

THE BLEACHED SKULL TRIBE



Feral denizens of the deepest, wildest reaches of the Tangled Forest, the Bleached Skull gnolls are creatures of atavistic desires and sadistic lusts. Ferocious warriors and terrible foes, they worship the primal, blood-soaked spirits of the woodlands and war with their neighbours for booty and sacrifices to bury alive beneath their sacred trees.

Typically for gnolls, the Bleached Skull tribe dwells deep in enclaves scattered throughout the thick, twisted depths of the primal forest. Driven here from their normal hunting ranges by some long-forgotten inter-tribal warfare, the gnolls found sanctuary among the ancient trees of the forest and eventually cast aside their old demonic gods to worship the woodland spirits of their new home.

The primal spirit of the woodlands touches a few of the gnolls. Within their veins courses the savage, primal vitality of the wild. Such creatures hold positions of power and influence within the tribe through dint of their exceptional strength and boundless bloodlust.

SOCIETY & ORGANISATION

The Bleached Skull's society is a turbulent, violent place. Shifting personal alliances and interminable blood feuds govern life, and while a strong subchieftain or shaman can control the warriors, their base instincts ever lurk just below the surface.

The strongest hold positions of power within the tribe, and hereditary rule is unknown. Personal might and the chieftain's will govern day-to-day life.

Religion: The Bleached Skulls believe they venerate the nameless, primal spirits of the woodlands. While this may be true in your campaign, it is also possible that another entity—perhaps a powerful demon or death god—grants the shaman their abilities. The truth of the matter is likely unimportant in many encounters featuring the Bleached Skull gnolls.

Bloodspawn Treants: Bloodspawn treants are the twisted result of the Bleached Skull shamans' sacrificial practises. The tribe's depraved shamans open the veins of their sacrifices before burying them alive under the forest's ancient trees. The trees' roots greedily feed upon the sacrifices' vital fluids while the final doom-laden screams of the damned infuse the trees with an atavistic bloodlust driven by a malevolent, primal sentence.

PERSONALITIES

Most of the Bleached Skull tribe comprises warriors intent on little but battle-glory, mating and their personal standing. A few members of the tribe, however, are exceptional for one reason or another.

- **Ryrr Silverfur** (CE middle-aged male gnoll) leads the tribe but rarely now emerges from his forest lair. Ryrr is content to sire many young and accept the tributes of his

followers. This huge, much-scarred gnoll is a terror in battle and fond of decapitating those who challenge him.

- **Brexak Bloodfinger** (CE female gnoll) thirsts for power and dreams of creating an unstoppable legion of bloodspawn treants to sweep all other tribes and races from the Lonely Coast and the Tangled Wood. Brexak is a supremely dangerous psychopath.

ECOLOGY & LAIR

The severed heads of slain enemies mark the approaches to a Bleached Skull camp. Set upon wooden stakes driven deeply into the forest floor or set high up in the boughs of the surrounding trees, these battle trophies mark the lair as macabre, pitiless places.

Normally protected by thick walls of gorse and bramble or dense stands of ancient trees, Bleached Skull gnolls prefer deep valleys, hidden coombes and steep-sided gorges for their lairs. Chieftains build great wooden halls deep in these valleys; within, the warriors feast and indulge their orgiastic desires for blood sports. Normal gnolls dwell in rude wattle and daub huts surrounding the chieftain's hall. Huts closest to the hall belong to the tribe's subchieftains, champions and other favoured folk.

Male gnolls live with several mates—constant raiding and warfare keep the numbers of males low—and between 2 – 6 infants. Infant mortality is high; accidents, fights, punishments and predators all take their toll on the tribe's young. A few family groups also contain older gnolls, but this is rare as life in the Bleached Skull is typically short and brutal.

A Bleached Skull encampment has few, if any, slaves. Enemies taken on the battlefield are only spared to become living sacrifices for the tribe's sacred trees (see "Religion" for more details). The young, non-combatants and a few elderly, crippled warriors carry out menial tasks, and all except the youngest child stand ready to repel interlopers.

COMBAT & TACTICS

Bleached Skull gnolls overwhelm their enemies through weight of numbers and their terrible, primal savagery. In battle, they strike from ambush, hurling volleys of javelins into their enemies' flanks before bursting from cover in a screaming wave of flesh, steel and violence.

The gnolls' battle tactics are unsubtle and brutal. They mob opponents, surrounding and cutting down enemies. Chieftains and champions lead from the front and vie for glory by slaying the most dangerous enemies.

Bleached Skull gnolls ask for and grant no mercy in battle. They take prisoners only when their shaman demand sacrifices for their sacred trees or when a chieftain desires entertainment. Those unlucky enough to fall into the tribe's hands can expect nothing but a painful, drawn-out death.

Words: Creighton Broadhurst; **Source:** Monstrous Delve #03: *Gnolls of the Bleached Skull*