



Bits of the Wilderness™:

Into the Wildwood

Writers:

K. H. Keeler
Christopher A. Field
Daniel Brakhage
Deborah Balsam
Matt Blakeley
Rodney Lucas
Martin Ralya
John Walsh
Brian Williams
Mark Potter
Vicki Potter
Christopher Welsh

Artists:

Cover Artwork by
Gillian Pearce

Original Interior Artwork by
Christine Griffin

Cover Layout by
Edward Wedig

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Bits of the Wildwood

01. This area of forest is dense with thin young trees. The trunks are barely three inches in diameter and they fill the space, so there are hundreds of them on all sides of you. The young trees are about 30 feet tall and form a complete canopy blocking out the sun. All the trunks are about the same size, and they are so dense that for a bit, you cannot get everyone off the trail even if you want to. Individuals could [dismount and] pick their way between the trees, but it would be slow going.

02. You hear a sudden crash and see a flash of light as the leaves are forced aside and reflect the sunlight. The drumming of hooves tells the tale as a stag flees the intruders to his woods.

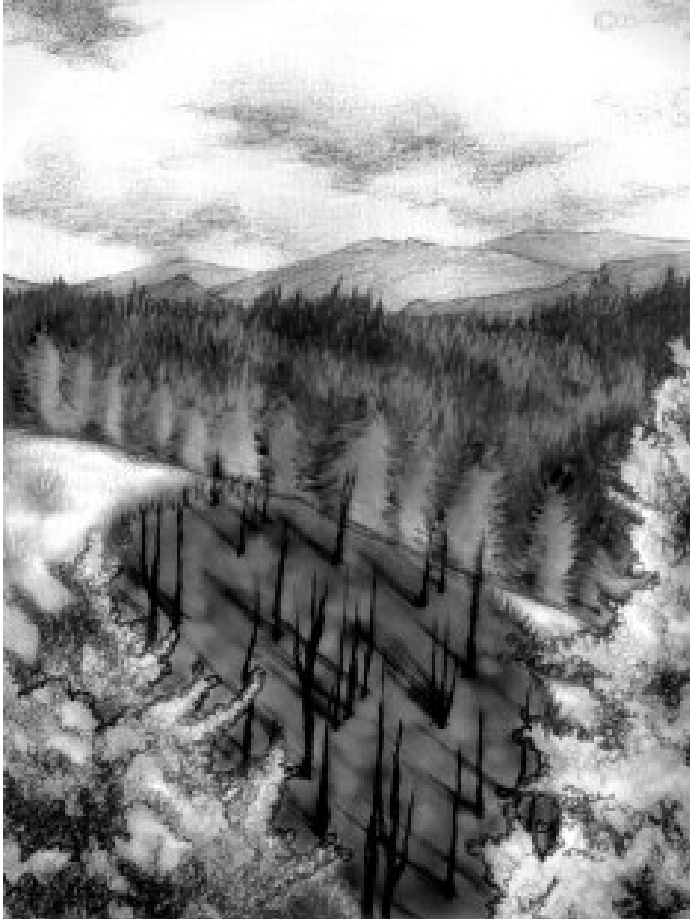
03. As the path meanders around a corner, you see a ring of toadstools just off the path ahead of you. Some call such a thing a “faerie ring” and claim it leads to the lands of the fey. Others believe it is simply an odd formation of mushrooms, either edible or, possibly, poisonous. Thinking about it, you almost believe you can smell freshly brewed ale as you get closer – or is that the scent of roasting meat? And is that just a trick of the light, or is there a shimmering form in the toadstool ring? [The GM can have the smells be illusory products of self-deception or use this to lead into a faerie encounter.]

04. The path you are on narrows to an animal trail only a forearm’s length wide. You can make some effort to move more quietly if you move in single file and go carefully along this path. That choice might actually be faster than going side by side and blazing new trails. If you spread out to make your way through the deadfall and underbrush, it will be a struggle and you will make considerably more noise.

Anyone not on the path will move slowly and grow fatigued very rapidly. If you have to fight here it will have to be close in with thrusting weapons. Any attempt to swing a long sword or other long weapon would have a good chance of being caught in the branches and dry vines. Wherever you are, you could stand and reach out with a long sword and touch a tree trunk – or several.

05. You hear a loud cracking noise and a branch suddenly falls from about head height, just in front of the party, narrowly missing you. The smell of dry wood and of soot reaches you. Looking over to your left, you see the lightning-scarred tree from which the branch fell. The damage to the great oak is extensive, but seems awfully low to the ground. How could a bolt of lightning miss the great crown and just strike the trunk where it did? The question quickly leaves your mind, though, as you hear further snapping and cracking from the tree and see it begin to topple towards you.

06. The forest around you seems wrong. Unnatural. Anyone with knowledge of nature would be especially disconcerted by the trees you have been passing through, though it is only slowly that you are beginning to realize why. The trees are a little too evenly spaced, with too little undergrowth around them. The trees themselves appear too regular, too similar in size and even shape. As you look around, taking it in, the forest seems more like an orderly garden than something that has grown up on its own. You see no signs of civilization, no signs of cultivation, but the natural chaos of the forest seems to have been replaced by an unnatural orderliness. [The GM can have this continue for a few hundred yards or several miles, and then just end suddenly without explanation.]



83. You have come suddenly to a spot of forest where the trees are blackened and dead. The edge is abrupt; outside this area the trees seem untouched, inside they are thoroughly burned. In this area, a nearly circular patch about 40 feet across, every tree is burned, base to crown, the leaves and smaller branches all missing. The shrubs and herbs on the ground were incinerated as well. The fire appears to have occurred this year because no live plants have colonized the devastated area. There is a lingering smoky smell but it seems residual, not recent. [This was the site of a fireball.]

84. The woodland creatures are uncomfortably quiet today. No squirrels chatter, and the birds are silent. Even the expected drone of insects is missing. You do not know if it because you and your companions are passing, or whether it is due to something else more menacing.

85. As you hike through the woods you notice a number of deer tracks that go off to the west. You can smell the pine trees that stand all around you and a thick bed of needles blankets the forest floor. You note that the land in front of you seems to be quite flat and you can see a good distance through this sparsely wooded place.

86. Birds sit in the trees, singing as you journey through the woods. You hear the rat-a-tat-tat of a woodpecker at work, and then spot him toiling away on the light-brown wood of a sycamore tree. He stops, apparently at the sound of your foot-falls, and cocks his head in your direction. All around you, you can sense the myriad forms of life that dwell in this forest.

87. The vegetation is thick and the path greatly overhung by leafy branches. The location of the trail is pretty clearly marked by blazes on the trees, but trees and shrubs have grown down into and up out of the trail, making it difficult to travel even when you know clearly where it is. You duck under branches, or weave to avoid them. Despite your best efforts, you are stung by spiny leaves and your clothes scraped and ripped by branches with long thorns. Hacking at them with knives would make passage easier but it would be very slow.

88. Standing stones as high as a grown man's knee line the path. The smooth boulders are dominated by a single spiraling glyph carved into their face, which may represent a blessing for travelers – or a warning. Underneath the runes are a series of dots and dashes which may have meaning to someone, but not to you.

89. A jagged shard of unpainted wood has been driven into a low mound of earth just off the forest path. A badly misspelled message gouged into the impromptu grave marker with a dull knife announces “Justen, a pedlur dyd heer. Gods rest hm.”



Shards of the Wildwood

Common Locations

1. *Tangled Entrance*

You stand at the edge of a thick, dark forest. The trees stand close together and there appears to be no discernable path that you can follow into this tangle of vegetation. Greens and browns of every hue fill your vision, and the smell of green life permeates the air around you.

2. *Well-used Entrance*

The clouds overhead darken as you approach the forest. A well-worn path, about twelve feet wide, leads into the woods. The path is so washed out that you can't recognize any definite tracks of either man or beast. Suddenly, in the distance, you hear the howl of a wolf coming from within the forest.

3. *Entering from the heat*

The sun stands high in the blue sky as you draw near the edge of a wooded region. You can feel the heat of the yellow orb beating down on your skin. Sweat beads up wherever your skin meets clothing and your brow moistens as you stare at the forest.

4. *Quiet Entrance*

The path leads down into [through] the forest of tall trees. Most of the ground is blanketed with dry, russet-colored needles, though piles of dead leaves also gather among the large, gnarled roots of the trees. The ceiling of the forest allows only isolated pillars of light from above and the sun pools in small circles about your feet. Your footsteps make quiet crunching sounds along the spongy path. You hear the industrious tapping of a woodpecker far in the distance, and the flutter of many wings from the forest ceiling above. The air is very still and despite the darkness of

the woods it is becoming warmer as you walk.

5. *Stream and Pond*

Traveling along, as you scan the area, you think that you hear the sound of water, as if from a rippling stream. The sound is coming from directly in front of you. [If the adventurers follow the sounds of the water:] You advance only about fifty yards further when the sound becomes more distinct. As you move around a particularly large tree you see the source of the noise. About twenty yards ahead of you there is a large pool of water, big enough to call a pond, but too small to describe as a lake. [If the party advances further:] A stream is feeding the pond on the opposite side from where you stand. It strikes you as odd that although the gurgling rivulet is running into the pool of water, there is no stream running out.

[If the group has some knowledge of nature it may deduce the following:] **You know that water must be leaving the pond from somewhere, or else it would continuously rise and flood the area, which doesn't seem to be happening. Your only guess is that there must be an egress below the surface of the water where the overflow makes its way underground to some unknown destination. [The GM may decide that the hidden waterway pathway leads to an underground cavern or all the way to another stream that resurfaces elsewhere.] The sun holds sway here due to the size of the pond, and you can see about ten feet down into the clear water, but beyond that you can't tell how deep this pool goes. [The water is fresh and drinkable. The pond is about thirty feet deep and the cavern that leads underground is at the bottom]. As you take in the scene, you know that you must move on, but this does seem like a good place for a short rest.**

As you hike through the woods you notice a number of deer tracks that go off to the west. You can smell the pine trees that stand all around you and a thick bed of needles blankets the forest floor. You note that the land in front of you seems to be quite flat and you can see a good distance through this sparsely wooded place.

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Birds sit in the trees, singing as you journey through the woods. You hear the rat-a-tat-tat of a woodpecker at work, and then spot him toiling away on the light-brown wood of a sycamore tree. He stops, apparently at the sound of your foot-falls, and cocks his head in your direction. All around you, you can sense the myriad forms of life that dwell in this forest.

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You've been walking for quite some time through this thickly wooded area. As you have moved up and down small hills and vales you've noticed that this forest is alive with sights, smells, and sounds. Though you haven't actually seen any animals larger than small birds, you have heard the calls of wolves, or wild dogs. You've also seen the spoor of deer, rabbit, and possibly bear on the ground as you've delved deeper into the woods.

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CREATURES OF THE FOREST: Whistler in the Forest

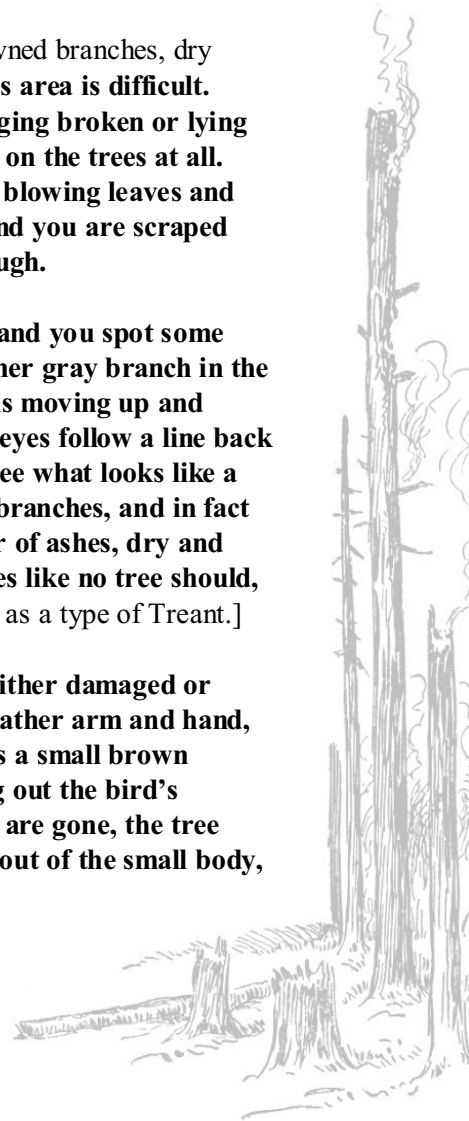
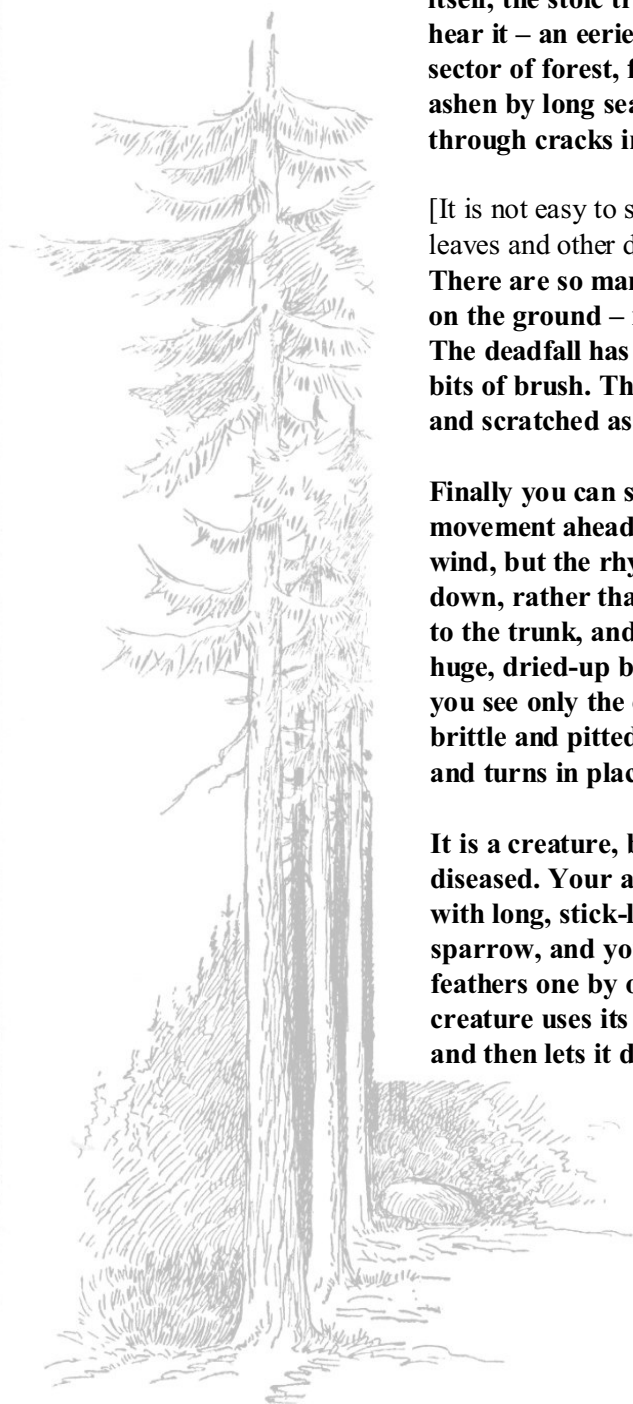
Introduction:

The area of the forest into which you have traveled is very still; no birds call, no deer forage. Aside from the plants, swaying silently in the breeze, there is no sound, no movement. In fact, there is no sign of animal life at all – not a squirrel, not even an insect, just the forest itself, the stoic trees and the swaying of massive branches. Then you hear it – an eerie whistling sound, coming from the deepest, oldest sector of forest, from somewhere within a stand of dead trees made ashen by long seasons. It sounds almost like the wind whistling through cracks in the ancient rotting oaks. Almost.

[It is not easy to see past the dead trees, due to downed branches, dry leaves and other deadfall.] **Movement through this area is difficult. There are so many dead branches around – hanging broken or lying on the ground – it is a wonder there are any left on the trees at all. The deadfall has captured more bits and pieces, blowing leaves and bits of brush. The result is practically a maze, and you are scraped and scratched as you try to push your way through.**

Finally you can see through into a clearer area, and you spot some movement ahead. At first it just seems like another gray branch in the wind, but the rhythm is wrong, and the branch is moving up and down, rather than swaying in any breeze. Your eyes follow a line back to the trunk, and then up to the top where you see what looks like a huge, dried-up bird's nest. There are no upper branches, and in fact you see only the one. The tree's bark is the color of ashes, dry and brittle and pitted with insect holes. Then it moves like no tree should, and turns in place. [Adventurers may recognize it as a type of Treant.]

It is a creature, but if it is related to trees, it is either damaged or diseased. Your attention goes to its branch, or rather arm and hand, with long, stick-like fingers. Its other hand holds a small brown sparrow, and you can now see that it is plucking out the bird's feathers one by one. When all the large feathers are gone, the tree creature uses its nimble fingers to crush the life out of the small body, and then lets it drop to the ground.





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