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DEAD TREE VALE

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INTRODUCTION

This is a short adventure for four player characters of 7th level. You (the DM) need the D&D rulebooks, including the Player's Handbook, the Dungeon Master's Guide, and the Monster Manual to run this adventure. This scenario utilizes the D&D 5e rules. To get started, print out the adventure. Read through the scenario at least once to familiarize yourself with the situation, threats, and major NPCs. Text that appears in white is player information that you can read aloud or paraphrase for the players at the proper times. Maps are in the appendix.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Dead Tree Vale is a small valley that lies along a road between Kelerak and Daven. Over two decades ago, a Zelandic Druid of questionable morality established a modest residence in a cave at the base of the Vale's eastern ridgeline. The Druid, Calistin by name, befriended the local animals, encouraged the local plant life to grow and conceal his home, and conducted his research free of interference from other Druids, or anyone else for that matter. He experimented in human-animal hybrids, among other twisted past-times. His crowning achievement was a spell that would transform humans into a unique species of tree, while allowing the transformed subjects to retain full cognizance. Unfortunately, he was unable to perfect the

spell, despite repeated attempts. Invariably, every human-turned-tree withered and died shortly after transformation, some lasting as much as a tenday and others less than twenty-four hours. It is possible that the spell itself was not flawed, and that the subjects simply succumbed to the shock of the event. (Calistin did not use volunteers interested in experiencing a tree's life, preferring instead to prey on small parties of travelers foolish enough to camp for the night within the Vale's confines.) He still inhabits the veil and preys on travelers, seeking to perfect his twisted experiments.

ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

Once the characters enter Dead Tree Vale, they will face lamias and evil treants. Eventually, they will be approached by werewolves, who claim that Calistin the druid created them. They will ask the heroes for help dispatching him and becoming human again. This is a trick, and the werewolves are trying to lure the PCs into a trap, where the druid can use his evil magic to turn them into trees. They must face and dispatch the evil druid.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

The PCs may choose to journey to the area of the Dead Tree Vale for any number of

reasons. As the DM, it is your job to decide how best to involve them in the adventure. You can use the following hooks to spur your imagination, modifying them as necessary to fit your campaign or the characters.

Unfortunate choice of paths. The characters have chosen to take a poorly traveled back road between Kelerak and Daven. This road leads right through the Dead Tree Vale, and they will quickly be embroiled in the adventure.

A plea for help. The characters are staying at an inn when they are approached by a young woman named Deidre. She begs the heroes to help find her brother Gregor, who was last seen on the road entering dead Tree Vale.

An intriguing tale. Player-characters hear a tale in an inn or tavern, located near Dead Tree Vale. The tale-teller is a caravan mercenary, a merchant, or an old drunk looking for a free drink.

else. Each one a sickly gray color, all twisted and misshapen, with branches reaching out to the sky like the claws o' some dying beast, or a man begging the Gods for mercy . . . Mayhap they were oaks once, or maple, or something . . . I tell ye, no wise or even sane man lingers in a place the likes o' that. I certainly didn' t. Nor do the caravans. I heard tell from one hired guard, said his master whipped the wagon horses the whole length o' the Vale, and refused to stop and set up the night's camp ' til well after dark, when those trees were better than a league behind them . . . Only a fool, I tell ye, only a fool . . . Still, they also say the Vale guards a cache o' rich treasure, and an even deeper, darker secret . . .

“Aye, twas not long ago that I traveled through Dead Tree Vale, and I can tell ye from my own experience, tis and eerie and unsettling sort o' place-- and one I was glad to leave behind . . . Ye haven' t heard o' the Vale? Well, twould be easy enough to not know it, less ye were from those parts. It lies off the beaten path, so to speak, east of the road, ' tween Lust and Glutton's lands, or what used to be their lands. Who can tell nowadays? I tell ye-- only a fool travels south o' Fisherman's Solace by himself, but I' ve been marked for a fool since long ago. Hehe . . . Anyway, ye want to know why they call it Dead Tree Vale, I' d expect. ' Tis a simple enough reason, really. The whole place is filled with naught but dead trees, though they' re like no trees yer likely to have seen anywheres

PART 1: EVENTS IN DEAD TREE VALE

Dead Tree Vale is a natural valley that is about two miles long and one mile wide. Dead Tree Vale is located along the course of a poorly travelled back road between Kelerak and Daven, in a little valley that lies in the lee of the Hook Hills. Whether the trail is an ancient dwarf-road or not is unknown, but unwary travelers who intend to head south from the northeast often use it as a shortcut. There are no streams or other surface water in the Vale, though the trail gets fairly muddy when it rains.

Contrary to popular rumor, the Vale is full of both plant and animal life, including many perfectly ordinary trees. However, scattered throughout the Vale, usually in clumps of two to four, but occasionally alone, stand hideous, dead trees. The trees bear a passing resemblance to oak trees, save that their branches tend to be slightly fewer in number and most spread skyward rather than outward. Many of the trees' trunks are also misshapen, sometimes bent almost double. The trees' bark is gray, and feels like petrified wood when touched. It also feels unnaturally cold--several degrees colder than the surrounding normal trees--regardless of the time of year. It is not difficult, particularly in poor light, to imagine human qualities in the dead trees--the branches seem to resemble outstretched arms, the boles look like faces twisted in horrible expressions of fear and pain. Each

tree was, in fact, once human. The Vale is a shadowy, fearsome place, and the adventurers will feel the chill of its evil as they walk through it.

The following events do not take place in any particular order. They are triggered when the PCs visit the spots marked on the map of Dead Tree Vale (in the appendix), when the exigencies of the adventure dictate they occur, or when the DM deems they should occur.

Treant Trouble

When the heroes visit this location (marked T on the map), they will be assaulted by evil treants, that are actually the hapless victims of Calistin's experiments. The two treants have no memory of their former lives, although they feel an explained but unremitting hatred toward humanoids. The treants are in a weakened state, however, as they are in the slow process of drying up, dying, and becoming the dead trees for which the Vale is named. The trees are followed by 3 twig blights, which feel an admiration and identification with the evil treants, and are shadowed by an ettercap, which follows the treants in hopes of feasting on any humanoids they slay. The ettercap will spring from the bushes in eagerness after the treants begin their attack in hopes of hurrying what it sees as the inevitable conclusion of the battle: the death of the party.

The treants cannot be reasoned with. Only powerful spells (see Concluding the

Adventure) can return them to their former forms: Gregor, Deidre's brother, a local farmhand (see Adventure Hooks); and Simon, a merchant who traveled through the Vale some six months ago. The treants will not attack the werewolves or Calistin, although they are not his allies and will not obey his commands. The treants will not leave the confines of the Vale.

2 weakened treants (See MM pg. 289, except +9 to hit on slam and rock actions, slam attack does 3d6+2 damage, rock attack does 4d10+2 damage, 116 hps, 10 hd; CR 7)
1 ettercap (See MM pg. 131)
3 twig blights (See MM pg. 32)

Lamia Labors

When the heroes visit this location (marked L on the map), they will be beset upon by 2 lamias and 3 death dogs, creatures attracted to the Vale by its evil reputation and the foul feeling it exudes. They are interested in nothing more than slaying the heroes. If 1 Lamia and all death dogs are slain, the remaining lamia will flee. A death dog will only flee if it is the sole creature left on the battlefield. The lamia are not allies of the werewolves or Calistin. One of the lamia wields a magical +1 silvered long sword (add +1 to its hit and damage).

2 Lamia (See MM pg. 201)
3 death dogs (See MM pg. 321)

Werewolf Woes

As the heroes first enter Dead Tree Vale, make a perception check DC 12 for each of

the three human-wolf hybrids (effectively werewolves, but since they didn't gain their forms through the curse of lycanthropy, they cannot spread lycanthropy). If any of the three succeed at this check, they will have warned Calistin of their presence, and then they will either ambush the heroes or choose when to encounter them. When the heroes visit the location marked W on the map, they will always encounter the werewolves.

Calistin's early experiments as a Dark Druid centered on the idea of creating new forms to better understand nature. This unorthodox approach to Druidic magic quickly earned him the disapproval of his masters and led to his eventual flight from his Zelandish enclave. He took his ideas with him, however, and eventually discovered a way to merge species. Initially, Calistin perfected his work using animals. Most of the results of this early experimentation were truly horrifying, and almost all of his creations died. The few that survived were useless because Calistin had no means to communicate with them concerning any enhanced understanding of nature they might be experiencing. Eventually, he decided to use human subjects, but was unsure what creature to pair them with. The next day, while wandering about his new home, he found an orphaned litter of wolf pups and realized they would be perfect. Calistin knew wolves to be among the most intelligent of animals, and the many legends of werewolves convinced him that lupine and human traits could easily coexist. Alara, Nicholas, Latsu, and Palitan are the surviving results of his experimentation to cross wolves with humans. (It should be noted that after years of working with his lupine companions, Calistin decided he was on the wrong track and started over. His new attempt at better understanding nature involved research that led to the

creation of his unique ritual that transforms humans to trees.) Calistin owes the loyalty of his hybrid companions not to his Druidic abilities but to a more mundane source. All three were very weak for months after their new bodies formed, and Calistin nurtured each carefully. The procedure he used to join the forms left the new creatures with no memories of their former lives or of their transformations. They view him as their pack leader, and even Latsu will cooperate with his requests unhesitantly. It should be noted that Calistin's ability to communicate with the pack is a function of years of close contact and their remaining language ability, and cannot be disrupted or dispelled as a magical effect could.

When not in Calistin's company, the pack wanders in the general vicinity of the vale. They will immediately return to Calistin to warn him of intruders they observe. All wolves use similar tactics when fighting as a group against a single opponent. Generally speaking, they surround their prey, and engage in a series of feints and strikes to confuse it. Often, the wolves to the prey's front will feint to draw its attention, while the wolves behind will simultaneously make crippling hamstring attacks. When fighting against a group, wolves still attempt to surround their adversaries, and still coordinate their feints and strikes. Calistin's pack has grown accustomed to his use of magic, and is not unnerved by it like true wolves would be. They do still share other wolves' fear of fire, though. The three wolf-human hybrids encountered here are Alara, Latsu, and Nicholas. They each have their own personalities and motivations.

Alara: Alara was an intelligent but coquettish young woman from a village in Daven. She was

captured by Calistin and became his second successful wolf-human creation. In poor lighting, Alara (like the other wolf-human hybrids) is easily confused for a very large wolf, but the resemblance fades quickly if she is examined more closely. Her head is shaped in the lupine / canine fashion, but her muzzle is shorter than normal and her ears smaller and less expressive. She retains the ability to speak, though her words are heavily accented with growls and yips, and are difficult to understand without practice. Her torso and forelimbs are an even blend of human and wolf, with the most noticeable feature being a fully-developed hand (with claws), including an opposable thumb. Her hindquarters are more lupine, with legs that bend to the rear, and a bushy tail. Alara (like the others) is completely covered in shaggy fur, and is most comfortable moving on all fours. Her personality is predominantly human, tempered by a wolf's strong instincts. She has no particular dislike of humans, but is slow to trust them as her experiences have taught her that nearly all humans are hostile to her kind. Calistin is the one exception - he nurtured her for years, and has earned her complete loyalty. (New creatures resulting from Calistan's experiments do not retain memories, including those of being an involuntary subject of a spell.) Alara takes a thoughtful and innovative approach to problem solving and combat; she is particularly fond of luring or frightening opponents into indefensible positions before attacking, such as a bog or patch of quicksand. She is the unofficial leader of the pack in Calistin's absence.

Latsu: Latsu was a day laborer travelling from village to village when he encountered Calistin and became his first victim. Latsu is not particularly bright and is quite short-

tempered. He usually charges into any fight in a reckless manner, snarling angry curses at his opponents. Alara can sometimes restrain him, but not often. Latsu hates all humans, but he fears Calistin and will not act against him. He is enamored of Alara, and often acts in whatever manner he thinks will please or impress her. Latsu's transformation was not as perfect a blend as the others – he lacks a tail to provide better balance while running; as such, his speed is 25 feet per round. Latsu is the only wolf-human that continues to use implements; he fights with a sturdy club (1d6 plus strength modifier bludgeoning damage) as well as his fangs and claws

Nicholas: Nicholas was a furtive and moody teenage boy who ran away from home and fell afoul of Calistin just last year. He is less accustomed to his form than the others, and lacks confidence. He tends to be a sneaky fighter, always looking for the cheap shot. Like Latsu, he has a crush on Alara, but is far too shy to do anything about it. As a human, Nicholas had a certain disregard for other's property rights, and still likes to collect baubles now. He hides some, leaves others where Alara might find them, and shares the rest with Calistin, who he sees as a father figure. Nicholas, mostly due to Alara's influence, is very distrustful of humans. He also does not like Latsu very much.

3 werewolves (See MM pg. 289, but cannot spread lycanthropy)

3 direwolves (See MM pg. 289)

Strategy: When the heroes encounter the three werewolves, Alara will speak and attempt to persuade the PCs (using deception checks) that the werewolves are helpless victims of Calistin. She will lie and say that she will guide them to Calistin so that they

may slay him. If the heroes believe her, the three werewolves will indeed guide the PCs to the druid, but along the way, the PCs should gain hints from the personalities of the three wolves that all may not be what it seems.

When the werewolves and PCs reach Calistin, the werewolves will promptly turn on them and aid Calistin in subduing them, disarming them, and knocking them unconscious.

Calistin will thereupon bind the PCs and use them as subjects in his dark rituals.

If the heroes do not believe the werewolves, they will attack the heroes and attempt to subdue them to bring them to Calistin themselves, hoping to curry his favor. If all direwolves are slain, any werewolf reduced to half hit points will flee the battle and retreat to Calistin.

Helpful Howler

As the heroes first enter Dead Tree Vale, make a perception check DC 12 for the forth wolf-human hybrid (werewolf), called Palitan. If he succeeds at this check, he is aware of the PCs' presence in the Vale. He will attempt to trail them secretly and learn about their intentions and alignment. Make a stealth check for Palitan and compare it to the PCs passive perceptions scores. If they don't perceive him, assume that Palitan learns enough about them that he judges them an enemy of Calistin. He will reveal himself to them at an opportune time of his choosing.

If the heroes perceive Palitan, he won't have had time to discern their alignment and intentions and will attempt to flee from them without combat. He will then try again to stalk them and learn about them. If they



again perceive him, he will attempt to flee, will not try again to stalk them, and will hide himself at the location marked H on the map.

When the heroes visit this location (marked H on the map), they will encounter Palitan if he fled from them or if he never perceived them in the first place.

Palitan: Palitan is the most unusual of the hybrids – his combination with a very weak-willed wolf allowed him to keep most of his human traits and memories. As a human, Palitan was a considerate and educated priest of Reenan. He was seized by Calistin while travelling and subjected to the transformation. Initially very confused, he eventually overcame his wolfish emotions and fled from Calistin and the pack. Since then, he has come to regard his new form as a sort of penance for unknown misdeeds, and still strives to serve the Lady of Paladins as best he may. Palitan will seek to aid travelers if he judges that they are decent folk, sometimes helping them to find needed water or game and often helping them to flee the Vale, but his efforts are usually unsuccessful due to his appearance and limited ability to communicate. Reenan has not forgotten her faithful servant, however, and those who worship Reenan and fight by Palitan's side will feel blessed, gaining advantage on one attack roll of their choice per day while Palitan is in their sight, so long as their combat objectives match Reenan's (defend the weak, punish evil, etc.). Calistin and the other hybrids know of Palitan's continued presence in the area of the Vale and will try to kill him on sight.

Strategy: If Palitan judges that the PCs are decent folk, he will reveal himself and try to warn them to leave the Vale. However, it

takes a DC 15 Intelligence check to understand his garbled language. He can also be persuaded to reveal the location of Calistin's cave with a DC 10 persuasion check, and a DC 15 persuasion check will convince him to fight by the side of the PCs when they confront Calistin.

I werewolf (See MM pg. 289, but cannot spread lycanthropy)

PART 2: FACING THE DRUID

The adventure will culminate with the PCs facing Calistin, for the evil druid will not let the PCs leave Dead Tree Vale unmolested. The encounter is likely to take place at the druid's cave, as he does not wander around and is not likely to be encountered anywhere else.

The Cave Lair

Calistin makes his lair in a natural cave in the Vale, marked C on the map in the appendix. The entrance is extremely well hidden in the heavy undergrowth. Unless the heroes have been led to the cave entrance by the three evil werewolves or by Palitan, they will have to search in the correct location and succeed at a Wisdom (Perception) check DC 20 to find it. The opening is less than four feet high. It is covered by thorny vines. This is a part of Calistin's defense network; if surprised near his lair, he will retreat inside and cast *Entangle* on the vines, making it difficult to enter his cave and perhaps catching someone in the entranceway. The spell should give Calistin enough time to catch his breath and decide on his next course of action. Inside, the cave is divided into two sections.

The outer section is high enough to stand in, and contains Calistin's bed (a mess of leaves and a threadbare blanket), cooking fire, and a scattering of old bones and other debris. The

inner section is much smaller, and has a small spring-fed pool. A map of Calistin's cave is in the appendix. Calistin has left the mundane concerns of mankind behind (the rumors of immense treasure in the Vale are false), but a buried cask in this second area contains 900 silver pieces worth of rubies and a potion of hill giant strength that Calistin secreted away and then forgot.

The dark druid has given orders to his three human-wolf hybrids to bring him travelers that pass through the Vale so that he may use his transformation ritual on them. He hopes to learn more so that he can perfect the spell to create an army of evil treants under his control. However, so far everyone he has managed to turn into a treant inevitably dies and becomes the withered, dead trees dotting the vale and giving it its name. If the werewolves manage to bring the PCs to Calistin, he will give a howl and immediately attack, as will the werewolves. Their aim is to batter the PCs into unconsciousness, whereupon he will strip them, bind them, and get to work on his evil ritual.

This ritual, called *Calistin's Transformation*, takes 10 minutes to complete. Upon its completion, the target, who must have been restrained for the entire 10 minutes of the ritual, must succeed on a Constitution saving throw against Calistan's spell saving throw DC or become a treant. The creature saves with disadvantage. The new treant has all of

the statistics of a treant, including its mental statistics, it becomes neutral evil, and it forgets its previous life and that it has undergone a ritual. The new treant will not attack Calistin or his allies, but it will not obey his commands. The ritual, however, is imperfect. The new treant slowly withers and dies. Each week it loses 1 hit die (and the corresponding hit points) permanently. Once it has lost all hit dice, it becomes a dead tree rooted to the spot in Dead Tree Vale. If a PC saves against the ritual, Calistin attempts to slay the bound individual.

If Calistin is encountered alone, he will give a loud howl, and within 2d12 minutes, if they are not slain, whatever remains of the three werewolves and dire wolves will arrive at his location. Calistin will try to be deceptive under these conditions, lying to the PCs about his motives, getting them talking, and giving his wolves time to arrive. If they haven't arrived in 20 minutes, he will flee if he can; otherwise he will attack in an attempt to drive off the PCs.

Calistin (See appendix)

CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

Once Calistin and his wolf-hybrids has been vanquished, the PCs may wish to try to help Palitan, the other werewolves, and any remaining treants regain their true forms. This will require powerful magic on the order of a *wish*, although you can also allow the PCs to come up with some creative (and also difficult and/or expensive) combination of magic to undue the effects. Anyone that the PCs succeed in returning to their true forms will remain life-long friends and will aid the heroes in whatever way they reasonably can.

FURTHER ADVENTURES

If Calistin escapes from the Vale, he is likely to remember the heroes and seek to do them harm in the future. Similarly, if Calistin is slain but the evil werewolves are left alive, they too might become life-long enemies of the PCs. Finally, if the heroes succeed in somehow restoring Palitan to his true form, his connections with the church of Reenan means that the church is likely to call upon the heroes when they need help with a quest or goal.

APPENDIX

NPCs

Calistin the Druid

Medium humanoid (human), neutral evil

Armor Class: 11 (16 with *barkskin*)

Hit Points: 40 (8d8 + 8)

Speed: 30ft.

STR 10 (+0) **DEX** 12 (+1) **CON** 13 (+1) **INT** 12 (+1) **WIS** 16 (+3) **CHA** 11 (+0)

Skills: Medicine +6, Nature +6, Perception +6

Senses: passive Perception 16

Languages: Dark speech, Kelevan
Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Spellcasting. Calistin is a 8th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 15, +6 to hit with spell attacks). He has the following druid spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *poison spray, produce flame, shillelagh*

1st level (4 slots): *charm person, entangle, healing word, thunder wave*

2nd level (3 slots): *barkskin, bold person, moonbeam*

3rd level (3 slots): *call lightning, dispel magic, wind wall*

4th level (2 slots): *confusion, wall of fire*

ACTIONS

Quarterstaff. Melee Weapon Attack: +4 to hit (+6 to hit with *shillelagh*), reach 5 ft., one

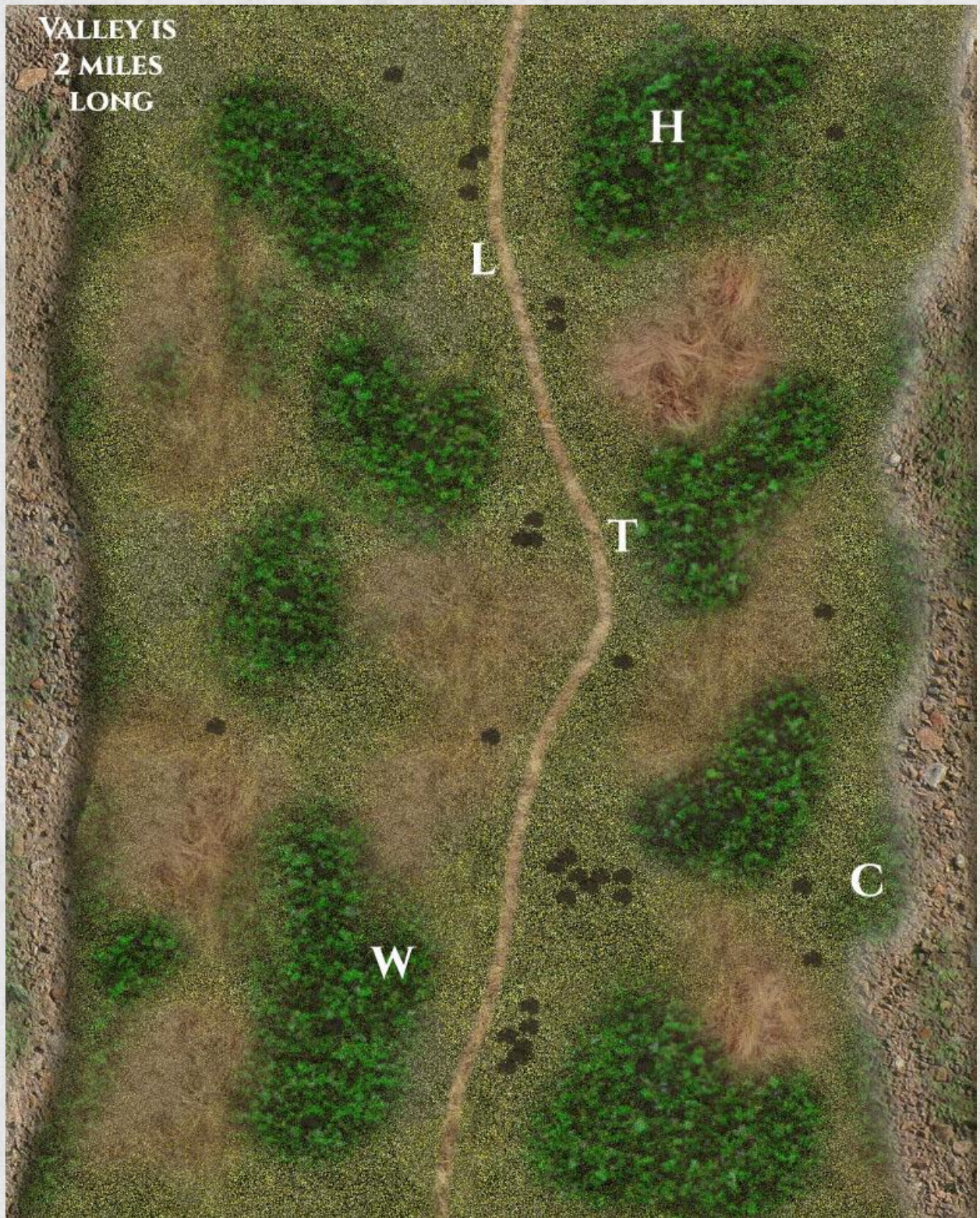
target. **Hit:** 4 (1d6+1) bludgeoning damage, or 7 (1d8+3) bludgeoning damage with *shillelagh*.

Wild Shape. Calistin can use his action to magically assume the shape of a beast that he has seen before. He can do this twice before he needs to rest for 1 hour. He can transform into a beast that has a CR of 1 or lower. This ability is otherwise as the druid class feature ability on page 66 of the Players Handbook. Calistin favors the shape of a brown bear, an eagle, a dire wolf, or a giant spider.

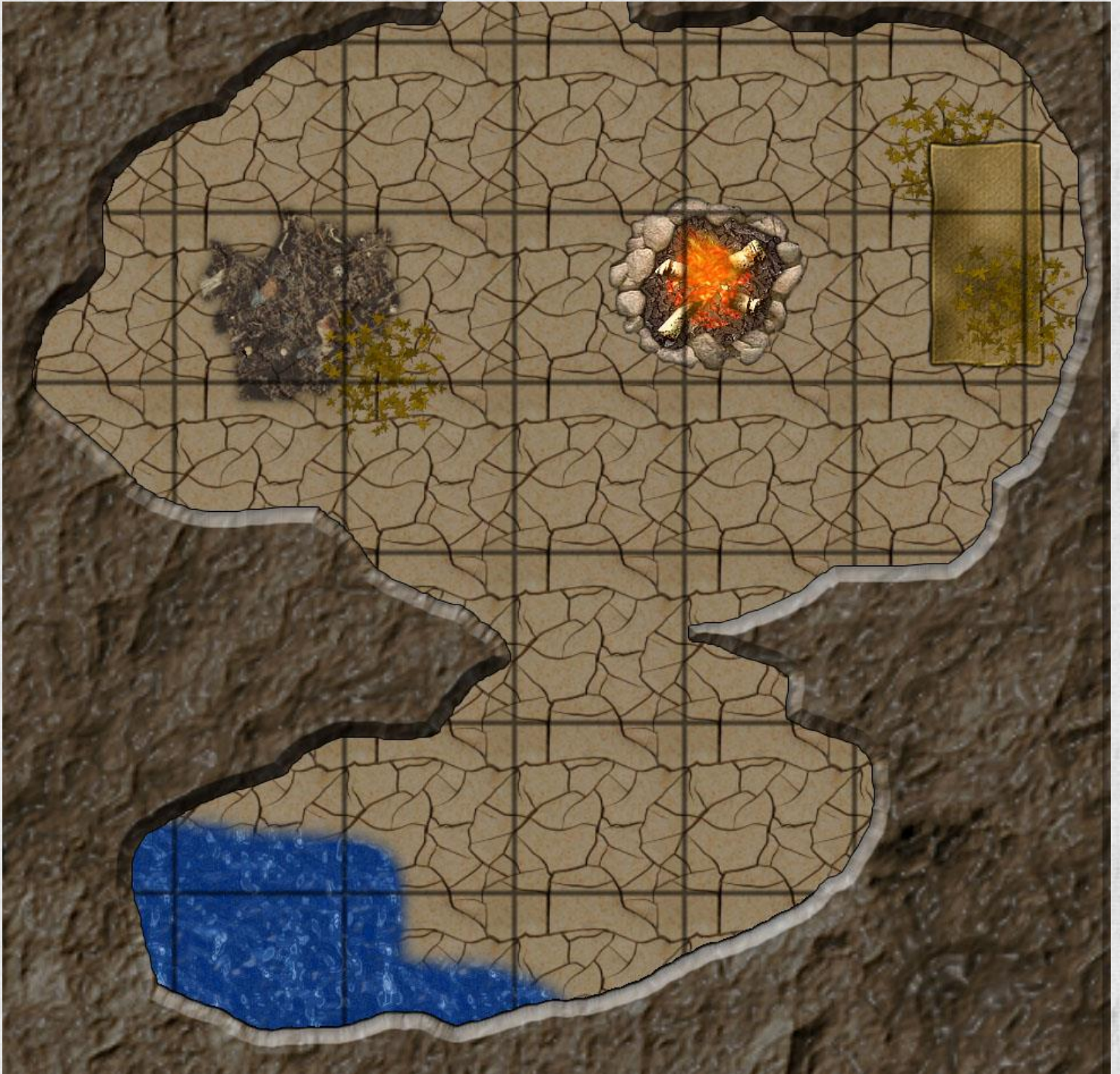
Possessions: 34 silver pieces, quarterstaff, dagger, gold bracelet (100 sp value)

Calistin has lived in the wilds of Southern Kelerak for over a decade and certainly looks it. His skin has a tough leathery quality, resembling the wrinkled hide of a warthog. His eyes are small, brown, and widely spaced, and the modest amount of hair he retains is long and unkempt. His clothing has disintegrated into little more than rags after years of abuse, and he bathes only in rainstorms. All things told, Calistin could more easily pass for a weather-beaten old serf than an accomplished druid, but looks are deceiving.

MAPS



Dead Tree Vale



Calistan's Cave (one square equals 5 feet)

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Designed for the World of Farland Campaign setting.

From the World of Farland (www.farlandworld.com), produced by the webmaster, S. Baker.

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