

FANTASY AGE

ENCOUNTERS



ANCIENT SHADOWS

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ANCIENT SHADOWS

WHERE ARE THE CHARACTERS?

The village of Crows Crossing, located near a site of ancient ruins and standing stones.

WHAT'S GOING ON?

A child has accidentally freed an ancient evil from its otherworldly prison. The creature now possesses the child. A local shaman believes he can rid the child of the creature, but the evil possessing it must still be defeated to banish it once more. A local scholar believes the child has already been irrevocably tainted by the possession, and that allowing the creature to first consume the child's soul will temporarily weaken it, making it easier to banish.

WHAT DOES THE PARTY NEED TO DO?

Resolve which route to take to deal with the creature and banish it.

WHAT'S AT STAKE?

If the heroes fail, a terrible monster will be unleashed on the world. Depending

on which path they take, they may either save a child or use the child's death to protect others.

SETUP

The heroes have arrived in the village of Crow's Crossing, a small settlement built on a crossroads of two minor but well-traveled roads. While they are still taking in the sights and getting their bearings, they come across a child wandering in the street, wrapped in a blanket. The youth, a boy of about eight named Darios, looks lost and disoriented.

If the heroes approach the child, he stares blankly at them as they try to communicate with him. Then Darios' eyes turn black and he charges at the nearest hero, howling in a voice far too deep for his tiny form. He poses no threat to the heroes, but he is surprisingly hard to restrain.

Heroes seeking to restrain the boy need to make a **TN 11 STRENGTH (MIGHT)** test. Any hero passing a **TN 14 INTELLIGENCE (ARCANE LORE)** test recognizes the child is possessed by some sort of dark entity.

If the heroes restrain the boy they quickly see his parents, two merchants named Henma and Krell, come rushing out from a nearby house. They stammer an apology and plead to take Darios away. A moment later, a thin, elderly woman wearing a cloak of feathers decorated with bone arrives on the scene. She introduces herself as the local shaman.

If the heroes ask what's wrong with the child or declare the boy is possessed, the old woman either agrees with them or informs them the child is possessed by "an ancient evil that sleeps in the ruins nearby." The shaman identifies herself as Elga Bone-Eye, a local wise woman and shaman. She also states she has found a way to save the child from the creature, but she cannot do it without aid.

DECISION POINT: DIFFERING VIEWS, HIGH STAKES

If the heroes abandon the child and leave, the encounter is over. Later they will hear about a failed exorcism in the village that killed more than half of the

Killing Darios when he is first encountered is an extreme action that will lead to the creature immediately erupting from the boy's corpse at full power. They don't need to roll anything to kill the boy – it's easy for the big bad heroes to kill a child. However, their impulsive and violent act will cause the creature to manifest at its full power.

Also, killing the child immediately will turn the village against the heroes. They will get terse thanks for dealing with the monster and then it will be made very clear they are not otherwise welcome. Prices will raise, free rooms will suddenly fill, and the authorities will suggest they move on.

villagers. They will also hear of a terrifying beast of pure malice which now dwells in that region.

If the heroes agree to help the shaman, they will find their assistance is straightforward but vital. Elga can draw the creature out of the boy and force it to take a physical form. However, if this physical form is not destroyed the creature will surely kill the shaman, devour the child's spirit, and survive to cause "great evil."

AN ANCIENT EVIL

If asked, Elga will relate what she knows of the story of how the child came to be possessed. The boy was playing in some nearby ruins and managed somehow to awaken the creature that was either imprisoned or slept there. A **TN 13 INTELLIGENCE (ARCANE LORE)** test confirms the tale and adds that the creature was likely imprisoned or bound to the sacred standing stones in the ruins long ago. If the heroes think to rebind the creature in its old prison, they can travel to the nearby ruins to discover a number of shattered standing stones. A **TN 11 INTELLIGENCE (ARCANE LORE OR RELIGIOUS LORE)** test will confirm that these stones were the prison for the creature and their destruction means the creature cannot be bound again in the same fashion.

ADDITIONAL LORE

As they are making a decision, the heroes will receive a visit from a local scholar who claims to be an expert in demonology, possession, and the forbidden magicks of the ancient cultures who once dwelled here. The scholar, a serious young woman named Lym, claims that the child's soul has already been tainted by possession. According to her studies, the child's soul is now marked forever and even if he is freed from possession he will eventually give in to corruption and

evil. However, if a ritual is performed to force the beast to consume the child's soul before it is ready, it will emerge weakened and easier to defeat. A **TN 12 INTELLIGENCE (ARCANE LORE OR RELIGIOUS LORE)** test will reveal that the scholar's theories go against the consensus for most in her field, but they cannot be explicitly disqualified and that most scholars do agree that the weakening of the possessing creature is true in any case. Even Elga if pressed will admit forcing the creature to consume the child will temporarily weaken it, but she vehemently disagrees the child's soul is irrevocably tainted and insists young Darios can be saved.

A FATEFUL DECISION

Ultimately Elga, Lym, and the child's parents will follow whatever path the heroes agree to – they need the heroes to fight and defeat the creature and cannot perform either version of the ritual without them. Will they have the shaman exorcise the dark spirit and face the monster at its full power? Or will they sacrifice the child to face a weaker foe, thus increasing the chance to end a dire threat to many lives?

THE FINAL SCENE

Whichever version of the ritual the heroes decide to perform, both Lym and Elga suggest to take young Darios out to the ruins near town. The reason for this is ritualistic, but also practical – there are fewer people for the creature to kill out of town. However, there is one key difference between the two rituals. Elga's ritual must take place at night, where the shadow beast who possesses Darios will be at the height of its power. Lym's ritual must be performed at dawn, and the sunlight will weaken the creature.

As the ritual begins, the winds howl and the child begins to scream in agony. As either Lym or Elga chants the ancient

rituals required to expel the spirit, the boy's body thrashes and writhes as unholy screams come from his mouth that no mortal child could make. After several minutes the ritual ends and the boy collapses. What happens next depends on the exact ritual used.

- Regardless of which ritual is used, Darios' eyes pop open and dark energies shoot forth from his eyes and mouth, quickly forming a large creature that resembles a massive bear with blazing orange eyes and flesh that reflects no light; the beast seem like a living shadow.
- If Elga's ritual was used, the heroes can hear Darios coughing and whimpering as the shaman gathers the boy's trembling form and drags him to safety. This version of the creature uses the Shadow Beast stats in the **Adversaries** section of this Encounter.
- If Lym's ritual is used, the heroes see Darios' lifeless body twitch one last time before falling still. The creature uses the Shadow Beast stats in the **Adversaries** section, but its Regenerate and Shadow special qualities are affected by the light.

The heroes must face and defeat this creature on their own. If they fail, it will destroy them. If they flee, it will move on to destroy the town and menace the region for years to come.

ADVERSARIES

The shadow beast in this Encounter in its normal state appears as a massive hybrid of a bear and an ape, with smooth, muscular flesh that reflects no light, making it appear as a being of living shadow. Note that the shadow beast creature cannot normally possess targets, but the process of its imprison-

ment long ago enabled its spirit to do so. The shadow beast lives off both flesh and life essence, devouring a victim's spirit even as it eats their flesh.

The creature isn't stupid, but it's not a big thinker. It prefers to hunt, kill, and terrorize. However, it will remember the heroes if it is somehow resurrected or restored and will seek revenge of its defeat in this encounter.

ROLEPLAYING TIPS

Humanize the NPCs as much as you can. Darios is a scared kid barely holding it together as a terrible monster tries to control his body and consume his soul. His parents love and care for the child, but they have other children and their own lives to consider—a fact that makes them open to Lym's ritual.

Elga is confident she can save the child, but she is also stubborn and this may color her views. Lym exhibits the confidence of a learned academic, but also the arrogance of a scholar who is sure that her way is the most reasonable and effective.

The debate on which path to take forms the core of the noncombat elements of this Encounter, so feel free to spend a lot of time on it.

Note that it is possible to save the child, but the heroes don't know that and that path is definitely more difficult. Also, there is no guarantee that Lym is not correct, and Darios' spirit may be permanently tainted.

FURTHER ADVENTURES

This Encounter raises a few interesting questions or issues that could lead to future adventures:

- Even if the shadow beast is defeated, are there more of these creatures imprisoned in the sacred stones nearby? Can something be done to keep these creatures from possessing others.

SHADOW BEAST			
ABILITIES (FOCUSES)			
3	ACCURACY (BITE)		
0	COMMUNICATION		
6	CONSTITUTION (STAMINA)		
2	DEXTERITY		
4	FIGHTING (CLAWS)		
1	INTELLIGENCE		
2	PERCEPTION		
7	STRENGTH (INTIMIDATION, MIGHT)		
1	WILLPOWER (DISCIPLINE)		
SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
12	75	12	8
WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL		DAMAGE
BITE	+5		3D6+7
CLAWS	+6		2D6+7
SPECIAL QUALITIES			
FAVORED STUNTS: Knock Prone, Mighty Blow, Quick Bite (2 SP), Regenerate (2 SP)			
BIG: Knock Prone and Skirmish stunts used against this monster require 1 more SP than normal to work.			
DARKVISION: The shadow beast can see normally in total darkness.			
QUICK BITE: The shadow beast can follow up a successful attack with its claws with a Quick Bite as a special stunt costing 2 SP. This bite attack must be taken against the same target as the original attack. Doubles on the bite attack roll don't generate more stunt points.			
BLENDING: The beast can blend into its surroundings. This gives it a +2 bonus to any DEXTERITY (STEALTH) checks based on hiding or avoiding being seen. The shadow beast's Blending only works in darkness or dim light.			
REGENERATE: The shadow beast can heal a number of Health equal to its Constitution (6) as a 2 SP stunt. This stunt may be used multiple times in the same roll if enough SP are available, increasing the healing effect. The shadow beast can only Regenerate in darkness or dim light.			
SHADOW: This monster is attuned to the mystical realms of darkness and shadow. It takes half damage from all non-magical attacks and can use the Regenerate and Blending qualities in darkness or dim light. In sunlight or other bright light, the shadow beast takes damage normally and all light-based magical attacks do an extra 1d6 Penetrating damage to it.			
THREAT: MAJOR			

- If Darios is saved, who is to say Lym's diagnosis isn't correct? The boy may grow into a powerful and corrupt individual, possibly returning as a threat in long-running campaigns.
- If the shadow beast manages to escape, it will quickly become a terrible threat. It will carve out a large hunting territory from the nearby region and prey on all who cross its path until it is stopped.