

Bleeding Heart of the Woods

Bleeding Heart of the Woods is an in character scavenger hunt for props followed by a group storytelling exercise. It is most easily run with four to six people. It has three distinct phases-**Getting In Character**, **Scavenging**, and **Fireside Chat**.

What You'll Need

Land

Bleeding Heart of the Woods is most easily run where there are 10 plus acres of undeveloped land that you can safely roam, away from other people. You want space with bad, obstructed sight lines in order to give the illusion of separation while letting everyone hear each other in case of a real world emergency. Ideally, you'll wrap up the game gathered around a campfire, but you can huddle in the dark lit only by flashlights too. That'll be fine. You'll be fine.

Props

You're going to need a decent sized grab bag of spooky items, three per player and all different from each other. They should be fake enough or distinctive enough from the surroundings that the players can be relied on to know that they're part of the game rather than part of the scenery. There's still a non-zero chance someone is going to come back from the **Scavenge** with a hog skull, but view it as a perk of the system rather than a problem. Free hog skull! If you're still worried about making sure the players can identify the props, you can take a marker and draw a symbol from a horror movie, or any standard mark, on all your props so the players can be sure what's game material and what's just local ambiance.

The players will sit down with the props they've found during the **Scavenge** at the **Fireside Chat**, and you can certainly influence that story by your choice of props, but given the amount of variance and interpretation inherent to the game, it's probably best not to worry about it.

Preparation

Figure out when sundown will be the day of your game, and set the opening of the game two hours prior to that. Get there ahead of the players and find an open, central point that's easy to find, and radiate out from there with your bag of props, hiding them as you go, first rather badly close to the central point, and then more thoroughly as you get farther away.

Game Phases

Getting In Character

When the players arrive, ask them to pull a name, profession, character trait, and relationship at random(starter lists are provided in Game Tools, p.4). As with the props, you can manipulate the themes that are likely to appear by switching these out or choosing a particular subset of them for you game. Have the players negotiate who is the other half of the relationship they've chosen. Everyone should be in exactly two relationships, and if folks are having trouble just have them circle up and have the relationship they drew apply to the person on their right. Have everyone review your safety rules(there's an example in Game Tools, p.3), get them all to throw their cell phones into a box for safe keeping, and then read out the text below.

It's getting dark. There's no gas left in the tanks, and your cell phones gone dead. The rumors you've heard about the valley lured you out here, got you lost, got you stranded, but now they've abandoned you. People die out here. The question is how they die, and why, the whos and the wherefores. Walk the land with your fellows, find the clues, and return here when the bell tolls.

Scavenge

Your players should head into the woods looking for props. If you see someone wandering off on their own, encourage them to go with a group, ideally with one of their relationship matches. If you see people congregating and not moving, encourage them to walk and talk. Once they're all gone, prepare but don't light your fire. This is good, it will convince the players that you have something to do for the time until they're done scavenging for props. Don't light it, just prep it. Twilight will start rolling in and it's time to go out into the fading light and sow some paranoia.

Sneak up on folks, throw rocks into the bushes to draw their attention, find some scary noises to play on your cell phone. They will catch you the first few times, but don't worry, you'll get a feel for it. Humans are actually pretty bad at detecting things once it starts getting dark, that's why we're scared of it. You don't even necessarily have to do anything to be scary. You can just crouch, unmoving, in the bushes out of sight. The human brain is keenly away of when it's being watched, and it can often tell that it's happening even when it can't tell where the watcher is. So, you know, that's nice. Use that.

Half way through the game's run, if you notice that the players have formed into fixed groups, ring the bell to gather them back at the middle and regroup them. The easiest way is to have everyone switch to travelling with their other relationship partner. This is to encourage people to explore both of their relationships and as many character interactions as possible.

If you have some conspirators, people who weren't introduced up front as GMs, have them sneak around on the edges of the property, and tell them to get closer and louder the darker it gets. As full darkness sets in, or whenever people start having trouble moving around the space due to lack of light, light the bonfire and ring the bell to call the players back to the fire.

Fireside Chat

Once everyone has gathered back at the fire and it's fully dark, it's time for folks to go around the fire and tell the story of the grizzly fate of the people of the valley. As the fire keeper it's your job to keep the story moving, and to go back at people for more detail by using the modest hooks provided by their traits, professions and relationships. Going around the circle is a good idea as a basic organizational structure. You want to maintain a strong 'Yes... and' vibe, encouraging players to buy into the decisions already made while giving everyone equal spotlight time to come up with something great or grody or gross. As firekeeper, you should be paying close attention the whole time, because there is a strong possibility that you'll have to wrap all the thread up into a satisfying conclusion. Whether the players wrapped up the story or you did, after the story is closed, you should use a previously determined phrase to call in your conspirators, who should have been sneaking up on the fire-blind players during the chat, to give everyone one last solid scare. Extra points if they can hear enough of the fireside story to yell some applicable things as the swoop out of the darkness.

Game Tools

If you don't have any firm ideas about a safety agreement, we suggest you use ours, presented below.

Bleeding Heart of the Woods Safety Agreement

- People are more important than games. If at any time you feel that you cannot continue for whatever reason, please let the GMs, NPCs, and other PCs know.
- If someone is stepping out of character because of an issue, accept that issue at face value as an important concern which need to be resolved before continuing, regardless of your role
- PHoF is a horror game. Information has been withheld from you for the purposes of scaring you. This can include additional staff on site, blood effects, sound effects, and other things.
- The terrain is rough. Though this is a horror game, make sure that you watch where you're going. Always prioritize safety, yours and that of others, over game.
- This is a horror game, and hopefully you love the genre as much as we do, but we have to be critical of the things we love, and horror carries a lot of gross baggage, particularly on the topics of rape and gendered violence. This game is already pushing a fair number of boundaries for people, what with the dark, unfamiliar terrain, and the possibility of people you don't know, or can't see. This is a shitty situation to explore those issues, so don't. There's plenty of horror to be had without them.

Jobs	Traits	Relationships	Names
Garbage Man	Upbeat	Seeking Revenge	Wexler
Professor	Brooding	Old Highschool friends	Theo
College Student	Nervous	Betrayed	Cameron
Youtube influencer	Foolhardy	Fellow Valley Researchers	Casey
Retiree	Irritable	Child	Parker
School Teacher	Pompous	Siblings	Blake
Auto Worker	Sarcastic	Coworkers	Quinn
Psychic	Clever	Owes a Big Favor	River
Adoption Advocate	Melancholy	Crush	Rumor
Forest Ranger	Argumentative	Ex-Son in Law	Helena
Real estate agent	Passionate	Best Frenemies	Philomena