RAGING SWAN PRESS VILLAGE BACKDROP: STARSPUN HOLLOW



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VILLAGE BACKDROP: STARSPUN HOLLOW

Floating on the edge of a wooded fen, Starspun Hollow is a font of life and beauty in an otherwise dreary swamp. Equal parts human and halfling and always vibrant with colours, this prosperous village seems to have fallen from a child's story. Merchants travel from distant lands to purchase the village's beautiful dyes and unique "star silk," woven from the webs of the local starweaver spiders. Beneath its pleasant facade, however, Starspun Hollow grapples with political strife concerning its natural resources, made worse by racial tensions older than the village itself.

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| _ | Kane N male crocodile | 5 |
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When human conquerors expanded into halfling lands, several families fled the invaders and built a camp on the edge of a wooded fen. The refugees eked out a meagre existence fishing and foraging while trying to fend off the vermin plaguing their new home. The halflings' luck turned around, however, when the druid Mayli Nightwillow happened upon a unique discovery. Mayli studied a local arachnid, known as a starweaver spider, which attracted prey by reflecting moonlight off its mirror-like webs, and soon learned how to harvest and process the spiders' silk. This "star silk" could be woven into fabrics that shimmered and sparkled even in dim light. Furthermore, star silk showed an affinity for colours derived from the surrounding wildlife, which led to the development of several vibrant dyes.

It wasn't long before star silk became popular among foreign aristocrats, and the halflings found themselves in possession of a valuable commodity. Starweaver spiders were quickly integrated into the village's culture, used to protect crops from pests, decorate buildings and even serve as pets. The burgeoning community took the name Starspun Hollow in honour of the spiders that brought about its fortune. Before long human traders started building houses nearby, which contributed to the village's prosperity but concerned the halfling refugees, who still remembered being driven from their homes. The result is a patchwork of differently sized buildings floating on the fens, alive with riotous colour day and night.

Though seemingly peaceful, Starspun Hollow is rife with whispers of conflict. Milni Nightwillow, Mayli's daughter and the village reeve, insists on sustainable but low-yield production of star silk and dyes, much to the chagrin of Markku Olent, owner of the community's primary dye works. Their increasingly heated arguments stir up old racial animosity among the citizens, leaving everyone on edge. To make matters worse, the village's most popular dye is derived from a dragonfly considered sacred by a large tribe of boggards, who grow more outraged every day by the audacity of the "bite-sized" spider catchers.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Ruler Milni Nightwillow Government Magical Population 188 (79 humans, 78 halflings, 19 gnomes, 7 elves, 3 half-elves, 2 half-orcs) Alignments NG Languages Common, Halfling Corruption -3; Crime -1; Economy +0; Law -1; Lore +3; Society -3 Qualities Prosperous, rumourmongering citizens

Danger 0; Disadvantages None

NOTABLE FOLK

Most of the population are nothing more than hardworking peasants. A few, however, are of interest to adventurers:

- **Aiwin Elestien** (location 6; CG male elf bard 3/expert 2) Aiwin is patriarch of an elven family of tailors and musicians known for their borderline-debaucherous revelries.
- **Bekka Murray** (location 2; NG female halfling druid 2) Milni Nightwillow's protégé is eager to please everyone.
- Berno Dewberry (location 3; N male halfling expert 2) The Dream Weaver's owner is anxious and constantly apologizes.
- **Kyler Sylbane** (location 7; N male human ranger 5) A fen explorer, Kyler worries about the rising boggard aggression.
- Markku Olent (location 5; LN male human aristocrat 2) Owner of the village's largest dye works, he believes he can expand production by using the fens to replace lost resources.
- Milni Nightwillow (location 4; NG female halfling druid 7) Starspun Hollow's reeve wearies of politics, but steadfastly defends maintaining renewable silk and dye production.
- **Ricola Aulburn** (location 8; CN female halfling rogue 4) The owner of the general store leads the anti-human radicals.
- Willina Capleaf (location 1; NG female halfling expert 3) Willina is overseer of the village's crops and star silk cultivation.

NOTABLE LOCATIONS

Most of the village comprises peasant homes. A few locations, however, are of interest to adventurers:

- 1. Berry Fields Main Office: Agricultural centre and home of the starweaver spiders.
- Commons: This dry hillock serves as the village centre, festival grounds and open-air market.
- 3. Dream Weaver Inn: The local inn and tavern.
- 4. Nightwillow Manor: Milni's home and the de facto town hall.
- 5. Olent Dye Works: Starspun Hollow's largest producer of dyes.
- 6. Silks & Songs: Home and workplace of the Elestien elves.
- 7. Sylbane's Sojourns: A fishing, hunting and ranging lodge.
- Wanderer's Wares: General store and meeting place for antihuman mavericks.

MARKETPLACE

Resources & Industry Dyes, farming, fishing and silks Base Value 650 gp; Purchase Limit 3,750 gp; Spellcasting 4th; Minor Items 2d4; Medium Items 1d4; Major Items –

The following items are for sale:

- Ring improved swimming (10,000 gp)
- Scrolls (Divine) control water (700 gp), wood shape (150 gp)
- Wand spider climb (34 chgs., 3,060 gp)
- Wondrous Item gloves of arrow snaring (4,000 gp)

VILLAGE LORE

A PC making a Knowledge (geography) or Knowledge (local) check may know something about Starspun Hollow. A successful check reveals all the information revealed by a lesser check.

DC 10: Starspun Hollow is known as the sole producer of a fabric called star silk, as well as numerous clothing dyes.

DC 15: The villagers derive several dyes from the surrounding wildlife, and are always looking for people to brave the fens in search of raw materials.

DC 20: The village was built by halflings fleeing human invaders. Even though many humans now live there, the small folk don't fully trust them and racial tensions run deep.

VILLAGERS

Appearance Villagers tend toward fair skin and brown hair, usually bound in braids or buns that fit beneath their shawls.

Dress Villagers wear layers of nets, shawls and veils to keep pests off their skin. Clothing is usually made of star silk dyed magnificent colours. Leather does not take local dyes well, so it is only worn by labourers and seen as improper for social events.

Nomenclature *male*: Collyn, Daven, Olivir, Timmett, Rolth; *female*: Brenna, Fayli, Liria, Misty, Penni; *family*: Bryony, Hoplee, Kermen, Olmadder, Safflin.

WHISPERS & RUMOURS

A PC can use Diplomacy to gather information about the village and its surroundings. This takes 1d4 hours and requires a DC 10 check. A PC exceeding this check gains one additional rumour for each 5 points by which he exceeded DC 10. Use the table below to determine which rumour(s) the PC learns.

D6 RUMOUR

| 1* | Human merchants are trying to smuggle out some starweaver spiders and undercut prices abroad. |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2 | Ricola Aulburn has been sabotaging the dye works to |
| | show Markku Olent and the other humans they're not |
| | welcome. |
| 2 | Fewer folks are returning from forays into the fens, and |
| 3 | locals are hearing croaking sounds in the dead of night. |
| 4 | Markku is trying to undermine Milni's resolve by |
| | buttering up to her pupil, Bekka Murray. |
| | Someone, or something, damaged the webs along the far |
| 5 | end of the Berry Fields. Willina Capleaf is offering a |
| | bounty to find the culprit. |
| 6* | The Elestien elves are actually evil fey trying to draw the |
| | whole village into lascivious vice. |
| | - |

*False rumour



1: BERRY FIELDS MAIN OFFICE

Traditional farming techniques are useless in the waterlogged fens, so Starspun Hollow gets its food predominantly from wild rice, reeds and most of all, berries. Dozens of different types of berries grow in the swamp, which the residents use in most of their cooking and several of their dyes. The village's most fertile grounds, known as the Berry Fields, contain several large wooden scaffolds housing starweaver spiders, which simultaneously produce star silk and serve as pest control.

Oversight for both crop harvests and silk collection has been consolidated into the Main Office, a large granary and warehouse managed by Willina Capleaf (NG female halfling expert 3). A portly halfling with greying hair, Willina's booming voice and blunt personality cause her to stand out even among the tallest humans. She works hard to make the Berry Fields a positive work environment, but is quick to anger when the safety of the starweaver spiders is threatened.

2: Commons

The founders of Starspun Hollow built their town around this large knoll, which remains dry even when heavy rains flood the fens. Almost every public event, from village meetings to festivals to criminal trials, is conducted on the Commons.

Management of the Commons falls under the purview of the village reeve, but Milni Nightwillow has delegated the responsibility to her pupil, Bekka Murray (NG female halfling druid 2). Milni sees the village's future in the golden-haired halfling girl, and decided overseeing the Commons would provide valuable administrative experience. Bekka's new position, however, attracted Markku Olent's attention, who has taken advantage of her accommodating nature and aversion to conflict to push his agenda on the village's future leader.

3: DREAM WEAVER INN

Travellers stay at the Dream Weaver Inn, a cosy structure standing on stilts above the mire. Images of stars, moons and dream catchers decorate the common room, and a domeshaped web spun among the chandeliers creates the illusion of a clear night sky. Unsurprisingly, Starweaver spiders live in the inn.

The back room is a makeshift brewery, where the proprietor, Berno Dewberry (N male halfling expert 2), experiments with various distillation techniques to produce liquors from local berries. His unique brews are popular among locals and outsiders alike, and would likely turn a large profit if shipped abroad. Berno shows no interest in expanding his production, however, leading to rumours he is trying to keep a low profile to avoid mysterious pursuers. The rising racial tensions have been taxing on Berno. Even though he sympathizes with the halfling locals, his biggest patrons are human merchants and he doesn't want to alienate his customers. The stress has caused him to lose hair, and rarely does he utter a sentence that doesn't include an apology.

4: NIGHTWILLOW MANOR

Home of the village reeve, Nightwillow Manor underwent several expansions to accommodate human guests. The result is a human-sized ground floor that serves as a village hall, with smaller living quarters making up the second storey. The swamp beneath the stilted manor serves as a pen for Milni's animal companion, Kane, though the crocodile spends most nights beneath the front porch guarding against intruders.

Milni Nightwillow (NG female halfling druid 7) is spending most of her time here of late, trying to negotiate with Markku Olent and Ricola Aulburn, away from the public eye. Maintaining the village's safety and self-sustainability is her top priority, but both the dye baron and her sister-in-law grow less willing to compromise as the conflict drags on. The constant arguing is wearing Milni's patience thin, and her wife, Eanith (location is desperate to find a third party who can help the reeve.

5: Olent Dye Works

Comprised of dozens of laboratories and refineries, the Olent Dye Works dominates Starspun Hollow's commercial dye production. The massive complex extends over the mire, using it for fresh water and waste disposal. The dye works are kept away from the village in order to sequester the malodorous – and often toxic – mordants and reagents far from the locals' homes.

The works are owned and operated by Markku Olent (LN male human aristocrat 2), a stern man whose tall, willowy frame causes him to loom over almost everyone in Starspun Hollow. The dye baron has long sought to expand his production, but thus far his power and influence have been insufficient to win over either the reeve or the village's halflings, who remain suspicious of the humourless old man. Markku pays his workers well, but recent sabotage by Ricola Aulburn's cohorts has hardened his heart against halflings not under his employ. This causes strife between his labourers and the general populace.

6: SILKS & SONGS

All seven elves residing in Starspun Hollow belong to the Elestien family, a lively and hedonistic clan of craftsmen and musicians. Their patriarch, Aiwin (CG male elf bard 3/expert 2), brought his paramour and five children to the village shortly after star silk became popular. Every elf is a master tailor and proficient with several instruments, and they all use Silks & Songs as a studio to create elegant clothing and provide music lessons. Their frequent celebrations and performances make them welcome additions to the village, but rumours abound of their romantic liaisons and dark rites hidden by their indulgent lifestyle.

7: SYLBANE'S SOJOURNS

Much of Starspun Hollow's food and raw materials for dyes is collected from the fens. Rangers returning from the mire or looking for work often stop at Sylbane's Sojourns, a hunting lodge for those earning their living in the wild. The owner, Kyler Sylbane (N male human ranger 5), knows what quarries fetch the best price, though adventurers usually have to suffer his long-

| MILNI NIGHTWILLOW CR 6 (XP 2,400) This solemn halfling's slight form is hidden beneath layers of brightly-coloured silks. |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Female halfling druid 7 NG Small humanoid (halfling) Init +0; Senses Perception +10, Sense Motive +10 Speed 20 ft.; trackless step, woodland stride; ACP 0; Acrobatics +2, Climb +2, Stealth +4, Swim +6 |
| AC 12, touch 11, flat-footed 12; CMD 14 (+1 natural [amulet of natural armour +1], +1 size) Fort +8, Ref +5, Will +10 (+12 vs. fear); +4 vs. feys' spell-like abilities and spells hp 49 (7 HD) |
| Space 5 ft.; Base Atk +5; CMB +4 Melee quarterstaff +6 (1d4) Ranged sling +6 (range 50 ft.) +6 (1d3) |
| Special Actions wild shape Wild Shape (Su [standard; 2/day]) Milni Nightwillow can change into a Large, Medium, Small or Tiny animal, as <i>beast shape II</i>, or a Small elemental, as <i>elemental body I</i>. The effect lasts for 7 hours, or until she changes back. Druid Spells Prepared (CL 7th; concentration +11; Natural |
| Spell, share spells) 4th—extended dominate animal (DC 17), giant vermin 3rd—greater magic fang, remove disease, wind wall 2nd—bear's endurance, bull's strength, delay poison, lesser |
| restoration 1st—cure light wounds (2), entangle (DC 15), longstrider, shillelagh 0—detect poison, guidance, light, purify food and drink Combat Goar bullets (10), oil of magic vestment |
| Combat Gear bullets (10), <i>oil of magic vestment</i> Abilities Str 10, Dex 10, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 18, Cha 15 SQ nature bond (animal companion [Kane]), nature sense, wild empathy (+9) |
| Feats Brew Potion, Extend Spell, Lightning Reflexes, Natural Spell Skills as above plus Diplomacy +9, Knowledge (nature) +6, Spellcraft +9, Survival +13 |
| Languages Common, Druidic, Halfling; link Gear as above plus headband of inspired wisdom +2, 75 gp, |

spell component pouch, holly & mistletoe, noble's outfit,

amethyst earrings worth 100 gp

winded hunting stories before he reveals anything useful. Kyler's jovial nature has become more sober of late, as he notices the signs of increasing boggard activity. He is desperately trying to alert the villagers to the rising threat, but locals dismiss his warnings as more of the retired hunter's tall tales.

8: WANDERER'S WARES

As Starspun Hollow's general store, Wanderer's Wares is one of the few places visitors can purchase tools and weapons. The building is cramped even by halfling standards; the proprietor, Ricola Aulburn (CN female halfling rogue 4), refuses to expand the space because she wants humans to feel as uncomfortable as possible in her shop. Raised on stories about the humans who drove her grandparents from their home, Ricola sees Markku Olent's political machinations as another example of humans bullying her people. She and a few like-minded radicals burglarize and sabotage human businesses, particularly the Olent Dye Works, to remind everyone Starspun Hollow is halfling territory. Thus far Ricola has avoided legal consequences because her sister, Eanith (N female halfling expert 1), is the reeve's wife, but the increasing hostility between her and Markku may lead to serious repercussions soon enough.

| KANE CR — | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|--|--|
| A grey-scaled lizard the size of a pony follows your | | |
| movements with beady yellow eyes. | | |
| Male crocodile | | |
| N Medium animal | | |
| Init +0; Senses low-light vision; Perception +5, Sense Motive | | |
| +1 | | |
| Speed 20 ft., swim 30 ft.; sprint; ACP 0; Acrobatics +2, Climb | | |
| +9, Escape Artist +2, Stealth +6, Swim +17 | | |
| Sprint (Ex [free]) Once per minute Kane may sprint, | | |
| increasing his land speed to 40 feet for 1 round. | | |
| AC 20, touch 12, flat-footed 18; CMD 21 | | |
| (+2 Dex, +8 natural) | | |
| Fort +9, Ref +7 (evasion), Will +3 (+7 vs. enchantments) | | |
| hp 51 (6 HD); Diehard | | |
| Space 5 ft.; Base Atk +4; CMB +9 | | |
| Melee bite +9 (1d8+5 plus grab) and | | |
| tail slap +9 (1d12+2) | | |
| Atk Options Blind-Fight, death roll, grab | | |
| Death Roll (Ex [standard]) When grappling a foe of its size or | | |
| smaller, Kane can perform a death roll with a successful | | |
| grapple check. As he clings to his foe, he tucks in his legs | | |
| and rolls rapidly, twisting and wrenching his victim. Kane | | |
| inflicts his bite damage and knocks the creature prone. If | | |
| successful, Kane maintains his grapple. | | |
| Abilities Str 21, Dex 14, Con 18, Int 1, Wis 12, Cha 2 | | |
| SQ hold breath (72 rds.) | | |
| Feats Blind-Fight, Diehard, Endurance | | |
| Skills as above plus Intimidate +0, Survival +6 | | |
| Languagos link (Milni Nightwillow) | | |

Languages link (Milni Nightwillow)

Life in Starspun Hollow is as vibrant and varied as the people living there. The villagers work hard, but can always find a reason to celebrate, and hold several festivals every year. Even when tensions are high, most citizens agree they would not want to live anywhere else.

LAW & ORDER

Starspun Hollow requires little law enforcement, mostly due to superstition. Years ago a local feud became violent, and dozens of starweaver spiders fell ill meaning the entire village suffered. Though the events were likely unrelated, most villagers still believe open conflict harms the spiders. As a result the locals are always on best behaviour in public, only expressing anger in the form of vicious rumours and social exclusion. In the few cases where criminals must be brought to justice, the reeve usually recruits volunteers for backup and uses magic to apprehend the offender.

TRADE & INDUSTRY

Starspun Hollow's industry revolves around dye and star silk production. Silks and dyes are usually sold separately, though the Elestien elves and other local tailors make a profit by providing finished clothing at a higher price. Villagers work hard to keep outsiders away from the dye works and spider nests for fear of competitors stealing their trade secrets. The only exception is when the dye works hires rangers and adventurers to procure raw materials from the fens, since many locals dare not brave the dangers of the marshes.

EVENTS

While the PCs are in the village, one or more of the below events may occur. Choose or determine randomly:

D6 EVENT

| 1A boggard warband leaves the mutilated body of a ranger at the edge of the village.2The villagers prepare for a festival as merchant caravans begin arriving to trade their wares.3A fire at the dye works injures several workers and dumps toxic materials into the marsh. Markku accuses Ricola Aulburn of sabotage.4A giant dragonfly is hunting in the surrounding area, attacking villagers and starweaver spiders. The reeve posts a bounty for its head.5Several locals return from an Elestien celebration in a daze, unable to recall exactly what they did last night.6intimidation. Ricola tries to recruit halfling PCs to her cause. | | |
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| 6 intimidation. Ricola tries to recruit halfling PCs to her | Э | daze, unable to recall exactly what they did last night. |
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