



THE UNILLUSTRATED MAN

3 Difficulty
5 Complexity

A standalone encounter for five adventurers

By Corwin Riddle

The Unillustrated Man is a standalone encounter designed for five 6th to 8th-level adventurers. A shaman's magical tattoos have been washed off by a mysterious storm, coming to life as dangerous spirit animals. The players must venture into the storm and weaken the illustrations until their ink can be extracted and the tattoos restored to their original host.

BACKGROUND

Storm clouds hang over the lush and verdant valley of Teveld, as they always have. A torrential downpour is visible for miles, dark and heavy rain that obscures everything caught beneath—though a closer look reveals an oddity; the thatch huts scattered below the rain are dry as bone, and those living in the area have never felt a single drop of water. Sating the curiosity of bewildered visitors, Teveld's shamanistic elders explain that the valley rests on a fragile point between the living world and the spirit realm; the wall between the planes is stretched thin, letting the spirit realm's eternal storm break through.

Called the *long rain* by those familiar with the phenomenon, the storm, clouds, and rain exist on a separate plane—visible to this world but intangible to those in it; the lightning flashes, the thunder rolls, and the rain falls, but the storm's effects are nothing to the residents but a perpetual and calming presence, a soothing reminder of nature and the spirit realm. Some claim to have felt the rain, others swear they can hear the drops bouncing off stones and dripping from leaves; none of the assertions are validated or believed, and the valley goes on with its slow and rural life, its residents and travelers taking advantage of the tranquility to connect with ancient spirits.

Once such traveler was a strange and mysterious man known only as Darsk, a tall and lanky elf with a preference for quiet and solitude. Covering his body, head to toe, are countless tattoos of exquisite detail, inked to represent the spirits called upon by primal shamans—ghostly bears, lions, and tigers. A closer look reveals the tattoos themselves as more than mere art; the images dance and move in impos-

sible ways, alive beneath the skin. Teveld's elders have heard of such illustrated men, those capable of channeling spirits through their body with magical tattoos, and it is only natural that Darsk would be drawn to the valley by their tattoos.

However, almost immediately after arriving in the valley, the long rain began to affect Darsk and his illustrations, washing the magical ink off his body. As it collected in puddles on the ground, the glowing ink came to life, twisting into ghostly shapes of the animal spirits they used to represent. Separated from their host and agitated by the incessant rain, these tangible illustrations have turned hostile, terrorizing Teveld's vulnerable population of elders and travelers. Becoming more powerful each day they stay within the storm and having grown far beyond the match of the valley's residents, Darsk's tattoos must be erased before the long rain and its effects manage to wash away the people of Teveld for good.

GETTING THE PLAYERS INVOLVED

The Unillustrated Man is designed as a standalone encounter, but can easily be turned into a full adventure. The PCs can stumble upon Teveld and the long rain, be summoned there by a connection with spirits, or be looking for a particular resident within the valley. Once there, you can send them to the grove with one or more of the following hooks:

HOOK 1: THE INK, ME THINKS

The players can find Darsk without much trouble. Although clothed, he covers himself as if exposed—feeling naked without his tattoos—and shivers uncontrollably, suffering from severe separation anxiety. He tells the players that the spirits from his tattoos must coexist—once separated from his consciousness, they revert to an angry, primal state. Although most of the valley's residents are calling for the destruction of the illustrations, Darsk explains that it's been tried before with no success; the spirits can't be killed through brute force—the valley's connection to the spirit realm regenerates

them almost immediately.

Instead, Darsk tells the players, the illustrations must be turned back into ink and reapplied to his skin (they can only meld with Darsk, if the PCs ask). To accomplish this, the illustrations must be engaged in combat and have their hold on the living world weakened; once subdued, the spirits can be extracted into special vials that will shield them from the long rain's effects until Darsk leaves the valley.

Besides pointing them in the direction of a grove where the spirits are usually seen, Darsk gives each of the players two magical vials each and specific instructions for capturing the illustrations: the players must weaken the spirits until they begin to dissipate into ink, then attempt to extract the ink into the vial. He warns the players that it might take multiple attempts to recapture a spirit's essence, depending on how powerful it is. If the players accidentally destroy a spirit, it should regenerate shortly.

Quest XP: 600 XP and 2,000 gp for recapturing all five of Darsk's illustrations by extracting their ink.

HOOK 2: A TABOO TATTOO

An old orc named Igrush is one of Teveld's most revered elder shamans, and is notorious for his hold on tradition and strict teachings. Although most of the valley's elders and shamans are upset at the destruction caused by the illustrations, Igrush's displeasure is directed at something a little more specific—one of Darsk's tattoos, a chimera. Igrush believes the spirit of a chimera is an abomination of nature, a twisted atrocity of a monster that should hold no place of reverence among the honorable and noble spirits of the oldest and most respected animals.

Igrush is aware of both Darsk's plans to recapture his illustrations and the fact that the spirits will regenerate if destroyed. However, the orc has vast knowledge of dealings with spirits and knows how to separate a weakened one from the spirit realm and let it die.

He gives the players a bag of powder to be used on a weakened spirit once it begins to dissipate, which should kill it immediately. Igrush warns the players that there's only enough powder to kill one of the spirits, and that he will be quite displeased if they destroy one of the other spirits.

Quest XP: 300 XP and 400 gp for destroying the chimera illustration.

SPECIAL FEATURES

TOUCHED BY THE STORM

If a player is damaged by an illustration that passed through a square affected by the long rain, that player is afflicted by *Touched by the Storm* until the end of their next turn:

- A PC takes **10 necrotic** damage at the start of their turn while afflicted by *Touched by the Storm*.
- If a PC afflicted by *Touched by the Storm* enters or starts its turn in a square affected by the long rain, they can move an additional 3 squares and their next attack deals an additional **1d6** damage.

EXTRACTING INK

The illustrations regenerate each turn and can only be eliminated completely if their ink is extracted:

- Each PC gets two vials; once an illustration has been extracted into a vial, the vial is full and can't be used again.
- A PC can attempt to extract ink from an illustration once the illustration has reached 25% of its total hit points (24 for agile, 28 for brutish).
- A PC can spend a minor action to attempt to extract ink.
- A PC must be within 2 squares of an illustration to extract ink.
- To attempt to extract ink, a PC rolls **1d20** and adds their *Arcana* skill to the roll. If the total exceeds the illustration's remaining hit points, all of the ink is extracted and the illustration disappears.
- Each time an attempt at extracting an illustration's ink fails, the next attempt by any PC against that illustration gains a +5 to the roll. This effect is cumulative, increasing by 5 each attempt.
- A natural 20 on the **1d20** roll automatically succeeds and extracts the ink.
- One spirit can be killed immediately with Igrush's powder, which can be used as a minor action within 2 squares once a spirit is weakened.

GETTING STARTED

Read this as the players enter the valley:

Shadowy clouds roll above, unleashing an incessant torrent of rain below, though the ground below is dry and unaffected by the storm. The drops are clearly visible and appear to bounce off your armor with a dull splash that seems to echo from a place far away. A gentle wind whistles, hiding the subtle sounds of low whispers—a reminder that you're close to the spirit realm.

AREA: THE GROVE

Read this when the players enter the grove:

As you cross the open fields of the valley and enter the grove, the clouds above turn black. A bolt of lightning crackles overhead; the air turns thick and electric, your hairs stand on end. Here, the spirit realm seems to overlap the living world.

The canopy of trees above blocks out most of the storm, though there are several openings that allow the long rain through. Out of the corner of your eye you notice a number of glowing pools of liquid come to life, twirling into shadowy wisps of creatures; among them spirits representing cats, a bear, a chimera, and others.

Perception (DC 12): *The pools of water below the long rain seem to become substantial as the spirit animals pass through them.*

SETUP

3 Agile Illustrations (A)

3 Brutish Illustrations (B)

The agile illustrations are a lion, tiger, and panther. The brutish illustrations are a bear, a boar, and a chimera. There is one of each, but their individual positions are not important.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

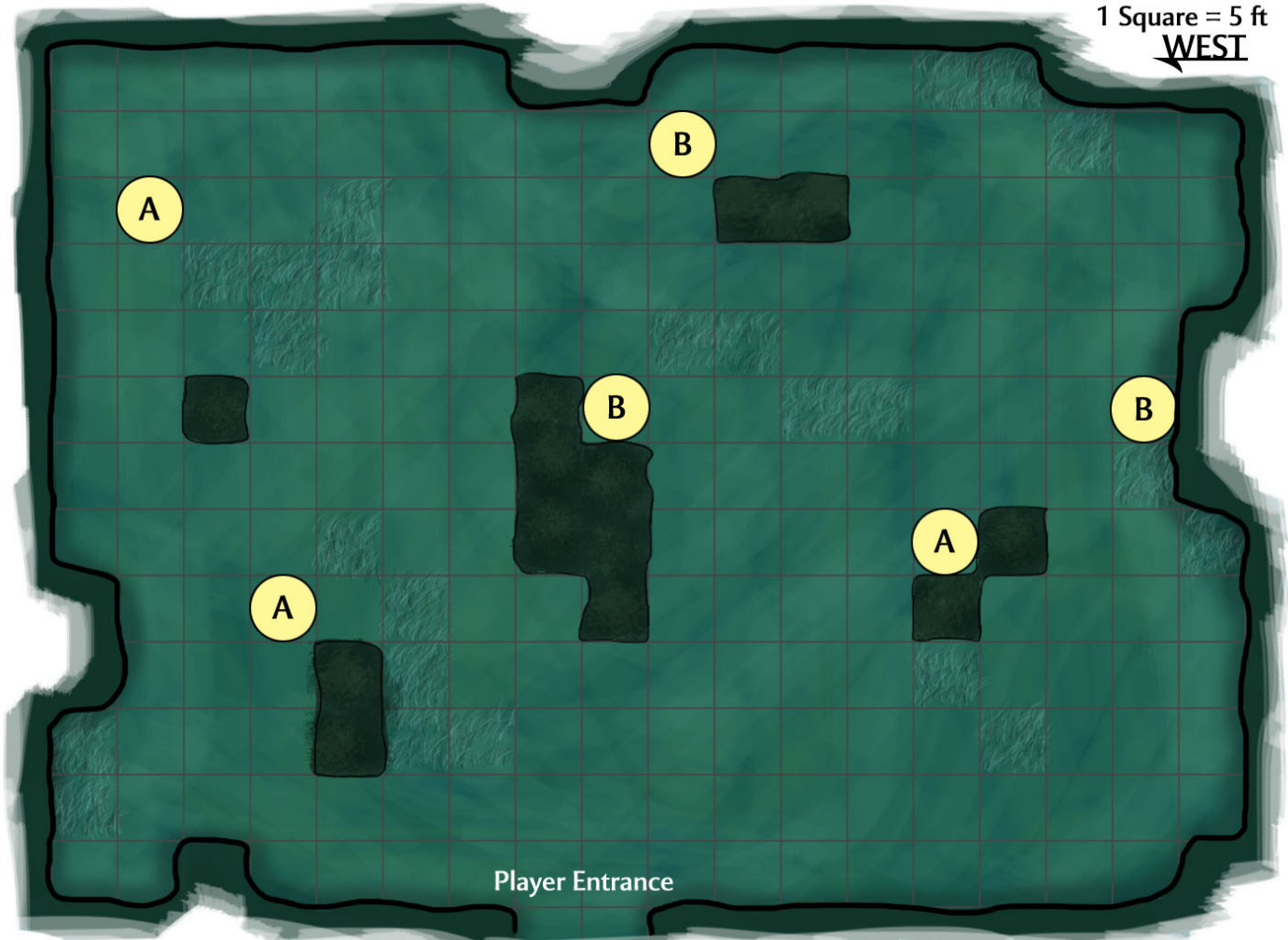
Height: The tree canopy is 20 ft high.

Illumination: The grove is almost dimly-lit.

Shrubs and Trees: Marked as dark green shrubs, these dense clusters of foliage extend to the canopy and block movement and line of sight.

The Long Rain: Many of the squares are filled with bluish-gray rain drops, marking squares where the rain falls through openings in the canopy.

1 Square = 5 ft
WEST



ILLUSTRATIONS IN COMBAT

The illustrations are primal and aggressive, agitated by the storm, the long rain, and the proximity to the spirit realm. They will not follow any advanced combat tactics, and will tend to attack the closest, most vulnerable target.

The agile illustrations should act similar to stalking cats, trying to flank the players and making use of *Spirit Lash* after slipping between multiple targets. The brutish illustrations prefer a straightforward approach, charging into a single player before using *Spirit Strike*.

All of the illustrations are aware of *Out in the Rain*, and will attempt to pass through the long rain's squares whenever possible as long as they can still attack a player that turn. The illustrations will use *Spirit Surge* to close the gap with a vulnerable target.

Regenerative Ink will keep the illustrations alive until the players extract their ink, while *Unstable Existence* lets them avoid attacks after dealing or taking a critical hit.

FIGHTING THE ILLUSTRATIONS

The encounter is a straightforward fight, but the enemies are not meant to die. Make sure you are making your players aware of the vials and extracting the ink, so they don't become frustrated (or dead) when the illustrations keep returning to life.

The long rain only affects players if they have been attacked by an illustration after it passed through the rain, as if passing on the storm's power to a player through damage (*Touched by the Storm*). Make sure to let your players know the bonus is only temporary so they can figure out how and why it happened when it did.

COMBAT FLAVOR

If you dislike reading powers and effects to your players, give them hints with the following flavor text.

When an illustration makes use of *Out in the Rain* by passing over a square affected by the long rain, read:

The spirit glows brightly after passing under the falling rain, energized by the storm.

When a player becomes afflicted with *Touched by the Storm*, read:

Recently affected by the storm, the illustration transfers its energy to you through its attack. You can feel subtle drips of the long rain trickling down from the leaves above.

When a player afflicted with *Touched by the Storm* enters a square affected by the long rain, read:

You feel the rain and wind as if you were in the midst of the storm, which temporarily energizes your movement and attacks.

Agile Illustration		Level 8 Soldier
Medium shadow beast (tiger, lion, panther)		XP 350
HP 96; Bloodied 48		Initiative +8
AC 22, Fortitude 22, Reflex 19, Will 20		Perception +6
Speed 5		Low-Light Vision
TRAITS		
Out in the Rain		
If the illustration enters or starts a turn in a square affected by the long rain, it can move an additional 3 squares during its turn and deals an additional 1d6 damage with all attacks. A player damaged by the illustration this turn is afflicted by <i>Touched by the Storm</i> . See Special Features .		
Regenerative Ink		
If the illustration is reduced to 0 hit points before its ink is extracted, it regains 24 hit points at the start of its next turn.		
STANDARD ACTIONS		
Ⓣ Bite ♦ At-Will		
Attack: +12 vs AC Hit: 3d6 + 6 damage.		
↓ Spirit Lash ♦ Recharge [☐][☐][☐][☐]		
Attack: Close burst 1; +12 vs Fortitude Hit: 2d6 + 10 damage and push all enemies in the blast 1 square.		
MINOR ACTIONS		
Spirit Surge ♦ Encounter		
Effect: The illustration takes a move action.		
TRIGGERED ACTIONS		
Unstable Existence		
Trigger: The illustration takes or deals a critical hit. Effect: The illustration becomes insubstantial until the start of its next turn.		
Skills Stealth +11		
Str 20 (+9)	Dex 15 (+6)	Wis 15 (+6)
Con 17 (+7)	Int 2 (+0)	Cha 13 (+5)
Alignment Unaligned		Languages –

Brutish Illustration		Level 8 Brute
Medium shadow beast (bear, boar, chimera)		XP 350
HP 112; Bloodied 56		Initiative +6
AC 20, Fortitude 21, Reflex 19, Will 20		Perception +6
Speed 5		Low-Light Vision
TRAITS		
Out in the Rain		
If the illustration enters or starts a turn in a square affected by the long rain, it can move an additional 3 squares during its turn and deals an additional 1d6 damage with all attacks. A player damaged by the illustration this turn is afflicted by <i>Touched by the Storm</i> . See Special Features .		
Regenerative Ink		
If the illustration is reduced to 0 hit points before its ink is extracted, it regains 24 hit points at the start of its next turn.		
STANDARD ACTIONS		
Ⓣ Claw ♦ At-Will		
Attack: +11 vs AC Hit: 2d6 + 6 damage.		
↓ Spirit Strike ♦ Recharge [☐][☐][☐][☐]		
Attack: Reach 2; +11 vs Reflex Hit: 3d6 + 8 damage and slide the target 2 squares.		
MINOR ACTIONS		
Spirit Surge ♦ Encounter		
Effect: The illustration takes a move action.		
TRIGGERED ACTIONS		
Unstable Existence		
Trigger: The illustration takes or deals a critical hit. Effect: The illustration becomes insubstantial until the start of its next turn.		
Skills Stealth +11		
Str 20 (+9)	Dex 15 (+6)	Wis 15 (+6)
Con 17 (+7)	Int 2 (+0)	Cha 13 (+5)
Alignment Unaligned		Languages –

When an illustration is weakened (25% hit points), read:

The illustration becomes unstable, its wispy tendrils sweeping around as it begins to lose shape.

When a player fails at extracting ink, read:

You manage to extract some of the illustration's ink, but it manages to retain its shape and some of its power.

When a player succeeds at extracting ink, read:

The illustration loses shape and is pulled into the vial, which you quickly cap, shielding it from the storm's effects.

If Regenerative Ink is triggered, read:

The spirit falls, but the ink begins to move. The remnants of the illustration begin to grow and take shape once more, regaining a small amount of its former power.

If Unstable Existence is triggered, read:

The strength of such a blow jars the illustration, which fades as it phases into the spirit realm for a few seconds.

CONCLUSION

The illustrations fight until they've all been extracted (or killed, if the players used the powder as well). If they try to keep the ink for some other purpose, you can explain that the spirits within the ink have already been fused with Darsk's soul and won't work on anyone else.

If they return to Teveld and successfully extracted the ink and killed the chimera, Igrush will give them a level 9 magical weapon; Darsk is saddened by the missing tattoo and gives the players a reduced reward. If they extracted all of the illustrations including the chimera, Darsk gives them a piece of magical armor (level 9) adorned with moving illustrations of several spirits.

If they stick around for a few, the PCs will overhear Darsk talking to the vials when he thinks he's all alone:

"Oh, you thought you could escape, my precious creatures? Surely you knew I would find you; there isn't a plane in this universe I wouldn't cross to bring you back. Your power shouldn't be wasted, and I'll put it to such use once we're back together. Don't worry, my beautiful darlings, you'll grow to love me eventually."

ADJUSTMENTS

If you like this encounter but aren't sure how to fit it into your campaign, here is some advice:

We have too few or too many players:

For 4 players, subtract two illustrations. For 6 players, add 3 illustrations and double the illustration's static damage.

We aren't the right level:

The illustrations are custom creatures, but you can take any animal creatures and add in the unique powers.

It's too easy:

If things aren't challenging enough for your players, consider the following adjustments:

- Increase the damage bonus from **Out in the Rain**.
- Give the illustrations two attacks each turn instead of one.
- Reduce the cumulative bonus per attempt given to players when extracting ink.

It's too hard:

If the players are having a hard time, consider making the following adjustments during combat:

- Remove the damage from **Touched by the Storm** and increase its damage bonus given to players.
- Allow illustrations to have their ink extracted with a static number of attempts, such as 2 or 3, depending on how the fight is going.

We want to play a full adventure:

The valley of Teveld is home to many mysterious creatures, visitors, and happenings. Consider the following additional forays into the long rain:

Adventure 1:

The long rain has, inexplicably, begun affecting a portion of the valley, causing massive mud slides and forcing the inhabitants to seek higher ground. Further inspection reveals a shaman released an earth spirit into the living world, which has decided to reclaim the valley by controlling a small army of mud elementals.

Adventure 2:

A portion of the clouds above is always clear and sunny—a perfect, circular hole that remains as the sky passes overhead. Below is an ancient temple surrounded by a magical shield (that extends to the sky and creates the hole). Inside are the remnants of an orcish temple, predating most of the valley's knowledge and filled with vengeful spirits of a clan betrayed by an ancestor of one of Teveld's leading shaman.

