

THE THWARTED COURSE

AN ADVENTURE LOCATION BY MICHAEL PRESCOTT

THE SITUATION

Upriver from the miserable village of **Culmin** is an ancient, crumbling bridge spanning a river gorge. It once joined two halves of a great coastal road, now lost to the forest.

The **Martoi** people that built bridge and road are gone from the natural world, though their dead lords still demand tribute from the living. For those willing to gather it, the cursed bridge is a place of cruel opportunity.

THE LOW BRIDGE

This lower half of the bridge is centuries older than the **high bridge** that stands atop it. Fallen rubble and blown leaves fill the many **niches and corners**. Slick **cords** dangle from the railings down to the **waiting dead**.

THE WESTING STAIR

A twisting, leaf-filled channel in the rock was originally used to reach the level of the road. It joins the surface a short distance from the river.

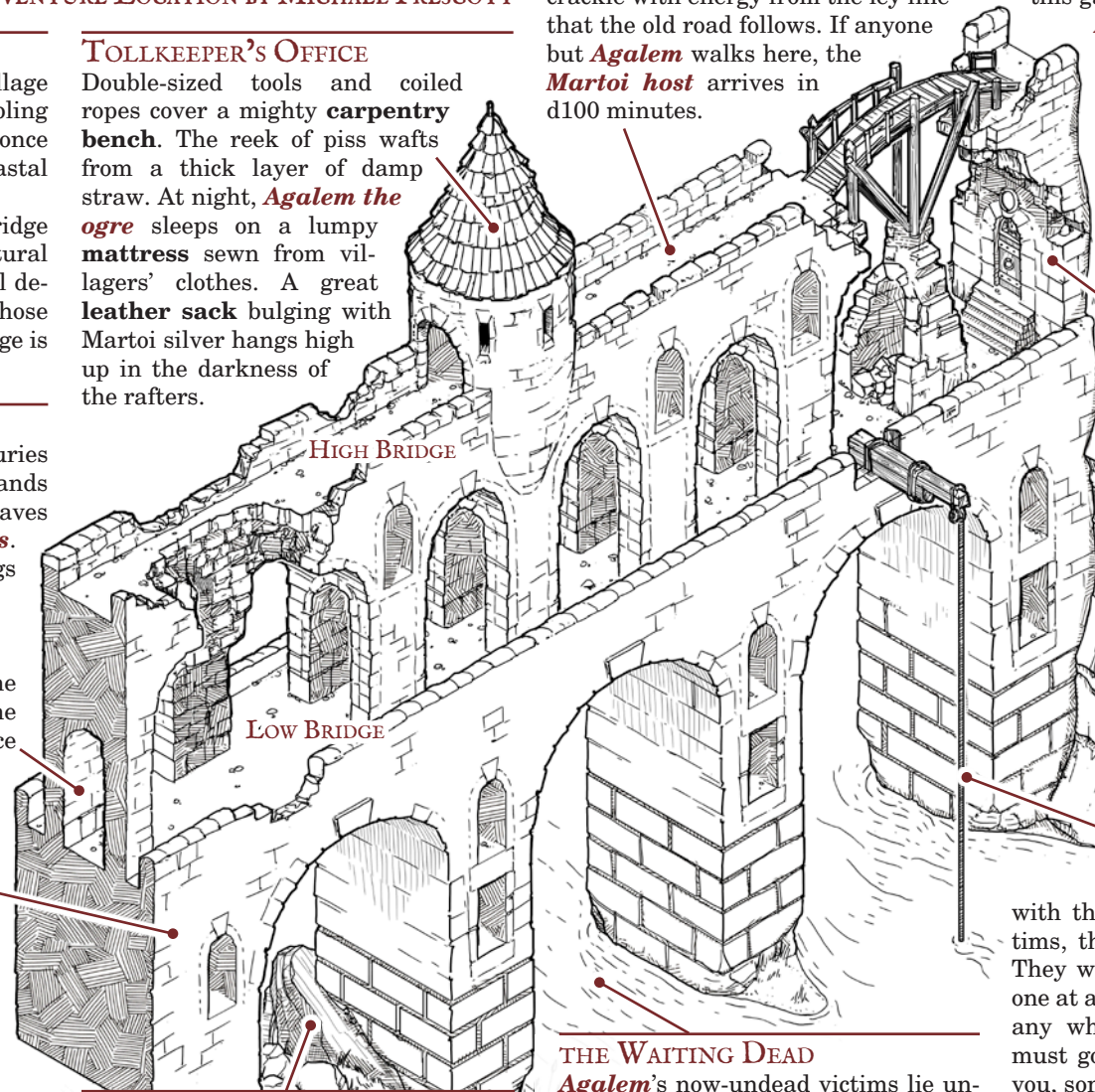
CLIMBING THE BRIDGE

Rusting iron pegs have been hammered into the stonework. They are spaced for **Agalem's** huge reach, but are a boon for skilled or prepared climbers.

With them, Agalem can climb any part of the bridge with ease, including the vaulted archways.

TOLLKEEPER'S OFFICE

Double-sized tools and coiled ropes cover a mighty **carpentry bench**. The reek of piss wafts from a thick layer of damp straw. At night, **Agalem the ogre** sleeps on a lumpy **mattress** sewn from villagers' clothes. A great **leather sack** bulging with Martoi silver hangs high up in the darkness of the rafters.



THE HIGH BRIDGE

The lightning-blackened cobblestones crackle with energy from the ley line that the old road follows. If anyone but **Agalem** walks here, the **Martoi host** arrives in d100 minutes.

AGALEM THE OGRE

A veteran stranded by a forgotten war, this gaunt giant trades victims to the **Martoi**, hoping to earn enough to buy his way back into Firevault. He carries a short sword the size of a spade and wears the **Toll Keeper's Chain**.

Fearful of direct contact, he skulks on the high bridge, preferring to interact through life-sized **marionettes** that he operates from above.

GRENNA'S SHOP

The former easting stair is home to Grenna, a spry old crone—actually a puppet, sewn to the far wall.

The dim room is packed like an antique shop with clothes, boots, small knives and keepsakes. Unless revealed, Grenna hawks these with gusto.

GORGE WALLS

The smooth, dark gray slate of the gorge is streaked with bird droppings and fans of pink lichen.

THE WINCH

When the **ferry**men come with their boats full of unwitting victims, they anchor beneath the winch. They wait **Halafes** to haul them up one at a time, using excuses to separate any who might resist—"the heaviest must go first so he doesn't tire", "now you, someone light for a change."

Agalem lurks in the shadows to brain the victims with a rock, strangle them, and bind them with a cord to be lowered into the river for storage.

In a bad fight, the ferry men (who can swim) will capsize the boats to drown the others and send them to the **net**.

THE WAITING DEAD

Agalem's now-undead victims lie underwater, 2d6+10 in all. They undulate in the current at the river bottom, tethered by strong, thin cords to the railings of the low bridge.

They are numbed by the cold water and Agalem's whispered hex, but if disturbed, they grow frantic or violent.

THIEVES' ROCK

Beneath the bridge is the only landing place for leagues. The **ferry**men will sometimes make a rough camp here overnight. They carouse and haggle with **Peccanio**, but politely refuse any invitation to come up onto the bridge.

d6 Low Bridge Encounters

1-2	Peccanio the Trader
3-4	Rano the Fox
5	Halafes the Strong
6	Pasma , terrified escapee

d8 Niches and Corners	
1	A horseshoe of blessed iron
2	Tiny doll that mewls constantly
3	A knife that will not cut flesh
4	Owl's nest with three huge eggs
5	Leather pouch of finger bones
6	d6 venomous serpents
7	d8 scrawled letters to home
8	Graven image of a forgotten god

THE MARIONETTES

Agalem's marionettes are carved from driftwood bones, then covered in leather and dressed in clothes.

Tiny strands are attached to their joints and heads, but their movements are so life-like that most of the time, observers don't even think to notice.

Agalem operates them from high above on the bridge, but after decades of representing parts of Agalem's personality, they act as if they had minds of their own. Agalem's ventriloquism is perfect; each speaks with its own voice.

Half the time, Agalem isn't even there, and it seems as if the strands are being tugged by the breeze rather than the giant's coarse hands.

PECCANIO THE TRADER

Peccanio is short, squat, and nearly a sphere of clothing layers. He complains endlessly about the chill, and he snatches up any item of clothing left lying about, adding it to the rest. He brings the conversation back to money and trade at any chance.

"I can take that off your hands, for a modest fee."

"If you have need of that, or anything else, you simply *must* see Grenna."

Agalem has completely dissociated himself from the cruelty of his trade, and blames Peccanio's greed for every part of it.

RANO THE FOX

This marionette is tall and thin, with pale, angular features. She wears a long coat and a dashing hat, and sports an onstentatious moustache of orange fox fur.

Rano nettles and insults anyone she encounters, to goad malcontents into revealing themselves. The *ferrymen* know not to rise to the bait.

She fights like a champion with a slender blade, and can leap almost the full length of the bridge on her gossamer strings. Cuts from her blade bleed alarmingly until treated. If need be, she can throw her sword twenty paces with the force of a longbow.

HALAFTES THE STRONG

Halaftes is strong, and dresses only to the waist, revealing skin as young and taut as new leather stretched over a cobbler's form. There is a quiet joy to their movements, as if each one is an act of homage to constancy and toil.

They speak little, but will find jobs for any idlers: moving rubble, winding cord, plucking rushes, gathering the clothes strewn about the lower bridge and sweeping them into the niches and corners, or carrying them to Grenna.

PASMA, ESCAPEE

A young mason from Grinvolt has escaped Agalem's notice, and hides in the lower bridge. He is emaciated from a weeks-long diet of moths and rain water. Having seen all that goes on here, he trusts no one, but is desperate for aid and will get it at knifepoint if he must.

TOLL KEEPER'S CHAIN

Agalem's thick, pewter medallion prevents any mindless undead from striking him unless they first pay him a coin. (If they have none, they will happily take coins from the of anyone else unlucky enough to be nearby.)

THE MARTOI HOST

Though they don't know it, the tribute gathering cavalry of the Martoi are dead, like all their kin. They arrive like a spectral train, thundering hooves and wisps of fog. Only their spear points and iron-shod hooves are physical, all the rest is ghostly fog, silvery streaks, and piercing eyes.

They stop for nothing, galloping across the upper bridge to collect their tribute. Anyone in their path, living or dead, is either swept up and carried away, trampled, or skewered by willow-wood lances. Any that are struck down flutter from the bridge like ash.

Agalem will not be on the high bridge for any reason when they come. At the sound of their horns, he hurries to pull up his victims from the river. When the Martoi are gone, he collects the silver they scatter behind them.

CULMIN POST

Two days downstream from the bridge is a lawless hamlet: half trading post, half temporary camp. **Tents** of linen or moth-eaten wool line the riverbank. A rowdy, dilapidated **public house** ("The Bluebottle") and the muddy clearing in front of it is the center of activity.

Martoi silver coins are plentiful, but prices and necessities are erratic. Goats, cheese and grain arrive along the narrow tracks that converge here, but the post often goes for weeks without. The boom town atmosphere has drawn bandits to the area, and the locals are quick to trade but slow to trust, mentally sorting everyone into specialists, bandits, or rubes.

THE FERRYMEN

Sixteen motley thugs wander the muddy lanes of Culmin, drinking their silver away and putting out word that masons are still needed upriver for honest work. Every week or so, d6 new faces

d6 Sightings in Culmin Post	
1	A fisher, keeping their live catch on strings in the river
2	A child stands on a roof to see tomorrow before it comes
3	A man tied to a tree; he has murdered his brother
4	A carver, too old to help with heavier work, carves wooden figures of deceased relatives
5	A flock of majestic, white deer crossing the river; the locals will warn against hunting them
6	A woman pleads for news of her sons; they went upriver and sent silver, but no word since spring

arrive in answer. The locals aren't stupid, but ask few questions, and are happy to sell food and shelter to those who are waiting for the Ferryman's monthly trip to the bridge.

ONE-EYED STASS

From her table in the corner of the Bluebottle, one-eyed Stass commands the gang of ferryman. She prides herself on her numbers, and keeps a detailed record of the earnings of each thug. Her arrogance and rigidity fuel resentments in the gang, but she alone is trusted by Agalem enough to meet directly and receive payment for the victims they ferry to the bridge.

THE NET

Halfway between Culmin and the bridge is a net. Once the ferryman cross it, they draw it up to catch any bodies that happen to drift downriver—these, Agalem will buy at half price.

TRILEMMA ADVENTURES