

Into the Direwood

A Tier III–IV Survival Horror Saga

A Fate's Edge Adventure Module

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*Beyond the last bell-line, where the mist never lifts and the roots drink only memory,
an ancient spear pins a dead druid to a fortress of bone.
Pull it free, and the forest remembers how to scream.*

Contents

1	Into the Direwood (Tier III–IV Adventure)	4
1.1	Setup and Hooks	4
1.2	Historical Truth	4
1.3	Adventure Structure	5
1.4	Name Quest Subsystem: Remembering the Forgotten	11
1.5	Key Threats	16
1.6	Environmental Horror	17
1.7	Rewards and Consequences	17
1.8	Using With Any Setting	17
1.8.1	Rites of the Druid of the Mist	19
1.8.2	Spellwheel: The Druid of the Mist	21
1.9	Patron: The Heroine of the Mist	22
1.9.1	Miracles and Major Rites	22
1.9.2	Higher Mysteries (Prestige/Epic Rites)	23
1.9.3	Spellwheel: The Heroine of the Mist	23
1.9.4	Devotional Gifts (Mechanical Boons)	23
1.9.5	Narrative Role in the Direwood Adventure	24
1.10	Nemesis Profile: The Heroine Shade	24
1.11	Artifact: The Golden Thorn	25
A	Preparation Checklist	26
A.1	Session Zero Considerations	26
A.2	Pre-Session Preparation	26
B	Pacing and Flow Management	26
B.1	Act I: Payden’s Port	26
B.2	Act II: Through the Direwood	27
B.3	Act III: The Fortress Heart	27
C	Key Mechanical Reminders	27
C.1	Story Beat Economy	27
C.2	Environmental Horror Tags	28
D	Character Archetype Support	28
D.1	Tank/Controller Players	28
D.2	Striker/DPS Players	28
D.3	Support/Buffer Players	28
D.4	Utility/Scout Players	28
E	Thematic Reinforcement	28
E.1	Consistency Tips	28
E.2	Horror Pacing	29
F	Troubleshooting Common Issues	29
F.1	Players Moving Too Slowly	29
F.2	Players Rushing Ahead	29

F.3	Combat Dominance	29
F.4	Investigation Stalling	29
G	Optional Variations	29
G.1	Shortened Campaign	29
G.2	Increased Horror Focus	30
G.3	Mythic Heroism Focus	30
H	Tracking Sheets and Handouts	30
H.1	Player Tracking	30
H.2	GM Tracking	30
I	Conclusion	30
J	Aeler Military Engineer	30
K	Mistland Local Guide	31
L	Zakov Smuggler Captain	31
M	Linnic Trader-Raider	32
N	Lethai-al Valewood Ranger	32
O	Aelinnel Gnome Artificer	33
P	Aelaerem Halfling Herbalist	33

1 Into the Direwood (Tier III–IV Adventure)

Premise and Tone

- **Recommended Tier:** III–IV (experienced crews)
- **Atmosphere:** Half cosmic horror, half survival horror
- **Themes:** Lost names, corrupted guardianship, identity erased by history, truth vs. myth

The Direwood is a blighted frontier forest where an ancient fortress vomits mist and undead into the world. Long ago, a nameless champion impaled a corrupted druid with a **gilden spear**—but the act unleashed the Mist that devoured her, erased her name, and warped her soul into a tragic antagonist.

Deep within the Direwood lies the fortress heart where she and the druid remain bound in a cycle of torment. Heroes must enter, survive, and uncover the truth: **The curse persists not because the druid lives, but because the heroine’s name was erased.**

Only by revealing her name and restoring her saga can the curse be broken.

1.1 Setup and Hooks

This adventure is **setting-agnostic**. Any region bordering cursed wilderness can use it.

Universal Hooks

- **The Mist Thickens:** Something wakes in the Direwood. Fog breaches warding lines—new horrors stalk settlements.
- **A Fragment of Saga:** Scholars, oracles, or ravings speak of a “nameless champion” and a spear of gilded dawn.
- **Faith or Faction Interest:** Reformers, pilgrims, war cults, or occult orders want the fortress breached or sanctified.
- **A Bargain:** A ghostly figure visits a character in a dream: *“Find my name, free me... or drown with me.”*

You may replace factions with whatever religions, orders, or political blocs exist in your campaign.

1.2 Historical Truth

Once, a powerful druid served as the Direwood’s warden. When an exiled necromancer befriended him, their work twisted root and bone into death-magic. The druid raised undead armies—Shades, Mistwraiths, Shadewalkers, and beast-things.

A champion—her culture forgotten—defeated him using a **gilden spear** of unknown origin.

But victory was a lie.

- The druid’s death ruptured a dimensional wound.
- Mist poured out, consuming the heroine and her companions.
- She became a bound shade—hero and warden both—now twisted into a **Guardian of Silence**.

The world remembered the druid as the villain but *forgot her name*. That erasure is the core of the curse.

1.3 Adventure Structure

Run this as a 3–5 act ordeal:

Act I: Payden's Port and the Forgotten Chord

Tone: political gothic + creeping horror

Premise: The warding bell-line falters. Bells toll out of sequence, Mist incursions grow bolder, and refugees whisper of shapes in fog.

The PCs arrive in Payden's Port — a sea-garrison city of cracked statues, storm-beaten docks, and chanting wardens — and are pulled into crisis.

The Hook: Only one thing can repair the failing bell-line — **the Chord of the First Curse:** a strip of woven gold and root, a relic that was *torn away and lost in the Direwood when the first curse was sealed*.

Legends say it once bridged sound and spirit, harmonizing the ward with the heroine's true name.

Act Beats

- **Factional pressure:** The Aeler garrison, Mistlander priests, and Guild factors all demand different outcomes; each tries to recruit or manipulate the PCs.
- **Living omens:** Dead gulls arrange themselves in votive circles, fog-children whisper names not spoken.
- **The first breach:** The city's outer bell-line sputters; Mistwraiths claw at the docks. PCs must assist the wardens or improvise defenses — gaining first taste of the Mist.
- **Call to action:** Divination, confession, or coercion leads to one truth: *the Chord lies deep in the Direwood, near the fortress where the heroine fell*.
- **The Charge:** "Retrieve the Chord and restore the bell-line — or the Port will drown in white."

The PCs are sent through the breached ward with blessings, suspicions, or threats at their back.

Dread Clock Mark ticks when:

- the party ignores port omens or visions
- they mishandle the dead or desecrate wards
- they underestimate or bargain with Mist

If filled early, Act II becomes harsher and the heroine initially appears as a hostile nemesis.

Act I Exit Conditions:

- the party crosses into the Direwood,
- an alliance (or enmity) with at least one faction is set,
- the first imprint of the nameless heroine haunts one PC.

Act II: Through the Direwood

Tone: Survival horror, mythic fever-dream, predatory landscape.

Crossing the tree-line is not entering a forest—it is passing into a place shaped by memory, undeath, and betrayal. The Direwood resists mapping; it *reacts* to intrusion.

Environmental Themes

- **Twisting Trails:** Paths repeat; distances elongate. A day’s march may loop back to a familiar tree, now adorned with new corpses.
- **Living Landmarks:** Hollow oaks bleed pale sap, stone cairns whisper warnings, ravens speak in half-remembered curses.
- **Memory Echoes:** Scenes replay—villagers fleeing, army banners burning, lovers separated—yet the faces blur and distort.
- **Dream Fatigue:** Rest is possible, but sleep is disturbed. PCs wake with soil under their nails, leaves in their hair, or frost upon their cheeks.

Adversaries and Threats

Mistwraith Packs: *Tier III* predators that sense rising fatigue; they do not eat—they *erase*. PCs marked by fear or exhaustion attract them.

Shadewalkers: *Tier II-III* revenant infantry—stone-cold tacticians reenacting endless patrols until interrupted.

Hunger Wolves: *Tier III* *beast-spirits*, sinew stretched over bone, jaws unhinging to swallow light itself.

The Forgotten Chorus: *Tier IV* *psychic hazard*—mourning voices that harmonize grief into psychic drowning.

The Heroine’s Phantom: A *shifting Tier IV entity*—sometimes guide, sometimes executioner. Her mood tracks the party’s reverence for lost history.

Nightly Visitations Each night, one PC dreams of the nameless heroine:

- Meeting her mother beneath a moonlit birch.
- Riding with oath-sworn shield-sisters.
- Walking toward fire knowing she will die.

GM Note: Fragments arrive out of order, wrong names inserted—only when her true name is spoken do the visions align.

Direwood Survival Procedures

1. At each travel segment, roll the **Direwood Consequence Table**.
2. Reduce safe camp options—firelight attracts attention, cold invites wraiths.
3. Food spoils overnight unless blessed or sealed.

Direwood Encounter Generator

Roll once when entering a new sector or when the party loses direction.

Step 1: Terrain Distortion (d6)

1. Fog walls—movement halved, perception impaired.
2. Reverse stream—water flows upward, whispers of drowned souls.
3. Forest of empty armor—hollow suits clatter as wind passes.
4. Birch grove—trees lean inward as if listening.
5. Corpse orchard—fruit grows from ribcages (*dangerous temptation*).
6. Silent clearing—sound dies, even thoughts echo.

Step 2: Threat Manifestation (d6)

1. Mistwraith Pack hunting fear scent.
2. Shadewalker patrol marching in silent formation.
3. Hunger Wolves circling camp perimeter.
4. Memory echo forcing PCs into historical reenactments.
5. Voice of the Heroine offering cryptic aid (or condemnation).
6. *No creature*—but the woods rearrange behind them.

Step 3: Psychological Pressure (d6)

1. One PC hears their name whispered from a corpse.
2. A random PC dreams while awake—vision interrupts action.
3. Someone's equipment rots or tarnishes instantly.
4. PCs lose track of time—night becomes day without transition.
5. PCs forget a small fact—names, directions, purpose.
6. PCs find something belonging to them—but aged or broken.

Step 4: Strange Reward or Revelation (optional d6)

1. A black feather giving +1d to bravery tests.
2. A shard of gilt metal humming near the heart of the forest.
3. A whisper of her true name—wrong syllables, but directionally useful.
4. A bone talisman—*Ignore fear once, then crack under stress.*
5. A half-remembered lullaby that soothes undead spirits.
6. A map that leads in circles unless the party honors the dead.

GM Guidance: Use 1–2 results per segment. Combine for escalating horror.

Escalation Triggers Increase threat when:

- PCs desecrate corpses or mock legends.
- Someone tries to rationalize the supernatural.
- A vision is ignored or laughed off.

At high escalation, the Heroine’s Phantom appears—not as ally, but as judge.

Role of the Heroine in Act II She is not a quest-giver—she is *the wound*. PCs must:

- earn her attention through reverence or boldness,
- learn fragments of her forgotten name,
- survive her tests.

Only by **speaking her true name** does her attitude shift from hunter to guide.

The Name That Was Forgotten

The Direwood will not allow the heroine’s name to be spoken lightly. Her identity shattered when she died unremembered; the party must **gather fragments** through visions, echoes, relics, and mercy.

Each revelation provides one **Name Fragment**. When all are gathered and spoken with intention, her wrath becomes sorrow—and the way forward opens.

d8	Fragment Source	What the PCs Receive
1	Whisper in dream	A syllable spoken by a weeping voice
2	Relic unearthed	Rune-symbol etched in gilt metal
3	Mercy to dead	A spirit forms a phoneme in frost or ash
4	Heroine’s phantom	She screams it in rage, misheard or inverted
5	Shadewalker patrol	Captain repeats her battle-cry fragment
6	Shrine remnant	A carved votive holding half her naming-mark
7	Mistwraith hunt	One wraith mimics her dying breath-sound
8	The wood itself	Wind across hollow birches shapes the final tone

Guidance

- **Fragments are ambiguous:** each is a syllable, rune, or phonetic gesture.
- Players must *interpret*—wrong assembly draws her fury.
- If spoken prematurely, increase the **Dread Clock** by +1 and attract a spectral assault.
- Once all are gathered, speaking the true name pacifies her and reshapes Act IV.

Optional Twist The final fragment cannot be heard—only *remembered*. A PC must sacrifice a cherished memory to speak it aloud.

Act III: The Fortress Heart

The fortress is not built — it is *grown*. Petrified roots coil into walls, bone-columns hold roofs of fungus stone, and halls pulse faintly as if remembering breath.

Tone: grim revelation + predatory architecture.

- **Shades** recite campaigns that never resolved.
- The **druid's corpse** still hangs impaled by the gilden spear, a font of eternal fog.
- The **nameless heroine** prowls silently — testing, haunting, or confronting.

If the *Dread Clock* is high, she manifests as a lethal nemesis. If the PCs earned reverence or curiosity, she delivers riddles, cryptic lore, or half-truth bargains.

Threats of the Fortress

- **Mistwraith Sentinels:** absorb Fatigue; attack as whispers that drain resolve.
- **Bone Choir Shades:** animate when disturbed, chanting fragments of battle oaths.
- **Shadewalker Wardens:** undead knights commanded by instinct only — bodyguards without a master.
- **Grasping Roots:** attempt to root intruders in place; test Body + Athletics to break free.
- **Reflected Self:** mirrors show PCs as future undead — risk mental Fatigue on failed Resolve.

Fortress Traps and Wards Magical Traps

- **Bone-Sigil Wards:** trigger phantom spear volleys.
- **Echo Brands:** mark targets — nearby undead treat branded PCs as hated traitors.
- **Mist Spore Bursts:** cause hallucinations and misplaced action declarations.
- **Remembrance Locks:** doors open only when spoken with a name fragment.

Mundane Traps

- Root-pit collapse leading to a crypt nursery of Shadewalkers.

- Impaling stakes grown from bone growths under leaf cover.
- Hollow floors that drop PCs into memory-echo chambers.
- Glyph-etched bells that summon a Shade patrol if rung.

Room Generator: The Dire Stronghold Roll d10 for each chamber or turn deeper:

d10	Room / Encounter
1	Hall of Hollow Shields — spectral infantry drill endlessly
2	Bone Spindle Stair — roots twist upward; false steps activate impaling branches
3	The Echo Choir — Shades lament their failed charge; listening risks Fatigue
4	The Memory Pit — visions drag one PC into a relived massacre
5	Oath Archive — bone tablets with names scored out; fragments hidden here
6	The Bloodless Barracks — Shadewalker knights frozen until disturbed
7	Grove of Still Hearts — petrified Druid seeds containing wraith embryos
8	Hall of the Betrayed — mirrors show the PCs as corrupted avatars
9	Root-Chamber Gate — door opens only to a true fragment spoken aloud
10	The Spear Hall — the druid's husk nailed to reality; the heroine watches

Adversary Table: Fortress Foes

d6	Adversary
1	Shade Cohort (3–5 spectral infantry, DV 3 vs Resolve)
2	Mistwraith Pack (absorbs Fatigue before Harm)
3	Shadewalker Knight (Cap 3 undead bodyguard wielding rusted rites)
4	Echo Sorcerer (fragment of the druid, casts DV 4 control spells)
5	The Forgotten Squire (undead child bearing a name rune fragment)
6	Her Shrine-Guardian Self — a phantom of the heroine in life

Environmental Effects (1d6 per room)

- **1: Breath Leech** — PCs lose 1 Fatigue entering.
- **2: Time Loop** — first action each turn repeats.
- **3: Whispering Winds** — disadvantage on stealth.
- **4: Grief Pulse** — one PC makes a sorrow check.
- **5: Bone Bloom** — undead roots sprout mid-combat.
- **6: Heroine's Watch** — her phantom judges the action; aid or hinder.

GM Guidance: The Heroine as Dynamic Antagonist She is not merely a boss — she is a *mirror*.

- When PCs show **oath-keeping**, she grants a name fragment.
- When they show **hubris or desecration**, treat her as a deadly hunter.
- If her name is assembled, the fortress reorganises — root-walls peel back, the mist recoils, and the druid's corpse becomes vulnerable.

This act should end with a revelation, not a combat — unless the party refuses to remember.

1.4 Name Quest Subsystem: Remembering the Forgotten

Premise Some truths cannot be killed — only forgotten. The Heroine of the Mist can only be freed by remembering her.

Memory Track

A shared party track with 6 boxes.

Mark one when:

- uncovering a name fragment or true deed,
- fulfilling an oath tied to her story,
- suffering hardship to defend the innocent,
- being recognized by shades as her lost companions.

Effects at Thresholds

2 Marks: Shades hesitate; mist retreats briefly.

4 Marks: The Heroine shifts from Nemesis to Trial.

6 Marks: PCs may speak the Name — final resolution triggers.

Name Fragments

Fragments may be discovered, traded, stolen, or revealed through:

- prophetic dreams,
- battlefield memories,
- ghost-songs,
- the Golden Thorn's revelations.

Each Name Fragment must be **correctly placed** in her saga — requiring Roleplay + Lore + Presence.

Final Rite: Restoration of Name

When all fragments fit:

Her Shade kneels, ceasing hostility.

The Mist lashes, then withdraws.

The Heroine ascends, becoming patron or guide.

The party must swear: *her saga shall be sung, her deeds recorded, her name remembered.*

Breaking this oath:

- summons her wrath,
- marks all PCs as **oathbreakers**,
- the Mist becomes a nemesis for the rest of the campaign.

Act IV: Descent into the Root-Vault

Tone: metaphysical pursuit + sacrificial myth

Premise The Root-Vault is an inverted under-world where:

- roots are ossified memory,
- words become walls,
- and oaths have gravity.

Here, sealed at the breach-point of the First Curse, rests the **Resonant Keystone** — a crystalline bell-core wrapped in the heroine's erasure.

Why It Matters Without it, the bell-line can never be repaired — the Mist spreads until shore cities fall.

With it, PCs can:

- re-tune the warding line,
- awaken the quiet bells,
- and name the heroine back into existence.

Vault Threats

- **Name-Eaters** — spectral archivists that rip identity pages from memory.
- **Mist Stalkers** — ragged emanations of the druid's will, trying to seize the Keystone to unbind the curse.
- **Root-Engines** — biomechanical heart nodes that reorganize corridors, threatening to erase the path behind PCs.

Trial of Worth To claim the Keystone, PCs must:

1. **Speak or fully assemble the heroine's name.**
2. **Acknowledge her sacrifice — and its injustice.**
3. **Swear an oath to restore her saga publicly.**

Oath refusal? The Keystone remains inert — or lashes out violently.

Backlash Possibilities If PCs try to take the Keystone without the oath:

- the heroine becomes their eternal Nemesis,
- the Resonant Keystone fractures (marked with their names),
- and Act V begins with Payden's Port collapsing.

Act IV Ends When:

- the PCs physically hold the **Resonant Keystone**, and
- their bond — or enmity — with the heroine is sealed.

Act V: The Last Saga — The Seal and the Spear

Tone: mythic horror, tragic revelation, ritual triumph

The Heart-Fortress shudders as roots split, mist curls in reverse, and the pinned druid's body flexes against the Golden Thorn. The party stands where the curse began and will end — or repeat.

The Awakening of the Husk

If the PCs disturbed the Thorn, or if the Name remains incomplete:

- The **Druid of the Mist** reanimates.
- Root-bone walls shatter into a **spiral arena**.
- The husk becomes a **multi-phasic boss** (see Stat Block).

The party cannot kill it — only *subdue* or *pin* it again. Its flesh reforms, its bones knit; it is the curse given shape.

Final Objective: Hold long enough to force it beneath the Thorn.

Intervention of the Heroine Shade

If the PCs completed the Name Quest (Section 1.4):

- The Heroine Shade manifests in full Valkyric radiance.
- She strides through the mist untouched, spear alight.
- Her presence weakens the husk's regeneration.

Resolution Trigger A PC must proclaim her Name aloud as the Shade strikes — only then does the cycle break.

If done, the Shade impales the Druid again with:

- golden light,
- cascading roots,
- and the sighs of a thousand dead.

The arena collapses inward, and the mist recoils violently.

If the Name Was Not Restored

The husk overwhelms the fortress's structure:

- Root corridors twist and collapse.
- Mist seals passages behind the party.
- They must flee through the **Root-Vault escape path**.

Survival is victory — but the curse remains, stronger than before. The Golden Thorn becomes inert until her Name is remembered in future play.

Loot, Legacy, and Consequences

If the Name Was Restored

- PCs gain **Saga Reputation +1**.
- The Heroine becomes a **Patron of Valor, Memory, and Resurrection**.
- The Mist withdraws for a generation — bell-lines strengthen.
- The Golden Thorn ascends in power (see Artifact Upgrades).

If the PCs Only Re-Pinned the Druid

- The fortress stabilises.
- The Mist is contained, not ended.
- PCs become *known* — but without honor or clarity.
- The Thorn is unchanged, awaiting remembrance.

If the PCs Failed or Fled

- Mist incursions increase for months.
- Bell-lines must be rebuilt at great cost.
- PCs are viewed with suspicion — or blame.

Epilogue: The Heroine's Choice

If restored:

“My saga is yours — now yours is mine. Go — and let the living remember.”

She dissolves into starlight — but may return as:

- a Patron,
- a guide spirit,
- or a PC boon (once/arc miracle of defense or intervention).

If not restored, her Shade remains bound:

- sometimes an ally,
- more often a Nemesis in later arcs,
- forever seeking one who will speak her name.

GM Guidance: Multi-Phasic Boss Confrontation Removing the tuning-spike or attempting to destroy the husk awakens the **First Druid** in a catastrophic resurrection state. This is not a standard fight — it is a ritualized horror battle with shifting phases and survival focus.

Phase I: The Husk Wakes

- The petrified body reanimates, still impaled.
- It lashes mist tendrils and summons *root-shade guardians*.
- Attacks ignore armor unless the PCs invoke sacred names or oaths.

Objective: Break its stabilization — the spike needs to be removed or driven *deeper*.

Phase II: The Unbound Druid

 When the spike shifts:

- The husk splits open along its old wounds.
- The druid's true form — a writhing tangle of bone, antler, and liquid mist — pulls free.
- Mist thickens; PCs must navigate collapsing terrain and hallucinations.

Abilities:

- *Corrupted Command* — rerolls PC successes into failures in scenes of desecration.
- *Mist Rebirth* — dismissed enemies reform unless sanctified.

Objective: Force the druid back to the sanctum-heart — where the spike can restrain it again.

Phase III: The Heart Rift Push the druid to the spike altar — the battlefield becomes a circular pit of oaths, death echoes, and sagas written in air.

- PCs must endure mist storms, identity erosion, and memory theft.
- The druid attempts to *rewrite one PC into its replacement host*.

Objective: Impale the druid again — but only through a sacrifice, bargain, or declared deed.

Conditional Intervention: The Heroic Shade If the party has restored the heroine's name:

- Her shade manifests behind the druid as a golden silhouette.
- She seizes the spike herself and drives it home through the druid's heart-core.
- Mist recoils; servants disintegrate; the sanctum stabilizes.

This ending:

- restores the status quo,
- seals the husk back into slumber,
- and confirms the heroine as a protector rather than nemesis.

If Her Name Is Not Restored The fight must continue through three additional rounds of escalating horror:

- the druid's antler mass becomes a crown of thorns,
- a PC must willingly offer an oath and blood to bind the spike,
- otherwise the fortress collapses and the Mist erupts outward.

If the fight ends without the heroine intervening, the victory is pyrrhic — the druid is bound, but the Mist threshold expands, warping the wider region.

Reward for the True Name Path If her true saga is spoken before or during the battle:

- the fight ends early in dramatic fashion,
- the heroine becomes a continuing NPC patron or ally,
- PCs may take her boon or blessing as a campaign-long tag.

This version preserves high tension while allowing the name-restoration path to feel mythic and consequential.

Act III Ends When:

- PCs understand that true salvation lies below,
- their relationship to the heroine is set (Nemesis, Test, or Maybe Ally),
- and the path to the vault opens — willingly or through collapse.

1.5 Key Threats

Mistwraiths (Tier IV Horrors)

Secrets made flesh. Feed on awareness and fear. Appear where the party hesitates or falters.

Shadewalkers (Tier III Undead)

Corpse-puppets bound in root and bone. Slow, relentless, territorial.

Direwood Beasts

Animals twisted by necromantic saturation. Symptoms: extra limbs, eyeless faces, echoing screams.

The Nameless Heroine

Shade-queen, tragic antagonist. If encountered before her name is found, treat her as a boss encounter. If her name is revealed mid-battle, she collapses into grief rather than rage.

1.6 Environmental Horror

Core Tags:

- **[MIST-CHOKED]** — Disorienting and oppressive.
- **[HAUNTED]** — Reality shows seams; time loops.
- **[STARVED-WORLD]** — No food, no warmth, whispers that sap Resolve.

Consider starvation, dehydration, and will-despair as slow pressures. The Direwood wants them to give up—or accept its bargain.

1.7 Rewards and Consequences

Curse-Breaker Outcomes

- **Saga-Bearer:** PCs gain renown as keepers of a forgotten truth.
- **Artifact Wardens:** They inherit the gilden spear—now dormant unless wielded in her name.
- **Map Change:** The Mistline shifts; local politics scramble to react.

Failure or Refusal

- The Mist expands or mutates.
- The heroine becomes a recurring nemesis.
- PCs are marked by the Direwood—hunted by nightmares or undead emissaries.

1.8 Using With Any Setting

Plug this adventure into:

- a Viking-flavored frontier,
- a Slavic cursed forest,
- a Romanized empire borderland,
- a gothic or Celtic wilderness,
- or a colonial frontier horror setting.

Swap religions, factions, and cultural icons as needed—the core dynamics remain:

- **Forgotten hero as antagonist**
- **Curse anchored in erasure of identity**
- **The truth is the weapon, not the sword**

This keeps the module stand-alone, portable, and emotionally powerful.

Tales of the Direwood

A Traveler's Briefing for Those Who Walk Beyond the Bell-Line

What is the Direwood?

A blighted forest where fog is older than the trees. No map draws the same twice. Beasts walk on borrowed bones. Time forgets to move correctly.

What the Elders Say:

- Once it guarded the borderlands.
- Now it breathes death instead.
- Something within remembers us.

Safe Conduct Within the Mist

- Travel in pairs; loneliness draws attention.
- Firelight helps, but only if you believe it will.
- Bells keep the lesser spirits away—until they learn you.
- Do not chase echoes; if someone calls your name, check if their feet touch the ground.

Signs of Corruption

- Roots that bleed when cut.
- Faces where bark should be.
- Whispers in languages you almost know.

Things Seen Near the Heartwood

- Towers of petrified wood and bone.
- A spearhead of gold hammered through stone.
- A phantom warrior in ruined mail watching from the mist.

The Nameless Hero

- Locals speak of the “Warden Without Name.”
- Some call her guardian, others curse her as betrayer.
- Legend holds she fought a great evil—and died forgotten.

Rumors and Warnings

- “If you speak her name, she might listen.”
- “If you mock her, she will find you.”
- “The spear keeps him dead—but keeps her bound.”

Why Venture In?

- To stop the creeping Mist.
- To find lost knowledge.
- To free or defeat the Warden.
- To discover her true name.

Advice from Survivors

- Bring rope, salt, bells, and flame.
- Do not trust your memories inside.
- When in doubt—speak truth, not courage.

*The Direwood does not hate you.
It simply remembers before you do.*

1.8.1 Rites of the Druid of the Mist

These rites reflect the patron’s ethos: *erode, unmake, devour, dissolve.*

Followers learn that every invocation is a transaction — power traded for identity.

Low Rites (4–6 XP)

Mist’s Caress *Scene; Zone; No.*

[VEIL] [SENSE] [DRAIN]

Call thin fog across Near. Gain +1 die to detect fear, fatigue, or spiritual imbalance. Living foes suffer unease; undead gain interest.

Whisper of Hollow Roots *Scene; Self; No.*

[SENSE] [GUIDE]

Hear paths where boundaries blur. Once per scene, bypass mundane impediment (wall, guard, protocol) narratively; GM provides complication.

Sap of Forgetting *Scene; Touch; Yes.*

[DRAIN] [WEAKEN]

Inflict –1 die to resistance rolls for one exchange as the target’s name wavers. Push It: Target forgets one small truth or detail temporarily.

Bitter Blossom Mark *Extended; Close; Yes.*

[CURSE] [DECAY]

Plant a sigil that corrupts soil, masonry, or a social oath. Start a **Creeping Ruin [4]** clock; when full, something breaks.

Standard Rites (7–9 XP)

Root of Unmaking *Scene; Zone; Yes.*

[DECAY] [BIND] [CORRUPT]

Infect a structure, body, or agreement with invisible rot. Allies gain +1 die to exploit fractures; order-based actions suffer +1 DV.

Shroud of Dissolution *Scene; Self; Yes.*

[VEIL] [CONCEAL]

Become indistinct: sound muffles, form blurs. Gain +1 die on evasion/stealth; fail with 1s risks name-fragment loss (GM chooses).

Bone Orchard Bloom *Scene; Zone; Yes.*

[ANIMATE] [AREA] [CORRUPT]

Corpses or dead roots animate as spectral vines/limbs that hinder foes. Create **Difficult Terrain** and start a **Gravegarden [4]** clock.

Harvester's Breath *Scene; Zone; Yes.*

[DRAIN] [FEED] [AREA]

Draw fatigue, sorrow, or fear from all in Near. Convert one such condition into +1 die for yourself or a chosen ally.

High Rites (10–14 XP)

Reclaim the Boundary *Scene; Zone; Yes.*

[DOMAIN] [CURSE] [REWRITE]

Select a place or law; for the scene, its borders cease functioning. Walls don't divide, ranks don't compel, names are unreliable. Resistance causes sensory fragmentation (Position -1 next exchange).

Pale Menagerie *Scene; Near; Yes.*

[SUMMON] [UNDEAD] [COMMAND]

Call forth 1–3 mist-echoes (Cap 2) that obey simple urges. They dissolve when named or sanctified.

Walk of Unbeing *Scene; Self; Yes.*

[PHASE] [VEIL] [MOVE]

Step through boundaries, walls, or social constraints. Treat any Blocked route as Open but mark 1 **Name Erosion**.

Famine of the Living Word *Scene; Far; Yes.*

[CURSE] [SILENCE] [BLIGHT]

Silence a leader, liturgy, or institution. For one scene, oaths, commands, or blessings falter. GM marks **Narrative Ruin** — consequences linger.

Apex Rite (15–20 XP)

The Mist Devours the Story *Extended; Domain; Yes.*

[UNMAKE] [DOMAIN] [APOCALYPSE]

Declare a rooted structure — a keep, dynasty, covenant, religion, or name. Begin **The Unmaking [6+]** clock. When full, that thing loses identity: histories rewrite, memories fracture, its power-base dissolves. Survivors may cling to fragments, but it never becomes the same again. *Cost:* Mark **3 Erosion**, lose one personal truth, risk becoming an avatar.

Corruption & Erosion Mechanics

Followers of the Mist do not track *Obligation*; they track **Erosion**.

Each time a rite produces backlash or a 1 is rolled:

- erase a memory,
- distort a feature,
- or lose a social bond.

At **3+ Erosion**, the GM may enforce:

- shadow-speech,
- hostile mist manifestations,
- or NPCs forgetting the PC's name.

At **6+ Erosion**, the patron attempts apotheosis — the character becomes a *Mist-Thing* unless named and anchored by others.

1.8.2 Spellwheel: The Druid of the Mist

Sigil	Aspect	Tags	Invocation Theme
Root	Boundary	[BIND][DECAY]	Unmake structure, rot identity, bind paths or truths
Bloom	Hunger	[DRAIN][FEED]	Harvest fear/fatigue; convert suffering into momentum
Mist	Veil	[VEIL][SENSE]	Cloud meaning; detect cracks, sorrow, forgotten names
Bone	Unlife	[ANIMATE][CORRUPT]	Raise echoes; twist flesh or soil with old death
Hollow	Dominion	[CURSE][REWRITE]	bend will, rewrite laws, fracture names and memories
Rift	Tide of Unbeing	[PHASE][UNMAKE]	erase borders, dissolve authority, or step through reality

Usage Notes Cantors assemble invocations by chaining:

$$\textit{Aspect} + \textit{Tags} + \textit{Channel}$$

Invoker-style play treats the wheel as a *menu*:

1. Choose 1–2 Aspects
2. Add 1–3 matching Tags
3. State the narrative form (fog, vines, sorrow, whispers)

The more the invocation erodes boundaries or identity, the higher the DV and the greater the Erosion risk.

1.9 Patron: The Heroine of the Mist

Aspect *Memory, Oath, Bloodshed in Defense*

Once mortal — now half-Valkyrie, half-Mourn-Warden. She embodies:

- valor without recognition,
- sacrifice without audience,
- and the terrible cost of defending those who never remember you.

Sphere of Influence

- names,
- sagas,
- identity persistence,
- righteous vengeance,
- guardianship of the innocent,
- oaths that bind but uplift.

Devotional Archetypes

Oath-Keepers: sworn blades, bodyguards, shieldbearers

Saga-Wardens: skalds, lorekeepers, the memory-obsessed

The Forgotten: outcasts, orphans, traumatised veterans

Taboos

- abandoning a sworn charge,
- erasing someone's rightful name,
- cowardice in duty.

1.9.1 Miracles and Major Rites

Devotional power flows through remembrance and sacrifice.

Rites (General Access)

Namebinding: Mark 1 Fatigue — grant an ally **+1 Position** for defending or reclaiming identity.

Saga's Spark: Once per scene, declare a past victory to gain **+1 die** for an action — must narrate the remembered deed.

Shield of the Forgotten: Allies under your protection count as **one tier higher** for resisting fear or domination.

Blood Oath: Swear protection over a person or truth; gain a boon whenever fulfilling that oath through hardship.

Witness to Glory: Convert suffering (Fatigue/Harm) into +1 SB when defending others.

1.9.2 Higher Mysteries (Prestige/Epic Rites)

Reclaim the Name: Restore a forgotten truth or identity; remove Mist penalties for the scene.

Mist-Splitting Spear: Manifest spectral spear; +2 dice vs undead and corrupted oathbreakers.

Saga Ascent: Once per session, prevent death of one ally — they rise with 1 Harm and a memory of you they cannot shake.

The Last Watch: Bind your spirit to a place or charge; if abandoned, you become a shade that hunts oathbreakers.

1.9.3 Spellwheel: The Heroine of the Mist

Sigil	Aspect	Tags	Invocation Theme
Spear	Valor	[SMITE][PURIFY]	punish undead, strike corruption, reveal truth
Shield	Oath	[GUARD][ENDURE]	intercept harm, stand immovable, sanctify ground
Torch	Memory	[REVEAL][NAME]	expose hidden identity; illuminate forgotten stories
Tears	Sacrifice	[BIND][MEND]	heal through cost; bind wounds, take suffering
Crown	Remembrance	[SAGA][INSPIRE]	uplift allies, declare deeds into reality, rewrite legacy
Bell	Requiem	[BANISH][SEAL]	end hauntings; sever curses; close breaches

Cantor/Invoker Themes

- songs of valor,
- whispered sagas,
- spear-light metaphors,
- radiant mist,
- oath-fire halos.

1.9.4 Devotional Gifts (Mechanical Boons)

- **Once per session:** treat any Desperate defense as Dominant.
- When defending others, gain +1d to resist fear, torment, or loss.

- When fulfilling sworn duty under hardship, **mark 1 SB**.

1.9.5 Narrative Role in the Direwood Adventure

If her true Name is restored:

- she manifests at Act V,
- impales the Druid with the *Golden Thorn*,
- and offers one PC her blessing — or burden.

If her Name remains lost:

- she remains a Nemesis Shade,
- hunting oathbreakers and defilers,
- until someone speaks her back into the world.

1.10 Nemesis Profile: The Heroine Shade

Role *Guardian of memory, judge of oaths, hunter of the unworthy.*

A spectral shieldmaiden formed of mist and radiant sorrow. She is tragedy weaponised.

Tier IV (Legendary Adversary)

Concept Tags [VALKYRIE] [OATH] [MOURN] [JUDGE] [SAGA]

Core Traits

Spirit: 6

Resolve: 5

Body: 4

Speed: 3

Presence: 6

Harm Capacity: 6 (Cannot be killed until her Name is restored)

Armor: 2 (Spectral Plate)

Phase Structure

Phase I: Silent Hunt *She watches, tests, strikes symbols not flesh.*

• Attacks inflict Conditions rather than Harm:
REVERENCE, [FEAR], [UNWORTHY]

- If PCs perform **oath-keeping**, she withdraws for 1 exchange.

Phase II: The Shieldmaiden Revealed *Triggered when she is struck for 3+ Harm in one scene.*

- Gains +2 dice to melee attacks.
- Her spear manifests: Harm 2, ignores Armor.
- She utters fragments of her lost Name.

Phase III: The Ascendant Shade *Triggered when PCs hold three Name Fragments or swear an oath to restore her saga.*

- She switches from Nemesis to Trial.
- PCs may **roll to remember** (Lore + Presence).
- If spoken true, she kneels — and joins Act V.

Abilities

Mist-Splitting Spear +2 dice vs corrupted or undead foes; on 6s, pins enemy spirits.

Witness of Deeds Once per scene, invert Position against oathbreakers.

Saga Binding When PCs narrate past deeds tied to sacrifice, grant +1d to them.

Oathscour When someone abandons a charge, immediately strike Harm 2 ignoring Armor.

Weaknesses

- Cannot be harmed until her Name is known.
- Will not strike the innocent unless manipulated.
- Spear shattered by betrayal or false remembrance.

1.11 Artifact: The Golden Thorn

Origin Forged by an unknown power to pierce immortal spirits and bind mist-born corruption.

Appearance A meter-long gilded pin, root-etched, warm to the touch, humming faintly with invoked names.

Properties

- **Harm 2**; ignores Armor on undead or cursed entities.
- When used to impale, creates a **Banishment Seal**.
- If wielded by one who knows the Heroine's true Name, treat as **Harm 3**.

Golden Thorn Invocation Rites

These may be used by Cantors, Invokers, or Runekeepers.

Thorn Seal [BANISH] [SEAL] [MIST] — impale a spirit, pinning it to reality.

Memory Piercing [NAME] [REVEAL] — the impaled target utters a name or truth unwillingly.

Vigilant Thorn [GUARD] [WARD] — mark a threshold; undead must test to cross.

Radiant Impalement [PURIFY] [LIGHT] [SPEAR] — destroy spectral extensions or illusions.

Restriction: May only be used at full potency by one who has sworn an oath to restore the forgotten.

Running Direwood: GM Tips and Appendix

A Preparation Checklist

A.1 Session Zero Considerations

- Confirm player comfort with horror themes (psychological horror, identity loss, existential dread)
- Establish safety tools (X-Card, Script Change) for intense scenes
- Review character backgrounds for integration hooks
- Set expectations for investigative vs. combat focus

A.2 Pre-Session Preparation

1. Map key faction NPCs with clear motivations
2. Prepare 3-4 name fragment discovery scenarios
3. Review Patron mechanics for The Heroine and The Druid
4. Set up tracking sheets for:
 - Dread Clock
 - Memory Track
 - Faction attitudes
 - Environmental consequences
5. Prepare key location descriptions (Payden's Port, Direwood sectors, Fortress Heart)

B Pacing and Flow Management

B.1 Act I: Payden's Port

- **Focus:** Political tension + creeping horror
- **Key Scenes:** Faction meetings, first breach, departure
- **Pacing:** 2-3 sessions

- **GM Tips:**
 - Use omens liberally (dead gulls, fog children)
 - Let factions compete for PC attention
 - Don't rush the departure - build dread

B.2 Act II: Through the Direwood

- **Focus:** Survival horror + mythic revelation
- **Key Mechanics:** Environmental table, name fragments, Heroine's phantom
- **Pacing:** 3-4 sessions
- **GM Tips:**
 - Vary the environmental effects - don't use them every scene
 - Let the Heroine's phantom shift based on PC actions
 - Name fragments should feel earned, not random

B.3 Act III: The Fortress Heart

- **Focus:** Grim revelation + predatory architecture
- **Key Mechanics:** Room generator, adversary table, Heroine's judgment
- **Pacing:** 2-3 sessions
- **GM Tips:**
 - The fortress should feel alive and reactive
 - Use the Heroine as a dynamic antagonist, not static boss
 - Let the PCs' Memory Track influence her behavior

C Key Mechanical Reminders

C.1 Story Beat Economy

SB	Direwood Use	Impact
1 SB	Minor environmental shift	Path loops, fog thickens
2 SB	Moderate complication	Wraith attraction, memory loss
3 SB	Serious threat	Shadewalker patrol, trap activation
4+ SB	Major escalation	Heroine's wrath, fortress restructuring

Table 1: Direwood Story Beat Applications

C.2 Environmental Horror Tags

- **[MIST-CHOKED]**: Disorientation, impaired perception, fear generation
- **[HAUNTED]**: Reality seams, time loops, memory distortion
- **[STARVED-WORLD]**: Resource scarcity, will-draining, identity erosion

D Character Archetype Support

D.1 Tank/Controller Players

- Emphasize defensive positioning opportunities
- Provide clear crowd control scenarios
- Reward proactive threat management

D.2 Striker/DPS Players

- Offer tactical advantage positioning
- Include mobile combat scenarios
- Provide clear damage-dealing opportunities

D.3 Support/Buffer Players

- Create party-cohesion challenges
- Include social manipulation opportunities
- Provide healing/resource management moments

D.4 Utility/Scout Players

- Design puzzle/problem-solving scenarios
- Include exploration-focused challenges
- Reward specialized skill usage

E Thematic Reinforcement

E.1 Consistency Tips

- Always tie mechanical effects to narrative causes
- Let the forest react to player choices thematically
- Use recurring motifs (bones, mist, names, memory)
- Maintain the tension between heroism and tragedy

E.2 Horror Pacing

1. **Establish Normalcy:** Start with recognizable elements
2. **Introduce Wrongness:** Small, subtle violations
3. **Escalate Gradually:** Build to major violations
4. **Provide Relief:** Moments of safety or clarity
5. **Return Stronger:** Escalate beyond initial wrongness

F Troubleshooting Common Issues

F.1 Players Moving Too Slowly

- Increase environmental pressure (Dread Clock ticks)
- Introduce time-sensitive threats
- Use faction pressure from Payden's Port

F.2 Players Rushing Ahead

- Enforce consequences for missed investigation
- Use environmental barriers that require preparation
- Let important clues become inaccessible

F.3 Combat Dominance

- Emphasize non-combat solutions to threats
- Use adversaries that are difficult to defeat conventionally
- Introduce social or psychological consequences

F.4 Investigation Stalling

- Provide multiple paths to information
- Use active investigation (visions, dreams, encounters)
- Let the environment provide clues organically

G Optional Variations

G.1 Shortened Campaign

- Focus on core mystery (name restoration)
- Reduce faction complexity
- Streamline environmental challenges
- Condense fortress exploration

G.2 Increased Horror Focus

- Emphasize psychological effects
- Increase memory distortion elements
- Add more personal horror connections
- Reduce combat options

G.3 Mythic Heroism Focus

- Emphasize the Heroine's redemption arc
- Provide more opportunities for legendary actions
- Focus on saga and legacy themes
- Reduce horror elements

H Tracking Sheets and Handouts

H.1 Player Tracking

- Memory Track shared sheet
- Name Fragment collection log
- Faction relationship tracker
- Direwood survival log

H.2 GM Tracking

- Dread Clock status
- Heroine's attitude tracker
- Environmental effect log
- Faction pressure indicators

I Conclusion

Remember: The Direwood responds to the players' approach. Respect their choices, escalate meaningfully, and let the tragedy of the forgotten heroine drive both horror and hope.

Thematic Tier III Character Examples

J Aeler Military Engineer

Name: Thrain Stonecaller

Background: Aeler Charter Apprentice

Concept: Fortress-Craft Master who specializes in defensive engineering and siege-breaking

Attributes: Body 3, Wits 4, Spirit 3, Presence 2

Skills: Craft 4, Tinker 3, Tactics 3, Lore 2

Talents: Vent Prior's Training (3 XP), Stone-Sense (5 XP), Defensive Architecture (4 XP)

Patron: The Sealed Gate

Familiar: Thiasos - Ironscale (Stone Sentinel)

Codex: Charter of the Deep Vaults

Assets:

- Minor: Engineering Kit (surveyor's tools, measuring chains)
- Follower: Gunnvor Ironwright (Cap 2 Siege Specialist)

Background Tags: Charter-Stamped, Stone-Speech Initiate

Signature Contact: Master Builder Emrik (Cap 1)

Background Boon: Once/session around structures, ignore the first environmental complication from collapse or strain.

K Mistland Local Guide

Name: Elara Mistweaver

Background: Mistlands Bell-Keeper

Concept: Bell-tender turned wilderness guide who knows the dangerous paths through the fog

Attributes: Body 2, Wits 3, Spirit 4, Presence 3

Skills: Survival 4, Perception 3, Lore 3, Sway 2

Talents: Heightened Senses (3 XP), Mist Reading (4 XP), Bell-Speech (3 XP)

Patron: The Silent Choir

Familiar: Whisper (Corvid Scout)

Codex: Songs of the Dusk Bells

Assets:

- Minor: Bell-Pouch (ceremonial handbells)
- Follower: Bramble Thornwick (Cap 3 Wilderness Guide)

Background Tags: Bell-Law, Causeway Rights

Signature Contact: Dusk-Warden Morn (Cap 1)

Background Boon: Once/session in mist, choose route-or-safety: negate a travel delay or downgrade a hazard.

L Zakov Smuggler Captain

Name: Captain "Shadow" Kestra Voss

Background: Underworld Hand

Concept: Pirate-turned-smuggler who runs contraband past Aeler checkpoints

Attributes: Body 3, Wits 4, Spirit 3, Presence 3

Skills: Sway 4, Ranged 3, Subterfuge 3, Survival 2

Talents: Second Wind (2 XP), Keen Senses (2 XP), Social Chameleon (4 XP), Shipmaster's Instinct (4 XP)

Patron: Raéyn (Mistress of the Sea)

Familiar: Stormrider (Seabird Scout)

Codex: Tide-Rider's Charter

Assets:

- Minor: Hidden Cargo Compartment
- Standard: Smuggling Vessel "Night's Passage"
- Follower: Finn the Knife (Cap 3 Deckhand/Scout)

Background Tags: Harbor Handsigns, Black Banner Cant

Signature Contact: Fence Master Torr (Cap 1)

Background Boon: Once/session when using a cant, gain +1d to set up or slip out.

M Linnic Trader-Raider

Name: Bjorn Iceheart

Background: Frontier Marcher Homesteader

Concept: Seafaring trader who raids when trade winds fail

Attributes: Body 4, Wits 3, Spirit 3, Presence 3

Skills: Melee 4, Ranged 3, Survival 3, Command 2

Talents: Berserker Rage (8 XP), Weapon Mastery (4 XP), Cold Weather Survival (3 XP), Naval Tactics (4 XP)

Patron: Thrysos (King of Revels)

Familiar: Frostfang (Wolf Companion)

Codex: Saga of the Whale-Road

Assets:

- Minor: Dragon Boat "Stormbreaker"
- Standard: Trading Post in Linnstad
- Follower: Sigrun Ironscale (Cap 3 Warrior-Trader)

Background Tags: Veteran-of-the-Marches, Muster Papers

Signature Contact: Clan-Chief Harald (Cap 1)

Background Boon: Once/session in organized violence, ignore the first point of situational Disadvantage from confusion or fear.

N Lethai-al Valewood Ranger

Name: Aelindra Greenwalker

Background: Rural Valewood Forager

Concept: Forest guardian who protects ancient paths from outsiders

Attributes: Body 3, Wits 4, Spirit 3, Presence 2

Skills: Nature 4, Stealth 3, Perception 3, Lore 3

Talents: Canopy Spring (4 XP), Scent of Rain (4 XP), Green Speech (3 XP), Arrow-Song (4 XP)

Patron: Grimmir (Wild Speaker)

Familiar: Thornwhisper (Forest Cat)

Codex: Songs of Root and Branch

Assets:

- Minor: Hunter's Bow "Whisperleaf"
- Follower: Moss (Cap 2 Forest Guide/Healer)

Background Tags: Green Courts Token, River-Ferry Nod

Signature Contact: Leaf-Warden Sylvan (Cap 1)

Background Boon: Once/session in the wild, downgrade a Travel complication by one step.

O Aelinnel Gnome Artificer

Name: Quillwick Coppermeasure

Background: Academic of the Dialogues

Concept: Meticulous inventor who creates magical devices using precise calculations

Attributes: Body 2, Wits 5, Spirit 2, Presence 3

Skills: Craft 4, Arcana 3, Investigation 3, Lore 3

Talents: Long Memory (3 XP), Number Music (4 XP), Clockwork Mastery (6 XP), Two-Ledger Talk (3 XP)

Patron: Sacred Geometry

Familiar: Cogwheel (Mechanical Companion)

Codex: Theorems of Perfect Proportion

Assets:

- Minor: Workshop with Precision Tools
- Standard: Calculating Engine (Minor Artifact)
- Follower: Tink (Cap 2 Apprentice/Assistant)

Background Tags: School-Sealed, Reading Privileges

Signature Contact: Lecturer Brightmind (Cap 1)

Background Boon: Once/session in research or disputation, ask one clarifying question the GM must answer plainly.

P Aelaerem Halfling Herbalist

Name: Bramble Goodwort

Background: Rural Valewood Forager

Concept: Gentle healer who knows the dangerous plants of borderlands

Attributes: Body 2, Wits 3, Spirit 4, Presence 3

Skills: Medicine 4, Nature 3, Perception 3, Sway 2

Talents: Heightened Senses (3 XP), Root-Balance (3 XP), Healing Touch (4 XP), Herb Lore (3 XP)

Patron: The Silent Choir

Familiar: Sage (Garden Snake)

Codex: Remedies of the Hearth

Assets:

- Minor: Herb Garden and Apothecary Kit
- Follower: Pip Willowfoot (Cap 2 Gatherer/Apprentice)

Background Tags: Neighborhood Trust, Guild-Friend

Signature Contact: Village Elder Rose (Cap 1)

Background Boon: Once/session among familiar folk, convert a failure on routine labor to a success-with-cost.