

PARASITES FROM THE VALE

BY RYAN LANEY

Miles away from civilization lies a secluded stretch of land known as Letterlight Vale. On this forested peninsula high above a rocky shoreline a terrible parasite has begun infecting the wildlife, turning them to madness and causing gruesome malformations. Your team of adventurers has been given a potion to draw the parasite from any creatures infected by it, with the end goal of destroying the menace once and for all before it can make its way farther inland. If this creature makes its way closer to civilization, who knows what kind of havoc it might wreak.

This scenario features:

Survival Nature Combat

Maneuvers

And is particularly well-suited for:

Rangers Druids Fighters

RUNNING THIS SCENARIO

This scenario is a joy to run for DM's who like having the freedom to describe outdoor environments and pace combat encounters as seen fit. Each section features a brief write-up for what the environment looks like, but there aren't any particular encounters prescribed to that area. While the primary plot involves exterminating a series of parasites from the area, you can add combat encounters with

wildlife, social interactions with humanoids found in the wilderness, or small puzzlebox-like artifacts that can be solved to unlock or reveal a rare or magical item.

Tracking The Parasites: The parasites have infected 3 different wildlife creatures in the vale, though their exact locations on the map are determined by the DM. Using a variety of **Survival**, **Nature**, and **Perception** checks, the party can narrow down and track the parasites' exact locations. You as the DM might suggest that a festering, corrupt aura pervades the areas where the parasite lives, plus anything else that would help the party corner the infected creatures.

Extracting The Parasites: The party was given a *potion of fungal extraction* prior to the start of this scenario (*as told in the Background*). When they encounter one of the 3 creatures infected by a parasite, they'll need to successfully do a check for **Grappling**, **Animal Handling**, etc. to latch onto the creature and apply a dose of the potion. At the end of that turn, the parasite will leave the creature and attack the party on its own. The party should not harm the infected creatures!

Terminating The Parasites: When each parasite is defeated, it will retreat away. Once all 3 are defeated, the parasites will merge together into one massive writhing horror and confront the party as they try to leave the vale. Defeat this form to destroy the parasite for good.

At the end of this scenario write-up are stat blocks for the creatures the party may encounter, the 3 individual parasites, and the final combined parasite named Meeringlen's Parasite.

BACKGROUND

Miles away from civilization lies a secluded stretch of land known as Letterlight Vale. On this forested peninsula high above a rocky shoreline a terrible parasite has begun infecting the wildlife, turning them to madness and causing gruesome malformations. Others have tried unsuccessfully to exterminate the fungus from the region, and so the city council of the local town of Hattan has hired your party to take over.

The local apothecary Gemma Euthwaite has given your party a potion of fungal extraction that should be useful in drawing the parasite from the creatures. 'Take this,' she tells you, 'and apply it to the creatures affected by this horrible parasite. It should draw the abomination out so that you can destroy it without harming the animals.'

After crossing a long peninsula high above the surrounding ocean, you reach the entrance to Letterlight Vale, a secluded sanctuary of forests, plains, and rocky mountains. While the vale shows aged signs of human contact in the form of rope bridges, dilapidated huts, and the occasional traces of wooden cart tracks, any civilized settlements have long been abandoned and overtaken by the natural elements."

I. ENTRANCE TO LETTERLIGHT VALE

"You set foot on a lush grassy plain atop an expansive seaside plateau. The sounds of crashing waves far below roll in your ears as the salty ocean mist fills the air. Before you

lies a distinct treeline which starts the first forested areas of Letterlight Vale, with gnarled roots, fallen trees, and scant remnants of human contact from years before.

In the distance directly north past the forests you see a steep mountain top. To the west you see a mixture of black slate rocks and various shrubs. To the east you see a clearing cut through the trees, though you can't see exactly what's through the path."

An **Investigation** check can be used to identify a series of manmade paths barely visible on the mountain peak in the distance.

If the party checks out the areas along the treeline, some small empty food crates and a long-worn sign with the words "Provisions, Climbing Tools" can be found scattered around what looks like a former trade post.

If the party chooses to go straight north into the forest, you'll need to provide options for going either west or east as shown on the map. The passage going farther forward is blocked by steep rock walls.

II. SHALLOW CRAG

"The southwest edge of the vale is almost entirely covered in flat, black rocks. The ocean mist has left much of this surface slick, though enough ivy and shrubs have found their footing between the stone, helping provide a more stable place to stand.

Far to the west across a massive gap you see a fairly isolated portion of land. A low, lush meadow leads to it from the northeast, and a long rope bridge connects it to another part of the vale directly north.

From where you stand, another wide meadow spreads out to the north. To the east is the entrance to the vale.”

This area is largely a plain of black slate with small crevices and vegetation all around it. You may choose to add a false, out-of-place rock that serves as a door to an underground hiding hole.

III. EASTERN MEADOWS

“The southeast corner of the vale is another wide plain similar to what you saw at the entrance. This plain, however, features large groups of about 10-15 trees clumped together, giving the impression of many small forests spread across the plains.

All along the northern stretches of the vast meadow is a more solid barrier of trees. You can still see the mountain peak in the distance, though it’s impossible to see anything at your elevation beyond the forest.”

A successful **Nature** or **Intelligence** check will determine that environments like this are perfect habitats for giant scorpions (p.327, MM). The trees give them perfect cover to hunt birds and medium-sized mammals, while the plains provide many opportunities to create an underground home away from other beasts.

IV. LAUGHING CAT MEADOWS

“You stand in a wide meadow with few trees or large bushes anywhere. The majority of this plain is covered in tall sawgrass and

rolling hills, allowing for predators to easily stalk their prey. Far within the grass you see the tall stalks occasionally move in unusual patterns, though you can’t tell if there’s something hiding among it or if it’s just a side effect of the strong winds blowing in from the ocean.

To the north you see a few distinct trails carved into the treeline of another forest. The tall mountain rises up to the northeast while more forests at the base of the steep cliffs stretch out to the east. To the south you see large rocky plains, while to the southwest the plains stretch down to a thin landbridge that slopes back up to a tall outcropping. A rope bridge connects the outcropping to some land to the northwest.”

This region is known informally as Laughing Cat Meadows due to the large population of hyenas native to the area. While the feral ones tend to keep their distance from humans, you could easily add an encounter incorporating hyenas (p.331, MM) and the bandit captain (p.344, MM) that commands them ambushing the party from a distance in the tall grass.

V. DERUGO FOREST

“You enter a thickly-forested area with a distinct scent of juniper bushes everywhere you go. The sound of crashing waves below the vale is harder to hear, and has been replaced with the sound of chittering cicadas and flightless birds cantering along the forest floor. Direct sunlight is rare, and shafts of light contrast heavily against the rest of the shrouded environment.

While there are paths that have been cleared through the forest by people from years before, fallen trees, broken branches, and

thick overgrowth obscure the path occasionally.

The forest paths tend to lead to the north, the south, and the west. The tall mountain at the center of Letterlight Vale can sometimes be seen to the northwest between the thick trees and heavy branches.”

This forest offers a perfect opportunity to let the party get a little lost from the beaten path. Monster ambushes, hidden encampments, and social encounters with fanciful creatures can easily be added in addition to the difficulty of navigating the forest while avoiding dangerous plants and poisonous fungi.

If you choose to add a parasite encounter here, consider utilizing the environment to make for interesting obstacles. Fallen trees, tree stumps, and sunken stretches of ground can help make for a more interesting fight.

VI. FINNTACK OVERLOOK

“You set foot on one of the highest points in the vale, second only to the towering mountain peak looming to the northeast. The ground is covered mostly in patches of dirt and smooth stones weathered over time by the ocean mist and wind. At this elevation, any vegetation larger than a handbasket is rare.

From this height you can see nearly the entirety of Letterlight Vale. A rope bridge extends directly north to another forested area, while a long sloping landbridge connects northeast to the meadows sprawling underneath the vale’s lone mountain. The view of the ocean is breathtaking.”

When the party comes to Finntack Overlook, provide them with obvious information about the layout of the vale. This area is at a much higher elevation than everything else except for the central mountain peak, allowing the party the ability to see everything at a distance (except for **X. Meeringlen’s Plateau** due to being obscured by the mountain).

If the party has a spyglass, telescope, or similar equipment, they can roll with advantage and/or a +5 modifier on any **Investigation** or **Survival (Tracking)** checks to find the parasite or other creatures in the vale.

VII. MEERINGLEN’S FOREST

“This forested area is more lush and densely packed than anywhere else on the peninsula as far as you can tell. The well-worn trails that you’ve seen in other places are completely absent here, with only the faintest sign of human contact among the trees and detritus-covered ground. The outer edges of the forest hold the occasional tree stump and other signs of logging, but no such activity seems to have taken place more than even 20 or 30 feet farther in.

The distinct calls of cicadas and small birds fill the air nonstop, alongside the smell of thick undergrowth and detritus on the forest floor.”

You may give the party clues that the best paths lead to the north, south, and east from within this forest. To the west is simply a steep cliff overlooking the ocean.

Within the overgrowth of this forest lies an abandoned shack which can be found with a successful **Survival (Tracking)** check, or a basic **History** check to know about the people who used to live here based on a small sign with two crescent moons found on the outskirts of the forest. Within the abandoned shack is a storage chest containing 2 *potions of minor healing*, a *circlet of blasting*, *eyes of the eagle*, and a *scroll of tree stride*.

VIII. TRAIL OF FLEETING WINDS

“This forested area appears to have been well-traveled years ago, with many trails still apparent between the trees and shrubs. As a result of these carved out pathways among the dense foliage, occasional gusts of wind fly through frequently, nearly knocking you off balance. There don’t seem to be many young trees in this area, likely a result of the winds being too fast for saplings to properly take root.

To the east among the tall trees you see high cliffs and the mountain peak that looks over the vale. The trails lead to the north, south, and west, but various little offshoots from the main path lead to large clearings.”

If you choose to have one of the parasite encounters take place here, consider adding the occasional **Dexterity** or **Constitution** saving throw to resist strong gusts of wind. You could easily have an encounter in one of the clearings, whether it be a combat against beasts or a social encounter against marauding bandits.

IX. THE NORTHWEST SCRUBLAND

“The northwest point of the vale has almost no living vegetation, though the various fallen trees and dried out soil tell you that a small forest may have grown here decades ago. Combined with the heavy winds laced with saltwater, this is a difficult place for any plant life or wild animals to live.

On the far northwest corner you see a large mirror mounted on a rotating base, pivoting by a few degrees whenever the wind blows. Natural pathways lead to the south and to the east.”

While this area used to have more vegetation, it’s now a complete scrubland. The large mirror on the edge of the plateau was used in combination with an enhanced *light* spell to function as a lighthouse of sorts. You may choose to add some minor items to be found in the area, along with *mariner’s armor* in a cloth wrapping.

X. UMBERLEE’S POINT

“The saltwater spray of the ocean clashes against the north side of this lookout. A surprisingly intact sign denotes this area as Umberlee’s Point, along with crude arrows pointing to Letterlight Peak and the town of Hattan south of the vale.

A crude staircase is carved into the side of the cliff, leading down to a small dock on the shore that could likely only take a canoe or small catamaran. This dock shows no signs of recent use.

To the west you see a long stretch of dirt and gravel all the way to the western coast. To the east is a long rope bridge leading to an isolated island, and directly south is a clear trail going into dense forest. To the southeast you see what looks like the only sure path leading to the top of Letterlight Peak up a steep incline.”

This area is largely uninteresting, though would be a great place to hold a parasite encounter if you'd like somewhere with few obstructions.

The party may investigate the dock at the base of the cliff after climbing down the unsafe stone steps. In the sand they may find a lost bag of coins worth 60g total.

XI. MEERINGLEN'S ISLAND

“You stand on an isolated plateau, connected to the rest of the vale only by two long rope bridges to the west and to the south. A large wooden totem near each bridge has ‘Meeringlen’s Island’ carved into it along with a simple owl figure.

In the middle of this modest elevated island you see a simple one-story building surrounded by many tables of varying size and shape. In between two of these tables you see some kind of metal scaffolding with nothing inside of it. There’s a clear walking path between this empty scaffolding and a door to the lone building.”

This house was owned by Shilo Meeringlen, as is easily indicated by his name being written on various items inside. If the party investigates the house, it's obvious that he was an astronomer of some kind. Schematics for

telescopes, calendars indicating phases of the stars and moon, and various other tools can be found among what's left on the shelves and desks inside.

It appears the house has been abandoned for ages, but there are some fine telescope lenses inside a cupboard that can be sold for around 90g if kept in good condition.

This island is a perfect location to hold an encounter with the parasites if you'd like to incorporate urban elements like the tables, house, and various tools lying around.

XII. LETTERLIGHT PEAK

“You follow a steep yet well-defined trail curated into the base of the mountain rising in the middle of Letterlight Vale. This path continues all the way up to the peak with the wind getting much stronger and more intense as you go.

The peak of the mountain has enough flat land facing every direction that you can easily stand and get a view of every other part of the vale from here. Even the town of Hattan far to the south can be seen with relative clarity.”

From here, your party should be able to easily find any remaining parasites in the vale that haven't been defeated yet. A handheld telescope can be found lodged between a few rocks at the peak to help.

If the party spends extra effort in searching the area, they may also find a small wooden box with a crude latch. In handwriting that obviously belonged to a child, “*The Mighty Ronbo & The Courageous Kara!*” is written on the lid. Inside are some children's toys (a

yo-yo, several smooth skipping stones, a small wooden dagger and sheath, etc.) along with three different scrolls of three different cantrips of your choice, with each scroll containing 1d6+4 casts of that cantrip.

If you choose to have the party encounter a parasite on the peak, consider making it extra harrowing by incorporating their proximity to the steep cliffs leading to thick forests or directly into the ocean. Remember that the parasite itself has to reform into a large manifestation for the final battle, so try to avoid letting it completely fall into the ocean and get washed away.

THE FINAL ENCOUNTER WITH MEERINGLEN'S PARASITE

As the party tries to leave the vale, possibly assuming they've defeated the parasite, it rises one last time as they near the southern exit. Read the following at that point:

"As you approach the long landbridge leading back to the mainland, the distinct aura of sick corruption surrounds you. Looking around, you sense that something of this parasite still lives.

Just then, long wispy black tendrils rise from the ground in an area about 40ft wide, all pulsing and moving toward a central point. The wisps begin to take shape as a large writhing horror stamps its malformed feet into the dirt. The creature stands nearly 10ft tall, making grotesque gurgling sounds as it clearly acknowledges your presence.

As the final wisps dissipate, the horrific monster strikes!"

EPILOGUE

Upon defeating Meeringlen's Parasite, read the following out loud:

"Defeated, the massive parasite begins to writhe and convulse in a strange dance, quickly withering away and rotting into a grotesque puddle of black sludge on the ground. The horror that once inhabited these lands is no more.

As you stare down at the puddle, now perfectly still and absent of life, a valiant, shining streak of silver appears among the darkness. You find yourself drawn towards it."

A simple *detect*, *identify*, or similar spell can determine this to be an ichor of aberrations' bane. Any weapon that is briefly soaked in this silvery residue gains +2 to hit and +2d6 damage against aberrations and monstrosities. This can also be bottled up for later use, or sold for 40g.

Upon returning to the town of Hattan with proof of the parasite's defeat, the townsfolk are elated to hear the good news and offer the party food, housing, and entertainment for several days. The town takes up a collection and offers 55g for your services.

If you'd like to continue this adventure, perhaps the news of the party's success has traveled far in the days that the Hattan townsfolk have been celebrating. A small militia from a far-off city sends a message seeking to recruit this team for help with a similar, larger problem.

CREATURE STAT BLOCKS

Below are stat blocks relevant to this scenario, specifically for the beasts the parasites may be found infecting, the three parasites themselves, and the final combined form named Meeringlen's Parasite.

The parasites can be found infecting any of the following creatures:

Black Bear (p.318, MM)

Dire Wolf (p.331, MM)

Giant Boar (p.323, MM)

Giant Elk (p.325, MM)

Phase Parasite

Medium aberration, neutral evil

AC 13 **HP** 32 (5d10+5)

Speed 30

STR +2 **DEX** +2 **CON** +4

INT -1 **WIS** -2 **CHA** +0

Languages –

Ethereal Jaunt. As a bonus action, the parasite can briefly shift to the Ethereal Plane and back to the Material Plane. This ability does not allow it to exceed its maximum speed.

Actions

Multiattack. The parasite makes a Bite attack, teleports, then makes two more Bite attacks.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5ft., one target.

Hit: 1d10+2 piercing damage.

Hulking Parasite

Medium aberration, neutral evil

AC 17 **HP** 40 (7d8+8)

Speed 30

STR +4 **DEX** -1 **CON** +2

INT -1 **WIS** -2 **CHA** +0

Languages –

Inhuman Howl. As a bonus action the parasite lets loose a horrible, visceral howl from its mouth. Each creature that can hear this within 100ft must make a DC 10 WIS saving throw or be frightened until the parasite is defeated. Creatures affected this way can attempt to save again at the end of their turn.

Actions

Multiattack. The parasite makes a Bash attack, followed by a Slam attack on the same target (*though Slam may affect a second target*).

Bash. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5ft., one target.

Hit: 1d10+4 bludgeoning damage.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5ft., one target.

Hit: 2d8+2 bludgeoning damage. On a successful hit, the parasite can attempt to throw the target (*if it's medium or smaller*) at a second target with +8 to hit, 20ft. range, 1d10+2 bludgeoning damage.

Tendriled Parasite

Medium aberration, neutral evil

AC 12 **HP** 32 (5d10+5)

Speed 30

STR +2 **DEX** +4 **CON** +1

INT -1 **WIS** -2 **CHA** +0

Languages –

Grasping Tendrils. The parasite has up to 5 slender tendrils writhing from its body. These can make the tendril attack listed below, independent of the parasites other actions. Each can be debilitated by dealing either 10 damage to it, or dealing any amount of slashing damage to it. Damaging the tendrils does not affect the parasite's overall hit points.

Actions

Multiattack. The parasite makes a bite attack, followed by one attack with each tendril that's still alive.

Bite. Melee Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, reach 5ft., one target.

Hit: 1d6+2 piercing damage.

Tendril. Melee Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, reach 20ft., one target per tendril.

Hit: The target is grappled (Escape DC 12). If it starts its turn still grappled by the parasite's tendrils, the target takes 2d4 bludgeoning damage.

Meeringlen's Parasite

Large aberration, neutral evil

AC 14 **HP** 90 (11d10+30)

Speed 30

STR +4 **DEX** +1 **CON** +2

INT -1 **WIS** -2 **CHA** +0

Languages –

Amalgamation. Meeringlen's Parasite is the combined form of the other three parasites defeated earlier. It has all of the attacks and abilities of those creatures in various ways.

Ethereal Jaunt. As a bonus action, the parasite can briefly shift to the Ethereal Plane and back to the Material Plane. This ability does not allow it to exceed its maximum speed.

Inhuman Howl. As a bonus action the parasite lets loose a horrible, visceral howl from its mouth. Each creature that can hear this within 100ft must make a DC 10 WIS saving throw or be frightened until the parasite is defeated. Creatures affected this way can attempt to save again at the end of their turn.

Grasping Tendrils. The parasite has up to 5 slender tendrils writhing from its body. These can make the tendril attack listed below, independent of the parasites other actions. Each can be debilitated by dealing either 10 damage to it, or dealing any amount of slashing damage to it. Damaging the tendrils does not affect the parasite's overall hit points.

Actions

Multiattack. Meeringlen's Parasite makes

any three of the following attacks on its turn.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5ft., one target.

Hit: 1d10+2 piercing damage.

Bash. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5ft., one target.

Hit: 1d10+4 bludgeoning damage.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5ft., one target.

Hit: 2d8+2 bludgeoning damage. On a successful hit, the parasite can attempt to throw the target (*if it's medium or smaller*) at a second target with +8 to hit, 20ft. range, 1d10+2 bludgeoning damage.

Tendrils. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 20ft., one target per tendril.

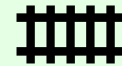
Hit: The target is grappled (Escape DC 12). If it starts its turn still grappled by the parasite's tendrils, the target takes 2d4 bludgeoning damage.

Parasites from the Vale [map]

A brutal parasite has been infecting wildlife in Letterlight Vale. It'll take a strong will and aptitude of nature to permanently rid it from the area.

Drawing This Map

Because there are so many areas in Letterlight Vale, it's encouraged you use most of your drawing space for an overall map of the region not to scale. Leave a small to-scale corner of the map or a separate map reserved for combat. The exact size and shape of each area is completely up to the DM, only adhering to which areas are accessible from other areas. Unconnected areas can be shown blocked off by sheer cliffs, treacherous rivers, ravines, or other impassable terrain. Notably, the areas around Letterlight Peak are steep, slippery rock that can't be climbed.



Across Letterlight Vale are three rope bridges that connect plateaus to the mainland. While not inherently dangerous, they could certainly be cut or otherwise affected by adventurers or nature. Areas under the bridges and around the land masses are entirely ocean.

