

13 WOODS OF WOE

This short sample contains descriptions of eerie forests in a modern setting, with ten Bits and three Shards. Bits are shorter pieces that can be dropped in anywhere, while Shards may be longer or fit specific circumstances. The **bold print** is to be read aloud, while [normal print in brackets] is information for the GM only.

BITS:

1. **The sun filters through the trees, sprinkling the cool green light with patches of gold. it would be soothing, even cheerful, if it was not for the absolute silence around you. No birds sing, no animals move; even the leaves hang still from the trees. Only your own sounds assure you that your hearing is intact.**

2. **You hear the sound of a train on a distant track. The haunting whistle gradually grows louder and louder, which is odd because you didn't realize there were any tracks in this area. The urgent pulse of the wheels beats in your ears and it sounds as if a train is practically on top of you, though you see nothing. A strong hot wind suddenly blows your hair and swirls leaves high, and a shrill whistle sounds, piercing to your ears. Then the noises fade to silence as the mysterious train seems to move away.**

3. **A sound like a gun shot rings out through the forest, disturbing the birds and frightening small animals. The echoes have barely died away when a second shot sounds, even louder; maybe closer. The sharp noise startles a flock of birds into the air, and others call nervously from the trees.** [Characters familiar with the sound of gunfire can identify these as pistol shots, rather than rifle fire, which might be more likely – coming from a hunter, for instance.]

4. **A bank of thick clouds covers the sun, and suddenly it seems as if something has sucked all the light out of the forest. The green branches look dark and threatening as they toss in the wind, and the cool shaded areas are now shadowy and forbidding. The wind whistles eerily through the tops of the trees, and despite yourself a quick shiver runs up your spine.**

5. **Leafy green bushes edge the forest, but they extend only a couple long steps into the woods. Past them, the overhanging branches cut out most of the light and very few plants grow. The ground is thick with dead leaves and dried pine needles, and the debris muffles your steps. All the sounds are deadened, as if the air is too thick for them to resonate.**



6. **The day is bright, though leafy branches hide the sun itself, and the treetops are full of birdsong. Suddenly the sunshine disappears abruptly as something – probably a cloud – obscures the light. The dimmed woods look slightly creepy, and it occurs to you that the birds have become totally quiet, and that none are moving now. The shadow passes quickly and the light brightens again, but it is several minutes before the birdsong returns.** [If travelers get to where they can see the sky, they realize it is nearly cloudless, with very little wind.]

7. **The breeze blows some floating specks past your face, and you feel tiny particles against your skin. As the wind picks up, larger bits are carried by and eventually you recognize the pieces as ashes. The ashes are cold, and the amount in the air is uncomfortable but not dangerous.** [After a few minutes, either the wind drops or changes, or the travelers turn a corner or in some other way move out of the area of blowing ashes. There is no indication of the source of the ashes.] [Optional: **Ahead of you on the trail is a pile of ashes. It is about six feet long, wider and mounded up somewhat in the center and narrower at the ends.** This could be a burned log, or it could be the remains of a human body, at the GM's discretion.]

8. **The rustling of the leaves brings to mind that poetic phrase, “the wind whispering in the trees.” It is a soothing noise, becoming more sibilant as the wind picks up. Suddenly you realize that there are *words* in the whispering. You strain your ears to catch the sounds as your brain tries to make sense of them.** [This could end by the GM concluding: **You finally decide it was just your imagination.** As an alternative, the GM could use this to deliver a meaningful (or distracting) message of choice. The use of lots of “s” sounds is recommended. Some possibilities: “She is lost. Lost!” “It rises! It rises!” Severed. It must be severed!”]



9. **The sun is bright overhead and the high branches are tossed by the wind, but at ground level the air is still and the shadows under the trees and below the bushes seem very dark. In the dimness your eyes are playing tricks on you, seeing movement although there is no breeze to rustle the bushes. As you go on, the movement in your peripheral vision seems to keep pace with you.**

10. **The trees in this humid forest are hung with long draperies of moss, hiding the branches entirely and forming shadowed alcoves around each trunk. The air is still and heavy, and only the drone of insects breaks the silence. Suddenly, in the shadows under a nearby tree you see a pair of gleaming golden eyes. Moments later they are joined by another pair, and then others.** [If desired:] **Looking around, you see more golden eyes under the trees surrounding you.** [If anyone approaches one of the trees:] **The eyes disappear and you hear scratching and a skittering sound as something with sharp claws hurries further up the tree.** [The eyes could belong to something as innocuous as squirrels or – at the GM's discretion – as unlikely as small demons.]

SHARDS:

11. Moonlit Sinkhole

You make your way cautiously through the woods in the moonlight. Even without a full moon there is plenty of light in the clear areas, but under the trees it is extremely dark. [Optional: Your flashlight illumines only a small portion at a time, and the stark shadows it throws hide almost more than it reveals.] Ahead you see a dark shadow on the ground. [Upon further investigation:] The shadow appears to be a hole in the ground, with grass growing right over its edge. You can't see from here how deep it is. [If someone moves closer:] As you move forward to examine the hole, the edge of it crumbles beneath you. A three-foot space of ground drops away, enlarging the sinkhole. [The endangered person may be required to make a check to avoid falling into the sinkhole, or to fall but not be injured.]

12. Running

Branches brush your face and slap your body as you race through the trees. The leaves on the ground muffle your footsteps, but they also hide uneven spots and you sometimes find yourself stumbling in your hurry. Your own breath is loud in your ears, coming in ragged pants as you run.

13. Downpour

A violent storm has blown in and wave upon wave of rain batters the forest, making it almost impossible to see anything. The wind whips the tree branches back and forth strongly and pushes the rain in great soaking sheets. Anything could be hidden in that storm and you would never know. [If people are out in the storm:] The downpour and the constant movement of everything around you wreak havoc with your sense of direction and you are almost certainly lost. The wind gusts change directions suddenly and it seems you get the rain in your face no matter which way you turn. You get the feeling that drowning on land may be a real possibility if you don't get out of this storm soon.

