

The village of Stonetop

*Prosperity: Poor // Population: Steady (~250) // Defenses: Militia
Resources: Stone, Furs, Whiskey // Trade: Gordon's Delve (metal)
Trade: Marshedge (textiles, herbs, glass) // Blight: goblins*

Everyone in town is expected to pull their weight, but few think badly of those who suffer misfortune. The town pulls together; its community is its strength.

Able-bodied men and women are expected to know how to fight and protect the village when needed. Everyone keeps a spear, a round wooden shield, and maybe a bow. Folk rotate through guard duty, manning the three **WATCHTOWERS** each night.

There's no government. When decisions need to be made, the leaders come together and make them. Everyone knows who the leaders are: the old and wise, the cunning, the brave. It's not a formal thing.

Most of the buildings in town are stone, low and squat, scavenged from the crumbling Old Wall about a mile out of town and the half-buried ruins that litter the area. The roofs are almost all of thatch. Families pass these homes on, with two or three generations living in one or two small buildings.

A **LOW STONE WALL**, cobbled together and about waist-high, rings most of the town. It'd be no use against a real army, but it provides some cover against goblin raiders. The houses built outside the wall are newer ones, their families mostly newcomers to the village.

A relic of the Builders, **THE WEST ROAD** crosses the Highway a few miles out of town and runs all the way to Gordon's Delve in the Western Stonewall Mountains. The roads never get overgrown, and travel on them is safer than it ought to be.

Most folk in town are farmers, growing beans, potatoes, and some barley in nearby fields. **THE FIELDS** stretch out to the edge of the Old Wall. Beyond that, the weedy, inedible grasses of the Flats choke out anything the villagers plant.

There's no mill in town, not much in the way of bread. Families keep goats for milk and chickens for eggs. The town owns two horses in common, plus a couple carts and a wagon they bought from Marshedge.

Well over 30 ft tall and etched in faint runes, **THE STONE** appears to be older even than the giant-sized ruins of the Builders that the village is built on.

When storms roll in from the southeast (and they often do), lightning strikes the Stone repeatedly. The locals barely even notice.

The **PUBLIC HOUSE** is the largest building in the village, where the locals meet after sundown to drink and socialize. It offers floor space in the common room for travelers and boasts a small stable. The town's two horses are kept here.

Next door is the **GRANARY**, where the town stores foodstuffs for winter. Everyone contributes, everyone shares.

The village sits on a bluff overlooking the **GREAT WOOD**. A few brave souls ply its depths for fur and meat, which the town trades to its neighbors. Trappers bring in most of the town's wealth, but hunters get more respect. It's dangerous, hunting in the Wood.

By compact with the elves of the Wood, the people of Stonetop never fell a living tree. They're free to gather fallen wood, but if they need timber they send folk northwest to the foothills. But the **ELVES HAVEN'T BEEN SEEN IN A DECADE**, and some grumble that there's plenty of timber in their own back yard.

GOBLINS are known to lurk in the Great Wood. The elves once hunted them and kept them in check, but their numbers have been growing and they grow bolder.

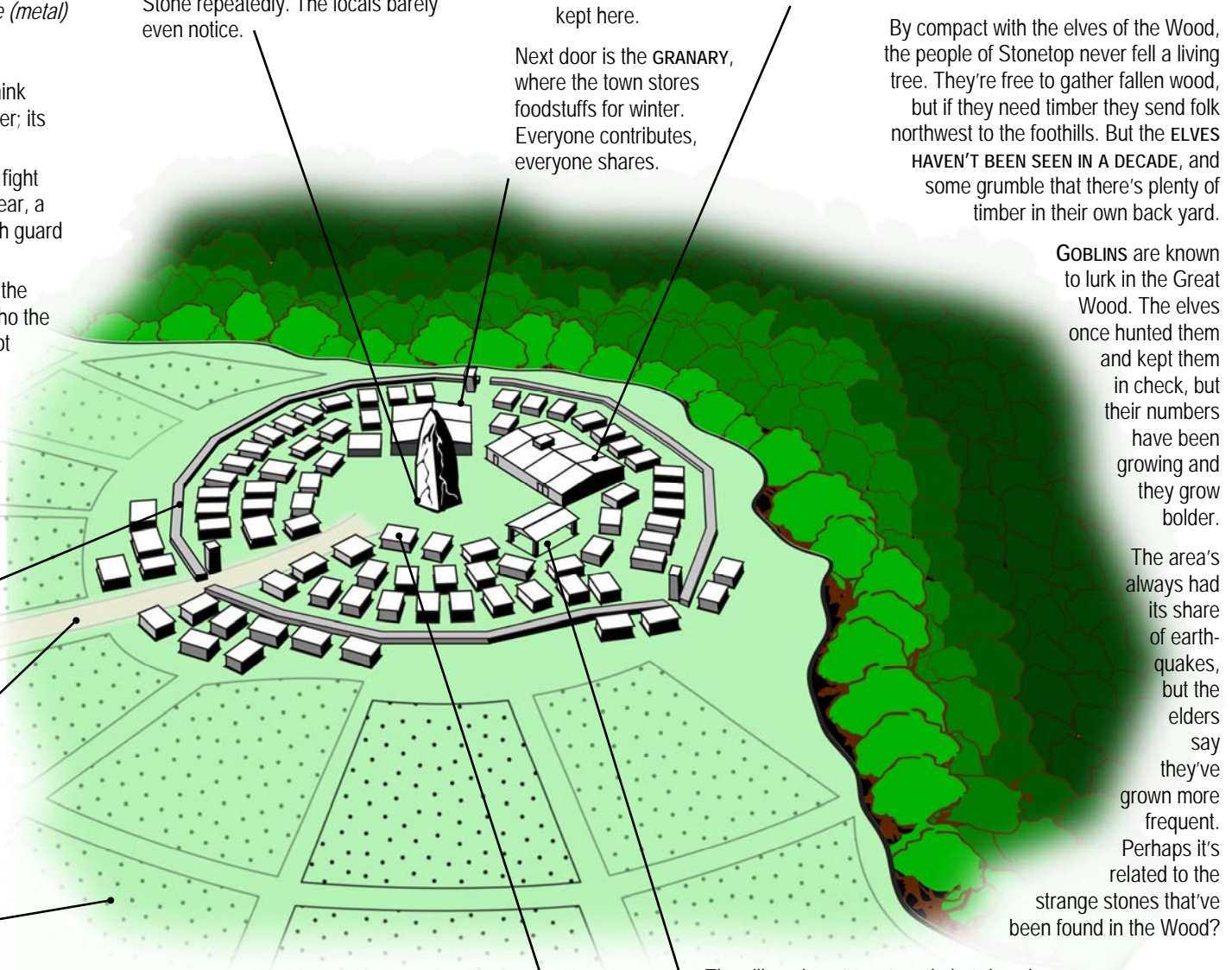
The area's always had its share of earthquakes, but the elders say they've grown more frequent.

Perhaps it's related to the strange stones that've been found in the Wood?

The village boasts no temple but does have a **PAVILION OF THE GODS**, an open building with shrines to Helior (the Daybringer), Danu (the Earth Mother), and Aratis (keeper of laws and lore), and Tor (rain-maker, thunderer, slayer-of-beasts). Tor is the most popular and widely associated with the Stone itself, but all four gods are given due respect.

All sane folk shun lakes, rivers, and other large bodies of water. *Things* live in the water, things that slither forth and drag you in with them. Everyone knows this.

The village stores as much rainwater and snowmelt as it can in an ancient **CISTERN**. But in a dry spell, someone's got to take the wagon and some barrels to the Old Wells, a couple days' journey north of town.



Nearby

Stonetop

The villagers never fell a living tree from the Great Wood, so when they need timber they send the wagon and some hearty souls into **THE FOOTHILLS**. Same if the village cistern runs dry; someone has to head out to **THE OLD WELLS** and fill the town's barrels.

Either way, it's about two days out, a day of hard work, and another two or three days back. And while the Highway and the West Road are relatively safe, the Foothills themselves hide many dangers: wolves, gnolls, and maybe even the odd ogre or giant come down from the mountains.

Surely, a trip to the Foothills is a scary thing. But sometimes it has to be done.

THE FLATS are a wide open plain between the Great Wood and the Goodwall Mountains. They are overrun with weedy, bitter-tasting grasses that choke out most other vegetation.

Traversing the Flats can feel like an exercise in loneliness, but they actually teem with life. Most of it will ignore travelers, but wolves or cougars sometimes slink in from the Foothills or the Steplands, and packs of hunting drakes stalk through the tall grasses.

Wise travelers keep to the ancient roads. The Builders' old magic keeps them mostly in good repair, and predators shun them. But tales tell of dancing lights and strange spirits luring the unwary off the roads at night, never to be seen again.

THE RUINED TOWER lies about a day's march from Stonetop, a good half-day's trek from the roads. It's hardly still a tower, more a pile of enormous stones and earth.

Everyone in town knows about the giant-sized tunnels beneath the tower. Adventurous folks get it in their head to go there now and then, but they usually just go a little way in and get spooked. There are people who've gone deeper -- generations back -- and brought back amazing things. Little of that stuff is left, long since traded away, but the stories remain.

There's a **CAVE IN THE GREAT WOOD** not too far from town. No underbrush grows within twenty feet of the cave's mouth. Trappers and hunters have heard strange noises coming from the cave, particularly at night. When goats (and other small animals) go missing, it's not entirely uncommon to find evidence of them near this cave.

On certain nights, **THE ERLKING** hunts in the Great Wood. Even those hunters and trappers who are sometimes out at night make sure to stay in town during a harvest moon. The elves spoke of the Erlking as something like a force of nature, not a god to be worshipped so much as a storm to be weathered.

There are different opinions about what will happen if he encounters you. You might be ignored, you could be the subject of the hunt, or if you're very lucky you could join him in the hunt. If you're the subject and get away, you're handsomely rewarded. If you're caught, you're sure to die.

There's a **GROVE OF TREES** in the forest that turn blood red (leaves, bark, and all) near the autumnal equinox. By springtime the trees look normal.

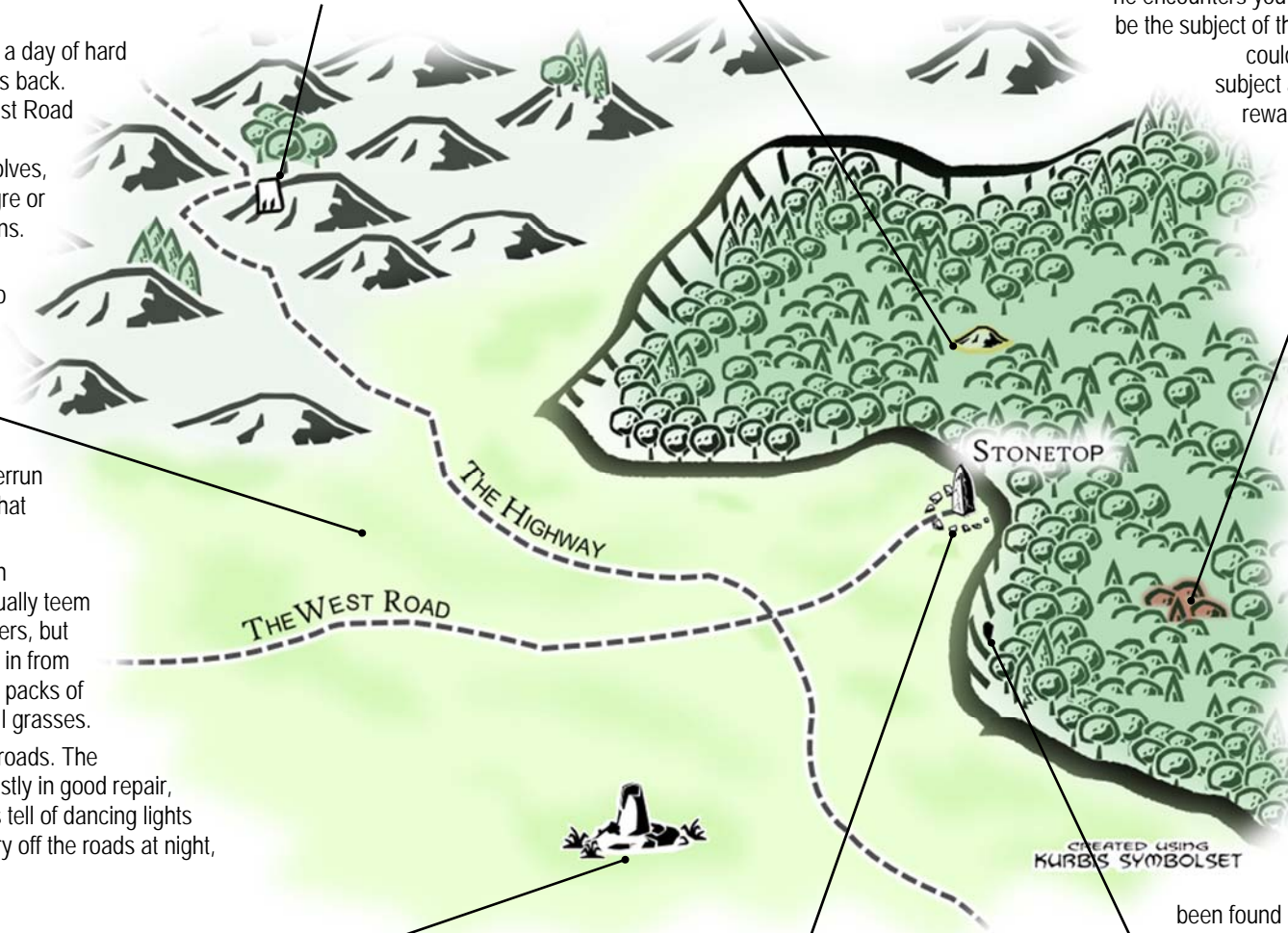
The elves would never tread near that grove, and warned the townsfolk to avoid it as well. They never said why.

Since the elves disappeared, **THE GREAT WOOD HAS BECOME MORE DANGEROUS**. Goblins have grown more numerous and gotten bolder, recently raiding the village. Hunters and trappers have reported unnatural stone protrusions from the earth that they swear were never there before. And the desiccated remains of deer have been found strung up in the trees, wrapped in what appears to be spider silk.

A pair of **CAVE BEARS** have a den in the bluffs just south of the village. They keep to themselves, and the hunters and trappers generally avoid them, but in a pinch a bear could feed a whole lot of people. Also, who knows what else is in the cave that holds their den? Perhaps it opens up to a larger network of caverns.

A ring of ruins surrounds the village of Stonetop, about a mile out from the Stone itself. **THE OLD WALL** was clearly once a massive rampart, but has tumbled and been buried by the ages. When the villagers need stone for construction, they dig it out of the old wall and haul it back to town.

Occasionally, some crack-job scholar from the south comes up to study the remains of the Old Wall, but they can rarely stand the "primitive" conditions out here for long.



The Region surrounding Stonetop

BARRIER PASS is blocked by a massive wall and gate. It's held by stoic, unfriendly folk who want little to do with strangers. They live on mountain goats and sheep and gods know what else, and brook no trespass in their territory. The town elders tell tales of their kind coming down every generation or two to trade some ancient wonder for crops or goats, but none alive remember such a visit.

A mining town high in the foothills, **GORDON'S DELVE** is in many ways the end of the known world. Folk make their way here when they're on the run or when there's nothing left for them back home.

It gets its name from four passages (obviously from the time of the Builders) that plunge into the depths beneath the mountains. Beyond the delves is **THE LABYRINTH**, haunted by beastmen and worse. But dwarves occasionally come forth from the depths to trade.

About two days' hike from Stonetop is **TITAN BONES**, a lone hill amidst the Flats. A huge fossilized skeleton is visible on one side of the hill. When Stonetop or the Hillfolk need to signal the other, they light a huge bonfire atop the hill.

THE STEPLANDS are a rugged wilderness, home to the nomadic **HILLFOLK**. They are horselords and shepherds, a fierce people but barbaric to those who live in the towns. They trade with Stonetop (horses, wool, and even salt from farther south), but hold the folk of Gordon's Delve to be blasphemers for their practice of prying sacred metal from the earth.

The Steplands are dotted with **ANCIENT BARROW MOUNDS**. Unlike most ruins, these are man-sized and less sophisticated than those of the Builders. The Hillfolk shun these and warn all travelers away from them.

To the north and west run **THE GOODWALL MOUNTAINS**. They are said to be peopled by savage, brutish giants. Little is known about what lies beyond them but rumors are rampant.

Throughout the long hot summers, thunderstorms roll up from the southeast and crash against the mountains. When they do, processions of green and purple lights can be seen around the top of **TOR'S FIST**.

On a clear day, sharp-eyed folk from Stonetop can spot **THE GOLDEN OAK**. The elves whispered that a hero buried at its roots would return from beyond the Black Gates. But no one from Stonetop has ever made it there and back.

The **NORTHERNMOST REACHES OF THE MANMARCH** are home to an aggressive, warlike people who dwell in wooden longhouses.

Fortunately for their neighbors, they fight amongst themselves in an eternal cycle of blood-feud. But if some day a leader unites them, they will be a terror to all the known world.

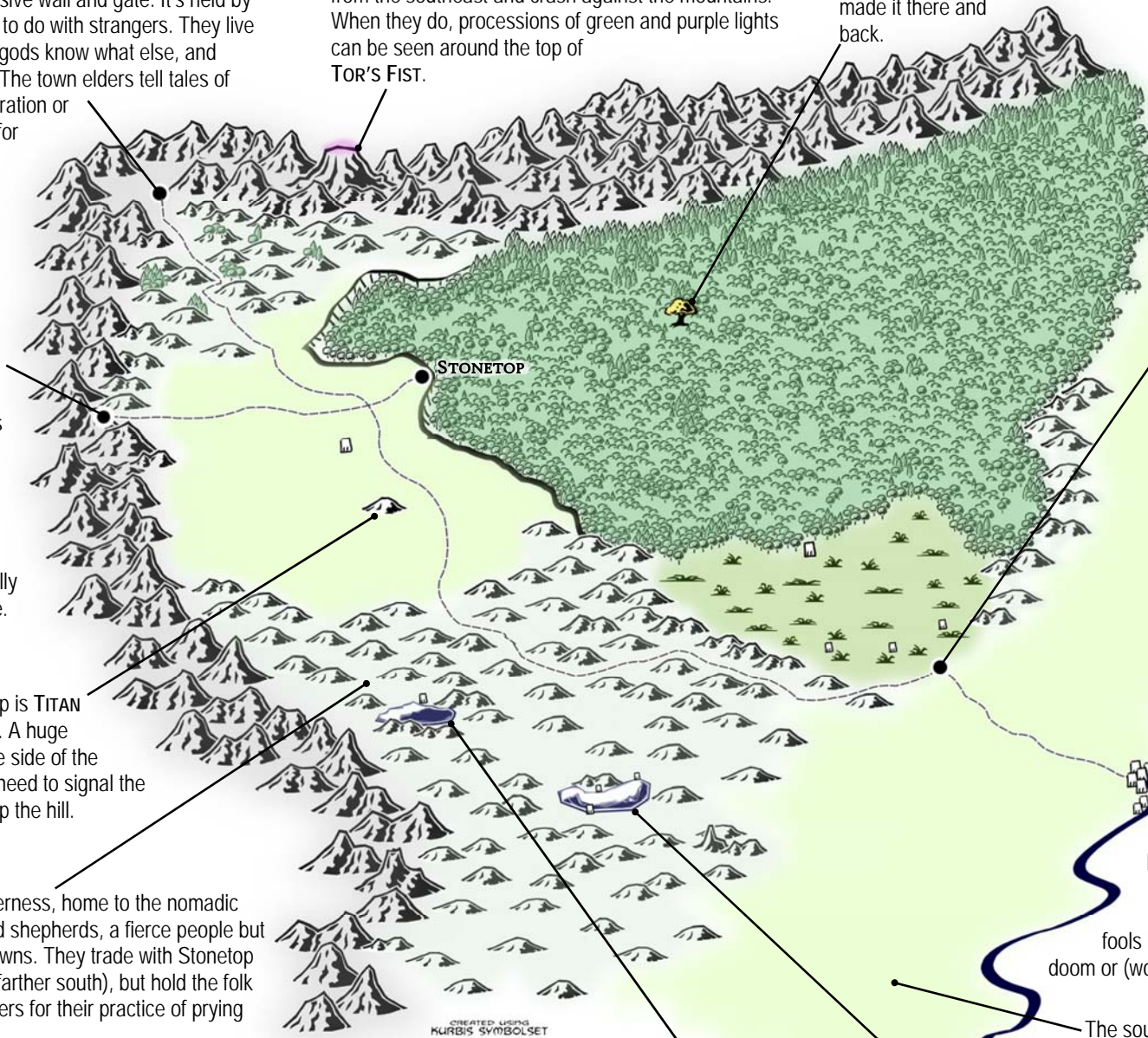
MARSHEDGE is a proper town, with a wooden palisade and market and a town council.

They grow hemp and wheat; and collect wild rice and herbs from **FERRIER'S BOG**. But no one dares venture too deep into the bog. Lizardmen drag fools away to sacrifice to their foul gods.

A few years back, the council asked a notorious bandit, **BRENNAN**, to take the job of marshal. He's still in charge and his Claws are still a big part of the town's

THE DREAD RIVER marks the eastern edge of the known world. None get too close, but a sprawl of ruins can be spotted at the end of the Highway. Folk tales speak of fools braving the ruins only to meet their doom or (worse) bring back some cursed relic.

The southern plains of **THE MANMARCH** are mostly uninhabited, only a few small tribes of nomads hunting auroch herds. But a steady trade runs between Marshedge and the more civilized city of Lygos and other towns of the arid south.



The Steplands hide two great terrors: **BLACKWATER LAKE** and **THREE-COVEN LAKE**. The Hillfolk wisely keep well away, but the few who have dared approach the lakes report ancient ruins on the shores and even beneath the water.