Caves of the King

Settings: In the Trollshaws at The Inn Of The Last Bridge.

Requirements: The party must include at least one Elf or Half Elf before they will be approached by the Hillman Chief Grodda to slay a group of troublesome Trolls.

Background: Taking place in the Trollshaws, a troublesome group of three trolls have made their lair in a forgotten tomb of an old Rhudaur noble. The local Hillmen, although wild and distrusting of outsiders, are desperate for assistance as a result of the large number of warriors the Trolls have killed and eaten. Their tribe is unable to move away from this area, as other tribes are not too pleased with the idea of their hunting territory being shared. Other tribes will only accept them if they are willing to allow themselves to be enslaved. Thus, they have no choice but to either kill the Trolls or die where they are.

The tribe is now down to a mere twenty warriors. All of the Chief's bodyguards have been killed in attempts to remove the Trolls. Chief Grodda, in desperation has turned to the advice of the tribal Wegec Mareya who has said that she has had dreams which shows a successful combat against the trolls with a group lead by one of the hated "white faces"(a derogatory Hillman term for Elves) winning the day. Grodda has resolved to approach an Elf with the view of hiring them to lead a group against the Trolls.

Note that the term "Hillmen" in this scenario refers to the original Hillmen inhabitants of Rhudaur rather than the closely related Dunlendings who later receive this title. For details refer to ICE's Arnor.

This encounter takes place before the final demise of the Hillmen in the 17th century TA, however if the GM wishes to use it at other times it can be altered by exchanging the Hillmen with some other race. (Dunlendings would be a suitable substitution)

Starting: The players are assumed to have rolled an encounter with Trolls somewhere in the vicinity of the Last Inn. (See page 98 of the MERP rulebook for a detailed description of the Last Inn.) This encounter does not manifest itself until they reach the Last Inn for a nights rest.

As they take their rest with a fine ale in the Last Inn, they are approached by a non-descript couple who wish to speak to Elves in the group. No matter who answers them, this couple will only speak to Elves. It becomes apparent that they believe the Elves are the leaders of the group, and if told otherwise they will refuse to believe it, thinking that the group is lying to conceal their true leader for some reason.

The couple is in fact Grodda and Mareya. They have taken care to ensure that as many distinctive features of their culture are hidden by their dress and assumed manner. Unfortunately, their disguise does not really give the impression of any culture, and world wise players will have problems identifying where in fact these people come from.

Those players that have had close contact with Hillmen are entitled to make an Easy(+10) perception roll. If they succeed in this roll, they will be able to identify the people before them as Hillmen who are trying to disguise their true origins.

Grodda does most of the talking, but Mareya will occasionally interrupt with an incisive comment. They explain that they wish to rid the world of a trio of Trolls, but that they come from a poor family that is unable to pay large amounts to the players to undertake the task. They offer each non-Elf a Black fox pelt (5gp worth), and Elves in the group are offered the pelt of a White Fox (12gp). If the players try to talk up the offer, then they will be offered some herbs. These may include up to one dose of Arkasu, one dose of Kelventari and five doses of Aloe. Note that Grodda will not automatically offer all these herbs, but rather only give them if he has no choice.

The Hillmen do not usually deal in coinage, but if he is asked Grodda will throw in 1 gold coin and 3 silver coins of non descript origin that he has come into possession of and is using to purchase food, drink and lodging at the Inn. He does not place much value on the coins, so he will easily part with them if need be.

The Troll band will be found a good seven days march away in the Ettendales. The lair is fairly obvious: a cave blocked by a stout wooden door. On the way there they will be able to see clear evidence of Troll caused mayhem. This will include a burnt hamlet (this group was part of Grodda's clan), trees hacked and burnt for no real reason and a pile of skulls left by the Trolls near the roadside simply to terrorise. If during this time the players have a random encounter, the Gamemaster may wish to have them meet a refugee band fleeing from the area. They will not want to stop and talk, although the players should be able to get from them a few garbled lines that bring home the horror and brutality of the Troll marauders.

Grodda and Mareya will escort the band until they are within sight of the door, then quickly take their leave. The party is now on their own.
A direct assault on the door would be quite difficult. The door is extremely solid, and barred with a small tree trunk as well as possessing an ancient Edain lock. In the absence of a battering ram it will be an absurd Strength related task (-70) to force open the door. The lock is Extremely Hard (-30) to pick.

The Trolls come out at night on their search for food and plunder, and usually return the next morning. There is a 20% chance that they find a temporary lair away from their main lair, so that they can extend the range of their plunder. When they leave they will lock the door with the key that Butus, the largest of their number, has hanging around his neck on an Iron Chain.

The three Trolls are two males and one female, named Butus, Ragg and Dira. Butus is especially large, and the closest that the rather argumentative trio have to a leader.

The Trolls are not very careful when they leave the lair. Months of not having serious threats to their safety have lead to them being careless. Thus, it may be possible for a party to lay an ambush when they leave their lair. Setting up in cover near the lair, or even standing high up on the hill above the door to their lair can do this. If the group wish to set up in cover, then an appropriate skill roll will be needed. This will be a Stalk/Hide, and will be a Hard (-10) task to fool the Trolls. If they stand above the door, then they will automatically succeed in surprising the Trolls. They will be able to have one free round of missile fire, and then the Trolls will take 1-3 rounds (roll separately for each Troll) to charge up the hill and attack the players. Each Troll has a 35% chance of returning missile fire with rocks instead of attacking the players. Assume there are 3-18 handy throwing size rocks.

Another option is to set an ambush in the lair once they have left for the night. The party will only have to pick the door lock, as the tree trunk that bars the door can only be set if the Trolls are inside their lair. This is highly likely to be successful, as the presence of intruders in their lair is the last thing that the Trolls would expect.

**The Troll Lair:** The immediately visible part of the lair is a large cavern. This is the only part of the complex that the Trolls have access too. Hanging from the ceiling is a grisly harvest of corpses, six in all. As well as this a number of more savoury edibles, mostly Hillman type foodstuffs, are stacked up against the west wall. Also among the food are 12 fox pelts, in bad condition, but still worth 1 gold coin each in any Arthedanian settlement. Consider the food to be the equivalent of 6 weeks rations for a human.

Their treasure is in a large chest in the North east corner. It is not locked. Within it are 237 copper coins, 17 bronze coins, 245 silver coins and 3 gold coins. These coins are of varied origins. The following magic items are also to be found:

- a sheaf of 6 +5 arrows.
- a pair of delicate silk gloves that give the wearer a +20 sewing skill.
- a fine coat woven of silver thread, worth 12 gold coins to an Arthedanian noble.
- a small statuette of a cat. It is a sheer folly (-70) Use Item roll to find out its purpose. A Mage can use the statuette to create a familiar in the form of a black cat. If the cat is within 120 yards of the Mage, the Mage can utilise the senses of the cat simply by concentrating. (ie he could see through the eyes of the cat, for example) The familiar also has the effect of adding 1 power point per level of the Mage to the Mages total. Other than this the cat is a normal cat for purposes of movement, DB, MM and OB. If the cat encounters anything whilst its master does not have control of its senses, it will act as a normal cat would. (ie generally flee/hide, unless the encounter is with a mouse)

The use item roll can be modified by research in a good library that has tomes on magical subjects. This would reduce the difficulty level to absurd (-50).

There is also a secret door in the east wall of the cavern that the Trolls have not discovered. (and if the players are lucky, they won't either!) It is a very hard (-30) Perception roll to find this door, but once found is reasonably easy (+10) strength task to open it.

Behind the door is the resting place of long dead noble Dunedain. The family is long lost, and none but the most qualified historian on Dunedain matters would know much about it.

The last head of the family rests on a stone table in this room. He is richly clad in the finest clothing and most superb weapons and armour, but most prominent is a superb gold crown set with black opals.

These items were the pride and joy of the long dead Lord. Toward the end of his life he despaired that he would not be able to pass on these family heirlooms, as one of his sons was a profligate gambler, and the other so dedicated to charity work that he had undertaken a vow of poverty and would not doubt sell the heirlooms to gain moi ney for the poor. Driven insane by his obsession to protect the heirlooms, he quietly prepared his own resting place that the players now stand in. Room A was originally occupied by a magical construct that he paid the last of his family charity work that he had undertaken a vow of poverty and would no doubt sell the heirlooms to gain money for the poor.

In the hundreds of years since, some nameless adventurer who then did not find the secret door to the inner room has destroyed the construct. The obsession with his heirlooms has transformed the Lord into a Wight. As he is obsessed with the heirlooms, he will not attack unless the players in any way touch them. He will then attack until any that have handled any part of the panoply are dead, and all others have fled the room.

The Crown is worth 300 gold coins in jewel value alone, and has the effect of increasing a wearer’s presence bonus by +5. The robes are made of spun gold and silver, and worth 60 pieces of gold. Underneath the robes the Wight wears Chain Mail, +10 in effect. The Shield and Helmet are also +10, with the Sword being +20.