Speaker of the Trees

Adventure Background

In the small, rural village of Ameroth, the village botanist, Gareth Littleroot was viewed as an outcast. He seemingly had no friends within the village, and spent many hours within the woods. Littleroot often advocated for the protection of their forest, though few people even bothered to stop and listen. During his many hours in the woods, Littleroot created awakened trees and awakened shrubs as companions.

Littleroot's advocacy for the forest was a way for him to protect his plant companions. In his latest scheme, he attempted to create eternal fire so the village would not need firewood. Instead, he accidentally summoned a fire elemental, that killed him and drove the awakened plant-life to the edges of the forest. They carried his body to the each of the forest for the villagers to find. The plants now, without their creator to protect them, have taken to pretending to be the voices of ghosts and scaring away all who might chop them down.

Overview

In "Speaker of the Trees", residents of the small village Ameroth have begged the players to rid their forest of the ghost that has been tormenting them. With villagers, wildlife, and players on edge, the true problem has yet to be discovered.

Part 1: A Desperate Request
Invited to the Ameroth Council meeting as distinguished guests, the players are offered a grand reward in exchange for ridding their lumber forest of the ghost that haunts it. Residents offer many of their own theories regarding the hauntings, but the biggest one is that the recently deceased village botanist seeks his revenge. The players may investigate the village and search for clues to appeasing the angry spirit.

Part 2: Enter the Woods
On the way to the forest, animals can be found acting more aggressive than usual due to being displaced by a fire elemental. Upon reaching the forest earlier than expected, it is revealed that awakened trees and shrubs have been playing the part of the "ghost" and they too have been displaced by the fire elemental.

Part 3: Into the Fire
The players must work with wildlife and awakened plants to extinguish the fire elemental. Once it is gone, the awakened plants can return to their home, and the villagers may once again chop wood without fear.

Adventure Hook

As the party passes through the small village of Ameroth on the way to their next destination, they are approached by Mayor Lenoi, who either recognizes them as heroes from a previous adventure, or, should the party lack adventuring history, mistakes (or pretends to mistake) them for other famous adventurers, and he insists they be celebrated as honored guests. Should the party try to correct him regarding their identities, he will ignore them and insist that they are great adventurers to be celebrated. His motivation is being in desperate need of any adventurers to help, so he will do whatever it takes to make them stay.

Mayor Lenoi will provide the party with free lodging at the Pinesap Inn and host a hearty feast, before inviting them to an important meeting the next morning.

Part 1: A Desperate Request

The story begins with Mayor Lenoi knocking on the door of each player to wake them up and bring them to the meeting. Read the following to the players:

> You have pleasant dreams as you sleep off the previous night of feasts and festivities. For your accommodations, you were given the biggest rooms and the softest beds, with beautiful pine furnishings that live up to the inn's name. Your sleep is interrupted by a terse knock on the door. "Good morning, fine heroes. The time has come for a very important meeting. Yes, hurry, hurry, tis very important indeed."

Roleplaying Mayor Lenoi
With winter approaching, the pressure on Mayor Lenoi grows as the villagers look to him for a solution. While he tries to keep up his appearance and maintain control of the conversation, his anxiety and desperation shine through.

Characters may chat with Mayor Lenoi on the way to the meeting. He will be hesitant to share any information before arriving, but if pressed for information at least three times, or with a DC 10 persuasion check, he will say: "We have a bit of a problem you see. Our lumber jack, Mr. Reivold, claims the woods are being haunted, so he hasn't been able to collect any firewood for the winter. I wouldn't dare say so in front of the

council, but I think he's taken a few too many branches to the head. Ghosts! He must be mad. However it seems to whole town already wholeheartedly believes in this 'ghost' business."

The Meeting

> The cool autumn breeze follows you into the meeting hall as Mayor Lenoi seats you near the head of the busy table. Men and women anxiously chat among themselves, and you overhear murmurs of ghosts and freezing. As you seat yourselves, the room falls silent. The mayor begins speaking. "As you all know, we have gathered these brave adventurers here today to make a big request. A ghost is haunting our woods, and it must be removed. Please, great heroes, rid us of this ghost, and you will be rewarded handsomely."

The mayor will initially offer the party 250 gp, but should they show any sign of rejecting the offer he will immediately double it to 500 gp. With a DC15 persuasion check or deception check, he will make it 1000. Should the party threaten to reveal his true feelings regarding the ghost or pass a DC20, persuasion, deception, or intimidation check, he will offer them his family's great treasure, a silver raven figurine of wondrous power. The statue will be offered upfront. After price negotiations, the meeting will open to a discussion of what is currently known. Random NPCs can offer any of the following ideas:

1) "It must be the old botanist come back to haunt us!"
2) "Could be some kids in the woods pulling a prank"
3) "There's multiple ghosts! I'd bet fifty of 'em!"
4) "The botanist was right. That was a spiritual resting place!"

By following up with the NPCs, players have the opportunity to learn the following information:

From NPC1:

- The botanist was an outcast.
- The botanist spent hours each day within the forest.
- The botanist died shortly before the hauntings began.

From NPC2:

- They noticed smoke rising from deep in the forest recently, what they believe to be someone's campfire.
- They have overheard voices chatting deeper within the woods, before the hauntings began.

From NPC3 (Mr. Reivold the lumberjack):

- Multiple distinct ghostly voices have been heard.
- No ghost has actually be seen.

- The ghosts are invisible, bushes shake with their movement, but no one is there.

From NPC4:

- The Botanist advocated for protecting the forest.
- The Botanist had claimed the forest was a spiritual resting place not to be disturbed.

Littleroot's House

The players may optionally choose to investigate the botanist's house before going to the forest. Have the players make a perception check before entering. With any roll higher than 15, they hear a sink turn on, and then off from inside.

> You enter the cabin that once belonged to Gareth Littleroot. It is a modest cabin. In the far right corner is a small bed and a bookshelf. In the far left, a desk with hastily written notes covering it. Closer to the entrance is a small kitchen area, where a potted plant sits next to the sink. Other potted plants sit in the windowsill.

The plant next to the sink is sentient, thanks to the Awaken spell, however, it will not move or speak in the presence of people. The sink turning on and off was the plant watering itself. The true nature of this plant can be discovered by spells such as Detect Magic, or the plant will reveal itself by shouting if someone picks it up. Otherwise, a DC 15 investigation check will allow players to discover that the plants near the window are almost dead, while the plant near the sink is alive and healthy. If they are searching near the back of the cabin, they'll discover a book discussing the Awaken spell. Once discovered, the plant will still refuse to speak, unless a DC 20 persuasion or intimidation roll is made. It will then admit that Gareth is its creator and it is Gareth's friend. It only knows that Gareth's goal was to protect his friends, but he hasn't returned yet.

Searching at all in the cabin will lead players to discover Gareth's Journal Entry (see Handouts). A DC 10 investigation check will allow them to discover books on fire magic, with a page torn out. Spell casters or those who can pass a DC 15 arcana check will realize he was studying various fire spells like Create Bonfire and Continual Flame.

Part 2: Enter the Woods

Once the players leave Ameroth, they will begin to encounter animals driven from their homes by the fire elemental. While possible to pacify, it will be difficult and require a DC20 animal handling check, due to the animals being on edge. At the start of each encounter, have the players make a

DC15 perception check to notice that the animals have scorched fur. If a player can pass a DC15 nature check, they'll notice the animals are far from their natural habitat deep in the woods. The first encounter consists of two 11 hp wolves, who were starving and lying in wait to attack the first passersby. Use the Wolf Encounter map. After this encounter, the players may notice smoke rising from the deepest part of the woods on a successful DC10 perception check. The second encounter consists of one 34 hp brown bear, rushing out of the woods and right into the players (spooked by the awoken plants) as they're about to enter. For this, use the Bear Encounter map.

The 'Ghost' Appears

As the players enter the forest, countless awoken trees and shrubs begin their act.

> As you enter the woods, you hear a haunting voice from among the trees. "You are not welcome among these woods..." In another direction: "You must turn back..." The voices come from seemingly everywhere. "You've disturbed the dead..." "These woods are sacred..." "Come no further..." The bushes shake as though people were walking among them. The longer you stand there, the more aggressive the shaking becomes. Tree branches shake as though blown by a nonexistent storm, and the voices only grow louder.

Should the players attempt to talk things out with the so-called 'ghosts', the awoken plants will calm down once they realize the players are not lumberjacks come to chop them down. If the players had previously gathered enough evidence to realize immediately that the ghosts are actually awakened plants, the plants will drop the act after being called out.

Roleplaying Awakened Plants
When not pretending to be ghosts, The Awakened Plants (known among themselves as 'Friends of Gareth') tend to speak in simple sentences. They tend to have names such as Cherry or Stick. They will avoid conflict at all costs and are eager to work out a peaceful solution.

Should the players attack a 60 hp tree or 10 hp bush, the plant will cry out for mercy and reveal its identity as an awoken plant. If players keep attacking, plants will not fight back, and instead run away, and the fires in part 3 should reach the players early and begin that encounter.

When talking peacefully to the plants, they will explain that their friend, Gareth (the botanist) was trying to find ways to keep out lumberjacks who need firewood in order to protect them, and instead of creating a permanent fire, he summoned a permanent fire elemental. Just by existing and moving around the forest, it has started fires, driving both awoken plants and local wildlife to the edge of the forest. The plants urge the players to help get rid of the

elemental, stating they'll return to the deep forest and stop 'haunting' villagers once it's gone.

Part 3: Into the Fire

As the players are discussing the situation with the plants (or are chasing the few remaining ones away), inform them that they notice the smell of smoke, which grows stronger every second. The trees slightly further into the woods move away to escape the approaching fire, and the 102 hp fire elemental is revealed, in the middle of a fight with four 20 hp wolves and a 40 hp bear.

The wolves share one initiative, and the bear has it's own. The fire elemental should focus its attacks primarily on the animals and not the players. If one wolf gets too injured, it will retreat off the battlefield and in next the turn, another wolf will show up to take its place. The fight will begin with any three tiles of the map on fire, roll 1d4 for each fire, if a 1 is rolled, the fire will spread to an adjacent tile. The trees have buckets nearby that were previously used to water the younger plants with the river water. The trees should suggest to the player that they could try lure the elemental towards the river so the trees can knock it in, or for players to fill buckets of water for the trees to dump on the elemental for 5 damage (or put out fires). The plants will not attack directly. (For the sake of time, you can choose to have the wolves do a set amount of damage each turn rather than roll everything). Use the Final Encounter Map.

Conclusion

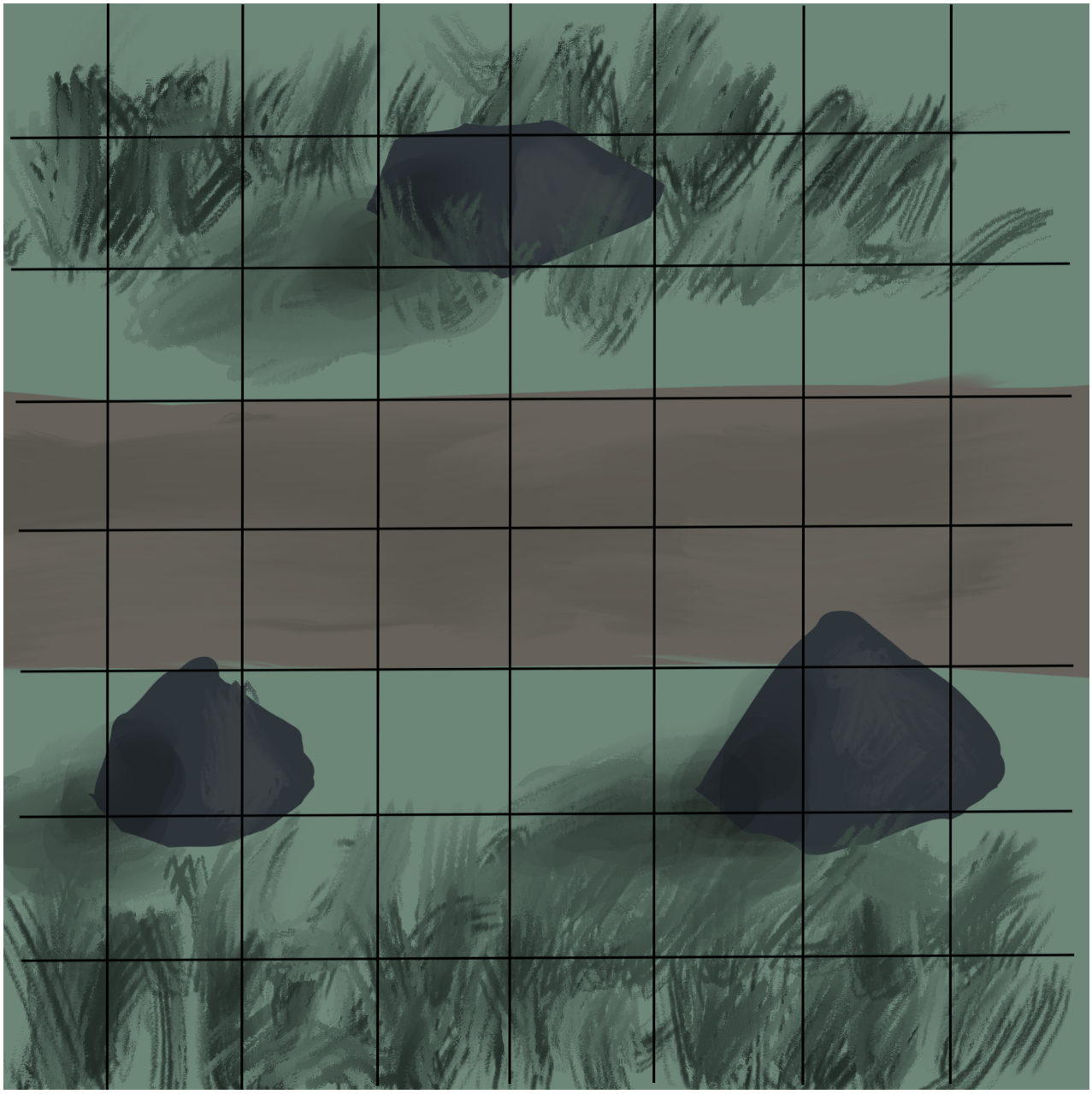
Upon the fire elemental's defeat, the plants will thank the players for their help, saying that they will be welcome anytime in their forest. One of the shrubs reveals a note that Gareth Littleroot had written before his death, explaining his actions, and requests that the party deliver that to the mayor when they return to town (see Littleroot's Last Letter in Handouts).

Upon their return, the party receives the reward they'd negotiated for, and the village holds another feast for the heroes. The mayor promises to work sometime out with the awoken plants.

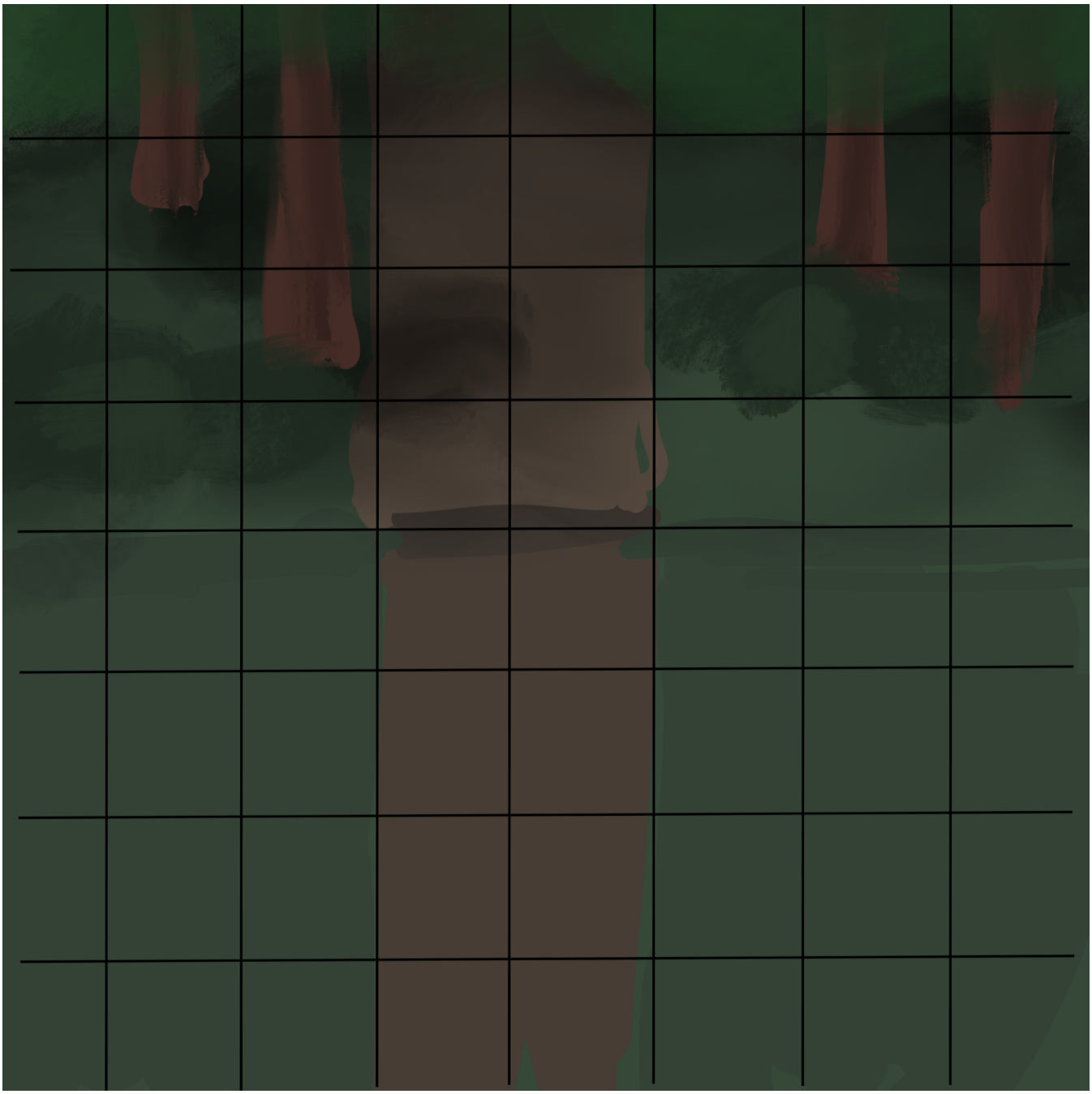
If the fire elemental is not defeated, and the players run away, the citizens of Ameroth will send for help from nearby larger cites. Most of the forest burns down before more help can arrive, and the surviving awoken plants find themselves wandering in search of a new home.

Maps

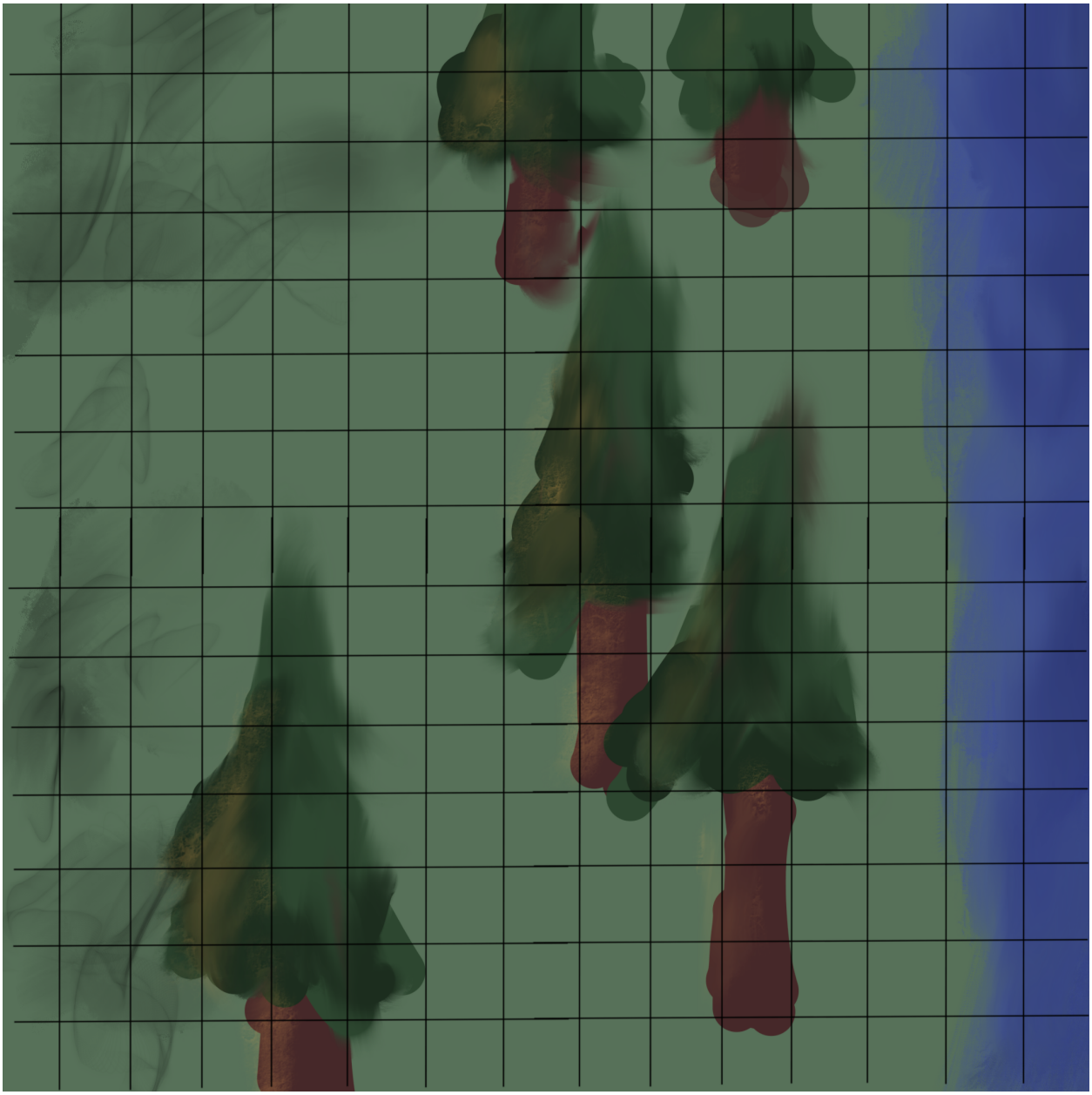
Wolf Encounter



Bear Encounter



Final Encounter



Handouts

Gareth's Journal Entry

I must protect my friends in the forest. The villagers mean to make them firewood. They refuse to consider my words, so if it is fire they want, then fire I shall give them.

I find myself exploring dangerous magics. If I do not return, I hope my friends find safety. The wizard who sold me this book warned me of its danger, but the fools will need wood for the winter and I'm running out of time.

Littleroot's Last Letter

To whomever finds this,
I'm afraid my actions have caused quite a bit of trouble. I was loney, so I took it upon myself to create my own friends out of trees and shrubs. I had only wished to protect them. Instead, in my foolishness, I may end up destroying them all. If things end up okay, please be kind to them, they think and feel just as we do. I hope you can one day forgive me.

-Gareth

Encounter Information:

Wolves: https://5thsrd.org/gamemaster_rules/monsters/wolf/
Brown Bears: https://5thsrd.org/gamemaster_rules/monsters/brown_bear/
Fire Elemental: https://5thsrd.org/gamemaster_rules/monsters/fire_elemental/
Awoken Tree: https://5thsrd.org/gamemaster_rules/monsters/awakened_tree/
Awoken Shrub: https://5thsrd.org/gamemaster_rules/monsters/awakened_shrub/