

The Darkwood Shrine

Outline: The party spots a splash of color as they travel through a dark wood, finding a small shrine. This shrine is the center of a hidden cult that worships a dark spirit that lives in the stump. In return for blood offerings, it gives glimpses of the future.

Encounter:

“Your eye is drawn by a bit of red, which seems out of place in these woods. Peering closer you see a splash of yellow, and curious, you guide your mount closer. As you look, it appears that a hundred feet or so from the road there is a shrine of some sort.”

“This shrine was once a stump that someone has carved rather skillfully. Instead of a flat top, it is instead crowned with a smooth, shallow bowl that has filled with several inches of rainwater. The side facing the road has been carved out to make a sizeable nook, that someone has placed a stone statue inside of. The statue is roughly shaped into the form of a skull, upon which someone has painted a yellow spiral. The paint is fresh, though the shrine is clearly older. Around the base of the skull are a large number of what appear to be offerings: crystals, shards of carved bone, a tiny gold cup, an antler hilted dagger, and a garland of woven flowers.”

The crystals: A half dozen crystals, ranging in size from that of a finger up to the size of a closed fist, are scattered around. If placed in the bowl of water, they will glow faintly, and hold that glow until the next dawn.

The dagger: There is dried blood on this dagger. Otherwise there is nothing special about it.

The tiny cup: looks to be worth about 10 gold. It is a plain cup with no ornamentation, though it is stained wine red on the inside, likely from blood. It is a bit battered and dinged up, and has clearly been here for some time. Those who can

investigate if it is magical detect that there is the faintest pulse of dream magic about it, but very faint. If it comes into contact with blood, then that pulse grows stronger. Those who drink blood from it will that night have a prophetic dream.

The bones: Some of the bones around the skull look like baby's bones. Also, nearby there is a pile of bones and carcasses of small animals, mostly cats and dogs it seems like, though there are a few bones that look like wild animals.

Creature:

If the party does anything to try and destroy the shrine, then the spirit will awaken and attack them. Choose a creature that is appropriately leveled to your party. Suggested is either some sort of spirit (ghost/nature spirit/invisible stalker), or some type of tree creature (treant/ent/vine creature). The idea being that this stump was once a massive tree that was worshipped by the former, more primitive inhabitants of the area, and then the tree was cut down, it twisted the nascent god spirit of the tree into the evil stump creature it is today. Describe it with phrases like “dark red sap oozing like blood from its hollow eyes,” and “thorns have sprouted from its rough bark, breaking out in painful gashes along its limbs.”

The party can either offer a blood sacrifice to put the creature back to sleep, or defeat it. The creature can not be killed however, so long as its stump shrine is still intact. Flame is the quickest way to do this, setting the stump on fire, but it can also be hacked apart. If the creature is ‘killed’ but the shrine still whole, then the creature will go dormant until the following night, when it will start to go on a rampage.

If anyone in the party drank blood from the cup, and the creature has started to go on a rampage, it can reach through the dream, turning it into a nightmare that inflicts small bits of damage each night.