

# THE WAGONER'S TABLE

A WANDERING ADVENTURE LOCATION BY MICHAEL PRESCOTT

## THE SITUATION

Each winter, an ancient, magical *wagon* follows a hidden, meandering *course* through snowy highlands. It offers sanctuary to anyone who can intercept it and climb aboard.

## HIGHLAND FOREST RUMORS

- Ruffians know a secret route through the mountains—or they seem to, as they have no trouble getting across.
- Each winter, trappers find the tracks of a mighty, horseless wagon.
- Villagers tell of a pack of huge wolves, forever bound to chase a quarry they will never catch.
- A strange wagoner plies the snowy forest trails; the poor sometimes throw themselves upon his mercy. If you vex him, he throws you to his wolves. Otherwise, you feast!
- Years ago now, the King himself came to our forests to hunt a great wagon, hoping for a last meeting with the ghost of his father.
- In these parts, thieves are turned out of their homes and exiled, told to 'beg the wagoner,' for their supper, if he exists.
- There's a song they sing in the highlands, about a boy lost for six years who returned fat and happy, but had scarcely aged a day!
- That song they sing in the villages is completely true. I swear! It was my uncle!

## THE WAGON'S COURSE

The wagon follows a winding, mountainous course near several highland villages. Each year it appears following the first snows, and again for several weeks. In mid-winter, it plunges into

the deep, trackless forests for several weeks before being seen again just before the spring thaw.

The wagon's course starts (seemingly out of nowhere) in the lowlands. After looping around several dozen remote villages on a months-long route, the track disappears just as suddenly.

## ALWAYS WINTER

Originally, the strange vehicle was a tribute wagon, bringing farm produce, delicacies and unusual game from the remote villages down to where the Seree ruled the region from the lowlands.

Now, it skips the lowlands part of the journey entirely. After the last village, its *drivers* turn onto a ley line, and *Astin* whisks the wagon away in a shower of snow. It isn't seen again until the following winter.

For those aboard the wagon, no time passes. There is a brief lurch, and it's suddenly ten months later.

## TRAIL HAZARDS

Over the years, the wagon has worn a narrow track (often hidden by snow) through the fir trees. The wagon crunches along quietly, leaving deep grooves.

Sometimes the forest breaks into *clearings*, where great drifts of snow accumulate.

Other times the ground becomes steep and treacherous, and the track runs along steep *ravines* where black rocks claw through the snow.

When it meets bare rock or the icy flows of frozen streams, the wagon shudders and skids precariously close to the edge, but guided by its experienced *drivers*, it is as sure-footed as any mule.

## THE DEMON WOLVES

The *wagon* is pursued by a pack of wolves, as large as horses. They are demons, loosed upon the earth to chase down the Seree-made wagons. They've ruined many over the centuries, but their number is too few to overpower this final one. They follow it, sometimes close, sometimes a league or two behind; they are bound and can't do anything else.

The wolves *burble* as they run, which sounds like a child blowing into a bottle half-full of spit. Flaming drops fall from their mouths and hiss in the snow.

*Bzalt* is their leader, though she is the smallest. She earnestly believes the wagon is a curse upon the earth, and will happily accept aid from anyone who seems likely to help her catch it.

## WAGON HUNTERS

The wolves stay at least a bow's shot from the *wagon*, unless they have an opportunity: if people approach the wagon in a group, the wolves will try to use them as concealment or distraction in order to get closer.

They leap surprisingly far, easily forty paces. If they reach the wagon, they destroy d2 automatons before it vanishes with a pop (leaving them behind) for the season.

If cut, their blood catches fire and burns with green flames as it becomes exposed to the air. If grievously wounded, sticky, rope-like *tentacles* burst from the wound and attack.

## THE FALLEN WOLF

Somewhere along the wagon's path is a fallen wolf. It is studded with cross-bow bolts, and its guts have been mashed into the snow. The wagon has run over it every year for a decade. Only demonic willpower keeps it alive. Low flames flicker around it. Still, the

d8 Forest Encounters	
1	Fresh wagon trail—knee-deep, crisp grooves in the snow curving gently around the trees. It's d20 hours ahead.
2-3	Last year's wagon trail, a gentle dip easily missed unless you look down its length. It arrives in d8 hours.
4	A family of <i>exiles</i> , looking for the wagon
5	d2 rogues, looking for the wagon
6	The wagon, creaking and grinding along the trail
7	d8 <i>demon wolves</i>
8	The body of the <i>fallen wolf</i>

pelt is flawless and white. Being horribly wounded has not freed it from its compulsion to hunt the wagon, but the inability has made it mad and cruel.

It asks for help in a well mannered voice, but strangles do-gooders with intestines that rise up as tentacles.

## THE EXILES

A family of eight seeks the wagon, exiled from their village after a poor harvest left them begging. They hope to find the "King of Saltbride" aboard, and plan to beg him for relief.

## APPROACHING THE WAGON

The wagon is indeed horseless, and crunches quietly through the snow. The occasional clonk of heavy wooden mechanisms comes from within, as well as snatches of song and merriment.

The wagon moves relentlessly at a jogging speed (~12 leagues/day), making it easy to intercept, but difficult to catch up with (without horses) if it gets ahead of pursuers.

*Stepiro* throws down a rope ladder to anyone not obviously hostile who draws near.

## UPPER DECK

**Eight automatons** with crossbows guard it from the upper deck; several are legless and nailed to the railings.

Only d4 can see from any given angle, except the back, where four can fire. They will shoot at the wolves, or to scatter anyone obscuring the wolves.

## DRIVER'S HUT

Two wizened **gnomes**, Winsow and Grote, peer out of the cupola windows and direct the wagon's course. They bicker about directions, and tolerate no distractions (except philosophy).

The **steering** is geared, and must be turned many times for even slight course changes. There is no throttle; a silver-chased **gear lever** selects between full-speed forward full-speed reverse, or 'neutral'. Changes are made sparingly, as the mechanism grinds with each shift.

## COLLECTION GANTRIES

A vestige of its time as a Seree tribute collection wagon, the **metal hooks** were once used to grab proffered sacks during drive-by pickups. **Astin's** magic fills them now: every d100 minutes, bundled foodstuffs on a looped rope appear, dangling. Most common are sacks of grain, then dried fruits, cheese, salt-crusted game, tuns of wine, mead, or strong spirits.

## PROW & BATTERING RAM

The lower chassis of the wagon is solid wood, but for the **vexed timber** inside. The **iron boss** is actually the tip of the timber, and rotates constant as the drive turns. The boss is enchanted as a **battering ram**, and is especially effective against natural obstacles (boulders, fallen trees). These, it obliterates.

## OLD BRIDGE AND MAP ROOM

Stacks of **parcels** fill the room, each wrapped in dyed paper—painted maps, unreadably dense with elevation changes and wagoning hazards, and centuries out of date. Inside each is clothing or food—jars of jam, potted meat, sturdy pies. The **walls** are decorated with brass navigational instruments and drafting tools.

d6 **guests** too drunk, full, or hoarse for the feasting hall are dozing amid the stacks.

## STEPIRO'S TOWER

A rickety lookout tower houses Stepiro, a gray-haired man with a scarred face. Once an assassin, he drowned the heirs of Aridenn, triggering a disastrous war. He guards the top and repairs the automatons. He would be welcome at the feast, but hasn't forgiven himself for his former life.

## GUESTS OF THE WAGON

The d20 guests aboard are outcasts and exiles, reformed criminals, orphans and the destitute. Few stay long, but some have been aboard for years. Everyone helps as they are able; **Astin** suggests jobs.

## FEASTING HALL

Spiced cider steams atop Three tin cabin stoves keep spiced cider steaming hot; a half-dozen lanterns throw an orange glow. The corners hold harps, flutes and fiddles. Hourly dishes from the **kitchens** make a constant feast. All are welcome, but **Astin** demands **song or saucer**: prepare a dish from home, or sing your heart. Every effort is teased, devoured, then applauded.

## KITCHENS & ARCHIVES

The massive **cookbook** (in its third volume) records everything cooked here. The gravy-stained favorites evoke profound feelings of *deja vu*.

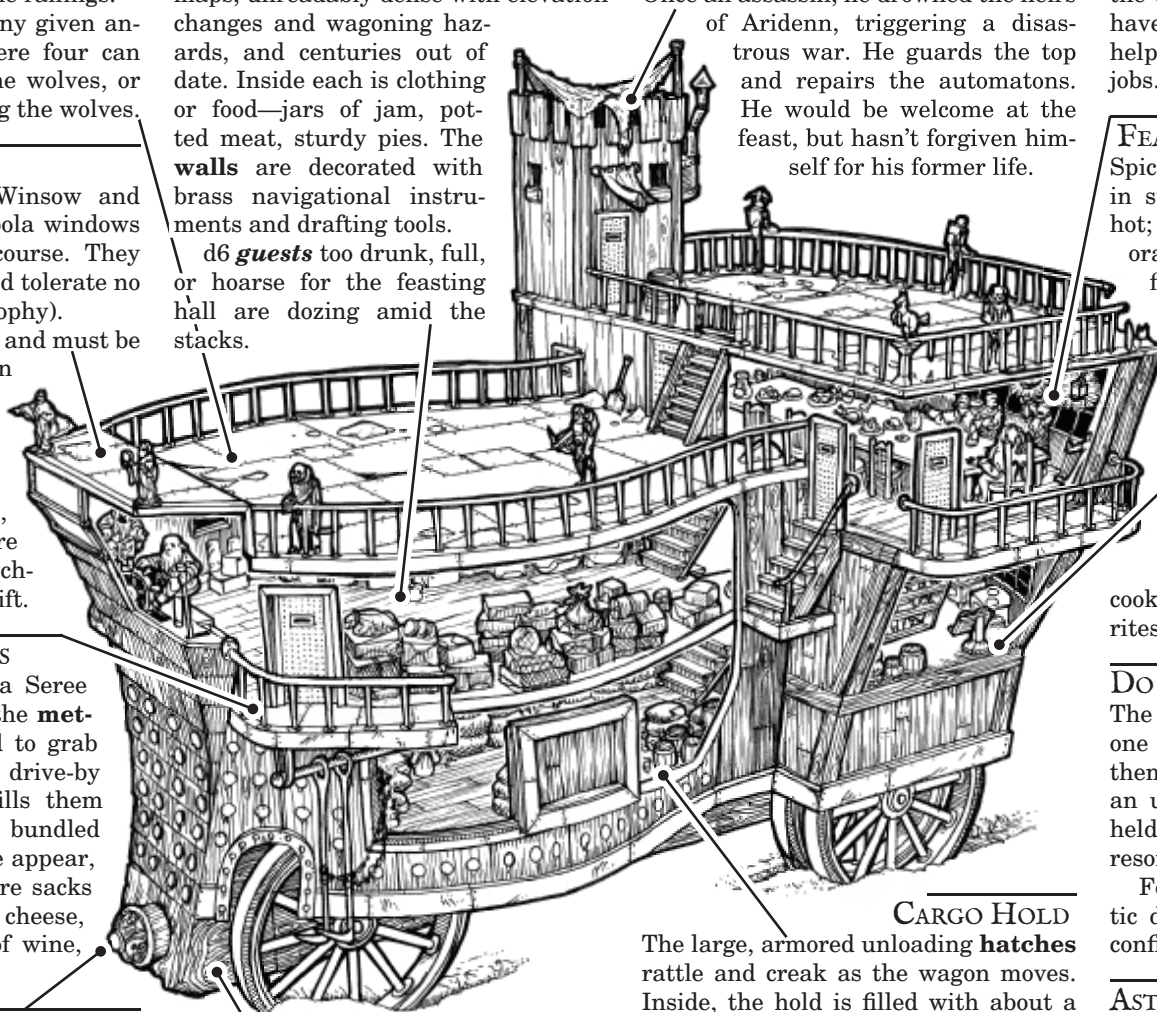
## DO I KNOW YOU?

The wagon is a place out of time. Anyone searching for someone will find them here—or at least, someone with an uncanny resemblance. Discussions held with these people have a mythic resonance in the wider world.

Folklorists and sages in anachronistic dress sometimes arrive, hoping to confirm obscure sociological details.

## ASTIN THE WAGONER

A huge and portly wizard with chestnut skin framed by a white beard. The Seree wagons were his design, centuries ago; now he repays imperial greed one feast at a time. He dozes in his chair rather than leave the guests unattended. He sings the loudest, claps longest, and makes sure those who leave the wagon take a parcel and a gold coin.



## CARGO HOLD

The large, armored unloading **hatches** rattle and creak as the wagon moves. Inside, the hold is filled with about a ton of **sacks** and **barrels** of food.

Several **floorboards** have been lifted to expose part the ever-rotating vexed timber as a **makeshift mill**. The resulting flour is blown out with a small bellows—everything here is heavily dusted in flour.

A sarcastic, **talking cat** (actually a familiar spirit) keeps the mice down.

## CHASSIS & VEXED TIMBER

The source of the wagon's power is a mighty log, taken from deep in the underworld and placed in a channel within the chassis. It rebels at being wrenched to the surface, and its twisting drives the wheels.