



THE ROTTING WILLOW

BY EDWARD P. BROMLEY III

Tree houses are not
just for kids.

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Cartography by Diesel

Edward Bromley is a corporate paralegal in New York City. He graduated with a BA in economics from Hobart College in 1985. This, his first published work, comes from his campaign world. The scenario is an adaptation of an adventure of Dorian, his wife Lorethra, Ebenezer, and Jethro.

The Rotting Willow is an AD&D® game adventure for 4-6 player characters of 7th-9th level. These characters may be of any class, race, or alignment, although characters of good alignment have added incentive to rid the world of the evil depicted herein. The characters should possess only a low to moderate amount of magic, as too much will throw off the balance of the scenario. The Dungeon Master should pay particular attention to the viewpoint of the antagonists: three boggarts.

For the Dungeon Master

This scenario is designed to be used as the player PCs travel from one adventure to another, along the fringe of a swamp. The players should be given no introduction for the scenario. Treated it as an extended random encounter.

The adventure takes place in the village of Rotting Willow and the nearby swamp. The village lies at the intersection of two trade routes. One route follows the edge of the Great Cypress Swamp and is well traveled because it is shorter (although not safer) than larger trade routes. A smaller route runs east and west, ending abruptly where it meets the swamp route.

It is important that the DM does not alert the players that anything is amiss in the village. The townspeople do not know what name to give to the sometimes formless, sometimes eerily child-like evil that oppresses them. They are reluctant to discuss the boggarts' habits, or even existence, with strangers. This is partly due to local superstition, which holds that speaking of an evil draws that evil to the speaker. The residents are also practical enough to reason that unwary strangers may become the boggarts' prey, thus saving the life of a relative or friend.

As the PCs enter the village, they are viewed by the boggarts as likely victims for the latter's escapades. The boggarts are attracted by the strong life forces surrounding the characters, forces

which are vital to the existence and growth of the three boggarts (AC -6; MV 18"; HD 6; hp 35, 32, 29; #AT 1; Dmg 2-12; SA electrical discharge, *confusion*; SD *invisibility*, limited immunity to magic, limited *shape change*; AL CE).

The DM should have a complete understanding of the boggarts' viewpoint. They are evil, and they take great joy in deceiving creatures and feeding upon them. Although the boggarts appear to make a game of their attacks, success is important to their continued welfare. All three of the boggarts are extremely intelligent and should be played in this way. During the adventure, they try to show themselves in only demi-human forms — as gnomes, halflings, or very young humans. They attempt to deceive the party into believing that they are merely little thieves or mischievous children who need a spanking.

The boggarts never fight to the death. There is always easier (if less tasty) game elsewhere. If escape is needed, the boggarts won't stop for anything — they care little for objects of material value. They use will-o-wisp form to escape through the air. If party members have some means of flying, the boggart will-o-wisps pass through solid objects (walls, trees, etc.) to throw off pursuit. In escape, as in melee, the boggarts become *invisible* whenever possible.

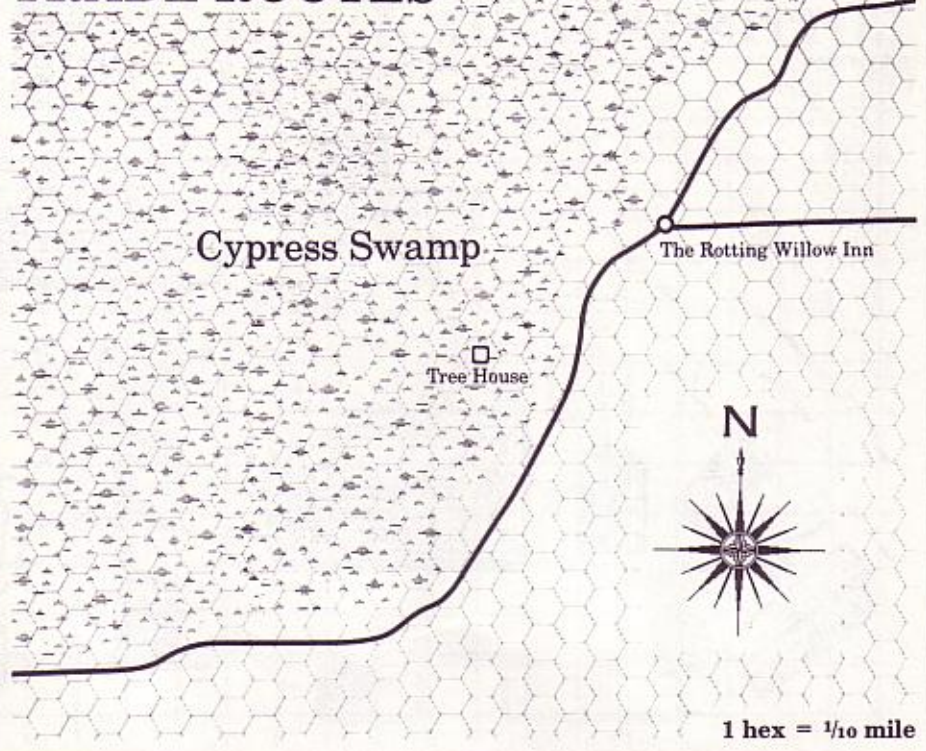
The village's oldest dwelling is an inn named The Rotting Willow. The village was, in fact, named after the inn, which was established along the trade routes long before others moved here to form a community. The Rotting Willow is the only inn in the village and manages to stay in business with a rather small but steady flow of traffic.

The Village

The ramshackle village which has sprung up around the inn exists primarily to serve those few traders, mercenaries, and adventuring types who travel on the roadways. The village is approximately one day's travel from the closest town or city. As such, it is a convenient stopping place for merchants and travelers along the trade routes.

The village lies outside the jurisdiction of any country or governmental area. No system of law exists within the village; each establishment creates its own rules. However, many written and unwritten agreements exist between

TRADE ROUTES



the permanent residents of the village.

There are usually 15-20 houses in the village, depending on the population, which is transient and can vary from 100-150 people. The dwellings are made of cypress wood from the trees of the swamp. The houses are shoddily built and rebuilt, prey to sudden storms which rage across the swamp.

Six of the village structures are of more permanent construction. These buildings and their occupants are described below.

1. Gerold's Store. This is a one-room, circular building with a domed roof which rises 20' above the dirt floor below. The building is packed with odds and ends of all varieties, all of which are for sale or trade — even the hammock upon which old Gerold sleeps.

Gerold (AC 9; MV 12"; F5; hp 48; #AT 3/2; Dmg by weapon type; S 12, I 16, W 12, D 15, C 15, Ch 14; AL N; long sword specialization) is a wily old character who won't let anybody best him in a transaction. He's a retired adventurer who's had enough of wandering but is always willing to listen to a tale (but not if he believes he may be duped). The

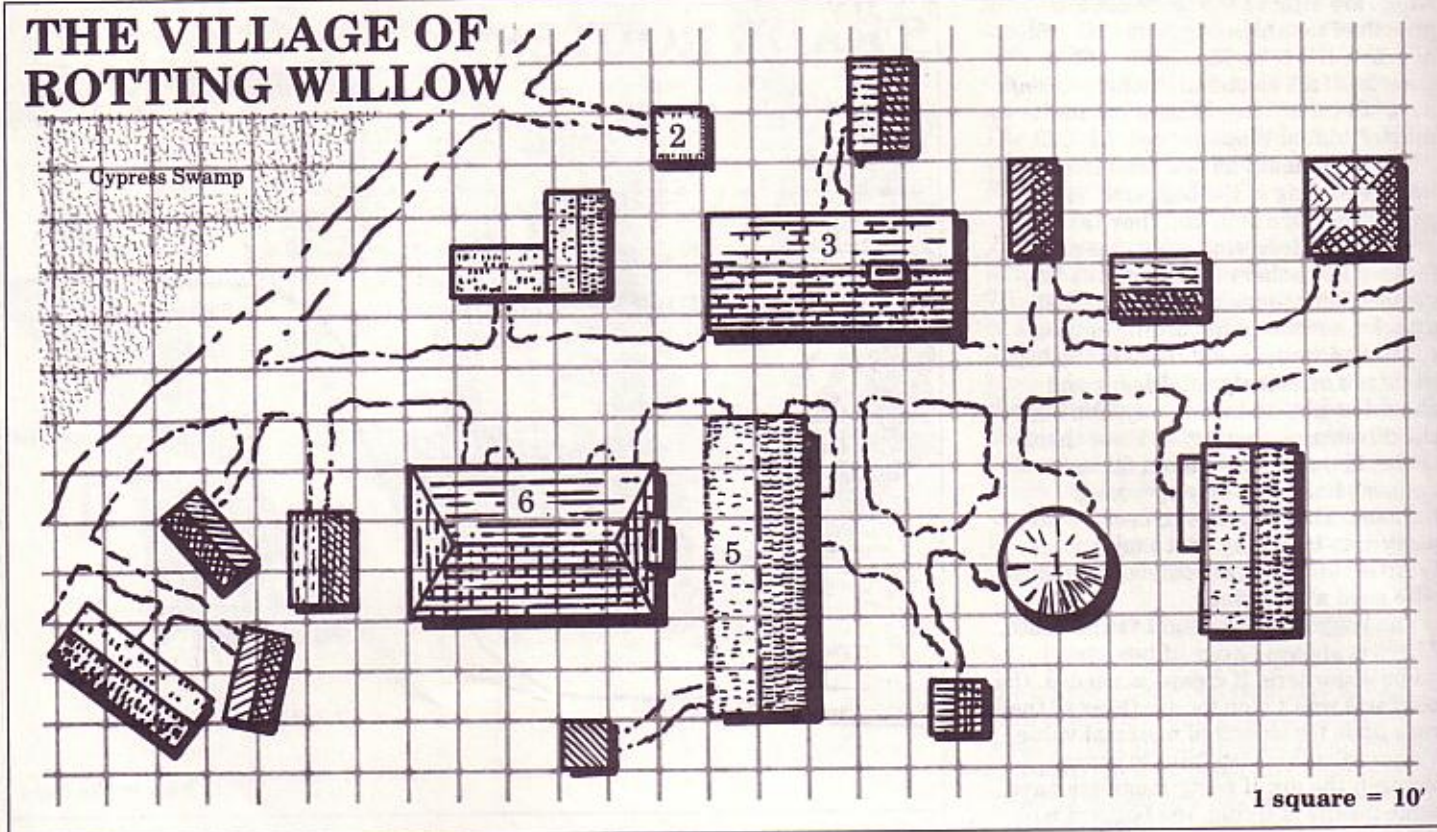
PCs have a 30% chance of finding any nonmagical item they need in Gerold's store. If the proprietor catches anybody stealing, he immediately executes the culprit. (Remember, each establishment in the town makes its own laws.) Most of the time, however, Gerold is lenient and allows the thief's companions to buy him back by paying a ransom of 10 times the value of the item stolen (plus the return of the item, of course).

Gerold does not allow children or other short beings to enter his store unless accompanied by an adult, preferably one he knows. He is very suspicious of dwarves, gnomes, and halflings and demands they wait outside unless the other PCs insist on their presence. If questioned about this policy, he only mutters something about "devil children" and "shapechangers."

2. Willy's Shack. Willy (AC 10; MV 12"; zero level; hp 4; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon type; AL CG) is a native of the area and the bottler of a rather tasty but infamous swampberry wine, from a recipe he shares with no one.

Several years ago, Willy made an agreement with Jebiah, the proprietor

THE VILLAGE OF ROTTING WILLOW



of The Rotting Willow Inn, to supply the inn with wine at low cost. In turn, Jebiah helped Willy construct a dwelling and agreed to send all visitors who wish to purchase large quantities of swamp-berry wine over to Willy's place.

Willy slams his door in the face of any PC smaller than adult human size. If pressed to explain, he clutches a crudely made charm worn on a chain around his scrawny neck and clamps his lips tightly together while backing away from the halfling, dwarf, or gnome. Willy is virtually helpless against any form of organized attack. Jebiah, however, would not look favorably upon any character responsible for Willy's demise.

3. The Sunken Cypress. This building once housed a second inn, built in the heyday of trading on the swamp route. As the notoriety of the swamp route grew, due to unpleasant tales of certain swamp denizens, there was less need for two inns in the village. The Sunken Cypress was gradually transformed into a boarding house. Its owner rents out rooms for long-term stays if a vacancy occurs.

4. Relt's House. This is the only two-story structure in the village, except for The Rotting Willow Inn. The building is constructed of solid wood on a stone foundation. Relt (AC 10; MV 12"; zero level; hp 3; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon type; AL CN; long sword) is a retired trader whose previous deals made enemies for him in more civilized and populated areas. He infrequently ships goods which can only be found in the swamp. He is basically a recluse but sometimes hires a few of the villagers to help gather goods for one of his shipments.

Relt's behavior toward strangers is distinctly odd. He stubbornly refuses to acknowledge the existence of any halfling, gnome, or dwarf, looking straight through them and not responding to any of their questions. He continually asks larger PCs, "Don't I know you?" and "Haven't I seen you somewhere before?" while looking over his shoulder nervously.

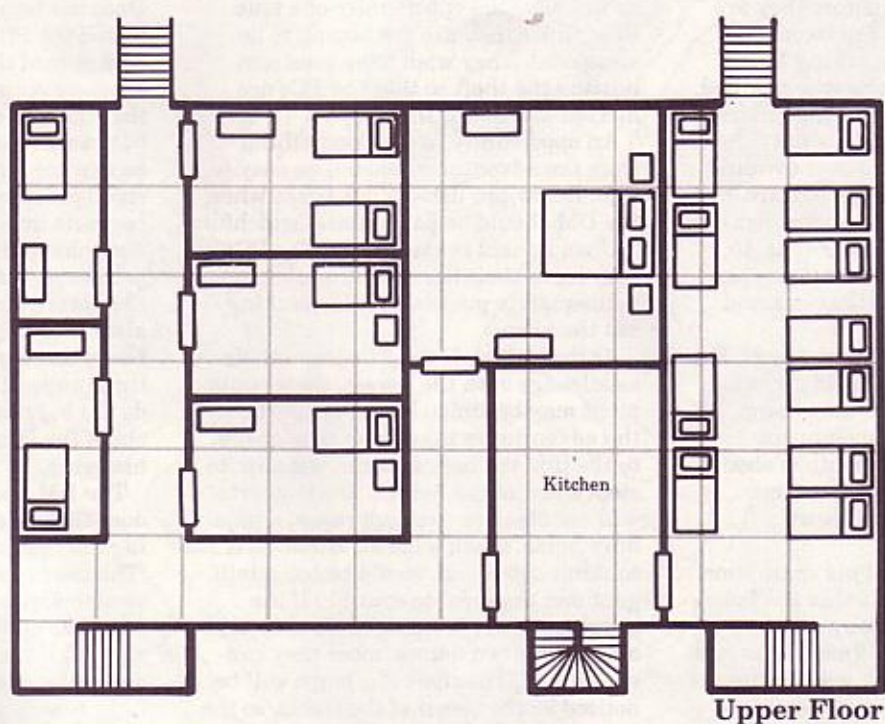
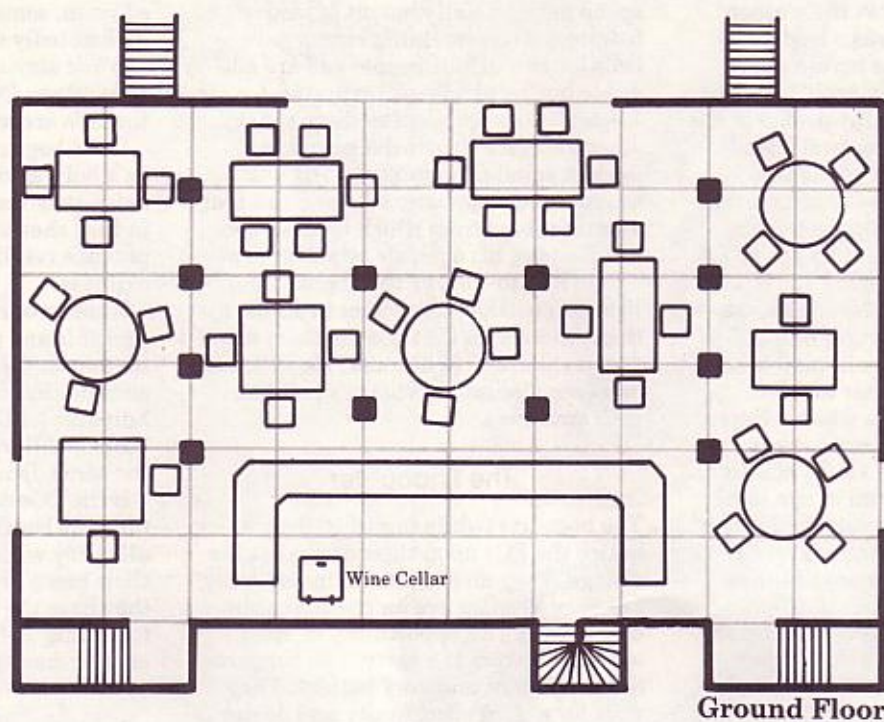
5. The Stable. This large structure houses the mounts and trade wagons of those who stay at The Rotting Willow Inn. A center aisle runs the length of the building, lined with stalls for the

horses. Larger stalls for caravan wagons take up the north end of the building. At the south end is a room for Boswick, the owner (AC 10; MV 12"; F4; hp 26; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon type; S 15, I 11, W 10, D 14, C 14, Ch 11; AL LN; hammer), and Pip, his assistant (AC 10; MV 12"; zero level; hp 5; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon type; AL N; hammer). Pip is a poorly skilled blacksmith and has just enough ability to shoe a horse, using an anvil that stands outside the stable. Boswick tries to keep an extra horse or two for sale. These are usually riding horses, but he takes whatever he can get. In any case, the quality of the mounts is never above mediocre.

The stable owner asks that traders who leave goods with him post an extra guard or two at the stables for security. He will not, however, allow the PCs to leave any halfling, gnome, or dwarf of their number as a guard and is extremely reluctant to allow such a character near the horses. If questioned about this, he replies, "Can't trust 'em. You just never know."

6. The Rotting Willow Inn. All business and social activity in the town

THE ROTTING WILLOW INN



1 square = 1½'



centers on this inn. It is the largest structure in the village, two stories tall and as broad as it is high. The first floor of the inn is constructed of stone, sunken into the ground to support the wooden second floor. The three steps leading to the main entrance of the tavern are actually fragments of a monolith which the owner dragged from the depths of the swamp with the help of several friends.

The current proprietor of the inn appears to be in his mid-40s but moves with the body of a much younger man. Jebiah (AC 3; MV 12"; F9; hp 48; #AT 2; Dmg by weapon type; S 17, I 12, W 12, D 15, C 15, Ch 12; AL CN; double specialization in bastard sword; *bastard sword* +3, *shield* +3, chain mail armor) is a very strange character and has redesigned the inn to his whims. Every seat in the first-floor tavern area is close to an entrance or exit. In addition, numerous windows placed at eye level allow customers to look outside. None of the entrances or exits to the tavern area have doors; the windows are likewise just holes in the walls.

Jebiah is very possessive of his establishment and lets all new customers know that if they damage any part of the inn, they will pay out of their own hides. Considering his concern, it is puzzling that he tells visitors they are welcome to fight in his tap room. He does, however, insist on taking 10% of all valuables from anyone who is killed. Jebiah usually stays out of the affairs of others, but if necessary, he is not against inflicting control over rowdies with the help of his trusted bastard sword, "Stun," and three underlings (AC 5, 4, 4; MV 9"; F5, F4, F4; hp 40, 29, 26; #AT 3/2; Dmg by weapon type; AL N; long sword specializations and chain mail armor).

Jebiah is a semiretired adventurer. He is obsessed with rumors of old civilizations that once existed in the swamp, and he has done much adventuring therein but is very closemouthed about his past. He still ventures into the swamp on occasion, on unknown errands.

Jebiah spends much of his spare time brewing his own beer. As this is a hobby of his, there are often many different varieties of brew on tap. In addition, the inn serves a surprisingly wide variety of food, including packages of rations which he makes up for travelers when they leave.

The second floor of the inn holds the

kitchen and a number of guest rooms. The large room on the east is known as "The Barracks"; it serves as a common sleeping room for those who wish to spend only a small amount of money on lodgings. The remaining rooms have beds for two to four people and are adequate but by no means luxurious.

Jebiah does not seem to share the other villagers' provincial prejudice against small demi-humans. His own adventuring experiences have given him a broader base from which to judge people. Besides, his open-air establishment allows him to observe the approaching PCs well enough in advance to decide by their interaction that none of them are "devil children" in disguise. He will not, however, discuss the village's problem with strangers.

The Encounter

The boggarts (while *invisible*) first notice the PCs upon their arrival at the village. They do not attack immediately, but they keep an eye on the adventurers, awaiting an opportunity to steal something from the party. The boggarts are intelligent and very patient. They wait for a good opportunity and do not take unnecessary chances. The boggarts do not need the opportunity of a true thief, since they are *not* hoping to be successful. They wish to be seen committing the theft so that the PCs are alerted and follow them.

An opportunity to steal something from the adventurers should be easy to find. Below are listed a few times when the DM should be particularly watchful:

Upon arrival in the village. The PCs may leave their horses and equipment inadequately guarded while checking out the town.

At the stables. If the PCs leave their saddlebags with the horses, their equipment may be stolen by the boggarts. If the adventurers take their saddlebags to the inn, the boggarts may attempt to steal a few of the horses. The boggarts will not steal, or even approach, a paladin's horse. (Such a horse, although it couldn't *detect evil*, would be too intelligent and powerful to control.) If the boggarts resort to horse theft, they take only one or two horses; more they cannot handle. The theft of a horse will be noticed by the owner of the stable, so the boggarts need not worry about making sure the party catches them in the act. The boggarts prefer, however, to steal an

inanimate object, and wait patiently for such an opportunity.

Upon arrival at the inn. If the PCs leave their possessions in an unattended room, some of their belongings undoubtedly disappear.

While staying at the inn. The boggarts may attempt to steal something while the PCs are asleep.

If the boggarts identify one of the PCs as a holy warrior or the cleric of a good deity, they may perform a suspicious act in that character's presence in order to provoke retaliation because of their evilness.

Remember: The boggarts can become *invisible* and pass through solid objects to commit their crimes. They can assume the shapes of various demi-humans: halflings, gnomes, and small human children, but need not assume the same demi-human shape each time.

If the PCs do not offer a good opportunity, the boggarts simply do nothing at all. They wish to fight their battles on their home ground in the swamp, where they have the advantage. The PCs' visit to Rotting Willow then becomes only another memorable stop along the way.

The Chase

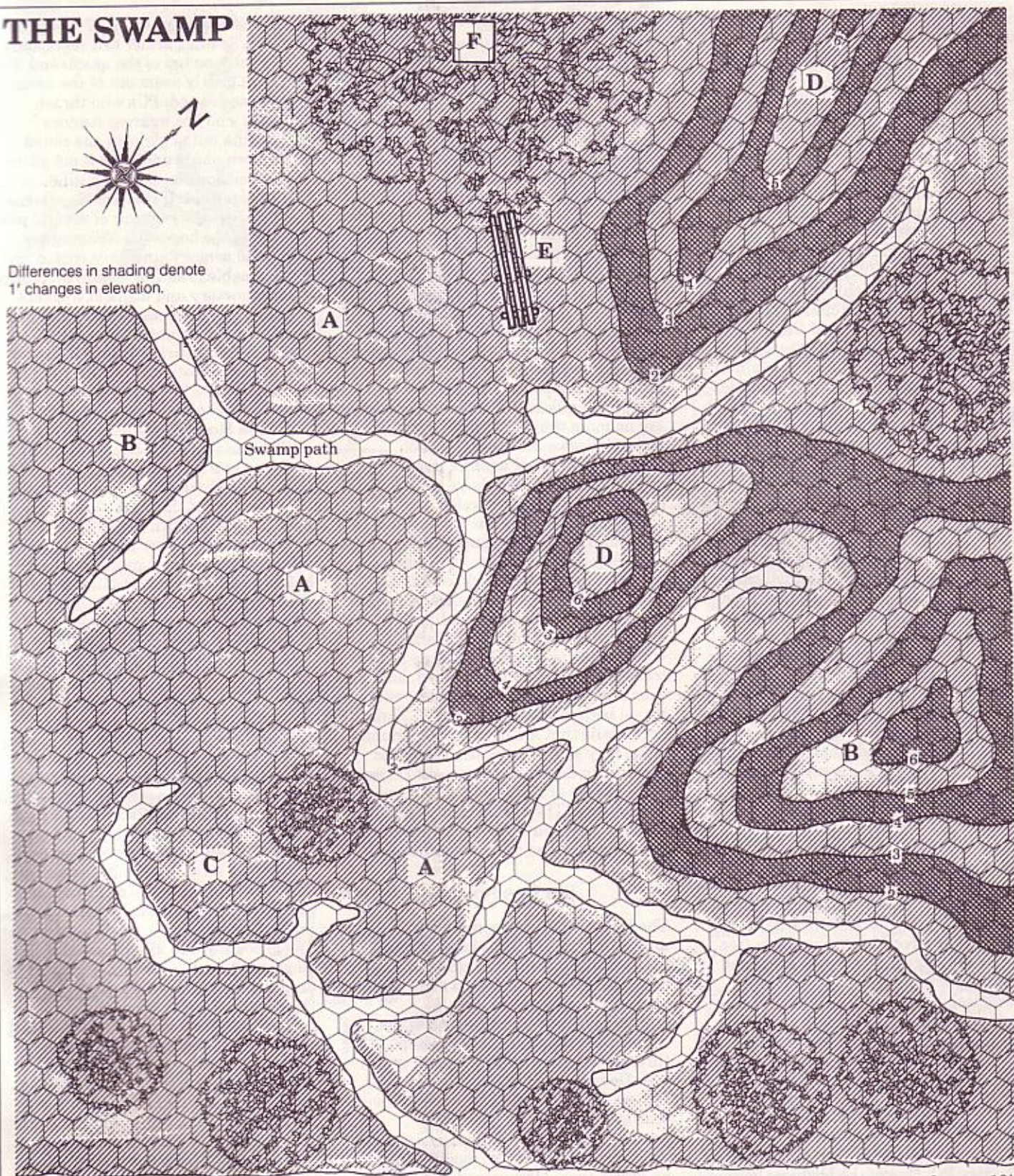
Once the boggarts have successfully baited the PCs, they run down the roadway toward the west. The boggarts move at whatever speed necessary to insure that the PCs see where they are going but cannot catch up. If the adventurers have some form of transportation whose speed exceeds that of the boggarts, the boggarts immediately leave the roadway and take to the swamp. Here, on familiar pathways, they should be able to dictate the nature of the chase. The boggarts also enter the swamp if they are drawing heavy missile fire or spell attacks. At no time (unless the PCs give up the chase) do the boggarts allow themselves to get out of the PCs' sight for more than a few moments.

The DM may wish to add brief random encounters while the PCs are chasing the boggarts through the swamp. (The use of the temperate wilderness swamp and marsh encounter table on page 135 of *Monster Manual II* is suggested.) If the PCs are delayed by an encounter, the boggarts wait until the fight is over, then attempt to provoke the PCs into chasing them again. The DM should use random encounters sparingly to add spice to the adventure,

THE SWAMP



Differences in shading denote
1' changes in elevation.



but not to demoralize the PCs or put them off the chase.

The boggarts attempt to lead the PCs to an area of the swamp chosen as their killing ground — a tree house built in an old cedar. Here, the boggarts set their trap. This tree house is not the boggarts' real home; it was designed to deceive their prey.

Regardless of the area in which combat occurs, the boggarts' tactics are basically the same:

First, the boggarts attempt to use their *confusion* ability. All three boggarts participate in this at the same time, to increase their chance of success. If possible, they wait until they can catch all of the PCs within the area of effect. The boggarts attempt to gain full cover or become *invisible* before initiating their *confusion*. It is important that the boggarts use their *confusion* ability to the best effect possible, as it may prove to be the key to their success.

After their *confusion* attack has been used, the boggarts use electrical attacks on those members of the party not *confused*. They first attack any character whom they recognize as a spell-caster and attempt to disrupt any spell-casting efforts. If it appears to be in their best interest, the boggarts gang up in an attempt to neutralize one character. When using their electrical attacks, the boggarts change to will-o-wisp form to avoid the weapons of the PCs. Armor-class adjustments for metal armor should *not* be used. All metal armor should be discounted when determining armor class for a PC versus the electrical attack of a boggart.

If the PCs are willing to chase the boggarts (in any form), the boggarts attempt to lead them into a quicksand pit or deep pool of water (especially if one of the PCs is wearing heavy armor). In addition, if several PCs are wading in a pool, the boggarts discharge electrical current directly into the water (see the DMG, page 57, "Underwater Spell Use," *lightning bolt*.) The boggarts' electrical discharge has an effective radius of only 10'.

The boggarts have a few magical items which they use: a *wand of magic missiles*, and five *beads of force*. The *wand of magic missiles* is used primarily to stop the casting of spells. The *beads of force* are used sparingly in attempts to neutralize any particularly effective PC. One of the boggarts carries the *wand of magic missiles*, and the

other two split the *beads of force*. The boggarts use these items, especially the *beads of force*, only in extreme circumstances.

The Swamp

The huge swamp lies in a temperate area, somewhat like the marshy regions of the southeastern United States. The most abundant tree in the swamp is the cypress; for this reason, the area is often called the Cypress Swamp. These cypress trees, and others in the swamp, are often laden with Spanish moss and vines. Except across large pools of water, vision is restricted to 30-90' because of the heavy overgrowth. Game trails thread their way through the area, skirting pools of stagnant water and pits of quicksand. Most of the pools are no more than 1-2' deep. Below the water, however, lie 1-4' of soft silt. Numerous forms of wildlife live in the swamp, most of which have never been seen by the average traveler.

The boggarts know the swamp well, particularly the area immediately surrounding the tree house. They know which pools contain quicksand and which trails lead to dead ends. A ranger or barbarian character familiar with swamp environments can determine which trails are used by making a tracking roll. It should be noted, however, that several denizens of the swamp travel both on the paths and off. Thus, even trails that are dead ends to human types may simply be easier routes for the swamp denizens. Movement rates off the trails are reduced for PCs as noted below. The boggarts, of course, make use of their will-o-wisp form to move through the swamp at will.

The Tree House

The swamp map shows details of the area leading from the roadway to the tree house. If combat moves out of this area, the DM should design additional swamp areas as necessary.

A. Average pool. The depth of the water is 1-2'. Movement is possible through this area at half normal speed.

B. Deep pool (depth marked in feet). If more than 75% of a character is covered by water or silt, movement becomes impossible without assistance. This percentage may be modified based on armor type. Movement is otherwise at one-quarter normal speed.

C. Quicksand pool. A PC wearing no armor or leather armor can relax and float gently on top of the quicksand. He can then gently swim out of the danger area in one round. PCs who thrash about or who are wearing heavier armor sink out of sight in one round and drown one round later if not pulled out by someone on firmer ground.

D. Deep pool. If this area is searched, the PCs find the remains of several past victims of the boggarts. Nonmagical arms and armor found have rusted and are unusable. The DM should determine what monetary and magical treasure remains, if any (treasure type X from the *Monster Manual* is suggested).

E. Small footbridge. This bridge was built to allow potential victims access to the tree house. The depth of the water at either end of the bridge is only 1'.

F. Tree House. Wooden steps are nailed into the trunk of a large cedar and lead to a trapdoor in the floor of the tree house. Once inside, the PCs notice that the floor of this bare, 20' x 20' room is littered with the bones of past victims. In one corner lie the clothing, armor, weapons, and goods which once belonged to these unfortunate travelers. Buried in this pile are the victims' coins, gems, and magical items. It is up to the DM to determine what the PCs find here, based on the needs of the campaign.

Ending the Adventure

If the PCs are defeated, they become one more meal for the boggarts. Future adventurers may pass through this area in search of their comrades, necessitating another encounter with the boggarts — or with the will-o-wisps into which they have matured.

If the PCs drive away or kill the boggarts, the campaign can proceed, treating this scenario as a random encounter. The encounter can also be used as a stepping stone to further adventures in or around the swamp. Perhaps one of the boggarts' past victims had an old map or an interesting artifact that will get Jebiah's tongue flowing. He might then convince them to set off in search of a lost, ruined city at the heart of the swamp. Heads filled with visions of an entire civilization's gold and treasure, the adventurers might put aside their current business, turn their backs on the lights of Rotting Willow, and squish off through the swamp — into a new and perhaps more dangerous quest.