

hammer of the Underworld

The One Ring 2E one-shot

Background

In year 1200 of the Second Age, Sauron came to the Elves of Eregion disguised as Annatar, the Lord of Gifts. He taught the Elves his craft, and together they made magical rings – first, a number of lesser rings, and then the 20 Rings of Power. Sauron betrayed the Elves: through the rings, he wanted to dominate their wills. But the Elves refused and took the rings off their fingers; and Sauron went to war with them, a war in which Eregion was destroyed and the secrets of ring-making lost.

At least, that's the common story. However, one of the Elf-smiths didn't want to abandon his ring – one of the lesser ones – and so Sauron enslaved him and made him serve the Enemy during the war and forever after.

Those mythical times are in the past, but now Sauron is returning again. In secret, he has sent the last ring-smith back to Eregion, to re-light a hidden forge and use it for nefarious purposes. Using the magical tools at the forge, the smith crafts cursed trinkets – magical items that help their user for a while, but also expose them to the influence of the Shadow. A group of Marsh-dwellers accompanies the smith, gathering raw material for the forge and keeping intruders out. A greedy, clueless merchant helps the smith distribute the trinkets.

Setup

It is year 2965 of the Third Age, and shadows are gathering in northern Middle-earth. The Player-heroes are a group of adventurers working with the Elves of Rivendell, under the command of Elladan and Elrohir, the sons of Elrond Half-elven, keeping peace in the surrounding lands. In early winter, a traveller arrives, with the following information:

- The traveller is a hunter named Frida from the village of Littlefall a week's distance to the south.

- Over the recent weeks, a weird sound has been ringing on the hills, like hammer strikes echoing from deep underground. The locals have dubbed it ‘the Hammer of the Underworld,’ speculating it belongs to a giant going on a rampage under the hills.
- Some went to investigate the source of the sound, but nobody returned alive – instead, the investigators’ dead corpses turned up at the edge of the village. The locals are getting very anxious, and the noise keeps people awake at night.
- The hunter was sent to fetch help from the brave Rangers and Elves rumoured to live in the north.

Let the players **introduce** their characters.

The heroes travel south with the hunter, aiming to figure out what is going on. Skip Journey rules – instead, each Player-hero **gains 2 Fatigue**.

Village of Littlefall

This is where the adventure starts: a small village near the mountains, next to a dark forest. It is wintertime: most people stay inside, but some are out and about, chopping firewood, repairing fences, and tending to animals. A merchant is shaking a cowbell, and a crowd is gathering to browse his wares. Suddenly, a booming sound echoes around. Frida tells the heroes: “Yep, that’s the hammer. And this is the village. However you may help us, we will be grateful.”

Ask how the heroes want to approach the situation.

Booming sound. Every now and then, a distant, booming sound echoes around. The vibrations can be felt in the ground. The sound comes from the direction of the forest.

Merchant. “Come here! Come here! I bring gifts! Gifts for all! Knives, scythes, needles, scissors! Hammers, chisels, tongs! Pens, pans, looking glasses! Pendants, necklaces, rings!” The merchant Thor has a cart, pulled by a donkey, full of exquisitely crafted metalware, which he is giving away for free, one item per person. Some locals are taking the offer, which the merchant also extends to the Player-heroes.

- The items are **Marvellous Artefacts** (which the Player-heroes may recognise), but they are **cursed** (which is harder to spot): their maker can spy on their carriers remotely and, over time, enslave their wills. Each bears a **mark** with three intertwined Elvish “D”-letters inside a circle.

- The merchant is extremely polite to the heroes, referring to them as “my good friend.” He offers the heroes the following items:
 - Astrid: Belt (Athletics) (“To support you in all your feats of strength”)
 - Bruni: Circlet (Enhearten) (“To inspire those who would follow you”)
 - Gwendhael: Loupe (Lore) (“To aid you in scholarly work”)
 - Harry: Ring (Riddle) (“To one who appreciates the finer things in life”)
 - Primrose: Broach (Stealth) (“To pin your cloak so it stays out of the way”)
 - Tarmund: War horn (Awe) (“To strike fear in the hearts of your enemies”)

The merchant will only say the items come from a “benefactor” who values their privacy, and refuses to elaborate. He wears a silver brooch shaped like a star bearing the “DDD” mark. If the brooch is removed, the man becomes confused, not remembering why he is here; he only remembers being approached by a cloaked gentleman with promises of wealth and power.

Asking questions. The locals can provide the following information:

- Two people went to the forest to investigate (Sven and Eshter). Their **bodies** were found at the forest’s edge by Leif the woodcutter, covered in criss-crossing slashes from blades or claws. The men are now buried on a cemetery behind the village.
- There are many **local legends** about the mountains behind the forest. Some say giants live and fight there; and elderly woman named Hilda speaks of fairies holding court in crystal caves.
- If asked about **other recent incidents**, the locals say that some of their valuables have gone missing (a wedding ring here, a silver necklace there). A young woman named Ingrid swears she saw a hunched creature with big, gleaming eyes sneaking amidst the houses one night.

Forest

It is clear that the booming sounds come from the direction of the forest. An ancient, paved road leads to the woods but quickly vanishes into the undergrowth. The forest is dark, the canopies of pine trees blocking out most light. All player-heroes **gain 2 points of Shadow (Dread)** as they enter.

A roll is needed to navigate through the forest without problem. On each failure, each hero gains 1 Fatigue.

Whispers in the woods. As they push deeper into the forest, the heroes start to hear coarse whispers, every now and then, from multiple directions, repeating: “GO - AWAY”. They may see glimpses of glinting, **pale eyes** staring. These are the Marsh-dwellers. If the heroes press on, one of the dwellers approaches and attacks. If the heroes failed a navigation roll, three dwellers attack instead. They are easily intimidated and flee if wounded.

Hillside cave. The forest makes way for rocky hills. On a hillside, there is an opening to a cave. The booming noise comes from somewhere nearby, underground. **Noises of falling water** can be heard from somewhere nearby. A failed navigation roll may lead the heroes here.

Cliff. If the heroes explore the surroundings, they find a rocky cliff with a drop of dozens of meters, with a waterfall plunging from the hills above to a gorge below.

Dungeon

The booming sound continues and grows louder as the heroes descend through the dungeon.

Cave

The cave is mostly empty, but on the opposite wall, there are large stone double doors and two stone statues, one on each side. It is dark.

Doors. The doors have been closed with magic. There is an inscription in Elven script: Dol Dringdant, standing for “The Hill of Hammerfall.”

Statues. Two elves in flowing robes. Left: elf holding a smith’s hammer in an extended hand. Right: elf stretches out a hand, with palm up. On the palm, there is a circular indent, as if something had worn the spot down over the ages.

If a ring, or a ring-like object, is placed on the indent, the doors silently swing open. They close on their own after a while. There is an identical pair of statues on the other side.

Marsh-dweller skulking. A lone Marsh-dweller may gather its courage and peek into the cave. The dwellers carry simple copper rings to open the doors. If the heroes hide, the dweller skulks into the cave, places its ring on the statue’s hand, and passes through.

Antechamber

The doors lead to a round, built chamber, with a round platform covering an opening in the floor in the middle. The far end of the chamber has collapsed.

Collapsed stairway. Buried under the rubble on the other side of the chamber, the start of a descending stairway can be seen. There is just enough room for a small creature (like a Hobbit or a Marsh-dweller) to wriggle through, but if bigger heroes want to take this route, they have to complete a **level 5 Skill Endeavour** to clear the rubble. Each roll causes **1 Fatigue** to the roller. The stairway connects with the stairs in the main chamber.

Platform. This is an elevator. The platform, 4 yards across, is attached to six vertical rails, running from the ceiling to the floor and then further down along a circular shaft in the floor. The platform blocks most of the shaft. A cable runs from the ceiling to a huge coil on the platform. Two cranks are attached to the coil (one on each end); turning them uncoils the cable, lowering the platform down the shaft.

If the heroes use the platform to descend, something goes wrong midway through: the cable above them snaps, and the **platform starts to fall** uncontrollably. The rails lead it down to the wider main chamber. A bridge connects the rails to the chamber's wall, but below this, the rails end (the lower parts have rusted and fallen off; they lie at the bottom of the chamber). The heroes must stop the platform and/or jump on the bridge before the platform hurls off the rails into freefall. Failures lead to loss of endurance.

Main chamber

This cylindrical, high, round chamber is located directly below the antechamber.

Stairway. Stone stairs spiral down along the chamber's walls, circling around three times before reaching the bottom. The stairway has crumbled at one point, requiring the heroes to come up with a way to cross.

Murals. There are four huge murals painted on the walls along the staircase, revealed one by one as the heroes descend. They depict the following scenes:

- A fabulous, radiant figure on one side, extending their hands, greeted by a host of elves holding hammers on the other side.
- Elves and Dwarves working side-by-side, building towers, digging caves, and laying bricks for a forge.
- Elves working a forge, hammering down on what looks like rings.

- The radiant figure raising their hands into the air, with 19 rings hovering above, and more surrounding the figure.

Knowledgeable heroes can connect the murals to the history of Eregion (see Background above).

Waterwheel chambers. At three points along the stairway, directly above each other, there are landings. A bridge leads from the landing towards the middle of the chamber and ends there. On the wall, a doorway leads to a smaller chamber, dominated by a giant waterwheel, attached to the walls with a thick shaft. Every now and then, water gushes from an opening in the ceiling through the waterwheel, making it spin, and down an opening in the floor. There is a secret door in the stonework; pushing the door open leads to a room filled with delicate gears and machinery.

The waterwheels lift the giant triphammer at the forge; water always flows for a time after the last boom sound was heard. If the machinery is sabotaged, after a while, the Elf-smith opens the doors of the forge and comes out to investigate.

Marsh-dweller attack. To rise tension, a marsh-dweller may plunge on the heroes from the shadows, or from a vantage point on the wall, screaming “GO – AWAY!” and trying to push a hero off the stairs.

Bottom of the main chamber

At the bottom, pale light floods in from an opening in the wall. An open doorway leads to the store room; closed double-doors leads to the forge.

Opening in the wall. The opening leads outside. A curtain of falling water blocks the view (this is the waterfall the heroes may have spotted from outside); the sound of rushing water fills the chamber. The opening leads to the side of a vertical, rocky cliff; it’s a long way up and down.

Closed doors. These are almost identical to the doors of the antechamber, with two accompanying **statues**, except that the elf on the right is extending a hand in greeting, with a ring in a finger; the elf on the left is holding out a hand with palm up, slightly cupped, as if ready to grip something. Placing a hammer on the hand opens the doors. There is an identical set of statues on the other side.

Treasure chamber

In the middle of this round chamber, there is a pile of treasure. And then, there are the Marsh-dwellers.

Treasure pile. In the pile, there are raw materials (barrels of gemstones, ingots of gold and silver) together with delicate, ornamental items and jewellery. The (somewhat less fancy) items stolen from the villagers are in the pile. There are also scattered smithing tools (hammers, chisels, tongs) – and a sword that gleams with blue light.

Magical sword. This ancient sword is decorated with copper wiring that depicts the Sun and seven stars. The sword (Damage 4, Injury 16, Load 2) is a Magical Weapon with the Bane of the Undead and the Luminescence reward. The dungeon's current inhabitants don't dare touch the blade.

Marsh-dwellers. The Marsh-dwellers live in this chamber, revelling in the treasure (though avoiding the sword). Their pale, plate-like eyes gleam in the darkness. There are one and a half for each Player-hero. If disturbed, they either attack or flee through the crack in the wall to the forge.

Crack in the wall. The stone has cracked on the far wall; the crack leads to the forge. Moving through is cumbersome.

Forge chamber

This chamber is filled with workbenches and scattered tools. In the middle is a massive anvil bolted to the floor. Dim light emanates from red-hot forges. A dark figure hammers away at something.

Underworld hammer. The smith is currently working on a large shield. He carefully places it on the anvil and pulls a lever nearby – and from the ceiling above, a metal cylinder the size of a tree trunk drops down, its conical end hitting the shield and the anvil, making the chamber tremble. This is the origin of the booming sound. The cylinder then starts to slowly rise again (provided the waterwheel system is functional).

The hammer, built by Dwarves, may seem an overt measure for such small-scale work, but it is necessary for working with the magical enchantments the smith places on his handiwork.

The works of the smith. Piled into a corner is a stash of crafted items, from everyday farm tools to weapons and jewellery, all bearing the “DDD” mark. These are cursed magical items manufactured by the smith.

The last ring-smith. The figure wears a leather apron and tattered clothes. Little trinkets hang from the clothes, making a chiming noise as the figure moves. The figure's posture is lordly, with pale, handsome, Elvish features. However, there is cruelty in the figure's dark eyes, and its skin is oddly pale, almost translucent.

The smith's voice is low and raspy. "Why are you here?" If the heroes engage in a conversation, this is what the smith has to say.

- He is a proud smith from Eregion, the last of his kind, now working for a different Master.
- His Master is the Lord of Gifts, and he spreads his Master's will and continues his tradition.
- This is his forge – is now, as it was in the days of yore – and he won't suffer intruders.

The smith welcomes an opportunity to learn where the heroes come from and what they know of his operation, but he won't let them leave alive. Once the conversation comes to a halt, he grabs his hammer and attacks.

The smith uses the statistics of a **Fell Wraith** but with Attribute Level and Hate 6, Might 2, 20 Endurance, Parry 0, and without the Fear of Fire Fell Ability (he is used to working on a forge, after all). His weapon is a Hammer 3 (5/12, Break Shield).

When the smith engages in combat, **each hero carrying a gift from the merchant** gains 3 Shadow (Sorcery). If a hero has used the gift's magical abilities, their roll is Ill-Favoured. Each hero who fails is momentarily overtaken by the Shadow and can't act on the first round.

When the Elf-smith strikes with his hammer, a keen-eyed hero may notice a pale gleam at his hand: a single, undecorated **golden ring**. The gleam glows brighter as the fight stretches on. This is the smith's magical ring, a lesser ring giving him power but also enslaving him to Sauron's will. The ring can be cut off with a Piercing Blow, if the hero specifically aims to do this. No Protection roll takes place; the ring-finger is cut off, and the smith lets out a final scream of agony as his body crumbles to ash.

Endgame

In the climax of the adventure, the heroes fight the last ring-smith. This may happen at the forge or outside if the heroes manage to lure the smith out. The Marsh-dwellers should also be involved – either the heroes defeat them first in the treasure chamber, or

the smith commands them to join him in battle. Note that both the smith and the Marsh-dwellers are weakened in the sunlight at the bottom of the main chamber.

If the heroes are about to be defeated, the Loremaster may save them at the last minute: **Elladan and Elrohir**, the sons of Elrond, burst in at the last moment (perhaps descending down on a rope, perhaps entering through the waterfall) and attack. The Elf-lords make quick work of the Enemy, saving the day. They explain how they heard of the heroes' mission, became worried, and followed their footsteps. They thank the heroes for clearing the way, and answer any lingering questions the players may have about the adventure.

Special rules

The Marsh-Dwellers in this scenario don't have the Heartless or Thing of Terror Fell Abilities. The Loremaster should consider whether they want to use the Marsh-Dwellers' Deathless ability, depending on the desired pacing for the scenario.

It is best to let Primrose Proudfoot use the magical sword, even though she is a Hobbit. When doing so, she loses (1d).

Harry Appledore is proficient in Swords, contrary to the rules for Men of Bree. This is also done to make the magical sword more appealing.

Note that, in the pre-generated character sheets, no useful items are listed – for simplicity, the associated bonuses are added directly to the Skill ranks.