**Escape Room Activity: The Woods That Never Let Go**

***The Haunted Chronicles***

**Ages: 9-13**

**Objective**

Players must navigate a series of puzzles, riddles, and challenges to "escape" the haunted forest before time runs out. Each puzzle incorporates themes and elements from *The Woods That Never Let Go*, focusing on mystery, the supernatural, and survival.

**Overview**

* **Setting**: A replica of the haunted forest clearing with eerie props: fake trees, dim lighting, whispering sounds, and an ominous, large "cursed tree" centerpiece.
* **Time Limit**: 60 minutes.
* **Group Size**: 4–8 participants.
* **Goal**: Solve all the puzzles to break the forest’s curse and escape.

**Stages and Puzzles**

**Stage 1: The Entryway**

* **Scenario**: Players are at the forest's edge. They must find a way to "cross the threshold" safely.
* **Puzzle**:
	+ Players find a journal with the phrase, "The trees watch those who don’t belong." Nearby, three wooden plaques display symbols of eyes, footprints, and roots.
	+ Clue hidden in the journal: “The forest sees before it lets you pass.”
	+ **Solution**: Players must align the plaques in the correct order (eyes, footprints, roots) to unlock the forest door.

**Stage 2: The Clearing**

* **Scenario**: Players enter a haunted clearing where whispers grow louder. The cursed tree stands ominously in the center.
* **Puzzle**:
	+ A locked box sits at the base of the tree. It contains the "next map" but requires a four-digit code.
	+ Clues are scattered around: an old photo of Haven Brook (with a faintly circled date: 1924), a broken compass, and a carved message on a tree ("The time we’re lost").
	+ **Solution**: Players combine the clues to deduce the code is **1924** and unlock the box.

**Stage 3: The Symbolic Path**

* **Scenario**: A map from the locked box leads them deeper into the forest, where they find strange carvings on the trees.
* **Puzzle**:
	+ Players must match symbols carved into trees with those shown on the map, deciphering the correct sequence to move forward. The symbols include:
		- A crescent moon
		- A hand
		- A broken branch
		- A set of eyes
	+ **Solution**: Players realize the sequence relates to the phases of Hope's journey from the book (hand for bravery, eyes for watching, etc.). The correct order allows them to move forward.

**Stage 4: The Whispering Roots**

* **Scenario**: Players are trapped by the cursed tree’s roots, which “whisper” riddles. They must answer all riddles to release the roots.
* **Riddle Examples**:
	+ "I am not alive but can grow; I don’t have lungs but need air. What am I?" (Answer: Fire)
	+ "The more you take, the more you leave behind. What am I?" (Answer: Footsteps)
* **Solution**: Answer all riddles to free the roots.

**Stage 5: The Final Stand**

* **Scenario**: The cursed tree begins to tremble. Players must find and destroy its heart to escape the forest.
* **Puzzle**:
	+ A series of glowing roots lead to the tree’s core. Players must solve a logic puzzle on a nearby tablet. Example:
		- "Four adventurers attempt to cross a bridge. Only two can cross at a time. They have 17 minutes before the bridge collapses. Can they make it across if their speeds are 1, 2, 5, and 10 minutes, and they must carry a lantern?"
		- (Answer: Yes, by strategic pairing.)
	+ Once solved, the "heart" of the tree is revealed in a hidden compartment.
* **Final Action**: Players use a symbolic object (an ax or amulet) to destroy the tree, breaking the curse.

**Escape and Debrief**

* **Escape Ending**: When the tree’s heart is destroyed, the whispers fade, and the forest begins to “recede.” A hidden exit door opens, allowing the group to escape.
* **If Time Runs Out**: The room goes dark, and a prerecorded whispering voice taunts, "The forest never lets go…"
* **Post-Escape Debrief**: Share how the puzzles tie into themes from the book, reinforcing key moments in *The Woods That Never Let Go*.

**Optional Enhancements**

1. **Sound Effects**: Whispering voices, snapping branches, and distant screams to heighten tension.
2. **Lighting**: Dim, flickering lanterns with occasional blackouts.
3. **Props**: A replica of Hope’s journal with excerpts from the book, broken compasses, carved symbols, and an eerie tree centerpiece.