Whispers of Willowdell

An Adventure for Castles & Crusades
OSR-Compatible Horror Module

Overview

The PCs are sent to the halfling village of Willowdell to appraise its status as part of a new alliance with a human fortress. What begins as a routine reconnaissance quickly turns into a fight for survival against a malevolent forest spirit, Tharalan.

Designed for **1st-level characters**, this adventure can be adjusted for higher levels by modifying monster stats. Use the included lore and hooks, but feel free to adapt for your campaign.

Background

- **Isolated Village:** Willowdell is a southwestern Great Forest hamlet of reclusive halflings. They rarely interact with other villages.
- **Occult Pact:** Fifty years ago, the villagers made a secret pact with **Tharalan**, a forest spirit. In exchange for bountiful crops, they offered one child each planting season.
- **Tharalan's Trickery:** The spirit consumed the children's blood to grow stronger, binding their souls as guardians of Willowdell. The villagers believed it was a sacred ritual, not murder.
- **Dhelia Proudbramble:** The mayor's adventurous daughter married a man from Greeneye, Garland. They returned to Willowdell for a visit, unaware of the full horror.
- **Alliance with Humans:** Facing rumors of an invading force, the mayor reluctantly agreed to supply the Fortress of Dawn in exchange for protection.
- **Spirit's Revenge:** Tharalan guided gnoll marauders to Willowdell, planning a massacre that would culminate in a dark ritual.
- **The Ritual:** The mayor, under duress, sacrificed his daughter and four relatives. Tharalan's power surged, transforming the participating villagers into **Halfling-Fiends**.
- **Aftermath:** Tharalan now inhabits the mayor's body. Garland hides in the tavern, desperate to survive.

Important NPCs

Name	Description
Tharalan	Forest spirit, now possessing the mayor. Seeks vengeance and the destruction of surrounding villages.
Garland Proudbramble	Dhelia's husband. Injured during the ritual, hiding in the tavern.
Alhia Proudbramble	Mayor's wife, protected in a basement circle. Knows about the ritual but is shielded from its effects.

Adventure Hook

- The adventure begins in **Greeneye**, 9.5 miles southeast of Willowdell.
- PCs are recruited by the Greeneye mayor to check on Willowdell and deliver a letter to Garland.
- The trek through the **Great Forest** is roughly 10 miles northwest, taking ~6 hours over difficult terrain. Non-scripted encounters can be added for tension.

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Non-Scripted Encounters

- **Halfling-Fiends** constantly patrol the village.
- On paths: 2-in-6 chance every 5 minutes of 1d4 Fiends approaching.
- Noise in the open: 4-in-6 chance 1d4 Fiends arrive in 1d6 rounds.
- Fighting indoors: 1-in-6 chance per 10 rounds that 1d4 Fiends hear and arrive.
- Fiends leave if no prey is detected after 2d10 minutes.

General Characteristics

- **Light:** Assumes daylight; windows open, houses lit. At night, unlit interiors and 20% chance to find a lantern. Lights can attract Fiends.
- **Paths:** Dirt, flat.

- **Doors/Windows:** Wood; none locked. Most open.
- **Houses:** Ruined; may contain valuables or Fiends (1-in-6 chance of 1d2 inside). Ten-minute search + INT CL-2 yields 1d10 gp in household goods.

Creature Stat Blocks (C&C-Compatible)

Halfling-Fiend

- **HD:** 1+1
- **AC:** 4 [12]
- **MV:** 12"/round
- **Atk:** Claws 1d4
- **Special:** Frenzied rage; additional Fiends attracted by noise.
- **Save:** F5
- **Morale:** 8
- **XP:** 40

Tharalan (Mayor Host)

- **HD:** 4+4
- **AC:** 3 [13]
- **MV:** 12"/round
- **Atk:** Slam 1d6+1 / Bite 1d6
- **Special:** Possession attempt (Will save or controlled 1d6 rounds), fear aura (-2 to morale within 30 ft)
- **Save:** F3
- **Morale:** 12
- **XP:** 400

Areas

Area 1: Southern Village Path

- **Quick Description:** Dirt path north to an intersection. Ruined houses, scattered bodies, faint thumping sound. Orchard west.

- **Damaged Halfling-Fiend:** Hits head against wall; INT 4, -2 to attacks; charges if noticed.
- **Bodies:** 5 halfling corpses + 3 gnolls.
- **Treasure:** None.

Area 2: Southeastern Village Path

- **Quick Description:** Dirt path with scattered halfling and gnoll bodies.
- **Search:** INT CL-4 reveals gnoll pouch with 20 gp.
- **Treasure:** Leather pouch, 20 gp.

Area 3: Central Village Square

- **Quick Description:** Open square with blackened totem and scorched ground. Whispers in the wind.
- **Totem:** INT CL-4 reveals buried acorn vessel. Destroying vessel weakens all Fiends (-1 attack/damage for 1 hour).
- **Noise:** 3-in-6 chance every 5 rounds of 1d4+1 Fiends.
- **Treasure:** 1d10 gp in ritual trinkets.

Area 4: The Tavern ("The Sleepy Stoat")

- **Quick Description:** Two-story inn, flickering candlelight, muffled voice.
- **Garland:** Can be calmed with CHA CL-3. Provides info about ritual and hidden cellar passage.
- **Treasure:** Crossbow + 8 bolts, 1d4 bottles cider (10 sp each), Dhelia's wedding band, 25 gp.

Area 5: Mayor's Residence

- **Quick Description:** Half-collapsed home, rotting smell, bloodstained parchment.
- **Basement:** Alhia in protective circle. Circle destruction triggers immediate Fiend attack.
- **Treasure:** Holy charm (Protection from Evil 1/day), silver dust 50 gp.

Area 6: Town Hall (Tharalan's Lair)

- **Quick Description:** Roof torn open, blackened walls, pulsing blue-green light, whispers.
- **Tharalan:** Negotiates or attacks. Possesses mayor's body; attacks weakened if acorn vessel destroyed.
- **Treasure:** Mayor's signet ring 50 gp, Tharalan heart-root 100 gp, locked chest: 80 gp + 3 silver goblets + fortress letter.

Aftermath & Rewards

- **Destroying Tharalan:** Fiends collapse/flee; Garland and Alhia survive.
- **Acorn vessel left intact:** Corruption spreads; new Fiends emerge.

XP Rewards

- Uncover truth: 250 XP
- End curse: 400 XP
- Rescue survivors/relics: 100 XP

Optional Hooks

1. Queen's envoy investigates Willowdell.
2. Souls of sacrificed children linger; freeing them leads to quest.
3. Corrupted seeds spread blight to nearby villages.

Random Encounters / Moods (1d6)

1. Distant screams through trees
2. Ravens circling overhead
3. Rusted lantern flickers, still warm
4. Soft whispering: Tharalan calling a PC by name
5. Gnoll corpse, throat cut, eyes wide
6. Spectral child weeping, vanishes

Boxed Read-Aloud Texts

Area 3: Central Village Square

The dirt paths widen into an open square ringed by burned cottages. A wooden totem, wrapped in blackened vines, stands in the center. The air smells of rot and old blood.

Area 4: The Tavern

A weathered sign of a stoat curled on a mug creaks in the wind. Candlelight flickers through cracked shutters. A hoarse male voice mutters from within.

Area 6: Town Hall

The town hall looms, roof torn open, walls blackened. A blue-green light pulses from within as whispers echo through the rafters.