

MAYHEM AT MIDNIGHT

BY TRAE STRATTON

Dazzling beauty teams up with a tentacled beast.

Artwork by James Crabtree

Trae lives in College Point, New York and dedicates this, his first publication, to Sunrise, Mom, Pop, Sis, Tugboat, Sarah, and to The Arsenal—who always found a way and made legends of themselves.

“Mayhem at Midnight” is an AD&D® game DRAGONLANCE® adventure for 5-8 player characters of levels 4-7 (about 35 total levels). Though playable with any mixture of classes, races, and alignments, an extra warrior may be helpful. The story can be inserted into an existing campaign in any temperate forest that is considered dangerous by those who live near it. Lunitari must be at least half full, but a full moon is recommended to throw wary adventurers off the nature of the true danger. The main monsters in this adventure are taken from MC4 *Monstrous Compendium*, DRAGONLANCE appendix, but inventive DMs may wish to use them in a different setting.

Adventure Background

About three months ago, Vlade the Deceiver, a Black-Robed illusionist of some renown, hired seven intrepid human fighters to collect seedpods from a patch of shimmerweed, a rare flower growing deep in the forest. Though the job was beneath their abilities (or so the adventurers thought), it paid well and they accepted. They were given directions, a brief description of the plant, and a warning to be well away from the flowers come nightfall.

The warriors took no chances. Aside from a brief skirmish with some ogres, they followed the wizard's instructions, collected the seedpods, and were soon on their way home. Making good progress, the party settled in a clearing for a short rest and an afternoon meal. Then things got ugly.

The ogres they had tangled with several days before found some friends and caught up with the humans at the clearing. The ambush went well, and soon several of the party were knocked senseless, to be devoured later. Two of the seven warriors managed to flee the massacre with their lives, and one of them even had a pouch of seeds to collect on.

The ogres rummaged through their spoils and had a feast right there in the clearing to celebrate the victory. The creatures had no use for the

seeds, so they simply tossed them aside. The drunken revelry ended late that night, with the ogres passed out in the clearing.

But fate had not yet finished with the glade. Late that night, while moving through the woods in search of a new lair, a wyndlass caught a glimpse of the ogres' fading campfire. The tentacled horror silently wound its way into the clearing; when it left again the area was devoid of life and its belly was full. Deciding this was as good a place as any to feed, the monster groped 30 yards back into the woods and sank a new lair into the soft earth behind some low-lying hills. The lair was close enough to pick off anything heading into the clearing. Should the need arise, the wyndlass could reach the clearing itself with minimal effort.

The wyndlass had chosen well, for the clearing was at the juncture of several game trails used frequently by animals and humanoids. The creature fed regularly for a time, but after several months the game became scarce, especially at night. Finally, starvation made the creature desperate. Hoisting itself from its damp lair, it made for the clearing in search of food.

As the wyndlass surged along, it used the thick, strong trees along its path as anchors for its tentacles, pulling itself forward at an even faster pace than it could normally manage. When it reached the clearing, the creature was suddenly confronted by a blinding barrage of colored light.

The wyndlass blinked rapidly, clearing its vision of the confounding array of luminescent light, and made a wonderful discovery. There in the glade was a party of dazed hobgoblins. Hungrily, the wyndlass plucked off as many hobgoblins as it could carry and slid back to its lair without a fight.

The wyndlass, though not a genius, was smart enough to understand that the fragile flowers had something to do with the dazzling lights, and that the lights could stun prey into immobility. Recognizing the opportunity of a lifetime, the wyndlass decided to take advantage of its good fortune. As prey drifted into the clearing and was subjugated by the flowers, the creature could glide in from the darkness for the kill. The wyndlass wasn't very fond of leaving its lair, but the beast had a voracious appetite, and the promise of easy and plentiful prey couldn't be ignored.

The wyndlass began to work with the shimmerweed, timing its attacks to coincide with the onslaught of flickering light. Now, after many repetitions, the wyndlass executes the trap with lethal perfection.

For the DUNGEON MASTER™

The PCs have been traveling through the forest for several days, just one part of an even longer journey toward their next adventure. Encounters in the woods are up to the DM's discretion, but the PCs should see and hear shadowy forms, some vaguely human, stomping through the forest in search of prey.

The adventure begins near midnight, several hours after the PCs have found a decent clearing and made camp for the night. Unfortunately, they have chosen the deadliest site in the entire forest.

The DM must be careful to make this clearing seem like any other; therefore there is no boxed text to be read to the players. Unless you normally run a highly detailed campaign, a lengthy description will only tip the players off. Simply incorporate the sequence of events below along with their casual descriptions when the time is right.

As the party winds through the forest, the hour grows late. Toward evening, a thick darkness rapidly falls over everything; it is necessary to call a halt. (To be caught wandering in the blackness of the wood is a mistake few live to make twice!) The PCs find a suitable clearing next to a lazily flowing brook, and the party stops for the night. This area, similar to their earlier campsites, is dotted with typical wild flowers, lush grass, and dandelions.

Anyone who insists on searching the clearing has a 75% chance of finding something lying about the perimeter. Roll 1d10 and consult the following table:

- 1-3 **Humanoid bone** (Ogre, goblin, orc, elf, dwarf, human, or other)
- 4-9 **Animal bone** (Deer, wolf, bear, rabbit, and so on, but no monster bones)
- 10 **Rusted weapon** (Dagger, knife, arrowhead, or broken spear)

The adventurers should follow their normal routine (dinner, prayer, spell memorization, and conversation) with no suspicions that anything will happen.

Midway through the meal, a lone wolf calls out solemnly from somewhere deep

within the forest. Soon the blood-chilling howl is joined by several other wolves, and there is no mistaking the signs of a wolf pack forming. The fearful sounds of the wolf pack tearing down an animal just outside the clearing should keep the PCs sweating through the night.

Lunitari rises steadily, nearly full as the PCs prepare for bed and set up watches. The pale white orb reaches its zenith around midnight, and only PC guards will be awake when the mayhem begins. If the PCs break camp and run, they avoid the worst of it but may get lost and meet the ogres in the woods at night.

The Dancing Lights

The dandelions in the crescent shaped patch around the north and eastern ends of the clearing are the first threat.

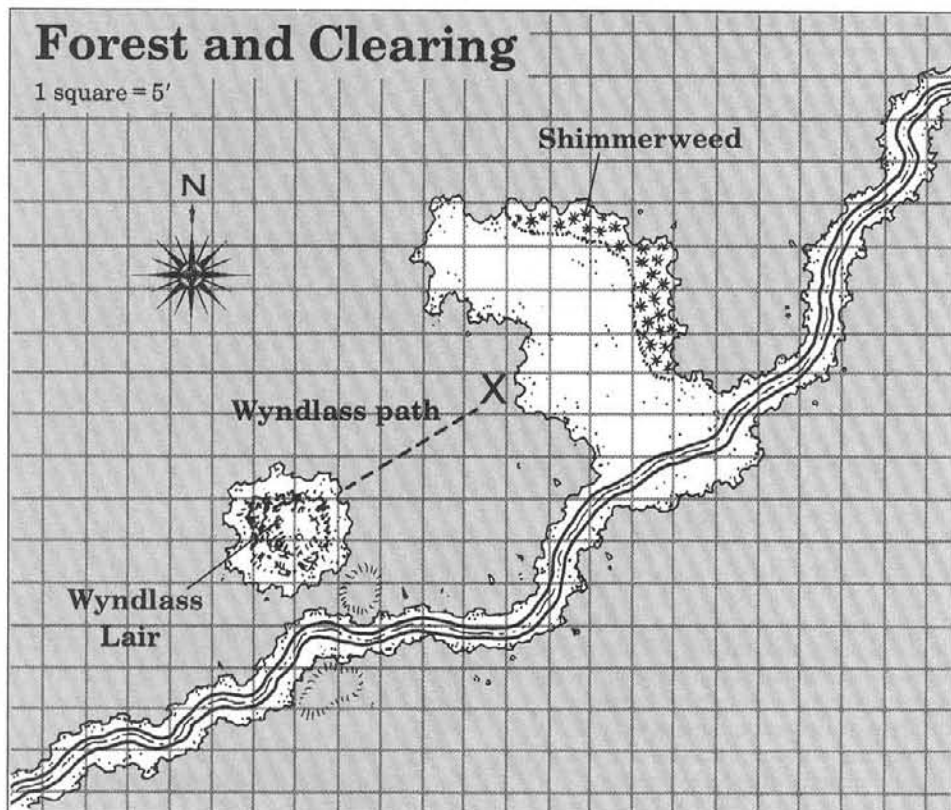
Shimmerweed (26): INT non; AL nil; AC 8; MV nil; HD 1 hp; THAC0 not applicable; #AT 0; Dmg nil; SA confusion; SZ T (11" tall); ML 20; XP 35; MC4.

Only keen observation will unmask this natural deception and reveal the true nature of the plant. Under close inspection, the wildflowers appear to be cast of fine spun glass and are so delicate that the slightest blow shatters them into dust.

Close to midnight, the shimmerweed patch comes to life. The flowers, enchanted by the moonlight, spray forth a dazzling iridescent display of flickering light.

Anyone in the clearing who sees these "dancing lights" is affected by the display as if a *confusion* spell had been cast by a 10th-level Red Robed wizard. The combined power of the patch can affect 26 Hit Dice or levels, one for each flower, and has a maximum duration of 12 rounds. A saving throw vs. spells (at a -2 penalty and adjusted for high Wisdom scores) should be made when each PC first sees the lights.

PCs who save successfully have fought off the dazzling power of the shimmerweed and may act unhindered for the entire encounter. Those who fail the save become bewildered and must check each round for individual reactions. Roll 1d10 and consult the chart below until the spell duration expires or the "Wander away" result occurs:



The forest shudders again, crackling with the explosion of shattering branches. As a hail of kindling rains down on the glade, a swarm of the rippling tendrils shoots out of the darkness, ensnaring the clearing in a writhing net of flailing death and destruction.

The hidden creature is a wyndlass, a monster that resembles a monstrous, land-roving black octopus whom nature has equipped with two extra tentacles, a powerful beak, and three eyes.

As the wyndlass is a beast few have seen and fewer still have lived to describe, the PCs may be the first to discover an aspect of the creature's ecology that was previously unknown: The wyndlass's eyes glow with a faint blue light, a natural mutation that renders the beast immune to the shimmerweed's spell-like effects. However, whether this immunity is specific to shimmerweed or a general immunity against all related spells cannot be determined from this single encounter.

Wyndlass: INT low; AL N; AC 3; MV 3; HD 12; hp 88; THAC0 9; #AT 11; Dmg 1-10 ($\times 10$)/1-4; SA surprise; SZ H (22' long); ML 16; XP 5,000; MC4.

Several hours after dark, the wyndlass crawls forth from its lair and drags itself toward the clearing until it reaches location X on the map. From this point the creature can reach the clearing easily with its tentacles (each limb is nearly 30' long), and the trees block missile attacks directed at it from the clearing. The darkness and the clustered branches obscuring the wyndlass give all missiles a -3 penalty.

Although it has 10 tentacles, the beast can attack only two opponents at one time. PCs held in the grip of the wyndlass cannot defend themselves from attacks by the other tentacles. To break free, a PC must roll a successful bend bars/lift gates check. However, the razorlike barbs that cover each tentacle inflict 1-6 hp damage for each limb that the PC tears free during the escape.

Once the wyndlass has secured prey in each of its limb clusters or takes over 60 hp of damage, it immediately retreats to its lair, a maneuver that takes only one round. If the creature is heavily attacked along the way, it will drop one of its prizes in order to defend itself. If fate favors the wyndlass and the battle goes well, the predator will slay

1 **Wander away** (unless prevented) for duration of spell.

2-6 **Stand confused** one round (then roll again).

7-9 **Attack nearest creature** for one round (then roll again).

10 **Act normally** for one round (then roll again).

Confused PCs may defend themselves if attacked, but they are still subject to the above effects the following round. Those who wander away from the clearing walk off in a random direction determined by the DM and are likely to become lost in the forest. At the DM's option, they are attacked by a wandering predator.

Besides being vulnerable to any form of trampling, crushing, or slicing, shimmerweed patches are very sensitive to bright light. Sudden exposure to spells such as *light* or *continual light* overloads the petals, causing the plants to explode into dust, destroyed forever. Plants killed in any other way sprout and grow back again in about a month.

The Attack

This is the moment the hidden beast has been waiting for. Creeping forth from its oily lair while the party is enthralled, the wyndlass attacks with its deadly barbed tentacles. Read the following to the players after the saving throws are rolled:

As the rainbow of colors flickers and flashes about the glade, many of you stagger mindlessly, victimized by the dazzling effects besieging your senses. Suddenly, a pulsating crack explodes through the forest, ramming your skull like thunder. Trees quake in the blackness, battered by a huge, unseen force smashing through them. Then, amid the whine of splitting tree limbs, a surging pair of massive, barbed tentacles reaches into the clearing in search of prey.

This attack starts during the second round of the light show. Those who saved vs. spells the round before may take decisive action, followed by the confused reactions of those who failed. When the second round ends, read the following passage.

everything in the clearing and drag it back to its lair for future consumption.

When it reaches its lair—a 16'-wide pool of quicksand about 40' deep—the wyndlass and anybody caught in its tentacles is completely submerged in a single round. PCs submerged with the wyndlass suffocate and die unless they have means of breathing underwater (see the *Player's Handbook*, page 122).

The black, oily pond is nestled behind a grove of ancient oak trees some 30' away from the clearing. When it is time to feed, the beast uses the massive trees to pull itself out of the quicksand pit. If unencumbered, the wyndlass can also use the trees to pull itself along, increasing its movement rate (MR) to 4.

Swimming in the quicksand pit is impossible. However, if a method is found to get to the bottom of the pool, the PCs can find five gems worth 500 gp (×3), 375 gp, and 100 gp; a waterproof tube containing a portrait worth 2,000 gp to a collector; and a nonmagical scepter worth 4,000 gp

to its rightful owner (half that to anyone else). There are also three magical items lying on the bottom of the pool. One item can be found for every three rounds of searching:

- A large shield +2
- A suit of elven-sized *elven chain mail* +2
- An arrow of sea monster slaying

Concluding the Adventure

If the PCs survive they may find a way to turn a profit from the encounter. Wyndlass oil is an excellent lubricant and the most important ingredient in *oil of slipperiness*. If bottled, it fetches high prices from alchemists and wizards. Shimmerweed seedpods are valuable additions to any wizard's laboratory, for the crafting of magical items such as *crystal balls*. Even shimmerweed petals are highly sought after. When ground into fine sand, they are used in the creation of magical items

related to light and hypnosis.

If word of their exploits gets around, the PCs may be approached by several parties interested in the location of such a rare find, including an agent dispatched by one Vlade the Deceiver. Ω

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