

Tales of the Vale

- Tale the First (2025-01-31)
 - Calling all Heroes
- Tale the Second (2025-02-28)
- Five Years Pass
 - Down in the Well
 - Year One
 - Calling all Heroes
 - Year Two
 - Calling all Heroes
 - Year Three
 - Join the Army!
 - Year Four
 - Calling all Heroes
 - Year Five
 - Join the Navy
- Tale the Third (2025-03-28)

Tale the First (2025-01-31)

We first meet our would be heroes¹, Class Two at the Cathedral School in the foothills north of Bear Vale.

The Cathedral School has two classes. One class caters to six to eleven year olds and the other to twelve to fifteen year olds. The two classes are prosaically named class one and two and more imaginatively called kidlings and eldlings.²

Transitioning from class one to two is a big deal in the minds of the students. In class two the students start seriously studying the art of war and making plans for adulthood. Play is over

¹ Bud Bellflower too even though he insists that he is just an ordinary kid.

² Or more rudely snotty nosed brats and the cool kids.

for the most part. Hermont the Elder takes a bigger role in the student's education and the kids have decided for the most part what role they will play in the future of the valley.

Students spend months here at a time, after sowing and before harvest and then a few weeks after harvest before the snow and ice starts accumulating. They are expected to participate in all aspects of looking after the school, cleaning, cooking, washing, etc. on top of their lessons and are also expected to work on lessons during the long winter.

Class One

The teachers:

Teacher – a nature spirit of fluid gender who has been teaching at the Cathedral School for generations. They are affectionate and very knowledgeable about the invisible and visible worlds. They also teach class two occasionally.

Annabelle – a bear.

Gertrude – a badger.

The students:

1. Tam Eagle-eyes age six
2. Otto Ipswich age ten
3. Sally Strivings age nine
4. Nimble Nan age seven
5. Carl Druthers age six
6. Carly Druthers age six³
7. Scaly Scarf age

Class Two

The Teachers:

Hermont the Elder – a powerful sorcerer⁴. He⁵ appears as a vortex of mirror shards. They spin around a common axis and reflect many things some present, some elsewhere and some which are hopefully imaginary. He can adopt many guises but never appears as a human. He

³ And five minutes older.

⁴ At the very least.

⁵ Well his voice is masculine so that's the assumption people make. Hermont has not corrected this assumption.

was once described as “mean, cruel, petty and a bully” but these things are no longer true if they ever were. He is one of the oldest and most powerful beings in the valley and a very adept teacher.

Ingrid – a bearkin. Ingrid is the tallest and strongest woman in the vale and unlike the bulk of her kin is affable and genial. She is also beautiful and scar free. She loves to teach and trains the shield wall and heavy weapons among more scholarly subjects. She transforms into a giant white bear.

Old Man Gruitt – he is a veteran of the shadow scouts and has just started at the school. He is Ingrid’s polar opposite. Shadows that seem to have no obvious source cling to him

The students:

1. Tuck O’Plenty (Owen) age 12
2. Pretty Percy (Jeff) age 14
3. Allan (Darryl) age 14
4. Brandon the Nimble (Gary) age 15
5. Bud Bellflower (Craig) age eight⁶ aka Voleboy.
6. Mean Cass age fourteen
7. Hetty Longshanks age fifteen⁷
8. Trudy Half There, Half Not age seven and a half⁸
9. Gwen Good Shoes⁹ age thirteen.
10. Witch Hazel Bellflower age twelve¹⁰.
11. Just Janet age thirteen.
12. Trilby the Truthful age fourteen.¹¹

Our cast of heroes include:

Young Bud Bellflower (age 8). When he was but a toddler his older sister Witch Hazel turned him into a vole. Months later she miraculously turned him back into a human. This has left

⁶ He’s a prodigy.

⁷ The best runner in the entire Valley.

⁸ Trudy is literally the left half of a person. Perfectly bifurcated somehow. It’s unknown how this happened and where the other half of is. It’s assumed the other half is also seven and a half which together adds up to fifteen.

⁹ She is from a long line of cobblers and always has the best shoes at the Cathedral School. Currently she favours spiked combat boots which she is not allowed to wear inside without padded slip on’s.

¹⁰ She transformed her brother Bud into a vole at age 18 months. She shouldn’t have been able to do that at 5 ½ and she definitely shouldn’t have been able to turn him back. She promises to continue growing into an ever more formidable witch.

¹¹ Trilby cannot lie.

him with a special attachment to voles, especially the latest in a long line of Victors. Bud loves plants and can create special mixtures that soothe, heal and send people to their rewards.

Tuck O'Plenty (age 12). A rather small, round boy, meek and clumsy, but undeniably lucky.

Allan (age 14). Another meek and hesitant lad, who is curious, somewhat hesitant, and may yet prove to be a worthy warrior.

Pretty Percy (age 14). Percy is very handsome, curious and mouthy. He likes to think he's a ladies man but the ladies don't seem so sure about that. He loves music.

Brandon the Nimble (age 15). He seems to be destined to join the Shadow Scouts. He loves his bow and hunting.

Old Man Gruitt (age old). A veteran of the Shadow Scouts who is a gifted alchemist and scout and has recently joined the Cathedral School staff. He's in charge of the boys in class two.

Class Two sits and waits for their teacher Old Hermont. The boys, except Percy are lounging at their desks waiting. Percy slips in looking perfect as always just beating the girls into the class. Once all the girls, except Hetty are present, a loud disturbance is heard coming from the girl's dorm. It's Hetty yelling, and birds and assorted rodents chirping. Hetty stumbles into the room waving her arms around and yelling at the birds and rodents, "I'm not getting married until next year! Stop dressing me!" In a scene worthy of Disney, a group of birds and small rodents are trying to dress her in wedding finery. Her hair is full of twigs and flowers and she's got swatches and snatches of fabric wrapped around her shoulders and arms. She shoos the last of the would-be tiny seamstresses and tailors out a handy window. Pulling the scraps, twigs and flowers from her hair and body and glaring at anyone to dare comment she takes her seat. "It's next year for bear's sake. Are they going to bother me for a whole year?"

One minute Hermont is not there, the next he is. With a clearing of an invisible throat the class goes silent. "Today class we are going on a hike. Please get your gear." Some of the less active students groan sotto voce but they all get their gear.

Hermont leads them along a trail further up into the hills. He discusses the nature sights seen along the way. Suddenly there is a complete failure of an ambush on the part of a small, old man who stumbles out of his hiding place into plain view. More alarming is the huge white predator that rises out its extremely successful hiding place. It's a monstrous, white bear. It rears to its full impressive height and roars! The girls all squeal and charge the white beast

tackling it to the ground and rolling around with it like puppies. The bear changes into a tall nude woman and the girls all scream “Ingrid!” It is Ingrid their war teacher.

The small old man is introduced as Gruitt, a former shadow scout who is to train the boys in the ways of war. Old Hermont tells the students that he has business with Old Bear and is leaving Ingrid and Gruitt in charge. He states that he will be back in a few days. He changes into a hawk and soars into the sky. Once he is far enough away not to soil or wet any pants he changes into a mighty dragon and flies off to the East. Ingrid takes the girls under her literal and figurative arms and they head off to train while Gruitt takes charge of the boys for the training he’s prepared for them.

Gruitt put them through vigorous paces. He has them venture deeper into the hills looking for bandits. The bandits turned out to be their older siblings and some other relatives. They encountered three groups in turn:

- Bud’s oldest brother and his least favorite aunt, Ben Bellflower and Emma Longpants.
- One of Old Crow’s¹² grandsons, Carrion Crow.
- Percy’s cousin, Stella Highvoice.
- Tuck’s older sister, Patsy O’Plenty.

The second group encountered consisted of:

- Mean Cass’s older half-brother – Motherkiller Wainwright.¹³
- Allan’s 2nd cousin – Honeychild Meadows.
- Brandon’s stepsister – Beatrice Bearbaiter.
- Percy’s uncle – Max the Silent¹⁴.
- Another of Old Crow’s grandsons – Beer Wagon (strong like mule, smart like wagon).

The final opponent was Tuck’s grandfather - Chuck Northman – who is even bigger than Ingrid despite not being a bearkin.

The boys acquitted themselves well. The girls and Ingrid are met and they seem to have had more fun and accumulated fewer bruises and scrapes than the boys. Everyone heads back to the school for the evening meal.

¹² Former leader of the Shadow Scouts and brewmaster.

¹³ His mother died in childbirth.

¹⁴ Rumored to have gifted Percy his words, which is why Percy uses so many.

That night as they sleep something awakes them. Looking out the window they see what appears to be a giant, shiny golden dragonfly with glowing eyes. It lands on a ridge near the school and a group of small men¹⁵ apparently made of metal descend from the dragonfly collecting a ladder and a large sheet of rolled paper. They start heading towards the school. Gruitt takes charge and gets the boys ready to flee.

The younger students of Class One and its teachers leave first. Checking for the girls and Ingrid they find them missing! Getting away from the school they circle around for a look. They find the girls and Ingrid in the hills having a singalong and a campfire. Once brought up to speed Ingrid becomes all business. From some distance they spy on the little metal men who use their ladder to post a message on the door of the school.



The little men job finished grab their ladder and return to the dragonfly. It ascends and flies off into the darkness. Approaching cautiously they find that the little men have posted a [notice](#) on the door.

¹⁵ Roughly 18 inches in height.

CALLING ALL HEROES!
THE CLOCKWORK EMPRESS
NEEDS HEROES.

GREAT REWARDS AWAIT
ANYONE WILLING TO PLEDGE
THEIR LOYALTY AND THEIR
LIVES TO THE EMPRESS!
JOIN THE WINNING SIDE.
THE EMPRESS WILL PREVAIL!
ACCEPT NO LESSER
IDEOLOGIES!



RECRUITERS ARE TRAVELLING THE LANES
AND BY-WAYS. YOU SHALL KNOW THEM BY
THEIR EXCELLENCE AND THIS MARK!

THIS MESSAGE HAS BEEN APPROVED BY HER EXCELLENCY GERTRUDE THE 33RD, EMPRESS OF THE GLORIOUS CLOCKWORK EMPIRE. ALL
HAIL THE EMPRESS!

Last Updated February 23, 2025

Tale the Second (2025-02-28)

A year has passed since the little metal men's visit. The students spent a lot of time combing through the books in the library but could not find any references to any clockwork empire. Hermont the Elder has consulted every contact he has as well and come up blank. He draws the line at visiting the library at Maripose, the City of Wizards. There has been no sign of any little metal men since.

Hermont the Elder has left on sorcerer's business once again leaving Ingrid the Bearkin and Old Man Gruitt in charge. Ingrid is taking charge of class two today. She is dressed in a spotless snug white tank top and tight leather pants. "Let's talk about our future plans shall we? Hetty what do you want to be when you grow up?" Hetty stands to answer and this causes snickering and gentle gibes. She's 16 going on 17 and is almost ready to leave the School and go out into the adult world. Cass snorts derisively. "Problem Cass?" asks Ingrid.

He stands and huffs, "You always favour them," he nods vaguely in the girls' direction. Ingrid nods. "You're right, resume your seat Hetty. Okay Cass you have the stage. What do you want to be when you grow up?" Cass' mouth opens and shuts a few times and his face scrunches up a bit in effort. He mutters, "Err, come back to me." And he resumes his seat to much catcalls and not so good natured jeering.

Our heroes are each asked what they want to be when they grow up and answer thusly:

- Young Bud wants to continue learning herbal lore and brew lots of potions.
- Pretty Percy seems to be too mesmerized by the spectacle of Ingrid's torso to come up with a coherent answer.
- Allan wants to join the Shadow Scouts.
- Brandon the Nimble wants to leave the Valley and explore the wide world. This comment is greeted by much derision as everyone knows you can't leave the Valley. He scowls and resumes his seat. "You just wait," he says, "I'll manage it."
- Tuck O'Plenty says he wants to become a chef. This is greeted with puzzlement as there are no restaurants in the Vale. Brandon says, "You stick with me, we'll find somewhere out there where we can achieve our dreams!"

Ingrid is just getting ready to call on Cass again when Gertrude the Badger, teacher of class one rushes in, "A Barge, a Barge has been sighted."

By tradition school is always out for the day when a Barge is sighted so everyone rushes outside.

Carly Druthers age seven asks, “How will we get to the Bear Track?” Her brother Carl age seven turns scornfully to her and says, “Don’t you ever listen?” He points and proclaims, “That’s how.”

A herd of fey horses stand there impatiently waiting. Carl shrieks and yells, “Mount up racers!”

Everyone jumps on a horse to be whisked away to the Bear Track that runs the length of the valley. All the students mount up. Poor Bud barely manages to scramble up and ends up slung over the horse’s barrel, much to the horse’s amusement. Mean Cass who the horses know well ends up riding backwards with his face right above the horse’s rectum. As soon as the rider is astride their horse the beast is off like a shot! The ride is equal parts terrifying and exhilarating. The horses are supernaturally fast and agile. Up seemingly vertical cliffs in some form of horsey parkour. Being slung across the barrel of the horse makes this even scarier! Whooping and hollering makes the ride all that much more fun! The riders try and encourage more speed out of their steed and some succeed in getting them to run even faster. Poor Bud tries to get his horse to let him sit astride but fails.

At the end of the run just east of the Knee villagers are gathered. Children who do not attend the Cathedral School are lined up waiting to race and everyone is craning their necks and looking to the west for the first sight of the Barge. The smallest children are sitting on their parents shoulders complaining about not being allowed to race. When they reach the Knee, the nearest village they dismount. Mean Cass of course is dumped on his ass and barely misses a steamy pile of fresh fey horse dung. Witch Hazel gives her horse a thank you kiss and she shakes her head in approval. Tuck O’Plenty also yells thank you. Everyone lines up with the



local racers and turns their heads to the west to catch the first sight of the Barge. The adults watch for sneaky behaviour with Mean Cass getting especial attention.

The race has been a tradition in the Vale for generations. During the summer months magical golden Barges float through the sky. They first appear far off in the Sea of Grass and make a

beeline for the Vale. They float slowly over the valley and the strange beings on board throw candies and strange magical prizes¹⁶ at the children of the Valley who race after the Barge. If any adult dares to try for the candy or prizes the Barge passengers immediately stop throwing them.

The children stood there, almost trembling with pent up energy waiting for the Barge to appear and for the race to start. Finally Allan spots it, “The Barge, the Barge is coming!” Once spotted the Barge seems to speed up. Soon it majestically passes directly overhead. The racers all tense up. “Go!” yells the Headwoman of the Knee, Mildred Beater¹⁷. Shrieking exuberantly they all set off!

Poor Witch Hazel trips over her own feet and her brother Bud Bellflower and Pretty Percy stop to help her. Allan and Brandon are at the front of the pack but Hetty Longshanks lives up to her name, taking the lead. Everyone manages to grab some of the candies being tossed from the Barge and Hetty grabs the first prize!¹⁸

Prize the First - The Curious Clock. An intriguing ornate ormolu mantel timepiece that tells perfect time for somewhere else and cannot be set or wound. Its chiming ranges from one to 37 strikes.

All the children¹⁹ manage to resist the temptation to eat the candies²⁰ during the race.

1. Blue Bouncer – if you eat this you swell up into a blue balloon for d20 rounds. You are indestructible but have zero control over your motion. Fun for others.
2. Yellow pucker drop. So sour your mouth seals shut and you cannot eat for d4 days.
3. Striped pastille – super tasty but with a faint aftertaste of disappointment.
4. Green zipadeedoo – adds 4 to the eater’s PACE and changes their running die to a d20! This effect only lasts 5 rounds. While under the influence the eater can only move at full speed.
5. Red heart²¹. This candy makes you very angry but you go totally limp for d6 rounds. Has a very strong aftertaste that makes everything you ever eat afterwards taste vaguely of cinnamon.

¹⁶ Parachutes are attached to these prizes so they can survive the descent.

¹⁷ Named so because of her expertise at beating flax straw to make paper.

¹⁸ The race is abstracted as being five stages, five prizes and one grand prize!

¹⁹ Well almost all of them.

²⁰ No one has ever died from eating a Barge candy. Not permanently anyway.

²¹ Shaped like an actual human heart, not the Valentine kind.

6. Black briquette. A completely black candy that has an extremely strong licorice taste. It also serves as a month's supply of coal for a blacksmith.

Besides what at a distance looks like humans, i.e. the crew, the following beings can be seen on the Barge.

- A beautiful naked blue haired woman with a pixie cut who has beautiful gauzy butterfly wings on her back.²²
- A giant insect man with lots of spikes.
- A bouncy blue rubber ball the size of a prize winning pumpkin.
- A giant corgi.
- A sad old man dressed in rusty armour accompanied by a donkey.
- A barrel of monkeys. They are dressed in sharp suits made out of paper currency²³.
- An energy being made up of connected spheres of various iridescent colours.
- A very tall hairy man.

During the second stage of the race Mean Cass found himself next to Tuck O'Plenty and took the opportunity to trip him! Witch Hazel, Bud and Percy rejoined the race. Hetty was still in the lead but she shied from grabbing the second prize, a sheath less knife dangling from a parachute. Brandon hot on her heels grabbed the knife and discovered how sharp it was when he easily sliced the threads of the parachute!

Prize the Second - The Misericord of Infinite Sharpness. This slim blade is impossibly sharp and cannot be sheaved. It is incredibly dangerous and can only be laid flat. If it's stuck into something it will slowly sink into it and keep sinking until it falls out the bottom of the world. The blade causes d12 damage on a successful hit but any critical failures while wielding the blade cause the wielder to strike themselves for STR + d12 + d6. Anyone unaware of its nature has to make a Fighting or Agility roll to safely grab it. A Critical Fumble means you cut yourself for full damage.²⁴

During the third stage Mean Cass tries to trip Allan but Allan's quick reflexes means he trips Cass! Hetty is still holding a narrow lead but misses her grab at the next prize so Brandon grabs the next prize...

²² Sadly non functional.

²³ None of it legal tender anywhere. Nor is it collectible.

²⁴ That's a lot of damage for a weapon in Savage Worlds!

Prize the Third - A Perfect Stick. It's a stick yet anyone who looks at it agrees that it's perfect somehow. Yet it has absolutely no function and somehow is too short or too long for any purpose you intend.

Running with the stick in one hand and the Misericord in the other Brandon manages to pass Hetty. Mean Cass grabs and eats one of the red hearts. He is filled with rage but immediately goes limp! Brandon grabs the fourth prize.

Prize the Fourth - The Mysterious Book. A beautiful illustrated book written in some indecipherable language and containing bizarre, seemingly meaningless illustrations. It gives you the sense that it's an instruction manual for something. Something you really don't want to know about. It has a small piece of paper glued to the inside cover that features a scowling demon face whose lips seem to be moving. Thank goodness you have no idea what it's saying.

During the last stage Brandon and Hetty are tied. With an extra push he manages to pass her. He ignores the last minor prize but swings the Misericord at the parachute of the final prize! He rolls a critical fumble and the Misericord turns on him causing two wounds! Hetty and Trilby the Truthful ignore the two prizes and try to help him. They manage to heal one of the wounds. He dropped the Misericord and it slowly sinks into the ground disappearing.

Allan passes them all and grabs the last two prizes.

Prize the Fifth - The Perfect Lily. A cut flower that never dies.

The Grand Prize – A tiny blue cut glass bottle that contains a faint, beautiful smell.²⁵

Brandon is fixed up with a magical potion and everyone returns to the Knee for the traditional postrace feast. After the feast the fey horses return to take the children back to the School. The horses refuse to let Cass ride, they saw his mean tricks and he has to ride Ingrid's bear form back.

It's a beautiful moonlit night moon that lights up the night. After they reached the School and the horses leave them a loud boom rocks the night. In the sky above the school the Golden Barge that had passed overhead earlier that day can be seen²⁶. It is listing badly and anyone who makes a notice roll sees that something is sticking out of the side. A screeching sound as of metal being torn is emitted by it and observers can tell that it is going to crash. It brushes

²⁵ Bud the Herbalist says it smells like his aunt.

²⁶ Barges never return the same day.

the mountain side with a sickening crack and the thing sticking off the side is torn off. It tumbles to the ground ejecting small figures as it falls.

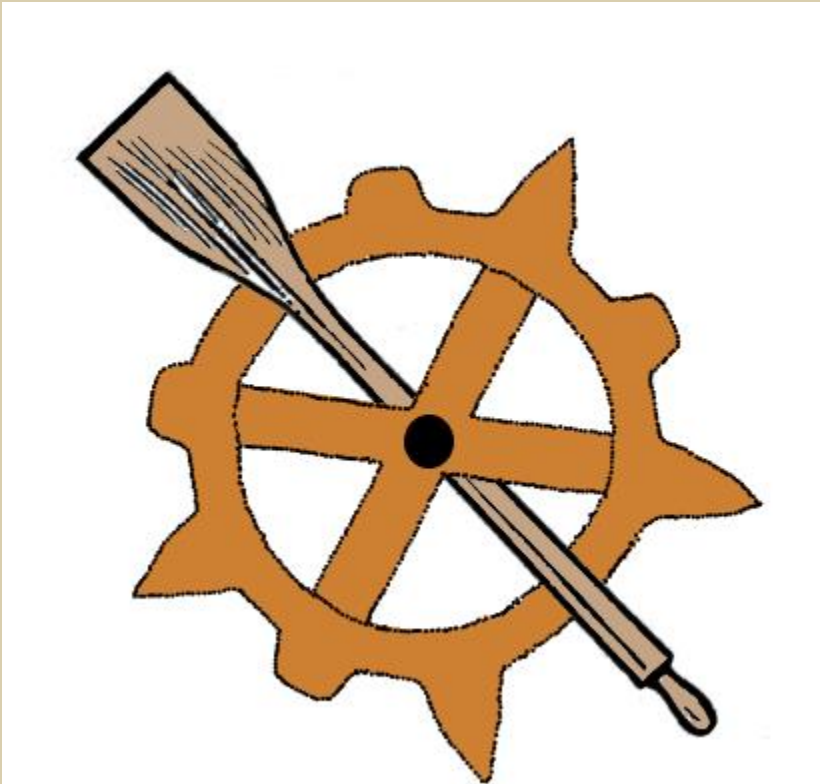
The barge tries to right itself and steer away from its doom but it is too late. A fire of unnatural hue starts and spreads. Figures can be seen emerging on deck. This includes all the beings seen earlier.

- The beautiful naked blue haired woman with the beautiful gauzy butterfly wings on her back climbs over the railing and is silhouetted by the full moon. She spreads her wings and drops over the side. As she descends she brushes her wings against the burning hull which sets them afire. They burn instantly and she drops from sight.
- The giant insect, man with lots of spikes spreads tiny wings and seem to be successfully descending to the ground.
- The bouncy blue rubber ball the size of a prize winning pumpkin jump off the deck and disappears from sight.
- The giant corgi howls in despair and leaps over the side.
- The sad old man dressed in rusty armour rides his donkey across the deck and the pair leap to their doom.
- The barrel of monkeys rolls out a doorway and across the deck. It rolls over the side and disappears.
- The energy being made up of connected spheres of various iridescent colours flies off into the distance and disappears.
- The very tall hairy man covered in flames comes out of the cabin and leaps like a hairy comet into the night.

The barge descends striking the insect man and crushing him into the ground. The crew, captain and all stay with their ship.

Gruitt and Ingrid lead the students to try and rescue any survivors. They find two crash sites, the one for the strange thing that was sticking out of the Barge, and the Barge itself.

Various bodies are found in the wreckage of the other craft. It is made of blackened bronze and is marked with an odd symbol. There are no survivors. They all appear human and wear flared pants, striped shirts and short jackets with round hats.



The craft is a long cylinder about 80 feet long and 12 feet across.

It had a crew of six and the rear part is full of twisted metal gears.

No magic is detected and it does not seem to have any weaponry.

The bodies are quite badly damaged but all of them bear a tattoo like the image at the left.

The vessel itself also makes heavy use of the symbol.

No paper survives the crash.

A single small club sized ranged weapon of some sort has survived the crash undamaged. There are four other badly damaged examples and two larger weapons, also damaged.

The Barge

The barge burns for a day and a half. The bodies of most of the passengers are found other than the energy being and the giant insect man crushed beneath the barge itself.

Pretty much everything on the barge is destroyed by the crash and the fire. The barge seems to have been made of wood covered with gold which melts off and covers the debris field. It can be salvaged but it doesn't seem to have any special properties.

The bodies that are recovered are buried in a small cemetery at the site of the crash. Anything suspicious looking is gathered together and taken off for examination.

Five Years Pass

Most of class two graduates and starts to make their way in the adult world. To celebrate and impart some wisdom Old Man Gruitt and Ingrid take the class to The Well.

Down in the Well

“What is this place?” asks Hazel. Just before graduation Ingrid and Old Man Gruitt had taken all the students from class two to an out of the way ramshackle and sprawling building on the outskirts of the Stomach. Even Bud and Tuck who were not graduating this year. The place was dark and unwelcoming but music and raucous laughter had drifted from the building out into the night. When Ingrid opened the door a cacophony of sounds and an olfactory assault wafted out. Loud raucous laughter and the smell of burnt stew and stale beer. Music of a sort was mixed in and Percy winced at the inept playing. Ingrid ducked her head to enter and a loud chorus of “Ingrid” greeted her. Old Man Gruitt walked in, no need to duck for him and was greeted by a single nod. “Assholes,” he muttered under his breath.

The students squeezed through the door, seemingly all at once and looked around in amazement. It looked exactly as it sounded and smelled. There was a table of bearkin and what looked like but could it really be Sidhe Lords? Pixies wove clumsily around the rafters, nothing like their normal agile selves and Just Janet asked, “What’s wrong with them?” Someone at a nearby table overheard and laughed, “Why they’re as drunk as skunks!” He patted his lap and leered, “Come and have a sit, little lady.” He reached towards her to drag her over. Ingrid intercepted and effortlessly dragged him into the air. She harumphed and even though the sound was not loud total silence filled the room.

“What is rule number one about my students, no, all the students? No, to everyone who passes through these doors?”

“No touching without an invitation”, replied everyone present in perfect unison.

“And what happens if you don’t follow rule number one?” growled Ingrid.

“You’ll eat our balls or wombs,” and everyone present hunched a bit and covered their family jewels.

“And what will I also do?”

“Enjoy our tasty bits ever so much.”

“That’s right,” replied Ingrid and just her head turned into that of a giant bear and she roared in the offender’s face. He fainted dead away and she dropped him to the floor. Her head turned back. “Now behave and we can all have some good clean fun.” Some of her kin raised their mugs in her direction. The aural and olfactory assaults resumed. The students noticed

some of their older siblings and relatives in the crowd, in fact much of the crowd were only slightly older than they were. Tuck huffed, "Why haven't we heard of this place before?"

Ingrid and Old Man Gruitt found a table to sit at though it wasn't empty when she got near. They all sat and Ingrid ordered beer and food. After tasting the wares which were much better than the décor suggested Old Man Gruit started into a lecture. They all groaned and he snapped, "This is it my dimwits, after today most of you won't be my problem any more so listen good!"

"The Well is a place to go and relax, a place to blow off some steam when you think you can't stand things no more. We're all stuck here in this valley and you're probably all going to be fine, upstanding citizens some day. Some of you sooner than others." Allan interjected, "You're not." Gruitt glared at him before chuckling darkly. "That's true. And that's why you'll see me here or one of the other holes like this, each settlement has one. Just stay away from the one at Shadows Cling! That's Old Crow's place. He's a right fucker."

"You know there's nowhere to go right? We can't travel into the Sea of Grass because the centaurs and minotaurs hate us. Ya can't use the Path of Skulls unless you got a token. And there's none in this here valley. The ogres would rather et ya than look atcha. And," he shudders visibly, "if you tries to travel through the mountains you might as well slaver yourselves with barbecue sauce because you're drawing the attention of things what's attention you...do...not...want! And if you come back from a long time in the mountains you'll be met with fire and steel because you won't be you!" He slumps lost in thought and the students are most impressed that when he uttered this last statement Ingrid shuddered as well. Happy go lucky Ingrid, not scared of anything Ingrid? What was out there?

After a few minutes of uncomfortable silence he sits up straighter and empties his mug with one long pull. Ingrid puts an arm comfortingly around his shoulders. Old Man Gruitt's face contorts ever so briefly and quite alarmingly. Not even the most generous observer would characterize what happened to his face as a smile but it was certainly something. He nods, resumes his customary frown and she drops her arm. She starts speaking, "This is the place where you can come to vent your frustration, where you can punch someone in the face." She casually does so and the innocent victim only passing by on his way for a piss drops like a stunned steer. A puddle forms. Everyone on that side of the table shuffles their feet to keep them dry. "And it's all left here. This is where you can come for a snog...always consensual," her eyes narrow, "a good feed, a rowdy time and some really, really, really shit music." She winces, looks at Percy and says, "If you would be so kind." He grabs his lute and heads to the

small stage. The tenant of the stage looks mad at him until she catches Ingrid's meaningful eye and she hastily vacates the stage. Percy honours them with a tune.

Ingrid stands up, stretches her back, cracks her knuckles loudly and says, "Now, who wants to start a fight?"

After the Well

Five years pass between the second and third sessions. Here's a general overview of what the PCs were up to.

Year One

General Notes: another poster [calling all heroes](#) is posted everywhere in the Valley. Alarmingly no one sees anyone do the posting.

Only one ogre attack happens. The usual trade with the ogres does occur but they trade very little mirror glass. The usual trade mission from Maripose, the City of Sorcerers arrives.

For the first time in living memory no golden barges sail over the Valley.

Allan (16): continues studying stone working and lives his life.

Brandon (16): continues studying fletching and scouting and lives his life.

Bud (10): is still in school, as is Tuck, the others have all graduated to the adult world.

Gruitt (Old +1): spends the year guiding the group on increasingly far-ranging patrols, hoping to pound some basic survival skills into their thick skulls.

Gruit also dedicates time to investigating what he calls the "cross-sling", the odd weapon that survived the crash of the vessel that struck the golden barge. After quite a bit of very careful experimentation he manages to replicate the alchemical powder used to propel the bullets the device uses. He finds he can carefully refill that strange tiny canisters the cross-sling uses and replace the even tinier explosive cylinder it uses to ignite the powder in the canister.

He can't replicate the device itself because the metallurgy is beyond anyone in the valley. He thinks he might be able to create a simpler version but he can't find a blacksmith to help him. They don't see the point and they're all busy.

He does come up with an improved alchemical fire bomb though that has a slighter more powerful explosion and affects a larger area.

Percy (16): Percy spends his time travelling about the valley learning the 'lay of the land'. If he's going to be a scout he needs to know what's going on where.

Percy finds out he's going to be a father. His friend tells him he's certainly capable to making babies but she doubts he's father materials and lets him go his own way. He does promise to help support his son.

He gains some friends and some enemies (the friend's fathers).

Tuck (14): Tuck is still in school but he follows his first love on the side, culinary experimentation.

Notes on Experiments in Culinary Excellence

By One Tuck O'Plenty, Gourmand, Chef, Brewer and Distiller and Cuisnomancer Extraodinaire, Par Excellence

14th year: On the preservation of wheat biscuits by four times baking:

Many long distance breads are baked again to reduce their moisture to bone dryness, I propose here a method to even further prolong the keeping of grain goods: baking them once more, then once more again. This process of four times baking discovered by genius prescient guess work on my part while preparing some travel biscuits in my fourteenth year, yields a biscuit impervious to teeth and pest alike. While kept out of dampness, these biscuits hold for years, as discovered of the ones left in the storage cave, deep in the back, where they had been mislaid so as to hide them from judging eyes.

Conclusion: Wet the biscuit thoroughly before attempting to eat.

Year Two

General Notes: another poster [calling all heroes](#) is posted everywhere in the Valley. Alarmingly no one sees anyone post them.

The usual trade with the ogres does occur but they trade very little mirror glass. The usual trade mission from Maripose, the City of Sorcerers arrives.

For the second year no golden barges sail over the Valley.

Allan (17): lives his life.

Brandon (17):): lives his life.

Bud (11) leaves school. He's left to his own devices mostly because he's so young.

Gruitt (Old+2): "I ain't your teacher no more. And I ain't no damned patrol leader. One of you jackasses is in charge. I don't care which one - you lot decide. Just whoever it is should know that when I'm with you, I'm the lead scout and you don't tell your scout how to do his damned job."

Because Gruitt always gets this question, he will add:

"You want to know how to you pick your leader? Always a nightmare, that. The traditional way is a drinking contest. Everyone drinks until only one is left standing. Then, the standing man picks the leader. Course he's pretty pissed and usually picks his own stinky self. Tis okay cause you don't want your boss to get drunk under the table by some other wanker and end up with your patrol 'volunteered' for the shit jobs."

With most of the 'kids' graduated from his teaching, Gruitt undertakes a long-delayed project. He assembles all his alchemy recipes into a book he calls "The Shadowspinner's Almanac." It is written in Shadow to keep posers from reading it. He gives the completed work to Hermont to pass on to any future shadow alchemists that may arise in the Vale.

Percy (17): Percy decides it might be useful to spend some time travelling outside the valley learning the 'lay of the land'. If he's going to be a scout he needs to know what's going on where. He spends a season living with the giants, and learning to speak giantish and weird giant stuff.

He gains some friends and some enemies (the friend's fathers).

Percy's son Patrick is born. He's the spitting image of his father.

He manages to get the attention of a lady giant and eventually manages to escape said attention.

Tuck (15): leaves school. 15th year: Beverages reduced for greater potency:

On noticing that, when frozen, beer separates into a large part of ice and a smaller part of unfreezing, much stronger liquid; I have endeavoured to recreate this process on large scale. I purposely mislaid a cask of ale that I had helped Gruit brew over the winter. I then, over a period of many weeks, skimmed what liquid didn't freeze into a smaller cask. This cask was then also freeze reduced for greater effect. I have had to rewrite this section as the notes I took while tasting the concoction were quite a mess.

Conclusion: A good idea, but takes a lot of ale or beer to produce a relative small quantity.

Year Three

General Notes: A poster exhorting people to [Join the Army](#) is posted. Again no one sees the beings doing the posting.

No ogres are seen and no trade occurs. The trade expedition from Maripose does some desultory trading but departs laden down with disappointment.

No golden barges sail over the Valley.

Allan (18): lives his life.

Brandon (18): lives his life.

Bud (11): lives his life.

Gruitt (Old +3): Although still teaching, Gruit undertakes a Vale-wide survey of all the stories and tales of the People of the Bear. He sits in every tavern in the Vale and writes down all the stories he can persuade people to tell him. He also warns all comers of the dangers of consuming Old Crow beers. "Tales of the Vale" enters general circulation but is surprisingly grim reading.

Percy (18): Percy decides it might be useful to spend some time travelling even further outside the valley learning the 'lay of the land'. If he's going to be a scout he needs to know what's going on where. He spends a year living with the minotaurs, and learning to speak minotaur and weird minotaur stuff. At least that's what he claims.

He gains some friends and some enemies (the friend's fathers).

Tuck (16): 16th year: Cheese what isn't soft:

Through experimentation I have devised a method with which typically soft cheeses can be rendered hard and dry for prolonged travels. The chief method through which this is accomplished is thus: Aging. When left salted and aged in a dry area, such as the storage caves or hidden under the hearthstone, a typical soft cheese will, over a period of months, harden into a road worthy cake. Long have we had to carry cheese in the very animal stomachs they form in, now we can boil the milk with the stomachs themselves, then discard the stomach and separate the curds from the whey before forming a cake to harden. A success in my culinary experiments.

My sister has suggested adding berries and nuts to the cheese. This is a preposterous notion; surely they would ruin the flavour?

Conclusion: A great success, no improvements could possibly be made.

Addendum from 17th year: She was right, but I refuse to admit it.

Year Four

General Notes: another poster [calling all heroes](#) is posted everywhere in the Valley. Alarmingly no one sees any posters.

No ogres. The trade expedition from Maripose does some desultory trading but departs laden down with disappointment.

No golden barges sail over the Valley.

Allan (19): lives his life.

Brandon (19): lives his life.

Bud (12): This is the year Bud loses Very Young and becomes just Young. See the following entry for more of what happens or almost happens to Bud.

Gruitt (Old + 4): Alarmed by an incident where Bud nearly dies trying to collect herbalism

supplies, Gruit works with Bud to develop a Vale map with notes on where all the relevant herbs can be collected without wandering into dangerous terrain. Near the end of the year, Gruit is alarmed by another incident where he nearly kills Bud because the kid won't stop talking. The map is declared 'good enough,' and Gruit stops working on it.

Percy (19): Percy decides it might be useful to spend some time travelling really really far away learning the 'lay of the land'. If he's going to be a scout he needs to know what's going on where. He spends a year living with the centaurs, and learning to speak centauri and weird centaur stuff.

At least that's what he claims he does.

He gains some friends and some enemies (the friend's fathers).

Tuck (17): 17th year: Stewed radish for improving ones health in the ways of eyesight, sore backs and other general illnesses:

I recall Bud telling me of radishes healing properties, and so, following my prior success in reducing liquor, I attempted to reduce a stew to produce a superior medicine. This process involved mashing stewed radish into a paste then pushing said paste into cheese cloth to extract the radish liquor, which was then freeze reduced. This yielded next to no product and the product in question was bitter to the extent of most poisons.

Conclusion: Enormous failure.

Year Five

General Notes: A poster saying [Join the Navy](#) is posted everywhere in the Valley. Alarmingly no one sees any posters.

No ogres. The trade mission from Maripose does not appear for the first time in living memory and history.

No golden barges sail over the Valley.

Allan (20): lives his life.

Brandon (20): lives his life.

Bud (13): lives his life.

Gruitt (Old +5): Looking to retire, again, Gruit undertakes to start his own brewery. The product is surprisingly good, but the marketing is miserable and fails to overcome the common fear of drinking anything created by a shadow-cursed alchemist. Gruitt drinks the remaining product and returns to scouting, even more grim and miserable than before.

Percy (20): Percy decides to live on his own for a year so that various friends (and their father's) leave him in peace/one piece. He learns more weird stuff.

He lurks on the most fringes of the valley and misses Patrick's third birthday.

After a year he returns to the valley to see if people are still looking for him.

Tuck (18): 18th year: Mixing food and drink for benefit of flavour:

Long have leaves been boiled to impart their flavour to water and stews, in this vein I have attempted to impart flavours to drinks. Among these attempts, I have had both successes and failures. My base drink chosen: mead, for its relative tame base flavour. Among the failures were adding various meats to the mead to impart meatiness, and cheeses for likewise cheesiness. Successes were of a floral variety, with berries and fruits and herbs creating great successes.

Conclusions: Old Gruitt is rather fond of the mead imparted with Juniper berries, then reduced by freezing.

JOIN THE ARMY!

THE CLOCKWORK EMPRESS' GLORIOUS FORCES SWEEP ALL BEFORE THEM!

- **GREATER AND LESSER
FLANTAGONIA HAVE FALLEN,**
- **THE ORBITES HAVE BEEN
DEFEATED,**
- **KAZATASCHAGORY HAS BEEN
ANNIHILATED!**

JOIN THE IMPERIAL ARMY AND BE ON THE WINNING SIDE!



THIS MESSAGE HAS BEEN APPROVED BY HER EXCELLENCY GERTRUDE THE 33RD, EMPRESS OF
THE GLORIOUS CLOCKWORK EMPIRE. ALL HAIL THE EMPRESS!

JOIN THE NAVY!

THE CLOCKWORK EMPRESS



TO JOIN THE IMPERIAL NAVY! GREAT REWARDS AWAIT THOSE WHO SERVE! THREE SQUARE MEALS AND A COMFY HAMMOCK ARE WAITING. A GOOD LIFE AND PROPER BELIEFS ARE YOURS TO CLAIM.



THIS MESSAGE HAS BEEN APPROVED BY HER EXCELLENCY GERTRUDE THE 33RD, EMPRESS OF THE GLORIOUS CLOCKWORK EMPIRE. ALL HAIL THE EMPRESS!

Tale the Third

The party was keeping watch in the Basket the tower that blocks the mouth of the Valley as part of their militia duties. Old Man Gruitt had been chosen by the group to be their leader much against his wishes. It was the usual boring duty with no expectation of anything happening. Old Man Gruitt spotted what looked like a centaur running towards the valley being chased by other centaurs. A closer look revealed it was a person riding a two wheeled vehicle of some sort. Percy realized the figure was female so he wanted to help her. They fired the ballista at the centaurs and missed and then started firing bows.

The woman got up to the basket and put her vehicle in it. One of the centaurs was hit by an arrow but none were damaged. After an alchemical bomb was tossed at the centaurs they backed off and rode away. The woman and her vehicle were hauled up to the top of the tower. She introduced herself as Opal Wolf, a servant of the Clockwork Empress. She said she was here to request an audience with Old Bear. When she took her leather jacket off she revealed the fact that she had a metal arm powered by magical clockwork. Her vehicle which she called a velocipede was also powered by clockwork. She also had a one handed war hammer and a clockwork pistol. She was very hungry because of her chase with the centaurs and Tuck shared some provisions with her.



Because they were at the end of their shift Old Man Gruitt reported Opal Wolf's mission to the Watch Captain who immediately assigned them the duty of escorting Opal Wolf to the Bear's Den at the end of the Valley, a three day journey. They headed east to the Knee intending to spend the night at the Hole, the local watering hole. Opal Wolf tried to get Brandon to push her velocipede but he refused so Allan pushed it instead. When they reached the Hole Opal enquired about the possibility of getting a warm bath. Old Man Gruitt suggested the nearby stream. She headed that way in the company of Percy who was going to help her get clean. Of course once she was out of earshot Old Man Gruitt headed to the nearby bathhouse. They reconvened after Opal Wolf's bath. Both she and Percy seemed very relaxed. Tuck gathered supplies for the trip from the Hole as they were on official business. That night Opal invited Tuck to share her cot which he did somewhat reluctantly.

As they travelled Opal Wolf showed the party what her velocipede could do by taking Allan, Brandon and Percy for rides. The others refused. She also showed off her arm and hammer which seemed to increase her strength and damage.

The next day they headed to the next settlement, the Stomach. That night she invited Allan to her bed and he noticed that she had a tattoo on her inner thigh that made them question her true motives in meeting Old Bear. They took a detour to the Cathedral School where Hermont the Elder subjected her to a mind reading spell. She swore she meant Old Bear no harm and the mind reading spell confirmed this.



They continued on to the next stop The Reach. Here they found a group of bearkin watching the Vale of Woe. A steady trickled of salty water had been descending the Vale for around a week. Old Man Gruitt examined the water and determined that it was just regular water tainted with salt. That night the party slept in a cow barn and Opal Wolf slept alone.

The next day they would reach the Bear's Den. As they neared the track that led to Shadows Cling they noticed an interesting effect. The shadows that cling to Old Man Gruitt started pointing towards Shadows Cling and kept doing so as they passed the entrance and headed to the Bear's Den. At the Bear's Den they found the elite bearkin shield thanes that guarded Old Bear. They asked for an audience with the Old Man, Old Bear's major domo.

He appeared and was incredulous that anyone had the temerity to seek an audience with Old Bear. Especially as no one in the valley had ever heard of a clockwork empire or its empress. The Old Man disappeared into the longhouse for quite a while and the party waited to hear his answer. Percy tried to get the female shield thanes to notice him but they refused. As they waited a giant passed over the valley carefully avoiding stepping on anything. They heard a loud roar coming from inside the longhouse and the Old Man reappeared and incredulously said that Old Bear would hear Opal Wolf's petition.

The entire party was invited in. As the door opened they were hit by a horrible smell, a cross between an animal's den and rot. At the back wall of the longhouse was a huge pile of fur which of course was Old Bear. He had a huge gaping wound in his side that oozed contagion. He lifted his head and looked blearily at Opal Wolf and the party. She gave him greetings from the Empress and said the Empress was looking for a supply of mirror glass from the Ogre Duke. The glass would then need to be transported to Maripose where it would be picked up by representatives of the Clockwork Empire.

In exchange for this the Empress would look favourably on Old Bear and the Valley and she would give six tokens that would allow passage on the Path of Skulls. Old Bear said he would have to think on this and would let her know his answer the next morning.

That night Opal Wolf slept alone and Old Man Gruitt and Bud brainstormed about possible alchemical/herbal remedies for Old Bear. They sorrowfully came to the conclusion that a cure was beyond their abilities.

The next morning they were summoned to Old Bear's presence where he agreed to the Empire's request. He appointed that party as his agents and each of them was gifted with one of the path tokens. Opal Wolf hung one of the tokens around each of their necks saying,

By this gift you swear to obey the Empress in these two things, first to obtain the Dark Mirror from the Ogres, and second to bring the Dark Mirror to Maripose the City of Sorcerers to turn it over to her agents.

Old Man Gruitt and Bud could detect that the tokens were magic but not what kind of magic they were. They also could not be removed once they were around their necks. When confronted by this fact Opal Wolf replied, "Well you wouldn't want them to come off while you're on the Path of Skulls would you? Besides they will come off at the end of the task."

Opal Wolf thanked Old Bear and the party and rode off towards the Basket on her velocipede. She bore a writ of safe passage from the Old Man. The party returned to the Reach to try and get the Ogre's attention. After collecting the customary goods and signalling in various ways to no effect they finally realized after a week's passage they would have to ascend the Vale of Woe to seek out the court of the Ogre Duke in person.

On the seventh morning Old Man Gruitt, suspicious as always, who had been counting the links every morning counted the links again. He then counted again and once more in a panic. Then he got everyone to count there's and upon hearing the count declared in his voice of doom, "The damn thing is a link shorter!" Brandon swore, "68 weeks to go."

Last updated March 30, 2025