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WINTER'S BITE

Sample file





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This adventure takes place in the winter months in a small village that lies just within the bounds of the wilderness. It involves some overland adventures, a few village encounters, and a short dungeon. This is an adventure designed for **3-5 characters of 3rd level**. Some type of arcane spell casters, divine spell casters, or holy warriors are helpful though not necessary. If you are playing this adventure in the world of Aihrde, it takes place in the Tar Kiln, just north of the Kingdom of Kayomar. The people here are not citizens of the paladin's realm, but enjoy the protection of its knights when they venture north to score some deed or earn some renown.

In the sprawling community of Springwood Terrace, where men and halflings dwell, one with the other, along the fast moving, but shallow Spring River, there has come a nightmare. A creature of tremendous stealth haunts the river folk. It steals into homes and snatches the unwary—pets at times, children at others. Worse still, the creature robs the dead of their teeth and leaves no sign.

Speculation runs rampant as to the identity of the creature. Could it be an apparition? Some fiend of the old world? A black-hearted fey? Few can tell for few have seen it, and those who have, see only the dark shadows of its flight. The river people hide now, they seal their doors with wax every night, stamped with the local witch's rune magic. They do not fish or hunt save when the sun is out, making sure they are tucked in before the close of dusk. They flee from storms and hard weather. What it is, they do not know, only that they need help.

This adventure can be inserted into any ongoing campaign by simply changing the names of the village and river, or by inserting both into the campaign. It is perfect as a bridging adventure between other adventures more germane to the CK's overall plans. The eldritch goblin they encounter, called the Toothman, can become a recurring villain with little or no effort.

SALIENT POINTS

- ☞ An eldritch goblin, Oisoth, has escaped his prison.
- ☞ Wild animals are killed.
- ☞ A creature has been seen spying on villagers.
- ☞ Merryman, the halfling stripling, has gone missing
- ☞ Fleckworth, one of the villagers, has been murdered and his teeth pulled.
- ☞ Elizabeth, a young girl of 8, is stolen from her room. The goblin is spotted.
- ☞ Wit, a young boy, is taken while fox hunting. His father goes mad.
- ☞ Rangers discover the Harrow Tree is occupied but are killed by Oisoth.
- ☞ The tinker is slain and his teeth taken.

- ☞ The baby Peppy is kidnapped in front of her mother.
- ☞ The village is locked up and seeks help from any quarter.

INTRODUCTION

An eldritch goblin, Oisoth, terrorizes the town. The creature has recently escaped a stone prison that lay long buried some miles north of the town, guarded by an old stone door built within the bole of an ancient tree the locals call the Harrow Tree. The villagers, aware of the stone door and the tree, rarely speak of it, believing local legends that call it a gateway to Hell. They avoid it like the plague. Oisoth has turned the tree into his home and the dungeon where he lay bound, into his own vile prison.

Oisoth has kidnapped three villagers, two children and one halfling. He uses magical rings, called *transporter gates*, to spirit his victims to his dungeon. One of the rings he carries on him, the other is set upon a stone bench in the dungeon. Once the victim is spirited away, he follows suit, returning to the dungeon, leaving no trace behind him.

NOTE: These transporter gates are unlike those found in *Monsters & Treasure* in that they are limited by charges. Each use of the rings expends one charge, and once the charges are exhausted, they cease to be magical. If and when the PCs discover the rings, there will only be 24 charges remaining.

When Oisoth escaped his binding, he opened the door from the inside, crawled up into the cavity of the tree and from there looked out upon a world unfamiliar, wet, cold, and not a little miserable. He left his prison and began to look for his teeth, as he had been doing before his binding. He slew some animals, taking their teeth to see if they matched his, even believing that the animals had stolen his, and that these may be those he lost.

One afternoon, after cruelly mutilating a rabbit and contemplating its teeth, he spied some hunters crossing a field. He took to their trail and followed them home to their unwallied village along the river. Awaiting nightfall, he crept into the town to see what was afoot. He listened at windows, spied through half hung curtains, climbed atop roofs, and pressing his ear to the thrush listened to what unfolded. The contentment and overall happiness of the people fouled his mood more than it usually was fouled, and it opened within him a door of hate that he had never fully closed.

He spied upon them for many days and when he began to know them and see them, he took note that many of them, most if not all, had clean, strong teeth. This enraged him, for he had lost his long ago and had spent many ages of the world searching for them. Envy now consumed him, and his spying turned evil.

At first, he stole things. Items the people might find valuable. An axe from a woodcutter, a break from a cart, lids to barrels, and other many mundane things. This proved little more





than a nuisance to his victims, so he turned to more nefarious actions. Several pets fell to his malice. An old milk cow was led from the barn and into the wild where wolves took it. Then, a halfling stripling, out for a night hunt, fell afoul of Oisoth and he was taken. Oisoth did not slay the halfling, but took him to his dungeon and passing into the door through its secret lever he imprisoned him. There he promised to take his teeth and fill his bag with them.

Next, he murdered a villager. Catching the young man out in the dawn he slew him, pulled his teeth, and fled into the dark.

The villagers were horrified. They sent their two rangers far afield looking for signs but there were none. They again failed to approach the Harrow Tree, for the trails to it were cold with no sign of coming or going all around it. A week later a child vanished from her bed, taken into the night. This time, however, the goblin was seen. The little girl's brother saw the creature as it dropped out of the window, and he described a small, twisted man of green mottled skin, a half-closed eye, and a toothless mouth. He wore a necklace of teeth, and a crown too, and teeth hung about his body.

After that, the villagers took to calling him Toothman, and thus he terrified the town for all the long summer and autumn, killing animals, leaving toothless carcasses about, and spying on any and all fool enough to venture forth at night.

After the girl was taken, the villagers took guard and began locking doors and barring windows. They employed the local witch to create rune magic to guard their homes from the depredations of whatever this creature was. And so, she did. Thus, all took to a more careful living.

Some months passed and though no sign of the two missing victims had manifested it seemed as if the worst of it had passed. It had not. As the cold descended, the Toothman's reign of terror returned. A horse went this time, then a favored cat. Eventually, the goblin struck the people once more, this time taking a child named Wit, who had snuck out of his house to hunt fox in the local grove. The boy's tracks led to a tree where they disappeared. He too was taken to the dungeon beneath the stone. The two rangers went forth again. Investigating the Harrow Tree, they discovered that it was occupied, but never returned to tell their tale, for Oisoth slew them and took their teeth. He hid their bodies so that none could find them.

When the rangers failed to return, the villagers grew despondent.

As winter settled on the land and the snow began to fall the killing continued. Animals both wild and domestic were slain alike. A traveler was killed as well, a tinker come to trade his wares. His toothless body was found a few miles south of town, all his goods intact.

Right after that, a fifth victim fell to the goblin. A baby, barely a few months old. Seeing this child, Oisoth thought to himself that he could grow the teeth as he saw fit and take them when the child's teeth were the proper size. He swaddled the child carefully and took great care to take its blankets, food, and a small rattle that kept the child calm. These he bore back to his dungeon and sat upon the hearth of his old tomb to await the child's coming of age. This last act had the unintended consequence of saving the other kidnapped victims from



further harm—aside from thirst and hunger—as the goblin took little heed of them.

It is into this, but two days later, that the characters wander late one afternoon. The town is bolted up and the local watering hole, the Finch Rest, is about to close, though it welcomes the strangers before they lock the doors behind them.

The adventure however, begins on the road that leads to the town.

GETTING STARTED

The adventure begins with the characters on the road in the late afternoon. How and why they are on the road is entirely up to the discretion of the Castle Keeper. Below are a few reasons that they may be traveling.

- ☞ They have lately concluded an adventure and are on the road. Allow that they are following the trail when they run into the opening encounter and then the village.
- ☞ The party have gathered on the edge of the wilds and seek to find fortune and fame. They travel in the relevant direction and the adventure begins.
- ☞ Someone in the party has heard of the evil afflicting the village and travels north in order to serve good and vanquish evil.
- ☞ A letter finds one of the characters wherever they are, informing them that their relatives (citizens of Springwood Terrace) are afflicted with some evil fey and need their help.
- ☞ Saving the Lady Arestol (see below), she imparts to the party that some supernatural affliction hounds the people of Springwood Terrace and that she was going there to aid them. She encourages them or charges them to do the same.

Whatever the reason, the adventure should begin on the trail leading to the village or a trail that leads to the village.

SNOWY TRAIL

The party has traveled for the better part of the day, and it is midafternoon. Winter is full on, and all is covered in several inches of snow. The trail, of course, is easy enough to spot.

SCREAMS

Begin the adventure in the early morning. The characters are camped just off the trail, with plans to pick up early and head in that direction. They are awoken by, or whoever is on guard takes note of, a blood curdling scream in the distance. The wind carries it to the party, and it swirls around them for a moment. Then it passes. All is quiet for several minutes until it is heard again, somewhat farther off.

This is in fact the father of Wit, the boy taken while fox hunting some weeks previously by the goblin. He roams the

wilderness, possessed of maddened rage, hunting whatever creatures he deems evil, and slaying them. This morning, he fell upon a lone orc crouched by its miserable fire. The first scream warned the orc, who fled, the second was Wit's father killing the orc and expressing his rage.

Packing up soon after that, the party continues their journey along the trail, heading generally north.

Sometime after noon read or paraphrase the following to the party.

You find yourselves following a well-marked trail through the rough, broken country. Clearly an old, well used trail, more of a trace than a track, it winds before you climbing over small ridges, passing into shallow valleys, in and around small groves of trees and amidst bramble everywhere. The day is cool, a fresh blanket of snow, several inches deep, welcomes you as you follow this trace through the wild lands. As the morning gives way to the early afternoon you come across signs of a tremendous struggle. The stone is scattered about and trampled. Further down the trail a helm lies in the snow, then a shield. In the distance you see a horse standing across the trail, its labored breath like a cloud in the cold air. At its feet lies a tangle of armor.

The battlefield the characters have stumbled upon belongs to a young female knight of Kayomar and a wraithwisp. The creature sprang upon her in the early dawn hours and hounds her still. Wounded by her magic blade, it fell back and lingers just beyond the horse, hidden in the shadows of some rocky overhang. Its prey just in sight.

The knight is an errant knight from Kayomar. She rode forth some days past to find glory upon the trail. She ran afoul of the wraithwisp and fought it from her horse, though she wounded it, its constant babble broke her spirit so that with several successive blows it drained her of her constitution when she fell. Her foot became entangled in the stirrup and her light war horse drug her down the trail, attempting to get her to safety, away from the wraithwisp.

She is barely alive, at 4 constitution points. She is unconscious.

Following the debris trail is easy enough. On the path there is a helm, then a shield, and a few hundred feet from the battlefield her magical *longsword +1*.

As the characters approach, the wraithwisp falls back in astonishment, though its rage is growing. It is about 25 feet from the fallen knight, hidden beneath an overhang. It begins to quietly babble, and the characters can hear it, though not very clearly. It sounds more like a twisted wind, carrying some errant thoughts to those who pay little heed.

Each character hears the babbling wind. Attempt to describe it as just that; however, if they take note and try to look

