

The Siege of Sprucetuck

A midsummer mission for Mouse Guard

by John Aegard

Introduction

Fever has swept the Territories and the medicine shipment from Sprucetuck is long overdue. The last uninfected patrol in the Mouse Guard must travel over a drought-parched landscape to Sprucetuck and return to Lockhaven with a caravan of medicine. If they fail, the whole Territories will suffer.

This mission is intended to be run in a 2-3 hour slot for 3-4 players. To get this kind of run speed and to leave a lot of time for player turns, I frame hard into the obstacles and I dwell only briefly on things in between.

The Mission Briefing

The mission orders, written and sealed by Gwendolyn, are delivered on the road outside the city by a Lockhaven acquaintance of the patrol. This mouse is wearing a beaked plague mask filled with fragrant herbs, as a precaution against the fever. If the patrol has no acquaintance in Lockhaven, then the messenger is Guard Captain Reyes, an ambitious deputy of Gwendolyn.

After pleasantries, this mouse explains that the patrol is not to travel into Lockhaven, as they are the last guard mice known to be healthy and they must minimize their risk of infection. Then the messenger passes over the the orders, which are written in the hand of one of Gwendolyn's secretaries:

"I am sure you are aware of the serious fever that has swept the Territories this summer. Mice who should be out farming and foraging and preparing for the coming winter are instead incapacitated by fever--or, worse, dead. Intercity travel has all but ceased as towns lock their gates in quarantine.

As the hub of the Territories, Lockhaven has been hit particularly hard. Your patrol is the last known to be healthy. Much of the Guard is sick. Our quartermasters keep a supply of fever

medicine in Lockhaven, but most of this has been distributed to the Territories in a vain attempt to control the spread of the epidemic, and our stock is now exhausted.

More medicine is urgently needed! This medicine is made only in the apothecaries of Sprucetuck. Ordinarily, Lockhaven would have received its annual shipment in the late spring, but that shipment is now weeks overdue.

Your patrol must travel to Sprucetuck and bring back as much medicine as they can get. Time is of the essence! Every day that the Territories are paralyzed by this epidemic will make the upcoming winter that much harder.”

After the mice finish reading the briefing, the acquaintance remarks that Gwendolyn is critically riddled with fever herself. She gives so much of herself to the Guard, with her endless work and sleepless nights, that she might not have enough left to fight off the disease!

Also note that the weather has been brutally hot for the past several weeks. The grasses are dry, the lakes have shrunk, the needles of the evergreens are brown and brittle. Travel to Sprucetuck will be grueling.

Notes for the Game Master

Delay

Some of the twists in this mission charge the patrol with a Delay. Track the number of Delays the patrol accumulates -- that count will add to the final Obstacle the mice will have to pass in order to return to Lockhaven in time to save Gwendolyn.

Weather

Play up the brutality of the heat and the drought. You want to be certain the players are thinking of the danger of fire if they decide to burn the wasp nest in Sprucetuck.

Obstacles

Obs are calibrated to give the three-mouse patrol of Kenzie, Saxon, and Lieam a solid challenge. You may wish to adjust them if you have a different number of mice, or less capable mice.

Note that the patrol may travel either the Lockhaven - Ivydale road or the Lockhave - Elmoos road on its way to Sprucetuck, and that the roads have different obstacles.

Relationships

If you are playing with pregenerated characters, I suggest altering some of their relationships to

move them into one of the mission cities -- Ivydale, Elmoss, or Sprucetuck. Put those NPCs in the crosshairs of the fever. Tempt the patrol to use the medicine for its own selfish needs!

If the players are using their own patrol mice, you may wish to relocate the adventure to force the players to travel to some of the cities in which they have connections.

GM TURN FOR THE LOCKHAVEN-IVYDALE ROAD

Obstacle 1 : Wildfire

The first evening out from Lockhaven, storm clouds will gather to the south and thunder will rumble in the distance. The next day they will encounter the first obstacle. Describe a faint smell of smoke as the mice wake for the day, then gradually reducing visibility as they travel south, then finally the crowns of trees on fire before them.

Ob 4 (Health) to follow the trail and push through the fire zone

Failure Condition: The lead mouse is Injured, and helpers are Hungry. They lost a bunch of their supplies in the fire, especially the water they had to douse themselves with!

Ob 4 (Pathfinder) to circumvent the fire

Failure Twist: The pathfinding is brutal work through hard, smoky country. The patrol gets back on track but it costs them an extra day. This counts as a Delay.

Obstacle 2: Ivydale quarantine / roadblock

Just a few minutes north of Ivydale, a narrow pass through a heap of boulders serves as a naturally defensible choke point. A rabble of plague-masked mice have barricaded this pass. These mice have been deputized by the Ivydale authorities to enforce a quarantine and travel ban. Their armored leader, the veteran soldier Digby, zealously refuses passage. The patrol must make a test or be forced off the road.

Persuade or Deceive vs. Digby's Will of 5 / Orate vs. Digby's Orate of 3

Failure Twist: Just as the speaker's arguments start to get traction, they get a bit of dust in their nose and sneezes. The quarantine patrol lowers its weapons and goes to Fighting!

Fighting vs. the rabble's Fighting of 5

Failure Condition: The patrol drives off the roadblock, but the lead fighter is Injured and any assistants are Angry. The lead fighter maims one of the roadblock personally. Tales of the Patrol's brutality are circulated in Ivydale.

Ob 4 (Pathfinder) to circumvent the roadblock

Failure Twist: The patrol gets back on track, but it costs about a day to safely circumvent Ivydale. This counts as a Delay.

PLAYER TURN AT IVYDALE

Ivydale is a rough place to spend a player turn. The fever in Ivydale is widespread and authorities have imposed an extreme quarantine. This will complicate player turn Obstacles. Failed checks may result in official attention or a Sick condition. Be explicit that it's risky for the patrol mice to be present in the fever zone.

There is also considerable sentiment against the Guard in Ivydale, as their unnatural traveling ways have spread the fever all through the Territories. All of the guard mice in Ivydale are out on missions, in hiding, or down with the fever.

Ivydale mice will confirm that the Sprucetuck medicine caravan has not passed through.

GM TURN FOR THE IVYDALE-ELMOSS ROAD

Obstacle 1: Vulture Dinner

An elk carcass lies across the road, and half a dozen vultures are dining on its entrails. Vultures are jealous beasts and will not take kindly to any mice stealing bits of their dinner, and may enjoy a side of fresh mice to complement their tasty deer carcass!

Vultures have Nature 6 (guard my catch, smell my catch, gorge on my catch)

Fighting vs. the Vulture's Nature of 6

Failure Condition: The vultures are driven off, but the lead mouse is Injured and helpers are Tired.

Nature (Sneaking) vs. the Vulture's Nature of 6

Failure Twist: The patrol is ruled by its Mouse Nature and some of the mice are trapped inside the elk carcass.

Ob 4 Health To Chew Free

Failure Condition: The lead mouse is Sick and other mice may be Tired.

GM TURN FOR THE LOCKHAVEN-ELMOSS ROAD

Obstacle 1 : Wildfire

Use the Wildfire obstacle specified for the Lockhaven - Ivydale road.

Obstacle 2 : Vulture Dinner

Use the Vulture Dinner obstacle specified for the Ivydale-Elmoss road.

PLAYER TURN AT ELMOSS

The fever is present in Elmoss. Be explicit that it's risky for the patrol mice to be present in the fever zone. Failed tests during the player turn will impose the condition 'sick'.

There is just one patrol mouse in Elmoss, a tenderpaw named Louis who has a mild case of the fever. The other patrol mice stationed here -- Sumer (yellow cloak), Brance (orange) and Dak (patchwork) made an medicine run to Sprucetuck ten days ago and have not yet returned.

The missing Sprucetuck caravan did not pass through here in the spring. However, the ruling family of Elmoss has sequestered itself in their apartments high up in the elm, and rumors abound that they have a secret cache of medicine. Others say that black marketeers are making a lucrative business selling precious doses!

Obstacle 1: Elmoss Caravan

The patrol is not far out of Elmoss when they overtake a ragged party of about a dozen Elmoss mice who are traveling to Sprucetuck to fetch medicine for their sick families back home. These mice are hopelessly out of their league on the road. Their only experienced traveler is a blind beetle drover. They are clearly terrified and see the Mouse Guard as deliverance!

Ob 3 (Scout) to hide from the refugees and short-circuit the obstacle.

Failure Twist: The refugees go off the Sprucetuck road and are headed towards a well-known open country of rocky shale. Open country means great danger for these humble mice -- crows, owls, and other predators love to hunt there! If the patrol chooses to intervene at this point, use either of the other two approaches.

Ob 4 (Health) or Ob 3 (Orator) to take the the refugees to Sprucetuck without losing time.

Failure Twist: A young mouse or two wander off. Family members are very upset and beg for the Guard's aid. The party may opt to delay to find them or may just press on. This succeeds

automatically but counts as a Delay.

Ob 5 (Orator) to shoo the refugees back to Elmooss.

Failure Condition: The Elmooss mice do turn back, but only after a contentious argument and insults are hurled. The roller is Angry at the selfish Elmooss mice who are interfering with the business of the Guard.

Obstacle 2: Hive At Sprucetuck

A low hum fills the air. The patrol comes across the husk of a caravan that was bringing Elmooss moss into Sprucetuck. All of the caravaneers have been dead for at least two weeks. Cause of death is unknown. The bodies are too far gone to tell. They will also find the bodies of the Elmooss patrol mice, wearing still-bright cloaks of orange, yellow, and patchwork. These mice appear to have been stabbed repeatedly with daggers. They died with their weapons drawn, and their equipment is still in its packs.

When the characters enter the spruce grove, they discover the truth: Sprucetuck has been blockaded by a huge wasp nest, the size of a porcupine, that has been nestled low in one of the spruce trees. The wasps will attack anything that approaches. This nest must be dealt with or else nothing will escape Sprucetuck!

Conflict vs. Nature: Wasp (swarm, sting, seek sweetness) of 7

The wasps' objective will be to kill the patrol. Wasps are evil bastards.

Possible compromises include death of the patrol mice, the Injured condition, destruction of Sprucetuck by fire (if fire is employed against the wasps, remember the forest is very dry), death of any Elmooss mice, etc.

Player Turn at Sprucetuck

There is plentiful medicine and treatment available at Sprucetuck, but as they are being sieged, food is very precious. Hungry mice will not be able to count on their relationships for food, they will have to roll vs. Ob 2.

Sprucetuck has ample medicine stockpiled and they are happy to share it. Beetle drovers are standing by to caravan it to the Territories.

The wasp siege, ironically, has left Sprucetuck free of the fever. Principled and thoughtful mice will act to minimize their exposure to the Sprucetuck mice. A Sprucetuck epidemic lurks as a twist to any failed rolls made by Sick mice during the Player Turn -- and such an infection will mean that the Sprucetuck mice will be less willing to share their bounty!

GM TURN FOR THE RETURN JOURNEY

Obstacle 1: Race Back To Lockhaven

Ob 2 + the number of Delays suffered by the party (Health) to get back to Lockhaven in time to save Gwendolyn.

Failure Twist: Gwendolyn succumbs to the fever!

A Less Brutal Failure Twist: The beetles in the caravan can't hack the brutal pace set by the patrol mice. Half of the beetles are lost, which means that half the medicine must be abandoned on the road. The party returns before Gwendolyn passes, but will she accept the medicine if it's in short supply?

Player Turn at Lockhaven

Questions abound: If the patrol returns in time to save Gwendolyn, will they have to persuade her to take the cure? If the patrol returns after Gwendolyn has died, will they give the medicine over to ambitious Guard Captain Reyes, who has named himself Emergency Quartermaster? What other work has been left undone in the wake of the fever, and what are the consequences?

Designer's Notes

Written for PAX Prime 2012. Intended to be run in a 2-3 hour Game on Demand slot for 3-4 players. To get this kind of run speed, I frame hard directly into the obstacles and don't dwell on anything happening in between.

Thanks!

Seth Johnson, Wilhelm Fitzpatrick, Dylan Mayo, and Kristian Haapa-Aho playtested. Jonathan Walton, Ben Robbins, Nathan Roberts, Tim Franzke, and Timothy Adamson gave thoughtful feedback on the alpha version of this mission.

Many brave PAX mice hurled themselves at the wasps' nest, and not all of them returned.

See my other games at john.aegard.com.