. He has recently met up with Ivan Klibitski, a priest of Erik and friend of his parents.

Appearance and Personality: Torok doesn't show many elven features—his build is human, and his blonde hair is very human. However, his hands are long and fine, and his speaking voice carries the enthralling ring of his nonhuman parentage. He is a quiet, open-minded man who practices his faith with every word and deed.

Viewpoints on other player characters: Torok is familiar with the xenophobia that underlies Rodyl's cool treatment of him, and he is grateful that his traveling companion is intelligent and civilized enough not to let his fears boil over into hatred—he has seen the way his friend Nelka gazes at Rodyl when she thinks no one is watching. He also sees that Rodyl is oblivious to Nelka's feelings, and Torok occasionally wonders if he should take on the role of "match-maker." Torok took an immediate liking to Ivan when the young druid joined the party, and he suspects Ivan is destined for great things in the church of Erik. Lenora he is rather ambivalent toward—she's already proven herself a powerful fighter and a worthy member of the party, so why does she feel obliged to keep proving it? is the kind of woman Rodyl envisions himself marrying someday—a strong, self-reliant warrior who will be able to protect their many children while Rodyl hunts for their food. Finally, you're not sure what to make of Gregor. You know that Nelka doesn't trust him, but you constantly find yourself admiring his uncompromising independence; if everyone conducted themselves like Gregor, you feel, Vosgaard would be a much happier land.

IVAN KLIBITSKI

5th-level male priest of Erik

STR 12

DEX 10

CON 14

INT 12

WIS 13

CHA 12

HP: 25

AL: CG

Height: 5'9"

Weight: 150

Eyes: Blue

Hair: Brown

Bloodline: Vorynn, minor, 21

Blood Abilities:

minor—Alter Appearance

minor—Animal Affinity (owl)

major—protection from evil

Spell Spheres: All, Animal, Elemental, Healing, Plant, Summoning, Weather, Divination (minor), Protection (Minor), Travelers (minor)

Priestly Powers: As druid, plus move silent, hide in shadows, and *animal empathy* as an 8th level ranger

Weapon Proficiencies: Spear, sling, dagger

Languages Spoken: Vos, Rjuven (Rjurik)

Non-weapon Proficiencies: Healing, religion, fishing, animal lore, survival (Arctic)

Magical Items: *Staff of curing* (6 charges)

Armor Worn: Studded leather, wooden shield

Money: 12 gp, 8 sp, 9 10 gp gems

Background: Ivan hails from the realm of the Manticore. Sensing a bond with nature at a young age, his parents sent him to live with a small circle of druids in the forest. Ivan matured under the tutelage of the followers of Erik. He has since traveled through much of eastern Cerilia, spending most of his time in Vosgaard and the Rjurik highlands. After his most recent return to his druid tutors, he was asked to find and deliver a message to a young ranger named Torok, the son of two of the members of the circle. Ivan found him about a month ago in Velenoye, and has decided to stay with the wandering ranger for a while.

Appearance and Personality: Ivan is a handsome young man with fine features and a crooked smile. He prefers to attempt to find peaceful resolutions to conflicts, and will usually try to negotiate with a foe if at all possible. To his mind, a solution where neither side in a conflict is left happy with the outcome, or where both sides are left happy, is the ideal resolution to any situation.

Viewpoints on other player characters: Ivan enjoys the company of Torok, but is somewhat uncomfortable with his traveling companions. He is disturbed by Nelka's swings from icy calm to almost elemental rages, does not understand the thinly veiled dislike that Rodyl shows toward him, is occasionally frustrated by the cold shoulder Lenora constantly has turned toward his friend Torok, and he dislikes Gregor's arrogance, for while he is indeed a masterful warrior, giving respect to one's betters is simply part of the natural order. Still, there is no doubt in Ivan's mind that any of his traveling companions would put their lives on the line in order to save his.

LENORA TAVAROS

5th-level Female Vos Warrior

STR 17

DEX 9

CON 16

INT 13

WIS 12

CHA 13

HP: 36

AL: LN

Height: 5'5"

Weight: 160

Eyes: Black

Hair: Brown

Bloodline: Brenna, tainted, 9

Blood Abilities: None

Weapon Proficiencies: Spear, long sword (specialized), dagger, short bow, flail

Languages Spoken: Vos

Non-weapon Proficiencies: Survival (Arctic), cooking, riding (varsk), endurance, read/write selevyek (pictographic runes)

Magical Items: *Potion of healing*, +1 dagger

Armor Worn: Banded mail

Money: 38 gp, 5 25 gp gems

Background: Lenora's parents would have been happy to have her married off to some merchant or influential soldier, but the young woman had other plans. Never willing to be subservient to a man, she practiced in secret until she was confident enough, then applied for the soldiery of Rovninodensk—and was accepted. After serving for four years, the strong-willed woman had built a reputation for herself; she left the military and began a life as a traveling sell-sword. She has recently come to Velenoye, knowing that its proximity to the Sword Rust Tribes and the goblins of Lutkhovsky mean that the opportunities for battle—and glory—aren't far away. Eventually, she would like to use her reputation to start her own mercenary company, and possibly retire as the regent of a province.

Appearance and Personality: Lenora is a burly woman of broad and handsome features. Her smile is bright, open, and draws attention away from the large scar on her neck (acquired in a battle against the goblins of Kal Kalathor). She doesn't believe in being "womanly" and has no time for social pleasantries—getting the job done is all she cares about, and most talk is just a waste of time. She is more than happy to demonstrate her great strength on anyone foolish enough to disparage it. Her long brown hair is worn back in a ponytail, with bones of various creatures woven into it.

Viewpoints on other player characters: Lenora has decided that her current traveling companions might very well be the heart of the mercenary company she intends to form one day. They are all brave and skilled warriors, and are also mostly trust-worthy—they all have their quirks, but most can be excused. She keeps trying to position herself as the leader of the party, something which often brings her into conflict with the disgustingly arrogant Gregor. She also struggles regularly with giving Torok the respect he is due—not only is he a man, but he is part elf. Lenora doesn't like or trust non-humans. Rodyl might be a more palatable companion if he didn't keep making veiled slams against the priestesses of Kriesha. While they are not perfect by any stretch of the imagination, Lenora admires their strength, and she shares their belief that she should be the preeminent deity worshipped in Vosgaard—perhaps even the *only* deity. Nelka is the companion Lenora has the most respect for. Here is a woman who has been on her own from a very young age, who understands why women must be independent and protective of themselves and each other, and who lives by the warrior code in almost all things. If only she would stop turning their conversations from battle and tactics to the topic of Rodyl and his value to the party.

GREGOR ROGALOV

4th-level Male Vos Warrior

STR 16

DEX 10

CON 15

INT 9

WIS 11

CHA 15

HP: 29

AL: CN

Height: 6'3"

Weight: 240

Eyes: Blue

Hair: White-blond

Bloodline: None

Weapon Proficiencies: War spear (specialized), throwing axe, flail, bastard sword

Armor Worn: Banded mail (with armor spikes)

Languages Spoken: Vos

Non-weapon Proficiencies: Weather sense, singing, fire-building, blacksmithing, survival

Armor Worn: Banded mail (with armor spikes)

Magical items: +2 ring of protection, ring of vampiric regeneration

Money: 80 gp, 50 sp, 3 50 gp gems

Background: Gregor has always been powerful and handsome, and is used to getting what he wants. What he lacks in intellect, he more than makes up for in physical presence and charm. He is friendly to people who show him respect, but is openly disdainful of those that act superior to him. He is honest, even if he is occasionally cruel in showing it. He has a soft spot for farmers, having been born to a poor farming family.

Appearance and Personality: Gregor is the image of a Vos warrior, the sort that an Anuirean mother uses as a bogeyman to warn her unruly children. Tall, broad, and powerful, his shock of white hair seems to personify him as a physical manifestation of the fury of the stark winters of his homeland. He is admired by Vos men and women alike as the epitome of a true warrior's ferocity and power. Gregor is a natural leader, and it is second nature for him to attempt to take control of any group of people he finds himself with.

Viewpoints on other player characters: Gregor likes everyone of his current traveling companions, and he thinks that when he someday looks back on the time he spent with them, that he will remember it as some of the most glorious times he's had; they are all brave and worthy companions, and none of them have violated honor or the warrior's code yet. The most problematic party member for Gregor is Lenora. She is clearly a warrior of great skill, and he suspects that she might even be somewhat more intelligent than he is, but her need to be in charge of the party seems to be greater than her actual leadership ability. Gregor tries to let her take charge, realizing that she is too valuable a companion to alienate, but he will step in if it appears she is being too gung-ho.