



TOTEMIC VANDALISM





INTRODUCTION

Sulwe, sister of Rybalka's Vikmordere totem-coaxer Sulwotik, has an issue. She oversees maintaining the mystic protections of Rybalka alongside her brother, which includes the replacement of weathered totems just after the new moon. Due to the importance of the task and its time-sensitive nature, they create totems three months in advance to let them saturate in the ambiance of the locale. Two new moons ago, the first totem was vandalized and the incident was repeated on the last new moon. The siblings are down to one last eligible totem, which they barely managed to prepare in time. If this totem is also destroyed, Rybalka risks losing its mystic protection.

Sulwe thinks she knows the culprits, but unbeknown to her, neither marred the totems. An undead creature, a **Lesser Totemic Apostate**, has covertly defaced the previous totems with the help of enslaved animals and framed people in Rybalka to sow dissent.

Arriving at Sulwe's homestead, she fills the adventurers in on the issue:

For the last two months, our magpie totems have been vandalized; I barely managed to coax the spirit back into one in time. As you know, tomorrow will be a new moon, and I need you to guard the totem throughout the night. Please keep it from harm; the binding of the spirit is currently very fragile. It might be worth consulting with individuals I suspect of being responsible for the previous scarring of the totems. The first would be Maksym Ogachrev, a drunkard who was seen stumbling towards my homestead; the second suspect is a rebellious adolescent called Rimma Yoracheya. Of course, you're free to look around here as well, though the snowfall has eliminated any tracks from back then.

INVESTIGATING THE AREA

AREA 1A: ANTEROOM

This is where muddy and snowy clothes are taken off. Wooden hooks on the wall allow guests to hang up their coats.

AREA 1B: WORKSHOP

Carpenter's tools and wood lie around. A warm glow emits from the fireplace set into the wall opposite the entrance.

AREA 1C: SULWE'S ROOM

This is Sulwe's private space. She is not keen on letting the heroes inside but complies if asked. The room is heated by the backside of the fireplace. The fur-covered bed looks comfortable, but overall spartan.

AREA 2: WATER WHEEL & AXE

A small water wheel can be lowered via a lever and the Utilize action into or from a swift running streamlet; when powered, the contraption is connected to a massive axeblade that allows a character to take the Utilize action to cut apart massive logs, accelerating the totem carving process considerably. A Study action with a **DC 13 Intelligence (History) check** reveals the water wheel to be an innovation of Klavekian loggers; a Study action with a **DC 15 Intelligence (Religion) check** (made with **Advantage** if the character is a Vikmordere) notes that using this technique might be seen as sacrilegious by conservative Vikmordere.

Water-Powered Axe. As a Utilize action, one can place a log or Grappled target on the block. If the axe is currently powered, it strikes the block and cuts up any nonmagical wood on it in one fell swoop. If a target is placed on it, they must make a **Dexterity saving throw: DC 20**, one creature on the block. *Failure:* The target takes 17 (2d12 + 4) Slashing damage. *Success:* Half damage.

AREA 3: LOGS AND OLD TOTEMS

Logs. The logs are carefully curated and of various woods; Sulwe explains that different spirits prefer different trees.

First Defaced Totem. This totem could have been vandalized by Maksym Ogachrev. The totem bears marks of four parallel inch-deep slashes. A successful Study action with a **DC 15 Intelligence (Nature)** or Search action with a **DC 15 Wisdom (Survival)** check notes that the scratches could have come from climbing claws, as e.g. bears would leave five parallel marks, not four. A successful Study action with a **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation)** check while carefully digging beneath the snow reveals an indentation of a Klavekian hip flask with the initials “OM” frozen in the mud beneath; incriminating evidence against Maksym. If the Intelligence result is at least 20, they also piece together a partial pawprint from a big canine under the snow.

Second Defaced Totem. This totem could have been vandalized by Rimma Yoracheva, a tomboy and notoriously rebellious youth. The marks are not as deep as the ones on the first totem, but there are a lot of them, and they are mostly centered at the top of the totem. A successful Study action with a **DC 10 Intelligence (Nature)** or Search action with a **DC 10 Wisdom (Perception)** check is sufficient to note that the scratches could have come from most Piercing or Slashing weapons. If the result is at least 18, the character determines the exact shape is curved like a single animal claw. A successful Study action with a **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation)** check notices a curious absence of arrows or stones beneath the nearby snow—if the damage had come from ammunition, it would be hard to leave no trace of them like this.

INVESTIGATING THE SUSPECTS

A quick trip to Rybalka finds the suspects:

Maksym Ogachrev. The palpable reek of alcohol and stale sweat emerges from the obviously neglected homestead. Hungover, bloodshot eyes stare at the heroes. Maksym is a drunkard and has a Klavekian metal hipflask with his initials (OM) hanging from his belt, next to a pair of four-pronged climbing claws for scaling large trees. He is unfriendly and prejudiced towards Vikmordere. Ability checks to influence him favorably towards Vikmordere, or those made by Vikmordere, suffer from **Disadvantage**. Maksym is standoffish and feels unjustly persecuted, as a Search action with a **DC 15 Wisdom**

(Insight) check notes; it takes clever roleplay and an Influence action with a **DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion)** check or **DC 13 Charisma (Deception)** check to get him to confess: He did go to the totem and urinated against it, but adamantly denies vandalizing it beyond that. He did notice three wolves were watching him from the trees. Playing to Maksym’s persecution complex and prejudices provides **Advantage** on checks to get the truth out of him.

Rimma Yoracheva. Rimma is stronger, faster, and, so she thinks, more mature than all the other youths around. Daughter of a Klavekian and an exiled Vikmordere, she is a self-styled rebel among Rybalka’s youth. She is constantly accompanied by **Yanik, Yen,** and **Yuri**, three youths who admire her every action. When confronted, Rimma seems proud of her deeds and even boasts how she shot the totem pole full of arrows. She seems wholly unrepentant, which makes her even cooler in the eyes of her circle. Anyone who takes the Search action and succeeds at a **DC 15 Wisdom (Insight)** check recognizes that she looks distractedly away when describing her action and slightly flinches when mentioning the totem. She will not deviate from her story while her peers are around, but if the party manages to distract the youths or talk to her alone, it only takes an Influence action with a **DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion)** or **DC 10 Charisma (Intimidation)** check to make her admit that she’d never vandalize a totem. She was around that night, but she saw a giant bat attack the totem and ran home, scared by what she considered to be a dark omen.

NIGHT OF THE NEW MOON

Nightly Vigil. Snow falls, and the night is pitch black. The party needs light sources. Let the adventurers roleplay how they keep vigilant and warm.

After midnight, a successful **DC 17 Wisdom (Perception)** check is enough for a characters to notice a **Giant Bat** drawing closer and provides 1 round for the party to prepare. A character aware of a bat (likely from Rimma’s testimony) has **Advantage** on this check. Simultaneously with the bat’s arrival, a **Black Bear** and three **Wolves** burst from the forest. The animals have the Charmed condition from a **lesser totemic apostate** (replacement: Undead **Scout** with 44 HP and AC 16) lurking in the woods, who can be spotted with a Search action and a successful **DC 14 Wisdom (Perception)** check. The apostate enters combat if the party does not flee from the animals. If left unharmed, it drags the totem to the **Water-Powered Axe** and destroys the totem in one fell swoop. Defeating the apostate secures Rybalka’s mystic protections... for now.

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