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HELLFROST

THE DARK SEED





THE DARK SEED

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INTRODUCTION

This adventure is designed for a group of four Novice characters with two or three advancements. A selection of pre-generated Novice characters can be found at our website, www.tripleacegames.com.

For parties with more members or advancements, the GM should increase the number of opponents accordingly. For higher Rank parties, the GM should increase the number of the most common Extras in an encounter. For this adventure we advise you add one additional creature to each encounter for each Rank the party is above Novice. For instance, if a party of four Seasoned adventurers encounters sap zombies numbering one per hero, the characters must fight a total of five zombies—one for each hero, plus an additional one because the party is Seasoned.

This adventure should be run in spring or summer. See the *Savage Worlds* rulebook for the effects of cold weather and the *Hellfrost Players' Guide* for how the rules work in this setting.

Only vague geographic information is provided. So long as the adventure takes place in and around woodland, the GM has free choice over where he sets it. That said, he should avoid using the Frozen Forest as the backdrop—no human settlements exist nearby. GM's running it in the High Winterlands might wish to consider switching the villain from a hearth elf to a taiga elf. No other changes need be made.

Allies: Two of the encounters include allies. These will be controlled by the players at the appropriate time. The GM should create Ally Sheets for the villagers and lumberjacks in advance to speed up play.

GM BACKGROUND

Our story begins many thousands of years ago, in an age before the civilized races were created. When the

world was first created, the only life forms on its surface were plants. This was a magical age, and many of the plants were sentient and animate. Some legends say skogsra, wood wights, and tree men were born of this age, but the veracity of these claims is impossible to verify. Then, for reasons known only to her, Eostre created herbivores.

Of the many species of sentient plants, there was one known as the Black Ones. Bitter, twisted, and malignant, they saw plants as the dominant species and felt betrayed at Eostre's creation of herbivores. Not knowing the mind of the goddess, they spent untold centuries rousing the plant world to rise up against the animals. Once sufficient oaths of allegiance had been gathered, they unleashed their might. A great and terrible war ravaged the land, as plants turned on beasts. Eostre watched passively.

Neither side really achieved victory. Plants slaughtered beasts, and beasts ate the plants in equal measure. Finally, both sides agreed a parley, much to the disgust of the militant Black Ones, who boycotted the conference. After much debate, it was agreed some of the herbivores would stop eating plants and would instead feed only on flesh. In this way, the number of herbivores was kept in check. For their part, the plants vowed to stop killing animals, save for those which were found in colossal numbers, like insects. Still Eostre did nothing but watch.

The Black Ones launched a short-lived campaign against the animals and other plants but were quickly defeated. While the herbivores could chew plants, the claws of the newly formed carnivores easily sliced through the thickest bark. With peace restored, emissaries from the plant and animal kingdoms approached Eostre, who had foreseen the war and the eventual good it would bring. They begged permission to exterminate the Black Ones to the last of their kind, for with their continued presence there could never be balance in the world.

Seeing that the plants and animals could live together in peace, Eostre granted permission for the last Black Ones to be hunted down. So it was the first species vanished from existence.

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Our story now leaps forward through time to the present day. Melasion Leafwalker was, until recently, an ordinary druid, caring for the plants and animals of his woodland home, arguing with loggers about excessive foresting, and studying the natural order of the world. He had no fanatical beliefs, considering the actions of the Guardians of the Wild, a sect of druids and elves who detest the destructive force of urban civilization, to be counter-productive and provocative.

As he meditated one day at a stone circle, Melasion's mind was dominated by a powerful, irresistible force. Compelled to dig into the earth, the druid, his fingers torn and bleeding, unearthed a strange, black seed pod unlike anything known through his extensive knowledge of the plant kingdom. Such a pod has not been seen since before the Black Ones were made extinct, for it was one of their spore pods.

Without warning the seed pod cracked open. A snaking tendril darted out and pierced the druid's flesh. As he watched helplessly, thick, black sap began to pump into his veins. As the last ounce of sap left the pod, it withered and died. Melasion's internal organs began to wither almost instantly as the sap began to convert his body into plant matter. New energy coursed through his body.

With the energy came a new, dark purpose. No more would Melasion sit on the fulcrum between nature and expanding civilization—he would foster in a new world, a world in which all animal life would be extinguished.

THE VILLAGE OF FORESTGATE

No matter where you set this adventure, the heroes begin on the road. On the distant horizon is a dark, brooding forest. As the sun begins to head toward the western horizon, the party spies the welcoming sight of houses—a small village lies not a mile ahead. Like most settlements, it is protected by a ditch and bank. If you set this tale in the Winterlands, then the village also has a wooden fence for added security.

Walking past the first few houses, you notice a small group of people to one side. All but one is bent double, digging away at the soil. Nearby stands a wagon. Long bundles wrapped in white cloth are piled in the back. The upright figure turns, catches sight of you, and nods grimly. "Dig faster," you hear him say to his colleagues. "It'll be dark soon and we don't want wolves snooping around."

If approached, the man answers any questions the party may have. Example questions and answers are detailed below. He introduces himself as Lars Loksunu.

Q: What are you doing?

A: *"Burying corpses, eight of them to be precise." He gestures to the wagon.*

Q: What happened to them?

A: *"No idea, stranger. When we awoke this morning this cart and its contents were outside the ditch by the north gate. No sign of any horses, though. We summoned the priest from a nearby village right away. He blessed them and gave them departing prayers. Now we're burying them before the wolves catch the scent."*

Q: How were they killed?

A: *"Not quickly by the looks of them. Take a look if you're interested. But be quick—once these graves are dug we'll be rid of them. Their souls have gone, and what's left is worm food."*

Q: Any idea who they were?

A: *"Some folk reckon they were loggers. There are several lumber camps up by the forest. We don't have much to do with them, though. Wagons of provisions roll past us, and wagons of cut trees come back."*

Q: Can you tell us the way?

A: *"Not tonight. The road passes through some deep bogs and there'll be fog tonight. If you're thinking of heading to the camps I'd advise against it until sunrise. It's not wise to wander around these parts after dark."*

Q: Is there an inn here?

A: *"Over there, the Axeman's Hall. It isn't much, but it has beds and serves decent enough ale. There'll be a good crowd in tonight; everyone is talking about the corpses."*

Q: Who's in charge?

A: *"No one, really. We're tenants of Baron Peredur. His manor is a day's ride to the east. We sent a rider to inform him, but it'll be late tomorrow before we hear back. Likely he'll send some militia to ask questions and then drop the matter—the camps aren't on his lands."*

Checking just the head or arms reveals the corpses appear to have been beaten—their cold flesh is black and blue. Examination of the torso reveals yet more bruises, but also strange puncture wounds. The wounds are raised and tinged green. A Healing roll reveals they were made by a cylindrical object, not a spear or dagger thrust. There is no sign of any injuries typical of weapons, not of the teeth or claws of a wild beast. Pressing the puncture wounds causes a trickle of green, sticky fluid to well out of the hole. It is unidentifiable.

Heroes who investigate the north gate can make Tracking rolls. With success, they detect large paw prints amid the cart ruts and traffic of human feet. The tracks are noticeably deeper leading toward the village, and lighter as they head back toward the forest. The inbound tracks end at the point where the locals say the cart was found. On a raise, the tracker realizes whatever made the tracks walked on two feet as it approached the village and four when it left. A Survival or second Tracking roll reveals the prints were made by a bear, though it is impossible to tell what type.

Checking the back of the cart reveals scratch marks, as if some clawed beasts had its hands, or paws, on the wooden planks. The claw marks alone are not enough to identify whatever made them as a bear, but if the heroes have already discovered the paw prints they are additional confirmation.

HELLFROST ADVENTURE: #02

MOVING ON

Some groups may be a little keen to move on to the logging camp once they learn of the corpses. Here the GM has two main choices.

First, he can simply skip the first encounter with the plant monsters and let the heroes visit the camp. Unfortunately, on their return they find Forestgate overrun. The tendrill thing infected several villagers, which then added to the number of sap zombies. By dawn, every villager had been killed or infected. Over 60 sap zombies now patrol the streets. Should even one escape into the wilds, it could prove fatal—sooner or later a sap infection will create another tendrill beast, or perhaps another Melasion. Second, he can create a reason why they can't leave. Fog will rise, as the villager said, but instead of a light mist it could be truly dense fog. The heroes walk around in circles for a few hours and then arrive back in the village. Alternate suggestions might be strange noises in the mist—the party is likely only Novice characters, so any threat, especially one in Dark lighting, could spell disaster.

THE AXEMAN'S HALL

The Axeman's Hall is a single-story structure. It comprises a main drinking hall, a kitchen annex, two guest wings (all double rooms), and a separate stable block and brewing shed.

As Lars suspected, the inn is heaving—half the village must be crammed inside. The babble of voices is discussing only one thing—the mysterious appearance of the lumberjack's corpses. Working their way to the bar, the characters can order rooms (none are currently occupied) and drinks. Stew, bread, and cheese are available, but it takes half an hour to prepare. The innkeeper tells the heroes to find a table and wait for their order to be brought over.

None of the villagers knows any new information, but talking with them is a second chance to gather information the party missed earlier. Mentioning the bear prints brings a few rueful nods—the woods are crawling with them—but telling the locals a bear walked upright and pushed the wagon causes howls of laughter.

Once the characters have finished dealing with the locals, their food arrives. **Before** any of them can take a mouthful of soup, read the following text aloud. If no one eats, then read the text before the characters think about leaving the bar.

As you raise your spoon to your lips, a loud groan cuts through the noisy inn. Looking around, you see one of the villagers stagger back from his table, dropping his spoonful of stew onto the floor and clutching at his stomach. His back arches, bending him almost in double. A spray of dark

red blood jets across the crowded bar, as two thick, slimy tentacles burst out from his ribcage. Smaller tendrils erupt from his flesh, dancing and writhing wildly about his tattered corpse.

The other villagers panic, rushing headlong toward the door, only to find it won't open. The innkeeper quickly flings open one of the doors to the east accommodation wing. Within seconds the bar is clear, leaving only you, a handful of villagers too stupid or drunk to leave, and the vile, writhing tendrill thing.

Ask the players to place their characters on the tabletop first. They may begin by any of the tables marked "P." The tendrill thing stands at the point marked "X" on the map, but this is only revealed after the characters are set up. Now deal the action cards.

At the start of the second round, the main door to the inn crashes open. Spilling in are the corpses of the lumberjacks. Their skin pulsates as if something is writhing inside them, and thick, green veins are clearly visible on their exposed flesh. Seeing the zombie horde, and knowing they were the lumberjacks, requires a Guts roll. The villagers make a group Guts roll.

There are a maximum of eight sap zombies, regardless of the party's strength or size. For higher Rank parties, subtract two allied villagers per Rank above Novice. For instance, a Veteran party has four fewer allies than a Novice one.

Terrain: The space containing the fireplace counts as difficult ground. Any creature actually stepping into the flames takes 2d6 damage and has a chance of catching fire. Pulling a burning brand from the fire is an action. As a weapon, it causes Str+d4 damage (unlike a flaming torch, the log itself is the weapon, not just the fire). Those struck have a chance of catching fire only if flammable.

Spaces occupied by the tables and chairs are difficult ground. Heroes can go under or over these obstacles, and the chairs don't fill the entire space. Characters who want props for tricks have access to cups, plates, bottles, cutlery, and whatever else the GM feels is appropriate for a small, country inn.

Monsters: None of the villagers are particularly skilled combatants. Most of the patrons run when the trouble starts, but a few have enough courage, or at least alcohol, in their veins to stand and fight.

Ⓜ **Tendrill Thing:** See page 16.

Ⓜ **Animated Plants:** See page 15.

Ⓜ **Sap Zombies (2 per hero):** See page 15.

Ⓜ **Villagers (2 per hero):** See page 17.

Tactics: The villagers are under the control of the heroes and thus have no preset tactics. The tendrill things remains stationary the entire fight, lashing out blindly with its tentacles. Once the sap zombies enter the fray, they move toward the nearest animal life form and engage in melee.

The animated plants (see page 15) remain out of play

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until someone moves adjacent to any window or a door leading to the outside. They begin on Hold. Only the plants outside the window or door approached reveal themselves—the rest wait until prey is near.

Aftermath: There is nothing wrong with the soup. The tendril thing's host was one of the gravediggers. He nicked his hand while handling one of the corpses and a small amount of sap entered the wound. Rather than transform him into a sap zombie, it had a strange reaction and created the thing which later consumed him. The animated plants quickly wither and die, leaving only crumbling, dried stalks.

A QUIET NIGHT

The villagers are naturally scared witless by what just occurred. Armed with torches and shovels, they spend much of the night hacking down plants, shrubs, and small trees. The vegetation is gathered into a huge bonfire and doused with oil. The remains of the sap zombies and tendril thing are gingerly dragged out and added to the pile. Torches are then thrown onto the heap. Brilliant flames rise high into the night sky. A plume of thick, black smoke drifts lazily on the wind in the direction of the forest.

There are no more clues in the village. To progress, the characters need to visit the nearest logging camp.

THE LOGGING CAMP

Come morning, the villagers are only too keen to direct the party the way to the nearest logging camp. Everyone is of the opinion last night's trouble stemmed from the loggers' corpses, so it makes sense *someone* should investigate (just not the locals). The camp is 15 miles away. Assuming the party leaves shortly after dawn, it is early afternoon when they arrive on the outskirts of the forest.

The miles quickly disappear behind you. Each step takes you nearer the forest, a dark, brooding tangle of ancient trees and thick undergrowth. The air grows more oppressive as you draw nearer, and you get the uneasy feeling the forest is watching you.

Over another low rise and the logging camp comes into view. Protected by a sturdy-looking, wooden wall, you can just make out the tops of log cabins. The main gates are closed. No smoke drifts from the chimney holes, and there are no sounds of life.

Calling out elicits no response. The corpses buried in Forestgate were formerly lumberjacks. Melasion attacked the fort the night before, summoning an army of plant beings to rid the camp of all animal life. All of the forest-

ers were slain in a short, brutal battle. While some rose immediately to join the druid's growing army, others infected by the strange sap were ordered to lay dormant. Melasion then instructed his sidekick, an intelligent bear by the name of Grimbjorn, to load the corpses onto a cart and take them to the nearest village. Here, the druid planned, they would arise at night and infect the villagers, thus swelling his ranks even further. If the characters are here, it is very likely that plan was thwarted.

The main gates are barred from the inside (Toughness 20 (3)). The characters can climb the eight-foot-high wall (no Climbing roll is required if the heroes concoct a sensible plan, like a human pyramid or using a grappling hook) or investigate for another entrance. Once inside, or if they investigate around the rear first, the party discovers something entered the camp before them.

The rear protective wall has a wide breach. The thick posts haven't shattered or been torn asunder, though. The posts, each taller than a man, are bent and buckled, as if some immense giant had twisted lengths of flimsy straw.

Closer inspection reveals no damage to the wood. Although the posts should have snapped, the fibers remain intact—the wood has warped to an extent beyond which stress fractures should have snapped them.

The camp comprises six small log cabins and a single long hut. None of the structures are locked. The small cabins show clear evidence of a disturbance—beds are turned over in some, tables and chairs scattered in others, and bloodstains mar the wooden surfaces. The long hall is the communal kitchen, dining, and storage area. It too has been trashed. There are no signs of any bodies.

Any character checking the ground in and around the camp may make a Tracking roll. A success indicates clear signs of a struggle in the mud—footprints, churned up areas, and blood splatters are everywhere. The hero deduces the attackers entered via the rend in the back wall and made their way through the camp unopposed. The defenders, it seems, were caught unawares, for most of their tracks are no further than a few yards from the various buildings. Aside from one set of animal prints (those of a bear), the other tracks are like nothing the tracker has seen before—they resemble drag marks and oversized, misshapen footprints, rather than clear boot impressions. The strange tracks originate in the forest and lead back in that direction. Finally, there are fresh wheel ruts in the mud and a single set of paw prints. A Survival or second Tracking roll identifies the prints as belonging to a bear.

A raise on the Tracking roll indicates the bear walked upright, picked up several heavy objects lying in the mud (these were the loggers' corpses), and carried them back to a wagon. At some point, the bear pushed the wagon out the rear of the compound and onto the main track. The only clear wagon tracks are fresh—it seems the wagon was already in the camp and had not been moved for several days.

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A Notice roll made while inspecting any of the buildings reveals faint traces of sticky, green sap. On a raise, the character deduces the splatters are not drips, but resemble blood spray from a wound. A total of 137 gold shields can be scavenged from the lumberjacks' various personal effects.

Studying the tracks and checking the various buildings takes the best part of three hours. By then, the sun is beginning to sink in the west, and a mist is starting to rise.

MEETING THE NEIGHBORS

Before the party can think of departing, a band of lumberjacks from a neighboring camp arrives. Having heard of tales of numerous disappearances, and having received no word from this site for several days, they have come to investigate.

Rumors abound among the lumberjack community that an elf druid is behind the attacks, though no one has seen him clearly. The lumberjacks are immediately wary of the characters. If there is an elf in the party or anyone who could be mistaken for a druid (the loggers have a very stereotypical view of druids), the loggers advance menacingly, but can be talked out of violence. This requires a Persuasion roll at -2. Only one roll is allowed, but it may be Cooperative. If there is an elf who looks

anything like a druid then the loggers immediately attack and cannot be reasoned with.

Should violence occur, a deep voice calls the lumberjacks to cease after three rounds. The loggers break from combat as a burly man enters the scene. Otherwise, a wide-set man with a full beard approaches the heroes and addresses them.

"Forgive the rude welcome," the man says. "There have been several...incidents recently and the men are on edge. I am Aelfric Haraldsunu, the supervisor of the neighboring camp to the east. Now, what are your names and where are the lumberjacks who live here?"

The lumberjacks are shocked to their core if told about the attack at Forestgate. They immediately clutch their axes tight and look nervously at the nearby forest. Once the party has finished speaking, Aelfric talks to them again.

"That is not a tale I wish to hear ever again," he says, shaking his shoulders as if to rid himself of the memory. "Whatever your quest, it is no time of day to be entering the forest. If we make good speed we can be back at our camp by nightfall. Despite what you see here, our camp is better than

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spending a night in the open. We are forewarned now, and we will be ready for trouble. More needs to be said about the events of recent weeks, but not here, not now. Will you accept our hospitality?"

A brisk walk sees the characters at the second camp an hour before dusk. The layout is identical to the previous site. Aelfric immediately orders his men to light bonfires close to the palisade nearest the forest and to erect torches throughout the camp. Other men are then put to work as sentries. The supervisor then invites the characters into the main hall.

Seated around a roaring hearth, the heroes are given slices of roasted rabbit and boar, chunks of fresh bread, and flagons of ale. When they are nourished, Aelfric answers their questions. Likely questions and answers are detailed below.

Q: What can you tell of recent events?

A: *"Camps all along the forest edge have reported disappearances. Men would enter the woods, alone or in small groups, and never be seen again. There are several cabins deeper in the woods, which we use when we must, but all were deserted. Many of these men are skilled in the ways of foresters. They looked for tracks, but found nothing. Our colleagues simply vanished into thin air."*

Q: When did you last talk to anyone from the other camp?

A: *"A week, maybe ten days ago. They reported one man missing, so we went to help form a search party. Since then we have been busy with work. Our paymasters demand their quotas be met."*

Q: Who do you work for?

A: *"This camp is run by a consortium of merchants at the capital. Some of the others are the property of noblemen whose lands border the forest. A small few are independent—the lumberjacks work for themselves. They make more money, but the buyers are less regular—most of the owners have contracts with merchants. The independent camps are also smaller, so they harvest less wood."*

Q: Have none of the owners done anything to help?

A: *"One did. A patrol, maybe ten soldiers strong, visited our camp. They questioned us, bought fresh provisions, and set off into the forest. That was three days ago, and we have seen nothing of them since. Perhaps they exited by another route. Perhaps they didn't. Our masters have yet to answer the message we sent last week. Once the timber shipments dry up, they'll respond for sure."*

Q: Where are the other camps?

A: *"They surround the forest at various points. Ours and the one you visited are fairly close together, but our next closest neighbor is thirty miles away. Even for a healthy man, it is a four to five day round trip if he avoids the forest. Through the woods, one could make it there in a day. But we have heard nothing from any of our neighbors. Perhaps we waited too long to act. Had we visited our neighbors yesterday they might still be alive. Or maybe we would have died alongside them."*

Q: Who do you think is responsible?

A: *"No one knows for sure. There are rumors an elf druid has been seen spying on the camps from the edge of the forest, but talk is plentiful, especially in troubled times. We have seen nothing, except for a lone bear which wandered close to the camp on several occasions."*

Q: Can you describe the bear?

A: *"Big, brown, and bearlike. The strange thing was the way it looked at us, as if it was studying us. We drove it off each time. It must be three days since we saw it last. One of the men swears the creature walked upright."*

Q: Have you noticed anything different about the forest?

A: *"Strange you should ask. Until three weeks back, everything seemed fine, but then the woods took on a different air. It's hard to explain, but we felt, well, unwelcome, if that makes any sense. Everyone felt like they were being watched by unseen eyes. Glades were suddenly stifling and oppressive. Even the flowers seemed off, as if they resented our being there. I've worked in the forests all my life, and even ones infested with orcs and giants have never had an air like this one."*

Q: Are there any Elfhomes nearby?

A: *"Not here, no. Some claim there are deeper in the forest, but if there are elves around, they keep to themselves. It's just us and the animals around here."*

When the heroes are done questioning him, Aelfric shows them to an empty cabin. A small fire has warmed the room to a comfortable level, and a pot of simmering broth hangs over the glowing coals.

Any characters who want to take a stint on guard duty are welcome to join the lumberjacks. With Aelfric vouching for the party, the loggers are surly but friendly. Most have a passing interest in the party's recent exploits, and hearing tales of brave deeds gives them courage against the unseen threats lurking in the forest.

THE WOOD TURNS WILD

An hour after the sun sets, a mighty storm breaks over the area. Dark, boiling clouds gather with supernatural speed, rain falls like a waterfall, gale force winds threaten to tear trees up by their roots, and brilliant flashes of lightning illuminate the night as bright as day. The raging storm wakes any sleeping heroes.

Half an hour later, any heroes on sentry duty in the compound witness the following. Otherwise, the characters are alerted to the danger by shouts from the lumberjacks. Heroes not already outside join the battle at the start of the second round.

The palisade suddenly begins to shudder, as if shaken by some giant, invisible hand. Without warning the posts begin to gracefully twist, gently contorting and parting to create a wide breach. Lightning tears across the dark sky, momentarily highlighting a shambling horde of humanoids and plants advancing on the compound.

HELLFROST ADVENTURE: #02

HERBALISM

A forest in spring or summer is an ideal time for herbalists. Unfortunately, this isn't the best forest to start picking plants. Due to Melasion's foul influence, many of the plants, roots, berries, and herbs have become toxic to animal life.

For each batch of plants picked, the GM must secretly draw a card from the action deck. A red card indicates the herbs are fresh and unsoiled. A black numbered card means they are tainted but the taint is detectable. A Knowledge (Alchemy) check reveals the toxin, but note the roll can only be made if the character *specifically* checks his haul. Only one roll per hero is permissible per batch. The taint cannot be detected if the card is a black Jack through Ace, however.

Instead of producing the desired effect, tainted herbs produce a low-grade poison. Any herbal remedy made using the plants, whether fresh or concocted later with dried ingredients, forces the victim to make a Vigor roll. The modifier applied to the herbal remedy for its expected type acts as a similar modifier to the Vigor roll. Thus, a poisoned regenerative herb gives a -4 penalty. A failed Vigor roll causes a level of Fatigue for 24 hours. It is cured as a poison.

Ask the players to position their heroes before revealing where the breach occurs. The plant army begins 4" from the breach, outside the compound. The edge of the forest is 20" away.

Terrain: The storm is fierce—howling winds and lashing rain blast across the compound. The ground becomes extremely slippery. Any character who runs and rolls a "1" on his running die, slips and falls prone. These conditions inflict a -1 penalty to most actions due to slipping, difficulty hearing, and so on. The Game Master must decide if any actions are unaffected.

At the start of round one, all the torches in the compound are extinguished. At the start of round two, the bonfires (marked "F" on the map) are greatly diminished. For the remainder of the storm, each bonfire illuminates all adjacent squares as Dim lighting (-1) and all squares 1" away as Dark lighting (-2). Light from the windows illuminates the square directly in line with the window with Dim lighting (-1) and the next square in line as Dark lighting (-2). The lighting conditions are for attacks *into* an illuminated area. Beyond this, the lighting is Pitch Black (-4). Lanterns are unaffected, being shuttered against wind and rain.

Each round a Joker is drawn, a flash of lightning rips the sky asunder. For the entire round, visibility is as per normal daylight. If both Jokers turn up in the same round, the lightning lights up the scene for the next round, as well.

Monsters: Melasion's attack force is led by his bear companion, Grimbjorn. A small number of spore grenadiers act as artillery support for the main troops, a host of sap zombies. Melasion is watching the battle from deep in the forest, and plays no part in this encounter.

Ⓜ **Grimbjorn:** See page 15. Melasion has cast *armor* on his bear, increasing its Toughness to 12 (2).

Ⓜ **Spore Grenadier (1 per hero):** See page 16.

Ⓜ **Sap Zombies (3 per hero):** See page 15.

Ⓜ **Aelfric:** Aelfric is a Wild Card logger (see page 17) but has Strength d10. He carries a great axe (Str+d10, AP 1, 2-hands). His Parry is 4, due to his weapon.

Ⓜ **Loggers (2 per hero):** See page 17. Half have hand axes and half wield battle axes.

Tactics: Aelfric and the loggers are under the control of the players. The sap zombies lead the assault. They break ranks in a bid to infect as many humans as possible.

The spore grenadiers wait further back, firing their spore pods at the most opportune time. For instance, a choking or sticky pod is launched the round before the sap zombies engage with enemies, thus preventing the victims from withdrawing. An explosive pod is best used against a group of characters or to harm spellcasters. The rash pods are ideal for heavily armored heroes, likely the skilled fighters, as it reduces their effectiveness.

Grimbjorn the bear remains out of sight until the minions engage the defenders. His orders are to crush the stiffest resistance (likely the player characters) without overly endangering his life. As soon as he takes two wounds, he tries to flee into the night.

THE WOODLAND FEY

Once the furor has died down and the camp made secure again, the heroes can return to bed. At some time during the night, one character chosen at "random" (any hero with Curious is the ideal choice) hears scratching at their shuttered cabin window. The sound is rhythmic—two sets of three taps, then a long pause before it is repeated. Sooner or later someone will take a peak outside. When they do, read the following text aloud.

THE WOOD WIGHT

Sitting on the window ledge is a small creature, maybe a yard tall. Humanoid in form, its body appears to be made of twigs. The hand tapping at the window is long and spindly, with branchlike fingers. Large, round, jet black eyes peer curiously at you, betraying no emotion. The creature cocks its head to one side and smiles, revealing a row of pointed wooden teeth.

Any elf, druid, or cleric of Eostre Plantmother can make a Common Knowledge roll to recognize the crea-

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ture. Earth elementalists, skalds, and clerics of Eostre Animalmother may also make the roll, but with a –2 penalty. Other heroes must make a Knowledge (Fey) roll to identify the beast. Success means the hero knows the little creature is a wood wight (literally “wood man”), a form of woodland-dwelling fey. Like many fey they are neither benevolent nor malicious by nature, but instead mimic the reactions of those they meet.

The wood wight has been sent by a leshij, a powerful form of woodland spirit. Using its fey powers, it learned of the characters’ fight against the plant monsters in For-estgate and of the recent struggle at the logging camp. Although a leshij is part plant, it has no love for Melasion or his insane plan to rid the world of animals. As the old Anari saying goes, better the demon you know—humans may destroy forests, but they are a known quantity. The leshij wishes to speak with the heroes in secret.

Any threatening gestures or shouting causes the wight to scamper away into the darkness, only to return and resume its tapping a few minutes later—it’s far more afraid of failing the leshij than it is of being killed by the characters. Sounding the alarm causes the wight to cast *boost Stealth* and vanish into the night. Only when the camp has settled down again does it return.

In the event it cannot make peaceful contact with the heroes at night, the wight watches from the woods. It tries to open dialogue if they enter the forest. Note that without its help, the heroes can’t get very far—the best they can do, is blunder aimlessly around the vast forest.

When the characters show an interest in talking to the wood wight, it passes on its message. It first tries Fey, then Elven (both languages), and finally Saxa. It doesn’t know any other languages.

The small creature bows low. In a bushed, child-like voice it says, “Come, follow. Into the forest we must go. The forest lord wishes to speak with you. Come, come, into the dark wood. I will guide you.”

The wood wight doesn’t really understand non-fey and is puzzled if the heroes show reluctance to accompany it into the dark, foreboding forest in the middle of the night. If necessary, it adds only the following “comforting” words—“Forest lord wants to speak with you. Must not disobey forest lord or wood wight will be punished. Come, come, quite safe.”

Once it appears the party is getting dressed, it scurries out of the compound and waits by the tree line. When the characters have caught up, it slips quietly into the gloom.

FOLLOWING THE FEY

The creature has no name, at least not one non-fey would understand. It has no desire for small talk, nor will it reveal anything about where it is leading the party. It grins its toothy grin, stares at the party, mentions the forest lord, and gestures deeper into the forest. For a

small creature, it moves with remarkable speed, leaping over fallen trees and darting through thick undergrowth without breaking step.

After two hours march, it suddenly stops and begins sniffing the air. Quick as lightning it overturns a rotting log and pulls out a large, black beetle. Licking its lips, it pops the struggling insect into its mouth and crunches down. A thin trickle of yellow goo runs from the corner of its mouth, and it crunches on its snack. Realizing its charges may also be hungry, it roots around in the undergrowth for a few moments. With a beaming smile it offers the party a selection of beetles, spiders, and worms. It merely shrugs if its offer is rejected and devours the lot in a single mouthful.

An hour later, the wood wight gestures for the party to halt. It takes a dozen steps forward, coughs, bows so low its head brushes the floor, and announces the “ones you seek are present.” It then steps back, head still bowed. The wood wight turns to the party and gestures toward a small hollow. Inside are several empty waterskins and numerous animal bones.

Any elf, druid, or cleric of Eostre Plantmother can make a Common Knowledge roll to know what the pile represents. Earth elementalists, skalds, and clerics of Eostre Animalmother may also make the roll, but with a –2 penalty. Other heroes must make a Knowledge (Fey) roll. Success means the hero knows the pile represents offerings left to the woodland spirit. If everyone fails, the wood wight prompts the party to leave a token gift.

Not leaving a gift has no immediate effect on the adventure. However, later on, the wood wight is less inclined to aid those who thought themselves above sup-plicating the leshij.

THE FOREST LORD SPEAKS

Seated cross-legged atop a large boulder, is a strange blend of plant and animal. The creature is humanoid with bark-like skin, and hair and beard of living grass. A pair of straight horns adorns its crown, while its feet end in cloven hooves. A tail like that of a horse swishes casually against the cold stone. Its craggy face is ageless, but its eyes betray centuries of wisdom.

“Greeting, mammals,” it says in a deep, hollow voice. “Sit, you are quite safe in my sanctuary.” It gestures to a number of stones, worn flat by untold ages of use. “I am a leshij, a fey warden of the forest. I know of you and your recent struggles, and this is why I summoned you here.

“By the old laws I am forbidden from interfering in what is happening, but you are not. While I cannot give you direct aid, I can answer questions.”

Typical questions the heroes are likely to ask and the fey’s response are detailed below.

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IT'S NOT A FIGHTER

The GM should note the wood wight is *not* a combatant. It gladly uses its spells to aid the party if they have treated it kindly, but it avoids entering combat under any circumstance. Similarly, it refuses to act as point man when the party suspects an encounter. If continually pressed to join the fray or go ahead as an ambush detector, the wood wight takes offense and scurries away into the undergrowth.

Without the wood wight's aid, the journey time increases dramatically. The frequency of encounters drops to one per two days—remember to apply thirst and hunger penalties if the party runs out of food.

As noted elsewhere, any heroes who did not leave the leshij an offering are viewed poorly. The wood wight will *not* cast spells that directly benefit such heroes unless first convinced of their good nature. This requires a successful Persuasion roll. One roll per character is required, but the wood wight only listens to one such argument per day.

As such, the wood wight should either be entrusted to a player who won't abuse it or kept as a GM-controlled character.

Q: Do you have a name?

A: *"Names are power, and you are not yet ready to wield power. When you are ready, we will meet again and names will be exchanged."*

Q: What's happening in the forest?

A: *"An ancient evil from the dawn of time has awoken. Before animals rose from the ground, the world was inhabited only by plants. Eostre, in her infinite wisdom, saw fit to create animals which fed on plants and animals which ate animals. So the system of nature you know came to be."*

"But in those early days, distant days even to my kind, there were plants which refused to accept the new order. A terrible war ravaged the land, a war between plant and beast, a war which threatened total extinction of entire species. The worst of the plants were black, malevolent things who hated all things flesh. No name exists for them except Black Ones. We thought their kind long extinguished, but one slumbered unseen. Now it has awoken, and the first war begins anew."

Q: What were those things we fought?

A: *"Abominations, animals becoming plants. The sap of the Black Ones was a blight upon all animals. Each animal death brings new plant life. For every life your side loses, the enemy gains a life. There is no cure for its ills—only destruction of the host."*

Q: Who awakened these Black Ones?

A: *"My wood wights tell me of an elf druid, Melasion by name, who has become host to the last Black One. How he came to this state they will not speak. What he once was, he is no longer. We would talk often, and I*

came to know his heart. Once he was a force for balance. Now he is a plague, a powerful force for evil."

"For now, my kind is safe, but soon his growing powers will affect even us. Every forest in Rassilon will become an enemy of animals. The grass beneath your feet, the flowers whose fragrance you smell, the crops you eat—all will become lethal to your kind."

Q: How do we stop this thing?

A: *"It is mortal. It can die. But be warned—its corpse must be consumed by fire, else a seed may live and begin the cycle again."*

Q: And killing it ends the war?

A: *"If only it were that easy. Killing the Black One ends the Black One. It no more ends the life of those it has created than the slaying of your parents would end your existence. Its minions may be vile creatures, but their powers are like a child to a frost giant compared to those of the master."*

Q: Why haven't you destroyed it?

A: *"There is more complexity to this universe than you will ever imagine. An ancient pact prohibits me from direct action. I can no more war against it than the gods can walk the surface of the world."*

Q: Where do we find this druid?

A: *"The wood wight will guide you through the forest as far as he dares. But be warned—the forest is your enemy. The moment you entered this wood, it knew you were here. You have no advantage here. It is waiting for you, and your journey will be difficult."*

Q: And if we don't help? (or "What's our reward?")

A: *"The choice is simple—either you fight or all animal life will be wiped from the surface of the world. Life shall be your reward."*

Once the questioning is over, the leshij gestures to several dense patches of moss. "Rest now," he says. "The forest is no place to wander at night. You will be quite safe here."

INTO THE DARK WOOD

At first light, the wood wight (the fey responds to any polite name the heroes choose to give him) quickly gathers a few grubs and beetles to sustain him on the journey. The creature knows where it is going, but is unable to express this in terms the characters understand. It has no comprehension of human measurements nor of marking the passage of time. Rather, it identifies the correct trail by tiny, often ephemeral markers, such as a fallen log, the scent of certain flowers, the direction the bees fly, the sound of the wind, and such like.

For much of the journey, the wood wight takes the lead, following its invisible trail through the forest. Due to the lack of trails, the trip takes many days. Several times the wood wight stops, looks left and right, shrugs, and then speaks to the party. Things have changed in the forest and the fey isn't sure which way to go. So, it offers the party the choice. Asked what lies along either path, the wight replies, "Danger all around. Either path is just as bad."

At each junction, the party must make the decision whether to go left or right. The direction they choose may lead just to further walking or to an encounter. These are detailed below. There is one junction per day. The final scene of this adventure occurs on the morning of the third scene.

If the party is more experienced, the GM should make some adjustments. For Veteran parties, the first junction *always* leads to the encounter. Heroic parties always face the first two encounters, and Legendary parties all three.

Junction	Left	Right
1	Safe	Bridge over Troubled Water (see page 11)
2	Impaled Patrol (see page 12)	Safe
3	The Marsh	Safe

BRIDGE OVER TROUBLED WATER

Cutting through the thick vegetation, you suddenly find yourselves on a rough trail. A high arched, stone bridge leads over a wide, fast-flowing stream, while looking the other direction, the trail is quickly lost in the forest. Dense patches of tall grass and reeds line the banks, while brambles and briars cover much of the forest floor. The wood wight points to the bridge. "That way," it grins.

The trail has been used by foresters, rangers, hunters, and loggers for generations. The bridge is a single arch and rises some seven feet above the water, allowing passage beneath down the center of the stream. A forest troll, corrupted by the mad druid, has taken up residence under the bridge.

Terrain: The stream is waist-deep and counts as difficult terrain. Slick stones line the bottom. Any hero who runs through the stream and rolls a "1" on his running die, slips and falls. Any hero who falls becomes soaked to the skin, ruining any scrolls and other such items not in waterproof containers.

The trees provide Cover (Heavy Armor +6) and block line of sight, as do the boulders. The undergrowth provides Cover but only blocks line of sight if a hero is crouched. Any attacks into the undergrowth, which miss because of the Cover modifier, are assumed to miss the target, the weapon having become entangled.

The patches highlighted on the map in light green are tangle vines. Any creature without the Plant special ability moving through the vegetation does so as difficult ground and cannot run. Elves, Disciples of Freo, and heroes under the effects of *wilderness step* treat the ground as difficult terrain, but they can run (this is still halved). Other areas highlighted as vegetation are considered forest difficult ground.

Monsters: Lurking at the point marked "T" on the map is a corrupted forest troll. It fell prey to one of

KNOCKBACK

These rules are taken from the *Hellfrost Bestiary*.

The physical attacks of large creatures can knock over smaller foes. In order to cause knockback, the attacker must make a successful Fighting attack. The blow does not have to cause damage, however. The victim cannot avoid this—no human can hope to remain standing after being on the receiving end of a frost giant's colossal war axe.

An opponent who is knocked back into a relatively solid object (hay bales and glass windows, for instance, are not solid) is automatically Shaken. This is treated as a separate attack, and thus a foe Shaken by an attack who is then knocked back into a solid object, suffers the effects of successive Shaken results. Opponents may try to Soak any initial damage from the attack or spend bennies to remove the Shaken condition *before* the knockback is applied.

- If a creature is 2 or 3 Sizes larger than its opponent, the victim is knocked back 1" and falls prone.
- If a creature is 4 to 7 Sizes larger than its opponent, the victim is knocked flying 1d4" and falls prone.
- A creature 8 to 11 Sizes larger than its foe, causes knockback of 1d6" and sends foes prone.
- A creature 12 or more Sizes larger, knocks foes back 1d10" and sends them prone.

Melasion's many plants. While it has undergone transformation into a plant-being, it retains its crude intellect. The troll is curled up, but is not asleep—it is waiting in ambush. Until it moves, it resembles a mossy stone.

The troll awakens and rears up to its full height when any character steps onto the bridge or when one enters the stream, whichever comes first. The character must make a Notice roll to avoid Surprise.

Corrupted Forest Troll: See page 15.

Higher Ranks: GMs may wish to increase the difficulty of this encounter for higher-Ranked parties. Seasoned or Veteran parties should face two trolls (both Extras), while Heroic or Legendary parties must defeat a Wild Card troll and an Extra troll. Both additional trolls begin under the southern end of the bridge.

Tactics: The troll moves so as to best use its Improved Sweep. It won't risk a free hit by bypassing enemies just to obtain a better position, though. Because the troll is now part plant, it is unaffected by the tangle vines.

Treasure: Stashed in a hollow beneath the southern end of the bridge is the troll's treasure haul. Coins and small pieces of jewelry amount to 218 gold shields.

Among the waterlogged, detritus and mangled gear is a backpack containing a healer's bag, flint and steel, and a bandolier containing three alchemical potions—*healing* (cures two wounds taken within the "golden hour"), *boost Spirit* (cast with a success), and *warrior's gift* (Improved Nerves of Steel).

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There is also a short sword in a leather scabbard. The weapon isn't magical, but it is finely worked and holds a keen edge. It causes an additional +1 damage (but no modifier to Fighting). Auld Saxa runes on the blade identify it as "Bonegnawer." A Knowledge (History) roll at -4 recalls a blade of that name once belonged to a powerful Saxa chieftain who died during the struggle to throw off the Anari yoke. How the weapon came to be here is a mystery.

THE LOST PATROL

An eerie silence descends over the forest. Ahead you can see a pile of leather-clad corpses lying in the trail. It is unlikely they died where they stood, for the bodies are jumbled one on top of the other. Eight short spears are thrust into the ground nearby.

The corpses are those of the patrol Aelfric mentioned to the party. Ill-equipped to battle Melasion's fell creations, the soldiers walked into a deadly trap and were slaughtered to the last. Infected as sap zombies, Melasion has put them to use as guardians along the trail leading to his lair.

Terrain: This encounter uses the same map as **Bridge Over Troubled Water**. Remove the bridge and stream.

Replace the boulders with thorndarts (see below). Position the sap zombies prone in the center of the trail, where the bridge should be. The party begins on the southern edge of the trail.

The trees provide Cover (Heavy Armor +6) and block line of sight. The undergrowth provides Cover but only blocks line of sight if a hero is crouched. Any attacks into the undergrowth which miss because of the Cover modifier are assumed to miss the target, the weapon having become entangled.

The patches highlighted on the map in light green are tangle vines. Any creature without the Plant special ability moving through the vegetation does so as difficult ground and cannot run. Elves, Disciples of Freo, and heroes under the effects of *wilderness step* treat the ground as difficult terrain, but they can run (this is still halved). Other areas highlighted as vegetation are considered forest difficult ground.

Some of the trees are semi-animate, being able to swing their branches around. On any round in which a hero within 2" of a tree draws a deuce as his first action card, the tree swipes at him. It attacks at the start of the round, before any other actions are taken. Roll d8 Fighting. With success, the victim takes 2d6 damage and is knocked back 1d4" directly away from the nearest tree. See the sidebar on page 11 for further details.

Monsters: The soldiers have been transformed into

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sap zombies. A small number of thorndart bushes also grow in the area.

📊 **Sap Zombies (2 per hero):** See page 15. These wear leather armor, giving them Toughness 8 (1).

📊 **Thorndarts (1 per hero):** See page 16.

Tactics: The thorndarts launch repeated volleys of thorns at the nearest character—they don't attack the sap zombies (a result of Melasion's control over them). The sap zombies then rise to their feet and lurch toward the party.

DEADMAN'S MARSH

The trail ends abruptly at a wide stretch of dank, fetid marsh. Floating on the brackish water are two dozen or so bloated corpses. Thick sedge and reeds break the surface in great clumps. Several islands, each little more than an elevated outcropping of rock, lie between you and the far edge of the marsh. The remnants of a wooden causeway span part of the distance.

Terrain: The water is only knee deep (12–18"), but the bottom of the marsh is a deep layer of thick silt, tangled weeds, hidden logs, and other debris. Movement through the murky water counts as difficult ground. (Pendantic player alert: the marsh may be within a forest, but it is not forest terrain. Hence, elves' Forest Born racial ability does not apply.)

The wooden bridges are rotten. Each time a character moves across one, the GM should flip the top card of the action deck. A black numbered card indicates the character's foot has broken through. He treats leaving that square as difficult ground (he has to extract his foot). A black face card means the hero's leg has punched through the planks. His movement is immediately halted. Removing his foot requires a Strength roll as an action. Until this is done, the character cannot move and has a –1 penalty to attack rolls.

Monsters: Numerous corpses float in the water. Those marked "C" on the map are mundane corpses, left here by Melasion as a warning to intruders. Those marked "Z" are sap zombies, floating face down amid the weeds and sedges.

📊 **Sap Zombies (2 per hero):** See page 15.

Tactics: The sap zombies remain lifeless until an animal moves within 3" of one. At this point, they all rise and wade toward the nearest target. The party members must make Notice rolls to avoid Surprise.

Treasure: Any hero willing to search the corpses finds 1d6 gs per mundane corpse.

and there. Tall stones, ancient and weathered, form a wide ring. The air positively hums with magical energy.

Standing in the center of the circle, before an altar made of jumbled bones, fastened together by vines, is a tall elf. His wan skin is riddled with thick, green veins, and his hair replaced by slim, woody sprouts. Fastened to his body are bark plates, curved yet rough. In his hands he clutches a long antler staff.

"Ah, the animals have finally arrived," the elf smirks. "I am Melasion and you are unwelcome intruders in my kingdom. Wait, what is this, a wood wight? Do you not know, little fey, that you are fighting for the wrong side? Traitor!" the elf snarls, gesturing at the cowering wood wight. "Your fate is sealed for daring to defy me!"

With an insane glint in his eyes, the elf turns his attention back to you. "Your kind has devoured and destroyed the plant life of this world for far too long. Now the ancient order will be broken and paradise restored. All animals will be eradicated...starting with you!"

CIRCLE OF STONES

Hacking through the brambles, you find yourselves on the edge of a large glade. Patches of brambles and dense grasses are scattered here

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Druidism is an ancient art, formulated long before humans ever achieved sentience. Raised long ago, ages before the first human tribes formed villages, the glade is a powerful focus of natural magic—magic which affects plants and animals. It also has strong ties to the elemental realm of earth. Any druids, earth elementalists, and elves automatically sense the glade is a powerful focus for natural magic. A hero who casts *detect arcana* sees the standing stones glow, as well as Melasion's antler staff.

Terrain: Any druid, cleric of Eostre, or earth elemental gains +1 to arcane skill rolls while within the glade. This is *in addition* to the +1 bonus druids already incur for being in a totally natural environment. Melasion's bonuses are already factored into his stat block.

If subjected to the Siphoning while inside the glade, druids and earth elementalists roll 3d6 if their arcane skill die is a 1 and take the *highest* two. On a critical failure, they roll 2d6 as normal.

The patches highlighted on the map in light green are tangle vines. Any creature without the Plant special ability moving through the vegetation does so as difficult ground and cannot run. Elves, Disciples of Freo, and heroes under the effects of *wilderness step* treat the ground as difficult terrain, but they can run (this is still halved). Other areas highlighted as vegetation are considered forest difficult ground.

The standing stones are 8' tall and have Toughness 12 (4; Heavy Armor). They provide Cover and block line of sight. Destroying all the standing stones breaks the ancient enchantment, and the glade loses its magical power. Transporting the stones to a new location also destroys the charm (and the new site does not gain the power).

Melasion's altar is 4' high and provides Cover (+3 Armor). Moving through the square it occupies is difficult ground.

Monsters: Melasion stands before the altar, facing the heroes—the forest plants alerted him to the characters' imminent arrival. Grimbjorn is hiding in the position marked "B" on the map. Growing around the site are several thorndart bushes (marked "T"). A number of sap zombies ("Z") are also present. For higher ranked parties, the GM should position any extra thorndarts and sap zombies within 3" of those already marked on the map.

Ⓜ **Melasion:** See page 14.

Ⓜ **Grimbjorn the Bear:** See page 15. Any injuries Grimbjorn took during the attack on the lumberjacks' compound have been *healed* (remember, the druid was watching from the forest). Melasion has already cast *armor* on Grimbjorn, giving him Toughness 12(2). Remember, this gives him a -1 penalty for Maintaining a spell.

Ⓜ **Thorndart Bushes (1 per hero):** See page 16.

Ⓜ **Sap Zombies (1 per hero):** See page 15.

Tactics: Melasion starts by casting *sphere of might* on his person. Heroes who remain close together are targeted with *entangle* spells. Against those who separate,

the druid casts *barrier*, positioning lengths of thorny hedges to keep the party divided (and thus easy targets for his minions). Melasion isn't stupid—his *barriers* will turn through right angles when required, so as to trap a hero in the corner and force the victim's potential allies to move further to provide aid.

When the party moves toward melee range, the druid cancels his *barrier* spells (a free action), thus removing the spellcasting penalties they incur. If given the opportunity, he casts *armor* on his person for added protection. Once forced into melee, he attacks with Wild Attacks against elves and druids, whom he considers sellouts, but uses regular attacks against other heroes.

The thorndarts fire volley after volley of sharp thorns at the nearest conscious character within range. They are a deadly foe, but the heroes can avoid them once they work out their maximum range. A well-placed *barrier* spell can stymie their ranged attacks, though the plants will try to blast the *barrier* apart.

Each sap zombie heads for a different hero and engages in melee. Once they have closed, Grimbjorn bursts from his hiding place and attacks the nearest hero, looking to use the Gang Up bonus to secure a bear hug.

This is the only fight in which the wood wight will use *healing* during combat, rushing to aid heroes who are taking a beating. He still avoids getting into actual combat, though.

Treasure: Melasion carries a relic to which he is attuned. His antler staff grants a +1 bonus to arcane skill rolls when affecting plants or using plants as a spell trapping. For instance, *entangle* with a "creeping vine" trapping gains the bonus, but using *beast friend* to summon an animal does not. Thus, it is likely beneficial only to druids, clerics of Eostre Plantmother, and certain earth elementalists.

AFTERMATH

With the death of Melasion, the major threat is ended. However, if the party missed any encounters, the GM may either have the party stumble into them on the return journey or have the surviving sap zombies start a second plague at some point in the future. He should devise a scenario for the latter. Glory is awarded as normal for successfully slaying the druid.

BESTIARY

MELASION

Melasion has been forever altered by the black seed. His wan skin is riddled with thick, green veins, his hair has been replaced by slim, woody sprouts; the nails have become bark, and his blood replaced with thick sap.

THE DARK SEED

More plant than elf, the corrupted druid seeks only one thing—the total extermination of animal life.

Melasion's Druidism skill already includes the bonuses for being a druid in a natural realm, being within the druidic glade, and his magical antler staff.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d10, Spirit d10, Strength d6, Vigor d8

Skills: Climbing d8, Druidism d10+3, Fighting d8, Guts d8, Healing d6, Notice d8, Stealth d8, Survival d8, Tracking d8

Charisma: -2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 8 (2)

Hindrances: All Thumbs, Delusional (Major: plants will rule the world), Ugly, Vengeful (Major)

Edges: Agile, Arcane Background (Druidism), Beast Friend (bear companion), Command, Frenzy, Level Headed, Natural Realms, Woodsman

Gear: Bark plate (+2), antler staff (Str+d6, +1 Parry, Reach 1, 2 hands). The staff is also a relic. See **The Stone Circle** for full details.

Powers: *Armor* (bark skin), *bolt* (sharp wooden darts), *barrier* (thorny hedge), *entangle* (animated vines), *healing* (plants inject him with sap), *sphere of might* (thorny branches)

Special Abilities:

- * **Forest Born:** Hearth elves suffer no penalties for difficult ground in forests.
- * **Low Light Vision:** Elves ignore penalties for Dim and Dark lighting.
- * **Plant:** +2 recover from being Shaken, Called Shots do no extra damage, immune to piercing attacks, suffers no wound penalties.
- * **Plant Sense:** Immune to Surprise and the Drop while there are plants within 48" of his location.
- * **Tendrils:** Str+d6, Reach 3. As an action, the druid can shoot out a single tendril. Anyone Incapacitated by the tendril automatically dies and returns as a sap zombie 1d4 hours later.

GRIMBJORN (BEAR COMPANION)

Grimbjorn was always smarter than the average bear. His loyalty to Melasion proved his undoing, for the crazed druid infected him with his deadly sap. Rather than fully transforming the bear, it has left him largely ursine. However, plant sap has replaced his blood and dissolved most of his internal organs.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d8(A), Spirit d8, Strength d12+3, Vigor d12

Skills: Fighting d8, Guts d10, Notice d8, Swimming d6

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 10

Special Abilities:

- * **Bear Hug:** Bears don't actually "hug" their victims, but they do attempt to use their weight to pin their prey and rend it with their claws and teeth. A bear that hits with a raise has pinned his foe. The opponent may only attempt to escape the "hug" on his action, which requires a raise on an opposed Strength roll.
- * **Claws:** Str+d6.

- * **Plant:** +2 recover from being Shaken, Called Shots do no extra damage, immune to piercing attacks, suffers no wound penalties.
- * **Size +2:** These creatures can stand up to 8' tall and weigh over 1000 pounds.

ANIMATED PLANTS

The tendril thing has special powers over vegetation. The shrubs and grasses outside have mutated at lightning speed, becoming snaking tendrils. The plants are not a true creature, and thus are particularly hard to defeat.

Attributes: Agility d4, Smarts d4(A), Spirit d4, Strength d10, Vigor d10

Skills: Fighting d6

Pace: 0; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 7

Special Abilities:

- * **Grapple:** The plants make a grapple attack against every character adjacent to a window or the front door. They suffer no multi action penalties for fighting multiple foes. Grappled foes are affected as if under the effects of an *entangle* spell, "cast" as if the plants' Fighting was an arcane skill. Victims take no damage—the plants only seek to hold animals.
- * **Impossible to Kill:** So long as the tendril thing is still alive, it is impossible to kill the vegetation—it just grows back. However, inflicting a wound on the grasping vines causes that particular patch to retreat back through the opening until their next action card. Any characters held by the affected vines are released.
- * **Mindless:** Unaffected by Tests of Will, Tricks, or arcane powers like *puppet*.
- * **Plant:** +2 recover from being Shaken, Called Shots do no extra damage, immune to piercing attacks, immune to Tests of Will.

CORRUPTED FOREST TROLL

Forest trolls exist in great numbers in the Hearthlands, but sometimes inhabit taiga elves' forests, as well. They are usually of green skin and hair, with growths of moss on their limbs. This particular specimen is now part-plant and part-troll.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4, Spirit d6, Strength d12+2, Vigor d10

Skills: Fighting d8, Guts d10, Intimidation d10, Notice d6, Swimming d6, Throwing d6

Pace: 7; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 10 (1)

Gear: Spiked club (Str+d8).

Special Abilities:

- * **Armor +1:** Rubbery hide.
- * **Claws:** Str+d4.
- * **Improved Sweep:** May attack all adjacent foes.
- * **Plant:** +2 recover from being Shaken, Called Shots do no extra damage, immune to piercing attacks, immune to Tests of Will.
- * **Regeneration (Fast):** Trolls make a natural Healing roll every round, even after death. They cannot heal wounds caused by fire or heat. This includes coldfire.

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Decapitation (a Finishing Move) also prevents regeneration.

- * **Size +2:** Trolls are tall, lanky creatures over 8' tall.

SAP ZOMBIE

Sap zombies aren't actually undead, though the human spirit no longer inhabits the body. The green sap in their veins is alive and capable of moving the corpse, albeit slowly and with jerky movements. Sap zombies are not capable of speech or intelligent thought, though they can emit a ghastly wail and possess rudimentary cunning.

Attributes: Agility d4, Smarts d4(A), Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Druidism d6, Fighting d6, Notice d6

Pace: 4; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 7

Special Abilities:

- * **Bite/Claws:** Str+d4. Anyone Incapacitated by a sap zombie has a 50% chance of dying and returning as a sap zombie 1d4 rounds later.
- * **Limited Plant Control:** Sap zombies know the *entangle* power (unearthly wail trapping). They may work together using Cooperative rolls when invoking this power. Those aiding must use an action. They are immune to the Siphoning—their power does not stem from the threads of magical energy.
- * **Plant:** +2 recover from being Shaken, Called Shots do no extra damage, immune to piercing attacks, immune to Tests of Will.
- * **Semi Undead:** +2 Toughness.
- * **Sticky Hands:** The hands of a sap zombie exude sticky resin. A zombie that hits with a raise has grappled his foe. The opponent may only attempt to escape on his action, which requires a raise on an opposed Strength roll.
- * **Susceptibility (Fire):** Take +4 damage from fire attacks (but not heat).

SPORE GRENADIER

Spore grenadiers are mobile plants. Their base is a large, bulbous mass of roots, which the plant uses to shuffle around. Protruding from this is thick, waxy, hollow tube about a yard long. Inside the base of the tube are four spore sacs, which the plant can launch at targets.

Attributes: Agility d4, Smarts d4(A), Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Fighting d6, Notice d6, Shooting d8

Pace: 4; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 5

Special Abilities:

- * **Mindless:** Unaffected by Tests of Will, Tricks, or arcane powers like *puppet*.
- * **Plant:** +2 recover from being Shaken, Called Shots do no extra damage, immune to piercing attacks, immune to Tests of Will.
- * **Spore Pods:** A spore grenadier can shoot a spore pod as a single action. Range: 5/10/20. It has just one

of each spore pod. All pods are subject to deviation as thrown weapons and explode in a Medium Burst Template. The pods are slow moving area effect weapons. Victims aware of the attack are allowed an Agility roll at -2 to avoid the effects.

* **Choking:** Anyone under the template must make a Vigor roll or be Shaken.

* **Explosive:** Anyone under the template suffers 2d6 damage as from an explosion.

* **Itchy Rash:** Anyone under the template must make a Vigor roll or suffer a level of Fatigue for 24 hours. This can be removed earlier by applying an antihistamine herbal remedy.

* **Sticky:** This acts as the *entangle* power. Roll a d8 "arcane skill."

- * **Susceptibility (Fire):** Take +4 damage from fire attacks (but not heat).



TENDRIL THING

The tendril thing is not a thinking being in any sense of the word—it is simply a writhing mass of plantlike tentacles whose sole function is to kill animals and create new plant-based spawn to further the druid's maniacal goal.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4(A), Spirit d8, Strength d10, Vigor d10

Skills: Fighting d8

Pace: 0; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 7

Special Abilities:

- * **Improved Sweep:** Each round, the creature's smaller, flailing tentacles attack every adjacent character with no penalty for Strength damage. These do not contain sap—Incapacitated victims do not rise as sap zombies.
- * **Mindless:** Unaffected by Tests of Will, Tricks, or arcane powers like *puppet*.
- * **Plant:** +2 recover from being Shaken, Called Shots do no extra damage, immune to piercing attacks, suffers no wound penalties.
- * **Tendrils:** Str+d6, Reach 3. The tendril thing makes two Fighting attacks each round with no penalty. Anyone Incapacitated by the tendril has a 50% chance of dying and returning as a sap zombie 1d4 rounds later.
- * **Weakness (Flame):** The creature suffers a -2 penalty to Fighting rolls to attack characters holding a source of exposed flame, such as a torch of burning log from the fire.

THORNDART

Thorndarts are similar in appearance to large rose bushes, but are covered in 1" thorns. Their extensive roots protrude in a complex pattern for up to a dozen yards around the base. Any creature passing over the roots triggers the thorndart's attack. As slain prey decomposes, so the thorndart dines on the rotting meat and blood. Their usual prey consists of small animals but

THE DARK SEED

they have been known to take down much larger prey with sustained attacks.

Hearth elves harvest the thorns to use as sewing needles, drill bits for boring wood or horn, and to close wounds before bandages can be applied.

Attributes: Agility d4, Smarts d4 (A), Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d4, Notice d6, Shooting d6

Pace: —; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 8 (2)

Special Abilities:

- * **Armor +2:** Thorndarts are protected by thick, waxy skin.
- * **Plant:** +2 to recover from being Shaken. Called Shots do no extra damage. Not subject to Tests of Will.
- * **Thorns:** A thorndart can fire a volley of thorns each round. Range: 3/6/12, Damage: 2d6. Armor and shields protect as normal.



Leshiji (less-idg-ee) are wood spirits. They inhabit all the forests of Rassilon, typically tending an area of 100 square miles. They are also known as “fathers of the wood wights,” though in truth the role they perform is more like a supervisor, watching over and aiding a gang of wood wights within their domain. Wood wights call them “forest lords” out of respect for their powers.

As protectors of both forest and animals, their form is a blend of the two. Their usual form is that of a human-sized figure with bark-like skin, and hair and beard of living grass, but with a tail, hooves, and horns.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d10, Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d10

Skills: Fighting d6, Guts d6, Intimidation d8, Notice d8, Spellcasting d12, Stealth d8, Survival d8, Swimming d8, Tracking d8

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 7

Gear: Large club (Str+d8).

Special Abilities:

- * **Alter Size:** An as action, a leshij can alter its size up or down. The creature makes a Smarts roll, with each success and raise indicating a one point change in Size. For every point of Size change, Strength and Toughness increase or decrease one step (above d12, Strength rises a single point—d12+1, d12+2, and so on). They gain the Large Monstrous Ability at Size +4, Huge at +8, and Gargantuan at +12.
- * **Forest Born:** Leshiji never suffer difficult ground penalties in forests.
- * **Powers:** Leshiji can use the following spells: *animate war tree* (song of awakening), *armor* (bark skin), *barrier* (wall of wood), *bladebreaker* (only works on axes), *confusion* (victim hears voices on the wind), *deflection* (branches intercept attacks), *disease* (wasting sickness), *healing* (plants and animals only), *entangle* (trees grab at targets), *fog cloud* (special: trees move to block out light),

growth/shrink (song of changing), *nightmare* (victim dreams he is wandering through a dark, ever-changing forest), *refuge* (trees form a shelter), *summon elemental* (wood only).

- * **Shapeshift:** Leshiji know the *shape change* power but can only assume the form of mundane plants and animals. They use Smarts as their arcane skill die.
- * **Speak with Nature:** Leshiji can communicate with all mundane animals and plants.
- * **Summon Beasts:** A leshij can summon forest creatures to him by singing. This requires an action and a Smarts roll at -2. If successful, 1d6+2 wolves or 1d4 bears come from the surrounding wilds in 1d6+2 rounds.

WOOD WIGHT

Although commonly used to describe a form of undead, the word “wight” is an old Saxa term for “man.” Thus, wood wights are literally “wood men,” which sums them up nicely. Saxa often use the term *waldgeist*, or wood spirit. These fey creatures stand 3–4’ high, and have the appearance of small humans made of twigs. Their eyes are large, round, and totally black, their hands long and spindly, and their wooden teeth pointed (for eating beetles).

Wood wights are shy creatures, dedicated to tending the forests they call home. They are usually on good terms with other good-hearted forest dwellers, such as nykr, skogsra, tree men, elves, and most mundane animals. Each wood wight tends an area of about a square mile. When their homes are threatened, they resort to guerrilla tactics, hiding in the undergrowth and attacking with spells.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Climbing d8, Fighting d4, Guts d6, Knowledge (Herbalism) d10, Notice d6, Spellcasting d8, Stealth d4, Survival d4, Tracking d4

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 5 (1)

Hindrances: —

Edges: Woodsman

Special Abilities:

- * **Armor +1:** Bark.
- * **Camouflage:** When a wood wight stands motionless in a forest it gains +4 to Stealth rolls.
- * **Forest Born:** Wood wights suffer no penalties for difficult ground in forests.
- * **Forest Folk:** Wood wights have Stealth, Survival, and Tracking at d8 in forests.
- * **Low Light Vision:** No penalties for Dim and Dark lighting.
- * **Powers:** Wood wights know the following spell: *boost/lower Stealth*, *entangle* (vegetation comes alive), *healing* (animals only), *beat mask*, *knockdown* (nearby trees slap victims), *wilderness step* (forests only).
- * **Size -1:** Wood wights are similar in size to young human children.

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LUMBERJACK

The loggers lead a hard life, working long hours in often adverse conditions. They work hard and play harder. Living in small camps for much of the year, they tend to be insular and surly, though those who earn their trust are treated with friendship and respect.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d8

Skills: Climbing d6, Fighting d6, Guts d6, Knowledge (one Craft) d6, Notice d6, Survival d6

Charisma: +0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 6

Hindrances: —

Edges: Sweep

Languages: Anari, Saxa, Trader

Gear: Hand axe (Str+d6) or battle axe (Str+d8).

VILLAGER

These stats suffice for the general populace the heroes encounter in the adventure. GMs can change them from being faceless extras by adding a random personality trait.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Climbing d6, Fighting d4, Guts d4, Knowledge (one Craft) d6, Notice d6

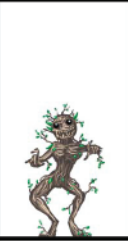
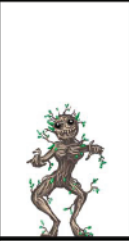
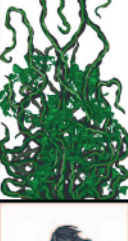
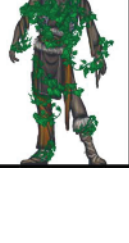
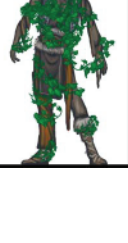
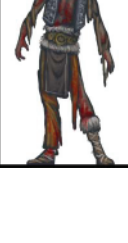
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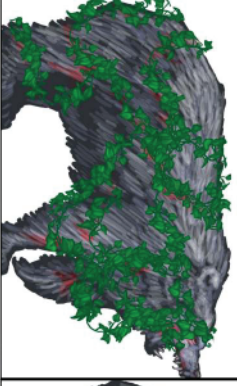
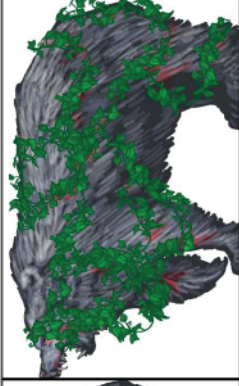
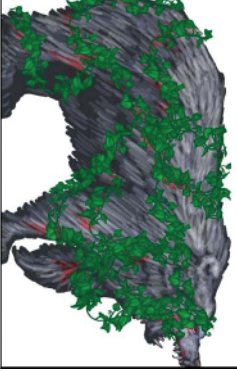
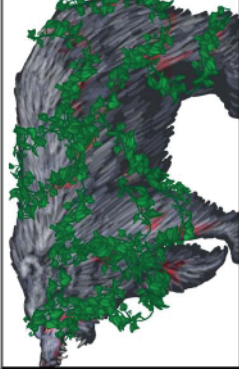
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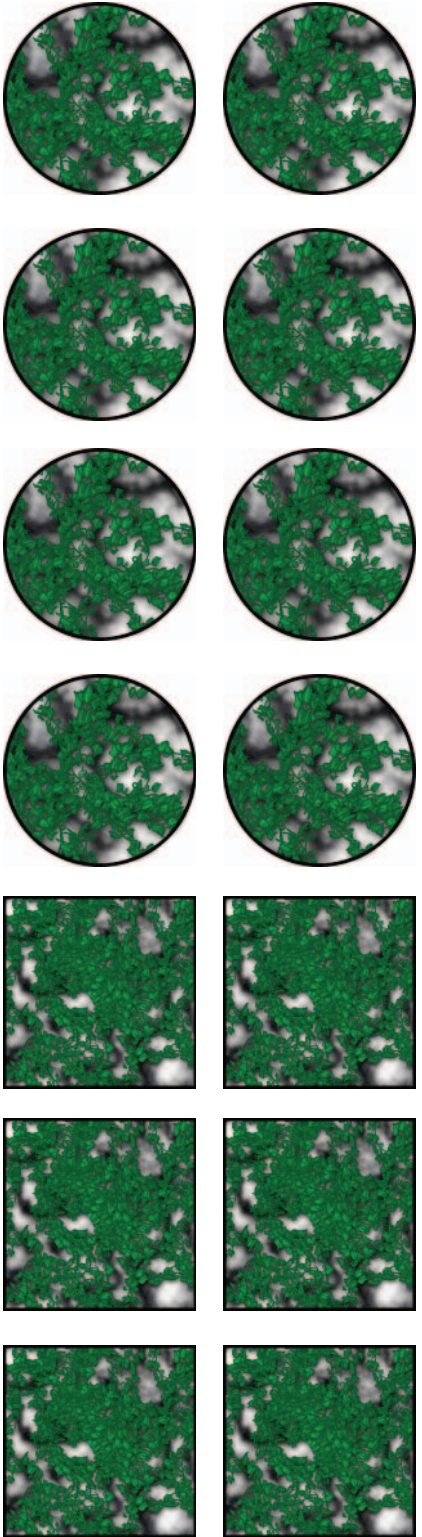
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Languages: Anari, Saxa, Trader

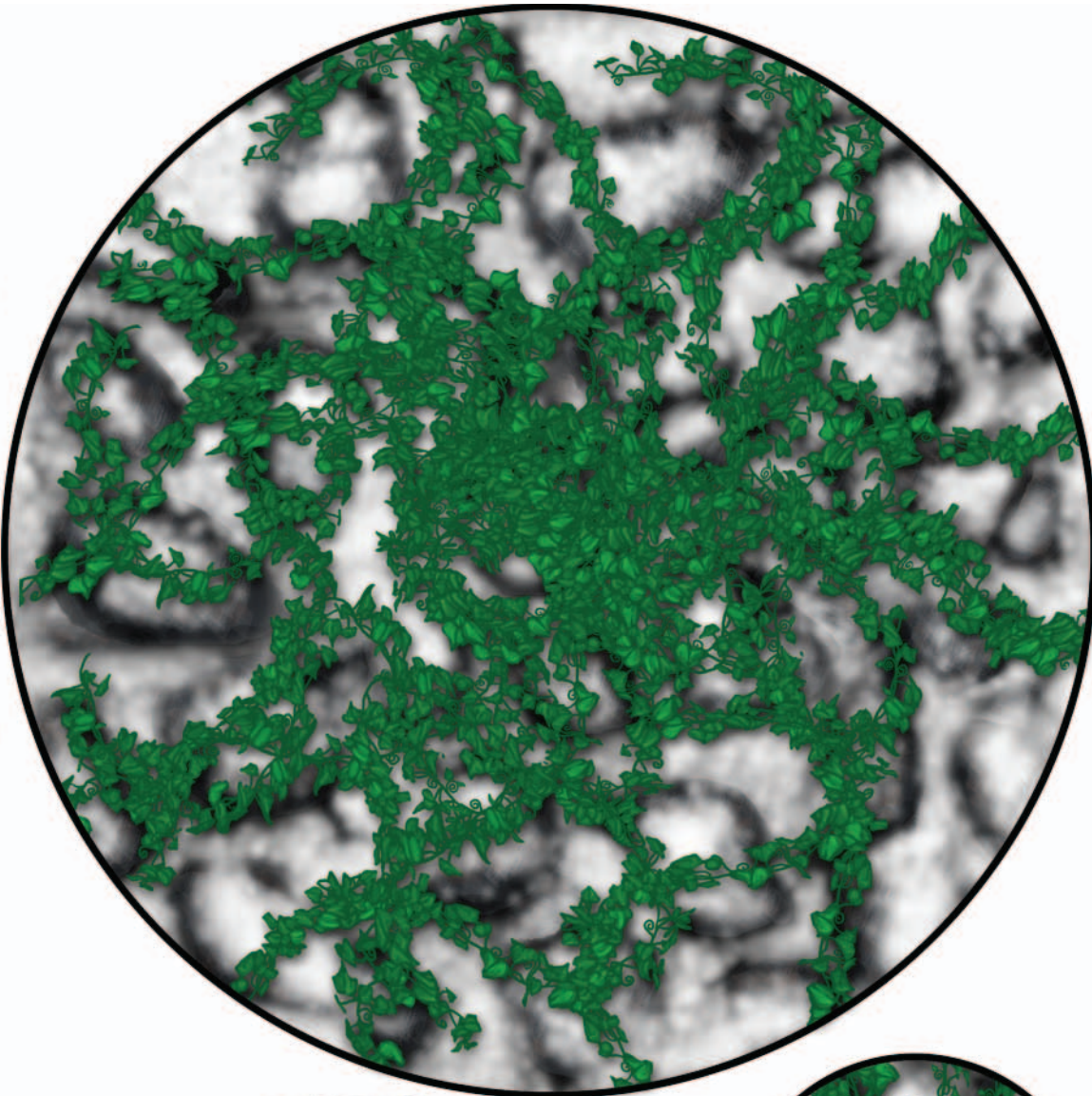
Gear: Dagger (Str+d4).

			Leshy / Forest Lord				Wood Wight				Barmaid
			Lumberjack				Lumberjack				Barmaid
			Bar Patron				Bar Patron				Cook
			Melasion, Elf Druid				Spore Grenadier				Tentacle Thing
			Corrupted Forest Troll				Forest Troll				Frost Wight
			Sap Zombie				Sap Zombie				Sap Zombie
			Sap Zombie				Zombie				Zombie

					Grizzly Bear
					Grimbjorn
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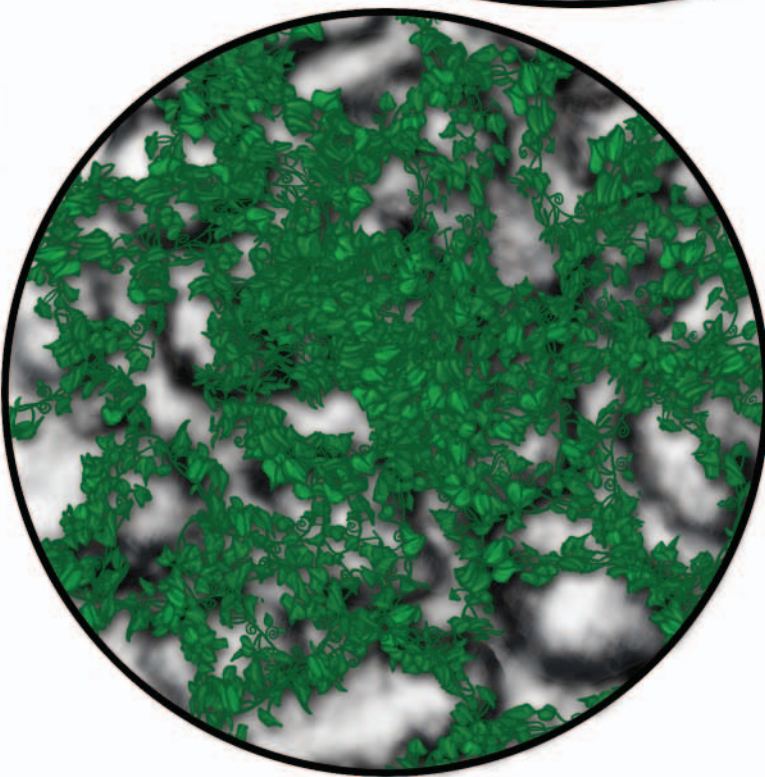
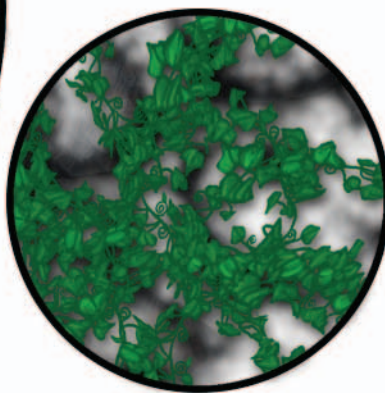
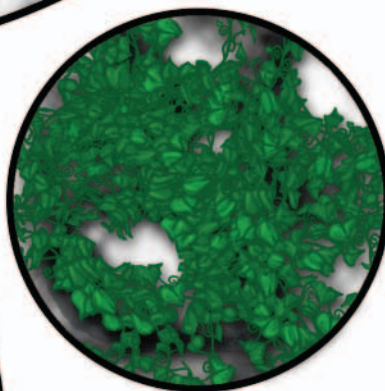


Animated Plants Template



Large Burst Template

Small Burst Templates



Medium Burst Template



THE BALANCE OF NATURE IS TIPPING!

Animal life was not always dominant in Rassilon. Eons ago, before the balance of nature was established, sentient plants were the superior life form. Among their number was a particularly vile species which sought the extermination of all animal life. Although long thought extinct, one of their seed pods has lain dormant, silently waiting for the right time to awaken and release its deadly contents. That time has finally come.

An elf druid, infected by the seed pod, plans to issue in a new era—a world of plant domination. To defeat him the heroes must first stand against his insidious creations, creatures part-animal and part-plant, and whose touch is deadly. But the heroes are not alone in their quest, for the fey have sensed the danger the druid presents to the natural order.

Can the heroes avoid becoming mutated plant beings long enough to track the druid to his lair? Are they strong enough to stand against the druid's corrupting power or will they end up with more than green fingers?

The Dark Seed is the second tale for Triple Ace Games' *Hellfrost* setting.



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