



Shadow in the Jungle

by Hugh.

The Jungle echoes.

A Shadow lurks.

The shadow watched the procession approach the ruined and ancient temple, its black skull mask blending in with the dark night. It stayed perfectly still, observing as one of its allies got hit in the head with a stray branch. It quickly and quietly began to move towards its destination.

It darted across the branches of the jungle. Each step causing little to no disturbance until it reached the side of the temple opposite of what appeared to be the main entryway, where it began to climb up the walls. Thrown knives swiftly and quietly dispatched any guards that could've jeopardized its mission. It arrived at the pinnacle, before creepily descending downwards again, to just above where the ritual was believed to begin. Then, after weaving the darkness around itself like a cloak, it waited.

It did not have to wait long.

The procession reached the ritual site. The tribe's chief had arrived while the shadow was waiting, gestured for his subordinates to cut down the fool before they grabbed his wrists and pinned him on the altar as the chief began chanting. The fool seemed to panic before he noticed the shadow, then calmed down. The fool was more perceptive than the shadow thought.

The chief seemed to notice the fool's newfound calm, but just as quickly chose to ignore it in favour of the ritual. Just as it reached its zenith, when the chieftain raised a ritual knife over the fool's chest, the shadow struck.

Leaping down from its hiding place to drive a dagger into the man's neck, it vaulted over the fool to eliminate one of the tribesmen holding him down. A dagger was driven into his heart before pushing off his already dead body as it fell to the ground. Lunging towards another foe, the shadow quickly decapitated her. A tearing sound filled the air and the shadow turned to see its master holding two halves of one of the tribespeople in each hand. Having ripped the man in half, his white hair streaked with blood, a savage grin on his face. A bloodthirsty joy clear in his one eye.

Seeing this, many of the surviving tribesfolk began to surrender, and with a shouted command from the master, it was accepted. They began herding the survivors towards a corner as the master approached the body of the chieftain, whom the shadow noted with no small amount of shame was still alive. The master picked him up, and after inspecting him for a scant moment, flung him against the far wall. A loud *crack!* filling the air as his neck broke upon impact.

The master looked contemptuously towards the broken corpse. He turned to the surrendered tribespeople.

A therapeutic smile appeared on his face as he slowly advanced towards them, spreading his arms out as if to embrace them. Shadows swirled around him, a monster emerging. The tribespeople screamed in terror as they

gazed upon what emerged. A few of them going catatonic. One individual tried to charge the monstrosity, only to be impaled upon a scorpion-like tail, then flicked aside.

The tribespeople screamed. Then they died.

The shadow watched dispassionately as it's master began to feed on the terrified survivors, before it turned and approached the gem embedded within the wall. Ignoring the screams and crunching sounds from behind it, as well as the blood that sprayed across it's back, it took out it's dagger to pry the gem out.