

THE CHEESE THUGS

Created by Adam C. Hawkins

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Entering the small berg of Middleton, the players read a public notice posted on a tree saying, "WANTED: The Cheese Thugs, dead or alive. Reward: 80 gold coins. All inquirers see Local Militia Leader, Gop, at the blacksmith shop." When visited, Gop, the town blacksmith, tells players that over the last 2 months a gang made up of 6 bandits has been robbing travelers and locals. The notorious gang is untouchable while in their hideout at Chagon Cheesemaster's abandoned home and shop. The cheese shop lies at the edge of Midwood a mile west of town. The shop was abandoned by Chagon 7 months ago after he made a particularly nauseating batch of cheese and he retired after that. Chagon's shop is made of stone

with slate shingles. The thugs fire arrows through small windows at intruders, but worse, the stench of old forgotten cheese in the shop is unbearable to all who approach. Gop does not know how the thugs can bear the stench.

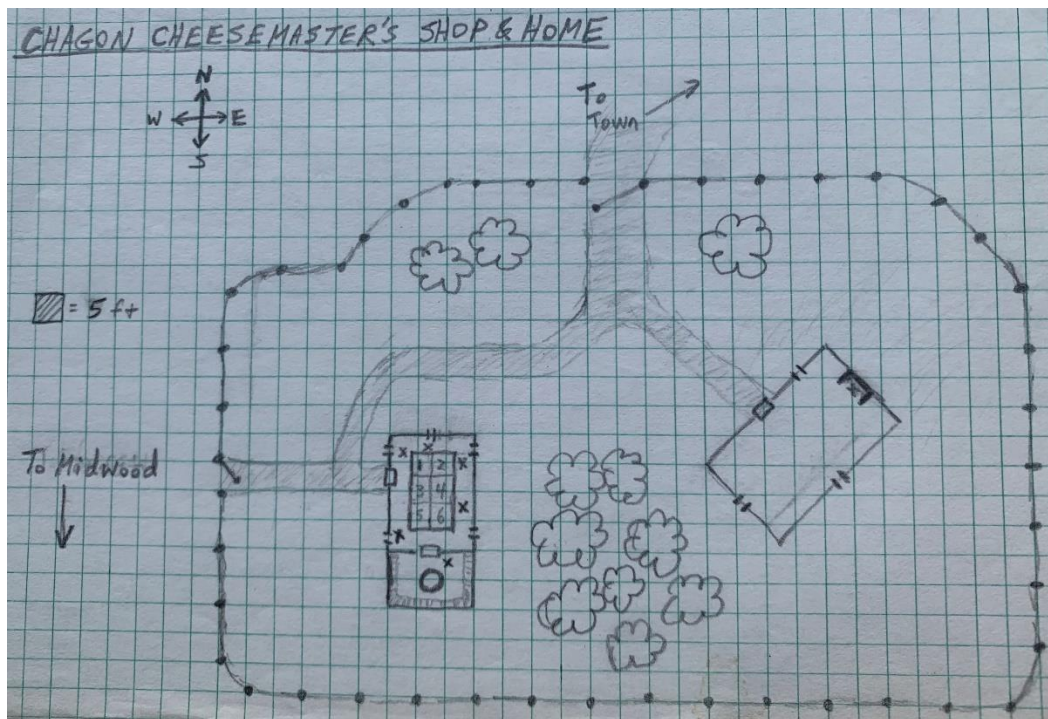
Chagon's abandoned cheese shop and home is only 100 yards south of the west road from town. Both structures are surrounded by a range fence with swinging gates north and west. The north edge of Midwood is 30 feet south of the fenced area. A few leafless trees grow inside the fence, but the wood cabin to the east and the stone cabin to the west are well preserved. Any person within 120 feet of the shop (or further downwind) can smell an overwhelming Limburger cheese scent emanating from the shop. Anyone within 60 feet of the shop or who ventures inside the fenced area may suffer from nausea.

Inside the cheese shop is a vat of bad cheese covered in **Blue Mold**, which causes nausea that impacts attack and resistance rolls (-2 on d20 or 10% penalty) to those within 60 feet of the patch. Only those who protect themselves with cloths or clothespins over their noses may potentially avoid the poisonous effects of nausea. The smell of garlic will completely cover and nullify the effects of nausea, and all thugs wear strings of garlic around their necks.

Worse still, Blue Mold occasionally emits a 10' x 10' x 10' cloud of spores that will rust iron and steel instantly. Only magical items have a chance to prevent rusting. The spores will also rot exposed foodstuffs within 48 hours. Blue Mold can only be destroyed by fire.

East Cabin: The windows are shuttered and the door is stuck, but all can be forced open. The fireplace has a low red glow of burning embers. Any approaching the fireplace will be attacked by a **Giant Beetle** with a glowing abdomen like a firefly hiding under 2 logs. It may escape up the chimney if severely wounded.

West Cheese Shop: The door is locked and the 5 windows are porthole sized, preventing anything bigger than a baby from crawling through. Inside the shop, a rectangular vat of cheese is marbled throughout with



Blue Mold. Five human bandits casually converse and stand guard with bows and arrows in front of their small open windows. At night, the shop is lit by a lantern. Their leader, a half-orc named Grum, is in the back room, but will come to the front room at the first sign of trouble.

The thugs will automatically see any who come through the fence gates during the day. Otherwise, the thugs have normal chances of seeing intruders (roll for surprise). The party has a better chance of approaching undetected (1) at night without carrying any light source; (2) if they approach from the south, or (3) if they sneak up using the cabin, fence, and trees for cover. Roll 2 or 3 times for detection as the players approach the shop.

If the players wait in hiding for the thugs to come out, normally only 1 thug will exit the shop at any time. In 2 days, all will exit at evening to go raiding, being watchful for ambush as they leave. They keep the door unlocked as they go. If attacked, they will flee back to the shop.

When the players enter the shop to fight the thugs, the Blue Mold will release a 10' x 10' x 10' cloud of spores. Roll d6 to determine what part of the vat the spores are released from, and randomly determine when the cloud will be released during the combat. The thugs are armed with axes and wear scale mail armor. Due to rust, their steel weapons have a 25% chance to break with any attack roll, rendering their weapons useless, and their armor will fall completely to pieces on any attack roll that would successfully hit them without armor - all to their surprise. Grum is armed with a heavy wooden club, and thus will not be at risk of breaking his weapon in combat.

The back room of the shop was made for smoking cheese. It has a central fire pit, a narrow chimney above it, and empty wall racks. The racks now hold the Cheese Thugs' water, foodstuffs, oil, torches, firewood, and accumulated treasure (118 gold coins, 4 cheap hematite gem stones [worth 10 gold coins each], and a large man-sized gold ring inset with a coral stone worth 1,100 gold coins).