

THE GROTTO

D&D 5e Compatible, Suggested LVL 3-5

Terrain

The overhang is 60ft above the grotto, the southern ramp begins 30ft above, and any space mostly covered by foliage is Difficult Terrain.

Setup

Local livestock have been lost, fences and barns crushed, and a hulking creature on two legs seen in the woods. The villagers have pooled a reward of 300gp to kill the creature.

Hrugkhu the Escaped Troll & His Pursuer

Hrugkhu (as **Troll**) inhabits the nearby grotto in the woods. His keen sense of smell lets him hunt more easily. He has strange marks up and down his arms that have “healed” into peculiar folds that flop like tendrils and glowing metal studs in his wrists, leftover from experiments on his regenerative properties. The wizard he escaped from has dispatched her apprentice, with **Mage Hand**), to clean up the mess. He’s not very capable in a fight, but he has a bone amulet which when crushed summons three **Skeletons**. He can cast a simple spell that renders him invisible while in foliage, but it takes him ten minutes to do so.

Finding the Cave

The cave awaits in the woods nearby.

- DC 14 **Investigation** check on the damaged farms reveals a strange blood stain pattern and rent flesh; DC 15 **Medicine** or **Arcana** determines it’s troll flesh and blood.
- DC 11 **Survival** check will determine the felled brush leads to the grotto.
- Some locals know more than they’re saying—a local ranger, Fyerl, will talk for an expensive drink or a DC 15 Persuasion check. He saw **Vontuth** stalking through the woods muttering something about “that damn troll,” and can point them in the direction he was headed.
- The local wisewoman will ask them to collect a rare mushroom, Ridgebloom, that only grows in local caves. She knows one nobody has been to in many months they could check, though she warns them it’s a falling hazard (and, unknown to her, the home of **Hrugkhu**). She can create an “odor-masking” tincture for 1gp/a piece that makes them smell of the forest (mostly damp leaves and moss).

The Battle

Hrugkhu is home, and hungry.

- Unless the party’s scent is masked, he will immediately become suspicious and start pacing around the lower grotto.
- There’s a fresh cow corpse in the grotto and its scent is evident when one approaches the lip of the pit.
- **Hrugkhu** does not really differentiate between “people trying to kidnap him” and “people looking for what all the fuss is about,” and will attack anyone he encounters.
- **Vontuth** is hidden, invisibly, in the bushes to the southwest. A DC 25 **Perception** will detect the subtle twist of leaf and brush that will give him away, DC reduced by -5 if they are looking deliberately at that section of woods.

The Aftermath

The fight’s over... or is it?

- **Vontuth** will reveal himself shortly after the party wins, acting as though he just arrived from the south. He makes them an offer: his master, who “had been hunting the troll for alchemical reagents,” will pay them 100gp for returning the corpse to her, although he cannot pay them at all now.
- He is visibly nervous and scratching his neck, eyeing **Hrugkhu**. DC 15 **Insight** indicates he’s not being totally honest about all of this, and isn’t confident the party will actually get the reward.
- He has a small metal device in his robe pocket that will, when stabbed into the troll, revive it at half HP as an undead “loosely” under the control of the injector.
- If the party gives him no choice he’ll crush his amulet to deploy his skeletal goons and make a break for **Hrugkhu’s** corpse, injector in hand.
- If the party agrees to take it back to his teacher’s tower, she will actually pay them, and throw in some **Regenerative Potions** that heal 1d4+4 HP/turn for four turns—they have a strangely meaty aftertaste...

This encounter is created for **Mouth of a Cave Battle Map**, it can be downloaded here:
patreon.com/posts/mouth-of-cave-81242911

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