

LEGENDARY PLANET



THE ASSIMILATION STRAIN

BY TOM PHILLIPS AND NEIL SPICER

PATHFINDER
ROLEPLAYING GAME COMPATIBLE





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We've hyperlinked this product internally from the Table of Contents and externally with links to the official Pathfinder Reference Document as well as d20PFSRD. If it is in the core rulebook, we generally didn't link to it unless the rule is an obscure one. The point is not to supersede the game books, but rather to help support you, the player, in accessing the rules, especially those from newer books or that you may not have memorized.

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WELCOME TO THE LEGENDARY PLANET ADVENTURE PATH

This product is a part of our line of sword-and-planet adventure products blending science fiction and traditional fantasy in an interplanetary epic that will take your characters to whole new worlds of adventure. Drawing from the pulp sci-fi tradition of Edgar Rice Burroughs, Jack Vance, and their contemporaries, this adventure saga spans exotic worlds filled with alien races and ancient secrets, as the heroes must confront interstellar conspiracies and unravel long-lost mysteries if they are to save the galaxy from annihilation, or even just find a way home. Whatever you favor the *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game* or the 5th edition of the world's most famous RPG, when you see the Legendary Planet logo you'll know you are getting an adventure that is quite literally out of this world.

The Assimilation Strain is an introductory adventure for 1st-level characters which can be played as a standalone adventure or as a prelude to the **Legendary Planet Adventure Path**, introducing heroes from any fantasy world to the cosmic threat of alien invaders from beyond who see nothing on this planet but another world to conquer. The adventure blends exploration and negotiation alongside elements of horror and a desperate battle to survive against a foe bent on their enslavement or extermination. The interplanetary adventure continues in **To Worlds Unknown**, launching your heroes into a fantastic universe of exotic pulp adventure! The sword and planet genre comes to life on **Legendary Planet!**

The all-star team of designers here at Legendary Games is committed to bringing you—the busy GM or player—the absolute best third party support for your Pathfinder campaign. To deliver on that commitment, we've assembled the best of the best of current gaming authors, designers and layout experts so that you can feel comfortable that Legendary Games products will be the most creative, balanced, dynamic, and exciting content you can find anywhere. Bringing talented creators together on projects they pursue with passion is what helps us make products that are as beautiful and enjoyable to read as they are fun to play at the table. Pick up the **Legendary Planet Adventure Path** today, and **Make Your Game Legendary!**

- Jason Nelson



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BY TOM PHILLIPS AND NEIL SPICER

ADVENTURE SUMMARY

“The Assimilation Strain” is a sword-and-planet mystery adventure for the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game involving a beleaguered logging town called Holver’s Ferry. Designed for four 1st level characters, the plot swiftly unfolds as the PCs investigate a strange, rage-inducing madness overtaking the town’s human population. Tracing its origin to the ruins of a nearby manor house on the outskirts of town, the PCs should reach 2nd level before exploring the dangerous catacombs, below. There, they face an unexpectedly alien threat with a nefarious, long-term plan for assimilating and transforming the entire town.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Over the past two weeks, the lakeside town of Holver’s Ferry has suffered a setback of epic proportions. Almost 90% of its inhabitants have either succumbed to the worst effects of a terrible virus known as the assimilation strain, or packed up and left. The primary carrier of this illness is a hulking lumberjack named Silam Oddle, but a sinister, ooze-like invader from another planet introduced the disease and controls Silam’s actions in order to spread it among the rest of the town. Known as a xoraphond, this insidious creature acts as a scout and saboteur for a conquest-minded species of aliens called the jagladine. And, together, they intend to establish a foothold on the PCs’ homeworld in preparation for a much larger invasion in the days to come.

The jagladine have long perfected the science of bio-organic manipulation, frequently engineering entirely new creatures from the genetic material of other species. This has enabled them to more effectively infiltrate other worlds, making use of ancient interstellar gateways between planets to assimilate other races into a local, occupying force. Recently, they succeeded in opening a portal to the PCs’ homeworld, and sent one of their best agents—a xoraphond named Vuelib—to assess opportunities for conquest and experimentation on entirely new creatures. Performing extensive reconnaissance, Vuelib encountered the lumberjacks of Holver’s Ferry, and, after identifying most of the town’s inhabitants as humans, the xoraphond began crafting a targeted virus capable of remapping and genetically altering the minds of a majority of its citizens.

Just outside Holver’s Ferry, Vuelib also discovered a long-abandoned ruin called Arvarenhode Manor, which the xoraphond decided to use as a base of operations. This site proved ideal as a secure, remote location, and Vuelib influenced several ooze creatures in the manor’s half-flooded catacombs to serve as guardians for its alien laboratory. Vuelib then set about tailoring an assimilation strain for the humans of Holver’s Ferry. The effort took considerable time to research and sequence, but field experimentation soon revealed a significant flaw.

The first strain of the virus induced an unanticipated side-effect in its hosts, driving many of them temporarily insane. Though some of the infected merely suffered from severe dementia, a large number became suicidal or violently psychotic. Within days, Holver’s Ferry became a blood-soaked battleground. Over three terrifying days and nights, many buildings were burned to the ground and more than half the villagers perished. Fortunately, the virulence of the flawed assimilation strain burned itself out shortly thereafter. Human villagers infected with the initial version could no longer transmit the disease, though they remained a physical danger to themselves and others due to the madness which lingered in their broken, remapped personalities.

Vuelib remained unfazed by this setback. Side-effects such as these had manifested during jagladine invasions of other worlds, and the xoraphond had already prepared for such a scenario. It immediately began altering its metabolism to re-tailor the assimilation strain for humanity. Three days later, Vuelib successfully re-engineered the virus and proved its perfection by infecting Silam Oddle. Thereafter, Vuelib commanded the lumberjack to spread the improved disease through the remaining population of Holver’s Ferry. Since then, Silam has also abducted some of the survivors—usually those resistant to the disease or anyone from a different, non-human species—all so the xoraphond can monitor the strain’s long-term effects, and conduct further study and experimentation on expanding its reach to other racial types.

Silam’s actions have not gone unnoticed, however. After four villagers went missing, two people in town—Sheriff Onessa Jerreth and Rexel, an old gnome apothecary and retired adventurer—realized something besides a virulent sickness was at work in Holver’s Ferry. Unfortunately, Onessa decided to act alone in following a potential lead, and, without informing Rexel, she confronted Silam at his isolated orphanage on the far side of the lake, only to be attacked by the enslaved lumberjack. Silam quickly rendered her unconscious, and then carried her to Vuelib’s lair as another abductee for torture, interrogation, and eventual experimentation in the xoraphond’s laboratory. By the time the PCs arrive in Holver’s Ferry, Onessa Jerreth has been missing for six days and her friend, Rexel, is in desperate need of aid to save her and the town.

The adventure opens with the PCs encountering those still suffering from the madness and violence caused by the initial virus, as well as the machinations of the citizens assimilated by the perfected strain. Part One unfolds as the PCs interact with the remaining survivors and resolve a number of lingering threats in town. After gathering clues and consulting with Rexel, they should eventually make their way to Silam’s orphanage in Part Two, where further evidence points them to the long-abandoned Arvarenhode Manor. Then, during Part Three, they explore the manor’s partially flooded basement and catacombs, overrunning the xoraphond’s lair with an opportunity to thwart its goals and those of its alien masters.

MAXIMUM FLEXIBILITY

Designer's Note: Although *The Assimilation Strain* is designed as a prequel to the *Legendary Planet Adventure Path* by Legendary Games, the adventure may also serve as a standalone sword-and-planet scenario, or as a launching point for different Adventure Paths set in the *Legendary Planet* multiverse. It can even act as an introductory adventure to bring off-world, alien threats into a GM's existing campaign. Regardless, within these pages, we've done everything we can to create a *Legendary* gaming experience for you and your players. How you run it, is up to you. So, good gaming! And enjoy!

GETTING STARTED

To more easily integrate the PCs into the adventure's setup, consider using any of the following hooks to connect them more fully to the plight of Holver's Ferry:

Reclaiming Family Property. One or more of the PCs recently discovered a family relation who owned farmland only a few miles from the village of Holver's Ferry. Though the last, local scion of their line died many years ago, a PC with established ancestry may have a lawful document allowing them to reclaim the long-abandoned property as their birthright, provided they can present such evidence to the local sheriff and town council.

Death from Beyond! An influential and well-respected mystic (perhaps an oracle or other suitably spiritual individual close to the PCs) received strange visions foretelling a dreadful prophecy of apocalyptic ruin on a worldwide scale. These mad ramblings, which describe insidious horrors descending on Holver's Ferry, resonate with the PCs, who may decide to investigate the region out of concern for those they've befriended in the small town.

Mission for the Lumber Barons. A wealthy darkwood merchant asks the PCs to investigate missing shipments of raw lumber which he normally receives every month from Holver's Ferry. His last agent to inquire about the matter was recently discovered wandering the wilderness in such a maddened state his bodyguards had to defend themselves by slaying the man. He now wishes for the PCs to learn what befell him and the logging town.

No Word from Holver's Ferry. A wealthy relative of someone living in Holver's Ferry hires the PCs when he grows concerned about their failure to attend a family wedding. He asks the PCs to travel to check on them. Alternatively, one or more of the PCs could have relatives of their own in town with whom they've lost contact, including one of the local shop owners, temple priests, Sheriff Onessa Jerreth, or even Rexel the apothecary.

Plague and Madness! Refugees from Holver's Ferry have fled to a PC's hometown, spinning tales of a strange illness and dire happenings in the beleaguered settlement. A local lord or town official asks the PCs to investigate the problem before it threatens them, as well.

ASSIMILATION MADNESS

Some of the residents of Holver's Ferry were infected with the initial, flawed version of the assimilation strain, and periodically slip into temporary bouts of confusion, depression, and insanity—a malady which the jagladine and their xoraphond servants refer to as assimilation madness. This affliction works very similar to the confused condition, though the victim's bizarre behavior lasts for the entire episode rather than changing from round to round. When a human infected with the flawed virus is subjected to physical or mental stress (such as by entering combat, being injured, being targeted by a harmful or mind-affecting spell or effect, witnessing the injury or death of an ally or loved one, or even being intimidated or even ridiculed in an emotionally impacting way), the infected human automatically suffers one of the effects listed in the **Assimilation Madness** table below. Victims who survive the episode's short-lived duration revert to normal behavior again, but remain infected and may relapse again after 1 hour.

The temporary effects of assimilation madness can be countered by spells such as: *calm emotions*, *hypnotism*, *joyful rapture*, *lesser restoration*, *serenity*, *suggestion*, or any greater equivalent of such spells. This does not, however, cure the victim of the flawed assimilation strain, and new episodes may occur as the brain's remapped personality continues to vex the victim. Only a *cleans*, *greater restoration*, *heal*, *limited wish*, *miracle*, or *wish* fully cures a victim of both the madness and the flawed assimilation strain. A heightened *remove disease* cast by a spellcaster of at least 10th level also cures the victim of the madness and the assimilation strain.

ASSIMILATION MADNESS

D%	BEHAVIOR
01–20	The victim does nothing but cower, drool, and babble incoherently for 5d6 minutes.
21–40	The victim runs away from the source of stress, shrieking manically and insensibly for the next 1d6 minutes. Immediately afterward, the victim collapses from exhaustion and remains unconscious for 5d6 minutes.
41–55	The victim engages in wanton destruction of their physical surroundings for the next 1d4 minutes, ignoring nearby creatures to attack trees, rocks, structures, etc. This deals 1d6 points of nonlethal damage to the victim at the end of the episode, and immediately afterward the victim is nauseated for 1d6 minutes and then sickened for the next 1d6 hours.



56-60	The victim falls into a suicidal depression lasting 5d6 minutes. If the victim is alone and/or has adequate time, he attempts to commit suicide in a bizarre manner based upon a fragment of personal memory which torments them (e.g., he might gouge out his eyes to avoid hallucinations of his worst horror, methodically paint individual shards of glass or pottery for a lost loved one and then swallow them, or dress in his finest outfit and then set himself on fire). If the victim is not alone and believes others might intervene to prevent him from harming himself, he deals 1d8 points of damage + Str modifier to himself with an available weapon, an item in hand, or his bare hands, automatically inflicting critical damage.
61-100	The victim becomes violently psychotic and attacks the nearest creatures (for this purpose, a familiar counts as part of the subject's self) for the next 5d6 minutes.

PART ONE: HOLVER'S FERRY

The adventure opens with the PCs arriving on the outskirts of Holver's Ferry, a small village by the shores of Lake Shimmermere. Flanked by a deep, slow-moving river and vast tracts of forested woodlands, the village has based its economy on an active lumber industry, including a significant supply of locally-grown darkwood. Once home to over 400 souls, the devastation inflicted by the flawed assimilation strain has left only a handful of desperate townsfolk struggling to survive—most of whom still face a daily aftermath of violence and madness as they seek to either defend their holdings or flee for safer lands.

All unmarked buildings on the map of Holver's Ferry indicate either a farmhouse, residence, or local business left abandoned or damaged by the madness which engulfed the village just two weeks ago. Rotting meals remain on dinner tables, clothes and furnishings are in disarray, and livestock have been left uncared for—all signs of lives unexpectedly interrupted. Though most townsfolk took their valuables with them when they left, PCs who succeed on a DC 25 Perception check may identify 1d6 x 5 gp in valuable goods from each location (silverware, ornamental jewelry, etc.) up to a maximum of 200 gp of such items throughout the entire town.

A1. FERRY CROSSING (CR 2)

Next to a small shack, which squats at the edge of a wide, slow-moving river, a dead mule lies in the dirt, its body gashed with multiple wounds and covered in flies. Nearby, a flat-bottomed skiff rests along the north riverbank, grounded beneath a thick rope which spans the water. Across the river, a sign declares the small, lakeside village in the distance to be Holver's Ferry. Much seems amiss, however, as the settlement appears deserted, and several of its buildings bear signs of having recently burned to the ground with plumes of white smoke still drifting lazily into the sky.

This ferry station served for decades as a river crossing for prospectors, hunters, and other frontiersmen before an enterprising lumber merchant named Enion Holver founded a village by the lakeshore. Ownership of the ferry changed hands through many generations, and most recently was owned and run by a jovial ex-lumberjack named Unoff Ollus. Following the outbreak of assimilation madness 12 days ago, Unoff stopped operating the ferry and spent his time in a drunken haze, hating himself for trapping his friends and neighbors across the river and not doing more to help them. For, after witnessing the bloodshed which devastated the town from afar, he quarantined the village in an effort to protect himself—or so he thought. Unfortunately, others had already carried the assimilation madness beyond town and into the forest, soon returning to visit the violence on him, as well.

A thick length of rope spans the river, secured to an identical post on either bank. Unoff used the rope to haul the ferry across with help from his mule. The ferry itself—a flat-bottomed skiff wide enough to carry two wagons side-by-side—sits unoccupied at the river's edge close to the shack. Hauling the ferry across the river using the rope requires a combined Strength score of 25 and takes 15 minutes. Without using the rope, PCs must succeed at a DC 13 Profession (sailor) check to pilot the skiff across the river using its clumsy rudder. Failing this roll causes the skiff to float downriver (to the west) for 20-50 minutes and drift $3d6 \times 1000$ feet before eventually making landfall on the opposite bank. Though the river appears slow-moving, its current is deceptively swift and considered rough water (requiring a DC 15 Swim check each round). PCs on the shore who succeed at a DC 15 Knowledge (nature) or Survival check recognize this potential danger.



Creatures: Shortly after the PCs arrive at the ferry crossing, four, wild-eyed men emerge from the shack, brandishing blood-stained farm implements they've recently used to kill and hack apart the drunken ferryman. These locals contracted the flawed version of the assimilation strain a little over two weeks ago when they delivered their harvest to the village granary (A4). After returning home, they succumbed to assimilation madness and slaughtered their own families in a psychotic outbreak. Now, they've returned to Holver's Ferry to visit their murderous rage on its citizens in twisted retribution for the deaths of their loved ones.

Treasure: An unlocked, wooden strongbox sits under Unoff's bunk in the tiny shack. It contains: 19 sp, 57 cp, a *potion of cure light wounds*, and an *elixir of swimming*. Unoff's spear is mounted on one wall, and a loaded light crossbow with a quiver of nine crossbow bolts rests atop his bunk.



PSYCHOTIC FARMERS (6)

CR 1/4

XP 100 each

NE maddened farmers (*Pathfinder Roleplaying Game GameMastery Guide*)

hp 10 (currently 4) each

Fort -2, **Ref** +0, **Will** +3

Str 11, **Dex** 10, **Con** 12 (currently 6), **Int** 10, **Wis** 13, **Cha** 9

Gear sickles only

TACTICS

During Combat The farmers charge the closest PC, slashing and stabbing in unison to bring them down before moving to another victim.

Morale The assimilation madness induces the farmers to fight to the death.

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Assimilation Madness (Ex) These farmers were once neutral, but their alignments shifted to neutral evil due to the flawed version of the assimilation strain. They've each taken 6 points of Constitution damage, as well. A successful DC 15 Heal check determines these men suffer from some sort of sickness, though it's currently impossible to identify the exact

illness. Since the farmers have had the flawed version of the virus longer than 24 hours, they can no longer infect others.

Bloodthirsty (Ex) A maddened creature gains a +1 morale bonus on attack and damage rolls against creatures taking bleed damage.

Savagery (Ex) A maddened creature gains a +2 morale bonus on combat maneuver checks made to bull rush, drag, or overrun.

A2. REDTHISTLE FARM (CR 1)

This modest farmhouse and adjacent barn overlook several vegetable gardens and a large field of grain. In front of the farmhouse stands a wagon half-loaded with provisions and personal belongings. Two stout horses, hitched to the wagon, stamp their hooves impatiently, straining against its brake.

When the PCs cross the river to Holver's Ferry, they find the village eerily quiet and the streets almost deserted. The first building they pass is likely this farm owned by **Ambrin Redthistle** (*Shopkeep, Pathfinder RPG GameMastery Guide*), who lost his eldest son and two daughters to the recent violence.

Creatures: When the PCs approach, Ambrin appears from behind the wagon, having armed himself with a shovel, and moves to stand between the PCs and his remaining family (a wife and toddler son, both non-combatants). He warns the PCs to keep their distance, but gives them an opportunity to explain their arrival and intentions. Assuming the PCs refrain from hostile action, Ambrin apologizes for his demeanor and warns them of the outbreak in Holver's Ferry. If the PCs brought the skiff across the river, he thanks them for doing so, saying he and his family "can finally escape this hell-hole." If the PCs remain on friendly terms with Ambrin, he may stick around long enough to answer some of their questions:

Who are you? "Ambrin Redthistle. I own this farm. My family's lived here for three generations."

What happened here? "A sickness hit town a few weeks ago. It weakened a lot of folks and clouded their minds. A bunch of them went mad. Some just shut down and babbled like idiots, but others were much worse. They either killed themselves or started killing each other. It was a bloodbath! I bet half the folk who lived here are dead now—most of them dragged from their homes or cut down in the streets. A few buildings burned, too, including House Formidable and the lumber mill."

What's House Formidable? "That was our temple to the god of protection. Fine lot of good it did us. It's just a burned-out ruin now, but was real popular with the woodcutters and lumberjacks who work in the wilds."

Where did this sickness come from? "I don't know! The priests never found its source. And that was before they ran away or boarded themselves up in their chapel."

Who's in charge here? "Onessa Jerreth is our sheriff, but we haven't seen her in a week. There was a group of village elders, too, but most of them are dead—except maybe Hagrid Foss and Rexel the Apothecary."

Who's Hagrid? "Hagrid is the high priest at Silverstone Hall. He and his acolytes survived the violence, but I haven't seen anybody leave their temple in days."

Who's Rexel? "An eccentric old gnome. He sells medicinal powders, tonics, and cure-alls out of his treehouse south of town. It's on the other side of Old Mill Pond."

Is there somewhere safe to stay in town? "The only inn is the Hapless Harpy. It's located in the center of town, near the White Oak. Not sure if it's still open for business, but it's owned by Vessa Cormindi, and she let many of us take shelter there during the worst of the violence."

Reward: Even during a conversation, Ambrin is eager to finish loading his wagon so he can get his family away from Holver's Ferry. If the PCs help load his family's possessions to enable a swifter departure, he thanks them and grants them the use of his farmhouse (and a week's worth of provisions) for as long as their business keeps them in town. He also leaves them with his good luck charm, a silver holy symbol (worth 25 gp) of the god of protection, saying his brother Treningar gave it to him in the early days of the madness before he perished in the fire at House Formidable (A10).

A3. BELDRAK FARM (CR 1/2)

The cornfields surrounding this sprawling farmhouse have been mostly trampled and, in some places, burned. The nearby barn is open and abandoned of livestock, and the house looks unattended.

The widower Vel Beldrak and his four adult sons used to work this modest farm, but when madness engulfed the village, they took up arms with the town militia and tried to keep the peace. All of them perished in the violence.

Creature: The Beldrak's faithful hunting dog, a burly mastiff named Scratcher, has been locked inside the main farmhouse for the past two weeks. Having eaten all of the accessible food days ago, Scratcher's hunger led him to devour the family cat, as well. This act unhinged the normally friendly hound, turning him feral enough to prove dangerous to visitors. PCs may use wild empathy to try to calm the hostile dog, but unless he's given food immediately, the check suffers a -4 penalty. Even with food, the PCs must still succeed on a wild empathy check to prevent the dog from attacking them for it.

Rewards: If the PCs change Scratcher's attitude from Hostile to Indifferent, award them XP as if they'd defeated the dog in combat. If Scratcher's attitude is further improved to Friendly or Helpful, he bonds with the first PC to give him food, and may be retrained with the Handle Animal skill—or, at the GM's discretion, adopted as an animal companion by a PC with a class feature which allows it.

Treasure: PCs who succeed at a DC 15 Perception check following at least an hour searching the farmhouse locate a teak jewelry box (worth 40 gp), containing 100 gp worth of modest jewelry belonging to Vel's late wife. It also holds a small leather pouch with 9 gp, 13 sp, and 26 cp.

SCRATCHER

CR 1/2

XP 200

Riding dog (*Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary*)

hp 13

A4. GRANARY (CR 2)

A 30-foot grain silo rises here, its ground-level door slightly ajar. The top of the tower also includes another door accessing a narrow, wooden walkway overlooking the town, river, and nearby lake.

Holver's Ferry relies on this communal granary to store harvests from the nearby fields to sustain itself through the winter. The town militia also occasionally uses the roof-level catwalk as a watchtower, which can be accessed by a sturdy ladder built into the interior's back wall. The 30-foot ascent reaches a small landing near the ceiling which allows unimpeded access to the rooftop through a narrow doorway. Somewhat surprisingly, the main silo has escaped damage, remaining largely ignored during the recent violence. As a result, it remains well-stocked given the early-autumn harvest season and recent grain deliveries by outlying farmers. If PCs approach the silo, a DC 15 Perception check discovers a discarded padlock (an average quality lock) and its key lying on the ground.

Creature: When the PCs approach or pass the granary for the first time, Milda Vesk—a plump middle-aged woman dressed in a beautiful, but ill-fitting white lace wedding gown (worth 100 gp)—appears atop the granary's catwalk. Recently widowed by the untimely death of her husband—the lumber mill owner and magnate Tabin Vesk—when he perished in the lumber mill (A14) as it burned to the ground 10 days ago, Milda is lost in mourning. This, coupled with her infection by the initial, flawed version of the assimilation strain, has led Milda into bouts of deep, suicidal depression.

After appearing atop the granary, which she accessed with a key taken from one of the village elder's she found dead on the street, Milda loudly sings a song from her wedding which her husband loved. PCs approaching within 60 feet of her may make DC 12 Perception checks to notice her dress appears to be drenched in some sort of liquid. Four rounds later, when Milda finishes her tune, she melodramatically produces a tindertwig, lamenting the loss of her husband and preparing to light herself on fire. Unless the PCs prevent her from doing so, two rounds later she strikes the tindertwig and touches it to her gown, immediately bursting into flame (having doused herself with lamp oil). She then jumps from the granary unless anything is done to prevent it, hitting the ground with a sickening crunch. Milda takes 1d6 points of fire damage, 3d6 points of damage from the fall, and another 1d6 points of fire damage each round for the next 1d4 rounds unless the PCs smother the flames.

Development: If the PCs somehow prevent Milda from killing herself, she remains a risk for the remaining 5d6 minutes as described in the **Assimilation Madness** section. If they keep her safe during this temporary bout of madness, she eventually thanks them and calms herself, earning them an XP award as if they'd defeated her in battle. She then asks the PCs to escort her to her house (A12), where she promises to cook them a good meal and answer any of their questions.

If the PCs take Milda up on her offer, she proves good to her word. Once at her house, she cooks a simple rabbit and cabbage stew, conversing with them as she serves the table. Though clearly addled and unsteady from the mental ordeal afflicting her scattered mind, she shares the same information provided by Ambrin Redthistle (A2), while also telling tales about her late husband and their life together.

MILDA VESK

CR 2

XP 600

N Maddened noble scion *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game GameMastery Guide*

hp 20 (currently 16)

Fort -1, Ref +2, Will +3

Str 12, Dex 12, Con 11 (currently 6), Int 10, Wis 8, Cha 13

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Assimilation Madness (Ex) Milda was once neutral good, but her alignment shifted to neutral due to the flawed version of the assimilation strain. She has also taken 5 points of Constitution damage. A successful DC 15 Heal check is enough to determine she suffers from some sort of sickness, though it's impossible to identify the exact illness. Since she's had the flawed version of the virus longer than 1 day, she can no longer infect others.

A5. SHERIFF'S OFFICE

A sign above the door of this stout, stone building identifies it as the local sheriff's office. A single-story structure with a flat roof, the building seemingly has all its windows boarded up, and the solid oak door bears a number of deep marks from the heavy blows of an axe. A small porch runs along the front of the building, its boards stained with dried blood.

For the last 27 years, this building has served Sheriff Onessa Jerreth as her office and the town jail. The interior appears neat and tidy, and all three holding cells are currently clean and empty. Onessa survived the initial violence which engulfed Holver's Ferry, and did her best to protect the villagers while attempting to restore order. When the worst of the violence subsided 11 days ago, she recruited her longtime friend Rexel (A16) into investigating the mysterious outbreak. Though they failed to determine the source of the disease, both believed something sinister had caused it. Finally, eight days ago, they noticed that villagers who'd managed to survive the violence started vanishing, usually at a rate of one missing person per day. Convinced the people in question hadn't simply fled town, they began to theorize that a malevolent presence still lurked within Holver's Ferry and the surrounding wilderness. A skilled woodsman and tracker, Onessa noticed large bootprints in the earth around the missing villagers' homes, and quickly surmised they belonged to the largest man in Holver's Ferry—the woodcutter, Silam Oddle. The next day, Onessa set off alone to question Silam at his home on the far side of the lake and never returned. The sheriff's office has remained locked and

boarded up ever since, though a DC 20 Disable Device check can successfully open the main door, or it can be broken down (hardness 5, 20 hp, break DC 25).

Inside, on the sheriff's desk, lies an unfurled cloth map showing the village and surrounding area of Lake Shimmermere. It includes two brass pins marking a pair of locations along the lakeshore. Anyone in town can recognize these markers as the site of the old Oddle orphanage and the small island which holds the ruins of Arvarenhode Manor. Onessa marked these locations to indicate the two places which drew her interest during her investigation. She marked the orphanage because of her growing suspicion of Silam Oddle, and she included Arvarenhode Manor because the ruins have been used in the past by a dangerous band of brigands.

Treasure: A locked, sturdy cabinet takes up one entire wall of Onessa's office. A successful DC 25 Disable Device check unlocks it, though Rexel has a spare key at his shop (A16). It contains three suits of studded leather armor, six hand axes, three short spears, nine daggers, four light crossbows with five cases containing 20 crossbow bolts each, and a masterwork longsword. A small, wooden box at the foot of the cabinet also holds three *potions of cure light wounds*, a *wand of sound burst* (23 charges remaining), and a purse holding 22 gp and 77 sp.

A6. MULNARIN FARM (CR 1)

The door to this small farmhouse lies kicked in, and the adjacent barn has burned to its foundation.

The Mulnarin family held out for two days against a mob of their infected neighbors. Eventually, deranged victims of the assimilation strain breached the front door and dragged the father and mother—Dorven and Kayla Mulnarin—into the front yard to butcher them. The priests from Silverstone Hall, led by Hargrim Foss, rescued the couple, only to turn on them, as well, since they'd succumbed to the perfected version of the assimilation strain, turning to evil in the name of an unknown 'god' whispering in their minds (see A11). Afterward, scavengers thoroughly sacked and looted the Mulnarin farmhouse, and the adjacent barn was burned to the ground. With a successful DC 15 Perception check, PCs investigating the farmhouse discover a basement trapdoor barred from within (hardness 5, 15 hp, break DC 18).

Creatures/Trap: Four adolescent children—Tevan (15 years old), Cyria (11 years old), and twins Javos and Mersia Mulnarin (8 years old)—are hiding in the farmhouse basement, terrified for their lives. Tevan is armed with a dagger, but the younger children are non-combatants. Having been taught as a trapper by his father, Tevan has rigged the basement entrance with a heavy crossbow which fires as soon as someone opens the door.

If the PCs call through the door, no one answers, as the children are much too frightened to respond and expect more maddened villagers, but PCs who succeed on a DC 15 Perception check hear a small amount of movement and whispered voices from within. PCs parlaying with those inside may attempt a DC 15 Bluff or Diplomacy check or a DC 25 Intimidate check to draw out the children. If successful, Tevan opens the door, but emerges with the loaded crossbow to deter any troublemakers from harming his siblings.

Aside from the strange sickness in town, the Mulnarin children know very little about the troubles of Holver's Ferry. In the early chaos, their parents ushered them into the basement just before the maddened villagers arrived. They've remained here ever since, too afraid to leave, and living off the foodstores and water barrel in the root cellar.

Reward: The Mulnarins were fast friends with the gnome apothecary, Rexel (A16), and provided him with rare herbs and mushrooms for his alchemy. If the PCs successfully resolve the encounter with the Mulnarin children without violence, Tevan explains their parents often asked 'Uncle' Rexel to look after them in their absence, but they've been too afraid to seek him out. If the PCs escort them to Rexel for safekeeping, award each of them a 200 XP story award.

TEVAN MULNARIN

CR 1/2

XP 200

Farmer (*Pathfinder Roleplaying Game GameMastery Guide*)

hp 10

Gear dagger, heavy crossbow with 5 bolts

CROSSBOW TRAP

CR 1

XP 400

Type mechanical; **Perception** DC 20; **Disable Device** DC 20

EFFECT

Trigger touch (opening the basement door); **Reset** none

Effect Atk +15 ranged (1d8+1/19–20)

A7. THE WHITE OAK

An enormous, 40-foot-tall oak tree, covered with dull, white bark and silvery leaves stands here, its moss-draped branches stretching for dozens of feet in every direction. Three human bodies, hanged by the neck with coarse ropes, slowly sway in the breeze, their feet just inches off the ground.

This great oak tree marked the civic heart of Holver's Ferry. Long used as a meeting place for festivals, weddings, and other events, the tree recently became a battleground when violence engulfed the village. The three townsfolk hanging from the tree were executed by Hargrim Foss and his acolytes at Silverstone Hall (A11). Two of them include the parents—Dorvan and Kayla—of the Mulnarin children (A6).



A8. THE HAPLESS HARPY (CR 1)

This two-story, fieldstone building has a slate roof and oak timbers providing support along its sturdy walls. A sign above the entry depicts a monstrous woman with great, bat-like wings sleeping under a willow tree. All the windows on the ground floor have been thoroughly boarded up and sealed tight, but some of the second floor windows still remain open.

The Hapless Harpy is the only inn in Holver's Ferry, acting as a favorite spot for generations of villagers to gossip over a pint of the inn's celebrated Black Harpy brew—a thick, malt beer as dark as night. The owner and proprietor of the Harpy is **Vessa Cormindi** (LG middle-aged female human expert 2/warrior 1), a buxom woman with a milky, left eye and a small, curved scar on her right cheek. When madness engulfed Holver's Ferry, Vessa sheltered several families inside her defensible inn, helping them ride out the conflict until they could gather their belongings and leave town.

Creatures: When the violence subsided 11 days ago, everyone Vessa had sheltered at the inn departed, except for her only remaining customer—a capable, human mercenary named Vorthad. Vorthad helped defend the inn during the worst of the chaos, rescuing a number of citizens from the mobs outside. Unfortunately, during one such skirmish, an infected villager injured him and passed along the flawed version of the assimilation strain. Vorthad hid the symptoms of the disease for many days, but after growing increasingly irrational and irritable, he locked himself in his bedroom on the inn's second floor.

When the PCs arrive at the Hapless Harpy, they find Vessa nervously pacing in the common room. She seems equally surprised and worried to see new customers, but capable-looking individuals like the PCs soon give her hope. She immediately shares her concerns about Vorthad, and that the last few times she checked on him, the mercenary responded by shouting belligerent curses through the door and striking it with his halberd. Vessa pleads for the PCs to subdue Vorthad

so he can be restrained until his madness passes. She offers free rooms if they agree to help, beseeching the PCs not to kill Vorthad if they can avoid it. A steadfast believer in the rules of hospitality, she feels responsible for his well-being and appreciates his contributions in saving so many townsfolk.

If questioned about the happenings in Holver's Ferry and the damage to the town, she relays the same information the PCs may have gleaned from Ambrin Redthistle or Milda Vesk, but she also adds her growing suspicions about the priests of Silverstone Hall (A11), mentioning that she saw Hagrim Foss and his acolytes execute Dorvan and Kayla Mulnarin by the White Oak (A7).

Reward: If the PCs subdue Vorthad without killing him, Vessa is extremely grateful, offering them free room and board and a polished bloodstone (worth 50 gp) she's been holding onto for years. Even after being rescued from his madness, Vorthad remains a suicide risk for the next 5d6 minutes as described in the **Assimilation Madness** section. If the PCs keep him from killing himself during this brief period of time, he still remains dangerous because of his alignment shift to chaotic evil. However, since he's no longer insane, he keeps his thoughts to himself, gruffly thanking the PCs and deflecting their questions, as he quietly bides his time before slipping away from the inn. Always a proud warrior, he inwardly fumes at being bested by the PCs, and lurks in the ruins of the abandoned buildings near the inn so he can watch for their comings and goings. If he spots a lone PC leaving the inn, he trails after them in an attempt to avenge himself. If no such opportunity occurs after five days, Vorthad vents his rage elsewhere by leaving Holver's Ferry forever.

VORTHAD **CR 1**

XP 400
 CE maddened guard (*Pathfinder Roleplaying Game GameMastery Guide*)
hp 19 (currently 10)
Fort +1, **Ref** +1, **Will** +1
Str 14, **Dex** 11, **Con** 13 (currently 6), **Int** 9, **Wis** 10, **Cha** 8

TACTICS
During Combat Vorthad fights like a wild animal with little regard for his own safety, focusing on one opponent at a time while positioning himself in front of the doorway to prevent PCs from entering and surrounding him.
Morale Vorthad fights to the death or until he's incapacitated.

SPECIAL ABILITIES
Assimilation Madness (Ex) Vorthad was once chaotic neutral, but his alignment has shifted to chaotic evil due to the flawed version of the assimilation strain. He has also taken 7 points of Constitution damage. A successful DC 15 Heal check is enough to determine he suffers from some sort of sickness, though it's impossible to identify its origin. Since Vorthad has had the flawed version of the virus longer than a day, he can no longer infect others.
Bloodthirsty (Ex) Vorthad gains a +1 morale bonus on attack and damage rolls against creatures taking bleed damage.
Savagery (Ex) Vorthad gains a +2 morale bonus on combat maneuver checks made to bull rush, drag, or overrun.

A9A. YENSER'S STOREFRONT (CR 2)

This well-kept, fieldstone building has a simple sign over the door that reads "Yenser's." A large display window dominates the front of the building, but now lies smashed in with shards of broken glass strewn everywhere. Inside, the darkened store also lies in shambles. Shelves have fallen from the walls, tables have been overturned and broken, and various wares lie scattered about the floor.

This modest store sold common tools, supplies, dry goods, clothing, and even a small selection of arms and armor. The owner—a well-liked, middle-aged half-elf named Yenser Delharo—also served his neighbors as a part-time blacksmith. A small, covered porch with an anvil sits behind the shop, along with an unlit firepit and common blacksmithing tools.

On the first night of violence in Holver's Ferry, Yenser's shop became a battleground when a dozen villagers suffering from assimilation madness broke through the window to loot the place and ended up fighting one another as they squabbled over Yenser's tradegoods. Though the half-elf fled to his attic (A9b) and escaped harm, the villagers thoroughly looted his store of weapons, armor, and anything of value. It now lies in shambles, with shattered display cases, overturned tables, and broken shelves littering the bloodstained floor (treat as difficult terrain).

A small display case weighing 70 pounds leans against the entry door. A PC succeeding at a DC 10 Strength check can easily push the door open and knock the case over, but the noise immediately wakes the shop's current occupants (see below). PCs can also quietly move the case away from the door with a successful DC 10 Strength check followed by a DC 20 Stealth check, but any Stealth checks made to move inside the shop itself suffer a -10 circumstance penalty due to the broken glass and other debris littering the floor.

Creatures: A lean, female bugbear named Agrizarga and her goblin raiders waylaid several villagers fleeing Holver's Ferry about a week ago. After torturing these victims, they learned about the town's misfortune, and crept into the village the night before the PCs arrived, eager to visit further misery on the weakened survivors. Agrizarga decided to investigate the village store first, and found Yenser shortly thereafter, whose scent alerted the bugbear to his presence. A short battle ensued in which she slew the shopkeep, but not before Yenser killed two of the goblins and heavily wounded her, as well. After the fight, she ordered the remaining goblins to stand guard while she climbed into the attic to feed on Yenser's corpse and let her wounds heal.

During the day, the goblins cover themselves with clothing, blankets, and other light-weight debris in the shop to shield themselves from the sun so they can sleep. This gives them a +4 circumstance bonus to their Stealth checks while hiding (DC 24 Perception check to notice). PCs searching the messy shop find little of interest, however, a successful DC 15 Perception check discovers an empty vial from a *potion of cure moderate wounds* Agrizarga drank after her battle with Yenser. It lies next to the ladder leading to the attic.

GOBLINS (5)

CR 1/3

XP 135 each

hp 6 each (*Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary*)

TACTICS

During Combat The goblins fight in pairs, trying to assist one another in flanking their enemies.

Morale If three or more goblins perish, the survivors flee Holver's Ferry, abandoning Agrizarga.

A9B. YENSER'S ATTIC (CR 3)

A terrible stench fills this long attic. Near a straw bed in the southwest corner, the half-eaten body of a man hangs from a simple, iron chain looped over a rafter.

Agrizarga claimed the straw bed in Yenser's attic to recover while gorging herself on Yenser's lifeless corpse. During the day, she remains here, even if her goblins are attacked by the PCs, caring little for her minions and thinking nothing of using them as fodder against tougher opponents or as a convenient distraction if she needs to escape. If the PCs fail to discover Agrizarga, the bugbear remains hidden in the attic for the next two days until her wounds heal and she runs out of food. Three nights after the PCs arrive in Holver's Ferry, she—and any goblin underlings who remain—emerge from hiding to stalk and murder random villagers. They slay a new victim each night until Agrizarga is killed or driven from town.

Treasure: Near the straw bed, Agrizarga has amassed a small collection of valuables Yenser kept in the attic, including 15 gp, 114 sp, a decorative darkwood bracelet of elven design (worth 30 gp), a small velvet pouch holding five uncut agates (worth 10 gp each), and Yenser's blood-smearred +1 *short sword*.

AGRIZARGA

CR 3

XP 800

Female bugbear rogue 2

CE Medium humanoid (goblinoid)

Init +3; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., scent; Perception +10

DEFENSE

AC 18, touch 13, flat-footed 15 (+2 armor, +3 Dex, +3 natural)

hp 34 (5 HD; 3d8+2d8+12), currently 24

Fort +3, **Ref** +9, **Will** +2

Defensive Abilities evasion

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee horsechopper +7 (1d10+4/x3) or dagger +6 (1d4+3/19–20)

Ranged javelin +6 (1d6+3)

Special Attacks sneak attack +1d6

TACTICS

Before Combat If Agrizarga hears a PC climbing the ladder to the attic, she drinks a *potion of invisibility* and attacks anyone entering through the small trapdoor. Medium-sized creatures are considered squeezing during the round in which they move into the attic. If possible, Agrizarga tries to murder her target quickly using a sneak attack and then hauls the body into the attic with her.

During Combat Agrizarga uses her environment to her advantage to ensure only one attacker can reach her at a time. She focuses her attacks on the largest, strongest-looking opponent first, hoping to demoralize her opponents with an Intimidate check.

Morale If reduced to less than 10 hit points, Agrizarga retreats through an attic window, hoping to return later and pick off PCs one by one under the cover of darkness.

STATISTICS

Str 16, **Dex** 17, **Con** 15, **Int** 12, **Wis** 8, **Cha** 13

Base Atk +3; **CMB** +6; **CMD** 19

Feats Intimidating Prowess, Iron Will, Martial Weapon Proficiency (horsechopper), Skill Focus (Perception)

Skills Climb +10, Intimidate +18, Perception +10, Sleight of Hand +10, Stealth +18, Survival +7, Swim +8; **Racial Modifiers** +4 Intimidate, +4 Stealth

Languages Abyssal, Common, Goblin

SQ rogue talents (weapon training), stalker, trapfinding +1

Combat Gear *potions of invisibility* (2); **Other Gear** leather armor, mwk horsechopper, dagger, javelins (2), necklace of severed ears, noses, and tongues

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Stalker (Ex) Perception and Stealth are always class skills for bugbears.



A10. HOUSE FORMIDABLE (CR 2)

Nearly three dozen charred bodies lie among the ash and debris of this burned-out temple where statues carved with common runes of protection have similarly fallen into ruin, pulled down by ropes and half-melted chains.

This ruined building once served as the local temple to the god of protection, a popular deity among the many woodcutters, carpenters, and lumberjacks who called Holver's Ferry home. A large, open-ceilinged structure enclosed on all sides, House Formidable provided a measure of security and peace along the frontier, with its wandering acolytes presided over by a burly high priest named Treningar. When madness engulfed Holver's Ferry, many of the town's faithful came seeking shelter, and Treningar did everything in his power to protect them. Unfortunately, a large mob of infected villagers eventually set fire to the temple, and any townsfolk who escaped found themselves cut down by the madmen waiting outside.

Creatures: A proud man who took his duties as a healer very seriously, Treningar often aided Sheriff Onessa Jerreth—or those in her custody—helping them recover from their injuries. In the early days of the assimilation madness, Treningar also sought his god's favor to treat the infected, but his efforts failed to stem the outbreak. Unaccustomed to such letdowns, when the flames closed on him and his doomed followers, the experience shook the very core of his faith. As the fire consumed Treningar and two of his acolytes, they cursed their patron god for abandoning them and the town in its time of need. In their final moments, this blasphemy damned the priests to an undead existence as burning skeletons with blackened, smoldering bones and empty eye sockets trailing thick, black smoke. They now lie among the still smoldering ruins of House Formidable, rising to attack any who venture too close to the site of their greatest pain and failure.

Treasure: Treningar's golden holy symbol, studded with semi-precious stones and worth 400 gp, still hangs from a thin chain around his blackened, skeletal neck, miraculously unscathed by the flames.

BURNING SKELETONS (3)

CR 1/2

XP 200 each

NE Medium undead

Init +6; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +0

Aura fiery aura

DEFENSE

AC 16, touch 12, flat-footed 14 (+2 armor, +2 Dex, +2 natural)

hp 5 each (1d8+1)

Fort +1, **Ref** +2, **Will** +2

DR 5/bludgeoning; **Immune** fire, undead traits

Weaknesses vulnerability to cold



OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee light mace +2 (1d6+2 plus 1d6 fire), claw -3 (1d4+1 plus 1d6 fire) or

2 claws +2 (1d4+2 plus 1d6 fire)

TACTICS

During Combat The skeletons crawl forth from the smoldering rubble as soon as a living being moves within 30 feet of the ruined temple. They split up to attack separate targets, burning opponents with their fiery aura and melee strikes.

Morale Because of the divine curse, the skeletons must all stay within 30 feet of House Formidable, retreating into the total cover provided by the few, remaining beams of the ruined temple rather than pursuing interlopers beyond the grounds. They fight until destroyed, at which point, their penance is paid and their spirits finally put to rest.

STATISTICS

Str 15, **Dex** 14, **Con** —, **Int** —, **Wis** 10, **Cha** 12

Base Atk +0; **CMB** +2; **CMD** 14

Feats Improved Initiative^B

Gear broken chain shirt, light mace

SQ fiery death (DC 11)

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Fiery Aura (Ex) Creatures adjacent to the burning skeletons take 1d6 points of fire damage at the start of their turn. Anyone striking them with an unarmed strike or natural attack takes 1d6 points of fire damage.

Fiery Death (Su) The burning skeletons explode in a burst of flame when they die. Anyone adjacent to them when they're destroyed takes 1d6 points of fire damage. A successful DC 11 Reflex save halves this damage.

A11. SILVERSTONE HALL (CR 4)

Polished, metal sheets adorn the exterior of this domed, stone building, each embossed with decorative symbols of coins, trade, and commerce. It seems to have weathered the violence much better than other buildings in town. Solid, oak boards seal every window, and the great entry door is reinforced with an iron gate.

A consortium of wealthy lumber barons established this local temple to the god of commerce and merchants well over a decade ago. They believed the chapel's clergy would assure that trade flourished in the region, and the temple's high priest, Hagrid Foss—a short, plump man with stern, impassive features and the paternal demeanor of a seasoned judge—has led the institution for years. The interior includes a domed roof with a main worship hall, a small kitchen, a common room for practicing acolytes, and Hagrid's private study adjacent to his own small bedroom. The priests have barred the great entry door from within (hardness 5, hp 20; break DC 25), but emerge periodically to replenish their water supply at night before sequestering themselves again. Behind the temple near the woods lies a smoldering pile of dozens of scorched bodies. Many dead villagers were brought there after the violence subsided, and Hagrid and his acolytes burned their bodies in an attempt to stop the spread of the disease. Since their assimilation by the perfected form of the virus, they've turned their attention away from caring for the townsfolk and now pose a new danger to Holver's Ferry and surrounding region.

Creatures: Eight days ago, when Hagrid realized he and his acolytes had become infected with the virus affecting Holver's Ferry, he ordered their temple sealed, preparing to sacrifice the entire priesthood in the hopes of sparing the town another bout of madness. A few days later, however, it became evident the priests had contracted a different form of the illness—the perfected assimilation strain spread by Silam Oddle. Soon thereafter, the clerics' alignments shifted to lawful evil and an angry seed of malevolence grew in their hearts. Compounding this development, Hagrid began receiving whispered guidance in his mind through the long-range telepathy of the xoraphond Vuelib. Believing these words to be the manifest directions of a new god, and driven by a desire to slaughter his former neighbors, Hagrid and his clergy rounded up a dozen villagers—those who'd proven resistant to the outbreak—and began executing them by the White Oak (area A7). Now, only three of these captives (NG male and female human

commoner 1) still live, and all three remain uninfected since the virus has run its course. Hagrim keeps them gagged and bound on the floor of his private study, while his acolytes hold vigil in the main worship hall, growing ever more furious at their inability to channel the divine power their deity once bestowed, while beseeching the voice in their heads to grant them new power to carry out its will.

Treasure: An unlocked strongbox kept behind the altar in the main worship hall holds 214 gp, 129 sp, and 93 cp. A PC who searches Hagrim's private study (and succeeds on a DC 20 Perception check) notices a secret drawer in the large, oak desk. It contains four *potions of cure light wounds*, a *wand of lesser restoration* (11 charges), and a *scroll of prayer*.

Reward: If the PCs defeat the corrupted priests of Silverstone Hall and rescue the three villagers, award each of them a 200 XP story award.

HAGRIM FOSS

CR 3

XP 800

Middle-aged assimilated male human ex-cleric 5
LE Medium humanoid (human)

Init +3; **Senses** Perception +5

DEFENSE

AC 15, touch 9, flat-footed 15 (+6 armor, -1 Dex)

hp 34 (5d8+7)

Fort +5, **Ref** +0, **Will** +7

OFFENSE

Speed 20 ft. (30 ft. base)

Melee +1 *morningstar* +6 (1d8+2) or mwk dagger +5 (1d4+1/19-20)

Ranged mwk light crossbow +3 (1d8/19-20)

TACTICS

Before Combat If the PCs pound on the temple door and ask for entry, Hagrim and his acolytes take up positions against the wall on either side of the door. If the PCs breach the doors, he directs his men to attack with surprise.

During Combat Now that his madness has worn off, Hagrim fights with measured precision with his +1 *morningstar*. His tactics are simple, brutal, and driven by an unassuaged hatred of anyone not under his command or that of his newfound 'god' Vuelib.

Morale Realizing he'd face execution for murdering the villagers if subdued, Hagrim fights to the death.

STATISTICS

Str 12, **Dex** 9, **Con** 13, **Int** 11, **Wis** 16, **Cha** 14

Base Atk +3; **CMB** +4; **CMD** 13

Feats Alertness, Brew Potion, Improved Initiative, Weapon Focus (morningstar)

Skills Appraise +4, Diplomacy +8, Heal +10, Knowledge (history) +4, Knowledge (religion) +8, Perception +5, Profession (merchant) +7, Sense Motive +9, Spellcraft +4

Languages Common

SQ infected

Combat Gear *potion of bull's strength*, *potions of cure light wounds* (3); **Other Gear** breastplate, +1 *morningstar*, mwk dagger, mwk light crossbow w/ 10 bolts, silver holy symbol, 76 gp, 27 sp, 30 cp

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Assimilated (Su) Hagrim was once lawful neutral, but his alignment shifted to lawful evil due to the perfected version of the assimilation strain.

Ex-Cleric (Su) Hagrim's shift to lawful evil stripped him of his divine spells and class features, except for his armor, shield, and weapon proficiencies. He cannot gain levels as a cleric again until cured of the assimilation strain and he atones for his evil deeds.

Malign Influence (Su) An assimilated creature takes a -4 penalty on all Fortitude and Will saving throws against mind-affecting effects and technologies wielded by the jagladine or their servants, as the co-habiting nanites force the creature's body and mind to acquiesce to such commands. When an infected creature makes an ability check or opposed skill check to resist a Charisma-based ability or effect initiated by such individuals, the infected creature must roll twice and take the lowest result.

ACOLYTES (3)

CR 1/3

XP 135 each

LE assimilated acolytes (*Pathfinder Roleplaying Game GameMastery Guide*)

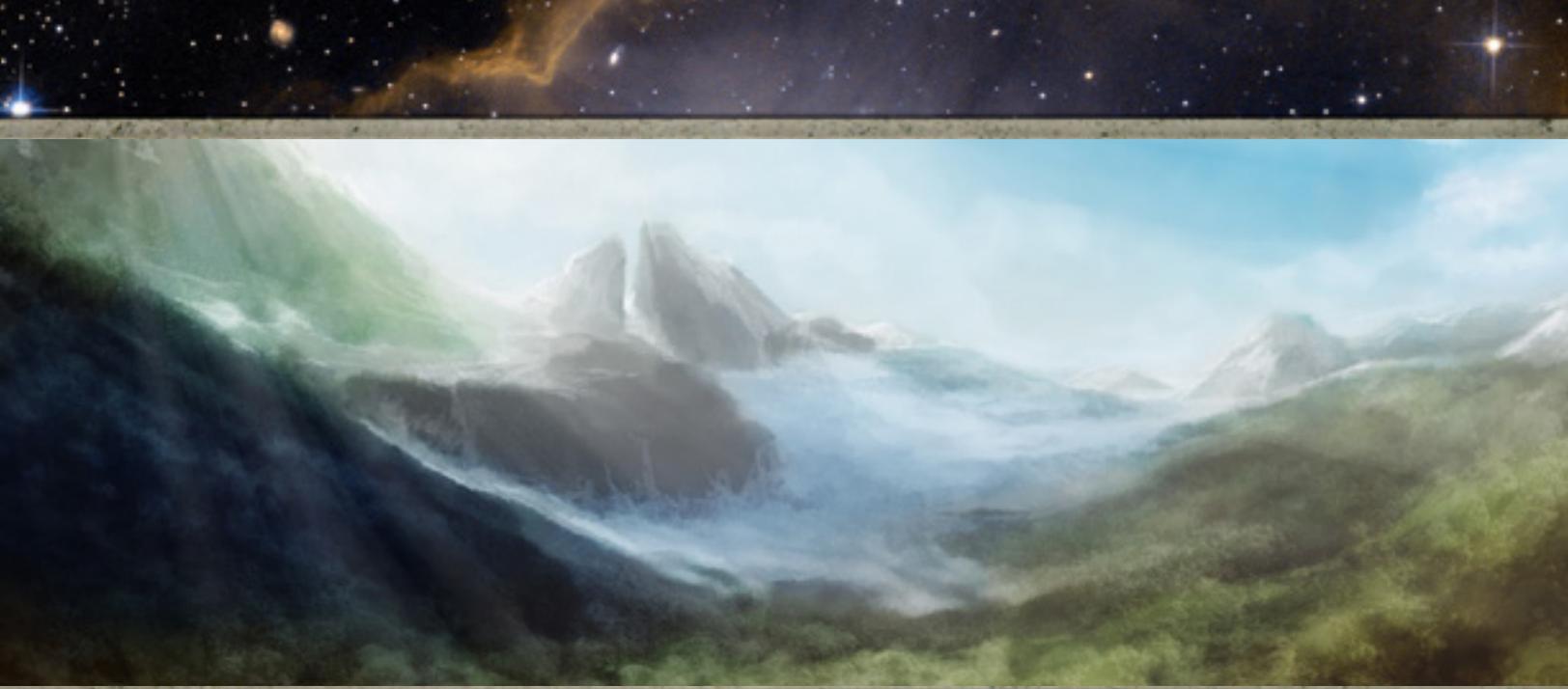
hp 5 each

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Assimilated (Su) The acolytes were once lawful neutral, but their alignments have shifted to lawful evil due to the perfected version of the assimilation strain.

Ex-Cleric (Su) The acolytes' alignment shift has stripped them of all of their divine spells and cleric class features, except for their armor and shield proficiencies and proficiency with simple weapons. They cannot gain levels as a cleric until they are cured of the assimilation strain and atone for their deeds.

Malign Influence (Su) An assimilated creature takes a -4 penalty on all Fortitude and Will saving throws against mind-affecting effects and technologies wielded by the jagladine or their servants, as the co-habiting nanites force the creature's body and mind to acquiesce to such commands. When an infected creature makes an ability check or opposed skill check to resist a Charisma-based ability or effect initiated by such individuals, the infected creature must roll twice and take the lowest result.



A12. VESK RESIDENCE

This modest, two-story manor house has white-washed fieldstone walls supported by dark oak timbers. Its steeply pitched roof bears bright shingles made from tiles of red clay. Although still stately-looking, the home shows signs of recent vandalism. Windows on the ground floor have been smashed, several scorch marks mar the walls, and a half-dozen crossbow bolts are embedded in the front door.

The most prosperous merchant in town—Tabin Vesk—built this home around the same time he erected the lumber mill to employ most of the woodcutters and lumberjacks around Holver's Ferry. He recently perished, however, when a crazed mob burned down the mill around him (A14). His wife, Milda, survived the attack, and escaped from the building before the flames consumed it. As Milda fled, however, one of the infected villagers bit her and passed on the flawed version of the assimilation strain. She returned to the manor and eventually succumbed to the more suicidal aspects of the madness. If not encountered already, the PCs may find Milda at the local granary (A4).

Treasure: Old Tabin kept most of his wealth in his office at the lumber mill, which was lost when it burned to the ground. A thorough search of his manor, however, still locates 500 gp worth of valuable furnishings and works of art (silverware, paintings, tapestries, fine rugs, etc.). Additionally, a successful DC 20 Perception check locates a secret cache in the bedroom closet. This space holds a satchel containing: 500 gp in assorted coins and semi-precious gemstones), a masterwork longsword, a *potion of barkskin*, and a *potion of bear's endurance*. If the PCs prevented Milda from killing herself (see A4), she offers them the gemstones, sword, and potions as a reward.

A13. MILITIA HEADQUARTERS

This smoldering ruin was once a three-story, wooden structure. Though three of its four walls remain standing, the building's interior has long since collapsed, leaving it a smoldering tangle of blackened beams and ash.

This building held the local armory and headquarters for the village militia, a volunteer organization capable of mustering 40 armed men in times of duress. When violence engulfed Holver's Ferry, the armory fell first, because nearly a third of its militia members contracted the flawed assimilation strain as they tried to restore order. Within a few days, they turned on one another and the battle claimed the lives of most everyone left behind. The few militiamen who survived took refuge under the command of Wendred Lorgg in one of the warehouses next to the ruined lumber mill (A14).

Treasure: A PC who succeeds on a DC 20 Perception check while searching the burned out armory locates a serviceable, masterwork warhammer in the clutches of a fire-blackened skeleton.

A14. LUMBER MILL RUINS (CR 3)

An eight-foot-high, fieldstone wall surrounds the burned ruins of a lumber mill and three, non-descript warehouses. The mill is little more than ash and crumbling masonry now, still smoldering in a few places, but the warehouses look intact.

Creatures: When the violence hit Holver's Ferry, the village militia did their best to keep order, but the enraged mobs and assimilation madness quickly overwhelmed them. Wendred Lorgg, one of the militia's best officers, survived the savagery long enough to rally a handful of loyal militiamen. Though they lost their armory headquarters (A13), he led them to the ruined mill and established a temporary stronghold in the undamaged warehouse closest to the lake. For a few

days after the virus burned itself out, Lorgg and his men policed the streets, rounding up maddened survivors to hold in the warehouse for their own safekeeping. Unfortunately, the xoraphond Vuelib soon learned of Lorgg's actions and, viewing him and his men as continued threats, ordered Silam to infect them with the re-engineered assimilation strain. Controlled by a *mindslave harness* (see Appendix), Silam had no choice but to obey, offering Lorgg and his men additional provisions as he volunteered to join them. As the newest member of the militia, he made sure to shake hands with everyone present, and the remaining men soon manifested the infection, as well, having their brains and personalities remapped until they became neutral evil.

Since their assimilation and Silam's departure, Lorgg and the rest of the militia have heard alien whisperings in their minds—the telepathic urgings of the xoraphond, Vuelib. Unlike Hagrid Foss (A11), Lorgg believes this voice is an otherworldly or extraplanar creature intent on conquering the region around Holver's Ferry. And, no longer shackled by a moral compass, he and his men stand ready to serve this entity when it fulfills the assurance of its impending arrival. In addition, Vuelib has encouraged Lorgg to remain in Holver's Ferry, preventing its citizens from leaving while also restraining all newcomers, especially those who cannot “hear” the xoraphond's voice for themselves. To date, only Silam and the priests of Silverstone Hall have demonstrated that ability, but everyone else is either put to death if they show signs of assimilation madness, or held captive within Lorgg's warehouse until the xoraphond and its jagladine masters come to claim them. Currently, Lorgg holds seven villagers (N male and female human commoner 1) inside the compound, but soon seeks to add the PCs, as well.

WENDRED LORGG

CR 1

XP 400

NE assimilated caravan guard (*Pathfinder Roleplaying Game GameMastery Guide*)

hp 16

Gear banded mail, buckler, longsword, dagger, heavy crossbow with 10 bolts

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Assimilated (Su) Lorgg was once neutral, but his alignment shifted to neutral evil due to the perfected version of the assimilation strain.

Malign Influence (Su) An assimilated creature takes a –4 penalty on all Fortitude and Will saving throws against mind-affecting effects and technologies wielded by the jagladine or their servants, as the co-habiting nanites force the creature's body and mind to acquiesce to such commands. When an infected creature makes an ability check or opposed skill check to resist a Charisma-based ability or effect initiated by such individuals, the infected creature must roll twice and take the lowest result.

INFECTED MILITIAMEN (5)

CR 1/3

XP 135 each

NE assimilated foot soldiers (*Pathfinder RPG GameMastery Guide*)

hp 8 each

Gear chainmail, longsword, dagger, light crossbow with 10 bolts

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Assimilated (Su) The militiamen were once neutral, but their alignments shifted to neutral evil due to the perfected version of the assimilation strain.

Malign Influence (Su) An assimilated creature takes a –4 penalty on all Fortitude and Will saving throws against mind-affecting effects and technologies wielded by the jagladine or their servants as the co-habiting nanites force the creature's body and mind to acquiesce to such commands. When an infected creature makes an ability check or opposed skill check to resist a Charisma-based ability or effect initiated by such individuals, the infected creature must roll twice and take the lowest result.

A15. LUMBER YARD (CR 2)

This large, grassy field is empty except for six piles of unprocessed timber, each roughly 20 feet long and 10 feet high.

Not yet processed into usable lumber, the stacked logs of this lumberyard have lain unused and unattended since the outbreak of the assimilation strain. PCs who inspect the southernmost pile and succeed on a DC 12 Perception check, notice what looks like the entrance to an animal burrow sized for a Small creature to squeeze into. Six, empty liquor bottles lie scattered on the ground nearby, discarded there by the burrow's current occupant.

Creature: Besker Zimm, a wild-eyed, halfling woodcutter with a crooked nose and clean-shaven head, lives in the small earthen space under the timber, having hidden there since the night before the PCs arrived in Holver's Ferry. Since that time, he's observed the comings and goings in town of nearly every major group and party, even noting the arrival of the bugbear Agrizarga and her goblin raiders (A9). Not quite right in the head even before the fall of Holver's Ferry, the frequently drunken Zimm is convinced the village is infested with monsters—both real and imagined. Paranoid and delusional, his initial attitude is Unfriendly and he refuses to leave his burrow unless the PCs change his attitude to Friendly. If they attempt to enter his home and remove him by force, he reacts violently, directing his trusty dog, Runt, to attack alongside him. A blatant alcoholic, Zimm ran out of liquor to get him through the horrors he's observed as everyone in town turned on one another. If the PCs offer him a drink, he automatically becomes Friendly, but his burrow is barely large enough to accommodate him, so he's perfectly comfortable sitting outside among the logs while conversing with them.

Despite any headway the PCs make with Zimm, he proves a shaky ally at best. His primary motivation is survival and the acquisition of copious amounts of liquor. Every action he takes, or promises, is designed to support these two goals. If the PCs

change his attitude to Friendly (an automatic occurrence if they give him any amount of alcohol), he becomes amenable to answering their questions. He can share information about the early outbreak of madness in Holver's Ferry, the danger posed by the remaining members of the town militia (A14) and priests from Silverstone Hall (A11), as well as the activities of Agrizarga and her band of goblin raiders (A9a and A9b). So far, Besker has remained hidden from all these threats, but hasn't left town for fear of Lorgg's patrolling militia and the night activities of Hagrim's priesthood.

BESKER ZIMM

CR 1

XP 400

Male halfling expert 3

CN Small humanoid (halfling)

Init +2; Senses Perception +7

DEFENSE

AC 13, touch 13, flat-footed 11 (+2 Dex, +1 size)

hp 13 (3d8)

Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +4; +2 vs. fear

OFFENSE

Speed 20 ft.

Melee mwk dagger +4 (1d3/19–20)

Ranged sling +5 (1d3)

TACTICS

During Combat Besker prefers to let his dog, Runt, take on attackers up close while he scrambles to higher ground on the logs to hurl stones with his sling.

Morale The cowardly halfling has no heart for a real fight and flees into his burrow as soon as his dog is slain or he falls to 3 hit points or less.

STATISTICS

Str 10, Dex 15, Con 10, Int 8, Wis 11, Cha 11

Base Atk +2; CMB +1; CMD 13

Feats Point-Blank Shot, Precise Shot

Skills Acrobatics +4 (+0 when jumping), Climb +7, Craft (carpentry) +5, Knowledge (nature) +3, Perception +7, Profession (woodcutter) +6, Ride +6, Stealth +11, Survival +6, Swim +4;

Racial Modifiers +2 Acrobatics, +2 Climb, +2 Perception

Languages Common, Halfling

Other Gear mwk dagger, sling with 10 bullets, 2 gp

RUNT

CR 1/3

XP 135

Dog (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary*)

hp 6



A16. APOTHECARY (CR 3)

The trail from Holver's Ferry disappears into the woods for several dozen yards before ending abruptly at the foot of a great, gnarled sycamore tree. A narrow, wooden staircase wraps around the trunk a half-dozen times before reaching a small, two-story hut nestled between the branches thirty feet overhead. A simple sign at the base of the stairs reads: "Apothecary. Come on up."

For over a hundred years, a wiry, white-haired gnome named Rexel has run this small apothecary, selling simple alchemical items, magical potions, and an eccentric assortment of trinkets and other odds-and-ends. In his cramped shop, one can find a fossilized troglodyte femur bone carved with the characters of the draconic alphabet, a pair of lady's slippers made from the delicate eyelids of a silver dragon, or a dozen different amulets, rings, and charms Rexel swears were crafted in the otherworldly realm of the fey.

During the first three days of violence which engulfed Holver's Ferry, Rexel's shop came under attack by three burly lumberjacks who contracted the flawed version of the assimilation strain. The men broke into Rexel's hut, vandalized the shop, and attacked him. Though the gnome drove the men off with alchemical acid, they still destroyed his well-stocked laboratory and most of his magic potions. Rexel subsequently cleaned things up, but it's still apparent from the collected, broken junk that some sort of scuffle recently occurred.

Creature: Rexel closed the doors to his shop about six days ago, hiding out after his longtime friend, Sheriff Onessa Jerreth, mysteriously vanished (see A5). He's grown more paranoid ever since, and when the PCs first encounter him he's become desperate for aid in tracking her down. He believes Onessa can root out the origin of the strange disease afflicting Holver's Ferry and help the village recover more than anyone else in town.

When the PCs arrive, Rexel remains guarded with a starting attitude of Unfriendly, calling out to them from his treehouse, and prepared to drop an alchemical bomb in anticipation of more maddened townsfolk trying to reach him. Provided the PCs identify themselves, he proves slightly more hospitable shifting his starting attitude to Indifferent. A DC 16 Diplomacy check can further improve his outlook, and if the PCs bring the Mulnarin children to him (A6), he's overjoyed by their survival and immediately becomes Helpful.

If Rexel's attitude improves to at least Friendly, he invites the PCs into his shop and tries to enlist their aid in solving the mystery of Holver's Ferry. If they describe or bring the cloth map from the sheriff's office (A5), Rexel immediately recognizes the two locations marked with Onessa's pins as Mother Oddle's orphanage (described in Part Two) and the ruins of Arvarenhode Manor (described in Part Three). He shakes his head sadly and surmises that the habitually impetuous sheriff must have investigated the leads on her own and probably wanted to enlist Silam's help as an ally in searching the forest. He begs the PCs to find her and suggests they begin at the old orphanage since it lies closer to town.

Here are some possible answers to any questions the PCs might have Rexel:

Who are you? “I’m Rexel and I’ve lived in this town and run this apothecary for the last 100 years.”

What happened to Holver’s Ferry? “A sickness hit town a few weeks ago. It weakened a lot of folks and drove some of them mad. It made some kill themselves or each other, driving them into a murderous rage. I’ve never heard or read of anything like it before. They tore the town apart in just a few days. And there was nothing Onessa, the town council, or militia could do about it.”

Who’s Onessa? “Onessa Jerreth. She’s the village sheriff and a good friend. She weathered the violence the same as me. We were working together to find out what caused it and where the disease came from, but then she up and vanished six days ago. Other villagers were vanishing, too, but not just the infected. It was always the ones who survived the sickness. Onessa thought she had a theory on why, but she never got around to sharing it with me. She might have collected some clues in her office, but the streets were always too dangerous—and I’m too slow and old—to make it there alone.”

Vanished? What do you mean? “The day after the violence wound down, villagers started disappearing one after another. The folks just vanished from their homes, and left everything behind, untouched. That’s what convinced Onessa and me there’s something evil behind it. These people are being taken...for something. But we still haven’t found out who or what’s behind it. And now, whoever caused it probably has Onessa, too!”

Who’s Silam Oddle? “Silam’s a good-natured woodcutter. A local boy who lives at the old orphanage across the lake once run by his late mother. I say ‘boy,’ but he’s a big man now, almost seven feet tall, but gentle as a kitten. He keeps to himself mostly, but does good by the town whenever called upon.”

What can you tell us about the disease? “I’ve taken samples from the bodies of the infected—those Onessa or the militia had to put down, and even some of the ones who took their own lives. So far, it only seems to affect humans. Everyone else is immune. Other than that, I can’t tell its origin, but it seems to spread through contact, weakening its victims’ minds and bodies, but without killing them—almost like it’s the first stage to something else. The sheriff and I think there may be something—or someone—behind it.”

Reward: If the PCs agree to help Rexel investigate the cause of the strange disease, he offers them any of his remaining alchemical items, some infused extracts of *cure light wounds*, *keen senses*, and *lesser restoration*, as well as his *elixir of fire breath*. If the PCs make plans to visit the sheriff’s office (A5), or if they’ve already been there and mention the locked cabinet, he offers them Jerreth’s spare key and explains they might find some useful gear inside.

REXEL THE APOTHECARY CR 3

XP 800
 Old male gnome alchemist^{APG} 4/expert 1
 NG Small humanoid (gnome)
Init –1; **Senses** low-light vision; Perception +10

DEFENSE

AC 12, touch 10, flat-footed 12 (+2 armor, –1 Dex, +1 size)
hp 31 (5 HD; 4d8+1d8+9)
Fort +5, **Ref** +3, **Will** +5; +2 vs. illusions, +2 vs. poison
Weaknesses hobbled

OFFENSE

Speed 10 ft.
Melee mwk light mace +2 (1d4–3) or mwk dagger +2 (1d3–3/19–20)
Ranged bomb +5 (2d6+4 fire)
Special Attacks bomb 8/day (2d6+4 fire and catch fire, DC 16, 10 ft. radius)
Spell-Like Abilities (CL 5th; concentration +6)
 1/day—*dancing lights*, *ghost sound* (DC 12), *prestidigitation*, *speak with animals*
Alchemist Extracts Prepared (CL 4th)
 2nd—*cat’s grace*, *lesser restoration*
 1st—*bomber’s eye*^{APG}, *cure light wounds*, *expeditious retreat*, *keen senses*^{APG}

TACTICS

During Combat Rexel seeks to keep a measured distance between him and his opponents, relying on his bombs to dissuade would-be attackers. He fights with his masterwork light mace only as a last resort.
Morale With his hobbled movement, Rexel always drinks an extract of *expeditious retreat* to flee most altercations, doing so as soon as he falls to 10 hit points or less.

STATISTICS

Str 5, **Dex** 9, **Con** 13, **Int** 18, **Wis** 15, **Cha** 12
Base Atk +3; **CMB** –1; **CMD** 8
Feats Breadth of Experience^{APG}, Brew Potion, Point-Blank Shot, Throw Anything, Weapon Focus (bomb)
Skills Appraise +8, Bluff +8, Craft (alchemy) +14 (+18 to create alchemical items), Diplomacy +8, Disable Device +7, Heal +10, Knowledge (arcana) +10, Knowledge (engineering) +12, Knowledge (local) +10, Knowledge (nature) +13, Perception +10, Profession (herbalist) +12, Sense Motive +8; **Racial Modifiers** +2 Craft (alchemy), +2 Perception
Languages Common, Draconic, Dwarven, Elven, Giant, Gnome, Sylvan
SQ alchemy (alchemy crafting +4, identify potions), discoveries (explosive bomb, infusion), master tinker, mutagen (+4/–2, +2 natural, 40 minutes), poison use, swift alchemy
Combat Gear acid (2 flasks), alchemist’s fire (5 flasks), *elixir of fire breath*, mutagen (Str), *potion of blur*, *potions of cure moderate wounds* (2), *potion of lesser restoration*; **Other Gear** leather armor, masterwork dagger, masterwork light mace

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Hobbled (Ex) Rexel suffers from severe arthritis in his knees, which reduces his speed to 10 feet.

Master Tinker (Ex) Rexel has experimented with all manner of mechanical devices, gaining a +1 bonus on Disable Device and Knowledge (engineering) checks. This racial trait replaces a normal gnome's defensive training and hatred.



PART TWO: THE ORPHANAGE

Mother Oddle's orphanage lies about four miles east of Holver's Ferry, along a cart path which also runs past the ruins of Arvarenhode Manor (described in **Part Three**). Weeds, saplings, fallen logs, and a number of ruts filled with muddy water have taken over the route in recent years. Although wagons can no longer navigate the path in its present state, mounted PCs or those on foot can make easier time using it than braving the thickets and undergrowth of the surrounding timberlands. Regardless, the terrain is still considered trackless forest (halving overland movement rates) due to the path's rugged condition (see Chapter 7, *Pathfinder RPG Core Rulebook*).

The orphanage itself is a dilapidated, two-story house once cared for by the loving Mother Oddle—a kindly lady who took in abandoned children as well as those whose parents had died or could no longer afford to raise them. After the venerable woman's death ten years ago, the orphanage closed and the house became the property of her only son, Silam. Read the following when the PCs first arrive:

Surrounded by gnarled oak trees, an unkempt apple orchard, and an overgrown flower garden, this ramshackle, two-story farmhouse has clearly seen better days. The plain, rectangular building is covered in gray-green moss and white, sun-bleached planks showing signs of rot. Even the roof sags heavily, displaying multiple holes and missing shingles. Aside from the chirping of crickets the area seems quiet and abandoned.

Inside, the orphanage remains structurally sound, proving safe to enter and explore, but its dilapidated condition makes for alarmingly creaky floors which impose a -4 circumstance penalty to Stealth checks. Unless otherwise noted, the walls and ceilings of the orphanage are 10 feet high and made of wood. The doors have fallen into disrepair and count as simple wooden doors (hardness 5, hp 10, break DC 13).

During the day, sunlight filters through the windows to provide normal illumination. At night, however, rooms are cast in deep shadow, and Silam tends to only keep a low fire going in the kitchen (**B2**), creating dim lighting conditions.

B1. PARLOR

The front door is locked but can be unlocked with a successful DC 15 Disable Device check. When the door opens, read or paraphrase the following:

Furnished with a mildewed sofa and three dusty rocking chairs, this parlor's floor bears a thick layer of grime, as well as a few hardy weeds growing between the floorboards near the front door. On the walls, some painted portraits have started to fade and peel, and a well-worn path leads through the dust toward a dark hall to the west and a flight of stairs along the east wall.

Silam rarely lingers in this parlor as it reminds him of his mother. Now, he only uses it to cross from the kitchen to his upstairs bedroom, preferring to use the back porch to come and go from the orphanage, and leaving the parlor door locked to discourage guests.

B2. KITCHEN

This kitchen features a large oven and fireplace. Both show signs of recent use. A set of filthy pots and pans, dented cooking utensils, and a stack of simple, wooden plates rest on the brick hearth. The wooden floor in the center of the room is stained by splashes of dried liquid, through which several bootprints track to the southeast door.

This room played host to a brief, but violent struggle between Silam Oddle and Onessa Jerreth when she came calling to investigate her suspicions (see **A5**). The small, unmarked room to the east is a simple pantry which Silam used to temporarily hold Onessa captive until he could deliver her to Vuelib at Arvarenhode Manor. Any PC who succeeds at a DC 15 Perception check notices a small badge (worth 2 gp) lying on the floor emblazoned with the seal of Holver's Ferry, carried by Onessa in execution of her duties as town sheriff.

B3. BOYS' DORMITORY

This dingy bedroom holds eight, dusty bunks draped in cobwebs and reeking of mildew.

This room hasn't seen use in years. Dozens of small, harmless spiders scuttle about the cobwebs and the detritus of desiccated insect carcasses crunch underfoot if anyone explores here.

B4. GIRLS' DORMITORY (CR 1)

This communal bedroom is painted a soft, rosy hue, and holds four, dusty bunks, as well as the collapsed ruins of what may have been four more. Thick sheets of cobwebs hang between them and over a fireplace in the southwest corner. Underfoot, a multitude of gaps and holes show in the haphazard floorboards.

This room has remained sealed for years. As his mother ran the orphanage with strict rules to separate boys from girls, Silam never ventures here and the door remains stuck (break DC 13).

Creatures: The cobwebs throughout this room represent the handiwork of hundreds of aggressive black-and-scarlet spiders which have made their nest in the fireplace. The hungry swarm boldly skitters forth to attack any creature who disturbs this room (including breaking down the door).

SPIDER SWARM

CR 1

XP 400

hp 9; *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary*

TACTICS

During Combat The spiders assault the nearest possible victim, giving chase through the rest of the house, if necessary. The holes in the floor, walls, and ceiling permit the swarm to treat those barriers as merely difficult terrain.

B5. CLASSROOM

This small, dusty classroom contains 16 child-sized, wooden chairs, all neatly stacked against the south wall. A blackboard decorated with chalk drawings hangs slightly askew in the middle of the west wall, and several pieces of white chalk lay on the floor nearby.

A somewhat skilled artist, Silam likes to use this room to draw pictures on the blackboard. Usually, these comprise images of birds or other wildlife encountered in the forest, but more recently he's drawn pictures of Arvarenhode Manor, the key he found to open its catacombs (see **B6** and **C7**), and the strange, alien xoraphond named Vuelib he encountered there.

B6. SILAM'S ROOM (CR 3)

This small bedroom contains a bed, tiny table, dresser, and a single chair. A large, open trunk also sits on the floor, containing various articles of discarded clothing, all sized for a very large man.

Silam started using this room as his bedchamber as soon as he outgrew the child-sized beds in the downstairs dormitory. A PC who succeeds on a DC 12 Perception check notices a gray-green stain on the pillow atop his bed. This resulted from the *minds slave harness* Vuelib grafted to Silam after he succumbed to the assimilation strain. The substance that caused the stain cannot be identified at this time, but a successful DC 30 Craft (alchemy) or Knowledge (nature) check concludes the substance likely originated in a laboratory rather than a natural environment.



Creatures: If the PCs haven't yet alerted Silam to their presence in his home, they will most likely face him here. His last visit to Vuelib at Arvarenhode Manor (when he delivered Onessa Jerreth) left him particularly shaken. He's spent the past couple of days here feeling equal parts remorse and elation at his ability to subdue the sheriff. The presence of intruders, however, helps refocus Silam into the killing machine he's become, and he aggressively attacks anyone he finds intruding in his home, especially if he finds or hears them disturbing his mother's room (B7).

Treasure: Silam piled the majority of his wood-cutting tools under his bed. They include three woodaxes, a lathe, chisel, and several hammers and saws of varying size. A large key also lies among the tools, carved from a single piece of black granite marked with the symbol of a flying raven. A PC who succeeds on a DC 15 Knowledge (local or nobility) check recognizes it as an emblem of the noble Arvarenhode family, once given purview of the woodlands before their lineage died out many decades ago. The key unlocks the doors to the Unspeakable Shrine (C7) in the catacombs under Arvarenhode Manor (see **Part Three**), which Silam found and explored before encountering Vuelib and succumbing to the assimilation strain.

SILAM ODDLE **CR 3**

XP 800
 Male assimilated human expert 2/ranger 2
 NE Medium humanoid (human)
Init +1; **Senses** Perception +5

DEFENSE

AC 15, touch 11, flat-footed 14 (+4 armor, +1 Dex)
hp 30 (4 HD; 2d8+2d10+10)
Fort +5, **Ref** +4, **Will** +3

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.
Melee battleaxe +8 (1d8+6/x3 plus disease) or handaxe +7 (1d6+4/x3 plus disease) or dagger +7 (1d4+4/19–20 plus disease)

Special Attacks combat style (two-handed weapon), favored enemy (humans +2)

TACTICS

Before Combat If Silam becomes aware of the PCs, he readies his axe and hides next to his bedroom door (DC 16 Perception check to notice). If undetected, he launches a surprise attack as soon as the first PC enters.

During Combat With his first strike, Silam attempts to sunder any heavy or medium armor worn by his opponent. He then follows up with Power Attack, focusing on one enemy at a time. If the PCs try to flank him, he uses Pushing Assault to beat them back, preferring to defend the narrow hallway just outside his room rather than let the PCs surround him.

Morale Mentally controlled by Vuelib, Silam cannot retreat, surrender, or offer quarter to defeated foes. Unless the PCs remove his *mindslave harness*, Silam fights ruthlessly and to the death. If they manage to take the *mindslave harness* from him and the woodcutter survives the ordeal, he immediately surrenders (see **Development** below).

STATISTICS

Str 18, **Dex** 13, **Con** 14, **Int** 8, **Wis** 10, **Cha** 12

Base Atk +3; **CMB** +7 (+9 sunder); **CMD** 18 (20 vs. sunder)

Feats Endurance, Improved Sunder, Power Attack, Pushing Assault^{APG}, Weapon Focus (battleaxe)

Skills Acrobatics +5, Climb +8, Craft (drawing) +4, Intimidate +5, Knowledge (geography) +3, Knowledge (local) +3, Knowledge (nature) +5, Perception +5, Profession (woodcutter) +5, Stealth +6, Survival +7, Swim +7

Languages Common

SQ assimilated, track +1, wild empathy +3

Other Gear masterwork chain shirt, dagger, battleaxe, handaxe, *mindslave harness*

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Assimilated (Su) Silam was once neutral good, but his alignment shifted to neutral evil due to the perfected version of the assimilation strain.

Contagious (Su) As the main carrier of the assimilation strain, Silam continues to expose those he touches or wounds in combat. *Assimilation Strain*: Disease—contact; *save* Fort DC 14; *onset* 1 day; *frequency* 1/day; *effect* 1d4 Cha damage (cannot reduce below 1), if more than 2 Cha damage, target must make a DC 14 Will save or change alignment one step towards evil and gain the Assimilated template (see Appendix); *cure* 2 consecutive saves.

Mindslave (Su) Silam's mind is currently overtaken by a *mindslave harness* (see Appendix), which looks like a splotchy black tumor growing across the back of his neck. This makes him an unwilling but obedient thrall of Vuelib, the xoraphond (in area **C13**).

Development: If the PCs free Silam from the *mindslave harness*, he breaks down into great, heaving sobs as the crushing weight of his terrible deeds overwhelms him. A DC 15 Diplomacy check helps to calm him and ease his pain, whereupon he claims an ooze-creature from Arvarenhode Manor spoke words into his head, controlling him and making him do terrible things. He explains this “Master infected him with a disease and made him spread it among the villagers of Holver’s Ferry. It also made him abduct people, taking them back to the monster’s lair in the catacombs below the ruin. He can sketch a simple map showing areas **C5**, **C7**, and **C8** (where he delivered his unfortunate victims). He can also give a general description of these areas, including their contents and guardians. Vuelib never allowed him inside area **C11**, but he knows the xoraphond resides somewhere beyond the strange barrier there.

B7. MOTHER ODDLE’S BEDROOM (CR 2)

This musty bedroom is modestly furnished with a large, canopy bed, a small desk and chair, a wardrobe, and a cold fireplace. A dusty rug covers most of the floor.

This bedroom belonged to the loving Mother Oddle, caretaker and owner of the orphanage for over 40 years. The smell of decay emanates from her ill-preserved, partially mummified corpse still lying on the bed in a threadbare nightgown. She died of natural causes 10 years ago, and Silam has kept her body neatly composed here ever since.

Treasure: Mother Oddle’s corpse still wears a thin, silver necklace studded with shimmering ornamental stones (worth 150 gp).

Hazard: Though Silam regularly visits and covers his mother with sweet-smelling flowers and herbs, a serious health hazard awaits anyone else venturing here. PCs who approach within five feet of the body risk contracting a lethal respiratory disease—the same infection which claimed Mother Oddle’s life so many years ago.

WHEEZING COUGH

CR 2

Type disease, inhaled; **Save** Fortitude DC 12

Onset 1d3 days; **Frequency** 1/day

Effect 1d2 Dex damage and 1d2 Con damage; **Cure** 2 consecutive saves



WHERE'S REXEL?

If the PCs return to the village after exploring the orphanage instead of continuing on to Arvarenhode Manor, they may find Rexel missing when they pay another visit to his treehouse (A16). The gnome's shop bears obvious signs of a fresh struggle as well as strange, adhesive spatters on the floor. This resulted from a battle with Vuelib's newest minion, an adherer manufactured from the remains of Sheriff Onessa Jerreth. Once Silam delivered Onessa to the xoraphond, Vuelib set about immediate experimentation and succeeded in an unusually sinister way. Rather than reanimate her as an undead, the xoraphond used jagladine nanites to transform her body, making her infinitely more pliable and useful. The process even allowed Vuelib to extract her memories and determine who else in Holver's Ferry might share her suspicions—which led to the targeting of her good friend, Rexel.

Vuelib then ordered Onessa to return to Holver's Ferry to subdue the inquisitive gnome before he could dig any deeper into the mysterious illness affecting the villagers. PCs investigating Rexel's shop who succeed on a DC 15 Perception check find that the gnome dropped an infused extract of *expeditious retreat* onto a particularly viscous blob of Onessa's adhesive secretions. After knocking the old gnome senseless, the ex-sheriff then carried Rexel to the xoraphond's lair under Arvarenhode Manor and tossed him into the prison pit (C12), where he awaits interrogation, experimentation, and eventual infection with a new assimilation strain the xoraphond is tailoring to target a gnome's biology.

PART THREE: ARVARENHODE MANOR

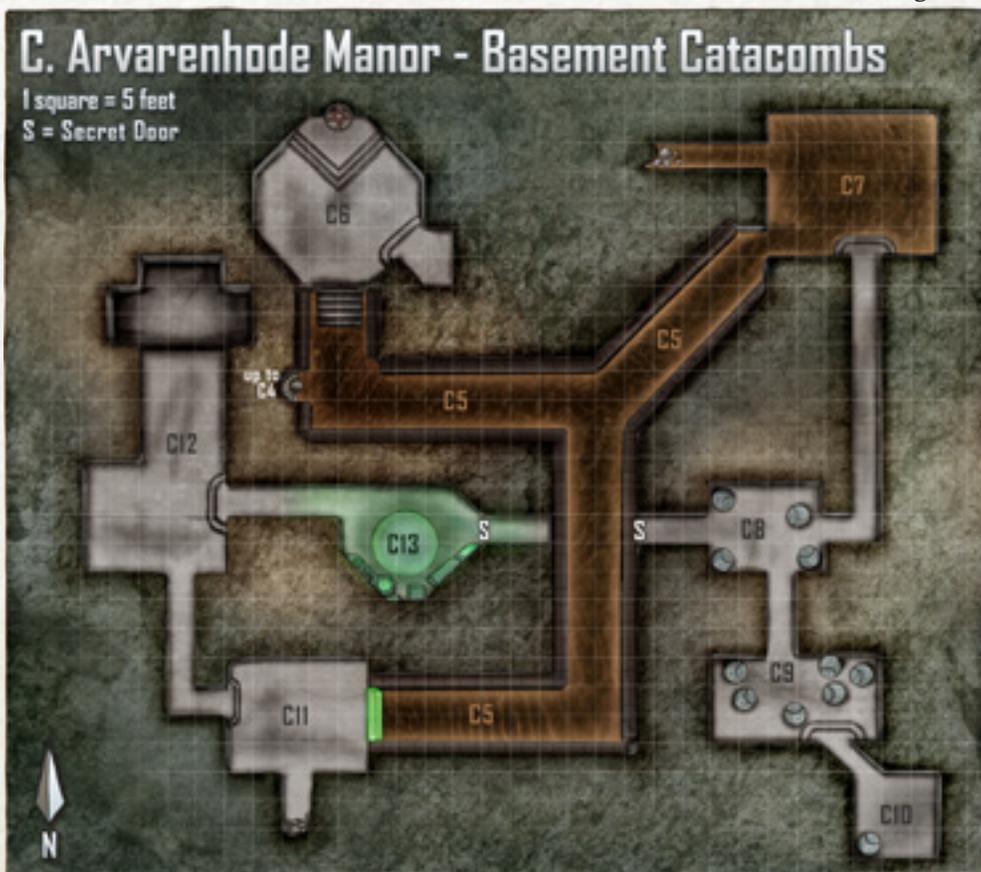
The ruins of Arvarenhode Manor lay another four miles east of Mother Oddle's orphanage along the same cart path from Holver's Ferry. The track eventually terminates at the foot of a narrow, 60-foot-long, stone bridge connecting the shore to a rocky island where the Arvarenhode family built their manor. Their line ended about 120 years ago, when their last scion abandoned good reason and called forth an unspeakably powerful entity from a terrible, alien realm. This invader laid waste to the manor's interior, consuming the family's horrified guards and servants, while carrying its shrieking conjurer to a dreadful fate in another dimension. Ever since, generations of woodcutters and honest folk have shunned the ruins, leading to all kinds of tales and legends as to what awaits inside.

When the PCs make their way across the bridge leading to the manor, read or paraphrase the following:

A long, narrow, stone bridge—barely wide enough for a single wagon—arches over Lake Shimmermere, connecting to a small island of rocks and windswept weeds. The jumbled ruins of a fortified manor house dominate the dreary islet, its upper floors and watchtowers having long since fallen into piles of rubble at its base. Vines, creepers, and prickly weeds cover the tumbled stones, atop which a dozen or so crows caw and flap.

UPPER RUINS

Arvarenhode Manor once had four upper stories, but these levels have long since collapsed, forming a ragged heap of impassable rubble above the partially intact rooms of the ground floor (C1–C4). The building itself was constructed from tightly-fitted blocks of light-gray stone sealed with white mortar. The floors are unadorned, but the ceilings still depict simple decorations with small, ceramic tiles—though many are now missing or lay shattered and crumbled about the floor. All the walls, floors, and ceilings show signs of age, weathering, and other, more ancient abuses, including cracks, gouges, and a few fist-sized holes. Small bits of rubble and debris—mostly broken stone and the ancient remains of worn, rotting furniture—litter each floor. Unless otherwise noted, all ceilings are 12 feet high and holes or empty windows allow natural light to permeate inside. The manor's doors are 3-inch-thick, oak panels which have swollen a bit over the years (hardness 4, hp 12, break DC 15).



C1. GREAT HALL (CR 3)

The northeast corner of this great hall has collapsed, leaving a gaping, rubble-strewn gap stretching from the floor to the 18-foot ceiling overhead, providing enough natural light for a moss-covered tree and swathes of grass to take root among the sunken flagstones underfoot. A 12-foot-wide, 6-foot-tall fireplace dominates the middle of the eastern wall, and two doors lead further west.

Despite the ruin of Arvarenhode Manor's upper stories, the rubble piled atop this large hall settled long ago and presents no imminent danger of further collapse.

Creature: The moss-covered tree in the center of the hall is actually a moss troll named Two-Cut Turrok. Vuelib enlisted the creature's aid with promises of fresh meat culled from the captive villagers Silam delivers from Holver's Ferry. Any failed experiments become food for Turrok, as well, and currently, the troll stands guard here, using his *tree shape* ability to mask his presence. However, a large group of intruders—like a party of PCs—appeals to his voracious appetite, and he readily attacks to gorge himself.

TWO-CUT TURROK CR 3

XP 800; hp 30
Moss troll (*Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary 3*)

C2. SERVANTS' QUARTERS

The remains of three skeletons draped in rotting leather armor lie heaped in this dusty, otherwise bare, room.

This small chamber once provided personal quarters for the manor's servants, but sits devoid of any furnishings now. The skeletons are those of three highwaymen who succumbed to their wounds following a violent clash with Onessa Jerreth and the Holver's Ferry militia a few years ago. The sheriff put an end to their raiding in a bloody battle along the cart path skirting Lake Shimmermere, but three survivors fled and sought shelter amid the manor ruins. Unfortunately, they couldn't outlive the winter cold, lack of food, or their lingering injuries.

Treasure: One of the skeletons still clutches a +1 *dagger* in its right hand, and its skull rests on a leather satchel which contains 58 gp, 13 sp, an onyx statuette of an Arvarenhode raven (worth 75 gp), and a *potion of invisibility*.

C3. KITCHEN

This room is empty except for a few scattered bits of rubble and a large fireplace in the southwest corner. Broken windows in the walls, as well as a handful of small cracks in the mortar, emit a chill breeze, creating an eerie whistle. Wooden doors lead east and north.

This kitchen is mostly undamaged, though the furniture, cookware, dishes, and utensils were all looted long ago. Silam sometimes sleeps here when he stays overnight after delivering an abducted villager to Vuelib. Turrok and the rest of the xoraphond's guardians know to leave this place alone.

C4. ARMORY (CR 2)

A half-eroded, wooden rack traces the edge of this room's northeast wall, next to the open door of a small, cobweb-filled storage closet. Near the middle of the south wall, a set of narrow stairs spirals up and down.

This room once served as a guardroom and armory, though the wooden rack no longer holds any arms or armor. Ascending the stairs reaches the rubble and debris of the upper story's collapse which completely blocks the way after a 15-foot climb. The spiraling descent, however, continues downward for 40 feet into the manor's catacombs.

Creature: A variant boilborn ooze called a plagueborn clings to the ceiling immediately inside the stairwell. Placed there by Vuelib as a quiet sentinel, it shares an empathic link with the xoraphond, capable of sharing general feelings of hunger and pain. If anyone other than Silam accesses the stairs, the plagueborn attacks, alerting Vuelib to the presence of intruders.

PLAGUEBORN BOILBORN CR 2

XP 600
hp 15 (*Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary 4*)

THE CATACOMBS

The Arvarenhode family included a series of catacombs beneath their manor to entomb deceased family members, honored servants, and loyal henchman. Expanded several times over the first six generations, they remained largely undisturbed until Lord Bertram Arvarenhode—the last of his line—ordered the construction of a unique shrine devoted to an alien god, as well as a series of chambers which he and his sinister allies used to entertain themselves with decadent feasts and dark, more deplorable, forms of merriment. The vaults suited Vuelib's tastes, as well, and, shortly after the xoraphond's arrival, it repurposed them for its own alien experiments.

Unless otherwise noted, the catacomb ceilings reach a height of 10 feet here, but the halls remain unlit. All doors are made of solid, 4-inch-thick stone (hardness 8, hp 60, break DC 28). Rats, cockroaches, tiny spiders, and harmless water snakes have infiltrated the partially-flooded chambers and hallways, but these creatures quickly scatter as soon as anyone approaches or illuminates their surroundings.

C5. BURIAL HALLS (CR 1 OR 4)

Murky, brown water fills this wide corridor, rising just short of several burial niches that run along the walls, each filled with old bones bound in decayed funeral wrappings. To the north, a short flight of stairs leads from the water to a massive stone door bearing strange carvings. The rest of the flooded hall splits into corridors running northeast and south.

The stagnant water in these catacombs slowly leaked down from torrential rainfalls and the surrounding lake. It averages a depth of 3 feet and makes the ground here difficult terrain. Each burial niche lies inset along the wall, roughly 4 feet off the ground.

Creatures: Since taking over these ruins, Vuelib has encouraged the growth of amoeba colonies in the flooded catacombs. Three locations (marked as C5 on the map) identify their presence. The two topmost locations represent amoeba swarms, and the southernmost represents a giant amoeba. These creatures move up and down the corridors, but use their blindsight to quickly converge on anyone moving within 30 feet of them.

Treasure: Grave robbers have already looted most of the burial niches along the walls, but a successful DC 20 Perception check and an hour of effort unearths a single piece of jewelry worth 2d6 x 10 gp, and further efforts may turn up a maximum of 200 gp worth of similar valuable items.

AMOEBAS (2) CR 1

XP 400 each

hp 9 each (*Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary 2*)

GIANT AMOEBAS CR 1

XP 400

hp 15 (*Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary 2*)

C6. THE UNSPEAKABLE SHRINE (CR 2)

A complicated, mechanical lock seals the stone doors leading to this chamber. Two keys exist which can open it—one in Silam Oddle's bedroom at the orphanage (B6), and another in the Arvarenhode sarcophagus (at C9). A DC 40 Disable Device check is otherwise required to unlock them, or the doors can also be smashed down with suitable tools and considerable effort (hardness 8, hp 120, break DC 28).

This octagon-shaped room has a low, 7-foot-high ceiling and a recessed alcove to the east. Along the far wall, on a pointed, three-step dais, a black stone statue of a hooded figure stands within a pristine pentagram. It clutches a black crown in one hand and a raven in the other. Perhaps more disturbing, a dancing, magical aura surrounds the figure, bathing the room in a soft, violet light, while a long tentacle protrudes from the figure's hood where its face would normally be.

PCs who succeed on a DC 30 Knowledge (religion) check identify the statue as a representation of the alien god Nyarlathotep—the obsession and ultimate folly of Lord Bertram Arvarenhode. The eastern alcove's floor, walls, and ceiling are painted jet black, just like the statue. Any creature stepping into this area receives a disturbing vision of a stark, desolate landscape surrounded by a distant ring of impossibly tall mountains—a depiction of the nightmare realm of Leng. One round later, the viewer must succeed on a DC 15 Will save or be shaken for 1d4 minutes. This alcove once functioned as a one-way portal to Leng, which Bertram Arvarenhode used to offer humanoid sacrifices to the denizens on the other side in exchange for occult knowledge.

Creature: On the night Lord Bertram was abducted, the portal in the eastern alcove temporarily allowed two-way access and an interdimensional horror crossed over from

Leng to visit ruin upon the entire manor. Eventually, it skinned its conjurer alive before dragging him back through the portal. The otherworldly energies which flooded the chamber then combined with a fragment of Bertram's tortured soul, animating his skin, and transforming it into an undead creature known as a shredskin. This wretched creature now seeks to escape the shrine, having spent more than a century locked inside. It attacks anyone venturing here in an attempt to enshroud and control a new body before escaping the manor, but only animates if someone enters the alcove where Bertram died. His shredskin is immune to the effects of the alcove, but anyone else who enters the area is effectively blinded and dazed for 1 round while they receive the vision (no save), but this effect doesn't recur unless a person leaves and then re-enters.

Treasure: Lord Bertram also left a few items of value here. Within the east alcove, a brittle leather bag holds: a *potion of bull's strength*, a *potion of lesser restoration*, a *potion of remove disease*, a *scroll of speak with dead*, *universal solvent*, and a *+1 throwing axe*.

SHREDSKIN CR 2

XP 600

hp 22 (*Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary 4*)

C7. FLOODED CHAMBER (CR 1)

Mud and filthy water have pooled within this sunken chamber, covering its entire floor and those of the western exits. A small dais provides firmer footing to the south, rising from the water into a long, dark passageway lined with empty torch sconces.

Once used as a gathering hall for the decadent rites of Lord Arvarenhode, this chamber now lies filled with mud and filthy water which runs four-feet-deep. As a result, the entire room is considered difficult terrain.

Creature: An aggressive choker named Gesstak climbed its way into the catacombs several years ago, and now lairs in the rubble-filled passageway extending from the room's northwest corner. Though Gesstak endures by eating water snakes, rats, and insects, he vastly prefers more succulent prey and leaves the catacombs at night to hunt in the forest. So far, Vuelib has tolerated and bargained with the choker rather than force it from the catacombs. In truth, the xoraphond feels a relative kinship with Gesstak's aberrant mind, and hopes to study the creature's physiology more fully after assimilating Holver's Ferry.

Treasure: Over the years, Gesstak has collected many baubles from victims who sought shelter at the ruined manor or wandered alone in the nearby forest. He stacked most of these possessions in the muddy rubble of the northernmost passage as a display to lure even more would-be grave robbers his way. They include: a jeweled scepter (worth 150 gp), a masterwork chain shirt, a *+1 light steel shield*, a scroll case containing a *scroll of knock*, a teak box of scented candles (worth 35 gp), five small garnets (worth 15 gp each), 137 gp, 62 sp, and 38 cp.

GESSTAK

CR 2

XP 600

Choker (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary*)

hp 16

TACTICS

During Combat Gesstak ambushes prey from the shadows (DC 23 Perception check to notice), striking out with his long reach to grab, strangle, and constrict his opponents.

Morale Gesstak owes no true loyalty to Vuelib and flees if reduced to less than 5 hit points.

C8. WARRIORS' CRYPT

This chamber's walls are lined with small burial vaults spaced six inches apart. Most are either smashed or pried open, spilling their ash gray contents onto the floor. Four, upright sarcophagi also stand here, each one intricately carved to resemble a muscular human figure wearing archaic armor. Passageways lead east, west, and south.

This chamber once housed the remains of honored guard captains of Arvarenhode Manor—the most distinguished men-at-arms who served the family's interests. All four of the sarcophagi have had their seals broken and now stand empty. Even the physical remains of those laid to rest here were desecrated long ago. The western exit leads to a secret door (DC 20 Perception check to notice), which Vuelib sometimes uses to visit the crypts and check on his growing farm of mindslaver mold (at C10).

C9. FAMILY CRYPT (CR 2)

This long burial chamber contains six stone sarcophagi—three carved to resemble smiling maidens, two bearing the likenesses of noble young men, and a sixth depicting a naked man with a visage caught in extreme horror and revulsion.

This burial chamber once held the ancestors of the Arvarenhode family. While the first five sarcophagi were looted long ago, the sixth—with the image of the naked man—remains sealed. It radiates a strong aura of evil and bears a series of complicated dials and mechanisms reinforced with an *arcane lock* (requiring a DC 30 Disable Device check to bypass).

Creatures: Standing guard among the sarcophagi are three plague zombies—all recent experiments which the xoraphond Vuelib created by transforming captives from Holver's Ferry in the interests of providing an alternative means for spreading the assimilation virus. He hopes to release this newly-tailored scourge on the surrounding region in the coming days. The zombies mindlessly attack any creatures other than Vuelib who venture here.

Treasure: The sealed sarcophagus holds the skeletal remains of an Arvarenhode patriarch who was murdered by his kin. In one hand, the skeleton clutches a large key carved from a piece of black granite marked with the symbol of a flying raven. A PC who succeeds on a DC 15 Knowledge (local

or nobility) check identifies the symbol as a heraldic device of the Arvarenhode family. The key itself unlocks the double-doors to the Unspeakable Shrine (C6). The skeleton's other hand also holds a *wand of burning hands* (CL 3rd, 5 charges). Its missing finger—found at the bottom of the sarcophagus—wears a *ring of protection +1*.

PLAGUE ZOMBIES (3)

CR 1/2

XP 200 each

Variant zombie (*Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary*)

hp 12 each

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Death Burst (Ex) When a plague zombie dies, it explodes in a burst of decay. All creatures adjacent to it are exposed to its plague as if struck by a slam attack and must make a Fortitude save or contract the assimilation strain.

Disease (Su) The slam attacks of Vuelib's plague zombies carry the assimilation strain. *Assimilation Strain: Slam*—contact; *save* Fort DC 16; *onset* 1 day; *frequency* 1/day; *effect* 1d4 Cha damage (cannot reduce below 1), if more than 2 Cha damage, target must make a DC 16 Will save or change alignment one step towards evil and gain the Assimilated special quality (see Appendix); *cure* 2 consecutive saves.

Susceptible to Slashing Damage (Ex) A plague zombie does not gain DR 5/slashing like a normal zombie.

C10. MAIN CRYPT (CR 3)

A raised hallway leads to this perfectly square chamber where a single, stone sarcophagus lies upon the floor, draped in sheets of filthy green fungus.

Creatures: This chamber hosts one of the few creatures to accompany Vuelib on his interplanetary journey. Originally brought in a container of alien spores, a mindslaver mold now grows inside this room's sarcophagus, carefully maintained, cultivated, and controlled by the xoraphond. Vuelib keeps the creature confined rather than letting it roam free, but a DC 20 Strength check is sufficient to lift the lid sealing it inside. The mold constantly whispers in Aklo as it attempts to convince others to release it, but immediately seeks to attack and infest anyone doing so.

The mindslaver mold—and the sheets of green fungus Vuelib harvests from it—serve a vital purpose in the xoraphond's plans for Holver's Ferry. While Vuelib has the means to infect victims with a perfected assimilation strain, he still relies on the mold as a necessary ingredient in the crafting of *mindslave harnesses* (see Appendix) to prepare them for an additional step in 'evolution'—a process designed to transform native populations into a superior breed of utterly loyal shocktroops known as klaven—a fate intended for Silam once Vuelib's jagladine masters arrive. The mindslaver mold resents being used in this fashion, but the jagladine have long since subjugated its species, and the mold has little chance of escaping without assistance.

MINDSLAVER MOLD**CR 3**

XP 800

hp 30 (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary 4*)**C11. OOZE FARM AND GUARDIAN WALL (CR 2)**

A luminescent-green, gelatinous barrier blocks the end of the water-filled hallway here, separating it from a half-seen chamber beyond. Debris, of a type indeterminable through the translucent substance, lies scattered across the chamber's floor.

The gelatinous membrane is a half-inch-thick. If inspected closely, PCs who succeed on a DC 18 Perception check observe tiny black dots moving through the strange substance. The barrier itself is immune to all forms of energy, magical effects, and physical damage. If touched or prodded with an object, the barrier doesn't impede passage. It does, however, leave behind a clear, quick-drying residue on those who push through it, and then expands to reseal the wall behind them.

Hazard: The gelatinous barrier stems from a particularly useful form of jagladine biotechnology, and acts as both an environmental seal and a passive security system, capable of telepathically alerting the alien apparatus controlled by Vuelib (at **C13**) of anyone passing through it. In addition, any creature crossing the barrier also acquires a coating of nanites contained in the residue, which quickly integrate into any living creature's body. These nanites remain active for up to one year, and though they cause no physical harm, they imprint a genetic marker designed to give the jagladine and their servants the ability to identify and track them as potential targets for future abduction and experimentation (as described in the first adventure of the *Legendary Planet Adventure Path, To Worlds Unknown*).

Once inside the chamber, read or paraphrase the following:

A thick layer of crusty, pale-orange slime covers the floor of this room, and the air is filled with an odor of rotting vegetation and tar. A luminescent-green barrier seals off the water-filled hallway to the east, and another, drier passage leads west.

The slime covering this room's floor increases the difficulty of Acrobatics checks by 5. Anyone attempting to move more than half-speed through this area is also required to make a DC 15 Acrobatics check or fall prone. The slime is an organic ooze farm, another marvel of the jagladine technology to aid Vuelib's mission. Once per month, the farm can birth a giant amoeba, which the xorphond may automatically befriend with its ooze empathy ability. Vuelib has already created several of these monsters to serve as guardians and has released most of them (and their amoeba swarm progeny) into the flooded catacombs (**C5**) and Lake Shimmermere.

The ooze farm is due to birth another giant amoeba in 12 days, and Vuelib plans on strengthening it by allowing it to feed on several of the villagers Silam helped abduct from Holver's Ferry. If PCs examine the slime, they may discover lumps of darker material amid the goo—which a DC 15 Heal check reveals as evidence of human remains from prior victims. Touching an

open flame to the slime causes the entire ooze farm to catch fire and evaporate into a harmless, orange mist in just 6 rounds, effectively destroying it and the developing amoeba.

Creatures: A unique darkwood cobra guards this approach to Vuelib's inner sanctum. It currently hides among the dark lumps of human remains beneath the orange slime, but moves to attack any creature which enters the chamber unless commanded otherwise by Vuelib, easily slithering through the slime.

DARKWOOD COBRA**CR 2**

XP 600

Variant iron cobra (*Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary*)

hp 15

TACTICS

During Combat The cobra can use its full swim speed to move through the slime without penalty. It attempts to bite and poison as many intruders as possible.

Morale The cobra keeps fighting until destroyed.

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Poison (Ex) Vuelib filled the cobra's hidden reservoir with a paralytic toxin manufactured by the jagladine to subdue victims rather than kill them. *Paralytic toxin:* Bite—injury; save Fort DC 12; frequency 1/round for 6 rounds; effect 1 Wis damage and paralyzed for 1 round; cure 1 save.

C12. FEEDING CHAMBER AND PRISON PIT (CR 3)

This large room includes an open area to the south next to a raised dais and a passageway leading east. Further north, the floor drops away into a wide pit along the back wall. Between the open area and the pit, several strands of a thick, glue-like substance stretch from floor-to-ceiling and wall-to-wall, creating a maze of ropes to navigate.

Originally a dig-site for expanding the catacombs to another level, Vuelib repurposed this room as a holding pen for the villagers which Silam abducted from Holver's Ferry. Seven townsfolk (N male and female commoners 1) reside in the pit, most of them drugged and weakened from lack of food, already demoralized and resigned to their fate. When the PCs arrive, the xorphond's most recent captive—Rexel the Apothecary—hangs suspended from the sticky strands above the pit. Bruised and wounded, but still conscious, he's in dire need of rescue from his current tormentor.

Creatures: Onessa Jerreth, now transformed through Vuelib's experiments into a murderous adherer, resides here, slowly savoring and feeding on Rexel one bite at a time. Though most of Vuelib's surgical and biochemical experiments have failed, Onessa represents his greatest breakthrough in developing new transformation techniques for human captives. The xorphond treats the slime-covered adherer as a prized pet, far more dangerous and controllable than Silam, its amoeba guardians, or even the plague zombies. Unfortunately, the process also sacrificed most of Onessa's sanity and she's forgotten all traces of her former humanity. She immediately attacks the PCs when they arrive, ready to fight and die for her new master.

ONESSA JERRETH

CR 3

XP 800

Assimilated adherer (*Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary 3*)

hp 30

TACTICS

During Combat Onessa uses the sticky strands around the room to her advantage, risking attacks of opportunity to bull rush or reposition opponents into them. If successful, victims of these attacks must succeed on a DC 14 Reflex save or find themselves entangled in the square where the maneuver ends (as a tanglefoot bag). Entangled creatures may attempt a DC 17 Strength check to break free of the strands, but doing so provokes an attack of opportunity. Onessa may also use this strategy to push opponents into the 15-foot pit at the north end of the room, though victims may voluntarily choose to be entangled by the adhesive strands above it rather than take falling damage.

Morale Onessa fights to the death.

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Assimilated (Su) Onessa was once lawful good, but her alignment shifted to lawful evil due to the perfected version of the assimilation strain.

Malign Influence (Su) An assimilated creature takes a –4 penalty on all Fortitude and Will saving throws against mind-affecting effects and technologies wielded by the jagladine or their servants, as the co-habiting nanites force the creature’s body and mind to acquiesce to such commands. When an infected creature makes an ability check or opposed skill check to resist a Charisma-based ability or effect initiated by such individuals, the infected creature must roll twice and take the lowest result.

REXEL THE APOTHECARY

CR 3

XP 800

hp 25, currently 6 (see **A16**)

Development: If rescued, Rexel relates the horror of Onessa’s attack. After she knocked him unconscious, he awoke here several hours ago and was then visited by a strange, semi-transparent ooze which spoke to him telepathically. It explained he should be honored to be the first among his kind to undergo assimilation and transformation into a willing servant for its masters. Though not a particularly powerful combatant, Rexel assists the PCs however he can with his abilities and knowledge when they confront the xoraphond. Unfortunately, he has none of his equipment, extracts, or bombs unless the PCs thought to bring such items with them from his treehouse.



C13. ALIEN LABORATORY (CR 4)

The walls to the south of this chamber angle inward, dominated by a domed apparatus roughly 11 feet in diameter and 6 feet tall. The weird device is composed of slimy, pale-violet stalks of flesh studded with scores of flexible, metallic-looking, fungal growths which writhe and interact like mechanical gears. Sixteen glass containers—each about twelve inches in diameter—connect to the apparatus through gurgling hoses, vibrating tubes, and sparking metal wires. Each holds a bubbling froth of pink slurry that reeks of potent chemicals. The entire machine shakes and shudders, emitting a gurgling whimper every few seconds as a sickly, green radiance glows from within.

This alien laboratory belongs to the xoraphond, Vuelib, who works tirelessly here to tailor the assimilation strain’s effects on the region’s local inhabitants, all while relying on the alien apparatus in the center of the room to facilitate much of that work. The ghastly vivisections Vuelib performs on abducted victims typically involves this machine, as well as the removal of their blood and organs for physiological analysis and various chemical washes to explore possible organic applications which the apparatus can provide. Vuelib’s ‘successes’ in these awful endeavors have resulted in the plague zombies (at **C9**), Onessa Jerreth’s transformation

into an adherer (at C12), and the perfection of an assimilation strain for making humanity vulnerable to a jagladine invasion of their homeworld.

Mechanically, the alien apparatus functions as an alchemy lab and medical lab which can automatically generate and store a maximum of 20 charges of power each day (*Pathfinder RPG Technology Guide*). However, use of the lab to manufacture alchemical or pharmaceutical substances requires a successful DC 30 Knowledge (engineering) check to work out how to physically interface with the construct's bio-organic mechanisms, and a willing or coerced creature to sample its creations to determine their effects.

The alien apparatus also magnifies Vuelib's telepathic influence, particularly over those affected by the assimilation strain or a *mindslave harness*. As a grown piece of jagladine technology with the direct purpose for using nanites to control other creatures, it allows Vuelib to generate a *daze* effect (DC 11, 1 charge) or *enthrall* (DC 13, 2 charges) as a standard action on all assimilated creatures within 30 feet of the device. It also serves as a long-range interface for telepathically conversing with assimilated creatures up to 10 miles away, enabling Vuelib to remotely speak with affected townsfolk in Holver's Ferry like the priests of Silverstone Hall or Lorgg's militia. Lastly, once per day the device can also generate a *suggestion* effect (DC 15, 3 charges) to influence a single, attuned victim wearing a *mindslave harness* within 10 miles—an effect Vuelib has used to force Silam into carrying out various tasks beyond Arvarenhode Manor.

Creature: Vuelib resides in this laboratory, busily manipulating the strange gears of the apparatus while intently studying the contents of its glass containers. If aware of the PCs' approach, the xoraphond hides behind the alien apparatus, waiting to observe the PCs, and then directing it to delay them with an *enthrall* effect if the machine senses any victims of the assimilation strain among them. During this time, and even while hiding, Vuelib speaks with the PCs telepathically, his words tumbling through their minds with an alien dispassion: "You must be gifted indeed to overcome so many challenges, and so many of our minions. That makes you excellent candidates for assimilation and transformation. You will become klaven and the jagladine will be pleased." The xoraphond attacks soon after, eager to harvest the PCs for more strenuous experimentation since they've proven so resilient in penetrating the alien's lair.

VUELIB

CR 3

XP 800

Xoraphond (see page 30)

hp 42

TACTICS

During Combat Initially, Vuelib uses a full-round action to target PCs with its anesthetizing touch, following up with an attempt to infect them with the assimilation strain so the apparatus can affect them. If dealt 10 points of damage or more with a single attack, however, the xoraphond abandons this strategy and manifests all three of its pseudopods to beat back its attackers with coordinated slam attacks. Against weakened opponents, it switches to nonlethal damage in an effort to subdue more victims for experimentation.

Morale It never occurs to Vuelib that it might be overmatched. Even if grievously wounded, the xoraphond keeps fighting.

Development: Vuelib has no interest in killing the PCs, especially since it regards them as excellent candidates for assimilation and eventual transformation into new servants for the jagladine. As a result, Vuelib prefers to incapacitate opponents so it can use them to spread the assimilation strain. If the xoraphond somehow manages to incapacitate the entire party, it infects each PC with the disease, strips them of their gear, and then drags them into the pit (at C12). Vuelib then continues its mission and pays little heed to the PCs unless they escape and attack the xoraphond again. Fully consumed with fulfilling its mission, Vuelib relies on the same tactics in subsequent battles.

Treasure: If the PCs examine the alien apparatus and succeed on a DC 18 Perception check, they notice a secret compartment hidden in the creases of the machine's slimy flesh. The interior contains five *potions of lesser restoration*, one dose of *cardioamp* (*Pathfinder RPG Technology Guide*), five doses of *vive* (*Pathfinder RPG Technology Guide*), and a Small-sized +1 *keen dagger* which Vuelib uses to dissect captives.

CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

If the PCs fail to defeat Vuelib, the xoraphond continues its mission to assimilate the inhabitants of the PCs' homeworld. It only takes two weeks to infect the remaining citizens of Holver's Ferry. After that, the xoraphond moves on to another village and repeats the process until its jagladine masters arrive to give it new orders. If the PCs manage to defeat Vuelib and destroy the alien apparatus, award them a 1,200 XP story award. While the jagladine threat may continue to loom over the PCs' homeworld, the resulting setback delays their invasion plans. The next adventure in the *Legendary Worlds* campaign setting, *To Worlds Unknown*, has information and advice on how to further integrate the PCs into an epic saga involving this much larger alien threat.

ALIEN TECHNOLOGY

This adventure includes a new, alien device called a *mindslave harness*, which the PCs may discover as they investigate the assimilation strain.

MINDSLAVE HARNESS

Price 900 gp

CONSTRUCTION

Requirements Craft Pharmaceutical, medical lab, nanotech lab

Craft DC 30; **Cost** 450 gp

DESCRIPTION

This gray-green bio-mass includes several fungal growths, writhing and coiling as if seeking to latch onto something. It has the viscous texture of wet clay and a strong, oily scent. Created from patches of mindslaver mold (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary 4*), a *mindslave harness* is a manufactured product of jagladine bio-technology, a nanite-infused device designed to monitor, influence, and communicate with sentient creatures affected by an assimilation strain—essentially turning them into useful, subservient thralls.

When a *mindslave harness* first comes into contact with a sleeping or otherwise helpless, living creature infected with an assimilation strain, it imposes its will on the subject, seeking to merge with them as an alien graft—usually near the back of the neck for easier access to a creature’s brain stem and spinal column. Victims of this targeted attack must succeed on a DC 16 Will save to prevent the *mindslave harness* from integrating with their physiology, and the traumatic backlash of this neurological rejection causes the device to harmlessly self-destruct.

If, however, a targeted victim fails the Will save, a *mindslave harness* attaches to the creature’s flesh, appearing as a splotchy, blackened tumor across the back and neck. At this stage, the victim’s mind becomes more accessible to the jagladine and their mind-control devices, enabling them to monitor such victims within a 10-mile radius as a *status* effect. In addition, any jagladine device or creature may extend their telepathic communication by the same distance, using such a link once per day to remotely assault victims with a targeted, mind-affecting spell of 3rd level or lower. Lastly, the *mindslave harness* also prolongs the contagious special quality of the Assimilated template (see below), extending a creature’s ability to spread a perfected assimilation strain to 1 month.

A *mindslave harness*’s attachment can only be broken by one of the following methods:

- By mental command of a jagladine.
- A *remove disease* spell, followed by *restoration*.
- A self-inflicted (or administered) wound to cut away the mindslave harness. This automatically inflicts a critical wound and 2 points of permanent Cha drain.
- Ten days after falling victim to a *mindslave harness*, thralls may attempt another DC 14 Will save to free themselves from the device. If unsuccessful, the

DC slowly increases by 1 for each daily Will save thereafter until it reaches DC 24. If a thrall succeeds at any of these Will saves, the *mindslave harness* is immediately expelled from its body, which destroys the device. If they fail each of these attempts, the mindslave harness permanently bonds with its host.

BESTIARY

This adventure includes a new alien threat known as the xoraphond, an insidious invader which serves as the primary antagonist—and carrier—of the assimilation strain.

Xoraphond

This blob of translucent flesh surges forward, stretching and reshaping its body to manifest a hood-like face and three, long pseudopods covered in foul-smelling slime.

XORAPHOND

CR 3

XP 800

NE Small aberration

Init +7; **Senses** all-around vision, darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +11

DEFENSE

AC 16, touch 14, flat-footed 13 (+3 Dex, +2 natural, +1 size)

hp 28 (3d8+15)

Fort +6, **Ref** +4, **Will** +4

Defensive Abilities amorphous; **DR** 5/bludgeoning; **Immune** cold, critical hits, precision damage

Weaknesses vulnerable to sonic attacks

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft., climb 20 ft., swim 20 ft.

Melee 3 slams +6 (1d4+1) or anesthetizing touch +6 (special)

Special Attacks disease

STATISTICS

Str 12, **Dex** 17, **Con** 20, **Int** 12, **Wis** 13, **Cha** 11

Base Atk +2; **CMB** +2; **CMD** 15 (can’t be tripped)

Feats Improved Initiative, Weapon Finesse

Skills Climb +15, Escape Artist +11, Heal +4, Knowledge (dungeoneering) +7, Knowledge (engineering) +7, Perception +11, Stealth +17, Survival +5, Swim +15; **Racial Modifiers** +4 Escape Artist, +4 Perception, +4 Stealth

Languages Aklo (cannot speak); telepathy (30 ft.)

SQ ooze empathy

ECOLOGY

Environment any aquatic, land, or underground

Organization solitary, pair, scouting party (3–8), or invasion (9–16)

Treasure standard (including technological gear)

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Anesthetizing Touch (Ex) As a standard action, a xoraphond may execute a single melee touch attack to deliver an anesthetizing slime to a potential victim. If successful, the slime paralyzes the target for one round—long enough for a xoraphond to infect a creature with its chosen disease (see below). A creature which succeeds at a DC 15 Fortitude save negates this effect. This is a poison effect and the save DC is Constitution-based.

Disease (Ex) The xoraphond's alien masters engineered it to carry a variety of nanite-based diseases and retroviruses, all designed to support its mission of infecting, weakening, and eventually assimilating a world's sentient population. As a full-round action, a xoraphond can transmit a disease carried in its aberrant flesh to a helpless creature by extending a pseudopod into any orifice or open wound. Those victimized by this assault can resist the resulting infection with a successful DC 16 Fortitude save. Otherwise, the effects of the disease vary according to the exact infection it carries. Some examples are given below:

Assimilation Strain: Anesthetizing touch—contact; *save* Fort DC 16; *onset* 1 day; *frequency* 1/day; *effect* 1d4 Cha damage (cannot reduce below 1), if more than 2 Cha damage, target must make a DC 16 Will save or change alignment one step towards evil and gain the Assimilated template (see below); *cure* 2 consecutive saves.

Ocluding Strain: Anesthetizing touch—contact; *save* Fort DC 16; *onset* immediate; *frequency* 1/day; *effect* 1d4 Str damage (cannot reduce below 1), if more than 2 Str damage, target must make an additional Fort save or be permanently blinded; *cure* 2 consecutive saves.

Submission Strain: Anesthetizing touch—contact; *save* Fort DC 16; *onset* 1 day; *frequency* 1/day; *effect* 1d4 Wisdom damage (cannot reduce below 1), if more than 2 Wis damage, target must make a DC 16 Will save or suffer an additional 1d6 points of nonlethal damage; *cure* 2 consecutive saves.

Wasting Strain: Disease—Anesthetizing touch; *save* Fort DC 16; *onset* 1 day; *frequency* 1/day; *effect* 1d4 Con damage, target must make a second Fort save or 1 point of the damage is drain instead; *cure* 2 consecutive saves.

A xoraphond automatically knows when it has successfully infected a creature, but can carry only one disease at a time. Each day after resting for 24 hours, a xoraphond may organically alter its disease to a different strain. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Ooze Empathy (Ex) As a standard action, a xoraphond can improve the attitudes of oozes with a Diplomacy check, similar to a druid's wild empathy ability. The xoraphond rolls 1d20 and adds its HD and Charisma modifier to determine the empathy check result. Oozes typically have a starting attitude of Indifferent towards xoraphonds. To use this ability, the xoraphond and ooze must be within 30 feet and capable of studying one another.

Vulnerable to Sonic Attacks

(Ex) Xoraphonds are vulnerable to sonic attacks and take half again as much damage (+50%) from such attacks. If a xoraphond takes sonic damage it must succeed on a Fortitude save (DC equal to the damage taken) or become dazed for 1 round.

One of many artificially engineered creatures manufactured by the jagladine, xoraphonds are designed to spread nanite viruses, particularly a dreaded assimilation strain intended to convert sentient creatures into new recruits for the jagladine war effort. This virus weakens the minds of sentient creatures, remapping and repurposing their brains for alien influence. When the jagladine develop an interest in assimilating inhabitants of a new world, they often dispatch an invading force of xoraphonds, directing them to work independently and establish a stronghold from which to begin their mission of assimilation. A xoraphond's resilience, ability to survive in hostile environments, and cautious, inquisitive nature makes it an exceptional scout and infiltrator.

Xoraphonds typically carry out their missions by abducting a hardy specimen from the local population, often using jagladine biotechnology to turn the creature into a willing thrall, before infecting it with the assimilation strain. The xoraphonds then direct such thralls to infect their own kind. As the virus spreads, the xoraphonds study the new world and its other inhabitants, compiling a vast amount of data for their jagladine masters, while reacting swiftly to protect themselves and their missions—even directing thralls to slay interlopers and sow discord in their communities to hide their presence. Unhindered by emotion, xoraphonds never hesitate to sacrifice thralls or any of their infected flock to ensure their survival and the success of their missions.



Creatures infected by a xoraphond's assimilation strain carry thousands of microscopic tracker-nanites, dooming them to capture and experimentation by the sadistic jagladine in their alien bio-labs. There, the jagladine perform further tests on a candidate's viability, before subjecting them to unspeakable procedures involving surgery, chemical infusion, radiation exposure, and psychological reconditioning. Most of these candidates are eventually transformed into a special breed of shocktroop called klaven, however, the jagladine produce an array of other creatures from these vile assimilations, including new xoraphonds.

A newborn xoraphond oozes forth from its birthing vat completely autonomous and fully functional. Though xoraphonds are amorphous and can flatten themselves to form a bewildering number of forms, most prefer to remain in a roughly oval shape, about 4 feet in diameter and 3-1/2 feet tall. Xoraphonds weigh around 90 pounds.

ASSIMILATED TEMPLATE (+0 CR)

Assimilated is an acquired template which can be applied to any animal, humanoid, or monstrous humanoid that is not immune to disease, representing an infection with a perfected form of an assimilation strain tailored to its specific species. It causes creatures to become docile and compliant to the jagladine and those who carry certain technological devices designed to force their will upon other creatures. Assimilated creatures often feel an affinity for one another, drawn together in common cause for the telepathic direction of their jagladine masters.

Weaknesses: An assimilated creature gains the following weakness:

Malign Influence (Su): An assimilated creature takes a -4 penalty on all Fortitude and Will saving throws against mind-affecting effects and technologies wielded by the jagladine or their servants as the co-habiting nanites force the creature's body and mind to acquiesce to such commands. When an infected creature makes an ability check or opposed skill check to resist a Charisma-based ability or effect initiated by such individuals, the infected creature must roll twice and take the lowest result.

Special Qualities: An assimilated creature gains the following special qualities:

Assimilated (Su): Due to the remapping of its personality, an assimilated creature with an Intelligence score greater than 2 has its alignment shifted one step towards evil each time it suffers more than 2 points of Charisma damage on a failed Fortitude save while resisting the assimilation strain. This has no effect with respect to law versus chaos. Only a *cleanse*, *greater restoration*, *heal*, *limited wish*, *miracle*, or *wish* can restore a creature's former alignment, and the individual resists such efforts as if affected by a *helm of opposite alignment*. If a character of a class with an alignment requirement is affected, an *atonement* spell is needed as well. Once a creature

becomes evil, the assimilation virus causes no further Charisma ability damage and the creature may recover such damage, as normal.

Contagious (Su): During the first 24 hours of a creature's infection with the assimilation strain, others coming into close contact may also contract the disease, as well (DC 14 Fortitude negates). A creature directly exposed to an infected victim's bodily fluids, such as sharing intimate contact, using a Heal check to deliver first aid or treat deadly wounds on an infected creature, or touching or being touched by an infected creature taking bleed damage, takes a -2 penalty on this saving throw. The duration required for exposure is subject to GM discretion, but creatures in close proximity to an infected creature who take precautions to avoid contact or filter their breathing receive a +2 circumstance bonus on their saving throw to avoid contracting the disease.

Assimilation Strain—disease; *type* contact; *save* Fortitude DC 14; *onset* 1 day; *frequency* 1/day; *effect* 1d4 Charisma damage (cannot reduce below 1), if more than 2 Cha damage, target must make a DC 14 Will save or change alignment one step towards evil and gain the Assimilated template; *cure* 2 consecutive saves.



MADDENED TEMPLATE (+0 CR)

Maddened is an acquired template which can be applied to any animal, humanoid, or monstrous humanoid that is not immune to disease, representing an infection with a tainted or imperfect version of an assimilation strain. Rather than causing creatures to become docile and compliant, it plays havoc with their emotions, magnifying them in extreme ways depending upon external stimuli and varying wildly between them as the virus runs its course. Sometimes, it drives them into a deep, suicidal depression, posing a risk to their own well-being. For others, it inflames their emotions and aggressive impulses, causing them to become feral, bloodthirsty, and bestial in their behavior, turning upon their non-infected friends and relatives to assault them and drive them mad, too. When in this state, maddened creatures can sometimes maintain a tenuous mob mentality, though it always teeters on the brink of disintegrating into an orgy of cannibalistic rage and violence, even against one another.

AL: Due to only a partial remapping of the victim's personality, a maddened creature with an Intelligence score greater than 2 only has its alignment shifted one step towards evil when it acquires the Maddened template. This has no effect with respect to law versus chaos. Only a *greater restoration*, *miracle*, or *wish* can restore a creature's former alignment, and the individual resists such efforts as if affected by a *helm of opposite alignment*. If a character of a class with an alignment requirement is affected, an *atonement* spell is needed as well.

Saves: As the base creature, but a maddened creature gains a +1 bonus on saving throws against mind-affecting effects for every 2 points of Charisma damage taken from the virus. On saves against effects that cause confusion or insanity, the creature takes an equivalent penalty rather than gaining a bonus.

Special Attacks: A maddened creature retains any special attacks of the base creature. In addition, it gains the following special attacks while enraged:

Bloodthirsty (Ex): A maddened creature gains a +1 morale bonus on attack and damage rolls against creatures taking bleed damage.

Savagery (Ex): A maddened creature gains a +2 morale bonus on combat maneuver checks made to bull rush, drag, or overrun.

Special Qualities: A maddened creature gains the following special qualities:

Assimilation Madness (Su): A maddened creature is afflicted with a corrupted version of the assimilation strain virus. When exposed to the tainted virus, a creature becomes infected if it fails a DC 14 Fortitude save. This causes no ill effects for the first 24 hours, during which the creature is contagious (as described above). After 24 hours, the afflicted creature is no longer contagious but begins showing symptoms. Until the disease is cured, the afflicted creature is subject to bouts of maddened behavior when under stress (see **Assimilation Madness** sidebar on page 3), in addition to the usual effects of the disease. The signs of the illness are difficult to detect, requiring a DC 20 Heal check during the disease's onset period, reduced to DC 15 once symptoms begin to manifest.

Contagious (Su): During the first 24 hours of a creature's infection with a flawed assimilation strain, others coming into close contact with the infected creature may contract the disease, as well (DC 14 Fortitude negates). A creature directly exposed to the infected creature's bodily fluids, such as sharing intimate contact, using a Heal check to deliver first aid or treat deadly wounds on an infected creature, or touching or being touched by an infected creature taking bleed damage, takes a -2 penalty on this saving throw. The duration required for exposure is subject to GM discretion, but creatures in close proximity to an infected creature who take precautions to avoid contact or filter their breathing receive a +2 circumstance bonus on their saving throw to avoid contracting the disease.

Assimilation Strain—disease; type contact; *save* Fortitude DC 14; *onset* 1 day; *frequency* 1/day; *effect* 1d2 Con and 1d2 Cha damage, if more than 2 Cha damage, target must make a DC 14 Will save or gain the Maddened template; *cure* 2 consecutive saves.

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