Forest Path

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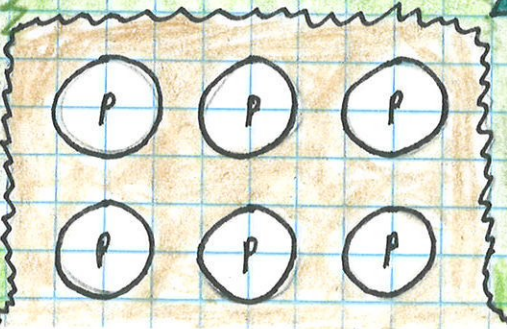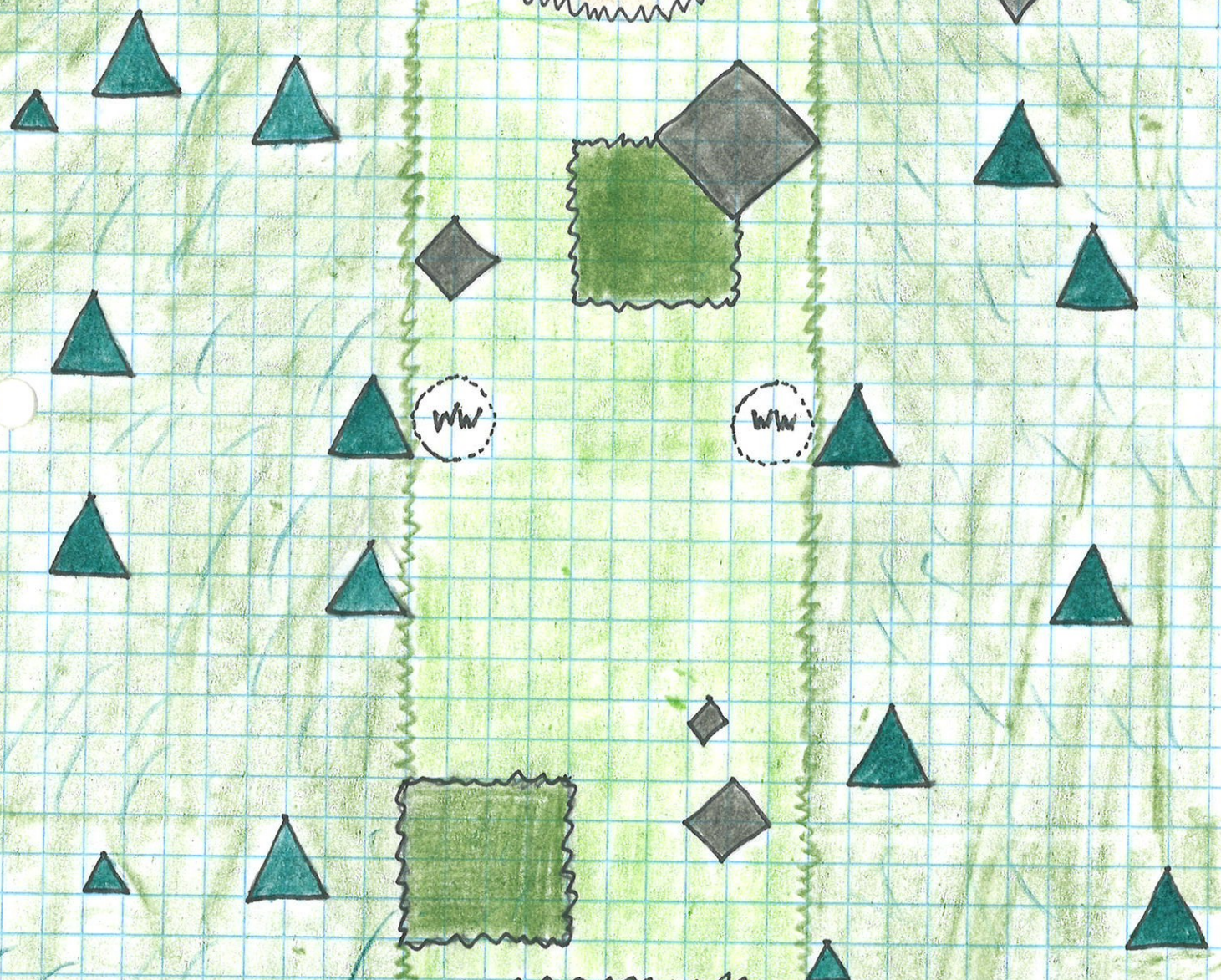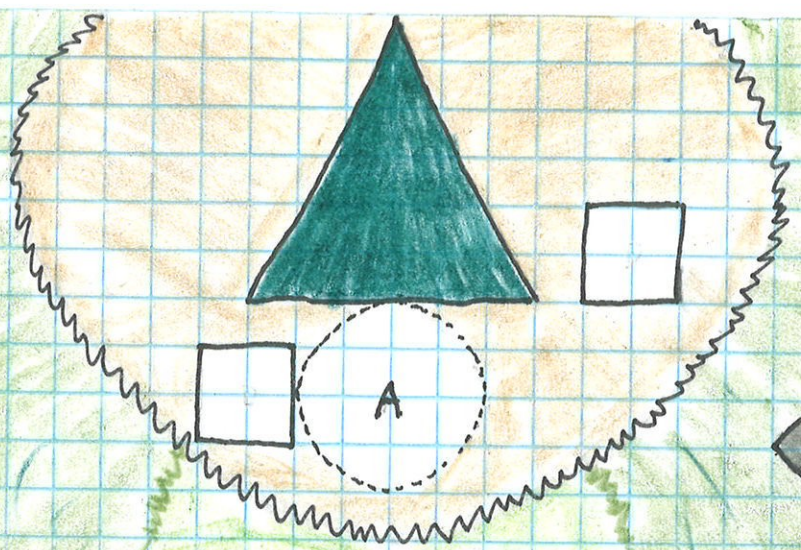
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<u>**Low-to-Mid-Level (Levels 1-10) Encounter for *Dungeons & Dragons, 5th edition***</u>

The players are monster hunters for a local guild. A bounty has been placed by a nearby circle of wood elf druids on an alkilith (see ***Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes*** for stats): a demonic black ooze that grows around doorways, windows, and other portals. The druids offer 200 gold pieces to each adventurer who helps to slay the alkilith. The guild demands a vial of the alkilith's ooze as proof of the kill.

Upon arriving at the edges of the druids' forest, the party is greeted by Archdruid Tyto. No map is required for this stage of the journey, since the druids are intended as a social (non-combat) encounter. Tyto is dressed similarly to the other druids, other than he is also adorned with a cloak and helmet that seem to be made from barn owl feathers. The Archdruid greets the party and thanks them for agreeing to take the contract. The players can respond to Archdruid Tyto however they wish, but the Archdruid conveys two key pieces of information.

First, the alkilith is feeding off the druids' sacred tree at the heart of the forest. The sacred tree contains a portal to the Feywild, and the alkilith has been feeding off the extradimensional energies. Archdruid Tyto fears that the alkilith will not only cut off their main link to the naturalistic energies of the Feywild, but also corrupt the planar rift into a portal to its home dimension: the evil and chaotic Abyss. The Archdruid begs the party not to allow their sacred tree to come to any harm, and to remove the alkilith.

Second, Archdruid Tyto wishes to collect a sample of the alkilith. The druids wish to learn how to prevent future incursions by demons into their sacred forest. In exchange for bringing back an extra vial of the alkilith's ooze for the druids, Archdruid Tyto will award 25 gold pieces to each party member.

With Archdruid Tyto warning about the dangerous creatures that occupy the forest (especially now without the druids to keep watch), the party embarks into the forest. The first stage is the Forest Path map. Each 1x1 square unit on the map represents 2.5 feet by 2.5 feet. Thus, a 2x2 square is 5 feet by 5 feet. The party arrives at the southern (bottom) edge of the map. Starting positions for the players are indicated by circles with a "P" inside them. The path is dirt and indicated on the map with brown. Off the path in light green is the vegetation of the forest floor. Players can deviate from the path if they wish, but the Dungeon Master should notify them that doing so will likely draw greater attention to the party. If the party travels off the path, the enemies in this stage roll with Advantage for Wisdom (Perception) checks, due to the noise generated by the party's movements. The path branches off in two directions: west (left) and east (right).

The Western Path
The western path is heavily trapped. Three traps are strung between three pairs of trees (as indicated by the dotted line between two tree icons). A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals a tripwire just three inches off the ground. Following the tripwire with a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check will reveal the 10-foot long and 5-foot wide tree log that will come swinging down onto whoever is unlucky enough to trigger the trap. An unsuccessful Investigation check will lead to no further information about the nature of the trap.

A party member with thieves' tools can successfully disable the tripwire with a successful DC 15 Dexterity check.

Upon a failed Wisdom (Perception) check to notice the trap or a failed Dexterity check to disable it, the trap activates and any adventurers within the trap's line must make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw. The party member takes full damage (1d10 or 5 bludgeoning) and is knocked prone on a failed save. On a successful save, the party member takes half the damage and is not knocked prone.

Up in one of the trees for the first trap resides a grung (see ***Volo's Guide to Monsters*** for stats): an aggressive and fiercely-territorial frog-like humanoid. The grung resides in the tree, unless combat is triggered (the dotted circle marked "G" on the western path is where the grung will hop down onto the ground). The party can possibly sneak by the grung with a high enough Dexterity (Stealth) check vs. the grung's opposed Wisdom (Perception) check. If a trap was triggered, it alerts the grung and it sounds the alarm to its tribe.

The Eastern Path
Suspiciously, the eastern path is lacking in the traps of the western path. This is because (as indicated by the dotted circles marked "G", "GW", and "GEW") there are three grungs lying in wait along the eastern path. A passive or active DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check can reveal the grungs in the treetops. The party can attempt to sneak by the grungs with an opposed Dexterity (Stealth) check against the grungs' Wisdom (Perception) check. If the grungs' Perception should outweigh the party's Stealth, the grung elite warrior will fire an arrow at the party and combat will be initiated.

Combat Encounter: Grung Tribe
Whether the single grung is alerted on the western path or the three lying in wait on the eastern path attack, the party must now fight the tree-dwelling amphibians. The number and type of grungs can be modified to lower or increase difficulty of the fight (depending on the party's levels). This summary assumes that the tribe consists of two green grungs, a red grung wildling, and a gold grung elite warrior. Green grungs are the tribe's warriors, hunters, and laborers. Red grungs are the tribe's scholars, shamans, and magic-users. These grung wildlings are a higher caste than the green grungs. Gold grungs are the highest caste, and the grung elite warrior is the tribe's leader.

Grungs seek to capture and enslave other creatures. Grungs use slaves for menial tasks, and bossing slaves around is a favorite grung pastime. These grungs are no different, and they will seek to incapacitate the party with venom and non-lethal blows. The green grungs will attack with daggers, while the grung wildling and grung elite warrior prefer to attack at range with spells and shortbow (respectively).

Upon defeating the grungs, the players may wish to loot the bodies. Grung daggers and arrows are poisoned with their venom, but the venom will lose its potency after 1 minute. The Shaman's Staff magic item can be looted from the grung wildling. In addition to acting as an arcane focus for spellcasters, the Shaman's Staff allows the wielder to cast the Spike Growth spell twice per

long rest. Those who try to harvest the grungs for venom can attempt a DC 12 Intelligence (Nature) check to harvest the grung poison (which again, is only potent for 1 minute).

The party might end up being defeated by the grungs, in which case they will awake towards the end of the eastern path in the grung's village (indicated on the map by the four squares). Grungs prefer the shade of trees, but grungs need to immerse themselves in water at least 1 hour per day, or they suffer 1 point of exhaustion. These ground-level pools are covered and somewhat hidden, and it helps explain why three out of the four grungs were guarding the eastern path. The Dungeon Master might decide that the party was all poisoned to lull them into lethargic complacency. On a failed DC 12 Constitution saving throw, the grung venom deals 2d4 or 5 poison damage. The gold grung leader's venom also charms the poisoned creature and gives them the ability to speak the Grung language (so that the new slave can follow orders). Players can attempt to shrug off the poison's effects with another DC 12 Constitution save at the end of each of their turns.

Before the grungs can attempt to poison the party again (or boss around their new slaves, depending on the player's rolls), the grungs are forced to deal with the monstrosity at the end of the path.

End of the Path
If the grungs have been defeated or avoided, the players might discover the grung village at the end of the eastern path. With the village now unguarded, the players can search the covered pools to discover stocked supplies, such as four common healing potions. However, the players may wish to deal with the final threat along the path.

As the western and eastern paths merge back together, an owlbear (see ***Basic Rules*** for stats) is resting (or prowling around, depending on how noisy the party has been). The owlbear's starting location is the large circle marked with an "O". A party that rouses the grungs and engages them in combat might stir the owlbear, which provokes the creature to charge toward the sounds of battle.

If the party was captured by the grungs, the owlbear attacks the grung village. If charmed by grung venom, the party might feel compelled to aid the grungs in fighting off the beast. Party members not charmed might try to sneak away while the owlbear and grungs fight it out.

If the grungs have already been dealt with (or avoided), the players might try to sneak past the owlbear with an opposed Dexterity (Stealth) check against the owlbear's Wisdom (Perception) check. However, because of the owlbear's Keen Sight and Smell granting Advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks, a fight is likely inevitable.

Combat Encounter: Owlbear
The owlbear is deadly and ferocious, and it attacks without provocation. The owlbear will attempt to limit the party's escape routes by corralling them into a dead-end like the grung village or the clearing at the center of the path. The party can use the owlbear's stubborn aggression to their advantage by goading it into traps and ambushes.

If the players wish to loot the owlbear, they can make a DC Intelligence (Nature) check to harvest some of the owlbear's feathers, which are useful fletching for arrows.

After the owlbear is defeated, the Dungeon Master should recommend that the players heal up and rest before continuing on. The next combat encounter could be deadly.

The Sacred Tree
As the party continues north, they begin to notice the dirt path begin to be overtaken with more and more of the grass and plants of the forest. The players arrive on the Sacred Tree map as the dirt path ends at the south (bottom) of the map, and the path transitions into a narrow forest clearing. The clearing has dark green patches of tall grass (which certain characters can Hide in), and the grey diamonds mark rocks that players must either move around or climb. The forest floor is surrounded by denser foliage on both sides (marked in dark green on the map), and about 90 feet up (north) is a huge tree: bigger and taller than any other in the forest. The party can easily surmise that this is the druids' sacred tree. The forest floor around the sacred tree has been cleared into a dirt circle, with a small ring of stones around it.

Upon a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check, the party can notice a strange black ichor-like ooze bubbling around a knot on the tree. The party can determine that the ooze is the alkilith, and the tree-knot is the Feywild portal mentioned by Archdruid Tyto. A successful DC 18 Wisdom (Perception) check will reveal to the party member that some of the trees appear to be shifting unnaturally…almost like they're alive?

The party must now find some way to lure the alkilith from the sacred tree. They can attempt a Dexterity (Stealth) check to sneak up on the alkilith. However, in the center of the clearing are two trees, each with a wood woad (see *Volo's Guide to Monsters* for stats) camouflaged and lying in wait (the wood woads blend in with the trees and will appear in the dotted circles marked "WW" when attacking). The wood woads will make opposing Wisdom (Perception) checks to keep an eye out for intruders, and attempting to sneak around the long way through the denser forest on the sides will grant Advantage to the forest guardians. Once the wood woads become aware of the party or the alkilith and/or sacred tree is attacked, the wood woads will attack.

Combat Encounter: Wood Woads and Alkilith
Wood woads are plants that are created when a humanoid gives up their life and places their soul into a tree…becoming an eternal guardian for the woodlands. However, upon closer inspection, these wood woads have bits of the same black ooze as the alkilith, seeping from beneath their bark. These wood woads have become corrupted by the alkilith: their duty to protect the sacred tree perverted by demonic influence.

The alkilith will prefer to let its wood woad guardians do all the fighting for it, but if its attention is drawn (for example, by killing one or both of the wood woads), it will depart the sacred tree and deal with the party personally.

The alkilith and the wood woads are intended to be a difficult and potentially deadly fight. The alkilith can avoid obstacles in its path by seeping into the ground, and the wood woads regain hit

points until they take fire damage. However, the Dungeon Master is free to add or subtract the difficulty by modifying the stats of these creatures. The combat can be made more difficult by allowing the alkilith to split into two independent oozes or by allowing the wood woads to share in the alkilith's immunity to poison damage. Alternatively, the fight can be made easier by removing certain abilities (for example, the alkilith's Foment Madness ability) or adding new weaknesses (for example, susceptibility in both the alkilith and the wood woads to radiant damage).

Upon being killed, the Dungeon Master should warn the players that the alkilith will evaporate and no ooze will be left to collect if they wait too long (longer than 1 minute). If the alkilith is killed before the wood woads, the wood woads can make a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, the wood woad will continue to fight in order to avenge its fallen master. Upon a successful save, the wood woad manages to purge the alkilith's evil influence from itself. The wood woad will thank the party in the Sylvan language and permit them to take samples of the alkilith's now evaporating ooze. However, the wood woad will not permit the party to enter the druids' circle around the sacred tree (which it is charged to protect). Failure to heed this warning will result in the freed wood woad reinitiating combat.

In the druids' circle around the sacred tree are two opportunities for loot. The druids clearly did not abandon the sacred tree without a fight, as the druids' circle is littered with at least half-a-dozen partially-dissolved elven corpses. Searching for gold or weapons reveals a corpse with elven-made arrows and daggers. Searching for armor or magic items yields a corpse with Boots of Speed (see *Basic Rules* for stats).

Ending the Adventure
The party returns to Archdruid Tyto, who thanks them for their heroism in defeating the alkilith. If the party remembered to grab an extra vial of ooze, the Archdruid will reward 25 gold pieces to each party member.

If the players failed to obtain any vials of ooze, then the guild and druids will both refuse to pay. If the sacred tree was damaged (or worse, destroyed) in any significant way, the druids will refuse to pay and will no longer speak with the party.

Either way, the party returns to the guild for either the promised 200 gold pieces each, or a scolding for angering the druids. Whether for a job well done or to make up for this adventure's losses, the guild assigns the party their next contract.