

THE SNARL

Weird Fantasy Tabletop RPG

PLAYTEST 1 Setting

Posthuman Studios
20251219

Greetings!

This is the first part of our open playtest for *The Snarl*, our new weird fantasy TTRPG.

This PDF includes *The Snarl's* setting — known as the **Weald**. It provides an overview of the environment, the species, and all of the worldbuilding basics you need to run a game. Get acquainted with the Weald—and the Snarl that lurks outside its safe zones.

This is an incomplete not-final draft. It still needs proofreading and may see some changes before further playtests and final release. We'd love to hear your feedback on it. Please email any of the following to us at

info@posthumanstudios.com

with the header "Snarl Setting Playtest":

- Any critical setting info you think is missing
- Any additional setting info you'd like to see, or like to see explored in more depth (in future books)
- Your general thoughts and feedback
- Typos, poor grammar, inconsistencies, and other editorial issues

To read up on what we've posted about the game so far, check our dev blog:

<https://snarlrpg.com/blog>

We will be running this playtest in 3 stages. In early 2026, for Part 2, we'll be posting the basic rules, a selection of characters, a rules cheat sheet, and a starting scenario. This should be enough to play 2-3 sessions of *The Snarl* and give us your feedback. Now's a good time to talk to your friends and see if you can schedule some games!

In Part 3, we will release the full character creation rules, so you can make your own characters and run your own scenarios.

For Parts 2 and 3, we will be asking for specific feedback on specific rules issues. We also encourage you to discuss the game on our discord!

<https://discord.gg/C3PBwWBfTU>

We plan to run a kickstarter campaign for *The Snarl* in early 2026. Please follow our launch page:

<https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/507486226/the-snarl-ttrpg?ref=3szghn>

The Snarl currently 97% written and the early art pieces are rolling in. We plan to release it later in 2026.

Thanks for joining our playtest—we look forward to your feedback!

Posthuman Studios,
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<https://snarlrpg.com>

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A SETTING WEIRD & WILD

The world of *The Snarl* is an encapsulated sylvan environment unlike anything we are familiar with on Earth. It exists entirely in and around massive, ancient, kilometers-high trees called *pillars*. The pillars carpet a continent-sized area known as the *Weald*. Numerous intelligent species—few of them humanoid—called the *Wealdfolk* live and thrive upon the pillars.

The environment is roughly divided into four ecosystems: the airy, sunlit *Canopy*, the misty and ethereal *Tangles*, the dark and dangerous reaches of the *Mulch*, and the mysterious and mythical *Roots*. Most of civilization is entrenched in the Canopy and Tangles.

Outside of the tree-towns, carven cities, extradimensional notch settlements, and other safe havens, the wilds are referred to as the *Snarl*. Here, strange creatures lurk along lush pathways and the entangled growth teems with predators. Treequakes send the unwary plunging to their death, and the savage winds of sudden shredstorms are fierce enough to tear entire villages from their pillar perches.

The people of the Weald lived in abundance and wanted for little—until the encroachment of twin threats known as the *Blight* and the *Creep*. The Blight entirely surrounds the Weald with a wasteland of devastation, decay, and death, stretching as far as anyone knows, moving further inward every day. Meanwhile, the Creep's corrupt, fungoid, and alien presence expands its influence upward and outward from its foothold in the dark depths. Together, these threats create new conditions of scarcity and instability that threaten all Wealdfolk.

THE CALL OF THE WEALD

You play a resident of the Weald's arboreal environment. You are not human, you are one of many intelligent insectoid, avian, reptilian, mammalian, or plant species. Your skills and abilities are useful in handling threats, conflicts, and other matters. You use *sap*, the lifeblood of the trees, for arcane effects. You may even have the ability to wield the mystic *spark*, manipulating the environment or others with your mind alone or summoning and interacting with the invisible spirits that work unseen everywhere.

Through choice or circumstance, you are drawn into intrigue, conflict, and adventure. In the Snarl, you will face monsters and situations unique to this strange world.

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CORE CHARACTERISTICS

Every fantasy setting is based on underlying assumptions that shape the world. These are the defining characteristics of *The Snarl*:

The Snarl Is Strange. The environment is lush and wild and teeming with flora and fauna—and yet to a human's alien eyes, it is unnatural, impossible to have grown into being by organic means. It is a place of beauty and wonder—and undefinable *wrongness*. The residents, of course, know no different.

This Is Not Your Typical Fantasy World. There is no feudalism, no kings or queens, no peasants. The material aspects of the Weald have generated other social structures. Heroes are motivated not by greed, but by survival, loyalty, or a thirst for knowledge, justice, or adventure. The riches and loot sought by murder hoboes are absent—no gold, no magic swords, no spell books. Treasures are gifted for social status. Monsters exist, but dragons and orcs are replaced by far stranger things.

The Environment Is Feral. The Weald is verdant and alive. Millions of species thrive—and millions more prey upon them. Outside of settlements and nomad camps, the Snarl is a dangerous place, teeming with dangerous wildlife. Stragglers and wanderers often do not return. Residents are familiar with their local regions, but the Snarl grows and changes quickly. Numerous civilizations have been swallowed under the leaves and mulch.

Magic Is Unusual. This is not a world of spells and grimoires. All Wealdfolk make use of *sap* reverently drawn from the pillars and consumed for supernatural effects. Spirits lurk invisibly everywhere, working as caretakers of the environment, taking physical form only when needed. The *sparks* who see and command these spirits also manipulate esoteric forces within the environment for their witchcraft.

There Are No Gods. There are no signs of divine power or omnipotence. If there are supernatural forces behind the Weald, they are long absent and negligent in their duties. The Weald's sapientia have myths and tales and even creation stories, but no organized religions or faiths.

There Are No Humans. Abandon your anthropocentric mindsets. This world was not crafted by or for human hands. Embrace your new limbs and senses. Adapt yourself to non-human modes of thinking.

Threats Are Encroaching. The Weald's ecological systems are unbalanced. The Blight and the Creep consume more of the world every day. This has disrupted the equilibrium of entire societies and bioregions. Strife looms with the displacement of refugees from their homes and never-before-experienced scarcity.

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THE PILLARS

The pillars are the living terrain upon which the Weald thrives and dies. Though composed of dozens of distinct tree species, each shares common characteristics. Every pillar is singularly massive, towering between one and two kilometers over the Mulch, with core trunks dozens of meters in radius. Some are wide enough that horizontal cities have been carved into their interiors.

The pillars are studded with gargantuan branches up and down their entire height, reaching out to their verdant neighbors. These wooden arms inosculate—graft together—forming a massive support framework. This wooden lattice serves as the elevated foundation for the trails, roads, and infrastructure of the Weald's denizens.

Most of the pillars are ancient if not immortal, having existed for the extent of recorded history. Outside of the Blight and a few that have suffered disaster, they do not die. An unknown process regenerates their core trunks, though individual branches occasionally wither and die. The death or destruction of a pillar is considered a major catastrophe, as they are revered and venerated. Pillars never stop growing; their lower branches transform into roots when they are subsumed by the ever-rising layers of the Mulch.

As gargantuan as they are, it should be no surprise that the pillars themselves are the foundation on which entire ecosystems grow and die. Pillars are covered in thick layers of moss, algae, lichen, fungus, and ivy. A layer of nutrient-rich humus blankets the tops of their branches, providing an organic soil in which normal-sized trees and bushes can take root and sprout. Vines, epiphytes, and similar flora dangle from their heights.

Many pillars feature hollow cavities, both natural and carved. These “tunnels” and “caves” serve as homes, shelters, pathways, refuges, or even vibrant gardens. Some pillars have been worked by ancient hands, shaped into distinctive forms, both functional and artistic.

Remarkably, the pillars themselves are resistant to fire—though the flora that grows upon them is not. Wildfires have scoured some pillars clean of life; the pillars themselves have only burned on a few rare occasions.

>>> Diagram of zones, heights, etc here

roots	anything below 0 m
mulch	0 to 200 m
tangles	200 to 1,000 m
canopy	1,000 to 1,500+ m

SAP

The interior of each pillar flows with veins of miraculous sap—a marvelous viscous fluid that serves as their life source and defense system. Many insects and animals feed upon sap leaks; some even make it their sole diet. Sap is abundant throughout the Weald, easily harvested by drilling a small hole and inserting a spout that allows it to slowly ooze out. Homes, villages, and camps take advantage of established spout taps to collect sap regularly.

The Weald's denizens use sap for myriad purposes, from the mundane to the mystical. Saps are consumed in almost every way conceivable: they are ingested, applied as balms or weapon greases, crafted into potions and poisons, and even dried and smoked. Everyone in the Weald learns how to prepare specific applications for their benefit and makes use of sap on a regular basis. The effects range from new senses to accelerated healing to enhanced physical prowess and even mending items. Sap is easily acquired, but the skills to unlock its potency take time to master.

Every adventurer prepares a small amount of sap when resting or camping, carrying it with them throughout the day to use as needed. The small stylized and decorated containers for this purpose—wooden vials, bark-woven baskets, or hollowed gourds or nuts—are known as sap *flaskets*. Flaskets are valued personal items, often gifted to children by their clan as they come of age.

The potions and alchemical substances crafted with sap are valued and often bartered and traded, but they must be used quickly. Sap-derived items quickly lose their potency, lasting no more than a day. Stories of elusive Wealdfolk who craft potent rare elixirs and legendary tonics are beloved by chroniclers.

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SPECIES OF THE WEALD

The various societies of the Weald are each composed of the twelve sapient species that populate its reaches.

- **Clackers:** Living trees shaped and grown for years by gardeners before invested with sapience by a memory crystal.
- **Flickers:** Spirits that have found their autonomy, capable of operating in both physical and non-corporeal forms.
- **Fuzzkleaws:** Energetic brachiating and climbing mammals with the ability to toggle their mental states between hyper, calm, and aggro. Cute but fierce.
- **Gukri:** Lizard folk with gliding membranes, sticky tongues, and regenerative capabilities.
- **Kalioctera:** Winged multi-limbed beetles. Males are small and fly, females are large and tough.
- **M'qwhirls:** Symbiotic pairings of a raptor-like bird and a small monkey rider that are telepathically conjoined and act as one.
- **Scrills:** Carnivorous, motile plants with caterpillar-like bodies, vine-like limbs, and venomous tongues.
- **Slyphs:** Lithe humanoids with tails, camouflaging chromatophore skin, and the ability to transform their morphology over time, making each physically unique.
- **Strixen:** Aerodynamic, nocturnal, echolocating raptors who avoid sunlight.
- **Veetlings:** Small, winged, anthropomorphic insectoids known for mischievousness.
- **Vescids:** Six-limbed wasp-analogs with beaks and stingers.
- **Weavemothers:** Female arachnids who carry colonies of tiny non-sapient males under their carapaces and telepathically control them.

PHYSICS & COSMOLOGY

To one familiar with the physical laws of other worlds, key aspects of the Weald mark it as distinct.

GRAVITY

Gravity in the Weald is roughly half or less of that on Earth. You can jump farther and higher, carry heavier loads, and fall greater distances without injury. Living things tend to grow taller than they would on a higher-gravity world, but they are no less hardy. This state of affairs is normal to the people of the Weald. Most have only a primitive concept of gravity anyway, and few suspect it to be different anywhere else.

ATMOSPHERE

Given the reduced gravity, an astrophysicist would expect a less dense planet and a thinner atmosphere. However, an unknown mechanism keeps the Weald's atmospheric density similar to Earth's, and there is only a slight thinning of the air from the Mulch to the Canopy heights.

UNCERTAIN GROUNDING

The most unique aspect of the Weald is that it may not be a “world” at all. Only a limited area is known and explored, and the concept of a planet is foreign to the Weald's denizens. Cosmological theories and myths abound, of course, ranging from the Weald's creation as a floating bubble to the idea that their world is a shared dream or hallucination. Those who have ventured to the skies above the Canopy are aware of a horizon, and some nascent scientists speculate over a curvature to the Weald's surface. A visitor from Earth, however, would note that the horizon is significantly farther away.

The lack of a “ground” is of related interest. Where an Earthling would expect to find rock and stone under the Mulch, the surface of the Weald is composed of deeper and denser layers of decayed plant matter and detritus. Though mulched matter eventually breaks down into something akin to dirt, there is no clay, quartz, gravel, sand, or other stone. The pillars continue downward, anchored with deep roots that were once branches. Far down, in some areas, one can find a type of petrified mulch or wood known as *petra*, which is mined for many purposes. If there is a true “ground,” it is so deep as to be undiscovered.

HEAVENLY BODIES

The Weald has three suns. While these do rise and set, they do so at

different rates. The largest, Kai, appears smaller than Earth's sun, but is brighter and blue-white. The Weald's denizens measure their 24-hour days by it. The small white-yellow Ro and even smaller red Mora often traverse the sky together. The sky is blue, albeit a deeper shade than Earth's; Kai's sunset turns the heavens purple. A full night with only the distant stars is infrequent, though even then the sky glows with the soft reflected light of a half-dozen small and tiny moons. The periods of eerie scarlet twilight when only the dim Mora lurks above are renown in legends and marked as historical junctures. Less rare is the arrival of shooting stars—many a blazing meteor has scarred the forests of the Weald, the only source of rare and precious metals.

CLIMATE, SEASONS, & WEATHER

The entirety of the known Weald exists in a comfortable, rainforest climate. The years are long (over 4 Earth years), but seasonal variations are mild, manifesting in slight changes to rainfall. The air is warm and humid, with precipitation common. When it's not raining, mist and fog often hang in the Tangles and Mulch, limiting visibility and layering the environment with eerie echos and haunting wisps. No one in the Weald has experienced frigid temperatures or snow, except for cold tunnels and pools hidden in the shallow Roots.

Strong winds are a constant in the Canopy, bucking the upper branches of the pillars. Heavy growth provides shelter in the Tangles, except for infamous pillar "canyons" and the screeching air currents that blast through them. Wild updrafts carry debris all the way from the Mulch to the Canopy. At all heights, sudden gusts can ground winged folk and knock unwary denizens off of precarious perches to plunge into the depths below.

The monsoon storms that bombard the Canopy are wonders to behold, with the treetops swaying like a ravenous ocean below dark storm clouds, assaulted by lightning strikes and sheets of rain. The droplets rarely penetrate farther down than the upper Tangles, but runoff water streams and drips its ways down various paths all the way to the Mulch. Rivulets carve their own channels through leaves and bark, feeding tiny waterfalls to splash into the depths. Amphora plants collect rainwater in their deep basins, providing refreshing pools of fresh water for the residents and wildlife.

The occasional *shredstorms* that move through the Weald are powerful and terrifying; denizens scatter for shelter as they approach. Entire villages and clans have been lost to them.

THE CANOPY

The Canopy is the treetop realm, open to the sky above. It is abundant with foliage and awash in light from the three suns. With few nights, sunlight, bright or dim, is a near-constant. This zone begins roughly a kilometer above the “ground,” at the tops of the Tangles, and reaches 500 meters or more to the tops of the tallest pillars.

The Canopy itself is broken into different layers. The topmost level is dense with broad pillar leaves, catching all available sunlight. The branches are numerous, thin, and bifurcating, inclined upwards at steep angles. The area is traversable only by small creatures and skilled climbers or flyers. A few emergent pillars tower dozens of meters above their peers, desired perches for birds and airship platforms.

Below the immediate treetops, the branches grow thicker and sturdier the further you descend. Unlike the thick Tangles below, the branches large and vertical enough to serve as pathways are clear and not as thoroughly occupied by other flora, making them less entangling and easier to traverse. The lower one gets, the more the shade deepens.

Few of the pillars are grafted together at this level. Pillars are instead connected by rope bridges and ziplines for easier traversal. The winds are strong at the Canopy’s heights; fierce gusts sway the branches noticeably.

The Canopy absorbs the majority of rainfall in its leaves. On occasion, the clouds descend, enveloping the treetops in chill mist.

FLORA & FAUNA

The pillartops thrive with flocks of chattering birds, gleaming spiderwebs, small mammals, insects, and creatures of all kinds. The Canopy ecosystem is home to more fauna than the other biome levels combined—and with a vaster diversity of species represented. However, the Canopy is considered the safest region, untouched by the Creep and with fewer predators prowling its branches. The branch pathways are stalked by hunters and patrolled near settlements.

PEOPLES

The major civilizations of the Weald make their home in these upper reaches, enjoying the sunlight and building balloon airships for easy travel over the forest heights. Airship docks jut from the treetops or extend into gaps between pillars in the foliage coverage. Some towns and cities tend farms along exposed branches or construct vertical farms to capture available sunlight.

Notable Locations: Breezesway, Driftwood, Expanse, the Lashings (Anchorpoint), Moongaze, the Murmurings, the Spires, the Windings

Notable Factions: Cloud Confederation, Hexhold, Shield Pact, Storm Dancers, Triarchy of Verrex

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THE TANGLES

The Tangles are the middle realm, the understory layer between the Canopy and the depths below, as large as both combined. They range from 200 meters above the forest floor up to a kilometer high. They are lush with life and rich with sap.

The environment is dim, lit by scattered sunlight in the upper boughs and fluorescent fauna in the lower reaches, with the bright contrast of the occasional sunwell and radiant beams of sunlight piercing down through the Canopy above.

The air is humid and damp, often choked with thick mist. It is not uncommon for visibility to be heavily restricted, with the whispering sounds of the the pillars and scurrying wildlife echoing all around you. Travelers often carry light sources and move quickly and quietly, careful not to disturb potential predators around them.

The pillar branches at this height are thick, intertwined, and locked together, their branches grafting into one another, providing a lattice pathway upon which creatures can easily traverse. Along well-traveled routes, steps, ladders, bridges, and ziplines are common, some decades or even centuries old.

FLORA AND FAUNA

Thick entangling foliage is what gives the wilds of the Snarl their name. The pillars and their branches are encrusted with shade-tolerant vegetation: shrubs, weeds, small trees, vines, fungus, ferns, mosses, and choking kudzu and undergrowth. Even well-traveled pathways overgrow quickly; travelers must often cut their way through untamed growths.

The Tangles are home to all manner of creatures: birds, lizards, snakes, arthropods, and an astounding array of insects. Many are venomous and otherwise dangerous—Wealdfolk learn at an early age not to grab onto things without inspecting them first. Predators both large and small are abundant, from tree crabs and hawk-monkeys to jaguars and mantids. Many of these consider Wealdfolk to be choice menu options, especially if they are small or alone. Even for experienced foresters, the Tangles are a dangerous place.

PEOPLES

Despite the omnipresent dangers, the denizens of the Weald have carved out pockets of safety and civilization from the Snarl. The Tangles are dotted with small villages, towns, and nomad campsites.

Entire cities are carved into the living wood of pillar trunks or crafted from branches that have been artistically shaped and sculpted over decades and centuries.

In recent years, the civilizations of the Tangles have begun to wrestle against the reach of the Creep, rising up from below. In much of the Tangles, the areas of Mulch below them are off-limits, having succumbed to the fungal menace.

Notable Locations: Briar, Cavity (Anchorpoint), the Dangles, the Galleries, Lake Hollows (Deepsplit, Flotsam, Hornwood, Scarlet), the Shine, Splinternest, the Three Saplings, the Thickets, the Twists, Wisket

Notable Factions: Concordance, Glade, Hexhold, Mistrunners, Roving Assembly, Shadow Moot, Triarchy of Verrex

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THE MULCH

The Mulch is the depths of the Weald, where the massive pillar trunks erupt from the dense layers of compost and decaying plant matter that serves as the ground. It measures from the forest floor to the Tangles, 200 meters above.

The Mulch is a dark and murky place; almost no sunlight penetrates this far down. It is lit instead by eerie fungus and bioluminescent plants, lichen, moss, and critters.

The air is still, thick, and damp. A chill penetrates the dark, inspiring residents who otherwise roam with little clothing to add a layer. The sounds of dripping and litterfall are omnipresent.

The throughfall and stemflow from rainwater makes its way down through the Canopy and Tangles via millions of rivulet channels, erosion gullies, and waterfalls. Runoff collects in ponds, rivers, and lakes, before eventually being absorbed into the Roots below.

The constant damp makes the mulch “ground” muddy and difficult to traverse. It is not uncommon for creatures to get trapped within the muck, easy prey for lurking predators. Patches of quickmire can suck unwary travelers to a drowned doom. For those who can’t stick to the branch roads above, plank and log pathways and elevated walks are placed along common routes for easier travel.

The litterfall rain of debris and detritus from above never ceases. The pitter-patter of falling nuts, fruits, and spinning leaves is occasionally punctuated by the louder crashes of branches, dropped or wind-blown items, and the inevitable body. Whether the corpse discarded by a predator, the animal that has reached its lifespan, or an accident-prone resident, each reaches terminal velocity before impacting with a squelch into the mud.

FLORA AND FAUNA

The Mulch is the province of fungus, lichen, algae, moss, and hardy plants that can survive with little to no light. Fungus is abundant, working diligently to decompose the detritus that falls from above. Other plants thrive parasitically on fungal networks or the pillars themselves.

Scavengers and detritivores of all kinds feed on the litterfall, particularly fruit, seeds, and plant matter. An assortment of opportunistic necrophage birds, mammals, insects, and lizards feast on the plentiful carrion, sometimes fighting for scraps. Most remains are consumed quickly, but a larger corpse can sustain the carrion feeders for days,

until only scattered and gnawed bones are left behind. In turn, predators such as mudflaps and ripperwings lurk in the dark, stalking scavengers and unwary travelers.

The Creep is an ominous presence, claiming almost half the Mulch as its own. Experienced residents know how to discern Creep from benign fungi; new infestations are ruthlessly attacked with fire.

PEOPLES

The residents of the Mulch are a defiant folk, refusing to yield to the Creep's incursions. Many settlements are under siege, giving their dwellers a grim but hardened perspective. They grow frustrated with the perceived lack of aid and support, yet are unwilling to abandon their homes.

Other cities and towns thrive away from the Creep's reach; these shine like jewels in the deep, going about their usual affairs under well-lit awnings that protect against litterfall. These settlements are filled with plunderers who delve into the Roots, seeking the treasures of holds long lost to the mulch, as well as traders dealing in special saps that are only found in these depths. Mulch towns are known for their racousness and revelries; an open celebration of life in the face of the surrounding shadows. Existence in the perpetual dark is weary and draining—especially to those unused to it—and best countered with drink, music, dance, and good company.

Deeper in the murk, other outposts remain—the province of loners, outcasts, and ne'er-do-wells. Some protect their privacy with vicious hostility; others welcome strangers who are bold enough to venture across the dark depths.

Notable Locations: The Beneath, Drizzle, Droptown (Anchorpoint), Flue, Glumnest, the Scorch

Notable Factions: Concordance, Hexhold, Roving Assembly, Shadow Moot

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THE ROOTS

Thick roots wind through the decayed and petrified matter below the Mulch, providing the pillars with a solid foundation. Many cities and towns that once thrived aboveground have been buried over time; some are still inhabited, others provide ruins for brave adventurers to explore. New settlements have also been dug—warrens and burrows that provide safety from the predators that stalk the Mulch.

Tunnels carved by massive boleworms or dug by the hands and claws of industrious Wealdfolk provide the means for underground travel. The tunnel air is thick and oppressive—and sometimes unbreathable due to the outgassing of decomposition.

The Mulch's chill permeates the top layers. Immediately below the surface, temperatures run cooler—around 10° C (50° F). Around 10 meters down, however, they warm up again, to a balmy 20° C (~70° F).

Like the Mulch above, tunnels and caverns are often lit by the dim phosphorescent glow of fungus. Wealdfolk burrows rely heavily on light-emitting plants and lanterns fueled with fats and oil from seeds, vegetables, and animals; the smoke from torches and fires can be smothering without careful ventilation.

The Roots are damp with rainwater runoff. Small pools collect in tunnels and burrows, before draining further or being absorbed into the compacted ground detritus.

The Roots are riddled with *chutes*—sinkholes and crevasses that act as slides into deeper tunnels, burrows, and caverns. Many tales tell of chutes that lead to the remnants of ancient enclaves—or Creep cores hidden deep under layers of Mulch. Exploring down a chute is a dangerous but enticing endeavor.

FLORA AND FAUNA

The Roots are home to the largest creatures found in the Snarl: titanic boleworms, known for digging endless tunnels as they chew and slither their way through layers of mulch. The other creatures living in these depths are accustomed to the dark and sparser sources of food that come with life underground: bats, rats, worms, centipedes, toads, salamanders, and spiders, among other burrowers and troglodytes.

Few plants subsist among the Roots. Fungal mycorrhizal networks are extensive, however, maintaining a mutualistic and sometimes parasitic relationship with the pillar roots. Like the Mulch above, the Creep is an omnipresent threat, invading a large percentage of the Roots.

PEOPLES

The Roots are the most sparsely populated of the biomes. Few Wealdfolk prefer life underground. Most of the major warren cities and settlements were established long ago aboveground and eventually swallowed under the mulch, yet still persist, their residents too stubborn to move on. Those burrows that were intentionally carved from the Roots tend to have been founded either by explorers who seek to unearth old ruins or outcasts who desire to be hidden.

Notable Locations: Mudworm, Volestra's Fools

Notable Factions: Hexhold, Muckritters, Shadow Moot

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NOTCHES

Scattered throughout the Weald, often in hidden or secret locations, are gateways that lead to *notches*—transdimensional spaces that exist alongside the physical world. These gateways are embedded within pillars, opening into pocket spaces that far exceed the pillar's physical dimensions. They range in size, with the smallest being the size of a modest home and larger ones capable of holding entire villages or even cities. Most notches are used for protection and safety during the shredstorms; during other periods, they provide spaces for cities, gardens, and wonders to thrive and grow within the physical constraints of the Weald.

The portals leading to and from a notch are two dimensional, appearing as simple flat black circles. Light does not pass through them, and there is no sensation to touching the surface or moving through. They are often placed against surfaces and surrounded with decorative frames; they are invisible from their “back” sides and edges. Some sparks know how to seal notch gates, as is often done during times of war or to protect tribes during shredstorm periods.

The interior of a notch is a strange thing. The walls, floor, and ceiling are composed of an unknown and impenetrable physical force. They appear flat and smooth, gray or blue in tone, glowing slightly in the dark. Interior corners are rounded, with no sharp angles. Denizens have found ways to adhere things to notch surfaces with sap and to decorate them with paintings, murals, living art, and other decor.

The climate within notches is similar to that of the Weald, but drier. Even when sealed, their air seems to last. Some sparks have learned to work with the spirits that make their homes within notches to generate sunlight, mulch, and water. Thus a community can be partially sustained, growing its own food and providing other essential resources. However, over a substantial period (years), a populated large notch would require outside food and supplies, meaning that they cannot serve as indefinite sanctuaries.

Notches are occasionally known to disappear or cease functioning, leaving behind only their ornate portal frames. Many chroniclers tell sinister stories of those who were trapped but managed to survive and eventually escape—and of those who didn't and were trapped forever.

If anyone possesses the ability to create new notches, they keep it a closely guarded secret. Sparks universally claim to have no knowledge or capabilities for creating them. Nevertheless, new notches sometimes appear, but the process or reasons behind their creation are hidden.

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ABUNDANCE

The Weald is abundant with food and resources. You need not venture far to find a cornucopia of edible fruits, nuts, insects, and vegetables. Gardens are easy to maintain, even in the depths of the Mulch, where roots, fungus, and a few vegetables unique to the Weald can grow in the dark or with the dim light of moonflowers. For hunters, prey animals are everywhere, ranging from easily trapped rodents, beetles, and birds to larger creatures. Together, the flora and fauna provides ample sustenance for the hunter-gatherer lifestyle of most clans.

Larger communities rely on agriculture. The topology of the pillars makes farming difficult, but clever methods have been devised. Agriculturists carve terrace farms into the sides of pillars or plant rows along the lengths of their branches. Hanging gardens attended by flying denizens make use of vertical space. Others make use of notches, relying on the capabilities of ecomancer sparks to provide light, soil, and water.

Some bands and settlements care for small stables of herd animals. M'qwirls corrale wind skates above the Canopy while stables of tree goats, docile reptilian snokes, plump twig hens, and cattle-like hump beetles and similar creatures provide meat, fur, leather, chitin, eggs, and milk to their caretakers.

Sample Foods: glitterberries, grapes, walnuts, vinenuts, apples, sun pears, dew roots, peppers, twig hen eggs, sweet ants, locust cakes, hump beetle jerky, tree goat stew, snail skewers, roast lizard, spiceleaf salad, honey parsnips

AVAILABLE MATERIALS

The residents of the Weald make use of everything the environment offers, harvesting from plants, animals, and the pillars themselves. Structures are predominately made from wood, bark, bamboo, thatch, and broad leaves. Clothes are woven from leather, animal skins, and textiles: plant fibers, wool, and hair. Tools, weapons, and armor are made from hardy organic materials: chitin, bone, scales, petra (petrified mulch/wood), and fire-hardened or lacquered wood. In place of metals, the dense heartwood of ironwood timber is used, though its crafting require special tools. Bindings are crafted from rope, resins, latex, rubbers, and glues.

Patient crafters have manipulated and pruned the large growths of pillars and other trees over time into organic architecture, making structures out of living wood. Entire homesteads have been designed

this way, crafting settlements that are aesthetically pleasing and in harmony with the Weald.

SCARCE MATERIALS

With no actual ground to speak of, there is little in the way of stone, clay, or metal. Gems, rocks, sand, crystals, coal, petroleum, and anything normally mined from the earth are exotic and unheard of substances (including derivatives such as glass, ceramics, plastics, or concrete).

Some earth-originating materials are present via other sources, though still rare. For example, some crystals are available thanks to biological processes. The sparkling ammonites that thrive in the Mulch grow crystalline shells, and gleaming lizards are known to excrete crystal shards as waste. Likewise, precious metal has been harvested from fallen meteors; the elite specialists of the Star-Metal Guild have even learned how to forge it.

The spirits of the Weald occasionally construct items composed of rare materials (glass, ceramic, metal, plastic) by unknown means. These artifacts are valued curiosos to the Weald's residents, who often do not understand what they are handling, though scholars find them fascinating.

CLOTHING

Despite the tropical environment and non-athropomorphic nature of the Weald's denizens, most sapients wear some degree of clothing. Light weaves and cloaks are commonplace, with sturdy leather boots and clothing worn by craftsfolk and travelers. Mulch- and Roots-dwellers don warmer clothes and high boots to handle the mud.

Clothes are designed to accommodate the particular anatomies of the wearers. Gukri, for example, are fond of tabbards that tie at their wrists and ankles as their gliding membranes make sleeves impractical. Strix, veetlings, and vescids require garments that do not hamper their wings. Fuzzleclaws and slyphs prefer sandals that allow them to grip with their toes.

While the Wealdfolk make heavy use of components harvested from other creatures, including leather, bone, scales, and chitin, it is considered crude and gauche to wear items derived from sapient body parts. A kalioctera is likely to take grave offense at someone wearing another kalioctera's shell. On the other hand, weavemother-spun silks are valued for their smoothness and durability.

SOCIETY & ORGANIZATION

The unique environment of the Weald maintains a strong grip, shaping both civilization and social relations in interesting ways.

SMALLER SCALE

The difficulty of conducting large-scale agriculture means that the Weald's population centers are inherently limited in size. This in turn has prevented the development of centralized governments, keeping societies small and decentralized. There are no vast kingdoms or empires, and few nation states. Historically, only a few societies holding sway over hundreds of thousands with their accompanying bureaucracies have existed, and none have lasted long. The largest civilizations support populations in the tens of thousands, and these are primarily decentralized alliances and confederations of small city-states.

The reality is that most societies within the Weald operate on a small, localized scale. Semi-nomadic clans and tribal groupings range in size from dozens to a few hundred. More sedentary communities are similarly-sized villages or larger towns or notch communities of a thousand or two. Major cities with multiple thousands of residents are not uncommon, but most have grown organically and typically lack a centralized structure or authority.

BANDS, CLANS, AND TRIBES

The most common social groupings are small bands of a few dozen members. An alliance of (often inter-related) large families usually unites the core of these clans, with a large number of individuals and smaller families composing the rest. Though it is not uncommon for a majority to belong to the same specific species or three, tribal membership is almost always multi-species.

Membership in such bands is voluntary and often changes, with a basis of cooperative survival and shared goals. New people are absorbed on a regular basis—travelers, new partners, refugees, captured rivals—as others drift or are driven away. It is not uncommon for larger groups to split into several smaller clans over time.

DIVERSITY OF ORGANIZATION

The limited scale of Weald societies means that people are free to explore a wide variety of organizational forms. Life and survival among the pillars emphasizes freedom and both self-reliance *and* community. What this means is that heavily hierarchical structures and authority

figures are rare—why allow others to place a yoke around your neck? People rely on themselves and each other, not institutional powers.

In practice, many bands and villages have community-approved leaders, often elders, who are respected due to their wisdom and experience, but their authority is rarely absolute. Their opinions are debated, challenged, and even mocked—they have power only as far as people agree with them. Unpopular edicts are ignored. In many ways, authorities serve as coordinators and facilitators more than rulers. They cannot rely on their power for control, they must be persuasive and respected to be effective.

Social structures thus trend towards the cooperative, voluntary, and directly democratic. Authority must be earned and is temporary and revokable. There are no nobles, no aristocratic classes, and few hereditary positions. The hierarchical groups that do exist are viewed with suspicion by outsiders.

Because people are not beholden to authority, groups can become quite fractitious internally, arguing over priorities and difference of opinion. Contentions can slow down projects and decisions, but few matters are time-sensitive or emergencies. Groups that are not united in their outlook simply split apart. Fluidity is viewed as a feature, not a bug, but as a result only more stable organizations develop institutional memory.

Examples of groupings are covered in *Peoples & Powers*, p. XX.

MUTUAL AID

It is custom for cultures within the Weald to take care of their own people—few suffer from want or need. Helping out the injured, sick, elderly, or disabled is considered a social responsibility. The few societies that do not do so are viewed as shameful or ill. People largely treat others as they would hope to be treated in return—altruism born of selfishness. This is especially true even with strangers, though it does not mean outsiders are not handled with some suspicion. Strangers may be rivals or have unexpected motives, and the Creep and Blight have ways of turning people against each other.

COLLECTIVISM

Most tribal bands within the Weald operate with a collectivist outlook. The needs of the group outweigh the needs of the individual. Band membership is voluntary, and members are expected to contribute towards the clan's well-being—and to also reap their share of its bounty.

Those rare individuals who are not part of a tribal band are known as outsiders. These include outcasts, pariahs, hermits, and rugged individualists. Though treated with wariness, most bands welcome them as they would any traveler or stranger, at least for short periods—unless they are *branded*. Outcasts who commit major crimes against their former tribes are branded with sigils before they are banished, so that other clans will see their shame and shun them.

PROPERTY

To Wealdfolk, the idea of owning land that you aren't immediately occupying is an unusual one. Even within cities, homes are communally constructed and then occupied by those who need them.

"Property" is largely dependent on need and use — if one is no longer using something, it is free for others who need it to take. Most goods aside from basic personal necessities and trinkets are considered to be communally "owned." Even a gift is only yours as long as you are using it (tools), displaying it in honor (art), or protecting it (heirlooms). Hoarding goods and not giving them to others who need them is considered odd and hostile. Hoarders often find their stashes reappropriated to the local community.

The exception are rare and unusual items that are considered sacred or have cultural significance, such as fine art, unusual artifacts, or items crafted from star metal or fabricated by spirits. These *arcana* are considered to be owned by the community that possesses them, though in

some cases specific individuals are given stewardship and tasked with watching over and protecting them.

GIFT ECONOMY

There is no money, no exchange of currency within the Weald. Within communities, goods and services are gifted freely. Everyone can take from the common stash. A rich community is one in which everything is shared with your peers. A band or village that allows its own people to suffer and go without is considered strange, impoverished, and cruel.

Outside of one's community, when interacting with strangers, trade and barter are the norm. If you have nothing to reciprocate, you incur a debt. Small debts are casual affairs, often forgotten or forgiven. However, there is a strong social obligation to fulfill one's debts when possible. Large debts are logged and tallied with local figureheads and incur the involvement and awareness of the larger community—making such obligations all the more likely to be eventually paid back.

Gifting

The practice of gifting treasured and highly valued things plays a multifaceted role in the Weald. It is common to offer such gifts as a sign of honor or esteem, as a reward for particular bravery, heroism, achievements, or sacrifice. Gifting a cherished item is also an accepted way of settling a debt.

Lavish gifting is a practiced method of increasing one's reputation and standing—in effect, you establish your worth by giving things away, usually with feasts or festivals. Rival clans often bestow each other with extravagant gifts as a means of one-upping each other and claiming superiority. Community leaders build social capital by bestowing gifts upon those they interact with.

Gifting can also be antagonistic, by burdening the receiver with unwanted responsibilities. Gift-givers are not entitled to reciprocity, but the receiver of a lavish gift may feel obligated to gift something of equivalent value back—and an inability to do so could result in loss of face. Many treasured objects are also deeply tied to cultural traditions, rituals, festivals, and community roles. These gifts come with a web of entanglements and obligations. For example, someone gifted a village's ceremonial headdress could be expected to handle the logistics of a major tribal gathering, officiate the event, and play a specific role in ceremonial rituals, before then passing it on as a gift to the next recipient. Keeping the valued gift safe from harm and outsider threats may be an integral—and dangerous—part of the responsibility.

JUSTICE & CONFLICT

Police have not yet been invented by the Wealdfolk; volunteer militias patrol the pathways and protect settlements from outside dangers. The closest things to laws are local traditions, some more codified than others. When people have a serious dispute, or when someone harms or commits an offense against others—abuse, assault, destroying a home, murder—it is treated as a community affair, and tribal justice is dispensed.

In practice, this manifests as a gathering where the situation is explained and both sides given a chance to make their case. Others also voice their opinions as the group proposes methods of resolution and moves towards a rough consensus. Clan leaders or elders then decree a punishment or other resolution. Justice is often redeemed with debts or gifts, but in some cases more severe discipline is mandated: ritualized shaming, painful punishments (lashes, biting insects), or marking and banishment. Notably, jails and prisons are absent among the Weald; locking someone away is not considered a reasonable or humane punishment.

In rare cases where leaders make judgements opposed to the majority opinion, their decisions may be discarded as the mob takes matters into its own hands.

When disputes arise between members of different clans, these groups might come together to find a common resolution. If the conflict is between the tribes themselves, then negotiation and diplomacy sometimes win the day, but just as often rivalries linger and fester.

RIVALRIES

Despite the trend towards cooperative tendencies, the people of the Weald are suprisingly contentious. Bands that roam the same regions and neighboring villages usually develop fierce rivalries with each other. These are often good natured but highly competitive, manifesting as reputation contests, battles to out-perform each other, elaborate gift-giving one-upmanship, duels of creativity, and so on. Some of these clashes have a history of centuries, to the point where opposition to one's rivals becomes a major facet of a group's identity.

Schismogenic behavior—where one group adopts social customs in direct defiance and opposition to their rivals' traditions—is frequent. Many clans pride themselves on being the exact opposite of their neighbors. Thus the blue-feathered cloaks, friendly body contact, and

wild parties of the Sapling Clan stands in stark contrast to the red-resin bodypaint, social distance, and somber rituals of their Firekeeper neighbors.

STEALING THUNDER

The most common method for expressing rivalry is to *steal thunder* from your opponents. This can take many forms, from hosted physical competitions of athleticism and martial prowess to straightforward theft of items considered valuable to one or both factions. Ritualized combats are favored, where one champion calls out a single opponent for a test of arms. It also manifests as raids to best each other in battle and take prisoners. Though injuries are common, such fights are rarely taken so far as to maim or kill one another.

Thunder is not always stolen via combat. Other forms of ritual competition are accepted and common: storytelling, tests of wits, marksmanship challenges, races, obstacle courses, artisanal skill tests, feats of strength or athleticism, or even growing the largest gourd or constructing the finest home within a set period. Outside of staged competitions, rival clans seek to steal thunder spontaneously, often involving straightforward theft of valued community items.

Prisoners are showered with comforts and treated lavishly, as a display of largesse. Some are treated so well that their jailers adopt them and welcome them into their tribe—a switch of allegiances considered a major victory over their rivals. Stolen goods and people are returned in elaborate celebrations of victory or exchanged in ritualized festivals where each side boasts of their accomplishments.

WAR

Occasionally, these neighborly competitions turn overtly serious, usually when one side takes things too far, whether by accident or malicious intent. Murder, the destruction of heirlooms, severe loss of face, or just sheer vindictiveness can transform a contest into a war. Some clans have been killing each other for so long that their conflict's origins are long forgotten.

War is brutal, but most Wealdfolk adhere to specific rules. It is considered a grievous crime to slaughter non-combatants. Fallen warriors are also honored by being returned to their tribe, so that their minds can be interred within their home dream pool (*Death Rituals*, p. XX).

CUSTOMS

Among the societies of the Weald, a few traditions are commonplace.

DEATH RITUALS

Throughout the Weald, the dead are honored by placing them within a dream flower pool (p. XX), where their bodies are dissolved and their minds are absorbed into the Dreaming. This ensures that their knowledge and memories are retained and remain a resource for the community. For years after, loved ones can immerse themselves in the dream pool and visit the departed, though all minds are eventually absorbed within the Dreaming gestalt.

To be fully absorbed, a corpse must be placed in the pool within hours of death. Days later, a gathering is held to celebrate their transition from the corporeal world to the afterlife. Many cultures ritually burn the deceased's possessions, a symbolic acknowledgment of their passing into an incorporeal immortality.

Not all corpses are interred in time. Those souls who are lost are mourned more fully, yet still their lives are celebrated, however brief.

Arrangements are often made, even between rivals, to retrieve bodies after a conflict, so that the dead may be interred. However, those killed by enemies may not be offered a place within the Dreaming. Dishonored rivals are given open-air burials in the Canopy, where they are fed upon by scavengers, or they are dropped from great heights to the Mulch below and recycled into the Weald.

Clackers

Not all of the deceased are content to join the Dreaming. Some seek resurrection, returning to the world invested within a new clacker body. And occasionally, dream flowers return people to the world of their own accord. For this purpose, special clacker trees are shaped and transplanted into dream pools, in the hopes that they will grow a mind crystal inhabited by someone brought back from the Dreaming.

There is no definitive rhyme or reason explaining which Dreamers are returned to physicality. Often it is a person who recently died but had unfinished business or a strong desire to be reborn. Sometimes it is a mind long deceased, perhaps one so long infused within the Dreaming that it remembers little of its previous self. Some are minds that would have preferred to remain part of the Dreaming.

Returning people to life as clackers is not a universally approved practice. Many feel that the minds within clackers have turned their

backs on the afterlife or are shirking their duty by not melding within the Dreaming. A few cultures even consider clackers to be abominations and attack them on sight. At the opposite spectrum, there are always those who mourn the departure of a loved one and who go to great lengths to grow and shape a clacker and leave it within the pool in which they were interred, hoping they will return.

HOSPITALITY & SANCTUARY

It is universally expected that travelers and outsiders will be granted hospitality, welcomed by a community, and given food and a safe place to rest, at least for one night. This includes protecting them from outside threats. Communities view visitors as an opportunity to gather news about the outside world and make connections. Strangers are often mobbed, pestered with questions, and prodded for interesting tales. Chroniclers are especially well regarded and encouraged to perform from their repertoire of stories. However, guests who are able-bodied and linger longer than a few days are expected to contribute to the community's function and well being.

>>> ART HERE

UNIQUE CUSTOMS

Distinct clans and communities often have their own unique local traditions. These can range from the whimsical (annual food fights, competitions with unlikely sports such as log tossing, or reversing family/clan roles) to more serious or spiritual affairs (perceived insults, changing leadership roles, holoring spirits or the dead). The Uncommon Customs table provides a sampling of unusual traditions.

UNCOMMON CUSTOMS

1d00 Roll	Description
01-05	The dead are mummified and paraded during festivals
06-10	Red flowers are considered offensive and a display of hostility
11-15	Fermented mudworms are served as a delicacy at large gatherings
16-20	Guests who do not repay their hosts with a gift may be hunted for sport
21-25	An empty spot is always left at the table for spirits; flickers are, however, considered abominations
26-30	Veetlings are treated with mocking but lavish affection, every whim they have is heeded
31-35	It is a grave insult to not give the eldest the first choice of anything
36-40	Anyone not slathered in Mulch mud is not to be trusted
41-45	When young adults come of age they must capture a live venomous vinehopper with their bare hands
46-50	Clackers are venerated and treated as oracles
51-55	Weekly feasts are prepared for local packs of hawk-monkeys.
56-60	Clackers are considered unnatural abominations and their mind crystals forcibly returned to dream pools
61-65	Every season, something valuable is dropped from the highest branches into the depths below for good fortune
66-70	Not consuming every last morsel of a meal is a serious insult
71-75	Not expressing attraction to each others' partners is considered rude

76-80	The person who tells the most entertaining new tale in the evening is granted authority over the village for the next day
81-85	Wearing clothing aside from straps/packs for carrying is an affront to the Weald
86-90	No one is allowed to speak during the evening hours
91-95	Whenever the red sun Mora is in the sky, blood may not be spilled
96-00	Guests are expected to exchange weapons with their hosts

>>> ART HERE

COMMUNICATION

The runners and flyers of the Fleet Guild, who brave the depths of the Snarl to deliver messages between far-flung outposts, provide a much-valued service, keeping distant communities informed and connected. The arrival of a messenger is treated with fanfare in small towns and camps. It is an unspoken tradition among all factions to aid and not impede couriers in their missions.

Many settlements rely on messenger animals to relay communications over short distances. Purple dart parrots in particular are well regarded for their ability to recall and recite verbal missives.

In the Tangles and Mulch, factions and neighboring clans use drum signals to warn each other of dangers or call for aid. Likewise, Canopy towns use colored smoke signals to pass messages, visible for kilometers over the treetops. Red smoke is a known universal distress signal.

LANGUAGE

The people of the Weald speak only one language. However, regional dialects and variations exist, as do differences between vertical biomes. Physiological differences in the way each species vocalizes plays an even more significant role; the same words can sound entirely different when spoken by a fuzzleclaw and a scrill. Vescids are known for their hiss-laden speech, kukri are said to lisp, strix draw out their words, weavemothers whisper, and kalioctera voices rumble with bass. Communication can sometimes be confused or challenging, especially between peoples of different backgrounds.

Less than 5 percent of the populace is literate. Few communities prioritize reading and writing; such skills are largely the province of chroniclers who maintain both written and oral histories. However, some professions—notably rangers and shadows—make use of symbolic markings, which they use to leave messages and warnings to one another. These glyphs are considered secrets of the trade and rarely shared with outsiders.

Librarians say that previous languages have existed, but the evidence for them is rare, and none are known who can decipher them.

COLLECTIVE KNOWLEDGE

Within the Weald, most knowledge is passed down from parents to children and mentors to apprentices. Chroniclers acts as historians and storytellers, reciting, singing, or performing tales of historical events with liberal embellishments. They also serve as record-keepers

and archivists, keeping small libraries of books and scrolls according to their communities or interests. Sparks, meanwhile, tend to be possessive about guarding the lore of mystic affairs and dealings with spirits.

Some sparks retain the knowledge of creating scarabs: oval-shaped amulets, rings, or seals, often embossed with images or symbols, and designed to be worn. Scarabs are said to be solidified spirits, mystically encoded with knowledge or a message, that narrate the contents directly to your mind when properly activated.

Larger settlements often have a library, staffed by chroniclers and other volunteers willing to share their experiences. The largest of these, the **Archive of All** in the canopy city Expanse, is said to hold tens of thousands of books, scrolls, and scarabs; some allegedly written in languages lost to time.

Most communities also have access to a dream pool, which has absorbed many of their ancestors into the Dreaming. Anyone can immerse themselves within a dream pool and commune with these long-dead minds. The process, however, is disjointed and strange, like navigating a waking dream. As the communer attempts to link with the gestalt consciousness and extract specific answers, or speak to specific individuals, their thoughts are crowded with random memories from dozens of minds seeking attention, flooded with emotions from a thousand lost souls. Extracting specific information from these clouds of stray thoughts is a difficult skill.

TIME KNOCKERS

In large villages and cities, public timekeepers known as *knockers* loudly mark the passage of time. Every hour on the hour, large rhythmic sounds are made using drums, bells, or heavy pieces of wood. After a short interval, the knocks are repeated a second time. The number of knocks made indicates the time, with 20 knocks completing the day and 1 knock marking the early hour of the next.

In the Tangles and Mulch, or during the rare Canopy evenings when none of the three suns are present, knockers also serve as lamplighters, fueling and setting alight the lanterns that illuminate major public thoroughfares.

TRAVEL

Traversing the three-dimensional spaces of the Weald can present significant challenges. Gaps between the pillars, winding branch pathways, and long upward journeys are just the start.

HORIZONTAL TRANSIT

Common routes are well-trodden, with cleared paths, carved stairways, and wooden or rope bridges. Nomad tribes, itinerant performers, hunting bands, and lone wanderers are regularly found along their lengths. Most walk, though wagons pulled by hump beetles or riders astride stag lizards or riding spiders are not uncommon. Near settlements, these roads are well maintained, with carved even surfaces, planks, or lined with discarded shells for better footing.

Off the beaten path, the trails are unkempt and more treacherous. Uneven footing, rotten branches, slick surfaces, entangling vines, and thick foliage can make passage difficult. And, of course, predators and hostile folk are known to prey on small groups and lone travelers.

AIR TRAVEL

Balloon airships enable travel over the canopy, and sometimes even down into the Tangles if the airspace is cleared. Sparks learned the principles of balloon ships by studying puff plants, which internally produce a lighter-than-air gas and swell in size, floating up to the Canopy where they burst and distribute their seeds. It was soon learned that the large seeds of lampweeds produce a similar gas when heated in water, even better at lifting than heated air. Using this method, balloons are filled and attached to ships and platforms for air travel.

Airships are difficult to maneuver, but make use of sails to capture the wind. Some aeronauts capture large birds known as stretchwings, roping several to their airships and using them as draft animals. Airships are often used in battle, equipped with ballistae and spear-throwers. Air pirates are an occasional menace, using grappling hooks and planks to board rival ships.

The drawback to airships is that the lifting gas within balloons is quite flammable. A single flaming arrow can set off an explosion, sending an airship careening while ablaze. To avert disaster, balloons can be protected with lightweight chitin armor.

VERTICAL MOVEMENT

Many pillars feature winding staircases up their entire length, usually

along the exterior, but sometimes internal. To ease upward and downward journeys, various clever means are deployed. A few precious pillars feature carved slides descending down their interior, with frequent stop-off points. Ziplines strung between pillars and branches allow quick, more lateral but downward descents, though they are not always well-maintained. Stations with reeled harnesses and mechanical counterweight lifts haul people and cargo up and down respectable distances. However, setups that allow you to ascend and descend a entire single pillar are uncommon, and generally only found near major settlements. Waystations that get you part of the way are more common, but separated by horizontal distance, so a full ascent or descent often involves a meandering path between these points, adding time to a journey.

Ascent

Ascending a pillar from the Mulch to the top of the Canopy easily takes an hour or two by stair, and is an arduous leg-cramping affair, even in the lighter gravity. Winged folk can make the upward journey in half an hour if they push it, though they often struggle to do so without frequent breaks (taking ~an hour). Lifts cut the full ascent to ~20 minutes, but they are limited in the upward distance they can cover, and so there is often extra time added to travel to the next nearest lift.

Descent

Descending is much faster, of course. A direct flight down takes 5-10 minutes. Descent by ziplines, slides, drop-reels, gliding, or balloon takes about 20 minutes, not counting time between stations. Lifts take 15 minutes, stairs ~30 minutes or more.

Travel Method	Ascent (Mulch->Canopy)	Descent (Canopy->Mulch)
Balloon	20 minutes	15 minutes
Drop-Reel/Slide/ Zipline	—	20 minutes+
Flight	30-60 minutes	5-10 minutes
Gliding	30-120 minutes	20 minutes
Lift	20 minutes+	15 minutes+
Stairs	1-2 hours	30-60 minutes

CULTURE

The biology and physical circumstances of the Wealdfolk mean that their cultures are unique in their development.

SEXUALITY

Each of the Weald's species has its own preferences for romance, finding partners, and mating. Fuzzleclaws tend towards life partners and big families, kukri and vescids rarely form attachments, kalioctera women take multiple partners, m'qwirls bond in pairs, scrills fluctuate between sexes and partners, and weavemothers form long-term companionships with other mothers. Slyphs, strix, and veetlings are more flexible and varied in their relationship habits.

These species' tendencies overlap with, and are sometimes influenced by, specific local cultural norms. In smaller clans, familial bonds are encouraged for support; in larger villages and cities, casual relations are more common.

Interspecies romances/partnerships are rare but not unheard of. However, being distinct species, such couples are not usually biologically compatible and are incapable of creating children.

Infant mortality is high among the Wealdfolk; the Snarl claims young and old with equal measure. Large clutches of young are common, with the acceptance that not all will reach adulthood.

SPIRITUALITY

The Wealdfolk hold to no organized religions or beliefs in omnipotent deities. Some adhere to a sort of animism, an acceptance that the natural world around them is alive, with its own agency and purpose. These beliefs are grounded in interactions with wild spirits, who act with free will and pursue their own agendas and who are often tied to specific places or functions. It is also based on the experiences of sparks, who claim that there are unseen forces that manipulate the environment and connect everyone and everything together via some hidden skein.

In practice, the common folk accept that they are a component of the ecosystem and treat the spirits and environment with honor and respect. Undue waste or destruction is frowned upon. They might perform small rituals—tending gardens, burning incense, or leaving offerings—at shrines to honor the spirits. Others vocalize or stridulate (rub body parts together to generate noise) into the Snarl as a form of greeting, respect, or warning. This conscientiousness is the extent of

their spirituality.

A small segment of the population takes it further. They treat every part of the environment, from trees to pools, as if they are alive. They speak of great spirits and intelligent animals and legendary makers lost to depths of the Blight or the mists of time. They claim vast intelligences lurk in the depths of the Dream Pools, brimming with primordial secrets. A few iconoclast sparks speak of a deeper connection with an unseen firmament that puppets everything. In a few instances, these spiritualists organize covens and cults with esoteric teachings and purposes.

On the darker side are rumors of brooding doomsayers who claim the Blight is an inevitable apocalypse that will soon consume all. These nihilists embrace the coming annihilation fully as a “great cleansing” and are whispered to aid the Blight and assist its spread.

Flickers

Flickers (p. XX), being spirits themselves, have a complex relationship with the Wealdfolks’ beliefs—individual flickers have conflicting takes on their own status. Most claim no special status and no knowledge of any purpose or a secret spiritual world. They simply exist, without any explanation why—just like everyone else. Some believe that they have somehow lost their way and that a purpose will be found or return to them in time. A few, however, claim to act with intent and private knowledge, sometimes even amassing followers to support their agenda.

Most people consider the spiritfolk to be slightly strange and unusual, given their connection to the Weald, but treat them as any other person. Chroniclers and sparks theorize that they are iconoclasts or errant children who may someday return to their duties. A few proselytizers claim that flickers were sent among the Wealdfolk with a secret but benign mission.

Not all take such a kind view. There are those who consider flickers to be outcasts or somehow estranged from the Weald, given their lack of purpose or function. For this reason, some clans treat flickers with suspicion or even open hostility, believing them to be banished outsiders or abominations that the Weald itself has spurned.

FESTIVALS

Festivals play a major role in the affairs of Wealdfolk. Every faction holds a minimum of 1 or 2 major gatherings each year, with a number of smaller holidays space in between. Festivals are culturally significant, celebrating historical events, major achievements, or communal traditions. They are also an excuse to gather in large numbers, bring together far-flung peoples, and encourage socialization with both strangers and rivals, who are treated as honored guests.

The carnival atmosphere of festivals is marked by music, dancing, chronicler performances, competitions, fermented spirits, and feasts. Clowns engage in outrageous and mischievous behavior, embodying discontent or mocking the values and adornments of rival clans. Team sports matches are popular, particularly clawball, aerial hoops, and wickerbat—drawing large crowds and spurring occasional brawls. Some festivals are centered around communal projects, such as erecting a new bridge between pillars, building new homes, or constructing and launching a new airship. For many, they are a chance to find new romantic partners, traveling companions, or mentors for a professional trade. Masks are often worn to anonymize the participants and allow them to act more freely.

Rituals are a key component of festival activities, which may honor the spirits, sacrifice goods, or revere and then destroy effigies. Sometimes particular community members are singled out and honored (or burdened) with stylized roles, perhaps even showered with gifts or granted temporary authority before they are symbolically dethroned. Festivals are also a time for erasing debts and paying reparations to those who have been wronged.

Festivals can also play a pivotal political role. The Roving Assembly depose their old leaders and elect new ones at yearly gatherings. The Mistrunners spend half a year building a settlement, organized with a complex hierarchy and bureaucracy, and half the year as collectivized leaderless nomadic tribes, with each switch-over point marked with an elaborate festival. The Verrexians have recently adopted a custom of expecting elders of 60 years or more to retire to the Dreaming each festival, to conserve dwindling resources.

HISTORY

The written and oral histories of the Weald date back for thousands of years, citing events and peoples eclipsed by the mists of time. Legends, ruins, and relics speak to ancient civilizations and extinct species known only by what they accomplished. Though their artifacts remain, each of these societies have long-since disappeared, along with countless others.

- Hundreds of years ago, the **Shapers** molded the Pillars as easily as clay, transforming the trees into fantastic works of art. The pillars known as the Spiral and the Angles are some of the few remnants of their skills.
- More recently, the **Monument Builders** erected monoliths, spires, and arches for unknown purposes, many of which still stand today. The Thousand-Arch Road, Triple Towers, and Sundered Lovers are examples of their work.
- An extinct species known only as the **Leaf Eaters** has left behind numerous distinctively decorated notches that remain in use by the Silkstrider clan. These notches feature unique resin mosaics, brilliantly colored amphitheaters, and wondrous sap fountains.
- The peoples known as the **Dreeandi** and the **Kepch** were infamous for their antipathy towards each other, leading to generations of blood feuds and hostilities. Their conflict drew in many other clans, until it erupted into all-out war and mutual destruction.
- A society known as the **Archivists** are said to have amassed the Weald's largest library, known as the **Perch of Deep Ken**, sadly destroyed centuries ago—whether by accident, war, or nature's wrath is widely disputed. Legends claim that remnants of the library still remain, buried among the Roots or hidden away in secret or lost notches.
- An ancient culture known as the **Scale-Noses** are claimed to have trained and ridden massive flying beasts, who sadly died along with them during one of the more vicious shredstorm periods.
- A type of spirit known as the **Veiled** are often mentioned in myths and legends as invisible guides and providers of counsel. According to myths, they all at once said their goodbyes and never returned. Some claim they will be back.
- According to tall tales, the predatory **mantid** beasts that stalk the Weald were once intelligent. Their warlike ways spurred many conflicts of the past, until a particularly heinous incident of slaughter and cannibalism by a mantid cohort led to them being hunted to extinction.

CURRENT DANGERS

Though aspects of thede Wealdfolks' lives are idyllic, danger and conflict are omnipresent.

THE SNARL

The Snarl lurks everywhere outside of pockets of civilization and security. It is the slaving of feral predators, the hunger of darkness, the uncaring horror of the natural world. It claims the unwary and foolish with no regards to their dreams, loves, or aspirations. Those who are not alert to danger and quick-footed or nimble-winged are easy prey. Everyone among the Wealdfolk has lost someone they knew to the Snarl. Some were dragged off screaming, others were snatched off a branch in a sudden flurry of motion, others simply left and never returned.

Some clans organize search-and-rescue teams when the Snarl claims victims, though these can lead to further deaths or disappearances. Others simply honor the lost and bow in respect that the Snarl has trapped another within its embrace.

THE BLIGHT

No one knows exactly when the Blight first appeared. Most chroniclers say centuries—some believe even longer. What is certain is that it approaches from all directions, encircling the remaining untouched areas of the Weald, inexorably pushing further inward each year. Islands of prosperity are routinely separated and cut off from the greater mass of the Weald, reachable only by airship; each of these inevitably succumbing to the Blight's wastes.

For years and years, the Blight has been a distant, unseen threat to most Wealdfolk—something of concern, but not an immediate danger. Even people near the edge of the Blight have rarely been endangered—they simply moved inward, finding a new home far from the threat. Until recently, there has rarely been a want of space. The fall of major cities has raised alarms, but these have been distant and far between, allowing people to become complacent in between incidents.

But the situation has changed. The Blight is no longer an abstract concern to be ignored. It is closing in.

THE CREEP

Concurrently, there was a time when the Creep was considered just a nuisance and the Mulch a less sinister place. Over the centuries, however, once prosperous cities have sunk beneath the rising layers of mulch and the Creep has claimed more and more territory. Over half of the Mulch and Roots are now overrun. For the first time, Creep infestations are now appearing in the Tangles. How long until it reaches the safety of the Canopy?

RISING TENSIONS

Together, these two threats have become a danger that is encroaching on people's home branches and increasingly impossible to ignore. Displaced creatures roam everywhere, making once heavily traveled paths unsafe and upsetting the balance of local ecosystems. Refugees grow in number—while space to relocate becomes harder to find. Forced migrations create territorial disputes. Once-abundant resources fall scarce in some areas, inspiring local groups to become insular, hoard their resources, and repel others from their claimed regions, counter to Weald traditions.

The most clear example of changing traditions is among the Verrexians, a cultural grouping that has fought against both the Blight and Creep for decades. With the rise of a new triarchy of leaders, the Verrexians have undergone a societal transformation, renouncing their old ways. Having lost their home pillars to the twin threats, they are now actively seizing and claiming territory and hoarding resources from others, claiming a right by might. Some smaller refugee clans are drawing inspiration from the Verrexians—or succumbing to selfish fear, depending who you ask—and turning to banditry.

PEOPLES AND POWERS

The population of the Weald is primarily clustered among small bands, clans, and tribes, usually with membership in the low hundreds. Though some are organized with chiefs and hierarchies, most are collectively organized and directly democratic. Many of these bands are united together in loose alliances or confederations, numbering in the tens of thousands. A few larger entities exist, with populations exceeding fifty thousand, almost exclusively focused around large cities, notches, or allied city-states.

THE CLOUD CONFEDERATION

This prosperous union of clans is a major force in the Canopy, uniting multiple pillartop cities. Together, they control a significant number of airships and do much to keep the Canopy safe from various monstrous threats. Their capital, **Expanse** (p. XX), is considered a treasure of the upper reaches.

Conflict is brewing, however, as the Confederation's eastern allies have recently been plundered by Triarchy raiders.

THE CONCORDANCE

Concordance clans adhere to a deeper spiritual outlook than most Wealdfolk. In their ethos, harmony and balance with one's self, each other, and the Weald itself is necessary for true integration within the Dreaming. The most stalwart Concordians adopt a pacifist mindset and a diet that only consumes plant and animal byproducts (nuts, berries, fruit, honey, milk, cheese, etc.). Their festivals center around honoring spirits, and flickers are treated with reverence. To the chagrin of their neighbors, some even seek to find "equilibrium" with the Creep.

The Concordians' outlook, however, has made them easy targets for the Verrexians, who have begun seizing their towns and resources with little resistance.

THE GLADE

The Glade is a region deep within the Weald, centered around a trifurcated and oddly bent pillar and a cluster of large sunwells. These features grant enough landscape and light for Glade residents to engage in large-scale agriculture, unseen in the rest of the Weald.

Rumors that the Glade has suffered a Blight outbreak—many kilometers from the Weald's borders—are of deep concern.

GLUMNEST

Once a prosperous hub city, the Mulch notch now known as Glumnest was cut off and surrounded by the Creep decades ago. The residents soldier on, bunkering within their notch, occasionally reclaiming the area around their portal or re-forging a trail to nearby settlements. Glumnesters rarely get visitors, and are notably suspicious of outsiders.

THE HEXHOLD

The Hexhold is comprised of 6 cities in near proximity: **Breezesway** and **Moongaze** in the Canopy, **Briar** and **Wisket** in the Tangles, **Drizzle** in the Mulch, and **Mudworm** in the Roots. The contentious and sometimes hostile alliance maintained by these towns over the years keeps them unified against outsiders, if nothing else.

An integral aspect of the Hexhold's alliance is that each town contains a notch, and all six notches are linked together internally. This allows a traveler to, for example, enter the Moongaze notch and exit the Mudworm notch. Notch arrangements of this sort are unheard of elsewhere in the Weald.

THE MISTRUNNERS

This faction of small Tangle-dwelling clans is engaged in a long-lasting rivalry with the more numerous bands of the Roving Assembly. The Mistrunners hold to a ritualized and morphing system of organization. For several months, they celebrate the *Testing* season, where they roam in small nomadic bands of a dozen people or less, surviving in the harshest areas of the Snarl. The survivors then gather for the *Settling*, whereupon they construct a new settlement together, taking months. Inevitably, however, in fear of growing complacent, they call forth a weeks-long *Ending* festival, where they nominate a child Autarch, bestow them with lavish gifts, and obey their every whim. During this period, grudges are settled and debts are paid or resolved. The town is sometimes ruined in an orgy of destruction, sometimes abandoned largely intact as the bands split apart for another period of Testing as the cycle starts again.

THE RAVENOUS

Composed primary of scrills, strixen, veetlings, vescids, and weave-mothers, the Ravenous are a loose alliance of bands and individual hunters who strongly identify as predators. However, they do not constrain their hunting proclivities to beasts. They eschew the taboo

most Wealdfolk have towards murder, arguing that predation is a natural and imperative biological/psychological drive and thus integral to their identity—and dietary needs. To this end, they hunt other Wealdfolk among other animals, taking particular pleasure in stalking and eating sapient prey.

Raveners drape themselves in the skin, shells, feathers, and scales of their victims, wearing them as trophies in open mockery. Most clans consider the Ravenous to be a threat and attack them on sight. Rumors insist that some Ravenous have an unusual craving for blood or hemolymph (insect fluids).

THE ROVING ASSEMBLY

The assembly is a rough alliance of hundreds of small nomadic bands that regularly criss-cross the Weald at all levels, seeking new experiences and adventures. The Rovers are known for their hearty embrace of life, their gregariousness, and for their humor and impish tricks. They are infamous for their traveling drama and circus troupes, their relentless pursuit of a good time, and their propensity for luring away lovers and rebellious youth. Their Assembly gathers twice a year to celebrate, air grievances, settle disputes, and negotiate new alliances.

THE REACH

The Reach is an outpost of civilization that is slowly but surely being cut off from the rest of the Weald. While large, it is now an island of pillars entirely encapsulated by the Blight on all sides, though travel to and from is still possible by airship. While the Blight's encroachment has been slowed—for now—there is a growing concern that the equilibrium will not last and the Reach will eventually succumb. Many of the Reach's denizens stubbornly refuse to evacuate their homes, calling instead on the Weald's other societies to come to their aid and unite against the Blight.

THE SHADOW MOOT

This network of city-states is influential among the Tangles and Mulch and the most experienced with dealing with the Creep. The Shadow Moot tribes take pride in living in the more dangerous and dark depths, often mocking the easy ways and carefree lifestyle of the Canopy's civilizations. Individuals from the Moot are often considered greedy and “proportarian” by others.

Rumors indicate that the contract assassins known as Bloodthorns are trained and based within Moot cities.

THE SHIELD PACT

This grouping of bands has joined together to stem the Blight's progress along the Weald's southwest border, with mixed success. They have pioneered many of the anti-Blight measures adopted throughout the Weald: blightbreaks, controlled burns, and airborne reseedling of threatened areas. Rumors imply that part of their success is due to a secret alliance with a group of spirits. However, when infamous chronicler and scoundrel Levvi Bluewing began boasting that he knew the secrets of what the spirits asked for in return, he mysteriously disappeared.

THE STORM DANCERS

Storm Dancer clans are small but aggressive, occupying a handful of nomadic airships. These folk idolize physical feats and conquests above most else, viewing danger and conflict as the source of life's meaning. They often raid other clans and settlements, kidnapping rivals to assimilate into their own adventurous lifestyle and replenish the tribe's losses.

Viewed with hostility by many other Weald clans, the Storm Dancers have earned respect by being one of the few groups willing to pilot their airships over the devastation of the Blight. Some Storm Dancers claim to be in contact with long-lost distant "islands" of survivors.

THE TRIARCHY OF VERREX

In recent decades, the once-massive eastern border region of Verrex has been methodically eroded by the uncaring advance of the Blight and Creep. Having lost numerous pocket cities and settlements, they are increasingly confined and beset on three sides—and from below.

Facing unprecedented population pressures and resource shortages, Verrexian culture underwent a rapid transformation. Desperate to ward off their extinction, a trio of populist leaders seized power. This Triarchy methodically restructured the Verrexians into a hierarchical, bureaucratic state, exerting control over personal affairs in a way never before seen among the Wealdfolk. Outsiders are no longer welcomed and their people are militarized in their fight for survival.

The Triarchy has launched a new campaign of aggression against their neighbors, seizing territory they deem critical and raiding resources. Their aggressive behavior has sent a ripple of alarm throughout the Weald's other cultures, prompting many to consider what actions they need take to protect themselves.

GUILDS & GROUPS

A few organizations deserve specific mention:

- The **Ascendant Embers** are sparks who believe the Weald has gifted them unique capabilities and status. They claim their arcane insights grant them authority over others and seek to keep such mystic knowledge under spark control. Sparks who do not join their burgeoning organization are considered renegades. The Embers have seized dominion over several towns and caused conflicts in many others.
- The **Bloodthorns** are a secret order of assassins, reputed to have origins in seeking justice against clans who had killed someone from a rival clan and never made amends. They are known by many names: the Subtle Sting, Fading Light, the Last Breath, and Dagger & Claw. They are not simple contract killers, however; they are notoriously discerning in whom they accept as a target. According to rumor, the cost of their services is a life—either the client's mind is promised to the Bloodthorn's own dreaming pools when they die, or a child must be handed over to be raised in the Bloodthorn's secret ways.
- **Dreamtenders** specialize in caring for dream flowers (p. XX), tending to corpses and sapling clackers, and helping people commune with the Dreaming. Many dreamtenders are sparks and excel at extracting information from the Dreaming's legion of voices.
- The **Fleet Guild** are messengers and parcel carriers. They regularly carry communications between major settlements. They take pride in ensuring delivering even in dangerous conditions.
- The **Librarium** are chroniclers and archivists, dedicated to maintaining the written word. They operate many of the libraries within cities, and are dedicated to providing open access to knowledge for all. They deride the way many chroniclers color and exaggerate tales of the past, focusing on the untainted truth. Many librarians take a vow of silence, so as not to contaminate the historical record with their own voice.
- If rumors are to be believed, the **Muckflitters** are an underground organization dedicated to hoarding resources and wealth and enriching their members at the expense of others—perhaps the Weald's first criminal cartel. Chroniclers blame their origin on dwindling resources and sociopathic mindsets. Muckflitters are said to thief, vandalize, murder, and worse, earning a demonic reputation.
- The **Star-Metal Guild** are skilled craftfolk and smiths who have learned to forge items from rare star metal.

 >>> Art

LANDMARKS & ANOMALIES

A few specific geographical features of the Weald stand out as noteworthy and are well known to most residents.

THE DANGLES

The vicious winds of a shredstorm once ripped the treetops from two pillars, dropping them into the Tangles below. The branches now hang, dangling and swaying precipitously, though seemingly firmly caught. Crossing them is potentially dangerous but a sign of great bravery.

DRIFTWOOD

This small but semi-mobile nomad camp platform is carried on massive balloons, like a lumbering airship. It is home to the **Haze Serpent** clan. It is often docked for long periods at various pillars before the tribe pulls up ropes and drifts on.

THE GALLERIES

Separated by great distances, at least four pillars display thousands of intricate faces carved into their trunks along spiralling steps. These faces represent every known sapient species—and a few unknown. Chroniclers tell tales of travelers holding conversations with the faces, an experience blamed upon imbibing excessive amounts of fermented fruit or hallucinogenic fungi.

LAKE HOLLOWS

The Hollows are the remains of pillars scattered across the Weald that were somehow broken and sundered. Their hollow trunks were reformed by unknown hands to hold deep large lakes within. These are some of the largest sources of water within the Weald—deep lakes with their own unique ecosystems.

The lake hollow known as **Flotsam** is home to a floating town of the same name. Its harvest of unique aquatic life is considered a delicacy across the Weald.

Scarlet is known for the deep red tint of its waters; the origin of which is unknown. Of late, its community has staved off several incursions of the Creep.

Hornwood, named for the massive shard of pillar remnant that looms over the lake, is also home to one of the Weald's few waterfalls, which occur in the periods during and after rain, when the hollow's water level is high enough. **Lake Hornspill** at its base is one of the

largest bodies of water in the Mulch.

Deepsplit is suspected of being one of the deepest hollows, though some have expressed concern that its thin walls are weakening. Should they collapse, the deluge would be devastating to the denizens below.

THE MURMURING

This normal-seeming region of the Canopy is sparsely inhabited, but for good reason. Those entering it find themselves burdened by an oppressive psychic presence, manifesting as incomprehensible voices and whispering, on occasion rising to an intolerable cacophony. Some travelers report also witnessing odd mirages and visual manifestations. Sparks speculate the area is home to a grouping of intolerant spirits.

THE ROT

The Rot is an area where the Creep has risen all the way from the Mulch to the Canopy, transforming entire pillars. This is startling because the Creep normally confines itself to the Mulch and the Roots, taking care to avoid sunwells and direct sunlight. The Creep within the Rot, however, has adapted well to its environment and expressed many new forms, leading scholars to fear for the entire Weald.

THE SCORCH

Ages past, a massive conflagration overcame the pillars' inherent defenses to flame and left a jagged scar upon the Weald. Numerous pillars were permanently marred and blackened by the blaze, some consumed down to the Mulch. The Scorch strikes a narrow, zig-zag path for several kilometers, lined with the charred and barren remains of once-mighty pillars.

THE SHINE

This daunting and unusual mass of purple crystalline stone—a material otherwise unknown to Wealdfolk—floats at the height of the Tangles, held in place by no visible supports, and glowing with an inner light. It is known to sometimes flicker, fade from existence, and return later. Local clans consider it sacred and attack anyone who attempts to approach it, though several sparks have tried. Rumors of strange rumblings from the hovering monolith add to its mystery.

SUNWELLS

The spacing of pillars is not even, meaning the distance between some pillars allows sunlight to pierce most (if not all) of the way down to the

Mulch. Sunwells have their own ecological niche, and are regarded as safe zones from predators that steer away from the light—at least while daylight lasts. Some clever Wealdfolk use reflective mulch mollusk shells as mirrors to redirect extra light down sunwell shafts.

The residents of **Flue** went to great effort to cover the top of their sunwell, leaving a large and dark open-air chimney from Mulch to Canopy. The chain of linked towns along its vertical length are heavily populated with strixen.

THE THICKETS

In this massively overgrown area, the Tangles and Mulch are almost impossible to penetrate. The pillars and their limbs are woven closely together and completely overcome with other plant life. Traveling through the Thickets is slow and difficult, requiring much hacking and slashing and squeezing through narrow channels. Some claim pathways cut through the area are covered back up with growth within hours. Rumors persist of secret tribes and ancient cultures hidden within its maze-like depths.

THREE SAPLINGS

Ages ago, a trio of pillars was destroyed by means unknown. In the shells of their shattered trunks, three sapling pillars now grow, rising into the Tangles. Local clans venerate the site and hold festivals here.

THE TWISTS

It is whispered that the pathways of the Twists resonate with a supernatural eeriness, especially noticeable to sparks. Travelers claim the pillars and branches move or switch positions, changing the complex, overgrown landscape almost overnight. Attempts to map the Twists have universally failed and more than one traveler has gone missing, only to reappear months later, claiming that only a few days have passed to their senses.

THE WINDINGS

This unusual notch is shaped as a twisting maze of tunnels rather than a large space. Some speculate the tunnels may map to existing tunnels under the Mulch. Attempts to fully map the Windings have failed.

EXPANSE

The proud city known as Expanse is the capital and core stronghold of the Cloud Confederation. It roosts among a grouping of pillars known as **the Spires** that rise high above the Canopy, over two kilometers in height—the tallest trees known to the Weald.

Expanse is well-lit and windy. It is a cosmopolitan city of thousands, possibly the largest in the Weald, populated by folk of every species and culture, with travelers from all across the Weald crossing paths. However, a growing influx of people displaced by the Blight and Creep is straining the city's resources and empathy.

DETAILS

- Lofty bustling platforms and bridges open to the sky and winds.
- Terraced dwellings built along the upper pillar branches.
- Balconies marked with lush gardens and colorful streaming banners.
- Hawkers marketing circuses, plays, and performers of all stripes.
- Groups of gawking travelers and rowdy sky sailors.
- Dozens of airships and flocks of birds always overhead.
- Refugees from areas ravaged from the Blight and Creep.

PEOPLE

- **Nikka-Fenni**, aging m'qwirl First Speaker of the city's Conclave, focused on prosperity, order, and appearances—and stubbornly unconcerned about growing threats.
- **Gormossle**, doomsaying vescid hex considered a nuisance by his peers.
- **Ripple**, a suprisingly ambitious flicker and upstart politician who seems intent on using the displaced for political maneuvering.
- **Xandre**, jaded veetling militia leader who strongly believes the confederation should be preparing for war, known to carry a star-metal spear.
- **Isla**, a winged slyph considered the best living actor and orator in the Expanse, who holds increasingly dissident views.
- **Enetheros**, a clacker aeronaut and engineer who knows all there is to know about the docks and air sailing, but carefully hides secrets about his former life. Rumors connecting him to the proliferation of drugs like glowvein and cinderpuff among the refugees are almost certainly unfounded.

LANDMARKS

- **The Thousand-Arch Stairs** begin below the main Canopy and spiral up the Spires to Expanse. Every few meters a wooden arch looms overhead, crafted by ancient hands and decorated with glyphs of unknown meaning. Some sparks claim the arches hold dormant power.
- **The Air Docks** are bustling platforms that extend out from the Spires, where airships are moored and cargo and passengers transferred. The docks are raucous with the animal pets kept by aeronaut crews. The rickety area known as the Planks is where public disagreements are settled to cheering crowds—*usually* with the safety of nets.
- **The Conclave Arena**, a massive open-air auditorium carved into a Spire pillartop, where the city's people come to debate and make decisions.
- **The Cove**, the city's central pillar notch, noted for its vaulted ceilings, painted walls, and lengthy historical tapestries. Supplies stored within would last the city for a year or more. Usually unoccupied but used for gatherings, the Cove has recently become a shelter for new refugee arrivals, to the disgruntlement of other residents.
- **The Sky Market** is thick with skilled artisans offering their services, shops bartering all manner of goods, chroniclers drawing crowds with their news and tales, and children chasing livestock.
- **The Hanging Gardens** take advantage of vertical space and sunlight to produce an ample harvest. Visitors walking these terraces are free to help themselves of the bountiful fruits and vegetables.
- **The Archive of All**, speculated to be the largest library in the Weald, its books and scrolls carefully curated by Librarium chroniclers.

OPPORTUNITIES

- An airship en route to Expanse has suffered a calamity, sinking into the depths. A scrill named Tilven Munch seeks a party to find the ship or its wreckage and retrieve its precious cargo.
- A recent murder has members of the local Cordsplitter clan hungry for blood, and they've turned their eyes towards a group of refugees as the perceived culprits.
- The sight of a falling star over the Weald is a rare but anticipated event. The Star-Metal Guild is eager to find someone to descend to the Mulch and seek out its precious ores.

SPLINTERNEST

The major crossroads in the middle of the Tangles known as Splinternest is the central gathering spot for the Roving Assembly's biannual gatherings. During these festivals, the area is overrun by thousands of rovers and a healthy amount of chaos. When the nomads are away, however, Splinternest maintains a modest community of several hundred folks and acts as a stopover point for travelers.

DETAILS

- A complex interconnected focal point of multiple pillar-branch “highways,” bridges, stairs, and elevators.
- A massive settlement platform built across multiple levels of branches.
- Numerous “cavern” dwellings bored into nearby pillars.
- Haggard travelers and nomads from all across the Weald eager to rest, barter, gossip, and engage in revelry.
- During festivals: huge encampments, loud crowds, revelry, and entertainment of all kinds.

PEOPLE

- **Stratha**, a wizened strix and elder rover who oversees gatherings. Maintains an impressive information-gathering network of nomads. Often facilitates negotiations over clan/faction disputes.
- **Thennick**, a scrill hermit residing in a tree cave overseeing Splinternest, protected by guardian beasts. Rumored to be an ancient and powerful ecomancer. Occasionally in need of rare herbs and flowers.
- **Orthia**, a ponderous and heavily scarred kalioctera who serves as the settlement's primary protector and warden. Has a particular hatred of the Creep and those addicted to Mulch drugs like cinderpuff.
- The **Vinewoven Sisters**, two clacker tinkers who died and were resurrected together, but have since grown into enemies. Both are too stubborn to leave, though they butt heads constantly and sabotage each other's endeavors.
- **Allendrio**, a slyph spymaster working with the Verrexians, masked as a chronicler to gather intel on enemies and potential allies.

LANDMARKS

- **The Pyramid**, the local notch named for its unusual interior shape. The Trailkeeper clan makes its home within and takes upon itself the maintenance of Splinternest's pathways and infrastructure, particularly for the large yearly gatherings.
- **Wanderlust**, a large five-story inn and pub, built against and partially around a pillar trunk. The best chroniclers in the Weald are invited to challenge each others' tales and wits.
- **The Stand-Still**, a set of 5 closed notch portals set upon 2 pillars in near proximity to each other. These portals have been closed for as long as anyone can remember; all attempts to open them have failed.
- **The Exchange**, a trading outpost set along the largest roadway. Due to the far reach of the nomads, the vendors have the largest collection of oddities, curios, and relics from across the Weald.
- **The Pest Hives**, a set of dwellings built of paper-like wood fibers by itinerant vescid families, periodically occupied by mobs of riotous and trouble-making hawk-monkeys considered a major nuisance by the locals.

OPPORTUNITIES

- A predatory creature has been stalking the Snarl pathways leading to Splinternest, snatching travelers. As a major gathering approaches, someone needs to hunt it down. Several hunters compete for the prize.
- A long-simmering interpersonal conflict between the Eyelicker and Driftwing rover clans threatens to spill into open bloodshed. Can peace be struck before other rover clans are dragged into choosing sides?
- One of the Stand-Still's long-dormant portals reactivates without warning. Who will be first to explore within?
- A heirloom standard of ancient origins used to kick off each gathering's festivities has gone missing and must be found before the ceremonies commence, else the rovers will view it as an ill omen.
- A haggard rover clan that hasn't been seen in years suddenly returns, claiming to have ventured beyond the borders of the Weald. Is their tale true, and what wonders and dangers did they stumble across?

THE BENEATH

A lively hub of trade and entertainment for those seeking adventure in the Mulch and Roots, the Beneath is one of the longest-standing communities in the Weald. Some claim it was originally a Tangles town, until the Mulch rose to its heights. The Creep is a consistent threat to the Beneath; signs of it are purged wherever they are found. The brightest minds committed to defeating the invasive entity assemble here regularly to assess matters and devise new efforts to beat it back.

The bases of three revered pillars (Shiversong, Bender, and Roughbark) form the triangulated perimeter of the Beneath. Between them sprawls a maze of dwellings, fungus farms, and covered walkways.

DETAILS

- Colored lanterns, torches, glowing patches of fungus, and bonfires keep the Mulch's gloom at bay.
- Rope bridges, zip lines, and platform elevators operated by innovative pulley systems.
- Acrobats, musicians, and chronicler poets entertain travelers, hoping to create enough buzz for themselves to be booked at Flutterchum's.
- The endless pitter-patter of litterfall rains upon roofs and coverings.
- Crowded hovels and covered streets, dimly lit but thrumming with music and life.

PEOPLE

- The renowned former-kalioctera vocalist **Flutterchum** now occupies a gigantic clacker fused with the pillar housing the popular entertainment venue that bears his name. Flutterchum's talent scouts scour the Mulch for new performers; gaining an audition with the clacker is a great honor. Flutterchum takes great pride in his influence over the culture of the Beneath. He claims to have become one with the great pillar Shiversong and to commune with the Weald in prophetic ways.
- **Mummie Sproutwarden**, a former scrill nursery caregiver from the Canopy who now operates a prestigious merchant stall in the Glimmer Ring. If rumors are to be believed, she peddles "sprigs" to discreet clients—clippings of herself that grow into miniature scrills of limited intelligence that can be trained to obey simple commands.
- **Dollvessian**, a flicker rumored to be an influential figure in the

burgeoning Muckflitters criminal syndicate. They are said to send their pilferers after intriguing arcana and artifacts, selling them to others for large favors and influence.

LANDMARKS

- The ethereal **Glimmer Ring** occupies a hollow in Roughbark's base, lit entirely by cultivated patches of glowing fungus of many varieties and colors. It holds the city's primary market, crowded with vendors trading experimental foods, tinker craftworks, and curios from the Roots. The herbalists and esoterics dealing in potions and concoctions brewed from strange Mulch flora are widely regarded.
- **Thunderquake**, a combat arena carved into Bender's base with a nightly schedule of battles. Fights alternate between friendly competitive bouts and performances, with slots set aside for parties who wish to settle personal, clan, or factional grievances. Special obstacles, changed frequently, make the bouts interesting. Friendly wagering of favors and barter goods is common. A veetling/strix duo, Zibbyn and Nesasi, accept more serious wagers of arcana and Roots artifacts.
- **The Rush**, an intermittent river channel that flows down a fallen pillar during heavy rains, ending in a waterfall just inside the Beneath's walls. A clan of veetlings offer log rides down its length with a splash ending.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Flutterchum is experiencing strange visions, quietly shared with his inner circle. The visions suggest that the Blight is actually a benevolent force in the world, necessary to purge the gnarled overgrowth of the old world to allow the sprouting of a more vibrant and abundant world. Some of those in the know believe that his vision could create problems if made public—or destroy Flutterchum's reputation.
- A skittish fuzzleclaw named Hya has a showdown in Thunder Quake with a trio of begrudged vescids, but the rest of her crew has ditched her, leaving her to face the battle alone. Without companions to fight by her side, she fears she will be badly hurt or slaughtered.
- Davi-Tah, the m'qwhirl who maintains elevated glowing fungal beds in the Glimmer Ring, has heard rumors of a vibrant and hyperbright fungus discovered deep in the roots, accessible only by one of the chutes near Volestra's Fools. They seek adventurers to procure a sample.

VOLESTRA'S FOOLS

This Roots “town” has the feel of a sprawling base camp more than a proper settlement, with many additional camps located in nearby tunnels. Ensconced within a cavernous underground space with walls of thick petra at least 40 meters underground, it glows with the light of phosphorescent fungus. One end of the cavern is dominated by a pool occasionally fed by an intermittent waterfall—Volestra’s Falls.

This encampment is popular not just because it is stationed at the nexus point of numerous boleworm tunnels, but because of the nearby eponymous Volestra—a massive boleworm that is either hibernating or stuck and has not moved for decades.

DETAILS

- Constellations of glowing fungi line most walls and ceilings, often sculpted into designs and sculptures by local folk artists.
- A mix of permanent structures and ephemeral extended campsites, populated with tunnel crawlers, explorers, and adventurers.
- A deafening thunderous roar when the falls are active, drowning out many other sounds with its constant background noise.
- Thick, deep pillar roots winding through the compacted Mulch, exposed in the caverns and tunnels.
- Water vapor from the Falls keeps the cavern humid and feeds the voracious fungi; moisture drips from the ceiling above.

PEOPLE

- **Fathom Vizivey**, a veetling peddler who runs a black market for Creep-infested sap, Volestra meat, and potions concocted from the boleworm’s fluids and organs. Recent samples harvested from Volestra’s flanks suggest the worm is infected with something. Fathom is still pondering how to verify her suspicions and what to do with the information.
- **Luthiem**, a vescid mindrender who has spent years studying Volestra. He is convinced the boleworm is alive and even awake, but his attempts to establish a link to its consciousness have caused him to suffer strange reality-warping episodes.
- **Gmya**, a gukri healer who tends to adventurers and explorers. Secretly, she is a fugitive from the Shield Pact and carefully avoids those with connections to that region of the Weald.

- **Nifrik**, a small but bold kalicotera who is said to have explored more Roots tunnels than anyone else. He often consumes too much liquor and laments the comrades he was forced to leave behind in the depths.

LANDMARKS

- **Volestra**, a gargantuan living but unresponsive boleworm, taking up half a kilometer or more of tunnel. Despite abundant speculation, no one knows why it no longer moves. Opportunists and esoterics have discovered exotic uses for parts of its body—as well as the tastiness of boleworm meat—carving off bits that miraculously regenerate over time. Many of the locals, however, revere Volestra and seek to protect it from those who would pillage it.
- **Volestra's Falls** crash violently down from a ceiling chute whenever a lake in the Mulch above collects enough rainwater, sparking revelry. The water creates a mammoth cave pool, illuminated from below by glowing fungus. The pool occasionally dries up, but locals steer clear, as being caught in a sudden deluge can be deadly.
- **The Vault**, a strangely small notch with a disguised portal directly behind Volestra's Falls. Some claim it once held an ancient hidden artifact, long lost to the Roots' tunnels.
- **Envil's Chute**, a nearby sinkhole tunnel that once led to a discovery of ancient arcana and artifacts, according to legend. Many have plumbed its depths, never to return.

OPPORTUNITIES

- An infestation of aggressive crab-like parasites the size of small dogs is attacking perimeter camps and small groups of tunnel travelers. A deeper investigation can track the parasites to a segment of Volestra. Are the parasites part of the boleworm—or something plaguing it?
- A weavemother explorer named Xenethia claims to have discovered a new type of sap with intriguing properties from a deep pillar root. She seeks allies who will help her reach it again, though it requires crossing a region overrun with Creep infestation.
- A rebellious vescid fungal folk artist, Yeetsa, has gone missing. A tunnel explorer claims to have seen recent art like hers in nearby tunnels.
- The m'ka half of a m'qwirl, Jinna-Keev, has lost its qwirl mind-partner to the other side of a mulch cave-in. If not reunited soon, they will go mad.

ANCHORPOINT

Besieged by the Blight, Anchorpoint may soon be cut off as an island from the contiguous Weald. The residents have worked hard to stave off the threat for decades, in the process generating some of the most effective tactics used to counter Blight spread. What was once hope is now turning to dread, however, as their defenses are methodically eroded despite their efforts.

Anchorpoint is a multi-level settlement vertically placed along a stalwart pillar at different heights/biomes. It is the primary port through which airships travel to and from the Reach, isolated in the wastes.

DETAILS

- Dozens of elevators transporting people and goods to large platforms.
- A “war-time effort” atmosphere, with everyone grimly playing their part.
- All but a few branches to the central pillar trimmed away for defensive purposes, each fortified and guarded against Blight beasts.
- A system of bell-laced alarms wires and horn-equipped outposts, to warn the residents of incursions.
- A surrounding circle of barren pillars stripped entirely clean to serve as a breakzone against the Blight’s spread.

PEOPLE

- **Enris and Ynac**, a slyph couple who have adopt a mirror look to one another, copying each other’s mutations. They are elders of the Zephyr and Scratch clans, the two most numerous clans in Anchorpoint. They have led the effort to thwart the Blight, hoping to rally the Weald behind their cause.
- **Horotholo**, veetling sage and reluctantly the city’s foremost expert on the Blight. Some believe his theories and methods are growing outlandish. He has rebuffed multiple Verrexian recruitment offers.
- **Liva 7-Eyes**, gruff and scarred weavemother explorer who has ventured further into the Blight than anyone else, though she is reluctant to speak of her experiences. Considers most Wealdfolk to be fools.
- **Throosha**, gizzled fuzzleclaw warrior and admirer of the Verrexians. Considering what it would take to adopt their methods in Anchorpoint.
- **War Beast**, a massive clacker sculpted and equipped with weaponry and armor, who serves as the city’s lead defender against Blight threats.

LANDMARKS

- **The Lashings**, the upper Canopy town with multiple airship platforms. Large winches operate the main elevators.
- **Droptown**, the sprawling settlements at the base of the pillar, walled and covered for protection.
- **Orbit**, a nomadic camp maintained within the Blight itself, relocating every few weeks or months, but staying within 10 kilometers of Anchorpoint. Staffed by explorers and researchers who seek to learn more about the Blight.
- **Cavity**, a Tangles-level market stationed within a tree hollow left behind by a withered branch. A few brave traders carry oddities from Orbit, found in the Blight's deep wastes.
- **The Sullied Squirrel**, a dingy watering hole favored by explorers, aeronauts, and crews who work to mitigate the Blight, many of whom are bitter with resentment at inner-Wealdfolk who offer no support.

OPPORTUNITIES

- An airship crew spotted something unusual deep in the Blight. Horotholo seeks a group of explorers willing to investigate it.
- A large unknown egg has been found in the upper branches near the Lashings, but no one knows what type of creature it comes from.
- An aeronaut from a visiting Storm Dancers ship is accused of murdering a resident, but the ship has been tasked with carrying vital cargo to the Reach and refuses to take the mission if an investigation is pursued.
- A group of residents have decided to flee Anchorpoint, and seek assistance and protection traveling inward to the Weald. Before they leave, tensions flare with those who feel they are abandoning their posts.
- Rumors that someone acquired a legendary artifact known as an *eccentric knife* from a notch hidden in the Blight have several factions scrambling to obtain it.