

If You Go Into the Woods Today, You Had Better Not Go Alone

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Changes for 2300 AD by Thomas Vickers, so if you don't like it, its all my fault. Originally appeared in Challenge Magazine 50 as "If You Go Into The Woods Today, You Had Better Not Go Alone".

I remember that line from an idiotic song my mother used to sing to me as a child. It seemed very appropriate for the situation I was facing. The woods were silent-no animals, nothing but an occasional breezy rustle. We were searching for the survivors of a Kafer band that we had ambushed several days ago and everyone was on edge.

I'd have never noticed the building if I hadn't been on point and scared out of my wits. I stood still for almost 10 minutes, watching and waiting. The building looked and sounded empty. No funny smells, either. So I continued forward for two or maybe three steps.

I squatted looking for something. A broken twig, a blood spot, anything to let me know if the Kafers we had ambushed had retreated this way. What I did find made my heart skip a beat. It wasn't a vine-too straight, so rusted that I almost missed it.

I carefully leaned over the wire and peeked into the bushes on either side. Sure enough, to the right that old wire was tied to an equally rusty grenade that had been stuffed in a metal container. My curiosity was piqued. Why would anyone want to booby-trap this place?

SETUP

This is a 2300 AD microadventure specifically designed to fit into any referee's campaign. A broken down Kafer supply vehicle, abandoned and forgotten long ago, lies rotting in an out-of-the-way barn. The only thing standing between the PCs and the treasure inside the truck is a handful of booby traps. (The original scenario also called for a snake, but since snakes are probably rare off of Earth, so feel free to substitute your own, small, poisonous native lifeform.) This microadventure allows the PC's a chance to capture some Kafer equipment, fill their larders, and the referee to make complete paranoids out of the player characters.

If the PCs have not been introduced to booby traps, or they are just getting sloppy, this is a good way to instill the fear of God and TNT into them. This microadventure can be set anywhere along the player characters' path and can also be changed to fit any locale.

The only criteria is that the building be located 100 meters off of a secondary road and in a wooded or similar area, though the woods can be long dead. In fact, a collection of shattered or leafless trees can add much to the terror of the situation. Ideally, the site should be found by one of the PCs who is searching for Kafer signs.

THE STORY BEGINS WHEN.....

Chok'an turned to watch Kaachach working under the Sha ju'ushech*. A day ago the unreliable vehicle had broken down, and they had been left behind by the convoy, along with the Gnich* who would not listen to reason.*

As they were still behind their lines, the cargo had not been unloaded. The powers that be had been so concerned with other things that they had only left the Gnich behind to look after whatever was in the vehicle.*

The Sha ju'ushech had just enough left of wheeze another 100 meters, off the road and into an abandoned stone building. This tiny rotting structure was tucked into a grove of thick underbrush, and it was pure luck that Chok'an had found it. He had been scouting the area (under the fearless leader's orders) and stumbled upon the road. Actually, the road leading to it was choked to the size of a small path for most of its distance.*

But the Gnich had insisted that their cargo was valuable and they had to find a defensible position. Defensible position! How laughable. They had two Vved ach*, a Vved ush, half a dozen Gaaach*, and a Gah erech* between the three of them. The Gnich* collected the Gaaach*, rooted around in the Sha ju'ushech* cargo box and then went off to rig traps along the approaches to their hideout. Perhaps he felt obligated to practice his skills he had learned as an officer.*

While he was gone, Chok'an and his friend had decided to take a look at their cargo. Prying open two or three of the crate, they found food and weapons. With these supplies they could escape this boring guard duty return to the front lines. The Sha ju'ushech was hidden, and all they needed to do was find some transportation and return to remove the crates.*

Chok'an went to find the Gnich and returned to Kaachach* half an hour later, the blood still staining the rifle's butt stock. The two of them decided to leave a nasty surprise for any snoopers. Chok'an was rigging the Gah erech* under the Sha ju'ushech* bed, just over the fuel tank, when the Gnich* silently appeared at the edge of the clearing.*

He put three shots into Kaachach before Chok'an brought his rifle up. The Gnich* put two more shots from the Vved ush into Chok'an as he emptied the magazine in defense. The Gnich* was dead, but so was Chok'an.*

At least he would be in a few minutes. He staggered into the cool shade of the barn, next to the vehicle. The Kafer was dead within seconds.

LAIR OF THE BUGBUS

There are a dozen grenade booby traps (to discover them is Difficult: Observation) located along the old approaches to the barn (to disarm them is Easy: Combat Engineering). They are simple traps: the grenade, less its pin, has been placed in a metal container which is attached to a tree or some such solid object. Some poor slob walks down the path and trips over the string, pulling the grenade free. The result can be predicted.

These traps are also faulty. There is a 10% chance that the grenade will fail to explode or that it has rusted to the container and remains there while the string breaks. Imagine what fun it will be when a fearless PC feels a tug at his ankle, trips and then realizes what he just did.

THE BARN: The barn and its approaches form a bowl-shaped clearing in tangled woods. The hiding place looks like a trash heap at first glance. A few pieces of disemboweled furniture, scattered scraps of lumber, and some shingles are buried under the web of vines and undergrowth. The remains of the Kafer officer's body lies three meters from the barn door and is now covered by underbrush (to find the body is Easy: Observation roll under half one's intelligence). His web gear is rotted and his horse pistol is rusted solid.

THE BUGBUS: The bugbus is parked inside a barn that is barely larger than the dimensions of the vehicle, leaving just enough room to walk between the bugbus and the walls. The roof, originally shingled with slate, had been patched in several places with thatch. It is now deteriorating faster than the walls and now affords only about 80% protection from the elements.

The Bugbus is a standard Kafer troop transport. Like most Kafer vehicles, the bugbus was far from pristine and suffered extensively at the hands of Kafers who tried to make it smarter. This Bugbus was a special variant obviously designed for easily loading and unloading cargo, as opposed to hauling Kafer troops. The back of this bugbus was open , which eased the strain on Kafer equipment being loaded or unloaded.

Number 3205 was old, its engine tended to overheat in hot weather, and the beast was afflicted with a particularly terminal malady-a disintegrating transmission. It was this final straw that stranded the three Kafers. Now the tracks are rusted, the fuel has evaporated, the lubricants have coagulated, and the engine has frozen from inactivity. However, a fair amount of salvage could be taken off of this wreck.

TWO MORE BODIES: The two other bodies are inside the structure and are both visible from the entrance (Easy: Observation to spot). The skeleton of *Chok'an* toppled from its sitting position and, like the others has been worried by animals. His web gear and rifle have been exposed to the elements too long to be of any use, but his loaded magazines are still good. *Kaachach*'s* body remains under the truck, with only his feet

sticking out. His rifle is still in the Bugbus cab and is functional, despite a thin film of rust. Lying next to it are three loaded magazines in a pouch.

*Kaachach** attracted carrion-eaters, which in turn attracted the snake that has bedded down in the skeleton's ribcage (to discover the snake before it discovers a searcher of the skeleton is Difficult: Observation. This is where you might want to forget the snake idea or at least insert a more suitable creature. Who knows, maybe snakes have gotten loose and filled a niche on this world.) Almost any sort of dangerous critter could be put in here, but snakes have the best lethality for their size.

CARGO: The exact nature of cargoes in Kafer transport battalions were kept secret from lower echelons, which is why the two Kafer troopers did not know what they were carrying until the officer left. The Bugbus was loaded with food reserves, spare weapons and a Kafer computer on the bottom. Despite being in plastic or metal crates, the food will be compromised and are now extremely rotted, even for Kafer food. The top 20% of the crates will hold food, with the middle and bottom crates holding various Kafer weapons, ammunition and the large box on the bottom could be the Kafer computer, a very rare find.

THE SACHEL CHARGE: *Kaachach** was skilled at being vindictive, but he was not particularly bright. The satchel charge is rigged to explode should one of the crates in the bugbus be moved, killing the thieves and destroying the cargo (the fuel tank was half full when *Kaachach** set the charge). The charge is wired to one of the drive axles, the trip wire runs up through the bed of the bugbus and is tied to the handle of the fifth crate (to discover the trip wire is Difficult: Observation). Theoretically the explosion would have also set the fuel on fire and totally destroyed the cargo. The charge is also rigged with an antihandling device (to disarm the device is Difficult: Combat Engineer), evidenced by the taut tripwire. There is little chance of a misfire (1% lets say) as the satchel charge was well cared for and has been protected from the elements.

VARIATIONS

Some versions of the satchel charge can only be activated when the triggering weight is removed from the mine's pressure plate. If the PCs miss the charge entirely, delete the triggering wire (say it fell off due to old age if anybody asks you later). The charge then could be placed under one of the crates and it will only detonate when that weight shifted-say after three quarters of the crates are removed.

Another fun stress point that the referee can add is a time element: an approaching storm, a pursuing force, dwindling supplies. Any half-wit can cautiously navigate such a mini-minefield, but how good are the PCs at negating booby traps under pressure? Once the cargo is theirs, can they get out or will they meet the same fate as the Kafers?