

FREE PREVIEW

THE LAST WILD

A Light in the Trees

HEROIC FANTASY · WONDER VS SAFETY · SYSTEM-AGNOSTIC ·
ONE-SHOT

A few opening pages of the scene. The full one-shot, with every scene, NPC, map note, and handout, is the complete download on narrativehall.com.

THE LAST WILD

A Light in the Trees

A System-Agnostic Heroic-Fantasy One-Shot

The one-shot at a glance

A boy followed a light into the wood, and the wood is the last wild magic left in the world.

A Light in the Trees is a complete, system-agnostic heroic-fantasy one-shot for a Game Master and any small group, runnable in a single evening of about three to four hours. The band comes to a verge village on the last green edge of the tamed world. A child is three nights gone into the Wild, lured by a beautiful drifting light, and two people want the band's help: a mother who wants her son back, and a Concord warden who wants to burn the edge of the wood so it never takes another. To find the boy the band must walk into the Wild themselves, taste exactly why a child would follow a light into it, and choose, in small, the same thing the whole world is about to choose in large.

This is the doorway to the full **Last Wild** campaign. It stands alone, and it teaches the campaign's engine in one night: wonder is real, its cost is real, and the choice belongs to the people brave enough to walk in and look.

- **Players:** Game Master plus any group.
 - **Length:** one session, about three to four hours.
 - **System:** any. No stat blocks, no math.
 - **Rating:** Teen. Peril, a child in danger, and a gentle but real moral weight. Safety guidance included.
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The world in one page

There is one great enchanted wilderness left in all the world: the **Last Wild**, a realm of living forest and fair folk and old wonders, beautiful past telling and genuinely dangerous.

Everywhere else the land has been tamed, made safe and orderly and a little grey, by the young, bright, well-meaning empire called the **Concord**. The Concord is not evil. It tames the wild because the wild kills children, and it is not wrong about that. The Wild is not innocent. It does take them.

Both of those are true at once. Hold both. That is the whole game.

This one-shot happens at the **verge**, the thin green seam where the tamed fields stop and the Wild begins. Verge villages live in the contradiction every day: they fear the wood and they leave milk on the stones for it; they thank the Concord for safety and grieve the way the world goes flat and quiet as the wonder is felled. Tonight the contradiction has a name, and he is nine years old.

The hook: the boy who followed a light

Three nights ago, a child of the village of **Lastfield** woke to a soft light moving at the treeline, the way a lantern moves, but no one was carrying it. It was warm and lovely and it seemed, the way these things seem, to be waiting just for him. He went out the window in his nightshirt and walked into the wood, and the light went ahead of him, and he followed it laughing. His name is **Tam**, the cooper's son. He has not come out.

The village has not gone in after him. No one goes in after dark, and few in daylight, because people who go into the Wild for a taken child come back changed, or wrong, or not at all, or come back glad and empty with a year gone by in a night. So Lastfield sent to the road for help, and the band came. So did someone else.

When the band arrives, two people are waiting, and they want opposite things.

The cast

Annet, the cooper's wife, Tam's mother. Tired-eyed, steady, past weeping into the cold practical calm of a person who has decided to act. She does not want the band to be brave. She wants her son back through her door, whatever it costs. She will say so plainly. She is the one who leaves milk on the stones and thanks the Wild in the same breath she curses it, because she grew up here and knows it is both. If the band asks her whether the Wild is evil, she will not answer fast. *"It took my boy,"* she says. *"And the year I carried him, a fair thing in the wood sang outside my window every night, and I have never been so unafraid. I do not know what it is. I want my son."*

Warden Sela Marr, of the Concord. Young for the grey-and-iron coat, careful, kind in the way of people who have seen the thing they are kind about. She has come with a Concord torch, a small cold engine that unweaves wild magic at the edge of the wood, the same kind the empire is using to fell the whole Wild, only handheld. She does not want to burn anything out of cruelty. She has counted the verge villages and she has counted the taken children, and the

numbers are why she does this. “*You can go in and bring one boy out,*” she will say, “*and I am glad if you do. But while you are in there being brave, I am going to make it so there is never another Tam. You will not like watching it. Do it anyway.*” She is not the villain. She may be right.

Tam, the cooper’s son, nine. When the band finds him, he is not crying, not bound, not hurt. He is happy. That is the problem. He is sitting in a glade where it is always the gold hour, eating something that tastes like every good thing, with a year already spent in three days, and he is being slowly, gently, lovingly turned into something that belongs to the wood. He does not want to leave. He will, if they make him, but he will lose what he found, and he is young enough to know it.

The light, called the Lamplight. A small fair thing, no bigger than a held lantern, that feeds on delight the way a moth feeds on warmth. It is not malicious. It loves children because children are the gladdest thing the world makes, and it gathers their joy the way you would gather flowers, not understanding, or not caring, that the flower dies cut. It is genuinely beautiful and genuinely lethal and it does not know the difference. Behind it, deeper in, is the suggestion of something larger that the Lamplight answers to, the **Lady of the Lamps**, who need not appear tonight but should be felt: the Wild has a court, and it is old, and it does not think the way people do.

The road in: three beats

The band walks into the Wild at dusk. Run the way in as three beats, each one showing a face of the thing they are about to have to weigh. Let them feel the pull before they reach the boy, so that when they reach him the choice is honest.

Beat one, the verge. The seam where tame ends. On the village side, flat fields, a straight fence, the grey-iron survey-stakes the Concord has already driven. Step across and the air changes: warmer, sweeter, louder with life, lit from nowhere. Show them the first small wonder, something harmless and lovely, a tree that has fruited out of season into glass-bright lanterns of its own, a stream that runs uphill and sings. Let a player reach for it. Let it be exactly as good as it looks. Then show them, snagged on a thorn, a scrap of a child’s nightshirt, and the gladness goes cold. *Both at once.* That is the lesson of beat one.

Beat two, the deep. Further in, the wonder gets stranger and the cost gets nearer. Time runs wrong here; play it. An hour’s walk and the moon has crossed half the sky; a moment’s rest and a player’s beard is longer, or a ration has gone to dust in the pack. They pass things that were

people, a verge-villager from a generation ago, glad and humming and no longer quite real, who will tell them, smiling, that they have been here only since *last week* and would they like to stay. This is what the Wild costs, shown not told: not death, something softer and worse, a happiness with the self quietly emptied out. Let one player be tempted by it. The temptation should be sincere.

Beat three, the glade. The light leads them to the gold-hour glade where Tam sits, and the Lamplight drifts above him like a small kind sun, and it is, for a moment, the most beautiful thing any of them has seen. Hold there before anything goes wrong. Let them stand in it. Let them understand, completely, why a boy would follow this into the dark. Only then does the choice arrive.

The glade and the choice

In the glade, three truths land at once, and the band has to hold all three.

Tam is happy, and Tam is being lost. He greets them gladly and does not want to go. Every day he stays, more of the human boy thins out into something fair and gentle and not theirs. A day more and he forgets his mother's face. He is not in pain. That is what makes it hard.

To take him back is to take the wonder from him. If they pull him out, he comes, but he comes back into a grey world that felled the magic, into a flat tame Lastfield, and some part of him will always know what he left, and grieve it, and so will they. The Lamplight will not fight them for him, exactly; it will only dim, and be sad, and let the gold hour fade, and that small grief is its own weight.

Outside, the warden is lighting her torch. However long the band lingers, let them feel the clock: a cold thread of unweaving light has begun at the verge behind them, Sela Marr keeping her word, the edge of the Wild going quiet and grey and safe. If they want the Wild's edge to survive the night, they have to *choose that too*, and go back out and face her, and she is not wrong, and they have no clean argument, only what they felt in here.

There is no correct ending. Offer the weight, not the answer. Three shapes the night can take:

- **Brought home.** They take Tam back into the safe grey world. He lives. The wonder is lost to him, and he will always half-remember it, and so the safety has a price they will carry out with them. This is the Concord's answer, chosen with open eyes.

- **Left to the light.** They cannot bring themselves to drag him out of the only place he has ever been that glad, and they leave him, and the Wild keeps him, and they walk back out to tell Annet that her son is happy and gone. This is the Wild's answer, and it costs exactly as much as it sounds.
- **A bargain.** They find the third road: they treat with the Lampling, or the Lady behind it, and pay a price of their own to bring Tam out *with* something of the wonder intact, a memory kept, a small marvel that comes home with him, a promise made. The Wild bargains fair and bargains dear. This is the campaign's true answer in miniature: not safety, not surrender, but a new thing made by people willing to pay for it. Make them pay.

And threaded through all three: what do they do about Sela Marr and her torch? Stop her, and they have chosen wonder over the next taken child, and must own it. Let her, and the verge goes grey behind them forever, and they must own that. Talk her into waiting, and they have only moved the choice down the road, which is exactly what the whole world is doing.

Running it

Play both sides honestly. The one rule that makes this work: never let the Wild be simply evil and never let the Concord be simply evil. The moment a player can dismiss either side, the choice collapses and the night goes flat. The Wild must be genuinely worth following into the dark. The warden must be genuinely trying to save children. Keep both true and the table will do the rest.

Pace it in the three beats. Verge, deep, glade. Do not rush to the boy. The campaign's whole feeling lives in beat two, the slow dawning that wonder costs something. Give it room.

It is fair-play. Everything that matters is findable in the fiction. The time-slip, the emptied villager, the warden's torch at the verge: each is a clue the players can read, so that the choice at the end is informed and theirs, never sprung.

System-agnostic. Bring the rules you love. This provides the village, the road in, the wonder, the cost, and the choice; you provide the dice. No stat blocks. When the Wild bends time or the Lampling lures, resolve it with whatever your system uses for a save, a check, or a hard call, and lean on description over numbers.

Safety at the table

This story turns on a child in danger and on a gentle, sorrowful kind of loss, and it asks players to sit in a choice with no clean answer. That is its strength and it deserves care. Before you begin, take five minutes as a table: name that the themes here are a lost child, enchantment that erodes the self, and grief, and agree that anyone can call a pause, fast-forward a moment, or step a scene off-camera at any time, no reason owed. Lines that say *not at this table* and veils that say *keep it off-camera* are both welcome; ask for them up front and honor them without friction. Nothing here requires graphic peril to a child to land; the weight is in the choice, not in harm, and you can hold all of it while keeping the actual danger to Tam soft-focus and off the page. Check in once at the midpoint and once at the end. Wonder and weight, never grimness; if it stops feeling like a fairy tale and starts feeling like a wound, slow down and tend the table first.

Example of play

GM: The light leads you between two leaning birches and stops. Beyond them there's a glade where it's somehow still the gold hour, late sun though you walked in at dusk. And there's Tam. He's sitting in the grass with the light hanging over him like a little sun, and he's laughing, and he's got something in his hands that smells like every birthday you ever had. He looks up and sees you and he's *glad*. "Did you come to play too?"

Maren (ranger): Oh, that's so much worse than finding him crying. I kneel down, slow, like he's a deer that might bolt. "Tam. Your mum sent us. Annet. She wants you home."

GM: His face does a complicated thing. For just a second, under the gladness, he remembers her. And then the light dims warm and gold over him and the second passes and he smiles again. "But it's nice here. You could stay. Nobody's tired here, and nobody's cross, and the dark doesn't come."

Davin (cleric):... I look at the light. The Lamplight. I don't draw anything. "What is it you want with him? Truly."

GM: It doesn't speak in words. But it drifts toward you, and where it passes you feel it: it isn't cruel, it doesn't even understand cruelty. It loves him. It loves how glad he is, the way you'd love a warm fire, and it is gathering that gladness the way you'd gather it, not knowing the fire goes out. It dips, and offers *you* a little of the warmth. And gods, Davin, it's lovely.

Davin:... how lovely.

GM: Roll me whatever your system uses to hold onto yourself.

Maren: And while he's rolling, can I feel the warden's torch yet? Back at the verge?

GM: You can. A thin cold line of light, way back the way you came, eating the edge of the wood. Sela's keeping her word. Every minute you spend in here being moved, a little more of this goes grey behind you forever. So. The boy who doesn't want to leave, the light that loves him to death, and the safety burning its way in at your backs. What do you do?

The fine print

Teen and up. Themes of a lost child, enchantment that thins the self, peril, and a heavy gentle choice, handled with wonder and weight rather than grimness. Includes session-zero safety guidance. A personal-use digital download. A complete one-shot and the doorway to the full *Last Wild* campaign.

From Narrative Hall. We build the foundation. You tell the story.

Want the rest?

This is just the opening. **The Last Wild: A Light in the Trees (Heroic-Fantasy One-Shot)** is ready to run: a complete, system-agnostic kit you can drop into any tabletop game.

Get the full download at

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