

A photograph of a young evergreen sapling, possibly a spruce or fir, growing in a forest. The sapling is the central focus, with its green needles and thin branches clearly visible. It is surrounded by a thick layer of green moss on the forest floor. The background is a soft-focus forest scene with more trees and foliage, creating a sense of depth and a natural, serene atmosphere. The lighting is soft and natural, highlighting the textures of the needles and moss.

# Sapling Soul

a solo tabletop game by breathingstories

**Sapling Soul** is a tabletop roleplaying game (**TTRPG**) meant to be played by yourself. It is a hack of Jamila R. Nedjadi's *We Forest Three* which deeply moved and profoundly touched me.

To play this game you will need

- a copy of the game itself
- some way of keeping a journal, be it a physical journal, digital document or audio notes
- at least one six-sided die (d6) and one twenty-sided die (d20)
- about 30 minutes



*You are a Sapling Soul. You belong to the Forest but the Forest does not belong to you. The Forest is bigger than you in more ways than one, and you regard it with awe.*

*Most days you lead an average life, not so different to your peers. But some days you hear the Forest call and you answer. Always you answer.*

*Tonight the Forest calls to you again. There are always mysterious creatures in the Forest, but tonight something is amiss. There is a newcomer who may cause trouble. You are a Sapling Soul, you are called to help.*

### Before you begin

**Trust:** you trust in the Forest, in its power. You cannot exactly say why, but you trust that when the Forest calls you it means you no harm and will even protect you. If you lose Trust in the Forest, bringing your Trust to zero, you lose your nerve and flee. The Forest will not call you again. Or maybe it will, but will you hear? Skip to 'Losing Trust' if this happens. *Roll 2d6 and add 3. This is how much Trust you have. Note this in your journal somewhere easily accessible. Know that this number will change.*

To create your **Sapling Soul** answer the following questions;

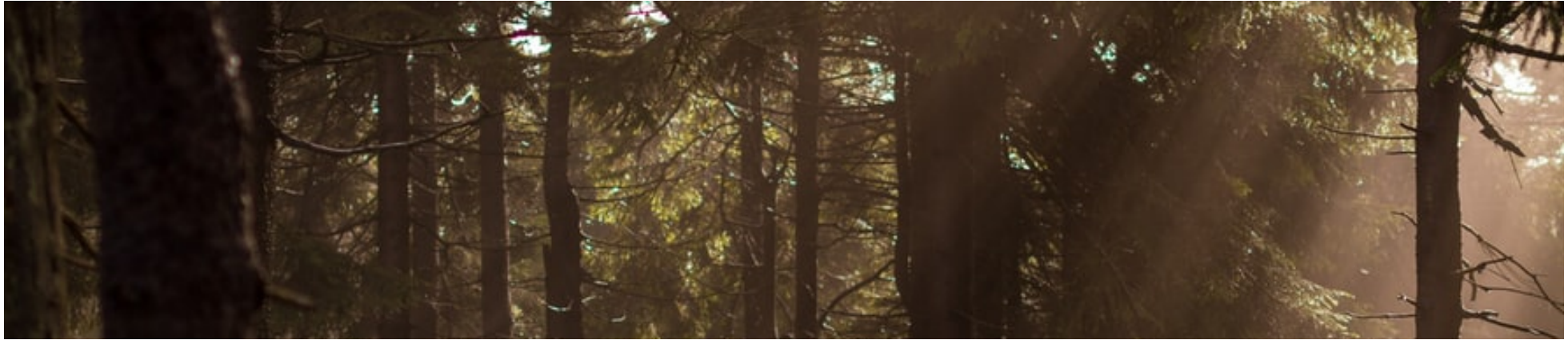
**What is your name?**

**What does the Forest call you?**

**How does the Forest call to you?**







### As a Sapling Soul you bear three main attributes

**Empathy:** Your ability to connect with the creatures of the Forest, to calm them and commune with them.

**Nurture:** Your ability to connect with the plants and trees of the Forest, to remember what they are and what they can do.

**Unknowable:** Your ability to lose yourself to the presence of the Forest and channel its raw energy. Perhaps it is magic, perhaps it is something more unknowable.

To determine the numerical value of your attributes, roll 3d6 and add them together. This is the numerical value for your **Empathy**. Do this twice more to discover your **Nurture** and **Unknowable** attribute values.

As you journey through the Forest you will meet many creatures and see many things, as is the nature of the Forest. At times you will be asked to test your attributes. To do this, *roll one twenty-sided die. If you roll equal to or under your value, you succeed. If you roll over your value, you fail.* In either case there are consequences. The Forest is a powerful place, take care.

Most of the creatures in the Forest are ambivalent toward you, you are just another creature of the Forest to them. But some creatures are more hostile. Any time you draw the attention of the Haunted you may be asked to 'Mark a strike'. Once you gain three strikes, the Haunted have found you. Skip to 'Hunted by Haunted' to resolve this.

It is recommended that you journal your journey through the Forest. Trust yourself to build on the prompts provided and fill in any blanks to create a story unique to you. The aim of **Sapling Soul** is not necessarily to 'win', but to *discover a memorable story*. Stories are important, I hope you enjoy creating one with **Sapling Soul**.

In general when you come across a scenario or encounter you are invited to *roll 1d6* to discover where your journey will lead.

Then you may be asked to *complete a test* of Empathy, Nurture or Unknowable. *Roll a d20* equal to or under your attribute to succeed. Note whether you succeed or fail and then *roll 1d6 to face the consequences*.

Feel free to embellish and build on the story as you go, it's **your story**.

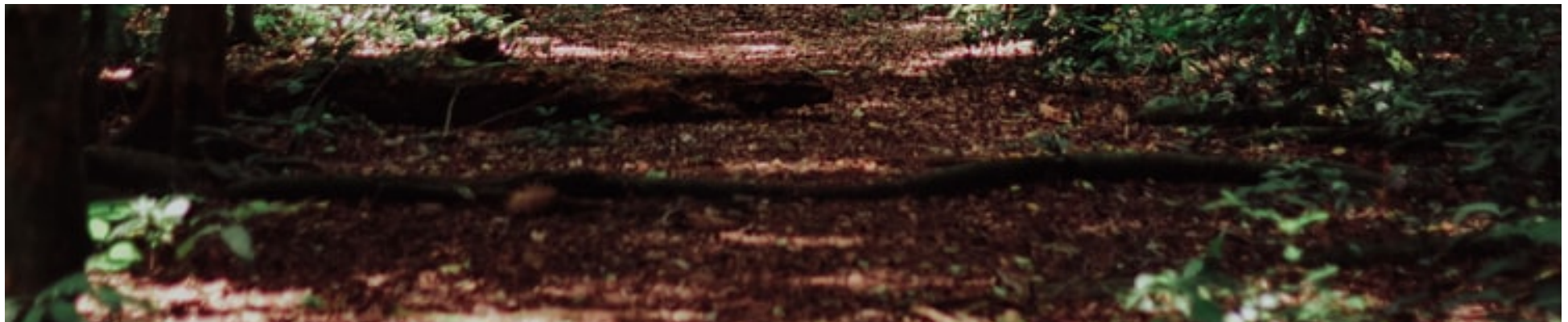




### Safety Tools

This game is meant to be difficult, there is a chance that you will not make it through. That is OK, **even failure is a story**. If you are ever uncomfortable please pause the game or leave it if you have to. Though stories are important, your well-being is more so.

Now take a deep breath, it's time to tell a story.





**You have heard the Forest's call and you enter now.**

A sense of calm comes over you, a familiar feeling that settles comfortably on your shoulders. A sense of Otherness also settles. It is hard to describe, but it makes you feel more. More here, more present, more powerful, more a part of something.

*Take 1d6 and roll to discover:*

**What does the Forest look like when you enter?**

**1-2** The leaves on many young trees are multicoloured, from natural greens and reds to startling blues, purples and whites. It is beautiful but violent. The colours jar against the Forest's natural state, twisting it against its will. The older trees are strong enough to resist and warn you of the Green-Eyed Intruder.

**3-4** The trees are frozen in place. It's like time simply ceased around them; leaves hang at gravity-defying angles, bark hangs in the air, nearby animals shriek their confusion. The stronger trees hold on to time and warn you of the Green-Eyed Intruder.

**5-6** The Forest is unsettlingly quiet. There is no wind and no sound of the creatures within. When you enter, the Forest stays silent, not a word of greeting. Something is wrong.



**The Forest is large, perhaps never-ending. But that's only sometimes. How do you know which way to go?**

**1-2** Inspecting a shrub marked with the change deeper into the Forest you see a Forest sprite. They are common here, if they let you see them. They call to you with your Forest name, teasing and mischievous. *Test your Empathy to see if you can talk to them about serious things for once.*

**3-4** The change in the Forest is obvious to you, but the location of the cause is not. Surrounded by nature, the change is so unnatural, it disorients you for a moment. *Test your Nurture to see if you can glean information from your surroundings.*

**5-6** The presence of the Forest is different somehow. The Forest always feels big, its force too big for you to contain. Even though it is changed the power of the Forest runs deep and cannot be broken. *Test your Unknowable to see if you can channel the power long enough to get a sense of direction.*

If you **Fail** a test of **Empathy**, **Nurture** or **Unknowable** to find your way:

The Intruder's minions, the Haunted, are roused by your searching. Their laughter is juvenile but chilling. They are coming.

**1-3** You feel your heart race as it sinks in your chest. You escape their gaze and whatever else they herald, but you are left somewhat shaky. *Roll 1d6 and lose that much Trust.*

**4-6** They find your scent, the smell of your Sapling soul. They are tracking you, you have to move on. *Mark one strike.*

If you **Succeed** a test of **Empathy**, **Nurture** or **Unknowable** to find your way:

You manage to orient yourself with your newfound information. The Forest is ever-changing, but you know which way to go for now.

**1-2** You feel the presence of the Forest grow in you. You hear the whispered reassurance of the trees and are emboldened. *Roll 1d6 and gain that much Trust.*

**3-4** You hear the giggles of the Forest sprites in your ear. They are mischievous but harmless, they are looking for some fun. You convince them to play a trick in your favour. *The next time you roll a test, roll twice and take the lower score.*

**5-6** A satyr spots you on your way and offers themselves as a guide. They walk beside you and play a soft but powerful tune on their wood instrument. They lead you to a clearing with several other creatures and you dance among them for a time. With a start you realise you've been here too long. You don't know how long you've been dancing. You must make up for lost time somehow.







**Though you've been here many times, you still find new things upon each visit. Tonight you stumble upon some ruins, stones toppled while gates stand strong. You know you must pay respects here.**

**1-2** You kneel before the toppled stones and close your eyes. Foreign anger and sadness and pride fills you from this place. *Test your Empathy to remain in control of yourself.*

**3-4** A few strange plants grow here, peaking out from the fallen debris. They made some sort of pattern before the damage disrupted their shape. *Test your Nurture to discern the pattern and replant it.*

**5-6** You feel the presence of the Forest fill you, causing your heart to leap in your chest. Your blood pumps faster through your veins, you can almost hear it. Your whole body starts to vibrate with raw power. *Test your Unknowable to channel the Forest's power and restore this ruin.*

If you **Fail** a test of **Empathy**, **Nurture** or **Unknowable** at the site of the ruins:

**1-3** You cause a stir in the Forest, the Haunted are alerted to your presence. *Mark one strike.*

**4-6** You feel yourself tire quickly in your task, your muscles ache as if you'd carried a huge weight up a hill. *The next time you make a test, roll twice and take the higher number.*

If you **Succeed** a test of **Empathy**, **Nurture** or **Unknowable** at the site of the ruins:

**1-2** You feel a sense of peace descend on you, you have done well here. Your purpose is clear and your ability assured. *Roll 1d6 and gain that much Trust.*

**3-4** The Otherness you feel blossoms within you. In your heart, in your gut, in your soul. You are growing, becoming more. *Add one point to whichever attribute you rolled for this test.*

**5-6** Your surroundings blur and change. You see this place as it was before, perhaps as it will be again. Cats sun themselves in the garden here, tails flicking lazily. As you pass each of them they whisper contradicting predictions of your future. What do they say? Who do you believe?

**You move deeper into the Forest, the outside world long gone now. Soon you hear the sound of water droplets and find yourself in front of a lake. It is small, no larger than your own height in any dimension. No matter how much you try to walk by it, it remains in front of you.**

**1-2** The water shimmers even in the dim light. You recognise the signs of a water naiad, their movements indicate distress. *Test your Empathy to reach and calm them.*

**3-4** The water of the lake calls to you, its voice similar to the call of the Forest. You take a deep breath and plunge into its depths. The lake is deceptively deep. In fact you cannot see the bottom, or the surface anymore. *Test your Nurture to navigate the depths.*

**5-6** You enter the water, slipping into its depths. It is shallow enough for you to stand, though one moment the water reaches your chest and the next your chin. *Test your Unknowable as you wash your face in the water, see what you can learn.*

If you **Fail** a test of **Empathy**, **Nurture** or **Unknowable** to move on from the lake:

**1-3** Frustration rises in you, a cry threatening to loose itself from your throat. Just like that, the lake is gone. You stand alone. *Roll 1d6 and lose that much Trust.*

**4-6** The water of the lake turns thick and sluggish, a trap set by the Intruder! You haul yourself away, the muck coating you and marking you for their hunt. *Mark one strike.*

If you **Succeed** a test of **Empathy**, **Nurture** or **Unknowable** to move on from the lake:

**1-2** Confidence fills you as you taste victory on your lips. It is crisp, like cold, refreshing water. You feel a weight lift from your chest even as the calm shroud on your shoulders reasserts itself. You can do this. *The next time you make a test, roll twice and take the lower number.*

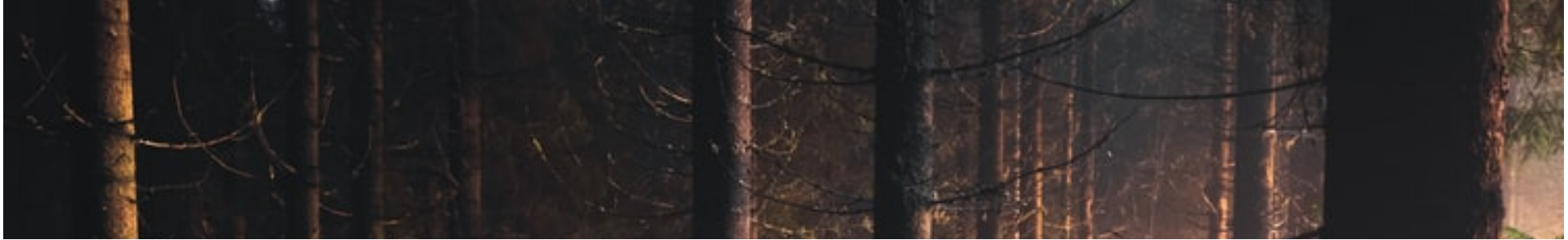
**3-4** You ask and you find answers, you know where to go from here. You continue on, the lake receding in the distance behind you. The Forest

opens itself, welcoming you deeper. You're on the right path. *Roll 1d6 and gain the much Trust.*

**5-6** As you finish your task you jump at the touch of a hand on your shoulder. You turn to see a figure; humanoid but with short fur and a deer's head. They bow. And though their horns barely touch you, blood is drawn immediately. A single drop beads against your skin before it is drawn up from you into the being. They nod sagely, declaring your debt paid.







**The Haunted chitter and cackle, cruel laughter forcing its way between their sharp teeth. They don't belong here, the Forest wants them gone. You hear them above you, behind you, beside you, calling out to the other creatures of the Forest. Their voices turn sickly sweet, pleading for aid.**

**1-2** You raise your own voice against those of the Haunted. You plead for aid on the Forest's behalf. *Test your Empathy to reach those that live here before the Haunted do.*

**3-4** The creatures of the Forest are fooled by the Haunted's honeyed words, regarding them as innocent and in need of protection. The trees are wiser than that, they may be your only allies. *Test your Nurture to speak to the trees and have them help you.*

**5-6** The chattering fills your ears, grating and jarring. It fills your mind, but the presence of the Forest fills your soul. You know the Forest is vaster, deeper, stronger. *Test your Unknowable to scream right back at them.*

If you **Fail** a test of **Empathy**, **Nurture** or **Unknowable** to reveal the lies of the Haunted:

**1-3** The Haunted jeer at your defeat, gloating in their victory. They know you now, how you think, how you act. They are closer to unravelling you. *Mark one strike.*

**4-6** Your throat aches from your cries, voice almost hoarse and to no avail. Perhaps this was their plan all along, rob you of your voice so you will be weaker later. *Roll 1d6 and lose that much Trust.*

If you **Succeed** a test of **Empathy**, **Nurture** or **Unknowable** to reveal the lies of the Haunted:

**1-2** As you intercept on the Forest's behalf, you feel its presence almost like an embrace around you. You are brave, you are strong, you are at home. *Roll 1d6 and gain that much Trust.*

**3-4** You feel the tide turn and push back in your victory, you know their weakness now. You collect yourself as they flee to their master, feeling more prepared. *When you meet the Intruder and roll a test of Empathy, Nurture or Unknowable, roll twice and take the lower number.*

**5-6** The trees of the Forest gather around you. They gather to listen to you and to shield you. The Haunted scatter when they realise they are defeated. With the spell broken, many of the Forest creatures give chase to ensure they stay away. Through all this a striking figure made entirely of petals stands by you, watching this unfold. They smile their thanks and produce a flower from their hand which they place behind your ear. You blink and they are gone.



**The Intruder grows weary of your interference, equal parts bored and enraged by it. All the shadows of the Forest begin to bend as the Intruder pulls them, yanks them from their places. All creatures heave against the change, as part of them is ripped away.**

**1-2** You fall to your knees beside a huddle of stick folk, each of their backs arched in pain and shock. You reach with both hands to touch as many as you can. Stay with me, you plead. *Test your Empathy to strengthen them against the disruption.*

**3-4** Every leaf on every tree looks moments from being torn away. Every branch looks moments from snapping, and only the strongest and oldest trees hold their roots firm. Kneeling at the base of the oldest tree you can find, you thrust a hand into the dirt beneath your feet as stray clumps rain down on you. If you can get through to this old, wise tree, perhaps the others will be strengthened too. *Test your Nurture to ground the trees.*

**5-6** Let go. Let go of your shadow and become something else. Sacrifice your shadow and let the presence of the Forest fill the void it will leave. *Test your Unknowable to survive the change.*

If you **Fail** a test of **Empathy, Nurture** or **Unknowable** to withstand the ripping of shadows:

**1-3** For a moment all your senses dull. Light isn't as vibrant, smell isn't as rich, taste isn't as strong, sound isn't as sharp, touch isn't as firm. Perhaps you aren't as strong as you thought you were. But you're still here, and you're still fighting. *When you roll your next test you must face extra consequences. That is, if you succeed the test, first roll 1d6 as if you had failed the test and then roll for your success. If you fail the test you must take both consequences. Roll to see in which order they occur.*

**4-6** The Forest is old and strong, many of the trees hold on to their shadows, and a number of the wildest creatures do too. The rest of the shadows form a writhing mass above you, taunting you, and you watch as your own shadow is yanked away to join them. Your knees are left weak and shaking even as the trees stare down stoically. *Roll 2d6 and lose that much Trust.*

If you **Succeed** a test of **Empathy, Nurture** or **Unknowable** to withstand the ripping of shadows:

**1-2** There's a moment when you feel you can't breathe before air reasserts itself around you. You breath deeply and feel... whole. You open your eyes to see a few stolen shadows being dragged deeper into the Forest, but here at least most of the beings resisted. Thanks to you. *Add one point to the aspect with which you succeeded.*

**3-4** As you stand, breathing heavily, you almost fall for a moment. You are caught by a figure with green skin and horns. Their face is kind now, but shows wrinkles of mischief. They help steady you and gently rub circles of dirt on your hands and face. They place leaves and flowers in your hair and with a twinkle in their eye dash off into the trees.

**5-6** Your presence is known here, your connection to the Forest is palpable. The creatures of the Forest know you, the trees know you, and your movements are such that the Haunted now know you too. *Mark one strike.*



**You're close now, you can feel it. The ripping of shadows was a final attempt to prevent you from getting this far. The Haunted are thick in the trees here, chittering and cackling down at you, but they don't stop you. You soon reach the Intruder's lair; a huge hollowed out tree of a sickly yellow colour, sitting alone in a small clearing. All around it is the writhing mass of stolen shadows like a sinister shroud.**

**You climb up the tree and clamber into the hollow entrance. As you land inside you realise it is deceptively spacious in here. Roots stick up from the ground and vine drape the walls that reach so high it ends in only darkness. You enter gingerly, eyes darting around.**

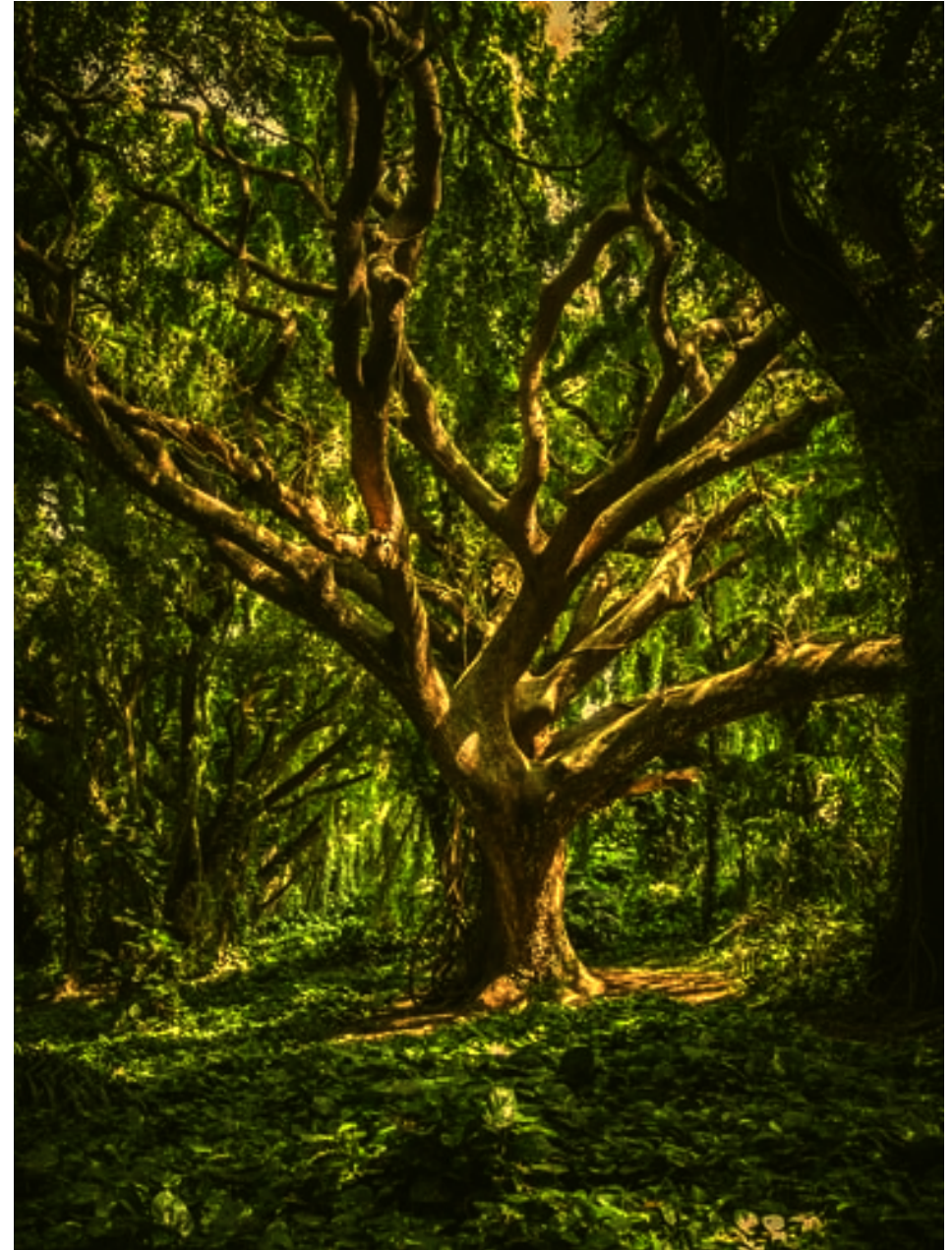
**Too late you hear movement from above and the Intruder descends on you, swooping down to meet you. He has wings made of shadow so dark they are like a void. His face looks young but his too-green eyes are old and callous. His smile is too wide, not inviting but menacing.**

**He does not belong in the Forest, but he is old and wild enough to.**

**1-2** All he wants is to be listened to, to be understood. You can do that for him. *Test your Empathy one last time.*

**3-4** He has bent this sickly tree to his will, but surely this old being as some fight in it yet. Together maybe you can throw him out. *Test your Nurture one last time.*

**5-6** No, this ends here. The Intruder is a blight on the power and beauty of the Forest, taking what he wants with no care. The presence of the Forest is old within you, it can hold much anger and might. *Test your Unknowable one last time.*







If you **Fail** a test of **Empathy**, **Nurture** or **Unknowable** against the Intruder:

**1-3** You struggle and yearn and feel sweat bead on your brow. And suddenly it is over. The fight leaves the Intruder and he drops to the ground. You stagger out of his lair, away from the sickness it represents. The Haunted are quiet now, sensing a change. You barely make it out of the clearing before their shrieking resumes. They're hunting you. *Mark one strike.*

**4-6** You struggled, you struggled so hard, pushing every limit you've ever had. You've overcome every obstacle, every threat, you can't stop now. Here in this sick tree you are surrounded by the Intruder's domain, you suddenly feel very alone. Eventually the Intruder falls, he is not as grown as you. But even after you leave the clearing, that alone feeling persists, just a little. *Roll 1d6 and lose that much Trust.*

If you **Succeed** a test of **Empathy**, **Nurture** or **Unknowable** against the Intruder:

**1-3** He gives in far quicker than you expected. He can see he is outmatched. He confides that he is jealous of the presence of the Forest in you, and that jealousy made him cruel. He promises to leave and never return. You're not sure if he will remember the promise; you've heard of him before.

**4-6** The Intruder struggles against you for a long time, but you can see his heart is not in it. Eventually he leaves himself vulnerable and you see an opportunity to harm him deeply. You pause a moment, remembering the damage to the Forest when you entered, the traps, the trickery, the theft. You take the opportunity.



**You leave the sickly tree, clambering back out the way you came in. As you reach the edge of the clearing you look back one last time and see already the tree beginning to heal. The power of the Forest is reclaiming it, restoring things to how they should be. You have accomplished what the Forest has asked of you, you have answered the call. The Forest is not grateful but it is pleased with you. You belong to the Forest but the Forest does not belong to you, it is much much bigger than you are. Much more.**

**It is up to you what you do now. Tie up any loose ends, ask any questions you have, but you must return to your mundane life soon.**

**You have done well Sapling Soul. You are part of something. And even though you leave the Forest behind for today, the weight of its power and the feeling of its presence remain like a comforting mantle. You belong to the Forest.**



## **Losing Trust**

You tried your best, but the mysteries and danger of the Forest overcame you. You feel the weight of exertion settle on you, another form of pressure seeping into the comforting heaviness of the presence of the Forest. The two feelings mix in uncomfortable ways, and all you know is that you have to leave *now*.

You throw caution to the wind, abandoning the call of the Forest in favour of your Sapling Soul. As you break the tree line you find yourself oddly close to where you live. Is this a message from the Forest? Is this a 'goodbye' or a 'get well'?

*Reflect on your thoughts at this point in your story. Do you think the Forest will call you again? And if it does, will you answer?*

## **Hunted by Haunted**

If you have not yet faced the Intruder:

The Haunted are dogged in their chase, eager to fulfil their directive from their master. The Intruder has plans for this Forest and you shall not interfere, the Haunted will make sure of it. Their forced laughter fills your ears, their deceptive faces fill your vision. Everything goes black. When you open your eyes again you see through deceptive eyes and feel a barking laughter force its way through your throat. What will your master ask of you now?

*Feel free to end your story here or continue on as a Haunted. Tell a memorable story. Still, you belong to the Forest.*

If you have already faced the Intruder:

The Haunted are dogged in their chase, eager to fulfil their directive from their master. They do not care that he is gone right now, they have mind enough only for one thought at a time. Right now that thought is you. Their forced laughter fills your ears, their deceptive faces fill your vision. Everything goes black. When you open your eyes again you see through deceptive eyes and feel a barking laughter force its way through your throat. You feel a blankness in your mind, now connected with theirs, as their one thought is complete. You have but a moment to make your own thought.

*What do you think? How does that thought shape the actions of the Haunted? Feel free to end your story here or continue on as a Haunted. Tell a memorable story. Still, you belong to the Forest.*

## *Credits*

Sapling Soul was made for the #JammiJamJam which celebrates the amazing and inspiring work of Jamila R. Nedjadi. Their work can be found at <https://temporalhiccup.itch.io/>

I particularly recommend their game We Forest Three which I adore and which directly inspired this game.

All images are from unsplash.com, a great source of free-to-use, high-quality images.

I have always felt something indescribable when I enter a forest. When I am surrounded by tall trees and dirt I feel a sense of something I can't quite describe.

I hope you enjoyed your time going through this forest of mine, this forest of yours.

If you have any feedback for me, I'd love to hear it! Feel free to leave comments on my itch.io page, or contact me via twitter, @gallifreyboy12

Thank you again, and may all your stories help you grow.



