STUFE 1 – WAGEMUT (6–9) · FRÜHLING

The Great Spring Awakening

The long winter is finally over – yet the valley won’t wake up. The spring brook is still half-frozen, the flowers sleep, and high in the Great Oak the magical **Spring Bell** has fallen silent.

Grandma Hazelwort gathers the youngest squirrels: “Only those who find the three **Spring Sparks** – Sun, Water and Song – can make the bell ring again. Then the whole valley wakes, and we hold the first festival!”

How it works (Level 1): Read the scene aloud, then choose one of two paths together. When it gets exciting, a Daring Roll follows (2 d6 + stat). Nobody comes to harm.

1 · Setting off in the last snow

> Thin snow still lies outside the store-hollow, but the air already smells of spring – of wet earth, of buds, of waking up. Drips fall softly from the branches, and somewhere far below the first brook gurgles shyly.
>
> But something is wrong. Usually a thousand birds wake the valley with their song at this hour – today, though, it’s quiet, far too quiet. The flowers keep their heads bowed, as if they don’t quite dare come out yet.
>
> Grandma Hazelwort presses a warm little moss cap into each of your paws. “Spring has overslept,” she says gravely. “The Spring Bell high in the Great Oak has fallen silent, and without its ringing the valley won’t wake. You must find the three Spring Sparks – Sun, Water and Song – then the bell will ring again.”
>
> She points her tail outside, where two narrow paths begin in the snow. “Two ways lead out into the garden,” she says, winking at you encouragingly. “Choose wisely, stick together – and don’t be afraid. Nobody comes to harm.”
>
> You pull the moss caps snug over your ears, sniff the cool spring air, and feel the tingle right down to your tail-tips. Your very first adventure of your own begins right now.

Choose one path together:

- **Climb to the sunny south slope** (Flitz) → continue at **2 · The south slope and the grumpy toad**

- **Follow the old blackbird who knows the way** (Köpfchen) → continue at **2 · The south slope and the grumpy toad**

2 · The south slope and the grumpy toad

On the south slope, where the snow has already melted, the sun shines so warmly on the stones that the air shimmers. And there, above the biggest, flattest stone, it dances: the **Sun Spark** – a golden, warm point of light that tingles straight into your hearts.

But on the stone squats a fat, grumpy toad, broad as a heap of pebbles, blinking at you sourly. “Mine!” she croaks, puffing herself up. “The prettiest, warmest spot in the whole valley, and you want to take it from me? Not a chance.”

She smacks her lips contentedly and snaps at a fly buzzing past. You soon realise: this toad isn’t wicked at all – just terribly comfy and a tiny bit vain. A compliment about her beautifully glossy warty skin makes her eyes shine at once. And a fat fly as a gift … you could bribe her with that easily.

“It’s warm here,” she mutters, yawning so wide you can see right down her pink throat. “Far too warm for quarrelling.”

The Sun Spark hovers temptingly above her head, so close. If you can just get the toad to shuffle aside for a moment, the first spark is yours. You put your heads together and think how to win the cosy guardian over.

Challenge (Köpfchen): Talk the toad round or outwit her (she loves compliments and fat flies).
Enemy: Grumpy Toad (Puff 2)
Reward: the Sun Spark ☀

Choose one path together:

- **On to the rushing spring brook** (Flitz) → continue at **3 · The swollen brook**

3 · The swollen brook

The path leads you steeply downhill, and already you hear it roaring: the spring brook, fed by the meltwater, has swollen overnight and shoots wild and foaming through its bed. To a little squirrel it’s a raging river, cold and grey and far too wide to jump.

> Spray splashes into your faces, and the water gurgles and bubbles as if in a hurry to carry the winter away. On the bank a pussy willow ducks in the wind, silvery and soft as a paw.
>
> You search for a crossing. There – by the bank a big, firm leaf bobs in the reeds, almost like a little boat, and a broken twig would make a fine paddle. Only you must keep an eye on the current, or the brook will sweep you off.
>
> A little further on, slippery stepping stones jut from the water, one after another, wet and mossy. Whoever is nimble and sure-footed can hop from stone to stone – but one wrong step and you’re sitting in the icy wet.
>
> A dragonfly, the first of the year, whirrs over the waves and seems to show you the way. You take a deep breath. The far bank is near, and the second spark waits beyond it. How will you cross with dry fur?

Choose one path together:

- **Paddle across on the leaf raft** (Flitz) → continue at **4 · The frozen spring**
- **Leap across the slippery stepping stones** (Pfote) → continue at **4 · The frozen spring**

4 · The frozen spring

On the far bank, where the brook rises, you find the spring – a still, round pool still spanned by a thin, clear sheet of ice. And deep beneath it, as if under glass, it glitters: the **Water Spark**, a blue-shimmering light that breaks a thousandfold in the ice.

It’s bitterly cold here. Icicles hang from the branches like sparkling daggers, and your breath stands in little clouds before your snouts. Winter still holds this corner of the valley in a tight grip.

The ice is too thick to simply scratch through – but perhaps you don’t need to. A single warm sunbeam falls slanting on the pool. If you use the Sun Spark you won on the south slope cleverly, the ice might begin to melt in the sun. Or you find another clever trick – sometimes warm breath, patience and the right hole in the right spot are enough.

As you ponder, suddenly it drips: tip … tap … tip. A crack runs crackling through the ice. The thaw is on your side, if you just help it along a little.

A particularly lovely, clear icicle breaks off the branch and lands at your paws – you tuck it away as a keepsake. But now: how do you free the blue light from its cold prison?

Challenge (Köpfchen): Melt the ice with the Sun Spark or a clever trick.
Reward: the Water Spark and a sparkling icicle as a keepsake

Choose one path together:

- **On to the singing clearing** (Köpfchen) → continue at **5 · The clearing and the lost chick**

5 · The clearing and the lost chick

Beyond the spring a sunny clearing opens up, and suddenly the air is full of music: on every twig a bird practises its spring song – a warbling, piping and chirping that warms your very heart. The third spark, you sense, is very near.

But in the middle of the tall grass sits a tiny, fluffy chick, all alone, peeping so heart-breakingly that the other birds fall silent. It has fallen from the nest and can’t find its way back. “Peep! Peeep!” it cries, trembling all over.

High up in a birch the mother blackbird waits, fluttering back and forth in despair – too big to squeeze between the thin stalks where her little one is stuck.

You step closer carefully. One wrong word, one hasty movement, and the chick would flee deeper into the grass in fright. So you talk to it very gently, the way Grandma Hazelwort talks to you when you can't sleep at night. Little by little the trembling stops, and the chick hops trustingly onto your paw.

Carefully you carry it back, stalk by stalk, until the mother blackbird can finally take it under her warm wings. For joy the whole clearing strikes up a song – and gives you the **Song Spark**, bright and golden as a melody.

Challenge (Köpfchen): Calm the chick and carry it safely back to its nest.
Reward: the grateful birds give you the **Song Spark**

Choose one path together:

- **On to the dense thorn hedge** (Flitz) → continue at **6 · The thorn hedge**

6 · The thorn hedge

Now you have all three sparks together – Sun, Water and Song – and they warm you from within like three little coals. Only the Great Oak is left; up there the silent bell awaits.

But the way is blocked: a dense, wild thorn hedge grows right across the path, tall and impenetrable, with spines as long as your tail. Behind it, just barely to be guessed at, the Great Oak rises into the sky.

Between the tangled tendrils there is a single narrow gap, hardly wider than a squirrel. Whoever wriggles through nimbly and supply is out the other side – but beware, sharp thorns lurk everywhere.

Beside it, half buried in the leaves, an old hedgehog snores softly. He blinks sleepily as you come closer. "Off through the hedge, are you?" he grunts and yawns. "I know every path in here – every turn, every bolt-hole. Just ask nicely and I'll guide you through safely. No pricks at all."

A friendly, clever fellow, this hedgehog – but a touch self-important, and he loves to be asked for advice. Two options lie before you: the quick, brave way through the gap – or the safe way at the hedgehog's nose. How will you conquer the thorn hedge?

Choose one path together:

- **Slip nimbly through the narrow gap** (Flitz) → continue at **7 · The wise owl in the willow**
- **Politely ask the hedgehog for the safe path** (Köpfchen) → continue at **7 · The wise owl in the willow**

7 · The wise owl in the willow

> On the far side of the hedge stands an ancient willow, its branches hanging to the ground like a green curtain. As you slip through, a round pair of yellow eyes opens above you: the wise owl sits in the fork of a branch and studies you curiously.
>
> “Well, well,” she rasps, wobbling her head. “Three little squirrels with three little sparks. Off to the bell, are you? The way is steep and time is short – spring is waiting.” She leans forward until her beak almost tickles your whiskers.
>
> “But before I tell you the quickest way, solve me a riddle,” she chuckles merrily. “Listen closely: What sings without a mouth, wakes flower, tree and beast, hangs round up in the treetop – and waits for you right now?”
>
> She clacks her beak contentedly and half-closes her eyes, as if she’d posed the hardest riddle in the world. You put your heads together and puzzle. Something that sings but has no mouth … that wakes the whole valley … that hangs high up in the oak and waits for you …
>
> Then you can’t help grinning: you’ve been carrying the answer in your hearts ever since Grandma Hazelwort sent you off. Tell the owl, and impressed, she’ll show you the secret, quick way up – and perhaps even come with you a little way.

Challenge (Köpfchen): Solve the riddle (you’ve been carrying the answer all along …).
Reward: the owl reveals the quickest way to the oak

Choose one path together:

- **On across the butterfly meadow** (Flitz) → continue at **8 · The butterfly meadow**

8 · The butterfly meadow

> No sooner is the willow behind you than a meadow opens before you that takes your breath away. Overnight spring has burst out here: a thousand blossoms in

red, yellow and blue, and above them hundreds of butterflies rise like colourful snow falling upward.

A brimstone butterfly perches cheekily on the smallest one’s nose and fans its wings until you all have to giggle. Bees hum their cosy song, and the warm air smells sweetly of nectar and honey. For a moment you forget the bell, the hurry, the whole long way – and simply marvel.

Here there is no danger, no riddle, no test. Only a gift of spring to remind you what you’re doing all this for.

In the middle of the grass, on a blade, hangs a single dewdrop, catching the sunlight so that it sparkles like a tiny, round pearl. Carefully you loosen it and tuck it into your cheek pouch – a treasure like that is sure to bring luck, and at the hedgehog trader it’s surely worth an acorn.

A ladybird crawls over your paw, silently counts its spots and flies away. You stretch, breathe the scent in deeply, and suddenly know for certain: the valley is worth waking. Freshly heartened, you move on.

Reward: a shining dewdrop pearl (worth 1 acorn)

Choose one path together:

- **On to the busy ant road** (Köpfchen) → continue at **9 · The ant road**

9 · The ant road

The path narrows, and suddenly you stand before a road – but what a road! An endless line of busy ants crosses your path, packed close together, each with a crumb, a stalk or a grain on its back. They march so purposefully that the whole road seems to teem and wander.

“Left – two – three – four! No dawdling back there!” commands a stern ant in a voice like a tiny sergeant. Not one stops, not one looks up – they have important things to do, after all.

The ants are no enemies, you see that at once. But there are many of them, very many, and anyone who simply tramples through and muddles their painstakingly gathered cargo is sure to earn a few hearty pinches on the toes – and makes no friends.

There are two ways through. You can watch for a gap in the ant stream and dart across in a flash, just after a carrier column has gone by. Or you seek out the fat

ant queen who oversees everything from the edge, and ask her ever so politely for free passage – perhaps the ants will even stop briefly and form a lane.

A particularly large ant pauses curiously, feels you with its antennae and scurries on. Above you a cloud is already gathering. You should hurry. How do you get past the ant folk?

Choose one path together:

- **Dart across in a gap** (Flitz) → continue at **10 · The spring shower**
- **Politely ask the ant queen for passage** (Köpfchen) → continue at **10 · The spring shower**

10 · The spring shower

No sooner are you past the ants than it darkens above you: a thick, grey cloud slides in front of the sun, a gust rushes through the grass – and without warning the sky opens its floodgates. A warm spring rain comes pattering down, fat and heavy, drumming on the leaves so that everything roars.

In seconds you're soaked through, your fur sticks to your bodies, and water runs into your eyes. The ground turns slippery, and out of every hollow a little brook suddenly gurgles. "Phew!" splutters the smallest of you, shaking itself. "It's coming down in buckets!"

But the rain isn't meant unkindly – on the contrary, it wakes the earth and makes everything sprout even faster. Still: soaked and shivering like this, it's hard to make progress, and the climb to the oak is still far.

Luckily a huge coltsfoot leaf grows right beside you, big as a green umbrella. You could shelter beneath it, wait out the pattering above you, gather Puff and shake yourselves dry until the cloud has passed on.

Or you don't mind a bit of wet, lay back your ears and dash on bravely through the rain – whoever is quick enough is out the other side of the shower in a trice. The thunder grumbles far off and friendly. How do you deal with the spring shower?

Choose one path together:

- **Wait under the leaf roof and gather Puff (rest)** (Köpfchen) → continue at **11 · The root gate of the Great Oak**
- **Dash bravely on through the rain** (Flitz) → continue at **11 · The root gate of the Great Oak**

11 · The root gate of the Great Oak

At last, at last you stand at the mighty roots of the Great Oak. They rise around you like the legs of a giant, thick and gnarled and grown over with soft moss. Above you the vast trunk loses itself in the green sky.

High up, so small from down here that you have to blink, you glimpse a golden shimmer: the Spring Bell. So close now – and yet still so far.

But the secret entrance the owl told you of is sealed with an ancient, tight-lashed root-knot, thick as your belly and hard as wood can be. No one gets through like that.

You feel the knot from all sides. There – in one spot it’s thinner, almost crumbly from all the spring and frost. With strong teeth, the Nutcracker knack, you could gnaw your way through. Or you all brace against it with four paws and push and heave until the old knot finally gives.

An earthworm curiously stretches its head out of the soil, studies you and disappears again. And when the knot at last springs open with a hearty crack, you discover behind it, in the hollow of the root, a forgotten store: a small handful of hazelnuts, glossy and good. With full cheek pouches you heave the root gate open – the way up lies clear.

Challenge (Pfote): Open the root-knot with the Nutcracker knack or a strong paw.
Reward: inside the hollow lies a forgotten hazelnut store (2 acorns)

Choose one path together:

- **Climb up inside the Great Oak** (Pfote) → continue at **12 · The climb through the oak**

12 · The climb through the oak

And now up you go, into the inside of the Great Oak. The way winds through crumbling passages, over smooth bark steps and past fragrant drops of resin, higher and higher. Muffled birdsong drifts in from outside, and with every step it grows brighter.

Soon you peer through a knot-hole – and your breath catches: deep, deep below you the whole valley lies like a toy landscape. The meadow is just a green

handkerchief, the brook a silver ribbon. You feel a little dizzy, but you simply look back up quickly.

Halfway up it gets tricky: an old branch is brittle and cracks alarmingly as the first of you steps on it. For a heartbeat everything wobbles – but already the next one hands you a paw and pulls you across. “I’ve got you!” Together the steep way is only half as high.

A bat hangs sleeping upside down in a niche and twitches its ears briefly as you tiptoe past. You have to giggle and quickly clap your paws over your snouts – whatever you do, don’t wake the whole oak!

Higher and higher. And then, very close above you, you hear it for the first time: a soft, silvery hum, as if the bell were already holding its breath. Just one last, steep stretch. You gather all your courage in your little paws.

Choose one path together:

- **On to the highest branch with the Spring Bell** (Pfote) → continue at **13 · The Frost Sprite at the bell**

13 · The Frost Sprite at the bell

You climb over the last ledge – and there it hangs: the **Spring Bell**, a beautiful blossom of shimmering silver, as big as you are, quite still and coated in white frost. No note comes from it, no sound. It sleeps.

Around it, though, an icy breath hangs in the air, and to its stem clings a transparent, shivering creature: the **Frost Sprite**. He is no wicked monster – just the very last remnant of winter, small and trembly and a little sad because nobody wants him any more. With his cold fingers he holds the bell tightly, and wherever he touches it everything freezes to ice.

“Stay … stay away,” he whispers in a jingling voice. “When the bell rings, I have to go. And I … I don’t even know where.”

Then you understand: you can’t fight the Frost Sprite. You have to warm him, gently and kindly, until he lets go of his own accord and melts away content. And for that you have exactly the right thing with you: three warm sparks – Sun, Water and Song.

Hold the bright Sun Spark out to him bravely, and his cold thaws in the warm light. Or sing him a spring song ever so softly with the Song Spark, so comforting that his heart grows warm. How will you bid the last winter farewell – so that spring may finally ring out?

Challenge (Köpfchen): Warm the Frost Sprite with sun, water and song – don’t fight it.
Enemy: Frost Sprite (Puff 3)

Choose one path together:

- **Flash the Sun Spark boldly** (Flitz) → continue at **14 · The bell rings out**
- **Softly sing the spring song** (Köpfchen) → continue at **14 · The bell rings out**

14 · The bell rings out

Gently, as you’ve learned, you warm the Frost Sprite with your sparks. At first he still resists a little, clinging and trembling – but then he sighs deeply, and something like a smile flits across his transparent face. “Thank you,” he breathes. “It’s time. Until next winter.” And with a soft jingle he dissolves, turns into warm mist and drifts away content.

> The frost melts from the bell in glittering droplets. You take hold with your paws – and nudge it carefully.
>
> For a heartbeat nothing happens. Then: Ding! A bright, golden note frees itself from the silver blossom, so pure and beautiful that tears rise to your eyes. The note rolls out over the treetop, over the whole valley, on and on, brighter and brighter – ding, ding, ding!
>
> And the valley answers. Everywhere, as far as you can see, the buds burst open all at once. Leaves unfurl, blossoms open their eyes, and a thousand birds join jubilantly in a song. The brook glitters, the meadow glows, and a scent of spring drifts round your noses, so strong that you have to laugh.
>
> You've done it. Spring has woken – and you stand right in the middle of it, high up in the Great Oak, looking down on a valley that blooms like a miracle.

Choose one path together:

- **Down to Wipfelweiler, where the festival begins** → continue at **15 · The first Spring Festival**

15 · The first Spring Festival

When you climb back down into Wipfelweiler, the village is unrecognisable. Where grey snow lay this morning, now everything blooms and glows in every colour. Garlands of blossoms hang between the branches, everywhere there is singing and dancing, and a wonderful scent of dandelion honey hangs in the air.

No sooner have the others spotted you than a cheer breaks out that sets the leaves trembling. “They’re back! They’ve woken the spring!” Grandma Hazelwort pushes through the crowd, takes each of you in her paws in turn and hugs you until you can hardly breathe. “I knew it,” she whispers, her eyes shining. “I sent the bravest.”

Then the first Spring Festival begins. There are roasted beechnuts and sweet dandelion honey, there are jumping contests from branch to branch and stories – your story, again and again, and each time it grows a little more thrilling. Proudly you show off your dewdrop pearl and the sparkling icicle, and everyone marvels.

Late in the evening, as the first stars rise over the Great Oak and the freshly woken leaves rustle in the warm wind, each of you presses a shiny acorn into the soft earth. “That’ll blossom by next time,” says Grandma Hazelwort with a wink.

And as you snuggle into your moss beds, full, happy and just a little bit heroic, high above the Spring Bell still rings ever so softly – ding – as if to wish you good night.

Reward: 3 acorns each, the great Spring Festival – and whoever likes may plant their first acorn