



"A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder."
Joseph Campbell, *The Hero of a Thousand Faces*

Adventure Pack

FEATURING

The 1st Annual



Writer's Pro-Am TOP TEN Adventures Pack One

The Blighted Grove by Brannon Hollingsworth & Ken Marable
&
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Citizen Games D20 Adventure Pack

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The Blighted Grove

Credits

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A concise adventure for 1st to 4th-level characters.

Introduction

Seeking the only cure that can heal those close to them, the party must plunge headlong into the source of a rapidly spreading and deadly disease. Despite the risk of possible death and infection, they forge ahead, knowing full well that only the secrets of that which lies at the center of this horrific outbreak will save them. However, the solution to this mystery could very well be the end of all they know, or the beginning of something they never before imagined.

Preparation

All that is required to use this adventure is a copy of the *Player's Handbook*, the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, and the *Monster Manual*. All NPC and monster statistics are provided with each encounter in an abbreviated form, or where appropriate, the proper page and resource is clearly referenced.

Text that appears in shaded boxes is considered player information, which you can (at your discretion) read aloud to, paraphrase, or hand out to when appropriate. Unshaded boxes contain important information that you (as the Dungeon Master, or DM) should pay particular attention to and will often contain special instructions.

Lastly, after each NPC description one will find two new sections, labeled as **NPC Initiation** and **NPC Continuation**. Both of these sections are optional, but could be of great use to most DM's. This information is provided with the forward-looking DM in mind, and it is not required for the successful completion of the adventure.

The **NPC Initiation** section provides helpful suggestions for introducing that particular NPC to the party, as well as possibly providing information for use in seamlessly blending the NPC into the scenery of a DM's campaign.

The **NPC Continuation** section provides seeds that the DM can use, throughout the PC's interaction with the NPC, to plant ideas for future adventures or encounters involving or relating to that particular NPC.

Adventure Synopsis

A horrible, crippling malady has befallen the homeland of the PC's, killing countless people with cold, unfeeling indifference. The source of this sickness is ultimately traced to the sudden appearance of a strange blight-like plant growth in a near-by forest. Seeking answers, the PC's travel to this blighted glade and along the way encounter a crazed druid. This druid, who has obviously been driven mad by the disease, babbles incoherently about "talking trees" and "whispering willows" within the infected forest. He warns the characters with an ominous tone that "enlightenment and death lie within" before attacking them in a madness-born rage.

Once the obstacle of the insane druid has been overcome and the PC's enter the glade, they eventually learn that the source of the infection is actually a sentient, living plant form. The plant, which is native from the Ethereal plane, was somehow seeded on the Prime Material. Now, far away from its native realm of potential matter, it has discovered that it can feed off of the dreams and mental energy of other sentient creatures. The plant does not wish to harm

anyone, but it struggles to survive, and the horrible disease is a ramification of its attempts to communicate and sustain itself.

The PC's, now faced with a thorny quandary, must decide whether or not to help this marooned plant by becoming its hosts, or destroying it. Either way they will be able to save their homeland, but one way offers a passage into a broader, more remarkable realm.

Initial Adventure Hooks

The very existence of a disease that is quickly reaching plague-like proportions, not to mention the suffering and deaths of many of their townsfolk, loved ones, family, or servants should be enough to propel the characters into this adventure. However, for more callous PC's, seeking out and eliminating the cause of this disease might have the distasteful ring of "Good Samaritan" to it. This, of course, might not speak to their primary motivators – their purses. If this is the case, try one (or even a clever combination of two) of the following three ways to get them moving in the right direction.

- One (or all) of the PC's have themselves become infected and everyone else seems too sick to help them. They face two choices – either do something about their situation or die a horrible, ghastly death.
- The local church offers a substantial bounty (1,000-5,000 gp) for the cure of the disease, as their best efforts have succeeded in merely slowing the disease's inevitable march of doom.
- Perhaps the PC's are not infected at all, but they know that they have been exposed to the disease. Seeing the horrible, painful and wasting results of the disease should be a very powerful motivator for any character that even suspects that he might be infected.

Once the PC's have their incentive, they should begin looking for information. Allow the characters to make a few checks (Gather Information or Bardic Knowledge work nicely) around town where they could learn any of the following:

Sources of the Disease

DC	Information
10	There is no cure for the disease. Everyone that has contracted it so far has perished.
15	The disease causes a slow, painful death and towards the end, folks say they hear strange voices.
20	The disease seemed to begin on the edges of the wilds and gradually worked its way into the civilized areas.
25	Everyone with the disease has visions of a nearby forest landmark – perhaps a waterfall, a particular copse of trees, a well-known pond, or perhaps an ancient, knobby oak.
30	One of the first folk seen with the disease was a ranger who lived in the forests to the northeast; seems he came to town seeking healing.

Once the PC's have gathered their information, they should have a clear trail to follow. It seems that some substantial clues to the disease (if not the source of the infection itself) lies in the forest nearby.

Leaves of Grass (EL 2)

Since he passed his every waking hour tending his fledgling forest grove, the druid known as Tolvis Fawndancer was one of the first individuals to be infected by the otherworldly plant. Now, even despite the fact that he has been infected longer than any other victim of the plant, he survives due to his close ties to nature and his hardy disposition. Due to his exacting and rigorous training in the ways of nature, he knew the moment he came in contact with the plant that it was sentient. Excited beyond measure, he tried many times, through his druidic powers, to contact the plant creatures, but failed time and time again. Each time he came in contact with the plant he became more infected and entwined with these creatures.

As a result, he is now almost mindless and utterly insane. On one hand, he wishes to protect this unique creature of nature, but on the other hand, he knows that it is somehow killing him. Seeking the solace of the only true balm that he has ever known, Tolvis strips down to mere rags and clothes himself in the trappings of nature – with mud, leaf, and twig as his armor, he seeks to rid himself of this horrible, mind racking agony.

The result of this is an exceedingly unstable, bizarre looking and dangerous individual, one, which the characters now come in contact with. As the players begin the encounter with the crazed druid, read the following aloud to the players:

As you travel along the forest path, you get the uneasy feeling that someone is watching you. Your finely honed instincts warn you that you are not alone, and you notice that what looks like a large holly bush is in fact keeping tabs on you. Wide, crazed eyes stare out of a mask of prickly holly leaves, dirt, grass and sweat while the thing's dry, cracked lips seem to mouth the same phrase over and over again. You realize the word at the same time that you realize that it is a half-naked, leaf-covered man that is silently speaking it – “Run”, the man-thing whispers harshly, “Run”...

The crazed druid reacts initially as the PC's react - if they draw weapons and make ready to attack or defend, then the druid screams his warning (see the **Adventure Synopsis**, above) and attacks in turn. If the PC's attempt to parlay, then the druid will remain calm enough to convey some information to the PC's. Initially, Tolvis will tell the characters to flee - thus his warning to 'Run', above - but he will also try and tell the PC's of the wonder and danger that awaits them within the blighted grove. His speech is full of double-speak and contradictions, but if the characters remain patient, they will at least get a hint of what there is to come.

Tolvis will only talk to the PC's for about three rounds, before he becomes increasingly irritated and unstable. The source of this increased irritation is actually the plant creature, calling for him to gain the character's help, because they can sense that they are near, but the poor druid simply cannot understand them. He becomes irate, and loses his grip on reality and attacks the PC's, screaming at them to “leave him be” and “quiet their voices” in his head.

The characters are now faced with a tense situation, do they slay this poor, diseased and crazed man or attempt to somehow detain and possibly help him? Tolvis can be helped, but only if he is neutralized as a threat - as long as he is conscious he will continue to attack the PC's to the fullest extent that his abilities will allow.

Ad Hoc XP Adjustment:

Due to the difficulty involved in this encounter, award PC's that find a non-violent solution to this quandary an extra +50% experience points; for PC's that use a bit of force, but still come up with a non-lethal solution, award an extra +25% experience points.

The Mad Druid

Tolvis Fawndancer; Male elf Druid 4; CR 4; Medium-size humanoid; HD 4d8; hp 22; Init +1; Spd 20ft.; AC 14 [+1 Dex, +3 Hide]; Atk +2 (1d6 halfspear); SV Fort +4, Ref +2, Will +6; Str 8, Dex 12, Con 10, Int 11, Wis 14, Cha 9.

Skills and Feats: Animal Empathy +6, Concentration +4, Heal +6, Intuit Direction +3, Swim +3, Wilderness Lore +10; Endurance, Track.

Possessions: Hide armor, Halfspear, waterskin, Totem charms, journal (recent entries detail mental illness).

Spells: Due to his mental illness, Tolvis has no spells memorized at this time.

Tolvis Fawndancer has only ever known the forest as his home, his shelter and his place of respite and peace. Since the day of his birth, he has never set foot outside the shadows of the boughs that he lovingly calls home. A member of a small, almost reclusive clan of forest elves, Tolvis grew up learning the intricate ways of his forest dwelling, and the call of the druid came readily and easily to him. In fact, it seemed to come almost natural for him, particularly the healing, growing, and tending of plants, for which he seemed to have a special knack.

While Tolvis and his family knew of the outside world and heard of all of its wonders from passers-by and visitors, they simply had no desire to leave their home. They all, like Tolvis, were content to marvel at the sheer breath-taking beauty that nature had surrounded them with rather than travel hither and yon.

NPC Initiation:

Introducing Tolvis into play is quite simple, as he is the primary focus of interaction in the previous encounter entitled “Leaves of Grass” (see the information provided above).

NPC Continuation:

How Tolvis continues to function within a campaign depends greatly on the outcome of the aforementioned encounter. If the PC's kill the poor, mad, druid then there can be no future dealings with him.

Similarly, if they attack, but do not kill the druid he will remember it and it is a sure bet that if he ever comes to his senses that the characters have made an enemy for life. If this is indeed the case, then it should be very easy for a cunning DM to work Tolvis into an existing campaign as a now half-crazed druid bent for revenge against the characters.

However, if the PC's help and heal the druid, then he could become a valuable ally in the future. Tolvis, if he survives this encounter, is destined to become a great and powerful druid in this area, and he will owe his life and his sanity to the character's heroic and noble actions. He could become a dependable contact for the characters and would even go so far as providing a “home away from home” for them in his grove. The characters could use the druid not only as a source of information, but also as a safe haven whenever they are in the area.

Dismissing a contact with this much potential for future campaign development would be a near crime for any DM. The DM could use Tolvis as the springboard for countless adventures or adventure seeds; the druid will know that the characters are not only able, but also of a similar mind set as he, so a bond of implicit trust could be formed amongst them. Tolvis and his people, in their desire to remain within the forest, could greatly benefit from having a group “on the outside” to aid them in their affairs, and in return, Tolvis can provide the PC's with free healing, nature-based magics, spells, items and tools, as well as teaching

them a “secret sign” known only to druids and their ilk. The characters could then make use of these items and this knowledge during their future encounters.

The Blighted Grove (EL 4)

Within the interior of the blighted grove are the mysterious plants that are the root of this horrible disease. Native to the Ethereal plane, the Tween Thorns are normally a very innocuous plant that grow sparsely throughout that plane. Normally subsisting on the endless waves of proto matter, Tween Thorns provide a mainstay in the Ethereal ecology, or what passes for such; how they came to be on the Material Plane is anyone's guess.

These plants have fared only marginally better here than in their native home, but it is their affects on those that come in contact with them that has changed things so drastically. Tween Thorns are marginally sentient and on their native plane, which is ever in flux, they have to adapt quickly to survive. They have used this ability to their advantage here in the PC's homeland. They have learned to feed off of the mental energies and dreams of sentient creatures, as these things are the closest to their native fare. However, they know that they cannot survive indefinitely in this manner and have been attempting to contact all with which they come in contact.

It is this combination that has caused the wasting disease that has spread from this tiny grove into the PC's homeland. Passing from infected individual to individual in the form of a mental thorn, it disturbs the thoughts and robs the dreams. Thus, the body slowly begins to waste away due to lack of rest and having its will to live sapped from it. The Tween Thorns do not know this, of course, so they continue to contact every new person who receives a mental thorn, thus continuing the vicious cycle. Only through role-play can the characters make the Tween Thorns understand what they are doing and reach a viable solution.

The solution is a simple one, but requires an act that most parties will not be willing to perform – the group must willingly become the hosts for the plant for a period of time. In order for them to survive for any length of time on the Material Plane, the Tween Thorns need a constant source of potential matter – that is, matter that has not formed into an actual *something* yet – the only place this is found outside of the Ethereal is within the dreams and unrealized thoughts of sentient beings. However, in the case of the Tween Thorns' other “victims”, they were neither aware nor willing of the plant's need. If the PC's can learn that this is what the plants need to survive and willingly give it as a group, then they can not only sustain the plants, but also evade any major ill effects.

The reason for the ill effects experienced by those infected by the disease can be likened to the way a drowning individual acts – when they are alone, frightened and fearing for their life (much like the Tween Thorns) they can very easily drown their savior in their near-mindless struggle for survival. However, if that same drowning individual is given a rope, then the fear subsides to the point where they can be saved. The characters' offer of their dreams and unconscious thoughts is the life-saving rope that the “drowning” Tween Thorns are so desperately in need of. It is only through patient role-playing and communication that the PC's can find this out, however, and in order to do this they must first touch (or be touched by) one of the plant's mental thorns.

Upon entering the blighted grove, the characters will begin to notice the scattered presence of a scraggly and pathetic looking weed all around. Closer examination reveals that this plant is, despite its appearance, not dead, but in fact is lifeless looking by nature. Tween Thorns look more like a dead, thorn-ridden vine than anything else and are always (even on the Ethereal) dull brown in coloration. Anyone getting within five feet of the plant is subject to

the Tween Thorn's "attack", even if it could be called as such. This attack comes in the form of the plant firing one of its countless thorns at the PC, and is actually the plant's feeble attempt to communicate. The Tween Thorn begins making attacks using its Mental Thorn ability. For every 5' a character progresses towards the center of the grove (up to 100') the Tween Thorn makes 2 attacks per round that can be divided amongst all characters present (so at 30' in, the characters face 12 attacks per round). However, once the characters have gone very far into the grove, they will soon find themselves dodging out of the range of one part of the plant and directly into the range of another of the plant's thorn-bearing branches.

If the thorns at any time, strike the characters, proceed to the **Voices in My Head** section below for details. However, there is a very likely chance that many highly cautious or skilled PC's (or even an entire party) might not ever enter the grove or be struck by the thorns. If you encounter such a situation, see the section entitled **Last Ditch Effort**, below.

Tween Thorns CR 4 (4 HD Huge); 32 hp; AC 15; see Appendix.

Voices in My Head

Once the PC's have been struck, they immediately begin hearing the plant's mental voice, wailing in despair, hunger, and fear. Focusing the mind and attempting to tune out the chaotic din is far too great a task for a single character to try, but for every character that adds his effort into the task, it becomes increasingly easier. Have each player make a Will save (DC 15). Since the Tween Thorns can telepathically communicate with multiple minds at the same time, characters are able to boost each other's save. They gain a +2 bonus for every infected character within 30'. The chaotic onslaught will continue either until someone makes the save (and therefore is able to communicate clearly with the plant) or until 5 rounds are over. At that point, the plant gives up unless the characters leave and enter the grove again. Psionic characters, despite their specific training in this area, simply cannot understand the alien thought process of this plant without the help of their fellows, however, completing this task is considerably easier with a psionic character in the group's midst.

Once the party has "broken through" the chaotic din that the plants are projecting, they can better understand the Tween Thorns, although it is still obvious that their way of thinking is utterly alien and foreign to the PC's. Initially, they always refer to themselves as "we" and do not understand the concept of individuality. No matter what the PC's say to them, they will always recognize the group as a single entity. If one of the group somehow disconnects from the others, the Tween Thorns will mourn the loss of their "lost branch". Also, the speech of the plant is halting and oddly timed – they often put the verbs of their statements first and jumble the rest of the sentence together almost as an afterthought. For example, if the Tween Thorns are trying to tell the party that they are hungry, they might convey the following: "Eat-must.....or die else we might." Therefore, allow the characters a bit of time to acclimate themselves before throwing them into the details of what must be done to save the ethereal plant.

Decisions, decisions...

Eventually, after the characters have learned a bit about the Tween Thorns and the fact that they are truly harmless and merely lost, they will have to decide exactly how to deal with them. They really have two choices, one is to destroy them, which any good-aligned party should be loathe to do after learning about these albeit alien-seeming, but basically harmless plants. Or they can elect to help them.

The first choice is easily completed, as the Tween Thorns have no way of defending

themselves here on the Material Plane. A simple flaming torch is all that is needed to exterminate the plants. However, since the characters must get close to the thorns to kill them (as they are impervious to magical fire), they will be forced to listen to the anguished, soul-wrenching cries of the murdered Tween Thorns in their heads. Make certain, as DM, that these are sounds that will haunt them to the end of their days. (For ideas on how to use this event for additional campaign or adventure ideas, please see the **Concluding the Adventure** section below).

Ad Hoc Adventure Adjustment: At the DM's discretion, you may elect to have the act of destroying the Tween Thorns to be not such a traumatic and horrific act. Despite the continued effort of the Tween Thorns (see **Last Ditch Effort**, below), some parties might not ever recognize the sentience of the plant. Therefore, having to endure the massive negative side effects for destroying what they see as "only a disease causing weed" could be considered a bit excessive.

If this is the case, merely convey to the PC's that as they destroy the plant, they notice that it does not merely crinkle up, but rather thrashes about as if alive. They will experience intense sensations of loss, grief, pain, and despair as the plant expires and there should be little doubt that they have just wrongly destroyed what was more than a mere plant. Leave each character to deal with this guilt in their own way, but most good characters, especially paladins and clerics, might want to seek atonement for their actions. If this alternate method is used for completing the encounter, please proceed to **Concluding the Adventure** section below and see the note regarding the **Ad Hoc Adventure Adjustment**.

Last Ditch Effort

However, some astute characters might devise a way to exterminate the Tween Thorns from afar, such as with the use of flaming arrows, oil grenades, and the like. This method, of course, precludes the characters being struck with the thorns, and causes a bit of problem with the remainder of the adventure. If this is the case, the Tween Thorns will know it, and use nearly all of their remaining life force to try and convey to the characters that they are in fact, friendly.

The Tween Thorns somehow sense that this force that has arrayed itself against them is both its last chance and its possible doom. So, it does the only thing that it knows to do normally to frighten away predators on the Ethereal – it uses its projection power. Normally, this power is rarely used as it saps an enormous amount of the plant-creature's life force, even in its native environs of potential matter. It saps the plant even more here, but it knows that if it does not try now, it very well will perish.

The Tween Thorns' projection power allows it to manifest potential energy into kinetic energy, in a myriad of forms. Normally, however, the Tween Thorns transfer this potential energy into the form that it was intended to take, basically, they can make dreams into reality. This only happens for a brief period of time, but it is quite a startling display, to say the least. It is normally quite sufficient to frighten off any predators, and in this case, is just enough to give the character's pause before they seal the plant's doom. If this occurs, read the following:

Before your eyes you see the dreams your townsfolk, family, friends, servants, or even those from your own mind (for those that are infected) materialize and evaporate at a frightening pace. It is like watching a dream unfold, but with your eyes open sights, sounds, fragrances, scenes, and people appear before them. As you watch, mouths agape, you begin to see a similar theme that runs throughout the conjoined dreams – “Plants need help. Partake of Thorns. Mean no harm. Help Us.”

After seeing this startling display, only the most thickheaded of characters will still seek to destroy the plants without question. If the PC's decide to destroy the plants despite all of this, there is little that one can do. However, if they decide to take a closer look and enter the grove, proceed with the adventure by returning to the section entitled **The Blighted Grove**, above.

A Meeting of the Minds

If the characters decide to take the road dictated by kindness and higher morals, then things are considerably different for them. If they at any point ask the Tween Thorns what they can do to help (or something similar), the plants will respond that they can become its host for a period of time until a way to get them home can be found. In order to become a host for the Tween Thorns, the characters must partake of its fruit, which essentially becomes the embodiment of the entire plant creature for a period of time. A part of the fruit must be eaten by each of the PC's that intend to be hosts, but there must be at least three PC's in order for it to work. Once the fruit has been created, there is no going back for the Tween Thorns, and if at least three of the characters partake of the fruit, the plant dies horribly at their hands (see above for effects).

Once the characters consume the fruit, each one experiences a highly unusual sensation of another unique presence entering their minds. It is not in the least bit painful, but it is increasingly odd and unusual, to say the least. Once the Tween Thorns are “settled” in the minds of the characters, the chaotic din dies down immediately. Further, all of those folks who had contracted the “disease” instantly experience a sense of relief and a return of mental stability. They are, in essence, “cured”, as the Tween Thorns are no longer attempting to contact them. Many of them (including Tolvis) will be perfectly fine after a long, long period of restful, rejuvenating sleep, complete with vivid, spectacular dreams.

Concluding the Adventure

No matter which road the PC's took to cure the dreaded disease that was consuming their homeland, the disease can be vanquished with little or no harm to the PC's themselves (or rather, physical harm, that is). They will still return to their homeland as heroes, having destroyed the disabling disease; however it is the ramifications of exactly how they accomplished their deed that they must continue to deal with.

If the PC's chose to destroy the Tween Thorns, they will be continually haunted by the mental screams and voices of the murdered plants. Sleep will bring them no respite either, for their dreams will be filled with images and voices so horrific that they can get little to no sleep. They will slowly begin wasting away almost as if they were the only ones NOT cured by the disease. It is not a disease, of course, but rather the trapped spirit of the Tween Thorn that inhabits them and they will eventually die if they do not take steps to cleanse themselves.

This dire situation can lead to any number of spin-off adventures, or even into an entire campaign wherein the PC's are searching for a cure to this near “possession” within themselves. Conventional magic can do little for them, as they are not technically sick, nor

are they “possessed” by any foul denizen from beyond. Only through a journey of self-cleansing and purification can they eventually expunge themselves of this horrible crime and free the trapped spirit of the Tween Thorns.

However, if the DM elected to use the **Ad Hoc Adventure Adjustment** as shown above, then the characters still return as heroes, but they still must deal with their guilt in their own way. Characters that seek atonement might have to undertake a holy pilgrimage for their church, or undergo a purification ritual that can only be preformed in a remote area of their homeland. Characters that do not seek penance for their rash act might be plagued by reoccurring dreams or possibly become introverted and sullen.

If the party elected to become hosts of the Tween Thorns, the disease is cured and they have a new goal ahead of them – find some way to return the plant-creature to its home. While being a host of the Tween Thorns has its downsides (the host characters are continually tired and restless, and do not dream for the duration of the time they are hosts), it also has an unexpected and unforeseen upside. The host characters can now communicate telepathically through the link that the Tween Thorn has between them. This telepathic bond gradually makes itself known within a few days of eating the fruit and can lead to quite a number of interesting role-playing situations in itself!

Just as with destroying the Tween Thorns, saving them opens up a whole new realm of possibilities for continued adventures and campaign potential. The party could find themselves searching through ancient ruins for clues on the origin of this plant-creature, or contracting out to a wizened sage for information on its extra planar home. Their search could lead even to the planes beyond the Prime Material, as they strive to return their charge to its long lost home.

Nevertheless, the characters will be hailed as heroes in their homeland for saving countless lives and vanquishing an invisible and malevolent enemy. They could have possibly gained a powerful ally in the form of a growing and knowledgeable forest druid. They will be known as the saviors of countless lives and will find themselves on the short list of many powerful men and movements that need such able-bodied doers of good. Perhaps a local church is in need of such stalwart adventurers to rescue a group of humble monks that are trapped and besieged in a mountain tower by dark, demonic creatures? Perhaps a local lord has learned of a foul, barbarian presence in his sparsely inhabited kingdoms to the north? There is no end to the adventures that await them just beyond the next bend...

Appendix I:

The following appendix contains information used in this adventure and comprises a new creature, the Tween Thorns, as well as a new template to accompany those characters that might become “hosts” of that creature. All of the information contained within the stat blocks should be considered open content, but all other information pertaining to these entries are closed content and may not be used without express written permission of the authors, as detailed in the Open Gaming License.

New Monster: Tween Thorns

Type: Large Plant

Hit Dice: 1HD

Initiative: +4

Speed: 5ft

AC: 16 (-1 size, +7 natural armor)

Attacks: Mental Thorns +4

Damage: -

Face/Reach: 10ft'x10ft' /20ft' (per HD)

Special Attacks: Mental Thorns (Su),
Mental Disease (Su)

Special Qualities: None

Saves: Fort +1, Ref +4, Will -3

Abilities: Str 10, Dex 17, Con 10, Int 7,
Wis 4, Cha 2

Skills: None

Feats: None

Climate/Terrain: Ethereal Plane (or
Any Forest or Swamp when on
Material Plane)

Organization: None

Challenge Rating: 2

Treasure: None

Alignment: Neutral

Advancement: 3HD Huge to 10 HD Gigantic



Description:

Looking more like a scraggly, dead vine than anything else, Tween Thorns are dull gray in coloration and wholly unremarkable. Only the proliferation of its many and often large thorns and eternally lifeless-looking leaves set it out from other plants, and even then, most folks would want to avoid it (rather than investigate further) as a result of its mere appearance.

Combat:

Mental Thorns (Su) – Ranged touch attack (+4) that causes no damage, but character must make Will save (DC 15) in order to understand chaotic thought flow.

Tween Disease (Su) – Those within 1 mile of Tween Thorns or other infect persons must make a Will save (DC 20) every 24 hours or else be infected by the plant's pollen. Effects are slow to occur, but within one week, severe mental illnesses (especially paranoia and hallucinations) begin to occur. Unless the Tween Thorn is either destroyed or persuaded to stop the mental drain, those infected die within 2 weeks.

Habitat/Society:

Very little is known about the society of the Tween Thorns, other than the fact that they are sentient. However, it is theorized that massive congregations of these plants can be found on the Ethereal plane, but exactly what the purpose of these gatherings could be. Of course functions such as mating and communication are assumed, but no such reasons have yet been proved. It is also not known if Tween Thorns can communicate with others of their kind, but this too, is assumed to be the case.

Ecology:

Tween Thorns are a natural part of the Ethereal ecology, or whatever passes for such. They subsist on a diet of potential energy that is gleaned from proto-matter, which is thought to comprise the bulk of that plane. In turn, these sentient plants provide a stable and relatively easy to harvest food base for many of the larger and more powerful creatures and inhabitants of that plane. Further, nothing is known about the reproductive habits or cycles of these elusive creatures.

New Template: Tween Thorn Hosts

Tween Thorns are sentient plants normally encountered solely on the Ethereal Plane, but can be rarely found on the Material Plane as well. Tween Thorn's normal method of communication is via a connection that it creates with an individual that is struck or jabbed by one of its numerous thorns. However, it is only when characters willingly attempt to become hosts for the plant that some alterations occur within their minds and bodies. Further, there are very specific qualifications that must be met before this alteration is considered even moderately beneficial, as detailed below.

Creating Tween Thorn Host characters:

First, only characters that agree to willingly undergo the process of hosting the sentience of the Tween Thorns will be allowed the opportunity to consume the plant's fruit. This fruit is essentially the life force and the sentience of the plant itself, and it by no means will produce it for no reason or for just anyone that happens along. Only in the darkest hour and if it means the difference between life and death for the plant; even then if the Tween Thorns do not feel that the individuals can be trusted, it will not produce the fruit.

However, once the fruit has been formed, at least three willing characters must partake of it and eat of it their entire portion. Once these conditions have been met, the host characters will immediately feel the slightly negative side effects, but will come to realize the beneficial ones within a few days.

Type: Same as base creature

Hit Dice: Same as base creature

Initiative: Same as base creature

Speed: Same as base creature

AC: Same as base creature

Attacks: Same as base creature

Damage: Same as base creature

Face/Reach: Same as base creature

Special Attacks: None

Special Qualities: Characters that become hosts for Tween Thorns will immediately notice a distinct lack of mental and physical energy. While this is not so great as to affect everyday life (or adventuring), it does create the opportunity for the player to role-play an irritable, grumpy and somewhat surly character. Also, characters will not sleep as well, and throughout the duration of the time that they are hosts, they will not dream at all.

However, within a few days of becoming hosts, the characters (minimum of three) will begin to notice that they have a means of telepathy (as per the spell) amongst them. Characters can use this ability as will, for as long as they are host of the Tween Thorns.

Saves: Same as base creature

Abilities: Same as base creature

Skills: Same as base creature

Feats: Same as base creature

Climate/Terrain: Same as base creature

Organization: Same as base creature

Challenge Rating: Same as base creature

Treasure: Same as base creature

Alignment: Same as base creature

Advancement Range: Same as base creature

Tween Thorn Host Characters: Due to the rarity of the Tween Thorns on the Material Plane, DM's should have little difficulty in balancing these sorts of characters within game play and their campaigns. Further, most characters would probably not want to remain hosts for an indefinite period of time, as the Tween Thorns prefer living in their natural environment to within a host, and will not hesitate to tell the characters as much. DM's should feel free to extrapolate any penalties that they see fit for characters that attempt to abuse this template. After all, the Tween Thorns are within the characters heads, and should be able to cause considerable pain, if so provoked. Further, as this template does not confer any class-specific abilities, it should remain open, available, and attractive to all player classes and races.

Korangar's Hoard

by Nathanael Christen

For many years the Bloodfang orc tribe was a scourge of civilization, raiding settled areas and stealing everything of value. Through many such raids, the tribe amassed quite a pile of treasure.

No creature was more aware of this fact than Korangar, the shaman who served the Bloodfang tribe. Although Korangar disliked the blood and terror of raiding, he had a well developed appreciation for the treasures that such activity could garner. Unbeknownst to his kin, the shaman sought to acquire a hoard of treasure in order to secure the services of demons. Every time the tribe conducted a raid, Korangar spirited away a bit of the booty for himself. After many months of this thievery, his own secret hoard grew to a considerable sum.

Now, Korangar was no fool. Knowing that it would be too dangerous to hide the stolen goods inside the tribe's lair, he instead converted a series of caves nearby to store his cache. In this endeavor he called upon the tribe's adept and a band of warriors for assistance, telling them that the place would serve as a secret temple and promising them gold for their silence. Soon they had constructed a well-fortified trove. Then, in true orc fashion, Korangar repaid them by murdering them.

In the end, however, Korangar was never able to enjoy his ill-begotten gains. The shaman met his end when a band of adventurers raided the tribe's lair. Had it not been for the action of the tribe's adept, Nurott, the hoard might have been lost forever. This half-orc, hoping that he might live to see the shaman's demise, gouged an inscription of the route to the cache into his crystal prism before the shaman betrayed him. After their raid on the orcs' lair the prism was claimed by the adventurers, who failed to recognize its secret and hocked it as a semi-precious bauble in the nearest marketplace. Since then it has changed hands numerous times, finally

ending up in the possession of another band of adventurers.

Nurott's Prism

The map to Korangar's hoard is etched into the side of an ordinary crystal prism, the one the adept used in casting the spell *read magic*. A DC 10 Spot check is needed to notice the strange markings on the item. Holding it up to a light source reveals what seems to be a cluster of three small hills, with a stream passing between them; at the base of one hill is marked an "x." An inscription on one side of the prism depicting the setting sun denotes west.

The Journey

Korangar's Hoard can be placed in any convenient location with the campaign setting, although it should be somewhat removed from civilization. (The town square wouldn't work so well, but a stretch of open land just beyond the surrounding farms would.) The journey can be as eventful as the DM desires, consisting of numerous encounters or none at all. Perhaps the best way to find the hoard is to identify the river depicted on the prism and then to follow it until reaching the three hills; this can be achieved with a DC 18 Knowledge: geography check. PC's might also ask about the formation of three hills, finding some information about the landform (and maybe a tale of the battle with the orcs) on a DC 18 Gather Information check.

The Hidden Temple

Arriving at the westernmost of the three hills, just where the map indicated, the PC's find Korangar's hidden temple.

1. Cave Entrance

This is a low tunnel that leads into the side of the hill. Its ceiling is only five feet high, forcing many adventurers to crouch down; it is of similar width, allowing only one character to pass at a time. Twenty feet into the cavern it is completely dark. At this point the walls are natural earth. Characters who succeed at a DC 15 Wilderness

Lore check recognize signs of habitation (bits of bone and fur); those with the Track feat can identify tracks of an unknown nature.

2. Howler Lair (EL 5)

Here the cavern becomes wider and taller (about seven feet in height). On the west side of the cavern an accumulation of fur marks the place where the howlers sleep. A natural alcove in the north wall contains a mass of chewed bones and bits of clothing, the remains of the howlers' meals.

Creatures: A pair of howlers lives here; they attack any who enter.

Howlers (2): hp 43, 37.

Tactics: The howlers, if they hear the party approaching, attempt to encircle and then attack.

Development: Beneath the bone pile lies a trapdoor, easily found by anyone who investigates the pile, amongst tatters of clothing and armor, rusted weapons and similar bits of discarded equipment. An old, rusted lock secures the trapdoor; it requires a DC 22 Open Locks check to open, or a DC 18 Strength check to break. Otherwise it has Hardness 5 and 15 hit points.

3. The Temple

The trapdoor opens onto a small antechamber; a ladder leads down to the floor twelve feet below. An archway leads into the main area of the temple, a broad rectangular chamber of neatly worked stone with a ceiling that arches twenty feet above. A series of ten pillars support the ceiling, each with a humanoid skeleton changed to it. The walls are swathed in musty, stained tapestries that depict glorious orc victories and dark rituals honoring Gruumsh. At the north end of the chamber a stone altar lies beneath a statue depicting the orc deity.

In the north wall, behind the altar, is a secret door that can be discovered on a successful Search check (DC 20). The mechanism for opening this door is contained in the altar, in the form of a small reservoir built into the blood

trough. It is magical in nature; if a sufficient amount of blood is poured onto the altar, the door swings open. Characters examining the altar might notice (DC 18 Spot check) a faint blackish residue in the vicinity of the depression, and could identify it as blood with a DC 15 Heal check.

4. Study (EL 5)

A stout wooden door grants entrance to this room; it is solidly locked, requiring a DC 30 Open Locks check to bypass. Failing this, a DC 23 Strength check can force open the door, or sufficient damage from slashing weapons (Hardness 5; 20 hp) can destroy it.

On the floor against the west wall lies a summoning circle, a raised stone platform inscribed with numerous arcane runes and sigils. A large desk occupies the north wall of this room, upon which rest a pair of tomes, one open and one closed.

Trap: The library is protected by a *glyph of warding* spell; any creature who opens the door without first uttering the words "Gruumsh be praised" suffers 3d8+7 damage from a *cause serious wounds* spell.

Creatures: The room's only inhabitant is a wraith that attacks any characters who enter the chamber.

Wraith: hp 35.

Tactics: The wraith hides in the back right corner of the room, then attacks from behind once a few characters have entered, attempting to block the doorway. (Keep in mind that its Combat Reflexes feat allows it three attacks of opportunity.)

Treasure: The open book is the text used in the worship of Gruumsh. Written in Infernal, it describes the rites and rituals used to supplicate the dark lord of orcs. Of these, the most important is a blood sacrifice performed on nights of the new moon; this rite is depicted in vivid detail in the tome. There is also a spellbook, including the following spells: *mage armor*, *obscuring mist*, *summon monster I*, *unseen servant*; *Melf's acid arrow*, *summon monster II*, *summon swarm*; *flame arrow*, *sepia snake sigil*, *summon monster III*;

Evard's black tentacles, summon monster IV; summon monster V, lesser planar binding.

The shelves against the south wall hold a complete alchemist's laboratory set. There is also a collection of chemicals and components suitable for use in alchemy. Feel free to make up appropriately mystical-sounding ingredients, such as wolf's blood, hair of the dretch and hell hound spittle.

5. Meditation Chambers (EL 5)

This area was once used by the acolytes who attended to Korangar. Each room is a bare ten-foot by ten-foot chamber.

Creatures: The rooms are now occupied by a ghast and two ghouls, the barely recognizable warriors who had once served Korangar in life and now do so in undeath.

Ghast: hp 27.

Ghouls: hp 15, 12.

Tactics: The undead attack unceasingly, rushing the first character who enters the room.

6. Secret Passage (EL 4)

Through the secret door lies a natural passage. Due to seepage this area has filled with slimy mud; the muck is three feet deep, slowing movement to one quarter normal. The muck is three feet deep in the middle, and about a foot and half on the sides. Due to the amount of moisture in the chamber, treat the walls as slippery (DC 25 Climb check).

Creatures: In the time since the temple was used, a gray ooze has taken up residence in this area.

Gray Ooze: hp 27.

Tactics: The ooze, having not had a meal in some time, fights unceasingly.

Development: Keep in mind the rules for drowning in this area if any character is incapacitated.

7. Treasure Chamber

A secret stone door seals the entrance to this chamber (a DC 20 search check is needed to find it). Beside it stands a life-size statue of a massive orc. This statue is the key to the secret door; if its left eye is pried free, the door swings open. Inside is a natural stone chamber; it is unremarkable, but for the two chests that rest against the north wall. The chests are locked with good quality (DC 25) padlocks.

Treasure: The chests contain Korangar's accumulated treasures: 6000 sp, 1250 gp, four onyxes (400 gp each), a *ring of protection* +2, a *greataxe* +1, a *potion of love*, a scroll containing *hold person* and *summon monster III*, and a *Heward's handy haversack*.

Appendix

Full monster statistics are provided here for easy reference.

Howlers (2): CR 4; Large outsider (Chaotic, Evil); HD 6d8+12; hp43, 37; Init +7; Spd 60 ft.; AC 17; touch 17, flat-footed 14 [-1 size, +3 Dex, +5 natural]; Atk +10 melee (2d8+5, bite), 1d4 quills +5 melee (1d4+2); SQ Quills, howl; Face/Reach 5 ft. by 10 ft./5 ft.; AL CE; SV Fort +7, Ref +8, Will +7; Str 21, Dex 17, Con 15, Int 6, Wis 14, Cha 8.

Skills and Feats: Climb +10, Hide +8, Listen +11, Move Silently +8, Search +1, Spot +4; Alertness, Improved Initiative.

Wraith: CR 5; Medium-size undead (Incorporeal); HD 5d12; hp 35; Init +7; Spd 30 ft., fly 60 ft.; AC 15; touch 15, flat-footed 15 [+3 Dex, +2 deflection]; Atk +5 melee (1d4, touch); SQ Constitution drain, create spawn, undead, incorporeal, +2 turn resistance, unnatural aura, daylight powerlessness; Face/Reach 5 ft. by 5 ft./5 ft.; AL LE; SV Fort +1, Ref +4, Will +6; Str --, Dex 16, Con --, Int 14, Wis 14, Cha 15.

Skills and Feats: Hide +11, Intimidate +10, Intuit Direction +6, Listen +12, Search +10, Sense Motive +8, Spot +12; Alertness, Blind-Fight, Combat Reflexes, Improved Initiative.

Ghouls (2): CR 1; Medium-Size Undead; HD 2d12; hp 15, 12; Init +2; Spd 30 ft.; AC 14; touch 14, flat-footed 12 [+2 Dex, +2 natural]; Atk +3 melee (1d6+1, bite) and 2 claws +0 melee (1d3); SQ Paralysis, create spawn, undead, +2 turn resistance; Face/Reach 5 ft. by 5 ft./5 ft.; AL CE; SV Fort +0, Ref +2,

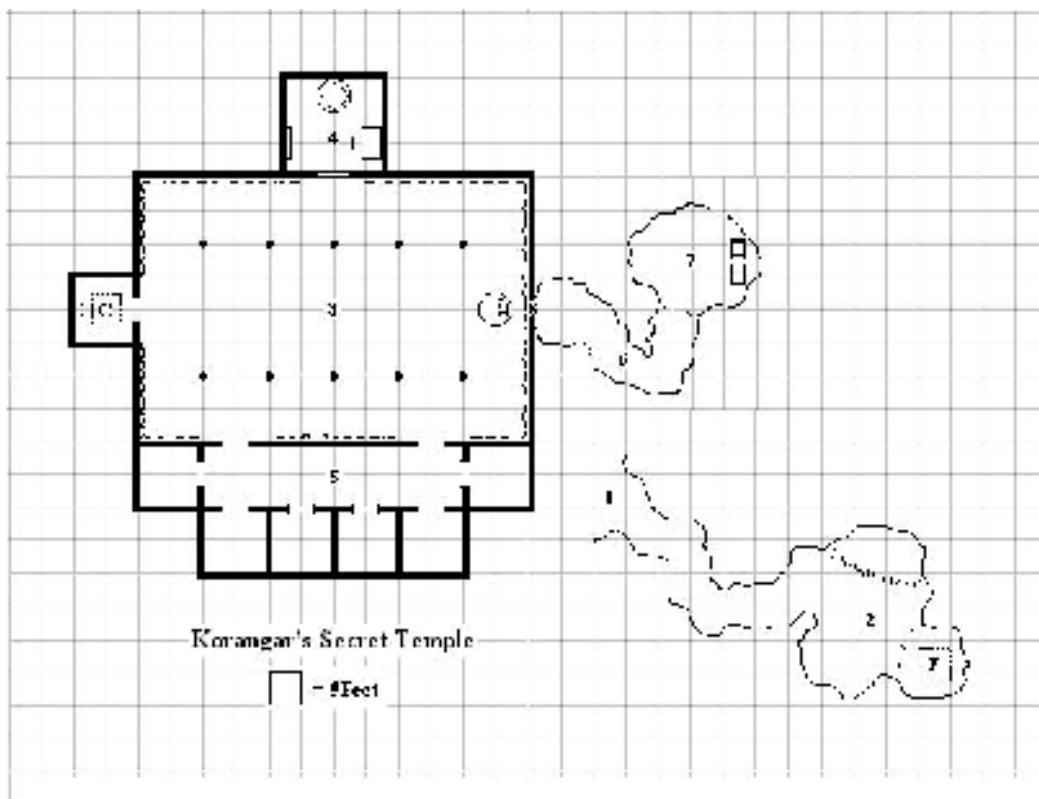
Will +5; Str 13, Dex 15, Con --, Int 13, Wis 14, Cha 16.

Skills and Feats: Climb +6, Escape Artist +7, Hide +7, Intuit Direction +3, Jump +6, Listen +7, Move Silently +7, Search +6, Spot +7; Multiattack, Weapon Finesse (bite).

Ghast: CR 3; Medium-Size Undead; HD 4d12; hp 26; Init +2; Spd 30 ft.; AC 16; touch 16, flat-footed 14 [+2 Dex, +4 natural]; Atk +4 melee (1d8+1, bite) and 2 claws +1 melee (1d4); SQ Stench, paralysis, create spawn, undead, +2 turn resistance; Face/Reach 5 ft. by 5 ft./5 ft.; AL CE; SV Fort +1, Ref +3, Will +6; Str 13, Dex 15, Con --, Int 13, Wis 14, Cha 16.

Skills and Feats: Climb +6, Escape Artist +8, Hide +8, Intuit Direction +3, Jump +6, Listen +8, Move Silently +7, Search +6, Spot +8; Multiattack, Weapon Finesse (bite).

Gray Ooze: CR 4; Medium-Size Ooze; HD 3d10+10; hp 27; Init -5; Spd 10 ft.; AC 5; touch 5, flat-footed 5 [-5 Dex]; Atk +3 melee (1d6+1, slam); SQ Improved grab, acid, corrosion, constrict, blindsight, cold and fire immunity, ooze, camouflage; Face/Reach 5 ft. by 5 ft./5 ft.; AL N; SV Fort +1, Ref -4, Will -4; Str 12, Dex 1, Con 11, Int --, Wis 1, Cha 1.



Nurott's Inscription