

POST-APOCALYPTIC DISPATCH

#10

INFERNO

BY DOMINIC COVEY

Inferno is an adventure for higher-level characters that pits the party against what at first seems to be a living wall of fire that threatens to destroy an entire tribal village high in the forested mountains. Soon the PCs realize there is far more to this firestorm than they first thought, and end up fighting a desperate battle to save the innocent villagers from a danger that threatens to wipe them and their village from the map.

Inferno is designed for character of levels 12-14.

BACK STORY

The PCs are about to walk into a war that neither they, nor even the villagers, are aware is coming. The “Festival of Songs” is approaching, a tribal celebration in which the headman’s only daughter is to be wed to a mate who may eventually become chief of the entire village. It is an important event and a favorite celebration of the villagers, but this time around a dark cloud looms over the festivities.

Tuwan, a local trapper living at the far edge of the village, had high hopes of marrying the headman’s daughter, whom he has been obsessed with since he was young. But being rather homely, and viewed by many as a somewhat eccentric hermit, he knew his chances of being accepted were slim. Heading off one day to check his traps steeped in a gloomy mood, by some twist of fortune Tuwan stumbled upon an old crashed military truck deep in the woods that contained artifacts (weapons) of the Ancients, overgrown

but apparently still intact.

Considering it a stroke of good luck, Tuwan kept the find secret, hoping to use the stash to convince Jacinta, the tribe’s healer and “wise woman”, to look on him favorably. By tradition the chief of the village came around to Jacinta’s shack before the Festival of Songs, and would ask her to “divine” who would be most suited as a husband for his daughter. Thus, using the artifacts as a bribe, he hoped Jacinta would put in a good word for him, but his plan backfired. Jacinta was angered by his attempt, and denounced him outright. Ashamed and humiliated, Tuwan retreated to his hut on the outskirts of the village.

As the Festival approached, Tuwan’s humiliation grew into petty anger. He decided he would exact some sort of vengeance on the village, to show Jacinta



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that she had made a poor decision. Half-drunk he wandered into the woods and built a fire. In an act of foolish destructiveness he set the trees on fire to begin a localized forest fire, hoping it would spread to the outskirts of the village and begin burning homes. Jacinta would surely see this as a sign from the mountain spirits that she had turned away the best choice for future chief - or so he thought.

But the fire grew out of control. Instead of sweeping towards the village, the prevailing winds caused the fire to move east, sweeping over the mountain and *away* from the village, into a neighboring valley. Tuwan cursed his fickle luck.

Bad luck indeed. Dwelling in the neighboring valley, unseen and unheard for generations, was a secret community of *mongoliant*s, giant mutants that once ruled this part of the Twisted Earth in a terrible empire known as the “Mongoliant Horde”. Shattered long ago, the survivors had degenerated into tribal outcasts scattered across the most distant places. This village in particular had come to make the forested mountain valleys their home, giving up their former ways of depravation and raiding to become master woodsmen, hunters, and trackers. Though giants, they no longer sought to dominate other people, but merely to live alone in peace. They were long aware of the human village on the other side of the mountain, but never made contact, preferring to remain in isolation and undiscovered.

When the forest fire was lit by Tuwan, it spread into the valley with the hidden mongoliant village. Being entirely out of season, the mongoliant came to suspect that the humans had somehow discovered their location and had started the forest fire to try and wipe them out. Incensed (as much as by the fact that the humans were trying to kill them as by the wanton damage the forest fire was causing), the mongoliant decided to strike back, using their uncanny knowledge of the forest to re-direct the fires back towards the human village. Moving through the smoke and

STORIES OF THE HILLS

PCs asking around about the mountains they’re traveling to may have a chance to hear a few rumors and stories before the adventure begins. At your discretion some of this information may also be learned from the tribal villagers once the PCs arrive at the village. A Gather Information or Knowledge (Twisted Earth) check will uncover a few bits of information, as shown below.

DC 16: The Mountains are extremely rugged, and no sane man would go there without a tribal guide knowledgeable in how to survive. Even the rivers are barely navigable, though some tribal folk have been known to use the rivers to travel down the mountains by raft.

DC 21: Stories have it that during the Final War the armies of the Ancients traveled through these mountains en route to distant battlefields. Treasure-hunters still search the mountains for any sign of artifacts that might have been buried, cached, or simply lost along the way.

DC 25: Stories of the mountain folk speak of mysterious giants that once lived in the mountains, creatures with a close affinity to nature. Master trackers and hunters, legend has it these mountain giants died out generations ago. The world is a sadder place without them, as they were said to be peaceful creatures despite their monstrous appearance.

between towering infernos, the mutated giants have quietly set out to destroy the tribal village before they can mount an effective defense. It’s all-out war.

The PCs arrive just a few days before the Festival of Songs. The forest fires have already begun, but the tribals aren’t concerned since they seem to have moved away into the neighboring valley...

GETTING STARTED

The adventure begins as the PCs arrive in the small tribal village high up in the mountains. The village itself is rather prosperous and peaceful, a fact that has drawn the attention of the major merchant groups of the low country (such as the Clean or, if situated elsewhere, the CrystalTime). Because they aren’t warlike, civilized groups have begun trading with these people, delivering goods the tribal’s can’t otherwise get in exchange for water from the river on whose shores the village is built, as well as wood from the surrounding forest.

The PCs come to the village delivering the trade goods to reward the tribals for a particularly productive logging season. That is where the adventure begins.

The journey through the mountains has been surprisingly dangerous, as the only trail leading higher and higher up into the heights is entirely unsuited for pack animals. At one point you had to give up your mules to make the last leg of the trip, crossing shallow streambeds and walking up a rocky trail towards the village hidden deep in the forest.

As you turn the last bend, you hear the sound of wood chopping, chickens clucking, and children’s laughter. There, spread out beneath the foliage, is a small village of wooden huts and cabins. An unusually strong smell of smoke fills the clearing, and over the rooftops, and on the other side of the looming, forested peak the village is built under; you see that the entire sky has turned the color of amber smoke.

As the PCs arrive they are quickly greeted by a few villagers, who gather around to help them unload their wares and take them off to a storage cabin. The PCs notice that the people are in a particularly cheery and welcoming mood, and if they ask they are given brief references to the upcoming “Festival of Songs”, for which preparations are already underway. If they ask any of the tribals in specific about the festival, read the following:

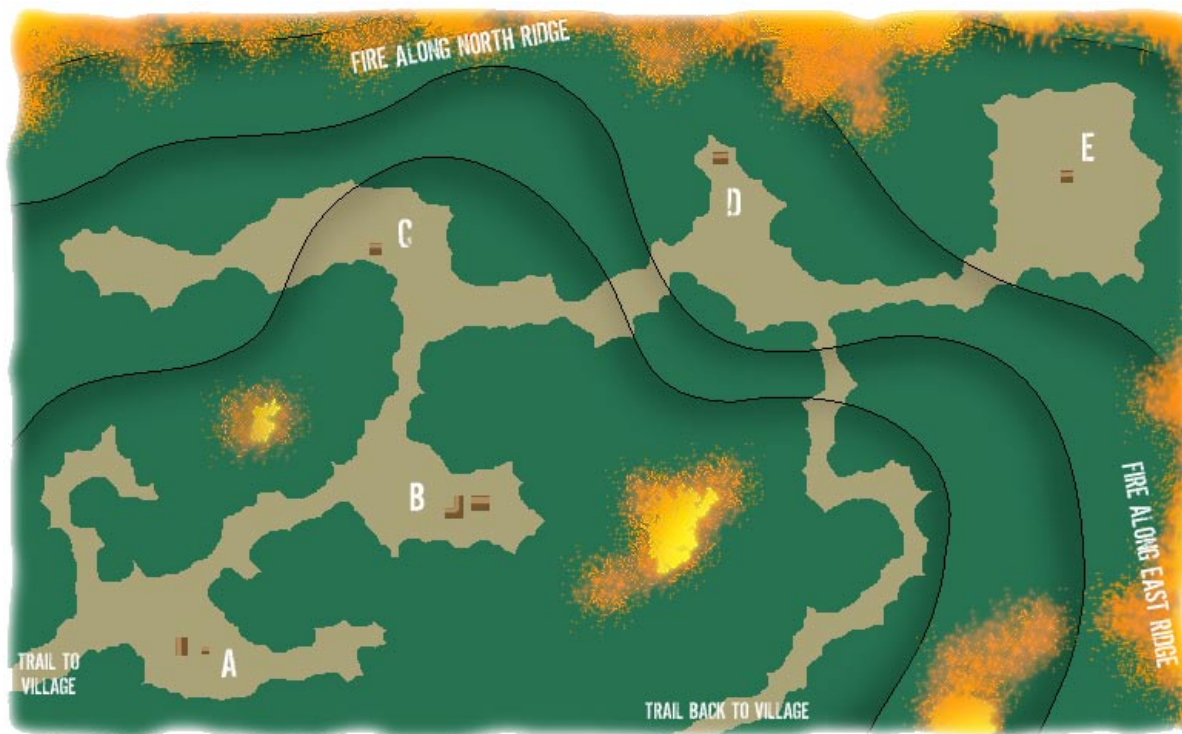
“The Festival of Songs is a big celebration for our people. The chief’s daughter is ready to marry, and the spirits will choose a husband for her who will one day become chief.”

Eventually the PCs are met by the village chief, a jovial middle-aged man who personally thanks them for making the long trip on behalf of their merchant employers. He tells them that the supplies will be important for the tribe to weather the winter.

If at some point in the conversation the PCs ask about the smell of smoke, or the smoky sky, the chief apparently shrugs it off.

“A forest fire. They happen each year, though this one is a bit late in the season. It started closer to the village and grew almost overnight. But the winds have blown it into the next valley. There is nothing to worry about.”

The chief invites the PCs to stay and rest before heading back they way the came. After having traveled for miles over excruciatingly bad terrain, the PCs should feel inclined to take the chief up on his offer. If they agree, as guests of the chief he makes room for them in his own lodge near the center of the village. The furnishings are primitive (furs and skins), but are considerably better than sleeping out in the woods. They are fed, and as evening closes in the chief entertains them in his hall with musicians



and a visitation from his daughter (describe her how you want; she should strike the PCs as graceful and attractive - for a tribal - and quite excited about the upcoming Festival; her whole life has been spent waiting for this moment, and she is sure the spirits will select someone right for her to marry).

THE NEXT DAY

The next day, as the PCs emerge ready to leave, they find the chief, two woodsmen scouts, and a few advisors standing outside the chief’s lodge staring out at the sky. If the PCs look, they notice that the early morning light has been drowned out by angry black smoke clouds that fill every corner of sky. What’s more striking, however, is that towards the horizon the

forest seems to literally “glow” with a hellish orange light, creating a false sunrise that stretches from horizon to horizon. By the look on the chief’s face, something is wrong.

“Perhaps I was mistaken...” the chief begins, and seeing the deep woods scouts at his side you surmise the situation has changed since last night. “Overnight the wildfire seems to have doubled back and returned over the mountain. The fire now burns all along the north and east ridges, about a half mile from the village. My scouts say the fire now blocks the only trail out of town. But you are welcome to stay here until the fire burns itself out.”

The chief admits that there is some potential danger to the village, and he is looking for volunteers to head out to the outlying village homes to gather up the people and move them to temporary shelter closer to the heart of the village. But for now there is no need to panic or evacuate the whole settlement, and if the fire sweeps closer to the village the tribe can simply move on down the mountain out of its path.

If the PCs volunteer for the task of heading out to the outlying homes they will earn considerable points with the chief, who will nod and accept their offer.

The route the PCs will be taking will take them past several outlying homes, including one of the local merchants, the village healer, and others. The chief asks the characters to convince the people to leave their homes and follow the party, but since there is no immediate danger of running out of space in town they can bring any belongings they can carry. Once the PCs have evacuated everyone they are to bring the tribesfolk back into the village where they will be quartered in an outbuilding of the chief's lodge.

A. SMALL FAMILY (EL 3)

The smell of smoke is strong here, and in the distance you hear the crack-sizzle-pop of trees burning. The glow is stronger here as well, and through the forest you can see the hellish glow towards the north and east.

The first hut is some ten minutes from the village, sitting along the forested path. A half-naked tribesman with a bucket of water in hand watches you warily from the doorway as you approach.

This hut is the home of a small family (husband, wife, three boys aged 6-14). When the PCs arrive the tribesman, Yermo, is preparing to defend his home from the fire (with a bucket of water). He is wary of the strangers, but a Diplomacy check (DC 16) - and an explanation of the danger - gets him to listen. If the

characters mention they have been sent by the chief, they get a +4 bonus to their check.

Once the PCs convince the man to evacuate, he runs inside and gathers his wife and children. Yermo's wife is noticeably frightened, but his oldest son (14) seems to react intelligently and does as his father says, gathering up their hunting spears, skins, and some food and water. Eventually Yermo gets his wife and other son out of the house, but their third - and youngest - is missing.

As the wife begins to enter a panic, allow the PCs to make a Spot check at DC 16. Those who succeed see the young boy running towards the hut (from the short trail winding just northwest of the family's hut; see map), breathing heavily. He has an excited look on his face. When he reaches them, before his mother and father can scold him, he giggles and shouts: *"I saw them! The spirits of the fire! I saw them!"*

Though the PCs may be intrigued, his mother and father will have nothing of his tall tales, and admonish him for lying, especially under such serious conditions. If the PCs try to question him about what he saw (which amounts to having seen "strange shapes" moving behind the fires some 200 yards from their current position), he refuses to speak, afraid of getting into more trouble with his parents.

GM's Note: The boy was watching the towering flames in awe when he spotted a small group of mongolians moving behind the advancing wall of fire. He didn't get a good look at them due to the distortion in the air caused by the heat. The creatures slinked back into the woods when they realized they had been spotted; if the PCs go to take a look, they are no longer there.

B. MERCHANT'S HOME (EL 0)

With the small family trailing behind you you come to a somewhat larger wooden cabin with a barn-like outbuilding standing out back. Red hot ash and cinders rain down from above, a

reminder that the fire is getting close.

Already a large family of tribespeople have gathered outside the cabin, stacking boxes and sacks filled with their belongings on the ground. A small dog barks and yips excitedly at all the activity, as father, mother, four daughters, and three young sons hurriedly empty out what must be every possession the family has in expectance of your arrival.

This is the cabin of one of the village's more prosperous merchants; one of the local tribesmen who have made a bundle due to the expanding relations the village has had with the traders from beyond the mountains. A frugal and fiesty man, the trader, Ernan, hopes to save everything he can before the fire claims his home. His wife, having become used to their life of luxury, is in tears, as are his daughters. His sons don't have time to cry, too afraid of getting a whipping if they don't get everything ready for the PCs. When the characters arrive Ernan runs over to them and seems shocked that so few have been sent "to help carry his belongings" back into town. He tells them that there just aren't enough of them to do the job, and suggests they head back immediately to get more help.

Ernan is in a state of denial and disbelief, and the PCs will have to shake him out of it. A bit self-important, he must be instructed that the PCs are only here to evacuate the tribesfolk (not carry their baggage), and that they can only take what they can carry. The rest will have to be left behind. Unless the PCs do this diplomatically (Diplomacy DC 22) Ernan will be insulted by their curt manners; though this has no immediate effect (other than to shock the man back to reality), Ernan will forever look on them unfavorably.

Regardless, eventually Ernan gets the idea and breaks the bad news to his family. At first they try to bribe Yermo's family to drop their possessions

and carry theirs (which doesn't work), then Ernan and his family finally come around and start picking the most valuable things - with much argument amongst themselves - to take with them. In the entire encounter should take about ten to fifteen minutes; though the PCs aren't under any real pressure to get moving, it should feel like forever!

C. JACINTA THE HEALER (EL 0)

The trail has gotten rougher and rockier as you ascend higher up the mountain. The forest grows thicker, but every now and again you see through the gaps between trunks the brilliant glow of the impending inferno. It seems to have grown, burning along the entire northern stretch of the forest. Up ahead you see a small hut under a cluster of trees, from which hang a collection of animal skulls and antlers.

A few deer break from the nearby trees and bound off down the trail, so frightened by the coming firestorm that they almost ignore you and the people following close behind.

As you approach the hut the hide curtain over the door opens and an attractive young woman with dark skin and soft full lips emerges, apparently unburdened by the heavy pack, bedroll, and numerous small bags and curious potion bottles dangling from her back and belt. "Ready to go", she says.

The woman is Jacinta, the village healer and "holy person". Like many of the other villagers she is an exotic black/hispanic mix and strikes the party as quite lovely. As with many tribal cultures the people of the village see their healer as a wise woman, who communes with the spirits of nature and uses "magic" to create ointments and unguents that heal the sick and pluck the dying back from the edge of death's precipice.

As much as she is valued and respected by the

people of the village, Jacinta is also a clear-headed and level-minded woman of no little skill. She's surprised to see a bunch of strangers there to lead her back to the village, but it lasts for only a moment; if the chief has sent them, then they must be worth his trust (otherwise he's desperate, but in either case there's no point in questioning the party's capabilities). She's already gotten her things ready - some mundane supplies as well as a few medicines for the treatment of burns and other injuries, which will be much needed by the other villagers - and is poised to move out.

Without further delay, the party can continue to their next stop.

GM's Note: Jacinta may prove useful throughout the adventure, tending to the party's wounds and giving sound advice. Since she tends to go where the party goes, her statistics are given below.

Jacinta (Mutant Strong Hero 3/Juju Doctor 4): CR 7; Medium-size humanoid; HD 3d8+6 plus 4d8+8; HP 46; Mas 14; Init +1; Spd 30 ft; Defense 15, touch 15, flatfooted 14 (+0 size, +1 Dex, +4 class); BAB +5; Grap +5; Atk +5 melee (1d8, spear), or +6 ranged (1d8, spear); FS 5 ft by 5 ft; Reach 5 ft; SQ medical incompatibility, immune to poison; AL Villagers; SV Fort +8, Ref +2, Will +7; AP 3; Rep +2; Str 10, Dex 12, Con 14, Int 13, Wis 15, Cha 9.

Occupation: Healer (Craft [pharmaceutical], Treat Injury).

Background: Tribal (Survival).

Mutations and Defects: Superior Kidney Development.

Skills: Craft (pharmaceutical) +12, Diplomacy +1, Knowledge (Ancient Lore) +2, Knowledge (Behavioral Sciences) +3, Knowledge (Earth and Life Sciences) +3, Knowledge (History) +2, Knowledge (Mutant Lore) +3, Knowledge (Theology and Philosophy) +2, Knowledge (Twisted Earth) +3, Listen +4, Research +3, Spot +4, Survival +10, Swim

+3, Treat Injury +14.

Feats: Archaic Weapons Proficiency, Endurance, Iron Will, Juju Medicine, Primitive Technology, Quick Treatment, Remove Defect, Shaman [B&L], Simple Weapons Proficiency.

Talents (Strong Hero): Extreme Effort, Improved Extreme Effort.

Talents (Juju Doctor): Juju Specialist +1, Brew Potion (DW), Expert Healer, Juju Mastery.

Possessions: Spear, bone jewelry, body paint, backpack, juju kit, twelve *juju potions* (1d4+4), two doses of *garo potion*, five doses of *safar oil*, bandages, bottles of burn cream, various charms and talismans.

D. MASSACRE (EL 0)

You hear the sound of tree branches falling as they are consumed with flame, but so far the forest fire hasn't reached where you are - but it soon will. You skirt a small wooded rise, where a wooden hut sits near an old ramshackle well.

The villagers, growing tired, stop at the base of the rise until the PCs can check it out. If the PCs call out, no one answers their call, and everyone present notices it is unusually *quiet* here. After a moment, the small dog belonging to Ernan's family begins to bark, then whine pitifully, hiding behind its master. Jacinta senses something in the dog's behavior, and insists on going with the PCs up to the cabin.

Approaching the hut through the trees the PCs immediately recognize signs of foul play. A scene of carnage is spread out in the small area in front of the house. The PCs find the bodies of a man, woman, and teenage boy, the former and latter still clutching hatchets. All three bodies appear to have been cleaved almost in half in a single stroke, and left for dead just outside of the protection of their hut. If the PCs step inside, nothing appears to have been taken; a few of the family's belongings lie scattered outside, but these items were no doubt being taken by the villagers when

they realized they had to flee.

When Jacinta sees the dead she stifles a cry of surprise; though death is nothing new to her, apparently she has never seen injuries like this. If the PCs ask she can identify the dead, and assures the PCs that none of the family survived the mysterious massacre. A Treat Injury check (DC 22) or Investigate check (DC 16) by either the PCs or Jacinta reveals that the injuries were likely caused by bladed weapons, behind which was an “enormous force”. Jacinta is at a total loss to explain what has happened here, but she tells the PCs that when they get back they must inform the chief right away.

A character thinking of it may try to use Tracking, but a Survival check (DC 28) only uncovers signs of recent passage (trampled grass, broken tree branches, etc.), but not individual tracks. Apparently whoever or whatever killed these people took great pains to avoid being followed back to wherever it came from.

When the PCs return to the refugees the ashen looks on their faces spell out what they’ve seen. Ernan is the first to speak.

“What’s wrong? Aren’t they coming? Are they already dead? What’s going on? If they’re already dead, then let’s head back. Forget Tuwan, that damned hermit. He’s probably dead too; the fires are getting hotter and closer and I’ll bet his house is already up in flames. Let’s get back to the village before it’s too late!”

The other villagers murmur in agreement - apparently none of them has any love for the hermit living further up the trail. Even Jacinta seems hesitant to risk her life for the man, but eventually her sense of duty gets the best of her. She cuts Ernan off before he can convince the others to head back on their own (with or without the PCs), and tells them that Tuwan deserves to be warned just like everyone else. With that, she defiantly leads the way up the trail, albeit with a

quicken step - after having seen the mysterious massacre, she doesn’t want to be away from the village any longer than she has to!

GM’s Note: The family living in this hut had the tragic experience of being the first victims of the vengeful mongolians from the forgotten village over the mountains. The mongolians took no pleasure in killing them but did what they had to defend their settlement, and left the humans where they lay, without looting them, letting the fires take their bodies.

E. THE HERMIT (EL 3)

You can now feel the heat swirling through the air - the fire is here. The villagers, terrified but silent, quickly follow behind, a few of them thinking twice about bringing so much stuff and dropping unneeded items along the path. The forest all around burns with a yellow-orange-red fire, and plumes of smoke curl and lash like whips from nearby tree trunks before rising into the pitch-black sky.

Jacinta stops as a small shack comes into view at the end of the rocky trail. Beyond lies the forest, brightly burning wherever you sweep your eyes.

If the PCs think to ask why this “hermit” is so loathed, a distasteful look comes over her face. A Diplomacy check (DC 22) or Charisma check (DC 16) gets her to talk.

“Tuwan has long been an outcast, because he doesn’t know how to get along. He is always looking for a way out of his duties, always looking to do things as cheaply and easily as possible, or trying to get others to do it for him. He doesn’t share the burdens of the other villagers.”

She says no more, but a Sense Motive check (DC 16) reveals she may know more than she’s letting on. However, she will not speak of it (namely Tuwan’s shameful attempt to bribe her into giving him her blessing to marry the chief’s daughter in the upcoming Festival of Songs).

Near the little shack the PCs find a man standing there, staring out at the fire that looms all around his home, spreading further west along the northern edge of the village with each passing minute. A look of awe - and horror - is clearly etched on his face. The man is Tuwan, the “hermit” of the village. As the PCs approach the man turns with tears in his eyes. Without needing to be convinced, he seems eager to go. A Spot check (DC 16) notices that he avoids looking at Jacinta, as if ashamed of something.

Tuwan runs back to his shack and asks for one of the PCs to help him get his things. If the PCs follow, they find the interior of the hut relatively cluttered, with furs and skins hanging to dry, and old metal traps stored from hooks on the roof. Tuwan explains that he’s a trapper, and the traps are his livelihood; without them he won’t be able to make a living.

As he speaks, packing a backpack with some more valuable skins, any PC present will easily notice numerous empty gourds scattered about, as well as two or three empty jerry cans of kerosene lying on the floor near the back of the building. The smell of alcohol and kerosene is hard not to notice...

If the PCs ask Tuwan about the gourds (which if sniffed smell of whiskey) or the jerry cans, Tuwan becomes suspiciously defensive and tries to change the subject, bluffing that they must hurry - “no time for questions!” A Sense Motive check isn’t needed for them to realize he is guilty of something, and he’s covering up with bluster.

Smart players should figure out what’s going on. If the PCs put any sort of pressure on him (physical or psychological), the simple tribal quickly cracks and admits what happened:

“I admit it! It’s my fault! It’s all my fault! I lit the fire! Are you happy?! I lit the fire! Why you ask? Revenge! Jacinta refused to give me her blessing for the Festival of Songs! I wanted to marry the chief’s daughter; but Jacinta said no! Who is she to say no to me? What does any other villager have that I do not? Why am I not deserving? And...and I was drunk. I wasn’t thinking clearly. I thought if I started a small fire, there would be some damage, and Jacinta would see it as a sign that she’d made the wrong decision about me. But I never thought it would grow out of control! When it moved away from the village I thought my worries were over. I thought we were safe. But now the fire has doubled-back and is threatening the entire village. I’m sorry! I never meant this to happen!”

Tuwan begins to break down. If Jacinta is present, she confirms that Tuwan came to her trying to bribe her into deciding in his favor in the upcoming Festival. She looks at Tuwan with a mixture of pity and disdain.

Tuwan begs the PCs to be merciful, but Jacinta assures him that that decision is up to the chief. Without anything further she turns and joins the other villagers, starting back towards the village. Tuwan follows behind like a shamed animal, consigned to whatever fate is in store.

GM’s Note: If any of the PCs lingers behind, allow her to make a Listen check at DC 28. Even with a success the PC hears nothing over the raging fires, but instead she “senses” something unusual, as if she were being watched from somewhere out in the burning forest (in fact a few mongolians are out there, watching from hiding). No matter how hard she tries to look, she doesn’t see anything, and after a few moments the hairs on the back of her neck diminish.

Development: If the PCs don’t lean on Tuwan

as suggested in the text above they may not learn the information given in this section, but it probably won’t change a whole lot. If you feel that his monologue is important you can simply have him confess later to his misdeeds when the mongolians begin to attack the village.

BACK AT THE VILLAGE

When the PCs finally make it back to the village the tribals are close to a state of panic. Read to the players the following:

You eventually make it back to the village down the forest trail. The families you’ve brought from the edge of the forest are met by other grateful villagers, who cast you thankful looks before helping the new arrivals to the chief’s lodgings.

When word reaches him that you’ve completed your mission, the chief approaches. He is accompanied by two or three warriors, but his woodsmen are no longer present. A grave look shows on his seasoned face.

“Thank you for what you have done. But I seem to have made a grave mistake. The fires have spread further than I thought they could. My scouts report that the fire has spread from the east slope all across the north ridge, and now it has begun to curl around the west side of the village.”

Any tribal character, or any other character making a Knowledge (Earth & Life Sciences) check at DC 22, realizes that this is absolutely not natural behavior for a forest fire. But there seems to be no explanation for the seemingly “supernatural” behavior of the ever-growing inferno, which, if the chief is telling the truth, now surrounds the village in a wall of towering flame on the east, north, and west sides.

The chief continues. “We are now trapped. The fire is all around us, and our backs are up against the river. We could escape that way, but crossing the rapids would be impossible for the young and elderly. Even then, there is nothing beyond the river but the deep wilderness. I doubt if many would survive.”

If the PCs explain about Tuwan, the chief grows angry. He orders Tuwan locked away in his lodge until there can be a decision by the village elders on what to do with him. However, the chief seems somewhat relieved when he hears about Tuwan, as if he suspected something “else” was behind the fires.

If and when the PCs bring up the massacre scene they came across (Jacinta is sure to), or mention the strange feeling they may have had at the Hermit’s shack in the forest, the chief is suddenly shaken from his relief, as are his bodyguards. He asks Jacinta her opinion on the matter, but she is as baffled as anyone.

The warriors look to one another with curious looks that seem to suggest they know something you do not. The chief gives them a sharp look, and then explains.

“Many in the village are starting to think that the fires are the work of spirits, spirits of the mountain and the forest. They say they are angry, but about what we do not know.”

Just then a lean young man runs up, spear in hand, cloth over his face. He pulls it down and breathes heavily for a minute, then speaks.

“Chief, one of the scouts has gone missing in the western wood!”

The warriors gasp and grip their weapons. The chief grinds his teeth for a moment, then looks to you. You know what to do.

THE LOST CACHE

At some point during the adventure (or even afterwards) the PCs may try to find the artifacts Tuwan tried to bribe Jacinta with (assuming she tells them the whole story). This may become especially important if the PCs find themselves under-gunned for their fight with the mongolians.

Whether or not Tuwan proves to be cooperative is up to you. If he hasn't told anyone yet, when the *mongolians* first attack he might tell the PCs about the cache out of fear, leading them in a mad dash during the battle up into the burning woods to the location of the secret cache. If instead he has confessed and was locked up by the chief, most likely he will try to bargain for a lenient sentence from the village elders in exchange for telling the PCs where the cache is. You can roleplay the tense negotiations (while the village is burning), but in the end the chief, out of desperation, will agree to exile Tuwan in exchange for him telling where the artifacts are. The chief has no idea what they are, but if the PCs think they might help he's willing to go along.

Either in the middle of the battle (for example, in the time between the encounter at the *River* and the *Final Stand*), or at any point during the adventure, Tuwan takes the PCs deep into the forest, just a hundred or so yards from his cabin. As the forest burns, he takes them to the wreckage of an old military transport truck, half-buried under thick forest vegetation. In the back is a collection of pre-Fall armaments which have apparently sat here for years, undiscovered until Tuwan found them just a few days ago.

Treasure: The truck was part of a military convoy that fled east into the mountains during the Final War as the Great Enemy swept across the land. This truck in particular careened off of an old mountain road - now long gone - and down a cliff, killing its occupants. The rest of the convoy moved on without time to spare.

The contents of the truck include five *plasma grenades*, two *laser rifles*, two *gauss rifles*, two *power backpacks*, two boxes of gauss rifle ammo (60), and a *magnetic shield B*.

free of flame - can be seen weaving in and out of these fires, but some must certainly be dead ends, leading foolish trespassers to certain death.

Consult the nearby map for an idea of what the western stretch of the forest looks like. The mongolians have already spread the fire here using age-old firefighting techniques that they're people have fostered for generations, and by the time the PCs arrive the forest fire is beyond fighting. However, there are narrow corridors that will allow the PCs to search the woods before everything goes up in flame.

The areas indicated mark solid walls of fire. Each of these walls is 40 to 70 ft. in height, and at least 10 ft. wide (wider in places), and presents a formidable barrier. If PCs try to cross a wall of fire consider using the following rules.

Anyone coming within 10 ft. of a wall of fire takes 2d4 points of fire damage. Anyone coming into contact with (or passing through) the flames takes 2d6+20 points of damage and must save to avoid catching fire (see page 213 of *d20 Modern*). This damage is incurred for every 10 ft. traveled through the flames. The walls of fire cannot easily be extinguished, though PCs with fire extinguishers or similar tools can conceivably exhaust a small section (perhaps 10 ft by 10 ft) if they bend their efforts into doing so.

GM's Note: PCs with immunity to fire, or the ability to fly, could conceivably bypass the danger of these fires without harm and thus should get no experience for the encounter. However, award any party member that goes through a wall (taking damage) as if she had faced an EL 3 encounter. Award this experience bonus only once.

G. FALLING TREE (EL 5)

It's hard to see - and breathe - with all this smoke, but suddenly you are aware of a gut-wrenching cracking sound overhead. Turning,

THE WESTERN WOOD

If and when the PCs head to the Western Wood to find out what's become of the chief's forest scout, Jacinta insists on coming along. Since the scout may be injured, she notes that her skills may be needed. Once they relent, read the following:

You've left the village behind and plunged headfirst into the forest, with Jacinta in tow. The smoke is heavy here, forming a grayish fog that grows lighter in color - but remains no less choking and obscuring - as dawn turns into day. Like a deep fog the smoke obscures vision for very far, and through the miasma the trunks of

trees (some beginning to burn) seem to appear and disappear as the smoke winds its way through the woods.

Wherever the lost scout is, he's going to be hard to find.

F. FIRES (EL SEE BELOW)

A roaring wall of fire, more than forty feet high, soars into the sky, lashing at nearby tree trunks and feeding thirstily off of the dry leaves and vegetation covering the forest floor. The flames seem to wander in elongated lines like rivers of fire, or come together in huge walls that rise like the ramparts of Hell itself. Narrow corridors -

you are just in time to see a coal-black tree trunk, wreathed in flames, falling towards you!

Allow the first two characters in line to make a Reflex save at DC 20 to avoid being caught under the burning tree as it collapses. If either PC fails she is hit for 10d6 points of damage and must make a Strength check at DC 40 to avoid being *pinned* under the burning trunk. If the save is successful she takes no damage and is not at risk of being pinned.

Any character that is struck by the tree must also make a Reflex save (DC 15) to avoid catching fire. A character who fails takes 1d6 points of damage immediately, and on subsequent rounds must make another Reflex save or take another 1d6 points of damage that round. A successful save indicates that the fire goes out. A character may extinguish the flames by rolling on the ground or smothering the fire with blankets, allowing another save with a +4 bonus.

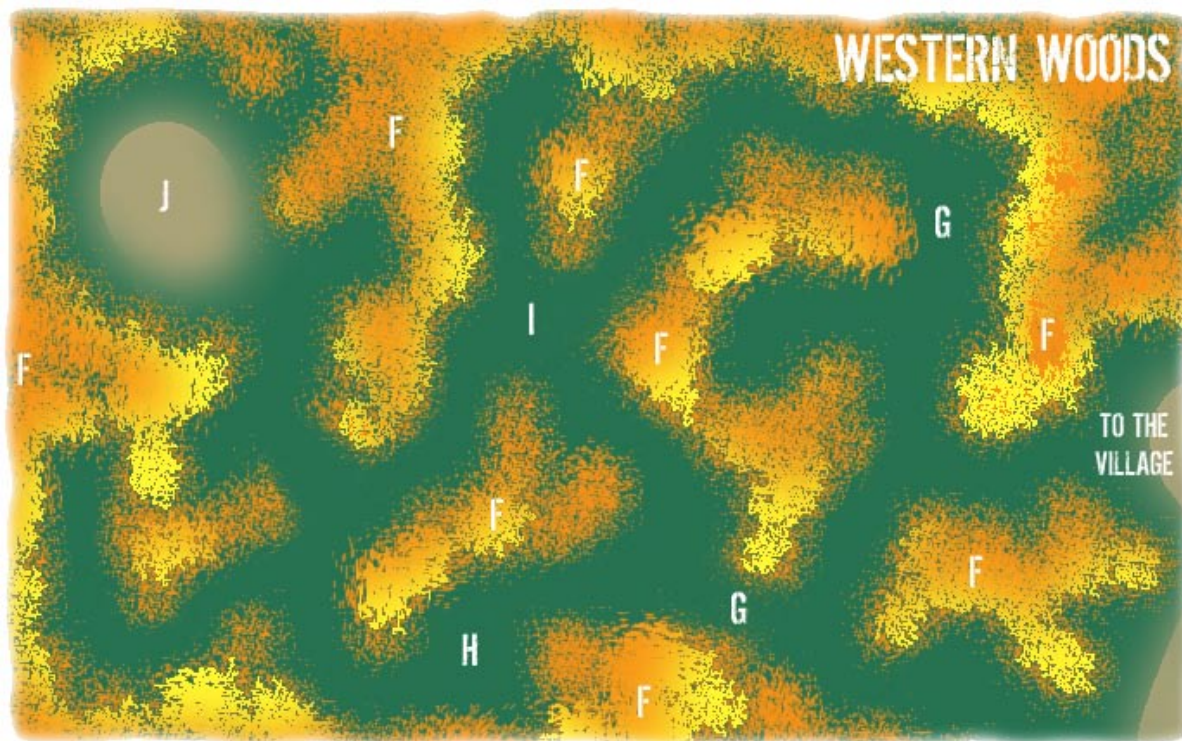
If the PCs lack the strength to free a pinned colleague, they can smash the trunk apart (it is quite brittle).

H. STARTLING EVIDENCE (EL 0)

Whorls of ash soar up in your faces as you press on.

Here the PCs have a chance to notice something lying near where they walk. A Spot check (DC 22) or Search check (DC 16) allows the PCs to notice a crude clay pot lying on its side near the center of the “path”, its rim discolored by some tarry black substance. The pot is rather large (about the size of a cauldron), and seems totally out of place here in the woods. The substance proves to be a form of pitch, and the pot itself seems very crudely made, as if created by primitive hands.

GM’s Note: The pot, while large for a human, is only about the size of a potion bottle for a mongoliant, and was in fact carried by the mongoliant woodsman



Tytan (see the *Dead Scout*) and used to help spread the forest fire down this stretch of the forest, sealing the human village in. This is evidence that the unusual spread of fires has not been a natural phenomenon, and though started by Tuwan, have been perpetuated and indeed *channeled* by creatures that have yet to make an appearance.

I. PANICKED WOLVES (EL 7)

You find yourselves choking and coughing, wondering if heading into the woods was such a good idea. Just then you hear a panicked, ferocious growl, as a pair of huge grey wolves dart towards you, bright yellow teeth flaring. Both are huge specimens, appearing to be brutes

of their species, and by the sight of their smoking fur you can only guess they’ve been driven down from the mountains by the forest fire and right into your path!

The enormous wolves are legendary in these parts as the “spirits of the hunt”, and are considered sacred to the tribe - as such Jacinta will not attack them unless her life depends on it. The creatures will only attack the PCs in a panicked attempt to clear a way down the path; if the PCs run from them, or deliberately move out of their way, the wolves will instead growl at the party menacingly before running off down the path and away from the forest fire.

Smoke: This encounter takes place in an area of heavy smoke. Characters that breath must make a

Constitution check (DC 10, +1 for each previous check) each round or spend that round choking and coughing. Characters who choke for 2 consecutive rounds take 1d6 points of damage. Smoke also obscures vision, giving one-half concealment (20% miss chance) to all characters and creatures within it.

A character can take the precaution of wearing a mask, scarf, or bandana over her face to reduce the DC of the Con check by -4.

Advanced Wolves (2): CR 6; Large animal; HD 8d8+32; HP 67; Mas 19; Init +1; Spd 50 ft; Defense 14, touch 10, flatfooted 13 (-1 size, +1 Dex, +4 natural); BAB +6; Grap +14; Atk +11 melee (1d8+5, bite); Full Atk +11 melee (1d8+5, bite); FS 10 ft by 10 ft; Reach 10 ft; SQ scent, trip, low-light vision; AL none; SV Fort +10, Ref +7, Will +2; AP 0; Rep +0; Str 21, Dex 13, Con 19, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 6.

Skills: Hide -2, Listen +6, Move Silently +3, Spot +4, Survival +1 (+5 when tracking by scent).

Development: If the PCs let the wolves past they will avoid a fight now, but upon returning to the village will find the wolves killed a number of the unprepared villagers before brought down by the tribe's warriors.

J. DEAD SCOUT (EL 15)

Smoke clings to ground of this clearing, and is illuminated by leaping orange flames that send swirling shadows dancing across the burning, smoking grass. In the center of the small smoky glade is a dead body - the deep woods scout - pinned to the earth by what appears to be a long slim spear with feathers on one end. A look of inhuman terror is still frozen on the man's face, and you can't tell if he died from the sudden impalement or from a heart attack brought on by what he saw in the last moments of his life.

Jacinta stares, wide eyed, before spitting out these words: "That's no spear - that's an arrow!"

At this point allow the PCs (and Jacinta) to make a Spot check vs. the Hide check of *Tytan* (he gets +14 to his Hide roll), the mongoliant stalker hiding just out of sight among the burning trees.

Renowned as a stealthy woodsman among his own people, *Tytan* was sent ahead of the rest of the mongoliant tribe to spread the forest fire along the east flank of the village and seal in the human settlement so that the people would be trapped within. *Tytan* used pots filled with pitch to grease up the dry underbrush, effectively "painting" the way for the fire to spread. But he isn't alone. A few other mongoliant are nearby, pulling back deeper into the woods at this very moment, but he has remained, his acute senses telling him that someone is near.

Tytan killed the deep woods scout with his bow to avoid being seen, and has been observing the PCs as they stumble through the forestfire. When they reach this clearing he waits in ambush. He doesn't necessarily want a fight, but if the PCs spot him he will attack with his bow before engaging in melee. If this is the case, read the following:

Looking around, you think you see something crouching in the woods just out of sight. It's gigantic, a monstrous humanoid as large as any mythical ogre, with bumpy leathery skin and a face straight out of a horror story. Two small black eyes stare at you, but they are unevenly placed on its monstrous head. Its nose is shrunken into its face, and one ear hangs higher than the other. Tufts of hair top its slightly peaked head, and the rest of its body appears equally deformed, with one large arm and one small, and a bundle of muscle for a torso. Streaks of black paint have been added to it to provide camouflage, which seems ridiculous on something so huge.

The creature has apparently been watching

you for some time, cradling an enormous bow in hand. When you finally spot it the creature brings one gnarled hand up, turns it into a knobby fist, and holds it over its heart in a silent salute. It then reaches back and draws a spear-sized arrow from its back...

If the PCs fail to notice *Tytan* he will instead watch them for a few moments, then bleed back into the forest to join up with the other mongoliant deeper in the woods, foregoing the fight. He will appear later in the *Final Stand* encounter (see later).

Smoke: This encounter takes place in an area of heavy smoke. Characters that breath must make a Constitution check (DC 10, +1 for each previous check) each round or spend that round choking and coughing. Characters who choke for 2 consecutive rounds take 1d6 points of damage. Smoke also obscures vision, giving one-half concealment (20% miss chance) to all characters and creatures within it.

A character can take the precaution of wearing a mask, scarf, or bandana over her face to reduce the DC of the Con check by -4.

Tytan (Mongoliant Strong Hero 3/Tribal Stalker 7 [B&L]): CR 14; Large Giant; HD 5d8+15 plus 3d8+9 plus 7d10+21; HP 121; Mas 20; Init +2; Spd 30 ft; Defense 22, touch 17, flatfooted 20 (-1 size, +2 Dex, +6 class, +3 natural, +2 equipment); BAB +13; Grap +24; Atk +20 melee (3d6+12, large greataxe), or +15 ranged (2d6+7, large composite longbow); Full Atk +20/+15/+10 melee (3d6+12, large greataxe), or +15/+10/+5 ranged (2d6+7, large composite longbow); FS 10 ft by 10 ft; Reach 10 ft; SQ keen sight, mutant body; AL Mongoliant village; SV Fort +14, Ref +6, Will +4; AP 7; Rep +3; Str 24, Dex 15, Con 17, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 4.

Occupation: Guide (Spot, Survival).

Skills: Climb +12, Hide +14, Jump +12, Listen +3, Move Silently +7, Spot +6, Survival +10.

Feats: Archaic Weapons Proficiency, Armor Proficiency (light), Power Attack, Primitive Technology, Primitive Technology, Quick Draw, Stealthy, Track, Weapon Focus (large composite longbow), Weapon Focus (large greataxe).

Talents (Strong Hero): Melee Smash, Improved Melee Smash.

Talents (Tribal Stalker [B&L]): Trap Making 1d6, Wounding Blow, Trap Making 2d6, Wounding Traps, Trap Making 3d6, Vicious Wounding, Improved Damage Threshold.

Possessions: Large composite longbow (Str +7), 10 large arrows, large greataxe, leather armor, face scarf, 1d2 pots of pitch, bits of charcoal.

Development: During the battle Tytan will try to use his *Wounding Blow* and *Vicious Wounding* abilities so that the PCs continue to lose hit points (and thus be depleted for the coming final stand at the village) even if they manage to kill him.

1d6+3 rounds after the battle begins other mongolians begin to arrive on the scene to help fight the PCs, drawn by the sounds of combat. Treat these as regular mongolians (see page 298 of *Darwin's World 2nd Edition*), of which there will be three in number.

This should be the first good look at the mongolians for the PCs, and if reinforcements show up, they'll quickly realize that they aren't dealing with just one creature, but a whole tribe of monstrous giants!

Mongolians (3): HP 38.

WARNING THE VILLAGE

After the PCs find the slain corpse of the deep woods scout, they'll probably want to return to the village to let everyone know that there is more going on than there appears. If the PCs managed to see (and fight) the mongolian stalker in the encounter above, they

have even more to tell the chief and the villagers.

Your trip back to the village is relatively swift, despite the forest burning all around you. When you arrive you see the village in chaos; smoke has begun to filter into town, snaking its way between huts and cabins. Tribesfolk are running to the protection of the chief's lodge, and the warriors have gathered.

The chief meets you as you arrive. When the full impact of your report settles on the chief, he no longer hesitates. He, like everyone assembled and listening to your words, now realizes that you're not just facing a deadly forest fire, but monstrous creatures that seem bent on the village's total destruction.

The chief's first order of business is to assign men to fight the fires that are just now encroaching on the village. The PCs can help in this if they want, providing either extra hands or advice on how best to do it; though there aren't any rules specifically for doing this, PCs pitching in will help stave off the destruction while more villagers escape to the chief's lodge, in effect saving lives and helping to continue the story. PCs volunteering to do this should earn a 750 XP reward; those with particularly clever ideas should be awarded a little more.

Meanwhile the chief orders the rest of the men to arm themselves for whatever attack may be coming - if at all, since the monsters may simply plan to burn the humans alive without breaking through. Though a few think of this, none voice the possibility and instead follow the chief's orders without question.

Eventually Jacinta (or a PC, if she thinks of it earlier) approaches the chief with an idea. She asks if she may be allowed to take some of the women, children, and elderly down to the river and, using rafts, try to escape downstream. If the PCs think of this plan before Jacinta steps forward, you may award

them a 1,000 XP reward for considering the welfare of the villagers.

THE RIVER (EL 16)

The chief gives Jacinta his blessing, and she starts to lead the other villagers down to the river while the males continue to fight the fires and prepare a defense. The chief confides in the PCs that he hopes that once the weaker tribesfolk are safely down river, he and his warriors can follow close behind.

Unfortunately for the tribals, the mongolians have moved a large number of their warriors into the trees on the other side of the river, safely out of the fire but with a perfect view of the rear of the village. They expect the humans to try to flee this way (though they didn't expect by boat; they thought the human villagers would ford the river and try to flee into the mountains), and lay in wait among the trees.

Unless the PCs accompany Jacinta, it will be a massacre from which none survive (though Jacinta may escape, if you think the PCs will need her healing skills in the final battle). But assuming one or more PCs do go with Jacinta to help out with the evacuation by boat, read the following:

Jacinta leads the civilians down to the rapidly-flowing river, where they begin to untie rafts nestled near shore. With your help Jacinta manages to get a few families going, swept down river and out of sight.

Just then, however, the smoky air reverberates with the sound of many "twangs" - in a second, dozens of spear-sized projectiles begin raining down all over the shore, striking a few surprised tribesmen dead and splintering entire wooden rafts as they come down from above with tremendous force.

Allow the characters to make Spot checks (DC 16) to notice that the projectiles - archer fire - are coming from across the river. Once they recognize where the threat is coming from, read the following:

As you look you see numerous figures huddled among the trees and underbrush, enormous mutated creatures that somehow blend well into the surroundings, half-concealed by the smoke pouring down from the mountainside. There must be over a dozen of them, and as they continue to fire the villagers seem to notice as well and panic, running back up the slope to the village.

Just then a cluster of trees on the opposite bank snap and sway, there is a deep-voiced bellow as a huge giant emerges from cover, brandishing an enormous club made from the trunk of a tree. At his side comes a massive two-headed mutant bear, its deformed body knotted with muscles. The giant and his bear enter the water, both tall enough to walk unhindered along the gravelly bottom. A few panicked tribesmen, having fallen from their boats, scream as they are swept past on the current. The giant looks down at them with its little eyes, but doesn't kill them, apparently content to see the river take them away. Instead he looks back towards the village and continues marching forward.

The mongoliant, *Gygant*, is a *symbiot*, a member of the tribe who, like all of the mongoliant tribesmen of the secret valley, has an unusual affinity with the forest. Gygant is accompanied by his animal companion, a giant two-headed mutant bear.

Now that it has begun, Gygant is pressing the attack on the rear of the village. He and his bear lead the way; a few moments later other mongoliant begin to emerge from cover, replacing their longbows with their greataxes as they cross the river and begin the destruction of their enemies.

Gygant (Mongoliant Tough Hero 3/Symbiote 7): CR 14; Large Giant; HD 5d8+20 plus 3d10+12 plus 7d8+28; HP 132; Mas 22; Init +0; Spd 30 ft; Defense 18, touch 15, flatfooted 18 (-1 size, +0 Dex, +6 class, +3 natural); BAB +10; Grap +22; Atk +18 melee (2d8+12, large greatclub); Full Atk +18/+13 melee (2d8+12, large greatclub), FS 10 ft by 10 ft; Reach 10 ft; SQ keen sight, mutant body; AL Mongoliant village; SV Fort +14, Ref +4, Will +5; AP 7; Rep +3; Str 26, Dex 10, Con 19, Int 8, Wis 8, Cha 9.

Occupation: Guide (Handle Animal, Survival).

Skills: Climb +12, Handle Animal +6, Knowledge (Earth and Life Sciences) +3, Navigate +1, Ride +2, Spot +0, Survival +12.

Feats: Animal Affinity, Awesome Blow, Combat Reflexes, Guide, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Damage Threshold, Power Attack, Primitive Technology, Primitive Technology, Unbreakable [B&L]*, Weapon Focus (large greatclub).

Talents (Tough Hero): Remain Conscious, Damage Reduction 2/—*.

Talents (Symbiote): Animal Partner, Symbiote Opportunist, Bond Of Friendship.

Possessions: Large greatclub, bits of charcoal.

Two-Headed Mutant Bear (Symbiote Partner): CR 12; Large animal; HD 9d8+36; HP 76; Mas 19; Init +3; Spd 40 ft; Defense 21, touch 16, flatfooted 18 (-1 size, +3 Dex, +4 class, +5 natural); BAB +6; Grap +20; Atk +15 melee (1d8+10, claw); Full Atk +15 melee (1d8+10, 2 claws), +10 melee (2d8+6, bite); FS 10 ft by 10 ft; Reach 10 ft; SQ fast healing 5, blood lust, improved grab, two heads, scent; AL Gygant; SV Fort +14*, Ref +9, Will +5*; AP 0; Rep +0; Str 30, Dex 16, Con 19, Int 12, Wis 12, Cha 6.

Skills: Climb +18, Listen +6, Spot +6.

Talents (Symbiote Partner): Bond of Friendship, Evasion, Share Saving Throws*, Track, Man's Best Friend +2, Familiarity, Never Quits.

Gygant and his bear deal with the PCs, letting the other mongoliant march across the river and roll the rest of the humans back up towards the village. In combat Gygant uses his *Awesome Blow* ability to toss the PCs around as much as possible; keep in mind he also has DR so he should be a difficult opponent to bring down.

The two-headed mutant bear stays near Gygant and fights those who try to flank or gang up on its master. Since it is defending Gygant, it gets +2 to its attacks, checks, and saves (from its *Man's Best Friend* class talent). Also keep in mind that as soon as one of the PCs becomes injured it will enter a *rage* (see the description of the two-headed mutant bear's *blood lust* ability in *Darwin's World 2nd Edition*).

In addition to Gygant and the bear there are also six mongoliant, spread out in a rough line, crossing the river and heading towards the village. They effectively remain out of the combat - describe them as rolling up the NPC villagers and forcing them back up the hill towards the village - but if Gygant and his bear are killed they will falter and retreat (though the PCs can fight them, if they so wish).

Mongoliant (6): HP 38.

Development: If the PCs manage to kill Gygant, the two-headed bear will no longer be obliged to remain and fight. Snapped out of its bond with the mongoliant symbiote, it will suddenly to flee back across the river and away from the forest fire.

Even if the PCs succeed in this battle there aren't enough boats left (most were destroyed by the mongoliant arrows) to continue evacuating the villagers. If Jacinta is still alive she wearily leads the survivors back up towards the village to make a final stand with the chief.

FINAL STAND (EL 17)

The final onslaught of the mongolians comes soon after the mongolians attempt to cross the river and move on the village from the rear. The efforts of the villagers to keep the fire at bay by using bucket brigades and throwing sand on the approaching flames begin to pay off. Fearing the fires won't do the job after all, the mongolians decide to destroy the human threat to their village with an all-out assault.

By now the inferno surrounds the entire village like an all-encompassing curtain of blinding red light. The smoke clouds completely obscure the sky, and a heavy rain falls across the huts and in the narrow spaces between them. But it isn't normal rain, rather red-hot flakes of ash, and as a result spontaneous fires are erupting all over the settlement.

Despite the chaos, the efforts of the tribesmen to build a wall of water, sand, and soil seems to be working, and the majority of the inferno merely rings the village, instead of consuming it. The chief and his men gather around the lodge with what non-combatants are left, but they seem relieved.

All of a sudden that relief is shattered as enormous creatures emerge through the flames, bounding straight across the fiery gulf, landing with an earthshaking rumble. Enormous shaggy things, the creatures look like towering heaps of fur. Just then the monsters underneath cast off their protective coverings (fur capes treated with some fire-resistant tree sap), still steaming and smoking, revealing the giants that they truly are.

One of them, apparently their leader, stands several feet taller than the others. A concerned frown - filled with snaggle teeth - crosses its monstrous face as it sees the defiant defenders. The tribal holdouts are surrounded, but they make room for you among them in the defensive line.

The enormous mutants begin moving forward. This is the last stand.

Since the battle here could potentially be too large to control, assume that the PCs only participate in a small part of it. By chance they happen to face off with the mongolian leader (*Kronus*) himself, along with three of his bodyguards.

Kronus is the leader of the war party and son of their tribe's chief. As a youth Kronus delighted in the stories of the "Mongolian Horde" (as described briefly in the "Titans of The East" entry in *The Broken & The Lost*), a lost empire of giants who once laid claim to much of the eastern reaches of the known world. Though he knows the Horde's days are gone - and recognizes that the world is better off without it - he finds pride in his skills as a fighter which he attributes to his race's legacy of war, and also in the ability of his people to remain undiscovered in these woods for so long. He, like the rest of his tribe, doesn't hate the humans, but believes they must be taught a lesson, if not outright eliminated for what they have done. Though he's loathe to do it, he will lead the attack to defend his people's way of life.

GM's Note: If the PCs previously went to help Jacinta, those characters who fought at the river will either arrive after defeating the mongolians there, or will be retreating (if they lost). In the latter case the mongolians will have any survivors from the battle at the river, which arrive 1d4 rounds after the start of combat *behind* the defenders. When this happens, simply add Gygant and his bear to the forces fighting the PCs.

Also note that if Tytan got away from the earlier encounter (*Area J*), replace two of Kronus' bodyguards with Tytan instead. As a result there is a chance the PCs may be facing all three mongolian "characters" in this final fight!

Mongolians (3): HP 38.

Kronus (Mongolian Mutant Strong Hero 8/ Mongolian Marauder 4 [B&L]): CR 16; Huge Giant; HD 5d8+20 plus 8d8+32 plus 4d10+16; HP 149; Mas 21; Init +2; Spd 30 ft; Defense 23, touch 15, flatfooted 23 (-1 size, +0 Dex, +6 class, +3 natural, +5 equipment); BAB +15; Grap +32; Atk +24 melee (2d8+15, large glaive); Full Atk +24/+19/+14 melee (2d8+15, large glaive); FS 10 ft by 10 ft; Reach 15 ft; SQ keen sight, mutant body; AL Mongolian village; SV Fort +16, Ref +4, Will +5; AP 8; Rep +3; Str 26, Dex 11, Con 18, Int 8, Wis 12, Cha 6.

Occupation: Guide (Spot, Survival).

Skills: Climb +10, Intimidate +14, Jump +10, Knowledge (Tactics) +1, Listen +3, Spot +7, Survival +7.

Feats: Alertness, Archaic Weapons Proficiency, Armor Proficiency (light), Awesome Blow, Cleave, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Damage Threshold, Know The Signs [B&L], Power Attack, Primitive Technology, Primitive Technology, Weapon Focus (large glaive).

Talents (Strong Hero): Melee Smash, Improved Melee Smash, Advanced Melee Smash, Extreme Effort.

Talents (Mongolian Marauder [B&L]): Anti-Crusher, Damage Reduction 1/—, Sweep Attack.

Possessions: Large glaive, *mastercraft leather armor* +3, face scarf, bear pelts, bits of charcoal.

Keep in mind that as a member of the *Mongolian Marauder* advanced class Kronus has several special abilities. His *Anti-Crusher* ability means his oversized glaive crits on a roll of 19-20 against Medium-size creatures (18-20 against Small creatures, though there are unlikely to be any in the battle) for x3 damage, while he can use his *Sweep Attack* ability to use his reach to attack all targets in a given area. Because he uses a glaive, his effective reach is 15 ft.

Smoke and Flame: The final battle between the mongolians and villagers occurs as the village burns

all around them. As such there is a combination of fire dangers and heavy smoke to take into account.

Smoke affects everyone in battle, every round. Characters who breath must make a Constitution check (DC 10, +1 for each previous check) each round or spend that round choking and coughing. Characters who choke for 2 consecutive rounds take 1d6 points of damage. Smoke also obscures vision, giving one-half concealment (20% miss chance) to all characters and creatures within it.

A character can take the precaution of wearing a mask, scarf, or bandana over her face to reduce the DC of the Con check by -4.

In addition to smoke, there is the danger of *fire* as buildings collapse, sending fire and cinders raining down on the combatants. Each round each combatant must make a Reflex save (DC 15) at the start of her action or take 1d6 points of fire damage.

CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

Kronus fights heroically, inspiring the other mongolians in battle. If the PCs can take him out of the fight, the others will be disheartened.

Kronus fights until reduced to less than 30 hit points, at which point he recognizes that continuing the fight not only endangers himself, but the survival of his people; without a good number of their warriors the tribe won't be able to hunt, harvest, and support themselves. However, his tribe's defeat is not without some consolation: at the very least they've taught the humans that there are other creatures sharing the forest, and unless they're truly foolish (which Kronus now suspects they're not), they're sure to realize that killing the mongolians won't be easy.

Satisfied, he begins to withdraw in an orderly fashion. As he does, read the following:

The mighty giant seems badly injured, its leathery hide punctured and bleeding. Eventually it and the others begin to pull back. A thundering horn sounds somewhere in the deep forest, signaling the retreat. The giant's small black eyes bear heavily down upon you, but it raises its weapon to you in a salute of respect.

For some reason you think you've been given a chance, and not the other way around, by letting the mutated giants leave and return to the burning forest. Perhaps you should be thankful.

If Kronus was killed a different mongoliant will lead the war party in its withdrawal, but the descriptive text above should be much the same.

Once the mongolians leave and the fires run their course, village life starts returning to normal. Stock is made of the survivors, and any who fled downstream are found a few days later, shaken but safe (the mongolians didn't pursue them). The chief, Jacinta, and the others are left to ponder where the giants came from, and why they attacked the village, but to everyone concerned it seems Tuwan's carelessness most likely had a large part to do with it.

The chief decides to proceed with the Festival of Songs, seeing in it an opportunity not just to select a new chief through the marriage of his daughter, but also a chance to celebrate the villages continued survival. The PCs are invited as guests of honor, of course, and the chief hopes to reward them for what they've done. If they haven't already found Tuwan's secret cache the chief sends some men with the PCs to find it out in the ghostly wreckage of the burned-out forest. As a gesture of thanks the expensive artifacts - which are still intact - are given to the party members as payment for helping the village in its time of need.

As for the mongolians, they believed the humans would be easy to defeat and are stunned by their losses. Their inability to destroy the humans leads them to believe that the "diminutive" villagers are far stronger than they first appeared. Resigned, over the next few weeks the surviving mongolians quietly abandon their village in the next valley and migrate elsewhere, to start anew. Ironically the brave PCs who just happened to be in the area to defend the village are thereafter remembered in the giants' myths and lore as the "great villains" who drove them from their ancestral home...

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