



Tales of the Old Margrave

*A Pathfinder Adventure Anthology
for 1st–10th Levels*

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Sample file

Tales of the Old Margreve

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The spells in the "New Margreve Spells" section and the monster statistics in the Bestiary section are open content. All other material -- including descriptions, proper names, characters, story elements, designer's notes, geographical and setting material, flavor text, and society information -- is product identity.

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How Mikhail Gave the Moonlit King His First Taste of Good Forest Beer

ARCELAS THE BARD'S NOTE: *The lands in and around the Old Margreve Forest are alive with tales both light and dark. One scarcely begins a conversation with a Margrevian when they will say, "This reminds me of a story that my grandmother once told..." And then you are on a journey through a landscape peopled by mighty warriors, tragic lovers, unspeakable horrors, and a seemingly endless array of fools who offended the forest and met terrible ends.*

When the cooking-fires are burning low or when beer is set before them, the woodcutters of the Old Margreve tell tales of the greatest of their number: Mikhail the Woodcutter, also known as Mikhail of the Margreve or Mikhail of the Forest. A mighty figure who could fell 100 trees with a sweep of his axe, Mikhail went mad when his family was taken from him and carved the Great Northern Road out of the forest in his desperate and doomed attempt to find them. His fate is not clear: some say his quest took him into the Heart of the Forest, where he lives still. Others say his body lies in a secret tomb somewhere along the road, along with his magic axe.

One day when Mikhail the Woodcutter was coming home after a hard day's work in the forest, he heard the sound of merry-making deep in the woods and smelled the fine smell of meat on the spit. As I said, it was the end of the day, and Mikhail had a powerful hunger and thirst on him. His stomach growled like a dragon, and his mouth watered as he thought of the good food that lay beyond the trees. "I will go see who it is," he said to himself, "and maybe they will share their meat and drink in exchange for a good tale or service." And so he went.

Soon he came to a clearing, and what did he find but the Moonlit King and his court resting after a day's hunting in the Old Margreve. The king and his courtiers lay on silken pillows beneath a canopy of midnight blue and drank fine wine from silver goblets, while deer and boar roasted over magical fires on spits turned by the king's slaves.

As Mikhail stood wondering what he ought to do (for he knew tales of poor mortals who crossed

the Moonlit King's path and regretted it), the king's courtiers saw him. "This human has stumbled on us unawares," they said to each other. "Let us call him over, and we will have some sport with him." And so they did. Mikhail went when they called, but he said to himself, "I will keep my wits about me."

When Mikhail stood before the king and his courtiers, the courtiers laughed at his simple clothes and the dirt on his hands and the mud on his boots. They said to him, "Come, man, and rest your weary body on one of our fine pillows."

But Mikhail said, "Ah, generous lords! I cannot rest upon your fine pillows, for as you see, I am covered in filth and would spoil them."

The courtiers laughed and said, "You are wise to refuse, for if you had rested on one of our pillows you would have fallen into a deep sleep and never awoken." (The Moonlit King said nothing because he was a king and Mikhail was only a woodcutter.)

Then the courtiers offered Mikhail a plate saying, "Come, man, and sate your hunger with our fine food."

But Mikhail said, "Ah, most excellent of lords! I cannot accept your kind offer, for you see, as a poor woodcutter, I live on naught but stale bread and ill-cooked mutton, and your food would be much too fine for me."

The courtiers laughed and said, "You are wise to refuse, for if you had tasted our food you would have become our slave, and we would have carried you back to Shadow to serve us for 100 years." (The Moonlit King said nothing, because he was a king and Mikhail was only a woodcutter.)

Then the courtiers offered Mikhail a silver goblet brimming with wine saying, "Come, man, and slake your thirst with our fine wine." And full of mischief they said, "But perhaps you will tell us that you have no stomach for strong drink."

This, Mikhail could not abide. He took the goblet offered him, drank it to the dregs, and gave it back

to the courtiers. In a voice all innocence he said to them, "Ah, greatest of lords! Thank you for that most refreshing drink. Truth, it is as mild as the milk given by my village's best goat."

The courtiers were astonished at this and called for stronger wine. When Mikhail drank it he said, "Ah! This reminds me of water dipped from the clear brook next to my house."

The courtiers were again astonished and called for the strongest wine they had. When Mikhail drank it he said, "Ah! My lords, this draught reminds me of when, as a boy, I would beg my parents for a taste of strong drink, and they gave me fruit-juice saying, "This is strong wine."

At this the Moonlit King could not remain silent. "Sir!" he said. "You have drunk three goblets full of our strongest wine and call it milk, water, and fruit-juice. How can this be?"

Mikhail said to him, "Oh king, I am born of the Old Margreve, where men drink good, strong forest beer. It nourishes us when we are weaned from our mothers' breasts, and it is the last thing to pass our lips before we close our eyes for the final sleep. For taste and potency, I tell you that it surpasses all other drinks in the world."

The king said, "Let us taste this good forest beer, and if it is not as you say, we shall drag you into Shadow where our hunting-dogs will bite and tear your flesh for all eternity, yet you shall not die."

The king bade his servant to fetch some good forest beer. This he did at once, returning in the blink of an eye with seven great kegs. He tapped the first of these, and soon, the king and his courtiers and Mikhail all held great tankards of good forest beer. When the brew passed their lips, the king and his courtiers looked at each other in amazement and said, "We have drunk at the hearths and tables of thousands of worlds, from the abodes of the gods to the devils' own inn; and we have never tasted ought as fine as the beer of the Old Margreve!"

And so the king and his courtiers and Mikhail made merry throughout the night, singing and joking and dicing and dancing, and when the seven kegs were empty, they cried for seven more. So lively were they that no creature of the forest got a wink of sleep that night. Even Baba Yaga at last put her head out of her hut and shouted for peace.

In the hour before daybreak, the king called for an end to their revels. Before the king and his company returned to Shadow, he said to Mikhail, "With my own hand I give you this axe. It is called Woman's Scorn, for there is nothing so sharp in all the world. With it, you can cleave anything that stands before you, whether 'tis wood, flesh or stone, as if you cleft the air." Then he blew his hunting-horn, and he and his courtiers and their horses, slaves, and servants, were gone.

That is how Mikhail the Woodcutter gave the Moonlit King his first taste of good forest beer. And once a year since that day, when the Moonlit King comes a-hunting in the Old Margreve, he always stops at the inn where they serve the best beer, and drinks his fill of that fine brew.

And that inn is my inn, and devils take the man who calls me a liar!

—Gode Rockett





OLD MARGREVE GAZETTEER

Once upon a time, we feared the deep dark forest. Back in those early gaming days, the woods bristled with unknown creatures, fantastic new perils, and unfamiliar magic. Mysterious lights haunted the hollows. The shadows of unnamed creatures fell upon us. And nobody knew the singular weakness of the strange figures that stepped from the oaks. Back then, the forest was a scary, wild place. A dark frontier hiding darker secrets. A dungeon without walls. For us, it was a wonderful time of innocence and discovery and adventure. A time to kiss the ring of ignorance for the novelty it bestowed.

But then, something terrible and inevitable happened. One by one, we learned all of the creatures' names, cataloged the Achilles' heel of every foe, prepared the most effective spells and protections, and armed ourselves with cold iron and silver arrows. We strode into the woods, confident in our tried-and-true strategies and assured by a CR system that promised nothing more than we could handle. A few days later, we emerged with a few scratches and yet another *ring of protection*. The novelty and the risks were fading... and so was the thrill, lost somewhere in an overgrown lot of metagame knowledge, bluster, and expectation.

Tales of the Old Margreve rekindles our excitement in the forest. This gazetteer and adventure anthology revisits and reinvigorates the deep dark woods, breathing a new sense of wonder into the most classic fantasy environment of all. We and the patrons who helped design this book hope it has the same effect on your players.

In *Tales of the Old Margreve*, your heroes trek past crumbled griffon towers, over stiles and shepherds' fields, to where the lonely road vanishes under the dark canopy of the Old Margreve Forest. Deep in its misty hollows, new creatures and strange superstitions inspired by Eastern European folklore come to life in all of their Old World glory. Here, the rusalka's song rises over the crackle of a midnight fire. Here, those who ignore the Old Ways are never seen again.

Under the boughs of the Margreve, your heroes face the wiles and claws of Old World creatures, ply the power of folk magic, and earn a place in fireside tales. The rewards are new... and so are the risks.

Welcome to our campsite at the edge of the Old Margreve. Beyond our fire lies a great wall of trees and, beyond that, a vast unexplored wilderness the size of Ireland. Heft your pack, light your torch, and muster your courage. It is time to head inside.

—Tim & Eileen Connors