



FORBIDDEN FRUITS

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A Shadow of the Demon Lord Adventure for Expert Characters

Trouble has come to the door of Bleak's Faste, a stronghold built to protect the common peoples living in and around the Dark Forest. Beastmen have stepped up their attacks, raiding the trails and roads in a relentless assault that has kept the stronghold's soldiers on the defensive. To make matters worse, the expected supplies from a nearby commune have yet to arrive; unless they come soon, the soldiers will become too hungry to keep the howling, cackling hordes at bay.

Forbidden Fruits explores the mortal peril that the growing darkness poses to even the most virtuous of people. Anyone can be warped into debauchery and madness when they dwell in lands on which the shadow falls. The group completes this adventure by stopping the corrupted communers, preventing further infestation, and delivering the needed goods to Bleak's Faste.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Beastmen have haunted the Dark Forest for as long as anyone living there can remember. Their constant raiding led to the construction of Bleak's Faste, a mighty fortress of stone and timber standing at the fork of a river that flows along the forest's edge. A small commune nearby keeps the garrison supplied with foodstuffs in exchange for protection. Without these supplies, the soldiers would surely starve. Of late, though, the needed shipments have not been arriving.

An old, ruined tower stands upon the commune's lands. Unbeknownst to the inhabitants, it was abandoned long ago after a battle with a demonic woodwose and its mad followers. Their tainted remains decayed into the magic-soaked lands, causing a thorny, sticky vine to grow over the area.

The people of the commune moved into the tower, never realizing that the strange vine would be the source of their undoing. Its corrupting influence eventually drove them insane, twisting their religious beliefs into something dark and monstrous. Over the years, evil's grip tightened until the people living there were utterly in its thrall, transformed into hideous mockeries of their former selves. As well, a strange crop has brought new horror to the inhabitants.

The communers' madness reached fever pitch last harvest season, when they found an unconscious, grievously wounded minotaur on their return trip from Bleak's Faste. Though two of its limbs were missing and the other two were mangled, they saw in the beastman a sign from their horned god and believed it could help them bring forth the god in physical form. They carried the creature back to the tower, where they cleaned the stumps of its missing limbs and amputated the others. The people have held it captive there ever since.

The minotaur's disappearance has whipped the local beastmen tribes into a frenzy. Now they range out from their forest homes, bent on finding their prized champion and slaughtering all who get in their way.

GETTING STARTED

Forbidden Fruits takes place in and around the Dark Forest, a large swath of woodland found in the Northern Reach, but you can set it in any wooded location under the threat of beastmen attacks. The characters start the adventure traveling through the farmlands near Bleak's Faste.

You'll need to come up with a reason to involve the group. Expert characters are moving away from their original haunts, so they might be passing through the area on the way to another adventure or returning home from one they just completed. Alternatively, Commander Rabi at Bleak's Faste might have sent out a call for arms, offering a 5 cp reward for each beastman head collected.

A HOSTILE LAND

Several days of travel separate the various locations described in this adventure. Each time the group travels to a location, roll on the following table to see what happens on the way.

TRAVEL TABLE

d6	Event
1	A tear in reality opens next to one of the characters, releasing 1d6 small demons before the rift closes with an audible snap.
2	1d3 hell swine graze in a clearing. When they notice the group, they attack.
3	The group comes across a gnarled, dead tree trunk on which have been nailed dozens of stripped human faces. Insane symbols are scrawled in blood all over the trunk. Any character that sees this must get a success on a Will challenge roll with 1 boon or gain 1 Insanity.
4	The group comes upon a hunting party consisting of 1d3 + 3 wargs .
5	If the group includes any male characters, a lonely dryad emerges from a tree and tries to enthrall the best-looking one. If the party is composed of only females, the dryad is friendly and provides basic information about Bleak's Faste and the commune if asked.
6	A random character steps onto a concealed pit. The character must get a success on an Agility challenge roll or fall in, taking 3d6 damage from the sharpened stakes lining the bottom.

THE FARMLANDS

On the road to Bleak's Faste, the characters encounter an agitated man shouting at a group of farmers in the road, "I'm tellin' ya, it's a beastman. Raped two of my goats to death and ripped apart their paddock. It fell into the old silo and got trapped there. Now I don't know what to do with it. I can't open the door enough to stick a pitchfork in it without gettin' my eyes scratched out."

If the characters offer to help the man, he leads them to a decrepit, roofless silo with one section collapsed inward about halfway up. Something within growls and shrieks while claws scrabble on the inside of the jammed door.

On looking into the silo, the characters see what looks like an immature fomor crouched on the floor. The beastman is small for its kind and has but one horn growing from the side of its head. Patchy fur

covers its pink, scabby flesh; its limbs are shorter than normal and uneven in length. The creature wears a collection of rotting, fly-infested animal parts on a cord around its neck.

If the characters break down or pry open the door, the fomor juvenile springs on them in a flurry of clawed hands and gnashing, jagged teeth, desperate to escape. Though small, it's ferocious and tries to kill anything that gets in its way, howling unintelligible words all the while.

FOMOR JUVENILE

DIFFICULTY 1

Size 1/2 *beastman*

Perception 10 (+0); shadowsight

Defense 13; **Health** 8

Strength 8 (-2), **Agility** 13 (+3), **Intellect** 8 (-2), **Will** 7 (-3)

Speed 10

Feral The fomor makes attack rolls with 1 boon when it can reach two creatures or more.

ATTACK OPTIONS

Claws and Teeth (melee) +3 (1d3)

If the fomor escapes, the characters can follow the trail of destruction it leaves as it heads to the commune. If the characters kill it, the man thanks them and offers to provide food and shelter for their efforts.

BLEAK'S FASTE

The fortress commands the southern shore of a fast-flowing river that marks the edge of the Dark Forest. Its walls stretch east and west up to the river's edge, punctuated by guard posts with alarm bells and signal fires.

Just outside the walls, the players see guards tossing beastmen corpses into a pit filled with smoldering bodies. Commander Rabi (a dwarf **veteran**) oversees the work, occasionally barking an order. Rabi has seen her fair share of combat, as evidenced by her scarred and weathered face and a missing chunk of scalp behind her left ear.

TALKING WITH RABI

It should be obvious that Rabi is in charge. If the group came here to collect bounties on beastmen heads or to help the defenders against the raids, they can approach the commander. Otherwise, Rabi notices them and addresses the group instead.

Rabi can tell the group that beastmen attacks happen all the time, and usually the garrison is enough to handle them. In recent months, though, the creatures have become more aggressive. Just in the last week they almost overpowered the troops on the walls. She has issued a call for volunteers, but given that it's harvest time, few folk can afford to leave their fields.

Of even greater concern is the lack of supplies. Rabi explains that the nearby commune provides the fortress with foodstuffs in exchange for protection. The deliveries are crucial for feeding the soldiers, and without them, Rabi fears they won't have enough to get through the winter. Shipments should have begun arriving weeks ago, but no one has seen or heard from the commune since the spring planting season. Months can pass before the comuners make contact, but this is the first time they have been so long overdue.

If the characters offer to help defend the fortress, Rabi says she needs them to investigate the commune more than extra mouths to feed. She suspects the comuners have not been able to get the goods out due to the increased beastmen raids. She will pay the group 10 gc to escort the harvest shipment to Bleak's Faste.

THE COMMUNE

East of the stronghold, a group of nature-worshiping humans established a commune in the rich soil of the river delta about ten years ago. They chose a secluded, abandoned fortress with a fair amount of fertile land that locals believe is haunted and won't approach. The commune accepts no visitors, and none of its workers deal with anyone in the outside world as they tend the fields. Their only interaction is with Bleak's Faste, when a handful of comuners bring their seasonal produce and grain to the soldiers living there.

RUMORS

If the characters ask locals about the commune, they learn that many are suspicious of the strange, unsociable group. Thus, the commune's members are left to their life of silent worship and service without interference. Rolling on the **Commune Rumors** table can provide more colorful, if unreliable, detail.

COMMUNE RUMORS

d6	Rumor
1	No one has ever seen a child on the commune's lands.
2	They're a strange lot but seem harmless. They keep to themselves, and that's just fine.
3	That place is haunted! Everyone vanished from it during a battle a hundred years ago, including my great-great-grandpappy. No one with any sense goes near that place.
4	New recruits are brought in under cover of darkness against their will.
5	The comuners' tongues have been cut out. My Aunty Willums said one wagged its stump at her once.
6	On nights of the new moon, if you listen in the darkest hours, you can hear screaming, howling, and yodeling coming from the commune.

APPROACHING THE COMMUNE

From a distance, the player characters can see an 8-foot-high circular stone wall surrounding a yard with a red stone tower standing at the center. The wall has been patched with rocks and clay where it had crumbled from age and disuse. Strange-looking brambles grow out of what look to be three freshly dug graves nearby, and in various places they climb up the outer wall of the compound. No sounds emanate from within and no one answers calls.

Characters exploring around the wall might find a trapdoor covered by a camouflaged net near the south side. Anyone searching the ground in the area finds it automatically, while characters just looking around can notice it with a success on a Perception challenge roll made with 1 bane. The trapdoor opens into a tunnel that connects to another trapdoor inside the compound.

The main entry is through the barred gate on the north side of the wall. Opening it requires a success on a Strength challenge roll with 1 bane or dealing 20 damage to the gate. Alternatively, a character can scale the wall, but doing so is risky. Any climbing character must get a success on an Agility challenge roll with 1 bane or become exposed to skinweed (see below).

If the fomor juvenile escaped from the characters earlier, they face it here, prowling around the walls trying to find a way in.

SKINWEED

This exotic disease is transmitted by a creeping vine, usually found in the Spiderwood, but here covering the walls of the compound. Sap enters the victim's bloodstream when the vine's sharp thorns tear the flesh. Those afflicted by skinweed suffer from a maddening itch as the disease progresses and, if left untreated, die when vines burst from their bodies.

Transmission A creature becomes exposed to skinweed by coming into contact with the vine's thorns. The exposed creature must get a success on a Strength challenge roll with 1 bane or become infected, suffering the stage 1 effects of the disease.

Cure Anything that poisons the body will poison the vine. An infected creature that takes 5 or more damage from poison makes Strength challenge rolls to recover from the disease with 2 boons.

Stage 0 The vine dies within the body and must be pulled out through the skin where possible.

Stage 1 The creature becomes diseased and is feverish and itchy.

Stage 2 As stage 1, and the skinweed spreads farther across the body and begins to protrude from the skin. The itching increases in intensity, and victims are often unable to sleep or focus. The creature makes Will challenge rolls with 1 bane.

Stage 3 As stage 2, and the creature must get a success on a Will challenge roll or gain 1d3 Insanity from sleep deprivation and relentless itching.

Stage 4 As stage 3, and slime-covered flowers bloom from bits of vine poking through the skin, often in areas the victim can't reach. The itching is so severe that the creature becomes dazed for as long as it remains at this stage, as it scratches and pulls at the protruding vines.

Stage 5 The creature takes damage equal to its Health and dies as the vines reach its organs.

Recovery Each time a creature infected with skinweed completes a rest, it must make a Strength challenge roll with 1 bane.

20 or more: The disease moves down one stage.

Success: No change

Failure: The disease moves up one stage.

0 or less: The disease moves up two stages (maximum stage 5).

COMMUNE LOCATIONS

Inside the commune, everything is quiet other than the clucking of chickens that poke around the grounds.

Silo and Storage Sheds: Just inside the gate is a silo containing various types of grain. Two nearby sheds hold dried, smoked meats and stockpiled vegetables, as well as stacked bales of hay and straw. Several bags containing different types of seeds sit on a labeled shelf. One bag's contents are unidentifiable; the shelf label says "Kuorne Octe."

Livestock Shelter: The wooden shelter holds four oxen, as well as harnesses for wagons. Scratched into the side of the structure is: "Thou shalt not lay with the common beasts. The Great One shall quench all desires."



Loaded Wagons: Two wagons loaded with sacks of grain look ready for transport. Any character searching the wagons who gets a success on a Perception challenge roll finds a small bag of strange seeds nestled between the other sacks on each wagon.

Trap Doors and Tunnel: On either side of the wall, concealed by camouflage netting, are wooden trapdoors. They open easily, and each reveals a ladder descending 10 feet to the dirt floor of a tunnel.

Inside the tunnel are two sweating, feverish men (as **cultists**), one cradling the other in his lap. Both appear pale and sickly, covered in red, puffy sores from which erupt the tips of small vines. The man who tends to the other is softly crying and clutching at his own stomach.

If the characters offer to help, the upright communer tries to wave them back. He can't talk since he has no tongue, but if asked any questions, he scratches into the dirt, "GO," and points toward the exit hatch. The prone man is clearly on death's door and expires within a few minutes.

The group can leave the survivor or force him to come with them. In addition to being infected with skinweed (stage 3), he harbors a **violator** (see below), which erupts at a time of your choosing if the characters bring him along. If he remains in the tunnel, the group will face the violator later should they exit the commune that way.

Women's Barracks: The sparsely furnished structure contains eight bunk beds with an aisle down the center. At the foot of each bunk rests a storage chest containing simple brown robes and blankets. Neatly written across the walls in a flowery script is the following:

We shall bring forth the Great One.

The flesh is purified when split and sundered. Ecstasy awaits us all.

Reserve thy fertile valley for the Great One. Bring him forth, and you shall be saved.

The suffering of the vine is salvation.

Two women (as **cultists**) in shredded robes are huddled against the far wall of the barracks. Both have thorny vines growing under their skin, poking through in places, and they scratch and pick to no avail. On one woman's exposed back, a flower blooms from a protruding vine, brownish red and covered in slime.

The women ignore attempts to communicate with them, gibbering maniacally as they gouge and tear at skinweed growing from their flesh. Their words are unintelligible because they have no tongues.

Strange Crop: Last harvest season, one of the communers received a bag of new seeds from a guard at Bleak's Faste labeled only "Kuorne Octe"—seeds that came from a dubious merchant. Next spring, the communer planted them to find out what would grow.

Now this strange crop forms several rows on the west side of the compound. Their tall stalks shoot up from the soil, a few of which bear bulbous, veiny leaf pouches. These **kuorne octe** are vile, semi-intelligent plants that grow in the Spiderwood.

Inside the leaf pouches are lumpy, thumb-sized larvae. If a character moves to within 1 yard of the crops, the pouches peel open. The larvae within shoot sticky, barbed tentacles at the nearest humanoid that hook into the flesh where they land. They try to enter the person's mouth (or any other orifice), oozing an amber-hued slime trail that stings viciously in the lacerations. Once inside, they implant seedlings that sprout into a greater horror.

KUORNE OCTE

DIFFICULTY 25

Size 2 plant

Perception 15 (+5); sightless

Defense 15; **Health** 20

Strength 14 (+4), **Agility** 6 (-4), **Intellect** 5 (-5), **Will** 10 (+0)

Speed 2

Immune gaining Insanity; asleep, blinded, dazed, fatigued, frightened, stunned

Fire Vulnerability A kuorne octe takes double damage from fire.

ATTACK OPTIONS

Barbed Vines (melee) +4 with 2 boons (1d6 + 2 and the target becomes grabbed on attack roll 20+ plus Infest)

Infest If the target was already grabbed, the kuorne octe attempts to plant a seedling in one of the target's orifices. The target must get a success on an Agility challenge roll or become diseased as its organs liquefy. A creature diseased in this way cannot heal damage and makes attack rolls and challenge rolls with 1 bane. If the diseased creature becomes incapacitated, it dies and a **violator** erupts from its body 1d6 hours later.

Each time the diseased creature completes a rest, it must make a Strength challenge roll. On a failure, the creature takes a cumulative 1d6 penalty to Health. This penalty lasts until this diseased affliction is removed. If this penalty reduces the creature's Health to 0 while it is diseased this way, it dies and a **violator** tears free from its corpse 1d6 hours later. Three successes removes this diseased affliction from the creature.

Four communers lie dead behind the rows along the wall. Lacerations crisscross their necks, faces, and hands. One has been choked to death by her own hand, ripping the corners of her mouth in the process. The bodies look strangely flat, like half-filled waterskins. A success on a Perception challenge roll with 1 bane reveals that one of them seems to ripple, as though something were moving inside it.

If a character moves to within 2 yards of a corpse, a mass of veiny, barbed tentacles erupt from it as a **violator** attacks. The monster's torso remains inside the body, dragging it along like a hermit crab's shell. Once the corpse has been hacked away, the violator is easier to kill.

VIOLATOR

DIFFICULTY 50

Size 1/2 or 1 frightening plant

Perception 15 (+5); sightless

Defense 18 or 14 (when injured); **Health** 25

Strength 13 (+3), **Agility** 13 (+3), **Intellect** 5 (-5), **Will** 10 (+0)

Speed 12; climber

Immune damage from cold, disease, and poison; gaining Insanity; asleep, blinded, dazed, fatigued, frightened, stunned

Fire Vulnerability A violator takes double damage from fire.

Protective Shell While a violator is not injured it reduces any damage it takes by 1d6 (to a minimum of 1 damage).

Size Dependent A violator's Size depends on the Size of its host.

ATTACK OPTIONS

Barbed Tentacle (melee; reach +2) +3 with 2 boons (1d6)

SPECIAL ATTACKS

Tentacle Flurry The violator flails its tentacles in a 3-yard-long cone originating from a point in its space. Each creature in the area must get a success on an Agility challenge roll with 1 boon or take 3d6 damage.

SPECIAL ACTIONS

Evade and Strike When a creature attacks the violator's Defense or Agility, the violator can use a triggered action to impose 1 bane on the triggering creature's attack roll. If the attack roll results in a failure, the violator can move up to half its Speed and use its barbed tentacle to attack the triggering creature.

Men's Barracks: Spartan in design, this building contains eight bunk beds with an aisle down the center. At the foot of each bunk rests a storage chest containing simple brown robes and blankets. Neatly written across the walls in a flowery script is the following:

The sons of the vine will change the world.

Plough, sow, reap. The flesh is purified when split and sundered. Ecstasy awaits us all.

Waste not thy seed upon mortals. Make fertile the soil in praise of the Great One.

Tower: A 25-foot-tall stone tower juts from the center of the grounds. Arrow slits dot the walls at varying heights, and cracks and crumbling holes have been smoothed over with a red stucco. A weird vine climbs the south side of the tower, bearing sickly sweet-smelling flowers and sap-covered thorns. On the north side, dirty handprints surround the following words chiseled into the base, as though touched and revered daily:

Celibacy is godliness. We save ourselves for the Great One to bring him forth into the world.

Scourging purges the desires of the flesh and purifies the hearts of those willing to receive the Great One.

Silence is its own reward. Speak no words, and you shall have no regrets. Consorting with outsiders brings doom upon us all.

The vine brings suffering, and suffering brings salvation.

A single wooden door on the east side of the tower offers access to the interior.

TOWER INTERIOR

Shadows fill the space, cast by candles on an altar and set into nooks in the wall. The air on the first floors is thick with incense that smolders in a brazier on the altar.

Ground Floor: This part of the tower is used for worship.

A stone statue of a bull looms atop a dais across the room from the door. A crown of dried leaves, flowers, and thorny vines wraps around its head and horns. An empty offering bowl, stained with dried blood, lies at the front of the dais. Scourges and whips hang on the walls next to tapestries depicting obscene acts, and handwoven thatch rugs checker the stone floor.

When a character reaches the center of the room, 2 violators (Size 1) charge from behind the statue, dragging the remains of their hosts along.

On the south side of the room, a steep stone staircase leads up.

Second Floor: The second-floor landing has a single wooden door that is slightly ajar. A character listening at the door hears a wet slithering sound inside.

Lined up on a table along the west wall are six cages, each big enough to hold a medium-sized dog. The walls bear murals of grinning, ecstatic women in various stages of birthing horned, cow-headed infants, and of the children growing into robed, godlike figures.

Four cages each contain a **fomor juvenile** that claws and rages against its prison. The other two are open and empty. If the characters don't kill the caged fomors, the beastmen escape and attack the group when they reach either the third or fourth floor, at your discretion. On the north wall lies a nest of hay, blankets, and scattered bones.

A table on the opposite side of the room is equipped with leather straps and bloody medical instruments. Various tubes, beakers, syringes, and strange devices line the shelves on the walls. Any character with a medical or healing profession can determine the instruments are commonly used to assist in difficult births. Two violators (Size 1/2) scuttle out to attack the characters, one from under the cage table and one from under the birthing table. Bits of their fomor hosts are still attached to their bodies.

Steep stone stairs on the west wall lead up.

Third Floor: Behind the heavy, barred double doors on the third floor landing is a scene of carnage. Six dead communers lie on the floor around a deformed, emaciated minotaur chained to a wooden table. If a character moves to within 2 yards of a corpse, a violator erupts from the body.

The minotaur has stumps for arms below the elbows, and its amputated legs end at the knees. It grunts as it pulls weakly against the chains that hold

it down. (The communers were using the beastman in an attempt to bring forth their horned god from willing female devotees.)

Steep stone stairs on the north wall lead up.

Fourth Floor: The stairs end at a wooden door that leads to the parapet-bordered roof of the tower. Muffled sobbing can be heard behind the door.

The communers performed their fertility rituals under the night sky at every new moon. Unlit torches line the walls, and two large drums sit on opposite sides of the space. The place smells of sweat, blood, and other fouler secretions. Lewd paintings adorn the parapet, most of which involve large horned beasts rutting with humans.

A filthy elderly communer named Marna Escodi, who is quite out of her mind, huddles next to one of the drums. She pulls her hair and scratches at her face while babbling about the intruders murdering her beautiful babies, how close she came to bringing forth the Great One, and that all her work has been lost. She is the commune's founder and has been corrupted by the foul magic soaking the land.

MARNA ESCODI

DIFFICULTY 100

Size 1 human

Perception 14 (+4)

Defense 13; **Health** 68; **Insanity** 6; **Corruption** 6

Strength 11 (+1), **Agility** 14 (+4), **Intellect** 17 (+7), **Will** 11 (+1)

Speed 10

Thrashing Vines In combat, vines burst from Marna's body and whip around her. When a creature moves to within 2 yards of Marna or ends its turn there, it must get a success on an Agility challenge roll or take 1d6 damage and be exposed to skinweed.

Dread Impetus When Marna takes a turn, she can act before the player characters.

ATTACK OPTIONS

Staff (melee) +4 (1d6 + 1)

SPECIAL ACTIONS

Maddening Outburst When Marna successfully casts a spell, she can use a triggered action at any time before the end of her turn to loose a stream of nonsense. Each creature within short range that can hear her must get a success on a Will challenge roll with 1 bane or gain 1 Insanity and become dazed for 1 round.

Counterspell When a creature attacks Marna with a spell, she can use a triggered action to counter it. The triggering creature makes the attack roll with 1 bane and Marna makes the challenge roll with 1 boon to resist the attack.

MAGIC

Power 5

Curse *pox* (6), *swine* (2), *toad* (1)

Forbidden *obedience* (6), *vision's end* (3), *part bone from flesh* (2), *horrid joining* (1)

Magician *sense magic* (6)

Nature *oak hide* (6), *overgrowth* (3), *ensnaring vines* (3), *wrath of nature* (1)

CONCLUSION

The adventure ends when the characters recover the grain shipment and bring it to Bleak's Faste, at which point they receive the promised reward. However, if they fail to deal with the horrors at the commune, more trouble might befall the region.

If any violators or fomors are left alive, they escape the fortress and terrorize the surrounding farmlands. Also, if the group fails to find and destroy the kuorne octe seeds, the foul plants spread into the farmlands with predictably dire results. Both scenarios could expand the adventure in interesting ways.

